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Engaging Cinema in Environmental Crisis: A Paradigm of Documentary Films of the Niger Delta

Abstract

The oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria remains one of the most environmentally devastated places in the world. This is caused by gas flaring, crude oil spillages, illegal oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the region. The call for eco-democracy and the disruption of eco-apathy has driven global academia into developing paradigms that would foster environmental transformation. Interestingly, while academic disciplines such as history, geography, anthropology and the global humanities continue to critically engage in practices and discourses that would facilitate achieving anticipatory climate adaptation, African academia, especially in Nigeria, has been slow to absorb the same critical spirit as the West. In fact, environmental film critics in Nigeria have not fully explored the environmental discourse that has gathered strength in other disciplines central to the greening of the humanities. Therefore, there remains a dearth of critical underpinning for environment and cinema, or what I term discourses of/on the green cinema, in African scholarship. Against this backdrop, I examine environmental crisis in the documentary films

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Delta Blues, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* and *The True Price of Crude Oil*, and use content analysis method to investigate how these films have been used to create environmental awareness in the region. The analysis is anchored on Adrian Ivakhiv's biocentric model of ecocriticism, which acknowledges the unity of man and all the creatures and the environment around him, and further recommends a shift from human-centrism to biocentrism.

Keywords: cinema, Niger Delta, documentary, eco-democracy, biocentrism.

Introduction

Critical discourses on the environmental crisis are not new in the performing arts. In fact, the attention the humanities devote to environmental studies stems from the danger the industrial activities of man pose for humanity. Although the focus on this crisis only became explicit in recent times, it had begun long before the twenty-first century. The environmental crisis is a problem of industrialisation and globalisation, a result of technological advancement and capitalism. The crisis includes global warming, environmental degradation, species extinction, world water shortages and global hunger, which are presently a global concern.

Governmental and non-governmental organisations, scientists, environmentalists and ecologists have joined the clarion call for environmental restoration and stability, positive transformation and ways in which the environmental crisis could be tackled. In his bid to contribute to saving the earth from environmental depletion, Robert Bullard has coined the term environmental justice and led a movement for this cause, while John Foster theorises ecological revolution, thus expanding the horizon of the environmental discourse.

Gas flaring, extraction of solid minerals, crude oil exploration, deforestation and industrialisation are salient factors of environmental crisis. Environmental crisis holds sway in perhaps every nation across the world, especially where natural resources are being explored: countries like Nigeria, Iran, Russia, Iraq, South Africa, Angola, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are all affected. In the Niger Delta, environmental pollution has become a regular feature: crude oil exploration by multinational companies, such as Shell BP, Chevron and others, has led to various forms of environmental degradation. Gas flaring and crude oil spillages have become a serious concern in the region. Hence, various violent and non-violent groups emerged to campaign against the destruction of the environment. Violent groups such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND),

and non-violent groups such as Friends of the Earth International, were formed to combat all forms of environmental dislocation, pollution and degradation.

While studies on social revolution, political revolution, economic and cultural revolutions are numerous in academia, not much attention has been paid to the study of environmental issues, especially as regards the documentary film genre. Olu Obafemi, Femi Osofisan and Sam Ukala have written extensively on social and political revolution, AbdulRasheed Adeoye, Alex Asigbo and Emmanuel Dandaura have published numerous academic studies on economic and cultural revolution. Conversely, environmental studies, a fairly new field in academia, continue to gain momentum in the West. Critical studies have been conducted by Western scholars such as Slaymaker (2007), Gervet (2007), Nixon (2007), Caminero-Santangelo (2007), Doyle and McEachern (2008), and Foster and Clark (2016). In the same vein, although there are numerous critical works on the environment and literature in Nigeria – such as AbdulRasheed Adeoye’s “Ecotheatre and Climate Change in Nigeria” (Adeoye, 2013), and Lere Adeyemi’s “Literature and Climate Change: A Discourse in Eco-Criticism” (Adeyemi, 2012) – there is little or nothing on documentary film and the environment, especially in Africa. Rob Nixon confirms this situation when he notes that environmental film critics “have been slow to absorb the kind of provocative transnational thinking that has gathered strength in other disciplines central to the greening of the humanities, disciplines like history, geography and anthropology” (Nixon, 2007, p. 719).

