



The Portrayal of Liberation and the Niger Delta Question in Arnold Udoka's *Akon*, *Long Walk to a Dream* and *Iyene: A Dance Drama*

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Abstract

Nigeria's Niger Delta has become a thorny issue in the multidisciplinary intellectual discourse in the sense that local inequalities have assumed global dimensions. Human rights have been violated by the Nigerian government and global multi-national oil companies in such a way that make the Niger delta an environmental disaster zone. This problem has spawned local insurrections in the Niger Delta as multinational oil companies have had to either quit the zone or re-organize their *modus operandi*, with a general impact on Nigeria's economy. From the time of the state-murdered Ogoni writer and environmentalist, Ken Saro Wiwa and Adaka Boro before him, these problems have been articulated through various forms of political and literary expressions. One of such literary expressions is Arnold Udoka's plays which form the bases for analysis of the issues in this paper. Using the Marxist paradigm which enables inter-disciplinarily, this study takes a deeper look at the many variations of inequalities that have led to the Niger Delta problem. One of such is the gender question in the Niger Delta which Arnold Udoka articulates in *Akon*, which investigates the place of women in the political liberation of Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region. There is also the Niger Delta question in *Long Walk to a Dream* which explores the struggle of the people of this region to live a meaningful life in the midst of their environmental challenges. *Iyene* on the other hand looks at the global dimension of multinational companies and the local elites in resolving the Niger Delta question, which has become a wasteland. This is particularly so because the Nigerian Land Use Act vests the ownership of land on the government which in turn has led to multiple violations of the peoples' rights. It is therefore the position of this paper that the armed struggle, militancy, kidnapping in the Niger Delta are different manifestations of the aspiration of the violated locals for human freedom. Meaningful development and improved political ecology in the region is achievable if democracy and equity subsist both at the level of practice and legislation within and outside the Niger Delta region.

Keywords: Niger Delta liberation, struggle, oil politics, gender, human rights and violation

1. Introduction

The Niger- Delta region for a long time has remained the buffer zone for political gladiators in Nigeria. At the other hand is the oil exploration and exploitation which have left the region used, misused, abused, and abandoned. The region is characterized by abject poverty, lack of basic amenities including access to good drinking water and education. This paper therefore seeks to explore the role of the literary artist in the fight to liberate the Niger-Delta.

The struggle to liberate the Niger Delta region from both political and economic *Shylocks* had, over the years, taken different forms. There had been the political fronts, activism as well as the most recent form- the militancy. These struggles are reactions to repressive military and democratic regimes that have threatened to annihilate the Niger Delta people. In the process of defending the region, many principal actors in the struggle have paid the ultimate price. Among them is Isaac Adaka Boro. Boro's effort to liberate the region was stalled by the thirty months civil war. However, he inspired the people who are now ready to take their own destiny in their hands. Similarly, Ken Saro-wiwa's Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) is another attempt at liberating the region. His effort led to his arrest, trial by a Kangaroo court and summary execution in 1995. Commenting on the Niger-Delta plight, Ekanem-Mbeke (2000) avers that

Left out in the equation of governance and control in their own country are the minorities from whose land much of the resources are exploited. The exploiters don't care about the people whose land had been left bare due to years of oil exploitation. In a country where there is no environmental protection, the oil companies continue to operate insensitively often times leaving the people with a completely devastated environment. It is even more pathetic seeing the people living in pristine condition such as existed hundred years ago and yet billions of dollars worth of oil are being carted away from beneath their mud houses that have neither pipe borne water nor electricity, nor even cooking gas; even though gas is being flared to the heavens just a hundred yards away. In some of these areas, schools are

virtually non-existent. It is not uncommon to see children in an oil community with kwashiorkor as the consequences of severe malnutrition (p 91)

The gory picture of Niger-Delta region painted by Ekanem above is one of such predicaments of the Niger Delta region and her people. The popular Nigerian proverb which says that *“a man baths in the river yet soap enters his eyes or a man lives at the bank of a river yet baths with spittle”* explains the Niger-Delta situation. Commenting on the plight of the Ogoni people, (Amanye 2001) explains that

Oil exploration has turned Ogoni into a wasteland; lands, streams, and creeks are totally and continually polluted; the atmosphere has been poisoned, charged as it is with hydrocarbon vapors, methane, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and soot emitted by gas which had been flared 24 hours a day for 35 years in very close proximity to human habitation. Acid rain, oil spillage and oil blowouts have devastated Ogoni territory.(p 11)

Similarly, (Asagba 009) avers that:

