

Ecocide and Rebellion in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*

BASIT, Olatunji
 Department of Languages and
 Linguistics, Fountain University,
 Osogbo, Osun State.
 olatunji.abdbasit@fuo.edu.ng
 +2348065047923

Abstract

Human activities such as oil exploration and release of harmful chemicals are instances of the plunder of natural environment. This plunder, in the case of Niger Delta, is occasioned by the collaboration of oil companies and members of host communities, which has resulted in aggrieved individuals taking up arms to stage insurgency and rebellion. Hence, this study examines the nuanced factors responsible for the degradation of natural environment in Niger Delta. For the purpose of this study, postcolonial ecocriticism is employed as a theoretical framework to analyse the novel, "Tomorrow Died Yesterday" selected for this study. This multidisciplinary approach lends strong credence to the harmonisation of postcolonial and environmental issues suitable for a critical analysis of a literary work that makes ecocritical statements. Findings reveal that the Nigerian government, the oil companies and the people of Niger Delta are guilty of ecocide. The study also reveals the horrible human activities that culminate in the social inequalities and environmental injustice that lure the youth of the host communities to take up arms to demonstrate their grievances. The study therefore,

concludes that ecocide in Niger Delta manifests displacement, immorality, violence, killing and kidnapping, proliferation of deadly weapons, debauchery and above all, disruption of social and ecosystem.

Keywords: Ecocide, Niger Delta, violence, rebellion

Introduction

The Niger Delta has been acclaimed one of the ten most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world. It inhabits some 31 million people. (Report of the Niger Delta Technical Committee, November 2008:102). The Niger Delta also houses massive oil and gas deposits, which have been exploited since 1956. Facts and figures reveal that oil has generated an estimated \$600 billion since the commercial exploitation of oil in Nigeria. Despite this, the majority of the people that live in this region wallow in abject poverty due to what the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2006) describes as administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure, and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, filth and squalor

and endemic conflict. But the finding of the UNDP failed to acknowledge the fact that the gross despoliation of the Niger Delta environment also accounts for a number of these socio-economic malaise and environmental injustice catalysed by the mendacity as well as the obnoxious activities of the oil majors, the stark insensitivity and institutionalized corruption of the government, and the greed of some influential people in the region.

As claimed by Oyefusi (2007:17), the Niger Delta remains one of the critical fault lines of Nigerian politics due to its predominant status as the home of virtually all Nigeria's oil reserves and therefore, the national wealth. It has also won itself a new geopolitical importance in the context of global oil politics. Nevertheless, the region has been so enmeshed in various complexions of agony and pervasive conflicts associated with the management of oil resources and fighting the menace of environmental degradation. With the ascendancy of oil in the Niger Delta, the region has been steeped in a whole lot of environmental challenges and crisis engendered by oil exploration, and resource extraction.

Ibiwari Ikiriko (2000:7) while recounting the horrible experiences in the Niger Delta submits that the oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the region. He emphasises that the doom now bursts in blood. As a matter of fact, it now becomes crystal clear that the need to stop the doom from continually spilling blood demands a vibrant struggle. However, not all those who claim they are fighting for the restoration of the Niger Delta

environment and social justice do so with utmost sincerity.

Bearing in mind that inter-ethnic conflict between Ijaw and Itsekiri had been ravaging the region for a very long time, it cannot be said that everyone that fights in the name of Niger Delta struggle represents the interests of the other ethnic groups. This view is vividly expressed by Afinotan and Ojakorotu (2009:196) claiming that the crisis in the Niger Delta can be explained from three perspectives. The first is the inter-ethnic war or rivalry, the second is the hoodlums who perpetrate evils under the guise of fighting the just cause of environmental justice, and the third dimension consists of those who are genuinely concerned with the struggle for the actualization of a truly developed Niger Delta. They posit that:

The armed struggle, internecine conflict and insurgency in the Niger Delta, all of which have been subsumed under the general term; Niger Delta crisis, may be seen in three basic dimensions. The Niger Delta region is a pot-pouri of ethnic nationalities. These ethnic groups, while subscribing to a general interest in the development of the Niger Delta, nevertheless manifest inclinations towards more specific primordial interests. The bloody Ijaw-Itsekiri war for instance cannot be understood within the framework of environmental degradation or oil exploration in the region. It is therefore necessary to classify the real issues involved in the conflict (192).

Victor Ojakorotu (2009:130) advances a more holistic view in understanding the levels and the dynamics of the crisis in the Niger Delta. He reveals that the conflicts in the Niger Delta are a reflection of the contradictions of environmental governance and oil politics in Nigeria. That is, the bane of the region's environmental changes and challenges emanates from lack of proper environmental governance and obnoxious activities of the oil companies. He further maintains that these conflicts can be analysed along different lines and levels depending on the players involved at a particular point in time. The first of these levels is conflict between host communities and the oil companies; the second level is the conflict between local militants and the Nigerian state; while the third is the hostilities between and among the various local communities, which Afinotan and Ojakorotu earlier raise in their position.

