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POLITICS OF CONFLICT OILIFICATION AND PETRO-VIOLENCE IN THE NIGER DELTA

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ABSTRACT

The dialectical contradictions of modern states, which threaten stability and existence, are resolved in a way to stimulate social and economic development. The contradictions of the Nigerian state however, are not resolved but treated in ways that are inimical to social and economic development. Such contradictions include 'oilification' of conflicts, (the tendency of the state to treat every conflict even those devised or abetted by it, as oil conflict in the Niger Delta) is one of such contradictions. This has increasingly exacerbated conflicts, resulting in the "Columbialisation" of the region by frustrated militant youths. This paper suggests that the nature of the state's interests hinders its ability to appreciate and accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Niger Delta people, thus its prevalent reliance on fusillades of military violence to suppress anti-oil protests in the region.

KEY WORDS: Conflict, Oilification, Petro-violence, Niger Delta

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts of various scopes and nature have been a recurring factor in Nigeria's historical development before and after the attainment of independence in 1960. These unrests have expressed themselves in different forms, political, religious, communal and social. No matter their specific character each of these crises has been very violent and destructive. They have exacted heavy toll on life and property (public and private), enormously tasked the collective energies of the security forces, and profoundly exposed the fragile legitimacy of successive governments, which has aroused fears about the sustainability of Nigerian state.

The situation since the out-set of the present democratic dispensation has been extremely worrisome. Between 1999 and 2001, Nigeria witnessed an out break of about forty violent communal or ethnic conflicts, with some old ones gaining additional potency (Elaigwu, 2003). The frequent occurrence of conflicts in the country has made the issue of conflict management and resolution to be of utmost concern both to the government and members of the civil society in general. The pervasiveness of these conflicts and the associated destruction of lives and properties have increased the anxiety and level of insecurity in the country. These conflicts have threatened the nation's fledging democracy and persistently interrogated the national question; an indication of the unfinished process of Nigeria's statehood. This paper examined the issue of conflict oilification and its various covet and latent manifestations in the Niger Delta. It is divided into six sections; the situation in the Niger Delta (the Niger Delta drama), conflicts oilification, the institutional and rentier contexts of oilification and then conclusion.

Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta: A Conceptual Statement

Conflict is a situation in which two or more persons desire goals, which are perceived obtainable only by either persons but not both (Stagner, 1997:8). This is shown by (structure) the parties' conflict of interest, (behaviour) their communications and (attitude) inclination to diminish the concern of others (Galtung, 1996). Conflict is inherent in every human society (Donohue and Knolt, 1992:3) as such it is not an avoidable pathological phenomenon but an essential ingredient in the balance and vitality of group life (Simmel, 1998: 156). In other words, "conflict is the means to change and means by which social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved" (Burton, 1987:137). What all of these suggest is that though conflict is part of any society, it does not necessarily have to be violent. However, in the opinion of Lewis Coser, conflicts come from goals incompatibility, struggle over values, status and claims to power and scarce resource with the aim of the opponent being to neutralise, injure or eliminate rival (Coser, 1956:8) Most conflicts in Nigeria are identifiable with Coser's variant.

The prevalence of violent conflict are closely linked to the pulls of identities politics and access to power that often result in disregard for what is right, fair and just in resources distribution (Stedeman, 1995:154). This is due to the ruling elites' proclivity to use the state as instrument of exploitation, subordination, suppression and exclusion (Ihonbere, 1988). Postcolonial Nigerian has maintained a typical centralist position in the distribution of resources. The result is lack of autonomy between the state and the ruling elite while authoritarian

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provenance of power brokers results in the personification of the state (Ukiwo 2003:129). Often, the ruling elite construct and reconstruct identity politics in their struggles for hegemony and legitimacy. As Mardani (1995:162) has noted, the postcolonial state's character, undermines its institutional integrity. Thus, according to Ekeh, (1998) the state's actions are repressive; heightening sub-national identity mobilisation.

Conflict is closely linked with "frustration", which in turn, is closely connected with "aggression". It has been suggested that aggression always presupposes the existence of frustration (Goor, 1996). This is because according to Dollard *et al*, (1939) individuals become aggressive when there are obstacles (perceived or real) to their success in life. Thus, *frustration-aggression* has to do with *relative deprivation,* which most often is due to poverty. R*elative deprivation* is a derivative of the perception of a people about their deprived status compared to others. Mostly, this happens when conditions fails to improve for one group compared to others, as in the Niger Delta compared to other parts of the country. The Niger Delta conflict is therefore of no surprise, as this perception most often leads to conflict.

