



Fiction, Conflict and the Niger Delta: An Examination of Tanure Ojaide's *the Activist* and Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*

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Abstract

In this intellectual exercise, an attempt is made to critically examine the various issues that have arisen between the major protagonists in two fictional narratives by two novelists from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These issues of conflict between the natives of this region and those engaged in the crude oil exploration in addition to other sundry issues have become the fulcrum of thematic concerns, which Isidore Okpewho and Tanure Ojaide have explored in *Tides* and *The Activist* respectively. In this research, the comparative analysis of these two novels has thus brought to the fore the various levels of conflicts of the major protagonists in them and their efforts to navigate through the mirages of daily existence in their imaginary environments. The importance of this paper is to highlight the various conflicts of interest, which these novelists have discussed in their novels. The comparative study of these fictional prose narratives by two novelists who are clans' men from two different generations, has added to the corpus of literary critical discourse of the Nigerian novel. The adoption of the tenets of the theory of historicism in the analysis of the novels has also opened a new vista in the literary interpretation of *Tides* and *The Activist*. Finally, the two writers have used these novels to expose to the reading audience the usefulness of fiction as a vehicle for the discussion of the conflicts that are present in the homestead of the novelists.

Introduction

The literature that is identifiable with the geographical entity known as the Niger Delta of Nigeria is unique. The uniqueness stems from the peculiar nature of its thematic concern. The various literary exponents who mainly come from this environment have discussed very observable obnoxious issues. Either in the forms of prose narratives or poetic expressions, these writers have focused their attention on the ecological disorders that have arisen from the exploration of crude oil by the various International Oil Companies (IOC). Their activities have regularly brought economic hardships to the local people as a result of the frequent destruction of the ecosystem of the riverine communities. The frequent crude oil pollution resulting



from the damaged pipelines and other misdemeanours of the workers of these companies have led to a humongous loss of income for the indigenous people, who are predominantly farmers and fishermen. As expected, the locals carry out protests frequently, both violent and peaceful, as ways of showing their displeasure. These result in conflicts. These conflicts are regularly between the indigenous people of the region on the one hand and the workers of these exploration companies who collaborate actively with the agents of the various levels of government and some elites of the communities. These enduring spectacles form most of the thematic interests of the poets and novelists from the Niger Delta region. It is the mutualistic relationship between the works of fiction by two novelists and the various conflicts in their prose narratives that will be of interest in this research.

This paper aims at establishing a relationship between the conflict of interest between the fictional characters in the selected novels and the various animosities and clashes that exist in the realistic Niger Delta domain. The incidences of disagreement that exist between the local people on the one side of the coin, and the foreign expatriates of the crude oil companies with their local collaborators on the flip side of the coin, command a reasonable attention of these novelists. It is an evergreen observation that works of literature mirror the events in the society of the writer. Therefore, these novels discuss the conflicts between the major protagonists in their fictional environments and, by extension, showcase the real human situations in the region. The scope of this discourse shall cover extensively Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*. This research will establish the continuous relevance of the engagements of the fictional characters in these novels vis-a-vis the perennial imbroglios prevailing in the riverine communities of the Niger delta between the indigenous people and the perpetrators of evil against the ecosystem of the region. Perhaps, it is unique that these writers, who are from this region, have experienced first-hand the economic predicaments of their people as a result of crude oil explorations and the environmental catastrophes occasioned by the same activity. They have thus highlighted some of these features in their prose narratives.

These novelists have explored other creative skills in their literary journeys. Tanure Ojaide has published a non-fiction titled *Great Boys: An African Childhood* and a long list of poetry collections. The thematic considerations in most of these poems are the events taking place in his homestead, the Niger Delta. He has also carried out extensive studies on the folklore of his Urhobo people in Delta State of Nigeria. In his robust repertoire, he has also churned out an appreciable collection of literary critical works that include *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa* and *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka*. His childhood experiences under the tutelage of his grandmother must have influenced the content of the novel *The Activists* and his extensive research on the culture and tradition of his Urhobo people. In the same manner, the late Isidore

Okpewho was from Abraka in Delta State of an Urhobo father and an Igbo mother. He was an accomplished lecturer of creative writing, a novelist, a pioneer researcher in the field of Oral Literature on the African continent, and a foremost literary critic and classicist. Despite his creative exploits in the prose fiction, *The Last Duty*, *Tides* and *Call me by my Rightful Name*, he has shown a remarkable scholarship in *The Epic in Africa* and *Myth in Africa*, two intensely researched works on Oral Literature. He was a recipient of the most distinguished award for intellectual achievement in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM) in Humanities. Tanure Ojaide and the late Isidore Okpewho thus share the same Urhobo ancestry as two of a kind. It is the fictional works of these kinsmen that discuss the major causes of conflicts in their homelands that will be of interest in this research paper. The choice of the two novelists is thus deliberate.

