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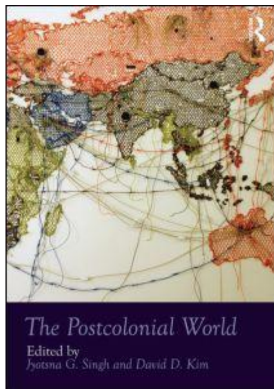

The Postcolonial World

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Rethinking Postcolonial Resistance in Niger-Delta Literature

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CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

RETHINKING POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN NIGER-DELTA LITERATURE

An ecocritical reading of Okpewho's *Tides* and Ojaide's *The Activist*

Cajetan N. Iheka

In "A Thriving Postcolonialism: Toward an Anti-Postcolonial Discourse," Grant Farred suggests that postcolonialism "has to be at once politically new (and renewed) and old."[1] While Farred agrees that certain strategies of the "anticolonial struggle" are worth keeping, he insists that the new postcolonialism "has to distinguish what was efficacious [in the anticolonial struggle] from what was not, what can be applied to the new terrain and what cannot."[2] I begin my chapter with Farred's work because of its call for a postcolonialism that revises or at least rethinks the anticolonial strategies of the old colonial and postcolonial liberation struggles. More specifically, Farred's work opens up a space for the case I make about rethinking violence as a strategy of postcolonial resistance in the Niger-Delta context discussed in this chapter.

Among other things, postcolonialism – in both its political and intellectual ramifications – inherited the justification of violent resistance from the anticolonial struggle, that is the kind we saw with the popular Mau Mau insurrection against colonialism in Kenya and the militancy of the African National Congress (ANC) youth wing against Apartheid in South Africa, among others. We ought to recall that Frantz Fanon also endorsed such armed confrontation with his call for revolution against the colonial forces in *The Wretched of the Earth*.[3] Inspired by Fanon, postcolonial scholars – from earlier decolonization to more recent times – have often celebrated violence as a strategy of resistance, as is evident in the Niger-Delta examples I highlight in this essay. However, I believe that the reconstitution of a new kind of postcolonialism must entail a reconsideration of potentially catastrophic strategies because of the ecological degradation that often results from such modes of opposition. Postcolonialism needs to be attuned to the ecological implications of colonial and neocolonial oppression and ensure that its responses are not complicit in the problems it seeks to address.

Take the Niger-Delta case, for example. Since 2005, several militant groups have taken up arms against the Nigerian state and the oil companies for the degradation of the Delta environment through decades of oil exploration. While the agency of the armed youth is manifested in bombing oil installations and oil bunkering, which involves scooping oil and selling the unrefined crude through illegal channels, as

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well as kidnapping oil workers and politicians, the palpable threats posed by global warming and climate change call for a reassessment of such activities. Put differently, if the kind of violence unleashed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) can be considered as an inheritance from the anticolonial struggle, the contributions of such forms of opposition to environmental degradation in an era of ecological decline warrants the search for more efficacious strategies.

In this essay, I focus on two Niger-Delta novels, Isidore Okpewho's *Tides* (1993) and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* (2006), to show the limitations of violence as a mode of resistance in the Delta and to suggest other approaches crucial for what Farred describes as "the new terrain of struggle" in postcolonialism.[4] I favor literary narratives, as distinct from merely empirical accounts, for the important role they "play in drawing attention to and shaping our ideas about catastrophic and long-term environmental challenges" such as the ecological devastation ongoing in the Delta.[5]

