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# Interrogating the Niger Delta (Nigeria) Crisis through the Lenses of Nollywood Films

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**ABSTRACT**
Since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, there has been some form of unrest or the other in the region over lack of adequate compensation for the degradation of the environment. This paper interrogates the representation of the Niger Delta crisis in two Nollywood movies namely; *Oloibiri* (Blood and Oil) as directed by Curtis Graham and *Niger Delta Nemesis* directed by Charles Inojie. The study is anchored on Third Cinema Theory. The major findings of the study include that the Niger Delta crisis is triggered mainly by the protracted insensitivity of the leadership class to the pitiable plight of the peoples of the Niger Delta. This paper also observes that the suffering and marginalization meted on the people of the oil-rich Niger Delta region since the exploration and exploitation of oil in the region is under reported in Nollywood films. It is for the foregoing that this paper calls on the Nigerian government in all tiers to put on sincerity of purpose and genuine commitment when dialoguing with the people of the Niger Delta region. It also challenges Nollywood filmmakers to focus adequate attention on the Niger Delta crisis trusting that film, like any other media has the power to catalyze social change in society.
**Keywords**: Niger Delta crisis, Nollywood films, social change

## INTRODUCTION

The discourse of the oil-rich but environmentally impoverished Niger Delta region of Nigeria has remained quite topical within literary industry in Nigeria. As at today, there exists quite a handful of novels, dramas and poetry that portray the decay, negligence, marginalization and pogrom that have engulfed the region consequent upon the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the region. Ranging

from the eco-centric poems of Gabriel Okara such as "The Call from River Nun" down to the protest dramas of Esiaba Irobi and Ahmed Yerima as evident in *Hangmen Also Die* and *Little Drops* respectively, the Nigerian literary circle is endowed with a rich repertoire of works that address the dynamics of the Niger Delta crisis which some scholars refer to as the Niger Delta Struggle. Right from the prose experiments of Ken Saro Wiwa as seen in his *A Forest of Flowers* and *Sozaboy*, the Niger Delta struggle had gained some level of international attention as a result of the instigating function of literature in human society. In an attempt to justify the motivation behind Niger Delta literature, Ojaide notes that the Niger Delta environment and its attendant neglect by the government constitute key inspirational sources for Niger Delta literature. He adds that the thrust of Niger Delta writers is to generally project a vision of their people's experiences and the writers often do this in their respective writing (11). It has also been asserted that "All classical traditions of world literature are fostered by environment, where there are intensive struggles against great evil or the restoration human dignity. This is the type of situation that created the great traditions of literature in Russia in the 19th century (Darah 4)

However, while we celebrate the abundance of novels, plays and poetry that portray the dynamics of the Niger Delta crisis, the same celebration cannot be extended to the film medium. History has it that in year 1995, Ken Saro alongside nine other Ogoni elites in Rivers State were executed by hanging on the machinations of General Sani Abacha, the then Military of Head State in Nigeria over the former's insistence that the government of Nigeria should compel SHELL, a multinational operating in Ogoni land to pay the Ogonis adequate compensation for the degradation of their environment due to oil exploration and exploitation activities. History also has it that in 1998, Ijaw youths across the Niger Delta States, converged at Kaiama in Bayelsa State to declare their resolve to fight for the control of the resources in their environment.as a result of the deprivations and marginalization that the government had meted on the region since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity. Interestingly, by the early 1900s the Nigerian film industry had birthed films that made huge box office hits. The commercial successes of these films speedily positioned Nigerian films into mainstream popular entertainment.

