

Confronting the Enemy Within: Subverting Internal Complicity in the Debacle of Oil in Two Niger Delta Plays

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Abstract. Nigeria's Niger Delta has a budding literary tradition that largely comprises of creative and critical writings on the history, trajectory and corollaries of mining natural resources in the region. A predominant and recurring motif in this literature is the deleterious effects of the exploitation of the human and non-human elements by multinationals and successive federal governments because of control over the revenue accrued from oil. However, this paper identifies Peter Omoko's *Crude Nightmen* (2015) and Stephen Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches* (2015) as two Niger Delta plays that are clear departures from the foregoing zeitgeist. Both playwrights are unequivocal in holding indigenous leaders and citizens complicit for the systemic impoverishment of the region as a result of placing personal interests over communal progress. However, they also balance their narratives by creating parallel sets of local characters who deploy intellectual and radical forms of agency towards the liberation of their oppressed people and despoiled environment from the machinations of the enemy within.

Keywords: Niger Delta Plays, Internal Complicity, Debacle of oil, Enemy within.

1. Introduction

The Niger Delta region has become synonymous with unending social unrests and environmental underdevelopment as a result of the debacle and consequences of oil exploration activities. The image of the region is as of a battleground

because of environmental pollution, internecine struggles over power relations and land ownership, militancy, kidnapping, vandalization of oil installations, hazardous health conditions and other negative indices caused by oil politics. Critics have continually held oil multinationals in collusion with successive federal governments culpable for its devastated ecology, conflict-ridden space and unmitigated impoverishment (Afinotan & Ojatorotu 2009, Umana 2018, Akingbe 2019).

However, with series of unfolding events lately, the most recent of which were shocking revelations of massive corruption and diversion of funds meant for community development in the region at the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), it has become clear that the enemy within, to include local leaders and representatives, is a collaborator and equally complicit in the systemic marginalization, oppression and exploitation of the region and people. This group made up of indigenes or bona fide citizens of the region is just as, if not more, guilty as exogenous invaders for the plethora of crises bedeviling the region.

2. The Debacle of Oil in the Niger Delta Region

Crude oil, a natural mineral resource was first discovered in commercial quantity in Oloibiri located in the Niger Delta region in 1956. Since then, the people and environment have gained

public traction because of offshoots of the “oil encounter” or the deleterious effects of oil exploration ((Aghoghovwia 2013). Over the years, oil mining and gas flaring have caused great damages to the physical landscape and altered the quality of lived lives of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta. In the course of drilling for oil, the region’s once rich flora and fauna and healthy bodies of water have been destroyed and polluted. This has gradually made it more difficult for indigenes to continue to depend on farming and fishing, their traditional means of livelihood just as constant exposure to unhealthy environmental pollutions have had negative impact on their physical and mental health. There is the dearth of alternative industries and infrastructures to ameliorate the above predicaments. Worse still, federal government’s policies to include the Land Use Act, control and disbursement of oil revenue as national, rather than regional wealth exclude them from benefitting from a much larger share of their oil patrimony. The irony inherent here is that being the proverbial golden goose that lays the golden egg does not translate to prosperity or development for the human and non-human population of the region. This situation has made them a poster example of the paradox of a boom turned doom or a resource curse instead of blessing.

The general impression that they would have fared better if allowed unregulated access to the revenue accrued from the sales of their oil further exacerbates their sense of alienation and atrophy. Consequently, this dissatisfaction has led to their agitation for resource control as a solution to environmental restoration and restitution. The fight for autonomous disbursement of oil funds and government’s resistance earned the advocates negative labels such as insurgents, rebels, and militants. Some personages and host communities have suffered dire penalties for their roles in calling for a clean-up of their polluted land, water and air spaces or an equitable share of their oil patrimony for internal development. Historical examples of these are the fates of the late writer and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni eight; brutal military sacking of oil-producing communities like Odi, Etche and

Ogoni; as well as the perpetuation of the insidious politics of divide and rule as in the various forms of internal conflict arising from oil compensation money paid by the exploration companies to host communities.

