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EDITORIAL NOTE

The *Ethiopia Journal of English, Literary, and Cultural Studies* (ISSN: 0795-5413) is an interdisciplinary journal that explores topical and generative issues in English linguistics and in literary and cultural studies. We recognise that African humanities research is both problem-based and knowledge oriented, and our aim is to provide a platform for scholars to analyse and theorise Africa in a way that is generative, conversational and decolonial. Specifically, the journal focuses on both the analytical and theoretical approaches to knowledge production in the context of Africa and the Global South. We want to curate papers that are hinged on African indigenous paradigms and approaches or that seek to extend, reimagine, or contextualise current theoretical or analytical approaches in English language studies and in literary and cultural studies.

We invite papers that dwell on all aspects of English language studies, including phonetics/phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, ESL, ESP etc. We also welcome papers that theorise literary and cultural texts, including film, still and moving images, music and dance, photographs, cultural objects, spaces and places, society and social formations, and other relevant corpora. While we accept purely analytical essays, we encourage authors to focus on theorising the texts or data they engage with. In particular, we welcome theoretical conversations that implicate postcolonial subjecthood, ecocritical approaches (especially postcolonial ecocriticism), feminism and gender studies, new trends in linguistics, object-oriented criticism and approaches, and other generative approaches to knowledge production. Authors are encouraged to do original theorisation rather than adopt extant theoretical frameworks. They may also extend the scope of extant theories and approaches based on the material they present and discuss.

Furthermore, papers with interdisciplinary approaches are also welcomed. We recognise that knowledge production is an elastic phenomenon, and that bright ideas might implicate various fields. Interesting multi-modal, eclectic, or collaborative research is encouraged in this journal.

JOURNAL POLICY

The *Ethiopia Journal of English, Literary and Cultural Studies* is published biennially by the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. All papers submitted to this maiden edition of the journal had undergone double-blind peer review and published papers are well researched, original and data-driven.

Contributors are to submit an e-copy of their manuscript for assessment and publication to ethiopejournal@delsu.edu.ng or ethiopejournal@gmail.com. Such manuscripts should be original and not under consideration for publication elsewhere and should not have been published in any other journal.

Submitted manuscript which should not exceed 7000 words should be typeset in MS Word Times New Roman Font 12, with double line spacing. The first page should include the title of the manuscript, name(s), and institutional affiliation/address, abstract (not more than 250 words and with not more than six keywords). Manuscripts should conform to the current APA or MLA style sheet. Author(s) of published papers will derive the benefits from peer-review of contributions by seasoned scholars, global visibility and receipt of hard copies as well as soft copies of their papers.

The twelve papers in this maiden edition of the journal cut across disciplines in cultural, media studies and sub-disciplines in English and literary studies. The contributors include seasoned and renowned scholars of international repute and young astute scholars with burning desire to excel in academics. The first article titled: “Folklore and African Poetry in the Age of Globalization” by Prof Ojaide is on cultural studies. Prof. Ojaide is a renowned poet and professor of international repute from the University of North Carolina, USA. It is pertinent to note that the contributors are from universities across the globe. We believe that the twelve articles will be of immense interest to researchers and students.

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REVOLUTIONARY FERVOUR IN SELECTED NIGER DELTA DRAMA

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Abstract

The politics of exploitation and dispossession in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria has engendered different experiences of disenchantment and resistance which are explored by dramatic literature from the region. Extant studies on the literary imaginations of the Niger Delta condition have examined ecological devastation and domination occasioned by activities of the oil conglomerates in connivance with the Federal Government of Nigeria. Though such literary researches acknowledge the subjugation and struggles in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, they are mainly in the domains of poetry and prose fiction. Scholarly works on Niger Delta drama focus more on intra-regional ethnic struggles and ecological despoliation. The current study, therefore, carries out a detailed investigation of repression and resistance movements in the Niger Delta as reflected in two plays, namely, *Pond of Leeches* by Stephen Kekeghe and *Majestic Revolt* by Peter Omoko. The plays were purposely selected based on their relevance in portraying the theme of protest and were subjected to critical analyses. The study adopted the Marxist Theory, propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, to account for the revolutionary movements. The analyses reveal that the Niger Delta struggle for resource control by the long oppressed, marginalized and exploited people of the oil-rich Niger Delta region is a historical experience foregrounded in literature. While Omoko's *Majestic Revolt* offers a historical British colonial perspective on the Niger Delta exploitation and challenges, Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches* approaches it from the angle of neocolonial oppression.

