





## **Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria: A Critique of the Role of the State**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. The paper argues that the discovery of oil in the region in late 1950s marked a turning point not only in the area but shaping and consolidating the character of the Nigerian state. As the deprived people of area protested against the massive environmental degradation occasioned by the exploitation of the oil resource and total near exclusion from the control of the resources in their domain, the state has always responded in a repressive and brutalizing manner. Conceptualizing the state in term of Marxist, Pluralist and Institutional perspectives, the paper argues that the state as monopoly of force has assumed repressive tendency in its attempt to control the oil resource and subjugate the people of the area. Also, the political actors who have been presiding over the affairs of the Nigerian state have succeeded in looting and pilfering the collective wealth generated by the region thereby keeping the people and indeed the entire masses of Nigeria in perpetual poverty while the state itself bears the unmistakably the features of a failed state.

**KEY WORDS:** State; Niger Delta; Oil; Crisis; Oloibiri.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term Niger Delta originally refers to that region of Nigeria that borders the Atlantic seaboard and stretches from Cross River State near Cameroon in the east to the western boundary of Delta and Edo State near Ilaje country. Geological history shows that the Niger Delta is about 120 million years old. (Darah, 2008).

The Niger Delta region is made up of six of Nigeria's 36 states, namely, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. The area is defined primarily by the River Niger and 21 other major rivers that drain into the Atlantic Ocean. The River Niger and these 21 rivers braid into hundreds of channels and rivulets. Nearly half of the territory is permanently under water for most of the year. The political definition of the Niger Delta has recently been enlarged to include all nine oil-producing states, namely, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. However, the six oil-rich states mentioned above constitute what is known as

### ***Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria***

Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone (Darah 2008; Ugwuoha, 2009). About 100 of Nigeria's 402 languages are spoken in the Niger Delta, the most populous being Ijaw, Urhobo, Edo-Bini, Esan, and Ibibio, and Igbo. Nearly 30 of the 100 languages are to be found in Cross River State. The region covers an area of about 112,110 square kilometres and is home to some 31 million people spread across 185 Local Government Areas. The region has 5000 communities made up of 13,329 settlements, out of which only 98 can be truly regarded as urban centres, more by reason of their population sizes and less by the availability or depth of infrastructural development.

The Niger Delta is one of the largest wetlands in the world, in the category of Mississippi, the Pantanal and the Amazon Basin in North and South America. The whole region is traversed and criss-crossed by large numbers of rivers, streams, canals and creeks. Yet these copious marine advantages have not been fully tapped for economic purposes due to high rate of silting in the numerous water ways, near absence of port infrastructure, physical obstructions and low levels of investment in water transportation in the region.

The age distribution of the population shows that over 62 per cent of its inhabitants are below 32 years. Adults in the age group of 32 to 69 years make up only 36 per cent. Life expectancy is put at about 47 years, even as infant and maternal mortality rates remain depressingly high (Ugwuoha, 2009).

Over two-thirds of the region consists of mangrove and coastal vegetation with a thin belt of freshwater swamp forest. The poorly drained and sandy soils in this dominant vegetation are not conducive for farming. Over 60 per cent of top soils of the mangrove forests and coastal vegetation zone are of low fertility, while the freshwater swamp forest zone has about 90 per cent of medium fertility topsoil. The extensive coastal line of the Niger Delta, one of the longest in the world, is continually under threat by the tidal waves of the surging Atlantic Ocean, which incidentally gives the region all its characteristics as a water basin. Often than not, there is more water than the basin can comfortably contain resulting in seasonal flooding and drainage problems that put both settlements and farming lands in great jeopardy. Thus, the wet season which is relatively longer, lasting up to eight months, brings with it so much anxiety.

Apart from oil and gas, the region is blessed with other natural resources, including cash crops such as oil palm, rubber, cocoa, coconut and a wide range of aquatic resources. There is also a large deposit of bitumen in Ondo State. Although the region remains home to the nation's oil and gas industry, ironically, what gives the people sustenance is woven around activities outside oil and gas operations. They engage in peasant farming, fishing and hunting, all of which have come under tremendous threat by oil exploration and exploitation. The traditional means of livelihood of the people have been grossly abbreviated by the new-found oil economy, yet in the allocation of the accruing profit and benefits, the people have been made by processes

outside their control, to remain perpetual onlookers (Darah, 2008; Ugwuoha, 2009).

