

Oil Politics and Niger Delta Ethnic Nationalism Film Genre in Nollywood Film Culture

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Introduction

The Niger Delta region, Nigeria's oil belt, has been the site of a generalized ethnic and regional struggle for self-determination since 1998. It has been the location of often violent confrontations between local ethnic communities and agents of the Nigerian state and oil companies involved in the extraction and exploitation of oil in the area. What began as community agitation has undoubtedly undergone several transformations. The first involved the flowering of civil societies, which mobilized a popular civil struggle. The second saw the extension of the agitation against multinational oil companies and the federal government. The third transformation involved the elevation of the agitation from purely developmental issues to political demands such as restructuring of the federal system, resource control and the resolution of the national question through a conference of ethnic nationalities. The current and fourth stage of the transformation has seen the entrance of youths, youth militancy, and youth militias with volatile demands and ultimatums that have accentuated the scale and intensity of confrontations and violence with the multinationals and the federal government (Eghosa, Augustine, Omobolaji, & Okhonmina, 2007, p.2).

After appraising the situation of human rights abuse in the oil producing regions of Nigeria, the *Human Rights Watch* came to the conclusion that the oil companies and the communities they operate in occupy different worlds, geographically overlapping but conceptually light years apart. The oil companies see themselves as

carrying out a legitimate business, which makes a major contribution to the Nigerian economy. They regret, at least officially, the lack of true democracy in Nigeria, the abuses carried out against the oil producing communities by the security forces and the failure of the Nigerian government to spend the oil wealth wisely, in particular in the oil producing communities themselves. They, however, represent these problems as having essentially nothing to do with the commercial companies that produce the oil.

Nevertheless, as a gesture of goodwill, as they would see it, and in partial recognition of the deficiencies of the Nigerian government, they invest substantial amounts of money in development projects in the communities where they operate. While they admit there are some negative environmental consequences of oil production, the oil companies argue that these are both exaggerated and in any event entirely outweighed by the benefits they bring. Despite this contribution, oil company managers state that they operate in Nigeria in a thankless, even hostile political environment. Although their relations with the federal government have recently improved, they still face difficulties in obtaining payment of the sums due to them under their joint ventures.

Furthermore, oil company personnel see no reason why they should answer to the communities in which they work when they are simply carrying out their normal activities, for which they have received government licenses. They view community protests as unrealistic demands on them to take on responsibilities that are properly the domain of the government; protests which at times amount to simply criminal extortion, sabotage or intimidation (HRW, 1999, p.79). For the communities, on the other hand, the oil companies and their contractors are often the most visible manifestation of central government in their areas. They know that oil companies are operating joint ventures with the government;

they see the oil installations guarded by federal police or soldiers, and the rapid response from the federal or state government if there is any threat to oil production. They draw the conclusion that the oil companies and government are so closely linked as to be effectively the same thing, an idea backed by the government's own comments.

Accordingly, they make their demands for greater revenue allocation to the delta as well as for compensation for the damage wrought by oil production of the oil companies as they do of the government, and blame the oil companies as they do the government for the repression with which their demands are met. The communities are well aware that the oil companies are making large profits out of what they see as 'their' oil, and believe that these profits bring with them responsibilities towards the traditional landholders. At the same time, they see that a few individuals in their communities, the contractors, traditional rulers and liaison representatives have profited handsomely from oil production, during the same period that the land has become less fertile and fish catches declined. Communities want compensation for loss of livelihood caused by land expropriations, oil spills and other effects of oil production, yet they find themselves with no meaningful way of obtaining an independent determination of their loss.

Therefore, there can be no solution to the simmering conflict in the oil producing areas of the delta until its people gain the right to participate in their own governance and until the protection of the rule of law is extended to their communities. The injustices facing the peoples of the delta are in many ways the same as those facing all Nigerians after decades of successive military regimes, yet in the oil producing regions the suppression of political activity, the lack of legal redress for damage to the environment and the

resulting loss of livelihood, and sheer ubiquity of human rights abuses by the region's security forces have generated greater protests, in turn generating greater repression (Human Rights Watch, 1999, p.202).

Ethnic agitation in Nigeria's political history dates as far back as the period before the country's independence. However, this chapter focuses on the agitation of the people of the Niger Delta, with a particular interest on the Ijaw ethnic grouping. Ethnic nationalism among the Ijaw can be conveniently situated within the context of Joireman's thesis of a "coincidence of ethnicity and a lack of economic prosperity":

A history of unequal development in a country in which the regional inequalities coincide with ethnicity can establish the precipitating factors for ethnic conflict. It can give a group of people a legitimate grievance that over time can escalate into ethnic conflict (2004, p.12).

This essentially captures the basis of the ethnic agitation in the Niger Delta against the Nigerian state. It is essential for this study to situate this scenario in proper historical perspective for a clearer understanding of the conflict situation in the region. Successive governments have mispent the oil wealth which the oil companies have helped to unlock, salting it away in foreign bank accounts rather than investing in education, health, and other social sectors, and mismanaging the national economy to the point of collapse. At the community level, the companies are faced with increasing protests directed at oil company activities and the lack of development in the delta; these have included incidents of hostage-taking, closures of flow stations, sabotage, and intimidation of staff. And all these have been used as raw materials for film production by Nigeria's Nollywood.

Oil Industry and the Oil Producing Communities

Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa and the fifth largest in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The discovery of oil has transformed Nigeria's political economy, and oil has for many decades provided more than 90% of foreign exchange earnings and 80% of federal revenue (HRW, 1999, p.26). Nigeria also has huge reserves of natural gas yet to be fully exploited. Yet, instead of turning Nigeria into one of the most prosperous states on the African continent, these natural resources have enriched a small minority while the vast majority has become increasingly impoverished. With a per capita gross national product of only \$260 per year, Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world (UNDP, 2009). At the same time, the struggle among the elite to gain access to the profits of the oil boom has been a major factor in the rule of successive military governments.

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been plagued by a succession of military rules. While minority ethnic groups in Nigeria's multi-ethnic federation have successfully demanded that new states and local government units be carved out to fulfil their hopes of receiving some benefit from the oil money and to compensate for damage done by oil production, the Nigerian federation has in practice, paradoxically, become ever more centralized, and power and money have been concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people. Politics has become an exercise in organized corruption; a corruption perhaps most spectacularly demonstrated around the oil industry itself, where large commissions and percentage cuts of contracts have enriched individuals.

