

Complicities in the Niger Delta Time bomb: Reflections of Selected Niger Delta Drama

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ABSTRACT:- Agitations and protests are regular occurrences in the Niger Delta which are occasioned by the environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and exploitation. This has resulted in poverty, psychological trauma, insecurity and crime. Although the tide of the insurgency was stemmed by former President Yar'Adua's extension of Amnesty to the Niger Delta insurgents, there are still pockets of unrest in the region till today due to the prevalent sufferings closely associated with oil exploration. Hence, if the root cause of the Niger Delta is not addressed, the relative peace being enjoyed in the oil rich region of Nigeria is a time bomb waiting to explode at an unpredictable time. This paper discusses how some dramatists from the region ignored best practices by using their plays and performances to misinform theatre artists and mislead the people for personal preferences. They influenced the minds of the people negatively which led to the crisis in the region. This is juxtaposed by other plays written by playwrights from other regions but who are able to view the situation objectively and with a detached mind. In essence, the government and multi-nationals have done and are still doing a lot to alleviate the suffering of the people, though these may not have met the full expectations of the people in the area. The research concludes that dramatists should imbibe best theatre practices to ensure high fidelity of their works and that the suffering of the people is not unconnected with the corrupt tendencies, avarice and misrepresentations of political leaders, chiefs and traditional rulers from the regions. In other words, the Niger Delta problems are more of internal colonialism rather than total negligence and insensitivity by the Federal government and oil multi-nationals. This paper draws largely from fieldwork, that is, quantitative and qualitative surveys carried out by the researcher through TfD praxis in some communities of the Niger Delta. This paper makes suggestions on how to alleviate the sufferings of the people.

KEY WORDS:- Eco-Criticism, Dramatists, Niger Delta, Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

It is an obvious fact that the ecosystem of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is characterized by polluted water, inclement terrain and weather, death of aquatic animals, and polluted farmlands which result from oil exploration and exploitation in the region for more than six decades now. The region has become a barren and unproductive land that cannot support farming. Also, the air which the inhabitants of the region breathe is completely polluted and contaminated due to oil spills and gas flaring. Many deaths have reportedly occurred through diseases and cancer from inhalation of toxic fumes and eating of contaminated fish. This, expectedly, has led to indescribable hardship and suffering with the people feeling repressed, exploited, marginalized, deprived and trampled upon and this suggests that the Niger Delta society is bereft of form and social balance (Renouard and Lado, 2012).

Oil exploration in that part of the country should be concomitant with good living conditions, buoyant economy, wealth, enhanced livelihood as well as safe and enabling environment for the people of Niger Delta. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case, in that environmental degradation and polluted land and water have been the hallmark of the region with their attendant problems such as abject poverty and penury, lack of potable water and pollutions of unimaginable proportion (Ashiedu, 2008; Ajiboye, Jawando and Adiza, 2009).

To ameliorate this trend, the Federal government and oil multinationals have made concerted efforts to solve the Niger Delta nightmarish condition, albeit, there is still so much to be done by them. What is of grave concern is the attitude and probable insensitivity of State Governors of the Niger Delta States and the insincerity

of some theatre artists of Niger Delta origin in reflecting the actual truth about the Niger Delta issue. This is coupled with the infidelity in the reports of some media outfits and the insincerity of some NGOs. Due to the avarice and insensitivity on the part of stake holders, the Niger Delta youths became enraged and decided to foment troubles which left the region in turmoil and puts it in the world's eyes. This has led to many deaths, kidnapping, vandalization of oil pipelines, militancy, gangsterism, cultism (due to militant groups commitment), and many other vices. This is done to get the attention of the stake holders to address their perennial problems. Due to the neglect suffered in the hands of successive state governments and the ignorance of the youths on the level of misrepresentation on the part of hegemonic structure, Niger Delta people, especially the youths, have resulted to armed struggle, ethnic militia and militancy to orchestrate their demands for better living conditions, improvement on the 13% derivation allocation and even resource control. This has led to killings and kidnapping of oil workers and vandalization of oil facilities in order to press home their demands. The people of the Niger Delta are forced to do the above because the oil exploration has rendered the habitat uninhabitable, and the farming and fishing professions rather difficult or out-rightly impossible due to oil spill, gas flaring, environmental degradation and deforestation engendered by oil exploration. This has been argued by Ibaba "... that oil spills and gas flaring in the Niger Delta areas is an agent of underdevelopment and poverty" (in Ezeibe and Nnamani, 108).

