Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique

ISSN 2790-6108 | E-ISSN 2790-6116

AVIS DE LICENCE / LICENCE NOTICE

Version accompagnée de cet avis : 3 octobre 2026

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Attribution - Pas d'utilisation commerciale - Pas de modification

Avec l'autorisation déclarée par la revue au nom des titulaires des droits, cette version est proposée sous la licence Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International.

Vous pouvez partager le document, sans usage commercial, en citant les auteurs et la revue, en indiquant la source et en fournissant un lien vers la licence. Cette licence ne permet pas de diffuser une version modifiée du document.

Les autorisations valablement accordées lors des diffusions antérieures, notamment sous CC BY-NC 4.0, restent applicables et ne sont pas retirées par cet avis. Les mentions antérieures figurant dans les pages originales ci-après sont conservées à titre historique.

Les auteurs conservent leurs droits. Le contenu scientifique et la pagination des pages originales sont intégralement préservés.

ENGLISH

With the journal's stated authorization from the rights holders, this version is offered under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. You may share it for noncommercial purposes, crediting the authors and journal and linking to the licence. Distribution of modified versions is not permitted under this licence.

Permissions already validly granted for earlier distributions, including under CC BY-NC 4.0, remain in force. This notice does not revoke them. Earlier licence statements in the following original pages are retained as historical information. The original scientific content and printed pagination are preserved.

Texte de la licence / Licence terms

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique(fr),
African Rhetoric Notebooks(An)
ISSN : 2790 -6108, EISSN : 2790-6116

Vol 3, N°02, 30 Décembre 2024, pp.178-198

Youth Edginess as an Indignant Outcry for Environmental Justice: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* and Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*[1]

Alphonse Dorien MAKOSSO
Université Marien Ngouabi, Congo-Brazzaville
alphonse.makosso@gmail.com

Reçu: 30/09/2024, Acceptation: 00/00/2024; Publication: 30/12/2024

Financement : L'auteur déclare qu'il n'a reçu aucun financement pour réaliser cette étude.
Conflit d'intérêts : L'auteur ne signale aucun conflit d'intérêts.
Anti-plagiat : cet article a été soumis au test anti-plagiat de Plagiarism Chercher X avec un taux de 09 %

Abstract: This study deals with the plight of the youth in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* and Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*. Drawing essentially from the postcolonial eco-critical theory by Huggan and Tiffin, it aims to show how young people, in the novels under consideration, show their outrage and fight for environmental justice and restoration. A peruse of both narratives unveils that oil pollution, environmental damages, as well as the chaos engendered by ecological mismanagement, have obviously instigated the resentment of young people, who, showing 'symptom' of edginess, no longer hesitate step from indignation to vandalism as a means of last resort to change the status quo. As a final assessment, this paper suggests that western neo-colonial corporations, with governments' complicity, constitute the real culprits of ecological damages in Africa, this motivates African writers like Chimeka Garricks and Imbolo Mbue to get involved in decrying these awful practices and resorting to eco-activism in their literary fresco to take a step towards sustainable development.

Keywords: Eco-critical analysis, environmental justice, kidnapping, oil exploitation, vandalism, youth indignation

[1] Comment citer cet article: MAKOSSO, A.D., 2024, «Youth Edginess as an Indignant Outcry for Environmental Justice: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Chimeka Garricks' Tomorrow Died Yesterday and Imbolo Mbue's How Beautiful We Wer », *Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique*, Vol 3, n°2, pp.178-198

Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique(fr), **Vol 3, N°02, 30 Décembre 2024, pp.178-198**
African Rhetoric Notebooks(An)
ISSN : 2790 -6108, EISSN : 2790-6116

L'audace de la jeunesse comme un cri d'indignation pour la justice environnementale : une analyse écocritique postcoloniale de *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* de Chimeka Garricks et *How Beautiful We Were* d'Imbolo Mbue

Résumé : Cette étude porte sur le sort des jeunes dans *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* de Chimeka Garricks et *How Beautiful We Were* d'Imbolo Mbue. S'inspirant essentiellement de la théorie écocritique postcoloniale de Huggan et Tiffin, elle vise à montrer comment les jeunes, dans les romans considérés, manifestent leur indignation et luttent pour la justice et la restauration environnementales. Une lecture attentive de ces deux récits révèle que la pollution pétrolière, les dommages environnementaux, ainsi que le chaos engendré par la mauvaise gestion écologique, ont manifestement suscité le ressentiment des jeunes qui, montrant des signes d'anxiété, n'hésitent plus de recourir à des actes de vandalisme pour changer le statuquo. En guise d'évaluation finale, cet article suggère que les entreprises néocoloniales occidentales, avec la complicité des gouvernements, constituent les véritables coupables des dommages écologiques en Afrique, ce qui motive des écrivains africains comme Chimeka Garricks et Imbolo Mbue à s'impliquer dans la dénonciation de ces pratiques éhontées et perfides et à recourir à l'éco-activisme dans leur fresque littéraire pour faire un pas vers le développement durable.
Mots-clés : Analyse écocritique, justice environnementale, enlèvement, exploitation pétrolière, vandalisme, indignation des jeunes.

Introduction

Oil exploitation with its subsequent drawbacks, such as the devastation of the environment and local populations' sufferings, frequently leads to revolt. This restiveness, in an ecological context, known as eco-activism, can be understood as "*a form of engagement in social and/or political campaigns with the aim of preventing damage to the environment*" (Era Kraja, 2018). With this regard, arguing further, Simon et al (2014:383) write:

The degradation of the [Niger Delta] environment through pollution has constituted challenged and concern for the people of the oil rich region. The ecosystem has completely been violated and destroyed. The destruction of the flora and fauna without clan-ups or compensation paid to host communities have resulted in youth restiveness and the ups surge of militancy in the region.

From this expert, one can easily picture that the violation and the destruction of ecosystem by multinationals and the indifference of the governments, partake to the plight of oil-bearing communities. Consequently, from this ecological scourge which bedevils the area, the inhabitants, especially young, automatically get involved into rebellion so as to voice their concerns. They resort to violence against the governments and the oil corporations as an expression of their discontent. Thus, working on youth restiveness in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* and Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*, appears relevant, since this research work aims at showing how young people, in the novels under consideration, manifest their

outcry using different violent mechanisms for the environmental justice and restoration.

It appears substantial to keep in mind that indignation is anger or annoyance provoked by what is perceived as unfair treatment, notably an offense or injustice. Let it be emphasized that indignation, from a psychological perspective, stems an emotion characterized by antagonism toward someone or something. This sometimes implies the use of violent manners for the quest for justice.

Tarkpegher (2020) attempts a detail analysis of the consequences of the crisis with specific reference to Chimeka Garricks' novel. However, Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020) interrogate the tropes of eco-activism situated in Garricks' novel, mainly how it traces the environmental concerns and how the novelist has positioned his characters as key stakeholders or voices in environment advocacy. When Biama et al. (2022) depict, in Mbue's novel, ecocriticism as a theory that displays the tools of activism and resistance; Nare et al. (2024) provides an analysis of some ways in which historical patterns of domination and colonization continue to cause various forms of injustices on powerless people and nature.