Keywords: Protest literature, Niger Delta Drama, Niger Delta Struggles, Revolutionary Movement, Historical Experience.

Introduction

African literature consists of a body of works written in many languages and encompasses various genres, ranging from oral literature to literature written in colonial and other languages. African literature thrives in three periods namely; the pre-colonial era, the colonial era, and the post-colonial era. Some of the major themes in African literature include advocating for political or social change. Since African nations continue to witness repressive political leadership, the literature that explores these realities is advocating for political or social change. As Wa Thiong'o (1981) rightly observes, literature and politics present a dialectical relationship as they "are reflected in one another and can act on one another" (p. 81). Umukoro (1994) in his book notes that in Africa, the practicality of art and the social responsibility of the artist are emphasized, thereby making politics a suitable subject for literature. Umukoro's submission is in agreement with Achebe's (1975) declaration that:

...it is clear to me that an African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like the absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames... (p. 78).

African literature can be seen as a tool or medium for interrogating and resisting injustice, and repression which also gives rise to the spirit of revolution. Expressions of advocacy of justice pervade the content of a good number of modern Nigerian literary texts. From colonial imperialism to post-colonial experiences, Nigerian writers continue to explore and condemn the failings in the society. While conveying the socio-economic and political failings in Nigeria, the writers do not hide their feelings. Thus, the language and content of their writings underscore their quest for social change. On

this note, Akingbe (2012) declares:

...as Nigeria's social, political and economic problems became pronounced, the nature of protest within Nigerian literature became harsher and more explicit, a development that was facilitated by the increasing Marxist ideology among its second and third generation of its writers... (p. 21).

Akingbe's argument above attests to the fact that since the emergence of modern Nigerian literature, the theme of protest has been frequently explored by writers across genres. Nigerian writers, including dramatists, produce works that have been characterized as “protest literature” or works that convey a “constant moral attitude” (Chinweizu, Jemie & Madubuike, 1980. p.7). Affiah (2012. p. 284) observes the prevalence of protest themes in the rich oeuvres of Nigerian dramaturgy. Similarly, Binebai (2013) discusses the tenor of resistance in Nigerian dramatic literature. Though these studies are not on Niger Delta drama, they, nonetheless, convey the predominance of protest as a significant motif in Nigerian drama.

The Niger Delta Struggles: From Society to Literature

The Niger Delta region is made up of the six states of the South-South geopolitical zone (Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Edo). Other oil-producing states include Ondo, Imo and Abia. (Darah, 2014; p. 37) . Since the discovery of oil at Oloibiri, Bayelsa state in 1956, and later in other parts of the Niger Delta in commercial quantities, the Niger Delta region became a troubled landscape. The restless quest for oil has worsened the poverty in the region, such that the Niger Delta natives believe that the Nigerian state has employed every available tool in systematically emasculating the Niger Delta region and depriving it of the benefits

of its natural resources. Oil and gas from the Niger Delta region account for over 90% of Nigeria's export earnings, yet the region wallows in abject poverty, and its environment suffers degradation as a result of oil exploration activities. Ecological despoliation occasioned by the pillaging effects of oil and gas has gravely affected the host communities (Okaba, 2005. p.6). These distressing experiences continue to embitter the Niger Delta natives, and have engendered different insurrectionary movements in the region.

The revolutionary theme in Niger Delta literature has been provoked by the injustice meted on the people and environment of the region. Writers like J.P. Clark, Tanure Ojaide, Ebi Yeibo, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Obari Gomba, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Stephen Kekeghe, Peter Omoko among others, have elected themselves through their creativity to champion the cause for the emancipation of the people and region. The tenor of such writings can be interpreted as revolutionary. Darah (2011) posits that:

... the nation and peoples of the Niger Delta have been engaged in another war, a war of verbal weapons to emancipate their territory and natural resources from the avaricious grip of the Federal Government and its international allies... (p. 3).

Darah notes that the militarisation and exploitation of the Niger Delta region has engendered the radicalization of the aggrieved natives of the region. This, according to Darah accounts for the radical themes in Niger Delta literature. For the Niger Deltans, this verbal war is also carried through and experienced in dramatic literature as the playwrights reveals and explicates the excruciating pains they feel in their minds. Most of the writers in the Niger Delta region use radical rhetoric to enact the unrest in the region.