This research beams its search light on the seeming insensitivity of the state governors to the plight of their own people, the avarice of traditional institutions in enriching themselves at the expense of their people and the level of fidelity in the works of Niger Delta dramatists/theatre artists.

II. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The term "ecocriticism" was first defined by Cheryl Glotfelty as "the study of Literature and its relationship to the environment (xviii)". Buell (in Habeeb and Habeeb) also defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (504). The above definitions are limited in scope as they only focused on the relationship between ecocriticism and literature without looking at the disciplinary nature of the concept and its interrelatedness with other fields or disciplines. This last position aligns with Theresa May's concern when she states that ecocriticism should: not be limited to literature, and indeed, the inclusion of theatre and performance within its discourse will bring new and important issues to light. Precisely because theatre is both a living art form and a site wherein bodies, communities, politics, commerce and imaginative possibilities intersect in a material way, ecocriticism in the theatre will engage the debates occurring around us, including not only global warming, but also green business practices, sustainable urban planning, environmental justice, food security, consumption, watershed democracy, globalization, and many other human concerns (97-8).

May states further that ecocriticism "is a critical (discursive) perspective on cultural performance (from theatre, film and literature to zoos, amusement park, and social protests) afforded and informed by the science of ecology and the greening fire it has precipitated across disciplines" (97).

The foregoing shows that ecocriticism discourse is interdisciplinary in nature, therefore underscoring the importance of synergy among different fields of learning and disciplines. The interest of intellectuals should, therefore, be to saturate the academic space with works and materials that serve to enlighten and re-orientate the people on the importance of caring for our environment, for our survival as a people and the imperatives of keeping our environment safe and green to be able to sustain us. Researchers should harness their potentials, resources and acumen towards ameliorating the dangers inherent in the abuse of environment and reduce hazardous situations to the barest minimum.

Theatre, like the chameleon, takes its coloration, plot and theme, from the culture and prevailing circumstances of a particular time and period. Adedeji describes theatre as a "universal phenomenon which subsumes a cultural base and succeeds only when it reflects the reality of the people with whom it directly communicates" (16). The responsibility of theatre artists, therefore, is to reflect in their works and performances the reality, that is, the prevailing circumstance of the society at a particular time without bias and prejudice. This professional fidelity is important so that history will not be distorted and man will not perish. This research takes a look at how truthful dramatists/theatre artists, especially from that region have fared in the light of this and to have a balanced view, texts written by non-indigene will also be analyzed.

Sustainable development is the organizing principle of human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural system to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. It is expected that such development meets the need of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It also extends to the call to action to end poverty and protect the planet (Wikipedia.com, Accessed February, 2019).

In view of the above, the condition of the Niger Delta region that is devoid of peace and justice due to the neglect the people have experienced over the years from all stake holders, that is, the institutions that are expected to salvage the situation and ameliorate the dystopian condition of the Niger Delta people is laid bare in

this work. Such stake holders include: the Federal government, oil multinationals, state governments, traditional rulers, chiefs and dramatists/theatre artists who have the responsibility of portraying the condition of that region in utmost fidelity without allowing sentiment to overrule their emotions in reflecting the happenings in the region so as not to generate crisis and apprehensions. The situation in the Niger Delta runs contrary to goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of achieving Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions in all regions of Africa for sustainable growth and development. The institutions that are expected to salvage the situation are not sensitive enough to the needs of their people. These institutions are the state governments that have billions of Naira as allocations on monthly basis but will prefer to spend such on frivolities. The traditional rulers and chiefs, on their part, more often than not, circumvent monies meant for the development of their environment for personal aggrandizement and theatre artists, most times write out of emotions thereby putting the blame of the region's underdevelopment on the wrong institutions. The natural system and ecosystem upon which the economy and the Niger Delta society depend are depleted and are not developed, not to talk of sustaining development (Jike, 2004; HRW, 2005; Ukiwo2007 and Sutcliffe, 2012). Therefore, the region is far from achieving goal 16 of the SDG.

