

Spaces of Insurgency:
Petro-Violence and the Geography of Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta

By Elias Edise Courson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Geography
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael J. Watts, Chair

Professor Ugo G. Nwokeji

Professor Jake G. Kosek

Spring 2016

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Abstract

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This work challenges the widely held controversial “greed and grievance” (resource curse) narrative by drawing critical insights about conflicts in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has attracted substantial scholarly attention in view of the paradox of poverty and violence amidst abundant natural resources. This discourse suggests that persistent resource-induced conflicts in the region derive from either greed or grievance. Instead, the present work draws inspiration from the political geography of the Niger Delta, and puts the physical area at the center of its analysis. The understanding that the past and present history of a people is etched in their socio-political geography inspires this focus.

Whereas existing literatures engages with the Niger Delta as a monolithic domain, my study takes a more nuanced approach, which recognizes a multiplicity of layers mostly defined by socio-geographical peculiarities of different parts of the region and specificity of conflicts its people experience. In specific terms, the study demarcates Rivers and Delta States in Niger Delta into two distinctive domains – Eastern and Western Niger Delta respectively.¹ Although each domain has experienced violent conflicts of various dimensions and proportions, such conflicts are distinct and distinguishable in several respects: in terms of their genealogy, patterns, trajectories, actors, motivations and modalities. These important distinctions, in turn, define and determine the nature and responses to conflicts generated over the years. The two conflict domains of Rivers and Delta States are shaped, then, by local socio-political dynamics within the Niger Delta.

There are however, cross-delta linkages and common burdens connecting these domains such as: corporate imperialism, marginalization, dispossession, environmental degradation,

¹ It is instructive to note from the onset that Bayelsa State which is today considered Central Niger Delta was an integral part of Eastern Niger Delta (Rivers State) until 1996 when it was carved out as a separate state and referred to as Central Niger Delta. In this work therefore Bayelsa State is mostly treated as part of the Eastern Niger Delta. In the oil industry up till now the region is divided into eastern and western operations. Except for oil activities in Ekeremor Local Government Area in Bayelsa State which falls under the western operations, all of Bayelsa State oil operations fall under eastern operations.

repression, poverty, unemployment and the quest for social justice. These common denominators influenced Paul Collier² and most social science scholars to categorize the Niger Delta holistically as a conflict zone. Unfortunately and significantly, however, all these scholars have ignored the fact that in countries such as Nigeria, there is not just one conflict (resource conflict); rather, there are several, and they cannot be easily placed under the blanket category “resource curse.”

This study thus, rethinks Collier and conventional social science narratives on the Niger Delta conflict with a view to understanding the complicated geo-political dynamics of the region. The work shows that conflicts in the Niger Delta are precipitated by age-long animosities arising from land disputes, territorial claims, chieftancy tussles and demand for political autonomy fueled in the contemporary moment by petro-capitalism (petro-relations) and blurred by the spoils of oil.

The methodology for the study is a comparative analysis of East versus West Niger Delta. It draws on primary and secondary data sources as well as making extensive use of archival materials in order to elicit the historical, geographical and contemporary dimensions of the conflicts.

² Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Dedication

In memory of:

A caring, loving and great Mum, Mrs. Silipah Courson

An ecological justice activist, Oronto Natei Douglas

A genius and academic mentor, Moses Oke

Acknowledgements

My debts of gratitude are many and too significant to be captured in just a few paragraphs. However, I would like to acknowledge faculty members, graduate student colleagues and staff members of the Geography Department at University of California, Berkeley. I greatly appreciate the immense kindness and generosity of my dissertation committee chair, Professor Michael Watts for his care, guidance and support in making this adventure possible. I would also like to thank my committee members, Professor Ugo Nwokeji and Professor Jake Kosek for their guidance, invaluable suggestions and help throughout my studies. Special thanks to Professor Nancy Peluso, a member of my oral committee, who was always willing to help and give suggestions on my work.

I am grateful to Rotary International Foundation for the World Peace Fellowship award (2008-10) at the start of the program, and to the Social Science Research Council, USA, for the Doctoral Dissertation Research grant to support my field research in Nigeria. I would like to express my gratitude to Goodluck Jonathan and Kingsley Kuku for their financial support towards the completion of my course work and initial writing stages.

I also want to thank all the librarians and archivists that I encountered over the last few years in Enugu and Ibadan, Nigeria and Kew, Richmond, London. I would like to sincerely thank Matthew Tonlahga, Omolade Adunbi, Ike Okonta, Eron Budi, Dennis Otuario, Patrick Naagbanton, Charles Ukeje, Kathryn Nwajiaku, Paul Bebenimibo, Doifie Ola, Miabiye Kuromiema, Felix Tuodolo, Isaac Osuoka, Adam Romero, Aaron de Grassi, Ukoha Ukiwo, Kestin Pondi, Dimieari Von Kemedi, Tari Dadiowei, Emem Okon, Daphne Wysham, Laura Livoti and Goodluck Ebelo for their support and assistance during my field research in Nigeria and beyond. My research would not have been successful without their help and encouragement.

Lastly, I want to thank my wife Dr. Alero Kufre and our kids, Perekeme Emmanuel and Ebiegberi Bryce for all the support, patience, love and understanding while I was away to complete this dissertation. Words cannot express my gratitude, love and affection.

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Preface

Over the period January 2006 to 2009 Nigeria's oil-rich delta was mired in a major insurgency led by a previously unknown militia, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), a militant group that emerged in late 2005 from the swampy creeks of the western fringe of the delta, promising to shut down oil activities in the region.³ Within weeks of MEND's launch of spectacular constant attacks on multinational oil companies, oil installations and government security forces, close to one-third of the nation's oil output was shut-in. The ferocious attacks and abduction of oil workers (in some cases their family members and or loved ones) by this largely unknown militia threw Nigeria's petro-economy into crisis and global oil markets into volatility. A report released in late 2008 by The Technical Committee of the Niger Delta (TCND, a government commission on the crisis) put the loss incurred by the Nigerian government due to MEND sabotage of oil activities in the region at \$23.7 billion in oil revenues in the first nine months of the year.⁴ On the international scene, American consumers had to adjust to a sudden rise in the pump price of gas in their domestic market. MEND's conditions for a possible ceasefire included the unconditional release of two Ijaw leaders in government custody and payment of \$2.5 billion by Shell Oil Company to aborigines of Bayelsa State in compensation for environmental hazards.

Intensified military efforts by the federal government to curtail MEND's activities in compromising the oil industry from 2006 to early 2009 alone led to the death of over 100 Nigerian soldiers and destruction of several oil installations in the region. By late 2009 government's increased securitization of the region to hunt down members of this group and MEND's retaliatory intensification of attacks on oil facilities brought the oil sector to a near collapse; production had dropped drastically from 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2005 to barely 800,000 bpd in mid-2009.

On May 13, 2009, Nigerian military troops launched an unprecedented full-blown counterinsurgency against what the government saw as violent organized criminal elements who have crippled the oil and gas industry. Thousands of villagers in the region around Gbaramatu clan, southwest of the oil city of Warri in Delta State, an area known to harbor a number of militant encampments including the notorious Camp 5, were consequently displaced and hundreds of innocent civilians were murdered.⁵ The casualties were almost wholly Ijaw, an ethnic minority who have since time immemorial inhabited the swampy creeks and lowland river ecology where the Niger River empties into the Atlantic. MEND fighters in the region retaliated

³ Watts, M., "Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geo politics* 9, No. 1 (2004), pp. 637-660.

⁴ Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, November 2008.

⁵ Camp 5, adjacent Okerenkoko in Gbaramatu is an abandoned construction site of Julius Berger (a German Construction firm) where the fabrication of pipes and other oil platforms used by multinational oil companies in the Escravos axis was undertaken in the 1970s. In the mid 2000s this abandoned site became a well known militant base in the creeks of Gbaramatu under the command of Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo). The need to save human lives in times of war with the military necessitated the movement of militants from communities (and other human settlements) in the creek to this abandoned camp.

with vicious reprisal attacks, gutting Chevron's first and most productive (which also is to say most lucrative) oilfield, the Okan manifold, which controls 80 percent of the company's oil exports. In the summer of 2009 alone, about twelve violent attacks were launched against Nigeria's \$120 billion oil infrastructure.⁶ Agip was forced to declare a *force majeure*⁷ on its Brass oilfield, while the Anglo Dutch giant, Shell, following a series of devastating attacks on wellheads, flow stations, terminals, rigs and pipelines near Escravos (in the western fringe) and the Cawthorne channel (in the eastern fringe), was losing about \$20 million per day in deferred production from its onshore operations. By mid-July 2009, MEND's fierce attacks had compromised over 120 of Nigeria's 300 operating oilfields in Nigeria's Delta region.

MEND militants made real their threat to extend their operations beyond oil facilities in the Niger Delta. Late in the night of July 12, 2009, nine MEND gunboats launched an audacious and overwhelming assault on Atlas Cove (the nexus of oil supply to western Nigeria), a major oil facility in Lagos, the economic heart of the nation, 300 miles from the Niger Delta oilfields. (A year earlier, to accentuate both their strike capability and the ineptitude of the Nigerian security forces, MEND troops overran and compromised the massive floating Bonga production and storage facility 75 miles offshore). The consequence of the attacks' crippling effect on the energy sector was that by late 2009 Shell closed its western operations entirely and the eastern region was barely producing 100,000 bpd. Many of the engineering, construction and oil service companies (so-called contactors) withdrew core personnel and in some cases evacuated completely. In the industry parlance, the multinational oil companies (MNOCs) effectively no longer had a "license to operate." During this same period hostage-taking became a major growth industry and represented a broader part of the conflict economy.

The MEND insurgency is a direct culmination of largely unaddressed historical grievances complicated in the present by debilitating effects of petro-capitalism: land dispossession and pollution, inequitable distribution of revenues, unstable federalism, marginalization and political repression. The 2006 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report on human development in the Niger Delta for example puts the poverty rate in the whole of the south-south of Nigeria (including the delta) at 73.8 percent and further asserts that local people often cannot tap directly into the oil industry benefits including employment, due to lack of skills or capital resources or both, required for participation in the energy sector.⁸ Fuelled by said grievances, at the heart of MEND's stated objective is the intention to win the right of local oil-bearing communities to participate in Nigeria's oil industry: this includes securing benefits – royalties, employment, infrastructure and compensation for despoiled ecology caused by oil activities – from the federal government and oil corporations.

On its surface, the MEND insurgency appears to be a classic example of the "resource curse" narrative that seeks to establish strong linkages between natural resource abundance - "the paradox of plenty" - and violent conflict in countries of the global south. Collier and Hoeffler⁹,

⁶ Ibid,

⁷ Force Majeure is a legal term that means exemption of a company from prosecution for failure to fulfil contractual obligations, including the inability to meet production targets, due to circumstances beyond its control.

⁸ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Niger Delta Human Development Report, Abuja: UNDP, 2006.

⁹ See Collier, P. & Hoeffler, A., "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," World Bank Working Paper, No. 2355 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000); Paul Collier et al., "Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy," (Washington DC: World Bank & Oxford University Press, 2004).

and Ross,¹⁰ among other scholars have attributed the propensity for armed conflict in the global south to the abundance of primary resources. Of significance is their view that resource wealth acts as a motivation to greedy and/or corrupt actors who violently pursue wealth by funding the conflict and their armed supporters through capturing, stealing or extorting oil revenues. More recently, the analysis has gone beyond “war economics” towards providing explanations for how resource abundance feeds the paradox of plenty and how a dangerous mix of corruption, poverty, conflict and state failure also generate serious threats to global security and development.¹¹ This work interrogates the claims of the “resource curse” perspective by drawing on the case of conflict in the Niger delta. In this regard, the fundamental questions are whether conflict in the Niger Delta is propelled by deep-seated historical grievances compounded and intensified by petro-capitalism since 1960 and the spoils of oil? In other words, to what extent has the arrival of oil complicated deep-rooted grievances/animosities in the Niger Delta and equally how can we understand how these grievances and the logic of the Nigerian petro-state produced an insurgency of the sort witnessed between 2005 and 2009?

As a geographer with a historical approach I am especially interested in how space (in this case west versus east differences and inter-region dynamics) is key to understanding these questions. I undertake a historical and spatial study of crises since the 19th century to the present moment with a view to unraveling the deep-seated, unresolved animosities that underlie current tensions and conflicts in the east (Rivers State) and west (Delta State) delta regions of Nigeria. A spatial analysis in this regard would help unwrap the distinctiveness in these conflicts, and articulate how in the contemporary moment these conflicts have been made more complex by actions as well as inactions of the Nigerian state and its alliances with “Big Oil” (what Ken Saro-Wiwa called the “Slick Alliance”). The aim here is not to exonerate petro-capitalism but rather to show the intricate and complicated nature of conflicts in the Niger Delta and reveal the new character and dimensions that the political economy of oil has brought to bear on the geography and history of conflicts in the region.

MEND is illustrative of a wider landscape of violence that emerged in the era especially after 1980 – my dissertation explores its origins and dynamics. I have placed the oil and gas period on an earlier period of conflict and struggles in the delta in order to provide an indispensable foundation on which to understand the hydrocarbon era. On the oil era, my study offers two sorts of analyses: the first is geographical and spatial. It explains the production and reproduction of distinctive histories and geography of conflicts in the east and west delta. Second, I provide an account of the emergence of insurgency exploring how age-old rivalries, disputes, squabbles and conflicts in east and west delta have been complicated and intensified to the scale of insurgency by oil.

Chapter one rethinks the oil curse hypothesis and explains how, in spite of the economic and political woes, Nigeria’s fragile and unstable federalism has been held together by oil, in the

¹⁰ See Ross, M., “How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil Wars? Evidence From Thirteen Cases,” *International Organization* 58, Winter (2004), 35-67; Ross, M., “Nigeria’s Oil Sector and the Poor,” Paper prepared for the UK Department for International Development “Nigeria Drivers of Change” program (2003); Michael Ross, M., “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics*, 53, (2001): 325-361.

¹¹ Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

wake of a horrendous civil war, years of military dictatorships and truncated democratic regimes. Chapter two chronicles the character of struggles and agitations undertaken at different periods in the Niger Delta since the mid-19th century to the start of the current democratic rule in 1999. The chapter rationalizes the different and/or common conflict grievances, dynamics, motivations and actors and trajectories since the 19th century and provides an historical as well as spatial overview of conflict in the region.

Part I (being chapters three and four) is devoted to the spatial examination of conflict in the Port Harcourt axis of Rivers State (eastern delta) from the 19th century to the present. Chapter three unveils the complexity of ethnic configuration of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and the contentious relations arising from and within these complexities among groups before oil. The introduction of global capitalist economy (slave trade and palm oil trade) into this region changed institutions (political, economic and social) and thereby produced and reproduced contentious social relations among and/or within groups in the area. Understanding the transformation of social and political institutions by global capitalism and colonialism is critical to understanding conflict dynamics related to trade, markets, kingship disputes, settlement/boundary disputes and occupation in the Port Harcourt area of the eastern delta. Pre-oil social relations and conflict dynamics arising thereof are crucial to the evaluation of the effect of oil in the region. Chapter four deals with the rise of violence and militancy in the post-independence oil era in the Port Harcourt area. The chapter unveils how age-old crisis over kingship tussle, settlement dispute and territorial claims as well as modern violence occasioned by cultism, party politics, youth mobilization and criminality are constructed and reconstructed in a petrol-state as oil-crisis. The arrival of oil, its local and global significance as well as its footprints compounded pre-oil rivalries and squabbles and also produced new forms and spaces of insurgency in the region.

Part II (being chapters five and six) lay out the history and geography of inter-ethnic relations and development of conflict in Warri, Delta State (western delta). Chapter five shows how unequal relations to global capitalist processes and colonial hegemony in the Warri area of western delta produced uneven knowledge/power relations among groups in the territory. The chapter argues that commercial interests which exacerbated inter-group relations and material interests were deepened by the colonial state's reinforcement of ethnic identity and its contradictory attempt to bring under one fold people who long had distinct existence produced conflict in Warri. It is the history of the evolution of uneven power relations among ethnic groups and related territorial disputes (autochthons/settlers vs immigrants/strangers) which was further complicated by change in chieftancy nomenclature and crisis arising thereof. Chapter six shows how the history of contentions and conflict over claims to Warri ownership (territorial disputes) was both renewed and expanded with the post-colonial demands for political citizenship in a petro-space. The advent of oil and spoils derivable therefrom after 1960 transformed an unpretentious local quest for civic citizenship and land ownership into local and global demand for ecological justice by MEND insurgents.

Chapter seven explores the processes of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in Ijaw cross-delta struggles and national identity formations since the colonial period to the present. The inability of colonial rule to amicably resolve majority-minority dichotomy that emerged from its regional governance structure produced struggles for Ijaw ethnic identity formations in the Niger Delta. Centralization of power and oil revenues in Nigeria's fragile federalism to the detriment of

groups in the delta reopened Ijaw nationalism in the present (1990s and 2006). In all, the character and geography of Ijawness has been dynamic (expanding and shrinking) while relationship between Ijaw and other minority groups in the region has become more contentious since the arrival of oil. Hence the geography and political economy of oil are critical to understanding the dynamism in Ijaw identity transformations. Finally, the work concludes with a critical assessment of the 2009 presidential amnesty program as well as a rational examination of ongoing developments, issues, undercurrents and new trends and how these processes speak to the question of a possible resurgence of violence in the delta.

Chapter One

Greed, Grievance and the Oil Curse: Rethinking the Niger Delta Crisis

1.1 Introduction

This chapter interrogates the resource curse discourse (with special interest on the oil curse). The first section examines the scholarly literature on greed, grievance and the oil curse. It espouses literatures that link the abundance oil to the preponderance of conflict in war-ravaged countries of the global south. The second section interrogates scholarly works on the causes, trajectories and motivating factors for civil wars, armed conflicts and insurgencies in the African continent. The third section challenges the conceptual architecture of oil-conflict (“resource curse” and greed/grievance narratives) and rethinks the notion of civil war and conflicts in spatial terms. A spatial analysis presents a more complicated picture of civil armed conflict and militant dynamics and offers an analysis more attentive to localistic and regional forces.

In the fourth section, I examine the political economy of oil in Nigeria. The chequered political history of Nigeria – marked by years of military dictatorship, electoral violence and a thirty-month civil war, yet joined together in a fragile and unstable federation by oil. Finally, the chapter examines Nigeria as an oil state - it espouses the role of the Nigerian state in the oil industry and details the mechanism for the distribution of revenues from oil. It also brings to light the structural and endemic nature of corruption - how corruption at all levels of governance is linked to the country’s economic stagnation and underdevelopment, and how oil revenues are devoted to the purchase of consent.

1.2 Theorizing the Oil Curse

An influential body of contemporary scholarship has linked armed conflicts and underdevelopment in countries of the global south to the abundance of primary natural resources.¹² Some argue that “war retards development, but conversely development retards war.”¹³ It is therefore conceived that the “key root of conflicts is the failure of economic development.”¹⁴ According to this framework civil war or armed conflict is seen as a development trap.¹⁵ Conflict thus comes as an account that links resources, politics and development – the “resource curse.” Since the emergence of the resource abundance-conflict narrative, previously held hypotheses on conflict generation in nations of the global south (such as Nigeria) have been relegated to the background: issues such as absence of democratic governance, poverty, resource scarcity, lack of avenues for amicable resolution of disputes,

¹² See for example the World Bank Development Report, Washington DC, 2011.

¹³ Collier, P. *et al*, “Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy,” A World Bank Policy Research Report, Washington DC: World Bank & Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53

¹⁵ Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: op. cit.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 18-52.

ethnic and religious differences, economic inequality, social contradictions arising from colonialism, discriminatory policies and weak political institutions¹⁶ – some of these earlier conflict narratives, especially with regard to the global south, are articulated of late as mere fall-out or addenda to the resource curse discourse.

Nigeria is an archetypical oil-state. It is the thirteenth largest producer of crude oil (currently 2.7 million bpd), the jewel in the crown of the resource-rich, and since 9/11 the geopolitically strategic, West African Gulf of Guinea oil-states. The heart of the Nigerian oil sector is located in the nine oil-producing states of the Niger Delta, a vast multi-ethnic, sedimentary basin, home to over twenty eight million people and by most estimations over 30 billion barrels of oil reserves.¹⁷ Over the *longue duree*, the delta has been shaped by successive waves of trans-Atlantic capitalist accumulation and its associated commodity booms and busts: the slave trade between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, the palm oil economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and since the mid-twentieth century by oil and gas.¹⁸ In the last half century, Nigeria came to depend heavily on oil and gas revenues: it has become a classical rentier (resource-dependent) state with 98 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 80 percent of government revenues, and almost half of GDP derived from the petroleum sector.¹⁹ It has also become the poster-child for the “resource curse” – Nigeria for example has pride of place in Paul Collier’s influential book *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it* - in which the deadly logic of predation and patronage politics, “the survival of the fittest,”²⁰ produces massive state corruption and inefficiency joined with a lack of transparency and accountability and poor economic performance and human development achievements.²¹ Since the late 1990’s with the launched of the so-called “resource control” movement and the first wave of youth militancy, the Niger Delta has produced a homegrown insurgency. Particularly since late 2005, the descent into militancy and what Watts calls “petro-violence”²² has been dramatic and devastating.

¹⁶ Cramer, C., “Civil War is not a Stupid Thing: Exploring Growth, Distribution and Conflict Linkages,” SOAS Working Paper Series, No. 73, London: School of Oriental African Studies, 1999; Goodhead, J., “Ending Disorder and Persistent Poverty: A Review of the Linkages between War and Chronic Poverty,” *World Development*, 3:3, 2003, pp. 629-646; Easternly, W., “Can Institutions Resolve Ethnic Conflict?,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 2003; Borjas, G., “Ethnicity, Neighborhoods and Human Capital Externalities,” *American Economic Review*, 1995, pp. 365-390; Moor, M., “Political Underdevelopment,” Presentation at the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Development Studies Institute, London School of Economic, September 2000.

¹⁷ The Niger Delta is undisputedly the largest wetland in Africa and is ranked amongst the three largest mangrove forest estates globally. Measuring some 70,000 square kilometers, this swampy maze of creeks, estuaries and rivers is home to some 28 million inhabitants (2006 National Census). It is composed officially of nine states (Abia, Akwa-Igbom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Imo, Ondo and Edo) and 185 local government areas (LGAs). The Niger Delta is a multi-ethnic region consisting of more than 30 distinct ethnic groups some of who have inhabited the region for more than ten thousand years or even centuries.

¹⁸ Okonta, I. & Douglas, O., *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2001.

¹⁹ Watts, M. (2004), “Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Geo Politics*, 9(1).

²⁰ Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: op. cit.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 146.

²¹ Collier, P., *Bottom Billion*, 2007; Yates, D.A., *The Scramble for African Oil: Oppression, Corruption and War for Control of Africa’s Natural Resources*, London: Pluto Press, 2012.

²² Watts, M., “Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 2007, No. 114; See Michael Watts, “Blood Oil: Anatomy of an Oil Insurgency in the Niger

On its face this appears as a textbook case of resource-predation and greed over grievance. Collier, for example, argues that people in the Niger Delta with a sense of grievance were no more likely to take part in violent protest than those who were not aggrieved.²³ As he argues, “the violence occurs in the districts with oil wells. [A]lthough the risk of violence jumps sharply if there is at least one oil well, if there are two oil wells in the district it starts to go down again. And with twenty oil wells it is lower still... To my mind this looks more like a story of a protection racket than outrage provoked by environmental damage”.²⁴ He states further, “in the absence of an oil well there is no scope for extortion (and so no violent protest) but with an oil well the protection racket is in business. But the more oil wells...the greater the incentive for an oil company to pay up and buy peace.”²⁵ Over time, the situation has evolved and within the region local politicians are fighting over oil revenues and violent protest has become an orchestrated part of the political rent seeking. As Collier says, “Grievance has evolved, over the course of a decade, into greed.”²⁶ He seems to be saying, grievance motivates people into violent armed conflict while greed keeps them there. From these assumptions Collier concluded that the delta resembled an “American gangland” involving a ferocious struggle over “hydro-carbon”; by 2007 it was a vast protection racket run by young, unemployed and poorly educated criminals for whom life is cheap.²⁷ At the same time, as Zinn notes, Nigeria seems to represent a striking exception to Collier’s predictions:²⁸ namely, Collier and Hoeffler’s²⁹ model saw civil war as an unlikely event between 1965 and 1969 (when in fact the Biafra war erupted), while on the other hand the possibility for civil war was high between 1985 and 1999 (when there was no such conflict).

The causal linkages between oil and conflict are premised on a predation or rebellion as organized crime theory of oil violence. Collier focuses on the important question of financing violence politics and offers an argument that oil provides a ground on which rebels can finance rebellions (through looting of oil resources) that are self-interested and criminal movements against the state.³⁰ Collier and the economics of war position draws upon a related and now large

Delta,” FOCAAL: *European Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 52, No. 8 (2008); Michael Watts, “Imperial Oil: The Anatomy of An Oil Insurgency,” *Erdkunde*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (2008), pp. 27–39.

²³ Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it*, 2007, op, cit., pp. 30-31.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 31.

²⁵ Ibid,

²⁶ Ibid,

²⁷ Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: op. cit.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

²⁸ Zinn, C., “Nigeria”, in Collier, P. and Sambanis, N. (eds.), *Understanding Civil War*, Vol. 1, Washington DC: World Bank, 2005.

²⁹ Collier, P & Hoeffler, A., “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” World Bank Working Paper, No. 2355, Washington DC, 2000.

³⁰ Collier, P & Hoeffler, A., “On Economic Causes of Wars,” in M. Berdal and D. M Malone (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agenda in Civil Wars*, Boulder: Lynne, Rienner, 1998; Collier, P. & Hoeffler, A., “Justice-Seeking and Loot-seeking in Civil War,” World Bank Working Paper, No. 28151, Washington DC, 1999; Collier, P. & Hoeffler, A., “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” World Bank Working Paper, No. 2355, Washington DC, 2000; Collier, P. *et al*, “Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy,” A World Bank Policy Research Report, Washington DC: World Bank & Oxford University Press, 2003; Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it*, 2007; Collier, P., *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009; Collier, P., *The Plundered Planet: Why We Must – and How we Can – Manage Nature for Global Prosperity*, London: Oxford University Press, 2010; Jua, B., “Social

body of work that explores the character of oil as a source of predation by focusing on geography and resource characteristics: specifically, its point (as opposed to diffuse) character and its location (in relation to state power) and the ease with which it can be looted. Geographer Le Billon argues that different political outcomes can then be deduced from specific resource couplets: warlordism (distant/diffuse), mass rebellion (proximate/diffuse), coups (proximate/point) and secession (distant/point).³¹ Oil is characterized by the latter two (it is a point resource that varies along the axis of its location with respect to power) for which Angola and Chechnya, and Colombia and Yemen are paradigmatic cases. Relatedly, political scientist Michael Ross explores the dynamics of oil politics along two parallel axes: lootability (understood to be “easily appropriated [resource] by individuals or small groups of unskilled workers”)³² and obstructability (that is to say the ease with which its movement or its productive networks can be interrupted or blocked). Oil (on shore and off shore) is unlootable; it is however readily obstructable (pipelines can be detonated, flow stations closed) on shore but not off shore.

Social science scholars like Ross,³³ Addison and others³⁴ have linked the outbreak or prolongation of conflict in countries of the “Bottom Billion” to abundant resource endowment, which feeds into corruption, struggles over resources and political instability. According to proponents of this position, the thirst for oil from endowed nations of the global south has contributed to the ongoing conflict dynamics in third world countries.³⁵ For example, Ross argues that since the oil boom of the early 1970s, Nigeria -- an Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries’ (OPEC) member nation and major player in the global oil trade -- has done so little to raise citizens’ income and alleviate poverty in the land.³⁶ This is alarming, considering the enormous amount of revenue the country has derived from oil. In a similar vein Micheal Ross identified five spheres that the political economy of oil has affected in the Nigerian state: causing economic volatility, crowding out the manufacturing and agricultural sectors,

Political and conflict factors in Niger Delta,” Working Paper, the World Bank, Social Development Program, Washington DC, 2007.

³¹ Le Billon, P., “Fuelling War”, *Adelphi Paper*, London: Routledge, 2005.

³² Ross, M., “Oil, Drugs and Diamonds,” in Ballentine, K & Sherman, J. (eds.), *The Political economy of Armed Conflict*, Reiner: Boulder, 2003, p. 47.

³³ Ibid,

³⁴ Addison, T, *et al*, “Conflict in Africa: The Cost of Peaceful Behavior,” *Journal of African Economics*, 11(3), (2003), pp. 365-386; Brunnschweller, C. & E. Bulte, “Linking Natural resources to Slow Growth,” *Science*, May 2008, pp.616-617; Dibua, J. Citizenship and resource control in Nigeria, *Afrikaspectrum*, 1: 2005 5-28; Dibua, J. Conflict over control of natural resources in Nigeria, *Lagos Historical Review*, 4, 2004, 142-172; Forrest, J. & Sousa, M. *Oil and terrorism in the New Gulf*, Lexington, Oxford, 2006; Frynas G. & Paulo, M. A new scramble for African oil?, *African Affairs*, 106/423, 2007, 329-51; Ginifer, J. & O. Ismail, “Armed violence and poverty in Nigeria, Centre for International Cooperation and Security,” Working Paper, University of Bradford, Bradford, 2005; Jua, B., “Social Political and conflict factors in Niger Delta,” Working Paper, the World Bank, Social Development Program, Washington DC, 2007; Martin, J. & Subramanian, K, “Addressing the Resource Curse: An illustration From Nigeria,” IMF Working Paper, Washington DC: IMF, July 2003.

³⁵ Cramer, C., *Violence in Developing Countries: War Memory, Progress*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998; Frynas G. & Paulo, M. A new scramble for African oil?, *African Affairs*, 106/423, 2007, 329-51; Forrest, J. & Sousa, M. *Oil and terrorism in the New Gulf*, Lexington, Oxford, 2006; Gore, C. & D. Patten, “The politics of plunder,” *African Affairs*, 102, 2003 211-240; Yates, D. A., *The Scramble for African Oil: Oppression, Corruption and War for Control of Africa’s Natural Resources*, London: Pluto Press, 2012.

³⁶ Ross, M., “Nigeria’s Oil Sector and the Poor,” Paper prepared for the UK Department for International Development “Nigeria: Rivers of Change,” program. DFID, 2003.

heightening inequality, inducing violent conflict and undermining democratic rule.³⁷ And to add to Ross' list, the oil regime has generated - or perhaps intensified - ethnic identity, political instability, corruption and electoral fraud.

Scholarly empirical studies have identified developing nations with natural resources as having a high risk of experiencing internally generated armed conflict.³⁸ Thus, according to the abundance primary resource narrative, conflict in Angola, Burma, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, Indonesia, and Nigeria can be attributed to the destabilizing and conflict element in the resource abundant-development linkage. Scholars of this neoliberal economic interpretation of violence attribute the prevalence, propensity and duration of conflict in regions of primary resource rich nations of the global south to antagonism between rulers, elites, youth groups and merchants over control and access to primary resources for self or group aggrandizement and the consolidation of political or economic power.³⁹ Michael Watts thus aptly describes the 'resource curse' narrative as a form of commodity determinism.⁴⁰ This is the idea that a bunch of 'natural resource' endowment determines a particular set of outcomes.

Thus empirical studies have presented greed, opportunism and economic interest as motivating incentives for armed groups to engage in violent conflict.⁴¹ Drawing on the case of resource-endowed Nigeria, Augustine Ikelegbe argues that foreign mining and mineral exploration companies enter into partnership with state or non-state actors to have unhindered access to the legal or illegal trade in oil exploration and exploitation, and attempts to stop such an organized economic interest may result in violent conflict.⁴² A thriving political economy of

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 1-14.

³⁸ Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A., "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50(4), 1998, 563-573; Ross, M., "How Do Natural resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases," *International Organization* 58, Winter 2004, pp. 35-67.

³⁹ Ellis, S., "Liberia's Warlord Insurgency" in *African Guerillas*, Cramer, C., (ed.), Oxford: James Curry, 1998; Naifziger, W.E. & Auvinen, J., "Economic Development, Inequality, War and State Violence," *World Development*, 2002, 50(2); Keen, D., "Greedy Elites, Dwindling Resources, Alienated Youths: The Anatomy of Protracted Violence in Sierra Leone," *International Politics and Society*, 2003, Vol. 2.

⁴⁰ Le Billion, P., *Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, Profits and the Politics of Resources*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013; Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it*, Oxford University Press, 2007; Humphreys, M., et al (eds.), *Escaping the Resource Curse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007; Dunning, T., *Crude Democracy: Natural resource Wealth and political Regimes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Cramer, C., *Violence in Developing Countries: War Memory, Progress, 1920-2004*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007; Karl, T. L., *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Lewis, P. M., *Growing Apart: Oil Politics, and Economic Change in Indonesia and Nigeria*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007; Kaldor, Mary & Terry Lynn Karl (eds.), *Oil Wars*. London: Pluto Press, 2007; Olivera, Ricardo De Soares., *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, London: Hurst and Company, 2007; Sawyer, S., *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004 Watts, M., "Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta", *Review of African Political Economy*, 2007; Yates, D.A., *The Scramble for African Oil: Oppression, Corruption and War for Control of Africa's Natural Resources*, London: Pluto Press, 2012.

⁴¹ Weinstein, J., "Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49 (4), 2005, pp. 598-624; Ikelegbe, A., "Economy of Conflict in the oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, (2006) No. 1, pp 23-55; Collier, P. & Hoeffler, A., "Resource Rents, Governance, and Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49. No 4, (2005), pp. 625-633.

⁴² Ikelegbe, A., "Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," 2006, op. cit; Reno, W., "Foreign Firms and Financing of Charles Taylor's NPFL," *Liberia Studies Journal*, 1993 18(92).

violence in primary resource endowed nations of the global south engenders and sustains struggles and resistance by the marginalized or deprived against the state or its agents – economic patronage/inducement renders violence a profitable business enterprise. It is, however, argued that oil as a primary resource does not in or by itself engender conflict; rather, the hegemonic class struggle by groups with regard to the manner of its management, appropriation, mode of extraction and derivative ecological effects, benefits, allocation and political repression that propels armed civil conflict.⁴³ It is therefore the unequal socio-economic relation arising from the resource that engenders conflict.

Aderoju Oyefusi's empirical analysis of conflict in the Niger Delta bifurcates the propensity for violent armed conflict at the individual and community levels.⁴⁴ He attributes the increase in the propensity of individuals to armed insurgency in the Niger Delta to "lower income, lower educational attainment, lack of asset or asset-immobility, if an individual is unconstrained by a marital bond, or is from the dominant ethnic group".⁴⁵ In his empirical data analysis, "oil availability, long distance from state capital and absence of government presence makes a community haven for would-be rebels".⁴⁶ However, other empirical analyses of the propensity for armed violence in the third world identified three grievances derivable from a quest for justice: hatreds arising from relations between distinct social groups, repression in the process of decision making, and poor economic outcomes.⁴⁷

Also, Fearon and Laitin, drawing from empirical data covering a 54-year period (1945-1999) in 161 countries with populations of at least half a million in 1990 eliminated "end of the Cold War and associated changes in the international system, ethnic or religious diversity or cultural demography and broadly established grievances" as possible causes of civil armed conflict.⁴⁸ Armed civil insurgency, they argue, emerged as a result of an enabling environment -- "conditions that favor insurgency."⁴⁹ That is, economically, structurally and politically weak central government attracts the emergence of armed rebels due to ineffective and corrupt security.⁵⁰ They further argue that the propensity for armed conflict is more rife in poverty ravaged, economically and bureaucratically frail states that favor rebel recruitment and feature political instability, rough terrain and large population.⁵¹ Fearon, drawing from previous empirical analysis, predicts a high propensity for civil armed conflict in oil-bearing nations of the

⁴³ Ikelegbe, A., "Economy of Conflict in the oil Rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria," *African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, (2006) No. 1, pp 23-55; Reno, W., "Foreign Firms and Financing of Charles Taylor's NPFL," *Liberia Studies Journal*, 1993, 18(92).

⁴⁴ Oyefusi, A., "Oil and the Propensity to Armed Struggle in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," World Bank Working paper, No. 4194, Washington DC, 2007; Oyefusi, A., "Oil and the probability of rebel participation among youths of the Niger Delta," *Journal of Peace Research*, 45, 2008, 539-555.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Collier, P & Hoeffler, A., "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 50(4), 1998, 563-573.

⁴⁸ Fearon, J.D & Laitin, D.D., "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, 2003, Vol. 97, No. 1, pp. 75-90.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.79.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 1.

⁵¹ Fearon, J.D & Laitin, D.D., "Weak States, Rough Terrain, and Large-scale Ethnic Violence since 1945," Paper Presented at the Annual Meetings of American Political Science Association, September 1999, Atlanta, Georgia.

global south given their relatively low state capabilities and level of per capita income.⁵² Humphreys and others⁵³ engage the “resource curse” discourse by attributing conflicts in oil endowed countries to: Dutch disease, unequal expertise between government and the MNOCs on technical issues, government spending without investment, insufficient investment in education, weak and unaccountable states, corruption, grievances from community producing regions, etc.

Collier’s approach and that of others in the field of resource violence has been large (cross-national) studies; their analyses have produced varied and often contradictory results as regards the relations between both resources and growth/conflict.⁵⁴ It appears that among the energy and non-energy resources, only oil appears to offer a robust association with the onset and duration of conflicts. But differing measures of the resource itself – oil output versus oil reserves, or oil revenues as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or oil rents – disclose rather different and even contradictory patterns and associations. Hence De Soysa and Neumayer, by using a particular measure of oil rents, find that the oil-conflict relationship using the conventional measure of civil war (1000 battle deaths) is not met.⁵⁵ The correlation seems to hold only for “low intensity” (25 battle deaths) conflicts. Collier, in his work *Bottom Billion*, makes use of Oyefusi’s⁵⁶ important survey of Niger Delta communities to bolster his case but there are all manner of inconsistencies here too. Some of this turns on the data itself – the oil variable consists only of the number of wells within a community territory and nothing of their status (producing or non producing) or the quality and quantity of oil from local oil fields and wells. More fundamentally, Oyefusi’s data seems to indicate, *contra* Collier’s account of rebel recruitment and mobilization, that education, income, ethnicity and assets increase the likelihood of personal grievance as a basis for rebel participation. Unemployment and/or political repression seem to be of no consequence as regards grievance level nor rebel participation. All of

⁵² Fearon, J.D., “Primary Commodities Exploits and Civil War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2005, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 483-507.

⁵³ Humphreys, M., *et al* (eds.), *Escaping the Resource Curse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007; Dunning, T., *Crude Democracy: Natural resource Wealth and political Regimes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Cramer, C., *Violence in Developing Countries: War Memory, Progress, 1920-2004*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007; Karl, T. L., *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Lewis, P. M., *Growing Apart: Oil Politics, and Economic Change in Indonesia and Nigeria*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007; Kaldor, Mary & Terry Lynn Karl (eds.), *Oil Wars*. London: Pluto Press, 2007; Olivera, Ricardo De Soares., *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, London: Hurst and Company, 2007; Sawyer, S., *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004; Omeje, K., “Oil conflict in Nigeria,” *New Political Economy*, Vol.10, No. 3 2005 321-334; Omeje, K., “High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict in Nigeria,” Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006b; Ikelegbe, A., “Beyond the threshold of civil struggle,” *African Study Monographs*, 27/3 2006 Centre for African Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 87-122; Ikelegbe, I. “Civil Society, Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39, No. 4, 2001, pp. 437-469.

⁵⁴ Lujala, P. et al., “Fighting Over Oil: Introducing a New Dataset,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 24: 239-256, 2007.

⁵⁵ Neumayer, E., & De Soysa, I., “Resource Wealth and the Risk of Civil War Onset: Results From a New Dataset of Natural Resource Rents, 1979-1990,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 24: 201-218, 2007.

⁵⁶ Oyefusi, A., “Oil and the probability of rebel participation among youths of the Niger Delta,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 45, 2008, 539-555; Oyefusi, A., “Oil and the Propensity to Armed Struggle in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” World Bank Working paper, No. 4194, Washington DC, 2007.

this makes for, as Michael Ross has admitted, a much more complex field of causality.⁵⁷ Resource wealth and political violence may co-vary but it may be that the obsession with resources mistakes a symptom, a state failure, for a cause.⁵⁸

Oil has earned exporting countries enormous wealth and contributed in no small way to economic stagnation, political decay and social instability in oil-endowed developing countries of the world – the paradox of plenty.⁵⁹ As Karl rightly asked, “Why have most oil-exporting developing countries suffered from economic deterioration and political decay? In the midst of two massive booms that seemed to create the opportunity for politics without limits,”⁶⁰ why have these countries chosen a common (under)development path? In this class are nations such as Nigeria, Indonesia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Angola, all of which have followed a similar petro-developmental trajectory.

In this work oil states refer to states in which the production of oil and gas represent a very significant proportion of gross domestic products and foreign exchange earnings. Thus, petro-states are characterized by large, inefficient, often corrupt and highly centralized bureaucracies, and they depend solely on oil through the establishment of a statutory monopoly over mineral rights.⁶¹ Most of these Petro-states establish national oil companies and operate a joint business partnership with big oil companies, with a joint venture agreement (JVA) that would in effect divide the value of every barrel of oil between government and international oil companies (IOC). In most JVA, a greater fraction of the money from every barrel of oil flows into the state account. These are classical rentier-states, where huge rents acquired from oil finance the administration of the state.⁶² Scholars (mostly economists) and the World Bank have traced the problem of oil-states to the “resource curse”⁶³ – the view that petro-states are wrapped

⁵⁷ Ross, M., “How Do Natural resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases,” *International Organization*, 58, Winter 2004, pp. 35-67.

⁵⁸ Bates, R., *When Things Fall Apart*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁵⁹ Karl, T. L., *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. xv.

⁶¹ Watts, M., “Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004; Watts, M., “Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta,” *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 114, 2007; See Michael Watts, “Blood Oil: Anatomy of an Oil Insurgency in the Niger Delta,” *FOCAAL: European Journal of Anthropology* 52, No. 8 (2008); Michael Watts, “Imperial Oil: The Anatomy of An Oil Insurgency,” *Erdkunde*, 62, No. 1 (2008): 27–39; Yates, D.A., *The Scramble for African Oil: Oppression, Corruption and War for Control of Africa’s Natural Resources*, London: Pluto Press, 2012.

⁶² Ibid,

⁶³ Collier, P & Hoeffler, A., “On Economic Causes of Wars,” in M. Berdal and D. M Malone (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agenda in Civil Wars*, Boulder: Lynne, Rienner, 1998; Collier, P. et al, “Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy,” A World Bank Policy Research Report, Washington DC: World Bank & Oxford University Press, 2003; Collier, P., *Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it*, 2007; Yates, D.A., *The Scramble for African Oil: Oppression, Corruption and War for Control of Africa’s Natural Resources*, London: Pluto Press, 2012; Ross, M (2004), “How Do Natural resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases,” *International Organization* 58, Winter 2004, pp. 35-67; Oyefusi, A., “Oil and the Propensity to Armed Struggle in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria,” World Bank Working paper, No. 4194, Washington DC, 2007; Ikelegbe, A., “Economy of Conflict in the oil Rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria,” *African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (2006) pp 23-55; Elbadawi, I & Sambanis, N., “Why Are There So Many Civil Wars In Africa? Understanding and Preventing Violent Conflict,” World Bank Working Paper No. 28130, Washington DC, 2000; World Bank Report, “Defining an Environmental Strategy for the Niger Delta,” Vol. 1 & 2, 1995; World Bank, “Assessment of the Nigerian Economy,” Washington DC: The World Bank, 2007.

up with the politics of revenue allocation processes.⁶⁴ “Resource curse” therefore refers to the heavy dependence on a natural resource like oil, which could actually produce crony capitalism, inefficient economic performance, state deficits and dysfunctions and lack of transparency.

Oil dependent states are turbulent and volatile and tend to be associated with civil and/or violent conflicts. Economists have postulated greed as the motivating predatory factor that propels conflict in resource-endowed states. But is it as simple as the economists would want us to believe? Are insurgents in the Niger Delta who receive all the downside and debilitating cases of the oil industry merely motivated by greed? Are the Niger Delta militants who suffer the ecological damage caused by oil exploration and are historically marginalized because of ethnic minority status from the oil revenue allocation process selfish agents rather than agents of democratic change? Are they criminals or liberators? For the economic advocates of the “resource curse” hypothesis, insurgencies are organized crimes composed of legal and illegal activities, and wrapped within an insurgency are personal greed and political aims. The blanket generalization that all third world oil states are suffering from “resource curse” is problematic because petro-states are hastily lumped in together with all political and social vices. In fact we have to take into account the distinct historical development trajectory of every state, and the local politics that shape and frame how revenues are actually collected and allocated or distributed.⁶⁵ In that sense, even though they suffer from the “resource curse,” Venezuela, Angola, Equador, Indonesia, Angola and Nigeria are hugely different types of petro-states.

1.3 Africa: Civil Wars, Armed Conflicts and Insurgencies

Recently, development studies narratives of the African predicament have shifted from earlier conceptions that pointed to a lack of political stability or integration into the world market, to focus instead on sub-national conflict and its effects on development in the continent. The varied historical complexity and sociological details of civil armed insurgencies have become the focus of contemporary Africa narratives. Since the end of the Cold War attention has shifted globally, from wars between nations to low-intensity violence fought within nationalized spaces using conventional weaponry.⁶⁶ Of late, Africa has been the epicenter of low-scale conventional warfare. Kaplan has therefore described the continent as a “Malthus-with-gun,”⁶⁷ while Richards and others examine the various insurgencies ravaging the African continent from

⁶⁴ There is always a political mechanism by which oil revenues are distributed in these states. It appears differently in various states but usually called Revenue Allocation Formula (RAF) process. For instance, in Nigeria, it is a complex formula by which the central government keeps a bunch of money, while federating states are allocated a quota, and Local Government Areas (LGAs) are allocated a percentage. While this system is corrupted in every layer of government, it is most corrupted at the LGA level – this is the politics of revenue allocation process in oil producing states.

⁶⁵ Ahmad E. & R. Singh, “The Political Economy of oil revenue sharing in a developing country,” IMF Working Paper WP/03/16, International Monetary Fund, Washington DC: IMF, 2003.

⁶⁶ Clapham, C., *African Guerrillas*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998; Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, & Resources in Sierra Leone*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996; Fierke, K.M., *Critical Approaches to International Security*, Malden: Polity Press, 2007; Collier, P., *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009.

⁶⁷ Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, & Resources in Sierra Leone*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996.

historical and sociological perspectives.⁶⁸ Similarly, the economistic (greed-based) interpretation of conflicts in Africa has been critiqued as partial and inexhaustive in explaining civil armed struggle in the continent.⁶⁹ It therefore follows that past and on-going conflicts in Africa are best understood as rational responses to the composition and configuration of the state and politics.⁷⁰ Conflict in Africa is deeply rooted in the continent's history, and not only in the colonial past or the transition to independence but in the totality of its history – ideology, grievances against governments, sectional marginalization, elites' zeal to capture power, the politicization of autochthonous claims and global capitalist trends. The vexed questions on autochthony in the form of politics of space, belonging, identity and contested citizenship are if not the most crucial then among the most contested in African politics.⁷¹

Over the years, conflict in Africa (including Nigeria) has manifested all of Clapham's four typologies of insurgency: liberation, separatist, reform and warlord.⁷² On the other hand Francis identified three categories of civil militias in Africa – vigilantism, militia and separatist groups.⁷³ Liberation insurgencies (such as the Mau Mau of Kenya) are nationalist movements that emerged in the African continent during the colonial era; they fought for independence and liberation of their land and countries from white minority domination.⁷⁴ Separatist insurgencies are well structured, not selfish and well connected to demands of local communities, while reform insurgencies are highly disciplined formations that have clear ideology and structure and the goal of creating a different kind of state.⁷⁵ Clapham lumps residual categories that fail to fit into any of the above three as 'warlord.' Most conflicts in Africa are a consequence of state behavior to its citizens.⁷⁶ Civil warfare in the continent has been traced to the brutalization and maltreatment of ordinary citizens by central government and its military or other agents.⁷⁷ Civil

⁶⁸ Richards, P., *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005; Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, & Resources in Sierra Leone*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996; Clapham, C., *African Guerrillas*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998; Boas, M., & Dunn, K. C., *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*. Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc, 2007; Francis, J. D., *Civil Militia: Africa's Intractable Security Menace?*, Guildford: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

⁶⁹ Boas, M., & Dunn, K. C., *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*, Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc, 2007; Yates, D.A., *The Scramble for African Oil: Oppression, Corruption and War for Control of Africa's Natural Resources*, London: Pluto Press, 2012.

⁷⁰ Ibid,

⁷¹ Boas, M., & Dunn, K. C., *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*, Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc, 2007, p. 31; see also, Osaghae, E., "Do Ethnic Minorities Still Exist in Nigeria?," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 24/2 1986 151-168; Rotimi, S., "Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria," Washington DC: USIP, 2001; Nnoli, O., 1978, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Boston: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978; Lynch, G., "Negotiating Ethnicity: Identity Politics in Contemporary Kenya," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 107, 2006, pp. 49-65; Suberu, R., "Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria," Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2001; Ikporokpu, C., "Petroleum, Fiscal Federalism and Environmental Justice in Nigeria," *Space and Polity*, 8/3 2004 321-354.

⁷² Clapham, C., *African Guerrillas*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.

⁷³ Francis, J. D., *Civil Militia: Africa's Intractable Security Menace?*, Guildford: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

⁷⁴ Maloba, O. W., *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.

⁷⁵ Ibid,

⁷⁶ Weinstein, J., *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006.

⁷⁷ Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, & Resources in Sierra Leone*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996; Weinstein, J., *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge

wars start as consequence of the state brutality against people from particular sections or regions of a nation or because of these people's maltreatment or marginalization in national affairs by political leaders saddled with responsibility for state affairs. In most cases organized resistance against state directed brutalization of populations or regions of the country has created armed conflict in the continent.

Similarly, the state's deliberate neglect of particular regions, problems of polarization creates a propensity to violent armed conflicts in African nations.⁷⁸ A major cause of conflicts is the inability of the opposition (or rebels) to get their political, economic and social viewpoints -- such as economic empowerment, citizens' welfare, enthronement of multipurpose democracy, the eradication of corruption and provision of social infrastructure -- accepted as legitimate by the state. Richards argues that "trouble starts when the intellectuals, driven from the city, but uncomfortable in the bush, take up backwood ideas and develop them into a universal complaint."⁷⁹ The forest becomes a place of fortress and refuge, where rebel groups rethink strategies and modalities of resistance. Richards also points to practical lessons of survival in the wilderness and the potential value of the forest to a wider audience.⁸⁰ In particular, youth dominate crises in Africa because they constitute in many countries about 60 percent of the continent's population. The youths' in-depth knowledge of the forest and their acquaintance with war videos and books, drugs, and modern communication gadgets has increased the militias' ability to communicate and coordinate violent activities and provide access to both local and global media, which in turn means a global audience. In most cases, hostages are taken to draw local, regional and global attention to the rebels' plight.

Patrimonialism (the fusion of political and economic powers) and the emergence of private security and reckless use of state military by corrupt political leaders, as well as the rise of illegitimate rulers after the conduct of sham elections, have also increased the likelihood of conflict in the African continent.⁸¹ Corruption by the political class has contributed in no small measure. Neglected, poor, dejected and unable to meet the material conditions for existence, most persons join forces against the state as a means of redress. In short, legitimation crisis of the postcolonial state in Africa constitutes a cause of civil unrest; the iconic manifestation is the introduction of unfriendly policies such as the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) by the World Bank and the marginalization of African states in the world economy.⁸²

Writing on conflict Africa, Weinstein thinks it's a by-product of the civilian populations' interests, resources and support for military struggles that plague developing countries, and

Press, 2006; Clapham, C., *African Guerrillas*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998; Ifeka, C., "Conflict, Complicity and Confusion: Unraveling Empowerment Struggles in Nigeria After the Return of Democracy," *Review of African Political economy*, 2000, Vol. 83 No. 2.

⁷⁸ Richards, P., *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005; Richards, P., *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth, & Resources in Sierra Leone*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 70.

⁸⁰ Ibid,

⁸¹ Boas, M., & Dunn, K. C., *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 2007.

⁸² Ibid,

concludes that their experiences are different and varied.⁸³ Using Uganda and Mozambique as examples, he argues that the variations in how rebel groups deploy violence are a consequence of the initial conditions confronted by the leaders of rebel groups.⁸⁴ On the attitude of insurgents to the civilian population, he argues that although some rebel groups (as in Mozambique) abused non-combatants, others (like those in Uganda) exhibit restraint, discipline and control. In some cases rebel groups kill and maim their victims selectively, while in others violence is undertaken indiscriminately.⁸⁵ Some rebel groups loot and destroy the property of the civil populace, while others protect them from the central government's brutality. On the contrary, Elbadawi and Sambanis see the lack of political and economic development as the root and ultimate cause of conflict in the African continent.⁸⁶ They argue that "contrary to popular belief, Africa civil wars are not due to ethnic and religious diversity, but rather the high levels of poverty, failed political institutions, and economic dependence on natural resources,"⁸⁷ and suggest therefore that the best and fastest strategy to reduce and prevent the prevalence of civil armed conflict in the continent is to institutionalize democratic reforms that would effectively manage the obstacles facing Africa's diverse societies: promotion of inter-group cooperation, specially tailored political governance and economic management of state institutions.

In contrast, Fierke has ascribed violent conflicts to the global shift in human security from nations to individual(s).⁸⁸ Since the mid 1990s human security has shifted attention from states to individuals with emphasis on individual human rights and security and development. These he attributes to the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report (UNHD). First, the individual now becomes the central focus of human rights, safety from violence and sustainable development.⁸⁹ The shift of rights from states to individual (human) was a response to civilian human casualties during small wars that emerged at the end of the cold war. Fundamental to this shift were the desires to protect the environment and put people at the center of the development discourse. Thinking centered on the idea that safety of the individual is key to global security.⁹⁰ Second, the relationship between security and development, which were previously considered distinct areas of analysis, are now subject to re-evaluation.⁹¹ This re-evaluation gave rise to the assumption that underdevelopment is dangerous insofar as it exists alongside violent conflict; to re-emphasize the trope, "development retards conflict as much as conflict retards development."⁹² Thus the enthronement of democracy was seen as a cure and at the very least a move towards the realization of human security. Hence, the international community conceives of democracy as a responsibility because it is paramount to the attainment of global security.

⁸³ Weinstein, J., *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006.

⁸⁴ Ibid,

⁸⁵ Ibid,

⁸⁶ Elbadawi, I., & Sambanis, N., "Why Are There So Many Civil Wars In Africa? Understanding and Preventing Violent Conflict," World Bank Working Paper No. 28130, Washington DC, 2000.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Fierke, K.M., *Critical Approaches to International security*, Malden: Polity Press, 2007.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 144.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 145.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 144.

⁹² Collier, P., et al., "Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy," (A World Bank Policy Research Report), Washington DC: World Bank & Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 1.

Again, as shown above, the analyses of conflicts in different African countries under one category suffer from lumped generalization. Armed or civil conflicts in various states of Africa are distinct because they are shaped and transformed by local political and social dynamics. Such dynamics are specific in time and space to that particular situation. Conflicts in different nations of the continent may appear similar, but a closer examination would reveal their causes, mechanisms, aims and motivations as distinct, separate and loose.

Long before now, David Hume had warned intellectuals against inference from one event to another based on habit, convention and custom.⁹³ He contends that events should be observed, studied and analyzed separately one from the other even though they appear similar – the causal antecedent mechanisms and consequential effect of events are different, one from the other. For instance, in some African societies land was sacred, invaluable and culturally significant to the peoples' existence before the advent of capitalism, which placed monetary value on land. Conflict over land in Africa hence is shaped and transformed differently in various societies according to its cultural, political, religious and social significance. The variation in resistance to land loss would thus be determined by the value placed on land by a given society. Rather than making blanket generalizations, therefore, we need to rethink civil war and other armed conflict - in the African continent (especially the Niger Delta) and elsewhere - in geographical terms.

1.4 Rethinking Civil War and Conflict in Spatial Terms

My dissertation challenges a number of these scholarly analyses and much of their conceptual architecture, which sustains the “resource curse” and predation/greed hypotheses. Most of the analyses ignore the ways that oil exacerbates and conflagrates pre-existing (pre-oil) conflicts in Nigeria's delta. In particular I challenge the notion that the Niger Delta's oil insurgency is a singular or unitary phenomenon (it must rather be located on a wider field of violence), that the rebels and insurgents can be defined by their distinction from and opposition to the state, that the relations between predation, resource character and political outcomes are consistently related, and that there is any simple shift from grievance to greed. The goal of this work therefore is to show (a) that in the Niger Delta there is not just one conflict (resource conflict), but several which cannot be easily placed under the blanket category ‘resource curse,’ (b) within the oil-rich Niger Delta there are important and different sub-regional dynamics with regard to the ongoing oil conflict, (c) differing local political structures shape and transform the conflicts in the east and west regions of the delta, and (d) although there is no simple temporal shift from grievance to greed, the different insurgent dynamics between eastern and western regions of the Niger Delta show how different motives (criminality, youth alienation, ideologies of resource control) combine in different and unstable configurations whose trajectories and character are shaped fundamentally by state politics. Watts captures the spatiality of conflict in Niger Delta so aptly when he says:

The presence and activities of the oil companies as part of the oil complex, constitutes a challenge to customary forms of community authority, inter-ethnic

⁹³ Hume, D., *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

relations, and local state institutions principally through the property and land disputes that are engendered, via forms of popular mobilization and agitation. These *pre-oil* political struggles are animated by the desire to gain access to (i) company rents and compensation revenues, and (ii) federal petro-revenues by capturing rents (often fraudulently) through the creation of new regional and/or local state institutions. The oil complex (as a state institutional description) and petro-capitalism (as a dynamic set of forces) refigure differing sorts of governable spaces in which contrasting sorts of identities, and forms of rule come into play. In some cases youth and generational forces are key, in some cases gender, the clan or the kingdom or the ethnic minority (or indigenous peoples). In other instances local governmental authorities or electoral wards may be crucibles within which oil politics are generated.⁹⁴

My dissertation therefore rethinks the “resource curse” hypothesis and relatedly intends to provide a rather different set of policy and strategic interventions for the long term development of the delta and for the short term de-escalation of violence. In social scientific terms I hope to demonstrate some important claims. First, as Kalyvas suggests, viewed from the micro-level the delta insurgency resembles a “welter of complex struggles”⁹⁵ in which the notion that the rebels are criminals who operate against law-abiding states fail to capture the dynamics at work. Group interests are often “localistic and region-specific”⁹⁶ yet their specificity emerges from the structured totality of the national and sub-national oil complex. Second, a geographical, that is to say spatial, analysis presents a more complex picture of the insurgency and militant dynamics and renders an analysis more attentive to localistic and regional forces. Finally, the picture that emerges from the Niger Delta is one in which the oil insurgency – itself a complex amalgam of Clapham’s liberation, separatist, reform and warlord insurgencies⁹⁷ – is part of a wider political economy of violence. Unlike those subscribing to the ‘resource curse’ narrative, I find that there are significant historical forces of conflict which predate oil, and in the contemporary moment are complicated and made more complex by oil and the spoils of oil. Like most other guerilla wars, the Niger Delta civil conflict and insurgency is a complex blend of state-driven political conflicts, ethnic violence, youth unrest, chieftancy tussle, political citizenship, and intra and inter-community tensions and criminality. It resembles forms of social and class struggle – some criminalized, some not – within a historically and politically specific form of what geographer David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession.⁹⁸ Rather than poverty, economic stagnation and a lot of oil (Collier’s foundation stone), my starting point is a historical sense of class and socio-political exclusion, corporate and other capital flows, and military neoliberalism. Nigeria’s oil insurgency points to the multi-dimensional character of opportunity structures for mobilization from below. In this regard Nigeria’s insurgency resembles the case of Colombia in which oil played a huge role in the escalation of armed

⁹⁴ Watts, M., “Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004, p. 54.

⁹⁵ Kalyvas, S. N., “New” and “Old” Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?, *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2001, p. 113.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 112.

⁹⁷ Clapham, C., *African Guerrillas*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.

⁹⁸ Harvey, D., *The New Imperialism*, London: Clarendon, 2003; Harvey, D. *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism*, London: Oxford University Press, 2005.

conflict through opportunities for predation,⁹⁹ that was a classic instance of “policy failure, collusion of civil actors and terror and fear in the absence of the rule of law that created the opportunity structure”¹⁰⁰ for civil war and rebellion. These opportunities emerge from, and are the products of, what Cramer calls the “double helix of violent conflict,”¹⁰¹ one strand of which reflects accumulation by dispossession, the other global oil dynamics and interests of the advanced capitalist states.

My analysis questions the oil-conflict linkage as espoused by Collier, Ross and other social and political scientists. As Watts argues, their analyses “steadily ignore how oil’s contribution to war or authoritarianism builds upon pre-existing (pre-oil) political dynamics.”¹⁰² It is noteworthy to acknowledge that while oil can and actually does generate rents, enhance military and security budgets, and generates limited employment and linkages effects, the types of violence and politics that are derived from the “oil complex are spatially heterogeneous and not readily encompassed by the idea of predation, looting and rebellion.”¹⁰³ Therefore Watts has so eloquently argued:

Oil may indeed be a curse but its violent history – and its ability to generate (*and conflagrate*) conflict – can only be decoded if we are attentive to the unique qualities of oil itself, to the powerful corporate and state institutions for which it becomes a bearer, and not least to the ways in which oil becomes an idiom for doing politics as it is inserted into an already existing political landscape of forces, identities, and forms of power.¹⁰⁴

The role big corporations (whether state owned or otherwise) play in crisis generation in countries of the third world (and Nigeria is no exception) is worth examining. Big corporations generate underdevelopment and endemic crisis in countries of the global south.¹⁰⁵ Owners and managers of capital exercise enormous power over groups and institutions for the appropriation and maximization of huge profit. This development creates other groups and social classes – workers, peasants and unemployed who are dispossessed, dominated, dependent and exploited. The primary dynamic is not the federal government and local people but the class of exploiters and exploited that emerges in the oil host communities. Within this framework of dominance and exploitation, conflict between the government/oil corporations and oil-bearing communities in the delta becomes an inevitable class struggle.¹⁰⁶ This category of antagonism between petro-capitalists and unemployed farmers/fisherfolks in the Niger Delta has forced its way into the traditional family lifestyle of the delta, thereby destroying communal governance, livelihood, old

⁹⁹ Pearce, J., “Policy Failure and Petroleum Predation: The economics of civil war debate viewed from the ‘war zone,” *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2005, pp.152-180.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ Cramer, C., *Violence in Developing Countries: War, Memory, Progress*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 199.

¹⁰² Watts, M., “Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004, p. 75.

¹⁰³ Ibid,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Girvan, N., *Corporate Imperialism: Conflict and Expropriation*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1976; Tamuno, T., *The Niger Delta Question*, PortHarcourt: Riverside Publications, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid,

harmony and communal interests. The Niger Delta crisis is a revolt by oil-bearing communities against the dependent and subordinated role to which they have been subjected over the years.

My point of entry into the economic conception of violence would be the spatial analysis of pre-oil conflicts that emerges from, and in the contemporary time is associated with, the oil complex and petro-capitalism in east and west Niger Delta. A spatial analysis of the Niger Delta conflict which interrogates Rivers State (eastern delta) and Delta State (western delta) will show differing local political, organizational structures and reveal deep historical narratives that shape and frame the conflicts in these two regions of the delta. Common conflict grievances and burdens interlink these two regions, yet they are generated by distinctive political responses and conflict dynamics. The Delta State (western delta) actors, since inception, have a well-coordinated and coherent form of resistance, and are at every point centrally organized. The Rivers State (eastern delta), on the other hand, is made up of fractured/fragmented groups without a centralized leadership and has not been able to coherently articulate a position different from the general claims of resource control and self-determination. I find that the difference in their demands is attributable to geography, social-historical conditions, and the geo-political dynamics. Each geographical space (east or west) is constrained by different kinds of pre-existing forms of conflicts that have been complicated and reframed by the oil complex. In this regard oil is a mere catalyst that has unleashed new forms of social, economic and political forces that have helped to transform conflict in the region.

1.5 The Political Economy of Oil in Nigeria

Nigeria is an important, diverse and complicated country. It features a federal structure made up of thirty-six states and divided into six geopolitical zones. Nigeria is arguably one of the most important countries on the African continent; it is geostrategically, politically and economically significant, with a huge economy and population of over 170 million people (CIA World Factbook and World Bank Population Chart 2014).¹⁰⁷ So, Nigeria is critical to the stability and future of West Africa. The country is also a highly fractious multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The British co-opted many ethnic groups to coexist within a colonized territorial space.¹⁰⁸ Today there are more than 350 culturally distinct ethnic groups in the country, with the majority ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) accounting for nearly two-thirds of the total population. While the Hausa-Fulani Muslims are the dominant group in the northern savanna part of the country, the Yoruba and Igbo are majority in the southern rain belt; the bulk

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, P. & Watts, M., *Doing Development Differently (DDD): A Pilot for Politically Savvy, Locally Tailored and Adaptive Delivery in Nigeria*, Discussion Paper, "Nigeria: The Political Economy of Governance," A Report commissioned by the World Bank as part of its Programmatic Approach to Governance, Washington DC: The World Bank, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ The British for administrative convenience joined majority and minority ethnic groups in this arbitrary creation. The minority question or agitations since inception by groups are centered on the continued dissatisfaction of the ethnic minorities with the distribution of power and resources in the nation. The minority groups in the North - the Middle-Belt Region in particular - seem to be agitating for greater participation in the central government and the equitable distribution of resources as a means of bringing about significant development to their people, but not necessarily the direct control of resources derived from their region. The Niger Delta minorities in the South on the other hand appear to be seeking the direct control of their resources as a means of achieving meaningful development of their region.

of Christian- and Muslim-mixed Yoruba are in the southwest while the nearly all-Christian Igbo populate the southeast. Since independence (in 1960), the contentious relations among these three major ethnic groups have significantly shaped the politics and economy of the nation.¹⁰⁹ The recurrent colonial relics of “sharp and abiding regional, class, ethnic and religious lines”¹¹⁰ created by these three groups hinders development and progress in the nation. At independence, Nigeria, a precarious multi-ethnic society, was governed by the Hausa-Fulani dominated Northern Peoples Congress (NPC).¹¹¹ It did not take long before cracks began to emerge among elites from the major ethnic groups and minority groups began to express their frustration and dissatisfaction.

British colonial indirect rule, which was tied to regional communal governance institutions, reinforced ethnic, social and religious identities. In postcolonial Nigeria, these traditional institutions of customary governance such as emirs, chiefs, obas, obis, amanyanabos and native administrative authority systems were accommodated in the governance space.¹¹² These traditional institutions have been sustained and strengthened by the incorporation of indigeneity in successive Nigerian constitutions since independence. The irreconcilable contradictions arising from indigenous rights and citizenship rights in Nigeria’s multi-ethnic society has attracted more conflicts in recent times.¹¹³ Indigeneity and citizenship are highly contested and combustible claims over territory in Nigeria.

Nigeria’s political history is marked by electoral violence, a brutal civil war (1967-1970) and years of military dictatorship. Right from independence, the Nigerian federation has been unstable; for example, the Middle Belt’s boycott of the first post-independence general election of 1964 generated conflict that led to the death of many people in that region. Also, in 1965 allegations of monumental electoral malpractices in the Western Region led to near anarchy

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, P. & Watts, M., *Doing Development Differently (DDD): A Pilot for Politically Savvy, Locally Tailored and Adaptive Delivery in Nigeria*, Discussion Paper, “Nigeria: The Political Economy of Governance,” A Report commissioned by the World Bank as part of its Programmatic Approach to Governance, Washington DC: The World Bank, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

¹¹¹ Nnoli, O., *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Boston: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978.

¹¹² Mustapha, A. R., “Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria,” CRISE Working Paper No. 18, Oxford Center for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University), 2005.

¹¹³ Egwu, S. G., “Ethnicity and Citizenship Rights in the Nigerian Federal State” in Gana, A. T. & Egwu, S. G. , (eds.), *Federalism in Africa: The Imperative of Democratic Development*, (Vol. 2), Trenton: African World Press, Inc., 2003; Ojukwu, C. C. & Onifade, C. A., “Social Capital, Inequality and Identity Politics: The Jos Crisis in Perspective,” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4 (5), 2010, pp. 173-180; Adebani, W., “Terror, Territoriality and the Struggle for Indigeneity and Citizenship in Northern Nigeria,” *Citizenship Studies*, 13 (4), 2009, pp. 349-363; Omotoso, F., “Indigeneity and Problems of Citizenship in Nigeria,” *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2), pp. 146-150; Watts, M., “Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004, pp. 50-80; Kraxberger, B., Strangers, indigenes and settlers: Contested Geographies of citizenship in Nigeria, *Space and Polity*, 9 (1), 9-27, 2005; Human Rights Watch Report, “Do They Own This Place”: Government Discrimination Against “Non-Indigenes” in Nigeria, New York: HRW, 2006; Adesoji, A. O. & Alao, A., “Indigeneity and Citizenship in Nigeria: Myth and Reality,” *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 2. No. 9, 2009; Osaghae, E. E., “The Problem of Citizenship in Nigeria,” *Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente (IsIAO)*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 1990, pp. 593-611; Osaghae, E., “Do Ethnic Minorities Still Exist in Nigeria?,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 24/2 1986 151-168; Tamuno, T., *The Niger Delta Question*, PortHarcourt: Riverside Publications, 2000.

there and death of many people. In January 1966, the first military coup overthrew a democratically elected government and enthroned a military dictatorship. Again, between 1967 and 1970 a thirty-month brutal civil war, prompted by the secession by Biafra (then Eastern Region), nearly tore the country into shards. Yet in spite of all these problems, federalist complexities and political turbulence, the country has even in the wake of a terrible civil war, been durable. In short, oil has in part helped to hold the country together.

The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in 1956 in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, coupled with the subsequent commercial output and global increase of oil prices in the 1970s, put Nigeria in the committee of petro-dollar nations. The Nigerian government became the dominant source of capital through its control of extraction, refining and distribution of petroleum products.¹¹⁴ The economy of Nigeria became heavily dependent on oil, and strategies to manipulate government revenue and spending for self-aggrandizement became the means to personal wealth. State bureaucracy expanded rapidly, a phenomenon that was exacerbated by the proliferation of federal parastatals which increased the size of government sector relative to the rest of the national economy. The agriculture sector, which was doing relatively well before the oil boom of the 1970s, was severely affected by the near total reliance on oil exports. In their quest to benefit from the oil windfall, rural dwellers migrated to the city in droves.¹¹⁵ The rural-urban migration led to a drastic reduction in the production of agricultural exports and domestic food crops the so-called Dutch Disease. The reliance on oil export to the detriment of other sectors of the economy made Nigeria a net importer of food. With overarching military dictators at the center of governance, primitive accumulation was intensified: corruption, maladministration, cronyism, theft, looting of state treasury and other fraudulent practices became rampant. The state further created a business class that relied heavily (and solely) on government patronage through inflated contracts rather than on production of goods and services. The gap between the rich and the poor increased geometrically. Incompetent and corrupt governance since 1966, particularly by the repressive and brutal military dictators who have ruled the country for the greater part of its post-independence years, has produced a mass of poor, uneducated, angry and restive citizens.

A massive oil economy directly under the vice grip of the state has provided a plethora of opportunities for political patronage and elites/activists co-optation. Post-colonial centralization of oil revenues and political authority has contributed in no small measure to the sustenance of Nigeria's unstable federal system.¹¹⁶ The centralization of oil revenues facilitated the dismantling of the colonial regional structures of governance and introduced the states and local governments structure without necessarily addressing fears arising from ethno-religious and ethnic

¹¹⁴ Ikein, A. A., *The Impact of Oil on a Developing Country: The Case of Nigeria*, New York: Praeger, 1990.

¹¹⁵ Watts, M., *Silent Violence: Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

¹¹⁶ Watts, M., "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004; Lewis, P. & Watts, M., *Doing Development Differently (DDD): A Pilot for Politically Savvy, Locally Tailored and Adaptive Delivery in Nigeria*, Discussion Paper, "Nigeria: The Political Economy of Governance," A Report commissioned by the World Bank as part of its Programmatic Approach to Governance, Washington DC: The World Bank, 2015; Akinleye, R., "State Creation in Nigeria," *African Studies Review* 39/2, 1996, 71-94; Suberu, R., "The struggle for new states in Nigeria 1976-1990," *African Affairs*, 1991, 90, 499-522; Suberu, R., "The struggle for new states in Nigeria 1976-1990," *African Affairs*, 1991, 90, 499-522.

identities.¹¹⁷ This is because the states and local government areas thus created now depended on oil revenue distributed from the central purse.¹¹⁸ Because oil rents sustain institutions of state and the polity, Nigeria is thus a particular type of political economy, what can be called an oil dependent state petro-economy.¹¹⁹ After years of military dictatorship, in 1999 a democratically elected government was installed and saddled with the responsibility to douse frictions arising from Nigeria's federal system, bring the economy out of shambles, and build strong democratic institutions despite the constraints of the ever recurring regional, ethnic, tribal and religious tensions.

1.6 Nigeria as an Oil State

Arguably, oil is the basis of our hydrocarbon capitalism and the most significant global commodity of the twenty-first century. It is the basic foundation of energy for modern civilization and the fuel for modern industrialization. It is globally strategic. Oil is a substance with high demand that has contributed greatly to modern industrial development, and at times the world seems to be operating at the mercy of this liquid substance located under the crux of the earth. When there are disruptions in producing territories, with a corresponding increase in market prices, households and corporations alike feel the global significance of oil as a product. Globally, the oil and gas industry is huge (several Million dollars) and controlled by some of the largest forms of corporate capital. The industry has a vast infrastructure and wells spread across planet Earth.¹²⁰ It includes a complex amalgam of sectors, e.g., engineering companies, oil service companies, banks that fund the industry, the military, security consultants, and paramilitary apparatuses. The oil and gas industry is composed of a complicated set of institutions, then, that are part and parcel of how we might think about it. At the epicenter of the oil and gas industry is a cartel called the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which was established in 1960 to coordinate and unify petroleum policies.

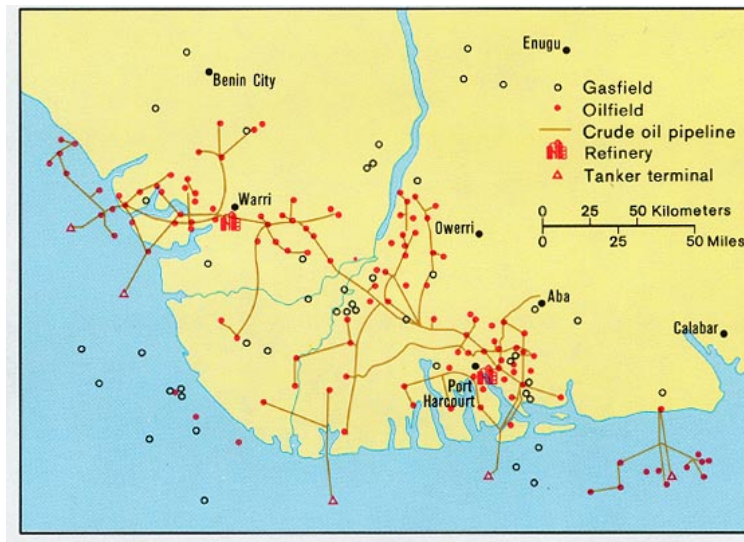
¹¹⁷ Ibid,

¹¹⁸ The creation of states and local government areas (by military rulers) is skewed in favor of the majority ethnic groups, who dominate the political space to the detriment of the Niger Delta where oil is extracted. For instance, while Bayelsa State has only 8 local government areas since its creation in 1996, Kano in the north on the other hand, has 44. So, while more revenues are allocated to regions with more states and LGAs, region like the delta with fewer states and LGAs get less funds from the federal pool. A 2006 UNDP report on human development in the Niger Delta puts the poverty rate in the whole of the South-South region of Nigeria (including the Niger Delta) at 74.8% and further asserts that local people often cannot tap directly into the oil industry benefits, including employment, because they lack skills or capital resources or both, required for participation in the industry. However, it should be noted that since 1999 federal allocation (oil derivation plus other sources) to oil bearing states of the Niger Delta have increased and huge compared to non oil producing state outside the Delta. Even though more revenue was allocated to oil bearing states of the Niger delta insurgency grew and was increasing in absolute terms and in relation to other regions.

¹¹⁹ Ibid,

¹²⁰ Watts, M., "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004.

Figure 1: Oil and Gas Fields in the Niger Delta



Source: <http://maps.nationmaster.com/country/ni/1>

Nigeria joined the prestigious league of oil states in 1958, even before it gained independence. The production of oil and gas represents a significant proportion of gross domestic product and foreign exchange earnings; Nigeria's oil and gas earnings are close to half of its GDP. About 80 percent of government revenues and 98 percent of foreign exchange earnings come from the "black gold." By 1970 Nigeria had become a major oil producer, the ninth largest producer in the world, and since then has been producing an average of 2.5 million barrels per day (bpd). The bulk of the oil reserves are found in the delta and offshore in the Bights of Benin and Biafra, along with the Gulf of Guinea.¹²¹ By some estimate, the oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta is a multi-billion dollar investment comprised of 606 oil fields, 5,284 wells, about 7,000 kilometers of pipelines crisscrossing the delta, 10 export terminals, 275 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 4 refineries and a gigantic liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant.¹²² The Nigerian government earns huge revenues from the sale of oil, running into billions of dollars (the country earned over 500 billion dollars from oil revenue between 1999-2014). Clearly, oil has become the mainstay of the nation's political economy, making the country a classic wealthy petro-state.¹²³ Yet how the oil revenue has been spent is highly questionable and unimaginable, and in fact what you see is an astonishing failure all over the country. Even though centralization of both political authority and oil revenues sustains Nigeria's fragile federalism, the post-colonial remains, how to find an equitable and just formula for the distribution of power and revenues. A huge proportion of the oil revenues that have accrued into the government's purse simply get

¹²¹ Lewis, P. & Watts, M., *Doing Development Differently (DDD): A Pilot for Politically Savvy, Locally Tailored and Adaptive Delivery in Nigeria*, Discussion Paper, *op cit*, 2015; Olivera, Ricardo De Soares 2007, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, London: Hurst and Company, 2007.

¹²² Watts, M., "Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 114, 2007.

¹²³ But it has not been an all rosy affair without hitches; the oil boom of the 1970s ended with an intense bust in the mid-1980s, hence the introduction of austerity measures and World Bank structural adjustment (SAP) reforms.

squandered, disappeared or brazenly stolen by the ruling political elites.¹²⁴ The rest, which is distributed between the federal government, states and local government areas, has very little impact on the daily lives of the citizens. The life expectancy of a Nigerian is 45 years, one of the lowest life expectancies globally, and about 70 percent of the population survives below the poverty line, i.e. at less than \$1 a day. In a nutshell, despite its promise, oil has produced a catastrophic failure of development. Nigeria thus evinces a significant proportion of the characteristics of an oil state. A recent World Bank study of Nigeria's re-based GDP growth for selected sectors in 2011, 2012 and 2013 was assessed at 5.3% 4.2% and 5.5% respectively. Although the re-basing has diminished GDP share estimates for oil and gas, the sector nonetheless accounts for a greater proportion of the federation's exports and budgetary revenues, hence vital to its macroeconomic and budgetary stability.¹²⁵

Figure 2: GDP Growth in selected sections: 2011-2013 (New Estimates)

A Comparison of Newly Re-Based and Older GDP Estimates			
	2011	2012	2013
Total	5.3	4.2	5.5
Non-Oil GDP	5.8	5.8	8.4
Agriculture	2.9	6.7	2.9
Crude Oil and Gas	2.3	-4.9	-13.1
Manufacturing	17.8	13.5	21.8
including food, beverages, tobacco	7.3	6.6	11.8
Electricity, Gas, and Utilities	39.5	14.6	14.6
Construction	15.7	9.4	14.2
Trade	7.2	2.2	6.6
Transportation	6.0	-3.4	3.8
Telecommunications and Info Services	1.2	3.7	4.7
Entertainment, Broadcasting, Movies, Music	10.5	1.9	24.1
Real Estate	0.4	5.6	12.0

Source: World Bank Report, 2014

In Nigeria, the government established a central bureaucracy and statutory monopoly over all mineral exploration and exploitation rights through the promulgation of laws. The federal government, in a bid to maintain exclusive monopoly over mineral resources (specifically, oil), enacted the Oil and Pipelines Act of 1956, Petroleum Act of 1969 and Land

¹²⁴ World Bank, *Nigeria's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011a; World Bank, *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011b; World Bank, *Nigeria: Economic Report*, Abuja: The World Bank, 2013.

¹²⁵ World Bank, "Nigeria Economic Report," Washington DC: World Bank, 2014, p. 4. The World Bank report says insurgent activities; vandalism, theft and community protests in recent years have greatly reduced output and investment in the oil and gas sector.

Use Act of 1967.¹²⁶ These laws vest ownership, control and management of all mineral resources (oil inclusive) in the hands of the federal government and dispossess the people completely of their land and natural endowments. Also, the laws have direct bearing on oil prospecting, exploration and mining in Nigeria to the detriment of oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta. Dispossessed and dislocated from their primary means of livelihood (farming and fishing) and with no hope of replacement, the communities that have engaged (since the 1970s) in more than three decades of peaceful non-violent agitation seem to have reached high levels of frustration and anger which, very unfortunately, are spawning avoidable violent conflicts whose echoes are reverberating around the world.

In 1971 as part of the government's indigenization policy, a state-owned oil company, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), was established. As a nationalized oil corporation, the NNPC operates a joint venture partnership agreement with oil majors (Shell, Chevron, Agip, Exxonmobil, Texaco etc.), which are granted oil concessions and operating licenses (in some cases as oil blocs) to ascertain a sharing formula for burdens, royalties and rents.¹²⁷ In this joint venture business partnership between government and oil majors, the Nigerian government cuts a certain percentage value of every barrel produced, in that about two-thirds of revenue from every barrel produced flows into the Nigerian federal treasury. This makes Nigeria a classical rentier-state where huge rents from oil bankroll the running of the state and institutions. There have also been since the 2000s the production sharing contracts (PSC), which involves the International Oil Companies (IOCs) assuming all the financial risk for developing the fields and to recoup their investment before the Federation begins to get its share, as well as the service contracts that involves the participation of the NNPC's exploration and production subsidiary (Nigerian Petroleum Development Company) as a joint operator.

The military is a powerful force and player in this "vast unearned (oil) income, flowing to the federal exchequer, derivative of the alliance of state and capital" in Nigeria.¹²⁸ Like most oil-rich nations (petro-states), oil is considered a national security resource, hence, oil fields are militarily policed and any form of protest or resistance is brutally crushed. In the Niger Delta, epicenter of the multi-billion dollar oil infrastructure and personnel, oil workers and their family members are moved around in heavily guarded military convoys. The oil sector is heavily securitized with a retinue of international security consultants and national security agencies: military, paramilitary, private-military, police and mercenaries.¹²⁹ Securitization as it pertains to oil operations in Nigeria's Niger Delta is better described as the economization of security and the securitization of economic affairs. In matters of national security and surveillance, the protection of oil infrastructure and personnel by government and its agencies takes precedent over and above the protection of lives and property of ordinary citizens living in the delta's oil-

¹²⁶ These laws are sustained in successive Nigerian constitutions and minority efforts at challenging and abrogating them as fundamentally unjust and obnoxious have yielded no efforts.

¹²⁷ Nwokeji, G. U, "The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and Development of the Nigeria Oil and Gas Industry: History, Strategies and Current Directions," Prepared as part of a study sponsored by The James Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Houston, Texas, and Japan Petroleum Energy Center, Rice University, 2007; Watts, M., "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004.

¹²⁸ Watts, M., "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geo Politics*, 9(1), 2004, p. 60; Reno, W, "Nigeria under military rule," Program in African Studies, Northwestern University, Working Papers No. 12, 2002.

¹²⁹ Ibid,

bearing communities. This is why Anna Zalik thinks the delta is “marked by a history of state and petroleum industry collusion both in social repression and environmental destruction.”¹³⁰ The region is better described as an occupied territory.

Figure 3: International Oil Companies Operating in Nigeria as at 2007

Company	Nigerian Production as % of production (boe*)	Operated leasehold area in Nigeria (km ²)
Shell (Netherlands)	10.8%	27,000
TOTAL (France)	10.2%	11,000
ExxonMobil (USA)	10.1%	4,500
ENI (Italy)	8.5%	12,800
Chevron (USA)	5.4%	10,500
ConocoPhillips (USA)	2.0%	3,900

*boe = barrels of oil equivalent

Source: PFC Energy 2007

In Nigeria, there is a political mechanism by which revenues from oil that accrue to the federal government’s central pool are distributed. It is called the Revenue Allocation Formula and the “derivation principle”¹³¹ under the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), which designs formulae for the distribution of federally collected revenues. The distribution of oil revenues among the various tiers of government by RMAFC is a complicated process by which the federal government keeps a bunch, the states are allocated a bunch, and local governments areas are allocated another bunch. But in Nigeria this system is enormously corrupt. The corruption is structural, settled and endemic in the entire system. The revenue allocation process has decentralized and democratized corruption, especially at the local government level where funds meant for development are merely appropriated, embezzled or squandered by corrupt politicians. Some of these local politicians accuse state governments of diverting and/or withholding funds meant for local development. This may not be far from the truth, but the fact remains that there is nothing to show for even the little that trickles down to the local government areas in Nigeria.

¹³⁰ Zalik, A., “The Niger Delta: ‘Petro-Violence’ and ‘Partnership Development,’” *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 101, ROAPE Publications Ltd., 2004, p. 401.

¹³¹ The “derivation principle” is a formula by which a particular percentage of revenues accruing to the federation account are paid to the state(s) where the natural resources are domiciled and exploited. Unfortunately, with the centralization of political authority and oil rents, there was a downward review of the derivation formula from its earlier post-independence 100% to a paltry 3% with oil as the mainstay of the nation’s economy. It was merely reviewed upwards to 13% in 1999 by a democratic regime after much agitation from oil-bearing communities. The oil-bearing states and communities of the delta, who have since adduced the downward review to their minority status, are agitating for 100% control of oil and gas resources in their land and then pay adequate statutory tax to the central government.

Figure 4: Federal and State Shares of Petroleum Proceeds

Years	Producing state (per cent)	Distributable Pool Amount or Federation Account (per cent)
1960-67	50	50
1967-69	50	50
1969-71	45	55
1971-75	45 minus offshore proceeds	55 plus offshore proceeds
1975-79	20 minus offshore proceeds	80 plus offshore proceeds
1979-81	-	100
1982-92	1.5	98.5
1992-99	3	97
1999-present	13	87

Rotimi, 2001

Corruption is pervasive and, as noted, structural and endemic in Nigeria. It hinders government's ability to deliver on economic development and social services for the benefit of its citizenry. The problem of corruption has been attributed to government's lack of transparency and accountability.¹³² Less than one percent of the population illegally or corruptly appropriates Nigerian revenue from oil, to the detriment of ordinary citizens. Since independence the country has earned over \$800 billion from the sale of oil and gas resources, yet infrastructure and human development are in no way commensurate with those revenues.¹³³ There is endemic poverty, a high mortality rate, over 60 percent youth unemployment, and an abysmally low standard of living. A former chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mr. Nuhu Ribadu, notes that more than \$380 billion of oil revenue have either been stolen or wasted by Nigerian governments since independence in 1960.¹³⁴ He says when you fight corruption in Nigeria, corruption fights you back, and he posits that unless the problem of corruption is confronted directly, Nigeria may not reach its desired destination due to greed by political and ruling elites. The World Bank, on its part, records that about \$500 billion have been stolen in Nigeria since independence.¹³⁵ In sum, grand corruption at every level of governance has been linked to Nigeria's economic stagnation and infrastructural deficit.

Much of what passes as the state allocation of revenues is in effect devoted to the purchase of consent. In effect, the state becomes a mechanism through which political elites

¹³² Lewis, P. & Watts, M., *Doing Development Differently (DDD): A Pilot for Politically Savvy, Locally Tailored and Adaptive Delivery in Nigeria*, Discussion Paper, *op cit*, 2015; World Bank, *Nigeria's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011a; World Bank, *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011b; World Bank, *Nigeria: Economic Report*, Abuja: The World Bank, 2013.

¹³³ Ibid,

¹³⁴ "Nigerian Leaders 'Stole' \$380bn," BBC News October 20, 2006, <http://new.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6069230.stm>

¹³⁵ World Bank, *Nigeria's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011a; World Bank, *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011b; World Bank, *Nigeria: Economic Report*, Abuja: The World Bank, 2013.

attempt to purchase civic consent simply by distributing oil revenues in ad hoc patterns.¹³⁶ The Nigerian state is therefore typically seen as corrupt and failed what the World Bank calls a “fragile and conflicted state”.¹³⁷ It amounts to a failed secular national development now confronted by religious fundamentalism, ethno-religious conflict and youth insurgencies. Since independence, oil and its centralization have kept Nigeria together mainly through the state-led oil investment. But at the same time the patterns of conflict generated from this unstable and fragile federation are strongly territorial (spatial); this geographical fragmentation often the affirmations of local identities such as ethnic, religious, cultural, regional, clan and village that stand in contradiction to a national sense of identity.

Since late 2005, the Niger Delta oil-bearing region has been confronting an armed insurgency. All the instability and resultant fall in oil output point to a profound crisis. But rather than oil taking center stage, the delta insurgency animates a complicated constellation of issues arising from local grievances, ecological despoliation, unjust revenue allocation, unemployment, oil theft (“*bunkering*”), ethnic rivalry/conflict, chieftancy tussles, political marginalization, criminality, securitization and repression, and controversial activities of MNOCs in the region. Moreover, it is not just the Niger Delta that holds the key to Nigeria’s fractious federalism.¹³⁸ Since 2010 another insurgency has emerged in the northeast, where an Islamic sect “Boko Haram” (“the movement against western education”) has destroyed a great part of that region, murdered many people, displaced millions and launched several coordinated bomb attacks in many parts of the north including both the central/capital city of Nigeria, Abuja, and the United Nations compound. The country therefore confronts twin political insurgencies.

This work, however, focuses exclusively on the Niger Delta and its forms of discontent and modes of expression against the Nigerian state. Therefore the next chapter, titled “From Resistance to Ethnic Mobilization: Phases of Conflict in the Niger Delta (1850-1999),” presents a chronology of key struggles and agitations undertaken in the Niger Delta at different epochs beginning in the 19th century and extending to the most recent minority ethnic mobilizations of the 1990s.

¹³⁶ Lewis, P. & Watts, M., *Doing Development Differently (DDD): A Pilot for Politically Savvy, Locally Tailored and Adaptive Delivery in Nigeria*, Discussion Paper, *op cit*, 2015.

¹³⁷ Porter, D. *et al*, “Managing Public Finance and Procurement in Fragile and Conflicted Settings,” World Development Report Background Paper, Washington: World Bank, 2010, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Watts, M., “Violent Geographies: Speaking the Unspeakable and the Politics of Space,” *City & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2001, pp. 85-117.

Chapter Two

From Resistance to Ethnic Mobilization: Phases of Conflict in the Niger Delta (1850-1999)

The people of the Niger Delta were not enthusiastic to board the ship of Nigerian independence in 1960. Not because they loved the so called colonial masters. Indeed, the Niger Delta was in the forefront of the primary resistance to the colonial masters, and had a disproportionate number of its rulers and leaders killed, removed from office, and exiled to distant places. It was fear of completely losing the remaining vestiges of their pristine sovereignty to bigger Nigerian groups, the Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani. It was a fear shared by other minority ethnic nationalities in other parts of Nigeria...Can we tell a story of success that bellies fears of mistreatment of minorities, of democratic governance and of fair distribution of resources since 1960? (Alagoa, E.J., *In Memory of Heroes*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2011, p. 22).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is an excursion into the historical development of resistance, agitation and conflict in the Niger Delta. My aim is to articulate the changing historical geography of conflict from the late nineteenth century up to the start of the current civil rule (1999). Rather than attempting to write a complete and full account of resistance or agitation in the Niger Delta over a century and a half, I chart/chronicle several significant conjunctures in each of three historical phases: the precolonial (1850-1900), colonial (1900-1960) and postcolonial (1960-1999). Each of the conflicts I describe will differ in dynamics, motivation, trajectories and actors. These differences reveal the undulating nature of regional conflicts since the late nineteenth century and help greatly in providing a firm understanding of the historical geography of the Niger Delta. Similarly, an interrogation of some past conflicts, it is hoped, will deepen our insight into the types of grievances and problems common to both past and present conflicts, in our bid to understand the rise of insurgency in the contemporary period.

I begin by examining some late nineteenth century (precolonial) reactions by communities and peoples of the Niger Delta to the economic geography and acts of exclusion by Liverpool trade merchants in the coast: the deposition and subsequent banishment of King Anna Jaja Pepple of Opobo, Nana Olomu of Itsekiri, and the invasion of Akassa (King William Koko). In the colonial epoch, I consider minority ethnic groups' demand for autonomous states (self-determination) and establishment of the Willink Minority Commission and its unsatisfactory outcome. Finally, the narratives chosen to represent the postcolonial era involve a brief analysis of the Boro insurrection of 1966, ethnic mobilization against the state by the Ijaw National Congress (INC) and the Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP) since the 1990s.

2.2 Revolts and Repressions in Precolonial Niger Delta

Precolonial Niger Delta comprises the history of incongruent city-states inhabited by distinct ethnic nationality groups, including: the Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ibibio, Efik, Ogoni and other minority ethnic nationalities inhabiting the south coastal region of Nigeria. Archaeological finds show that some of these societies (especially Ijaw) had existed in the Niger Delta (West African coast) for centuries before the advent of European merchants. The archaeological record is a useful complement to oral traditions and written sources, but much work remains to be done in this area. Fortunately, the personalities and events covered in this section (late 19th century resistance) can be found in written history even though such works may have been prejudiced or meant to serve particular agendas.

According to written accounts, Portugal recorded the first western foray into the coastal plain of West Africa in the fifteenth century.¹³⁹ Before the arrival of Portuguese navigators in the West African coast, the Niger Delta (and by extension the whole of the West African coast) was not integrated into the global political economy. The Portuguese maintained a monopoly on slave and merchandise trade with city-states in the West African coast until the intrusion of trade merchants and missionaries from other nations (Sweden, Holland, Denmark, France and Britain) in the 16th and seventeenth century. Trade with these western nations transformed West Africa's coastal region into an outpost of the trans-Atlantic commerce and brought it into the global capitalist economy. Since the fifteenth century, therefore, the Niger Delta has been significantly influenced and in fact transformed by global political economic processes through commerce and social relations with European capitalist merchants. Between the 15th and mid-19th centuries, the Niger Delta played a strategic and significant role in the trans-Atlantic slave and merchandise trade. As a prime example, from the seventeenth century until the prohibition proclamation in 1807, city-states of the delta supplied a great proportion of slaves to the Atlantic world compared to other regions of the West African coast.¹⁴⁰ In all, more than three million African slaves were shipped from the coastal city-states of the Niger Delta to Europe and the Americas.

The 1807 and 1833 Imperial Acts abolishing slave trade and slavery thus had a tremendous impact on sociopolitical and economic institutions in West Africa. The abolition also led to remodification and enlargement of trading "Houses" in Niger Delta (especially in the east delta) to meet transportation and other challenges of the new trade.¹⁴¹ The transition from slave trade to nonslave commodities was historically significant, in the case of the Niger Delta, palm

¹³⁹ Pereira, D. P., *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, translated and edited by, George, H. T. Kimble, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937; Dike, K. O., *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956; Ikime, O, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, London: Heinemann, 2000; Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005; Nwokeji, G. U., *Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Ryder, Alan F.C., *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897 (Ibadan History)*. London: Longman, 1969.

¹⁴⁰ Tamuno, T. N., *The Evolution of Nigeria: The Southern Phase, 1898-1914*, New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1972; Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

¹⁴¹ Tamuno, T. N., *The Evolution of Nigeria: The Southern Phase, 1898-1914*, New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1972.

oil became the new export (joined later by palm kernel oil; peanuts had played the same role in Senegambia, for example).

By mid-nineteenth century, slave trade had come to an end and the palm oil trade had become the principal export to overseas markets, with Britain as the major player. In England, capital was diverted into industry and other sectors that were considered more lucrative than slavery.¹⁴² As is often the case with major economic transitions, a new economy emerges with its own class interests and their increasingly central role in the economy. They aspire to control the power structures more generally and constitute themselves as the new dominant commercial class. Such radical shifts do not happen without strident resistance from the established classes, whose interest is to maintain the *status quo ante*. In Niger Delta the new post-slavery trade in palm oil not only simply brought new wealth into the region, but it placed much of it into the hands of hitherto-unknown elements during the slave commerce, such as Jaja Anna Pepple of Opobo. This challenged the established ruling classes and in some cases caused a breakdown of their authority. The commercial revolution has generated a whole historiography of its own, of which Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* is the seminal study. Similarly, Nwokeji's work *Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra* articulates clearly that this transition had especially extreme repercussions in the Bight of Biafra than any other region in Atlantic Africa because of the value of palm oil and, later alongside palm kernel oil in the international market.¹⁴³ Palm oil accounted for three-quarters of all Atlantic African trade during the second half of nineteenth century.¹⁴⁴ During the 1860s, for example, virtually all palm oil exports from Africa came from the Bights of Biafra and Benin, with the bulk of these coming from the Bight of Biafra (It was not even produced anywhere else in the world at that time). By the mid-eighteenth century, Bonny in the Bight of Biafra had become the principal port in Atlantic Africa, but internal communal strife in Bonny had by the second half of the nineteenth century culminated in the establishment of Opobo by Jaja Anna Pepple (a former slave boy turned merchant) in 1869; the latter, due to its strategic location, henceforth became the largest palm oil port in all of Nigeria.¹⁴⁵ This great transition from slave trade and slavery to 'legitimate' commerce in commodities, and the complex conflicts it threw up, set the necessary context in which to understand the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The introduction of steamship and mail service, which removed the requirement that a trader must own a shipping vessel in order to operate, opened up the business for small-scale British traders in the region, and resulted in the proliferation of European trade merchants,¹⁴⁶ which in turn prompted conflicts and power struggles between those merchants and age-old city-states' coastal middlemen. The Europeans' attempts to displace Niger Delta middlemen (such as Jaja, Nana, Ovonranwen and others) from the lucrative palm trade and thereby gain unhindered access to the hinterland for cheap produce were vehemently resisted, often leading to violent conflicts. Economically, intense competition among European traders for commodities became a common scenario in the Niger Delta propelling an upward surge in prices. When competition

¹⁴² Hopkins, A. G., *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Longman, 1973.

¹⁴³ Nwokeji, G. U., *Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

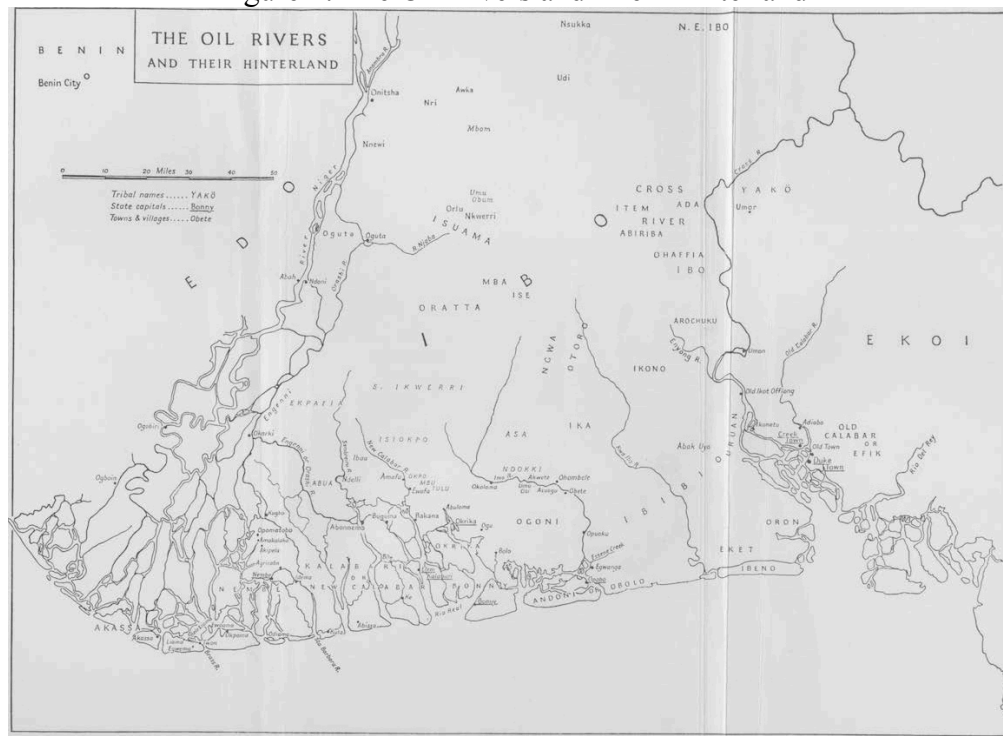
¹⁴⁴ Ibid,

¹⁴⁵ Dike, K. O., *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830 – 1885*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

¹⁴⁶ Lynn, M., *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

became critical, European traders combined forces to keep prices down.¹⁴⁷ However, their tactical maneuver of joining forces for price reduction was “defeated by the delta middlemen’s consistency and unanimity in withholding their produce when threatened with price agreement.”¹⁴⁸ The Niger Delta middlemen’s counter strategy was not defeated until the introduction of Sir George Taubman Goldie’s Royal African Company’s (later Royal Niger Company) monopoly in 1879. European combination succeeded only when consuls, in the name of Her Majesty, forced their terms on city-states. This led to the attack, dethronement and banishment of several African leaders and merchants in the region including Jaja Anna Pepple of Opobo in the late nineteenth century.

