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Beyond Ecological Interpretations in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday, Isidore Okpewho's Tides and Othuke Ominiabohs' A Conspiracy of Ravens*

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Abstract

Creative writers in Nigeria often follow the trend of events in their society and respond to happenings through their art. One such event is the Niger-Delta crisis. The novel, being a tool for social investigation, continues to reveal deep insights into the moving spirit of these crises than any historical or political document treating the same subject. This is a view well expressed by the foremost Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. However, despite the tendency of Niger Delta writers to dwell extensively on environmental issues in their works, this work argues that environmental matters cannot be the sole issues pursued in Niger-Delta literature. Using the ecocritical and sociological theory, this study explores multifaceted issues presented in Niger-Delta Literature, such as human greed, selfishness, ignorance and several others, with the sole objective of proving that no writer or group of writers can foreground just one thematic preoccupation in their work, no matter how laudable such a focus might be.

Keywords: *Niger-Delta, Environmental Degradation, Ecocriticism, Violence, Militancy.*

INTRODUCTION

The Niger-Delta is home to a greater part of Africa's largest mangrove forest and also a source of Nigeria's wealth. It is typically considered to be located within the nine coastal southern states: Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Delta, Ondo, Abia and Imo.

The oil spills by multinational oil and gas corporations have caused extensive amounts of land, water and air pollution. The Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (NDRDMP) (2001) summarises the problems of the Niger Delta, as severe environmental degradation and adverse community impact from exploration and exploitation of oil and gas, deforestation and over-fishing of fresh water and sea fish stock and unorganised discharge of urban human and industrial effluents; Sporadic civil unrest and insecurity (NDRDMP, 14, 15). These problems have resulted in abject poverty, as over 70% of the population is on or below the poverty line.

Since the government has failed to meet the people's demands for proper development after all the damage, youths in the region resorted to militancy to force the government to respond to their plight. Different groups, such as The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, The Ijaw Youth Council, and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (the leading militant group in the region), have come together to protest against marginalisation, oppression, and environmental degradation. This has culminated in the Niger-Delta crisis; consequently, the area has become a breeding ground for violence, insurgency, kidnapping, hostage taking, oil pipeline sabotage, crude oil theft, gang wars, bloody struggles, and so much more. There has been armed and violent conflict between gangs and security forces, which has also increased militancy in the region. The widespread pollution, a lack of livelihood and the government's complacency have made militants target oil pipelines and kidnap foreign oil workers for ransom; as a result, insecurity, cultism, piracy, and corrupt security personnel have destabilised economic activities.

Significant attention has been given to ecological aspects

of literature in the Niger-Delta. This dominant focus on ecocriticism has limited the comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted narratives and challenges faced by the region's literary and societal landscape. Consequently, there is a need to shift from ecocriticism and engage with other themes. Much of the scholarly attention given to the works of writers from the Niger-Delta has been of an ecological nature. In fact, sometimes it appears as if a writer from the Niger Delta cannot project any other thematic preoccupation in their work than environmental issues. The problem, however, is that there is hardly any work of art that projects just a thematic concern. Even when a writer sets out to focus on a particular issue, they inadvertently throw up a plethora of others that they may not have known were there in the work at all, and therein lies the beauty of art. However, the inordinate concentration on espousing ecological themes in Niger Delta creativity makes one to wonder whether or not there is any other message in the literary creativity of this region beyond environmental concern, this paper proposes to find out by identifying features that make Niger-Delta literature distinct, determining how much literature from this region reflects not just sectional but national and or global issues and explore the experiences of the Niger-Delta people as reflected in the selected texts to aid nation building.

Okpewho (1993), Garricks (2020), and Othuke (2022) have been selected for this paper, thereby identifying these authors who are arguably among the most popular voices of the Niger Delta region, to give the study its credibility. The selected texts are relevant to this study as they address a wide range of issues, including ecological degradation, pointing out how many of the problems have evolved over the years and newer issues that have come up in recent times in the Niger-Delta.

This study aims to investigate whether thematic concerns of interest exist in the literary creativity of Niger-Delta writers beyond ecological degradation. For these reasons, this paper is significant.

Ohagwam (2023) examined the impact of environmental degradation on the Niger-Delta communities and ecosystem. He asserts that the novel presents a fictional account of the consequences of a poor or complete absence of land ethic, which is a moral responsibility of humans to the natural world. It is in this regard that Garrick raises the question of devaluing nature. This requires discussion, attention, and resolution. Ohagwam points out the ecological damage in the fictional Asiama community by examining the gory images of a dislocated landscape severed by oil exploration and exploitation. The value of the environment in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is viewed solely as a resource, leading oil companies overlook the environment as a vital part of the community. Consequently, environmental hazards are seen as mere byproducts of production errors, which are addressed only after the damage is done, resulting in a lack of precautionary measures. The position maintained by Ohagwam (2023) opines that the statement, like many other writers who have critiqued, argues against expunging the "environmentalist tag" on this novel.

Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020) serve as crusaders against the destructive ramifications of the oil industry's activities in the region, highlighting their negative impact on the local population. They argue that ecocriticism should examine the effect of degradation on human lives, not just the damage caused by humans. This perspective aligns with the views presented in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, which focuses on environmental degradation.

Nwoma (2024) interrogates the relationship between humans and the environment within a neo-colonial context, showing how the environment has been damaged after neo-colonial dominance. He points out the explorations by foreign companies in the Niger Delta region and the disruptions these explorations cause. In The Niger-Delta Ecological Question: An Analysis of Ecological Challenges in *Tides*, Ejih Sunday points out the ecological problem in the Niger-Delta as artificial and reveals the impact of these problems on the inhabitants to be a form of retribution. He emphasises that the author's use of characters and incidents in the novel clearly shows that the issues there would only end if full retribution had run its course, since each oil company struggles to make the most of the opportunity to strip the environment.

Salamatu (2016) argued in the Daily Trust Newspaper that *A Conspiracy of Ravens* demonstrates how environmental devastation, evident in destroyed farmlands, polluted water, and displaced people, contributes to increased violence, which is manipulated by foreign and political interests for selfish gain. She asserts that environmental collapse, created by foreign corporations and the political elite, not only destroys nature but also fosters deceit and profiteering. Anthonia Eguvwebere and Akpore Ogheneruemu, in Abraka Humanities Review, contend from a neo-colonial viewpoint that Western post-independence influence and multinational oil companies prolong political and environmental crises in the Delta. Acheru China adds that these intertwined issues destabilise national unity, linking ecological and political decline in the Niger Delta to wider insecurities like Boko Haram and IPOB.