On the other hand, the people’s clamour for more, if not total, control over their oil wealth has yielded some negligibly positive results. The Nigerian federal government in response over the years set up special development commissions (Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission-OMPADEC, Niger Delta Development Commission- NDDC, etc.) devoted to managing intervention funds exclusively allocated for the establishment, rehabilitation, and improvement of basic infrastructures and amenities in the region. An amnesty programme was introduced, geared towards reintegrating and empowering restive youths as well as help quell incessant crises which have made the region notoriously famous and insecure. In addition, major oil-producing states are given a certain percentage of the oil revenue as derivation fund aside the monthly federal revenue allocation from oil. All of these efforts are meant to afford the people more indigenous based windows of opportunities at capital and non-capital development as well as some reprieve from the effects of ecological damages as a result of oil prospecting. These measures were also meant to serve as ameliorative for years of unaddressed human and environmental neglect in spite of the region’s crucial role in generating over eighty percent of the nation’s economic wealth.

A core argument of this paper therefore, is that the burden of blame for the abuse and deplorable state of the population and ecosystem is not solely that of an oppressive federal government, or self-serving capitalist multinationals that profit most from the region’s oil and gas reserves. Rather, through a study of two play texts by budding Niger Delta playwrights, I intend to show how the selfish interests-greed, megalomania, vaunting ambition, disingenuousness and others - of indigenous citizens, religious leaders and constituted local authorities within oil-producing communities contribute to the debacle of oil. Peter Omoko’s

Crude Nightmen and Stephen Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches* were both published five months apart in 2015. They are dramatic re-imaginaries of the nefarious roles and activities of autochthonous characters who further complicate the people and region's insalubrious conditions as a result of oil politics, thereby making them victims of a double and more agonizingly painful jeopardy.

Unlike some other plays on the Niger Delta condition, our playwrights do not wholly hold outsiders responsible for the predicament of the region. Rather, they project insiders as those who have compromised the well-being of their own people just in order to maintain and promote different self-aggrandizement schemes. But in addition, I further explore the playwrights' efforts within these plays at balancing their narratives by creating another set of local characters whose agency represent the spirit of genuine patriotism as they are altruistic, incorruptible and true advocates of social and environmental justices. Some of them adopt radical and revolutionary measures as they actively engage, resist and thwart complicitous acts by their kinsmen. Others espouse persuasive reasoning and non-violent campaigns as intellectual forms of activism. Thus, these dramatists deftly adopt theatre as a tool for social activism and environmental advocacy as they artistically resolve dramatic conflicts to reflect poetic justice. Ultimately, machinations, conspiracies and collusions are subverted towards a remediation of environmental degradation and social instability for communal advancement.

3. A Niger Delta Literary Tradition

The Niger Delta as a region blessed with abundant natural resources has been a major hub of trade and commerce even from before the era of colonialism. Its location along littoral passages also facilitates access and ease of entry and exit enabling local communities' engagements with outsiders. Palm oil, and later crude oil are two exports from the region much sought after to meet growing global demands undergirded by national and foreign interests. Consequently, through an internal form of

colonialism, external stakeholders with vested interests continued to meddle with the local economy and politics as means of retaining their profiteering hold over that region. Sometimes, these outsiders contribute to creating and exacerbating conflicts and violence amongst local communities through divisive activities and forceful coercion to protect their investments. But generally speaking, the antics of agents of oppression and exploitation because of oil percolate from the state through multinationals down to indigenous representatives. Nigeria's Niger Delta region has been ranked the poorest and least developed oil producing area compared to others elsewhere in the world as a result of years of systemic neglect from external and as revealed recently, internal agents.

Modern African literature is a literature of engagement. It takes up through a creative imaginary the experiences of a people at particular points of their existence. The trajectory of the region's oil resources have been the subject of scholarship on the Niger Delta experience (Reddick 2019). The unabating socioeconomic and political injustices plaguing the Niger Delta region especially as a result of the possession, extraction and commercialisation of natural resources is largely, but not solely, responsible for the efflorescence of a prodigious literary tradition now popularly referred to as the Niger Delta Literature. Ojaide's impression of this subgenre is of a literature that shows:

...a Niger Delta setting and context with the characters reflecting the worldview, sensibility, and experiences of the people. The works all have relevance to the Niger Delta problems and issues and reflect the historical as well as sociocultural, political, economic lives of the people of the region.... There is a cultural identity established in these literary works with place names and characters that bear names of Niger Delta ethnicities. (p.71)

Works in this category are mostly by writers from the region as well as a few outsiders who empathize with their plight. But, it is essentially a subnational literature which is essentially defined by the writers' attachment to their nativity. In more contemporary times, oil

prospecting and its attendant corollaries have become the preponderant motif in this particular literature.