Figure 1: The Oil Rivers and Their Hinterland



Source: Jones, G. I., *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Easter Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963

From the above, it could be inferred that Britain’s determined and concerted efforts to eradicate slave trade cannot be totally uncoupled from her politico-economic interest in the region, namely uncontested sole access to resources of the Niger Delta city-states. Palm oil economics overwhelmed the slave trade in the light of its demand in England and western nations. Britain’s economic interest was made evident by succeeding events in the region as noted by Nwokeji:

The overbearing presence of the British, highlighted by a series of bombardments and sponsored expeditions against certain key indigenous traders, mainly along

¹⁴⁷ Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830 – 1885*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, p. 110.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid,

the Niger waterway, tangled the imperial power with many local ruling elites. The European presence also incited and emboldened weak indigenous groups to stand up against oppressor groups, escalating existing rivalries and creating new ones as rival power groups sought to renegotiate existing arrangements to their advantage.¹⁴⁹

At the Berlin West African Conference of 1884/5, Africa was partitioned for exploitation among European nations, and Britain instituted a trade monopoly in the Niger Delta. By this time (the 1880s) price disputes generated by the palm oil trade locally and internationally necessitated British traders' move to gain direct access to the hinterland markets so as to get cheap goods and maintain their huge profit margins.¹⁵⁰ The resulting crises arising from control of trade in the Niger Delta constitute some of the central antecedents of imbroglia that have characterized and shaped the region since the nineteenth century. One of the earliest significant encounters over control of trade was between the British and an African leader/merchant, Jaja Anna Pepple of Opobo in the late nineteenth century.

2.2.1 King Jaja's Arrest and Deportation

Jaja Anna Pepple was an Igbo slave boy sold into the Bonny Anna Pepple royal family in the Eastern delta.¹⁵¹ Being an energetic, able, intelligent and productive young man, he was incorporated into the royal household after undergoing the required rights of passage.¹⁵² He became a member of the Anna Pepple family with all privileges attached. What made Jaja distinct from other influential and powerful slaves were his innovative ideas for the maintenance of law and order in a traditional milieu. Even though Jaja was a product of slavery (sold when the trade had been officially abolished) he himself was never directly involved in the slave trade. Jaja's rise, influence and prosperity came with the palm oil trade of the nineteenth century. His determined efforts to succeed and his ability to adjust to the demands of international commerce in palm oil contributed a great deal to his achievements. Jaja moved within the elite social structure showing respect for, and participation in, various Bonny traditional institutions. Before long, he became head-chief of the Anna Pepple canoe-house.¹⁵³ Beginning in the 1860s, then, Bonny's political economy was characterized by political power tussles between the Manilla Pepple and Anna Pepple group of canoe-houses.¹⁵⁴ There was serious rivalry and conflict between the two (Manilla Pepple house and Anna Pepple house) on who should produce the

¹⁴⁹ Nwokeji, U. G, *Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, op. cit, p. 181.

¹⁵⁰ Lynn, M., *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

¹⁵¹ The Igbo hinterland was the major source of slave that serviced the Eastern delta. For more on the Igbo role and participation in the slave trade see, Nwokeji, G. U., *Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁵² Cookey, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times, 1821-1891*, New York: Nok Publishers Ltd., 1974; It is noteworthy that despite their slave beginnings some predecessors and contemporaries of Jaja achieved great power and privilege in their society.

¹⁵³ The Anna Pepple war-canoe house was the military and economic wing of the Anna Pepple ruling household in Bonny Kingdom during the palm oil trade era. The "house-system" and its transformation into war-canoe-house in Eastern Niger Delta by trans-Atlantic trade would be well articulated in the next chapter (chapter three).

¹⁵⁴ Cookey, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit,

King (*Amanyabo*) of Bonny and thereby control trade in the region. Bonny was in constant intra-communal political conflict, which polarized the community along these canoe-houses in the royal family.

In 1869 Jaja as factional head-chief of Anna Pepple canoe-house decided to relocate to an independent territory with his chiefs and followers due to persistent political instability and attacks against his group by Manilla Pepple faction. Well grounded in the area's economic geography, Jaja established a settlement "where he would have easy access to and control of all canoe traffic to palm oil markets of Imo."¹⁵⁵ Jaja and his men relocated and founded Opobo, on an Island not too far from the open sea and interwoven with creeks. It was a strategic location in terms of trade. Cookey described the new settlement in these words:

Like Bonny, the proposed settlement was an Island lying a few miles from the open sea. Beyond the creeks that surrounded it on three sides lay swampy land and thick forest of mangrove; on the fourth side was the Imo itself, almost two miles wide, sluggishly emptying into the ocean. Thus the site was impregnable from local attack on all sides. At the same time it was close enough to the Mbambie, the place where the narrow creek from Bonny joins the Imo and its markets. Consequently, it afforded an easy platform for blocking the Bonny canoe traffic to that River.¹⁵⁶

Geographically strategic, Jaja's settlement quickly attracted trade traffic, which was drastically reduced in Bonny River and diverted to Opobo. Thus, in the 1870s Opobo became a beehive of trade activities in Eastern delta.¹⁵⁷ In 1873, Anna Jaja Pepple signed a treaty with the British government.¹⁵⁸ The first article of the treaty recognizes Jaja as King of Opobo and his entitlements as such, the second articles recognizes Jaja's right to collect comeys¹⁵⁹ or toll from British traders as paid in Bonny, and the final article states:

After April 5, 1873, the King of Opobo shall allow no trading establishment or hulk in or off Opobo Town, or any trading vessel to come higher up the River than white man's beach opposite Hippopotamus Creek. If any trading ship or steamer proceeds further up the River than the creek mentioned, after having been fully warned to the contrary, the said trading ship or steamer may be seized by

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 68.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 71.

¹⁵⁷ Bonny Chiefs reacted violently to diversion of trade from Bonny River to Opobo and thereby resumed conflict with Jaja and his Chiefs. Until the British mediated a "Perpetual Treaty of Peace" between Anna Jaja Pepple and Manilla Pepple in 1873, the two were locked in hostilities. Conflicts and tensions fizzled out with the inauguration of the perpetual peace treaty, which allocated separate markets for the groups.

¹⁵⁸ This treaty was signed on board her Britannic Majesty's ship Pioneer, off Opobo town, on 4th January, 1873. The Queen was represented by J. E. Commerell, Commodore, Commanding-in-chief; Her Britannic Majesty's Naval Forces on the Cape of Good Hope and West Coast of Africa Station; and Charles Livingstone, Her Britannic Majesty's Consul for the Bights of Biafra and Benin.

¹⁵⁹ Comey is a term derived from the Portuguese word comer, which means "to eat." It refers to a compulsory toll fee or duty imposed on European traders by rulers/gatekeepers (middlemen) in the Niger Delta city-states. Payment of comeys and "breaking" of trade by Kings or rulers of the Niger Delta was religiously observed in the nineteenth century before the start of commercial activities. Comey payment was gradually abolished with the signing of protectorate and trade treaties and eventual colonization of the region.

King Jaja, and detained until a fine of 100 puncheons be paid by the owners to King Jaja.¹⁶⁰

This last article barred Europeans traders from the interior markets and grants such to the sole patronage of African traders. Jaja therefore consolidated his grip on hinterland commerce and exercised authority over British traders in his coastal Opobo territory. Effectively in charge of Opobo and with a strong military backing, Jaja appropriated comeys paid by British traders to himself without regard to the chiefs who migrated and established Opobo with him. Even though some were dissatisfied, none could query Jaja's action in the open. By the late 1870s, Jaja had become one of the most influential (if not the most influential) African traders and well-known figure throughout Eastern Niger Delta and beyond.

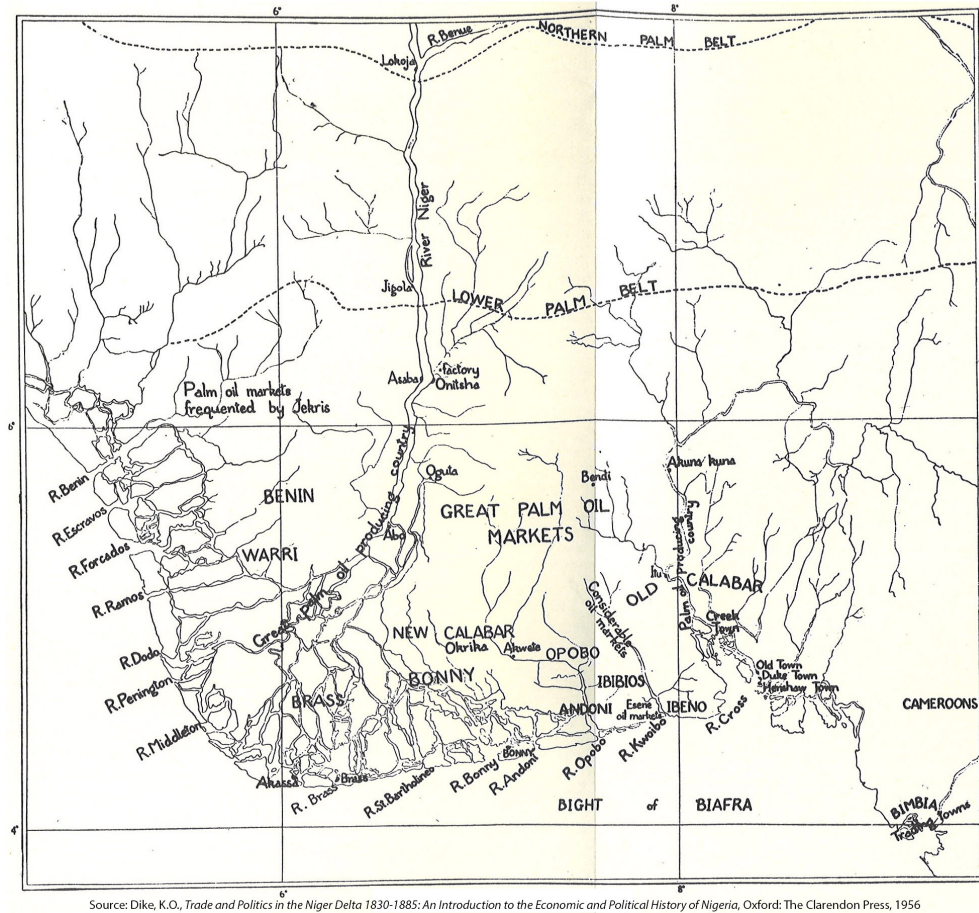
From the start of trade in Opobo, Jaja ensured there was mutual respect between himself and the British administrators and traders he had to deal with.¹⁶¹ Although he acknowledged the might of the British whose military presence was evident on the territorial waters of Eastern delta, he was of the view that African traders must not be subordinated to the whims and caprices of European traders. As traders, conditions must be mutually beneficial to both parties. Thus, he enjoyed a cordial trade and administrative relationship with Consul Livingstone throughout his stay as consul of the Bight of Biafra and Benin. Consul Livingstone, a friend and confidant of Jaja, died in 1873 in Bonny (from yellow fever complications). While Jaja welcomed the presence of European traders and administrators in Opobo, he was not comfortable being treated as a second-class citizen in his own country. Based on article III of the 1873 treaty with the British, Jaja instructed all British cargo vessels to move their establishments from the bank of the River directly opposite Opobo to a location near the open sea, which later became known as "Down Below."¹⁶² Even though this was an ideal location for the supercargoes, Jaja's intention was to cut European influence on the traditions of his territory. He also directed all Europeans to vacate the town every day at dusk. Jaja's interests were the protection of his city-state from attack and sole control of the hinterland by African traders. He was not ready to surrender his sovereignty, which he protected jealously.

¹⁶⁰ British Treaty with Opobo contained in Cookey, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit., pp. 170-171.

¹⁶¹ Cookey, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit.,

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 101.

Figure 2: The Niger Delta, c. 1870



Unknown to Jaja, the appointment of British administrators (consuls and vice-consuls) and signing of treaties with the British, especially in the 1880s and beyond, would drastically alter the relationship between African merchants and Europeans in the Niger Delta. From the 1880s the British stepped up their efforts, from mere agents or administrators to being “masters.” The British, saw an urgent need to change the pattern of relationship between Africans and Europeans, which had existed for over two centuries at that point. In opposition to their stance Jaja recognized the enormous power and influence the British exercised in the region but he was unprepared to surrender easily. As an African King, he was not ready to position his interests as inferior to those of the Europeans.

Starting in the early 1880s, the contention between Jaja and consulate officers or British administrators with whom he dealt revolved around the question of sovereignty and control of hinterland markets.¹⁶³ Since the establishment of Opobo, Jaja had made it clear that:

Europeans should not venture beyond the coast but must obey the traditionally accepted rule that they had to purchase the produce of the hinterland through the

¹⁶³ Cooley, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit.,

middleman whose enterprise had pioneered the trade and whose livelihood depended on the existing system.¹⁶⁴

As a sharp-witted African King, Jaja had codified his sole right to the hinterland and sovereignty through the 1873 commercial treaty he made with Consul Livingstone. It is on the strength of this 1873 commercial treaty that Jaja protested attempts by British traders to establish trading posts in the delta and interior markets. Jaja relied strictly on the 1873 commercial treaty as the basis of his actions and decisions on hinterland trade by European merchants. He ward off several attempts by British traders to establish posts, but this put him at loggerheads with British traders and administrators.

To consolidate their hold on the Niger Delta, the British signed protectorate treaties with Chiefs and peoples of the region. While some signed without a careful analysis of the contents, others including Jaja meticulously examined the letters of the treaty and rejected certain sections, the process democratized trade and religion:

Jaja was the most cautious and demanding, carefully questioning every clause. Aware that neither he nor his state was threatened, and sensing that the word ‘protection’ in the treaty implied more than its ordinary meaning, he demanded further explanation from Hewett.¹⁶⁵

For fear of losing his sovereignty, Jaja refused to append his signature until the meaning of “protection” was explained to his satisfaction and certain sections of the treaty --dealing with free trade and religion, and consul’s authority over British subjects in Opobo-- were expunged. With the deletion of these two articles, Jaja and his chiefs signed the treaty in December 1884,¹⁶⁶ after the British protection treaties had been signed with most city-states of the Niger Delta.¹⁶⁷ In most of those other instances the protection treaties were signed under duress, on board British warships.

By start of 1885, the price of palm oil had surge upwards in England. Jaja therefore tried to bypass the British merchants and sell directly to firms in England in the hope of making more profit.¹⁶⁸ British traders, on the other hand, appealed to Consul Hewett to grant them access to hinterland markets to buy products directly from producers at cheaper rates. Consul Hewett acceded to his countrymen, directing that British traders by virtue of the Berlin Act were free to move into the interior markets and trade directly and freely with palm oil producers. With this directive, the African middlemen monopoly of hinterland markets was broken and something drastic had to be done. Jaja’s immediate strategy was to join with other African Kings and Chiefs in a battle aimed at sustaining their control of hinterland markets. It failed due to internal chieftancy disputes and community squabbles. However, Jaja was now targeted as the most

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 106.

¹⁶⁵ Cooley, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit, p. 115.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid,

¹⁶⁷ It was these various protection treaties with Niger Delta Chiefs and peoples that were presented on behalf of Britain by Sir Goldie to justify Britain’s claim to full presence in the Niger Delta at the 1884/85 Berlin West Africa conference.

¹⁶⁸ Hopkins, A. G., *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Longman, op. cit; Cooley, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit.,

significant obstacle to establishing effective British authority in the Niger Delta; it is imperative he be cut to size and made to realize that the sound of the drums have changed and the dance steps can never be the same. In early 1885 Consul Johnston¹⁶⁹ said, "The most effectual aid to peace and commerce in the British Protectorate of the Oil Rivers would be administered by the humiliation or banishment of Jaja."¹⁷⁰ The plot against Jaja for his audacity was aggressive: he was sternly warned against harassing British traders who ventured into the hinterland. Not long afterwards, Consul Johnston accused Jaja of extorting money from British traders and thereby contravening the commercial treaty of 1873. He was therefore ordered to pay a fine of thirty puncheons of oil.¹⁷¹ Jaja appealed to the Foreign Secretary on the grounds he was not guilty of the charges. He said British traders had paid come to Opobo without complaint since the kingdom's inception, just as they did in other city-states. The middleman role was the only source of livelihood for the African merchant: therefore, the 1873 commercial treaty placed hinterland markets as the domain of the African trader and noted that the protection treaty did not alter this agreement -- but if it did, it was a fraud:

We, of course signed Treaty with Her Majesty's Government upon the sole basis that there should be no interference whatever with regard to our laws, rights and privileges of our markets, etc., but at the present we are at a loss to find that we have been misled; that is after gratuitously arranging to come under Her Majesty's Government Protectorate, and preventing other nations coming in as have been previously agreed between myself and chiefs with Consul Hewett.¹⁷²

After several failed protests at the consulate, Jaja sent an official Opobo delegation to England to present his case directly to the Home Government.¹⁷³ And in the meantime, though the British traders had access to the hinterland unhindered (so undesirable to the Opobo), Jaja devised strategies that prevented hinterland middlemen from dealing with the British merchants who had come for trade. He dislodged hinterland traders and positioned his men who refused to sell to British merchants at hinterland palm depots. Frustrated, dejected and vexed by the turn of events, British merchants pressured the Consul to take drastic actions against Jaja. Consul Johnston, who was at the time administrator of the Bight of Biafra took sides with British merchants and gave Jaja stringent conditions for peace.¹⁷⁴ In Johnston's opinion, British merchants must have space in the Niger Delta and hinterland and Jaja must be removed. While Consul Johnston was pressuring the Home Government in England through messages, letters and telegrams to remove Jaja, British merchants complemented his efforts with diplomatic actions in

¹⁶⁹ Consul Hewett was the primary Consul, with Johnston filling in whenever Hewett was on leave but as it turned out in the case of Jaja, even when Hewett returned in 1886 as Consul General, Johnston was saddled with the responsibility of dealing with Jaja until his eventual arrest, dethronement and banishment to Ghana and then later to the West Indies.

¹⁷⁰ Johnston to Salisbury, 15 January 1886, FO 84/1762, No. 1, Africa, quoted in Cooke, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁷¹ Cooke, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit.,

¹⁷² Jaja to Salisbury, 26 March 1886, FO 84/1762, No. 1, Africa, quoted in, Cooke, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit., p. 120.

¹⁷³ The team returned after the arrest of Jaja with no positive response from the Home Government in England.

¹⁷⁴ Johnston wanted Jaja to enter into an immediate agreement whereby he would be liable for the payment of prescribed fines for his subjects' thwarting free trade. Secondly, Jaja was to make available a senior chief of Opobo, who would accompany Consul Johnston to the hinterland markets to break any sworn oath between hinterland traders and Jaja. As expected, Jaja resisted both of these stringent conditions.

England.¹⁷⁵ Jaja, on the other hand, had few British trade allies supporting him and calling for justice.

Back in the Delta in 1887, Consul Johnston suspended trade between British traders and Opobo, and equally suspended Opobo-hinterland trade relations. Johnston's action was designed as revenge for the humiliation British traders continued to suffer in the hinterland markets but Jaja never budged in response to Johnston's efforts to intimidate him. He was convinced in time intervention from the foreign office and British Government would enthrone justice. In a bid to instigate a crisis, Johnston deliberately confronted an armed gang that had thrown a boom across the Opobo River.¹⁷⁶ The blockade was meant to prevent British merchants from venturing into the hinterland markets. Johnston forcefully attacked Jaja's armed gang, enabling British merchants passage in the Opobo River. Johnston, in a telegram to England, painted the Opobo River scene as a near-descent into anarchy that requires prompt and resolute steps.¹⁷⁷ He requested that Jaja be removed and temporarily deported to the Gold Coast.¹⁷⁸ A foreign office telegram response to Johnston's read: "Your actions re Jaja approved. Further instruction will be sent after communication with the Admiralty."¹⁷⁹ With this message Johnston had received license to punish: a foreign office approval to castigate, humiliate and deport the most influential African trader in the West African Coast.

In September 1887, Consul Johnston invited Jaja to a "friendly meeting" at the beach of the British firm called Harrison, with assurance of no restraint on him. Though suspicious, Jaja honored the invitation, at which time he was lured on board a British warship and ferried to the Gold Coast. Writing about his ordeal in Accra in a letter to one of his Chiefs (Cookey Gam), Jaja described the episode as a kidnap:

I am sorry now that I did follow Consul Johnston to Accra, if I had known that all these things would be so, I would rather die in Opobo than come away with the Consul, because Consul told me that the Queen wanted to have all palaver (*troubles*) settled in Accra and now dispatched me away for no just cause. And I am sorry to tell you all, that I don't know if we shall meet again once and see face to face.¹⁸⁰

In 1888 and 1890, for fear of Jaja's influence on business in the delta and possible uprising in Opobo due to its proximity to Gold Coast, the British again moved Jaja to St. Vincent and Barbados in the West Indies. All his pleas, petitions and pressures from British friends to set him free were ignored until he fell terribly ill. He died in July 1891 while he was being relocated to Opobo due to severe health conditions. The most influential and most powerful African

¹⁷⁵ There were demonstrations in England; a lobby of parliamentarians and popular pressure mounted on officials at Downing Street for the removal of Jaja. It was a high powered conspiracy against a powerful African merchant by British merchants and the Home office in England.

¹⁷⁶ Cookey, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit, p. 130.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid,

¹⁷⁸ Consul Johnson, in his telegram dispatched to the foreign office, had accused King Jaja of organizing armed attacks, amounting to obstruction of waterways and markets.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 131.

¹⁸⁰ Jaja's letter to Chief Cookey Gam quoted in Cookey, S. J. S, *King Jaja of the Niger Delta: His Life and Times*, op. cit, p. 141.

leader/merchant in the Niger Delta city-states had been subdued as lesson to other would-be-recalcitrant African Kings and Chiefs in the region. But as we shall see in Nana's claim to territorial sovereignty and Nembe's revolt against the Royal Niger Company's trade monopoly, destroying Jaja did not in any way stop the spirit of rebellion against imperial powers.

2.2.2 Nana: The Ebrohimi Expedition

The so-called Ebrohimi expedition was imperial Britain's 1894 attack on Nana Olomu -- a powerful Itsekiri trader at the Bight of Benin -- resulting from irreconcilable trade differences. The Bight of Benin,¹⁸¹ west of the delta, operated as the single major outpost to service international trade. Like most West African coastal plains, the Bight of Benin was integrated into the global capitalist economy through the slave trade and maintained its importance after abolition with the introduction of palm oil export as its main economic activity.¹⁸² Ironically, by virtue of the high manpower required to service, engage with and survive in this industry, the new trade in palm produce and palm kernel oil was itself anchored in domestic slavery. In the Bight of Benin, commercial trade activities with Europeans were under the firm control of Itsekiri natives, who traced their genealogy to Benin.¹⁸³ This was a period when economic and political power were fused and exercised by the dominant class or individual. It was a society thus "dominated by trading concerns, trade and politics became intertwined, since trade was the source of wealth and thus of power and influence."¹⁸⁴ The Ebrohimi expedition (attack on Nana Olomu of Itsekiri) therefore cannot be properly understood outside the context of nineteenth century trade and political intrigues in the Bight of Benin.

As expected, there were rivalries over palm oil trade among leading Itsekiri traders in the Bight of Benin. These rivalries sometimes led to sabotage or in other instances complete war between families.¹⁸⁵ This possibility of sabotage, along with rivalry among Itsekiri traders, a need to strike terror in Urhobo palm producers at key moments, and the need for defense against Ijaw pirates in the waterways, attracted the armed movement of trading canoes in the Bight of Benin.¹⁸⁶ In Ikime's opinion, these developments explain why "trade in arms and ammunition continued to be one of the most profitable throughout the nineteenth century."¹⁸⁷ The nineteenth century unrestricted sale of arms and ammunition in this region could be attributed therefore to an imperative to aid and facilitate trade in the region. Beyond trade, the availability of arms and ammunition explains the relation between European traders and their trade allies (Itsekiri) and the place of other groups (such as the western Ijaw and some Urhobo settlements) opposed to

¹⁸¹ Bight of Benin is also sometimes referred to as Benin River.

¹⁸² Lloyd, P. C, 'The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, Vol. IV No. 2, 1963. In the 1840s two important Liverpool corporations were established on the bank of the Benin Rivers: Horsfall was near the Bobi, and Harrison & Co near Jakpa, while other firms like Douglas Steward, Miller Brothers and James Pinnock were to follow a decade later.

¹⁸³ The historical origin and sociopolitical activities of Itsekiri are discussed in more detail in chapter five of this work.

¹⁸⁴ Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu, Last Governor of the Benin River*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1968, p. 3.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 6.

them. It also reveals the power relations that existed among the various groups in the Bight of Benin in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁸ The triumph of Itsekiri over their neighbors in nineteenth century Western Delta feuds could be understood in the context of European traders' weaponry empowerment of Itsekiri over and well above their neighbors.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, Britain appointed consuls to oversee the commercial activities of British citizens doing commerce in the Bight of Biafra and Benin. To effectively perform this function, consuls in turn appointed influential natives wielding economic power to be "governor"¹⁸⁹ through whom all economic and political affairs, whether individual or at the level of city-states, would be conducted. Any individual thus appointed as governor became the *de facto* political as well as economic leader.

John Beecroft, a British trader well acquainted with Niger Delta, was the first British appointed consul in the Bight of Biafra and Benin. Beecroft was appointed in 1849, at a time when the Itsekiri community's interregnum had just started after the demise of King Akengbuwa in 1848, and irreconcilable rivalry had left the throne vacant. Before the appointment of Consul Beecroft, there had been skirmishes between British traders and natives in the Bight of Biafra and Benin.¹⁹⁰ Beecroft was thus appointed purely to safeguard British citizens and trade interest. Attempts by Consul Beecroft to intervene in the Itsekiri kingship quagmire yielded no fruit, hence he opted to appoint leading Itsekiri traders in the Bight of Benin as governor. Consul Beecroft appointed one such influential Itsekiri trader, Idiare, in 1851 as first governor of Benin River. Tsanomi succeeded Idiare as governor of Benin River in 1870, while Olomu Numa was governor in 1883.¹⁹¹ There was a contradiction, however. From the British traders' standpoint, the governor was one who would exercise some authority over natives, thereby protecting their lives and investments in the region; they would maintain peace and/order in trade. But for Itsekiri natives, the governor was conceived as one who would lead agitations against the British in the event of a row over the acceptable price of goods.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 202; For instance, Ikime listed the following arms and ammunition recovered from Nana's Ebrohimi armory after it fell to attacks by British naval troops in August 1894: 106 cannon (from 3-prs to 32-prs); 445 heavy swivel blunder-busses about half of them brass; 640 long Dane guns; 1,151 short flint-lock and cap guns; 17 cases of short swords; 5 large swivel mountings for small cannon; 10 Revolvers (various calibers); 1,640 kegs of powder (over 14 tons); 500 zinc cylinder case-shot, filled; 500 bamboos cylinder case-shot, filled; 1,000 or more, bamboo cylinders, ready for fillings, of all calibers, to suit the cannon; 14 kegs of small round shot; 540-gallon iron pots of balls of various sizes; 2 cases Snider ammunition (about 1,600 rounds); 5 cases machine gun ammunition, containing 36 feeders filled ready with 43 rounds in each – 1,548 rounds; 1 case, containing 5 empty feeders for machine-gun; 2,500 rounds solid-drawn machine-gun – ammunition; 300 rounds Eley revolver cartridges (various calibers); 1 machine gun; 78 kegs gunpowder (about 2/3 ton). In one of Nana's responses to Consul Moor's letter during his encounter with the British contained in Ikime, O, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, op. cit, p. 120, he said "the arms which he had acquired were not meant to be used against the British government, but that all the coastal people of the Benin and Warri districts kept and carried arms for the protection of their lives and property and for use against the Ijo and Urhobo who were of a warlike disposition."

¹⁸⁹ Governors or warrant chiefs were natives appointed to act as representatives of the British administration among the locals in territories where there were no sovereign authority or leadership.

¹⁹⁰ In the Bight of Benin some British traders' property had been looted following the death of King Akengbuwa, while in the Bight of Biafra (Bonny to be specific), King Pepple of Bonny had once imprisoned a British trader with whom he had skirmishes arising from commerce.

¹⁹¹ Ayomike, J. O. S., *Nana: British Imperialism at Work*, Ilupeju: Mayomi Publishers, 1992.

Before his death in 1883 Governor Olomu Numa was undisputedly the richest Itsekiri trade merchant in Benin River. He was succeeded by his son Nana Olomu (popularly called Nana) as head of the family business and governor of Benin River.¹⁹² Nana Olomu was elected and declared governor of Benin River, in the presence of Consul Hewett, on 12th July 1884.¹⁹³ Because Nana was the richest and most influential Itsekiri merchant in the Bight of Benin, at the time, the British considered it expedient to appoint him governor. The appointment was political as well as economic. In the absence of a substantive Itsekiri monarch, the governor served as both chief merchant and *de facto* collector of custom duties (tolls/comey) from European traders in the Bight of Benin. Nana Olomu's first stroke as governor – only four days after his appointment, on 16th July 1884 -- was to lead an influential Itsekiri delegation to sign a “protection treaty” with the British, bringing the Bight of Benin under British protection.¹⁹⁴ The “protection treaty” signing occurred without the knowledge of Itsekiri neighbors (Benin, Ijaw, Urhobo) in the Bight of Benin.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, despite the signing Itsekiri leaders rejected some Articles (especially VI) dealing with trade. Article VI says: “The subjects and citizens of all countries may freely carry out trade in every part of the territories of the Kings and Chiefs parties hereto, and may have houses and factories therein.”¹⁹⁶ This section of the treaty canvassed for free trade, which was inimical to African middlemen who controlled hinterland trade. With the signing of treaties in the Bight of Biafra and Benin in the nineteenth century, British government took deliberate measures beyond mere protection of her citizens and trade, to implement policy

¹⁹² Ikime, O., *Nana of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1972; Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1968; see also, Ayomike, J. O. S., *Nana: British Imperialism at Work*, Ilupeju: Mayomi Publishers, 1992.

¹⁹³ Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968, *op. cit.*,

¹⁹⁴ Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1968, pp. 50-96. A staff of office as Governor of Benin River was presented to Nana Olomu by the Vice-Consul, David Blair, at an Assembly of Itsekiri influential traders and elders on May 6, 1885. The Vice-Consul informed the Itsekiri leaders present that by virtue of the 1884 treaty, they had passed under the “protection” of the Queen of Great Britain. The Vice-Consul addressed Nana, saying that he and the British government looked up to Nana for the implementation of terms of the 1884 treaty. Vice-Consul David Blair on behalf of the British government promised Nana full support and cooperation in the exercise of authority insofar as such was used in the interest of good governance, cordial relationship with neighbors and in furtherance of trade and civilization in the territory.

¹⁹⁵ Ekeh, P. (ed.), *Warri City and British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2004, *op cit.*, p.17.

¹⁹⁶ Treaty with Chiefs of Itsekiriland, 1884, in Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968, pp. 197-199. However, within months of the treaty, which was exclusively between Itsekiri and the British was extended by the British Consul to cover all inhabitants of Benin River and beyond, and thereby made Nana and the leadership of Itsekiri an overlord over groups distinct from Itsekiri. The extended power was further supported by Itsekiri weaponry power and trade relations with British merchants, But in defiance the Ijaw of River Forcados, Escravos and Ramos are reported to have entered into a separate treaty agreement with the Royal Niger Company by which they ceded the coastal territory to the Royal Niger Company in 1888. To uphold the authority of Nana, Consul Hewett vehemently objected to the Royal Niger Company treaty entered with Ijaw groups, on grounds that the territory was within Nana's jurisdiction, and he petitioned the Home Government in England to decline its recognition. MacDonald, who investigated the incident in a “Report of his visit as Her Majesty's Commissioner to the Niger and Oil Rivers” in January 1889 and submitted it in 1890, noted that indeed Ijaw of Ogulagha (Goolah) and Burutu signed treaties with the Royal Niger Company in 1888. He was informed and indeed believed that Nana had gone to Ijaw communities with British-like gunboats and compelled them to surrender their copies of the treaties. MacDonald is said to have accepted the story of the Ijaw elders he interrogated, whom he described as intelligent. In MacDonald's account, Nana in his interview and discussion with him failed woefully to produce concrete evidence that he had any right/authority or power over the Ijaw in Benin River.

actions towards harnessing the region's valuable resources to the exclusive preserve of Britain and her citizens.

Following the protection treaty was the declaration of the territory as a Niger Coast Protectorate, with the appointment of Vice-Consul Galway as administrator of Benin River district in 1891.¹⁹⁷ With the appointment of Galway as British administrator and representative of the Queen, Nana's position as governor was relegated to the background, though it took some time for him to realize this - in practical terms, Nana's office as governor ceased to exist the moment a Vice-Consul was appointed to administer the territory.¹⁹⁸ Prior to this appointment, various European traders had complained about their inability to penetrate the hinterland for commerce due to the power and influence Nana exercised in the region. As had happened with Jaja, there was an urgent need to trim and curtail Nana's power and influence on trade in Benin River; the European traders wanted free trade.¹⁹⁹ Their complaint prompted a tour of the hinterland by Vice-Consul Galway in 1891. The purpose of the tour was to identify suitable sites for the "establishment of a vice-consulate, barracks and constabulary, the idea being that such inland government posts would embolden traders to move into the hinterland, as well as ensuring the maintenance of law and/or order."²⁰⁰ One outcome of the Vice-Consul's tour was the creation of a vice-consulate at Sapele to service the Urhobo and Kwale interior markets. This development encouraged trade traffic towards Sapele, and drastically reduced trade at the Benin River.

When the Royal Niger Company moved into the Forcados district, some trade posts formerly under Nana were either made free or removed from his authority. Soon Nana and other Itsekiri traders were barred or made to pay exorbitant export duties for going to some Urhobo markets that were previously under his control. With this and other measures, Britain put Nana and Itsekiri trade merchants' monopoly in Benin River under check.²⁰¹ Not long afterwards, Nana was accused of high-handedness against citizens, of using his power and wealth for self-aggrandizement rather than for the benefit of society. Galway thus accused Nana of "injuring trade."²⁰² From this moment, most atrocities and disturbances caused in Benin Rivers were attributed to Nana, his servants and/or followers. Even when evidence to the contrary existed vice-consuls accused Nana as the architect of most crimes, terrorist acts and disorder in Benin River.²⁰³ Before long, altercations ensued between Nana and his erstwhile British friends and trade allies in the region.

¹⁹⁷ Britain was no longer content with "indirect rule" through appointed Chiefs or Trade Agents in the Niger Delta; there was thus the need to set up administrative structures that would manage people's affairs and resources on behalf of the British Government.

¹⁹⁸ Lloyd, P. C., "The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, Vol. IV No. 2, 1963, p. 229.

¹⁹⁹ Ikime, O., *Nana of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1971.

²⁰⁰ Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968, op. cit. p. 77.

²⁰¹ Nana had used terrorist tactics to control and dominate trade to a near monopoly level in this region. Not until the British deregulated some markets, he had made free trade in the region impossible.

²⁰² Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968, op. cit. p. 94.

²⁰³ See Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, 1968; Ikime, O., *Nana of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1971; Lloyd, P. C., 'The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, Vol. IV, No. 2; Lynn, M., *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Hopkins, A. G., *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Longman, 1973; Dike, K. O., *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830 – 1885*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

Beginning in 1893, skirmishes between Nana and Niger Coast Protectorate forces began, sometimes leading to loss of property, injury and death on both sides. The exponential escalation of squabbles created an atmosphere of uncertainty, tension, anxiety, and ultimately suspension of trade activities in Benin River. Several pleas by Nana for reconciliation fell on deaf ears.²⁰⁴ British administrators had one and only one mission – to remove Nana as Governor and take express control of the region. By August 1894, the British administrators realized Nana was militarily more fortified than imagined, and the task of removing him from his Ebrohimi base would not be child's play. Initial attempts to enter Ebrohimi had been intensely resisted, suggesting that Nana was well equipped militarily for counter resistance. At this point, the British prepared for an all out war against Nana; military hardware reinforcement arrived from Lagos to complement logistics for the operation, and the full military strength of the British navy was deployed on Ebrohimi. After several attempts and maneuvers, in late September 1894, Ebrohimi fell to the superior weaponry and trained manpower of invading British naval troops. Ikime gave a vivid account of the Ebrohimi expedition when he said:

The attack itself commenced at 5.30 a.m. on 25 September. It spoke well of the vigilance of the beleaguered that the attack was anticipated; for fifteen minutes after it had begun heavy fire was opened on the attackers from the town. Apparently the firing did not harm. By 6.30 a.m. the attack had been completed right into Ebrohimi. The British force advanced – the marines were on the right flank, supported by the blue jackets and guns from H.M.S. *Phoebe*; in the center were the rocket party from H.M.S. *Alecto* and a maxim gun party of 'native' troops; another force of 'native' troops were placed on the left flank. Heavy fire continued from Ebrohimi but caused no damage to the attacking force. Eventually the rockets and maxim guns did their work and not only set many of the thatched houses on fire but succeeded in silencing the fire from Ebrohimi. By 9 a.m. Ebrohimi had been taken. The Ebrohimi expedition was virtually over.²⁰⁵

As the target of the Ebrohimi raid, Nana had fled the community before it was finally captured. British troops intensified efforts towards his arrest by declaring him wanted, with five hundred pounds reward for anyone who aided them. Unfamiliar with the windy maze of creeks, British troops co-opted friendly leading Itsekiri traders (such as Dogho and Dudu) and other natives;²⁰⁶ such support led to attacks by British troops on Eddu and Okotobo communities for allegedly harboring (sheltering) Nana from arrest. But Nana eventually appeared in Lagos and surrendered to Governor Carter. MacDonald, then Consul of Niger Coast Protectorate, repatriated Nana to Old Calabar for trial. He was charged with four count offences: war against Her Majesty the Queen in Niger Coast Protectorate, non-compliance with letters of the 1884 protection treaty, breach of peace in Benin district, and indulging in conducts likely to induce others to breach the peace in Benin district.²⁰⁷ As expected, Nana was found guilty of all charges

²⁰⁴ At several points, Consul MacDonald invited Nana for "reconciliation meetings" on board British warships. On each occasion Nana sent a representative to the meetings and consistently pronounced his loyalty to Her Majesty's government. Nana's refusal to honor meetings on board a British warship for "dialogue" was not unconnected with Jaja's experience on board British warship for a supposed meeting and his subsequent kidnap and deportation to Ghana and later the West Indies.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, pp. 123-124.

²⁰⁶ Ikime, O, *Nana of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1971.

²⁰⁷ Ibid,

and punished with exile and forfeiture of all property to the government. He was detained in Old Calabar briefly and later, in 1896, deported in exile to the Gold Coast. After a decade in the Gold Coast and through the intervention of his former British trade allies and other friends, Nana was permitted to return home, not as governor or with any privilege but as an ordinary man living in the Benin River district.

The British military's punitive measure against uncompromising locals in the Niger Delta was extended to the Nembe city-state (otherwise known as Nembe Ijaw clan) on the Atlantic fringe in the central Niger Delta during the late 19th century. Like Jaja and Nana, Nembe folks intensely resisted British merchants' policy to exclude them and monopolize access to markets along the Akassa River and its environs. The Nembe aggressive rebellion against British merchants' monopoly of access to markets, which they had long enjoyed, and the well-organized British onslaught against Nembe settlements is the focus of the next section.

2.2.3 The Akassa Invasion

The Akassa invasion replicated the Ebrihimi expedition, except that unlike Ebrihimi, Nembe²⁰⁸ adopted proactive measures against British merchants' efforts to eliminate them from the late nineteenth century palm oil trade. The invasion refers to the organized insurgency by Nembe settlements against the Royal Niger Company (British company) in Akassa and the counteroffensive measures launched by the British forces against Nembe settlements.

Even though the fifteenth century slave trade had an early start in the Brass River, it was not as prominent as its neighboring Rivers (Kalabari and Bonny Rivers).²⁰⁹ The slave trade only had a boom in the Brass River in the nineteenth century when there were strict enforcements for its abolition by Britain in the more important centers of Kalabari and Bonny Rivers.²¹⁰ The British, who had become main traders in city-states of Niger Delta, had implemented preventive measures against slave trade in favor of "legitimate" commerce. However, in 1834 King Boy Amain of Ogbolomabiri signed a formal treaty – "offensive and defensive" - with Colonel Edward Nicolls (then governor of Fernando Po) on behalf of the British; its purpose was to eradicate slave trade in the Brass River.²¹¹ In 1856, the Kings of Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri with their chiefs again signed a formal "legitimate" trade agreement with the British that

²⁰⁸ Nembe, apart from being a prefix often used for Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri communities, is a generic term used to refer to all Ijaw inhabitants of Ogbolomabiri, Bassambiri, Twon, Odioma and Okpoma etc. All aborigines in settlements occupying the stretch between Nembe in the Mangrove to Twon-Brass in the Atlantic fringe are called Nembe (Nembe Ijaw clan). Even in contemporary times, Ijaw in other territories regard people who inhabit this geographical area in present day Nembe and Brass Local Government Areas (LGAs) as one indivisible Nembe family. Hence, there is the Nembe Divisional Council of Chiefs (NDCCs), composed of Chiefs from settlements in the two LGAs.

²⁰⁹ Alagoa, E. J, *The Small Brave City-State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964.

²¹⁰ Ibid. The chiefs in Brass coast settlements obtained slaves from Igbo hinterland markets, especially Aboh, and moved as far as Onitsha, Idah and to Lokoja in central Nigeria. They also traded in Kalabari markets located to the east. Slaves served as domestic servants or as wives for procreation and enlargement of house size. Slaves also serve as a source of revenue on sale to European traders in the coast.

²¹¹ Alagoa, E. J, *Beke You Mi: Nembe Against the British Empire*, Pot Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 1995.

enjoined Nembe people to quit the trade of slaves for payment of comey dues to Nembe chiefs.²¹² By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, the Brass River had shifted its focus and become a significant palm oil commercial center in the Niger Delta.²¹³ The Brass chiefs had jettisoned the slave trade for comey the regime and found a more lucrative trade in palm produce. More than half of the palm oil exported to Europe from the West African coastal plain came from the Niger Delta ports at this time. Traders in Brass River did not enjoy the palm oil boom for long, however, before price of palm oil nose-dived in late 1870 due to competition with British merchants in the interior markets. The situation became a desperate one for Nembe middlemen after the 1884/5 Berlin Conference. Their plight was a direct consequence of the Royal Niger Company (formerly the National African Company), with headquarters at Akassa, tightening its control of trade in the Brass River.²¹⁴ By 1886 George Taubman Goldie, a British merchant and head of the company, had secured a royal charter and monopoly of trade along the Niger and the Brass River, and this had become unacceptable for the Kings and chiefs.²¹⁵ The Company's zero tolerance to competition similarly led to decline in commerce at the port of Twon-Brass, a few kilometers from the company's Akassa base. The Nembe chiefs protested the company's monopoly and asked for its abrogation and to have their exclusive right to the hinterland markets restored. But British administrators in the region flippantly ignored their protests as the ranting of a savage tribe.

In August 1885, Nembe chiefs protested and ordered three British traders to dispose of "their launches, pay a hundred puncheons and to sign a bond not to go beyond Fishtown Point on the one side and Akassa Creek on the other."²¹⁶ The traders were also warned to report their colleagues who attempted to move up River without authorization. The chiefs' action was intended to enforce an earlier policy outlined by King Ockiya of Ogbolomabiri in 1876 that, "European traders must be kept out of markets in the interior unless they were willing to go beyond Onitsha, and willing also to buy produce other than those the Nembe traders bought."²¹⁷ It took more than two months with compelling intervention from Commander Craige through the courts of equity to get the matter resolved. British administrators thereafter terrorized and exercised authority over the locals in the Niger Delta using gunboats under the pretense of containing slave trade for "legitimate" commerce; they also worked on obtaining consent for protectorate treaties. In 1884, for instance, Consul Hewett signed a six-month protectorate treaty with the Nembe chiefs at Brass. Vice-Consul White and Nembe chiefs again signed another "Treaty of protection with Great Britain for further period of six months ending in August 1st 1885."²¹⁸ After the expiration of the 1885 treaty, there is no recorded evidence of any other treaty of protection or otherwise between Britain and Nembe chiefs.

²¹² Ibid,

²¹³ In the views of Alagoa, an estimated 2,800 tons of palm oil were exported from the Brass River between 1855 and 1856. The annual export from the Brass River by 1864 was put at between 2,000 and 2,800.

²¹⁴ Alagoa, E. J, *The Akassa Raid, 1895*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1960.

²¹⁵ Alagoa, E. J, *Beke You Mi: Nembe Against the British Empire*, 1995, *op. cit.* For purposes of survival, some Nembe middlemen engaged in smuggling activities in the Brass River against the regulations of the Royal Niger Company.

²¹⁶ Alagoa, E. J, *The Small Brave City-State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964, p. 66.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 66.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 67.

Beginning in 1888, the Oil Rivers Protectorate government introduced new regulations into the political economy of comey. Chiefs of Nembe were to be entitled to only half of proceeds from comey in the territory, while the remaining half would go to the British government. This reform moved the jurisdiction of the Consular beyond trade regulation to exercising authority over the local elites. It was a gradual process of shifting authority away from the Kings in Nembe to British administrators. By 1889, the government abolished payment of comey to Kings or chiefs, and pledged to undertake compensatory payments named “subsidies.”²¹⁹ Unlike the comey regime, subsidies collected by government would be channeled into administrative expenses and development projects in the area, leaving the chiefs with nothing. Comeys, which were hitherto trade tax payable to chiefs, changed over time and finally were called “subsidies” to be applied to the promotion of community interest and development.

By 1893, the Royal Niger Company had similarly deployed more stringent measures and checks in the Brass River against commerce by locals; for example, Nembe traders were made to pay five pounds to obtain a trading permit and another ten pounds to every company station they transacted trade.²²⁰ It became very evident to the Brass chiefs that no help would come from the Europeans since appeals to British Administrators (Consuls) over the years had not yielded any satisfactory outcome.²²¹ The Brass chiefs’ protests continued until the end of 1893, with no improvement or foreseeable redress from appropriate administrative quarters. Stuck after having exhausted all possible avenues to resolve their grievances administratively, Nembe chiefs embarked on a self-help strategic plan to salvage their situation.

Very early in 1895, the failure of diplomatic overtures dawned on King Frederick William Koko of Ogbolomabiri, who had been installed in 1889. King Koko provided leadership by initiating consultations with Kings and chiefs in Nembe settlements (Ogbolomabiri, Bassambiri, Twon and Okpoma) to argue for a joint action against the Royal Niger Company. In January 1895, the consultations crystallized into a gathering of Nembe clan chiefs hosted by King Koko, and a pact was reached.²²² Nembe chiefs, rather than engaging in lamentations, had resolved instead that “to die by the sword was far better than to die of hunger.”²²³ With a strategic plan of action, Nembe males in various settlements organized and prepared for an invasion of the Company’s headquarters at Akassa.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 78.

²²⁰ Okonta, I., & Douglas, O., *Where Vultures Feast, op cit.*, 2001, p. 13.

²²¹ Alagoa, E.J, *The Akassa Raid, 1895*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1960. There had been several failed negotiations/agreements with British Administrators in the region. For instance, Consul Hopkins had offered them markets from Aboh to the sea in 1878. The Nembe chiefs had insisted on their exclusive rights status to the interior markets in the temporary treaties of 1884 and 1885 but were never granted them. When Consul Hewett returned in 1886, he announced to the amazement of all that the question of markets was closed for discussion; henceforth they would be free for trade by any particular individual willing to trade. Not long after this the Consul returned to pronounce the grant of a royal charter to National African Company, which then turned into Royal Niger Company, chartered and limited.

²²² Alagoa, E. J, *Beke You Mi: Nembe Against the British Empire*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 1995.

²²³ Alagoa, E. J, *The Small Brave City-State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964, p. 102.

On January 29, 1895, King Koko led thirty-one war-canoes containing over a thousand men from various Nembe settlements to invade the Royal Niger Company's base in Akassa.²²⁴ The war canoes, which left Nembe on the night before, reached Akassa under the cover of darkness to take strategic positions at the Akassa River, then launched assaults on the company facilities in the early hours of 29th January.²²⁵ The Nembe war canoes did not depart Akassa until late evening, when the native "warriors" were content that an irreparable damage had been inflicted on the company and its employees for its "crimes" against them. The war canoes returned to Nembe on the morning of 30th January, chanting victory songs accompanied by sporadic shots into the sky, to the warm reception of the women who had been out on vigil since their departure. Back home, the booty collected from the company at Akassa was pooled and distributed -- unequally -- among Nembe settlements.²²⁶ At the settlements, the booty was further unequally divided into individual lots, taking into account individual members' rank and status. Immediately after the attack (31st January 1895), Nembe chiefs sent a letter to Vice-Consul Harrison, pledging that they had no squabble with Her Majesty or her representatives and that their anger was directed solely at the Royal Niger Company, Akassa.²²⁷ The attack on the company, therefore, was a popular decision in which nearly every chief, headman and adult male in the Nembe clan participated in one form or another.

Vice-Consul Harrison immediately sent a cable message to Claude McDonald, Consul of the Niger Coast Protectorate in Calabar, informing him of the invasion of Akassa by Nembe warriors. Consul MacDonald visited the headquarters of the Royal Niger Company at Akassa on February 2nd 1895 to ascertain the level of destruction suffered by the company.²²⁸ After an on-the-spot assessment of Akassa, Consul MacDonald declared war on the Nembe, sending a dispatch to the chiefs directing them to surrender on or before February 9th 1895.²²⁹ On 3rd February 1895, Consul MacDonald, who regarded the attack of a British company as an affront

²²⁴ Alagoa, E. J, *The Akassa Raid, 1895*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1960; Alagoa, E. J, *Beke You Mi: Nembe Against the British Empire*, 1995; Alagoa, E. J, *The Small Brave City-State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964: On Sunday 27th January 1895, Twon Vice-Consul C. E. Harrison received an anonymous letter informing him of the impending calamity, which he treated with levity, and merely forwarded same letter to the Company's agent, Joseph Flint at Akassa. Flint, who received the letter on Monday 28th January 1895, similarly did not consider the Nembe clan capable of such action; hence the invading Nembe war-canoes caught both men unaware. Still, on the night of the incident Flint had stationed himself at the landing-stage, where he had placed only one out of seven quick-firing guns commanding the River, which was three-quarter miles wide. He least expected the action. Flint escaped with another European on a steamboat as soon as his gun was disabled. The Vice-Consul Harrison also escaped into safety on the steamer "Bathurst."

²²⁵ Ibid: The Company's crew and native employees in the machine stores and sheds were either killed or captured, while the Nembe invading team also recorded four casualties. The Company suffered heavy loss to its property: large sacks of coal, yet to be exported palm nut, and its printing office was damaged, treasury looted, goods, furniture, arms and ammunition and gins all carted away. There was also damage to Company's records, books and accounts.

²²⁶ Alagoa, E. J, *The Akassa Raid, 1895*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1960.

²²⁷ Ibid,

²²⁸ Ibid,

²²⁹ Alagoa, E.J., *Beke You Mi: Nembe Against the British Empire*, 1995. The Nembe Kings and chiefs again responded with a letter dated February 4th 1895 and stated, as they had earlier, that they had no problem whatsoever with Her Majesty or her representative in the Niger Coast Protectorate and that their quarrel and mass action was directed at no one other than the Royal Niger Company headquarters in Akassa for its oppressive policies in the region.

to Britain, started the concentration of forces from all parts of the Protectorate.²³⁰ Even though the Royal Niger Company's policy of monopoly was provocative and brought hardship to the Nembe people, MacDonald's position was that the Nembe's action amounted to taking the law into their own hands, and that they had thus committed a punishable offense.

Between 4th and 18th February 1895, Nembe chiefs employed diplomatic tactics to plead with the Consul to see reasons for their action and find an amicable resolution of the impasse. But Consul MacDonald brought troops, warships and equipment from every section of Niger Coast Protectorate for a counterinsurgency on Nembe settlements.²³¹ By the 18th of February, Consul MacDonald had assembled in Twon-Brass warships, military hardware and a Protectorate counteroffensive force of over three hundred men (including officers), with a mandate to unleash unprecedented strikes on the Nembe chiefs and their people. On 19th February 1895, Protectorate troops led by Admiral Bedford left Twon-Brass to start a planned offensive against Nembe settlements.²³² Protectorate troops started its attacks on settlements around the Ekole Creek on the 19th and continued to make steady progress, despite resistance efforts from Nembe fighters, until they reached Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri on the 22nd. Ogbolomabiri, considered the stronghold of Nembe fighters and base of King Koko, was razed to the ground as was neighboring Bassambiri. MacDonald described the assault on the two settlements as follow:

In Nembe (Ogbolomabiri) the King's house, and the houses belonging to Chiefs had been totally demolished with gun cotton and the native houses burnt. The houses and huts of the poor people in Bassambiri had fared better but the Chief's European houses notably that of Chief Christopher Warri were riddled with projectiles from 3 pounder quick firing guns, 7 pounder mountain guns and 9 and 24 pounder war rockets.²³³

Not done, the Protectorate counterinsurgency force proceeded eastwards to Okpoma on 25th February and burnt down the settlement completely, and the next day terror was unleashed on Twon where assets of the poor were spared but "two-storied European" type buildings owned by chiefs were damaged.²³⁴ The retaliatory attack launched in the name of Her Majesty against Nembe left more than two thousand -- mainly women and children -- dead.²³⁵ The attacks on Okpoma and Twon concluded the British Protectorate retaliatory attacks on Nembe settlements.

Even though the Nembe settlements had been vehemently repressed, Consul MacDonald on instruction from Britain mandated the chiefs to further pay a fine (cash), surrender their weapons and war canoes, and return all property confiscated from Royal Niger Company at

²³⁰ Alagoa, E. J, *Beke You Mi: Nembe Against the British Empire*, 1995.

²³¹ Alagoa, E. J, *The Akassa Raid, 1895*, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1960.

²³² Ibid,

²³³ Consul Claude MacDonald quoted in Alagoa, E. J, *The Small Brave City-State: A History of Nembe-Brass in the Niger Delta*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964, p. 109.

²³⁴ Consul MacDonald, writing on Twon's preferential treatment as against other Nembe settlements by the Protectorate forces. noted that even though the people participated in the invasion on Akassa, they stood aloof when the atrocities were committed.

²³⁵ Okonta, & Douglas, O, *Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta*, London: Verso, 2004, p. 1; The Protectorate troops also lost about five men and saw four seriously injured.

Akassa.²³⁶ However, due to sympathy expressed by merchants and British citizens opposed to the company's monopoly and the counterinsurgency on Nembe, an investigation into the activities of the company was constituted with John Kirk as commissioner.²³⁷ John Kirk arrived in the region in early June 1895 and departed at the end of same month, having concluded his task of investigation. He concurred that the company had practiced monopoly trade and its regulations blocked native traders from their traditional markets. Kirk faulted the British government for granting and approving the company's charter and regulations. In response, the British reorganized governance in Nembe by setting up the Native Council in 1896.

2.2.4 Summary

The British parliament's legislation of 1807 prohibiting her citizens from participation in the slave trade, effective 1808, not only constituted a major impetus for ending that trade in western Africa but also facilitated British enforcement of "legitimate" commerce and subsequent colonization of the region that became Nigeria. At the 1815 Conference of Vienna, where a peace treaty was negotiated to end the Napoleonic War, the British compelled other European slave-trading nations to allow the Royal Navy to extend its antislavery operations to vessels flying the flags of those nations. Although the slave trade did not stop immediately, these concerted efforts definitively launched its final phase, and the traffic ended in the Bight of Benin and Biafra (Niger Delta) around 1850 and by the late 1860s elsewhere. Under the guise of ending the slave trade and slavery, western European imperial powers curtailed the independence of African polities by compelling them to sign treaties of "protection" that culminated in colonial invasions and occupation of those polities. The quest to "civilize" Africans and to establish "legitimate" and/or "free" commerce was also cited to justify the imperial agenda. But "legitimate" commerce promoted the production and export of commodities (palm produce) for European industries and "free" trade effectively promoted the domination of European traders at the expense of African middlemen.²³⁸ African "gatekeepers" resistance to attempts to block them from their traditional markets led to violent conflicts in many cases.²³⁹ These conflicts of the late nineteenth century therefore laid the foundation and remain a crucial phase in the Niger Delta's history of resistance against imperialism, including foreign merchants as well as corporate hegemony. This, in a nutshell, is how the British came to claim the Niger Delta region and by extension Nigeria.

²³⁶ Some but not all of these conditions were fulfilled; about twenty-three war-canoes, some guns confiscated at Akassa, and about twenty-five prisoners of war were surrendered.

²³⁷ In Alagoa's account, Chiefs Iwowari, Kieriam, Yekorogha and Thomas Ockiya represented Nembe at the investigation panel, while Chief James Spiff served as an interpreter. A Native Council was established for the region before the end of 1896, composed of chiefs from Ogbolomabiri, Bassambiri, Okpoma and Twon. King Koko did not honor any of the invitations extended to him by British administrators for reconciliation and was never part of any reconciliation team. Unlike Jaja and Nana, he was never captured by the British and sent on exile. He died on 20th February 1898, and was buried with full traditional rites according to Nembe custom two days later.

²³⁸ See Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830 – 1885*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956; Galway, H, "The Rising of the Brassman," *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1935, 34 (135): 144-162.

²³⁹ Beyond the three representative examples discussed above, other Niger Delta middlemen who were brutally repressed, arrested and deported by Britain for standing up against British merchants' excesses and control of commerce in the nineteenth century include: William Dappa Pepple of Bonny in 1854; King Ibanichuka of Okrika in 1896, and Oba Ovonranwen of Benin in 1897.

2.3 Colonial Space: Demand for Political Space and the Henry Willink Commission

In 1900, the British took effective control of the territory called Nigeria, with the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (which includes the Niger Delta) and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria as separate colonies.²⁴⁰ The British administered these colonies separately until 1914 when they were amalgamated to form a colonial space, the Nigerian colony. Hugh Clifford, who took over from the first governor-general of amalgamated Nigeria, Fredrick Lord Lugard, split the colony into three distinct administrative units: the Colony of Nigeria and the Northern and Southern provinces. Later, in 1939, the Southern region was divided into two: the Western and Eastern province. In 1947, the Richards' constitution introduced regional parliaments into the three regions – North, East and West – dominated respectively by the Hausa/Fulani, the Igbo, and the Yoruba respectively. This regional system of administration prevailed until independence in 1960. Britain ruled Nigeria under a system referred to as “indirect rule,” ostensibly governing Nigerian through “natural” rulers. The system worked successfully in the north and southwest, where powerful potentates existed, but less so in regions that lacked such institutions, particularly in the southeast, in spite of the British efforts to create institutions such as warrant chiefs in the latter regions and to invest the appointed with autocratic powers.²⁴¹

The colonial economy focused on two primary objectives: to ensure unfettered British access to Nigerian resources at minimal cost and to create and expand a market for British manufactures (merchandise). In this connection, the colonial state invested just enough capital to deliver the minimal infrastructural development needed to source and transfer raw materials to Britain. For instance, two parallel single-gauge railroads ran from sources of coal, groundnuts, palm oil, cocoa and other commodities in the interior to Atlantic ports where ships were ready to transport the resources to Britain. The exploitation of cheap materials and forced labor was a significant part of this colonial project.²⁴² The expansion of export-driven agriculture spawned a corresponding decline in food production for domestic use, with the result that increased peasant incomes from export crops were cancelled out by food shortages.²⁴³ Ensuing economic hardships, a political system whose colonial regime failed to integrate Nigerian elites, and the regional governments' discriminatory attitudes against minorities were instrumental to the rise of

²⁴⁰ Crowder, M, *The Story of Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber, 1978.

²⁴¹ The workings of this system was spelled out in Lugard, F. D., *Political Memoranda*, 3rd edition, with an introduction by A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, London: Frank-Cass, 1919; Lugard, F. D., *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, London: Frank-Cass, 1921. The system was murky and subject to continuous refinement under successive governors-general. For detailed and critical analysis of the system, see Crocker, Walter R., *Nigeria: Critique of Colonial Administration*, Freeport: Boors for Liberty Press, 1936; Afigbo, A. E., *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria, 1891 – 1929*, London: Longmann, 1971; Vaughan, Olufemi, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s – 1990s*, Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2000; Nwokeji, Ugo, “The Colonial Joint Venture: An Interpretation of ‘Indirect Rule’ in Southern Nigeria, 1900 – 40,” in *The Transformation of Nigeria, Adebayo Oyeade* (ed.), 2nd edition, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003; Nwokeji, Ugo, “The Colonial Joint Venture: An Interpretation of “Indirect Rule’ in Southern Nigeria,” in Adebayo Oyeade (ed.), *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Folala*, Vol. 2. Trenton: African World Press, 2003.

²⁴² Sara, Berry, 1992, “Hegemony on the Shoestring: Indirect Rule and Access to Agricultural Land”, *Africa*, 62, No. 3: 337-355.

²⁴³ Watts, M, *Silent Violence: Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983 See also, Ake, C., (ed.), *The Political Economy of Nigeria*, London: Longmann, 1985.

autonomous state movements in the delta and beyond. Hence, prior to independence, the Chiefs and peoples of the Niger Delta (especially Ijaw) protested their inclusion in the Eastern and Western regional arrangements and demanded that the British Colonialists grant them self-rule in a separate state or states.

In late 1930, when the British government split the former Southern Nigeria into Eastern and Western Regions, the coastal belt (Niger Delta) was split. While the Bight of Benin (western delta) fell to the Western Province, the Bight of Biafra (eastern delta) went to the Eastern region; these regions were dominated by Yoruba and Igbo peoples, respectively. Later in the 1940s national as well as ethnic groups emerged, such as the National Youth Movement, National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC), Nigerian National Democratic Party, Egbe Omo Oduduwa and Igbo Federal Union. Leaders also emerged, such as Herbert Macauley, H.O. Davis, Nnamdi Azikwe and Obafemi Awolowo. With time the Northern Peoples Congress, which emerged from *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa*, controlled the North, Action Group led by Awolowo gained ground in the West, while Nnamdi Azikwe's NCNC had its support base in the East.²⁴⁴ In the East, Ijaw also founded the Rivers Peoples' League in 1941 as a platform against Igbo majority domination; the principal aim was to separate the Rivers (coastal) territory from Owerri Province.²⁴⁵ Ethnic groups in Nigeria have attributed quests for state, local government, and ward control to the majority ethnic groups' discriminatory practices against minority groups and the minority groups' desire for self-rule and development. The early introduction of ethnic party politics, even before independence, into Nigeria's geopolitical landscape and neglect of minority groups in the allocation of scarce political and economic resources accelerated demands for self-determination/autonomy in the polity.²⁴⁶ Other considerations such as culture played very minor roles in the demand for self-determination or state creation.

Agitations from the Ijaw Rivers Peoples' League and petition from Rivers non-Ijaw people (Ahoada, Ndoni, Ogoni, Egi, Ekpeye, etc.) led to the establishment in 1947 of Rivers Province with Port Harcourt as headquarters.²⁴⁷ Clamor for an autonomous state by Rivers people continued due to real or perceived political marginalization and discrimination in the social and infrastructure spheres. The continued agitations gave rise to the establishment of the Rivers Chiefs and People's Conference in 1953.²⁴⁸ As secretary of the body Chief Harold Dappa-

²⁴⁴ Most of these organizations were founded as cultural and welfare bodies, but were transformed into political organizations with the emergence of party politics in the polity. For instance, the Northern Peoples Congress emerged from *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa* established in 1949, while the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Organization of the Children of Oduduwa) was converted into the Action Group political platform and the Igbo Federal Union and Igbo Union of Lagos became the nucleus of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (later changed to National Council of Nigeria Citizens) Political Party.

²⁴⁵ Naanen, B, "State Movements" in Alagoa, E. J, & Derefaka, A. A (eds.), *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Publications, 2002.

²⁴⁶ Naanen, B, 'State Movements' in Alagoa, E. J, & Derefaka, A. A (eds.), *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Publications, 2002, p. 340.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. The Rivers Province was made up of Ahoada, Brass, Degema and Ogoni Divisions

²⁴⁸ Founded in 1953, the Rivers Chiefs and People's Conference emerged from Council of Rivers Chiefs. That same year the Council of Rivers Chiefs, led by Chief Davis Manuel, attended the Nigerian Constitutional Conference held in London to officially present to the British Colonial Secretary the position of the Rivers Chiefs and people on the establishment of an autonomous Rivers State. The Council sent a follow-up memorandum to the Colonial Secretary promoting the need to incorporate their demand for Rivers State creation at the resumed 1954 constitutional conference. The Council of Rivers Chiefs was thereafter renamed Rivers State Congress, and again later renamed

Biriye visited and pleaded with other minority groups in various districts to support the creation of Rivers State.

As in the Eastern region, minority groups under the Western Region government in the Bight of Benin also agitated for political autonomy.²⁴⁹ But unlike the Rivers people, while some Western region groups demanded a separate state called Mid-West, others requested to be joined to their historical ethnic affiliations.²⁵⁰ For a very long time (and even now), the area had been embroiled in land ownership squabbles, immigrant-settler brouhahas and petitions protesting the domination of one ethnic group over others; hence, complaints in this area ranged from differences arising from historical competition for local-level power to exclusion from processes of party politics at the regional space. The Yoruba ethnic majority in the Western region combined with the multi-ethnic composition of Warri and Delta Province (Bight of Benin) to reinforce primordial sentiments of ethnic identity and political patronage as forms of social relations. In the 1950s, depending on their aspirations, each of these groups petitioned the British Colonial Secretary in London differently to actualize their dreams. Faced with the multiplicity and variety of petitions and claims for the establishment of more than ten autonomous States by minority groups in Nigeria, the London Conference of 1957 invited the Secretary of State to appoint a Commission of Enquiry. Based on petitions for separate states made to the Secretary of State for Colonies from minorities in all regions and the influence of Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye's presentation on minority ethnic groups in the London Conference of 1956/7, the British Government inaugurated an Enquiry Commission on Fears of Minorities (popularly called

Rivers Chiefs and People's Conference, with Chief Francis Alagoa as its inaugural chairman and Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye as secretary. In 1956, a majority of members in a general assembly of the body were said to have voted for the establishment of an autonomous Rivers State. (The only four persons who abstained from voting and rejected the demand were members of the Action Group Party).

²⁴⁹ The various agitations for autonomy and domination by western Ijaw from the colonial period to the contemporary insurgency is the focus of chapters five and six (Part II) of this work, which deal specifically with the Western Niger Delta.

²⁵⁰ The western delta (Bight of Benin) section of western region was (and is to date) a multi-ethnic space with complicated social relations. This section of the western region is home to Edo, Urhobo, western Ijaw, Kwale, Igbo, Ishan, and Isoko speaking people. The Edo speaking group of Benin and Urhobo were favorably disposed and vigorously campaigned for the establishment of a Mid-West State; Specifically, in 1948 the Reformed Benin Community made its demand and in 1950 representatives of Delta and Benin Provinces presented their own demand for the creation of a separate state at a Regional Conference held in Ibadan to discuss the working of the 1947 Constitution. Again, in 1953, the Delta-Benin People's Party, with Oba of Benin as leader, was inaugurated with the aim of securing a Benin-Delta State independent from the Western Regional government. In June 1955, a private member of the Western Regional House of Assembly moved for the creation of Mid-West State, and was unanimously supported; the motion requested that Her Majesty make adequate and constitutional arrangements for the establishment of a new state separate from the Western region. The offer of political appointments to the Oba of Benin and some political elites (arrow-heads/leaders of state creation) from the Delta and Benin Provinces by the Action Group Party in Western Region truncated the process. However, these efforts were not completely lost. In October 1957, shortly before the Willink Commission arrived for duty in Nigeria, the Western Regional government created a Ministry of Mid-West Affairs and Mid-West Council with advisory powers and appointed Chief Anthony Enahoro as Minister. The western Ijaw and Itsekiri, on the other hand, preferred affiliation to their Ijaw kin in the proposed Rivers, Eastern Niger Delta and Ondo Central states (Yoruba) in the west, respectively. The proposal to include western Ijaw in the Rivers State as demanded led some non-Ijaw ethnic minorities (Ikwerre, Ekpeye and Ndoki) in the Eastern delta to dissociate themselves from the Rivers State Movement. They reasoned that inclusion of western Ijaw into Rivers State, if created, would make the Ijaw the majority among minority groups, thereby going back to the *status quo ante*. The non-Ijaw groups wanted a state where all groups would have equal status, privileges and a non-domineering attitude from members.

Willink Minority Rights Commission) in September 1957.²⁵¹ As its name suggests, the four-man Commission was saddled with the responsibility of ascertaining the veracity or otherwise of “fears of minorities” – i.e., fears held by minorities -- in any part of Nigeria, and of proffering solutions towards allaying such fears, whether real or imagined.

Members of the Willink Minorities Rights Commission arrived in Nigeria in November 1957 to work on their assignment. The Commission’s stipulated terms of reference were:

- (1) To ascertain the facts about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and to propose means of allaying those fears, whether well or ill founded.
- (2) To advise what safeguards should be included for this purpose in the Constitution of Nigeria.
- (3) If, but only if, no other solution seems to the Commission to meet the case, then as a last resort to make detailed recommendations for the creation of one or more new States, and in that case: (a) To specify the precise area to be included in such State or States; (b) To recommend the Government and administrative structure most appropriate for it; (c) To assess whether any new State recommended would be viable from an economic and administrative point of view and what the effect of its creation would be on the Region or Regions from which it would be created and on the Federation.
- (4) To report its findings and recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.²⁵²

Armed with these terms of reference, the Commission started its work in November 1957 with a view to determining where, if anywhere, the minority group’s fear lay. The Commission held public hearings (in Lagos and all Regional headquarters, and in different other locations in all three Regions of Nigeria), and they also received memoranda and listened to oral and legal representations including cross-examinations from the groups. The Commission found that, in all regions, there was no iota of fear expressed by minorities in terms of the Federal Government; rather, all minority fears are expressed in regard to Regional Governments, which in every region were perceived as a majority group.²⁵³ The Commission thus held that minority fears arose from the division of the country into three main power blocks (Regions) in “each of which one group

²⁵¹ Willink Commission Report, “Report of the Commission Approved to Enquire into The Fears of Minorities and the Means of Allaying Them, was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Colonies by Command of Her Majesty, July 1958.” It was a four-man Enquiry Commission with Henry Willink (chairman), Gordon Hadow, Philip Mason and J. B. Shearer as members. Mr. K. J. Hilton served as secretary to the Enquiry Commission during the period.

²⁵² Willink Commission Report, July 1958, pp. 1-2.

²⁵³ Ibid. The reason being that the Regional Governments deals with issues that directly affect the life and existence of the people far more obviously than those that fall under the purview of the Federal Government. Also the Federal Government was not seen as a group that arrogates power and influence to itself, but a conglomeration of various interests in which compromise is required and essential.

is numerically preponderant”.²⁵⁴ Minorities espoused their restraints, burdens, fears and grievances under a majority ethnic dominated and complicated independent structure.

In the Western Region, the Commission of Enquiry’s major concerns were the minority multi-ethnic Mid-West Provinces (Delta and Benin Provinces). The Yoruba were in the majority with more than two-thirds of the total population in the Western Region. But while a majority of inhabitants in six out of the eight Provinces were Yoruba, they remained a small number in the multi-ethnic Mid-West (Delta and Benin) Provinces.²⁵⁵ The Commission did a brief review of the Western Region’s (especially Mid-West) historical development from the standpoints of politics, economic, geography and demography. In so doing the Commission recognized the tensions arising from ethnic differences within the Mid-West as well as between the Mid-West and the Yoruba majority. The fear that ethnic minorities of the Mid-West most generally expressed to the Commission was perpetual “domination” by the Yoruba majority in the Western Region without prospect for change.²⁵⁶ The minorities alleged the Yoruba majority was attempting to impose a “Yoruba superior identity” and thereby obliterate the language(s), culture and institutions of Mid-West minorities groups.²⁵⁷ For example, the conception of the Western House Assembly made in “Traditional Yoruba Pattern” along with other Yoruba symbols and use of derogatory terms such as “kobokobo” (description of non-Yoruba as people who speak unintelligibly) as applied to Mid-West groups were adduced as patterns of domination²⁵⁸ because these measures arouse a sense of Yoruba superiority over other groups in the region.

Again, there were minority allegations expressed over the composition and discriminatory operation of public boards in the Western Region. The Mid-West groups charged that boards such as the Scholarship, Production Development, Finance Corporation and Marketing boards as well as the Public Service Commission and the Local Government Service board were composed exclusively of Yoruba and were discriminatory in practice.²⁵⁹ Considering the Yoruba two-thirds majority, their dominance in education and political affiliation with the Action Group (itself the dominant party in the region), their presence on boards in the Western region could not be prohibited by the Commission but the area of discriminatory practice did require attention. Mid-West minorities similarly presented discriminatory practices to the Commission in the following: economic activity, provision of public facilities, and allocation of parliamentary seats, party politics, Chiefs and Local Government Councils and legislations.²⁶⁰ The Commission on Fears of Minority critically examined all of these fears and grievances, as well as the question of religion in Western Region, with regard to demands for State(s).

The Commission dispensed with all requests to establish more states within Yoruba densely populated territories of the Western Region because such were outside the terms of its reference; namely, demands not from ethnic minorities. Regarding the subject of a Mid-West State, due to three proponents for its establishment making obscure and contradictory demands as to its nature, geography and ethnic composition, the Commission also made an unfavorable

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁵⁵ Ibid,

²⁵⁶ Ibid,

²⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 11-13.

²⁵⁸ Ibid,

²⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.13-15.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 15-25.

recommendation.²⁶¹ The Commission reasoned that even though “this area had been neglected in certain aspects, not only by the present Government but by its Colonial predecessor, there was no evidence of deliberate and vindictive discrimination or even culpable neglect.”²⁶² A supposed inability to stand on equal terms with existing Regions, protests from minority groups within the proposed state, and lack of passion for its creation from moderate groups hindered the advocates from persuading the Commission to award a positive recommendation for the creation of the Mid-West State.

In January 1958, the Willink Commission moved to Eastern Region to entertain proposals, oral presentations and memoranda by minority groups on that region’s demands for separate statehood. Like the Western region, it was established that two-thirds of the population of the Eastern region was of the Igbo ethnic stock.²⁶³ To the east and south of the Igbo lie the Cross River valley and the coastal belt, respectively. Minority ethnic groups such as Ibibio, Efik, Anang, Ogoni, Ijaw occupied the Cross River valley and coastal swampy marshy belt. These minority groups expressed fears of being dominated by the Igbo majority group and demanded the creation of four states.²⁶⁴ Igbo domination of the socio-economic and political landscape of the Eastern Region was adduced to justify the demand for autonomy. In the Eastern Region, the Commission noted minority resentment of majority autocratic supremacy when it said, “Faced with the prospect of being perpetually in opposition, the minorities were prepared even to reject the hope of independence, assenting that colonial dependence had been preferable to what was before them.”²⁶⁵ Like their western counterparts, minorities leveled allegations of marginalization and discriminatory practices against the Igbo majority in the spheres of politics, public posts and services, provision of economic and social services, Local Government and Chiefs, administration of justice and maintenance of public order.

The Eastern Region Government advocated for the abolition of the Regional Structure and suggested the establishment of a strong Federal Government supported by a number of smaller states with lesser powers. For the Eastern Government, they argued, any such state must

²⁶¹ The three main advocates for the creation of a Mid-West State were: the Government of Western Region, the Action Group and the Mid-West State Movement. All three presented memoranda to the Willink Commission for the creation of Mid-West State, though with differences in enthusiasm and differing in its territorial space. The new State as demanded by the Mid-West State Movement comprised the geography of Benin and Delta Provinces, while the Action Group advocated the unity of ethnic groups and applied language as the first test for ethnic differentiation. The Action Group thus grouped all Edo-speakers into one State, while asserting that Igbos of Asaba and Aboh should be reunited, with Igbo in Eastern Region; they argued that Western Ijaw likewise should be united with Ijaw in Eastern Region and the two Yoruba minority tribes (Akoko-Edo of Afenmai and Itsekiri in Warri) should be united with Yoruba in Ondo Province. The Government of Western Region for its part supported and proposal that Ishan and Afenmai be part of the Mid-West State. On the basis of ethnic difference giving rise to political division, the Western Regional Government recommended separate States for Edo-speakers, the union of Igbo tribes and Western Ijaw respectively in the Eastern Region, while Edo and Itsekiri should be moved to Ondo Province.

²⁶² Willink Commission Report, 1958, p. 29.

²⁶³ Willink Commission Report, 1958.

²⁶⁴ There was the demand to make the Ogoja Province in the north-east of Eastern Region a state of its own called Ogoja state; second, Cross River State, which would be made up of Calabar Province and part of Ogoja Province; third, Rivers State, which would consist of Rivers Province with certain additions (Ijaw in the coastal belt of Western Region); fourth, Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) State, whose proposed geography would be the three non-Igbo Provinces of Ogoja, Calabar and Rivers.

²⁶⁵ Willink Commission Report, 1958, p. 37.

satisfy the requirements of self-determination, ethnic relationship, spatial contiguity and viability.²⁶⁶ It did not take long before the Commission discarded the idea of an Ogoja and Cross River state.²⁶⁷ The lack of zeal from some ethnic groups in the geography of Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers State, and those groups' demands for the creation of other autonomous states as a priority made it more complicated. Proponents for the creation of Rivers State presented a historical, legal and moral argument to support their claim for autonomy, saying:

..when the British first came to this area they made treaties of trade and protection with local Chiefs; these were of a special nature and differed from the treaties made with other Chiefs inland. The British Crown undertook to provide protection and to deal with foreign powers, but the treaties did not provide that the Chiefs should surrender to the British Government a sovereignty which could be transferred to any other authority. If Her Majesty's Government saw it fit to end the treaties, then the Chiefs of this area were morally entitled to revert to their original status.²⁶⁸

Advocates for Rivers State creation also impressed upon the Commission that the needs of residents of the marshy swamps and maze of windy creeks in the coastal delta are dissimilar from those of the hinterland. Therefore, the principal agitators for establishment of the Rivers State wanted its spatial location to be the whole of Rivers Province (Brass, Degema, Ogoni, Port Harcourt and Ahoada Divisions) together with the Western Ijaw Division from the Western Region and including Ijaw in the Eastern Region outside Rivers Province.²⁶⁹ In contrast, Ahoada Division (an Igbo enclave in Rivers Province) presented a position sternly opposing the establishment of Rivers State: their rejection of the proposal was based on the numerical disadvantage that would befall the Igbo if they are a minority in a different Region -- failed to accede to any proposal for state creation in the Eastern Region. After listening to the presentations of Chiefs and peoples of the Niger Delta, the Commission agreed that "it is not easy for a Government or legislature operating from far inland to concern itself, or even fully understand, the problems of a territory where communications are so difficult, building so expensive, and education so scanty."²⁷⁰ They did not proffer any practical solution to these problems. The Commission's recommendation of a mere development board instead of an autonomous state for the region was a disappointment and far below minority expectations with regard to demand for self-determination. The Willink Commission's unwillingness to create autonomous states for minority groups ruined their expectations for independent existence.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 46; Applying these principles, the Eastern Region Government did not see anything wrong with the creation of Ogoja state, Cross Rivers State and Rivers State, but objected to Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers State because it did not satisfy the first three requirements advocated for new states.

²⁶⁷ The proposed Ogoja State with Abakaliki and Afikpo, if created, would still have a majority Igbo population with other minority ethnic groups embedded within, hence it was rejected, while the Cross River state had no strong support for its creation at all.

²⁶⁸ Willink Commission Report, 1958, p. 49.

²⁶⁹ Ibid; Rivers Chiefs and People's Congress (especially from Degema and Brass), the main proponents for the creation of Rivers State also included two small sections in the Eastern Region from outside the Rivers Province: Opobo and Andoni on the one hand, and Ndoki on the other. This was with a view to incorporate as many as possible Ijaw from various sections of the Niger Delta coastal belt so as to get the attention they had since lacked in the new state if created.

²⁷⁰ Willink Commission Report, 1958, p. 50.

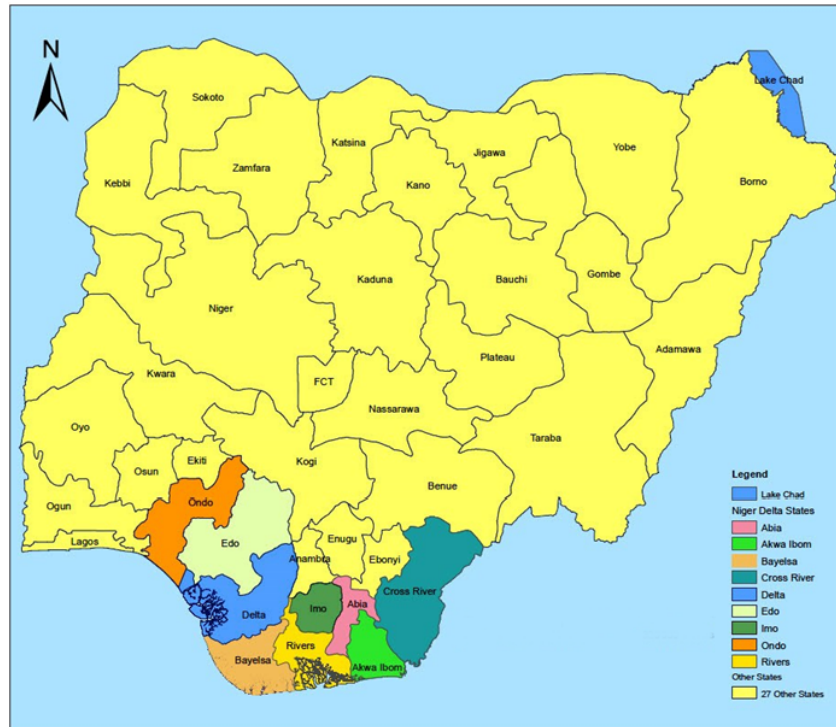
2.3.1 Summary

The groundwork for establishing Nigeria as a British colony was laid by the colonization and amalgamation of 1900 and 1914, respectively. Shortfalls in manpower and economic resources compelled the merger of the arid savannah north and tropical rainforest south, regions occupied by people of diverse geography, politics, culture, occupation, language and religion. British division of the Federal colony into Northern, Eastern and Western Regions (Regional governance structures), and minority ethnic resentments over majority ethnic domination in the social, political, economic spheres, together gave rise to petitions and demands for autonomous states. The outcome of these minority petitions to Britain was the inauguration of the Henry Willink Commission in 1957. The Commission, however, confirmed the fears and disadvantaged position of minority groups in every region. It concluded that state creation was not the solution and even could obstruct the proposed granting of independence to Nigeria in 1960.²⁷¹ The Commission therefore recommended the constitutional classification of the Niger Delta as an area with “Special Development” needs that requires cooperative efforts of the Federal, Eastern and Western Governments because it was “poor, backward and neglected,” and it suggested the establishment of a Federal Board to address the peculiar problems of the Niger Delta people.²⁷² This recommendation led to the post-independence creation of the Niger Delta Development Board in 1961 by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, then Prime Minister. But the Board failed in all parameters to meet the desire and aspirations of the people of the area; hence the demands for autonomy and fair treatment continued in post-independence Nigeria.

²⁷¹ Willink Commission Report, 1958.

²⁷² Ibid, pp. 95-97.

Figure 3: Map of Nigeria



Source: <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/1/4/2/>

2.4 Post-Colonial Niger Delta: Boro's Insurrection and Ethnic Civic Nationalism

Nigeria gained independence from Britain on October 1st 1960. However, by leaving their companies and investments behind, Britain did not grant the country economic independence. The fact remains that it would have been difficult for the country to achieve economic independence due to its reliance on colonial institutions and investments.²⁷³ Again, the ethnic tensions that characterized most parts of colonial rule continued into post-colonial Nigeria. It did not take long before ethnic discontent among minority groups appeared, along with struggle for political power among elites of the three majority ethnic groups; Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. Specifically in the south, the Niger Delta minorities sought access to, and control over, their resources as a means to achieve meaningful development of their region. Disappointed with the outcome of the Willink Commission, which ruined their expectations of self-determination, they renewed their demands in post-colonial Nigeria.

The year 1963 marked another watershed in the political evolution of the country. That year, Nigeria became a republic, with the Queen of England's representative ceasing to be head of state. A fourth region, the Mid-West, was created out of the Western Region to coexist with

²⁷³ Since independence, British corporations and their subsidiaries, such as Shell and the United African Company, have dominated the economic landscape of the country; institutions such as the police, judiciary and civil service have yet to be reformed. All of this has led to discontent in certain sections of the polity.

the Northern, Eastern and Western regions.²⁷⁴ At independence, the nation was governed by the Hausa-Fulani-dominated Northern Peoples Congress (NPC).²⁷⁵ The Middle Belt's boycott of the first post-independence general election of 1964 caused a crisis, leading to the death of many people in the Middle Belt. In 1965, apparent widespread irregularities during elections in the Western Region created disorder there, again leading to the death of many people. In January 1966, a military coup overthrew the civilian government, and the federal Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and premiers of the west and north all were assassinated in the process. The first military coup produced Major General T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, as military head of state. General Aguiyi-Ironsi introduced a unitary system of governance that stifled demands for self-determination in Nigeria.

Before this time, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) at the pre-independence election of 1959, post-independence Eastern Regional elections of 1962, and Federal elections of 1964 had defeated the Niger Delta Congress (NDC, a party founded by Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye for the Rivers/coastal people). These defeats, which Boro attributed to electoral inducements and described as “pay before I vote,” show that the area had been “sold to outsiders for nothing, making the work of constitutional emancipation by the younger generation utterly disastrous” and unattainable.²⁷⁶ There were political as well as constitutional provisions that made creation of a Niger Delta State seem so herculean as to be unattainable.²⁷⁷ The Niger Delta also remained underdeveloped, even though oil from this area had become the booty of Nigeria. Hence, Boro argued:

... an Ijaw nationalist finds that a state for his people is more of a necessity than a mere desire. A Niger Delta State is a clear case as the people concerned have a distinct historical silhouette. Such a demand becomes all the more compelling when the area is so viable. Yet the people are blatantly denied development and the common necessities of life. If Nigerian governments refuse to do something to drastically improve the lot of the people, inevitably a point of no return will be reached; then evil is afoot.²⁷⁸

The Rivers people blamed the Eastern Igbos for their woes, in an attempt to retain them

²⁷⁴ Ezera, K.. *Constitutional Development in Nigeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

²⁷⁵ Nnoli, O., 1978, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Boston: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978.

²⁷⁶ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, Tony ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, Benin-city: Idodo Umeh Publishers, 1982, pp. 68.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 69; in Boro's view, constitutionally the NCNC had no interest in the creation of a Niger Delta State because the oil-rich Niger Delta had become the booty of Nigeria. Secondly, of the nine members representing the Niger Delta eight were members of NCNC. Even if all were members of the Niger Delta Congress (NDC), they would have been too few to control a majority vote for state creation. In the Eastern Regional House, for instance, the Niger Delta had four members against a hundred and ten other representatives. The provision for state creation in the constitution was complicated; “An area demanding for a state had to get the approval of the regional government or governments within which the area demanding the state falls as well as one other regional government and also that of the Federal government. Alternatively, if the government or governments of the area proved stubborn, it could then get the backing of the Federal government. In the state of affairs as at 1965, the Niger Delta could probably get the support of the governments of the North and West and the Federal government, but never those of the East and Mid-West. The approval of the North and the West were also extreme probabilities because the Middle-Belt area of the North, too, were agitating for a state” (Boro, I., *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, pp. 69-70).

²⁷⁸ Boro, I., *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, op. cit., 1982, p. 66.

in the region so as to grease their economic and political interests.²⁷⁹ By 1964 it became very clear that party politics in Nigeria revolved around the three major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba).²⁸⁰ In the absence of the British, Nigeria was effectively in the hands of these three groups. This was the period when Isaac Boro (see below) mooted the idea of an organization to “prepare the minds of Ijaw youths for the right moment to demand for self-determination.”²⁸¹ The emergence of General Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, as head of state in January 1966 therefore heightened ethnic tensions in the Niger Delta creeks. General Aguiyi-Ironsi’s attempt to introduce a unitary system of governance was considered part of the “Igbo agenda” against the Niger Delta.

Isaac Boro was an Ijaw nationalist, former teacher, police officer and former student leader at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In late January 1966 he relocated from his Lagos base to his Kaiama hometown in the Niger Delta to organize Ijaw youths for self-determination in the region.²⁸² As a police officer and student in Eastern Nigeria, Boro had experienced both ethnic marginalization and discrimination. He was convinced that the “minority question” -- or agitation for self-determination, which since the colonial period had been placed on the front burner – could not be achieved through a political or constitutional process:

Year after year we were clenched in tyrannical chains and led through a dark alley of perpetual political and social deprivation. Strangers in our own country! Inevitably, therefore, the day would have to come for us to fight for our long denied right to self-determination.²⁸³

Upon his arrival in Kaiama, Boro recruited Niger Delta youths into an armed liberation force called Niger Delta Volunteer Service (DVS).²⁸⁴ The aim of Boro’s DVS (as it was called) was to dismember the Niger Delta territory from “any support whatsoever of the newly formed military government” of General Aguiyi-Ironsi and to make it an independent state.²⁸⁵ On the 23rd of February 1966, after a brief swearing-in ceremony of DVS fighters and shortly before his

²⁷⁹ The situation was more frustrating for the Rivers Ijaw because when the Mid-West Region was created by the Western Region in 1963, the promise given to Western Ijaw was that in the event of the creation of a Niger Delta State from the Eastern Region, they (the western Ijaw) would be allowed to join their kith and kin. But the Eastern Region was not ready to let go of the Niger Delta, principally to satisfy the Region’s economic and political considerations.

²⁸⁰ The Hausa-Fulani Northern People’s Congress (NPC) controlled the North, the Action Group (AG) of the Yoruba controlled the West, and the Igbo dominated NCNC controlled the East. All minority political parties became appendages to these majority ethnic political parties. For instance, The Niger Delta Congress, Middle-Belt Democratic Front and the Nigerian National Democratic Party were appendages of NPC, the Igbo dominated NCNC had the Northern Elements Progressive Union and Mobolaji Grand Alliance as hangers-on, while the United Middle-Belt Congress allied with Yoruba Action Group for survival. The Regions therefore were under the vice grip of these three major ethnic groups politically and economically.

²⁸¹ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, Tony ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

²⁸² For more on Isaac Boro’s activities see Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, Tony ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, Benin-city: Idodo Umeh Publishers, 1982.

²⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 71.

²⁸⁴ Isaac Adaka Boro in conjunction with Nottingham Dick and Samuel Owonaro, recruited youths ranging from eighteen to thirty years of age from different Ijaw settlements in the Niger Delta into the service of DVS. Before the insurrection DVS which had its training camp at Tontonbou around Taylor Creek estuary of the Nun River, had a total of one hundred and fifty nine members.

²⁸⁵ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, Tony ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, p. 96.

declaration of the coastal region (Niger Delta) as an independent state, Boro addressed his DVS combatants and made them understand that their action (liberation of the Niger Delta from Nigeria) would be a message to the globe about how and what they feel under the yoke of oppression.²⁸⁶ He therefore enjoined them to:

...remember your seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty stricken people; remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom.²⁸⁷

The inevitable came when Boro, with support from his 159-man Niger DVS, declared sections of the Nigerian coastal belt to be “Niger Delta Republic.”

In the manner of a military *coup d’etat*, Boro read an eleven-point Declaration of Independence and a six-number operational guideline to DVS members. The declaration specified the spatial boundaries of the new republic and instructed that: (a) All former agreements as regards the crude oil of the people undertaken by the defunct Nigerian Government in the territory have been declared invalid. (b) All oil companies... [are] to stop exploration and renew agreements with the new Republic. Defiance of this order will result in dislocation of the company’s exploration and forfeiture of their right of renewal of such agreements. (c) All aliens (defined as anyone who by birth was not from the Niger Delta) are “to report within twenty-four hours to the nearest DVS agent to ensure his or her protection.” The declaration similarly ordered the closure of “district and county councils, courts and revenue collecting organs” of government, and declared the territory “tax free until fully industrialized.” Though the DVS would be responsible for maintenance of law and/order, an 84-member provisional Senate, with six members from each of the fourteen clans, was created to “advise the Liberation Government on a new constitution for the people.”²⁸⁸ Regarding the DVS operation of internal security, the declaration imposed a dusk to dawn curfew, and it restricted movement of canoes on the “waterways from 11pm to 7am.” Citizens of the delta were advised to keep clear of DVS operational areas declared as Aggression Repulsion Centers (ARC), while any “craft or canoes defying DVS orders [would] bear full responsibility for their non-compliance.” Finally, anyone caught vandalizing or removing Government notices or posters was punishable by death.²⁸⁹ Armed with this pronouncement, the DVS shut down economic, political and social activities in the Niger Delta, and non-Ijaws in the region took to their heels.

²⁸⁶ Ibid,

²⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 116-117.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 119-121.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 120-122; The declaration signed by Adaka Boro as Commanding Officer and Leader of the Liberation Government also has a proclamation stating: “Today, the long awaited salvation has been fulfilled. We, the Niger Delta People, have obtained our independence. All of us are aware of the events in Nigeria. For those who may be deceived still, the new government of the Niger Delta tells them plainly and in unequivocal terms that tribalists have foiled our attempts to acquire our own statehood and determine our social, political and developmental future. You have heard that our Prime Minister Sir Abubakar, has been murdered and the government has been illegally seized. We shall henceforth have nothing to do with them. We need your support for our venture, not for ourselves, but for yourselves and the generations to come. For those who were members of NCNC, you may well be reminded that we have not come to separate but to unite the scattered Ijaws. However, no subversion will be condoned and we expect that shortly after, all hands will be on deck to salvage our sinking nationality...” (Boro, I., *The Twelve-Day*

Government counteroffensive troops arrived in the evening to dislodge Boro's DVS militants from the creeks, with logistical assistance from Shell Oil Company.²⁹⁰ Boro's DVS fighters resisted Federal counterinsurgency troops in a gun battle that lasted twelve days before his squad was crushed. Subsequently Boro, alongside Samuel Owonaro and Nottingham Dick, were arrested, charged with treason, tried, and condemned to death in June 1966. The Nigerian Federal Supreme Court confirmed the judgment in December of that same year (1966). But before the Supreme Court's affirmation of the lower court's judgment, there was a change in Nigeria's political leadership at the center. In July 1966, Major General T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi was killed in a coup led by Major T. Y. Danjuma and other largely northern military officers. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon was made head of state. The coup led to the murder of numerous Easterners, particularly the Igbo, who were living in the north. There was thus a mass migration of Igbo from the north back to the east.²⁹¹ The regions made several attempts from September – November 1966 to negotiate a return to democratization, but failed.

On May 27 1967, the military leader of the Eastern Region Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, empowered by the previous day's meeting of the Eastern Regional Consultative Assembly, declared the Eastern Region of Nigeria an independent "Biafra Republic." Pre-empting Colonel Ojukwu's move, the Major General Gowon-led government at the center divided the country into twelve states in place of the four regions, and subsequently declared emergency rule in the area that used to be the Eastern Region and was now comprising the three states of Cross River, East-Central, and Rivers. The states of Cross River and Rivers simultaneously fulfilled the longstanding agitation of the Eastern Region's minorities for a new state that would remove them from Igbo domination and sought to remove the oil fields from the control of the Igbo, who were now virtually confined in East-Central State. On May 30, 1967, fighting broke out between federal and Biafran (i.e., Igbo) troops.

There was a dramatic twist in May 1967; the death verdicts for Boro and his colleagues had been commuted to life imprisonment. On further consideration, in August 1967 they were freed from custody while the civil war was ongoing, so that they might fight on the side of the federal government.²⁹² Even though he was in prison, Boro congratulated General Yakubu Gowon for the creation of Rivers State and pledged his loyalty to the Nigerian nation, saying, "My men and I, with the creation of our state, are now free to help, not only our people, but also Nigeria to peace, unity, stability, and progress."²⁹³ Boro did join the civil war. He was killed in

Revolution, p. 122). He announced the change of the currency to the American dollar and enjoined the international community to cooperate with members of the DVS.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 134; DVS fighters who had kept watch across the Nun River under cover saw a Shell Company pontoon driven by two outboard engines being loaded with what was observed as federal troops and Nigerian mobile police.

²⁹¹ Reprisal action from the east also led to the death of Hausas in the Eastern region. Other people from the south-south (Niger Delta region) inhabiting the north were also killed. However, the Igbo happened to have been preponderant among the immigrants in the north from the south and thus a higher proportion of the casualties in the north were of Igbo stock.

²⁹² It is believed that the Presidential pardon granted Boro and his colleagues was a deliberate ploy by the Federal government to seek realignment with the oil-rich Niger Delta region which was under Biafran occupation at the time. The Federal government had lost Rivers State to Biafra soldiers and found it difficult to recapture the region due to its marshy terrain and windy maze of creeks, but found a reliable ally in Boro, who was highly knowledgeable about the area's geography. Boro did not disappoint, as he fought on the side of the Federal government and liberated Rivers State from Biafran soldiers before his death in Okrika, Rivers State in 1968.

²⁹³ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, Tony ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, p. 158.

1968; the civil war, which claimed millions of lives, continued until January 1970 when the Biafrans (Igbos) surrendered.

Rivers State, so created, was multi-ethnic and complicated. Geographically, the state was composed of the former Ahoada, Degema, Brass, Port Harcourt and Ogoni Divisions; hence, a “mainland-riverine” dichotomy emerged among inhabitants. It was also a conglomeration of different ethnic groups, including the Ikwerre-Igbo, Ijaw, Ekpeye, Ogoni and more.²⁹⁴ With the dissolution of the regional governance structure and the creation of twelve Nigerian states, economic and political power moved from the regions to the center, i.e., the Federal government. The emergent fiscal centralist policies of military rule combined with the creation of more states in less resource-endowed ethnic majority territories exacerbated minorities’ demand for autonomy and fairness.²⁹⁵ The majority ethnic groups at the center saw state creation as a catalyst for the development of their stark lands to the detriment of resource-gifted ethnic minority areas of the Niger Delta.²⁹⁶ It is this unjust political economy of state creation that minority ethnic groups, especially from the Niger Delta, have challenged in contemporary times.

²⁹⁴ Rivers State thus was established as a deliberate effort by the General Yakubu Gowon administration to solve two fundamental problems at the time: First, the unending and consistent demand for an autonomous state by Niger Delta minorities and, second, the urgent political need to checkmate and frustrate Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu’s successionist program in the Eastern Region. Western Ijaw was not incorporated into Rivers State; rather they became part of a new state that emerged from Mid-West Region called Bendel state.

²⁹⁵ By this time (1970 and 80s) the oil discovered in commercial quantities at Oloibiri (then Rivers State) in 1956 in the Niger Delta had become the economic mainstay of the Nigeria Federation. The Federal government and multinational oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta had entered a joint venture business partnership sharing proceeds from oil extracted in communities of the Niger Delta, with very little given to the states from the Federation account and nothing awarded to communities that bear the brunt and burdens of oil operation activities.

²⁹⁶ From twelve states in 1967, the number was increased to nineteen in 1976, and to twenty-one in 1987, then further to thirty states in 1991 and by 1996 further increased to thirty-six with 774 local government areas in all. Of these, thirty-six states of the Federation and based on the first three regions arrangement, while territories of the former Eastern and Western Regions combined together now have seventeen states (Eastern region nine and Western region eight including the delta areas attached); the Northern region on the other hand has nineteen states. Paradoxically, these states are in majority ethnic group territories without regard to economic viability. All are economically sustained, infrastructurally developed, and politically maintained by the oil rents primarily from the Niger Delta.

Figure 4: States of the Niger Delta



Beginning in the 1990s, Niger Delta groups started to respond to processes of dispossession caused by the political economy of state creation that favored majority ethnic groups.²⁹⁷ In south-south Rivers State, Kenule Saro-Wiwa brilliantly brought five different but related groups under one fold called Ogoni.²⁹⁸ The Ogoni, through an organization called Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) demanded civic nationalism and emphasized the need to rethink the constitutional foundation of the Nigerian state through an evaluation of the legal and constitutional basis for revenue derivation and allocation in the Federation and of community land rights with regard to oil exploration in the Niger Delta. MOSOP laid political claim to natural resources in Ogoniland and fought for modification of how Nigeria distributed revenue from these resources.

Similarly, in 1991 the Ijaw ethnic group formed Ijaw National Congress (INC), an umbrella organization for all Ijaw in different states of the Niger Delta. Because state and local government areas (LGAs) had become the only legitimate avenues for resource allocation and development, INC mobilized Ijaw clans and demanded that all Ijaw in the Niger Delta be unified into three homogenous and contiguous states in the Nigerian Federation.²⁹⁹ The Congress's request for three States was based on contributions Ijaw oil-bearing communities had made (and

²⁹⁷ The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and Ijaw National Congress (INC) that emerged during this period as minority ethnic movements to challenge the Nigerian state and multinationals oil corporations are discussed further in chapter five of this work.

²⁹⁸ Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination*, Trenton: African World Press, Inc., 2008, pp. 189-196.

²⁹⁹ For more on INC and its activities, see Nwajiaku, K., "Oil Politics and Identity Transformation in Nigeria: The Case of Ijaw of the Niger Delta," PhD Dissertation submitted to the Department of Politics and International Relation, University of Oxford, June 2005.

still make) to the Nigeria's economic sustainability and the ecological burdens arising therefrom. MOSOP and INC's modes of effective grassroots mobilization and the state's brute response to "legitimate" political demands opened the floodgate of minority ethnic mobilization in the Niger Delta. The state's brute pacification and securitization rather than dialogue woke the youth from their dogmatic slumber to take the center stage from mid-1990, producing a near balance of force between the state's paradigm and the defiant resistance from youthful "militants" in the region.

