

Chapter Twenty

CRUDE OIL, A BLESSING AND IMPEDIMENT IN NIGER DELTA POLITY: TANURE OJAIDE'S *THE ACTIVIST*

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Abstract

Oil has constituted a physical problem to Delta State and Nigeria as a whole. It is a serious impediment to survival among the indigenes of Niger Delta area. It has constituted nuisance which inhibits economic growth and endangers lives and property. It annuls indigenous participation in oil excavations to assure survival and national development. Oil has turned a tool of colonialism and neo-colonialism to the detriment of the Delta indigenes. This paper verifies oil as impediment in Delta of Nigeria; Economic growth constraints, socio-political problems and Neo-colonialism; and finally, verifies modes of tackling the problem of oil in Delta State of Nigeria. The conclusion summarizes the problem of oil in Delta State and proffers solutions to them.

Introduction

Niger Delta area is an oil-rich region bedeviled by problems emanating basically from oil exploration and government's neglect of the people of the area. Such negligence informs the socio-economic situation adversely affecting the people. The poor management of crude oil in Nigeria results in a lot of tension, riots, revolts and even seizure of oil wells and other forms of disturbances. Oil is the main cause of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta area. Such characteristic situation of the people as will be found below; form the focus of the works of many literary writers, environmentalists and Journalists. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in her inaugural lecture, "Artistic Creativity: Literature in the Service of Society" *Inaugural Lecture*, states that "all over the world, writers are imbued with a passion to change and redirect their societies..." (20).

Crude oil in Delta state is a blessing to the Nigerian nation and oil multinationals that enrich them by tapping the natural resources of the state. It is an impediment to the people because of the multifarious problems that accrue from its handling. Such problems are environmental degradation caused by oil spillage, gas flaring and fire disasters; low agricultural returns; poverty and unemployment. All these culminate in high cost of living in Niger Delta region. There is also youth restiveness and militancy. Ordinarily, the discoveries of oil in Olobiri in 1958 could have given succor to the people of Niger Delta area instead of untold hardship.

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Natural gas flows together with crude oil but the interest of the government and the oil companies lay in oil alone hence the gas flaring to separate natural gas from crude oil rather than converting it to fuel or raw material. This paper therefore explores such blessing and impediment from three perspectives: oil as impediment in Delta state; economic growth constraints, socio-political problems and neocolonialism; and modes of tackling the problem of oil in Niger Delta. Tracing the location and history of Niger Delta area, Udeme Ekpo in "The Niger Delta and Oil Politics," states that "the Niger Delta comprises about 1,600 communities in nine states namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers..." (Ekpo 1) But the focus of this study is the present Delta state of Nigeria.

Oil as Impediment in Niger Delta

The Delta people were content with farming, fishing, and other activities ever before oil is discovered. With the discovery of oil the peaceful atmosphere of the region becomes disrupted. This new trend of events is summarized by Ekpo who states that "for the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta...oil has been more of a curse than a blessing...where oil exploration and production are carried out onshore, deforestation, erosion and destroyed farmlands are the main signposts for this gift of nature. Oil production in these communities have polluted creeks and destroyed aquatic life...when there are spillages, losses could be unquantifiable." (Ekpo 39)

The 1970s Nigeria witnessed oil boom which turns out to be a disaster to people of Delta state. The quota system of the federal government favoured other states with majority count in the census leaving the minority in abject poverty. Ojaide states that "the oil boom turned into doom for the Delta people. The proceeds from oil went to Lagos to build a festival town for the black peoples of the world to celebrate their culture and arts and also to construct unending bridges to connect water-separated parts of the teeming city. Other oil gains also went to build an entire new capital on rocks in the windy and dusty savannah." (Ojaide 2006, 48) The indigenes suffered untold hardship as farming becomes a thing of the past due to oil pollution. Farming being their main source of livelihood, being adversely affected by pollution, threw the entire society in disarray. Parents could no longer feed their children not to talk of offering them basic education. Unemployment became more serious as farmers and fishermen forcefully disengage from their occupations due to oil pollution of the farm land and even water. Their lives become doomed and yet money flows from their natural resources to the federal government of Nigeria, diverse multinationals and inland states. Secondary school graduates could not get jobs, places of abode of Boma lacked social amenities, and government does not care about all these problems.