Thus, I observe that there remains a dearth of critical underpinning for environment and cinema. Consequently, this study examines environmental crisis in the documentary films *Delta Blues* (Thomas, 2010), *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* (Ludlam, 2016) and *The True Price of Crude Oil* (The Guardian, 2012). I use content analysis method to investigate how these films have been used to create environmental awareness in the region.

Theoretical Framework

I anchor this study on Adrian Ivakhiv’s biocentric model of ecocriticism proposed in 2008. The choice of this approach is predicated on its suitability for examining the documentary films under scrutiny, as well as guides our critical work on environmental crisis. Although critical theories on ecology and the environment became popular in the 1990s, there had been studies on ecology and the socio-economic context by economic and cultural

theorists such as Karl Marx, with his appropriation of capitalist and socialist ecology. The academic movement of ecocriticism began in the USA in the 1980s and in the UK in the early 1990s, with Cheryll Glotfelty considered to be the first pioneer (Ayinuola & Abiodun, 2016, p. 724).

According to Rueckert (1978, Essay II “Literature and ecology: An experiment in ecocriticism”, p. 71), ecocriticism is “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature”. Ecocriticism “deals with writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating nature, berating its despoilers and reversing the harm through political action” (Howarth, 1996, p. 69). Ecocriticism contends further that:

The need of the day is a viable environmental ethics which can successfully counter the Enlightenment myth of human preeminence and exclusiveness among the creations. Critics of this school believe that literature is capable of playing a very constructive role in promoting a vision and a language appropriate to such an environmental ethics. (“Ecocriticism – A theoretical perspective”, 2016, pp. 50–51)

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that ecocriticism is critical of the exploitation and marginalisation of nature by anthropocentrists. It valorises nature and other species that are therein. Ayinuola and Abiodun (2016, p. 722) also note that “ecocriticism celebrates the purity and the sustenance of the natural environment on one hand, and addresses man-made and natural disasters on the other”. In fact, ecocriticism is the “study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell, 2011, p. 68).

It is imperative to note that “as ecocriticism develops in scope and in influence, it is spreading beyond its original home in literary studies and colonizing new niches in related fields. Among these is film criticism” (Ivakhiv, 2008, p. 1). Apart from literary artists, filmmakers have also engaged in the production of films that have an ecocritical appeal: Ivakhiv (2008, p. 15) submits that this has culminated into a new critical field known as “eco-cinecriticism”. Not only has film absorbed the spirit of ecocriticism, but it has also focused on the three models of ecocriticism, viz: the conservative or biocentric model, the domination model (Ivakhiv, 2008, p. 7) and the caretaking approach.

Biocentric ecocriticism, otherwise known as deep ecology, “involves the acknowledged unity of man and all the creatures and environment around him” (“Ecocriticism – A theoretical perspective”, 2016, p. 33). It advocates the equality of species. Deep ecology contends that all creatures have their

intrinsic values and as such, no one creature must dominate the other. This approach recommends a shift from human-centrism to biocentrism. This means a transition from the culture of human dominance to a tradition of cooperation between man and nature. The tenets of biocentrism are as follows:

- a) awareness of the more than human in the work of art;
- b) the environment as a character;
- c) equality of all species in the art work;
- d) protection of the environment;
- e) radical struggle against anthropocentrism;
- f) art depicts human beings are tied in a web of connections with nature;
- g) nature's intrinsic value beyond the utility it provides humans in the work of art;
- h) subjugation of capitalism by socialism in the work of art (Ivakhiv, 2008, p. 23).

The strength of the biocentric theory stems from the fact that it is rooted in art ecology. In other words, its focus is the arts and the environment. Considering that the theory is interdisciplinary, it therefore articulates how the literary arts, sculpture, painting, the performance arts such as music, dance, film and drama can be used to enlighten the audience on the importance of the environment. The theory, then, is suitable for the aims of this study, which focuses on environmental crisis in film, a work of art. Despite its strengths, the biocentric theory is lacking in articulating a peaceful approach in achieving environmental transformation and protection. Regardless of this shortcoming, we adopt it in the analysis of the films under study.

Environmental Crisis in the Niger Delta

The oil-rich Niger Delta region “is the hub of oil and gas production in Nigeria that accounts for 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 95 percent of national budget, 80 percent of government revenue and over 80 percent of national wealth” (Ugwuanyi et al., 2014, p. 78). In spite of this, the people of the region still wallow in abject poverty and their health is increasingly endangered due to gas flaring, oil spillage, soil erosion, illegal disposal of toxic wastes, land, air and water pollution. The above factor led to the emergence of environmental activists such as Isaac Boro (1938–1968) and Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941–1995), the latter brutally murdered by the Nigerian government.