As earlier pointed out, the reactions to the issues of environmental changes and crisis in the Niger Delta can be viewed as a triangular phenomenon where three parties are overwhelmingly involved. The government, the oil companies and the host communities have a stake in the affairs of the region. It is instructive to note that the crisis in the Niger Delta escalated as each party has refused to hold the stake accordingly. The stake is either lacking or collapsing. On the part of the government and the oil companies, little or no measures have been put in place to assuage the people's suffering and douse their tension.

In fairness, the people have to be given something worth holding on to in exchange for their sufferings since their means of livelihood has practically been traded for oil. But instead, the oil companies continue to have their land hijacked and degraded, their forests decimated and rivers poisoned, and have the whole region plunged into serious environmental hazards. Since their means of sustenance has been forcefully taken away from them, they have, no doubt, been completely pushed to the wall, and so, have no option than to protest even if it has to be through violence.

Conceptual Review of Environmental Damage and Conflicts in the Niger Delta

The effects of environmental damage and the conflicts that ensued can be viewed from two perspectives – the poor and the rich. However, this study prefers to dwell more on the poor as they are always at a serious disadvantage. In an unmistakable conviction, the effect can be narrowed down to what can be perceived as the general plunder of the natural environment wherein other effects are subsumed. Since man is affected by the environment and responsive to its condition, he will certainly bear the brunt of any damage suffered by that environment. Invariably, whatever is made of the environment, whether good or bad, automatically makes the man. Since serious damage has taken the better part of Niger Delta environment, its effect manifests in various ways. The manifestation cuts across social, economic and political borders. Yuniarto asserts that:

The portrait of environmental damage is now affecting the social, economic and political life of society. There are changes in cultural patterns of society in adjustment with the changing nature of life, agrarian pattern gradually changes to a pattern of industry, natural pollution causes increased health care costs, and the economical cost of living is growing by the changing in the cropping pattern of farmers (2012: 271).

In essence, the effect has socio-economic and political implications. Eregha and Irughe (2009:167) in what they describe as economic and social multiplier effects of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta identify alarming unemployment rate, high level of poverty, conflicts, youth restiveness, hostage taking and HIV AIDS prevalence as both economic and social dimensions of the effects.

In addition, devaluation of pristine cultural practices, moral bankruptcy, youth unrest, inflationary trend, migration and displacement have been established as social cultural impacts of oil and production in the Niger Delta land acquisition (Aghalino and Lemuel 2010:211). What can be deduced from this is that environmental degradation in the region has socio-cultural and economic repercussions. Since the beginning of oil boom in the 1970s, Niger Delta ceases to be a cornucopia of good vegetation and pristine environment that it used to be before oil was discovered; the effect of environmental degradation resulting from mindless

extraction of resources has opened a Pandora's Box of so many evils and lethality.

Of all the effects of environmental problems bedeviling the Niger Delta, displacement, pauperization, militancy and youth restiveness seem to be more pronounced and ravaging. Virtually all the lands in the Niger Delta have been hijacked by the government from their lords (owners). The government does not only claim exclusive control over the lands, it also gives out the lands to the multinationals for oil exploration and resource extraction. As a result of this hijack and the damaging extraction that follows, the people in the region have been forced out of their natural habitats. Since their lands have been damaged beyond repair and waters polluted beyond purification, they have got no choice than to relocate to another safe environment where they can get another means of sustenance.

While some choose to be environmental refugees, others are a bit pugnacious as they refuse to leave, even when instructions have been issued to vacate the land. Rob Nixon dubbed this set of environmentally disadvantaged people "goners of nowhere to go". Nixon states in clearly outspoken terms, identifying with the victims of impoverishment and displacement resulting from environmental ruin and social injustice, and at the same time justifying their resistance as a necessary medium to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the government and the horror of oil spillage and gas flaring. He reiterates:

What I wish to stress here, then, are not just those communities that are involuntarily (and often militarily) relocated to less hospitable environs, but also those affected by what I call displacement without moving. In other words, I want to propose a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable (2011: 9)

It is revealed from the quotation above that those who relocate and the ones that refuse to do so suffer the risks of being cut off from their means of livelihood and being susceptible to all forms of environmental hazards. Majority of them who are farmers and fishermen have been rendered jobless and pauperized. They could no longer shoulder family responsibilities because they have lost their lands to the oil companies who damage their environment through their obnoxious activities. This is reflected in Agary's *Yellow Yellow* where Zilayefa's mother could not send her daughter to school because her farmland is destroyed by oil spillage. The protagonist of the novel recounts that;

Farming and fishing, the occupation that had sustained my mother, her mother and her mother's mother no more provided gain. I had witnessed land claimed by massive floods during rainy seasons, the early slowly

melting into rivers. Women rowed canoes farther and farther away to find land for farming. In addition, every year it was harder to catch fish (2006:39).

