

GENDER AND DECONSTRUCTION OF HEROISM IN NIGER DELTA ECO-DISOURSE: CHIMEKA GARRICKS' TOMORROW DIED YESTERDAY

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Abstract

This paper examines gender disparity in the construction of heroism in the Niger Delta environmental struggle in Chimeka Garricks' Tomorrow Died Yesterday. The paper argues that a cursory interrogation of gender dimension of literary trajectory of the resource-rich region constantly reveals an established literary canon that volarises men in the context of the Niger Delta struggle, while portraying the female as a subaltern, perpetually cowering in the shadow of a male hero. Against this backdrop, this paper questions this male-centered narrative and renegotiates gender identity for gender balance in the making of heroes of eco-activism in the Niger Delta. The paper adopts eco-feminism as its theoretical position. One of the major assumptions of eco-feminism is that women are more culturally and biologically tied to the environment than men. Through analysis of some extrapolations from the primary text, this paper interrogates the misogynistic positions from which the narrative of environmental activism in the region is projected. The paper concludes that, contrary to this preference for male-centered narrative, women have always been in all fronts of the Niger Delta struggle, and not just appendages to men as represented in some literary works on the issue.

Keywords: Gender, Niger Delta, Eco-activism, Ecofeminism, women.

Introduction

Maltreatment or cruelty, which Worugji and Affiah see as the "inhuman treatment of a person or group of persons in the society" (40), is a problem faced by all irrespective of gender. However, despite the quantum of literary and critical engagements on Nigeria's Niger Delta region, there has been little or no substantial attention on the gender dimension of environmental activism in the region. The literary and critical mooring on the region, since the discovery of oil, consistently "projects an exclusivist perception of a male-centred struggle - a history in which the female voice becomes doubly absent" (Olajide, 2018: 135). Olajide (2018:135) submits that "...this perception generates for the female identity as a subaltern under the persistent shadow and protection of her husband who helps with her burden".

It may be indisputable that the harshest brunt of the environmental, economic and health crises, orchestrated by inhuman and mindless method of oil exploration in the region, is borne by women. As those whose existence anchors on the environment through agriculture, the Niger Delta women function within and outside their homes as mothers, wives, caregivers, producers, procurers and farmers. They are also expected to earn wages and contribute meaningfully to the family income. According to Okon (2002:66),

Since most of them are uneducated and therefore unemployed outside the home, their main source of income is agriculture where they comprise 60-80% of the agricultural labour force and account for 90% of family food supply. As a result of these responsibilities, the Niger Delta women are always willing to fight any unfavourable condition to the realisation of these duties, hence their struggle against degradation of any sort.

The incessant oil spills in the region, and the eternal flaring of gas, which are recurrent decimals in the region, most often, expose the environment to acute degradation, which in turn undermines agricultural productivity. Kemedi (2003:62) underscores the insensitivity of the Nigerian government and the oil companies when he reveals that in events of oil spill “clean ups are usually tardy and limited. As such, little oil is recovered, making pollution impacts more acute on the eco system”

In all these, the people hardly find reprieve, apparently because the Nigerian federal government, in its usual display of crass indifference and insensitivity to the problems and protests of the Niger Delta people, remain recalcitrant to the unethical drilling methods of the oil companies and this, most often, results in guerilla confrontation between the people, the oil companies and government forces. According to Ekine (2018:69),

As the dispossessed communities demand corporate responsibility, environmental, economic and social justice and proper compensation, their protests have been met with violence including extrajudicial killings and mass murder, torture, rape, the burning of homes and property, and increased military presence.

As a result, the region has not only become a hotbed of crises, but also secured by unrestrained and unaccountable Nigerian military men, and this has always placed the people almost eternally on the defensive.