The Niger Delta region, the oil pit of Nigeria and symbol of economic prosperity for the future, the battle line between the ragtag militants and the government has been drawn. In spite of contrived peace parleys, rehabilitation and resettlement initiatives that have remained unresolved, the issues of resources control, or social justice and equity, cultural liberation, community right and economic independence have continued to haunt and gape at a country in dire strait.(p 7)

These environmental degradations have for some time now defined the Niger-Delta region. Oil which has been seen as one of nature's benevolent gift to the region has become the albatross on the neck of the region. Exploring this situation, (Ushie 2006) opines that

50 years of crude oil exploitation and exploration has rather left the Niger-Delta environment completely vandalized, its once fertile land soaked in and sterilized by crude oil, its people living in thatch and mud shacks, its rivers, streams and creeks poisoned, its fishes murdered, its people, left without drinkable water, left without electricity supply, left without security, left without jobs, left without health facilities... and worse... the region lives in the midst of oil spillages and round-the-clock gas flares ... Thus, instead of fetching Niger-Delta gold bracelets, crude oil fetches them hand cuffs, instead of fetching them gold necklaces it fetched them nooses, instead of fetching them tarred roads it fetched them early graves.(p 8-9).

Ushie's position alludes to Ken-Saro Wiwa who was gruesomely executed by the Late Sani Abacha's regime in 1995. His position agrees with the later views of (Nwahunanya 2011) avers that

Saro Wiwa's execution was essentially aimed at not just muffling but permanently silencing the voice that could raise in future in dissent against the Nigerian federal government's political and social neglect of the region even while tapping all her wealth...ironically, instead of muffling the voices or silencing them, the government action has thrown into bolder relief the contradiction which the writers have been talking about.(p xv)

Maier (2000) for instance, argues that the crisis in the Niger-Delta as it is now is still mild, “all these explosions throughout the Niger-Delta are just mini explosions. There could be a big bomb. The Niger-Delta is at the base of Nigeria and it is like putting a keg of gun powder under Nigeria. If the Niger-Delta explodes, Nigeria goes with it” (p 13). The fear of exploding the treasure base of Nigeria has spurred the Nigerian government to adopt the non violent approach like the amnesty programme to restore peace the Niger-Delta region.

Also commenting on the agitations in the Niger-Delta, Akpan (2000) explains that; “the tyranny of the majority as reflected in the hegemonic nature of contemporary Nigerian policies is the main source of perceived feeling of marginalization, domination and desire to opt out of the federation...”(p 141) Though one may agree with Akpan, the crux of the matter is the tyranny of the ‘majority’ groups in the Nigerian polity, it is also apt for him to refer to the glaring cases of political and economic domination of the Niger-Delta region as “‘perceived feeling of marginalization’ (Akpan 14). The marginalization of the Niger-Delta region has been brutal, total and complete. It is on the basis of this that the various agitations have been going on both at the economic and the political front all aimed at achieving the desired well being of the region. The paradox of the Niger-Delta region makes Raji (1998:110) argues that:

Paradoxically, the same resources representing the power house of national life also serve as a big agency of desolation and disorientation for several millions of people inhabiting the areas where it is produced. Directly, the dislocation and disorientation drive from two complementary and interrelated factors, the first being the devastating impact of the exploration of the resources on the environment and the second that of the cruel neglect of the people of the area by successive Nigerian administrations.

From this, it is germane and expedient to further point out that the negative impact of oil exploration and the blatant neglect of the region have been the major cause of crisis in the region. This according to Amnesty International Report (2009:9) is a violation of the people's rights: “Widespread and unchecked human rights violations related to oil industry

have pushed many people deeper into poverty and deprivation, fuelled conflict and led to a pervasive sense of powerlessness and frustration.” The report agrees with the later views of Desola (1995) who states that: “the region which is the economic base of Nigeria has witnessed one of the uncanny forms of neglect and marginalization –and yet 90% of Nigeria foreign exchange comes from oil exploration, exploitation and marketing by the multinational corporations”(p 62). The above position Raji and Desola agrees with later views of Awuhefeada (2013) who avers that:

The predominance or concentration of eco-lit in the Niger Delta region derives from the reality that the region remains one of the most ecologically devastated in the world. The region’s experience of oil boom easily translated to doom as the multinationals as well as the nation’s excessive governments...connive to put the nation’s ecology under severe and human pressure...Over the years oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta have assumed different and frightening representations. It has become the harbinger of poverty, disease, death pollution, and extinction of biodiversity, loss of means of livelihood, agitation restiveness, militancy, criminality, and varying degrees of ecocide pointing in the direction of Armageddon (p 95).

It is this pointer to Armageddon that the need for a total liberation of the region has become expedient in the face of recent realities to bring about ecological justice to the people of the region.

