

Artistic practices as resistance in contemporary Nigeria: The Nelson Edewor's sculpture

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ABSTRACT: Over the years several Nigerian artists have undertaken socially engaging visual artworks that seek to redress societal challenges and rebuild communities. They engaged in visual art practices that interface with and expose the ills and injustices that the people undergo in contemporary Nigeria. They have interrogated these challenges artistically, employing various media and genres. This trend is typical of Nelson Edewor's sculptures created to mitigate the psychological and social estrangement of the people and the oil-producing companies in the Niger Delta oil-producing region. In his sculptures titled *Ivri*, produced between 1997-1999, Edewor created sculptural forms of people impoverished by the polluted environment of the Niger Delta. The forms are stylized to express figures drowned by the barrels of oil in a very critical manner. The figures represented by the artist present the story of a people overtaken by the concomitant of a greedy leadership in a cohort with foreigners to scam the people. He explains the organic form of the petroleum oil pipes in the articulation of different poses of human figures in sculpture using mortar (a sculpture material composed of sand, cement and water). This study takes a close look at selected numbers of these artworks by Nelson Edewor that interrogated these social ills in contemporary Nigeria using formalistic and iconographic art historical methods. The article examined their socio-cultural implications to engender civil consciousness among the communities. It is hoped that this would further expose the depravity; and help in check-mating the socio-cultural and economic challenges that are prevalent in the exploration activities of these multi-national oil companies in contemporary Nigeria.

Keywords: Artistic, art activism, challenges, communities, practice, resistance.

INTRODUCTION

The expression of artistic practice as resistance in Nigeria has been a reoccurring artistic theme and commentaries over the years, since the colonial and post-colonial eras. Several Nigerian artists have undertaken socially engaging visual artworks that emphasise redress to socio-cultural and political challenges. They aimed at rebuilding communities and catalysed socio-political emancipation. As these efforts intensify, more voices are being raised in favour of re-conceptualization and transformative system change (Foster and Martusewicz, 2018 in Linnea, 2020).

Before independence, Nigerian artists engaged in their artworks as instruments of Nationalism geared towards the ideologization of convictions or grievances that are of national interest (Oloide, 1995) Artists such as Akinola Lasekan (1916-1972) who was described as a "pioneer

social political cartoonist" (Egunlae, 1985:192) was in the forefront of the struggle for Nigeria Independence with the likes of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and many others. He used his cartoons to sensitize the people on the socio-political issues of independence and propagated cultural nationalism. His cartoons were simple, conventional illustrations with symbolic meanings. It was marked by a cultural renaissance and a reawakening of interest (Emiemokumo and Esimike, 2011). In his cartoon titled "Eternal Servitude?" (West African Pilot [Lagos], Dec. 19th 1950 in Antwi, 2016). Lasekan represented a bore-headed European imperialist dressed in a suit holding an open umbrella sitting on the shoulders of an African with his legs closed on the chest of the man whose facial expression shows pain and

anguish under the weight of the European. This connotes the physical, mental and psychological dominance the average African was going through in the hands of oppressive colonial masters. Oloide (1995) described his cartoon series as a powerful weapon Zik acquired to fight the colonial masters and their Nigerian agents.

Immediately after independence, when we thought we were independent, those Nigerian agents, civil, military and politicians continued to heighten the already charged socio-cultural and political challenges in the country, especially during the military era.

During the Nigerian Civil War, artists from both sides of the divide explored artistic imagery to challenge social ills and military tactics, thereby providing impetus for change: They were also used to create awareness and attract sympathy from European interest for both parties.

These provocative policies and attitudes of the Nigerian leaders further spurred more artists into creating artworks that provoked nationalist ideologies and promoted civic consciousness among the people to resist obnoxious rules. One such artwork is *Descent of the Falcon* 1993 by Chike Aniako (b1934). It is an artwork executed in lino etching on paper; 70cm. x 50 that illustrates the inglorious military junta of General Ibrahim Babagida's regime from 1985-1993. According to Nwafor (2020), the falcon is a metaphor to illustrate the vices of the Nigerian military junta whose excesses could be likened to a vast desert landscape where neither vision nor knowledge existed. This artwork is a reaction to the annulment of the June 12th 1993 Presidential Election by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida which was generally acclaimed to be free, fair and credible; and was won by Chief M.K.O Abiola. The painting is crowded with many figures in different poses that seem to chronicle the confusion, depravity and collective despondency associated with that regime and the resultant hardship.