Ironically, while these films portrayed themes that bother on ritual killings for wealth acquisition, lavish lifestyle, prostitution, communal rivalries, love, betrayal and cultism, filmmakers of the time did not give the lingering and trending Niger Delta Crisis visibility on screen. As earlier mentioned, by 1998, following the Kaiama Declaration, the Niger Delta Crisis had skyrocketed to the point of posing major security threat in the region in particular and Nigeria in general. It was a period when kidnapping, broad day robbery, pipeline vandalism, bunkering and youth restiveness in general soared in the Niger Delta region. Ironically, films of these era portrayed little or nothing about this crisis since the emphasis was more on glamour and lavish lifestyle. When pitched against the backdrop that the Niger Delta Crisis is a global issue that has attracted various human and environmental rights organizations since it climaxed in the 1990s, when measured against the stark reality that the residents of the Niger Delta are victims of insensitive governments who care little or nothing about their living conditions, then one begins to wonder why Nigerian filmmakers did not see the need or motivation to make films that portray the poverty, pogrom and decimation in the region.

Whereas most Nollywood films in the late 90s portray communal life in Niger Delta communities, it was only from 2000 that films that address the Niger Delta struggle in its full dynamics started gracing Nollywood screens. Between 2002 and the present day, films such as *Black November* (2012), *Oloibiri* (2016), *Niger Delta Avengers* (2022), *Niger Delta Nemesis* (2004), *Black Gold, Daughters of the Niger Delta* (2012), *Sweet Crude* (2009), *Blood and Oil* (2011), *Across the Niger* (2007), *Militants* (2007) and *Crude War* (2011) among others. In the light of the above, this paper shall interrogate the thorny and lingering issue of the Niger Delta struggle from the perspectives of two Nollywood films namely: *Oloibiri* as directed by Curtis Graham and *Niger Delta* Nemesis directed by Charles Inojie.

**The Niger Delta Crisis: An Overview**

The Niger Delta struggle has had quite some impressive as well as chequered history. It dates back to colonial times amidst the European scramble for West Africa in search of avenues to dispossess the

former of its rich mineral resources. In their article titled "The Niger Delta Crisis: Issues, Challenges and Prospects", Afinotan and Ojakorotu inform that the Niger Delta Struggle as we see in present times drew its root mainly from the struggle by the Ijaw nation for self-determination as spearheaded by Isaac Adaka Boro in the 1960s (2). According to them, the Boro struggle birthed the consciousness and the spirit of the Kaiama Declaration of 1998 as well as the formation of such movement as Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) to serve as the military arm of the Ijaw National Congress (INC) (2). According to Afinotan and Ojakorotu, the second dimension to the struggle was the formation of :

> …various bands of criminal cult gangs established, encouraged and funded by political godfathers and dedicated to the theft of crude oil, kidnapping for ransom, assassination of political opponents, various acts of brigandage and piracy in the creeks, and upon the territorial sea. The attempt by militants to hijack the Niger Delta Struggle was proving increasingly counter-productive to the region's overall interest, as their indiscriminate killings, kidnapping activities and attacks on oil and other business facilities have made the entire region unsafe for legitimate business to thrive…(3)

Afinotan and Ojakorotu recount further that the third dimension in the struggle consists of those who are genuinely concerned with the struggle for the actualization of a truly developed Niger Delta, free from poverty, degradation, unemployment, environmental pollution, economic and socio-political alienation, disease and squalor. The crusaders of these era are neither militants nor insurgents. They are mainly members of the intelligentsia, political and economic elites, as well as enlightened traditional institutions (4) For Ehighelua, the Niger Delta struggle first arose in the early 1990s over tensions between foreign oil corporations and a number of the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who feel they are being exploited, particularly the Ogoni and the Ijaw (7). Summarily, the Niger Delta crisis has its roots in a long history of exploitation and dispossession of the region beginning with during the British imperial era: first for slaves during the 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ centuries, later for palm oil during the 19$^{th}$ century, and finally for petroleum after Nigerian independence (Mateos 8). Some scholars also feel that the Niger Delta crisis sprang from artificial political borders drawn during British rule that resulted in nearly three hundred ethnic groups being arbitrarily consolidated into a single nation-state (Obi 3).