Oreoluwa (2022) indicates militancy and hostage-taking using postcolonial theory, emphasising the novel's exploration of neo-colonialism. She argues that Western

influences and oil corporations exploit the Niger Delta by extracting resources and neglecting the environment, while employing few locals and overpaying expatriates. Lesi maintains that the Nigerian state's failure to provide infrastructure and the prevalence of corruption support power structures beneficial to foreign interests. She contends that militants, manipulated by elites, become tools for political gain, and that grassroots resistance is co-opted to serve these agendas. The novel's depiction of expatriate hostages illustrates forced ethical dilemmas for state actors, uncovering alliances between the Niger Delta militants and other Nigerian crises like IPOB, Biafra, and Boko Haram. Lesi concludes that militancy in the region is a response to injustice and a means by which elites manipulate the population.

These reviews continue to focus on ecological damage as the primary driving force and dominant issue in the selected novels, utilising ecocriticism as a framework. In contrast, the present study goes beyond ecocriticism, further encompassing the issues mentioned above. Through the eyes of various scholars and critics, we gain insight into the complex nature of environmental issues that the Niger Delta is renowned for. It is also clear that many critics have explored ecocriticism and identified some socio-political issues, but these are often overshadowed by the persistent ecological damage in the Niger Delta. It is by filling this important gap that this work will help in understanding how interconnected the issues in the Niger Delta are and how some of these issues are not purely ecological, as many critics would have us believe.

Ecocriticism and the sociological school of literary criticism serve as the framework for analysis in this study. The theories are the anchor for this enquiry because they offer a comprehensive approach. Ecocriticism delves into the ecological dimensions to address environmental concerns, and as a result, ecological content can be identified in this study. It is only by identifying these that other issues can be pointed out. The sociological theory of literature enables a deeper exploration of the social structures, power dynamics, and cultural contexts depicted in literature. This dual framework enables a distinct analysis to examine how environmental and social factors intersect and influence each other within the narrative, providing a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the region. This approach considers how societal factors shape and are shaped by the narratives, offering insights into broader issues such as culture, economy, colonialism, globalisation, and social justice.

William Ruecket coined the term ecocriticism in 1978 in his essay titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocritics". The term gained popularity in the mid-1990s when it became a genre defined by the Western Language Association (WLA). These associations emerged in response to growing environmental concerns, focusing on the relationship between literature and the physical environment. The relevance of ecocriticism to modern-day literature cannot be overemphasised in the face of the present global environmental challenges and concerns. According to Habeeb and Habbeb (2012), ecocriticism investigates the relationship between humans and the natural world in literature, examining how environmental issues, cultural concerns related to the environment, and attitudes towards nature are presented and analysed, as well as how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. Habeeb and Habeeb (2012) identify objectives of ecocriticism some of which are to understand man, through literature, as an inseparable part of the environment and his ability to alter this relationship while also being susceptible to its influence, to gain a broader understanding of literature and environment and their role in society and to show concern for the present day issues of threat to wild life, global warming, industrial pollution, depletion of natural resources, population explosion etc. these point us to the happenings in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) define ecocriticism as the interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment. Huggan and Tiffin (2010) emphasised the need for ecocriticism to incorporate postcolonial perspectives, focusing on the environmental impact of colonialism and neocolonialism. Naess (1989) introduced deep ecology, a radical form of environmentalism, in 1973. United States environmentalists Bill Devall and George Sessions further developed it in the 1980s. Naess wanted "to go beyond the factual level of ecology as a science to a deeper level of self-awareness and 'Earth wisdom' she pointed out that this is a call for man to show concern for both living and nonliving things, emphasizing "the role of the individual who is invited to behave as a citizen of the World and Earth and to take responsibility for it".

The sociological theory of literature emphasises the extrinsic view that art is a function of society and that it can be used as a tool to interpret and transform society. It explores how literature reflects and shapes society. Prominent propounders include Georg Lukács, who emphasised literature's role in reflecting social contradictions, and Pierre Bourdieu, on the other hand, focused on the cultural capital embedded in literary works and their reception. Each has contributed unique perspectives on how literature intersects with society, culture, and politics. These theorists offer valuable insights into how literature interacts with and influences the social fabric.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Tomorrow Died Yesterday

Garrick (2020) indicates that the story is set in 2003, amidst the Niger Delta's oil, militancy, and political crisis. There are four main characters and narrators, except Deola, who features in their adult life to help Amaibi out of prison. Tubo, Amaibi, Kaniye, and Doye, also known as Doughboy, grew up on the Asiama Island, at a time when oil exploitation was at its peak, and the people's lives were transformed by it. The writer connects their shared experiences growing up in Asiama. The land is an important part of their lives, as Tubo recalls that 'Everything was linked to Asiama Island. Our lives were shaped by major events and tragedies that happened there. We were also influenced by the intangibles: the history of the island, the spirit of the place, and the secrets of the water'' (73). The novel opens in the middle of an ambush by the dreaded Doye (Doughboy) and his crew on the Imperial oil staff to kidnap Brian Manning, a Caucasian executive. Doye refuses any other mediator except Amaibi, the Public Relations Officer of the oil company, and Doye's childhood friend reaches out to Amaibi. A renowned crusader against oil exploration by big oil companies is made to stand as a go-between for the two parties. The hostage situation goes awry as the hostage dies while in captivity, and Doye decides to collect the ransom paid and hands out Brian Manning's decomposing body. This leads to the unfolding of many events that make up the story.

Beyond Ecocritical interpretations in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday.*

The activities are deeply and precisely rooted in Imperial Oil's oil politics. Its gas flaring and other forms of pollution have destroyed the social and economic life of the Asiama people. The flaring is no doubt an important theme, but other prominent issues that Chimeka Garricks brings to perspective on the complex issues, and also focuses on are:

The first of these issues is subjugation and injustice. The indigenous people are denied their rights to personhood, peaceful existence, and access to natural resources, amongst other things. This aims to withhold from them the right to benefit from the riches of their homeland and prevent them from participating in the geopolitical discourse that should naturally concern them. The government turns a blind eye to the pollution of the environment and even provides Imperial Oil with soldiers to safeguard their operations and intimidate the people. This is clearly a matter of injustice meted against a people meriting condemnation. The people of the Niger Delta region have to contend with some of their leaders in Asiama, as well as the government. This raises questions about the humanity of the people of Asiama. The situation causes some individuals in Asiama to resort to violence. This violent militancy is represented by Doughboy, the leader of the militant group known as the Asiama Freedom Army (AFA). His ruthlessness becomes well-known. He seems invisible and there is a sense of mystery about him as he unleashes terror on even his fellow indigenes; according to him, his form of subjugation is "a very effective way of sowing terror in the hearts of men", and it has "fuelled wild rumours and added to my myth: my own manipulation of my publicity" (5). Amaibi, Doughboy's former schoolmate, an activist, seeks dialogue with the government. He believes that dialogue is a means of settling the issues in the region. The government subjects him to a great deal of government-sponsored persecution for attempting to question its exploitative interest in the region.

