

**ALIENATION AND ECOACTIVISM IN SELECTED WORKS  
ON THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

The discourse of alienation, provoked by environmental despoliation due to the activities of multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta region, is aptly captured in literary works. Previous studies on literary texts about the Niger Delta crisis have identified the negative socio-economic and political impacts of oil exploitation as responsible for the ecoactivism in the Niger Delta, neglecting the role of alienation or erosion of self in the fueling of the crisis. This study, therefore, examines the indicators of erosion of self as projected in selected prose texts on the Niger Delta crisis. This is with a view to establishing how the literary writers connect ecoactivism to the erosion of self.

Karl Marx's and Marilyn Nissim-Sabat's postulations on alienation as well as Lawrence Buell's theory on practical commitment to the environment were adopted based on their concern with alienation and ecoactivism, and as implicated in the Niger Delta crisis. Six prose works: Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day (AMAD)*, a memoir; Okpewho's *Tide (T)*; Ojaide's *The Activist (TA)*; Egbuson's *Love My Planet (LMP)*; Agary's *Yellow-Yellow (YY)* and Habila's *Oil on Water (OOW)* were chosen. Their selection was based on the shared experiential knowledge of all but one of the writers, and the themes of alienation and ecoactivism, which are common to them. These texts were subjected to literary analysis.

Three indicators of alienation or erosion of self-consciousness and two indicators of ecoactivism are differently portrayed in the six texts. Alienation is unveiled through the following: pictures of degraded ecosystem; internal division; presentation of the people as victims as well as protagonists. Ecoactivism is illustrated through ecoterrorism; and non-violent eco-campaign. All the six texts, employing pathos, capture the feeling of alienation of the people of Niger Delta through appalling pictures of the degraded environment as a result of the activities of multinational oil companies. Saro-Wiwa's *(AMAD)*, Okpewho's *T*, Ojaide's *TA*, Egbuson's *LMP* and Habila's *OOW* illustrate the people's erosion of self as a result of divisions among them, due to financial inducements from the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies. Okpewho's *T*, Saro-Wiwa's *AMAD*, Ojaide's *TA* and Egbuson's *LMP*, through antithetical pictures, capture the people's loss of self by presenting them as victims of internal/external exploitation as well as protagonists against internal/external foes. Three of the texts, namely: Ojaide's *TA*, Egbuson's

*LMP* and Habila's *OOW* present violence/ecoterrorism against the perceived internal/external foes of the people as a means of preserving the environment. Saro-Wiwa's *AMAD*, Okpewho's *T* and Agary's *YY* reveal urgent non-violent eco-campaign in the area. Ecological degradation and internal divisions are linked by the six texts to the oil and gas exploration activities of the multinational oil companies and these generate a sense of alienation that leads to intense ecoactivism in the area.

Three indicators of erosion of self, which connect with ecoterrorism and non-violent eco-campaign, are manifest in the selected texts through the use of pathos and antithesis. These reveal the writers' construction of self as a contingency on ecoactivism in the Niger Delta crisis.

**Key Words:** Nigerian government, Alienation & ecoactivism, Niger Delta, Multinational oil companies, erosion of self.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God, whose grace has brought me this far in life.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

## **CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this work was carried out by Mr C.C. Feghabo in the Department of English, University of Ibadan.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 An overview of the Niger Delta**

The insurgency in the Niger Delta, which was provoked by environmental degradation by the activities of multinational oil companies, has given birth to a body of literature. These imaginative works on the crisis in the region are married to the social, political and historical events in the Niger Delta that influenced their emergence. Most of the texts that have emerged from the crisis advocate environmentalism in a forceful or urgent manner. The interface between this writing on the Niger Delta crisis and the historical events confirms Chidi Amuta's contention quoted in Neil Griffith, Diana Louis, and Eva Marshall (1989) that African literature and African history cohere. Amuta is of the view that African artistic creations, therefore, cannot be understood in isolation from her experiences. Paula Gunn Allen's (1996) writing on Indian American literature validates Amuta's position when she posits, "A literature can best be understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and the purpose of literature is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumption on which the literature is based" (241). Background information on the Niger Delta will aid the appreciation of the writing on the region. It is worthy of note that while a number of works in the three genres of prose fiction, drama and poetry, have emerged, this research is limited to selected prose works on the Niger Delta crisis.

We shall attempt to preface the discussion on the Niger Delta with a delineation of what constitute(s) the Niger Delta. The attempt is made imperative by the emergence of differing definitions of the area. The descriptions are classified as political and geographical. What is referred to as an administrative Niger Delta is a designation, which is informed by political interest, while the geographical delineation is based mainly on the depiction of the environment. An example of the geographical Niger Delta can be seen in the Willinks Commission's Report of 1958 that situates the area thus:

To the east of Ibo Plateau lies the valley of Cross River, which is fed by streams from the Cameroon's as well as the Plateau. This forms a broad vertical strip containing people who are not Ibos. Across the south of the region from the Niger is the West to the mountains in the East, stretches abroad horizontal belt of swamps and low-lying country. These two of the coastal belt and the Cross River valley together make together a piece of country, the shape of a rather sprawling reversal "L" which encloses the Ibos Plateau. In the swamps and creeks country of the South-West there is an area in which the predominant tribal group is that of the Ijaws...towards the mouth of the Cross River are Efiks... And Ibibios...Further north in the Cross River are many tribes intermingled in a confusing multitude... (Ibaba S. Ibaba, 2005: p. 11).

This demarcation of the Niger Delta given before the discovery and subsequent export of oil and gas from the area gives information on the inhabitants of the area who are found in the present day Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Edo and Ondo States. These states also fall within another definition of the Niger Delta given by the now defunct Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC):

...The River Niger discharges its waters into the Atlantic Ocean through a large number of tributaries, which form the Niger Delta. The area of the Delta is further enlarged by rivers other than tributaries of the Niger, Calabar River, Cross River and Iwo River to the East, and Siluko River, Benin River, Escravos River and River Forcados, to the West (Ibaba S Ibaba, 2005: p. 10).

While the first two definitions are similar and can be classified as geographical because they are unblemished by politics, a recent picture given by the Niger Delta Development Commission, which is a phoenix of the defunct OMPADEC, differs from the earlier two. Its (NNDC) designation, which was influenced to accommodate other states with relatively small quantities of oil, has a broader Niger Delta that is constituted of nine states: Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Ondo, Abia and Imo states as its focus.

The concern in this thesis is the geographical Niger Delta, which is constituted of ethnic minorities, hitherto pushed to the fringes of Nigerian ethnicised politics. The consequent violent reaction from the people of this region against their perceived oppressors and exploiters (the multinational oil companies and the federal

government) has commanded the attention of the international community as well as writers within and without the zone.

This deltaic part of Nigeria that became a hotbed of unrest, according to a World Bank report, is one of the world's largest wetlands and Africa's largest delta covering some 70,000km, formed from the accumulation of sedimentary deposits transported by the Niger and Benue Rivers. It lies between 4° and 6°N of the equator and between 5° and 9°E of the Greenwich (Mercy Erhun, 2008; Ibaba S. Ibaba, 2005). The Niger Delta is mostly lowland area that experiences flooding, especially during the rains that fall almost all year round; the dry season lasts only for a few months of the year. It is made up of predominantly mangrove forest, freshwater forest and rainforest that are home to many exotic animals and birds. Its human inhabitants are of diverse smaller ethnic nationalities whose major occupations are fishing and farming at subsistence level. Some of such ethnic groups include the Ijo, Urhobo, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Ikwerre, Etche, Ogba, Andonis, Egene Ibibio, Efik, Edo and others. This deltaic environment is rich in oil and gas deposits. The exploration and exploitation of these minerals by the government of Nigeria through multinational oil companies have resulted in ecocide and threat to human existence in the region.

### **1.1 Oil exploration and its effects on the Niger Delta ecosystem**

Oil was first discovered and drilled in commercial quantity at Oloibiri in the present Bayelsa State in 1956 (Kikpoye Aaron, 2008, Aaron & John, 2008). Since this date, there have been oil exploration activities on and off the shores of other parts of the Niger Delta and beyond. This drilling and sale of oil overseas have caused a shift in the nation's earnings from agricultural produce like cocoa and groundnut to oil and gas that account for eighty to ninety-five percent of Nigeria's revenues (Ibeanu, 2008; Christian Opukiri, 2008; Wayne E. Nafziger, 2008; William Ehwarieme, 2008). It is, however, paradoxical that in spite of the region's enormous economic contributions to the wellbeing of the Nigerian state, it is the least developed part of the Nigerian state vis-à-vis infrastructure. The neglect of the area is manifest in the near-absence of federal roads in the area. Less than 27% of the people have good drinking water, and about 30% of households have electricity (Ibeanu, 2006).

The region is a major victim of serious environmental degradation occasioned by frequent oil spills and gas flaring. Ikelegbe (2008) further reveals that, between

1976 and 1996, about 2,369,471 barrels of oil were spilled. Out of this quantity, about 1, 820,044 barrels of oil were never recovered – meaning that this quantity was absorbed by the soil that consequently became infertile for agricultural activities. Eborge, as quoted in Ikelegbe, also unveils that “about 479, 392mm of gas was flared between 1958 and 1994” (p. 109).

The above information reveals that the multinational oil companies are unmindful of the implications of their poor standard of mining for the environment and its inhabitants. The negative consequences of their activities are therefore devastating on the human and non-human dwellers of the region. On the flora and fauna, frequent oil spills and gas flare have left most places deforested, forcing the wildlife to go into extinction or migrate farther. The reports of East Timor activists’ visit to some places in the Niger Delta, as captured by Oyenola Dokun (2008) gives a representative picture of the plight of the people vis-à-vis this ecological menace:

In Kolo creek, Bayelsa State in Otuasegba Community in the Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State in the Central Niger Delta, two mountain-like flares from Shell’s pipes had ravaged the community’s forests, streams and farmlands. Other sites had been devastated from Shell’s action in the area and the company refused to clean up (p. 910).

Adeniran Samuel Fakile (2008) describes the gas flaring experienced by the communities in the Niger Delta as the worst felt anywhere in the world. This can be classified as the most horrible human right violation anywhere, because “the environment is the first right of man. Without a safe environment, man cannot exist to claim other rights, be they political or social or economical” (Ken Saro-Wiwa, 2008).

As a result of the gas flared in the area, T.T. Tamuno (2008) argues that the humidity in Niger Delta is at a “much higher rate than ever before to the extent that humidity has graduated from (75 to 80%) to (81%-85%) and, more particularly, during the rainy season” (p. 922). This has translated into rainfall that is much more frequent, resulting in recurrent flooding and devastation of farmlands in the area. Much more serious than the deluge faced by the people of the region, according to a recent report, is the peril of extinction of life through acid rain in the area (Efe and Mogborukor, 2008). Efe and Mogborukor (2008) further disclose that this acidic rainfall affects the rivers, creeks and wells. Because of the infrastructural neglect suffered by the Niger Delta people, who are mostly rural dwellers, they are compelled to drink water from these only available poisoned sources.

Not only through the acid downpour occasioned by gas flaring and corroded pipe lines do the people of Niger Delta – living and yet unborn – have their lives threatened, they also have their ecosystem destroyed by toxic and non biodegradable by-products dumped into the soil, creeks and rivers through oil refining. The oil effluents discharged into the Niger Delta environment by multinational oil companies contain cadmium, chromium, mercury and lead that are inimical to the functioning of the human metabolism. By the disposing of such into the rivers, creeks and land, the entire ecosystem is polluted and the food chain is consequently contaminated. The adulterated food web of the people comes through the consumption of fishes in mercury or lead fouled water (Ibeanu, 2008).

## **1.2 Environmental degradation and poverty**

The Niger Delta is constituted mostly of rural settlements where the major means of livelihood are agriculture and fishing. The successful engagement of the people in these occupations is hampered by the effects of the activities of the multinational oil companies such as Shell, Elf, Chevron, Mobil and Agip. Man and his environment exist symbiotically: what affects one, impinges on the other. As has been said earlier, through oil leakages and gas burning, the aquatic life and wildlife are affected negatively. Eteng justifies this, arguing that:

Oil exploration and exploitation has over the last four decades impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger Delta oil bearing communities, massively threatening the subsistent peasant economy and environment and hence the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people (Chinedu S. Udeh, 2008).

The frequent spillage of oil, much of which is not cleared but is left to be absorbed by the soil and the rivers, consequently render the soil sterile and force the fishes to move farther into the ocean. This experience has therefore hurled the peasant farmers and anglers into a state of deprivation. This post-oil discovery poverty of the people is one of the reasons advanced by the people of Ogoni in their Bill of Rights excerpted here:

That the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages in Ogoni one of the most densely populated areas of Africa: (average:1,500 per squarely mile; national average: 300 per square mile (culled from Ogoni Bill of Rights, 1990: p. 5).

The experience of the Ogonis with regard to their impecuniousness in the midst of so much oil affluence that enriches others is representative of all oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta. The multinational oil companies in league with successive dishonest indigenous leadership have flourished without regard to the near-hellish experience of the host communities. The apathy shown to the plight of the people of Niger Delta is evidenced in the paltry thirteen percent of oil earnings given to them by the central government. Two sets of people are seen as responsible for the woes of underdevelopment of the region: the corrupt national leadership that, until recently, had often emerged from the major ethnic groups and the multinational oil companies whose major interest is to ensure maximum exploitation of resources at little cost. We shall look at each of the two culprits and their culpability.

### **1.3 Multinational oil companies and oil politics in the Niger Delta**

Lenin, according to Aina Loomba (1998), had argued that the growth of financial capitalism and industry in the Western nations had come with super abundance of capital that would need to be invested in the colonies that, though rich in human and natural resources, were deficient in capital. The need to put in its surplus assets in less developed counties is what informs the dominance of the oil search in the Niger Delta by multinational oil companies such as Shell Petroleum Development Company, Elf, Chevron, Agip Oil Company and Mobil Nigeria Ltd. The financial and technological advantages they have over their host country Nigeria make them unequal partners in business. This financier status, according to Ikelegbe (2008), therefore makes them too powerful to be regulated by their dependent host countries of the Third World, especially those of Africa.

The inability of the host nations to dictate to these transnational oil companies is noticeable in their insensitivity to the host communities' complaints of neglect and destruction of their environment. The callousness of the multinational oil companies often engenders reactions that snowball into violence. The multinational oil companies, during protests, exert their financial muscles over the host villages and towns by bringing in soldiers and the police to throttle such violent reactions to the exploitation of the resources of the region. In addition to this, obsolete Nigerian laws also aid the nonchalant attitude of these oil concerns. The national laws on land approve of only paltry compensations for economic trees destroyed by such oil corporations (Ibaba, 2005). Thus, both the Nigerian state and the oil companies are



collaborators in the sufferings of the people of oil region. Such miserable recompense by the transnational oil companies is in consonance with the oil companies' principle of maximum returns through minimal cost.

What can be associated with a capitalist exploitative streak of spending little for maximal profit is also apparent in the multinational oil companies reluctance to execute projects that will bring the people to the corridors of modernity. They prefer paying money to some prominent and influential members of the host communities. Usually what is paid to some host communities' leaders and rulers are far less than the cost of executing a project. However, where they carry out projects, the motive informing such seeming benevolence is a wrong one – to launder their image or to respond to criticism from NGOs, international outcry, query or to draw favourable attention to themselves at the commissioning of ostensibly trivial projects (Kingdom K. Aaron, 2008).

The preference for spending on few individuals with intent to placate many people in their areas of operation, unfortunately, has often resulted in pitting one faction of the people against the other in bloodshed. An example of such a case was in Nembe in Bayelsa State where such direct payment of money to some prominent individuals, rather than executing projects, led to bloodletting among the youths in 2000 and 2001 (Thomas Watts, 2001). Such clashes within a community or with another, because of the envy prompted by the disbursement of money to a select few, are stratagems for the undisrupted exploration of oil. Augustus Dokpesi (2008) describes this as a “divide and rule” ploy employed by the multinational oil companies.

The direct payment, it is worthy of note, also has become an avenue for the community liaison officers to engage in corrupt practices to enrich themselves. Ikelegbe (2008), quoting Shell's annual report, reveals these distasteful practices of its employees in connivance with some members of the oil producing communities. The multinational oil companies have also been accused of treachery in their dealings with host communities. They sign M.O.U (Memoranda of Understanding) with the communities before the commencement of their business operations, but they often breach the agreements reached. This betrayal has therefore often instigated negative reactions from their host communities who feel short-changed (Benjamin Okaba, 2008).

Iyayi, according to Ikelegbe (2008), sums up the community relations strategies of the multinational oil companies as “silence, denial, defiance, co-optation, and payment of money to selected individuals – especially community leaders – involvement in community projects, divide and rule, blaming the victims of oil spillages, promotion of false consciousness and violence” (p.118).

Unfortunately, these negative actions of the multinational oil companies have made them the direct victims of the pent-up fury of the host communities who also feel short-changed by the Nigerian state that has left them in wretchedness, despair and destitution after decades of oil export. While the multinational oil companies are accused of neglect of the host communities with regard to the provision of infrastructure and necessities, they in turn often shift the buck to the government, arguing that it is government’s responsibilities to provide social amenities. The government to which they pass the blame, unfortunately, is far away from the people; hence the oil companies become the direct recipients of the wrath of their hosts.

#### **1.4 The Nigerian government and the host communities relationship**

The government at the national level seems to be miles away from the people of the Niger Delta. They only feel the breath of the government on their necks at the time of conflicts with the oil companies. The remoteness of government has made the oil companies to be the direct sole victims of the frustrations of the oil producing communities. With regard to the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian State, the definition of the state by Marxist scholars seems true. Marxist scholars see the state as an instrument exploited by the privileged class for the advancement of its interest to the neglect of the disadvantaged.

The minorities of the Niger Delta see the exploiters in Nigeria as constituted of people of the major ethnic groups – Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, whom the minorities believe, employ the instrument of State power to make laws and policies that are adverse to the development of the oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta. Atare Otite (2008) discloses that the allocation of resources, for instances, is done by the State which is controlled by the privileged class. The resources are allocated to those within this cabal or those related to the leaders. He, therefore, attributes the struggle for political supremacy by individuals and ethnic nationalities to the desire to gain favourable allocation of the resources.

In this battle for the control of the resources of the state, the ethnic majorities have advantage over the ethnic minorities, who are consequently marginalized and schemed out during the making of policies on the control of the resources exploited from their land. The present culture of dominance over the resources and people of the Niger Delta by the larger ethnic groups has its origin traced to the colonial era (Otite, 2008; Adejo, 2008). Adejo (2008) traces the genesis of the ethnicised politics in Nigeria to Arthur Richard's constitution which balkanized the country into three ethnic groups under which were subsumed other minority ethnic nationalities. Thus, by the elevation of the major ethnic nationalities in the pre-independence era, the plan for the underdevelopment of the minorities of the Niger Delta in the post-independence Nigerian State was consummated. The post-independence era became the implementation period of the underdevelopment plan.

From independence, the struggle for the political control, which also translates to economic control of the Nigerian State, until recently, unfortunately was exclusive of the minorities of Niger Delta given their population disadvantage. By this exclusion, the people of the Niger Delta seem to have had their lives and destiny determined by the major ethnic groups. The effect of their absence in the administration of the country, even with regard to their welfare, began to manifest after the first republic, precisely in the military era, when the allocation of resource based on derivation began to dwindle with successive governments – from fifty to forty-five percent during Gowon's era to between forty-five percent and twenty percent during the Murtala/Obasanjo's regime. The Buhari/Idiagbon era brought it down to 1.5 percent. It was pushed a little up by Babangida's era to three percent. At present, it is at thirteen percent (Ibaba, 2005; Ikelegbe, 2008). The pre-independence government had put fifty percent as the revenue to be allocated to any region for mineral derived from it. The change from this derivation formula was occasioned by the shift in Nigerian's sources of major foreign exchange earnings from cocoa, groundnuts and palm oil (Ibaba, 2005).

The people of the Niger Delta are of the belief that this change in the source of revenues is one of the main causes of their impoverishment in spite of the wealth from their region. Some scholars and commentators have attributed the modification in this sharing method to the absence of the people of the region in the committees that recommended the new formula. Ibaba (2005) reveals that, Pious Okigbo's

commission had argued for the removal of the derivation formula. He further contends that Aboyade had also recommended the de-emphasis of the derivation principle. It can also be argued that Nigeria's ethnicised politics encouraged the exclusion of the less populated. The other factors responsible for the plight of the people of the Niger Delta are Nigerian federalism and corruption of the leadership. These two are to be examined in detail one after the other.

### **1.5 The Nigerian federalism and the Niger Delta**

To look at federalism as practiced in Nigeria, there is need for the examination of the concept as universally defined. Federalism is a system of government constituted of regions or states that exercise independence in the running of their individual affairs, though a central government controls the decision making process at the national level. K.C. Wheare, one of the strident voices on federalism, as quoted in L. Dare (1979), argues that:

The federal principle requires that the general (federal) and regional (state) governments shall be independent of each other within its sphere, shall not be subordinate to one another, but co-ordinate with each other...if this principle is to operate...no practice, it follows that both general and regional governments must each have under its own independent control of financial resources sufficient to perform its exclusive function (p. 27).

The principle of non-subordinate status of either of the central or state or vice versa and the independent control over the financial resources by each federating unit is practiced in the United States of America and in Canada. In both countries, the recognition of the sovereignty of the constitution of the states or provinces manifests in the laws on the control and mining of resources.

Given the mono-resources dependence of the Nigeria's economy, national leaders, over the years, find it difficult to allow the control of resources by the states constituting the whole. The units are rather subordinated to the centre for their sustenance. The consequence of this is the nation's sustained reliance on oil and the de-emphasis on the other sources of foreign earnings. The sole faith in income from oil and gas by all suggests the politics behind the present revenue sharing formula that denies the oil-bearing minorities proportional proceeds.

## **1.6 The Niger Delta crisis and its beginning**

The beginning of the problems of the Niger Delta have been traced by scholars to 1958. At the twilight of the nation's independence in 1958, the people of the Niger Delta, who are numerically fewer, had expressed their fear about their fate in the post-colonial Nigeria. Consequently, the colonial masters set up the Willink Commission that led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBOA) to ensure the development of the region (Ibaba, 2008). The failure of this authority to transform the Niger Delta after independence, and the feeling of exploitation ignited the late-Major-Isaac-Boro's-led-armed-struggle for self-determination in 1966 (Aaron and Patrick, 2008; Omotola, 2008). Boro's struggle to liberate his Ijo folks, from what he perceived as oppression, survived 12 days before it was quashed by the stronger might of the federal government (T.T. Tamuno, 2008).

Over twenty years after the crushing of the militant activities of Boro, there was again in the 1990s a demand by the Ogoni of Rivers State led by Ken Saro-Wiwa. The call was a peaceful resistance against Shell Oil Company as well as an invitation to the international community to address the injustice and exploitation of the people. Like Boro's, the struggle was short lived following the arrest and the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa by the government of late General Sani Abacha in 1995. (Aaron and Patrick, 2008; Ikelegbe, 2008; Thomas, 2008).

The protracted marginalisation and neglect of the people of the region once again in 1997 provoked yet another phase of the struggle for the control of their resources. The rebirth of the struggle came with the Kiama Declaration that revived armed struggle against the Nigerian State and the oil companies. Hostage taking and the shutting down of oil and gas flow stations frequently disrupted the oil search in the area. These actions carried out by youths of the Niger Delta States left both parties in the feud suffering casualties and material losses.

## **1.7 Causes of the crisis in the Niger Delta**

A number of reasons have been advanced as the probable cause of the unrest in the Niger Delta. These reasons are contained in the resolutions of the different ethnic nationalities constituting the Niger Delta. Here are excerpts of two of such resolutions and declarations:

## 1.8 Ogoni Bill of Rights in the 1990s:

That over 30 years of oil mining, the Ogoni nationality have provided the Nigerian nation with total revenue estimated at over 40 billion naira (₦40 billion) or 30 billion dollars.

That in return for the above contribution, the Ogoni people have received nothing.

That today, the Ogoni people have:

No representation whatsoever in all institutions of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

No pipe borne water.

No job opportunities for the citizens in Federal, State, public sector or private sector companies.

No social or economic project of the Federal Government...

That the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited does not obey Federal Government's regulations.

That the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortage in Ogoni land one of the most densely populated areas of Africa (average 1,500 per square mile...

That neglectful environmental pollution laws and substandard inspection techniques of the Federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning homelands into an ecological disaster.

That successive federal administrations have trampled on every minority right enshrined in the Nigerian constitution to the detriment of the Ogoni and have by administrative structuring and other noxious acts transferred Ogoni wealth exclusively to other parts of the republic.

That the Ogoni people wish to manage their own affairs (Ogoni Bill of Rights, 1990. p.5).

## 1.9 Kiama Declaration

(An extract):

We Ijaw youths drawn from over five hundred communities of about 40 clans that make the Ijaw nation and representing 25 representative organizations in Kiama to deliberate in the best way to ensure the continuous survival of the indigenous peoples of the Ijaw ethnic nationality of the Niger Delta within the Nigerian State.

After exhaustive deliberations, the conference observed:

That it was through British colonization that the Ijaw nation was forcibly put under the Nigeria State.

That the quality of life of the Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalization visited on the Ijaw by the alliance of the Nigerian State and transnational oil companies.

That the political crisis in Nigeria is mainly about the struggle for the control of oil mineral resources which account for over 80% of GDP, 95% of national budget and 90% of foreign

exchange earnings. From which 65%, 75% and 70% respectively derived from within the Ijaw nation. Despite these huge contributions, our reward from the Nigerian State remains avoidable death resulting from ecological devastation and military repression.

That the unabating damage done to our fragile natural environment and to the health of our people is due in the main to the uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas which has led to numerous spillages, uncontrolled gas flare, the opening up of forests to loggers, indiscriminate canalization, flooding, land subsidence, coastal erosion, earth tremors etc.

That the degradation of the environment of Ijawland (sic) by transnational oil companies and Nigerian state arise mainly because Ijaw people have been robbed of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land and resources though the instrumentality of undemocratic federal legislations such as the land use Decree of 1978, the Petroleum Decree 1969 and 1991...

That the principle of Derivation in Revenue Allocation has been consciously and systematically obliterated by successive regimes of the Nigerian state.

We note the drastic reduction of the Derivation Principle from 100% (1953), 50% (1960), 45% (1970), 20% (1975), 2% (1975), 2% (1982), 1.5% (1984) to 3% (1992) to date and a rumour (sic) 13% in Abacha's 1995 undemocratic and unimplemented constitution (Kiama Declaration, 1998).

Discernable from the resolutions of the two ethnic nationalities is frustration borne out of neglect, marginalisation, unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation that the people have suffered since after independence. This is the cause of the crisis that cost the oil companies, the host communities and the Nigerian State no little, in terms of humans and money.

### **1.10 Corruption and insincerity of leadership and the Niger Delta**

The problems of the Niger Delta, as enormous as they are, are trivialised by the endemic problem of corruption at all the tiers of government – central, state and local governments. From 1954 until date, various agencies or commissions have been constituted to address the problems of the Niger Delta – from the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), to the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by the military. The activities of these commissions are often characterised by dishonesty, as these bodies have rather become conduit pipes for the enrichment of

few individuals at the expense of many languishing in want. Though the thirteen percent allocation from the centre brings some money to the region, its impact is not felt (Michael Watts, 2008). Benjamin Okaba (2008), irked by the relatively much money without a propositional utilisation, designates the Niger Delta as having “the lion share of these “bad eggs”, at all tiers of government” (p. 34). He adds that these fraudulent persons, who parade themselves as “power holders, influence peddlers, crowd manipulators, exhibitionists, demagogues, self seekers or lords that were violently imposed on the citizenry by a defective and “do or die political process” (p.34).

Bound to the bane of deprivation and destitution in the midst of plenty in the Niger Delta is the problem of insincerity or non-commitment on the part of the federal government. The deceit is evident in the plethora of complaints of paucity of fund by the various agencies so far constituted by the Nigerian government to develop the region.

#### **1.11 The cost of the Niger Delta crisis to the Nigerian state, multinational oil companies and the host communities of Niger Delta**

The Nigerian State suffered huge financial losses through pipeline vandalism and hostage taking by militant youths of the Niger Delta. Nigerian National Petroleum Company’s annual report gave the nation’s loss through pipelines and oil companies’ facilities vandalism between 1998 and 2003 as \$1 billion annually. Between January and September 2004, 581 acts of destruction were perpetrated; while there was a cut of 30% in oil productions through the actions of militants. Thus, the nation lost \$9 billion in her revenue between 2006 and 2008 (Watts: 2008).

Not only did the Nigerian state suffer financial loss, it also experienced the tainting of her image in the comity of nations. Nigeria was seen as a place insecure for international investors. Apart from the destruction of their environment through oil spillages and gas flaring, the people of the Niger Delta had some of their towns and villages razed to the ground by soldiers sent by the Nigerian government. Soldiers on the orders of the Federal Government had attacked Umuechem in Rivers State in 1990, Odi in Bayelsa State in 1999, Opia, Ikiyan, Akarankokoro and Gbaranmatu in communities of Delta State in 2009. Ikiyan community’s traditional



monarch, who was on a mission to negotiate for peace, was shot dead by soldiers (Eseduwo, 2008).

### **1.12 Literature on the Niger Delta crisis**

The environmental crisis in the Niger Delta has provoked into existence writing which thematic focus is on ecological degradation. Before the crisis in the region, the writers of Niger Delta origin had contributed immensely to modern African literature in general and that of Nigeria in particular. Like most non-literate societies, the people of the region had expressed their literariness through folklore, dance drama and poetry in forms of songs, dirge and incantations. Modern literary engagements began in the region with the introduction of Western education. Some of the prominent writers and critics from the region include Gabriel Okara, James Henshaw, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Elechi Amadi, Okugbule Wonordi, Isidore Okpewho, Buchi Emecheta, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Festus Iyayi, Tess Onwueme, Ben Okiri and Tanure Ojaide.

With settings located in the Niger Delta, these aforementioned writers contributed to the corpus of African literature or Nigerian literature through the exploration of issues of national focus, ranging from corruption, oppression and misrule by the Nigerian leadership. In recent times, the reawakening of insurgency in the area has engendered the appearance of a new genre of writing of commitment that explores environmental activism.

In the case of the Niger Delta, the authors that are compelled to respond to the challenges of the ecological devaluation in the region are a mix of old and new writers. It is worthy of mention here that this sub-genre of literature is distinguished by its contributors who are both from within and outside the zone. What qualifies or constitutes the corpus of recent writing on the Niger Delta are the environmentalism and revolutionary aesthetics in the works. This recent writing is a body of writing that identifies with the struggle of the people of the Niger Delta to salvage both their environment and themselves from destruction. Given its mixed composition, in terms of the origin of the writers, we do not see this body of writing as being all that Niger Delta literature is about. Thus, this emergent works are subsumed under the wider Niger Delta literature. Some of the emergent works include Ken Saro-Wiwa *A Month and a Day*, Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*, Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*.

### **1.13 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Oil exploration in the Niger Delta is associated with internal (Nigerian government) and external (multinational oil companies) collaborative politics. The collaborative politics that goes with oil and gas exploration in the region has had negative impacts on the people's psyche and their ecosystem, triggering the violent environmentalism in the area. Most literary essays on the environmental crisis in the region, however, interpret the singular act of oil/gas exploration. Richard Ulman and Doris Brothers (1988) argue that trauma is not provoked by a single event – no matter how horrible – but by the individual's interpretation of the event. Unfortunately, existing literary essays interpret the insurgence in the area as resulting from the oil and gas exploration in the Niger Delta, thereby neglecting the implications of the people's perception of the collaborative oil politics. This thesis, therefore, examines the people's interpretation of the totality of the politics that goes with oil exploration vis-à-vis the ecoactivism in the area; this is with a view to establishing how the literary writers on the crisis connect the two - alienating effects (that is, their interpretation of the oil politics) and ecoactivism.

### **1.14 PURPOSE OF STUDY/OBJECTIVE**

The purpose/objective of this thesis is to examine some selected literary texts that are products of environmentalism in the Niger Delta, highlighting the indicators of erosion of self/alienation, which are consequences of the people's perception of the totality of oil politics in the region. Through the exploration of narratives by different authors, the thesis attempts to establish how the writers connect the ecoactivism in the area to erosion of self or alienation in the people, thus providing deeper understanding of the psychological implications of environmental issue in the region.

### **1.15 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

What matters is not to know the world but to change it.

(Frantz Fanon, 1963)

This thesis examines six literary works, which are a part of the writing that has been engendered by the socio-political problem in the Niger Delta region. Most of the literary essays on texts on the environmental crisis, however, interpret the singular act of oil/gas exploration as responsible for the ecoactivism in the region. They fail to

examine the totality of internal and external collaboration in the politics of oil and gas exploration in relation to the people's perception of the collaborative oil politics – the shattering of self that triggers intense ecoactivism in the area. This thesis establishes how literary writers connect the two - alienating effects (that is, the people's understanding of the oil politics) and ecoactivism. The study, therefore, provides a fuller understanding of oil politics and environmentalism in the Niger Delta.

Some of the selected texts are new and yet to attract much critical attention. Since education is constantly enriched by brand new ideas, the inclusion of new texts helps to update and broaden our knowledge of the crisis in the region. Moreover, by the considerations of relative new authors and works, we have opened a door for further studies on these relatively new texts, even as we have widened the scope of literature on the environment.

#### **1.16 METHODOLOGY**

The following six texts: Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*; Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* (a memoir); Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*; Vincent Egbuson's *Love My Planet*; Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* were examined. These texts were selected based on the shared experiential knowledge of all but one of the writers as well as the themes of alienation and ecoactivism, which are common to them all. They were subjected to literary analysis.