The ambitious youths who could no longer withstand the horror and tribulation venture into the city to find greener pasture. Some take to the city to find jobs; some to continue their education while some find crook means of sustaining themselves either by engaging in illegal oil bunkering or kidnapping the white expatriates for ransom. As revealed in *The Activist* and *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, they claim that after all, the land belongs to them. Therefore, they have a right to the wealth made from it. Nixon also points out that:

If environmental protest has frequently been incited by the threat of forced removal, it has also been incited by the threat of displacement without moving. Such a threat entails being simultaneously immobilized and moved out of one's living knowledge as one's place loses its life-sustaining features. What does it mean for people declared disposable by some "new" economy to find themselves existing out of place in place as, against the odds, they seek to slow the ecological assaults on inhabitable possibility? What does it mean for subsistence communities to discover they are goners with nowhere to go, that their once-sustaining landscapes have been gutted of their capacity to sustain by an externalizing, instrumental logic? The

desperate entrapments, the claustal options that result have galvanized environmental justice insurrections, in the global South and beyond (19).

Within the purview of slow violence and displacement as postulated by Nixon, it has been ostensibly revealed that it is not only the threat of forced removal from their place that caused the affected people to stage protest for socio-environmental justice. It has also been stimulated by displacement in a place which implies the cutting off of people's means of sustenance by the oil conglomerates whom Gadgil and Guha described as "resource omnivores". In the end, this entrapment and the drive to survive at all cost make the people to be seriously in dire need of way-outs. Owing to the fact that they have obviously been pushed beyond endurance line, the embittered people of the region especially the youths lost their calmness and patience. They grew tired of being cajoled that the oil pipelines crisscrossing their land are there to better their future. Hence, they resolve that if the government has decided not to compensate them for plundering their lands and milking out wealth used to develop the other parts of the country at the detriment of their region, taking up arms would be their last resort.

Their situation keeps on degenerating almost every day owing to lack of basic social amenities and infrastructures. Therefore, they see it not as a crime to go violent to get some of their entitlements, but a means to an end. Even though some of these militants and protesters are driven by primordial

interests incongruent with the just cause of seeking environmental justice, the government and the oil companies have wilfully given them a reason to employ violence toward getting their needs met and handed them a justification for committing heinous crimes. If only the government together with the oil companies could prioritise the proper management of the people and their environment, and ensure the costs and benefits of environmental damage and challenges are evenly shared and distributed, it cannot be wrong to conclude that youth restiveness, militancy and other crisis may not likely stop.

Theoretical Framework

Before delving into how the Niger Delta literature has been able to reflect the ideology of postcolonial ecocriticism, it is germane to briefly discuss the concept of Niger Delta literature in view of the fact that this study is based on the works selected from the region. At this point, the definition given by Tanure Ojaide will be considered relevant and useful in this discussion. Ojaide says:

Literature of Niger Delta and Niger Delta Literature will be used interchangeably to mean works of written literature that have been produced by indigenes of the Niger Delta about their region or by others about the region. Niger Delta literature is a reflection of the experiences of the people and whose content the people can identify with in shared manner. The literature reflects the locale and is informed by, among others, geographical, socio-cultural, political, and biological factors (2011:1)

From the foregoing, Niger Delta literature can be understood as literary works (poetry, drama or prose) written about the region by a writer who is either an indigene or a non-indigene of the region. Such works should, apart from portraying the Niger Delta setting and its relationship with the outside world, reflect the people's cultures, showcase their socio-political and economic struggles, and other experiences (Ben Binebai, 2012:55). This then justifies the choice of text selected for this study.

Having taken a cursory look at the definition of Niger Delta literature, the rest of this section will be dedicated to evaluating how the literature has been able to absorb, and at the same time propagate, the principles of post-colonial ecocriticism in term of ideology and thematic preoccupation. This section will also focus on showing the wide range of ideas co-opted to set up a new way of reading the literature (literary works) that counters flagrant social and environmental abuses perpetrated in the name of development, and emphasizes the ways in which Niger Delta literature has been able to align with the arguments and internalise the ideas and principles of postcolonial ecocriticism.

The thrust of postcolonial ecocriticism, certainly, is to challenge the continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance disguised in the name of development. In other words, the theory sets out to dispute as well as reject the do-gooder mentality of the West by discrediting the kind of development brought up in the name of modernization. As argued by Huggan and Tiffin (2009), ecocriticism sets out to debunk the western

ideologies of development and redirect the focus of development away from the self-serving interest of the West. They claim that

One of the central tasks of ecocriticism as an emergent field has been to contest – also to provide viable alternatives to – western ideologies of development. These contestations have mostly been in alignment with radical Third-Worldist critiques that tend to see development as little more than a disguised form of neocolonialism, a vast technocratic apparatus designed primarily to serve the economic and political interests of the West (2009:27)

Development, in this regard, can be viewed as a destructive weapon used by the elitist First World countries to continue to re-establish and expand the rift between them and the Third World countries (especially Africa) so that the former can continue to maintain its political power and economic hegemony over the latter. In this connection, De Rivero (2001) believes that development in western ideology is a means of relegating the Third-World countries to the perpetual state of social, political and economic standstill under the guise of assisted modernization.