### **Discovery of Oil and Squandering of Fortunes**

Before the discovery of crude oil, Nigeria's economy survived and flourished on agriculture. The domestic and external economy depended solely on the enormous potential, productivity and vitality of agricultural commodities. From historical records, palm oil became an export commodity for what is presently known as Nigeria as far back as 1558; and by 1830, the Niger Delta, which now produces crude oil, had become the major source of palm oil which dominated Nigeria's export list for more than fifty years. Cotton joined the export list in 1856, while cocoa was introduced and became an export crop in 1895. Together with rubber, groundnut, palm kernel and benniseed in later years, these cash crops formed the main, source of revenue, export and foreign exchange for government to provide social and economic infrastructure. Records showed that 72 percent of total national output of the economy, GDP, came from agriculture in 1950, as against 1.1 percent by mining and crude oil.

The dominant role of agriculture in the nation's fortune continued in 1960 when its contribution stood at 66 percent, compared to 1.2 percent from minerals. Also, at independence in 1960, more than 70 percent of exports came from agriculture while 95 percent of the nation's food needs were locally produced. Also, of the NGN 2.247million GDP recorded in 1960, mining sector including crude oil, contributed a mere 1.2 percent. By 1966 when GDP increased to NGN 3.375 million, share of crude oil had risen four fold to 4.8 percent. In 1970 GDP stood at NGN 3.486, out which crude oil contributed 7.5 percent (Ogunlowo, 2008).

It is pertinent to note that the economy, particularly at regional level recorded tremendous self-sustaining growth and expansion before crude oil became the mainstay. Revenues from agriculture was appropriately used to build landmark social and economic infrastructure, while providing basic services like education, health, water and electricity supply. The then revolutionary free education programme in the Western Region was funded entirely from cocoa, rubber and palm oil proceeds. Also, University of Ife, Liberty Stadium, Cocoa House and Western Nigerian Broadcasting and Television Services (WNBC/WNTV) were funded by the same proceed. Furthermore, Ahmadu Bello University, ABU, Zaria, and University of Nigeria Nsukka, UNN, were not built with foreign grants or loans, but from proceeds from cotton, groundnut, rubber and palm oil (Ogunlowo, 2008).

Several factors contributed to the impressive growth of the economy before the advent of crude oil. Primarily, law and order was effectively maintained, which fostered peaceful co-existence among the populace and the colonial administration. Efficient communication and transportation systems also contributed to the growth of commercial activities. The railway was functional, electricity supply regular, telephone and telegram services

### ***Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria***

were efficient while the roads were in highest standard of the time. Equally, instruments of economic management were thought out and consistently implemented. The concept of development planning was given serious attention. It was meant to ensure greater diversification of the economy, achieve economic growth by increasing the income per capita of the people and use government's resources to directly finance the provision of infrastructure, training programme and general services.

In 1946, the first 10- year plan, 1946 – 1956, for development and welfare was introduced. This plan, however, came an abrupt end when the Federal System of government was introduced in 1954. Under the new structure, each of the regional governments as well as the federal government launched new plans known as the 1955 – 1962 Economic Development Plan. These plans identified and articulated the peculiar needs of regions, while public expenditure was judiciously and transparently channeled to actualize the welfare objectives of the government. Despite the inadequacy of these plans, they provided the platform for successful economic development in the regions

However, between 1953 and 1956 oil was struck in a relatively unknown town called Oloibiri. With this Oloibiri grew to become a big town and a hub that drew people. Soon, helicopters were landing and it became a centre of modern civilization. When oil was found, Shell Petroleum Development Company, SPDC, the Anglo-Dutch company, marked it with a wild party which even the locals attended. By 1958 when they starting pumping oil from Oloibiri oil fields made up of 22 oil wells, ships started docking at the island and sailors added to the bubble (Agbo, 2008; Darah, 2009). Oloibiri was a blue-chip town where white men played lawn tennis, table tennis, volleyball and football with the locals. Then the town was the headquarters of Ogbia District, now called Ogiba Local Government. It was the only cosmopolitan town in the district.