The most recent in this series of artistic practices as resistance in contemporary Nigeria came in the wake of the #EndSARS campaign protest in 2020 where various art genres such as visual arts, music and dance drama played vital roles in ensuring that the struggle against police brutality was achieved through (photography, video, illustrations, graphic design, paintings, inspirational designs, music and dance). Their artistic practices became one of the major symbols of the struggle or campaign for change. They communicated significant messages encoded in their forms, lyrics and movements that engendered and endeared the meaning and philosophy of the #EndSARS campaign in the minds of the people both within and outside Nigeria. This non-violent artistic activism of these creative minds has become a critical impetus for peaceful and non-violent resistant struggles against injustice in Nigeria.

In ancient and modern societies, the world over, art forms have served as socio-cultural and political signifiers; and have been used as symbols to cause social change in

different communities. It has been commissioned by those in authority to "underscore the legitimacy of the established order and to signal and support distinctions of status within society.... Art has also been used to criticize rulers and speak out against injustice embedded in society" (Getlein, 2002:33). According to Wang (2016), "Mainland China has witnessed an evident increase of artists who undertake socially-engaged art and seek to optimize the power of art for social criticism or community rebuilding in their professional practices.... while also demonstrated many commonalities with the socially and best art circulated in the global art world". Thompson (2012) in Wang (2016) observed that "social practice artist creates forms of living that activate communities and advanced public awareness of pressing social issues". These social practices or socially engaging artworks are common spectacles in most major cities globally.

In the early nineteenth century, Europe, Pablo Picasso used his mural painting titled 'Guernica' 1937 to challenge the unprecedented destructions of the ancient Basque town of Guernica by joint military operation of the Italian Air Force and the Condor Legion of the German Luftwaffe. According to Picasso in Thompson (2006), "the mural is for the definite expression and resolution of a political problem".

This trend is typical of Nelson Edewor's 'ivri' sculptures created to alleviate the psychological and social entanglement of the people and the oil-producing companies in the Niger Delta oil region. This study discusses five of Nelson Edewor's Ivri sculptures as evidence of artistic resistance in contemporary Nigeria. It undertakes this discussion from two perspectives:

1. Formal Analysis of the Sculptures
2. Iconographic Appraisal of the forms

The paper also perused a brief biographical survey of the artist to enhance further understanding of the artist and his works as visual redress to socio-cultural and political issues.

This appraisal is based on the conceptual framework of art activism which expresses the creation of artworks as socio-political, cultural and economic tools to investigate revolutionary sentiments that critique institutions and authorities in order to bring about socio-political change that alters and transforms society (De Canter 2011 in Akpang, 2016). And also, the theoretical framework of social realism. It admits the conceptualization of reality as a revolutionary development which combines the task of ideological remaking and education (Edewor, 2014).

A brief survey of crude oil discovery and exploration in Nigeria

The discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri town, Bayelsa State in 1956, Niger Delta region of Nigeria was greeted with much enthusiasm. From relative obscurity in the early

1960s petroleum crude oil became the fiscal basis of the Nigerian state effectively removing agriculture as the basis of growth in the Nigerian economy from the early 1970s (Ekuerhare, 2008). The fiscal resources were then concentrated in the Federal Government to the detriment of the federating units especially the Niger Delta region where the petroleum oil exploration activities are taking place. The resultant effect was that the “Niger Delta region has thus increasingly emerged as distinct socio-economic political formation characterized by huge oil resource extraction and exploration, and recycled for development of the Nigerian people and communities of the Niger Delta Region. Consequently, the Niger Delta region has been characterized by enormous problems of increasing poverty and improvisation, backwardness and underdevelopment, starkly manifested in increasing rate of unemployment and crime, and marked by enormous problems of the growing internal colonialism” (Ekuerhare, 2008). According to Edewor (2014), the exploitative impact of oil exploitation/exploration through abusive exploitative processes in the region as a common feature has altered the socio-economic and political mindset of the people.

The oil exploration and exploitation has raised several environmental issues which have adversely affected the environment and the people. These include environmental degradation, depletion of biodiversity, coastal and riverbank erosion, flooding, oil spillage, gas flaring, noise pollution, sewage and wastewater pollution, depletion of the ozone layer, and soil fertility loss and deforestation (Adati, 2012; Edewor, 2014).