2.4.1 Summary

Minorities' discontents and cravings for autonomous states instead of political, economic and social marginalization and discrimination by majority ethnic groups continued even in post-colonial Nigeria. The transition of governance from British imperial rule to local majority ethnic surrogates as rulers and the continued deprivation of minority ethnic groups altered the mode of resistance. While in the colonial era resistance took the form of petition writing, in post-colonial Nigeria it graduated to an armed revolutionary/insurgency approach accompanied by minority civic nationalism. Since the mid-1990s these methods of protest and the state's strategy of brute pacification and co-optation of ethnic youth mobilization in the Niger Delta have, in global parlance, turned the region into a turbulent and unpredictable zone of insurrection.³⁰⁰

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides a broad based synoptic account of the different phases of discontent and domination in the Niger Delta since 1870 to 1999 and portrays responses by institutions of governance from the late nineteenth century to the enthronement of democratic rule in 1999. I have emphasized first the dissatisfaction shown by Niger Delta "gatekeepers" (middlemen) to British merchants' desire to gain unfettered access to hinterland markets and the resultant attack, arrest and banishment of several African leaders; and second the protest against majority ethnic domination during colonial rule and the inability of the Willink Commission to fundamentally address legal, moral and constitutional issues raised by minority groups; and third post-colonial armed insurgency and ethnic mobilization against the political economy of state creation, including militarization as the state response to such insurgency.

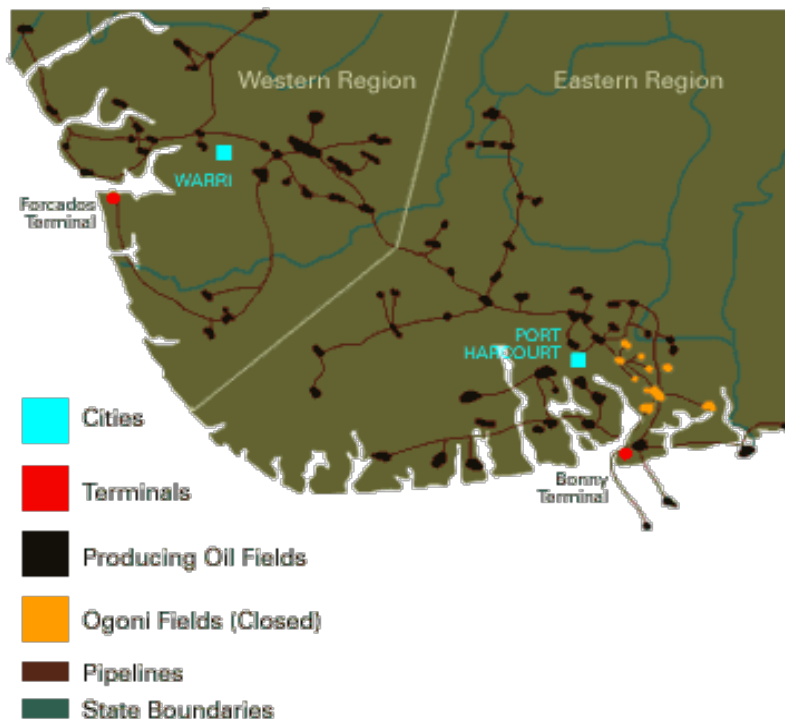
The next four chapters (divided into Part I and II) examine the history and geography of intra- and inter-communal conflicts in the Eastern and Western Niger Delta. Chapters three and four (Part I) examine the political history of pre-oil intra- and inter-communal conflicts and how the incursion of oil into the political space complexified intra/inter clan/ethnic rivalry in the Port Harcourt region of Eastern Niger Delta. Intra and inter-clan as well as inter-ethnic conflicts in the Port Harcourt region are deep-rooted in history and also complicated. The aim here is to interrogate these old unresolved rivalries in the region and to show how in the contemporary politics, political economy of oil and youth mobilization feed into and/or transform these old

³⁰⁰ Ukeje, C., "Changing the Paradigm of Pacification: Oil and Militarization in Nigeria's Niger Delta," in Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., (eds.), *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, London: Zed Books, 2011.

animosities to assume a new form, dimension and character of conflict in the region – it espouses the embeddedness of old rivalries in contemporary political, oil and youth militants’ conflict discourses in the Port Harcourt region of Eastern Niger Delta.

The fifth and sixth chapters (Part II) would examine the pre-and-post independence inter-ethnic relations in Warri, Western Niger Delta and the conflict dynamics derivable therefrom. The chapters examine a long history of tensions (since the 19th century pre-oil era) among ethnic groups (especially Ijaw and Itsekiri) over ownership of Warri and environs, demand for political autonomy and change of chietancy nomenclature. These Chapters (Part II) unravel how the unceasing and renewed (pre-oil to oil regime) demands for self-determination by groups in Warri, Western Delta has turned violent in the contemporary and how the violence is complicated, transformed and blurred by the local as well as global significance of oil. These chapters espouse the interconnectedness and differences between old and current trajectories, motivations, shape, dynamics and characters of conflict arising from the demand for ethnic autonomy in Warri, Western Niger Delta.

Figure 5: Western and Eastern Niger Delta Map



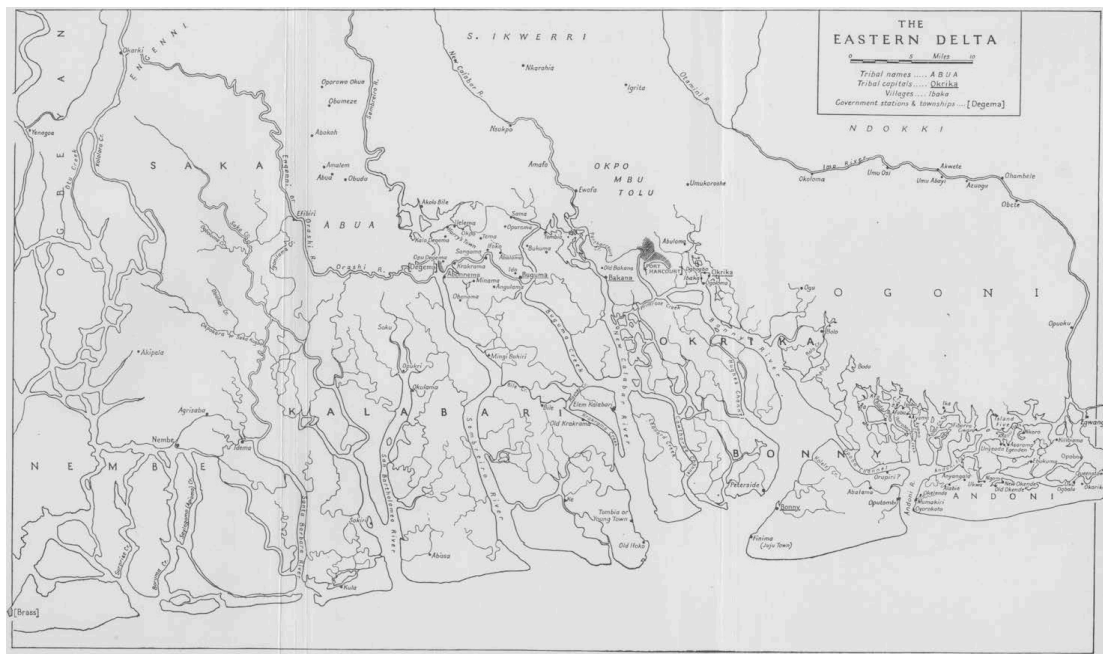
Source: <http://www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Maps/Oilfields.html>

PART I: EASTERN NIGER DELTA

Chapters three and four (Part I) of this work are devoted to the regional and spatial analysis of conflict dynamics in the Port Harcourt region of Eastern Niger Delta. The chapters examine the history and factors propelling intra-and-inter clan/ethnic conflicts in the Port Harcourt axis of Rivers State and how these pre-oil historical conflicts have been complicated by the arrival of petro-capitalism. The first of the two chapters of Part I (chapter three) examines the contentious intra-and-inter clan/ethnic politics of the region before the arrival of oil - the pre-colonial and pre-oil social relation within and among groups (especially among Kalabari and Okrika on the one hand and Okrika and Ogoni/Eleme on the other) in the region prior to oil exploration and exploitation activities. In this regard, My argument is that the social and political dynamics of pre-oil conflicts arising from commercialization or trade among groups and rivalry over control of markets, conflict propelled by claims to territory and/or boundary disputes, dynastic or family struggles for power/leadership and contentious histories of settlement and occupation are key to understanding the impact of oil in the region. An understanding of these pre-oil conflicts among groups is critical to understanding the node, character and dimensions of contemporary conflicts in the region.

The second chapter of Part I (chapter four) focus on the post-independence rise of violence and militancy in the Port Harcourt region of Eastern Niger Delta. The chapter interrogates the politics of state and local government area creation in Nigeria's fragile and unstable federalism to the detriment of minority groups with abundant natural resources (oil and gas). It examines the fractious relation between the Nigerian state-oil industry collusion and oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta and conflict arising therefrom. My argument is that the arrival of oil opened new and transformed old conflicts in the region. The chapter argues that ethnic mass mobilization against the ecological footprints of the oil industry and government-oil industry mode of pacification deepened conflict to an unprecedented scale in the region. I argue that an amalgam of state-oil-company violence, party politics, territorial claim and counter claim, chieftancy tussle and youth mobilization all help produce an ungovernable space in the Port Harcourt region of Eastern Niger Delta – conflict in the Port Harcourt axis of the Niger Delta is a complex blend of both old and new trends. Part II (chapters five and six) explains the western conflict dynamics.

Figure 6: Eastern Niger Delta



Source: Jones, G. I., *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Easter Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963

Chapter Three

Contentious Politics Before Oil: Intra and Inter-Clan Conflict in the Port Harcourt Region, Eastern Delta (1875-1960).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the complex ethnic configuration in the Eastern delta (Rivers State) and considers conflicts arising from these complexities since the nineteenth century, specifically in the city of Port Harcourt.³⁰¹ First, I briefly describe the traditions of origin of some of the key ethnic groups making up Rivers State. Next, I interrogate the social relations that existed among Ijaw clans in Port Harcourt during the era of trans-Atlantic commerce and colonial rule in the region. In the process I unveil historical intra- and inter-clan tensions and conflicts among some Ijaw clans of the Eastern Niger Delta (most especially Kalabari vs. Okrika) over chieftancy, resources, and control of markets, territory and trade. There are other important conflicts in the Eastern delta, but the Kalabari-Okrika intra- and inter-clan conflicts of the nineteenth century are indispensable to an understanding of the rise and character of Ijaw mobilization in Rivers State today. The intention is to show that conflict in Rivers State is very complex, more complex than one might imagine. The chapter therefore evaluates the transformation of the “House-System” as an institution of governance into the “war-canoe house” system, developed by settlements in the Eastern delta in order to meet demands of the trans-Atlantic trade. I further show how, in turn, this modification attracted conflicts. The chapter ends with an examination of the incursion of oil economy into this multi-ethnic space and I argue that the political economy of oil deepened and extended old conflicts and tensions over the various ethnic groups’ claims to territory in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. In Chapter four I show how reverberates and take new form in the contemporary.

3.2 Brief Traditions of Origin and Internal Trade

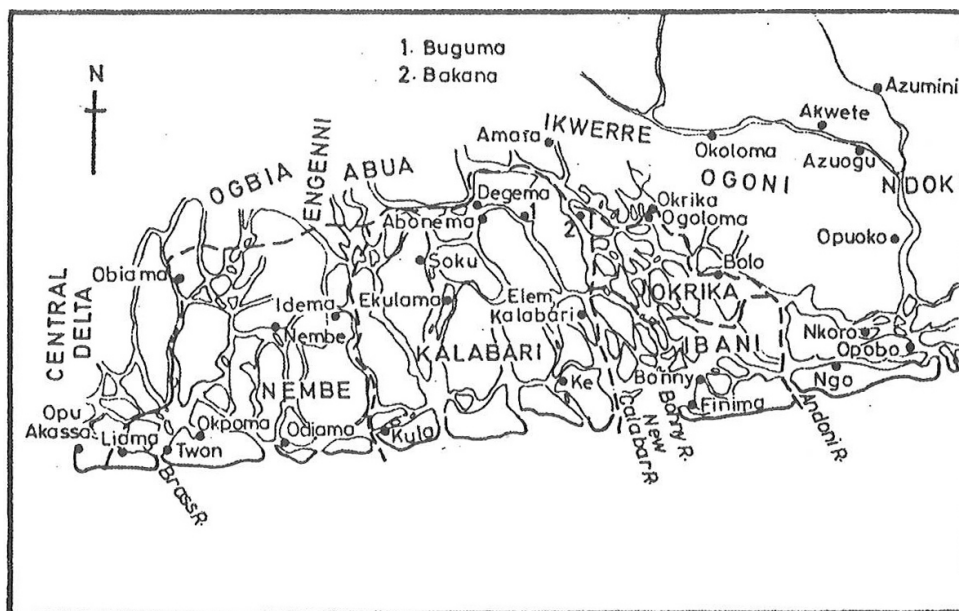
Eastern Niger Delta (Rivers State) represents the eastern fringe of the Ijaw expansion in the delta.³⁰² The Ijaw who are mainly fishermen occupy the coastal plain of the Niger Delta stretching from Arogbó, Ondo State in the west to Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State in the eastern fringe. Ijaw ethnic group with a population of about 14 million (UNDP Report, 2006) is made up of about fifty sub-groups otherwise known as clans. A clan is an Ijaw sub-group based on kinship with a common religious, linguistic and cultural tradition. There are about nine Ijaw clans in

³⁰¹ The Central and Eastern Niger Delta were lumped together as Eastern Niger Delta (then Rivers State) in 1976, lasting this way until 1st October 1996 when Bayelsa State was carved out of Rivers State. Bayelsa State, a Central Delta State, is located between of the East and West delta.

³⁰² The Ibeno Ijaw of Akwa Ibom State are farther east of Rivers State and in geographical terms are considered the east-most Ijaw aborigines of the Niger Delta.

Rivers State.³⁰³ The Bonny, Opobo, Okrika and Kalabari are some of this region's most important Ijaw clan settlements. Most of these Ijaw clans are located in the coastal margin of the state. Eastern Ijaw clans do not trace their traditions of origin to the famous Benin Kingdom in the west (as do some Ijaw clans in contemporary Delta State) western but rather to the Central Niger Delta.³⁰⁴ (The exception is the Kalabari, where Benin has featured in recent narratives on the town of Bakana, which was founded by Will Braide in the late nineteenth century).³⁰⁵ Most Ijaw settlements to the east and west trace their traditions of origin to Wilberforce Island, the territory of Oporoma, the region of Apoi creek and Obioma, all in the Central Niger Delta.³⁰⁶ It is typically assumed by historians that the Central Niger Delta is the homeland of Ijaw groups who had settled in this part of the delta too long ago to remember an origin.³⁰⁷ The Ijaw have existed as a distinct linguistic group for at least five thousand years, distinct from the major languages in Nigeria.³⁰⁸ This explains why historians cannot and should not discard the Ijaw claim of autochthony with a mere wave of the hand.

Figure 11: Ijo (Ijaw) of the Eastern Delta



Source: Alagoa, E.J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005

³⁰³ The nine Ijaw sub-groups or clans identified in Rivers State are: Andoni, Opobo, Nkoro, Kula, Okrika, Kalabari, Engenni, Bille and Bonny.

³⁰⁴ Alagoa, E. J., "Oral Tradition Among the Ijo of the Niger Delta," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 405-415; Alagoa, E. J., *In Memory of Heroes: Nigerian Historical Discourse*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2011.

³⁰⁵ Alagoa, E. J., "Oral Tradition Among the Ijo of the Niger Delta," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 405-415.

³⁰⁶ Alagoa, E. J., "Peoples of the Cross River Valley and Eastern Niger Delta," in Ikime, O, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1980.

³⁰⁷ Alagoa, E. J., "Oral Tradition among the Ijo of the Niger Delta," *op. cit.*, 1966

³⁰⁸ Estimate made by Kay Williamson by the glotto-chronological method acknowledged by Alagoa, E. J., in "Peoples of the Cross River Valley and Eastern Niger Delta," in Ikime, O, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1980.

In terms of autochthony in the Eastern delta, the people of Ke (a Kalabari settlement) in the Degema local government area of Rivers State claim to be original to their abode. Ke neighbors down to Nembe in the south and beyond believe that Ke people did not migrate from any place and have always existed in their present environment:

Only the people of Ke (in Kalabari clan) claim to be autochthonous, that their founders dropped from the sky. Obiama is extinct, and many groups who claim it as their place of origin decline to say whence Obiama itself came, but some name Benin, and others simply state that the ancient Obiama were 'Ijo'.³⁰⁹

Based on this assumption, some Ijaw settlements trace their traditions of origin to Ke.³¹⁰ It was a revered place where surrounding clans -- especially the Nembe and Kalabari -- would go for arbitration in the event of dispute.³¹¹ Archeological excavations in the east and central delta so far demonstrate that Ke has the deepest time depth in the history of human habitation.³¹² In some Ijaw traditions of origin, Oporoma and Ke are considered settlements that dropped from heaven with Ijaw inhabitants; these oral traditions suggest no possible place of origin outside of the delta but merely explain movements and spread of the Ijaw across the region.

Linguistically, eastern delta (Rivers State) groups are classified into two families: the Ijoid and the Benue-Congo.³¹³ In this classification, Ijaw clans are distinctly categorized as part of the Ijoid family while the rest are classified as the Benue-Congo family. In Rivers State, the ethnic groups are identified on the basis of linguistic affinity and/or oral history. The Benue-Congo linguistic family of Rivers State is quite complicated and further divided into four units: the Igboid unit (Ikwerre, Ekpeye, Etche, Ogba, Egbema and Ndoni), the Delta-Cross unit (Ogoni and Obolo), the Central Delta unit (Abua, Odual, Ogbroagum) and the Delta Edoid unit (Degema and Engenni).³¹⁴ These linguistic affinities suggest external affiliations between some east delta groups and groups outside of the region. In particular, the Igboid group suggests affiliation to the Igbo settlements in the north and northeast of the delta, the Delta-Cross suggests affiliation to groups in the Cross River Valley to the east of the delta, and the Delta Edoid suggest affiliation to Benin in the northwest of River state across the Western delta.³¹⁵ In their early oral traditions the Igboid group trace their genealogy to Igboland, while recent narratives tilt toward Benin Kingdom and historical contacts with other neighbors in the southern parts of the delta.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 413.

³¹⁰ There are Nembe settlements in Central Niger Delta that trace their traditions of origin to Ke in Rivers State, Eastern delta.

³¹¹ Talbot, P.M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932.

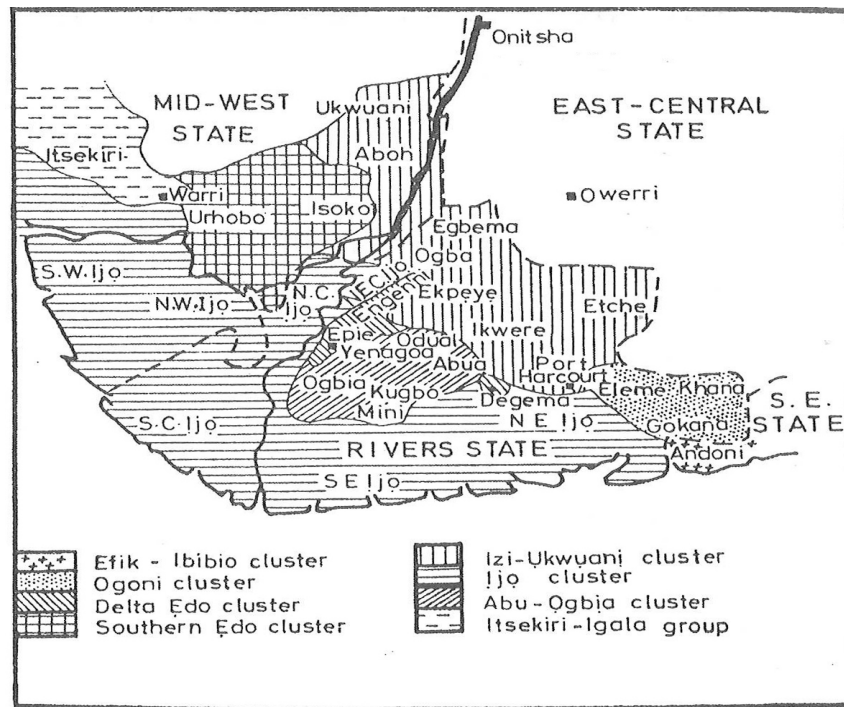
³¹² Derefaka, A. A, "Prehistoric Developments" in Alagoa, E. J, & Derefaka, A. A (eds.), *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Publications, 2002, pp. 261-275.

³¹³ Alagoa, E. J, & Kpone-Tonwe, S, "Traditions of Origin" in Alagoa, E. J, & Derefaka, A. A (eds.), *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Publications, 2002.

³¹⁴ Ibid,

³¹⁵ Ibid,

Figure 12: Languages of the Niger Delta



Source: Alagoa, E.J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005

Some Eastern Delta (located in the northwest sphere of the eastern delta) groups' membership in the Benue-Congo family indicates a close relationship to groups to the east of their current environment.³¹⁶ Engenni and Degema in the Deltaic Edoid linguistic setting have recorded historical narratives in which Benin features as their original homeland; this would corroborate their linguistic affiliation.³¹⁷ Although linguistic taxonomy and/or oral traditions suggest possible migration of groups from outside of the delta, some scholars have also recorded traditions of autochthony, denying the likelihood of certain groups' (especially Ijaw) migration from anywhere outside of the Niger Delta.³¹⁸ This evidence from language, which distinguishes the Ijaw from all other spoken languages, suggests the inadequacy of traditions of origin that trace Ijaw migration to the delta from another major linguistic group in Nigeria. Archaeological

³¹⁶ Ibid,

³¹⁷ Ibid.,

³¹⁸ For instance, Alagoa E. J & Derefaka, A. A 2002, record that Jeffrey (1931) recorded a tradition of autochthony by tracing Ogoni from Gbenedeka, great mother, who had "come down from the sky." The invocation of traditions of autochthony in parts of the delta may not be unconnected with anticipated land and territorial claims in the region and beyond. Autochthony confers on group(s) the status of indigeneity/first settler in the event of a dispute over territory/land with neighboring ethnic groups in the region. Also, groups who have lived for so long in a particular territory, and could no longer remember their history of migration and occupation since there was no written documentation at the time, use it. Territories that have been occupied for centuries are bound to adduce autochthony due to the fact that oral history with time is either corrupted or lost at particular stages of human memory.

findings in Rivers State also suggest that some Ijaw settlements have existed for centuries, with evidence of human habitation predating the Atlantic trade.³¹⁹

Before the advent of trans-Atlantic trade merchants, commerce existed across the delta (east-west) and with hinterland communities west and north of the delta. Ijaw occupying the coast traded their fish and salt for agricultural products from groups inhabiting the hinterland. Archaeological findings show that there was trade between settlements of the delta and countries of the west as far as Warri, Benin and Lagos and up north in the Igbo hinterland.³²⁰ Pereira, one of the earliest explorers to the delta, attests to the existence of trade within the region and beyond while reporting on a port in the estuary of Rio Real (now called Bonny River):

Eight leagues beyond Rio Pequeno to the east is a very large River called Rio Real (*Probably Bonny River*), the mouth of which is five leagues across. The people of this River are called Jos, being the same as those whom we spoke above (*reference to an earlier encounter with the western delta Ijaw of the Forcados and Escravos Rivers*)...At the mouth of this River within the creek above mentioned is a very large village (*probably Bonny*) of some 2,000 inhabitants, where much salt is made. The bigger canoes here, made from a single trunk, are the largest in the Ethiopias Guinea; some of them are large enough to hold eighty men, and they came from a hundred leagues or more up this River bringing yams in large quantities, which, in this district, are very good and nourishing; and they also bring many slaves, cows, goats and sheep. Sheep they call 'bozy'. They sell all this (merchandise) to the natives of the village for salt and our ships buy these things for copper bracelets, which are here greatly prized.³²¹

Pereira's account shows the people of the east delta exchanged sea produce for agricultural products supplied from the hinterland well before the advent of European traders.

3.3 The Trans-Atlantic Trade

The earliest recorded accounts of the trans-Atlantic trade in Eastern Niger Delta are the details contained in the Portuguese explorer Duarte Pacheco Pereira's voyage records of the late fifteenth century.³²² Even though Pereira's remarks on the Eastern delta fishing settlements of the coast were derogatory, he nevertheless gave a vivid description of the estuary and its inhabitants. Before reaching the large "Rio Real"³²³ (Bonny River), Pereira identifies four other small rivers

³¹⁹ For archaeological excavations in Rivers State, see Derefaka, A. A, "Prehistoric Developments," in Alagoa, E. J, & Derefaka, A. A (eds.), *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Publications, 2002, pp. 261-275.

³²⁰ Alagoa, E. J, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," *Journal of African History*, Vol. XI, No. 3, 1970, pp. 319-329.

³²¹ Pereira, D. P, *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, (translated and edited by George H. T. Kimble), London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937, pp. 131-132.

³²² Pereira, D. P, *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, translated and edited by, George H. T. Kimble, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937, pp. 131-134. These Eastern Niger Delta Rivers were allotted Portuguese names by Pereira and his team.

³²³ Rio Real is Portuguese word meaning "Royal River."

within the estuary: Rio de Sam Bento (Brass River), Rio de St. Ilefonso (St. Nicholas River), Rio de Santa Barbara, and Rio Pequeno (Sombreiro River). He writes, “These four Rivers are rather small and we have not hitherto traded in them; we only know that their inhabitants are called Jos (Ijaws).”³²⁴ Pereira also records the use of bigger canoes made from a single trunk with capacity to contain eighty men traveling great distances from the east delta coastal settlements to exchange salt and fish for agricultural products from the hinterland,³²⁵ confirming the existence of economic relations between the coast and hinterland before the arrival of the Portuguese explorers/merchants.

Drawing from Pereira’s account, the east delta settlements of New Calabar (also called Elem Kalabari or Kalabari), Okrika, Andoni and Bonny were already involved in a form of organized trade with the hinterland (probably Ibibio, Igboland and Igala) before the advent of trans-Atlantic merchants. The implication of this trade and industry between the coastal fisherfolk and the farming hinterland was that some basic state institutions or structures, trade routes and socioeconomic relations existed amongst them before the interruption by trans-Atlantic commerce.³²⁶ Trans-Atlantic trade was, therefore, merely embedded into an already existing indigenous trade. The advent of the trans-Atlantic traders reshaped trade and delta fishing settlements in three basic ways: first, it helped transform these fishing settlements into commercial city-states; second, the trans-Atlantic merchants’ demand changed the articles of trade from fish, salt, goats, yams, ivory and other products to slaves and later palm oil; and third, east coastal trade merchants became middlemen (gatekeepers) between European traders, on the one hand, and depots of the hinterland, on the other.³²⁷

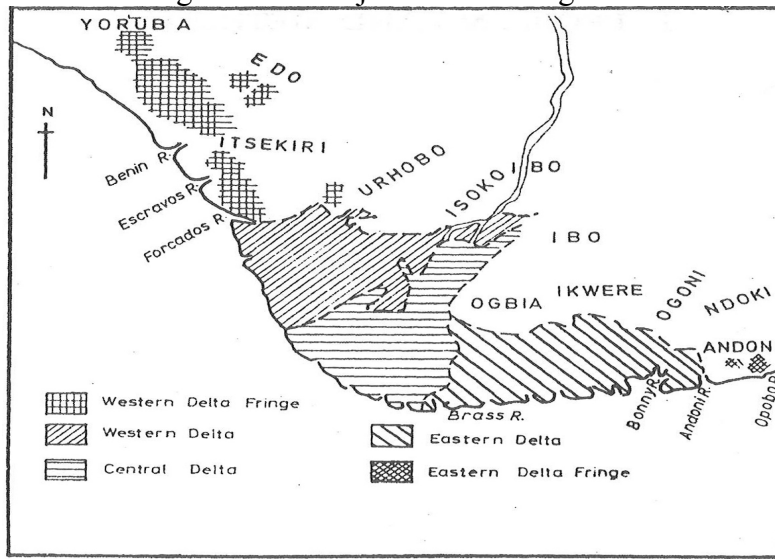
³²⁴ Pereira, D. P, *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, translated and edited by, George H. T. Kimble, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937, p. 131.

³²⁵ Ibid,

³²⁶ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963; Alagoa, E. J, “Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta,” *Journal of African History*, Vol. XI, No. 3, 1970, pp. 319-329.

³²⁷ Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

Figure 13: The Ijo and their Neighbors



Source: Alagoa, E. J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005

The need for workforce in plantations in Europe and the Americas shifted the focus to West Africa for such labor. In this new arrangement, Rio Real in the estuary of New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) River and Bonny River were quickly identified as suitable points in the east delta to harbor European ships.³²⁸ At first slaves were sourced within the delta and sold to European merchants.³²⁹ But the astronomical increase in European merchant demand for slaves and the paucity of population in the delta necessitated the need to expand the search for slaves beyond the coast. The east coastal trade merchants used existing channels to contact their hinterland trade partners for slaves. The hinterland partners cooperated in this regard and the hinterland became a major source of slave labor for east coastal “gatekeepers.” Igboland, in this regard, became a significant source of slaves:

The major routes came through Igboland to Ikwerre areas to supply the traders at the Rio Real. The Western route took off from Onitsha and Awka and passed through Oguta, Owerri, Nkwere, Etche into Ikwerre and Ogoni. The Eastern route came from central Igboland, joining the Western route at Bende and passed through Umuahia, Aba Ngwa, Omuma and Akwete into Ogoni and Ndokwa. By the 18th century, the trade had been fully established. By then the Long *Juju* oracle (*ibiniukpabi*) of Arochukwu had emerged as the local machinery for organizing the trade. Its adherents simplified the whole process of gathering and distribution of slaves to the various ports, with coastal middlemen ready to receive and sell them to European traders for transportation to the New World.³³⁰

³²⁸ Ibid,

³²⁹ They purchased yams, fish and other local food products to feed the slaves on the journey to Europe and the Americas; however, with time, other food crops (especially maize and cassava) were introduced from Brazil and parts of South America to be grown in West Africa for feeding slaves on ships.

³³⁰ Ejituwu, N. C, “Atlantic Trade”, in Alagoa, E. J, & Derefaka, A. A (eds.), *The Land and People of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Publications, 2002, pp. 278-279. For more on the Igbo role in the

The east delta participation in the slave trade was intensified from the seventeenth century. The estuary of the Bonny River and New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) River in the east delta, otherwise known as Rio Real estuary, became the epicenter of European trade,³³¹ and New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) and Bonny became coastal outposts of trans-Atlantic trade. While European ships harbored at Rio Real (Bonny River) in the Atlantic fringe of the east delta, European traders used smaller vessels to link the adjoining coastal creek settlements: Okrika, Andoni, Bille, and Ogoni. But Okrika and Adoni also dealt directly with European merchants at New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) and Bonny, respectively.³³²

External trade and the need by African merchants to meet trans-Atlantic commercial obligations transformed the region's institutions of governance.³³³ Although the oldest in the settlement retained the title of *Amaokosuwei*, the headman of the village-men's assembly (*Amagula or Amabeni*) was to be addressed as *Amanyanyabo* (proprietor or owner; founder of a settlement).³³⁴ The change attracted new and greater responsibilities for the *Amanyanyabo* as headman of the settlement's village-men's assembly.³³⁵ Gradually over time, these new responsibilities and opportunities transformed the office of *Amanyanyabo* from headman of the village-men's assembly into an effective kingship. Also, merchant trade helped transform the settlements' traditional lineage institution of household (*wari or polo*) governance into the war-canoe house model.³³⁶ War-canoe was the modification of a lineage into an economic and military arm of the family for commercial and defense purposes in a given clan. The war-canoe house was also expected to maintain a cordial economic and political relationship with community leaders who had power over the hinterland markets in the region. Jones called them war-canoe houses (*wari*) because the canoe house or *wari* was not merely a trading unit under the command of an independent trade merchant, it was, at the advent of the slave trade, a military wing of the house manned by several agile men. In the area of trade, the war-canoe house was a significant unit for the movement of slave cargoes or palm produce from markets to European ships on the coast intended to prevent surprise attacks by members of rival trading villages.³³⁷

trans-Atlantic trade, see Nwokeji, G. U., *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

³³¹ Alagoa, E. J., "Peoples of the Cross River Valley and Eastern Niger Delta," in Ikime, O, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 1980.

³³² Andoni actually also did deal with the Europeans from their own port on the Andoni river estuary by the mid-eighteenth century.

³³³ Politically, the village was the basic autonomous unit in Ijaw settlements. Ijaw settlements of the Eastern Delta, like their central and western brothers, practiced the village assembly of all adult men (*Amagula or Amabeni*). In this model of governance, the position of headman (leadership) of the general assembly is formally reserved for the oldest mentally and physically fit man (*Amaokosuwei*) of the settlement; that is, the village maintained a gerontocratic system of governance. The oldest man (*Amaokosuwei*) is the highest in the political hierarchy and presides over the general assembly of all adult males where decisions are taken in the community. This is borne out of respect for age, experience, temperament and knowledge of the community's history and its past and present relations with neighbors. In the village, the authority of lineages/household (*Wari or polo*) over an individual is very strong, since right over resources resides with the lineage as security against the rival claims or interference by neighbors.

³³⁴ Horton, R, "From Fishing Village to City-state: A Social History of New Calabar," in Douglas, M, & Kaberry, P. M, (ed.), *Man in Africa*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1969.

³³⁵ Ibid,

³³⁶ Jones, G.I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

³³⁷ Ibid,

Prosperous trade merchants in east delta Ijaw settlements modified the lineage institution into a military wing of trade. Also, most rich trade merchants, in a bid to enlarge their household, married more wives for the purpose of procreation to expand and strengthen the house. They also bought slaves from the hinterland who were integrated into the household for security and its enlargement.³³⁸ The household (*wari or polo*) was an important segment of governance for an individual.

The dramatic change from the “house system” to the “war-canoe house (*wari*) system” was intended to increase both the wealth and military strength of a household in anticipation of economic and power rivalry during trade.³³⁹ In the east, the idea of kinship or descent as the basis of the family unit was deemphasized. Rather, with the incorporation of slaves bought from within or acquired from the hinterland, criteria for family membership became open.³⁴⁰ Slaves were acquired to increase the labor force of the Wari (house) and for aspiring/incoming leaders to create new Wari (house) out of existing lineages. It is noteworthy that anyone could be elected to the position of lineage-head including freed slaves who had been incorporated into household and seen as members of the Wari (house). The emergence of a new lineage-head depended on the individual’s ability to enhance wealth and political power for the Wari (house), not on his former status. The house system encouraged hard work, rewarded merit and allegiance to house leadership. These were the criteria that saw the emergence of Jaja Anna Pepple, a former slave boy in the Anna Pepple lineage of Bonny, as lineage-head of the Anna Pepple Wari (house) and later King of Opobo. The formation of a sub-house from an existing Wari (house) required approval from the Wari (house) head, who could help successful members seeking a new sub-house by giving them capital and possibly linking them up with European traders.³⁴¹

The cities that appeared from this arrangement, using the war-canoe house system, exercised effective authority in markets and satellite towns over a considerable distance (as a consequence of which they are aptly called “city-states or trading states.”)³⁴² European traders used the supply of weapons (gun-powder, guns and cannons, etc.) to produce communal dislocation, visible as intra-clan and inter-clan conflicts over trade markets and routes emerged in the eastern settlements.³⁴³ The geography of settlements and desire to control trade in the region contributed to conflict among settlements. But there were alignments and reconciliation after strife, for purposes of both business and survival.

³³⁸ Ibid,

³⁴¹ Ibid,

³⁴² Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

³⁴³ These conflicts were not completely total since there was reconciliation, in most cases, after strife. For instance, Bonny and New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) constantly had friction over control of markets, yet reconciled for purposes of trade due to geography (while Bonny stood between European ships and Kalabari, the latter occupied a strategic position between Bonny and hinterland markets).

3.4 Some Intra and Inter-Community Conflicts in Eastern Niger Delta

Beginning in the eighteenth century, trade rivalry intensified amongst coastal settlements in the east delta, especially between Bonny and Kalabari.³⁴⁴ The wars were over “who controls the trade on this part of the coast and [who] acts as middleman between European traders and people of the interior.”³⁴⁵ The geography of Bonny and Kalabari contributed to struggles over control of the trade. While Bonny, which lay directly to the south of Kalabari, had the advantage of nearness to the Atlantic and therefore to European ships, Kalabari stood along the most direct route to the hinterland markets.³⁴⁶ The wars and internal strife compelled King Abbe, Amachree IV (1863-1900), the longest ruling *Amanyanabo* of Kalabari to move the headquarters of Kalabari from Elem Kalabari to present day Buguma. It was King Amachree IV, a skilled politician and diplomat, who settled a host of wars between Kalabari and her neighbors; these included Kalabari-Okrika, Kalabari-Bonny, Kalabari-Nembe, and more. He secured treaties of peace between Kalabari and her neighbors, which were arbitrated by the British colonial administrators.³⁴⁷ Most of the wars were over resources, control of markets, territory and trade. Recurring war with Bonny and/or Okrika and internal rivalry between dissident Chiefs supported by rival neighbors led the Kalabari to relocate from Elem Kalabari (Old Shipping) to Buguma.

The nineteenth century change spearheaded by the shift in British trade commodities, from slaves to palm produce (“free/legitimate trade”) triggered conflicts in the east. To completely stop the slave trade, Britain took practical steps such as compensation, cooptation, and coercion of both local merchants and the European nations and traders concerned.³⁴⁸ Palm oil trade, which became dominant from mid-nineteenth century, changed the nomenclature of coastal settlements from trade ports to Oil Rivers States. During this period Kalabari, Bonny, Okrika, Andoni and Opobo occupied strategic positions in the east delta. Trade in palm oil also brought new alliances along with trade and conflict among coastal settlements. As the local adage put it, “Okrika was to Bonny what Ohombele was to Opobo” – namely, collection centers for palm produce from the hinterland.³⁴⁹ There were also wars among coastal settlements over access to, and control of, markets and trade routes.³⁵⁰ For instance, Bonny and Kalabari were constantly at war over control of coastal trade and access points to hinterland markets, while

³⁴⁴ Talbot, P.M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

³⁴⁶ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005. Amachree (Amakiri) before his death in 1757 built a Kalabari nation from disparate tribal groups. Amachree I was succeeded in 1757 by his eldest son Amakoro (Amakuru), whose reign as Amachree II (1757-1782) was considered short but peaceful. Upon his death, Amakoro (Amachree II) was succeeded by his son Karibo, who reigned as Amachree III (1782-1863). King Karibo (Amachree III) won a host of wars against the Bonny and Okrika. In 1850 the British Consul Beecroft made a treaty with Amachree III to stop the slave trade. He also brought the rivalry between the Barboy and Amakiri groups to a head in the political struggle over succession.

³⁴⁷ Alagoa, E. J, *In Memory of Heroes*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2011.

³⁴⁸ Ryder, A, F. C, “The Atlantic Slave Trade” in Ikime, O., (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 1980; Dike, K. O, Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956. Patrols by the British Royal Navy and geometrical increase in palm-oil export from the 1830s contributed to ending the trade in slaves and developing trade in palm produce in the region.

³⁴⁹ Anene, J. C, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, p. 98.

³⁵⁰ Ibid,

Okrika and Andoni fought over control of the border to hinterland markets. After Opobo's establishment it was at constant war with Bonny, while Okrika and Kalabari remained antagonists. There were also alliances of communities in warfare e.g., Okrika-Bonny alliance against Kalabari; and sometimes Andoni-Kalabari alliance against Bonny. These coastal settlements' wars for boundless access to, and control of, markets/trade created two fundamental developments: first, the wars created avenues for British intervention in the internal affairs of settlements and people in the region. Second, it facilitated European traders' urge to gain unhindered access to hinterland producers of raw materials, which had sustained the Atlantic trade and the prosperity of the delta merchants.³⁵¹ The inter-settlement wars, driven by new trade alliances and new territorial claims, affected the social relations that existed before the advent of European trade in the region.

The introduction of the consulate regime, the signing of protection treaties (under duress on board gunboats), and the creation of native courts in the nineteenth century all helped to strengthen the British strategy of divide and trade.³⁵² The changes challenged the authority of the Chiefs and Kings of the delta. Together, the policies led to a complete loss of local sovereignty, and they fanned the embers of violent intra- and inter-community conflicts in the east delta. The political and economic status of *Amanyano*, who had become one of the most powerful Chiefs in the east delta settlements, diminished with the more coordinated and more targeted British occupation. The British consulate regime and subsequent colonial rule rendered defunct the local communities' political institutions and governance structures, even turning their kings into powerless lackeys destined to be elected, disputed over, and disposed by rival house-heads.³⁵³

British colonial administrators in the region also appointed influential yet controllable people as warrant chiefs. They strengthened the office of warrant chief in opposition to the *Amanyano* (the traditional chief), thereby creating tensions between the two. The result was conflict over *Amanyano* or political leadership in east delta settlements often evolving into violent intra-clan conflicts. In some cases, rather than continue fierce intra-clan violence, factions left to establish new settlements.³⁵⁴ The dissolution of customary governance by the British in the east delta created the conditions for continuous rivalry over political leadership in communities, which increased in ferocity into the nineteenth century.

Layered into the conflict brought about by British rule, is the remodification of the war-canoë house system and the incorporation of slaves into the traditional household in a bid to satisfy demands of the palm oil trade. Over time the acquisition of slaves and their full incorporation into households generated friction between ex-slaves and freeborn.³⁵⁵ For example,

³⁵¹ Ibid,

³⁵² Treaties were signed with New Calabar (Elem Kalabari) in 1850, Opobo in 1884 and with Bonny in 1836, 1837, 1839, 1841, 1848 and 1850.

³⁵³ National Archive Enugu (NAE), Jones, G. I, "Report of the Position, Status and Influence of Chiefs and Natural Rulers in Eastern Region of Nigeria, 1956."

³⁵⁴ For instance, Opobo and Bakana are nineteenth century settlements established by factional elements from intra-community conflicts in Bonny and Kalabari, respectively.

³⁵⁵ For instance in 1901, the British High Commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor, introduced the Native House Rule Ordinance. The Ordinance tried to remodel the house system that existed in the Eastern coastal states by strengthening and enforcing ties between Chiefs and house members. The idea was inconsistent with the policy of

in some settlements, there emerged political tussles between influential ex-slaves and freeborn men over war-canoe house headship or over the entire community's *Amanyano* stool (throne). The resistance of former prominent slaves against discriminatory social, economic, and political practices in the society generated new conflicts. Even though ex-slaves were considered "free" members of both household and society, and where privileges and rights pertained to both freeborn and ex-slave, those of freeborn status took precedence over ex-slaves. In most cases, the insistent demand by influential ex-slaves to be treated fairly and equitably, on the same scale with freeborn, generated (and continues to generate) conflict. Since the nineteenth century, Kalabari and Okrika have been bedeviled by interrelated sets of conflicts – intra- and inter-community – arising from political tussles over chieftancy, boundary disputes, and the incorporation or enlargement of war-canoe houses.

3.4.1 Intra-clan Conflict in Kalabari

The Kalabari are an Ijaw clan occupying the banks of Kalabari River.³⁵⁶ Oral traditions refer to the founder of this settlement as Kalabari, son of Mein, who moved from the Mein clan of Ogobiri in the central delta.³⁵⁷ The history of the Kalabari clan is synonymous with the emergence of the Amakiri (anglicized as Amachree) dynasty in the eighteenth century. Earlier the people who occupied the New Calabar (Elem Kalabari or Kalabari) territory came from various tribes, each with some degree of autonomy. Kalabari was made up of seven autonomous tribes composed of nomadic fisherfolks working in the ocean tide from neighboring areas, who finally settled at Rio Real d'Calabar (River Kalabari).³⁵⁸ The seven tribes operated independently and engaged in constant raids for property as well as in murder, kidnapping and other vices among themselves. Amachree (1669-1757) from the Endeme or Kalabari group, who migrated to the area from the central delta, is said to have unified the warring groups under his leadership. Amachree, aided by Awomekaso (Owoamekaso), the goddess of the Kroame, became the first *Amanyano* of a unified Kalabari nation.³⁵⁹ He built it into a prosperous nation and expanded its

freedom for house members engendered by the new political and economic conditions and was abrogated during the 1914 amalgamation.

³⁵⁶ The Kalabari clan or community before now has been called Old Shipping, New Calabar, Elem Kalabari or Owame.

³⁵⁷ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963; Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005.

³⁵⁸ Ibid; see also National Archive Enugu (NAE), Nwabufo Uwechia, 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Kalabari Chieftancy Dispute', 1959. The seven groups – the majority of whom were Ijaw – are: Endeme (Kalabari Polo), Amabiname, Akialame, Ituruame, Bukoame, Igodoame and Kroame. The Endeme (Kalabari Polo), which produced the Amachree dynasty, and the Kroame section, which produced the national god and priest, were proto-Ijaw groups from Central Delta that exercised considerable influence over the others.

³⁵⁹ Alagoa using documentary evidence to support his claim, argues conversely that Amakiri (Amachree) merely started a new dynasty and did not start the institution of kingship: "A document dated 1620 refers to a King of Calabar (Rey de Calabar), as well as to a King of the Rio Real (Rey del Rio Real), said to have been friends of the Portuguese, although normally very warlike. These were clearly Kings of the Kalabari and the Ibani (Bonny). And in 1699 James Barbot and Grazihier visited Elem Kalabari and met a King Robert [whom he described as] 'a good civil man, about thirty years old.' King Robert was supported in his negotiations with the white man by three leaders who could have been lineage or house Heads. The implication of these documents and other traditions is that before the time of Amakiri I, the city was known as Kalabari and was fully engaged in the Atlantic slave trade. The

borders to include other groups in the area that were too small or scattered to protect themselves against external aggression.³⁶⁰ By virtue of its abounding success, at the time, the Kalabari clan was described as a “people of great interest and intelligence, hardheaded, keen-witted and born traders.”³⁶¹ It is therefore argued that before Amachree I, there was no dynasty, no *Amanyanyabo* stool, or Kalabari clan. In short, Amachree created Kalabari.

In Kalabari, intra-clan tensions first came to a head on the demise of King Amakoro (Amachree II) in 1782. On the death of Amachree II, “two evenly matched factions, with the Barboy group of houses opposed to a combination of the Harry (Ombo), Birinomini and West India groups under the leadership of the first named”³⁶² emerged. However, King Karibo (Amachree III), who emerged as king, was able to contain and maintain a balance between the two factions throughout his reign (1782-1863). He brought all the powerful war-canoe houses under his fold and expanded the Amakiri war-canoe house so as to contain possible hostilities. With the death of King Karibo (Amachree III), internal divisions, expansions, splits and (re)alignments amongst Kalabari war-canoe houses resurfaced in a struggle for control of the Kalabari political machinery.³⁶³ King Abbe (Amachree IV), who was installed Amanyanyabo (1863-1900), was antagonized by George Amachree (Idilolomari) and Will Braide (Ibanibo).³⁶⁴ Before now, George Amachree had formed a subordinate house and become headstrong in the community while Braide expanded further the “Barboy war-canoe house.”³⁶⁵ King Abbe

kingship too was fully developed, and, apparently, also the house system so characteristic of the Eastern Delta States. The published Amakiri dynastic traditions suggest, however, that he himself did not take part in the Atlantic trade until after he became King. He is stated to have accumulated capital through internal trade in mudskippers, periphthalmus schlosseri. Accordingly, most of the institutions and developments credited to Amakiri I, seem in fact, to have begun before his reign. His reign may, therefore, be interpreted as the period when at least some of these institutions, such as the house system, reached their height, a period of great achievement and success for the nation. It seems likely too that this period of the eighteenth century saw the widest extension of the authority of Elem Kalabari through the surrounding territory” (Alagoa, E.J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt, Onyoma Research Publications, 2005, p. 138).

³⁶⁰ Talbot, P.M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932; Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963; Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005. For instance, Ke, Kula and Bille are said to be older settlements, which had lived in the territory for centuries before the emergence of Kalabari but were incorporated into the Kalabari clan through diplomacy, war, cultural affinity and promise of possible protection against external aggression. In an era of slave trade, where weaker communities were at the mercy of stronger nations, it was pertinent and understood why smaller communities around Kalabari acknowledged the leadership and agreed to be incorporated into membership of Kalabari nation.

³⁶¹ Talbot, P.M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932, p. 9; see also, Jones, G. I, ‘Report of the Position, Status, and Influence of Chiefs and Natural Rulers in the Eastern Region of Nigeria’, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1956.

³⁶² Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 150-151.

³⁶³ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

³⁶⁴ Ibid,

³⁶⁵ Ibid; The expansion bifurcated the Barboy house into two groups: the Braide group of houses, which included the Barboy main house, and those other Barboy houses (George Will, Manuel, Don Pedro and Dick Barboy) founded before Braide assumed headship of the main house. The division was extended to the other Kalabari houses attached to the Barboy segment; the Standfast Jack and Briggs houses, which considered themselves of pre-Amakiri origin, associated with the other Barboy houses, and the new houses of Igboroma in Ifoko and the Yellowe (Iyala) in

(Amachree IV), on the other hand, was unable to strengthen or enlarge his inherited house (Karibo war-canoe house).³⁶⁶

In 1879 tensions turned into violent confrontation between Elem Kalabari and the two insurgent chiefs, Will Braide of Elem Kalabari and Yellowe of Young Town, over questions of inland markets and politics.³⁶⁷ Chief Will Braide noticed his inability to prevail over the coalition of Chiefs George Amakiri, John Bull and Horsefall Manuel (extensions of the Barboy house), hence decided to fight King Abbe (Amachree IV) without the support of other members of the Barboy house.³⁶⁸ Consul Hewett intervened and made peace between the Chiefs of Elem Kalabari and Will Braide by signing a “Perpetual Treaty of Peace” on 19th November 1879. The peace treaty was made possible by the presence of H.M.S *Dido* (a British naval warship), the threat of which was sufficient to curtail the excesses of unruly chiefs and individuals. Will Braide signed the peace treaty with the king and chiefs of Kalabari which allowed him to return to Elem Kalabari, trade freely, and retain the property and status that he had previously held. Rather than honor the “Perpetual Treaty of Peace” deal, however, Chief Will Braide withdrew all his supporters to a safe and fortified location at Ewaffa in the Okpombutolu axis which was a strategic route of passage up the Elem Kalabari River.³⁶⁹ Braide and Yellowe then solicited the support of Bonny and Okrika in a planned attack against Elem Kalabari, and expected the Consul’s tacit support.

In 1880, Chief Will Braide and Yellowe, with support from Elem Kalabari’s natural enemies (Bonny and Okrika), attacked and caused inestimable damage to Elem Kalabari:

The result of this war was that Amachree IV and the rest of the Kalabaris left Old Shipping (Elem Kalabari) and moved further inland to Abonnema and Buguma. This gave them better control of the trade with the inland markets and more land than was available at Old Shipping. On the 8th of July 1881, Consul Hewett signed a ‘Decretal Order,’ based on the treaty of 1879, that Will Braide, Head of Barboy house, and the other insurgents should leave Ewaffa (Ewaffa dominated the markets up the New Calabar River) where they had gone after the war, and settle at Bakana. The order also bound over the Chiefs of New Calabar to pay four hundred casks of oil should Will Braide come to a violent or unnatural death by the offender. He expressed the hope that the estrangement which had for so long existed between the Head of Amachree house and Barboy house should soon disappear; this hope appears to have been fulfilled. The rest of Young Town

Tombia continued their association with the main house. A war-canoe house is entitled to only one Chief and Commander, and the moment a war-canoe house is created either from an existing one or outside, it takes a different name, so as to distinguish it from its former and other existing houses in the clan.

³⁶⁶ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

³⁶⁷ National Archive Enugu (NAE), News “Report quoted in ‘Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Okrika-Kalabari Dispute,’” 1950.

³⁶⁸ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

³⁶⁹ Ibid,

moved to Tombia and several of the other villages which had been living near Old Shipping moved to their present sites (Buguma and Abonnema).³⁷⁰

Bonny and Okrika's support strengthened Will Braide and prolonged the duration of the conflict beyond the "Decretal Order." While the Amachree group of houses and their factional Barboy group supporters constructed barricades opposite Ewaffa to contain Will Braide's insurgency, Briade still fought until 1884 when he had moved most of his people to Bakana, and resisted all consular efforts to move him closer to Kalabari settlements.³⁷¹ When peace was finally restored through the intervention of Consul Hewett, King Amachree IV moved some of his people to Buguma, others to Abonnema and the rest to Bakana. On this exodus, King Amachree IV was among the last group of Kalabari people who moved to Buguma with the *Amanymanabo* stool and the Awomekaso goddess. This nineteenth century movement gave rise to the emergence of Buguma as the traditional, cultural, religious (spiritual) and historical headquarters of the Kalabari clan.

In 1932, during colonial rule, Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree from the lineage of King Abbe (Amachree IV) was installed *Amanymanabo* of Kalabari. He ruled until the early 1950s when C. C. Amachree was put up as a rival.³⁷² The political rivalry degenerated to a point where the judiciary was approached through a court case between Samuel Will Braide and Chief J. T. Amachree.³⁷³ The politico-royal tension was exacerbated by a question put to the Civil Secretary of the Eastern Region Government at the time on whether or not Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree was entitled to be the *Amanymanabo* of Kalabari. In 1952 the Eastern House of Assembly responded to this question, saying:

Government is not aware of the existence of any paramount Chief of Kalabari land. There has been no universally recognized *Amanymanabo* since 1900 when the last Amachree holder of the title died. At the time that the News report was being written various parts of the Clan claimed that it would be more correct to trace the line for the successor to *Amanymanabo* to an ancestor prior to Amachree I.³⁷⁴

The implication of the Eastern House of Assembly's response was that it did not recognize Chief J. T. Amachree Princewill as *Amanymanabo* of Kalabari.³⁷⁵ This response aggravated the intensity of intra-clan political rivalry in Kalabari, and emboldened the C. C. Amachree group to claim legitimacy to the kingship stool. An attempt by a Kalabari delegation to see and brief Government on the institution of *Amanymanabo* of Kalabari was rebuffed. Over time, the political conflict deepened and on April 16th 1959, Mr. R. O. Iwuagwu, Minister for

³⁷⁰ National Archive Enugu (NAE), News' Report quoted in "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Okrika-Kalabari Dispute," 1950.

³⁷¹ Talbot, A. M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932; Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

³⁷² National Archive Enugu (NAE), Nwabuo Uwechia's Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Kalabari Chieftancy Dispute, 1959.

³⁷³ Ibid,

³⁷⁴ Ibid,

³⁷⁵ The Kalabari people were angered and immediately sent a letter to the Government demanding that a deputation of Kalabari people be received to give the Government a true picture of the history of Kalabari Clan and to ascertain how the Government got its facts all wrong.

State, Customary Courts and the Appointment and Recognition of Chiefs in the Eastern Region Government, appointed Nwabuo Uwechia, a Queen's Counsel, as sole Commissioner to inquire into the dispute generated by the recognition of Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree as Kalabari king.³⁷⁶ The one-man committee, whose report was expected not later than 18th May 1959, was mandated to:

- (i) Examine and report on the claims of Chief J.T. Princewill Amachree to be the Amanyabo of Kalabari.
- (ii) Inquire and report as to whether the said Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree is entitled to be the Amanyabo of Kalabari.
- (iii) Make recommendations to the Government.³⁷⁷

Nwabuo Uwechia arrived in Port Harcourt and Degema in April 1959 to carry out his new assignment. In late April the inquiry opened at the premises of Kalabari Native Court Hall, Degema. Hearings were held at this Hall throughout the period of presentations, except for the last sitting day -- 8th of May 1959 -- when the one-man committee moved to Buguma to ascertain the veracity of claims made during the presentations.³⁷⁸ At the inquiry opening, Uwechia addressed the community members in attendance, informing them of his mandate and his willingness to sit in any other venue if the parties so wished. After Uwechia's address some community Chiefs staged a walkout. As he noted,

At the close of my speech some six men came forward and said they wanted to make a statement on behalf of 'the chiefs and people of Kalabari'. Two of them were the spokesmen, viz., Chief Hutton Tom George and Mr. N. G. Yellowe. The gist of their statement was that they were not prepared to give evidence before me since the Legal Department played a prominent part in the court case between Chief Samuel Will Braide and Amachree on the Chieftancy dispute. They stated that as I was a member of the Legal Department there would be some bias. They further stated that they had already sent a telegram to the Premier and that they had sent a copy to me.³⁷⁹

Uwechia acknowledged the group's protest message before he finally left the venue of the hearing. The hearing thereafter started with a caution from Uwechia: "It does not necessarily follow that the side that is presenting its case will, as it were, obtain judgment by default. I can only come to a conclusion if I have sufficient evidence."³⁸⁰ Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree presented his case, tracing the genealogy of Kalabari to the emergence of Amachree I. He introduced a curious twist when he proclaimed that the *Amanyabo* stool was now reserved for only Amachree IV male lineage with support from Amachree III lineage:

When an Amanyabo dies, the Kalabari nation requests the Royal house to chose from among themselves the person who should be the next Amanyabo. The

³⁷⁶ NAE, "Instrument Setting up an Inquiry in Connection with the Chieftancy Dispute at Kalabari," 1959.

³⁷⁷ Ibid,

³⁷⁸ National Archive Enugu (NAE), Nwabuo Uwechia's Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Kalabari Chieftancy Dispute, 1959.

³⁷⁹ Ibid,

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 2.

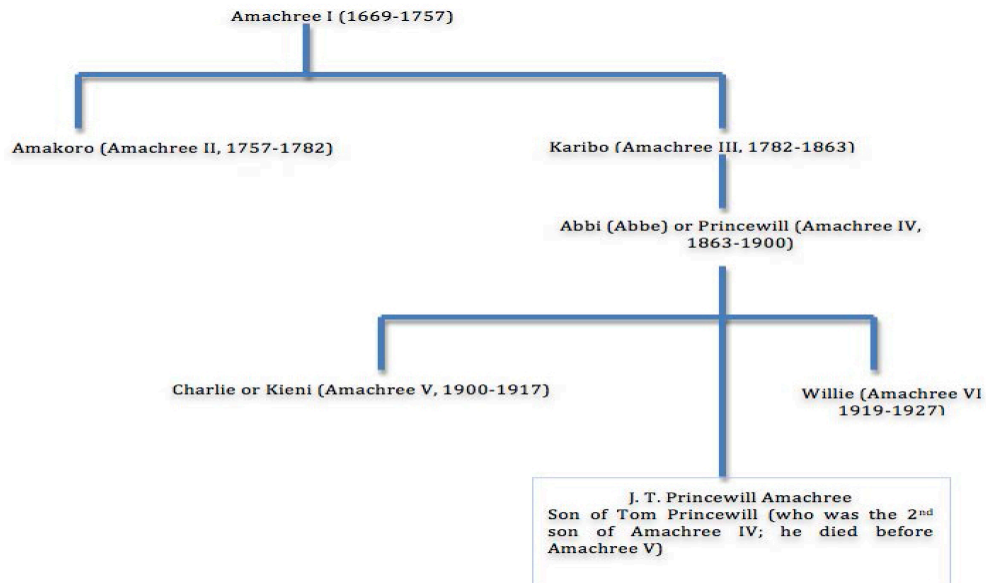
Royal house nowadays is the direct male descent of Amachree IV as usage has whittled down the line of Amachree I all of whom were originally entitled. If the Royal house could agree among themselves, that is the end of the matter. The Amanyanabo then performs certain ceremonies, at the end of which he is presented to the whole descendants of Amachree III for introduction to the chiefs and people of Buguma...Only the house of Amachree III could refuse recognition. There has not been an instance where the Buguma people or the whole Kalabari nation refused a candidate duly elected by Abbi house. Where however, the Abbi house failed to agree, the Karibo (Amachree III) house would intercede and resolve the difference.³⁸¹

Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree, who traced his lineage on a table of succession to Amachree I presented documentation on claims of comeys subsidy payment to him. He also claimed that the customary and traditional ceremonies that were required to make him King of Kalabari had been performed, and he tendered his certificate to his claim to the *Amanyanabo* stool in Kalabari which had been recognized by the Native Court.³⁸² Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree pleaded with Uwechia to visit Buguma to confirm that the traditional paraphernalia of the Amanyanabo were legitimate and under his custody.

³⁸¹ Ibid,

³⁸² The Buguma (was a small satellite Kalabari settlement at the time) Internal Affairs Society, an association of all Buguma people working outside their homeland, gave unqualified support and loyalty to Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree. The association had its headquarters in Enugu with a membership of traders and businessmen, civil servants and professionals throughout all the important towns in the country. So too did the Kalabari National Union at home, Lagos, Enugu and Aba give their support. Of the Chiefs that comprise Karibo and Abbi houses, twenty-three out of twenty-eight were on the side of J. T. Princewill Amachree. All the villages that gave evidence and submitted memoranda spoke on behalf of their chiefs and people in favor of J. T. Princewill, and disassociated themselves from those who boycotted the inquiry. They claimed that those who opposed had no mandate to speak for the chiefs and people of Kalabari.

Figure 14: Amachree Dynasty of Kalabari



Source: Nwabufo Uwechia's Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Kalabari Chieftancy Dispute, 1959

After a careful examination of various memoranda, oral presentations and inspection of the natural (traditional) relics of Kalabari (shrines of Amachrees, Awomekaso goddess, the Ofo) under the custody of Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree, Uwechia was convinced that Chief J. T. Princewill Amachree was the Amanyanabo of Kalabari. He recommended thus:

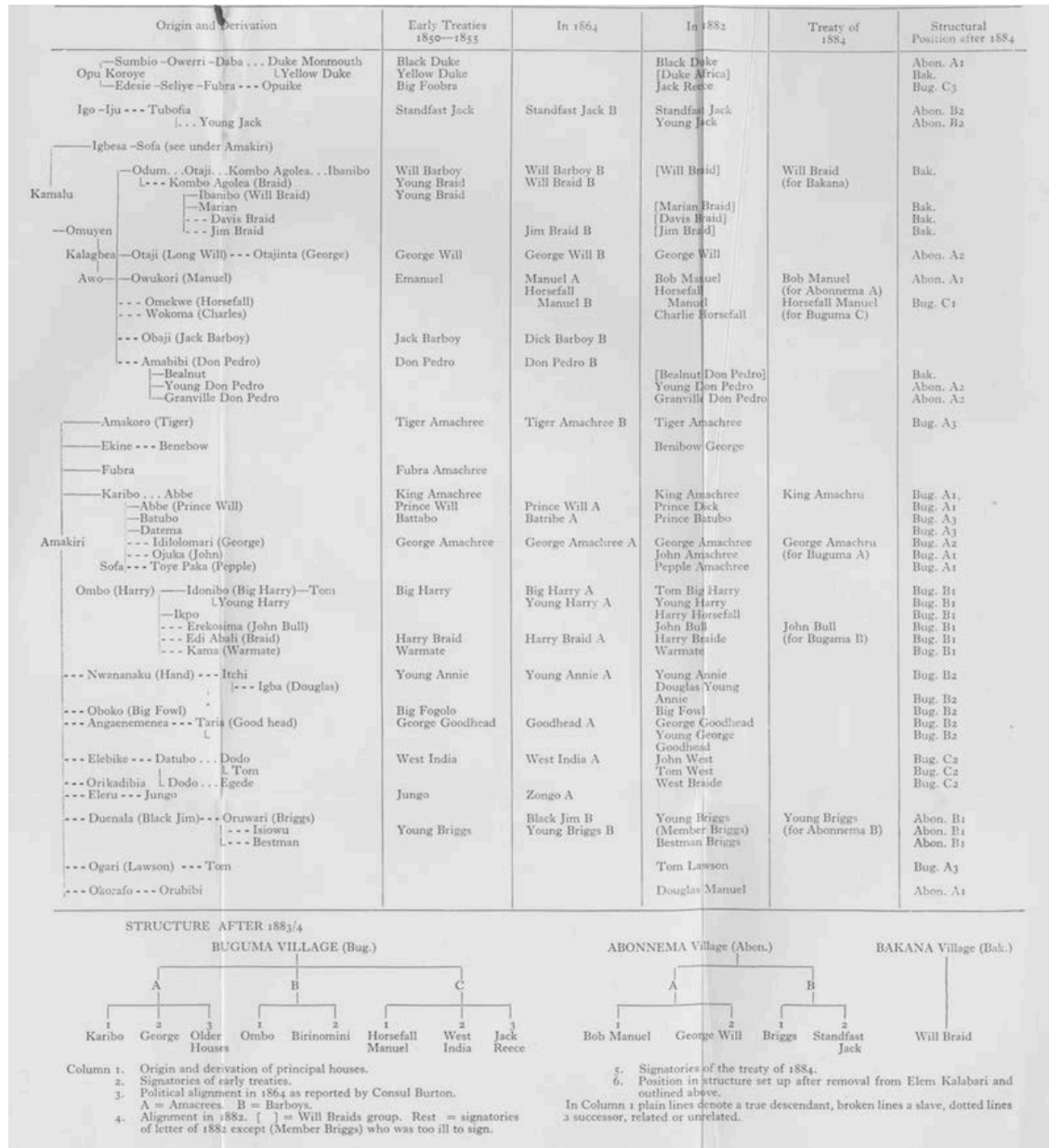
The table of Amachree I's dynasty shows a remarkable continuity which remains till today and bids fair to remain so... Amachree I, unaided and without a precedent to guide him galvanized into a nation various settlements that had no common custom, or language, or history, who were mutually hostile, and gave them a government, culture and tradition which exists to this day. To state that there was an earlier dynasty suggests that Kalabari nation existed before Amachree I, or, at least, that Amachree I continued where someone left off... To suggest that is to do violence to history and to insult the memory of a great king who was a great man, a genius in his own class, and a powerful administrator whose people remember with affection and reverence in much the same way that Fulani hold the memory of Othman dan Fodio. The name that has been mentioned as this 'ancestor prior to Amachree I' must be Kamalu... Kamalu was a friend and confidant of Amachree I. Amachree gave him privileges and honor and no more. Kamalu's line has never produced an Amanyanabo, and the fact that Kamalu was an Igboman rules him out, as the whole of Kalabari had voluntarily surrendered to Amachree I and his descendants the exclusive right to rule.³⁸³

³⁸³ National Archive Enugu (NAE), Nwabufo Uwechia, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Kalabari Chieftancy Dispute," 1959.

The Assembly's response created the fertile ground for groups to lay claim to *Amanyabo* stool of Kalabari, and was further complicated by national party politics at the time. To curry the favor of politicians in the Eastern Region, petitions and counter-petitions were sent by various Kalabari Chiefs who claimed a right to the Kalabari throne of *Amanyabo*.

To this day, ever since the Princewill Amachree saga began, the selection and appointment of *Amanyabo* of Kalabari polarizes the community along factional lines and has brought violence into the community. The stool has become a major source of conflict in Kalabari clan. For instance, in the 1990s and early 2000s, before the installation of Professor Theophilus Jacob Princewill, Amachree XI, as *Amanyabo* of Kalabari, the community once again was thrown into tension over the selection and appointment of an *Amanyabo*. Chiefs and community members were polarized along support lines until, and even after, Theophilus Princewill had been crowned as *Amanyabo* in 2002. Finally, in 2004, factionalized community members and Chiefs were reconciled by the Rivers State government in a peace accord signed by over sixty chiefs in Buguma, the traditional headquarters of Kalabari Kingdom. The squabbles over *Amanyabo* that started in the nineteenth century are not limited or exclusive to the Kalabari clan in the east delta. The Okrika, another Ijaw clan, as shown in the next section has similarly been involved in intense conflicts over *Amanyabo*, which for ages has turned that community into a theater of intra-clan war.

Figure 15: The Structure and Political Alignments of Kalabari Houses During the 19th Century



Source: Jones, G. I., *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963

3.4.2 Okrika Intra-clan Conflict

The traditions of the communities on Okrika Island have been complicated by a series of violent disputes. There are two main settlements on the Island, namely, Okrika town and Ogoloma. There is inevitable controversy between these two

concerning prior arrival on the Island. There is, in addition, a split within each of these towns along lineage lines into two factions. Thus, in Okrika town, the Tuboniju (Traders) contest claims of primacy with the Koniju (Fisherfolks). These internal divisions may be traced in each case to shifts in the location of political authority in earlier times. But these early historical changes have probably generated more heat within the Kingdom of Okrika in recent times than in those comparatively remote times.³⁸⁴

There is no documented history on when Okrika was established. Like most Niger Delta communities, there are divergent opinions on its origin.³⁸⁵ Okrika emerged from two rival autonomous communities on a single Island: Okrika and Ogoloma. The rivalry is over who settled first amongst the duo on this Island.³⁸⁶ The most popular version of Okrika history is that the founder(s) of these two autonomous settlements migrated from Central Niger Delta.³⁸⁷ But whereas the Ogoloma argue that their ancestor Opu-Ogulaya settled first on the Island before Okrika founder Oputibeya arrived from the Andoni axis, the Koniju settlement in Okrika claim that their ancestor Oputibeya, who also moved from the Central Delta, was the first to settle on the Island -- before Opu-Ogulaya and others joined him.³⁸⁸ The name Okrika is a corrupted version of the Okrika word “*wa kirike*” (meaning “we are the same”) in recognition of ancestral and cultural similarities and as an expression by Oputibeya and Opu-Ogulaya of consistent unity against external aggression (especially from the Ogoni). Hence, for Nemi Adoki, Okrika is a confederation of nations that have come together for the common good of the people.³⁸⁹ The Okrika segment is further bifurcated into rival factions called Koniju and Tuboniju, which loosely translated means “fisherfolks” and “traders” respectively.³⁹⁰ Since the 19th century, these two rival Okrika sub-settlements (Koniju and Tuboniju) have been in contention over the Amanyanabo (kingship) of Okrika.

Prior to 1874, dynasty was derivable from either of the two founding settlements depending on economic capability and ability to host the institution; essentially it was interchangeable between Okrika and Ogoloma. In Okrika, however, there was a conflict with the Kalabari in which King Igo, fifth following from Oputibeya, was killed and the Bonny either

³⁸⁴ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005, p. 145

³⁸⁵ Okrika Clan is made up of nine major towns and several other villages and fishing settlements. The nine major towns/settlements are: Okrika or *Wa'kirike* (Tuboniju and Koniju), Ogoloma, Bolo, Ibaka, Ogbogbo, Ogu, Abuloma, Isaka and Ele town.

³⁸⁶ National Archive Enugu (NAE), Porter, J. C, (District Officer) “Okrika clan Intelligence Report,” 1933; Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005.

³⁸⁷ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005.

³⁸⁸ Ibid; In Alagoa’s account traditions on the Island suggests a third settlement named Okochiri (Okopiri). The names of the persons who founded and moved to this community from Okrika are given as: Fenibeso (male), and two females, Sangataro and Tominaro (with her husband). The significance of this third settlement is that apparently Fenibeso was a restless marauder and may have started piracy against the Ogoni on the neighboring waters and on the adjacent mainland. He is also said to have taken over from the Oputibeya lineage not only leadership in war, but also the religious functions of their ruler. Finally, and very significantly, he is claimed to have disappeared miraculously into the earth, and from then on was accepted as the national god of the Okrika (Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005).

³⁸⁹ This idea was expressed by Chief Nemi Adoki, Chairman of the Okrika Traditional Council of Chiefs, during an interview with the author in Port Harcourt on October 24, 2012.

³⁹⁰ National Archive Enugu (NAE), Porter, J. C, (District Officer) “Okrika clan Intelligence Report,” 1933.

required some material items for rituals or demanded them for appeasement so as to avert war.³⁹¹ The Koniju (fisherfolks) of Oputibeya lineage in Okrika were unable to provide the required items, which at the time were items of trade; Ado of Tuboniju (traders section) from the Oputibeya lineage of Okrika – provided them, and he was thus accorded the throne.³⁹² Ado occupied the *Amanyanyabo* throne sometime in the early seventeenth century and died around the mid-seventeenth century. This historical analysis of how the Ado ruling house in Okrika occupied the exalted throne of *Amanyanyabo* indicates the vital role played by the economic sphere in other spheres of Niger Delta life (including the political) both in prehistory and the European trade era. It elucidates the role economic power played in the social relations among elites, society and governance institutions during these periods.

After the death of King Ado I, and due to natural incapacitation of his male child Ojusa, Dokube -- who was incorporated into the Ado war-canoe house and had over time become headman -- was installed as Amanyanyabo of Okrika, Ado II. The installation of King Dokube, Ado II, who was not an offspring of King Ado I, as Amanyanyabo of Okrika, knit a pattern of succession to the throne.³⁹³ The Amanyanyabo stool was complicated in Eastern Niger Delta communities by the remodeling of the house system in most eastern Ijaw settlements of the Niger Delta. A situation where non-family members (sometimes slaves), who were merely incorporated into a family structure as a way of strengthening its military and economic base, had risen to the height of command in its governance structure contributed to chieftancy tussles in Eastern Niger Delta. In Okrika, most of the first generation Amanyanyabos were non-family members incorporated into the Ado household; yet the need to amicably rotate the title amongst the different war-canoe houses that have since emerged, some led by their descendants and some led by other families, is the root of conflicts even to this day.

In Okrika, the Ado royal house had expanded over the years due to births, the incorporation of other members into the family, and the creation of more war-canoe houses by prosperous members of the family.³⁹⁴ These expansions, especially of autonomous but affiliated war-canoe houses, served to preserve the royal lineage and strengthen the Ado royal house. For instance, Fibika (Ado V), who succeeded Nemiduko as Amanyanyabo of Okrika in 1832, incorporated two new war-canoe houses into the Ado royal fold.³⁹⁵ The tenure of King Fibika

³⁹¹ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005; Ogan, C. D. S, *Okrika: A Kingdom of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2008.

³⁹² Ibid: Part of the reason alluded to for Ado agreeing to undertake the payment of the required items was the promise that the Royal throne of *Amanyanyabo* of Okrika clan would be reserved for him and his lineage from that moment on.

³⁹³ Abam, A. S, (Ado IX), “Peace in Okrika: The Way Forward,” Memorandum submitted to Prof. Tekena Tamuno Okrika Community Peace Committee (OCPC), 2005; Dokube’s pattern of succession threw up three fundamental issues: (i) succession to the throne would not be by progeny alone (ii) the aspirant to the throne must be the Head of the Ado war-canoe house, and (iii) succession to the throne must rotate between the various houses, e.g, Ado war-canoe house and Dokube war-canoe house (other houses were added). Over the years, succession followed the pattern by moving from Dokube (Ado II) to Boka (Ado III), from Boka to Nemiduko (Ado IV) who died during a war with Bile 1815, and then Fibika (Ado V).

³⁹⁴ In Okrika, therefore, now the Ado royal house comprises five war-canoe houses: Dokube war-canoe house, Ibanichuka war-canoe house, Ogan war-canoe house, Fibika war-canoe house and Abam war-canoe house.

³⁹⁵ King Fibika created the Ibulubo war-canoe house in 1835 with Inyanaboitamuno George as Head (it has after several years changed its name to Dokube war-canoe house), and Nwaoma war-canoe house in 1840 with Ilamamaoku Ogan (popularly called Ije) as Head.

(Ado V) as Amanyanabo of Okrika witnessed the change from slave trade to palm oil trade, and saw the signing of peace treaties between Okrika and her neighbors as arbitrated by British Consuls.³⁹⁶ As Amanyanabo of Okrika, King Fibika (Ado V) meandered through these turbulent times and died in 1874.

The death of King Fibika and attempts by various groups to succeed him raised tension between the Ado royal house and Dokube war-canoe house which were the two houses that had produced Amanyanabo of Okrika since their inception. By the rotational arrangement, the Dokube house was supposed to produce a King, but it was no longer considered part of the original Ado royal house. As noted, the creation of autonomous war-canoe houses within the Ado royal house had complicated issues; several persons claimed entitlement.³⁹⁷ The Okrika kingmakers (Sekení Ogbo) resolved the political quagmire by disqualifying both the Dokube war-canoe house and the newly emergent Ado royal war-canoe houses. Instead of rotation, they confined their search for a new monarch to the Ado royal house and nothing outside it.³⁹⁸ The kingmakers therefore settled for the head-chief of Ado war-canoe house, as tradition demanded; this was Chief Abam Dikisikiboka, who was over eighty years.³⁹⁹ By virtue of his age and the responsibilities associated with *Amanyanabo* of Okrika at the time, Chief Abam Dikisikiboka nominated a younger cousin, Ibanichuka, to succeed King Fibika as Amanyanabo of Okrika and head of the Ado war-canoe house; this was in keeping with tradition, which says the *Amanyanabo* must be the head-chief of Ado war-canoe house.⁴⁰⁰ Okrika kingmakers accepted the choice of Ibanichuka as *Amanyanabo*-elect of the community. He was crowned in 1876 as King Ado VI, *Amanyanabo* of Okrika. During his reign as *Amanyanabo* of Okrika, King Ibanichuka (Ado VI) led other Chiefs in concluding the 1881 Church Mission agreement with Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowder and signed the 1888 Treaty of Protection with British representatives in Okrika.⁴⁰¹ Then, in 1896 King Ibanichuka (Ado VI) became a victim of the British gunboat diplomacy policy and was deported to Degema:

The last Amanyanabo of Okrika, Ibanichuka by name, was given up and confined at Degema at the special request of his people, who would there be more easily able to visit him than at Bonny which was then the Consular headquarters. No authentic account of his end can be found. The Okrikans themselves say that he is still a prisoner in Government hands. Another version is that he escaped from Degema and was drowned in his flight to Okrika.⁴⁰²

The banishment of King Ibanichuka to Degema was followed by the destruction of traditional shrines (Fenibeso) in Okrika by British naval troops. The British thereafter introduced

³⁹⁶ One of these was the aforementioned “Perpetual Peace Treaty” with Kalabari, which King Fibika (Ado V) signed in 1871 on behalf of Okrika while on board British war ship, H. M. S. Dido.

³⁹⁷ As described earlier, a war-canoe house is expected to have only one Chief as Head and commander; therefore, when another house is created from an existing house (for an ambitious member or purposes of expansion), it means the creation of a fresh house. On this basis the new house Chief and Head goes by another different nomenclature, completely new from that of his former house.

³⁹⁸ Abam, A. S. (Ado IX), “Peace in Okrika: The Way Forward,” *op. cit.*, 2005.

³⁹⁹ Ibid,

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid,

⁴⁰¹ Ibid,

⁴⁰² National Archive Enugu (NAE), Porter, J. C. (District Officer) “Okrika Intelligence Report,” 1933, p. 14.

indirect rule in Okrika with the appointment of Chief Daniel Oju as Paramount Chief of Okrika. Chief Oju's cooperation and loyalty to British administrators at the time earned him an appointment as British Political Agent for Port Harcourt after its establishment in 1913.⁴⁰³ He died in 1928 and was succeeded by Chief Samson Igobo Adoki as paramount Chief of Okrika.

Early in the twentieth century, the Ado war-canoe house (Tuboniju section of Okrika), which faced problems of (re)alignments and internal cohesion, was also now faced with an "attempt by the Oputibeya (Koniju section) family to challenge its sole right to the Amanyabo stool of Okrika."⁴⁰⁴ The latest tensions were the consequence of a 1933 Intelligence Report on Okrika, in that the report noted explicitly the divergence of opinions regarding Okrika origins and the role that this divergence has played in longstanding tussles over chieftancy of the settlement. As the report said:

It is perhaps not surprising to find that there is some divergence of opinion on the subject of the foundation and early history of origin and, arising from this, is the question of an Amanyabo. This dissension is mostly found in Okrika village itself, which has been divided from time immemorial into two rival factions. These two parties have always been known by names, which loosely translated, means 'fishers' and 'traders'.⁴⁰⁵

The acknowledgment of Tuboniju and Koniju as historically separate communities and recommendation by the Commission for their equal representation in the Regional Council of Chiefs has over the years emboldened the Koniju in their demand for a slot in the Amanyabo stool or, alternatively, to have their own distinct Amanyabo. In 1949 their threat along with (re)alignments within the Ado war-canoe house led to a division by a faction and consequent change in name to Abam-Ado war-canoe house, with Chief Isaiah Bamson as head.⁴⁰⁶ Those left out of the new arrangement established the Fibika-Ado war-canoe house.⁴⁰⁷ The Ado royal house was thus split into two autonomous co-equal war-canoe houses in Okrika.

The establishment of the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs in the 1950s and the need for Okrika to be represented in the new arrangement led the Okrika Council of Chiefs to request that the Ado royal house produce an Amanyabo of Okrika. In the context of this new development, the Oputibeya (Koniju section) family pitted itself against the Ado house (Tuboniju section) as rightful claimants to the throne.⁴⁰⁸ Again, the Ado family was faced with problems within and from without. As expected, the two Ado house groups suspended their differences and came together in order to face the challenge posed by a common enemy, i.e., the Oputibeya or Koniju section. A unified Ado house presented Zedekiah Fibika as Amanyabo to the kingmakers for

⁴⁰³ Abam, A. S. (Ado IX), "Peace in Okrika: The Way Forward," 2005.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 26: It is instructive to note that the contest for Amanyabo is argued along the Tuboniju and Koniju divide of Okrika, where the Ado war-canoe house is regarded as Tuboniju and the Oputibeya war-canoe house represents the Koniju section.

⁴⁰⁵ Proter, J. C., "Okrika Intelligence Report," 1933, p. 19.

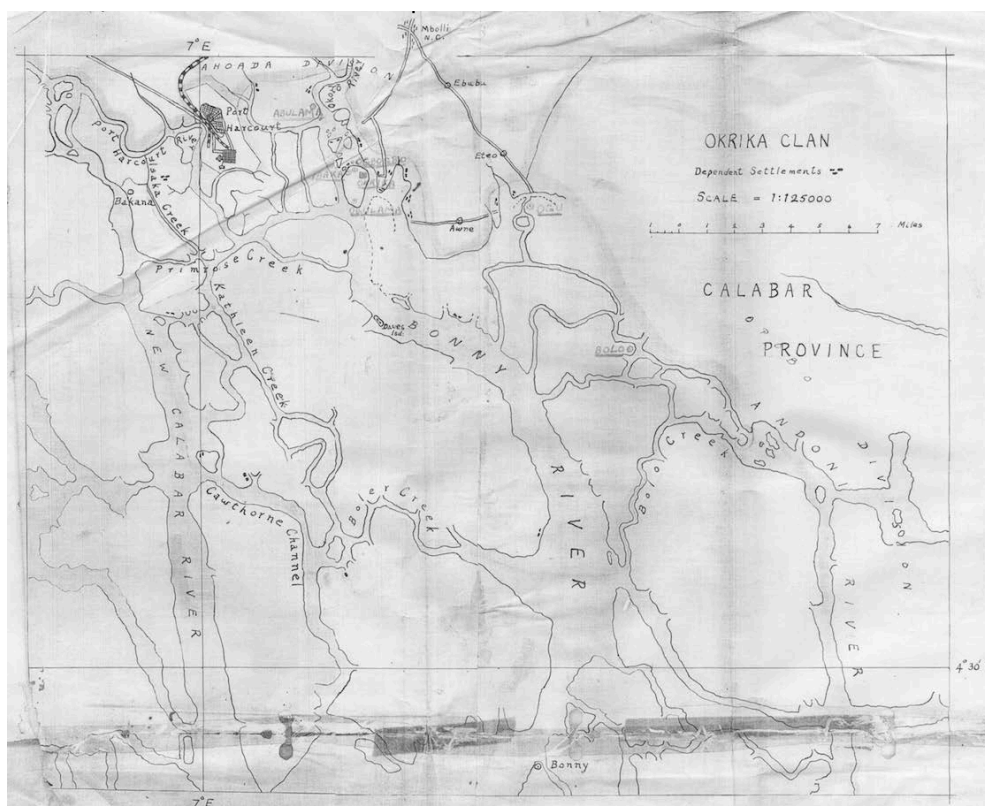
⁴⁰⁶ The change in the name from Ado war-canoe house to Abam-Ado war-canoe house led to the extinction of the original Ado war-canoe house, even the Ado compound was renamed Abam compound; and occasionally the two names (Ado and Abam) are used interchangeably.

⁴⁰⁷ Abam, A. S. (Ado IX), "Peace in Okrika: The Way Forward," 2005.

⁴⁰⁸ Jones, G. I., "Report of the Position, Status and Influence of Chiefs and Natural Rulers in the Eastern Region of Nigeria," National Archive Enugu, 1956.

necessary rituals and installation. But the Oputibeya (Koniju section) family rejected the choice of Zedekiah, saying Oputibeya was the rightful house to produce a royal father for Okrika.

Figure 16: Map of Okrika Clan, 1933



Source: National Archive Enugu (NAE), Porter, J. C., (District Officer) 'Okrika clan Intelligence Report', 1933

As with the Kalabari and also in 1959, the Eastern Regional Government, decided to address the conflicting claims to Okrika the *Amanyanyabo* throne by Oputibeya (Koniju) and Ado (Tuboniju) houses by setting up the Uwechia Commission of Enquiry to investigate the matter. However, the Commission's report had yet to be made public when the Eastern Government announced in March 1960 that the Amanyanyabo throne of Okrika would now be rotated between the Ado royal house (Tuboniju section) and Oputibeya house (Koniju section), and enjoined the Ado house to assume the position.⁴⁰⁹ The Ado house therefore presented Zedekiah Fibika, whom they had earlier in 1959 presented and crowned as Ado VII, Amanyanyabo of Okrika, to continue. Unfortunately, Zedekiah Fibika (Ado VII) died in 1960, before independence. The Oputibeya (Koniju section) family pressed the Eastern Regional Government to recognize their choice for next Amanyanyabo of Okrika, in keeping with the government's earlier pronouncement. But the Ado house (Tuboniju section) rejected any Oputibeya family (Koniju section) attempt to choose the Amanyanyabo on the grounds that it would be sacrilegious and therefore unacceptable.⁴¹⁰ The tensions associated with the opposing houses' claim and counter-claim turned into riots in 1961

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid,

⁴¹⁰ Ibid: The Ado royal house argued that they never accepted the Eastern Regional Government rotational principle between themselves and the Oputibeya family.

and engulfed the entire Okrika, especially the Koniju and Tuboniju.⁴¹¹ In order to save lives, property and restore order, the Eastern Regional Government set up the Graham Commission of Enquiry in December 1962.⁴¹² Mr. R. J. Graham, who at the time was an Administrative Officer in service of the Eastern Regional Government, was expected to conduct investigations into the outbreaks of violence in Okrika, and to make adequate recommendations so as to forstall further occurrences.

After a critical examination of documentations, memoranda, papers and oral presentations and cross-examinations of Okrika Chiefs who appeared before him, Graham observed that the dispute was between two sections of Okrika town. He reported that the two claimed to be direct descendants of the founder of the Island settlement and laid claim to the *Amanymanabo* stool of Okrika.⁴¹³ Graham further observed:

Okrika has been divided for very many years into these two sections of Tuboniju and Koniju, and each section under its respective leadership supported the claim of that house which came from its own section of the town. Relations between the Tuboniju and Koniju Sections had been friendly and peaceful for many years until the revival of the *Amanymanabo* dispute from 1956.⁴¹⁴

Although Graham blamed the bifurcation of Okrika along Oputibeya (Koniju) and Ado (Tuboniju) lines for the crisis, he also attributed the conflict to actions and inactions of unscrupulous leadership in Okrika and further blamed the Eastern Regional Government for the non-publication of the earlier 1959 Uwechia Commission's recommendations on the Okrika dispute.⁴¹⁵ Graham also blamed the bitter rivalry between these two sections of Okrika on the 1961 election, which saw the defeat of the Koniju candidate by the Tuboniju candidate, and he cited the army of idle and unemployed adults as an additional factor that exacerbated the conflict.⁴¹⁶ Graham, therefore, made the following recommendations (among others) as his panacea for peace in Okrika:

- (i) That the previous decision of Government on the *Amanymanabo* of Okrika should be revoked and that the Ado house, composed of the Abam, Dokube, Fibika, Ibanichuka and Ogan families be recognized as the *Amanymanabo* house of Okrika and be the house from among whose members the *Amanymanabo* of Okrika should be chosen.
- (ii) That the *Amanymanabo* of Okrika, when appointed, should be a second class Chief and the Clan Head of Okrika Clan.
- (iii) That the right of the other villages in the Okrika Clan, to wit: Ogoloma, Abuloma, Ogu, Bolo, Ogbogbo and Ibaka to have their own *Amanymanapu*

⁴¹¹ National Archive Enugu (NAE), "Summary of the Reports and Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Outbreaks of Violence at Okrika," Official Document No. 23, 1963.

⁴¹² Ibid,

⁴¹³ Ibid,

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

⁴¹⁵ National Archive Enugu (NAE), "Summary of the Reports and Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Outbreaks of Violence at Okrika," Official Document No. 23, 1963.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid,

should be conceded but that this will in no way prejudice the right of the *Amanyabo* of Okrika, when appointed, to be the Clan Head nor will such a concession on the part of Government imply any recognition of such *Amanyabo* to be chiefs within the meaning of the Classification of Chiefs Law.

- (iv) That the Government should commence the process by which the division of Okrika Town into the Koniju and Tuboniju Sections will eventually disappear by no longer dealing, through its agents – the Provincial Commissioner and the Provincial Secretary, with Chief the Honorable Samson Adoki and Chief John George as the respective Head Chief of these Sections. Government should, again through its local officials, do all in its power to ignore the division of Okrika Town into the Tuboniju and Koniju Sections and deal with Okrika Town as a whole through the legally constituted local instruments of Government, the Okrika Town Local Council and, at a higher level, the Okrika County Council...If the old division is allowed to remain by the actions or words of either party or both, then the future of Okrika is bleak indeed.⁴¹⁷

In 1963 the Eastern Regional Government published an abridged version of the Graham report including the recommendations for resolving the Okrika succession dispute. In that publication, it agreed to implement the first three recommendations above and noted others.⁴¹⁸ The recommendations of the Graham Commission and action of the Eastern Regional Government as published in 1963 ruled out the Oputibeya house (Koniju section) from further claims to the *Amanyabo* of Okrika, and thereby recognized the Ado house (Tuboniju) as sole rightful claimants.

Immediately when the Government decision was made public, the Oputibeya family challenged the outcome in the Eastern Regional High Court, Enugu, asking the court to set aside the recommendations of the Graham Report and decisions of Eastern Government on the report. In a judgment delivered in 1965, the court presided over by L. N. Mbanefo refused to grant the petitions of the Oputibeya family to share succession to the Okrika *Amanyabo* stool on a rotational basis with the Ado house.⁴¹⁹ The Oputibeya house approached the Supreme Court to overturn the decision of the High Court through an appeal. In April 1973, after several months of legal fireworks between the two houses, the Supreme Court dismissed the application and appeal.⁴²⁰ The decision of the Supreme Court, being the final court, was a major setback for the Oputibeya house and was expected to put to rest the rivalry over *Amanyabo* between Koniju and Tuboniju in Okrika.

On the other hand, immediately following publication of the Graham Report and the accompanying decision of the Eastern Government, the five members of the Ado family

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 5-7.

⁴¹⁸ National Archive Enugu (NAE), "Summary of the Reports and Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Outbreaks of Violence at Okrika," Official Document No. 23, 1963.

⁴¹⁹ See Suit No. E/87/63. In the High Court of Eastern Nigeria of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Holden at Enugu, Before the Honorable Sir Louis Mbanefo, Chief Justice, Wednesday, 10th February, 1965.

⁴²⁰ See Suit No. E/8/1963; SC.615/1965; In the Supreme Court of Nigeria, Holden at Lagos.

(Tuboniju section) as recognized by the Commission conferred and agreed amongst themselves in order to install an Amanyabo of Okrika who would succeed King Zedekiah (Ado VII).⁴²¹ After a careful consideration of the history of succession to the throne based on fairness, it was discovered the Ogan and Abam houses had not benefited. Consequently, the group agreed that the Ogan family would produce the next Amanyabo of Okrika. The Ogan family chose S. P. U Ogan and made him Head of the Ogan war-canoë house and presented him for the position of Amanyabo of Okrika. Chief Ogan was installed Amanyabo of Okrika (Ado VIII) in 1964 (even as the Oputibeya family was contesting the Graham Report and Eastern Government decision in court).⁴²² Chief S. P. U. Ogan reigned as Amanyabo of Okrika (Ado VIII) until he died in 1997.⁴²³ However, before his death Chief Ogan and some Koniju Chiefs, led by Evans Awoala, had two fundamental disagreements: first, which family among the Ado royal house should be king after him and second, whether the Koniju family should be allowed to have its own Amanyabo distinct from Tuboniju as an autonomous Okrika settlement.⁴²⁴

In short, upon the death of Chief S. P. U. Ogan, a new rivalry of succession emerged within the Ado house, over which among the six families (by this time Ibulubo family had been added to the five recommended by the Graham Commission) would produce the next Amanyabo of Okrika.⁴²⁵ The challenge threw up two candidates from opposing camps: Chiefs A. S. Abam and Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo. Support for these two candidates has polarized Okrika along Tuboniju and Koniju lines since 1997. While the Koniju section tilt towards Chief A. S. Abam, the Tuboniju section was favorably disposed to Chief Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo. The polarization led to violent conflict. In September 2001, the rivalry turned into a full-blown war between Koniju and Tuboniju that by 2005 had claimed more than two thousand lives, and destroyed property worth several millions of naira.⁴²⁶ Both candidates (Chief A. S. Abam and Chief Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo) claimed to have been installed as *Amanyabo* of Okrika at different occasions in 1999 and have paraded themselves as such. Even though supporters have written letters to the Rivers State government for each claimant's recognition as *Amanyabo* of Okrika, the government has not responded to either of them, due to the raging controversy.

In the next chapter I explore how in contemporary times this *Amanyabo* of Okrika rivalry involving Chief A. S. Abam and Chief Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo has been greatly exploited and immensely complicated by party politics in Rivers State and youth mobilization in Okrika against the background of oil. Specifically, I examine this when dealing with the rise of

⁴²¹ Abam, A. S. (Ado IX), "Peace in Okrika: The Way Forward," 2005.

⁴²² Ibid,

⁴²³ Koniju people were directed by Chief Evans Awoala not to participate in the burial ceremony of King Ogan. The directive was strictly obeyed by all Koniju sons and daughters. Any Koniju participant in the burial was threatened with banishment from the settlement. During the burial the whole of Koniju settlement was barricaded with raffia palms to demarcate it from the Tuboniju section.

⁴²⁴ The author was informed of these disagreements during an interview session with Belema Awoala (son of Chief Evans Awoala) conducted in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, July 20 2012.

⁴²⁵ See Memorandum submitted by the Ado Royal Family of Okrika to the Okrika Community Peace Committee, November 2005: The Ibulubo family was added to the Ado Royal house by a Court of Appeal judgment of 29th November 2001, in suit No. CA/PH/267/2000.

⁴²⁶ See Memorandum submitted by the Ado Royal Family of Okrika to the Okrika Community Peace Committee, November 2005.

Ateke Tom. The succession struggles within Okrika persisted and are part of the contentious politics of the region espoused in the next chapter. The next section of this chapter, however, examines the inter-clan conflict between Kalabari and Okrika in the Port Harcourt area of Eastern Niger Delta.

3.4.3 Kalabari-Okrika Inter-Clan Conflict

In the old days, partly owing to their enterprise and partly to their proximity to the factories and consequent command of European arms and goods, the Kalabari gained supremacy over nearly all Ijaw in the district. The only section which appears to have defied them successfully were the Okrikans, whose capital is situated on a small island at the north of the Bonny River, and who have a considerable Igbo strain through intermarriage with that race.⁴²⁷

Beginning from the mid-nineteenth century coastal Eastern delta settlements (Bonny, Opobo, Okrika, Andoni and Kalabari) were pitched against each other in a host of conflicts. These conflicts are better understood if gauged against the economic background of the time. The abolition of slave trade and introduction of palm oil trade and its expansion in the region had created a need for collaboration and for the development of new markets. For instance, the Kalabari “developed new markets on the Sombreiro which was fast-flowing and difficult to navigate above Degema” at the expense of Nembe in the central delta, while Bonny “developed the Igbo and Ogoni markets on the mainland bordering Okrika,” aiming to expand beyond Kalabari by encouraging “Okrika to lay claim to the ‘Obiatubo’ markets on the new Kalabari River, and asserting ‘ancient’ rights to trade in the Sombreiro and lower Niger markets.”⁴²⁸ Thus new alliances formed among communities of the Eastern delta to meet transportation demand and other requirements of the new palm oil trade, and in the process engendered regional conflicts.

Before this time, people moved freely in the region to practice their trade and make temporary settlements in territories other than their own. For example, Okrika fisherfolks moved as far as Nembe while Akassa people on the Atlantic fringe came to Bonny to sell canoes. But the introduction of palm oil trade and local communities’ need to restrict rivals from interfering in established markets that they hoped to monopolize, and the community’s desire to extend its economic territory at “the expense of its rivals and to restrict them and people trading with them from passing through its territory,” created conflicts.⁴²⁹ For example, Kalabari and Bonny were involved in protracted conflicts over control of trading territory and access to markets. And by 1865, when Consul Livingstone arrived in the territory, conflict had extended to the Okrika, who ambushed and killed Kalabari trading cargo canoes on the Kalabari River.⁴³⁰ Intervention by the

⁴²⁷ Talbot, A. M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932, p. 9.

⁴²⁸ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 146.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 147.

⁴³⁰ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Consul revealed that Okrika people had attacked an outlying Kalabari village and killed many people.⁴³¹ Okrika thus became a credible and visible threat to Kalabari, who had dominated trade in the axis.

While the Okrika sabotaged Kalabari canoes, the Kalabari prevented Okrikans from engaging in fishing activities (their major occupation) within Kalabari territorial waters.⁴³² Amidst these conflicts Kalabari and adjacent Bonny stood as the main centers of the palm oil trade in Eastern Niger Delta until 1870. To deal with constant hostilities from their Okrika neighbors, the Kalabari devised a strategy by which cargo canoes were moved under the cover and protection of war-canoes.

In 1870, Jaja's strategic establishment of Opobo town on the estuary of the Imo River had successfully cut off most of Bonny's palm oil supplies from the Ndoki and western Ibibio settlements. This situation forced the Bonny to enter an alliance with Okrika (Kalabari's historic enemies) to attack Kalabari and gain control of the Andoni markets. In June 1871, a combined force of Bonny and Okrika undertook a major attack; they bombarded Kalabari for a whole day before withdrawing at sunset.⁴³³ Parties from the three settlements drew the Consul's attention to the attack and sought peace in the territory. A truce was agreed on and was followed by "Perpetual Treaties of Peace" between Kalabari and both her neighbors (Bonny and Okrika).⁴³⁴ According to the treaty between Bonny and Kalabari, both were to jointly trade in the Billituro and Ndelli markets on the Sombreiro Rivers, and the Kalabari settlement was ordered to open the creeks between Bonny and Brass in order to allow Akassa from the Atlantic fringe passage into the region.⁴³⁵ As for the Okrika-Kalabari Treaty, aside from affirming the maintenance of lasting and inviolable peace in its preamble, some articles of the "Perpetual Peace Treaty" of 1871 state:

- (Article 5) By the treaty is secured to the Okrika men the right to pass through and make fishing settlements in any of the Creeks belonging to New Calabar (Kalabari) and Brass.
- (Article 6) The Calabar (Kalabari) men will inform all neighboring tribes with whom they have entered into agreements against the Okrikas, that they have now made a lasting truce with them and they are to pass in perfect safety through all waters.

⁴³¹ Ibid,

⁴³² On Okrika occupation and mastery of the water A.M. Talbot, former District Officer in the region noted: "The Okrikans had established an uncanny reputation among neighboring tribes, by whom it is affirmed that 'Okrikans understand water more than any other River-side people. They can go down into the depths and catch fish by hand alone, without spear or net.' Many are said to be able to stay for days at a time beneath the surface, like the Buduma of Lake Chad; and of one renowned fisherman, named Aba Bile, it is commonly said that he can even live under water for weeks, reappearing with enormous catches." (Talbot, A.M, *Tribes of the Delta*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11).

⁴³³ Jones, G. I, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

⁴³⁴ Ibid,

⁴³⁵ National Archive Enugu, "Perpetual Treaty of Peace, Concluded under British Mediation, Between the Chiefs of Bonny and New Calabar," 27th October, 1871, Signed on board H. M. S. Dido in Bonny River.

- (Article 7) The Obiartuboo markets belong exclusively to the people of New Calabar (Kalabari), their heirs and successors. The Obiartuboo markets commence at Abbia on one side and Eweffa on the other.
- (Article 8) The Deobo (*now called Diobu market in Port Harcourt*) markets belong exclusively to the Okrika, their heirs and successors.⁴³⁶

The Kalabari and Bonny peace treaty was set for five years, while that between Okrika and Kalabari had no time limit. However, it was not long before the terms of the treaties were violated. During the Kalabari intra-clan conflict in which two renegade Kalabari chiefs (Will Braide and Yellowe) revolted, the Okrika supported the rebel Chiefs against the Kalabari house.⁴³⁷ From 1871 until 1888 when Okrika signed its treaty of protection with the British, military superiority ruled the day and the Kalabari held sway over the rivers, creeks, and swamps. Individual Okrika fisherfolk thus faced threats and harassments in spite of the 1871 treaty that formally gave them unhindered access to fish in Kalabari Rivers and beyond. It is believed that the individual Okrika fisherfolks who forayed into waterways overlorded by Kalabari, so as to fish and settle while they dried their catch, paid some kind of tribute to the Kalabari Chiefs in exchange for their safety.

The late-nineteenth century establishment of British Colonial rule in the region changed the dynamics of social relations. With the institution of judicial processes and the rule of law, it was assumed that authority to regulate human actions had shifted from the Kalabari to British administrators. Okrika fisherfolks felt secure and many of them stopped their payment of tribute to Kalabari Chiefs, even as they continued to fish and settle wherever they wished.⁴³⁸ Moreover, British presence and the associated availability of judicial institutions altered the dynamics of the Okrika-Kalabari feud - from violent confrontation to seeking justice through the native courts of law.