#### **1.17 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The Sociological Approach to literature was adopted in the analysis of the chosen texts. This is because there exists a symbiotic relationship between literature and society. The interface between the two is such that one cannot exist without the other. This bond between literature and society is obvious, particularly in African literature from the preliterate people until the present century. African literature has always been utilitarian rather than being purely aesthetic. Thus, it contributes to the socio-political wellbeing of the people. Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo's (1986) corroborates this position when she says:

Literature in its oral and written form has consistently remained one of the greatest tools in the representation of reality. Literature has become an important means of understanding and interpreting aspects of society such as politics, religion, social conflicts, class struggle and human condition (p.1).

It is the reproduction of life or man and his environ by literature – whether in spoken or written form, that informs Warren and Wellek (1975) depiction of literature as a representation of life or society of which the writer is a part. Similarly, Chidi Amuta (1986) interprets literature as “the fictional representation of a slice of social experience in a manner that reminds us, through the laws of probability and casualty, of everyday existence” (p. 83). This relationship between literature and society, therefore, makes the employment of the sociological approach for the interpretation of African creative works inevitable. Given the experience of slavery and colonialism that Africa has had, Abiola Irele (1968) validates the sociological approach contending that an African writing should make, “significant statement with direct relevance to the African experience” (p. 23). He says the adoption of this approach by the critic takes into account “everything within the society which has informed the work” (p. 19).

This method of interpretation forms the basis of Marxian approach, postcolonialism, cultural and gender studies. The social significance of the writing on the Niger Delta necessitates the adoption of Karl Marx’s and Marilyn Nissim-Sabat’s postulations on alienation, and ecocriticism supported by Subaltern theory as the theoretical framework for the exploration of the selected works on the Niger Delta. The concern of the theories with subjugation and resistance necessitated the choice of a conflating mode for the interpretation of the texts. The struggle between the exploited and exploiters, superior and inferior, as projected in the selected texts, informed the preference for the Marx’s postulation on alienation, and the Subaltern theory. In addition, the environmental concern in the texts influenced the employment of ecocriticism – a theory that calls for activism for nature. We shall examine each of these in turn.

### **1.17.1 The sociological approach**

The Sociological Approach to literature is traceable to George Lukacs, Lucien Goldman, Ernst Fisher, Walter Benjamin, and Terry Eagleton (Lanre Bamidele, 2000). To Lukacs, the literary work contains a worldview or ideology, and system of values. It is the presence of these qualities in an imaginative text that qualifies it as a work of literature. A.A Zhdanov declared at the All Soviet Congress of Writers in 1934 that writers “must depict life not simply as objective reality, but...in its revolutionary development” (Ezeigbo, 1986). From Zhdanov’s declaration, it is

obvious that what Marxists see as reality in a work is its identification with the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. It is this relationship between a creative work and the reality in the eyes of the Marxists that Lukacs' disciples, like Bertolt Brecht and Jean Paul Satre, were faithful to (Bamidele, 2008).

Marxists are united in their belief in the existence of duality in human society – exploiters and the exploited. Marxists desire the replacement of this binary existence with a classless society with equal opportunities over the means of production. In the struggle for the attainment of this, they expect the writer to identify with the maladies of the oppressed, using his craft.

### **1.17.2 Karl Marx's postulation on alienation**

Marx explains alienation from the economic angle of production in capitalist system. The capital economic system – the successor to feudalism – according to Marx, is sustained by the separation of the worker from his production, the society, and himself. The estrangement experienced by the worker in the capitalist system is occasioned by the expropriation of his labour by the bourgeois class who controls the means of production (Jude Cox, 1998). Marx identifies four types of alienation: the first is the alienation of product from the labourer. He argues that capitalism promotes the appropriation of the products of the labourer by the capitalist who owns the means of production and not the creative strength or acumen. By the confiscation of the products of his sweat, Marx feels the labourer is estranged from his product. The second is alienation from the labour process: the worker has no control over the production process, the work condition, the effect of the work on him or the entire creative process broken down by the capitalist owner. The third alienation is that of alienation from fellow human beings. He contends that the disjunction between the producer and the controller of the means of production and the products creates antagonism between the two classes. In his words:

If his activity is a torment to him, it must provide pleasure and enjoyment for someone else...If therefore he regards the product of his labour, his objectified labour, hostile and powerful object which is independent of him, then his relationship with that object is such that another man – alien, hostile and more powerful and independent of him – is his master. If he relates to his own activity unfree... then an activity in the service, under the rule, coercion and yoke of another man... (Jude Cox, 1998:p.7).

The fourth kind of alienation identified by Marx is alienation from our being. Our humanity that derives from our potency to influence change in the world through our creativity is distorted by the forced or coerced labour associated with capitalism. Under capital economic system, there is an increase in productivity because of greater division of labour, yet the resultant wealth is denied the worker. Marx contends that:

It is true labour produce marvels the rich. It produces privation for the worker; it produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It procures beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labour by machines, casts some of the workers into the barbarous forms of labour and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker (Cox, 1998: p. 7).

His detestation for the exploitation of the poor compels him to proffer a proletarian revolutionary overthrow of the oppressive bourgeois. (Istvan Meszros, 1970).

While Marx's interpretation of the concept of alienation was limited to the economic implications, the later patrons of Marx's vision in the West have examined the concept from a psychological perspective (Cox, 1998). Social psychologists, who seem to be expanding on Marx's alienation theory, associate the concept with the mind even as they source its root to production in a capitalist system. The responses to alienation are noticeable in forms other than self-estrangement and acquiescence in the prevalent reality. Social psychologists have identified other methods of responses to alienation: the alienated turns to himself, turns away or turns against the oppressor. Turning to oneself may take diverse forms of antics – taking to such habits as alcohol consumption, smoking, drug addiction, and prostitution – habits that are inimical to the individual and the society by extension. The estranged or oppressed may chose violence or aggression against the oppressor as an attempt to reverse the status quo that he finds asphyxiating his existence. These reactions of the alienated are akin to Henri Tajfel's argument that the oppressed responds to his oppressed state by: (i) accepting the status quo of inferiority; (ii) challenging the system with intent to invert it; (iii) assimilating the situation – the assimilation may be total or partial. In total assimilation, the oppressed minority accepts all that defines him as minority. While in partial assimilation, the oppressed retains negative connotations to the displeasure of the majority (Christopher Sonn and Adrain Fisher, 1998:p. 462).

### **1.17.3 Marilyn Nissim Sabat's postulation on alienation**

Marilyn Nissim-Sabat (2002) a social psychologist, in "Phenomenology, Psychology, and the World: Towards a Manifesto" re-examines Edmund Husserl's (1970) postulation that transcendental phenomenology be employed to address the cause of crises. Differing from Husserl, Nissim-Sabat advocates that efforts should rather be directed at synthesising transcendental psychology and psychoanalysis to be able to solve crisis effectively. She argues that violence is escalating in contemporary times much more than Husserl's times. According to her, human beings resort to violence when there is a threat to their existence and "when faced with the danger of psychic death through severance from and loss of socius of humanity" (p. 3).

Explaining further the cause of violence, Nissim-Sabat contends that the threat to people's existence "comes from oppression and mode of alienation associated with it" (p. 3). Oppression, whether familial or cultural, threatens the humanity of its victim. She explains that oppression dehumanises the victim, provoking in him or her, the self-understanding that he or she is outside the precinct of the "analogy of humanity" (p. 4). The incorrect self-understanding that stems from oppression prompts two actions in the oppressed: he/she drops his or her personal autonomy and adopts the perception of self imposed, the understanding of self that is imposed upon him by the oppressor, or he or she becomes violent out of fear of loss of interconnectedness with others.

### **1.17.4 Ecocriticism or Ecolit**

Ecocriticism or Ecolit is a body of literature that looks closely at the environment. Cheryll Glouffey and Harold Fromm (1996: xviii) define it as "the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment." Lawrence Buell (1995), one of the chief proponents or fathers of Ecolit, in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, establishes the relationship between literature and environment. He argues that literature, even in non-fictional form, should be practically committed to rescuing the ecosystem from being destroyed by corporate institutions. He validates the relationship between literature and the nature by examining earlier writings that project nature, particularly Henry Thoreau's *Walden*. Buell, however, opines that the representations of nature in literary texts are culture and ideologies influenced.

The birth of the theory is traced to the 1980s, while it began to be a part of academic programmes in the US in the 1990s. Some scholars, however, date the provenance of nature writing to a much distant past, considering even the Romantic writings of Shelly and Wordsworth as well as Hemingway – from nineteenth century to the twentieth century (William Slaymaker, 2001). Lawrence Coup (2001) sees Kenneth Burk as the precursor of ecocriticism. According to William Slaymaker (2001), its peak period as a theory was the 1990s.

Besides the polemics on its genesis, there are varied interpretations of Ecolit by its patrons. The contentions and diverse explanations only contribute to broaden this body of writing on the environment. Michael Cohen (2004), contributing to the discourse, sees ecocriticism or ecolit as flowering after the World War II. He reveals that the books that emerged within this period were American centred – an accusation that some scholars that will be discussed later consider valid. He further reveals that ecocriticism has carved or designed a privileged space within which exist considerations of gender, race, ethnicity and class. The discourse has moved even from nature to incorporate culture. Interpreting Glofelty, a major voice in eco-discourse, Cohen (2004) reveals that there is a relationship between the physical environment and culture; they both affect each other. He argues that it is from this interconnectedness between the two that ecocriticism takes its roots.

William Slaymaker (2001) seems to disagree with Cohen on the birth period of ecocriticism: he sees its peak phase in America, the United Kingdom and Japan as the 1990s. He however traces the origin of nature writing to Wordsworth, Henry Thoreau, Li Po and Basho. He differentiates between nature writing and ecocriticism as he explains romantic writing as a spill over to ecoliterature: ecoliterature is, therefore, a throw back to nature writing.

The concern for nature has drawn the interest of feminists that are referred to as ecofeminists. They discern patriarchal culpability in the exploitation of nature. They contend that the woman and nature are both victims of patriarchal subjugation. Generally, ecocriticism is concerned with the non-human part of nature that is destroyed through man's industrialisation efforts. In their commitment to the environment, ecocritics advocate activism for nature in literature. Nature has been featuring in Nigerian literature since 1970s, for instance in Ken Saro-Wiwa's *In a Darkling Plain* (1989). The work captures the relationship between man and his



environment. Also in 1991, J.P. Clark has taken the mere mention of nature to ecoactivism in his *Wives Revolt*. Ecoactivism has since come to the fore of Nigerian literature with the severity of environmental crisis in the Niger Delta in the twenty-first century.

### **1.17.5 Subaltern theory**

The Subaltern theory is a part of the Postcolonial theory, which interrogates the hegemonic practices of colonialism, and imperialism that intend to obliterate the essence of the colonised peoples. Given the multiplicity of the effects of colonialism on the colonised society, postcolonial discourse has drawn scholars from multiple fields of study such as literature – its place of birth, Political Science, Anthropology, History, Sociology and Critical Linguistics. Its multi-disciplinary nature has made it polemic as reflected even in the post-colonial/postcolonial hyphenation or de-hyphenation. The prefix in the word does not indicate or suggest the demise of colonialism, which has since been succeeded by neo-imperialism. Therefore, postcolonial scholars, who include those in Subaltern studies, are in the business of subverting Western hegemony in an attempt to decolonise the imperialised and establish for them an identity distinct from that imposed on them by the cosmopolitan centre.

Subaltern studies were evolved by Asian historians in the 1970s with Gayatri Spivak as one of its most strident voices. The study group, which derived the term subaltern from Antonio Gramsci's writing, started with attempts at subverting Europeans' misrepresentations about Asia's history (Vinlay Lal, 2001). Subaltern studies are a part of postcolonialism blazed by Edward Said through his *Orientalism* (1978), an essay that attempts to re-examine the construct of the Orient by early European historians and travellers who saw the Orient as primitive, weak, feminine as opposed to the intelligent, strong, masculine and civilized West. The coloniser saw themselves as superior people who needed to go on "civilising" expeditions to the "uncivilized" and weak people.

In recent times, the term Subaltern has come to be associated with social group(s) alienated from the hegemonic political structure of societies, hence, has/have no voice; being alienated geographically and politically from the colonial centre. It also denotes the colonised or the lower classes of people who are at the fringes of society.

Gayatri Spivak however does not subscribe to the over-generalisation of the term. In an interview she granted in 1992, She contends that the broad use of the term Subaltern tends to include people with political interest, who are excluded from governance. In her “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Spivak rather sees the unrepresented illiterate rural women as belonging to the Subaltern group. These people represent the voice that is never heard. Homi K. Bhabha (1996) shares similar view with Spivak when he argues that power relationship should constitute the basis for defining the real oppressed.

As a discourse, Subalternism queries the Whites and Non-Whites (Africa, Asia and Middle East) binary of Self and Other. It also interrogates the West’s relegation of non-Whites modes of knowledge to myths and folklore. Such relegation generates, in the Subaltern, the desire to drop his knowledge, culture and language for the adoption of Western culture, knowledge and language.

These postulations/theories examined have in common their concern with alienation/subjugation and activism. These issues of exploitation/alienation and resistance/activism are implicated in the literature that has emerged from the eco-crisis in the Niger Delta. Thus, the application of these postulations/theories in the analysis of the selected texts is valid.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Politics and literature share some affinity – their concern for the society and their attempts at influencing the attitudes, emotions and thinking of men in the society (Ngugi, 1981). The relationship between politics and literature is evidenced, in some cases, in the expression of political, gender and other forms of activism in varied genres of literature. In Africa, the evidence of the symbiotic correlation between the two became manifest from the beginning of the reactions of educated Africans against Western imperialists' presence on the continent. The responses were informed by their comprehension of the foundations of the mission of the colonialists. The basis was a feeling of superiority over the colonised people – superior Self (Europeans), inferior Other (Africans or colonised). Given its binary base, colonialism flourished luxuriantly to the glory and transformation of Europe, but to the stifling and the underdevelopment of the imperialised and colonised nations of Africa.

The dissension occasioned by the frustration arising from the politics of estrangement by the imperialists in Africa marked the start of the interface between politics and modern African literature as exemplified in negritude. The anti-expansionist activities had the nationalists and the writers seamlessly bonded or had them as different combatants united against common foes (the colonialists). The overthrow of the intruder, both believed, would mean the retrieval of their culture and psyche mangled as a result of colonialism, and the re/designing of the destiny of their people. At independence, the fellowship between the writers and the nationalists was broken and they became adversaries to each other. The destruction of the relationship has been attributed variously to the policies and actions of the political leaders that the writers saw as antithetical to their pre-independence dreams. To the African writers, the perfidious actions and plans of their former comrades estranged the society of which they were and are still part.

The result of this isolation was and has continued to be the thriving of different forms of maladministration that have consequently compelled the writers to engage the policy makers and dictators through their art. To the African writer, the

ravaging inferno of poverty and general maladies ignited by maladministration was a major theme and subject of artistic concern that could not be ignored. In their attempt at remedying or contributing to the righting of the abnormalities, the craft of the writers has become a veritable weapon. This attempt at reordering society through writing, thus seem to have made the marriage of the two indissoluble. Given the apparently endless post-colonial challenges, many writers and critics of African literature therefore advocate the need for an African literature that is committed to the liberation and advancement of the society. This advocacy is in consonance with Marxist ideology. We shall attempt a review of some essays on commitment in literature, postcolonial agitations and ecocriticism.

The sociality of literature compels our application of the sociological approach with emphasis on Marxism to the creative works on the Niger Delta. Edris Makward (1972) in “African Literature and Ideology” endorses this approach when he identifies the existence of a link between African literature and, the African political and cultural renaissance.

Bernard Crick (1978), in “Writers and Politics,” however holds a contrary opinion on the functionality of literature. He contends that literature should be unmarried from politics; aesthetics instead should be prioritised, and the individual man in society be made the focus of a literary work. Reacting to Terry Eagleton’s essay on devotion, he argues that the writer’s involvement in the politics of the day means being steeped in the politics of the day. Crick (1978) seems not to have taken cognisance of the political nature of literature that is sometimes engendered by the socio-political experience of a given time. This is a fact validated by the history of English literature from the medieval to the twentieth century that is tainted by the socio-political, religious and economic experiences of the society.

Guy Amirthanayagam (1965), in “Commitment in Literature,” also expresses apathy towards a committed literature. To him, every writer is dedicated so long as he is a human being. He opines that the humanity of the writer informs his writing about his inner being, about himself or about his environment; hence every writer is committed. Amirthanayagam, therefore, does not see any difference between committed writers like Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy on the one hand and on the other hand, Jane Austen and Emily Bronte who were detached from the social challenges of their period. He reasons rather that the historical experiences of the

period a writer lives are incapable of influencing the content of his writing; because to him, the great art is not propaganda, it is wrought out of the mind, the emotion and the blood of the writer.

In “Redefining Relevance”, Njabulo Ndebele (1994) is in same school of thought as Crick. To him, excellence in the craft must be privileged over socio-political concerns. This view was what provoked Theophilus Makhuba’s (2005) contention in the essay, “A Critique of Njabulo Ndebele’s Criticism of Protest Fiction”. He asserts that the writer is influenced by events around him as they dictate his writing. Using South Africa as example, he discloses that the rancid experience that dominated every aspect of the people then became handy raw material for the writer.

Similarly, in Latin America, such events as colonialism and neo-colonialism evident in misrule, poverty and economic backwardness that dehumanise and still devalue the essence of living cannot be ignored for writings that privilege entertainment, personal artistic deftness. Consequent upon the post-colonial woes, Mario Vargas Llosa (1978) in “Social Commitment and the Latin American Writer,” argues that, in Latin America, being a writer means being committed to the socio-political, economic and cultural problems of the society.

Writing on the relationship between literature and politics, Ngugi “Writer in Politics” (1981) expresses his belief in the potency of writing as a weapon for social transformation. He identifies the use of word as a fact of life that unites the politician and the writer. According to him, they both have human beings and human relationship as their subject and object respectively. He discloses that over the years, politicians and writers have found themselves engaged in the same fight for the liberation of their people from the apparently choking grip of colonialism. In this business of unfettering the people, writing is the weapon common to the politician and the writer. Moreover, the post-independence challenges in Africa, he explains, compel even the apolitical writers such as Cyprian Ekwensi and Christopher Okigbo to become political. By this view, Ngugi is saying that it is a matter of necessity for the African writer to be concerned with events as they unfold in his society.

Ngugi supports the alignment of the writer with the African masses who have suffered the devaluation of their essence by Western capitalism. He makes a similar advocacy in the essay “Literature and Society.” He opines that literature should not be

a mere reflection of social reality. Literature is the product of a writer who is part of the society sharing in the same experience as the underprivileged. Consequently, he desires that the writer identifies with the exploited. Discernible in his writing is a call for works tilted towards Marxism. In relation to the experience of the people of the Niger Delta – experience that the writers have scripted, the Marxist approach advocated by Ngugi is valid. Our choice is informed by a palpable identification by the writers on the Niger Delta crisis with the sordid experience of the people.

Ononge (1986) argues for the employment of socialist realism in African literature. In his “The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African literary Criticism”, he outlines some facts about socialist realism and they are:

- (1) socialist realists see capitalism as the cause of all the social maladies, and consequently they seek its overthrow through internal revolution.
- (2) the writers must not address themselves to abstract humanity as is the case with the ‘art for art sake’ advocates, but must address themselves to the 80% of the population wallowing in impecunity.
- (3) the socialist realists are optimistic of the potency of their constituency to overthrow their oppressors and alter their essence.
- (4) they desire the necessity of Pan-Africanism and indeed a proletarian internationalistic outlook (37, 38).

However, it should be noted that Ononge’s first point – that all social maladies are traceable to capitalism is rather absurd, especially in the case of the woes of African countries. Some of Africa’s problems are self-inflicted. This is apparent in the ecological challenges faced by the people of Niger Delta: they are internally as well as externally generated.

Ononge also puts forward some factors that contend against the successful realisation of the socialist vision in Africa. These factors are:

- (1) the colonial heritage and liberal mentality in the universities where the minds of aspiring writers are sculpted to see capitalism as modernisation.
- (2) the African, though the most reactionary, is still most tame compared to Asia vis-à-vis revolutionary enthusiasm.
- (3) the lack of revolutionary fervour among the educated class douses revolutionary flame in burgeoning writers with radical zeal.
- (4) the language inherited from the colonialists for communication walls off the writer from his illiterate audience (39).

In spite of these constraints, he is optimistic of the triumph of radical activities in Africa. His hopefulness, he says, finds strength in:

- (i) the sustained arms resistance against colonialism and the evolution of revolutionary theories.
- (ii) the growing knowledge to organise and agitate for rights exhibited by the exploited in Africa.
- (iii) such knowledge prognosticates the eventual triumph of revolution in Africa (p. 42).

The restructuring of the society, for the happiness of the majority of the masses on the African continent, bedevilled by myriad of adversities, can be effected through sundry methods. In literary productions, protest against the unwholesome state of things in the society is one method employed by the writer who is not insulated from the ills of the society. Charles Ibitoye (1990) also lends his voice to the polemics on the place of the writer in a state in conflicts. He is of the opinion that writing is a necessary catalyst for social revolution. In *Apartheid and the Pattern of Protest* (1990), he approves of the practical involvement on the part of writers in the struggle against oppression. Contending, he says that a writer who shifts from the responsibility of being committed to the socio-political issues of his immediate milieu would be writing his own obituary.

According to Ibitoye, Mshengu highlights three characteristics of the writing in the period of the struggle against apartheid: political oppression, economic exploitation, and racial segregation. Different writers within this period address themselves to these respective woes. Ibitoye (1990) ascribes the militancy that came to colour the lives of the people of South Africa to radical theatre. This theatre, he reveals, conscientised the black people to demystify the prowess of their oppressors. His agitation concentrates on the superficial cause of the protest against white South African government's racially biased policies. Although the examination focuses on the overwhelming issue of segregation, brutality and the consequential black resistance, he leaves untouched the psychological consequences of the segregation on the dominated. He consequently leaves a gap that Jude Agho (1993) fills in *Disillusionment and Alienation in the Novels of Ngugi, Amarah et al.*

Oppression, exploitation, injustice as well as maladministration thrive on the estrangement of the subjugated. Marxist scholars associate the success of capitalism with the alienation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie class. While the policies made

by the privileged class work to their favour, the underprivileged class, disfavoured by the rich-centred policies, feels alienated. In the face of an enduring marginalisation, the deprived are compelled to react in different ways. The oppressed consequently become withdrawn, acquiesce in the status quo, protest their marginalisation through violent actions against the tormentors, or exhibit aberrant behaviour.

Jude Agho's (1993) *Disillusionment and Alienation in the novels of Ngugi, Amah et al.* fits into this work. He interprets disillusion and alienation as the consequences of colonialism and neo-colonialism that often provoke revolution – a major yearning of Marxists for the overthrow of capitalism. He prescribes rebellion for the overturning of apartheid that he considers as the same as imperialism, or as a product of capitalism and neo-colonialism. Consequently, his chosen-method of the analysis of the works of Ngugi, La Guma, and Amah is the sociological approach. His choice of this approach, he reveals, is informed by the distortion of the African communal order by Western imperialism. This twist, he argues, alienated Africans from their cultural traditions.

On disillusionment, Agho traces its beginning to the post-World War II period when most people, including writers, became disheartened by the contradictions in the world. He interprets the writings of such men as Charles Dickens and Leo Tolstoy as the result of their attempt at coming to grip with a society that had changed from their expectations. According to him, these two concepts are products of Western imperialism in Africa. The resultant aggression against Western hegemony by the Africans is only proportional to the violence with which the imperialist project was executed in Africa. He avers that committed literature in Africa, that was prevalent in South Africa's apartheid era, was only an attempt by writers through their craft, to undermine the existing political order that alienated the black South Africans.

Dumbi Osani (2003), in *Alienation and Resistance in the Novels of Peter Abrahams and Alex La Guma*, explores the concepts of alienation deeper than Agho does. Writing on the South African experience in relation to the concept of alienation and resistance, Osani (2003) describes estrangement as a condition in which an individual is disconnected from himself and external realities (25). He further defines it as a state in which the individual experiences the fragmentation of his psyche (25). He traces its origin to religion and philosophy – with Augustine, Plotinus, and Hegel who were the first interpreters of the phenomenon. Both Augustine and Plotinus,



according to him, saw sin as the cause of separation between man and God, his Maker. Hence, alienation as a phenomenon has a spiritual beginning.

Osani (2003) also associates the feeling of detachment with moral failure – anomie or a state of moral collapse in a society. At the sociological level, he sees it as a consequence of a society ruled by privileged minority. His interpretation of alienation is a derivation of Jean Jacques Rousseau who sees this form of alienation as a consequence of a cruel government's attempt at protecting some privileged individuals. The effort by the government, to protect a few individual to the neglect of the majority, engenders a feeling of disaffection on the part of the unprotected majority.

Karl Marx, he adds, identifies a kind of isolation associated with capitalism, which flourishes on forced labour. The workers whose output is appropriated by the exploiters for their comfort feels separated. Apart from the Marxist interpretation, he further explains that alienation is a result of a discordant between the unconscious and the conscious forces in the human mind. Osani interprets this to mean self-estrangement.

In spite of the various ways alienation is felt or interpreted, its consequences on its victims are similar. Osani identifies the following results of the experience – self-gratification through alcoholism, indulgence in sensual pleasure, enjoyment of the rustic or appreciation of nature, resistance through protest to escape the unpleasant condition.

This detailed information on alienation forms the basis of Osan's (2003) interpretation of the South African resistance novels. He interprets the fierce resistance that characterised the daily life of apartheid South African as a natural product of the psychological separation suffered by the black majority as a result of obnoxious apartheid policies. In relation to commitment in literature, we see disaffection suffered by the writer along with the masses as the stimulant for his creativity.

The contention that violence initiated by imperialism only leads to a corresponding hostility is a re-echoing of Fanon's postulation in his *Wretched of the Earth* (1967). The validity and relevance of the preceding argument to our work lies in the similarity of the experience of the oppressed in Apartheid South Africa and the Niger Delta. In apartheid South Africa, the brutal alienation led to antagonism from

the blacks on the one hand; on the other hand, in the Niger Delta, the isolating activities of the multi-national oil companies and the Nigerian state-assisted violence led to armed resistance from the youths of the area.

Udenta Udenta's (1993) writing on committed literature in "Revolutionary Aesthetics and African Literary Process" sanctions socialist realism for the sensitisation of the oppressed masses. He explains critical realism as, a thorough analysis of society in its constituents of politics, ethics, and legal system. He claims that class struggle is best captured in critical realism in an undialectical manner, portraying the relation between power and alienation of labour. By such interpretation of the tradition, he shares the same view as Ngugi (1981) who sees it as analytical enough to capture everything about society – the structure of class, the conflicts between the oppressed and the oppressors. According to Udenta (1993), critical realism, though non-violent, leads to the evolution of revolutionary ideology.

He associates African writing in the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century with critical realism. The reason he advances for this is the institutionalisation of corruption and repression that were connected with the emergent post-independence leadership. The early writing, which was critical of the ruling class, was what he refers to as humanist transformation. The scathing criticism, in his reasoning, was occasioned by a perceived abandonment of the writers by the bourgeois nationalists. These nationalists became neo-colonialists, establishing alliances with capitalist Europe. In the portrayal of the post-independence maladministrative ills, satire, he says, became a veritable missile in the hands of the humanists turned critical realists. According to him, this mode flourished from the 1970s to the 1980s in spite of what he considers its deficiency – not proffering a solution to neo-colonialism and maladministration.

Udenta traces the origin of socialist realism to post 1917 Russian writers that recommended its adoption by all writers. The features of this genre of realism, according to him, as an ideological weapon are: (i) to service the people; (ii) adherence to the partnership; (iii) close bond with the working people's struggle; (iv) historical optimism; (v) rejection of formalism and subjectivism; (vi) nationalistic primitivism (9). He interprets this kind of writing as a complement to critical realism, which is incapable of addressing the crises in the continent traceable to Western imperialism. He points to Sembene Ousmane, Alex La Guma, Ngugi wa Thiong'o as

the patrons of this mode in Africa. In another essay, “The Place of the Revolutionary Aesthetics in the Context of African Literary Process” (1993), Udentia associates these practitioners of the socialist realist mode that he describes as radicals with true comprehension of the socio-economic situation in the continent. They consequently, desire revolutionary alternative in all areas including literature. He, however, disparages the earlier critical essays of Ngugi and Ousmane for their exclusion of what he considers to be the historical context. He sees insurgent aesthetics as a progressive thing influenced by the historical conditions prevalent at a time.

The historical events, which he considers as mere portrayals of life in the early works of Ngugi and Ousmane, we reason, are foreshadowing of the ultimate triumph of the exploited through a revolt. The protests and agitations may not be the final triumph of revolution, yet they constitute a part of the whole process of insurgency. Moreover, history has shown that sustained demonstration and unrest by the oppressed can, and does lead to the overthrow of tyranny. The final demise of South African apartheid system as a result of sustained fighting and protests is exemplary. It has become a jaded statement that Africa’s history – especially that since her contact with the Europeans – has been unsavoury. Though free politically, much of the continent is economically manacled to its colonialists; hence, the craving for Africa’s total emancipation by African writers – especially those with a Marxist bent.

The struggle of African writers to liberate the continent, therefore, has, tied the African literature. Griffith, Diana Louis, and Eva Marshall (1989) in a review, “Chidi Amuta: A Dialectical Theory of African Literature”, Chidi Amuta to have said that African literature is linked to her history: that its literature can only be understood through its history. According to Griffith et al., Amuta argues that African literature and art are committed to freedom, and that the flourish of literature is only feasible in a free society. He argues that the socio-historical experiences that define the continent are transported into a work, as the empirically real become fictional reality.

Therefore, in the criticism of African literature, a work should not be treated in isolation from the issues in the history of the society. Amuta believes that African literature is founded on the challenges imposed on the continent by colonialism/imperialism and neo-colonialism. It is to such problems that African literature is committed. Amuta contends that there is a link between literature and

anti-imperialism. In this belief, he commends the anti-colonialist literary as well as political activism of Amical Cabral, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Among other things, he commends Cabral for his exaltation of the peasant culture that Amuta sees as a representative culture of the masses. (Griffith et al., 1989).

The above highlights the social utility of literature. L.O. Bamidele (2000), in "Art and the Artist in Society," attempts to provide an answer to the relevance of literature even in the age of technology and globalisation. He posits that from the traditional to modern world, literature has always had positive social import. The literary artist, he explains, has always served as the custodian, redeemer, and reformer of the society. Even as he recognises the roles of the artist in the society, he however disagrees with the seemingly over bloated image of the artist as painted by Shelly in his *Defence of Poetry*. He argues that the angel-like picture painted of the artist by Shelly contrasts sharply with the inner being of the artist. Men with such contrasting personality cannot be the voice of the society, nor be the agents of revolutionary change.

Nevertheless, Bamidele (2000) discountenances writing divorced from politics. He rebuts Stendhals' argument that politics is no business of the writer, as the writer's involvement in politics will defile his craft. The disjunction between politics and the writer as demanded by Stendhal, to Bamidele, will make writing irrelevant to the society to which the work is addressed. He contends we cannot escape from political function since art itself cannot be divorced from politics.

By this position, Bamidele exhibits the same persuasion as Archibald Malcheish who says poetry is able to deal with every human political experience as political experience is certainly human. His opinion on the relationship between literature and politics reveals itself in his interpretation of Malcheish's statement, "that the artist's role in political debate is relevant and necessary but not in a degree that becomes a political slogan and propaganda" (32). He also shares the same view as Brecht, whom he discloses, opines that the writers should transcend the reflection of reality to the level of changing society.

However, he departs from Brecht, desiring that, the intention to reform and to transform society is the responsibility of the artist. The transformation intended, he argues further, should be only to awaken the man to ethical and religious concerns.

Bamidele is opposed to the radical revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois oppressor – a desire often associated with Marxists.

Given the seemingly endless unpleasant experiences of the people of Africa – experiences engendered by maladministration – we believe that, it would be a disservice for a writer to distance his writing from the socio-economic and political experiences of the day. This is because, the society looks up to the intellectual elite, which class the writers belong to, to inaugurate a social change.

The above position is in consonance with that of Femi Osofisan's (2001). Osofisan (2001) accords the task of altering society to the intellectual elites in the society. In the essay, "Revolution as a Muse: Drama as Surreptitious In-surrection in Post-colonial State," he demands for imaginative creations committed to influencing revolts in the post-colonial African society bedevilled by corruption and repressive leadership. Osofisan sees the African intellectual elites as dishonest and consequently culpable for their acquiescence in or support for the anomies prevalent on the African continent. The educated class in Nigeria therefore, becomes his object of attack in his writing. Through ridiculing and criticism, he believes, the intellectuals can be provoked into resistance and pull the society out of its cesspit. He therefore challenges the writer in Nigeria to employ his craft to enlighten the masses to unchain themselves. He shares the same position as Osundare (2007) with regard to gingering the intellectuals to be in the crusade for change. His proposed surreptitious insurrection may take a long time to yield its fruits, because a majority of the Nigerian populace is illiterate. Osundare advocates that the writer instead needs to go beyond mere sensitisation to being at the forefront of the vanguard for social revolution.

Dasyuva (2003) wants the unhappiness of the writer to influence alternative governance in African countries. This credo places him in the same boat as Osofisan. In "The Writer and Society in Conflict," he posits that committed literature will provide an innovative substitute and that African literature cannot but be conflict centred as literature by its nature revolves on difference and its resolution, especially the dramatic genre. He explains that the very existence of Africa itself is struggles-characterised – slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and its attendant post-independence challenges. Consequent upon this, he argues, it is incumbent upon the writer to incorporate the politics of the day into his art. He establishes the compelling

need for political involvement of the African writer, citing the case of Okigbo who was forced by the post-independence tension in Nigeria to take up arms to defend his people during the Nigerian Civil War. Dasyuva further discloses that Soyinka was said to have been impelled by the same post-independence frustrations to take up the extra-authorial task of seizing a radio station to spur the people – an action that a Soyinka’s contemporary, Eleche Amadi saw as an act beyond the precincts of the natural calling of a writer. In Dasyuva’s (2003) view, the literature has the potency to mediate in conflicts, and consequently, contribute to social development.