At the centre of the crisis is the Niger Delta woman who is faced, with double jeopardy. She receives the greater impact of the oil exploration and at the same time faces her biological devaluation through sexual exploitation as well as severe and pristine cultural practices. These women sometimes offer themselves to the white expatriate workers who sexually abuse them in inhuman and horrific ways. Most of these expatriates got these women pregnant and abandoned them to fend for themselves. It is this kind of situation that Agary (2006) describes as “African profits”(p171). Women in the Niger Delta have great potentials that have not been fully tapped. They have participated in the struggle to free the region from political and economic hawks besieging them. Ewvwerhoma and Yacin (2011) explain that “in general support for militancy...women are not left out of the struggle...the women have taken up arms alongside their male counterpart”(p 261). Niger Delta literature is predominantly protest literature as Akpofure(2011) puts it, “itS is a collective struggle against those rulers who loot and steal the collective wealth of the Niger-Delta” (p 249). Akpofure’s position agrees with the views of Okome who avers that the protest in the Niger Delta is to “right the wrong which the Nigerian state has perpetuated on the minorities”(xvii). With this background, we will now go into the discussion of the plays.

2. The Niger Delta question in *Akon*

Udoka (2007) uses this play to make a clarion call to all concern in the Niger-Delta to rise and take up the challenge to eradicate oil obstacles hindering the full emergence of the Niger Delta person, particularly the women. For him “the emancipation of the woman is now” (Akon,7).The play begins with a call by Ekpu a female journalist to find out the outcome of all “investigations into cases of discriminatory and repressive practices against the fairer sex” (Akon, 9). Here one notes Udoka’s choice of words; the woman is not a weaker sex but a fairer sex. It is only when the result of these investigations are made public that one can appreciate the enormity of the repressive practices against the woman. The woman as seen in the play has been sidelined for too long and it was time she took her proper place, because in politics there is no gender” (Akon, 12). Akon’s problem begins when she veers into politics. Here, politics is viewed by the likes of Ikud as the exclusive preserve of the men and he is quick to tell Akon to speak like a woman “with respect and fear according to customs and tradition” (Akon, 17) However, Akon is quick to remind him “what do you know about our celebrated Amazons”(Akon, 17). Here, Udoka is making a point that in history there had been Niger-Delta amazons’ like Lady Margaret Ekpo who led the Aba Women Riot of 1920 thereby helping to shape both the politics and history of Nigeria in general.

Ikud on the other hand, a one- time Local Government chairman is the antagonist to Akon. His campaign is not based on sound logic and principles, but on patriarchal dictum and male chauvinism couple with vaulting ambition. He declares thus “A woman cannot make a good chairman a councilor may be” (Akon, 23). Udoka uses Ikud to point out some of the limitations and challenges the Niger-Delta woman faces because of her gender. Every person doubts her capability and tends to limit her ambition. Udom on the other hand affirms Ikud’s claims as he says “she should have remained in her husband’s house, cook for the poor husband” (Akon13). Udom who is educated and male journalist, still believe the patriarchal dictum that the place of the woman is the kitchen. Udoka presents Mgboho an old woman and village leader as the link between tradition and modernity. In spite of her position, she still thrives in the patriarchal way. She reminds Ikud that “ I was stubborn, very stubborn, I never allowed young men touch my waist beads along the path to the stream.”(Akon, 37). Yet, she sells out Akon’s ambition and zeal to emancipate her people simply because she did not perform the circumcision rites.

Mgboho represents a tradition that has kept the Niger-Delta woman in servitude’ Because of the failure of the daughters to follow the customs strictly, Mgboho would not agree that a woman has the potentials to lead. One begins to wonder whether what she said when she heard that a woman was contesting for the post of the chairman of the Local Government Area, was something to go by “A woman desiring to lead us.... I will personally mobilize the entire women in support of her ambition”(Akon 41).She confronts Ikud, and further states that “with all my strength if I am alive to that day I will support that woman if she is still willing to fight you on the political field”(Akon, 45). But when she realizes that Akon was trained in the “white man’s land”(Akon, 46).she declares “No she can’t win” (p46).She is ready to take revenge against Akon “Now the opportunity presents itself for me to remind you of the shame you have

hidden for many years” (Akon47). Mbogho as an elder and a custodian of moral values lacks same, she is self centered, and is not bothered if the clan of women perishing for custom and tradition to thrive. When Ekaette confronts her, she says, “...you are suffering from self pity” (Akon, 82). People like Mbogho according to Ekaette “...desire that we (women) remain in obscurity” (Akon, 83). Again, she further states that Mbogho’s “lopsided stories diminishes womanhood. Here, again we notice the need for the Niger-Delta woman to move out of her shell and confront this outdated cultural practice that militates against her dreams. The woman must begin to recreate her own story to define her existence and not to diminish her womanhood.

