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## **ODI REVISITED?**

### **Oil and State Violence in Odioma, Brass LGA, Bayelsa State**

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# **ODI REVISITED?: OIL AND STATE VIOLENCE IN ODIOMA, BRASS LGA, BAYELSA STATE**

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On February 22, 1895, a British naval force under the command of Admiral Sir Frederick Bedford laid siege on Brass, the chief city of the Ijo people of Nembe in Nigeria's Niger Delta. After severe fighting, the city was razed to the ground. Over two thousand people mostly women and children, perished in that attack launched in the name of Queen Victoria.

Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where The Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*, Verso, London, 2004, p.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Odioma a quiet Island community located in the Brass LGA of Bayelsa State in Nigeria, witnessed monumental State violence on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 2005. There were remarkable similarities in the Odioma case to the widely condemned events in Odi, also in Bayelsa State, when the President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces ordered soldiers into the

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank the following people for assistance: Sampson James, Chief Daniel Inemi, the Odioma Council of Chiefs and the King of Odioma HRH, Omieh Churchill. Fieldwork in Odioma was conducted in 2005. Thanks to Jim Wallace and Steve Inskeep of National Public Radio, Washington DC and Ibiba Don Pedro for the images of Odioma.

community to arrest alleged criminals. By the time the operation, code named HAKURI II ended, about 2,483 bodies mainly women and children lay lifeless (see *A blanket of Silence: Images of the Odi Genocide*, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria report, 2002, p 2). This act of State terrorism was re-enacted in Odioma when the State Governor, Chief D.S.P Alamiyeseigha sent into the community a detachment of army, navy, police to arrest some alleged criminals in the community. By the time the combined forces finished their mission about 78 houses were leveled to the ground, scores were dead and missing and life in the community was devastated.

The pattern can be replicated many times over. On smaller scale, in 2001 and 2002 due to the seizure of boats and employees of an oil service company engaged by SPDC, the navy responded not by arresting those alleged, but by undertaking a reprisal raid on the abductors village (Liama), leveling homes and taking the lives of four (*The Niger Delta: No Dividend*, Human Rights Watch, October 2002, p2). Again military operations were mounted against the defenseless citizens on the third week of March 2003 in Okerenkoko and Gbaramatu, two oil rich Ijaw communities in the Warri South-West LGA of Nigeria's delta (*Ijaw Council for Human Rights*, Briefing Notes I Report, March 24, 2003). The report further states that, "six gunboats, nine armoured fast attack boats, sixty-three open passenger type (uncovered) speed boats and five armoured tanks were moved into the creeks with the mandate of 'opening the water ways for navigation and uninterrupted flow of economic activities'. The military hardware was said to have been accompanied by one thousand, five hundred soldiers drawn from the 7<sup>th</sup> battalion known as David Ejoor barracks located in Effurun, near Warri, Delta State" (*Ijaw Council for Human Rights*, Briefing Notes I report, March 24, 2003). At the end of the bombardment seventy-two Ijaw youths and three soldiers lost their lives, while the injured could not be ascertained. Three Itsekiri and two Ijaw communities were completely destroyed (*ICHR*, March 24, 2003).

The Odi and Odioma massacres are clear evidence of the State's misuse of its apparatus of coercion and protection in the delta of Nigeria. Both cases were instigated by allegations of actions by militant youth groups that were not and never investigated before the deployment of military men and artilleries by the government. State violence against its citizens in Nigeria has a long and ugly



Jim Wallace, NPR

history and in the in the delta cannot be understood outside of the state definition of oil as a national security issue and its desire to ensure that the oil keeps flowing. Thus, after the destruction of Odi, Nigeria's then minister of Defence General Theophilus Danjuma, in the course of addressing the Economic Committee of West African States (ECOWAS) ministerial conference on November 25, 1999 was quite explicit when he said: "This Operation HAKURI II, was initiated with the mandate of protecting lives and property—particularly oil platforms, flow stations, operating rigs terminals and pipelines, refineries and power installations in the Niger Delta" (*The Guardian*, Lagos, November 26, 1999).