History has it that since 2016 the Niger Delta crisis had escalated to a point that managing it poses serious issues till date. This has translated in the mass relocation of the multinationals from the region. First, on February 2016, the then Minister of State for Petroleum Emmanuel Ibe Kachukwu bemoaned the drop in oil production by three hundred barrels per day as a result of the explosion in a pipeline operated by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). Available reports link the explosion to one of the Niger Delta militant groups (Fick and Raval 10) On May 11, 2016, Shell (SPDC) closed its Bonny oil facility as a result of the killing of three soldiers that were deployed to provide security in the terminal (Uguru & Faul 12 ). Within the year 2016, a handful of militia groups announced their emergence and their activities were targeted at cutting short oil production activities. They succeeded reasonably as Nigeria's oil export dropped significantly such that Nigeria fell behind Angola as Africa's largest oil producer (Holodny 7)

**Third Cinema Theory: A Review Statement**

The term third cinema film theory draws its root from the Latin American film movement that emerged between 1960s down to the 70s which sets out to decry neocolonialism, the capitalist system and the Hollywood model as mere entertainment to make money. It was coined by the Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (Martin 2). The motivation behind the propounding of third cinema theory stems from Solanas and Getino's vision to produce a film that decolonizes human cultures. According to the duo:

> Third Cinema is, in our opinion, that cinema that recognizes in that struggle that most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestations of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point- in a word, the decolonization of culture (Getino & Solanas 7).

In their manifesto, Getino and Solanas describe third cinema as a consciousness in the cinematic industry as well as a dramatic alternative to First Cinema, which was produced in Hollywood for the purpose of entertaining its audiences and from Second Cinema that increased the author's liberty of expression. Third Cinema charts a new course as it sought to inspire revolution against class, racial and gender inequalities. The fundamental vision behind the conception of Third Cinema is to expose the process by which oppression occurs; and to criticize those responsible for social inequality in a country or community (Gabriel 14). Other goals of Third Cinema include; to raise political consciousness in the viewer, expose historical, social, political ad or economic policies that have led to exploitive conditions for the nation, engage viewers in reflection which will inspire them to take revolutionary action and improve their conditions, create films that express the experiences of the masses of a particular region and produce nd distribute films that are uncensored by oppressive entities (Dodge 10)

It is against the theoretical character and stipulations of Third Cinema as expressed above that we shall do a critical reading of two Niger Delta films –Curtis Graham's *Oloibiri* and Charles Inojie's *Niger Delta Nemesis.*

**Synopses of *Oloibiri* and *Niger Delta Nemesis***

The two films understudy portray the pangs and paroxysms of the Niger Delta crisis as occasioned by the consistent exploration and exploitation of oil in the region. *The Niger Delta Nemesis* as directed by Charles Inojie depicts the travails and triumphs of a Niger Delta youth, Kio (Gentle Jack), who is a native of Toruama, a community that suffers severe ecological damage and environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration activities in the land. As a brilliant and diligent student, Kio had bagged a first class honour degree in Philosophy in a prestigious university and had gone ahead to complete the compulsory National Youth Service Scheme in order to prepare him for employment. With high optimism of getting a mouth- watering job, Kio resorts to writing several application letters to several companies and corporations. Fortunately, he receives an invitation for a job interview from a reputable oil company in Lagos following his outstanding performance in the written aptitude test organized by the same company. There, in Lagos, Kio was denied the job on the ground that he studied philosophy and so could not be employed by a multinational that prospects oil and gas.

In his frustrated state, Kio returns to his impoverished community to start life afresh and in his dejection, he reunites with his childhood friends, Ebitimi (Emmanuel Ehumadu) and Gogo (Bobby Ogoloma) who have been deep into youth activism over the series of exploitation and marginalization of Toruama community. Together with his friends, Kio raises a strong team of youths of Toruama who are bent on rescuing the community from the exploitative claws of Community Development Committee (CDC) members as led by Chief Dumo (Enebeli Enebuwa). On their part, the members of Toruama CDC, ably spared headed by Chief Dumo, resorts to covering their tracks for their corrupt practice of sharing the money sent by the multinational company as part of the compensation for the environmental degradation. However, they meet stiff resistance from Chief Iju (Columbus Irisoanga), Kio's father who insists that the money meant for the community should be used for community development and not be shared by few individuals in the guise of community chiefs.

