

Nigeria: Delta Oil Exploration Politics and the Portrayal of Brutal Impact in Yerima's *Hard Ground*

Uche-Chinemere NWAOUZU

Ifeanyichukwu ABADA

Emeka ANIAGO

Abstract: This study presents an interdisciplinary approach towards a critical analysis of some impacts of crude-oil exploration in Niger Delta and polemics of viable conflict resolution framework. This approach involves analysis of Ahmed Yerima's creative portrayal in *Hard Ground* which revolves around the variables activating conflicting emotional interests in matters concerning 'black gold' in Nigeria, and how these variables resonant in debates and demands for Nigeria's polity restructuring because of perceived resource mismanagement. More so, our scope includes an analytical attempt at illuminating elaborately our interpretation of the dimensions to the

loud and shrewd inclinations subsuming what some see as solution to the lingering conflict, and the suppositions explaining why others see the debates and demands on polity restructuring as dark convoluted ploys aimed at hidden agenda. Hence, through select theories of victimhood, this study attempts to elucidate on the variables propelling conflicting emotional interests about oil exploration in Niger Delta, by looking interpretively hard and deep on the perspectives, views and suppositions defining the ideologies and inclinations propelling them. In the end, this study notes that the disenchantments and troubles with Nigeria's polity framework and structure as it relates to oil exploration in Niger Delta are subsumed in *Hard Ground's* creative contribution as a means of assessing the points to the fault-lines that characterize the subsisting socio-political structure upon which Nigeria stands and wobbles.

Uche-Chinemere NWAOUZU

Department of Theatre & Film Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Ifeanyichukwu ABADA

Department of Political Science,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Emeka ANIAGO

Department of Theatre & Film Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria
Email: emekaaniago@gmail.com

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Introduction

How plausible is the assertion by very many scholars, human right activists and citizens that the socio-political structure and framework upon which Nigeria stands, makes her to wobble? Again, how factual is the claim that “one of the major topical concerns that have taken the centre stage in scholarly as well as pedestrian discourses in Nigeria in recent time is the apparent intractable web of Nigeria’s socio-political woes” and the “polemics of corruption and leadership failure” (Aniago, 2017, p. 25). Furthermore, is it rational and plausible to suggest that “Nigeria’s troubles are primarily beyond dumping of blame semantics solely on leadership failures due to sheer incapacity and corruption” and is it tenable to argue that “the troubles are essentially subsumed in entrenched culture of hypocrisy and lack of faith in Nigeria” (Aniago, 2017, p. 25). More so, to what extent do we align with Chinua Achebe’s supposition in his celebrated essay *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Wole Soyinka’s dense purviews in *Interventions V: Of Power* that leadership failure is the major variable keeping Nigeria in throes, orchestrating retrogressive, chaotic and deplorable parochial sentiments? (Ebiede, 2011; Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2012; Clark, 2016; Osuagwu & Olaifa, 2018). Finding from our review of several relevant literature indicates a preponderance and concordance of suppositions and perspectives, in support of the hypothesis that sociology of living life, which includes the twists and turns which propels progress, conflict and pain are realities that emerge majorly because of people’s capacity and approaches to management of resource in response to subsisting and projected circumstances. If this is a plausible hypothesis, how then does it explain the retrogressive politics, painful twists and agonizing atmosphere persisting in Niger Delta and Nigeria in relation to crude-oil exploration?

To discuss these purviews as clearly as possible, we shall start by critically looking at three inter-connected trajectories. These trajectories are definitive highlights projecting the extant impacts of crude-oil exploration in Niger Delta; how these extant impacts add towards instigating the subsisting victimhood inclinations of Niger Delta people; how these inclinations are dramatized in Yerima’s *Hard Ground* as shades of extreme dimensions of bad, disturbing and ugly interests, particularly the underbelly and labyrinths of Nigeria’s polity restructuring debates and demands; and our idea of functional conflict resolution paradigm. In a bid to place our discussion in clear perspective, we shall make attempt at explaining what Niger Delta represents, before providing highlights on a few prominent examples of impacts of crude-oil exploration in Niger Delta. Furthermore, we shall interpretively assess Yerima’s creative depiction of the contexts of the subsisting victimhood inclinations of the Niger Delta people in *Hard Ground*, and how mismanagement and maladministration instigate nuances of demands and debates for polity restructuring by Niger Delta people and some other Nigerians, as well as the polemics of counter demands and debates by others. To this end, we intend to explain what polity restructuring mean as a universal idea, and its plausible application as a means of conflict resolution mechanism within Nigeria’s subsisting context.

