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No Longer at Ease: Intellectuals and the Crisis of Nation-Statism in Nigeria in the 1990s

Introduction

Intellectuals, traditional and modern, as producers and purveyors of knowledge, ideas and societal totems linked to identity, meaning, culture and politics, have always played critical roles in the construction of nationalism(s). This should not be taken to imply the denial of the more fundamental role of the masses – the popular forces who seek national liberation, and whose anger and blood, fire the engines of national resistance against the exploiter/oppressor, and who expect the most from the fruits of freedom. Yet, while the masses fuel the nationalist fervour, it is the intellectuals who have control of the architecture of the ideology of national resistance, and the construction of a political-territorial space of refuge hinged upon a ‘national identity’. They are the ones that provide justification either for integration or for decentralisation, in ways that different units would be given autonomy, or even independence, in order to take control of their affairs. Conversely, some intellectuals may work for the perpetuation of the status quo under a national banner, while others seek its transformation either by the devolution of power and autonomy to (sub) national units, or by advocating secession.

Within the African context, in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, intellectuals played vital roles in all facets of socio-political life. It may be argued that in pre-colonial Africa, intellectuals as priests, griots, artists, Islamic scholars, philosophers and historians, gave meaning to identity and social progress. They were also important in giving expression to the shortcomings, strengths, unity, knowledge and common aspirations of their communities or kingdoms. In this regard, colonialism apparently interrupted the process of the evolution of Africa by its interventionist and exploitative logic. The colonial state in the process of destroying pre-colonial modes of production and integrating Africa into the capitalist mode of production undermined the sub-structure of African traditional intellectualism and its links with the nation. In its place, missionary and western education became the new fountains of African intellectualism that had to cohere with the imposed European-style colonial state. Although the western-educated African elite was relatively small and initially viewed with suspicion by the traditional elite and colonial administrators, by the end of the Second World War, they had emerged as the

articulate spokespersons of the masses, and the mobilisers of Pan Africanist and nationalist energies towards political freedom.¹

In spite of the nationalism of the western-education intellectuals and the ways their newspapers, books, speeches promoted the ideals of Pan Africanism and political freedom, they ended up inheriting a colonial state apparatus. Indeed, the new nation-states that emerged out of Africa at the 'end' of the nationalist struggles of the 1950s and 1960s did not really signify a break with the past. They were made in Europe, and were accepted by African nationalists. In real terms, independence amounted to the indigenisation of the colonial state. This implied that the state was not transformed in terms of its exploitative, extractive and oppressive nature, and that the imposition of the European model of the centralised nation-state on Africa had been legitimised. This was in spite of the fact that the 'artificial' nation-states in Africa with arbitrarily drawn boundaries each harboured many 'nations', and did not reflect the interests of the people lumped together in each nation. That all these multi-ethnic nations subordinated their differences to the over-arching logic of the nation-state during the decolonisation phase was no doubt influenced by considerations of expediency in the face of imminent independence. Some intellectuals in the name of national unity also justified such expediency, and they went ahead to advocate particular types of political arrangements that would best manage the differences/diversities between the constituent ethnic (nations) groups in the new nation-state. Clearly these were influenced by expectations of the gains of power, or from clear naivete as to the magnitude of the political struggles that lay ahead. It would appear then that there were two nationalisms – that from above – the elite, and that from below – the masses. The temporary unity of the 'two nationalisms,' unravelled when that from the above inherited the state and began to enjoy the perquisites of power.

Most of the intellectuals that articulated the project of the Nigerian nation-state in the decolonisation phase ended up as politicians, civil servants, or academics at the various tiers of the Nigerian federation. It did not take long after independence for the cracks to begin to appear in the nation-state project. At that point, hitherto suppressed ethno-regional passions were unleashed as the divisions between the factions of the Nigerian political class widened. Unfortunately, the intellectuals were not left out of these divisions based on their class interests. Even those who were apolitical, or even truly nationalist, found themselves in a minority, and unable to stem the strong influence of ethno-regional sentiment among the masses. This much was clear from the Western Region electoral crisis in 1965, the coups of 1966, the pogroms in Northern Nigeria, and the mobilisation of the Igbo 'nation' for secession in 1967, and the ugly descent into civil war in the same year.

