

# Violence and National Development in Nigeria: The Political Economy of Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta

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**One element in the contradictions underpinning Nigeria's development crisis is the marginalisation of the youth. This article examines the factors that influence youth restiveness in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. It discusses the impact of conservative elite politics and the oil-centric political economy characterised by the impoverishment, neglect and the repression of the oil-producing communities on the youth in the region. The article raises pertinent questions on the violence–development dialectic, drawing upon the context, dynamics, explanations and impact of youth violence in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. It examines the contradictions and injustices existing against the ethnic minorities of the oil-bearing communities in the region, from the centralisation of oil revenues by the federal centre and how these have generated marginalisation and violent conflict in the region. Detailing the repressive responses by the Nigerian state and the forms of violence that have occurred in the region between 1999 and 2007, the article discusses the implications of youth violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta for national development in Nigeria. It provides a context for understanding the connection between youth involvement in violent conflict and its deleterious impact on Nigeria's development. Tapping into issues of ethnicity and high-stake elite politics, it locates violent youth behaviour in the politics of exclusion and proffers suggestions for restoring the trust of marginalised youth as a necessary step toward development and peace in Nigeria.**

## **Introduction**

Although studies on the youth in Nigeria point increasingly to the incidence and impact of oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta, the systematic linkage between repressive state policies and the adoption of violent behaviour as a strategy for articulating group disaffections has been poorly accounted for. This article fills this gap and discusses the need to restore the trust of marginalised youth in the region as a necessary step toward development and peace in the country. Highlighting the impact of conservative elite politics and the oil-centric political economy, this article establishes the implications of youth violence in the region on national development in the country.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the specific histories of youth politics are matters that will not be treated here. Rather, the impact of conservative elite politics and the resort to violent behaviour by the youth in this region, as well as the implications of youth

violence in the region for national development in the country, are the focus of analysis in this article. Conservative elite politics is a distinct feature of Nigerian politics, which accelerates governance failure and fundamentally inhibits state capacity. It involves a cake-sharing psychosis and corruption of state officials, the determination of public policies based on the competition for sectional advantages, the misuse of state resources and lack of accountability in the democratic political process. Just like clientelism (Elischer 2008, pp. 175–201, Omobowale and Olutayo 2007, pp. 425–446, Omobowale 2008, pp. 203–224), neo-patrimonialism (Von Soest 2007, pp. 621–645) and other internal failings of the state in Africa, this feature of Nigerian politics is a debilitating element of the political culture with adverse impacts on development and the entire social structure. Hence the need for strategic policy interventions relevant for improving the operations of the Nigerian state.

The central argument of this article is that although the dimensions of the conflicts in the region are complex and varied, underlying most of these conflicts – especially those that have erupted within the last decade – are the marginalisation and neglect of the youth. These situations have engendered contradictions and tension in the public sphere. They have also underlined an almost pathological context in which allegations of domination and exclusion among individuals and groups have become ceaseless and widespread – leading to struggles and violent conflicts – over oil-based revenues in the region. This has especially been the case since the post-Cold War period.

Violence within this region has taken many forms including ‘attacks against oil firms and Nigerian military personnel protecting oil complexes’ (Ukiwo 2007, pp. 587–610), ‘abduction, hostage taking and hijacking of oil workers and foreign expatriates’ (Suberu 2004, p. 338), ‘the detonation of bombs and other deadly explosives at oil refineries and the premises of multinational oil companies’ (Obi 2008, pp. 417–434), political assassination, youth militancy, vandalism of oil pipelines and other installations as well as state–ethnic, intra- and inter-ethnic communal clashes by criminal gangs and militant groups. What is the history of the violence in the region and how has violent conflict impacted on national development in the country? How has violence affected the fragile foundations of Nigeria’s fledgling democracy? These questions form the core concerns of this article.

Since the 1990s, fundamental changes have taken place within the state in Africa (Ellis 1996, pp. 1–28). The significance of this period for Africa lies in ‘the coincidence of the transformation in the international system with a profound internal crisis of the state in the continent’ (Clapham 1997, pp. 99–100), from which period ‘constructive interaction within African states has remained largely elusive’ (Cooper 2006, p. 184).

The debt crisis of the mid-1980s triggered an economic transformation in most parts of the continent with profound political and social repercussions. From this period, the state has become more and more repressive in the face of endemic economic collapse (Taylor 2007, pp. 7–8), while neoliberal policy prescriptions adopted during the 1980s and 1990s produced neither equitable prosperity nor widespread poverty reduction. This failure spurred the call for a second independence, especially given the disillusionment with deliberative democratic institutions, a development that some noted observers have linked with citizens’ belief that their voices are not being heard by the state and its officials (Hagopian 2005, Mkandawire 2005, Teichman 2009). The major feature characterising Africa from this period onward has been the explosion of internal conflicts and wars over its natural resources. This has undermined democratic development, especially given the forms of politics woven around

revenue allocation – a practice, which simultaneously defines development and underdevelopment for different regions of the world.

The consequences of violent conflicts in Africa have been deleterious to the continent's development and security. In 1996, armed conflicts in Africa accounted for half of all the war-related deaths worldwide, and also resulted in more than 8 million displaced persons, refugees and returnees (Adejumobi 2001, p. 149). Economic growth has continued to elude the continent, while most of the least developed and heavily indebted countries are also located in Africa (World Bank 2000). These situations are not surprising, since countries engaged in war have generally had dismal records of socio-economic growth compared with those at peace.