The military government operated quota system which favoured only the areas with large population in census count not minding whether they inflated their numbers by counting the animals they have. Ojaide summarizes the untold hardship suffered by the indigenes of Delta state and the reverse luxury in Nigeria thus, “since they had population advantage, the people of those states enjoyed the oil prosperity at the expense of the hard-toiling farmers and fishermen and women whose lands, waters and air were polluted by oil slicks, blowouts, and permanent flares that made hell a daily experience of the Niger Delta people.” (Ojaide 49)

Ojaide portrays the deplorable situation in Niger Delta area caused by the wrong manipulation of their natural resource blessing from God, the crude oil, as emotional and psychological problems. It has entered the psyche of the Activist that photographs of poverty-stricken situations gingers him into action. He decorated the walls of his bedroom with pictures of destitute, starving children, raped and battered women and cases of pollution. This is an indication that crime has taken over the society due to the economic situation of Delta state of Nigeria. While more money accrues to the government’s purse through oil, the indigenes are confronted with a lot of problems ranging from lose of agriculture to keeping them poverty stricken. The Activist “returned to witness the wake of destructive hurricane as far as the environment was concerned.” (Ojaide 45)

There were remarkable changes in the lives of the people of Niger Delta area due to the economic constraints caused by oil exploits. Most girls turn into club girls for their subsistence. They sleep with the sailors thereby turning into prostitutes. Kaine Agary in her novel titled *Yellow Yellow*, equally captures the pains and predicament of the Niger Delta people which also portrayed oil as impediment to the well being of the people. This, she recounts in the words of Zilayefa, “...one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village, broke and spilled over several hectares of land, my mother’s farmland included.” (Agary 3)

Considering the quantity of natural resources, oil in particular in Niger Delta area, Peter Ekeh in *History of the Urhobo People of the Niger Delta* comments that “petroleum produced almost entirely in the Niger Delta area is the most impoverished in the country and its people are amongst the very poorest on earth.” (Ekeh 635) Their God-given blessing rather turns to be more of a blessing to others than the Niger Delta indigenes as the multinational oil companies concentrate on the employment of non-Delta indigenes. The Niger Delta indigenes die of severe austerity measures. This embittered the area boys who were the worshippers of Egba, the god of war, revenge, and restitution as according to Ojaide, they vowed to “die to wrest a few naira from the outsiders.”(Ojaide 49)

The area boys took laws into their hands as poverty, neglect, and deprivations of the people of Niger Delta area amidst plenty increase at alarming rate. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* opines that "...the greatest wealth is surrounded by the greatest poverty." (Fanon 138) This summarizes the situation of the indigenes of that region. Ojaide equally summarizes the entire situation and actions of the area boys in this way,

The poor economic situation promoted armed robbery. The area boys were not mindless robbers but hardened locals who felt they had to share in whatever they could from the economic life of their communities. They were jobless urchins, capable of robbing, killing, and doing any type of dastardly act for pay to survive the hard times. Their morality and ethics were convoluted by the socio-economic dictates of the time but they knew very well the experience of survival. Call it hustling, harassment, blackmail, or extortion, they were ready to take on the outsider to eke out a living. (Ojaide 49).