While critics of Niger-Delta postcolonial literature, including Charles C. Feghabo and Sunny Ahwefeada, have often celebrated violence in Okpewho's and Ojaide's works, I seek to reveal how insights from ecocriticism complicate and interrogate such endorsements of insurgency. Charles C. Feghabo, for instance, argues that "Okpewho's vision of the triumph of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta through a revolution becomes glaring" from Bickerbug's bombing of oil infrastructure in the novel.[6] Similarly, Sunny Ahwefeada argues that oil bunkering in *The Activist* amounts to a subversive act perpetrated for the betterment of the people.[7] In contrast, I argue that celebrating near catastrophic acts like bombing oil installations and oil bunkering ignores the devastating ecological footprint they leave behind. In reading these narratives, I intend to enrich our understanding of Niger-Delta literature and contribute to the burgeoning field of postcolonial ecocriticism. According to Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, postcolonial ecocriticism draws "attention to both global imperial contexts and parts of the world often elided" by western ecocriticism's focus on primarily American and British cultural productions.[8] I envisage a kind of postcolonial ecocriticism that emphasizes the imbrication of humans and nonhumans and decenters humans as the locus of environmental criticism. My emphasis on ecological survival is important because focusing mainly on humans runs the risk of reifying the anthropocentric positioning of the environment that led to problems these Niger-Delta texts critique in the first place.

In following this argument that emphasizes a symbiotic relationship between humans and nonhumans, my essay is informed by Timothy Morton's idea of ecological thought. In *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Morton suggests that both nature and culture interact and are transformed by their interactions. Morton's point is particularly germane for postcolonial societies, where the colonizers altered the land with the introduction of plants and crops that complicated the idea of the natural. The interaction of people with their environment shows an interplay of nature and culture that gets lost when we focus mainly on humans in environmental criticism. Morton also undercuts human exceptionalism when he stresses the interplay of human and nonhumans, and insists that we redefine our notion of personhood to include other beings we do not normally ascribe to the same category. In his view, it is important to "treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas of what counts as people."[9]

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According to Morton, the main point is "thinking big," which contrasts with the notion of "thinking small" in terms of the locale or place, and thinking in terms of only human interests. For Morton, "thinking big" allows for a recognition of the interdependence of humans and nonhumans, an idea he describes as the mesh. In his words, "[a]ll life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitat which are also made up of living and nonliving beings."[10] Morton enjoins humans to consider animals and other environmental elements as "strange strangers" to enable a recognition of the familiarity and intimacy we share with them despite their strangeness. Morton's term emphasizes the radical alterity of nonhumans and the impossibility of knowing them. As he puts it, "we can't predict or anticipate just who or what – and can we tell between 'who' and 'what,' and how can we tell?"[11]

Morton is not so naïve as to ignore the uncertainty that characterizes ecological thought. He draws attention to debates concerning the rationality and capacity for suffering of nonhumans and asks if these really matter:

> We can't be sure whether sentient beings are machines or not. And it would be dangerous if we thought we could. . . . However much we try, we can't explain the strange stranger away. We're stuck with the paradoxes of pure appearance.[12]

He also opposes the tendency to use the idea of consciousness to demonstrate human superiority over other species. As Morton writes: "The ecological thought should not set consciousness up as yet another defining trait of superiority over nonhumans. Our minds are hugely quantitatively different from other terrestrial minds but perhaps not qualitatively."[13] In other words, the crux of the author's argument is that there is uncertainty concerning nonhuman beings because we as humans cannot really know them. Hence, the term "strange strangers" dictates that the inconclusive debates on their capacities should not be the basis for denying them equivalence.

Although Morton's work can be critiqued for not addressing the power structures and inequalities that characterize our neoliberal society, I find his work useful because of the redefinition of personhood he envisages, his obliteration of a center in ecological thought, and his insistence on recognizing nonhumans as "strange strangers" regardless of their capacities. The strength of Morton's work for this inquiry relies on the decentering of the human and the fact that he does not consider reason or sentience the key parameters for recognizing nonhumans. That their existence is enough to compel our intimacy and respect for them is pivotal for discussing the Niger-Delta environment in this essay. Morton's ecological thought holds us to a larger conception of the environment that caters not only to our interests as humans. Rather, he compels us to conceive of a broader ecological ethic that serves the larger interests of the different beings inhabiting the environment. So while I do not eschew or denigrate the history of colonial and postcolonial armed struggles – the Fanonian legacy of the twentieth century – I attempt to argue for an activism that is based on the conceptualization of communities or collectivities based on a symbiotic relationship between humans and the world they inhabit.