This review task proves how a great number of works and discussions concerning the environment, have been directed to the impact of oil exploitation upon it, but very little attention has been given to eco-activism. Some particularities which make this study an original and singular one, are the fact that it mingles two novels with different settings, and tackles indignation and vandalism with reference to youth. Thus, the interest in writing on Mbue's and Garricks' novels is significant so as to fill this lacuna and widen works about the quest for environmental justice.

Thereby, the central question in this critical investigation can be stated as follows: How do young characters manifest their outcry for environmental justice? The hypothesis backing up this study is that young people, with regard to dirty and unpleasant conditions caused by oil activities, decide to practice vandalism, kidnapping and militancy to voice their indignation for the environmental justice and restoration.

This study is conducted through the prism of the postcolonial eco-critical theory by Huggan and Tiffin who assert the intertwined correlation among environmental violence, marginalization of the indigenous groups, and destruction of land by the neo-colonial agencies. (Musaib and Tania, 2022, p.67). It obviously justifies the pertinent use of this theory in approaching the thematic under consideration.

Henceforth, exploring youth eco-activism in the selected narratives implies examining the following important points: unpleasant living conditions, economic erosion and displacement, tyrannical oppression, indignation stepping to revenge, and violence as a means of last resort for a change.

1. Unpleasant Living Conditions

The pristine state of the environment looks like paradise, as it allows living organisms to thrive without the burden of ecological issues. In this state, ecosystems support the peaceful coexistence and prosperity of wildlife, including animals, birds, and fish. This enables humans to cultivate cash crops, engage in various economic activities, and secure their livelihoods, sustained by the health of the environment.

In *How Beautiful We Were*, Imbolo Mbue highlights similar experiences through the reflections of Thula's peers, who nostalgically proclaim: "*it may be long dead,*

Kosawa, but we never forget it, the splendid piece of the earth it was. (…) How could we not want to return those full-moon nights when we danced in the square?" (pp.359-360) Here, the authoress draws a stark contrast between the current deteriorated state of the environment and the once idyllic landscape, often remembered as a paradise. This contrast even reinforces the novel's title, as it illuminates the deep sense of nostalgia felt by Kosawa's inhabitants, who long for the lost beauty of their homeland. Unfortunately, when Pexton, an American oil corporation, comes and commences drilling oil, things fall apart and environmental lives immediately begin to change. In this regard, the mortification of the environment by oil exploitation beyond measure destroys its paradisiacal image and tortuously signs its death.

In Mbue's novel, characters express their doleful outcry in the fictional village of Kosawa, where oil extraction by Pexton leads to widespread environmental damage: "*When the sky began to pour acid and rivers began to turn green, we should have known our land would soon be dead*" (p.3). The air is thick with toxic fumes, the rivers are polluted, and the land is no longer fertile. Mbue vividly describes how the oil spillages and gas flares have poisoned the soil, leaving the villagers unable to farm, hunt, or fish. In this regard, Makosso, Loumbouzi and Mouzita (2022:161) write: "*There is a kind of undeniable connection between the devastation of the nature and the humans' sordid living conditions. As humans are responsible for what happens, they remain geological force that alters ecosystem*." This means that environmental destruction has profound consequences, robbing the inhabitants of Kosawa of their primary means of survival. This squalid condition results in health problems which continue to persist long after the initial disaster. Hence, the pollutants, acting as corrosive agents of disease, also contribute to numerous fatalities, as the novel reads:

> Only after my classmate Wambi began coughing while the rest of us laughed, and then began vomiting blood; only after we'd buried Wambi and coughs like his began echoing across the school compound and bouncing from hut to hut, some children urinating blood, others burning with fevers no amount of cold baths could bring down. (p.33)

This narration reveals how exploitation of crude oil by Pexton turns Kosawa atmosphere into a nightmare wherein characters suffer from different diseases and where the smell of crude oil becomes the smell of death. The novel emphases on how the villagers must watch powerlessly as their children die from drinking dirty water, breathing poisoned air, while their requests to the government and the oil multinational corporation fall on deaf ears. Here, Mbue's portrayal of the villagers' suffering evokes a powerful sense of injustice, as they are left to bear the penalties of an industry that profits from their land while neglecting their well-being.

Likewise, in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Chimeka Garricks depicts the ecological damage caused by oil extraction in the Niger Delta. The novel describes how oil pollution has turned once-vibrant Asiama ecosystems into wastelands due to outdated and cost-effective drilling methods that cause significant environmental degradation. The novel renders: "*the companies use outdated but cheaper drilling methods which pollute the environment*" (p.149) as it damages "the ecosystem, gas flaring, pollution, acid rain, greenhouse gas emissions, bronchitis (p.198)." Here, the

reader comes across Oil Imperial's nasty methods which result in severe air and water pollution, contributing to broader health crises. About gas flaring which releases harmful toxins into the atmosphere, the character Tubo, childishly qualifies it of "hellfire" and continues to ironize about it by questioning his friends Doye, Amaibi and Kaniye:

> Has any of you seen that fire stop burning, even for one minute? Tell me, have you? (…) See the pipe that the fire is coming out from? Well, let me tell you something that you don't know. (…) The pipe leads straight down to hell. If not for the fire coming out of the pipe, you can go down, go really deep and you will see the devil himself! (p.61)

From this irony which encapsulates a critique of the continuous gas flaring in the region. Tubo sarcastically advocates that the relentless fire from the pipe is a direct link to hell, symbolizing both the destructive characteristics of the oil company's practices and the ongoing suffering of local population. The imagery of the pipe leading to hell reflects the infernal conditions the people endure due to the harmful pollutants from the gas flares.

In the context of unpleasant living conditions, these environmental drawbacks have a direct impact upon the health and well-being of local inhabitants. When the author mentions "bronchitis", he underscores the physical toll on villagers, as air pollution from gas flares causes respiratory diseases. Yet, Doughboy's report "*the river became sluggish in its flow, as the oil gradually choked its life away*" (p.74) makes it significant to understand that rivers that once teemed with fish are now slick with oil, and the air is polluted with gas flares that burn day and night. The mixture of environmental squalor and health problems widely paints a grim picture of life in these oil-bearing areas, where indifference leaves indigenous suffering the long-term effects of pollution.

Both novels make it lucid that the living conditions in these communities have been harshly worsened due to oil pollution. The inhabitants of Kosawa and the Niger Delta, being entombed in spaces that are wantonly ruined by oil corporations, become unable to prosper in environments that are no longer capable of supporting life.

2. Economic Erosion and Relocation

The demolition of ecosystems appears as a killing-poison stepping to traditional livelihoods since it leaves communities in a state of economic vulnerability. With this regard, local population, being robbed of the ability to sustain themselves through traditional economic practices such as fishing and farming, are definitely trapped into a vicious cycle of poverty. This economic erosion constitutes a fundamental cause of many villagers' relocations in both novels where oil pollution leads to severe socio-economic hardships.

In Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*, economic destruction is portrayed through the devastation of Kosawa's main source of agriculture due to oil extraction activities. The once fertile lands, which maintained farming and local trade, become poisoned by oil spills and gas flaring. Some interwoven injuries of oil exploitation upon the environment and characters are directed to the land used for farming. Consequently, the land is destroyed because of the toxicity instigated by oil spills. This leads to dramatic shortages in agricultural production, and sets off a chain

reaction of destruction. The character Thula explains how oil spills devastate some families' farmland due to the fire coming from an unprotected pipeline:

> At the end of that first dry season, a pipeline burst and oil flooded the farm of the mother of one of my friends – her family barely had any harvest that year; some days, I had to share my food with her during recess. Weeks later, a new spill turned into a fire that ravaged the farms of six families, forcing mothers to go searching for new land deep in the forest, a trek that left many with little strength for toiling. (pp.32-33).

This textual snippet evidences difficult situation that villagers experience under the pain of a calamitous way of extracting crude oil. For, they mostly rely on agriculture for food and for their livelihood, so they witness "*the destruction of any crops that come into contact with the oil. Fires associated with oil spills often increase the spread of the damage*" (Amnesty International, 2009:30). Thus, Thula is obliged to share her food with her friends since the fallout of this catastrophe worries to the point that it is "*forcing mothers to go searching for new land deep in the forest*." The environmental ruin which drives to the collapse of local economies, is compounded by the lack of government support and the negligence of Pexton. Therefore, traditional agricultural practices become infertile and unsustainable. This scenario captures the real-world exploitation of African communities by foreign corporations.

Additionally, Imbolo Mbue illustrates this economic erosion through the increasing waste dumps into the river which contribute to the complete disappearance of aquatic life, devastating the local fishing industry, which had once been a crucial source of sustenance and income. The character Thula reports: "*It was then, with the increased wastes dumped into it, that whatever life was left in the big river disappeared. Within a year, fishermen broke down their canoes and found new uses for the wood. Children began to forget the taste of fish*." (p.32). This passage illustrates how water pollution brings a real bane that extremely harms and ruins villagers' lives insofar they lack basic substances to survive. The following hyperbole "*fishermen broke down their canoes and found new uses for the wood*", indicates the final collapse of this traditional livelihood since villagers are compelled to break the canoes and utilize the wood for other purposes. With the devastation of aquatic life in the area and the high unemployment observed in Kosawa, oil pollution further complicates the scenario. The other hyperbole "children began to forget the taste of fish", reveals the commencement of the long-term of suffering as main food source is erased. This passage highlights how environmental destruction directly undermines the economic stability of the community, leaving them without their natural resources and exacerbating their poverty and hardship.

Similarly, in Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, economic erosion manifests through the devastating effects of oil pollution on the Niger Delta. The novel x-rays how oil spills and environmental destruction disrupt local economies by rendering farmland barren and waters polluted. When the character Soboye argues: "*My brother, poverty is the main problem*" (p.68), this emphasizes the central issue that local communities experience in oil-rich regions. Poverty is not only an outcome of systemic neglect but also a consequence of environmental degradation, as highlighted in the subsequent passage about the oil spill on the Asiama River:

> This year there was also something that happened up on the Asiama River. We woke up one morning to see oil, thick and black, floating on top of the brown water of the river. The river became sluggish in its flow, as the oil gradually choked its life away. After school, I sat on the banks and watched dead fish, turned on their sides, slowly drift by. The river stank. Papa called it an oil spill. (p.74)

From this quotation, one reads how the description made within reflects the devastating impact of industrial exploitation. The river, once a vital source of sustenance, becomes contaminated, killing fish and rendering the water unusable. This environmental disaster worsens the existing poverty, as traditional livelihoods such as fishing are ruined. The association of poverty and environmental dilapidation in these passages exposes a vicious cycle. Oil spill, a symbol of corporate malpractice, not only destroys the ecosystem but also entrenches indigenous in poverty. The "dead fish" encapsulates the death of the traditional source of livelihood. This fictionalized issue is also observed in real-life as it is the case of the Niger-Delta where fishers met the same situation. Focusing on this issue, Amnesty International (2009:26) reports:

> Because of oil exploration there are no more fisheries … We experience the hell of hunger and poverty. Plants and animals do not grow well, the fish have died… Pollution kills fish, their food sources and fish larvae, and damages the ability of fish to reproduce, causing both immediate damage and long-term, cumulative harm to fish stocks.

From this excerpt, one clearly sees how oil pollution, in killing the fish and damaging the ability of fish to reproduce, has instigated poverty and increased hunger.

Furthermore, oil pollution and its subsequent consequences often result in the displacement of many villagers, a pressing issue from the human suffering and insecurity. As oil production intensifies the environmental degradation, the decision of individuals to abandon polluted regions becomes increasingly justified. In this context, relocation is caused by the fact that local populations are fed up with oil pollution, environmental damages, dirty and unpleasant conditions including health problems and death. Here, the primary drivers of relocation are the local populations' frustration with oil pollution, environmental damage, and the unpleasant living conditions, which include health hazards and even death.

This appears in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* when Kosawa children decide to leave the village because staying there becomes for them a continued hardship that oil pollution instigates. As the story unfolds, these activists even further with the reasons which prompt the population to leave their homeland:

> One of our age-mates needed to leave the village because of a condition that caused her monthly bleeding to last for weeks, accompanied by blood clots and backaches and severe cramps. This friend (…) had no choice but to leave Kosawa in search of a cure. Other friends of ours had to move to new villages because a father had died and a mother deemed it best to live among her people, or a mother had buried more than one child and knew that the burial of another would be more than she could endure. (p.195)

This narration poignantly illustrates the forced relocation of Kosawa's villagers due to the devastating health and emotional toll introduce by environmental degradation. The woman's prolonged bleeding, a probable consequence of pollution, and the other cases of families who have lost children or loved ones, mirror the effect of ecological destruction on human life. These relocations are not voluntary; they are acts of survival, driven by the need to escape worsening health conditions and the emotional trauma of loss. The community's disintegration, with families leaving in marauding waves for new villages for different reasons, indicates how oil pollution horribly devastates and fractures the fabric of the community.

This angle of vision on which the story focuses, is far from being only a fiction since some experts on the ground testify this situation. In this vein, Opukri and Ibaba (2008:174) accordingly write:

> We argue that environmental degradation, caused by the Oil industry does not only have the potentials of exacerbating the tragedy of internal displacements in the Niger Delta, but is responsible for many of the dislocations experienced in the area. The collapse of local economies, induced by oil spillages, gas flaring, and other activities of the oil industry had displaced many from their occupations, without providing viable alternatives.

From this textual snippet, one can assert that environmental degradation generated by the oil industry has the potentials of exacerbating the tragedy of internal displacements. Imbolo Mbue's description of this situation can be alike in Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* since evil practices of oil drilling which result in grim effects ultimately cause relocation. One can add that oil pollution, by rendering the lands unbearable, makes displacement a psychological conception where individuals like Doye are condemned to justify violence as the only way of survival. Both novels finally highlight how economic corrosion and displacement are interconnected consequences of environmental squalor driven by the oil industry.

3. Tyrannical Oppression

Oil producing regions always fascinate corporations insomuch they find it interesting to settle and drill crude oil. Unfortunately, local populations do not take huge profits on oil extraction, but undergo all calamities because of authoritarian oppression. It is noticeable that corporations' quest of oil often leads to the behaviour that causes pain and suffering to oil-bearing communities, especially in a deliberate way, under the collaboration with the governments. This oppression which causes sufferings automatically leads to disillusion. With this regard, Salihu (2019:36-37) talks of subjectivity that he explains as follows:

In simple terms, subjectivity refers the total control of a society or nation by an authority which denies the dominated populace freedoms through use of brute force. (…) The word 'subjectivity' is the refutation of access to basic necessities, marginalization, both socio-economic and political, and the denial of rights to a social grouping.

