

## Editorial Introduction: The Warri Crisis, the Niger Delta, and the Nigerian State

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Warri is a strategic city in the Niger Delta. As the second major oil city after Port Harcourt, Warri is the center of scores of oil installations and the nerve center of the operations of oil companies in the western Niger Delta, particularly the U.S. major, Chevron-Texaco. Since colonial times, control of Warri has been the principal *casus belli* in a lingering conflict among the three ethnic groups (Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo). Although initially the conflict was over land, fishing rights and cultural differences, oil has become the highly charged political issue, as a huge oil economy has grown around the city. The insecurity produced by the Warri crisis has repeatedly led to the shut down of oil installations, leading many to believe that Warri is now the litmus test for measures to resolve the problems of the Niger Delta.

In a report published in late 2003, Human Rights Watch documented the escalation of violence in Warri since the first serious conflicts in 1997 (HRW 2003). Hundreds have been killed and thousands displaced: the details of the violence are difficult to document in the slums and around the creeks where much of the violence has occurred. The crisis involves issues of peace, human rights and environmental justice; it has led to intermittent fighting resulting in the loss of life and the periodic shutdown of oil production and export. At stake is the stability of the entire oil and, more important, the political stability of the entire Niger Delta. Running across the inter-ethnic conflicts over the governance of Warri is a complex story of corruption, oil politics, oil theft (called bunkering), and machine party politics.

Disputes over government resources and control of crude oil, including the stolen oil, drive the violence that has engulfed parts of Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta. The Human Rights Watch report documents how violence in Nigeria's southern Delta State, especially during the state and federal elections in April and May 2003, resulted in hundreds of deaths, the displacement of thousands of people, and the destruction of hundreds of homes. Among the dead were dozens killed by government security forces. At the height of the violence, 40% of Nigeria's oil production was closed down, and most oil companies withdrew their staff. "The people of

the Niger Delta have suffered horribly from living amid the source of Nigeria's wealth," said Bronwen Manby, deputy director of the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch and the author of the report. "And the perpetrators get away with these crimes without even the faintest chance of being brought to justice."

The perpetrators of violence in Delta State are the state security forces and armed ethnic militias belonging to the Delta's three major ethnic groups fighting over rule in Warri. Collectively, the Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo constitute an absolute majority of the population of the Niger Delta. Since the Human Rights Watch report was released, renewed violence has broken out once again in Delta State and Warri, and although peace negotiations of various sorts are progress, the depth and profundity of the crisis requires immediate and serious attention.

In Nigeria, individuals in government office often have virtually unchecked control over resources. Elections are therefore a focus for violence and fraud. Delta State produces 40% of Nigeria's two million barrels a day of crude oil and is supposed to receive 13% of the revenue from production in the state — so control of government positions is a particularly large prize. In addition, the warring factions are fighting for control of the theft of crude oil, known as "illegal oil bunkering." Illegally bunkered oil accounts for perhaps 10% of Nigeria's oil production, bringing profits that are probably more than US\$1 billion a year. Both politicians and those who head the illegal bunkering rackets — sometimes the same people — employ armed militia to ensure their reelection or defend their operations.

On 24 November 2003, the police arrested three journalists at Lagos-based *Insider* magazine, detained them for two days, and charged them with sedition and defamation of character in connection with an article alleging that the vice president of Nigeria and the national security adviser to the president were involved in large-scale theft of crude oil. "Although the violence has both ethnic and political dimensions, it is essentially a fight over the oil money — both government revenue and the profits of stolen crude," Human Rights Watch said. "Efforts to halt the violence and end the civilian

suffering that has accompanied it must therefore include steps both to improve government accountability and to end the theft of oil."

This issue of the ACAS Bulletin is the result of preparatory work I did with Michael Watts, Okey Ibeanu and Ike Okonta for a workshop to address the crisis in Warri. The meeting, now postponed, was to have taken place in May 2004 at Blue Mountain Center in New York State. The workshop's aim was to address the need to understand fully the political dynamics of the contemporary struggles over Warri in order to provide a framework within which government, local communities and the oil transnationals can all be held accountable; we also hoped to lay out some dimensions of a just and responsible political machinery for the governance of Warri. The meeting would bring together a group of participants from the three main ethnic groups who are in regular contact with the communities in the Delta and who could reflect the sentiments of people; as well, representatives of two of the most important and central NGOs operating in the Niger Delta — Leaders of Our Niger Delta and Environmental Rights Action — were to participate. Working with other Nigerians who could contribute their related experiences and a team of conflict resolution specialists from Rutgers, we hoped the outcome would be a new frame for a solution to the crisis.

The appeal of this Blue Mountain initiative lay, first, in the center's remoteness from the immediate Niger Delta and national contexts of the conflict. Second, it was to take place during a period of relative peace in Warri, thereby offering an opportunity for dispassionate engagement of the issues. This timing contrasts with previous initiatives, most of which emerged in the immediate aftermath of eruptions of violence when positions were hardened and memories fresh on all sides. Third, an international initiative such as this would have raised the profile of the Warri crisis and its management, as well as confidence building measures among the communities.

This initiative still holds great prospects of the parties trusting the process because of its international character and visibility. One of the concerns that factions have raised about past conflict management attempts is that they could not trust the process, especially the sincerity of government and other mediators. Finally, past initiatives have tended to focus too much on getting a peace accord quickly signed by the warring factions, with little attention paid to expression of the contending positions and a cooling off and confidence building period. The Blue

Mountain initiative was to provide ample opportunity for all positions to be vented in a non-threatening manner, mediated by experts in negotiation and conflict management. We still hope to hold this meeting, if we can raise the necessary funds, for which we are appealing.

We originally requested the articles in this issue as background information for the meeting. The Bulletin leads off with an analytical overview of the Niger Delta by Ben Naanen. It is followed by three general observations on the crises of the Nigerian State, the Niger Delta and Warri (Kayode Soremekun, Dan Omoweh and Okechukwu Ibeanu). Note that our authors refer to the rulers in a variety of ways — ruling class, elites, militariat, rentiers, political class, state managers, clique of gatekeepers, and users of revolving doors. Kayode Soremekun makes the case for considering three inter-related crises, not just one in Warri. Dan Omoweh tries to hammer out the shape of the struggle over Warri; he makes the claim, which not all analysts do, that this crisis is political, not economic. Ibeanu shows how rulership (as it is called in Nigeria) has passed from so-called military to so-called civilian rule; he states that the discourse of "resource control" is pertinent not just to the Federal Government's hand in this crisis, but also to the entire Nigerian public and media. Resource control is a powerful discourse, and Ibeanu correctly notes that it takes away from the issue of human rights — a shift clearly marked in the media when Obasanjo came into power.

Ike Okonta provides a case study of Nembe, a Delta community hard hit by the conflict. Rather than constructing and analyzing the factions, that are always changing, he analyzes elite alliances that bring together what are usually imagined as disparate actors. And he shows how the transnational actors are just as much involved in Nigerian corruption as the elites. Not even the best Nigerian media pulls this off very often. The role of women in the conflict is described in a press release from Environmental Rights Action. This situation, in which colonial notions of masculinity and power come together with indigenous conceptions, offers potential for a feminist analysis that could contribute towards understanding the violence and how people manage to cope with daily onslaughts of brutality. In their essay, Terisa Turner and Leigh Brownhill try to analyze the women's protests in terms of a global power shift from corporate rule toward popular communal movements.

Also included in this issue is Peter Ekeh's report on an earlier attempt in 1999 to hold a peace summit on

the Warri Crisis. Ekeh represents one of the factions (he is president of the Urhobo Historical Society), and in this report he is really speaking to a Nigerian audience. For background on what brought the Nigerians together for this meeting, please consult his excellent and informative website (<http://www.waado.org/>). Finally, and with the greatest pleasure, we present a four-part poem by Ogaga Ifowodo, written for Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni 9.

A word about our contributors, all of whom have been active on Delta issues for many years: Ben Nannen, a founding member of MOSOP (Mobilisation for the Survival of Ogoni People), is Professor at the University of Port Harcourt; Kayode Soremekun is Professor of International Relations and Dean of the Faculty of Administration at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Okechukwu Ibeanu is Program Officer with the MacArthur Foundation, Abuja; Dan Omoweh is Senior Research Fellow, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos; and Ogaga Ifowodo is a human rights activist, lawyer and award winning poet. Terisa Turner is a sociologist and anthropologist at the University of Guelph in Ontario, and Leigh Brownhill is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto; they are members of First Woman (the East and Southern African Women's Oral History and Indigenous Knowledge Network) and co-direct the International Oil Working Group.

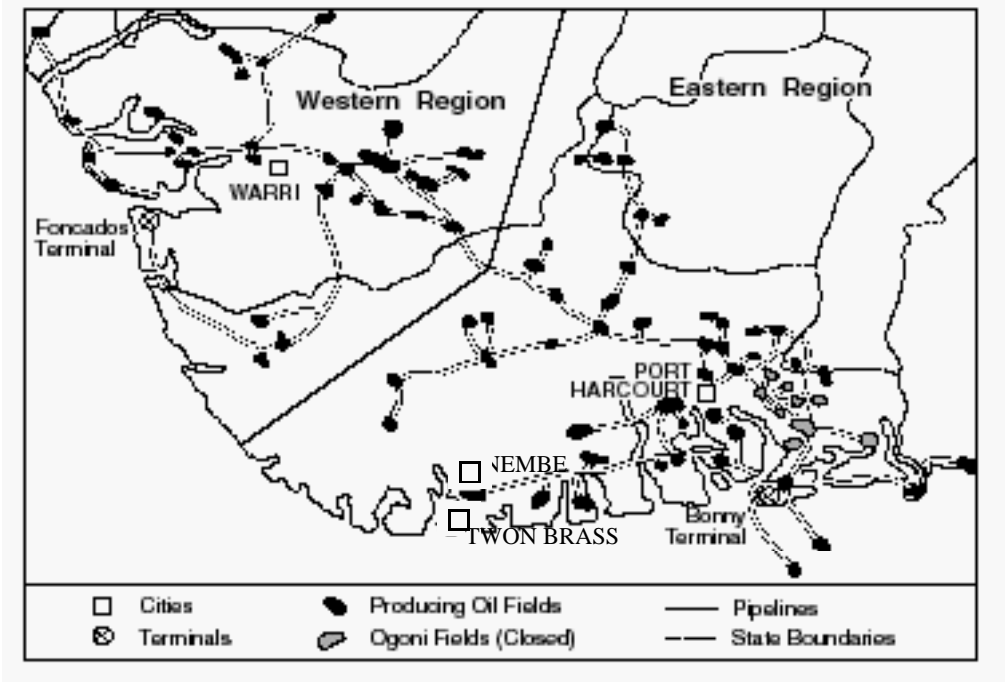
A final word. One of the reviewers fears this issue of the Bulletin will once again project the view that Africa is full of "failed states," "violence out of control," and "hopelessness." Our authors do discuss resistance, most often in the context of violence, but they suggest that the resistance itself has become quite corrupt. None of the articles gives an account of the strength and struggle of civil society organizations, and there are a lot of grass roots organizations focusing on building schools, health clinics, and other community facilities. They are trying to survive and stay out of the conflict, using new funding from diverse sources available since Obasanjo came to power. Because of the purpose for which these articles were written, they comprise a political sketch that foregrounds war and violence. ACAS cannot ignore the interminable suffering. We need to remember colonial legacies, the dominant, even determinant, role of international capital (the international oil companies cannot be separated from acts of corruption and violence), and the alliance of rulers and capital (whether military or not) that crushes local peoples.

*\*I want to thank Michael Watts, Okey Ibeanu, Ike Okonta, Kristin Peterson, Carol Thompson and Michael West for their important contributions to this introduction.*

**References**

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**Map of the Niger Delta Region** (reprinted courtesy of Review of African Political Economy)



## The Political Economy of Oil and Violence in the Niger Delta

Ben Naanen

The Niger Delta remains crucial to the Nigerian economy. The oil and gas that sustain the nation are produced in the region and its contiguous continental shelf. This region has in recent years grown into a hugely complex enigma that is difficult to decode, even by the most informed analysts. Abysmal underdevelopment in the midst of plenty and the multi-dimensional struggle for the control of the resources of the region define the current social parameters of the Niger Delta. This struggle, which is an amalgam of ethnic conflicts, youth restiveness, insurrection and brazen criminality, has taken the form of ferocious internal wars.

Okey Ibeanu identifies what he describes as the three paradoxes that could be used to analyze the Niger Delta – the paradox of plenty, the paradox of national security and the paradox of development.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps when that piece was written violence and insecurity in the Niger Delta had not reached its current level of anarchy that has rendered ungovernable whole sections of the region. Nor was there an American naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea. This short paper explores how the political elite, especially the ruling party and its factions, hijacked the existing struggle for social rights and environmental protection and transformed it into a zero sum violent struggle for power whose central objective is the expropriation of oil revenues, resulting in heightened insecurity. While outlining the effect of this violent environment on the oil industry, the paper also comments on how the search for energy security by the United States is gradually building up external security pressure on Nigeria.

We may have to start with a glance at history, for history seems to be repeating itself in several important respects. The Niger Delta has always produced some of the major impulses that define Nigerian history. That history has been denominated by oil – palm oil in the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and crude oil thereafter. The European scramble for protected oil markets in the region led ultimately to the creation of the Nigerian state by the British at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 1960s the state so created was threatened by secession, which resulted in a thirty-month civil war. That conflict was critically linked to the objective of controlling the petroleum resources of the Niger

Delta. Since the 1990s oil-related turmoil in the region has repeatedly threatened to unravel the cohesion of the Nigerian state.

At the moment another scramble for Niger Delta oil is going on among major Western economies. The importance of African (Niger Delta) oil to the U.S. economy, following the formidable challenge to American supremacy in the Middle East, is now well known. The British have also estimated that they will be importing as much as 10% of their oil from the Niger Delta in less than a decade from now. As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the palm oil business brought about the proverbial British gun boat diplomacy in the Niger Delta, the current scramble has set in motion another foreign military process whose ultimate end can hardly be predicted with any certainty for now. American marines are already cruising freely in the Gulf of Guinea to safeguard U.S. oil supplies from the region. Ultimately, the British may also end up sending troops to the region under one disguise or another.

The Niger Delta had known occasional internal conflicts for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century over the control of palm oil markets by local potentates. But hardly anyone expected the current levels of violent struggle connected to the control of crude oil revenues. Some sources have gone so far as to describe the situation as high intensity conflict comparable to better known cases such as Colombia and Chechnya.<sup>2</sup>

### In the Beginning

The Niger Delta was one of the pioneer areas of what was to become Nigeria to be incorporated into the Atlantic world economy from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The region consequently developed a monetized economy, which was ahead of contemporary developments in other parts of the future Nigeria, leading to a substantial degree of prosperity and the development of a proud culture in the region. These developments contributed immensely to the region's development of its own identity. Hardly had the Nigerian colonial state the opportunity to consolidate itself when the fear of ethnic domination prompted the struggle for self-determination in the Niger Delta from the 1940s. In the Eastern Delta that aspiration assumed the form of demand for an autonomous Rivers State. Delay in granting the demand led to an

armed insurrection in 1966, culminating in the declaration of a Niger Delta Republic, which was crushed within barely twelve days of its birth. That revolutionary tendency has continued to define social trends in the Niger Delta.

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in the 1950s and the virtual exclusion of the region from the benefits of the oil economy have sharpened that revolutionary tendency. The early 1990s marked a watershed in the Niger Delta struggle with the outbreak of the Ogoni Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Like savanna fire the new phase of the struggle rapidly spread to other parts of the Niger Delta. But lacking the kind of disciplined leadership that the Ogoni have in MOSOP (Mobilization for the Survival of the Ogoni People), which has kept the resistance relatively non-violent from the Ogoni side,<sup>4</sup> the struggle assumed a radical dimension elsewhere in the Niger Delta. At this stage the demands of the Niger Delta people revolved mainly around the core issues of underdevelopment, resource control, environmental protection and political marginalization.