III. THE SITUATION IN THE NIGER DELTA

The situation in the Niger Delta is precarious because it is one where death stares the people in the face on daily basis. The activities of oil exploration have taken a toll on facilities, living condition and health of the people. The effects of oil exploration on water and the effect of rain on the roofs of houses in that region are given attention by Nda as follows:

Water pollution is another of Nigeria's serious environmental problems. Rivers and fresh waters have been polluted with effluent, industrial wastes, oil spillages and through obnoxious fishing practices, resulting in the near extinction of aquatic life in some areas, and the contamination of streams and the aquifers under the earth surface. The oil-rich communities can now hardly claim access to good natural drinking water nor could they vouch for the aquacultural future of their waters. Oil spillage and acid rain raining from the flaring of natural gas by oil producing companies have also been the lot of the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta region. This has affected the air, water, and land infrastructure in these areas. A typical roof in this area cannot last because of the corrosive deposits on them (89).

The deplorable environmental conditions mentioned above have resulted in untold hardship, bad health, diseases, poverty and other indescribable sufferings for the people of Niger Delta. As established earlier, the intention of the Niger Delta youths to release their people from the clutches of abject poverty and underdevelopment resulted in the formation of ethnic militias with the aim of attacking the multi-nationals in every conceivable way in order to force the government to recognize their plight.

What is of grave concern is the outcome of the Independent Scientific Assessment carried out by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2011. The scientific assessment, carried out in over 14 months, examined more than 200 locations, surveyed 122 kilometers of pipeline rights of way, reviewed more than 5,000 medical records and engaged over 23,000 people at local community meetings. Soil and ground water contamination investigation were conducted at 69 sites, more than 4,000 samples were analyzed, including water taken from 142 groundwater monitoring wells drilled specifically for the study and soil extracted from 780 boreholes. Part of the report reads as follows:

Some of the United Nations team's findings revealed that there are at least 10 Ogoni communities where drinking water is contaminated with high levels of hydrocarbons... the most worrisome finding of this salient report is the health threatening situation at Nisisioken Ogale, where families were said to have been drinking water from wells that are contaminated with benzene – a known carcinogen – at levels over 900 times above World Health Organization guidelines. UNEP had explicitly recommended that the contamination in Nisisioken Ogale warrants emergency action ahead of all other remediation efforts (NAS, 3).

The report further stated that if the situation in Ogoniland is not urgently addressed, it may result in the spread of oil pollution footprint spreading to all parts of Ogoniland and this undoubtedly will have adverse effect on the people's health. It is obvious from the foregoing that the Niger Delta, especially Ogoniland, is in grave danger which may end up in genocide if the situation is not urgently addressed.

Oil as Crisis: An Uprising of Armed Struggle

In order to put the record straight, it is important to state here that insurgency in the Niger Delta predated oil exploration and exploitation that started in commercial quantity in February, 1958. The insurgency at that time was to protect the region from British dominance and control of the palm oil trade. The resistance was carried out by noble Delta Kings like King Jaja of Opobo (Hargraves, 1996; Tamuno, 1999; Ayodele, 1999). But at this juncture, it is apt to isolate some of the militant groups and their leaders in the modern day Niger Delta insurgency in order to ascertain that they are not faceless groups. For instance, the Movement for

the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was established in 1990 by Ken Saro-wiwa and others. Their aim was to fight for the promotion and protection of minority rights, indigenous people's right and environmental justice. In recent years, its activities are aimed at promoting democratic norms, accountability, equity and transparency at the grass root, especially in Ogoni and neighboring minority territories in the Niger Delta.

Other militant groups include the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), General Boy Loaf (GBL), the Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Vigilantes, the People's Liberation Force and Niger Delta Survival Movement (NDSM).

It was gathered from researches that all these militant groups have political affiliation with subsisting State governments of their respective states (Ikelegbe, 2006; Watt, 2007; Emuedo, 2013). It was alleged that Peter Odili, the former Governor of Rivers State sponsored Asari Dokubo's NDPVF against Ateke Tom's NDV but withdrew his financial support when an election conducted by him (Odili) was condemned as fraudulent by Dokubo. He (Odili) then began to support Tom's NDV and this led to serious breakdown of law and order that resulted in uncountable mishaps. This was as a result of groups fighting for the control of routes as well as support from militants and other militant groups. The resultant untold hardship is expressed below:

The conflagrations spurred violent acts against the local population, resulting in numerous deaths and widespread violence. Daily, civilian life was disrupted forcing schools and economic activity to shut down and resulting in widespread property destruction. (Wikipedia, Accessed: 28th May, 2017).