In order to truncate their being probed by the community youths, the CDC resorts to bribing some youths of Toruama especially Ebitimi (Kio's supposed ally and childhood friend) who would pose as opposition to Kio's vision to subject the chiefs to accountability. In the end, Kio's group succeeds as their restiveness attracts the attention of the governor of the state who pays Toruama community a visit and in the process, he appoints Kio as the chairman of the board that would guarantee rapid infrastructural and human resource development in the community. The film ends on this optimistic filmic atmosphere.

Like *Niger Delta Nemesis*, Curtis Graham's *Oloibiri* begins with an exposition of the impoverished and pitiable conditions of the oil host communities in the Niger Delta as a result of consistent oil exploration and exploitation activities by the multinationals. Camera opens on a community thrown into protracted mourning and pogrom as a result of the multiple deaths caused by the hazards of oil exploration. In the midst of the mourning, we are introduced to Timipre (Olu Jacob) who is the protagonist of the film. He is

seen recovering from the trauma of losing his wife to the pandemic of oil exploration in his community. The introduction of Timipre also signals the ushering in of the point of attack in the film as we see him meet face to face with Gunpowder (Richard Mofe-Damijo) and his gang of militants. At the point of this meeting, Gunpowder is at the verge of killing some young men whom he suspects to be traitors to the struggle. Eventually, he kills Dogo, one of his colleagues in the struggle upon the confirmation that the latter collected bribe in order to betray the struggle.

In this film, **Foreshore Exploration**, an oil exploration company is keen on exploring oil in an already troubled community in the Niger Delta region but its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Robert Powell and the management board members keep receiving pictures of the impoverished nature of the region. The pictures are sent anonymously and the same source also discourages Foreshore Exploration Company from continuing in their plans to explore in the region. Robert Powell is genuine about his dealings with the host community and so he decides to travel down to the Niger Delta region himself in order to guarantee adequate for the host community but he is unaware of the plans by his Personal Assistant, Mr.Azul to conspire with the militants to kidnap his family and those of other board members all in a bid to protest for the suspension of oil exploration in the region. Robert Powell arrives Nigeria and escapes the ambush set by Gunpowder and his men through the assistance of Dr. Chisom and Boname. Like Chisom and Boname, Timipre desires to help secure the life of Mr.Powell but he is also mindful of Gunpowder's wrath should the latter find out that he is involved in concealing his target. Propelled by his good conscience to protect Mr. Powell, Timpre delivers him to a gang of uniform men in the creek whom he misconstrues to be men of the Nigerian Army but latter realizes that the men are members of another militant group in the neighbourhood led by Boko. Incidentally, Gunpowder and his men invade Boko's camp, capture Mr.Powell and torture every visible accomplice to Mr. Powell's concealment.

The entire story takes another twist when Gunpowder refuses to release Mr. Powell even after the company had shut down oil exploration activities in the region as agreed earlier. As the torture on Mr. Powell intensifies, Mr. Azul expresses regrets for betraying his master and his family and yet he is unable to save him from the den of Gunpowder. He prefers to plead guilty to the crime of conniving with the militants in the abduction of Mr. Powell even when he had the window to escape to the United States of America. The protracted abduction of Mr. Powell raises serious security concerns such that the Nigerian Government deploys a special troop to go and comb the creeks in order to rescue the former. The operation is successfully executed and Gunpowder is killed after engaging men of the Nigerian Army in a running gun battle. The death of Gunpowder signals the restoration of normalcy in the region. However, Mr. Powell prepares to return to the United States as he apologizes to Timipre for the series of pain his company has inflicted on the host community. Timipre also apologizes to him for the torture that he went through by the hands of the militants. The film ends on this reconciliatory atmosphere.