Background of the Study

Works of literature have various genres, of which fiction constitutes a part. Nadine Gordimer in her article titled ‘Fiction, morals and politics’ defines fiction from the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘the action of feigning or inventing imaginary existences, events, states of things... prose novels and stories collectively’ (115) she slightly disagrees with this narrow definition and believes that poetry should be classified as fiction. She reasons that “if fiction is the supranatural spirit of the imagination, then poetry is the ultimate fiction. In speaking of fiction, I should be understood to be including poetry” (115). My acceptance of the definition of fiction however differs from hers. It is a story that appears in the form of a novel, consisting of protagonists, imaginary events and environments. It is Frank Kermode who in his essay titled *The Sense of an Ending* as quoted by Chinua Achebe expresses the view that fiction is “something we know does not exist but which helps us to make sense of, and move in, the world” (Achebe,106). Also, Achebe’s opinion of what fiction should be is not farfetched. He sees a work of fictional expression as imaginative literature which “does not enslave (but) liberates the mind of man... It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and humane conscience. The selected novels represent imaginary storylines that create awareness of the various imaginary conflicts that are semblances of real situations. These novels which are predominantly set in the Niger delta capture the economic and environmental predicaments of the people who struggle daily to survive in the midst of plenty. These fictional writers use imaginary settings to depict the evils that are continually been committed against the people of the indigenous riverine communities to the advantage of the Nigerian nation. These novelists thus use their storylines to arouse pity and condemnation from the readers.

The enclave popularly referred to as the Niger delta is the hotbed of economic activities that produce the barrels of “black gold” that sustain the economy of the



Nigerian state. This locality contains a large number of communities (apart from the few cities) scattered in the creeks. This is “the delta of the Niger River directly on the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria” (wikipedia.org). This consists of the six states in the enclave classified as the South-South geopolitical zone, inclusive of Ondo state and Imo state in the South-West and South-East respectively. The recorded history of the area dates back to 1885 when it was considered the British Oil Rivers Protectorate and in 1893 it earned the appellation of the Niger Coast Protectorate. Due to the presence of a large reservoir of crude oil in this environment, there have been several decades of conflicts and confrontations between the local people and the expatriates of the crude oil exploration companies whose activities have destroyed the ecosystem and the economic activities of the natives. The late Adaka Boro and late Ken Saro-Wiwa remain cult heroes of the demand by the Niger Deltans for equity and justice in the exploitative activities of these economic vampires. It was as a result of these unending conflicts that led to the creation by the federal government, the Niger Delta Development Commission and later the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and the economic derivation formula that dedicates thirteen percent of the total revenue from crude oil sales to the states in the region for infrastructural developments. Some writers of fiction, drama and poetry from this domain have churned out many creative materials to depict the politics, injustices, conflicts and environmental disasters occasioned by the crude oil production in their homelands. Writers like the late Isidore Okpewho, Odia Ofeimun, Ogaga Ifowodo, Ojaide Tanure, Kaine Agary, Tony E. Afejuku, Nnimo Bassey, G. G. Darah and late Ken Saro-Wiwa amongst others have used their literary impetus to draw attention to all of the above. Of significance in this paper are the fictional narratives of Isidore Okpewho, and Tanure Oajide in *Tides*, and *The Activist* respectively. It is Nadine Gordimer who in her paper titled “*Three in a Bed: Fiction, Morals and Politics*” posits that “great art in fiction can evolve in imaginative revelation to fit the crises of an age...” (115). The crisis of an age as in the Niger delta is the frequent conflicts surrounding the exploration activities in the region.