By the reflection and recreation of events that he advocates, he recognises the role of the critical and the socialist realists in addressing the socio-political challenges of the African continent. His recognition of the collaborative role of both modes in influencing a reordering of society is congruent with our exploration of writing on the Niger Delta, some of whose contributors are of both traditions.

Niyi Osundare (2007) also shares the same passion with Osofisan and Dasyuva vis-à-vis the vision for social change through artistic creations. In *The Writer as Righter*, he opines that the writer has the potency to precipitate a new circumstance in the African continent through the employment of his skill to persuade and appeal. He sees the African writers as constituting the educated elite that can break the society free from the shackles of subjugation placed on the society by post-independence megalomaniac African leaders. His call for an activist literature in Africa stems from the challenges imposed on Third World countries by Western capitalism. Given the enormity of the capitalism-imposed distress, he desires a kind of involvement from the African writer that transcends a mere innocuous documentation of the distasteful socio-political experiences with candour to provoking a cataclysmic social change. It is an expectation such as this that propels him to lampoon the early African writers for their non-committal writing. He attributes their evasiveness to the European brainwashed, elitist education, the early writers had received – a training that prepared them for neo-colonialist privileges that alienated them from the maladies of the society. The consequence of such a disjunction between the early writers and their society, according to him, is a body of writing with a palpable quiet on the culpability of Western capitalism/imperialism for Africa’s underdevelopment.

While Osundare castigates the first generation African writers for their insensitivity, he applauds the succeeding generation of Ngugi wa Thiongo’, Femi

Osofisan, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide for its revolutionary fervour. The writing of this generation is in tandem with his belief that the writer should not only be in the vanguard of an aggressive change, but must be in the front line for change. Osundare's passion for a revolutionary change in Africa realisable through literary creations is an obvious Marxist agitation that is compelling in the African experience as such advocacy offers an alternative that should come from the intelligentsia.

George D. Nyamndi (2006) in "Prospective Commitment in African Literature" differs slightly from Marxists who call for an overt revolt against tyranny and oppression. Like other scholars, he sees African literature as experiences or events influenced. In the capturing of the happenings in Africa, he contends that the artist's role should not just be circumscribed to culture rescue, but should be directed at moving the continent forward. There should be a shift from a retrospective to a 'prospective' literature: there should be an African literature that projects into the future rather than a literature that reminisces about the past. He argues therefore that the uncritical romanticisation of the past in African literature without making the past guilty for the present predicament of the continent is a major limitation in African literature. The uncritical glorification, he warns, will not prevent future replication of traumatic socio-political problems of Africa. He, therefore, prescribes a new role for the African writer: a job where the writer identifies with the problems of the present society.

He recognises the impediments to the realisation of his task for the writer. A major limitation to the new role of the writer that he identifies is that of the use of language of the colonial masters. For the dismantling of this barrier, he subscribes to Jean Paul Satre's counsel on violence against the colonisers' language. Given the improbability of an abrupt divorce from the colonialists' language that has had a seemingly permanent place in pedagogy, he advocates a synthesised language such as that employed by Achebe, Gabriel Okara, and Okot P'Bitek.

G.G. Darah (2009), in an opening speech at the annual convention of Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes, not only shows the relationship between literature and politics or society, also reveals the trend of revolutionary ethos in Niger Delta writing. In the speech entitled "Revolutionary Pressure in Niger Delta Literature," he argues that from classical times to 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, literary works that emerged were a result of the struggles of the people against forces inimical to their wellbeing. He

reveals that Leo Tolstoy's novels were the result of his distaste for the feudal system in Tsarist Russia. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century France, the radical philosophers and writers influenced the existing environment by sensitising the people to overturn feudal structures.

In addition, Darah (2009) opines that the unsavoury experiences of the African Americans in the United States inspired the productions of music and writing that were intended to restore to the blacks their humanity lost to slavery, colonialism and capitalism. He contends, therefore, that the protracted internal colonialism that the people of the Niger Delta experience from the Nigerian state has begun a revolutionary process that will lead to their emancipation. He traces the activist tendency evident in literary works of writers of Niger Delta origin from the pioneering works of Dennis Osadebay, James Ene Henshaw, and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo to Tanure Ojaide, and Kaine Agary.

Darah (2009) also discerns in Osadebay's and James Ene Henshaw's anti-colonialist writing and African cultural reaffirmation a protest tradition. He further associates Clark-Bekederemo's *The Raft* and his later works of *Wives Revolt* and *All for Oil* with the revolutionary process that is unfolding in the Niger Delta. Okara's poems such as "The Fisherman's Invocation" and *The Voice*, he argues, are objection to the marginalisation of the minorities. At the traditional level, Darah (2009) links the commencement of radical pressures to the fight of traditional monarchs of the Niger Delta against the colonialists' domination of economic activities in the area. He believes that the post-colonial insurgences in the region are occasioned by the betrayal suffered by the people of Niger Delta from the Nigerian state. Thus, the bitterness generated by the corrupt nature of the Nigerian state has influenced the emergence in the region of radical artistic creations – music and literature.

His interpretation of earlier works such as those of revolt in the Niger Delta is an obvious re-reading of these writings with the lenses of Fanon. It is ironic that radical scholars like Udentia and Osundare, however, have berated these artists for their non-committal nature. We believe that Darah's opinion is based on his belief that insurrection is a progressive experience with the writers in the two realist traditions being part of it. Darah's postulation that Niger Delta writers, whose works belong to critical and social realism, are revolutionary is in consonance with our focus in this essay. We believe that Niger Delta literature is one that captures the pains and



destructions inflicted on the people as well as their flora and fauna. Such corpus could be by non-Niger Deltans, yet with genuine concern for the region's political and economic emancipation.

In the essays we have examined, what is obvious in African literature is its social nature. The social significance expresses itself through the exploration of the socio-political and historical events that shape the writing from time to time. From the start of modern African literature – from anti-colonial struggle to the present – African literature has been that of a committed one. This kind of imaginative works are intended to serve as instruments of correction of the socio-political ills that have plagued the continent. Thus, in the interpretation of African literature, the sociological approach with Marxian focus becomes valid. The experience that necessitates the application of this approach includes colonial and the anti-colonial experience with their enduring implications on our existence. For this reason, we shall look at what Amilcar Cabral and others have said about decolonisation.

## **2.1 Decolonisation**

Cabral (1980) in “National Liberation and Culture” posits that central to every form of imperial domination, the goal is to decimate the population of the imperialised to forestall cultural resistance or impose itself on the dominated without harm to its culture. The other objective is progressive assimilation. He considers this theory as the most violent attempt at culture denigration and destruction. He believes that the emancipation of the oppressed is often executed through culture manifestation that enables the subjugated to reject the culture of the oppressor.

To Cabal, therefore, national liberation is an attempt at retrieving the right of the subjugated stolen from them by the imperialists. He discloses that one strategy employed by the imperialists to sustain the exploitation of their victims is to cause division between the intellectual class and the other classes in the society through the assimilation of the former by exposing members of this group to privileges that alienate them from their culture. The intellectuals thus become apathetic to the liberation struggle. This view agrees with Osundare's (2007) opinion that early western education detaches the educated and makes the African intellectuals complacent to the struggle of the masses.

Frantz Fanon (1963) is more forceful in this advocacy for the violent overthrow of the colonialism, which he believes, was carried out through brutality. Its fierce overthrow by the affected people, according to him, is only reactionary – only proportional to the cruelty inflicted on the oppressed for the success of the imperialist project. Abiola Irele (1982) corroborates Fanon's comments on the effect of colonialism on Africa. He discloses that the establishment of the British Empire was through calculated belligerence. About the relationship between Africa and Britain, he unveils that it was a master-servant relationship with durable palpable relics. A major consequence of colonialism, he points out, is the alienation of the colonised from his roots. His prescription for the alteration of this experience is however a direct opposite to Fanon and Cabral's. He believes that the colonised can only overcome the negative effect of this unpleasant event by having a new spirit, a fresh mindset to be able to come to terms with his estranged state and make positive significance of it.

Biodun Jeyifo (2004), in "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory," makes a distinction between that experienced by Western nations and that initiated by the West against non-Western countries. He explains the former as a civilising process and the latter as a civilizing mission. The civilising process is about the West and their various stages of evolution while the civilising project is about Europe's activities abroad to refine non-whites. He discloses that while the civilising process, which is Europe's experience, succeeded, the civilizing project failed because of resistance from the colonised who would not master the coloniser's script and enlightenment. In addition, it failed because of the hegemonic and autocratic attitude of the colonisers.

Jeyifo's focus on culture is informed by his belief that colonisation was informed by the desire to export and impose Western culture on Other countries with supposed inferior cultures. Nevertheless, as adumbrated by Lenin, the much more serious reason for the export of colonialism, especially in its advanced stage (imperialism), is economic gains (Loomba, 1998). Oil exploration activities that preceded Nigeria's independence and have continued in the post-independence era are evidences of the evolution of colonialism to neo-colonialism.

The sustained economic gains at the expense of the imperialised nations irks Ngugi (1988). In his essay, 'Writing against Neo-imperialism' (1988), he identifies

three stages of the African writer's evolution vis-à-vis the post-colonial history of African states – the age of independence, the age of neo-colonialism and the writer in the eighties. He sees the self-government age, especially the sixties, as a period African nations witnessed external and internal pressure and the military in different African countries was influenced to take over power from the civilian. This triggered disillusionment in the writer whose weapons of correction were ridicule and contempt. The neo-colonialism stage, according to him, was one of Western powers, especially the USA exerting dominance over the countries in Africa and Asia through such financial institutions such as IMF and World Bank. He sees this period as one of triumph, as African military coups were Western imperialists directed and literature became anti-imperialistic as writers ascribed the failure of African leaders to the West.

The eighties, in his opinion, was a phase of sustained clash between the forces of democracy and socialists against the forces of expansionism. In his belief, this stage would see many coups in the likeness of those of Jerry Rawlings and Thomas Sankara, which occurred in Ghana and Burkina Faso, were directed against neo-colonialism for the reordering of Africa to enable her gain control over her resources. He foresaw the African writers in this period up to the nineties hitting harder on the neo-colonialism, taking sides with the masses in revolution.

The crisis that has come to characterise the Niger Delta region has as its provenance the coming of the Europeans to the region and to the Nigerian nation generally. The imperialistic exploitation of both the human and natural resources of the region has negatively affected both the people and the ecology of the area. The restiveness in the area was informed by the commitment of the youths to the protection and restoration of the people and their ecosystem that are faced with the threat of extinction through the activities of multinational oil companies operating in the region. The concern for nature in the struggle of the people, who include writers, makes the examination and the application of ecocriticism germane to the essay. Consequently, we shall examine some essays on ecolit.

## **2.2 Ecocriticism/ecolit**

William Slaymaker (2001) in his essay, "Ecoing the Other: the Call of Global Green and Black African Responses" argues that the focus on the environment in Sub Saharan Africa since the 1980s has been faint. He opines that no African writer is

engaged in the exploration of the environmental in texts in the manner advocated by Buell. He attributes the apathy shown by the African writer to the environment to the African writer's suspicion of Western environmental interest as another attempt at neo-colonialism. However, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *On a Darkling Plain* (1989), Niyi Osundare's *Eye of the Earth* (1986) – a collection of poems that speak for nature, J. P. Clark's plays *Wives Revolt* (1991) and Okpewho's *Tides* (1993) as well as recent works that all discuss the environment invalidate Slaymaker's claim. Byron Caminero-Santangelo (2007) in "Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature" also invalidates Slaymaker's (2001) claim that eco-consciousness is rather quiet in Sub-Sahara African literary works. He identifies Ken Saro-Wiwa's effort at raising universal awareness of the environmental challenges and environmental activism in the Niger Delta as an example of eco-consciousness in African writings.

In an essay titled "What is Ecoterrorism" (2009), Buell contends against the terrorists tags placed on activists against the mistreatment the flora and fauna as well as their natural dwelling when there is enormous violence is committed against the American nation.

Though, relatively, a novel discourse or theory, Ecolit or Ecocriticism has continued to bait into existence, proponents as well as opponents whose writings contribute daily to its corpus. Dana Phillips (1999), for instance, claims that men's search for truth about ecology only results in a falsified reality. What is referred to as hyper reality, to him, is an artificialised reality – the result of which is neither unreal nor quite real and is consequently frustrating. On nature and culture, Phillips reasons that the relationship between the two concepts is complex. His major grouse against proponents of ecocriticism or ecolit is their apathy toward theory. He also accuses ecocritics of ignorance of the recent history of ecology, and exaggerating the success of its representation of nature.

One voice that is resonant against Ecocriticism is that of Simon C. Estok (2009). His discomfort with the discourse on the environment is mainly its place of birth – USA. He sees environmental issues as global with every local environment having its peculiar ecological challenges. To him, therefore, the overwhelming flow of ecoliterature from America to other nations, particularly the erstwhile colonies of Western nations, smirks of American imperialism. His suspicion is founded on the cultural imperialism already experienced by Canada and Korea. This kind of fear is a

major reason for the apathy demonstrated by most postcolonial scholars towards ecocriticism. We rather see a link between the two discourses. The imperialist oil politics in the Niger Delta and the attendant ecoactivism invalidates such suspicion. There is a point at which both discourses meet. Ecocriticism can, however, be nativised by the colonised to interrogate imperialism.

Of recent, some Feminists seem to have shifted attention, addressing environmental concern as it applies to the woman. To an enthusiastic environmental campaigner like Bina Agarwal (1997), there is a relationship between nature and the woman as both are victims of hegemony, hence their interest in the ecology over which, they argue, culture has been privileged by the patriarchal society. Catherine Acholonu (1995) in her essay, "Environmentalism/Not Feminism" notices this contiguity between the rural woman and environment. She claims that visible in the rural woman are the qualities of nature's motherly virtues that are innocence and unsullied nature. To her, the rustic woman, by her agricultural engagement, is the provider of the food needed by the city and its inhabitants, thus she serves as the agricultural, commercial, economic, and political base of the nation. She also sees the countrywoman as knowledgeable enough about her milieu to interpret it. She however observes that ecofeminism is a discourse that unites both men and women.

Vandana Shiva (1989), who sees relationship between nature and the woman, interprets ecofeminism as distinct from liberal feminism that attempts to be more concerned with the push for equality between the women and the man. Ecofeminism, she says, is rather an attempt to liberate the woman. Like Acholonu, she understands the woman as being closer to nature than the man is. To her, as with other feminists, the natural world and its oppression parallel the subjugation of the woman. In her view, ecofeminists loathe any form of hierarchy but uphold the sharing of power. According to Shiva (1989), a woman liberationist, construes patriarchy as male's creation founded on Western ideology that emerged five thousand years ago to promote the binary relations of male/ female, body and mind, nature and culture. One is superior and the other inferior and is discriminated against. She believes that the activism of ecofeminists is rather the amalgamation of the qualities of the male – competitiveness, individuality, assertiveness, leadership – with those of the female's for a balanced human. Shiva's essay reveals that ecofeminism is constituted of activists with distinct views. Some feminists are opposed to the bonding of the

woman with nature. To such feminists, the closeness of the woman to the natural world is a male-chauvinists stratagem to oppress women.

### 2.3 Essays on Saro-Wiwa's writing

The texts explored in this work include *Tides* by Isidore Okpewho, *A Month and a Day* by Ken Saro-Wiwa, *The Activist* by Tanure Ojaide, *Yellow-Yellow* by Kaine Agary, *Love My Planet* by Vincent Egbuson and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila. It is pertinent to note that given the nascence of this sub-genre of literature that is eco-focused, some of the texts are yet to command much critical attention; hence, the limitation to only few available essays on them.

Harry Garuba in "Ken Saro-Wiwa: *Soza boy* and the Logic of Minority Discourse" (2000), prefaces his exploration of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soza boy* with a look at its distinct choice of language – pidgin – which he believes is a deliberate choice to reflect the narrator's intellectual level. In his analysis of the novel, Garuba draws parallel between the experiences of Saro-Wiwa and Mene, the major character in Saro-Wiwa's *Soza Boy*. Saro-Wiwa suffered discrimination and later death by hanging during the military regime of late General Sani Abacha, and Mene experiences discrimination and rejection. According to Garuba, Mene, a barely literate young man from the minority Ogoni ethnic group, in the novel, is always a subordinate to other characters in the novel. He sees the recurring subordination experience of Mene as representative of the marginal position of the Ogoni in Nigerian politics.

Oshita Oshita (2000) in "Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Trajectory of the Minority Predicament" traces the plight of the minorities to the pre-independence period when the people of the Niger Delta had expressed fears of marginalisation or domination. Oshita also argues that Saro-Wiwa's activism against domination of minorities was informed by the discrimination he had experienced while he was in secondary school in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Oshita, however, is silent on Saro-Wiwa's environmental activism, a thing for which he was hanged.

Solomon Odiri Ejeke (2000) in "The Socio-Political Dimension of Ken Saro-Wiwa's Activism" attributes Ken Saro-Wiwa's acerbic criticism of Nigerian leadership and his environmental activism to his belief that the writer should go beyond mere x-raying of social ills to practical efforts at social transformation. In his examination of Saro-Wiwa's *Prisoners of Jebs*, Ejeke identifies humour as Saro-

Wiwa's major medium through which he makes comments on the Nigerian state. Ejeke associates Saro-Wiwa with violence. This is strange, as Saro-Wiwa was known in his lifetime as non-violent environmentalist.

Amen Ahunuwangho (2000) in "The Gift of Voice: Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Prisoners of Jebs* as a Political Discourse" focuses on the language employed by Saro-Wiwa in his *Prisoners of Jebs*. Employing pragmatic theory, Ahunuwangho identifies the use of familiar words as symbol in Saro-Wiwa's text. According to him, through the use of familiar words, Saro-Wiwa caricatures various elites and aspects of the Nigerian society.

Also, writing on minority politics, Francis Angrey (2000), in "A Metaphor of the Nigerian Situation: A Socio-Political Reading of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Prisoners of Jebs*," classifies Saro-Wiwa's text along those of Eighteenth century French writing that focus on the search for truth and love for ideas, deemphasising the beauty of language. Angrey, like Ejeke and Ahunuwango, interprets Saro-Wiwa's tone as sardonic, satirical, trenchant and humanistic. According, Ahunuwangho, Saro-Wiwa employs satire in the novel to expose the failure of the military and the political leaders of Nigeria.

Onookome Okome's (2000) in "The Fear of Colonization: Reading Ken Saro-Wiwa's Political Thoughts in Nigeria's Political Public" discloses that Nigeria came close to disintegration during the days of late General Sani Abacha. Okome believes that Nigeria is still not far from disintegration, unless the leadership of the country takes some of the measures highlighted by Ken Saro-Wiwa. Okome is of the view that the aggressive activities of the youths of the Niger Delta are the practical fulfilment of Saro-Wiwa's vision of the decolonisation of the people of Niger Delta. Okome describes Saro-Wiwa as Philosopher, fighter who was engaged in philosophical and physical war to wrest his people from those he described as domestic colonialists. Okome interprets some of Saro-Wiwa's writing as being a part of his attempt at decolonising his people. We see ecoactivism to liberate his people eloquent in his prison text.

#### **2.4 Essays on Tanure Ojaide's writing**

Tanure Ojaide belongs to the second generation of modern Nigerian writers, which include Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, among others. Famed nationally and internationally more for his poetic deftness, Ojaide has imaginative

fecundity that has found expression in his numerous published collections of poetry, short stories, critical essays, and novels that include *The Activist* – one of the texts of our consideration in this essay. While Ojaide’s poetry has enjoyed robust literary comments, his prose works are yet to have similar attention. The reason for this is the novelty of this aspect of his writing career. Some critics have identified in his poetry, especially his latter collections, a recurrent resonant concern for the social malaise occasioned by post-independence misrule as well as ecofriendliness. His unease with repression, which is ideology-influenced, is inscribed in most of his works.

Aderemi Bamikunle (2002) is one critic that reveals the revolutionary colouration in Ojaide’s poetry. In his essay, “The Stable and Changing Nigerian Poetry: Tanure Ojaide’s Search for a Poetic Voice”, Bamikunle sees Ojaide being optimistic of the overthrow of the exploiters whose noxious policies and actions seem to be a menace to the breath of the masses. His identification with the plight of the masses, he further reveals, mirrors in his change from a turgid elitist language to one accessible to the masses at whom his writing is directed. In his writing on Ojaide, he discerns a modification in trend and style. While he points out the presence of a revolutionary vision in the later Ojaide, he avoids tagging the writer as a Marxist in spite of the obvious manifestation of Marxism in Ojaide’s writings. There is post-colonial distress obvious in Ojaide’s unhappiness with the post-independence challenges for which he holds the West guilty. Bamidele is however, silent on this aspect of Ojaide’s writing. In our exploration of *The Activist*, we shall examine this neglected postcolonial enthusiasm.

In, “Ojaide’s Poetry and the Niger Delta Landscape: A Study of Delta Blues and Home Songs,” Charles Bodunde (2002) identifies the participation of the West in the local colonisation and exploitation of the Niger Delta, but does not locate this in Ojaide’s writing. In his essay, he perceives a protest against the degradation of the environment, and the devaluation of the lives of the people. He also finds the poet deploring the plundering activities of the multi-national oil companies that contribute to the extinction of much of the flora and fauna of the area. He finds the personal experiences of the poet constituting the events in the poetry. We find the protest against the environmental depredation and its effect on the human and non-human inhabitants transplanted in *The Activist*. Bodunde’s interpretation is devoid of an association of Ojaide’s imaginative creations with a vision that runs through all his



recent writing. On Ojaide's prose – *The Activist*, specifically – a few comments have emerged. We shall examine these.

Ikhide Ikheloa's (2007) review of *The Activist*, entitled "The Activist Dies in Tanure Ojaide's Dreams" is a tirade. He faults the text from the title to the content. About the title, he avers that it was awkwardly chosen, and its story is too familiar, told in a turgid language. He also considers the story improbable, and consequently does not capture the real plight of the people. It is absurd that he considers Ojaide's *The Activist* unworthy of publication. Ikhloa's (2009) vituperative comments on the novel as a jaded tale unworthy of perusal seems to be redolent of the rather abrasiveness associated with the criticism of Chinweizu et al (1980). His vitriolic outburst in its subjectivity, however only validates the need for divergent and dissenting views one of which is what this thesis attempts to be.

Uzoечи Nwagbara (2008) in "Political Power and intellectual Activism" sees the novel as an ideo-aesthetics work that examines post-independence Nigeria's struggles, and post-colonial tragedies. He sees Ojaide sensitising the Nigerian intellectuals to awake to alter the Nigerian politics. Altering the status quo includes elevating national politics to a level of patriotic enterprise. In the whole, he explicates the novel as Ojaide's vision of redefining man and his environment and freeing him from the clutches of devastation, even as it attempts to offer an alternative system to the maladministration in Nigeria.

Nwagbara focuses on political power and intellectual activism. He leaves unexamined the ecological and neo-colonial politics of which the people of the region are victims. He also leaves out the erosion of self/ alienation resulting from the oil politics in Niger Delta. Germane to the exploration of this text is the culpability of the West in the underdevelopment of the colonised. In the execution of the imperialist enterprise from inception, there have been Western and African collaborators. Even after flag independence, Western hegemony is perpetuated through the collaboration of emergent African comprador class. This much, though visible in the novel, is left unveiled by him, even as he analyses it with the lenses of ideo-aesthetics. He, however, examines Ojaide's concern for the ecosystem in some of his poems.

Enajite Ojaruega (2013) in "Ecoactivism in Contemporary African literature: Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness* and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*" argues that the environment is fundamental to human existence as there is a symbiotic relationship

between the two. Consequently, a threat to the environment, anywhere through pollution, impinges on man's right to the environment. She interprets the involvements of some African writers in environmental issue as their attempt at sensitising the society to eco-consciousness. Employing Ecocriticism to interpret Mda's *Heart of Redness* and Ojaide's *The Activist*, Ojaruega identifies the two writers as advocating for the preservation of the environment. According to her, while Mda calls for an end to the destruction of the environment, Ojaide wants corporate organisation to put in place measures that will ensure the preservation of the environment. In Ojaide's *The Activist*, Ojaruega identifies a binary relationship of strong/weak: the oil companies and the Nigerian government being the strong, while the people of the Niger Delta are the weak. While she identifies the treacherous activities of some elites in the Niger Delta as encouraging the destruction of the environment, she fails to connect the psychological effect of the betrayal with the ecoactivism of the people.

## **2.5 Essays on Kaine Agary's text**

Kaine Agary is a young female writer of Niger Delta origin. Her book, *Yellow-Yellow*, is yet to have much critical essays written about it. E. D. Simon (2010) in "The Niger Delta Region and the Woman's Predicament: A Case Study of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*" contends that the activities of the multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have destroyed the environment on which the people depend. The destruction of the environment has, therefore, resulted in joblessness, poverty and increase in vices among the people of the area. According to him, the increase in vices in the area has made the woman a victim of exploitation. Young and old men – foreigners and indigenes – constantly prey upon her as she attempts to survive in the midst of the suffering brought by the activities of the multinational oil companies. Simon examines the plight of the woman in the Niger Delta majorly from the experiences of Zilayefa, the heroine of the Agary's novel and her mother, Binaebi. His examination of the experiences of the rural woman in the Niger Delta environment is exclusive of the psychological trauma provoked by the destruction of the environment on which she depends for her survival.

Ignatius Chukwuma (2011) in "The Displacement of the Father-figure in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" examines the psychological challenges faced by the young heroines in both novels. While he

identifies the setting of Agary's novel as the Niger Delta, his focus is on the sexuality of the heroine, Zilayefa. Employing Sigmund Freud's Psycho-analytical theory, Simon identifies an endless quest for a father-figure in by Zilayefa. He associates her search for a father-figure that leads to her sexual escapade with an old man with the natural attraction of the female child to the older male and vice versa.

Sunny Awhefeada in his essay "Degraded Environment and Destabilized Women in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*" (2013) identifies Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide as pathfinders in writings committed to the environment. He avers that the two poets have since had disciples in eco-conscious writings with the emergence of writings on the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta. He sees Kaine Agary's debut novel, *Yellow-Yellow* as one of such emergent eco-conscious texts. Employing ecocriticism, Awhefeada sees Agary's novel as dwelling on dual issues of environmental despoliation and the plight of women in the Niger Delta. He avers that both issues are linked. The unwholesome activities such as prostitution and unplanned pregnancies that the women in the region indulge in are corollaries of the destruction of the environment by the oil companies. Awhefeada's examination focuses mainly on the socio-economic effects of the despoiled environment on the people of the Niger Delta, particularly the women. His exploration of Agary's novel is not eloquent on the psychological import of the destruction of the ecosystem on the women, especially the effects of the environmental degradation on the economic position of the women vis-à-vis the fe/male relationship. The psychological trauma resulting from the devaluation of the environment and the emasculation of the economic strength of the Niger Delta women are our concern in this essay.

Like Awhefeada, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in "The Niger Delta, Women and the Politics of Survival in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*" (2013) holds the multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta responsible for the destruction of the ecosystem and the moral value of the women in the region. She examines the plight of the women in the region through *Yellow-Yellow*, the heroine of Agary's novel. Chuma-Udeh argues that the flourishing of immoral way of life among young women in the Niger Delta is a consequence of the activities of multinational oil companies operating in the region. Like Awhefeada, Chuma-Udeh in her examination of Agary's novel leaves out the psychological consequences of the destruction of the ecosystem on the women, focusing instead on the socio-economic and political effects of the

degradation of the environment by the activities of multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta. She, consequently, leaves a gap that this essay attempts to fill.

## **2.6 Essay on Vincent Egbuson's novel**

Vincent Egbuson's novel, *Love My Planet*, one of the texts examined in this essay, is yet to attract much critical attention. Ovuoke Dorcas Owhofasa in "Women as Victims, Environmentalists and Eco-activists" (2013) traces the beginning of the destruction of the African environment to the incursion of whites into the continent. She contends that the African women, who associate more with the environment, suffer the same experiences of exploitation, devaluation and abandonment as the environment. Examining Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, In "Women as Victims, Environmentalists and Eco-activists", Owhofasa argues that poverty, diseases, prostitution, kidnapping and hostage-taking that are prevalent in the Niger Delta are consequences of the violation of the ecosystem by the activities of the multinational oil companies operating in the region. She sees the major female character in the novel as an environmental activist that advocates for a change of attitude towards the environment. Owhofasa's essay focuses on the socio-economic and political implications of the destructions of the environment. She leaves unexplored in her essay the erosion of self-consciousness that is illustrated in the violent activities of the people of the region as a result of the protracted despoliation of their environment. She, therefore, leaves a lacuna that this essay tries to fill.

The above essays reviewed provide understanding of our focus in this work as they reveal the opinions of various scholars and the limitations of such arguments. The gaps left by the essayists on the novels chosen for analysis in this work are what we attempt to fill.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 FACTS AND FICTION: EROSION OF SELF AND ECOACTIVISM IN ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S *TIDES* AND KEN SARO-WIWA'S *A MONTH AND A DAY*

The environment is man's first law. Without a safe environment, man cannot exist to claim other rights, be they political, social or economic (Ken Saro-Wiwa, 1995).

#### 3.1 Shell's strategic capitalism and the exploitation of the poor

The lack of social commitment on the part of the transnational oil companies – callousness symbolised by Shell's activities in Ogoni – is informed by the capitalist greed for wealth that goes along with alienation. Shell's representative insensitivity, with regard to the relationship between the oil companies and their host communities, reveals the profit-mindedness of the multinationals. The victims of exploitation are often alienated by the exploiters from the proceeds of their labour. In the case of the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta, they are alienated from the proceeds from their oil; from the environment as a result of frequent oil spillages and from self as a result of betrayal from within (by indigenes) and without (by Nigerian leadership).

Charles Ibitoye (1990) identifies alienation with capitalism that was exported to the Western and American colonies. In the days of colonisers, the successful implementation of the alienation policy for the carting away of the resources of the colonies was done through force. In the pursuit of her interest, Shell finds an easy ally and tool for exploitation in the Nigerian military government that is greatly blemished by ethnocentrism and avarice. The ethnicised military becomes veritable cudgel in the hands of Shell that habitually uses it to suppress recalcitrant minorities opposed to the destruction of their environment.

Through the Ogoni's agonies, Saro-Wiwa therefore, sees the perpetuation of colonialism by the British through her transnational oil company, Shell. He says, "British imperialism imposed on them oil exploitation and the Nigerian nation-state

with powerful and dangerous forces which together spelt omnicide in Ogoni” (p.190, *A Month and a Day*).

As part of its imperialistic stratagem to sustain its exploitation of the people, armed with plenteous profits from oil exploration in the Niger Delta, Shell employs the media – local and international – to have its image immaculately laundered. By such image laundry, its terrorism against the environment, especially in the erstwhile colonies of the empire, is obscured. Through the media, for instance, Shell publishes few of its social projects that are not proportional to its huge proceeds from the environment. This subterfuge is intended to arrest international bodies’ attention, thus veneering its insalubrious activities in the Niger Delta region. Shell saw Saro-Wiwa’s activities therefore, as an affront, especially when such activities are coming from a black man, or a black community when its environmentally friendly activities are eulogised in Europe and America.

These deceitful acts of Shell alongside betrayal by Nigerian leadership, their collaborators, provoke a feeling of alienation/erosion of self that expresses itself in ecoactivism by the people of Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa captures these acts of multinational oil companies represented by Shell in *A Month and a Day* and Okpewho fictionalises the experience of the people in his *Tides*.

Literary scholars find it difficult to delineate the borders between fiction and history, and fiction and facts. History and fiction, in spite of their superficial dissimilarities, have society as a common bond: society provides the threads with which factual or fictional stories are spun. Consequently, it inextricably strings the fringes of history or fact and fiction together. This inseparable interlacing makes some scholars describe them as strange bedfellows who cannot cohabit and cannot be divorced from each other.

Even with the historian’s attempt at disengaging his writing from fiction to ensure fidelity to truth, his writing remains tainted by some doses of fiction. This results from his personal interpretations of seemingly or overtly silent areas about events. For the creative writer, while history about the different epochs of human socio-economic and political evolution provides the raw material for his imaginative weaving, he down-plays the historicity, exalting instead his artistic finesse through the dislocation and reconstruction of history. Thus, he distinguishes his work from historical or sociological documents, and gives it the stamp of fictionality.

Autobiography, under which the literary genre called prison diaries or prison notes and memoirs are subsumed, even as it is historical in nature, is also considered a part of fiction. Its major qualification as a sub-genre of fiction, among other qualities, is its stain of unavoidable falsehood. Bernard Shaw's statement about autobiography validates its fictiveness when he avers that:

All autobiographies are lies. I do not mean unconscious, unintentional lies: I mean deliberate lies. No man is bad enough to tell the truth about himself during his lifetime, involving as it must, the truth about family and his friends and colleagues. No man is good enough to tell the truth to posterity in a document he suppresses until there is nobody left to contradict him (R Oriaku, 1998:p. 7).

The deliberate lies discernable in autobiographies legitimise the seal of fiction on autobiographies even as its historicity retains its unquestionable nature.

Given the peculiar socio-political experiences of Africans and Africa nations – experiences such as the slave trade and colonialism that midwifed the birth of African American, and African literature, the written literature from inception consequently, has been a blend of history and fiction that is sometimes autobiographical with fictional blemishes. The autobiographical tradition has enjoyed the employment of some African writers from the early nationalist writers like Kenneth Kaunda in *Zambia Shall be Free*, to later writers such as Wole Soyinka in *The Man Died*, Camara Laye in *The African Child* and Ngugi wa Thiongo' in *Detained*.