The conflicts in the Niger Delta, reflects the profundity of the frustration and angst harboured by the oil producing communities, directed first against local comprador elements and secondly, against the oil companies whose years of oil exploration and exploitation have yielded very minimal development; and lastly against the Nigerian State, whose only concern is how to ensure the continuous flow of petro-dollar. The conflicts in the Niger Delta are a manifestation of the intrinsic limitation of institutions of the Nigerian state to effectively resolve conflicts. This gives credence to the assertion that almost everywhere, violence is the mode of response to the problems that political institutions are incapable of solving" (El-Kenz, (1996: 51-52). Under such condition, it is said, violence becomes the easiest options available because it does not have a 'high threshold of social transaction cost' in terms of preparation and also easier for local groups to imitate' (Tarrow, 1996: 19,103).

Thus, the violent protests in the Niger Delta are largely part of opposition to economic marginalisation and political domination by the State. This is because the character, behaviour and the nature of politics spawns by the Nigerian state often, result in identity mobilisation and conflict (Esman, 1994; Osaghae, 1994; Egwu, 2001). This is given credence by the fact that even though environmental degradation and poverty have typified oil extraction in the Niger Delta for over four decades, the protests in the area before now, were always non-violent. It would seem therefore, that the conflictual state of the region are offshoots of poor governance, unequal access and lop-sided distribution of resources, as a result of which other parts of the federation have had more and better prospect at the expense of the Niger Delta. Inevitably, this has altered power relations, which has in turn led to the persistence of poverty in the region. Thus, it is the people's perception of poverty and themselves that has given rise to the volatility and the near insurgency in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta Drama

The conflict in the Niger Delta, home to Nigeria's oil and gas production, the linchpin of the economy and the country's main revenue earner, is one of the conflicts that has become protracted, vitriolic and assumed an international dimension. The resistance movements in the Niger Delta started with the Ijaw leader Isaac Boro in the 1960s. This was taken up by Ken Saro-Wiwa's led Movement for the survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and continued with the explosive confrontation between the Abacha military junta and Ijaw groups around the city of Warri in 1997. The escalation of the conflict in 2006; kidnap of oil workers, attack on soldiers, destruction of oil pipelines and oil facilities, were accompanied by demands for resource control and economic development of the region. The fear has thus, been expressed that democracy must be allowed to flourish in order to avert a major conflict that could lead to the break up of the country[1].

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil-producing state and the world's sixth largest exporter of crude oil, with an average daily production of over 2.4 million barrels. The Niger Delta presently possesses a massive oil infrastructure consisting of 606 fields, 5,284 wells, 7,000 kilometres of pipelines, 10 export terminals, 275 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 4 refineries and a massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector (Watt, 2007). The Niger Delta is even said to be richer in gas deposits. Its proven gas reserve is estimated at about 176 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), making Nigeria the largest natural gas endowed country in Africa and one of the top ten in the world (Oil and Gas Journal, 2005).

Oil exploration and exploitation activities have caused severe changes in the ecological environment; coastal erosion, flooding, sea level rise, water contamination fishing and rapid depletion of natural resources. Added to these are the direct effects of oil on environmental degradation, which operates at a number of level; oil spills, pipeline blowouts and gas flaring. Records available at the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) put the volume of crude oil spilled at 3,121,909.8 barrels and incidents of spill at 9,107 in the Niger Delta between 1976 and 2005 (Egberongbe *et al,* 2006). The true figure may be far higher. For instance, according to UNDP, between 1976 and 2001over 6,800 spills were recorded (see also Green Peace 1994; Dublin – Green *et al*, 1998; Banfield, (1998).