Solutions were sought in varying degrees of self-determination to be granted by constitutional means. The Ogoni Bill of Rights pointedly asked for local autonomy that would allow the Ogoni to control both the resources of their land and the environment as part of the Federal Republic. The Kaiama Declaration by the Ijaw, similarly embodied the principle of autonomy. The peoples of the Niger Delta, like other pro-reform groups in southern Nigeria, especially, have consistently advocated for a restructuring of political relations in the country in favor of greater devolution of power from the center to the states, including particularly the power to control a greater share of oil revenues. Some call it true federalism.

### **Struggles Within a Struggle**

Meanwhile, the oil economy was generating a rapid momentum of its own as cheap oil money massively corrupted the polity. The military and its civilian clients (the *militariat*, according to Ibeanu) garnered fantastic personal wealth at the expense of national development. Control of oil-bearing land and control of access to the transnational oil companies (TNOCs) became highly lucrative, generating intra- and inter-communal conflicts. Ethnicity and the local community now became the platforms for prosecuting the struggle for a share of the oil wealth. Large numbers of unemployed youths, alienated by their own social condition, which provided no hope for the future, became the crack troops of the ethnic-based conflicts.

Every major ethnic movement had its own youth wing, which in certain situations served as the military arm of these movements and are popularly called "ethnic militias". The Ijaw National congress (INC) had the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), the Ikwerre people had the Ikwerre Youth Congress, and MOSOP had the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP). Open wars erupted between the Ogoni and their neighbors – the Andoni and Okrika to the south and the Ndoki to the north – all in Rivers State in the Eastern Delta. In the Western Delta, there occurred three-dimensional wars involving the Urhobo, the Itsekiri and the Ijaw, mainly over the control of the oil city of Warri, its environs and the major waterways in Delta State. Bayelsa, peopled mainly by the Ijaw, had series of communal clashes involving Nembe, Ogbia and other communities.

Meanwhile, having militarily defended their ethnic and local communities, the youth discovered their own power and potential. Inspired and at the same alienated by the corrupt enrichment of the elite and their own elders resulting from access to oil money, the youth now moved to seize power from their elders in various localities. In Ogoni insurgent youths forced chiefs they perceived to be opposed to the interest of the Ogoni people into exile. In other places youths put to death community leaders they deemed to have misappropriated compensation or project funds from the oil companies. For most community leaders the fear of youth became the beginning of wisdom. Village chiefs involved in power struggles against their opponents especially over the control of oil funds allied themselves with the community's youth group. Of course the outcome was a foregone conclusion. The borrowed term, "warlord", is now used to describe a powerful and ruthless youth leader. These cases serve to illustrate the new found power of youth, as opposed to the past when the elders held sway. What a dramatic transformation of the political sociology of the region.

Youth power has been most exercised in relations with oil companies and in respect of any projects involving money in the communities. Community leaders who want concessions from the oil companies have only to send their youth groups. To extract legitimate or illegitimate shares of oil money, the youth occupy oil production facilities and oil company premises and take oil workers hostage. In some cases in recent times they have killed these hostages. In April 2004 five seized oil workers, including two Americans, were brutally murdered while negotiations for their release were still going on. The warlords and their private armies sustain themselves on a variety of oil-related sources, including what

amounts to protection payments from oil companies and other corporate bodies.<sup>5</sup> Oil *bunkering* (theft of crude oil) has become a major source of funds for these groups. The stolen oil is sold in dollars to foreign buyers whose boats are moored on the high seas. Bunkering has become a lucrative business, patronized and protected by well-placed people in government and society. The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) estimates that Nigeria loses 50,000 barrels of oil daily (18 million barrels per year) to oil thieves.<sup>6</sup>

### **Politics, Violence and the “Carry-Go” Syndrome**

Violent conflicts dramatically escalated with the end of military rule and the inauguration of a new civilian administration in 1999. One explanation given for this paradox is that the repression of the military years was able to check tendencies, which could be remotely (mis)interpreted as anti-government and anti-state. The reprisals against the Ogoni people, who rose up against the inequity of the Nigerian state as it affected them and against multinational oil companies for a variety of corporate sins, including environmental damage, served as a grim deterrent to other aggrieved groups.

The other major challenge to military authority came in the form of demand for the restoration of the acclaimed victory of Chief Moshood Abiola in the 1993 presidential election, annulled by the military under General Ibrahim Babangida. That opposition was organized mainly by the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and centered on Lagos. As in the case of the Ogoni, suspected NADECO leaders were targeted for summary treatment by the Abacha regime. After 1999 the relatively free atmosphere of the new civilian order seemed to have encouraged the free expression of repressed social grievances, resulting in heightened tension in the polity.

Hardly had the Obasanjo government settled down when a two-pronged struggle for supremacy between factions of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and between the PDP and the opposition parties threatened to tear the country apart. In many states PDP victory in the 1999 polls was marginal. To maintain its hold on such states the party made every effort to eliminate the opposition. Events connected to the subsequent 2003 elections were to provide an indication that the party was hardly in the mood to concede power in a free electoral contest. Within the ruling party itself the struggle became even more deadly as a result of the ambitions of individual political leaders and their supporters.

It is in these political struggles that we identify the major transformation of existing social conflicts. The armies of unemployed and angry youth, who led the communal and ethnic-based conflicts while remaining the scourge of the oil companies, now became willing recruits for ambitious politicians. Their political patrons now generously funded the new private armies, locally referred to as political thugs or secret cult groups, armed them with expensive sophisticated weapons that are not available to law enforcement agencies, protected them from the law, and rewarded them with oil bunkering. They terrorized not only political opponents but local communities as well. Inter- and intra-party party clashes laid waste whole communities. Political violence intensified with the approach of the 2003 general elections. The Niger Delta became the hot bed of violent political contestation. The main reason is obvious. No one in power in Abuja ever wants to lose control of the Niger Delta and its oil and gas resources, and the PDP is no exception. Control of power in Nigeria has always been about control of oil revenues.

Rivers State became a test case of the emerging macabre trend. In 1999 the PDP candidate was declared the winner of the state governorship, which most people expected would be won by the All Peoples Party (APP), later changed to All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). The alleged victory came only after an inconclusive first ballot. The new governor moved quickly to build up and consolidate the party's control of the state by the use of carrot and stick. This led to tremendous violence, which in some cases came in the form of local disputes over chieftaincy struggles and other residual grievances. Parts of the state such as Okrika where the opposition was in control, having won the local elections, knew no peace. At the same time personal ambitions within the ruling party deeply factionalized the PDP.

As the 2003 general elections approached, many parts of the state were thrown into a conflagration in the struggle for the ruling party tickets for the various elective positions, especially that of the governorship. Curiously, members of the party seem to have held the belief that winning the party ticket was tantamount to winning the election. The crisis led to the strengthening of the opposition ANPP, which happily threw its portals wide open for aggrieved defectors from the PDP. It looked as if the party would gain in the coming elections what it lost in 1999. This was not to be. Violent repression of the opposition gained momentum and the party could not campaign in certain places.<sup>7</sup> When the polling finally came objective observers dismissed the results as a

mockery of democracy. EU election monitors indicated in their report that the elections were deeply flawed in six states, including Rivers State.<sup>8</sup> Other reports showed that polling did not take place in many communities, yet results were declared in favor of the ruling party. The U.S. State Department, in its Human Rights Report for 2003, had cause to be critical of the Nigerian elections. As imperfect as the grammar is, the term “Carry-Go” popularized by PDP faithfuls in describing their approach to the election has since become the slogan for any large-scale theft.

Rivers State did set a perplexing record in modern multi-party elections: 98% of registered voters allegedly turned out to vote for PDP in the National Assembly, presidential and governorship elections. The main opposition party, ANPP, saw participation in the remaining elections as a waste of time and announced its boycott of the state assembly election. Regardless, the election was held, or so it was claimed, and the PDP awarded itself all the seats in the 23-member assembly. The same applied to the local elections held in March 2004. In effect, Rivers State became a one-party state, the remaining twenty-two parties having been hounded out of the political process.

### **The Price of Victory**

The state was to pay a steep and bloody price for the PDP’s acclaimed victory. The private armies, aka cult groups, which had made the electoral feat possible, started demanding their promised reward from the state government. Now comfortably in power, the government failed to deliver on its promise.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, rival cult groups, which had collaborated in the political project, fell out against each other in the macabre struggle for supremacy.<sup>10</sup> The frightening result of these developments has been a near state of anarchy in Rivers State. Attacks by the rival groups have laid waste large parts of the state. The state capital, Port Harcourt, the center of the country’s oil industry and until recently a proud cosmopolitan model in Nigeria, has become a theater of ferocious cult wars. Frightened residents have been fleeing the city.<sup>11</sup>

Between 22 and 31 August 2004, not less than three well-coordinated major attacks were launched on the city and its environs, resulting in about 50 fatalities,<sup>12</sup> most of them innocent non-combatants. The state governor, Dr. Peter Odili, had to cut short his vacation to make a state broadcast in which he announced further security measures that promise to be as futile as the previous measures. He also announced the dissolution of his cabinet, as many

cabinet members were known to be the godfathers of some of the cult groups. Indeed it has been claimed that the main qualification for appointment to the cabinet was the delivery of PDP victory in the last elections. And of course such victory meant that the prospective cabinet member had to be the local leader of the cult groups in the area. Before the last attacks the state assembly had proscribed 103 cult groups in anti-cult legislation passed in June.

The common assumption is that the state government has been unable to move effectively against the cult groups because the leading groups owe their ascendancy to the government. The groups remain firmly in control of the sophisticated weapons imported for them, especially AK-47 assault rifles. A Frankenstein monster that subsequently attempts to devour its creator has been brought into existence. The insecurity in Rivers State has led to calls for a declaration of a state of emergency.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Oil Industry and Violence**

It has become common knowledge that poverty and the attempts to control oil revenues remain at the root of violence in the Niger Delta. That violence is now a significant threat to the oil economy. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the largest of the oil companies operating in the country, reported a loss of about 43 million barrels of oil in 2003 as a result of the shut down of production facilities arising from communal disturbances, especially in Delta State. The company also reported about 88 crude oil theft incidents, resulting in an estimated loss of 9 million barrels of oil, and 78 security incidents, most of which were theft cases against the company’s staff, as well as 20 cases of hostage taking.<sup>14</sup>

There can be no doubt that through some of their policies and methods, the TNOCs themselves contribute to the volatile situation in the Niger Delta. The widespread accusation of environmental damage and the issue of corporate (ir)responsibility expressed through community relations are cases in point. A major study commissioned by SPDC states: “It is clear that SCIN [Shell companies in Nigeria] is part of the Niger Delta conflict dynamics and that its social license to operate is fast eroding.” This is the result, it is stated further, of “a quick-fix, reactive and divisive approach to community engagement expressed through different areas of policy, practice and corporate culture.”<sup>15</sup> There are widespread allegations of this divisive approach and of the company’s field managers’ readiness to use unethical methods in handling community relations.

This field staff seems to have discovered a lucrative economy of conflict, which it would like to sustain. For the companies do not seem to subject to adequate scrutiny aspects of their community relations budgets that come under the nebulous cover of “security”, leaving room for abuse. MOSOP has repeatedly highlighted the alleged role of such staff in undermining efforts to bring about successful negotiations between Shell and the Ogoni people, who sacked the company from their territory in 1993.<sup>16</sup> There are pointers that MOSOP is quietly exploring ways of convincing the Nigerian Government to allow other TNOCs which are perceived to have better community relations record than Shell take over the latter’s concessions in Ogoni.

The SPDC study concludes that should the current conflict trends continue, Shell might not be able to continue its onshore operations in Nigeria beyond 2008 (obviously in anticipation of further escalation of violence in the 2007 national elections). This conclusion was widely interpreted in the media to mean that Shell will be withdrawing from Nigeria. The company promptly dismissed the speculation. The oil business is too lucrative in Nigeria for oil companies to easily shut their doors and leave. In fact to avoid the demands of host communities the government has been encouraging the TNOCs to pay increasing attention to offshore oil development. The violent operational environment has increased the TNOCs’ cost of doing business in Nigeria, but that is not the companies’ problem. Being in joint ventures with the Nigerian Government, which is represented by NNPC, the TNOCs simply transfer these costs to the joint venture account. The companies therefore lose very little. In fact they have everything to gain with the current record high prices of oil in the world market. The losers are actually the poor people of the Niger Delta and the rest of Nigeria who continue to be victims of both bad governance and the quest for corporate profit.

#### **Niger Delta Oil and External Security Pressure: The Pax Americana**

The importance of African oil to the American economy is now an open matter. The January 2002 symposium on African oil and U.S. national security priorities, organized by the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS), made far-reaching recommendations. The American authorities seem to be implementing some of these recommendations already. Let us take, for example, the recommendations on national security:

1. Congress and the administration should declare the Gulf of Guinea an area of “vital interest” to the U.S.

2. There should be established in the area a regional sub-command, similar to the U.S. forces in Korea.
3. That regional sub-command should strongly consider the establishment of a regional homeport, possibly on the islands of Sao Tome and Principe.
4. A U.S.-Nigeria compact on regional security issues should be established to make the area more secure and thereby more attractive for direct foreign investment.<sup>17</sup>

Recent events in Nigeria leave little doubt that these recommendations are already being implemented. In May 2004 the U.S. marines moved into the Gulf of Guinea as an area of “vital interest” to the U.S. Three months later, General Alexander Ogomudia, Nigeria’s Chief of Defence Staff, used the opportunity of the visit of the Commander of U.S. Air Force in Europe, General Robert Foglesong, to announce joint military exercises between the Nigerian Armed Forces and their American counterparts. The exercises would take place in Calabar. Could this be part of the recommended “U.S.-Nigeria compact on regional security”? The port city of Calabar, we should be reminded, is the Nigerian city nearest to Equatorial Guinea and the islands of Sao Tome and Principe. Is Calabar going to be the regional homeport? American military presence in Calabar in the Niger Delta gives the U.S. direct connection to the region’s oil. It is not impossible that that access could translate into control should the situation in the Nigeria Delta pose greater threat to oil flow than what it is at the moment.

Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe have since established a Joint Development Zone (JDZ) to explore the rich oil resources of the Gulf of Guinea. Similar bilateral arrangements could be negotiated between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. We should also recall that the IASPS symposium had made a number of recommendations on energy security. These included the encouragement by the U.S. of regional cooperation among nations in the energy sector through debt relief exclusively to countries demonstrating commitment and progress in this area. Nigeria does not need debt relief or any external incentive to pursue such a potentially highly lucrative initiative. Retired generals, including two former heads of state and other prospective oil barons in Nigeria, have already won in the scramble for oil blocs in the JDZ. Most of the investors have American companies as technical partners and obviously the major shareholders.



Nigerians do not seem surprised by these developments. As one newspaper commented, since President Olusegun Obasanjo came to power he has “literally accorded the U.S. Department of Defense a caretaker status over the Armed Forces of Nigeria.”<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

We have attempted to demonstrate how oil has destabilized the Niger Delta, generating both internal and external insecurity, while impoverishing the people. We have also seen how the struggle for power and ultimately the control of oil revenues, by the post-military elite, especially the ruling party, has led to the dramatic escalation and transformation of the existing conflicts in the region. To have a pointer to the future, we again fall back on history. When violent disputes between the rulers of the Niger Delta and commercial disputes between them and British traders threatened to disrupt the palm oil trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British authorities moved in their gunboats to settle the issues. American gunboats are already stationed in the Niger Delta. Will the Americans use these gunboats if the security situation in the Niger Delta deteriorates further, affecting oil flow beyond current disruptions?

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “(Sp)oil of Politics: Petroleum, Politics and the Illusion of Development in the Niger Delta, Nigeria” *ACAS Bulletin* #64, 2002/2003, pp.16-36.

<sup>2</sup> Conflict Expert Group, *Peace and Security in the Niger Delta: Working Paper for SPDC*, December 2003, p.5

<sup>3</sup> The term “revolution” is used in the sense of the impact of the Ogoni struggle on internal developments in Ogoni and the rest of the Niger Delta, and on the policies of TNOCs operating in the country, as well as on the nation’s international relations.

<sup>4</sup> Non-violent in the sense that the Ogoni consciously tried to avoid using violence as the weapon of the struggle. State response, however, was exceedingly violent.

<sup>5</sup> In the attempt to ensure the security of their personnel and facilities, some companies hire these youth leaders under the elegant title of security consultants.