It is also noted that during these crises, the women are seen as easy target. Ihahere et al (2014:16) reveal that “... the soldiers usually sent by the Federal Government to calm the rioting villagers use the women in the area as their resting place. At night, they invade private homes, terrorizing residents with beatings and raping women and girls.” Most times, arising from these rapes, some young women are put in the family way, and are later abandoned to bear the responsibilities of bringing up the children alone. Human Rights Watch (1999:82) reports that “the Association of Niger Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ) has been fighting for a law making it mandatory for those responsible to claim their offspring”. Also, as reported by NDWJ, different testimonies of rape and sexual violations in the Oputa Panel Report, submitted to the Federal government in 2005, attest to this sad reality of Niger Delta women. Akpan (2021:31-32) argues that: “Through fictional representation of armed conflicts, African

writers, especially the contemporary ones, poignantly project civil conflicts as destabilising agent in the postcolonial African polity”

However, significant literary output on the environmental degradation and its impact on gender consistently fail to interrogate the ugly prices these women pay in the region’s struggle, thus, denying them the recognition they deserve as agentic entities. The reason may have arisen from society’s (especially African society) fixation and presupposition that men have the monotony of violence and are naturally created and socialised as defenders of the society. Thus, some societies view a woman’s role in this direction as a misnomer. The consequence, according to Oriola (2016:451) is that, “Such narrow focus undervalues women’s contributions and fails to acknowledge how they demonstrated capacity to draw on available resources, constraints and opportunities to shape the structures affecting their lives”. This also informs Olajide’s (2018: 135) view of the female “as an atrophied body whose biology is constantly under threat because of the bad and polluted environment, but whose voice is dislocated or projected through the male”. Thus, to deconstruct this negative portrayal of women has been the major goal of Nigerian female writers. Udoette. and Akpan (2023:58) corroborate the above when they aver that: “... the primary goal of women’s literature appears to be an effort in correcting and re-directing attention to the ideals and worldview of women while charting the significance of the feminine element in literary texts”.

Against this backdrop, this paper dialogises the above scenario and insists that environmental activism, in the context of Niger Delta struggle, does not only connote violent confrontation with the multi-national oil companies and Nigerian military personnel, but can take many forms, some of which are overt in their actions and consequences and others, less so. It is also noted that resistance is intangible and, in the summation of Collins (1990:70), “Despite the intangible nature that resistance can sometimes take, any forms of resistance are nonetheless worthy of recognition and can be just as powerful as overt acts”.

December Green in *Gender Violence in Africa* exemplifies the above position when he employs a schema developed by Jane Everett, et al to “illustrate the efforts of women to protect themselves and their interests in areas where they have little formal power as strategies of disengagement” (Green, 152). Accordingly, this schema could be used as a framework to analyse the acts of resistance of women of Niger Delta. According to Ekine (2018:71), the schema consists of four categories:

The management of suffering occurs when women living under imposed hardships seek out survival or coping mechanisms. Although survival requires active pursuit, this activism is often regarded as passive. Insulation consists of a turning inward to family and kin as an alternative way of gaining recognition, power, and resources. In collective action, women as a group, confront authority in order to resist its growth or to demand adherence to norms of behaviour. Escape, the fourth type of resistance, is often taken as a last resort and is perhaps the most extreme, escape is often ventured under only the most dire circumstances.

Niger Delta women have been employing sundry methods of resistance to environmental degradation such as joining militant groups, strikes, demonstrations and culturally specific responses such as stripping naked.

Zoeze (2007:26) reports a scenario in 1996 when “the people of Omadino community met with the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) authorities and warned that oil spillage and gas flares are wrecking their environment and have done damage to their fishing and other forms of agriculture” (Quoted in Iyahere et al, 2014: 17). This warning was followed by serious protest by the community women. Ihahere et al (2014:17) captures the scenario thus:

We are farmers, fisherwomen and hunters. With all the flaming and pumping of oil into our swamp areas, the oil companies have denied us every living thing. Today, we have no hope, while they are making billions of naira with our gifts from God. They don't care or hear our cry; they only throw tear gas on us, beat us, and drive us out of our land.

This sometimes culminates in series of women uprising in the region. Ihayere et al (2014:18) further reveals that “The most serious of all women uprising in the region occurred in 2002 against Chevron and it lasted for 10 days. The women threatened to strip – the most natural and powerful way of getting their message across but an unthinkable gesture in the West”. This interrogates and dialogises the male-centered monologue of environmental activism, which locates women in background of the struggle. Olajide (2018:135) is of the opinion that “This recurrent male-image in their narratives points poignantly to patriarchal countenance of Niger/Delta society.”