Mbogho’s reason for not supporting Akon is that the latter did not perform the ritual of circumcision, Ekaette reacts thus

Why should you foist genital mutilation on a modern girl and a married woman as a condition for her to contest an election...? Is such sexist butchery the focus of our constitution? What has administrative or managerial competence got to do with the knifing of genitalia? Eh! Is such butchery the focus of our constitution? This is the first time in the history of politics that genital mutilation is a determining factor (Akon, 87).

The terms used in describing female circumcision serve to reinforce the brutality and desecration of womanhood. As earlier stated Mbogho sees Akon as a child her academic and administrative prowess notwithstanding; because she is not circumcised, she affirms that “while I am alive tradition and customs of our fore fathers must be kept” (Akon, 88), and since Akon is not circumcised, “She is still a child”(Akon, 88). Akon confronts her saying, “I could not go through the circumcision while at school at Lagos or even London, I did not need it to pass my examinations, stay alive or get married. I have never intended to go under that blade nor any of my daughters that shall come”(Akon, 92). With this statement, we come to the conclusion that circumcision is not a yardstick for measuring the capability of the woman.

If the emancipation of the woman is now, the first step is to break away from these obnoxious practices that tend to annihilate humiliate the woman and which places her in a disadvantaged position. One of these practices as Udoka opines is circumcision or genital mutilation. The final appointment as the country enjoy vindicates the resilience of Akon and affirms her worth as a person and not merely as a woman. For Akon to be imbued with the knowledge of diplomatic missions Udoka through a flash-back technique, shows us Akon as she goes through tutorials with Mr. Peter, a Briton. Akon learns more about colonial history and begins to question whether we should continue to blame colonialism for our failure to provide good governance to our citizenry, in spite of the nation’s abundant human and mineral resources. The Niger-Delta woman can only attain awareness and consciousness through education. Education earns Akon the position of an envoy, while lack of education denied the likes of Mbogho the will power to live above obnoxious traditional practices. Education motivates Akon to contest for the chairmanship of her L.G.A., She will love to rebuild the nation from this level. According to her “Our foundations had been weakened and the integrity of our political base and strength was suspect and questionable”(Akon, 61). These weak foundations had for a long time militated against the growth and development of the nation. It is the view of this paper that if the Niger-Delta question is clearly defined, the nation would progress. This cause had led to many leaders of the region paying with their lives. There would be no need to mention all of them here, but suffice to mention Ken Saro-wiwa, the literary and environmental martyr killed by the Gen. Abacha’s regime. Harry Garuba (2000) avers that the killing of Saro-Wiwa becomes the springboard for the the minorities discourse in the Niger Delta. According to him the “execution has become the principal site of discursive contestation between the hegemonic powers of the multinational oil industry in Nigeria’s military despots on the one hand, and minority and environmental right activists on the other”(Garruba 25).

On the call for the restructuring of the Nigerian state along the line of mutual-existence and fundamental human right Akon says;

Our people love justice and peace and hate oppression and humiliation from anyone. Every ethnic group desires to be respected as a people... but the majority and minority dichotomy introduced after the amalgamations has heated up the polity to steel-melting degrees and bred prejudices and ethno phobia (Akon, 68).

This and many other issues must be discussed and resolved, if the nation must move on. Akon could achieve all these through education. Education has become a central point for the Niger-Delta woman. As Pereira(2007) argues that; “when social and economic constraints are such that when parental resources are limited, girls are rated as being of lower priority concerning entry to higher education”(p6). The consequences of these are enormous for the woman; these include high rate of unplanned or unwanted teenage pregnancies which usually lead to high drop out from school. “Girls in such circumstances are often expected to hawk and trade in order to supplement the family income” (Pereira, 7). This defines clearly the situation at the Niger-Delta and the multiplier effect has been the unrest of the region. Having done this we can now discuss the next play.

3. The Niger Delta question in *Iyene : A Dance Drama*

This play is another of Udoka’s ambitious plays. Udoka uses the framework of danceto interrogate the role played by oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta. The play begins with the birth of a child to Bawking community christened Iyene, meaning wealth. The birth of Iyene came on the eve of the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta. Ironically the chief priest when naming the child says; “This child shall bring us joy as sweet as honey”(Iyene, 16). But as we are to see later in the play, the birth of Iyene becomes the metaphor for the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta. Rather than a blessing, it becomes a curse to the people of the Bawking. The priest who also

doubled as narrator says, “what you just saw took place thirty seven years ago”(Iyene, 19). But the Bawking’s wealth now lives in the city, an example of the flight of the Niger-Delta’s wealth and the people now get peanuts like: “fishing nets and hoes”(Iyene 19). The people are now at cross-roads.