THE NIGER-DELTA UNVEILED

Since texts are "always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society," as Edward Said reminds us,[14] it is important to explore briefly the history of the Niger-Delta region before discussing Okpewho's and Ojaide's narratives. The Niger-Delta is an important site from which to consider the effects of globalization and resource extraction in Africa.[15] The Delta's proximity to the Atlantic Ocean makes it accessible to foreigners and it has allowed the region to engage in trade with outsiders since the sixteenth century.[16] It is considered one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world and it is home to over forty ethnic groups, including the Ogonis, Ijaws, Urhobos, and Itsekiris.[17] Despite these communities' variations, they share certain similarities – for example, the fact that fishing and farming are mainstays of their traditional economy. J.S. Oboreh reports that, "prior to oil exploitation and exploration, the Niger Delta region had been a peaceful place with fishing and farming as the main means of livelihood of its denizens."[18] Oboreh adds that the region "has suffered from environmental degradation and deprivation" since oil exploration started in the region.[19] Shell achieved a major breakthrough in their exploration activity in 1956 by discovering oil in commercial quantities in the Delta.[20] The first oil tanker left Oloibiri in 1958, but as Rob Nixon critically asks, "[w]ho could have dreamed in 1958 that four decades and $600 billion of oil revenues later, some 90 million Nigerians would be surviving on less than a dollar a day?"[21] The poverty underscored in Nixon's rhetorical question is entrenched in the Niger Delta where oil companies' operations have polluted the lands and the rivers.

Not surprisingly, the people of the Delta have taken up what Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez Alier describe as the "environmentalism of the poor."[22] The people's grouse, as represented in *Tides* and *The Activist*, is the destruction of their environment and means of livelihood caused by oil exploration activities. Since the late 1990s, violent activities including the kidnapping of oil workers and bombing of oil installations in the Delta have been carried out by different groups, the most notable being the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).[23] MEND has claimed responsibility for several militant activities since 2005 and it was one of the groups that accepted the amnesty program of the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2009.[24] Although the spate of militancy has significantly diminished since the beginning of the amnesty program, the people in the oil producing communities continue to claim that there is no substantial development of their region or change in the operational procedures of the oil companies for environmental sustainability. Gas continues to flare day and night nonstop, oil continues to spill, and the environment continues to suffer. It is no wonder the area is often cited for the illustration of the resource curse in Africa. The Delta is also the setting of a corpus of literary works, including those analyzed in the following sections.

BOMBING OR TALKING THROUGH THE TIDES?

Set between 25 August 1976 and 28 February 1978, Okpewho's epistolary novel follows a literary tradition popularized by Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) in African literature. The novel records letter exchanges between two friends: Piriye and Tonwe. Piriye also associates with a radical activist named Bickerbug who launches

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tirades against the government and oil companies for the exploitation of the Deltan communities. At the end of the novel, Bickerbug is arrested after having blown up a bridge in Lagos, several oil installations in the Delta, and the Kwarafa Dam.

In reading Okpewho's novel, one can see the limitations of Bickerbug's violent revolution; I also point to the non-violent forms of opposition centered on collaboration/collectivity, which the epistolary narrative suggests. Of particular interest are Bickerbug's devastating activities at the end of the novel since they ironically endanger the environment he is fighting to protect. Paying attention to the militancy of Bickerbug is also important because it has implications for the discussion of the "resurgence of the insurgency in the area years after its publication."[25]

Feghabo compares Bickerbug to Ken Saro-Wiwa, arguing that Bickerbug's portrayal as a "non-materialistic and non-ideological activist truly devoted to the salvation of his people matches Saro-Wiwa's personality. Like Bickerbug, he was a graduate of English, not known for materialism, or as a Marxist."[26] Although there are similarities between Bickerbug and the late environmentalist, Bickerbug's insurgency radically sets him apart from Saro-Wiwa whose principle of non-violence is known to have influenced environmental movements across the world.

Bickerbug's militancy is significant for drawing attention to the plight of the Delta in the novel, but it is also problematic. His actions are actually inimical to the environment they purportedly seek to safeguard. In other words, the fact that his actions are dangerous to the "persons" in the local environment calls for a reassessment of the celebratory readings by critics like Feghabo. Here one can recognize persons in the way Morton would approve of, namely to cover both the human and nonhuman beings in the environment. I argue that while Bickerbug's violent activities draw attention to the problems, showcase the agency of the participants, and represent legible assertion of a right to a better life, they are also injurious not only to fellow humans but to the strange strangers in the environment as well.

