BEYOND PARDON IN NIGER-DELTA POLITICS:
EXPLOITATION AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN CHIMEKA
GARRICKS TOMORROW DIED YESTERDAY AND
TANURE OJAIDE’S THE ACTIVIST

By

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Abstract
Ever since the advent of the colonial masters in our midst, the Nigerian society is rife with many forms of disillusionment, frustration, dehumanisation resulting from bad governance and poor followership. Thus, Chimeka Garricks’ Tomorrow Died Yesterday and Tanure Ojaide’s The Activist satirised the corruption among the ruling class and the effects in the society. The novelists showed us the society reeking in corruption that gave birth to the literature of post-independence disillusionment. Therefore, instances of oppression, exploitation, corruption, suppression, cruelty, intimidation, man’s inhumanity against his fellow man and, above all, class consciousness as it affects the relationship between the rich and the poor as portrayed by the writers, have been the bane of the society. In Tanure Ojaide’s The Activist, the leaders are shown to be excessively corrupt and exercising brute force in the political scene. The insensitivity and lack of regard for the lives of the people by the leaders were vividly explored. In Chimeka Garricks’ Tomorrow Died Yesterday, the writer showed us how the expectations of the Niger-Delta, the Asiama Community, were shattered. The writer exposed the political activism in his community. Though oil was discovered in Asiama land, the people were denied the major sources of good living. The people faced hardship; some died of hunger and starvation and their women were raped by some corrupt militants. It is believed that the novelists succeeded in exposing the issues that undermine the lives of the people; hence they set out to address those ills in order to usher in rebirth, reformation and development.

Keywords: Exploitation, Betrayal, Disillusionment, Militancy, Corruption, Pains, Frustration, Degradation
Introduction

Literature serves as a mirror, a channel through which the social, political, cultural and economic issues that ravage a given society are explored. As such, there is a correlation between art and life, hence literature deals with people and their experiences in a given milieu. However, most pioneers of African literature dwelt more in the area of cultural nationalism. Their efforts were directed towards enhancing the status of the Blackman and to correct the poor opinion of black people held in most European and American countries.

These writers showed that Africa has dynamic social, economic and political institutions before the advent of the white man. European norms and values were superimposed on the people of Africa and the writers of the period joined the movement of cultural revivalism to bring Africans back to their rich cultural heritage. This resulted in such socio-cultural novels like *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *The African Child*.

But before the attainment of independence in Nigeria in 1960, many thought that immediately the white man left the seat of power, the road to an egalitarian society would open. They hoped that misery, degradation, political and economic exploitation would stop. But, ironically, these ills rather than diminish, increased with the departure of the white man and the handing over of the mantle of leadership to Africans.

According to Alexander Madiebo in *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*:

Growth of nationalism and subsequent emergence of political parties were based on tribal rather than national interests and, therefore, had no unifying effect on the people . . . Rather, it was the people themselves who were the main victims of political power struggle which were supposed to remove foreign domination (9).

Then after the struggle for independence, a new task arose for the committed writer. Hence, Chinua Achebe in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* believes that:

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done for he is after all . . . as Ezekiel Mphahlele says in his *African Image* . . . the sensitive point of his community (59).

The writer has to face the challenges posed by the problems of social ills. This led the writers to change to writing novels that reflect the problems in the system of
government and life in general. Novels like *A Man of the People, Anthills of the Savannah, Violence, Heroes, The Contract, Devil on the Cross, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and recently *The Activist, Tomorrow Died Yesterday, Teachers on Strike, Wizard of the Crow, Devil on the Cross, Waiting for an Angel, Half of a Yellow Sun,* etc. emerged to portray happenings in post-independent African society. Achebe stresses the point further in these words:

Most of Africa is today politically free; there are many independent African states, managing their own affairs . . . sometimes very badly. A new situation has arisen. One of the writers’ main function has always been to expose and attack injustice. Should we keep the old theme of racial injustice when new injustice has sprouted all around us? I think not (138).

There were widespread cases of political riots, marginalisation, exploitation, materialism, brazen corruption, electoral malpractices and wanton killings in which hundreds of the people lost their lives. In some cases, the army had to be called in to quell the riots. The people were disappointed with independence and wished for the good old times when the white man was at the helm of affairs.

Furthermore, the national assembly/parliament was reduced to an inter tribal battlefield and physical violence erupted from time to time between the various ethnic groups that make up the federation.