Little wonder then about how the militant groups access huge financial resources to acquire arms and ammunition and provide welfare for members. It has been observed that the youths constitute the largest proportion of these militant groups. The term youth here is used to encompass men approximately between 15-40 years of age (Ifaka in Sutcliffe, 11). The youths of the region are referred to as a 'lost generation' or 'restive youth' (Watts, 2007) due to their enormous involvement in the Niger Delta insurgency.

Researchers have also shown the unscrupulous and insincerity of purpose of the militants towards their professed claims. This is manifested in the series of attack on oil pipelines and kidnapping of prominent oil companies staff for personal aggrandizement. This seems to be a common trend. In the words of Sutcliffe (1), "such behaviour (sic) is evidenced in the predatory economic activities seen among militants, often standing starkly at odds with their professed grievances of political and economic marginalization". This is exactly what scholars refer to as 'greed, not grievance' (Kaplan, 1994; Keen, 2000; Reno, 2000; Richards, 2003; Sutcliffe, 2012).

Other groups or institutions that could have calmed the temper of the youths through proper representation are the political leaders, community elders and the traditional institution. In Nigeria, much premium and respect is accorded local leaders, elders and royal personalities but in the case of Niger Delta leaders and elders, much is yet to be accomplished or maybe it is appropriate to mention that they have disappointed the youths through their complacency or collaboration with government or multi-national companies (Jike, 2004; Ukiwo, 2007), to deny their people of proper and genuine development. This is because in some instances, the leaders and elders had spearheaded negotiations and dealings with the state but with little or no visible result (HRW 2005), thereby making the youths to accuse the leaders of gross misrepresentation and poor leadership (Ukiwo, 600). Sutcliffe (4) puts it in a clearer perspective thus:

Local leaders and elders did not simply fail to prevent the current environmental devastation and marginalization of the oil complex which caused this catastrophe through a reciprocal relationship with MNCs ... found that a loss of faith in local elders and leaders and their inability to provide development was the single larger reason given for the emergence of youth at the centre of struggles against the state and MNCs.

One may wonder if the governors of the Niger Delta States are excusable or blameless in all of these. Factually speaking, the governors of Niger Delta States and the Conference of the Southern Governors took different steps, ranging from demanding a share of the 'national cake' to making unrealistic demands for 'resource control' or what Run (in Tarr, 2011) calls 'the resource and war paradigm'.

Apart from the above, the politicians and security operatives are also culpable in the insurgency and the spate of violence in the Niger Delta region. Emuedo (4) alleges politicians and security personnel by asserting that:

...the earliest militias were formed as political thugs to coerce and deliver votes in the shady and violent 2003 elections. Therefore, violence got started through support (finance and arms) from politicians. Thus, the idea of an impermeable membrane dichotomizing two discrete entities: government and rebels is porous. Also, vast caches of arms used by the militias were acquired from the military. In addition, oil bunkering engaged in by the militias to finance their struggle, is organized through a vast syndicate linking high ranking persons; military, politicians, the security apparatuses and the JTF.

It is quite obvious from the above that the survival or "salvation" of the Niger Delta people may not be in the hands of their traditional rulers, leaders and the governors because they have failed on many occasions to salvage the present quagmire and intervene in the development and the total wellbeing of their people. Political leaders of the region perhaps, had done more harm than good on the issue of the insurgency. In our earlier

argument, it was posited that State governments sponsored the militants for political gains. It was also mentioned that the huge money in the name of monthly allocation that has gone into the coffers of the State Governments did not reflect in the human and infrastructural development of the region. Alamiyeseigha avers that “greed and fictionalization were the major problems of the indigenes of the Niger Delta as this has caused them developmental tropes” (www.gasandoil.com, 2018). Hamilton corroborates this when he mentions that “community leaders were accused of embezzlement” (4). Therefore, political leaders have failed the people by compromising their development for personal aggrandizement. Some researchers (Ross, 2003; Afolayan, 2011; Adeseke, 2011) have decried the sybaritic life style and domineering attitude of African leaders which has led to the underdevelopment of the continent, in this case Niger Delta traditional rulers and political leaders. One wonders why billions of naira that went into the coffers of the State and Local Governments in the region has failed to translate into good living condition and infrastructural development for the region. The following Federal Account Allocation for the month of September, 2014 and July, 2018 explain this better:

September, 2014
Highest Paid State

S/N	STATES	ALLOCATION (TOTAL GROSS AMOUNT)
1	Akwa Ibom	19, 467, 767, 266.19
2	Delta	14, 884, 561, 011.30
3	Rivers	13, 811, 059, 254.97
4	Bayelsa	10, 522, 293, 702.84
5	Lagos	81, 023, 794, 161.05

Lowest paid states

S/N	STATES	ALLOCATION (TOTAL GROSS AMOUNT)
1.	Kwara	3, 446, 615, 149.18
2.	Ekiti	3, 022, 560, 084.72
3.	Ebonyi	2, 952, 706, 061.22
4.	Gombe	2, 948, 522, 092.40
5.	Osun	2, 575, 099, 200.40

(*Guardian Newspaper*, Thursday November 25, 2014).

July, 2018

Highest paid states:

S/N	STATES	ALLOCATION (TOTAL GROSS AMOUNT)
1	Akwa Ibom	16,797,825,973.32
2.	Delta	18,728,658,347.43
3.	Rivers	15,075,840,591.20
4.	Bayelsa	13,612,232,432.31
5	Lagos	11,610,837,815.68

Lowest paid states

S/N	STATES	ALLOCATION (TOTAL GROSS AMOUNT)
1	Kwara	4,154,044,061.71
	Ekiti	4,174,084,731.09
2.		
3.	Ebonyi	4,195,329,190.49
4.	Gombe	4,342,212,144.79
5	Osun	4,322,568,363.46

From the above allocation structure, four of the six Niger Delta states occupy the first four highest paid states, therefore, it is not acceptable for them to complain of funds in terms of infrastructural and all-round development of their states and people unfortunately, the reverse is the case. This is why Hamilton (12) says that “the States have repressed and exploited the oppressed class”.

The traditional rulers are equally culpable in the insurgency and its attendant woes. In some cases, they directly instigated the youths to protest against the government and the oil companies while in other cases, they embezzled money meant for development of their communities thereby surreptitiously setting the youths against the Federal Government and the oil companies, as the youths feel that the latter duo have reneged on their responsibility. For example, in Toru-Ndoro, the people of the community dethroned the traditional ruler due to accusations that he exploited the citizens by collecting monies from SPDC in exchange for allowing them unlimited access to the oil resources (Hamilton, 8). The next section clearly portrays the situation in the Niger Delta using play texts as primary source.

John Dudafa's "Mangrove in the Desert"

Ineye Johnny Dudafa has B.A. and M.A. in Theatre Arts from the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. He is a native of Ayibabiri town, Kolga, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. His play, "Mangrove in the Desert", has been performed many times, including during the visit of President Olusegun Olusegun to Bayelsa State. His other plays include "Oloibiri" and "Harmony". The plot is below:

The performance of "Mangrove in the Desert" highlights some issues that relate to the insurgency that has been part of the Niger Delta for so many years now. Some of the issues are: laying blames on the oil companies and successive governments at federal level for the environmental degradation that has befallen the region for years now, encouraging youths restiveness, exposing the greed of Niger Delta's traditional rulers and Chiefs and appealing to youths to acquire skills that can make employment in the oil companies easy. The play opens with a market scene where issues relating to the damage caused by oil exploration on farm products affect the prices of food items in the market. This is evident in the ensuing dialogue:

OWEIBO: This is terrible

You can imagine, I have been with these few palm nuts, which I took three days to gather. Nothing seems to be moving

When will this barrenness of our land come to an end? (p.7).

ARUPU: Do you know what it costs me to transport these few plantains through the Creeks to this market?

FURERE: It does not matter

Do you think it is easy to raise five hundred naira?

ARUPU: Do you think it is easy to harvest this kind of plantain in this barren land of ours? (p.11).

The youths shift the blame of all the woes of the Niger Delta on oil companies and the Federal Government without thinking of the negative roles and pranks of the local authorities. They, therefore, charge their colleagues to protest against the oil companies and the government. This is evident in Tari's lines below:

TARI: This is the question

Who is wrong in this matter?

Is it our poor civil servant brother who is not paid enough to buy the garri he needs for his family!

Or our poor sister who is a local farmer faced with poor harvest? If you must cure a sickness then you must find and stop the source of that sickness. The source of our sickness is known to all of us. Or don't we know that oil exploration is the source of our pain?