The community of Odioma was invaded and razed down between 10am and 6pm on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2005 by members of the "Operation Restore Hope" (ORH), a joint military task force of about 5,000 men stationed at David Ejoor barracks, Effurun, near Warri, Delta State. This forced had been based in Warri since 2003 to arrest, kill, maim, or deal ruthlessly with perceived and real perpetrators of criminal activities against the oil industry in the Niger Delta, and operated under the command of Brigadier General Elias

Zamani<sup>2</sup>. During this period the undisciplined and violent nature of the military operations of ORH have been widely reported and criticize by the human rights community.

The militarization and state orchestrated violence in the delta of Nigeria since the 90's to date is not only alarming but unequalled in Nigerian history. In a report conducted by the Human Rights Watch it was emphasized that "from the early 90's a cycle of protest and repression had led to the militarization of large parts of the delta, notably in Ogoniland, a small part of Rivers State where demonstrations leading to the closure of oil production had led to a five-year deployment of a special military task force to the area and the November 10, 1995 execution of the President of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and eight others" (*The Niger Delta: No Democratic Dividend*, Human Rights Watch report, October 2002, p.2). The situation has deteriorated with the continued deployment of more army, navy, police into the delta territory for the protection of installations and their personnel. The events of late 2005 and early 2006 in which new attacks by a group named Movement for the Emancipation of the Nigger Delta (MEND) has further escalated militarization of the Western Delta amidst reports of attacks on civilian communities and many casualties (*Vanguard*, February 26<sup>th</sup> 2006, "Oil War in the Creeks").

The Niger Delta of Nigeria is presently under seize. Some oil operation bases have in effect been turned into garrisons (e.g., Escravos, Bonny, Nemb)e. This is a development that has led to protest by communities of the delta agitating for fiscal/true federalism and resource control. More critically, the militarization of the oil fields provides the indispensable background for an understanding of what the Odioma massacre represents and how to grasp its political dynamics.

## **ODIOMA AS AN OIL COMMUNITY**

Odioma community is located in the south coastal reaches of Nembe kingdom in the present Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The LGA has a population of about 110,000 people of the Ijaw extraction. Odioma is bordered to the east by Obioku of Nembe (Bassambiri) Local Government Area also in Bayelsa State. Odioma community is east of Brass (the administrative LGA headquarters) and it is about an hour drive using 75 horse

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<sup>2</sup> Zamani was recently remove from this position in regard to his being involved in oil theft in the Warri region (*Reuters*, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2006)..

power out-board engine. The community is an Island and not connected to any community by road. In the State house of Assembly Brass LGA is represented by Hon. Belief Nelson of Akassa town and Hon. Yousuo Amalanyo of Okpoma town.

Odioma is an ancient riverine Ijaw village with a population of about 15,000 people, whose major occupation is canoe carving, fish-farming and trading. Like other oil producing communities of the delta in Nigeria, poverty is endemic in the community. Most inhabitants live in thatched houses and could not afford three meals a day. Fishing which is the major occupation of the people is no longer lucrative because little or no catch is made due to the pollution of the waters and creeks by the activities of SPDC in the area. The major and greatest of threats to the community according to Chief Daniel Inemi is the encroachment by the sea. This is because most Odioma communities or settlements have been lost to the sea. There are no projects (roads, water, hospital, light etc) in the community by Government or its agencies. The primary school and dispensary health center are the self effort of the community members. The thatched dispensary has no doctor, bed or drugs, but only a nurse stationed by the State Government.

The community is governed by the King Omieh Churchill assisted by a Council of Chiefs (about 25) persons of notable character, who makes decisions and policies for the town. There is also in the community a community development committee (CDC), youth and women groups who contribute to decisions and policies when and where necessary or if they are called upon by the King and Council of Chiefs. The Odioma people are of the Nembe clan. The kingship throne of Odioma is presently occupied by His Royal Highness, King Omieh Churchill, Igoni the XXI. It should be noted that before now when Nembe is mentioned the reference is to all the territory today covered by Nembe and Brass LGAs. Hence, we have the Nembe Divisional Council of Chiefs comprising Chiefs from the two LGAs whose vice Chairman is Chief Noel Amadi-Igobiri of Odioma community.

Chief Daniel Inemi says prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 2005, Odioma was the most peaceful community in the Nembe Clan. This he adduced to the fact that they have never been at war with any other community, but have only mediated in disputes involving other communities. He, however, traced the crisis to a boundary problem of 1919 when the Okpoma people argued that part of Odioma's land belong to them. He says by 1923 the matter was decided at the Supreme court that the disputed territory belong to Odioma. He further stated that the Odioma people have lived in the territory since the 12<sup>th</sup> century long before Bassambiri was founded.