However, with the end of the Nigerian civil war – a war of national unity in 1970, which coincided with an oil-boom – an integrative (centralist) nation-state project was imposed on Nigeria by the military. It was informed by

two considerations. First was the fear that regions (states) should not be strong enough to challenge the Centre, and secondly, that the Centre should control the oil produced in the Niger Delta, and distribute it equally to all parts of the country for national development. This was also to prevent any unit of the federation from being strong enough to challenge the Centre.

However, in spite of the sub-division of Nigeria from four regions in 1966,² to twelve, then nineteen, then twenty-one, and finally thirty-six states by the 1990s, the nation-state became immersed in a crisis. This crisis was owed partly to the collapse of the external oil sector, and the feeling in some parts of the country that the nation-state project was short-changing them. It was also alleged that federal power (particularly over oil wealth) had been in the hands of the northern faction of the Nigerian political elite, who had proceeded to monopolise the wealth for the long years of military rule, to the exclusion of other groups. The feelings of alienation were particularly strong in the ethnic minority region of the Niger Delta, where in spite of being the country's main oil producing region it had suffered neglect and the people remained impoverished, with their region underdeveloped and faced with the vagaries of oil production.³

It was in the context of the foregoing grievances that ethnic nationalism re-emerged in Nigeria. At its heart lay the interrogation of a hegemonic nation-state project that had allegedly been to the advantage of a hegemonic ethnic group, and was considered unfair and skewed against other ethnic groups (particularly the minorities that 'owned' the oil). It was further worsened by the emergence of ethnic militia which forcefully sought to pursue an agenda of self-determination and local autonomy within Nigeria. This went alongside loud demands, particularly from southern Nigeria and the Niger Delta, for the convening of a sovereign national conference of all the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, in order to re-negotiate the very basis of their belonging to the Nigerian Union. Although the hegemonic bloc that controls the Nigerian petro-state has so far resisted the efforts at restructuring Nigeria, there is little doubt that the country is immersed in a crisis of nation-statism which is yet to be resolved. There is no doubt that the present crisis of nation-statism in Nigeria is partly due to the inter-, and intra-ethnic struggles over the oil found in the Niger Delta. However, intellectuals have not been left out of the struggles for self-determination, and for the demands for the restructuring of the Nigerian federation.

It is therefore important to raise questions about the factors that led to the intellectualisation of ethnic nationalism as a critique of the hegemonic nation-state project in Nigeria, and how some intellectuals today could seemingly lend their support to the deconstruction of a nation-state project they worked for decades ago. How does globalisation come in, particularly in the face of the challenge of mediating the tensions between intellectualised

'ethno-nationalisms' in Nigeria, in the face of the imperatives of national unity and Pan Africanism in the 21st Century?

In going about its analysis, this paper is divided into four broad sections. The introduction provides an overview of the issues in the paper, while the second section examines the conceptual issues in the crisis of nation-statism in Nigeria. This dovetails into the third, and main section, of the paper that examines intellectuals and the crisis of nation-statism by drawing essentially on the case of the Niger Delta, Nigeria's main oil producing region and chief revenue earner, upon whom Nigeria's oil-hinged unity and existence as a nation-state ultimately depends. In the concluding section, the arguments are summed up, and the prospects for the future are captured.

Conceptual Issues in the Crisis of Nation-Statism in Nigeria

The crisis of Nation-statism, which currently raises the spectre of the possible disintegration of Nigeria,⁴ is the culmination of historical factors and the deepening contradictions in Nigeria's oil political economy. Eteng, in an analysis of the minority rights issue under Nigeria's federal structure, notes that:

The tension between Nigeria's federal centre and its constituent units has persisted since colonial times. It has frequently assumed genocidal proportions, thus constantly calling into serious question the philosophical and practical bases of the Nigerian federal system.⁵

The foregoing point is further underscored with instances of conflicts between the federal government and various minorities, such as the Tiv riots of 1959, 1960, 1964, the Nigerian civil war of 1967-70, the militarisation of the Niger Delta, and religious strife.⁶