<sup>6</sup> *Daily Independent* (Lagos) 1 September 2004 (editorial).

<sup>7</sup> It has been reported that about 73 people died and 159 were injured in polling violence across the country. See *Thisday* 23 June 2003, p. 13. These numbers exclude occurrences in the run-up to the polls.

<sup>8</sup> [www.europa.eu.int/comm/europaid](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/europaid)

<sup>9</sup> See, “Why we are fighting Odili” *Daily Independent* 4 September 2004. Dr Peter Odili is the PDP Governor of Rivers State.

<sup>10</sup> Two main rival groups have since emerged: the Ateke Tom group, named for its leader, and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo. The two groups, which are credited with a crucial role in the PDP victory in Rivers State, have repeatedly clashed since November 2003. Both were protégés of the Rivers State Governor. Dokubo admitted that he fell out of grace with the Governor when, motivated by certain grievances, he announced publicly that elections had not taken place in Rivers and Bayelsa states where the PDP claimed stunning victories. See “There was no election in Rivers State”, an exclusive interview by Alhaji Asari, *The Hard Truth* (Port Harcourt) 22-28 January 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Ebiri, “The many crises in Rivers State” *The Guardian* (Lagos) 1 March 2004.

<sup>12</sup> *The Beacon* (Port Harcourt) 2 September 2004

<sup>13</sup> The Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the Middle Belt Plateau State in May 2004, on account of insecurity following a series of ethnic clashes, and appointed a retired general as the Sole Administrator of the state. People have called on the Federal Government to do the same in Rivers State, but Abuja seems unwilling to do so, a reluctance some interpret as born out of the economic importance of Rivers State.

<sup>14</sup> SPDC, *People and Environment Report*, 2003

<sup>15</sup> *Peace and Security in the Niger Delta (PaSS)*, December 2003, p.5.

<sup>16</sup> See various press releases by MOSOP. In 2000, for instance, a tripartite negotiation between SPDC (and Shell International), the Ogoni People and the Nigerian Government, brokered by the Methodist Church of Britain, proceeded cordially until the issue of verification of Shell’s purported community assistance projects in Ogoni came up. MOSOP has always alleged that most of these projects do not exist. Shell’s field managers, apprehensive that the game will be discovered, reportedly instigated the chairmen of certain local government councils in Ogoni to turn against the verification team, which was attacked by thugs, making verification impossible. That ended the negotiations. MOSOP has further alleged that in its planned attempts to return to Ogoni, SPDC has generously funded certain militant youths to cause trouble in Ogoni; SPDC has also meddled in leadership disputes, trying to ensure victory for the factions it has compromised.

<sup>17</sup> [www.marekinc.com/ImagesBusBriefs/IASPSlogo.jpg](http://www.marekinc.com/ImagesBusBriefs/IASPSlogo.jpg)

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Independent* 23 August 2004 (editorial).

## Is it the Warri Crisis or the Crisis of the Nigerian State?

Daniel A. Omoweh, Ph.D.

The protracted bloody violence in Warri and its surroundings and the attendant destruction of property and rising death toll have posed security, political and economic concerns to the Nigerian state, foreign capital, civil society organizations, scholars, activists and the people, particularly those who live in the contested communities. As the violent confrontations between the people (with youths, in most cases, as the fighting force) and the state's military personnel and oil companies rage on, the articulation of the crisis in Warri in particular and in the Niger Delta generally remains problematic. It is not surprising that wrong remedies have been administered, as some pertinent questions have not been asked. What is meant by the Warri crisis? Is it the localized violence in Warri and its neighboring communities? Or is it the crisis of the Nigerian State, its policy, politics and actions, and the path it took to development? Is it part of the larger crisis of the Nigerian political class and its approach to accumulation in the country's oil and gas industry? In what follows, I try to articulate how the crisis rocking Warri and its neighboring communities is the crisis of the Nigerian state and, therefore, a political crisis. Although what to do in order to resolve the crisis is largely embedded in the analysis, a sketch of the philosophical framework of an alternative path to take is provided.

### **Analysis of the Problem**

The Niger Delta has long had bloody confrontations: between and among the various ethnic groups, between ethnic groups and the foreign slave merchants, between the people (especially the merchant princes of the Delta area) and mercantile foreign capital as well as the colonial state, and between the people, the Nigerian state and foreign oil capital. The Delta region is still immersed in bloody violence. Several works document the history of the political, economic, social and cultural developments of the region, giving useful insights into the nature of the crisis (Dike 1956, Alagoa 1964, Ikime 1969, and Otite 1992). On the rivalry between the Urhobos and Itsekiris, the resultant political crisis and the tax revolt in Warri, Ikime's study provides deeper insights. One of the major limitations in his and other studies is that they are historical and largely descriptive; they fail to capture the state, contextualize it and analyze its role in shaping the

dialectics of development of the region and the contradictions engendered in the process. With the exception of a few works that adopt a class analysis of the crisis in the Niger Delta since oil was found and produced there (Omoweh 2004a), the methodological approach to the study of the Niger Delta remains too compartmentalized and largely unrigorous. A few scholars of strategic studies have tried to juxtapose theories of war and conflict in their analysis of the crisis in Delta region, particularly in the violence in Warri, without first demonstrating a clear understanding of the origin and nature of the crisis. The recent work on the Niger Delta with special focus on Warri edited by Thomas Imobighe *et al* (2002), is a clear case of the theoretical limitations of trying to apply war and conflict theories to the worsening trend of violence in Warri city, while paying little or no attention to the dialectics of the conflicts. As I have argued elsewhere, a comprehensive methodological framework is needed to inform all interrogations on the Niger Delta crisis including the Warri case and to fill gaps in the literature, as well as advocate an alternative path to the development of the Delta region (Omoweh 2004b).

As part of the holistic methodological framework, it is crucial to understand that the basic problem is the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta and that its root cause is political, not economic as often misconstrued by some scholars of the region. Yet it is in the economic context that a larger aspect of the crisis is most manifest. If anything, the prolonged neglect, backwardness, poverty, landlessness and exploitation of the oil-producing areas are to be located in the nature of the grim struggles between and among the constituents of the state. That explains, in part, why the resolution of the crisis in Warri does not reside entirely with the provision of social amenities. All this will be brought into greater focus as I explain how the crisis is state-perpetuated.

### **A State-Perpetuated Crisis**

The crisis rocking Warri and its surroundings is a crisis of the Nigerian state; it is, in practical terms, a political crisis. As far back as the colonial period, the state was constituted purposely to facilitate the exploitation of the economy by foreign capital. Its policy and politics, and the path it took to capitalist

development, were not really concerned with getting a strong productive force underway but only a weak local business class disposed to distributive trade. The indifference of the colonial state to development was to become an albatross, as it fired the aggression of the nationalist struggles that demanded the state's demise. Nationalist politics also placed such a high premium on the control of political power that politics was reduced to a fierce struggle for political power. Politics became the means to acquire wealth, and political competition took the form of an anomie as holders of political power sought to retain power at all costs and by all means; sometimes they went so far as to deny the opposition its inalienable rights. All these struggles continued in the post-colonial period.

Rather than change, the new political class inherited the colonial policy, politics and structure of exploitation. The real problem is not so much this inheritance as the failure of the managers of the Nigerian state to put development on the agenda. The state managers are basically concerned with consolidating their accumulative base and consuming public wealth, but not much with wealth creation. The Nigerian state is a specific public force dominating the larger society through a system of institutional mechanisms that cater for its selfish political, social and economic interests. It is not a public force whose objective is to use its monopoly of coercion to guide the society impartially. Because the state is not class neutral and relies on political power to accumulate rather than invest, the struggles going on within its constituencies have helped shape the content and direction of political competition between and among the politicians and that of national development generally. In essence, the state can hardly be regarded as an umpire overseeing politics, political competition, allocation of resources and development as often misconstrued by some scholars; it is a major actor deploying all strategies to actualize its parochial interests. This explains why the state cannot rise above its class interests in the politics of the country, particularly the path it took to the extraction of surplus from the economy inclusive of the oil industry. Not surprisingly, a cabal within the state not only manipulates the overall political competition in the country in its favor, but also retains control of the political ownership of all natural resources like land and oil, while excluding new entrants from access to the state's political power and access to oil and other minerals.

### **State-Transnational Capitalism**

Whatever perspective the crisis is examined from, the ravaging of Warri and neighboring communities is an integral part of the Nigerian state. It is part of the

contradictions engendered by the forces of state-transnational capitalism, which have held the state hostage, in the sense that the state and foreign and local capitals are increasingly unable to resolve the crisis; as well, they are unwilling to rethink the nature of capitalist development promoted in the Delta region. Many a Nigerian worries about how Warri, the burgeoning oil city of the 1960s and early 1970s, became a theatre of war in the 1980s.

The little-understood oil boom in Warri can be traced in part to the activities of McDermott, a company contracted by Shell/BP to lay its flowlines in the area. Other construction companies like Niger Cat and Mother Cat built the access roads for the oil companies. These activities made Warri attractive to a majority of primary school leavers seeking jobs. The service companies, which were part of state-transnational capitalism in the oil industry, had hardly any backward linkages in the Nigerian economy; their relationships with the local economy were externally oriented. By the mid-1970s, when the oil pipelines were fully laid and the construction of access roads completed, McDermott shifted its business to offshore haulage, where it needed few staff, leading to the retrenchment of most of its workers. The construction companies also laid off most of their workers. This was the early origin of the recent unemployment crisis and the attendant social upheavals in Warri city in the early decades of the post-colonial era. Not even the relocation of the national port authority from Burutu to Warri and the creation of employment opportunities could help halt the rising trend of unemployment in the city. An irrelevant state did not help matters, since its major pre-occupation was to facilitate the exploitation of its own people and communities by the forces of imperialism, rather than ensuring the enhancement of the people's material well-being. The rising cost of living in Warri over the years was largely indicative of a political class that expected foreign capital to provide all that was required for development to take place, without really being prepared to pick up where capital left off.

That said, the violence in Warri has historical dimensions having to do with British colonialism's politics of divide and rule; the policy and projects of colonial capitalism, including its trade and the political creation and contention over the ownership of Warri, sowed the seeds of discord among the dominant ethnic groups -- Urhobos, Itsekiri and Ijaws. The divide and rule tactics entrenched the politics of exclusivity, as evident in the rule of a minority ethnic group over the majority ethnic group. This problem remains one of the crises of

democratization in the country and a major bane of Nigeria's body politic today.

This history deepens the acrimony and hatred between the dominant groups as evident in sporadic outbursts of violence within Warri city and its Itsekiri and Ijaw surroundings. In most cases, the violence has been taken out of context by the same state or political class that is perpetuating it. Far from being understood as a legitimate agitation by those who feel they are suffering social injustice and political inequity to have a minority group rule over a majority as evident in the Warri council areas, the state has, on account of its limited interest in the crisis, regarded those who are engaged in the confrontations as its enemies and economic saboteurs, and it has cashed in on that to apply maximum force in dealing with them as if it were engaged in full-scale war. In any case, the reaction of the state is no less than that of a war against a people who are agitating for environmental security and rights to land and oil.

The colonial bureaucracy in the metropolitan council of Warri, as in other administrative centers, was skewed in favor of those the colonial master trusted would protect their economic interests, namely people who were mostly of Itsekiri extraction. The Itsekiri held top positions, dominated the administrative machinery, had greater access to the colonial state, and more exposure to Western education, which placed them ahead of other ethnic groups. As people from other ethnic groups acquired better education, the fight for equity in the bureaucracy of the Warri councils intensified. Displacing entrenched interests and positions in the councils has been met with stiff resistance, and each ethnic group is now pitted against the others. Worse still, the dominant political class from each of the three major ethnic groups has retained a firm grip on the politics of Warri council areas as they entrench themselves as gatekeepers in the recruitment of new politicians into the political competition and political positions. Rather than allow the people to stand for elective positions, the clique of gatekeepers has the monopoly and makes the choice for them, which is a quite undemocratic act. Part of the bloody violence in and around Warri is rooted in the revenge mission of those who lost out in this political screening process imposed by the political gatekeepers. All this accounts, in part, for the political volatility of Warri city. At the moment nothing is being done to redress the lack of popular participation in the politics of the area because, at the state and national level, the political class continues to instigate political violence. The warring parties have signed several peace agreements, but not surprisingly the hostilities

continue to rage between and among the communities, and between the communities and the state – and sometimes, the oil companies, which provide arms and ammunitions to the state security personnel.

### **Community Responses**

Of greater concern for the deepening trend of violence in the Niger Delta and Warri is the path the state took to capitalist development in the oil industry. It is a path ridden with contradictions that the state and oil capital are unable to resolve. Since the Abacha junta hanged Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental activists on November 10, 1995, the Delta region has been under protracted siege. People's increasing consciousness of the pollution of their environment has fed their animosity toward the state and the oil companies. The aggrieved communities have deployed various strategies to damage oil installations, as the state and the oil companies are, in most cases, adamant in their refusal to halt the degradation of the environment.

The agitation is partly rooted in the politics of the ownership and control of land and its mineral contents. The agitation can also be located in the context of environmental degradation. There is a need, therefore, to understand how the kind of capitalist development promoted by the state and the oil companies precipitated a worsening trend of insecurity in the oil-producing communities. As I have argued elsewhere, the state is the chief pollutant of the oil-producing areas; coupled with being the 'landlord', it believes it cannot be punished for pollution, and this is the reality. No group has dared to sanction the state despite the havoc it and the oil companies have wreaked on the oil-producing communities. Its unwillingness to halt the degradation of the environment has placed the state on a collision course with the inhabitants of the Delta region who bear the brunt of oil exploitation and production. In order to further the capitalist penetration of the Delta region, the state deploys its military personnel to crush all forms of opposition. In essence, the state accumulates by terror. However, rather than decline, protests across the Niger Delta, especially in and around Warri, have assumed more deadly dimensions; armed youths have effectively engaged not only the navy and army in the thick of the jungle and along the creeks but have frequently taken oil workers hostage in an attempt to force the state and the oil companies to the negotiating table, though a faction of the aggrieved youths has resorted to taking workers hostage for ransom.

### **Natural Resources Struggles**

Of greater concern is a tiny cabal within the dominant political class that is cornering the state's political power over and access to oil. This cabal has wielded and consolidated enormous political power and authority over Nigeria's oil over the decades; it has outsmarted 'new' actors and fended off those staging a comeback. Since the tiny class within the state will not willingly concede power over oil to other lesser actors within the state, much less to those outside the state structure and the people, the democratization of the governance of oil and other natural resources has to be struggled for; in most instances this taken the course of bloody conflicts. The origin of the illegitimate bunkerers — oil rogues who steal crude oil — can be traced to this cabal. Outside of the state structure, and sometimes siding with the lesser actors within the state, or acting independently, the rogues have resorted to other means — namely, war — to get a share of the oil. Unfortunately, the oil being bunkered is channeled to the foreign oil dealers, but not for the benefits of the people. Herein lies the international context of the bloody conflicts in Warri and across the Niger Delta.

Bunkering is a deadly business. All those engaged in it have developed a closely-knit network, involving hotshots in the government, private sector and the larger Nigerian society. They are not a faceless group of people who cannot be reached, as the state would have us believe. The illegal bunkerers have constituted themselves into a formidable political force that the government of the day can hardly crack. The bunkerers are notable Nigerians with clear identities, occupying reputable positions in the society. As bunkerers, they are well equipped to engage state security agencies in heavy gun battle should they be obstructed in the course of stealing crude oil. Their strategies also include the instigation of intra- and inter-communal violence in the Delta region as evident in Warri area, and they sustain the supply of arms and ammunitions to the warring communities. The aim is to inject a significant level of insecurity into these rural areas, because illegal bunkering requires an atmosphere of fear, tension, siege and insecurity to be able to thrive. Once the oil communities are inflamed and the people gripped with fear, attention shifts away from the surveillance of installations to the scene of violence; then the bunkerers can swing into action. The scene of violence has, in most cases, been far removed from where the thefts of crude oil take place, as evident in the restiveness in Warri. This is not the scenario in all cases, since sometimes there is an understanding between the bunkerers and the state security agencies patrolling the creeks and guarding the oil

installations. Poorly paid government officials regard this arrangement as an additional source of income.

