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Poverty as Offspring of Corruption: An Analysis of Leadership Failure and Militancy in *Night Rain* by Chris Anyokwu

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Abstract

*This study examines the dramatic portrayal of the Niger Delta crisis in Chris Anyokwu's 2014 play *Night Rain*, an adaptation of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's seminal poem, which starkly contrasts the environmental degradation and abject poverty of oil-polluted rural communities with the opulence of urban centres funded by the region's wealth, thereby exposing the paradox of abundance amidst deprivation; drawing exclusively on Michel Foucault's theory of power and resistance, the analysis conceptualises corrupt leadership at federal, corporate, and traditional levels as a relational and productive power that alienates indigenous populations from their resources, directly generating poverty while inevitably provoking militant resistance as a counter-power exercised by disenfranchised youths, such as Pereowei and Eneowei, who resort to violence in the creeks as a strategic refusal of domination, through close examination of the play's imagery, character dynamics, and thematic progression, the study traces a causal chain wherein corruption breeds poverty, which in turn fuels militancy, addressing a scholarly gap in the under-examined critique offered by Anyokwu's theatrical work and affirming the vital role of literary interventions in highlighting systemic injustice while advocating for equitable governance, environmental restoration, and sustainable peace in the Niger Delta.*

Background to the Study

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, often described as a paradox of abundance amidst deprivation, has long been the epicentre of the country's oil economy. Endowed with vast petroleum reserves that account for the bulk of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, the region paradoxically grapples with severe environmental degradation, widespread poverty, and persistent socio-political unrest. Oil exploration and production activities, dating back to the late 1950s, have resulted

in extensive pollution through oil spills, gas flaring, and pipeline vandalism, destroying farmlands, fisheries, and water sources that form the traditional livelihoods of indigenous communities. This ecological devastation has exacerbated economic marginalisation, unemployment, and health challenges, fostering a cycle of poverty despite the region's contribution to national wealth.

Central to these issues is the role of corrupt leadership and unequal resource distribution. Federal

government policies, including revenue allocation formulae that centralise oil proceeds while neglecting local development, have been criticised for perpetuating inequality. Multinational oil companies operating in the area have also faced accusations of complicity in environmental harm and inadequate corporate social responsibility. The betrayal by local traditional leaders, who often prioritise personal gains from government and corporate alliances, further alienates communities. These grievances have historically manifested in protests, beginning with non-violent agitations in the 1990s, notably the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, whose execution in 1995 intensified tensions.

The escalation into militancy and violence in the early 2000s, marked by groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and others, reflected deep-seated frustration over neglect, pollution, and lack of basic amenities. Although the 2009 presidential amnesty programme temporarily reduced armed insurgency by offering rehabilitation to ex-militants, underlying issues of poverty, corruption, and environmental ruin persist into the present day. Recent years have witnessed resurgent attacks on oil infrastructure, underscoring the fragility of peace in the region.

Nigerian literature has served as a powerful medium for critiquing

these socio-economic and political maladies. Writers from the Niger Delta and beyond have deployed poetry, prose, and drama to highlight the human cost of oil exploitation. J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's seminal poem "Night Rain" (1962), set against the backdrop of a torrential downpour in a rural riverside home, evocatively captures themes of vulnerability, poverty, and resilience in the face of nature's fury a metaphor for the harsh realities of Delta life even before the oil boom intensified hardships.

Chris Anyokwu, a prominent Nigerian playwright, scholar, and critic based at the University of Lagos, extends this literary tradition through his dramatic adaptation of Clark's poem in his play *Night Rain*. Transposing the poetic imagery into a theatrical form, Anyokwu foregrounds the contemporary Niger Delta crisis, juxtaposing the gloom of polluted, impoverished communities with the opulence of urban centres built on oil wealth. Through characters like Enara, her mother, and militant figures such as Pereowei and Eneowei, the play dramatises how corrupt governance and leadership failure breed abject poverty and propel youths towards militancy as a desperate form of resistance (Anyokwu 91).