Secondly, there is also the theme of corruption, betrayal, and insensitivity on the part of the Niger-Delta leaders, who, ordinarily, should be interested in the well-being of their people. Joseph Peter, popularly known as Tubo, lets us into some of the backstage deals carried out by government representatives and Imperial Oil. As a member of Imperial Oil's staff, his revelations are quite informative and provide firsthand knowledge of how the oil company operates. Early in the novel, the Amanyanabo and his Council of Chiefs sell Ofirima Island to Imperial Oil without consulting the people. Land that belongs not just to the chiefs, but they choose to dispossess the entire community of its fishing bay, and this forces the community's fishermen to relocate. The action also deprives young boys of "Maracana Stadium," their collective playground. This dictatorship and betrayal reflect the insensitivity of the heavily beaded local chiefs and their Amanyanabo. Selling off a communally-owned property and allocating to themselves the right to negotiate and sell off the island, and sharing the proceeds from this sale. The Chiefs comprise the ruling class, as they act as representatives of the state and align themselves with dominant powers. They oppose the lower class. Clearly, therefore, we have a case of high-handedness, betrayal of collective trust, and corruption on the part of the Niger Delta leadership. Themes of this nature have been swept under the carpet by other critics of this novel in preference for ecological issues.

We can clearly see that high price corruption is a major theme in the novel. This is portrayed through characters such as Wali, Chief Ikaki, Prosecutor Ikuru, and others. Wali is a government representative who embezzles money from the ransom deals. He frames Amaibi for the death of Manning, orders his death, and threatens Tubo to

lie against Amaibi in court. Chief Ikaki has to be bribed to allow oil production to continue in his area. Every benefit, contract, and scholarship goes through Ikaki, but it is shared among his loyalists. After McCulloch made sure Asiama fishermen were settled by Imperial Oil after a recent oil spill without consulting Chief Ikaki, Tubo says: ‘‘The settlement had also caused him to miss out on a chance to somehow wrangle out a percentage of the payments for himself. To make Imperial Oil come crawling back to him, he had arranged for his boys to disrupt its operations’’(236). Ikuru knows the truth about Amaibi’s innocence, yet he builds a case against him so he can get promoted to Attorney General. Kaniye bribes prison wardens to obtain Amaibi's premium care; these warders are also bribed to bring the suspect to court.

Thirdly, there is clear evidence of a society that stifles dissent, no matter how constructive it may be; a society in which corruption is so entrenched that anyone who voices out against it is considered an enemy and treated as such. For example, Sir James and two of his supporters are expelled from the council of chiefs for standing up against the ruling class. Catechist Akassa is also barred from attending council meetings for no other offence than for supporting the subaltern’s cause. Their removal stems from their refusal to engage in corruption. They are considered threats to the status quo. The council of chiefs protects its interests by ousting Sir James and Catechist Akassa, pushing them out of the influential core. These are acts against the Niger-Delta people which are as heinous as, if not more than, the environmental disasters that most critics of the literature from this region prefer to concentrate on, and by so doing sweep these other issues under the carpet. As a result, a plethora of internal problems in the region, created and sustained by the Niger Delta people themselves, and reflected in the region's literature, have gone unexplored until now.

Fourthly, the novel highlights the deep-seated problems of ethnic distrust in the region, which have prevented the people from coming together and speaking with one voice in their efforts to address the challenges facing them as a community. One example that readily comes to mind is the fact that militants like Doughboy view other ethnic groups outside of theirs as invaders. This reflects the widespread reality in the community, where people of different ethnic backgrounds are often perceived as being different, thereby highlighting ethnic differences. The novel demonstrates that these petty ethnic divisions constitute a significant factor contributing to the numerous challenges facing the region. This is because, as a result of these ethnic divides, the state and the ruling class exploit the ethnic divisions to their advantage, and this explains Doughboy’s strong resentment towards the perceived ethnic disadvantages faced by his people.

The novel also depicts clear instances of lawlessness on the part of the military sent to the Niger Delta region. The novel shows that these soldiers act with total disregard for the law and human decency. The military treats the people of the region as captured and subjugated people rather than as citizens of the same nation. Despite acting recklessly as shown in the novel, the military does not suffer any repercussions for its crimes. This highlights the imbalanced power dynamic in the region, where the military appears to have no rules of engagement, or if it does, chooses not to follow them. This is another critical matter that is clearly outside the normal discourse on the literature of the Niger Delta, generally, and this novel in particular.

Another thematic concern that is projected in Garrick’s novel, which we can confidently say is not exclusively ecocritical in nature, is the obvious lack of social amenities. Although this region is rich in mineral resources, which are the mainstay of the entire nation, it lacks basic amenities, including power supply, water, and medical facilities. The schools built by the catholic and Anglican churches are neglected by the government. All this makes it seem as if the region's resources have become a curse rather than a blessing.

In addition to the above issues, the novel clearly demonstrates that circumstances can shape individuals and determine what they will ultimately become, either positively or negatively. For example, Doughboy is shaped by his environment. In an interview with Dise, he says ‘The slave trade ended years ago, but I was born and raised in a different kind of slavery… what pushed me to become what I am? The slavery pushed me. The system pushed me’’ (221). Doughboy speaks for his people; his aggressive behaviour reflects the people’s loud frustrations with the government. Similarly, Garricks speaks the minds and feelings of militants in the region and takes on a strong alternative to peaceful protests since the government violently stopped peaceful protests. Militancy becomes more powerful than loud complaints.

A character like Doughboy is a mix of kindness and violence. By presenting a character like Doughboy, Garrick makes his early traits of bullying, domination, and violence a believable but unavoidable transition. Amaibi and Doughboy grow up in the same environment with similar experiences, but their approaches to addressing the same issue differ; both are shaped by their respective societies. The novel lets us in on Doughboys’s psyche and sensibilities, making militancy more potent than angry shouts, like Mpaka’s, which make little or no change. Doughboy is selflessly kind yet violent. He shows Belema

kindness but brutally murders one of his boys. He knows that what he does might not really change anything, but he hopes it will encourage his people to fight for what they deserve. And in fact, he does motivate them. The novel suggests that a society like the Niger Delta is capable of producing numerous characters like this.

Another important message presented in the novel, which is not ecocritical in nature, is the uselessness of violence. The novel shows that resorting to violence is not the only answer. There is also a need for smart and thoughtful activism, which can be highly effective. The novel teaches that there are other ways to bring about change, such as active engagement, utilizing the media, leveraging public relations, and securing strong legal support. Amaibi represents this smarter approach. He contrasts with Doughboy, and his experiences of both suffering and winning in court show that his way is more sustainable, even though it may take longer. Amaibi is a thoughtful leader who understands his people and stands firm in his beliefs. He is loyal and trustworthy, and he has a forgiving nature—just like his father, who forgives the soldiers who hurt him. When a guard spits at Amaibi, Kaniye gets angry, but Amaibi calmly tells him to let it go, reminding Kaniye that if he can forgive, then anyone can. Amaibi is honest. Even when Kaniye tells him to lie to avoid trouble, he chooses to do the right thing instead, believing that true courage means having a clear conscience. This is not the first time he has shown this. Years ago, his father taught him about the importance of following one's conscience. His father told him 'Today, my son, you followed your conscience. It takes courage to do that. Always remember, courage without conscience is foolishness" (75). This strong upbringing is why Tubo tells his bosses at Imperial Oil that Amaibi cannot be bribed. He stands up for those who cannot defend themselves and demonstrates a deep concern for the environment. Garrick utilizes this admirable character to reveal a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness that presently pervades the Niger Delta region.