This trend has continued unabated and even worsened in contemporary Nigeria with successive governments appropriating every available fiscal resource to insignificant projects, other regions, and private accounts. These adverse activities of oil companies have seemingly altered the psyche of the average inhabitants of the region (Edewor, 2014). This has prompted different types of civil resistance from the citizenry; thus, many Nigerian Artists have also registered their presence in this struggle for socio-economic and political emancipation from the firm grip of the multi-national oil companies and the political leadership of Nigeria. They have used their artworks to engender socio-political consciousness among the people. Amongst this group of artists is Nelson Edewor whose Ivri sculptures speak volumes in this regard. They were created to mitigate the psychological and social estrangement of the people by the multinational oil-producing companies and the political elites.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NELSON EDEWOR

Nelson Uyoyon Ofejiro Edewor (b. 1970) is a renowned Nigerian sculptor, reverend gentleman and an academic. He was born at Erawha-Owhe at Isoko North, Delta State on December 5th 1970 to the family of late Bishop J.F.K.

Edewor (1942-2021) and Dame Elizabeth Edewor. His artistic inclination was discovered at an early stage of his career by his parents who both were principals at the secondary school education level. “His art-inclined dream was nurtured and supported by his parents who at the secondary school level employed art graduate lesson teachers for him to augment his non-graduate art teacher in the school at that time” (Edewor, 2019). He was thus exposed to the academic skills of draughtsmanship in the figurative tradition and clay modelling with concerns for narrative and expressive gesture which set him apart from his contemporaries. Thus, he made a distinction in Fine Arts subject. In 1989, he gained admission into the University of Benin, Benin City to study his dream course, Fine and Applied Arts specializing in sculpture where he had a Second-Class Upper Division Degree in 1993. He further bagged a Master of Fine Art (MFA) Degree majoring in sculpture from the same University in 1999. The quest for further studies and intellectualism spurred him into acquiring another Masters of Art (MA) Degree in Art History in 2006 and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree in 2009 respectively, both from Delta State University, Abraka where he has been employed as a lecturer since 2000 till date. This Leventis Post-Doctorial Fellow (2012), articulated his work from researchful dispositions interrogating the traditional Ivri figures of the Isoko-speaking people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These formal configurations were a breakthrough during his Masters of Fine Art (MFA) research studies at the University of Benin, Benin City. He has depicted socio-cultural elements using the organic forms of the petroleum pipelines in most of his sculptures (both male and female stylized figures) and their relationships to the environment. He approached most of the artworks from a perspective of the identity of myth, folklore and conscientious signification of contemporary socio-cultural issues. His body of visual works is all imbued with formal and contextual strength that endears visibility and patronage. He is an erudite scholar; and a compelling and compulsive contemporary Nigerian sculptor whose visual art school could be regarded as activist art or art activism.

His “works depict configurations that expose contexts associated with inimical and exploration tendencies of petroleum oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region” (Edewor, 2014). The sculptures are an amalgam of traditional Ivri sculpture forms of the Isoko people of the Niger Delta, petroleum oil pipes and human responses that have resulted in a “new formal realism that represents a metaphorical structure, which succinctly represents today’s Niger Delta crises” (ibid) The forms are rendered in stylized human forms articulated in cylindrical, tubular and pipe-line structure that are suggestive of the deprivation, tension and anger that are observable within the Niger Delta environment. The art pieces evoke the limitlessness of formal expressions associated with post-modern art, thereby providing new thematic and

conceptual insights. Some of his works include 'Cry the Beloved Country' (1998), 'Burden Is Our Reward' (1998), 'Death Has Struck My Egg' (1998), 'My Peoples Blood For Money' (1998), 'A Monster Is Strangling Us' (1998), 'The African Scholar' (2001), 'My Hands Are Clean' (2008), 'Man Of The People' (2009), and 'Cry the Beloved Country II' (2011) amongst others. However, this paper is anchored on the first five artworks.

FORMAL ANALYSIS OF THE IVRI SCULPTURES

Cry the beloved country

This piece is a figure sitting on the floor wailing (Figure 1). It is executed in mortar and measures 135cm. This sculpture composition is made of nine cylindrical volumes of various sizes and shapes. Its formal arrangement is composed of organic forms that suggest the tubular forms of oil drilling pipes in actualising human gestural possibilities. The figure is dominated by vertical tubes that form the trunk. This form is transited at the lower part by a triangular volume that suggests the pelvic region with two short cylindrical volumes forming the limbs, extending horizontally from both sides creating a 'V' shape on the ground. This extension ended abruptly with short feet and round toes. The upper part of the torso appears an oval shape with two conical shapes attached to the front chest pointing at the viewer; they connote breasts. These are the only elements that suggest the gender as a female and therefore a mother. The objectification of the nation or country as a female seems to amplify the natural philosophy of womanhood. As a female, she is the one who bears the children and, in most cases, is more emotionally affected when the children are in pain. These motherhood feelings have a "strong intrinsic meaning for women, such as the quality and values of a mother and go beyond mere fertility" (Hwang *et al.*, 2022).