That is not all. The illegal bunkerers operate in a warlike manner, because they encounter the state security agents like the army and navy deployed to guard the oil installations and provide security for the oil workers. This explains in part why the oil thieves need sufficient arms and ammunitions to match the firepower of the armed security personnel on duty. The geography of the Niger Delta (largely a jungle with winding creeks that make it easy to capsize naval patrol boats) lends itself to the use of small arms and light weapons because they are easily moved around and can cause severe havoc on the oil installations, the people and society at large.

Another group of actors involved in the bloody conflicts in the Niger Delta are the small arms and light weapons merchants, both local and foreign, who are tangential to the raging conflicts in the oil-producing areas but cash in on the protracted violence to sell their goods; they sell double-barrel guns, pistols, assault rifles like AK-47, automatic sub-machine and heavy machine guns, ammunitions and explosives. More than that, the dealers have created networks of veteran mercenaries, who are moved from warring countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone to help sustain the siege across the Niger Delta. This has accounted in part for the proliferation of small arms in the oil-producing areas; there is evidence of assault rifles from Yugoslavia finding their way into the hands of youths engaging the military in the Niger Delta.

All explains why the use of notable sons and daughters of the various ethnic groups to call for peace in the city through paid advertorials in print and electronic media will not abate the crisis; the majority of them are part of the crisis despite their pretensions to be otherwise, or they have sold out, or they are cronies of the state, enjoying its largess. Youths oppose these self-imposed community leaders for these reasons. Unfortunately, the leadership of the youth has become questionable, as it is undemocratic, leading to the emergence of splinter groups, with each claiming to represent the community. This development has weakened the rank and file of some youth movements. The organization of workshops by the state, oil companies and civil society for 'restive' youths will not yield any meaningful results; the workshops are part of the state's strategy of co-opting the rank and file of some youth movements into its fold. The state has no plan to deal decisively with the agitation across the Delta region. President Olusegun Obasanjo may blame state-created agencies like the

Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) for its inability to rehabilitate the 'restive youths,' but this does not absolve his government from blame; it amounts to radical posturing, as the state, whose agenda is being acted out, remains at the heart of the crisis.

That the three prominent warring ethnic groups in Warri city are Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw does not make the crisis an ethnic one. The battle lines are drawn not so much along ethnic boundaries as along class, politics and exploitation. So, playing the ethnic card, as is sometimes done by the political class, the oil companies and other groups involved in the so-called process has, on balance, not been very helpful in halting the bloody violence in and around Warri. Nothing can be more misleading than to adopt a strategy, as some of the non-governmental organizations do, by asking the warring groups what they wanted, believing that if they were provided, then the battles would stop. For the root cause is not economic or social but political. The majority of those who constitute the leadership of the youth movements do not really understand the politics, the actors and the interest they represent that underpin the violence being perpetuated across the Niger Delta.

#### What Should be Done?

What to do in order to deal with the roots of the crisis in Warri is embedded in my analysis. I will just list here what I think should be done in the context of programs aimed at dealing with the crisis of the Nigerian state with a special focus on Warri. The details will be provided later, possibly after an exploratory meeting where I expect that decisions on in-depth studies will be taken.

- *Program on Democratizing the State:* The Nigerian state across its constituents will have to be democratized. This will entail the re-orientation of the state managers away from their parochial view of politics as a job instead of service to the people, and the re-orientation of development as a process involving the input of all instead of being their exclusive project. There is the need to entrench popular participation in the political, economic and social development of the country.
- *Program on Rethinking Development:* There is the need to democratize development. This will mean empowering the people in concrete terms to intervene decisively in the development process. It is not enough to declare that development is taking place. Development in whose interest? The well being of the people has to be brought to the center-stage of development.

- *Program on Security:* The security of the Delta region and the country should be re-defined in order to establish whose security is being protected — the people or the state. Also, who is actually the threat — the state or the oil companies or the youths? Agitation should be placed in context to avoid any misconceptions about security. If security is about people, then agitation should be understood as a response by a people at the brink of extinction to the activities of the state and oil companies. In such a setting, security will become the collective responsibility of all. Community security will begin to make sense as the people begin to be obligated to the state and help in the protection of the flowlines.
- *Program on Governance and Democratization:* The governance of oil and natural resources has been top-down and should be democratized. This entails redressing the denial of the rights of the oil, land and natural resources as contained in the Land Use Act of 1978. Once the people are assured of their rights to land, minerals and forest resources among other natural resources, they are likely to be committed to the political process, and that will help deepen ground-up governance and democratization at the local level.
- *Program on Youth and Women:* Then it will be meaningful to have youth in governance and women in governance programs at the local level, then later mainstreamed.
- *Program on Civil Society:* There is the need to engage civil society in the development process of the Delta region because this has not been well articulated. Why? In part, because the state sees civil society organizations as enemies that should be related to cautiously. On their part, too, the civil society organizations have no stake in the state because of its exclusivity and lack of service delivery. All explains why they have frontally contested the terrain of development, but they have not done much to penetrate the rural areas and mobilize the people for development.

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## **The Rhetoric of Rights: Understanding the Changing Discourses of Rights in the Niger Delta**

Okechukwu Ibeanu

### **Introduction**

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, there has been a shift in the public discourse of rights in the Niger Delta. It is a shift from a traditional human rights discourse to one of resource allocation and control. This discourse of resource allocation and resource control is what we call the rhetoric of rights, and it defines what constitutes the right rhetoric (political correctness) on issues of the Niger Delta. The last days of the second era of military rule (1983-1999)<sup>1</sup> saw the emergence of a coalition of motley factions of the ruling class, most of them created by the military. It was this coalition that inherited power in 1999. Expectedly, the politics of control of oil revenues, which marked out the era of military rule, has remained the cornerstone of the politics of this coalition, and the rhetoric of rights is the idiom of that politics.<sup>2</sup> These factions of the ruling class (erroneously called the political class)<sup>3</sup> orchestrate two distinct forms of rhetoric of rights in the Niger Delta as they angle for control of the vast petroleum and gas revenues from the Region. In other words, they have polarized along two opposing lines, each articulating a separate rhetoric of rights. On one side are the Federal and non-Niger Delta state governments, and on the other are the Niger Delta state governments.

There are two dimensions of the opposing forms of the rhetoric of rights. First, there is the rhetoric of resource control. In putting forward this rhetoric, governments of Niger Delta states, particularly Delta and Bayelsa states, insist that Niger Delta peoples through their state governments have a right to larger shares of oil revenues. Since 1999 they have been pushing for an increase in revenue to the Niger Delta from the 13% of resources derived from each state to 50%.<sup>4</sup> In response, the federal side initially reacted by seeking to seize all revenues from offshore oil production by excluding such revenues from the

calculation of the 13% derivation. In some cases, this cut the revenue accruable to some littoral States of the Niger Delta by as much as 80%. This gave rise to what has come to be called the struggle for resource control.

It began on 9 April 2001 when the Federal Government went to the Supreme Court asking for clarification of section 162, subsection 2 of the 1999 Constitution. In the suit, the Federal Government asked the court to declare that petroleum resources in Nigeria's territorial waters belong to the Federal Government and not to states and so should not be used to calculate the 13% derivation. In April 2002, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Federal Government, drastically cutting revenues to oil-producing states like Akwa-Ibom and Ondo. However, in what appeared like forgiveness of the Niger Delta states by the Federal Government, and a rare act of statesmanship by the country's leadership, President Obasanjo sent a bill to the National Assembly to abolish the distinction between onshore and offshore petroleum revenues in applying the 13% derivation principle in revenue sharing. Although the Assembly passed the bill in October 2002, the controversy did not end there. In a sudden twist, the president vetoed the bill by withholding assent to it in December 2002 over the issue of the bill's definition of Nigeria's offshore. Is it a "contiguous zone", the term used in the president's draft bill, or a "continental shelf", the term inserted by the National Assembly? Soon, northern elders led by the Emir of Kano joined the fray, warning northern members of the National Assembly not to override the president's veto because abolition of the onshore-offshore dichotomy by the bill meant that fewer resources would go to the north. This brought into clear relief the centrality of petro-politics to the survival of the Nigerian ruling class, notwithstanding the rhetoric of

equity and justice consistently mouthed by both sides in the resource control struggle.

The issue was resolved, though temporarily, when the act was modified to provide that “200-metre water depth isobath” contiguous to a state will be used for purposes of calculating derivation. But in the latest turn of events, 22 state governments (19 from the north and 3 from the southwest) in August 2004 went to the Supreme Court asking it to nullify the Act. This has again raised fears that the bodeful politics of resource control will be reopened, with all the dangers it portends for the country and Niger Delta.

A second reaction of the Federal Government to the rhetoric of resource control put forward by the Niger Delta has been to counter with the rhetoric of transparency. In doing this, the Federal Government consistently accuses state governments generally and Niger Delta governments in particular of being financially profligate if not corrupt. In fact, recently, the Minister of State in the Federal Ministry of Finance, Mrs. Nenadi Usman, accused state governors of using financial allocations to their states to buy foreign exchange, which they then take outside the country. The Federal Government also insists that Niger Delta governments have generally misused the huge revenues they have been getting as a result of the 13% derivation. Consequently, it has embarked on a campaign of transparency in the extractive industry, particularly targeting the petroleum industry. In February 2004, the Federal Government of Nigeria, Transparency International and the World Bank organized a major international workshop on petroleum revenue management in Nigeria as part of the Petroleum Revenue Transparency Initiative.<sup>5</sup>

The second dimension of the rhetoric of rights, is the argument by Niger Delta governors that Niger Delta peoples have a right to far better living condition than is on offer presently, and available data seem to justify this claim. The population of the (political) Niger Delta is between 15 and 20 million, which is more than 16% of the national population. Petroleum derived from the Niger Delta accounts for about 50% of Nigeria’s GDP, 95% of foreign exchange earnings, and 80% of all budgetary revenues. These amount to nearly \$20 billion annually or about \$54 million daily. Compared to this enormous wealth, the social situation in the Niger Delta presents a mammoth discrepancy, and is generally worse than the situation in most parts of the country. To illustrate, available figures show that there is one doctor per 82,000 people, rising to one doctor per 132,000 people in some areas, especially the rural areas, which is more than three times the national average of 40,000

people per doctor. Only 27% of people in the Delta have access to safe drinking water and about 30% of households have access to electricity, both of which are below the national averages of 31.7% and 33.6%, respectively. Only 6% of the population of the Niger Delta have access to telephones, while 70% have never used a telephone. For added measure, apart from a Federal Trunk B road that crosses Bayelsa State, the State has only 15 kilometres of tarred road. Poverty remains widespread, worsened by an exceptionally high cost of living created by the *petro-economy*. According to a World Bank study, in the urban areas of Rivers State the cost of living index of 783 is the highest in Nigeria. GNP per capita is below the national average of \$280, and unemployment in Port Harcourt, the premier city of the Delta, is as high as 30%. At the same time, access to education, central to remedying some of these social conditions, lags abysmally when compared to other parts of the country. While 76% of Nigerian children attend primary school, in the Niger Delta the figure drops appallingly to between 30 and 40%.

In response to the argument of welfare and right to development, the Federal side counterpoises the rhetoric of peace and security, arguing that the main factor militating against the enjoyment of the right to development in the Niger Delta is violence perpetrated by people in the Delta against themselves, oil companies and the Nigerian state. Repeatedly, examples of vandalism of oil installations, kidnapping of oil workers and communal conflicts are cited as antinomies of development. For instance, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) reports that between 1993 and 2003, there were 1,298 seizures/piracy targeted at oil facilities in the Niger Delta. In addition, in March 2004, Shell, Chevron and Elf were forced into production deferments of 155 million barrels per day amounting to \$1.7 billion in lost revenues as a result of crude oil theft, community disturbances and destruction of oil facilities.<sup>6</sup>

Civil society groups, communities and foundations have imbibed the new discourse of resource allocation and resource control. Many local and international groups have embarked on projects to monitor and report on budgets and resource flows. Although this is very useful, we think that it is important to understand the ideological subtext that the ruling class brings to this discourse. So how did we get sold on this rhetoric of rights? In the immediate aftermath of military rule, civilian politicians sold the shift from traditional human rights to resource allocation and control to civil society organizations and the wider public on three



grounds. The first is that the termination of military rule would mean an end to the flagrant violation of human rights in the Niger Delta. The second integral assumption of this line of thought is that elected representatives of the people of the Niger Delta would pursue policies that redress the contradiction of riches expressed in the contrast between the dire socio-economic conditions of inhabitants of the region and the vast resources their land contributes to Nigeria's national wealth. And the third assumption is that, given an end to human rights violations and improvements in socio-economic conditions, the violent conflicts that characterized the region in the years of military rule would come to an end. Given this scenario, it was thought that the major concern in the post-military era would revolve around resource extraction, allocation and use.

Sadly, reality has shown these prognoses to be too optimistic and civil society has been hoodwinked into accepting the new rhetoric of rights in the Niger Delta. In the first place, although there have been improvements in the human rights situation in the Niger Delta, violations still persist, and in some cases have actually worsened. These are perpetrated not only by government agencies like the army and police, but also by private agents such as ethnic militias, private security outfits and Mafia style gangs. For instance, in addition to the much-publicized military operation in Odi in 1999 in which the Nigerian army on the orders of President Obasanjo killed hundreds of people, many communities in the Niger Delta still live under heavy military surveillance. In the highly volatile creeks of the Western Delta, particularly in Delta State, military patrols have summarily killed hundreds of people, ostensibly when trying to dislodge armed gangs that steal crude oil and abduct oil workers. The situation has worsened since April 2004 when a team of Chevron workers returning to land from an offshore facility ran into a gang of oil thieves ("bunkerers"). Unfortunately, the Chevron workers had a military patrol escorting them and in the ensuing shootout between the soldiers and robbers two Americans and five Nigerians in the Chevron team were killed.

On its part, Rivers State has virtually become a jungle of anarchy since the massively rigged 2003 elections, with an assortment of armed factions freely roaming the streets of towns and villages. In Buguma, over 500 people have lost their lives in the last 10 months in clashes among warring members of the community, seemingly over traditional chieftaincy titles. In reality, however, the Buguma carnage is symptomatic of the enduring character of violence

in Rivers State - a complex interplay of political and cultural forces in the struggle to control oil revenues. The situation got out of hand following the 2003 elections during which political factions armed youth groups to protect themselves and aggress opponents. Thereafter, these groups metamorphosed into what has been described as "cult groups", taking over towns like Port Harcourt, Buguma, Abonema and Ahoada. Two of such groups stand out namely, *Dey Well* and *Dey Gbam*.<sup>7</sup> Each identifies itself not only by a special insignia, greeting style and dressing mode, but even by the type of dry gin it drinks. While *Dey Well* drinks only Chelsea Dry Gin, *Dey Gbam* drinks Squadron Dry Gin.<sup>8</sup> Many people in Port Harcourt have been attacked for trying to buy Chelsea Dry Gin in areas of the city controlled by *Dey Gbam* and vice versa. Some of the leaders of the major factions in violent clashes around the state are known to be members of the ruling People's Democratic Party. Two of them, Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom, were prominent during the elections. In response, the Rivers State government passed an anti-cult law in mid-2004, which outlaws cult activities and grants reprieve to those who turn in their weapons. The government claims that the law is working as some armed groups, notably the group led by Ateke, have turned in their weapons. However, human rights groups insist that the return of a few guns by this group is laughable. According to one human rights lawyer we spoke to recently, "Ateke has enough weapons to take on and defeat Bori Camp".<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, the envisaged turnaround in social conditions has not occurred, despite the huge amounts of resources flowing to local and state governments and specialized agencies like the Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC) from the federation account, oil companies and development agencies. For instance, NDDC and oil companies are presumed to spend between \$500 million and \$700 million annually on community projects. This year alone, the Nigerian government has approved a budget of nearly \$300 million for the NDDC. The state governments of Rivers and Bayelsa between them receive an estimated average of \$75 million monthly from the federation account. Despite these huge increases in resource flows, the cost of living index in Rivers State is estimated to be the highest in Nigeria, GNP per capita continues to run below the national average, unemployment, particularly among the youth is estimated at between 30 and 50%, and only about 35% of school age children attend primary school.