Scholars have distinguished between eco-terrorism and environmental terrorism and their work is useful for a reading of Bickerbug's character. While both forms are considered terrorist acts, their difference, as DeMond Shondell Miller, Jason David Rivera, and Joel C. Yelin see it, is "in the targets they choose: environmental terrorists target natural resources, whereas eco-terrorists target human made structures (including technologies used to destroy natural resources in defense of natural resources)."[27] According to this distinction, Bickerbug can be considered an eco-terrorist given that his targets are not natural resources like the River Niger or the land, but oil rigs and the Kainji Dam. These edifices are primarily human-made structures meant to control natural resources – crude oil and water, respectively. In blowing up these structures, Bickerbug registers a strong protest against the government and the oil company for the despoliation of the environment. More importantly, he wants to return the land and water to a "natural" state. But as the novel suggests, such return to an originary moment is impossible. Bickerbug tells Piriye after his arrest: "Our people have won. [. . .] The water is flowing again, full stream. The tides are here again. Soon there'll be plenty of fishes swimming again, eh?"[28] Bickerbug's celebratory tone ignores the extent of ecological damage to the environment as I discuss later. In fact, rather than return us to an original state, his actions compound the ecological problems he is invested in. His activities seem typical of what Morton calls "'one at a time' sequencing."[29] Morton uses this term to describe the tendency

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in environmentalism to fixate on certain aspects of the environment while ignoring others. For Morton, the idea of the mesh and the interconnections of its constituents make such thinking irrelevant. In Okpewho's novel, Bickerbug is fixated on ensuring the flowing of the river, while ignoring the ecological issues it raises about the other life forms in this environment.

In his last letter to Piriye, Tonwe describes the devastation of the Delta environment by the bombing of the installations. Tonwe tells his interlocutor that he "cannot imagine how much oil is floating about now in these creeks. It is better seen than described."[30] Tonwe registers the representational challenge of using writing to convey the enormity of the pollution caused by Bickerbug. Tonwe's insistence on physical witnessing shows the limit of language to convey the enormity of the tragedy. Blowing up one installation is already detrimental to the environment, but blowing up five located in different villages suggests the pollution of a vast expanse of landscape and waterscape by the spillage. If we ask Morton, he will remind us that "there is always more than our point of view," and that the environment "is made of strange strangers."[31]

The image presented in Tonwe's last letter surely undermines Bickerbug's claim that the water is flowing and plenty of fish are swimming again. If at all, it will be water contaminated by oil spills and rendered useless as a habitat for aquatic beings and a source of replenishment. Worth recalling as well is that Lati, the journalist wife of Piriye, who traveled to cover the destruction of the Kwarafa Dam, is still missing when the novel ends. As the hospital search remains futile, so does hope of her being found alive. Lati can be identified as a symbol of the human toll of the explosions, but we should not stop there. If oil spillage is an example of "slow violence" that happens gradually and out of sight, as Rob Nixon astutely explains it, the passage invites us to transcend the spectacular and arresting image portrayed by Tonwe's letter and reflect on the long-term consequence of the explosions for various beings.

Bickerbug's actions fall short of Morton's requirement for ecological thought insofar as they do not recognize the coexistence of other beings and the translation of his actions onto them. In their work in which they contest the appropriateness of terrorism for describing the destruction of property by environmental activists, David Thomas Sumner and Lisa M. Wiedman contend that while terrorists do not care about life, for "environmental activists, however, the sacredness of life is the motivating idea for their actions."[32] Sumner and Wiedman's work is relevant for insisting on the respect for life as an important factor in environmental activism, just as Morton's is for urging readers to respect the importance of all lives and the interconnection of beings inhabiting the environment. Bickerbug's environmentalism fails because his actions do not bear witness to the sanctity of lives in the environment. Whether it is the humans killed from the explosions or the "strange strangers" in the land and rivers, what is at stake is the violation of lives. In fact, one might conclude that Bickerbug fails to "think big."