This study situates the play within the broader discourse on Niger Delta literature and eco-criticism. By examining how Anyokwu illustrates corruption as the progenitor of poverty and violence, the research depicts the enduring relevance of

literary interventions in advocating for justice, equitable resource distribution, and environmental restoration in the region. In an era where these challenges remain unresolved, such artistic engagements continue to illuminate pathways towards sustainable peace and development. It intends to present the intricate causal relationship between corrupt leadership and its devastating offspring poverty and militancy in Anyokwu's *Night Rain*. Using a non-statistical methodology.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria continues to embody a stark paradox of immense wealth derived from oil extraction juxtaposed with pervasive poverty, environmental degradation, and recurrent violence, despite contributing the bulk of the nation's revenue; indigenous communities suffer polluted waterways, destroyed livelihoods, unemployment, and absent basic amenities while oil funds fuel the opulence of distant urban centres such as Abuja and Lagos, a disparity largely attributable to systemic corruption, centralised resource control by the federal government, exploitative practices of multinational oil companies, and the complicity of local traditional leaders who often prioritise personal gain over communal welfare (Enweremadu 16). This leadership failure has entrenched abject poverty and propelled disenfranchised youths towards militancy and gangsterism as forms of desperate resistance, with temporary measures

like the 2009 amnesty programme failing to address root causes and thus allowing conflicts to resurface. Although Nigerian literature has effectively critiqued these injustices, Chris Anyokwu's dramatic adaptation *Night Rain*, which extends J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's poem to dramatise corruption as the direct progenitor of poverty and violent revolt through vivid character portrayals and contrasting imagery (Anyokwu 167), remains underexplored in scholarly discourse, which tends to privilege prose or earlier works and thus overlooks the play's significant contribution to eco-critical and postcolonial analyses of resource curse and subaltern agency; this study therefore seeks to fill this critical gap by examining how leadership betrayal in the play generates poverty and militancy, buttressing the vital role of literary interventions in advocating for justice and sustainable development in the region.

Review of Literature

Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2011) vividly portrays the neocolonial destruction of the Niger Delta through oil exploitation, portraying ecological devastation, social disruption, and the complicity of multinational corporations and the Nigerian government in perpetuating poverty and violence among indigenous communities (Feldner 27).

Tanure Ojaide's poetry, particularly collections like *Delta Blues & Home Songs*, employs eco-critical lenses to

lament environmental despoliation in the Niger Delta, framing oil activities as a form of internal colonialism that breeds economic marginalisation and militant resistance (Gomba 239).

Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992) serves as a foundational non-fictional critique, accusing the federal government and oil companies of ecological genocide against the Ogoni people, thereby laying the groundwork for literary protests against corruption and environmental injustice in the region.

Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* and Barclays Ayakoroma's *A Chance to Survive* utilise drama to explore governance failure and youth restiveness, applying eco-criticism to depict how oil-induced degradation fuels militancy and underscores the betrayal by corrupt leadership (Igbokwe).

Chiemeka Garricks's *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* interrogates eco-activism among Niger Delta youths, positioning characters as advocates against environmental sabotage and economic disenfranchisement wrought by oil corporations and state neglect.

This study departs from previous efforts by focusing specifically on Chris Anyokwu's dramatic adaptation *Night Rain*, a text that has received comparatively scant critical attention, and by foregrounding corruption in leadership federal, corporate, and traditional as the primary generative force that

directly breeds poverty and subsequently militancy, rather than treating these as parallel or independent consequences of oil exploitation, unlike broader eco-critical approaches that emphasise environmental despoliation or postcolonial readings

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored solely on Michel Foucault's theory of power and resistance, as articulated in his lectures and writings, particularly those exploring power as a relational, productive, and omnipresent force rather than a merely repressive or possessive entity.

Foucault conceptualises power not as something held by individuals or institutions but as a network of relations that circulates throughout society, producing realities, subjects, and behaviours (Foucault 139). Far from being purely negative or prohibitive, power is productive: it generates knowledge, discourses, and forms of subjectivity while simultaneously provoking resistance at every point where it is exercised (Frazer and Hutchings 27). Resistance, for Foucault, is inseparable from power; it is not external to it but emerges within the same relational field, making revolt or refusal an intrinsic possibility of power dynamics (Maze 135-40). Violence, therefore, is not an aberration but a productive practice that can either sustain dominant structures or challenge them, depending on the strategic relations in play.

In Anyokwu's *Night Rain*, this framework illuminates the operations of corrupt leadership as an exercise of subversive power that alienates Niger Delta communities from their resources, imposing poverty and environmental degradation while producing docile or rebellious subjects (Anyokwu 167). The federal government, multinational oil companies, and complicit traditional rulers deploy centralised control over oil revenue and draconian policies to maintain domination, yet this very exercise of power provokes militant resistance in the creeks, where characters like Pereowei and Eneowei enact counter-power through armed revolt (Anyokwu 183-91). Militancy thus emerges not as mere criminality but as a strategic refusal and reversal of oppressive relations, highlighting how resistance constitutes a practice of freedom within the power network.