The roots of the present crisis lie in the historiography of nationalism.⁷ In the earliest phase of 'modern' nationalism which was linked to Pan Africanism in the late 19th century, there was basically no fundamental disagreement with the colonial state structure imposed on African social formations.⁸ Rather, the protests were against racial discrimination and oppressive colonial laws, and the non-involvement of the western-trained African elite in the higher rungs of the colonial administration.⁹ This can be gleaned from the demands of organisations such as the Nationalist Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), and the West African Students Union (WASU), the Nigerian Youth Movement, and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). These groups in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s made up the first wave of nationalist agitation with strong connections with the Pan-African movement. Indeed, some of the actors in these organisations had studied in the United States of America and Britain, and had been involved in the Pan-African movement. Some of them who participated in the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Ghana in 1945 included Dr. James Aggrey, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Mbonu Ojike, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, S.L. Akintola, Magnus Williams and Wallace

Johnson.¹⁰ These Pan-Africanists propagated macro-nationalism along African and West African lines, but after the end of the Second World war, and with the decolonisation process in top gear, the second wave of nationalism took over, this time directed at the individual nation-state. From Pan-Africanism they turned their focus to their respective nation-states, setting up national parties in readiness to contest national power, but in some cases using ethnicity and religion and other primordial sentiments to mobilise the peasants and workers to support their political ambitions. Thus, in the new wave of nationalism, not only was the focus on the nation-state, but also on those parts or regions of the nation-state that could deliver power.

As has been noted in relation to Nigeria:

When it was clear that constitutional changes would transfer power to Nigerians, ambitious politicians dropped the ideals of Pan Africanism and even of national consciousness and created strong regional political parties... Such parties rested on strong ethnic feelings – indeed, the formation of such parties was preceded by cultural unions, which revived the ideology of the ethnos and manipulated local traditions for effectiveness and mobilization.¹¹

How then, can the change in the direction of nationalism be understood? This can be discerned from the link between the nationalists and a class project. It would appear that based on their exposure to western education and culture, the emergent Nigerian elite saw themselves as the natural successors to the colonialists,¹² that is, as a ruling class-in-waiting. Although in their writings, speeches and polemics they were anti-colonialist, their politics was accommodationist in orientation. Three issues are very critical. First, most of the nationalist elite were not against capitalism, even though they flirted with various forms social democracy, or Fabian socialism. They were aware of their class identity and project even as they formed alliances with the masses based on ethnicity and the need to overthrow a 'common enemy'. Second, they did not interrogate the structure of the colonial state that was basically an exploitative and oppressive in nature, even if some, like Obafemi Awolowo, had referred to Nigeria as a 'mere geographical expression', and advocated a federation of ethnic states, as the best political arrangement for managing Nigeria's diversity.¹³ Third, based on the ethnic underpinnings of their nationalism, the political parties they formed broadly represented ethno-sectional interests: Northern People's Congress – North (Hausa-Fulani), Action Group – West (Yoruba), National Council of Nigerian Citizens – East (Igbo). Apart from ethnic difference – and the exclusion of the 'other' from power and resources – the demographic factor became coterminous with power, with the majority with the obvious advantage, and the minority at a disadvantage. In this way the (ethnic) nationalists sowed the seeds for future discord and crisis in the Nigerian nation-state.

The outcome of the foregoing was that there was no fundamental break in the character of the nationalism of the Nigerian elite, safe for a 'shrinking' in its

focus over time. After its formation of a broad alliance with the masses in order to use their anger as a tool for negotiating the transfer of power, or what was really the indigenisation of the colonial state, the alliance was consumed in its own contradictions. After independence, this broad alliance began to break down under the new ideologies of national development and national unity which sought to homogenise the nation-state project, but led to regional rivalry, the manipulation of the electoral process in Western Nigeria, crisis and coup d'état, and civil war.

As noted earlier, the civil war provided yet another opportunity to rally the masses around a national unity project, and to make an example of what could happen to those who attempted to secede. At the same time oil, which was concentrated in the ethnic minority areas of the Niger Delta, had become the unifying locus of the Nigerian post-war centralised nation-state project. It is the breakdown of the post-civil war 'social contract' between the political (military) elite and the masses that is at the heart of the current crisis that threatens the existence of the Nigerian nation-state.