For virtually all countries in the region, there is either a potential threat of violent political explosion, a raging civil war, a process of negotiated peace and political order, or an immediate post-war rehabilitation process going on. (Adejumobi 2001, p. 149)

As Rotimi T. Suberu (2000) has observed:

Although these conflicts have long been a feature of the African political landscape, they have recently acquired a new visibility and stridency owing largely to the declining capacity and viability of the centralised African state, the collapse of the continent's economies, the demonstration effect from the explosion of ethnic nationality passions in the former communist states, and growing external (donor) pressures for economic and political liberalisation. (p. 123)

Several contextual analyses of violent conflict in the Niger Delta have been undertaken by scholars. The dynamics of a political economy of youth politics as a form of collaboration and resistance have been critically examined (see Olurode 2000, pp. 1–7, Adejumobi 2003, pp. 227–260, Momoh 2003, pp. 200–226, Ya'u 2003, pp. 178–199, Christiansen *et al.* 2006, pp. 9–31, Obi 2006b, pp. 1–25). The operations of the youth, their organisation and descent from peaceful protests to violent resistance from the 1990s onward have also received extensive treatment in the literature. The complex question of how members of this region have utilised the 13 per cent of the revenue derived from oil exploration has been equally examined by scholars in other works (see Suberu 2004, Omotola 2007). In January 2006, militants belonging to the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) attacked naval officers protecting a Shell complex near Warri, a major oil city located in the western part of the volatile Niger Delta, and subsequently claimed responsibility for an explosion on a Shell pipeline around the same area (Ukiwo 2007, p. 587). On 29 April 2006, MEND detonated a car bomb close to the Warri oil refinery, and later abducted nine Chinese National Petroleum Company contract workers who were conducting seismic work for the Nigerian Agip Oil Corporation at Sagbama, Bayelsa State (Obi 2008, p. 418). MEND's involvement in insurgent and pirate activities thus reflects the latest transformation of hitherto peaceful protests into volatile anti-state and anti-oil-company mobilisations in the region.

Resulting from a complex mix of economic and sociological factors, violent conflict in the Niger Delta has slowed down the pace of economic development in the region. It has crippled oil production and revenue generation in the country. It has legitimised previously marginalised armed groups as 'a source of leverage in negotiating peace agreements' (Ismail 2008, p. 259). It has also informed the development of sub-national conceptions of ethnic citizenship (Joseph 2003, pp. 159–170). The relationship between

violence and development in the region thus needs to be carefully examined vis-à-vis the orientations and values of governance and their impact on state–society relations, especially citizenship. This helps future studies in uplifting the discourse on the historiography and political economy of violence in Nigeria. This article is an initiative in this direction. It begins with a conceptual note on ethnic minorities and the youths in Nigeria. This is given the foreground of a discussion of the historical origins of their marginalisation in Nigeria, particularly given the context of a skewed federal structure in the country. Analyses of the elite origins of youth violence in the Niger Delta and an assessment of the impact of violence in the region on national development in the country are followed by the conclusion, which summarises the findings of the article.

## **Ethnic minorities in Nigerian history and politics: a conceptual note**

Minorities have been defined as culturally and relatively cohesive groups that occupy positions of numerical inferiority and actual or potential socio-political subordination vis-à-vis other cultural sections in a political community. Based on socio-economic and other considerations, Rotimi T. Suberu (1999, p. 118) and Ted R. Gurr (1993, pp. 15–23) have classified and cross-classified minorities into *ethno-nationalists*, *indigenous peoples*, *ethno-classes*, *militants*, *politicised sects* and *communal contenders*.

In Africa, minority conflicts have often been animated by resource competition because ethno-territorial constituencies have been the key beneficiaries of state allocational decisions, especially since such sectionally-based local or regional administrations constitute important agencies for distributing economic benefits, and also because rival sectional elites find it expedient to mobilise ethnic solidarities in their competition for power and privileges. Related to this, expanded educational opportunities and socio-economic mobility facilitate the rise of new minority elites who are astute at giving corresponding expressions to communal grievances and mobilising their communities in response to changing political situations. Finally, minority tensions are sometimes inflamed by the sheer incapacity of political institutions to adjust to peculiar historical factors which have shaped the evolution of such political systems. Nigeria's history no doubt confirms these postulations (Arowosegbe 2007, pp. 7–12).

One perspective on minority politics emphasises the disadvantages that minorities suffer in the hands of a majority group that controls the instruments of power, enabled by the political process through which both majority and minority groups are governed. Another underlines the monopoly of power by a dominant minority, which it achieves either by subverting democratic processes or more usually by cultivating aristocratic principles of governance (Ekeh 1996, p. 33). Clearly, Nigerian history has been confronted by both types of relationships between majority and minority groups in the exercise of power.

While dominance by majority ethnic groups over minority ethnic groups has had special resonance since about 1951 to 1954, the period marking the onset of the democratic processes that accompanied decolonisation, Nigeria's earlier history across several centuries was distinguished by examples of dominant minorities that exploited and ruled majorities over whom they exercised substantial power. Such dominance by minority ethnic groups over majorities has also left behind a bitter residue for modern politics and has besmirched the relations between the former dominant minorities and the groups they ruled in the past. There is therefore an

active relationship between the two forms of the distribution of power among the minority and majority groups in Nigerian history and politics (Ekeh 1996, p. 34). On this relationship, Eghosa E. Osaghae (2002) stresses that:

Emergent Nigerian realities transformed powerful pre-colonial groups such as the Bini and Ijaw (who in fact lorded it over several Ibo sub-groups under King Jaja) into minority groups. Such transformations changed the complexion of the national question in important ways. (p. 223)

This article does not intend to analyse instances of political domination and exploitation of majority ethnic groups by minority ethnic groups in Nigerian history; nevertheless, it is contended, following Osaghae (2002) and Ekeh (1996), that the eventual emergence and description of certain ethnic groups as minorities in the present times in Nigeria are a creation of the British colonialists. By locating the argument within this historical context, it is possible to establish how modern political exigencies in terms of complex power relations were shaped and influenced by the legacies of the colonial past. For example, the term 'minorities' was used in Nigeria for the first time in the 1950s to refer to newly disadvantaged entities and groups that emerged from the country's constitutional reforms, and it emerged from the political processes that prepared Nigeria for independence from British imperial rule in the tense years between 1952 and 1960. During the constitutional changes that began between 1951 and 1954, the existing political culture was challenged by the regrouping of Nigeria's 24 provinces into three political regions, the North, East and West, each with central powers over the provinces placed under it. This centralisation of political power impacted significantly on the ensuing political participation (Osadolor 2002, pp. 31–45). The most serious impacts were the emergence of ethnic power blocs based exclusively on the dominance of the three major ethnic groups, namely the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West, with allegations of majority domination by the minority ethnic groups within each region and the differentiation of ethnic groups based in each case on their access to power.