The neck is attached to the central axial arrangement of the trunk with the head at the apex tilting backwards. The facial formation shows a tiny rectangular nose ridge flanked on both sides by two oval-shaped eyes reminiscing the NOK terracotta-style rendition. Below the simplified muscle form is a round concave form that represents an open mouth. While the overall facial expression indicates an agonized and depressed figure. A close observation of the thoracic region shows two cylindrical curved limbs on both sides with linear designs at the transitions. Both are curved, raised and tilted backwards with the right limb pointing its fingers towards the doom of the head which again amplifies the agony she is facing.

The burden is our reward

The sculpture also executed in mortar is a volumetric work that is composed of several barrels of petroleum oil made of cylindrical forms (Figure 2). It is a figure in a squatting position with the right limb stretching backwards while the



Figure 1. Cry the Beloved Country, Nelson Edewor, 1998, Mortar, 135cm, Location: Uniben, Photo: Felix Ophori (2023).



Figure 2. Burden is Our Reward, Nelson Edewor, 1998, Mortar, 90cm x 120cm, Location: Uniben, Photo: Felix Ophori (2023).

left limb is folded inward. The torso seems to be lost as the weight of the cylindrical shapes of the four barrels resting on it have crushed it so much so that it seems to have become part and parcel of the first barrel. On the spherical shape surface on the side of the barrel suddenly appears a volume that seems to indicate hand-holding the rim of the barrel to relieve the torso of its weight. The weight of the barrels has made the tubular left leg to be folded into a sharp curvilinear form, thereby creating two parallel cylindrical forms resting on each other. The left arm projects from underneath one of the barrels to form a triangular cylinder with the fist holding firmly to the massive tubular ankle.

Death has struck my egg

The articulation of sculpture configuration that shows more elements of the art of the Niger Delta is adapted in this sculpture titled "Death has struck my egg". This piece is executed in mortar, measuring 150cm in height, it is a standing figure dominated with a vertical formal arrangement which presents semi-symmetrical tubular limbs (Figure 3). These forms bend inward toward each other to terminate at the two sides of a round volume that represents the pelvic region. On these curvilinear forms of the bent limbs rests two forelimbs executed in both organic and inorganic formal configurations respectively. These forms are capped on top with a thoracic form composed of a convex shape. The limbs and the thoracic form create a central axial arrangement that amplifies the torso. In the middle of this appears an almost squared void hanging on the round form of the pelvic region. On the thoracic cap, the cylindrical neck carries an oval-shaped head with naturalistic facial element. The head is frontal with the denture revealed showcasing a stern-looking facial expression. The nose is of a planner character, and the transition between the neck and the thoracic region has curvilinear design elements of several lines running around the base. On the round pelvic form, the thoracic cap and the forehead are three incised lines respectively. The gender is not suggested, although the figure seems to represent a male.

My people's blood for cake

This figure is a masculine sculpture piece holding a cutlass (Figure 4). It is 165 inches in height and made with mortar. The work shows a compendium of varied cylindrical shapes arranged in vertical axial compositions. The torso is configured with a cylindrical form textured with centripetal spatial curvilinear movement. This volume is flanked by two four limbs executed in both organic and inorganic formal elements transited at the elbow point with forward angular movement that holds a knife on the right



Figure 3. Death Has Struck My Egg, Nelson Edewor, 1998, Mortar, 135cm, Location: Uniben, Photo: Felix Ophori (2023).



Figure 4. My People's Blood for Cake, Nelson Edewor, 1998, Mortar, 140cm, Location: Uniben, Photo: Felix Ophori (2023).

limb and the left limb clinch-fisted. The thoracic region is configured in a breastplate-like form with three incised lines running parallel at the centre flanked on both sides by two incised circles which is suggestive of the breast. At the top, the folded neck presents the head putting on a cap that is reminiscent of the Niger Delta traditional attire for men. The breastplate formation also portrays the fashion design pattern for men's clothing in the region. Nelson introduces the formal elements of the lower limbs "with cylindrical volumes that tapered down into a recessional plan that forms the feet" (Njoku, 2016). These lower limbs which are curved at the pelvic region seem to carry a symmetrical design formation.