Oil production has had damaging effects on the environment of the oil producing region, though the extent of the damage is subject to dispute. The Niger Delta is one of the world's largest wetlands, and the largest in Africa. It encompasses over 20,000sq kilometres of which perhaps 6,000 square kilometres is mangrove forest, and has high biodiversity typical of extensive swamp and forest areas with many unique species of plants and animals. Despite decades of oil production, there is surprisingly little good quality independent scientific data on the overall or long term effects of hydrocarbon pollution on the delta, yet oil led development has clearly seriously damaged the environment and the livelihood of many of those living in the oil producing communities. The oil companies operating in Nigeria maintain that their activities are conducted to the highest environmental standards; but Nigerian environmental laws are poorly enforced.

While the people of the Niger Delta have faced the adverse effects of oil extraction, they have in general also failed to gain from the oil wealth. The people living in the oil producing communities do not belong to the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba), and speak a diverse range of languages and dialects; the largest of these groups are the Ijaw who collectively form Nigeria's fourth largest ethnic group. Since the creation of the Nigerian state by the British, the peoples of the delta have complained of marginalization by the regional and federal governments who have ruled their affairs. Despite the vast wealth produced from the oil found under the delta, the region remains poorer than the national average; and though in the northern part of Nigeria poverty is more extreme, the division between rich and poor are more obvious in the areas where gas flares light up the sky (HRW, 1999, p. 202).

Protests and Repression in Oil Producing Communities

The Niger Delta has proved to be the pivotal point where all of Nigeria's plagues of political gangsterism, corruption, and poverty seem to converge. Amidst the theatre and drama of masked militants lay an insurgency in which bitter men are engaged in a ferocious struggle to end oppression and exploitation by the federal government of Nigeria. Virtually every oil-producing community has experienced an incident along the following lines: Community members stage a protest demanding compensation for oil company activities (often stated to have been promised in prior agreements) in the form of cash, development projects, or employment, or calling for environmental clean-up. In response to the protest, members of the Mobile Police or other security forces come to the scene; the security forces carry out indiscriminate beatings, arrests and detention; the protest is then abandoned. In some cases, oil companies apparently responded to the demands to some extent, in others, they have been ignored.

- In March 1997, youths captured a barge delivering goods to a Chevron installation. The crew of seventy Nigerians and twenty expatriates were held hostage for three days by youth demanding jobs on the vessel. Following negotiations in which money was paid to the protesters, the barge was allowed to go offshore; the navy then boarded it and rescued the hostages.
- In August 1997, the Iyokiri community in Rivers State blocked access to SPDC employees seeking to repair a leak, demanding that compensation be paid first; as a result, three flow stations were closed for several days.
- In September 1997, the 10,000 bpd Diebu flow station in Bayelsa State was closed for several weeks as a result of a

dispute with the Peremabiri community, which was demanding compensation for fishing nets damaged by an oil spill in June of the same year.

- In October 1997, the Odeama flow station in Bayelsa State was closed for several days by youths demanding that fifty of them be employed by SPDC.
- In October 1997, youths in Gelegele village, near Warri, Delta State, halted production for several days at a well yielding up to 2,000 bpd operated by Dubri Oil Company, an indigenous Nigerian operator. The youths were protesting the effect of gas flaring on their village.
- In November 1997, Nigerian opposition radio reported that about 3,000 people from Ekakpamre village near Ughelli in Delta state had forced the closure of Ughelli West flow station for several days, demanding N20million compensation for encroachment on their land, a new access road and other projects.
- From November 25 to December 23, 1997, Tunu and Opukoshi flow stations, together pumping 80,000bpd, were closed by villagers, forcing Shell to declare on December 19 that it would be unable to meet all commitments on time at its Forcados terminal from December 21, to January 11.
- From December 13 to December 17, 1997, thirteen employees of Western Geophysical were held hostage by youths in a barge off the coast of Ondo state.
- Odeama Creek flow station was closed for several days in January 1998 by youths demanding environmental tests, a reduction of gas flaring, clean water supply and other projects.
- From January 20, 1998, Texaco's offshore Funiwa platform was occupied for about one week by youths from the

neighboring Koluama community, shutting in about 55,000bpd.

- In March 1998, SPDC reported that it had shut in 200,000 bpd at its Tora manifold in the Nembe area, after youths had protested; calling for compensation, jobs and development projects.
- From April 28 to May 11, 1998, Shell's flow stations at Odidi and Egwa in Delta State were closed by protesting youths
- From May 25 to June 2, 1998, youths occupied Chevron's Parabe Platform, offshore from Ondo State, and held workers hostage.

In many cases, oil companies describe protests by local youths as purely criminal in purpose, aimed at extorting benefits to which they are not entitled from the oil industry. These same incidents are described by the youths involved as a fight for their rights. According to Chevron, for example, "In some cases, the youths simply try to extort money from personnel working on barges and drilling rigs without reason or based on some fabricated excuse." Thus, "Because of the level of poverty in most of the remote areas, there are... many cases of unscrupulous claims for compensation for damages that cannot be substantiated" (HRW, 2008, p.139). While Chevron identifies the disproportion between the wealth of the oil company and the poverty of the oil producing areas as an important contributor to conflict, it sees the protests that result as criminal only. The youths who make what Chevron describes as 'unscrupulous' claims put it differently: "We have committed ourselves to the fight against environmental degradation, social and economic injustice in our land. Chevron pays soldiers to kill us and

has bribed the police to keep us away; when we demand our rights, they just send the Mobile Police” (HRW, 2008, p.139).

The story of Oloibiri, which has been described as the ‘ground zero’ of Nigeria’s oil exploration and exploitation activities, is even more pathetic than others. In the 1960s (the hay days of Oloibiri) the town had a population of about 10,000. It is now a wretched backwater, a sort of rural slum, home to barely 1,000 souls who might as well live in another century. No running water, no electricity, no roads, and no functioning primary school; the creeks have been so heavily dredged, canalized, and polluted that traditional rural livelihood has been eviscerated. Oloibiri’s intimate association with oil contains another crucial lesson: It was in Oloibiri that Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service was born in 1938. Declaring an independent Niger Delta Republic on February 24, 1966, in the wake of Nigeria’s first and bloody military coup that ousted the first republic; Boro’s famous ‘Twelve Day Revolution’ was a foretaste of what was to come a few decades later as the abandonment and despoliation felt so harshly by Oloibiri was replicated with terrifying fidelity across the Niger Delta oil fields. Boro’s immediate successors in the struggle for self-determination and resource control were Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni people. The rise of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) during a brutal moment in Nigeria’s sad parade of military governments ended with arrest, trial by a kangaroo court, conviction and hanging of Saro Wiwa and eight others in November 1995. Saro Wiwa’s charismatic leadership spawned a raft of other ethnic nationality movements among the Ijaw, the Isoko, Itshekiri and Urhobo. As Saro Wiwa predicted and feared, the nonviolent struggle turned into violent struggle as the conditions across the oil fields remained not just the same, but even worse. Security forces still operated with

impunity, the government failed to protect communities in oil producing areas while providing security to the oil industry, and the oil companies bore responsibility too for the appalling misery and the political violence across the region.