More so, the global economic crusade about sustainable development is obviously not without the West's predisposition to stain the environment in order to sustain its economic growth. Escobar, as quoted by Huggan and Tiffin, claims that sustainable development is practically designed by the West as a regulating mechanism used to

determine people's everyday lives. They further assert that

The term 'environment' itself implies the marketability of nature providing an implicit rationalization for the control and management of natural resources by the global urban-industrial system and its primary political ally, the nation-state. In this sense, sustainable development implies that it is economic growth, rather than the environment, that needs to be protected, and that environmental degradation is to be fought against principally because it impedes the growth (2009:32)

From this, it has been discovered that postcolonialism and ecocriticism have joined forces to collectively challenge human inequalities and environmental abuses. By the common grounds that postcolonialism and ecocriticism share in terms of advocacy for socio-environmental justice (however polemical to a certain extent), most literary works that form the body of the Niger Delta literature have profoundly re-established and reinforced the 'mutuality' between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. By this, it would be appropriate to say, postcolonial ecocriticism has become more sophisticated in terms of drawing attention to the socio-political usefulness of literary texts without losing its aesthetic values.

The usefulness in question is resonant in *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* where Watson, though a non-Nigerian, presents the intricacies pulling down the Niger Delta social and political systems. With the

consciousness that social equality and environmental justice should be the right of every individual regardless of language and culture, she has succeeded in exposing the exploitation and injustice in the Niger Delta thereby asserting her commitment to justice. Just like writers from the region, she blames the government and the oil companies, and spares not the few corrupt people who collaborate with the government and the oil companies in the plunder of the environment. Condemning the activities of the government and the oil companies, she reveals through the character of Alhaji the novel:

It is a collaboration of the politicians and the oil companies. You can't lay all the blames at the oil companies' feet when our government is taking bribes from them! Our government would not be in power if not for the oil companies. The oil companies are being allowed to get away with it. 'Let us light our pipeline fires, they say,' burn our poison gases, destroy the environment, and here, here is a million dollars for your convenience. We all turn our backs while you wipe out democracy. (122)

Addressing the Niger Delta problem as a case of exploitation disguised in the name of development, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away* testifies to a colonial genesis that eventually graduates into continuing human inequality and environmental abuses. Of course, one has to admit that development as harmful as it is in itself is not what postcolonial ecocriticism is contending with. But the contention

is about the flagrant social and environmental abuses perpetrated in its name. And this same development is a camouflage under which the West hides to sustain their political power and economic hegemony over the developing countries. In practical terms, what they claim to sustain is not development at all but market domination. This is why reinvention of a new method of colonization is possible. After all, gaining economic power is synonymous to gaining absolute political power.

Research Methodology

Analytical research methodology will be employed in this study. This methodology helps in making analytical appraisal of the selected text – its characters, what the characters do especially in environmental related matters and the effect of their activities and decisions on their socio-economic and political status through their interactions with the environment. This will help to interrogate the causes and effects of environmental damage and crisis from a socio-natural lens as this destruction and the ensuing violence culminate in the disruption of social and natural environments.

Postcolonial ecocriticism will be deployed to analyse the selected text for this study. The theory is premised on the postcolonial effects on the environment. The disillusionment occasioned by the independence of most African countries manifest in so many ways owing essentially to leadership failure. One of such manifestations is the horrendous plunder of the natural environment resulting from a long history of greed and rapacious consumption, which has displaced man and animals from their homes and natural habitats.

Therefore, the study will be narrowed down to Huggan-Tiffin's assertion. The characters in the literary work selected for the study, the major-central characters especially, their roles and attitudes towards the plunder or preservation of the environment will be ecocritically analysed revealing their status quo in terms of their interactions with the environment.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Ecocide and Rebellion in Chimeka Garricks'

Tomorrow Died Yesterday

As ecological damage continues to wax stronger, so are its multiplier effects and challenges. The effects manifest in social, economic and political lives of the people. Social relations, economic activities, and political dealings are all subject to the tenor of the environment since all forms of exploration and exploitation are exclusively operative within the gamut of environmental changeability, from preservation to degradation. More so, the centrality of land to human endeavours has predicated a paramountcy of its discussion under the umbrella term, environmental studies.

Particularly in Africa, and more importantly in the Niger Delta part of Nigeria, land is central to all sorts of human activities. The oil industry on one hand and the people of the oil-bearing enclaves on the other hand, depend on land for extraction, to grow their food, fish and hunt (Aghalino and Lemuel, 2010:17). All this clearly shows that land is central to the fragile ecosystem and the complex

social system of the people. It is not a dismissible factor of production and a strong determinant of people's livelihood. Their culture holds land as a symbol of communal bond, which invariably, if anything happens to the land, that bond will be broken. This is why the people fight teeth to teeth to save the land from damage and never to lose its ownership no matter the circumstance.

In addition, land continues to be a pre-eminent subject in the discussion of environmental issues because its exploration and exploitation in the name of economic development accounts for all the strains and stresses which are the aftermaths of its degradation. Certainly, land degradation constitutes the largest chunk of environmental damage. Virtually all causes of environmental damage are traceable to the poor management of the land.