The Crisis of the Nigerian State

The Nigerian nation-state is in crisis. This appears to mimic a trend in other parts of the world since the end of the Cold War where several multi-ethnic states are unravelling. Examples include the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In all cases, ethnic, nationalist, regional and religious forces have emerged to challenge the state. In the case of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, successor states have emerged from the old state. In Africa, the crisis in the Great Lakes region, particularly the genocide in Rwanda, and the ongoing conflict in the neighbouring Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and as well as in Côte d'Ivoire all reflect the tensions between the nation and the state. It would appear that the current crisis is tied to the alienation of the post-colonial nation-state from the collective aspirations of the people who have now mobilised themselves along ethnic/national, regional, and religious lines, to challenge the integrative centralised nation-state. Referring to this phenomenon as the curse of the nation-state, Basil Davidson notes that:

the state was not liberating and protective of its citizens, no matter what its propaganda claimed: on the contrary, its gross effect was constricting and exploitative, or else it simply failed to operate in any social sense at all.¹⁴

This was largely the case with the Nigerian state, which at independence in 1960 was still an artificial union of multi-ethnic 'nations', which were broadly divided into the North and the South, first by colonial administrative convenience, but also by distrust and rivalry. When the oil boom came in the 1980s, Nigeria was under military rule with its centralist authoritarian character. With the oil largely coming from the oil minorities region of the Niger Delta, the

integrative nation-state project came to rely on oil which accounted for over 90 percent of Nigeria's export earnings, and 80 percent of the revenues of the federal government. In political terms, it meant that the hegemonic class had to control the oil in the region, which tended to reproduce the ethnic domination of the region by majority ethnic groups and foreign multinationals. Secondly, while the oil was taken out of the Niger Delta, and its proceeds used in developing cities in other parts of Nigeria, and also enriching the hegemonic elite, the region itself was impoverished, underdeveloped and polluted. Thus, while there was a zero-sum struggle for power at the federal level between various factions of the ruling elite, the people of the Niger Delta became disillusioned with the nation-state project that alienated them from the benefits of the oil produced from under their lands and waters. It is this that exploded in the 1990s after almost a decade of economic crisis and structural adjustment into a struggle for self-determination in the Niger Delta. Apart from the Niger Delta, there have been inter-, and intra-ethnic struggles over oil in other parts of Nigeria. While some have taken an ethnic colouration, others have been communal, pitching indigenes versus settlers, or neighbour against neighbour. What is rather disturbing is the trend towards the use of violence and the destructiveness of the low intensity conflicts. All attention is focussed on the Centre, which controls all the oil, and on the hegemonic group that has captured the Centre. Demands for change and equity have become very persistent so that access to oil revenues can be redistributed to all. Yet those who control the Centre are not ready to negotiate to their control of oil, and the basis of their power, thus setting the stage for the further escalation of struggles as they seek to hold onto to, and others seek to wrest away, the power of oil.

What flows from the foregoing is that the fundamental issues revolve around the questions: whose State? whose Nation? whose oil? In a context where a homogenising state project cannot mediate the competing claims and demands of the nations within its territorial and jurido-legal space, crisis inevitably erupts. The role of intellectuals in defining claims and demands, or defending such, thus occupies a critical space in the dynamics of nation building in Nigeria. For, ultimately, it is they that produce the ideology of resistance and the language of liberation, with far-reaching implications for the struggles that take place over the definition, content and direction of the national question. It is also important to note that there are intellectuals who produce the ideology of repression and reaction, providing justifications for dictatorship and misrule. Such intellectuals enjoyed a 'golden age' during the days of General Ibrahim Babangida as Nigeria's military President. Some of them, like Professor Oyovbaire, Professor Jinadu, Dr Olagunju and Dr Amuta, produced books that justified the policies of government, and celebrated the General's leadership qualities, even when it became obvious that his military regime was leading the nation into a crisis. On the other hand, there were intellectuals organised under the Academic Staff Union of Nigeria Universities (ASUU) that struggled

against military authoritarianism, and stoutly defended academic freedom in the universities. Yet, there were intellectuals in the social sense of the word, that were immersed in the self determination struggles of ethnic groups as an interrogation of perceived inequities of the Nigerian nation-state project. It is to this group to whom this paper addresses itself. The choice of the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta has been guided by the critical position they occupy in the political geography and economy of oil in Nigeria as the goose that lay(s) the golden egg – oil, the lifeblood of the post-civil war nation-state project.

