



# Mitochondrial Eve

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## Exploring Potentials of Theatre, for Political and Environmental Restructuring; Yerima's "Hardground" And Onwueme's "Then She Said It", As Paradigms.

Ike Salome Obiageri

### Abstract

Nigeria is a colonial creation, which process brought together motley nationalities in terms of Statecraft and bewildering assets and powers of demographics, especially in an electoral practice. There have been agitations by various groups on the path of true federalism and good governance. The structure of federalism in Nigeria is called into question and the factors affecting incessant agitations in recent times need to be addressed. It has been noted that the calls for restructuring is borne out of some perceived levels of injustice, inequality and discontentment witnessed by Nigerian society as a result of bad leadership and faulty federalism. This has brought myriads of socio-political and economic problems and has resulted in incessant fallouts between various ethnic groups and federal government. The theatre, being alive to the socio-political realities of its time is not left out in the crusade for restructuring. Using Ahmed Yerima's "Hardground" and Tess Onwueme's "Then She Said It", this paper will examine the environmental degradation and political upheavals that have befallen the Nigerian people, especially, the Niger Delta region. Onwueme, uses 'Hungeria' as a metaphor for Nigeria, a country endowed with abundant natural resources, the majority of whose people live in poverty. There is no equity in the distribution of the abundant wealth. Yerima, also decries the unequal distribution of the abundant wealth that leads to uprising and protest by the people. Thus, there should be adequate conscientization and sensitization of the people, since people's protest, revolt and uprising maybe the only means of effecting restructuring in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Restructuring, Federalism, Environmental degradation, Agitation, Discontentment.

## Introduction

Ever since the present Buhari's administration came into power in 2015, with the change mantra and, the subsequent dissatisfaction of Nigerians with the change, there have been calls for restructuring in the Nation as a whole. People from the South East and the South West of the country have been agitating for the restructuring of the Nation State, while those from the Northern side of the country, are of the opinion that the status quo should remain. The current political, social, economic, and security status of Nigeria is unsustainable. The cries for marginalization, secession, abject poverty, unemployment, including the decrepit nature of infrastructure are some of the nation's critical dysfunctionality. Given the above challenges, there is need for something to be done to give the citizens, a sense of belonging, hence the cry for restructuring. Restructuring is not a new phraseology in the Nigerian concept. Resource control at a time was the song on the lips of many. The only difference is that resource control largely captured the imagination of the people of the Niger Delta, the oil producing areas of Nigeria; while restructuring is pitting the elites of the North and those of the South. There are different faces of restructuring. The political and environmental degradation of

our polity needs serious attention. This paper will be divided into parts that will investigate what restructuring is, what the defects that call for restructuring are, what gains or otherwise there would be in restructuring, what form and shape the restructuring will take. Then recommendations and conclusion.

## Restructuring; What Is It

Restructure is taken from the root word, structure. Structure, according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2008), is defined as 'the way in which parts of something are connected with each other and form a whole, or the things that these parts make up'; 'something that has been built, especially something large such as a building or a bridge'. Structure also has social (societal), political, economic etc. components. It is this root word, that a prefix "re" has been added, to give the trending word Restructure. There has been a gamut of definitions to the word Restructure, depending on the interest of individuals. It has become a political language subject to several political interpretations based on the interest of the subject matter.

Restructuring according to Folajagba in Ezenwoke et al (2018) 'is the act of re-organizing the legal, ownership, operational or other structure for the

purpose of making it more manageable or better organized for its present needs". Restructuring in this context is corporate restructuring which means constitution that will support good governance, respect for citizens, equity and equality. To Nkwede in Ebiziem and Ezenwoko (2018), "Restructuring is a systematic intervention aimed at improving the structure, operations system and procedures to enable its transformation as a multifaceted agent of change, and as a veritable instrument of social cohesion and socio-economic development" To Okeke et al, Restructuring means "effecting changes to our current federal structure, to bring it closer to what our founding leaders erected in order to address the very issues and challenges that led them to opt for a less centralized system".