Another thematic focus in the novel that is not ecocritical is the exploration of love, friendship, and loyalty. The novel highlights the complexities of friendships, marriage, and relationships between parents and children, and how these challenges also refine character. Romantic and familial love is portrayed by the author to highlight the power of love as both a source of strength and vulnerability. For instance, Amaibi grapples with his feelings for himself and the pregnant Dise after she is raped by the soldiers during the invasion of the island. He faces conflict within himself and conflicts from outside of himself arising from the fact that he is not able to look at Dise the same way after the invasion, and he loses his erection after this incident, and the couple decides to go their separate ways. When she finally visits him in prison, he is able to voice out the feelings he had kept bottled up for a very long time. The narrative demonstrates the compelling nature of the love and friendship between these individuals, compelling them to make significant sacrifices, challenge their identities, and confront their fears. It is love that brings Kaniye to stand as Amaibi's Lawyer to prove his innocence and the sly Tubo to testify against the corrupt government officials.

The history of Asiama reveals that the island has always attracted colourful vocations and foreigners due to its location on the world map. Young men, old men, and audacious women met with strangers and had 'brisk commerce in an assortment of goods during the day and in flesh at night. Tubo is born through one of these transactions; his mother is one of many prostitutes moved to Asiama when foreigners came to do business on the island. He says 'My father was obviously a white man of some sort, possibly a sailor''(52). Father Patrick names him Patrick Tubo Joseph, as he is found at the doorsteps of the church quarters, placed in a fishing basket, and he is given to Kaniyes's mother, Eno, to suckle. She raises both boys as brothers. Kaniye's father, James Kenebi Rufus, forces himself on the fifteen-year-old Eno and births Kaniye, Doye, and Amaibi. They were born into regular families, and this is evident in how they turn out. Tubo reveals that 'maybe because they were born into regular families who wanted, loved and celebrated them, there is nothing remarkable to tell about their birth''(53). The boys were born the same year oil was discovered in Asiama. Their friendship becomes very complex as they all take different paths as adults. Doye, also known as Doughboy, becomes a militant, Kaniye a lawyer, Tubo works with Imperial Oil, and Amaibi becomes an activist on his return to Nigeria from the U.K.

Their friendship serves as a cornerstone of the narrative, underscoring the significance of their bond and the support they offer to one another. Their bond highlights the importance of understanding and the shared experiences they have. They all grow up in the oil-rich Asiama and play at the Maracana beach, going on adventures together. Conflicts arise between them as Doye puts Amaibi in trouble by insisting he deliver the ransom money for Manning, which eventually lands him in prison. This sets the course of events and tests the reliance of their relationships as Tubo ends up testifying against Wali and the government and exonerating Amaibi. Kaniye shows loyalty to Amaibi, as this is linked to their friendship and romantic relationships. The commitment in showing up for him and Deola's decision to ensure Amaibi gets the help he needs show the strength of their friendship.

From the analysis above, it is clear that what we have in Garrick's *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is not just a collection of narratives espousing the ecological concerns of the Niger Delta; there is much more, and some people can argue that there is, in fact, much more than ecocritical concerns. The over-concentration on ecological concerns by critics of this novel at the expense of these topical issues revealed above is clearly an error that this work sets out to correct.

Beyond Ecocritical interpretations in Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*

Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*, published in 1993, is among the early novels that critically examine the Niger-Delta crises. It is set in the Ijaw part of the Niger Delta. Using the epistolary form, it tells the story of two reporters who have been fired from a national newspaper. One remains in Lagos, and the other moves to the rural area. The devastating effects of oil exploration on the environment in their homeland draw them together to fight those who are exploiting their land. At this time, the tragedy of the palm oil crisis has passed, Isaac Boro's uprising has been quelled, and Ken Saro Wiwa's agitations for environmental rights through the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People are at their peak. The novel predicts and captures some of the most dire moments of militancy in Nigeria, showcasing the writer's keen vision and ability to foresee the future of a society. Consequently, in this novel as well, it is possible to encounter so many messages that are not exclusively ecological in nature, just as was the case in our analysis of *Tomorrow Died Yesterday.*

The first of these issues is the ethnic crisis. In Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he laments the ethnic problem in Nigeria and refers to it as tribalism, which, according to Achebe (1983), is discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth. This problem is also pertinent in the Niger-Delta, as the writers from the region portray. The area consists mainly of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, and the people view the various injustices perpetrated against their region as contempt for their minority status, as portrayed in *Tides*. For example, Piriye was unjustly retired from *The Chronicle* as a journalist due to his ethnicity. He sadly points out, 'I believe some of our friends on The *Chronicle* must have felt uncomfortable that two Benitou people- two *minority* people! - had risen to two of the topmost positions in the newspaper (one an editor-in-chief and the other the editor),''(4). The chairman of the board for the Newspaper does not hide his bias against the minority personnel. Piriye does not fail to tell a foreign press that ethnicity remains an unattractive aspect of Nigerian politics. He writes that ''The scourge of ethnicity in contemporary African politics is starkly demonstrated by the fact that Nigeria, the largest nation on the black continent, fought a civil war whose origins may be traced without any question to ethnic rivalry. However, after his failed marriage to a woman from his ethnic group, he goes into a new relationship with Lati Ogedengbe, who is from another ethnic group, the Ibile ethnic group. This helps him to become more accommodating of other groups. It is glaring that they attach sentiments to inter-ethnic marriages and uphold them dearly.

Another thematic focus that has nothing to do with ecological matters is totalitarian leadership. *Tides* evokes the essence of George Orwell's political novel, *Nineteen Eighty-four*. The political landscape in *Tides* embodies essential characteristics of an Orwellian regime. One prominent aspect is the extensive surveillance of citizens' activities. Security agents employ bugging devices that relay conversations directly to the police headquarters. Individuals like Ebika, who are aware of their surveillance, must exercise extreme caution in their actions. His growing paranoia leads him to question, "I've seen enough to make me wonder if the shirt I'm wearing now is my own or an exact replica placed in my room" (36).

Another characteristic of this type of leadership, as portrayed in the novel, is the suppression of independent thought through restrictions on reading. Security personnel, such as Haastrup, impose censorship on literature deemed unacceptable. When Haastrup discovers several titles on Piriye's shelf, including *An Introduction to Marxist Ideology, Revolutionary Politics, Cry Freedom, The Wretched of the Earth,* and *The Thoughts of Mao Tse Tung*, he interrogates Piriye about their purpose and becomes notably hostile upon learning that Piriye reads them.