Saro-Wiwa, a prominent social activist, environmentalist, green peace activist and deep ecologist, was popular for his efforts to liberate his people and environment from degradation and oppression by the Nigerian federal government and multinational oil companies, led by Shell BP. He gained considerable recognition in academia and in the international community. Notable eco-critics such as William Slaymaker, Rob Nixon, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Garth Myers and others, have written extensively on Ken Saro-Wiwa's ecocritical perspective. His popularity stems not only from the fact that he was a playwright, a novelist, a television play writer – he is also the first African environmental martyr. His desire to speak for his people (the Ogoni) led him to join the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. MOSOP and Saro-Wiwa had tied their non-violent advocacy for human rights in Ogoni land to highlighting the oil industry's devastating impacts on the ecosystem of their Niger Delta homeland (Caminero-Santangelo & Myers, 2011, p. 1).

Saro-Wiwa's struggle against the environmental destruction of the Ogoni land is one of the numerous voices of the Niger Delta of the 1990s. Academics and other socio-political activists have also spoken against the environmental despoliation in the Delta. The list of those involved includes Peter Ekeh, Tanure Ojaide, Gabriel Darah, Ogaga Ifowodo, Itse Sagay, "Benjamin Okumagba, Professor Onugu Otite, Chief Edewor, and many others. They provided the intellectual dimension to the struggle of the people in the 1980s and the 1990s" (Aghalino, 2012, p. 119). Their voices speak for the people of the Niger Delta region. Opaleye (2009) and Aghalino (2012) make us aware that examples of these voices and socio-cultural movements that stood for the emancipation of the Niger Delta include "the Kaiama Declaration, the Ikwere Charter, the Urhobo Economic Summit, the Oron Bill of Rights, the Aklaka Declaration, the Ijaw People's Charter, and the Demand of Ogoni People" (Opaleye, 2009, p. 178). The above movements in the Delta spoke against the unfavourable revenue allocation formula, the degradation of the environment by numerous oil spillages, gas flaring, inflation in the price of goods and services among others.

Another eco-activist worthy of note is Isaac Adaka Boro, who championed the struggle for the liberation and emancipation of the Niger Delta from Nigeria, from oppression and marginalisation. In fact, he championed the armed struggle for the environment in the region. Binebai (2014, p. 287) states that "Boro laid the foundation for the numerous agitations in the Niger Delta". He started the first oil war in the Niger Delta and led

the first attempt to break away from Nigeria – in 1966 he led 150 Ijaw youths and proclaimed the oil producing region the Niger Delta Republic. This violent struggle is known as the Twelve-Day Revolution or Operation Zero.

The post-Boro and post-Wiwa era saw the emergence of other eco-revolutionaries such as Henry Okah, of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom, General Boyloaf, General Africa, Aboy, John Togo and Government Ekpemupolo. Their militant activities are a response to the unfavourable human condition – gas flaring and environmental degradation and displacement, which has led to climatic change, youth restiveness and reduction of life expectancy in the Niger Delta. This is a quest for positive transformation and liberation from oppression. Despite the militant and pseudo-militant approaches of the above eco-revolutionaries, the crisis in the region still persists.

Apart from the activities of transnational oil companies, illegal oil bunkering has compounded the environmental crisis in the Delta. Unemployed youths in oil producing communities indulge in “oil vandalism and theft, which has become a way of life for many, as unemployment opportunities in the region are low” (Herbert & Husani, 2018, p. 16). Profits made on petty oil bunkering are invested in bigger illegal refineries. In fact, oil bunkering is a multi-billion naira venture, as can be evidenced by observations made by the author of the present article, who hails from the region. Unfortunately, this illicit business sabotages the due process of the Nigerian oil enterprise. During a visit to my home town, Iwhrekreka, Ughelli South in Delta State, I observed that the atmosphere of the community has been destroyed by the bunkering and illegal refining of crude oil in the region. Harm done to the lithosphere from this activity is not an exception. The oil bunkering industry continues to prosper as government officials and members of security agencies such as army and naval officers invest into it. In fact, some of them are owners of illegal refineries.