A report indicates that gas flares in the Niger Delta is the highest in the world and the largest single contributor to global warming (Hunt, 2000). The flares emit more than 34 million tons of carbon dioxide and 12 million tons of methane yearly (Shelby, 1996: 28). Gas flares produce acid rain and cocktail of toxins that directly impact on the people and the environment; proliferation of diseases, phobic disorders and resources depletion (See Ekpu, 1995; Saro-Wiwa 1995; Akpofure *et. al*, (2000; Achebe 2000; ATSDA 2003). In addition, massive dredging in deltaic areas has impacted on the ecology leaving severe stress in its wake, arising from the destruction of community livelihood support systems. Indeed, the impact of oil activities on the Niger Delta people have been well documented (see Ekpu 1995; Robinson 1996; RAN 1997; Manby 1999a; Pegg 1999; Akpofure *et al* 2000; Achebe 2000; Ekine 2001; Douglas and Okonta 2001; Kemedi, 2002; Christian Aid 2003;

ATSDA 2003; Udonwa *et al* 2004, Ebohon and Emuedo).

Over four decades, oil revenues have not impacted positively on the Niger Delta. Though, the region has yielded immense wealth for the nation, it has only poverty, disease, and underdevelopment for its people. As such, despite its huge petroleum resource, the region is in a static state and its resource base, severely threatened. Arising from these contradictions, and being the mainstay of the economy, oil and the oil sector have come under increasing pressure, first, from the elites of the dominant ethnic groups, who appropriate a disproportionate share of oil revenues for themselves and second, from the people of the Niger Delta, who bear the brunt of oil exploitation and are impoverished, by it (Emuedo, Anoliefo, and Emuedo, 2007). Increasing oil and gas pollution and the proliferation of water-related diseases, have exacted enormous social and economic toll in the region (World Bank, 1995). This situation is further exacerbated by effects of government legislations on petroleum. These include the Petroleum Act, which vested all natural resources on the Federal Government and the Land Use Act, which bequests all lands in the region to the government. These two pieces of legislations have been partly responsible for the impoverishment and the spate of conflicts in the Niger delta. In the opinion of Douglas, (1999) no single piece of legislation in Nigeria has so viciously robbed the people of the Niger Delta of their humanity than the Land Use Act. To the Niger Delta people, the Land Use Act is an assault on their culture. In the region, land is sacred; it is also a source of pride, subsistence and income, links the living to the dead and source of confidence in supernatural and deities. From this point of view, these legislations are contrary to Brugger (1974: 62) definition of social order.

The Politics of Oilification

Fatalities from the Niger Delta conflicts were estimated to be over 1,000 yearly, which places the region side by side with 'highly intense conflict such as Colombia and Chechnya (SPDC, 2003). The intensity, destructiveness and criminalisation that have characterised the conflict since 2006 and the political economy of conflicts, implies that the basis for escalated, protracted and entrenched violence is ossifying rapidly in the region. This means that conflict management should be an issue of utmost concern as the scenario poses obvious threat to national security, the future and operational capability of the oil companies. However, what has been confounding is the state's conflict management strategy that seems to give fillip to, instead of mitigating conflict. The state's inclination is to treat every conflict in the Niger Delta, including those abetted or devised by it, as oil conflicts. Contrary to the common belief, most conflicts in the Niger Delta are not oil related. Thus, "oilification" is a deliberate distortion and reconstruction of non-oil related conflict to give it an oil connection (Omeje, 2004). The purpose it appears, is to create a scenario that would justify the utilisation of maximum force by state's security forces; including callous military campaigns and wanton killings in the Niger Delta that may be acceptable to the international community.

Oilification thrives on mischief, hypocrisy and deceit and the "national interest" subsumed therein, is nothing but oil. Oilification is thus, another in the series of perilous iffy paradoxes fashioned by the political faction of the dominant elite to suppress, subjugate and dominate the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta in the guise of national interest. As such, rather than mitigate conflicts, the state and its agents have used oilification to rationalise its atrocities; killings, mass displacements, torture, arrest and detention of innocent citizens and mass destruction of propertiess. For instance, the atrocities committed across Ogoni land, by the defunct Rivers State Special Task Force on Internal Security in the early 1990s, were rationalised via oilification (NDT, 2001). In like manner, the killings and burning at Umuchen (1990), Afiesere (2006), Odi (1999) and Odioma (2005), the bombardment of Okerenkoko, Seitorububor, Seigbene, Ukpogbene, and Perezuouweikoregbene with helicopter gunship (2006) and the destruction of all major clans in Gbaramatu Kingdom by the Joint Military Task Force (2009) were all rationalised via oilification.