Literary studies on the Niger Delta condition have investigated ecological injustice, minority politics and trauma, which are the resultant effects of oil exploration and economic

dispossession in the region. Most of the existing literary studies on the Niger Delta condition are in the genre of poetry and prose. Tayo Olafioye (2000) examines ecological injustices and the problem of dispossession in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide. Stephen Kekeghe (2014) carries out a critical analysis of the politics of oil exploration and dispossession in the poetry of Ebi Yeibo, Ibiwari Ikiriko and Ebinyo Ogbowei. Enajite Ojaruega (2015) investigates folkloric and cultural images in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide. From the linguistic perspective, Maledo (2020) examines the Niger Delta issues in Ojaide's poetry from the point of view of syntactic parallelism while Maledo (2019) is a graphological explication of the Niger Delta problems in Ojaide's poetry.

However, a few scholars have specifically investigated the Niger Delta condition in dramatic literature. Ezema (2016) examines Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches* as an allegorical representation of the Niger Delta and Nigeria. Ezema highlights the politics of dispossession and disenchantment in the Niger Delta region as explored in the play. Lebe and Oyemwen (2022) discuss conflict resolution in three plays from the Niger Delta region. The focus of this study, unlike the current one, is to highlight how Niger Delta drama offers a solution to the Niger Delta conflict. Ojaruega's (2020) study identifies the tenor of confrontation in two Niger Delta plays, namely, Stephen Kekeghe *Pond of Leeches* and Peter Omoko's *Crude Night Men*. The focus of Ojaruega's study is how the playwrights used their plays to confront the natives of the Niger Delta that are perceived to be the enemies of the region. Ojaruega's paper also foregrounds the idea of revolution, it acknowledges the dramatic representation of the repressive and indigenous domination in the Niger Delta.

The current study however examines revolutionary fervour in two Niger Delta plays with a view of ascertaining social and dramatic literary response to the exploration of oil and other natural resources that have continued to afflict the region.

Theoretical Framework

This study will adopt Karl Marx's theory also known as

Marxism or Marxist theory as its theoretical framework to investigate the revolutionary ideas used to foreground the content and form of the plays under study. Marxism is a social, political and economic philosophy and theory propounded by Karl Marx. Marxism examines the effects of capitalism on socio-economic and human development. As an ideology and movement, Marxism is said to be a 20th Century phenomenon that inspired the Soviet Union's system but its actual origin is traced to the radical ideas of Karl Marx, a 19th Century German philosopher and economist. It suggests a radical strategy for the repressed and exploited workers and members of society to overturn capitalism in favour of communism so as to emancipate themselves. In Marxism, according to Dobie (2002),

...Marx argued that the means of production controls a society's institutions and beliefs, contended that history is progressing toward the eventual triumph of communism, and introduced the concept of dialectal materialism, the theory that history develops as a struggle between contradictions that are eventually synthesized... (p. 87).

Dobie adds that although Marxism was not originally designed as a method of literary analysis, “its principles were applied to literature early on” (p. 87). The revolutionary tenets of Marxism later gained entrance in literary studies. The dispossession of the natives of the Delta and the struggles for emancipation, as depicted in the plays under study, is adequately taken care of by the application of the tenets of Marxism.

Revolutionary Fervour in the Plays

Peter Omoko's *Majestic Revolt* is a fictional representation of event based on the struggle against the imposition of a head tax on adult males in the former Warri Province by the British colonial administration led by Major Walker, the Deputy Inspector General of Police in the Province. The play does not only highlight the injustice and repression, but it also conveys the revolutionary stance of the people, championed by their leader, Oshue Ogbiyerin, who revolted against the obnoxious law in 1927. In *Majestic Revolt*, Omoko recreates the subjugation of the people of the Former Warri Province and the radical steps taken by the natives of the former Warri Province. The Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Ukwuani in a meeting held at the Igbudu Quarters of Warri. (Oreh, 2020).

The play opens on Atake's lamentation over his two wives' birth of three male children in one night. Given the obnoxious decree of the British colonial Government to impose head tax on males, Atake feels that it is more beneficial to give birth to female children now to avoid paying head tax. Atake's helplessness in the face of a glaring injustice is conveyed in the following dialogue between him and Oguma:

ATAKE: (*Swallows hard*)
Look Oguma, everything is wrong. I have five boys already. The trouble of that is almost tearing me apart right now, now three additional ones. Is this not death, my friend?

OGUMA: How? Has our land lacked the food to feed us all?

ATAKE: I can see you have not heard that the Oyibo

man's chief has announced
that henceforth all adult
males in the province will
pay taxes on their heads.
Three pence on my head and
that of my eight male
children! My ancestors, how
have I offended you? (p. 5).