This environmental conundrum has influenced the thematic preoccupation of Nollywood productions and other transnational feature and documentary films. The first film dramatisation of the environmental situation of the Niger Delta is Eddie Ugbomah’s *Oil Boom*. Feature films in Nigeria have been used to articulate the ecological crisis. They are revolutionary dramatisations of environmental issues and marginalisation of the region. Nigerian documentary films have also incorporated themes of the Niger Delta encounter. Films such as Aaron Thomas’s *Delta Blues* (2010), *Oil Spills in Nigeria: The True Price of Crude Oil* (2012), produced by *The Guardian*,

Lin Bin's *Faces of Africa*, Ken Saro-Wiwa: *All for My People* (2016) and others, are aimed at "galvanizing an audience in relation to the practical matters of revolution and social change" (Smith, 2013, p. 555) in the Niger Delta.

It is, however, pertinent to note that Nigerian environmental film scholarship has focused extensively on the feature film genre. One of the most remarkable examinations of the Niger Delta crisis within the context of the literary and cinema scholarship in Nigeria is Onoriode Aghoghovwia's (2014) PhD thesis. Despite his fabulous reading of the Niger Delta encounter within the eco-cinema and literary context, this dissertation focuses on literature and solely on the feature film genre. Hence, the documentaries which have explored the environmental situation remain unexamined in the Nigerian academic space. Against this backdrop, this study examines environmental crisis in three selected documentary films: *Delta Blues*, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* and *The True Price of Crude Oil*. It also investigates environmental awareness in the analysed documentaries.

A Synopsis of *Delta Blues*, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* and *The True Price of Crude Oil*

Delta Blues (Thomas, 2010), a 2010 SBS Australia production, explores environmental pollution in the Niger Delta region. The documentary investigates oil spillages on the waters and land of the region and fully captures the endemic state of degradation of the physical environment. The film includes interviews with principal actors in the Niger Delta struggle and major environmentalists in the region; among those interviewed are former governor of Bayelsa State Chief Timipre Sylva, regional leader Timi Alaibe, and two former militants: Henry Okah and Victor Ben Ebikabowei. Okah is critical of the amnesty programme initiated by the Nigerian federal government. He tells the narrator that the initiative is a sham, and that the government is not sincere with their proposition. The narrator, who is a white man, engages Luckyman Ngila, a native of Bayelsa State in the Delta, as a middleman to fully understand the trajectory of the region. Ngila, an ex-militant, complains that the amnesty programme has not yielded the desired result.

The Nigerian Oil Thieves (Ludlam, 2016), a 2016 Sky News film, investigates the real cause of crude oil bunkering in the Niger Delta and explores the effects of gas flaring and oil spillages in the region. The narrators travel into the creeks of the Delta. They accompany young men who run illegal refineries – the youths take them to the site where they operate; they

show them around and justify their reasons for engaging in this illegal business. The narrators learn that oil bunkering in the Niger Delta is caused by youth unemployment, marginalisation of the region and despoliation of the environment by the oil companies. However, they realise that this illicit business has compounded the pitiable state of the environment of the region. They see how fishermen no longer have good catch from the contaminated waters. The raconteurs return to the airport, guarded by a security escort.

The True Price of Crude Oil (The Guardian, 2012), produced in 2012, focuses on the political dimension of oil bunkering in the Niger Delta. The narrator, who is a foreigner, interviews illegal oil bunkerers, clergymen and community leaders on the situation of oil bunkering in the region. Reverend Father Edward Obi states that oil companies such as Shell BP are responsible for the degraded environment of the Niger Delta, but they refuse to take responsibility for oil spillages in the region. However, the indigenes who indulge in illegal bunkering have also compounded the environmental crisis as their illegal refineries, which lack adequate safety measures, cause severe damage to the environment. Towards the end of the documentary, the narrator engages in an interview with Nnimmo Bassey, the Chair of Friends of the Earth International. Bassey contends that Nigeria and the global society should stop oil and fossil fuel exploration and diversify their economies. This would create spaces for an environment that is free from degradation.

Environmental Crisis in *Delta Blues*, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* and *The True Price of Crude Oil*

Delta Blues is an environmental documentary which reveals that the Niger Delta is Nigeria's most intractable problem. The film brings to light the endemic state of the Niger Delta environment and emphasises the effect of oil exploration by Shell, NNPC, Chevron and other oil companies. It also depicts how the depleted environment affects the economic structure of the region.