Eco-discourse and Female Subalternity in Selected Literary Works on Niger Delta

One of the outstanding Nigerian literary writings that has so redefined heroism, in the context of Niger Delta struggle, is Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*. The author, through her protagonist, Zilayefa makes commendable efforts in questioning the otherness of women in the Niger Delta struggle. This arises against the backdrop of some Nigerian writings on Niger Delta across genres and, especially those authored by males, which consistently locate women within the periphery of eco-critical discourses of the region. According to Olajide (2018:135):

Despite creating a practical female identity whose body signifies desire and pleasure for the flickering male image, Agary becomes a constructivist by accounting for the independence of her female hero. Her novel could be accounted for as one of the recent writings that address the issue of gender imbalance in the eco-activism and eco-critical scholarship of the Niger/Delta.

From the days of Isaac Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa, the literary trajectory of the region's agitation has been configured around male figures, and this has become a kind of canon that detects the delineation of characters and events in some literary writings on Niger Delta. To these writers, environmental activists in the Niger Delta conjure an image of able-bodied men hiding in creeks, kidnapping and launching offensives on pipelines or indulging in battle of guns with government forces, while centering women within their traditional roles as caregivers and providers of sexual services. This certainly overlooks the reality of some women who are actively implicated in the struggle.

For example, Eni Jologho Umoko's *The Scent of Crude Oil*, dramatises the helplessness and hopelessness of Esidi people in the Niger Delta, who should be living in abundance, by reason of availability of oil in their community, but are rather pauperized through crass

mismanagement of their resources by the government and multinational oil companies. Through the intervention of some male youths of the community such as Tafa, Misaren, Odiri, Tombrifa and others, the community finally finds reprieve, through an NGO initiated by Shell Petroleum Development Company, SPDC, with a mandate to create employment and drive development for the people. In this text, the author simply draws from the familiar canon of centering the struggle and interventions for a better community around his male characters, while pushing the women such as Mama Kongo, Patience and Comfort to the fringes of the community's schema. In fact, the only time Patience is heard in the text is when her husband, Chief Huri-Huri harasses her for a meal, before leaving for a meeting in the village town hall.

This one-directional conception of women continues in poetry. Olajide (2018:135) notes that the consistent reference to "Egbesu Boys" by Tanure Ojaide in his *The Tale of the Harmattan* echoes the same male heroism, as his poetry celebrates the militaristic measures advanced by "Egbesu boys" and invocation of a male god "Ogidiga" against the predicament occasioned by industrialisation and urbanity". Bisi Daniel further forges this mesh in *Ghost of the Niger Delta*, when he locates the salvation of the crises-infested region around his male protagonists John Hunter; an investigative journalist and Jones Coleman; son of a fictional US Senator. Suffice it to say that, most of the literary trajectories of the region is a further substantiation for the predilection for male heroic narrative of the region. It is for this reason that this paper seeks to renegotiate heroism through a female character, Dise, in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*. The paper avers that women have historically been part of the Niger Delta struggle and have always deployed many forms of resistance against the exploitation and degradation of their environment, and thus, deserve recognition.

Renegotiating Gender Balance in the Niger Delta Eco-activism in Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*

Chimeka Garricks is one of the literary voices echoing within the Nigerian literary space. In this debut novel, he demonstrates a kind of narrative resilience and courage in weaving a pathetic and heart-rending story of a people who are pauperized by mindless exploitation and degradation of their environment by the multi-national oil companies aided by the insensitivity of the Nigerian government.

In this narrative, a military assault resulting in the death of many Asiamas indigenes prompts the formation of Asiamas Freedom Army (AFA). AFA is a militant organization with the audacious claim of fighting for the liberation of Asiamas people and the Niger Delta region. It is headed by an engineering graduate, Doye Koko popularly known as Doughboy. As events of the story unfold, the reader quickly realizes that Doughboy, in cahoots with some highly placed individuals in the country, is running a kidnapping empire that fetches good money into their pockets. On discovering this, his friend Ganiye derisively asks him: "so all your talk about fighting for the rights of the people of Asiamas and the Niger Delta is nonsense" (162).

Notwithstanding the prominence some male characters enjoy in the context of the Niger Delta struggle in this narrative, the author stylistically creates a strong and practical female identity, whose roles in the narrative change the course of the struggle. Through this, the author attempts to address the prevalent gender imbalance in the eco-activism and eco-critical scholarship of the Niger Delta. The author creates Dise; a strong female character, who she uses to redeem women from the ghetto of invisibility in the Niger Delta struggle. Thus,

Garricks becomes a deconstructionist and constructionist by questioning the exclusivity of male-centered narrative of Niger Delta struggle and also centering women as active participants in the discourse of the struggle.