In 1912, Chief Charlie initiated a legal process on behalf of himself, the chiefs, and the people of Kalabari against Chief Daniel Kalio as representative of the chiefs and people of Okrika.⁴³⁹ The Kalabari wanted the court to give (a) title to a list of 108 fishing villages including fishing ponds, creeks, etc., within New Calabar lands; (b) an injunction restraining the Okrika from Kalabari territory; and (c) payment of damages.⁴⁴⁰ Judge J. Webber ruled in favor of the Kalabari. He issued a restraining order that no person could fish within Kalabari Rivers without Kalabari permission; at the same time, he allowed that permission to fish included

⁴³⁶ National Archive Enugu (NAE), "Perpetual Treaty of Peace, Concluded Under British Mediation, Between the Chiefs of Okrika and New Calabar," 28th October, 1871, Signed on board H. M. S. Dido in Bonny River by King Amachree and seven of his Chiefs for New Calabar and by King Phibia (Fibika) and four of his Chiefs for Ogoloma and Okrika, together with three chiefs of Bonny.

⁴³⁷ In the 1879 "Perpetual Treaty of Peace" between Kalabari and Bonny Chiefs, "seeing the deadly enmity that has so long existed between the people of Okrika and New Calabar, it was decided, for the welfare of the communities, that they shall not use the same oil markets, and further, that the New Calabar men have, by a long possession of the Obiartuboo markets, proved their rights to them, and it was, therefore, decided that they shall retain undisturbed possession of the same."

⁴³⁸ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, 1950, National Archive Enugu (NAE).

⁴³⁹ Suit No. 44 of 1912, in Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid,

putting a shelter on the riverbank for curing the fish.⁴⁴¹ Rather than rule on title to the communities (as demanded by the Kalabari), the judge merely placed a restraining order on the Okrika. The case went to the full court on appeal in 1914, and findings at the 1914 hearing were that: (a) the Kalabari are entitled to exclusive fishing rights in Kalabari creeks, rivers and swamps; (b) the Kalabari River as a public highway was free for all to fish, but the creeks branching off it would lie within the Kalabari sphere of influence and the Okrika were not allowed to erect structures within Kalabari spheres of influence.⁴⁴² At both the 1912 and the 1914 court hearings, the Perpetual Peace Treaty of 1871 was neither produced nor considered; hence, the articles of the treaty were never deliberated upon in the judicial proceedings. Based on the 1871 treaty, Okrika people rejected the court's position on their right to fish in the waters, while the Kalabari naturally wanted the court judgment implemented since it was in their favor. Even though there was no physical confrontation, a cold war between Kalabari and Okrika peoples was generated.

In April 1915, the Degema District Officer at the time, A. M. Talbot, intervened in the cold war by making an agreement between Chief Daniel Kalio on behalf of Chiefs and the people of Okrika, and Chief Mirian Braide on behalf of Bakana (a Kalabari settlement). In the agreement Chief Kalio agreed to pay Chief Mirian Braide the sum of ten shilling (British shilling that was in use at the time) per house for all permanent buildings erected at Gidda-kiri, Arugbana-kiri and other territories owned by Bakana, and one shilling for temporary buildings erected for fishing purposes.⁴⁴³ Although Mirian Braide agreed to the terms of the contract on behalf of Bakana, he noted that the money was being "paid for the sake of amity and peace and absolutely without prejudice to the legal rights claimed by both parties."⁴⁴⁴ This agreement failed for two reasons: first, individuals -- not Chief Daniel Kalio and the whole of the Okrika clan -- live in houses. And second, Mirian Braide from Bakana lacked the authority to sign an agreement that would be binding on the whole of Kalabari clan.

Only a week later, due to this lacuna, another agreement (dated 28th April 1915) was signed in the presence of the Resident Officer, Mr. Ingles, between King Amachree (Princewill) representing the Kalabari and Daniel Kalio representing the Okrika, which established an amount payable by Okrikans for rent on houses and other shelter on the land covered by the 1914 court judgment.⁴⁴⁵ The new agreement was to the effect that an annual rent of ten shilling be paid per house sized no more than eighteen feet square. The Okrika still found the agreement inconsistent with the 1871 treaty, and again refused to pay for fishing or erecting structures on Kalabari

⁴⁴¹ Ibid,

⁴⁴² Ibid,

⁴⁴³ The "Talbot Agreement," 21st April 1915, in Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, 1950, National Archive Enugu (NAE); The "Talbot Agreement" was the first to incorporate rent payment in the territorial controversy between Kalabari and Okrika. The 1914 judgment was silent on Kalabari application on the question of demarcation of boundary involving the two clans. Okrikans strongly protested against it and wanted the boundary demarcated. But while Kalabari felt satisfied on the question of boundary demarcation with the 1914 judgment, Okrika on the other hand, wanted the demarcation effected because, even though, Arugbana-kiri and Gidda-kiri were contained in the Kalabari list of 108 villages of the 1914 judgment, they were effectively occupied by Okrika people. Yet, the two (Arugbana-kiri and Gidda-kiri) were again specifically mentioned in the 'Talbot Agreement' as belonging to Bakana (Kalabari).

⁴⁴⁴ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid,

waters and riverbanks. Chief Lulu Braide, on behalf of himself and the chiefs of Bakana (Kalabari), initiated a legal suit for rent against the collective led by Chief Daniel Kalio; this time, their suit fell under the “Talbot Agreement of 1915.”⁴⁴⁶ The case was dismissed on the grounds that the Talbot Agreement was not “enforceable for lack of consideration” and lack of evidence that Kalio had “authority to bind individual Okrika fishermen to pay rent.”⁴⁴⁷ (This was the same problem that Chief Mirian Braide from Bakana faced on behalf of the Kalabari.) However, on the 27th January 1927, the full court decided otherwise -- that the Talbot Agreement was indeed enforceable – and ordered a retrial. From 1912 to 1930, a variety of lawsuits were filed and multiple agreements were reached between the Chiefs of Kalabari and Okrika.⁴⁴⁸ Despite these judgments and agreements, and though a few individual Okrika fishermen who were expected to pay rent may have complied under duress or out of fear, most individuals did not comply.

In March 1931, during another court process, Okrika counsel obtained the 1871 “Perpetual Peace Treaty” agreement from London and tendered it to support Okrika’s claim to free trade. Based on the Mineral Ordinance, Cap. 93, section (1), the court adjusted its judgment in favor of the Okrika; this section states: “Property in all Rivers, streams and watercourses throughout Nigeria is vested in the crown”⁴⁴⁹ – fishing was therefore free to all anywhere. The judgment conferred on the Okrika entitlement “to go to the creeks and ponds, tributaries of Kalabari River to fish” and to “temporarily erect huts on River banks on the payment of yearly tribute to Kalabari Chiefs in accordance with native law and custom.”⁴⁵⁰ The judgment had no significant effect on the ordinary Kalabari or Okrika citizens who maintained the *status quo ante*. But behind the scenes there was a cold war of frustration on the part of the Kalabari, and an inner feeling of satisfaction on the part of Okrika fishermen and chiefs. Given that context, with time something drastic was bound to happen. There was however, a period of relative peace, though not without minor skirmishes between these two Ijaw clans until 1948 when inter-clan rancor was again brought into the open.

In March 1948, Pinaro-kiri, an Okrika settlement close to Kula, was razed to the ground. Investigation showed no proof of arson; hence, it was attributed to accident, and the Okrika accepted it as such.⁴⁵¹ In the meantime the Kalabari, whose trade at the local market was dwindling, appointed rent collectors to help collect rent and tribute on their land as alternative sources of income. The rent collectors were dispatched to every nook and cranny of Kalabari rivers, creeks and swamps, and understandably this led to tensions and conflicts in those locations. Not long after the devastating fire at Pinaro-kiri, Kalabari deployed its war-canoes to patrol its territorial waters, chasing away Okrika fishermen, and razing down fishing settlements.⁴⁵² The situation was nearly lawless and completely chaotic before the government intervened. When it did, the government brought the situation under control by restricting Okrika fishermen to Okrika Island so as to forestall conflict. Considering that the Okrika are mainly

⁴⁴⁶ For the case, see Nigerian Law Report (N. L. R) 126, and for the full court proceeding in 7 N. L. R, 34.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid,

⁴⁴⁸ For more, see Suits Nos. 8 & 44 of 1928; the 1st January & August 1923 Agreements.

⁴⁴⁹ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950, p. 17.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid,

⁴⁵¹ Ibid,

⁴⁵² Ibid,

fishermen, the government action was only a temporary measure. The problem needed an amicable resolution.

In January 1949, the government as presided over by the Honorable Buowari Brown under the auspices of the two Degema District Officers, H. N. Harcourt and W. F. H. Newington, attempted to broker peace through a mass meeting open to everyone from both communities.⁴⁵³ The government resolution referred to as the “Peace Agreement of 1949” resolved, among other stipulations, that Okrika chiefs restrict their fishermen from any of the communities listed in the 1914 court judgment; that Okrika Chiefs were to deposit the sum of five hundred pounds as payment of tributes that could be ordered by Supreme Court judgments against them; and that the Kalabari Chiefs were to accept that money as sufficient payment for tributes as soon as the money was deposited.⁴⁵⁴ The Okrika legal counsel wrote to oppose the five hundred pounds deposit as unfair and unjustified. In a general meeting held in June 1949, Okrika commoners and fishermen alike rejected the agreement:

The Peace Agreement, was repudiated by the fishermen and commoners on the ground that the 500 pounds was for tribute and not for a pledge for peace and no tribute ever could be payable in view of the 1871 Treaty, and therefore the Okrika Chiefs had betrayed their trust because the Chiefs did not fish and could not bind the real fishermen who, if anyone, might be said to be liable to pay the tribute.⁴⁵⁵

The Okrika fishermen and commoners’ rejection of the 1949 peace agreement signaled tension in the region. The government quickly stepped in and inaugurated the G. G. Robinson Commission of Inquiry, in November 1949, to resolve the impasse. The Robinson Commission was mandated to look into only rights to fish, settlement, and areas where those rights can be exercised, but not title to land. The first two terms of the Robinson Commission were:

- (a) The nature and extent of the rights of fishing possessed respectively by the Okrikans, the Kalabaris or any other person or tribe in the Degema and Ogoni Divisions of the Rivers Province.
- (b) The nature and extent of any rights of settlement possessed by the Okrikans or the Kalabaris or any other person or tribe in connection with the exercise of any such fishing rights and the terms and conditions thereof.⁴⁵⁶

At the Robinson Commission, Chief Samson Adoki represented Okrika as principal witness. He hinged his argument on Article V of the 1871 “Perpetual Peace Treaty,” which stated that, “By this treaty is secured to the Okrika men the right to pass through and make

⁴⁵³ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid: Suit No. 53/1949, in which Chief Samson Adoki for Okrika had sued Chief J. T. Princewill and others for Kalabari, for an Order of Court restraining the Kalabari from interfering with Okrika fishing rights in the creeks and ponds, tributaries of Kalabari River and for 1,500 pounds damages for interference during the previous twelve months, had been transferred from Kalabari Native Court to the Supreme Court. It was hoped that an amicable resolution of the conflict by the November 1949 Commission of Inquiry into the Okrika-Kalabari dispute would put an end to the Supreme Court case, which had yet to be heard when the Commission was set up.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

⁴⁵⁶ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950, p. 32.

fishing settlements in any of the creeks belonging to New Calabar and Brass.”⁴⁵⁷ He supported his claim with a map of Degema Division, surveyed by P. Amaury Talbot and described Okrika territory as that contained in article ten of the 1888 Treaty of Protectorate agreed between Okrika and Britain. Article Ten states, “The Territory of Okrika is recognized by Her Britannic Majesty as extending along the north or left bank of the Bonny River from Gbolo to the Manamatoro Creek and inland as far as the Southern boundary of the Ogoni Country.”⁴⁵⁸ A careful analysis of the geography of the 1888 Treaty and cross-examination of Chief Samson Adoki revealed that the territorial claim of Okrika as contained in the 1888 Treaty would not stand; hence, “no reliance could be placed [by the Commission] on the Treaty for accurate description of Okrika territory.”⁴⁵⁹ The Okrika defense also offered other evidence related to Article V, namely that since the enthronement of legitimate government (colonial administration) in the region, they had never paid rent or tribute to the Kalabari.

Kalabari, on the other hand, was represented by Chief Hutton Tom George, a leading chief from Buguma, appointed by the entire clan as their principal witness. The Chief argued that all creeks and rivers belong to them.⁴⁶⁰ Chief Hutton Tom George agreed that fishing was free to everyone; nevertheless, he said that rent or tribute had always been paid for structures erected on river banks. He presented court judgments, treaties, rent payment receipts, and leases, including one between Bakana and the government on the sale of “two parcels of land at the left bank of ‘Primrose Creek or Bonny River’ as claim to all areas between Bonny River and Santa Barbara” as belonging to Kalabari.⁴⁶¹ He said the Kalabari had always opposed boundary demarcation because the 1912 court judgment had dealt with the issue and they were satisfied. Chief Hutton Tom George never addressed the 1871 Perpetual Treaty in detail, but submitted that the letters of that Treaty were invalidated by the Kalabari intra-clan conflict (Amachree Princewill IV vs Will Braide), in which the Okrika supported Braide.⁴⁶² By virtue of this action, the Kalabari claimed that Okrika had nullified the Perpetual Peace Treaty and in effect ceded their right to fish and settle on Kalabari River through to Brass, as had been contained in the agreement.

After a careful analysis of all previous court judgments, agreements, documents, and/or oral submissions, the Commission also took time to tour the waterways of Degema Division to verify communities’ claims and counter-claims. In its analysis the Commission unraveled various inconsistencies, errors of judgments, and contradictions from its examination of the evidence presented before it.

On its terms of reference, the Commission’s answer to the first issue was, “Fishing everywhere is free to all comers in the tidal waters.”⁴⁶³ On the second, the Commission submitted that territories were either socially owned (by clans) or privately owned and it was

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 20.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid,

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 23.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p. 23; The agreement for sale of the two parcels of land was tendered as an exhibit before the Commission as proof of Kalabari ownership of the territory. The Bakana used this to show Government that they are the owners; hence, were paid. It was very possible that the Okrika clan was not in the know or never heard of the transaction between Government and Bakana on the lands in question.

⁴⁶² Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, p. 32.

expected of anyone fishing outside an entitled territory to do so on the payment of tribute.⁴⁶⁴ However, the commission introduced a twist into the dispute noting that the notion of “tribute” was anachronistic, because it suggests inequality among citizens in society where people are expected to meet basic necessities of life. Payment for facilities (in the form of tributes) must therefore be mutually beneficial to the payer and payee, without regard to status in society. Recognizing the lucrative nature of fishing in the area the Commission recommended, for the benefit of all, that fishing in Degema Division be organized into three parts, called the three Native Authorities. Based on the fact that fishermen migrate from one location to the other in search of fish and routinely make temporary structures, the Commission leader said:

I therefore suggest that the right to make temporary settlement should be licensed and the money be collected and licenses be issued by the Native Authority. The money paid would be for a license to land on the bank, and make a settlement, not of course for fishing which is free for all. This would only apply to fishermen wishing to make settlements for the purposes of carrying on fishing outside their own area... The obtaining of the license must be made easy. I therefore suggest that each of the Native Authorities, Okrika, Kalabari and Bonny be entitled to issue them.⁴⁶⁵

Under this scheme, the clan or Chiefs were stripped of the right to collect rent or tribute, and rather than the individual fisherman, it was the hut or house (though with not more than six persons) that was licensed. The Robinson Commission stipulated different fees for fishermen doing the trade within Degema Division as compared to those coming into the territory from adjoining Administrative Divisions.⁴⁶⁶ Removing the Kalabari Chiefs’ or clans’ power to collect rent and tribute, and putting it under the domain of a Native Authority to the mutual benefit of all for implementing community development projects brought relief to the region. The idea eliminated any “rule of the fittest” and enthroned equality before the law among individuals. The Robinson Commission’s recommendation, which designated the Native Authority Council as the arbiter when it comes to fishing and settlement rights in the Degema Division and beyond, put to rest the recurring fishing boundary tensions and conflicts between Okrika and Kalabari in Eastern Niger Delta. But rather than perpetual peace, conflict shifted from inter-clan involving Okrika-Kalabari to inter-ethnic between Okrika-Ogoni with the arrival of oil into the region.

Okrika (Ijaw) and Eleme (Ogoni) are border communities between the hinterland and communities in the Atlantic fringe that have lived and interrelated with each other as neighbors

⁴⁶⁴ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Okrika-Kalabari Dispute, National Archive Enugu (NAE), 1950.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 37.

⁴⁶⁶ The Commission suggested thirty British selling per year for the peoples (fishermen) of Degema Division wishing to make settlement outside their own clan, and suggested three pounds per year and different type of tallies for people (fishermen) outside Degema Division wishing to do the trade in the Administrative Division. It said the Native Authority, which issues the licenses, should be allowed to keep five percent for itself and the balance should be credited to a deposit account in each Treasury in favor of the Degema Clans. The five percent collection fee would be to cover any incidental overheads incurred by the Native Authority. The total amount collected in any given period should be distributed by the District Officer, Degema, to the Clans for use by towns or Village funds for any projects of Community Development to be decided by the people.

for centuries.⁴⁶⁷ They have a common market called Akpoju (today called Akpajo). Geographically, Okrika is to the southeast of Eleme. In the late nineteenth century, during the palm oil trade period, these communities were in constant competition and strife with one another over resources, markets, territorial claim and trade. There are records of such inter-ethnic wars in 1875, 1878 and 1888.⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, despite being close and often cordial neighbors, adversaries between these communities date back to the ages.

From 1959 to the early 1960s, the oil multinational Shell-BP (as it then was) entered the Ogoni-Okrika axis of Eastern Niger Delta. The entrance of oil generated new, and complicated old, ethnic feuds over territory in the region. In the 1960s, the Nigerian government's decision about managing the downstream sector of the petroleum industry was to site its first refinery in the Okrika-Alesa (i.e., Ijaw-Ogoni) axis of Port Harcourt. The decision ignited old tensions over territorial claims and brought new dimensions of conflict between communities in the region.

3.5 Arrival of Oil: Okrika-Eleme Inter-Ethnic Conflict

The establishment of colonial rule and division of the territories into administrative units complicated existing tensions between the Okrika and Eleme. For instance, in 1936, the Eleme were moved from the Ahoada Division of Owerri Province into the Opobo Division in Calabar Province at the same time that some Okrika villages on the mainland were also transferred to Calabar Province, in their case from the Degema Division. In 1937, the Eleme demanded rent payment from those mainland Okrika now placed under Calabar Province. The Okrikans rejected the demand on the ground that they had lived on the land since time immemorial. The colonial Administration intervened, fixing the Okrika boundary as "not more than one thousand feet inward at high water mark from the mainland shore, stretching twenty-seven miles."⁴⁶⁹ Neither community was satisfied with the outcome of the Commissioner's intervention, and tensions remained high. Their anger culminated in 1946, when Okrika and Eleme engaged each other in violent confrontations destructive of both lives and property.⁴⁷⁰ At that point the colonial Administration deployed security agents to the area to restore peace, law and order.

As with other intra- and inter-clan conflicts, the late 1940s saw the territorial rivalry between Okrikan and Eleme become the subject of litigation. For example, in a High Court litigation presided over by Justice G. F. Dove-Edwin, the court ruled that:

The whole of the land in dispute right down to the water edge belong to Eleme and they will have their declaration accordingly, but the Okrikas have the right of occupation under the Native law and Custom to all that portion in which they

⁴⁶⁷ The Eleme clan is a sub-tribe of the Ogoni, though some of them claim they are not Ogoni but a distinct ethnic nationality in Rivers State. The traditional ruler of the Eleme was the only traditional ruler of 'Ogoni' who did not sign MOSOP's Ogoni Bill of Rights in the 1990s.

⁴⁶⁸ Abam, A. S, "Memorandum Submitted to the Commission of Inquiry into the Dispute Between Okrika and Eleme," October 1999.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 10: Both Eleme and Okrika expressed displeasure with the decision of the Chief Commissioner on the demarcation of the boundary between the two communities.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid,

have settlements shown on the plan and verged yellow and they are not to be disturbed in their occupation of these 101 settlements.⁴⁷¹

There was a tricky caveat attached to the judgment, which stated, “Of course, if the Okrika should leave the land then that portion would revert back to the Eleme.”⁴⁷² Both parties requested injunctions that were granted: the Eleme were restrained from interfering in any way with the peace of Okrika settlements on the land, while the Okrika were similarly restrained from interfering with the Eleme’s peaceful use of the remainder of the land in dispute and allowed passage to the Okrika River. The Eleme wanted full custody of the land, however, and appealed the High Court’s injunction against them, taking the judgment to the Supreme Court in 1956.

The Supreme Court held that because the Okrika community had far beyond living memory occupied the strip of land, with the consent and approval of the Eleme and with no payment of tribute or rent for their occupation of the land and had never abandoned it, they were therefore entitled by Native Customary Law to remain there.⁴⁷³ The court argued that even though the Eleme had title to the land in dispute, the judgment from the lower court rightly protected the Okrika possessory title to the land as a “form of native customary tenure under which the individual members of Okrika community may have beneficial enjoyment as members by transfer *inter vivos* or by succession.”⁴⁷⁴ The Supreme Court ruled:

The Appellants (Eleme) should be content that their right of access to the Okrika River or creek is preserved. I take this to mean that the Appellants’ community may for lawful purposes pass across the strip of land in the Respondents’ (Okrika) possession, along such paths and roads to the water’s edge as already exist and in such a manner as not to interfere with the Respondents’ (Okrika) community in their quiet possession and enjoyment of that part of the land. The Appeal fails and I would dismiss it with costs for the Respondents (Okrika) allowed at fifty-four pounds.⁴⁷⁵

Thus, not only did the Eleme fail in their appeal but also the final court reaffirmed the Okrika’s possessory right to the land. Through the Supreme Court judgment, the Okrika believed the land question was settled -- that the Supreme Court had overturned the High Court’s granting to the Eleme of a reversionary right to the disputed land should the Okrika for any reason vacate it. As the Okrika community understood the Supreme Court judgment, they would continue to have right of possession to the strip of land without any interference from Eleme for eternity. This was not how the Eleme interpreted the judgment. For the Eleme, if the Okrika vacated the strip of land for any reason, that land would reverse the *status quo ante* and make it theirs. Nonetheless, the Supreme Court ruling, which in legal terms was the final decision, brought some respite and peace to these communities.⁴⁷⁶ And this changed with the arrival of the

⁴⁷¹ High Court Judgment quoted in Abam, A. S, “Memorandum Submitted to the Commission of Inquiry into the Dispute Between Okrika and Eleme,” October, 1999, p. 11.

⁴⁷² Ibid, p. 11.

⁴⁷³ Fiberesima, J. A, *Okrika in Search of Ancestry*, Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited, 1990.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 194-195.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 195.

⁴⁷⁶ With the two ethnic groups (Okrika and Eleme) holding divergent interpretations to the various court rulings on ownership of the territory the crisis was bound to resurface sooner than later.

multinational oil companies (MNOCs) into the Okrika and Ogoni territories of Eastern Niger Delta in the late 1950s.

In Okrika in the late 1950s, Shell-BP (as it was then) started its upstream operations in Ofinomiamma village, which was owned by the Kalakineme war-canoe house of Okrika. On behalf of the Okrika clan, Chief Evans Awoala and Mr. Owubokiri (a teacher at the time) signed the document that allowed Shell-BP operations.⁴⁷⁷ The company also had an operational site at Owubiri, owned by a different Okrika settlement, the Ibaka war-canoe house. In this same period Shell-BP started its upstream operations in Afam (Lekuma) and Bomu, all in Ogoni.⁴⁷⁸

About five years later, the Nigeria Government moved to establish its first oil refinery in the downstream sector. In 1964, it acquired from the Eastern Regional Government land from Okrika (Ijaw) and Alesa⁴⁷⁹ (an Eleme settlement) communities in the Port Harcourt axis. The certificate of title states:

It is hereby certified that pursuant to the Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance, Cap 185, All that piece or parcel of land situate at Alesa/Okrika in the Ogoni/Degema Divisions of Eastern Nigeria acquired under Eastern Nigeria Notice No. 1384 of 21st September 1964 published in the Eastern Nigeria extraordinary Gazette No. 77 of 23rd December 1961 as amended by Eastern Nigeria Notice No. 534 of 1964 published in Eastern Nigeria Gazette No. 29 of 28th May 1964 comprising an area approximately 359.1 acres which is described in the schedule annexed hereto...and more particularly marked and delineated on the plan annexed hereto and hereto colored pink together with all ways, rights and appurtenances thereto belonging are vested in the Governor of Eastern Nigeria and his Successors in trust for the Government of Eastern Nigeria.⁴⁸⁰

The refinery was built through the joint efforts of the Nigerian Government and Shell-BP, based on the certificate of title, and at its inception the project was called the Alesa-Okrika Refinery (jointly named after the two host communities). The two communities did sign required documentation as hosts. In 1969, the Nigerian Government inaugurated the Petroleum Act which provides that “only Nigerian citizens or companies incorporated in Nigeria may be granted exploration, prospecting and mining licenses.”⁴⁸¹ It also provided for joint partnership with the government on all fresh concessions.⁴⁸² Prior to the Petroleum Act oil corporations operated as private corporations and merely paid tax and statutory revenues to the government. In the 1970s

⁴⁷⁷ This information was given by Chief Nemi Adoki, Chairman, Okrika Traditional Council of Chiefs during an interview with the author in Port Harcourt on October 24, 2012.

⁴⁷⁸ Saro-Wiwa, K., *The Ogoni Nation Today and Tomorrow*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Ltd, 1968.

⁴⁷⁹ Alesa is an Eleme (Ogoni) settlement, host to Eleme Refinery and border town to Okrika in the east. It shared ownership of the Refinery with Okrika at inception.

⁴⁸⁰ Judge of the High Court, “Certificate of Title,” September 22, 1964: A map indicating the pillars and expanse of land/area acquired was attached to the Certificate of Title.

⁴⁸¹ Nwokeji, G. U., “The Nigerian National petroleum Corporation and the Development of the Oil and Gas Industry: History, Strategies and current directions”, Rice University: The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, 2007, p. 13.

⁴⁸² Nwokeji, U.G, noted that up to 1970, the only occasion where when the government came close to exercising this option was 1962 in an agreement whereby it reserved the right to take 33.3 percent stake in Agip at a time chosen by the government.

the situation changed. The government acquired participatory interest in the activities, assets and liabilities of multinational corporations operating in the country and established the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to manage its stake in the joint venture partnership that emerged from the collaboration.⁴⁸³ By this new arrangement, the Alesa-Okrika refinery became an asset of the government-owned NNPC.

At the community level, the refinery re-opened old wounds between Okrika and Eleme – who owns the refinery site? Even though both communities signed documents to establish the refinery as legitimate stakeholders, to this day its ownership remains disputed. The Eleme rely on the reversionary clause in the High Court ruling and further claim that because the refinery is not extended into the waters, all the territory covered by the refinery belongs to them. The Okrika, on the other hand, claim that the Supreme Court judgment voided the High Court ruling, also that their territory is not the water edge but one thousand feet inward at the high water mark from the mainland shore, stretching twenty-seven miles. By this calculation the Okrika claim the refinery is partly located on their territory, and therefore they should be entitled to every benefit as a host community. The communities' claim and counter-claim and varied interpretations of multiple court judgments generated tensions throughout the 1970s, with little or no intervention from government at the state or federal level.

In 1977, the tensions again turned into intensely brutal inter-ethnic violence involving the Eleme and Okrika. An Okrika border settlement (Ele), not far from Onne (an Eleme sea port town) was completely sacked and its inhabitants displaced.⁴⁸⁴ The government quickly intervened, deploying security agents to the troubled communities in order to halt the violence. With that, the two communities suspended hostilities. But the government made no serious move to resolve the conflict. Instead, in 1985 the refinery was expanded and the Rivers State Government issued a certificate of occupancy to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) headquarters in Falomo, Lagos. The certificate describe the acquired territory (with an additional area of land) for the refinery as jointly owned by the two communities (Alesa and Okrika):

All that parcel of land situated at Alesa/Okrika in the Okrika/Oyigbo/Tai-Eleme Local Government Area of the Rivers State of Nigeria, containing an area of approximately 80.815 Hectares as shown on Plan No. TE. 32 (Tracing No. RS1418).⁴⁸⁵

Although the Rivers State Government issued NNPC a certificate of occupancy to take charge of the land, it took no concrete steps to mitigate the Eleme-Okrika feud generated by that land. In

⁴⁸³ For a detailed study of the history and emergence of NNPC see, Nwokeji, G. U, "The Nigerian National petroleum Corporation and the Development of the Oil and Gas Industry: History, Strategies and current directions", Rice University: The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, 2007.

⁴⁸⁴ Ogan, C., Okrika: *A Kingdom of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Rsearch Publications, 2008: The Ele (an Okrika settlement) have since been internally displaced with majority of former inhabitants now at Ogu, while others are scattered all over Okrika villages. The Government Technical College, Ele-Ogu, which was built before the crisis and spared during the fracas, stands to this day.

⁴⁸⁵ Rivers State Government (The Land Use decree No. 6 of 1978), "Certificate of Occupancy No. 47, RSG 014140": The term of ninety-nine years commencing from the 1st day of January 1985 was stated as start period of the lease. The boundaries as well as pillar numbers are also contained in the certificate of occupancy.

1993, the Eleme won a new court case and insisted they be sole beneficiary of oil profits and also that the name of the refinery be changed to Eleme Refinery; the change was effected. The decision led to a bloody, deadly, and property-destructive clash. Colonel Dauda Komo, Rivers State Military Administrator at the time, intervened, inviting both communities for dialogue, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the recurrent conflict over boundary dispute. After meeting with leadership of the two communities, the Military Administrator constituted a committee to examine and interpret all court judgments ever made with regard to land dispute between the Okrika and Eleme peoples.⁴⁸⁶ Each community was mandated to nominate a lawyer as its representative on the committee. However, the lack of cooperation on the part of some community representatives and the lackadaisical attitude of government toward committee processes foiled their efforts to find lasting solutions to a persistent, terrible problem. Without proper and sustained mediation from the government, the conflict was bound to resurface sooner rather than later. Indeed, in the next chapter I turn to the way that a recurrence in 1999 of this inter-ethnic territorial conflict between Okrika and Eleme developed through armed youth vanguards in Okrika.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the historical development of intra- and inter-clan conflict in Eastern Niger Delta in the late 19th century up to the discovery of oil in the late 1950s (the late colonial period). The chapter examined the historical formation of settlements in the coastal fringe of the Eastern delta and their social relations with the hinterland settlements before the advent of trans-Atlantic slave trade. It showed how these existing social relations laid the foundation for the trans-Atlantic trade in Eastern Nigerian Delta as well as for intense conflicts as such trade developed. The thrust of the chapter was that the trans-Atlantic trade forced modifications of Eastern delta governance and in the process fostered intra-clan and inter-clan conflicts. Specifically, the change in the house system of governance to the more coercive war-canoe house system – a change instigated by wealthy middlemen and their competition for resources, markets, territory and trade -- created the enabling space for tension, conflict, and violence in and among settlements. For instance, with respect to intra-clan conflicts, disputes over land and fishing rights created bitter feelings between the Okrika and their Kalabari neighbors (two Ijaw clans) for many generations.⁴⁸⁷ The chapter showed that the internal strife bedeviling the Okrika and Kalabari in the contemporary over Amanyanabo (kingship) can be traced to the eighteenth century (precolonial and pre-oil). The transformation of the house system to the war-canoe house, and of the village head (*Amaokosuwei*) to an Amanyanabo (ownership) with the paraphernalia of wealth and power conferred by the trans-Atlantic trade, lie at the root of most internal conflicts in Okrika and Kalabari. Long after the end of trans-Atlantic slave and palm oil trades contradictions and internal dislocations arising from those periods reverberates and are yet to be resolved.

⁴⁸⁶ Abam, A. S, "Memorandum Submitted to the Commission of Inquiry into the Dispute Between Okrika and Eleme," October, 1999.

⁴⁸⁷ Talbot, A. M, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932.

This chapter ends with the arrival of petro-capitalism into the region and shows how the location of a downstream project (an NNPC oil refinery) in a disputed territory rekindled old fires of inter-ethnic conflict between the Okrika and Eleme, leading to the destruction of lives and property. This inter-ethnic conflict, which has over the years defied all possible solutions (though as yet failing to compel any serious action by government toward resolving it), was one of the nodes of the early twenty-first century conflict that engulfed Rivers State. In the second chapter of Part I (chapter four), I address the contemporary rise of violence and militancy in that Eastern Delta locale.

Chapter Four

The Rise of Violence and Militancy in Rivers State (1960-2006)

Before the Second World War, the main energy resource had been coal. Now coal is almost extinct in the fuel world and scientists refer to this era as the oil age. Oil has not only revolutionized the industry but has also made others covet its possessors with the attendant conflicts and aggressions. This is not only true of Nigeria but also of the Middle East countries like Kuwait, Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan. Small though they are, they have attracted world powers up to the point of provoking open blows (Boro, I., *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, p. 62).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the contemporary nodes of conflict in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.⁴⁸⁸ It builds upon my analysis of conflict in the previous chapter and now focusing on how they are articulated in the oil era and the rise of a petro-state. Specifically, I examine the political economy of oil in Port Harcourt and its consequences and pre-1990 processes of addressing legitimate concerns by communities. By the 1990s, failure to tackle community concerns produced contentious relations between oil corporations and oil-bearing communities on the one hand, and oil-bearing communities and the Nigerian state on the other. The chapter will einterrogate Ogoni uprising against corporate rule, youth mobilization (Ijaw Youth Council, IYC) and state violence in Rivers State, and delineate how youth mobilization in Rivers State is complicated by chieftancy tussles, land dispute, party politics, and the arrival and spoils of oil.

The chapter begins with the political economy of oil in Port Harcourt, its consequences on locals and the failed attempts (in the 1970s and 80s) undertaken to draw the State-MNOCs' attention to the people's predicament. The characteristic Ogoni (MOSOP) uprising of the early 1990s against State-MNOCs coalition in Rivers State and its impact on other oil-bearing nationalities in the region. Formation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND) in the wake of Ken Saro Wiwa's execution in 1995, and subsequent galvanization of various incongruent Ijaw groups in the region to form the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) in late 1998 as a youth vanguard. The chapter describes how Alhaji Dokubo Asari and Atake Tom emerged as militant youth leaders from the Kalabari and Okrika flanks of Rivers State, respectively. Conflict between Alhaji Dokubo Asari and Atake Tom turned Okrika and Kalabari into theaters of war. I examine the peace deal/accord of 2004 and, more generally,

⁴⁸⁸ Rivers State, with Port Harcourt as its capital, was as earlier noted one of the twelve states that emerged when the regional political architecture was terminated in 1967 at the inception of the civil war that lasted about thirty months. The population of Rivers State is 5,184,400 (2006 census) and composed of 23 local government areas (LGAs). Spatially, Rivers State is made up of coastal and inland settlements, with Bonny River and the Atlantic Ocean to its southeast. Rivers State stands as the capital of the oil industry and its personnel in Nigeria.

investigate the role of party politics in youth mobilization and crisis generation starting from 2003.

In telling the contemporary Rivers State story, there are overlaps into Bayelsa State (Central Niger Delta) because Bayelsa was part of Rivers State until 1996. This includes the critical role played by the Bundu waterside in Port Harcourt as home to MOSIEND leadership (mainly from Bayelsa) and the hub of Ijaw youth activities at the time. The chapter concludes with an examination of Alhaji Dokubo Asari's arrest in 2005 and the proliferation of militia groups in Port Harcourt.

4.2 The Political Economy of Oil and its Consequences in Port Harcourt, River State

British Colonialists established Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in 1913 (named after Lewis Harcourt, then Secretary of State for the Colonies). It was a port town designed by the colonial administration for the export of raw materials (coal in Enugu, tin and columbite in Jos) from the hinterland to Europe. The Ijaw, Ogoni and Ikwerre inhabit the geographical area called Port Harcourt which became a significant city in the Niger Delta during the colonial era. While the Ogoni and Ikwerre occupy the upland regions the Ijaw are found mostly in the riverside territories of Port Harcourt – upland and riverside dichotomy of the inhabitants.⁴⁸⁹ To date, Port Harcourt stands as the most important modern industrial and commercial center in the Niger Delta and the most significant in the nation's petro-industry.⁴⁹⁰ When crude oil was discovered by Shell-BP (as it then was) in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in 1956, the first commercial shipment was exported to Europe through Port Harcourt in 1958.⁴⁹¹ The locals of Otuasegi (Oloibiri) slaughtered chicken and pumped drinks to celebrate the discovery by Shell-BP and in anticipation of developmental benefits to the community.⁴⁹² A few years after the first

⁴⁸⁹ The upland inhabitants (Ogoni and Ikwerre) are mostly farmers while the coastal (riverside) inhabitants/Ijaw are mostly fishermen. Some of the groups engage in both farming and fishing.

⁴⁹⁰ Port Harcourt is the footprint of the petro-industry in Nigeria, with the visible presence of oil servicing and producing companies such as: Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Chevron, Texaco, ENI-AGIP, TotalFinaElf, Halliburton, Slumberger and the National Liquefied Natural Gas. Oil operations are undertaken offshore and onshore in Rivers State by Shell, Chevron, Exxon-Mobil, ENI-AGIP, Elf, and the Chinese National Oil Company (the Chinese National Oil Company is a new entrant into the oil business in the region). Petro-capitalist activities for the 'black gold' started in Rivers State in the late 1950s. The state is also host to oil export terminals: Eleme and Bonny Ocean Export terminals. In the down-stream sector, Rivers State is host to two refineries, a petrochemical industry, and a fertilizer plant. Through its oil assets located both onshore and offshore, the state contributes very greatly to the socio-economic and political sustenance of the Nigeria federation.

⁴⁹¹ The creation of Bayelsa State in 1996 changed the politics of Rivers State: before the creation of Bayelsa State it was mainly a rivalry of upland versus riverside with the riverside (mainly Ijaw) gaining the upper hand. But since the creation of Bayelsa State, even though the rivalry persists the population has shifted in favour of the upland Ogoni and Ikwerre who are considered as majority (Okowa, W.J., "The Political Economy" in Alagoa, E. J. & Derefaka, A. A., *The Land and Peoples of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Onyoma Research Publications, 2002).

⁴⁹² See *ERAction: Newsletter of the Environmental Rights Action*, January- March 1999; Ken Saro-Wiwa notes the same scenario of celebration in Ogoni when oil was discovered in 1958, "The present unforgettable and unpardonable episode aside, it would be expedient if we look in retrospect into Shell-BP – Dere (Bomu) relations since 1958. In February of that year when we joined the Company in celebrating the discovery of oil in DERE, we thought we were celebrating prosperity, good health, good education, employment opportunities" (Saro-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992, p. 65). However, after two decades of oil exploration and exploitation activities Ken Saro-Wiwa recanted saying, "Bue we know now

export, oil was discovered in settlements around Port Harcourt (Ogoni, Okrika, Kalabari and Ikwerre). Spatially, Port Harcourt was produced through its interconnectedness to the global political economy and the new forms of internal differences.

By the 1970s and 1980s, the political economy of oil started to impacted negatively on oil-bearing settlements in Port Harcourt (Rivers State in general and by extension the region): first, oil has made Port Harcourt attractive to migrants from the rural areas and people from other parts of the country.⁴⁹³ The huge migration into the city has led to increase in rent and thereby created slum spaces in former fishing camps or waterfront settlements where poor migrants who are unable to afford “decent” accommodation reside – the oil economy helped in the formation of a class society (city dwellers/haves and slum dwellers/the have-nots). Second, even though Port Harcourt is the epicenter of the oil industry in Nigeria, it is economically disadvantaged by the centralization of political authority and oil revenues and the conscious and systematic reduction of the revenue allocation principle by successive governments in the federation: the Revenue Derivation and Allocation Principle has been reduced drastically since the inception of oil regime from 100% (1953), 50% (1960), 45% (1970), 20%(1975), 2% (1982), 1.5% (1984), 3% (1992) and to 13% in 1995.⁴⁹⁴ Third, the vexed issue of unemployment/exclusion of locals (indigenes of the Niger Delta) in the oil and gas industry and its domination by the majority ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo). Fourth, the lack of infrastructural development in the Niger Delta compared to other parts (like Lagos, Abuja and Kaduna) where petro-dollars from the region are expended on such developmental initiatives in those regions.

The above contradictions and footprint of the industry (oil spills, land dispossession and pipeline obstructions) generated contentious relations between the Nigerian State and oil-bearing communities on the one hand, and oil-bearing communities and MNOCs on the other. Most communities in Rivers State (which included Bayelsa State at the time) registered their displeasure with the government and MNOCs non-violently: they expressed their anger through petitions to the government and companies, advertisement of grievances in national newspapers, litigation in various courts, sending community delegation to government and MNOCs towards the amicable resolution of problems and engaging in non-violent open demonstrations against acts of injustice.⁴⁹⁵ For instance, one of many petitions sent by the Ogoni to the Governor of Rivers State and Shell-BP in April 1970 catalogued the people’s predicament as follow:

About two decades ago, agriculture was the mainstay of the economy of Ogoni Division. But today, the entire economy of our people has been completely disrupted through the connivance of a nation which seems to have allowed Shell-BP, a purely commercial organization, to enter upon and seize the people’s land at will. So long as the nation gets her royalties, nobody bothers what happens to the poor rural farmer whose land has been expropriated... In the same way, Shell-BP

that we were celebrating our entry into a darkened and oblique horizon of despondency, abject poverty, extinction of our lives and destruction of our crops” (Saro-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992, p. 65).

⁴⁹³ Okowa, W.J., “The Political Economy” in Alagoa, E. J., & Derefaka, A. A., *The Land and Peoples of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*, Onyoma Research Publications, 2002.

⁴⁹⁴ See the “All Ijaw Youth Kaiama Declaration Communique,” December 11 1998.

⁴⁹⁵ Ukeje, C., “Oil Communities and Political Violence: The Case of Ijaws in Nigeria’ Niger Delta Region”, *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13: 4, 2001, pp. 15-36.

destroys cash crops and economic trees without giving adequate compensation to their owners. A few weeks ago, caterpillars of Shell-BP entered into cultivated farms in Bomu area and mercilessly ploughed down acres and acres of cultivated crops: yams, maize, peper, melons, fluted pumpkins, cassava, okro, garden eggs, and other valuable crops.... When Your Excellency recently honored the Division with an extensive tour, you were shown large acres of mangrove swamps that have been destroyed by the periodic out-flow of crude oil into our rivers and streams, which have killed off not only mangrove trees, but fishes and crabs, mudskippers, shell-fishes, etc. on which the livelihood of the poorer people depends.⁴⁹⁶

These processes of addressing legitimate community concerns undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s yielded little or limited positive outcomes. Rather than address the people's concerns Shell-BP in one instance while responding to an Ogoni petition blackmailed the government and revealed its ambition for profit when it said, "the main aim and purpose of an oil company must be to find and produce hydrocarbons as efficiently as possible. This is the area in which it makes a very significant contribution to the overall economic development of any country in which it operates."⁴⁹⁷ All peaceful attempts in the 1970s/80s to draw the government and MNOCs' attention to the deplorable and deteriorating conditions of oil-bearing communities fell on deaf ears. Starting from the early 1990s and after over three decades of failed peaceful avenues to resolve the harsh consequences arising from political economy of oil and gas in the region, the people took to community/ethnic/youth mobilization (self-help) against the State-MNOCs alliance in a bid to attract local, regional and global support. As expected the State-MNOCs alliance brute response to all forms of uprising (legitimate or otherwise) against corporate hegemony in the Port Harcourt region of Eastern Delta produced a violent space. By the 1990s Port Harcourt (and by extension the Niger Delta) became a classic case of indigenous community resistance against corporate rule.

4.2.1 Corporate Hegemony: Ogoni Uprising and its Precursory Template

A new action template for restive oil-bearing communities was conceived, designed and executed in Umuechem, a small oil-bearing settlement in eastern Rivers State. In late 1990, a peaceful protest by the people of Umuechem, demanding from Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) job placement and compensation for years of oil exploration activities on their land, ended in carnage. The people were left with sorrow, anguish, tears, blood, deaths and ruins.⁴⁹⁸ Protesters had nonviolently occupied the community's SPDC facility with a view to making the company yield to their demands. But rather than negotiate, much less yield to the protesters' demands, Shell called in Nigeria's anti-riot police unit. At Shell's invitation, police

⁴⁹⁶ Saro-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992, pp. 45-46. For more petitions from the Ogoni people to government and Shell-BP and responses see Saro-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 51.

⁴⁹⁸ See Human Rights Watch Publication, *The Ogoni Crisis: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southern Nigeria*, New York: HRW, 1995.

stormed the protest scene and dealt ruthlessly with the protesters for daring to stop the flow of oil.

The anti-riot police invited by Shell went on a rampage, brutalizing, beating and shooting the people and razing down houses in the community. By the time the dust settled, more than five hundred buildings had been turned to rubble and eighty bodies of peaceful protesters lay lifeless.⁴⁹⁹ A judicial commission of enquiry instituted by the Rivers State government asserted the defenseless protesters posed no threat and that the police acted recklessly with little or no regard for lives and properties.⁵⁰⁰ All the same, the corporate hegemony of Shell with support from the Nigerian state against citizens of the Niger Delta set the tone for an onslaught on community rights agitators. Little did people in oil-bearing communities of the delta know that government had abdicated its primary responsibility of citizens' security to security of the petro-dollar industry. At Umuechem, a strategy was thus fashioned for how best to deal decisively with legitimate demands of restive oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta. With the emergence of a raft of actions the process was modified by the federal government, from state task force in Ogoni to the establishment of a special regional federal security outfit.

There is a dearth of historiography (either precolonial or colonial) on the Ogoni of the southeast delta. While various sources of migration have been attributed, the Ogoni are said to have settled in the area well before the fifteenth century and established themselves into the six traditional kingdoms of Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Nyo-Khana, Ken-Khana and Tai.⁵⁰¹ As a place, Ogoni is mentioned in colonial literatures either as a trade center servicing the interest of coastal and hinterland settlements or in the context of the people's conflicts with neighbors (especially Okrika) over trade, resources, markets and territory.

Like some Ijaw clans of the western delta fringe – to be examined in chapter five -- conventional historiography amounted to the erasure of non-elite participants in the trans-Atlantic trade (both British and ethnic Nigerian). In western historiography the Ogoni fall into the category of nations that did not play a prominent role in the trans-Atlantic trade; hence, those producing historical narratives passed it over in silence. In the twentieth century, Paul Birabi, a foremost Ogoni elite, educationist and politician, brought the group out of historical silence and championed its development.⁵⁰² Birabi's death in 1953 sent Ogoni into socio-political oblivion again until the emergence of Ken Saro-Wiwa in the 1990s.

Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995) was a writer, businessman and environmental activist who built a campaign protesting ecological damage by oil corporations and seeking a fairer share of the oil wealth for Ogoniland. Most of his works from the late 1960s condemned the activities and actions of oil corporations, that had been operating in the region recklessly without regard to host communities since the late 1950s by virtue of the oil mineral lease (OML) obtained from the colonial government. Following Birabi's example, which was political, Saro-Wiwa built a formidable campaign around troubles associated with the MNOCs operating in Ogoniland.

⁴⁹⁹ For more on the Umuechem massacre, see Human Rights Watch Report, *The Ogoni Crisis: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southern Nigeria*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid,

⁵⁰¹ Saro-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992.

⁵⁰² He was elected into the House of Representatives and pioneer member of one of Nigeria's foremost political parties (NCNC). He founded the Ogoni State Representative Assembly (OSRA).

Contemporary conflicts in Rivers State cannot be delinked totally from the 1990s Ogoni uprising against MNOCs. Even though the crisis today revolves around the government/oil companies' coalition vs. the Ijaw ethnic nationality in Rivers State, the legitimate agitation of the Ogoni was met with brute responses by government and the oil companies that inflamed embers of resistance in Rivers State and even beyond to an unprecedented scale, thereby producing a violence space that is sustained today.

Saro-Wiwa started his advocacy campaigns as a writer. He consistently reflected on the environmental hazards imposed on the Ogoni by MNOCs in Rivers State and throughout the entire Niger Delta, both in books and as a newspaper columnist in Nigeria. His writings drew the attention of local, regional, and national audiences to the environmental despoliation in his native Ogoniland. Okonta described him aptly when he said:

Saro-Wiwa was the quintessential political entrepreneur, deploying a complex mix of communal, class, and civic sentiments to mobilize and delink the Ogoni from Nigeria in order to relink them at more favorable terms, with himself as a key player.⁵⁰³

He moved from pen to practical action with the formation of Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990.⁵⁰⁴ It is a grassroots movement against corporate hegemony in Ogoniland. At first there was silence from the Nigerian state-oil corporations' coalition; hence, MOSOP took steps to globalize its campaign, placing their demand for ecological justice in the international arena through Saro-Wiwa. He shifted his attention to global environment advocacy networks for possible alliance toward realizing justice for the Ogoni.⁵⁰⁵ Saro-Wiwa linked the local Ogoni situation to a wider global transnational environmental advocacy and human rights audience in the style of Greenpeace, The Body Shop, Human Rights Watch and Friends of the Earth International.⁵⁰⁶ His collaboration with global organizations placed the reckless activities of MNOCs in the delta at the center stage of international environment advocacy.

MOSOP embarked on a peaceful mission of non-violent protests aiming to end years of deprivation and eco-terrorism. The climax of MOSOP's mobilization was the development and presentation of an "Ogoni Bill of Rights" (OBR) signed by five out of the six clans making up the Ogoni nation and endorsed by all its elites. The thrust of the OBR is the demand for self-determination and economic empowerment for the Ogoni.⁵⁰⁷ However, at the local level, rather

⁵⁰³ Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008.

⁵⁰⁴ Ken Saro-Wiwa had held appointment positions before now with the federal and state government in various capacities. He served as the Administrator of Bonny during the civil war. The General Badamosi Babangida Administration also appointed him a director of the Directorate of Social Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) in 1987. At the state level, from 1970 - 73 he had been appointed at various times as commissioner for education, information and culture, and lands and housing in Rivers State.

⁵⁰⁵ Saro-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992; Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008.

⁵⁰⁶ Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt*, 2008, *op. cit.*,

⁵⁰⁷ Saro Wiwa, K., *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1995; Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt*, 2008, *op. cit.* The Ogoni Bill of Rights was presented to Nigeria Government in October 1990 as the Ogoni charter of demands.

than boomeranging on the government-MNOCs coalition, the transnational advocacy campaigns exacerbated state militarization of Ogoni and led to the formation of the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force (RSISTF). With the inauguration of a special security task force, people and communities of Ogoni were terrorized daily by security agents. The federal government deployed the task force with logistical support coming from the MNOCs.⁵⁰⁸ Several Ogoni villages were destroyed and many youths murdered as consequence of military task force operations.⁵⁰⁹ In late 1992, MOSOP issued a one-month notice to the oil firms operating in Ogoni to pay royalties, rents and compensation for over three decades of oil exploration on their land/or quit.⁵¹⁰ On January 4, 1993, the Ogoni made good and real their threat to send MNOCs packing through a peaceful mass action with most Ogoni communities participating and about three hundred thousand persons in attendance.⁵¹¹ All clans, villages and hamlets in Ogoni were represented in the mass action in which Shell (the major oil company in Ogoni) was declared *persona non grata*.⁵¹² This mass action led to the shutdown of all oil activities by MNOCs in Ogoniland.

In June 1993 the Nigerian government, with logistical support from Shell, responded to the victory of Ogoni's wretched by deploying soldiers to the area.⁵¹³ The government-oil companies' coalition reasoned that a decisive action must be taken to prevent the audacious mass action by the Ogoni people from being replicated by other oil-rich ethnic nations and to resume oil operations in Ogoni. Instead of dialogue, the government opted for stern coercive actions in Ogoni to meet its global oil commitments.⁵¹⁴ While government deployed brute coercion at the local scene, Shell hired global media consultants to articulate smear campaigns against MOSOP and its leadership so as to create disunity and disaffection.⁵¹⁵

Not long afterward, Saro-Wiwa and the leadership of MOSOP were accused of murder by the Rivers State government after the mob murder of four Ogoni men.⁵¹⁶ The four Ogoni were

⁵⁰⁸ Shell, the major oil company operating in Ogoniland, allegedly procured arms and ammunition and provided financial (in form of allowance) and material (weapons) support for the invading Nigerian military task force that maimed and murdered hundreds and destroyed property in Ogoni (Observer Newspaper, January 28, 1996). Also see a report by the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), *Blood Trail: Repression and Resistance in the Niger Delta*, Lagos: CLO, 2002.

⁵⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, (1999), *The Price of Oil: Corporate Social Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, New York: Human Rights Watch.

⁵¹⁰ Sao-Wiwa, K., *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1992; Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008.

⁵¹¹ Saro-Wiwa, K., *A Month and A Day: A Detention Diary*, London: Penguin Books, 1995.

⁵¹² Ibid, pp. 162-165.

⁵¹³ Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-Determination*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008.

⁵¹⁴ For more on the human rights abuses and destruction in Ogoni, see Human Rights Watch (1999), *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, New York: Human Rights Watch.

⁵¹⁵ Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt*, 2008, *op. cit.*,

⁵¹⁶ The four men killed were founding members of MOSOP. Their names are: Samuel Orage, Edward Kobani, Albert Badey and Theophilus Orage. MOSOP started as an Ogoni elites' political gathering that brought all into the same fold (politicians, civil servants, contractors, businessmen and professionals). With most of the elites relying on government or oil contracts for survival, it was not long before tensions arose. The question of whether to boycott the June 12, 1993 election and participation vs. non-participation in a political process that wasn't addressing the

attacked and killed on May 21, 1994, at Giokoo community at a reception where a mob accused them of betrayal and sell-out. Saro-Wiwa -- who was nowhere near the scene of the incident -- and other leadership of MOSOP were subsequently arrested, detained and tried by a special military tribunal. All those accused except Ledum Mitee (Vice-President of MOSOP at the time) were found guilty and hanged on 10th of November 1995.⁵¹⁷ The execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni leaders, which was orchestrated at the opening day of a Commonwealth conference in Auckland, outraged both the local and global community and was condemned in the strongest of terms. Nelson Mandela, then president of South Africa, called it a “heinous act,” President Bill Clinton (then American President) said it flouted “even the most basic international norms and universal standards of human rights” and former Prime Minister John Major of Britain described the entire process as “a fraudulent trial, a bad verdict, an unjust sentence,” which, he said, “has now been followed by judicial murder.”⁵¹⁸ The global actions and pronouncements that followed the hangings produced a social space of insecurity: increased securitization and human rights abuses in the Niger Delta region with government and MNOCs deploying more troops into the region to quell possible uprising and stoppage of oil production by other ethnic groups in the region. The “judicial murder” of Saro-Wiwa and the leadership of MOSOP was a deterrent move by the government-MNOCs alliance to scare would-be-agitators and transnational environment advocacy campaigners in the Niger Delta. But rather than deter, the action emboldened other ethnic nationalities in the region to agitate for a better deal. Oil transformed Ogoni, produced a local and global movement that in effect fell apart after 1995 as much as due to internal conflicts as external (state) repression but it triggered endless raft of movements in the region.

4.2.2 Ijaw National Congress (INC): Ethnicity to the Rescue

In the 1980s, under a World Bank structural adjustment program, the federal government commenced elimination of state provision of social services with a view to liberalizing the economy for private participation. These measures, together with devaluation, produced dwindling wages and reduced health, education and spending among citizens. The government’s decision to decrease spending on social programs contributed to the scarcity and loss of jobs. With excruciating economic conditions everywhere, the great majority became alienated from the state and questioned its purpose, efficacy and legitimacy. The consequence was the

Ogoni demands as contained in the Ogoni Bill of Rights led to division among the elites, with Saro-Wiwa sticking to non-participation. This led to the sacking of the entire steering committee and conferment of President of MOSOP on Saro-Wiwa, who before then was its spokesman. As President of MOSOP Saro-Wiwa aligned with the mass affiliate organizations of MOSOP that had emerged during the January 4, 1993 massive protest in Ogoni: Federation of Ogoni Women’s Association (FOWA), National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ogoni Teachers Union (OUT), Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP), Council for Ogoni Rights (COR), Ogoni Students Union (OSU), National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS), Confederation of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA) and Council of Ogoni Churches (COC).

⁵¹⁷ For a detailed account of the Ogoni story and uprising see, Okonta, I., *When Citizens Revolt: Nigerian Elites, Big Oil, and the Ogoni Struggle for Self-determination*, Trenton: Africa World Press, inc., 2008.

⁵¹⁸ Kovarik, B., Society of Environmental Journal, Fall 2005, <http://www.radford.edu/~wkovarik/misc/blog/17.wiwa>, viewed June 2010.

manifestation of repressed identities and (re)alignments. Jega captured the identity crisis rightly when he said:

The Nigerian state, under prolonged, and increasingly authoritarian and unpopular rule, came to experience an acute crisis of legitimation, in the context of which national identity became increasingly threatened and undermined, particularly as previously suppressed or relegated identities gained ascendancy. In the circumstances, ethnic, religious, regional, communal and other identities have become central modes of political organization, on account of, as well as aided and abetted by, the actions and/or inactions of the state.⁵¹⁹

In response to the debilitating economic conditions and withdrawal into ethnic enclaves, civil society groups appeared on the Nigerian political scene. A visibly threatened middle class had established such groups with support from the West (first world) to cope with the state's inefficiency. A Marxist oriented middle class as well as former university student leaders who opposed the government's decision on structural adjustment established and/or managed these organizations.⁵²⁰ But before long, divisions along ideological, ethnic and regional lines created irreconcilable differences within the ranks, leading to the establishment of alternative movements by aggrieved individuals.⁵²¹

For instance, in Port Harcourt in 1997, former student activists and civil society leaders established the Environmental Rights Action (ERA), a non-profit advocacy organization. ERA was originally established in 1993 as an Environment Project by the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) in its Benin office, south-south zonal headquarters. Owing to the possibility of independent funding from external sources, ERA was detached from the CLO as an independent ecology advocacy organization few years later.⁵²² They had also established the Chikoko Movement in 1997 as an alternative in case the detachment of ERA from CLO was resisted. The Chikoko Movement was, however, established to serve as a grassroots community mobilization movement following the Ogoni example; civil society movements at first were considered elitist

⁵¹⁹ Jega, A., "The State and Identity: Transformation under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria", in Jega Attahiru (ed.), *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet & Center for Research and Documentation, (Kano: 2000), pp. 25-26.

⁵²⁰ Osuoka, I., "Privatizing Dissent: Community, Civil Society and Contested Hegemonies in Southern Nigeria," PhD Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Graduate Program in Environmental Studies, York University, Toronto, May 2013.

⁵²¹ Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) was the first civil society organization established in 1987, while the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR) was established in 1989. The Campaign for Democracy (CD) was established in 1991 to complement the efforts of the CLO and CDHR. The Democratic Alternative (DA) was established in 1993 as a result of ideological differences that emerged in Campaign for Democracy during the reign of General Sani Abacha. The resolution of ideological differences and coming together of various forces within the Campaign for Democracy (CD) and Democratic Alternative (DA) gave birth to the United Action for Democracy (UAD) in 1997. Interestingly, all these civil society movements continue to exist and complement each other. Today, most have changed from pressure groups to mere NGOs implementing projects and programs of Western donor agencies. The identity crisis has also slipped into some and have since become defenders of sectional, ethnic and/or regional demands.

⁵²² Interview of June 2014 with Omolade Adunbi, a former student activist and Program Officer at CLO during the period. He further states that leadership tussle within the national hierarchy of CLO and the inability of some members from the South-South to be elected into its top echelon may have contributed to the decision by CLO members from the South-South and South-East regions to detach.

and the Chikoko movement sought to link the mass of society as an army of resistance against the ruling hegemony.

During this same period, General Ibrahim Babangida's (northerner) annulment of the June 12, 1993 free and fair election supposedly won by Chief M. K. O Abiola (Yoruba westerner) had thrown the west of Nigeria into chaos. Babangida's truncation of the democratic process and "privatization of public violence" to brutally quell unrest in the west was interpreted as the 'born to rule' mentality of the north.⁵²³ This perceived or real use of state apparatus of coercion against ethnic groups by the ruling hegemony (as in the case of Ogoni in southern and Yoruba in western Nigeria) generated identity crisis in the polity. It rendered the concept of national identity not only unattractive but illegitimate, and made ethnic identity a more appealing and legitimate fortress.

Although economic conditions were tough around the country, it was tougher for citizens of the delta, whose twin primary sources of livelihood (fishing and farming) had been adversely affected by operations of MNOCs. The MNOCs' operations had drastically reduced livelihoods in the region and created a mass of unemployed, idle, angry, hungry and restless youths. In November 1991, the growing army of unemployed youths, socio-economic neglect, and political marginalization in the delta necessitated the formation of an Ijaw socio-cultural body called Ijaw National Congress (INC) at a meeting in Patani.⁵²⁴ The Ijaw, who are balkanized into coastal fringe states of the delta, decided to come together under an umbrella organization to forge a common interest. The body at its inception had a National Co-ordinating Committee, with C. A Dime (from Edo state) as Chairman appointed to steer affairs of the organization.⁵²⁵ Among other things, INC demanded compensation for environmental damage due to oil operation in Ijaw territories and an upward adjustment of the derivation formula to the pre-oil era, which would mean that government would pay a fifty percent as derivation for oil exploration and exploitation activities.

⁵²³ Mbembe, A., *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

⁵²⁴ The Ijaw ethnic group is composed of more than fourteen million people in the Niger Delta region. It is the most populous indigenous ethnic nation in the region and constitutes the fourth largest ethnicity within the geographical borders of Nigeria.

⁵²⁵ As follow-up several conventions were organized in different locations (Kaiama, Arogo, Port Harcourt and Yenagoa), and a constitution was drafted and adopted for the body and executive body to manage affairs of the body appointed during these conventions. Also, Joshua Fumudoh President, Dimini Feberesima (Vice President), F. J Williams (Secretary) and others were elected as first executive members of the body on the dissolution of the National Co-ordinating Committee in 1994.

Figure 17: Incidence of Poverty (% falling below the poverty line) in Niger Delta, 1980-2004

State	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta 45.35 Edo 33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo 27.39 Abia 22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	42.15
Rivers/ Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers 29.09 Bayelsa 19.98

Source UNDP 2006, 58.

INC called upon the Nigerian state to treat the Ijaw fairly, considering their huge economic contribution to the nation. INC's claim is supported by a study published by the sixty-five-member Commission of Nobel Laureates on Peace, Equity and Development in the Niger Delta in December 2006, which states that most of ongoing mining activities and oil and gas reserves in Nigeria's Niger Delta are located in Ijaw territory.⁵²⁶ INC lobbied, petitioned and advocated for fair, just and equitable treatment of the Ijaw people. It advocated for the creation of three Ijaw contiguous and homogenous states (Abayelsa, Toru-Ibe and Oil Rivers State) in the coastal fringe.⁵²⁷ INC assumed a frontline Ijaw advocacy role, fighting for creation of more states and LGAs as legitimate avenues for revenue allocation in order to empower and develop Ijaw territories. In 1994, at the height of the June 12 annulment protests, when all cooptation attempts failed, INC's leadership was intimidated with threats of arrest, detention and possible elimination by the military government.⁵²⁸ In the event that the government made good its threat, INC leadership concluded that it was prepared to make the oil-fields ungovernable; hence, they prepared for a worst-case scenario.

⁵²⁶ For more on the Commission of Nobel Laureates on Peace, Equity and Development in the Niger Delta, see Watts, M., & Kashi, E, (eds.), *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*, Brooklyn: Powerhouse Books, 2008.

⁵²⁷ This demand was borne out of the fact that the Ijaw ethnic nationality in Nigeria had no state of their own (as at 1995); they were balkanized into about six states of the federation, while the other three major ethnic nationalities (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) each have three or more states in the federation at the time. Also, in view of the fact that the Ijaw territory sustains the Nigeria federation economically with its oil deposits that are daily tapped to the benefit of other nationalities through states and LGA allocations. In 1996, General Sani Abacha, President of Nigeria, while announcing the creation of more states and LGA in Nigeria announced the creation of Bayelsa State. This was also the same period Warri South-West and Ese-Odo LGAs were created for Ijaws in Delta and Ondo States respectively. While the Ijaw were pitched against Itsekiri over the LGA creation in Delta, the LGA created in Ondo State drew a violent conflict between Ijaw of Ondo State and Ilaje: the Ilaje had argued that Ijaw were tenants, hence; should not be entitled to political self-rule. The crisis that followed in 1997 and 1998 claimed several lives and destroyed many communities.

⁵²⁸ Joshua Fumudor made this revelation during a two-day Niger Delta Consultative Forum in Lagos, March 31st – April 1st, 2012.

In early 1995, Joshua Fumudor, then-President of INC, sponsored about six hundred Ijaw youths for secret military training at Agadagba bush in Edo state (western delta).⁵²⁹ This was the first non-state actor or militia organized to counteract perceived or real state military repression in the Niger Delta. This military training was specifically designed for the defense of Joshua Fumudor and the rest of INC leadership in case of arrest or attack by the military government of General Sani Abacha.⁵³⁰ The exercise, however, was terminated due to constant federal security's random checks of the training site due to a security tip-off. With threats, intimidation, politicians jostling for positions, contract inducements and cooptation, it did not take long before INC's advocacy campaign for justice began to wane.⁵³¹ But their activities had left an indelible message on the consciousness of Ijaw all over the delta. The message of justice woke Ijaw in the east, central and west delta from their dogmatic slumber and moved them toward taking practical steps to ameliorate their pitiable condition.

4.3 Youth Mobilization and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)

Starting in 1993, Ijaw youths had become apprehensive and were no longer comfortable with mere lobbying, petitioning and what they saw as fruitless advocacy campaigns, all of which INC represented. So, some young men who had keenly followed developments in the polity began to mobilize forces to complement the efforts of INC through direct mass action. It was the paradox of penury amidst petro-wealth, execution of the leadership of MOSOP, the weakness of the INC and the nonchalant disposition of government toward INC's demands that altered the socio-political landscape of the Niger Delta.

Drawing from the Ogoni example, these young men began to organize for possible mobilization against the federal government-MNOCs alliance in the region. Established in 1993, the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), with its base at the densely populated Bundu waterfront in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, became the umbrella body for youth mobilization.⁵³² Timi Kaiser- Wilhelm Ogoriba, leader of

⁵²⁹ Joshua Fumudor made this disclosure during a two-day Niger Delta Consultative Forum meeting in Lagos, March 31st – April 1st, 2012.

⁵³⁰ Ibid,

⁵³¹ For more on INC and its activities, see Nwajiaku, K., "Oil Politics and Identity Transformation in Nigeria: The Case of Ijaw of the Niger Delta", PhD Dissertation submitted to the Department of Politics and international relation, University of Oxford, June 2005.

⁵³² Bundu waterfront, like most other waterfronts in Port Harcourt, is a densely populated slum Ijaw settlement with mostly makeshift wooden buildings. It is a low-income earners' settlement, with a very few middle class amongst them. These are formerly fishing settlements where Ijaw fisherfolks constructed temporary structures to sleep in, in order to carry on their trade of catching fish or trading their catch with willing buyers. They are not planned settlements. However, due to scarcity and the high cost of housing in Port Harcourt, these former fishing settlements now serve as alternative housing corners to low-income earners in the state and beyond. A proposed gentrification of waterfronts in Port Harcourt by the Rivers State government has been vehemently opposed by its Ijaw inhabitants, who stress that it is an attempt by the government to dispossess them of their land and give it to the government's cronies and allies. The government has since denied the allegation, saying its action is due to daily and rampant criminal activities in the waterfront slums around Port Harcourt and the need to develop these areas for decent human habitation. Previous action by the Rivers State government in Amadi-Ama, where a slum settlement was gentrified and distributed to government officials and elites makes the government argument weak and unbelievable to most observers. On October 12, 2009, military men under the service of Rivers State government shot into a

MOSIEND, acknowledged the influence of the Ogoni uprising on the emergence of MOSIEND when he said:

MOSOP succeeded as much as it did because most Ogonis and indeed, many others in oil producing communities in the Niger Delta identified with its objectives. Really, we do not consider the struggle a fight. The consciousness of the generality of the Izon people has been so heightened that we do not expect it to dwindle again until these oppressive laws and tendencies, which have kept our people in sorrow and poverty are abrogated. The perpetrators of this oppression are themselves aware of the dangers imminent. That is to say if the country is still expected to remain together, the contentious issues would be addressed immediately. Nigeria is at a snapping point, we want to remain together but if the otherwise becomes inevitable, the Izons will never, ever regret it.⁵³³

MOSIEND was established by a group of Ijaw men who had been part of INC struggles and were dissatisfied with its leadership's mode of advocacy. Timi Kaiser-Wilhelm Ogoriba, native of Odi in Central Niger Delta and a 1983 Chemistry graduate who was teaching at the International School Port Harcourt, was the leader of MOSIEND.⁵³⁴ Meanwhile, as with its Ogoni forerunner MOSOP, subaltern Ijaw in east and central delta eagerly received MOSIEND's message of liberation:

We found out that the elders in our communities in whose hands we reposed our confidence tended towards a derailment in our march towards a total emancipation of our people. Our group, the Movement For The Survival of The Ijaw Ethnic Nationalities in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), therefore prepared to provide succor for the neglected Izons in the Niger Delta, knowing that what the Federal Government gets from that area by way of resources is what sustains the Nigerian economy without the people of the area getting anything in return. We realize that not getting any part of these resources in return means that we are an oppressed people. No one wants oppression. MOSIEND's objective is to tell the powers responsible for this oppression to stop perpetrating this. If they consider themselves invincible, hegemonic, in the fullness of time, the down trodden, the righteous will take over the earth. The Izons are moving forward, possessing their own possession...For peaceful coexistence, we implore the Nigerian government to recognize that in the comity of nations, everybody is equal. No one is a second class citizen in this country. In view of the many ills visited on the Izons despite the enormous human and natural resources we provide, which have always been

crowd of unarmed protesters in the Bundu waterfront community in an attempt to conduct an enumeration and assess the value of building structures earmarked for demolition. Some people died and several others were wounded. Several human rights organizations have intervened and the matter is currently before ECOWAS court, Abuja and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Abuja.

⁵³³ See Ibiba Don Pedro interview with T. K. Ogoriba on: <http://www.essentialaction.org/shell/mosiendOgoriba>, viewed, June 14, 2014.

⁵³⁴ Ibid,

exploited by the Nigerian government we would not want any further marginalization.⁵³⁵

MOSIEND's initial actions were limited to Port Harcourt, Rivers State. But soon, its mass action against MNOCs was extended to oil facilities mostly in the central delta region. Like Ogoni, heavy security was deployed into Ijaw settlements to quell MOSIEND's mass action and activities against the government-MNOCs coalition. With the deployment of military troops, MOSIEND embraced the *Egbesu* deity as an antidote to military bullets and brutality. *Egbesu* is an ancient religious institution of the Ijaw of the Niger Delta. *Egbesu* is a spiritual defense mechanism of the Ijaw in the event of oppression and warfare.⁵³⁶ Most adherents of this mystical (metaphysical) deity claim its efficacy and powers, cannot be explained in scientific terms. *Egbesu* is the apparent metaphysical deconstruction of scientific knowledge and, at higher scales, the reconstruction and manifestation of the inherent elements of nature beyond scientific explanation. Boro, in his memoir, recorded an encounter between *Kolokuma Egbesu*, and three Nigerian mobile police officers as follows:

During the atrocities, an attempt was made at destroying one of the most respected shrines in the Delta area, the *Egbesu* of the Kolokuma clan. The scepter in the shrine, which had been there for God knows how long, was pulled out and the drums damaged. As this scepter was about to be taken away, darkness

⁵³⁵ Ibid,

⁵³⁶ A variant of this well revered religious institution whose origin or source is yet to be accounted exists in most Ijaw settlements in the delta. For instance, we have the Gbaraun Egbesu, Tarakiri Egbesu, Egbema Egbesu, Kolokuma Egbesu, and Ekeremor Egbesu etc. This shows that different Ijaw clans and communities identify with Egbesu in their locality. Egbesu is considered the highest medium through which the creator (Tamarau, Tamuno, Woyin, etc.) of the Universe is consulted and appeased for the enthronement of justice. It is therefore a medium through which Ijaw communicate with the Almighty creator in their search for knowledge of persons and/or the world. It is believed that Egbesu priests are endowed with supernatural powers to see what the ordinary man cannot. Since the nineteenth century, the practice of Egbesu deity as a traditional religion has been adversely affected by the influx of Colonialism and western religious practices (especially Christianity) into the Niger Delta. However, some pristine community priests and adherents, amidst Christian derogation and western civilization's mockery, have sustained the practice and laws of Egbesu from generation to generation. Also, contrary to claims and insinuations that inscriptions are made on would-be adherents by powerful witchdoctors during secret initiations, Egbesu as an ultimate spirit is imbued in every Ijaw from birth, but its efficacy and manifestation during trouble is dependent on individual's observance of its tenets. It is believed that no harm of man could befall and defeat an Ijaw who observes the rules and regulations of Egbesu, *stricto sensu*. Egbesu is justice personified and demands justice from its votaries at every step taken in life. For instance, it forbids Ijaw from being in the offensive rather than defensive; thus, an Ijaw adherent is considered fighting a just and legitimate war if and only if he/she is on the defensive, such would have the full protection of Egbesu. Those who fault in the tenets of Egbesu, even in the most secret of corners, are liable to punishment by Egbesu except confession is made and cleansing rights of individual concerned are properly performed in line with its beliefs and practices. It is also instructive to note that in its practice, there are roles reserved for both males and females. While the Chief priest is head, he is not the 'know it all' on what is required in the practice of Egbesu deity. It is departmentalized so as to have checks and balances on its practice and use. Similarly, during war, while the young men are on the battle front, the priests are engaged in spiritual warfare back home and women, especially the elderly are to be embedded in *Ogele* procession until the youths are back home safely. Egbesu, however, operates with lesser deities at its service such as Oborowei, Kpokpotin, Amaseikumo, Ekineh, and so on. It is some of these lesser deities whose priests use inscriptions on would-be-adherents during secret initiations.

shrouded the sights of those mobile policemen and they no longer knew their way. Whenever it was replaced, their eyes became clear.⁵³⁷

All three police officers, he claims, drowned in an encounter with his men not long after this incident. In this way *Egbesu* deity served both as a defense mechanism and morale booster to MOSIEND in its bid for membership mobilization. The group was already creating tensions in the streets of Port Harcourt and creeks of the central delta when Bayelsa State was established.

Bayelsa State, created in October 1996 by General Sani Abacha in an attempt to placate the Ijaw, only exposed the injustices perpetrated against them over the years.⁵³⁸ The new state, with abundant oil wealth, appeared virgin with no infrastructural presence – no road, electricity, hospital, water. Even its capital Yenagoa, a stone's throw to Oloibiri where the first drilled oil well in the nation is located, lacked development. Oloibiri, which put Nigeria in the global map of oil exporters in 1956, has been exploited, devastated, ruined, and abandoned.⁵³⁹ By 1996, it had become a poster child for the sad the sad relationship between the government-MNOCs alliance and the host community in the delta. MOSIEND's message of emancipation was enthusiastically embraced by the army of unemployed youths. They had come to realize that they were poor amidst wealth in their land, and that Nigeria's enormous wealth comes from the oil extracted from their backyards. With the creation of Bayelsa State, tensions shifted to Yenagoa. Most youths who had earlier operated in Port Harcourt actually moved from (rural) fishing settlements in the new state. The movement of MOSIEND activities to Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, kept the political temperature of the new state constantly on the high side.

MOSIEND's encounter in 1998 with Navy Captain Olubolade, Military Administrator of Bayelsa State, raised its political profile and the efficacy of *Egbesu* among youths. On June 16, MOSIEND's leader T. K. Ogoriba was arrested in Port Harcourt and transferred to a detention center at Creek Haven Government House, Yenagoa, due to a petition of "profligacy" made by the group against the State Administrator.⁵⁴⁰ On July 20 members of MOSIEND set him free in *Rambo* fashion. Recounting events of his release, Ogoriba notes:

On July 20, some members of my group marched on to Government House, on information that the man they were looking for was there. They divided themselves into four platoons made of 12 people each and stormed Government House. They got to the gate and dislodged the security men, arrested them and took their guns, then headed towards the quarters unharmed. Naturally, security operatives noticing an insurgence will definitely fire to quell it. They fired at these boys but not one was harmed. When the boys got to any of the security operatives, they brought them down and removed their guns without any blood

⁵³⁷ Boro, I. A., (Tebekaemi, T.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, Benin-city: Umeh Publishers, 1982, p. 154.

⁵³⁸ A new state (Bayelsa) was created out of Rivers State. The new state, which is a homogenous Ijaw state occupying the Central delta was the former southern section of Rivers State. Besides Bayelsa, five other states were created: Ekiti, Ebonyi, Gombe, Nasarawa and Zamfara.

⁵³⁹ Oloibiri had become a reference point for oil-bearing communities as the fate that awaits them. Ironically the discovery of first oil well at Oloibiri in 1956 was marked with fanfare. But the community by now had become desolate, poor, polluted and ravaged after years of environmental despoilment by Shell. The aim of MOSIEND, therefore, was to educate and mobilize oil-bearing communities from falling into the 'Oloibiri oil doom.'

⁵⁴⁰ Ibiba's interview with T. K. Ogoriba, *op. ci.*,

spilled. Then, they got to the Milad's (*Military Administrator*) lodge, disarmed the men stationed there and began looking for me without knowing where I was. They ransacked the whole premises and when the guards, guarding their leader (myself) saw the boys approaching where I was incarcerated, they fired at the boys without a single one of these boys being injured. The boys got the people firing at them and locked them up in a room there. By this time, I had come out on hearing noise and commotion. When they saw me they became jubilant and with the guns they had seized from the security operatives, we marched out. Government House, Yenegoa became naked. We marched majestically out of the road and had an *Ogele* procession to the waterfront arranged for boats and went downstream. We went through many towns and finally returned the seized guns to them through Peremabiri, at the police station there. We handed over the guns to the Inspector we met there, one Frank Bassey, who took them to the D.P.O. at Oporoma. It was a miracle. People who were not there may disbelieve but it did happen.⁵⁴¹

By 1996/7, groups such as Supreme *Egbesu* Assembly (SEA) and *Egbesu* Boys of Africa (EBA) had emerged in Central and Western delta respectively. These groups' leaderships, whose closeness to some *Egbesu* priests was never in doubt, led youths to shut-in oil facilities. They mobilized youths on the efficacy of *Egbesu* as demonstrated in their constant confrontations with the military without any bodily harm. This idea, "efficacy of *Egbesu*," was given credence by fears expressed by military men posted to the region and sight of their guns tied with a red or white piece of cloth.⁵⁴² The piece of cloth, the military men believed, would serve as antidote to the powers of *Egbesu*.

When General Sani Abacha created six states including Bayelsa, he also announced the creation of more Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Nigeria. On the south coastal fringe of Ondo state, Ese-Odo LGA with Igbekebo as headquarters was created for Ijaw (Arogbo and Apoi); in Delta State, Warri South LGA with headquarters at Ogbe-Ijoh also was created for Ijaws. Ilaje (Yoruba in Ondo) who termed Ijaw "tenants"/"immigrants" resisted the LGA creation for Ijaw in Ondo state. This led to violent conflict between Ijaw and Ilaje in Ondo state that lasted for several months in 1998 and 1999. Similarly, the relocation of Warri South LGA headquarter from Ogbe-Ijoh (an Ijaw town in Warri) to Ogidigben (an Itsekiri town on the fringe of the Atlantic) after about three months was resisted.⁵⁴³ This also caused a conflagration between Ijaw and Itsekiri in Warri as we shall see in chapter six. There were therefore pockets of ungovernable spaces in the Niger Delta, especially Ijaw territories: Nembe, Port Harcourt,

⁵⁴¹ Ibid,

⁵⁴² Some soldiers the author spoke with in 2011/2012 said the efficacy of *Egbesu* was real and that the piece of red or white cloths tied to their guns was the antidote provided by spiritualists. The military provided the antidote (maybe as a ploy) due to large desertion witnessed among those posted to the region during the period.

⁵⁴³ The LGA created in Warri was changed to Warri South West in 1997 when its headquarters was changed to Ogidigben. These conflicts involving Ijaw and Ilaje on one hand, and Ijaw and Itsekiri on the other, led to the emergence of militia groups. Like MOSIEND in the East and Central delta, these groups also depended on the efficacy of *Egbesu* deity in war with their neighbors. *Egbesu* thus became the unseen mythical force behind Ijaw mass mobilization against the Nigerian state and their estranged neighbors. Militia movements thus emerged in Ijaw territories of the delta: In Ondo they led to the formation of the Arogbo freedom fighters, while in the Warri axis groups such as *Egbesu* Boys of Africa, Fiebagha, and Meinbutu Boys emerged.

Yenagoa, Okirika, Arogo, Gbaramatu, Ogbe-Ijoh and Warri – places of violence against the state-MNOCs coalition and/or between ethnic neighbors. By this time MOSIEND, Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA) and other groups in Central Niger Delta have made Bayelsa State nearly ungovernable by constantly protesting against military high-handedness and need to treat the region fairly. Youth groups' intensified mass action in Ijaw territory had shut-in over two hundred thousand barrels of oil per day in the delta. It was time to blend all these disparate agitations into a coordinated mass action against the state-MNOCs alliance.

Late in 1998, some members of the Chikoko Movement and by extension ERA identified the need to bring all pockets of mass agitations in Ijaw territories under a coordinated regional mass action.⁵⁴⁴ Ijaw groups engaged in mass action in various parts of the delta were consulted and facilitated for a joint meeting of all groups. A conference of all Ijaw youths was thus slated for Kaiama in December 1998. Selection of Kaiama as the venue was due to its geographic centrality: it was equidistant for participants from the far east and west. The Bayelsa State government attempted to stop the process, but by then preparation had gone too far. The next line undertaken by agents of the state was to make the conference a mere gathering/talkshop. The possibility of sabotage was high; to forestall this, when the conference was finally held on December 11, 1998, T. K. Ogoriba and Felix Tuodolo were appointed Chairman and Co-chairman respectively.⁵⁴⁵ T. K. Ogoriba represented the grassroot mass movements and Felix Tuodolo stood in for civil society elite groups.

The Kaiama All Ijaw Youth Conference drew youths from hundreds of communities (east, west and central delta) and from over forty clans stretching over six states.⁵⁴⁶ It also had in attendance about twenty-five representative organizations (*Ogbos*). The All Ijaw Youths' communiqué, which is attached as an appendix, called for the cessation of oil activities until the

⁵⁴⁴ The idea -- like Karl Popper's hypothesis from imagination -- came from Isaac Osuoka, Head of ERA, Port Harcourt, while standing on the balcony of the office at 13, Agudama, Avenue, Port Harcourt, with Felix Tuodolo, then Program Officer of ERA. Isaac, realizing that Felix was Ijaw from the western delta (meaning he could successfully access the western fringe without any problem) and had links to the leadership of MOSIEND, suggested the idea of bringing the various agitations in Ijaw territories towards a common goal. Both pondered the idea and finally agreed that it was achievable if sufficient work were done in the various regions. Other members of Chikoko Movement and ERA (especially Oronto Douglas) were informed of the process and gladly bought into it. At the time T. K. Ogoriba had just become the new darling of Niger Delta for his forced release from Bayelsa State Government House prison by members of MOSIEND. With Ogoriba and MOSIEND occupying the front page of newspapers and headlines, he certainly was the big fish to catch. Visits were paid to his home at the densely populated Bundu waterfront and meetings were held. Based on his position in MOSIEND and their activities, Ogoriba was bestowed with chairmanship of the All Ijaw Youth Conference in Kaiama. He agreed to the idea and also pledged to reach out to other Ijaw groups and raise funds from AGIP oil company so as to make the event a success. Whether or not the funds were raised cannot be verified, but it is on record that funds for the program came from ERA members and some Ijaw in Diaspora who whole-heartedly supported the idea of an Ijaw youth conference.

⁵⁴⁵ Isaac Osuoka, the first PRO of IYC and one of the initiators of the conference, revealed this information to the author in an interview conducted via skype from his base in Toronto, Canada in September 2013. There were dissenting youth groups who opposed the meeting in Kaiama and did not attend. A body whose interest, they claimed, is national, regional and sometimes global would not properly address their local and specific problems. However, after the conference in Kaiama some of these groups were absorbed into the body.

⁵⁴⁶ The Kaiama Declaration, Communiqué of the All Ijaw Youth Conference held on December 11, 1998 at Kaiama. The conference was also attended by non-Ijaw activists who were in solidarity with Ijaw youths.

question of ownership and control of resources was determined.⁵⁴⁷ The communiqué ended with attendees agreeing to set up the “Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) to coordinate the struggle of Ijaw peoples for self-determination and justice.”⁵⁴⁸ Like the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the central message of the Kaiama conference was express demand by the youths for indigenization of resources and autonomy for Ijaw in a united Nigeria. Structurally, what emerged from the conference was a seven-man collegiate leadership for the body.⁵⁴⁹ It was not until late 1999 at a convention in Abonnema, Rivers State, after the dissolution of the collegiate leadership, that an executive committee was inaugurated for the IYC.⁵⁵⁰ With the formal inauguration of an executive council in Abonnema, the conference in Kaiama was crystallized.

The first IYC Executive Council was composed of: Felix Tuodolo (President), Alhaji Dokubo Asari (Vice President), Kalsuo Didi (General Secretary), Isaac Osuka (Public Relations Officer), Miabiye Kurimiema (Treasurer) and Oboko Bello (mobilization Officer); Oboko Bello and Alhaji Dokubo Asari were appointed into the executive council in absentia. Alhaji Dokubo Asari, who became Vice-President, was not at the inaugural meeting in Kaiama. He joined the group after the youths’ Declaration and stand had been made public. Alhaji Dokubo Asari joined with his Kalabari Ijaw relatives of Rivers State through the intervention of Dr. M.T Akobo at a successive meeting held in Bomadi, Delta State. Alhaji Dokubo Asari had complained to Dr. Akobo that Kalabari was being excluded from the All Ijaw Youth gathering. Some members of the collegiate leadership, who were accosted by Dr. M. T. Akobo, responded to the allegation saying that all Ijaws were welcomed into the fold, but that no Ijaw would be invited to be part of a Youth group that aims to steer the ship of Ijaw nation. It was a voluntary organization open to every Ijaw Youth desirous of change. Therefore, if Alhaji Dokubo Asari was satisfied with what was done in Kaiama he was welcome, as was his Kalabari kith and kin. After this intervention Alhaji Dokubo Asari mobilized his Kalabari folks and joined the IYC. Oboko Bello of FNDIC from the Warri axis was also appointed Mobilization officer in absentia for the sake of accommodating the Western fringe into the new executive body.

IYC established Western, Eastern and Central zonal structures.⁵⁵¹ The birth of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) did not only change the political space but also produced tidal waves in the creeks and estuaries of the delta. IYC introduced a system of mobile parliament as a general assembly of all Ijaw youths meeting in Ijaw settlements. Mobile parliaments as IYC general assembly was moved from one zone to another for fairness and inclusiveness. Through Mobile Parliaments, IYC conscientized communities and admitted new entrants into its fold; for example international, regional, national and local issues as they affect the Ijaw people were

⁵⁴⁷ The Kaiama Declaration Communiqué, 11 December 1998.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid,

⁵⁴⁹ Those appointed into the collegiate leadership were: T.K Ogoriba, Oronto Douglas, Felix Tuodolo, Kingsley Kuku, Oweinanabo, Bedford Abule and Isaac Osuka. The seven-man collegiate leadership managed subsequent meetings and admittance into the fold.

⁵⁵⁰ Even though not all sections were well represented in Kaiama for the conference the first IYC Executive Council was composed to reflect and accommodate Ijaw in the eastern, central and western regions.

⁵⁵¹ The Eastern zone comprises Ijaw in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States; Central delta is made up of Bayelsa State and the Engenni (border communities between Rivers and Bayelsa States) axis of River state; while Western delta comprises Ijaw in Delta, Edo and Ondo States. The zones were to coordinate, oversee and protect interests of the Ijaw at the local level, while a National Executive body was to coordinate the activities of the zones and respond to national, international and regional issues.

discussed at mobile parliament meetings. Elders and politicians in Ijaw land made several earlier attempts to subvert the declaration and persuade the youths not to engage in any form of direct mass action against the state. But such attempts were vehemently resisted by youths, who daringly told the elders and politicians to stay clear from an impending mobilization or be consumed by the fire of youth anger.⁵⁵² All efforts to use Ijaw elders and politicians to thwart the youth program of action failed. The government-MNOCs coalition therefore intensified military action against Ijaw youths. The government deployed battalions of Nigerian military with both light and heavy arsenal to the streets of Ijaw towns.⁵⁵³ There was a complete focus of government military action on Ijaw youths in the region.

After the December 11 Kaiama Conference, IYC called for a ten-day (January 1-10, 1999) *Ogele* mass action and “operation climate change” by Ijaw youths.⁵⁵⁴ On December 30, 1998 a peaceful *Ogele* mass action of over two thousand youths was attacked by federal military troops in Yenagoa. The attack left three people dead, many wounded and several others arrested.⁵⁵⁵ Attack on another protest demanding release of the arrested led to federal troops’ murder of two more. Similar attacks and murder of youths were recorded during the *Ogele* and “Operation Climate Change” mass actions in Ijaw communities of Mbiama, Port Harcourt, Warri, Bomadi, Oloibiri, Kaiama and Patani.⁵⁵⁶ In early January 1999, soldiers from the Chevron military base in Escravos razed two Ijaw oil-bearing settlements (Opia and Ikenyan) in Delta State. Many villagers were murdered in the operation, where Chevron helicopters and speedboats were used to convey the Nigerian military. Even women were not spared; a women’s protest against military brutality in the Niger Delta organized in Port Harcourt was tear-gassed and several protesters were beaten, wounded and tortured. Many Ijaw youths were summarily executed on being tagged an “*Egbesu Boy*” by federal military troops. By 1999, the situation had

⁵⁵² For more on the intrigues after Kaiama Conference see, Osuoka I., “Contested Hegemonies,” *op. cit.*; Also, in an interview with the author, Osuoka said that on multiple occasions the youths were invited to meetings with elders and politicians in Ogbia and Port Harcourt. The elders and politicians were not comfortable with the Kaiama declaration and position of the Youth group. Similarly, individual Ijaw leaders also appealed to the youths to jettison the views expressed in the Kaiama Declaration for a more liberal approach. The principled position of the youths in all these meetings and threats prevented the elders involved from going public in condemning the Kaiama Declaration. When the elders saw the passion and determination of the youths to defend the declaration, they started to endorse and embrace the letters of the Kaiama conference. In response, some of those with vested interests both personal and sectional, found their political ambition (even their political survival) threatened by the very idea and letters of Kaiama All Ijaw Youth Conference.

⁵⁵³ For instance, the streets of Yenagoa, Mbiama, Bomadi, Patani, Warri, Kaiama and parts of Port Harcourt were completely militarized.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ogele* is an Ijaw mass action, which involves drumming, singing and dancing to attract the attention of society/general public to events in a community or society in general, while ‘operation climate change’ was attempt to connect local environmental issues as they affect the Niger Delta to global climate issues - disruptive impacts of global climate as a consequence of MNOCs operations. Thus, the *Ogele* mass action aimed to bring the message of Ijaw Youths at Kaiama to the various communities. It was also an introduction of the non-violent civic action by Youths using a traditional method.

⁵⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch reports on the Niger Delta (1999), “Crackdown in the Niger Delta”, New York: Human Rights Watch; see also, International Crisis Group report, “The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria’s Niger Delta Unrest”, August 2006.

⁵⁵⁶ For more on the military killings, see Human Rights Watch reports on the Niger Delta (1999), “Crackdown in the Niger Delta”, New York: Human Rights Watch; see also, International Crisis Group report, “The swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria’s Niger Delta Unrest”, August 2006.

degenerated to the extent that during the transition to civil rule, elections could not be conducted in Bayelsa State and some Ijaw territories due to youth unrest in Nigeria.

General Sani Abacha's death in 1998 and the democratic transition initiated by his successor General Abdulsalami Abubakar gave some glimmer of hope for the Niger Delta quagmire. President Olusegun Obasanjo's May 1999 election ended decades of military dictatorship in Nigeria. Civil rule was expected to give Nigerians a voice and open up the democratic space for citizens' participation. But a few months into civil rule, hopes of resolving the Niger Delta question were dashed. Participatory democracy corrupted youth mobilization and deepened the Niger Delta crisis in weaponry sophistication and dimension.

4.4 Civil Rule: Democratic Repression and its Discontents

In Nigeria, civilian rulers took over from military dictators on May 29, 1999. The elections produced Olusegun Obasanjo (a retired military general and former head of state, 1976-79) as President, while in the delta Peter Odili, D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha and James Igbori emerged as Governors of Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States respectively.⁵⁵⁷ The Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) victory in the Niger Delta States was very marginal in number of votes in 1999. Even so, the termination of military rule and emergence of democratic space were expected to attract good, effective and responsive governance. Instead, political corruption, cronyism, tribalism, political repression and electoral fraud undermined Nigeria's budding democracy.

In the delta, there was guarded optimism that the crisis would be resolved democratically. Some discussions facilitated by General Abdulsalami Abubakar between President-elect Olusegun Obasanjo and leadership of the Ijaw and Ogoni to end the crisis did not show any positive outcomes. The President-elect had his mind set on a particular resolution to the crisis. In this respect, after a meeting with the President-elect, Ledum Mitee (President of MOSOP at the time) expressed his frustration, saying:

I went away believing that our struggle has just started. I was disappointed. I thought here was a chance to dialogue, to give Obasanjo first-hand information because sycophants and all kinds of advisers moved in. I thought there was a chance to resolve the Niger Delta problem peacefully. I was wrong. The President was not with us; he had all the solutions.⁵⁵⁸

Immediately upon being sworn into office, President Olusegun Obasanjo deployed more federal military troops into the delta. Barely six months into the democratic dispensation, precisely on November 20, 1999, an oil-bearing community (Odi) in Bayelsa State was razed. More than two thousand people, mainly women and children, were murdered by Nigerian

⁵⁵⁷ The elections were rigged in favor of Olusegun Obasanjo and the ruling PDP candidates in the Niger Delta. Also in most Riverside communities, there were no election materials or electoral officers, due to restiveness; results were clearly fabricated. See Human Rights Watch report, "Crackdown in the Niger Delta" (1999).

⁵⁵⁸ Ledum Mitee, quoted in, *Blood Trail: Repression and Resistance in the Niger Delta*, Lagos: CLO, 2002.

military troops on the orders of the President.⁵⁵⁹ The rationale for military action in Odi was the alleged killing of nine police officers by a youth gang. In fact the youth gang had been used by the ruling party (PDP) during the 1999 elections as political thugs to rig elections in its favor.⁵⁶⁰

President Olusegun Obasanjo wrote to the Governor of Bayelsa State, D.S.P. Alamiyeseigha, threatening a state of emergency within fourteen days if the culprits were not apprehended and punished. Before expiration of the ultimatum, President Obasanjo ordered federal military troops into the community to unleash terror and havoc on inhabitants. A few days after the military invasion, retired Major General T.Y. Danjuma, then Minister of Defense, revealed that the action had been taken to protect oil installations in the territory.⁵⁶¹ Also, Femi Fani-Kayode, an aide of President Olusegun Obasanjo, justified the military onslaught on communities in the Niger Delta and specifically the massacre at Odi, saying:

...when we need to be hard, we have been very hard. We were very tough when it came to Odi town where our policemen and our people were killed by these ethnic militants. And the federal government went in and literally leveled the whole place. And the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It has never happened again since that time. So, I think that policy works.⁵⁶²

While the federal government drafted military troops to curtail restiveness in Delta oil communities, state governments and local politicians dangled carrots to lure restive youths and thereby gain political capital. To acquire political capital, elected officials -- especially from the delta -- struggled to gain the trust, goodwill and support of influential youths in IYC and other groups in the region. Political elites were caught between supporting the federal government's military action against IYC and other youth groups and then invariably wane in their political capital at the center or, conversely, inducing such groups with contracts, cash and favors and be classified as "true leaders of the region." The latter was favored by the region's political elites as the means to sustain PDP's grip on Niger Delta States (and as we shall see in Part II this co-optation strategy was not possible in the west). Therefore, rather than implementing social and development programs, politicians emphasized maintenance of IYC and other targeted youth groups' attention as a major political accomplishment. Okonta was alluding to this scenario when he said:

⁵⁵⁹Environmental Rights Action, "A Blanket of Silence: Images of the Odi Genocide", Lagos: ERA, 2002, p., 2. See also, Human Rights Watch Report, "Update on Human Rights Violations in the Niger Delta", December, 2000.

⁵⁶⁰Ken Niweigha, who led the gang, was a native of Odi town in Bayelsa State and was killed at Odi in May 2009. The group was promised jobs and other benefits by their political sponsors. But immediately after the elections they were abandoned and chased out of Yenagoa (the State capital) by policemen for intimidation and harassment of innocent persons. They relocated to Odi, the community of their leader. The community petitioned the commissioner of police due to the criminal activities of this group, but nothing came out of their action. When crisis broke out in 1999 between the Yoruba militia, O'dua Peoples Congress (OPC) and Ijaw in Lagos, this group was alleged to have mobilized for the defense of Ijaw in Lagos. This allegation caused the commissioner of police to send nine police officers to Odi to investigate the charge. The police team was led by a Yoruba police officer, Thomas Jokotola, who had led the operation that chased the group out of Yenagoa. The police officers were taken hostage and murdered by the group in retaliation for the police action against them in Yenagoa.

⁵⁶¹Ibid,

⁵⁶²Femi Fani-Kayode quoted in International Crisis Group, "Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unrest," Africa Report, No. 115, Dakar: ICG, August 2006, p. 7.

Prominent members of such civic groups as the Ijaw Youth Council were lured with promises of cash and government contracts and made to work for the governors of the various Niger Delta States as enforcers and thugs. Indeed, the metamorphosis of political activism in the delta region from non-violent advocacy to armed insurrection is partly explained by the deliberate infiltration of their ranks by government and oil company agents, thereby narrowing the civic options of those who refused to be co-opted. In desperation, elements of the latter group embraced the AK47 to seek redress.⁵⁶³

Political capital thus was construed as the ability to rally support of identified leadership of IYC and militant youth groups while staying out of their hair. To maintain political order and get things done, governors curried the favour of their state's IYC elements and/or youth groups. The political capital of a Niger Delta governor at the local and national levels was contingent on his ability to maintain peace and prevent youth mass action in his state and beyond. Politicians in the region out-bid one another for access to youth groups in order to: scare political opponents, assure the federal government, oil industry and global community that the youth have their ear, portray a sense of security that things are in order, and enhance their wobbly political career. Governors Peter Odili and D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha (east and central delta) fought tirelessly for control of the soul of IYC. In Warri (western delta), the leadership of *Egbesu* Boys of Africa (EBA) were awarded state and federal government logistic contracts, while some other groups received monthly state allowances to keep the peace. In Bayelsa (central delta), at various times notable members of IYC and MOSIEND were appointed to government positions.⁵⁶⁴ A development agency, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) established in 2000 for the region, compromised groups and IYC leaders on behalf of the federal government. For instance, the NDDC gave jobs to some IYC youths, and co-opted other youths/groups with vehicles or contract awards.

Before then, Governor Peter Odili of Rivers State had created disunity within IYC during a struggle with his Bayelsa State counterpart for IYC's control. However, he found a willing ally for his efforts to factionalize IYC in Alhaji Dokubo Asari. He similarly raised Ateke Tom as part of the political machine from the Okrika fringe in order to secure electoral victory. It was Governor Peter Odili who produced Alhaji Dokubo Asari and Ateke Tom from the Kalabari and Okrika flanks of Rivers State, respectively, to ensure his reelection bid and destabilize IYC as a movement. The rise of this duo in the post-1999 transition to civil rule earned Rivers State (Eastern Niger Delta), an insurgency space in the global map of conflict.

⁵⁶³ Okonta, I., "Behind the Mask: Explaining the Emergence of the MEND Militia in Nigeria's Oil-Bearing Niger Delta," Pambazuka News, 2006.

⁵⁶⁴ Alamieyeseigha appointed T. K. Ogoriba as Chairman, Bayelsa State Transport Corporation; he also made Azibaolanari Nelson and/oronto Douglas, two notable members of IYC, Commissioners in his cabinet. The leadership of IYC and civic movements were thus compromised by political elites for political capital.

4.4.1 *The Rise of Asari*

Rivers State Ijaw clans, especially Okrika and Kalabari, were not visible at the All Ijaw Youth Conference in Kaiama.⁵⁶⁵ Most Kalabari and sometimes Okrika youths did not consider themselves Ijaw before now. To these youths Kalabari and Okrika were distinct ethnic groups. For example, at the State-owned University (Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt) where an All Ijaw socio-cultural organization, National Association of Ijaw Students (NAIS) existed, Kalabari and Okrika youths had opted out and formed different bodies (for instance, the National Association of Kalabari Students (NAKS), to differentiate themselves from the Ijaw. Those considered Ijaw are the clans in Central and Western delta. Dr. M. T. Akobo,⁵⁶⁶ shortly especially after the Kaiama conference, advised and encouraged Alhaji Dokubo Asari⁵⁶⁷ to organize and incorporate Kalabari clan youths in Rivers State into the IYC fold. Asari, who was in his late thirties at the time, took the task seriously and mobilized Kalabari clan youths under the IYC umbrella body. Alhaji Dokubo Asari, a Kalabari and son of a former High Court Judge, the late Melford Goodhead from Asaritoru LGA, Rivers State, was not at the inaugural meeting of the All Ijaw Youth Conference in Kaiama. He completed his early education in Port Harcourt. He mobilized the army of unemployed Kalabari youths and attended IYC mobile parliaments in Ijaw settlements. Soon, Asari became the most influential member of IYC from not only Kalabari, but the entire Eastern region.⁵⁶⁸ Asari's participation and activities brought visibility to the IYC in the Kalabari clan and Port Harcourt.

