

DEPICTION OF RESISTANCE AND UPRISING IN TANURE OJAIDE'S *THE ACTIVIST*

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Abstract

Literature offers a unique point of view through which to examine Nigeria's socio-political experience. This research examines the interplay of resistance and uprising in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. *The Activist* by Tanure Ojaide highlights representations of oppression and denial of basic human rights as triggers of revolution in the novel. The theoretical framework used for this research is Marxist approach to literature. The main aim of this research is the evaluation of various social, economic, political, environmental issues deployed in the novel, and it establishes the role of literary narratives in emphasizing issues of resistance against subjugation, class stratification, social injustice, and poverty. The analysis demonstrates how Tanure Ojaide utilizes literature as tool for emancipation of the people, which underscores his quest to collapse the social disparity between oppressors and the oppressed. This study employs the content analysis approach to qualitative research methodology.

Keywords: Resistance, Injustice, Literature, Oppressors, Emancipation

Introduction

Resistance is a way of life that people can sensibly adopt if they care about themselves, their families, their friends, their neighbours, their fellow citizens and families across the world. It should be noted that resistance is not only to make people's lives better but to awaken new desires, to prepare for pursuing new demands, to foster organisation, to raise new consciousness and in general to be part of a

process aimed ultimately at fundamental change. Chinua Achebe (1973:8) reminds us:

A man who cannot tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. After all, the writer's duty is not to beat this morning headline in topicality; it is to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history.

Resistance literature tends to expose the bitterness and woes of oppression by highlighting attempts made by writers to galvanize the people to dethrone oppression. By implication, literary works that explore the theme of resistance reject oppressive tendencies manifested by rulers. As if charting prescription for writers of Marxist/socialist disposition, Coovi Innocent Datondji (1980:8) makes strong affirmation:

In whose name should they live in excessive luxury while the rest strive to obtain food? These are some of the questions that the African writer asks himself or at least that self-respecting African writer should ask himself.

A major message, which writers in this thesis put across to the people, is that silence in the time of oppression is cowardice. Wole Soyinka (1972:13) timely warning is important, "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny." Thus, in effecting resistance against oppressive tendencies, violence may be inevitable. On this note Ngugi Wa' Thiong'o's (1981:28) acclamation comes to mind, "Violence to change an intolerable unjust social order is not savagery; it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man." The right time for the people to act

by using resistance to salvage situations in Nigeria is now, no longer emphasis of disillusionment as expressed by Biodun Jeyifo (2008:89), “And with the entrenchment of unspeakable levels of cynicism, alienation, incivility and cheating among all classes.... in the question of whether there are good things to say about Nigeria”.

The inspiration for this research stems from how literature reflects the oppression and marginalization of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian state and their collaborators. Nigeria is widely considered to be abundant in both human and natural resources. However, despite this wealth, its citizens continue to live in hardship, while the nation remains in a state of decline. Akpo Mudiaga-Odje (2008:13) asserts:

For decades, oil exploration and exploitation have been going on in Nigeria The oil-bearing areas have been degraded. They have been robbed and they have nothing to show for the God-given wealth. They have no light, no water, no roads and no decent accommodation This vividly explains why the area has become hot-beds of crisis.

Nigeria has been at the centre of discourse on both domestic and global platforms for several years. Various intellectuals and commentators have suggested ways to resolve the human-induced calamities facing the country. However, the unrelenting suppression of the citizens by the Nigerian state forms the foundation of the country’s enduring tragedy. Notably, this study investigates the conditions that sparked Tanure Ojaide’s radical ideological stance, while also emphasizing the role of the populace in challenging and transforming the existing order. This is what justifies this academic work.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Marxism. Marxism according to Ian Brookes (2004:732) is, “the theories of Karl Marx

(1818 – 1883), the German economist and political philosopher, stating that the struggle between different social classes is the main influence on political change and that communism will eventually replace capitalism. From the above definition, Marxism is a creation of Karl Marx and later Fredrich Engels. Marxism is a social theory of human society and culture which aims primarily at creating and if possible, enthroning a classless society. Allen Swingewood (2005:23) is of the view that, “Marxism maintains that a Marxist writer is one who is conscious and fully aware of his own responsibility in the society. No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distanced from the oppressed”. However, this is through a struggle or revolution where the oppressed people will seek to overthrow the capitalist bourgeois class. This could be achieved through organised revolution, encompassing all facets of the society especially the deprived.