Chief Daniel Inemi further opined that the disputed Obioku was founded by a son of Odioma who was later joined by others from Odioma and Nembe Bassambiri. He stressed that the Odioma people did not see any need to disallow settlers from Bassambiri in Obioku because they regarded them as their brothers and that the relationship between the duo was very cordial. He says “we all regarded ourselves as one indivisible family”. In any case, people who inhabit the present day Nembe LGA and Brass LGA were all regarded as Nembe people by Ijaws in other territories.

Unlike Nembe axis where Shell and Agip operates, Brass has Agip tank farm or terminal located since the 70's. The Brass LGA and Nembe LGA combined together produces about 250,000 bpd. In the Nembe axis SPDC has four flow stations (Nembe 1, 2, 3, 4) and Bassambiri oil field, with several oil wells, rigs, terminals and pipelines criss-crossing the whole territory of Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri. In Brass LGA Odeama Creek oil field is the only on-shore field operated by SPDC. Brass territory also has Agip and Texaco operating off-shore. There have been several spills in these territories (Nembe and Brass), but the major recorded one was the spill of 2001 at Odeama Creek due to equipment failure by SPDC as stated by the Joint Investigation team (Comprising DPR, the state ministry of environment, federal ministry of environment, SPDC and representatives of the community).

## **THE ORIGINS OF THE ODIOMA CRISIS**

The indispensable starting point for the Odioma tragedy is an historical/political dispute over oil-bearing lands. According to interviews conducted with Chief Daniel Inemi Orumiegha-Bari Luckyn (acting Chairman Odioma Council of Chiefs) resident of Odioma a dispute arose in 1996/7 between Nembe Bassambiri in Nembe Local Government Area and Odioma in Brass Local Government Area, over the ownership of Obioku, an oil-bearing community. Obioku is located east of Odioma and it is about 20 minutes drive using a 75 horse power out-board engine.

Obioku is a small village compared to Odioma. The inhabitants are majorly fishers-men, and traders. The community according to Chief Daniel Inemi was founded by prince Wari Ogbodo and Mr. Igbologi Akanga all of Odioma. The community according to him is now majorly populated by Bassambiri people from Nembe. The community has a primary school and a non functional cottage clinic. Obioku is also an Island but bigger than Odioma in land size, headed by Chief Albert Lawrence Digigha Wari. However, SPDC discovered

another crude oil deposits in the early 90's in so-called Owukubu oil field located in Obioku.

The two communities – Nembe/Bassimbiri and Odioma - have been battling for the ownership of this historically/politically disputed Obioku territory. Disputes over territory and hence over access to rents and payments from the oil operators is a widespread feature of the Niger Delta oilfields. In the case of the discovery of oil in the Owukubu field the dispute turned on the land ownership question. Who own's Obioku? Who is to be paid the royalty? Bassambiri or Odioma. Obioku's position is that no other community should dabble into its internal matters, be it Bassambiri or Odioma, even though they agree that the territory and community is owned by Odioma. Hence, for them any royalty from SPDC should be paid to members in the community and nothing more.

Beginning in 1996 after the discovery of oil deposits in Owukubu SPDC initiated discussions with Nembe/Obioku people on the payment of royalty as landlords of the territory. According to Chief Daniel Inemi, Odioma protested in writing to SPDC that they are the landlord and not Bassambiri. Hence, SPDC called the Odioma community for a meeting on the 11th of March, 1999, and agreed that Obioku territory is actually owned by Odioma. However, because money had been paid to Bassambiri and the residents of Obioku money could not be paid to Odioma, thus SPDC agreed to pay remunerations to Odioma in subsequent payments. Odioma was, in effect, marginalized from the first discussions which included payment of rent royalties. The strategy followed by SPDC – and the fact that SPDC turned to Nembe/Bassambiri according to Chief Daniel Inemi must have been influenced by influential Nembe indigenes with political/economic influences within and outside government. He says for instance, the present Deputy Speaker of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, the present representative for the Nembe/Brass constituency at the lower House at the national level and the state commissioner for works are all indigenes of Bassambiri in influential government positions.