A monster is strangling us

This monster sculpture is a piece that exemplifies the masculinity or nature of the male figure (Figure 5). It is configured in multiple cylindrical forms that are vertically and horizontally articulated. The compositional arrangement presents a twin art figure of a gigantic figure with both arms wrapped around a small figure squeezing it against its abdominal region. This sculpture piece is vertically positioned with his two hind limbs configured in a cylindrical and rectangular shape. It has a sharp transition between its ankles and flat plan feet, while the torso is composed of the smaller figure that is being strangled. It is a triangulation of cube and spherical forms juxtaposed on each other with tiny tubular forms on both sides serving as the limbs and fists of the strangled figure ending in a tight fist which signifies pain and a round form serves as the head. The almost square-shaped form also doubles as the lower abdominal region of the larger figure that forms and connects the lower limbs to the upper part of the figure. The neck that presents the head of the smaller figure is completely lost due to the two massive tubular limbs of the bigger figure wrapped around the thoracic and neck regions. Both angular-shaped tubular upper limbs are connected to the shoulder via a short horizontal tube that curves downward at both ends. The shape is reminiscent of the shoulder region of a rhinoceros or an American rugby player. At the apex, the neck and the head are attached to the middle of the horizontal tube of the shoulders tilted forward. The spherical-shaped head is resting on the squeezed circular form of the head of the smaller figure. The connecting neck is a curvilinear volume that is conspicuously enlarged to cover some parts of the head and the shoulders. Nelson articulated these figures with the petroleum oil pipeline/pipes. This goes to show the interaction between oil exploration activities and the people of the Niger Delta. The use and adaptation of rectilinear and curvilinear elements as an interface between the pipelines and the human figure exemplifies the distinctive character and qualities of the various volumes that make up the different figures. Interrogating



Figure 5. A Monster is Strangling Us, Nelson Edewor, 1998, Mortar, 140cm, Location: Uniben, Photo: Felix Ophori (2023).

these figures presents a sculptural composition embedded in linear, curvilinear, orderliness and harmony of formal organization. Njoku (2018) observed that the perfection of these formal elements classifies the artist's approach as formalism which Wangboje (1982 in Njoku, 2018) described as locating excellence in formal organisation as a relationship among the visual elements of sculpture".

CRITICAL ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF RESISTANCE IN THE WORK

A critical study of Nelson Edewor's Ivri sculptures shows that the works seem to engage a social-political construct that activates communities and advances public awareness of pressing oil exploration issues in Nigeria as they interface with the realities of pollution, deprivation, hopelessness and poverty. These could be noticeable in the compositional arrangement of the works; first, the cylindrical roundedness that characterized the formal elements of the works are derivative of the petroleum oil pipes line networks that criss-crossed the length and breadth of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This formal context is the major player and conduit through which the syphoning of our natural resources and wealth is being made. Saidu *et al.* (2016) argued that the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria instead of being a blessing has become a curse to the economic development of the country. This visual commentary of deprivation is stylistically and truthfully articulated in Figure 1 "Cry The Beloved Country". This figure sitting on the ground carries

the axial arrangement of the entire structure of the trunk with the neck holding onto a tilted head at the Apex. This formal arrangement presents a wailing mother (The people of the Niger Delta) crying for the pollution and deprivation caused by the oil exploration activities which have consequently resulted in low life expectancy and very high child and maternal mortality rates. The raised curvilinear tubular forelimbs seem to suggest the height of poverty and deprivation. The natural green grasses further support the concept of suffering amid plenty. Relying on the concept of de-constructivism, the green exemplifies richness in both agriculture and natural resources; yet Nigerians are in great penury and want. The synthesis of crude oil facilities, natural and formal elements seem to herald the agonizing conditions in the Niger Delta region, therefore justifying the title and meaning of the work.

The monster of poverty and depravity seems to have not only compressed and overburdened the citizens as expressed in Figure 2 "Burden Is Our Reward" where the volumes of barrels are weighing heavily on the people of the Niger Delta. It has also further constituted itself into a monster strangulating the citizenry in Figure 5, titled "A Monster Is Strangling Us". The masculinity of the figure is distinctively captured in the massive tubular form that squeezes or strangulates a smaller figure within the visibly bigger torso. The volumetric tubular hands of the monster (the multinational oil companies and the political leaders) squeeze the smaller figure into itself, thereby forcing it into forming a part of the monster's torso and squeezing the life out of it.