**Interrogating The Niger Delta Crisis in *Niger Delta Nemesis***

Inojie's *The Niger Delta Nemesis* x-rays the Niger Delta crisis from the very root of the remote cause of the crisis. As the camera opens, we are exposed to the natural environment of Toruama in its already degraded state amidst due to oil exploration activities. This shot is complemented with another establishment shot of three youths of Toruama who are wallowing in idle fancy out of frustration from empty net from their fishing adventures. As they engage in dialogue, we come to terms with the reason for their frustration. The consistent oil exploration activities in their community have killed the fishes and other natural habits in the river and so they cannot catch any life fish at the moment. It also implies that they cannot access clean water to drink from the river anymore since the water has been polluted. It is this threat to their livelihood that triggers the defiance in them. The defiance in turn propels them to go in search of those responsible for their pitiable impoverishment. On the other divide is the King of Toruama (Ikiroma-Owiye Somiari) and the Chairman of the CDC, Chief Dumo who live in affluence with clean pipe-borne water and decent environment as a result of their serial embezzlement of funds brought by the multinationals as compensation for hazards caused he community. The contrasting visual narratives presented in this film clearly underscores the director's vision to argue that the impoverishment of the

Niger Delta region is hatched and executed by the Niger Delta elites themselves rather than the multinationals and the government as most Niger Delta minds often hurriedly conclude.

The Niger Delta crisis in the film understudy was brewed and served by the enemies within. Such characters as the Amayanabo of Toruama and the members of the traditional council of Toruama ably led Chief Dumo are "the enemies within" whose stock in trade are to siphon funds meant for community development. Without recourse to their subjects, they conspire and share the money meant for the development of the entire community. Not even the protest from one of them, Chief Iju, could deter them from sharing the money. Instead, Chief Iju's protest becomes a *reason de etre* for his banishment from Toruama community so they can have their way to perfect their corrupt practices. All attempts to appeal to them to return the money back to community purse fall on deaf ears until the youths of Toruama resort to taking laws into their own hands and began to unleash violence, militancy and terrorism. The decision of Toruama youths, through the leadership of Kio, Ebitimi and Gogo, to take their destinies in their own hands and fight for their rights signal a great paradigm shift in the Niger Delta struggle. Expectedly, they meet stiff resistance in their struggle. The resistance succeeds to the point of breaking their ranks as Ebitimi breaks away from the struggle and establishes another camp where he engages in illogical killings and destructions of Toruama common heritage. Being a sponsored break away just to get at Kio's noble vision of fighting for the impoverished people of Toruama, Ebitimi acquires sophisticated riffles and weapons that make him the most dreaded in the community. His target is to scuttle Kio's sincere mission to bring those that have embezzled Toruama's funds to book.

Inojie's *Niger Delta Nemesis* underscores the fundamental vision behind the conception of Third Cinema which is to expose the process by which oppression occurs; and to criticize those responsible for social inequality in a country or community (Gabriel 14). First, the film exposes the corrupt leadership style of the Amayanabo of Toruama and the CDC members with the exception of Chief Iju. Their selfish attitudes trigger community unrest and apprehension that take several lives and destroy several properties. In the end, Toruama community counts huge avoidable loses as a result of greed and excessive quest for materialism by a few persons in strategic positions. This is synonymous with the experiences in the larger Nigerian society where public funds are misappropriated serially without any serious accountability and the perpetrators are never brought to justice except the usual makeshift arraignment before the court of law in some cases.