Consequently, given their demographic advantage, the Igbo and Yoruba became formidable political power holders in southern Nigeria while other ethnic groups, including the historically dominant Benin, became minority ethnic groups. In the North, these developments coincided with the astutely firm determination of the Fulani aristocracy to expand its control beyond the territories of the conquered Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba–Ilorin to the Tiv and other ethnic groups. The resulting resentments from the disadvantaged political minorities and the abrasive dominance by the newly empowered majorities fuelled the turbulence of southern politics. It also led to considerable turmoil in the North. This is the context of emergence of ethnic minorities in Nigerian history and politics (see also Ezera 1960).

## **Understanding the youth in Nigeria**

Ranging between 15 and 40 years, Nigeria's population is largely youthful.<sup>2</sup> The youth is a social category of early adulthood, but also shaped and limited by societal values, levels of dependency and agency (Durham 2000, pp. 115–116). Given the influences of social institutions and values, the physical, psychological and socio-cultural attributes of the youths develop into specific cultural orientations and behavioural patterns, which reflect the prevalent values obtainable in the society. The most evident feature of youth culture in this regard is their struggle for identity, inclusion and survival as they negotiate their way into adulthood (Wyn and White 1996). As will be

argued, Nigeria's youth policy and the questions of citizenship, 'federal character' and the redistribution of resources from the centre to the states have all added to the feelings of alienation and social exclusion on the part of the nation's youth.

The economic devastation and deindustrialisation that resulted from the structural adjustment programmes and endemic state crisis of the 1980s and 1990s contributed immensely to the transformation of the youth in the Niger Delta. This has also been compounded by the distributive pressures, repressive and other practices among state officials that valorised pillage and banalised violence in the region. For the youths, the impacts of such developments have been dire, particularly in terms of poverty and unemployment, and have predisposed many of them to violent political action against the perceived sources of their deprivation.

Several transformations have also taken place in youth culture in the region. First, popular struggles by civil society groups against multinational oil companies have been extended and have taken the forms of anti-state mobilisations. Second, agitations previously limited to developmental issues now include political demands for restructuring, resource control and the resolution of the national question through the convocation of national conferences based on ethno-regional representations. Third is the emergence of youth militancy with volatile demands and ultimatums that have elevated the scale of confrontation and violence against multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state (Ikelegbe 2006, pp. 83–122). In most of these situations, civil and communal conflicts in the region have been mismanaged by the state, and have been transformed into armed struggles conducted by alienated and desperate youths. They have also been associated with economic crimes such as sea piracy, pipeline vandalism and oil pilferage. The conflict in the region has thus worsened, given the neglect and repressive dispositions by the state to the plight of the youths. Therefore, this emphasises the need to examine the changing role of the elite in predatory rule in Nigeria as well as conflict management in the region. This is examined in the next section.

## **Elite origins of youth violence in the Niger Delta**

### **Nigeria's elite politics**

Three elements underpin conservative elite politics in Nigeria. First, the values that drive elite politics conflict with the demands of national development. This is clear enough in (1) the choice of federal designs; (2) the interpretation and use of basic federal institutions and principles such as federal character, the creation of new localities or states; and (3) the rotation or zoning of major political appointments or offices. The federal character principle, for example, was first introduced in the 1979 Constitution as a form of affirmative action to ensure that the composition of government and any of its agencies was not dominated by persons from a few states, or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups. It sought to ensure that the conduct of government business recognised the diversity of the peoples within any area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all such peoples (Aiyede 2009, pp. 249–269). In practice, however, it has been hijacked and misinterpreted severally as a means of distributing federal amenities and opportunities such as industries, political appointments, public employment, public universities and so on. The misinterpretation of this edict has been demonstrated in the failures of virtually all major national industries, especially the steel industry, the rail system, telecommunications, electricity and the Nigerian airways (Aiyede 2009, p. 255).

Similarly, the policy of creating new localities and states was first initiated in 1962, when the Midwestern Region was carved out of the Western Region to allay minority fears of domination. It was also used to undermine the secessionist bid of Biafra, when General Yakubu Gowon created 12 states out of the existing four regions in 1967. Subsequently, the creation of states and local governments has become an instrument of patronage and political control. In these circumstances, the creation of new localities and states became a channel of advancement for regional elites who occupy, or at least determine the occupants of, expanded bureaucratic-political positions resulting from such exercises. This way, given the distributive pressures by the elites, institutions created to accommodate the country's diversity have been hijacked and channelled towards corruption and waste, thereby undermining economic rationality in critical centres of decision-making (Aiyede 2009, p. 255).

Second, the structural root of conservative elite politics in Nigeria is the bifurcated citizenship that confounds commitment to government accountability by the citizens. This mode of citizenship promotes opportunism, which enables the elites to indulge in political corruption without concerted opposition from the people. Consequently federalism, adopted as a constitutional design for allaying the fears of domination and ensuring balanced representation in Nigeria's polycentric society, has been converted into a means for sharing federal revenues, and also for distributing federal offices as political booties in the context of a rentier state.

The third element is that given the nature of politics in Nigeria, which is underscored by a high degree of corruption, low level of public accountability and poor service delivery, politics is not necessarily about the productive transformation of society, but rather about the accumulation of resources. It is no wonder then that Nigeria has always been poorly rated by Transparency International's index on corruption. Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) estimated that US\$380 billion of public funds were stolen or squandered by public officials between 1960 and 1999 (Aiyede 2009, p. 256). Approximately US\$12.2 billion in oil revenues were alleged to have disappeared during the administration of General Ibrahim B. Babangida between 1985 and 1993. His successor, the late General Sani Abacha, is believed to have personally stolen between one and three billion US dollars during his four-year rule (Human Rights Watch 2007, pp. 16–17). Recently, the House of Representatives Committee on Power and Steel revealed that US\$16 billion invested in the National Integrated Power projects between 2006 and 2007 was squandered by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo (Aiyede 2009, p. 256).