We were a very happy people until one day a strong and violent tide swept from the depths of the sea to our shores... it is now a curse to claim Bawking as a home land, the pains in our souls degenerates into fear, indignation, poverty, death... but we could not imagine the shackles of slaves dangling on our necks on our motherland, No! (Iyene, 23).

It is against this background for this uncanny reality that Joe Ushie (2006) argues that:

... instead of fetching Niger-Delta gold bracelets, crude oil fetches them hand cuffs, instead of fetching them gold necklaces it fetched them nooses, instead of fetching them tarred roads it fetched them early graves.(9).

The environment of the Niger-Delta continues to be ravaged by oil spillage caused by oil exploration, but the oil companies are not bothered about its effect on the ecology, especially the flora and fauna. The foreman say;

There is a mistake
The oil is flowing
But on the ground
On the water
And on the farmland (Iyene:26)

However the expatriate engineer does not see anything wrong with the spillage:

It is not a big deal
There are other waters
For the natives to fish
There are other lands
For the natives to till
The oil flows well
That is all I need
To make my money back (Iyene26)

Udoka in this play makes the expatriate engineer sing this song to show how in-human the oil exploiters have become, putting the value of money far above human life. Again the Amnesty report explains thus: “Oil spillage destroys the quality and productivity of the soil that the communities use for farming”(p14). Consequently, “People living in the Niger Delta have to drink, cook with and wash in polluted water. They eat fish contaminated with oil and other toxins, if they are lucky enough to still be able to find fish” (*Amnesty*21). This position informs Cliff’s (2013) views that oil operators in the region are mere capitalist with “lack of social commitment”(p65). And this is “informed the capitalist cupidity for wealth that goes along with alienation”(Cliff 65). This alienation is also backed by internal colonialism also the major ethnic groups that have continue to back these multinationals companies in raping the region. The alienation to a reasonable extent has propelled a literature of protest with counter-discursive approach.

In this play the woman has also taken the centre stage to fight for issues which relate to her welfare. Pheba one of the women leads the protest which finally yields result at the end of the play. After listening to the engineer, Pheba confronts him thus: “this is our community white man”(Iyene.28). She does not only confront the expatriate engineer but also the Niger-Delta leaders who have become saboteurs. She asks the foreman: “Do you like what you are seeing?”(Iyene.29).When bestammers, she explodes;“Tell Timi your father that the whole land of Bawking is sad because of his greed... the shark that he is , our waters now red from his carnage, now you will know how to deliver our message to your father our oppressor” (Iyene.29-30). Pheba took the bull by the horn when the men failed. “Since our men have turned into worms and cannot stand the sight of guns, it is now our duty to redeem the land”(Iyene31).She declares

Young men, all we are asking for is our ancestral land, rivers and oceans, we must farm and go fishing that is all we have. We cannot die of hunger on our mother land! ...you have been given weapons to cut us down but we have been given nothing except hunger, pain, diseases and poverty,(Iyene31).

Pheba’s action raises many questions about the region. The leaders of the region connive with the expatriate workers to exploit the people. In most cases the people are armed by the expatriate workers to kill themselves through divide and rule which is one of the colonial policy to sustain exploitation of the “natives.

She further berates the expatriate’s guard who is from the region: “you call yourself a man yet you are a simple slave scavenging for crumbs with a gun” (Iyene 39). According to her all those assisting the expatriates to rob the people are “born idiots” (Iyene 33). The guard clings to the slavish job because the water ways and the land have become “clogged with crude oil” (Iyene33). This is also portrays in Iyene’s song in Movement Four,

But the real wealth of my land
 Has become the pain of my people
 And a curse to my people (Iyene37)

Udoka eulogizes Niger-Delta women who give their lives for the liberation of the region. The priest says:

For challenging environmental crisis, Pheba was killed. Demanding for practices to maintain the health and survival of life, Preye paid with her life. For seeking the reordering of the relationship between nature and the community, Preba lost her life, her ecological consciousness to regenerate the land of Bawkeng and reduce the death toll occasioned by the oil spillage and gas flaring condemned her for elimination. A great woman she was. What a great woman she was! Please, rise up to the memory of this great woman. May our ancestor accept her into the pantheon of heroes and heroines of Bawkeng. She it was, who told us that our natural wealth should never be allowed to become our permanent curse. It seems that is the case now for the land of Bawkenrg is at the twilight of its life. You see, we are hacked down by men, hunger, diseases of unknown names, and we have strangely become refugees on our motherland. None of this is of our own making. None! It is indeed strange (Iyene34-5).