Oil from the Niger Delta region has brought Nigeria to world reckoning. Nigeria's proven oil reserves were estimated at 36.2 billion barrels. With the continuing discovery of new oil wells, it is estimated that by 2010, the nation's proven oil reserves might increase to about 40 billion barrels. Nigeria is the largest oil producer in African and the seventh largest in the world. Its total oil production in 2006 including condensates, natural gas liquids and crude oil averaged 2.45 million barrels per day, bpd, with oil accounting for 2.28 million bpd. Although it is difficult to put a definite figure to how much has accrued to the country in safe to estimate it at several hundreds of billions of dollars (Aham, 2008).

Since it was first exported in 1958, the black gold has, ostensibly, catapulted the country from a struggling independent nation to an economically dependent and buoyant country. With oil wealth, Lagos, the nation's first capital city, was built to a befitting status comparable to many other nations' capitals. And when the capital moved from Lagos to Abuja, oil money was, equally, used to set up a capital city of an enviable standard (Aham, 2008; Ajanaku, 2008).

### ***Emmanuel Emeka Okafor***

It was also with this oil windfall that Yakubu Gowon's regime in 1977, organized the Festival for Arts and Culture, FESTAC, the first of its kind in the nation's history. More importantly, with the oil wealth, government in the 1970s was able to set up the second-generation universities across the country. Petrodollars was also used in constructing several stadia across the country as football increasingly became a popular national pastime. Beyond this, in the 1960s and 1970s major infrastructural developments took place particularly in the transport sector. Huge road constructions, including the Lagos – Ibadan, Sagamu-Ore-Benin, Kaduna, Kano expressways, among others, were constructed (Ajanaku, 2008).

The availability of huge oil revenues and weak political and administrative structures gave rise to high incidence of corruption, more emphasis on oil taxes and less on direct personal taxes which created the problems of lack of accountability and weak linkages between government and the citizens, which in turn led to weakness in democratic institutions and culture.

With so much petrodollars at his disposal, Gowon administration embarked on a spending spree, even picking the salary bills of other countries. When late Murtala Muhammed, a general, a general, eased Gowon out of power in 1975, there was hope and light at the end of the tunnel. He dismissed over 1,000 civil servants and permanent bureaucrats for offences related to abuse of office, corruption, "divided loyalty" and nepotism. He probed governors in Gowon's administration and many of them were found to have dipped their fingers in the public till. Mobolaji Johnson and Oluwole Rotimi, both retired brigadiers, were the only military governors that were absolved (Ajanaku, 2008).

There were many adverse consequences of the situation described above, of which included: First, basic infrastructure was allowed to get to near total decay, with electricity generation barely enough for one-fifth of the population. Secondly, there was also less focus on wealth creation which led to poor attention to investments in human capital. Thirdly, there was a culture of impunity by the leaders, occasioned by four decades of militarization of virtually all aspects of governance and disrespect for the constitution. A fourth consequence was the excessive fiscal expansion occasioned by accommodating monetary policy, which fuelled inflationary expectations during the past decades, with inflation reaching an average of 28.5 per cent in the 1990s and an overvalued exchange rate, leading to great macroeconomic instability (Usman, 2008).

At present, the glamour of Oloibiri town has gone and the countenance of the town gives no clue to the great place it once was. After 20 years of oil-drilling, Shell said the wells had dried up. They dismantled their equipment and left in 1978. But before their departure, the foundation for the fall of Oloibiri was laid when Ogbia elites became politicians and used their power to relocate the headquarters away from Oloibiri. The final nail in the coffin of the town was driven I when Shell left and their camp at Otuogidi soon became a forest (Agbo, 2008).