The opening scene is a long shot of a river and a speed boat with militants in it. Next, there is a transition to a beautiful, green forest. The biocentric model of ecocriticism posits the awareness of the more than human in the work of art. Here, the river is part of nature; it is a living entity on its own. Nature and existence transcend humanity and as such the work of art must not place only man in the centre of discourse. In fact,

this belief is displayed in the transition from the militants in the boat to the trees and green leaves in the forest. Here, the trees provide shade and a hiding place for two militants holding AK-47 rifles. They are apparently militants who are responsible for the kidnapping of expatriates, pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering and other social vices. The narrator makes the audience understand that for twenty years, the Niger Delta has been in crisis, with rebel groups holding multinational oil companies and the government to ransom. This is a response to the lopsided sharing formula of the proceeds from the natural resource in the region as well as the destruction of the environment. We agree with the narrator's position on the rationale for the violence in the Delta. Prior to the discovery of oil deposits in the region, the major source of income of its inhabitants was hunting, farming and fishing.

The oil exploration exercise, which culminated in deforestation, oil spillage on the rivers, streams and land as well as economic inflation, displaced the inhabitants and posed a challenge in the region. The multinational oil companies amass billions of dollars every year from the extraction of the oil deposits in the Delta while the region remains undeveloped. The 13% share of the national oil revenue that the states in the region receive for development has not brought much change. Henry Okah, the first militant interviewed by the narrator, says that the militants have taken up arms to fight for the people of the region and for their land. The land is a salient feature of the environment. Biocentrism advocates the protection of the environment and, as can be seen in the film, this is exactly what the militants claim to do. They are convinced that the environment should be conducive to human habitation and that the land must not be degraded by oil companies and must be protected.

There is an extremely close shot of a scene where the SBS correspondent, who also serves as the narrator, holds a piece of zinc roofing sheet on which it had rained. He easily tears the zinc into two, showing the effect of acid rain, which remains prevalent in the region. "The rain is corrosive from the gas being flared into the atmosphere. Gas flaring occurs all over the Delta" (Nwahunanya, 2011, p. 17) since it is the cheapest way to dispose of excess gas. However, in other places in the world, this is done using other methods because of the severe impact of flaring on the environment. The principal actors in the docu-drama highlight the effects of gas flaring. They complain that in this way oil companies have caused harm to the environment and the people. The statement of Henry Okah, the leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, fully captures environmental

protection as one of the objectives of militancy in the region: “We are all fighting for the freedom of our people, we are fighting for our resources, we are fighting for our land” (Thomas, 2010).

In the above statement, land refers to the right of the people of the region to comfortable living conditions. It also connotes the environment that is being degraded by oil exploration. Okah’s position makes one recall the environment of Ogoni land, which has been severely affected by the activities of the oil companies. To date, although various panels and bodies have been put in place to facilitate the clean-up of Ogoni land by the Goodluck Jonathan-led administration and the Muhammadu Buhari-led government, none have yielded fruitful results. The processes have either been marred with embezzling of the funds allocated to this project, or incapable hands have been placed at the helm of affairs.

To change this status quo of environmental despoliation by the transnational and local oil companies, the youths must take a radical step that amounts to taking to arms to fight against anthropocentrism, the binary opposite of ecocentrism. This radical approach is supportive of the tenet of biocentrism which articulates the radical struggle against anthropocentrism. Luckyman Ngila, a former militant who takes the narrator around the polluted creeks, shows him the nature of the suffering of local people and the marginalisation of the region. He states that his frustration made him pick up the gun. Ngila and other young men in the region see armed militancy as the only way for surviving. Youth restiveness, therefore, compounds the environmental war. Ngila says that while the workers of the oil companies live in heaven, the ordinary inhabitants of the host communities live in hell. Although there are numerous oil companies in the region, graduates from the local communities still remain unemployed; the overall rate of unemployment in the region quoted in the film is ninety per cent. Frustration with unemployment made Ngila pick up the two main tools of the militant: the gun and the mask. His conversation with the narrator goes as follows:

Ngila: The mask reminds me of so many things I’ve done

Narrator: Like what?