OIL BUNKERING AND ACTIVISM IN OJAIDE'S NARRATIVE

Like Okpewho's text, Ojaide's *The Activist* also explores the destruction of the Niger-Delta environment and its people by the oil companies and the federal military

government. Like Piriye, Tonwe, and Bickerbug in *Tides*, the Activist, the novel's protagonist who is only known by this name, is an intellectual. But while Bickerbug blows up installations in *Tides*, the Activist participates in oil bunkering business, which positions him as an eco-terrorist since he is damaging man-made structures built for transporting crude oil from the rig. Another remarkable distinction is that Ojaide's novel introduces a gendered perspective to the Niger-Delta problem, which I discuss in the next section. Unlike *Tides*, Ojaide's novel foregrounds the participation of women in the Delta struggle. The Activist is excited about the possibility of hurting the oil companies and the government, both of whom he describes as "the two principal outsiders that were robbing and destroying the people of the Niger Delta."[33]

Critics like Sunny Ahwefeada have hailed the Activist's bunkering business as subversive in that it disrupts the activities of the oil companies.[34] There is value in that position, but such perspective does not seem attentive to the larger ecological problems posed by oil bunkering. One can put pressure on that perspective by positing the following questions: does oil bunkering significantly affect the oil company and the government? Does bunkering affect the people positively or negatively? What are the environmental implications of bunkering? In other words, what is the implication of bunkering on beings in the environment?

While it is true that oil companies and the government lose revenue if they are unable to meet their production quota due to bunkering, the loss is negligible in comparison to the problem it poses to humans and nonhumans. Sabotaging the operations of the companies via bunkering is not an antidote to ecological devastation. Instead, it contributes to destroying the environment, providing excuses for the companies not to curtail oil spills, which eventually result in fires. The novel provides examples where the multinational Bell Oil deflected responsibility for spills, arguing instead that the villagers broke the pipeline to extort compensation from the company. The bunkered oil seeps into the land, eroding it for agricultural use and other purposes. As Ngozi Chuma-Udeh remarks in a reading of similar spills in Kaine Agary's novel *Yellow-Yellow*, "[t]he resultant oil spill wrought heavy contamination of land and underground water courses, sometimes more than 40 years after oil spilled."[35] Patrick Bond shares a similar view in his foreword to Oriola's *Criminal Resistance?* For him, "[o]il bunkering and pipeline sabotage, for example[,] are similarly fraught given the collateral damage including explosions and ecological devastation."[36]

The point is that these adverse effects of bunkering need to be considered to rethink the celebration of the Activist's bunkering by critics. According to the novel, bunkering is helpful to the Activist and his business partner, Pere. They not only become rich themselves, but they are able to provide employment opportunities for others. The wealth from the bunkering business is also what enables the Activist to fund his gubernatorial ambition. Without it, the jobs created by the Delta Cartel and the possibility of change brought about by the election of the Activist as governor would be impossible, but one cannot lose sight of its destructive effect on the larger environment.

So far, I have drawn attention to the ecological problems posed by oil bunkering and destroying oil installations. I have shown how Bickerbug's violent actions in Okpewho's novel contribute to the ecological degradation he intends to combat.

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Additionally, my reading of Ojaide's novel has highlighted the dangers of oil bunkering to the environment even though the proceeds from the illegal business facilitated the Activist's election as governor later in the novel. Yet the most important contribution of these narratives is that they provide alternative forms of opposition that are attuned to ecological sustainability. The more efficacious alternative forms of the Niger-Delta struggle, which I discuss in the next section, focus on collaboration and reinstate the politics undermined by the resort to arms in the preceding sections.