Even the works that can be inarguably referred to as fictions draw profusely from the historical experiences of Africa at various epochs. Examples of such writings include Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *Man of The People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Ayi Kwe Armah's *The Beautiful Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragment* and *Two Thousand Seasons*; Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The River Between*, *Weep not Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*; and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. While this list of works consists of early African writing, the most recent works by even the much younger generation of writers are not divorced from the tradition of borrowing from history. It is worthy of note that by definition, history is not circumscribed to the past, but is inclusive of all human experiences with social import. This inextricable relationship between history and literature is what Ernest Emenyonu (1989) argues when he says:

The writer needs to use the fact of history to dramatise for the people the realities of their common existence, as well as dramatise for them their predicaments so that they can make correct and appropriate choices in the future (p.vi).

The engagement of the African writer with history is because Africa's history for over five hundred years has been that of struggle against forces that have threatened to obliterate the destiny of the people (Steve Ogude, 1991). These forces against the people of Africa – forces that have existed from the period of Slave Trade, all through colonialism and decolonisation unto the present, have been from without and within.

From the twilight of the twentieth century until the twenty-first century, the socio-economic and political stability of Nigeria has been menaced by insurgency in the Niger Delta. The insurrection was occasioned by the despoliation of their environment by the activities of multinational oil concerns and the exploitation of the people of the region by the Nigerian state misruled preponderantly by succession of military juntas that often carried out apparently genocidal, repressive actions against the people of the area. The literature provoked by the unrest in the region is revolutionary, reflecting the nature of the Niger Delta region. This corpus of writing differentiates itself from the larger body of Nigerian literature by its ecoactivism.

The Western capitalists' advent to Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria through colonialism is often associated with a post-colonial trauma that includes the degradation of the environment. The multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are seen by the people of the region, especially writers, as an extension of the imperialists' enterprise beyond the colonial era. In the artistic creations that have emerged, therefore, there are references to colonial and post-colonial Nigerian history in fictionalised or factualised form. Thus, there is a convergence of history or facts and fiction about the environmental unrest in the region. This consequently, validates our consideration of Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*, which is fictional, and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* that is autobiographical in nature.

Okpewho's *Tides*, which dwells on the ecological challenges and the neglect of Niger Delta is one of the environment conscious works that presages the Niger Delta ferment that peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century. Through their advocacy of activism for the environment, Okpewho and Saro-Wiwa affirm their distinction from writers that merely capture nature in their writing. J. P. Clark in *Wives Revolt* (1991) has earlier explored the oil related unrest in the region without a



call for activism. It is worthy of note that the degradation of the biodiversity in the area and the intense ecoactivism of the people long predate the emergence of Okpewho's novel. In the early post-independent Nigeria, under the military rule of General Yakubu Gowon, there was an insurrection in the Niger Delta led by late Major Isaac Adaka Boro. Okpewho's work predicts the recrudescence of intellectual ecoactivism in the region. The title of the novel, *Tides*, is emblematic of the deltaic milieu of people even as it also symbolically envisages the phoenixing of the insurgency in the area with the passage of time. The novel, written about the time of the burgeoning of Saro-Wiwa's non-violent protest against the despoliation of the Ogoni environment by Shell Petroleum Development Company, is a prophecy as well as wake-up call to ecoactivism in the region. This prophesy is realised through Saro-Wiwa's environmental struggles, his arrest, trial and hanging by the military government of late General Sani Abacha in 1995. The aggression of the youths of the region in the years after Saro-Wiwa death is a part of the response to Okpewho's challenge of commitment to the environment.

### **3.2 Environmental degradation and divisive politics in Okpewho's *Tides***

Employing an epistolary style, Okpewho explores the plight of the people of the Niger Delta whose environment is depleted through oil and gas exploration activities by multinational oil companies. Through the correspondences of two journalists, Piriye Dukumo and Tonwe Brisbe, who are both victims of the apparently immanent effusion of ethnic politics in Nigeria even into the work place, Okpewho attributes the breath-stifling environmental traumas faced by the people of the Niger Delta to the ethnocentrism supported by greed that characterises the Nigerian existence. He argues that ethnocised politics works to the disfavour of the people of minority ethnic groups, particularly those of the oil-rich Niger Delta.

Ethnic sentiments, therefore, serve as the basis of most of the actions and reactions of the principal and other lesser characters in the work. In this epistolary work, Okpewho draws readers' minds to such experiences and their negative impacts on the Nigerian society, among other sundry references to palpable distasteful Nigerian realities. With regard to the oppression suffered by the people of the Niger Delta and the resultant upheaval, through one of the three major characters in the novel, Tonwe Brisbe, he warns that the crisis in the region will rob the nation of peace. Through another major character, Priye Dukumo, Okpewho foresees the

insensitivity to the appalling experience of the Beniotu minority group by the other ethnic nationalities forcing everyone to his own ethnic cocoon. Beniotu is an Ijo word for riverine dwellers. Okpewho has chosen this apt expression to designate and represent the people of the Niger Delta.

Since independence, the people of the Nigerian nation have had to contend with negative effects of misrule by military and civilian leaders. Beyond the general maladies suffered by all, Okpewho discerns ethnocentrism as the basis of the marginalisation and exploitation suffered by the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region represented in the novel by Beniotu people. He also associates ethnocentric politics with the environmental degradation of the zone. He interprets this tribal politics promoted by the military government as injustice and repression against the people of the Niger Delta. These twin evils, with smothering effects on the people, in Okpewho's view, are acts of alienation that are provocative of forceful environmentalism. This opinion is the central motif of his novel.

In the ecological woes of the people of the Niger Delta occasioned by tribalism, he implicates imperialists' politics. The imperialists' involvement is highlighted through their insensitivity to the environmentally hazardous activities of multinational oil companies operating in the region. The callousness of the oil companies and the military government towards the sufferings the people of the Niger Delta experience – maladies engendered by pollutions oil exploration activities, in Okpewho's reasoning, are made possible by the flourishing of ethnocentrism. The imperialists' politics of the exploitation of the colonised territories, in the case of Nigeria, finds fertile soil in ethnocentrism promoted by the military. Ali Mazuri corroborates this nature of the military in Africa and its divisive actions when he argues that:

The best a military regime succeeds in putting ethnic cleavages in a society in 'cold storage'. At worst, military rule, partly because of its pattern of recruitment into the armed forces and partly because of the nature of army rule itself, simply degenerates into eruptions of militarized ethnicity with violent confrontations (O. Otite, 2000).

The above contention establishes its validity in Okpewho's work through the relationship between the multinational oil companies and the people of Beniotu of the Niger Delta. In this epistolary, some noble men of Ebrima fishing village are

compelled by the noxious effects of oil exploration activities to visit an oil rig to complain to its operators – Atlantic Fuels, an oil company. The visit to the oil rig is prompted by:

Enormous search-lights which they train on the waters around their offshore rig were drawing the fish away. They wondered if there was anything the company could do to save them the trouble; their lives are dependent on fishing, and they faced certain disaster if the schools of fish were forced permanently out of their area of activity. The spillages from the rigs and pipelines have done enough harm to their trade, and the activity of this new rig would only snuff out their lives for good (11, *Tides*).

While the mission is to seek a compromise with the oil company, the team of negotiators for peace are harassed and intimidated. The engineer radios for a boat loaded with soldiers one of whom on arrival slaps Opene, the head of the delegation across his face. This forces the members of the team to escape for their lives. Tonwe visit to speak to the commanding officer, Commander Bayo Adetunji yields no better results as Adetunji rather takes sides with the oil company to which he grovels for pecuniary gains. Such actions of the soldiers are provocative of a feeling of alienation in the people of Niger Delta who feel betrayed by the military that is supposed to secure the citizens from external aggression. Tonwe's visit to a naval base unfurls the ethnicised politics in Nigeria. Commander Adetunji is a non-Beniotu. This explains his attitude towards Tonwe and the suffering people of Ebrima. His approach, despite the obvious plight of the villagers, is expressive of a national problem as Tonwe's earlier statement reveals, "ethnicity has become a major tragedy in the Nigerian body politics, and has hindered many a fine relationship among Nigerians" (5).

Such ethnicised politics in the military helps to cement the collaboration between the imperialists and the military leadership. Such an alliance with a repressive and corrupt leadership, to the imperialistic multinational oil concerns, is a good one. This is because it provides the enabling environment for the execution of their politics of exploitation of the resources of the people. The materialism of the military leadership is a weakness exploited by the multinationals for the fulfilment of the capitalist agenda of their owners – the exploitation of the natural resources of the subjugated or alienated through an alliance with internal perfidious collaborators. The veracity of this is established by Chevron's – an oil company in the Niger Delta –

admission of sending Nigerian soldiers to crush upheavals in Rivers State in Nigeria (Robert Vitalis quoted in Rob Nixon 2011). This attitude is articulated in the novel through the question of a white engineer on the oil rig to which Ebrima villagers have gone on their innocuous protest against the activities of the oil companies. Tired of what he considers as too frequent protests by illiterate fishermen, the white engineer reasons aloud, “What ... did the inconvenience suffered by a few scruffy fishermen matter to the general prosperity which the oil has brought to Nigeria?” (12). To the multinational oil companies, they have no part in the blame for the environmental woes experienced by the villages, after all, as the white engineer further reasons that they have been given “the franchise to exploit oil here” (12), after all they are only “businessmen, and had no political interest or social welfare...” (12).

Okpewho, through these statements discloses the profit-centredness that obscures the sensitivity of the imperialists represented by the multinationals oil companies. This profit-mindedness even at the expense of the lives of oppressed, as evidenced in the above referenced statement of the white engineer, also reveals what informs their employment of the state apparatus – the security agents, as well as a tool of oppression. The treachery of the multinational oil companies’ operators is made possible by the support they readily enjoy from internal accomplices. This can be seen in the actions of the multinational oil companies during the visit of a task force constituted by the military government to investigate the oil pollution in the Niger Delta. The inaugural meeting of this task force to which Tonwe is invited also has in attendance, among others, military officers like Commander Adetunji, Major Haruna Ismaila, oil companies executives and local chiefs. While speaking, Mr Segel, the Exploration Manager of Freland Oil Corporation, representing all companies, tries to hoodwink the aggrieved people of the oil producing communities and the government representatives. He contends that the oil companies are determined to clean up oil spills using what he deceptively describes as the most advanced detergent for oil spills.

In this gathering, which has come as a result of repeated grievances of the people over the pollution of their environment, Tonwe, who is representing the people of Beniotu, is a lone voice in the midst of the two allies. The loneliness of Tonwe’s voice is a metaphor for the marginality of the people of the Niger Delta in relation to the people of the major ethnic groups and their collaborators (the multinational oil

companies). The consequences of this marginality are evident in Opene's experience with the soldiers on the oilrig we have mentioned earlier and the frustration of Tonwe's efforts to interrogate the claims of Mr Segel by a dishonest chief who claims to be a true representative of the people of Beniotu. These actions of the internal traitors only beef up the insensitivity of the multinational oil companies operators to the detriment of the Niger Delta.

Insensitivity to the plight of the people and the environment is a shared streak of the multinational oil companies and the country's military leaders. Its existence in the latter influences the activities of the former vis-à-vis the unpleasant experiences of the people of Niger Delta. This is validated by the respective actions of the oil companies and the government. In the novel, the callousness of the government is demonstrated in the construction of Kwarafa Dam by the government and the effects on the people of Beniotu. According to Piriye in his median correspondence to Tonwe, the construction of the Dam is carried out without regard to the negative implications for the people of Beniotu who are mainly anglers. The construction of the dam has occasioned a reduction in "the volume of water flowing down the Niger Delta and so curtailed activity in the Delta and our people are nothing if not fishermen" (2).

Kwarafa Dam is the corruption of Kainji Dam in the northern part of Nigeria. In real life, the water level of this dam affects the agricultural activities in the Niger Delta. Okpewho has fictionalised this real life experience to explore the provocative effects of the damp on the livelihood of the people of the Niger Delta. He sees the insensitivity of the government and the activities of the multinational oil companies as contributing to the destruction of the ecology, thereby engendering a feeling of alienation in the people of the Niger Delta. He believes that this marginalisation experienced by the people of the region will snowball from harmless protests from the people of the region to ecoterrorism in future. The novel establishes these prophetic and historical qualities by capturing the graduation of the agitations of the people of the region from simple complaints to non-violent protests, then to belligerent resistance. The graduation also illustrates the progression of the people's plight from simple complaints of discomfort to erosion of self. The stages of metamorphosis of the struggle of the people of the Niger Delta, as projected in Okpewho's text, parallel the historical realities of the growth of the struggles of the people. C.B.N. Ogbogbo

(2003) corroborates in his description of the various phases of the reactions of the people of the zone. He discloses that the armed response had been preceded by complaints and writings by prominent educated sons of the Niger Delta to draw the attention of oil companies and government to their predicament. Okpewho depicts these futile historical attempts and the reactions of the people through the peaceful visit of the people of Ebrima to the oil platform of Atlantic Fuels.

Piriye's ecoactivism is stirred up by the callousness of the multinational oil companies, their divisive politics and the betrayal of Nigerian state and fellow. His wake-up call through his letter to his friend, Tonwe is a challenge to the Niger Delta people. His call for ecoactivism is one that is propelled by their attempt to salvage their essence, environment and the future of the children. The effort of the villagers to invert their suffering through the Opene-led peaceful delegation is the first step of the fight of people against their marginalisation.

The second phase is the efforts of Tonwe and Piriye to utilise their educational and professional skills to alter the plights of their people. Piriye and Tonwe had both lived and worked in Lagos as journalists with the *Chronicle* newspaper. Their lofty positions as editor-in-chief and editor in the newspaper had attracted to them the envy of their colleagues from major ethnic nationalities that were not comfortable with their exalted positions. Inexplicably, both were hurled out of their jobs at the same time by the Chairman of the Board, Mr Ajibade, whom Piriye thinks, had ethnic resentment against them.

Tonwe was compelled to return to his village roots in the Niger Delta on losing his job as a journalist because of tribal politics. He however discovers to his chagrin that, contrary to his expectation of peace at his Niger Delta village, he has the ubiquitous ethnic politics of Nigeria on his trail. His village, Seima and other neighbour villages in the Niger Delta capture the historical reality of the woes of the people of the area. In the villages, because of oil exploration activities by multinational oil companies, the ecosystem on which the people depend for their daily sustenance is ravaged with impunity – an act that Rob Nixon (2011) aptly describes as slow violence. The devastation of the environment by the oil companies is enabled by the insensitivity of the Nigerian military leadership. This collaborative thoughtlessness of the two, in Piriye's opinion, is provocative erosion of self that generates of revolt from the people who are alienated from their ecosystem and

betrayed by the Nigerian state. Thus, in his maiden letter, Piriye attempts to arouse Tonwe to environmentalism, giving to him a pathetic picture of the ecological degradation experienced by the people thus:

First, there is the Kwarafa Dam, which has severely reduced the volume of water flowing down the Niger and so curtailed the fishing activity in the Niger Delta – and our people are nothing but fishermen. Secondly, the spillage crude petroleum from oil frigs down there – one of which is in fact located near your village has proved an absolute menace to agricultural life, for many farms are practically buried in the thick layers of crude oil, which kills off many fishes and other forms of life (2).

It is worth mentioning that, in spite of the above terrific portrayal of the environment, Tonwe at this point is yet to be jolted to engage in ecoactivism that is advocated by his friend. The reason for his nonchalant response is founded on his earlier distaste for ethnic politics, which to him, only polarises the nation. He is however later compelled by his personal experience of the effects of the pollution and the brutal frustration of the Opene-championed protest to change his previous stance against tribalism. After the objectionable experience of Opene in the hands of the soldiers, he tells his friend, Piriye that:

It may come as a surprise to you when I say I feel better disposed to your project now than I did at first. Something happened here recently which has shaken me from my complacency and inspired me with concern not much below the zeal that you require of me. I have indeed become a little sadder than when I came here (11).

The statement reveals Piriye's gradual loss of self-consciousness, which provokes his non-violent ecoactivism.

Tonwe's transformation from complacency to activism is ignited by the despoliation of the ecosystem that also threatens the health of the living and the unborn people of Beniotu. Through this change in Tonwe, Okpewho captures the compelling nature of the plight of the people of the Niger Delta and thus, the need for the involvement of the elites in the struggle for the environment. His sudden change is in consonance with Udenta Udenta's (1993) contention that a character should be influenced by the challenges of his environment. This interpretation also agrees with Nelson Fashina (2009) who associates some distasteful experiences such as ethnic

discrimination, election rigging and expropriation of national wealth by the ruling class in Africa with revolutionary pressures. In the novel, the plight of the people in the villages of Beniotu meets the inciting conditions pointed out by Fashina (2009).

The blaze of activism to reverse the oppression of the people is manifest in Tonwe subsequent moves. His visit to Commander Adetuji and his attendance of the inaugural meeting of the Task Force on Pollution – all of which we have highlighted earlier, demonstrate his ecoactivism that is intended to influence a change in the lot of his Niger Delta brothers and sisters. His craving for the amelioration of the woes of his people drives him to extend a call to other Niger Deltans or Beniotu. To him, this call to other Beniotu kindred is inevitable. He expresses this in his letter of concession to Piriye when he says, “I have come home to lead a peaceful life, but how can I honestly disown a cause which has everything to do with the peace that I crave” (14).

This inexorable need for a peaceful existence that is guaranteed only by an environment free of pollution from oil exploratory activities informs Tonwe’s attempts to get the government to intervene in the despoliation of the environment by the multinational oil companies. This commitment to the rescue of the environment also makes him persuade the city-corrupted, consequently insensitive Beniotu indigenes in the Diaspora who are represented by Commissioner Freeborn Batowei in Benin. He tries to persuade the elites to haul their financial weight to influence the government. While with the Batowei, he argues thus:

“I have been driven from Lagos. Now I am home, there is nowhere else for me to run to. Take your mansion in the village. I imagine you have built it so that when you finally retire, you will have a good place to go home to and spend the rest of your days in peace and comfort. Now, how would you like it if this whole oil palaver got out of control, and your own village, and with your beautiful house, bogged down by oil spillage? So, if you ask me what is in it for me, I say it comes down to that...But let us look at from another angle. We talk about the civil war, and we should always remember that such things usually start from one small localised problem, which ends up engulfing the whole country because nobody is giving a chance to peaceful approach. So the fishermen get angry and blow up the oil installations, and the Federal Government brings down its might on our people, an another Isaac Boro rises up to try to fight the cause of the people, and the whole Niger Delta goes up in flame once again. Now, where does that leave you and me and all the beautiful homes we hope retire to?” (80-81).



Tonwe's above statement is an apt prognosis by Okpewho on the recent restiveness in the Niger Delta championed by youths from the region. The non-violent ecoactivism led by Ken Saro-Wiwa in the 1990s and the later belligerent actions of the young men in their attempts to retrieve their humanity and save their ecology daily menaced by the oil companies and insensitive leaders of the Nigerian state are the fulfilment of Okpewho's prediction. The actions of Saro-Wiwa in the 90s and the aggression of the youths of the region in the twenty-first century are responses to the wake-up call made by Okpewho through Tonwe.

In the novel, Tonwe's plea to his Beniotu kindred to resist the exploitative activities of the oil companies and the repressive actions of the Nigerian military government is also a struggle to secure a clean environment for himself and his Niger Delta compatriots – born and unborn. It is the response to this urgent call to duty that commands Tonwe, Piriye, 'Bickerbug' or Ebika Harrison and the Lagos based Beniotu elitist group, Committee of Concerned Citizens to rise up to revise the destiny of their people, employing their exposure to the city and Western knowledge differently – through peaceful protest to outright forceful activities. For Tonwe at the village in the Niger Delta, challenged by the repressive activities of the oil companies and the collaborators, it is time to use his position as an educated man and erstwhile Chief Editor of the *Chronicle* newspaper to lead his people out of the woods of oppression, repression, harassment and intimidation. His method of the liberation for his people is through peaceful mediations and motivation of privileged Beniotu indigenes to get the government's attention to end the despoliation of the environment.

Piriye is the one who influences Tonwe into ecoactivism. Employing his craft as a journalist, Piriye, on his part, becomes an antagonist to the military. He writes in national and international dailies to attract the attention of the national and international community to the horrors of ecological injustice experienced by the people of Beniotu. He ferrets for information from Lati, a former female Yoruba colleague of his at the *Chronicle*. His writing and activities intended to unshackle his people, gets him hurled into prison by the authorities. His subsequent conditional release from prison by security agents flings him into a quandary as to what approach is the best solution to the problem of his Beniotu people – the violent reaction sought by Bickerbug or the non-violent change desired by Tonwe.

Ebika Harrison or Bickerbug on his part espouses a militant solution to the problem. It is noteworthy that through the divergent approaches of the various categories of the people, Okpewho examines the varied reactions of the people of the Niger Delta to the ecocide in the area. In doing this, he tries to detach the struggle of the people from any ideological strings, especially Marxism, as most advocates of the oppressed are wont to do. This is obvious even in Bickerbug, the major character with ecoterrorist traits. In spite of his resentment against the oppressors of his people, he is disconnected from any ideology. Bickerbug is an English graduate. His aggressive reaction to the repression of his Beniotu people presages the final stage of the resistance of the people of the Niger Delta that Tonwe has adumbrated in his argument with Commissioner Freeborn Batowei. Bickerbug is the resurrected late Major Isaac Boro. Boro is the precursor and symbol of armed resistance by the youths of Niger Delta against the Nigerian state. Boro with some of his friends from the Niger Delta, in the early years of military rule in Nigeria, had staged a brief but inspiring revolt against the Nigerian state. Saro-Wiwa's whose environmental activism coincides with the time of the publication of Okpewho's novel, to some extent, shares some resemblance with Bickerbug. This is apparent in Piriye's description of Bickerbug:

Not in the fashionable ideologue mould – he doesn't flog the names of Marx or Lenin or Fanon or any people. At least I haven't heard him do so and I haven't seen any of their books in his – well library, if you call his collection by that name. But he is a true guerrilla type, with a lot more time for planning action and executing it than for the more comfortable ways of doing things. He doesn't shave, wears nearly the same clothes all the time, gets what he wants as fast as he wants it (38).

From Piriye's above description, Okpewho envisages the emergence of a true revolutionary leader not distracted by materialistic pursuit, but genuinely committed to the liberation of his people. This picture of a non-materialistic, non-ideological activist truly devoted to the salvation of his people matches Saro-Wiwa's personality. Saro-Wiwa was not known for materialism or as a Marxist. Okpewho's belief in a non-covetous leader is founded on his reasoning that the economic prosperity of one or few individuals in the midst of millions will not translate to a plural fiscal and political emancipation of the people of the Niger Delta. In Okpewho's opinion

therefore, financially successful Beniotu indigenes such as Batowei in Benin, Chief Zukumor in the village and Tari Strongface are simply self-seeking, opportunists who easily compromise the benefits of the collective struggle of the people. This is manifest in the treacherous acts of the already mentioned “perfidious” elites. At different occasions in the novel, commissioner Batowei and Chief Zukumor, who symbolise the compromising Niger Deltans, attempt to frustrate the agitations of their people for their personal gains. Batowei, who through his personal struggles has become rich, refuses to be persuaded by Tonwe to lend his privileged financial weight behind the general struggle of his own people. In his egocentric thinking, he is rather surprised at Tonwe’s selfless interest in the plight of the people. He therefore asks him, “That’s why I asked you, how has the oil problem affected your life? I really meant to ask you what’s in for you?” (79). Zukomor on his part, exhibiting similar self-interest, frustrates Tonwe’s attempt to interrogate the claims of the oil companies that they employ the detergent in the cleaning up of oil spills.

Ignoring perverse characters such as the above therefore, Okpewho chooses Bickerbug, who is not an ideologue to predict the resurfacing of violent revolutionary activities in the Niger Delta region. Bickerbug is self-effacing, not an avaricious character, but a simple activist who is sincerely committed to yanking his Beniotu brethren free from the claws of oppression of the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state. In his one-track-minded commitment to the salvation of his people and their ecosystem, he parts ways with the Lagos based Beniotu people’s Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC). The committee, whose leadership, as it is typical of Nigerians, is made up of opportunists seeking to exploit the sufferings of their people back in the Niger Delta for their selfish interest.

Consequently, he refuses to align with this group, which he sees as part of the forces bent on keeping his people under the yoke of oppression. Bickerbug, after his release from gaol, (he had been arrested on grounds of being a threat to security) recruits young men from the dregs of society and blows up an oil rigs in the Niger Delta and then goes ahead to blow up the Kwarafa Dam, thereby causing a deluge that disrupts the supply of electricity nation-wide. Through this act of Bickerbug, Okpewho’s vision of the triumph of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta through a revolution becomes clear. This visualisation of Okpewho finds expression in the

statement of Bickerbug following his arrest by the Nigeria police after he has blown up the Kwarafa Damp:

“Well, well, well, Piriye... we have won, haven't we?  
Our people have won ...The water is flowing again, full  
stream. The tides are here again. Soon there'll be plenty of  
fishes swimming again, eh?” (188).

The expression, which is laced with sarcasm and disgust, also serves as a caveat to the military leaders on the likelihood of the evolution of the crisis in the Niger Delta into a revolutionary level with nation-wide negative consequences.

Okpewho's predictions of insurgency with far-reaching implications for the Nigerian state has since been validated by Saro-Wiwa's arrest and subsequent execution through hanging by the government of General Abacha, and the recent rebirth of restiveness in the Niger Delta. Okpewho's fiction draws its contents from the history of the immediate-past before the time of his novel. It is a history of immediate recall. By the fictionalisation of such not-too-distant history, Okpewho has used literature to refract the present and foreshadow the future.

The realisation of Okpewho's prophecy through the Saro-Wiwa-led activism that was succeeded by insurrection in the region shows some form of transition in the writing on the Niger Delta eco-crisis – from theory to praxis just as it indicates a kinesis from fiction to facts.

### **3.3 Ken Saro-Wiwa's Ecoactivism: From shadow to substance**

Ken Saro-Wiwa's prison diary, *A Month and a Day*, posthumously published, marks a new beginning in African literature vis-à-vis the praxis of ecoactivism in literature. The work does not inscribe its distinctiveness by its autobiographical contents, but by its practical concern for the environment. Saro-Wiwa in his earlier novel, *On a Darkling Plain* (1989), has demonstrated his love for the environment when he captures the beautiful relationship between man and his unsullied environment. His last text on his ecoactivism shows a deviation from mere Romantic presentation of nature to ecoactivism.

Saro-Wiwa's new focus in documented form, to some extent, agrees with Charles Nnolim's (2006) call for a universal canvas for African literature in the twenty-first century. Though autobiographical in content, the work is part of Saro-Wiwa's environmental conflict with Shell Petroleum Development Company and the

Nigeria's Federal military government that colluded to devastate the ecosystem and consequently impoverish his own minority people of Ogoni in the Niger Delta.

Saro-Wiwa's agitation, which is foreshadowed in Okpewho's epistolary text, is the realisation of Okpewho's prophecy. Saro-Wiwa's struggle for the Ogoni's despoiled environment is a response to Okpewho's call for activism to be led by the educated class. Tonwe and Piriye, in Okpewho's novel, are journalists who employ their vocation in the liberation struggle of their people. Incidentally, Saro-Wiwa also utilises his craft as a writer in his ecoactivism. We thus, see a link between the two works of arts – Saro-Wiwa's environmental activities in textual form, being not only a fulfilment of Okpewho's prognosis but are also an extension of Okpewho's novel. Saro-Wiwa's physical contention against the forces within and without documented as a diary can further be seen as ecoliterature in praxis, while Okpewho's novel is ecoliterature theorised.

As a realistic work, we find Okpewho's adumbrations expanded in Saro-Wiwa's memoir. The validity of our argument about Saro-Wiwa's prison notes or diary as a practical literary text on environmental struggle is obvious in a letter he had sent to his British writer friend, William Boyd. Part of the letter reads:

I am in good spirits ... There is no doubt that my idea will succeed in time, but I'll have to bear the pains of the moment ... the most important thing for me is that I have used my talent as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors. I was not able to do this as a politician or as a businessman. My writing did it (Boyd's introduction to *A Month and a Day*, 1995).

Saro-Wiwa's ecoactivism on behalf of his Ogoni ethnic group is simply the practical establishment of his belief that the writer should use his craft to prosecute the war against injustice perpetrated by the Nigerian military leaders. It is a credo he never fails to verbalise at different convocation of writers. He recapitulates this creed in his memoir thus:

... literature in crucial situation such as Nigeria cannot be divorced from politics. Indeed, literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, by intervention, and the writers must not merely write to amuse or to take a bemused, critical look at society. They must play an interventionist role (81).

Saro-Wiwa's advocacy for what he refers to as an interventionist role expected of the writer, is informed, according to him, by his personal experience that:

African governments can ignore writers, taking comfort in the fact that only few can read and write, and that those who read find little time for the luxury of literary consumption beyond the need to pass examinations based on set texts. Therefore, the writer must be *l'homme engage*: the intellectual man of action. He must take part in mass organizations. He must establish direct contact with the people and resort to the strength of African literature-oratory in the tongue (81).

Saro-Wiwa's involvement in the direct mobilisation of his Ogoni brethren for their emancipation from the shackles of neglect, exploitation and ecoterrorism is African literature in practice or the advocacy of literature made palpable. His involvement of the intelligentsia and the ordinary people of the communities of Ogoni is a demand of many a writer, especially those with Marxist leaning. Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* (one of the texts examined in this essay) makes a similar call. Saro-Wiwa's action, as chronicled in his memoir, is therefore a kinesis of literature from the abstract to reality. In contrast, works like Okpewho's *Tides* and Ojaide's *The Activist* are a reality transcribed into fiction. Saro-Wiwa's vision, vis-à-vis the aggregation of the respective classes for social revolution, is harmonious with that of a Karl Marx-influenced Ngugi's. Ngugi, not only expresses his desire for social change through his creative imaginations, but also uses them, especially his dramatic works, to mobilise the people to engineer social change.

In the same school with Saro-Wiwa and Ngugi, with regards to the employment of the creative art as an instrument of change, are Femi Osofisan (2001) and Niyi Osundare (2007). For Osundare, the writer should not just be in the vanguard of revolutionary positive change, but should be at the forefront of such vanguard for social change. Saro-Wiwa puts himself at the forefront of the vanguard of Ogoni' people that are genuinely committed to the retrieval of their destiny violated by the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies.

In the epic struggle that later led to his execution, Saro-Wiwa's fundamental method of protest is non-violence. His knowledge of the superiority of the pen to the gun comes alive when he realises that the objectives of the struggle, which are environmental, psychological, economic, political, and cultural, can be best achieved in a military regime only through the drawing of the attention of the international

bodies to which Nigeria is a member. Saro-Wiwa's memoir is a factual or historical document of the experiences of the people of Ogoni whose experience, vis-à-vis their environmental desecration and ethnically prejudiced position, is representative of the minorities in the Niger Delta. The work captures the daily experiences of Saro-Wiwa during the period of his arrest for campaigning against Shell Oil Company's ecocide in Ogoni land. His daily experiences are the mirror through which the unappealing conditions of the people of the Niger Delta are reflected. The text based on his experiential knowledge expands on Okpewho's fictional story on the plight of the people of the Niger Delta.

Unlike Okpewho's imaginative work with only dots of history, Saro-Wiwa's memoir discloses the details about the history and the reason for the struggle of the people of the area. We shall examine in turn the contributions of the multinational oil companies and the Federal government to the destruction of the people of the Niger Delta, their environment with their flora and fauna and the consequent restiveness.

#### **3.4 Historical background of Saro-Wiwa's environment memoir**

Oil was first struck in the Niger Delta at commercial quantity in 1958. The nation has made so much gain from the exploration of oil since then. More than fifty years afterwards, on the contrary, the people of the oil producing communities have continued to live their lives in a manner that is antithetical to the wealth derived from the bowels of their land. This is as a result of the insensitivity of the oil companies and the Nigerian state. At the time of the resurgence of the agitations that Saro-Wiwa captures in his work, it was thirty years of oil exploration in Ogoni land and other parts of the Niger Delta by the Shell Petroleum Development Company and other oil companies.

He estimates thirty billion dollars as financial dividends of Shell Petroleum Company operating in Ogoni land by the 1990s. In spite of these huge proceeds, he reveals that there is a disproportionate attention to the people and the environment. Its activities have rather impoverished the people as a result of the despoliation of their farmland and aquatic lives by frequent oil spillages. This injustice compels Saro-Wiwa to identify with other ethnic minorities at the international level suffering similar ecological degradation. A part of his address to an international assembly of such minorities, under the umbrella of Unrepresented Nations and Peoples and

Organization (UNPO) at Geneva in 1992, he graphically captures the ecological woes faced by the people of Ogoni as a result of the activities of the multinational oil companies.

The environmental havoc caused by the activities of Shell Petroleum Company as depicted by Saro-Wiwa's text is similar to the ecological effects suffered by the people of Beniotu from Atlantic Fuels in Okpewho's novel. In both texts, the oil companies are presented as the means of perpetuating capitalism in the erstwhile colonies. In Saro-Wiwa's narrative, the consequence of the environmental pollution by the activities of the multinational oil companies on his people and his psyche form the crux of Saro-Wiwa's struggle for environmental justice from the Federal Government of Nigeria and the international organisations.