With the people's survival depending absolutely on the survival of the land, and the consequent plunder of the environment for economic reasons, there has been a very large container of issues and challenges begging for attention. Out of these issues, literary writers from the region have pitched their tent on the ones that appeal to them. It is therefore apparent that environmental issues in Africa, especially in the Niger Delta will never cease to be a topical critical academic discourse as long as environment is relegated to the background and traded off for economic development (Ogaba Agbese, 2008:192). This is evident in the steady turnouts of literary and academic writings across the country and beyond.

In a bid to serve as advocates of environmental justice and assert the importance of social

commitment in African literature, writers from the Niger Delta have been so responsive and responsible to their environment. They hold it a duty to reflect upon the prevailing hitches and ills that maul the value system of the society. It is from this standpoint that Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is considered fitting for a critical appraisal of socio-economic and political implications of environmental damage in the Niger Delta.

Chimeka Garricks's debut novel, *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is reflective of the lethal consequences that result from the pervasive environmental challenges in the Niger Delta. Indeed, tomorrow had been soaked in misery. The oil boom of the 1970s turned out to be a stark prognostication of doom in which the future had been methodically gnawed and swallowed. It now seems the people of the region will have to live in that doleful rut forever.

Garricks, with an impressive sense of humour, lampoons the ploy of the government and the exploits of the oil companies together with the ignoble activities of some of the community leaders. The author reveals four different dimensions to the problems of the Niger Delta and its ravaging effects to social relations and the people's sense of moral. These dimensions manifest in the characters and relationships of the four friends whose births and ascension from childhood to adulthood are evidence of, in Rob Nixon phraseology, "slow violence" and a strong depiction of the overwhelming distress of

the entire region and a serious damage of its social system.

From Doye (Doughboy), the ferocious militant, Kaniye, the romantic humorist, less-ambitious but strong-willed advocate, Tubo, the cunning and greedy oil executive to Amaibi, the incorrigible, stoic and radical environmental activist, one discovers the deepening impartation of ecological damage on the society as it reflects on the social structure, economic status and political (in)stability. With circumstances surrounding the births and growths of the four friends in Asiamia, Garricks acquaints us with the genesis as well as the nemesis of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The intricate linkages in what environment turns the people into and by extension what the people turn the environment into form the pretext upon which Garricks' debut novel is based. Tubo, one of the four friends reveals:

Everything began on Asiamia Island. The story of us: Kaniye, Amaibi, Doye and I, started there. Everything was linked to Asiamia 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 waters (73).

The tangibles and the intangibles of the story are presented as vestiges of leadership failure that extends to the handling of the environment and the resources in it. The coincidence in the births of the four major characters with the discovery of oil in

the 1970s is symbolic of a rigour-ridden tomorrow occasioned by oil. Indeed, oil is situated, transfixed, between their pristine yesterday and their massacred tomorrow wherein the dreams of the prospect-laden yesterday have been completely eaten up by the screams of the overstretched tomorrow.

One of the serious effects that environmental degradation has caused in the Niger Delta, as reflected in the novel, is kidnapping and hostage taking. Doye Koko, popularly known as Doughboy is a Niger Delta militant fearsome for his tactics in kidnapping the white oil workers and well respected for knowing how well to make use of publicity to achieve his aims. He is the leader of Asiamia Freedom Army (AFA) and has a gang of fearless men under his control. So are the other militant groups in the Niger Delta.

Doye is one of those Niger Delta youths with bright future but who had their future doomed because of oil which ironically was meant to boom their lives. He could have won a scholarship to study Petroleum Engineering but unfortunately could not achieve that because of his brother who was immolated while engaging in oil bunkering the night prior to the day he was to write the scholarship exam.

Having grown up in a broken home under a completely disillusioned father, and with a 'useless' degree in Petroleum Engineering earned through thick and thin, he could not progress as it had earlier appeared to him. In the end, he became a dare-devil militant, notorious to the government and the oil companies but worshipped as god by the people of

his community. He demonstrated his dejection and a total rejection of what his life had turned into by kidnapping the oil workers whom he believed were responsible for his woes. He thought he would make the oil companies and the government pay for the degradation of their entire environment and for making their lives so miserable.

To him, the government and the oil companies have undermined the development of the region to the point that nothing seemed redeemable. They can only survive the hardship if only they could use some force to take back part of what had been forcefully taken away from them. After kidnapping Brian Manning, he indicted the Hausa and Yoruba security officers that were with the captive. This is in a bid to justify his actions, though people might take them for sheer violence-mongering or an act of wickedness. He says:

How can you, a Hausa man, be my brother? When your people were stealing our oil money all these years, was I your brother then? My people have the oil, yet it is your people who have all the jobs in the oil companies. Your people refuse to employ my people. They say we are not qualified. Yoruba man, answer me – are my people not qualified? (6-7).