### ***Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria***

Oloibiri is a living tragedy of the Nigeria situation. It is a mirror with which Nigeria can see herself. The biggest general hospital in the old Rivers State was sited at Oloibiri. It has 22 buildings fully completed and painted but the squabbles prevented the hospital from being commissioned. The buildings are swallowed by a trespassing mangrove forest and are inhabited by wild animals. Oloibiri women fetch firewood around the complex and hunters set traps for animals inside the buildings. At present, Oloibiri is a parable of what the Niger Delta could become after oil (Ugwuoha, 2008; Darah, 2009)

It is important to note that Shell Petroleum Development Company, not only succeeded in winning the contest for Oloibiri, but mid-wifed Nigeria's birth not just as an oil-producing nation but also as a member of the league of the world's oil-exporting countries. At present, more than 50 years after, the once proud oil-producing community is history. The relationship between the company and the community left Oloibiri battered, down and out, abused and exploited. The hitherto bubbling oil-rich community is now a barren land sucked dry of its natural endowments and its environment devastated by serial oil spillages and pollution. The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC, puts the quantity of oil jettisoned into the environment yearly at 2,300 cubic metres with an average of 300 individual spills annually. But the World Bank contends that the true quantity of oil spilled into the environment could be as much as 10 times of officially claimed amount. Texaco and Shell remain the greatest individual culprits. A blow-out of Texaco's offshore station in 1980 dumped an estimated 400,000 barrels of crude into the Gulf of Guinea, while Shell's Forcados Terminal tank failure spilled an estimated 580,000 barrels (Agbo, 2008; Ero, 2008).

Rather than being proud and privileged to be the goose that lays the golden eggs of the nation's oil wealth, the thought-provoking debate in the Niger Delta region is whether oil, perceived as nature-given gift, is a blessing or a curse. Oloibiri is a metaphor of the tragic fate that awaits many more oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta region. While the federal government counts its blessing in trillions of naira from oil revenue, the hapless people, whose land bears the 'black gold', bemoan the loss of their means of livelihood. It was only in the days of yore that fresh fish delicacies adorned their dining tables, as fishes have disappeared from their waters, as a result of oil spillages and other poor environmental habits by the multinational oil companies. No doubt, Oloibiri serves as a metaphor for environmental degradation and neglect (Ero, 2008).

### **The Chequered efforts at Developing the Niger Delta**

Early in the life of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, the need to pay special attention to the region because of its difficult terrain appeared not lost on the leadership of the country. The first of such moves to address the Niger Delta question was the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board, NDDB. This was the product of Sir Henry Willink's Commission of 1958,

which recommended that the area deserved special developmental attention. But it was not until 1960 that this board came into being. It had the mandate to manage the developmental needs and challenges of the region then segmented into the Yenagoa Province, Degema Province, the Ogoni Division of Port Harcourt and the western Ijaw Division of Delta Province. But for the seven years it existed, it made no significant mark. It faded into oblivion with the military coup of 1966 (Yishua, 2008).

Years after the Nigeria civil war, no special attention was given to the region. But following the return of the country to democratic rule in 1979, the region was remembered again. Following agitations for a special focus on the development of the region, The Shehu Shagari administration set up a president task force, better known as the 1.5 Per Cent Committee, with the mandate to address the peculiarities of the region. It was allocated 1.5 per cent of the Federation Account to carry out its assignment. The coups that brought to power Muhammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida, both retired military dictators, did not immediately lead to its abandonment. But a few years into the Babangida regime, it was abandoned. Cumulatively, it could not make any success of the mandate given to it.

In 1992, Babangida administration set up the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission, OMPADEC. The administration gave OMPADEC the mandate of turning around the faces and the phases of the region. However, by 1999, when it was wound up, OMPADEC had as achievements projects that had no direct bearing on poverty reduction, which is considered a major challenge in the region.

When Olusegun Obasanjo assumed power as a civilian president in 1999, he met the region in chaos. His administration came up with the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, with the mandate of facilitating “the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and political peaceful” (Yishau, 2008).

It is also pertinent to note since oil was discovered in the region, the region has been receiving a mere token while the Nigerian state has been reaping billions of , dollars (Onuorah, Olayinka Adeyemi and Salau, 2009) For instance, in 1953, the derivation principle in revenue allocation was 100 per cent. By 1960, it went down to 50 per cent. During the Nigerian civil war, it was blanked out to zero to perhaps, fund the war. By 1982, it was only a whisper at two per cent. It was further reduced to 1.5 per cent in 1984, and in 1992, it was doubled to three percent. At present, it is 13 per cent and the campaign is on for either total resource control or a minimum of 50 per cent derivation (Agbo, 2008b; Ugwuoha, 2009; Darah, 2009).