The excerpt above acts as an exposition and initiates the play's conflict. The introduction of "head" tax by the colonial administrators initiated social restiveness. Unlike Atake's docile and helpless thought on the issue, Oguma demonstrates his resentment on a note of protest thus: "Me, Oguma, pay tax on my head...to a stranger. God forbids!" (p. 6). Unlike Atake, who is afraid of the military might of the British administrators, Oguma believes that with unity and loyalty, the people of the Warri province will rise and upturn suppressive acts of the British colonialists. Eventually, the people of the province, therefore, collectively rose against the injustice of strangers imposing a head tax on their land.

In order to fight the injustice meted out to the people by the British Administrators, Oshue, the leader of the people summons a meeting of all representatives of the various ethnic groups in the former Warri Province. The meeting reveals serious disenchantments from the people. Oshue's opening remarks at the meeting underscore the people's rage against the injustice brought upon them by the British colonial Administrators:

OSHUE:... Leaders of our
great Province, we called
this congress today to
inform you that the
foreigners are no longer
satisfied with the reception
we have given to them. But I
must tell you this, it will not
be acceptable in any part of

the Province that the oyibo man from his faraway country should come here to impose taxes on us.

We are going to tell them that before they came, our land was not devoid of law and order, neither did we lack administrative power. Their imposition of taxes on us is a mortal threat to our autonomy. I do hope that at the end of this congress, we shall see the reason why we must say 'no!' to the foreigners. Once again, I welcome you all (p. 14)

Oshue's radical voice conveys the people's dissatisfaction and resentment. This is why all his speeches are greeted with resounding applause from the people. By implication, Oshue is seen as the people's messiah who will put an end to the oppression brought upon them by the colonialists in their own lands. All the leaders of the various ethnic groups in the meeting also expressed their readiness to resist the oppression of the British administrators. Bozimo, the leader of the Ijaw people, makes known his grievances against the Whiteman thus:

.... But I assure you this, my brothers and I here present will see to it that nobody in Ijaw territory pays such a tax (p. 15).

Bozimo's speech above summarizes the collective resolve of the Ijaw people to put an end to the oppression masterminded by the British colonial actors. Like Bozimo, Otuedon, the representative of the Itsekiri people, also declares the commitment of the Itsekiri nation to putting an end to colonial oppression. Otuedon's

pronouncement below is a reflection of the decision and resolve of the Itsekiri people:

....But let me tell you this:
we stand here today, in one
spirit, for a just cause...My
people and I resist any form
of taxation. (p. 16).

The following dialogue further conveys the people's anger and revolutionary tendency which are clear indications of their determination:

OTUBU: We shall pay no
such tax to anybody

GBUDJE: No. We will not
pay anything called tax to
anyone. Who is he that has
that power to collect taxes on
our heads?... He should first
of all show us a receipt of
taxes collected from our
ancestors.

ALL: Yes, he should show
us...

OSHUE: Yes...you all are
correct. We shall pay no such
tax to anybody. But let me
ask you this. By what means
should we embark on this
resistance? (p. 18).

The question posed by Oshue stimulates a positive reaction from the people who are encouraged to fight for their freedom. They unanimously agree that henceforth any trade with the Whiteman must stop this reveals how committed they are to the cause.

The Marxist revolutionary fervour that runs through the play is evident in the resolve of the people to fight injustice in their land.

Summoning everyone for the meeting against the tax imposition was the first evidence of the revolutionary fervour in the play. In the meeting declared by the revolutionary leaders led by Oshue, the people decided to fight the injustice in their land and to liberate themselves from the oppression perpetuated by the British Colonial Administrators in their land. The leaders of the revolutionary movements also instructed all communities to resolve internal disputes through their traditional, age-grade mediated village councils, thereby ignoring the Whiteman's courts. The people went further setting free of native court prisoners in several places.

The movement spread to other places some groups invaded the market of Forcados and also went ahead to place an embargo on trade with Europeans. This was strictly monitored by able-bodied youth across the province. Where there are defaulters, they were arrested and punished. What this implies is that there is a great sacrifice to be made before the attainment of freedom. Oshue sternly warns defaulters and further educates them on the need to stop the repressive law of head tax imposed on the people of the province by the British colonial administrator. The leaders of the struggle in the province take time to enlighten their people.

The revolutionary spirit of the people in confronting their oppressors is made possible by the initiatives of their leaders who make them, through heavy rhetoric, to examine the condition of their lives and perceive the extent of the repression they suffer. In the creek, the pirates reveal their expulsion of whites thus:

PIRATE: We've expelled
the oyibo people...the
whole market burning...the
captain of the ship and two
of his crew, seized. They are
right in our custody (p. 44).