As long as oil continues in the crude form, there must be poor harvest in the land. There must be hardship. There must be hunger and cries, bitter cries, and of course death, untimely death. This must not remain our fate. We must review our relationship with the oil companies and the Federal Government or we perish forever. The time is now, go and prepare for the protest, we must change our situation now (p.16, 17).

The above is enough to incite the youths to protest, riot, vandalize property and snuff out lives. The king, Amananaowei, engages the youths and raises his anger against the planned protest by the youths. He claims that such protest will jeopardize his position whereas the main reason is for personal aggrandizement as the following excerpt shows:

ELDER 2: How?

We have a landing jetty.

There is also a public toilet now.

What about the promised classroom blocks?

All these and many more will come my young men.

Just be patient and believe in us.

We will deliver the dividends.

Be patient.

YOUTH 2: Yes, we will be patient

But tell me of what use is patience to a people who lose many of their children in childbirth.

Tell me,

what is patience to a people whose brothers and sisters die daily from devastated and polluted environment?

ELDER 3: My children.

We understand.

But just give us some time to address these problems.

TARI: As our leaders and fathers, you have tried in your own way.

But that does not mean it is the only way we all can follow to bring about the better standard of living to our people.

We must join our hands as brothers to try out this new way of your children.

ELDER 1: This new way you talk about.

Will it not affect the twenty five thousand naira I receive from the oil companies as member of the Council of Chiefs?

ELDER 2: What about the various gift items during Christmas and the New Year?

Will they still come?

ELDER 3: The quarterly meeting with their packages, shall we still be allowed to attend?

These are things one cannot forgo easily my children.

YOUTH 1: Pity!

ELDERS: What?

YOUTH 1: It is sad

ELDERS: Why?

YOUTH 1: Have you known how much profit they made from your land to give you those packages as you call them? If you do, you will feel betrayed by these greedy masters called companies (p.28-9).

It is obvious from the above excerpt that the people are aware that the King and Chiefs are against the youths' protests due to their personal gains which has rendered the community impoverished. It exposes the hypocrisy of the traditional rulers. Another good point raised in the play is that the youths are encouraged to acquire skills so that they can fit into the employment space of the oil multi-nationals:

TARI: Now that we have chosen an intellectual approach to replace the sword and guns. It is a war forward. But to those brothers of ours...What happens? ... everybody must own a trade.

TEME: Yes, as a brother or sister of this land, you must own a trade.

TEKE: So we can beat them to their game and get closer to our wealth. You can't survive without a trade. No, not in this world of today. We need skills (p.40).

In the end, the play advocates peace through the surrender of arms and ammunition and encourages the people to engage themselves in positive trade skills and education that will help them get a better part of life. Notwithstanding, the import of some scenes are enough to incite the youth to violence and such incitement could not have been quelled by the conclusion of the play. Opinions have been formed.

Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops and Ipomu*

It is obvious that the people are embroiled in an offensive attack. At the river lives Memekize, a victim of the Nigeria civil war where he loses her husband and two sons that she buries at the river bank. She presently experiences attack from the inhabitants. At the river bank three women, at different times, run for safety and she accommodates them, even though she dresses as male militant to ensure the ingenuity of the women's need of help. Each woman comes with different sad tales of the militants' attacks same night. First is Mukume who is just married to Ovievie and they are still enjoying their honeymoon when they experience a reprisal attack from the militants. Ovievie escapes but Mukume is not that lucky as she is raped by three men, losing her virginity to strangers. Second is Azue who escapes with her son who unfortunately is carrying a bullet in his bowel; he later dies and Memekize buries him beside her husband and sons at the river bank. Third is Bonuwo, a teacher, who loses 41 students to bomb blasts or cross fire between the militants and the Joint Task Force. The play *Little Drops* provides a clear exposition on the real happenings in the Niger Delta. From the play, it is obvious that the insurgency and its attendant woes are because the traditional rulers and supposed leaders of the Niger Delta have compromised and have eaten from both sides of their mouths.

The issue of rape pervades the play as Mukume says thus:

MUKUME: Yes, please! I have been raped three times today already. Kill me instead. Shoot me and let me die (*crying*). No! I will not let another man touch me. Kill me first. (*slowly, she raises her head*).. I shall die first, not one more finger on me (p. 68).

MEME: Shut up or I will shoot you! Shut up and do what I say!