Therefore, these writings give robust expressions to the status of the endangered citizenry and vanishing landscape even as it clamours for a redress. Global concerns over the disastrous effects of climate change as a result of anthropocene activities have contributed in projecting the living realities and literature of this region to wider audiences. The Niger Delta region and its literature as they pertain to the discovery and extraction of crude oil have been able to bring to world attention the existential conditions of a local region because of the primacy and politics of a vital mineral resource. The literature is birthed and propelled by writers and critics' commitment to examining issues affecting the place and well-being of the human and non-human elements in that region via literary studies. In this vein, it has been referred to as a protest literature as it riles against the destruction wrought on a once idyllic setting. This has in turn led to other dimensions of assessing issues of marginalization associated with the notion of Us versus Them; represented by the region and its people on one hand and the oil exploration companies, federal government and other geopolitical regions profiting from the former's indiscriminate plunder on the other hand.

Two strands of writings are easily decipherable in this literature. The first group have works of pioneer writers like J.P. Clark and Gabriel Okara whose art valorise the bucolic in their home environment. Theirs is more of a nature or animist literature with themes that venerate the rich flora and fauna, bounteous waters, and generally pristine landscape that is familiar and offer hearth, familial love and security to its natives. Whether during the turmoil of an inclement weather or in the thick of a dense jungle, the respective speakers in Clark's "Night Rain" as well as Okara's "Piano and Drums" take pride and are content in the haven their home environment offers. There is also a place allotted to the role of nature or the environment as an influential cosmic force in the fate of the people. Examples of this trope as literary

reconfigurations in Niger Delta literature are found in Clark's *Song of a Goat*, *The Raft*, and *Ozidi*, and Elechi Amadi's *Isiburu*. Imperialist attempts to impose and dominate host communities in order to appropriate their resources, and the latter's resistance have also been recreated through this literature. Niger Delta drama of this ilk include: Clark's *All for Oil*, Ola Rotimi's *Ovoranwen Nogbaisi*, Miesoinuma Minima's *Odum Egege*, Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*, Omoko's *Majestic Revolt* and others. The tone of cultural nationalism projected in these plays attest to Niger Delta communities that revelled in and revered their natural habitat, relied on it for physical and spiritual sustenance, and were united in warding off invasive foreigners while punishing delinquent insiders.

The above parade of literary productions on and from the Niger Delta can be contrasted with the tone of the second strand of writings from this same region by writers who bemoan the unremitting pillage of the idyllic environment of yore in a postcolonial dispensation as a result of oil and gas exploration. This group consists mostly of poets like Ojaide, Nnimmo Bassey, Ibiwari Ikoriko, Ogaga Ifowodo, and Obari Gomba. Petrofiction by Ojaide, Kaine Agary and Helon Habila also belong here. These writers decry the unmitigated ecocide and sundry human rights violations carried out by national leaders and oil companies against host communities and indigenous peoples in this oil rich but marginalized region. Ahmed Yerima stands out as a playwright of note within this second subset of Niger Delta literary writers as his *Hard Ground* explores the people's revolutionary agency in overthrowing forces of oppression and injustice against them because of their oil heritage.

I situate our selected playwrights within this latter taxonomy of a Niger Delta literary tradition and furthermore acknowledge their clinical assessment of emerging realities concerning the roles of indigenous citizens in the underdevelopment of the region against the matrix of oil politics.

4. About the Plays

Crude Nightmen addresses the conflict and consequences arising from the inability of neighbouring communities to arrive at an amicable means of sharing oil compensation money paid by an oil firm. The conflict of the play is introduced from the opening scene and first setting. A rowdy crowd of men are gathered in a community's town hall to decide on how to disburse the funds given to two oil producing communities, Abotigbene and Otugbene, Ijaw villages that have hitherto co-existed peacefully as neighbours. Apart from both belonging to Abrobibo kingdom, villagers from each community have forged strong friendship and kinship ties mostly based on years of mutual trust. This is why they were able to unite and as a team successfully agitate for recognition and pacification from Atlantic Oil company for the damages to their environment because of oil prospecting activities.