From this assertion, one can underscore that authoritarian oppression is a process of placing the people of a nation or a given community under control and denying the dominated populace freedoms through the use of brute force. It is, on the other hand, a disproof of access to basic necessities, marginalization, both socio-economic and

political in connivance with a subjugator, mainly a government. Both novels under the scrutiny exemplify the devastating consequences of oil industry, government corruption, and environmental exploitation on populations, nurturing deep disillusionment.

In *How Beautiful We Were*, the inhabitants of Kosawa are oppressed by Pexton, an American oil company that exploits oil with no regard for environmental and human costs. Its tyranny is deepened by a corrupt government that fails to protect its citizens, allowing Pexton to continue its destructive practices. Here, Imbolo Mbue describes both oil industry and government as tyrannic since they precariously use their authority as it pleases them. They dive into an unbelievable indifference towards local populations whose pain and suffering mean nothing to both Pexton and their own government. In this context, the driver of Pexton representatives tells them: "*no one in Bézam cares about villagers like you, okay? Absolutely no one in the government. No one at Pexton. No one whatsoever*" (p.94). Hence, one can extensionally infer that Pexton considers them mostly as 'submen' insomuch that no empathy is expressed from Pexton towards Kosawa squalid conditions. Kosawa's inhabitants have no real voice or means to challenge the corporation's control over their lives and environment. With this regard, Huggan and Tiffin (2010) claim that the voices of the environmental catastrophes in the periphery are always neglected.

The stance of a cruel use of power is widely illustrated by the fact that the government, instead of prosecuting Pexton which deliberately violates human rights and environmental life, supports its harsh oil activities. Being fed up with the ravages of the environment by Pexton and the unpleasant effects it leaves upon them, Kosawa villagers decide to march to Bézam, the capital city, and burn down headquarters. But, the reaction of Pexton representatives extremely betrays the complicity they clutch with Bézam government as the narrator reports: "*The Pexton men simply smiled in response. They knew the young men wouldn't do it – we all knew that His Excellency would have our young men exterminated if they dared harm Pexton and our village would only be left further enfeebled*." (*How Beautiful We Were*, p.10). The use of '*His Excellency'* connotates the meaning of the President of the Republic. Therefore, the sentence "*we all knew that His Excellency would have our young men exterminated if they dared harm Pexton*" demonstrates the strong guarantee of Pexton security by the government. The latter forgets even its position of securing the population at first, for the sake of money. A government which is about to exterminate a delegation of young villagers who simply express their anger towards a criminal oil company, bears a cruel use of power upon people. In this connection, Frantz Fanon (1961:29) writes:

> It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.

The quotation above serves as a torchlight through which the subjectivity on people is clearly seen. In fact, Fanon explains how the government denies its people's freedom. Instead, it speaks the language of force, and brings violence, oppression and domination. Imbolo Mbue's novel carries on showing evidence when "*soldiers*

burned a village to ashes because one of its men split open a tax collector's head with a machete in anger" because "*this is a country of law and consequences*" (p.19). It indicates that the political power, used negatively, becomes a tool for the elites to dominate, and behave as it pleases them.

In the same token, tyrannical oppression in oil-bearing areas often manifests through environmental destruction, suffering, and hardship for local populations. Governments, prioritizing financial gains over the well-being of their citizens, sell land and resources to oil corporations, as seen in *How Beautiful We Were* when Kosawa's land is handed over to Pexton without villagers' consent: "*on a date we'll never know, at a meeting where none of us was present, our government had given us to Pexton. Handed, on a sheet of paper, our land and waters to them*" (p.11). This abuse of power results in environmental degradation, ignored by both the government and oil companies, despite the devastating impact on local communities. Mbue highlights this issue by illustrating how the government and corporations conspire to prioritize profits over people, using military force to suppress protests and kill those who resist. One can read it through the assassination of some villagers (Malabo, Bissau, Lusaka, Bongo, and others) who initiate the process of protesting against the atrocities committed by Pexton both on the environment and Kosawa residents. The character Yaya, in her monologue addressed to her departed husband, argues: "*our sons are both dead (...) there's no grave for our sons, because they were killed and tossed aside to rot like garbage*" (p.230). Here, Villagers' efforts to seek justice are met with violence, as soldiers' massacre those protesting Pexton's environmental atrocities. When villagers kidnap three Pexton representatives and their driver, this appears as a way of telling the government that this company destroys the environment and makes them suffer a lot. Unfortunately, no answer has been found. Thus, they rely on The Sick One's nephew called Austin, a journalist, to help them. The latter writes Kosawa story which ends up in American newspaper to seek for justice. Once Pexton leaders have been aware of it, they converse with the government, and instead of finding a peaceful manner to fix the problem, the government, however, sends its soldiers to massacre the villagers, as Thula complains:

> I'll never forget the blood of our people. Jakani's and Sakani's blood, the first to spill. (…) Bullets began flying, felling children like little trees that did not deserve to grow. Felling mothers through their backs. Felling fathers as they attempted to save their families. Five children. Four women. Five men. (…) We heard more gunshots. We ran farther into the forest. (…) They went into our huts and pointed their guns at the old and the sick. (…) they found Konga snoring. They hit him in the head with their guns. (*HBWW*, pp.179-181)

The novel's depiction of this brutality echoes real-life incidents where oil companies, in collaboration with governments, stifle opposition and neglect the rights of the local population. Geo-critically, one can infer that Imbolo Mbue alludes to Shell which paid war criminals to murder the Ogoni chiefs and Saro-Wiwa, an activist and a civilian ambassador for his people. Also, the consequences of such tyranny are further illustrated when villagers seek external help from journalists like Austin, who are silenced by threats or forced into exile. One can be justified to say that everyone, who tries to protest, is immediately seen as an enemy of the whole country as the government letter recommends: "*for all those who seek to hurt the republic must be*

made to pay a price" (p.189). Austin, being a journalist and besought by a group of villagers for a help, is threatened by the elite for his involvement in Kosawa affairs as he has pictured the massacre in Kosawa and published a newspaper in which he decries the atrocities of Pexton. The novel tells evidence through Thula who astonishedly sees him in America as she reports it in her letter:

He told me (…) The decision to leave or stay, though, wasn't his. Two weeks after pictures of the massacre appeared in his newspaper in America, soldiers arrived at his door to escort him to the airport. They told him that His Excellency did not want in his country any newspapermen who made up fake stories-doing so meant that Austin was His Excellency's enemy, and thus the enemy of his people. (*HBWW*, p.210)

From this declaration, one understands that the use of military force to implement these oppressive regimes, as described by Frantz Fanon, shows how soldiers act as agents of violence, suppressing free speech and human rights. Ultimately, this unchecked power leads to the destruction of both the environment and the local communities, leaving them disillusioned and powerless against the oppressive system.