Marxists has fully evolved in African literature. African novelists as means of expanding the frontiers of their ideological standpoints and individual perception of society have expressed themselves through the concept of Marxism. Festus Iyayi distinguished himself in the use of Marxism in his novels. In virtually all his novels there is always one form of resistance and revolt. Marxism is crucial to the African novelist as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1981:50) believes that:

African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national idea. For we must strive for a form of social organisation that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so that we can build a new country and sing a new song.

Like most novelists, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o is a committed writer committed to the well-being of his people. This is seen in his literary works. Though revolution fail temporarily in his novels, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o create rebellious characters who he imbued with

revolutionary ideas with which they show their rejection as well as galvanizing the masses to collapse capitalist tendencies.

It is true to a large extent that Marxism is a style or form in itself. This is because though Marxist is an ideology, Marxism adequately prescribes its characteristic expressive standards. Therefore, writers of Marxist colouration must conform to its form of prescriptions. It is instructive to state that the Marxist writer committed to liberation of the people do not become prisoner of reality because the modern African society is evolving, any Marxist inclined writer should be ready to confront the oppressive elites as the oppressive elites are desirous of continuing the subjugation of the people. They may likely not allow change of status quo. Emmanuel Ngara (1985:31) lend credence to this fact:

Social stratification and inequality are a historical part of our society and these are what Marxist writers are continually highlighting against in our society. Through the change significant attention of social structures will be made. This will come in form of a revolution which is the displacement of one class by another.

In quoting P.J. Brown's *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature* (1953), Allen Swingewood (2005:84) agrees:

In a class society, literature serves the interest of a particular class and only through that class does it serve all humanity. Therefore, proletarian literature is such a literature organized by the psyche and the consciousness of the working class in the direction of the final talk of the proletariat as the creation of communist (classless) society.

From the foregoing, the novels used for this research can be classified as Marxists as the characters see themselves as avenue for routing out their sorry predicament. With this, the use of propaganda is necessary for the writers to inculcate resistance ideologies in their characters. Note the statement of Charles Nnolim (2010:33), “art that contemplates society we expect, art that is propagandist, art that tends towards proletarian concerns and art that has Marxist undertones”.

Resistance and Uprising in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*

Tanure Ojaide's novel, *The Activist*, explores different indices of resistance and uprising. Poverty is one of the socio-economic issues raised by Tanure Ojaide in the novel. Tanure Ojaide's narration of poverty in the novel apparently stimulates the anger of the masses. With an air of resistance, Tanure Ojaide unfolds the injustice meted on the people and engages in a conspiracy with them to stop such suffocating situation. Themes of poverty, exploitation, looting, environmental degradation, injustice, anger, and disillusionment resonate in this novel. As if Tanure Ojaide's other works, *The Activist* continues to be gripping and lucid. The protagonist, The Activist, who returns to Nigeria, is amazed that his country of birth has degenerated into a state of decadence: there is filth and chaos everywhere. He sees how poverty ruins the people and stunts their economic growth. This novel is a social satire showing the failure of post independent Nigeria. To this extent, the author's presentation of events in the novel showcases the predicament of the Niger Delta region. Tanure Ojaide, with a high sense of perception, shows the Niger Delta society as a place where poverty is rampant. But coming back home, *The Activist* is desirous in changing the situation.

In the Niger Delta, the base depravity of the wealth of the people manifests in various ways. Here, the people are treated in a cruel

manner by the Nigerian government and the oil companies. The writer laments the poor condition of the people:

Since the Activist left, Nigeria's oil production has risen from about four hundred thousand to more than two million barrels a day.... Bell Oil and the other oil companies had been given a free hand.... While that meant more money in the government's coffers to sustain the dictatorship, it also meant total disregard of the Niger Delta people (44 & 45).

With this novel, Tanure Ojaide shows that the real tragedy is usurpation of economic means of the people. Thus, the people are either forced or coerced to absorb the oppressor's abuse. Almost six decades after the discovery of oil in the region and the resultant disregard of the owners of the oil wealth, birthed varieties of anger and protest. It is this conception that informed the making of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*, thereby following the footsteps of earlier Niger Delta revolutionaries - Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Except the government utilizes political will in tackling the indignities, inhumanities currently experienced by the people, the agony of the effect of oil exploration and exploitation in the region would not abate soon. The awareness created by *The Activist* in inspiring the people for change shows that the region is on the verge of another conflagration as stated by the author, "There was no neutral ground, either you were on one side or other.... One cannot be with the exploiter and exploited. The slave owner and the slave cannot be on one side. One must be on the side of humanity"(173).