Government officials also utilize financial incentives to recruit collaborators and traitors among the populace. For instance, Okpene, who endures military violence due to his loyalty to local fishermen, ultimately succumbs to financial pressure and begins aiding oil companies in their unscrupulous activities. Another Orwellian element reflected in the narrative is governmental deception. Officials from the Nigerian government and oil corporations conspire to exploit the Niger Delta community, claiming that oil exploration benefits the entire nation while making hollow promises to rehabilitate the environment, with no genuine intention of helping the residents.

Imprisonment and physical torture serve as instruments to crush individual resilience. A powerful depiction of brutality unfolds when Ebika recounts his prison ordeal.

Law enforcement officers receive directives to incapacitate him. After mercilessly whipping him, they escalate to punches and kicks before confining him to a cell. His account of the harsh treatment continues with further details:

The whole day passed, and the second night too, and I still wasn't given anything to eat, nor was I allowed even a moment's exposure to the open air. It wasn't until the mid-morning of the third day that I heard the lock turning and saw the door open wide. A guard shouted my name and told me to come out. I crawled my way out, weak and thoroughly broken. I felt my eyes were swollen. My waist was aching. My knees could hardly support me. There was blood and shit all over my clothes. I was stinking, man, and I was starving. Such incidents of military and police brutality are reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's observation on totalitarian societies, where it is obvious that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and the mind of the native.

When the Ebrima delegation approaches the white engineer to ask him to turn off the searchlights during the day so they can fish, he dismissively replies that he is tired of the agitations and representations from illiterate natives who know nothing about what the oil industry is trying to do for them (12). The White Engineer feels that the struggles of a few scruffy fishermen are trivial compared to the overall wealth that oil has brought to the country and to him as a foreign businessman; consequently, he instructs the military commander to warn the delegation, using their rifle-butts, to never voice complaints again. Tonwe narrates how Freeborn Batowei behaves typically as a public servant, insisting that the people of the Niger Delta should view the oil pollution as a sacrifice they must accept. Batowei's self-serving attitude prompts Tonwe to wonder what the greater threat to his people's survival is: "the shameless duplicity of the bureaucrat, or the brazen insolence of the arrogant soldier" (85). Similarly, Piriye's treatment by the police while inquiring about Ebika's arrest, along with the harsh treatment of a middle-aged man found in Ebika's apartment, highlights how violence permeates the lives and thoughts of the natives.

Thirdly, it illustrates the challenges of pursuing a non-violent response to a ruthless and oppressive regime that is insensitive to the people's suffering. In the novel, Tonwe exemplifies a non-violent approach to conflict resolution. He chooses not to retaliate against those who unjustly dismiss him from his job, akin to Mahatma Gandhi, who renounced his legal career to live and work among India's peasants. Like Gandhi, Tonwe abandons his journalism to engage with his community's peasant fishermen. Yet, while Gandhi aimed to learn from the peasants to effectively protect them from British oppression, Tonwe returns home seeking a tranquil life. He eventually realizes that this peace is unattainable unless he actively champions his people's cause, leading him to confront his new moral obligation when he admits that he had been selfish in desiring a quiet retirement, which would still elude him if he shut his eyes to his people's suffering.

However, Tonwe refuses Ebika's violent methods. He tells Ebika, 'I will have nothing to do with any measure that does not appear to me to be aimed at achieving a peaceful solution to our problems.' The moment I discover that my name or my efforts are being pressed into the service of violence, I will withdraw my participation forthwith, no matter what those who look up to me may think of my course of action.

He denies Ebika entry into his home and advises Piriye to report him to security forces, arguing that it is wrong to defend a criminal simply because he is a friend or a tribesman. He states, "I have never believed that the tribe needed violence to justify itself or to press its grievance" (178). He also makes reference to the Nigerian civil war, where "a small group of army officers eliminated a handful of politicians whom they thought were the only obstacle to peace in the land" and concludes that "no one who lived through the trauma of that history would in his wisdom support the use of violence" (68).

However, as things unfold, Tonwe appears to have changed his non-violent stance. He resents Chief Zuokumor's arrogance and makes the conflict personal. Chief Zuokumor symbolizes the failure of traditional leadership. The novel depicts him as a leader known for his corrupt and disgraceful roles in two recent arbitrations: one regarding fishing boundaries between the villages of Dimiso and Erefiebi, and another concerning compensation payments to the villages of Ekpetiama by the Dutch company, Atlantic Fuels (14). He openly displays his corrupt ties with the oil exploration companies (125). When the government's oil pollution team arrives in Warri, Tonwe raises concerns about the extensive destruction caused to the Niger Delta. Chief Zuokumor vocally counters Tonwe's claims regarding contaminated water, scoffing, "To sit there and talk nonsense? Talking about tasting petrol in his water. Nonsense! My house is very close to the river, and my drinking water comes from the ground. But I have never tasted any petrol in my water". Chief Zuokkumor's reaction reveals his detachment from the issues affecting his community. He allies with the oppressor, increasing the suffering of his people. The Ebrima delegation is

aware of this and chooses to present their grievances to Tonwe instead of the Chief and his corrupt council of elders. Even though committed to peaceful solutions when consulting people in government over environmental issues, Tonwe also faces the challenge of reluctance on the part of these officials, as they fear risking their careers to get involved. He is hopeful when Freeborn Batowei becomes the commissioner for health and environmental Affairs, since they are both from the same region and afflicted by the same devastation. Batowei is unwilling to assist, and he makes this clear. He recalls his humble beginnings as the son of a fisherman and shares his resolve to defend his hard-won position, suggesting that Tonwe should let go of his activism, considering the prevailing political unrest and disillusionment in the country. He encourages Tonwe to drop the idea of representing his people because the political scene has brought disillusionment. He explains that:

Look what a mess we're in this country right now. Every other year, there's a coup, and a new government comes into power. New men, new policies, new budgets, new spending– and we start all over again. Not that the civilians would do any better- they're probably worse, if you ask me. But this constant change leaves us without anything to hold on to, anything to believe in for any length of time. (79-80).

This has generated an attitude of indifference and personal greed in the leadership of the nation and has led Adewale Ademoyega, in his account of the civil war, to question:

Why was it that the average Nigerian was concerned first and foremost for himself and next for his family? Why is it that the usual attitude of Nigerians is to grab and grab and grab? Why was it that the Nigerian did not care about things that did not touch him personally? While the people on top used their power to benefit themselves and their families, why did the people below aspire to do more than get to the top simply to follow suit (148)?

Batowei displays this typical attribute after rising up the social ladder from the lower caste. He desires to acquire whatever he can for himself and his family, forgetting the problems that plague his community, which may in turn consume him later. Even a cursory look at the issues espoused in the above paragraphs will show that this novel contains other issues of interest beyond ecological concerns, which have been the focus of most critics who have studied Okpewho's novel and several others in the Niger Delta.

This is also similar to the situation in Garrick's (2020) where figures such as Wali, Tubo, the military, Amanayabo, and Prosecutor Ikuru take advantage of the situation in Asiama to reap the most they can and extract all they can from the town.