The Minister for Health, Professor Adenike Grange, was sacked by the Umaru Musa Yar' Adua government in early 2008 for disobeying the directive of the President that all unspent budgetary allocations for the 2007 fiscal year be returned to the government treasury. This brought to public awareness the fact that unspent budgetary allocations had usually been shared by civil servants and politicians in the past. Approximately US\$4 billion were returned as unspent budgetary allocation for the fiscal year 2007 alone (Ohu 2008, p. 1). Most of the stolen funds end up in foreign banks as capital flight.

These values have defined a problematic context for state–society relations in the country. Consequently, indigeneity, originally meant for preserving the sanctity of cultural identities within various traditional institutions, is now a critical factor for accessing opportunities within the state, especially, at the individual level. An individual may be born and live all her or his life in a certain state, pay taxes to the state and speak the local language, yet may be barred from enjoying state opportunities

because s/he is not ethnically indigenous to that state. The more robust the opportunities in view, the more vehement the discrimination and opposition against the non-indigenes. Underlining this practice is the understanding that public offices in the context of the centralised resources received by the government of a locality or state constitute the share of the national cake accruing to the indigenes of that area, and are therefore reserved only for the indigenes of that state. Non-indigenous residents must thus return to their states of origin to access their own share of the national cake. As Emmanuel R. Aiyede (2009) has observed:

The practice of allocating a major chunk of the shared revenue on an equal basis among states serves as an incentive to state elites to mobilise and clamour for new states and localities in order to expand access to the attendant opportunities. Public resources in the states and localities are then squandered by the political elite indigenes of a state or locality. In the context of this mobilisation to support efforts to obtain more resources from the centre and preoccupation with efforts to ensure nonindigenes do not enjoy too great a share of state resources, public accountability and state effectiveness carry little importance among the general population of indigenes. Some individuals complain of general failures in public service provision, but many look forward to a chance to get into some position and take their own share of public resources. (p. 263)

For youth groups in the Niger Delta, this translates into a double basis for exploitation and marginalisation. On the one hand, oil revenue, largely generated from the region, is hijacked as 'national revenue', so that citizens from the region are not able to lay claims to those resources deposited in their localities, even as indigenes of the region. On the other hand, besides their disproportionate access to oil revenue, citizens from this region are denied the opportunities accruing to other states of the federation if they are not indigenous to those states. While these practices serve the acquisitive interests of the elites, they have been politically destructive. They also underline the basis for violent conflict in the Niger Delta. Of all the challenges confronting the Nigerian state since its return to civilian rule in May 1999, the Niger Delta crisis has been the most volatile. This crisis is linked with the character of the Nigerian state and its limited autonomy, especially given the context of governance failure and the cake-sharing psychosis of its elites (Ake 1985a, 1985b).

Although neither state collapse nor subversion has occurred in Nigeria since its post-colonial history, the Niger Delta offers an instance in which the legitimacy of the state is being challenged by anti-state mobilisations, which increasingly accuse the state of not adequately representing their interests. While such mobilisations appear to be similar to the country's civil war experience, they are also fundamentally different, for, unlike the civil war, which was premised on a secessionist bid by the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, the Niger Delta struggle is anchored on agitations for 'resource control', 'true federalism', 'self-determination' and an end to decades of 'economic exploitation' and 'internal colonialism' by multinational capital and the majority ethnic groups through the operations of a skewed federal structure.<sup>3</sup> The Niger Delta question is therefore best understood as having many dimensions. First, it feeds into the predatory and rentier character of the Nigerian state; second, it is related to the questions of rights, citizenship and the national question;<sup>4</sup> third, it is linked to the politics of elite aggrandisement, which underlines the 'non-developmental use of the country's revenues' through 'the prebendal appropriation of public offices for private gains' (Joseph 2003, p. 162).

Given the centrality of oil in Nigeria's political economy, violent conflict in the region has serious implications for the country's viability (Ake 1996b, p. 34). This perspective



explains the weaknesses in the country's political economy, the imperatives of regime survival by self-seeking politicians, the pervasiveness of social injustices, the permeating of public institutions by endemic corruption, the fragmentation and breakdown of social trust, infrastructural and institutional decay, and the circulation of major political positions within a narrow spectrum of elites (Joseph 2003, pp. 162–163). They also underline the regressive dynamics of governance, institution-building, state-formation and economic performance in the country 'running in reverse and handicapping development' (Joseph 2003, p. 163, De Waal 2003). It is the politics woven around resource allocation in the country that engenders the legacy of conflict through the competition for oil revenues by ethnically-defined constituencies (Williams 1980, p. 69), together with 'the politics of neglect and repression' adopted by the state in its responses to agitations for redress by members of the region (Cooper 2006, p. 174). Claude Ake (1996b) captures the situation with disarming simplicity:

What is at issue is nothing less than the viability of Nigeria, as oil is the real power and the stuff of politics in Nigeria as well as what holds the country in a fragile dialectical unity of self-seeking. (p. 34)

The 1990s witnessed a renewal of violent uprising by the youths and ethnic minorities against the state and oil-prospecting companies in the region. Unlike the agitation by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the early 1990s, which was limited to the Ogoni, the present context signals the implosion of violent conflicts, which have been endemic throughout the region – almost on the scale of an insurgency – with telling effects on national development. The Niger Delta crisis is at present the greatest challenge to Nigerian federalism as a design for managing ethno-territorial cleavages and other fiscal challenges (Ejobowah 2000, pp. 29–47, David-West 1994, p. 33). The confirmations to this assertion have been cumulative and compelling in the country's recent history.