The relevance of Foucault's theory to this study lies in its capacity to trace the causal chain from corruption to poverty to militancy without reducing the phenomenon to moral failure or economic determinism. By framing corruption as a relational power strategy that produces poverty as its effect and militancy as its inevitable counter-effect, the theory enables a nuanced analysis of how domination and resistance are mutually constitutive in the Niger Delta crisis. This approach reveals *Night Rain* as a dramatic exposition of power's productivity, underscoring the play's critique of unequal relations and its implicit call

for transformative resistance that might reconfigure rather than merely invert existing power structures.

Poverty as Offspring of Corrupt Leadership in *Night Rain*

Poverty in the Niger Delta has been the result of unequal power and economic relations between the Federal government and Niger Delta and between the rich multinationals and poor indigenes in their area. The unequal power structures has led to the people of the Niger Delta positioned at the base and victims of subversive power. Justin Ukpong views poverty as a condition whereby the victim is alienated from access to resources that would make him/her live fully as a human in the society. He further states that the resources in which the poor are being deprived of may be physical, social, material, economic, spiritual or cultural and are often expressed in terms of basic necessities of life. Thus, poverty is not peculiar to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria alone but the environmental and economic challenges the people face in the midst of abundance is disheartening. Poverty is not knowing where the next meal will come from; poverty is losing your children to diseases like malaria and cholera; poverty is losing sleep losing sleep over an abode; poverty is losing your means of livelihood without an alternative. Poverty is all these and many more evils it harbours.

The poverty situation in the Niger delta is majorly occasioned by the

neglect of the area by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the oil multinationals operating in the area. Anyokwu's *Night Rain* presents a gloomy picture of the state of the Niger Delta. Enara the little girl of twelve questions her mother if it has always been like this because what she has grown to know is only misery. Her sisters are lying on loosened mats with water flowing everywhere because their roof is leaking all over and there is an incessant downpour. The little girl suffers psychological and physical alienation because she is growing up to encounter only woe and distress. The Niger Delta has seen better days as the mother rightly responds, and life was good until the source of their misery was discovered:

You see, Enara, if you do not work hard, hunger will kill you. So you had to go out before dawn to sea to fish. Sometimes, we grew cassava and yam for food and for sale. We also weaved piassava and mats as well as picked bush mangoes. We did all these to survive; to stave off hunger. And life went by; the tides turned and the seasons come and went... Even when the enemies arrived, the sharks and the crocodiles have brought the curse of oil upon us, when they arrived our land, we still managed to get by. But in recent times, things have

changed. They've taken our life away from us and have left us, empty handed (Anyokwu 171).

That has been the lamentation of the Niger Delta indigenes. The people especially the younger generation are only left to imagine what it means to be wealthy, have a good life and environment. As a form of escapism from the harsh realities of life, Enara and her mother engage in daydreaming on how it feels to live in affluence (176). Anyokwu through a sharp imagery and description juxtaposes between the Niger Delta environment and that of the city, specifically Abuja. In Enara's dream, she envisages a beautiful environment:

We are living in the city... It is a very beautiful city: streetlights, neon-lights expressways paved with flowers and boulevards lined with decorative or ornamental trees, hoardings, flashing lights of different colours. Men and women and children cruising around in fast cars, listening to music and eating ice-cream and chicken wings and drumsticks. Everybody is gaily dressed... And the sun is shining... (Anyokwu 172).

The clear contrast the playwright creates at the beginning of the play must be intentional because it reflects two distant realities; that of

opulence and affluence, and that of peril and abject poverty. The description of the Niger Delta goes thus:

A village ravaged by oil exploration and its attendant spin-offs. A fetid waste of dark waters punctuated with flotsam and fern-fronds. A persistent rain pours in the deepening gloom of Night. An oil lamp manages to hold its own in the howling storm. The world is, indeed, a commotion or cocktail of noises indistinguishable...
(Anyokwu 167).

Enara further gives a new dimension to the imagery:

... Just look at our neighbourhood... houses or sheds are built on stilts. Smelly water everywhere like a watery. You cannot go anywhere without a canoe. We fish and eat and defecate in the waters...
(169).

Where the world of the city is limned by brightness, light, beauty and everything positive, the world of the Niger Delta is characterized by darkness, gloom, ugliness, disarray, nightmare and all that is negative. The federal government has implemented draconian decrees, laws and enactments that have made the federal government of Nigeria

the sole decider of the disbursement of oil revenue. The revenue formula has it that whoever has oil, even if it is deposited under their soil, the soil revenue accruable must be handled by the federal government who is more or less a monster in the eyes of the people. The wealth of the Niger Delta has been taken to build cities like Abuja and Lagos while the Niger Delta lies in ruins.