### **3.5 Military politics and the dynamics of internal colonisation**

Shell was able to perpetrate these acts of suppression and estrangement of the people of the host communities in the Niger Delta with impunity because of the minority status of the people within the prevalence of ethnic politics in the country that also works against ethnic minorities, vis-à-vis the control of political and economic power. The silence of the military leadership that was constituted of people from the major ethnic groups on the environmental degradation bears testimony to Saro-Wiwa's cry of marginalisation of his people. Ethnicised politics hence, plays major role in the underdevelopment of the country – politically as well as socially. This is a reality Okpewho fictionalises in his artistic creation and Saro-Wiwa actualises in his work. Saro-Wiwa sees tribalised politics manifest in the binary relationship between the ruling major ethnic groups and the ruled or exploited minor ethnic nationalities. He explains this as the consequence of the age-long struggle for the emancipation among subjugated minority ethnic groups in the country.

This ethnic politics overtly influences Saro-Wiwa's interpretation of the actions of people from the dominant ruling ethnic groups. For instance, he attributes his arrest in Port Harcourt to ethnic politics, which, in his opinion, also informs the insensitivity of the military leaders to the environmental degradation suffered by the people. He discloses that it is on the basis of ethnic division in the country that his oppressors relate with him. He graphically captures this through his experience at the state office of security agents. At the office in Port Harcourt where he is being detained, he encounters an unsociable superior officer from the North who is rather



terse in his intercourse with Saro-Wiwa. The security officer appears to be concerned only with the biddings of his overlords who are his compatriots from the North. The affable attitude of an Ijo female security officer and her husband contrasts sharply with the inhospitality of the Northerner:

The young lady returned and smilingly engaged me in conversation. We spoke about Nigeria, about the suffering of the people of Rivers State, of oil and the sorrows it had brought those on whose land it is found, of the social inequalities in the country, of oppression and all such. She was an Izon, neighbours of the Ogoni and the fourth largest ethnic group; they lived in the main oil producing area of the country. She fully understood all the arguments I had been making and certainly sympathized with them and with me for the travails I had suffered in recent months (5).

The friendliness shown him by the Ijo officer evinces camaraderie between a people suffering the same fate of internal colonisation – an experience where the Northern officer and his people are lords over the minority Ijo and Ogoni. This indicates the existence of Self and Other relationship that is symptomatic of the colonial dispensation. This binary relation, in the case of the Nigerian state, facilitates the repression of the post colonial Other that the minorities are.

This internal hegemony is obvious in the dichotomised official positions occupied by the people of major and minor ethnic groups in Nigeria: the people of the major ethnic nationalities are favoured with topmost positions while the lowest levels, which Saro-Wiwa refers to as slavish positions, are reserved for the oppressed minorities. He notices this at the State Security office in Port Harcourt where:

Downstairs, you would meet men and women from the slave areas of the modern slave-state called Nigeria. Upstairs were the indigenous colonisers. They were not necessarily well spoken or well educated either. But they had power at their fingertips and knew it (7).

The “upstairs” and “downstairs;” “indigenous colonisers” and “slaves” (7) classification are metaphoric configurations of the oppressors and oppressed binary relationship. He sees the people from the major ethnic nationalities as the oppressive overlords while those from the minor ethnic nationalities are the oppressed. These metaphors, which run through the entire memoir, form the basis of the actions of the multinational oil companies backed by the military leaders from the major ethnic

groups as well as his interpretations. The metaphor, “indigenous colonisers” (7) explains his views as well as his people’s about the majority ethnic groups as neo-colonialists that have succeeded the British in Nigeria.

It is the metaphors of oppressors and oppressed that he attempts to justify when he posits that the military government, through the imposition of a unitary system on the country in the 70s, inaugurated the internal subjugation of the people of the Niger Delta. This politics initiated by the military, according to him, enables them to transfer the resources of the minorities to the centre for the exclusive advancement of the ruling major ethnic nationalities, while the former remain backward in terms of infrastructural development.

He argues that it is the duality of the oppressors and the oppressed that is the cause of the neglect of the region by the federal military government. The effort to reverse this duality therefore pits Saro-Wiwa against the military government and their collaborators – the multinational oil companies. He gives an instance that provokes his inexorable commitment to the social change. When he is being transported as a suspected insurrectionist from Port Harcourt to Lagos along the East/West Road, he feels his ethnic sensibilities assaulted by the deplorable state of the road. The East/West Road is the only road that links the Niger Delta with the West and North of Nigeria. The sorry state of the road, in spite of the wealth from the region, propels him to express his pledge to combat this injustice even with his life:

The state of the road irked me. It was one of my overriding concerns. Not the road itself, but the fact that in this rich, oil-bearing area, the roads should be so rickety, while in the north of Nigeria, in that arid part of the country, there were expressways constructed at great cost with petrodollars which the delta belched forth. The injustice cried to the heavens. The fact that the victims of this injustice were too timid or ignorant to cry out against it was painful in the extreme. It was unacceptable. It had to be corrected at no matter what cost. To die fighting to right the wrong would be the greatest gift to life! (19).

Saro-Wiwa is not only vexed by the infrastructural neglect of the region, he is also peeved by what he explains as a calculated attempt by the military government of Ibrahim Babaginda to subdue the people of the Niger Delta area for the prosperity of the major ethnic nationalities. He reveals that for these major ethnic groups, more states and local governments are created to be funded by the resources from the oil-

bearing minorities of the deltaic region. He describes actions such as this as a violent robbery of the people of the region.

This act of marginalisation, in his opinion, is another burden added to the frustrating environmental degradation suffered by the people. Consequently, an irked Saro-Wiwa becomes the voice for all the muffled voices of the repressed people of Ogoni and by extension the people of the Niger Delta whom he conscientises to reverse their situation even at the cost of their lives. In his own words, the injustice from both foes of the people of Ogoni, “was unacceptable. It had to be corrected at no matter what cost. To die fighting to right the wrong be the greatest gift of life! Yes, the gift of life” (19). This revolutionary stand of Saro-Wiwa, which later became the resolve of the youths of the Niger Delta after the death of Saro-Wiwa, is what Bickerbug represents in Okpewho’s epistolary text. Saro-Wiwa’s statement also reveals erosion of self as a result marginalisation.

It is not only the exploration activities of Shell that the Ogoni have to contend with, they also have the government at the state and central levels that attempt to frustrate their struggle to battle with. At the level of state government, Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots have to fight against a state governor who is working in league with the repressive military government at the centre. On its part, the central military government attempts to scuttle the struggle of the people by engineering a division among the people of Ogoni. There are some prominent leaders of Ogoni holding key positions in government that become easy tools of division in the hands of government against the collective concern of their people.

This divide-and-rule strategy of the oppressors agrees with Amilcar Cabral’s (1980) revelation that the colonialists caused division between the intellectual class and the other classes in the society through the assimilation of the former by exposing members of this group to privileges that alienate them. The activities of some sons of Ogoni have their fictional parallel in the characters that constitute the Concerned Citizens Committee (CCC) in Okpewho’s novel. Some of the compromised members of executive of CCC, aided by government at the centre, also place an advert that is intended to dissociate the people of Beniotu from the struggle for emancipation, thus dishonouring Bickerbug and others with revolutionary intentions. The similarity in the two cases, although betrayal is characteristic of all human liberation struggles, generates erosion of self in the people. The similarity of events in the two texts also

validates the link between them – Saro-Wiwa’s memoir being the substance of the shadowy picture in Okpewho’s fictional novel.

Through threats, intimidations and arrest, the government at the centre attempts to sustain the exploitation of the people. For instance, a military decree, with stipulated death penalty for illegal gathering, promulgated at the peak of Saro-Wiwa’s ecoactivism, in his belief, is part of the ploy to intimidate and perpetuate the subjugation of the Ogoni people.

Unfortunately, the activities of such repressive government and their elitist compromisers within, in both texts, only hone the resolution of the people to remain committed to wresting their destiny and ecosystem free from the hands of their destroyers. This kind of immutable resolve of Saro-Wiwa and his people illustrates the erosion of self as a result of the degradation of their environment. The erosion of self-provoked by the despoliation of the environment is not strange because of the bond between the people and their environment. Saro-Wiwa sees the preservation of the environment as integral to each individual’s psychic wholeness. This view may have informed his resolve that later becomes the creed of the generality of Ogoni through his effort at sensitising them. The environmental struggle of Saro-Wiwa and his people consequently, is prompted by the need to secure their human and environmental rights from the violent violators of such fundamental rights.

Saro-Wiwa establishes this through a story about unarmed men and women of Ogoni land who have been aroused to eco-consciousness through his activism. It is this attempt at protecting their primary right to their environment that is demonstrated by the people in the story about the confrontation between armed soldiers and unarmed villagers. The simple unarmed people file out to confront armed soldiers brought in by Shell Petroleum Development Company to aid the laying of oil pipes. Members of the community had earlier protested against such action and were brutalised by soldiers, yet undaunted; they march out for the second time against their oppressors.

Through the above story, Saro-Wiwa not only reveals the repressive attitude of Shell oil company that is symptomatic of the oil companies in the Niger Delta, but he also captures the irreversible resolution of the people to protect their first right – environmental right. Manifest in the reaction of this unarmed people is the psycho-social disequilibrium of a people bereft of their means of livelihood. Saro-Wiwa

makes the point that protracted exploitation causes erosion of self-consciousness, propelling the victim of oppression to turn aggressively against his tormentor, especially when such exploitation impinges on the breath of the oppressed.

The reaction of the people, who had been docile until Saro-Wiwa's arousal of their consciousness, manifests a dose of Fanonian advocacy. Christian Opukiri and Ambili Etekpe (2008) see Saro-Wiwa's mobilisation of the distinct classes of people for the alteration of their subjugated position as an application of pluralistic approach – an approach they associate with Fanon's "human ecology psycho-social factors" (137). Opukiri et al. (2008) explain that Fanon in this approach advocates the aggregation of the youths, men, women, and others for violent or civil disobedience in order to destroy the institutions of exploitation.

The direct confrontation of the oppressor by the erstwhile docile people as recorded above is redolent of the black South African's graduation from docility to consciousness in the days of Apartheid. The Ogoni here have been conscientised by Saro-Wiwa to confront their tormentors. Their reaction to a protracted injustice, exploitation, ecocide and alienation is a demonstration of the psychological state of the oppressed. The Holy Bible says oppression makes the wise mad – that is aberrant (Ecclesiastes 7:7). The fierce reaction of the people of the Niger Delta is a reality chronicled by Saro-Wiwa and fictionalised by Okpewho and other writers.

### **3.6 Metaphoric configurations in the texts**

What distinguishes a literary work from other forms of writing is the deployment of metaphors and symbols in the artistic creation. Okpewho in his epistolary novel employs a number of symbols that begin even from the title of the text – *Tides*. The title "Tides" is not only a metaphoric representation of the riverine Niger Delta milieu; it is also a prognosis of the eventual resurgence of ecoactivism in the region. The validity of the latter interpretation is established by the insurrection that flourished in the area years after the novel was written. The aquatic habitation and its inhabitants are underscored by the "Beniotu" trope. "Beniotu", as has been explained at the beginning of our examination of the text, is an Ijo word for riverside dwellers. The writer has carefully selected this metaphor as a designation for the macro Niger Delta people who inhabit a preponderantly wetland.

He creates a binary relationship of oppressors and their oppressed – Nigerian major ethnic groups who constitute the ruling class and the multinational oil

companies as the oppressors, and the ethnic minorities of Niger Delta as the oppressed. It is a duality with its negative political and ecological implications for the oppressed that he attempts to alter through the creation of two sets of characters with non-violent and violent revolutionary tendencies. While Tonwe represents a non-belligerent approach to be championed by the intellectual elite, Bickerbug is emblematic of a virulent method to end the exploitation of the people of the Niger Delta and their ecosystem. Bickerbug's actions, which some may interpret as nihilistic, in Okpewho's thinking, is but a possible approach by a people alienated from their natural environment. This approach was used by late Major Isaac Boro and Okpewho, thus, predicts the possibility of the employment of this aggressive means in future by Niger Delta indigenes to address the ecological politics in the area.

Similarly, Saro-Wiwa also infuses aesthetic elements into his memoir his handling of the duality in the relationship between the people of the Niger Delta and the major ethnic groups in Nigeria – the oppressors and the oppressed. He x-rays the oppressors and the oppressed relationship through such words as “masters” and “slaves” “indigenous colonisers” and “slave areas”, “Upstairs and Downstairs”. These tropes underscore the relationship between the people of Ogoni and major ethnic nationalities and the consequent feeling of alienation as well as the bitterness provoked by the lopsided relationship.

### **3.7 Styles and techniques of the two authors**

The two writers in their respective works employ styles and techniques that are different but at the same time capture their individual views on the despoliation of the environment by the activities of multinational oil companies. While Okpewho's adopts the epistolary technique, Saro-Wiwa's is a memoir. In spite of the differences in styles, the narrative techniques in both works are the same – the use of first person narrative technique. All the major events that include the actions and inactions of other characters in Okpewho's novel are unfolded through the correspondences of two friends; hence, the use of the first person pronoun is predominant. The epistolary method helps to distance the work from the author. The correspondences of the major characters in Okpewho's text not only veneer the author, they also shroud his personal emotions. Unlike Okpewho's, Saro-Wiwa's emotions are quite eloquent in the text, revealing the erosion of self. The usage of the first person runs through the gamut of Saro-Wiwa's text where the writer is an active participants in most of the

events. The employment of the first person in both texts helps to give the narration verisimilitude.

The veracity of the narration in the two works is further achieved through picturesque portrayal of the degraded environment. The unpleasant pictures create pathos that also serves, in the texts, as a persuasive device intended to generate empathy in the readers. Okpewho and Saro-Wiwa in their individual works also employ antithesis as a rhetorical device that captures the duality of oppressors/oppressed. This device helps to unravel the erosion of self engendered by the duality.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

While Okpewho fictionalises the experiences of the people of the region, calling for environmental activism to alter their experience, his violent revolutionary character, Bickerbug, however falls short of the makings of a revolutionary hero. He acts alone and consequently fails to mobilise the masses for a revolutionary change. His final act is terrorism against nature. Therefore, he does not serve as the symbol of Okpewho's advocacy for change. Okpewho's vision on the need for intellectual involvement is obvious instead in the eco-conscious efforts of the transformed Tonwe. Saro-Wiwa's ecoactivism, documented in his autobiographical text, provides a practical response to Okpewho's call for environmentalism to be championed by the elites from the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa's mobilisation of his Ogoni brethren is the substance of what Okpewho adumbrates through Tonwe. Thus, we find a progression from a prophecy to its realistic fulfilment.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 ALIENATION AND ECOACTIVISM IN OJAIDE'S *THE ACTIVIST* AND EGBUSON'S *LOVE MY PLANET*

Alienation is a state of estrangement or disconnection that could be physical, psychological, religious, economic, cultural, racial or environmental. Whichever way alienation is experienced, it translates to some level of psyche aloofness. There is some form of universality about the concept vis-à-vis human existence: every human being experiences some form of estrangement from something or someone, at one point or the other. This universality of the concept, therefore, may have informed its elusiveness in terms of a single definition: dissenting definitions by scholars therefore abound.

As a result of oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta with its negative environmental consequences, the people are detached from their ecosystem. Both nature and the people of the Niger Delta are victims of subjugation even as they are disconnected and alienated from each other/self. It is worthy of recall that capitalism, the export of which, to the colonised parts of the world, Marx had predicted, thrived on alienation, subordination and oppression (Aina Loomba: 1998). To quench the ceaseless thirst for more and more wealth by Western capitalists, the imperialist project was executed in the colonised countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America through forcefulness, as exemplified by the now moribund loathsome, cruel Apartheid system in South Africa with its concomitant violence against oppression, and domination of the non-whites. The frustration engendered by alienation or sadistic subjugation often makes violence from the oppressed inevitable. This is because resistance is a means of humanising the dehumanised. The reaction of the oppressed therefore is informed only by his bid to wrest out his breath from his assailants. This picture is captured in the words of Alvin F. Sanborn who explains that:

... homicidal outrages have, from time immemorial, been the reply of the goaded and the desperate classes, and a goad...and desperate individuals, to wring from their fellowmen, which they felt intolerable. Such acts are violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive: they are the last desperate struggle of outraged and exasperated human nature breathing space (Emma Goldman, 1911: p.12).



To Fanon (1967), a corresponding hostility from the colonised against their aggressive-colonisers was necessary and justified for their emancipation. The violent overthrow of the colonisers advocated by Fanon is best appreciated through the comments of Alvin Sanborn on the homicidal response of the desperate classes. In Fanon's view, capitalism, exported through colonialism with its attendant brutality, has hurled the colonised into a smothering despondency, necessitating desperate antagonistic reaction from the dominated.

The physical political freedom from the shackles of imperialism was indeed made possible in the colonised world through resistance that had come through hostility in form of armed conflicts, as was the case in Kenya, Guinea Bissau, Algeria, Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa. It is noteworthy that liberation from oppression or estrangement at the level of a group does not translate to its complete demise at the level of individuals. Therefore, Mullaly explains alienation or oppression as productive and reproductive, never static but dynamic: an oppressed at the level of race could be an oppressor at the level of gender or economic power. Therefore, oppression or estrangement could be, and is, infectious (Don Von King: 2004).

Because alienation or repression is infectious, the vestiges of the capitalists' exploitation have remained apparently palpable in African countries even beyond the levels of individuals. It must be noted that in Africa, as is the case with most erstwhile colonies of Europe and America, the independence was spurious as the colonisers still exert their hegemonic weight, especially in the economic control of the colonised. Through their economic hoses, Western capitalist countries and America's breath is felt on the necks of political leadership in Africa and other erstwhile colonies. Consequently, the colonial experience and the capitalism inherited from colonialists are not disconnected from the maladies of post-colonial epoch. Ademola Dasylva (2004) establishes the culpability of the colonialists through his indictment of Britain for the post-independence ethno-religious conflicts that have bedevilled the Nigerian nation – conflicts occasioned by the forced mis/marriage of incompatible ethnic nationalities hitherto independent of one another.

Adekunle Olowonmi (2008), similarly, traces the post-independence disillusionment in Nigeria to the imposition of what he refers to as puppet leadership by the colonisers before their physical exit. Through such imposed puppets leadership, the colonisers' vampiric fangs were sunk to perpetuate the draining of the

wealth or resources of the colonised for the sustenance of their economies). In the emergence of post-independence corrupt civilian and military leadership in different parts of the continent, we can assert that the capitalist colonialists and neo-colonialists are not guiltless.

In the face of these woes, the African writer cannot but be on the vanguard of the decolonisation, social cleansing and (re)ordering of the continent. From the days of colonial alienation, oppression, repression unto the twenty first century, the craft of the writer in Africa has been a handy tool in this enterprise of decolonisation. The African writing, consequently, has remained distinct from his European and American counterparts: the writer is not a mere chronicler of events germane to social transformation. If Daniel Defoe through his *Robinson Crusoe* in the eighteenth century, and Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century through his *Hard Times*, *Oliver Twists* and *Great Expectations* deprecate, explore and deplore the evil of the capitalist England, then, it is imperative for the African writer to employ his art for social reorganisation. As far back as 1967, at African Scandinavian Writers Conference held in Stockholm, Wole Soyinka had prescribed the role of the African writer when he said:

When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognise that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon... A concern with culture strengthens society, but not a concern with mythology. The artist has always functioned as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence himself (Soyinka, 1967: p. 21).

In the above statement, Soyinka is advocating the need for the writer to go beyond mere storytelling to being committed to transforming society through his craft. E.O. Apronti, in 1978, similarly, delineated the position of the African writer arguing that:

What the African needs at this time of her history are men and women in the vanguard of the struggle to liberate our people in the three fronts at once: to liberate the minds from the colonial fixation which has drained the African of self confidence, dignity and courage to demand for justice in an unjust world order; to liberate their bodies from hunger and want which have become the lot of this continent as a result of centuries of colonial exploitation that assumed even more predatory forms since the attainment of political independence; and finally to liberate their palates from the impositions of an alien economy (quoted in Charles Ibitoye, 1990: p. 68).

In Nigeria, as in other countries of Africa, the politics of isolation, oppression and repression is sustained by a succession of indigenous leaders. Consequently, Apronti's recommendation articulated over three decades ago that African men and women should be in the vanguard for total liberation remains topical. His prescription is germane to the writer on the contemporary issues on the Niger Delta, even as similar advocacies by writers and critics like Ngugi (1981), Osundare (2007), Onoge (1985), Osofisan (2001), and Udentia (1993), to mention but a few, remain valid to contemporary African writing in general.

The people and the environment in Nigeria's delta are victims of alienation (violent disconnect from self and from their environment) divisive politics, oppression and repression employed by collaborative activities of multinational oil companies, military and civilian leadership. These acts of estrangement, oppression and repression of the multinational and Federal Military Government are in consistent with Paulo Freire's interpretation of violence:

Any situation in which A objectively exploits B or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is an act of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence ... because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human (p.10).

The ecocide and the corresponding physical brutality unleashed by the multinational oil companies operating in the region and succession of military and civilian leadership, before now constituted of major ethnic nationalities alienate the people from their natural environment and its riches as well as from self consciousness, hence inhibits them from self affirmation in the Nigerian state. It is therefore this unwholesome experience of the people of the Niger Delta that Ken Saro-Wiwa (1995), Tanure Ojaide (2006), Vincent Egbuson (2008) and others seek to alter, exploring different methods and genres directed at their liberation. Our mould for the interpretation of the texts in this chapter is alienation as propounded by Marx and expanded by social psychologists and the concomitant resistance (armed or non-violent) as advocated by Fanon.

Nigeria's deltaic region was recently the focus of the world because of the restiveness of its people. The agitation was engendered by frustrations resulting from years of estrangement of people of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian state and the multi-national oil companies that operate in the region. The binary relationship of the

“superior” exploiting the resources of the subjugated “inferior” for the economic advance of the “superior” – a coloniser’s model adopted by corrupt post-independence Nigerian leaders – provokes a feeling of alienation. The attempt at catalysing the reordering of the Nigerian state and the restoration of the devastated environment through ecoactivism is therefore eloquent in Ojaide’s *The Activist* and Egbuson’s *Love my Planet*.

Ojaide’s eponymous novel *The Activist* captures his vision – a commitment to campaign against the suppression of the poor, economically emasculated and dominated minority. In this novel, Ojaide has simply transferred his vision resonant in his poetry to his prosaic writing, mooring the vision to ecoactivism in favour of his marginalised Niger Delta people. To ecocritics, subsumed in the same bracket of the marginalised minority people are the patriarchy-subjugated woman, and the environment – all victims of the terrorism initiated by humans and corporate institutions (Lawrence Coupe, 2001: p. 426). Therefore, Ojaide’s vision, as projected in the text, is in consonance with ecoactivism.

In exploring this vision, he, consequently does not just chronicle the sordid experience of the people of the Niger Delta and their degraded ecosystem, but advocates practical environmentalism to be championed by the intellectuals with the amalgamation of the various stratum of people in the society. Obvious in this environmentalism is an ideology or a vision that is Marxist in nature, and this is in tandem with Buell’s (1995) position – representations of nature are culture and ideology influenced. Therefore, our interpretation of the text is drawn from alienation within Marx’s interpretation, Fanon’s (1967) advocacy in relation to the flourish of capitalism through the employment of alienation and oppression, and ecocritics’ belief that man is alienated from the natural environment as a result of the pollution of the environment.

Protracted alienation or oppression engenders aggression on the part of the oppressed (Nissim-Sabat, 2002: p. 4). Ojaide, consequently, explores the isolation (political and environmental) and its psychological import on the oppressed people of the Niger Delta whose violence he interprets as only a naturally proportional reaction to the violence unleashed by their oppressors. His view of the reactionary hostility is an overt extraction from Fanonian creed. He explores this Fanonian advocacy with the intent to conscientise his Niger Delta people that are constituted of distinct ethnic

groups, different levels of intellectual exposure, male and female to unite against their common foes – the Nigerian state and the multi-national oil companies. The duo, have for long, through brutality, robbed the Niger Delta people of their being, their humanity, destroyed their health and that of their children yet unborn through the despoliation of their environment. The sundry seemingly insalubrious actions and activities the people indulge in, illustrate erosion of self as a result of the violence meted on them by the Nigerian state ruled by the major ethnic groups and the multi-national oil companies, who have the monopoly of power, and wealth that, in Ojaide's interpretation, is stolen from the people of Niger Delta.

Ojaide believes that the intellectual elites must champion the campaign against the repressive collaborators. He exposes this cause in the novel *The Activist* through his choice of a hero who is an intellectual. Unlike the traditional Nigerian academic that is wont to hibernate in the ivory tower, the Activist breaks the cocoon and gets committed to exploiting his academic prowess acquired in the United States of America to liberate his people in the Niger Delta. Ojaide's creation of an intellectual hero that defies being holed up in the intellectual fortress is a deliberate challenge to activism extended to the scholarly class to exploit its intellectual prowess for social change. In the novel, the people of the Niger Delta are wriggling apparently helplessly in the web of internal colonisation and its concomitant alienation, oppression and repression, as well as environment degradation. It is to these helpless people he returns to salvage.

The name of Ojaide's hero, the Activist, is suggestive of his commitment to ecoconscious campaign. He is a symbol of everyone who is dedicated to the evolution of a new Nigerian state devoid of nepotism, tribalism, favouritism and corruption. After years of his sojourning in the United States of America to which he had fled on asylum as a youth, because of oil conflicts that occasioned the brutalisation of his people in the Niger Delta, the Activist returns home in spite of the taunts and ridicule from within and without – his Nigerian-American compatriots as well as Niger Deltans. To him, home is the best place to be to influence the change needed. At home in Niger Delta, he is moved by the sufferings of his people as a result of their depleted environment, and their exploitation by the oil companies in league with the Nigerian state. The Activist aggregates, and harmonises various classes of persons and ethnic groups to put an end to the rancid experience of the people that Biodun

Jeiyifo (2009) refers to as internal colonisation, and restores the despoiled environment.

Ojaide identifies two foes in the oppression or alienation of the people of the oil rich Niger Delta region – the Nigerian state whose instrument of power is exploited by people of major ethnic nationalities and the multinational oil companies. These antagonists profit from the pains of oppression of the minority people of the Niger Delta, and the degradation of their flora and fauna. He itemises the strategies employed by the agents of internal colonisation to have an unfettered exploitation of the people and exploration of their natural resources. Ojaide sees these ploys of exploitation inimical to the health of the people as catalysing alienation that engenders reactions – positive and negative that will translate to the ultimate triumph of the Niger Delta people.

#### **4.1 Nigerian state's betrayal and its alienating consequences**

Chinua Achebe in *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984) attributes the failure of the Nigerian state to a number of factors, some of which are leadership failure and tribalism. Ojaide in his novel views these two factors as contributory to the people's feeling of alienation that expresses itself in the aggression against their perceived oppressors, within and without. He establishes his point in the novel by drawing overly from Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial history. He argues that the present maladies of Niger Delta are ascribable to the colonialists who handed over a policy of internal colonisation of the minorities by the major ethnic groups. This schema, thus, ensures the sustained isolation of the minorities, especially the people of the Niger Delta, who feel their oil and gas are exploited to develop other parts of the country – especially the regions occupied by people of the major ethnic groups, leaving them mired in wretchedness.

In Ojaide's ideological lenses, this stratagem vigorously implemented after independence by a cabal of top military leaders drawn from the major ethnic groups is tantamount to Marx's postulation on the capitalist expropriation of the products of the workers. The ethnocentric politics that works to the disadvantage of the minority oil-reach people of the Niger Delta ensures the carting away of their resources to develop other parts of Nigeria. This act, in Ojaide's reasoning, provokes a psychological

feeling of despondency that expresses itself in acts that are at variance with acceptable values. In the words of the omniscient narrator:

The proceeds from oil went to Lagos to build a festival town for the black peoples of the world to celebrate culture, their culture and arts and also to construct unending bridges to connect water separated parts of a teeming city. Other oil gains also went to build an entire new city on rocks in the windy and dusty savannah. The oil-producing coastal people were left in the lurch. Children of boma boys dropped out of school and those that graduated from secondary schools had no job (sic). The areas in which they had lived lacked social amenities and the government failed to address the problem (48).

The neglect of the people, whose resources have transformed places remote from them, engenders a palpable bitter feeling of Otherness as revealed in the omniscient narrator's statement "to celebrate their culture and arts" – "their culture," "not our culture" (48).

The success of the internal colonisation with the resultant feeling of Otherness has been enabled by the promulgation of military decrees the most obnoxious of which is the Land Use Decree. Through Pere, the Activist's partner in the revolt against the system of exploitation, Ojaide contends that a "military decree is an instrument of coercion, exploitation and oppression" (138). The Land Use Decree is the military's enabling law for the confiscation of the resources of the people. Pere therefore interprets this decree as illegitimate, and promises to resist the oppression with whichever means – legitimate or illegitimate as he reasons, "one has to fight fire with fire" (138). Pere's reasoning with regard to the return of evil for evil, violence for violence, which is an obvious re-echoing of Fanon's contention that the cruelty of colonialism can best be combated through corresponding aggression, reveals loss of self consciousness as result of protracted oppression. Ojaide through the characters in the novel overly expresses this argument to validate the belligerent actions of the people of the Niger Delta.

He argues that the purloining of resources with impunity by the government at the centre has led to the emergence of the Boma boys before the civil war and the Egba boys in the years after the civil war. The Boma boys symbolise the first revolutionary activities of Isaac Boro and some of his friends before the civil war. The Egba boys represent the later activities championed by the Egbesu boys in recent

times. Both Egba and Boma groups consist of male youths who are frustrated by their inability to secure employment in the environment depleted by oil exploration activities. Their confrontational nature has been necessitated by the aggravation occasioned by their alienation by oil companies and the Nigerian state:

The government and the oil company brought in people from other states to fill the jobs in the industry that was destroying not only their environment but also their sources of livelihood. The area boys saw themselves as a reject out caste thrown out of their paradise that has become haven for others. They were a bitter group and they would die to wrest a few naira from the outsiders (49).

Ojaide draws from Fanon's postulation about the violent revolution of the oppressed, as he explains the actions of the youths through the omniscient narrator. Such seemingly nefarious acts as hostage taking, "robbing, killings and other dastardly act" (49), he explains, are means to get paid "to survive the hard times" (49). Therefore, he argues, "the area boys were not mindless robbers, but hardened locals who felt they had to share in whatever they could from the economic life of their communities" (49). No doubt, these militant youths, in his perception, have been eroded of self-consciousness by the activities of the multinational oil companies. Here, Ojaide is exploring the potency of oppression to transform a man.

Not only are the people of the Niger Delta incensed by the loss of their land to the government and its accomplice – the multinational oil companies, they are infuriated also by government's isolation of itself from the people it is supposed to be governing. The people of the Niger Delta feel the presence of government only through its instrument of repression – the soldiers sent to unleash horror on the people revolting against their neo-colonisation in the hands of the oil companies. The Activist, for instance, as a child has had the distasteful experience of being shot twice on the knee by soldiers and mobile police officers ordered by the government and a major oil company to massacre his people. Their offence is that they "dared to bring foreign journalists to document the degree of their exploitation and the pollution of their environment" (19). The subsequent publication of the story by the journalists had brought embarrassment to the military government and cost the oil companies heavy compensations. Ojaide has not just chronicled an experience that is real and recurrent in the lives of the people of the Niger Delta, but as a writer with a vision, he has also captured the commodification streak typical of the capitalist exploiters and the virulent nature of the action of government. What matters to the multinational oil



companies in their traditional capitalist greed are not the lives of people sacrificed as lambs, but the profits to be gained in the process.

The crushing of any opposition through military might is part of the methods often employed by the capitalists for the unfettered expropriation of the labour and produce of the oppressed. Paulo Freire interprets this repressive predilection of the capitalist oppressors as an act informed by their perception of the oppressed as inanimate objects unworthy of attention. Such objectification of the subjugated is a manifestation of fetishism that Marx associates with the repressive capitalists. While Marx did not have military leaders in mind when he talked about the profit-mindedness of the capitalists, Ojaide believes that the military leaders in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, having abandoned their traditional rule of protecting the nation for governance shortly after independence, have long been bitten by the bug of capitalist's greed. Their rule of isolation is made possible by the use of force even as it has helped the unfettered manifestation of their materialism as they engage in unorthodox means of wealth acquisition. Pere's friend, Owumi tells him that:

Many of the top military officers were involved in bunkering. The head of the military junta was himself a bunkering chieftain. He had associates who did the job for him to enjoy the huge profits. He used the bunkering business as a means of favouring loyal officer or buying the loyalty of key officers whose loyalty he needed (136).

Such expropriation of their resources by non-Niger Deltans is, therefore, a natural challenge to the people of the region to strive to appropriate the wealth that is naturally theirs. This is what informs Owumi's involvement in bunkering. Some years earlier, Owumi had been a haggard looking man who could hardly afford the luxury of two meals, but when Pere meets him at Angle Ninety – the place of illegitimate business – the latter is a man rid of the anxieties over the next day's meals. To the Activist and Pere, the bunkering business is not just a means of livelihood:

Pere saw petroleum as his own property taken away from him. He was going to set up a business to reclaim his birthright. Call it illegal business, smuggling, stealing or bunkering, he did not care what dirty name you called it. He thought of the mobile police and the army boys, and the foreign planes with military men wielding strange guns and binoculars flying over the air space. Their presence in the oil rich area amounted to blatant intimidation and robbery. He will rob the robbers to get back his property. Bell Oil Company and other oil companies did not have more right than him. The Federal Military Government too in Lagos or Abuja did not have more right to the oil than him (137, 138).

Even as Ojaide seems to be querying the moral right of the military leadership to plunder the resources of the Niger Delta, he is also exploring the psychology of the oppressed Niger Delta people. Plundered of their resources, repressed and left in the lurch by the military, the people of the Niger Delta have been compelled to scoop up their daily bread by any means available to them. Such an experience of the people with the consequent violent reaction is evocative of Sanborn's homicidal outrage of the oppressed, which we have earlier highlighted. Ojaide, therefore, has explored the survival instinct of man in the people of Niger Delta as a result of the cruelty meted to them by the military. Activist and Pere believe that it is in their best interest to get involved in bunkering and use the proceeds to change their situation and the lot of the people of the Niger Delta. Beneath the prescription is some form of urgency – an imperative for change as a result of the protracted flourish of oppression and repression.