Paradoxically, the rising resource inflow to the Delta appears to have vanished into many failed

government projects, private bank accounts and into the purchase of small arms for waging community conflicts and criminal activities such as hostage taking and stealing crude oil. It is now estimated that there are over one million small arms in private hands in Rivers State alone. More worrying is that there are strong indications that public funds may be going into the purchase of these arms.

### **Beyond the Rhetoric of Rights: Linking Human Rights to Monitoring Resource Flows**

The real objective of the rhetoric of rights is, paradoxically, to strip the peoples of the Niger Delta of their human rights. First, by changing the focus to resources and how they are shared, it diverts attention away from the continued militarism and egregious human rights violations taking place in the region. Second, by creating a distinction between human rights and resource allocation and use, the rhetoric of rights undermines the unity of human rights – political, economic, social and cultural. Finally, the two sides of the rhetoric of rights try to appropriate the long struggle of the peoples of the Niger Delta both for more resources and for transparency in using them. The rhetoric of rights creates an unwarranted dichotomy between the two.

There is therefore a need to transcend the rhetoric of rights, whether from the Niger Delta governors or from the Federal Government. Although it is important that civil society continues to focus attention on monitoring the allocation and use of petroleum resources, we think that the enduring subtext of the Niger Delta question remains human rights. Consequently, resource monitoring needs to be linked effectively to human rights. The inalienable right of the public to know what the government does, especially how it uses public funds, justifies this link. As well, the misuse of resources has grave implications for human rights, especially the right to development. And, by linking resource flows and rights, local communities could recapture from politicians the initiative of controlling their lives by setting the development agenda at the community level and revitalizing institutions of community governance.

We think that the link between human rights and monitoring resource flows could be established along four related lines: fostering environmental justice; growing the social, economic and cultural rights of individuals and communities; combating the culture of impunity; and strengthening the legal and social frameworks for the protection of human rights.

### *Environmental Justice*

The first way to link resource monitoring and human rights in the Niger Delta is by posing questions of environmental justice. In spite of the end to military rule, the persistence of poor environmental standards associated with oil mining and refining remains a major problem in the Niger Delta. At the same time, resource depletion and waste jeopardise the livelihoods of communities and endanger the survival of future generations. Environmental justice in the context of the Niger Delta therefore poses the issue of the rights of people to live in a secure, clean and sustainable environment, to take part in decisions concerning the use of their resources and to share equitably in the wealth generated from the exploitation of their natural resources. A remarkable feature of environmental injustice in the Niger Delta is that renewable resources like land, forests and underground aquifers are destroyed in the process of extracting non-renewable resources like crude oil and gas. Worse still is that little of the wealth generated from this process returns to local communities.

### *Social, Economic and Cultural Rights*

Related in many ways to environmental justice is the need to grow the social, economic and cultural rights of individuals and communities in the Niger Delta. The decay of social infrastructure in the Niger Delta, unemployment and poverty, and the contraction of the rights of ethnic minorities within the wider Nigerian framework are major human rights issues. These are in turn linked to issues of resource flows to the region. Dominated by ethnic minorities, the Niger Delta has over the decades been short-changed in a federal system that favours the majority ethnic groups in the distribution of revenues, the architecture of political representation, including state creation, and the allocation of social infrastructure. At the same time, ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta have since colonial times seen their cultural rights eroded through the imposition of the culture of the larger ethnic groups, the rapid demise of local languages, and the growth of stereotypes that cast their cultures as backwards. The Ogoni Bill of Rights, which remains the premier document on the struggle of Niger Delta communities, aptly captures the import of social, economic and cultural rights in the Delta:

. . . the Ogoni languages of Gokana and Khana are underdeveloped and are about to disappear, whereas other Nigerian languages are being forced on us. . . . [T]he Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigerian Limited does not employ Ogoni people at a meaningful or any level at all, in defiance of the Federal government's regulations. . . . [T]he search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages

in Ogoni one of the most densely populated areas of Africa. . . . Ogoni people lack education, health and other social facilities [and] . . . it is intolerable that one of the richest areas of Nigeria should wallow in abject poverty and destitution.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Combating Impunity*

In spite of return to civilian rule in Nigeria, many features associated with military rule still persist. Among these features are personalization of power and disregard for due process.<sup>11</sup> These conditions have reincarnated in the way officials have used the instruments of state power and the public purse at the local, state and federal levels under the civilian dispensation, particularly in the Niger Delta. For example, not only have security forces been used to violate the rights of citizens, but also public resources have been converted to the personal use of office holders, their families and friends. This is made possible by the absence of a robust legal and institutional framework to hold public officers accountable for their conduct.

#### *Improving the Legal Framework for Protection of Human Rights*

Effective monitoring of resource flows in the Niger Delta is not possible without strengthening existing legal and social frameworks for the protection of human rights, including the right to development. A comprehensive review of environmental laws, strengthening legal guarantees of public access to information, domestication of various international treaties guaranteeing human rights, overhauling the legal architecture for using the police, army and security forces in domestic operations, and the development of a new legal framework for the protection of human rights in communal conflict situations are critical for the present and future development of the Niger Delta.

Monitoring resource flows in the Niger Delta calls for a review of applicable legal and policy frameworks to bring them in line with democratic standards and international expectations. Aspects of this legal architecture pertain to issues of access to information, transparency and accountability in the use of state resources and corporate social responsibility. Others are the protection of the confidentiality of sources of information and protection of the human rights of individuals and organizations engaged in resource monitoring.

#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The first era of military rule lasted from 1966 to 1979.

<sup>2</sup> I have elsewhere characterized this ensemble as the *militariat*. For a full discussion of the rule of the *militariat* in Nigeria and its consequences for the Niger Delta see my piece 'Insurgent civil society and democracy in Nigeria: Ogoni encounters with the state, 1990-1998'

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/final/nigeria/Nga8.doc>.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of political class, which has become quite popular in academic and popular writings in Nigeria since the country returned to civil rule, lacks scientific depth. It is used in a descriptive way to distinguish between politicians and military rulers, thus blurring the internal unity of the ruling class and emphasizing the minor differences among its fractions. Moreover, it does not problematize the socio-economic basis of class formation and class action, and we do not know the relationship between the political class and the military, or between them and the popular classes. In the end, the class struggle is banished from analysis and, therefore, the political class, paradoxically, has no politics.

<sup>4</sup> Section 162(2) of the 1999 Constitution provides for a minimum of 13% of revenue to return to oil producing states by derivation.

<sup>5</sup> Also at that meeting, a steering committee for monitoring transparency in petroleum revenues was announced, but not much has been heard of the committee since then.

<sup>6</sup> NNPC and Academic Associates PeaceWorks (2004) Report of the Niger Delta Youths Stakeholders Workshop, Port Harcourt, April 15 – 17, 2004. pp. 48, 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Dey Well* (to be well) and *Dey Gbam* (to be all right) are derived from "pidgin English", a corruption of English spoken widely in the Delta. Ironically, they both translate roughly into the same thing namely, wellbeing.

<sup>8</sup> Chelsea Dry Gin and Squadron Dry Gin are popular brands of gin sold in Nigeria. It is said that these are youths who before the 2003 election could only afford the cheap local gin call Kai-Kai. But as a result of money they made from serving as political thugs during the elections, they can now afford to buy the more expensive imported brands.

<sup>9</sup> Bori Camp is the main military garrison in Port Harcourt.

<sup>10</sup> Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) (1992) *Ogoni Bill of Rights*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers. p. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> The endurance of these conditions in an ostensibly democratic system has been attributed to "the rule of the *militariat*", a phenomenon that does not necessarily coincide with military rule because the *militariat* draws its membership from both military organizations and the civilian populace. This is

underscored by the defining role of serving and retired military officers both in the transition to civil rule and in the present government. Also the strong business and political connections that have arisen between civilians and military personnel all point to the deepening of the rule of the *militariat* even under the present government.

### The Warri Crisis – A Case of Three in One

Kayode Soremekun

The Warri crisis is emblematic of the crisis at two other levels in Nigeria. The first, in Warri, constitutes a reflection of the second crisis, in the wider Niger Delta. The third level is the crisis inherent in the nature of the Nigerian State itself. Obviously, these three crises are inter-related. For the sake of analytical convenience they will be treated in turn.

It is necessary at this stage to mention that much of what is written here does not derive just from the literature of the Nigerian oil industry; rather a lot of it is informed by first-hand experience that derives partly from a first-hand assessment of the crisis in the Niger Delta that I was commissioned to produce by the Swedish-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.<sup>1</sup> In the course of this assignment I toured the Niger Delta, and in the process I interviewed individuals from various walks of life. One remarkable feature that came through was the attitude of the elites in the Niger Delta. Some of these individuals had occupied very high and sensitive posts in various previous military regimes. In the course of my conversations with them, they were to be seen mouthing the usual clichés about the Niger Delta being a backward, neglected, dehumanized and deprived area. One question that I always put to them was, what did you do when you were in government? The usual response was a helpless wringing of hands and mumbling to the effect that while they were in government, they could only have been said to be in office and not in power. I remember one particularly striking fellow, an aging former Minister of Petroleum, who could be regarded as an archetype of this elite.

It is fairly safe to conclude that, while an individual holds a ministerial or similar post, it is time to keep quiet. Once such an individual is out of the policy arena, however, it is time to take up the cudgel against the Nigerian State. What I am saying here is by no means specific to the elites in the Niger Delta.

It is really a Nigerian phenomenon. Or rather, one can say that elites in the wider Nigerian social formation have replicated these attributes of the elites in the region. This observation lends some credence to the observation that the Warri Crisis is essentially a reflection of the crisis at two other levels.

In looking at the Warri Crisis and its consequent evolution, it is useful to take a very close look at the career and person of Ken Saro Wiwa. Ken Saro Wiwa as I have pointed out in another forum, largely typifies the Nigerian elite. In saying this permit me to use the imagery of 'food,' which is very prevalent in discourses on Nigerian politics. Having served in various governmental positions, Ken Saro Wiwa, could be said to have had his fill at the dining table of the Nigerian State. Where he differs from the rest of the Nigerian elite is that it was not enough for him to have his fill; he started to ask hard and probing questions about the existing arrangements in the Niger Delta and by extension Nigeria itself. Of course, he was no ordinary critic. Unlike Isaac Adaka Boro<sup>2</sup> who in an earlier era challenged the Nigerian State through recourse to armed warfare, Ken Saro Wiwa waged his own war at the level of ideas. And as we all know, a man of ideas is really infinitely more dangerous than the man with weapons. Ken Saro Wiwa was even more dangerous in another sense.

Unlike Adaka Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa was a son of the citadel. As the saying goes, when a son of the citadel decides he wants out and in the process storms the citadel, then the destruction of that citadel is only a question of time. As you read this piece, wherever you see citadel, please substitute the Nigerian State. In the process you will understand and appreciate why it is indeed possible to effect a linkage between oil and the mortality of the Nigerian State. But before the funeral oration gets too loud, permit me to say that we are already running far ahead of our story. So for sake of balance and perspective, we might as well

turn now to the specifics and dynamics of the Warri Crisis.

In a reflexive context, it is very tempting to sketch a one-to-one relationship between oil and the Warri Crisis. At a reflective level, however, such a sketch appears to oversimplify the dynamics and tenor of the Warri Crisis. This is because, long before oil assumed prominence in Nigeria, there already was a phenomenon called Warri Crisis. Obaro Ikime said as much in his book when he spoke about the love-hate relationship that has always characterized the relationship between and among the various peoples inhabiting Warri township and its environs.<sup>3</sup> In other words, as central as oil could be to the intensification of the crisis, this phenomenon would have obtained in the absence of oil.

One general and useful way of viewing the crisis in Warri is to view it in terms of the nexus between interaction and conflict. This means that in the course of the interaction between and among social groups or communities, conflicts are bound to ensue, and when such conflicts are not well managed, they come in handy for the various self-serving elites; what one gets is an outcome called crisis. The scenario sketched above deepens in the presence of exogamous and intrusive forces. In the case of Warri, intrusion dates as far back as 1444, when the Portuguese first set foot on Warri. The main reason for this first Warri crisis was the privileged access certain groups had to the new-comers (i.e. the White man), which was to the detriment of other ethnic groups lacking access and led to their exploitation.

Features like crises and conflicts are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are instrumental in the sense that they usually take place in the context of the struggle for resources. The Warri crisis is no exception. This is why it is possible to contend that the Warri crisis is also in part a struggle by the various social forces for a critical resource like land. For instance, whenever a flashpoint occurs in Warri, one intractable question is: who owns the land?

In saying this one runs the risk of diminishing the impact of the oil variable. But the role of oil in stoking the crisis cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it is arguable that oil and land constitute the twin resources in contemporary times, which have kept the Warri Crisis alive. Courtesy of the 1978 Land Use Act, the issue of who gets what by way of compensation from the oil companies has pitted the various communities against one another in Warri. The crisis is by no means localized: it can be found in every area of the Niger Delta. A recent report,

commissioned by no less than Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC), has perhaps unwittingly shown that the Warri Crisis is a microcosm of the larger and wider crisis in the Niger Delta.<sup>4</sup> Olayinka Ogunkoya, the report's author, shows this pervasive situation when he describes the operational reach of Shell, which is arguably the hegemonic force in Warri and the Niger Delta. According to him, Shell, the largest oil and gas company in Nigeria, in joint partnership(s) with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and other oil companies, accounts for over 40% of Nigerian oil production. In the context of this arrangement, Shell operates an oil-mining lease in a large portion of the Niger Delta. Moreover, it has more than 90 producing oilfields and 1,000 producing wells, and a network of more than 6,000 kilometers of flow lines and oil pipelines taking oil through the Niger Delta. It also has eight gas plants and two coastal crude oil terminals within the Delta. Its areas of operations span all the ecological zones in the Niger Delta -- the coastal fresh water forests and barrier beach ridges, sub tidal mangrove swamps, fresh water swamps, and inland rain forests (both seasonally and non-seasonally inundated). The oil mining leases are located in seven states in Nigeria — Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Imo and Abia.

This clinical profile of Shell says very little about the searing and brutalizing nature of the crisis in Warri and the Niger Delta. But a closer look reveals that the operations of Shell and other oil companies have spawned crises and conflicts in the Niger Delta. These crises and conflicts can be vividly seen in the modus operandi of the oil companies. In conjunction or better still in collusion with the Nigerian State, the oil companies have seized communal lands and polluted them in a way that leaves them unanswerable to the various communities. The outcome of this dehumanization is not just pollution and the impoverishment of these areas, but also intense competition between and among the various oil communities for recognition and 'rewards' by the oil companies. This situation has in turn led to internecine violence between communities, with the consequent loss of lives and property. Very much the same thing can be said for the social capital, which constitutes the basis for the development and survival of the communities. In these mortal contentions, the international oil companies in both overt and covert ways have openly supported one or both of the warring parties. In the process the people have remained divided, and in turn they have concentrated on mutual annihilation rather than question the unjust

system of exploitation in any effective and efficient manner.

At this juncture, it is apposite to stress that the oil companies have not operated alone. They have carried out their exploitive activities in the context of an alliance of interests between them and their parent governments. Louis Turner spoke to the historical dimension of this “revolving door” when he revealed the re-circulation of individuals in Washington, who had taken turns in places like the State Department, Treasury and the boardrooms of oil companies.<sup>5</sup>

Partly in response to the crisis in Warri and beyond, the elites in the Niger Delta are rallying around issues of ‘resource control’. Resource control refers to the monopolistic hold of the Nigerian State on the oil industry and the contention among the various regional governments that oil-bearing communities should have a greater and more decisive voice in how the oil industry is managed. There is much to be said for this argument. Indeed revenues to the various oil producing states have been increasing substantially. But the story does not end there because the substantially increased revenues have yet to make any impact at the level of street conditions. And if the disclosures of Oronto Douglas are anything to go by,<sup>6</sup> such increased revenues that have accrued to the oil producing states have merely been callously ‘privatized’ courtesy of the kleptocratic tendencies of the status quo forces in the oil producing states.

