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## **Situating Otherness in Chimeka Garricks's *Tomorrow Died Yesterday***

**ABSTRACT.** In 2010, Chimeka Garricks published his debut novel, *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*. Years after its publication, the novel has received little scholarly attention. However, it is a highly significant novel on Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region. Its portrayal of the region has both aesthetics and topicality. This paper examines the depiction of otherness in Chimeka Garricks's novel. It argues that the nature of resource politics, as represented in the novel, triggers and perpetuates otherness in the Niger Delta. It also posits that otherness can be both a product and producer of violence and forms of resistance.

**KEYWORDS:** Garricks, otherness, hegemony, resistance, oil politics

### **Introduction**

Though oil politics regularly calls attention to itself as a subject of tension and contention, the depiction of this subject in Garricks's novel has not got the attention it deserves. Garricks's work is an important novel that adds to the corpus of literary works on one of the world's richest deltas. The pessimistic tone of the novel's title is consistent with the region's history. Across centuries, the region has been a victim of global power equations that are tied to resource extraction and transfer: the transatlantic slave trade, the hunt for palm oil and ivories, colonialism, etc.

Thus, Garricks's *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* implies that the region's precolonial and colonial agony is still starkly manifest in its postcolonial experience. It is a grim story with a contemporary force or historicity full of gore and grief. Otherness is an element in the text. Scholars have observed that identities are constructed to operate as dichotomies or binary

opposites. Andrew Okolie has explained that identities have little meaning without the “other” (2003, p. 2). So, by defining itself, a group defines others. Power is implicated here. When groups do not have equal powers to define the self and the other, the consequences reflect power differentials. The dichotomies of otherness are made to look so natural that we often believe them to be so, perhaps because they take after the natural binary opposites in life and nature itself: day and night, light and darkness, up and down, and so on.

Jean-Francois Staszak says that otherness “is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (‘Us,’ the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (‘Them,’ Other) by stigmatising a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (2009, p. 2). In Garricks’s novel, otherness defines the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors. The novel also indicates otherness in the modes of resistance that oppression provokes. Thus, this paper takes a two-step approach to discuss otherness in the novel.

### Contextualizing Otherness

Garricks’s perspective on the question of oil politics in Nigeria, is conveyed through *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*. In this context, it is the common people of the Niger Delta region versus the predatory group which comprises some leaders of Asiamas (chiefs), the government, and the oil firm. Otherness, as projected by the predatory group, calls to question the humanity of the people of Asiamas. In other words, the indigenous or native Others are denied their rights to personhood, peaceful existence, and access to natural resources, amongst other things. The subjugation of the Asiamas people aims to withhold from them the right to benefit from the riches of their homeland and/or prevent them from participating in the geopolitical discourse that should naturally concern them.

The activities in the novel are deeply and precisely rooted in the oil politics of Imperial Oil. Its gas flaring and other forms of pollution have destroyed the social and economic life of the Asiamas people. The flaring is harmful, of course. However, in keeping with its character, the government has turned a blind eye to the pollution of the environment. The government even provides Imperial Oil with soldiers to safeguard their operations and intimidate the people. The novel equates this gas flaring with the

Biblical hell, as conveyed through Tubo's statement: "Of course it's hell-fire, Amaibi!" Tubo says (p. 69). He also notes that "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 see the devil himself" (p. 69). The comparison with hell is unequivocal. This passage is meant to help readers imagine the magnitude of the people's pain as they suffer from pollution, climate change, deforestation, and loss of aquatic life, among so many other ills.

The situation causes some individuals in Asiamia to resort to diverse strategies and acts of engagement. Some adopt violent militancy as represented by Doughboy, the leader of the militant group known as the Asiamia Freedom Army (AFA). His ruthlessness becomes well-known. He acquires a reputation for invincibility, built on bullet-defying charms. According to him, it is "a very effective way of sowing terror in the hearts of men", and it has "fuelled wild rumours and added to my myth: my own manipulation of my publicity" (p. 5).