The unwritten but boldly etched dictum in the minds of the dominant ethnic political elites it would seem, has been that whoever controls the Niger Delta oil resources, controls the proverbial honey pot of the Nigerian State with all its sybaritic trappings and pleasures. Therefore, oil resources are highly important for the reinvention of the state, as well as for the reproduction of its dominant elite groups. Thus, from the state's point of view, any threat to oil activity warrants decisive action that international public would understandably condone. In addition, oilifying a non-direct oil conflict in the Niger Delta also pays off as a convenient means of "securitisation"[2] and the personal enrichment of state officials[2]. Oil as a resource has failed in creating the cognitive freedom for the national elite to grasp the acute crisis facing the polity that guarantee stability outside the framework of official repression (Ukeje *et. al*, 2002).

This accounts for the regularly set-up of the convoluted security architectures (Military Task Forces) to sanitise the region. These include the Rivers State Special Task Force on Internal Security (1991), Operation Andoni and Operation Hakuri (1999), and Operation Swift Flush I, II, and III, Operation Flush, Rapid Anti-Kidnapping Squad, Joint Task Force or Operation Restore Hope between 2006 to date. The officers and men of these task forces have been dominantly Muslims from the far North. This recently gave rise to grumblings in the army (see (Adisa, *et al*, 2010, Adisa, T., 2010). The raison d'être is to ensure that the Soldiers will readily obey orders for the use of maximum force on the people of the area, arising from their religious, social and ethnic differences (Huntington, 1991:191; Horowitz, 1985:447). The sole purpose of the task forces is to ensure steady oil flow, oil companies' profit, and collection of rent and royalty by the state. Thus, the multinational oil companies since the 1990s have actively participated in the activities of the task forces. They have been implicated in the provision of arms and strategic logistical support (boats, helicopters, payment of field allowances) to soldiers on repressive missions in the Niger Delta (Manby 1999:175; Pegg 1999). The activities of these task forces have over the years, left catalogue of woes in the Niger Delta. Some of these are briefly discussed below.

In 1990, 80 unarmed persons were killed and 350 houses burnt or looted in Umuechem community by contingents of Nigerian police on the invitation of Shell (see Okonta and Douglas 2001; Manby 1999a; Pegg 1999). In 1993, arising from the Ogoni people's protests of passive resistance against Shell, Ogoni land was placed under military siege and their leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 others murdered (ERA, 2002). On November 20, 1999, a contingent of the Nigerian Army invaded Odi town, in Bayelsa state on presidential orders, killing 2,483 people (1460 males and 1023 females) from 11 compounds and 109 families. On February 19, 2005, 50 persons were killed and all the houses in Odioma community were bombed or burnt by a Joint Task Force of the Nigerian Army and Navy (ERA, 2000). On February 21, 2006 five communities; Okerenkoko, Perezuouweikoregbene, Ukpogbene, Seitorububor and Seigbene were aerially bombarded by the Joint Task Force using helicopter gun-ships killing 15 women and children (Amaize and Bebenimibo,, 2006). This incident led to the hostage taking by militant groups. On October 14 2006, 20 people and over 80 houses were burnt by irate policemen at Afiesere community. The police men sang and danced as they carried out their barbaric acts (Okafor, 2006). On May 15, 2009 the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) started a simultaneous air, land and sea bombardment and blockade of all communities in Gbaranmatu Kingdom. The exercise lasted for over a month period, resulting in the death of about 2,000 persons, displacement of about 20,000 others and the destruction of almost all the houses in the area. This action was extended later to all parts of the Niger Delta (see Umanah and Emmanuel 2009; Adebayo 2009a; Onabu 2009; Emmanuel 2009; Adebayo 2009b; Adebayo, Isine, and Olokor 2009; Amaize 2009; Ganagana 2009; Oyadongha 2009). It is instructive however, that until the abrupt proclamation of a general amnesty by the state, no single body of a militant was ever shown by the JTF among those killed.

President Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) in contrast to other regimes before it, probably contributed most to the fast tracking of this phenomenon. Generally, oilification has been operated at two levels or contexts; the institutional context and the rentier context.

