

## **Social Deprivation in Tony Nwaka's *Lords of The Creek* and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes the impact of corruption on environmental management in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, drawing on existing literature, specifically Tony Nwaka's "Lords of the Creek" and Tanure Ojaide's "The Activist". Adopting Marxism as its theoretical framework, the study highlights the corruption depicted in these prose works. Findings indicate that corruption contributes significantly to environmental degradation in the region. Furthermore, the evident class structure—where the marginalized proletariat grapple with poverty, illness, and death from oil spillages, while the bourgeoisie oppress them—fuels social depravity, leading to vices like kidnapping and subsequent conflict. The study concludes that corruption has grave consequences for the environmental management of the Niger Delta, fostering various vices. It further concludes that the oppression stemming from the class structure provokes the marginalized proletariat to engage in counter-attacks and vices as a means of seeking justice and reclaiming their legitimate benefits.*

**Keywords:** *Niger-Delta literature, Marxism, class structure, environmental degradation.*

### **Introduction**

This paper serves as an informative resource and lends a voice to the issues of corruption and the resultant vices in Nigeria's Niger-Delta region. It posits that these vices are propagated by dishonest conduct, particularly by those in power, referencing Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek* and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*.

The grave repercussions of corruption include social deprivation, which creative writers have captured as the root of various vices like armed robbery, prostitution, civil unrest, and kidnapping. Critics theorize that capitalism and the resulting class structure underpin social deprivation and marginalization. Nwaka's and Ojaide's texts underscore that this social deprivation is a direct product of a class-structured society, which inevitably leads to vice.

In the Niger Delta, the government's continued failure in accountability and development has strained the populace. In response to the need for self-preservation, residents, especially the young and middle-aged, resort to unlawful means to claim their perceived entitlements. Literature, as a reflection of society, mirrors how social negligence culminates in such attendant problems. This paper investigates the impact of corruption on environmental management in the region by examining the motif of social depravity in the two selected texts.

Marxist literary theory is based on the premise that literature reflects a society torn by strife and contradictions, particularly one founded on private ownership of the means of production, where class struggle is inevitable. As defined by Fowler, Marxism is a political philosophy and economic worldview derived from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxist criticism aims to study social environments or literary works from the perspective of inequality, exploitation, class struggle, and power relations.

Eagleton views Marxist criticism as part of a broader analysis aimed at understanding ideologies—the ideas, values, and feelings by which people experience their societies. Its goal is to explain the literary work by attending to its forms, styles, and meanings in relation to social forces and ideology. A central tenet is that the economic base of a society determines the nature and structure of its superstructure (culture, literature, politics, religion). Material conditions, including power, determine life. Marxist critics judge a text by its ability to portray social actions, arguing that literature must be understood in relation to historical and social reality. They believe literature should evoke a revolutionary consciousness.

For Marxist critics, politics and economics are inseparable from art. They argue that writers translate social facts into literary facts, and the critic's duty is to decode these facts and uncover reality. Since the socio-economic

element is the ultimate determinant of a society's character, literature is situated within the base/superstructure and can either maintain the capitalist mode or expose and attack it. This research employs Marxist literary theory for its critical examination of literature as a tool for revolutionary change and its focus on power relations.

### **An Overview of Niger-Delta Literature**

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has emerged to prominence in the literary field largely because of certain unique experiences that have come to distinctly differentiate the people from the larger cycle of society. Perhaps, it will be a crass mistake to advance an exploration in Niger Delta literature without a working definition. By way of defining the peculiar literary oeuvre, Tanure Ojaide in "Defining Niger Delta Literature: Preliminary Perspective on an Emerging Literature" informs that "the terms literature of the Niger Delta and Niger Delta literature are used interchangeably" <sup>(55)</sup>. He further submits that it is a "literature that have been produced by both indigenes of the people of the region" <sup>(55)</sup>. This definition highlights the main construct of this literature. It clearly maps out the interest of the literature as well as the ideology that provides it with its earned rigidity.