In this narrative, the criminality perpetrated by Doughboy, in the guise of struggle for liberation, turns him into a fearful and terrifying monster that could not be confronted by any mortal being. This is evident in his arrogant bragging that some parents even beg to enroll their children in the Asiamma Freedom Army: “what you don’t understand...is that these people believe in me and the justice of my fight. To them I am more than a hero, I’m an ideology. Most of their children and young men beg to join me or imitate me” (163). It later becomes glaring that Doughboy is actually running a cartel of kidnapping and bunkering, using the Niger Delta as a veil. This manifests in this confession: “Look, the Niger Delta struggle is essentially a fight for oil, or the control and use of the resources from oil. No one fights for oil for purely philanthropic purposes. Yes I have made some money from my fight...” (220). This development is seen as rather inspiring incessant unrest instead achieving restitution for the region.

Following the above, there is need to confront Doughboy and remind him of the hopelessness and destructiveness of bunkering and kidnapping of expatriates in the crusade for a better environment. However, when others, including the men, fear to undertake this seemingly deadly exercise, Dise; a journalist, risks her life, as she explores the creeks searching for Doye to interview. In the course of this interview, Dise boldly condemns the activities of Asiamma Freedom Army and questions the idea of kidnapping oil workers as a means to drawing global attention to the exploitation of the region. By appropriating this phallic responsibility of negotiating a truce with militants, Dise explodes the myth and questions the otherness of women in the Niger Delta struggle. The author also entrenches this in the narrative to reject the cowed position in which the third world woman is perceived on environmental matter. This is also in line with the assumptions that eco-feminism merges feminist principles and environmental activism, and that ecofeminism annexes the relationship between women and the environment (Olajide, 137). For eco-feminists, women are more culturally and biologically tied to the environment than men. According to Kaur (2012: 385) “Ecofeminism argues that there are important connections between the domination and oppression of women and domination and exploitation of nature by masculinist methods and attitudes”.

Amaibi, Dise’s fiancée’s response to Tubo who tries to woo him to the side of the Imperial Oil company is revelatory and attests to the fact that women have always been agentic entities, and have been assuming frontline roles in the Niger Delta environmental activism. Amaibi is persuaded to jettison his environmental activism and accept a job offer from Imperial Oil, to be able to take care of Dise, his would-be wife. Tubo’s perception of Dise as an incapacitated being whose welfare should be of concern to the husband than the devastated environment, underscores patriarchal dominance and paints a parasitic picture of one living as an appendage of another. Regan (2020) quotes Francoise d’Eaubonne, a French feminist when she avers that “the disenfranchisement and oppression of women, people of colour and the poor are intrinsically linked to the degradation of the natural world, as both arose as a result of patriarchal dominance”

Amaibi's response reveals that Dise has been behind all the successes both of them have achieved as environmental crusaders.

She encouraged me to speak out against what your criminal government and oil companies are doing to our land. She marches with me at rallies and protests, usually just a handful of us, in the rain, sometimes in the freezing snow. She took advantage of her contacts as a journalist to give international publicity to my views. She already thinks your company is run by blood suckers. Your offer has confirmed that (235).

Through this, the author re-evaluates heroism in the Niger Delta struggle by creating an emotionally strong and enlightened woman who deploys her professional and intellectual ingenuity to draw global attention to the devastation wrought on the Niger Delta environment by the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies.

This further challenges the narrow focus on women by some writers in the making of history of the Niger Delta environmental activism. It also contradicts Awogu-Maduagwu and Umunnakwe's (2018:1) position that "In a largely patriarchal society such as Nigeria, the wartime picture of 'man does' while the woman is perhaps only an extension of what obtains in times of peace." It also attests to the fact that in times of crisis, every human being possesses the ability to be violent and nonviolent. This implies that every human has the capability to be both. This informs why, most times, warring countries create sundry propaganda to enlighten men and women on how to act properly. This suggests that masculinity and femininity are acquired and not innate traits. Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble* (1999:5) also protests "the compulsory order of sex, gender or desire". Her position simply implies that "assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of men will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that women will interpret only female bodies". Gender is seen as a multiple interpretation of sex and not a fixed thing.