In the views of Chief Daniel Inemi, this is evidenced in the fact that Obioku which is in Brass L.G.A is delineated politically as ward in Nembe L.G.A for political convenience. In the federal government survey plan maps No. 1500/620/9.74 of 1974 and No. 1500/34/6.74 of 1974 shows that the territory is called Odeama Creek. Also in the 1999 map of Bayelsa State Obioku is located in Brass LGA and not Nembe LGA.

All of these developments led to tension in the two communities of Obioku and Odioma, following which there was an alleged threat early 2005 by a notorious cult group called Isenasawo (Teme), meaning spirit, under the leadership of one Clever Oseikebekuma resident in Odioma to attack Obioku residents if work was not stopped in the disputed territory. The 'Teme' cult being one of the cult groups accused of electoral violence in the Nembe and Brass axis in the 2003 elections has been a terror sect even to the whole territory since after the election. The Iseinasawo group is said to have come into being after the Nembe-Kalabari conflict of 1992. Osei Clever its founder and spiritual head was a native doctor, whose services were sought by the high and mighty in the society. He originally settled at Mariakiri and Owukubu all in Odioma, but left after his houses were burnt by Obioku people due to a disagreement that he had an expansionist agenda for his cult activities. His new found base at Mariakiri became a Meca for personalities seeking political and spiritual help. Isenasawo later metamorphosed into "Isein Peace Council" whose services were used by the State government against oil thieves and sea pyrates in the entire Nembe territory. He was having adherents in Rivers, Delta, Edo and Bayelsa States.

Osei Clever and his group later relocated to Odioma. The cult group resident in Odioma was alleged in early 2005 to have surrounded Obioku with guns and carried out sporadic shootings, which created tension in Obioku and neighboring communities that led to panic and the migration of some persons to nearby fishing towns and communities.

This action compelled the Chairman of Nembe L.G.A (Hon. Kuroghofa Walter) to report the security breach to the police in Nembe with a view to bringing the situation under control. But contrary to expectation, the police detachment of about 10 men led by police DSP Debekeme sent to investigate the incident was alleged to have been molested by the rampaging youths of the "Teme" cult in Odioma town. With this ugly incident the chairman was said to have contacted his counterpart at the Brass L.G.A, the State Government and other security operatives in the State with a view to bringing the situation to normalcy.

Thus, a peace meeting of all CDC officials, Chiefs, opinion Leaders, elders, women leaders and youths of Odioma and Obioku was called on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005 at Intercontinental Hotel, Yenagoa by the two Council Chairmen in order to calm the nerves of the aggrieved and to bring the situation under control. The peace meeting was said to have been well attended, and all present were advised to keep the fragile peace in the area, with the instruction that government was going to constitute a committee to look into their

grievances as well as proffer lasting solutions to the rift. The parties were also urged to go and inform their communities of this development and to be law abiding.

On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, four councilors of Nembe L.G.A and eight others including a pregnant woman were on their way to Obioku to inform members of the community of this development. They were attacked and killed at Seria-kiri Akanaga River, a distance of about one hour drive from Nembe by persons suspected to be members of the “Teme” cult group resident in Odioma. However, there is no eye witness account of what happened on that day. It is only rumoured that a certain woman of Nembe extraction saw the 12 persons being shot, macheted and killed from her hiding and relayed the incident to the Nembe community that the killing was done by the “teme” cult members from Odioma. However, till date the identity of the woman remain unknown for fear of attack, therefore the true situation of the incident is blurred.

In a press statement of 24<sup>th</sup> February 2005, the Nembe (Bassambiri) Council of Chiefs identified the victims as:

1. Hon. Iniebio Chiefson – Leader of the legislative arm Nembe L.G.A
2. Hon. Iruosounmoye Godwin - Chief Whip
3. Hon. Evans Nimibofa Ekosa - Member
4. Hon. Ingo Tari Sylva - Member
5. Mrs. Ikaebinyo Eneni - The Pregnant Woman
6. Miss. Nyingilayefa Debo -
7. Mr. Lucky Imbe Derri
8. Master Tonworio Goodwill Keremah
9. Mr. Ebi Okuro
10. Mr. Ebinyo Jeremiah
11. Unidentified
12. Mr. Bokolo (a.k.a. Daddy) - Driver

The Nembe Council of Chiefs accused the Odioma community of masterminding the killing and identified the murderers as;

1. Mr. Demain Nathan Demain - Chief Elect (as the Captain)
2. Mr. Olali Mark
3. Mr. Sunday Otari
4. Mr. Woki Ngomunabo
5. Mr. Kastinah Suotongha
6. Fyneface Frank - Driver

To date nothing has been had concerning these persons, their whereabouts also remain unknown. It was confirmed by King Omieh Churchill that they worked closely with Osei Clever before the incident; hence their membership of the cult group cannot be doubted.