There is also Amaibi, Doughboy's former schoolmate, who as an activist seeks dialogue with the government. He believes that dialogue is a means of settling the issues in the region. Regrettably, he is subjected to a great deal of government-sponsored persecution for attempting to question the government's exploitative interest in the region. And there is Joseph Peter, popularly known as Tubo. He lets us into some of the backstage deals carried out by government representatives and Imperial Oil. Given that Tubo is a staff of Imperial Oil, his revelations are quite informative and they provide first-hand knowledge of how the oil company operates. In his evaluation of Amaibi's prosecution by the government and Imperial Oil, he concludes that "Amaibi was, in many ways, more dangerous than the likes of Doughboy. He [Amaibi] was respected, informed, articulate, and always had a platform to rage from" (p. 11). Clearly, one of the author's major feats, as will be discussed later, is to juxtapose Doughboy's militant approach with Amaibi's.

Early in the narrative, the Amanyanabo and his Council of Chiefs sell Ofirima Island to Imperial Oil without recourse to or consultations with the people. The irony is that, in truth, Ofirima Island does not belong to only the chiefs. It is a public property. By selling the island, the chiefs dispossess the entire community of its fishing bay, and this forces the community's fishermen to relocate. The action also deprives young boys of "Maracana Stadium," their collective playground. This example of dictatorship and betrayal reflects the insensitivity of the heavily-beaded local chiefs and their Amanyanabo. The appropriation of a communally-owned property (arrogating to

themselves the right to negotiate, sell, and disburse the proceeds as only they deem fit) indicates how the Amanyanabo and his chiefs demonstrate their otherness. The Amanyanabo and his chiefs are the ruling class, they represent the state, they belong to the hegemonic forces, and they have placed themselves against the lower class (the subalterns).

Following information from Soboye about the sale of Ofirima Island, his younger brother, Doughboy, wonders where their father was. If all the fishermen have relocated to "Maracana Stadium", then their father should be there. Soboye proudly tells Doughboy and his friends: "Papa went to the Amanyanabo's palace to curse the Amanyanabo and his chiefs to their faces" (p. 65), to speak truth to power, so to say. Another truth, however, is that it will take more than random acts of talk, cursing or rant to bring about and sustain a change in power. Even Mpaka seems to realise this at some point in his development as a character when, toward the end of the book, Kaniye tells us that Mpaka has "decided that raining loud curses on them [the Amanyanabo and Chiefs Council] was no longer enough. Now at the jetty, he was trying to convince me to sue them for 'incompetence, stupidity, abuse of power and corruption". The triple-mark at the end of the quote is grammatically appropriate because there is a quotation within a quotation. (p. 250).

Although Mpaka represents the masses, it will take a much more concerted and coordinated effort for counter forces to supplant the ruling idea of the day and enthrone a new form of leadership. That is where Doughboy and Amaibi come in. That notwithstanding, small acts of defiance such as exhibited by Mpaka, Soboye's father, fertilise and wet the earth for stronger resistance to take root or sprout.

Like Mpaka, there are dissenters who prick the council from within. As events later turn out, Sir James (father of Kaniye and Dise) and two of his loyalists are later thrown out of the Chiefs Council and denied administrative power in Asiamama. Catechist Akassa, Amaibi's father, is also technically barred from attending the council's meetings. If Sir James and Catechist Akassa can be described as forces of progress and voices of reason, it is because they are on the side of the people, and it is for that reason that they are removed from the Chiefs Council. Because Sir James and Catechist Akassa will not partake in corruption and sleaze, which is the order of the day, they are not allowed in the council. For the Chiefs Council, the two represent an opposition within the hegemonic class and the class moves quickly to protect itself by checking the "threat" that Sir James and Catechist Akassa represent. Both men are pushed to the periphery where the others (the outsiders) exist, away from the core where the interest of the powerful thrives.

There is also otherness based on ethnicity. An example of this plays out in the scene where Doughboy confronts the bodyguards of Brian Manning before Manning's abduction:

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Nigeria, sir..." I shook my head. He knew that wasn't what I wanted to hear.

"Sorry sir, Kano State, sir." He knew he couldn't lie. His accent indicated he was from the North.

"Hausa man." I lowered my voice. I didn't want my anger to show. I continued slowly. "How can you, a Hausa man, be my brother? When your people were stealing our oil money all these years, was I your brother then?"

I turned to another one who was face down on the floor. He was in the navy uniform. I kicked him hard on his ribs.