The actions of these youths in the violent confrontation of the oil companies drew the attention of both local and international bodies to the plight of the people of Niger Delta. As presented by Ojaide, violence took over the land as the area boys "swore to avenge or take back whatever had been robbed from them. The kidnapping of the expatriates working in the oil companies was a major preoccupation of the area boys. They built up personal wealth from the proceeds of ransoms, which the companies paid secretly even though they publicly denied dealing with armed gangs and terrorists."(Ojaide 50)

The reverse becomes the case in lives of the Delta state indigenes. The expected development turns to underdevelopment as once self-reliant people in agricultural products become liabilities to their children in big cities. It is no longer a question of visiting the village and going with food items like garri, yams, plantain and so on as presented by Ojaide, "...all of a sudden his people had become recipients from their own children in the cities because there was no way of generating enough money to live on their rural homes. And the worst part of it all; they could no longer produce food to feed their families." (Ojaide 124) Chief Ishaka's concept of development as different from that of the rest of the chiefs is that "development means using modern tools to farm and fish more efficiently for a good harvest and catch respectively. Development meant modern ways of storing and preserving excess yams and fish for a season of need."(Ojaide 152) Despite this agricultural aspect, Chief Tobi Ishaka's desire is the tarring of the local roads, and construction of drainage system.

The outcome of the economic situation in Delta area is incessant death. Such deaths are with numerous causes and by and large are not all that natural. Ojaide recounts such incidents in this way, "people die as much as from food they eat as from not having food to eat. Water saves and kills. The doors through which death enters to seize its victims could be strange and fantastic. Where there are doors, death now creates its own doors to enter wherever it likes to inflict its fatal blows..." (Ojaide 128) The hijacking of the natural resources and its proceeds by the federal government of Nigeria and the multinational oil companies engendered a lot of problems / businesses in disguise in Delta. Apart from stealing and prostitution, bunkering became a lucrative business and a quick access to wealth. They adopt the easiest and fastest way of surviving having suffered poverty much. They decided to give hope to their hopeless future and Nigeria's political system makes it easier for them to achieve their objective. Corruption portrays the Nigerian forces as represented by the police or soldiers as allies to crime. As explained in the paper titled "Military: Nigeria-Niger Delta," "the Niger Delta is an unstable area of Nigeria, and inter-ethnic clashes are common- often access to oil revenue is the trigger for violence. Pipelines are regularly vandalized by impoverished resident who risk their lives to siphon off fuel." (Ojaide 1)

Ojaide's character, Owumi, gives clues to bunkering and ascertains the nature of the Nigeria's force. "It's God's blessing and way is open for those who see it to follow...Police and soja no be Nigerians...You don see goat dey guard cassava leaves? Or you don see pigeon dey guard corn...Many of the rich and notable people in the area were involved in bunkering. It worked like a secret society in which only those involved knew each other."(Ojaide 135) Such highly placed indigenes who took part in bunkering business are Chief Young Kpeke, Chief Goodluck Ede, many top military officers, e.g. "the head of the military junta was himself a bunkering chieftain...Many of the generals had their own tankers taking crude oil to the spot market in Rotterdam. Others tapped refined oil and shipped loot to neighboring poor countries to sell."(Ojaide 136) This is an indication that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerians. Again, it is a confirmation of Chinua Achebe's claim in *The Trouble with Nigeria* that the trouble with Nigeria is nothing but bad leadership. Many of the generals became multimillionaires. Ojaide portrays bunkering as a normal business, a means of survival since the indigenes were denied access to the natural resources and agriculture which is their means of livelihood.

But, the painful aspect of bunkering is the dominance of the Nigerian military in the business. Ojaide explains that "to be a favoured general in the Nigerian Army was to be a bunkering chief and a multimillionaire! With the commander- in -chief and his officers involved in bunkering..." (Ojaide 136-137) Further injustices were perpetrated on the people of Niger Delta area which depict cause of the disillusionment among most Nigerians in the neocolonial era, a shattered hope of high expectation. Ojaide again points out that "a military