More worrisome to the Niger Delta people is the attitude of oil companies and the Nigerian state in the development of the region, which the narrator in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* shows the contrast between the region and the other parts of the country: "After the oil boom turned into doom for the Niger Delta. The proceeds from the oil

went to Lagos to build a festival town for the black people of the world to celebrate their culture and art and construct unending bridges to connect water separated part of the teeming city" (48). While other parts of the country attract massive infrastructural development which increase the wealth of residents in those areas, Tanure Ojaide describes the pitiable condition of the Niger Delta region to show that the discovery of oil has worsened the economic situation in the area: "Other oil gains also went to build entire new capital on rocks in the windy dusty savannah. The oil producing coastal people were left in the lurch" (48). Like other critics and scholars on the Niger Delta issue, it is sad to admit that the Niger Delta region breeds poverty amidst massive wealth from crude oil. The discovery of oil has worsened the abject poverty in the region.

Exploitation is another trigger of resistance and uprising in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. Bernth Lindfor's view that T.M. Aluko's *One Man One Wife* (1959:41-53)" ... touches on many topical Nigerian problems - exploitation of the uneducated class by the political irresponsibility, bribery, misappropriation of public funds...." are also applicable to Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. In the novel, when crisis broke out in Warri, Bell Oil exploited their workers as they forced them to come and work despite the problem of insecurity in the area:

When the killing started, other workers came to work with machete cuts; a few with bullet wounds, and others just dazed by loss of family members. They could not afford to lose such lucrative jobs that made them live very well among a poor population. But Bell Oil Company was happy that oil continues to flow without any interruption. Business was not affected, they reported to their head office in Europe (216).

As depicted in the novel, the people are second class citizens in their country. The exploited Niger Deltans remain tied to the dictates

of the oil companies and the Nigerian government. However, to free themselves from this life of exploitation, the people must organize themselves, and if possible, revolt against the degradation of their human existence. Tanure Ojaide clearly shows that it is the people's hopeless situation that is exploited by the two forces of oppression - oil companies and the government. Note that the origin of the crisis in the region is due to the negative exploitative attitude of the government and oil companies in collaboration with some greedy individuals who inflame the crisis for their own selfish ends. Oftentimes, the oppressors use ethnicity as means of exploitation. This problem is apparently reflected in *The Activist*:

Unconfirmed reports said that the Izon were not given any nets at all and that all went to Itsekiri, who not only had many lobbyists and sympathizers in Abuja but also used their beautiful women to get what they wanted. The Izon saw this as another manifestation of their persistent marginalization despite their large population and contribution to the national wealth and felt something should be done once and for all to stop it, if not in Abuja but in the Niger Delta where they lived (211).

A similar case of exploitation is highlighted when the students met Professor Tobore Ede. Professor Ede who is the oil company's Development Officer arrives the meeting in a provocative manner. Authorial discussion pays adequate attention to details by unfurling the extravagant appearance of Professor Ede:

He dressed flamboyant in a flowing robe made of expensive brocade. That robe would cost more than one student's annual school fees, its embroidery alone would take care of a senior student's recommended books for the entire year. He came in chauffeur - driven; ensconced at the right back seat....

The driver jumped out to open the door for the don to come out. The driver carried his bag after him as if he was his personal servant (177).

The professor typifies the indigenous individuals who join the exploitation of the Niger Delta people. Instead of helping to assuage the people's ill feelings, he collaborates with the oppressors to further dehumanize the people. It is worthy of note that his death in the hands of the angry students is a triumph of revolutionary change over injustice and exploitation. His speech to the students is highly provocative as it unfolds his arrogance and boastfulness without sympathy for the masses. He believes:

The villagers set their village on fire because they wanted to extort money from Bell Oil Company. People have become lazy and want an easy way to make money.... The villagers only sit at home drinking illicit gin and playing both draft and eko games.... The mere fact of oil pipeline passing through their village has made them feel entitled to earn huge sums of money without work.... They are all arsonists (178).