In “Gender Discourse and the Portraiture of Women Activism in Tanure Ojaide *The Activist*,” the duo of Umezina Jennifer and Yakubu Patience outline the feminine activism of the major female character, Ebi Emasheyi, the wife of the male protagonist. They detail the activities of a frontline female academician who jointly works with other women under the umbrella organization known as WODEFOR (Women of the Niger Delta Forum) to galvanise the women of the region for positive agitations. The two literary critics analyse this novel using the Feminine Literary theory and the Critical Discourse Analysis mode as instruments of literary criticism. They use various sub-themes that are focused towards feminist struggles and emancipation, and they arrive at the conclusion that these fictional women through their activisms succeed in expressing their dissatisfaction with the ill-treatment the

natives of the region are subjected to by the international oil companies exploring for crude oil. In his literary criticism of *The Activist*, Ekanpon Enewaridideke portrays the novel as containing inaccuracies in its imaginative storyline. He feels that the novelist's use of historical events in the crafting of the novel is flawed. In his criticism of *The Activist* Enewaridideke identifies various pitfalls that point in the direction of poor literary craftsmanship on the part of Ojaide. This includes the novelist's numerous derogatory allusions in the prose fiction that cast the people of the Niger Delta in a bad light. He opines that Ojaide's "transformations of the Activist from a university lecturer to activist and activist to illegal bunkering mogul, from a multi-million-naira illegal bunkerer to the Governor of Niger Delta State", will not lead to any positive development in the fictional Niger Delta domain. The critic justifies this by concluding that "a state governor does not have the required range of power to solve the problems of the Niger Delta people created by Bell Oil Company and the military government". Therefore, according to the critic, "Ojaide's *The Activist* is viewed as a celebration of spikes, nothingness and artistic failure because nothing can give rise to something". Despite the above literary critical investigations into *The Activist*, many other scholars have analysed it within the context of the eco-critical theoretical framework. However, within the context of this research, it is the fictional conflicts between the fictional characters in the novels, who are caricature representatives of the real personalities in the riverine communities that will be of interest.

Nwanyanwu Augustine in his analysis of *Tides* repeats the popular opinion of literary critics that *Tides* should be consigned to the eco-critical inquest. My view is that a work of fiction can be subjected to multiple literary interpretations. However, in Nwanyanwu's critical interrogation of the novel, he sees the creeks and swamps as symbolic representations of the environment and also the "cultural memory and ethnic identity" of the people. In tracing the environmental problems of the region, he identifies what he calls "apocalyptic vision" which influences the ways the fictional personalities respond to the environmental issues in the novel. He however fails to discuss the various conflicts between the major characters in the novel who are on different sides of the conflict. Andrew I. Nwagbara in *Politics, Rebellious Agitation and the Nigerian Fiction: An Overview of Isidore Okpewho's Tides* takes a look at the relationship that exists between the politics surrounding the crude oil exploration in the Niger delta and the restive responses of the fictional characters in *Tides*. In the paper, he looks at the manner of involvement of politics in the destruction of the ecosystem of the area and how one of the three protagonists Harrison deploys violence as his own response to the ill-treatment of his people. Nwagbara's emphasis here is the link between politics and rebellious agitations among the major protagonists in *Tides*. There is no nexus between fiction and conflict situations in the actions of the major characters in *Tides* in his research paper.



The application of the theory of new historicism will aid the textual analysis of these two novels. Literary critics may have adopted other literary critical apparatus in doing comparative studies of these novels. The new historicism literary approach is a crucial instrument in dissecting these fictional narratives due to the fusing of facts and historical materials in their crafting by Isidore Okpewho and Tanure Ojaide. This approach which is attributed to the Americans was initiated by German writers in the eighteenth century and it extended to the twentieth century. Stephen Greenblatt is famous for having written extensively on new historicism which he frequently referred to as cultural poetics. (Akidi, 298). His intellectual exploit of new historicism was recorded in his Introduction to a Special Edition of *Genre*, Vol. 15 published in 1982. This theory has come under various names like “historical method” and the proponents “constantly interrogate the relationship between history and literature rather than making dogmatic assertions” (Cuddon, 470). J. A. Cuddon observes that new historicism is associated with research being done in two periods in English literature – the Renaissance and the Romantic. He also asserted that the new historicists are opposed to the tenets of pure formalism, structuralism, post-structuralism and hermeneutics as approaches to literary criticism. According to the duo of Abrams and Harpham, “in place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meaning, its effects and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations” (244). These scholars see new historicists as literary critics who view a literary text as being encapsulated “within the totality of the institutions, social practices and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and space” (Cuddon, 244). Felista Akidi agrees with Cuddon when she posits that “new historicism tends to approach literature in a broader way through its historical context, x-raying how time affects the work of literature and how the work reflects the writer’s time” (Akidi, 299). The novels chosen for this research, *The Activist* and *Tides* have discussed the social activities and the various institutions existing within the Niger Delta region and how these have caused disagreements between the fictional characters. The use of this literary approach in the comparative studies of these novels will open new vistas in their literary discourse.