Only two bodies of the victims - that of the Hon. Evans Nimibofa Ekosa of the legislative arm of Nembe Local Government and one other person - have been discovered. They were deposited at the mortuary in Brass. The bodies of the other victims have not been discovered to date.

Immediately the killing was announced linking Odioma to the dastardly act, the community wrote a letter (signed by 8 Chiefs, the youth president and his vice) dated 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2005 titled "The Owukubu Disagreement" which was directed to State Governor, Chief D.S.P Alamiyeseigha saying the community had no hand in the killing and that the matter should be properly investigated and anyone implicated be brought to book by the appropriate authorities.

## **THE MILITARY INVASION**

There was tension in Odioma and its environs when the news came that four councilors of Nembe L.G.A and eight others have been killed in Akanaga rivers, and that the "Teme" cult in Odioma and the Odioma community have been fingered. King Omieh Churchill expressed a widely held local opinion



Jim Wallace, NPR

that the Teme cult group was accused before any formal investigation. King Omieh Churchill in his narration of the ordeal in Odioma said sometime after the killing of the Councillors and eight others, the Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief D.S.P Alamiyeseigha called him on phone and informed that, the “military task force” will be coming into Odioma community on the 18<sup>th</sup> February to effect the arrest of suspected members of the Teme cult group in respect of the death of the four councillors and the eight others. According to King Omieh Churchill most indigenes had fled the village by the mere attribution of the killing to the community in anticipation of an invasion by government forces. Others were persuaded to stay or return to Odioma since the King Omieh Churchill had spoken with the Governor and informed that the military task force was only coming to arrest alleged perpetrators of the heinous crime.

The King of Odioma informed all his Chiefs of this development and waited with his Council of Chiefs and other local notables for the military task force to arrive at the palace of the King on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 2005. The following day, on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2005, as the Amayanabo-in-Council had concluded plans to receive the military team, they were greeted with several gun shots at around 10:30am. Odioma town had been surrounded, overtaken and set ablaze by men of the military task force “Operation Restore Hope” led by one Captain John Garuba. Chief Daniel Inemi put the figure of the soldiers who did the raiding/invasion at about 150, all fully armed. The forces, according to local descriptions, were shooting and killing indiscriminately. The palace was not spared; the King and Chiefs were all ordered out of the palace, which was also set ablaze by the rampaging soldiers.

The King Omieh Churchill - an octogenarian - was ordered to sit on the sand while they tied the hands of all the attending 8 Chiefs, the king’s youngest son, the King’s personal security and others mainly women and gave them the beating of their lives at the river bank. In the community a brotherhood church building and 9 mausoleums were among the properties totally destroyed by the military invaders. And at the end of the day 17 persons were confirmed dead as at 31/05/2005 and a host of others whose status (life or death) cannot be ascertained are still missing. All canoes, fishing-nets, engines and boats were burned deliberately. According to King Omieh Churchill the whole community is literally deserted and about 78 buildings were leveled to the ground on that “black Saturday”.



Jim Wallace, NPR

In a speech to Governor of Baylesa on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2005, The King of Odioma (Highness Cabri George Omieh, Igoni XXI) made the following assessment of the events:

The Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief D.S.P Alamiyeseigha. Ph.D, JP and his entourage. I may not be able to know everybody here now, but I know, His Excellency is here, the secretary to the state government, Dr. Steve Azaiki is also here and all very important people of Government.

You are welcome to Odioma community in Brass Local Government Arear, Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

Your Excellency sir, your visit is timely and an epoch making one, showing how much you care for the down-trodden, deprived and depressed people of Odioma community.

What you see here today is a far cry from what Odioma town was just some few days ago. Here is a complete devastation of an ancient town and its rich cultural heritage. The people have been subjected to an excruciating and

painful experience never before known in all centuries of our existence.