"Hey, you! Where are you from?"

"Eh...eh...Ekiti State, sir."

"Yoruba man, are you my brother? My people have the oil, yet it is your people that 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?" (p. 5–6)

Militants, like Doughboy, perceive Nigerians of other ethnic extractions as threats, invaders, and oppressors of the Niger Delta region. However, the militants are not alone in this. It is a pervasive practice all over the country. It is not preposterous to say that, in Nigeria, wherever two or three persons of different ethnic groups are gathered, they know what ethnic otherness means. Canci and Odukoya argue that ethnicity "is seen as the most basic and politically salient identity of Nigerians" (n.p.). Otherness based on ethnicity is one of the fundamental causes of Nigeria's numerous setbacks. Given that ethnic otherness is weaponized by the state and its control elements, it is clear why Doughboy speaks so bitterly about his people's ethnic disadvantage.

From the Asiamas community's perspective, the soldiers that are deployed to the region are invaders. The soldiers act with brazen impunity, callousness, and lawlessness because they are backed by power. In Nigeria's power dynamics, the South is perceived as the weaker other, and Asiamas's delta region is treated like a conquered territory. Gorimapa, Rodman, and their ilk from the North are shown to be aware of this and they believe in its veracity. They know too that they are rooted in hegemony against the subalterns, the Asiamas people.

When the army attacks Asiamas, the soldiers get away with all the atrocities they commit. It makes a commentary on the balance of power in Nige-

ria. The ruling class will not hesitate to abuse the state apparatus to keep its hegemony and safeguard its profiteering. In other words, the growth and sustenance of violence and militancy, as forms of subaltern response, are triggered by the activities of the government and the oil companies. Asiama's masses do not believe that the country is theirs because the government treats them as outsiders. The government and the oil company oppress Asiama (and deny its people basic citizenship rights) because otherness is a weapon of control in the hands of hegemony.

### **Violence and Activism: Character Contrast as Otherness**

At this point, it is important to take a more critical look at two major characters in the novel, Doughboy and Amaibi. It is necessary to examine their modes of engagement, violence and activism. It is another case of otherness. Same environment, similar experiences; but different approaches to a social problem. Yet, both characters are rooted in the story's milieu; both are shaped by society.

Doughboy is a product of his environment. He tells Dise, in the interview he grants to her: "The Slave Trade ended centuries ago, but I was born and raised in a different kind of slavery...What pushed me to become what I am? The slavery pushed me. The system pushed me" (p. 221). Doughboy represents the voice of the people. His militancy symbolises the decibel of the people's voices. His militancy also expresses the people's frustration with the state and its agencies.

In portraying Doughboy, the novel explores the psyche and sensibilities of militants in the Niger Delta. It presents them as an alternative approach to mere peaceful protests which are known to have been broken violently by the government in the past. It makes militancy more potent than random curses and shouts, such as Mpaka's, which have achieved little. Doughboy is a well-wrought character. He is complex in a humanly plausible way. He is a blend of kindness and violence. He is so selflessly kind to Belema, but he gruesomely murders Snow White. Early in the narrative, his courage, strength of will, and ruthlessness are revealed. As a young boy, in his conversion with his brother, Soboye, he keeps innocently referring to bunkering, which he has just been introduced to, as stealing. Nevertheless, he grows to be in charge of Chief Ikaki's massive bunkering operation. His early tendencies to bullying, dominance, and violence make this growth and transformation from Doye to Doughboy believable, even inevitable.

Doughboy's personal history and the tragic history of his family are meant to draw sympathy to him, almost justifying his cause as a militant. However, it is necessary to note that it is the weaponization of otherness against the people of the Niger Delta by the government and the international oil companies that have created the monster that Doughboy turns out to be. As a realist, Doughboy is aware that his actions may not change anything, but he is hopeful that they can inspire his people "to stand up and take what is rightfully theirs" (p. 220). Moreover, he does inspire his people.

In spite of Doughboy's activities, the novel shows that violent militancy cannot be the only approach to the problem. There is a need for intellectual activism. It has its own level of effectiveness. There can be another pathway to social engagement through a combination of activism, concerted media effort, public relations, and an excellent legal process. Amaibi is an example of this approach. He is, therefore, Doughboy's alter ego, and his suffering and victory (in the court) indicate that the novel shows that his approach is more enduring.