Orizu et al (2018), after defining what structure means as to organize something such as a system or company in a new different way, is of the opinion that restructuring entails alteration and re-organization of an existing system in a way different from what it used to be. In the same vein, Okonkwo (2018), says that to restructure is "to change existing status-quo in order to make it functional". Deductive from his assertion is that restructuring is a purpose driven activity that hinges on replacement of an existing nature of a

system with a new one that will be suitable to achieve the purpose of the system. Thus, Orizu et al, continuing says that restructuring "is a significant alteration, re-organization, reformation and re-arrangement of an existing structure, form or status quo in a revolutionary or evolutionary manner, with the aim of making it more improved, effective and functionally efficient". Nuhu Yaqub (2016), captures the essence of restructuring when he posits that as a pre-fixed word, the concept can be defined as a "process, in the case of a nation-state, that requires its citizens to take a closer look at the national edifice, or, better still, the state of the nation with regard to how to address structural deformities, if any". For the purpose of this paper, restructuring can be said to involve, a total overhaul of existing structure in the Nigerian nation to make it not only effective, but workable and acceptable to the federating states and ethnic nationalities. The reason for this view is that Nigeria is made up of distinct ethnic nationalities, regions, states etc. These component units or federating states and by extension, ethnic nationalities should have the opportunity to participate in their own affairs as obtainable in developed federations.

The British colonialists, forcefully lumped different ethnic nationalities together in the

entity called Nigeria to serve their own selfish interests or as Osuntokun in Epelle and Nweke (2018) observed that Nigerian federalism was a:

Deliberate creation of the British government in order to maintain a neo-colonial control of the country even after independence. To this end, the British colonial government purposefully created structural imperfections that feathered the nest of inter-ethnic rivalries in the guise of federalism.

This is also in line with Ndoma Egba in Osegbue Chike et al (2016) that the "colonialists having encountered economic quagmire in the North, co-opted these entities previously ruled as protectorates into one entity to be later named Nigeria. The rationale behind it was to pool the rich resources of the Southern protectorate to augment inadequacies of the North". The British who patched these non identical tribes never thought of the workability of the 'unholy marriage', and what would be the state of the new found family after independence. This line of thought gave rise to Nuhu Yaqub's (2016) question "Did it ever occur to Nigerians that Britain that introduced federalism to Nigeria was, and

is still never a federal society? What practical experience did it have to pass on to Nigerians? (pg.8). On the other hand, given the large size and ethnic multifarious nature of Nigeria, the best bet was to settle for federalism that can effectively manage the differences as opposed to a unitary system. This opinion agrees with what Nwabueze (2013), avers that "Nigeria, just like the United States of America, who having been faced with large territorial size and more confounding ethnic nationalities of inherent diversities, settled for federalism as an antidote to the myriad of historical and geographical problems of the country". The reason is that federalism is a device aimed at formally recognizing diversities inherent in a plural society.

Smiley in Omotola (2016) explicating what federalism involves states that

a federal system must attempt to deal with diversities which are territorially based either by conferring the power over some of these pervasive diversities on the states or by giving the constituent (local governments) units a permanent voice (or function through decentralization or devolution) in the central government to make the citizens feel the impact or presence of government.

In the same vein, writing about federalism and heterogeneity, Olawari in Osegbue et al (2016) argues that:

The point is made that a federal system exists when power is shared between a central government and component units. As a form of government, it is usually in heterogeneous societies where people of diverse origins unite to form a common government; wherein unity in diversity is preserved

This captures the element of cultural diversity and multifarious ethnic groups, which comprised the entity. It recognizes the existence of diverse opinion and political orientations, coming together to form a united nation. Powers are shared between two or more levels of government that work to manage diverse interests of the polity. Powers are structurally arranged to avoid conflicts and disputes arising from their interactions and association. For Nwabueze in Eta et al (2019),

Federalism is an arrangement whereby powers of government within a country are shared between, a national, country-wide government and a number of regionalized governments in a way that each exists as a government separately and independently from the others operating directly on persons and property within its territorial area, with a will of its own and its own apparatus for the conduct of its affairs, and with an authority in some

matter, exclusive of all the others.

In the same manner, Apparodai quoted in Eta et al sees federalism as "a system built on the principle that the government must be structured on the basis of existence of multiple levels of government each of which exercises some governmental legislative powers allotted to them by a constitution, which is supreme and the life source of all governments in the country". The formal division of power between the levels of government which is usually claimed to be the essence of federalism is thus to be seen as an attempt to prevent a single group defined in racial, class or linguistic terms, from dominating the others and monopolizing the public goods. Kapur in Okeke et al (2018) is of the view that "federalism is a dual government where powers are divided and distributed by the constitution between central, regional or state governments..., the component units are independent authorities within their allotted sphere of jurisdiction". He further asserted that it is imperative that the component units must be left with adequate economic resources to perform the functions assigned to them satisfactorily without being dependent on the doles of the national government. From the foregoing, federalism refers to the doctrine which advocates and promotes the form of organization of a state in which

power is decentralized by contract as a means of safeguarding local identities and individual liberties. It also describes the structure of a state, and designates political process and culture. Nigeria's experience is very different from what federalism is because, the central government has usurped the powers exercised by the regional governments. It is this anomaly in the Nigerian practice of federalism that has led to the clamour for restructuring.