But even Saro Wiwa's gravest fears could not have anticipated the calamitous descent into violence over the years, culminating with the dramatic appearance of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in 2005. MEND claims to be a "Union of all relevant militant groups" (Watts, 2008, p.38). Beginning with a massive attack on the Opobo pipeline in Delta State in December 2005, MEND subsequently destroyed the offshore Forcados loading platform, the Ekeremore – Yeye manifold, and the state oil company Escravos-Lagos gas pipeline in Chanom Creek. Between January 2006 and March 2007, the bitter men of MEND, who were neither communists nor revolutionaries, had taken 200 expatriate oil workers hostages and attacked 42 oil installations. Within a period of one-year MEND almost succeeded in paralyzing the oil industry in Nigeria. *The International Herald Tribune* painted a vivid picture:

Companies now confine employees to heavily fortified compounds, allowing them to travel only by armoured car or helicopter.... One company has outfitted bathrooms with steel bolts to turn them into 'panic' room, if needed. Another has coated the pylons of a giant oil-production platform 130kms, or 80miles offshore with waterproof grease to prevent attackers from climbing the rig.... Some foreign operators have abandoned oil fields, or left the country altogether. 'I can't think of anything worse right now,' said Larry Johnson, a former U.S. Army officer who was recently hired to toughen security at a Nigerian site operated by Eni,

an Italian oil producer. Even Angola during the civil war wasn't this bad (as cited in Watts, 2008, p.38)

It is estimated that by November 2007, oil revenue was down by 40%. Shell alone, the largest oil operator, accounting for almost half of oil output had lost over 10 billion dollars. By any estimation, the costs of this oil insurgency were vast. A report prepared for NNPC published in 2003, titled "Back from the Brink" painted a very gloomy risk audit for the Delta. NNPC estimated that between 1998 and 2003, there were 400 vandalizations on company facilities each year; oil losses amounted to over 1 billion dollars annually. By 2003, 750,000 b/d were shut in as a result of attacks on oil installations, and beginning in April 2004 another wave of violence erupted, this time triggered by ethnic militia. Ateke Tom (leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante) and Asari Dokubo (leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force), each funded in part by their control of oil bunkering trade, sprung to life during the 2003 elections along the Port Harcourt – Okirika – Kalabari axis, employed as political thugs and armed by local politicians.

The Niger Delta's long festering crisis is nourished by a gigantic reservoir of anger and dissent. The reality on the ground is a dizzying and bewildering array of colourfully named militants and militant group and cults. Over fifty operating military camps were at one time dotted around the creeks. The fact on ground is that there was overwhelming popular sympathy for what the militants were doing. Watts claims that some of his sources estimate that the number of trained militants operating in the creeks was over 25,000 commanding monthly salaries of over N50,000, well above the wage that might be secured by an educated youth employed in the formal sector. The disturbing question remains, "How did what began with wild cotters and compo officials preaching the virtues of oil to chiefs and traditional diviners in Oloibiri culminate in car bombs, rocket

propelled grenades, and counter insurgency?" (Watt, 2008, pp.38-39).

Suppression of Demands for Compensation

During June and July 1995, there were major disturbances in Egbema, Imo State, after youths demonstrated against Shell, demanding among other issues, the installation of a gas turbine to supply electricity for the community. The police responded violently to this protest by carrying out indiscriminate beatings and arrests and using teargas freely. Many were beaten who were not involved in the protest but were simply passers-by. More than thirty people were arrested, of whom about eight were women, and some were teenagers. They were detained at Owerri for one to three weeks, and charged with sabotage, though the case later adjourned indefinitely. A number of Mobile Police remained stationed in the community for several months (HRW, 1999, p.139).

On August 24, 1995, conflict between a Shell contractor and a local community over employment opportunities led to the killing of a teacher at Iko, Akwa Ibom State. There had been serious disturbances in Iko in 1987, when Mobile Police had burnt forty houses to the ground following a protest against Shell, and in 1995 the village of Iko was still badly affected by a malfunctioning flare which was flooded by salt water at high tide, allowing salt from sea water to be vaporized and shot out over the village, killing vegetation and corroding metal roofing sheets. In August 1995, Western Geophysical, a seismic survey company, came to the nearby Utapete flow station, close to the Atlantic coast, to carry out a three-dimensional survey on behalf of SPDC. According to community members, the company was approached to seek employment for local people in carrying out the survey; villagers

reported to Human Right swatch that representatives of Western Geophysical accordingly came to the village accompanied by a number of naval officers and negotiations took place with community leaders in the chief's house. Eyewitnesses described how, sometime after the Western Geophysical representatives had left, a detachment of Mobile Police came to the community, fired teargas and beat people at random. During this incident, a school teacher from the village, Emmanuel Nelson, who had been interpreting during the meeting, was beaten to death. Up to twenty people were detained, beaten, and put in police vehicles, although they were released at the next village, on the appeal of two senior members of the community (HRW, 1999, p.143).

In September 1995, a youth from Elele, Rivers where Elf operates several wells, went to speak to Saipem, a Contractor for Elf, on behalf of his family on whose land one of Elf's well was located. The family believed that, since land had been taken for the operation of oil production, they should be compensated in some way for any new activity on the land and the youth was delegated to make representation on their behalf. The public relations representative for Saipem told the youth that he should go to speak to Elf; but while the meeting was going on, three soldiers came to the caravan where the meeting was taking place and took the youth to the nearby military cantonment, where he was detained two days and severely beaten. When he was released he spent two weeks in hospital (1999, p.154).