Amaibi is a man of ideas. He has developed and grown from within his society within the subaltern class. Amaibi is a leader with all the hallmarks of great leadership. He is understanding and accommodating yet firm with his convictions. He is fiercely loyal and can be trusted to stay the course. He has a forgiving spirit (like his father, who easily forgives the soldiers that blinded him). When a prison warder spitefully spits in front of Amaibi, and Kaniye gets angry with the man, Amaibi admonishes: "I said let him be. After all, I'm the one he is doing it to, remember? If I can forgive him, then who are you not to?" (p. 148).

Amaibi is honest. Kaniye advises Amaibi to lie in court to save himself from possible incarceration. Amaibi remains firm in doing the right thing. He prefers the path of honour and integrity. He tells Kaniye: "It takes the hardest form of courage, courage with conscience," to do the right thing (p. 210). And that is not the first time. Years before, when Amaibi was still very small, his father is believed to have told him: "Today, my son, you followed your conscience. It takes courage to do that. Always remember, courage without conscience is foolishness" (p. 75). It is this upbringing that makes Tubo tell his white bosses at Imperial Oil that Amaibi cannot be bribed.

Amaibi has always been a defender of the helpless, a voice for the subaltern. He is sensitive to the environment. When Doughboy needlessly kills a crab with a stick, Amaibi loses his temper for the first time in his life and gives Doughboy the fight of his life. He feels contrite after the fight and



he has the presence of mind to apologise to Doughboy. His early tenderness is matched with brilliance. As a smart kid on his way to becoming a sound intellectual, Amaibi is the one who explains to his young friends that the flame which Tubo refers to as hell fire is, in fact, a gas flare. He later grows to become an “environmental consultant and activist, a lecturer at the State University, and one of the most brilliant scientific minds in the country. He is known to have had a Ph.D. in Petroleum Geosciences from Imperial College” at “twenty-one” (p. 11). His expertise makes the fishermen rally around him. He is the soul of the struggle. Tubo best captures his impact and significance: “He had testified twice as an expert against oil companies in two oil spill cases, rubbishing the testimony of the opposing experts in the process” (p. 11).

Nevertheless, if Amaibi is the soul or, to use a more physical equivalent, the head of the struggle, then Dise and Kaniye are the arms and legs. When Amaibi is carrying placards and leading protests, Dise provides the PR and media knowhow that gives activism its edge and bite, and Kaniye provides the legal expertise necessary to keep the struggle alive. Amaibi synergizes with Dise and Kaniye. Thus, Amaibi, as a team player, works with partners who share a commitment to a lawful method of resistance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Garricks’s representation of the oil crisis in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region shows that there are oppositional forces, each reinforcing the dynamics of power and control through otherness. The region combatively challenges the oppressive action of hegemonic forces. Lack of employment opportunities and social mobility has caused many youths in the region to resort to violence like Doughboy.

Violence can easily become decriminalized in the eyes of the masses who believe it is proper to get even with the state and its instruments of oppression. This explains why the masses in the novel see Doughboy as their hero and many aspire to be like him. It is good that the novel offers Amaibi as Doughboy’s other because it presents another character and a different mode of engagement. This conforms with Gramsci’s stance, as Thomas Bates explains, that revolutionaries “must learn to distinguish between behaviour which is revolutionary and behaviour which is simply criminal. For even if criminality may be a form of rebellion against the existing order,” we cannot “ennoble it with ethical approval” (p. 365).



Indeed, the novel uses characterization to great effect. Through characterization and other narrative techniques, Garricks has been able to explore the implications of otherness in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Characters serve their group interest and reveal their otherness. We see, for instance, the brutalisation of fellow Nigerians (Asiama citizens) by the military based on their perception of Asiama. It is the height of otherness when a powerful class unleashes the army on unarmed citizens. In a state that has failed to give its component units a sense of integration, otherness will be a trigger for state aggression and terror as it will be a provocation for uprising amongst the oppressed. That is a marker of a nation-state that, as Chinua Achebe says, is moving heedlessly "towards a world of bad systems, bad leadership, and bad followership" (p. 140).

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