We shall also look at its dimensions, the reasons why the cries and tears are becoming increasingly disturbing in relation to Niger Delta oil malady, and the nuances of blame on leadership failure as suggested by overwhelming number of scholars.

Niger Delta and Oil Exploration

The Niger Delta, located in the Atlantic coast of southern Nigeria is the world's third largest wetland. It occupies a total land area of 75,000 square kilometers, and it is the world's second largest delta with a coastline of about 450 km (Awosika, 1995; Ukiwo, 2009). As of June 2020, Niger Delta is composed of 9 out of 36 states in Nigeria, (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Imo and Rivers), and has 185 out of 774 local government areas. The strategic politico-economic importance of Niger Delta revolves around the fact that nearly all of Nigeria's proven oil and gas reserves and a total of 159 oil fields and 1481 wells in operation are located in the region (Nwilo & Badejo, 2006). Total production from Nigeria's oil fields in Niger Delta region increased from 308 million barrels in 1970 to 703,455 million barrels in 1991 and production peaked in 1980s when the total output was 753.5 million barrels per annum, out of which 93% was exported overseas (Nwilo & Badejo, 2006). Though the GDP ratio contribution of oil and gas dropped significantly from average of 37% to 40% achieved in 1980s, 1990s and beyond, to an average of 12% in 2000s, it has delivered from the 1970s to 2019 more than 70% of foreign exchange for Nigeria. Thus, between 2000 and 2004, oil and gas accounted for 75% of total government revenues, and 97% of foreign exchange earnings (Ukiwo, 2009). According to Nigeria's Budget and National Planning report titled *Nigeria Economy Recovery and Growth Plan – 2017 to 2019*, "Nigeria's economy is highly dependent on the oil and gas sector" and "although the sector accounts for just 10% of GDP, it represented 94% of export earnings and 62% of Government revenues (for Federal and States) in 2011-2015" (Nigeria Ministry of Budget & National Planning 2017, p. 28). Also, according to Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics in its quarterly publication titled *Nigerian Gross Domestic Product Report, Q1 2019*, the petroleum sector contributed 8.6% in 2018 and 9.14% in the first quarter of 2019 to Nigeria's GDP but accounted for about 90% of Federal Government income in the period under review. Furthermore, in the above mentioned report, the Ministry of Budget and National Planning observes that the "falling oil revenues widened the Federal Government deficit from N1.2 trillion in 2013 to N1.4 trillion in 2015, and an estimated N2.2 trillion in 2016", hence "States in particular have been badly hit by the oil price shock in 2015" (ibid p. 29). Again, in the same report, the Ministry of Budget and National Planning notes that "40% of States were running a deficit of more than 30% of their revenues" thus "fiscal sustainability is therefore a critical challenge for Nigeria" (ibid p. 29). This brief insight indicates that most of the federating States in Nigeria are heavily dependent on federal allocation to remain solvent and this allocation comes majorly from oil sales income. Therefore, through the above highlight, which paints a vivid picture of the fiscal

framework of Nigeria, it is possible to appreciate better that since Nigeria joined the ranks of oil producers in 1958, when Shell British Petroleum, discovered and drilled oil at Oloibiri, that Niger Delta had remained consistently vital to Nigeria's fiscal viability, as well as very important to global energy security (Ukiwo, 2009).

Introduction to Ahmed Yerima's¹ *Hard Ground*

The story in *Hard Ground* revolves around a young man named Nimi. He is portrayed as a militant who represents the subsisting victimhood and freedom-fighting ideologies of some Niger Delta youth who believe that the only way available to them to make the federal government listen is through militancy. Nimi was sent to his village in Niger Delta by his parents who reside in Lagos to learn Ijaw language and culture as a way of keeping their heritage alive. However, in the village, Nimi gets radicalized and enlists with one of the militant groups. Rapidly, he strives to lead as he becomes a vicious cult linchpin and goes by the gang name Scorpion. In his attempt to impress the big commanding militant leader, he selects some members of his gang to vandalize crude-oil pipe as part of economic sabotage aimed at destabilizing oil distribution and economic process to hurt the Federal Government. Unfortunately, his plan was leaked to the military task-force mandated to secure the pipe-lines by 'rats' in his fold. Armed with this tip-off, the task-force promptly mobilized, ambushed Nimi's gang and neutralized most of them summarily as they arrive to break oil pipes.