In early 1996, a spillage took place at Uheri, Isoko Local Government area, Delta State, for which compensation was agreed. There was a delay in payment – according to Shell, this was because there was a need to ‘clarify duplicated claims by various groups in the community’ – and a number of youths protested at the flow station, telling the workers there to stop production. Federal police

came from the divisional police station and arrested six of the dozen youths involved, held them overnight at the police station and released them the next day. According to Shell, the spill was reported to Idu Amadi, chair of the local government authority, who requested the intervention of the police, apparently because he was irritated and embarrassed by the youths' failure to dialogue with SPDC (p. 160).

In January, 1997, over one hundred youths held a demonstration at SPDC's Ahia Flow Station, Omudioga, in Rivers State. The youths demanded that Shell should carry out development projects in their village, including tarring the road, completing a water project and providing electricity; a tarred road currently leads to the flow station, but bypasses the village (understandably annoying local residents); a water project had been begun but not completed, and electricity poles had been erected, but no cables were attached. The youths went to the flow station, demanded that the staff there close down production, and occupied the site. About fifteen members of the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force came to the flow station and arrested twelve of the youths. They were taken to Bori Camp in Port Harcourt and detained for one month; for the first five days they were beaten every morning, and teargas canisters were fired into their cell on a number of occasions. They were eventually released without charge, with a warning that they should not hold any protests about development projects or they would be detained again (p.155).

In July, 1997, ten youths from Edagberi, Rivers State, were detained for a day at Ahoada police station. They had gone to Alcon Engineering, a contractor for SPDC, demanding that Alcon provide diesel for the community, in accordance with an agreement that they understood to have been made with the company as compensation

for the disturbance caused by the operations in the community. According to Shell, no such agreement existed, although there had been an agreement for the provision of an electricity project (p.145).

On September 21, 1998, several thousand women from Egi community in Rivers State demonstrated at Elf's nearby Obite gas project, protesting the actions of security officers at the facility, demanding the release of an environmental impact assessment for the project, and calling for social investment in the community. A confrontation ensued between youths of the community and Mobile Police based at the site, during which youths destroyed property at the site, while one youth was stabbed and severely wounded, and twenty-one detained. The twenty-one were held without charge until a local human rights organisation applied to court, and they were charge and released on bail. A meeting was subsequently held with representatives of Elf, at which the demands were again presented. On November 23, a larger women's demonstration was held, with the same demands (HRW, 1999, p.151).

On December 30, 1998, Ijaw youths protesting against the oil companies and in support of the 'Kaiama Declaration' adopted on December 11, 1998, demonstrated in Yenagoa, and several other locations across the delta, calling on the multinational oil companies to withdraw from Ijaw territories, 'pending the resolution of the issue of resource ownership and control' (see Appendix C). Thousands of troops and navy personnel were brought into the region in response to these protests. In Yenagoa, at least seven youths were reported to have been shot dead by security forces on December 30, and another sixteen the following day in nearby communities (HRW, 1999, p.153).

The Case of Umuechem

On October 30 and 31, 1990, a protest took place at Shell's facility at Umuechem, east of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, which led to the police killing some eighty unarmed demonstrators and destroying or badly damaging 495 houses. This incident was the first to bring the situation in the Niger Delta to international attention according to Human Rights Watch (1999, p. 123).

Youths from Umuechem community demanded provisions of electricity, water, roads and other compensations for oil pollution of crops and water supplies. On October 29, 1990, the Divisional Manager, SPDC Eastern Division, had written to the Rivers State Commissioner of Police to request security protection, with preference for the paramilitary Mobile Police, in anticipation of an impending attack on SPDC facilities in Umuechem, allegedly planned for the following morning. Following peaceful protests by village youths on SPDC's premises on October 30, SPDC again made a written report to the Governor of Rivers State, a copy of which was sent to the Commissioner of Police. On October, 31, Mobile Police attacked peaceful demonstrators with teargas and gunfire. They returned at 5 a.m. the next day, shooting indiscriminately, in a purported attempt to locate three of their members who had not returned the previous evening.

A judicial commission of inquiry established by the government found no evidence of a threat by the villagers and concluded that the Mobile Police had displayed a reckless disregard for lives and property. No compensation was awarded for the attack to those whose relatives were killed or homes destroyed, nor have the perpetrators been brought to justice (HRW, 1999, p.124).

The Case of Ogoniland

The most significant effort to target oil production in an attempt to highlight minority grievances has been that led by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), founded in 1990 by the leaders of the Ogoni ethnic group, including Ken Saro-Wiwa. In August 1990, MOSOP adopted an “Ogoni Bill of Rights,” which listed the grievances of the Ogoni people and demanded ‘political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the federal republic as a distinct and separate unit,’ including ‘the right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development’ (see Appendix B). In October 1990, MOSOP sent the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the then head of state, Ibrahim Babangida, but received no response. In December 1992, MOSOP sent its demands to Shell, Chevron, and NNPC, the partners in the joint ventures operating in Ogoni, together with an ultimatum to pay back royalties and compensation within thirty days or quit Ogoniland.

On January 4, 1993, at the start of the UN’s International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, MOSOP held a mass rally in Ogoni attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Mobilisation continued throughout the year, and MOSOP decided controversially, to boycott the June 12, 1993 elections. Shell withdrew its staff from Ogoni and ceased production at its facilities. This demonstration of organised political opposition to both government and oil companies resulted in a military crackdown in Ogoni. Ken Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders were detained several times during 1993. A Rivers State Internal Security Task Force, a military unit, was created in January 1994 specifically to deal with the Ogoni crisis. In May 1994, there was a brutal murder by a mob of youths of four prominent Ogoni leaders, who had been associated with a faction of MOSOP that had differed with Saro-Wiwa on the organisation’s tactics and strategy, and had been regarded by some in MOSOP as government collaborators. Ken

Saro-Wiwa and several other Ogoni activists were immediately arrested in connection with the four murders, despite a lack of credible evidence to connect them to the deaths. Sixteen members of the MOSOP leadership were put on trial for the May 1994 murders, and nine, including Ken Saro-Wiwa were eventually convicted and sentenced to death by a special tribunal established for the case, whose procedures blatantly violated international standards of due process:

The judgment of the Tribunal is not merely wrong, illogical or perverse. It is downright dishonest. The Tribunal consistently advanced arguments which no experienced lawyer could possibly believe to be logical or just. I believe that the Tribunal first decided its verdicts and then sought for arguments to justify them. No barrel was too deep to be scraped (as cited in HRW, 2008, p.125).

Without the right to an appeal, the ‘Ogoni Nine’ were executed on November 10, 1995.