The Land Use Decree of 1978 which deprived the region its land vested ownership of all land in the government. Also, the Petroleum Decree of 1969, amended in 1991: Decree No. 52 of 1993, known as Osborne Land Decree; and the National Inland Waterways Authority Decree No. 13 of 1997 served to only complete the deprivation process There is also the controversial issue of maritime boundary of coastal states solely for the purpose of derivation



### ***Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria***

which the federal government puts at 200 nautical miles from the low water mark. The target is to deprive the states of their offshore oil wells.

#### **Road to Bloodshed and State Responses**

On February 23, a 27-year old Isacc Adaka Boro, general officer commanding, the Niger Delta Volunteer Service DVS, declared an Independent Niger Delta People Republic, NDPR, 40 days after the historic January 15 coup. It was 3 pm and the three division of the DVS, made up of 159 troops, were going into action at 5 pm with the objective of dislodging the federal police and taking over Yenagoa at 12 midnight. It was code-named 'Operation Zero' It marked the beginning of the "12 -Day Revolution" during which Boro an ex-police inspector called the attention of the world to the fact that the inhabitants of the Niger Delta were feeling very uncomfortable with their fate in Nigeria(Agbo, 2008).

Earlier in 1963, Boro and his Internal Caucus took their campaign to the embassies of some countries whom they considered advocates of freedom. They did not get the desired support. In 1964, Boro and Samuel Owonaru, later to be his second in command in DVS, toured West African countries to conscientise Ijaws living in the West Coast about the plight of the their people in independent Nigeria. That ripe moment came during the killing of Tafawa Balewa, the prime minister on January 15, 1996. Boro resigned his job, cashed his emolument, sold his property and with £150, returned to Kaiama, his hometown, set up camp at the Taylor Creek and began recruitment. After six weeks' training, they struck. And 12 days later, the revolution was foiled and Boro and his lieutenants were arrested. Boro and all his commanders were condemned to death. But fate favoured them and General Yakubu Gowon's government freed them and created Rivers State and Lieutenant Commander Diете Spiff, an Ijaw, was made governor.

The civil war started and Boro became a major in the Nigerian Army. He was killed on April 20, 1968, near Port Harcourt and the muted the radical voice of the Ijaw against the disappointments in their expectations for the next 30 years. Nigeria deteriorated under the unitary military regimes and worsened the plight of the Niger Delta.

Then Ken Saro-Wiwa, poet and novelist, who had worked with and seen the inside machinery of governance, concluded that Nigeria had not delivered on the expectation of the Ogoni, who, too like the Ijaw, were very proactive of their identity. Despite this contributions of the region, the Ogoni nationalists regretted that they had no representation at the national level, no pipe-borne water, no electricity, no job opportunities in the federal, state, public and private institutions, and no social or economic project of the federal government, even as crude oil flowed from their land into waiting oil tankers for export. Against this background, in 1990, the Ogoni made of Babbe, Gokana, Ken Khana, Nyo Khana, Ueme and Tai, with a population of about half a million, formed the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, MOSOP, under the leadership of Saro-Wiwa. While reaffirming their wish

*Emmanuel Emeka Okafor*

to remain a part of the Nigeria polity, the Ogoni demanded seven basic guarantees from Nigeria predicated on “political economy to participate in the affairs of the republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever named called”. Of course, Nigerian state did not deliver. The relationship between the Ogoni and Shell, which was exploiting the oilfields in their land, worsened and the federal government led by a military dictator, Sanni Abacha, arrested Saro-Wiwa and seven other Ogoni activists following the alleged murder of some indigenous military/Shell apologists in the Community. They were hurriedly tried, condemned to death and hanged on November 10, 1995, an act which has been widely described as judicial murder that earned Nigeria suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations. Consequently, the Ogoni people grew restive and sacked Shell from their land for about 15 years now. Ogoni oil has been under lock and key as several reconciliation efforts failed (Agbo, 2008b).