Similarly, Garricks' novel goes in the same vein as it x-rays, according to Ujowundu and Okoye-Ugwu (n.d.:349) "*the tyrannical leadership seen in the Niger-Delta region and exploitation at its peak*." In *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, the reader comes across Imperial Oil Company which represents oppressive forces that devastate the Niger Delta communities under the collaboration with the government. This corporation uses outdated and dangerous drilling methods, leading to environmental squalor through oil spills, gas flaring, and pollution. However, Asiama activists, as the lecturer Amaibi, are brutalized in their challenge against oil exploitation. The tyrannical nature of the government can be seen in the Amaibi's report:

> They came to my house very early one morning, almost a squadron of them. They smashed down my door commando-style. They arrested me…in bed. I didn't resist. They beat me up. I didn't resist. Then, they shot me. I still don't know why. For months, I was interrogated and tortured by the police and the state security people, in Abuja, Kaduna and Maiduguri. They accused me of working with Doye. Now, they've charged me with kidnapping, manslaughter and possession of weapons. (*TDY*, p.34)

Amaibi's arrest, brutal and unjust, underscores the tyrannical oppression met by those who compete against the government's collusion with oil companies. His shooting, despite his lack of resistance, highlights the extreme violence taken by the authorities to silence opposition and maintain control over oil-bearing regions. This shows how the government is more interested in petrodollars than Asiama inhabitants' health issues, poverty, loss of livelihood and the degradation of the environment. In the same direction, Sir James' assertion finds credence in this context: "*The government wants Amaibi out of the way. In this country the government is the mafia. Everything has already been arranged*" (p.43). Here, one observes how government members turn the State into a criminal organization, going so far as to eliminate anyone who tries to threaten their interests. Their selfishness

incorporates corruption and brutality in the system, considering those who stand against the mafia as targets or enemies of the regime.

Mbue and Garricks poignantly portray how the crushing conspiracy of oil corporation and government tyranny wears away both physical landscape and hopeful spirit of indigenous who live under their shadow. The two novels under consideration offer a powerful critique of the negative conjuncture between capitalism, environmental exploitation, and systemic oppression.

4. Indignation Stepping to Revenge

Era Kraja (2018) argues that the most impressive voices are those of people who experience the impacts of climate change and pollution on a daily basis. This means that the fundamental human rights go hand in hand with environmental protection as both people and environment rely on each other for their well-being. In this regard, Era Kraja (2018) quotes the wise Pesek's maxim: "*human and environmental health are indissolubly bound*". This shows how there is an urgency for local populations to manifest their indignation once their environment is strongly damaged by multinationals' oil activities. However, indignation amidst the local inhabitants escalates into acts of revenge as a response to the environmental devastation and oppressive regimes. The passage from indignation to revenge is deeply rooted in the characters' experiences of betrayal, suffering, injustice and the cruelty of both governments and oil companies.

In Mbue's novel, the inhabitants of Kosawa experience years of frustration as their land and livelihood are decimated by Pexton. The aftermath of oil drilling activities wrenchingly impacts and eventually condemns them to live in abject situation. The pollutants which are the corrosive sources of diseases, consequently instigate in them a perceptible fear. So, their anger extensionally manifests as they utter in an irritated voice: "*we hated that we went to bed in fear and woke up in fear, all day long breathed fear in and out*" […] "*though our hatred of Pexton multiplied as we got older and our indignation deepened* (pp.8; 73)." This negative feeling is typically associated with hostile thoughts, physiological arousal and maladaptive behaviours. The experience of a squalid situation instigated by oil pollution and different environmental damages, trigger Kosawa villagers' anger off. This can be seen through Thula's irritated speech when she says: "*How someone could be here and not here, in our world but also gone from it, with a nose closed off to air, eyes that won't open, a sealed mouth, a human but just a thing. I hate this world*" (p.26). The different antitheses used by Thula clearly express her indignation. It is undoubtedly difficult for someone to be here and not here, in a world but also gone from it. Because of the devastated environment by Pexton, villagers become a human but just a thing; this pushes Thula to hate this world, and becomes angry against Pexton as the rest of indigenous.

Moreover, the government, in collusion with Pexton, ignores the people's pleas and allows the continuous poisoning of the environment. This gradual erosion of local populations' health and culture engenders a myriad of feelings of anger and indignation among the villagers. Imbolo Mbue traces Kosawa villagers' indignation about infertile promises made by the oil corporation to mend the damaged environment. Indeed, Pexton makes them believe that the dirty and unpleasant conditions "*would soon be over*" as children argue: "*we would all be well in no time.*

They asked us to come to village meetings, to talk about it. They told us we had to trust them" (p.3). As deception always leads to a bad reaction once a truth is discovered, villagers become annoyed when they realise that Pexton only lie to them, as evidenced in the following passage:

We should have spat in their faces, heaped upon them names most befitting – liars, savages, unscrupulous, evil. We should have cursed their mothers and their grandmothers, flung pejoratives upon their fathers, prayed for unspeakable calamities to befall their children. We hated them and we hated their meetings. (*HBWW*, p.3)

A close understanding of this extract reveals the annoyance Kosawa villagers consume and vomit upon Pexton. The irritated tone of this speech describes how they are fed up with them. This can be considered as the beginning of eco-activism since their emotion is characterized by antagonism toward Pexton due to its offense and injustice.

In addition, the act of rebellion marks the villagers' shift from passive indignation to active revenge. Broadly speaking, people are motivated to seek revenge when they feel attacked, mistreated or socially rejected. Getting an eye for an eye is thought to bring a sense of catharsis and closure. Yet, Imbolo Mbue puts invectives in some characters' mind to show their dissatisfaction towards the injury they experience day-to-day. This is the case of Thula whose anger drives her to vengeful feelings because Pexton, the government and the local elite beyond the devastation of the environment, make villagers suffer, kill those who try to protest, especially her father and uncle. The novel evidences it when Thula copiously despises them: "I promise myself that afternoon that someday I will make Woja Beki and his friends in Bézam pay for what they've done to my family. I know nothing about how a girl makes men pay for their crimes, but I have the rest of my life to figure it out." (pp.48-49). As can be seen, the emotions that fuel Thula's revenge constitute a pathological reaction to a negative life event that she experiences.

Besides, it is obviously clear that embitterment, anger, fury and hatred, especially against the triggering stressor, often accompany fantasies of revenge. In the novel under the scrutiny, one sees Kosawa villagers' desire to harm Pexton for what it has wrongly done. Thula, for instance, in a letter to her age-mates, writes: "*I'm open to listening to your ideas about making it clear to Pexton that it's not over*" (p.213). The fact of saying that it's not over shows a way-out to a hurtful reaction. Consequently, the feeling of anger and fury against Pexton makes some of Kosawa inhabitants to commit a harmful action against the latter in response to a grievance. The novel reads: "*our young men started shouting. We'll march to Bézam and burn down your headquarters, they said. We'll hurt you the same way you're hurting us*" (p.9). From this assertion, one is tempted to infer that revenge is a kind of "wild justice" as Francis Bacon describes it, for it joins the ideology of "*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*".