In the excerpt above, Garricks appears to be holding on to the stereotypic idea that the wealth of the region has been taken away by the non-Niger Deltans, especially the Northerners. However, he has clearly shown us that it is not only the

environment that is devastated but lives and delicate social relations were shattered too.

For Doye whose future could have been a very bright one, the effects of oil extraction dashed his hopes and aspirations. Although he managed to graduate from the university through thick and thin with a two-one in Petroleum Engineering, he could not get a job. Not because the job was not available but because he was not one of the relatives of the corrupt Personnel Manager who deserved to be favoured even when the most qualified for the job are roaming the streets looking for the job that had already been dashed out to a ‘lucky’ relative.

As the natural resources buried in the earth of the Niger Delta land are explored and abused so is the human resources vested in the people misused or underutilized. Instead of using the wealth made from oil to improve the living conditions of the people, ironically, it is being used to worsen their situations. Graduates with good results and useful ideas remain unemployed. This same set of youths eventually become criminals, vandals and militants claiming that they have a reason to partake in the spoils from the on-going plunder of their land since the government and the oil companies have a chief hand in their awful fate.

Since the government and the oil companies have made them jobless and idled by hijacking and desecrating the land which they depended on for sustenance, they should not be blamed for trying to engage themselves in something that would keep them busy. This gives rise to the increase in the number of militant groups in the region. Doye is

just one of those youths whose lives could have made more meaning than turning out to mere militant if there were social justice and fair sharing of oil wealth. He told Kaniye about his ordeal while still looking for job before he decided to form a militant group.

Let me remind you of my story, Kaniye. And it's a familiar story with people from the Niger Delta. I graduated from the university in 1990, with my now useless two-one. I applied for a job everywhere, Imperial, Shell, Chevron, name it. I did more than a few aptitude tests. For three years I was unemployed. The last test was at Imperial Oil. I passed it easily. I got called for an interview... Actually, I was the best at the interview. But they gave the job to one Yoruba boy who also had a two-one. The Personnel Manager at the time was the distant relative or something (233-234).

Obviously, this story is not new. Almost everyone has a share of the impact of the story in his/her life. Hence, the activities of Doye Koko are indicative of the lingering effects of environmental damage resulting from oil exploration. Apart from displacement and pollution which appear to be the first phase of these effects, impoverishment, kidnapping, youth restiveness and escalation of social disorderliness generate other multiplier effects. Among them are moral decadence, prostitution, killing, racketeering and proliferation of lethal weapons.

Before the people discovered oil bunkering and militancy, they engaged in unlawful and immoral activities such as dealing in black-market, drugs, sex and guns. This is an indication of what the prevailing circumstance had made of them. They had completely given up on themselves as they involved in illicit behaviours to reveal their disillusionment about their miserable condition which they believe can never change for better. So, to be able to continue to survive despite all odds and perhaps to try to forget their misery (if they could ever forget), they started a black-market, especially during the frequent periods of scarcity, deal in hard drugs, and sex became a cheapened commodity as the price of a phone card, and guns found their ways to the hands of armed robbers (236).

The story of Belema, an unrepentant harlot is a pointer to the depth of immorality and obscenity in the region. She and the other most beautiful ladies in Asiamia make prostitution a full-time profession. They trade their bodies for money. Before kidnapping and oil bunkering gained ground, their biggest clients were the 'company boys', who were the expatriates and workers from Imperial Oil's Asiamia Base Camp. But with the arrival of the 'oil boys', like Doye, their fortune increased because an oil boy could squander in one night the equivalent of the company boy's impressive salary (276). In this, Garricks has succeeded in revealing extent of the devaluation of feminine virtue and 'thingification' of womanhood in the Niger Delta.

All these effects give rise to social disintegration and dismantling of social bond. The iniquities have

ripped off the essence of communality which the African society is credited for. A diminutive number of people is used to bring about the devastation of the whole community. The diminutive part is made up of the greedy and self-centered members of the community who benefit from the losses and woes of the majority. Just like his compatriot writers from the region, Garricks has tried to strike a balance in the long-standing jaundice and prejudice by showing how the few corrupt people have contributed to the underdevelopment in the region.

Apart from social dimension to the effects of environmental damage in the Niger Delta, economic effects appear to be more ravaging. The few powerful members of the community collude with the government and the oil companies to bring untold hardships upon their own people. For love of money and power, Chief Ikaki and Tubo turn their backs on their own people. They deal in shady businesses such as oil bunkering, bombing oil installations and sponsoring the kidnap of the oil workers. They interface with the militants for kickbacks.

Tubo exposes the despicable activities of chief Ikaki in compounding the problem of the community for his own gains. He sponsored the bombing of one of the oil rigs of the Imperial Oil because the company did not let the compensation given to the fishermen pass through him. Before then, all compensations had been paid through him which he either gave very little of it out or refused to give it to those who deserved it. So, to avoid the pressure coming from the fishermen in the community, the company

decided to remove their go-between from the show. Tubo says:

Everything meant for Asiama (benefits, contracts, scholarships, etc) passed through him and was shared among his loyalists. But after the debacle of the recent spill, McCulloch the maverick had made sure Imperial settled the Asiama Fishermen Cooperative's lawsuit without consulting chief Ikaki. For a man like him it was a serious loss of face. The settlement had also caused him to miss out on a chance to somehow wrangle out a percentage of the payment for himself (362).