The conflicts brought about by tribal and sectoral interests grew in great intensity and brought about the final drifting apart of the peoples of Nigeria. In fact, the politicians were so incapable of providing genuine leadership that within six years of independence, Nigeria became a pool of corruption, political confusion, insensitivity, exploitation and abuse of power and office. The political leaders of the immediate post-independent Nigeria exploited the differences that existed between the various ethnic groups for their own selfish political gains. The resultant disunity distorted and complicated efforts made by the government to develop the country.

So both Chimeka Garricks and Tanure Ojaide, as the most acknowledged novelists in recent times, try to look into the problems and dilemmas of the current political dispensation and other crime rates in their various societies. The novelists felt that time had come for the abandonment of the old literary themes for immediate political and social problems that threaten the delicate bases of the country’s unity. The situation
of the country seems to be critical that many felt the need for reappraisal. The writer “as the sensitive point of his community (or country)” had to change as well. Solomon Iyasere agrees with Achebe and puts it this way:

I think we have spent too much time renovating the shrines of our ancestors. It is time we stepped out into the present to seek the painful truth and meaning buried underneath its bloated surface. Thus, our literature must move from that of an elite class to that of exploring the anguished state of our present condition (5).

So, the works under study justify the claims of the novelists that the people have realised that they are still suffering. They still find themselves as messengers, paupers, hewers of wood and eaters of leftovers, this time for their own brothers, “the black white men” (John Ekwere, Reflections, 27).

As a result of the exploitation of the masses by the few at the top, the novelists as the watchdog of the society took up their pens to expose and attack this predominant case of man’s inhumanity to man and crimes in their various societies within the shores of Africa and other developing countries. These rampant cases of exploitation, marginalisation, crime, political corruption, immorality, despair, nepotism, disrespect, dictatorship, materialism, planlessness and unfulfilled promises heralded the fight for equality and an egalitarian society in Nigeria. That is why this paper wants to study the novels published within these past ten years in Nigeria in order to ascertain how the novelists have fared in exploring events in our contemporary society.

The theoretical framework for this paper is Marxism, a political philosophy and economic worldview based upon a materialist interpretation of history, a theory of social change and an atheist view of human liberation. It refers to the social, economic and political doctrines of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and their disciples. According to C.H. Holman in A Handbook to Literature,

It assumes the independent reality of matter and its priority over mind (dialectical materialism). It teaches a theory of value based upon labour, the economic determination of all social actions and institutions, the class struggle as the basic pattern in history, the inevitable seizure of power through the revolution of the proletariat, and the ultimate establishment of a classless society (304-5).
Some of these features of Marxism are discernable in the works of Tanure Ojaide and Chimeka Garricks. For instance, the economic determination of social actions is demonstrated to a certain extent in Chimeka Garricks’ *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* as well as in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist*. The actions of the principal characters are dictated by economic compulsions. They not only highlight the problems in the society but points to a way out of them.

Therefore, since literature is virtually engaged in the living situations of men and women, and also displays life in all its rich variety, it is expected to teach good behaviour and to condemn evil in society. It is expected to mirror the lives of the people and to improve their minds so that they would be able to learn from the experiences and the fate of the characters in the various works of art.

**Oppression, Betrayal and Environmental Degradation in Chimeka Garricks *Tomorrow Died Yesterday***

Chimeka Garricks wrote *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* to inform the world of his view on the Niger-Delta crisis and of the rise of militancy in Nigeria. *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is a literary composition conveying moral truth mixed with fictional characters and their personal experiences. The novel has five books and each episode is named after the narrator or a major character or incident. The novel explored various themes like suffering, pain, disappointment, poverty, exploitation, above all tyranny and oppression. The work focuses on tyranny and oppression and also their attendant consequences on the people under a despotic leadership.

The novel is set in the post-colonial Nigeria. It x-rays the tyrannical leadership seen in the Niger-Delta region and exploitation at its peak. The novelist takes us through the lives of ordinary people and the effect of the harsh experiences on them. Garricks made use of a fictional town Asiama, an oil rich town located in the heart of the Niger-Delta region as the setting of the story. The author brings to light the main cause that led to the Niger-Delta militancy which the government does not want the world to know about. In his author’s note, Chimeka states:

I know now that I wrote this story as a form of catharsis, to try to make sense out of all the madness, and to tell some of the truth, as I understand it. Besides, I was fed up with the fact that the only “voices” of the people of Niger-Delta was either the political class or the self-styled “militants,”
(two equally appalling choices in my view). I was also tired of the hypocrisy of the people of the Niger-Delta, my people, who are the real victims but have refused to take the lead responsibility of their own roles in the calamity that has befallen them (ii).