The conversation, in the extract below, shows the clash and tension that constitute the play's conflict:

MR. TUNA: Mr. Bozimo,
you're over stepping your

boundary— you're toiling
with the kindness of His
Majesty...

BOZIMO: In our land, we
decide what happens— not
your king.

MR. TUNA: You must
release immediately the
captain and his crew in your
custody. They're His
Majesty's officers (p. 44).

The reader is made to see the revolutionary steps taken by the people of Warri Province to redeem themselves. The British administrators felt the full weight of the people's resistance. For example, in the excerpt below, an officer recounts his experience with the angry people of the Province to the British administrator, Mr. Walker:

OFFICER: Sir, His
Majesty's subjects in the
Province are beginning to
prove difficult for us to
manage.... As soon as the
Native Ordinance was
passed, things have taken a
new dimension. The natives
no longer respect our
District Officers. Yesterday,
the District Officer in Warri,
Mr. Swayne, was mobbed at
Okere and the rescue of a
man convicted for
obstructing assessment was
attempted. This sort of

violence has been followed
by the freeing of native court
prisoners in several
places...(p.47)

The people's radicalism attests to the fact that they are resolved about putting an end to oppression. When Walker gets to know that Oshue spearheads the revolt, he makes different unsuccessful efforts to win Oshue over. For instance, when Oshue was invited by Major Walker, he did not hide his oppressed people's disenchantment on the activities of the colonial administrators.

WALKER: ...Are you the said Oshue who stopped the people from paying taxes due to His Royal Majesty, the King of England?

OSHUE: Yes- I am Oshue...You must understand this, Oshue will not pay any head tax nor will any of my people do while I live (p. 71).

The people of Warri Province, as recounted in Omoko's *Majestic Revolt*, engage in rebellious actions because they consider it imperative to liberate themselves from the British colonial administrators. The struggle climaxes with killings and incarcerations from both sides, as seen in the following dialogue:

O G B A R I E M U U :

(*Panting*) Yes, Your
Highness. War...!
Deaths...! Sporadic
shooting...! Everywhere,
people run...! Me, run.
Running to save my head!

OSHUE: Where? What
happened?

OGBARIEMU: Police at
Sapele...! Oyibo police is
shooting all of us.
Everybody at rally
running...

GBUDJE: Calm down and

tell us what happened...

OGBARIEMU: Otuvwie is accused of obstructing trade with the oyibo man. Plenty, plenty police came and drag him to Sapele.

OSHUE: Then what happened?

OGBARIEMU: Quickly, we all mobilized. Men, women, youths, with branches of trees in our hands, we all marched to Sapele to rescue our comrade, Otuvwie

Yes, yes, go on.

OGBARIEMU: Police...! Plenty of them came and *kpo*...! Smoke...! *kpoo*...!

OTUBU: Gun shots..?

OGBARIEMU: I saw it with my two eyes. A man was shot dead...I saw him on the ground, dead (p. 66).

As a result of the revolutionary fervour, the captain of the ship and two of his crew were seized, and in the custody of the natives in order to make sure nobody goes to the market and trade with them. Otuvwie is accused of obstructing trade with the oyibo man, so the police arrest him and takes him to Sapele. Quickly the natives mobilized men, women and youths with branches of trees in their hands in protest and they all marched to Sapele to rescue Otuvwie. The police attempts to quell the protest lead to shootings and killings.

The British oppressors represented by Major Walker, the Deputy Inspector-General of police reacts immediately. They arrest and imprison the ring leaders including Chief Oshue who was jailed for two years. But, the 1927 Anti-Tax uprising in Warri province led

by the revolutionary Chief Oshue a man of great eloquence had already spread across the River Niger to the Owerri Province in 1929 where the women there led the revolt of what is generally and famously known as the “Aba Women Riot” in colonial records and in the nation's history. The 1927 anti-tax revolt in Warri province can be seen as a landmark in the resource control struggle of the oppressed, marginalized and exploited people of the oil-rich Niger Delta region which has produced martyrs which include Jaja of Opobo, King Dappa Peppele of Bonny, Okumagba of Okere, Ovie (king) Oghwe, Ossai of Aboh, Nana Olou, Salubi of the Urhobo and others. (Oreh, 2020),

Despite the threats and eventual imprisonment of Oshue by Walker, he remains undeterred. He stand brave for the people and province. Walker sentenced Oshue and some gallant elders including, Erhuen, Odomibi, Ighale Umuroro, Egbe Oteghe and Otugbe Amuko to two years imprisonment with hard labour. Oshue's speech after the sentence shows his irrepressible nature:

OSHUE: for the effacement of man's inhumanity to man we here stand trial...But let it be known this day, for as much as my people are deprived of their dignity and freedom, for as much as my people are oppressed by overnight masters, the Province will remain ungovernable for you and your thieving masters. Nobody, I say nobody, while I live will ever pay tax on his God given head. You can even kill, maim, and traumatize them, but it is impossible to kill the will of the struggle against imperialism. I assure you, my friend, even in my captivity the people will need my consent to comply with your evil laws (p. 94).