Unequivocally, the novel bemoans the corrupt practices of some of the community leaders. The sharing of ransom over the kidnapping of the oil workers by the security agents, some politicians and the militants portends a sort of reinforcement instead of deterrent for the militants to continue to unleash more terror on the people since they have the backings of the security agents and the few powerful politicians. No wonder then that the security agents have found it so difficult to bring the militants to book. Not because they don't know them or their hideouts but because they are afraid to do so because their evils will be exposed if they apprehend them.

In this network of corruption, the novel reveals that the few corrupt members of the community have joined the government and the oil companies to create a terrible system with a heightened level of quotidian iniquities which virtually everyone has

been irretrievably immersed in its malignant nemesis. Doye laments:

They (the people) are products of the system. The system which was created by the government, the oil companies and some of our own people... The system is designed to sow confusion, divide-and-rule, and injustice. So naturally the system will only reap monsters (324).

These captives of corruption, to use Ojaide's vitriolic remark, frustrate development from coming to their community simply because it won't fetch them monetary benefits. The novel then points out that so far the system had made monsters out of the people and chosen a terrible lifestyle for them rather than allowing them to make their own free choices, it has to be stressed that the people cannot be blamed for the wobbly system which they are victims of. Garricks laments that apparently the system has been knocked off balance since the government and the oil companies have decided to unsettle the social order thereby creating a grueling atmosphere. Obviously, environmental degradation has taken a serious toll on not only the ecosystem of the Niger Delta but also its social system.

Either environmental degradation is lethal in its political repercussions or in its economic convulsions, either way; it gives rise to a complete social disruption. This is certain because everything points back to the society. Therefore, corruption, pollution, environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, tribal conflicts, youth insurgency and so on are the greatest evil that has hit human

existence in the Niger Delta. This evil is partly self-induced, and on the other hand, brought upon the people by those dubbed 'resource omnivores'. The hot debate among the chiefs at the Amayanabo's palace over proffering solution to the menace of oil extraction and its resultant effects, and how the majority of the chiefs take side with corruption rather than liberation is a pointer to the fact that the so-called leaders of the community have practically sold out their own people to eternal damnation.

Catechist Akassa and Sir James, the reasonable ones among the chiefs, believe that the problem of Asiamia is bigger than just demanding some ridiculous ransom from the oil companies or the government. In their own reasoning, the fundamental problems of the community must be solved instead of claiming ransom that would in the end be shared among the greedy chiefs.

We have (other) problems in Asiamia. There is no electricity, no potable water, and no hospital... Our schools have produced excellent students, especially this year. But many of the students who are the future of Asiamia, cannot afford to go to the university. They are likely to join many other unemployed Asiamia youths who roam around restlessly, causing trouble... Some chiefs, stony faced, refused to look at Catechist Akassa. Others who did had their anger in their eyes... the chiefs were angry because it did not give them any direct monetary benefit (129-130).

Also, in a vitriolic outburst, Garricks bitterly satirizes the militarization of the Niger Delta. Frequent raids by the heartless soldiers contribute to the eventual pandemonium and unspeakable atrocities rampant in the region. The Nigerian military men known for their volatility to indifferently inflict pains on the people also have a hand in the desecration of the moral values and the disruption of social system in the region. They rape, torture, loot and abuse the innocent people beyond imagination. They are also part of the reason why the problem of militancy in the region has become so insurmountable. Instead of curbing the menace, they problematize it and, in the end, make it so complex to deal with.

The novel points out that the soldiers are so insensitive to the point that their human feelings appear to have died a natural death. They torture and injure people severely, and yet feign ignorance of the robberies, rapes, arson and looting they had committed. They also don't care about the tragic destruction of families, the murder of dreams, and the irreparable damage of the collective psyche of the people.

The people have been so deeply wronged in various unimaginable ways. Therefore, the Niger Delta people want to take revenge on them which is why some of the youths who have lost their beloved relatives to this scandal resort to violence and criminality. The same can be said of Ezekiel and Sibeye Boys in Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*. The rape of Dise in a church, and before her helpless husband's eyes is so heartbreaking and

unforgivable. This is just one of the many scandals the military men are guilty of. But who is going to punish them? Which law is going to convict them? Kaniye opens Doye's eyes to the death of the country's judicial system when the latter asks him about their chances of getting justice for all that had happened to them. He says:

What do you mean by justice? Do you mean justice from the courts? If Asiama people make enough noise, the best that can happen is that the military government will set up a panel of inquiry or some other bullshit committee who will find that the atrocities were committed by 'unknown soldiers' acting outside their command. Case closed... That's the only justice we will get (374).