Intellectuals and the Crisis of Nation-statism in Nigeria: The Oil Minorities of the Niger Delta

Several intellectuals have been at the forefront of the struggle for self-determination and local autonomy for the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta – Nigeria's oil producing region. Examples include Professor Ebiegberi Alagoa, Professor Tekena Tamuno, Dr. Ben Naanen (former Secretary-General of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, MOSOP), Alfred Ilenre, leader of the Ethnic Minority Rights Organisation of Africa (EMIROAF), the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, among others. Since the death of Saro-Wiwa, Oronto Douglas, a lawyer, and vice-chairman of the Environmental Rights Action (ERA) and a leader of the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), and Dr. Ike Okonta, have continued to articulate the case of the oil minorities of the Niger Delta, both locally and globally.

For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be mainly on the work of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a poet, writer, environmentalist, Ogoni nationalist and activist, who was able, through his writings speeches, and networking activities, to take the case of the Ogoni demand for self-determination to the front burner of national and global discourse. The case of Ken Saro-Wiwa is particularly instructive not just because under his leadership MOSOP was able to successfully globalise its struggle against the Nigerian Federal Government and Shell, but also because Saro-Wiwa had been an ally of the federal side during the Nigerian civil war, and a friend of Nigerian military officers.¹⁵ Yet, by the 1990s up till his hanging on the orders of a tribunal in November 1995, Saro-Wiwa had become an implacable opponent of the federal government and Nigeria's military rulers.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, considered himself first and foremost as a writer.¹⁶ To a large extent he devoted his literary skills and ideas to the promotion of the Ogoni cause, which placed him on a collision course with the Nigerian state. In his closing statement to the military-appointed tribunal that was to convict him and eight others, Saro-Wiwa pointed out that:

I am a man of peace, of ideas. Appalled by the denigrating poverty of my people who live on a richly endowed land, distressed by their political marginalisation and economic strangulation, angered by the devastation of their land, their ultimate heritage, anxious to preserve their right to life and to a decent living, and determined to usher to this country as

a whole a fair and just democratic system which protects everyone and every ethnic group and given us all a valid claim to human civilisation. I have devoted all my intellectual and material resources, my very life to a cause in which I have total belief...¹⁶

As an intellectual, Saro-Wiwa was embedded in the politics seeking to transform the Ogoni from a marginalised community to one that was equal with other ethnic groups in the federation, and that could control 'its' oil resources. In his days as a supporter of the federal government, hoping that this would translate into the recognition of Ogoni rights and a measure of autonomy and access to oil, Saro-Wiwa had exhorted the Ogoni '...to reassert ourselves side by side with all other nationalities in the Nigerian federation. We cannot let this opportunity slip past us. If we do, posterity will not forgive us, and we shall disappear as a people from the face of the earth.'¹⁷

In Saro-Wiwa's calculation, his people, the Ogoni, would have no future in Biafra, since in his view they would continue to suffer under the Igbo who had dominated the Eastern region, and who had marginalised the minorities there. To him liberation would come from siding with federal forces to remove Biafran claims to the oil in the Niger Delta. Yet, by the end of the war, Saro-Wiwa lamented that 'even before the war ended, the Federal Government had begun a plot against the Ogoni and other minorities'. A Commission (the Dina Commission) was set up to explore ways of expropriating the rights of the inhabitants of the oil-bearing areas.¹⁸ At the heart of Saro-Wiwa's complaint lay the fact that in spite of Ogoni support for the federal side, they had been severely shortchanged, and even lost access to oil, in a context where as a minority they were not well represented in federal institutions. In his view the nation-state project had betrayed Ogoni trust and support.

Thus, by 1980, the federal government had left the oil-bearing areas with only 1.5 percent of the proceeds of oil production. Before the military seized power, the governments in the areas were entitled to at least 50 percent of such proceeds, in addition to rent and royalties.¹⁹ The point is thus made that the Ogoni had been deceived and cheated by an integrative hegemonic nation-state project, that was also threatening them with genocide.²⁰ Saro-Wiwa therefore claimed that:

...the minorities of the Niger Delta and its environs in particular must remain awake to the real threat that is posed to the very existence by the politics of competitive ethnicity and involuted loyalty of the majority groups. Indigenous colonialism and blind materialism of international capitalism which prospects for oil in the belly of the delta ring the death knell of these peoples.²¹