Owing to the foregoing evil, resistance is the only way to remedy the appalling situation. The oppression in the Niger Delta region is assuming a frightening dimension. Except the people redirect their frustration from anguish to quest for freedom through every means necessary, the oil companies and Nigerian state will not stop the oppression. As represented in *The Activist*, the exploitation of the people continues as the school authorities taxed the students to pay for properties damaged during protest Bell Oil but alas, the monies realized by the school management was corruptly swindled by the school authorities. Tanure Ojaide shows his utter disgust:

All students were fined a huge sum of money to compensate the family of the burnt community development officer and to make repairs in the university resulting from the riot, as it was described.... Nothing was paid out of the students' levy to the family of Professor Ede after the university authorities assured themselves that it was Bell Oil's responsibility to compensate his family since he was on their assignment and died on active duty for them and not for the university (182).

However, Tanure Ojaide believes that this exploitative tendency will not persist for long; hence, he advocates for change. The change could result either through act of violence by the people as demonstrated by the university students or through sensitization as seen in the Activist's speech in Washington, United States of America, "Together we will always be strong and win our struggle as true Niger Delta people" (322). What encourages exploitation is bad socio-economic structure of the society. As depicted in *The Activist* (2006), it is the wide economic margin that gives rise to exploitation. Women played a legendary role in this novel. In Nigeria's history, women have always contributed to the socio-economic and political growth of the nation. Women like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, and Queen Idia, resisted and revolted against oppression. Tanure Ojaide in *The Activist* (2006) utilized the power of womanhood in preaching the need for revolutionary change in the Niger Delta. Ebi, the wife of The Activist, is helpful in mobilizing them to protest against the government and oil companies. Her contribution to *The Patriot*, a newspaper established by her husband, The Activist, is seen as she inspires the women to fight for freedom in their society. In the words of the narrator, "The women were now very aware of the threat of oil fire to their lives... The women held a meeting to use their naked strength against the tyrants.... The women felt their people have endured enough of tyranny

and now they must use their last means of power, a nude march, to defend themselves" (244 & 245).

The formation of Women of the Delta Forum (WODEFOR) serves as an avenue where the women join to speak the voice of resistance, "They would look for ways to talk to the oil companies to persuade them to arrest the deteriorating environmental situation in the Niger Delta.... They would have to confront those ruining them and the environment with the power they possessed" (223 & 224). Mrs Timi Taylor as the head of WODEFOR outlines the effect of oil exploration as it affects the women to include infertility, malformed babies, early menstruation, impotency, early menopause, sexual exploitation, and other diseases because of the poisoning of the environment by the oil companies in collaboration with the Nigerian rulers. The women in WODEFOR, agreeing to use their nakedness against the tyrants, can be likened to the countless nude protests of various Niger Delta women groups in Oporoza, Gbaramatu, Ugborodo, Aboh, all in Delta State, against the Nigerian government and oil companies. According to the women group, only women who have reached their menopause would strip to their waist, "This was in keeping with traditional practice of cursing the oppressor" (244). Women were mobilized throughout communities in Niger Delta to participate in the protest. Though the protests do not take place, it shows to the world, the government and oil companies disregard for Niger Delta people:

The world was denied the spectacle of a naked parade of old women before the oil terminal and the nearby flow station. Mask-wearing navy personnel with the assistance of retired marines kept by Bell Oil...overwhelmed the island with teargas.... Every exposed person was dazed and the women and pressmen became drowsy and sleepy (251).

It is gratifying to note that despite the attitude of the oil companies and government, the women were not discouraged as Ebi opines, "God and our ancestors are not sleeping, they are witness! Let those who assaulted us know the crime they have committed ... 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" (252). Note the report of Mrs. Timi Taylor, while addressing a news conference, she mentions the negative situations in Niger Delta and the role of the women in changing their predicament. Her report of the abuse:

Mrs. Taylor then took over to talk about the water, air, and soil that had been contaminated by the oil exploitation; she repeated all the known atrocities of the devils, as she now called Bell Oil and the other oil companies. She said that she wanted to let the world know that the Niger Delta women will not give up their struggle until positive change come. She invoked the patron goddess of women, Umalokun, to avenge the rape and humiliation of women during the protest (252).