Trouble begins to brew when some elders from Otugbene, led by the greedy and raucous Minikini, adopt a lopsided sharing formula for the money. Emissaries from Abotigbene reject this arrangement, insisting on an equal share of the crude oil windfall. Benefa, an elder from Otugbene and the lone voice of reason advises his kinsmen against defrauding their closest ally as he encourages them to eschew any conflict and assent to Otugbene's request for equal allocation. The other elders rebuff his appeal to them to do what is morally right by their neighbours who stubbornly proclaim that "that will be over our dead bodies" (p.19). Engulfed by a rapacious covetousness, they readily subvert historical antecedents by claiming original ownership of Abotigbene's land and by extension, their oil wells and proceeds. Under the excuse of defending their "community's interest [which] is at stake" (p.33), they remain obstinate and refuse to review the allotting formula for the money. The effect of this impasse is soon felt as the people of Otugbene bar workers from Abotigbene entry into the premises of the Atlantic Oil company located on Otugbene land and their women from going into their farmlands.

To further complicate matters, Minikini convinces Opokumo to accompany him to a

meeting with Mr Edgerton, the foreigner representing the oil company. At the nocturnal meeting held in their boats and from which the playwright apparently derived the title of the play, both men sign over to Edgerton's company unrestricted access to mining rights in exchange for arms supply to prepare them for an impending war with Abotigbene because of the conflict over the oil compensation money. Their liaison with the white man is also borne out of the quest for personal financial gains and the control of power that would place the local leaders "in charge of the entire creeks of the Niger Delta" (p. 39). They are remorseless about mortgaging the future of their children and region for their immediate and parochial ambitions. In what appears like a twist of fate and a dose of poetic justice, the duo, and unfortunately a section of Otugbene villagers, get blown up by explosives wrongly handled by Minikini while he was demonstrating the use of the war weapons he just took delivery of.

In *Pond of Leeches*, the playwright sustains the trope of corrupt and oppressive indigenous leadership as the bane of development in the Niger Delta. Through a more radical form of dramatic advocacy, Kekeghe condemns internal conspirators who further compound the fate of the region by conniving with external aggressors to impoverish and oppress the citizens because of their oil resources. The Chairman of Okugbe community is a cold-blooded politician who appropriates the community's wealth for himself and is prepared to do anything to maintain his selfish interests. To this end, he uses a retinue of killer guards to unleash terror on any opposition to his refusal "to reorganize the sharing of the resources for the benefit of all" (p.24). He is clearly one of the metaphorical leeches or 'man eaters' who feeds off the misery and poverty of the people he governs using fear, intimidation, outright violence and unbridled power to curtail or get rid of dissident voices.

Conscripted to protect the interest of capitalist oil companies from which he also benefits, the Chairman quashes any rebellion against oil exploration activities by aggrieved citizens in his oil producing constituency. He has no empathy for his suffering subjects or despoiled landscape

since he profits from their un-development. He, like Minikini, allows himself to be used by external forces as a weapon of injustice against his own people and is unyielding in quashing those he regards as threats to “the peace of the oil business” (p.37). Chiefs like Oteri and Shenye who are in his paid service are also projected as leeches and sly foxes as they betray even close family members just to remain in his good books. However, the playwright creates the rebellious Ovwata as a formidable antagonist who prevents the Chairman from completely succeeding in his plans to muzzle opposition voices. Ovwata, self-appoints himself as his people’s liberator from the Chairman’s tyranny and exploitation. As an initiate, he derives his courage and power through fortification from Ivwri, the Urhobo god of war and restitution who abhors injustice. Thus, Ovwata deploys both his physical and assisted powers towards waging a one man war against the local oppressors.

Ovwata later enlists Ophu, his young nephew on his side. Both men finally devise a non-violent or confrontational method of retrieving their community’s autonomy from the greedy exploitation of the Chairman. They spread news of the mysterious drying up of their oil wells which means no more oil earnings for the Chairman. Betrayers like Chief Shenye eventually suffers mob action as he is stoned to death for trying to discredit Ophu, the appointed leader of the newly created Urhukpe community. According to Ovwata, with his death “the leech in the family is gone” (p.96). However, during an attack by the Chairman’s ferocious guards to reclaim Urhukpe community, Ovwata is badly injured and consequently dies from his wounds. Tragic as his death is, the play ends on a note of optimism signified by the sudden appearance of a rainbow which all the people agree portends a better future for their land.