Because the people cannot afford to let this injustice go unpunished, they decided to take the laws into their hands. The point Garricks is making here is that if there were punishments for the soldiers for committing such atrocities, people like Doye might give militancy a second thought. But because the injustice is wishfully allowed to go unpunished, the people have a moral justification to counter the injustice in their own way. This becomes clear in Doye's explanation of his cause to both Kaniye and Dise when the duo demand to know why he put up such a fierce fight against the government and the oil companies. He tells Kaniye:

The government has already sold the oil that will be drilled in the next decades. The politicians and the military boys have shared

oil blocks among themselves. The companies use outdated but cheaper drilling methods which pollute the environment. The refineries never work because it's profitable for some people to import petroleum products. The marketers cause artificial scarcity so they can make a killing. It's a never-ending gang rape. I didn't start it, Kaniye. I can't stop it either. I decided that since it's my oil, my river and my land, that's being raped, I might as well join in (234-235).

The excerpt above is a clear vindication of the Niger Delta Struggle which Doye strongly swears to champion. He claims that since there seems to be no hope that their current deplorable situation would be any better, it won't be wrong to join in the process of its deepening degeneration. He also reveals to Doye the hypocrisy of their own people towards the never-ending deterioration of their condition. He speaks disparagingly of their ignoble activities.

It's no secret that we, the people of Niger Delta, are our own worst enemies. Some of our governors loot our states' share of oil revenues; some of our chiefs and youth leaders frustrate development from coming to our communities simply because they won't receive any monetary percentages for the contracts. Yet we always blame the oil companies and the government (324).

It is just heart-breaking that Garricks never brings up a resolution to the conflict in the novel. In other words, that the likes of Tubo and chief Ikaki never

get punished for their crimes against humanity is a pointer to Garricks' strong conviction that the problems of the Niger Delta will continue to defy all solutions. After all, the whole system is corrupt and the by-product of that system has been doled out to the people to either taste it or swallow it completely.

In addition, that no resolution to the key issues in the novel was offered is frightening and leaves one to continually wonder when the devastation of the Niger Delta will come to an end. However, in what appears like a resolution to the conflicts in this novel (though none is offered by the writer), Ben Binebai, another writer from the region, provides a solution as to how the tomorrow of the Niger Delta people can be rescued from the dangers of yesterday. He says:

If our tomorrow must be bright, our dim past should be forced to leave the present and future alone. History my dear children, is the present becoming the past that makes or mars the song of humanity. For when the present becomes more frightening than the most dreadful of nightmares and the drummers beat the drums to the bang of obituary, the past is darkened; the future hangs and dangles in perilous bleakness. Knowing the past is the secret of survival (2011).

Clearly enough, the excerpt above lends some vigour to the powerful projection of the overall theme of the novel, which is so resonant in the seemingly 'impossible antitheses of the title,

Tomorrow Died Yesterday. Amidst the gory details of the novel, Garricks infuses humour and satire to diffuse the tension radiating from the story. This he has done successfully by managing to ‘trivialize the untrivializable’ which leaves the pitiable victims of the situation rather laughing than wailing.

In all, it is crystal clear that the author, through a masterly use of catharsis has succeeded in releasing the tempestuous tension and the repressed feelings that might have accumulated in the minds of the people. So that when they remember their ordeals, they will be unemotionally numb, and be able to make sense of the sickening nonsense. Indeed, the story as told by the author is a sort of catharsis; a distillation of congested spirits.

Conclusion

This study reveals that, beyond the aesthetic value of literature, Garricks has brought his creative ingenuity to bear on the utilitarian value of literature to Africans thereby making *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* a compendium of satire and indictments to the corrupt African leaders who make a monster out of the people by creating a rottenly corrupt system using Doye Koko and the whole of Asiamama community as a simulacrum of the much larger continent. Doye becomes a dare-devil monster because he feels he has to make the people of the Niger Delta experience a little justice which has long been deprived them by joining in the horrendous plunder of the Niger Delta environment (235). Doye wishes to avenge the death of his people and the rape of his environment. This decision is reinforced by the way the government

and the oil companies continue to impoverish the region and terrorise the people. He thinks it is not bad to counter-attack the government and the oil companies for the crimes they have committed against his people.

Also, the daily experience of violence and oppression in Asiamama community gives rise to eventual social iniquities that the people have to contend with. It is revealed in the novel that the people do not wishfully desire to live in such miserable situation but the joint forces of the government and the oil companies as well as the few despicable people of the community keep oppressing them and frustrating development from coming to them. So, Doye decides that since there is no hope of imminent justice and possible alleviation of their sufferings, he has to stand up for his rights by countering an unjust cause through unjust means. He believes the people have a right to partake in the spoils from the ongoing plunder of their land (236).

Because there is no hope that the problem of the community will come to an end one day, Doye, together with the people of Asiamama, as hard as it is, succumb to the fact that, their Tomorrow (already) Died Yesterday. Realistically, their tomorrow holds no hope but woes. Through Doye’s interviews with Kaniye and Dise about the depth of social injustice and the debilitating effects of environmental degradation in the region, one is able to understand that, it will be a mere world of illusion to hope that social and ecological justice will ever come to reality in the Niger Delta.

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