The women quest for change and the negative attitude of the security personnel on the order of Bell Oil leading to the death of Mr. Van Hoort and General Mustapha Ali Dongo are an acclamation that the women's protest succeeded in replacing tyranny with justice as the principal actors involved in the region's debasement died:

Exactly two weeks after the aborted nude protest, the death of the head of the FMG, General Mustapha Ali Dongo in weird circumstance, meant the women stripping protest that was thought aborted had worked.... The women's thoughtfully planned action was fulfilled cosmically - they brought down tyrants that their men failed to remove. The

two tyrants that tormented the Niger Delta people were gone!
(252-253).

The above illustration shows that the author is out to demonstrate that the idea of silence in the face of oppression should be discouraged, because it is inimical to the progress of the Niger Delta region. Rather, the people irrespective of sex, tribe, religion, and political affiliation should reject their subjugation and fight for freedom. Looting of public treasury in recent times by people in position of authority has become rampant and is now a source of worry to the populace and writers alike. While government officials swim in ill-gotten wealth, the people wallow in squalor. This is one of the issues confronting the Niger Delta people. A typical example of looting in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* is seen when the people of Eni behead their traditional ruler for fraudulent mismanagement of the funds provided by the oil company to the community, "Area boys of Eni, a neighbouring clan, had beheaded their traditional ruler after accusing him of keeping for himself what O&G Company give to the entire community. The news had sent shock waves all over the oil-producing area" (297). The writer also takes a swipe at the Niger Delta chiefs and traditional rulers who embezzle and misuse public properties. The writer denounces the knack for looting public funds provided by oil companies by highly placed individuals. We appreciate the inspiring role of Chief Ishaka to revolt by exposing the thieving gang:

In cases like this...Let your Royal Highness make a public statement. Either it is true or false.... I respect our royal father, but my withdrawing words I have spoken will not help in this matter. I stand by my words.... Chief Ishaka was not ready to lay the matter to rest. He wanted the relationship between the oil companies and the council of chiefs to be resolved once and for all. Why should money bags be brought to the king

and his chiefs instead of that money to be used to develop the community? (297 & 298 & 299).

This act affects the people as the commonwealth of the community is diverted by persons in high position. In Niger Delta, looting of public resources is given stamp of legality and it is done with utmost secrecy in certain time while at other time, the looters shamelessly use their looted proceeds to further dehumanize the people. As stated earlier, the perpetrators of this looting indulge in it as if it is normal. The above illustration shows that the victims of these dastardly acts are the masses who get nothing at the end of the day. Tanure Ojaide demonstrates in this novel that the idea of, "Soja don steal our money.... Water don pass garri for here.... We dey inside fire. If e no better, na die-o... you no fit be somebody for dis our country unless you steal. All the big men be thief!" (10 & 11) is utter resignation to acts of evil on the part of the masses; rather, they should listen to the advice of Omagbemi and stop the looting spree:

It's because your spoilt generation squandered many opportunities that would have changed the society that we are where we are today.... Your best was not good enough. You received so much and gave back nothing. We have to change things.... We are ready to take matters into our own hands and turn things around for the general good. The country needs a revolution (168).

Having known how their resources are looted by persons in authority, and government failure to stop the evil act, the people revolt against the government and oil companies in the Niger Delta region. So, for peace to reign, the government must stop the looting of Niger Delta wealth to avoid further violence in the region.

Like other revolutionary agents - Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, The Activist sets out on a revolutionary quest as he uses every platform to inculcate his revolutionary mission by establishing *The Patriot*, a newspaper with the motto, "Justice and Humanity for the People" (262). He desires a government position where he can serve the people and affect their lives positively. Note The Activist's use of the available resources to effect change:

He came down to fight the gubernatorial race in the state where he had been very active... it would be a great opportunity, if elected, for him to show accountability to his own people. The Activist brought together his resources in the Delta Cartel, the Patriot, and relationship with the Egba boys, the students, and university to wage a vigorous campaign (313 & 315).

It is instructive to note that most of the political elites from the Niger Delta region are not utilizing their political sagacity in effecting changes in the region; they are merely appendages of other ethnic groups perpetuating economic and environmental injustice in the region.