The novel focuses on the lives of four young men who struggle to live by their values in a difficult and morally challenging environment. The story is written in no chronological order. It centres on Doye Koko, alias Doughboy; Amaibi Akassa; Kaniye Rufus and Tubo who are childhood friends and natives of Asiama (the oil land). The Niger-Delta region produces most of Nigeria’s oil and since the early 1990s has experienced a lot of conflicts caused by tensions between oil companies and the Niger-Delta’s ethnic minority groups who feel they are being exploited. This has led to increased militarisation in the area and kidnapping of foreign oil workers. It is against this backdrop that Chimeka Garricks writes.

The novel starts in 2003, when a routine kidnapping of a foreign oil worker by Doughboy (Doye) goes terribly wrong. This kidnapping leads to a chain of events that reunites the four friends. Kaniye is a lawyer in the group, although he has not practiced law in years and owns a restaurant. Tubo is the self-centred one who works with the Imperial Oil Company at the centre of the story. Doye (Doughboy) is the leader of a militant oil group that kidnaps foreign Imperial Oil workers and Amaibi is the lecturer and activist in the group.

*Tomorrow Died Yesterday* spans three decades. Part way through the book, we go back to 1970, the year all four boys were born. The novel flicks back and forth between 2003/4, when the kidnapping occurred and the series of unfortunate events that unfolded afterwards, and key moments in each of the boys’ lives—the 70s, 80s and 90s. We get glimpses of each of the boys’ childhood, how they became friends, the eventual demise of their friendship, and the events that shaped their lives and made them who they are.

It explores one of the major challenges facing Nigeria today—oil. Chimeka Garricks manages to capture it all in his book—oil bunkering, oil militancy, the impact oil has had on the everyday Nigerian living in the Niger-Delta region, the corrupt politicians and employees of oil companies and how people try and live their lives in this situation.
The novel explored chiefly pain, suffering, corruption, dehumanisation, exploitation, inhumanity, money mongering and ruthlessness, all of which are aspects of the central focus—tyranny and oppression. The first portrayal of tyranny and oppression can be seen in Amaibi’s description of his mode of arrest to Kaniye. Amaibi says:

They came into my house very early one morning, almost a squadron of them. They smashed down my door, commando-style. They arrested me . . . In bed. I didn’t resist then. They shot me. I still don’t know why (55).

The tyrannical nature of the government can be seen in the above statement. Amaibi being an upright man and an activist kicked against the governmental control of the oil companies which drilled from Asiama. The governments were only interested in the revenues the oil companies generate. They never looked into the affairs of the oil town or provide basic amenities or infrastructural development. The oil companies lacked provisions for proper industrial waste disposal, thereby polluting the Asiama River, environment and causing the death of aquatic animals which are the town’s source of livelihood. These and many more Amaibi kicked against because Asiama is a town made up of mostly fishermen, the natives lived at the mercy of the companies. Amaibi went as far as suing the government to court with the help of his friend Barrister Kaniye Rufus. He even organised rallies that picks on the governmental neglect of the Asiama community which got the governing body agitated and sought for a way to bring Amaibi down.

Soon, the government found a way by the Imperial Oil Company using Amaibi as an intermediary between Doye Koko (Amaibi’s childhood friend and the head militant) and the Imperial Oil Company. Amaibi agreed, took the ransom to Juju Island in exchange for the Imperial Oil staff manager who was kidnapped by the militants, not knowing that the hostage had already died. The government soon made a case out of Amaibi’s selfless help with the help of Wali, the tyrant chief security of the Imperial Oil Company. Amaibi was charged for aligning with militants when it was they (the Imperial Oil staff) that begged Amaibi to help out. The government used this medium to oppress and dehumanise Amaibi who had been challenging them all along. Amaibi’s words to Kaniye while in the prison gave a clear message of what his life was like. Amaibi says:

. . . No leader from the Niger-Delta has gone to court with the government against him, and came out a free man, I wont be the first. I’m certain of
that, twenty senior advocates can’t save me. I’m going down, Kaniye, no matter who I get to defend me. In the circumstances, I’d prefer to go down fighting . . . (36).

Amaibi is seen as one of those voices in the society who refuse to be shut down by the oppressive system of government, even at the point of death. Sir James Rufus, Kaniye’s father and a senior advocate, also voiced out the tyrannical nature of the government when Kaniye sort his advise to help in Amaibi’s trial in court. Sir James had this to say:

The government wants Amaibi out of the way. In this country, the government is the mafia. Everything has already been arranged. The trial will be merely to rubber stamp his predetermined conviction. And the rest, as they say, will be history (69).