Oil Politics and the Niger Delta Ethnic Nationalism Films

The actual history of oil is one of violence, brute force, and the worst excesses of frontier capitalism. This is very much the case in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study of the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism agitations and youth militancy needs to be viewed in economic and political terms, as a major profit oriented venture. Looking at the situation through the filter of ‘profitism’ and capitalism will allow us see why the region appears to be trapped in a treacherous sea of petro-violence; perhaps, a clear vision will also pave way for a possible solution. The films that re-enact the agitations in the Niger Delta provide insight into this profits and capitalism as the bug of selfish interests appears to have caught

people at all levels of the society within and outside government. A critical reading of the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism films helps us situate the politics of oil within a reasonable ambience as we move from community politics of self-aggrandizement to the national politics of power brokerage and selfish interests, all motivated and fuelled by the wealth of the Niger Delta region.

Nnimmo Bassey (2008, p.90) describes oil as a cheap source of energy; cheap because the cost of oil extraction, especially in the Niger Delta, is not reflected in the price at the pump. One consequence of the unfettered and reckless exploration and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta is that the poor people continue to subsidize the cost of crude oil through the losses they suffer in environmental services, quality of life, and extreme environmental degradation. In turn, opportunistic groups (oil bunkerers, gangs, militants, etc.) find space to extract and extort financial gains from the system. This brings about the assertion that Nigeria suffers from a “resource curse.” But oil should be a blessing, not a curse. Resource wealth need not subvert development. It is the scramble for the wealth that produces the pillaging of the public sector by private interests in their violent struggle for oil rents.

To put it this way privileges one set of local actors: the state/political elites, militia groups/warlords, and weak and inept bureaucracies. Very little attention is paid to the role of external and international actors and the lack of transparency that shroud the extent of their involvement in these conflicts and violence. They all cooperate in tandem. Ken Saro-Wiwa called it the “slick alliance” (Bassey, 2008, p.11). The benefits of disaster capitalism that accrue to oil companies are considerable. They operate behind the military shield of state; they refuse to pay adequate taxes unless publicly pressured; they bribe Nigerian officials. A case in point is Wilbros Group which pleaded guilty to bribing government officials with

more than \$6million in June 2007 while hiding behind the government programme of fighting corruption. They declare oil spillages to be the result of sabotage in order to avoid cost of clean-up and paying compensation (2008, p.12). The point being made here is that people must try to understand that violence in the Niger Delta is a boon for the merchants of disaster capitalism. The gun runners, the kidnapers, the ballot thieves, and the oil thieves differ very little. For Chimamanda Adichie, (2008, p. 103) the Niger Delta injustices will end when we have at the helm of affairs, people who are honest, tough and forthright with the political will to do the right things.

Nollywood's Niger Delta Ethnic Nationalism film genre has evolved around the historical antecedents of the region. One of the major characteristics which film theorists and critics recognize about film genre is the fact that the stories are really there and are known by the people. The events are historical, sociological, cultural, political and topical encounters negotiated within and amongst the people. These encounters and negotiations have in turn given birth to a class of films referred to as ethnic nationalism films which have become a genre of its own within Nollywood film culture.

The Concept of Nationalism and the Cinema

Nationhood is always an image constructed under particular conditions, and nationalism itself, as a concept in modern sense can only be traced to the late 18th century. It is therefore the necessary basis of the national narrative (Higson, 2002, p.62). Ethnic nationalism is a complex social phenomenon. It may be looked at in terms of beliefs about the superiority and differences of one's ethnic group and defense of its interests above others. There is always a

tendency for ethnic or linguistic groups to fight for recognition of their own identity. The Nigerian experience with pronounced ethnic nationalism is not particularly a strange phenomenon. In practical terms an ethnic nationalist identifies with and sees himself first, as a member of a particular ethnic nationality, before identifying himself with a nation. This helps to explain the emergence and proliferation of ethnic associations and militias in Nigeria, such as Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE), Odua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Ohaneze Ndigbo, Egbesu Boys, Bakassi Boys, Middle Belt Forum (MBF), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), South-south People's Conference, Union of Niger Deltans, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Higson quotes Heath as suggesting that “nationhood is not a given, it is always something to be ‘gained’ (as cited in Williams, 2002, pp.62-63), and cinema needs to be understood as one of the means by which it is gained. Therefore, the definition of any nation's cinema would always involve the construction of what has been referred to as “an imaginary homogeneity” of identity and culture of that nation (Williams, 2002, p.2). Thus, the definition of Nigerian cinema (Nollywood), for instance, or Niger Delta ethnic Nationalism film genre, will involve, on the one hand, the construction of an imaginary homogeneity of identity and culture, an already achieved national or regional identity, apparently shared by all Nigerians or all Niger Deltans; or on the other hand, the valorisation of a very particular conception of Nollywood cinema, which involves ignoring whole areas of the nation's history. In each case a process of inclusion and exclusion is enacted, a process whereby one thing is centralized, at the same time necessarily marginalizing another, a process wherein the interests of one

particular social group are represented as the collective or national interest, producing what Andrew Higson has called the “imagined community of the nation” (2002, p.63).

National Cinema

Rosen observes that “identifying the coherence of a national cinema will always require sensitivity to the countervailing, dispersive forces underlying them” (as cited in Williams, 2002, p.41). The nation can subsume into a fictional identity all manner of differences, across axes of class, gender, ethnicity, culture and so on. Discourses of national cinema reception tend to effect similar homogenization. Reductive national cultural symbolization crowded out more complex articulations of national identity. This tendency is challenged only at limit-case points where a politicized cinema explores differences of class, gender, ethnicity and region (Crofts, 2002, p.42).

In *Film and Nationalism*, Stephen Crofts seeks to enable a consideration of national cinema outside the first world terms. According to him, to achieve this necessitates acknowledging a wider range of national cinemas than is regularly treated under the rubric. The world views of different national film cultures are substantially informed by their country’s relations – military, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and ethnic – with other parts of the globe (2002, p.42). Recent instances of assertion of ethnicity centre on linguistic rights and cultural protection. Minorities or majorities defined by political dissent, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, or region are the everyday stuff of many people’s lives. Politics is a matter of unequal distribution of power across axes of nation as well as class, ethnicity and region. The political engagements of people vary with their social and political contexts, and their readings of

those contexts. In considering national cinema, this implies the importance of a political flexibility able, in some contexts, to challenge the fictional homogenizations of much of discourse on national cinema, and in others to support them (Higson, 2002, p.62). What is suggested here is the importance of acknowledging the continuing power of the nation-state. To acknowledge these powers is not to disavow the cultural hybridity of nation-states, nor to unconditionally promote national identities over those of ethnicity, class, gender, region and other axes of social division which contribute to those identities; nor to buy into originary fantasies of irrecoverable cultural roots, or into the unitary, teleological fantasies in which nationalisms display themselves (Crofts, 2002, p.44).