### **Why Political and Environmental Restructuring**

Restructuring has been a trending word in the mouths of many especially since the coming of the Buhari administration, and has heated the polity. This heated debate has pitched the Southern Nigeria against the Northern Nigeria. The people from Southern Nigeria are the protagonists, since they are agitating that there should be a change in the polity. While the people from Northern Nigeria are the antagonists, who want the status quo to remain. The protagonists argue that by virtue of their contribution to the general purse, the principles of equity and justice demand that they should be allowed to control and manage their resources, since they bear the impact of oil exploration; while the antagonists maintain that oil exploration activities were funded from the proceeds of cocoa, ground-nut, hides and skin from the

North according to Adeosun et al (2017). The protagonists want the Nigerian structure changed. Professor A.B.C.Nwosu, a political adviser to president Obasanjo in an interview granted to Sun Newspaper as (2016) argued that restructuring means 'let us change the structure'. What is the structure? There is too much power at the centre. The federal government has too much power, too much responsibility, too much money to waste... In answer to why people are asking for restructuring, he asserted that the structure we have is anti development, the structure we have is unfair, and unjust" In the same vein, Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president of Nigeria is of the opinion that "the current structure of the Nigerian federation has been a major impediment to the economic and political development of our country. He concurs with Nwosu that "our version of federalism should be made less centralized, less suffocating, and less dictatorial in the administration of the country". On the part of the antagonists, Anthony Sanni, one time public relations officer of the Arewa Consultative Forum argues in Yaqub (2016) "The North is currently opposed to the restructuring of Nigeria precisely because, there is nothing to restructure. The North does not believe the problems of Nigeria can rightly be attributed to the form of government the country chooses. Those who hanker for true

federalism to enable each constituent unit to develop at its own pace, are unwittingly advocating that Nigerians live as if they are in different countries, where some citizens would live in a comfort zone, while others would live on the fringe. Tanko Yakassai in the Sun newspaper in the same line of thought avers that those agitating for restructuring is unpatriotic, they are doing so with a kind of hate in their heart; what they want to is to deny the North, the kind of share they are getting from the federation account since the factors used in the sharing formula include population and landmass which is God made". From the position of people of Northern extraction, it is clear they are not perturbed about the present structure of Nigerian federalism. In other words, they are very comfortable with the way and manner the highly centralized Nigerian federalism is run. They are interested in regular receipt of allocation from the Distributive Pool Account.

Nigeria, as presently constituted does not accommodate differing interests, circumstances and diversities of the constituent groups. All the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, appear to be living together grudgingly over the years due to perceived social injustices. In an attempt to liberate them from this menace, the quest for political restructuring becomes expedient. Political restructuring

according to Amuwo and Harault in Epelle and Nweke (2019)

seeks to restructure the existing federalism in such a manner that the powers of the federal government are drastically reduced with a view to giving the component units or federating states and by extension, ethnic nationalities the opportunities to participate in their own affairs as obtainable in developed federations

Tamuno aligns himself with the same view, when he in Epelle and Nweke (2019) avers

federalism as I understand it is, a form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a cooperative manner though the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity, among others, tend to pull their people apart.

Going by the definition of federalism above, it is clear that the persistent clamour for political restructuring can only come when there is social injustice where ordinarily, there should be justice. So, when there is injustice in a political system that is structured to achieve not only justice, but unity in diversity, there would then be quest for justice with a view to bringing back the original ideals for which the union was formed or made to exist. Najakku (2016) says that political restructuring

involves "reorganization, re-arrangement and reformation". To Adeosun et al (2017), political restructuring entails "both political re-configuration of the country and the devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes". To Orizu et al (2018), political restructuring "entails the systemic reform and re-organization of the existing political structure in the nature of practice and in the way it relates to the social and economic dimensions of the polity, be it in governance and resource control or otherwise". To Epelle and Nweke (2019) political restructuring connotes "sustained clamor for 'true federalism' by some federating states and ethnic nationalities in Nigeria". According to Obaze in Okeke et al (2019), "The Nigerian federalism is very sick, unbalanced and lopsided in terms of centralizing power". This has made effort in terms of securing peace, and stability of the country, and its survival against the forces of division and conflict in a diverse and heterogeneous society like Nigeria to remain elusive. One basic ingredient in the practice of federalism is equity of federating units. Orizu et al (2018) quoting Wheare states that:

Equality of the federating units in a federation must be reflected in some reasonable balance between the units in area, population and wealth

which will ensure that all units can maintain their independence within the sphere allotted to them and that no one dominates the other.