Next to it, vengeful behaviour has been found across a majority of human societies. Some societies encourage revengeful behaviour, which is called a feud, that is a mutual enmity or quarrel that is often prolonged or inveterate. These societies usually regard the honour of individuals and groups as important. Thus, in protecting the reputation of his/her ancestors, an avenger feels as if they restore the previous

state of dignity and justice. According to Michael Ignatieff (online), "*revenge is a profound moral desire to keep faith with the dead, to honor their memory by taking up their cause where they left off*". Thus, honour may become a heritage that passes from generation to generation. Imbolo Mbue seemingly describes the same attitude for those who suffer from feud. This can be seen through Thula's letter when she writes:

Our fathers, brothers, uncles, friends—what did they die for? They died so that we could live peacefully in Kosawa, and if not us, then at least the next generation. (…) The government and Pexton (…) speak to us in the language of destruction – let's speak it to them too, since it's what they understand. (*HBWW*, pp.213-214)

From this passage, one notices the desire of Kosawa children not only to harm and get rid of Pexton on their land, but also to restore the initial "balance of honour" that preceded the perceived injury. In this regard, "*acts of revenge not only sought to deter a second harmful act by a wrongdoer but also acted as an insurance policy against future harm by others, a warning signal that you're someone who will not tolerate mistreatment*" as declares Michael McCullough (cited by Hamber and Wilson, 2002), a professor of psychology at the University of Miami.

In the same perspective, Chimeka Garricks' novel encapsulates the indignation that people of Asiama feel regarding the pernicious exploitation of their natural resources, particularly oil, by Imperial Oil Company. The oil, seen as a symbol of wealth and prosperity in Niger Delta, becomes an inaccessible resource for those populations who should benefit most from it. Unfortunately, they endure the environmental degradation, poverty, and health crises caused by oil drilling, while the profits are stolen by corporations and corrupt government officials.

The statement below captures the deep sense of injustice entrenched in the fact that despite the oil being extracted from their own land, Asiama inhabitants are deprived of access to it: "*and they prevent people like you, people from Asiama, from taking the oil that comes from your own land* (p.71)." This inequality of power is a reflection of both economic and political oppression, which energies the anger and frustration of the local population.

On top of that, some indigenous, especially those from Asiama, direct their indignation towards the government in its complicity of raping natural resources and destroying the biodiversity. They speak to the hypocrisy of leadership, mainly "Mr. President" who benefits from the wealth that oil extraction generates while remaining detached from the devastating consequences faced by his fellow citizens. Doye, alias Doughboy, expresses his anger as follows: "*All Mr President does is shit in and drill oil from my river. Does he eat the rotten fish from Asiama River? Does his wife drink the contaminated water? Do his grandchildren play next to gas flares and pipelines? So how the hell can he own my river?*" (p.149). Here, the vivid imagery emphasizes the disconnect between the ruling class and local population. It further highlights the injustice and cruelty as the government takes huge profit on polluted rivers, contaminated water, and hazardous gas flares that harm the community. With this regard, the above statement criticizes the government's prioritization of profit over the well-being of its citizens and accentuates the deep anger and disappointment that fuel Asiama inhabitants' desire for justice and change.

Likewise, Chimeka Garricks, in his novel *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, depicts the transition from indignation to revenge against a system that perpetuates exploitation and corruption by the unbearable economic and environmental injustice. From this angle of reasoning, one can read Doye's pronouncement which suits with the idea of injustice:

Everyone else is milking our oil. The government has already sold the oil that will be drilled in the next decades. The politicians and military boys have shared oil blocks among themselves. The companies use out dated but cheaper drilling methods which pollute the environment. The refineries never work because it's more profitable for some people to import petroleum products. The marketers cause artificial scarcity so they can make a killing. It's a never-ending gang rape. (*TDY*, p.149)

It appears clear that the system is rigged for the benefit of a few, while the majority suffers the awful drawbacks. This gathering of anger over time ultimately leads to a desire for revenge, as local population realize they are repeatedly exploited without redress.

Next to it, one can assert that the oppressed local populations bear the desire for revenge seeing their voices and rights systematically ignored by government in favour of its interests and those of oil company. In *Tomorrow Died* Yesterday, the irritated voice of Doye, alias Doughboy, is thunderous: "*the system has made trillions of dollars from persistently brutalising and sodomising my people. The system has too many interests, politicians and bullshit talk-shops.*" (p.204). Here, the pronouncement conveys a strong sense of violation and dehumanization, which fuels Asiama natives' desire for reprisal. In this perception, claiming the right to oil outcomes by all means necessary becomes a moral imperative and a collective call to action. The voice of Doye speaks again:

> I have made some money from my fight. But there is also an ideological angle to my fight. In taking what is rightfully mine, I hope I inspire my people to stand up and take what is rightfully theirs. (…) I know the nonsense that the law says. But, it's an unjust law. And in the words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr., "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." (*TDY*, p.204)

From the forgoing, one can easily infer that Doye, alias Doughboy, is not simply motivated by personal gain, but by the wider vision of justice for his people deepening the sense of virtue in their pursuit of justice beyond the revenge. By quoting Martin Luther King in these circumstances, this heightens the idea that sometimes, the only way to counter systemic oppression is through disobedience and defiance. It further justifies the move from passive indignation to active resistance and revenge against a corrupt system. Asiama people have witnessed decades of oi exploitation and environmental degradation, this explains the rhetoric of justice, rights, and moral responsibility which gives their children's actions a sense of purpose and legitimacy, transforming the anger into a determined fight for liberation.

In both novels, the indignation of young indigenous characters emanates from environmental destruction and social injustice, which swiftly mutates into a thirst for revenge since their grievances are continuously disregarded. The rotation of

indignation to revenge highlights the unfathomable scars of exploitation and oppression, a way of showing that without justice and redress, annoyance and disenchantment can lead to further conflict and devastation.

5. Violence as a Means of Last Resort for a Change

The exploitation of the environment by corporations in collaboration with the government, in oil producing areas, generates most of the time controversies. The environment which is made up of land, air and water, constitutes an important entity to Africans. Thus, inhabitants cannot tolerate the degradation of it as it was the case of Kenyans who, through the Mau Mau struggle, fought and resisted imperialists' occupation and horrible exploitation of their rich land. In view of this, it becomes crucial not to anchor ideas of eco-activism from a single struggle tactic, mainly peaceful demonstration, but to broaden it to amounts of mechanisms that appear necessary for environmental justice. In this context, violence, as a manifestation of discontent and a request for change, unarguably emerges as a strong response to systemic oppression, environmental ruin, and economic exploitation, motivated by the disillusion which gulps communities. In lieu of this, Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020:3) write:

> Taiwo asserts that 'the environmental devastation associated with the industry (petroleum) and the lack of distribution of oil wealth have been the source and/or key aggravating factors of numerous environmental movements and inter-ethnic conflicts in the region.' This, in general, has seen the youths turn to militancy, kidnapping and robbery in their fight against the multinational oil companies and the government.

In both novels under analysis, violence is not depicted as mindless brutality but as a form of resistance, an ultimate resort for young people that have exhausted peaceful means of claiming their rights. This reasoning finds credence in Makosso's argument when he explains youth criminality in the context of despair as "*a reverberating cry for social redress. For, these young people think that their violent actions are the only way to attract their authorities' attention about their critical conditions in their very homeland*" (2020:35). Far from making an ovation of violence, it is worth reminding that some critics examine young people's resort to violent means as simply the expression of discontent with socio-economic and political realities in the region. In this regard, Tom Odhiambo (2007:136) accordingly writes:

As a result of the inability of the system to sustain a coherent mechanism for fair and equitable division of the national resources, different individuals or interest groups that have been pushed onto the margins of the formal system of resources distribution resort to strategies outside officially sanctioned means of accessing economic resources or livelihood to make a living.