The exploration of crude oil and the exploitation of the people of the Niger Delta region has eaten so deep not only into the present but into the future, as the oil reserve is gradually drying up and alternative energy needs are being discovered every day. Therefore, the future is a blink for generations yet unborn, especially in the Niger Delta. This visual commentary is emphasized in Figure 3 titled "Death Has Struck My Egg", as experts warned that Nigeria's crude oil reserves may dry up in 30 years (The Guardian Newspaper 21st October, 2016). Although the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) (2020) in the Punch Newspaper (February 20th) data shows a slight change in life index and depletion rate at 49.03 years and 2.04% respectively. The above sculpture (Figure 3) is composed of a vertical structure with its two forelimbs resting on its hips. These limbs form a link between the upper region of the figure and the lower part with a cubic void or space forming the abdominal region where the eggs are formed for procreation. An egg is a unit of life that forms the embryo after it has been fertilized. According to The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. (2016), an egg "is a female sex cell or gamete. The human female reproductive cell is also referred to as ovum". Explaining further, Oxford Dictionary 5th edition defined ovum as a female sex cell of an animal or plant that can develop into a young animal or plant when fertilized. The visual void on the

artwork indicates that the part of the body that produces, houses and nourishes the egg and the embryo after fertilization has been destroyed, therefore the future generation of the Niger Delta people has been tampered with or compromised by the oil exploration activities of the multinational oil companies and their government collaborators. In other oil-producing countries of the world, "the resources (petroleum oil) belong to present and future generations, and therefore the development of the industry should benefit both generations" (Elwerfelli and Benlim, 2018). Therefore, they have used "My People's Blood for Cake". 'Evidence shows that in Nigeria, oil has been more of a curse' (Elimefelli and Benlim 2018; The Guardian 2021 Nov. 9).

The degradation, pollution, depravity, hopelessness and poverty of the Niger Delta people has reached its height that the temperament to tolerate and endure the hardship encountered is beginning to wane. This has manifested in different deviant behavioural patterns such as vandalization of pipelines, civil unrest, armed robbery, violent crime, protest and militancy. These elements of protest have been conspicuously configured in the sculpture titled "My People's Blood for Cake" (Figure 4). The figure is a vivid conceptualization of the anger that has developed in the hearts of the people over the years. The artist configured these feelings and behaviours as a warrior spirit ready to fight the injustice associated with petroleum oil exploitation activities. This concept may have been influenced by the traditional Urhobo and Isoko warrior spirit deity sculpture that is associated with most communities in Urhobo and Isoko land. The vertical compositional structure of this figure shows an art form with a breastplate or volume that seems to indicate a shield and the right forelimb holding as if it were a cutlass which in itself is a weapon of warfare, self-defence and an agricultural tool and stern facial expression that expresses vengeance and anger. The entire sculpture seems to suggest a battle-ready warrior. On the right bicep, is a form showing a band which represents an amulet or charm usually worn by warriors in the Urhobo and Isoko land. This visual commentary highlights the emotions of the Niger Delta people who are ready to fight for their emancipation and control of the natural resources in their environment.

CONCLUSION

The art of socially engaging visual configurations that seek to redress societal challenges, cultural critiquing and encourage rebuilding and rebranding of communities seem to be on the increase. They have been approached in various ways by different artists in Nigeria who seek to change socio-political and public spaces. Nelson Edewor's sculptures analysed above have highlighted visually the general discontentment of the people of the Niger Delta region from where the natural resources that are providing

the most needed revenue to the nation are gotten. These artistic expressions have been able to engage the minds of the people to the general but different resistant social behaviours in response to the oil exploration and exploitation activities of the multi-national oil companies and their government collaborators. These include vandalization of pipelines, civil unrest, armed robbery, violent crimes, protest and militancy. He transformed these complex phenomena into visual representations of reality and tangibility. With his art activism, he has continued to reinvent and reactivate the socio-political consciousness of the people to the struggle for resource control and the general emancipation of the people of the region. Edewor's artistic (sculpture) configurations have also re-echoed the logic of art and politics by calling for more hands to be on the deck to check-mate these monsters, the multi-national oil companies and the political crannies in contemporary Nigeria. He stated that when men's creative essence is not put into practice to salvage or enliven hitherto soulful decadence, the socio-political environment will remain docile. Nelson Edewor's art not only reflects the socio-economic and political realities of contemporary Nigeria but calls for civic involvement through the arts in the resistance against oppression and any form of neo-colonialism associated especially with the Niger Delta region.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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