Garricks used Tomorrow Died Yesterday to also tell the world of the circumstances surrounding the Niger-Delta crisis cum militancy. Niger-Deltans suffered exploitation and neglect not only from the government but also from some of their own people who enrich their pockets at the expense of the community. This, Garricks made known in his author’s note and used the character Chief Dumo Ikaki to satirise those selfish politicians found in the society and also show the corrupt nature of the human mind.

Chief Dumo Ikaki, a member of the Asiama Council of Chiefs and the special adviser to the governor on special duties likes to be at the helm of affairs. Dumo’s position in the government should have been able to bring about infrastructural development in Asiama Community but all he was after was to enrich himself the more. He master-minded the arrest of Amaibi because Amaibi’s involvement in the ransom delivery cut the percentage he and the Imperial Oil staff executives were to get from the money. His tyrannical and oppressive nature can be seen when his company Tortoise Shell was given the contract to secure a generator by Imperial Oil Company, which is to give electricity to Asiama Community. He used the contract as an avenue for money laundering and oppression. This can be seen in the words of Tubo, an Imperial Oil staff:

Tortoise Shell bought a second-hand contraption from one Asian country.

It powered parts of Asiama town for all of twenty-three days before falling
apart. I say parts of Asiama town because the whole town was never completely wired. Coincidentally, it was the houses of Chief Ikaki’s enemies that were not wired (72).

Chief Ikaki, being the head of the Asiama Council of Chiefs, intimidated the chiefs with his governmental position and runs the chiefs’ council with an iron fist. He is also the Amayanabo’s puppet-master because he compels the Amayanabo to do whatever he says. He even banished Sir James and his loyalists from Asiama because they challenged his authority.

In his author’s note, Garricks said: “. . . I was also tired of the hypocrisy of the people of the Niger-Delta my people, who are the real victims, but have refused to take lead responsibility for their own roles in the calamity that has befallen them” (iii).

Garricks used another word in the novel as the Niger-Deltans turn everything into a money-making venture, especially when Asiama lost some of its natives in a pipeline explosion in one of the bunkers. The Asiama Council of Chiefs sought for monetary compensation from the government instead of agitating for means to secure the pipelines from oil bunkers. Hypocrisy is also seen on the side of Dumo Ikaki who pretends to have other affairs of Asiama at heart only to exploit, oppress and misappropriate funds meant for them. For instance, Chief Ikaki’s company, Tortoise Shell, deserted the contract given to them to clean up the oil spillage on the Asiama River. He is also the brain behind the dehumanising experiences Asiama town got from the soldiers after they agitated for monetary compensation for an oil spillage on the river.

The novelist used the actions of the soldiers in the novel to satirise the military. The soldiers sent to Asiama terrorised the natives, which portray tyranny and oppression in their actions. The soldiers bludgeoned and manhandled the people without mercy. They killed, raped and battered the inhabitants. The soldiers grouse is that Asiama natives were responsible for the death of a soldier who slipped off a boat and was mangled by blades of the outboard engine during the demonstration at Asiama Base Camp. So, they dealt mercilessly with the natives. The soldiers shot sporadically, killing many people, Mpaka Doye’s father inclusive. They lay all the villagers on the floor, both young and old, and even made a man eat his own excreta. They flogged and humiliated Doye the Amayanabo by making him do the frog jump before his subjects.
They caught the Amayanabo hiding in the royal mausoleum. They beat him. They cursed him for not being able to control his kingdom. Then they made him hold his ears, squat and jump around on his haunches (376).

They caught Amaibi and his wife Dise hiding inside the church, raped Dise till she passed out and made her husband watch while they raped his wife. The rape of Dise had a chain reaction on her and her husband Amaibi. Dise lost her pregnancy in the rape process and also had a psychological depression which affected her lifestyle. Amaibi on the other hand, could not handle the incident, which cost him his marriage to Dise. The doom spelt by the soldiers on Asiama changed the town as it affected each and every member of Asiama negatively.

The novelist used Kaniye’s words to Doye to bring to light the government’s nonchalant and insensitive attitude towards the plight of the people. Kaniye had this to say to Doye when he was asked to sue the soldiers to court:

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 (374).

All these show the oppressive nature of the government who would do everything possible to shut down any voice that tries to protest or ask questions. Doye Koko, Doughboy’s predicament is to tell the world the cause of the Niger-Delta struggle/militancy and also the effect of tyranny and oppression on the oppressed. Doye is born under a harsh condition with a tyrant as a father who always oppressed his family with ranting and beating. As a kid, Doye is very aggressive and always tries to intimidate his peers, a leaf he borrowed from his father Mpaka. Doye has been frustrated all his life, starting from his tyrannical father, Mpaka’s constant beating and desertion by his wife, Doye’s mother, the death of Soboye his only brother, which resulted from oil bunkering which affected Doye by not going for a scholarship examination. The intimidation he got from the soldiers that came to Asiama, his father’s cold murder by the soldiers and finally his denial of a job opportunity in the Imperial Oil Company even when he emerged the best in the interview.