Late in January 1999, Asari's influence and vocal support of the IYC principles earned Minama, a Kalabari town, the privilege of hosting the first mobile parliament to be held in Rivers State. Afterward, Asari continued to mobilize Rivers State youths against the activities of government and MNOCs in Kalabari settlements and Port Harcourt. As the nerve center of the petroleum industry in Nigeria, mass actions against operations of MNOCs in Rivers State posed a great threat to the industry. Asari's capacity for youth mobilization and consistent mass actions made him the symbol of IYC in Rivers State. It was no surprise, therefore that in late 1999 he emerged from the IYC inaugural election held in Abonnema, a Kalabari settlement in Rivers State, as vice-president.⁵⁶⁹ The position consolidated Asari's influence on IYC in Rivers State

⁵⁶⁵ However, the elderly, scholars and historians of the delta amongst the Kalabari and Okrika identify with the Ijaw ethnic group as their home. Some of these elders had participated actively in the activities of INC during its reign; e.g., Dr. Feberesima of Okrika was the first Vice President of INC.

⁵⁶⁶ Dr. M. T. Akobo is a Kalabari and a trained medical practitioner. He was appointed Minister of Petroleum during Olusegun Obasanjo's reign as Head of State of Nigeria in the 1970s. Dr. Akobo has always identified himself and Kalabari clan as members of the Ijaw ethnic group.

⁵⁶⁷ He attempted law degree programs at two Nigerian Universities – University of Calabar (1985-88) and Rivers State University (1988-90). At the University of Calabar, he was a member of the Leninist/Marxist Movement and Movement for Progressive Nigeria. He converted to Islam in 1988 while at the University of Calabar, convinced that the tenets of Islam suited his nature and aspirations in life. He was a member of MOSIEND from 1995 under T.K. Ogoriba. He had served the movement in various capacities including Election Secretary and Chairman.

⁵⁶⁸ Osuoka, I., *Contested Hegemonies*, 2013, *op. cit.*,

⁵⁶⁹ Rivers state was well represented in the first IYC executive council – four out of the nine clans in Rivers State had representatives in the executive body due to their active participation. Aside from Alhaji Dokubo Asari (Kalabari clan), other Rivers State youths who served at the inaugural executive council of IYC include: Kalsuo Didi (General Secretary, from Bonny), Isaac Osuoka (PRO, from Engenni) and Miabiye Kuromiema (Treasurer, from Okrika). At this point, even though the west participated in the Kaiama conference they saw their struggle (demand for political citizenship) as distinct from the general agitation against oil corporations in the region. The

and beyond – his reachout to youth groups, individuals and elders on the need to support IYC and its programs against the state-oil corporations’ alliance in the region. As vice-president and most senior executive member of the youth group from the east, he became the *de facto* leader of Ijaw youths in the Niger Delta. The unemployed, hopeless and vulnerable youth following Asari, whose energy was channelled towards compromising the MNOCs’ activities of MNOCs, multiplied geometrically. He attracted scores of Ijaw youths who were willing to do his bidding – creating a cult-like IYC following around himself.

After the 1999 election politics, Asari and his teeming IYC followers’ mass mobilizations drew local, national and global attention to the pitiable condition of Ijaw people, and deeply embarrassed the government. Scenes of young men dancing *Ogele* in the streets, creeks and Ijaw villages and compromising oil operations were broadcast around the world. It generated severe alarm in government circles and MNOCs’ boardroom meetings around the world. With oil rigs, platforms and flow-stations overrun by youths, it was very evident that the federal government’s military strategy was making negligible impact. At this point, most governors of the delta had adopted the youths’ slogan of “resource control” and pretended to be “advocates” of social justice. From this vantage point they gained entry into the IYC and access to its members.

Some governors identified vocal IYC members from their own states and developed working relationships with them. Thus, beginning in 2000, Asari and the Governor of Rivers State developed an intimate working relationship. Governor Peter Odili funded and patronized Asari’s activities in the Kalabari clan and as IYC vice-president. The governor awarded security contracts to Asari to keep the Kalabari waterways free of sea pirates and criminals.⁵⁷⁰ Asari had a warm relationship with the governor which enabled him to maintain his coterie of followers and family. The Rivers State Commissioner for Information at the time, Magnus Abe, corroborated this when he said, “Asari worked with us before the 2003 election.”⁵⁷¹ Asari also maintained close ties with, and had funding from, Timi Alaibe, a director with NDCC.⁵⁷² He therefore, like some others from Bayelsa and Delta States, enjoyed patronage from the government of Rivers State and the federal agency.

In 2001, with an election cycle around the corner, Peter Odili sponsored Asari in a factionalized election to become the President of IYC. The Rivers State government provided not only a venue (Rivers State civic center) and funds for the election, but also security men to facilitate his emergence as President. While Asari’s faction of the IYC were declared executives

anger of the west was yet to be totally directed against the state-oil company alliance but to their Itsekiri neighbors who they believe deprived them of a LGA.

⁵⁷⁰ Osuoka, I., *Contesting Hegemonies*, 2013.

⁵⁷¹ See Human Rights Watch, “Testing Democracy: Political Violence in Nigeria”, April 2003.

⁵⁷² The Niger Delta Development Commission was established by an act of parliament after President Olusegun Obasanjo refused to sign the Act into law. An Act of Parliament then passed it into law in 2000. It is established as a development agency to facilitate and execute development projects in the nine oil-bearing states in the South-South region of Nigeria. It is to receive funding from the government and a levy from the oil multinationals operating in the region. Since its inception, the agency has been bogged down by political bickering and has been starved of funds by the federal government and oil companies in the region. Timi Alaibe, an accountant by profession, indigene of Bayelsa State and former banker turned politician was the first Director of Finance and Administration of the agency. He was later made the Managing Director of NDCC and thereafter was appointed Special Adviser on Niger Delta Affairs and Chairman Presidential Committee on Amnesty to President Ya’Adua. He left in 2010 to contest election for Governorship of Bayelsa and lost the party’s ticket to Seriake Dickson.

for the body with Asari as President, the other faction inaugurated a Caretaker Committee, with Oboko Bello from the west as chairman.⁵⁷³ From then on Asari, who asserted himself as IYC president, started working with Peter Odili toward helping the governor achieve his political ambitions. The duo had a cordial relationship, with Asari promising to mobilize youths and communities for Peter Odili's re-election as governor of Rivers State in 2003.⁵⁷⁴ Recognizing that his task of being returned to governor was herculean, Peter Odili identified and incorporated Ateke Tombari (popularly called Ateke Tom) into his 2003 re-election project, independent of Asari. Ateke Tom came from the Okrika corner of Rivers State, and Governor Peter Odili had previously been defeated there by the opposition party (All Nigerian Peoples' Party, ANPP) with Sergeant Awuse as their governorship candidate. With these steps Governor Peter Odili was returned as governor of Rivers State in an election marred with monumental irregularities. But not long after the election, the friendship between Asari and Governor Odili went sour. The post-2003 election conflict between Asari and Ateke was further deepened by deterioration of relations between Asari and Governor Odili in Rivers State.

4.4.2 The Rise of Ateke Tom

Unlike Asari, the emergence of Ateke Tom as a militant in the Okrika fringe of Port Harcourt, Rivers State cannot be directly linked to IYC. Even though his appearance could be remotely traced to IYC, he was never a creation of that body, never an active member of IYC or its affiliate organizations in the Okrika clan. Ateke first emerged as the "saviour" or "hero" of Okrika, but was influenced by political and chieftancy squabbles (discussed in a succeeding section of this chapter) that turned him into a renegade and then an insurgent militant in Okrika.

In February 1999, the first IYC mobile parliament in Okrika clan was held at Bolo community. The meeting was held successfully, without a hitch. At the Bolo parliamentary session, for purposes of effective mobilization, IYC collegiate leadership formally inaugurated the IYC Okrika clan chapter. By this inauguration, Okrika youths were officially welcomed into IYC fold. After the IYC mobile parliament, some Okrika mainland youths inaugurated the Mainland Youth Development Union (MYDU) established as a platform to demand employment and other available opportunities for Okrika youths from companies whose operational bases were in the area. The group was led by Abiye Alatoru who himself was unemployed. In late September, MYDU wrote to the Management of Eleme Refinery demanding full-time employment or casual work for Okrika mainland youths in ongoing "turn-around maintenance"

⁵⁷³ The IYC itself became fractured due to allegiance to politicians, with some of the leaders sliding towards D.S.P Alamiyeseigha, Governor of Bayelsa State, others looking up to Rivers State politicians, and still others junketing from one politician to the other in the region – this is the origin of the fragmentation of the first generation leadership of the IYC. Observers in the region attributed the scene to greed. In the midst of this drama, there were youths who remained resolute, principled and committed, and had no dealings whatsoever with the political class in the region but concentrated on their global west-funded NGO business.

⁵⁷⁴ Alhaji Dokubo Asari's testimony before the Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Port Harcourt. The Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inaugurated in November 2007 by Governor Rotimi Amaechi barely a month after taking his oath of office as Governor of Rivers State. The Commission was mandated to find a lasting solution to the spate of violence and militancy that had pervaded the state. Justice Kayode Esho, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, was chairman of the Commission.

(TAM) at the Refinery. But the company did not respond to the letter, nor did it employ any Okrika youth in the TAM process that was being carried out. The company's silence prompted early in October 1999 Abiye Alatoru to lead over a hundred Okrika mainland youths to the Eleme refinery gate for a peaceful protest to its management. The Okrika youths non-violently barricaded the refinery gate and promised to remain there until their demand for employment was met. This action did not sit well with Eleme youths, who thought the Okrika action was threatening to a facility located in their territory. Eleme youths requested the Okrika youth to dismantle their barricade and vacate the premises of the refinery, given that it was located in Eleme territory. Okrika youths defied the order insisting that as "landlords" they are stakeholders in the refinery. The refusal to vacate the refinery premises infuriated Eleme youths and violent conflict ensued. An Okrika youth was shot (he died later) and many more wounded. This youth action and reaction rekindled the old boundary conflict between Eleme and Okrika, and inspired a full-scale inter-ethnic conflict.

In what followed between Eleme and Okrika, all institutions (political and traditional) in Okrika contributed to the prosecution of the inter-ethnic conflict.⁵⁷⁵ All of Okrika was united in the fight to defend a common cause (namely, its territorial claim) and to make sure they got a fair share of the refinery proceeds as hosts. The conflict was in one sense traceable to the recurring land squabbles between the two ethnic groups that I discussed previously.⁵⁷⁶ But the immediate cause could be attributed to economic and employment demands by Okrika mainland youths. In the course of the conflict, Okrika acquired an organized regiment of youth combatants from the two pristine mainland settlements, Tuboniju and Koniju. Like their Eleme counterparts, Okrika combatants were sponsored and armed by the elites of Okrika.⁵⁷⁷ It is also rumoured that funding support for Okrika fighters came from the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP)-controlled LGAs under the prompting of the traditional authority.⁵⁷⁸ The Okrika youth warriors, led by Felix and Sunny Opuambe prosecuted the inter-ethnic war under the name "*Piribiapu*"⁵⁷⁹ (meaning "Bush-boys"). Many persons were killed from both ethnic groups in aggressive acts mostly orchestrated under the cover of darkness.

⁵⁷⁵ While the Okrika political elites (especially at the LGAs) contributed monetarily to the prosecution of the war the Okrika Traditional Council of Chiefs mobilized material and human resources in various communities to defend Okrika against their Ogoni neighbors. The Eleme (Ogoni) equally deployed all available political, economic and social resources to fight the Okrika. The Eleme were united and insisted that Okrika do not have a stake in the refinery and should not be considered for employment or contracts.

⁵⁷⁶ The Okrika claim that the refinery is situated between the two ethnic groups and on land owned by Eleme and Okrika as indicated in the certificate of title No. EN 1095/64-65 issued by the Rivers State Government to NNPC. Okrika believe that as a host community they have as much right as the Eleme to benefit from the refinery's social corporate responsibility actions.

⁵⁷⁷ This was a major entry point of arms into the hands of Okrika youths in Rivers State. On the other side, Eleme youths were also well armed, by the Ogoni ethnic nationality.

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with Abiye Kuromiema and Belema Awoala, Port Harcourt, July 20 2012. Okrika fighters were fed and paid by the traditional institutions to ensure that they would make Okrika territory safe for habitation.

⁵⁷⁹ The name '*Piribiapu*' is a descriptive reference to Okrika warriors stationed in the bush. The fighters were stationed in a forest borderland between Okrika and Eleme permanently (twenty four hours a day) during the period of conflict in 1999 to prevent Eleme from embarking on surprise attacks on Okrika. Many people brought them food or other items to support their presence there. Most persons in Okrika, rather than say fighters, descriptively referred to them as '*Piribiapu*' ('Boys in the bush' or 'Bush boys'); hence they became known as 'Bush boys' throughout Okrika and beyond.

Before and during the inter-ethnic war, former University (especially University of Port Harcourt and the State owned University of Technology) cult members had begun to recruit from the army of jobless, unskilled, uneducated and unemployed youths in Port Harcourt, Okrika and Kalabari for the establishment of urban cult gangs such as Deybam, Elegemface, Deywell, Greenlanders and Icelanders. Some of these street gangs are affiliated to campus cult gangs in Port Harcourt: Vikings, Eye, Black Axe, Klansmen Konfraternity (KK) and others.⁵⁸⁰ Some former university graduates without jobs took to illicit trade in oil and drugs. Street gangs were established to facilitate their illicit trade (whether oil theft or “bunkering” and drugs). Street gangs made nightlife and weekend burial celebrations in Okrika horrendous. Indeed Okrika became a haven and a poster child for all the vices perpetrated by young boys under the influence of drugs. Hoodlums terrorized ordinary citizens who seemed distraught. Social and cultural life in Okrika in effect came to a standstill.

Ateke Tom, who was a fisherman from Koniju settlement, organized youths into what he called Okrika Vigilante. The group aimed to curb violence in Okrika settlements as cult gangs and criminals threatened life. The Okrika Vigilante was indeed a vigilante group created to rid the community of criminals and gangs terrorizing innocent citizens and to provide security. The Okrika Vigilante under Ateke provided free security service at burials and protected citizens from attack and harassment by criminals and cult gangs. They arrested and handed to security agents several hoodlums and criminals in Okrika. For bringing a measure of sanity and safety into settlements, Ateke was praised for his heroism, service, courage and determination to salvage Okrika.⁵⁸¹ With this vigilante structure, Ateke Tom drew into his fold many youths; he created a rentier empire, collecting fees from commercial bike riders, local traders and businesses in the name of peace, and/organized the group as he emerged as a powerful leader. The vigilante became a popular organization with local communities. He assumed leadership by bringing order once again to rival splinter groups that had hitherto operated under his command.

The Eleme-Okrika inter-ethnic conflict fizzled out with time through the intervention of Rivers State government and security agencies. Consequently, the Okrika youths at war with the Eleme returned from their forest abode to see Ateke Tom occupying a respectable leadership role as head of the Okrika Vigilante in Okrika. The war veterans changed their nomenclature from “Bush boys” to “Peace-makers.” Rather than identifying as inter-ethnic combatants, they became community “peace-makers” and arrogated the community space to themselves, in fact interfering in the settlement of quarrels and disputes involving citizens and families with a view to extracting funds from such persons or families.⁵⁸² They took over all of Ateke Tom’s responsibilities and fomented terror in all Okrika settlements by making life unbearable for

⁵⁸⁰ Peterside, S., “On the Militarization of Nigeria’s Niger Delta: The Genesis of Ethnic Militia in Rivers State,” Economies of Violence Working Paper No. 21, United States Institute for Peace & Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, America, February 2007, <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/NigerDelta>.

⁵⁸¹ There are speculations that the “Bush boys” heard about Ateke Tom’s exploits in their forest location and became jealous, hence; they sent word to stop his activities in Okrika.

⁵⁸² The “Bush boy” activities became a great concern for the whole of Okrika but with guns in their possession, no one would dare to stop them. Even those traditional institutions that had created the ‘Bush boys’ could no longer control them. They intervened in every aspect of existence in Okrika, even in domestic conflicts involving family to extract money from victims. Ironically, guns given by the Okrika community to its youths for protection against Eleme aggression had been turned against the community. Citizens of Okrika paid fees to allow the burial ceremony of family members. With time many hundreds of people began to flee from the community for their safety.

ordinary citizens. By this time, “Bush boys” had come to see themselves as “lords” in Okrika. They vividly displayed their unwillingness to disarm after the inter-ethnic conflict and demanded a continuation of the privileges (cash payment, free food, etc.) they had enjoyed while the crisis lasted. Their aim was to undermine Ateke Tom’s leadership status and usurp his role in the kingdom but it generated tension between Ateke’s Vigilante and the “Bush boys” in Okrika. After several threats, the “Bush boys” made good their intention to expell Ateke from Okrika.⁵⁸³ Amidst much shooting, Ateke Tom was pushed out of Okrika to Port Harcourt and several of his family and father’s properties were destroyed by Bush boys.⁵⁸⁴ The dethronement of Ateke Tom saw the effective occupation and reign of the Bush boys in Okrika.

Upon his banishment to Port Harcourt, Ateke Tom fraternized with the Icelanders cult gang.⁵⁸⁵ His aim was to use the group as a platform to launch his re-entry into Okrika. However, while Ateke Tom was still away in Port Harcourt and thinking on a re-entry strategy, two other events were unfolding in Okrika: first, the *Amanyanyabo* rivalry involving Chief A. S. Abam with its support base in Koniju and Chief Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo with its support base in Tuboniju has reared its ugly head. Second, politicians were trying to capture the LGA election in Okrika in preparation for 2003 general elections in Rivers State. Even in elections, the two pristine settlements were divided along party lines.⁵⁸⁶ These divisions further polarized the two settlements and exacerbated their animosity towards each other.

In these developments, Ateke Tom pitched his tent with Koniju and the PDP, the ruling party at the state and federal levels; on the other hand, Bush boys tilted their support towards Tuboniju and ANPP at the LGA level.⁵⁸⁷ While in Port Harcourt and working closely with members of the Icelanders, Ateke had modified his organization’s name from Okrika Vigilante to Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV). This was with a view to accommodating non-Okrika street gang associates into his group. Ateke capitulated on the sharp division between the two Okrika settlements –the Tuboniju-Koniju axis -- along traditional and political lines. He infiltrated the Bush boys and induced the Koniju settlers among them into his fold, giving his reasons why

⁵⁸³ The Bush boys threatened Ateke numerous times and he went round Okrika complaining that his men were being attacked and shot at by Bush boys with no intervention from any quarters.

⁵⁸⁴ It was rumored that Tuboniju Chiefs and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) controlled Okrika LGA Chairman, Godwin Tamuno, secretly patronized the Bush boys at the time, while Chiefs and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) members from Koniju secretly supported Ateke Tom’s Okrika Vigilante. In this division Chief Ngeri Rowland and his group of Chiefs from Tuboniju supported ‘Bush boys’ and the ANPP, on the other hand, Chief Evans Awoala and his group of Chiefs from Koniju supported Ateke Tom and the PDP. While the PDP ruled at the state level, the ANPP was the ruling party at Okrika LGAs.

⁵⁸⁵ While in Port Harcourt, Ateke Tom was said to have formed an alliance with Cockman Oyegu, who was leader of the Icelanders’cult group” in Port Harcourt. In this fluid situation, alliances were made between all manner of cult, criminal and political youth groups.

⁵⁸⁶ Koniju settlers and Chief A. S. Abam (“Amanyanyabo-elect”) supported the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the party ruling at the federal and state levels. But Tuboniju inhabitants and Chief Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo (‘Amanyanyabo-elect’) supported All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the party in power at Okrika LGAs at the time.

⁵⁸⁷ It is interesting to know that Chief Rufus Ada George, a former Governor of Rivers State in 1992 from Tuboniju section of Okrika, was leader of the ANPP at Okrika LGAs. Chief Ada George was elected on the platform of the National Republican Convention (NRC) in preliminary elections conducted by General Ibrahim Babangida. Ironically, at the state level, where the PDP reigns, Peter Odili, a former Deputy to Ada George while he was Governor in 1992 was elected under the platform of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 1999 as Rivers State Governor, and Abiye Sekibo, from Koniju in Okrika and former Personal Assistant to Ada George when he was Governor in 1992 was now Secretary to Rivers State Government.

Koniju should have a distinct *Amanymanabo* from Tuboniju. As a result of Ateke's action there was shift in alliance within the camp of Bush boys. Most Koniju fighters among Bush boys shifted their allegiance to Ateke Tom.⁵⁸⁸ Bush boys from Koniju settlement shifted their allegiance to support a fellow Koniju, Ateke, in order to install Chief A. S. Abam, *Amanymanabo* of Okrika, and to ensure that the PDP won the LGA election in Okrika.⁵⁸⁹ The Bush boys from Tuboniju, for their part, supported Chief Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo as *Amanymanabo* and fought to ensure the victory of ANPP in the LGA election. Hence the traditional headquarters of Okrika (*wa'kirike*: Tuboniju and Koniju) revealed massive cleavages along party, chieftancy and militia lines. A traditional problem of succession within the Ado royal house and a sense of material, economic and political alienation and deprivation in the Koniju section were complicated by the emergence of party politics (ANPP and PDP) and powerful political Godfathers of Okrika extraction (Chief Ada George and Abiye Sekibo). As Okrika was divided in the run up to the elections, now backed by rival militia factions loyal to each side, it was not long before the bubbles burst.

In late 2001, with human and material support from Icelanders and alleged logistical support from PDP stalwarts at the state level, Ateke Tom launched attacks on Bush boys in the Okrika mainland to herald his re-entry into Okrika.⁵⁹⁰ The Bush boys who held sway fiercely resisted Ateke's Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV). It was a fight that lasted several days with severe casualties on both sides before the Bush boys group was finally subdued by NDV's superior firepower. Ateke gained control of Okrika after his group dislodged the Bush boys to Okuru-ama, an Okrika settlement in Port Harcourt.⁵⁹¹ He won the LGA election for the PDP in Okrika and the party officially took control of the LGA from ANPP. It was not until October 2005, after the PDP had been declared winner in the 2003 general election that the Rivers State government

⁵⁸⁸ With Ateke's infiltration of the Bush boys, there was disagreement among them whether to allow him into Okrika or not. Though most members of the group from Koniju supported his re-entry into Okrika, the Sekibo Tuboniju group was opposed to the idea. In the disagreement that ensued among Bush boys one person from Koniju was murdered. This further aggravated tension among the Bush boys, with the Koniju section accusing the Tuboniju section of killing their own. This led to a crisis within Bush boys and subsequently to its division along Koniju and Tuboniju settlement lines.

⁵⁸⁹ There are claims that Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilante support for Chief A. S. Abam installation as *Amanymanabo* in the chieftancy dispute was due to Abam's support for an autonomous *Amanymanabo* for Koniju while he (Abam) remains the *Amanymanabo* of Okrika clan as a whole.

⁵⁹⁰ It is believed strongly within Okrika that Abiye Sekibo, Secretary to Rivers State government at the time, contracted the services of Ateke (his Koniju kinsman) for the project of winning Okrika LGA for the ruling party (PDP) at both state and federal levels. Others believe Chief Abam and other Koniju Chiefs in PDP rallied around Ateke to enthrone PDP control of Okrika LGA.

⁵⁹¹ With Ateke Tom and other Koniju men and allies effectively in charge of the Okrika LGA, Chief Captain Nemi Tamunoiyalla Oputibeya was installed as *Amanymanabo* of Koniju (Koni-ama) in November 2005, but he died in 2010. The Ado Royal House in a Memorandum to the Okrika Community Peace Committee (OCPC) condemned his appointment and asked the general public to disregard his untraditional appointment. Ateke Tom's victory also saw the banishment of several Tuboniju Chiefs from the community after the destruction of their property: Chief Rufus Ada George, Ngeri Rowland, Opuambe, Belema Feberesima, Major. N. N. Ogan. In another development, the Bush boys' relocation to Okuru-ama was exploited by their new host in order to wage war against their neighbor. Okuru-ama saw gunmen in their midst as an opportunity to settle a boundary dispute with their Abuloma (also an Okrika town) neighbors. In this regard, Abuloma also sought the assistance of Ateke Tom in the boundary dispute with Okuru-ama, leading to another clash between Bush boys on the side of Okuru-ama and Ateke Tom's NDV, on the side of Abuloma. The conflict led to the destruction of Okuru-ama and dislodgment of the Bush boys from Okuru-ama to Amadi-ama, another Okrika settlement in Port Harcourt.

inaugurated a 15-man Okrika Community Peace Committee with Professor Tekena Tamuno as chairman.⁵⁹² The Committee submitted its findings and recommendations to government but to date government has yet to make pronouncement or issue a white paper on the Committee's report. Prior to the inauguration of the Peace Committee in Okrika in 2005, Ateke had worked closely with the PDP government and stalwarts in the state and Okrika specifically, and thereby secured victory for the party at the local, state and federal levels. The party's electoral victory in the 2003 general elections in all of Okrika was not without his efforts, supplemented by covert and overt support from machines of the state. The next section therefore deals with conduct of the 2003 general elections and violent fallouts thereafter.

4.4.3 Party Politics: Electoral Violence and the Rise of Militancy

As already described, in 1999, like most Niger Delta governors, Peter Odili of the PDP emerged as Governor of Rivers State under controversial circumstances. He was declared winner in an election most saw as deeply flawed. The governor's romance with perceived or real warlords and cult groups in the state was a deliberate attempt to consolidate the party's control of the state. Attempts by PDP leadership to entrench a one-party rule in Rivers State generated tremendous violence in many communities.⁵⁹³ Early in the twenty-first century ominous signs became glaring that the elections slated for 2003 would be decided on the altars of violence, intimidation, sorrow, tears, fear and blood. With Ateke effectively in charge of Okrika, and Alhaji Dokubo Asari commanding the affairs of IYC, violence was almost inevitable.

As expected, the 2003 general election was another turning point in the history of insurgency in Rivers State. Party politics and the quest to enthrone the rule of one party over another served to democratize violence in Rivers State and beyond. Politicians in Rivers State deployed corruption as an effective means to achieve electoral victory over opponents in the democratic process.⁵⁹⁴ Prior to the elections, therefore, politicians recruited "thugs" and armed

⁵⁹² According to its terms of reference, the Okrika Community Peace Committee of October 2005 was to: ensure the resolution of disputes, intra-and extra-community; where there are cases of spills over, including effective measures for restoration; ensure peace and reconciliation up to grassroots level; undertake rehabilitation works; ensure holistic development in orderly and sustainable manner with particular reference to there infrastructural, social and economic dimensions; encourage inculcation and essential values and virtues; disarm militia groups in its area; reconcile all militia groups that have taken up arms against themselves; register youths requesting jobs within the community and indicate programs of employment applicable, including youth training and retraining programs and; encourage harmonious relations with the State Government and other relevant authorities. The Tekena Committee received memoranda from various groups including traditional institutions, political institutions, security agencies, youth bodies, women groups, settlements, house heads, chiefs and individuals. For effective interaction with stakeholders in Okrika the Committee decided to rotate its sessions to three LGAs in Rivers State: Okrika, Ogu and Port Harcourt city LGAs. To date the outcome of the Committee is yet to be made public or recommendations implemented.

⁵⁹³ For instance, Okrika -- where All Peoples Party (APP), later changed to All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), was in political control -- became a theater of outright warfare. Every identifiable ANPP (opposition) controlled territory in Rivers State was violently repressed. Also, while the ruling PDP ticket's struggle for elective positions created an atmosphere of unrest in many communities in Port Harcourt, the implicit requirement that a PDP local win was the prerequisite for political appointments in the state caused further tensions.

⁵⁹⁴ See Human Rights Watch, "Testing democracy: Political Violence in Nigeria", April 2003.

youth groups to act against perceived or real political opponents. The national and state ruling party (PDP) was not willing to let go of electoral victory on a platter of one-man-one-vote. Political relevance thus became synonymous with ability to deliver, by whatever means necessary, electoral victory for PDP in the state. As the economic nerve center of Nigeria, the Niger Delta became the center of attention for all parties; the ruling PDP was no exception. Post-independence power tussles in Nigeria, both military and civilian, have been all about control of the oil and gas resources. Boro alluded to this when he said “the natural resources is the main factor on which the famous Nigerian political dispute is based.”⁵⁹⁵

The PDP wanted victory at any cost and was not ready to take chances in the state. On this initiative, opposition (APP) strongholds became target zones in the state.⁵⁹⁶ For this task, Asari and Ateke were contracted explicitly to oversee the victory of PDP at Kalabari and Okrika fringes of Rivers State respectively.⁵⁹⁷ While Asari as factional leader of IYC and friend of governor Peter Odili controlled the Kalabari flank, Ateke Tom’s Niger Delta Vigilante feel the dreaded group in Okrika. Asari, in reference to his role in the 2003 elections, said in an open letter while advising groups and individual’s from supporting politicians in the 2007 election said: “I warned Soboma (a senior leader of the ‘Outlaws’ cult gang at the time) that a repeat of 2003 would happen where he would be used and dumped. He didn’t listen.”⁵⁹⁸ With the incorporation of street gangs into the project, the duo secured victory for PDP on April 19, 2003.⁵⁹⁹ Scores of persons were killed before and during the elections in Rivers State.⁶⁰⁰ Security agencies connived with armed youth groups working for government to subvert the process producing a “landslide victory” for PDP. Those state security agencies served as the “official” armed wing of the incumbent party. A local NGO described the elections as “low intensity armed

⁵⁹⁵ Boro, I. A., (Tebekaemi, T., ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, Benin-City: Umeh Publishers, 1982, p. 62

⁵⁹⁶ The ANPP had changed its nomenclature to All Peoples Party (APP). During the 1999 elections the ANPP (as it then was) had won all Okrika LGAs (Okrika and Ogu/Bolo) and some seats in the State House of Assembly. In the same vein, in Kalabari, Marshal Harry, a former strong ally of Governor Peter Odili and South-South Vice Chairman (national) of PDP, defected to APP as South-South Chairman of the party.

⁵⁹⁷ See Stephen Davies, “The Potential for Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta,” Coventry Cathedral, 2009; Abiye Sekibo, Secretary to Rivers State Government and an Okirika from Koniju who was rewarded with a federal appointment after the election was alleged to have facilitated the services of Ateke Tom to ensure electoral victory for PDP in Okirika. For this purpose, Abiye Sekibo was rumored to have obtained weapons and ammunition for Ateke and his group.

⁵⁹⁸ See Alhaji Dokubo Asari in an open letter, “Asari Dokubo: Me, Henry Okah ‘Jomo Gbomo’, Judith Asuni and the Niger Delta Insurgency”, October 2007. While he referenced the role played by youth groups in 2003 (including him), he similarly alluded to the fact that Soboma and other groups were deployed to win the 2007 elections in the state. The PDP was declared landslide winner of the election. The ANPP, the main opposition party, withdrew its participation from remaining elections on grounds of electoral fraud they attributed to the PDP. Unperturbed by the withdrawal of its main opposition, PDP concocted results and awarded its candidates all 23-seats in the State House of Assembly. Before then in March 2004 all elective positions in every Local Government Areas in Rivers State had been awarded to the ruling PDP.

⁵⁹⁹ See Stephen Davies, “The Potential for Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta,” Coventry Cathedral, 2009.

⁶⁰⁰ For example, Marshall Harry, from Rivers State and former south-south Coordinator of the ruling PDP at national and state levels, who defected to an opposition party (APP), was assassinated in his home in Abuja. For more on the elections violence and killings see, Human Rights Watch report (2004), “Nigeria’s 2003 Elections: The Unacknowledged Violence”; Human Rights Watch Report (2008); “Politics as War: The Human Rights Impact and Causes of Post-Election Violence in Rivers State, Nigeria”; See also, Stephen Davies, “Potentials for Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta (2009)”, Coventry Cathedral

struggle.”⁶⁰¹ Globally, the election was condemned as subversion of the people’s will and far below expectations.

On April 21, 2003, just three days after a declaration of PDP as winner at the state and federal levels, Asari – in his role as IYC President, in local as well as national media -- condemned the outcome of the elections as fraudulent.⁶⁰² IYC called for a total cancellation of the process and added that the results were unacceptable to the Ijaw nation.⁶⁰³ For an election already so globally condemned - marred with irregularities as articulated in local, regional and international observers’ reports - Asari’s outburst was a great embarrassment to his erstwhile friend and Godfather in Rivers State, Governor Peter Odili. Uncomfortable with Asari’s verbal eruptions, Governor Peter Odili sent words to the IYC leader, asking him to retract his condemnation of the electoral process.⁶⁰⁴ But Asari refused and stood by his position that there was “no election” in the Niger Delta.

Beginning late May 2003, events took a theatrical turn in Rivers State. Asari’s convoy of vehicles, conveying the corpse of his father (Retired Justice Melford Goodhead) to Buguma for burial was attacked by suspected cultists at Choba in Port Harcourt. Six people including a boy from Choba were killed.⁶⁰⁵ Then in October, the venue of a family meeting in Buguma where Asari was in attendance was attacked by unidentified armed youths. Even though no one was injured, the armed gang left only after doing severe damage to the building.⁶⁰⁶ Knowing that the only person capable of such an action toward him in Rivers State at the time was Ateke Tom, Asari called Ateke to ascertain his involvement. Ateke denied knowledge and involvement in the assault. Asari’s suspicion of Ateke as the mastermind of these attacks against him strongly contributed to the escalation of armed conflict that followed.

⁶⁰¹ Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Report “Election Monitoring Report”, April 2003.

⁶⁰² See Dokubo Asari’s exclusive interview “There was no election in Rivers State,” *Hard Truth Newspaper*: Port Harcourt, 22-28 January 2004.

⁶⁰³ In a revelation (though contradictory since both elections were held same day and time) at the Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Asari said he met with and agreed to work for the re-election of Governors Peter Odili and D. S. P Alamiyeseigha of Rivers and Bayelsa States respectively on the platform of the PDP, on the condition that the Presidential election would not be rigged in favor of the party’s candidate, President Olusegun Obasanjo. But to his surprise the national election was rigged for the re-election of Obasanjo as President with support from the two Governors. This was his (stated) reason for the condemnation and rejection of the results.

⁶⁰⁴ While giving testimony at the Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 2007, Asari said he was called by several persons on the authority of Governor Peter Odili to ask if truly he signed the IYC press releases saying “There was no election in the Niger Delta,” and Asari answered in the affirmative. He was advised by these individuals to rescind the IYC media campaigns against the outcome of the 2003 election. He claimed that even at the point of signing the press release, his legal adviser and Felix Tuodolo (first and former president of IYC) begged him not to sign it because of what it would do to the good relationship between him and Governor Peter Odili at the time. But he refused and said he would rather resign than fail to sign the document.

⁶⁰⁵ The attack did not stop movement of the corpse to Buguma for burial. Asari, who was present at the scene, later paid a condolence visit to the King and people of Choba for the loss of their son.

⁶⁰⁶ While the attack lasted, Asari’s attempts to reach security agencies (including his allies within the security agencies) in Rivers State for a quick response proved abortive; even their phone lines could not be reached.

By late 2003, Ateke's NDV and Asari's IYC engaged each other in fierce battles in the creeks and riverside communities located southeast and southwest of Port Harcourt.⁶⁰⁷ The conflict affected mostly the waterfront settlements of Port Harcourt city LGA (Amadi-Ama, Sangana, Njemanze, Marine base and Abonema watersides). Also adversely impacted were Tombia, Bakana, Buguma and Abonema and several Okirika communities.⁶⁰⁸ In these clashes scores of the combatants' lieutenants as well as innocent citizens died, and property, livelihood and communities were destroyed.

In late 2003, at the height of conflict with Ateke and under a constant military offensive by security agencies, Asari fled Rivers State and relocated to the Warri axis in western Niger Delta. In Warri, Asari was housed by Ijaw youths fighting against Itsekiri domination, but aimed to re-strategize and acquire arms for a possible onslaught against Ateke and the Rivers State security agencies.⁶⁰⁹ While in Warri, aware that he would be condemned for fighting Ateke Tom (a fellow Ijaw) on the platform of IYC, Asari decided to float a different body under which he hoped to prosecute his war.⁶¹⁰ In December 2003, Asari and his Rivers State supporters launched the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF). Aided with material and human support of Warri Ijaw militia, Asari under the banner of NDPVF returned to Port Harcourt in early 2004 to engage Ateke Tom and security agencies in warfare.⁶¹¹ Upon the return of Asari (NDPVF) into Port Harcourt, the state erupted in violent attack and counter-attacks involving Asari and Ateke on the one hand, and cult gangs contracted to secure victory for the ruling PDP but now denied rewards by government and security agencies on the other. The state was thus wrapped in violent conflagration that engulfed mostly waterside settlements. These violent actions propelled Rivers State to the front burner on local, regional, and global scales of conflict-ravaged spaces.

The government of Rivers State, which attributed the conflagration involving the two warlords (Asari and Ateke) to fights for control of illegal oil activities in the waterways, declared them wanted.⁶¹² But, the "wanted" tag did not deter warlords and their followers from engaging

⁶⁰⁷ Best, S. & Kemedi, V., "Armed groups and conflict in rivers and plateau states Nigeria" in N. Florquin and E. Berman (eds.), *Armed and Aimless, Small Arms Survey*, Geneva 2005, 12-44; Briggs, J. "Guide to armed groups in the Niger Delta," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 7, Part 1, 1-4, 2007.

⁶⁰⁸ For more, see Human Rights Watch (February 2005), "Rivers and Blood: Guns, Oil and Power in Nigeria's Rivers State," (A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper).

⁶⁰⁹ Asari since confessed to buying arms from Henry Okah (a South African based Nigerian from Niger Delta) who was introduced to him by a friend, and bought arms in excess of a hundred million naira (\$500,000 at the time). On the source of his money for weapons, Asari says he got his money through aiding and abetting oil thieves 'bunkerers' in the region.

⁶¹⁰ Tompolo, in an interview with the author, said Asari was assisted against the state government and not Ateke Tom. He (Asari) did tell the group in Warri that the government and security agents were targeting him. He knew he would not be assisted if he solicited help to fight a fellow Ijaw (Interview in Oporoza, Delta State, December 5, 2011).

⁶¹¹ After the formation of NDPVF and upon Asari's return to Port Harcourt, several cult groups including the Bush boys allied with Asari's NDPVF against Ateke Tom and security agencies in the state. Asari in his open letter "Conscience is an Open Wound: Only Truth can Heal it" said that when the crisis became full blown in Rivers State he relocated to Warri and stayed at the house of Mr. George Timinimi (an Ijaw youth leader from Gbaramatu from 2007-2009) shuttling between Okerenkoko (a Riverine Ijaw community) and Warri.

⁶¹² Alhaji Dokubo Asari, in several interviews, asserted that he refines petroleum products in the creeks of the Niger Delta and sells them to the community at a cheaper rate. Part of the crisis was attributed to fights for control of the waterways (which implies control of 'bunkering' territories) and collection of tolls from oil companies operating in the creeks.

each other in bloody clashes in and around Port Harcourt. By August 2004 many parts of the city had become in effect ungovernable – for example, Marine base and Amadi-Ama waterfronts were constantly under attack and retaliatory counter-attacks by youths loyal to NDPVF and NDV, using all available weapons of mass elimination. In a daunting coordinated attack from the Marine base axis of Port Harcourt, Asari had declared his intention to overrun Brick House (Rivers State Government House) which was a stone's throw away.⁶¹³ The audacity of the attacks unveiled the ineffectiveness and incapability of the Nigeria security agencies in the state.

Early in September 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo intervened and directed security agencies to wipe out NDPVF and its leadership. The Presidential directive led to air, water and land raids on several camps of NDPVF, causing the death of several persons. In the face of well-coordinated military attacks on NDPVF camps by the military, Asari changed his war strategy and declared an “all out war” against the oil economy. He directed all MNOCs operating in the Niger Delta creeks to stop forthwith, threatening to launch unprecedented attacks on pipelines, flow stations, platforms, oil rigs, and manifolds crisscrossing the maze of creeks if they did not. The sudden change in tactic was a deliberate ploy to stop the material and logistic support that the military enjoyed from MNOCs, gain sympathy and support of impoverished Ijaw people and communities, and re-frame the conflict as a “resource-war” in order to attract global interest. MNOCs did not take the threat casually, considering the ineptitude of security agencies to protect operations in the region. The oil majors heeded Asari's advice and quickly withdrew their personnel and vacated facilities located onshore in order to avoid casualties and destruction. The action of MNOCs led to shut-in of over fifty thousand barrels of oil per day from Niger Delta. The consequence was an upsurge in global oil prices to over fifty dollars. At that point global leaders subtly appealed for a quick and positive resolution of the “oil-war” by virtue of its macro significance and effects.

Early in October 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo called for a truce by flying Asari and Ateke Tom to Aso Rock, the seat of government in Abuja, for a peace meeting.⁶¹⁴ At this meeting where a Peace Accord was reached, President Olusegun Obasanjo enjoined the warlords to embrace peace and despise violence. President Obasanjo granted the warlords and their lieutenants a blanket pardon and directed that they submit weapons in their custody to government and be paid back for them. The militia leaders and their followers returned to Port Harcourt, submitted their weapons (but this was not a demilitarization of the delta because only a few arms were forthcoming), and were appropriately remunerated for every weapon returned to government.⁶¹⁵ The Abuja Peace Accord and arms buy-back arrangement were processes geared

⁶¹³ It was rumored in the state that this declaration by Asari made the Governor Peter Odili relocate temporarily to Bori Camp (Military barracks) in the city of Port Harcourt for fear of attack by NDPVF armed youths. It became clear late-2004 to the Governor that the rampaging NDPVF armed militia could not be tamed by security agencies in the state.

⁶¹⁴ The peace deal was brokered by Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW) and Our Niger Delta (OND), Port Harcourt based NGOs. Asari also accepted the truce due to intervention, pleas and emissaries from Ijaw elders, European Union and western embassies (American, Canadian and British).

⁶¹⁵ For more on the guns buy-back deal and intrigues, see Asari's “Conscience is an Open Wound: Only Truth can Heal it”, October 2007. Asari says he submitted more than three thousand weapons (general purpose machine guns, rocket launchers and AK 47s) to the Rivers State government team involved in the buy-back deal in Port Harcourt. The modalities for the share of the proceeds from the arms buy-back deal created disunity between Asari and some of his “commanders.” Some Asari “commanders” (Abiye Abaku, Fara Dagogo, Bright George, Opu Kala, Kenneth

towards achieving perpetual peace in Rivers State. But did the Abuja Peace Accord and arms buy-back enthrone the required peace in Rivers State? Fallouts of the Abuja Peace Accord and arms buy-back deal are the focus of the concluding section of this chapter.

4.5 Conclusion

On his return from Abuja in late 2004 and submission of the arms in his care, Asari joined a Pro-National Conference (PRONACO) movement agitating for the convocation of a sovereign national conference of nationalities to address the myriad of problems in Nigeria.⁶¹⁶ The body was gaining momentum among activists, civil society organizations, and ethnic nationality organizations in the country. In a bid to undermine PRONACO, President Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated a 169-man National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) to deliberate pressing national issues such as electoral reforms, women's representation in government, redefining citizenship (settler/immigrant problems in states), and redistribution of oil-wealth.⁶¹⁷ On September 17 2005, PRONACO held its first south-south meeting in Port Harcourt.⁶¹⁸ Elder statesman Anthony Enahoro chaired the meeting, which was well attended by civil society groups, ethnic nationality organizations and activists. Before then, security agencies in Rivers State had pressured Asari to decline to host PRONACO activities, but Asari was just one among many hosts and the meeting held.⁶¹⁹ When non-violent attempts to stop the gathering failed, security agents resorted to intimidation: over ten truckloads of stern-looking mobile policemen were deployed outside Algate Hotel, Abacha Road, Port Harcourt (venue of the meeting). PRONACO successfully conducted its activities at the conference hall, Algate Hotel without rancor. On September 20 2005, however, Asari was arrested, taken to Abuja, incarcerated, and later charged with treason. Many predictably in the Niger Delta viewed this development as a betrayal of the Abuja Peace Accord with President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Dan, Napoleon Dagogo, Stephen George and Boma George) had demanded that Asari give a full account of the money from the arms buy-back deal, but he refused on the ground that they were not in the know regarding how the arms were procured. NDPVF became as a result fractured. Even though Asari still had a large following, with some of the "commanders" fort leave and set up splinter groups. More militia groups emerged. In similar vein, Ateke Tom who submitted his weapons in Okrika had problems with his second in command Soboma George over a leadership tussle (over who should be number one man) that led to the breakaway of some members to form the "Outlaws," headed by Soboma George.

⁶¹⁶ PRONACO was an assemblage of Nigerian activists, statesmen (Elder Anthony Enahoro, Wole Soyinka, Baba Omojola, Beko Ransome Kutu, etc.) and ethnic nationalities organizations. The aim of PRONACO was to agitate for the convocation of a sovereign peoples' conference in Nigeria that would decide the future of the country and her people.

⁶¹⁷ The NPRC ended abruptly due to a walkout by delegates from south-south (Niger Delta) region when delegates from other regions declined an upward review in oil revenue derivation from its current 13% to 25% and later 50% over the next ten years. The third term ambition of President Olusegun Obasanjo was the last straw that broke the camel's back, leading to the sudden demise of the conference in July 2005.

⁶¹⁸ The reformed NDPVF, Chikoko Movement and Ijaw Republican Assembly (led by Charles Harry and AnnKio Briggs then), among others, hosted the gathering.

⁶¹⁹ Asari and other activists had held meetings in various states of the Niger Delta with ethnic nationalities in the region on the need to support PRONACO and to give it a strong backing. Hence, the success of the conference in Port Harcourt was not a surprise.

Asari's incarceration complicated misgivings among elites, activists and militants over government's sincerity as it relate to the Niger Delta question. Layered on this was the misunderstanding generated by arms buy-back and the age-old ambition of some "commanders" for independence within NDPVF. The result was the organization's fragmentation and emergence of splinter groups with radical tendencies in Port Harcourt. This was the background to the proliferation of armed groups and escalation of tensions in Port Harcourt.⁶²⁰ By 2005/6, the armed groups' jostle for relevance combined with limited opportunity in Port Harcourt allowed criminality and other vices to flourish. Ironically, the demand for Asari's freedom became the most potent excuse under which criminal terror was unleashed in the state. At the core of most conflicts was a struggle for power and significance, access to the spoils of oil, and patronage by political elites. Before long, the state was awash with kidnapping, armed robbery, hostage-taking, abduction, murder and rival gang wars. By 2005 the Port Harcourt region of eastern Delta was chaotic, violent and ungovernable. These armed groups' insurgent and violent activities greatly threatened oil production and export, western investments, and the nation's export revenue. This was the situation in Rivers State until early 2006, when some of these disparate groups with support from Warri axis blended into the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The emergence of MEND and activities of the movement will be discussed in detail in Part II, Chapter Six.

⁶²⁰ Some of the groups are: The Joint Revolutionary Council (led by Cynthia White), The Martyrs Brigade, Enough is Enough, The Suicide Squad, Niger Delta Strike Force, Niger Delta Vanguard, Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force and the Niger Delta Salvation Front (political wing of NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilante (resurfaced with Ateke Tom as head), and The Outlaws (a breakaway from Ateke's NDV led by Soboma George).

PART II: WESTERN NIGER DELTA

Part II (chapters five and six) of this work articulates the history and geography of conflict in Warri, Western Niger Delta. In this Part (chapters five and six) I hope to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic and political dynamics of conflict in Warri since the pre-colonial and pre-oil to the contemporary. In the first chapter (five), I will explain how ethnic groups' unequal access to, and/or non-participation in the global capitalist economy in the 16th to mid-20th century (pre-colonial and pre-oil era) created unequal power and social relation among groups in Warri. My argument in chapter five is that conflict in Warri involving the Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo are fought on the questions concerning autochthony (settler/immigrant) in the form of the politics of place, belonging, identity and contested citizenship. I also argue on how conflicts arising from autochthonous claims and counter-claims by these groups on the ownership of Warri have been further compounded since the pre-oil and colonial era by a politically motivated change in chieftancy nomenclature, perceived or real domination and demands for self-determination. The contemporary conflict (popular called oil-conflict) in Warri is layered on, and cannot be properly explained outside the pre-oil and colonial era dynamics of conflict in the region.

In the last chapter (six) of Part II, I explained the recurring questions of autochthony and demand for self-rule in post-independence Western Delta by 'excluded' groups in Warri – the hydra-headed discourse on autochthony (Warri ownership) among groups (especially Ijaw and Itsekiri) and Ijaw demand for autonomy. The chapter explains how pre-colonial, colonial and pre-oil dynamics related to power/domination, ownership of Warri, change in chieftancy nomenclature and demand for self-governance are vital to understanding the petro-violence in the region. My argument is that the discovery and exploration of oil in Warri and environs reconfigured pre-oil crises and created new conflict dynamics through varied and complex processes of primitive accumulation and dispossession. I argue how the Warri Ijaw renewed demand for autonomous LGAs (self-rule) in Warri in the 1980s and 1990s amidst Itsekiri opposition was 'granted' in 1996. At the center of my analysis is the 1997-2004 Ijaw-Itsekiri dispute arising from the location and relocation of the LGA headquarters, unequal ward delineation and the reconfiguration of this political conflict into an economic violence by the action and/or inaction of the state-oil corporations coalition in the region. I espouse how the state-MNOCs' militarization project to quell inter-ethnic conflicts and youth militancy as well as community unrest over the footprints of the oil-industry did not merely impair conflicts in the Niger Delta but produced a vicious cross-delta insurgency (MEND) beginning in 2005.

Chapter Five

Ethnic Relations and the Historical Dynamics of Conflict in Warri, Western Delta (1900 -1960)

The roots of the modern predicament that has been dubbed as the Warri crisis stretch back to some five centuries. A clear historical understanding of why the problem of Warri arose at all and why it persists will require that we link the political and social development of the Western Niger Delta with the rise of the phenomenon that modern historians call the Atlantic world. That is the point at which we begin our survey of the origins of what has been branded as the Warri crisis (Ekeh, P. P, (ed.), *Warri City and British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2004, p. 1)

5.1 Introduction

The western delta ecologically comprises Delta and Edo states, but for political and economic reasons has been extended to include some territories at the Atlantic fringe of Ondo state. Warri, the western hub of multinationals' petro-dollar comparable to Port Harcourt in the east is the focus of Part II of this dissertation. An important city established by Colonial officers in the nineteenth century, it is the most populated and significant oil city in Delta State (though not the capital).⁶²¹ Escravos Port, an outpost in riverside Warri serviced western slave and palm oil merchants, and the hinterlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Today, Warri is the epicenter of oil activities in western Niger Delta, second only to Port Harcourt as Nigeria's petrol-hub. Warri is host to one of Nigeria's four refineries, a petroleum depot, and a seaport. As in the east delta, these economic development initiatives are matched by recurring ethnic clashes and violent conflicts, which have earned the city a place on the global map of violence.

In this chapter I focus on the historical development of Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis in Warri which has a long history. I describe Warri's various traditions of origin and pre-independence ethnic relations, and the history and historiography of the social relations that existed between the trans-Atlantic powers and the various ethnic groups in this region and the incursion of the Portuguese traders, slave and palm oil merchants and colonial legacy. Of vital importance here are the uneven social relations between the invading western powers and ethnic groups in Warri, and how over a century and more of uneven power relations evolved amongst ethnic groups in Warri. Two historical dynamics emerged in Warri (western delta) which are central to how crisis

⁶²¹ Asaba, the hometown of Maryam Babangida (the then President's wife during its creation), was announced as the headquarters and remains so to this date. Warri continues to take center stage in the state. The population of Warri in the 1991 census was put at about 300,000 and in the 2006 census at over 500,000. Warri is made up of both coastal and inland settlements and it is a multiethnic cosmopolitan city comprising the Itsekiri, Ijaw, Urhobo, kwale, Isoko and Igbo. Warri is host to the western headquarters and operations of most oil corporations in the Niger Delta such as: Shell, Chevron, Texaco, ENI-AGIP, etc. A gigantic Liquefied Natural Gas project underway by the American oil giant Chevron is near completion in the Escravos Rivers of Delta State. Warri is also host to a refinery that serves the western fringe of Nigeria.

unfolded: first, “Who owns Warri”? and related territorial disputes (autochthons/settlers vs. immigrants), and second, the change of chieftancy nomenclature – “Olu of Itsekiri” to “Olu of Warri”. After a careful examination of tensions generated from these issues, the chapter shows how these unresolved pre-oil historical quandaries are foundational to the particular form and character of political violence and the rise of insurgent groups in the Western Delta.

5.2 Warri: A Historical Trilemma

Little is known about the history of Warri and the relationship that existed between the various ethnic groups inhabiting the city and environs before the advent of Portuguese traders into the territory in the fifteenth century. Most historians (academic or otherwise) of Warri have preoccupied themselves with the period covered by western written documents. But the fundamental problem in regard to Warri is contention and disputes surrounding the oral traditions of origin that the major ethnic groups (Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo) would find satisfactory. Central to the story is who the first settlers were, who the autochthonous communities are and what their territorial jurisdiction is? The lack of written documents is a great hindrance to historians’ attempt at unraveling the traditions of origin, not only of Warri but elsewhere in Nigeria. Similarly, oral historians who have tried to reconstruct history of the past through proverbs, songs, drum, praises, poems, folklores, riddles and other traditional oral literary media are constrained by chronology and the dearth of archeological record.⁶²² Alagoa alluded to this phenomenon in the Niger Delta when he said:

The basic limitation of traditions of origin is the chronological. For, although they are cast in the form of accounts of the beginning of people, they really refer to only a fraction of the history of such people. For example, Ijo traditions of origin cannot tell us the ‘origin’ of the Ijo people. The traditions of origin of the various sub-groups refer only to movements within the delta, the expansion of the Ijo from the heartland to the extremities of the Niger Delta. This conclusion is supported by the evidence of linguistics which indicates that the Ijo language is several thousand years old. The oral traditions of origin clearly go back less than a thousand years. The oral traditions, then, do not cover all of the history of the people, but for a people without written history, they take us farther back than any other available source.⁶²³

The inability of historians to proffer acceptable oral traditions of origin for the ethnic groups in Warri leaves contemporary historians with no other option than to rely on colonial texts, politically motivated ethnic narratives and distorted academic accounts of history often shaped by shifting political debates especially after the discovery of oil. In Nigeria, politics as well as historical narratives are greatly influenced by ethnicity and ethnic rivalries.⁶²⁴ Ayomike alluded to this on Warri when he said, “History is a notoriously slippery creature. Governments

⁶²² Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005, pp 3-6.

⁶²³ Ibid, pp 3-4.

⁶²⁴ Falola, T. & Aderinto, S., *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History*, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010.

may mould it to fit official purposes, historians reinterpret it to give it a new life and human memory may distort it when the truth is too painful... so it has been of Warri”.⁶²⁵

One tradition of origin based on trans-Atlantic documentation has it that Warri was founded by a Benin prince Ginuwa, who was advised by his father to flee due to rivalry between the two in the fifteenth century.⁶²⁶ Benin Empire in the interior was the dominant player in the western delta before the advent of the Portuguese merchants. The Itsekiri, who have since the sixteenth and seventeenth century exercised great power in this part of the delta, claim to be direct descendants and followers of Ginuwa, who migrated to the territory from Benin. The name Warri, they claim, is an anglicized form of the name “Iwere,” “Aweri,” or “Ourre.”⁶²⁷ The Itsekiri were said to have moved from Benin River to Ode-Itsekiri, which serves as their ancestral home:

To the west of Urhobo country live their Itsekiri neighbors... Their (Itsekiri) neighbors, apart from the Urhobo to the east, are the Ijo to the south, the Bini to the north and the Yoruba of Ondo Province to the north-west. Virtually all the area lies within the mangrove swamp region. Only on the Eastern fringes is there some firm land. Ode-Itsekiri, the capital of the Itsekiri kingdom, stands on part of this firm land which is only twenty feet above sea level.⁶²⁸

At present, Itsekiri towns and villages spread from sections of the hinterland to sections of the coastal Escravos axis of Warri. The preoccupation of the Itsekiri was identified as fishing, pottery, salt-making and earthenware.⁶²⁹

The Urhobo, another major ethnic group in Warri, have similarly traced their traditions of origin to Benin kingdom.⁶³⁰ However, Dike has warned that claims of traditions of origin to Benin, which may hold for some locations, must be treated with scepticism in the case of others until more supporting evidence is forthcoming, especially as the temptation to claim Benin origin

⁶²⁵ Ayomike, J. O. S, *The Ijaw in Warri: A Study in Ethnography*, Benin city: Mayomi Publishers, 1990.

⁶²⁶ Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956. See also, Ayomike, J.O. S, *A History of Warri*, Benin city: Ilupeju Press Ltd, 1988; Ayomike, J. O. S, *The Itsekiri at a Glance*, Benin city: Mayomi Publishers, 1990; Sagay, J. O. E, *The Warri Kingdom*, Sapele: Progress Publishers; Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969.

⁶²⁷ Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry {Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936}*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p.32. Linguistically, these terms do not have any meaning or bearing in the Itsekiri language.

⁶²⁸ Lloyd, P. C.,: *The Itsekiri*, being part of the same book by R. E. Bradbury, quoted in Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, pp. 29-30.

⁶²⁹ Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p.p. 30-31.

⁶³⁰ Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, pp. 6. The Urhobo are located in hinterland settlements of Warri such as: Warri, Sapele, Abraka, Ozoro, Oghara, Ughelli, Orogun, Agbarho, Aladja etc. Urhobo are mainly agricultural farmers producing pepper and other agricultural products, which they exchanged with products from their neighbors inhabiting the coast fringe of Western Niger Delta.

is very strong.⁶³¹ In fact, though some Urhobo trace their lineage to the Benin monarchy, others have traced the movement to their present settlements from Ijawland and still others claim Igboland as their tradition of origin.⁶³² On origin of the name Warri, Peter Ekeh, an Urhobo scholar argues:

The origin of the name Warri does not belong to the Itsekiri, Urhobo or Ijaw. The whole region from the mouth of Rivers Forcados and Escravos to the inland waterways now called Warri River was nicknamed after the Portuguese sailor Afonso de' Aveiro, who pioneered in the exploration of the region in the 1840s. His surname 'Aveiro' would be pronounced in its Latin form of 'Aveiro,' yielding various corruptions of 'iwere' and 'wari.'⁶³³

The Ijaw are the third major ethnic group in Warri (others, though insignificant in numerical terms are the Isoko and Ukwuani). Ijaw the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, occupy the stretch of the coastal fringe and considered the earliest settlers in the Niger Delta.⁶³⁴ They seem to have preceded the Portuguese arrival into the region.⁶³⁵ A contemporary oral tradition of origin says Ijaw of the western delta migrated to their present locations from Gbaraun, a community in central delta, several centuries ago.⁶³⁶ Another account is to the effect that Oporoza, a coastal community in the Escravos and ancestral home of Gbaramatu kingdom in the Warri axis, is the origin of Ijaw people (especially so-called western fringe Ijaw settlements: Arogbo, Apoi, Kabo, Kanbowei, Efferun-Urhobo and even Gbaraun in the central delta).⁶³⁷ Early Portuguese writers have for a very long time provided evidence of the existence of Ijaw and Urhobo settlements in the western delta. For example, Duarte Pacheco Pereira, one of the earliest Europeans to visit the western delta in the fifteenth century, wrote:

Five leagues beyond Rio dos Fermoso is a River with a fairly large mouth, which we call Rio dos Escravos. Two slaves were obtained by barter there when it was discovered; hence its name. Five leagues beyond Rio dos Escravos is another River called Rio dos Forcados; its name is due to the fact that when it was discovered many large birds were found here with tails forked like swallows; five leagues up the branch is a place of barter, which consists chiefly of slaves and cotton cloths, with some panther skins, palm oil and some blue shells with red stripes which they call 'coris'. These and other things we buy there for brass and copper bracelets. The inhabitants along this River are called Huela (*maybe Ogula*). Farther in the interior is another country called Subou (*probably Urhobo*)

⁶³¹ Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956, p. 21.

⁶³² Ibid,

⁶³³ Ekeh, P. P, (ed.), *Warri City & Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2004, pp. 197-198. Peter Ekeh's interpretation strikes me as quite weak. It is hard to figure out how Aveiro (Ah-vay-eeroh) in Portuguese is phonetically related to Warri. Also problematic is Ekeh's assertion that Aveiro "pioneered the exploration of the region in the 1840s" when there are evidence that the Portuguese visited Benin Kingdom on occasions as far back as the fifteenth century.

⁶³⁴ Dike, K. O, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956.

⁶³⁵ Ibid; See also, E. J. Alagoa, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005.

⁶³⁶ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005.

⁶³⁷ Ibid,

or *Sobo*), which is densely populated; here there is a fair amount of pepper. Beyond these dwell other negroes called Jos (*Ijaws*), who own a large country; they are a warlike people.⁶³⁸

Pereira further emphasized Ijaw habitation of the western delta when he said:

Ships making for Rio dos Forcados have suffered wreck here, for they passed Rio dos Forcados without recognizing it and entered Rio dos Ramos mistaking it for the other and were wrecked on the bar. The inhabitants of this country are called Jos (*Ijaws*) and... There has been no trade here so far, nor do we know if there is any possibility of trade. All of this country is densely populated and thickly wooded, the interior is intersected by other Rivers and all the Islands, the inhabitants communicating by canoes made of a single trunk.⁶³⁹

Pereira's account of Ijaw and Urhobo existence in the region is further corroborated by William Moore's version that "the territory now known as the kingdom of Itsekiri or Iwere was inhabited by three tribes, namely, Ijaws, Sobos and the Mahins before the advent of Prince Ginuwa."⁶⁴⁰ Similarly Peter Ekeh, writing on the western delta, referenced Father Joseph Kenny who in his detailed history of the relationship between the Benin and the Portuguese also identified two group of persons aside the Benin: "the Ijo (whom the Portuguese routinely called 'Jos') were common in the Rivers that the Portuguese traversed and the Sobos."⁶⁴¹ On the name "Warri," the Ijaw claim that it is a rendition of the Ijaw word "Wari"⁶⁴² (meaning home or house) used to refer to their homeland (Wari) before the arrival of the Portuguese and British.

Radically different historical accounts among the three ethnic groups, based on equally divergent histories of origin, speak to the knotty question of who actually settled first in Warri. Since every group claims to be the autochthon, with histories and documents fabricated and (re)constructed to sustain such claim, how do we determine who amongst the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw is indigenous and who is an immigrant to Warri? This is Warri's historical trilemma, and it has defied solutions and generated tension and strife in the western delta.

5.3 Pre-Atlantic Trade

Very little literature exists on pre-history ethnic relations in Warri and, by extension, most parts of the western delta before the arrival of the Portuguese merchants. Most historians

⁶³⁸ Pereira, D. P, *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, translated and edited by, George H. T. Kimble, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937, pp. 128-129.

⁶³⁹ Ibid, p.130.

⁶⁴⁰ Moore, W., *History of Itsekiri*, Stockwell 1936, p. 13, quoted in Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p.11.

⁶⁴¹ Ekeh, P. P, (ed.), *Warri City & Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2004, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁴² Wari (meaning "home" in Ijaw) was the homeland for the western Ijaw where they returned after fishing season in the creeks and coast of the western delta. Most communities in the coastal delta today were mere fishing camps/ports where Ijaw fisherfolks settled for fishing purposes (in an interview with Chief Thomas Ekpemupolo at Kurutie Community in Gbaramatu on June 17th 2011).

focus on European-written documents about the region. Archaeology, which could have helped in the reconstruction of western Niger Delta (Warri) socio-political history, is inadequate due to a dearth of excavations in the delta; the terrain has contributed in no small measure to this deficiency. Some historians have, however, argued that before the Portuguese came to Warri and its environs, internal trade existed across the region, and also with peoples of the hinterland.⁶⁴³ Alagoa, in his work on trade in the Niger Delta, observes:

There was, however, another delta trade axis that was little observed by the early European visitors, and was, in fact, gradually subverted by the arrival of European traders and wares at different points on the coast. This was the transverse trade across the delta from east to west. The sole reference to it in European accounts of the Niger Delta was probably that of Adams towards the close of the eighteenth century when he reported from Warri in the Western Delta; 'Much trade is carried on here with the natives of Bonny and New Calabar, who come in their canoes for that purpose'...The traditions indicate that the trade of the Eastern Delta States passed westwards to Warri and beyond the Benin River to connect other routes to the lagoon ports of the Ijebu country and, most probably, to Lagos.⁶⁴⁴

Alagoa stressed further:

...the Oproza bronzes, like those others scattered throughout the Niger Delta, pre-date the overseas trade, and indicate contact between the delta communities and those of the hinterland...The combination of oral tradition, material artifacts, and of the meager written evidence suggests a modest participation of the Gbaramatu in external and internal trade on the Escravos River. The bronzes suggest migration or trade probably pre-dating the overseas slave trade. The oral traditions of origin of the Ijoh of the area do indeed attribute such antiquity to the Gbaramatu settlement of Oproza.⁶⁴⁵

Ikime similarly posits the existence of internal trade relations between the coastal Itsekiri and their hinterland Urhobo neighbors:

The mode of life of the Itsekiri people has been determined by their environment. Thus, the Itsekiri are primarily fishermen and have become known in the area as suppliers of 'crayfish' which was a valued article of trade between the Itsekiri and their Urhobo and other neighbors, and which today is still one of the articles of trade for which the Itsekiri are known...The Itsekiri have never been farmers to any great extent, there being very little land on which they could farm. At no time

⁶⁴³ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005; see also, Alagoa, E. J, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1970), pp. 319-329; see also, Alagoa, E. J, "Oproza and Early Trade on the Escravos: A Note on the Interpretation of the Oral Tradition of a Small Group", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. V, No. I (1969); see also, Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969.

⁶⁴⁴ Alagoa, E. J, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1970), pp. 322-323.

⁶⁴⁵ Alagoa, E. J, "Oproza and Early Trade on the Escravos: A Note on the Interpretation of the Oral Tradition of a Small Group", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. V, No. I (1969), p. 156.

in their history did they ever grow enough food to feed themselves. Consequently they have always depended for their agricultural products on the farming folks to the hinterland, especially the Urhobo.⁶⁴⁶

The foregoing historical analyses unveil a mutually beneficial socio-economic relationship among the various ethnic groups in Warri before the incursion of the Portuguese trade merchants and colonialism into the region starting in the fifteenth century. Not only did the arrival of the Portuguese traders and imperial Britain change the articles and mode of trade but it also affected the social relations in the area and the ethnic groups' independent political existence.

5.3.1 The Trans-Atlantic Trade and Rise of Itsekiri

The arrival of Portuguese traders changed the dynamics of trade and inter-ethnic relations among the groups in the Warri region. For one thing, the Itsekiri became middlemen between the hinterland markets and British merchants. The concentration of trade with the Itsekiri has been attributed to their strategic location at the Benin River and their monarchical system of governance at the time.⁶⁴⁷ The trans-Atlantic trade created the enabling environment for the growth of Warri as a kingdom independent from Benin.⁶⁴⁸ Articles of Itsekiri trade included slaves, ivory, pepper, cotton clothes, leopard skin, and palm oil, while the Portuguese exchanged these articles with brass, copper manilas, tobacco, linen cloth, woolen, coral and glass beads.⁶⁴⁹ The “gatekeeper” role played by the Itsekiri strengthened them politically, socially and economically; they became not merely wealthy due to commerce, but politically strong. And as Claude Ake rightly noted, economic dominance by one class over another induces gross inequality.⁶⁵⁰ The Portuguese helped to maintain this ethnic hegemony by supplying firearms and other weapons of “communal destruction” to their Itsekiri allies. The firearms helped to maintain Itsekiri superiority in the trade and repress other ethnic groups in the region. Emboldened by the support they received from the Portuguese, the Itsekiri attacked Urhobo and Ijaw communities and established trading posts in Urhoboland and Ijaw territories in the Escravos River.

Unlike the Urhobo, who featured as suppliers of slaves in the midst of Itsekiri domination,⁶⁵¹ coastal western Ijaw are conspicuously missing from the records of trans-Atlantic

⁶⁴⁶ Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid,

⁶⁴⁸ Ryder, A. F. C., “Missionary Activity in the kingdom of Warri to the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. II, No. 1 (1960), pp. 1-25.

⁶⁴⁹ Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p. 45; Ikime argues further that considering the environment of the Itsekiri and the items traded with the Portuguese, the Itsekiri must have secured some of these trade items from their Urhobo and other neighbors in the territory.

⁶⁵⁰ Ake, C., *A Political Economy of Africa*, Longman: Harlow, 1981.

⁶⁵¹ For a detailed study of Urhobo-Itsekiri relations in Warri, see Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969; see also, Ukiwo, O., “Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Ethnic Conflicts: A Comparative Study of ethnic Relations in Calabar and Warri, Southern Nigeria”, PHD dissertation submitted to the Department of International Development, University of Oxford, 2006.

trade. There is very little literature on the western Ijaw though they resided in this region long before the Portuguese arrival. Unlike in the east, the western Ijaw were not active participants in the trans-Atlantic slave or palm oil trades.⁶⁵² The most common reference to western Ijaw in existing works is the tag ‘pirates.’⁶⁵³ For instance, John Adams described the western Ijaw as “a predatory race, [who] frequently attack boats bound to Gatto (i.e, Ughoton or Gwato of the records); and when weakly manned, they have been known to murder the crew, plunder their cargoes and burn the boats,”⁶⁵⁴ while De Cardi portrayed the western delta Ijaw as “great canoe-builders and agriculturists in a small way who produced a little palm oil.”⁶⁵⁵ Writing on the historical silence regarding western Ijaw, Ikime notes:

The Ijoh of the western delta did not, for example, develop into important city-states in the days of slave trade or those of the palm oil trade which replaced the slave trade in the nineteenth century. So while the Ijoh of Eastern Nigeria has been prominent in the annals of delta export trade, his counterpart in the Delta Province tended to remain basically a fisherfolk. At a first glance this appears surprising seeing that the Western Delta featured prominently in the trading activities of the Portuguese and other European powers in the period c.1500-1670. During this period the commercial activities of the Portuguese as of other Europeans were concentrated mostly on the Rivers Forcados and Benin. As a look at the map of this area reveals, these Rivers led respectively to the kingdoms of Itsekiri and Benin. In other words Portuguese and other European commercial activities by-passed the western Ijo, the bulk of whom lived in the area to the south of the Forcados and Benin Rivers, the highways of overseas trade not only in the early period to which reference has been made, but also in the nineteenth century.⁶⁵⁶

An examination of the western Ijaw’s ecology reveals an impediment: “Although location near the sea and by navigable entrances was important for this development, equally important was a rich hinterland which could be exploited for the purposes of export trade.”⁶⁵⁷ Although the requisite of ports to the development of business activities is essential, such ports must be directly linked with the hinterland by an adequate means of communication.⁶⁵⁸ Furthermore, the western Ijaw’s lack of a centralized political authority that could direct business

⁶⁵² This explains why the war-canoe house system in eastern Ijaw settlements is non-existent in western Ijaw settlements. Similarly, rather than the institution of the *Amanyano* - as King separate from the priest - in western Ijaw the *Pere* (King) simultaneously combines the duties of chief priest and King (ruler) of the community. A Chief priest in this context is not the owner of the settlement but a mere custodian of the culture and tradition of the clan or group.

⁶⁵³ Ukoha, U., “From ‘Pirates’ to ‘Militants’: A Historical Perspective on Anti-State and Anti-Oil Company Mobilization Among the Ijaw of Warri, Western Niger Delta”, *Journal of African Affairs*, 106/425, pp. 587-610, 2007.

⁶⁵⁴ John Adams, quoted in Ikime, O, “The History of Western Ijo 1900-1950: A Preliminary Survey”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 69.

⁶⁵⁵ D. M. De Cardi, quoted in Ikime, O, “The History of Western Ijo 1900-1950: A Preliminary Survey”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 69.

⁶⁵⁶ Ikime, O, “The History of Western Ijo 1900-1950: A Preliminary Survey”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 66.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid,

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid,

activities in the city-states was also a hindrance.⁶⁵⁹ In contrast the Itsekiri possessed such a centralized authority, were strategically located at the mouth of Benin River, and could communicate adequately with -- and hence utilize -- Benin as its hinterland for facilitating trade.

Surprisingly, British colonial records are also silent on the socio-political and economic activities of western Ijaw. This silence cannot be disconnected from the fact that the British inherited from the Portuguese an existing commercial/social relation with the Itsekiri in the region; none of the important trading centers was located in an Ijaw territory. Although there are records of visits by the British consuls to mediate trade disputes between Itsekiri and white traders and prepare the ground for imperial rule, very few, if any, of such consul visits were made to Ijaw settlements.⁶⁶⁰ Like the Portuguese, the British consuls mentioned the Ijaw only in passing, describing them as trouble-makers and/or sea pirates. For instance, in 1856 and 1857 the British consul in charge of the territory deployed gunboats against western Ijaws because they “ventured in great force to within sight of the English factories and committed great depredations, capturing several canoes with cargoes of palm oil, making captives of their crew.”⁶⁶¹ On the British consuls’ silence about the western Ijaw in their records, Ikime notes:

Later in the century -1884 – Burutu and Ogula featured in the treaty-making journeys of Consul Hewett. But the consul has left no comments on the way of life of the Ijo people concerned. Indeed the Ijo aspect of the treaty-making journey was a kind of appendix to the more widely known incident of a protectorate treaty with the Itsekiri of 1884.⁶⁶²

The lack of historical works on the western Ijaw may also be connected with their uncompromising posture while the trans-Atlantic trade and colonial rule lasted. The various scanty descriptions of the western Ijaw show that they were uncooperative and did everything within their means to scuttle trade in their territory, perhaps connected to their exclusion as middlemen. Written narratives have not been fair to the Ijaw on their role in western delta history. Ikime, considering the importance of written history on the development of a people, has advocated for a comprehensive study on the history of the western Ijaw:

This history of the Western Ijo still remains to be written. The Ijo have remained so much in the backwoods both economically and politically that any one who seeks to write their history must be prepared to spend a great deal of time on the field, for recorded documentary material is scarce. Because the British hardly penetrated Western Ijo, the history of western Ijo must be more a study of people,

⁶⁵⁹ For the western Ijaw, the village served as the active political unit of governance. The Ijaw practiced an amorphous system of governance where one is often not expected to look up to a higher political unit. Even though clan consciousness exists, it was limited among the Ijaw. A clan center exist in the main village of each group and offspring of the main village recognizes their ritual linkages with the latter, but had little to do with it politically. This situation is a reflection of the nomadic lifestyle of the Ijaw. The western Ijaw practiced a village assembly gerontocratic system of governance.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 69.

⁶⁶¹ Campbell, quoted in Ikime, O, “The History of Western Ijo 1900-1950: A Preliminary Survey”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 69.

⁶⁶² Ibid, pp.69-70.

their actions and reactions to the various developments that have taken place around and among them, than a study of European activity in their land.

To summarise, except for some works by Alagoa, no serious historical research has been undertaken on the western Ijaw to date.⁶⁶³ Except for some works by Alagoa on Ijaw, even though Urhobo are discussed in western Niger Delta literature, it is the Itsekiri who are in dominance. Over time, the economic advantage of the Itsekiri over other ethnic groups in Warri was extended to the social and political spheres, which they structured to their own advantage in the midst of other ethnic groups. Historical scholarship in short mirrors the political economy.

A robust history of the Itsekiri produces, if inadvertently, active silence on their itinerant coastal Ijaw fisherfolks and hinterland Urhobo neighbors in Warri. Narratives about Warri convey that what happened to other ethnic groups aside from the privileged Itsekiri is inconsequential and does not matter. Clearly, the power of history lies in the fact that “history is always produced in a specific historical context. Historical actors are also narrators and vice versa.”⁶⁶⁴ Similarly, the social production of history revolves around people, and does so in three basic ways: “First as agents, or occupants of structural position, as actors in constant interface with a context and finally as subjects whose voices are aware of their vocality.”⁶⁶⁵ In this context, people and groups are silenced if they are incapable of penetrating processes of historical production at the stages of fact creation (making of sources), fact assemblage (making of archives), fact retrieval (making of narratives) and the stage of retrospective importance (making history in the final instance).⁶⁶⁶

The historian is expected to reinvent the past in order to unveil the truth, and embedded within this process is power. But in the production of historical narratives, power is disguised as “unproblematic and irrelevant,” and it is entrenched at various levels of the narrative:

Power does not enter the story once and for all, but at different times and from different angles. It precedes the narrative proper, contributes to its creation and to its interpretation. Thus, it remains pertinent even if we can imagine a totally scientific history, even if we relegate the historians’ preferences and stakes to a separate, post-descriptive phase. In history, power again begins at the source.⁶⁶⁷

The history and historiography of the western delta is significant to understanding the origin of gross inequality, political exclusion, domination, and conflicts in the region. In the western delta, history and historiography are constantly invoked in social, political, economic and legal discursive spheres in order to validate claims in the region.

An evaluation of western delta historiography shows that the trans-Atlantic trade, which started in Benin River, was expanded to Ode-Itsekiri, headquarters of Itsekiri monarchy in the

⁶⁶³ Alagoa, E. J, *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005; Alagoa, E. J, “Oproza and Early Trade on the Escravos: A Note on the Interpretation of the Oral Tradition of a Small Group”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. V, No. I (1969), pp. 151-157.

⁶⁶⁴ Trouillot, M, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, p. 22.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 23.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 26.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 28-29.

mid-nineteenth century during the reign of King Akengbuwa.⁶⁶⁸ The trade strengthened the Itsekiri monarchy and its merchants economically and socio-politically. The movement of trade from Benin River to Ode-Itsekiri consolidated their stronghold through the establishment of more trading posts in Warri and environs. Itsekiri merchants later turned these trading posts, which were necessitated by the movement of trade into Ode-Itsekiri, into Itsekiri settlements in the region. Akengbuwa died shortly after the relocation of the trade center to Ode-Itsekiri. After the death of King Akengbuwa, intra-ethnic chieftancy rivalry increased in Itsekiri that lasted nearly a century (1848-1936: period of interregnum). It involved competing claims to the throne by Dore (Dogho) and Nana Olomu (from two different influential Itsekiri royal families).⁶⁶⁹ The absence of an Itsekiri Olu (monarch) during this period paved the way for British administrators to appoint influential and wealthy Itsekiri men as “governors” of Benin River. The interregnum chieftancy vacuum permitted the position of Benin River governor to be construed as the most influential political structure in the community. Any person appointed “governor” became the *de facto* political leader of Benin River and discharged various responsibilities, including control of coastal trade, resolution of disputes, and maintenance of law and order.

5.4 British Imperial Rule

In 1849 Britain appointed John Beecroft as first consul for the Bight of Benin and Biafra with a view to facilitate colonial rule. Beecroft was a British trader highly knowledgeable about the geography of the delta.⁶⁷⁰ The British, who had secured control of the Nigerian space in the Berlin conference of 1884/5, used the period of interregnum to pilot their anticipated indirect rule – by appointing Itsekiri trade merchants as “governor.”⁶⁷¹ The Ijaw and Urhobo were never considered for this position due to a lack of centrally organized governance institutions in their domain. All British-appointed Governors in the western delta, including the most influential governor Nana Olomu, were Itsekiri: Diare in 1851, Tsanomi in 1870, and Olomu in 1883.

Governor Olomu Numa was of the Ologbosetere lineage. Before his death in 1883 he was one of the richest Itsekiri merchants in Benin River, Numa was succeeded by his beloved son Nana Olomu (popularly called Nana) as head of the family and Governor of Benin River.⁶⁷² The “Olu” as Itsekiri monarch was the chief merchant and in this capacity collected customs duties (tolls) from European traders who came into Benin River for business. Nana Olomu was officially appointed Governor of Benin River on July 12, 1884 at a gathering of the most

⁶⁶⁸ Ode-Itsekiri is the headquarters and ancestral home of the Itsekiri Kingdom and it is located some twenty miles away from Warri town.

⁶⁶⁹ Falola, T., & Aderinto, S., *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History*, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010.

⁶⁷⁰ Ikime, O, “The Western Niger Delta and the Hinterland in the Nineteenth Century” in Ikime, O, (ed.), *Groundwork of History*, London: Heinemann, 1980, p. 268.

⁶⁷¹ Starting from the 1890s, the British had taken practical steps towards a direct full implementation of colonial rule rather than use the Royal Niger Company. Hence, in 1891 the British established the Niger Coast Protectorate with several districts in the Niger Delta. In western delta three districts were established: Benin River District, Sobo District and Warri District.

⁶⁷² Ikime, O, *Nana of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1972; Ikime, O, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1968; see also, Ayomike, J. O. S, *Nana: British Imperialism at Work*, Ilupeju: Mayomi Publishers, 1992.

influential Itsekiri merchants of the time. One of Nana Olomu's first actions on assuming office was to sign a "protection treaty" with British on July 16th, only four days later; the treaty brought Benin River under British protection.⁶⁷³ It is imperative to acknowledge that the British "did not consult with Itsekiri's neighbors in the Western Niger Delta, namely - Benin, Ijaw and Urhobo."⁶⁷⁴ This is the context in which the attempt to extend this treaty to other ethnic groups in the Warri region became the genesis of persistent rivalry in Benin River.

Consul Hewett (1884-1890s) extended the Itsekiri-British Treaty of 1884 to cover non-Itsekiri territories in Benin River.⁶⁷⁵ In a further twist, the Ijaw of River Forcados, Escravos and Ramos were reported to have entered into their own "protection treaty" in 1888 in which they ceded their territory to the Royal Niger Company.⁶⁷⁶ But to uphold the authority of Nana Olomu, Consul Hewett dismissed the Royal Niger Company treaty entered with the Ijaw as not binding, on grounds that the Ijaw were subjects of Nana Olomu. Hewett therefore petitioned the Home office to decline recognition of the Ijaw-Royal Niger Company treaty. MacDonald was commissioned to investigate the incident and, after an extensive tour of the area and interviews with Ijaw elders as well as Governor Nana Olomu, noted that Nana had gone to the Ijaw communities with a British gunboat and forced them to surrender their copies of the treaties. He also noted that "Nana failed entirely to show him that he ever had any right or power over Ijaw"⁶⁷⁷ in Benin River. According to MacDonald, the Ijaw story, which he believed, was that they have never been subjects of Nana, but that the latter was a good friend.⁶⁷⁸ MacDonald wholeheartedly accepted the stories as told by intelligent Ijaw elders he interrogated. Despite MacDonald's analysis, the 1884 Itsekiri-British protection treaty and subsequent inclusion of independent groups, without their consent, was at the core of Itsekiri hegemony over other groups and provided foundation to their sole claim to ownership of Warri and the surrounding areas.

Nana Olomu, a dependable and trusted ally of the British, was deposed in 1894. He was accused of stopping trade with the British with a view to jacking up the price of palm oil in the region. The British decision to eliminate Nana Olomu as gatekeeper and to deal directly with palm oil producers in Benin River and hinterland markets has been suggested as the reason for his banishment.⁶⁷⁹ The deportation of Nana Olomu (1894) and Oba Ovonrenwen (1897) of Benin

⁶⁷³ Ikime, O, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1968, pp. 50-96.

⁶⁷⁴ Ekeh, P, (ed.), *Warri City and British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2004, p. 17.

⁶⁷⁵ This action to overlord Nana Olomu and the leadership of the Itsekiri ethnic group, through the backdoor, over other ethnic groups in Benin River, was not without the tacit political and weaponry support of British merchants; turn allies, in the region.

⁶⁷⁶ MacDonald, "Report of Her Majesty's Commissioner to the Niger and Oil Rivers" in January 1889 and submitted in 1890; Ikime, O, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1968.

⁶⁷⁷ MacDonald, "Report of Her Majesty's Commissioner to the Niger and Oil Rivers" in January 1889 and submitted in 1890, p. 63.

⁶⁷⁸ Foreign Office, 84/2109, Macdonald's Report Chapter VII – The Forcados Question, quoted in Ikime, O, *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta*, *op. cit.*, 1968, p. 62.

⁶⁷⁹ For more details on Nana Olomu, see Ikime, O., *Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta: The Rise and Fall of Nana Olomu Last Governor of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1968; see also, Ikime, O., *Nana of the Niger Delta*, London: Heinemann, 1972.

gave the British unfettered access to cheat palm production in the region. Chief Dore (Dogho) Numa, an Itsekiri trader with adequate knowledge of the terrain, was co-opted by the British to hunt down Nana and Oba Ovonrenwen. Chief Dore, a fellow Itsekiri trader, helped greatly in the British search, attack, and subsequent banishment of Chief Nana Olomu from the region.

The British Consul Galway (1890s) compensated Chief Dore Numa, who assisted British troops with their onslaught against Nana Olomu and Oba Ovonrenwen, by appointing him as their Chief Agent in the region. The British also appointed an Urhobo Chieftain, George Eyube, as Chief Agent to represent the Urhobo hinterland. Unfortunately, the untimely death of George Eyube in 1901 led the British to incorporate the Urhobo hinterland under the supervision of Chief Dore (Dogho) Numa with the result that Numa became the only recognized government-appointed Chief Agent in the Warri axis.⁶⁸⁰ Again, Chief Dore Numa used his position as Chief Agent of the British to sign leases for parcels of land for his British friends without the consent of the other ethnic groups; he did this in 1906, 1908 and 1911.⁶⁸¹ These early twentieth century Warri land leases, signed by Chief Dore Numa, are the major basis of Itsekiri claim to ownership of Warri lands. The Itsekiri claim that Chief Dore Numa -- a Chief they never appointed -- acted on their behalf in signing the Warri land leases with his British allies. But since the twentieth century the Ijaw and Urhobo in Warri have challenged the validity of these leases. Also, during the time he was appointed president of Warri Native Court of Appeal, Chief Dore influenced the empowerment and appointment of Itsekiri elites into strategic positions: native courts, court clerks, interpreters, etc. Chief Dore Numa's disproportionate appointment of his Itsekiri kinsmen into strategic administrative positions even when they fell outside the Itsekiri domain, and his over-lordship in Warri to the detriment of other ethnic groups, laid the foundation for inequality and conflict in Warri.⁶⁸² The Urhobo and Ijaw mobilized their communities against Chief Dore Numa and Itsekiri domination, which after all was against the British-professed principle of native administration in the region.

The Urhobo and Ijaw mobilization against Itsekiri domination reached a climax with the introduction of taxes in 1926. In parallel with the tax regime being resisted in Aba in 1929, there was similar resistance in Warri, where aggrieved Urhobo and Ijaw residents mobbed Itsekiri tax officers. For instance, the District Officer at Forcados had informed the visiting Lieutenant Governor from the Southern Province that the "attitude of the people seems to be -- we will pay if Warri pays. The assessment and taxation of much of the Division will present a problem similar to that found among fishing settlements in the Rio Del Rey area."⁶⁸³ The tax regime riots and perceived resentment over Itsekiri domination in the western delta caused the British to undertake native administration reform in 1932. The reform saw the emergence of new divisions: Jekri-Sobo Division, Sobo Division, and Western Ijaw Division. The height of administrative

⁶⁸⁰ Dore was appointed President of Native court on its establishment in 1900 and also appointed to the Nigerian Council in 1914 after the amalgamation of north and southern Nigeria.

⁶⁸¹ For instance, Ogbe-Ijoh and Agbassa lands allegedly belonging to Ijaw and Urhobo were signed out by Dore Numa as leases to the British without the knowledge of the people.

⁶⁸² For instance, Forcados court, which was at the headquarters and so was a Native Council presided over by the District Commissioner, was entirely composed of Itsekiri men with no Ijaw on the bench of the court until 1916. Hence, the Ijaw took little or no interest in the native court administrative system and by extension the British Government.

⁶⁸³ National Archive Ibadan (NAI)/Colonial Secretary Office (C.S.O) 26/File No. 09098, Vol. No. IV "Inspection Notes by Lieutenant Governor, Southern Province", December 1926 & January 1927.

reforms and political discrimination against the Western Ijaw was the 1940s relocation of divisional headquarters from Forcados to Warri rather than Bomadi as demanded by the Western Ijaw Native Council.

In general, Western Ijaw communities were less impacted than other ethnic groups by British imperial rule in the region. The mangrove swampy terrain made it difficult for colonial officers to gain unfettered access to Ijaw settlements. The British admitted that the “truculent Ijaws” had “never really been conquered.”⁶⁸⁴ The ecology contributed to the lack of social, educational, human, political, economic and infrastructural development of Ijaw territories. Thus in comparison to other ethnic groups in the western delta, the Ijaw benefitted the least materially:

It is, for example, a matter for regret that as late as 1951 there were only six primary schools in the western Ijo Division preparing pupils for the standard six examinations. Little wonder that by comparison with most other Nigerian peoples, the Western Ijo have remained educationally backward, a backwardness which by the nature of things is reflected in other spheres.⁶⁸⁵

From the Ijaw perspective, the creation of Western Ijaw Division did not completely solve the problem of domination, whether perceived or real, because some Ijaw clans and settlements were still retained within Warri Division. The geography of these Ijaw communities and relatedly a raft of lawsuits over land ownership (e.g., Gbaramatu vs. Itsekiri; Ogbe-Ijoh vs. Itsekiri) were used to justify the colonial officers’ decision to retain the Ijaw in Warri division.⁶⁸⁶ The Ijaw and Itsekiri thus have a long history of strained relationship arising from boundary disputes and territorial claims dating back to the nineteenth century.⁶⁸⁷ In sum, the fundamental keys to understanding conflict dynamics in Warri are: the relocation of the Itsekiri Council to Warri in late 1940s and the various claims to the ownership of Warri land (who owns Warri?), the change in the title of the Itsekiri monarch from “Olu Itsekiri” to “Olu of Warri,” and the Itsekiri claim to all lands in Warri based on land leases signed by Chief Dore Numa.

5.5 Warri Ownership Question (Who Owns Warri?) and the Demand for Political Space

Conflicts in and around Warri, which have taken on a violence dimension in the last two decades, can be traced back to the actions and inactions during British colonial rule in the early nineteenth century. Chief Dore Numa (the British-appointed Chief Agent and friend) dominated Warri Province’s political space for over thirty years, with support from his British allies. During this period, Chief Dore Numa signed land leases to the British, and did so without the knowledge of the Urhobo and Ijaw groups. Since the 1920s, the Urhobo and Ijaw settlements around Warri have been fighting this anomaly of land dispossession created by Chief Dore Numa. They protested, petitioned and went to court to reclaim “their” land, but most of the time they lost; judgments were delivered on the strength of colonial documents that featured Itsekiri chiefs as signatories:

⁶⁸⁴ NAI/C. S. O 26/2, File No. 11875, Vol. IV, Annual Report, Warri Province, 1927.

⁶⁸⁵ Ikime, O, *A History of Western Ijo 1900-1950: A Preliminary Survey*, *op cit.*, p. 83.

⁶⁸⁶ National Archive Ibadan (NAI), C. S O 26, File 27142, “Intelligent Report, Gbaramatu, 1930.

⁶⁸⁷ Moore, W, *History of the Itsekiri*, Stockwell: F. Cass, 1936, pp. 44-83.

The coming of the British and their formal acquisition of land for government and other purposes raised, for the first time, the question of the title to land. The fact that it was Dogho (Dore), an Itsekiri, who signed the legal documents which conveyed the lands to government has remained a key factor favoring the Itsekiri claim in the celebrated Warri land cases.⁶⁸⁸

Several of these court cases were appealed all the way to the Nigerian Supreme Court, while some reached the West African Court of Appeal and still others went as far as the Privy Council in London.⁶⁸⁹ Moreover, the fact that all judgments up till 1936 favored the Itsekiri did not deter the Urhobo and Ijaw from contesting Itsekiri claims to Warri land ownership.⁶⁹⁰ So, the question of the ownership of Warri land remains the most contentious and volatile issue in Itsekiri-Urhobo-Ijaw relations. The Itsekiri claim every land in Warri and environs as their home. The controversy over autochthony in Warri is a subject of great historical and legal disputation between Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw. In the next sections, I return to the question of the politics of co-habitation given that various oral and written histories are evidently carefully concocted products. I argue that the crises generated by this question was engendered by colonialism, but was deepened by Nigeria's Western Regional government's political action on chieftancy and, in the contemporary period, was forced to its boiling point by the spoils of petro-capitalism.

The combination of inconclusive, ambiguous and ultimately undocumented histories of settlement and rule (including many distortions and fabrications of actual history), the complex and complicated changes associated with several centuries of deepening European involvement, and finally colonial rule, fashioned a situation that is largely intractable at the level of historical consensus. The complexity and confusion turns on two profound issues. The first is the political salience of 'indigeneity' in Nigerian politics. At independence in 1960, the granting of citizenship rights was matched by a commitment to the preservation of customary forms of rule predicated on the notion of the indigenous group; this principle has been enshrined in the constitution. Consequently, indigeneity can be – and indeed always is – invoked as a basis for political claim making. The second issue is the fact that the definition of who is an indigene (operational definitions that reflect the hegemony of particular systems of chiefly and territorial governance) has direct implications for the politics of territory (i.e., who can establish or is entitled to a State, an LGA, or at least an electoral ward) and for control over oil-bearing lands. The question of controlling and “owning” Warri is therefore a question of the ways that indigenous groups can claim legal and legitimate access to land rights and hence oil rents, and to political institutions (local government or ward) that can confer on the chosen groups legitimate rights to the revenue allocation process in Nigeria. Owning Warri is a ferocious competition to

⁶⁸⁸ Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Ibadan: Longman, 1969, p. 255.

⁶⁸⁹ Imobighe, T. A, *et al*, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2002, p. 57.

⁶⁹⁰ Chief Thomas Ekpemupolo in an interview in Warri on June 30th 2011 posits that the court pronouncements have merely exacerbated the question of land ownership. When I posed to him that Itsekiri have won most land cases in Warri, the Chief asked, what does the Gbaramatu, Ogbe-Ijoh and Egbema people own and where? He argued further, the court judgment should not stop at merely saying Itsekiri own the land but should go further to tell the Ijaw man in Warri where he owns. “We existed in this environment before the Itsekiri came from Benin River and it was our fathers opposition against colonial domination that attracted the whiteman to the gullible Itsekiri; this is our land and nothing more.”

gain unhindered access to oil rents and social infrastructure through political autonomy. Warri is Nicos Poulantzas' classic example of nationalism as the territorialization of history and the historicization of space.⁶⁹¹

Since the late-1990s, the question of land ownership in Warri has turned violent. The Ijaw and Urhobo fought over land ownership in Aladja (the site of a gigantic steel company in Nigeria) and over Garigilo and Esama in 1996; the Ijaw and Itsekiri fought over LGA creation, relocation and ward delineation in 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2003; and the Urhobo and Itsekiri fought over both land in 1999 and ward delineation in 2003. All three groups have crossed paths over land squabbles in Warri. Thus, writing on the ownership of Warri in 2003, the Danjuma committee noted:

The issue of ownership of Warri has been settled through several court judgments. The fact that this issue is still alive today is merely the extension of the territorial claims for the whole of Warri Division by each of the three ethnic groups rather than for Warri urban itself.⁶⁹²

In an earlier time, August 1923, six Ogbe-Ijoh Chiefs petitioned the Resident Officer claiming that the lands of new Warri or Ogbe-Ijoh and Alders belonged to their fathers.⁶⁹³ They further claimed that their ancestor Enwe founded Ogbe-Ijoh and Warri. The Chiefs argued that from the time Ogbe-Ijoh was founded until the nineteenth century, when Urhobo and Itsekiri followed European traders to Warri, no settlement existed there.⁶⁹⁴ The petition articulated how the British decimated two of the six Ogbe-Ijoh quarters in 1893 and 1894 and how the remaining four had been demolished in 1902 and 1906, again by the British, to facilitate the building of Warri.⁶⁹⁵ In his analysis of the British expansion of trade and segregation, Ofonagoro alluded to this destruction when he said:

Even before 1894, Warri, an African village which was located about a quarter of a mile in the rear of the local European residential area had been 'purchased from its owners and burnt to the ground' by the Government because it was considered 'a hotbed of disease.'⁶⁹⁶

The Ogbe-Ijoh petitioners cautioned Chief Dore Numa not to attempt to claim lands in Warri and went further to remind him that, historically and geographically, the Irsekiri are from Benin River and not Warri River, but merely followed the European traders to Warri. The warning was clear:

As a government recognized Chief representing the Sobos, Jekris and Ijos etc, you sign land documents on people behalf and not yourself. Ijo land is not Jekri land. Chief Ogbe Yaunren of Ugbuwanguo late and you Chief Dore Numa of Bini

⁶⁹¹ Poulantzas, N, *State, Power and Socialism*, London: Left Book, 1978.

⁶⁹² Danjuma Committee Report of the Presidential Committee on Warri Crises, September 2003.

⁶⁹³ NAI/File No. 240, Petition Forwarding to in respect of the Lands of New Warri Or Ogbe-Ijo and Alder's Town in Warri, 29th August 1923.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid,

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid,

⁶⁹⁶ Ofonagoro, W. I, *Trade and Imperialism in Southern Nigeria 1881-1929*, London: NOK Publishers International, 1979, p. 235.

River are not natives of Ogbe-Ijo. Finally we assure you categorically that the lands of New Warri, Ogbe-Ijo and Alders town does not belong to you and your Jekri people... You Chief Dore and your Jekris are not natives of Ogbe-Ijo, Warri and also not the founder of Ogbe-Ijo, Warri. You Chief Dore is a government and native representative, the natives of the whole of Warri Province, appointed by the British government of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The British Government of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria acquired the lands of New Warri or Ogbe-Ijoh and Alders Town in 1906 and 1908 through and by the law of native land proclamation not by public land proclamation.⁶⁹⁷

Ikime also noted a petition filed by Ogbe-Ijoh claiming ownership of Warri land, which was vital to resolving the ownership question but instead was ignored:

In 1933 a group of Ijo people petitioned the Resident, claiming that the land now known as 'Ogbe-Ijo' in Warri township belonged to their fathers. They stated that some time after the fall of Nana the Provincial Commissioner, Seton James, requested the Ijo to move out of that land because government desired to acquire it. This, the Ijo did and so lost all control over the land. They now demanded that that piece of land be returned to them or that they be enabled to benefit from the rents accruing therefrom. To substantiate the claim that the land/originally belonged to the Ijo they enclosed copy of a notice signed by P. E Crawford and dated 21 October 1895, which stated that the British had decided to take Ogbe-Ijo under their protection, 'the headman of Ogbe-Ejor having specially asked to be placed under such protection'. No official notice was paid to this petition, yet it is of historical significance as indicating how the township of Warri probably developed.⁶⁹⁸

On November 10 1923, Chief Dore Numa gave a comprehensive response to the Ogbe-Ijoh petition and corroborated the petitioners' claim to be aborigines of Ogbe-Ijoh and well known to him. In his reply Chief Dore admitted that neither the Urhobo nor Itsekiri owned New Warri lands; rather, "Ogbe-Ijoh natives are the rightful owners of New Warri or Ogbe-Ijoh and Alder's town lands in Warri."⁶⁹⁹ The British Chief Agent went further to state that the town of Ogbe Ijoh, Warri had existed several years before the arrival of the Itsekiri and Urhobo, who followed the European traders into the territory in the nineteenth century: However, he claimed that some "Sobos from Agbassa-Otor were also living in Agbassa, Warri,"⁷⁰⁰ which was another territory under dispute between the Itsekiri and Urhobo. Chief Dore Numa, in his damning response to the petition of the Ogbe-Ijoh natives, acknowledged that the Itsekiri came from Benin River and that the British government had acquired Warri land belonging to Ogbe-Ijoh:

The Jekris, some of them from Bini River, some of them from Excravos River and some from Forcados estuary of Ijo territories. Myself Dore Numa came from

⁶⁹⁷ NAI/File No. 240, *op cit.*,

⁶⁹⁸ Ikime, O, *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Ibadan: Longman, 1969, p. 255; also see, Ughelli Papers, File No. 240, Jiebidah, Yobogha and Oloye to the District Officer, Warri, 13 January 1933.