Oshue is presented in the play as a historical hero that fought for the liberation of his people from the obnoxious laws enacted by the British administrators to subdue them. Throughout the play,

Oshue presents a stout stature of determination and courage. The class struggle in the play is as a result of the repressive laws introduced by the colonialists to oppress the people of Warri Province. Through the leadership of Oshue, the people come to the realization that freedom comes only after a collective struggle and resolve to end oppression. Peter Omoko's play, *Majestic Revolt*, therefore, explores the interplay of oppression and revolution in the Niger Delta. Unlike other contemporary works on the Niger Delta condition, Omoko's play enacts the Niger Delta struggle during colonial times.

Stephen Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches* explores the issues of exploitation, dispossession and conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Kekeghe imaginatively conveys the conflict between the Niger Delta natives and the oil explorers in connivance with the Federal Government forces. The play is set in Okugbe community, which, according to the Foreword, is “an allegorical imagination of Nigeria with its troublesome multilingual and multicultural contradictions” (Jegede, 2015. p.7). Okugbe is an Urhobo word that means togetherness or putting together. In Okugbe, the community where the play is set, there are different quarters. Egbo Quarters, which is symbolic of the Niger Delta region, is the richest of all the quarters, and has deposits of oil and gas, which the entire community depends on to survive. The exploitation, environmental devastation and underdevelopment of Egbo Quarters inspired different resistance movements. The latest of such movements is championed by Ovwata Ikobi, who, according to the playwright in the cast list, is “a revolutionary patriot among the dispossessed people of Egbo Quarters” (p. 13). Ovwata, a brave and radical character confronts the Chairman of Okugbe community and other thieving leaders, to redeem the people of Egbo Quarters from exploitation. Ovwata's nephew, an aggrieved jobless graduate eventually joins him in the struggle to liberate the people of Egbo Quarters. The play is filled with violence, tension and intrigue. At the end, Egbo Quarters breaks away as an autonomous community taking up a name, Urhukpe Community.

In this play, Kekeghe creates the Niger Delta condition, and

stimulates some form of optimism in the face of gloom and repression. A discernible message in the play is that, to liberate the Niger Delta region, the people must engage in a serious fight with the internal and external oppressors. By implication, freedom can only be realized after a crisis situation. Right from the play's prologue, the audience is exposed to the tenor of violence that will run through the whole play. For instance, a stage description in the prologue reads: "Chaos. Tension reigns as gunshots overwhelm the stage" (p. 14). This description, therefore, prepares the way for the violence and confrontation that runs through the entire play. The Marxist struggle in the play is geared towards the emancipation of the oppressed and dispossessed people of Egbo Quarters. Ovwata laments the pathetic condition of the people:

OWWATA: ... I can't fear death when young and old die of contaminated water, hunger and diseases, arising from the activities of the oil rogues. The farmlands are made less and less arable. The air, the water are polluted. The hospitals are epileptic. Why then must I fear death? I hate that voice! This is my struggle! (p. 28).

From the excerpt above, it is evident that Ovwata resents the injustice meted on the people of Egbo Quarters and fights to redeem them from oppression and poverty. The resources from the Niger Delta region(oil and gas)account for over 90% of Nigerian export earnings, yet the region continues to experience extreme deprivation and environmental degradation with a rising poverty(Darah, 2014).

The cause of the tension and conflict in Okugbe's community is revealed in Ovwata's dialogue with Ophu as seen below:

OWWATA: It's okay. Don't worry. They are ready to kill everybody because the oil

finds a bed beneath our land.
 This has brought us a curse.
 Adje that refused to be a man
 is also maimed by them...

OPHU: (*Obviously
 mournful.*) Papa, I'm bearing
 a heavy heart. A grieving
 heart... I don't know why
 they keep killing us and we
 keep running and forgetting.
 This time, I will die! I will
 die first! Ah, Adje! Why
 didn't you resist death...? I
 must avenge your death! (p.
 34).