Ngila: Like killing a fellow human being, wearing this mask, and not giving a damn about it. (Thomas, 2010)

In *Delta Blues*, the narrator comments that the 13% share of the national oil revenue transferred to the region by the federal government is not effectively utilised in the local communities – this share does not go beyond the state capitals. When he notes that the money is administered by governors like

Timipre Sylva, the camera pans through the plush home of the governor. This makes a large statement that those in government short-change the masses. Sylva, however, in an interview with the narrator, claims that the 13% share is spent on behalf of the people. In turn, Major General Godwin Abbe, Nigeria's former Minister for Defence, who hails from the Niger Delta, says that the people in the region have not been short-changed by the governors but by the oil companies and the federal government. However, General Abbe is critical of the youths' militant approach they take to pursue their demands. The documentary investigates further the amnesty programme initiated by the Nigerian federal government. General Victor Ben, alias Boyloaf, MEND's most respected battlefield tactician, was the first to join the amnesty programme. Conversely, Henry Okah refuses to embrace amnesty as he thinks it is a ploy by the Nigerian federal government to sabotage the fight in the Niger Delta region. Luckyman Ngila, one of the militants, believes that the amnesty will not disarm the Niger Delta – it will only calm the conflict for some time.

Delta Blues is geared towards restoring the destroyed and polluted environment of the Niger Delta. The film affirms the commitment of the Niger Delta cinema to raising the audiences' awareness of ecological issues and encourages them to abandon their conspiracy of silence and take action to seek redress from the perpetrators of environmental degradation. In the documentary, a medical practitioner complains that there is an upsurge in the number of patients with respiratory infections, pneumonia, asthma and cough, and that catarrh is rampant in the Niger Delta region. In his opinion, air pollution has greatly contributed to the situation.

Equality of all species in the art, which is another feature of biocentric ecocriticism, also comes to play in the film. This is revealed in multiple dimensions. In the context of the film, what comes across as species is the multinational oil companies versus the inhabitants of the region on one hand, and the multinational companies and the environment on the other hand. The dialectic of the wealthy people in government (who connive with the oil companies) and the poor locals capture the capitalist culture of inequality in the region. The camera transits from a dirty, poor, oil-degraded environment to the plush house of a former Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief Timipre Sylva. The disparity between his economic situation and that of the people he governs locates the need for overt action against the inequality of inhabitants in the Niger Delta. Major General Abbe, former Minister for Defence, who hails from the Niger Delta, also affirms that the inhabitants in the region are being short-changed.

Delta Blues seems to advocate the subjugation of capitalism by socialism, another salient feature of biocentrism. Socialism, which rejects private ownership and control of the superstructure, can only be achieved through revolutionary praxis, and “revolutionary consciousness could be raised to great heights in dramatic performances” (Udenta, 1993, p. 25). *Delta Blues* corroborates this fact. The unemployed youths in the region decide to take to arms to confront the capitalist exploitation of the Delta by the oil companies. In Luckyman Ngila’s words, “if you go to where these companies are, if you go to where their staff lives, they are living in heaven while we are living in hell” (Thomas, 2010).

The environmental crisis in general, and in the Niger Delta in particular, is the problem of capitalism. Oil exploration enriches the wealthy since the oil business is capital-intensive. This position is further explained by Clark and Foster (2010, p. 142): “The ‘problem of nature’ is really a problem of capital, as natural cycles are turned into broken linear processes geared to private accumulation. Marx’s ecology serves as a foundation for understanding environmental degradation”.

In *Delta Blues*, performance aesthetics employed by the filmmaker helps to fully capture the environmental crisis. The soundtrack, songs and dances help in conveying the message of the film to the audience. At the beginning, there is a long shot of a moving speed boat. The movement of the boat is accompanied by an eerie sound which connotes that the subject matter of the film is a serious one. The transition to the forest reveals the armed militants, which justifies the choice of eerie sound by the filmmaker. In other words, the sound is used as a precursor to serious events in the film. Costumes are imperative in the making of *Delta Blues*. The mask worn by Luckyman Ngila reveals that he is a militant: the Niger Delta militants wear masks to prevent them from being recognised. Also, guns serve as props in this documentary narrative. The sight of masked men in combat outfits holding AK-47 rifles tells the audience that they watch militants. The bodies of some of them are bare but for a piece of red cloth which they tie around their forehead. The large body of water which is revealed at the beginning of the documentary confirms that the film is set in the Niger Delta, a region with rivers and other water bodies. The extreme close-up shot utilised by the filmmaker to capture gas being flared into the atmosphere conveys the scale of harm to the environment (see Fig. 1).