In 1998, Ijaw nationalism welled up again as successive governments failed to meet the basic expectations of the Ijaw. An all-Ijaw youths conference was held at Kaiama, Boro’s hometown, on December 11. The youths made 10 resolutions known as the “Kaiama Declaration”. They reaffirmed that all land and natural resources within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of their survival. Consequently, they advised all oil companies’ staff and contractors to withdraw from Ijaw territories by December 30, 1998, pending the resolution of the issue of resource ownership and control in the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta. They asked for a sovereign national conference to restructure the Nigerian federation. Finally, the youths resolved to set up the Ijaw Youth Council, IYC, to coordinate the struggle of Ijaw people for self-determination and justice. Government of Gen. Abuldsalami Abubakar responded by sending in Joint Military Task Force, JTF (a special military outfit created to deal with restiveness and general insecurity in the Nigeria Delta region) to the area and scores of agitators were massacred.

Asari Dokubo became the second president of IYC. From his student days, he had, like Boro, been preparing himself for the liberation of the Ijaw. What started as political disagreement because of his protest against the rigging of the 2003 election snowballed into the guerilla warfare for resource control? To protect him, Dokubo, who sees himself as the spiritual successor to Boro, dusted up the DVS which had survived as Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, NDPVF, and engaged the federal troops. His arrest in August 2005, in violation of a ceasefire agreement, led to the rise of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND, and other militant groups. Hostage-taking entered the arsenal of the militants as a bargain chip and later as a source of revenue. At present, the Niger Delta is still on fire despite the stage managed amnesty granted to the militants by the Federal government, so that oil exploitation and exploration would continue undisturbed and unhindered.

**A Critique of the Role of the State**

From the foregoing, it is evident that oil has come to shape the character and content of the Nigerian state. A state is defined a set of institutions that possess the authority to make the rules that govern the people in one or more societies, having internal and external sovereignty over a definite territory. In Max Weber's influential definition, it is that organization that has a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. It thus includes such institutions as the armed forces, civil service or state bureaucracy, courts, and police (Skinner, 1989).

At present, most Western states more or less fit the influential definition of the state in Max Weber's (1994) *Politics as a Vocation*. According to Weber (1994) the modern state monopolizes the means of legitimate physical violence over a well-defined territory. Moreover, the legitimacy of this monopoly itself is of a very special kind, "rational-legal" legitimacy, based on impersonal rules that constrain the power of state elites. Therefore, for Weber (1994), the state is an organization with an effective monopoly on the use of legitimate violence in a particular geographic area. Weber identifies three components of the modern state, namely, its territoriality, legitimacy and coercive force monopoly. However, the state has always tended to be authoritarian. That explains why the checks and balances have been introduced to reign in its excesses in the context of constitutionalism (Tilly, 1992).

Theoretically, the state has been articulated by social scientists in different ways. Its origin is hypothesised in the contract theories of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacque Rousseau in western philosophy. In African context, there are equally sundry narratives on the origin of the state. In all these there is a consensus that the state arises out of the desire for collective freedom by the people, a condition which state of anarchy or 'war of all against all' cannot guarantee (Grinin, 2004; Jackson and Rosberg. 1982; Poggi, 1978; Odion-Akhaine, 2009).

People as a political category constitute the materiality and spirituality of a state. The state is an empty space without the people who animate it. And when a state has diverse demography, it is the duty of the state institutions and agencies to ensure harmony and 'the rightfulness of the units' not as a partisan dispenser of oppression. When state fulfils this basic role, it wins for it, consent and legitimacy, a major requirement for its continuous existence. As the state alienates the people, it breeds resistance with negative consequence on state's sovereignty

There are three main traditions within political science and sociology that shape theories of the state : the Marxist, the pluralist, and the institutionalist. Each of these theories has been employed to gain understanding on the state, while recognizing its complexity. Several issues underlie this complexity. First, the boundaries of the state are not closely defined, but constantly changing. Second, the state is not only the site of conflict between different organizations, but also internal conflict and conflict within organizations.

Some scholars speak of the 'state's interest,' but there are often various interests within different parts of the state that are neither solely state-centered nor solely society-centered, but develop between different groups in civil society and different state actors.

For Marxist theorists, the role of modern states is determined or related to their position in capitalist societies. Many contemporary Marxists offer a liberal interpretation of Marx's comment in *The Communist Manifesto* that the state is but the executive committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. Miliband (1983) argued that the ruling class uses the state as its instrument to dominate society by virtue of the interpersonal ties between state officials and economic elites. For Miliband(1983), the state is dominated by an elite that comes from the same background as the capitalist class. State officials therefore share the same interests as owners of capital and are linked to them through a wide array of interpersonal and political ties.