This attribute of federalism is negated in Nigeria, where there is gross inequality in area, population, number of states and local governments within the regional zones. This has brought about special treatment and recognition of some federating units to the detriment of others, with complete disregard that the principle of equality of federating units being a characteristic of federalism holds that federating units must relate to each other and to the federal/central government on an equal basis without any special recognition to any federating unit to the detriment of others. The example of the number of states within the different geo-political zones of Nigeria can suffice. The North west has seven (7) states, the South east has five (5), while the South west, South South, North east and North central have six (6) states each. There is a clear marginalization of the South east, and preference to the North west. It also means that regionally, the North has nineteen (19) states, while the South has seventeen (17) states. This also affected the number of local governments, even the allocation of federal revenue since the Northern region has an estimated no of 75% of the country's land mass and over 66% of



its population. The standard practice in developed federal system like United States and other countries is for a region/state to exploit the natural resource(s) embedded in its territory, and pay tax or royalty to the central government. The advantage of this type of federalism otherwise called 'fiscal federalism' is that it boosts the revenue profile of the resource producing region, allowing it enough funds to make up for any environmental hazard suffered in the course of the resources exploration/exploitation. This is not the case in Nigeria. According to Epelle (2004), the Land Use Act of (1978) "vests ownership and control of all lands and resources therein in the federal government", thereby, make all revenues accruing from the exploitation of these resources, the exclusive preserve of the federal government. This Act, along with an earlier promulgated Oil Mineral Rights Decree No. 51 of 1969 officially ensured that region/states which lay the 'golden egg' hand over the 'chicks' when hatched, while conversely, the states who produce no resource, get sometimes, each more revenue relative to resource bearing states from the monthly federal allocation, according to Epelle et al (2018). This unusual federalism, he continues, is bolstered by the fact that, in Nigeria, what is used in distributing revenue is not what is derived from your region/state, but such nebulous variables as "equality of states" (

40%), "population" (30%), "land mass/terrain" (10%), "social development sector" (10%), then "internal revenue" effort getting a paltry (10%). This anomaly is the reason behind the feeling of resentment, dissensions and agitations for remediation from persons in the resource-producing regions.

This checkered and skewed federal practice gained impetus since petroleum gained ascendancy to the commanding height in the Nigerian economy. Before this time, the derivation principle was left at 100%. It was only in 1964 that it was reduced to 50%. Commenting on this, Epelle and Isike (2005) observed "This period also coincided with the era when the regions had a fair spread of tradable agricultural produce: groundnut in the North, cocoa in the West and palm oil in the East." At that time, the three regional governments retained the lion share of revenue from resources gotten from their regions and bequeathed only a fraction of it to the federal government. However, all this changed with the discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta. With the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa in 1956, there has been a shift in the nation's earning from agricultural produce to oil and gas. Paradoxically, in spite of the region's enormous contribution to the well-being of the Nigerian state, it is the least developed

part of the Nigerian State. Aluko (2004), quoting a World Bank report on Environmental Development for the Niger Delta observes

The Niger Delta has been blessed with an abundance of human and physical resources including the majority of Nigerian oil and gas deposits, good agricultural land, extensive forests excellent fisheries as well as with well developed industrial base, a strong banking (potential system), a large labour force and an exuberant (potential) factor, but its potential for economic growth and sustainable development remains unfulfilled.

The region is a major victim of environmental degradation occasioned by frequent oil spills and gas flaring. Ikelegbe in Feghabo (2014), reveals that "between 1976 and 1996, about 2,369,471 barrels of oil were spilled. Out of this quantity, about 1,820,044 barrels of oil were never recovered –meaning that this quantity of oil was absorbed by the soil that consequently became infertile for agricultural purposes". This reveals that the multinational oil companies are unmindful of the implications of their poor standard of mining for the environment and its inhabitants. This give rise to negative consequences that is devastating to both the human and non human dwellers of the

region. On the flora and fauna, frequent oil spills have left most places deforested, forcing the wildlife to go into extinction or migrate further. There have been outcries nationally and internationally about the environmental pollution from oil spillage in the Niger Delta. Aluko (2004), quoting a World Bank Report on Environmental Action Plan towards the development of Environmental Action plan for Nigeria stated

The oil industry, particularly in Rivers and **Bayelsa states has both** urban and a rural presence. Oil wells are located throughout the rural area. Chronic leaks result in widespread destruction of fishing and agricultural resources. Oil exploration has contributed significantly to the deforestation of the states. Between 1979 and 1989, there were 784 reported significant incidents of oil pollution and in some cases, marine life was completely destroyed in the affected areas of Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers and Ondo states. Pollution is also attributed to spillages, washing of tankers, dredging, moving of heavy equipments and deballasting.