Nick Ludlam’s *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* is also set in the Niger Delta. The film focuses on the politicisation of the conflict, oil bunkering and environmental pollution in the region. At the beginning of the narrative,



Figure 1. Gas flaring portrayed in *Delta Blues*

the first raconteur makes us understand that she just walked into a graveyard of mangroves. Before she mentions this, a voice in the background tells her and her crew in the boat to put their hands up. This is obviously a warning from the Nigerian Army. Kidnappings for ransom and stealing have become the norm in the region. Since kidnap victims are taken via creeks, whoever goes along the waterways must put their hands up to show the Nigerian Army that they are not militants, but law-abiding citizens.

The second narrator observes that the people in the region are angry. This statement is accompanied by an extremely close shot of a dejected old man. There is a transition to the scene of a thatched house with children and women who look unkempt. In fact, the region smells of pollution. One of the narrators states that the Delta is rich in natural resources such as “black gold”, which is what crude oil is popularly called. Oil has stained the roots of the trees as it also flows on the water, giving them a gory look.

The film crew visits some crude oil bunkering sites. The documentary exposes this illicit activity engaged in by some of the youths in the region and shows how it has destroyed the land. The film presents the destruction of the Niger Delta as disastrous. The young males who are interviewed tell the narrators that their involvement in this destruction stems from unemployment in the region. They stress that while the elites enjoy luxury, they themselves live from hand to mouth. This is an attempt at subjugating capitalism – the core of biocentrism. But to subdue capitalism is actually an arduous exercise. The unemployed youths in the region feel it is not right to



Figure 2. Gas flaring captured in *The Nigerian Oil Thieves*

keep begging the politicians and elites for meagre assistance to survive. They must engage in a trade, whether it is legal or not, to fend for themselves. They are aware that oil bunkering is an illegal business, but the local people make money from it. The main interviewee tells the narrators that the bunkering site is where they live, where they eat and where their lives are. In other words, they have no other source of income. The revolutionary perspective of Ivakhiv's biocentrism comes to play here. The youths decry the subjugation of the common man by the crude oil companies and the people representing them in government. In return for short-changing the region, they decide to sabotage the effort of the government at exploring 2.53 million barrels of oil daily. According to the film, this is a battle of the "small man" against the oil companies; the battle between the haves and the have-nots is going to continue.

The film treats the environment as a character, which, as mentioned above, is a salient feature of biocentrism. Here, the narrator berates the oil companies and the young men for the destruction of the environment with gas flaring and oil bunkering. The camera captures the polluted environment and a woman and her two children fetching water from an oil-polluted stream (see Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).

In *The True Price of Crude Oil*, the filmmaker uses an Evangelion shot to begin the narrative. Taken from a helicopter, it enables the audience to see a broad view of the rivers, forests and communities in the Delta. This shot does not only capture the degraded environment, full of black spills of crude oil but also places the environment in the centre of discourse. Again, it also



Figure 3. Oil-polluted environment in the Niger Delta, captured in *The Nigerian Oil Thieves*

sees the environment as a character, which is a major tenet of biocentrism. This is a shift from “anthropocentric sinfulness to a biocentric gracefulness emphasizing the need for humanity to recognize the interdependence and interrelatedness of the whole creation” (Adeola, 2016, p. 21). Biocentric filmmakers see a degraded character rather than a despoiled environment. The rivers are being portrayed as degraded by oil spills. At the beginning of the film, we can see oil from a vandalised pipeline pouring into a stream.

Reverend Father Edward Obi, who is interviewed by the narrator, lays the blame on the Shell company and the Nigerian military, which indicates the political dimension of the problem. The documentary reveals that the military connive with some of the indigent people and Shell workers to carry out illegal oil bunkering in the region. In such cases, they share the financial proceeds from the illegally refined product. The illegitimate oil business has aggravated the environmental crisis. Considering the situation, the narrator states that oil has become a plague in the Delta, a disaster. Illegal refineries have done massive damage to the environment. Since they are expensive to build and thus require considerable financial investment, it is pertinent to state that the elites in the region are the real illegal oil bunkerers and not the peasants. The narrator finds confirmation of this in his interview with some owners of illegal oil refineries. They agree that complicity with the Nigerian military responsible for protecting the pipelines comes to play in the illegal business.