From the above, we can conclude that *Tides* evokes a keen sense of the crises afflicting Niger Delta society; a crisis that is far beyond ecological concerns, such that concentrating on ecological issues alone would amount to being wise by just half. Through its epistolary narrative structure, Okpewho exposes deep-seated sociological issues, illuminating the varied perceptions and responses of individuals to societal challenges. The novel highlights Nigeria's political strife, its ethnic tensions, and the overwhelmed minority groups in the Niger Delta, alongside the implications of ecological degradation on human lives. In sum, Okpewho's work mirrors the harsh realities faced by contemporary Nigerian writers as they strive to reflect the ongoing struggles within the Niger Delta, which are not just ecological, producing literary works that articulate these social challenges.

Plot Summary

Ominiabohs (2022) is a political thriller set in Nigeria that explores how militancy, insurgency, and state corruption are interconnected. The story begins with the kidnapping of nine foreign oil workers in the Niger Delta by militants led by their commander Tari Kamasuede, who is seeking justice for his oppressed people and the devastated environment. The Nigerian government dispatches Alex Randa, a skilled Department of State Services negotiator, to resolve the hostage crisis. But as Alex digs deeper, she discovers that the hostage situation is only one part of a vast and sinister plot called Operation Raven, a high level conspiracy that connects militant groups in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram in the North, and IPOB in the South-East.

These movements, thought to be isolated, are later revealed to be strategically planned by powerful political elites aiming to destabilize Nigeria for personal gain. The Militants are also unaware that they are being used as pawns in a wider neo-colonial scheme. The reader is taken through different cities like Abuja, Enugu, Warri, and Kano, Alex, the negotiator works against time to uncover the real masterminds behind the unrest and to prevent Nigeria from spiralling into civil war. Loyalties are tested, betrayals emerge, and the line between patriot and criminal fades out. The novel ends with an epilogue five years later, revealing the fates of the hostages, the militants, and the consequences of the conspiracy leaving readers with a haunting sense of how fragile the future remains.

The writer shines light on oil exploitation and its devastation on Niger-Delta communities but points more to the fact that it sparks up other thematic concerns in the novel and they are presented below:

4.4.2 Conspiracy and Manipulation

The title suggests the web of deceit behind multiple national crises. The reader is sold the idea that Niger-Delta militancy, Boko Haram insurgency and the IPOB agitations are not independent of each other but are part of a coordinated effort by a selected few who want to destabilize Nigeria. Chief Benaebi Davies who is a Niger Delta Chief along with others order and pay for weapons shipment from Jason Amon. Benaebi and his cohorts place orders for 'Attack helicopters, stealth bombers, armoured tanks, Army combat Uniform, advanced combat helmets, plate carriers and improved outer tactical vests, millions of Kalashnikovs and RPGs.' (266). Yuri Shevchenko the Russian who deals in ammunition keeps his end of the bargain and the shipment arrives Nigeria and cleared waiting for instructions to declare a civil war. Alex Randa says that 'whatever is going down is way bigger than the chief and his organization'' this reveals that there is more about to go down in leading Nigeria into a war than they know about. Jason Amon does not have details about the whole plan to destabilize Nigeria but makes large supplies at the order of a few of the political elite which points to plans of conspiracy. When Rasheed Shamsudeen the Boko Haram leader meets with the man referred to as 'the Fixer', he tells him he represents an affiliation that will benefit both of them mutually without naming the organization. It shows the two men planning to bomb mosques, churches and market places, reference is also made to the kidnapping of the Chibok girls, the Boko Haram leader thinks his actions are independent as he defends a religious cause, unknown to him he is used as a tool for distraction towards achieving the goal of his sponsors. In his words: 'I want the same thing as you want, but with a little modification and some sense of expediency' (16). This dialogue with the unnamed character labelled 'the voice' shows that Shamsudeen is not the mastermind behind the bombings but an instrument guided by unseen sponsors to use insurgency as a diversion.

When Shamsudeen arms a straggly kid with a bomb to take down a church, his mind flashes back to the mysterious old man who had visited him two years earlier, he asked

> 'why would someone pay him to do what he had already vowed to Allah that he would do? He who had dedicated his whole existence to guide men to the Holy Prophet's light and to punish those who dared to refute of turn away… it was Rasheed's sworn duty to wipe them out for the coming reign of the true servants of Allah. If all he had to do for the old man was speed things up then life couldn't be easier' (107).

The Niger Delta militants, who had once worked on the vessel in the past, attack the Escravors and Bonga rig and take nine hostages using this as a way of distracting people from the plan to destabilize the nation. The novel shows direct links between the three movements as a coordinated act by a particular group to achieve a specific aim. The militants are framed as rebels and also as tools in the Nigerian Political game. The politicians who are the power brokers in the Niger-Delta use the fact that the militants are agitated over degradation, lack and poverty in the region and mobilise and arm the militants to use as bargaining chips in politics and also to enrich themselves.

Anthony Clarke, the Chief Executive of the Mobef Group of companies boosts the crowd in his hometown, making them believe he has their interests at heart. He tells them

> 'Join me and let us free the Niger-Delta people from shame and suffering. Let us show the world the strength of our unity and the quality of our resilience and courage. The people of the Niger-Delta will be free! Free from ethnic chauvinism, from marginalisation and from the shackles of our oppressors! Freedom!'

On the other hand Clarke meets with Tari the militant commander occasionally, when he gets to know that the militants hideout will be bombed, he tries to warn him. He works with the Fixer in the hopes of ruling the new republic. The fixer tells him:

> You and the men chosen to work with you must defend the new republic. I do not wish for war, but if the Nigerian government insists, you mustn't hold back. You have at your disposal weapons they can only dream of and the manpower to wield them. For the few hours left, see to it that you live above suspicion. Cover your tracks and cover them well (411).

In the end Anthony Clarke murders the Fixer because he believes he has served him for years and has tasted wealth and power and will not share these with the other men.

Tari the Niger-Delta militant leader and Shamsudeen believe they are fighting for their own just causes but they are actual instruments of hidden elite. Tari believes he is fighting against oil exploitation. He says 'I fight for justice. And this is the only way the government will listen to us' (291). He tells Brooke Cochlain that,

> the foreign companies have been tapping from this liquid gold from our land for years, enriching themselves with our oil. The side effects of these explorations have left us helpless, our lands destroyed, our animals fled the forest seeking fewer toxic grounds to graze, leaving our hunters without

> meat and our families without food. Our water is polluted, causing all sorts of different ailments (92).

Shortly after we find the mastermind behind these manipulations and his true intentions. He says: 'of course Frank we can always recruit fresh militants. We will make an army of youth to fight in the coming war' (403).