⁶⁹⁹ See NAI/File No. 240/Chief Dore Numa's Reply to 'The Resident, Warri, Warri Province', November 10th, 1923.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid,

Bateren of Bini River of Ijo territory. Until a certain period of the same 19th Century freedom of living became impossible for Ogbe-Ijo natives when the British Governments of Oil Rivers Protectorate, Niger Coast Protectorate, Southern Nigeria Protectorate, the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria took over the control of the Lands from them and also quit them out of their own town Ogbe-Ijo, Warri. There was an Ijo settlement of Otrubo after Alders town along the left bank of Warri River, Warri from the Okere creek entrance, the Ijo Otrubo natives of Otrubo left there to the present Otrubo town before the Sobos town of Ogbe-Sobo. My very self Chief Dore Numa own not any land/or lands at Warri through native right of ownership. I owned land at Warri through alienation. Government acquired the lands from the natives of Ogbe-Ijo, and I got from the Government...The Government of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, when Sir Walter Egerton was Governor and Seton James was a Commissioner for the then Central Province that the land of Ogbe-Ijo was acquired by lease and to be in trust of the Government in 1906 and Alders town in 1908. Myself Chief Dore Numa and Chief Ogbe Yaunren were ordered by the Government and signed the two deeds of leases, we were not aware when the Deeds of leases were prepared for us to sign and again we cannot read and write. We only used our thumb impression.⁷⁰¹

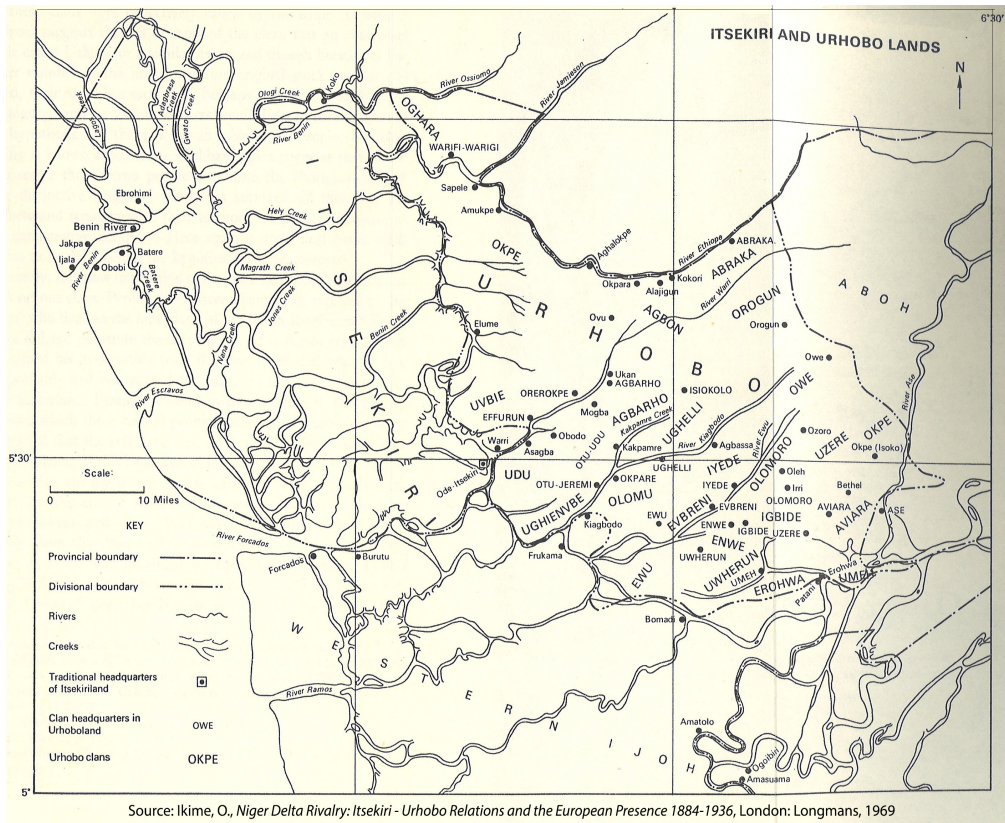
Chief Dore Numa, who acknowledged knowing the petitioners as respected individuals of Ogbe-Ijoh extraction, closed his response to their petition with a call for justice when he noted, "Justice is the root of peace. I am a Government appointed Paramount Chief who is representing all the peoples of Warri Province. Partiality, nepotism and tribalism is not of my rule."⁷⁰² In January and February 1923 Chief Dore Numa, who was also petitioned by Urhobo natives of Okere and Agbassa, had similarly repudiated private or representative claim to land ownership in Okere and Agbassa through Mr. S. L. Bucknor, saying, Okere land belongs to the people of Okere and Agbassa land belongs to the people of Agbassa.⁷⁰³ The Agbassa and Okere people had always claimed that their sections of Warri were virgin lands, with no sign of human habitation at the time of their settlement.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid,

⁷⁰² Ibid,

⁷⁰³ See Chief Dore Numa Letters to the people of Okere and Agbassa, through: Mr. S. L. Bucknor, Warri, January 18th 1923 and February 28th 1923 respectively.

Figure 18: Itsekiri and Urhobo Lands



Chief Dore Numa's repudiation of land titles in Warri jolted his British friends and allies in the region and had ramifications even in far away Lagos. The Commissioner of Lands in Lagos, W. J. FitzGerald immediately communicated Chief Dore Numa's disclaimer, saying it "constitutes a new and amazing development to the intricate history of Warri land... and it is difficult to understand why Dore made such a damning admission against himself."⁷⁰⁴ The Commissioner of Lands in Lagos attributed Chief Dore's action to his decision a year earlier to go back on certain deeds of conveyance to the colonial Government but was unsuccessful; according to the Commissioner, "it may be that he thinks he is placing Government in an awkward situation by his admission."⁷⁰⁵ The Commissioner of Lands also wrote to the Resident Officer in Warri Province maintaining the inexplicability of Chief Dore Numa's action, because he has "contested his right to proprietary interest in land;" so did the Commissioner envisage the effect of Chief Dore's admission on land litigations and judgments.⁷⁰⁶ The Commissioner requested that the Resident Officer furnish the Governor General with detailed information of the circumstances under which Chief Dore Numa made the damning admissions. He implored the Resident Officer to undertake a thorough investigation of the matter and possibly have an

⁷⁰⁴ NAI/File No. 240/W. J. FitzGerald, Commissioner of Lands, Lagos, Memo to: The Secretary, Southern Province, Lagos, October 16th 1923.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ See W. J. FitzGerald, Commissioner of Lands, Lagos, Memo to: The Resident Warri Province, 27th October 1923.

interview with Chief Dore Numa.⁷⁰⁷ The British, who certainly were rattled by Chief Dore's new position with regard to land leases in Warri, did everything within their power to ensure that the *status quo ante* was sustained.

The Ogbe-Ijoh natives supported their claim to the ownership of Warri land by attaching to their petition the "Township Assessment Report" of June 1928, prepared by F. P. Lynch. In the section on history, the assessor acknowledged that the Warri township was situated within the nucleus of an old Ijaw settlement called Ogbe-Ijoh.⁷⁰⁸ Due to his inability to trace oral or documentary evidence of the settlement's origin, Lynch estimated it at more than a century old. He described it as a small Ijaw settlement where nomadic fishermen anchored and traded with their Urhobo neighbors of the hinterland.⁷⁰⁹ The assessment report contains a vivid description of the area and people, recent development projects and facilities. It also noted how in 1888 or 1889 several Government officials who visited Warri were favorably impressed with the high right bank of the River.⁷¹⁰ Immediately following the visit of the government officials was the development of projects in Warri (construction of consulate building and post office in 1892 and completed and occupied in 1896).

The Itsekiri response to the evidence of Ogbe-Ijoh ownership of Warri land as contained in the "Assessment Report" was to the effect that the report was no longer of any relevance, due to other events that legally supplanted it:

All the three leases granted to the British crown, namely, in 1906, lease B2 in respect of GRA in 1906, lease B5 in respect of Daudu/Alders Town in 1908 and lease B7 in respect of Agbassa in 1911 were granted by Itsekiri Chief as representative of the Itsekiri people as landlords and owners of the land. None was granted by the Ogbe-Ijoh people, including the area called Ogbe-Ijoh.⁷¹¹

The Itsekiri argued that various court judgments had confirmed the sovereign rights of the "Olu" (Itsekiri king) on Warri lands and leases granted to Ogbe-Ijoh (1906) in Alder, Wilkey and Pessu Town (1908).

By the 1930s reorganization of Native Authority along tribal lines was undertaken to meet the demands and agitations of the various ethnic groups for self-rule in the western delta. The failure of the reorganization program was to have included some Ijaw clans and communities within the Jekri-Sobo Division. The Resident Officer, explaining the reason for this action, said:

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid,

⁷⁰⁸ NAI/CSO26/3, File No. 20653, Chief secretary's Office, Nigeria, "Assessment Report, Warri Division, Warri Province," 12th June 1928. Attached to the report is a map of the area.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid,

⁷¹⁰ Ibid,

⁷¹¹ See Report of the Ijaw of Warri/Itsekiri Peace Meeting, "Reply to Ijaw Reaction to Itsekiri Rejection of their Case for Three Ethnic Local Government Council Areas from the President Three Warri Local Government Council Areas Part II", January 2004.

or to be joined with their fellow ethnic group in the Western Ijaw Division.⁷¹⁴ In a preliminary report on the condition of the Ijaw communities, the District Officer notes:

The second problem is that of the Ijaw communities within the Itsekiri Native Authority Area, viz: The Gbaramatu Clan, the Ogbe_Ijoh community and a small Ijaw community in the Benin River Area. It is the desire of these communities to have an 'Ijaw Federation'. As far as the Ogbe-Ijoh and Gbaramatu areas go, this is welcomed as each of these areas is almost contiguous with the western Ijaw area to which they rightly belong, and to which in due time they might well be assimilated. These two communities are however far apart, the Ogbe-Ijohs being near Warri and the Gbaramatu almost at the mouth of the Benin River. The third community is too small and too far away to be encouraged to join this Ijaw group.⁷¹⁵

In the reorganization, a proposed move to relocate the Itsekiri Native Authority Administration headquarters from Ode-Itsekiri (Big Warri) to Warri was implemented.⁷¹⁶ On this new arrangement with regard to the Ijaw communities of Ogbe-Ijoh and Gbaramatu, the Resident -- whose opinion was ultimately rejected -- said:

Before proceeding to plan this reorganization, on my introduction Mr. Moodie endeavored to get clear in our own minds and in those of the people what the future of the Ijaw groups and the Itsekiri 'enclaves' ought to be. My first idea was that Gbaramatu should be transferred to Western Ijaw but this was rejected early because (a) The people themselves did not ask for it (b) The Olu claims the Land they live on and there might have been endless delays while this was worked out (c) The transfer would have reduced the Itsekiri N.A. to bankruptcy (d) The proposal would probably have turned the whole Itsekiri Council against the reorganization scheme (e) Geographical and transport difficulties which arise inevitably with every proposal connected with Ijaws.⁷¹⁷

For the reasons cited above, it was decided that the Ijaw groups in and around Warri should become part of Itsekiri Native Authority, with the same administrative and judicial organization as Itsekiri subordinate areas. On the judicial side, however, it was proposed that the Gbaramatu clan court with "grade C" powers should continue independently of the Itsekiri courts and that appeals from this court should be directed to the District Officer, except in land cases.⁷¹⁸ Eventually, when the Itsekiri Native Authority was reorganized based on Public Notice No. 10 of 1947, Gbaramatu and Ogbe-Ijoh clan Councils were among the seven subordinate native councils established.⁷¹⁹ Contention soon emerged when, in December 1948, the Ogbe-Ijoh people protested a proposed tax increase intended to enable the Olu build a palace in Warri. The

⁷¹⁴ NAI/Warri Province (W.P)/File No. 1452, "Separation from Itsekiri N.A. Annexation to Western Ijaw N.A: Petition from Ogbe-Ijaw People," June 6 1952.

⁷¹⁵ NAI, W.P., File No. 116/136.

⁷¹⁶ NAI, W.P., File No.116/165.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, W.P., 116/163.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid File No. 116/165.

⁷¹⁹ Aside these two Ijaw subordinate councils, other councils attached to the Itsekiri Native Authority are: The Koko Council, Ode-Itsekiri Council, Benin River Council and Gborodo Council.

Ijaw protest related, first, to a lack of development projects on their land and, second, to their claim that the Olu's jurisdiction did not extend to Ogbe-Ijoh. They observed, "In the year 1945 we applied for a Native Authority School, but we were not responded to."⁷²⁰ They attributed the lack of response to their subordinate status within the Itsekiri Native Administration. The Ijaw argued, "Since we do not receive any benefit for which we pay tax, there is no reason why we should be in agreement with the new assessment being proposed by the Itsekiri Council members."⁷²¹ In the 1950s the Ijaw, who had been tagged "a very backward tribal minority" of Warri, redoubled their efforts to separate from the Itsekiri Council and be included in Western Ijaw Division.⁷²² They were inspired by some Urhobo from the Jekri-Sobo Division being moved to join the Western Urhobo Division in 1949; at that point the Ijaw agitation turned tenacious. They contended that, like their Urhobo counterparts in the former Jekri-Sobo Division, they should be allowed to join their ethnic Ijaw Division. Such a move fit with the founding principle of the Native Authority Administration, that it be structured on the basis of ethnic or linguistic groups. The District Officer of Warri was sympathetic to the consistent petition of the Ijaw and recommended the change, saying:

The grounds of the petition are largely those of any unhappy tribal minority. The Ijaws, so the petition runs, are a minority with a different language, a humbler background, and with representation on the central Council which is always overruled even if it is heeded. The Itsekiri majority considers them inferior and acts accordingly. It is hard not to feel some sympathy with the Ijaw case, which has not been born of momentary exasperation. One remembers the historical background of simple Ijaw fishermen dominated by the knowing Itsekiri traders. The local government organization has never favored them; they have been asked always to try and fit in with the Itsekiris. The Gbaramatu clan petition in 1944. Both Clans petitioned in 1950 after the re-organization. Your letter of 9th August, 1950 re-instated the inadvisability of a change. No, so they say, having seen the old Jekri-Sobo Division split to the advantage of the Sobos and having endured further humiliations, they seek once more the right of being organized on the principle, which Government accepts, of ethnic and linguistic grouping.⁷²³

However, the Itsekiri reaction to Ijaw demand for political autonomy has been that of scorn and indignation: "Let these Ijaws go where they like but not with our land."⁷²⁴ Geography, which was earlier presented as the problem, was no longer an impediment due to the contiguity of Gbaramatu and Ogbe-Ijoh to Western Ijaw Division. Although financial loss to the Itsekiri also would not be serious, the Olu's claim to lands and the potential of losing a serious proportion of them was now the hitch. The District Officer, who had counseled both sides on moderation in order to bring the situation under control, offered his advice on the political sphere, saying:

⁷²⁰ Ibid,

⁷²¹ Ibid,

⁷²² NAI/ W.P. File No. 1452.

⁷²³ NAI/W.P. File No.1452, District Officer's letter to the Resident, "separation from Itsekiri N.A. & Annexation to Western Ijo N.A: Request for" June 1952.

⁷²⁴ Ibid,

Politically, this present agitation by the Ijaws is not, I feel, going to be easily quenched, certainly not by a further exhortation to collaborate with their Itsekiri brothers. The ties of inter-marriage and trade are not so tightly binding as to offset political emotion. Itsekiri prestige would be further weakened by a secession unless there were some compensatory development elsewhere e.g. in the Township. Thus an overall solution and nothing less seems called for.⁷²⁵

Rather than address the intractable agitation as evidenced by the District Officer's memo, the colonial government of the day merely adopted its usual promissory pacificatory approach to the demands of the Ijaw clans. The Ijaw argued that their predicament was the result of "legal, economic and political backwardness that subdued us, if not a stranger cannot ever rule his host."⁷²⁶ But they vowed never again to submit to the Itsekiri or allow them to dominate based on their political consciousness.

Beginning in the 1950s with the affiliation of some Urhobo within Warri town to the Western Urhobo Division, the "very backward" Warri Ijaw became more conscious, forward-looking and determined in their clamor for political autonomy. Wrapped up within the Ijaw quest for land ownership in Warri was the quest for political and economic liberation. By the 1950s the Urhobo had nearly caught up with the Itsekiri educationally and politically but the Warri Ijaw were lagging far behind due to lack of facilities and development in most of their territories. The establishment of a few Native Authority schools in the 1950s contributed in no small measure to the intensified agitation for political emancipation from Itsekiri.

In an inter area sub-Native Authority Council meeting held at Ogbe-Ijoh by the three Ijaw clans on March 3, 1952, the following resolutions were reached:

1. Be it be resolved that whereas we are all round Ijaws and have no connection in common with the Itsekiri in any form.
2. And whereas peoples whose dialects and native laws and customs differ cannot establish Government in smooth lines
3. And whereas the New constitution provides that local Government should be established on the basis of ethnic or linguistic group and which has been accepted in principle
4. And whereas the Government is aware of the wrong, abusive and slavish annexation to the Itsekiri Native Administration. Be it resolved that we demand immediate separation from the Itsekiri Native Administration and annexation to the Western Ijo

⁷²⁵ Ibid,

⁷²⁶ NAI/File No. 1503/15, "Severance from the Warri Divisional Council and Creation of a District Council for Ogbe-Ijoh, Egbema and Gbaramatu," Letter from Ogbe-Ijoh to The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice and Local Government, September 27th 1955.

Native Administration, and that copy of this resolution be forwarded through his Honor the Resident to the Lieutenant Governor, Western Region.⁷²⁷

The colonial administration, rather than grant the Ijaw joint request for political autonomy as demanded and recommended by Mr. Curwen (District Officer), rejected the proposal as unacceptable. In place of the District Council's demand, the Ijaw were merely granted Local Council status within Warri Divisional Council Area. Consequently, ten out of the eleven Ijaw elected representatives to the Warri Divisional Council boycotted its meetings.⁷²⁸ It is instructive to note that based on the blow suffered by the Itsekiri over the Urhobo boundary split (it weakened their prestige), a majority of the Itsekiri rejected the Ijaw proposal. The Itsekiri Council concluded their response to the Ijaw demand, as follows:

The suggestion that Ogbe-Ijoh in Warri, Egbeoma in the Benin River and Gbaramatu nearer to Gborodo should be grouped to form a District Council cannot be considered as these places are in different areas which are miles apart and they have no common boundary.⁷²⁹

The Local Government Inspector also objected to the Ijaw proposal for political autonomy. His argument was that the Warri Local Council Area was new and should be allowed to settle down, and also that the split would weaken the Itsekiri Divisional Council.⁷³⁰ He did acknowledge the neglect of the Ijaw but said this had improved of late and that he doubted if the agitations would die down for some time.⁷³¹ In a joint meeting held in Ogbe-Ijoh on September 23, 1955, the Ijaw rejected the outcome of the Warri Divisional Local Government Enquiry Committee report on the possibility of separation, calling it undemocratic and unconstitutional and asserting that it was the "opinion of the Warri Youth Congress" and contravened the rules of natural justice in that the six-man committee had five Itsekiri, one Urhobo and no Ijaw member.⁷³² Coupled with the fact that the Itsekiri dominated the Council – Itsekiri had thirty-seven members while the Ijaw had only fourteen members. With an uneven representation the "the Ijaw will only have a say but never a way," hence they reject the report. It is less of a surprise to note that the only Urhobo member in the Council's Enquiry Committee, Mr. E.N.A. Egho, submitted a minority report supporting the Ijaw viewpoint. The Ijaw reiterated their grievances as lack of infrastructure and human development since the 1928 introduction of tax in the region.⁷³³ They demanded self-rule and nothing else.

⁷²⁷ NAI/File No. 1503/15, "Severance from the Warri Divisional Council and Creation of a District Council for Ogbe-Ijoh, Egbeoma and Gbaramatu," Letter from Ogbe-Ijoh to The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice and Local Government, September 27th 1955

⁷²⁸ NAI/File No. 1503/15.

⁷²⁹ NAI/File No. 1503/15, Warri Divisional Council Resolutions to Local Government Inspector on Ogbe-Ijoh Council, sixteenth November 1955.

⁷³⁰ Ibid,

⁷³¹ Ibid,

⁷³² NAI/File No. 1503/15.

⁷³³ NAI/File No. 1503/15; Ogbe-Ijoh Local Council Response to Warri Divisional Council Report, 3rd December, 1955. The report says as at 1955 since the tax regime only four Ijaw trainees sponsored by the Council (three in 1944 and one to be in 1956). This shows the criminal neglect the Ijaw were subjected within Warri Divisional Council and reason for their consistent and determined agitation for a distinct political space.

The Permanent Secretary Mr. D.M. Elliott responded to the demands of the Ijaw on behalf of the Minister, with a stern warning:

I am directed to refer to your letter No. OLA01/1955 of the 27th of September, 1955 and to say that the Minister is not prepared to accede to your request. You are strongly advised to cooperate with the Divisional Council and to devote your energies to the settlement of your people within the existing administrative organization.

The Minister has been informed that out of your eleven representatives on the Divisional Council only one attends its meetings. In this connection your attention is invited to the provisions of section 26(2) (b) of the Local Government law.⁷³⁴

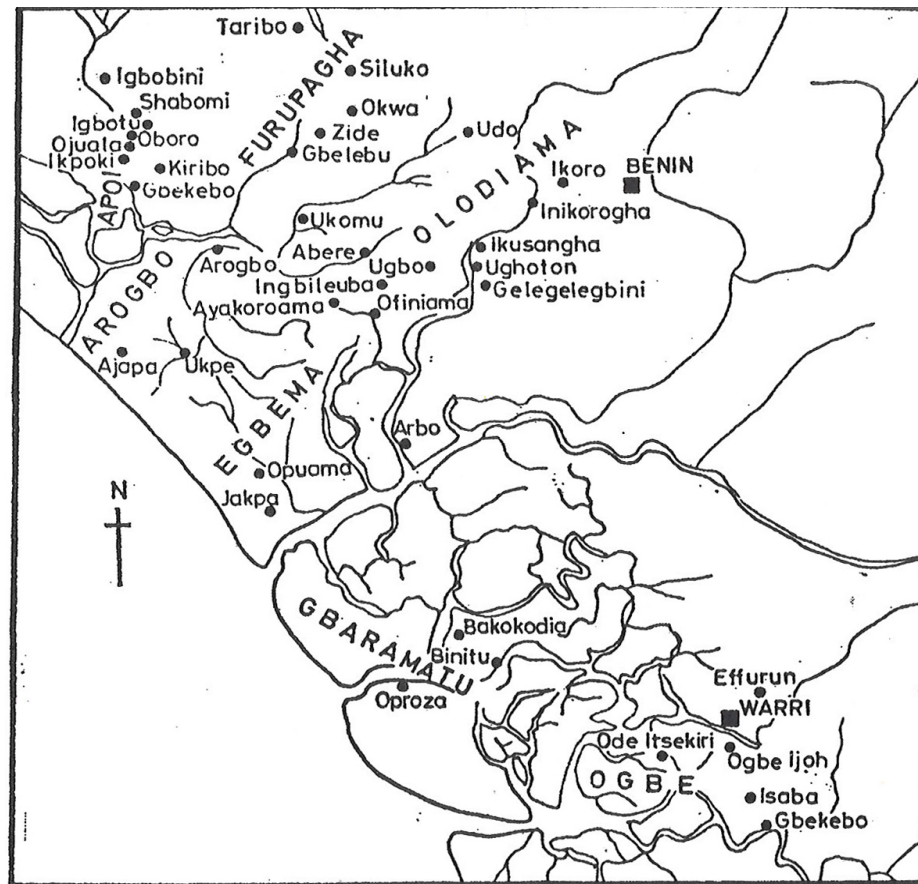
The Ijaw condemned the colonial officer's advice and termed it an invitation "into flames of burning fire, where one would be burnt."⁷³⁵ The stern warnings, rather than douse tension, merely aggravated the situation, with the Ijaw reiterating their claim to Warri land ownership and the corruption of the Ijaw word Wari (house) to Warri. But again, the Itsekiri argued that their land rights had been decided and settled at all available avenues by competent authorities – judicial, political and administrative. Ijaw welcomed the idea of judicial procedure for the settlement of Warri land disputes but only with the caveat that such must be undertaken outside any courts chaired by "Olu" or paneled disproportionately by Itsekiri members. While the Ijaw and Itsekiri fought over ownership of Warri land, an internal Memo from the Divisional Adviser of Warri to the Provincial Adviser reads: "As far as I am aware the Ijaws have been considered, to a certain extent, tenants of the Itsekiri, but I have no definite record to prove this in my office."⁷³⁶ Again, the crux of the Ijaw argument was that with the Itsekiri dominating the political, economic, and judicial spheres of Warri, the Ijaw will be denied justice. To petition the courts over land cases involving Itsekiri and other ethnic groups where Itsekiri are panelists (or where the "Olu" presides as President of the Court of Appeal) is as the local adage has it, like inviting a cockroach to a court where a chicken is Judge. So, the Ijaw believed – and still believe -- that the Itsekiri had unjustly acquired their lands due to the latter group's privileged positions. Moreover, the Urhobo had caught up with the Itsekiri and were running neck-in-neck on the political landscape.

⁷³⁴ Ibid,

⁷³⁵ Ibid,

⁷³⁶ Ibid,

Figure 20: Ijo (Ijaw) of the Western Delta Fringe



Source: Alagoa, E.J., *A History of the Niger Delta*, Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, 2005

In Warri, the elections of 1955 were fought along ethnic lines between the Urhobo and Itsekiri. The Itsekiri had aligned with the major political party in the Western region (Action Group) and recorded victory, while the Urhobo aligned with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a party at the national level. Itsekiri alignment with the Western Regional party secured them political appointments. While Urhobo, on the other hand, aligned with NCNC with a view to realizing the creation of a Mid-West State in the region. Immediately after the election, the Itsekiri began a rigorous campaign against the creation of a Mid-West State. The Olu of Itsekiri, King Erejuwa II, and other notable Itsekiri elites personally led campaigns opposing the new state. This was the situation when the Henry Willink Commission on fears of minority groups visited Warri.

When the Henry Willink Minorities Rights Commission visited Warri in November 1957, it was inundated with a barrage of memoranda addressing ethnic domination or the fear of it. For instance, the Itsekiri, who vehemently opposed the creation of Mid-West State, asserted that they opted to join their Yoruba kinsmen in Ondo Province of Western region for fear of domination. In a memorandum submitted to the Minorities' Commission by an Itsekiri elite Gabriel Ekwejunoe-Etche, he argued "...it is clear that the greatest fear of the Itsekiri people is to be

included in a Mid-West State which will virtually be controlled by the Igbos and Urhobos.”⁷³⁷ Other Itsekiri, acting through the Warri Divisional Council and Itsekiri Council of Chiefs, similarly opposed the creation of Mid-West State, saying:

That the Olu and the Traditional Chiefs of Itsekiri land now sitting at the Aghofon this fifteenth day of May 1957, hereby unanimously adopt the Resolution of the Divisional Council held at the Council on the 9th of May 1957 and resolve: The Itsikiri people being an integral part of the Yoruba Nation desire that their association with their kith and kin the Yoruba of the Western Region must remain unbroken. That the proposed Mid-West State is inimical to the interests of the Chiefs and people of the Warri Division and the Council of Traditional Chiefs here sitting dissociate themselves from this proposed state if and when it is formed.⁷³⁸

On the creation of Mid-West region, the Ijaw re-echoed their desire to be united with their kinsmen in Western Ijaw Division. For example, in one 1957 memorandum to the Minorities’ Commission composed by the Ogbe-Ijoh Local Council, the people of Ogbe-Ijoh noted:

That the Itsekiri too, are now agitating for an administrative redress from the Delta Province and annexation to Ondo Province in a Memorandum mandated by Olu as published in the ‘Daily Times’ of 22 August, 1957, praying the Western Nigeria Government to transfer the Warri Division to Ondo Province where they will join their ethnic group. This is to avoid minority *status* and domination by other tribes in the Mid-West when the Mid-West State shall have been created. That we, as hundred percent Ijaws will never be pleased to be transferred along with the Itsekiris to the Ondo Province, for as the Itsekiris belong to the Yoruba ethnic group, we Ijaws belong to the Ijaw ethnic group in the Western Ijaw Division in the Delta Province.⁷³⁹

Similarly, in a memorandum jointly signed by all the Ijaw Councils in Warri Province, the Ijaw documented their predicaments and woes under the dual yoke of Imperial Britain and local Itsekiri overlords:

...before the coming of the European into Warri Area, we knew nothing of boundaries, treaties for European settlement or agreement with neighboring tribes before settlement of both Europeans and other Nigerian tribes among us in Warri Area in Ogbe-Ijoh District... That the British Administration on their own personal desires for purposes of administration, and having seen people more advanced in civilization than us, subordinated us to the Jekri (Itsekiris) and the Sobos (Urhobos) under the title “Jekri-Sobo” Division which later came to be called “Itsekiri Division” after the separation of the Urhobos from the Jekri-Sobo

⁷³⁷ British National Archive (BNA)/Colonial Office (CO)/File No. 957/37. The same view of non-inclusion was expressed by the Memorandum submitted by the Council of OJOYES (Traditional Chiefs of Warri) to the Minorities Commission.

⁷³⁸ Ibid,

⁷³⁹ BNA/File No. 957/37 *op. cit.*,

Division and joined the Western Urhobo Division, now Warri Division as it is recently called in 1952. We are being administered by the Itsekiris with oppressive, undemocratic and unconstitutional ways...this unconstitutional subordination has greatly affected us that we are not heard by nor represented in the Western Nigeria Government. We are being administered dictatorially by the Itsekiris in all Local Government affairs; this will definitely eliminate our title "Ijaw" when Nigeria will attain her full independence if the position is not rectified.⁷⁴⁰

The Itsekiri and Ijaw were it would appear irreconcilable, uncomfortable with any arrangement that would make them subjugated minority ethnic nationalities in any new dispensation. Both groups preferred to join existing kinsmen Provinces. As an alternative, the Ijaw demanded entry into Rivers State, which stretched from Ondo Province in the Western Region to Degema Province in the Eastern Region, occupying the coastal creeks of the Niger Delta and part of the lower Niger.

In April 1957, through the Ijaw Rights Protection Movement, the Ijaw petitioned the Nigerian Constitutional Conference, London, to stop the allocation of Warri town and environs to any region or state pending the determination of a judicial process in Warri High Court between Ogbe-Ijoh and Olu of Warri with regard to land ownership.⁷⁴¹ The umbrella Ijaw body argued that so as not to complicate the situation, Warri should not be discussed or allocated to a particular state or region until the land dispute had been resolved through the judicial process already in motion.

In early 1959, the Western Regional Government established the Itsekiri Communal Lands Trust with the "Olu" as Chairman. The Western Regional Government awarded this body statutory powers to lease and regulate tenure of Warri lands, but in practice it was a carefully articulated ethnic political uppercut designed to floor other ethnic groups in the contest for Warri land ownership. The Ijaw and Urhobo protested against creation of the body on grounds that it was a deliberate design by the Yoruba ethnic group to deprive others of Warri land ownership. This action by the Western Regional government politically legitimized the Itsekiri claim to Warri land ownership and unlocked a floodgate of protests from Urhobo and Ijaw groups in the post-independence years.

Beyond the tri-fold claim to Warri land ownership, which was so intricately wrapped up with demands for political space, socio-economic empowerment, and resistance to one group's (the Itsekiri's) domination, the change in nomenclature of the Itsekiri monarch from "Olu Itsekiri" to "Olu of Warri" proved to be yet one more turbulent subject that created anxiety and conflict in and around Warri.

⁷⁴⁰ BNA/CO/File No. 957/37. Joint Memorandum submitted to the Minorities Commission by Ogbe-Ijoh Council, Gbaramatu Council and Egbema Council in November 1957.

⁷⁴¹ NAI/File No. 38, Vol. III, Western Ijaw Division, General Petition.

5.6 Beyond A Royal Crown: From “Olu Itsekiri” to “Olu of Warri”

Aside from the land dispute, another vexed issue in Warri during the 1990s and before was the nomenclature “Olu of Warri” being attributed to the Itsekiri monarch. In the early twentieth century, Dore’s appointment as Chief Agent of the British made it impossible to have a substantive monarch in Itsekiri until his death in 1932. Dore’s death and the subsequent installation of Emiko as Ginuwa II in 1936, after nearly a century without a monarch, ended the period of interregnum in Itsekiri monarchy. Shortly after the installation of Ginuwa II, a petition was sent to the Resident Officer, Warri, that the nomenclature of the Itsekiri monarch be changed from “Olu Itsekiri” to “Olu of Warri.”⁷⁴² The Resident Officer refused to accede to the Itsekiri request because it was a petition by one Edema Arubi with no evidence that the Council backed his petition.

Later the same year, the Commissioner of Southern Province, Sir William Hun, visited Warri, and the Council again requested that the nomenclature of the Itsekiri monarch be changed to “Olu of Warri.” The Commissioner saw nothing wrong with what he saw as a mere change in nomenclature but the Urhobo objected to the idea. The Urhobo Progressive Union⁷⁴³ expressed their objections in a petition to the Resident Officer, Warri. The Resident Officer responded to the Urhobo protest, saying that the accepted and recognized nomenclature was “Olu of Itsekiri”:

With reference to your letter of January 27, 1936, I have the honor to inform you that the designation accepted by the Itsekiri Council and agreed to by Olu-elect is that of ‘Olu of Itsekiri’. This is also the designation recognized by the Resident and approved by His Honor the Chief Commissioner.⁷⁴⁴

The issue was not amicably settled, however, and once again the Itsekiri raised the issue before Mr. Shute. On this particular occasion, after asking the Urhobo for their take on the proposed change in monarch’s nomenclature, the Urhobo once again rejected the proposal and Mr. Shute refused the Itsekiri demand. But the Itsekiri persisted with their proposal for the change on the ground that their capital city is Iwere (Warri), and merely changing the nomenclature of their monarch to reflect their home, as was customary in other places, was in order. The request was again presented, this time during Mr. White’s visit to Warri in July, when the Itsekiri pleaded with him, saying, “our home city is Iwere (Warri) and that the Olu’s title should be the anglicized version of Iwere, i.e. Warri.”⁷⁴⁵ Again, the proposal was rejected. Now, the Itsekiri accused the British officers of favoring the Urhobo position.

Throughout the 1940s the Itsekiri persevered in their call for the change to “Olu of Warri.” Much correspondence (letters, proposals, telegram, telephone calls)⁷⁴⁶ exchanged hands between the Itsekiri and British officers. For instance, in November 1944, the Senior Resident of Warri Province, Mr. Bowen, wrote to the Secretary of the Western Region, saying:

⁷⁴² NAI/W.P. 86, Vol. I, “Proposal for Change of Title.”

⁷⁴³ The Urhobo Progressive Union is the Umbrella Organization of Urhobo people formed in 1937 with Chief Mukoro Mowoe as its inaugural President.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid,

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid,

⁷⁴⁶ For more on the correspondence see, NAI/W.P. 86, Vol. I.

...a new Olu was elected after the usual controversies...A great deal of quite unnecessary suspicion was engendered among the Urhobos and very largely due to their representations the Resident (Cap. E.A Miller), after consultation with the Secretary, Southern Provinces, installed him as Olu of Itsekiri. Not long before but directly afterwards a concerted effort was made by the Itsekiris to prove that the title should be Olu of Warri.⁷⁴⁷

In his letter Bowen catalogued all previous futile attempts by the Itsekiri to effect the change, explained the reasons and described the Urhobo and Ijaw objections to the proposal. The Resident Officer enumerated a quite fair assessment of the grounds on which the Urhobo and Ijaw were opposed to the proposed change in nomenclature when he said:

The Urhobo and Western Ijaws are protesting against the use of the title Olu of Warri on the grounds that he was appointed Olu of Itsekiri and that the attempt to obtain the title Olu of Warri is intended to raise the prestige of the Olu over the other tribes in the Province and later to call him Olu of Warri Province. I have informed these Councils that Government have no intention of permitting such to be even considered. The arguments in regard to the Alake, Alafin and Oba are just met with the answer that they have always been so called. I was surprised at a recent meeting of the Western Ijaw Council to see the depth of feeling on this matter; the Itsekiris were called sly and cunning and nothing could make them believe that it was not the Olu's intention to attempt to become their overlord. For this I think the Itsekiris are much to be blamed. Frequent attempts by the Olu to interfere in the Ijaw lands of Forcados and Burutu, the Sapele land case, the unfortunate references of Edema Arubi to the Urhobos as slaves, which were not immediately repudiated by the Itsekiri Council, and the general idea of many of the Itsekiris that, they are a superior people and were civilized by contact with the Europeans long before the backward tribes of the hinterland, have led to a cumulative feeling of suspicion and distrust, which it appears quite impossible to eradicate from the minds of the other tribes.⁷⁴⁸

Bowen was sympathetic to the Itsekiri demand from an historical perspective but was quick to submit that such was politically undesirable. He recommended "Olu of Itsekiri" rather than "Olu of Warri" as an acceptable nomenclature. The Urhobo and Ijaw displeasure with the Itsekiri's claim to Warri land ownership and the existing litigation over land ownership in and around Warri motivated the subordinate groups' petitions against the change. Their thinking was that what the Itsekiri failed to achieve through political, historical and legal processes, they wanted to realize through the cover of the Crown, and they were firmly – and antagonistically -- opposed.

In February 1945, the Itsekiri Native Authority held a meeting and resolved to style their ruler "Olu of Warri" stating that the nomenclature of their monarch had been so styled since time

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid, see Bowen letter to The Secretary, Western Province.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid,

immemorial. It is not the official title of any other tribal head,⁷⁴⁹ and Itsekiri communicated to all British officers concerned: “We shall continue to call and address our ‘Olu’ as ‘Olu of Warri.’”⁷⁵⁰ Itsekiri advised anyone or any group not comfortable with their decision to proceed to any court of competent jurisdiction to file judicial proceedings against their action.⁷⁵¹ Again, after reviewing all Itsekiri petitions with regard to the change in nomenclature, the Chief Commissioner responded that “Olu of Warri is a misnomer” so, “the title should remain Olu of Itsekiri.”⁷⁵² Still not satisfied, in March 1946 Edema Arubi petitioned the British Secretary in Lagos, accusing British officers of collaborating with the Urhobo by rejecting the nomenclature change.⁷⁵³ Still, the British Secretary of State was mindful of the political tensions such change could attract. He disapproved of Ginuwa II’s objective, and the “Olu of Itsekiri” was compelled to be known and addressed as such until his death in 1948.

The British government’s 1949 relocation of government institutions and paraphernalia to Warri as Capital of the Province made Warri town more attractive. In view of the relocation, the Itsekiri decided to relocate their monarch’s palace to Warri too. To the British officers, the move was administratively reasonable.⁷⁵⁴ But the Urhobo and Ijaw considered the plan as yet another tactical move that, along with the Itsekiri proposal to change the monarch’s nomenclature, was deliberately designed to lay claim to the ownership of Warri.

In 1951, the Macpherson constitution was released onto the political landscape of Nigeria, designed to introduce party system into Nigeria’s political lexicon and encouraged citizens’ participation. In the same year, after the usual controversies, Gbemisi Emiko -- who took the title Erejuwa II -- was installed Olu of Itsekiri. The elections held under the Macpherson constitution saw the emergence of the Action Group (AG) forming the government of Western Region. Six Urhobo and one Itsekiri candidate of the NCNC won the election while Itsekiri Chief Arthur Prest won on the platform of the AG party. The NCNC formed a coalition government with the Northern People’s Congress to form a unity government at the national level, while the AG held sway at the Western Region. The Western House of Assembly handsomely rewarded Chief Arthur Prest for being elected into the central legislature, and was confirmed as the central Minister of Communications.⁷⁵⁵ Itsekiri saw in this political appointment of their son an opportunity to resuscitate and relaunch their earlier campaign for change in their monarch’s nomenclature.

Once again, this time with Erejuwa II as monarch, the Itsekiri renewed their proposal, now appealing to the Western Region government for the change in nomenclature from “Olu Itsekiri” to “Olu of Warri.” Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of AG and Western Region Minister of Local Government, visited the Urhobo-Isoko Native Authority in April 1952.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁴⁹ Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p. 269.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid,

⁷⁵¹ NAI/CSO, 26, File No. 54176, “From minutes of Itsekiri Native Authority. Ode-Itsekiri,” February 1945.

⁷⁵² Ibid,

⁷⁵³ Ibid; Edema Arubi’s letter to the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 March 1946.

⁷⁵⁴ NAI/File No. 116/162.

⁷⁵⁵ Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p. 270.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid,

Before the visit, Itsekiri had sent in their request. The Urhobo Council used the opportunity of the Minister's visit to express their total objection to a rumored plan to change the title because it "would give a universal impression that Olu was paramount chief of the province." They impressed it upon the minister that the renewed agitation for change in nomenclature was by virtue of undue influence Itsekiri wielded in the Regional party in power.⁷⁵⁷ At the meeting, the Minister assured the Urhobo-Isoko Council that if the issue arose he would return to gauge the wishes and position of Urhobo-Isoko Division before taking any decision.⁷⁵⁸ But in actuality in May 1952, without any consultation and disregarding all protests against the change, the Western Region government acceded to the Itsekiri demand. The change in the Olu's nomenclature from "Olu of Itsekiri" to "Olu of Warri" was announced in the media with the Western Regional government's tacit approval.

The Urhobo and Ijaw reacted angrily to the change in title by writing to the Western Region government to rescind its decision. The Urhobo forwarded two different petitions to the Western Region government to retract the change.⁷⁵⁹ The Urhobo argued that the unwarranted change in title was made without any justification, considering that Warri town was composed of people from various ethnic groups among which the Urhobo and Ijaw constitute the earliest and majority settlers. They asserted that the change was bound to have far-reaching consequences with regard to the progressive development of Warri town. Moreover, the Resident Officer of Warri Province, while responding to the Ijaw demand for autonomy during the period, had noted:

It is difficult to believe that Gbaramatu or the majority of Ogbe-Ijoh will cooperate with the Itsekiri in the near future, and indeed the recent change in the Olu's title has made the Ijaw as a whole more than ever antagonistic to the Itsekiri, so the question of separation cannot be dismissed out of hand.⁷⁶⁰

The change in title further strained relationships between Itsekiri and other ethnic groups in Warri and contributed to the Ijaw recurring demand for a distinct political space. Ijaw in other parts of the country condemned the title change, the Ijaw State Union, an umbrella Ijaw organization, also sent a petition calling on the Lieutenant Governor to reverse the change in the nomenclature of the Itsekiri monarch:

...knowing fully well the feelings of our people at home and abroad, we hereby humbly submit our heart-burning grievance towards the wrong naming of the 'Olu of Itsekiri'. Years have elapsed when 'Olus' have been coronated in Itsekiri tribe, but your excellency, none has been recognized as the 'Olu of Warri'. As it is apparently obvious that the 'Olu' is solely for the Itsekiris, your excellency will see with us that he will rightly be named the 'Olu of Itsekiri' than the 'Olu of Warri'. Warri is a cosmopolitan town mainly inhabited by the Urhobos, Ijaws, Ukwani-Aboh Igbos of the province. Since Warri is the seat of the Province in

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid,

⁷⁵⁸ NAI/W.P. 2/File No. 86/3.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid,

⁷⁶⁰ NAI/W.P. 1/ 1452.

which the above named tribes are under and since the Olu' is for the Itsekiris, we vehemently oppose the 'Olu' being called the 'Olu of Warri'.⁷⁶¹

Urhobo and Ijaw representatives in the Western House of Assembly also impressed it on the Western Region Minister for Local Government, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, that he ought to revisit the matter in light of the feverish tensions in Warri over the change. But the Minister's response to the representatives was to the effect that "the decision had been taken in good faith and after careful consideration."⁷⁶² In order to placate their constituents back home, the representatives suggested a change in name of the province from Warri Province to Delta Province.⁷⁶³ A meeting on this subject involving Itsekiri, Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko and the Minister for Local Government in Ibadan, merely reiterated the position that the change in the Itsekiri monarch's nomenclature could not be reversed.⁷⁶⁴ But as a compromise, the Minister informed the delegation of a possible change in the name of the province from Warri Province to Delta Province. Even so, the mere change in name of the province was not enough to placate the anger already created in the land.

Yet again, considering the charged atmosphere in Warri and environ with regard to the title change, an Urhobo elite who worked with the Labor Department, Chief T. E. A. Salubi, petitioned the Western Regional Government on September 5, 1952 where he catalogued the way that previous attempts were vehemently opposed and subsequently rejected by British administrators because a change in the title would deprive Itsekiri neighbors of their entitlements and cause significant tension derivable.⁷⁶⁵ But Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Western Region government treated the change in title as an insignificant action that deserved no serious attention. Meanwhile, the Itsekiri had changed most nomenclature with the term Itsekiri to Warri; for example, the Itsekiri National Union was now Warri National Union, and chiefs such as "Ologbotsere of Itsekiri" now went by the title "Ologbotsere of Warri."

Tension over the change in title was at its feverish peak when the central Minister for Communications, Chief Arthur Prest, proposed a tour of Warri on the September 8, 1952. Chief Arthur Prest, an Itsekiri and the only member of AG in the Western House of Assembly, has been fingered as the architect of the Western Region government action on the change in the Olu's title.⁷⁶⁶ The Urhobo mobilized to stop the Minister's proposed tour because they considered it a mockery of other ethnic groups in Warri. The Itsekiri, on the other hand, mobilized to give their native son a rousing welcome. The stage was set for violent confrontation in the Warri area. The atmosphere was tense and urgent intervention was required to prevent things getting out of control.

⁷⁶¹ NAI/W.P. 2/File No. 86/3.

⁷⁶² NAI/W.P. 1/File No. 86/2.

⁷⁶³ The decision to change the name of the province from Warri Province to Delta Province was to disassociate the Province from the Olu' nomenclature.

⁷⁶⁴ NAI/W.P.2/File No. 86/3.

⁷⁶⁵ Salubi, T. E. A., "The Change of title "Olu Itsekiri" to "Olu of Warri", in Ekeh, P. P, (ed.), *Warri City and British Colonial Rule in Western Niger Delta*, op cit, pp. 76-104.

⁷⁶⁶ Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p. 271.

Mr. Curwen, Resident of the Province, quickly sent telegram and telephone messages to the Minister of Communications, advising him to suspend his visit due to the palpable tension generated by his proposed visit and to avert bloodshed.⁷⁶⁷ The Minister heeded the instruction and suspended his visit to Warri but it was an action taken a little too late. An Urhobo group had already attacked an Itsekiri welcome procession and in a matter of minutes the whole of Warri town was engulfed in violent conflict. The violence spread to Urhobo towns fighting with Itsekiri settlements around Warri.⁷⁶⁸ The violence left extensive damage to property and scores of Itsekiri wounded but thanks to the swift intervention of the police, who brought the situation to normalcy, no lives were lost. In anger, the Urhobo and Ijaw boycotted the Warri main market. The Ijaw returned to the Ogbe-Ijoh market as their main area of commerce but the Urhobo community established a new market at Igbudu and instructed their people to stop selling food to the Itsekiri.⁷⁶⁹ The violent conflict attracted more petitions on the change of title from within and outside Warri. One telegram, from the Uvwie Urhobo of Accra to the Resident of the Province, reads, “warn Itsekiri against unlawful claim on Warri ownership careless talk cause confusion, please maintain peace;” in another, the Urhobo Union in Accra warned, “Olu has no claim in Warri Township stop unwarranted claim.”⁷⁷⁰ Also, the Urhobo community in Accra denounced the Itsekiri action and enjoined the government to restore order and peace amongst the ethnic groups.⁷⁷¹ The Itsekiri also petitioned, asking for adequate compensation for Itsekiri residents in Urhobo settlements whose homes and property were destroyed during the violent confrontation.⁷⁷² The Urhobo-Isoko Council then petitioned the Lieutenant Governor, accusing the Western Region government of bias indicated by its aiding the Itsekiri with the title change:

...we feel more strongly that there definitely is a bias by the Western Government against each single step we have taken to demonstrate our grievance and that the same has at no stage of the ‘transformation’ of the Olu’s title by the Western Regional Government given any consideration.⁷⁷³

In similar vein, the Urhobo-Isoko Native Council accused the Lieutenant Governor for his declarations during his visit to Warri on November 7, 1952. During his visit after the incident, the Governor had said without any commission of enquiry that “considerable damage had been done to property and that the Resident Officer was in the process of compiling names of victims,” and that “it would be for the Regional government to decide what action should be taken with regard to compensation.”⁷⁷⁴ The Lieutenant Governor also expressed concern over the difficult times the Itsekiri Native Authority was going through under the circumstances. The Urhobo-Isoko Council condemned the Governor’s utterances as unfair remarks to other members of the Province who, as their right, legitimately protested against the change in nomenclature. Urhobo-Isoko petitioners canvassed for the establishment of a commission of enquiry to ascertain the desirability of the title change and proposed change in name of the province (from

⁷⁶⁷ NAI/W.P. 2/File No. 86/3.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid,

⁷⁶⁹ NAI/CSO 26/File No. 54176. Telegram messages to the Governor by Itsekiri people (Mowarin, Oweh, Numa etc.).

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid,

⁷⁷¹ Ibid,

⁷⁷² Ibid,

⁷⁷³ Ibid,

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid,

Warri to Delta Province). But the government declined to set up the demanded commission of enquiry. Instead, the Lieutenant Governor referred all matters concerning the change in title to the Western Region government. When the matter was eventually raised in February 1953, the Western House of Assembly simply rubber-stamped the decision of the Western Region government and confirmed the title change.

The conflict and subsequent actions of the Western Region government worsened ethnic relations in Warri. From that moment on, the Ijaw agitation for political and socio-economic liberation from Itsekiri gained extra momentum. In late 1953, the Ogbe-Ijoh District Council pronounced the Itsekiri as their “bitterest political enemies” and subsequently wrote to Curwen, the Resident of Warri Province saying, “We the people of Ogbe-Ijoh detest the idea of the Olu visiting us as a Native Potentate coming to see his vassals” and emphasized further that “never in our chequered history have we been subjects of the Olu of Warri and we will oppose to the grave his visiting our territory.”⁷⁷⁵ It is noteworthy that the deep-seated animosity that exists amongst ethnic groups grew from the struggle for legitimacy and entitlements in Warri since the British rule. The emergence of ethnic politics in the 1950s, leading to independence in 1960 and beyond, deepened these ethnic tensions in Warri and environs. At the heart of the conflict, however, is the enthronement of a totally alien policy of supremacy of one group over others, which is not only bizarre but also inconsistent with pre-Colonial inter-ethnic relations that existed amongst ethnic groups in Warri.

5.7 Conclusion

It is evident from the above analysis that the inter-ethnic conflicts and contentious politics and chieftancy in Warri are a direct consequence of the trans-Atlantic trade and British colonial policies in Western Niger Delta. Itsekiri dominance in the region was bolstered by their early access to the trans-Atlantic traders and supported by successive British colonial administrations. I have shown that tensions and crisis arose in Warri mainly as a result of bringing to the same fold distinct “peoples who had been accustomed to independent existence” since time immemorial.⁷⁷⁶ The foundation of the conflicts is the resistance against the domination/over-lordship of one group over others in a setting in which the colonial state reinforced ethnic identity and commercial interests exacerbated inter-group relations and material interests. Omoweh was therefore right when he 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

⁷⁷⁵ NAI/W.P. 2/File No. 86/2.

⁷⁷⁶ Ikime, O., *Niger Delta Rivalry: Itsekiri-Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884-1936*, Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd, 1969, p. 272.

politics of exclusivity, as evident in the rule of a minority ethnic group over the majority ethnic group.⁷⁷⁷

This was further complicated in 1952 by the Western Region's change in the Itsekiri monarch's nomenclature, from "Olu of Itsekiri" to "Olu of Warri." The fact that the Itsekiri monarch's relocation to Warri had been recent (in the late 1940s) and that the proposed change in his nomenclature had been rejected from 1936 to 1946 by British colonial administrators. It was approved by the Yoruba ethnic-led Western Region government without sufficient consultation to alleviate the Urhobo and Ijaw's fears with regard to Itsekiri domination and claim to Warri land ownership. The appointment of the "Olu" as the chairman of Communal Land Trust in 1959 by the Action Group-led Western Region administration, irrespective of the fact that Warri is inhabited by other ethnic groups, all helped to lay the firm foundation for post-independence violent conflicts in Warri. These age-old, unresolved, and highly contentious issues of land ownership wrapped in the demand for citizenship rights and the demand for change in Itsekiri monarch's nomenclature have produced a multi-headed hydra in Warri and beyond. In the next chapter I show how this history of contentions and conflict in the Warri region was both renewed and expanded with the post-colonial demands for political citizenship in a petro-capitalist space.

⁷⁷⁷ Omowah, D. A, "Is It the Warri Crisis or the Crisis of the Nigerian State?," ACAS Bulletin, No. 68, p. 11.

Chapter Six

Political Deprivation And the Rise of MEND in Western Niger Delta

The Warri crises became complicated with the commencement of oil exploration in the area, particularly when the oil companies began to pay ‘royalties’ and compensation for ‘surface rights’ to land owners. As a result, territorial claims in Warri were intensified amongst the three ethnic groups including the Ijaws who had hitherto been maritime nomads but who now began to pitch permanent tents on land. Hence, a new dimension was introduced into the conflict in the area and this has since heightened the rivalry among the three ethnic groups because the more territory each ethnic group could claim, the more the access to ‘royalties’ and other socio-economic benefits (Report of the T.Y. Danjuma Presidential Committee on Warri Crises, September, 2003).

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the second part of the analysis of the western delta, I examine the post-independence socio-political ethnic relations in Warri. In doing so, I highlight the Warri Ijaw demand for political autonomy that is wrapped up in Local Government Area creation and the logic of revenue allocation. The chapter will also examine the emergence of youth mobilization in the western delta fringe and the oil complex, militant activities around the Gbaramatu clan, and the subsequent formation of Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). I hope to espouse why the MEND insurgency emerged in the Western Delta in 2005/6. Through a critical analysis of the transitory nature of the contemporary conflict in the western delta, I argue that the emergence of the oil complex after 1960 transformed a straightforward local demand for political citizenship and land ownership into a national, regional and global demand for ecological justice.

6.2 Post-Independence Socio-Political Ethnic Relations in Warri

At independence in 1960, the Itsekiri domination of other ethnic nationalities in Warri which they had undertaken under the cover of British colonial rule was consolidated. As willing allies of early Portuguese traders and, later, British colonial rule in the region, they had been empowered educationally, economically, socially and politically. The Itsekiri were better positioned for post-independence Nigeria than any other ethnic group by virtue of their educational and political attainments at local and regional levels.⁷⁷⁸ The Ijaw were relegated to

⁷⁷⁸ For instance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh an Itsekiri and associate of Nnamdi Azikwe was elected into the Western Region House of Assembly in 1951. He was elected treasurer of one of the major political parties in the country NCNC and became the Minister of Finance in 1957. He was re-elected into the Western Region House of Assembly

the background and had no place, while the Urhobo were not politically very visible until after independence at the Western Region cabinet.⁷⁷⁹ The Itsekiri political affiliation to the Action Group party and the political favor they had secured at the regional level further increased the antagonism and strained their social relations with other ethnic nationalities. Also, the political achievements of Itsekiri and especially their control of the machinery of governance at local and regional levels help consolidate their claim to political citizenship in Warri.

In August 1963, the fierce opposition notwithstanding, the Mid-Western Region was created out of the Western Region, with Dennis Osadebay as Administrator of the new region. The creation of Mid-West Region by the union of Benin and Delta Provinces generated enormous controversy and the Itsekiri and Ijaw in particular had objected to its creation for fear of ethnic domination. As alternatives, the Itsekiri had opted to join the Western Region, while the Warri Ijaw demanded to be joined to the Western Ijaw Division. Each ethnic group feared the domination of one over the others and wanted to maintain their pre-colonial independent inter-ethnic relations.

In any case, the Urhobo had demanded and worked hard for the creation of a Mid-West State out of the Western Region.⁷⁸⁰ As expected, the Urhobo dominated the list of political appointees to the new Mid-West Region at inception; for the Itsekiri it confirmed their fears of domination.⁷⁸¹ Chief Okotie-Eboh, the influential Itsekiri leader at the national sphere, however, used his political capital to incorporate into the Western Region's legal instrument a section safeguarding the interest of minorities through the creation of four "Special Minority Areas." This section, purportedly enacted to take care of the minorities, allocated the representation of Warri Division only to Itsekiri indigenes, to the detriment of the other ethnic nationalities.⁷⁸² Even though the Urhobo and Ijaw of Warri Division protested their exclusion from political participation in Warri, nothing was done to correct the inequality.⁷⁸³

in 1959. Chief Ekwejunor-Etche was also made a minister while Alfred Rewane was the political secretary of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of Action Congress (AG) party.

⁷⁷⁹ While two Itsekiri, Chief Webber Egbe and Chief Erejuwa, were appointed Regional Commissioners, an Urhobo, Chief T.E.A. Salubi was appointed commissioner for education in 1962 by the administration of Majekodunmi, M. A., who became sole Administrator of Western Region after the declaration of a state of emergency. The Ijaw had no representation at the regional level of governance.

⁷⁸⁰ For the Urhobo position; see British National Archive/CO 957/37. This is evident from a Memorandum submitted by Chief Arthur Prest, the Olorogun of Warri, to the Minority Commission dated 31st October 1957. Same position, purporting to support the creation of Mid-West State was endorsed by the Chiefs, Unions and People of Urhobo Division, Delta Province.

⁷⁸¹ The Olu of Warri and some Itsekiri Chiefs challenged the inclusion of Warri Division in Mid-West Region in courts.

⁷⁸² Ukoha Ukiwo's PhD Dissertation submitted to Department of Development studies, University of Oxford, 2006. Ukoha's work unravels how the legal instrument was deployed to sustain the doctrine of political exclusion. Ukoha notes, the implication of the legal instrument by the Senate of Nigeria was that it legalized Itsekiri claim to ownership of Warri Division and by implication laid the foundation for the struggle over Warri City. Therefore, according to him, by this constitutional provision Ijaw of Warri Division (Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu and Egbema), Urhobo, Igbo and Isoko residents of Warri were no longer constitutionally empowered to contest local, regional and federal elections in Warri. Similarly, the Itsekiri through alignment with their Yoruba kinsmen in Action Group (AG) had before now monopolized the membership of Warri Traditional Council.

⁷⁸³ For instance, Chief Daniel Okumagba, an Urhobo, from Okere Warri, who insisted in contesting regional elections was arrested and released after the elections.

The military incursion into the political turf in January 1966 did not in any way resolve this ethnic political quagmire; rather, it increased the rivalry and gulf that existed between Warri's three major ethnic groups (Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo). Lt. Col. David Ejoor, an Urhobo, and Maj. Samuel Ogbemudia from Benin (also called Bini), who became military Administrators of Mid-West Region in 1966-67 and 1967-75 respectively, were said to have favored the Itsekiri with appointments into the regional cabinet with respect to the controversial structural change that was popularly known as the Warri Division. In 1967, during the civil war, the Mid-West Region's status was changed to Bendel state with the transformation of Nigeria from four-region structure to twelve-state structure of governance. Commodore Husaini Abdullahi was appointed Military Administrator of Bendel state. Again, on August 27, 1991 Bendel state was carved further into two states: Edo and Delta States. Throughout the military and civilian regimes that emerged, the ethnic apprehension and rivalry between the Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo over Warri and its representation did not abate.⁷⁸⁴ From 1991, the tensions were exacerbated by the creation of Delta State because the Ijaw and Urhobo received little or no representation in governance. The near total Itsekiri control of political offices, governance structures, and socio-economic activities in Warri inspired a renewed clamor for political self-rule by the Ijaw of Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu, Isaba and Egbema. The lack of political and socio-economic development in Warri's Ijaw territories was attributed to political exclusion suffered over the years; hence, the Warri Ijaws' tenacious demand for a homogenous local government area.

Oil production began in the Ijaw axis (Gbaramatu clan) of Warri South West LGA in the early 1960s and heightened the dispute over land ownership (in the form of indigeneity rights) between Ijaw and Itsekiri in the territory. Land ownership conferred benefits: royalty payments, employment and corporate social responsibility projects. The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Chevron-Texaco were the major multinationals operating in the Gbaramatu territory.⁷⁸⁵ Oil facilities such as pipelines, rigs, terminals, and wells criss-cross the whole territory. All SPDC flow-stations are connected to a trunk line that leads to Forcados loading terminal, while those of Chevron-Texaco connect to another trunk line that goes to the Escravos loading terminal. The Ijaw of Gbaramatu claim host community rights to the following oil facilities:

First, Shell Petroleum Development Company-operated facilities are:

- Jones Creek flow-station with Okerenkoko and Kokodiagbene as Gbaramatu host communities
- Egwa I flow-station with Egwa and Okerenkoko as host communities
- Egwa II flow-station with Kunukunuma and Ikantu as host communities

Second, Chevron-Texaco-operated facilities in Gbaramatu are:

⁷⁸⁴ For instance, in 1976 the Egbema clan of Warri was transferred to Ondo State to enable the emergence of an Itsekiri as chairman of Warri LGA. Thus, when the councilors could not agree on who should be chairman of the Warri council due to a stalemate on an Itsekiri and Urhobo candidates, an Itsekiri (Sunday Skinn) was, after the disqualification of both candidates, handpicked and appointed chairman of Warri LGA by the State government.

⁷⁸⁵ Shell was the first oil company to indulge in oil exploration activities in the region and Jones's creek flow-station with about 52 wells was Shell's first facility in the region.

- Utunana flow-station with Kokodiagbene as host community
- Didi and Alero flow-stations are connected to Utunana flow-station, with Kokodiagbene as host community
- Makaraba flow-station with Makaraba and Okoitoru as host communities
- Abiteye flow-station with Benikrukru and Kenghangbene as host communities.

The Itsekiri have always claimed that the lands where these facilities are located belong to them and are considered Itsekiri land. They claim ownership of all lands in Warri Township and the Escravos River. Since the start of oil activities in the region, there has been tension over royalty payments and host community status/benefit projects in the territory.⁷⁸⁶ For example, the Ijaw of Okerenkoko and Itsekiri of Ugborodo fought over host status on the site of Abiteye flow-station in 1976.⁷⁸⁷ From their initial presence in Warri, the oil corporations have never recognized the Ijaw as host communities and have neglected them in all spheres of benefits. The lack of attention to Warri Ijaw communities from multinational oil corporations operating in the region since the 1960s was ascribed to their political exclusion and the overbearing influence of the Itsekiri. It is therefore the twin neglect of political governance and corporate social responsibility that facilitates the Ijaws' post-independence insistence on the creation of an autonomous LGA.

Efforts to manage and, preferably, resolve the crises in Warri have overwhelmed judicial avenues, where ethnic groups have been seeking viable solutions since the 1920s. It is estimated that between 1920 and 1971, over twenty cases were adjudicated in various courts (including the Supreme Court of Nigeria, West African Court of Appeal and the Privy Council in London) over land ownership in Warri.⁷⁸⁸ More recently, several Judicial Commissions and Panels instituted by government (both state and federal) to resolve the conflicts all have failed to produce a consensual outcome; these include the Justice Nnaemeka-Agu Commission (1993), Justice Al-Hassan Idoko Commission (1997), General Magashi Panel of Inquiry (1999), Prof. Tekena Tamuno Presidential Panel on Peace and Security (2000), the Gen. T.Y Danjuma Panel of Inquiry (2003) and others. In all of these, no government "white paper" has been published with

⁷⁸⁶ No Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) relationship has exist between the Ijaw communities and oil companies in the region since the 60s. Before 1997 no Gbaramatu Ijaw was employed in any oil company, and to date none is in the employment of Shell, while Chevron have about 20 persons employed but not in the senior cadre. No developmental project was undertaken in any Ijaw community until 2006 at the peak of the conflict. Shell was forced to deploy 20 generators to communities of Gbaramatu as community development in the area in 2006 as peace initiative. Scholarship opportunities are denied qualified Ijaw indigenes in the region by the oil corporations.

⁷⁸⁷ *Nigeria Observer*, September 6, 1976. An Ijaw from Okerenkoko was killed in the crisis.

⁷⁸⁸ Imobighe, T. A, *et al*, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2002; The Itsekiri have won most of the legal cases while the Ijaw and Urhobo have also won a small number. The Urhobo and Ijaw have insisted that the adjudications were based on fraudulent treaties/documents between the Itsekiri and colonial officers who favored them in the region. The judicial decisions are based on colonial relics and fabrications, hence have not brought respite to the region. Another important factor here is that the judicial decisions are not mutually beneficial to all the parties. The judicial decisions thus need to go beyond ascribing ownership to one group to informing the other group(s) who have inhabited Warri for centuries as their ancestral home where they own. The judgments do not take into account the fact that other groups do not have a place to call home but where they were born and have lived for generations.

respect to the outcome of the findings and neither federal nor state governments have ever implemented recommendations from these Commissions or Panels.⁷⁸⁹ This nonchalant attitude of government is viewed as tacit support for the Itsekiri ethnic group against the other(s). Government indifference fans the embers of conflict in Warri. For instance, the Danjuma Committee recommended creation of additional local government councils in Warri in accordance with the constitution, with a caveat that, in doing this, the government should take into account the Itsekiri fear of political annihilation.⁷⁹⁰ Most of the commissions and panels inaugurated on conflicts in Warri have recommended the creation of distinct LGAs for the different ethnic groups (Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw) in Warri. Yet the federal government has not found it expedient to create different LGAs for these groups as a way out of the quagmire. Hence the demand by dominated groups (especially the Ijaw) for self-determination has endured and as I shall show been made more complex by the growth of the oil sector.

6.3 Demand for Political Autonomy and the Oil Complex

The relative peace enjoyed in the Warri metropolis before late the 1990s is a consequence of the administrative restructuring undertaken by the British colonial government starting in the 1930s. To reduce the anxiety in those years between Ijaw and Itsekiri in Warri, the British had created two separate administrative divisions – Western Ijaw Division and Warri Division – as discussed earlier.⁷⁹¹ The Western Regional Government Law of 1952 created the Warri Division with a legal instrument that established the council and was published in the Western Regional Gazette, stating:

In exercise of the powers conferred upon the Regional Authority by section 3 of the Western Regional Local Government Law, 1952 (herein called “the law”), a Divisional Council entitled the Warri Divisional Council (hereinafter called “the Council”) shall be established upon the 30th day of September, 1955.⁷⁹²

However, this administrative separation brought only temporary peace because (again, as noted earlier) some Ijaw clans (Ogbe-Ijoh, Isaba, Gbaramatu and Egbema) were retained within the administrative jurisdiction of the new Warri Division. The consistent, constant demand of these

⁷⁸⁹ The lack of implementation of Judicial Commissions or Panels’ report is not limited to Warri. Several other Judicial Commissions or Panel reports are yet to be implemented or made public by government such as, Ife – Modakeke, the Jos crises, Zangon – Kataf, Aguleri – Umuleri, Ogoni – Andoni, Okirika – Eleme and Ijaw – Ilaje. Also, in the aviation sector Nigeria has recorded several fatal accidents (5 in 2006 alone). Panels have been established to unravel the remote and immediate cause(s) of the crashes, but no government white paper or recommendations of commissions/panels have been made public to date.

⁷⁹⁰ *Report of the Presidential Committee on Warri Crises*, September 2003, p. 11.

⁷⁹¹ Imobighe, T.A., *et al*, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 2002.

⁷⁹² British National Archive (BNA)/Colonial Office: series No: CO 957/19. As contained in the ‘Supplement to the Western Regional Gazette No. 30, Vol. 4, 30th June, 1955’, the area of authority of the new Council shall be the areas of jurisdiction of the following councils: Benin River Local Council, Egbeoma Local Council, Ode-Itsekiri Local Council, Gborodo Local Council, Gbaramatu Local Council, Koko Local Council and Ogbe-Ijoh Local Council.

Ijaw clans for political autonomy, along with the Warri ownership question, created constant friction; but a total breakdown of law and order did not come until the late 1990s.

In 1991, when more local government areas were created in Nigeria, Warri LGA was split into two LGAs: Warri North and Warri South. Under this new arrangement, four Ijaw clans (Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu, Isaba and Egbema) were grouped into Warri North LGA, even though they were geographically within Warri South LGA.⁷⁹³ The Ijaw clans vehemently, though peacefully, protested this decision, and the Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu, and Isaba were relocated to Warri South LGA, while the Egbema clan⁷⁹⁴ remained in Warri North LGA.⁷⁹⁵ This division finally broke the relative peace and minimal cordiality that existed between the Ijaw and Itsekiri.⁷⁹⁶ The Ijaw became more determined in their quest for a separate and distinct LGA in the Warri metropolis as the Itsekiri dominated the two LGAs. The Urhobo and Ijaw saw the domination by Itsekiri in the two LGAs not only as unfair, unacceptable and insensitive, but as the result of connivance between government and Itsekiri elites. The Ijaw and Urhobo therefore pressed determinedly for the creation of separate LGAs for each of the three ethnic nationalities in Warri metropolis so as to break the yoke of Itsekiri dominion. This is yet to come into fruition. The Ijaw and Urhobo have consistently advocated for the establishment of ethnic LGAs in Warri as a measure to damp down tension in the region, but the Itsekiri insist it is an unrealistic demand because Warri is their homeland. The desire for autonomous LGAs and ethnic claim to land ownership in Warri provoked new forms of conflict starting from the 1990s.

In 1996, disagreements over land ownership resurfaced between the Ogbe-Ijoh (Ijaw) and Aladja (Urhobo) on the one hand, and the Okerenkoko (Ijaw) and Amadino (Itsekiri) on the other. In a way these conflicts served as the watershed for the contemporary crisis in Warri. The

⁷⁹³ Imobighe, T. A, *et al*, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: op. cit.*, 2002.

⁷⁹⁴ See Memorandum submitted to the Gen. T. Y. Danjuma Committee on Warri Crises by His Royal Highness, Bini Pere III, The Agadagba of Egbema Kingdom, Ogbudugbudu, June 2003. Also, in an interview (conducted in Warri, January 15th 2012) with Ebipade Kari of Ogbinbiri in Warri North LGA, he said that since the creation of the Warri North Local Government Area in 1991, the Egbema Ijaw have been put at the back burner in the scheme of things. “We have been politically dominated by the Itsekiri in all spheres including elected and appointed leadership in the Local Government, and even at the state level we have been denied representation in any cadre since inception. Except for the immediate past deputy chairman, who metamorphosed from deputy Caretaker chairman in 2003 to Vice Chairman between 2004 and 2008, no Egbema Ijaw has been considered for any political level. The local council is made up of ten wards: six Itsekiri wards while the Egbema Ijaw have four. This composition has not been reflected in the sharing of political offices as well as appointment/employment opportunities.” In July 2013, these actions and sense of domination led to the attack of some Itsekiri communities in Warri North by Ijaw youths, but a quick intervention by the Delta State government, Ijaw elders, and leaders in Warri saved the situation from degenerating into full blown war.

⁷⁹⁵ The decision to transfer Gbaramatu, Ogbe-Ijoh and Isaba to Warri South LGA was challenged by the Itsekiri in court. This action by the Itsekiri to challenge the transfer confirm the fears of the concerned Ijaw clans that drastic action must be taken to free themselves from the yoke of Itsekiri domination. The Ijaw clans (Ogbe-Ijoh, Isaba, Gbaramatu and Egbema) were said to have also demanded for a homogeneous and autonomous LGA with Headquarters at Oporoza, and suggested Nein-Ibe (four clans) as a possible name. It is widely believed by the Ijaw clans that the Itsekiri used their connections through their Yoruba kinsmen to block the creation of the LGA for them. The Ijaw saw this as an attempt to stop them from gaining political autonomy in Warri. Chiefs Okirika, Bubor and Ari are of the view that the decision to separate Egbema from the other clans in the relocation was an attempt to balkanize the four clans. The Itsekiri also insisted that the lands occupied by the Ijaw are part and parcel of their territory.

⁷⁹⁶ See Chief E.K Clark’s interview, *Tell Magazine*, Lagos, September 1, 2003.

Okerenkoko and Amadino conflict was over court judgments on the ownership of Jones Creek where the base of Shell's Jones Creek flow-station (one of the largest flow-stations in West Africa) is located. The courts had ruled that the land belonged to Amadino, an Itsekiri community in Warri town, and not Okerenkoko which is a stone's throw to the facility. The Okerenkoko community mobilized and attacked Amadino community⁷⁹⁷ but a quick intervention by the state government and appeals by elders saved the situation from degenerating into total war.⁷⁹⁸ The crisis was prevented but a sense of mobilization against injustice has been registered in the community. In contrast to the Okerenkoko-Amadino fracas, the Ogbe-Ijoh and Aladja crisis was a total war over boundaries.⁷⁹⁹ That crisis pertained to ownership of the parcel of land where the gigantic Aladja steel construction company is located. In the conflict that was generated, militant youth groups came from Aladja and Ogbe-Ijoh to defend and protect both lives and property. Federal military troops were deployed to the area to calm tensions. However, on October 16, 1996, Urhobo military officers and militant youths of Aladja in the guise of reconciliation raided Ogbe-Ijoh and razed the community to the ground, murdering scores of people.⁸⁰⁰ The conflict was finally brought under control but, as in Okerenkoko, a vanguard of youth against ethnic domination had been made ready to avenge at the slightest provocation. It is imperative to note that these two communities -- Okerenkoko and Ogbe-Ijoh -- became important nodes in the crisis that emerged from the 1996/97 LGA creation and relocations. When Gen. Sani Abacha created six new states and more than a hundred LGAs in Nigeria in 1996, there was already a tense situation characterized by youth vanguards hostile to one another, and armed.

On the occasion of Nigeria's 1996 independence, General Sani Abacha (then Head of State) announced the creation of six additional states and 138 Local Government Areas (LGAs). He named the six new states in his national broadcast and left the announcement of the newly created LGAs to the respective State Military Administrators.⁸⁰¹ Subsequently, in December 1996 on behalf of the Head of State, the Military Administrator of Delta State, Col. D.J. Dungs,

⁷⁹⁷ The reason for the crisis was SPDC's action and information to Okerenkoko community that the company has been instructed by Amadino (Itsekiri) people to stop recognizing and treating Okerenkoko as a host community based on existing court judgments. The company was instructed to stop any dealings with Okerenkoko in terms of employment, contract, scholarship and royalties.

⁷⁹⁸ In the words of two Okerenkoko Chiefs, Dennis Otuario and Williams Itima, from this action Okerenkoko became a fertile ground for youth mobilization against Itsekiri domination over Ijaw in Warri. The idea, according to the Chiefs, was to make it clear to the Itsekiri that enough is certainly enough. They considered the attempt by Amadino community in Warri town to lay claim to land in their domain in the creeks as taking the overlordship too far (Interview, March 16th, 2012).

⁷⁹⁹ See *Vanguard*, September 23, 2013. Just recently, youths of Aladja community appealed to the Governor, Emmanuel Uduaghan to settle the boundary dispute between Ogbe-Ijoh and Aladja before it degenerates again. Aladja youths are insisting the boundary dispute be settled before a proposed by-pass road construction to Ogbe-Ijoh be undertaken.

⁸⁰⁰ Chief David Pere of Ogbe-Ijoh corroborated by several persons interviewed says this singular action necessitated all Warri Ijaw clans to unanimously agree on the location of the LGA Headquarter at Ogbe-Ijoh in their demand to the Federal Government. The reason being that, it will bring life and development back into the community (Interview at Ogbe-Ijoh town, February 10 2012).

⁸⁰¹ The six states announced by the Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha are: Bayelsa, Nassarawa, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Kebi and Gombe states.

announced the creation of six new Local Government Areas in Delta State.⁸⁰² By his announcement a new Warri South LGA with headquarters at Ogbe-Ijoh was created for the Ijaw of Gbaramatu, Ogbe-Ijoh, Isaba and Diebiri, and the previous Warri South LGA was renamed Warri Central with headquarters in Warri.⁸⁰³ The creation of the new Warri South LGA was published in print and electronic media.⁸⁰⁴ Previously, the Ijaw had petitioned the Arthur Mbanefo Committee on Creation of States and Local Government Areas for an autonomous and homogeneous LGA in Warri; the petition was signed by Chiefs E.K Clark, Etoromi, Okirika, Mamumamu, and others on behalf of the region's Ijaw clans.⁸⁰⁵ Chief E.K. Clark alluded to this when he said:

It is the general belief that the Federal Military government created a local government council for the Ijaws of Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu, and Isaba. The Ijaws applied to the Arthur Mbanefo committee on the creation of States and Local government to recommend to the Federal Government for the creation of 2 local government for the Ijaws of Warri: One for the Egbemas of Warri North and the other for the Ijaws of Warri South.⁸⁰⁶

The announcement of Warri South LGA for the Warri Ijaw was greeted with joy, including much dancing and celebration on the streets of Warri. The Ijaw were elated that they had finally been rescued from the vice-grip of Itsekiri domination in Warri. Immediately, prominent Ijaw leaders, sons and daughters in the area and beyond started making contributions and donations to the Warri South LGA in Ogbe-Ijoh.⁸⁰⁷ The local government became operational in December 1996, courtesy of communal efforts of concerned Ijaw both at home and in Diaspora. On March 6, 1997, the Military Administrator of Delta State, Col. D.J. Dungs, visited the Council Headquarters in Ogbe-Ijoh and congratulated the people on their efforts. The Council also received its monthly subventions from the Federal and Delta State governments for its smooth running. The LGA was further delineated into ten Ijaw wards, and local government elections to political positions were held peacefully on March 15th, 1997, producing a Chairman and Councilors.⁸⁰⁸ Then, in late March 1997, after about four months in operation with Ogbe-

⁸⁰² The six LGAs announced by the Military Administrator of Delta State, Col. D. J. Dungs are: Udu, Uvwie, Patani, Oshimili North, Ukuani and Warri South LGAs.

⁸⁰³ The implication here is that the previous Warri South LGA was divided into Warri South with headquarters in Ogbe-Ijoh and Warri Central with headquarters in Warri. With this division Warri had Warri North, Warri South and Warri Central LGAs as announced by the Governor. A central LGA was merely carved out of an existing Warri South LGA.

⁸⁰⁴ The Warri Ijaw under the leadership of Chief E.K. Clark also made a full-page publication in the *Guardian*, expressing their gratitude and appreciation to the Head of state, Gen. Sani Abacha.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid; The Itsekiri have also posited that they requested for another LGA from the Federal Government the same time.

⁸⁰⁶ See Chief E.K. Clark's Letter to the President, "The Ijaw's Request and Suggestions for the Resolution of Warri Crisis to Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar." February 20, 1999.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid. Also the three clans contributed huge sums of money to provide the infrastructures for the new council including; Secretariat, Police Station, Senior staff accommodation, National Electoral Commission office etc, since there was no take off grant from the federal government.

⁸⁰⁸ The original ten Ijaw wards created at the inception of the LGA are; Ogbe-Ijoh 3 wards, Diebiri 1 ward, Isaba 1 ward and Gbaramatu 5 wards. For more on the activities of Warri South LGA before relocation, see Chief E.K. Clark's interview, *Tell Magazine*, September 1, 2003. Also see Chief E.K. Clark's Ijaw position to Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Ijoh as headquarters, a federal government gazette published changed the headquarters of Warri South LGA from Ogbe-Ijoh to Ogidigben, an Itsekiri coastal town near Escravos.⁸⁰⁹ The government gazette said that the federal government had actually created Warri South West LGA with headquarters at Ogidigben.⁸¹⁰

Ijaw jubilation in the Western delta, especially Warri, was cut short by this sudden turn of events. They attributed it to manipulation by the Itsekiri to deprive them of political autonomy through their own LGA in the territory. Chief E.K. Clark attributed the relocation to manipulative tendencies of the Itsekiri, saying:

It was when the Itsekiri kicked and they had their way through Jeremiah Useni (a member of then Provisional Ruling Council and married to Itsekiri woman) and Oladipo Diya (a Yoruba and then number two man in the country), who have paid dearly for their own iniquities. I was in Ibadan when the governor phoned me that this is what he has been asked to do, to make an announcement changing the headquarters to Ogidigben, after the council had functioned from December 1996 to March the following year.⁸¹¹

Warri Ijaw protested the decision as presented in the federal government gazette and advised that the *status quo* be maintained so as to prevent a breakdown of law and order in the territory. Representatives of Ijaw elders were sent to the capital of Delta State, Asaba, and to Aso Rock, seat of the federal government in Abuja, to persuade governments at different levels to address the injustice.⁸¹² Both at the state and federal levels, all peaceful pleas by the elders and other concerned individuals fell on deaf ears.

In late March 1997, when all peaceful resolutions by elders and opinion leaders in the region and beyond failed, the Ijaw youth group in Warri stepped into the fray. Their incursion into the core of the struggle changed the dynamics of Ijaw agitation for political autonomy. Warri Ijaw youth groups embarked upon strategic direct mass actions to draw the government's attention to the injustice of relocating the capital, and to the political exclusion implied by that move. The youth groups peacefully occupied six flow-stations (Egwa 1&2, Dibi, Utunana, Makaraba & Abiteye) located in Gbaramatu-Ijaw axis of Warri and succeeded in stopping oil exploration activities.⁸¹³ The youth, especially in Gbaramatu, insisted that they would not vacate

⁸⁰⁹ Decree No. 36 of 1996 published in 1997 also show that the headquarters of the new LGA is Ogidigben. The Itsekiri says the Military Administrator announced something different from what the federal government actually approved.

⁸¹⁰ This implies that all three LGAs (Warri North, Warri South West, Warri Central) are to be owned and controlled by Itsekiri since they have their headquarters domiciled in Itsekiri communities.

⁸¹¹ See E.K Clark's interview, *Tell Magazine*, September 1, 2003. Most Ijaw in Western Niger Delta expresses this same feeling and says that except and until they have a separate and distinct LGA the crises rocking Warri will not abate. Also see Chief E.K Clark's "Ijaw position to Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar."

⁸¹² The state government could not have done anything to the contrary, given that the federal government in Nigeria dictates everything. The Itsekiri have accused the State Administrator, D.J. Dungs, of supporting and collaborating with the Warri Ijaw. Yet Dungs really could not do anything because the federal government has the last word in the Nigerian brand of federalism.

⁸¹³ The oil companies have insisted that the youth took over the flow stations violently. But the youth insists that their actions at first were peaceful. It should be recalled that the oil companies had drawn up a template on how to

the flow-stations unless and until the LGA headquarters was relocated back to Ogbe-Ijoh. Their occupation led to a shut-in of over four hundred thousand barrels per day of crude oil. Chief Oboko Bello, a youth leader in the territory, noted that the youth action constituted a “resistance against internal neocolonialism perpetuated by the Itsekiri and their government collaborators.”⁸¹⁴ In his support and justification of the action, Chief E.K. Clark argued:

The boys merely went to take over the flow-stations, six flow-stations to draw the attention of the federal government to what was happening to their council...It is not difficult for the leaders to call them (youth groups) to order. The people are fighting for their own freedom. They are fighting for their liberty; for political recognition. And when it is not forthcoming, they use power because they, as youths, are the people affected. I am old. While an Itsekiri youth can become chairman of council, an Ijaw youth who went to the same school with him cannot have the same privilege. They are fighting for their survival and they will continue to fight until the corrections have been made.⁸¹⁵

Chief E.K Clark, the Ijaw national leader and elderstatesman further stated:

It is my humble submission that the announcement made by the Military Administrator of Delta State was proper and legal, and it is the abrupt, unjust and improper dismantling of the Council at Ogbe-Ijoh and its relocation to Ogidigben an Itsekiri Village by the Atlantic Ocean was the immediate cause of the crisis in Warri and its environs.⁸¹⁶

The direct mass action embarked upon by the youth group compelled the state Military Administrator, Col. D.J. Dungs, to summon elders and opinion leaders of Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijaw to a crucial meeting in Asaba to resolve the LGA stand-off. On that same day in 1997 while away in Asaba on the Military Administrator’s invitation, Chief E.K. Clark – who was the leader of the Ijaw delegation – saw his home on 10 Mission Road burned to the ground by suspected Itsekiri arsonists, and his night-security-guard murdered.⁸¹⁷ In a 2003 interview, Chief Benjamin Okumagba, the traditional ruler of the Urhobo in Warri, traced the genesis of the contemporary crises to this incident (specifically the destruction of Chief E.K Clark’s house and murder of his security guard) when he said:

The Itsekiri started this crisis in 1997 when they burnt down Chief E.K Clark’s house. They killed E.K Clark’s night-guard and they got away with it. What happened to them? So, if government had ensured that those who did it paid

deal with community agitation (violently), starting in Umuechem and effectively tested in Ogoni and other parts of the Delta.

⁸¹⁴ Interview with Oboko Bello in Warri town in August 2 2006 by the author. Oboko Bello is the President of Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), a political group that emerged in late 2002 in the Gbaramatu axis to lead the agitation for equal wards creation for Itsekiri and Ijaw in Warri South west LGA.

⁸¹⁵ Chief E.K. Clark’s interview, *Tell Magazine*, September 1, 2003.

⁸¹⁶ See Chief E.K Clark’s “The Ijaw’s Request and Suggestions for the Resolution of Warri Crisis to Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar”, February 20, 1999.

⁸¹⁷ The Warri Ijaw are of the view that Chief E.K Clark was the target of the attack (as the Ijaw National Leader and Leader of the Warri Ijaw) and also believe that the attack was orchestrated by suspected Itsekiri militants. But the Itsekiri have denied their involvement in the attack.

dearly for it, to serve as deterrent, it probably would not have happened again. But nothing happened. At that time, I told Col. Dungs, while we were at the Security Council meeting the following day that 'here is the man who committed heinous crimes, (that is Olu),' he was there that day. Even the commissioner of police, I said you are all here and you allow this man to be sitting with us here instead of being put behind the bars. They said eh, we are coming to it. But the man went home in his Agbada, then he starting making noise, they started fighting. And the whole thing started spreading. Then the Ijaw retaliated.⁸¹⁸

Chief E.K. Clark was informed of these developments at the venue of the Asaba Security meeting for truce. Given the federal and state governments' indifference to the destruction and killing, attacks and reprisals from Warri's Ijaw and Itsekiri followed. The fighting became fierce, with heavy casualties on both sides, at which point the federal government deployed military troops to the area. With logistical support from Chevron and Shell oil companies, the military troops assaulted several Ijaw youth occupying the flow-stations in Gbaramatu.⁸¹⁹ They brutally shot and forcefully evicted the youth from the flow-stations. The Ijaw people considered these attacks on Ijaw youth and communities to constitute government-oil-company-Itsekiri alignment against them - Warri Ijaw interpreted the logistical support provided by the oil exploration companies to the federal military troops as tactical support for Itsekiri against them. The situation and its various analyses led to the emergence of militias in the three ethnic groups, for self-defense.

In June 1997, Delta State Military Administrator, Col. Dungs, after the loss of many lives and property, called for calm. He appointed a Judicial Commission of Inquiry chaired by Justice Al-Hassan Idoko from Benue state to look into the indirect and immediate causes of the crisis and to make recommendations to government. The Judicial Commission included representatives from the three ethnic nationalities. However, as the Judicial Commission was about to wind up its activities, the Itsekiri staged a walkout, preempting the possibility that the outcome would be unfavorable to them. Nonetheless the Judicial Commission completed its task, submitted its findings, and made appropriate recommendations to Col. Dungs. But, the government withheld the outcome.⁸²⁰ The Urhobo and Ijaw demanded that the government make public the Commission's recommendations, while the Itsekiri were against such a plan.

In September 1997, Col. D.J. Dungs was redeployed elsewhere and Navy Commander Walter Feghabo, an Ijaw Naval Officer (from Bayelsa in central Delta), was appointed the Military Administrator of Delta State. About a year later, in October 1998, before the new Military Administrator could properly settle for duty, the Ijaw and Itsekiri had a furious battle. The deaths and property damage – and the instability – caused oil exports to decline drastically.

⁸¹⁸ See Chief Benjamin Okumagba interview, *Tell Magazine*, September 1, 2003. The Urhobo and Ijaw are of the view that the solution to the perennial crises is the creation of separate LGAs for the three ethnic nationalities of Warri, but the Itsekiri have argued that such decision will be unfair considering the fact that they own the contested territories.

⁸¹⁹ The Warri Ijaw argues that the military was deployed to give support to the Itsekiri by the federal government-MNOCs' coalition. The Itsekiri have however, denied this allegation. Either way the military deployment exacerbated the conflict in Warri.

⁸²⁰ To date the recommendation of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry or a 'white paper' by the State Government on the recommendation is yet to be made public.

This time the new Military Administrator, Feghabo, promised to make public and possibly implement the recommendations of the Justice Al-Hassan Idoko Commission's report. The State Administrator restored temporary peace with that promise, but the Ijaw and Urhobo waited in vain for the Commission's report that was promised by the state administrator. They soon ran out of patience. They insinuated that the state administrator had played a fast one on them, but vowed to continue their campaign for political emancipation.

The political unrest in Warri and other pockets of violence in Ijaw territories (Ijaw-Ilaje, military attacks in Yenagoa, Mbiama) helped bring to fruition the Kaiama All Ijaw Youth Conference of December 1998 that produced the Kaiama Declaration. Some Warri Youth groups participated in order to garner Ijaw support outside of Warri. The Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis in Warri was a major factor that motivated the conference in Kaiama. The Warri Ijaw youth agitation was supported by Ijaw youth from other states of the federation who reasoned that the federal government's action to "withdraw" the LGA after months of operation was unjust, callous and an attempt to make the Warri Ijaw perpetual slaves. The conference galvanized the agitations that had been fragmented into different coastal states of the Niger Delta. Solidarity amongst Ijaw was one fundamental outcome of the conference – what affects one affects all. Pockets of violence in Ijaw territories in the Niger Delta continued before, during and even after the 1999 elections.⁸²¹

In late May 1999, during the hand-over from military dictatorship to civil rule and when political office holders were sworn into office, hostilities resumed between the Ijaw and Itsekiri in Warri and surrounding creeks. In the renewed fighting, villages (Kpokpo and Madangho) were completely wiped out by both parties and several persons killed. Crude oil supply was greatly reduced due to the unrest, and military troops were brought into Warri and its environs.⁸²² As was usual by now, the Nigerian military troops engaged the youth in gun battle and several occupying oil facilities in the creeks were killed. The new civilian Governor of Delta State, James Ibori (an Urhobo), imposed a curfew. As soon as the State House of Assembly was inaugurated, Governor James Ibori sponsored a bill requesting the relocation of the Warri South West LGA headquarters from Ogidigben back to Ogbe-Ijoh.⁸²³ Although the Itsekiri protested the relocation bill, the Delta State parliament passed it into law in September 1999.⁸²⁴ However, the relocation changed almost nothing; the Ijaw merely shifted the target of their demands from LGA headquarters to ward delineation. The Ijaw claimed that they had 63-percent of the

⁸²¹ For instance, in 1999 the National Electoral Commission could not conduct elections in Bayelsa State (the only homogenous Ijaw state) due to violence between Ijaw Youths and federal military troops.

⁸²² The new civilian President Olusegun Obasanjo also visited Warri in June and promised to proffer a lasting solution. The President's visit was necessitated by the crippling effect of crisis on oil in the region (there was a loss of about 300,000 bpd).

⁸²³ The action of the Governor undertaken to resolve the problem merely compounded it because the wards were unequally distributed between Itsekiri and Ijaw. Some Itsekiri wards previously in Warri North LGA had been added into the Warri South West LGA and in the new arrangement Itsekiri had 6 wards and 4 for the Ijaws.

⁸²⁴ Three out of the four Itsekiri members in the State Assembly staged a walkout and took the Government to court. The case is still pending. The only Itsekiri member who stayed back was the Speaker of the State Assembly, Late Hon. Francis Emegbele. The Ijaw boycotted the Ward delineation exercise of 1998 and also did not partake in the election of 1999. In 2000 there was voters' registration exercise undertaken and a call for bye-election to fill the Ijaw wards. It was discovered that an Itsekiri was representing Okerenkoko ward of Gbaramatu as councilor. This discovery led to a boycott, which degenerated into crisis in the territory. The Ijaw also boycotted the 2002 voters registration exercise in the region.

population but were reduced to four wards, while the Itsekiri with 37-percent of the people had six wards.⁸²⁵ Thus, the Ijaw argued that the LGA delineation was deliberately designed to favor a continuation of Itsekiri domination. The conflict in Warri South West LGA now transformed to a fight over equitable delineation of wards and constituencies.

6.3.1 Warri: Wars Over Ward Delineation

In January 2003, during the People's Democratic Party (PDP) primary elections for the Delta south senatorial seat at the federal level, the Urhobo and Itsekiri fought a deadly war over ward delineation at Okere in Warri town. The fight was over the actual number of wards in the district and boundary of such wards, which disadvantaged the Urhobo. In the attack and counter-attacks that followed several persons were killed and property worth millions of naira destroyed, including the estate of Chief Benjamin Okumagba, the traditional ruler of Urhobo in Warri.⁸²⁶ The unresolved problem of wards delineation began to rear its ugly head in the days and months that followed in Warri. Two months later (March 2003), Warri Ijaw youth groups issued some minimum demands through the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC),⁸²⁷ giving a 7-day ultimatum to the federal government of Nigeria. These demands included:

- Redrawing of electoral wards in Warri South West LGA
- Withdrawal of federal military troops in Ijaw communities
- Reversal of the April 2002 Supreme Court ruling that gave offshore oil revenue to the federal government, and
- Withdrawal of expatriate workers from oil facilities or face “mass action” to “reclaim” the creeks of the Riverine areas, and
- Suspension of all oil operations in the region until the Federal Government of Nigeria meets these demands.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁵ The Itsekiri have also contested this figure. They have also claimed to be in the majority, but the Ijaw have relied on the 1991 census figures conducted in the area concerned to justify their majority claim.

⁸²⁶ Some accounts of the crisis says the Urhobo were the first to attack but were prevented by the federal government troops and the Itsekiri retaliated, but the Urhobo have also accused the Itsekiri as the aggressors. The Urhobo have also accused the military of tacitly supporting the Itsekiri by withdrawing military men guarding the Okumagba estate before its invasion. The military have also being accused of extra-judicial killings during the crisis, especially Urhobo youth. The Urhobo territory was said to have been defended by their traditional warriors ‘Igbu.’

⁸²⁷ FNDIC is the political wing of the resistance formed by Warri Ijaw Youth groups in the 2003. FNDIC as an organization is a non-violence group even though it has within its ranks members who belong to militia movements in Warri. The identification of some of its members as belonging to certain militia group(s) is the reason why the group is wrongly tagged a militia by most observers.

⁸²⁸ Oboko, B., “FNDIC: Our Right, Our Life”, Warri: Enard Publishing Press, 2010; Oboko, B., “FG Orders JTF Ceasefire: FNDIC Role”, Warri: Enard Printing Press, 2011; Oboko, B., “FNDIC: Uneasy Calm in the Niger Delta,” Warri: Enard Printing Press, 2010; The demands are also contained in Human Rights Watch Report, “The Warri Crisis: Fuelling Violence,” 2003.

The federal government saw the demands as a declaration of war on the Nigerian state and oil corporations by Warri Ijaw; hence, there was a massive deployment of federal military troops into the region to curtail a possible uprising.⁸²⁹ As expected, on the third week of March 2003, the federal military troops and Warri Ijaw militants engaged each other in what was then termed the “biggest military operation ever mounted in peace time Nigeria against a civilian population undertaken by the federal military in Okerenkoko.”⁸³⁰ The military hardware deployed in the territory was reminiscent of the Odi saga, but the militia in Gbaramatu, especially Okerenkoko (which was the main target of the military assault) resisted the military invasion; the battle lasted three days.⁸³¹ After the gun battle with the youth groups, the military realized the futility of their action, but rather than retreat adopted an ethnic strategy. The federal military troops, which had used Itsekiri communities as bases for military operations, again approached Itsekiri youths for assistance in identifying vulnerable Ijaw settlements in the area, and turned their attention to razing identified Ijaw communities/hamlets in the creeks of Warri.⁸³² The Ijaw retaliated by attacking identified vulnerable Itsekiri settlements in the Escravos River.

What followed from this was severe fighting involving the Ijaw-Itsekiri, on the one hand, and Ijaw-federal military troops on the other. The fighting lasted several months, with scores of people killed, property damaged, and villages destroyed. Several people were rendered internally displaced persons (IDP) and the creeks became uninhabitable. During the crises there were attacks on oil facilities by Ijaw militia, shutdown of oil facilities, and evacuation of workers by Chevron and Shell in the territory due to insecurity of lives and property – leading to a combined shut-in of over seven hundred thousand bpd. Warri and its surrounding creeks were turned into mini war zone by the various wars waged by Ijaw, Itsekiri and the federal military troops deployed into the region.

In 2003, the city of Warri was tagged the most dangerous city in Nigeria.⁸³³ Therefore, the military incursion and brutality, the unfettered logistical assistance to the military troops by global oil giants in Niger Delta, and the lack of political will in the PDP to resolve a political

⁸²⁹ Courson, E., “The Burden of Oil: Social Deprivation and Political Militancy in Gbaramatu Clan, Warri South West LGA, Delta State,” *Economies of Violence Working Paper No. 15*, United States Institute for Peace & Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, America, February 2007 <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/NigerDelta>.

⁸³⁰ Ijaw Council for Human Rights (2003), “Briefing Note 1”. The invasion of Okerenkoko in Gbaramatu by the federal military was said to have claimed the lives of twenty-two Ijaw youths and four military officers. FNDIC pointed accusing fingers at the Nigerian Navy, whose men were accosted by youths working in conjunction with the Joint Task Force while carrying out illegal oil business at the Jones Creek oil field. But the Nigerian federal military’s account is that some Ijaw militia operating in the Okerenkoko axis had disarmed some military officers of their rifles, and attempts to retrieve the rifles had led to the death of some officers, hence; the clash was another attempt to retrieve the rifles from the youth militia. Another account has it that the Navy accosted a barge used for illegal oil business and arrested it despite the fact that those involved had paid the required bribe to the Naval high command in the territory. The illegal oil traders had therefore sort the assistance of the militia group to recapture the barge.

⁸³¹ Okerenkoko from this moment became the stronghold of militants in the Gbaramatu axis and marked for possible elimination in military circles. Hence; the military aerial attacks of February 15, 17 & 18, 2006 and the relaunched coordinated attacks on the whole Gbaramatu in May, June and July 2009, which left Okerenkoko totally devastated could not be totally divorced from this thinking in Nigeria military circles

⁸³² Interview in Warri with Oboko Bello while the crisis was ongoing on March 24th 2003.

⁸³³ *Tell Magazine*, Lagos September 1 2003.

trouble, all helped exacerbate the conflict in Warri to a combustible point. These factors created a situation where crisis became recurring incidents in Warri metropolis and surrounding creeks.

In February 2003, with impending elections in the country, the Governor of Delta State James Ibori invited Ijaw and Itsekiri youths to a meeting at a secret location in Benin, Edo state, in the hope of reaching an accord as to which ethnic nationality -- Ijaw or Itsekiri -- would get the Chairmanship slot for Warri South West LGA in the April 2003 elections. After two days of deliberations, the meeting ended in a deadlock. The Urhobo Governor, as mediator, was then asked to make the choice, and Governor Ibori chose the Itsekiri over Ijaw for the position. On this decision, the Ijaw youth delegation asked for one favor from the Governor: they wanted him to tell Ijaw militants in the creeks that he was the one who had to break the tie and chose Itsekiri, that the Ijaw youth delegation had been unyielding in their demand for the top political position in the LGA – in this way they hoped not be tagged sell-outs (betrayers).⁸³⁴ Dan Ekpebide, a member of the Ijaw delegation, had already called the militants and was ready to pass the phone to the Governor, but Governor Ibori vehemently rejected the plea, saying that he was Chief security officer of the state, and his agents would deal decisively with anyone not satisfied with his decision. The meeting ended without resolution of an identified problem for the impending election.

The crisis of March 2003 was a precursor to the April-May scheduled elections, anticipating the presumed outcome of the unresolved LGA chairmanship position and unacceptable-to-Ijaw ward delineation. By April 11, the crisis that started in the Escravos Rivers had spread to Koko (headquarters of the Warri North LGA) and later to Warri town. The government's and Independent Electoral Commission's (INEC) determination to go on with the elections without addressing the Ijaw's grievances (ward delineation and chairmanship) exacerbated the crisis. Rather than address the ward delineation imbalance, the federal government merely deployed more military troops to the region, having officially inaugurated in March 2003 the Joint Task Force for the whole region.⁸³⁵ Despite the heavy fighting and boycott of elections by the Ijaw, INEC and the Delta State Independent Electoral Commission (DSIEC) were said to have conducted elections in the three crisis-affected Warri LGAs in April and May 2003. Ijaw militants allegedly made the conduct of the elections nearly impossible through their constant and coordinated attacks on local communities and the INEC and DSIEC offices in Warri. Thus the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of such intense violence that observers questioned their credibility. In some cases, elections were suspended or postponed due to the unrest, and they could not be conducted in creek communities at all due to insecurity. The attempts to continue with elections despite the Ijaw protests increased the tension in the creeks as well as in the city of Warri. All these actions -- the conduct of elections, deployment of military, and subsequent attacks on Ijaw communities by the military -- were viewed as attempts by federal and state governments to jettison the ward delineation protests. Therefore, there were

⁸³⁴ Dan Ekpebide during an interview with the author in Warri on July 10 2008 said the Governor became very arrogant and even threatened that the Warri Ijaw would be dealt with decisively by security agencies if they fail to abide by his decision to make an Itsekiri Chairman. The Ijaw youth group returned home, call for the election boycott and threatened to stop it by all necessary means. Thus, FNDIC's demands and ultimatum to Government are fallout of this secret meeting held in Edo state in February 2003.

⁸³⁵ The Joint Task Force was headquartered at the David Ejoor Barracks in Efurun, Warri. The headquarters were moved to Bayelsa State in May 2009 few days before the invasion of Gbaramatu.

coordinated attacks and shut-in by Ijaw youth on oil facilities to stop production until their demands were met. It had become clearer to the Ijaw youth from their meeting with the Governor in Edo state that drastic measures must be taken to resolve the political logjam. Thus, according to Oboko Bello:

The priority of Government is to get back to full swing oil operations in the Niger Delta, whereas, the priority of the nationalities of the Niger Delta is, in addition to allowing full oil operations, to secure level playing ground in the practice of democracy; guarantying good governance, freedom to all citizenry including the Warri Ijaw.⁸³⁶

There was loss of lives, dislocation of thousands of persons, and ruin of Ijaw and Itsekiri communities in Warri and surrounding creeks. The violence which lasted till August 2003, attracted the imposition of a curfew by government to safeguard lives and property. Unknown to the military and security agencies, the Ijaw had moved from a simple ragtag militia to a coordinated and/organized armed resistance movement in the territory. The youths who started out fighting with bare hands, sticks, stones, machetes and hunting guns had by now graduated to the use of sophisticated weapons procured from international arms dealers, as well as other weapons acquired through the dispossession of their enemy combatants including federal military troops.⁸³⁷

Even so, the post-election violence in the Eastern region – specifically, in Rivers State between Alhaji Dokubo Asari and Ateke Tom, and Asari's threat to blow-up pipelines -- shifted global and media attention from Warri to Port Harcourt. And at the same time, President Olusegun Obasanjo's visit to Warri in April 2003 and subsequent inauguration of the Gen. T.Y. Danjuma's (a former minister of defense) Panel of Inquiry to find lasting peace in Warri doused tensions in the region.⁸³⁸ At the state level, Governor James Ibori initiated his "road map to peace" advocating for indigenous framework for fairness, tolerance and peaceful coexistence amongst ethnic nationalities in the region. The Governor set up the Ijaw-Itsekiri Peace Meeting in late 2003. The Governor's peace meeting was deadlocked when Ijaw leaders presented three

⁸³⁶ See FNDIC's position, "Pathway to the Council, the Ijaw Course," Handbook published by FNDIC, May 2006.