Victimhood Inclinations, Impact of Oil in Niger Delta and Yerima's *Hard Ground*

In this creative representation of some typical realities relating to Niger Delta oil conflict, Ahmed Yerima in our focus text *Hard Ground*, artistically interrogates through deft portrayals, the variables, conditions, worldviews and shades of politics defining the social realities of Niger Delta oil conflict. In the play, Yerima depicts the dense realities of familial relationships and the attendant climate of squabbles resulting from inter-personal conflicts. Thus, in his authorial note for *Hard Ground*, Yerima attempts

1 Ahmed Yerima, a Nigerian theatre studies professor, prolific playwright and theater director was born in Lagos on 8th May 1957 where he had his primary education and his secondary education at Baptist Academy in Obanikoro, Lagos. He served as director-general of the Nigerian National Theatre, & a director of the National Troupe. He taught in universities in Nigeria, and became a professor of Theater and Performing Arts, and the dean, College of Humanities, Redeemer's University Nigeria in 2013. Among Yerima's plays are *Ameh Oboni the Great*, *Attahiru*, *Heart of Stone*, *Idemili*, *Kaffir's Last Game*, *Little Drops*, *Mojagbe*, *Orisa Ibeji*, *Otaelo*, *The Angel*, *The Bishop and the Soul*, *The Lottery Ticket*, *The Mirror Cracks*, *The Sisters*, *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, *The Twist*, *The Wives*, *Uncle Venyil*, *Yemoja*, and *Hard Ground* which won Nigeria's highest literary prize 'LNG Literary Prize' in 2006.

to contextualize on his story's thematic inclination by citing a comment by William Maxwell, who poignantly adumbrates philosophically on conflicting interests noting that "too many conflicting emotional interests are involved for life ever to be wholly acceptable, and possibly it is the work of the storyteller to rearrange things so that they conform to this end" (Yerima, 2011, p. 9). Again, Yerima pointedly observes that in *Hard Ground* he attempts to share as well as instigate analytical interest on capacity and contexts of the human mind particularly "its complexities" as it relates to "man's ability to remain supremely wicked or good" (ibid, p. 9). Arguably, the description of human behavior as either supremely wicked or good, no doubt depends on the angle one chooses to appraise it. Essentially, Yerima portrays some variables of 'conflicting emotional' experience which revolves around the realities of oil exploration in Nigeria, as factors which have for decades instigated extreme dimensions of bad, disturbing and ugly emotional interests. As we intend to elucidate in later parts of this study, emotional interests is metaphorically projected as powerful inclinations propelled by ideology and survivalist penchants.

Through the character Nimi, Yerima attempts to illuminate on the reasons behind individuals' exhibition of specific kinds of emotional interests. Nimi is portrayed as a hot-headed brat who lacks respect for his father because his father in his imagination represents the old generation who appear indifferent and docile concerning the brutal oppressive realities that the people face. Nimi's response to his mother's lamentation that he has derailed, in many ways, subsumes the youth's feeling towards the old generation: "You cannot grow up in our ways, as you put it, Mama, and not feel what I now feel, unless you want to hide in the folds of your wrapper, like Baba, and pretend that all is well" (ibid, p. 13). Here, the subsumed illumination is that youths in Niger Delta find themselves in a generation with more youth population, who have far less opportunities in comparing to the realities faced by the old generation, and painfully the future remains glaringly stark if nothing urgent is done. The above utterance by Nimi, enunciates his subsisting ideology which propels his disdain and impatience towards his father and mother (who both represent embodiments of docile old generation), which makes him feel intense anger about himself and the prevailing circumstance.

The projected rational choice subsumed in Nimi's professed ideology is based on the premise subsumed in the following comment which he directed to his mother and father: "the school you sent me to was made up of wasteland and poverty" and "even as a child, you smell it and you quickly learn that nothing is free, unless you ask for it, and when they refuse to give you, you grab it, and that is what we are doing" (ibid, p. 13). Nimi's comment paints a disturbing picture to his parents especially his mother. Expressively Nimi explains:

Boys first growing up fighting for bean cakes and puff-puff. Then, gradually, we were forced to grow to become men overnight. Asking for our rights (ibid, p. 13).