Doye from his tender age built a strong wall around himself which thickened with harsh experiences as time passes. These experiences made him hostile and violent. He
saw the government activities with the oil companies as a slap on their faces and a rape of their land because the natives were not compensated and were given the least job in the companies. He took upon himself to fight the government and formed a group called the “Asiama Freedom Army,” which with time metamorphosed into militancy. The group was credited with oil bunkering, kidnapping and bombing of oil installations, which forms the basis of the storyline.

Garricks uses Doye to tell the world that one raised under a tyrannical and oppressive situation would be a lot worse than what nurtured him. The novelist also used the characters to satirise the people found in the society who try to battle/fight evil with evil, thereby going astray as power intoxicates. The story is actually relevant to any human community where dictatorship, exploitation, tyranny and oppression are practised. Thus, the novel is a satire on the Niger-Delta struggle and the factors that led to it. The author employs devices such as irony and sarcasm to convey his message. He writes in his author’s note:

As I write these words in October 2009, the pandemic has spread all across Nigeria, and the kidnappers less discriminatory in their choice of victims. Recently, I heard this rumour about the kidnap of a “vulcaniser” (an artisan tyre-mender) for a ransom of N30,000 (about $197 US). The Niger-Delta struggle has become a tragedy so bizarre that one has to search for comedy in it just to remain sane.

**Man’s Inhumanity to Fellow Man in Tanure Ojaide’s The Activist**

*The Activist* is also a novel that makes a bold revolutionary statement about the injustices, corruption, sabotage, exploitation and inequality that are evident in our country Nigeria. It is regarded as a monumental literary achievement and a passionate exploration of Nigeria’s political complexity and social tension of recent decades.

In the novel, the nameless protagonist, clearly a symbol of the patriotic and visionary Nigerian, irrespective of ethnicity, trades the bliss of life overseas and joins the bandwagon to develop his native land in this deeply moving narrative linked by conflicting ties of moral concern, human right abuses, environmental pollution, honour, courage, patriotic love, betrayal, tragedy and triumph.

It is a memorable narrative, populated with characters so vital and real. A truly riveting and startling tale enriched with colourful and highly sophisticated writing.
The novel is also a programmed attack on the oil multinationals that sponsor military coups in Africa in order for them to have a stronghold for their exploitative acts. These multinationals prop up the military dictatorship that brutally represses the populace as the exploitation goes on. Thus, white Europe portrays how literature encodes a people’s way of life as it affects privileges, the love and moves of the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo of the Niger Delta. Their rich cuisine, songs and dances, the rhythmic and enchanting pidgin English, the socio-history of the Boma boys, now “area boys,” the legends of mammy water, the water goddess, Egba, Egbesu and others create alluring and exotic world in the din of environmental holocaust. In all, the novel advocates unity for the tribes.

_The Activist_ has an elaborate, almost leisurely plot in which the novelist attempts weaving the strands of the story together. The characters are memorable and approximate those in real life. Ebi, Pere, Tob, Shaka, Dr Mukoro, Omagbemi, Dennis all represent recognisable individuals. But The Activist, apart from being nameless, does not demonstrate his activism except for his recall of protests he participated in, while in America.

Thus, the entire story is woven around the central character, the Activist. He had the aim of changing the impoverished society of his people. He wanted a change for the Niger-Delta people. He hated the intimidation by the multinational Bell’s Oil Company and the government in power. The people around him never really believed that he came back to stay for good in Nigeria from God’s own land. When he came back he met Ebi; he became aware of the traditional ways that he had forgotten.

Meanwhile, the militants who paid respect to the god of war and vengeance fought the same causes as The Activist. They had the Nigerian oil on their land but were not enjoying it, rather they were intimidated and maltreated.

The militants (Egba Boys) began to kidnap the white men of Ben Oil, the government officers, the rich etc. to get money from them and help the needy of the land.

Tanure Ojaide brought together different characters that met at the end of the novel. Pere who was a different character met with The Activist and they began to shake the society. The Activist and Pere met with Chief Ishaka who is an exceptional chief among others. He refused the bribes given to him by the government and the multinational Ben Oil Company. He never married many wives and sent his children to
school. One of the children became a member of the Bell’s Oil Company who was taken to Amsterdam. The women demonstrated, with Ebi Emasheyi as their Vice President. They almost wanted to go nude but could not as a result of government interference.