decree is an instrument of coercion, exploitation, and oppression and so is invalid whatever Land Use Decree that was promulgated to seize lands from owners...What was done by force by its very nature, was illegal and unjust. The oil companies and the military junta did not consult the owners of the land over their oil prospecting activities.”(Ojaide 138) Niger Delta is blessed with natural resources so why should people be wretched? Who owns the land, Niger Delta indigenes or Nigeria and does it mean that the owners of the land have no right over their possession? These are the questions asked by many whose answers could not be provided so that injustice will not die a natural death. Ojaide states that, “wealth was there in Niger Delta; it was there on their farmlands and even in their backyards. Wealth was not gold in the mouth of a python at the unattainable rainbows end.”(Ojaide 138) No matter how strict the security agents are, there must be a way out for the indigenes who continuously yawn for means of survival. The reality as stated by Ojaide is that “the nation’s entire army and police force could not monitor the so many pipelines that crisscrossed the forests, villages and roads in the area. All the planes of the foreign retired marines and mercenaries would not be able to see through the natural green canopy that the forest provided the Niger Delta people.” (Ojaide 139)

On the contrary, the guards are not too much kin about guarding national wealth knowing the activities of their superior officers. They too want to improve their living conditions. They therefore prefer fat tips from civilians in bunkering business than guarding the pipes strictly. To the Activist, bunkering is just a weapon against the outsiders that rob and destroy the people of Niger Delta area. Hence, he goes into partnership with Pere and formed the Delta Cartel, a name chosen “to spite the multinational oil companies and to mimic the powerful OPEC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.”(Ojaide 141)

Economic Growth Constraints, Socio-Political Problems and Neo-Colonialism

Oil in Niger Delta has generated a lot of debates, economic growth constraints, and political problems that the state is now seen as unsettled area. It has become a place of both national and international focus due to the impediment of crude oil on the lives and properties of the masses therein. Oil, which ordinarily could have formed as source of blessing to Niger Delta, has created a negative impact on the society due to the greediness of Nigerian government and oil multinational companies. Ojaide raised a lot of economic and socio-political problems caused by oil in Niger Delta in his novel, *The Activist*. Some of these problems are exploitation and hijacking of people’s natural resources to the detriment of the original owner. The exploiters’ actions generate a lot of protest both nationally and internationally as portrayed by Ojaide. “He had flown to Europe several times on chartered flights to carry placards against Bell Oil International and Group of seven over debt relief for third world

countries. He saw World Bank and the International Monetary Funds as exploiters of developing countries.” (Ojaide 16)

Ojaide presents the worst problem of oil in the Delta state of Nigeria which caused the people much pain to the extent that some of the surviving ones took refuge in other places even outside Nigeria; “...because of the massacre of his people by soldiers and mobile police working at the behest of the military government and the major oil company. The two parties colluded to wipe out his village because his people had dared to bring in foreign journalists to document the degree of their exploitation and the pollution of their environment.” (Ojaide 19–20) The atrocities emanating from the presence of oil and exploits both within and outside Delta region has become an issue of public concern. Such ill-fated situation at times becomes a blessing in disguise especially when foreigners intervene as the help rendered by the American ambassador in the novel. The implication of mishandling of crude oil in Delta state is the migration of many indigenes to foreign countries and the condition of some of them is a sympathetic one. As rightly put by Ojaide, “they bore the taunts of the low and the high”. (Ojaide 22) Most of these immigrants don’t actually like being away from home. They itch to come home just as the Activist took a decision to come back to Nigeria to teach. “No, I like being here at home. No place is sweeter than home...” (Ojaide 29) However, suffering and other socio-political and economic problems make some to desire to go abroad. The point Ojaide stresses in his comparison of America and home is that experience is the best teacher.