MUKUME: Shoot me. Kill me. Rape me after. But not while I am alive. Kill me first! I say kill me! (*slowly, she begins to walk before Memekize*) (p.68).

The insurgents rape and molest their own people.

MUKUME: Down there... where my virtue once lived. Tell me, mother, will I ever be the same again? I ... we just got married four days ago. Ovievie, my husband has only just given me this wedding ring and vowed to treasure and please me till death do us part. (*she begins to cry*). He always said that my body was his temple. And I was his goddess. But see what they have done to his temple. They have trampled upon my virtue, turned my passage to marshy swampy ground and my soul lost, full of shame and pity. (*grabs Memekize*). I do not deserve this, by the gods, I do not. (*she begins to cry*). What do I tell him now?

MEME: Your husband Ovievie. Is he alive?

MUKUME: By the gods, I do not know. We were on the bed celebrating our honeymoon at the Life is Sweet Hotel when all of a sudden, a loud gunshot noise came into the compound. It was deafening at first. We grabbed all we could. My husband was stronger and quicker. He picked his singlet and jumped through the window. I was caught by the door by three hefty, ugly men in black hoods and guns. My loose wrapper fell at the sight of death. That was when ... (*she begins to cry again*).

MUKUME: May the gods forgive me. I don't even know what I have in my womb now. What I took from those dirty Wild men. I don't know what I want anymore. All I know is that I must stay alive. I must avenge the loss of my being... of my virtue as a woman... as a wife. Nothing will stop me from living now, I swear (*pause*). You say I will know if he is dead? (P. 75).

Rape, killings and molestations pervade the play. At last, Mukume, Azue and Bonuwo escape as Kuru, a militant, drives them to Port Harcourt with the boat of Meme. The play shows that the agitation, though propelled by good reasons, has been hijacked by a few who use it to enrich themselves:

Meme: The war is fierce tonight. Only the gods know what they are really fighting for this time. We shall see in the end, just like the first war where I lost everything, it will end being for the interest of a few people again. So much blood... so much bodies... so much talk, and very little good to show for it. When shall they ever learn? (p. 76).

The play also buttresses the fact that the King is culpable in romancing the militants and the government in order to enrich himself and this results in his death:

Azue: First, the boys came and drank and ate. They dance and chanted his praise. They left driving like wild animals. Then came the government boys. Again, they drank and ate with him. Leaving bags of money in the palace. Unknown to the king he was being watched by his driver who was the informant of the boys. They came back, and there was confusion. They cut off the head of the king right in front of his family (p. 78)

Azue: He was warned. Some of the chiefs warned him, but he would not listen. He spoke from both sides of his mouth. He chooses to play the game of the big boys, and so his royal stool was kicked from beneath him. (*In a whisper*). The boys called him a "vulture" before they beheaded him (p. 79).

Meme: We heard his new wife pushed him. Urged on by her evil mother. We even heard that he had taken her from the hand of a youth leader, who had sworn to take her back with this last breath. And then he tried to please her with all he had. Buy her love. He sent his three wives packing. Those who started life with him, now smelt of age when his wealth arrived. Their only crime was that they all had female children. By the time the little girl had a son ... the prince... the heir apparent... his madness was complete. He went crazy with gifts (p. 80).

Kuru: I am sorry, he hurt the people. He exploited us. I am sorry, Your Highness, he sold his conscience and sense of duty to his people for money... (p. 110).

The traditional rulers, obviously have failed their people and sold their allegiance to money from the government and oil multinationals at the expense of their people's well being. The militants do not fare better as the ensuing dialogue reveals:

Kuru: Mother... I swear eight out of every ten kidnappings are not done by us. They are done by criminals.

Meme: Good, so you are only responsible for two out of every ten, but where is the money?

Bonuwo: Gone to big jeeps, cigarettes, drinks and girls.

Meme: See, you cannot answer. The money goes to your individual pockets. And you deceive us that you are fighting for our cause. Whose cause? (p. 112).

The amnesty has not really solved the problem because the government on its part reneged on its promise of giving stipends to the repentant militants as well as sponsoring their vocational education. Due to this unkept promise, the militants are acquiring more ammunition:

Bonuwo: Oh, we hurts the with his plea. Forty-one children, that's all I lost to this stupid wear Forty-one. And you were promised amnesty. But instead of giving up the arms, you acquire more... as we can see. (p. 110).