The Activist and Pere joined bunkering business and they became millionaires. Pere became the owner of the best hotel in Niger-Delta while The Activist became the owner of the award winning newspaper.

The woman, The Activist, Pere, Ebi, Dr Mukoro’s son met towards the end of the story, thereby contributing their efforts and making Niger-Delta a better place. They fought Bell Oil with their strength and came out victorious.

The Activist became the governor of the Niger-Delta people and Ebi emerged as the first lady. The Activist’s vision made him escape death narrowly and taken abroad, came back and brought his society to normal. The novel is set in Niger-Delta of Nigeria. It was set during the incidence of oil exploitation of Niger-Delta. It exposes the ills of the society at the periods in time. Ojaide captured the environment of the society and the consequences of such action.

So, at the centre of the episodically crafted novel is The Activist, the main character whose passion and nobility is the measurement of his human disposition, leaving behind the greener pasture of the United States. He arrived home with a pertinent mission—the emancipation of his people. In his favoured list of allies in the struggle are the effervescent and strong willed Ebi and Pere, propelled resourcefully to overcome several defeats.

The Activist with his huge luggage of academic credentials, foreign exposure, international diplomacy and deliberate adaptation of core values of many celebrated human virtues, remains by far the egghead with intimidating agenda to last a mission span. While in Ebi, the gender log is fundamentally and adequately represented. The modest grace to stand erect in a society marooned in male dominance and enforcing nationalistic instincts into the local women that need enfranchisement to wrestle for their right defined the feminine weight. Pere, at the end of the ladder, weathered through the squalid sloughs of poverty and parental squabbles in his bid to outlive squalor, rejection and unemployment. His painstaking emergence from the corridors of affluence and influence tend to voice hope to the numerous youths scavenging the streets in dire search of emancipation and identity.
These represent the very different vital stratification from which the battle rages on in the Niger-Delta, for what the region termed callous exploitation, and has vowed to fight to the finish. The exploitation is manifest in the reaction of the students against the forces they regard with suspicion, portrayed by graveness of the contention sizing them up on one side and the federal military government and Bell Oil Company on the other. Although we are offered a reason to become optimistic when The Activist triumphed, and became the governor. But the untold reaction of both the government and the oil corporation in respect to the path chosen by the new governor sustained our anxiety.

In fact, the setting of the novel can be said to be contemporary, the reality of the date as “here and now” living with us. This is aptly seen in the graphic description of the day, the events captured in the novels which tallies with actually what is happening in the Niger-Delta now. Through some of these events that have made headlines recently in Nigeria and outside the country, we can be sure that we are examining a recent text. As seen in these lines:

Pere made more inquiries about bunkering and learnt how multifaced it was. Every information business in petroleum produces was considered bunkering. Diverting the tankers taking fuel from the refinery to a roadside to sell drums of fuel to hustlers was bunkering (152).

Bunkering business in recent times has become Nigeria’s greatest undoing in respect of her oil revenue. This has become hydra-headed problem owing to the uncovering that both the leaders and the led, rich and poor seek the opportunity which ever way in order to enrich their pockets. And, recently, the United States intelligence report has it that “Nigeria looses to bunkering as much of her oil that she formally exports to the international market.” The novel is vividly running concurrent with our time. In the same vein, there are other related situations that have formed a discussion agenda in current Nigeria. For instance, the next extract says:

This was done especially when there was fuel scarcity and petrol station owners were so happy to receive their supplies that they did not check the accuracy of the fuel amount because they knew they would gain by adjusting their fuel pumps to their advantage (152-3).
Fuel scarcity in Nigeria has also become a public malaise affecting virtually the important sectors of the nation’s economy and while it ups market and service fares, it completes its damage in grinding to miserable halt several businesses which lack the connection to source petrol from the influential hoarders.

We must also fortify our realistic claim that we are dealing with a novel which content is as current as the new millennium. The period in question also has realistic reminiscences of what has happened outside Nigeria in recent time, and this event gains entrance in The Activist as the following lines say:

Though guarded by mobile police and army boys . . . these very guards . . . would rather get fat tips from the civilian bunkering lords than do their military duty of guarding the pipelines . . . they preferred being posted to Liberia where they could have a free range to loot and rape in the name of peace-keeping than guarding oil pipelines (153).

The novelist also drew up lists of events that yield substances to the reality of the Niger-Delta. The squalor in the region is put side by side with Abuja our nation’s capital city thus:

Several ethnic clashes broke out in the Niger-Delta. The Itsekiri, Izon and Urhobo . . . The Izon . . . despite their large population felt something should be done once and for all to stop it, if not in Abuja but in the Niger-Delta where they lived (231).