From the above report, it is evident that because of oil exploration and the consequent incessant spills, the traditional occupation of the Niger Deltans - mainly farming and fishing have been disrupted. A direct fallout of this is that most people

whose main occupations are farming and fishing have thus, been deprived of their means of livelihood.

There is a high rate of unemployment which arises from the destruction of the means of livelihood of the people such as fishing and farming as a result of oil exploration of the multinational oil companies, and moreover, the oil companies do not employ from the oil bearing communities. The destruction of the environment and the eco system through oil spillage and gas flaring, by the multi-national oil companies have led to the agitation for restructuring. Oyenola Dokun in Feghabo (2014) gives an insight

In Kolo creek in Bayelsa State, Otuasagba community in the Yenegoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, in the central Niger Delta, two mountain-like flares from Shell's pipes have ravaged the community's forests, streams and farm lands. Other sites have been devastated from Shell's action in the area, and the company refused to clean up.

Feghabo (2014) quoting Fakile describes the gas flaring experienced by the communities in the Niger Delta as the 'worst felt anywhere in the world'. This can be described as the most horrible human right' violation anywhere because as Saro Wiwa in Feghabo admits "the

environment is the first right of man. Without a safe environment, man cannot exist to claim other rights, be they political, social or economical". The gas flaring has led to high humidity, frequent rainfall that results in recurrent flooding and devastation of farmlands in the area. The negative impact of oil exploration to the people of Niger Delta and their environment is summed up by Udeh as quoted in Feghabo (2014),

Oil exploration and exploitation has over the last four decades impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger Delta oil bearing communities, massively threatening the subsistent peasant economy and environment and hence the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people.

The people are concerned about the environmental degradation of their region because it is their source of living. They depend on the environment and rivers for subsistence, socio-cultural survival, food and shelter. Now, they have no land to farm and rivers to fish, they are agitating for restructure.

### **Synopsis of the Plays**

**HARDGROUND:** Things went wrong with Nimi and his company of young boys who went to destroy oil pipelines in the creeks of the Niger Delta. An informant had given

away their plans. The police were on hand and swooped down on them, killing all except Nimi who escaped/was rescued. There is now a death sentence on his head. How will the mystery of the parrot be unraveled, and what will become of Nimi?

THEN SHE SAID IT: Tired of holding in/keeping quiet or being silenced over their oppression by the local, national and foreign interests in the land of 'Hungeria' typified, the women and youths of the land took matters in their own hand to tell the world and project their cause to the international community to be given a hearing for justice. Determined not to be silenced or intimidated by their oppressors again, they rose up to revolutionary struggle and challenged tradition. Dispossessed and betrayed, the people resort to militant action and protest. They pressed forward their demands for just compensation, human rights, dignity and equitable distribution of the resources of the land.

### **Yerima's Idea of Restructuring in 'Hardground'**

The agitation of the people of the Niger Delta for restructuring and even in resource control is termed 'the struggle' in *Hardground*'. Nimi, in reply to his mother's lament says "There are younger boys and girls than me in the struggle, children who believe 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 sound right to join the struggle, first as a boy of a group, then as the eye or a spy". Pg.12 Isaiah Ilo in Ujah observes that "---in protest, guerilla youth movements arose such as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, (NDPVF), Movement For the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), The Matyrs Brigade, Egbesu Boys and a host of others". The groups believed that their people were oppressed in the Nigerian federation and the solution was resource control under a federation of ethnic nationalities. The 'struggle', has almost become a way of life. It has now become synonymous with growing up. Nimi is of the opinion that "you cannot grow up in our ways Mama and not feel what I feel now, unless you want to hide in the folds of your wrapper like Baba and pretend that all is well"(Hardground.19). The fact that the school he went to was made up of wasteland and poverty, even the child could smell it and quickly learn that "nothing is free, unless you ask for it and when they refuse to give you, you grab it that is what we are doing. Boys first growing up asking for bean cakes and puff-puff. Then, gradually, we were forced to grow up to become men overnight, asking for our rights. Ameh in Fosudo (2010), puts it in the right perspective when he observes that the

"restiveness of the Niger Delta is as old as the discovery of oil in the region". The 'struggle' has become hydra-headed. Some under cover, because of the gains that will be accruable to them mask themselves while pushing out the young boys serving as fronts for them. In the play, Inyingifaa is a gun runner. He says "my business stopped. My shipment could not pass through. No one wanted my guns...my men were killed, paraded on television that they were caught bunkering. But I never meddle in oil only guns" pg 22). The Don is another of such men. He is described in the play as a 'god' and the 'head of everything', A 'real man', the 'supreme commander', the man sent as 'our Messiah'. The one who knows what the children needs for the future. He feeds and clothes us'. Baba confirms as he says 'There in the creeks, the Don is God' (pg.14).This calls to mind Nuhu Yaqub's (2014) question about restructuring "In whose interest?"