By contrast, other Marxist theorists argue that the question of who controls the state is irrelevant. Heavily influenced by Gramsci, Nicos Poulantzas, a Greek neo-Marxist theorist argued that capitalist states do not always act on behalf of the ruling class, and when they do, it is not necessarily the case because state officials consciously strive to do so, but because the 'structural' position of the state is configured in such a way to ensure that the long-term interests of capital are always dominant. Poulantzas' main contribution to the Marxist literature on the state was the concept of 'relative autonomy' of the state. While Poulantzas' (1969) work has served to sharpen and specify a great deal of Marxist literature on the state, his own framework came under criticism for its 'structural functionalism.'(Nozick, 1974; Forgacs and Geoffrey, 1985; Chomsky, 1996).

While neo-Marxist theories of the state were relatively influential in continental Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, pluralism, a contending approach, gained greater adherence in the United States. Within the pluralist tradition, Robert Dahl (1984) developed the theory of the state as a neutral arena for contending interests or its agencies as simply another set of interest groups. With power competitively arranged in society, state policy is a product of recurrent bargaining. Although pluralism recognizes the existence of inequality, it asserts that all groups have an opportunity to pressure the state. The pluralist approach suggests that the modern democratic state's actions are the result of pressures applied by a variety of organized interests. Dahl (1984) called this kind of state a polyarchy.

Both the Marxist and pluralist approaches view the state as reacting to the activities of groups within society, such as classes or interest groups. In this sense, they have both come under criticism for their 'society-centered' understanding of the state by scholars who emphasize the autonomy of the state with respect to social forces (Poulantzas, 1969; Nordlinger, 1981).

In particular, the "new institutionalism," an approach to politics that holds that behavior is fundamentally molded by the institutions in which it is embedded, asserts that the state is not an 'instrument' or an 'arena' and does

### *Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria*

not 'function' in the interests of a single class. Scholars working within this approach stress the importance of interposing civil society between the economy and the state to explain variation in state forms.

"New institutionalist" writings on the state, such as the works of Skocpol, Rueschemeyer and Evans (1985), suggest that state actors are to an important degree autonomous. In other words, state personnel have interests of their own, which they can and do pursue independently (at times in conflict with) actors in society. Since the state controls the means of coercion, and given the dependence of many groups in civil society on the state for achieving any goals they may espouse, state personnel can to some extent impose their own preferences on civil society. 'New institutionalist' writers, claiming allegiance to Weber, often utilize the distinction between 'strong states' and 'weak states,' claiming that the degree of 'relative autonomy' of the state from pressures in society determines the power of the state - a position that has found favour in the field of international political economy (Sklair, 2002).

Historically, the Nigerian State came into existence in 1914 following the amalgamation of ethnically and religiously diversified entities of Northern and Southern protectorates by the British colonial administrator, Lord Lugard for administrative convenience. She got her political independence in 1960, and over the years she has demonstrated capacity to use force in dealing with the legitimate agitations and demands of the Niger Deltans and the whole Niger Delta question. This continues to reinforce the repressive character of the Nigerian state.

The Nigerian state does not exhibit the neutral pretext or pluralism of the liberal state pretending to be umpire of the contending forces nor the service role of state-building. It bears through and through, the authoritarian content of the colonial state, from where it originated from. The nature of subduing the various ethnic nationalities which later became the Nigerian state was largely violent. Therefore what qualifies presently as Nigerian state is made of various ethnic nationalities which shared little or nothing in common, but were coerced to bind together by the colonial administration of Lord Lugard in 1914. The process of colonial disengagement placed power in the hands of ethnic feudal elite to whom power is warfare. The end in view for the British was to secure enduring neo-colonial future relations. Its post-colonial existence was illegitimately brought about, and the post-colonial Nigerian state has only one asset, the monopoly of coercive force which successive regimes have deployed to fulfil the goal of accumulation of the local elite and their metropolitan counterparts. For this reason, the political economy approach best captures its dynamics. Its highpoint as an approach is that it focuses exclusively on the social relations of production. In the words of Ralph Miliband (1969) the state in a class society "is primarily and inevitably the guardian and protector of the economic interests which are dominant in society. Its 'real' purpose is to ensure their continued predominance, not to prevent it." The political economy view of the state is that the state is the instrument of oppression of the oppressed class in society.