### **Protest and violence**

The foremost expression of protest by the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta against the Nigerian state took place under colonial rule against the creation of the 1946 three-region structure by the British colonialists. The imbalances, which resulted from that historic arrangement, have been sources of controversy and crucial determinants of the structure of federal power that goes to the centre and the regions.<sup>5</sup> In response, although the colonial government appointed a commission of enquiry in September 1957 to look into the protests and the means of allaying them, and although the commission confirmed the existence of what it called some genuine fears, the colonial state fell short of recommending any form of self-determination (Nigeria 1958). Similar responses have characterised the dispositions by the post-colonial state to minorities' agitations in the post-colonial period. In the early 1990s, in response to MOSOP's demands,<sup>6</sup> the then military government in Nigeria crushed Ogoni resistance through the repression of Ogoni protest and the trial and hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP activists in November 1995 (Obi 2006a, pp. 96–98). In doing this, it failed to stem the tide of protests and violence in the region, as the communities therein confronted oil companies and one another in bitter conflict. In December 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) released the Kaiama Declaration in which it claimed ownership of the oil in Ijawland and asked all oil companies' contractors and staff to withdraw from Ijawland by 30 December 1998, pending the resolution of the question of 'resource ownership' and the control of the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta (Kaiama Declaration 1998).

In response, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the region and deployed thousands of soldiers, naval troops and anti-riot policemen to protect oil installations and investments, while also dispersing Ijaw protesters. During the violent exchanges which ensued, some of the protesters and others suspected of being IYC members or supporters were arrested, while a handful of individuals were killed (Obi 2006a, pp. 96–98).

In May 1999, Chevron Texaco allegedly transported Nigerian military personnel in its helicopters from which they shot and killed two protesters on Chevron Texaco's Parabe oil platform (Obi 2006a, pp. 96–98; Chevron 2008). In addition, in November 1999, federal troops razed the oil-producing town of Odi to the ground for failing to produce a criminal gang suspected of murdering seven policemen. In the process, about 2,000 inhabitants of Odi lost their lives while several others were displaced.<sup>7</sup> As Obi (2006a, p. 96) observed, 'the operation at Odi fitted a regular pattern in which the Nigerian state deployed maximum force to deter and contain threats to oil interests and oil companies in the region'. Far from assuaging conflict, such responses have only militarised the region, with the escalation of violent conflict proceeding along communal lines. The consequences of all these have been grievous for the oil industry and also for national development.<sup>8</sup>

## **Violence and national development in Nigeria: an impact assessment**

From the 1970s, oil revenue replaced agricultural produce as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. This has largely come from the oil-bearing states of the Niger Delta (Obi 2002, p. 102). Covering nine out of the 36 states, 185 out of the 774 local government areas and occupying a total land area of 75,000 square kilometres, Nigeria's Niger Delta is the world's third largest wetland. The 2006 population census shows that 30 million out of the country's 140 million people reside in the region (Nigeria 2006). While oil and gas have accounted for about 40 per cent of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP), nearly all of Nigeria's oil and gas reserves are located in the region. Between 2000 and 2004, oil and gas accounted for 75 per cent of the total government revenues and 97 per cent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings. The region is therefore very critical to Nigeria's fiscal viability and the global energy sector (Ukiwo 2009, p. 1–4).

Unfortunately, the inflow of oil revenues was not used to further the necessary growth in other sectors. In spite of all such programmes as the 'green revolution', 'back to land', and the 'structural adjustment programme' introduced by the government to boost agricultural production in the 1970s and 1980s, the share of agriculture in GDP fell to 37 per cent in 1991 and 41 per cent in 1996 (Uche and Uche 2004). Nigeria continued to depend on imported plant and machinery in the manufacturing sector, while capacity utilisation remained below 60 per cent between the 1990s and 2000s (see Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria 1999–2003).

Given its perpetual dependence on oil-based revenue, and the harsh impact of the structural adjustment programme, the Nigerian economy nose-dived into a deep crisis. There was de-industrialisation, excessive pilfering of public resources and a dependence on the petty commodity sector for social reproduction. The fiscal crisis and adjustment measures introduced to cope with the recession led to further repression, especially as the disaffected groups tried to resist them. The social contract came

under considerable stress, while pressures for democratisation intensified (Bangura 1991, 1992, Mustapha 1992).

Initially, as the federal government collected mining rents and royalties, it paid a sum equal to 50 per cent of the proceeds to each region from which the accruing royalties were derived. The Distributable Pool Account, shared among the regions, received 30 per cent of all such proceeds. The federal government collected customs duties on behalf of the regions, while each region paid the cost of collecting the duties proportionate to its share in the proceeds of those duties. However, between 1966 and 1979 and between 1984 and 1999, the periods marking endemic military presence in Nigerian politics, the revenue allocation formulas were changed several times on the initiative of the federal government, sometimes on the advice of a technical committee set up for that purpose. These changes reduced the size of the federally collected revenues going to the regions of origin and arbitrarily increased the share of revenue going into the Distributable Pool Account. The states were denied access to the revenue from the Distributable Pool Account on the basis of derivation. As Emmanuel R. Aiyede (2009, p. 258) has argued, this was possible since the major oil-producing communities were minority ethnic groups. This way, emergent and subsequent policy choices failed to favour the oil-producing communities, especially given their relative lack of strength in the ensuing political power game. This led to the political marginalisation of minority ethnic groups. It also led to their loss of ownership rights vis-à-vis the natural resources in their territories.

Although oil revenue has greatly increased Nigeria's overall income since the 1970s, this has mostly been diverted into private pockets. With its dismal record of economic growth, Nigeria has moved from a promise of rapid development by the 1970s into one of the most debt-ridden countries in Africa by the end of the twentieth century. The World Bank's Federal Public Expenditure Review published in 1995 claimed that approximately US\$200 billion was invested in Nigeria between 1973 and 1993, with very little development to show for it (Aiyede 2009, p. 254). Oil revenue accruing to the country has only served to transform the Nigerian economy into a mono-mineral economy, the state into a rentier state, and the population into consumers rather than producers. With the expansion of the oil sector, the state in Nigeria has become more partisan than neutral – itself a focal point of very normless and ruthless competition. The resultant disillusionment thus informed the shift away from how to build the state's capacity, to a perspective informed mainly by an increasing evidence of its incapacitations and imminent subversion (Agbaje 1991, pp. 723–727).