This film encapsulates the sad narrative of how the Niger Delta region has been underdeveloped by the elites of the region themselves. Typical of the multinationals, they deploy the divide and rule tactics in order to have a smooth operation in the region while the host communities fight themselves to death. In *Niger Delta Nemesis*, the representative of the multinational corporation, an indigene of the Niger Delta region who serves as the Community Liaison Officer (CLO), connives with the CDC to share the money meant for the compensation of the host community. He goes further to insist that he would take 40% of the money before remitting the rest 60% to the King and the CDC members to share. The disposition of the CLO aptly captures the insensitivity of the multinationals towards the development of the oil exploration host communities. These multinationals often take advantage of the selfish and greedy attitudes of most host community leaders in the Niger Delta and offer them peanuts in cash rather than execute genuine developmental projects that would benefit the community in general. History has it that it is the same divide and rule attitude by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) towards the compensation of Ogoni land, Rivers State of Nigeria in the late 90s that snowballed into the gruesome murder of some prominent Ogoni elites by angry mob that comprises Ogoni youths. This in turn led to the public execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, the Niger Delta environmental activist and eight others by the Gen. Sani Abacha over the allegation that Saro Wiwa masterminded the killing of four prominent Ogoni elites.

**Interrogating the Niger Delta Crisis in *Oloibiri***

The import of the discourse on the Niger Delta crisis in Curtis Graham's *Oloibiri* begins with the title of the film itself. The name Oloibiri often resonates and triggers sensational discourses on the Niger Delta struggle for resource control. This is mainly because it is recorded in history that Oloibiri community remains the first location in Nigeria where oil was discovered in commercial quantity in 1956. Since then

and coupled with the impoverished, neglected and dejected nature of the community, the name Oloibiri has been overtly or covertly associated with the Niger Delta crisis. At a first glance of the film's title *Oloibiri* on the screen, the discourse of the Niger Delta crisis readily filters through the minds of the viewers. Like Inojie's *Niger Delta Nemesis*, Graham's *Oloibiri* mirrors the immediate and remote causes, challenges and dynamics of the Niger Delta crisis. Through the characters of Timipre, Gunpowder and Boko we see the psychological torture meted on the indigenes of the Niger Delta region. Due to the protracted negligence and insensitivity of the government in providing adequate welfare packages for the host communities even after degrading and polluting their environments, the indigenes are thrown into health and economic hazards that translate into high mortality rate in the region. Timipre, the hero of the film, loses his wife to the polluted waters. The same polluted waters have infested Ebiere, his only sister with tuberculosis and so he is thrown into some kind of defiance and trauma that translate into agitation against the multinationals operating in his community.

Similarly, Gunpowder, the leader of the most dreaded militant group in the region gained inspiration for violence and terrorism as a result of the insincerity of the government on one hand, and the multinationals on the other hand, in compensating the host communities for their huge loses occasioned by consistent oil exploration and exploitation activities. Thom-Otuya corroborates the narratives in Graham's *Oloibiri* when he recounts that "Niger Delta is a centre of protracted discontent among impoverished communities which felt neglected, marginalized and cheated out of the region's oil and gas wealth exploited by the Federal Government and oil companies" (246). Gunpowder is highly educated and exposed to oil politics and so understands the insincerity of the government towards the oil deal in the region. He also understands that the only language that the government would understand is that of violence and terrorism. Gunpowder symbolizes the typical Niger Delta militant who, out of frustration and defiance over the protracted negligence of the region, has taken laws into his hands and resorted to militancy, criminality, terrorism, kidnapping and bunkering among others. Like Timipre, Gunpowder wishes for a developed Niger Delta but unlike the former, he feels that is wishes can only come to pass through the nozzle of a gun. Timipre, is a pitiable victim of the environmental pollution in the region having lost his wife and still nursing his tuberculosis-infested sister, but he does not think that resorting to arms, violence, criminality and militancy like Gunpowder and Boko would solve the problem of the region. He prefers the dialogue option no matter the situation in the region. It is this divergence in ideology between Timipre and Gunpowder about the struggle that complicates the conflict in the film.