At a more substantive level, the issue of resource control is a clear pointer to the asymmetrical relationship that characterizes the issue of control in the Nigerian oil industry. Evidently, the proponents of resource control have not really given much thought to the fact that one can only really control what one understands. Consequently, resource control, despite its seductive appeal, does not mean much in a context where the oil producing states and of course the Nigerian social formation lack even a basic understanding of what it takes to produce the oil. Consequently, under the present circumstances, if and when resource control is achieved, the rentier status of the Nigerian State would only have been replaced by the rentier status of the various oil producing regions in Nigeria. Indeed, as I have had cause to point out to numerous audiences,<sup>7</sup> the substantive and concrete controllers of oil resources in Nigeria are Shell and its technological cousins, British Petroleum, ExxonMobil, Texaco, and Total. Against this background it is almost impossible to join issue with the fact that Shell is indeed the Nigerian State, while the Nigerian State is in fact a mere shell.

What much of my argument has demonstrated is that at the heart of the Warri crisis and its concomitant extension is the fact that Nigeria, contrary to popular expectation, is NOT an oil producing country. The multinational oil companies really produce the oil for Nigeria. In the process, Nigeria’s role in this tragic arrangement is really that of a laid-back recipient of providential revenues.

To worsen matters, much of the gloom sketched here has been deepened by current developments within and around Nigeria, especially the intensification of interests by the United States and its oil companies in the Gulf of Guinea — an area that encompasses countries like Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, Sao Tome, Principe and Equatorial Guinea. In view of this relatively novel and external intrusion, it is evident that the illusions, which attend Nigeria’s status as an oil producer, will be further magnified.

Another concrete manifestation of my argument about the Nigerian State is the fact that **Nigeria is the only major oil producing state lacking the capacity** to add any meaningful value to its crude oil, since it lacks functional refineries. The consequence is that its helpless citizens are subjected to a curious form of market and import driven forces as far as the price of gasoline is concerned. In stark terms the situation is this: Nigeria as an oil producing country lacks functional refineries and to this extent the government has decided to use internationally driven crude oil prices as a basis for pricing gasoline for the Nigerian populace. The contagious dimension of this unflattering and grim scenario is obvious enough. In view of the imminence of the hydrogen age, crude oil will sooner or later revert to its original status of crude, and in the process Nigeria will be left stranded. This inclement situation takes its biting edge from the fact that it is impossible to view a stranded Nigeria in isolation. This is because of the widely held belief that if the black man cannot make it in Nigeria, then he can never make it anywhere else in the world. However, rather than give way to pessimism, this reflection is essentially rooted in a challenge, which continues to underscore the continuing relevance of the Association of Concerned African Scholars and other like-minded bodies.

### Conclusion

Thus far, we have taken a non-episodic look at the nature of the Warri Crisis. In the process we have attempted to look at the crisis at two other inter-related levels, the Niger Delta and the Nigerian social formation itself. Essentially, the crisis has been deepened and compounded by intrusive factors from

abroad. These intrusive factors, which include the oil companies and their parent governments, have done much to question the legitimacy of the Nigeria State as an actor in the international system. It is an unflattering situation in which these various crises, largely spawned by oil, have exposed the under-belly of the Nigerian State. It is now possible to contend that Nigeria, like most other African States, is more of an arena than an actor in international relations.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> International IDEA. 2000. *Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue(s) for Nation-Building*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Adaka Boro was an Ijaw nationalist who took up arms against the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1965. He complained that the combined forces of the Nigerian State and the oil companies were brutalizing the Ijaws. He led a twelve-day armed revolution, but the Federal Government overwhelmed him, tried him and sentenced him to death. Eventually he was released and subsequently fought on the federal side in the Biafran civil war; he was

later killed in action. His significance for contemporary times is that various armed struggles in the Niger Delta invoke his name as a rallying point.

<sup>3</sup> Obaro Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence, 1884-1936*; London, Longmans, 1969. Ibadan History Series.

<sup>4</sup> Olayinka Ogunkoya, *Sabbatical Report* submitted to Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, 11February 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Turner, Louis. 1978. *Oil Companies in the International System*. London and Boston: Allen & Unwin (for the Royal Institute of International Affairs).

<sup>6</sup> Ikonta, Ike and Oronoto Douglas. 2003. *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil*. London: Verso Books.

<sup>7</sup> For instance at a recent workshop organized by The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria

**Death-Agony of a Malformed Political Order**

Ike Okonta

The primary election for local councils for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria's ruling party, in Nembe on 5 July 2002 was a bloody affair. Two factions, led by local politicians with substantial youth followings, battled for dominance of the political space to enable them place favored loyalists as the party's candidate for council chairman. The stakes were high. Whoever emerged victorious would most certainly romp to victory when the main inter-party elections were conducted in a year's time, given the PDP's near-total grip on power and strategic resources in the various states and the federal center. He would in turn oversee the five oil fields from which Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) produces an estimated 200,000 barrels of oil from Nembe creek daily.

By the evening of 6 July when the primary elections came to an end in Nembe and the seven other local councils in Bayelsa State (one of Nigeria's 36 states), forty people had been killed in election-related violence, the bulk of them in Nembe and Twon-Brass, a satellite community where the local subsidiary of Agip of Italy operates an oil terminal.

The two factional leaders and their storm troopers were at the heart of the political violence that engulfed Nembe and forced the surviving inhabitants to flee.

Lionel Jonathan, one of the factional leaders was head of Isongufuro, a cultural group that had metamorphosed into one of the most feared youth vigilantes in Nembe.<sup>1</sup> Jonathan, formerly a university teacher in law, also served as the Bayelsa State Commissioner for Environment and campaign manager for the state governor's bid for re-election in April 2003. Mr. Jonathan and his band of vigilantes were the governor's political enforcers in Nembe. Pitted against them was P. Barigha-Amange, a former oil executive who nursed the ambition of displacing the governor and saw the local council primary election as his opening move to realize his project. Barigha-Amange was leader of Isenasawo, a rival vigilante. Although Isongufuro had the backing of the state government and the machinery of 'legitimate' violence at its disposal, Isenasawo was the dominant political force in Nembe at the time of the elections.

The elections were a farce, albeit one in which men of violence played the star role. The Governor, anxious to ensure that candidates of his choice emerged victorious in the primary in all the eight local councils, had dispatched teams of heavily armed anti-riot police to Nembe, Brass, and other areas where he feared a free and open vote would go against him in the evening of 4 July. Groups like Isongufuro were to provide local backup.

When party members came out to vote on the morning of 5 July in the various towns, they found that voters' cards and other electoral material had been diverted to the homes of local politicians loyal to the governor and his henchmen. In Nembe, Isongufuro dispersed the voters, murdered several people who attempted to put up a fight, and made away with the electoral materials. In Brass, supporters of the governor, aided by a full complement of anti-riot police, launched a violent attack on politicians and their youth followers whom they considered the 'opposition.' They were beaten up and their homes were set on fire. Officials dispatched by the PDP from the national capital to ensure an impartial vote were kidnapped when they proved 'uncooperative.'

Officials of Shell and Agip were on hand to lend support to the governor. Ordinarily, election materials were to have been taken directly to designated voting centers by non-partisan party officials since the governor was also a member of the PDP and had a compelling interest in shaping the outcome of the vote. However, Creek House, the governor's office and official residence in Yenogoa, the capital, became a clearinghouse and store for voters' cards. Helicopters provided by Shell airlifted the cards and other electoral material from Creek House to Nembe where Lionel Jonathan and Isongufuro then took over proceedings. Agip also airlifted voting material directly to its own terminal in Brass instead of Twon, the local council headquarters designated by the party's national executive as the voting center. Aides sent from the capital then allocated votes to candidates favored by the governor. In the ensuing clash between protesting locals and the anti-riot police and local toughs in the pay of the governor, four people were murdered.<sup>2</sup>

When the results of the party primaries were announced one week later, all the governor's candidates in the eight local councils, including Nembe and Brass, were either 'returned' unopposed or 'won' outright. The governor expressed satisfaction with the outcome and declared that the elections had been conducted in an atmosphere of

'peace and tranquility.' The state police boss dismissed press reports that the primary election had been marked by murder, brigandage and vote rigging as 'unfounded.' Local NGOs and journalists who had monitored the elections called for their cancellation and the sack of the police boss. Nobody paid them any attention.

The ordinary people picked up their disrupted lives and continued to plod on.

### **In the Fog of the Season's End**

As our narration makes clear, the present political order in Nembe is founded on and sustained by violence. Our argument is that this order, inaugurated by the British colonial project in 1895 with unprecedented violence and reproduced and institutionalized by local Nigerian political elites since formal independence in 1960, is a malformed political order that is now in its last death-throes. Nembe and the other oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta are the epicenter of its decay and eventual death.

Central to this order was a regime of rapine despotism and the poverty and powerlessness that is born of this condition. It is a malformed political order because, producing political repression and scarcity instead of the freedom and prosperity that is the legitimate quest of citizens globally, it has not been able to find legitimacy in the eyes of the local people it has reduced to subjects these past one hundred years. This malformed political order is dying because new social forces, forged in the cauldron of violence, unremitting serfdom and material scarcity that are its legacy, are now pressing against the barricades.

We shall locate the prominent symptoms of this malformed and dying order in the political, economic, and social crisis in which Nembe, the wider Niger Delta, and Nigeria are engulfed currently. The three corresponding components of this crisis are the accelerating loss of state sovereignty and concomitant decay of state institutions, locally and nationally; the failure of neo-liberal programs of structural adjustment and its devastating impact on the people of Nembe; and the worsening communal violence and youth anomie that are reshaping social relations into malignant forms in Nembe and the other oil communities. Linking the local (Nembe), the national (Nigeria) and the global (Shell in Nembe creek oil fields), we show the ways in which the cross-cutting tensions generated in these three arenas play out in Nembe; our argument is that the present regime of institutionalized rapine



despotism is now collapsing under the impossible weight of its violent past and present inequities.

### **When Politics Fail: Three Symptoms of a Dying Political Order**

Rory Carroll, the Africa correspondent of *The Guardian* of London, filed this story from Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, on 24 October 2003:

'What Nigerians call bunkering and oil executives call rustling has hit the big time: criminal gangs are siphoning so much crude oil from pipelines in the Niger delta that they have started using tankers to spirit it away. A Russian-registered tanker laden with 11, 300 tonnes of allegedly stolen crude has become the latest vessel intercepted by the Nigerian navy in the gulf of Guinea. The vessel, African Pride, is believed to be part of a fleet which aids the theft of an estimated 200,000 barrels a day from the delta's swamps...Siphoning off such quantities amid a landscape of jungle and marsh, with thousands of creeks, requires sophisticated equipment and organization. To the dismay of the government and oil companies, the thieves have proved that they have this in abundance.'<sup>3</sup>

Nigeria is the sixth largest oil producer in the world presently. A daily output of 2.2 million barrels accounts for 80 per cent of government revenues and 90 per cent of foreign exchange earnings. Oil, clearly, is a strategic resource, at least viewed from the perspective of the country's governing elites. Yet, governmental power and the administrative structures vital to securing the all-important oilfields is precipitately shrinking in the Niger delta as elsewhere in the country. What the British journalist neglected to point out was why the oil smugglers are able to so flagrantly ply their illegal trade with impunity: The 'bunkerers' too are members of the governing elite – invariably senior political figures or military officers deployed to the delta to police the oil fields and ensure that 'restless' youth protesting the adverse impacts of the oil industry on their farm lands and water sources do not disrupt production.

As social and economic conditions worsen in Nigeria, politics is no longer the instrument through which contending interests are conciliated in a structured framework. Politics is itself a struggle for the control of the oil largesse, which, once secured in the form of booty, is used to further and consolidate political ends. In this struggle, the state and the paraphernalia of violence at its disposal is the ultimate booty. For whoever dominates the state

necessarily controls the means to displace rival contenders for a disproportionate share of the oil bonanza. The adept, the unscrupulous, and sometimes the lucky, emerge triumphant in this bruising contest. The losers, smarting from defeat and humiliation, turn their sights to lesser prizes. The oil bunkerers belong to this category.

Terry Lynn Karl has rightly argued that 'the revenues a state collects, how it collects them, and the uses to which it puts them defines its nature.'<sup>4</sup> Oil rent and the array of political and economic arrangements it throws up to perpetuate this predatory enclave economy not only powerfully shapes the nature of the Nigerian state, the vicious, bare-knuckled struggle between dominant and rising elites to control this rent ensures that the state is a key player in the economic and political spheres at the same time.

Its autonomization as the impartial arbiter of last resort between competing interests, embedded in social, economic and political society but sitting above them, is hindered. As a political instrument hijacked by the temporarily successful faction in the struggle for the oil prize, the Nigerian state is resented by unsuccessful rival factions. It may still be able to project power, but it is power lacking in real authority because its motives are suspect. It is also power without legitimacy because rival factions and ordinary people alike on whom it is exercised see only commandments backed up by the threat of violence; worse, commandments designed to make them part with their property on the pain of death.

Those who are able to challenge this illegitimate power, like the oil bunkerers in our story, do. The little people, in this instance the people of Nembe and the other oil-bearing communities in the Niger delta whose traditional sources of livelihood – their farmlands and fishing waters – have been devastated by half a century of uncontrolled oil exploitation, resort to civil disobedience, and in the case of youth, direct confrontation with Nigerian troops and riot police, the immediate, direct face of the oil rentiers who have visited so much grief and ruin on them.'<sup>5</sup>

The victorious factions respond by dispatching special forces equipped with rocket propelled grenades, machine guns, tear gas, stun grenades, attack helicopters, fast-attack naval patrol boats, and other paraphernalia of modern warfare, including experts in psycho-terror, to the 'volatile' region. Whole hamlets and villages are razed and some of the inhabitants murdered or mutilated. Faced with a well-organized and determined opposition with popular grassroots support as in the 500,000 Ogoni in the

eastern delta fringes, they decide to 'sanitize' the area and root out the 'subversive elements' disturbing the 'public peace.' In a lightening military maneuver that would have impressed Shaka the Zulu, the entire area is boxed in; then the death squads are sent in. Where the squad suffers fatalities, as in Odi, a central delta town in December 1999, gunmen simply shoot everything in sight, including goats, chickens, and eighty-five year old women too frail to get out of their houses. Those still standing after the massacre are torched, and the experts in psychological warfare scrawl graffiti on the charred walls insulting the dead town and its gods.<sup>6</sup>

It is all very impressive, very military. This must be a powerful state, with its striking arm reaching out to smite its enemies even in the furthest, uncharted parts of the 'empire'! But you can see that all this display of disproportionate violence, obscene in its extravagance, all this spectacle — it is all a put on. The rentiers and the men of violence in their employ may be deadly serious in their determination to maintain their grip on the oil fields; this is demonstrated clearly enough by all the shooting of unarmed youths and raping of young girls. The piling corpses, the maimed, the widowed and the raped traumatized for life testify to their earnestness.

But the marauding troops have no heart in the fight. The soldiers pile back into their trucks and beat a hasty retreat as soon as the latest round of killing is done. They do not hold conquered territory. There are no proconsuls to 'discipline and punish' the new subjects. A few soldiers are left to guard the oil wells and the oil company workers, and the rest scamper off. The survivors crawl out of the bush, bury their dead, and resume their cry for justice.

In Abuja, the capital, spokesmen of the rentiers deny that massacres are taking place in the delta. They speak only of rival ethnic militias hacking each other to death with blunt machetes. They are killing each other because...well, they hate each other. It is a 'tribal' thing; ancient, not at all amenable to rational political solutions. They speak also of the bunkerers, loudly, threatening them with 'the full rigour of the law.' The oil companies join the charade; indeed, they amplify it by flying in obliging journalists from London and Paris and New York to witness first hand what 'these tribesmen' are doing to each other. 'This has nothing to do with us. We don't understand the thinking of these people. They are not like 'us.' Frankly, we don't know why they are fighting and killing each other.' Then they bring in the subject of oil bunkerers. 'They are ruining our business! We don't know what to do about them. And the guns.

Where did they get such sophisticated weapons? The government must step in. We need more security or else this place will go up in flames!'