The Niger Delta Literature today has in no small way gained critical currency in the Nigerian literary milieu. Indeed, the traditional culture of the people as well as the recurring problems peculiar with the zone, accompanied by the reverberating reflections in literature have sustained the portraiture of the literature. Through the literature, the people have been able to transfer the entire mass of their culture viz products of their tradition from one generation to the other. As one is invited into identifying with the peculiar aesthetics indexed in the literature, the same becomes conscious of the whole oral tradition and art of the people which Isidore Okpewho in "Myth in Africa: A Study of its Aesthetics and Cultural Relevance" rightly views as "the irreducible aesthetics substratum in all varieties of human cultural endeavour [...transferred] from one generation to another" <sup>(69)</sup>.

Uzoечи Nwagbara in "Political Power and Intellectual Activism in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*" agrees that the Niger Delta Literature has a tradition of presenting the ecological and political landscapes of the environment (225). Citing *The Activist*, he confirms that "*The Activist* is a political novel with socialist realist ideas. It constructs the plight of the

downtrodden and marginalised in the Niger Delta.” This commentary immediately hints on some of the thematic foci of the Niger Delta Literature in that it keeps faith with what has been elementally identified as the substances of the unique literature. Indeed, the literary history of the Niger Delta region has been the history of marginalisation, civil unrest and has come to be the history of environmental degradation. Victor Akujuru [56] insists that “the Niger Delta region has become known the world over so much because of the violence prevailing it.” He further dictates that “the present conflict, has long drawn-out history, complicated by the interplay between government officials and multinational oil companies’ attitude and operational modalities” <sup>(56)</sup>. For Oyeniyi Okunoye, his sympathy in the broad corpus of Niger Delta Literature lies with the region's subgenre - poetry. In his paper entitled "Alterity, Marginality and the National Question in the Poetry of the Niger Delta", the critic remarks that the shared experience of the region has continued to catapult its literature to the fore (456).

The recurring themes of exploitation, oppression, marginalisation and resistance among others are shared by the Niger Delta person who sees the regions wealth taken to the federal centre at the expense of those whose lives have been dangerously affected by the oil and gas exploration and exploitation. The writer's vision tends to coincide with the sociopolitical, cultural and economic aspirations of the people of the area thus reflecting the evolving zeitgeist of the people. Therefore, the content and form of the works have the uniqueness that makes them stand out as typically Niger Delta because of the focus on the area and the Niger Delta perspective of viewpoint expressed in them.

It is no longer a mystery that literary creations from the region encapsulate the total experiences that critics have identified as being consistent with the region. Some of these literary texts that take into cognizance the worldview, consciousness, sensibilities, identity, society and landscape of the Niger Delta and earned the credit of being distinguished as Niger Delta Literature include: J.P Clark's *Ozidi Saga* (1966), *The Wives' Revolt* (1991); Ben Okri's *Songs of Enchantment* (1993); Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soza Boy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985); Isidore Okpwho's *Tides* (1993); Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said it* (2002) (formerly published as *Who can Silence the Drums*); Gabriel Okara's *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978); Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966); Ogaga Ifowodo's *The Oil Lamp*

(2005); Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* (2006); Ebi Yeibo's *The Fourth Masquerade* (2014); Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Marsh Boy and Other Poems* (2013); Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976); Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* (2006); Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of Death* (2000); Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought it was Oil but it was Blood* (2002); Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* (2006); Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010); Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek* (2015), among others.

### **Social Deprivation in Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek***

The analysis here shall be based on the subject of class structure as the harbinger of social deprivation which consequently culminates into several vices. The primary focus of the analysis is kidnapping.

In appreciating the motif of kidnapping in Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek*, it is impossible to divorce the subject from the discourse of class struggle. In fact, kidnapping is a direct consequence of the Delta setting rife in class structure. Tony Nwaka, through his creative rendering, presents a fictional society in which the haves and the have-nots are at constant war in the negotiation of supremacy. The text presents an ambience that provides the opportunity for class struggle and its reverberating vice of kidnapping to be conscientiously explored.