Figure 4. The shot of a woman and her two children fetching water from a polluted stream;
The Nigerian Oil Thieves

The filmmaker uses a sound effect to distort the voice of the interviewed oil bunkerers in order to conceal their identity. What is more, the camera only captures their backs, and the part of the image which shows them is out of focus to prevent recognition. The position of the concealed interviewees is confirmed by Ken Saro-Wiwa Jr, the son of the environmental martyr Ken Saro-Wiwa. He observes that illegal oil bunkering is complicated as it involves the cooperation of military personnel and police. In fact, it is a cartel and thus a proper investigation should take place. The last interviewee in the documentary is Nnimmo Bassey, the Chair of Friends of the Earth International, an environmental awareness organisation. He states as follows:

Nnimmo Bassey: Oil has been a major factor that has dislocated everything, including Nigerian politics and the Nigerian economy. It is now time for us all over the world to move on from this fossil fuel production and construction system. (The Guardian, 2012)

Bassey's position is the protection of the earth from further damage by oil production. The exploitation of resources is the exploitation of the people. Fish cannot survive in rivers and streams into which crude oil pours. Their protection would also amount to the protection of man as he feeds on fish. The docu-drama reveals that, unfortunately, fishermen have often become redundant from little or no catch. To curb human exploitation, man must

desist from exploiting the earth. Nature has its intrinsic value beyond the utility it provides humans. Man's existence is tied to nature: without flora and fauna, many would cease to exist. Unlike the two films discussed above, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* does not focus solely on militancy and resistance. Instead, the core of the film is environmental awareness. The filmmakers make the illegal oil bunkerers aware of the need to shun their activities since they compound the environmental crisis in the region.

Conclusion

Radical struggle has been engaged in by various movements in the Niger Delta in an attempt to curb the environmental crisis. These movements include Nnimmo Bassey's Friends of the Earth International and Ken Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. We must understand that while *Delta Blues*, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* and *The True Price of Crude Oil* reveal the environmental destruction caused by oil exploration, spillages and gas flaring in the Niger Delta, the tendencies of biocentrism embedded in them are advocacy for the equality of man, all the creatures and the environment around him. It is imperative to note that the objectivity of environmental docu-films of the Niger Delta stems from the fact that the producers and directors of these narratives are cineastes from the global North, and, as such, they take a neutral stand in their exploration of the subject matter. The study concludes that the dramaturgy of environmental crisis in films will create spaces for awareness of the threat of the crisis to humanity. Documentary films have become a viable weapon for environmental awareness. The film's under study attests to the argument that documentary films are apt in the quest for environmental protection.

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Kino zaangażowane w kryzys ekologiczny: przykład filmów dokumentalnych z delty Nigru

Bogaty w ropę region delty Nigru w Nigerii pozostaje jednym z najbardziej zdewastowanych środowiskowo miejsc na świecie. Jest to spowodowane spalaniem gazu, wyciekami ropy naftowej, nielegalnym bunkrowaniem ropy i aktami wandalizmu dokonywanymi na rurociągach w regionie. Dążenie do ekodemokracji i przerwania ekoapatii skłoniło światowych naukowców do opracowania paradygmatów, które sprzyjałyby transformacji środowiskowej. Na gruncie dyscyplin akademickich, takich jak historia, geografia, antropologia i humanistyka globalna, trwa więc krytyczne zaangażowanie w praktyki i dyskursy, które mogłyby ułatwić osiągnięcie antycypacyjnej adaptacji do klimatu. Tymczasem jednak afrykańskie uczelnie, szczególnie nigeryjskie, dużo wolniej przyswajają krytyczne podejście właściwe Zachodowi. Krytycy filmów ekologicznych w Nigerii nie zbadali w pełni dyskursu środowiskowego, który nabrał siły w innych dyscyplinach kluczowych dla ekologizacji humanistyki. Dlatego też w afrykańskiej nauce wciąż brakuje krytycznych podstaw do analizy związków środowiska i kina lub też, jak to nazywam, dyskursów na temat „zielonego” kina. Na tym tle przyglądam się kryzysowi ekologicznemu w filmach dokumentalnych *Delta Blues*, *The Nigerian Oil Thieves* and *The True Price of Crude Oil*. Analiza treści ma pozwolić na zbadanie, w jaki sposób filmy te zostały wykorzystane do budowania świadomości ekologicznej w regionie. Analiza opiera się na biocentrycznym modelu ekokrytyki Adriana Ivakhiva, który uznaje jedność człowieka i wszystkich stworzeń oraz otaczającego go środowiska, zalecając przejście od humancentryzmu do biocentryzmu.

Słowa kluczowe: kino, delta Nigru, dokument, ekodemokracja, biocentryzm

Przekład z języka angielskiego
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