Delta region has been of great importance in the annals of history due to its production of palm oil. It had been called “the Oil Protectorate” (Ojaide 44) but the new oil, petroleum, had drastically diminished the economic importance of the once invaluable palm tree that the Action Group Party had chosen...” (Ojaide 44) Oil has been of great economic importance but not to the full benefit of the Niger Delta indigenes. Ojaide’s summary of this is that

Nigerian’s oil production had risen from about four hundred thousand to more than two million barrels a day, and the country had joined the organization of oil producing and exporting countries and had remains ranked sixth among them. Bell Oil and the other Oil companies had been given a freehand by the military rulers to do all it took to continue increasing production. While that meant more money in the government’s coffers to sustain the dictatorship, it also meant total disregard of the Niger Delta people and their environment.” (Ojaide 45)

In spite of such tremendous money made from oil, the situation of the Delta people turns to a deplorable one as the days go by. Rather than witnessing a significant economic growth and

better life, it develops a new face which Ojaide describes as “an ugly or rather sick face that was different from the pristine one he used to know, the signs were already there before they left, but the disfiguration then was a child’s play compared to now. He returned to witness the wake of a destructive hurricane as far as the environment was concerned.” (Ojaide 45) The economic austere measures were so much that the Boma boys transformed into area boys. All forms of entertainment were killed as cinema houses closed down due to lack of resources to maintain them.

The government and the oil companies were nonchalant to the plight of the Delta people. They focus on milking them of their resources. They even embark on massive employment of people outside the natives thus enriching others and subjugating the indigenes to abject poverty. Ojaide portrays the disheartening nature of the government and oil multinationals, their avariciousness and inhumanity, to the Delta people which embittered the area boys. The outcry of the indigenes as well as writings from literary writers, Journalists and even the attraction of other nations to the problem of the oil state were regarded as the ranting of ants by the Nigerian government and the oil companies. The government and the oil corporations brought in people from other states to fill the jobs in the industry that was destroying not only their environment but also their sources of livelihood.

The neocolonialist Nigeria still depicts those things abhorred in colonialism such as the show of superiority, economic exploitation, betrayal and coalition with the whites. The Nigerian leadership is a replica of that of the colonists being so self-centered with little or no interest in the predicaments of the masses. This is the situation of Niger Delta indigenes who under the auspices of the various leadership groups, ranging from military to civilian, have suffered untold hardship. Ojaide exposes this as

That multinational oil company brandishing its yellow flame logo covered the entire Niger Delta area in its operations and was blamed for the oil spillage, blowouts, and gas flares. To the area boys, bell Oil Company stole their wealth to develop its owner’s countries overseas and left them impoverished...They realized that some how America had joined hands with their local enemies the oil companies and the military government, whose activities destroyed the people and their environment by spreading fire all over the oil –producing region. (Ojaide 68 – 69)

Any action taken by the foreign oil companies is a well calculated and their benefit oriented one as can be seen in the case of “a community development officer.” (Ojaide 68) The main daily duty of such officer is to liaise between the oil company and the local community and suggest and implement ways of “developing” the area.” (Ojaide 68) Again, the problem of

neocolonialist Africa reared its ugly head up. Greed, bribery and corruption dominate the life of the leaders and they betray their people.

This problem of leadership has become a canker that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian nation. There has been a lot of outcry on this very issue by several writers. Achebe in *The Trouble with Nigeria* for instance, states that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership... The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.” (Achebe 1) Most Nigerian leaders have always allowed themselves to be used to the detriment of their people and for their own self-aggrandizement. This is the case with the oil company’s public relations officers in Niger Delta area who play one-sided role through the press.