The heat associated with kidnapping in the text sits well with the hierarchical and complex infrastructure of inter-ethnic presences. Nwaka presents a fictional Deltan state of Nigeria in which three main ethnic groups are presented, i.e, the Itsekiri, the Ijaws and Urhobo. However, there is a constant rift between two groups - the Itsekiris and Ijaws. The Ijaws are embittered that they are marginalised by the Itsekiris in the negotiation of the state's common wealth. With the society shared into groups by culture; demarcated by interest and differentiated by the eagerness to demonstrate might, Nwaka sets a perimeter upon which the Marxist ideology becomes a dominant subject matter.

At the institutionalised level, the two groups are represented by their youth representative thugs, Tonye of the Ijaw descent and Ajaman of the Itsekiri. With these separate powers and an apparent class structure, then a constant struggle to topple the hierarchical arrangement is inevitable. The text established that “the conflict in the creeks between the force of Tonye and Ajaman was triggered mostly by the economic interests of both combatants”

(Nwaka, 56). The struggle of the Ijaws and consequent clash of the warring zones is a manifestation of class establishment. With the dominant Itsekiri group, the Ijaws, feeling marginalised, are bent on tumbling the supposed positioning that has ensured their seeming inferior status.

Tonye, the respected group leader of the Ijaws, who in no doubt has won his recognised position through consistent show of might, acquisition of light weapons and freedom-fighting troops, estimates the position of his ethnic group to oppression. Rejecting the entreaties of the monarch, Tonye declares, “even the president our own brother, has joined them to oppress us” <sup>(79)</sup>. In his ideology, his ethnic group is clamped down with serious oppression from the bourgeoning class. The class who he identifies as the government at all levels as well as who he considers to be the more preferred and superior ethnic group - the Itsekiris. The narrator observes that for long, Tonye has resolved to fight this subjugated representation by defending the interest of the Ijaws. Giving a brief on the antecedent of Tonye Briggs, the narrator reveals, “many times before the throne encountered certain problems, Tonye would have gone out of his way to fight battles defending the monarch's interest as well as the general welfare of their Ijaw kinsman” <sup>(80)</sup>.

On many fronts, Tonye is of the hunch that the way to negotiation is never by dialogue. Tonye believes that the decency of the diplomatic channel of dialogue will not address the order; for him, only the show of might can wrest their right. In his remark to His Majesty, Tonye asks the rhetorical question, which consolidates his resolve on no negotiation, “you still think decency will take s anywhere?” <sup>(79)</sup>. To strengthen his argument, Tonye emphasises, “why should we be decent when the president could not even ask them to meet a quarter of our demands and let it be said that we rejected the offer [...] I am not going to compromise our position” <sup>(79)</sup>. To corroborate the argument of Tonye, the narrator adds to the build-up by noting that:

The request for royalties from the oil fields on the fringes of Omadino was one battle Tonye would not compromise. He had come a long way on the matter and was not ready to retreat. Not after what he had come to know. He had in his possession an old survey map of Omadino area validating the claims of his people over some of the oil wells in that region.

*Social Deprivation ...*

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The submission from the narrator goes further to strengthen the establishment of the archetypal class of Marxism. It delineates a situation in which the favoured class can be passed off as the upper-class that enjoys the luxury of their position despite the overwhelming evidence of their erroneous claim. Citing the same Omadino possession, the narrator presents a situation that

gives the Itsekiris the opportunity to lay claim to the prized possession. In his avowal, neither the narrator, the monarch nor the Governor furnishes the reader with the information regarding how the Omadino land has come to become an exclusive possession of the Itsekiris. The text records, “meanwhile, I understand our neighbours are protesting our ownership of the Omadino Oil Wells [...] I am amazed at their recent agitation for Omadino [...] try to do something about it”<sup>(87)</sup>. The comment by the Olu suggests that their ownership of Omadino land and the oil Wells in it appears to lack merit of rights. Here, we are faced with a situation in which the monarch operates within the confines of an oppressive burgeoning system to dispossess the Ijaws of their rightful property. It is crystallised that the presence of class has necessitated such manifestation. Upon this backdrop, one can begin to identify the level of social deprivation the fictional Ijaw group seems to be facing before the dominating group - Itsekiris. As a way to topple such structure, the alternative of kidnapping becomes a necessary tool of negotiation.