Not only are the actions of the military catalytic of violence on the part of the alienated Niger Deltans, but also the neo-colonial activities and actions of the multinational oil companies operating in the area provocative of revolt. Thus, Ojaides in *The Activist* examines some of these actions and inactions of the multi-national oil companies and their negative consequences on the people of the area. We shall explore these below.

#### **4.2 The multinational oil companies' imperialistic strategies and ecoactivism**

Ojaide sees the multinational oil companies as neo-colonial capitalists in league with the Nigerian state for the underdevelopment of the region. Ojaide's description of the multi-national oil companies and their activities can be best understood through Aina Loomba's (1998) interpretation of the concept of colonialism. Loomba (1998) describes colonialism as "the takeover of territory, appropriation of the material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation" (p.6). In the intercourse between the oil companies and their host communities as explored by Ojaide, Loomba's (1998: p. 6) understanding of colonialism is obvious. All that informed the colonialist's enterprise was to ensure the sustenance of capitalism at home and the enthronement of divisive capitalism in the colonised territories. These are discernable in the activities of the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta.

Multinational oil companies, representing different European nations at different periods before Nigeria's independence, carried out the takeover of the Niger Delta territory for the exploitation of its people and their resources. In the novel, Ojaide views this stage of colonialism as the first, while the second and "crowning glory" (47) of it is the exploration of the oil in the area by multinational oil companies. He contends that this period is made possible in the post-independence era by military decrees. The motive or principle informing the activities of these companies owned by capitalist European nations and America is to exploit the resources and people of the annexed territory at minimal cost, yet with maximum profits to strengthen capitalism in the home countries of the oil companies, leaving the subdued people underdeveloped. The varied strategies employed by these companies in their relationship with host communities of the Niger Delta and the intense response are what Ojaide explores in the novel.

The oil companies depicted in the novel include Bell Oil Company (a corruption of Shell Oil Company), O & G, and others. Aided by the military overlords, these multinational oil companies have been carrying out their activities in Niger Delta before the Activist is forced to leave for the United States. As he returns, he discovers that, aided by the military's incontestably repressive power, the multinational oil companies have continued their activities even at a greater level of success – moving from producing four hundred thousand to two million barrels with Nigeria consequently joining the Organization of Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC). This success however does not translate to higher and better living standard for the people of the host communities. This is because the primary objective of the multinational oil companies is to prosper from the resources of the conquered people. The multinational oil companies consequently thrive on binary relationship with their host communities. The multinational oil companies' workers have the luxury of swimming pools and parks for relaxation as the case with Bell Oil Company's staff at Ugunu:

Had Disneyland for their children to play after school, on weekend, and during vacations. They had clubs in a large compound for their relaxation and entertainment. Though cinema houses had transformed into new Pentecostal churches, the Bell Senior Staff Club had a big screen that showed some of the latest movies in America and Europe. Food and drinks are heavily subsidized for the company to increase the morale and productivity of the workers (276, 277).

While the picture of the living standard of the workers of Bell Oil Company is reflective of the wealth from oil, the living conditions of the people of the host community contrast sharply with the riches from their soil as “they fetch water from the Ugunu River, brown from chemicals of oil exploration” (276). Ugunu’s experience is representative of the people of the Niger Delta who have poverty as their reward because of the environmentally hazardous activities of multinational oil companies. The antithetical pictures of luxurious/impooverished conditions of living of the staff of the oil companies and people of the host communities are projected in the text.

Contrasts such as this abound the novel, and they help to capture the psychological effects they provoke in the people of Niger Delta. The contrasts, which are sometimes between the pristine environment of pre-oil era and a degraded ecosystem in the oil exploitation period, provoke pathos in the reader’s mind. The antithesis between the past and present Niger Delta environment is captured in the Activist’s reminiscence during a picnic. During their picnic on countryside beach, the Activist and Ebi discover to their chagrin the consequence of such noxious activities of the multinational oil companies on the environment:

Where were the flying fish that used to shoot out of the water into the air and then somersault back into the water? That spectacle was now confined to memory. The water was no longer the herb-dark draught that she liked to dip her hands into and wash her face with. It was light green, greasy and smelly. The large fish population had either been decimated by chemicals from the oil industries or migrated downstream to the ocean. Where were the flock of storks, kingfishers, and many exotic birds that filled the airspace as one approached the ocean?... Things have changed so drastically that we might lose everything we knew from our youth just in a few years to come,” she said as one who knew the area very well. The oil companies are discovering more oil onshore and offshore. We are in for disaster, if nothing is done to save our waters, land, and air” (90, 91, 93).

In spite of the fact that the activities of the oil companies are so devastating to the people of the Niger Delta, as well as their flora and fauna, the oil companies carry on their business unperturbed. This thoughtlessness on the part of the oil companies, from the view of the Activist, is an act of violence against the environment, and its pollution consequently estranges the people from nature’s largess. This unsavoury

sight therefore, ignites his ecoconsciousness to the level of activism that is in tandem with Buell's (1995) call for commitment to the environment. It is a commitment to the rescue of the environment and to restore its past glory that makes the Activist respond to Ebi's call for prayers thus, "This will take more than prayers to resolve. We, the owners of the place have to force the oil companies and the Federal Military Government to start doing something about it before it is too late" (93). This consequently, marks in the Activist and Ebi the beginning of environmentalism fired by the destruction of nature. The Activist's involvement in the environment struggle for the liberation of his Niger Delta kindred is founded on the belief, which is Ojaide's, that man and his environment are intricately tied. Hence, he says, "the Niger Delta was part of its people and just as the land, air and rivers were poisoned so were the residents themselves" (93). It is not their physical being of the people that is poisoned but their psycho-social equilibrium. This is the position of Buell (1994).

Ojaide's commitment to the environment is evident in his belief that the Niger Delta environment can be developed with its flora and fauna still preserved just as it is in the Netherlands, the home country of Shell Oil Company. The environment in Netherlands as seen by Chief Ishaka's son, Dennis on his posting to the Netherlands, is still pristine. The water retains its natural beauty, "compared to what had happened to the creeks and rivers of the Niger Delta" (293). The "Dutch forests were still fresh despite the centuries past, the trees had grown, unlike the dying forests of the Niger Delta" (293). The contrast in the environments of the two places in the novel unmasks the neo-colonial intention of the multinational oil companies. The coloniser's intention is to exploit the annexed people for their development, to underdevelop and oppress the people for their selfish economic and social advance, terrorise the ecology of the margin for the preservation of the metropolis.

The craving of Ojaide therefore, is the restoration of the Niger Delta environment to the same unblemished look as that of the neo-colonialists'. This is what precipitates the ecoactivism in the Activist and Dennis, Chief Ishaka's son as both later come to work together for the change in the status quo in their society. The Activist and Dennis's desire to effect change as a result of what they have seen about their environment justifies Udentia's contention in *Revolutionary Aesthetics & The African Literary Process* (1993) that there is a dialectical relationship between the characters in a novel and the environment: each influences the other to effect change.

Through the action of these two intellectuals, Ojaide is challenging the educated of the Niger Delta and by extension, the Nigerian nation, to be affected enough by the woes of their immediate milieu to engineer a change.

Dennis' decision to join the Activist's struggle for a change is informed by his experience with Bell Oil Company as a very senior staff. Dennis is a University of Lagos' First Class Engineering graduate, who works with Bell Oil Company. From the first day of his employment until his transfer to Amsterdam, the company's headquarters, he is kept far from the field of drilling where his theoretical knowledge is supposed to be made practical. In Nigeria, he is assigned administrative jobs in exquisitely furnished offices. The subterfuge of his white employers is to ensure the erasure of his knowledge of engineering and crush his desire to learn drilling skills, thus frustrating the black man's dream of exploiting his resources independent of the neo-colonisers.

Through Dennis' experience with Bell Oil Company, Ojaide exposes one of the neo-colonial antics of the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta – to deny the people the knowledge of the technicalities of oil exploration. The black man's acquisition of the technical knowledge of oil exploration will also enable them to know how best to salvage the Niger Delta environment. Besides, the white man has a reason for keeping the knowledge to himself. Mr Van Hoort reasons, "Allowing him to acquire technical drilling experience is suicidal for the expatriate staff and business" (275). Dennis' representative experience is reminiscent of the days of colonialism when the areas of focus in the colonial pedagogy were reading, writing and arithmetic – learning that were enough to understand the masters' bidding. Dennis' understanding of this plot triggers his exit: he will not continue to be a victim of neo-colonialism.

It is worthy of note that Dennis' employment with the Bell Oil Company is a gift with Greek provenance. This is a typical deception employed by the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta region. The intent is to pacify the people for the unperturbed exploitation and exploration of the people and their resources. Dennis' employment has come as an attempt by Mr Van Hoort to placate Chief Ishaka, who is the only chief opposed to the sustained exploitation of his people in the Niger Delta by foreigners. A job offer to Dennis therefore, as Mr Van Hoort reasons in his mind, is:

A diplomatic issue that in the long run would benefit the company immensely. Once peace rained (sic), there would be steady production and that would be great achievement. Not paid to the chief's son would compare with the profits from peaceful co-existence with the local community...(164).

Obvious in the reasoning of Mr Hoort is Marx's argument that in a capitalist system, human relationships are governed by means of production. Every gift to the people of the host communities is therefore, weighed in the balance of production to determine its potency to yield pecuniary gains to the oil companies. When people are offered jobs, it is for the selfish advancement of the oil companies. It is unfortunate that these multinational oil companies are able to bait some internal compromisers into their divide and rule politics. The white man, to the detriment of the black man, has always exploited the greed of the latter – from his early contact with the white man as a slave trader, as a colonialist and up to the present time. This avarice has made some black men perfidious internal agents of Western hegemonic interest. Ngugi (1993) validates this, as he seems to summarise this treachery within in this manner:

First it has been the factor of foreign invasion, occupation, and control, and, second, the internal factor of collaboration with external threat. Whether Western slavery or slave trade, under colonialism today or under neo-colonialism, two factors have interacted to the detriment of our being. The greedy chief or other elements bred by the new colonial overlords, collaborated with the main external imperialist factor. The storm repeats itself more painfully under neo-colonialism (78).

This painful manifestation of internal collaboration in the endless neo-colonialist politics of exploitation as experienced in the Niger Delta engenders erosion of self-consciousness in the people as they become disunited. In the novel, Ojaide exposes erosion of self/alienation provoked by financial inducements to the people. He does this through the activities of the chiefs and a traditional monarch. As part of its neo-colonialists' divisive politics, Bell Oil Company and O & G (an oil company) give out money to the council of chiefs and the traditional monarch. The intention is to:

Silence the local population from demanding compensations for their despoiled environment, built palaces for monarchs. They not only paid the monarch monthly stipends but also catered for their luxuries that included big cars and jeeps. The multinational oil companies' directors expected the elderly chiefs keep a strong hold on their people because the well-fed dogs would not bite the hand that fed him (124).

These oil companies find it easier to bribe the chiefs to silence their people rather than pay much more to the people suffering the effects of environmental degradation caused by the oil companies. They would prefer to pay off these chiefs rather than spend much more in the development of the area. The success of their exploitative device is therefore, made possible by the existence of chiefs or leaders, who for their selfish interest, are ready to sacrifice the plural development on the altar of avariciousness. Ironically, however, in their greed, the chiefs see such gifts with Greek origin as an indication of partnership. Consequently, conscienceless, they confront an uncompromising Chief Tobi Ishaka, defending the oil multinational companies:

“There you go wrong. Who gives you some types of gifts can be taking more from you than he is giving you”, Chief Ishaka told them. “We have no robbers or enemies here”, the monarch intervened. “Bell Oil is our friend and partner in progress.” “Your Royal Highness”, Chief Ishaka replied, “I will like them to be friends and partners in progress but they are not now. Unless we are unequal partners that they take away our wealth and give us tidbits (sic) to quarrel over as we are doing now” (124).

The above reveals the success of the strategy of divide and rule employed by the multi-national oil companies operating in the Niger Delta. The multinational oil companies are never deficient of people and situations to be exploited for the success of their divide-and-rule ploy – the poverty of the people and division among the oppressed. This division often exploited by the oppressors, in the case of the people of the Niger Delta, is caused by poverty. The offer of juicy jobs to some personalities, therefore, for the oil companies, becomes a veritable means of achieving the trick of evading the payment of compensations for oil spillage and other forms of environmental degradation to the people of the oil producing communities. Given the juicy nature of offers such as employments, many a people sell themselves with glee to the oil companies to be used against their own kindred, moreover when the acceptance of such seemingly irresistible offers pulls the recipients out of the midst of the mass of people mired in penury. One of such perfidious character in the novel is Professor Tobere Ede, who for selfish financial gains, takes up the job of a Community Development Officer to influence his people to see things from the



perspective of his employers. Blinded by the filthy lucre from Bell Oil Companies, he joins in accusing the people of Roko that:

The villagers set their village on fire because they wanted to extort money from Bell Oil Company. People have become lazy and want an easy way to make money. None of these villagers has farms as they used to; none of them carries on fishing in waters proverbially rich with all kinds of fresh and salt water fish. The villagers sit at home drinking illicit gin and playing draft (sic) and eko games... The mere fact that oil pipelines are passing through their village has made them feel entitled to earn huge sums of money without work. That was why they did what they did. They are all arsonists... (179).

The people of Roko have lost all that they have had including their farms to a conflagration from a pipeline rupture, which Bell Oil Company's management dismisses as sabotage on the part of the host communities. This is a symptomatic attitude of the oil companies in of the Niger Delta that Ojaide has fictionalised to capture one area of the provocative insensitivity of the oil companies in the Niger Delta. Unfortunately, while doing his masters' bidding, Ede is burnt to death by his incensed students. This action of the people turning against their own is an indication of division that illustrates the erosion of self among the people of the Niger Dela. Through this, Ojaide also drops the hint that the Niger Deltans who compromise with the multinational oil companies at the expense of their own people are courting disaster.

#### **4.3 The strategies of the oppressed**

Ojaide is optimistic of the eventual triumph of the oppressed people whose inherent divisions based on social class, academic status, ethnic cleavages and genders disjunction have been manipulated over the years by their oppressors. He reasons that the unity of all ethnic nationalities and classes of people is compulsory for the success of the struggle as no class is spared the effects of the oppressive activities of the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies. Unfortunately, rather than being united by their common experience of exploitation, the various ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta have been involved in self-destruction over sundry issues. As revealed in the novel, in the days of the military, the major ethnic groups of Urhobo, Ijaw, and Itsekiri in the Delta had been at war with one another. Ojaide is of the conviction that the intellectual is more competent to use his academic

knowledge to stitch the various cleavages of society together for the ultimate victory of the people. In the novel, the reader finds out about the Activist that, though an Urhobo by ethnic heritage, his choice of life partner and later partner in the environmentalism is Ebi Emasheyi. Ebi Emasheyi, an academic herself, is a product of ethnic fusion – of an Urhobo father, and an Ijo mother. Similarly, Pere, the Activist's barely literate partner of dual parentage – an Ijo mother and an Urhobo father – picks Tosan, an Urhobo woman as his wife. These marriages, among men and women of the different ethnic nationalities, further underscore Ojaide's vision of the unity needed by a people with the common experience of marginalisation for the overthrow of their common foes.

It is noteworthy that the need for togetherness is realised in a refugee camp first by the women. Both men and women fleeing killings among the three major ethnic groups in Warri have been forced by their similar experience to stay at the same refugee camp. While with the men in the refugee camp, the women are able to understand that every one of them is a loser. In Ojaide's covertly Marxist's lenses, women are an inexorable factor in the overthrow of the oppressors from whose destructive activities they are not insulated. Thus, Ojaide unshackles the women from the traditional patriarchal inhibitive fetters and makes them contribute actively in the struggle for the liberation of the exploited people of Niger Delta. Ojaide's attempt to emancipate the woman is a theme, common in Marxist writings as illustrated by Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross* (1982) where women are also at the forefront of the revolt against neo-colonialist capitalist exploiters. In *The Activist*, illiterate Mrs Timi Taylor is the president of Women of Delta Forum (WODEFOR); Ebi Emasheyi is its secretary. Their first means of seeking an end to their plight is to dialogue with the oil companies and the Federal Military Government. When their pursuit for negotiation with Bell Oil Company fails, their last resort is a traditional potent tool of protest – nude protest led by illiterate old women.

While the mobilisation of the people for a revolt is good but could be frustrated, Ojaide believes that the change in their alienated position can best be effected through a political revolution championed by the intellectual elites harmonising the varied classes of people in the struggle. He therefore advocates for a revolution through the political participation of the intellectual elites who are wont to shy away from the Nigerian slimy politics. In the twenty first century, Ojaide

adumbrates the political engagement of the intellectual class, which he sees as the best tool for the Niger Delta and by extension Nigeria for the fruitful mobilisation of all the alienated and oppressed people to orchestrate a change. It is the same belief of aggregating every kind of prowess – academic, traditional and youthful, for the success of the expected change that informs the Activist’s redirecting the energy of the cult groups and students in the university towards their real oppressors few months after his assumption of office as a lecturer at the Niger Delta State University. The change he has influenced in them finds expression in the students setting ablaze the treacherous Professor Ede as he comes to speak to them in defence of Bell Oil Company.

For the execution of an overall change, given the huge financial implications of a political revolt for a people financially emasculated because of their estrangement from the gains of oil, Ojaide approves of their involvement in bunkering. He contends that if foreigners engage in the stealing of their resources, what is wrong if the real owners steal from the foreigners – the oil companies and the Federal Military Government? Ojaide argues for this through the Activist who reasons that robbery such as this is right, as it is not motivated by selfish interest, but by the sincere intent to “enhance humanity” (267). Besides, the Activist “...wanted to rob the oil companies and Federal Military Government to spite them for their indifference to the suffering of the Niger Delta people” (267). The Activist and Pere’s act of robbing the robbers of the resources of the people in the Niger Delta is in tandem with Fanon’s credo on a corresponding violent response to the colonisers’ hostility. The frequent repressive actions of the Federal Military Government, and the estrangement as well as the violence inaugurated by the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta compel them into a desperate class that Sanborn talks about – a desperate state where the violent acts by the oppressed, whether repressed or aggressive become the only means to breathe (Emma Goldman, 1911: p.2). It is in the light of this that Ojaide covertly sanctions the counter bunkering activities that the Activist and Pere engage in.

#### **4.4 Ojaide’s employment of literary aesthetics**

Ojaide explores the ethno-ecological politics in Nigeria with its implications for the people and the greenery in the Niger Delta region. In his examination of these issues, he x-rays the psychology of the people of the area. The work is replete with

metaphoric configurations that underscore the binary relationship between the major and minor ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Given the feeling of alienation provoked in people of the Niger Delta by the attitude of the multinational oil companies and the military government of Nigeria with its leadership drawn from the major ethnic groups, the duo in the psychology of the Niger Delta people are “overlords” (44), “slave owners” and “colonizers” (173). These epithets presuppose that the people of the Niger Delta are the subjugated or exploited in their land. It is the pain of alienation caused the people of the Niger Delta by the multinational oil companies and the military government that informs his choice of such metaphors as “outsiders” and “others” (49) as references to the duo. It is these “outsiders” and “others” epithets that are accentuated through negative references to the multinational oil companies and the military leaders and their activities as “robbers” (137), “robbery (50), “stealing” (67).

Besides these metaphors, the novel is spiced with few allusions. For instance, the name “Bell Oil Company” is allusive of Shell Petroleum Development Company – a major multinational oil concern in the Niger Delta region. The military dispensation that is highlighted in the novel crystallises through the allusion “the dark-goggled general” (249). It is an allusion to the late General Sani Abacha and it also discloses to the reader the period of focus of the novel.

Through his ecofriendly hero, Ojaide attempts a new definition of a revolutionary hero – eco-hero. The Activist, unlike what is usual of a revolutionary hero, goes into wealth acquisition. This action, in Ojaide’s reason, is informed by the changing times and differences in societies. In the Nigerian society, Ojaide discerns the indispensability of money for the successful overthrow of the affluent Nigerian leadership and the multinational oil companies. This unusual hero and his acts are in line with Amuta’s postulations that:

The hero of the African novel to date is therefore the sum total of the ...possibilities, not a monolithic and lifeless stereo-type who succumbs to absolutist horror of an incapacitating political economy. The heroic institution and its manifestations in the African novel represent an index of the changing challenges of the African in the historical process (Amuta, 1986:p. 100).

#### **4.5 Violence as an expression of erosion of self**

Vincent Egbuson is another writer on the Niger Delta crisis. His vision is slightly akin to Ojaide’s. His creative works include *Moniseks Country* (2001), *A Poet*

*is a Man* (2001), *Love is not Dead* (2002), *Womandela* (2006), and *Love My Planet* (2008). In spite of these works, one of which (*Womandela* 2006) earned him the ANA/NDDC prize in 2006, surprisingly, Egbuson's name is yet to be resonant beyond his immediate Niger Delta milieu – though a work like *Womandela* (a robust novel) has a national canvas.

Egbuson, like Ojaide, explores the same environmental challenges of the Niger Delta and their implications for the peace of the area and the Nigerian nation at large. His belief as espoused by myriad of events in the novel is that life on earth revolves on cause and effect. He argues that the violent acts such as robbery with or without violence and restiveness that excise peace from the environment are caused by a dereliction of duty on the part of government and the multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta. This is the crux of his environmentally conscious novel *Love My Planet*. Unlike Ojaide's environmentalism, Egbuson's demand for a change is far less eloquent and forceful.

Egbuson's ecoconscious novel, even by its title, captures his concern for the environment, especially the Niger Delta milieu and its ecological challenges. His love and respect for all the bounties of nature are couched in his statement that the world is constitutive of network of relations. Drawing from his credo that human actions and inaction are governed by the natural law of cause and effect, Egbuson says human beings will continue to reap the consequence of the degradation of the environment. For instance the flourish of lawlessness, violent crimes that have come to define the Niger Delta environment, in his perception, are strident indictments of the government, the political elites and the oil companies that in turn reap from their negligence. One of the robbers visiting the government's housing estate in the novel echoes Egbuson's denunciation of the indiscretion of government as he rhetorically asks some his victims:

'You think we don't know how much you people were paid today as arrears of salary increase?'

'You think we don't watch TV?' 'Anytime the Federal Government pays people and they put it on TV and praise themselves, they are telling us to visit the people for our own share' (13).

Vices such as robbery and violence that the society is awash with, as a result of the alienation of the ruled by the rulers, robs the environment of peace. Particularly, in the Niger Delta, militancy, with the concomitant crime of hostage taking of oil companies' workers has become a prevalent vocation among the youths.

This act of apparent criminality is a consequence of feelings of isolation from the mainstream Nigerian ethnic politics that is played to their disadvantage. Ibaba S. Ibaba (2008) validates this identifying alienation as the cause of the imbroglio:

The point is that oil based environmental degradation and ethnic based political domination have combined to alienate the people from the use of their natural resources for their own development. Oil exploration and production is associated with a number of activities that devastate the environment, and impact negatively on the economy and society...Because the State is ethnicised, power is used to promote sectional interests as against the common interests. The State in Nigeria is controlled by members of the dominant ethnic groups, who direct oil resources produced in the ethnic minority homelands of the Niger Delta to their benefit (p.15, p.16).

This ethnicised politics with the consequence of aloofness felt by the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta is what Egbuson explores in *Love My Planet*. This estranged feeling reflects through the designation of the setting of the novel – Daglobe delta. Nigeria exists in the novel as an exploitative foreign country with its nationals consequently considered as foreigners in the Daglobe delta. In contrast with the low standard of living of the people of Daglobe delta, the Nigerians employees, like other foreign employees of the multinational oil companies operating in Daglobe delta, live a life of affluence:

Oil city, the city of light, where there was electricity 24/7, sprang up from where wet land was cleared and sand filled – Oil city tickled the young women of Ogazza also with its paradoxical (sic) grid of paved ways, mini football pitch, concrete court for lawn tennis, many comfortable portakabins, one shiny prefabricated bungalow, a swimming pool and a borehole that supplied running water. The bulk of its residents are Filipinos, Britons and Chinese. There were a handful of Nigerians and Venezuelans and Daglobans, no one from Ogazza, no one from Daglobe delta (160).

In the statements above, the writer underscores the isolation suffered by the people of the Niger Delta by distinguishing between the Nigerians employees of the multinational oil companies and the Daglobe deltans that are denied employment by the oil companies. By the exposition of such dichotomised living, Egbuson captures the psychological exclusion felt by the people of Niger Delta – a feeling of bitterness occasioned by the promotion of binary existence of Self and Other. Consequently, his

novel, like Ojaide's *The Activist*, is also an exploration of the psychology of the oppressed and the consequential activism.

The setting of the novel is Daglobe – symbolically representing Nigeria, with a focus on the Niger Delta. Its prominent characters are Araba and Toundi. The name Araba in Yoruba means a big tree. The name therefore, is emblematic of the environmental activism that the character engages in. Araba has once been an undergraduate student, who has had his university education abridged by his blazing desire for justice. As a result of a students' unrest that he had championed to fight against arbitrary, astronomical increase in school fees, he is sought for by police. The hunt finally compels him to leave for the forests to fight against what he considers the injustice done by the Daglobe nation and the multinational oil companies to his people in Daglobe delta. Part of Araba's anger against the Daglobe is informed by its denial of a scholarship to him to study abroad even though he is excellently qualified. This denial is a symbolic injustice suffered by his people because of their minority status. His militant group, S.J (Simple Justice) engages in kidnapping and hostage taking of expatriate workers of the multinational oil companies who they see as accomplices in the exploitation of the people of Daglobe delta.

Araba's SJ and other militant group are also associated with self-destructive activities – disrupting the lives of fellow Daglobe deltans by engaging in killing and raping even as they fight against the oil companies and the government of Daglobe. Their activities, though inimical to the promotion of peace in the region, force the attention of the government to the area occasionally. After being hounded by the security operatives for some time, Araba surrenders himself for a trial by the state. Although he is eventually found guilty and jailed, he gets a pardon. However, he is shot dead through assassins sent by a new Vice President of Daglobe who fears the dredging up of his ugly past by Araba. The latter had collaborated with him in corrupt practices in their former place of work.

The violent actions of Araba and his militant gangs against the Daglobe and the multinational oil companies in the Daglobe delta are inimical to the society. However, in Egbuson's reasoning, the aggressive acts of Araba's group are prompted by the activities of the national government of Daglobe and the multinational oil companies that exploit the resources of the people without paying corresponding attention to the development of the area and the people. Egbuson interprets act such as this perpetrated by the state and the multinational oil companies as violence

necessitating a corresponding hostility from its victims. Eloquent in this contention is a re-echoing of Fanon's advocacy on the need for counter-aggression on the part of the oppressed. Fanon's advocacy is derived from Sigmund Freud, who, according to Fanon (1963), links individual characters to the traumatic experience that provoked them; and says that the behaviour of an individual is not stirred up by a single event, but by multiple traumatic experiences. The various torments of exploitation suffered by the black man through the violence of colonialism informed Fanon's agitation for corresponding bellicosity. Freud's interpretation of the actions of the traumatised therefore, is valid for the understanding of the actions and reactions of the people of the Niger Delta represented by Daglobe Delta in Eguson's novel. It is the anguish of injustice from the oil companies, Egbuson explains, that hurls the youths into robbery with hostility as the robbers who visit Araba and his neighbours in their estate. According to the robbers:

'You want to know whether our own people are armed robbers too. Have you been to our villages?' When last were you there to see how our people are suffering? Is that life? Despite all the oil from our land. What job do you have for me in Dabaka? No job, no money to continue school, you expect me to choose death? To accept injustice? I demand justice – simple justice' (12).

#### **4.6 External and internal pressure of oppression**

Egbuson associates the devaluation of the Niger Delta environment and the exploitation of the people of the area by the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian State with provocative pressures on the people. These pressures, in Egbuson's reasoning, as captured in the novel, are engendered from without by environmental degradation and repression by the multinational oil companies and government and from within by the divisive and oppressive activities of bourgeoisie within the region. In Egbuson's views, these weights of injustice are provocative of alienation propelling a drastic alternative. It is therefore the quest for a radical alternative that is illustrated by the picking up of arms by the youths in Daglobe delta in the novel. It is this compelling option that a middle-aged illiterate man verbalises in response to a question from a reporter visiting foreign kidnapping victims in a village:

"Dem say na de white people responsible for dat fire wey de burn there. For plenty years the fire dey burn. Is good weyting our boy dem dey do dem. Make dem quench the fire and go dem country" (243).



The statement of the middle-aged man is representative of the fury of the people who see the act of kidnapping as a means by which an oppressed lot can wrest justice from their tormentors. It is the legitimacy of the reactions of the youths that the old man therefore establishes as he further reveals the aggression-propelling environmental havoc caused by the activities of the multinational oil companies in the region:

“Dat place, you no fit go near am oh – at all at all. Even dis place wey hot so, na because of that fire, wey no dey quench. Yam, cocoyam and vegetable no dey grow for our area like places wey no dey near the fire. Many villages, because of weting dem call oil pollution, de rivers no get fish again. Even periwinkle and crab no easy to find again...” (243).

The bitterness of the people that finds expression in the kidnapping of foreign oil workers is illustrative of violence being the last resort of the oppressed just as the actions of the government, the oil companies and the reactions of youths are indicative of the conflict between the oppressed and their persecutors. The symbolism of the contest is obvious in Araba's reference to it as “a national conflict” (245). It is therefore, a fight to liberate the subjugated class. It is based on the conviction that it is a conflict for all oppressed people, Araba threatens to destroy the hydroelectric facilities in the Northern part of Daglobe because of the neglect suffered by the rural people of Nanunonda. The people of Nanunonda, who have been relocated from their traditional ancestral land to make way for the construction of hydroelectric facilities, are left to live without electricity. Egbuson thus, sanctions the belligerent search for justice by Araba in a country that robs the poor of justice. In his reasoning that is clothed in Araba's argument, it is impossible to divorce aggression from the struggle of the oppressed. Thus, violence can be moral or immoral. This is in tandem with Ngugi's (1972) position that “violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man” (p. 28).

In the novel, Araba's validation of counter hostility is drawn from Emma Goldman who posits that:

It is organized violence on top which creates individual violence at the bottom. It is the accumulated indignation against wrong, organized crime, organized injustice, which drives the political offender to act (349).

It is in the light of the postulation above that Araba associates the actions of the multinational oil companies and the government as provocative antagonism at the top igniting violence at the bottom. In the novel, the villages in the Daglobe Delta are direct hosts to the multinational oil companies that operate unconcerned with the destitution and poverty of the people. Specifically, in Ogazza, a host community to an oil company, while the people of the village live in squalor, in contrast, the employees of the oil company operating in the community luxuriate in abundance in their transient habitation called Oil City that is adjacent to the host community.

The protracted acts of neglect and pollution of the environment of the people of Daglobe Delta (Nigeria's Niger Delta) are the accumulated organised injustice and wrong that, in Egbuson's thinking, have engendered the actions of Araba and his ilk in Niger Delta. In the novel, though the actions of Araba and his kind are ostensibly destructive, they are validated by the swift mobilisation of men and equipment by the government of Daglobe to effect repairs on the East-West Bridge. The repair of the road is a condition given to government by Araba's Simple Justice militant group before they will release their kidnapped foreigners. In real life, the East-West Road is the only road that links the Niger Delta to the Western part of Nigeria. It is in a deplorable state almost all year round in spite of the huge contributions of the people to Nigeria's economy.

The quick repair on parts of this road is catalysed only by the aggressive reactions of the militant youths in the Niger Delta. This is quintessential of the Nigerian system of which Daglobe is only a parody. Nigeria is a country where government acts only when prodded by unpleasant reactions. Violence from the oppressed that gets a callous government to respond positively therefore, in Egbuson's opinion, is justifiable.

Egbuson has woven into the novel this verifiable experience of the people of the Niger Delta to foreground his credo of cause and effect – those who rob the environment of peace, inexorably desire violence. The novel therefore also offers an explanation that the violence in the Niger Delta is one that is validated by the cruelty of the federal government and the multinational oil companies operating in the area towards the people of the region. This clarification is highlighted by a speaker in one of the many television discussion programmes in the novel. Speaking on the cases of kidnapping of foreign employees of the oil companies, a speaker contends that they

are not intended to rid Daglobe Delta of foreigners, but to stop the oil companies from collaborating with the government to exploit the people of the area.

It is the same argument that violence at the top begets violence at the bottom that Egbuson also establishes through the activities of soldiers posted by the national government to Daglobe Delta and the activities of oil companies workers in the region. A forty-year old commander of soldiers posted to Akawai community defiles a fifteen-year-old girl and then takes over a thirty-year old mother of two from her over-sixty-year old legitimate husband and had him flogged by his men. Some youths interpret the humiliation of Orodou, the husband of the young woman, as “a castration of the man in all men” (354) and the woman, Silverline’s act, as a devaluation of womanhood. These acts are provocative of erosion of self-consciousness, necessitating the invasion of the camp of the soldiers by Simple Justice’s militant group. The action leads to a number of civilian and military casualties. Egbuson sees the action of the youths as action propelled by the repressive state apparatus. He asserts that violence to alter violent injustice is legitimate. This view is eloquent in Araba’s statement during his trial, after he willingly surrenders himself to the government:

“I take full responsibility for the use of terror as an instrument for achieving justice. For the people of Daglobe... Whoever takes back from the thievish rich, whoever faultlessly steals for survival, whoever kills, maims, kidnaps, or causes destruction in order to terrorize the unjust system are fighting the cause of Simple Justice, and though the authorities deny it, we the so called criminals, are on a collective quest for justice in society...I take full responsibility for waging war against the unjust system...I take responsibility for trying to overthrow the unjust system in behalf of Daglobe...Yes I am guilty according to the lights of the unjust” (358).