Ahmed Yerima's *Ipomu* reflects the disappointment the militants met with the amnesty arrangement:

Ipomu: We went along with it. And then two of my boys who were selected to go to America were deported last week, and three deserted the American State they were sent for their countrymen where they would be able to eat KKF and drink to their full, and now they hold me responsible... (p. 131-132).

To buttress the position that the avarice of State Executives and traditional rulers is one of the major causes of the much experienced agony, underdevelopment, poverty and squalor in the Niger Delta, the interview this researcher conducted with Austin Anigala sheds more light on this. The interview was conducted on 24/04/2014 when Anigala was the Head, Department of Theatre Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State. An excerpt of the interview is presented below:

Researcher: Sir, who is to blame for the level of poverty and neglect that the Niger-Delta has experienced?

Prof. Anigala: We are all to blame. All of us, because we're all stakeholders. Let's start with ourselves first. Who are the persons who caused all these spillages we're talking about? It's generated by the community. They're the ones who burst some of these pipes and then, they're not able to contain everything. So, with the spillage, you discover that aquatic life is destroyed. So many things also happen and so, by the time they're destroyed and go to the farm, no yield. We can't get anything from the water, from the rivers. That leads to starvation and the economic base is also eroded and at the end of the day, who has destroyed us? We have destroyed ourselves. Then, our leaders at the community level are part of the problems because once you give them peanuts, money, you bought them over. So, they cannot defend the interest of their community. Some of them are more interested in the contracts they're going to win. Once you give them a contract that is worth 2million, they think that they have made it and they're out to fight and betray their own people. Therefore, the divide and rule strategy or tactics is employed. The community cannot speak together as one and so, they come in, they exploit us, they manipulate us, take everything that they need to take by giving us peanuts, because we do not have a united front. So, at that level, we blame ourselves. Then, let's go to the Federal Government, the Federal Government is also part of the problem. Then, who is this Federal Government? Politicians and self-seeking leaders, who are more interested in what they're going to take out of the system than what they're going to give to the system. That's the problem of corruption. So, by the time they're even awarding contracts and they're discussing, they're not actually interested in what is going to happen to the common man. They're more interested in what they're going to make out of the negotiation. How many people own oil blocs? How many indigenes own oil blocs in their own communities? How many? So, let's say about 0.00001%. (The interview was conducted in the office of Austin Anigala on 24th May, 2014).

IV. CONCLUSION

The despicable and precarious situation of the Niger Delta people is not in doubt. It is deducible from our discussion that the Niger Delta crisis is far from being over. The state governments have failed in utilizing the huge resources accruable to the region for the benefit of the people. The traditional rulers have not performed better because they sell the souls of their people to oil multinationals for personal aggrandizement and self enrichment thereby enslaving and impoverishing their people. The youths' restiveness translates into greed rather than grievances and the way they handled the insurgence is far from being admired as they also showed that they are into such engagement to acquire wealth for themselves and not for the benefit of the entire region. Based on the above, dramatists/theatre artists are enjoined to imbibe best practices and ensure high fidelity of their works. The insurgence is far from being over as there are still many kidnappings and pipeline vandalization going on in the region and this has affected the economy of Nigeria. For example, in 2014, the cost of pipeline vandalization to the Nigerian government, oil companies and communities was estimated at 14million dollars. Lastly, Nigerian leaders and theatre artists should familiarize themselves with the concept of sustainable development. According to www.sd-commission.org.uk/page/what-is-sustainable-development.html: *Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.* The concept of sustainable development can be interpreted in many different ways, but at its core is an approach to development that looks to balance different, and often competing needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society. *All too often development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impacts... the way the approach development affects everyone. The impacts of our decisions as a society have very real consequences for people's lives* (emphasis mine).

The overall summary of the emphasized parts indicate that first, whatever steps that are taken in Nigeria in term of petroleum exploration in the Niger Delta should, henceforth, be done in such a way that it will no longer affect the lives and means of livelihood of the people of the region. This is because the way petroleum exploration is carried out in the region currently causes death, illness, environmental degradation and pollution with the overall result that the future generation of the Niger Delta will not be able to meet their own needs. In other words, the way and manner through which the Nigerian government gets money to develop Nigeria has severe future negative impacts on some people. To this end, theatre artists and playwrights all over Nigeria should write plays and put up performances that align with the above views of sustainable development.

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