Both Omoko and Kekeghe respective plays, *Crude Nightmen* and *Pond of Leeches* are dramatic re-enactments of internal conflicts that beleaguer oil producing communities in the Niger Delta as a result of oil politics. Their individual and collective thematic engagements, and fictional settings aptly subscribe to

admission into this literary canon by virtue of a writer’s depiction of an attachment to his/her nativity. Our dramatists are ‘home boys’ who spent their growing up years in different oil producing communities in Niger Delta’s Delta state. No doubt, at various times they witnessed and experienced first-hand some negative effects of agents and agencies mining natural resources from the land. They are aware too of the roles played by the federal government in cahoots with oil companies in undermining the well-being of the ecosystem and people in order to further maximize their gains from the region’s oil wealth.

However, what is most worrisome to them as seen from the issues their plays address is the unwholesome activities of bona fide citizens of the region whose indiscriminate greed and megalomaniac dispositions have made them eschew communal harmony and development for personal desires and profits. Their artistic oeuvre is different from a foregoing pattern within this subnational literature as they beam their narrative searchlights inwards in dramatizing the factors responsible for the region’s abject conditions. Both plays are unanimous in identifying internal complicity as a more sinister and disruptive force working against the actualization of liberating the indigenous people and restoring the environment from the catastrophes of oil exploration and exploitation.

5. Internal Complicity and Its Subversion in Omoko’s *Crude Nightmen* and Kekeghe’s *Pond of Leeches*

The exploitation of the human-capital resources of a minority group within larger core social and political structures points to altered forms of colonialism. This situation is possible too through internal complicity. In all of the raging conflicts and tragic culminations dramatized in the selected texts, both playwrights are unequivocal in holding local politicians and leaders accountable for promoting worse forms of inequality and underdevelopment among their own people. Characters readily abandon

collective aspirations and advocacy as a marginalized group at the slightest opportunity to promote personal gains. What should be a joint inheritance meant to evenly benefit all becomes the source of power intrigues and acrimonies among kinsmen and neighbouring communities.

In *Crude Nightmen*, the conflict is of a materialistic context as the sharing formula for the oil emolument paid by Atlantic Oil Company triggers the avariciousness of a group of indigenous leaders. It is surprising that money meant as reparation towards environmental resuscitation is instead divided by individuals among themselves for personal use or regarded as a form of pacification to permit uninterrupted oil extractive activities as stated below:

TIMINIMI: I am happy to inform you that our agitation for recognition by the government and the oil multinationals has yielded some results. The MOU we signed with the Atlantic Oil Company has opened up good radiant of hope for our land and indeed our people. They have realized that without pacifying us they cannot work in peace and make profit. (p.12)

The mindset projected here is that of a detrimental compromise. In other words, for a paltry compensation, community leaders are willing to allow the harmful plundering and profiteering continue. Some elders of Otugbene's agitations against environmental despoilation by the government and oil multinationals turns out to be because of what they personally stand to gain from a collective predicament. Minikini who spear heads the whole confusion over the sharing formula later reveals that he wants to use his share of the money "to bring in my ayoro [new wife]" (p. 9) and the rest to sponsor his future political ambition. Until events in the play finally reach a tragic end, nowhere did the leaders broach the idea of using the oil compensation money for community developmental projects that will restore and conserve the pillaged ecology or improve the people's standard of living. That both Minikini and Opokumo would go further to enter into a clandestine pact on behalf of the community by mortgaging the future of even the younger generation for their immediate

egotistical desires tells of how morally depraved these leaders have become because of their greed for oil money. This also substantiates Lawal's (2020) claim that leadership egoism and failure further aggravate recurring crises in the region.