The Army Chief of Staff Lt General Pascal Okoli tells the Old man referred to as the Fixer:

> Most of the Igbos in the Nigerian Army awaits my command, sir. Plus we have thousands of mercenaries from Niger, Chad and Sudan. They are currently in Nigeria as we speak, some of them posing as Fulani herdsmen with instructions to cause chaos any way they can. By the end of the week, we should have over one hundred thousand foot soldiers, and I'm certain that once the secession is announced, we will have many more Igbo and Niger-Delta youths on our side. Yuri's private security firm is also on board. Three thousand mercenaries from Black Hawk will come into Nigeria by midnight tomorrow. From what I gather, an operative from Black Hawk equals a hundred Nigerian trained soldiers (403).

The characters believe they are acting independently of their own accord but they serve larger unseen interests highlighting manipulation across different social strata. The Fixer tries to call off the attack on the militants in the creeks when he finds out that Tari is his grandson, after intentionally planning the attack but he finds out that

> he had failed. He had tried to call off the attack on the creeks. He still couldn't reach the Niger Delta chiefs. All attempts to reach Tari proved abortive. His pilot was unavailable. With nothing left to do but grieve, the old man let down the tears that clouded his good eye. He raised gloved hands to his unmasked face and wept like a child (431).

These instances show the larger conspiracies that override individual agendas and buttress the writer's argument that many of these regional insurgencies in Nigeria are interwoven to cause chaos and a grand scheme of conspiracy and not isolated events as believed.

The Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation is constantly followed by two EFCC agents, he receives a phone call and the voice claims to know his secrets and asks for ten million dollars in exchange for silence to turn a blind eye to the Director's crimes. This person makes reference to details contained in a very specific file to which no one but him had access, this same file disappears mysteriously from his office (21). This file leads to the death of many linked together by the knowledge of the file's contents which is the CORA fund and the plan to sponsor a civil war in the nation. The EFCC starts a fresh investigation in to the CORA fund after the NNPC Director's death the finance minister is interrogated and the flash containing the details of the funds is still missing after it was stolen from the Director and all the men involved in this conspiracy are nervous and double efforts to catch the thief before EFCC finds it and ruin all their plans.

4.4.3 Corruption and Betrayal

Ominiabohs (2022) is steeped in themes of betrayal and friends becoming adversaries. The Daily Trust Newspaper says friends becoming enemies is a very striking aspect of this novel. It shows personal bonds and political allegiances, constantly reminding the reader of how fragile trust is in environments with high stakes. Danny who is one of the militants works on both sides; as a sniper for the government officials and as a militant under Tari's leadership. The militant commander does not plan on killing when the militants attack the Bonga rig but Danny uses real bullets to wipe out most of the workers and kidnap the foreign oil workers. When the fifty billion dollars in the Crude oil revenue account earmarked for Niger Delta developmental projects go missing, the President Rufus Sylva organises a probe into the missing funds and the key players in this matter use Danny to try to hide truth and a killing spree goes on to keep those involved quiet. It is believed that the same person or group responsible for the CORA theft are also responsible for shipping arms to militants and Boko haram and planning re-engineering secession of Biafra using money made from stolen oil and missing government funds. The NNPC Group Managing Director, finance and defence minister are killed over these conspiracies. When Tari questions him about his whereabout and the flash with incriminating evidence, he turns on him. They try to kill each other.

Chief Benaebi Davies who is a founding father of the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities brings the militants' pay in two huge *Ghana-must-go bags* from Chief Obele praising the work that they do and prays that the heavens support their cause but Diseiye the commandant's girlfriend brings up new revelations:

> Chief Obele's involvement in siphoning developmental contracts meant for the Ijaw communities was as startling as it was saddening. Tari had heard rumours, but he had waved them aside, doubting their veracity, he heard Chief Obele was building a refinery in South Africa. Another time it was Chief Benaebi who was rumoured to own the Bena shopping Mall, a departmental store built on over twenty acres of land in Asokoro (370).

The oil companies know the right thing to be done but decide against it. Andre Parker says 'He was well aware of the effects of their explorations but since they paid the communities heavily, he felt he could still buy some time and work in peace' (56). Before Anthony Clarke becomes wealthy, he led protests to stand against gas flaring. After these protests, the bureaucrats offer him incentives to lay low for a while instead of doing the right by getting proper management of gas flaring. He loses his job after a private owned bank lay him off and throw into the labour market, he takes to farming but it proves abortive as the land is useless from activities of the multinational oil companies. It was after this he took up the role of protesting against the injustice. After the oil companies carve out billions from the land, and rivers, rendering it useless, they give nothing back: no jobs, good roads, electricity, good drinking water, hospitals or schools. The oil companies like in the other selected novels like *The Activist* lay flow lines crisscrossed dangerously along the outskirts of Gokana.

The President Rufus Sylva discloses to Anthony Clarke that he is unable to award contracts from the fifty million earmarked from NNPC's Crude Oil Revenue for projects in the region because he met the account empty, he is told of the high powered cabal whose members include all powerful men hell bent on controlling the economy for selfish gains, he laments on the girls kidnapped and no arrests made or information about the girls. In the end the missing CORA funds are found and traced to the Chief of Army staff's account including payments he made to Rasheed Shamsudeen and several other soldiers in the army.

There is betrayal with the militancy as Danny works with the high ranking officers within the army and for 'the Fixer, yet he goes on to work with the militants pretending to fight for the cause of the Niger-Delta people'. Garruba decides to turn on Tari when has a change of mind to let the hostages go and accept amnesty. He is tied to a tree and Garruba speaks saying

> 'Na we get dis creeks and we go die for wetin be our own. Now we go stand togeda, arm oursef and ready for the enemy. Make we show dem say Ijaw-land in Niger Delta is land of warriors; dat gun and bullet nor de fear us; dat we go fight for wetin we believe in with our last blood because we rugged' (422).

He turns on Mieye too when Oti speaks for Tari, asking the men to consider that Tari had led them for so long. The boy runs in to Colin Enders a Private Investigator sent by Liz Parker to rescue her husband Andre Parker, one of the hostages.

4.4.4 Violence and Poverty

Violence is portrayed as a weapon used by the ruling class to rebel, manipulate and maintain power not as random occurrences. Kidnappings and general uprisings are used as instruments to instil fear in citizens and direct political change and steer power to specific people. The novel depicts chilling scenes of kidnapping, beheading, ambushes, oil facility bombings and mass shootings. It is used to manipulate and show collapse in the nation. When Shamsudeen meets 'the voice', he is told that he represents an affiliation that can mutually benefit both parties, the voice tells him 'I know about your cause and your association with the men from the west… I want the same thing you want but with a little modification and some expediency' (16). Suggesting there is carnage in Kano the same time as there is in the Niger Delta, a journalist reports that:

> Janguza barracks in Kano State this afternoon witnessed a series of deadly explosions that has left two hundred dead and many more wounded. Investigation is currently ongoing but from the nature of the attack, the army suspects the bombs must have been planted a couple of weeks ago. The bomb armoury which had held weapons worth billions of naira appeared to be the target of the attack. Rasheed Shamsudeen and his Boko Haram sect have claimed responsibility (340).