In response, his father asks “so it your right to kill?” and bluntly Nimi retorts: “If we have to, Baba” (ibid, p. 13). Nimi’s astrigent comments and demeanour pushes his mother to the edge and she helplessly gets overwhelmed as tears cascades. Regardless, Nimi remains impervious and caustic, as he drives home his ideology and philosophy subsumed in the following point-of-view:

Poverty stinks, and if another man holds the soap, and won’t let you have it, then nudge him slightly and collect it. For you need a good bath to become a decent performed human being like him (ibid, p. 13).

Clearly the hard-hearted disposition demonstrated by Nimi as he resolutely projects his inclination, leads his mother to more tears. However, instead of any show of remorse, Nimi rebukes his mother subtly in the following comment in his attempt to validate his conduct and inclination:

Why does Mama cry? There are younger boys and girls than me in the struggle. Children who believe in the cause. First, you listen to what the elders say about the struggle. Even when in primary school. You live in pain, and then it sounds right to join the struggle, first as a boy of a group, then as the eye or a spy. By the time you are halfway through primary school, you carry guns for the boys, and by the time you are eleven, in these days of automatic guns, you become an expert. You see people die every day. Either of hunger or just death, so it means nothing to you. It is a hard life, Mama (ibid, pp. 13-14).

Nimi who is projected as an archetype of the youth with conflicting emotional interests, presents his logic which encapsulates his ideology and philosophy, and through Nimi’s comment, Yerima attempt to clearly portray how the social construction of reality in Niger Delta has gradually as well as rapidly developed and evolved because of the prevailing environment and stark social realities. Meanwhile, Yerima indicates through the disposition and comment of Mama that the old generation apparently does not share in the militant inclinations and extreme worldviews of the youth, when she tearfully says:

Brothers [...] warriors my foot, I have only one child, Nimi, only one child. And now you must curse me to tears by your stupid words and dreams (ibid, p. 11).

Mama’s comment suggests that Nimi’s words are largely outburst propelled by exuberant youthful disposition, hence she laments hysterically as her husband attempts to calm her down:

My only child turns a monster before my death? How else can I exorcise this evil spirit from my baby? (ibid, p. 11).

Through Mama Comment, metaphorically, Yerima alludes to the degree of radicalization of the youths as a result of collective victimhood inclination and troubles relating

to the subsisting subjugation and exploitation by the multinationals, the Government and their errand boys and girls. The victimhood inclinations in Niger Delta is mainly hinged on the premise that the beginning of oil exploration brought with it massive financial gains to Federal Government and perennial socio-economic pains to the Niger Delta. The pain in Niger Delta is subsumed in the profound changes to their livelihood which are mainly fishing and farming. This is because of rapid environmental pollution, degradation and deprivation, without commensurate reparation. Hence they feel they have gained abysmally, incurred monumental losses, such as the degradation of their environmental serenity and their sources of livelihood, whereas billions of petro dollars are spent in select parts of Nigeria with clear neglect to their domain. This feeling subsumes the nuances of victimhood in relation to the subsisting inclinations of Niger Delta people to the Federal Government approach to their realities. To explain the contexts of referring to Niger Delta people as victims and the conceptualization of victimhood, we turn to a definition which subsumes the views we are espousing in this discuss:

People are victims if and only if (1) they have suffered a loss or some significant decrease in well-being unfairly or undeservedly and in such a manner that they were helpless to prevent the loss; (2) the loss has an identifiable cause; and (3) the legal or moral context of the loss entitles the sufferers of the loss to social concern (Bayley, 1991, p. 53).

Similarly, examining victimhood and its nuances Tami Amanda Jacoby, observes that “in contemporary violent conflicts, the construction of grievance-based identity is a fundamentally contested process as the lines between victim and perpetrator are blurred by ongoing cycles of belligerence and retribution” therefore “as victims are incorporated into broader political campaigns, it becomes nearly impossible to separate the victim from the politics” (Jacoby, 2014, p. 511). More so, another definition of victimhood elucidating our point explains that “self-perceived collective victimhood is a state of mind that is brought into being by society members and transmitted to the members of new generations” through assimilation (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009, p. 257). Furthermore, the above school of thought explains that:

The establishment of this state of mind is based on real experiences and on the process of social construction. Once it evolves it is solidified and has important implications for society members, for the way the conflict is managed and for general intergroup relations of the victimized group (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 257).