In this way he sensitised the people to the dangers that the integrative nation-state project, controlled by the big three ethnic nationalities in Nigeria (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba), and global oil capital posed to their survival. Beyond this he also proposed a solution embedded in self-determination in a federation of equal ethnic units. It was this that informed the MOSOP ideology of ERECTISM, and the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR). ERECTISM – Ethnic

autonomy, Resource and Environmental Control – was designed to win back the control of oil from the federal government, and provide a constitutional recognition for the respect of their rights as minorities. But these demands struck at the very heart of federal hegemony and the centralised and homogenising nation-state project. It therefore raised suspicion and anxiety among the hegemonic elite, who depended on oil to reproduce themselves as a class-in-power, and to keep Nigeria connected to the international capitalist system as a supplier of cheap oil. They were afraid that if the oil minorities gained control of oil, they would have too much wealth and power at their disposal and might attempt to secede and break up Nigeria. There was also another view, that for the purpose of balanced national development and stability, the oil wealth should not be the exclusive property of the oil minorities, but should be held in trust by the federal government. The response of the federal government was largely anti-intellectual, relying more on the use of co-optation and force. But this is not to gloss over the group of intellectuals that loyally served the Nigerian military in justifying the repression of the Ogoni, and other obnoxious policies.

Saro-Wiwa devoted a great deal of his energy to his writings: poems, novels, books, newspaper articles and speeches in which he articulated the case of the Ogoni, and campaigned against federal expropriation of the oil resources in the Niger Delta. He argued that this was immoral and unjust, and threatened the very survival of the people of the region. These ideas caused a heated debate within Nigeria as well as across the world over issues of minority rights, environmental rights corporate (oil) responsibility in the third world, the inequities of military rule, and the national question. Saro-Wiwa's intellectualism also connected with his activism as a leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP).

Saro-Wiwa and the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

Saro-Wiwa experimented with his ideas among his Ogoni kinspeople. Using his position as the President of Ogoni Central Union he was able to organise seminars on the fortunes of the Ogoni. These activities went alongside with his similar efforts in some Ogoni elite associations, notably Kagote and Ogoni Klub, to address the burning issues affecting the Ogoni people and to form a mass movement of the Ogoni People.²²

It was under the auspices of the Ogoni Central Union that the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) was adopted by six Ogoni Kingdoms at Bori on August 1990, and was later sent to the federal government.²³ The OBR was disseminated widely, translated into the various Ogoni dialects, and was published in several national newspapers. The highlight of the OBR was the demand that Ogoni people be granted political autonomy, 'as a distinct and separate unit' within Nigeria. Critical to this were two 'sub' demands: political control of Ogoni

affairs by Ogoni people,²⁴ and the right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development.²⁵ Shortly after the OBR, MOSOP came into existence in 1991.

The OBR, which expressed the feelings of the Ogoni masses, spoke directly to the issues that Saro-Wiwa had written and spoken about. From 1990 onwards, he became the leading spokesperson of MOSOP and of Ogoni resistance. He went around the world promoting the Ogoni cause, and addressed many meetings, seminars and conferences in Nigeria, and Ogoniland. Before long the Ogoni cause was well known, and the effects of Ogoni resistance had begun to be felt by the Federal government and Shell.²⁶ By 1993 state repression of Ogoni resistance and its quest for self-determination had begun in earnest.²⁷ The situation in which almost half a million Ogoni were fully mobilised was unprecedented in the Niger Delta. Military ruling circles were extremely concerned and saw it as a threat that had to be crushed at all costs. Taking advantage of factional squabbles among the leaders of MOSOP, in a context of tension, distrust and hardening of positions, the state (and Shell) moved in forcefully to crush the 'MOSOP revolution'. There is no doubt that the ideas which Saro-Wiwa was canvassing had raised consciousness and expectation among the Ogoni masses, and revolutionised the youth. It was thus not surprising that he became a target of repression, and finally elimination. His ideas struck at the heart of the state-oil alliance, and raised the spectre of a domino-effect in the other oil producing communities in the Niger Delta. Hence the decision of the state to act against Saro-Wiwa and his comrades. From 1993 onwards, Ogoni was militarised, and thousands of Ogoni were either killed, jailed, maimed, rendered homeless or exiled as security forces unleashed terror on the people.²⁸ Following the murder of four Ogoni chiefs on 21 May 1994, Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders and activists were detained, and later arraigned before a military tribunal. Nine of them were eventually hanged on November 10, 1995.