Your Excellency, on the black Saturday of 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, the Amayanabo-in-Council and Chiefs of the Odioma Council of Chiefs were in a meeting discussing how to welcome the joint task force which we were informed had been put in place to patrol our rivers and creeks. We had a similar meeting the day before on the issue but the joint task force did not come. We had also informed our people not to panic at the arrival since they were sent to protect us. So, three elderly men were sent to wait at the jetty in order to conduct them to the king's palace for reception.

Hopefully, they arrived at about 10:30 a.m and gunshots heralded their arrival. Our reaction at the time was that the gunshots were just warning shots. However, when the gunshots continued for a long time, we became apprehensive. Just then, the three elders sent to conduct the members of the joint task force to the king's palace also ran back hastily and informed us that some of the houses at the water-front had been set ablaze. Pandemonium set in and everybody ran for his life.

On the western side of the town, many houses had been set ablaze and the attendant conflagration was frightening a few minutes after that, soldiers surrendered the King's palace and ordered the King and Chiefs and everybody who had taken refuge in the palace to move down and leave as the palace must be burnt. Everybody including the King obeyed so we were marched and led to the sand-bank at the western front of the town. There a severe beating of the captives under that effective command close and open took place and our old King had no option but to sit on the sand too. The other Chiefs were manhandled and rolled on the sand with their hands tied at the back and ordered to eat sand.

The men were also severely beaten and ordered to lie face down on the sand. It is however, unfortunate to observe that a soldier gave his captives bites on the body very uncommon in military history. The victim was the King's last son. The King and Chiefs were fed-up and asked to sleep at the sand

bank. The officers were not happy with the harsh treatment but they could not see everywhere at the same time.

Early the next morning, we were released and ordered back to our respective homes. What we saw was pathetic to describe, a massive destruction of property and demolition of houses had taken place and this was down when we had been driven away from our houses. Even the king's palace was not spared. You are a living witness, the gutted stairs of the buildings tells the story. This is mark of a well premeditated action.

Nine Monjolions of the community were also burnt down and everything in them removed. These monjolions had nothing to do with cultism. They were there before cultists were born and will remain when the cultists are gone.

You Excellency sir, we would like to know what we have done to be so treated, to be so condemned without trial. We would like to know why we have been judged and convicted without investigation and without our knowledge, only to be burnt to death as many of our people have died.

We cannot question government's action but the destruction is overwhelming. " The laws of Moses say that God would visit the sins of fathers upon their children", but today, the government seems to visit the sins of the children upon their fathers. However, there was something bound to happen and it has somehow happened. It is therefore our considered opinion that we should not at this point in time apportion blame but to remind government of its obligation to cater for her people in this time of distress in the areas of;

1. Shelter for the displaced and rehabilitation materials
2. Medical care for the elderly, wounded, nursing mothers, children and those suffering from traumatic health, burns etc.
3. Ensure uninterrupted government boat services from Yenagoa to Odioma and escort for boats from Odioma to Port Harcourt for sometime to come.
4. Rebuild the Church of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, rebuild the nine monjolions destroyed in the conflagration for the burial of our death still in the mortuary.

5. Consider the rebuilding of the of the King's fire gutted palace

Finally, we wish to thank His Excellency, Chief D.S.P Alamieyeseigha for the relief materials sent to us. Our thanks also go to all the members of his entourage for your august visit and to say that we should not be forgotten by you in these days of our travails. We also thank the people who ordered the troops to cease firing on that fateful Saturday. And as you leave our sores we call for a full scale investigation of the causes of this firing visitation by government on us, during which a Church, the king's palace, nine monjillions and 78 buildings of Odioma were completely burnt down.

God's journey mercies go with you while we wish you good bye and God bless. (From **Banner News, vol.9. No5, March 11-25, 2005**).

The inventory of known deaths is as follows but many people are still missing from the community which as of early 2006 is still under military occupation and is uninhabited:

NAME	MODE OF DEATH
1. Madam Lily Amuna	Burnt to death
2. Mr. Ellison Fenengi	“
3. Mr. Bishop Essah	“
4. Mr. Galipre Albert	“
5. Madam Power Matina	“
6. Miss. Ibogomo Adogiye	“
7. Miss. Inerefamokuma Oputa	“
8. Miss. Aladinyo Waribo	
9. Mr. Raphael Omoseni	Shot to death
10. Madam Amada Alphonso	Shot death
11. Mr. Newsmann Obed	Shot death
12. Master Lucky Sibia	Shot death
13. Mr. Amafamonte	Found dead
14. Miss. Igbaseimokuma Philips	Sick & died at Angalabio
15. Mr. Aniatei Okuaka	Fell & died at Brass (Amputee)
16. Mr. Christopher Charles	Ran & died at Fantuo
17. Mr. Emmanuel Odigimekume	Died of Shock



Highness Cabri George Omieh, Igoni XXI, Odioma

Jim Wallace, NPR

After the destruction, which according to Von Kemedi of OND was caused by a lack of courage on the part of the military to directly take on the Teme cult, the ORH forces must have started shooting many kilometers far away from the community.