A cross-examination of this pronouncement makes it noteworthy to deduce that the distortion of youth can be understood as a violent revolt directed to government who marginalize and maintain them in an unbearable situation.

Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* reflects a strong connection between Kosawa inhabitants and their ancestral land, vowing hostility to Pexton which, despite its power and claims, can never truly owns their land. Thula's friends argue: "*we told them that Pexton could never be our neighbour because the land wasn't theirs. The land was our land. It would never be theirs, no matter how often they said so*" (p.206). Here, it appears important to notify that land holds cultural, spiritual, and existential significance for the people as Simon et al. (2014:383) accordingly opine that land "*is tied to people's cultural, spiritual and physical inheritance [and] therefore has always been viewed as a source of conflict and violence among people*." However, in Mbue's novel, the conflict does not occur among villagers, but is directed towards the oppressors, including both government and Pexton.

Yet, the authoress incorporates, in her narration, the idea of liberation that must come from local populations themselves. This emphasizes the audacity and urgency of activism. The following statement captures Kosawa villagers' recognition about the harsh truth that no messiah will save them if not themselves:

- Children: Perhaps our mothers were realizing, as we all were, that no one was coming to save us and we had to save ourselves by whatever means presented itself. (p.77)
- Lusaka: We are the only ones who can free ourselves. (*HBWW*, p.102)
- Konga: Someday, when you're old, you'll see that the ones who came to kill us and the ones who'll run to save us are the same. No matter their pretences, they all arrive here believing they have the power to take from us or give to us whatever will satisfy their endless wants. (*HBWW*, p.103)

Here, one reads in Kosawa natives' mindset a kind of necessity of self-reliance and courage in the face of tyranny. This resonates with audacity and grassroots activism, where the burdened people, drove by resentment and a desire for justice, vigorously take bold steps to reclaim their rights and protect their future, rejecting passive hope for external rescue.

In addition, indignant young villagers use kidnapping, vandalism and militancy as a pressure tactic for getting the government and oil company to address the grievances of oil pollution in their communities since peaceful means have failed. Thula's letter reads: "*The government and Pexton have left us with no choice but to do what we must in order to be heard. They speak to us in the language of destruction – let's speak it to them too, since it's what they understand*." (*HBWW*, pp.213-214).

A close reading of this passage shows how violent protest becomes an ultimate solution to cope with the matter and to express the dissatisfaction by seeking the liberation, although it initiates conflicts and makes life insecure in different parts of the region. With this regard, Frantz Fanon (2004) opines that "*decolonization is always a violent event*." Thus, once Thula's five friends realize the ineffectiveness of peaceful demonstrations, they believe that their radical action is the only way to draw attention to their plight. Subsequently, they start kidnapping expatriates as the novel renders: "*we don't know when the Five left Kosawa to go to Gardens and kidnap Mr. Fish and his wife*" (p.347). Then, as the story unfolds, Imbolo Mbue highlights the young villagers' shift towards militarization, an important means of self-defence and empowerment. Thula's friends believe that "guns would allow us to do more than

break and burn - they would make Kosawa safer" (p.287) as they "*knew that if marching and singing and dancing failed, we would have a recourse*" (p.294). The novel provides further evidence: "*we had the best guns for our money. We marvelled at how good it felt to hold them. Killing suddenly seemed the most natural thing*" (p.394). The mention of guns reflects Kosawa young inhabitants' growing frustration with peaceful methods, which have failed to protect them from the exploitation of their land or from armed attacks instigated by the government. By arming themselves, they have faith in violence which undoubtedly becomes a necessary response to oppression and land deterioration.

If certain villagers worry about the new behaviour of their children, others get whereas satisfaction from what the young men are doing for they have "*their duty to fight for its restoration any way they want*" (p.239). When these young men damage pipelines, set fires and destroy the tanks, they do it because they need oil corporation to meet their concerns. The novel certifies when they explain it to their friend: "*We told him we couldn't put an end to the assaults, not until Pexton met our demands, which they appeared willing to do the following month, when they asked the Sweet One to tell us that a new overseer would soon be arriving at Gardens*." (p.255). Through this quote, one can easily surmise that the violent confrontation between foreign oil companies and local communities, being marginalized and oppressed, is a path to speak out their concerns and wish them to be heard. So, Imbolo Mbue tries to underscore that violent mechanism can sometimes be useful in eco-activism.

The use of violence by Thula's friends to make their concerns known, emanate certainly from the different pains they experience, which result in anger and revengeful desire as they confess: "*watching our friend undone by grief made us realize that our time to kill had come. We'd had enough. We'd wept enough. We'd buried enough. Our enemies needed to start paying for our suffering*" (p.305). They start bombing oil installations, which re-immerses the village in conflict once again. In this connection, Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2017) attempts to explain the causal relationship between natural resource endowment and the outbreak of violent conflict, in saying that oil exploration activities leading to environmental degradation such as shortage of farmlands, death of aquatic life, air and water pollution, oil poisoning causing respiratory ailments and destruction of mangrove forests, often without adequate compensation, have resulted in conflict. Then, she writes that "increasing frustration emanating from oil exploration has led to violent resistance which has culminated in conflict in the region between locals represented by militants and oil corporations operating in the region."

In the same way, young characters, in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday,* respond to the devastation triggered by oil spills and environmental ruin with militancy and vandalism. Here, Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020:1) report that "*Garricks describes the Niger Delta youth as a group that is disenfranchised economically and also sabotaged environmentally*." This means that the region becomes a space where the local populations, who are victims of those calamities, take up arms and resort to vandalism and militancy as means of fighting back. The government's complicity with oil companies exacerbates the environmental devastation, leaving the people with no option but to engage in violent protest. From this posture, Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020:2) further shed light on the question:

The discovery of oil in Nigeria and the subsequent oil exploration, trade and activities have been a blessing to Nigeria, but more of a curse to the region that produces the wealth. Unarguably, the Niger Delta has been a victim of its own blessings. It has been vandalized, degraded environmentally, polluted and castrated due to oil exploration activities in the region. The environmental degradation recorded in the Niger Delta has brought about ecological issues of despoliation, climate change, global warming, and many more. These issues have subsequently led to agitations in the Niger Delta, positively and negatively. Negatively, it has led to aggressive actions from the youths of the Delta: militancy, kidnapping and insecurity trails and overshadows the activities of the oil companies.

This means that militant, groups in the region, sabotage pipelines and vandalize oil installations, not as an act of wanton destruction, but as a form of dissent against the injustice that has been imposed upon them.