The novelist also presents an instance of constant occurrence that we have come to identify the area with:

Bell Oil knew very well that there was a blow out but did not ask for its fire-fighting team to put out the fire. The Uto River was literally burning. Evergreen plants, dry leaves, all became combustible materials. The poisonous methyric gas fumes engulfed plants, wildlife and humans around for days (261).

This represents a true picture of the real Delta, even in the present, a situation of constant threat to life, and premonition. A scenario of instability and unrest, this is forthrightly a graphic description of what Nigerians read almost daily on the pages of
dailies about the Niger-Delta region. The lines following inadvertently pre-empt observations:

Let Bell Oil and the federal military government stop killing us slowly. We cannot sit and watch our land made unliveable by outsiders, we will continue to fight to hand over the land, waters, and air of our birth to our children in a liveable state (267).

And true to their pleading and warning, the three principal actors involved in the conflict have not known peace until date, the federal government has not reduced the number of Nigerian soldiers deployed to the region to checkmate the activities and onslaughts of the local militants against oil corporations’ infrastructures. The several oil conglomerates doing business in the area have not as well known peace and have continued paying heavy ransoms as brutal demands of the militants before expatriate workers are freed from hostages and kidnapping nets. As for the militants themselves, it has been as well a constant preparedness for reprisal expected from the federal government’s army, police, and other para-military agencies pushed daily to guard the nation’s oil hub.

In the novel, this value of patriotism is epitomised in The Activist weighted with the current wave of uncertainty and disenchantment torturing the nation and her citizens, everyone looking for a way out of the land, those already outside the shores of the land refusing a return home. Transparency International, Green Peace, and Paris Club has ranked the country as one of the most corrupt, repulsively polluted, and dangerously indebted to financial institutions world over. One wonders what nerves The Activist is built with. He is a determination driven by passionate zeal; in the first phase of the novel titled “The Return,” the main character through series of his experiences with the local people portrayed his willingness to push through the several phases of impediments along the way to the emancipation of his people.

Home was his Niger-Delta state in Nigeria . . . The Activist was a different type of person. He loved his people and their ways . . . while abroad, he always longed to return home and live among his own people . . . He saw the problems at hand as a tug of war between the dictatorial military and the civilians . . . He wanted to throw his small weight on the side of his people (21).
In real life situation, so many had toed the same path, and many are still doing the same. The novelist also traced what effects the long dictatorship of military government has left on the masses of the nation. The Activist confirmed that his job involves more than conveying his militant protests to the attention of those that hold sway at Abuja. He must do more to dissuade the people from their pessimism and retrogressive complacency. He began to feel the thought of disenchanted Nigerians on his way right from the airport to the hotel where he hoped to lodge for the night:

Every where for country dry well well, e dry pass harmattan self” . . . “you no fit be some body for this our country now unless you steal . . .” “If you work hard, you go be rich too,” The Activist advised. “Not for here! If you work hard self and you no steal, na poor man you go die,” the driver responded (16-17)

This same atmosphere of hopelessness remains prevalent across the land. This has resulted in parents giving their daughters for commercial prostitution overseas in deliberate connivance with international pimps. Meanwhile, The Activist was made to feel that he has made an unforgivable mistake, coming from enlightened colleagues in the Niger-Delta University, people thought knowledgeably broadened to have triumphed over such crudity and backwardness: “People were stealing, prostitution, killing and committing other heinous crimes to make money, to look for devious ways to go abroad, “Let him live in our hell and see whether he can survive . . .” one said (41).

Through the novel, the narrator smears the different stratification of the Nigerian society with the sharpest fangs of indictment. From the federal government to the military, the oil companies, the local chiefs, and even the revolutionists themselves, everyone is prone to corruption, and see virtually nothing in it. To the society in The Activist, someone must engage in some fraud if survival is to be converted from mere wish to reality. Even the taxi man that drove The Activist on arrival from the United States holds firmly to the doctrine as well. And his remark on dropping The Activist worked prophetically into a reality: “Continue to work hard. You go be rich.” “Oga self you go see for yourself, nobody go tell you say life hard for here,” the taxi drive reiterated before he drove off” (18).

What he said actually came to fulfillment. The Activist in collaboration with Pere engaged in oil bunkering in order to fund their mission of emancipation. Before then,
Pere had met Owumi who has spiced up his life with money made from illegal bunkering:

Owumi described the process of bunkering to Pere and it looked so simple—“But what of soldiers and police guarding everywhere there are oil pipelines?” Pere asked. “Police and soja no be Nigerian?” Owumi asked in reply . . . “you don see goat dey guard cassava leaves? Or you don see pigeon dey guard corn?” Owumi asked Pere (145-50).