Amidst corruption, there is always an exception. Ojaide portrays this through the character of Chief Tobi Ishaka who is unique. As Ojaide rightly put it, “Tobi Ishaka was an exceptional chief...he was not tainted by oil and blood money. He refused to share in the big payoff envelopes that the oil companies frequently sent to the monarch and his chiefs. The tall chiefs, often compare to the slim Onoge palm tree, railed at his fellow chiefs who saw truth and deliberately by passed it to embrace lies.” (Ojaide 123) Quest for materialism has turned most Nigerians, especially leaders into irrational thinkers. They prefer magnificent houses, expensive cars, and luxurious living to the welfare of their people. The knowledge of such inordinate desires by Africans generally gives the foreigners especially whites the clue of how to handle them at every situation. Chief Tobi Ishaka’s distinctive role of calling the chiefs to order shows the role of the chiefs in Nigerian communities, “when have elders become afraid of telling the truth? The white robe of chieftaincy and the coral beads we wear set us apart. But we seem not to know our responsibilities. We are supposed to be the clean ones, but I am afraid we even stink. We secretly eat forbidden foods and wipe our mouths; we cannot deceive our ancestors and they will surely not forgive us.”(Ojaide 123– 124) Having weighed the pros and cons of the activities of the oil companies, he concludes that “Oil brought wealth, but how are we better off without farming, fishing and hunting that are” no longer viable?” (Ojaide 124)

Modes of Tackling the Problem of Oil in Niger Delta

There are several ways of tackling the problem of oil on Delta state. Some of these are tactful handling of the issues affecting the people by the Federal government of Nigeria and the oil companies operating in the area. Gas can be used as fuel rather than burning off more than 80% of it (flaring). It can also be used as cooking gas so as to reduce the cost and make it affordable for the average man in the society. Ojaide outlines the modes of handling the problem of oil in the state. He states that what the indigenes want is “a formal share to

develop their area, and compensate the people for their occupations destroyed by the oil-prospecting activities. They also wanted the oil companies to return as fraction of their profit to restore the environment that had been devastated by various forms of pollution.”(Ojaide 70) This is very simple and straightforward demands that can easily be adopted but due to the hidden motives of both the government and the multinationals, they could not.

Ojaide proffers sincerity in all purpose, straightforwardness and dedication as solutions to the problems of Delta people. To him, unity and identification with one’s community is very important. Again, trust is a serious weapon in handling the predicament of his people because it is only when that is present that unity can be achieved. He also proffers selfless leadership as solution to the problem of Niger Delta region. The area boys do not trust anyone not to talk of one from academic realm and America as the Activist. This simply means that education is not a barrier to corruption. Thus, “in their struggle against multinational companies and the federal government for “sovereignty”, the area boys did not trust every homeboy. People have to prove themselves, and they watched every step the Activists took, as they thought he also watched them.”(Ojaide 71)

Pere indulges in several crimes before achieving the headship of the area boys. “To come to his position, he had kidnapped five white expatriates, and the heavy ransom gained through secret negotiations had enriched him and his group...The struggle to him was to be allowed to live, Outsiders were not allowing him and his people to live...” (Ojaide 72) Most Nigerians explore whatever situation they find themselves in as far as survival is concerned. Uzezi in “*The Activist* by Tanure Ojaide,” describes the major characters in the novel through Professor Losambe who states that “the Activist, a cosmopolitan and radical scholar; Ebi, a staunch environmentalist and womanist, and Pere, a carnivalesque agent of change and representative of the down-trodden in Niger Delta society.” (Uzezi 2)

Creating job opportunities for Niger Delta people who are within working age and are so willing to work too could have gone a long way to help them. Virtually everything that is left for sustenance of life in that region is destroyed. Ojaide recounts the suffering of the people of Delta.

His people needed the fish that that had sustained them from the beginning of time, So also did they need the farmlands to cultivate cassava, yams and other subsistence crops to live on! They also had to grow much needed vegetables...oil slicks, blow outs, and gas flares had destroyed that life, Even the rain that fell was so sooth-black that no more did anybody drink rain water, which of all waters, used to be described as God-given water. The people had lost their green refuge as well. Their forests used to have deep green and lush foliage, the pride of the tropics, but that had changed, since fires often followed and gas accidents. (Ojaide 78)