The process of social construction is about the way and manner a group of people who share the same experiences, environment, history and identity are propelled to define their realities which are subsisting around and about them, thus, “the sense of self-perceived collective victimhood is an unavoidable part of the human repertoire in the context of intractable conflict” (ibid, p. 258). Therefore, interpretive analysis of contexts

to vicious cycle of conflicts involving claims of victimhood means that:

Societies involved in this type of conflict experience losses, bleed and suffer, and themselves cause losses, injuries, destruction and suffering to the rival. However, the real test for humanity is whether the groups involved eventually begin to see the contours of human beings on the other side of the fence, through the dark clouds of enmity that obscure them (ibid, p. 258).

Similarly, other scholars argue that the sense of victimhood develops when there is “self-perception of having been the target, either momentarily or over time, to harmful actions emanating from one or more other persons” thus “in the most general sense, a victim is anyone who experiences injury, loss, or misfortune as a result of some event or series of events” (Aquino & Byron, 2002, p. 71). The Niger Delta people as subsumed in Yerima’s portrayal feel they are badly disadvantaged because their main occupations which are fishing and farming are being taken away from them without any viable substitute, knowing the fact that more than 60% of the people of this area depend on the natural environment for their livelihood (UNDP, 2006, p. 73). Therefore the victimhood identity of the Niger Delta people steams from their perception of their continuing psychological injury and loss because of their misfortune resulting from effects of crude-oil exploration in their communities, because right from the inception, oil exploration brought with it monumental environmental degradation through oil spillages, which affect fishing activities, thereby hampering the major economic means of livelihood in most oil exploration host communities. However, apart from accidental oil spillages which occurs during oil exploration, there are other sources of oil spillages. Examples are ugly practice of cleaning oil tankers on the high sea and dumping the residue in the waters, leakages from ageing oil pipelines, disposal of used oil into the drains by the road side mechanics, oil blow outs from the flow stations, oil spillages due to tanker accidents, and deliberate breaking of oil pipes by militant groups (Raji & Abejide, 2013; Ekpo, Obot, & David, 2018). Meanwhile, several studies which have evaluated instances of oil spillages in the region, with emphasis on the effects on aquatic environment are in concordance in their observation that the gravity of damage is monumental. Some of these studies such as Akpan and Akpabio (2003), Wunder (2003), Nwilo and Badejo (2001, 2005, 2006), Adelana, Adeosun, Adesina, and Ojuroye (2011), Omajemite (2011), Kadafa (2012) or Ekpo *et al.* (2018), indicate that oil spillages severely affect both plants and animals in the estuarine zone, ocean floor, and beaches. The consequence of these is that sea animals are poisoned and killed, thus reducing the quantity available for fishing, and spillages on lands hampers crops and plants farming greatly thereby denying the locals both cash and food crops. The view projected in *Hard Ground* is that oil sales proceeds are mainly used in developing others parts of the country, whereas the locals in and around oil exploration areas are practically neglected.

It is these negative effects of crude oil exploration in Niger Delta communities and the abysmal resource management by the ruling class and government we argue are arguably the reasons for the acceleration of disenchantment propelling the people to identify themselves as collective victims, while they see the Federal Government as the source of their victimization because of the following reasons: the none convincing attempts by the Federal Government towards meticulous provision of result oriented approach to ameliorate the degradation of Niger Delta environment; and little or zero provision of sustainable developmental infrastructures which will represent a clear sign of re-investing significant portion of oil sales proceeds to the Niger Delta. Another factor is the issue of insufficient integration mechanism for people in oil bearing communities to become proper stakeholders.

According to the responses we gathered, Niger Delta people see past and current attempts by Federal Government to cushion the effect of their pains as orchestrated attempt to deodorize stinking environment rather than pin-point the sources of the disturbing odor and evacuate it, to achieve an enduring result. It is widely acknowledged that these reasons are behind the disenchantments by the youth like Nimi which have gone beyond just verbal demand for polity restructuring to militant-violent approaches. Therefore, the plausible supposition is that the current approach and ideology of the youth represented in Nimi is in many ways propelled by frustration.