Furthermore, the novelist keeps unmasking both the army officers and influential businessmen who are making inordinate fortunes from illegal bunkering. The local chiefs and the oil companies are given serious taunts and knocks for collaborating with the exploiters to deceive the people, that is, after the local chiefs had collected some fat sums from the oil companies (322-4). The author’s indictment is really living here with us. He is presenting a real life story to us and hoping it strikes our apprehension.

**Conclusion**

From the novels under study, we can conclude that the spirit, which propelled the literature of post-independence in Africa, is indeed the spirit of disillusionment, anger, oppression and hopelessness. African novels after independence are protest literature. The writers are firm in the forefront of the society towards progressivism. The writers are protesting against the corrupt and immoral leadership of the African politicians. Just like what is obtainable in Chimeka Garricks’ *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh’s *Teachers on Strike* and other African novels like Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Alex la Guma’s *A Walk in the Night*, Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel*, etc., which explore the social problems of disillusionment, unemployment, brutality, insecurity, harassment, betrayal of trust, injustice, violence, revenge and wickedness.

Chimeka Garricks’ *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* shows the leaders to be excessively corrupt and exercising brute force in the political scene. The insensitivity and lack of regard for the lives of the people by the leaders were vividly explored.

The novel portrayed realistic details of eruption of conflicts between the youths in the Niger-Delta, Asiama community, the invading oil companies and the federal government. Over the wanton destruction and merciless exploitation of Asiama
environment by the foreign oil corporations which was encouraged by the federal government.

Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* sought to expose the implications of the actions of leaders on the people. We see that the myopic behaviour of leaders subject the populace to much suffering and hardship, hence the masses have to react at one point or the other. The environment of the Niger-Delta in Nigeria continues to be populated and made uninhabitable with little or no consideration for the indigenes of the area whose livelihood also depends on economic activities around the Niger-Delta. The oil companies, therefore, are due for the scathing denunciation in Ojaide’s *The Activist*.

The novel thrives on imagery as can be seen in the author’s description of the Niger-Delta landscape, which is at times frightening and at other times enchanting. The novel abounds with proverbs, symbolism, flashback, dramatisation and instances of intertextuality in Ojaide’s creative corpus, at great deal of which constitute the Niger-Delta folk memory. The novel, however, has its faults. The events portrayed appear too real so that at times it is difficult to say whether this is a novel or a book on socio-economic history of the Niger-Delta people. There are also spelling errors just as several Urhobo words in the novel should have been italicised.

However, despite the vast wealth created by petroleum, the benefits to the impoverished indigenes of the area of production (Niger-Delta region) have been too infinitesimal. This problem has persisted with the Niger-Delta youths and the government getting to a dagger drawn position. The natives cry out of hunger and starvation. No good roads, electricity and good schools are built in the region. The Niger-Delta graduates are unemployed for years. Most of the jobs in the oil companies are not given to them but to the Hausas or Yorubas. The bitter antagonism between the many ethnic groups inhabiting the Niger-Delta and the government continues to rise over how the government denies them their rights and over the extraction of oil and the distribution pattern of the subsequent wealth accruing to the people. The violence between the forces brings unspeakable hardship to the indigenes.

Many of the Niger-Delta youths became militants, kidnapping the Imperial Oil expatriates and demanding for ransom, just to survive. Asiama land faced with a lot of challenges and damages, the violence they unleash is unbearable. The women were raped by the invading army who tried to stop the demonstrations.
Amaibi, one of the narrators in the novel, was shot on his leg because he was there to stop the government and some boys in the oil companies from taking a cut out of the ransom demanded by the militants. He was jailed for months without treatment and without trial.

The author exposes the leaders as corrupt. The chiefs of the Niger-Delta are seen as corrupt. Chief Ikaki who was given a huge sum of money to work on the community’s electricity project appropriated the money given to him. We see the leaders playing with the lives of the citizens and the damages caused by the Imperial Oil Company. The novel establishes the corrupt and fraudulent forces which stand between the government and the people. The novel looks beyond the turmoil of oil spillage which kills aquatic life in Asiama River in the Niger-Delta and makes them bewildered.

The novel looked beyond the anger of the Niger-Deltans as they were denied all the good things of life by the government. It looks beyond the pains of repression, the death of Niger-Delta youths as they strive for survival when nothing was given to them. They lost hope and were highly disappointed.

Thus, from the political class to the military leaders, down to the civil society, what we have seen in the societies portrayed are shattered hopes and disillusionment as a result of the existence of moral vacuum, political, social and economic problems.
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