ECOLOGICAL COLLECTIVITIES

Okpewho's and Ojaide's texts allow us to ponder alternatives to the militancy discussed above. I present these alternatives as ways of practicalizing the ecological thought in the Niger Delta. Morton appropriately titled his final chapter "Forward Thinking," which suggests a step in the future. He contends that the ecological thought "compel[s] us to imagine collectivity rather than community – groups formed by choice rather than by necessity," and that the "ecological thought must imagine economic change."[37] However, Morton's work falls short of the programmatic course of action for the formation of the ecological collectivity or even ways of bringing about the economic change. In other words, how do we practice the ecological thought especially in the Niger Delta? In regards to Okpewho's *Tides*, I suggest that its insistence on collaboration through the epistolary form and the open forum I discuss shortly constitute its mode of ecological collectivities. Ojaide's *The Activist*, on the other hand, demonstrates the ecological thought through the collectivities formed by the women who protested against the oil companies, as well as by the electorates who supported the Activist's political ambition and voted for him.

The insistence of *Tides* on collaboration through the epistolary form of the novel is critical. First, the idea of letters implicates an addresser and an addressee, and their collaboration is necessary for communication to take place. The grim, inconclusive ending of the novel makes collaboration particularly germane. As the novel ends, Bickerbug and Tonwe are arrested, while Priboye, the letter carrier, is on the run from the state security operatives. Meanwhile, the pregnant Lati is yet to be found, while the fate of her husband, Piriye, hangs on what the interrogation of Bickerbug and Tonwe would reveal about his complicity. This pessimistic ending of the novel leaves unsolved the Niger-Delta challenges and it undermines the celebratory reading of Bickerbug's revolutionary actions. The ending suggests that we look elsewhere in the narrative for viable alternatives to the grim condition imposed by Bickerbug's insurgent activities.

To look elsewhere is to ponder more seriously the collaboration between Tonwe and Piriye vis-à-vis the form that enables it. Deborah Kaplan, among others, has described the epistolary form as a feminine form.[38] It is no coincidence that a female writer, Mariama Ba, popularized this form in African literature. Okpewho's use of a form associated with women writing suggests that alternative feminist forms of mobilization, the kind visible in Ojaide's novel, are critical for addressing the problems in the Delta. Put differently, even if the novel does not foreground female voices in the environmental struggle as Ojaide's novel did, it still appeals to feminist sensibilities through its form that negates the patriarchal destructive impulse of Bickerbug.

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Additionally, the form is critical to readers' access of the narrative given the repressive bent of the state in the text. We see how Piriye is harassed by the state security agents for publishing his views on the Delta and Nigeria in different news outlets. Bickerbug is also incarcerated earlier in the narrative for staging rallies where he denounces the government and oil companies. Given these scenarios, the confidentiality of the letter form allows the interlocutors to continue their investigation and offer the narrative as a testament against the devastation of the Delta ecology. The collaborative work of Tonwe and Piriye enable us to witness the environmental drama as they unfold not only in the Delta but in the seat of power in Lagos.

Beyond its form, the novel adumbrates other collectivities, most notably through the "open forum" Bickerbug convenes in prison. It is ironic that the prison becomes a site for Jürgen Habermas's notion of a public sphere in the absence of similar opportunities beyond the prison walls. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a space for debate and interactions independent of the state. In his work on the emergence of the public sphere in England, Germany, and France, Habermas contends that the primary criterion for this sphere was that "they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether."[39] In his view, the public sphere was a space where the quality of the argument rather than social status won the day. The public sphere evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it became fully developed in the nineteenth century, and could be seen in salons, coffee houses, and in the pages of texts like novels and newspapers. In sum, the primary characteristic of this European notion of the public sphere is freedom of expression even when the discourse was oppositional to the state.

Although Habermas's conception of the public sphere has been elaborated and critiqued by scholars, it remains useful for my purposes because it provides insights relevant for discussing Bickerbug's open forum. Habermas's insistence on freedom of expression and the irrelevance of social status to the acceptability of one's viewpoints are critical components of Bickerbug's open forum.[40] Describing the discussions of the open forum to Tonwe in a letter, Piriye indicates that "[t]he session was also thoroughly democratic – everything was conducted in pidgin so that both the educated and the not so educated could deliberate on equal terms and hold a true dialogue."[41] Readers of the novel will remember the attempts by the state agents to stifle dissent when they clamped down on Bickerbug's public campaigns against corruption. As such, it is significant that the space of confinement becomes a productive space for the unhindered discussion of socio-political issues denied expression by the autocratic military leaders outside the prison walls in the text.