The dialogue above shows that the people of Egbo Quarters are repressed by the avaricious leaders whose sole interest is to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. Ovwata and Ophu represent the anger and dissatisfaction of the oppressed people of Egbo Quarters, which snowballs to a revolution. Egbo Quarters is used to represent the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria that has been despoiled by the activities of the oil multinationals that connive with the Federal Government to exploit the people. Like the Niger Delta region, the people of Egbo Quarters are subjected to oppression and deprivation. It is the quest for liberation that engendered the Marxist ideas of Ovwata in the play. The recruitment of Ophu, Ovwata's nephew to fight the oppressors shows that the people of the Niger Delta region can only redeem themselves if the older generation collaborates with the youth to fight for the liberation of the plundered landscape and people of the region. Their commitment to put an end to oppression is seen in Ovwata's statement below:

OWWATA:..... We must
 weed off the hands of
 oppression. Nobody should
 laugh at the pace of the

tortoise until nightfall. I'm waiting for you, my son. It's not only the dog that arrives at its destination even the snail does arrive at its destination. (p. 38).

Ovwata's struggle to put an end to the exploitation and dispossession of the people of Egbo Quarters makes him an enemy of the community by the plundering leaders whose only concern is to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. Chief Shenye, the representative of the people of Egbo Quarters in Okugbe Community congress, is a good example of such enemies of the Niger Delta region satirized by the playwright. Shenye is used by the playwright to mock the various hypocrites of the Niger Delta region who betray the collective interest of the subjugated natives of the region. The following dialogue between Shenye and Oteri reveals how they betray the collective interest of the people for personal interest.

CHIEF SHENYE: ...The Chairman has sent a message to you.

OTERI: (*Fear-faced*) Eh! What is it this time? I carried out his instructions as directed. It's Ovwata...I have never questioned the Chairman's order. You know...

CHIEF SHENYE: Far from it. (*Hands him an envelope.*) This is for you. A gift from our Chairman (p. 40).

Ovwata's radical posture offers hope to the repressed people of the region. The character of Ovwata stimulates some air of confidence and courage as it applies to the Niger Delta region. Ovwata whose name means 'purity' or 'righteous' symbolizes the kind of leadership that is needed to redeem the oppressed majority in the Niger Delta

region and elsewhere. The fact that Ophu joins the struggle to end oppression underscores the need for the younger elite in the quest to liberate the people of the Niger delta region of Nigeria from an obviously repressive politics. Ophu conveys his disenchantment over the repressive politics that gave rise to the revolution in the play:

OPHU: (*Shakes his head*)

The paradox of the wealth
and poverty of our quarter is
a deadly paradox.

CHIEF SHENYE: What is
paradox?

OPHU: A quarter from
which comes the lion's share
of the wealth of a
community also has the
lion's share of poverty in the
community. What a
paradox!

CHIEF SHENYE: He is
talking like Ovwata, your
brother. This is dangerous,
Oteri. (p. 57).

Ophu attests to the revolutionary spirit and commitments of Ovwata:

OPHU: (...) Ovwata, a
revolutionary patriot, a man
of deep convictions about
the value of human life with
equality and dignity for all
men and women. Ovwata,
my father... (p. 44).

Ophu's utterance about Ovwata, as shown in the extract above reveals what inspires him about the struggle. Ophu is convinced about the sincerity of Ovwata as a revolutionary character that is determined to liberate the people of Egbo Quarters. When Ovwata

confronts the Chairman, the reader witnesses his bravery and commitment to liberating the people. The Chairman and the Chiefs dread the appearance of Ovwata. The following dialogue greatly certifies this:

OWWATA: Look at them.
The thieves of the people's
mandate! So you don't want
to die...yet you kill our
people every day. They die
of hunger, diseases and even
murder. All arising from the
activities of the oil...

CHAIRMAN: I have sent
the Guards to tell you that
I'm not in any trouble with
you...

ELDER: At all! (p. 58).

As shown throughout the play, Ovwata's courage and selflessness are perceptible, and offer renewed hope to the people of the Egbo Quarters

OWWATA: ... You know the
reason I fight. Even the
widest river has a source. I'm
fighting to uproot your
atrocities from our land. A
cricket is not blinded by the
sand of its burrowing. I'm
fighting to upturn the filthy
table of the reign of terrors...
(p. 58).