The struggle of many national cinemas has been one for cultural and economic self-definition against Hollywood and Bollywood. While cultural specificity is not defined exclusively by boundaries of political construct, the nation-state, at certain historical moments, often moments when nationalism connects closely with genuinely populist movement, often nation building moments, national developments can occasion specifically national filmic manifestation which can claim a cultural authenticity or rootedness. Examples include some of the best known cinema “movements”: Italian Neo-Realism, Latin American Third Cinema, and Fifth Generation Chinese Cinema all of which arose on the crest of waves of national popular resurgence. The French Nouvelle Vague (New Wave), a national intellectual-cultural recovery in the making since the late 1940s; New German Cinema drew much of its strength from a 1960 – 1970s student audience and an allied concern to make sense of the traumas of recent German history. The Australian feature film revival took off on a surge of cultural nationalism developing through the 1960s (Crofts, 2002, p.45). To the above one may add Nollywood, which emerged at a period of

struggle for economic and political survival; and the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism genre, which rode on the crest of regional resistance and militancy. Such cinema movements occupy key positions in conventional histories of world cinema, whose historiography is not only nationalist but also elitist.

In the context of the relations of unequal economic and cultural exchange obtaining between Hollywood and other national cinemas, the generation and survival of indigenous genres is a gauge of the strength and dynamism of a national cinema. Outstanding instances in non-Hollywood post1945 cinema would be the Hong Kong martial arts film, the French (stylish) thriller of Chabrol, and the British Gothic horror films and Ealing comedy (Crofts, 2002, p.46). A vital research concerns the intersection between given genres and the national. A range of questions present themselves. For example: Under what conditions do cultural specific genres arise? How do imported genres affect the generic range of a given national production sector? Does Nollywood even have genres?

Crofts suggests the inappropriateness of theorizing differences of nations and national cinemas of the “exclusionary imperialist” ideologies of self and other. He maintains that national cinematic self-definition, like national self-definition, likes to pride itself on its distinctiveness, and its standing apart from others. Such a transcendental concept of an ego repressing its others urges abandonment of the self/other model as adequate means of thinking national cinema. This dualist model authorizes only two political stances: imperial aggression and defiant national chauvinism. It can account neither for Third Cinema’s move beyond what Solanas calls its “experimental” phase, nor for the existence of such projects as those of “Imitating Hollywood.” Still less can it make sense of the hybridity of national cultures (2002, p.46).

In Andrew Higson's opinion, "to identify a national cinema is first to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings" (2002, p.54). The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonizing, mythologizing process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings. At the same time, the concept of a national cinema has almost invariably been mobilized as a strategy of cultural and economic resistance: a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of international domination. Higson argues further that the process of national mythmaking is not simply an insidious or celebratory work of ideological production, but it is also a means of setting one body of images and values against another, which may threaten to overwhelm the first.

The search for a unique and stable identity, the assertion of national specificity does then have some meaning, some usefulness. Its histories can really be understood as histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation. He identifies two central methods, conceptually, of establishing or identifying the imaginary coherence, the specificity of a national cinema: a) the method of comparing and contrasting one cinema to another, thereby establishing varying degrees of otherness; b) an inward looking process, exploring the cinema of a nation in relation to other already existing economies and cultures of that nation-state (2002, p.55). The first of these means of defining a national cinema is premised upon the semiotic principle of the production of meaning and identity through difference. The task is to try to establish the identity of one national cinema by its relationship to and differentiation from other national cinemas.

To some extent then, the process of defining a national cinema, and thereby establishing some sort of unique and self-

contained identity, takes meaning in the context of a conceptual play of differences and identities. In other words, while it is conceptually useful to isolate a single national cinema, it is necessary also that it is seen in relation to other cinemas. The same is true when examining cultural identity of a particular national cinema. The areas that need to be examined are, first, the context or subject matter of a particular body of films – that which is represented, the dominant narrative discoveries and dramatic themes, and the narrative traditions and other source materials on which they draw (particularly the degree to which they draw on what has been constructed as the national heritage, literary, theatrical or otherwise); in other words, the ways in which cinema inserts itself alongside other cultural practices, and the ways in which it draws on the existing cultural histories and cultural traditions of the producing nation, reformulating them in cinematic terms, appropriating them to build up its own generic conventions. Second, there is the question of the sensibility or structure of feeling, or world-view expressed in those films.

Thirdly, there is the area of the style of those films, their formal systems of representation, the forms of narration and motivation, which they employ, their construction of space and staging action, the structuring of narrative and time, the modes of performance they employ, the types of visual pleasure, spectacle and display which they engage, and their modes of address and construction of subjectivity, particularly, the degree to which they engage in the construction of fantasy and the regulation of audience knowledge (Higson, 2002, p.62).

The Concept of Film Genres

A derivation from the French language, the word genre means type, sort, kind, category, field or variety. One of the categories, based on

form, style, or subject matter into which artistic works of all kinds can be divided. Ayakoroma (2007, p.6) uses the term genre within the context of a “...division of works into different recognizable groups which are bound in by certain distinguishing traits aimed at helping an audience’s understanding and appreciation of such works.” The word genre is not exclusive to the study of filmic expression – art, literature, music, media, design, drama and, in recent studies, fashion benefit from the application of the term with a view to properly appreciating the aesthetics of that art form. The main purpose in defining a genre is to establish a context for the approach to an individual work (Yacowar, 2008, pp.276 – 295).

Judith Hess Wright opines that genre films came into being and were successful financially because they temporarily relieved the fears aroused by recognition of social and political conflicts; they helped to discourage any action that might otherwise follow upon the pressure generated by living with these conflicts. They serve the interest of the ruling class by assisting in the maintenance of the status quo, and they throw a sop to oppressed groups who, because they are unorganized and therefore afraid to act, eagerly accept the genre film’s absurd solution to economic and social conflicts. In her view, the popularity of the genre film resides in the manipulation of the fears and anxiety of the masses to provide easy comfort and solace to economic and social situations that would otherwise overwhelm us and possibly push the masses to action. In other words, genre films are tools in the hands of the ruling class for the maintenance of the status quo (Wright, pp.42 – 50).