The non-hierarchical nature of this public sphere is indicative of a transformative space where the rights and obligations to nonhumans, to the larger environment, can be given serious consideration. Also worthy of mention is that the open forum discussed women's rights, a marginal subject in the novel. The novel indicates that it is in such space of equality that our superior attitude to marginal subjects – women, the larger environment – can be challenged and transformed towards a realization of the principles of the ecological thought.

If "epistolary writing," according to Janet Gurkin Altman, "refracts events through not one but two prisms – that of reader as well as that of writer," the third person or omniscient narrative point of view of Ojaide's *The Activist* showcases multiple prisms.[42] Although the novel's title suggests that the novel will be delivered in the

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first person's voice of the protagonist, the Activist, the novel comes to us in the third person voice. The narrative point of view is significant because it helps to reduce the emphasis on the Activist and allow us to focus on the different collectivities galvanized for the ecology. As we follow the protagonist throughout the novel, we see that his notable actions in the novel happen in collaboration with others. For instance, he gets fully involved in the community after he marries Ebi, and his bunkering business is in collaboration with Pere. More importantly, his governorship ambition is realized after the masses overwhelmingly vote for him. Put differently, the Activist becomes governor because of the women who embarked on the nude protest and the coalition of the masses that guaranteed his election victory after the demise of the military dictator.

CONCLUSION

While blowing up oil installations and bunkering are subversive acts pointing to the agency of individuals as existing scholarship on these novels indicate, the challenge that this essay undertakes is to put pressure on these otherwise salutary forms of protest by asking how they fit in with the need for ecological sustainability. This reading invites a conversation about the impacts of acts of sabotage on the environment while not losing sight of their critical role in a country where the government tends to understand mainly (if not only) the language of force. While postcolonial studies' emphasis on agency and resistance is important, the ecocritical perspective foregrounded in this essay illuminates the need for ecological appraisal of such strategies and a search for sustainable alternatives.

Given contemporary concerns over global warming, postcolonial studies scholars ought to reassess those actions hitherto hailed for demonstrating the agency of the oppressed so as to accommodate the interests of the environment as well. Clearly, both novels under investigation suggest possible alternatives as seen in the last section. In *Tides*, we see an emphasis on collaboration from the epistolary form and the transformative public sphere. *The Activist*, on the other hand, suggests that the role of the intellectual transcends championing dialogue and overseeing the public sphere like Bickerbug did in prison. The Activist's election as governor recommends the intellectual run for office to steer positive change. Unlike *Tides*, which ends on a less optimistic note with bombed environments, *The Activist* ends hopefully with the intellectual-turned-governor creating a ministry of the environment to address the environmental challenges facing the region, and declaring that "EVERY LIFE MATTERS" at a rally in the United States.[43]

This quote reads like something literally taken out of Morton's *The Ecological Thought* and deserves to be read in that light. For Morton, "[i]f we think the ecological thought, two things happen. Our perspective becomes very vast. More and more aspects of the Universe become included in the ecological thought."[44] The words on the Activist's placard definitely demonstrate a vast perspective, both formally and in content. That they are written in uppercase not only places emphasis on the subject they convey; the boldness of the lettering certainly conveys some sense of vastness. And even more so is the content. The qualifier "every" portends an all-inclusive category; no life in the universe is discounted in the passage. Read side by side, these novels buttress the role of the government and civil society in demonstrating the ecological thought in formerly colonized spaces. They also insist that intellectuals

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have a critical role to play in the social restructuring of the Delta environment and cannot afford to be missing in the public spheres of progressive conversations about the future of the region. But the larger point these narratives make is this: if the old postcolonialism – emerging from decolonization – sanctioned violence as a means to human liberation and progress, the new postcolonialism – both as a political and intellectual imperative – must be attentive to the needs of both humans and nonhumans in drawing up its modus operandi.