An Examination of Various Moments of Conflicts in *the Activist* and *Tides*

At the inception of *The Activist*, the reader wrongly assumes that Moses Odafetanure Ojaide, a human rights activist, poet and intense environmentalist will be reeling out the diaspora experiences of a fictional personality. This compelling writer of prose fiction, poetry and folklore shares the same kindred spirituality with Odia Ofeimun, Isidore Okpewho and many others in using this prose narration to express his dismay at the level of conflicts taking place in his home land, Niger delta; conflicts that emanate from the injustices suffered by the folks of the area in the hands of the

government officials, the elites of the local environment and the workers of the oil producing companies. Sunny Awhefeada observes that Ojaide thinks that “the region (is) a wasteland occasioned by the greed of the ruling elite and the rapacious oil multinationals”. The same Awhefeada also thinks that “his fictional narratives resonate with the concerns of his poetic representations”. The literary critic Sunny Awhefeada concluded that Ojaide in this novel “retells much of his poetic preoccupation with the Niger Delta homeland and the exigency of retrieving the region from the grip of its despoiler” (<http://guardian.ng>). These despoilers are engaged in the intractable political and economic conflicts of selfishness and exploitation. It is the activities of these self-centred people that Ojaide explores in this novel. In doing this, he uses fictional personalities and a fictional Niger delta domain as the setting. These imaginary characters include the workers of “Bell Oil and the other oil companies (that) had been given a free hand by the military rulers to do all it took to continue increasing production. While that meant more money in the government coffers to sustain the dictatorship, it also meant total disregard of the Niger Delta people and their environment” (Ojaide, 53-54). Despite Ojaide telling the story of what transpired during the military era, this timeless event continues to date. As this imaginary scenario breeds conflict in the novel, the real Niger Delta region has had no peace because of similar collaborative activities of the officials of the government and the multinational crude oil exploration companies.

Isidore Okpewho in *Tides* uses the epistolary literary technique to discuss a major thematic interest in the novel which is the crisis deriving from the exploration of crude oil in an imaginary Niger delta. He uses Piriye Dukumo, Tonwe Brisibe and Noble Harrison Ebika as the troika whose fictional activities in the novel throw light on the disagreements resulting from the crude oil exploration in the riverine communities of the region. The novelist engages the threesome protagonists fully by distributing the activities in the two settings among them. In using two settings; Lagos and Beniotu (a Niger Delta community), Okpewho achieves an effective foregrounding for the novel. It is the actions of the government officials in Lagos, the nation’s capital then, that bring about the violence in the Niger Delta communities. Without much ado, Okpewho establishes the twin reasons for the conflicts in the novel, “the Kwarafa Dam which has severely reduced the volume of water flowing down the Niger and so curtailed the fishing activity in the Delta... and the spillage of crude petroleum from oil rigs” (Okpewho 27) which have both destroyed the aquatic businesses of the people, especially fishing, farming. The novelist further fictionalises the criminal activities of the frustrated youths of the communities who adopt “The kidnapping of expatriates working in the oil companies...” (59) as their favourite pastime. At a point in the history of the oil-producing communities in Nigeria, the kidnapping of expatriates and senior staff of Nigerian origin working for the oil companies for ransom was the order of the day.



The novelist uses this work of fiction to discuss realistic situations in the Niger Delta region.

In Ojaide's *The Activist*, similar situations and events as in *Tides* play out. The area boys in this fictional domain see the staff of Bell Oil Company and indeed all multinational oil exploration companies as enemies of the common people and this is a precursor to violence. These companies are blamed for the "oil spillage, blow, and gas flares. To the area boys, Bell Oil Company stole their wealth to develop its owner's countries overseas and left them impoverished... "(Ojaide, 76-77). It is appalling situations like these that precipitate the conflicts between the natives and these workers. The dimension of the conflict is expansive in scope. The "Americans had joined hands with their local enemies, the oil companies and the military government, whose activities destroyed the people and their environment by spreading fire all over the oil-producing region" (77). The common people however see the major male protagonist, the Activist as not being different from their oppressors after all; he is a retiree from the United States who has imbibed the culture of the Americans. He does not fit the description of someone that they can trust "in their struggle against multinational companies and the federal military Government for sovereignty over their natural resources" (80). This impression of the locals turns out to be true; the Activist subsequently becomes a "thief of crude oil", who becomes so rich from crude oil bunkering. But Ebi Emasheyi the major female protagonist understands the agonies of their people. She is surprised at the helpless manner of the indigenous people "watch their waters turn to poison, their land becomes crust from blowouts and the air become hot from poisonous gas. They do nothing to stop the lands that want to strangle them..." (103). It is the reactions of the natives to these contentious actions that result in conflicts.