A larger part of the population of the Niger Delta people live in rural areas. They have managed their existence by subsistence farming, fishing, petty trading and handcraft as Enara's mother has outlined, "... so you had to go out before dawn to sea to fish. Sometimes, we grew cassava and yam for food and sale. We also weaved piassava and mats as well as picked bush mangoes..." (Anyokwu 171). The activities of oil production in the area have caused environmental degradation and subsequently depletion of soil nutrients that would have enhanced agricultural activities.

The words of the leader in Anyokwu's *Night Rain* captures the despondency of the people as they struggle for liberation. The message here is that poverty in the Niger Delta has also ameliorated militancy as their means of livelihood has been snatched from them:

remember the devastation,
the degradation, the
despoliation, the
degradations on our
farmlands, our rivers, the
pollution of our land... the



crying poverty and misery of our elders and the vacant emptiness of our children's dream of the future; remember the siege of ignorance and disease ravaging our communities; then remember the beauty, the ultra-modern sophistication of Abuja, of Lagos... remember the music of trillions of naira got from oil sale... (Anyokwu 191).

Corruption has been the bane of poverty in the Niger Delta. The manifestation is in the socio-economic lives of the people as they lack basic social amenities, infrastructural facilities, employment etc. These infrastructural facilities are only found in the cities enjoying oil revenue, while those who suffer the devastations of oil exploration are living in anguish.

The militants in the Niger Delta that have taken up to the creeks and they express in various terms the shortcomings of government leadership. The fourth and fifth warriors in *Night Rain* bemoan the absence of electricity, abundance of water without drinking water, absence of hospitals, schools, jobs and employments. One is even more disheartened when the sixth warrior speaks, "my wife and pikin die when my wife wan born my chil'. Horsepita no dey for we bush. I use canoe carry dem..." (Anyokwu 190). Yet the king due to influence and power exhibits total negligence to the cries, queries and complaints of the people

because he enjoys honour and huge financial and social benefits from the government and multinationals. Even though he acknowledges the people's demands are legitimate, he still compromises and betrays the people. Anyokwu depicts the tendency of people to be heartless when they find themselves in power. The king and his family are free from poverty because the government and multinationals are in control, while the people are left to fate:

King: ...

But seriously, we lost so many children due to mosquito bites.

Malaria is rife here.

Clean:

We shall see to that.

King:

We need treated mosquito nets and insecticides.

Okumagba:

For the palace?

Clean: Of course (Anyokwu 204).

Mortality rate continues to ameliorate due to the absence of medical facilities, and the environment due to continuous oil

activities has left the people prone to sicknesses and diseases.

High illiteracy rate in the Niger Delta is a major cause of poverty in the Niger Delta. It has led to the exclusion of the population from the nation's literary culture through which political and economic decisions that affect the life of the poor whom they are determined to keep poor in order to stay rich are deliberated. In *Night Rain*, Pereowei the figure of an embittered activist bewails the refusal of the king to renovate schools, despite the compensation funds given to him: "We asked him to use the money in his custody to renovate our rundown primary school buildings. The idiot refused..." (183). Anyokwu, through Eneowei evinces how the Niger Delta environment and schools are not conducive for learning. Eneowei narrates how he cannot go to school because the school structures have collapsed and the teachers are nonchalant towards their duty. The activities done in school are football discussions, life in the creeks and how to shoot guns. Hence, the student's ambition and dream is to be in the creeks and fight.

The poverty situation of the Niger Delta is not that of resource lack but rises from the shenanigans of the leaders in power and their refusal to ensure equitable distribution of wealth. Where poverty is usually attributed to laziness, the poor in the Niger Delta work harder yet the result is null. Hence, poverty has led to the breeding of vices in the region.

Violence in *Night Rain*

Foucault on the subject of violence forces a rethink on its nuances. Instead of viewing violence in terms of physical acts, its ultimate, Foucault tenders that one investigates and seek out the rationalizations that are the driving forces behind violence (Foucault 139). For Foucault, violence is part of the world and part of a productive practice. It is not what violence is that is important but what it does. So, the question to ask is, "what kind of power does it sustain or challenge?" (Frazer and Hutchings 27). Hence, it is used against people by those who dominate, and against the dominators by those who are oppressed. This results from the fact that for every exercise of power, there is a potential refusal or revolt (Maze 135). Resistance is then employed by people as a mode of the practice of freedom or liberation (Maze 140). Tantamount to this, power for Foucault captures the "how" and "why" of actions performed by subjects.