On balance, (1) the lopsidedness of Nigeria's federal structure, (2) the contradictions and injustices inherent within its fiscal operations, together with (3) the destructive disposition of elite politics in the country have defined marginalisation for the oil-rich region. This is, no doubt, the major basis for the agitation by the youth and other groups in the region. Marginalisation thus explains the disposition to militancy, restiveness and violent conflict by the youths in the region.

Being a most flexible category, the youth have mobilised to contest power and pose an alternate moral platform representing those marginalised by the existing dominant power relations. In this connection, the role of Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, a former student activist and Niger Delta revolutionary leader against the Nigerian state and Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) in February 1966, is a useful case in understanding the involvement of the youth in the region

in resource-based agitations.<sup>9</sup> The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by the martyred Ken Saro-Wiwa in the 1990s was also a call for resource control. The struggles by the Ijaw National Congress (INC),<sup>10</sup> led by Chris Ekiyor (who recently replaced Kimse Okoko<sup>11</sup>) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) were central in proclaiming the Kaiama Declaration in 1998. There is also the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF).<sup>12</sup> Threatening to go to war if its demands were not granted, its struggle represents one of the latest calls by members of the region on the federal government for self-determination and the reconstruction of a just federation.<sup>13</sup>

The Niger Delta's immersion into violent conflict has had harsh consequences for the Nigerian state. As at 2003, approximately 100,000 barrels of oil, estimated at a value of about US\$2.8 million, were reported to have been stolen on a daily basis from the region (Ikelegbe 2004). These amounted to approximately 36.5 million barrels of oil throughout the year, which would also have yielded an estimated US\$1.022 billion. Apart from bunkering and other crime-related activities, the Nigerian state lost about US\$6.8 billion in 2004 in oil and gas due to the disruptive and perennial crisis in the region. Oil exploration and production have also stagnated, leading to distortions and instabilities in national economic planning. This is because violence within the region since 1997 has taken the form of seizure, occupation and stoppage of oil facilities and operations (Ikelegbe 2004, p. 11). Although seizures by militant Ijaw, Ikwerre, Egi and Isoko youths have occurred repeatedly since 1998, they have been more difficult to control since 2003. In December 1998, youths organised by Isoko National Youth Movement shut down five oil flow stations. Between December 1998 and January 1999, the Ijaw Youth Council led other youth militias in a massive shutdown of oil facilities throughout the Ijaw region of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States. In July 1999, the Egi Youth Federation disrupted the 58 Elf Petroleum Company facilities, while in October 1999 the Ikwerre Convention occupied the Wilbross premises in Port Harcourt.

Militant youths from Ijaw, Ilaje and other ethnic groups in Delta and Rivers States have seized, occupied and disrupted oil production in numerous incidents (Abugu 2000, p. 7). Often, staff of such facilities are held hostage, while their facilities are occupied for several weeks, with disruptions lasting for months, especially in Warri. In recent times, even offshore oil facilities have become accessible to militant youths. In April 2002, militant youths in Ondo State seized an offshore oil rig at Ilaje and held 88 oil workers hostage (Bello 2002). In Akwa Ibom State, it took the intervention of the Nigerian navy to foil the attempts by militant youths to seize and blow up all the oil wells and offshore oil platforms. At different times in 2003, ethnic militias captured and occupied most of the facilities belonging to Chevron, Elf, Shell and Texaco in the Warri areas. Ijaw militias severally threatened to destroy facilities seized during their confrontations with the military in pursuance of resource demands (Okafor 2003).

Kidnapping and hostage taking of oil workers and state security personnel are some of the dimensions assumed by violence in the region. More than a dozen British nationals were kidnapped in 2002 and later released unharmed (Osamgbi 2003). In June 2000, 24 Chevron staff, including two expatriates, were kidnapped by armed youths in the Escravos area of the Benin River in Delta State, only to be released with the intervention of community leaders (Abugu and Amorighoye 2000). Even though there was no demand for any ransom, these youths took away one barge, two speedboats and a tugboat (Abugu and Amorighoye 2000).

Abduction and kidnapping have also become rampant since 2003. In November 2003, militant youths seized several oil barges and crew members together with their military escorts, while in February 2004, a naval officer, three Nigerian oil workers and a barge belonging to Shell were abducted by militant youths (Omonobi and Okhonmina 2003a, Okhonmina 2004). In addition, in November 2003, during some of the confrontational encounters with members of the security agencies in the communities and waterways, 15 military personnel of the Joint Security Task Force were dispossessed of their AK-47 rifles by Ijaw youths around the Burutu River in Delta State while guarding oil barges (Omonobi and Okhonmina 2003a, Okhonmina 2004).

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) indicated that there were 114 line breaks in the Port Harcourt and Warri areas of the distribution network between April and May 2000. In 2003, militant youths seized, occupied and vandalised several of Shell's flow stations. In April 2003, militant Ijaw youths blew up the Escravos pipelines that supplied crude oil to the Warri Refining Petrochemicals Company. In the process, they disrupted oil production for several months (Nzeshi 2003). In 2004, about 13 armed youths were arrested for vandalising Agip's crude oil pipelines (Ighodaro 2004).

In Delta State, there were kidnappings by militant youths in July 2003 and November 2003 in which ransom demands were made (Okpowo 2003, p. 21 and Okhonmina 2003). Such kidnappings for ransom demands have also been extended to offshore oil facilities. In April 2002, a group of militant youths from Ekeremor Local Government Area in Bayelsa State invaded an oil-service boat, Gulf Fleet (GF)-102 servicing the Trident-6 oilrigs on the EA offshore field of Shell, and took hostage ten crew members from whom they asked for a ransom of N3.1 m (Nzeshi 2002). On Friday 23 April 2003, seven local and expatriate workers and security personnel were kidnapped and murdered by militant youths at the Chevron swamp location along the Benin Rivers (Ahiuna-Young 2004). The increasing trend of these phenomena confirms the existence of kidnapping syndicates and warlords to which some militias are loyal. Some such syndicates were implicated in the kidnap of seven expatriate staff of an oil-servicing company at Bedero, along the Udu River in November 2003 (Omonobi and Okhonmina 2003b).