The thrust of the narrative in Graham's *Oloibiri* is to show the insincerity of the indigenes of the region in bringing about a peaceful deal between the host communities and multinationals. Mr. Powell, the CEO of the Offshore Exploration means well for the host communities and so approves adequate compensation for them but unfortunately, these compensation packages are either siphoned or cut short by the middlemen between the host communities and the multinationals. Unfortunately, these middlemen are usually indigenes of the Niger Delta who serve either as the company's Community Liaison Officer (CLO) or as members of the Community Development Committee (CDC).Upon the receipt of the threat letter from the anonymous militia group that his company should shut down operations, Mr. Powell becomes curios to ascertain if the compensations due the host communities have been given to them and when he was not satisfied with the response from this company, he quickly comes down to the region to see things for himself and in the process he discovers that his staff who are indigenous have denied their own their entitlements over time. In the process of getting to the root of the matter, Mr. Azul, the Personal Assistant of Mr. Powell quickly plots the kidnap of his boss all in a bid to conceal their impending misappropriation scandal.

The maliciousness and wickedness of the Niger Delta indigenes who sabotage the Niger Delta struggle is predicated against the background that the effects of the oil exploration activities in the regions have led to unmeasurable level of poverty and health hazards ranging from the destruction of aquatic live through oil spillage in the waters, breathing bad air through gas flaring, thrown into poor harvests due to the degradation of the soil and other attendant economic hardship. This impoverished people seeks retribution for their explored lands and waters and they are labeled militants. Ironically, not even the promise of

cleaning up oil spillage by the multinationals have not been carried out in the region. It is against this deplorable condition of his people that the hero of the film, Timipre takes it upon himself to agitate for speedy response and adequate compensation from the multinationals. However, his agitation meets several brick walls as a result of sabotage from some greedy and selfish leaders in the community who parade as chiefs and elders of the host communities. It is this avaricious disposition of the elders and chief that triggered the emergence of such dreaded militants as Gunpowder and Boko.

In contemporary Niger Delta communities, there are a handful of Niger Delta elites who share similar fate with the character of Timipre who is ostracized and relegated to background for speaking in favour of the impoverished masses rather than speak for his personal interest. As evident in the film *Oloibiri*, Timipre lives in the shanty, compared to other elders and chiefs who compromised the general welfare of the impoverished people and the region. He suffers from the mental trauma of watching his wife die of polluted water, his sister Ebiere down with tuberculosis, and uncountable loss of lives in the community from the effects of pollution. He blames himself for not doing much to salvage his people, despite his education. On the other hand, Gunpowder and Boko represent the restive youths who have taken laws in their hands, to at least gather the crumps they can from illegal mining, kidnapping staff of the multinationals, piracy and others. To underscore the height of defiance in the minds of Niger Delta militants, it is pertinent to reveal further that Gunpowder is a first class graduate in Geology who had worked with one of the multinationals in the region. And after seeing the high level of insincerity of these multinationals to their host communities, he resolves to quit his job and join his brothers in the creeks to accelerate the struggle. The motivation for Gunpowder's resolve to join his brothers in the creeks is encapsulated in Thom-Otuya's analogy, thus:

> Underdevelopment is a motivational force for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. The people of the Niger Delta are living under a very harsh condition. Outside most state capitals in the Niger Delta, there is nothing to write home about. Most towns and villages of the Niger Delta do not have electricity, schools, and health clinics, even portable drinking water is scarce. They lack roads and link roads, good houses, poor communication network, poor transportation system, educational facilities and a poor and hazardous environment (269)