Following an oil spill on Asiam River, a litigation is incidented by Amaibi and Kaniye against the Imperial Oil. With McCulloch, a new expatriate manager in the company, there is need to protect the image of the company by blocking every litigation and anything that may trigger negative publicity against the company. McCulloch confesses that "Headquarters is breathing down my neck. The lawsuit is the last thing we need. We can't afford any more bad publicity (243). But this will not happen as Dise through her contacts and connections, is bent on exposing the insensitivity of the Imperial Oil Company and the Nigerian government to the devastation of the region's environment, occasioned by the oil spill: "First, the BBC came all the way down to the shithole that is Asiam, the very next day, to report on the spill" (243). Tobu reveals that every attempt to conceal the oil spill is late. According to him "...it was Dr. Akassa's wife who got the BBC to report on the spill. She used to be a junior international correspondent for them until she moved back to Nigeria.... I suspect by now that, the BBC already has a copy of the lawsuit, or one is being sent to them" (243). Dise's role in the Niger Delta struggle highlights the multi-faceted dimension of women in the context of the struggle. Unlike men, who only hide in the creeks and occasionally launch offensives on the perceived enemies, women fight on all fronts.

Thus, this paper interrogates concepts of social identities and roles at the period of crises by examining the prominent gender dichotomy and related myths in the narrative of the Niger

Delta struggle. The paper therefore challenges the society's prescription of gender roles, which does not capture the realities of men and women in time of war and other social conflicts. According to Awogu-Maduagwu and Umunnakwe (2018:3) these roles are conceived in a disproportionate binary: "male combatants/female non-combatants, female life-givers/male life-takers, and female peacemakers/male war-mongers, female beautiful Soul / male Just Warrior". Against this backdrop, the author frames the participation of Niger Delta women in the environmental struggle in a way that captures all realities of women implicated in the crises, as military production workers, ammunition makers, as soldiers, as nurses, by sending, supporting and reproducing men, and sometimes as militants. Nnaemeka (1997:237) explores these multifaceted roles of women in wartime thus:

. ...the idea of the multiplicity and the simultaneity of women's battles in wars... is reverberated by Igbo women writers in their works on the Nigerian Civil War... these war stories by Igbo women also depict women "as beings laced through and through with sexual and maternal imagery, also including the remains of a perpetual and often intimate collaboration and struggle with men.

This is also very glaring in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* when the reader encounters the iconic Debbie putting on full military regalia, as she goes on her anti-militarist mission. On their remarks on Debbie's role in the war, Awogu-Maduagwu and Umunnakwe (2018:3) aver that "from the gun-carrying insurgents to the civilian victims of and warriors against hunger, indiscriminate air-raids, rape and many forms of sexual exploitation- the war front was everywhere."

It therefore looks like a conspiracy that the bulk of literary and critical engagements on the Niger Delta region have always undervalued or failed to acknowledge women's contribution to the quest to restore the region's degraded environment. This may have arisen, not only from the fact that war or other social crises amplifies the already existing gender inequality and women's subservience, but also from the unfortunate entrenchment of certain expected roles for women in some Nigerian cultures. Enloe (1993: 47) explains that the gender roles are important in the perpetration of wars. According to her,

militaries need men and women to act in certain gender stereotyped ways. Women are expected to behave in a maternal way, they are expected to need men to defend them and their wartime experience is typically sexualized. Men are expected to believe that to prove their masculinity, they have to fight and mostly be in support of going to war. Men are expected to have particularly "masculine" attributes, behaviours and attitudes, which for some reason always entails a great affinity for violence.

This explains why some women masculinize their involvement in war and other crises. Niger Delta women who participate in the struggle recognize that they have transcended gendered traditional boundaries and most often describe their actions as archetypal men's actions and not for real women. Oriola (2016:462) quotes a high-profile participant who served in a mediatory capacity in the Delta struggle explaining the dilemma of a woman-participant in the struggle:

I am amazed when people meet me and they go, wow you are a woman and I'm like what did you expect? ... That's the way the world is, that's the way our society is ... perhaps yes traditionally, the roles I'm playing, the things I'm doing, the way I speak, the fearlessness I exhibit, some people call it recklessness, some foolishness, all those things that I exhibit are manly ways of things.

Thus, as subaltern and an *othered* individual, who lives at the mercy of a superior human being and whose existence is determined according to the whims and caprices of the latter, a woman is considered weak and cannot confront any form of brutality.