Pere in *The Activist* is a contrast to the Niger Delta political elites who due to their selfish act inflict untold hardship on the masses while they can afford to live in ostentation. Therefore, when people like Pere or other Niger Delta activists react or protest the situation on ground, they are only being compelled to do so by their perilous situation and according to Tanure Ojaide, it is necessary, and it seems to be normal. Pere's use of good leadership skill to inspire his people for change, he shows the ideal political leadership which is absent in the Niger Delta politics:

Pere presided over the area boys like a democratically elected leader.... To him, a leader should give and take, so he made every action taken unanimous, and that endeared him to his followers. Such was the case when there was a discussion about what to do with the criminal disregard of the oil companies in polluting the environment. The area boys wanted to take the matter very far so that the military government and Bell Oil company would be held accountable for their activities in the Niger Delta area (194).

Furthermore, Pere, aware that the United Nations Organization as a political body could help the people, inspires the area boys to petition the agency on the insensitivity of the oil companies and the government. Following the footsteps of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Pere believes that the outside world must be notified:

They were fighters attempting not only to reclaim what had been robbed from them but also holding firmly to what was theirs that others were attempting to snatch away.... The area boys were preparing to send a petition to both the United Nations in New York and another one to the headquarters of the Anglo-Dutch Oil Company in Amsterdam. They realized that the more groups they were able to involve in the petition, the better their chances of grabbing the attention of the outside world to embarrass their exploiters and tormentors (46 & 195).

The Nigerian state and oil companies operating in the Niger Delta oftentimes exhibit negative politics as a quota system is used to employ workers in oil companies whereby the owners of the land that give the country her wealth is degraded with offers of menial jobs like security personnel, gardener, cook, housemaid, electrician, while

people from non-oil producing areas are placed in strategic positions in the oil sector:

Since they had population advantage, the people of those states enjoyed the oil prosperity at the expense of the hard-toiling farmers, fishermen, and women whose lands, water, and air are polluted by oil slicks, blowouts, and permanent flares that made hell a daily experience of the Niger Delta people.... The government and oil corporations brought in people from other states to fill the jobs in the industry that was destroying not only their environment but also the source of livelihood (49).

The Activist is a political novel where the novelist highlights the degrading plight of the poor masses in the Niger Delta. The most prominent character in the novel, The Activist, symbolizes the needed revolutionary transformation in the Niger Delta. His characterization uplifts the mindset of the people as he uses his intellectual and political ingenuity in upturning injustice in the society. To *The Activist*, he must rise and dethrone evil rulers who misdirect the progress of his people, "The Activist brought major changes to the state government. He had taken his office as a challenge.... He created a Ministry of Environmental and Mineral Matters to deal with many of the problems of the Niger Delta" (318). Prior to assuming governorship position, The Activist, like a good politician, outlines his plans for the people. He wants a place where the natural resources will be used for the region's benefit:

He talked about his plan to make the people prosper from their natural resources. He would set up industries that would make use of their water, their soil, and plants. He would establish an oil-prospecting company to compete with

the foreign ones and make Niger Delta educated men and women use their education to drill oil in the land (316).

Tanure Ojaide's main theme in this novel is to place oppression and injustice in Niger Delta on the pedestal of ideas and patriotic vocation. The novel shows the oppression in Niger Delta as well as putting forth ways on how the people and their environment can be redeemed from the cloak of man-made devastation which is resistance and revolting against the Nigerian state and oil companies which is an alternative means of recreating a better Niger Delta society.

Tanure Ojaide's desire in this novel is to help reconstruct the fate of the people. Here he corroborates Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's (1972:47) summation that, a writer responds, with its total personality to a social environment which changes all the time." Omafume Onoge (1985:44), on his part, asserts the need for art to evolve the exploited in the society from literary activism to literary revolution. According to Onoge, "The political criterion of excellent art is art which serves the struggle of the people against oppression." With Tanure Ojaide's portrayal of Niger Delta in his novel, politicians and other highly placed individuals who are oftentimes indigenes of the various host communities harboring oil installation usually hijack jobs meant for their people and instead give out the jobs to their cronies and political associates. On the other hand, people who could afford to buy jobs are made to become slaves in the hands of the oil expatriates and their Nigerian collaborators:

Young female graduates, who had been jobless after completing their national service, were recruited to serve tea at ten in the morning and at four o'clock in the afternoon to the staff that closed from work at five. Such ladies, picked for their beauty or other forms of appeal, were paid heavily and they made contacts with the expatriate and Nigerian senior

staff that resulted in a busy social life after office hours. This measure benefited all concerned (209).