The above listed problems require government's immediate intervention and proper construction of pipelines to ensure that they don't burst. It requires partnership involvement of the Delta indigenes in the oil operation so that they too will guard the oil jealously as their own property. That sense of belonging should be inculcated in them. In fact, the indigenes should dominate the working group in the oil companies. Bunkering is not the final solution to the problem of the Delta because it involves high risk. The nature of the problems is such that demand high intelligence, proper planning and long term preparation. As explained by Ojaide, "...the federal military government has already sold the rights for prospecting oil on our land to foreigners. They call it oil-prospecting concession." (Ojaide 162) Even the majority of Nigerians ganged up against the minority to milk the proceeds from their oil which form "ninety-five percent of the nation's revenue." (Ojaide 160) The chiefs of the Delta state don't help matters. Most of them are so self-centered and greedy that they sell their right for material wealth. For instance, Ojaide states that "once they brought money, there was no way of persuading the chiefs that they were being bribed to deprive their people of economic progress. Those chiefs would forsake their ancestors and people to follow the oil companies for their money." (Ojaide 161) On leadership, Achebe states that Nigerians have "misguided leaders...leaders ought to be a group of educated people moved with great passion. The danger and destruction which you see in Africa which has so much human, material and spiritual resources, is as a result of misguided leaders." (Achebe 28)

Ojaide proffers so many solutions to the problems of Delta people with practical illustrations through Tobi Ishaka and his son, Dennis. He first of all presents quest for self-actualization through proper business acumen and hard work as a solution to the regional problems. His presentation of Tobi Ishaka and his businesses is a clue to readers and the entire public who might be facing similar problems. Tobi Ishaka commenced with buying and selling of palm kernels and palm oil to bigger Nigerian traders who in turn sold to European exporters. From there he graduated into rubber business, buying and selling rubber sheets. Then, rubber was the major raw material in the world market. He worked hard to earn a modest wealth. To Ojaide, other people especially chiefs can follow his example rather being buried in corruption.

Again, when Tobi Ishaka's hope got dampened and the expected transformation of his rural place into a city failed when he could not have access to the oil in his farmland and family's land, he commenced a long term plan of solving the problem. His best bet this time is to embark on education of his children so that they will not just have good jobs, but penetrate the oil companies in which "he saw outsiders occupying all the key positions in the oil companies, while most of their children remained unemployed." (Ojaide 160) His success in training Dennis who eventually graduated with first class honors degree in Petroleum Engineering from University of Lagos got a senior staff job with the oil company through Mr

Van Hoortsaid whom his father approached, is an indication that if other indigenes work hard, they will achieve success too.

The act of the federal government in the oil-prospecting concession is another problem. Yet, there is solution to this which again demands tact and wisdom to get the federal government to revoke or reassign those concessions. According to Dennis, “by the land use decree and the many concessions already sold out, what’s in our land has been taken from us and is no longer ours to take back even if we knew how to.”(Ojaide 162) For this, Ojaide proffers change as solution. He states that “the world does not stand still, and soldiers will come and go. Things must change and it is my hope that the world ahead will change to bring into our hands our own destiny.” (Ojaide 162-163) What then will engender this change if not through careful planning, education and hard work? A very viable and possible solution creeps up out of these and that is “the penetration of the oil industry as a major way of wresting the stolen fortune back into our community’s hands.” (Ojaide 163) Education becomes an empowering factor for self-defense in the face of cruelty and wickedness meted on the people by the oil companies. Their inhuman feeling for the Niger Delta people through the experience of the people of Roko village when they lost all they have to fire and become refugees, and the inhuman nature of the development officer, Professor Tobore Ede, which cost him his life.

There are easy ways of tackling these problems to avert loss of lives and property. Proper construction and maintenance of pipelines and diverting them from people’s abode could have been a better option to maintain peace. Again, every good leader should be a good listener to the complaint of the masses. Since one cannot rule out accident where crude oil is present, there should be well-built and equipped fire service and instant intervention in cases of fire outbreak. Where it is very inevitable and the fire causes damage, there should be dialogue and immediate compensation of the victims of fire outbreak. In any case of intended demonstration, there should be proper dialogue and solution to the contending issues demonstrated.