Liquid Black Gold (Aniekwe, 2008) and *Genesis* (Inojie, 2008) might serve as examples of films illuminated by the sense of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism in the Niger Delta. But in these films we see a different climate than the historical antecedents of the region. Whereas the history points to a call for a revolution; a change

in the social, economic and political structure (in short a fundamentally radical change), but the films appear to advocate for only fair treatment within the same social, economic and political structure, thus confirming the views of Judith Hess Wright. It is not clear whether this is due to the demands of the regulatory body for these films or that the apparent messages of the films are as given by the filmmakers.

Yet, considering the many ‘dust’ that are thrown up in the course of the thematic, narrative and structural development of the films, it is difficult to reconcile the seemingly manipulative resolutions at the end with the issues raised, especially when such issues are still contemporary and relevant issues. Unlike the American western genre which is usually set in the past and therefore can be considered to be a romantic and nostalgic longing for the ‘good old days’, Nollywood’s Niger Delta ethnic nationalism film genre deals with issues of the present which have historical antecedents. They are not matters of some primitive tribes struggling against civilization. Like a character from *Liquid Black Gold* says, “We fight just to stay alive: We fight in order to live.” This fight has been ongoing right from slavery, to legitimate trade, to colonization, down to amalgamation and finally independence.

Considering the socioeconomic cum political climate, it appears that the conclusions of the films have not reflected the true image and feelings or even mood of the moment. *Genesis* ends with Kio (Gentle Jack) leading his gang to surrender their arms to the state, and he is appointed chairman of a committee that will oversee developmental projects in the community. To drive the point home, the film goes on to roll out shots of such developmental projects being carried out in the rural communities. This gives a picture of hope. In *Liquid Black Gold*, the two rival gangs surrender their arms

to government and promise to work with the Chief for the development of the community – another message of hope. In *Amnesty* (Aniekwe, 2010), government again extends the olive branch which the antagonist quickly grabs for selfish advancement. But again the social order is maintained; Tekina (Van Vicker) is given a government appointment and order is restored: back to status quo.

Genre Evolution in Nollywood

Production of films in Nollywood is basically characterized by a band-wagon syndrome. This is not unconnected with the very manner the industry itself began with the commercial success of Vic Mordi's *Living in Bondage* (1992) and its sequel, *Living in Bondage II* (Christian Onu, 1992). Okechukwu Ogunjiofor's *Circle of Doom* (1993) also came in two parts, shot in Igbo language and subtitled in English. As if this was a confirmation of the viability of the new trend, it was to mark the emergence of what Shaka (2002) refers to as "genre oriented productions." According to Shaka, the 'ritual videos' received a negative reaction from the public even where the producers raked in their commercial gains to embark on more ambitious productions, and, thus the emergence of another genre "the epic videos" (Shaka, 2002, pp. 58-59). Shaka also opines that Nollywood genres (Niger Delta subgenre inclusive) do not emerge from a vacuum. Their roots can be traced to social anxieties and fears, dreams, aspirations, demands of members of the Nigerian state and the response of the state to these demands. And since Nigeria is a vast country made up of about 390 ethnic nationalities (Babangida, 2003), with their peculiar competing political, socio-cultural and economic aspirations, there will always be plenty of

stories to tell and Niger Delta proves to be a fertile region for spawning such stories.

Emergence of Niger Delta Ethnic Nationalism Film Genre

Genres are not the specific creation of any individual persons, script writer, producer director, scholar or critic working within the film industry (Ayakoroma, 2008, p.109). They evolve at a particular point in the history of an emergent film industry as a result of several factors, including the viewing interest of the audience, prevailing socio-economic conditions and political climate as well as market forces which drive the industry. Looking at trends of genre evolution in Nollywood, starting from the blockbuster that opened the floodgates of Nollywood film industry, several factors can be said to account for the emergence of the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism film genre.

First is the fact that within Nollywood, there are Nollywood sub-film cultures which have developed along ethnic or regional lines. For example, we have the Hausa film, Yoruba film and Igbo films. Apart from language serving as delineating factor in categorizing these sub cultural film genres within Nollywood, these regional films tell the stories of the experiences of their people: political experiences, historical, economic, social and cultural experiences. It is only reasonable that a sense of ethnic pride and solidarity could have also encouraged the crop of artists from the Niger Delta who, after all, have as much rich material, if not even more than the other regions, and more relevant stories, to borrow a leaf from their colleagues. So each region or ethnic group tend to see the film medium as an effective medium for projecting the image of their people and for making statements that border on affairs of the Nigerian state. The film medium provides a platform for such

statements to be made without having to face litigation or be hounded. Secondly, the trend of evolution of other genre films can also be considered a factor in triggering the evolution of the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism genre. A third factor could be the diffusion of ideas from film stars.

Looking at the *Issakaba* series which evolved from the social climate of Aba, Abia State some years back, one cannot help but notice the dominant star actors of the *Issakaba* series also dominating in the Niger delta ethnic nationalism genre. It can be argued that from playing roles that portrayed the social climate of other regions, a conscious awakening of the prevailing circumstances in their own region was triggered. Another factor is the rise of a crop of writers, actors/actresses, directors, etc., from the Niger Delta who see an opportunity in the film industry as both a profitable commercial enterprise and an instrument of mass mobilization and social consciousness. Like the rise of Nollywood itself, the emergence of Niger Delta film genre provided job opportunities and meaningful livelihood for thousands of people who would otherwise be in the creeks trying to catch fish in waters barren of fish from oil pollution, or engaged in one illegal activity or the other. Packaging the abundant social, economic, political and cultural and historical experiences of the region as both entertainment and escapism for the people, and protest against marginalization and injustice proves to be a constructive, creative and innovation way of grabbing both local attention from state and federal government, as well as the international communities.

Furthermore, Niger Delta ethnic nationalism film genre evolved at a time when the Nigerian audience taste had also undergone some aesthetic evolution. The average viewer had started to complain about the monotony of film/story recycling. The excitement of the decade of *Living in Bondage*, *Taboo*, *Nneka: The*

Pretty Serpent, etc., was over. Viewers wanted more challenging viewing experience than those offered by recycling rituals, epics, romance, etc. The Niger Delta film became another genre that the viewing public could identify with because they were familiar with the real events and the topical issues that gave birth to the films.