In *Tomorrow Died Yeterday,* Doye, alias Doughboy, and his Asiama Freedom Army become a group which represents the relegated youths of the Niger Delta in kidnapping expatriates and bunkering oil. For instance, they kidnap Manning, an important Imperial Oil worker, and demand a ransom: amount of money that enables them to provide for their needs. This is seen, in some circumstances, as the only effective way to force the government and oil companies to recognize their grievances, needs and recommendations so as to end their frustration and injustice. Asiama inhabitants' indignation emanates from the exclusion of their people from employment in oil opportunities of their own land. The novel narrates through Doye's anger towards a Haussa man who comes in a delegation of ransom negotiators: "my *people have the oil, yet it is your people who have all the jobs in the oil companies. Your people refuse to employ my people. They say we are not qualified. Yoruba man, answer me – are my people not qualified?*' (*TDY*, p.4) Here, the novelist decries systemic inequalities faced by the community since the oil jobs are visibly taken by Yoruba and Igbo natives while Hausa community takes up the juicy political and security appointments, leaving the other ethnic groups with nothing. He further highlights the unambiguous imbalance between those who profit from the resources and those who, despite the land they bear, suffer from oil exploitation, and suddenly dive into kidnapping to voice out the inequitable treatment. Commenting on Doye's ideology, Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020:8) write:

> The only way he believes he can fight for the freedom of his people is through the kidnapping of the oil workers. He knows he cannot win the war against the oil companies and the Nigerian government, but the only way to make them uncomfortable as the Niger Desta people are is through kidnapping. (…) A whole region is being raped, sodomized and marginalized, yet the government and oil companies keep mute because of the wealth they accrue from the business. Eco-activism thereby falls on militant characters like Doughboy to advocate for both the environment and the marginalized people.

Doye irrevocably becomes Doughboy, a product of government oppression and the systemic marginalization of his people, because of the atrocity he witnesses such as the murder of his father along with thirty-seven other men from Asiama, during a massacre by soldiers in retaliation for the death of a single soldier. He observes Gorimapa, a military leader, force a grown man to eat his own excrement. Such events destabilize even the most resilient individuals such as Amaibi, who previously

rejected violence, becomes distraught after the 1997 massacre and asserts that in the case of the Niger Delta, violence is justified as the only means for the people to liberate themselves.

- Aimaibi: violence is now a justified option for dealing with the injustice in the Niger Desta. (*TDY*, p.23)
- Doughboy: Violence is the only thing that the government and the oil companies respond to. (*TDY*, p.151)

These quotations echo young characters' shared belief that violence has become the only practical response to the systemic injustice and exploitation in the Niger Delta. It appears prominent to argue that continual suffering and oppression have left no choice but to resort to violence as a justified means to address the injustice, the only language the government and oil companies understand. Both characters illustrate the strong frustration and the deep disillusionment that the local population feels under oil pollution and squalid living conditions, driving them to seek more extreme measures to reclaim their rights and protect their land.

Conclusion

This research work has been a textual analysis of Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* and Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*. It aimed showing how young people, in both novels, manifest their outcry using different violent mechanisms for the environmental justice and restoration. It has critically scanned how youth indignation, originating from environmental injustice, evolves into vandalism, kidnapping, and militancy. By examining the interconnected themes of unpleasant living conditions, economic erosion, displacement, tyrannical oppression, and the escalation of indignation to revenge, the analysis reveals a complex portrait of youth eco-activism. Conducted through the lens of postcolonial eco-critical theory by Huggan and Tiffin, the analysis has shown that young characters in both narratives, by witnessing the degradation of their land and the terrible indifference of their governments, escalate their indignation into acts of extreme violence as a last resort. Their engagement in these extreme measures underscores their frustration with a system that ignores their suffering and prioritizes oil company's interests. Ultimately, the youth's reactions reveal their desire for justice and restoration, as they challenge the forces that seek to exploit and destroy their environment. This exploration highlights the complexity of youth resistance in the face of environmental degradation and suggests that, in the absence of peaceful alternatives, violence can become a tool for oppressed communities to reclaim their rights and demand change. All things considered, it can be asserted that the quest for the environmental justice, through violent approach constitutes an in-depth outcry against darkness forces and paves the way to the ecological consciousness.

References bibliographiques

Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. (2017). 'Towards ending conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region'. Retrieved on June, 21st 2024 from https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/towards-ending-conflict-and-insecurity-niger-delta-region

Amnesty International [AI]. (2009). *Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta*. London, United Kingdom: Peter Benenson House.

Anwuri, I. and Olanrewaju, A. (2020). "Reflections on Eco-Activism in the Niger Delta in Chiemeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*." *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research | Arts, Humanities and Education*, Vol. 6, Issue 6, ISSN: 2488-9849, pp.1-12.

Biama, T. M. et al. (2022). "A voice of resistance and activism: A critique of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*." *African Educational Research Journal* Vol. 10(3), ISSN: 2354-2160, pp. 312-320.

Garricks, Chimeka. (2010). *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*. Port Harcourt: Paperworth Books Limited.

Hamber, B. and Wilson, R. A. (2002). "Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-conflict Societies". *Mental Health and Human Rights Info*. Retrieved on August, 10th June 2023, from https://www.hhri.org/publication/symbolic-closure-through-memory-reparation-and-revenge-in-post-conflict-societies/

Huggan, G. and Tiffin, H. (2015). *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Kraja, E. (2018). "Eco-activism: what it is and why it is relevant." Retrieved on August, 08th 2022, from https://www.wecf.org/eco-activism-what-it-is-and-why-it-is-relevant/

Makosso, A., Loumbouzi, D., and Mouzita, A. (2022). "Oil Exploitation and Children's Squalid Experience in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*". *Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique*, Vol.001, N°002, ISSN: 2790 – 6108, pp.160-179.

Mbue, I. (2021). *How Beautiful We Were*. Edinburgh, Great Britain: Canongate.

Musaib, J. and Tania, S. (2022). "Land Deterioration and Environmental Damage: A Postcolonial Eco-Critical Study of *How Beautiful We Were*". *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, Vol. 6, Issue I, ISSN (E): 2663-1512, pp.67-88.

Nare, M., et al. (2024). "Global Coloniality and Ecological Injustice in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (2021)". *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 55(4), pp.349-372.

Odhiambo, T. (2007). "Juvenile delinquency and violence in the fiction of three Kenyan writers". *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, Vol.44 (2), pp.134-148.

Simon, E. D. et al. (2014). "Environmental Degradation, Militancy/Kidnapping and Oil Theft in Helon Habila's *Oil in Water*". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, N°2, ISSN: 2039-9340, pp.363-366.

Tarkpegher, H. T. (2020). "The Postcolonial Challenge of Oil Bunkering and Kidnapping in The Niger Delta: A Study of Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*." *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JOLLS)*, Vol.9, N°6, ISSN: 2636-7149-6300, pp.110-118.

Ujowundu, C. O. and Okoye-Ugwu, S. (n.d.). "Tyrannical Oppression and Disillusionment: A Study of Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*". *IKENGA International Journal of Institute of African Studies UNN*, Volume 20, N°1, pp.349-355.

Copyrights

Le copyright de cet article est conservé par l'auteur ou les auteurs, les droits de première publication sont accordés à la revue. *L'article, sous la licence Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International, est la propriété intellectuelle de cet(s) auteur*(s). Cahiers Africains de rhétorique © 2022 by UMNG-FLASH is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

Cahiers Africains de Rhétorique(fr), Vol 3, N°02, 30 Décembre 2024, pp.178-198
African Rhetoric Notebooks(An)
ISSN : 2790 -6108, EISSN : 2790-6116