Araba’s statement, during his trial, summarises the kernel of Egbuson’s artistic vision expressed in the novel: the Nigerian state is a sick society where those who resist and attempt to reverse their oppressed positions are adjudged criminal by the unjust while corrupt governors and leaders come out of gaol feted. The flourish of such case of injustice is made possible by the existence of oppressors or exploiters within. In Egbuson’s view, there is need for radical reversal of such cases to ensure true justice. The need for change is highlighted in a case of irate youths returning from a colloquium stopped by security operatives. In a public transport bus conveying

them, the youths are enraged when an old clergyman counsels them against violence as he expresses his belief in “divine judgment – if not in this life time, another lifetime” (183). To leave the thieves to keep stealing at the expense of the suffering masses until divine judgment comes, as desired by the clergy, to the youths, is absurd. In their reasoning, a quick judgment passed on the corrupt leaders, even if such judgment is brutal, is the most apt. To them therefore, it is cheering news that a militant group has kidnapped a seventy-year-old father of a Local Government Chairman.

The reader learns that the Chairman had used the militant youths to achieve electoral success but has reneged on his promise of payment to them. Egbuson uses the comments and the reactions of the youths to depict the Nigerian political and legal systems that are exploited by the political class to the detriment of the nation and the common man. The perversions within the Nigerian system, therefore, make aggression on the part of the ruled inevitable. Egbuson believes that hostility at the top begets hostility at the bottom. Thus, the oppressed’s quest for justice is only an attempt at humanising themselves, especially when the judicial system can be emasculated by the privileged class to plunder the exploited of their humanity/self-consciousness. The attempt at recovering their peculated or eroded self-consciousness/humanity, therefore, necessitates Egbuson’s endorsement of counter hostility. If the emancipation from the dehumanising and debasing yoke of oppression must come, applying Freire’s reasoning, it cannot be by inadvertent actions, but by the praxis of brutal overthrow. The practice of violence occasioned by the failure of the political class is what Egbuson also captures in the kidnapping of the aged father of a Local Government Chairman.

David Van Acker (2003) states that justice and injustice seem to have “tacitly agreed upon meaning” (p. 2) and it is based on this “agreed meaning that right leaders, citizens, and slaves have always sought for justice” (p. 2). It is on scaffolding such as this that Egbuson seems to situate the search for justice by Araba and his group. Similarly, the aggressive activities of the youths of Ogazza village, where for years the elders had appropriated the paltry handouts from the oil companies, depict the pursuit for justice from within.

As revealed from the action of the Ogazza youths, the injustice and oppression are internally initiated even as they are externally promoted through the concomitant aggression visited on the common man. Moses, a militant, reveals that he is forced to take to militancy by his uncle’s oppressive tendencies. Moses, who had been a

humble young secondary school leaver, gets into the employ of his affluent uncle, Chief Wenni's as a labourer because he does not have sufficient money to proceed to the university. Chief Wenni underpays him and will not assist him financially, just as he will not give a salary advance to another employee, Tebida, whose wife is in labour. Irked by the feeling of oppression, Moses leaves Dabaka city for the forest to pitch his tent with Araba's militant group to fight for justice. When he pays his uncle a visit at home in Dabaka, the hitherto timid young man is a brave militant who comes boldly to warn his uncle to stop speaking evil of the Araba-led militant group called Simple Justice or SJ. Through Moses' experience and reaction, Egbuson examines the potency of oppression and injustice to transform a man from a shy man into a rebel.

Egbuson, therefore, is of the opinion that the inclination for brutality against a people plundered of their riches and left to wallow in the mire of underdevelopment is not the panacea to the problem of unrest in the Niger Delta. He posits:

Instead of bills to the National Assembly, and agreements with militants and conferences on the way forward, Umya Song should start the reconstruction and conversion of the East-West Road into a dual carriageway, a project that has been on the drawing board for over twenty years. So instead of APC's tanks, AK-47's, soldiers in battledress, helicopter gunship and naval and police or military checkpoints at every kilometre of Daglobe Delta, roll out caterpillars, forklift trucks, JCB's steamrollers, steam shovels' and bulldozers on the East-West Road and other places that need roads where hundreds of jobless youths would inevitable be employed. Start the building of one standard modern hospital in a riverine village which can serve many villages. Start one major bridge project. Do something, do something for the people to see, do something that will involve the people. When they see work in progress, when they see their youths working, the genuine militants would turn themselves into marine policemen and fish out the criminal from the creeks (387).

Egbuson avers that dialogue is necessary for the resolution of the crisis in the Niger Delta. Dialogue should however be followed by practical development efforts on the part of the federal government. Dialogue, he believes, can be possible only through the political overthrow of the system of corrupt leadership, especially an oppressive leadership that is desirous of self-perpetuation. For the realisation of his vision, he advocates the harmonisation of interests among the oppressed people, who include the militants, for the overthrow of the corrupt and oppressive political class.

His advocacy for an uprising against the oppressors through the collective effort of various classes of people is similar to Ojaide's. His point of departure is in the headship of the advocacy for change by a woman with a determined political interest. With the choice of a woman to catalyse social change (a belief eloquent even in his *Womandela* {2006}), Egbuson seems to verbalise his disenchantment with male leaders that are often associated with corruption and injustice.

In the novel, Egbuson expresses this vision through the political interest of Umya Song, a female politician and the ecoactivism of Toundi – another female character. Song, while contesting against the male incumbent, Chief Abel Zanda, in her campaigns, pledges an alternative, focusing on justice with every area getting attention – especially the people of Daglobe Delta whom she believes have been criminally exploited, as well as every other exploited people. She condemns violence perpetrated by the SJ and accuses the ruling government of Chief Abel Zanda of corruption and insensitivity. Song, through such utterances, wins even the support of SJ as well the populace of Daglobe. On its part, SJ aids her by forcing the government of Chief Zanda to conduct elections devoid of the traditional electoral fraud. SJ gives vent to such threats, blowing up places. At the end of the elections, Song emerges as the president of Daglobe.

Toundi, besides Araba, is one of the most prominent characters in the novel. She is a younger female. Her name and actions run through the gamut of the novel. Through her, the writer also explores the imperative for an alternative. A feminist first class graduate of English, Toundi is revolutionary from her secondary school days. In her radicalism, in her earlier days, she gets her father, Chief Wenni to change his male chauvinistic actions and repressive attitude towards his wife and his four female children at home. Toundi's desire for transformation is not limited to her home but is total. Thus, in her days of waiting for admission into the university and while in the university she pitched her tent with Moral Daglobe – a human right group. Upon her graduation, she comes to the forefront of the activism for the liberation of man and his environment by establishing a NGO (Non Governmental Organization) called Clean Daglobe.

Egbuson's elevation of the woman as exemplified in the engagements of the two female characters in the novel is in consonance with his belief in inverting the position of women who are victims of patriarchal repression. This elevation of the

patriarchy-oppressed woman is symbolic of his optimism in the ultimate triumph of all the oppressed. Through the choice of the younger generation of male and female characters as agents of change in the novel, the writer also expresses his disenchantment with the older generation of leaders. He is of the conviction that the vibrancy of youths of both sexes can be trusted to orchestrate a social transformation. He is convinced that this victory is realisable through the united efforts of all subjugated people. The belief is demonstrated by the role SJ plays in the election of Song. Their action is an expression of his conviction that the perverted youthful energies can be redirected toward social transformation. The same advocacy is discernible in Ojaide's *The Activist*. In both works of art, there is the anticipation of the triumph of the oppressed through the synergy of their efforts. Both writers see the people of the Niger Delta as one people in spite of the obvious cleavages based on class, gender and ethnicity, given their common experience of alienation and exploitation.

#### **4.7 Egbuson's style, technique and vision**

Egbuson's novel is structurally complex. The complexity is due to the existence of two dominant male and female characters as well as the presence of many TV discussion programmes. The creation of a female lead character alongside a male hero is emblematic of the writer's vision of the possibility of social change through the women. His vision is expressed even in the allegorical representations of names of the major characters and the setting of the novel. Araba – the name of major male character – is a Yoruba word for a large tree. The name has been deliberately selected by the writer to capture his ecofriendliness and the ecoactivism engaged in by the male hero. Similarly, Toundi, the dominant female character and Erintukpa, one of the female friends of Toundi, are Ijo words for light and day light. Both words are allegorical of the positive social change that is to be inaugurated by the women folk. The setting of the novel, Daglobe Delta, is an allegorical representation of the Niger Delta that is portrayed in the story as an environmentally violated geographical entity.

Egbuson also employs antithetical pictures to capture the duality in the living conditions of the members of staff of the multinational oil companies and the people of the host communities. While the employees of the oil companies live in houses

well equipped with modern facilities, the people of the host communities live in squalor. The people of the host communities are citizens of Daglobe Delta, a geographical entity that exists as a parallel to Nigeria. Through this antithesis, the writer projects the erosion of self provoked by this contrastive existence. The contrasting pictures of the binary existence also serve as a persuasive device.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be argued that *The Activist* and *Love My Planet* reveal that the people of the Niger Delta are people violently robbed of their humanity and their ecosystem by the neo-colonialist collaborative activities of the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies operating in the region. The writers submit that the violent reactions from the people of the Niger Delta are manifestations of erosion of self as a result of the oppressive actions of the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian leadership.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 OTHERNESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN KAINE AGARY'S *YELLOW-YELLOW* AND HELON HABILO'S *OIL ON WATER*

*Yellow-Yellow* is Kaine Agary's maiden work. Until the novel earned her a space in the literary world, she was little known. She is a United States-born young Nigerian woman of Ijo ethnic extraction. She had her early education up to secondary school in Port Harcourt. In 1992, she went back to her birthplace for her bachelor's and master's degrees in Sociology and Economics, and Public Administration in 1995 and 1997 respectively. She relocated to Lagos in 2004 and has been living there since then. *Yellow-Yellow*, which is her first creative work written in 2006, got her the Victor Nwankwo's 2007 Book of the Year Award. In the same 2007, Agary won ANA/Chevron prize for environmental writing. This award was followed by NLNG Prize for Nigerian Literature in 2008.

Agary's novel on the Niger Delta reveals her experience while growing up in the region. She examines the negative consequences of the oil politics in the region on the Ijo woman in particular and the Niger Delta woman in general. The activities of the multinational oil companies with their destructive effects on the environment alienate the Ijo woman from her sources of fiscal strength. This therefore, pushes her further down the ladder of the oppressed. The marginal position of the Ijo woman is in tandem with the contention by Bill Ashcroft et al (1995) that "in many different societies, women, like the colonised subjects, have been relegated to the position of "Other, colonised by various forms of patriarchal domination" (149).

Otherness is a consequence of alienation. It is a feeling that comes with being considered inferior to other(s). Ecofeminists argue that the Otherness experienced by the woman and nature is a construct of patriarchy: women and nature suffer violence initiated by patriarchy. Feminists generally contend that the Otherness of the woman is created through language, which privileges one thing or gender over another.

In the days of physical colonialism, the construct of the Other was obvious in the use of language by Western colonisers who deployed epithets such as natives or tribes that designated the colonised as inferior. Such words, even as they inscribed a feeling of superiority in the colonisers, also etched a feeling of subordination in the colonised. In the successful execution of the imperialist project, this duality, engendered by the deployment of words, played a prominent role. This was because the act stirred up in the oppressed the feeling of being estranged. On the part of the Other, the change in his/her status must come first by understanding his/her disadvantaged position and the consequence of that on his or her destiny.

The second step is making conscious and determined steps to alter the status quo. The effort at shredding the subaltern badge may be militant or otherwise, depending on the alienated's perception of the action associated with his/her subjugation. In the decolonisation of the erstwhile colonies, Frantz Fanon's (1963) advocacy for the radical overthrow of the colonisers was informed by his discernment of the psychological import of the colonial experience on the psyche of the imperialised. Among female scholars, there are divisions with regard to the reactionary stand against their perceived patriarchal manacles. While some call for a belligerent approach to modify the plight of the woman, others believe in a non-aggressive method (Nnolim, 2009).

It is interesting to note that within the superior Self, there exists the inferior Other, as is the case with African Americans and Indian American in the United States of America. Similarly, even within the Other, there are yet Others. It is within the postcolonial space of Otherness, that third world feminist's voice like that of Gayatri Spivak is strident. The postcolonial feminists believe that the decolonisation of the third world is not total when the woman remains in handcuffs placed on her by the patriarchal system (Ashcroft et al, 1989). Within the postcolonial space in Nigeria, there has emerged new Self and Other duality. This emergent Self is defined by its acquisition of intellectual and material wealth as well as political power. The possession of these alienates this class from the rest of the people.

The people in the Niger Delta feel further Otherness in their relationship with the larger ethnic groups who have control over the machinery of government. This feeling of Otherness by the minorities in the South-South of Nigeria is justified by Biodun Jeyifo's (2009) apt reference to their experience as internal colonisation – a

description we have given earlier in this work. Their struggle to reconstruct their status through violence is in line with Fanonian agitation for a return of corresponding hostility against the colonial Self. Within the Otherness of the general people, there is yet another set of Other – the woman. The female gender is the subjugated one in the binary relationship between the male and female genders. Most black feminists and those of the postcolonial third world countries like Alice Walker, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, Molaria Leslie-Ogundepe, Catherine Acholonu, Chineye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, among others, in their attempts at distinction from middleclass white feminism, see the woman of colour as a triple subaltern – of sex, colour and class. Vis-à-vis the experience of marginalisation and exploitation suffered by the people of the Niger Delta in the Nigerian state, the Niger Delta woman is a triple subaltern in the tribalised politics of the Nigerian state. Amidst the general suffering experienced by both genders as minority ethnic nationalities, she suffers further devaluation of her humanity and “womanity” – much of which are lost under the repressive jackboots of patriarchy.

The Niger Delta rural dwellers, who are disconnected from the environment through the oppressive activities of multinational oil companies, like the woman and nature, suffer Otherness. They try to reverse their situation through violence that is only a response to the aggressiveness of the oppressors. It is against the background of this postcolonial Otherness that we shall examine novels of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* with respect to the response of the people to their Otherness.

### **5.1 Reconstructing Otherness in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow***

The conflict in the Niger Delta, which peaked in the days of civil rule, dates back to the military era. In Agary's view, the autocracy associated with military leadership, while it lasted, provided the oil companies the chopping board for the slaughter of the humanity of the people of the Niger Delta – male and female. Their humanity is ruined or menaced by the despoliation of their environment. While the consequence of the activities of the multinational oil companies with their attendant ecological violence, governmental neglect and repression are shared by both genders of fe/male in the Niger Delta, for the woman in the Niger Delta, these are but additional burdens on her back already sagging under the weight of patriarchal domination. Thus, it is a triple yoke for the Niger Delta woman in a Western

capitalism-imposed society. She shares in the double-yoked status of the third world woman in a capitalist system, with its misdistribution and ownership, as revealed by Mucere Mugo in an interview:

First of all, let me note that we cannot talk of women's oppression by men. In capitalist systems, women tend to be exploited by the very nature of society, particularly the working and peasant women, just as the men are exploited. The difference is that women are hit particularly hard. Their most obvious hardship is being educational disadvantaged. Then you have of abuse that cut across class lines: sexual abuse, wife beating and the fact that men take advantage of the woman's role as a child-bearer. But I won't give the impression that I foster illusions. Sexual abuse, rape etc do take place in socialist societies, but statistics will bear me out that the abuse is less than capitalist societies, whose conditions of maldistribution and ownership tend to breed many social problems (Carole Boyce Davies, 1986:p. 565).

Mugo, in the above statement validates not only the triple oppression of the Niger Delta woman, but also unfurls capitalism (an export of and an inheritance from the colonialist West) as the cause of the maladies of the Niger Delta people that include the women.

The exploration of the distasteful experience of the people of the Niger Delta in the novels by most of the male writers is phallicentric. Such representations often have male characters as the major ones and make no distinction in gender, in relation to the implication of the devastation of the ecology for the individual gender. This act, in Niger Delta writing, re-echoes Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi's (1988) grievance with the corpus of Nigerian literature of which Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* is a quintessence – having only two female characters' name. Similarly, in most of the body of writing that have emerged from the Niger Delta, female characters are presented only as adjuncts to males – a lopsided presentation that is capable of inciting feminist critical reactions. We do not intend to do a feminist rereading of these texts by males as such an exercise is outside the purview of this work.

The lopsidedness in characters portrayal and the presentation of the experience of the people have therefore given birth to *Yellow-Yellow*. Agary attempts a deviation from the existing seemingly phallicentric paradigm as she explores the Niger Delta imbroglio with its vitiating effects on the female gender. Our interpretation of Agary's novel is not however informed by its female authorial origin

or the existence of a heroine, but by its examination of issues germane to the feminism doctrines, one of which stands out in the novel – the predicament of the woman. As revealed in the novel, the impoverishment faced by the woman in the Niger Delta is caused by the asphyxiating military autocracy that facilitates the unfettered exploration of oil with its resultant ecocide. The activities of the multinational oil companies with the noxious environmental consequences force the Niger Delta woman further down the abyss of patriarchal Otherness. This is so, because she is robbed of her one major means of sustenance – farming. This occupation in the past accorded her some level of humanity that derived from some measure of economic independence she had hitherto relished. This degradation of the environment to which the dignity of the Ijo woman was once moored, is validated by Catherine Acholonu's (1995) contention that the marginal position of the African woman was caused by the colonialism:

The demobilization and marginalization of the African woman was a major colonialist strategy to gain full control of the continent. It seems to me that the exploiters realized very early that Africa's very essence, her cosmological sense of order and cohesion, her epistemology and metaphysics are deeply rooted in the notion of the complementarity of the sexes, but more especially in the quintessence of womanhood; and having realized this his attack on African womanhood was planned strategy to weaken the very foundation of the African society, its cohesion, its inherent power and spirituality (p.78).

It is as a result of the destruction of her economic foundation that the Niger Delta woman is forced to reconstruct her endangered humanity through unorthodox and debasing means of livelihood that sometimes include prostitution. Most people in the rural areas of the Niger Delta are kept alive only by their daily dependence on the environment. Thus, they are the worst victims of the despoiled environment. Some are consequently, hurled into prostitution. There are others, who amidst the inhibitions, attempt to alter their destinies and 'womanity' through the acquisition of Western education. The various attempts by the women to reconstruct their Otherness within the postcolonial space are what Agary explores in her novel.

Four different women are prominent in the novel. Through the activities of these women, the life of the Niger Delta woman in the oil era is examined in the novel. Beside Yellow-Yellow, who is an itinerant eponymous heroine of the novel,

there is Bibi, her mother in a rural Ijo community. There are at the city of Port Harcourt, Sisi an elderly woman whom Yellow-Yellow goes to live with, and Lolo, a young educated trendy lady who becomes a model to Yellow-Yellow. Interestingly, all the women have one thing common to them – they are all single women. Except for Yellow-Yellow, who is in her teenage years, the rest find themselves in the single state for one reason or the other. Agary's choice of single women is deliberate – to create a peculiar level of Otherness felt by women in Africa in general.

African societies distinguish between the married and unmarried. Between the two, the former is considered inferior, hence she is discriminated against. Within the unmarried, exists also a stratum of the bereaved, divorcees and marriageable singles. Belonging to any rung of this ladder has its stigma that is not shared by the married. Agary's women in this novel therefore, have extra reproach or burden besides the general Otherness associated with womanhood in a male dominated system. It is worthy of note that these four women at a given point in their lives become united in the battle to alter the Subaltern position of the woman, particularly the rural woman. We shall examine in turn how each of the women attempts to define a space within the larger Niger Delta Otherness and its affiliated challenges.

## **5.2 Yellow-Yellow and her Otherness**

Yellow-Yellow, whose real name is Zilayefa, is the seventeen-year heroine of the novel. She is a product of a short-lived relationship of a Greek father and an Ijo mother. This miscegenation of her parents gives her a complexion that is distinct from people of both Greek and Ijo nationalities. The peculiarity in colour pigmentation, consequently gives her a tag of Otherness that is an additional burden on her fragile young shoulders. The colour, which marks her out, attracts to her discrimination and derision quite a number of times – right from her rural Ijo community where we first read about her, to the city of Port Harcourt for which she later leaves. She discloses to us that her peculiar colour easily gives her away as being one of the *born-troways* (74) – meaning that she is a product of prostitution or an immoral relationship. The enormity of the psychological trauma she and her likes that abound in the Niger Delta have to contend with is revealed in her discovery:

I found out there were generations of yellows in the Niger Delta area, and each had a different story. There were yellows of the 1800s, the days of the Royal Niger Company, later

known as United Africa Company (UAC)...There were yellows from Portuguese traders who remained in the region until the British took control... The next generation were those from Syrian, Lebanese and Greek business men and sailors, some of whom had married Nigerian women. These yellow knew their fathers; these fathers even sent them overseas for their education. They were the lucky ones. The rest of us were *born-troways*, rejected by our fathers or nonexistent to them...In Port Harcourt, being yellow defined my interactions with the people I met there... I came to realize that people had preconceived notions about others of mixed race – they thought we were conceited, promiscuous, undisciplined, and confused. A mixed-race woman in position of power must have gotten there by her looks. She was not there because of her intelligence. There was even less regard for *born-troways* such as me. We are products of women of easy virtue who did not have morals to pass onto their children (74).

This is not an experience, the existence of which, she is not instrumental to. It is but a part of her lot that she attempts to revise. She has to negotiate her being within the Otherness experienced by other Niger Deltans. Her Ijo mother, Bibi, toils on a land made barren by oil spillages from the activities of multinational oil companies. The poverty provoked by the destruction of the environment blemishes her fate just as it does the fortune of other Niger Deltans. It is this penury and the Otherness that Yellow-Yellow seeks to reconstruct. At her Ijo community in the Niger Delta, she begins her march toward steering her destiny away from her mother's beautiful dreams truncated by her unfortunate relationship with her Greek father.

### **5.3 Yellow-Yellow's inversion of her Otherness**

Bibi, Zilayefa's mother, is an orphan raised by relations. On the completion of her secondary school in a developmentally and educationally backward Ijo community in the Niger Delta, she leaves for the oil city of Port-Harcourt to get a good job. She has dreamt, "After all, Nigeria was in the middle of oil boom, and there were many businessmen around" (7) and she saw herself "working as a secretary for one of them" (7). Contrary to her great expectations however, she is not able to secure a job, instead she becomes pregnant with a baby – Yellow-Yellow, through a transient but promises-filled relationship with a Greek sailor. He sneaks away, leaving her with a nebulous future. As a result of this, she is compelled to raise her child alone. For Bibi, Zilayefa or Yellow-Yellow, her daughter, (both names are used

interchangeably), will be the fulfilment of her long-cherished dream of Eldorado abruptly throttled in the prime of her life by the coming into her life of the Greek sailor. By the abridgement of Bibi's dream of a blissful future, Agary portrays what feminists see as one of the many sins of men against womanhood. These wrongs against the woman in the Niger Delta are the devaluation of her humanity/self and her "womanity" of which Bibi's experience is quintessential.

Most young girls in the Niger Delta communities have had their woman dignity ravaged alongside the flora and fauna because of the flourishing of oil exploration activities and other ancillary activities that draw expatriates to the area – mostly male expatriates without their spouses. In the struggle to breathe in the seemingly smothering environment destroyed by frequent oil spillages that Nwagbara Uzoечи (2010) refers to as ecological imperialism, the young girls are easily baited into prostitution by the money often flaunted by the oil companies' staffers. The representative nature of the Bibi's experience to the Niger Delta communities is underscored in the novel by the eloquent silence of the author on the precise setting of the novel.

The several mention of Ijo land simply validates the commonness of the experience to the young women in Ijo villages, towns and cities. Yellow-Yellow graphically paints a picture of much more sordid daring practices among the girls and their ordeals in the hands of some foreign male nationals in the region. She discloses that in an attempt to escape the frustrations resulting from poverty in oil-rich communities, many young girls flee to the cities to take back from the oil companies' workers what they consider their own share of the oil wealth. Their struggle is accompanied with risks such as "travelling far into an Isoko land to get love portion" (37).

Unfortunately, their struggle to eke out their living from the expatriate whites is not without its dehumanising consequences. Some of such young girls, before parting with the money of such men, have the sanctity of their humanity and "womanity" violated by the white men "who beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their private parts as part of the 'fun'" (37). Through the disclosure of such an appalling vitiation of womanhood as experienced by some young women in the Niger Delta, Agary unfolds the negative effect of oil exploration on the Niger Delta womanhood - the dignity of womanhood is violated. This revelation agrees with S.O. Aghalino's



(2011) claim that promiscuous lifestyles of the staff of oil companies caused the escalation of “prostitution in previously isolated and stable communities” (24). Such anti-social behaviour of oil companies employees that has young women as victims justifies ecofeminists yoking of the woman and nature as co-victims of patriarchal repression. While there is an eloquent authorial quiet on such condemnable act, there is still some discernable detestation of the option adopted by the young girls to earn a living in the midst of apparently overwhelming indigence.

It is within such a challenging environment that Zilayefa attempts to alter the misfortune surrendering her birth and her lot as a mixed race young Niger Delta woman. Besides her trials arising from the bereavement of her paternal affection, she also has the challenge of self-actualisation after completing secondary school in a community deficient of modern infrastructure. The quests for fatherly affection and self-identity therefore, are the driving forces in Zilayefa’s life. She realises that these passionate desires cannot come except through a resolution to modify her present state of deprivation. The place to fulfil these is the city of Port Harcourt.

It is noteworthy that the rural to urban kinesis is traditional to feminists writing – especially that of African feminists such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Zainab Alkali, El Saadawi to mention but a few. Nnolim (2000) has also discerned this journey motif in feminists writing. This movement is understandable because the African village or rural setting is emblematic of patriarchy. The city, in contrast, is symbolic of the freedom offered by modernity. It is to an apparently brittle liberty offered by the city that Zilayefa, therefore, turns to change her fate defined by generic man. She believes that the realisation of her dreams can come only through education. This is obviously Agary’s conviction that the Niger Delta woman can and must wrest her humanity and “womanity” through education.

This recommendation, which resonates severally in the utterances of various characters in the novel, unites the four rural and urban women in the novel. Yellow-Yellow’s mother’s (Bibi) dream, for a pleasurable future for her daughter and for herself, is tethered to her daughter’s education up to tertiary level. In the novel, tertiary education is available only in the city of Port Harcourt. Yellow-Yellow’s knowledge of the existence of higher educational opportunities only in Port Harcourt whets her hunger to leave as she thinks of getting scholarship in the city – a privilege enjoyed only by the city dwellers. Yellow-Yellow, on the completion of her

secondary education, becomes defiant to her mother's attempts to halt her cravings. She thinks to remain immured in the village after her secondary education is to delimit her destiny. Zilayefa's doggedness is symptomatic of feminist heroine as demonstrated, for instance, by Nwapa's Efurū, who in defiance of her father, marries Adizua.

Yellow-Yellow's passion for escape in search for education and caring love unfortunately, exposes her to the sexual exploitation of men old enough to father her even though she had earlier deprecated prostitution. Shortly after the completion of her secondary education, Yellow-Yellow had her passion for the freedom and bliss offered by the city of Port-Harcourt almost frustrated by Sergio. Sergio is a middle-aged white man who has come to her village in the company of his black friends to attend a funeral. At their first meeting, her distinctive complexion attracts her to him to begin a friendly relationship with her. To Yellow-Yellow, desirous of fleeing from the village, this man is godsend to free her from the shackle of poverty in the village caused by oil pollution. Sergio however punctures her ecstasy at its zenith when he melts away from the village without prior information. Before his sudden disappearance, a day earlier, he had gone alone with her to a rendezvous on a picnic.

When he re-emerges in Port Harcourt where she eventually goes to, he attempts to establish yet another ephemeral relationship with her. Unfortunately, this time around she is not ready to be fooled the second time. Her initial rendezvous with him at the village, as far as she is concerned, had been enabled mainly by a blazing desire in her to get away from the village and its bleakness as well as her craving for paternal affection. In the accidental second meeting with him in a street in Port Harcourt, she is not ready for his desire for yet another run-of-the-mill relationship. She realises that Sergio and many other expatriates who abound the Niger Delta cities, have wives in their home countries, but only desire the Niger Delta women as mere sex foddors needed only to satisfy their transient libido. Through the action of Sergio, Agary reveals the exploitative nature of the foreigners who live in the Niger Delta towards the young women.

At Port Harcour, her unique colour marks her out easily to become a victim of sexual exploitation. This time it is Retired Admiral Amalayefa. The Admiral, who is also old enough to be her father, takes undue advantage of her longing for paternal affection. He needs her to satisfy his lust as he desires and gives her money to abort

the pregnancy that results from their illicit relationship. Her attempt to terminate the pregnancy almost claims her life. While Yellow-Yellow relishes her relationship with the admiral while it lasts, there are however, extenuating factors about her immoral escapades.

First, she is robbed of paternal affection. Her craving for the filling of this vacuum in her life gets her into the unorthodox relationship with the admiral. This need for a father, which she expresses severally in the novel, is exemplified by her admiration of the admiral at her first contact with him:

When I saw him, he was dressed in traditional attire and had a little bounce when he walked. In my eyes, he looked dignified. If I had the luxury of creating a dream father, he would definitely have come out looking like Admiral (120).

Second, the poverty faced by her young mother mitigates Yellow-Yellow indulgence in this illicit relationship. Bibi, her mother, alienated from farming – her only legitimate means of sustenance – because of the pollution from the activities of the multinational oil companies, is hurled into dependening on her only young daughter. This additional yoke on Yellow-Yellow's fragile shoulders makes it inevitable for her to accept the opportunity that affords her the extra money that she sends to her mother. Besides, her monthly income as a hotel receptionist is inadequate to be saved for her education and her mother's sustenance. Thus, this helplessness of Yellow-Yellow and her mother only accentuates the effects of the problems faced by the women in the Niger Delta, particularly the single woman.

Bibi's life of penury in the Ijo village is the mirror on which the plight of the woman in the polluted Niger Delta environment is reflected. While the consequences of oil spillage on the economies of families are enormous, they are greater on the single woman who depends on the soil for the sustenance and the education of her household. It is the huge demand on the woman as a result of the depleted environment that the writer x-rays in the novel. Agary's examination of the plight of the woman in the Niger Delta therefore, is linked to the environmental challenges of the people of the region.

The economic difficulties of the woman in the Niger Delta as result of the degraded environment authenticate ecofeminists' yoking together of the woman and nature. Catherine Acholonu (1995), for instance, contends that nature and the woman, particularly the rural woman, are linked together as both are victims of oppression in

the patriarchal system. The relationship between the two and its corollary effect on the woman is what Agary captures from the opening pages of the novel. In spite of the riches from oil, the people of Yellow-Yellow's Ijo community are mired in penury as a result of the frequent oil spillages that often destroy their farmland. She tells us at the beginning of the novel of her mother's early return from her farm all smeared with crude oil that has inundated farmland in the community. From her narration, this is a big blow on mother, erosion of self in Bibi:

The day my mother's farmland was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither, but she carried on watering it with hope. The black oil that spilled that day swallowed my mother's crops and unravelled the threads that held together her fantasies for me. She was able to find new farmland in another village, but it was not the same... a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. However, I think she had lost that land a long time ago, because each season yielded less than the season before. Not unlike the way she and others in the village had gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the river to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else, according to the voice on the radio (10, 4).

The sad event described above brings untold hardship and psychological strain on the mother as it means not only her being flung into pennilessness; it also implies the abridgement of her dream of a delightful future for her daughter. She had believed that through the proceeds from her farm, she would be able to give her daughter the university education that she was not able to have. The indigence experienced by Bibi is representative of the emasculation of the Ijo woman. Bibi's poverty that is not unconnected with her educationally disadvantaged position. Mugo has argued that the educationally disadvantaged position of the African woman makes her the hardest hit by the exploitative activities of the capitalist system (Davies, 1986: p. 565). Agary thus, sees the multinational oil companies as part of the patriarchal subjugation of the woman as the ecocide carried out by the oil companies in the region robs the woman of the economic independence she had enjoyed in the past.

The responses by the women, the worst victims, to the despoliation of the environment vary from woman to woman. Of particular concern to Agary in the novel are the debasing effects of such ecological imperialism on womanhood in the Niger Delta and the sundry distasteful reactions of some young women to the ecological imperialism. One of the consequences of this form of imperialism in the Niger Delta

is the erosion of self or further debasement of the humanity of the Ijo woman. The traditional Ijo woman, many years before the discovery and exploration of oil in the area, had been very industrious – farming and fishing to sustain the family. Thus, she was economically independent. However, her financial muscles have been enfeebled by oil exploration and its concomitant hazards of frequent spillages. It is this picture of the now fiscally emasculated Ijo woman in the oil era that Agary portrays through her characters. Yellow-Yellow recounts how her mother told her:

...of the days of her youth when every husband was expected to give his new wife a dugout canoe to fish, to earn a living, and help to feed the family. Those were the 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 the children. Those were the days when the Ijaw woman 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 any knew what to do with – roasted, boiled, mashed, green, and yellow, the possibilities were endless...Nowadays, the men were more oppressive than the women alive could remember. They demanded a healthy meal when they were hungry, disregarding the facts that woman had to walk extra kilometres to get firewood or cultivate and harvest the food fertilized by their sweat and blood. Cobwebs would fill the pots during this time before the men contributed to the feeding expenses of the household (39, 40).