The stories were there screaming from front pages and headlines of newspapers and magazines; they were there right in the living rooms on television; these were lived experiences, especially for those resident in the Niger Delta. Those people who were resident within the region could readily confirm that the cameras captured or reenacted the actual lived experiences of the people, especially during the turbulent years of incessant shootings and kidnappings. For those living outside the region, who only read from papers and viewed from televisions, the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism films came as authentic confirmation of all that were reported. These Niger Delta ethnic nationalism films have provided both entertainment and food for thought in the collective psyche of the Nigerian nation.

The Niger Delta ethnic nationalism genre of Nollywood film culture has evolved from a long history of social, cultural, economic subjugation, marginalization and denigration of the people. Perhaps, this genre of video films has done more to call attention to the agitations of the people than arm struggles and confrontations have been able to do. The Niger Delta ethnic nationality filmmakers have, through the use of the film medium, brought to the fore the atrocities, the ills and the unfairness of the whole situation into the living rooms of many stalwarts who had hitherto locked themselves up in their fortified mansions; caring nothing about the demands of restive youths and issuing orders to have them all arrested and exterminated. The wicked businessman who uses the youths to

destroy social infrastructure so that his business would flourish (like Alhaji Gambo in *Amnesty*); the arm dealer who supplies the weapons of destruction to rival militant groups while laughing to the banks (as in *Liquid Black Gold*); the community Chiefs who receive bribes from oil companies and government officials and betray the trust of their people (as in *Genesis*); the futility and stupidity of rival youth gangs who fight one and another, killing their parents, brothers and raping their sisters, while the real enemies of the people enjoy booties they neither worked nor fought for; all these are graphically brought into the living rooms to the rude shock and awakening of many.

At the beginning, the funding of Nollywood was in the hands of Igbo traders at Lagos, Onitsha and Aba. Being shrewd and astute businessmen, they were more interested in maximizing profit than in the quality of the productions, or even taking into consideration the theories of film production. As trained actors and academics began to get involved in the industry, egos began to clash. The Igbo traders had the financial ego and muscles while the professionals had the fine features of professional film making. While the financiers wanted their quick turnover and profit, the professionals wanted excellence; but they had to accept the decisions of the funders while they had no funds. With time some of the professionals who had hitherto acted and collected their professional fees became financially solvent enough to sponsor their own productions. This also partly accounts for the rise of the Niger Delta genre. The availability of funds from acting fees had put some of the Niger Delta actors in a position to tell their own stories from their own point of view; the way they wanted to tell it.

A few Chiefs and opinion leaders within the communities are bribed to help perpetuate the injustices and in subjugation of their own people. The principle of divide and rule has always been

the policy of all oppressive people. The British introduced it into Nigeria, and Nigerians have so far perfected it far beyond the intentions and imaginations of the whites who were the original inventors. Perhaps, while the motivating factor for the white man in his policy of divide and rule was disdain for the ‘primitive tribes’ and convenience for his administrators, the motivating factors for the despotic and autocratic rulers of today may well be greed, opportunity to take vengeance on rival families and ‘I pass my neighbour’ mentality. These socio-economic cum political situations have been contributory factors to the emergence of the militancy genre in Nollywood film culture.

Amnesty 1&2 makes a powerful statement to the effect that the problem of the nation is actually fuelled by cabals who are close to the corridors of power; individuals and groups trusted by government, but they frustrate the efforts of government clandestinely in order to serve their selfish interests. Apart from using the unemployed youths and capitalizing on hunger and poverty, they also use the instrument of misinformation to peddle false rumours while sitting back to sadistically watch the President worry, fret and rage over restive youths who are the creations of some official and unofficial members of the presidential cabinet.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has looked at oil politics being played out in the Niger Delta, we noted that the youth restiveness and militancy in the Niger Delta resulted from a combination of a number of factors, including marginalization of the youths of the region from all quarters (government, oil companies, local Chiefs, corrupt officers of multinational corporations, etc.), and insensitivity of government and multinational oil companies in their dealings with local

communities. Added to these factors are injustices and inequalities occasioned by institutionalized corruption.

The drama of hostilities in 21st century Niger Delta is a replay of the same drama played out in the 19th century with the British traders encouraging intercommunity hostilities, frustrating every effort at peaceful resolution of conflicts and generally raking in profits while brothers killed brothers and kinsmen turned against kinsmen. Alagoa and Fombo in *Chronicle of Grand Bonny*, indict the British for the role they played in fuelling hostilities and frustrating peaceful resolutions: “Efforts to make were frustrated by British traders, who persuaded Jaja not to yield to arbitration...” (2008, p. 31). The British supplied the warring factions with arms and ammunitions much the same way that those who benefit from the hostilities in contemporary Niger Delta region supply them with arms and ammunitions. In the *Liquid Black Gold*, we see the Ogbuefis, the Alhajis and the private foreign exploiters play the same roles of supplying arms and ammunition to the warring factions. The films discussed include the *Genesis* and *Liquid Black Gold* and the *Amnesty* series which explored the gradual process by which brilliant law abiding young men are pushed by a corrupt system into militancy.

The video films give insight into the major grievances of the poor masses of the Niger Delta region, where the youths are side-stepped by corrupt and conniving Chiefs to impoverish the land while the youths remain jobless and poor. Ethnic nationalism sentiment is strong and widespread among the youths of the Niger Delta. They believe that with self-determination and resource control of the region, their deplorable condition will change. Yet, rivalry and dissention polarize them such that the powers that be break their ranks by the trickery of divide and rule. Though in the Niger Delta ethnic nationalism film genre, we see and even accept

simplistic resolutions of the conflicts, the realities on ground are far from what the films portray and the way the issues of conflict are resolved. It is obvious that these simplistic resolutions represent the desires and fantasies of the society. Considering the historical antecedents of the region, a more meaningful commitment on the part of government needs to be made towards addressing the burning issues raised in the region to avoid a repeat of history which might provide more raw materials for another cycle of films that might tell worse stories than have already been told.

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VIDEOGRAPHY

Title: *Amnesty 1&2 and End of Amnesty 1&2*
Director: Ugezu J. Ugezu
Date of Production: 2010
Title: *Genesis 1, 2, & 3*
Director: Charles Inojie
Date of production: 2009
Title: *Liquid Black Gold*
Director: Ikenna Aniekwe Emmanuel
Date of Production: 2008