Therefore, the violent character of the Nigerian State in the Niger Delta affairs which started since 1960 with the execution of freedom fighters like Isaac Boro and his associates, the judicial murder of the renowned playwright and environmental activist like Ken Saro-Wiwa and continuous military crackdown of militants in the region shows the failure of the Nigerian state while its mainstay is authoritarian exertion. By definition it is not a state in the liberal sense but rather a failed authoritarian state interested in primitive accumulation (Burawry, 1979; Brown, and Madge, 1982; Buchanam and Tullock, 1982; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982).

The various political hawks both military and civilians who pretended to be the political actors of the state who appeared on the scene and presided over affairs of the state at different times not only looted the treasury and pilfered the collective wealth of the Niger Deltans but also collaborated with the neo-imperialist multinational oil corporations to economically rape the region and subjugate and impoverish the entire hapless masses of Nigeria. Hence, Nigeria as a nation has remained economically backwards and politically fragile fifty years after her political independence (Strange, 2000).

The Nigerian State as it is presently constituted is characterized by a windfall wealth of unprecedented magnitude from the Niger Delta. This is perhaps the singular incentive for Nigeria's continuous existence and simultaneously underlines its elusive nature. The state collects rents from sale of oil from the Multinational oil companies and is merely distributed through the bureaucratic mill from where it is appropriated, misappropriated and stolen outright. Local content to the production process is absolutely non existence, a fact that explains while the country has continued to import refined oil products into the country to the detriment of the country's current account balance. It is the struggle for this oil rent that has turned the contest for political offices in the country into 'a do-or-die politics' The Nigerian state by virtue of its sole reliance on oil is a rentier state (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Odion-Akhaine, 2009; Onuorah, Olayinka, Adeyemi and Salau, 2009).

The Nigerian state has failed in all ramifications while its mainstay is authoritarian exertion. Its current assault on the peoples of the Niger Delta and huge revenue it derives from the region has not translated to better living standard for the people of area nor the general masses of Nigeria (Bryne, 1999). For instance, it has been estimated that over the last fifty years Nigeria earned over \$400 billion, but the 2005 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) survey published by the National Planning Commission of Nigeria shows that as at 2004, 54.4% of Nigeria's households were living relative poverty, while 22.0% were living in extremely poverty. Also, 34.6% of Nigerians were living below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption (based on 2900 calories). The 2006 Human Development Report shows that 52% of Nigeria had no access to an improved water source as at 2004. Between 1990 and 2007, 70.8% of Nigerians earned not more that USD1 (NGN 130) a day, while 92.4% earned not more than USD2 (NGN260) a day. Within the same period, 34.1 lived below the national poverty line. Life expectancy at birth (2004) was 43.4 years. It is, therefore not surprising

### ***Oil and Blood in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria***

that Nigeria occupies the 76<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking of 102 developing countries, in spite of her enormous economic resources (Aham, 2008; Ajanaku, 2008; Usman, 2008). This situation raises much concern on the basis of the fact that Nigeria has more economic resources and favourable weather condition for development than some of the developed countries

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion the Niger Delta region has also been excluded from active participation in the oil industry. Oil wells in their communities are awarded to people who are predominantly from non-oil producing states, who exploit the land without regard for its owners. This is perpetuated by what they believe in their near exclusion from power. Precisely, the disconnection or a feeling of injustice and alienation has precipitated all the crises in the region. It follows therefore that the first major challenge in the transformation of the region is to establish a connection between the people and crude oil in the new game of survival and more importantly allow the people to control the resources in their domain as it was before the discovery of oil. The frustration, arising from years of unfulfilled expectations, is deep among the people of Nigeria This has led to tension, anger, restiveness, violent agitations and a lingering sociological dislocation that is often referred to as the Niger Delta question and which is increasingly becoming the national question.

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***Emmanuel Emeka Okafor***

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