The Niger Delta people are subjected to terrifying and inhuman treatment as second-class citizens on the ground that they are 'unfortunate people' who hail from a politically disadvantaged area of Nigeria.

The violence seen presently in the Niger Delta is a result of years of silence punctured by the Ogoni uprising which lasted between 1990 and 1995. This period marked a rebirth on the part of the people of the Niger Delta. With all these negative reflections on the poor state of the region, resistance by the people becomes inevitable and is recommended as an imperative to salvage their situation. In *The Activist*, the area boys are constantly harassed by security agents who accuse them of participating in oil bunkering. The security personnel who are placed in the Niger Delta region also engage in the same act of oil bunkering. So, Pere insisted on joining the oil bunkering business to express his anger with the Niger Delta situation:

Pere also learnt that many of the top military officers were involved in the bunkering. The head of the military junta was himself a bunkering chieftain. He had associates who did the job for him to enjoy the huge profits.... Pere saw petroleum as his own property forcibly taken away from him. He was going to set up a business to reclaim his birthright. Call it illegal business, smuggling, stealing, or bunkering, he did not care what dirty names you called it. (136 & 137).

On his part, *The Activist* sees oil bunkering as a form of revolt by the people against injustice perpetuated by the oil companies and Nigerian government, "The Activist saw bunkering as a weapon against the two principal outsiders that were robbing and destroying the people

of the Niger Delta" (140). Therefore, Pere and the area boys, in anger, resort to the gods to help them fight the oppressors, "They were dedicated to Egba, the god of war that helped his devotees to take back what has been forcibly taken from them. Egba was also a god of revenge and restitution" (46).

The lynching of Professor Tobore Ede by the students is a testimony to the fact that anger and injustice can instigate violence through resistance and revolt. Onome Okpako (2012:28) reminds us of the inevitable revolution in the Niger Delta, "Very soon, not far from now, the gathering storm in the Delta will burst and the oppressors will be destroyed. If the people sleep without food while the government and oil companies steal and amass wealth belonging to the people, the region is drifting into an arena of revolution and bloodshed." The following passage unfolds how the Professor was murdered by the students:

By insulting the entire community A group of students forced a tire over the don's neck. All of a sudden the ebullient don had become a sacrificial animal that was bound and helpless. The students dragged him outside to open field, filled the tyre with petrol, and set him ablaze.... This incident was the first case of neck-lacing in the area (179 & 180).

Bell Oil Company's appointment of Colonel Samson Dudu to replace Professor Tobore Ede does not change the bad situation; rather, the retired colonel from the northern part of the country exhibits the majority tribe viewpoint on the oppressed minorities, "You must be joking. Do you want my company to build you a new village? Prepare five cups of tea. Also bring biscuit for these gentlemen.... That is what I have for you" (185). The sudden death of the colonel further shows that oppression cannot last forever, rather, the people usually triumph over oppression.

The participation of the Activist in a protest march in New York supports the notion that by joining the protest, the Activist has raised the awareness of the people to demand justice, fairness and equality as placards in the protest arena have inscriptions like, "NO TO THIEVES, STOP IMPOVERISHING THE REST OF THE WORLD, AND LET OTHERS ALSO LIVE" (323). It is obvious from the foregoing that the Nigerian state and oil companies are not ready to tolerate any form of protest in the region, but it will be suicidal for the Niger Delta people to be silent. The masses in the region must show determination and utmost resilience to fight until the area is fully positioned with adequate infrastructural and human development,

Conclusion

Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* offers a compelling literary examination of resistance and uprising in the face of systemic oppression, environmental degradation, and corruption in the Niger Delta. Through vivid characterization, symbolic narratives, and a fusion of realism and ideology, Tanure Ojaide crafts a powerful portrayal of the people's collective struggle against both foreign exploitation and domestic betrayal. The novel not only highlights the resilience of marginalized communities but also underscores the transformative potential of organized activism and intellectual engagement.

Ultimately, *The Activist* stands as a creative and political statement, challenging the status quo and advocating for justice, equity and national renewal. This study validates that literature in Tanure Ojaide's standpoint, becomes a vehicle for resistance and a voice for the voiceless in postcolonial Africa.

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