This supposition is in accord with the conceptual inclination of Leonard Berkowitz who in his review of frustration-aggression hypothesis originally propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939), contends that “frustrations generate aggressive inclinations to the degree that they arouse negative affect” (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 59). The growing disenchantments and frustration are instigated by Niger Delta people’s believe that they are victim of artful alienation, oppression and repression. The manifestations and circumstances of the Niger Delta people as aptly captured in Yerima’s *Hard Ground* are espoused in Berkowitz’s conceptualization where he “argues that the blocking of goal-directed activity can create instigation to aggression” (ibid, p. 60). Furthermore, he explains that all “frustrations invariably lead to open attacks on an available target, even when the interference with goal attainment meets the specifications” (ibid, p. 67). Hence “there are many occasions during which the people prevented from obtaining an expected and desired outcome do not exhibit overt aggression” (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 67; Zillmann, 1979; Baron, 1977 & Bandura, 1973), just as the Niger Delta old generation are projected to have done in *Hard Ground*. The clear supposition here is that there are variables that propel the nature of response and behavior of people who feel frustrated; hence “it is clear that a variety of psychological processes can intervene to determine whether a given thwarting will be followed by aggressive acts” (ibid, p. 67). Furthering, it is the view of this scholar that “illegitimately imposed barriers to goal attainment are more likely to produce aggressive responses than are those that seem

to be socially proper, but even the latter can activate an instigation to aggression” (ibid, p. 71). More so, we are inclined to agree with the view that “people are more strongly instigated to attack their frustrater when they think they have been deliberately and wrongly kept from reaching their goal than when they believe the interference has only been accidental, and they may be inclined to inhibit their aggressive reactions when they think the thwarting was socially proper” (ibid, p. 71). Our effort is to clearly assemble information which elaborately indicates were leadership gaps have resulted in the deep disenchantment among Niger Delta people towards the Federal Government as a means of pin-pointing how best polity restructuring as a functional conflict resolution mechanism can secure a lasting peace and fairness.

Nuances of Demands for Polity Restructuring and Its Plausible Application for Lasting Conflict Resolution

It is indicative that the underbelly of the variables to the Niger Delta people’s frustration is that “between 1953 and 1960, that is the period of self-government and independence, regions retained 100 per cent of revenues, based on the principle of derivation” and “at independence, the proportion of revenue allocated on the basis of derivation was slashed to 50 per cent” (Ukiwo, 2009, p. 2). More so “from 1970 to 1999, derivation was gradually slashed from 45 per cent to 3 per cent, with the federal government pocketing most of the revenues” and “the 30-year period coincided with the era when oil became the major source of revenue for the country” (ibid, p. 2). The above insight succinctly indicates the beginning of gradual methodological concentration of accruing finances to the federal government coffers and clearly, this signposted the beginning of abysmal quality resource management by the successions of military regimes. Thus, the feeling of the Niger Delta people is that “since oil resources were mostly found in the Niger Delta, which is occupied by minority ethnic groups, the change in the revenue allocation formula was perceived by the Delta ethnic minorities as a ploy orchestrated by three major Nigerian ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) to exploit them (Niger Delta people)” (ibid, p. 2). The simmering embers of vicious disenchantment were exacerbated by successive Military governments’ abysmal resource management, thus “between 1984 and 1999, the military governors were appointed by and responsible to the commander-in-chief” thus “they made no pretence of representing the interests of the people of the states they were administering and were more concerned with maintaining law and order at all costs” (ibid, p. 1). The notion here is that the successive military governments’ approach to governance “predisposed the non-indigenous governors to work against pan-Delta solidarity” and unambiguously “some of them were perceived as having used divide-and-rule strategies to maintain hegemony” (ibid, p. 1). Hence, the level of insensitivity exhibited by the military governors and their preference for heavy-handed responses to community agitation, which falls within maladministra-

tion in many ways, propelled the youth to embrace militancy to force the hand of the Federal Government.

Thus the Niger Delta conflict blossoms because of the perennial endemic unreliability and mismanagement of resources by Federal Government as portrayed in Nimi's comments. In many ways some of the vexed issues that come to the fore in the conflict between ethnic identities/loyalties and national interest in the play subsumes the fragmentations of meanings to the conflict rhetoric which propels otherness as regards to demands for polity restructuring. In his comments Nimi feels that the repressive approach of the Federal Government should not make him afraid and meek, so also other youths, because his father and mother who belong to the old generation, who remained afraid and meek, are worse off. Though his mother claims that he is naive and dangerously exuberant, Yerima succinctly projects the variables that instigate the shaping of ideologies and inclinations in situations projected in the play. While Nimi represents the youth who embraces violence and militancy as the approach to end the unfavorable condition and victimhood, Mama represents the old generation who adopts tears, cries and solemn waiting, hence she thinks that Nimi is deluded or better still infested by wicked deceitful spirit. To explain a bit our supposition in this regard, we can say that mama's old generation is not as exposed as the Nimi's generation who could apply ideas harvested from electronic public domain and networks to undermine, sabotage, and hurt the perceived oppressor(s) severely even at painful cost.