Udoka uses this play to call for a non-violent approach in solving the crisis in the Niger-Delta region. The violent approach has led to loss of lives on the side of the people; thereby, hindering any meaningful form of development in the region. Iyene tells the people; "Let us change the strategy for the treatment of our collective aching tooth" (Iyene48). And this new strategy is dialogue. Iyene tells Adam the expatriate engineer: "what I am asking is that you give to my people what is commensurate to what you have taken... we are dealing with environmental degradation and pollution here" (Iyene50). With this approach, the oil company Adams Oil agrees to partner with the people to solve all ecological problems "I will / It's a promise"(Iyene 54).. The next play is more vocal in the call to liberate the Niger Delta region.

4. The Niger Delta question in *Long walk to a dream*

This play interrogates the excessive and unethical conduct of oil exploration in the Niger-Delta. The play is all about the resilience that has defined the people of the Niger-Delta in face of the harsh realities. The play raises mixed questions about the Niger-Delta people. Some of these questions border on resources control between the people and the state. This among other issues is the primary thrust of this play. As Udoka puts it, "This play celebrates the resilience and tenacity of a people who feel oppressed" (Author's note p, 8).

The play is a clarion call for action, as the people have become somehow cynical about the endless commission reports that do not see any implementation. Wariboko the protagonist of the play says, "I wish they know this might be the last time for all this endless and fruitless talk-talk" (Dream13). The Niger-Delta people are no longer docile, they are ready to take their destiny in their hands, Wariboko further states that "we think of how to produce good leadership for our people in future" (Dream,15). If this must come to fruition, good and qualitative education must be assured. However, the Niger-Delta region has been a complex irony to itself; those who have the qualification do not have good jobs. Wariboko further says "some of my friends are university graduates; they have not been able to find anything to do yet"(Dream, 16). Yet they see people from other regions enjoy plum jobs, while those who would want to go to school to further their education cannot afford the cost. The oil companies do not offer any incentives to help the Niger Delta people from whose land they generate much wealth. Udoka makes the protagonist his speaking voice in the play. Wariboko is a young man imbued with the knowledge of the region and comments on every aspect of the economy as well as the socio-political life of the people. "We were so blessed, fertile land, yielding seas and creeks, palm oil, crude oil, and good mentors too. Now we are left on our own in a cocoon of confusion and pain"(Dream 18).

Commenting on the ironic situation of the Niger-Delta, Nwahunnya (2011) avers that:

The region is the symbol of ironic contradictions of the consequences of capitalist exploitations by multinational economic interest teaming up with the local comprador bourgeoisie class. This part of Nigeria that accounts for 98 percent of the nation's foreign revenue ironically seem not to have been included in the calculations concerning how the revenue would be spent or invested.(p xiii).

Nwahunnya's assertion describes vividly the situation in the Niger-Delta which raises national questions. The failure of those concerned to solve these issues has led to armed struggle and militancy in the region. The people in the Niger-Delta live under palpable fear which in recent time tends to define their existence Odum the shrine's priest says after hearing the sound of a blast: "Oh, pipelines explosions maybe. Another spillage I suppose and that has become our lot"(Dream, 23). Sokari comments thus; "Yes Your Majesty, I heard those earth-shaking rumbles when I passed through Abari, it must be pipelines explosions again"(Dream, 25). This buttresses our earlier claim that pipelines explosions and oil spillage have become regular occurrences. The spillage and explosion have not only left the people poorer, but sick not only physical sickness; but psychological. Amnesty Report (2009) explains that: Widespread and unchecked human rights violation related to the oil industry have pushed many people deeper into poverty and deprivation, fuelled conflict and led to pervasive sense of powerlessness and frustration... Oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring are endemic in the Niger Delta. This pollution which has affected the area for decades has damaged the soil,

water and air quality. Hundreds of thousands of people are affected, particularly the poorest and those who rely on traditional livelihood such as fishing and agriculture (p 9).

The people suffer emotional and psychological torture. An example of such is Sekiri one of the brightest women in Peteke Kingdom. She flees the village to the city where she works as a sex slave to the white expatriate in the guise of a housemaid. All her dreams and aspirations are unfulfilled. She becomes mentally deranged, as a consequence of unfulfilled dreams and the emotional torture she has suffered. Udoka uses this exploited female character to make a point here. The Niger-Delta woman suffers double jeopardy. She is raped, maimed, used, and abused. Sekiri becomes Mad and there is no means of rescuing her. Through her, Udoka comments on the poor medical system in the region.

Health centre? That is where you get pain killers for headache, pain killers for pregnancy, pain killers for farming pain killers for fertilizer, pain killers for hunger, pain killers for death, pain killers for pain killers, pain killer for good, pain killer for evil (Dream, 27).