There is an ironical twist to the self-centred mentality this group adopts in helping themselves to a commonwealth when before now they had always blamed outsiders for channelling oil money towards external development while abandoning the region. Outsiders who see through their deficient moral trait cash in on this perverse behaviour as Mr Edgerton divulges in an aside:

Yes! It is cheaper to avoid the collective wrath of these primitive communities whose land and waterways are occasionally destroyed by the activities of our oil exploitation by getting the favour of some greedy chiefs. Sowing disunity among them will distract them from asking questions. We cannot spend our hard earned money to replace old pipelines when the uncertainty in the international market is mounting by the hours. They should continue to fight over peanuts while we make our profit from their backyards....I shall invest greatly to fuel this crisis. (p.41)

Oil compensation money from oil multinationals invariably turns out to be Greek horse gifts through which their representatives infiltrate and break up the ranks of citizens of oil host communities. The ultimate aim is to instigate internecine conflict among rural communities in order to prevent them from uniting as a cohesive force in challenging oil capitalists exploitation in their territories. Hence, Mr Edgerton follows through with his promise to "invest greatly to fuel this crisis" by supplying Otugbene the arms to go to war with their unyielding neighbours, Abotigbene.

Through what he calls a "dramatic metaphor" (p.11), Kekgehe's *Pond of Leeches* engages emblematic characters to roundly condemn the abuse and misuse of power by indigenous leaders against their own people. The virulently immoral Chairman of Okugbe community is the figurative head leech who alongside "his court of thieving chiefs" (p.24) commit atrocities

against the subordinate quarters where the oil wells are found in order to retain uncontested control of the oil revenue meant for communal development. Characters like the three Elders, Shenye, Oteri, Bishop Ukemu and the Crier are antithesis of their traditional roles. They reneged on their primary responsibilities to protect and promote the masses' well-being and have become hypocrites and sycophants.

Working with the edict "that any land oil and gas is discovered, even in their parlour, is the property of the father community" (p.62), the Chairman declares to his subjects that "I'm ready to kill anybody in that quarters who tries to stand in my way. They don't call me The-killer-killer-to-save-the-oil for nothing" (p.62). His reputation for enforcing this is underscored by the bizarre appellation of "The-product-shall-live-the people-shall-die!" (p.55) elders of his council address him by. His perception of what leadership is runs contrary to the moral and social expectations of the position. He, rather than the subjects he persecutes, seems more like the enemy:

CHAIRMAN: As a killer... sorry, as a leader you must be ready to silence any of your subjects who proves insubordinate to your governing mechanisms. They have no right to correct you. They just have to bear with you. That is leadership. The subjects must forever be subordinates! Whether your leadership is good or bad is never their concern. There are arms everywhere...kill, learn to silence your enemies. (p.83)

The title of the play itself is quite significant. It can be interpreted as a figurative representation of the parasitic power relations between indigenous leaders and their citizens in Niger Delta's oil mining communities. The playwright delineates the oil rich Niger Delta region as an environment that is naturally endowed, but suffers myriad calamities because of the reprehensible activities of leaders who he describes as "killers of destinies, leechers of destiny" (p.19) and "blood-suckers, soul-eaters" (p.20). This group promotes unequal relationships similar to that between predators and preys by misappropriating monies meant for internal development, leaving the people to

survive under deplorable conditions. He sustains this image by referring to them in several instances as vultures, hawks, hares and foxes. Egbo quarters where much of the oil wells are found is a microcosm of the Niger Delta region whose oil wealth is used to establish and upgrade infrastructures in other climes while it remains underdeveloped. Even their educated youths are unemployed or underemployed. Thus out of frustration, Adje and Shehor contemplate dumping their "lifeless certificates" to become militants "so that we can live a good life" (p.25). Tragically, these young men, as well as Ovwata's other family members, become part of the collateral damages of the crisis between the Chairman and Ovwata as they are ruthlessly killed by the chairman's guards.

Interestingly, almost all the characters in Kekeghe's play bear Urhobo names that allegorize their dominant character trait. Shenye means "oppressor". He was imposed by the Chairman on the people as their representative against their consent and because of this, his allegiance is to the latter whom he teams up with to oppress his people. Bishop Ukemu, the self-professed but immoral religious leader is on Shenye's payroll. He acts true to the meaning of his name-"trouble"- as he typifies the charlatan who uses false and divisive prophecies to hoodwink the people. Ovwata means "the righteous one." He is exemplar of an upright and principled man who detests injustice as such challenges those who subject his people to hardships because, and in spite of their oil patrimony. Ophu whose name means "anger" represents the more reactionary younger generation whose approach to subverting internal complicity is more violent and radical. Settings within the play also have connotative meaning. Thus Okugbe, which means "unity" ought to serve as the father community and watch out for the progress of other quarters. However, under the leadership of the Chairman, oil revenue from Egbo quarters is used to develop Okugbe, while the former's human and non-human elements suffer debased conditions. The new community is named Urhukpe, meaning light. It represents both an independent state as well as a new world order for its liberated people.