*Oloibiri* is a vivid portrayal of the internal dynamics and challenges of the Niger Delta struggle. Using the characters of Mr. Powell, Timipre, Gunpowder and Boko as symbols, the film x-rays the different perspectives adopted by the Niger Delta elites to champion the agitation against the oppression, neglect and marginalization of the region. As expressed earlier, the elites of the region have their divergent approaches to the struggle and this divergence appears to be the cog on the wheel of the struggle. Little wonder, the film ends in series of regrets, loses, disappointments and apologies. No doubt, the Niger Delta agitators and activists share one ideology in common and that is the consciousness of correcting the mistakes of their forebears who were given to bribery and corruption at the expense of the development of the region. Intermittently in the film, Gunpowder and Timipre bandy words that bother on the remote and immediate causes of hunger and poverty in the community. At another level, the youths blame Timipre and the elders of the community for not doing enough to protect the land. They go further to challenge the moral standards of the chiefs, elders and political elites that represent them at the local, state and national levels. Gunpowder accuses Timipre of running to England at a crucial point when he was needed most to champion the struggle as the community spokesperson given his robust educational background. On the other hand, Timipre blames Gunpowder for choosing the path of violence and terrorism thereby causing more harm, trauma and hardship for the already impoverished people of the region. However, a greater chunk of the blame goes to chiefs and elders of the community who, rather than ensure equitable distribution of the compensation packages brought by the multinationals, conspire and share these packages among themselves thereby throwing the people into untold hardship and poverty.

Regrettably, the funds released by the multinationals are fulfilments of initial agreements as contained in Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Foreshore Exploration Company and the host community right from the discovery of oil in the community. Mr Powell (C.E.O of Foreshaw

Exploration) was determined to be different from the other multinationals that operate in the Niger Delta region. However, his efforts are sabotaged by his own middlemen who prefer to share the money with a select few rather than the suffering people of the host communities in order to amass wealth. It is this misappropriation of funds that brings about the high spate of insurgency and consequently, the lingering unrest that occasioned the generous loss of lives and properties in the community. It also brings oil exploration and exploration activities to a halt with little or no home for continuation in the near future.

## CONCLUSION

The role of film as weapon of protest and revolution cannot be over emphasized. Our interrogation of Graham Curtis' *Oloibiri* and Charles Inojie's *Niger Delta Nemesis* reveal the preponderance of hidden mysteries and truths about the Niger Delta crisis. The salient deduction from this study is that the impoverishment in the Niger Delta is traceable to the greedy and selfish dispositions of the Niger Delta elites are leaders who are in such positions of authority as traditional rulers, village chiefs, Community Liaison Officers or members of Community Development Committee. As evident in the two films understudy, these set of elites are in the habit of siphoning monies and funds meant for the development of the host communities. In doing so, they sabotage the efforts of the genuine agitators or activists who consistently confront the government and the multinationals. It is this betrayal by the elites that propel the youths to toe the path of restiveness, militancy and criminality.

*Oloibiri* and *Niger Delta Nemesis* are sincere reflections of the decay, pogrom, decimation, poverty, pestilence, hunger and disease that have engulfed the Niger Delta region since the commencement of oil exploration activities in the region. Though they deployed different stories and narratives, both films are synonymous in their portrayal of the various shades of betrayals amongst the militant groups in the region which lead ultimately to the death of the traitors. In *Niger Delta Nemesis*, Kio kills Ebitimi for betraying the struggle while Boko dies by the nozzle of Gunpowder's gun over same reason of betrayal in *Oloibiri*. Fundamentally, the two films understudy constitute rich audio-visual materials that could catalyze the Niger Delta crisis to a revolution with a stern warning that those who betray the struggle will surely pay with their lives.

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**Filmography**

Title: *Oloibiri (Blood and Oil)*. 2017
Producer: Rogers Ofime
Director: Curtis Graham
Screenplay: Writer: Samantha Iwowo
Production House: Vision Films and Right Angle Production
Cast: Richard Mofe Damijo, Olu Jacobs, William R. Moses, Bradley Gordon, Taiwo Ajayi Lycet, Michael Walker, Dayton Sinkia, Ifeanyi Williams and Ivie Okujaye.

Title: *Niger Delta Nemesis* (2004)
Producer - Gentle Jack
Screenplay - Charles Inojie
D.O.P - Onyi Okechukwu
Director - Charles Inojie
Cast: Gentle Jack, Walter Anga, Ovunda Ihunwo, Enebeli Enebuwa, Columbus Irisoanga