Another level of class distinction that is analysed is recollected in the environmental description. The identification of this aspect is unavoidably important to the analysis, as it can be conscientiously concluded that the environment that the masses live in is a reflection of the level of development of that particular region. In the spectacle that describes the attempt at Roberts kidnap, the narrator gives a brief description of the environment and a modicum of detail about the lifestyle of this environment. Indeed, through the revealed detail, the narrator ventilates on the contrasts that characterise the living experience of the upper-class and lower-class. Again, through the introspection of Robert, one can safely arrive at the judgement that the commonwealth of the entire people seems to be in the depository of the rich only.

The description of this area which is said to be in the city makes a complete travesty of not only the idea of city but also the type of wealth that is supposed to be identified with the oil-rich zone. In the survey of the area, through the presence of Robert, it is visible that the inhabitants of this area, otherwise known as masses, are left in poverty and destitution. The contrast between the level of individuals in this environment and the breeds of people Mr. Roberts refers to as council officials define accurately the contrasts that typify their living. Although these individuals share a single geographical environment but the masses are forced to live in penury while the affluent live



in luxury. There is a sense in which it can be argued that the people here are denied of basic livelihood and even proper education. This deprivation culminates in the inner-city crime, i.e, kidnapping, which has become apparent.

Without doubt, the classification of individuals in the society could result in a number of vices. In a class structured society, the dominant group, more often than not, marginalises, oppresses, exploits and alienates the submissive group. The latter group are deprived of their quota in the common wealth. However, the consciousness and determination to alter this perceived dearth in which they are conditioned into by the upper-class, marks the turning point of the status quo. At the instance of epiphany, the revolution sets in, at this point, the lower-class comes to utilize any available tool or means to enforce or negotiate their place. The display here glosses over the Marxist theory of class struggle as rendered in *The Communist Manifesto* which outlines that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Karl Marx has also detailed that at the realisation of classification, a revolution becomes inescapable. The textual society is colossally soused in institutionalised classification of people. Drawing a corollary from this, the society becomes one in which the deprived groups seek illegal ways of redressing or a negotiation of their position. Therefore, the presence of class ultimately leads to social deprivation and the latter has the tendency to lead to kidnapping.

It has been established that the textual society is indexed in class structure and that the presence of this class structure transcends this concept into social deprivation, making social deprivation to be at the epicenter of the conflict seen in the text. The identified ethnic groups are of the hunch that they are not adequately catered for in the dispensation of social dividends. It becomes crystal that the failure to address the social depravity has resulted into vagrancy from the youth. These vagrant youth, thus, face the double yoke of being excluded from beneficial incorporation and the disadvantage of their lowly place in Nwaka's society.

In the instance of the Urhobo ethnic group, the youths agitate that they have been marginalised from the social responsibility coming from Adilax. The text notes, "for a while, the youths had been clamouring for their community to be accommodated in the patronage dispensed by Adilax for things like contracts, youth employment and scholarship schemes"<sup>(41)</sup>. For the