There is no doubt that the ideas of Saro-Wiwa have radically altered the politics of the Niger Delta. His ideology of ethnic autonomy, of resource and environment control, continues to be the fulcrum of all struggles for self-determination and resource control in the area. His ideas also resonate in the current agitation in the Delta for the restructuring of a highly centralised Nigerian federation, and the devolution of powers, particularly 'resource control', to the lower tiers of government.

The politics of resistance of the Ogoni locally and globally, and the aftermath of the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists has been well canvassed,²⁹ and will not be repeated here. What is important to note is that as an intellectual, Saro-Wiwa initiated a counter-hegemonic discourse hinged upon the right to self-determination of ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta, which continues to reverberate across the country up to today. His ideas are being built up, refined and modified by other resistance groups using the

platform of identity and the discourse of self-determination to agitate for the restructuring of the Nigerian federation in ways that give ethnic groups control of their resources.

Conclusion

In spite of Nigeria's return to democracy on May 29, 2003, the struggles for the 'hearts and minds' of the Nigerian nation-state have continued to rage. If anything, these struggles have intensified due to the release of hitherto suppressed grievance and claims, and the retreat of naked military authoritarianism and the return of (choiceless) democracy. Militant ethnic movements such as the Odu'a People's Congress (OPC), the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Igbo People's Congress (IPC), and the groups in the Delta, have emerged to contest the political space with the formal 'democratic' institutions that are firmly under the control of the hegemonic class.

Thus, under democratic rule, the crisis of nation-statism has continued to fester. The post-civil war ruling elite – a coalition of civilian politicians and (ex) military officers – has not been able to hegemonise its own nationalism beyond imposing a centralised logic of accumulation and the appropriation of oil rents, while it manipulates ethnicity and religion in its fractional politics, thus contributing to conflict and crisis.³⁰ In these crises, intellectuals have been immersed in terms of advancing the various cases for the restructuring of the Nigerian federation. Following the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential elections allegedly won by a Yoruba philanthropist, Chief Moshood Abiola, by a Nupe General (from the North), the National Question had assumed greater prominence. The events of the time resulted in demands for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC). Such demands were ignored or blocked by General Abacha, his successor General Abdulsalami Abubakar, and are also being blocked by the current President. Yet rather than subside, the demands for restructuring have increased.

In the Niger Delta, violence has continued to rage, and state repression has continued unabated. Protests against the state and oil companies are common and incidents of the invasion of oil company installations by protesting youth have continued. In the same way, inter-community violence over contesting claims to oil are ravaging the region, even as the Nigerian army in November 1999 destroyed the town of Odi in the Niger Delta to protect oil interests.

The intellectuals of the Niger Delta largely continue to support the struggle for self-determination and resource control. What this implies is that ethnic nationalism as articulated by these intellectuals, and forcefully promoted by ethnic militias, continues to exacerbate the crisis of nation-statism in Nigeria. Intellectuals have been able to produce knowledge, and advance ideas with which the post-independence integrative nation-state project is being interrogated, and will eventually influence the future form and modalities for its resolution. The point should be made that demands for restructuring do not

imply a call for the dismemberment of Nigeria. In real terms, they are demands for renegotiating the basis of the federation, as well as the social contract between the Nigerian state and its citizens. The Pan-African logic in the age of globalisation remains critical and relevant to the survival of the nation-state in the continent. The challenge perhaps is for the nation-state to be reconstructed in ways that represent the hopes, interests and identities of the people, whose consent remains ever so critical to its legitimacy and stability. It is on this equitable basis and the new social contract that Pan-Africanism in the 21st Century can be revolutionised and be made relevant to the interests of the African people.

Notes

1. Cyril Obi, 'Leadership in Local Communities in Historical Perspective: Pre-Colonial and Colonial Nigeria', Lagos: Centre for Social Science Research and Development, *Positive Leadership Monograph Series*, No. 2, 2002, pp. 34-37. Also see G. O. Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union and the Politics of Decolonisation*, Ibadan: DAYSTAR PRESS, 1992, pp. 43-50.
2. Northern, Western, Midwest, and Eastern Regions.
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