Subversion against internal complicity over oil earnings are of two dimensions in the plays under study. These are the non-violent and radical forms. Omoko's Benefa and his son, Pere appear to be the only rational thinking persons in the burgeoning crisis between Otugbene and Abotigbene indigenes. Benefa tries to broker peace as he repeatedly appeals to his people to reconsider the sharing formula to avoid aggravating the conflict between both communities. He warns against the recourse to lies and distortions on both communities land ownership rights just to justify injustice "against one's own family" (p.60). Pere is exasperated over the fact that the elders' greed will cause them to "kill ourselves because of mere peanuts from our oppressors" (p.23) and as a result "have lost all grounds to demand for justice and equity in the distribution of the wealth that accrue from our land" (p.28). His solution to the acrimony caused by the oil remuneration is that: *We should make peace with the people of Abotigbene and other peoples of the Niger Delta and then come together as a force to confront our collective enemy, the government and the oil multinationals. That is the only way we can demand justice and get it.* (p.29).

Although tragic, the inadvertent detonation of one of the war ammunitions supplied to Otugbene community serves as the deus-ex-machina that gets rid of the complicit leaders and prevents further escalation of the looming crisis.

The revolution against internal complicity in Kekeghe's play begins on a radical note. "Arising from the activities of the oil rogues," Ovwata's strong avowal is to "fight the leeches with the last drop of my blood!" (p.27-28). He is undeterred in his mission to ensure that the Chairman "must vomit all the fortunes he has stolen!" (p.32) as he is "an enemy of our quarters" (p.31). In spite of opposition from his family and kinsmen who mock him as an "old ijaguda", he believes that the reward of his struggle "is a great one – that we may have good life and not wandering corpses" (p.30). He finds a disciple or accomplice in Ophu who admits "your blood will ignite strength and courage in idle youths. I have buried my fear. I would

rather die fighting than die running...They shall die!" (p.37). It is with this united resolve that they both physically confront the Chairman on several occasions to make him relinquish his hold over their community's oil wealth. When this aggressive form of attack does not work, they retreat to re-strategize after which they adopt a more subtle and non-violent form of subversion against the Chairman. The Chairman surrenders his control over Egbo quarters, granting them their independence. The people after years of long-suffering and injustice from the centre are able to secure their freedom by eliminating the obstacles militating against corporate advancement.

6. Conclusion

This paper applauds Omoko and Kekeghe's endorsement of playwrights as citizens as both add their voices to the ongoing crusade against the internal crises of oil in the Niger Delta. By adopting very realistic portrayals, albeit through imaginative literature, the dramatists affirm their social and artistic responsibilities as chroniclers of their time and society. Their themes and other dramatic elements are essentially geared towards a form of introspection and reclamation that heed the Achebean proverbial edict of the importance of a people first identifying where the rain began to beat them. According to them, the blight of a natural inheritance turned an albatross is lately more because some local inhabitants fired by greed and lust for power have jettisoned communal and altruistic ethos for personal and selfish ambitions. Thus, their submission is that the bane of oil in the Niger Delta is no longer wholly the exploitation and marginalization by the West, national government and their affiliates but includes the complicity of indigenous persons. The endemic intrigues and machinations of self-seeking grassroot leaders and stooges operating an internal form of oppression against kith and kin have greatly fuelled and sustained the crises of oil extraction in the region. Sadly, instead of projecting a united front and force in defeating enemies from without, indigenous citizens have themselves become complicit and ironically are now the enemy within. The playwrights go beyond a mere identification of the activities of

the enemies within to creating a parallel set of characters who engage in intellectual and radical activism in usurping the perpetrators of injustices against the oil rich but impoverished Niger Delta people and environment.

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