But it all rings hollow. Everybody, the rentiers and oil executives included, know who the oil bunkerers are. They cannot move against them because they are all partners in the same crime: plunder. They all know the source of the guns that have flooded the delta: poorly paid soldiers selling their weapons to anyone, including 'enemy' youth, for hard cash; the oil companies, stocking up their private armories and arming 'company' police who subsequently pass them on to third parties; youth vigilantes recruited by the oil companies to 'protect' their facilities and who use the money so obtained to buy rifles and machine guns to secure yet more 'protection' work.

These are guns for hire, like in the American Wild West in the time of the gold rush. Only here crude oil is the new gold. Governmental presence is only felt in the form of machine guns and jackboots; but they have an eerie evanescent quality to them; here now and gone the next instant; leaving bullet-perforated bodies to bear mute testimony.

The Nigerian state is not only in retreat; it is speedily losing sovereignty. IMF and World Bank officials vet the annual budget before it is read in a public broadcast by the President. They are quick to take a knife to aspects they don't like, usually too 'generous' an allocation to social services. It does not matter that hospitals are emptied of doctors and medicines, and that school children have never held a textbook in their hands since 1986 when the structural adjustment regimen kicked in. The finance minister is powerless to countermand the dictates of their red felt pen.

The new civilian government is under intense pressure from the Bush White House to pull Nigeria out of OPEC and join the club of producers more amenable to American interests. This is yet to happen, but regime officials are talking loudly about the need for 'more flexible options' that will enable the country to maximize its production potentials. The Nigerian state has over the years benefited tremendously as a result of OPEC's price-fixing ability. It is in its long-term interest to stay in OPEC, not outside it. But then the calculations of the rentiers are shaped, not by the long-term interests of the state, but by considerations of regime survival and private gain. Bowling with America meets both needs, at least in the short term. This is a state without a mind of its own.

The decay of state institutions continues apace. In June 2003 a leading weekly reported that the Inspector General of Police, the nation's chief security officer, had been soliciting and accepting financial gratification from state governors in the country in return for 'co-operation' during election time (read turning a blind eye when thugs hijack ballot boxes from polling stations to enable them to inflate the vote in the governors' favor). The April 2003 presidential and governorship elections were openly and blatantly rigged by the party, in some areas returning more votes than there were people in the electoral register. The Carter Center, which had sent a team to monitor the exercise, declared it a fraud. A former deputy governor, under investigation for aiding and abetting the murder of the country's Minister of Justice, was sprung from detention and 'elected' a senator on the platform of the ruling party. High court judges assigned the case had to drop it like a hot potato when they began to receive threatening phone calls in the night, and senior government officials in the capital donned the coat of innocence.

Elsewhere in one of the eastern states, a political contractor whose only claim to fame was that his brother was the President's chief of staff, organized the abduction of the governor whose 'election' he had bankrolled only the previous month, sequestered him in a hotel toilet, and obtained his resignation at gun point. But not before readying a more pliable candidate to take over. In so doing he offered clear proof, if indeed any was needed, that the ruling party was the state, the regime, and the government melded into a seamless whole; a veritable racket sustained by violence and deploying violence to eviscerate all obstacles to its endless trips to the oil wells whose viscous contents it alone knows how to turn into American dollars.

The Maxim gun brooked no opposition in colonial times when Her Majesty's proconsuls embarked on the hazardous but very profitable project of taking the fat of the land, and in the process, reduced its owners from citizens to subjects. One hundred years later their clones continue dutifully on this path. The state sits on society; it does not emanate from it the better to secure it and make it more prosperous. Lacking a *raison d'être*, the Nigerian state looks more and more like a beached tilapia thrashing the hedge to death before its own demise.

#### **A Land That Devours Its Inhabitants**

How do these symptoms of a dying political order play out in Nembe, the primary subject of our enquiry? The signs of morbidity we have highlighted

in the wider Nigerian system are very much evident in present political, economic and social life in the twin city. The political order has broken down as we showed at the beginning of this narration. The two rival militias are locked in a deadly dwell for power. The King of Nembe lives in Port Harcourt, some 100 nautical miles away, and rarely visits his people. He steers clear of the political turbulence generated by the militias. The majority of his council of chiefs also live in Port Harcourt, and the handful courageous (or fool-hardy) enough to remain in Nembe do not participate in public affairs. Youth and vigilantes alike hold king and council responsible for the social and economic crisis that has taken over their lives.

The little semblance of authority that exists is the armed anti-riot police dispatched by the Federal authorities to the twin-city. There is an uneasy truce between the police and the warring factions. Each watches the other like a hawk. All are armed, and patrol the streets ostentatiously brandishing their machine guns. The vigilantes say the police are partisans; they support their rivals and also give protection to oil company officials whose activities have laid waste to their farmlands and fishing waters. The police say the vigilantes are criminal elements who have been terrorizing the city and extorting money from law-abiding oil workers. The ordinary people distrust all three groups; but keep their heads down in the face of the guns. Violence, not public virtue, is the basis of authority in present Nembe.

The economic life of the people turned on fishing. But this was before the incessant oil spills began to take toll on fish life in Nembe creek and the surrounding lakes, ponds, and rivers.<sup>7</sup> Now Nembe fishermen and women spend hours in the open sea and sometimes go home with no catch at all. The gas flaring in the vicinity of the oil fields has also substantially damaged plant life. Tidal waves also spread spilled oil through the mangroves and onto farmlands rendering them infertile. There is no manufacturing; there is little economic life in Nembe. The bulk of the food is brought in from Port Harcourt. The oil fields are all that is left; but two hundred thousand barrels are piped out of Nembe daily and the inhabitants receive neither rent nor royalties. The anti-riot police are in Nembe to ensure that the arrangements remain in place.

There is a sense in which it can be said that Nembe is a city in permanent curfew. The streets are always deserted. Social capital is a scarce commodity. All are at war with each other: king against his council; youth vigilantes against both and against themselves. The youths accuse the king and his council of 'eating

the oil money' and giving none to the ordinary people. Youth accuse youth of accepting money from Shell and refusing to share it. The quarrel usually ends in violence. Elders and women have been elbowed out of the public arena; they raise their voices on the pain of death and physical punishment, administered with relish by the vigilantes. The two parts of the city fight each other intermittently. They quarrel over whose king is supreme and has the right to represent the city at the state level. There are fierce arguments over where local council buildings and other social facilities should be located. Gunshots are exchanged. Young men die. Clashes with Okrika, a neighboring community, are also frequent, chalking up more bodies. Ownership of oil-bearing land is the perennial source of conflict. There is neither thoughtful government policy nor mediating agency to deliver permanent peace.

What Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz see as the constituent elements of the African crisis – the failure of economic development, political instability, societal divisions, violence, crime and communal conflict – are very much evident in Nembe and the larger Nigerian nation. Were the two scholars to explain the condition of contemporary Nembe, they would most certainly argue that the people are suffering from 'a crisis of modernity, and that the crisis of modernity is rooted in the deep history of the societies in which it is taking place.' Political disorder may reign in Nembe but it has been successfully instrumentalized by political bosses and their clients and actually functions to allocate social and economic goods to the satisfaction of all. State and society are locked in an anarchic, but nevertheless happy marriage. Development as it is understood in the West is not on the agenda. 'These' people are perfectly satisfied with their condition and see no profit in changing it.<sup>8</sup>

It is one thing to highlight the prebendal practices of political elites and argue that they are happy with the social framework that sustains this. It is an entirely different matter to read in the faces of the victims of this rapine order – in this case the overwhelming majority of the people of Nembe – joy and contentment in their present state of destitution, anomie, and political impotence – all of which are direct consequences of the reign of their elites. If it is such a happy kingdom, why the ubiquitous presence of the managers of violence and the lethal tools of their trade, deployed by the rentiers and sustained by the local subsidiary of Shell in all facets of Nembe life, coercing acceptance of the present order?

To reiterate our central argument, the political order in Nembe, turning on rapine despotism, has not been able to embed in society because its project runs against the deep desire of the ordinary people for democracy and its material fruits. Power, social theorists have told us, is the ability to make someone do what you desire of them. In the colony, violence, not capital, was instrumentalized to extract wealth from the colonized. The state did not deliver development; it was the very repository of the violence necessary to reduce the inhabitants into subjects and coerce them to give up their wealth, in labor and raw material. This predatory framework, since taken over by indigenous elites following decolonization, could not be institutionalized because it has encountered sustained and determined resistance, since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from those to whom it has given only poverty and arbitrary rule. To maintain this illegitimate regime, which we argue is now in its last death-throes, violence has to be applied and re-applied.

But herein lies the paradox of violence as the structuring basis of political order. The more violence is deployed to prop up and sustain economic and social arrangements, the more it undermines the very goal it seeks to achieve – a degree of social order within which it can continue its business of seizing booty in the long term. People forcefully deprived of the right to represent their own interests in the crucial arenas of political and economic life are by definition impoverished and discontented subjects. Discontents not only represent a real threat to the existing order; that order is also deprived of the vital contributions they could have brought to the project of creating prosperity for the commonweal. Scarcity is the soil in which revolt is nurtured. Political violence deployed to keep subjects down achieves its project of rapine in the short term, but ultimately defeats its own purpose in the long run. This process is clearly evident in Nembe and Nigeria today. That is why we argue that this malformed political order is dying.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Isongufuro began life as a youth cultural organization in 1992. With the return of electoral politics in Nigeria during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, it was gradually transformed into a political vigilante of sorts, led by Lionel Jonathan. Isenasawo, on the other hand, emerged in 1998 to counter Isongufuro's excesses in Nembe and environs. The members chose Barigha-Amange as their leader.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ballots of Blood: Report of the July 2002 Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Primaries in*

Bayelsa State, Nigeria, Ijaw Council of Human Rights, August 2002, Port Harcourt.

<sup>3</sup> Rory Carroll, 'Smugglers use tankers to steal Nigerian oil' *The Guardian*, London, 24 October 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> See Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil*, Verso

Books, London, 2003. See in particular chapter four, 'A Dying Land.'

<sup>6</sup> Environmental Rights Action, *Silent Genocide*.

<sup>7</sup> Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>8</sup> This is the central argument of Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, James Currey, Oxford, 1999.

## Violence Used Against Unarmed Women in Peaceful Protests Against Oil Companies

Environmental Rights Action, Nigeria

"We were just singing, we didn't destroy anything. We were peaceful. The police and soldiers misbehaved. Look at me, seven armed soldiers pounced on me and reduced me to nothing. I found myself in a Shell clinic, a day after the protest."

-Mrs Alice Youwuren (widow), 50 year-old mother of seven. Ugwagwu Community, Itsekiri.

"The river they are polluting is our life and death. We depend on it for everything. When this situation became unbearable, we decided to come together to protest. Ijaw, Itsekiri and Ilaje we are one, we are brothers and sisters, it is only people who don't understand that think we are fighting ourselves."

-Mrs. Bimpe Ebi, 34 year-old mother of five, from Awoye Community in Ilaje.

"We insisted on dialogue with the oil companies, but the soldiers refused and started kicking us with their boots, they flogged us, they wounded us. As I am talking to you, three of our women are still missing. As we are disgraced this way, those of us remaining will go there and let them kill us. We don't want Shell, Chevron, Texaco or any of the oil companies again."

-Mrs. Rose Miebi (widow), 36 year-old mother of six, an Ijaw.

Oil-bearing communities on the western flank of the Niger Delta witnessed a rising tempo of resistance to the violence of the oil and gas industry. Women whose local industries such as fishing and farming

and livelihood have been destroyed by transnational oil companies, ChevronTexaco and Shell, organized the protests. The protesting women were armed only with placards and green leaves; they sang solidarity songs to protest years of plunder of their natural environment by the European and US oil companies. On August 8, 2002, women from Itsekiri communities occupied Chevron's oil terminal; more women from the Gbaramatu, Egbema and Urhobo communities joined them to blockade Chevron flow stations in Delta State as the wave of women protests spread. The impoverished women, long neglected and forced to bear the burden of dwindling harvests and incomes, demanded a clean environment conducive for survival, jobs for their children, hospitals, safe drinking water and support for livelihood ventures such as poultry farming.

Armed soldiers and mobile policemen of "Operation Fire-for-Fire" invited by Shell, unleashed raw terror on the women. Scores of them were seriously injured as soldiers used wire whips on the women and "kicked them like footballs". Four soldiers and three mobile policemen beat Mrs. Alice Youwuren, a widow and mother of seven from Ugwagwu-Itsekiri community to a state of unconsciousness. She was admitted at Shell Clinic at Ogonu in Warri. Other women jumped into a nearby stream to escape from the melee. The women say three of them have not been found since then.

*From a press release by Environmental Rights Action, Nigeria*  
"ERA/FoE N" <eraction@infoweb.abs.net>

## African Women, Oil and Resistance

Terisa E. Turner and Leigh S. Brownhill

A sea change in the power of corporate globalizers relative to the power of global social movements occurred between 1998 and 2004. In 1998 the World Trade Organization's agenda was virtually synonymous with triumphalist globalization. But a short six years later the playing field was fundamentally transformed. By 2004 global mobilization against corporate rule and war asserted a powerful counterforce to corporate globalization. The U.S. Empire's drive to enclose and privatize resources via a permanent war on "terror" is one response to popular globalization from below and its assertion that another world is possible.

How can we explain this global power shift? One approach is to examine its local roots. Using a marxist, ecofeminist, subsistence perspective called "gendered class analysis," we examine current gendered class struggles in an African anti-corporate mobilization: the Nigerian women's war against the transnational oil companies. A dramatic feature of the struggle is women's use of nakedness to rivet attention on their demands.

The core argument is that peasant women have broken relations of ecological exploitation and simultaneously defended a life-world grounded in collective "commoning." Those at the bottom of the hierarchy of labor powers resisted further proletarianization by using an explicitly feminist tactic: the curse of nakedness. This assertion of life over death embraced the interests of people higher up on the hierarchy of labor powers and began to outline an alternative to corporate rule.

### **Nigeria: 'The Curse of Nakedness'**

The "male deal" (that set of relationships through which local men channel up to capital the results of women's unpaid work) is the arrangement between local compradors in and out of the state, on the one hand, and foreign corporations and their institutional promoters on the other. It functions to channel values from nature and labor, paid and unpaid, to capital. From 1957 when Shell discovered petroleum, the male deal in Nigeria united a comprador faction of the national bourgeoisie with oil capital. Their project involved dispossessing peasants of land for petroleum exploration and production. The state received oil revenues, which were massively

channeled to corrupt politicians, civil servants, intermediaries, contractors and motley hangers-on. Oil corporations profited handsomely. The losers were the autonomous peasantry. Women do most of the farming and fishing in the oil-rich Niger Delta. They process, transport and market foodstuffs not consumed by the family and community. Land alienation and severe pollution from petroleum activities directly undermined peasant women's economic power and capacities to sustain life. The male deal in Nigeria siphoned oil wealth from small farmers' land and fishing grounds, leaving these essentials of life degraded and enclosed.

Village women responded to ecological destruction by taking over the physical sites of petroleum companies. They demanded that the corporations get out. Beginning in 1993, a popular movement for "resource control" drove Shell out of Ogoniland in the eastern Delta. In 2002, women (with allied men) broke out of the repressive grip of local male dealers (chiefs, husbands, contractors, security forces, politicians) and successfully shut down oil companies in the western Delta. On 8 July 2002 some 600 women occupied for ten days the Chevron Escravos terminal, which exported 450,000 barrels a day, announcing that, "We women have taken over the yard. But we are not afraid because Chevron is on our land. All we want is for Chevron to leave our land" (ERA13 July 2002). The Escravos occupation immediately inspired at least twelve additional takeovers and shut down 40% of Nigeria's oil production. The shut down cost the government US\$11 million a day and the oil companies an estimated US\$2.5 million a day in foregone profits alone (Turner and Brownhill 2004a).

In an ultimatum published worldwide, 4,000 women demonstrators who had been attacked by Shell police on 8 August 2002, gave the Anglo-Dutch giant ten days to pay their hospital bills. The women confronted Shell with the curse of nakedness (Adebayo 2002, Wamala 2002). They threatened to expose their naked bodies, and most particularly their vaginas, to impose on oil company male dealers "social death" through ostracization. In much of Africa, women throw off their clothes in an ultimate protest to say, "this is where life comes from. I hereby revoke your life." Nakedness by elderly

women, in particular, is used in extreme and life-threatening situations. Many men subjected to this “social execution” believe they will actually die. According to one Nigerian source, “In a lot of the rural communities here, the practice of throwing off the wrapper is a common [form of censure, given the] belief among the women folks here that it goes with some magical powers to inflict curses ranging from death to madness on its foes” (IOWG, 2 August 2003).