The repression and hostilities manifested by the Chairman are checkmated by Ovwata and Ophu. Ovwata, like Ophu, appeals to us as a selfless, self-sacrificing individual. He craves the general wellbeing of his people and ignores personal interest or profit. The Chairman boasts to Shenye, the representative of Egbo Quarters, of his plan to kill everybody that opposes him:

CHAIRMAN: Tell them 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. You better make yourself popular before the people if you are willing to retain your position. You must bribe some smart youths to be on your side. If you eat alone and sabotage my government, I shall send you to an early grave. (p. 62).

Ovwata is a victim of the Chairman's political assassination. The Chairman's Guards kill his mother, wife and son, Adje, a fresh graduate from the university. Despite these moments of anguish, Ovwata stands sturdily to fight the repression and injustice which the Chairman subjects the people of Egbo Quarters to.

FIRST GUARD: We kill to celebrate!

ALL: Na our job.

FIRST GUARD: Abi? Abi?

ALL: Na our job.

CHAIRMAN: Stop there! You babblers, bunch of disappointment! I did not bring you to this mansion to drink, eat and sleep. Your job is to sniff life off my enemies...my rivals, my antagonists, my competitors...but here you are raising meaningless chants of your coward

selves. Where is the head of
Ovwata? (p. 15)

Ovwata, as a revolutionary patriot, stands firmly to oppose the injustice thereby putting his own life and that of his immediate family at risk. To Crier, Oteri and Shenye, by fighting the injustice meted to the people, Ovwata has brought problems to the people of Egbo Quarters. Ovwata's elder brother, Oteri, shares this notion in the following extract:

OTERI: Ovwata, you want to kill me, your brother. You want to wipe away the entire village, our children, and our wives. Ovwata! Ovwata! (p. 28).

Hiding the oil by the war god of the people— Ivwri and Egbesu makes a great statement about the Niger Delta realities. For instance, as soon as the Chairman discovers that there is no more oil in Egbo Quarters, he grants them autonomy to run as an independent community. When he later realizes that the oil still flows in Egbo Quarters, he fights to redominate the people but he fails eventually. Though Ovwata dies at the end, the statement has been made on the imperative steps to be taken to redeem the people of the Niger Delta from the politics of oppression and dispossession.

The arrest and eventual death of Ovwata did not stall the movement. Ophu takes over the struggle as the leader of the new Urhukpe Community, which evolved from Egbo Quarters. This signals the agitation for resource control and total autonomy in the Niger Delta region. The brutal killing of Chief Shenye by the youths of Egbo Quarters underscores the fact that the people are tired of oppression and collectively stand for resistance. For the people to liberate themselves, they have to stand sturdily and fight oppression. The people's triumph in Ophu's declaration at the end of the play:

OPHU: (*Abruptly*) Stop!
We shall not weep, lest our
leader be sorrowful. No

more sorrow...! We shall
 celebrate him forever!
 Sorrows, pains, poverty,
 alienation, futile struggle
 have left us. Ovwata was
 born to die that we may have
 a meaningful existence. We
 all must nurse a trait of
 Ovwata in us. In that case,
 nobody will rise too high
 above his neighbour.
 Greatness! The leeches have
 left the pond. Mothers, your
 womb will no more be open
 to leeches of destiny!
 Ovwata is a saviour. Ovwata
 is in all of us but we keep on
 crucifying him. In fear we
 dance with evil (p. 97).

Stephen Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches*, therefore, recreates the prevailing experiences in the Niger Delta region, especially the repression and protest movements, aimed at redeeming the people and region. In his dramatic enactment of the Niger Delta condition, Kekeghe presents a purely radical perspective which he offers as the sole alternative to stem the injustice that pervades the Niger Delta region.

Conclusion

The choice of the plays selected for this study is borne out of the expediency of unveiling the revolutionary fervour in the Niger Delta Region. The plays have aroused in the reader an idea of the issues in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria. From a critical discussion of Stephen Kekeghe's *Pond of Leeches* and Peter Omoko's *Majestic Revolt*, the socio-economic and political realities in the Niger Delta are brought to the fore. The study shows that as a way of responding to social realities, Niger Delta playwrights engage in literary re-creation of the Niger Delta condition by exploring the various conflicts and agitations for freedom in the society. The exploration of the Niger Delta experiences in the plays under study, attest to the fact that drama is an imitation of human experiences. From

British colonial rule to indigenous dominators, the Niger Delta region, as reflected in the examined plays has been a troubled region of manifold conflicts and socio-political and economic upheavals. The study shows how the oppressed people of the Niger Delta region through revolution or protest expressed disapproval of injustice and how they embarked on radical quest for freedom. The analyses of the text reveal how the domination of the natives of the oil-rich Delta continues to inspire protest movements.

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