The establishment and creation of new offices to replace the old ones as in community development office and community liaising office (CLO) is not the solution to the problem of Delta. Employment of people like Retired Colonel Dudu will not help either. He offered tea to the delegates from Roko village in place of shelter which they needed most. The Activist monitors the life of his people. He “was acting against poisonous methane gas from gas flares, leaking old oil pipes, blowouts, and spillages in the area that had rendered the evergreen wetlands poisoned; the wildlife dead, the aquatic life also dead, and humans in these areas suffering from undiagnosed diseases.” (Ojaide 205) He mingles with different

categories of people, even area boys just to find a way of tackling the problems of the region. “Academics become a mode of expression and reconstruction. At a stage, the military eroded academic freedom and asked the university authority to stop its academics and students from unnecessary interference in the strategic economic resources of the country” (Ojaide 205). Instead of the oil companies to spy as the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUNU), they should withdraw from the oil state for those who know the community very well to handle the oil issue.

The introduction of contract work by the oil company is not a permanent solution to the problem. Employment of various categories of workers as indigenes is the best. At least, “by virtue of being Bell Oil Company workers, they were heavily paid; the poultry attendant earned more money than a junior lecturer in the university.” (Ojaide 209) The problem of Delta escalated to the extent that the women took the bull by the horn. Mrs Timi Taylor started a reconciliation move and invited Ebi and some other women from Warri: “women farmers, fishers, traders, priestesses, chiefs, lawyers, lecturers, doctors and women of other occupations that the organization could think of were summoned.”(Ojaide 218) Peace talk and unity work like magic in situations like this. The executive members of the women of the Delta Forum (WODEFOR) were Mrs Timi Taylor as president and Ebi Emasheyi as the secretary.

Awareness is also a very vital need of the Delta people. People need to be conversant of thing going on around them. Again, through media people can be sensitized. The Activist therefore invents a newspaper named *The Patriot* whose motto was “justice and humanity for the people.”(269). *The Patriot* covers important events in “Port Harcourt, Bori, Nembe, Bonny, Yenagoa, Oleh, Ughelli, Sapele, Unutu, Ogwashi-Uku, and Warri.”(Ojaide 268)

Conclusion

Oil as a natural resource in Delta state of Nigeria has been a source of diverse problems to the indigenes, the nation and the world as a whole. Such problems are socially, economically, politically, and even culturally based. Crude oil is a blessing and impediment to the growth and development of Delta people. The problems which are mostly generated by wrong policies have caused a lot of innocent souls their lives. This therefore calls for immediate revision of certain obnoxious policies because Onosode in *Environment Issues and Challenges of the Niger Delta* emphasizes that “without environmental policies, development will be undermined and that failing to take the cost of environmental degradation and social injustice into account will ultimately turn commercial performance and profitability on its head.” (Onosode 65)

Human beings move to seek solution rather than waiting endlessly for it and all perish. If the indigenes are guilty of bunkering, then the government and the oil multinationals that tap their natural resources, pollute the entire area, make the land infertile, and yet fell to cater for the indigenes of Delta, are also guilty. Water that is meant to give life gives death in return due to pollution. The scourge of hunger, poverty and death set the ball rolling for quest for survival among the people. No wonder Ojaide describes bunkering as “a semi-official lucrative business...” (Ojaide 137)

The Delta indigenes qualified to handle issues concerning crude oil should be given access to it. It is long time Nigeria waved off the slavery of colonialism and be herself. The oil producing states should be entitled to a reasonable percentage of the money that accrues from oil being the direct recipient of the oil spillage, soil infertility for agriculture, pollution and other numerous problems of the same sort.

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Historically, 1958 may have proven momentous to the flourishing of the arts in Nigeria given many concomitant developments in this regard.