Urhobos, the absence of all these benefits in which they assume are sufficiently supplied to some other ethnic group, spell out trouble. While Adilax is blamed squarely for their restrained interest in fulfilling the pressing needs of the people, at the level of government the Urhobos indigene also faults the government for their perceived partiality in identifying with them. It is to this that the monarch, His Majesty Ovie Okujere believes that the presence of social depravity reflects the nonchalance the government has shown in denying them of their own local government. Even with the presence of the Community Development Centers, the common knowledge among the leadership remains that the institution is biased in its intervention. Given this portraiture of depravity, it is clear that in such situation, the youth are now faced to unlawfully negotiate their incorporation in the scheme of things. Even while Robert is holding discussion with the monarch, at the entrance of the palace, the youth are seen threatening riot as a way to demand for their rights. Even the king acknowledges his incapacity in taming the youths that feel marginalised. In offering the Panacea to remedy the situation, the monarch informs Robert with an air of clairvoyance, “I am sure if you had met our request all these wouldn't be happening” <sup>(51)</sup>. The narrator goes to submit that “the youths besieged Roberts as he hurried away under the guard of five boys who the monarch has tasked with protecting him” <sup>(52)</sup>. As a way of enforcing their demands by force, the disadvantaged and deprived youths of Urhobo seek to kidnap the Adilax Regional Manager.

Apart from the Urhobo youths and the youths of the city, the Itsekiri youths are of the unalloyed claim that they are deprived of their rights. Tonye Briggs who is the leader of the youths is particularly raged over the depravity he identifies as injustice. In his conversation with His Royal Highness of the Gbamaturu kingdom, Tonye reels out in frenzied indifference, “why then do you still care about them? Leave them to suffer the consequences of the injustices to which they have been subjecting our people” <sup>(78)</sup>. For Tonye, the only way in which peace can be defined into existence is when their demands to end social depravity are enforced or at worst, negotiated. The existence and oppressive system that have defined the social depravity against the Itsekiris have orchestrated an illegal avenue for a redress. Through kidnapping, Tonye and his men are of the resolute hunch that they will drive home their demands. The youth leader is construed to believe that the hands of the seeming upper-class “have been all over [their] calamities” <sup>(78)</sup>. The irreversible decision to

not dialogue is caused by the habitual nature of the government in not fulfilling its commitment to the region.

To this he questions the integrity of these oppressors by asking, “of all these we have discussed and agreed upon over the years, how many have they implemented?”<sup>(79)</sup> The behavioural pattern of the government, otherwise, upper-class, seems not to have any bearing with fidelity as the pattern of depriving the people of the region lingers. The deprived people throughout the land have come to identify with the occupation of kidnapping as a way to negotiate the oppression meted on them. Even the Governor, Areyenka, in apprehension admits that he is “worried at the high number of abductors in the last ten days”<sup>(21)</sup>. This type of social malady, favouritism and deprivation has awakened the consciousness in the marginalised groups to seek new horizon in demanding for their rights. The Orosun of Okere-Urhobo, in addressing Roberts alludes to this sudden awakening through a home-made aphorism. He cautions, “but I can tell you that when a man stays for too long in the dark, he will begin to see. If yam does not sprout from the head, it sprouts from the tail”<sup>(51)</sup>. The meaning potential of this statement lies in the actions that social depravity can define into existence, chiefly among them, the sudden surge in kidnapping.

Social inclusion has proved to be the bone of contention in the conflicts emanating from the fictional oil generating regions. The text mirrors the socio-economic effect that is called into existence as a consequence of marginalisation. Arguably, the authorial voice has been that social exclusion will always culminate into different forms of inner-city crime and in the case of the region, kidnapping is most prominent. Succinctly, it is reasoned that Nwaka's argument here is that the marginalised class aims to overturn this structural class hierarchy through a struggle charged at pressing home their demands for social inclusion and such has degenerated into kidnapping.

### **Social Deprivation in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist***

Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* mirrors how the Niger-Delta region is exploited by multinational oil firms as a result of the influx of crude oil into their territory. The local heads or leaders are used by international oil firms against their own people. Hunger, conflict, poor health, and other issues are triggered by this exploitation, which ultimately leads to poverty. Due to the inhalation

of potentially harmful chemical substances for human health, the residents' health is continually being impacted.

The society presented by Ojaide in the text has provided the information that the government representing these people simply observes and do nothing to remedy the ongoing crude oil extraction, leading to the destruction of the soil and roadways in the communities.