The Institutional Context

Various scholars (Karl, 1997; Watts, 1999; Frynas, 2000) have aptly demonstrated the centrality of oil as a natural resource and oil rents shaping both a national political discourse and the broad rhythms of social conflict. The institutional context for most conflicts in the Niger Delta, therefore, is broadly defined by the state's legislation and policies, on oil, as well as the different development programmes designed for the region. Thus, the institutional context for both oil and oilified conflicts in Nigeria is very much the same and in a sense, the two cannot be rigidly separated. A classic example is the establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) by the federal government in 1992 with an allocation of 3% of total oil revenue for special development of the Niger Delta oil-host communities. The allocation of projects by the Commission was based on the various communities' net oil production inventory; measured by the number of active oil wells. This became the source of some of the most internecine conflicts in the Niger Delta. As the quest for control of the land containing oil wells, (the basis for OMPADEC's project allocation) among various communities resulted in several conflicts. Many communities that hitherto lived in peace, with long filial and cultural relationships were suddenly caught up in the throes of 'petro-violence'. The Ogoni, for instance, prosecuted inter-ethnic wars with nearly all of their neighbours: the Andoni in July 1993, the Okirika in December 1993, and the Ndoki and Asa in April 1994 (Ibeanu, 2000:27). However, while the people were busy killing each other to attract projects, they failed to realise that all the projects that they were fighting to attract were being executed by people from other parts of the country that have neither seen the colour of crude oil or the effect of crude on the environment. Similarly, all major contracts awarded by OMPADEC's successor the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) have also followed the same trend. However, though, the same parameters used by OMPADEC are also being used by the NDDC, it has not resulted in characteristic violence in the region, because the people are now wiser. Their anger is now directed against common enemies, the government and the oil companies – the sources of their problems.

The Niger Delta, in part due to its riverine and swamp topography, has historically been extremely politically fragmented, and subject to frequent and at times violent disputes over land, fishing rights, as well as over traditional leaders' political jurisdictions (Emuedo et al, 2005). Indeed, competition for land, forests, creeks and swamps containing oil resources has often provoked thorny conflicts between different Niger Delta communities and groups because of the potential rents and 'gifts' or *dashes* (including hard cash, food items, wine; and TNOC's (Trans-national oil companies) diaries, calendars, key holders and related identification symbols) that control of such territorial spaces could attract from oil prospecting companies (Omeje, 2004). Thus, petro-business is not only crucial to politics at the state level, but also for understanding the changing dynamics of communal violence among the oil-bearing communities. Such oil-induced communal violence has taken a great toll on communities like Bille, Kalabari, Umuechem, Obagi, Brass, Nembe, Rumuobiokani, Ogu, Okere-Warri, Aladja and Bolo, resulting in the killing and dislodgment of thousands of people. In fact, the rising tide of community fragmentation and reconfiguration, identity mutation and reconstruction, and the politics of boundary adjustment in the Niger Delta are all partly related to the dynamics of petro-politics (Ibid). To this end, sundry oil-host communities have also increasingly oilified communal relations and conflicts in the Niger Delta often to maximise oil rents and dividends. It is this institutional context that partly accounts for the persistence of the larger Warri crisis and its changing dynamics. Oilification at the community levels however, is part of the desperate response of the local people to the institutionality and dynamics of petro-politics.

The Rentier Context

There is serious linkage between the rentier context of the economy and state security in Nigeria. Oil wealth, from the Niger Delta region, is largely responsible for sustaining the Nigerian Federation (UNDP, 2006: 62). Oil wealth, if well managed, provides