The expatriates work in Nigeria for some time without any hitches but Andre Parker says 'He had always known that the relative peace they enjoyed in the Niger Delta would one day come to an end. Despite the mounting odds and endless protests by the community youths, Shell had carved billions of dollars of the region' (56). The day finally comes when the militants who had worked on the vessel in the past and knew every inch square of the platform decide to attack the vessel. They are dressed in balaclavas and armed with uzi sub-machine guns and sniper rifles for the mission. Danny sneaks up on a soldier and plunges a hunting knife through his neck and down his throat, he shoots his target after taking aim and there is a spray of blood as the large calibre bullet soars and goes right through the rating's head, he keeps firing till the soldiers slump to the floor (60). The navy ratings guarding the rig also return fire 'erupting in peppery bursts of uncoordinated gunfire' (60). Danny crushes a soldiers windpipe when searching for the Naval commander on the rig (61).

A similar attack also happens on Chevron's Escravos facility, NPDC flow station in Delta State is also blown up. The Chief of Defence staff concludes that the militants only understand violence so in planning to rescue the hostages, he advises that the militant stronghold be attacked in the same violent manner without any

negotiations to meet violence for violence. When the hostages are taken to the militant stronghold Garruba attempts to rape Brooke Cochlain, the female journalist who is rescued by Diseiye the first time, he finally succeeds the second time. (89).

For the sake of religion Rasheed Shamsudeen is willing to kill but 'The Fixer' pays him to bomb designated areas. He arrives in a black Toyota pickup truck at St Mary's Catholic Church with a gaunt youth in his teens who is barefooted, armed with the bomb Shamsudeen watches the boy walk into the church saying Alhamdulillah. 'The explosion that followed shook the earth and rattled the windows of the truck. The church burst into bright billowing flames, like red angels flapping their wings' (107). Over fifty worshippers are killed and many injured in this bomb blast.

Gokana experiences so much lack that when Anthony Clarke refuses the incentive from the oil companies, his wife tells him; 'we can barely afford to eat and yet you turn down an offer of gold. What kind of man are you?' she decides to go out and fend for them herself, so when a vandalized pipeline bursts open, she joins in the scooping. It is said that 'oil bunkering-scooping crude oil from vandalised pipelines which would later on be processed in locally owned refineries and sold as fuel-was a dangerous venture. He had warned Tammy on several occasions never to get involved with it' (124). In the course of these residents scooping oil excitedly with colourful jerry cans, there is a blaze. A huge tremor ran across the earth launching Anthony Clarke from his bicycle. The rumble is followed by a loud ear splitting blast and the wave of heat that dries up struggling plants. Environmental damage has driven the Niger Delta people to poverty, to stealing crude oil from vandalized pipelines. The economy also suffers as the nation depends on hydrocarbon and the economy is worse off because of loss from vandalisation of oil installations. Homes are destroyed, families lose homes and livelihoods in an instant, and the fallout traumatizes survivors, this illustrates how poverty leads the people to sabotage piplelines and it spirals out of control into catastrophy. Tari's inner circle also includes not only disillusioned youths but also boys in their early teens, like Mieye who carry weapons and performing patrol duties, their presence underscores how violence corrodes childhood, trapping even minors in the crossfire of poverty and conflict. He tells Tari he wants to join the team when he runs away from his village. When Oti tells him his mother needs him he boldly states that

> 'I don reach to join this fight. Many people don die since you comot from Oporoza. I dey suspect the water, he said screwing up his face like an adult deep in thought. Mama sef get this cough wey nor gree go, I nor fit go school again because e too far. I nor fit sidan house when I know say I fo fit help you for here. Mama promise say she go send me go city but she no even get the money. But nor worry about her oh. Ashe say she go dey okay' (115).

These episodes weave a tapestry of systemic poverty breeding cycles of violence. They demonstrate how political neglect, resource exploitation, and environmental destruction force men, women, and even children into desperate acts. In this kind of environment, violence does not exist in a vacuum; it is an off shoot of deep-rooted inequality and ecological ruin. During the civil war young children are recruited easily as they are plagued with lack and hunger. Frank Madu is recruited early by Colonel Azoro who later becomes the Fixer and is the master mind behind the instability round the nation. During Tari's rally he remarks that 'there are hungry youths all over. The Niger Delta youth would carry arms for a dime. We will make an army of youth to fight in the coming war' (245). This reveals how the conditions in the region are so dire that violence has become a commodity and the youth are used as weapons by poverty and manipulation.

A striking representation of poverty is seen when Brooke is taken through the villages in the Niger Delta. It shows the stark reality of life in the region.

> Together they had moved through a few of the villages in the area and what she saw brought tears to her eyes. She saw the needs of the people, she felt their hunger and their raging despair. The sleepy little villages had no roads, so they had to travel by speedboat. Transportation between villages was mostly by water or a few bush paths that looked inimal… they drove past farms planted with a mixture of stunted and withering crops and past poverty stricken old men riding bicycles and women carrying large bundles of firewood on their heads with sick looking malnourished babies strapped to their backs. There were one or two modern houses but only after several derelict structures had occupied the scenery for a long stretch (135-136).

Brooke notes that according to the CIA World Fact book, Nigeria was the twelfth largest producer of crude oil in the world and more than seventy percent of black gold was from the Niger Delta but there is so much poverty amidst plenty. These images create a visceral impression of how poverty in the Niger Delta is not simply a result of economic hardship, but a result of political marginalization, environmental injustice, and systemic neglect. The novel shows the oil economy, where billions are extracted from the region while no development reaches the local communities. The villages that Brooke

sees are surrounded by oil installations, yet lack basic infrastructure like clean water, healthcare, electricity, or schools. The impoverished conditions reflect the failure of government intervention. Despite the fact that there are claims that funds are set aside for the development of the region, the people still live in squalor. The Commander's shows Brooke the sufferings of the people to justify the armed struggle against the state and oil companies. Poverty fuels insurgency and violence results in part, from desperation and neglect of the area.

This draws the attention to the injustices faced by a people caught between natural wealth and human greed. We are confronted with how poverty in the Niger Delta is not accidental, but rather the result of deliberate policies, historical exploitation, and on-going neglect.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Okpewho's (1993), Garricks (2020) and Ominiabohs (2022) explore other thematic thrusts apart from ecological issues. Unfortunately, critics who have read these novels have essentially elected to ignore these other equally important messages in preference for espousing environmental issues in the novel. What this analysis has achieved is to show that Niger Delta writers are also concerned and point out other issues like corruption, ethnicity, political and leadership problems and many more in the Niger-Delta which are not strictly ecological, and that concerns for the environment are hidden in other political sociological issues. This is evident in the characters and the different ways in which they approach the issues, pointing out deeper rooted issues in the Niger-Delta.

CONCLUSION

The Niger-Delta portrayed in the novels alludes to the fact that its location on the world map opens it up to trade and makes it more prone to many of the problems it has. Its deep rooted contentions are not just oil exploration but the half-hearted concerns for environmental problems.

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