Okpewho in *Tides* uses the two settings of Lagos and Beniotu simultaneously in the novel to sustain the flow of the narrative. The duo of Piriye and Tonwe worked as journalists with the National Chronicles newspaper in Lagos and lost their exalted positions as Editor and Editor-in-Chief respectively due to ethnic rivalry. Their joint desire to write a book becomes the novelist's avenue to expose the evil practices of the international oil companies and their government collaborators in the region. The animosity and restiveness between the groups on either side of the coin become exacerbated when a group of fishermen in Ebrima (a little community close to Beniotu) decide to lodge a complaint to the expatriates working for the Atlantic Fuels about the problems the fishermen encounter in their fish farming due to "the enormous search-lights which they train on the waters around their offshore rig (that) were drawing the fish away" (11). The harsh response from the foreign engineer remains instructive; "Did the inconvenience suffered by a few scruffy fishermen matter to the general prosperity which oil had brought to Nigeria"? (Okpewho, 12).

It is the arrogant nature of such foreign workers that upscale the conflicts in this fictional narrative. Worse still, “the Commander of a division of the Navy stationed in Warri... charged specifically with ensuring the security of oil exploration in the Niger Delta” (Okpewho,13) at the invitation of the expatriate engineer orders his men to physically assault these local fishermen and “spray the waters close to the canoe with a welter of bullets” (Okpewho,13). The above scenario also plays out in *The Activist*. There is an “oil blow out, exacerbated by a pipe leakage and fuelled by gas flares” (Ojaide, 126) that throws the Ekakpamre people into an unprecedented state of anxiety and anguish. In the ensuing imbroglio, the students of the Niger Delta University and the women of the affected communities choose the path of a peaceful protest to register their anger. As in *Tides*, soldiers who are agents of the federal government at the invitation of the staff of Bell Oil Company, attack these peaceful protesters; “... several protesters were shot dead...” (Ojaide 263). This action reinforces the opinion of the fictional characters in *The Activist* that the interest of the government is to kill “its own people to protect foreigners duping it of billions of dollars...” (Ojaide, 265). A similar protest by harmless nude old women receives a similar treatment. These helpless villagers, resort to a spiritual atonement, the court of their ancestors. They claim that “God and our ancestors are not sleeping, they are witnesses” (Ojaide, 273). The response to their cosmic appeals is swift. The news of the death of Mr Van Hoot, the Managing Director of Bell Oil Company and the head of the government-led military assault team some days later is attributed to the punishment of the gods.

In *The Activist* Ojaide, despite the involvements of the two major protagonists, the Activist and Ebi, engages the “Egba Boys” (the local military group) that “evokes mass hysteria” (55). They serve as the representatives of the native god of war, revenge and restriction. After their usefulness during the Nigerian-Biafra civil war, they transformed into ‘area boys’ who constitute the militant group in the community. The first reason for their anger is the penchant for the government and oil companies to continually import people from other regions of the nation:

to fill the jobs in the industry that was destroying not only their environment but also their sources of livelihood... The area boys saw themselves as a reject caste thrown out of their paradise that had become a heaven for others. They were a bitter group and they would die to wrestle a few naira from the outsiders (Ojaide, 58).

This is a repeated scenario in the real Niger delta region and a major source of agitation and conflict.



Earlier, in trying to seek a vain human solution to a snarl, Ojaide in his prose fiction creates an interface between a stubborn and self-centred local elite, Chief Tobi Ishaka and the General Manager of Bell Oil Company, Mr. Van Hoort. The son of the chief is a qualified petroleum engineer who needs a job in the oil company. For Mr. Van Hoort, offering him a job is a good public relations stunt. “This young man was not only Nigerian but also from the community in which Bell Oil had its operation. He would be highlighted as part of Bell Oil’s effort to bring in bright young men and women of the Niger delta area into its great company...” (Ojaide, 181). For the company’s boss, this will assuage the anger of the people towards the major multinational company. An action like this will douse the tension created by the pollution of the Niger Delta environment by the “outburst of crude oil that easily caught fire” (Ojaide, 192), and burns the entire village. Thus, the palliative given to an individual like Chief Ishaka cannot assuage the anger of the entire community. “The Activist, Pere and his area boys, and the Student Union of the University” (Ojaide, 193) respond to an occupational misdemeanour of the expatriates to embark on several protests. In the usual nature of the foreign staff of these international oil companies, an indigene of a turbulent community becomes a paid emissary of conflict resolution. An indigene, Professor Tobore Ede who serves as a Community Development Officer of the company becomes a sacrificial lamb that dies defending the dastardly act of Bell Oil Company. Colonel Samson Dudu (Rtd.) who replaces him dies mysteriously from “a massive stroke” (Ojaide, 202).