the means for societal social and economic transformation. However, studies have shown that most oil-producing states, particularly those in the developing world such as Nigeria, are typified by abject poverty, instability and social upheaval (see Auty, 1993; 1997; 2004; Karl, 1997, 2007; Sachs and Warner, 2001; Beck 2007: 46; Dunning 2008: 39). Since the 1970s, the Nigerian economy has remained dependent on earnings from oil exports, which no doubt had severe implications for the economy; the criticality of multinational oil companies, which produces the oil that is exported to the fortunes of the nation's economy. From 1970 to 1999, oil generated over $231 billion for the Nigerian economy and constituted between 21% and 48% of GDP. Since 2000, oil has accounted for about 79.5% of total government revenues and about 97% of foreign exchange revenues (UNDP, 2006). Oil revenue as a percentage of total state revenue was 64.19%, while as a percentage of the federation account it was over 67% from 1970-1979. However, from 1980 to date, Oil accounts for 80% of government revenues, 90% of foreign exchange earnings, 96% of export revenues and almost half of Gross Domestic Produce (GDP) (see Karl and Gray 2003:26; Agbu 2005:82; Ikelegbe 2005:1; Powell, Marriott and Stockman 2005:9; ICG 2006b:19; Agba and Obi, 2006; Orubu 2008). The 2008 budget projects a revenue of N1.986 trillion with 80% coming from oil, while other sectors provide a mere 20%[3]. It is therefore not surprising that when the Nigerian economy slipped into crisis, following the crash in oil prices in the early 1980s and agitations and the up-surge of conflict in the Niger Delta, an important aspect of the security calculations of the state was to preserve the interest of oil multinationals as the producers of its "lifeblood". This fact is given fillip by the personnel structure of the Nigerian oil sector. The oil sector currently employs about 10,000 personnel, of which about 4000 are expatriates, while 6000 are Nigerians. Seemingly, this satisfies the local content policy of 60/40% staff recruitment in favour of Nigerians. However, the 4000 expatriate personnel control about 85% of the executive positions and also earn about 75% of the salaries in the industry, while the 6000 Nigerians control 15% and earn about 25% of the salaries. This is because of the 6000 Nigerian employees about 3000 are contract (casual) workers, who earn about a quarter of a full employee's salary and are also not entitled any fringe benefits. For instance, when a Nigerian Basil Omiyi was appointed the Managing Director of Shell, he was based in Port Harcourt, and made to report to a Regional Director (newly created), based in Lagos. All Managing Directors (expatriates) before him reported directly to its Headquarters at the Hague. This reporting format only changed when a Nigerian was appointed "Managing Director". Thus, the oil companies not only control the technology of the industry but also the personnel.

The thesis of the "rentier" state as put forward by Beblawi and Luciani (1987) situates the relation of the foregoing to the rentier context. In their study of oil-rich Arab states, Beblawi and Luciani described a political economy based on the "sharing of a produce or natural stock of wealth without contributing to it". The scenario above amply fits the Nigerian situation since the 1970s; the state and the economy have totally dependent on oil rents (foreign receipts). The term "rent" aptly captures the state's lack of participation in the actual process of oil production, and its dependence on a share of the proceeds from oil sales to the global market. Consequently, the state has become very vulnerable to the fluctuating fortunes of as a commodity and over time, the real sectors of the economy have also been undermined by this dependence. Therefore, power calculations by the hegemonic elite have swivelled around the control and sharing of oil rents. This has ignited intense competition by all aspirants to wealth by bourgeons factional ethnic groups for access to and control over state revenue and material wealth (Turner, 1997). In the process, the Niger Delta was ignored, thus, while oil has yielded immense wealth for the hegemonic elites, it has only poverty, disease and polluted ecology for its people. The nature of the Nigerian state like all rentier states has been mostly characterised by authoritarian, arbitrary, clientele and extractive rule. Power is highly personalised and emphasis placed on connections and loyalty to a "grand patron" rather than merit or efficiency, loyalty is rewarded and opposition is ruthlessly repressed. According to (Obi, 1997) neo-patrimonialism became the basis for distributing and defining power relations. As such though the Nigerian state seems strong due to its copious oil resources, it is highly vulnerable to social pressures and intra-factional feuds. Thus, the major actions of the dominant ethnic elite are solely focused on the protection of the patron-client networks from the alienated populace in the name of national security. This therefore explains the convoluted security architecture in the Niger Delta. This gives credence to Beblawi assertion that rentierism often define state security as the protection of "political coalitions converged around the creation and allocation of oil rents" (Beblawi and Luciani 1987: 424).

CONCLUSION

As earlier mentioned, the Obasanjo administration accorded oilification a much more decisive twist in its dealing with the Niger Delta conflict. Thus, in spite of the democratic transition, the State has most often exhibited strong preference for military coercion to suppress the legitimate, though often, violent protests, which it considers threat to oil production in the Niger Delta. This explains the sacking of Odi town in Bayelsa by soldiers on orders of then newly democratically elected President Obasanjo in November 1999, 4 years after the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa, by Gen. Abacha's military junta. The destruction of Odi by an elected government is symptomatic of the crisis that has engulfed the Niger Delta since the late eighties. Also, it indicated clearly that the brutalities and arbitrariness with which successive military regimes dealt with legitimate political dissent, is still very much feature of governance. What has been happening in the Niger Delta is that the state, which ideally should mediate the oil conflict, is itself a major prosecutor of the conflict, vigorously championing unconcealed and unpopular interests. The State's primary interests are the economic and material well-being of the dominant ethnic factions of the Nigerian elite and their clients. Also, Juxtaposed to the former are the interests of the multinational oil companies given the centrality of oil to national revenues.