ENDNOTES

1. Grant Farred, "A Thriving Postcolonialism: Toward an Anti-Postcolonial Discourse." *Neplanta: Views from South* 2.2 (2001): 245.
2. Ibid., 245.
3. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1963), 6.
4. Farred, "A Thriving Postcolonialism," 245.
5. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, "Introduction: A Postcolonial Environmental Humanities." In *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.
6. Charles Cliff Feghabo, "Isidore Okpewho's *Tides* and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day*: A Kinesis of Eco-Activism from Theory to Praxis." In *Eco-Critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes*, ed. Ogaga Okuyade (New York: African Heritage Press, 2013), 60.
7. Sunny Ahwefeada, "A Nameless Activist in the Service of the Fatherland." *The Guardian*, January 22, 2007: 45.
8. Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, "Introduction." In *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, ed. Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 6.
9. Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 8.
10. Ibid., 29.
11. Ibid., 38.
12. Ibid., 79.
13. Ibid., 72.
14. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 35.
15. Joseph Ushie, "The Niger Delta Crisis, Origins and Neo-Colonialist Complications: An Entremesa Discourse." *Ecosahara: Journal of African Literature and the Environment* 1.2 (2011): 2–3.
16. Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*: *Shell, Human Rights and Oil* (London: Verso, 2003), 5–6.
17. Paul Orogun, "Resource Control, Revenue Allocation and Petroleum Politics in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Question." *Geojournal* 75 (2010): 460.
18. J.S. Oboreh, "The Origins and the Causes of Crisis in the Niger-Delta: The Way Forward." In *Anatomy of the Niger Delta Crisis: Causes, Consequences and Opportunities for Peace*, ed. Victor Ojakorotu (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 18.
19. Ibid.
20. Alexander J. Moro, *Socio-Political Crisis in the Niger Delta* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2009), xii.
21. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 106.

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22. Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 12.
23. For a discussion of the kinds of militancy in the Delta, see Augustine Ikelegbe, "Popular and Criminal Violence as Instruments of Struggle in the Niger Delta." In *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, ed. Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad (London: Zed Books, 2011), 125–135; for an overview of MEND and their kidnappings, in particular, see Temitope Oriola, *Criminal Resistance? The Politics of Kidnapping Oil Workers* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).
24. Lawrence Likar, *Eco-Warriors, Nihilist Terrorists and the Environment* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 179.
25. Feghabo, "Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*," 50.
26. Ibid., 59.
27. Shondell Miller DeMond, David Rivera Jason, and Joel C. Yelin, "Civil Liberties: The Line Dividing Environmental Protest and Ecoterrorists." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2.1 (2008): 113.
28. Isidore Okpewho, *Tides* (London: Longman, 1993), 198.
29. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 38.
30. Okpewho, *Tides*, 178.
31. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 57–58.
32. David Thomas Sumner and Lisa M. Wiedman, "Eco-terrorism or Eco-Tage: An Argument for the Proper Frame." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20.4 (2013): 870.
33. Tanure Ojaide, *The Activist* (Lagos: Farafina, 2006), 155.
34. Ahwefeada, "A Nameless Activist," 45.
35. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh, "The Niger Delta, Environment, Women, and the Politics of Survival in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*." In *Eco-Critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes*, ed. Ogaga Okuyade (New York: Africa Heritage Press, 2013), 119.
36. Peter Bond, "Foreword." In *Criminal Resistance? The Politics of Kidnapping Oil Workers*, authored by Temitope B. Oriola (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), x.
37. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 135, 19.
38. Deborah Kaplan, "Female Friendship and Epistolary Form: 'Lady Susan' and the Development of Jane Austen's Fiction." *Criticism* 29.2 (1987): 163–178.
39. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1989), 36.
40. One remarkable critique of Habermas's work is Houston Baker's. For him, the so-called ideal public sphere which Habermas outlines was also a site of exclusion, since women and blacks were left out of these European spaces. For more on Baker's critique and his theorization of alternative public spheres, see "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 7.1 (1994): 3–33.
41. Okpewho, *Tides*, 105.
42. Jane Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1982), 92.
43. Ojaide, *The Activist*, 349.
44. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 38.

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