There are also corrupt politicians who pay lip service to the 'struggle'. Nimi says of them, "They created us. They gave us the reason to find our place...first, we were errand boys, and so we got guns and money, we started to ask questions, they had no answers. We all knew what they looked like before they got into power. We dumped them". (pg.37) One of such politicians was Chief Tomfort, who, according to Tonye

"was a middle man who enriched himself rather than taking care of his people, the monies that was supposed to go to the people, he appropriated to himself and became a big philanthropist all of a sudden". Pg.34 Feghabo (2014), remarks to this effect "The problems of the Niger Delta as enormous as they are trivialized by the endemic problem of corruption in all the tiers of government". He stated that even though various agencies and commissions like Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission, and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) have been constituted to address the problems of the Niger Delta, the activities of these bodies have often been characterized by dishonesty, as these bodies have rather become conduit pipes for the enrichment of few individuals at the expense of many languishing in want". The Niger Delta people believe that it is only 'true federalism' that is needed in order to actualize long and lasting peace in Nigeria. They still believe in the Kaiama Declaration. Yerima through Nimi says "Cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our people and communities the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources which were enacted without our participation and consent...the best way for Nigeria is a

federation of ethnic nationalities". Pg.36.  
Epelle and Nweke (2019) are of the same view that

There is need for Nigerians to adopt and accept the constitution as theirs instead of the pseudo preamble in the constitution. By so doing, that would reinforce and galvanize the holistic acceptance of the preamble "We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: HAVING firmly and solemnly resolved: TO LIVE in unity..., AND TO PROVIDE for a constitution..., DO HEREBY MAKE, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES, the following constitution...in the 1999 Constitution as entirely owned by Nigerians and not one foisted on her

The people of Niger Delta have the idea that dialogue alone cannot do the magic to bring about restructuring of the polity. A lot of dialogue had already been done; it is now time for action, and something quite shocking. Nimi says "And my people are exploited every day. We started crying since 1940. Where is God? Why is nobody listening? Why?...Nothing is real anymore...I have changed my mind. I am going back to the jungle, where we write the laws and live them each day as we feel...I go back the swamps, I swear". Pg.53

### **Onwueme's Idea Of Restructuring in *Then She Said It***

As already stated in this write-up, restructuring is to organize something such as a system or company in a new different way. What it means is that restructuring entails alteration, and re-organization of an existing system in a way different from how it used to be. Quoting Okonkwo, Orizu et al (2014), states that "restructuring is to change an existing status-quo in order to make it more functional". Onwume in *Then She said it* writes that the 'Hungeria people, a metaphor she used for Nigeria, have had their fill of decades of oppression, exploitation and marginalization. Oxpul (2019), says of Nigeria; "it is an irony that people could go to bed hungry in a region where billions of Naira is churned into the coffers of the Nigerian Federal and State governments monthly". It is this poverty that drives many of the militant youths to violence. Onwueme, in *Then She said it* asks, "For how long can a people whose land produces enormous wealth continue to suffer in silence, abject poverty, hunger, starvation, acute fuel, water and electricity shortages? Violent rape, abuse of women and girls; environmental pollution, humiliation and betrayal; especially in the hands of those elected and entrusted to protect them? Pg.viii For being betrayed, dispossessed, the wounded people of Hungeria resort to militant action and protest to bring about change. Determined to never again be silenced, and intimidated

by their oppressors, the relegated women now take centre-stage to 'stage' their pain, and project their cause to the international community, who can no longer ignore them, as they are compelled to grant them a fair hearing for justice". Pg vii

Nigeria is a major producer of crude oil, an OPEC member and ranked 12<sup>th</sup> supplier of oil in the world. Sadly, the people of 'Hungeria' do not only lack food, water and other essential commodities, but also cannot find premium motor spirit and kerosene for their daily domestic use. There is always artificial scarcity created, paving way for corrupt oil barons and government officials to smile their way to the bank after selling at cut throat prices through black market. Onwueme captures this in the play:

OBIDA: ...You mean you had to sleep here?