Violence in the Niger Delta has borne many causes and multiple dynamics. There have been many concerns due to the growing conflicts in the Niger Delta as it has become the theatre of many forms of violence and criminality. This stems largely from the dissatisfaction of the Niger Delta indigenes with the government and oil companies. The emergence of these militias and cult groups has posed a serious challenge to all parties involved. Anyokwu in *Night Rain* shines a flambeau on Pereowei

and his son Eneowei as Niger Delta indigenes bitterly grieved by the status quo of the region and joining the militants in the creeks to fight is the ultimate. Anyokwu relates militancy and gangsterism as a kind of cause and effect in relation to the people's oppression. Pereowei was dissatisfied with the attitude of the leaders especially their traditional ruler, the king who is vile and ignoble. Pereowei formed a suicide gang with his songs as automatic recruits but that results to their doom. Eneowei his only surviving son in the spirit of kinship also decides to express his disappointment by joining the creeks. Anyokwu through the warriors of the suicide squad presents the matrix of the reasons [why] they are fighting and who they are against. Eneowei believes there is no point in going to school because it is paramount to nothing. Joining his kinsmen in the creeks to fight is the ultimate because there is no need to suffer in the midst of abundance (186). In the words of the gang leader:

The cause is supreme. Life is struggle. As you all know, we are going into our creeks to wage real battle against soldiers of the state. They are well trained and armed with superior weaponry. We too are armed. We are David, they are Goliath, so victory is ours... (187).

The people believe they are offering themselves for a worthy course because their environment has been

destroyed by pollution, they have been neglected by a corrupt government, they lack basic social amenities and unemployment has been rife. All these add up to the reasons for their violence. David Enweremadu opines that the incessant violence in the Delta develops less from the skewed revenue sharing formula, poverty, lack of capacity among security forces, than from exploitative nature of politics in the nation, as seen in the "accumulative instinct" of public leaders on all tiers of government and the effervescent determination of 'renegade actors', that is the militants to violently challenge their quest to monopolize resources accruing oil (1).

The predatory idiosyncrasies of both government and traditional leaders have been part of the major provocations of militancy, just as Pereowei expresses his resentment for the king and government (183). The youths in Nigeria have always borne the brunt of failed leadership and political marginalization since independence. The youths are at the receiving end, therefore they are angry and fight with great pains against unjust leadership and oppression because it is their future that has been made bleak:

There is pain in our souls. The mood is foul with fury and vengeance seems be the only proper thing to undertake. We all have reason to want to shed our blood for our land... (Anyokwu 191).

Unfortunately, the militant groups agitating using violent strategies end up affecting their people too. Apart from environmental degradation that occurs due to perpetrated activities like oil bunkering and vandalism, they also meet an equal resistance from the government and multinational oil companies through the State soldiers.

Resistance against the government and from the government has characterized the Niger Delta. Even when non-violent resistance was staged against the government in earlier times, the government reacted violently by hanging Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight Ogoni leaders in 1995. Violence has continued to flourish in the Niger Delta, and as Foucault claims, belief systems gain power as more people come to accept the particular views associated with that belief system as common knowledge (Frazer and Hutchings 28). Militancy in the Niger Delta has gained power because more indigenes of the Niger Delta, especially the youths have come to accept and recognize it as the only way to their freedom even if it is erroneous.

Conclusion

Anyokwu's *Night Rain* powerfully dramatises the Niger Delta's tragic paradox, where abundant oil resources yield only poverty and violence for indigenous communities, attributing these afflictions directly to corrupt leadership at federal, corporate, and traditional levels. Through Foucault's theory of power

and resistance, the study has revealed corruption as a productive power relation that alienates people from their livelihoods, generating abject poverty while inevitably provoking militant counter-power as a desperate assertion of agency. The play's vivid imagery and character portrayals depict a clear causal chain, leadership betrayal breeds deprivation, which in turn fuels violent revolt, transforming personal anguish into collective resistance. By filling a scholarly gap in the analysis of this under-examined adaptation of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's poem, the research emphasizes the enduring potency of literary critique in exposing systemic injustice. This study intends to portray the intricate causal relationship between corrupt leadership and its devastating offspring poverty and militancy in Anyokwu's *Night Rain*, thereby filling a critical scholarly gap in the analysis of this under-examined dramatic adaptation of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's poem; by applying Foucault's theory of power and resistance, it seeks to demonstrate how domination provokes inevitable counter-power, offering fresh insights into the socio-political dynamics of the Niger Delta crisis and reinforcing the transformative potential of literary critique, the research advocates for renewed attention to equitable governance and environmental justice, buttressing the enduring relevance of artistic interventions in fostering sustainable peace and development in resource-rich yet marginalised regions.

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