Following an earlier attack on the Imperial Oil facilities, there is need for security to help the company resume drilling. Chief Ikaki is eventually consulted to use his connections with the Nigerian government to assist in this direction. After being assuaged with money and promises for more money, Chief Ikaki assures: "It is settled, the government will send a small amphibious battalion to recover your flow stations..." (248). The military onslaught that follows becomes a tragic scene of decimation of Asiamas people initiated by the brutality of the Nigerian military personnel. It is against this leadership-motivated violence that Okpiliya and Akpan's (2020:55) views "the incessant violence and killings in the country as symptomatic of a dysfunctional leadership". Through flashback technique, the reader is told that the aftermath of this fatalistic conflict led to, not only the formation of Asiamas Freedom Army (AFA), but reprisal attacks and kidnappings by the militant group under the command of Doughboy.

It is during this military raid that Dise is gang-raped by a team of soldiers in the church vestry, resulting in a miscarriage of her pregnancy. The narrator puts it thus: "Dise's eyes were shut. Her lips moved silently. Perhaps, a prayer to God.... Rodman slapped Dise's legs open. As he forced himself into her, she cried out in pain. Rodman slapped her face" (263). As if this is not enough, one of the soldiers brutally inserted the tip of the barrel into her vagina. "He kicked her legs open, and lowered the barrel into her...As he poked it viciously inside her, Dise screamed... (264). Dise's sexual violation is one of the ways the narrator projects women as scapegoats of the Niger Delta struggle. Her body also metaphorises the pillaged Niger Delta environment. This development further buttresses one of the positions of ecofeminists that intrinsically links the violation of women to the violation of nature.

It is noted that in the Niger Delta, rape and other forms sexual violations have become a recurrent decimal in most communities where military forces have been deployed to quell protests and demonstrations against the government and oil companies. The intention is to create fear among the people and send signals to other communities who may be planning similar protest. Most times, these women victims find it difficult to absorb the shame and humiliation after the rape. Consequently, the women relapse into acute trauma and depression that sometimes result in suicide. Akpan and Akpan (2022:3) echo this when they posit that "... the gamut of all kinds of torture, abuse, and oppression unleashed on women... most often leaves them haunted and deeply traumatized". For instance, in this narrative, Amaibi, Dise's husband reveals that "that incident tore us apart and eventually led to our separation" (267). He further describes the post-rape Dise thus: "All I could see was that she would stare into space for hours. She refused to comb her hair. I don't understand why. That's how she got her dreadlocks" (267). Dise's condition validates Caruth's (1995: 342) position

that “traumatic experiences create a speechless fright and destroys self-identity of victims”. Kopf’s (2005:244) also echoes Caruth when she argues that “trauma has a devastating and disintegrative effect on language and communication.

In this narrative, Dise’s sexual violation and subsequent loss of a baby metaphorises the mindless exploitation of the resources-rich region of the Niger Delta by multinational oil companies and the Nigerian government. The incident also has ethnic colouration, as the soldiers sent by the federal government are always of northern extraction. The level of brutality exhibited by these army personnel against the region and her people ropes them in as accomplices in the wreckage of the region. This position is buttressed by the unfortunate situation where the proceeds from the oil is used in developing the northern part of the country, while the people from whose backyards this oil is explored, are daily strangled by abject penury. More so, it is widely believed that ninety percent of oil wells in the region are arguably owned by northerners. Through Dise’s ordeal, the author revolutionises the portrayal of women in the Niger Delta literary trajectory and locates them as active participants in the making of history of environmental activism in the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

This paper has exploded some of the prevailing myths that depict Niger Delta women as docile, invisible and cowed individuals, instead of assertive actors and participants in the Niger Delta environmental activism. To some extent, this negative perception of Niger Delta women has affected the portrayal of women in some literary and critical engagement on the region. The literary trajectory of the region has always valorised men and accord them heroism, as active gladiators in the agitation for a better Niger Delta environment, while condemning the women to the fringes of the region’s schema. Against this backdrop, this paper, through textual analysis of the text dialogises this monotonous male-centered narrative on the region and reveals that Niger Delta women, in many dimensions, have been in all fronts of the struggle, bearing the brunt of the environmental struggle, even more than their male counterparts. The paper also insists that environmental activism, in the context of Niger Delta struggle, does not only connote violent confrontation with the multi-national oil companies and Nigerian military personnel, as insinuated by some writings on the region, but can take many forms, some of which are overt in their actions and consequences and others, less so.

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