There have also been records of pirate activities. For example, all the waterways in the region have, sadly, become dens of bandits and sea pirates. This is particularly so in Bayelsa and Delta States, as well as the River Nun, Forcados River and Tungbo Creek. Passenger boats are attacked, occupants are robbed and sometimes killed or maimed. While their targets are usually the traders that ply the waterways, some of these pirates even dress in military fatigues as camouflage to ease their ambush of travellers' boats. These incidents are too numerous to be mentioned in detail. However, as many as 25 pirate groups have been known to attack passenger boats up to 2004 (Okhonmina 2004). These include groups between Sapele and Obaghoru in 2000 (Abugu and Amorighoye 2000), between Burutu and Ogbé Ijaw in the Warri-South waterways in 2003, and groups around Pere-Otugbene (Abia 2003). The communal-ethnic clashes which occurred in these areas in the period under review have also swollen the numbers of the pirate groups who, apart from criminal reasons, parade and attack ethnic indigenes and militias that they perceive as hostile in the waterways (Ikelegbe 2004, p. 15).

Bunkering and armed confrontations are other negative occurrences in the region. Militant youths and pirate groups armed and paid by illegal oil syndicates operate

as escorts, guards and sometimes collaborators in illegal oil trading. There are various estimates on the quantity of theft of crude oil stolen with the aid of these armed gangs and militant youths. Pirates and militias have been known to attack military personnel, police and armed forces' boats with many fatalities and casualties (Nzeshi 2003). Militant youths and the state's security agencies have sometimes fought for several days on the streets of Warri, in Ijaw and Itsekiri communities, and in the waterways of the western Niger Delta. In June 2004, hundreds of security forces personnel were reported to have clashed with rival ethnic militias in the Ogbakiri, Buguma and Tobia communities in Rivers State with casualties on all sides (Ikelegbe 2004, p. 16). These situations have made security the biggest problem in the region. As Oronto Douglass (2004) observes:

Security is the biggest issue in the Niger Delta after oil and gas. It is an issue that has dominated the political, social and economic spaces of the region and Nigeria especially these past twelve years, and the domination is likely to continue for ten or more years before a near-acceptable solution is found. (p. 1)

No one who has followed the fortunes and misfortunes of the Niger Delta will deny that all is not well in this region of promise that had an average of 20 deaths per day through oil violence in 1999, and approximately 50 deaths a day in 2004. It should be added that the casualties do not include deaths occasioned by poverty, old age, industrial, vehicular or motor-boat accidents and, very recently, politically inspired gang and cult wars of supremacy.

Regrettably, responses by multinational oil-prospecting corporations and the Nigerian state to youth violence and agitation by minorities in the region have not helped matters. As indicated, far from quelling the conflicts, such repressive responses have rather often compounded them.<sup>14</sup> Repression has therefore led to anger, resentment and ultimately, violent conflicts, in the form of endemic armed revolt in the region.

## Conclusion

As the article has tried to show, the Niger Delta crisis is a daunting challenge undermining nation-building and state-consolidation in Nigeria. This has particularly been the case since 1999, the period marking the country's return to civil democratic rule, after 15 years of endemic military presence in its politics, from 1984 to 1999. Since this period, the country has been plagued by violent conflicts, litigations on fiscal over-centralisation and a plethora of constitutional crises, among other pathologies, that underwrite the constitutional and structural constraints of Nigerian federalism as a design for accommodating ethno-territorial cleavages in this notoriously complex and divided society.

In order to erase the historic feelings of exclusion by the youths and other groups in the region, the punitive plights of the people should be assuaged by both the federal government and the states in the region. Existing fiscal measures should be reconceptualised and redefined in order to adequately accommodate the interests of these aggrieved populations. There is the need to redefine state-society relations in a manner that links fiscal federal relations to citizenship duties, obligations and privileges, which in turn further positive leadership and political responsibility at all levels. The Nigerian state should resort to compromise and dialogue, on a

continuous and inclusive basis, with all stakeholders and representatives of these groups. It should also endeavour to avoid conflict by being routinely sensitive to the plights and rights of the youths and other groups who seem weak (Ake 1995).

The Nigerian state should work towards approving the recommendations of the region's stakeholders, particularly the recommendations by the technical committee on the Niger Delta, on the increase of the derivation revenue allocation principle from 13 to a minimum of 25 per cent. Similarly, the federal government should review the corporate social responsibilities of all multinational corporations with a view to encouraging integrated and sustainable community development initiatives (Ukiwo 2009, p. 4). Governments at all levels should recognise and respect the communities and civic groups in the region as partners in the struggles against injustices and under-development. The rights of the youths in the region should also be respected and upheld by the state. The federal government, the states in the region and the oil companies should put in place concrete programmes for integrating alienated youths into the economic life of the region. Efforts should also be made to improve upon the resource-generating potentials of other states of the federation as a way of reducing the mono-cultural dependence on oil revenue in the country.

Needless to say, the successful implementation of these policy recommendations requires the existence of a strong, development-oriented, bureaucratic state. This underscores the need for the structural transformation of the Nigerian state as a prerequisite for sustainable democratic development in the country. Although institutionally viable, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and other recent initiatives introduced by the federal government *cannot be a substitute* for a consensual-deliberative democratic process, a judicious constitutional framework, institutionalised socio-cultural consensus, economic development and a system of rule of law that actually delivers justice and social progress to the ordinary people (Horowitz 2006, pp. 125–137, Suberu 2008, p. 483). These are critical components of the democratic legitimating process in the country. They also underline the significance of working towards the progressive transformation of governance and public administration in the country with a view to rekindling socio-economic progress for the ordinary people. These will go a long way to restoring the trust of marginalised youths and other disenchanted groups in the region to the Nigerian state.