Okpewho in his prose fiction discusses a few political events that resulted from conflict situations in the Niger delta of the remote past and the present time. He uses this to establish a link between the past and the present. Through the protagonist Harrison, the novelist gives the reading audience some information about the conflicts that led to the Nigerian-Biafra civil war. This protagonist assumes the posture of the reincarnated Isaac Boro, a personality of a heroic status in the historical efforts at liberating the people of the region from intractable political conflicts. Harrison wears the toga of Boro and desires to salvage the fictional citizens of his Beniotu homeland from injustices from their common enemies. For him “The fight which Boro started continues, as far as I’m concerned” (21). This fight is not restricted to him alone. The conciliatory requests of the common people are inoffensive. They “are not asking that oil exploration should be completely abandoned” (69). They want the government and the crude oil exploration companies to “guarantee the lives of the citizens of this country and the sources of their livelihood” (70). Okpewho, in this statement, kills two birds with a stone; that of the fictional personalities in the novel and the real citizens of the region.

Gradually, in the course of the storyline, Ojaide turns the major male protagonist, the Activist into an economic criminal, a thief of crude oil. He thus crashes from an

idealist status to the depth of criminality. What does the novelist aim to achieve with this somersault in the portraiture of this eminent intellectual? Despite his plunge into the abyss of economic sabotage, the Activist becomes the Chief Executive Officer of his fictional state, the Niger Delta State. There is, therefore, a conflict in his personality. Ojaide creates a complex personality who at various stages wears the toga of an emotionally depressed sojourner in the United States, a radical intellectual activist of the Niger Delta University, a co-founder of a crude oil bunkering cartel, a politician who becomes the political helmsman of a state in a fictional Niger Delta. In doing this, the novelist paints in an imaginary domain a picture of what transpires in the real Niger Delta environment of Nigeria; where many political leaders have evolved from a semblance of decency to the level of vampirism. The theft of crude oil in the region has been perpetrated by those who subsequently become leaders of the people.

Okpewho in *Tides* addresses a few of the conflicts that have been associated with crude oil exploration in Nigeria. The setting and characterisation unabashedly reflect the conflict of interest between the government and its collaborators in the fictional Lagos and Niger delta societies and the common people of the imaginary Niger delta. On the other hand, Ojaide in using a series of interrelated chapters in the novel discusses various thematic interests that include the various levels of disagreements between the different contending forces. He does not limit his area of interest to violent clashes but digresses from time to time with the love entanglement between the Activist and his wife Ebi Emasheyi. This creates a balance of interest, for the reading audience. The dexterity and the literary skillfulness of Ojaide become obvious in his effective blending of these sub plots in the novel to achieve a free-flow storyline.

Conclusion

In these novels, Ojaide and Okpewho see themselves as the bearers of the moral compass of exposing to the public eye, the conflicts existing in two different imaginary Niger delta societies. In doing this, the duo identifies the devastation of the ecosystem of the riverine communities by the crude oil exploration companies with the active participation of the agents of the government and the local elites. Ojaide and Okpewho in these literary exercises echo the views of Breyten Breytenbach who sees a writer as “the questioner and the implacable critic of the mores and attitudes and myths of his society... also the exponent of the aspirations of his people” (Breytenbach, 166). These two notable novelists have in these novels examined the various conflicts in their common homestead that have gradually become myths. The activities of their major protagonists have been responses to some of the social and economic inequalities that exist between the deprived natives and beneficiaries of the proceeds from the exploration activities going on in the



imaginary communities. In doing this, the novelists from this region face the dilemma of fusing fiction with facts. Therefore, in their narratives, constant references to real situations and individuals cannot be avoided. They have, therefore, discussed familiar conflict situations in the region under the purview of fiction.

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