⁸³⁷ On sources of weapons, the Gen. T.Y. Danjuma Presidential Committee on Warri crisis of September 2003, noted: "There is abundant evidence that the main cause of the current Warri conflict is illegal bunkering. The Committee received reports on the large-scale illegal bunkering activities going on in the Delta area and the huge revenues being generated from the illegal business which is estimated to be higher than the revenue of the Delta State Government. In the circumstance, unless there is a total stoppage of illegal bunkering, it will not be possible to resolve the Warri crises. There is evidence that some hoodlums are deliberately fuelling the crises in order to exploit the breakdown of law and/order as well as divert the attention of law enforcement agencies from the illegal activities; the committee was made to understand that it was from the proceeds of this illegal business that the sponsors of the violence in the area import arms and ammunitions into the country." The Committee further noted, "The oil companies operating in the Delta area were being compelled to pay protection money. However, the oil companies were unwilling to admit because of fear of reprisal attack," while the "abundant supply of small arms and light weapons had sustained the conflict in the area. All ethnic groups in the area and those engaged in criminal activities have unrestricted access to illegal arms and ammunitions and the communities are unwilling to disclose the locations of the arms and weapons of even their opponents" (p. 20).

⁸³⁸ To date, the recommendations of the Gen. T.Y. Danjuma Committee report have yet to be made public. The non-release of the recommendations of the Danjuma Committee has also led to a serious crisis starting from October 2003.

conditions as “master strokes” for the attainment of peace in Warri: creation of three local governments for Warri Ijaw, equal ward delineation in all local governments, and rotation of LGA chairmanship among the ethnic groups.⁸³⁹ The Itsekiri rejected the three conditions on the grounds that they were inconsistent with the *status quo ante*. In the midst of all these processes, there were intermittent violent eruptions between the Itsekiri and Ijaw, and between the Ijaw and state security agents. In Warri, the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw each have their own ethnic militias defending their settlements and positions. But observation from the constant conflicts have shown that the Warri Ijaw militias are more coordinated, more organized and better structured than other ethnic groups in the region.

In Delta State, Governor James Ibori’s opposition to the political demands of the Ijaw helped solidify the Ijaw groups, who became more united, fortified and determined to fight government-Itsekiri collaboration, while in Rivers State, Governor Peter Odili’s strategy of cooptation and use of armed groups for electoral thuggery splintered and fragmented those groups. This fragmentation in Rivers State deregulated violence and increased criminality in the state – from armed robbery to gang wars, hostage taking for ransom, kidnapping, and more. Warri Ijaw youth militias, unlike their Rivers State counterparts, are organized, departmentalized, coordinated, and well structured in their agitation for self-determination. Ijaw militias in the western delta have been consistent and coherent in their demand. The groups have insisted that the resolution of the crisis rocking Warri lies in granting political autonomy to Ijaws of Warri and the militias have been disciplined and committed towards realizing their goal.

The next section considers some of the Ijaw militia groups and organizations that have evolved since 1997 to date and the role they have played in the crisis. My interest here is to briefly characterize some of the key Ijaw militia groups in the Warri crisis and show how their organizational structure, discipline and commitment led to the emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in late 2005. MEND itself is a fallout of these groups reflecting the need for collaboration in the Ijaw struggle for self-determination in Nigeria.

6.4 The Rise of Warri Ijaw Ethnic Militias and Command Structures

The peculiar social and political space and experiences of western Ijaw in the midst of majority ethnic groups and oppositional local Godfathers are the factors that contribute to conflict generation, duration and motivation in the region. Ijaws in the west delta -- especially Delta, Edo and Ondo States -- see their balkanization into different states was a deliberate ploy for majority ethnic domination.⁸⁴⁰ Their claim to a common historical lineage and sense of filial solidarity and comradeship explains the deep connectedness and cordiality that exists amongst

⁸³⁹ See Report of the Ijaw of Warri/Itsekiri Peace Meeting, 2004.

⁸⁴⁰ Interviews conducted with eminent Ijaws from the western fringe: Chief Williams, F. J. (former INC Secretary) in Akure on November 30 2011 and Professor Dimie, C. (First INC President) on November 5 2011. Most persons interviewed from the western delta rehearsed the common bond of oppression, deprivation and political exclusion experienced by Ijaws in these states due to majority ethnic group’s domination and the need for coordinated and articulated response.

Ijaw in these three states. They seem to share a common burden:⁸⁴¹ the Arogbo Ijaw in Ondo state complain of oppression and political exclusion from the Ilaje (Yoruba), the Edo Ijaw (Egbema Ijaw) feel their experience in the hands of their Bini neighbors is no different, and the Ijaw in Warri (Delta State) argue they have been repressed politically by their Itsekiri (Yoruba) neighbors for decades.

Unlike their counterparts in the east and central delta, Ijaw youths from the western delta see themselves as politically barred from attaining their goals because they lack a homogenous LGA in any of the states. For instance, youth from the east or central delta could aspire to be LGA chairman, House of Assembly Member, Governor, Member House of Representative and even become a Nigerian Senator. This was impossible for Ijaw from the west without a distinct LGA in any of the states of the west. Similarly, an LGA confers on an ethnic group the right to self-governance, right to revenue allocation from the center and development and royalty payment to chiefs and communities by multinationals. Several decades of western Ijaw protests, petitions and appeals to federal and state governments, without any tangible result, suggest drastic measures must be employed to achieve autonomy. And given that the “enemy” is a rival ethnic neighbor well entrenched in Nigeria’s structures of governance, it behooves the western Ijaw to be well organized in their pursuit for justice and equity. Unlike the eastern region where co-optation of militias defused some of the momentum for resource control, in the west the desire for self-rule, freedom from domination and the emergence of a charismatic and selfless leadership help shape the western militias into an organic and purpose-driven ethnic force.

Beginning in 1997, various militia groups emerged in Ijaw communities and suburbs of Warri town with a dogged bid to press home their demand for socio-political and economic justice. The Ijaw youth groups began without a strategy, but before long the rag tag youth groups transformed into well organized, coordinated and structured military formations. Some of these early groups formed between 1996 and 2003 are: Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Feibokirifa Ogbo, Feibagha Ogbo, Meinbutu Boys, Olabrako-opri Ogbo, Ogbokonde, Mubotundigha Ogbo, Agelebagha Ogbo, Torudigha Ogbo, Egbemini, Dolphin Ogbo, Egbema freedom fighters, and the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC).⁸⁴² These groups played different and coordinating roles— some concentrated on the rivers, waterways and creeks (marine commandos), others on Warri mainland (infantry), still others served as amphibious brigade (assisting the river/creek and upland fighters when and where necessary), and yet another group served as the political wing of the resistance. This is one reason why the Ijaw resistance in the

⁸⁴¹ The Arogbo (Ijaw) and Ilaje (Yoruba) fought a deadly war over the creation of Ese-Odo LGA for the Ijaw in Ondo State in 1998. The crisis, which started in September 1998, claimed several lives and property worth millions. The Egbema of Edo state are in constant conflict with the Binis over domination, while the Warri Ijaw and Itsekiri are in eternal state of war. Like the Warri crisis, the Arogbo Ijaw and Ilaje (Yoruba), and the Bini and Egbema Ijaw crisis are over land ownership and claims to territory: immigrant-settler dichotomy.

⁸⁴² Some of these militia movements were formed spontaneously to respond to violence outbreak in particular spaces: for example, Meinbutu was a spontaneously movement of Ijaw youths in Warri metropolis to respond to Itsekiri ethnic aggression against Ijaw settlements. However, most of them sprang up from communities as Community-protection-against-external-aggression-militias -- based on the need for defense against Itsekiri and federal military troop invasions of communities in the region: for example the Torudigha Ogbo of Kunukunuma, Fiebikirifa Ogbo of Ogbe-Ijoh and Fiebagha Ogbo of Okerenkoko. While some have withered away (e.g EBA), others like Meinbutu have stood the test of time and remained to date even though they are inactive. It is important to know that some of these groups (e.g. Dolphin Ogbo) were youth social clubs transformed into militia groups as a matter of necessity.

Warri axis is well organized, coordinated and sophisticated in its demands for political justice. Aside from an air counterpart, the Warri Ijaw militia is structured along military lines: infantry, marine and amphibious commands. The Meinbutu boys coordinated infantry activities around Warri; Feibokirifa Ogbo, with their strategic Ogbe-Ijoh base, served as the amphibious arm of the agitation; finally, Feibagha Ogbo of Okerenkoko directed youth militant activities in the mangrove swampy creeks of Warri.

The Gbaramatu clan founded Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) to demand equal ward delineation in Warri South West LGA.⁸⁴³ To achieve that primary objective, some members of FNDIC (especially Tompolo) relocated to the creeks in 2003 to shut down all Shell facilities in the Gbaramatu axis.⁸⁴⁴ As noted earlier, FNDIC is the political wing of armed militancy in Warri.⁸⁴⁵ It is the “political face” that goes into dialogue on behalf of groups and warlords in Warri and surrounding creeks as necessary. The role of FNDIC is to articulate the position of the Warri Ijaw after due consultation with Ijaw militants in the creeks and upland, opinion leaders, women and elders. One of the group’s founders, Oboko Bello, connects all the happenings in the creeks of Warri to the political denial of Ijaw from having an LGA and inappropriate delineation of wards in Warri South West LGA.

Alex Priye (now deceased) founded Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA) at the Peretoru axis, Burutu LGA.⁸⁴⁶ This movement, which oscillated between criminality (armed robbery, piracy and other vices) and insurgency, participated actively in the Warri crisis in the 1997-1999 period. It was instrumental to the shutdown of flow-stations at the inception of the crisis. Starting in 1998, however, oil companies, the federal military, and politicians co-opted and compromised EBA militia leadership through the award of oil and security contracts to its leadership.⁸⁴⁷ The untimely assassination of its leader saw an end to the Egbesu Boys of Africa in 2000.

⁸⁴³ The original founders of FNDIC in 2003 are: Chiefs Dan Ekpebide, Oboko Bello, Government Ekpemupolo, George Timinimi and Barrister Kindsley Otuario. FNDIC emerged after the relocation of the LGA back to Ogbe-Ijoh with unequal wards delineation involving the Itsekiri and Ijaw.

⁸⁴⁴ The immediate reason for the attack on SPDC facilities in the region is connected to the failure of implementation of an earlier pledge by Shell to pay community members security allowances since 1997/98. The company was indicted as collaborating with the Itsekiri in the Warri crisis. It is important to know that Chevron fulfilled its pledge to communities in the area but Shell did not, and this explains why Chevron was operating in the region without any serious molestation while Shell facilities were under consistent attacks.

⁸⁴⁵ Dan Ekpebide was the inaugural president of FNDIC and was succeeded by Bello Oboko. Since assumption of office as president of FNDIC, Bello Oboko has been steering the ship of the political group even at dire moments. He has consistently defended the Warri Ijaw position and constantly advocated that the crisis in Warri is political, and demands democratic solution.

⁸⁴⁶ The name of this militia is tailored along the revered Ijaw Deity “Egbesu”. The origin and source of this deity cannot be accounted for, but it is believed that it is the Ijaw deity for war. It is also believed that the spirit is imbedded in every Ijaw man or woman who observes its moral rules and regulations. The deity is justice demanding and forbids adherents from being in the offensive, but defensive to see its manifestation and efficacy. All fighters; marine commandos, infantry and amphibious brigade are adherents of Egbesu and believe in the efficacy of the deity.

⁸⁴⁷ Construction companies such as Julius Berger engaged in dredging activities in the waterways engaged the services of this group in the Western and Central Delta during this period.

The Meinbutu Boys, assisted by Egbemini, Olabrako-opri, Ogbokonde and Alagbabagha Ogbo, were in charge of Warri town (1997-2004).⁸⁴⁸ The Meinbutu group, founded by enlightened Ijaw Youth leaders, had within its rank and file several university graduates of western delta Ijaw extraction; this explains the media attention it received at the start of the conflict.⁸⁴⁹ The Meinbutu represented the infantry brigade of Warri Ijaw fighters while other groups also assisted in its operations. Meinbutu galvanized all youths in the three Western Ijaw clans to fight for the common purpose of political autonomy, and waged most, if not all, of the struggle against the Itsekiri in Warri metropolis. Emerging in 1997, the Meinbutu Boys militia is still operational to date, though some members have moved on and new entrants have been admitted into the movement.

Feibokirifa Ogbo⁸⁵⁰ was an amphibious command that emerged from Ogbe-Ijoh, the first announced supposed headquarters of Warri South West LGA. The group, led by Mr. Friday Egbegbe, emerged from a previous youth militia (Ogbe-Ijoh Vanguard) formed during the Ogbe-Ijoh and Aladja crisis in 1996. During that crisis, the group acted as the amphibious arm of the struggle because of its strategic location -- supporting both the upland and riverine fighter groups as the need arose. Its main area of defense was Ogbe-Ijoh, but it constantly assisted in fighting with groups responsible for defending the riverine communities or upland settlements. For instance, if Meinbutu and its affiliates were battling the Itsekiri or federal military troops in any part of Warri mainland and the situation demanded urgent assistance, then Feibokirifa came in as reinforcement to contribute its fighters and military arsenal. In the same way, it could be called as reinforcement to assist the marine commandos fighting in the rivers or creeks. It thus served as a backup militia for the upland and Riverine fighters, even though its jurisdiction and primary objective was the defense of Ogbe-Ijoh from Itsekiri insurgents.

At the helm of the Warri Ijaw marine command in the creeks was Feibagha Ogbo,⁸⁵¹ which emerged from Okerenkoko in 1997. This militia group was coordinated and commanded by Tompolo.⁸⁵² Other groups -- Mobotundigha of Ogulagha, Agelebagha Ogbo of Iduwuni,

⁸⁴⁸ The name Meinbutu is an acronym derivable from the three main Western Ijaw clans of Mein-toru, Bulu-toru and Tuboru-toru. Thus, it is an Assembly of youths from these three Western Ijaw clans who came together against the LGA relocation from Ogbe-Ijoh to Ogidigben. Olabrako-opri signifies dealing with an enemy decisively and rendering him impotent as he/she deserves. Ogbokonde signifies the restoration of a lost glory, while Alagbabagha Ogbo, signifies that members are immune to death from arms such as gun. Egbemini means we shall reach the desired destination in the struggle for freedom.

⁸⁴⁹ The popularity of Meinbutu during the crisis and to date is its location, elites composition and area of operation and accessibility to the media.

⁸⁵⁰ Feibokirifa means "the dead go back to dust or mother earth." It is a euphemism saying that the earth is the last and final destination of man's sojourn.

⁸⁵¹ Feibagha is a euphemism meaning that members are immune to death. The members of this group believe that they are immune to death while fighting a just and fair war. This group cleared the waterways of criminal activities indulged by some youth involved in vices. It made the waterways safe for travelers and protected Ijaw communities located in the riverine areas from sea pirates and thieves. The sanitization of the territory by this group earned for it the respect of youth and elders in Gbaramatu clan, the JTF and the whole of Ijawland.

⁸⁵² His real name is Government Ekpemupolo. He is generally called GOC (General Officer Commanding the Niger Delta). He is one of the founders of the MEND militia and regarded by many as the founder and Grand Commander of the MEND movement. Tompolo is the name of a limited company involved in contract business with the oil companies in the region owned by his father. After his secondary education, he joined his father and became a managing partner in his father's construction, oil and gas businesses – Thomas Ekpemupolo & Sons Ltd. The name

Egbema freedom fighters of Egbema, Dolphin Ogbo of Ogulagha, and Atinbokiritin/Torudigha Ogbo of Kunukunuma, all from the creeks of Warri -- worked closely with Feibagha Ogbo to rid the creeks of enemy combatants.⁸⁵³ It is believed that the fighting between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, on the one hand, and the Ijaw and federal military troops, on the other, occurred more in the creek settlements and oil facilities in the Escravos Rivers, but largely went unnoticed due to lack of access and information. Several communities from both Itsekiri and Ijaw settlements in the swampy creeks were wiped out during the crisis. Under the leadership of Tompolo, the Feibagha Ogbo of Okerenkoko emerged as the main militant group in the creeks. The supposed triumph of the Warri Ijaw in these crises has been attributed to the dexterity of Feibagha Ogbo under Tompolo, who is revered in the Ijaw communities of western, eastern and central Niger Delta. Since 1997, this group has successfully defended Okerenkoko and its environs against several Itsekiri and federal military invasions, including the 2003 and 2006 military onslaughts.

The shutdown of oil facilities and counterattacks from Gbaramatu territory in the last twenty years can be traced to the agility of Feibagha Ogbo. The Feibagha Ogbo in conjunction with FNDIC as its political wing spearheaded the fight for the equitable delineation of wards in Warri South West LGA. Starting in late 2004, FNDIC's influence in the region began to dwindle: personal issues (the need to fend for their families and loved ones) overwhelmed some members while political involvement (appointment into government and party politics) altered the position for others.⁸⁵⁴ But Tompolo, FNDIC's mobilization officer and focal point of youth militancy in the creeks, decided to move the agitation beyond Warri Ijaw demand for political recognition to more embracing, all encompassing and national demand: resource control and self-determination. In sum, the contemporary conflict in Warri from 1997-2005 started simply as a demand for political space by the Ijaw people.

A gender dimension to the agitation for autonomy was introduced with Ijaw women stepping into the center to demand both justice and development.⁸⁵⁵ In late July 2002, Ijaw women of Gbaramatu and Egbema protested against the socio-economic and political condition of the people by peacefully occupying the Abiteye flow-station and insisting on remaining there until their demands for employment, scholarships, a micro-credit scheme, and the provision of infrastructure were fulfilled.⁸⁵⁶ The military was invited by Chevron to evict the women protesters, and troops brutalized some of the women. Also, in a striking case against the prevailing politics of inter-group relations in the region, military brutality of women protesters was repeated when women from Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw came together at the Chevron-Texaco

of the company was later changed to Tompolo & Sons Enterprises, and again later to Tompolo Nigeria Limited. Thus, his nickname Tompolo is a derivation from the company.

⁸⁵³ Mobotundigha means members are prepared for battle without retreat, and have to wage the war until victory is achieved. Agelebigha Ogbo means that members are immune to death from bullets. Egbema freedom fighter as their name signifies are the Egbema youth fighting for political freedom. Torudigha Ogbo means a 'merciless'/brutal group of youths who are fighting to conquer for their people.

⁸⁵⁴ For Instance George Timinimi was appointed into the Delta State cabinet as Commissioner for Water Resources by Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan in 2007.

⁸⁵⁵ The first women's protest in Gbaramatu in contemporary period was undertaken by Benikrukru where women protested against Chevron for the provision of water to the community.

⁸⁵⁶ See, DonPedro, I., *Out of a Bleak Landscape*, Lagos: Forward Communications Ltd., 2005. Before the Ijaw women protest, Itsekiri women had in July 8-18 2002, protested demanding for better condition of living for the inhabitants of the region by peacefully occupying Chevron-Texaco airstrip at Escravos export terminal.

office in Warri, to protest the inhumane treatment of their people and the general poverty in the region.⁸⁵⁷

The Warri Ijaw properly reasoned that the federal government was exclusively interested in exploiting the “black gold,” and in fact the government confirmed their fears in August 2003 by drafting a Joint Task Force called “Operation Restore Hope,” to ensure the unhindered flow of oil. The federal and state governments’ indifference toward an amicable resolution of the political logjam in Warri, federal military troops’ deleterious actions against protesters (legitimate or otherwise), and the consistent logistical support that oil firms operating in the region provided for the occupying military all helped to transform a political campaign into petro-insurgency. The inauguration of a special military task force for the Niger Delta was seen as a declaration of war on the people and oil producing communities, not only in Warri but throughout the entire region. These actions altered the dynamics of the conflicts from Ijaw-Itsekiri to Ijaw–government/oil companies’ coalition. The oil companies became legitimate targets for two reasons: first, the only visible infrastructural presence in the region are oil rigs, platforms, manifolds and pipelines; second, their provision of logistical support (boats, helicopters and cash payment) to the invading federal military troops in the region.

In Rivers State (Eastern delta), the irreconcilable differences between Alhaji Dokubo Asari and his former “commanders” over revenue from the Rivers State government’s arms buy-back deal, his subsequent arrest, trial for treasonable felony in far away Abuja, and the gun-point impeachment of D.S.P Alamieyeseigha in Bayelsa State (central delta), created widespread insecurity in the region which triggered the emergence of several militia groups (The Joint Revolutionary Council, Enough is Enough and Matyrs Brigade) in 2005.⁸⁵⁸ These actions, which were seen as deliberate repressive measures against the Ijaw people, propelled the Warri group to co-opt some of Asari’s allies in River state in the struggle for his release and that of D.S.P Alamieyeseigha. The meeting of these groups in Camp 5,⁸⁵⁹ with Tompolo presiding, produced the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). As Alhaji Dokubo Asari noted:

Tompolo called me to send in my people to Okerenkoko for a meeting of all the groups so that a direction will be fashioned out to press for the release of myself and Alams. I sent two of our most trusted female commanders, Cynthia White and

⁸⁵⁷ This action was made possible by the leadership of Itsekiri and Ijaw women who had protested against the injustice separately at different times. The women decided to put their ethnic rivalry and differences aside to fight for a common goal and interest. This brutality against the women, even leading to the death of one protester, made it very clear to the youth activists that the territory’s joint venture partnership between the federal government and oil firms went beyond profit-sharing to include the military suppression of oil communities. In most, if not all, of the demonstrations, oil company helicopters or speedboats ferried in the military and troops were paid extra allowances for community repression.

⁸⁵⁸ Dokubo Asari was an ally of the Warri group. He relocated to Warri and was under the protection of the Warri group during the heat of the crisis in 2004 involving him and Ateke Tom when it became clear that Ateke Tom had the backing of the Rivers State government. Alamieyeseigha on the other hand, was the only Ijaw governor in the country; hence the actions were viewed as against the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta.

⁸⁵⁹ Camp 5 was a well known militant camp in the creeks of Gbaramatu under the command of Tompolo. The need to save human lives in times of war with the military motivated the move by militants from the Gbaramatu axis to first settle at a place called Iroko camp, but the fighters later moved and finally settled at Camp 5, an abandoned Julius Berger Camp that hosted the construction of pipes and other oil facilities used in the region by multinational corporation operating in the region.

another, alongside some of my personal bodyguards known as the Immortals led by my cousin Dakoru Princewill. It was at this meeting that a decision was taken by the groups to have a name and platform for the struggle. Hence MEND was created not as an organization but as a name for the purpose of issuing unified statements.⁸⁶⁰

In late 2005, MEND emerged from the western delta as an offshoot of Ijaw militias in Warri. MEND was an amalgamation of militia groups that were formed to fight common Ijaw and Niger Delta interest; it was conceptualized and born in Gbaramatu, Delta State. The waning influence of FNDIC, the arrests and detention Alhaji Dokubo Asari and D.S.P Alamieyeseigha, all contributed to tensions in the Niger Delta and the emergence of radical tendencies of which MEND was one. The frustration that sectionalization (regionalization) of the conflict had failed to get the federal government and oil corporations to change their attitude toward the plight of the people of the Niger Delta. In response, a few determined militiamen from the western delta, joined by a few elements (Farah Dagogo, Boyloaf, Africa and Young-shall-grow) from the eastern and central delta, coalesced into one umbrella body called MEND in late 2005, under the leadership of Tompolo.⁸⁶¹

6.5 The Rise of MEND in Western Niger Delta

In November and December 2005, two explosives were detonated in the creeks of Rivers State, destroying two SPDC pipelines located in the Okirika and Andoni axis; no individual or group(s) claimed responsibility. On January 11, 2006, an SPDC oil-facility located 20km offshore of Bayelsa State was attacked and damaged, and four expatriates were abducted by militants after a fierce gun duel with the military who were guarding the oil field.⁸⁶² The dust had

⁸⁶⁰ Alhaji Dokubo Asari's open letter "Conscience is an Open Wound: Only truth can heal it."

⁸⁶¹ The outbreak of the Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis in March 1997 over local government area creation and relocation produced several militant groups and militia leaders amongst who was Chief Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo). He started out as one of the founders of Feibagha Ogbo of Okerenkoko town. He is also the mobilization officer of FNDIC. Before long, his organizational skills, mobilization prowess, "native" intelligence, selflessness, determination, calm disposition and fearlessness in the face of intimidation made him stand out among other militia leaders in the Niger Delta. An adherent of the Egbesu deity, Tompolo coordinated many of the wars in the creeks of Warri and became a model to would-be militants in the region. His exploits and leadership qualities in Gbaramatu clan made him the *de facto* militant leader in the Kingdom and beyond.

⁸⁶² MEND claimed responsibility for the attacks through an e-mail to the media and public from its anonymous spokesman Jomo Gbomo. Jomo Gbomo attributed the EA attack and previous attacks of November and December in Rivers State to MEND fighters in the creeks of the Niger Delta. He claimed that several federal military personnel were killed in the attacks. He advised oil corporations to suspend all operations due to their connivance with government in the impoverishment of the locals and evacuate their staffs from the region or face the wrath of MEND fighters. The hostages were: Patrick Arnold (USA), Nichev Miliko (Bulgaria), Nigel Watson (UK) and Harry Ebanks (Honduras). The militants' demands included: the release of Alhaji Dokubo Asari and D.S.P Alamieyeseigha, suspension of oil operations in the region, and withdrawal of federal military troops from the region. The hostages were released unhurt after one month of negotiation. It cannot be confirmed whether or not ransom was paid for their release.

barely settled when on Sunday January 15, 2006, MEND militants attacked and destroyed one flow-station and two military house boats belonging to SPDC in Benisede, Bayelsa State.⁸⁶³

According to the MEND spokesman Jomo Gbomo, MEND's object was "to totally destroy the capacity of the Nigerian government [for] oil export."⁸⁶⁴ The success of these and successive attacks in the Warri and Bayelsa axis, and the public sympathy they attracted especially from the locals, energized the militia group to redouble its efforts and increase youth influx into its ranks. These attacks and shut-in of about four hundred thousand barrels per day led to the hike in oil prices on the international market. Commenting on the strategy, a MEND commander Victor Ebikabowei (popularly known as Boyloaf) explained that it was based on targeting oil facilities rather than the military,⁸⁶⁵ he said:

I believe the economy is the power. Like you may know, I don't believe in fighting human beings, I believe in crumbling the economy. On my way crumbling the economy, if any military man comes across me and tries to stop me, I mean those people will kiss their graves. My bullet nozzle is always directed and targeted at the flow stations, pipelines etc. I don't believe in fighting human beings. Before we formed MEND, our people were fighting, but it was a war between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, that was not the Niger Delta struggle.

Figure 21: Value of Nigeria's Average Daily Oil Production Stolen and Shut-in 2000-2008 (at September 2008)

Year	Price Bonny Light	Volume Stolen bpd	Value of Oil Stolen (USD)	Assumed Production Shut-in bpd	Value of Shut-in production (USD)	Total Annual Value (USD)
2000	28.49			250,000	\$2.6 billion	
2001	24.50			200,000	\$1.8 billion	
2002	25.15			370,000	\$3.4 billion	
2003	28.76	300,000	\$3.2 billion	350,000	\$3.7 billion	\$6.9 billion
2004	38.27	300,000	\$4.2 billion	230,000	\$3.2 billion	\$7.4 billion
2005	55.67	250,000	\$5.1 billion	180,000	\$3.7 billion	\$8.8 billion
2006	66.84	100,000	\$2.4 billion	600,000	\$14.6 billion	\$16.6 billion
2007	75.14	100,000	\$2.7 billion	600,000	\$16.5 billion	\$19.2 billion
2008	115.81	150,000	\$6.3 billion	650,000	\$27.5 billion	\$33.8 billion

Davis, 2009

Understanding that the disruption of the oil flow from the Niger Delta to the global market would have a most potent and devastating effect on the federal government, oil

⁸⁶³ Jomo Gbomo's e-mail to the media and public after the Benisede attacks of January 15 2006. Again he claims that there was a military resistance but was overwhelmed by the firepower of MEND fighters.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid,

⁸⁶⁵ Boyloaf (Mr. Victor Ben Ebikabowei) in an interview with *Sunday Vanguard*, May 25, 2008, pp. 22-24.

corporations and international community, the MEND militants withdrew from the cities of the Niger Delta and instead headed into and operated from the maze of creeks. Their attacks on the infrastructure of the oil industry, particularly production and export, had the effect of cutting oil production and pushing up the price of oil in the tight and nervous global market. As a guerrilla movement, MEND has no clear leadership structure. The only known public face of MEND was its anonymous or veiled spokesman Jomo Gbomo, who is known only through press statements he distributes to the media. The movement is a loose or porous coalition of shadowy groups (cells) with a variety of leaders scattered all over the region, who sometimes are unaware of events undertaken by other cells until such events unfold. MEND's operational strategy not to have a single command structure but rather a diverse and amorphous leadership was to make the movement elusive, tenuous and effective in its guerilla warfare extending throughout the whole region. This strategy is designed to overcome the shortcomings witnessed in previous movements in the region that had a visible leadership, such as MOSOP, NDPVF and EBA. In those earlier groups, the leadership and top hierarchy were either targeted for elimination or otherwise compromised by the oil companies and the government. MEND's fugitive nature makes it much more difficult for the enforcers to handle the situation in the troubled zone.

The use of local militias and armed operations to block the global oil trade was quite significant in two ways. On the one hand, it led to more global attention being focused on the situation in the oil-producing communities in the region as a whole, particularly the plight and demands of the people. On the other, it has raised the energy security stakes of the world's established and emerging powers in the region. MEND has fully exploited acts likely to draw global attention to the Niger Delta situation: acts such as taking foreign (western) nationals as hostages and the shutdowns resulting from oil facility destruction that contribute to higher price of crude oil. These acts have been connected to a sophisticated strategy for engaging global media through the use of information technology and drawing the attention of intervention agencies to the crisis and plight of the people in the region. The Joint Task Force has always stated that MEND and other militia groups in the Niger Delta region are criminals and miscreants who have over the years been involved in illegal oil theft and other criminal activities and must be wiped out for the free and uninterrupted flow of oil.

It is instructive to note that in 2006, then Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Owoye Andrew Azazi (now late) had rightly cautioned against the use of the military in addressing the crisis in the region, saying that "such will be counter-productive considering the political nature of the problem."⁸⁶⁶ But JTF's top hierarchy, to the contrary, have consistently pushed for military options rather than a political solution. At one point the militants intercepted a JTF report authored by the then- commander of the JTF in the Niger Delta (2006-2008), former Brig. Gen. L.P. Ngubane (as he then was) and titled "Brief for the Chief of Defense Staff on Strategies to Stamp out Militant Activities within the JTF Operation Restore Hope Area of Responsibility,"⁸⁶⁷ and released it to the media and general public for analysis and scrutiny. In the report,

⁸⁶⁶ Edomaruse, C., *Thisday*, Lagos, July 1 2006. Lt. Gen. Andrew Azazi repeated again in 2007 when he was Chief of Defense Staff that the continued use of the army in the region was a futile because the crisis is political and could only be resolved through political will. He is of the view that the military is unnecessarily dragged into a political situation due to unwillingness or indifference on the part of the ruling class.

⁸⁶⁷ The Joint Task Force Report was posted on www.saharareporters.com in May 2009 during the military invasion of Gbaramatu Kingdom.

organizations such as MOSOP, INC (Ijaw National Congress), IYC, Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) were tagged as militant groups that must be crushed.⁸⁶⁸ The document highlighted militant leaders in the region and assessed their capabilities, weaponry, and manpower. The report marked certain Ijaw communities for total annihilation: communities such as Oporoza, Kurutie, Kunukunuma, Okerenkoko and other villages in the Gbaramatu clan in Delta State. The report further identified Ijaw communities in Bayelsa and River states that it asserted must be visited with carnage. The report was very clear that maximum military force rather than political action was required by the federal government to stamp out indigenous militancy, and that land, air and sea should be used in its attacks. The military posited that the resolution of the crisis lay in maximum military expenditure in the region even if it resulted in innocent lives lost.⁸⁶⁹

In tandem with this report, the Nigerian government and the oil companies (with some logistical support from some foreign countries) deployed more troops into the creeks to neutralize the "militants."⁸⁷⁰ For its part, the government described the Niger Delta militants as criminals, just as some media analysts tagged them "terrorists" that threaten legitimate oil commerce, property, and human lives. But Shadi Bushra, writing on the Niger Delta conflict in the *Stanford Progressive*, observes:

The overarching theme of this and similar resistance efforts, the liberation of a land occupied by an irresponsible foreign goliath cannot be dismissed as "terrorism". It is this oversimplification that forces people into arms. Whenever we regard the pain of others, regardless of how many borders or oceans are between us, with indifference, we open the door for such violent groups. We invite them into a world that doesn't recognize a shared purpose but instead chooses to reward those who recklessly pursue power and wealth. Without addressing the problems we have all helped fashion, we have all but invited such extremism into our shared world.⁸⁷¹

In an attempt to discredit and ultimately crush MEND, the government increased its use of the state security and coercive apparatus. The governors of the Niger Delta supported the approach adopted by the federal government and oil companies. The government of Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers contributed about 750 million naira each month to maintain the security outfit in the region.⁸⁷² Not surprisingly, the MEND militants viewed most of the governors in the region as externally imposed upon the region and constantly have friction with these governors.

⁸⁶⁸ The Joint Military Task Force Report, "Brief for the Chief of Defense Staff on Strategies to Stamp out Militant Activities within the JTF Operation Restore Hope Area of Responsibility," June 2008, pp. 1-15.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid,

⁸⁷⁰ The U.S. government gave the Nigerian military two gunboats to contain the militants; Mark Taylor of the U.S. State Department confirmed this to the author during his visit to the Delta in 2003. The U.S. Navy has since intensified its presence in the Gulf of Guinea. In the Vanguard Newspaper July 7, France and Britain have also promised to support the government and oil companies militarily. Due to the unrest most western countries placed traveling ban on citizens, warning and directing their nationals to stay clear of the Delta (http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_928.html).

⁸⁷¹ Bushra, S., "Nigeria Wages War for its Own Oil", *The Stanford Progressive*, January 2009, www.campusprogress.org.

⁸⁷² A Delta State top government official confided this information on the author, September 16th 2006

The governors in their own right also internally exploited the strategy of financial inducement (payment of allowances) to calm militants located in their territories in order to get the desired peace.⁸⁷³ For its part, MEND has alleged that the military deployment to creeks has led mainly to human right abuses, harassment, rape, the sacking of communities, and death of innocent citizens, often without provocation.⁸⁷⁴

On February 15 2006, after MEND insurgents released their four hostages the federal government sought to contain the MEND fighters by sending military helicopter gunships into Okerenkoko (an Ijaw territory in the creeks of Warri, termed the stronghold of MEND militants by the military) and its surrounding Ijaw villages and hamlets. The jet fighters emitted explosives from above and shot indiscriminately into human settlements. The aerial attacks by federal military troops were repeated on February 17 and 18. This 3-day aerial bombardment and shooting destroyed three communities of the Gbaramatu clan (Perezuoweikorigbene, Ukpogbene, and Seitorububor) and left twenty dead and numerous others homeless.⁸⁷⁵ The government justified the bombardment as an action against oil thieves in the region and to destroy their barges used for the illegal activity. MEND, on its part, interpreted the attack by the federal military as a deliberate targeting of communities seen as sympathetic to its cause, and the fighters responded by attacking SPDC's Forcados oil export terminal in Ogulagha. They wreaked devastating havoc on the facility – setting fire on available tankers, blowing up both pipelines and the loading point. MEND militants abducted nine expatriates, both in retaliation for the attack on Gbaramatu and to stop government's further attacks on oil-bearing communities.⁸⁷⁶ MEND constantly reminded the public that their action was propelled by the desire for justice and fairness. According to the organization's spokesman, "We are asking for justice. We want our land, and the Nigeria government to transfer all her involvement in the oil industry to host communities which will become shareholders in these oil companies."⁸⁷⁷ This demand is consistent with both the historical quest for local autonomy and for resource control by the ethnic minorities of the oil producing Niger Delta. What changed in real terms was the form of protest and resistance which has now entered a violent phase.

On April 20 2006, MEND extended its attacks into the region's cities by detonating two bombs: one in Port Harcourt (Bori camp military barrack) and the other at a petrol tanker garage

⁸⁷³ This information was given during the authors fieldwork trips to militant camps in June 2006 and August 2007.

⁸⁷⁴ Jomo Gbomo in an email to the media. See also, Amnesty international, *Rape: The Silent Weapon*, November 2006, found at www.hrw.org.

⁸⁷⁵ For more on the federal government attack, see Oboko Bello interview, *Niger Delta News Magazine*, Lagos, June 2006. The military helicopters were said to have been deployed from Shell's Osubi airstrip in Warri for the attacks and MEND warned that Shell would pay dearly for this action sooner than later.

⁸⁷⁶ The expatriate oil workers were taken into the communities being attacked by government. This action stopped further attacks on communities in the creeks of Gbaramatu. In an email to the media Jomo Gbomo said the location which was more of a garrison was chosen for attacks to send strong signal to the oil corporations that MEND has the capacity to storm and destroy any oil facility in the region not minding the number and sophistication of military personnel deployed for its protection. The group promised to do more harm and damage to the oil industry until it is finally crumbled and brought to nuts. Concerned elders, opinion leaders and Youth Leaders with a promise by government that federal troops will also stop attacks on communities in the territory help facilitate the release of the hostages in batches after intervention.

⁸⁷⁷ Jomo Gbomo's online message to the media after the militants attack on Forcados oil terminal on February 20th 2006.

in the city of Warri.⁸⁷⁸ MEND described the twin bomb attacks as “symbolic rather than strategic.”⁸⁷⁹ President Olusegun Obasanjo, who had hitherto been talking tough, suddenly called for dialogue. He created the Council on Social and Economic Development of Coastal States (COSEDECS) and offered other palliatives to the citizens of the delta region.⁸⁸⁰ The President’s overtures appeared not to go far enough and failed to attract the attention of the people and militias. The continued militarization of the region also meant that the palliatives sat uncomfortably alongside the deployment of the “military option.”

On August 20 2006, fifteen Ijaw citizens were ambushed and murdered by the military JTF while on their way back from Letugbene.⁸⁸¹ The paradox here is that MEND had facilitated the release of a Shell hostage and was taking him to safety when they were ambushed and killed. Specifically, the victims were said to be returning from Letugbene after rescuing an SPDC staff member, Ujeya Nelson, who had been detained by the inhabitants of Letugbene over SPDC’s refusal to honor a memorandum of understanding (MoU) freely entered with the community. FNDIC which intervened in the Letugbene saga only after pressure from the Ijaw Interactive Assembly⁸⁸², government functionaries (federal and state), officials of SPDC, chief of army staff and the JTF, viewed the incident as a set-up by SPDC and the military.⁸⁸³ The circumstances of the killings had the effect of hardening MEND’s resolve to fight on. As an organization MEND may have been polarized or even infiltrated by the government and multinational oil companies in the region, but their operations extended to all nooks and crannies of the delta, and their ubiquity continues to make the organization elusive for the military to handle.

In May 2007, after his failed bid for a third term, President Olusegun Obasanjo stepped down from office. Following the again controversial 2007 Nigerian general elections, President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua and Goodluck Jonathan (Vice President) came to power. The elections were marred by fraud and irregularities and were condemned by international observers and local monitors for not meeting democratic requirements.⁸⁸⁴ Unlike Olusegun Obasanjo, the new president met two of MEND’s conditions in 2007: Alhaji Dokubo Asari and D.S.P.

⁸⁷⁸ Jomo Gbomo notes, “It is a warning to the Nigerian military and the oil companies in the area and a prove that the Nigerian military was incapable of protecting itself, let alone protecting the oil industry” (April 20th 2006).

⁸⁷⁹ Jomo Gbomo in an email to the media after the twin-bomb attacks of April 20 2006.

⁸⁸⁰ Ijaw boycotted the presidential council meeting that gave birth to COSEDECS. The decision to boycott the meeting was made public by INC (Ijaw National Congress, the leading Ijaw sociocultural organization) and Ijaw national leader, Chief E.K Clark. The reason for the boycott was that the Ijaw nation has a peculiar problem and will want to discuss with the president as a distinct ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta. However, some Ijaw persons who were termed “sell-outs” attended the Abuja parley. The president also announced the dualization project for the East-West road (the only road linking the Niger Delta to other parts of Nigeria) and also directed that youths from the region be absorbed into the armed forces. (This latter directive was seen by many as an attempt to absorb and train youths of the region to fight the ragging battle with MEND and other militias).

⁸⁸¹ FNDIC press statement delivered at Warri Central Hospital on September 2, 2006, by Oboko Bello during the burial ceremony of the nine of the fifteen MEND members killed by JTF.

⁸⁸² The Ijaw Interactive Assembly was gathering of selected Ijaw elders, youths, opinion leaders and political leaders in the region where issues of national importance to the Ijaw ethnic group are discussed and possibly resolved. Meetings of the Assembly chaired by Chief E.K Clark are usually held in Bayelsa State and hosted by the governor.

⁸⁸³ Ibid,

⁸⁸⁴ For the atrocities of the 2007 general elections see International Crisis Group Reports, “Nigeria’s Elections: Avoiding A Political Crisis”, March 28, 2007, and “Failed Elections, Failing State?,” May 30, 2007 (New York: International Crisis Group). See also Human Right Watch Report, “Politics as War: The Human Rights Impact and Causes of Post-Election Violence in Rivers State,” New York: Human Rights Watch, March 2008.

Alamieyeseigha were released from prison. Dokubo Asari was granted bail on health grounds; Alamieyeseigha pleaded guilty to charges of corruption and was freed for having already spent the required number of years in custody.

Henry Okah,⁸⁸⁵ a MEND leader, agreed to participate in the dialogue process, and actually initiated the formation of the Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC).⁸⁸⁶ He nominated its chairman and secretary after meeting with the vice president in 2007.⁸⁸⁷ But a few months later, Henry Okah was arrested in Angola for gunrunning and was extradited to Nigeria and secretly tried for treason and related offences. His arrest and secret trial by the Nigerian government further jeopardized the peace process initiated in the region. MEND and other groups called for his immediate and unconditional release, and declared new armed campaigns (Hurricane Barbarosa and Hurricane Obama). MEND's operations spanned the various states of the region but were mainly concentrated around Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States. Offshore oil facilities that had been regarded as safe havens from militants' wrath also came under attack. On June 20, 2008, MEND fighters attacked the SPDC-operated Bonga oil platform -- the largest offshore oil platform in the Niger Delta, located 120km offshore.⁸⁸⁸ The attack underscored the sophistication of MEND fighters and showed that oil platforms/facilities (onshore or offshore) were within the reach of MEND fighters.⁸⁸⁹

MEND's June attacks may have been sophisticated and devastating to the oil companies, by 2007 the federal government was preparing for a showdown with MEND and other militants. Vice President Atiku Abubakar while commissioning his campaign headquarters in Abuja on January 30 2007, revealed to the public that the "administration of President Olusegun, a few weeks ago, just approved two billion dollars to buy weapons to fight the militants in the Niger Delta."⁸⁹⁰ The militants responded, saying, "We are prepared for war."⁸⁹¹ The president denied

⁸⁸⁵ Henry Okah is an Ijaw in the diaspora (South Africa) and has been identified as one the leaders of MEND. He was arrested in Angola in 2007 and deported to Nigeria in February 2008. In Nigeria, Okah was charged and tried privately on counts related to the offences of treason, terrorism, illegal possession of firearms and trafficking. His arrest and trial contributed to the rise of violence in the region in 2007 and 2008. When amnesty was granted to Niger Delta militants in July 2009, Okah's lawyer announced that his client has accepted the government offer of amnesty to militants and ready to lay down his arms and embrace peace. On July 13th 2009, the Judge (Mohammed Liman) announced the release of Okah. He was again arrested on October 2nd 2010 in South Africa in connection with the Independence Day Anniversary bombing in Nigeria where twelve persons lost their lives. In January 2013, a South African court convicted him on charges of terrorism including the Independence Day bombing that claimed twelve lives. He has however, maintained his innocence on the charges and claimed that his ordeal is politically motivated – his refusal to support President Goodluck Jonathan at the time.

⁸⁸⁶ The Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC) was inaugurated by then Vice President (Goodluck Jonathan) in 2007 to seek truce between government and militants in the Niger Delta region. The Committee was expected to reach out to militants to defuse tension (especially attack on oil installations) and secure the release of hostage in the region. But the Committee failed.

⁸⁸⁷ See Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum Press Release, "The Niger Delta Peace Process: A Critical Review", December 14, 2007.

⁸⁸⁸ Jomo Gbomo's email to the media after the attack on the Bonga oil platform, June 20, 2008.

⁸⁸⁹ The militia group derived its funding from royalties from oil corporations operating in the region, and tolls collected from individuals involved in oil theft in the region. Similarly, 70 percent of the group's arms were procured from international arms dealers and the remaining 30 percent are arms seized from the military during clashes or bought within the Nigerian local arms market (interview with a militant leader who does not want to be mentioned in Port Harcourt, October 2011).

⁸⁹⁰ *Vanguard*, February 1 2007, p. 17.

the vice-president's allegation. Not long afterwards, signals of coercion in the region became evident when Nigeria's new President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua presented the 2008 budget to the National Assembly in December 2007. In it, the government allocated sixty-nine billion naira to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) for the development of the Niger Delta region, as compared to four-hundred-and-forty-four billion naira allocated to security in the same region. Leaders, elders, activists and militia groups in the region condemned this action, charging that it was a tactical declaration of war in the region by the federal government of Nigeria.

The inauguration of a new administration on May 29 2007, and intervention by the Vice-President, Goodluck Jonathan (an Ijaw from the Niger Delta) produced two initiatives for a peaceful resolution of the conflict: the formation of the Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC) and the Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum (IYLF).⁸⁹² Intervention from these initiatives did restore temporary peace (especially attack on soldiers in the western fringe) but it could not be sustained due to military attacks on militant targets in the region. While the peace initiatives were on there were pockets of attacks and military invasion of communities in the region (especially in Rivers, Edo and Bayelsa States).⁸⁹³

From 2008, attack and counter-attacks involving the JTF and militants in the Niger Delta, especially Bayelsa and Rivers States was on the rise. The oil-fields (especially onshore) were barely operational: there were constant attacks and sabotage of oil pipelines and confrontation between military and MEND fighters in Kalabari, Okrika and Bonny in Rivers States; the situation was not different in Nembe, Brass, Southern Ijaw and Ekeremor axis of Bayelsa State. The oil economy was severely battered and most companies threatened to pull out in the face of daring attacks on facilities and personnel – most oil firms by this time had declared *force majeure* in some of the operational locations in the Niger Delta due to inability to meet targets. By mid-2008, the Nigerian military heightened its surveillance and attacks on militant hideouts and camps. They patrolled the creeks, waterways and raided communities in their search for militants.⁸⁹⁴ Rather than improve the Nigerian military counteroffensive on militant camps and

⁸⁹¹ Ibid,

⁸⁹² These two peace initiatives emerged from the Vice-Presidents' extensive consultations with militant groups and stakeholders in the region. The formation and activities of the two peace initiatives will be discussed in the conclusion of this work.

⁸⁹³ For instance, in late September 2007, MEND promised more attacks on oil installations and abduction of expatriate oil workers in the region. In November 2007, federal military troops (joint task force) attacked Gbaraun community in Southern Ijaw LGA, Bayelsa State. The community attack by the military was condemned because it was unprovoked since the community was in no way linked to militancy in the region. Similarly, in December 2007, the military task force and Ateke Tom (operating in Okrika) were involved in several shootouts around the Okrika axis of Port Harcourt. Amidst the New Year celebration in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on December 31 2007, a group of armed young men invaded two police stations in Borokiri and the Presidential Hotel along Aba Road, killing 16 persons including four policemen and one security officer attached to the Presidential Hotel.

⁸⁹⁴ On May 12, 2008 men of the federal military joint task force invaded Opuama community in Delta State in search of militants. During the invasion four persons were killed, many others were wounded and property worth millions of dollars destroyed. The federal troops again on June 3, 2008, invaded the town of Twon Brass in Brass Local Government Area, Bayelsa State where one Ebi (male) was killed, hundreds displaced and several others were wounded. On June 6, 2008, men of the Nigerian military in the Niger Delta attacked Epebu community in Bayelsa state: the military invasion left three people dead. Again, the federal military invaded Safarogbo Zion, Egbema 1 and 2 (Ijaw communities) in Edo state on June 8, 2008. Also, Agge community in Bayelsa State was razed during this period (August 2008) by the federal military troops in their search for militants in the region.

communities exacerbated counter-attacks targeted at oil installations in the region by militants. By December 2008 oil output had been drastically reduced⁸⁹⁵ – to less than 1.8 million bpd.

In the face of daunting attacks against oil facilities and loss in revenue to the nation the military restructured. In March 2009, Commander of the JTF Brigadier General Wuyip Nanyen Rintip (an army officer) was replaced by Major General Sarkin Bello (an airforce officer) as new commander of the JTF. General Wuyip Rintip was redesignated Land Component Commander of JTF to be based in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The Nigerian military force in the region was restructured with its operational headquarters moved from Effurun, Delta State to Yenagoa, Bayelsa State (central Niger Delta). In the new arrangement the three major oil-bearing states of the region (Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers) had a sector to be commanded by a senior military officer not less than the rank of a colonel. Delta State was designated Sector 1, and had Colonel Ahmed Mohammed as commander; Bayelsa State was Sector 2 with Colonel Victor Ezeogu as commander; and Rivers State was Sector 3 with Muftahu Yekini as commander. Before the new Nigerian military sector command structure was made public, MEND had an hint and had called off its September 27 2008 ceasefire on January 30, 2009 and resumed attacks on oil installations and personnel in the region. By the summer of 2009 oil production had significantly reduced, there was huge reduction in oil revenue to the nation (the economy was bleeding) and the oil fields had become ungovernable spaces.

The government finally unveiled its military action on May 15, 2009. After two days of fighting involving the JTF and militants in the Gbaramatu axis of Delta State, the military sent four jet fighters, twenty-four gunboats and three battalions of the Nigerian army into the territory. The JTF justified its renewed hostility to the MEND militants' killing of eighteen military officers guarding oil facilities; JTF asserted the murders had been committed by MEND fighters loyal to Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo). In contrast, the militants insisted that the attacks on their base were unprovoked and constituted a calculated attempt by the military to drag them into a preplanned military battle for control of the region's oil industry.⁸⁹⁶ The military attacked Camp 5, a suspected stronghold of the MEND militants, using jet fighters, bombs, and troops on ground and sea. The bomb attack was extended as far as Oporoza, the central headquarters of Gbaramatu Kingdom where a cultural festival (*Amaseikumo*) attended by indigenes and visitors was going on. In Oporoza, the community's guesthouse, the King's palace, and several buildings were attacked, with scores of people wounded or killed by the air

⁸⁹⁵ In May 2008, MEND attacked an SPDC operated oil pipeline in the Bonny axis forcing the company to halt 170,000 bpd export of the Bonny Light Crude. The 2008 attack on SPDC operated Bonga oil field (located 120km offshore) shut-in about 200,000 bpd of export from Nigeria. In early September 2008, MEND declared 'oil war' (Operation Hurricane Barbarossa) on companies in the region and made good their promise by unleashing attacks on oil pipelines and installations throughout the region leading to significant loss in output. But a week (September 27 2008) after this declaration and after destroying several important oil facilities, the group proclaimed a ceasefire until "further notice" upon the intervention of the IYLF, NDPCRC and elders in the region.

⁸⁹⁶ Amaize E., *Vanguard*, May 24 2009. See also Dokubo Asari's interview, *Vanguard*, May 24 2009. See also Oboko Bello, "Task Force Acted on False Intelligence", *The Nation*, May 26, 2009.

all, within a month of their audacious attacks on oil facilities, militants further reduced the oil output in the region to less than 800,000 bpd.⁹⁰¹

MEND's emergence in 2006 redefined the socioeconomic space and political ecology of the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. The militia group introduced sophisticated armed struggle into the local-global dimension of the quest for political autonomy and resource control. It has also sought to move the effort for resolving the various conflicts outside of the exclusive sphere of the Nigerian state, which it perceives to be unable to play the role of an honest broker due to its own vested interests in maintaining exclusive control of oil and being the exclusive partner of oil multinationals. Since its emergence, MEND has called for international mediation of the conflict. It has consistently rejected the terrorist and criminal tags, insisting that MEND's struggle is for survival, equity, dignity, and justice in the Niger Delta. At the heart of the MEND insurgency is the quest for a restructuration of Nigeria's fragile and unstable federalism and reevaluation of the centralization of political power and oil revenues derivable from the Niger Delta. From this, it can be surmised that at the core of the Niger Delta oil conflict are the deficits and dysfunctions of the Nigerian oil state which are key: the nation's statutory monopoly over all mineral (oil and gas) exploration and exploitation rights in the region, the joint venture business partnership between the Nigerian State and MNOCs in which the nation gets the majority share, the formulae for the distribution of federally collected revenues and oil rents among states and LGAs of the federation (where the Niger Delta is disadvantaged with less states and LGAs compared to other regions), the near-total reliance on oil (rentier state) and the footprint of the industry on the ecology of oil bearing-communities, the questionable and unimaginable manner oil revenues from the Niger Delta accruing to the central government are squandered and stolen by state officials and their elite collaborators (mainly from the major ethnic nationalities), the endemic poverty and lack of social and economic development in the country due to pervasive corruption which is structural and the reckless devotion of oil money for the purchase of civic consent in a fragile federation.

By mid-2009, militants' targetted attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta had overwhelmed the oil industry beyond the expectations of many (including the military) – oil production had been reduced to less than a million bpd. By writing the militants off as ragtag criminals and attempts by federal military troops to quash them with force exacerbated attacks on the oil industry. MEND militants had shutdown oil production completely in Delta State (SPDC and Chevron evacuated the region due to constant attacks on personnel and installations) by summer of 2009 while oil firms abandoned all onshore and offshore oil production (within the reach of militants) in Rivers and Delta States.⁹⁰² It became evident to the government-MNOCs alliance that the militants cannot be brought down (or even contained) by the federal military joint task force. With oil production at barely 800,000 bpd, a battered military image, an economy in shambles and given the deep-seated complexity of the crisis, the Nigerian government explored other initiatives to address grievances in the region. The federal government revisited and implemented an earlier committee and stakeholders' recommendation

⁹⁰¹ Owonibi, A., *The Nation*, July 28, 2009.

⁹⁰² Oil service companies were similarly affected. For instance, Wilbros, an American oil service company with headquarters at Choba in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, relieved its entire staff, sold all assets and left the country due to the insecurity – persistent attacks on the company's facilities and kidnap of personnel by militants forced the company to shutdown.

of amnesty to the “militants” in the creeks, prison, detention and those under surveillance.⁹⁰³ The stakeholders and committee had recommended amnesty to safeguard the oil facilities and personnel from militant attacks and to similarly protect oil-bearing communities from Nigerian military invasions. By late June 2007 it dawned on the government that amnesty offer to militants would significantly curtail attacks on the oil industry and improve output - the urgent need to protect the oil industry from total collapse being the mainstay of the economy informed the amnesty decision by the federal government.

On June 25 2009, the federal government announced a sixty-day blanket amnesty package for militants (from August 6 – October 4, 2009) during which the insurgents were expected to disarm and forswear violence. Arms collection centers and withholding camps were established, and since then some thirty thousand militants (in three batches) including most regional and local “commanders” accepted the government’s amnesty gesture.⁹⁰⁴ MEND and other militant groups did not embrace the amnesty offer with alacrity. There was doubt on the part of the militants if the offer was genuine or merely a ploy to bring them out of the creeks and hidings for possible arrest and prosecution. Hence, it took the intervention of elders, opinion leaders, youth leaders and even politicians before the offer was accepted by some of the MEND commanders (Tompolo, Ateke, Farah, Victor Ben, Africa, Bibo, Young-shall-grow and Ogunbos). For instance, Governor Timipre Silver of Bayelsa State facilitated the surrender of arms and ammunition of most MEND leaders (Victor Ben Ebikabowei, Ogunbos, Africa and Young-shall-grow) who operated in his state. Timi Alaibi (a former Director of Administration/Finance and Chairman of NDDC) facilitated Farah Dagogo and Ateke Tom’s surrender of arms and ammunition in Rivers State. It took the intervention and assurances of Mr. Timi Alaibi, Chief E. K. Clark (Ijaw national leader) and Chief Anthony Anenih (Chairman Board of Trustee of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party at the time) for Tompolo who was the general commander of MEND in the Niger Delta (and other commanders in the western fringe) to finally accept and surrender their weapons on the last day (October 4, 2009) of the deadline to accept the amnesty offer. A budget of four hundred and thirty million dollars was allocated to a Presidential Committee on Amnesty chaired by the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta. Monthly stipends of 65,000 naira is given to each ex-militant along with the opportunity

⁹⁰³ The Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum (IYLF) recommended amnesty as one its preconditions to government for the attainment of peace in the region in mid-2007. Also, the Technical Committee on Niger Delta (TCND) inaugurated by government in 2007 had recommended amnesty in its report submitted in late 2007 for all militants after consultations with stakeholders and the militants in the region. These two peace initiatives are further discussed in the conclusion of this work.

⁹⁰⁴ Except for Dokubo Asari who argued that neither he nor any member of his group (Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, NDPVF) have been convicted by any known court in the land of any crime in breach of any law, hence would not accept the amnesty offer, all other major actors (militants) in the Niger Delta accepted the government amnesty offer. Dokubo Asari’s NDPVF rejected the amnesty offer saying, “we wish to state that our movement does not understand nor subscribe to what the Federal Government of Nigeria, led by Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar’Adua means by the terminology “militant” or what it means by granting amnesty to militants, whatever such statement means, it is pellucid that Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo Asari and the entire NDPFV are not party to such arrangement... We wish to state loud and clear that our movement is a freedom fighting movement whose struggle for emancipation of the Niger Delta from modern-day Pharaohs is moral, just and legitimate” (Vanguard, April 12, 2009, p. 16). However, when the program commenced the training and education of youths from the region in and outside the country, Dokubo Asari made a u-turn and has been calling for the inclusion of members of his group (NDPFV) into the program so that they could benefit from the program like other groups and individuals in the region.

for conflict mediation in a series of training camps set in Cross Rivers and Lagos state, each with the expectation of some type of education or employment training at designated training institutes within and outside the country.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined ethnic antagonisms in Warri with regard to perceived or real political marginalization and showed how the oil complex complicated a strong sense of political injustice nagging at the people of the Western Delta since pre-independence. It was discovered that at the heart of the Warri crisis, even prior to independence, is the quest for political citizenship by the various ethnic groups in Warri: the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo. All three ethnic groups lay claim to Warri as their ancestral home; while the Itsekiri claim sole ownership of Warri, the Ijaw and Urhobo both claim aboriginal ownership. It is the disquiet generated by historical claims to ownership coupled by Itsekiri domination of the region's political landscape post-colonialism and the indifference of government (regional, state and federal) to the political demands of the Ijaw and Urhobo that is at the root of the crisis. The chapter focused on the role of youth mobilization in Warri toward redressing decades of political marginalization and analyzed how the action or inaction of government and MNOCs helped enthrone the twenty-first century regime of armed insurgency.

The chapter argued that the contemporary crisis is derived from the age-old political marginalization in western Niger Delta now significantly complicated by petro-capitalism. The struggle of oil-bearing communities to create legitimate access through local government to revenue derived from such oil production transformed a relatively simple local demand for political citizenship into a regional, national, and global demand for ecological justice. Ike Okonta was therefore right when he said, "Behind the mask of the militant is a political subject forced to pick up an AK47 to restore his rights as a citizen."⁹⁰⁵ MEND is thus a spatial conflict transformed by local grievances, petro-capitalism, political repression, and youth mobilization into a cross-delta insurgency. In the final chapter (Part III), I interrogate the expanding and shrinking (contracting) nature of the Ijaw ethnic identity formations in four epochs espoused in my earlier historical and spatial analysis of conflicts in the eastern and western Niger Delta: who is included in the Ijaw ethnic identity formations and why. I will also examine the relationship between the Ijaw and other ethnic groups emerging from the expanding and contracting Ijaw ethnic identity formations.

⁹⁰⁵ Okonta, I., "Behind the Mask: Explaining the Emergence of the MEND Militia in Nigeria's Oil Bearing Niger Delta," Pambazuka news, 2006.

PART III: IJAW CROSS-DELTA STRUGGLES AND IDENTITY FORMATIONS

In the previous four chapters (divided into Parts I and II) I examined the history and geography of conflicts in the east and west delta respectively. Chapter seven (Part III) will espouse the geography of cross-delta (east and west) Ijaw struggles and ethnic identity formations. The aim here is to show how pan-Ijaw nationalist articulations and processes of integration (and differentiation) have animated and unified disparate Ijaw clans (east and west), economically and political relegated since colonialism, toward a shared objective. My aim here is to interrogate how the geography of oil production and revenue allocation has transformed Ijaw national identity east and west delta. From my spatial analysis of conflict in Rivers and Delta States (east and west) four cross-delta Ijaw nationalism epochs are identified: Willink commission, Boro's revolution, INC/IYC era and MEND insurgency. The idea here is to see who (or what clan/territory) is included or excluded in the Ijaw struggles for national identity formations (nationalism) and why. Put differently in the struggle for pan-Ijaw nationalism who is included or excluded and why. Secondly, to show the relationship between the Ijaw and other ethnic minority groups in the region: what is the relationship between pan-Ijaw nationalism struggles and other Niger Delta minority ethnic groups?

Ethnicity identity is a socio-cultural means of classification and differentiation that attempts to essentialize political and cultural differences through the invocation of social and cultural practices (religion, kinship, myth, ancestry and tradition). It is the process of the (re)construction of identity over time in a given society due to the existence of particular economic, political and social order. Ethnicity is imagined, produced and reproduced as appropriate response to existential conditions in our everyday life practices - it is the reproduction of identity in various forms.

My argument is that the geography and political economy of oil are critical to understanding the dynamism in Ijaw identity transformations. Geography of Ijaw is constantly changing, expanding and contracting, depending on the economical, political and social order of the Nigerian State – the production and reproduction of spaces of nationalism. It is the shifting patterns of inclusiveness as well as exclusiveness of Ijaw clans or spaces in the quest for a national identity. The colonial tripartite political arrangement and domination (political and economic) of minorities (in the eastern and western coastal fringe) inspired Ijaw quest for identity in the 1950s. Colonial government's inability to amicably resolve political, economic, legal and moral contradictions embedded in the regional structure and agitations thereof and attempts by local political elites to maintain the status quo led to a resurgence of Ijaw pursuit for identity in a post-colonial oil-state. Centralization of power and oil revenues from the delta to the detriment of groups in the region and sustainance of Nigeria's fragile federalism reopened Ijaw nationalism in the 1990s and 2006. In all, the geography of Ijawness has been dynamic (expanding and shrinking) while relationship between Ijaw and other minority groups in the region has been contentious since the arrival of oil.

Chapter Seven

Ijaw Cross-Delta Struggles and Ethno-National Identity Formations

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language (Marx, K., *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte with Explanatory Notes*, New York: International Publishers Company Inc., 1963, p. 13).

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter (seven or Part III), I will interrogate Ijaw ethnic identity formations in cross-delta struggles espoused in Parts I and II, and the relationship between Ijaw and other ethnic minority groups in the Niger Delta. It is significant to show how oil politics has produced and reproduced a politics, economic and geography of Ijawness in post-independent Nigeria – the shifting character of Ijaw national identity and spaces. First, I examine the Henry Willink Commission of 1957/8 and the Ijaw project for political identity (demand for Rivers State); second, Adaka Boro's (1966) post-colonial oil regime declaration of "Niger Delta Republic" for the Ijaw; third, centralization of political authority and revenue allocation processes and the INC and IYC resuscitation of Ijaw identity project (1990s); and fourth, the Ijaw alliance in MEND's (2006-2009) trans-delta insurgency. These four inter-regional episodes crystallize the interconnection between Ijaw people from the east to west delta. These cross-delta Ijaw solidarities, networks and connections over the years have changed the Niger Delta's socio-political landscape, the relationship between Ijaw clans (east and west) and that between Ijaw and their neighbours, therefore, merit analysis.

The chapter examines the model idea of Ijaw nationalism circulated and coherently articulated to the Willink Commission in 1957/8 by the Rivers people (Ijaw) and how over the years the Ijaw identity has been complicated by the political economy and geography of oil. The particular sociohistorical, political conjuncture and material conditions of existence – political domination, underdevelopment and discrimination -- compelled the Ijaw to demand autonomy so as to attract development to the Niger Delta region. The emerging differences in citizens' privileges, opportunities, and benefits based on their ethnic affiliation, and Boro's declaration of an independent Niger Delta as a militant political project against the tyranny of the majority, will be articulated. The chapter further conceives of the emergence of the INC and the IYC as a result of the socioeconomic and political conditions of inequality in three arenas: state formations, LGA creation, and resource allocation in relation to the burden and footprint of the region's oil

industry. Finally, it interrogates the process by which these oil footprints and repressive conditions elevated the idea of Ijaw nationalism to the scale of insurgency led by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) in 2006.

7.2 Ethnic Identity Formations

A chain of misfortune has befallen the Ijaw ethnic nationality since the Niger Delta region became an outpost of global capitalism starting in the fifteenth century with trans-Atlantic slave trade, palm oil trade, and finally establishment of a British colony. First, based on the region's topography, early European explorers/traders bifurcated the region into Bight of Biafra (eastern delta) and Bight of Benin (western delta). Talbot, a British administrator, anthropologist, and one of the earliest researchers on the Niger Delta, notes in his classic (1932) work *Tribes of the Niger Delta* that, except for a few tribes, the coastal area stretching between the Ibibio (in the far east) and Yoruba (in the far west) was occupied by the Ijaw.⁹⁰⁶ Talbot further describes "this strange people [as] a survival from the dim past, beyond the dawn of history – whose language and customs are distinct from those of their neighbors and without trace of any tradition of time before they were driven southward into these regions of somber mangrove."⁹⁰⁷ The Portuguese topographical division (Bight of Biafra and Benin) split the coastal fringe's contiguous but disparate Ijaw settlements that have inhabited the area for centuries into the two separate domains of east and west. Second, the trading outposts established during the trans-Atlantic trade to serve as nodes between European coastal traders and hinterland markets further fragmented and deepened the bifurcation. For instance, trading posts were established in Ijaw coastal

⁹⁰⁶ Talbot, P. A., *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1932.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 5; Following from Talbot's historical narrative, the search for a tradition of migration for some Ijaw has been subsequently traced to Benin by Major A. G. Leonard. Although Dike acknowledged the data used by Major A. G. Leonard was meager and deficient, he nevertheless, agrees that Leonard's approach to the subject was correct. Dike therefore traced the time of some Ijaw migration from Benin to a pre-fifteenth century period, and possibly centuries before the advent of the Portuguese. Dike further added that the Ijaws were driven to their present home (Niger Delta) by the eastward-moving Igbos centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese (Dike, K. O., *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, 1956). In my view, these historical conjectures suffer from the slippery slope fallacy – the notion that since every ethnic group in Nigeria has a history of migration, the Ijaw cannot be an exception. Since the Ijaw are distinct and unique culturally, linguistically and otherwise from other groups in Nigeria and elsewhere, the other possible alternative is to assert that the people 'occurred' or evolved in the Niger Delta. If Darwin's theory of evolution and Anaxemenes' (a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher) prior postulation that the first humans evolved from slime-like object due to heat on moist are pursued further, it could be argued that the Niger Delta is one among other possible origins of human evolution. The helplessness of history, linguistics and science to unravel the riddle of the Ijaw origin compels one to contend the alternative that the people evolved from, and have since lived in, the Niger Delta. An objection to my claim is that at some indeterminate future time it is possible that new historical or scientific evidence may come to light and render false my argument that the Ijaw evolved in the delta. However, any objection to my claim of Ijaw autochthony itself presupposes some historical or scientific knowledge of their origin. In view of this, the objection must justify the presupposed knowledge, if the objection is to be taken seriously. To base an objection on future possible evidence is to claim to know now what is (presently) unknown and unknowable. In this regard, the greater burden of proof to discharge or onus of justification rests with the objectors to my autochthonous claim. On the other hand, if the evidence is not now knowable but only thought possible, then there is no need to respond to it. This is because whatever is not self-contradictory is logically possible; hence, the negation of a logically possible proposition is also logically possible. What is only logically possible may not be known to be true or false. Therefore, until the truth-value is determined it cannot be used as evidence against or in favor of what is claimed to be true or false. It is only an assumption, which has no evidential value until discharged.

settlements such as Bonny, Kalabari, Opobo, Okrika, Andoni and Akassa (in the east), and Escravos, Forcados, and Warri (in the west). Except in the west where the Ijaw were not prominent in trade and never “conquered” the central and easterners were major players in the trade.⁹⁰⁸ Before the advent of European traders in the coast, Ijaw settlements (east to west) interacted with one another through robust economic, social and political networks and alliances. Ijaw settlements were not completely devoid of conflicts during these times (e.g, Nembe and Kalabari over fishing territory) but it was the introduction of European traders that created avenues for re-evaluation of social relations and the creation of new forms of economic, social and political order.

British colonial rule, which was established on the flipside of global capitalist trade, simply annexed existing socio-political structures created by trade to affirm its presence and power in the region. Colonial governance structures were constituted along ancient global trade relics (centers or routes) in the Niger Delta. The introduction of colonial rule and establishment of governance structures such as protectorates, provinces, divisions and districts further complicated the fragmentation of Niger Delta Ijaw. In these arbitrary administrative demarcations, friendly and hostile Ijaw clans (*Ibe*) and settlements alike were randomly stitched together with each other and with rival ethnic groups in the region simply for managerial convenience. The establishment of colonial administrative units was determined geographically rather than according to culture, language, kinship and/or other socio-political considerations. The colonial administrative units of governance introduced new forms of inter- and intra-group relations in the region. What emerged from these arbitrary colonial administrative units created were new forms of identity and power relations that produced intra- and inter-group tensions.

Indirect rule and attempts by colonial administrators to impose the hegemony of one class or ethnic group over others unveiled deep-seated existing differences; it also produced fresh and enduring ones. In parts of Nigeria, “ethno-cultural cleavages were traditionally invoked for the purpose of enhancing the politics of the groups’ cultural identity and hegemony” over others.⁹⁰⁹ The east-west bifurcation of the Ijaw communities and their successive fragmentation into colonial administrative units -- with other groups in most cases -- denied them the privilege to invoke cultural identity and hegemony over other groups. Thus the two fundamental developments of the nineteenth and twentieth century (global trade in slave/palm oil and colonialism) laid the groundwork for the Ijaw spatial dichotomy and political disintegration that followed.

The colonial government in Nigeria did very little to address critical ethnic troubles that arose as a consequence of indirect rule imposed on the locals. “Indirect rule was mediated

⁹⁰⁸ Attempts to control trade among settlements, group(s) or individuals were a major hindrance to intra-group cordial relations during this period, as was the influx and incorporation of slaves into families; both phenomena contributed to change in intra-group relations and stimulated conflict in and between settlements (especially in eastern delta).

⁹⁰⁹ Falola, T., & Aderinto, S., *Nigeria, Nationalism and the Writing of History*, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010, p. 160. Falola and Aderinto, in their analysis of Ikimi’s historical writings, noted that the “Yoruba,” “Igbo,” and “Hausa” (the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria) emerged as ethnic groups as a consequence of developments arising from twentieth-century colonialism. Ikime, they noted, argued that elements making up these groups (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) operated as distinct social and political units during the precolonial era but were brought together to overcome problems of groups’ cultural identity and hegemony.

rule.”⁹¹⁰ It was the reorganization of “ethnic” leadership as a form of local governance or the inauguration and imposition of “chiefly rule” in amorphous communities where it had previously been non-existent. Before World War II, indirect rule was a colonial experiment that regulated the conduct of “natives” through the mediation of “their own,” appointed as chief or warrant officer by colonialists.⁹¹¹ This chiefly rule, which was a strategic form of colonial control over local uprising against imperialism, became a hegemonic platform. By virtue of the multi-ethnic nature of the Niger Delta and Nigeria in general, customary rule (chiefly hegemony) transformed into an instrument of domination by “favored” ethnic groups (and/or elites) over other groups, as we saw with the Itsekiri in Warri. The colonial introduction of customary (chiefly) rule or local governance produced myriad new forms of identity and public spaces.⁹¹² In the periphery, ethnicity reinforced access to and control over land (territory) and thereby presented a dual notion of subjects – autochthons and immigrants (original settlers and strangers). In most cases, which ethnic group(s) precisely were autochthonic to particular spaces became a contested issue. Any inquiry into autochthonic contestations would unveil contrasting narratives of past events in contemporary conflicts over space and political power.

During the Second World War, due to ethnic resentment, uneven development, and cultural differences, the colonial government divided the Southern Protectorate into two: Eastern and Western Provinces. Before then, the Northern and Southern Protectorates had been amalgamated in 1914. With the division of the south, a three-region (tripartite) governance structure was introduced into the political landscape of Nigeria.⁹¹³ This paved the way for regionalism and the subsequent establishment of regional parliaments in 1946. The British regional governance experiment consolidated ethnicity and ethnic politics in Nigeria. Political elites from majority ethnic groups mobilized and/organized party politics along ethnic lines in the three regions of North, West and East. While the North became the stronghold of the Hausa-Fulani-controlled Northern People’s Congress Party, the West was the comfort zone for the Yoruba-dominated Action Congress Party, and the Igbo from the East commanded the National

⁹¹⁰ Mamdani, M., “Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The African Dilemma”, *Journal of Social Justice*, Vol. 23, No. ½, p. 146; Mamdani, M., “Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2001; Mamdani, M., *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton Series in Culture/Power/History)*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

⁹¹¹ Ibid; Indirect rule for Mamdani was grounded in legal dualism: “Rule of law” that regulated the conduct of citizens in the urban settlements and “customary law” as a form of rule that framed the social life of the countryside subjects (peasants).

⁹¹² In the views of Peter Ekeh, colonial rule in Africa led to the rise of two historically distinct public spaces in post-colonial Africa rather than one as obtainable in the western world: first, a primordial public space which is identified with primordial groupings, sentiments and activities; and second, a civic public space which is associated with colonial institutions of governance introduced into the continent by colonial administrators such as the military, police, court and civil service. For Peter Ekeh, problems derivable from vices such as tribalism, nepotism and corruption confronting groups and impeding development in the continent are traceable to the irreconcilable contradictions arising from these two publics in contemporary Africa (Ekeh, P., “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement”, *Contemporary Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1975, pp. 91-112).

⁹¹³ The division was mainly a result of ethnic political rivalry and tension between three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa). The British colonial government realized the role of ethnicity in political conflict generation and thought the resolution lies in the creation of autonomous regional governance structures. This thinking is without regard to the fact that besides these three socially constructed ethnic groups, there are several others with diverse traditions, history, language, culture and myth struggling for socio-political space.

Council of Nigeria Citizens (formerly National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons). Ethnic-centered party politics in the regions complicated the existing fragile relations among citizens in the country. Beginning in the 1940s, the influence and control mechanism exerted by the majority ethnic groups on regional party politics dispirited and dampened minority ethnic aspirations for social, economic and political development. One such minority ethnic group, the Ijaw (east and west), responded to the majority domination with ideals of nationalism and demand for social justice: the rights to social development, economic independence, infrastructural growth, and political autonomy. The crux of minority agitation thus was a class strategy designed to checkmate majority ethnic domination in the Nigeria polity.

7.3 Willink Commission and Ijaw Quest for National Identity

There is no unequivocal conception of nationalism, nation or nationality. However, Anderson's seminal work *Imagined Communities*,⁹¹⁴ which was a reaction to structuralist interpretations of nationalism, laid a materialist foundation for a cultural conception of nationalism. In Anderson's viewpoint, "[nationalism] is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."⁹¹⁵ Nationalism is an idea or ideal instilled into the imagination of people in other climes, who believe such a political idea is worth achieving and thereby will fight for it. It is the collective imagination of an epistemic community in which members may never know, meet, or hear fellow members, yet are united in their imaginations.⁹¹⁶ Nationalism in this regard is the imperceptible idea or ideal (abstract phenomenon) that unites people towards a common political purpose. It is the underlying eternal *substratum* in which material conditions such as culture, tradition, language, and myth are inhered. Anderson further posits that it is the union of "capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language" that produced the "possibility of a form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation".⁹¹⁷ Thus, language and print technology are vital instruments for the transplantation of nationalistic political ideas. Nationalism as an imagined community, has the dual nature of inclusiveness and exclusiveness: inclusive in cultural and historical terms and exclusive by virtue of its demarcation between those who fit within that imagined community and those who do not.

Goswami's analysis of Anderson's "modular" nationalism delinks the causal relation between nationalist models and processes from their "contexts of production."⁹¹⁸ Goswami argues that Anderson's heavy reliance on print-capitalism "rather than the new form of social relations established by capitalism overlooks the multiple causal registers that shape nationalism and privileges processes of circulation over processes of production."⁹¹⁹ According to Goswami, to appreciate nationalism requires an understanding both of geography and sociohistorical

⁹¹⁴ Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso, 2006.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid,

⁹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 46.

⁹¹⁸ Goswami, M., "Rethinking the Modular Nation Form: Towards a Sociohistorical Conception of Nationalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44. No. 4, 2002, pp. 770-799.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 780.

processes at various levels and of how these processes intersect.⁹²⁰ In order to comprehend why individual communities buy into models of nationalism, one must understand the geography and sociohistorical material conditions that make people receptive to, or engage with, such models. Although various model ideas of political nationalism coherently articulated circulate, it is the spatial and material conditions that shape a particular people's receptivity to, and adoption and appropriation of such ideas. An epistemic group, according to its existing socio-political, economic, and material conditions, will appropriate a particular construct of nationalism in order to achieve their larger political goal.

Building on Goswami's analysis, then, Ijaw nationalism is an imagined political idea that seeks a unification of the peoples of east and west Ijaw in the Niger Delta – the imagined and shared historical, political, economic, cultural and spatial conditions. It is their shared identity that unites the east and west communities (clans), irrespective of their spatial differences, toward the struggle to realize a common political future.⁹²¹ Ijawness is the large cultural system that preceded the bifurcation of the delta, out of which – as well as against which -- they have existed.⁹²² Ijaw as an imagined community in this case is both inclusive and exclusive: it is inclusive in the spatial, cultural and sociohistorical terms and exclusive in that its inclusiveness distinguishes it from other ethnic groups outside it. The idea/ideal of "Ijaw" thus is used as justification for political claim-making within the Nigerian state and also as justification for the exclusion of other groups. I include here the various platforms and movements that have emerged since the twentieth century to justify an Ijaw shared sense of political and economic claim-making within the Nigeria state.

As a result of their division into east and west, the Ijaw appeared as a minority in the tripartite regional arrangement from the late 1930s. But beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, a greater political awareness of "belonging to a pan-ethnic public had begun to emerge amongst elite (Ijaw) residents of Port Harcourt, Warri and Lagos, who competed for jobs and scarce opportunities for social advancement with migrants from larger ethnic groups."⁹²³ Based on cultural identity, linguistic similarity, and spatial contiguity, the elite organizations and groups that emerged from these urban centers soon tried to unify the east-west Ijaw under a political movement for self-governance. Ijaw ethnic nationalism in the country is a consequence of the intensification of minority ethnic consciousness in Nigeria more generally.⁹²⁴ Ethnic politics in Nigeria, which became part of the political landscape in the pre-independence era was not limited to the Ijaw.

In the 1930s and 1940s, all citizens' desire for equal social and political opportunity propelled the rise of ethnic nationalism. The governance structure during this period tended to fuse minority elements, irrespective of their distinctive languages and cultural identities, into

⁹²⁰ Ibid, p. 781.

⁹²¹ For a detailed study of Ijaw identity transformation and nationalism, see Nwajiaku, K., "Oil Politics and Identity Transformation in Nigeria: The Case of Ijaw of the Niger Delta," PhD Dissertation submitted to the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, June 2005.

⁹²² Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: op. cit.*, New York: Verso, 2006.

⁹²³ Nwajiaku, K., "Oil Politics and Identity Transformation in Nigeria: The Case of Ijaw of the Niger Delta," June 2005, p. 18.

⁹²⁴ Ethnic consciousness in the country had led to the establishment of pan-ethnic unions such as the Ibibio State Union and Igbo State Union in the 1920s.

majority neighbors, in the process of which they were completely enfeebled.⁹²⁵ Majority ethnic citizens and domains took priority in the distribution of national and public services to the disadvantage of minority ethnic citizens and territories, and party politics (including political slogans, symbols, leadership, appointments, and establishment) became the preserve of majority ethnic groups.⁹²⁶ The socio-economic and political spheres of existence were in the firm grip of majority ethnic groups, who dominated the tripartite political structure. The regional governments with headquarters far inland of the coastal fringe had no developmental agenda for the Niger Delta.⁹²⁷ Nonetheless, and significantly, like the Yoruba of the west, Igbo of the east, and Hausa of the north, the Ijaw displayed their unflinching desire to sustain the continuity of their history, tradition, culture and customs in Nigeria.

In the early 1940s, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye (formerly called Mr. Harold J. R. Wilcox) from Bonny was among youth graduates of Kings College, Lagos, who founded the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons.⁹²⁸ In 1941, after a very brief stint in Lagos and a careful study of the political pendulum in the three regions, Harold Dappa-Biriye relocated to his Niger Delta base in Eastern Nigeria. On arrival, the young Harold Dappa-Biriye suggested to his father (Mr. R. T. E. Wilcox, a wealthy businessman and government supervising teacher) that only a distinct province for the coastal people would attract development to the area.⁹²⁹ He recommended forming an organized body of the local people to demand the establishment of Rivers Province so as to induce human and infrastructural development of the coastal delta from the Lagos- and Enugu-based governments.

The result of Harold Dappa-Biriye's suggestions to his father was a general meeting of Rivers indigenes,⁹³⁰ chiefs, and peoples of the coastal fringe held at the then Enitoma High School, Port Harcourt, on November 18, 1943.⁹³¹ In attendance at the meeting where the Ijaw Rivers Peoples' League (IRPL) was formed, were representatives from Brass and Degema Divisions as well as from Western Ijaw (western Ijaw division at the time – from Burutu to Brass) and Opobo town.⁹³² Absent at this meeting were Ijaw clans from the far west (Arogo,

⁹²⁵ Chief Opu-Ogulaya, E. D. W., "Lecture on the History of the Creation of Rivers State," delivered to the National Youth Service Corps, Rivers State of Nigeria, July 2, 1973, in Harold, J. R. Dappa Biriye, *Minority Politics in pre – and – post Independent Nigeria: Convocation Lecture Delivered at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State*, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1995.

⁹²⁶ Ibid,

⁹²⁷ In the maritime territories of the Niger Delta, infrastructure and social amenities were never provided. Similarly, the area was deliberately neglected in the human capacity development, which was at the time undertaken in other parts of the country by government and private individuals. Unlike other parts of the country, scientific research and reports were not carried out in the Niger Delta, while international trade during this period shifted to other urban hinterland centers. The lack of attention on the region rendered it desolate, backward, poor and contributed to the drift of populations from the coastal fringe to hinterland settlements.

⁹²⁸ Other founding members of the group include Mr. Anthony Enahoro (from the delta), Mr. Omo-Eboh (delta), Mr. Macaulay Omoko Ziregbe (delta) and some others. Nnamdi Azikwe, who joined the group and later became its leader attracted Igbo and Yoruba members into the fold.

⁹²⁹ Chief Opu-Ogulaya, E. D. W., "Lecture on the history of the Creation of Rivers State," July 1973.

⁹³⁰ Rivers was used during this period as a geographical term to cover coastal peoples and communities of the Eastern delta and some coastal sections (especially western Ijaw fringe) of Western delta.

⁹³¹ Ibid,

⁹³² The Ndokis were said to have joined as members of this organization later. The designation of League was adopted to enable other ethnic groups outside the Ijaw domiciled in the territory an open door to be incorporated incase they chose to. At the meeting in Port Harcourt, the following were appointed to steer the affairs of the

Apoi, Gbaramatu and Egbema) and east (Ibeno clan). Barely four months after the inauguration of the League, Mr. Wilcox (the President) was transferred by the colonial administration to Ijebu in the far west as a government supervising teacher. In his absence Mr. Wilcox's deputy, Mr. E. D. Wolseley (Opu-Ogulaya) was elected President, and Bishop David Manuel and Mr. Hart of Bonny were elected Vice Presidents of the League.⁹³³ A delegation of selected prominent members of the League went around coastal settlements east and west to solicit support for political autonomy from the people.

In 1944, the Rivers People's League demand for autonomy shifted to the chambers of the Legislative Council in Lagos. Two Niger Delta members of the Legislative Council (Reverend E. T. Dimiaeri and Obaseki from east and west delta, respectively) consistently advocated for the establishment of a Rivers Province.⁹³⁴ The duo's efforts and those of another group (the Ijaw State Union, formed in Lagos in the 1940s) maintained the momentum to create Rivers State, and early in 1947 the League -- represented by its new president, chiefs, and some other influential members -- visited Lagos to consult with the Secretary to the Colonial Government of Nigeria on the need to create a Rivers Province for inhabitants of the coastal fringe. In response to these pressures, the Governor General of Nigeria (Arthur Richards) visited some of the coastal settlements contained in the proposal for a Rivers Province in the Owerri Province (Eastern Region) flank of the Niger Delta. In April 1947, the colonial government established the Rivers Province out of Owerri province in the Eastern Region with Port Harcourt as headquarters.⁹³⁵ Importantly, this action did not serve the desire to create a homogenous Ijaw state or region. By the government's action, the Resident Commissioner of Rivers province, as well as locals, could directly petition the colonial administration headquarters in Lagos for actions to encourage the development of the Eastern delta's maritime fringe. Not long after this, the Leagues fizzled out due to both the political aspiration of its members (leading them to move on) and victimization of the Leagues' leadership by the colonial government.

Before long, in 1951, a fresh group called the Ijaw Union was inaugurated in Port Harcourt with Mr. H. B. Thom-Manuel as President and Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye as Secretary.⁹³⁶ This group coordinated the Ijaw in the Eastern fringe advocating for fair representation in the Port Harcourt Municipal Council. Some members of this Union petitioned the colonial government for direct representation at the London Conference of 1953 in order to press for the establishment of an independent Rivers State.⁹³⁷ Arising from this petition was the

League: Mr. R. T. E. Wilcox, President; Mr. E. D. Wolseley (Opu-Ogulaya), Deputy President; Messrs E. M. T. Epelle & Abassa (from Western Ijaw), Vice-President; Mr. S. D. AkanIgbo, Principal Secretary; Mr. Andrew Ogudire, Assistant Principal Secretary; Mr. D. E. Iwarimie Jaja, Organizing Secretary; Mr. Hamilton B. Thom-Manuel, Treasurer; Mr. D. Achebe, Financial Secretary; Mr. W. W. Peters, Publicity Secretary.

⁹³³ Ibid; The group's funding came from contributions by members and donations from influential members and wealthy citizens of the coastal delta. For instance, Mr. Henry Buowari Brown of Bonny and Mr. Francis Alagoa (who later became Mingi X of Nembe) were specially honored with the position of patron and given special seats during meetings due to their financial support to the League.

⁹³⁴ Chief Opu-Ogulaya, E. D. W, "Lecture on the history of the Creation of Rivers State," July 1973.

⁹³⁵ Ibid,

⁹³⁶ Ibid,

⁹³⁷ The Rivers State demanded was a separate and independent state from the Eastern Region government. The Union died due to the decline in members, by virtue of their party politics, to claim direct representation on the delegation to attend a 1953 Conference in London called by the Colonial Secretary to review the Macpherson Constitution. However, some members of group petitioned the colonial government for a direct seat at the proposed

nomination of Chief D. Davis-Manuel to London to join the Nigerian advisory government's bench delegation. Chief D. Davis Manuel went to the London conference of 1953 with the group's petition calling for the creation of a Rivers State for the coastal Ijaw. To strengthen their campaign through consolidation, a new group was formed in Port Harcourt in July 1953 called the Council of Rivers Chiefs. (members of this group metamorphosed into the Rivers Chiefs and People's Congress in July, 1956.)⁹³⁸ Before the conference resumed in 1954, Chiefs Abbey and Harold Dappa-Biriye went to Lagos to present to the Governor-General (Sir John Macpherson) a petition on behalf of the Council of Rivers Chiefs calling for the establishment of Rivers State; their objective was to have this petition included in the 1954 conference. As Chief Dappa-Biriye stated, "It was in the 1950s that minority politics in Nigeria became very articulate," and when central government "held powers on subjects in the exclusive and concurrent legislative lists while the Regions held residual powers."⁹³⁹ The restructuring of governance and territorial alignments were outcomes of the 1953 London conference.⁹⁴⁰

By the mid-1950s the Regional governments of the West and East were under the vice-grip of ethnic majority political parties: the Action Group and NCNC respectively. As a response to the over-bearing influence of the ethnic majority politics, minority politics emerged on the scene as protectors of the cultural, economic, social and political interest of groups. The Rivers Chiefs and People's Congress emerged in July 1956 as one such group to continue the agitation for establishment of Rivers State for the coastal inhabitants. This group mobilized the Ijaw (both east and west) to arrive at a common position on another proposed 1956/7 London Conference, where issues such as the question of self-rule for the Regions and the constitutional framework were billed for discussion. However, the stumbling block was that representation at the proposed conference would consist of political delegates from the three Regions of the federation, as handpicked by their respective governments.⁹⁴¹ The Rivers Chiefs and People's Congress exorcised itself from the Action Group Party and the NCNC Party so as to qualify as a political group that should be represented at the proposed London Conference. It was a smart move by minority elements amidst the majority in the selection of delegates for a conference.

1953 London Conference to press for the creation of a Rivers State. Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye and Chief A. P. Asisi-Abbey went before the Eastern Governor (Sir Clement Pleace) at Enugu, and successfully defended their petition on the need for the Rivers people to have a separate seat at the conference in London.

⁹³⁸ Chief Ben-Wari was President, Chief D. Davis-Manuel (Vice-President), Mr. Isaac T. T. Pepple (paid secretary), while Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye was a member of the working committee.

⁹³⁹ Chief Dappa-Biriye, H. J. R. *Minority Politics in Pre-and Post-Independent Nigeria*, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1995, p. 6.

⁹⁴⁰ At the 1953 London Constitutional Conference, the British Government declared the Colony of Lagos a Federal territory, thereby putting to rest the Action Group's (Yoruba) claim to the ownership of Lagos. The Conference also resolved that Nigeria shall operate a federal constitution beginning October 1, 1954, and that the Northern Cameroons would remain part and parcel of Northern Nigeria, while Southern Cameroons would maintain its quasi-federal status.

⁹⁴¹ Chief Dappa-Biriye, H. J. R. *Minority Politics in Pre-and Post-Independent Nigeria*, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1995. Representation at the conference was to be made up of ten delegates and five advisers from each of the three regions of Nigeria; and five delegates and three advisers for Southern Cameroon, while the federal territory of Lagos was allotted two delegates. The federal government was to be represented by the Governors, Commissioner for the Cameroons, two federal ministers and Leader of the opposition in the Federal House of Representatives. The federal delegates were to be assisted by six advisers: three official and three non-official advisers.

Rather than rely on either of the two dominant ethnic-based regional political parties (AG and NCNC), the Rivers Chiefs and People's Congress "fell back on pre-colonial treaties between Her Majesty (the British Queen) and treaty parties in Nigeria with particular emphasis on those treaties affecting communities in the Rivers territory."⁹⁴² Colonial administrators in Nigeria communicated to London the coastal people's demand for representation based on colonial treaties, and the Secretary of State for Colonies in Britain granted the group one representative at the 1956/7 Conference. Immediately upon learning of the decision, a general meeting was convened in Port Harcourt, including western Ijaw and involving Rivers persons from all walks of life and different corners of the country, under the chairmanship of Chief Francis Alagoa. There, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye (principal secretary of the group) was unanimously nominated to represent the group at the London Conference. Officials of the group and representatives from Degema, Ahoada, Brass, Opobo, Ogoni, Western Ijaw (western delta division), and Port Harcourt Divisions then drafted and signed a mandate which they handed to the Chief as official delegate of the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Congress; the mandate reads in part:

The Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference, being the territorial organization of all the political authorities in the Rivers territory Kings, Chiefs, Legislators, Councilors, and recognized tribal and clan unions in and outside the territory....speak for the people of the Rivers territory on the treaties between the British Crown and Predecessors of Rivers people... Now know ye that we, reposing special trust and confidence in the discretion and faithfulness of our trusty and well-beloved Jenebiwari Rowland Biriye Esquare of Bende Street, Port Harcourt, have nominated and appointed him to be our official delegate to the Constitutional Conference. We give and grant him in that character all powers and authority to do and perform all proper acts, matters and things which may be desirable or necessary for the promotion of our cause of a separate Rivers State as contained in our signed proposals for that matter, and for the promotion of our Treaty rights as therein mentioned. By the diligent and discreet accomplishment of these acts, matters and things aforementioned the said Harold Jenebiwari Rowland Biriye Esquare shall gain our approval and show himself worthy of our high confidence. We therefore request all those whom it may concern to receive and acknowledge him as our official delegate plenipotentiary as aforesaid and freely to communicate with him upon all the matters which may appertain to the object of the High Mission whereto he is hereby appointed.⁹⁴³

Armed with this mandate and the various treaties between Her Majesty (British Government) and the Chiefs/Communities of the Niger Delta, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye proceeded to the London Constitutional Conference in May 1957. While in London, both on the floor of the conference and in separate meetings held with British officials, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye assiduously advocated for political autonomy through the establishment of Rivers State

⁹⁴² Ibid, p. 8.

⁹⁴³ "Mandate to Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Congress Delegate to the 1957 Constitutional Conference in London" contained in Chief Dappa-Biriye, H. J. R. *Minority Politics in Pre-and Post-Independent Nigeria*, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1995, pp. 27-28.

for the peoples (minority ethnic groups) of the coastal fringe.⁹⁴⁴ At every opportunity, he argued that the treaties between Her Majesty (British Government) and Kings and Chiefs of the Niger Delta had not been invalidated in any way by the advent of Regional self-governance arrangement in Nigeria. The thrust of the Rivers people's contention was to the effect that the treaties of protection and others entered with the British government did not confer on Britain the right to transfer governance over the Rivers people and their territory to any third party (foreign or local) without their consent. As simple as this contention may seem, it speaks directly to the foundation of the Nigerian state: the moral and legal basis of Nigeria's corporate existence is called into question. Over the course of the conference the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples' representative (Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye) identified and defended the local rights of minority ethnic groups in the country. He focused principally on the myriad of problems and obstacles confronting Nigeria's minority ethnic groups. One of his major achievements was that the country's ethnic minority problems were recognized, and as a result the Willink Commission of Enquiry into Minority Problems in Nigeria was established in late 1957.

On the moral and legal argument posed to members of the Willink Commission with respect to the treaties, the Commission claimed it was not called upon nor qualified to form opinions on any moral or legal obligations that might arise from treaties between Britain and Kings and Chiefs of the Niger Delta, but that it did recognize the historical and social consequences of such treaties in relation to fears expressed by minorities.⁹⁴⁵ Further, when the Willink Commission's report was deliberated upon in late 1958, the British government delegation to the discussion explicitly acknowledged that "the treaties [between Britain and Niger Delta Kings and Chiefs] imposed moral obligations on Britain and the other parties involved by virtue of such international agreements."⁹⁴⁶ As articulated in an earlier chapter, the Willink Commission rejected the creation of Rivers State as demanded and merely recommended the establishment of a development agency for the Niger Delta. Even though the Willink Commission agreed there were "genuine minority fears and that the future was regarded with real apprehension," it asserted that creation of a "separate state would not provide a remedy for the fears expressed" by minority ethnic groups.⁹⁴⁷ The Ijaw hope for political autonomy may have been dashed by Willink's failure to create Rivers State for the coastal dwellers, but the consciousness and idea of national identity had been engraved in the hearts of the Ijaw, both east and west. Also, the Niger Delta ethnic minorities (especially Ijaw) had successfully laid bare before colonial and local political actors their displeasure with the political configuration of the Nigerian state and their ultimate desire for self-governance.

It is instructive to note that while some non-Ijaw ethnic groups (especially in the east: Ikwerre, Ndoki and Ogoni) were included in the pre-independent Rivers state project, Ijaw groups (clans) in the far west (Arogbos and Apoi clans in Ondo State and Egbema in Edo State) and east (Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State) were spatially excluded from the state demanded at the

⁹⁴⁴ For instance, before the conference proper Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye held a meeting with Sir John Macpherson (then Permanent Under Secretary of State for Colonies and a former Governor-General of Nigeria) and other British officials at the Colonial Office where he reiterated his demand for autonomy for the Rivers people based on Treaties between the British and peoples of the coastal fringe.

⁹⁴⁵ Chief Dappa-Biriye, H. J. R, *Minority Politics in Pre-and Post-Independent Nigeria*, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1995.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 20.

⁹⁴⁷ Willink Commission Report, 1958, p. 88.

time. Similarly, in the various meetings/gatherings leading to the London conference and even after, there is no mention of representative(s) or memorandum on the position of these clans. The geography demanded as Rivers State at the time stretches from present day Rivers State to parts of Delta State (i.e, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States). This action may be as a result of: first, lack of articulate clan elites interested in national issues at the time; second, the need to present a contiguous Ijaw densely populated space; third, the need to accommodate limited non-Ijaw in the new state - so as to command majority status. The spatial definition of Ijawness was restricted to these three contiguous states (Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States) even though there were Ijaw residents in other territories of the region.

On another note, Ijaw neighbors and allies in the Rivers State movement in the eastern region (especially the Ikwerre) who had earlier supported the idea opted out for fear of Ijaw majority domination. The Ikwerre opted out of the arrangement when it became clear that Ijaw east and west combined into a state in the region would be in the majority among other minorities and thereby dominate. The Ikwerre preferred a state composed of smaller ethnic groups with no group having a majority status. The Ogonis on the other hand supported and worked with Ijaw groups for the establishment of Rivers State. In the western fringe, Rather than be part of Rivers State with Ijaw majority, western minorities like the Itsekiri opted to be joined to Ondo province while the Urhobo advocated for an independent state for minorities in the western fringe which was later created as Mid-West State in 1963.

The minorities of the Niger Delta (especially Ijaw) were disappointed with the Willink Commission's recommendation, which was a far cry from their expectations of a new Rivers State. The Eastern and Western Regional governments (majority ethnic groups), on the other hand, responded by adopting palliative and punitive measures to contain minority demands.⁹⁴⁸ In May 1959, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye founded the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) party. The NDC participated in the pre-independence election of 1959, but except for Melford Okilo from Brass Division (Yenagoa Province), who won his ticket to the Federal House of Representatives, all other contestants representing NDC lost in the Eastern and Western Regions.⁹⁴⁹ Internal disagreements and cooptation by the NCNC- and AG-led Eastern and Western governments greatly hindered the NDC party's progress. All the same, the Rivers Chiefs and People's demand for political unification of Ijaw became a template for subsequent struggles by the Ijaw for social, economic and political self-determination in the region. It is especially noteworthy that embedded within the varied demands for political unification was the subtle quest for social justice.

⁹⁴⁸ In the Eastern and Western Region identified hardline members of the state creation movements were denied appointment by the Igbo dominated NCNC government and the Yoruba dominated AG party, while those who compromised were rewarded with positions. In the two Regions new provinces were created in the minority ethnic domains as palliative measures.

⁹⁴⁹ The NCNC and AG majority ethnic political parties dominated pre-independence elections of the 1950s (1951, 1953, 1957 and now 1957) in the Eastern and Western Regions respectively. The NDC formed a coalition with the Northern People's Congress (NPC) to checkmate the Igbo and Yoruba domination and contested for the Brass, Ogoni East, Ogoni West, Degema, Ahoada West and some Western delta seats. While some attribute the failure of NDC to the lack of cohesion and longstanding relationship enjoyed by the majority ethnic political parties in the region, others argue that the elections were rigged in favor of NCNC and AG candidates in the Niger Delta.

7.4 Boro: “Niger Delta Republic” and the Reconfiguration of Ijaw Identity

At independence on October 1, 1960, the British High Commissioner to Nigeria acknowledged the existence of over 300 valid treaties (including those between Britain and Niger Delta communities) between Kings and Chiefs (so-called customary rulers) and communities in Nigeria and Britain.⁹⁵⁰ These identified treaties were duly handed over to the then-Prime Minister of Nigeria (Sir Abubarkar Tafawa Balewa) for appropriate action. The Federal Ministry of Justice was saddled with the responsibility of critically examining these treaties with a view to adopting those considered valid. In view of this development, Rivers Chiefs submitted copies of treaties between Niger Delta Kings and Chiefs and Britain to the Ministry of Justice in the hope that a dialogue would be initiated based on the treaties, but this never happened.⁹⁵¹ Unfortunately, the study by the Ministry of Justice has yet to be made public (if it was undertaken at all). Since that time, the letters of these treaties have not been revisited or discussed in any form whatsoever with regard to the corporate existence of Nigeria since independence.

In the administrative sphere, Britain bequeathed the post-independence Nigeria polity to the three majority ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) in a tripartite regional structure. While the minority ethnic groups groaned under the weight of these majority groups, the three were at loggerheads over control of governance at the center. With the exit of colonial administrators from the political scene, dominant groups further curtailed the rights and privileges of minority groups in the country. Any attempt by individuals or groups outside the three major tribes to challenge the *status quo* of unequal political power and economic domination was taken as an invitation to destroy those individuals or groups.⁹⁵² Individuals from minority ethnic groups were treated as second-class or inferior citizens in the polity. Political and bureaucratic access to opportunities and privileges at the federal and regional levels of governance became the birthright of the three major ethnic groups and those willing to do their bidding. In contrast, early into independence it became obvious to minority groups (especially Ijaw in the delta) that their survival in the entity called Nigeria would not be an easy task. In the words of Isaac Boro, post-independence Nigeria of the early sixties “was besieged by almost all known vices: tribalism, corruption, avarice and falsehood.”⁹⁵³ Since independence the progressive growth and development of the country has been greatly hindered by these vices.