The unpopular nature of the state's interests together with its inability to appreciably accommodate

the legitimate aspirations of the ethnic minorities of the oil-producing Niger Delta incline the state to prevalently rely on fusillades of military violence to suppress local anti-oil protests. Hence, the state extends its application of military force to managing the largely non-oil conflicts in the Niger Delta. However, oilification has complicated conflicts in the region by escalating the pummelled peoples' hostilities against oil companies operations in their areas. Therefore, as a means of mollifying the oil-host communities and daunting them from further resort to violent protests, the state has, during the past few years, increasingly securitised development of the Niger Delta. The establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by the Obasanjo administration is the latest example of the securitisation of development in the Nigerian oil-producing areas. However, this development programme is contradicted by the increasing use of military reprisals on anti-oil protesters in the region, whose legitimate demands for environmental remediation, resource control and participatory development, have been scarcely addressed. The state's repression of the Niger Delta people and insensitivity to their needs and demands, have made substantially vague the prospect that oil-host communities would increasingly de-emphasise violent protests.

The role of environmental factors in shaping global security and international relations has been given more prominence since the fall of the Berlin Wall. As such, more attention is now focused on going beyond state-centric security notions to the reality of global economic and ecological interdependence. In the light of these changes in global security concerns, the ecology-security nexus is important in defining Nigeria's responses to the Niger Delta conflict and its implications for peace, democracy, and development in West Africa.

The possible escalation of the oil environment crisis in Nigeria, poses an immense threat to national

and sub-regional security. With its status as Africa's largest oil exporter and market, and home to the continent's largest population and elite, the implication of a possible deepening of tensions on the fragile oil-hinged unity of Nigeria is a grim prospect. The current threat summarises the wide extents of crisis spun by the struggles around oil and the potentially explosive features of the militarised Nigerian political terrain, where every inch of political space is locked in a zero sum game of the state takes all. Critically the government must recognise the realities in the Niger Delta and respond accordingly. The palliative measures which successive governments have applied to the problem in the Niger Delta will not work rather, the solution lies in resolving the fundamentals in line with the true and tested principles of federalism. The fact that even the stakeholders, that is the workers in the petroleum industry, have gone on or threaten to go on strike to pressurise government to resolve the problem in the Niger Delta demonstrates the failure of all palliative responses.

In the final analysis, disruptive conflicts in and beyond the Nigerian oil-producing region will scarcely abate without some fundamental reforms in the structures and policies of the state to downgrade the predatory and corrupt interests of the dominant elites, and in their stead have the popular aspirations of the vast majority of the citizenry, including ethnic minorities, significantly incorporated into the trajectory of governance.

Notes

1. In recent years the government has sought to address the causative factors of instability and violence in the Niger Delta through the Niger Development Commission (NDDC) that was created in 2000, followed by the Niger Delta Master Plan and the Niger Delta Peace and Security Strategy. For an analysis of the complex factors that play into the escalating violence (including corruption, money laundering, the availability of weapons), as well as the government's efforts to respond, see USIPeace Briefing, "Strategies for Peace in the Niger Delta," by Dorina Bekoe.

2. Securitisation is basically the process by which an issue is factored into the state's security agenda, defined or recognised as a security problem and by so doing the state and its elites (power holders) acquire the legitimate authority and justification to take extraordinary measures (including allocation of social resources) to control or combat the identified issue or threat. Oilification, from this basic conception, is a more localised or contextualised dimension of the politics of securitisation. For a more elaborate formulation of the theory of securitisation, see Waever (1995); see also Knudsen (2001) for a constructive critique of the theory.

3. "2008 Budget Speech by His Excellency, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, GCFR, at the Joint Session of the National Assembly on November 8th, 2008. – ThisDay, November 9th, 2007, page 13.

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