Seriki's comment points to lack of basic amenities in the Niger Delta and how it effect on the people. Their sources of livelihood are gone. Again, Sekiri comes to the stage with a dead fish saying "I caught it in the creek last week my canoe could not go far because of the black oil (crude oil spillage on the water) as I was waiting, the poor dead fish floated to me and I quickly rescued it".(Dream,29).The Amnesty Report further affirms that: "The most common examples include pollution of water, soil and air resulting in violations variously of rights to an adequate standard of living, to adequate food, to water, to adequate housing, to health and to life (Amnesty 12). Similarly Biodun Jeyifo(2004) explains that the Niger Delta region is "the most oppressed and marginalized group in neo colonial Africa" (p 23). This position agrees with the views of Mowarin (2012) who opines that the focus of Niger Delta literature is "on the environmental despoliation and the endemic poverty ravaging the ecologically devastated but oil and gas rich region which is under the grip of internal colonialists"(p212). Thus, it is expedient to state that the struggle in the Niger Delta region is against external colonialists as well as internal colonialists led by the federal government of Nigeria. .

To fight for the liberation of the region is to fight for destiny of the people. Udoka creates the Pogwa Boys and imbues them with revolutionary spirit. Through this they could confront the problems in the region headlong. The boys state their mission through one of their leaders Teke, who states thus; "We have gathered here to find an end to hunger and poverty and start a new life for us and our people" (Dream, 34). It is also important to state here that Teke's name echoes the renowned Niger Delta activist, Ateke Tom. For this the boys also know that they have a common enemy that must be identified and dealt with. Reacting to the crisis in the region Onukaogu and Onyerinowu argue that "The crisis situation in the Niger Delta region has emanated from the dissatisfaction of the citizens of the region over a number of issues that one associated with oil exploration and exploitation" (p 51).Their position is that the situation in the Niger-Delta has provided veritable grounds for revolutionary literature. The people are now reacting to the socio economic and political forces that have devastated the Niger-Delta region for selfish gains. Another reason for the crisis in the region as Nwahunnya(2011) points out is the

April 2010 blown out from the BP deep sea oil well in the gulf of Mexico, and its effect which have drawn international attention to the kind of environmental hazards socio-political consequences of oil exploration and extraction... in the case of the Gulf, blow out American House of Representatives insisted that BP commits a whopping sum to twenty billion dollars as compensation to the victims of the mishap. Yet for fifty years, foreign companies including America's Chevron have kept pillaging the Niger-Delta community without apologies (xvi).

With this the arrogance of the companies, the people are left with no other choice but to react. Whatever means or label may be given to this reaction no longer matters; provided their mission is attained. The people identify the enemy as the 'Vultures' or 'oil gang'. The vultures are the metaphors for the chiefs who collaborate with oil gangs- the oil companies to cheat the people; this also echoes the Ogoni Nine. The anger of the people is expressed by Okponiemi when he says "We have been living in the bank of the stream, but our eyes are hurting from the leather of soap"(Dream, 38).

The Pogwa Boys show absolute commitment to the struggle. Teke says "my blood boils!" (Dream, 39). While Wariboko says; "My future is in this struggle"(Dream 39). But one thing is sure; the struggle will be a non-violent. Wariboko continues to admonish the other boys thus,

What my brother Teke desires we do is the business of blood, blood and blood: we cannot approve, accept or prosecute vigilante justice in Peteke Kingdom it will be against our people. After all the bloodshed, if any, this land and all that is in it will remain our motherland.(Dream, 41)

In redefining the Niger-Delta struggle for liberation, Udoka calls for dialogue and a non violent approach. However, the real culprits must be identified and dealt with through legal means. The real culprits are the conniving chiefs, "the oil gang", who situate their offices many miles away from here"(Dream, 24).And as a result, they are not sensitive to the people's plight. Because of ethnic, egoistic, and jaundiced reasoning many critics see the Niger-Delta agitators and activists as ethnic bigots who have failed to transcend ethnic limitations. But the reality is that "other lands are blossoming with flowers from the heart of our land" (Dream. 43). What Udoka is calling for in these plays is equality and fair play. "Equality demands that our land be decorated first"(Dream, 43). This equality is what defines the struggle in the region. The nation benefits from oil exploration but the people whose land the oil exploited cannot find the *crumbs that fall from the master's table*. The struggle to define the region has for a long time been impeded by

saboteurs. When the people are looking for a means to alleviate their suffering, the likes of Chief Sokari receives a bribe from Prime Oil Company and calls it “a mere gift, not a bribe”(Dream, 49). Such actions as this sabotage the effort of the struggle. As the youths continue to press their demand, the Amayanabo of Peteke Kingdom, Pere, states it clear that “I cannot lead war against my people”(Dream, 52). But he is ready to fight “the companies that are changing these people into squatters in their own land”(Dream, 53). He refuses to succumb to blackmail from both the government and the “oil gangs”. He takes position with the boys after a long while. The Pogwa boys agree with him, but they urged him to match words with action to end the “talk talk sessions” (Dream, 60).