Ojaide glides us through *Oil Conflict and Environmental Degradation* in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. This novel infers on the difficulties faced by immigrants in the United States. We learn about the lives of immigrants who are otherwise viewed as fortunate and privileged because they have the chance to live overseas. After an incident that nearly left him disabled, the activist — whose real identity was withheld throughout the novel, finds himself in the United States of America with the help of an American Ambassador over a protest by his Niger-Delta people against Bell Oil Company and the military government for exploitation and environmental degradation in his village in. Bell Oil Company is compelled to compensate the people because of the global publicity of the environmental degradation. The activist is one of the two beneficiaries. Through the collision of Bell Oil company and the military government, soldiers are mobile police are deployed to massacre the village. To make ends meet, he lectures at Barber College in the U.S and drives a cab at night commercially in the city. His sense of unhappiness makes him consider returning to Nigeria, and despite numerous dissuasions from friends and coworkers, he persisted in his choice and returns to Nigeria after 25 years abroad. Despite his security precautions, he is met with an attempted robbery when he arrives in Nigeria. Upon his arrival to Nigeria, we are exposed to the environmental deterioration in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger-Delta region, the activist's abode, the country's major source of oil.

The Youths' determination to fight against the oil companies and wreak havoc is reaffirmed. Their approach through engaging in vices like kidnapping and robbery is means to forcefully take what is rightfully theirs and demand the attention of those in positions of authority to halt the injustice and act in the best interests of the populace. On the other hand, these young men, who are doing their best to protect their communities, are depicted as miscreants who engage in vices like kidnapping to obstruct both the community's and the oil companies' advancement. The media is influenced by

government officials and owners of oil companies to publish and market false information that casts them in a negative light. The media then blasphemes against these young men. The goal is to use the media to persuade the public that these men are criminals who use their vices to extort money and interfere with the operations of the oil firms. The images of these youths are then sold as kidnappers and even killers, who seek for destruction. The environment of the NG region settlements shows clear signs of exploitation. The processing of the oil could cause residents to inhale dangerous chemicals, which could lead to illness. Processing may also have an impact on vegetation, which may then have an impact on crop farming or breeding, leading to a bad crop or a poor harvest. The poor returns could lead to hunger and starvation.

Displacement is also a challenge and a form of deprivation that the inhabitants experience. Sometimes oil companies bribe the chief of these communities who are only interested in the immediate gain without thinking futuristically. As a result, inhabitants are forced to abandon their homes. The result of not attending to the environment in due course leads to swampy, dirty, roads that is unsuitable for driving and even walking. Regrettably, nothing is done to avoid this likely scenario. Even more interesting is the fact that there are laws in place that provide budgets specifically for addressing these environmental issues, but it appears that those in positions of authority in charge of carrying them out are unwilling to assume their duties, leaving the masses with the heavy burden to bear. It is the agitation from seeing the deplorable conditions of these communities and the unfair treatment that causes conflict and drives the youths of the affected areas or communities to take matters into their own hands, and engage in acts like kidnapping. They are using such acts to call for a retraction of such injustice and for the situation to be addressed accordingly, with the hope that such measures will cause a change and their grievances attended to.

*The Activist* is a passionate exploration of Nigeria's political complexity and social tensions of recent decades. 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 rights, environmental pollution, honor, courage, patriotism, love, betrayal, tragedy and triumph. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, The Niger-Delta has been plagued by crisis despite continued increase

in oil production. The novel discusses the need for a functioning government that serves the needs of the people. The novel deals with the need to have a government that works, and is beneficial to the masses. Ojaide weaves a gripping narrative that reveals the tensions between the state and society in contemporary Africa.

In the novel, Delta people are subjected to in the hands of Bell Oil Company and the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. The Niger Delta people who produce the bulk of crude oil which sustains the economy of Nigeria are willfully underdeveloped. In addition to the ongoing environmental pollution brought on by blowouts that are wrongly attributed to systematic sabotage caused by the Niger people themselves, they are denied opportunities for infrastructure development and employment within the oil industry.