The extract above is an obvious indictment on the multinational oil companies for the further inferiorisation of the Ijo woman in the oil era. She has been transformed into an economic parasite. The statement also highlights the plight of the woman. As the inferiorised, she is the one on whose shoulders the challenges of the society are further transferred. As the scapegoat for the maladies orchestrated by the multinational companies and the central government, she has to go the extra mile to get firewood and cultivate the land because much of the land is lost to frequent oil spillages. The statement also establishes the validity of Mugo's contentions we have referred to earlier – that the capitalists systems promotes the exploitation of men and women with the woman being the worse victim. Bibi's recollection is also a comparison of the traditional or pre-capitalist society and the capitalist system typified by the oil era. In this analogy of the two epochs, we find Agary sharing the

same view as Mugo's with regard to capitalism and the increased exploitation of the woman.

Even as Agary focuses on the Ijo woman in an oil-ravaged milieu, she does not fail to highlight the effect of oil pollution on the rural Ijo men. The men also experience the negative results of the activities of the multinational oil companies. Irked by the devastating spills on farmland, the men had once risen up to get the oil company to pay compensation for the destruction of farmland. However, their effort yielded no results. The failure of the men to redress the insensitivity of the multinational oil companies only underlines the helplessness of the woman in the ecocide perpetrated by the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta. Agary is of the view that the oil companies' irresponsibility and recklessness are made possible by the inability of the Nigerian government to make laws to regulate the day to day operations of the oil companies in the region.

Their careless attitude towards the wellbeing of the people of the Niger Delta is succinctly expressed in Admiral Amalayefa's argument when he told Yellow-Yellow that, "The government that should be enforcing the laws to protect us in the Niger Delta, it is in fact putting our heads on the chopping block for the oil companies to finish the job" (137). The Admiral's statement also reveals the internal and external alliance for the successful subjugation of the postcolonial other in the Niger Delta. The thriving of the domination experienced by the woman and men in the Niger Delta, Agary therefore avers, is made possible by the collaboration of Western capitalists and the leadership in Nigeria who are the postcolonial Self.

#### **5.4 Sisterhood of the Others**

Among the women in the region, Agary sees the rural woman as the most pitiable victim of the external/internal partnership. Her focus on the countrywoman is obvious in the central place Yellow-Yellow and her mother occupy in the novel. The other two city women in the novel, Madam George or Sisi and Lolo are relatively successful single women that serve as role models to Yellow-Yellow. They inhabit the same Niger Delta environment with its characteristic repression from the military leadership of the day, but are untouched by the "palpable fear, fighting, and poverty" (99) experienced by most of the dwellers of the Niger Delta. Sisi and Lolo are among the few too comfortable to bother about the prevalent woes in the area. Sisi or Madam

George is a fashionable mixed race old Ijo woman who is privileged to see her white father co-habit with her Ijo mother, and mixed race brother. Unlike Yellow-

Yellow, she is advantaged by having a white father who had been on the employ of UAC. Sisi, who is not well educated, is able to exploit her exposure to the city life: through contracts which make her rich. She however, shares in the pains of being an Other – being a mixed race. The father of her only child was disallowed by his own father from marrying her on accounts of her paternity with a doubtful pedigree. Sisi has however been able to take charge of her Otherness, hence has everything going for her. Consequently, she becomes a role model to Yellow-Yellow who needed to utilise the opportunities offered her by the cities to acquire education and change her Otherness.

It is this point that Agary establishes through the creation of Lolo, a twenty-five-year Ijo city lady. Yellow-Yellow sees her as an inspiration. Lolo, a University of Port Harcourt graduate of French, chooses to be a self-made woman. On the completion of her national service with the Elf Oil Company, she refuses to struggle for a permanent employment with the company, as many young women are wont to do, exploiting their beauty. She leaves to carve out an image of her own, engaging in businesses of all kinds both within and without the frontiers of Nigeria. She is a symbolic reincarnation of the pre-oil era Ijo woman who was economically independent.

This is the point that Agary explores in Lolo's refusal to stay back in her place of one-year national assignment. Her commercial shrewdness endears her to the rich – young and old, including Madam George and Retired Admiral Amalayefa. The adroitness that Sisi admires in her, informs her handing Yellow-Yellow over to Lolo to be moulded into the reformed Ijo woman, unshackled intellectually and economically to take her place in the Niger Delta environment. In the novel, we find the belief of Agary that the redesigning of the new Ijo woman can come only through education. This resounds in Lolo's and Sisi's interactions with Yellow-Yellow. Within a short period of mentoring, Yellow-Yellow also acknowledges the positive influence of Lolo on her life thus:

I was content being Lolo's tail and experiencing many new things with her. Her maturity was inspiring, and I hoped that I could one day handle people much older than me with respect while getting what I wanted, just as she did. Being around her made me want to continue my education, not just because I wanted to please my mother. I wanted to carry myself with the same confidence as Lolo (83).

As she performs the role of grooming Yellow-Yellow, Lolo never fails to demonstrate the virtue of being disciplined morally as well. Her rectitude is evidenced in her faithfulness to her only Hausa male friend, Kamal whom she hopes to marry. To instil this uprightness and focus of the new Ijo woman in Yellow-Yellow, Lolo is not unmindful of the need for chastity on the part of Yellow-Yellow, ensuring that she does not go into immoral relationship with any young man and have her destiny ruined. Lolo, who desires to see her become a lady that is financially independent, proposes the Adult Education Programme to Yellow-Yellow (67). This programme, she feels, will afford Yellow-Yellow the opportunity to work and save enough money for her university education and still reach out to her mother in the village.

Though Yellow-Yellow's internal craving for fatherly affection is exploited by Admiral Amalayefa and she is almost taken off her course in life, at the end of the novel she realises herself. She promises herself saying, "I promise God and myself that I would focus only on completing my education and making my mother, Sisi and Lolo proud of me" (177). Yellow-Yellow's rebirth, for a fresh beginning that will remould her destiny as an Ijo woman, who is an economic and academic success, is Agary's vision in the novel. She examines this in the light of the ecological challenges in the Niger Delta that have pushed the Ijo woman in particular and the Niger Delta woman in general further down the abyss of Otherness in the ethnocentric politics of Nigeria. The execution of her idea in the novel is done with the creation of these non-militant four women who all believe in the reconstruction of the marginalised woman through education.

### **5.5 Agary's characters and her artistic vision**

Agary's vision of altering the subjugated status of the Ijo, in particular, and the Niger Delta woman, in a despoiled environment, is achieved through the juxtaposition of diametrically opposed settings of rural and urban. The rural is symbolic of the place of repression and destruction of the value of the woman by the activities of the multinational oil companies. It is worthy of note that the rural setting where we first meet Yellow-Yellow is nameless, and this is symbolic of lost identity of the people of Niger Delta. Everything that they can associate with as home has been destroyed. This is symbolic as it reflects the experience of the inhabitants of the rustic dwellings that abound the Niger Delta. The urban area represents the place of freedom for the woman. The liberty offered by the city is figuratively captured by the



presence of educational opportunities at the highest level at the city. Yellow-Yellow's movement to city of Port Harcourt to pursue her education is emblematic of the change that will come to the Ijo woman whose economic fortunes have been ravaged by the activities of the oil companies. Her argument that the economic status has been destroyed is eloquently captured in Bibi's reminiscence as retold by her daughter. The recollections come with a contrast of the past and the present expressed in "Those were the days... and Nowadays... (39, 40)".

Agary's choice of a young heroine, and young successful female role model, is instructive: it is the youthful woman that is often baited to her ruin by multinational oil companies' staffers and other foreign nationals that swarm the region, hence the writer's choice of young Yellow-Yellow and her successful young role model, Lolo. Agary's method of narration is the first person done through childlike innocence. The innocence in the narration compels the reader to see the story about the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta as a credible one. Agary also uses both Ijo and pidgin expressions/words such as "okoi de o", "Ere owo' ow bein" "gbein mo", "born-troway", "ashawo pickin" "oyinbos". These Ijo expressions, whose English interpretations are not given, are persuasive devices Agary employs to draw the readers to come into her Ijo world.

#### **5.6 Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and *Other within the Other***

Helon Habila is a United States based young Nigerian writer of international renown. He was born in 1967 in the Northern part of Nigeria where he studied literature at the University of Jos. After a stint in lecturing at the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, he left for Lagos where he worked as a journalist with *Hints Magazine*. It was while with this magazine, that Habila wrote his maiden novel – *Waiting for an Angel*, which won him the 2003 Commonwealth Writers prize. His second novel – *Measuring Time* written in 2007 earned him yet another award in 2008 – Virginia Library Foundation Fiction Award. *Oil on Water* (2010) is Habila's third novel.

His writing, especially the first and the third novels, reveals him as a committed writer who identifies with the oppressed in the Nigerian society. Though domiciled very far from his home country, Nigeria, Habila's concern for the subjugated class back home has not waned, as we find this exemplified in the thrust of his *Oil on Water*.

While it is generally believed that the people of Niger Delta are the marginalised lot in the post-independence Nigerian ethnocised politics, Habila delineates the real victims of the oil politics from its beneficiaries in the Niger Delta in this novel. He sees the poor fishermen and their families domiciled in the creeks as the real sufferers of the consequences of the oil politics in the region. The explanation for this is obvious – by virtue of their location and means of sustenance – they are in a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment.

The destruction of their ecosystem, thus, is tantamount to tampering with their existence. These people are the postcolonial Other within the fringes of the general Otherness of the people of the Niger Delta. The experiences of these people and their environment despoiled by the oil companies form the focus of his attention in the novel. In contrast to those within the periphery of marginality, there are people who are beneficiaries of the oil politics. Politicians and lawyers who reside in the cities in the Niger Delta and Abuja represent this privileged class – the postcolonial Self in the novel. They have access to the oil companies and government at local and national levels. Their advantaged positions, thus, disconnect them from the direct effects of the degraded Niger Delta environment.

Two journalists – Zaq, the elder of the two and Rufus the younger – have the joint assignments of interviewing and mediating for the release of the kidnapped wife of a British engineer who works with an oil company in the Niger Delta. Through the movement of these two journalists in the creeks of the Niger Delta, Habila unfolds the picture of the ecological challenges faced by the fishermen and their families. The story is *journalese* in nature, with most of the events recounted through Rufus' encounters with other characters in the villages the two journalists visit in the course of their assignment. This narrative style, which obscures authorial comments, is employed by the writer to establish verisimilitude through the objective reporting on the experience of the people and their ecosystem.

As Zaq and Rufus visit and interact with the direct victims of the oil politics, for weeks – before finding the militants and Mrs Isabel Floode, the kidnapped woman – the oil politics in the Niger Delta, its colossal consequences on the human and non-human creatures as well as the reactions engendered by these effects amply reveal themselves. In the first village they get to in their search for the militants and Mrs Floode, they are greeted by emptiness, ruins and stench of decaying animals and

birds – all being telltale signs of a recent brutal clash between militants and soldiers. This is the general picture of the villages in the area and Rufus recounts that:

The Next village was almost a replica of the last: the same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrant stench, the barrenness, the oil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above punctured zinc roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return...Something organic, perhaps lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil...The patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker's hands (10).

The pathetic depictions of these villages rake up memories of the experiences of some Ijo communities like Odi and Gbaranmatu in Bayelsa and Delta States respectively that were overrun by soldiers in the heat of the insurgency in the Niger Delta. Here, drawing from these factual events, Habila captures the enormity of oil politics and its unpleasant effects on the people and their ecosystem. Through the narration of other minor characters, who interact with Rufus and Zaq, the reader is able to discern that the oil politics is all about brutal actions and counter-aggression – oppression and resistance.

Through these seemingly realistic representations of the actions of the soldiers and militants as well as the personal experiences of the two journalists, Habila unfolds the neo-colonial collaboration of the multinational oil companies, the Nigerian state and elites in the destruction of the Niger Delta. Habila adjudges the multinational oil companies, by their obnoxious activities, the aggressors. In Habila's reasoning, the collaborative ecocide carried out by the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies in the region engenders erosion of self in the people of Niger Delta. Consequently, in his interpretation, the forceful reactions of the militant illustrate the erosion of self. This is obvious in the words of Professor, the militants' leader that Rufus interviews briefly at their camp to which he is inadvertently taken:

“Write only the truth. Tell them about the flares you see at night, and the oil on water. And the soldiers forcing us to escalate the violence every day. Tell them how we are hounded daily in our own land. Where do they want us to go, tell me, where? Tell them we are going nowhere. This land belongs to us. That is the truth...” (232).

In the light of this statement, Habila mitigates the negative connotation associated with abduction, which characterised the struggles of the militants. The extenuation of the crime of hostage taking is palpable in the writer's de-emphasising the act in the novel. Habila's commitment to the plight of the people of the Niger Delta explains this deliberate emasculating of the seriousness of this seemingly criminal action, highlighting instead the cause of this act of misconduct by the youths of the region. This taking of sides with the exploited, as demonstrated by Habila, validates Ngugi's (1981) assertion that "A writer is trying to persuade us, to make us view not only certain kind of reality, but from a certain angle of vision often, though perhaps unconsciously, on behalf of a certain class, race, or nation (6)".

Habila persuades the reader to believe that the actions of the youths of the region are propelled by the injustice meted to them. This view tallies with Chidi Amuta's (1986) postulation on violence. Amuta states that, "violence is not a racial category. It is a means for the accomplishment of specific ends in the history of societies and is, therefore, a dynamic constituent of the historical process" (p.159). In this regard, Habila also shares the same view as Egbuson, who, in his *Love My Planet*, argues that, causes and effect are inseparable and that violence could be moral or immoral.

In Habila's novel, the morality of counter violence as a manifestation of erosion of self is evident in the revenge strategy employed by Salomon, the driver of Mrs Floode's husband. Salomon, a graduate, who for want of job, had picked up the chauffeuring of Mr James Floode, a white engineer with a multinational oil company. Through the relationship that had been established between the master and servant, Salomon was able to secure a job for his fiancée that he had brought from the village. However, in spite of Salomon's loyalty to his white master, the man impregnated Salomon's fiancée. When Rufus has an opportunity of interviewing him at the militants' camp, he recounts to him the grievance that informs his action thus:

"My Oga had insulted me badly, he had taken away my pride, my dignity, my manhood, and all the time I was serving him honestly, diligently. I trusted him. And another point, the money wasn't coming from his pocket: the oil company always pays the ransom, and Basse said that if you thought about it carefully, you 'd realize that the money came from our oil, so we would be getting back what was ours in the first place" (220, 221).

The moral justification of getting back their wealth from the oil companies by whatever means, as expressed by Rufus, is a general view held by the people of the Niger Delta. It is what informs the Professor-led militant group taking Mrs Floode captive from the amateur gang. It is with the intent of retrieving their wealth, which they believe is stolen by the oil companies, that makes Professor describe Salomon and his inexperienced lot as idiots for asking for a meagre sum of three million ransom when the least ransom payable should be five million naira.

Habila makes the point that these militants are not a gang of terrorists, but a people focused on liberating their ecosystem from its violators. To the militants consequently, whatever means can be employed to prosecute the insurgency until victory is eventually accomplished is justifiable. This belief influences Professor sending out his men to capture foreign oil workers. The explanation offered by one of the militants in their camp to Rufus, who asks why one of them is being punished, discloses one of the reasons for hostage taking:

The Professor needed to raise money quick quick (sic) to pay for a consignment of guns he was expecting from overseas, so he sent that guy over there, his name is Monday. His assignment was simple: take some boys, and enough guns and boats and everything you need, go to one of the oil companies in Port Harcourt and kidnap one foreign oil worker and bring him here. He went, returned with this cheerful-looking man who keeps saying they are making a terrible mistake in kidnapping him...They send their ransom demand, and waited...but surprisingly, the company shows no interest. Well, eventually they discover...the hostage was not a white man at all, despite his very fair skin (213).

The reason given for kidnapping as revealed above is economical – to fund the struggle for liberation. This reason agrees with one of the reasons advanced by Nseabasi S. Akpan (2010). Akpan classifies the reason given by the militant under the economic reason for the general emancipation struggle.

The economic reason as revealed by Professor, therefore, distinguishes them from others, who simply exploit the distasteful situation for their selfish interest. Professor's reply to Rufus' question about Gloria further shows their distinctiveness: "We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them?"(232). Gloria is a young nurse who takes care of the medical needs of the worshippers at Irikefe shrine. When the place is raided by militants revenging on the people, whom they think have betrayed them, she is carried away but is later

released without hurt. Professor tells him they are not the barbarians the government propagandists have painted them to be. His statement reveals Habila's sympathy for the genuine agitations of the rural people disconnected from the riches of their ecosystem.

Professor's statement also underscores a major point that Habila makes about the aggression on the part of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta: their belligerence, which is an expression of erosion of self as well as an attempt at salvaging their ecosystem that is ruined by the multinational oil companies. The armed struggle of the people of the Niger Delta, is consequently, a natural reaction triggered by the ecocide executed by the oil companies. Their counter-violence against their aggressors finds a parallel in ecocritic, Neil Everden's (1996) description of the Cichlid fish. Cichlid, though small, during its breeding season, fights off far larger fishes that encroach on its territory. Everden's illustration, that shows the relationship between every creature and its environment, adequately captures the relationship between the people of the Niger Delta and their ecology. The destruction of their environment is an attack on their essence/self consciousness and that engenders corresponding antagonism on their part as the oppressed.

Habila's position on the crisis is in consonance with the type of aggression that R.J. Rummel (1977) tags as benign. In his descriptions of various types and manifestation of hostility, Rummel (1977) contends that violence that is initiated in defence of oneself is good. He further differentiates another kind from this form of aggression – forceful aggression which usually involves violence. In the activities of the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta, the soldiers that are sent to execute the will of the multinational oil companies exhibit this second form of belligerence. Their action is synonymous with imperialism that Lenin believes is executed through violence. Lenin's view is validated by Francis Adeola (2001: p. 40) who identifies human rights abuse as a corollary of environmental degradation perpetrated by multinational concerns operating in impoverished minority communities:

In many developing countries of the world, indigenous people and other vulnerable and impoverished communities, including subsistence peasants, fishing communities, hunters and gathers, and nomadic groups are generally victims of environmental degradation mostly by the resources extractive operations of MNCs in the name of global development (p. 41).

As projected in the novel, the people of the Niger Delta suffer two forms of violence: multinational oil companies initiated violence against their ecosystem and the Nigerian state sanctioned violence against the people through soldiers. The two forms of violence engender erosion of self in the people, necessitating corresponding aggression. This aggression on the part of the multinational oil companies, demonstrated through state security, abounds in the novel. Soldiers under the command of Major, a minor character whom Zaq and Rufus meet in their search for Mrs Floode, are the main instrument of human rights abuse in the villages in the novel. The ruins and decay in the first villages (whose pictures of abandonment and putrefaction we have given earlier) that Rufus and Zaq get to are the handy work of these soldiers fighting against the militants.

The words and actions of the Major reveal the murderous mission of the soldiers to the creeks of Niger Delta. He tells Rufus that the militants who, “call themselves freedom fighters are but rebels, terrorists, and kidnappers” (156). He says therefore, it is his job “to pursue them to their swamp hideouts...capture them, and most times it is easier to shoot them than to capture them. Saves time, saves the government money” (156). In their desire to save money, unfortunately, many non-militants are made scapegoats. An innocent old fisherman and his little son, Michael, who are engaged by Zaq and Rufus to transport them from one village to another, unexpectedly run into Major’s soldiers who arrest them along with Zaq and Rufus. While Zaq and Rufus identities as journalists spare them from torture from their captors, the old fisherman and his little son are not lucky as they are treated as suspected militants. They are doused with petrol along others suspected militants.

Their torment is much better than the predetermined judgment and consequential death of Karibi in the hands of some of the soldiers. Karibi is arrested before the journalists at his village and accused of fraternising with militants. Such state violence, executed through security agents, is a commonplace experience in postcolonial Nigeria, especially in days of the military. Uzoechi Nwagbara (2009) sees such repressive activities as an imperialist hegemonic tradition inherited by the Nigerian state from the colonialists. Habila captures this inherited state violence through the acts of the soldiers in the novel.

### **5.7 Ignorance of the people, corruption and government's betrayal of the people**

Habila is of the conviction that the human rights violations carried by the multinational oil companies, through soldiers, are indications of governmental collaboration. He identifies a number of factors responsible for the affliction suffered by the people of the Niger Delta region. Some of these factors include ignorance and poverty of the people – maladies that are occasioned by governmental neglect and corruption, and internal/external collaborative corruption. These acts provoke loss of self-consciousness in the people of the region. Ignorance of the severity of ecological and health implications is visible in the actions of the people who are mostly impoverished rural people.

The multinational oil companies exploit this lack of awareness of the people. This is depicted in the experience of Chief Malabo's neighbours who gave out their land happily to the oil companies in exchange for money. Such money from the oil companies, to them, meant marrying more wives and getting modern electrical and electronic appliances – luxury items they believed were exclusively enjoyed by the city dwellers. Unfortunately, the transient pleasure offered by the money terminated suddenly and they found themselves struggling to eke out their living from an environment that had been ravaged by oil pollution.

The story that is told Rufus by Dr Dagogo Mark, a medical doctor that the former meets in a soldiers' camp, also speaks of the same penury and lack of knowledge on the part of the people as one of the causes of the devaluation of the ecosystem. Dr Mark tells him that, in their naivety, the people had looked forward to the blaze of gas in their community as they had associated such gas flare with wealth. He recounts to Refus an encounter he had with an elderly man. The old man had told him, "I am not ill. I am just poor. Can you give me medicine for that? We need that fire that burns day and night" (151). The doctor further reveals to Rufus that when the gas was eventually flared in the community, the surrounding of the glow became a place of meetings, story telling, and business at nights. A year after, unfortunately, this gas fire became the cause of the death of their livestock and their plants. Shortly after, many of the villagers died from polluted water and environment.

A later disclosure by the doctor on his research on this village, exposes not only the corrupt nature of the oil companies, but also unearths their insensitivity to the plight of the people. His research on the water consumed by the villagers revealed



that it contained toxins that kept increasing. In a year “it had grown to almost twice the safe level” (153). When he approached the oil company with his discovery, he was rather offered money to shut his mouth. Instead of doing something about his report, an Italian manager he met, according to him, gave him a cheque and asked him to continue with his research. Undaunted, he sends the results to an NGO that got them published in an international journal to attract government’s attention. Yet the government does nothing about it, obviously, because the leadership in the country had been compromised.

The above information reveals the emblematic corrupt practices of the multinational oil companies that operate in the Niger Delta. The dishonest actions of multinational oil companies flourish because there exists an unscrupulous leadership in Nigeria. This shows the external and internal collaboration in the exploitation suffered by the people of the region. The doctor’s revelation in this novel corroborates Ndirangu Mwaura’s (2005: p. 5) contention that African national leaders are traitors who ensure the sustained flow of the continent’s wealth to the West. Habila regards corruption as a common thread that binds the multinational oil companies’ operators and Nigerian leaders together in the business of exploiting the people of the Niger Delta region. Habila is of the opinion that corruption is prevalent in the leadership of the country – from the political representatives of the people at the states, to the leaders at the national level.

In the novel, the corrupt tendencies of the elites are taken advantage of by the multinational oil companies to the detriment of the people of the Niger Delta. This is apparent in the experience of the people of Chief Malabo’s kingdom. From a story told by Chief Ibiram, a nephew of Chief Malabo, the people in Chief Malabo’s community had lived as closely knitted people, enjoying the bounties of nature through farming and hunting. They were unmindful of the ostensible gains of consenting to having gas flared on their land. Their peaceful co-existence was, however, suddenly disrupted by the discovery of oil.

The people were initially polarized between accepting money and allowing the erection of an oil rig on their land on the one hand; and on the other hand, turning down the request of the oil executives and continue to enjoy the bounties of nature and their place as custodians of their ancestral home. Led by Chief Malabo, they settled for the latter option. Their choice stemmed from the experience of their

neighbours whose money from oil companies had since disappeared through marrying of extra wives and acquiring transient modern household appliances. They were later compelled to contend with “rivers that were already polluted and useless for fishing, and the land only grew gas flare and pipelines” (43).

The preference for holding on to their land did not make them wiser in the sight of the oil companies and their collaborators that were determined to carry out their activities. The desperate attempt of the villagers to secure their land from forceful acquisition by the multinational oil companies, unfortunately, only provided an “excuse for the oil companies and the politicians who worked for them needed to make their next move” (44). The politicians, in league with the multinational oil companies, had held conferences with the chief to secure his support. However, he remained obstinate. An opportunity to nail their enemy came when the villagers’ patrol team had a brief skirmish with oil workers. Chief Malabo was arrested and imprisoned for plotting against the federal government and threatening to kidnap foreign oil workers.

The subsequent move of a senator, representing Chief Malabo and his people, only further discloses the perfidious nature of the political elites. He came all the way from Abuja, promising the villagers the release of their chief. His treachery however, unfolded itself in the presence of two white men who are executives of an oil company. This deceitful act of the political elite is reminiscent of the same class in post-independence Africa – a betrayal that Ngugi portrays in *The Devil on the Cross*. The intellectual class, represented in the novel by a lawyer, is not different from the politicians. Following the arrest of the Chief Malabo, the lawyer suggested to the elders in the village that they grant, “the oil company’s demand, and sell the land... (44)”.

These acts of untrustworthiness on the part of the elites in the Niger Delta are indices of division among the people of the region. This division, influenced by financial inducements, engenders erosion of self in the people. Habila therefore makes the elites accomplices in the suffering of the people of the region. His denunciation of members of the elite class stems from their failure to pull their weight behind their rural brothers suppressed by the oil companies. His criticism of this class is a re-echoing of Femi Osofisan’s (2001) castigation of the Nigerian elites. Osofisan heaps the nation’s post-independence woes on the intellectual class. Given the greed

of the elite class, it is easily courted by the oil companies to subdue the rustic inhabitants of the creeks resisting the confiscation of their land.

The susceptibility of the members of this class to corruption is made possible by their self-alienation from the people they are elected to represent. This class, within the generality of the people of the Niger Delta, is elitist Other. The effect of corruption born out of greed for wealth on the larger Nigerian society is enormous. In the novel, Mr James Floode also identifies this while granting an interview to Rufus, who has gone to extricate more information on his kidnapped wife. Floode points out, “Such great potential. You people could easily become the Japan of Africa, the USA of Africa, but the corruption is incredible” (103). While his statement ostensibly exonerates his country from the cause of Nigerian woes, the culpability of his country bares itself out in the actions of the multinational oil companies. Given their financial weight, these companies are able to exploit the greed for oil wealth by the political elites.

Even as Nigerians are greedy, the multinational oil companies’ operators are not guiltless of avarice that is characteristic of capitalists – from the colonists to the neo-colonialists symbolised by the multinational oil companies that operate in the Niger Delta. Chidi Amuta (1986) gives credence to this opinion when he reveals that their:

Ultimate aim was subjugation of the native for the sole purpose of looting the economic resources of his land; the means for the achievement of this aim was a combination of trickery coated in Christian theology, the raw physical violence of maximum guns, incendiary shells, bayonets, police truncheons... (p. 136).

The multinational oil companies operating in the creeks of the Niger Delta replicate some parts of the Amuta’s revelation about the colonialists. This is clear in the arrest of Chief Malabo. He was apprehended by security operatives because of his unyielding stance on the release of his land to the multinational oil companies for their exploration activities. Though, in the novel, the oil companies are not directly involved in the arrest of the chief, but their sole responsibility in the action is evident in the absurd charges brought against the chief: he is “plotting against the federal government and threatening to kidnap foreign oil workers” (44). Their covetousness is clearer in the action of the oil companies after the demise of their enemy, Chief Malabo. In the account of Chief Malabo’s successor, Chief Ibiram:

The following week, even before Chief Malabo had been buried, the oil companies moved in. They came with a whole army, waving guns and looking like they meant business. They had a contract, they said, Chief Malabo had signed it in prison before he died, selling them all his family land, and that was where they'd start drilling....(45).

The narration of Chief Ibiram substantiates the validity of the continuity of colonialism as argued by Bill Ashcroft et al. (1997). The resistance against colonialism, in its new form, therefore, becomes inevitably an enduring engagement of the subjugated. The struggle of the militants is to end further devaluation of their environment as a result of the oil exploration activities of multinational oil companies with the sanction of elites at local, state and national levels. This is what Habila establishes through the armed struggle in the Niger Delta. The novel however focuses on the Other within the postcolonial Other that the whole people of the Niger Delta are in the Nigerian state. In this politics, the Niger Delta people are represented by fishermen and their families, who are helpless victims. Their powerlessness finds unambiguous portrayal in the dilemma of Chief Malabo's subjects that were caught between selling their land and suffering the menace of polluted environment; or refusing to part with the land and having it confiscated by the multinational oil companies empowered by the federal government. Trapped in this quagmire, to the oppressed Other in the Niger Delta, violence inevitably becomes a necessary weapon of defence. This is the angle from which Habila persuades his reader to look at the novel.

### **5.8 Habila's persuasive technique**

The novel is journalese in nature: the events are revealed through the interactions with and interrogations of the parties in the conflict by two journalists. There is some form of self-distancing on the part of the writer and this is underscored by the authorial silence in the work. This authorial quietness is a deliberate style that is employed by the writer to give the work the stamp of verisimilitude. Habila further establishes the closeness to truth through pictures of the degraded ecosystem aptly captured by a careful selection of lexical items. These sordid pictures, that include oil pollutions, dead birds and fishes floating on rivers, and revelations from the two parties to the two journalists, are pathos: persuasive devices employed by the author to connect ecoactivism in the Niger Delta to erosion of self as a result of the degraded

environment. He draws the readers to see the creek dwellers as the victims of ecocide while the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state are the real aggressors.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

The two writers capture the experiences of the Other within the general Otherness suffered by the people of the Niger Delta during military and democratic dispensations in Nigeria. Both writers advocate the inversion of the disadvantaged position of the people of Niger Delta and their environment. Agary, focusing on the plight of the woman in the Niger Delta, believes education is the best tool to reconstruct the erosion of self and “womanity” of the Ijo woman that are lost to the environmental despoliation due to the oil exploration activities multinational oil companies in the region. Habila, on his part, interprets counter aggressive actions of the people as illustrations of erosion of self-consciousness as a result of ecocide in the area resulting from the collaborative activities of the multinational oil companies and the elites within and without the region. The aggression of the people, therefore, is a manifestation of a shattered self as a result of the destruction of their ecosystem, and a feeling of collaborative betrayal by the elites, within and without.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the people's interpretation of the totality of the politics that goes with oil exploration vis-à-vis the ecoactivism in the area; and how the literary writers connect the two - alienating effects (that is, their interpretation) and ecoactivism. Three indicators of alienation or erosion of self-consciousness and two indicators of ecoactivism are differently portrayed in the six texts. Alienation is unveiled through the following: pathetic pictures of degraded ecosystem; internal division; presentation of the people of the Niger Delta as victims as well as protagonists.

All the six texts, employing pathos, capture the feeling of alienation of the people of Niger Delta through appalling pictures of the degraded environment as a result of the activities of multinational oil companies. Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day*, Okpewho's *Tides*, Ojaide's *The Activist*, Egbuson's *Love My Planet* and Habila's *Oil on Water* illustrate the people's erosion of self as a result of divisions among them due to financial inducements from the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies.

Okpewho's *Tides*, Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day*, Ojaide's *The Activist* and Egbuson's *Love My Planet*, through antithetical pictures, capture the people's loss of self by presenting them as victims of internal/external exploitation as well as protagonists against internal/external foes. The feeling of being estranged by the multinational oil companies' ecologically destructive activities have inscribed in the psyche of the people the existence of a binary relationship of oppressors/ oppressed, exploiter/exploited, and they are the oppressed or exploited.

This dual relationship is captured through the deployment of metaphors that configure the people of the Niger Delta and their ecosystem as the oppressed while the multinational oil companies aided by the Nigerian government are configured as the exploiters. While tropes such as "masters", "overlords", "internal colonisers", are used to designate the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian leadership as the exploiters, the people of the region and the environment are represented as the subjugated through such words as the oppressed, victims, slaves. The dichotomised relationship is further captured through such words as "outsiders" and "insiders", "ours" and "theirs". Three of the texts, namely: Ojaide's *The Activist*, Egbuson's *Love My Planet* and Habila's *Oil on Water* present violence/ecoterrorism against the perceived internal/external foes of the people as a means of preserving the

environment. Furthermore, Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day*, Okpewho's *Tides* and Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* reveal urgent non-violent eco-campaign in the area.

It can be said in conclusion that the aggression that characterise the Niger Delta region is not only a result of the people's consciousness that they have been economically and socially disconnected from their environment, they have also lost their self-consciousness/essence as a united people due to the activities of multinational oil companies supported by Nigerian leadership. Consequently, they see themselves as a people who have been forced to become aliens in their homeland. They interpret the breakdown of their ecosystem by the oil and gas exploration activities, and the divisive politics of the multinational companies supported by the Nigerian government, as violence against their essence as a people and a threat to their future generations.

The adoption of a belligerent approach, to them, is a means to sustain their existence. Their belligerent temperament is understandable when viewed through the lenses of the psyche of a people who have experienced ecocide and betrayal from within and without: within by some elites of the Niger Delta, and without by the Nigerian leadership that has derelicted its duty to secure its people and environment from external destruction.

As projected in the six texts, these dual experiences have generated in the people a discordant between consciousness and unconsciousness as illustrated in their actions – fighting against the multinational oil companies and the national government of Nigeria and their own people as well as deploying negative epithets to demonise their perceived oppressors. Therefore, the aggression of the people against internal/external aggression, as projected in the texts, is but an attempt to regain their self-consciousness and rescue their ecosystem.

Three indicators of erosion of self, which connect with ecoterrorism and non-violent eco-campaign, are manifest in the selected texts through the use of pathos, antithesis and the deployment of negative epithets to demonise the perceived opponents. These reveal the writers' construction of self as a contingency on ecoactivism in the Niger Delta crisis.

This study has provided fuller understanding of the nature and scope of the crisis in the Niger Delta. Generally, the study on environment related texts contributes to interdisciplinary research just as it also provokes further investigation on the psychology of the oppressed.

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