Jim Wallace, NPR

The Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief D.S.P Alamiyeseigha visited the community with his political and military entourage on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February to ascertain the level of destruction perpetrated by the military task force he sent to the community. King Omieh Churchill, the Amanyanabo of Odioma in a hand written address started by addressing the Governor and his entourage thus: “what happened here is such that I cannot speak in short sentences, so we decided to put it in writing so that it will be read out and a copy given to you and we will return one copy and then I will ask his excellency’s indulgence to go round with me and/or with others to see exactly what has happened here. What happened here is such a wonderful thing one cannot understand. So please, bear with us, just go round.” He posited further by informing the Governor and his entourage “what you see here today is a far cry of what Odioma town was just some few days ago. Here is a complete devastation of an ancient town and its rich cultural heritage. The people have been subjected

to an excruciating and painful experience never before known in all centuries of our existence”. The King thereafter narrated the ordeal of the community in the hands of the “firing visitation by the government”. King Omieh Churchill thereafter demanded the following:

1. Shelter and rehabilitation of the displaced
2. Medicare for the injured and provision of medical personal
3. Transportation with security from Yenagoa to Odioma and vice versa.
4. To rebuild the Brotherhood Church building and the nine mausoleums destroyed
5. To rebuild the fire gutted king’s palace.

However, before the Governor’s visit to Odioma, at a press briefing in Yenagoa, Alamieyeseigha (the Governor) admitted that he had authorized the soldiers’ mission to Odioma to track down the cult members. As he put it:

“I authorized the military to go after the killers anywhere they are. They must be brought to book. Nobody has the right to take another person’s life. Government is there to protect the weak. Once you invite the military to go into a place, things cannot be the same. Innocent persons would have suffered. Government would take care of the innocent persons that are affected” (Daily *Independent* March 11, 2005 p.A8.)

He also opined that “every killing in the Nembe area is linked with Clever Osei, head of the Isenasawo (Teme) cult group. I would like to see him. I got his GSM number and spoke with him, promising to look for him” (Daily *Independent* March 11, 2005 p.A8.) The governor further warned that other communities should learn from the Odioma experience, because communities harboring criminals will dearly pay for it<sup>3</sup>.

A motion of urgency was raised at the floor of the Upper Chambers by Senator Rufus Inatimi Spiff, representing Bayelsa East senatorial district on the destruction of Odioma, and the need for the federal legislators to intervene in

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<sup>3</sup> It needs to be added that there is another aspect of the events that have been systematically downplayed. This is the view that the Councilors who were killed at Akanaga rivers had problems with the Chairman of their LGA (Nembe) pertaining to some LGA purchases (specifically the type of government cars to be bought and who should do the buying). Hon. Evans Ekosa, one of the councilors killed, had informed a confidant before his death that the Chairman’s decision to take the contract of buying the cars was being resisted by the leaders of the house including himself and another person who also killed.

light of the deplorable conditions currently prevailing. The Senate mandated its committee on Defense and Security headed by Senator Fidelis Okoro to visit the community and investigate the ugly incidence. The committee was tasked to identify the remote and immediate causes of the destruction. The committee visited Odioma on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2005 to see for themselves the level of destruction undertaken by the military in the community. The committee was taken round the whole community by the Odioma Council of Chiefs.