In the fictional world of Ojaide, Nigeria at the time of this fictional creation is ruled by a military head of state General Mustapha Ali Dongo whose death in the wake of the nude protest of women brings Chief Jacob Oleitan as interim head of state. Similarly, Bell Oil Company has Mr. Van Hoort as General Manager and later Mr. Klaus Bilt when Mr. Van Hoort dies. The Activist starts to radicalise people inside and outside the university environment in order to create a counter-potent force after realising that the marginalisation of the Niger Delta would not end except there is a deliberate effort to stop it. His radicalisation drive brings him close to Pere Ighogboja the head of the area boys who has been imprisoned seven years for assault on behalf of his son Tonye beaten up at school. Pere whose interest in Oil bunkering is derived inspirationally from Chief Young Kpeke and Chief Goodluck Ede who are bunkering magnates, is a repentant armed robber and kidnapper who is once a pools agent assisting Yeri Daibo in his gambling business.

This fictional story relays Karl Marx's Marxist theory which stresses the struggle between the social classes; that is, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie here is the government and oil company workers while the proletariat is the masses in the Niger-delta region. This class distinction is evident in this novel.

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environment. Citing *The Activist*, he confirms that “*The Activist* is a political novel with socialist realist ideas. It constructs the plight of the downtrodden and marginalized in the Niger Delta” (Nwagbara, 225). This commentary immediately hints on some of the thematic foci of the Niger Delta Literature in that it keeps faith with what has been elementally identified as the substances of the unique literature.

*The Activist* underscores the need for unity and cooperation amongst the various people of the Niger Delta in order to ensure equity for themselves and other ethnicities in Nigeria. The narrative focuses on environmental degradation, the antics of the oil companies and corruption among the local elites. It is a story of bravery, selflessness and defiance. It is a message for the need for change, set in a corrupt and avaricious contemporary Nigeria. *The Activist* examines current political and social issues and examines the extent of public responsibility and accountability of the government. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, The Niger-Delta has been ridden in crisis despite continued expansion in oil production. The novel deals with the need to have a government that works and is beneficial to the masses.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the impact of corruption on environmental management in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria by examining social depravity and kidnapping as motifs in Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek* and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. The core objective was to expose the environmental damage and, more specifically, the social exclusion consistently meted out by the burgeoning government. The analysis highlights a typical Marxist class arrangement—the haves (upper-class) subjugating the have-nots (proletariat). Nwaka and Ojaide mirror this oppression, showing how the people of the Niger Delta are deprived of their communal wealth and forced into impoverishment through illegal land grabbing and enforced legislation.

The texts contrast the pre-oil discovery era, marked by peaceful and gainful occupations like fishing and farming, with the current state. The wake of oil discovery, overseen by the greedy upper-class, shattered this peace, replacing it with violence and corruption. The extensive environmental damage has destroyed the people's livelihoods, forcing them into hardship. The study reveals that the relationship between social depravity and

kidnapping is constructed upon the premature decline of traditional occupations and, crucially, the government's inertia and nonchalance. Driven by self-preservation, the people resort to illegal means for welfare.

While the upper-class uses its power to subjugate the lower-class, the proletariat resists, leading to the kidnapping enterprise. Within this context, kidnapping acts as an agency for negotiation, a means for the victims of social exclusion to demand recompense for their stolen entitlements and manhandled environment. The settings in *Lords of the Creek* (depicting the Urhobos, Ijaws, and Itsekiris) and *The Activist* (depicting the people of Ekakpamre) portray this social depravity that necessitates the trade of kidnapping as a means of negotiating demands. The study concludes that social depravity can morph into the enterprise of kidnapping. Until the grievances of marginalized and oppressed groups are adequately addressed, the crime of kidnapping may persist. While this research does not endorse the crime, it maintains that there is a definitive connection between social depravity and kidnapping as a means for aggrieved Niger Delta groups to seek redress and attention.



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