OJI/OLDMAN What else?, no water, no food...

WOMEN; Tomorrow (They all laugh. They spot some shady movements behind)

OJI/OLDMAN I smell something fish...fishy

OBIDA Fuel! It's there (pause) Always deceive us. Send us away so they can sell at bloated prices to their friends loaded with...

It is sad and pathetic that a nation that produces crude oil and has refineries can suffer acute and perennial scarcity of petroleum products.

OJI/OLDMAN...You dey mad?

OBIDA: You too. You're mad. Why? Why give fuel to him and not to us?

OJI/FUEL ATTENDANT?: If you want fuel, den pay...(showing) Dat one na one thousand

WOMEN: WHAT

OJI/FUEL ATTENDANT? Yes. Take it or leave it

OBIDA: Yes. That's how you people hike up everything.

NIGER: So poor people no go get...

OBIDA: You create artificial scarcity. Pg. 20

It is not just that they cannot get fuel for cooking; their sources of livelihood have been destroyed.

OBIDA: And look around you. See? They're not even killing us alone, the trees too

NIGER: Our farmlands

BENUE And Rivers

NIGER: The environment

BENUE: Polluting

NIGER: Polluting the land, the Rivers,  
our entire environment

WOMEN: All polluted

Aluko (2005) quoting Akabo agrees firmly stating "Most of the Niger Delta remain a 'shell' even though Shell and other Multinational Oil companies are still operating in the area. Pollution of farmlands, fishing streams, deforestation, corrosive erosion and other woes have all been traced to the oil exploration and production activities of the Multinationals. The consequence is that Niger Delta's mangrove and rain forest face real threats of being wiped out. Also facing possible extinction are the fauna and the indigenous peoples that depend on them for survival". The health of the people is affected too for it is tied in to the environmental degradation. Akabo giving an insight on how the health of the people have been adversely affected blames the high pressure pipe-lines criss-crossing homes, all of which have left the poor, local people at the mercy of respiratory, abdominal and cancerous illnesses which they never suffered from, prior to Shell's presence

OBIDA: They've killed everything with their oil pollution and spillage. We cannot breathe clean air. Fishes die or get fried in the polluted simmering rivers. Water-water, everywhere. But we have no clean

water to drink! And now, we lose the land too?

NIGER: Also firewood because the plants and trees are soaked in oil. What do they expect us to cook with?

A Guardian Newspaper report on August 21, 2002 in Aluko (2005) reports

The women specifically accused the oil company of ceaselessly digging artificial canals all over its host communities in Ugbok Kingdom without proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), thereby opening up their area to inflow of the ocean into their fresh water. Sea water enters into the originally fresh water through these canals, thus causing serious ecological problems. The sea water influx has resulted in serious vegetation damage. Our fisher men and women no longer catch enough fish to earn a living. Our farm lands, fish ponds and waterways are polluted or contaminated by oil spills as a result of prolonged exploitation by Chevron.

Efe and Mogborukor in Feghabo (2014) , reported that acidic rainfall affects the rivers, creeks and wells. Because of the infrastructural neglect suffered by the Niger Delta people, who are mostly farmers/rural dwellers, they are compelled to drink water from these only available poisoned sources.

It has been pointed out before that Nigeria's problem, especially that of the Niger Delta,



as enormous as they are, are trivialized by the endemic problem of corruption. It is not just the Multinational oil companies that are the problem, but the collusion of those in authority. We find evidences of this assertion in the play, where collusion between Atlantic, symbolizing the foreign multinational companies, and the local collaborators like Ethiopie, the Chief, and Kainji the government official. Chief pressurizes the oil companies to pay compensation to the people for getting displaced, for oil exploration, but he pockets the money so advanced.

CHIEF: That's why you must listen to me. You see that new place by my village where you just struck a new oil well? Well, the people there, too, are my own people.

ATLANTIC: Meaning?

CHIEF: Compensation

ATLANTIC: Oh yes! We'll compensate the people as usual.

CHIEF: Ye. Pay. Through me...so make payments in my name. I'm their leader after all.

ATLANTIC: I hear you. But the rule with the Government is that all compensation should go to the community to ensure that everyone is paid. You know everyone in that community/village must be displaced to the camp. Nothing there yet.

CHIEF: Oh! Yes. They will get...I mean, through me. I am their Chief, their leader. No one goes to the community ...land...except through me. And no one comes to it or to you, except through me. Pg.41

Kainji inflates contracts and collects monetary hand outs from the oil conglomerates so as to look the 'other' way and refuse to bring action against them concerning oil spillages and environmental pollution. In addition, they also collude with oil firms in stealing of petroleum products in the high seas by illegally siphoning same and selling to thieving marketers, the proceeds of which are paid to their foreign accounts.