To place in clear perspective the basis of our further analysis in this segment, let us first see the encapsulation of the demands of the people of Niger Delta as projected through Nimi in following comments.

The first comment: *The president-General of our movement had said all the great things about our past heroes, the need for us all to come together, and have one voice, and the best formula for the resource control of the revenue generated from our oil. But the one that sent the Governor twitching was when he said true federalism was needed to actualize long and lasting peace in Nigeria* (Yerima 2011, p. 37).

The second comment: *That was when we all chanted aloud the Kaiama Declaration. 'Cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our people and communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources which were enacted without our participation and consent. Agree to remain within Nigeria [...]'* and that *'the best way for Nigeria is a federation of ethnic nationalities.'* *Come and see the people clapping!* (ibid, p. 38).

In the two comments, the current demands of the Niger Delta people which are true federalism and resource control are projected as the variables influencing their common emotional interest which has continued to generate fervent debates. In the two

comments, Yerima projects the inclinations to the calls for polity restructuring which will help Niger Delta people to regain full resource control. 'Resource control' simply put means allowing resource bearing communities and States to own, control and exploit all resources such as oil and solid minerals in their areas, and contribute an agreed percentage to the Federation Account. Naturally, it is the believe of very many Nigerians based on our field study that States and communities who have more resources are in support of resource control because they will benefit much more, whereas States and communities that have little or no commercially viable resource, presently are against such demands. Thus, Niger Delta people's emotional interest which is propelled by subsisting sense of disadvantage within the current polity structure, see Nigeria's subsisting polity structure and framework as unfair, unjust, destabilizing, dysfunctional and retrogressive. Whereas others (mostly States in northern geo-political zone) who are not oil bearing and are afraid of not being able to sustain their economy if resource control by federating units is enthroned, in their emotional interest contend that the subsisting polity structure and framework is not the problem.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of crude oil exploration in the Niger Delta, Yerima's portrayals of the realities of the impact of crude-oil in the Niger Delta in his play *Hard Ground*, how the brutal impact of crude oil in the Niger Delta has continued to instigate debates and demands for polity restructuring in Nigeria, and the nuances of the debates and demands for polity restructuring in Nigeria. In Yerima's text, there is metaphoric suggestion of the struggle to validate the legitimacy and justification of the armed struggle. In scholarly reports, films, documentaries and creative literary inputs on Niger Delta people's perception of their livelihood in their environment in relation to oil and gas realities and experiences, are filled with tales of agony, dehumanization, brutality and gutter politics. The field studies we carried out for this study, indicate that oil exploration in Niger Delta have brought about monumental degradation of environment with its negative multiplayer effects on health, livelihood, development and fulfillment of people in affected areas. However, we notice that the call for polity restructuring deserves serious and urgent attention because of its propensity to heal the subsisting pain and foster a progressive sense of fairness and justice. Thus, Niger Delta reality is a subsisting conflict which requires a resolution for enduring peace and sustainable progress. The scenario is that holding on to power because of numerical strength by a section of the country will continue to propel disenchantment which means that the country will continue to grapple with violence, uncertainty and insecurity. Nigeria is a democracy and the northern states claim population majority hence they see the possibility of remaining in power, thus the subsisting polity structure apparently is in their favor. However, with the subsisting realities in Niger Delta there is a conflict which requires serious attention.

To change the narrative the Federal Government must begin to develop the oil producing communities through building of commensurate infrastructures and social welfare, enacting of enabling laws that will criminalize none cleaning and regeneration of areas affected by oil spillages, and making of concerted effort at increasing the stake holding of people in communities where oil exploration is going on. Our respondents suggest that poor and visionless leadership stopped the sincere implementation of these policies before the beginning of youth militancy. Now that the militancy has taken root, the policy makers should look towards polity restructuring that will decentralize governance, assets and liabilities through a well constituted national conference. However, our suggestion is that the decentralization needs to be in phases so that the federating units will considerably adapt and evolve into autonomous economic entities.

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