The insensitive posture of the ‘oil gang’ has excluded the Niger-Delta region “from humanity”(Dream, 62). Boro says about the fight: “We are going out there to fight for the survival of our land and its people ... the first reason for this struggle is environment the, second reason is environment and the third reason is environment! Not cash” (Dream, 63). Wariboko also reminds the chiefs of those worthy sons of the region who had started the struggle and paid with their lives. He says: “if Jaja, Isaac and Kenule were here our position would have made sense...”(Dream, 66). The boys remember Ken Saro-Wiwa particularly for what he stood for and for the unconfirmed report that after hanging him his body was immersed in acid to quicken decomposition. This singular act by the federal government of Nigeria has for a long time had a negative memory on the boys who feel they would go the same way as Kenule. Moreover the same cause still defines the struggle today- that is the need for better and healthy environment for the people. There are no schools, electricity, and pipe-borne water fertile land for farming and good roads. Sokari says “Most of the roads are not navigable even by foot”(Dream, 71).

The sermon by Monsignor Ekakaw is very inspiring to the boys who become very motivated and even the chiefs who initially were reluctant to give their blessing to the struggle. Taking the people through history, he tells the people that the real problem in the Niger-Delta is injustice and the official indecision.

God’s promise of justice. Oh ye weak and humble, many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the lord god delivers him from them all. We are victims of official indecision and injustice against our land. Yes, we have been talking and talking and talking, but all talk and no action makes Jack a failed talkative! Listen to all talks: Hicks-Phillips commission of 1951; the Chicks commission of 1953; the Henry Willincks commission of 1958; the Raismen commission of 1958; the Binn commission of 1964; the Dina technical commission of 1968; the Popoola commission of 1998; and the Ogomudia committee of 2007. The nightmare of the negligence of these talks is that we are now enslaved on our motherland. (Dream, 74).

He further tells the people, “You have been condemned to eternal poverty, damnation, liquidation, annihilation and extermination just because God has blessed you. Your children have been starved, bruised, raped, maimed, drowned, jailed and hanged for pointing their fingers to the thatched houses of their homestead and begging, crying, weeping and wailing not to be orphaned on their motherland, their fatherland (Dream, 75-76). This speech inspired the people to go ahead to fight for the liberation of the region.

From the above it becomes clear that the Nigerian government has democratized oppression and this played out when in hunt of the “miscreant *“militants* the Nigerian army led by General Seriki Bello razed down the whole of Gbaramantu kingdom. The struggle becomes their succinct attempt to resist the Nigerian government using its supernumerary army to terrorize them. The struggle is to liberate the region and the need to make the environment safe for the people. Claude Ake explains that: “The multitudes of flares in the Delta heat up everything causing noise pollution and producing SO₂ VO₂, carbon dioxide and nox and particles around the orbit...Nigerian oil fields contribute more in global warming than the rest of the world put together”(p 40)

5. Conclusion

This paper concludes that one of the major problems that continue to hinder the right of the Niger Delta people is the Nigerian law that places the right to ownership of land in the hands of the government. The communities that own these resources on the other hand are left stranded as they are not given fair treatment in the sharing of these resources. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria as amended represents this thus:

The entire property in and in control of all minerals, oil and natural gas in under and upon any land in Nigeria or in under or upon the territorial waters and the exclusive economic zones of Nigeria shall vest in the government of the federation and shall be managed in such a manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly.(Clause: 44)

In the same vein the land use act places the control of land under the state governor who has the right to revoke any right of occupancy for the *overriding public interest*. Many state governors using flimsy reasons of overriding public interest revoke most of these lands and hand them to their cronies. The consequence of this is the agitations, conflict and violence all aimed at the liberation of the people from institutionalized injustice. This paper also shares Garuba’s views that the struggle in the Niger Delta is “the converging point of the struggle for minority rights in the face of their ruthless suppression by a kleptocratic regime backed by oil interests (Garuba, 26). What is going on in the region as we see in the plays we have discussed are the various efforts by the people of the region to voice and “break their imposed silence” (Garuba, 27). The plays we have examine from our discussions show that Udoka uses theses play as responses to the diverse vistas of environmental exploitation and degradation and the sustained struggle to liberate the people of the region. This paper therefore submits that if the Nigerian law and Land Use Act are reviewed most of the conflicts

and violence would be reduced. In the three plays we have examined, the paper reveals that a non-violent approach is advocated as a panacea to the problems of the region, because the violent approach has failed and has left the region poorer.

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