Ethnic-based party politics and other forms of ethnic identity formations exacerbated the tense socioeconomic and political relations that existed among citizens and especially that which existed between majority and minority groups. Politics at the regional level was merely the expression of dominant groups. The establishment and configuration of party politics in the early 1960s along ethnic lines created disharmony and a lack of cohesion among citizens. Nigerians felt more comfortable and preferred to be identified with their ethnic groups rather than the nation-state. Hence as Falola and Aderinto rightly noted, “While we have a nation-state called

⁹⁵⁰ Chief Dappa-Biriye, H. J. R, *Minority Politics in Pre-and Post-Independent Nigeria*, Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1995.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid,

⁹⁵² Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, Tony ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit*, p. 5.

⁹⁵³ Ibid, p. 9.

Nigeria, we do not have Nigerians.”⁹⁵⁴ This, they explain, is due to greater benefits, opportunities and privileges derivable from ethnic affiliation. Nigeria was a mere spatial expression; individuals, rather than identify with this nation-state, coiled to their ethnicity for benefit, privileges and protection.⁹⁵⁵ Ethnicity and ethnic identity formation became highly pronounced in the distribution of scarce resources and allocation of limited opportunities, to the detriment of individuals of minority extraction in the country. Rather than divergent principles, what kept the minority and majority groups apart were their distinctly different social and material conditions of existence. Further, arising from the specific and separate social and spatial existential conditions are sentiments, beliefs, modes of thought, social relations, and views of life. In Marx’s analysis, such unequal economic conditions among citizens create and engender class antagonism:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class.⁹⁵⁶

In Nigeria the economic, social and political inequality (material conditions of existence) that existed between citizens of majority ethnic groups and minority ethnic groups created conditions of unequal class relations and over time fomented class antagonism. Opportunities, privileges, and favor granted majority ethnic citizens to the exclusion of minorities explain the origin of not only social class(es) but also of class conflict in Nigeria. Following from this Marxist analysis, ethnicity, ethnic politics and conflict arising from ethnicity identity or ethnic politics in Nigeria is not an exception but simply an offshoot of unequal material conditions of existence that exist between majority and minority status citizens.

Nnoli however, attributes ethnic politics in Nigeria to the way that the country’s political class has exercised governmental authority at the center as well as at regional levels.⁹⁵⁷ In the context of the state apparatus of coercion, the armor of ethnic identity became more pronounced and far more severe than under colonial rule. In Nnoli’s view, ethnic politics arose as a result of power struggles within the political class and the tendency of those who fell out in the power tussles (at the center and regional levels) to fall back on their ethnic cleavages in order to regain political relevance.⁹⁵⁸ Under the yoke of majority ethnic domination and repression, minority groups expressed their displeasure by forming minority-based political parties for liberation and

⁹⁵⁴ Falola, T. & Aderinto, S., *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History*, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010, p. 162.

⁹⁵⁵ One very important factor to note on the question of ethnic identity in Nigeria is the fact that the name ‘Nigeria’ was given to the geographical area by the wife of the first British Governor-General of Nigeria Lord Fredrick Lugard (who then was his mere lover) without consultation. It was neither a concept that emerged from a rigorous consultation between the British and inhabitants of the territory nor a decision reached at a conference or gathering of the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. So, while the British identified the geography as Nigeria, individuals on the other hand (even after independence), based on their sociohistorical and political development tilted their loyalty to ethnic groups for protection and possible benefits. Since Nigeria’s independence rivalry over political and economic supremacy among groups and demand for autonomy by alienated groups has contributed ransomly to the perpetual occurrence of conflict (both low and high intensity) in the country.

⁹⁵⁶ Marx, K., *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte with Explanatory Notes*, New York: International Publishers Company Inc., 1963, p. 124.

⁹⁵⁷ Nnoli, O, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1978.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid,

recognition. The Niger Delta, populated as it is by minority ethnic groups, became the epicenter of not only socio-economic and political deprivation but also minority political activism.

The first post-independence parliamentary general election, held in 1964/5, was fought along ethnic lines and marred with intimidation, financial inducement, thuggery, bribery, corruption, and obvious rigging of elections. The parliamentary election and its outcomes, especially relating to Niger Delta minorities, further deepened ethnic resentments and minority fears over majority domination. The unwholesome activities orchestrated during the parliamentary election combined with the minority groups' socioeconomic and material conditions throw Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist, into Nigeria's socio-political space in the mid-1960s.

Boro was born in 1938 in the central delta's Oloibiri town. He was nurtured in the Niger Delta and educated there from elementary through secondary levels. As a child growing up in the delta and later as a school teacher in the region, Boro saw firsthand the socioeconomic and political deprivation to which people of the Niger Delta were subjected by the majority ethnic groups, especially the Igbo in Eastern Nigeria. In the early 1960s, as an undergraduate student of chemistry at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo majority severely discriminated against Boro when he made a bid to become the president of the students' union.⁹⁵⁹ He eventually succeeded -- on his fourth attempt -- but the scars of ethnic discrimination he suffered during the elections could not be healed by his eventual triumph, and they helped to shape his socio-political thoughts and actions in the future. As an adult working as an officer in the Nigerian police, Boro again suffered ethnic subjugation and discrimination leading to his eventual dismissal from the police force.⁹⁶⁰ These personal experiences made Boro more determined and passionate to correct the injustice perpetrated by the dominant majority ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) against the minority groups (especially Ijaw) in the Niger Delta. Boro blamed the British Government for that majority ethnic domination, in that the British identified majority and minority ethnic groups before independence granted in 1960.⁹⁶¹ He queried:

What prevented them (British government) from creating ethnic states in the Federation, knowing just as well as anybody that these tribes would sooner or later object to domination by the other.⁹⁶²

He attributed Nigeria's bumpy political set-up, so rife with democratic imbalance and contradictions, to British design to overwhelm the new nation with catastrophic social and political upheaval. This, he believed, resulted from the British reluctance to leave the country, even in the face of citizens' political pressure on them (Britain) to go.⁹⁶³ Larry Diamond echoed a similar sentiment when he wrote, "The separate character of development in Nigeria, and the political tensions to which it gave rise, were rooted in the regional structure created by the

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid,

⁹⁶⁰ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, T., ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit.*,

⁹⁶¹ In Boro's account, before independence was granted Nigeria in 1960, eleven distinct ethnic groups stared the British in the face. They were: Hausas, Fulanis, Yorubas, Igbos (Ibos), Ijaws, Tivs, Kanuris, Nupes, Edos, Urhobos and Itsekiris.

⁹⁶² Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, T., ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit.*,

⁹⁶³ Ibid,

British.”⁹⁶⁴ From this standpoint the Ijaw of the Niger Delta were disadvantaged victims of a vague contraption called Nigeria.

Beyond ethnic domination, the neglect and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta angered Boro. Even though the region had become economically very significant to the Nigerian State at the time, it was nonetheless underdeveloped, backward and abandoned compared to other regions.⁹⁶⁵ In Boro’s account, the neglect was so enormously evident that most Niger Delta youths became disillusioned, frustrated, and therefore willing to be co-opted for any action facilitated and led by any exceptional leader proposing to gain “freedom from tyrannical fiends.”⁹⁶⁶ Boro confided to his father that unless and until practical steps were enforced to reverse this despicable ethnic deprivation in the Niger Delta, “Ijaw were going into perpetual bondage...and the entire Ijaws would be infernally chained.”⁹⁶⁷ The region, he predicted, would remain underdeveloped, deprived, and her people subjugated under majority ethnic rule.

Boro emerged as an Ijaw minority ethnic champion in February 1966 when he led a military campaign and proclaimed an independent Niger Delta Peoples’ Republic, complete with a flag and constitution. The action was a spontaneous response to the military coup of January 1966 in which the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, a northern sympathizer and supposed “benefactor” of the Ijaw, was killed and Major General Aguyi Ironsi (from the Igbo majority ethnic group in the east, allegedly dominating the Eastern Niger Delta) was installed as head of state.⁹⁶⁸ Boro recruited one hundred and fifty nine Ijaw fighters and trained the men in the use of explosives and firearms, with the aim of dismembering the Ijaw coastal spaces from the Nigerian state. Shortly afterward, in order to realize their principal goal of self-determination in a bounded space, Boro and his men in arms destroyed the police outpost in Yenagoa and raided the armory.⁹⁶⁹ They also vandalized oil pipelines and engaged the police in gun battles. The spatial boundaries and ethnic configuration of the new republic were clearly spelt out in the declaration by Boro as:

- (a) The land and river limits of Elemebiri on the Niger downstream to Gbekebo and Forcados inclusive.
- (b) The land and rivers limitis from the River Nun downstream to its Deltaic area with Akassa, Brass, Degema, Abonnema and Okrika and Opobo.

⁹⁶⁴ Diamond, L., *et al* (eds.), *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990, p. 354.

⁹⁶⁵ Most appalling was the fact that projects that should have been sited in the region for its development were relocated to majority ethnic territories: for instance, the fishery which should ordinarily be located in an aquatic environment was sited in Aba several kilometers from the delta while a boatyard at Opobo had its headquarters in Enugu. Also, employees in these industries and the oil sector operational in the Niger Delta were predominantly non-Ijaw. The Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was denied its statutory allocation by the federal and Eastern regional governments while the Eastern Regional scholarship became the preserve of citizens of Igbo extraction (Boro, I., *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, pp. 64-70).

⁹⁶⁶ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, T., ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 113.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 89-96.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid,

(c) The land and river limits stretching extensively up to Imbiama, Joinkrama, Okaki on the Orashi River, and the land limits of Buseni inclusive.

(d) The territorial waters of the Niger Delta area extending into the Atlantic.⁹⁷⁰

Spatially the areas specified as “Niger Delta Republic” are some (not all) Ijaw aboriginal settlements in the east, central and west delta. Adaka Boro unlike the pre-independence agitation of Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye which incorporated some minority groups in the region, restricted the composition of the new republic to Ijaw spaces.⁹⁷¹ The unification of Ijaw in the Niger Delta (east and west) under one homogenous and independent governance (political) structure that would in the short and long term facilitate economic, social, infrastructure and political development of the people and the Niger Delta territory propelled the rebellious move. But again, like the pre-independence struggle Adaka Boro’s new republic left out a chunk of Ijaw groups (clans) in the far east and west delta – the Ibeno of Akwa Ibom (east) and Gbaramatu, Egbema, Ogbe-Ijoh, Isaba, Arogbo and Apoi in the west were excluded in the new republic. While the whole central delta (Bayelsa State) was accommodated only Ijaw spaces in eastern (Rivers State) and western delta (Delta State) were integrated into the new republic. Ijaw nationalism pre-and-post-colonial was direct consequence of their peculiar geography and material conditions under which they lived. The denial of that demand compelled Boro’s Delta Volunteer Service (DVS) to resort to armed insurgency as an alternative means of redress.

The Boro-led DVS uprising was crushed within twelve days by federal security forces, and the leadership was arrested, tried and jailed. NDV leadership fought on the side of the federal government during the civil war in which Boro died. But by this singular act of revolt the ethnic minority question in Nigeria was democratized for citizens’ participation; hence, it moved from the elites’ boardroom conferences to the public space. From the standpoint of social justice, the revolution could be seen as a legitimate political expression that sought to restore ethnic equality among groups and thereby safeguard minority groups and their manifest lack of the material conditions for well-being from majority subordination and neglect. As in Boro’s submission, aside from his revolutionary legacy against oppression, “it was... better to call the attention of the world to the fact that the inhabitants of the Niger Delta in Nigeria were feeling very uncomfortable” with ethnic/tribal domination.⁹⁷² Beyond success, therefore, the revolutionists sought to draw local, national, regional and global attention to the Niger Delta Ijaws’ living conditions. Boro definitely was far ahead of his time. His revolutionary exploit stirred a militant political nationalist awakening among a new generation of disenchanted and

⁹⁷⁰ Boro, I., (Tebekaemi, T., ed.), *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁹⁷¹ Isaac Boro “Niger Delta Republic” comprised sixteen Ijaw clans (east to west) which he identified as: Apoi, Tarakiri, Kabouwei, Mein, Gbaran, Okogba, Kolokuma, Ogboin, Debe, Atisa, Buseni, Kalabari, Okirika, Opubu, Opukuma and Ogbia (Boro, I., *The Twelve-Day Revolution*, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 60). Isaac Boro’s failure to include or even acknowledge the existence of other Ijaw clans in the region could be attributed to inadequate research materials during the writing process (he wrote his memoir while in prison) and/or lack of adequate knowledge on the extensive spread of Ijaw across the delta. On another note, it is possible he was aware of the existence of other clans beyond the enumerated but did not feel obliged since they were not significant and outside the scope his narrative (the ‘Niger Delta Republic’).

⁹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 115; This internationalization in another dimension could be explained by the failed attempts by the leadership of the revolution to seek for support and assistance from some foreign governments through their embassies in West Africa, especially Ghana.

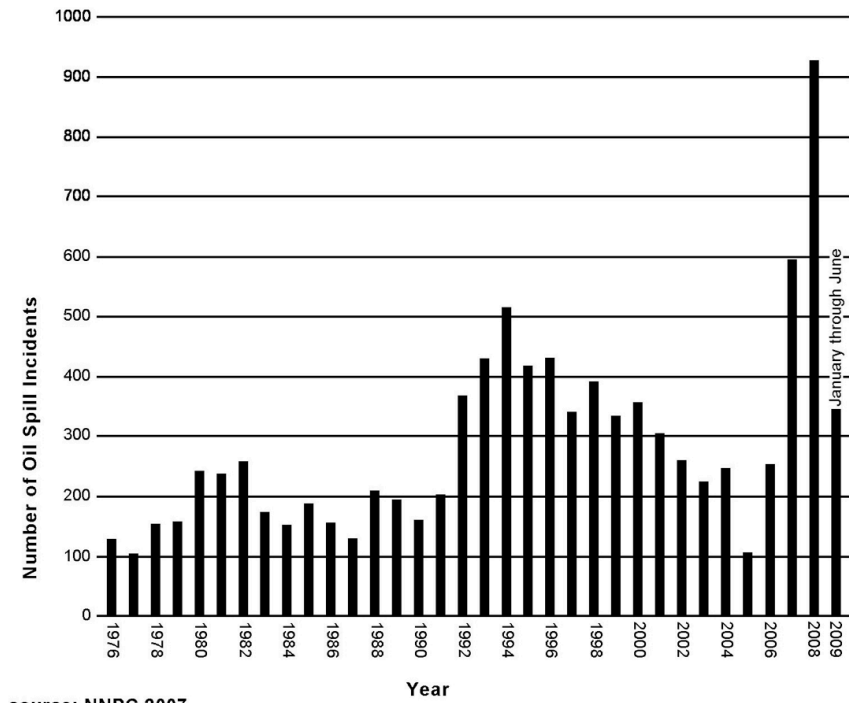
deprived ethnic minority citizens in Ijaw land. The Ijaw became seriously alarmed by the unrecognized massive contribution of the Niger Delta to the sustenance of Nigeria as a nation, especially in tandem with the region's gargantuan and pervasive shortfall in every aspect of development.

To fully and critically understand and appreciate the context of conflict in contemporary Niger Delta, there is a need -- as I have done in this and the preceding section -- to have a historical analysis of the unequal ethnic relations that existed between groups and how these uneven relations between majority and minority ethnic groups permitted unequal conditions of material existence. In the Niger Delta, the pre-independence calls for state creation (self-determination) and Boro's post-independence declaration a republic for the minority Ijaw through arms struggle are consequences arising from minority citizens' repression in the Nigerian federation. The contemporary geography of oil production and Ijaw National Congress (INC) and Ijaw Youth Council's (IYC) re-articulation of Ijaw nationalism through clan mobilization since the 1990s and beyond shall be the focus of the next section, but it is important to remember that they flow from such history.

7.5 Oil Geopolitics: Pan-Ijaw Civic Nationalism and "Resource Control"

In the Niger Delta, discontent by minority indigenous groups over their marginalization and the footprints of the oil industry further complicated economic and political feelings of exclusion. The region has repeatedly produced natural resources that put Nigeria into the global economic space: as described, from slave trade in the fifteenth century to palm oil trade in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century and to crude oil (hydrocarbon) production from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Over the decades, the petroleum industry (which sustains the nation's economy) has left a footprint that is hard to comprehend -- the pipelines, flow-stations, terminals, well-heads, rigs (offshore and onshore), and the ocean-going tankers.

Figure 23: Oil Spill Incidents in the Niger Delta, 1976-June 2009



The geography of oil exploration (mainly in the delta) and consequences arising thereof has left the creeks and rivers of the delta heavily polluted and the atmosphere contaminated by toxic gases, methane, and millions of tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions through gas flaring every year.⁹⁷³ Amidst these burdens inflicted on the ecology and inhabitants of oil-bearing communities the region is poor, underdeveloped and neglected by successive governments. Concrete civic actions to address effects of oil exploration on people and communities in the region soon emerged. Beginning in the 1990s, self-determination campaigns, environmental

⁹⁷³ A United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Report, 2011, on Ogoni in the Niger Delta concludes that pollution of the soil by petroleum hydrocarbons is extensive in land areas, sediments, and swampland. Most of the contamination is from crude oil, although contamination by refined product was found in some locations. The UNEP investigation found that the surface water throughout the creeks contains hydrocarbons. Floating layers of oil vary from thick black oil to thin sheens. The Ogoni community is exposed to petroleum hydrocarbons in outdoor air and drinking water, sometimes at elevated concentrations. They are also exposed through contacts with contaminated soil, sediments, and surface water. Of most immediate concern, the report noted, some community members are drinking water from a well that is contaminated with benzene, a known carcinogen, at levels over 900 times above the World Health Organization (WHO) guideline. The report states that this contamination warrants emergency action ahead of all other remediation efforts. Benzene was detected in all air samples at concentrations ranging from 0.155 to 48.2ug/m³. Approximately ten percent of detected benzene concentrations in Ogoniland were higher than the concentrations WHO and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) report as corresponding to a 1 in 10,000 cancer risk. Many of the benzene concentrations detected in Ogoniland were similar to those measured elsewhere in the world, given the prevalence of fuel use and other sources of benzene. However, the findings show that some benzene concentrations in Ogoniland were higher than those being measured in more economically developed regions where benzene concentrations are declining because of efforts to reduce benzene exposure.

justice activism, and resource-related turmoil by indigenous communities/people in the Niger Delta have consistently threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian state.

The 1990s ethnic phase of struggles in the region began with the Ogoni Bill of Rights, submitted to the central government in October 1990 by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), which demanded local autonomy to enable the indigenous Ogoni people access to and control of their natural resources and ecology within the Nigerian state. The Ogoni demand was borne in response to the damaging effects of the oil industry on the people's socioeconomic well-being and ecology. They wanted a fair share of the oil revenue (petrodollars) derived from their environment to be spent for their empowerment and development. But the Ogoni's non-violent indigenous movement for resource control and self-determination was violently repressed and the leadership murdered by the Nigerian state in late 1995.

Layered on the Ogoni struggle for fairness was the Ijaw ethnic group's (the majority ethnic group in the delta and fourth largest in Nigeria) call starting in 1991 for a fairer distribution of the natural resources extracted from the region, mostly in their territories.⁹⁷⁴ The Ijaw nationalist project across the delta occurred under the banner of the Ijaw National Congress (INC), an Ijaw socio-cultural organization. Unlike the pre-independence Ijaw nationalist project which was led by eastern elites, the INC was midwived by western and central elites.⁹⁷⁵ Ijaw clans from the eastern fringe (Kalabari, Okrika, Bonny, Andoni and Bille) of the delta were gradually incorporated into the fold.⁹⁷⁶ Because Nigeria's emergent centralized federal system had distorted political power and revenue allocation to the advantage of the majority ethnic groups and to the detriment of minorities in the delta, INC called for a renegotiation of the Nigerian federation to reflect the ethnic configuration of indigenous groups; it was a call for true or fiscal federalism. Moreover, in terms of deservingness, these minority groups bear the brunt of burdens arising from oil exploration and exploitation activities in the region. Joshua Fumudoh, a former President of the INC alluded to the call for fiscal federalism when he said:

The Niger Delta crisis has brought to the fore{...} the fundamental issues of resource ownership and control in a supposed federation of ethnic nationalities with divergent histories, interests and aspirations. The only panacea for continued peaceful co-existence in this country is for each ethnic nationality to have

⁹⁷⁴ In the Niger Delta beyond the Ogoni and Ijaw, other indigenous groups with time emerged on the scene such as: The Egi Peoples Movement, The Urhobo Economic Summit and the National Union of Ikwerre People etc,. All these indigenous peoples' movements demanded for self-determination and resource control as a result of the deprivation and ecological damage they have suffered over the decades due to the operations of oil multinational corporations and the government in the region.

⁹⁷⁵ Dr. Dimie, C. A from Edo State in western delta was the inaugural Chairman of the Steering Committee of the body while the first elected President and Secretary of INC Joshua Fumudoh and Chief Francis Williams hails from Delta and Ondo States respectively. Professor Kimse Okoko who became president after Fumudoh in 2000 was from central delta (Bayelsa State). After Kimse Okoko the presidency was moved to the east as stipulated in the constitution that offices be rotated among Ijaw clans in the three (western, central and eastern) regions of the delta.

⁹⁷⁶ The western/central conveners of the idea of pan-Ijaw nationalism invited Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye and few leaders from the east who participated at the inaugural meetings of the organization held at venues in the west and central delta. Aside these leaders the eastern clans had no representatives at the inaugural meetings and conventions of the body.

meaningful control over its own environment and resources, and to use them for self-development in accordance with each nationality's aspirations and desire.⁹⁷⁷

In a Niger Delta consultative meeting held in Lagos, Fumudoh presented four main reasons for the formation of INC: (1) Ijaw interest in the Nigerian state (2) the disconnect between Ijaw land and the economy (3) the vexed issue of resource allocation and (4) the goal of autonomous states creation for the Ijaw.⁹⁷⁸ INC was therefore principally inaugurated to articulate the demands, burdens, grievances, aspirations, and interests of the indigenous Ijaw ethnic group of the Niger Delta. The Ijaw are the majority ethnic group in the region, yet with the exception of Bayelsa state (created in 1996) they are split into five states (Ondo, Edo, Delta, Rivers and Akwa Ibom) as minorities.⁹⁷⁹ By this process the INC brought under its fold previously unincorporated Ijaw clans stretching from the far west in Ondo State to Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State – widening the geography and national identity of Ijaw.

Before the formation of INC, some eastern Ijaw clan members (young men from these clans) had started to see themselves as distinct ethnic groups different from Ijaw. For instance, some younger generation elites amongst Kalabari and Okrika clans see themselves not as Ijaw but distinct ethnic groups in the region. Except for clans from the western fringe (former Bendel State and Ondo State) and some in the central delta (especially the southern Ijaw, Ekeremor, Kolokuma, Opukuma and Ogbein axis) who identified themselves as Ijaw wherever they go, other clans in the east as well as central delta prefer to be addressed by their clan identity such as: Kalabari, Okrika, Engenni, Ogbia, Nembe, Bonny and Andoni. This explains why even though Ijaw Assembly (especially in the 1980s) existed in most universities and cities of Nigeria, members of these clans operated under clan assemblies.⁹⁸⁰ One fundamental achievement of the INC was that it brought these disparate clans into one indivisible pan-Ijaw fold in their demand of fairness. Because Nigeria considers ethnic demography in the allocation of states' development projects, this splitting up adds strong credibility to Ijaw allegations of political and economic marginalization and deprivation. The INC was therefore founded as a social cultural body to address these glitches, unite Ijaw across state lines and promote their interest as a nation

⁹⁷⁷ Joshua Fumudoh, a former President of Ijaw National Congress (1994 – 2000) quoted by Ibaba, S. Ibaba, "The Ijaw National Congress and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta", in Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., (eds.), *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 2011, p. 71.

⁹⁷⁸ Joshua Fumudoh made this submission as a keynote speaker on a Two-day Niger Delta (All Ijaw) Consultative Meeting held at Civic Center Lagos, March 31st – April 1st, 2013.

⁹⁷⁹ Using the parameters of language (dialects), culture, religion, history and kinship INC identified about fifty Ijaw clans across states of the delta which it brought under one umbrella of Ijaw national identity. The clans identified in Bayelsa State (central delta) are: Zarama, Tungbo, Tarakiri, Oyakiri, Oporoma, Olodioma, Opukuma, Okordia, Ogbein, Ogbia, Nembe, Kolokuma, Epie-Atissa, Ekpetiama, Ekeremor, Buseni, Bumor, Basan, Apoi and Akassa; in eastern delta comprising Rivers and Akwa Ibom States: Nkoro, Okrika, Opobo, Ibeno, Kula, Kalabari, Engenni, Bonny, Bille and Andoni while in western delta comprising Delta, Edo and Ondo States the following were identified: Arogbo, Kabowei, Egbema, Apoi, Ekeremo, Furupagha, Iduwini, Gbaramatu, Isaba, Kumbo, Mein, Obotebe, Odimodi, Ogbe, Ogulagha, Olodiama, seimbiri Tarakiri, Tuomo and Ukomu. While some of these clans are scattered around Island freshwater settlements others are spread around the coastal saltwater mangroves.

⁹⁸⁰ For instance, in the University of Port Harcourt at the time there was the National Association of Ijaw Students but the Okrika and Kalabari clan students at the institution operated under the banner of Okrika Students Association and Kalabari Students Association respectively. This was a way of distinguishing themselves as distinct from the Ijaw ethnic nationality. It should be noted that even at that time the older generation of elites and people from these clans did not abdicate their Ijaw origin and identity thus making it easy for the INC to penetrate the regions and clans in their drive for a united Ijaw nation.

within a corporate Nigeria. It became the umbrella organization for the defense of Ijaw rights and development, wherever the people may be. Ibaba thus was apt when he summed up the INC's objectives:

The INC was formed in the context of economic crisis and reform, military rule and a 'guided' political transition program, where political space was limited, and ethnic minority elites sought to centralize their identity driven groups and politics to better propagate their campaign for states creation, fair compensation for oil pollution, and a greater and fairer share of oil revenues/benefits.⁹⁸¹

Like previous Ijaw movements pre-and-post-independence, the INC pointed out that handlers of the Nigerian state lack adequate information and knowledge of the burdens and problems that are daily confronted by settlers of the windy creeks, rivers and swamps of the Niger Delta. Having experienced several decades of abysmal neglect, the Ijaw understood clearly that until the people, for and by themselves, took practical steps to change their living conditions nothing was going to be done about their situation, even though the region was home to enormous amounts of the globally significant natural resources: oil and gas. With the geography of hydrocarbons in this marshy terrain mostly inhabited by the Ijaw (from the east to west) makes them an essential component of the Nigerian federation, and so the INC sought a way out of the paradox of nothing amidst plenty by once again taking up the demand of 'ethnic self-determination' as a possible panacea to the age-old problems (underdevelopment and neglect) of Ijaw land.

For effective pan-Ijaw mobilization, the INC undertook a sensitization exercise in various clans and communities across the delta in order to enlighten Ijaw citizens about their problems and the need for possible solutions through an organic body (INC).⁹⁸² In its sensitization drive (conferences, seminars and summits), the INC highlighted the paradox described above.⁹⁸³ The greatest outcome of the INC pan-Ijaw sensitization exercise was the unification and shared sense of filial solidarity amongst Ijaw clans across the delta.⁹⁸⁴ Indigenous Ijaw clans in the eastern, central, and western delta became interconnected and vowed to work together as an indivisible bloc for the rights, defense, progress and development of Ijaws wherever they may be; this constituted a cohesive, coherent and collective pan-Ijaw agenda. Before long, a shared sense of consciousness and identity about marginalization, neglect, and deprivation was developed among Ijaw clans and communities in the region.

With respect to the pan-Ijaw fundamental demands (development and state creation), the INC sought an audience with the federal government on several fronts – demand for self-determination (autonomy) for ethnic groups. Between 1994 and 1998 the INC through

⁹⁸¹ Ibaba, S. I., "The Ijaw National Congress and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta", in Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., (eds.), *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 2011, p. 71.

⁹⁸² Interview by the author with the inaugural President of INC, Professor Dimie, C. A at Amassoma on June 2nd 2012.

⁹⁸³ Interview by the author with former Secretary General (1994 - 2000) of INC, Chief Williams, F. J in August 15th 2012. This view was corroborated by the inaugural President of INC, Professor C. A. Dimie in an interview with the author at Amassoma on June 2nd 2012.

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid,

advertorials, press releases and letters made numerous attempts to reach top functionaries of government at the central and state levels, without success.⁹⁸⁵ At this juncture the pan-Ijaw group had been infiltrated by political elites in the region and divided into anti-government and pro-government factions speaking in discordant tunes. Even efforts to reach the MNOCs operating in the region on the environmental question were either rebuffed or ignored, with the notorious “we don’t care” posture. The deafening silence of the government-MNOCs alliance suggests that the calm boardroom strategies adopted over time by the INC in hopes of resolving the pan-Ijaw question were ineffective, antiquated, and of no effect. Therefore many Ijaw youths who had followed developments in the INC with rapt attention and interest reasoned that its strategies deserved a recalibration and re-articulation to meet demands of the twenty-first century. A vibrant, fiery, and aggressive youth wing would be imperative to help galvanize and drive the pan-Ijaw agenda to a global audience.

Ijaw youths calibrated the pan-Ijaw question to bring it to national, regional and global consciousness in a significantly focused intellectual dimension.⁹⁸⁶ It became an urgent matter to articulate pan-Ijaw grievances and burdens to the globe, so as to bring justice to bear on the abominable conditions of the past decades. On December 11, 1998, an organic body of Ijaw youths (Ijaw Youth Council or IYC) was formed in Kaiama. Expectedly IYC geography of Ijawness followed the INC created clan pattern and mobilized along that line. The INC and IYC emerged under different circumstances and adopted distinctly different strategies, but they have one and same goal – justice for a pan-Ijaw nation. INC and IYC through shared history, culture, religion and language brought under one umbrella disparate Ijaw clans balkanized (into east-west) since the region became an outpost of global capitalist economy, a colonial space and post-colonial state and LGA creation.⁹⁸⁷ INC and IYC complement one another for the defense, progress, and benefit of the Ijaw nation where and when needed. Oronto Douglas identified three basic achievements of the youth body: first, IYC has since raised the pan-Ijaw consciousness of people and communities of the Niger Delta, and located that consciousness within a national and global space; second, it has helped to create a national awareness of the Niger Delta problem and the need for its urgent resolution by the Nigerian state; and third, it has consolidated INC’s efforts to bring cohesiveness amongst Ijaw, and among ethnic groups in the Niger Delta.⁹⁸⁸ Beyond the Kaiama gathering where over forty clans and about five hundred communities were in attendance, the IYC consolidated the INC efforts on pan-Ijaw ethnic identity formation through its mobile parliament across recognized Ijaw clans of the delta. IYC’s advocacy campaigns have helped to widen the space of the Niger Delta in the global struggle for environmental justice.

IYC introduced the slogan of “resource control” which was prefixed as a conjunction to the INC’s “self-determination” as rallying points for pan-Ijaw nationalism and community mobilization against the state-MNOC’s alliance. “Resource control” and “self-determination”

⁹⁸⁵ Interview by the author with former Secretary General (1994 - 2000) of INC, Chief Williams, F. J in August 2012. See also, Ibaba, S. I., “The Ijaw National Congress and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta”, in Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., (eds.), *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 2011, p. 76.

⁹⁸⁶ The author’s interview with Oronto Douglas (Environmentalist and founding member of the Ijaw Youth Council) in California, May 2010.

⁹⁸⁷ This unification included those who had earlier jettisoned Ijaw national identity for clan identity.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid,

were initiated into the political space by Ijaw youths to checkmate majority ethnic domination over minority groups in the polity. By resource control and self-determination the youths challenged the centralization of political power and the oil revenues allocation process: they challenged the revenue allocation process which over the years has been reduced from 100 to 3 percent in favor of majority ethnic groups with more states and LGAs.⁹⁸⁹ By resource control the youths advocated for community inclusion and participation in discussions/agreements relating to oil exploration and exploitation processes in the region – it was about the right of locals who “own,” work and whose survival is dependent on the land to be recognized as stakeholders in MNOC operations in the region. Similarly, resource control was a call for the reevaluation and possible abrogation of the Petroleum decree of 1969, Land Use Act of 1978 and other “unjust” legislations in the country. Resource control and self-determination was a subtle call on minority ethnic groups around the country to rise and possibly resist majority ethnic domination perpetrated since independence – a call on minority as well as majority ethnic groups to rethink the nation’s unstable, fragile and complex federalism and possible devolution of political power to the federating units and/or nationalities.⁹⁹⁰ Rather than a union of states IYC advocated for a renegotiated nation-state based on the union of ethnic nationalities.

INC/IYC was very successful in the pan-Ijaw civic nationalism campaign: the need to rethink the Nigerian legal framework (constitution), the oil revenue allocation process, land rights (undemocratic legislations) and basis of Nigeria’s fragile federation. The INC and IYC (pan-Ijaw nationalism) were tremendously effective in their ability to influence local, national, regional and global attention to the pan-Ijaw grievances since independence which are true and genuine. But at a pan-delta scale the INC and IYC as pan-Ijaw civic nationalism movements spoke the language of ethno-politics at the expense of other local minority ethnic groups in the region. Since ethnicity is not God-given but a complex category in the sense that who is Ijaw and who is not can only be determined by who defines it (in this case by INC and IYC) and its spatial borders, then who gets included and excluded as an Ijaw is a discursive political project.

Government’s response of militarized pacification to these legitimate grievances made dialogue not only impossible but also unattractive to citizens of the delta. Direct mass action by Ijaw youths across oil-fields around Ijaw land and the government’s reaction of securitization produced violent outbursts and rage in the Ijaw areas. Unsurprisingly, violence, which originally was not envisioned, became the paradigm. Violence in the region has led to the securitization of every aspect of existence. For all intents and purposes, the region has come to represent a classic instance of the securitization of space and spatialization of security. Government-MNOCs’ resort to violence rather than dialogue, and their refusal to address the fundamental questions of self-determination, resource ownership and control, and environmental justice have since generated a cross-delta militant ethnic nationalism in the form of the Movement for the Emancipation of

⁹⁸⁹ The political geography of revenue allocation is tilted in favor of majority ethnic groups who over the years have ruled and arbitrarily created more states and LGAs to themselves and skewed the oil revenue allocation process to their favor.

⁹⁹⁰ It was a call for the convocation of an ethnic nationalities based sovereign national conference where the future of the country and ethnic nationalities making up Nigeria would be discussed frankly and sincerely due to discontent expressed by minority as well as majority ethnic groups (especially with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election and the uprising generated in western Nigeria).

Niger Delta (MEND). The next section, hence, deals with MEND's civic and ethnic campaigns across the delta to draw even greater national, regional and global attention to the Ijaw question.

7.6 MEND: Securitization of Space and the Rise of Militant Ethno Nationalism

The securitization of the Niger Delta against nationalist movements is a complex paradigm that goes back in history. Since the nineteenth century, as explained in chapter two of this work, the paradigm of violence has been steadily deployed against indigenous groups to resolve (or subdue) perceived or real grievances in the region. Over the years, the personae dramatis have changed but the rhythm remain similar – the actors have changed over time (pre-independence to post-independence) but the roles are intact. Since independence, imperial Britain of the nineteenth century has been replaced by majority ethnic elites of the Nigeria state in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Crude oil has taken the place of palm oil, and the Nigerian security agents now effectively play the role of the British navy/security forces. The space previously occupied by the Royal Niger Company (transnational corporation) is visibly taken by MNOCs (Shell, Agip, Chevron, ExxonMobile, Texaco, etc.). Aside from these transitions, nothing has changed. Therefore, like the old struggles, violence in contemporary Niger Delta is the outcome of the interrelationship between active players in the region – Nigerian state and oil-bearing communities, oil states and oil-bearing communities, oil companies and oil-bearing communities, MNOCs and oil-bearing states, oil-bearing communities and oil-impacted communities, oil-producing nations and oil-importing nations.⁹⁹¹ It is therefore logical to assert that social relations in post-independence Niger Delta have been reshaped, framed, and transformed by local as well as global petro-relations.

Contemporary state's legitimization of securitization as a paradigm of pacification beginning in the late 1990s (especially in Ijaw territories) is quite significant to understanding the structure, shape and production of violence. Ukeje aptly deduced the reason for such a consequence when he pointed out the similarity in character between security of the colonial era and the contemporary:

Significantly, there is a striking parallel between the behavior of the police, army and other security agencies during the colonial era and now. Like police, the inherited army was also an instrument for the enforcement of the will of the state, not the protection of the people.⁹⁹²

One colonial relic inherited by the Nigerian ruling elites upon independence is a compromised security agency whose interest has been to enforce the will of those ruling elites, rather than to protect the people. Like most other institutions in post-colonial Nigeria, security has been ethnicized – the recruitment pattern and operational deployment of personnel speaks volumes.⁹⁹³

⁹⁹¹ Ukeje, C., "Changing the Paradigm of Pacification: Oil and Militarization in Nigeria's Niger Delta" in Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., (eds.), *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 2011.

⁹⁹² Ibid, p. 88.

⁹⁹³ Security as an institution in Nigeria is dominated by the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo). While there are individuals from smaller ethnic groups, the top hierarchy (cadre) in most security outfits is

Security is a mechanism designed by the ruling elites to whip dissenting groups or individuals (such as the Ijaw and other minorities in the delta) into line.⁹⁹⁴ Since the beginning of the IYC pan-Ijaw civic nationalism of the late 1990s, there has been a steady increase in the securitization of delta oil facilities and personnel. Ijaw youths' protests over unaddressed grievances, and the vicious interventions by security agencies to quell such protests, have resulted in gross human rights abuses and infringements.⁹⁹⁵ As could be expected, this has exponentially increased confrontations involving the federal government-MNOCs and oil-bearing Ijaw communities. The concentration of oil and gas industries in the Ijaw land also has created a great disparity in the securitization of the Ijaw areas compared to other parts of the delta. Unlike other parts of Nigeria, protests in Ijaw oil-bearing areas are considered a direct assault on the economic survival of the Nigerian state, and hence are harshly quelled due to the immediate or anticipated effect such could have on the oil sector and, by extension, the unfettered flow of revenue to the nation.

In the face of state sponsored intimidation, torture, murder, detention, arrests and destruction, a radical group called Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), emerged from the Ijaw civil society. MEND first appeared in 2005, escalated violent sabotage on oil installations, abducted oil workers, and held the Nigerian oil economy by the jugular. MEND's brutal attacks on oil infrastructure (onshore and offshore) and the military's counterinsurgency reprisals turned the oil fields of the Niger Delta into theatres of war. Within months of its launch, MEND achieved its avowed target of cutting Nigeria's oil output by thirty percent.⁹⁹⁶ By the end of 2006/7, the region had witnessed several brazen attacks on foreign oil productions, with many security agents killed and over seven billion dollars' loss in oil revenues per day.⁹⁹⁷ On the international scene, the violence caused a volatility of oil prices that further incensed the global market and created irritation over the rise in pump prices among citizens of consuming nations.

considered the exclusive preserve of these three groups. For instance, aside General Andrew Azazi (2010-2013), who was appointed by President Goodluck Jonathan, the office of National Security Adviser (NSA) to the President is unofficially considered the exclusive preserve of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria.

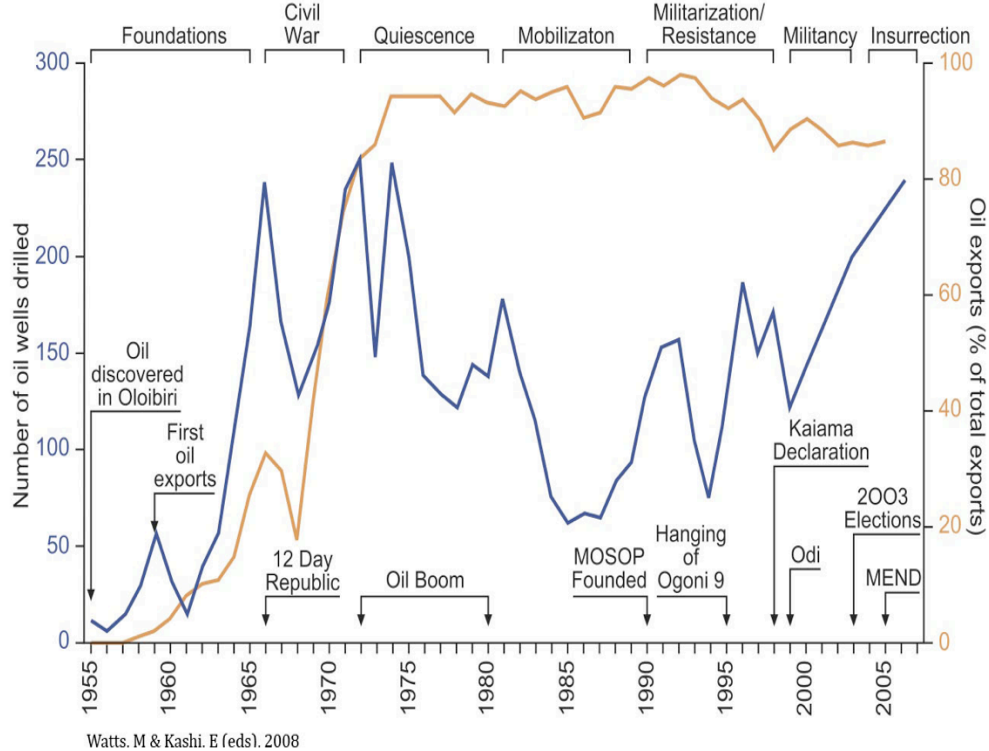
⁹⁹⁴ In most instances, non-indigenous heartless security agents of other ethnic groups outside of the Niger Delta, who care less about the enormous environmental despoliation and its consequences on livelihood and indigenous people in the region have been deployed to the region to quell agitations arising from failed promises, and for the protection of oil facilities and personnel.

⁹⁹⁵ The Human Rights Violations in the Niger Delta by security agencies are well documented in *Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999; Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: Crackdown in the Niger Delta," New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999; Human Rights Watch Report, 'Update on Human Rights Violations in the Niger Delta', New York: Human Rights Watch, 2000; See also, Civil Liberties Organization, *Blood Trail: Repression and Resistance in the Niger Delta*, Lagos: CLO, 2002; Okonta, I., & Douglas, O., *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2001.

⁹⁹⁶ Watts, M., "Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta," *Review of African Political Economy*, 34:114, (2007), pp. 637-660.

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid,

Figure 24: Oil Dynamics in the Niger Delta, 1955-2005



MEND, whose bold strikes targeted oil facilities in the delta, originally demanded the desecuritization of the Niger Delta and release of some eminent Ijaw sons who had been detained by government. Before long, this powerful and highly militarized group emerged with a mix bag of political claims: “resource control” and fairer share of oil revenues for oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta region. Not long, there appeared a deep tension between on the one hand what they called ‘resource control’ and the need to change the basis by which oil revenues from the Niger Delta are allocated in Nigeria’s unstable federalism: they argued that the oil belong to peoples of the Niger Delta, hence ethnic nationalities of the region must be allowed to receive the rents from oil and made to pay tax to government. These are purely political claims about who owns the oil, who controls it and what is the regulatory mechanism? On the other hand, it is absolutely clear that MEND appeared as an ethnic insurgency in Ijaw spaces in a deeply multi-ethnic region. The dominant group in the region is Ijaw and MEND is a pan-Ijaw ethnic militant group.

So, MEND was constantly oscillating on the one hand between civic nationalism: the need to rethink the constitution, the legal basis for oil revenues allocation in the federation and land rights (undemocratic laws) - these are claims that are globally considered as civic nationalism. On another note, MEND was sliding into a rather ugly and nasty ethnic nationalism: xenophobic at the expense of building some pan-ethnic militant movement across the delta which is composed of more than fifty different ethnic groups. The group constantly played this game in the region where it was hugely successful in its ability to use the media to leverage national, regional and global attention to its political claims: in any case, there is a sense of truthfulness and genuineness in those claims – the group was very successful in that regard.

Aside political claims, it seems there were elements within MEND that were speaking the language of ethno-politics at the expense of other minority ethnic nationalities in the region – MEND insurgency therefore speaks to the issue of the local. It is a group dominated by those who see themselves as excluded politically and economically – young unemployed men who have right and proper grievances about the footprints of the oil industry and how it has despoiled their ecology and livelihoods and need to reexamine the oil revenues allocation formulae. However, it is an insurgency built around a process of pan-Ijaw ethnic mobilization, and ethnic nationalism is a very complex category in the sense that inclusiveness and exclusiveness is defined by a determinant. Hence, pan-ethnic nationalism movements like MEND are at the edge of falling apart based on who is included and who is not in the discourse of its civic political project.

MEND's philosophy of violent nationalism appeared and was concentrated in a few Ijaw clans in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States: while MEND spoke the language of emancipation for the whole region it was however a pan-Ijaw ethnic movement whose operations were restricted mainly to Ijaw clans in the Escravos and Forcados areas of Delta State; Okrika and Kalabari clans of Rivers State; and Nembe, Brass and Southern Ijaw territories of Bayelsa State. Its initial political claims (civic grievances) were at first quite appealing to all Ijaw as well as other ethnic nationalities because such was in consonant with aspirations in the region. Not long, there arose disenchantments with the extent to which militant nationalism associated with insurgency grew and became uncontrollable due to the amorphous nature of MEND which is not unrelated to its ethnic/clan composition. There is a profound sense in which the geography of its operation and ethnic/clan composition of the group coupled with the counterinsurgency by military troops against oil-bearing communities contributed to the wane in popular support it gained at inception. The wane in public support and sympathy are not unrelated to the sense in which the oil fields and by extension the region was borderline ungovernable at the time – securitization of the region made it feel like an occupied space hence the decline in popular support. By restricting its operations even though it was an Ijaw ethnic movement to certain clans rather than all, MEND redefined the Ijaw national identity. Even though INC and IYC had earlier expanded the Ijaw national identity to include all clans stretching from Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State (in the far east) to Aroibo and Apoi (in the west), the geography of Ijawness was reconfigured (shrunk) by MEND activities to mean the group's operational areas. Rather than being identified in the six states of the delta in which they are balkanized into Ijaw identity was mostly identified in the three MEND's operational states.

MEND's emergence as a pan-Ijaw ethnic movement beginning in late 2005 redefined pan-Ijaw nationalism and space in Nigeria. The militia group introduced militancy into the Ijaw quest for civic nationalism (resource ownership and control, self-determination, and oil revenues allocation). By its violent ethnic nationalism and call for global attention it removed efforts to resolve the Ijaw question, and by extension the Niger Delta minorities' question, from the exclusive purview of the Nigerian state, which it perceives to be a dishonest broker by virtue of the government's own vested interests in exclusive control of oil and as exclusive partner of oil multinationals. Instead, MEND called for international mediation. From its inception, the group consistently rejected terrorist and criminal tags, insisting that MEND's struggle is for on the one hand, civic nationalism (political claims), and on the other, Ijaw ethno national identity.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined pan-Ijaw (cross-delta) struggles and ethno national identity formations since the pre-independence era to the contemporary MEND insurgency in the region. From the analysis it could be seen that Ijaw cross-delta struggles and ethnic identity formations since pre-independence to the present day are a complex mixture of civic nationalism (political grievances) and ethno-politics. The chapter showed the distinct history of Ijaw identity formation: I showed how this identity expanded in one epoch and shrank in another, making it elastic and malleable in character and space. In the chapter, I espoused how in pre-independence Nigeria colonial tripartite governance structure produced forms of identity and power relations among citizens. In Nigeria, colonial rule created conditions of unequal access to and control of scarce resources, privileges and opportunities among elites and citizens from majority and minority ethnic groups and domination arising thereof. In response to majority ethnic domination, there arose minority ethnic nationalism (and Ijaw national identity formation) in pre-independence Niger Delta as a direct response to perceived and/or real ethnic domination and deprivation in the polity. The chapter interrogated how the Ijaw ethnic group in the delta responded to the majority ethnic domination with ideals of nationalism and demanded for an independent state for the Ijaw and other minorities in the delta.

The chapter argued that the hegemony of majority ethnic rule over minority elements and intensification of ethnic politics by local elites and inability to resolve contradictions arising thereof in post-colonial Nigeria made Isaac Boro to declare some contiguous Ijaw spaces of the coastal fringe as “Niger Delta Republic” in 1966. Isaac Boro’s nationalist project (“Niger Delta Republic”) reconstructed geography of Ijaw identity with the inclusion of some clans (Ijaw groups) and exclusion of others.

The chapter further argued that the INC emerged in 1991 as a pan-Ijaw ethnic nationalist organization to challenge the economic and political order of the nation: the mode of state and LGAs creation and principle of oil revenues allocation. INC brought cohesion and expanded the geography of pan-Ijaw nationalism in the region. I also argued that IYC which emerged as an offspring of the INC in late 1990s consolidated and brought to the fore valid political claims: resource control and self-determination, and need to rethink the oil revenue derivation principle in the nations unstable federalism. Through its mobile parliaments, civic claims and mass movement against oil operations especially in Ijaw areas of the delta, the IYC attracted local and international attention to the pan-Ijaw question in the Nigerian state. Finally, the chapter showed how securitization and violent pacification became official policy of government towards addressing youth and oil-bearing community unrests and how this policy framework of government produced militant political claim-making as well as ethno-politics in the form of MEND insurgency in the region. The chapter showed that pan-Ijaw national identity and geography were transformed by youth militancy and became synonymous with MEND.

Conclusion

Amnesty and Beyond: The New Political Landscape of Niger Delta

Introduction

The lingering protests (unrest) and civil armed violence in the Niger Delta since the late 1990s and the attendant loss of lives and property pose great danger to the security of the Nigerian state and oil-bearing communities in the region. The violence, which is a blend of petro-complex, political conflict, ethnic violence, youth insurrection/unrest, and criminality, has profoundly affected the political economy of Nigeria. Escalating violent conflict in the Niger Delta specifically has turned the region into one of the world's major hotspots, and the nation's economy is the worst hit. MEND swept onto the political stage in late 2005 through 2009. It is a political project by insurgent groups who see themselves as excluded politically and economically, and are dominated by young energetic unemployed men in a gerontocratic society. MEND's political project is well organized militarily and is supported throughout the delta. The group wants a greater share of oil revenues to go directly to the impoverished communities and people that sit atop the oil wells in the Niger Delta region. They have a clear understanding of the ecological footprint of the oil industry and a clear analysis of how over the years it has devastated their livelihood in the region. MEND essentially fulfilled its promise to compromise the oil industry, and succeeded well beyond expectations; within months it shut-in Nigeria's oil output, bringing it from 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd) to its lowest point in decades of barely 800,000 bpd. In essence, after more than half a century of abysmal neglect, a young animated generation of men whose depth of anger is quite deep decided to unleash that emotion on the oil industry, making the petro-industry and region ungovernable.

President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's federal government took practical steps to nip the conflict in the bud, immediately upon assuming power on May 29, 2007. The implications of the conflict for the national and global oil economy were huge; therefore, robust and sustainable peace initiatives to end the violence were urgently required. In his inaugural address, President Yar'Adua had identified the Niger Delta question as one of the special interest issues of his administration and drew the nation's attention to this when he said: "The crisis in the Niger Delta commands our urgent attention. Ending it is a matter of strategic importance to our country. I will use every resource available to me, with your help, to address this crisis in a spirit of fairness, justice, and cooperation."⁹⁹⁸ The government definitely was very worried about the rising petro-insurgency and seemingly had at last come to grips with the seriousness of the situation in the Niger Delta and the insincere attempts by past administrations to resolve it. There was in President Yar'Adua's view a pressing need to engage stakeholders to explore alternative prospects for sustainable peace, development, and stability in the region.

⁹⁹⁸ President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, "The Challenge is Great: The Goal is Clear", Inaugural Address As President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abuja, May 29 2007.

Prospects for Sustainable Peace and the Amnesty Option

By 2007, the Niger Delta was gradually sliding into anarchy; there were peace processes initiated by government with stakeholders in order to bring stability into the region. At the center of the peace deals was the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw indigene of the Niger Delta. The Vice President consulted widely. He had discussions with ethnic leaders, youth and civil society leaders, and in June 2007 he visited the creeks to hold talks with MEND commanders in Camp 5. The Vice President's consultations produced two channels of dialogue, one from the top and another from below, namely the Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Reconciliation Committee (NDPCRC) and the Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum (IYLF) respectively. That same month, immediately after Goodluck Jonathan's visit to the notorious Camp 5, a general meeting of all Ijaw youth leaders (militants, civil society leaders and activists) was convened in Oporoza to find an amicable solution to violent conflicts in the region. That gathering, which became known as Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum (IYLF), negotiated with government to determine plausible ways to achieve enduring peace. Between June 2007 and August 2008, representatives of IYLF held regular meetings in Abuja with top government delegates to negotiate acceptable conditions for peace in the delta.

Then, in July 2007, the Vice President created a twenty-member Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC) with a former senator David Brigidi and former member of the Ondo State parliament Kingsley Kuku as chairman and secretary, respectively. Between 2007 and 2008, these two channels of dialogue (IYLF and NDPCRC) facilitated the cessation of hostilities and release of many hostages. But their peace processes were constantly hampered by mistrust between government and the militants as well as by the composition of committees.⁹⁹⁹ As a result the situation continued to deteriorate. In April 2008 the federal government then proposed to convene a Niger Delta Peace summit that would accommodate all stakeholders in the region and beyond.¹⁰⁰⁰ The government nominated Ibrahim Gambari – a pro-

⁹⁹⁹ For instance, in a press release titled "The Niger Delta Peace Process: A Critical Review," December 2007, the Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum (IYLF) gave some preliminary conditions for fulfilment, consequent upon which a proper dialogue would be initiated with government on the crisis in the region, but the government failed to address or honor the pre-conditions. Some of the conditions include: declaration of developmental emergency in the Niger Delta; reconstruction and rehabilitation of Ijaw communities destroyed by the JTF (such as Odi and Odioma); unconditional release of all Ijaw political detainees especially Alhaji Dokubo Asari and Chief D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha; grant amnesty to all Niger Delta militants including those already in government custody; President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to visit an oil-bearing community in the Niger Delta so as to have a first-hand information on what the oil corporations have done to the ecology of the region; and a gradual withdrawal of the military from peaceful communities or zones in the region. Except for the release of Alhaji Dokubo Asari on health grounds and Chief D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha government never implemented any of the other preconditions. Instead, while talks were ongoing, attacks on Ijaw communities and militant camps in the region was intensified by the government's joint task force; Henry Okah, a MEND leader, was arrested in far away Angola for gun-running; a military strategy document to attack identified Ijaw communities and militant camps in the region was uncovered by the group; and subsequent budgetary allocation of N444 million for securitization and military expeditions as against N69 million allocated for the region's development, were all adduced as reasons why the IYLF finally withdrew from the peace process with the federal government in August 2008.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Part of the reason for the proposal of an all stakeholders Niger Delta Peace summit could be adduced to discordant voices expressed against the peace process initiatives led by the Vice President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, an Ijaw from the region that revolved around Ijaw individuals or group(s). Even though MEND is nearly

government scholar and diplomat who over the years had been a vocal opponent of the delta's ethnic minority activists – to be chairman of the proposed summit. Niger Delta national legislators, ethnic leaders, youth groups, militants, women, and civil society groups vehemently opposed this nomination.¹⁰⁰¹ In response, and after further consultations, the federal government announced the formation of a Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (TCND).

On September 8, 2008, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, on behalf of the President, inaugurated a 44-member Technical Committee on Niger Delta (members of TCND were nominated by the various Niger Delta State governments and other civil society platforms). Members of the committee appointed Mr. Ledum Mitee (former President of MOSOP) and Ms. Nkoyo Toyo as chairman and secretary, respectively. The government gave the Committee just three terms of reference: (1) collect, review and distill the various reports, suggestions and recommendations on the Niger Delta from the Willinks Commission Report of 1958 to the present, and summarize the recommendations for government action; (2) appraise the summary recommendations and present detailed short-, medium-, and long-term suggestions for the Niger Delta; and (3) make and present to government any other recommendations that would help the federal government achieve sustainable development, peace, and human and environmental security in the Niger Delta region.¹⁰⁰² The TCND reached out to local, national, regional and global stakeholders/experts for their inputs and perspectives, and it received and reviewed over four hundred memoranda from various sectors of society.¹⁰⁰³ It also sought meetings with various stakeholders including security agencies, global development agencies, ethnic leaders and militants.

After exhaustive deliberations on all memoranda submitted and critical examination of about fourteen past reports on the Niger Delta and several ethnic nationalities/communities petitions to the federal government, the TCND submitted its report and recommendations to the federal government on December 1 2008. The Committee recommendations included the following: “increased revenue allocation of twenty-five percent in the interim but with a graduation towards fifty percent, leveraging extra funds from other sources, establishment of a Disarmament, Decommission and Reintegration (DDR) Commission which will explore negotiated approaches to address the challenge of arms and militancy, open trial and

wholly Ijaw and attacks are carried out mostly in Ijaw territories of the region, it was viewed by some persons and ethnic groups (especially in the delta) that the Vice President was giving undue privilege and advantage to his Ijaw kinsmen to the detriment of other groups in the Niger Delta.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibrahim Gambari is a Nigerian scholar and diplomat (a former foreign affairs minister 1984-1985) and United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary for Political Affairs. As a UN Under-Secretary, Gambari had helped to launder the image of the General Sani Abacha's military regime (1993-1998) and defended the nationally and globally condemned state murder of Niger Delta minority ethnic rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the other eight Ogoni/MOSOP leaders, whom he tagged ‘common criminals’. He was therefore seen as a biased umpire on Niger Delta matters and cannot be trusted to mediate in such a delicate issue of peace in the region. The Niger Delta All-Stakeholders summit as planned by the federal government was considered another “jamboree” (a reminder to the many conferences and commissions held on the Niger Delta situation with no positive outcome) in the offing by many observers and analysts because a serious conference designed to address the Niger Delta crisis must involve the ethnic nationalities in its planning and implementation. Such cannot be left to politicians who have their interests to serve and does not have the moral fiber required to address the Niger Delta question. The proposed All Stakeholders Summit on the Niger Delta died at the altar of controversy even before it was born.

¹⁰⁰² Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, November 2008, p. vi.

¹⁰⁰³ Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, November 2008.

unconditional bail for Henry Okah; negotiate amnesty for all Niger Delta militants; end to gas flaring by December 2008; achievement of five-thousand megawatts of power for the region by 2010; completion of the dualization of the East-West road including spurs to each of the coastal states, and ensure significant improvement in education, health and youth employment in the region.”¹⁰⁰⁴ From the array of previous reports examined, the TCND argues that there has been no shortage of proposed solutions to the Niger Delta problem; rather, “lack of demonstrable political will in the implementation of reports has been the bane of the region.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Following from this, the Committee noted that the government’s response to its suggestions “has to be drastic and dramatic in order to inspire hope, win confidence and halt a possible relapse into violent conflict.”¹⁰⁰⁶ This certainly is a serious indictment of how successive governments in the Nigerian federation have poorly managed agitations in the Niger Delta.

In a historic departure from previous reports, the TCND went beyond making recommendations to actually apportioning responsibilities for who should do what, when and how, in order to achieve a timely resolution of the crisis in the region; those responsibilities were assigned to various sectors of society including the federal government, states governments in the Niger Delta, local councils in the region, communities, militants, civil society groups, MNOCs, NDDC, and international development agencies.¹⁰⁰⁷ It took further steps by specifying the institutions and mechanisms that would raise and manage revenues to be deployed in the region’s development. At the same time, the TCND expressed great concern about the heightened expectations of stakeholders on the Committee’s report and prayed that its recommendations would not suffer the same setbacks as those of previous reports on the region’s crisis. But their concern was actualized. Like earlier reports and recommendations on the region, the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta’s report and the recommendations submitted to the federal government in December 2008 was only added to the archived pile of unimplemented reports on the Niger Delta crisis.

Early signs that the TCND and its recommendations would not be taken seriously appeared but were ignored. The TCND was inaugurated on September 8, 2008; two days later, the federal government announced the establishment of a ministry for the Niger Delta (Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs). To many, the creation of a ministry seemed like it would complement existing initiatives to end the violent conflict and bring stability into the region. The Niger Delta Ministry, which was to have a senior and junior minister, was expected to provide the required development and infrastructure in the Niger Delta, important items such as electricity, roads, transportation, hospitals, employment and empowerment. Yet the creation of a ministry to specifically focus on the problems, needs and challenges of this troubled, and much neglected region was greeted with mixed feelings. To some it was a bold and positive indication that government would tackle the myriad of problems and make a difference, but to others it was simply another piece of government bureaucracy created to window dress the situation.¹⁰⁰⁸ Not

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid,

¹⁰⁰⁷ Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, November 2008, pp. 62-64.

¹⁰⁰⁸ The former were of the view that a well-funded ministry dedicated to the development and challenges of the Niger Delta will accelerate development processes and calm tensions in the region. But the latter, based on experience with existing ministries in the nation, believed the ministry would be bogged down by inefficiency, administrative ills and bureaucratic bottlenecks like others in the country. Since no ministry was created to develop

long afterward, there was confusion about the relationship between the Niger Delta Ministry and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which had been established in 2000 to provide infrastructural development in the region – in other words, duplication of development functions. Further confusion arose related to low budgetary allocation to the ministry, questionable capability, origin and designation of the individuals appointed as Ministers (Ufot Ekaette, from Akwa Ibom State, as senior minister and God'sday Orubebe, from Delta State, as junior minister), and whether to locate the ministry headquarters in Abuja or a state in the Niger Delta.¹⁰⁰⁹ The bottom line is that in the region, there was no development or development work-in-progress corresponding to the government's established institutional responses and pronouncements.

The important report by the TCND emphasized the question of good governance and laid out a clear plan of action. But once more the report went unheeded. Instead the federal government, side by side with these peace initiatives, funded military campaigns in the region. The budgetary allocation for military hardware and campaigns in the Niger Delta was far more than for all development-related institutions in the region combined.¹⁰¹⁰ The budgetary allocation as it concerns the Niger Delta points to a government that was more prepared for war than development of the region. To justify the massive investment it had just received, the JTF (military joint task force) unleashed new attacks on targeted insurgent strongholds in the region. The militants responded with equally ferocious attacks on oil installations in the region; thus there was a renewal of militancy targeted at oil facilities with intent to cripple the industry.

The militancy continued to escalate to the extent that by May 2009 the oil fields were barely functional (over one million barrels shut-in). At this point the government launched a counterinsurgency attack by the JTF focused especially on the western Delta along the so-called Warri axis, with considerable displacement of people and loss of life. Most affected in the attacks were the Gbaramatu people, an Ijaw clan who inhabit the creeks and lowland environments of the Benin River. Within a month of its attack -- on June 25, 2009 -- the federal government announced a sixty-day (from August 6 to October 4, 2009) amnesty package for ex-militants. While declaring his sixty-day amnesty window to militants, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua acknowledged that the "challenges of the Niger Delta arose mainly from the inadequacies of previous attempts at meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the people,"¹⁰¹¹ and it was in this regard that "certain elements of the Niger Delta populace have resorted to unlawful means of agitation for the development of the region including militancy thereby threatening peace, security, order and good governance and jeopardizing the economy of the

Abuja, the federal capital territory, into a mega city on its movement from Lagos, with political will and if given same attention the Niger Delta can be developed.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., "Amnesty and Post-Amnesty Peace in the window of opportunity Closing for the Niger Delta," in Obi, C., & Rustad, S. A., *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, London: Zed Books, 2011.

¹⁰¹⁰ The huge military budgetary allocation of 444 billion naira and less than 100 billion naira for development (all institutions of development combined) became worrisome and a thing of concern to many people who questioned how much, if at all, the government was serious and sincere about its commitment to peace and development in the region.

¹⁰¹¹ President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, At the Proclamation of Amnesty for Niger Delta Militants, Abuja, 25th June 2009.

nation.”¹⁰¹²

The President therefore pronounced the option and grant of “amnesty and unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta.”¹⁰¹³ By this declaration – Disarmament Demobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR) -- all militants were expected to do just that: disarm, renounce violent activities, and be reintegrated into society.¹⁰¹⁴ Arms collection venues were created in various states of the Niger Delta, and many (by estimation thirty thousand, though some believe that figure is highly exaggerated), including regional and local “commanders,” have since embraced the amnesty offer and have been receiving a monthly stipend from the amnesty office since 2009.¹⁰¹⁵ Some are currently undergoing vocational training while others are in educational institutions in and outside Nigeria. Yet the majority of ex-militants are roaming the streets of Warri, Port Harcourt, Yenagoa, Benin, and Abuja. Most worrisome is the fact that some who have been “trained” in and outside the country have since returned to the Niger Delta with little or no skill due to lack of facilities and capacity building in the training institutions to which they were assigned. The large budgetary allocation (over \$400 million every year) is not in any measure commensurate with the human capital development in the region. Rather than concentrate on such development as a catalyst for peace and stability, the amnesty program has become a platform for political patronage; it’s used to pad the incomes of political cronies, compromise targeted youth leaders, and buy off aggrieved ex-militants in the Niger Delta.¹⁰¹⁶ This accounts for why some ex-militant leaders in the region have called for a thorough audit of the amnesty program.

Post-Amnesty and New Trends

The federal government’s Disarmament Demobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR) program started on a shaky note.¹⁰¹⁷ But history intervened once again as President Yar’Adua

¹⁰¹² Ibid,

¹⁰¹³ Ibid,

¹⁰¹⁴ It is important to note that a faction of MEND declined the amnesty offer and vowed to continue with the arms struggle until autonomy (resource control and self-determination) is achieved for the region.

¹⁰¹⁵ Information obtained from the Amnesty Office in Abuja is to the effect that the first batch of militants that surrendered before the October 4 2009 deadline was 20,192 while another of 6,166 were added in 2012 as second batch. Still another 3,642 were added in 2013 as third batch. This brings the total figure to 30,000. With no proper documentation and profiling there was no way of verifying this claim and figures.

¹⁰¹⁶ In late July 2015, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), an anti-corruption agency in Nigeria, invited a former Chairman of the amnesty program and Special Adviser on Niger Delta Affairs to former President Goodluck Jonathan, for questioning on July 28, 2015 over allegations of embezzlement and fraudulent diversion of funds running into millions of Naira. Mr. Kingsley Kuku, former Chairman of the amnesty program and Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta, who promised to help the Commission probe his stewardship under President Goodluck Jonathan agreed to honor the EFCC’s invitation in late September 2015 by virtue of his unavailability due to health concerns. Part of his response reads, “The record of my stewardship under the Presidential Amnesty Program is an open document and it is available for scrutiny since I have nothing to hide about what we did.”

¹⁰¹⁷ Besides the lack of preparedness on the part of government, there were accusations of inflation of the number of militants, embezzlement of funds by members of the Amnesty Committee and inadequate facilities in the designated camps. These allegations prompted the militia leaders and stakeholders to set up an Independent Committee in

was taken gravely ill in November 2009 and was shipped to Saudi Arabia for treatment. Nobody other than a handful of close advisers knew anything of his actual condition. He mysteriously returned to the country on February 24, 2010, but died on May 5. Delta native Vice President Goodluck Jonathan had assumed responsibilities of the presidency, but over this entire period the amnesty process -- and indeed the whole country -- had in effect stalled for almost six months. In any case there was much speculation that many militants had not taken the amnesty, the disarmament process was woefully incomplete, and many of the militants who had been waiting in holding camps for months were about to return to the creeks. Such was the situation until August 2010 when some of the rather poorly equipped training camps finally begun. It was a very delicate situation and it remains a very big question whether the militant leaders (Tompolo, Asari, Ateke, Farah, Boyloaf, etc.) will be prepared, or indeed able, to simply receive state payments and keep their boys from a renewal of militancy. The amnesty may have brought temporary peace and the much-needed uninterrupted flow of crude oil from the region, but it does not address the fundamental problems that led to armed insurgency¹⁰¹⁸ -- resource ownership and control and self-determination.

Since August 2010 and continuing to the present, the program has been marred by protests in Warri, Yenagoa, Benin, Port Harcourt and the federal capital (Abuja) itself by disgruntled militants. The picture is not rosy. As if to drive home the delicacy of the situation and the growing resentments over the failure of the amnesty program with Jonathan as President, during the Independence Day celebrations on October 1, 2010, two car bombs were detonated in Abuja, killing twelve people.¹⁰¹⁹ In the wake of these incidents President Goodluck Jonathan was

December 2009 to examine the amnesty process holistically. The Independent Committee discovery shows that 80% of the start-off fund (being sixty-five billion naira) allocated for the amnesty process has been assigned to contractors and consultants in the program. It was also discovered that some designated centers for vocational training were non-existent, even those that existed were not up to standard. The Independent Committee report condemned in strong terms the Amnesty Committee and advised that the program should be properly handled to forestall further violence in the region. It therefore, suggested some credible local and international institutions and craft centers for training of the militants. This Independent Committee's report, protests from the militants and stakeholders in the region facilitated the disbandment of the Amnesty Committee by Acting President Goodluck Jonathan in December 2009. The Amnesty Committee at inauguration was Chaired by General Godwin Abbe (retired and then Minister for Defense). President Goodluck Jonathan removed him as minister of Defense after the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Mr. Timi Alaibe who was Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta Affairs doubled as chairman of the Amnesty Program. The reintegration process was therefore, affiliated to the office of the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta overseeing the process. When Mr. Timi Alaibe left to contest the Governorship election in Bayelsa State in late 2010, Hon. Kingsley Kuku was appointed Special Adviser to President on Niger Delta Affairs and Chairman of the Amnesty Committee.

¹⁰¹⁸ Henry Okah, a MEND leader, during his meeting with President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in November 2009, insisted that the fundamental problems that led to insurgency in the Niger Delta must be addressed for peace to reign in the region. Similarly, Alhaji Dokubo Asari refused to accept the amnesty on the ground that he had not committed any offence against the Nigerian state. A faction of MEND also rejected the amnesty, claiming it's a ploy by government intended to give them unlimited access to oil in the region rather than address the fundamental problems of the region.

¹⁰¹⁹ Henry Okah, Charles Okah and Edmund Ebiwari were alleged to have masterminded the Abuja bomb blast. While Henry was arrested in South Africa, Charles and Edmund were arrested in Nigeria. Before then, on March 15 2010, MEND (factional MEND that rejected the amnesty offer) disrupted a post amnesty dialogue at the premises of Delta State Government House Annex, Asaba, through the detonation of two car bombs in the venue. MEND attributes the interruption to talk shows without corresponding action saying, "the deceit of endless dialogue and conferences will no longer be tolerated" (Jomo Gbomo, March 15, 2010). John Togo, an ex-militant leader and commander of the Niger-Delta Liberation Force, (NDLF), who had earlier taken the amnesty offer returned to the

considerably pressured by “hawks” within his government to “control his people” even though he, rather carelessly, sought to exonerate the Niger Delta and point the finger toward northern forces for the bombings. This exacerbated tensions around ethnic, regional and religious identities in Nigeria’s fractious federalism.

There was a period of anxiety during President Yar’Adua’s illness, as to whether Goodluck Jonathan, his Vice President from the Christian south (Niger Delta), should be allowed to be President. It was a moment of crisis, a time when the possibility of the military coming back to power was not ruled out. But in February 2010 the National Assembly intervened and introduced the “Doctrine of Necessity,” which empowered the Vice President to be Acting President. The Muslim north was not comfortable with the idea and so when President Yar’Adua eventually died in May 2010 there was a northern clamor for a president of northern Muslim extraction to continue Umaru Musa Yar’Adua’s tenure as president (and possibly continue until 2015) instead of southern Christian Goodluck Jonathan as stipulated in the constitution.¹⁰²⁰ But Goodluck Jonathan did not stop as Acting President; he also contested the 2011 general elections as the ruling party’s (PDP) flag bearer and won.¹⁰²¹ He was sworn in as President of Nigeria on May 29, 2011. The Muslim north’s clamor for the presidency, its avowed promise to make the country ungovernable for southern Christian President Goodluck Jonathan, and the renewed Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast along with constant threats by Niger Delta militants to go into war if anything happens to Goodluck Jonathan (a minority ethnic President), heated up the polity.

Thus clearly the emergence of a southern Christian President in 2011 was greeted with mixed reactions by the north and south of Nigeria. The election unveiled once again Nigeria’s fragile and complex ethnic, religious and regional federal configurations; ethnicity, religion, and regional affiliation played a big role during and after the election. The election received accolades from local and international observers for being well managed compared to previous ones. Yet there was post-election violence in the north triggered by the belief that Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), a northern Muslim, should have been

creeks with his followers and resumed attacks on oil facilities in the Delta State axis. He was however, killed during an aerial bombardment by the Joint Task Force, JTF, on the Niger-Delta, in May 2011. With several attacks in the wake of the bombings the situations remain fragile and potentially explosive.

¹⁰²⁰ The Muslim north’s clamor was based on the party’s (PDP) constitution, which guarantees rotational presidency between the north and south of Nigeria. Obasanjo, a Christian from the south had ruled for eight years (1999 – 2007) and the north believes it was their turn to have the presidency for eight years with Yar’Adua (2007-2015), but he suddenly died. So it was their opinion that a northern Muslim rather than a southern Christian should take his place so as to satisfy the northern interest as contained in the party’s constitution. The emergence of a southern Christian, Goodluck Jonathan, as Acting President and subsequently as an elected President in May 2011 (with support mostly from the Christian south), caused some Muslim northern leaders to feel cheated and they promised to make the country ungovernable for him.

¹⁰²¹ There was a serious controversy on whether President Goodluck Jonathan (a southern Christian) should be allowed to contest the primaries of his party (PDP) and become its flag bearer. With support mainly from the south and some elements in the north he contested the party (PDP) primaries and won, and became its flag bearer. Other popular northern Muslim candidates who contested the 2011 Presidential election on the platform of other political parties include: Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Nuhu Ribadu of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Ibrahim Shekarau of All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). Muhammadu Buhari who has a cult followership in some northern Muslim states came second in the election.

declared winner.¹⁰²² In the Christian south, many welcomed the emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as winner of the election.¹⁰²³ Many people expected Goodluck Jonathan, a minority ethnic president, to turn the fortune of the country around based on his pre-election campaign promises and an inauguration speech anchored in a “transformation agenda” for the country. He had set anti-corruption, youth empowerment, power sector reform, and judicial and electoral reforms as the main foci of his administration.

Just a few years into his administration, hopes of a better standard of living were dashed as things began to falter – from the ill-advised removal of fuel subsidy in January 2012, which attracted demonstrations all over the country, to the astronomical rise in Boko Haram terrorist activities in the northeast region of Nigeria.¹⁰²⁴ The strongest criticism against President Goodluck Jonathan was his inability to stop the violence from the Muslim fundamentalist group, Boko Haram. The President’s failure to decisively take on the Boko Haram scourge from the onset did not help his case. He foot-dragged, probably because the circumstances of his emergence put a brake on him and he did not want to be seen as someone who “usurped” the position of the north and was also at war with northern people. But a decisive action *ab initio* was required to crush the Boko Haram insurgency and prevent it from becoming the uncontrollable full-grown terrorist gang that they are now. Also despite the President’s claim of zero-tolerance for corruption, the fight against corruption was not robustly pursued. On the

¹⁰²² In parts of some northern states (Kano, Katsina, Bauchi and Borno) churches and Christian worship centers were burnt, non-indigenes were killed and ad hoc staff members (National Youth Corps Members, NYSC, co-opted into the conduct of the election) by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were attacked and murdered by rampaging Islamic youths. More than 500 persons were killed in the post-election violence that erupted in the north. The post-election violence was attributed to comments made by the leadership of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) to its teeming Muslim supporters in the north. The election showed the north-south divide in Nigeria politics – Muhammadu Buhari’s party (CPC) did well in the core Muslim states of the north, while southern Christian Goodluck Jonathan had an overwhelming majority votes in the southeast and south-south regions. Even though the CPC made little or no efforts to campaign in the Christian southeast and south-south regions, it issued a statement rejecting the election results in states of these regions, alleging manipulation of ballot by the electoral body. The CPC therefore called for the outright cancellation of election results from the southeast and south-south states where Goodluck Jonathan scored 90% or more votes. But election in Muslim northern states such as Katsina where the CPC had 83% votes was considered free, free and credible.

¹⁰²³ Before the elections, the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) with followership in the north and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) with followership in the southwest tried to form a merger to confront the dominance of the ruling party (PDP) at the center. But they could not reach an agreement, hence went into the election as regional parties with northern candidates as their flag bearers – Muhammadu Buhari for CPC and Nuhu Buhari for ACN.

¹⁰²⁴ There were hired demonstrators in parts of the Niger Delta to support the fuel subsidy policy of the government, while the demonstrations in the southwest and north were also political - sponsored by persons who lost out in the power game and those whose economic interest were threatened. The country was divided along ethnic, religious and regional lines during the fuel subsidy protests, and with regard to the government’s transformation agenda. The social media became a space for shaping public opinion as it relates to perception on governance through attack or support of government policies and decisions – most civil society groups, NGOs and individuals became paid agents of government or opposition forces. Regardless of outcome, majority of Niger Delta people who see President Goodluck Jonathan as “our own” and or “our turn” supported his administration’s policies and consistently attributed his short-comings to the lack of focus since inception due to the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast region – they constantly appealed to his minority ethnic (Ijaw, Niger Delta) origin status as reason for the barrage of criticisms against his administration by majority ethnic groups. But adversaries of the government and the President, who were mainly from the north and some sections of the southwest attributed their criticisms and attacks to dashed hopes - the lack of development or progress in the country, and to the weakness and ‘cluelessness’ on the political leadership of the nation to address corruption, power, unemployment as promised.

economic front, even though Nigeria emerged the largest economy in Africa and the 26th largest in the world, the poverty level despite reducing, remained unacceptably high, with about seventy percent of the population living below the poverty line.¹⁰²⁵

The above criticisms became the main focus of the opposition in the 2015 election, which was won by Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC). In anticipation of the 2015 election, the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) from the north, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) from the west, a faction of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in the east, and the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) had formed a political alliance called All Progressive Congress (APC) to wrest power from President Goodluck Jonathan's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Dramatically, it was a coalition of two out of Nigeria's three majority ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba) against a minority President. For instance, Dokubo Asari's Niger Delta Peoples Salvation front (NDPSF) reacted to the outcome of the election noting that Buhari's victory was a regional conspiracy against Goodluck Jonathan: "The voting pattern has clearly shown that the Gambari North and the Yorubas are united in the conquest of the Niger Deltans and the Igbos of the defunct Biafra with the middle belt now used as pawns."¹⁰²⁶ The group advocated for a return to the creeks when it said, "The conditions that advanced the need to embrace the creeks have been sadly re-energized, it is clear that a vicious government, which may maim and murder the voice of the so-called minorities may have just been birthed."¹⁰²⁷ Although charged ethnic, religious and regional sentiments marked Goodluck Jonathan's presidency, in the 2015 federal elections, the fractious relations between groups reverberated even in the Niger Delta, unveiling old and highly contentious relations and rivalries.

In the western delta, Itsekiri and Urhobo who had earlier rejected the amnesty and returned no arms protested their non-inclusion in the amnesty program and described it as an ethnic program designed to benefit the Ijaw. They were however, incorporated into the program through the second and third batch phases. But in 2014, the age long territorial dispute between Ijaw (Gbaramatu) and Itsekiri resurfaced over ownership of the land and naming of the Delta State multi-billion dollar Export Processing Zone (EPZ) project in Warri-southwest LGA.¹⁰²⁸ There was tension in the waterways of Delta State, hence, the flag-off ceremony was suspended to enable parties resolve outstanding grievances. After several peace meetings with the NNPC and Delta State government the two ethnic groups (Ijaw and Itsekiri) agreed on a separation of the project - Gas Industrial city, Ogidigben, and Deep Sea Port, Gbaramatu, Delta State.¹⁰²⁹ With this resolution, President Goodluck Jonathan performed the groundbreaking ceremony of the EPZ project in late March 2015. But immediately after the election (with Goodluck Jonathan out of office and Yoruba as Vice President) the Itsekiri, who claim a history of affinity with the

¹⁰²⁵ Amidst all these criticisms, the President Goodluck Jonathan administration must be commended on the areas of electoral transparency, revitalization of the agricultural sector of Nigeria's economy that was abandoned since the oil boom of the 1970s, resolution of the recurring problem of fertilizer distribution, resuscitation of the railway system and rehabilitation of dilapidated airport facilities in the country.

¹⁰²⁶ "Asai-Dokubo Calls for return to the creeks", *Thisday*, April 2, 2015, p. 40. See also, Dr. Femi Aribisala's interview "Why I'm not proud to call Buhari my president", *Vanguard*, April 23, 2015.

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid*,

¹⁰²⁸ Onabu, O., *Thisday*, "Gas City Project: Fresh Threats Loom Over Ijaw-Itsekiri Reconciliation Process," June 16, 2014. Amaize, E., *Vanguard*, "EPZ Controversy: Itsekiri, Ijaw talks end in deadlock," November 27, 2014.

¹⁰²⁹ Amaize, E., *Vanguard*, "Happening Now: At Last, Ijaw, Itsekiri agree on EPZ groundbreaking," March 04, 2014.

Yoruba, have gone to court and secured a ruling to stop the naming of the sea port territory as Gbaramatu. Again, the relative peace in Warri, came under threat, following the selection of only Itsekiri candidates as flag-bearers of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), into the three Warri local councils slated for October 25 2014. Problem started in the three Warri LGAs (Warri South West, Warri South and Warri North LGAs), which comprise the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo, over political arrangement that favors their Itsekiri neighbors. The political arrangement under the ruling PDP at the state had three Itsekiri candidates for the council polls and planned to field Itsekiri for the State House of Assembly, House of Representatives and the Senate seats in 2015 leaving the Ijaw and Urhobo with nothing.¹⁰³⁰ The Ijaw warned that this arrangement if not quickly corrected might throw the state into another round of communal violence. The Ijaw vowed to resist any attempt to stop them from fielding candidates in any office especially in Warri Southwest and Warri North councils.¹⁰³¹ The governor and leadership of the party in the state intervened and amicably resolved grievances arising from perceived or real political marginalization. In the Eastern delta (Rivers State), it was politics of the largely Ijaw Riverine vs non-Ijaw upland on who is best fitted for the governorship position. But many at the long run were swayed in favor of the PDP by virtue of President Goodluck Jonathan's presence and position in the party. These tensions (ethnic, religious, and regional) were doused, however, by President Goodluck Jonathan's concession of defeat to Muhammadu Buhari of the APC.¹⁰³²

In his inaugural speech on May 29, 2015 President Muhammadu Buhari gave December 2015 as the end date for the amnesty program. But he noted that his government intends to invest heavily in the projects and programs currently in place. He therefore enjoined the leadership and people in the Niger Delta to cooperate with the government in the rehabilitation programs, which (he promised) will be streamlined and made more effective.¹⁰³³ The President's December termination date for the amnesty program has generated anxiety and apprehension among beneficiaries and groups in the region. There is palpable anxiety in the region occasioned by delayed payment of stipends to beneficiaries and training centers/institutions around the world. For instance, 13 Niger Delta ex-militant youths undergoing commercial pilot training at the Lufthansa Flight Training School in Frankfurt, Germany, were sent away from the institution for non-payment of fees.¹⁰³⁴ The plight of ex-militants was attributed to delay in the appointment of a substantive Chairman of the Amnesty Program by President Muhammadu Buhari. But on July 28, 2015, the federal government announced the appointment of retired Brigadier General Paul T. Boroh (retired) as Coordinator of the Federal Government Amnesty Program for Ex-Niger Delta Militants. The appointment of General Boroh is expected to lead to the speedy resolution of the recent glitches in its implementation such as unpaid allowances to the ex-militants and

¹⁰³⁰ Chief Patrick Bigba, Press release by the Warri Ijaw Peace Monitoring Group (WIPMG), October 19, 2014.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid,

¹⁰³² There was mixed reactions to President Goodluck Jonathan's concession of defeat in the Niger Delta. Considering the deep tensions generated before and during the elections some were of the view that it was a bold decision to safe lives and property and the nation as a whole from absolute violence and possible disintegration, others think he shouldn't have bowed to the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba 'conspiracy' against the Niger Delta. Hence while some admitted that Goodluck Jonathan lost the election, others like Dokubo Asari accepted the outcome reluctantly.

¹⁰³³ President Muhammadu Buhari inaugural Address delivered as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, May 29th 2015, Abuja.

¹⁰³⁴ Okhomina, O., *Leadership*, "Amnesty: Women protest the sack of 13 ex-militants Undergoing Pilot training Abroad," July 22, 2015.

training institutions. Before now, some amnesty beneficiaries have threatened to return to the swampy creeks to indulge in their old ways if the stipend payment is stopped without any meaningful alternative plan. The Urhobo Youth Council on its part, has called for an overhaul of the amnesty program, while a faction of MEND and some Itsekiri youth leaders called for the termination of the program because it had left unaddressed the core issues that led to civil armed struggle in the region. But the Ijaw Youth Council have called for an extension of the scheme to enable those already engaged in educational or vocational programs complete their training and/or give a comprehensive development plan for the region. Since Goodluck Jonathan left office without implementing a comprehensive development plan for the Niger Delta, there is the very strong likelihood that the region will relapse into violent armed conflict when the amnesty program is terminated in December.

Conclusion

The unity among Ijaw clans has been reinforced by INC/IYC in contemporary times and further consolidated by the Goodluck Jonathan Presidency (2011-2015) – a strong bond now exist among clans stretching from the east to the west delta. There is an admission and acceptance of Ijawness among fringe groups (especially the younger generation) who earlier felt reluctant to identify themselves as Ijaw such as Andoni, Kalabari, Okrika, Engenni etc. There is an Ijaw nationalism engendered by INC and IYC against real or perceived political and economic discrimination and marginalization by the state or group(s) in any part of the nation. Rather than speak in disparate tunes (eastern or western Ijaw) the INC and IYC speak as organic ethnic bodies on behalf of Ijaw in any part of the country. There is a renewed Ijaw sense of solidarity across the delta – the Bayelsa State government’s appointment of Felix Tuodolo (from Delta State and first IYC president) into its cabinet as commissioner for culture and Ijaw Affairs is intended to foster Ijaw unity in action and deeds.¹⁰³⁵ There is a renewed unity of action against state, ethnic and corporate injustice perpetrated in any section of Ijaw land across the delta. Currently, there is an Ijaw harmony to protect the corporate existence of Ijaw against “foreign” bodies as well as for the promotion and development of Ijaw land and people in the Nigerian Federation. Already, the removal of some Ijaw from their statutory appointments and attempts to

¹⁰³⁵ For instance, during the EPZ naming saga involving Gbaramatu (Ijaw clan) and Itsekiri (Yoruba), the INC/IYC as well as Ijaw elites (Chief E. K. Clark) from other clans came to the aid of Gbaramatu and persuaded President Goodluck Jonathan to suspend the groundbreaking ceremony until all grievances related to the project are amicably settled among parties. Similarly, even though Jonathan had done very little with regard to development in the region, Ijaw (east to west) overwhelmingly supported and defended his policies. His party (PDP) was the favorite and won the election in most Ijaw communities. Even in the struggle for political power in Rivers State involving Dakuku Peterside (an Ijaw Governorship candidate of the APC and supporter of Buhari) and Nyesome Wike (an Ikwerre Governorship candidate of the PDP and supporter of Jonathan), most Ijaw support Nyesome Wike rather than Dakuku Peterside because support or affiliation to the APC is viewed by many (especially Ijaw) as betrayal of a fellow Ijaw or fellow Niger Deltan. Any support for the PDP is considered support for Goodluck Jonathan, the leader and symbol of the party, on the other hand, support for Muhammadu Buhari and/or his APC is considered as support for Hausa-Fulani/Yoruba (majority ethnic) domination of the Niger Delta.

probe others by the Buhari administration has been termed witch-hunting.¹⁰³⁶ This has created anxiety, generated tensions and a possible degeneration of the fragile peace in the region.

Except the Nigerian government acts swiftly and give desired attention to age-old grievances, violence may soon resurface in the region. The presidential amnesty program and pay-offs may have restored temporary peace and increased oil output (oil output has increased from less than 800,000 to about 2.5 million bpd), yet the root causes of insurgency (poverty, pollution, underdevelopment, unemployment and inadequate infrastructure) remain unaddressed.¹⁰³⁷ Development institutions established to address grievances in the region have all faltered. For example, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is bugged down by political interference and bickerings while the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs is starved of funds. Two new agencies, the Hydrocarbon Pollution Restoration Project (HYPREP) and the National Oil Spills Detection and Restoration Agency (NOSDRA) created to tackle oil spills have failed.¹⁰³⁸ A Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) initiated by President Musa Yar'Adua in 2009 to improve hydrocarbon governance and create funds for the development of oil-bearing areas has been trapped in the National Assembly since its introduction.¹⁰³⁹ In a nutshell, since proclamation of the amnesty program and subsequent surrender of weapons by the militants, no proper measure has been taken by the Nigerian state to address the core issues that produced violence in the delta.

While Goodluck Jonathan's electoral loss is causing anxiety in the delta, this has been further compounded by the Buhari administration's policy decisions since inception. Beyond his inaugural proclamation that the amnesty program which enthroned the fragile peace and rise in oil output would end in December 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari has terminated the petroleum pipeline protection contracts that Goodluck Jonathan awarded to ex-militant "commanders" in the delta and leadership of the western Yoruba ethnic militia, Oodua People's Congress (OPC).¹⁰⁴⁰ He also sacked an Ijaw Director General (Mr. Patrick Akpobolokemi) of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and revoked a ten-year running public private partnership initiative entered in 2012 between the agency and Global

¹⁰³⁶ The Muhammadu Buhari administration has promised to probe Goodluck Jonathan's tenure in its fight against corruption. While Godswill Orubebe (former minister for Niger Delta Affairs) has been dragged to the Code of Conduct Tribunal, Kingsley Kuku is still being awaited to appear before the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Also, Diezane Allison Madueke's (the minister of petroleum during Goodluck Jonathan tenure) house was searched by EFCC even though she is undergoing medical treatment in the United Kingdom while Mr. Patrick Akpobolokemi (whose tenure expires in December 2018) was removed as Director General, Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency all NIMASA ongoing projects and contracts in Ijaw territories (the Maritime University and Dockyard at Okerenkoko and the technical school in Okoloba) have been suspended on the pretext that they are being investigated by the EFCC.

¹⁰³⁷ One basic problem and agent of violence in the Niger Delta is unemployment. This is a region that has been neglected for so long that youth unemployment is somewhere around seventy percent. This is a generation of youth with university education, who feel that their future prospects have been truncated. Addressing the employment question can speak to some of the concerns of people who currently feel that criminality presents a better career trajectory than licit (un)employment. Dealing with unemployment is central to lowering the violent temperature on what is a very tricky and complex problem.

¹⁰³⁸ International Crisis Group, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (III): Revisiting the Niger Delta," Brussels: ICG, September 2015.

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid,

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid,

West Vessel Specialists Limited (GWVSL), a company with links to ex-militant leacer, Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo).¹⁰⁴¹ These actions have created a perception that Muhammadu Buhari is anti-Niger Delta (anti-Ijaw) and heightened fears that the region may relapse into pre-2009 violent insurgency.¹⁰⁴² At the moment, it is not just the delta's stability and relationship to the future of the nation that is at stake.¹⁰⁴³ In the last couple of years an Islamic fundamentalist group, Boko Haram ("the movement against western education"), have destroyed a large part of the northeast (especially Maiduguri in Borno State) through sustained attacks. Boko Haram is a threat to Nigeria not just because of its avowed affiliation to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and/or Al Qaeda but because this afterall is a serious challenge to the very political core of the Nigerian state – this is the Muslim north talking about a radical moral decay and abandonment of the very principles of sharia and more widely of the political leadership and of their exclusion from a secular national project. But instead of a secular project, they seem to be offering a religious alternative. So, the question of Nigeria's future turns in part on how government (and by extension the global community) tackles these twin crisis.

On a final note, increased securitization and militarization of the Niger Delta will likely not end violent armed conflict. The solution does not lie in the deployment of more troops, security advisers, or military logistics into the region; rather, it lies in reversing the culture of impunity and the lack of accountability on the part of the ruling elites and oil companies to the people of the Niger Delta. Beyond geo-political specificities, it requires a holistic response to

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid,

¹⁰⁴² There are also tensions occasioned by legal challenge of polls (especially governorship elections) and contradictory judicial pronouncements involving states of the Niger Delta and other regions. The PDP's victory in states of the delta such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross Rivers and Delta States is been challenged by the APC in the various State election tribunals. For instance, while the PDP won its first legal battle against APC in Delta State, the case is different in Rivers State where the election tribunal sitting in Abuja (moved to Abuja due to the security situation in the state) annulled the election on grounds of non-use of the card readers during the governorship election. Similarly, the Akwa Ibom State election tribunal also sitting in Abuja (for security reasons) annulled elections in 18 out of the 31 LGAs in the State for non-use of the card readers and called for new election in the 18 LGAs – both states have appealed the tribunal judgments. While the non-use of card readers is used as a ground to nullify elections in the delta states, the Court of Appeal sitting in Lagos upheld the election of the APC governorship candidate, Akinwunmi Ambode, stating that the non-use of card readers or dysfunctional nature of card readers cannot invalidate the Lagos State governorship election. The Appeal Court held that the Electoral Act (2010) as amended does not recognise the malfunctioning of a card reader as one of the factors that can lead to the nullification of an election - the appellate court pronouncement is based on the fact that the Electoral Act (2010) predates the introduction of the card reader (introduced in 2015 elections). These contradictory judgments have generated tensions with many in the delta insinuating that the APC is using the electoral tribunals to truncate the wish of the people and gain political control of the oil wealth in states of the region. As the economic nerve center of the Nigerian state and epicenter of the oil and gas industry that sustains the entire country, controlling the Niger Delta therefore is of critical significance to the federal government.

¹⁰⁴³ The type of situation ongoing particularly in the last five years in which one part of the nation (northeast) has been confronting a Muslim fundamentalist insurgency and of the instabilities that have surrounded it – millions of internally displaced persons, proportionate loss of lives and property. Similarly, a renewed agitation and huge protests by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) demanding for an independent "Biafra State" is graduating and grinding the Southeastern region to a halt. The ongoing (October 2015) arrest and trial of the Director of Radio Biafra/Biafra TV and leader of IPOB, Mr. Nnamdi Kanu (he was arrested on the 14th October 2015 at the Golden Tulip Hotel, Ikeja, Lagos, by the Department of State Security (DSS) for criminal conspiracy, managing and belonging to unlawful society and criminal intimidation), has further heightened tensions and proportionately swirled the army of protesters demanding for an autonomous "Biafra State" for the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria.

issues of poverty, democratic governance, employment, resource distribution, marginalization, and ecological justice. The resort to a military option over the years has not only aggravated the problem but has also made the military part of the problem. It is now time for the government, international community, and multinational oil corporations to jettison coercive violent methods in favor of a comprehensive, nonviolent, participatory resolution of the conflict. This would set the stage for dismantling armed local resistance and building sustainable peace in the region.

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Appendix

THE KAIAMA DECLARATION IJAW YOUTHS OF THE NIGER DELTA

BEING COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE ALL IJAW YOUTHS
CONFERENCE WHICH HELD IN THE TOWN OF KAIAMA THIS 11TH DAY OF
DECEMBER 1998.

INTRODUCTION

We, Ijaw youths drawn from over five hundred communities from over 40 clans that make up the Ijaw nation and representing 25 representative organizations met, today, in Kaiama to deliberate on the best way to ensure the continuous survival of the indigenous peoples of the Ijaw ethnic nationality of the Niger Delta within the Nigerian state.

After exhaustive deliberations, the Conference observed:

a. That it was through British colonization that the IJAW NATION was forcibly put under the Nigerian State

b. That but for the economic interests of the imperialists, the Ijaw ethnic nationality would have evolved as a distinct and separate sovereign nation, enjoying undiluted political, economic, social, and cultural AUTONOMY.

c. That the division of the Southern Protectorate into East and West in 1939 by the British marked the beginning of the balkanization of a hitherto territorially contiguous and culturally homogeneous Ijaw people into political and administrative units, much to our disadvantage. This trend is continuing in the balkanization of the Ijaws into six states-Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom States, mostly as minorities who suffer socio-political, economic, cultural and psychological deprivations.

d. That the quality of life of Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalization visited on Ijaws by the alliance of the Nigerian state and transnational oil companies.

e. That the political crisis in Nigeria is mainly about the struggle for the control of oil mineral resources which account for over 80% of GDP, 95 %of national budget and 90% of foreign exchange earnings. From which, 65%, 75% and 70% respectively are derived from within the Ijaw nation. Despite these huge contributions, our reward from the Nigerian State remains avoidable deaths resulting from ecological devastation and military repression.

f. That the unabating damage done to our fragile natural environment and to the health of our people is due in the main to uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas which has led to numerous oil spillages, uncontrolled gas flaring, the opening up of our forests to loggers, indiscriminate canalization, flooding, land subsidence, coastal erosion, earth

tremors etc. Oil and gas are exhaustible resources and the complete lack of concern for ecological rehabilitation, in the light of the Oloibiri experience, is a signal of impending doom for the peoples of Ijawland.

g. That the degradation of the environment of Ijawland by transnational oil companies and the Nigerian State arise mainly because Ijaw people have been robbed of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land and resources through the instrumentality of undemocratic Nigerian State legislations such as the Land Use Decree of 1978, the Petroleum Decrees of 1969 and 1991, the Lands (Title Vesting etc.) Decree No. 52 of 1993 (Osborne Land Decree), the National Inland Waterways Authority Decree No. 13 of 1997 etc.

h. That the principle of Derivation in Revenue Allocation has been consciously and systematically obliterated by successive regimes of the Nigerian state. We note the drastic reduction of the Derivation Principle from 100% (1953), 50% (1960), 45% (1970), 20% (1975) 2% (1982), 1.5% (1984) to 3% (1992 to date), and a rumored 13% in Abacha's 1995 undemocratic and unimplemented Constitution.

i. That the violence in Ijawland and other parts of the Niger Delta area, sometimes manifesting in intra and inter ethnic conflicts are sponsored by the State and transnational oil companies to keep the communities of the Niger Delta area divided, weak and distracted from the causes of their problems.

j. That the recent revelations of the looting of national treasury by the Abacha junta is only a reflection of an existing and continuing trend of stealing by public office holders in the Nigerian state. We remember the over 12 billion dollars Gulf war windfall, which was looted by Babangida and his cohorts We note that over 70% of the billions of dollars being looted by military rulers and their civilian collaborators is derived from our ecologically devastated Ijawland.

Based on the foregoing, we, the youths of Ijawland, hereby make the following resolutions to be known as the Kaiama Declaration:

- 1.** All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival.
- 2.** We cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our peoples/communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent. These include the Land Use Decree and The Petroleum Decree etc.
- 3.** We demand the immediate withdrawal from Ijawland of all military forces of occupation and repression by the Nigerian State. Any oil company that employs the services of the armed forces of the Nigerian State to "protect" its operations will be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people. Family members of military personnel stationed in Ijawland should appeal to their people to leave the Ijaw area alone.
- 4.** Ijaw youths in all the communities in all Ijaw clans in the Niger Delta will take steps to

implement these resolutions beginning from the 30th of December 1998, as a step towards reclaiming the control of our lives. We, therefore, demand that all oil companies stop all exploration and exploitation activities in the Ijaw area. We are tired of gas flaring; oil spillages, blowouts and being labeled saboteurs and terrorists. It is a case of preparing the noose for our hanging. We reject this labeling. Hence, we advise all oil companies staff and contractors to withdraw from Ijaw territories by the 30th December, 1998 pending the resolution of the issue of resource ownership and control in the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta

5. Ijaw youths and Peoples will promote the principle of peaceful coexistence between all Ijaw communities and with our immediate neighbors, despite the provocative and divisive actions of the Nigerian State, transnational oil companies and their contractors. We offer a hand of friendship and comradeship to our neighbors: the Itsekiri, Ilaje, Urhobo, Isoko, Edo, Ibibio, Ogoni, Ekpeye, Ikwerre etc. We affirm our commitment to joint struggle with the other ethnic nationalities in the Niger delta area for self-determination.

6. We express our solidarity with all peoples organizations and ethnic nationalities in Nigeria and elsewhere who are struggling for self-determination and justice. In particular we note the struggle of the Oodua peoples Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egi Women's Movement etc.

7. We extend our hand of solidarity to the Nigerian oil workers (NUPENG and PENGASSAN) and expect that they will see this struggle for freedom as a struggle for humanity

8. We reject the present transition to civil rule program of the Abubakar regime, as it is not preceded by restructuring of the Nigerian federation. The way forward is a Sovereign National Conference of equally represented ethnic nationalities to discuss the nature of a democratic federation of Nigerian ethnic nationalities. Conference noted the violence and killings that characterized the last local government elections in most parts of the Niger Delta. Conference pointed out that these electoral conflicts are a manifestation of the undemocratic and unjust nature of the military transition program. Conference affirmed therefore, that the military are incapable of enthroning true democracy in Nigeria.

9. We call on all Ijaws to remain true to their Ijawness and to work for the total liberation of our people. You have no other true home but that which is in Ijawland.

10. We agreed to remain within Nigeria but to demand and work for Self Government and resource control for the Ijaw people. Conference approved that the best way for Nigeria is a federation of ethnic nationalities. The federation should be run on the basis equality and social justice.

Finally, Ijaw youths resolve to set up the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) to coordinate the struggle of Ijaw peoples for self-determination and justice.

Signed for the entire participants by:

Felix Tuodolo and Ogoriba, Timi Kaiser-Wilhelm.