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The Committee thereafter held a three-day ‘public learning’ in Yenagoa on the destruction in order to entertain oral and written submissions from individuals or group(s) relating to the invasion. What is striking about the hearing is the very different interpretation of the role of the cult groups and their dynamics. While neither side of this dispute (government, Nembe or Odioma) deny the existence of Teme – though there is some dispute as regards whether they are responsible for the killings of February 2005 - the politics of the group as a sort of militia is complex. Testifying before the committee, suspended Legal Adviser of the Nembe Council of Chiefs, Nimi Barigha Amange, admitted being a patron of the “Teme” cult group, claiming that he knew only two of the suspects declared wanted. He also alleged that the State Government used the said cult group during the 2003 general elections. He stated further that “Osei cleverly influenced political elections in the Nembe area during the period. He colluded with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, Chief D.S.P Alamieyeseigha to ensure that voting materials did not get to

Odioma during the elections in 2003”. Also, testifying the CDC Chairman of Odioma community, Mr. Peter Sam, alleged that Odioma Chiefs were financiers of the Teme cult. Mr. Dagogo, the Chairman Nembe West L.G.A lamented that the area had not known peace since year 2001. He therefore appealed for the citing of a military base in Nembe to beef up security in the locality, and canvassed for the disbandment of the cult groups to enable the area to move forward.

In his submission, the vice Chairman Odioma Council of Chiefs, Chief Daniel Orumeigha-Bari stated categorically that the Government was sponsoring the activities of Osei Clever’s Teme militant cult group. According to him:

“There is a group calling itself ‘ISEIN PEACE COUNCIL’, they were virtually unknown to us until the State Government employed their services with the creation of a body known as ‘Bayelsa Volunteers Anti-Sea Piracy Squad’ and made Mr. Osei Clever as Coordinator in Brass L.G.A. The State Government did not inform Odioma community of their employment but boats bearing such inscription were seen at our jetties.” When asked why the State was not informed of the activities of this group he responded that “we could not doubt that there was Government support because they come into Yenagoa and we have never heard that they were questioned or accosted.”

The Senate Committee at the end of its sitting said the destruction of the town by the joint military task force was justified. Chairman of the Committee, Senator Fidelis Okoro maintained that after visiting the community, the legislators were convinced that the community ‘invited’ the misfortune because it harbored suspected cult members. He, however, maintained that the long arm of the law would catch up with the head of the Teme cult group, Mr. Clever Osei, who remains at large. A member of the Committee Senator David Mark, however, noted that there was need for the Committee to mediate in the crisis to enable peace reign in Nembe and its environs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Odioma is presently in ruins, deserted and desolate. The very few persons currently in the community are wretched, haggard, sorrowful and tearful trying to picking up the pieces of their lives. Many are living in the town hall, the primary school and the Christ Church located in the town, while many have moved to neighbouring communities. The majority of the refugees are in Fantuo were they are accommodated and catered for by their kith and kin.

The community is in desperate but the government on its part has sent in very few building materials (Zinc, planks, cement and nails), but nothing is done.

The military is still stationed in the community. The first batch of military men who were involved in the actual bombardment, harassment and torture of the inhabitants has been redeployed and another detachment has been brought into the community to take their place. Their mission is to ensure that the fleeing youths are arrested and that the community make no demand or protest with respect to the destruction, and to ensure that oil activities continue smoothly in the territory without any molestation by communities. The Committee appointed by the government to look into the incident on the destruction has since submitted its report, but it has not been made available to the public. There is every likelihood that it will never be released.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The government (State or Federal) should investigate properly any criminal act committed, and those involved should be arrested and tried according to law
- The boundary of communities should be demarcated properly by the government to stop the intra-communal conflicts in the delta and other parts of Nigeria.
- The State government should rebuild the community and resettle all refugees now living in other communities
- The government should publish the report of the panel of investigation appointed to look into the massacre
- The government should investigate the roles played by government officials, security forces, oil companies executives/officials, youths, and community leaders in the crisis and those implicated in human rights violations prosecuted
- The government should stop the redeployment of military troops to communities. The police that is trained to deal with civil unrest should be allowed to do its job without interference
- Long standing communal disputes over oil claims/benefits by various communities should be properly handled and amicably settled
- The government must as a matter of urgency abrogate the Land Use Act, the Pipelines Act and other obnoxious laws that deprive the people of their rights to survival, humanity and existence
- Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the military troop from Odioma community
- Demilitarization of the Niger Delta of armed forces

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8. The author wishes to thank Sampson James, Chief Daniel Inemi, the Odioma Council of Chiefs and the King of Odioma HRH, Omieh Churchill for providing most of the information and documents for this fieldwork.

## **APPENDIX I**

Photos of the Odiama destruction by Ibiba Don Pedro