By holding up oil exports, Nigerian women expanded the possibilities for collective defense of the commons, spurred international women’s naked demonstrations against the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, and squeezed petroleum corporations at the supply end just as consumer boycotts squeezed them from the consumption end. In sum, women’s defense of their communities’ collective entitlements exposed, delegitimized and weakened the male deals on which rentier state corruption and oil profits depend. At the same time, peasant women and their allies forged solidarity with a worldwide movement against neoliberalism as expressed through the World Trade Organization and through U.S. militarism on behalf of private oil corporations. The women’s challenge to corporate rule affirmed an ecologically sustainable alternative in which life support and village autonomy took precedence.

Two expressions of the Nigerian struggle at the international level are first, the demonstration effect of the curse of nakedness; and second, the unexpected coinciding of production and consumption boycotts. This coincidence posed the question of the possibility for direct oil sales deals between producers and consumers, bypassing and thereby disempowering the oil transnationals. The international impact of Nigerian women’s war against big oil was ramified by the simultaneous cutoff of oil from Venezuela where a management lockout conspired to oust the populist head of state Hugo Chavez. At the same time Iraqi oil ceased to flow as the U.S. invasion geared up. The global anti-war movement built on the dramatic confrontations between fearless African women and ChevronTexaco, Shell, Halliburton and the Nigerian subsidiaries of other majors companies. Suddenly Nigerian women’s cause was amplified by Iraqis, multitudes on the Arab streets, and the millions worldwide who opposed U.S. war on behalf of the very petroleum capitalists being challenged in the Niger Delta.

### **Conclusion: From Africa to the World**

What explanation of the global power shift away from corporate rule and toward popular commoning does this gendered class analysis of national struggle provide? Unwaged women’s subversion of male deals challenged the erstwhile dominance of neoliberal capital. This broke or eroded the social relations that effected the transmission of wealth from the unwaged and nature into corporate profits. The impact was at once national and international. Would a parallel analysis of other societies reveal a similar dynamic? We have analyzed the Kenyan feminist resurgence of the 1950s anti-colonial Mau Mau war for “land and freedom” and believe it reveals the same process at work (Brownhill, Kaara and Turner 1997, Turner and Brownhill 2004b). Additional analyses would position women engaged in life-centered activities at the forefront of the global struggle, which has, in the past six years, tipped the power balance away from capital toward an incipient collectivity of the multitudes. What lessons does this analysis yield for the construction and strengthening of global gendered class alliances and policies?

First, who are the essential class allies in the current coalescing of movements to replace for-profit global rule? What social forces have the capacities to further transform global power relations? Peasants, women, indigenous peoples, who are often unwaged workers, appear in this perspective as the revolutionaries with whom, sometimes, waged workers unite. Women amongst the unwaged possess significant power against capital because they predominate as the creators of values that from capital’s perspective are “free.” These values include unpaid work as well as surplus value from paid work, nature in all its expression, social services and built space. Corporate globalization incrementally imperializes and encloses these values in commodified relations. Capital consumes without replacing these free inputs, thus hastening them toward exhaustion and extinction. In so doing, capital undermines the social life world and ecology of women, peasants and indigenous peoples along with other dispossessed and exploited peoples. Here we have provided an account of women and allied men breaking male deals and thereby stopping transnational corporations’ access to the “free goods” of nature, unpaid labor, social services and built space. Women’s experience of capital’s depredation is the experience of frontline life producers and sustainers. Consequently women and other unwaged peoples defend life against capital. In so doing they have the capacity to affirm demands which unify everyone above them in the hierarchy of labor powers. This drive to unity contrasts with the divisions capital has constructed along ethnic and

gender lines, which have in the past resulted in the defeat of class struggles.

Second, what are life-centered policies, which if pursued at the global level could expose and undercut the re-engineered, re-labeled, corporate rule agenda that capital, through the WTO, IMF, and World Bank, unilaterally seeks to re-impose? Women's nakedness in the context of protests against big oil in Nigeria was concerned with birth, regeneration, the womanly source of life and subsistence. By exposing their vaginas women publicized their power to revoke life they have bestowed, by expelling agents of death from the circle of humanity. The demands put forth by Nigerian women center on the support of life itself: collective land rights, reparations and ecological restoration, an end to petroleum exploitation; direct deals between producers and consumers, fair trade and radical, direct democracy.

The insurgents are against capitalist commodification via trade in agricultural exports, especially genetically modified organisms; micro-credit schemes like that of Grameen Bank, privatized land reform, pollution credits and the trading of carbon emissions, and the host of corporate rule dictates disguised under the constant stream of newspeak rubrics such as poverty alleviation, empowerment, sustainability, human security, social and human capital enhancement, and development.

The double power of the unwaged, and especially of rural women, resides in their simultaneous participation in social relations of commoning for the sustenance of life and in social relations of global corporate organizations that organize, discipline and unite us all. Both theory and practice suggest that alliances with the unwaged around their life-centered demands will accelerate even more the dramatic shift in power from capital to the multitudes that we have witnessed over the past six years.

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**The Agonist**  
(for Ken Saro-Wiwa & the Ogoni 9)

Ogaga Ifowodo

**1 Let Us Pretend We Can Write It**

Let us pretend we can write it, using  
words that fled with the air from the tightening  
noose to maintain their ground, words that floated  
belly-up in the creek, their eyes coated

with the ash of the fire beneath. Let us  
plait to the hair the maddened mourner plucked  
from her head, the word that's cry and loss and curse  
and ask forgiveness for those that mocked.

But where is the word and where is the hand  
to match the heart that bleeds alone? Don't ask!  
Pray only to trace the silence and the scream

and fix to its spot of earth  
(which the murderer denies the martyr)  
the echo with which our cry hallows their death.

**2 Memory was His Saviour and His Death**

Memory was his saviour. And his death!  
He remembered the swamps and the rivers,  
the fish shivering in a choked net,  
the colony of creeks and mudskippers

founded by retreating tides. And the farms  
swollen with roots and bulbs. He remembered  
a bounty whose splendour wrote psalms  
chanted by the peasant to winds and birds.

*Memory was his saviour and his death.*

He had known the floods, the tides and the waves  
that softened the land and brought the fish home;  
at one with nature's lore, they left no graves.

He came to know the black springs of the fuel oil  
spewing liquid fire from iron pythons  
coiled like rigs of death round their love and toil;

he came to know cities floated on the oil  
plundered from the land under his feet, where  
councils held in big halls to share the spoils

*and memory became his saviour from death*

when the housewife stood aghast by her plot  
of cassava and herbs swallowed by slick

when trees, fish and animals in mourning  
surrendered to acid rain and gas poison

when the canoe paddling children to school  
capsized far from bridge or motorway

when the army invaded the village  
shooting bombing burning raping laughing!

when the commander of the mob boasted  
two hundred and twenty-one ways of killing,

memory became his saviour from the death  
when he bore witness to the rape and the shame!

**3 Hurry Them Down into the Grave**

Hurry him down, hurry them down into the grave,  
hurry them down before their bones nail my guilt.  
Now my eyes are redder than the blood I have spilled  
and my vision no further than my gilded chair  
recedes into my head to blaze forth my fear,  
hurry him down, hurry them down into the grave.

Hurry! hurry! time marches against me swifter  
than the horse. Before their blood cools, warned the witches,  
they must be in their grave. Hurry to the grave  
to bury the curse and their cause so the burning creek  
and swamp may stand still for the drilling rig, its foot  
planted in the core of their earth by the ace lifter.

Hurry them down, hurry them down, the witches prescribe  
sacrifice. At Ramadan, I will prove my faith  
by spurning Allah's grace to slit man and ram. Hurry!  
hurry! The world closes around me and I see Ken's  
spirit singing, his pipe now a gun pointed at me  
and I quail with a terror I cannot describe!

Hurry him down, hurry them down into the grave  
time races against me swifter than the horse  
and my eyes redder than the blood I have spilled  
grow too heavy for my face. Hurry to the grave  
before my barrel runs over with the last drop  
hurry! hurry! and save me from the brave.

#### 4 The Good Pupil

Years of steady understudy had cleared the needed footpath through the gross thicket of his mind. Too feeble for sums or spelling he would excel in turning guns to crickets to shrill wildly across the land. And biding his time, learn through fear to be the feared.

Luckily for him, he was in the right place where poetry, philosophy or kissing are alien arts, where booty and the honours of state await the unquestioning murderer, who ponders only When and How his act will glitter like rubies of blood and blaze

his name. One moment came gift-wrapped in the folds of a fool's robes when his country dangled from the web of his ex-master's plots.

He needed no speeches pressed in the false moulds of learning and wisdom, only threats angled to strike deepest at the wound. With frayed cloths

and blistering pepper, he would bind the gash, raw and red, festering beneath his bayonet. He steadied his nerves downing endless shots of his gin-and-blood cocktail pressed from the earth by the barrel, opening to the quick maggot his slowed liver and the stone called his heart.

But he always had a crippling fear to staunch so he could claim valour in the mask of a soldier's kit. And like the school bully, one dare with a heart proved too great a task for his nerves. So fleeing into the valley of bones he broke, he learnt well his lesson.

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### Report on the Peace Summit on the Warri Crisis

Washington, DC, July 24, 1999

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The destruction of Okere, an Urhobo area of of Warri, on June 4-7, 1999, probably marked the most dramatic emblem of insanity in the conflicts that engulfed the western Niger Delta in 1997-1999. This deadly conflict between two ethnic communities of Ijaw and Itsekiri, despite long-standing ties and friendships, was on this occasion extended to a third ethnic group, Urhobo, that had studiously stayed out of this mortal conflict. The debris and psychological scars left by the affairs of June 4-7, 1999, will remain with their victims on the ground at Warri.

Far away in North America, Nigerians hailing from the western Niger Delta were much troubled by these sad events that threatened to expand the dangers facing the peoples of the region. While there was dispute on who were the perpetrators of the violence of June 4-7, 1999, there was general concern about the welfare of the homelands of Nigerians who had sojourned from the western Niger Delta. It was on these grounds that Dr. Mobolaji Aluko of Howard

University and Dr. Philip Ikomi of George Mason University convinced skeptical leaders of the various ethnic groups from the western Niger Delta living in North America that a Peace Summit in Washington, D.C., for representatives of those in conflict and of those who had so recently been attacked might be helpful.

The Peace Summit was held at Howard University on July 24, 1999, with considerable expectations of success. Negotiations of the agenda and expected communiqué had been intense. The three delegations of the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo appeared well prepared — probably too well prepared. There was widespread interest in this novel Peace Summit. Indeed, a message from Chief Anthony Enahoro, the veteran Nigerian statesman, was delivered and read in the open session of the Peace Summit. Leaders of the three groups in Nigeria were interested. In at least one instance, as will be clear from the reports that follow, a Nigeria-based ethnic leadership seemed to

be intensely involved in negotiations on the Summit's process and agenda.

We think that documents conveying the rush of these discussions should be preserved and presented to the public. Those involved in these exchanges are highly valued in their three different ethnic groups. The new magical medium of the internet allowed them to express sentiments that reflect the viewpoints of their ethnic groups in ample ways. The exchanges are public, with hundreds, possibly thousands, of internet users, sharing in the agonies of the Niger Delta. We have therefore selected the most significant documents on (a) discussions on Dr. Ikomi's and Dr. Aluko's invitation to a Peace Congress and (b) the rather sophisticated preparation for the Congress, including an agenda and guidelines that were worked out by correspondence among the Conveners and the three parties to the Summit.

Sadly, all the good wishes in the world could not overcome mutual suspicion. The Peace Summit collapsed on the insistence of the Itsekiri delegation to forbid any discussions of the contentious issue of the title of the Itsekiri king along with the ownership of the prized oil city of Warri. The Ijaw and Urhobo delegations rejected such a maneuver. The refusal of any of the delegations to change their position led to an unpleasant impasse. In the end, it was the parliamentary maneuver of a "motion to adjourn" by one of the delegations that ended a bad experience.

Exchanges of messages in the aftermath of the Peace Summit have not been very friendly. Disputes about the interpretation of what happened continue to dog that brave attempt, many months after the one-day Peace Summit was adjourned. Many of the exchanges have been bitter and are not particularly of any significance for the history of the western Niger Delta region. However, as some of the following selections from public e-mail exchanges will demonstrate, the discussions do touch on the two issues of the title of the Itsekiri King and the matter of the ownership of Warri City. They have historical significance. We have accordingly focused some attention on exchanges that will shed some light on the twin problems of the title of the Itsekiri king and the ownership of the prized city of Warri.

In addition to these exchanges, four separate reports have been issued on the Washington, DC Summit on Warri. First, there was an Urhobo delegation's report that was issued when it appeared that the official conveners were unlikely to issue their own report, which was expected shortly after the Peace Summit. Second, there was a joint Ijaw-Urhobo communiqué

issuing from a meeting that the two delegations held on the same day after the collapse of the one-day Summit deliberations among the three ethnic groups. Both of these reports were criticized by the conveners and the Itsekiri delegation. Third, after much unexplained delay, the two conveners published their own report. Fourth, the Itsekiri delegation issued its report, offering an interpretation of events at considerable variance from the viewpoints in the Urhobo and Ijaw reports. For the sake of fairness and for the sake of historical fullness, all four reports are presented here.

Finally, we have introduced some background documents that will shed some light on the views held by the Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Urhobo on the Warri crisis. The Itsekiri document was offered during the Summit and was the subject of the dispute that led to the Summit's failure. The Urhobo document is the text of a press conference by Chief Benjamin Okumagba on behalf of indigenous Urhobo in Warri. It explains the Urhobo position on the attack on his community on June 4-7, 1999, by the Itsekiri. Finally, there is an Ijaw document, which was essentially a reply to the Itsekiri position denying that the Ijaw have any part in the ownership of Warri. These documents have not been selected at random. They were introduced in an initial report which Dr. Mobolaji Aluko, one of the conveners of the summit, had proposed. Dr. Aluko subsequently withdrew his proposal.

The documents in this package offer a rare picture of the ethnic intricacies of the western Niger Delta as presented by some of the most sophisticated spokespersons from the three ethnic groups of Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo. They offer the historian an inside look into the minds of these groups as they confronted one another. The point needs to be added that the focus of these documents is the tri-ethnic city of Warri. While this problem has obvious kinship with the larger crisis of the western Niger Delta, its genre leaves out the two other ethnic groups of the western Niger Delta. Neither the Isoko nor the Ukwuani participated in the summit because they have not been directly involved in claims of ownership of Warri as the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo have been.

From the point of view of the comparative history of conflict resolution in Africa, these efforts are important and unique. They contrast sharply with the absence of similar efforts by the elites representing the contending parties in such other conflicts in Africa, such as Rwanda, Somalia, and the Sudan. They also contrast with such other Nigerian conflicts

as those in Ife-Modakake among the Yoruba, Kafanchan among the Hausa, and numerous conflicts among the Igbo — to cite cases from the three celebrated majority ethnic groups in Nigeria. While it is difficult to estimate the role this one-day summit played in the final resolution of the conflict, it is safe to say that it helped to put pressure on the various factions to settle. The fact that Urhobo, the largest of the three ethnic groups in the western Niger Delta, was reluctant to enter into physical conflict may also have helped in persuading the smallest of the three, Itsekiri, as to how much danger it would expose thousands of its ethnic members who reside in

Urhobo lands if the Urhobos were finally provoked into mortal conflict with the Itsekiri. There is little doubt that this exercise at conflict resolution is important not only for the local history of the western Niger Delta of Nigeria but for the larger comparative history of conflict resolution in Nigeria and Africa.

One final editorial note: Readers of these documents will see that those to whom I have referred as the "Ijaw" are variously called Ijaw, Ijo, Ezon, and Izon. The British corruption of Nigerian ethnic names has apparently markedly affected the bearers of these names. They all refer to the same people.