As the region's experience and struggles illustrate, nationalism and political obligations generally, can be neither compelling nor guaranteed, if the state remains – as it is in Nigeria – entirely insensitive to the social needs of its citizens. In this regard, the resource-based conflicts in Nigeria's Niger Delta cannot be resolved outside the framework of a truly democratic state; they cannot be resolved without addressing the citizenship, indigeneity and nationality questions. Such conflicts also cannot be satisfactorily resolved without first resolving the knotty contradictions underlining the country's lop-sided federal structure

The actualisation of the Niger Delta expectation is a complex matter requiring a sustained political struggle, without which members of the region will hardly assert their interests effectively on the state's agenda. This is obvious enough in Nigeria. After all, law making itself is a complex political struggle. Critical thinkers must not lose sight of this fact, for it is precisely through their involvement in such struggles – in the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) and other organs of the state – that Claude Ake, Kimse Okoko and other scholars acquired their organicity as socially relevant intellectuals in the region and beyond. For members of this region, the

struggle against internal economic domination through the operations of a skewed federal structure is a major part of the second independence struggle.

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## Endnotes

1. For a thought-provoking discussion of national development and the possible role of the Nigerian youth therein, see Olurode (2000). While development is actually a multi-faceted process, here reference is made to economic development. This article raises relevant questions on the violence–development dialectic in the region and assesses the impact of violent conflicts on the prospects for development both in the region and Nigeria at large. In doing this, the connection between violence – measured in terms of the disruptive impact of the volatile activities embarked upon by the youth in the region and development – measured in terms of the difference between the actual and potential access to basic social services, economic growth and human resource development on a sustainable basis, is critical. Attention is focused on the question of access to education and health care services, housing, motorable road networks, and the eradication of gender discrimination, inequalities, poverty and unemployment. For the region, sustainable development is defined in terms of its capacity for absorbing global changes while also seeking to institutionalise development programmes determined by local needs, and which respond to critical questions of long-term considerations that are people-centred, rather than merely catering for the interests of global capital. While not discountenancing the weight of external factors and forces, this article argues that the dimmed prospects for development in the region are fallouts of the cake-sharing psychosis of the elite, the skewed nature of Nigerian federalism, and the perpetual dependence on the global market – a practice which underlines the lack of control over the region’s resources by the citizens in the region. This perspective explains the marginalisation and resort to violence by the youth in the region.

2. The definition and specialisation of the youth as a demographic category are broad, culture-specific and situational. The categorisation here is based on my observation of the age bracket of the youths involved in the violent conflict in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. By ‘violence’, it means neither structural violence, which is a property of social institutions and which denies the individual the possibility of self-realisation, nor psychological violence, which seeks to debase the self. Rather, it refers to ‘direct violence’, which, directed against authority, is variously described as rebellion, revolt or even revolution, as modalities of protest against repressive structures of the state. As a modality of action, violence neither enjoys a peculiar logical status, nor a sacrosanct or superior status. It is also not self-justificatory. The resort to its deployment in the particular example in the Niger Delta is understood against the backdrop of the exhaustion of other peaceful avenues of addressing historic and continuing injustices in the region. The fast emerging dialectics in the region is thus one of dissent, protest and change, or, to use Dudley’s (1975, p. 15) terms, ‘scepticism, anomaly and paradigm elaboration’. By ‘dialectics’, I do not have in mind a doctrine of logico-historical inevitability. Rather, ‘dialectics’ is used in its older and more ordinary sense in which the word simply means a process of doubt and confirmation, of trial and error, of change and interchange, of anomaly and elaboration.



3. Recent works, which speak to the differences between the two struggles, include Harneit-Sievers (2006) and Uche (2008).
4. The construction and nature of the state in Nigeria, rooted in the colonial pedigree, as elsewhere in Africa, tend toward the institutionalisation of ethnic entitlements, rights and privileges, so that rather than providing a common bond for the people through the tie of citizenship – with equal rights, privileges and obligations, both in precept and in practice – the state furthers their bifurcation. For elaboration on this position, see Adejumobi (2001).
5. Each of the three regions was based on the dominance of one of the three ethnically-dominant groups while other ethnic groups within the regions were treated as minorities, a situation which posed the fear of perpetual domination after independence. Consequently, such minority groups agitated for reforms including the creation of more administrative units in the forms of regions and later states. For an analysis of the protests by the Niger Delta minorities and the responses by the colonial state, see Mustapha (2003) and Osaghae (1991).
6. Contained in the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) in 1990 and its Addendum in 1991, the major demand by the Ogoni was for the right to control and use a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development.
7. For a comprehensive account of the state's responses to the Niger Delta crisis and its failings in that regard, see Obi (2006a) and Ukiwo (2007).
8. Witness the contradictory securitisation, tension and fragile peace in the region. Several anti-state and anti-oil-company mobilisation groups have emerged. The Egbesu Boys, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Martyrs Brigade and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) are examples of the militant groups that have emerged in the region, consequent upon the harsh responses by the Nigerian state, responses which have only steered violence in more dangerous directions rather than furthering the prospects for a peaceful negotiation of conflict.
9. Boro wanted all the resources in Ijawland to be controlled by his people.
10. The Ijaw regard themselves as the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria (following the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba), a claim sharply dismissed by the Tiv, who also claim to be the fourth largest ethnic group in the country. However, since Nigeria's population censuses contain no information on the demography of ethnic groups, these claims are only matters of conjecture and counter-factual imagination.
11. Kimse Okoko is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
12. The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) was later transformed into the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which came into prominence in late 2005 after the arrest on treason charges of its leader, Mujahid Asari Dokubo.
13. For an extensive treatment of the activity profiles, objectives and social bases of these militant groups and their operations see Ikelegbe (2006).
14. For probing analyses and politically suggestive critiques of the responses by multinational oil-prospecting companies and the Nigerian state to violent conflict and minorities' ferment in this region, see Alemika (2000), Ikelegbe (2006), Obi (2006a) and Omotola (2007).

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