KAINJI: ...But it's all part of it. But trust me, I have a special offer. Let's make a deal. You know the new off shore line?

ATLANTIC: Hmm...Yes

KAINJI: We can make a fortune..., you and me

ATLANTIC: What?

KAINJI: (Smiling) Pimp a million barrels or more a day. No records. Ships waiting at sea. Sale sealed. Paid in dollars or Pound Sterling overseas into your account and mine. No hassles. Just that we'll have to displace more villagers. Pg.38

These shady deals and the profits accruing from it have made those in authority lose connection with the people. They have no interest in them any longer and do not care for them. The people have become so disheartened that to the youths, their certificates are now useless. Unemployment has reached tragic proportions in Hungary. University graduates roam the streets in search of non-existing jobs. It got to the point that when there was a vacancy for the post of a guard, about two thousand people turned out in search of it. According to Yaqub recounting the unemployment issues in Nigeria has been a social issue. In 2014, about 6.5 million applicants vied for a four thousand (4,000), job vacancies that were advertised. Due to mismanagement of crowd control, about sixteen (16) deaths resulted, and many were injured.

ATLANTIC: My Gaad! Look... The whole damned country is at the gate. Waiting, waiting for handouts

KAINJI: But its only one job.

ATLANTIC: Just one vacancy for a guard, and they're all here? The whole nation. One hundred and twenty million of them. Goolie. These people make me sick.

### Analysis Conclusion

The economic and political marginalization in Nigeria, especially of the oil-bearing

communities, poverty and lack of basic infrastructure, high rate of unemployment and destruction of the environment and the ecosystem of the region through oil spillage and gas flaring by the Oil multinationals, amidst others, are reasons that are highlighted by both Onwueme and Yerima why there should be restructuring. These are some of the reasons that have been adduced for the 'struggle' in the *Hardground*, the youths and women in *Then she said it* took matters in their own hands and sought justice for themselves in the only way they know how. History often does not record where and when the oppressor freely let's go of the oppressed. More often than not, the oppressed would have to put up a tough and sometimes bloody fight of resistance. Onwueme seems to be aware of this. Perhaps this is why she believes and recommends that people under any form of oppression or injustice owe it to themselves to according to Uwem Affiah (2010) to "rise, protest, resist, agitate and reclaim their humanity". That is the spirit of the report of Niyi Bello in the Guardian of 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2018 of the meeting of ethnic nationalities of the Southern and Middle Belt parts of Nigeria. Chief Albert Horsefall remarks

The oil and gas belong to us, our freedom is a constitutional right, above all, it is God given right, and nobody can take it or

give it to us...that is why we are asking for restructuring, tomorrow we will take to ourselves what belongs to us and we will snatch it from those who have been sitting on our lives for so long.

The national leader of PANDEF, Chief Edwin Clarke asserts

...What we are fighting for is restructuring. We want equality in this country, we want to feel that we are all members of this society, a situation whereby the resources I have in my backyard are being mismanaged...We must trust ourselves, no more going back, nobody should chicken out.

This is in line with Epelle et al (2019) observation,

Political restructuring as being canvassed is a radical movement by ethnic nationalities and states to unbundle the 'No Go' areas in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended (1999) with the sole aim of devolving powers to the component units comparable to other developed federations globally

Remember the Arab spring. They were pushed to the limit and they reacted. Nigerians have been pushed to the wall especially, the Niger Delta. Yerima termed it the struggle, fighting from the 'trenches' and Onwueme said it is doing 'something shocking' kidnapping the oil multinationals

and other 'bigwigs'. The time for dialoguing is over; it is now time for action.

Nigeria is due for restructuring in all facets, including politically and environmentally. Lip service should no longer be paid to restructuring. The principles of federalism should be adopted in Nigerian federal practice so that ethno-regional entities interests should be mutually integrated. The lopsided federalism that is practiced in Nigeria where some parts of the entity is more favored than others should be done away with. The Nigerian people should be made to have a say and adopt their own constitution by themselves. States that have natural resources should retain the lion share of their proceeds and pay royalty to the federal government. This will boost the revenue profile of the region and also allow it funds to help ameliorate the environmental hazard resulting from it. The time has come, and it is now, to 're-engineer' Nigeria's federal practice. To Onwueme and Yerima, this may not come about through conferring, but through 'struggle' agitation and resistance.

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