

The Concept of Niger Delta and Oil Politics in Nigeria from the Pre-colonial Era to the Recent Past

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Abstract

Nigerian Niger Delta is known across the globe due to its economic importance related to oil exploration by multinational companies and the related massive coverage of news about the region by international press. A lot has therefore been written about the region, but scholarship is yet to systematically examine the history of the Niger Delta and oil politics in the area during the post-colonial era. This paper therefore critically examines how the concept of the Niger Delta developed and how it has been a factor in the Nigerian politics. The paper adopts an historical-analytical approach, relying on information obtained from primary and secondary sources from archives, newspapers, oral interviews, online sources, and different publications. The paper sheds light on various challenges in the region which over the years have heightened the discourse on the Niger Delta. It argues that the firm grip exacted on the concept of Niger Delta by many forces clearly demonstrates the resilience of multiple stakeholder interests over the region. Although the article focusses on Nigeria, the thrust of its analysis and argument is relevant to Africa in general, and specifically to countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Southern Sudan and Kenya, where an extraction-based economy has been evolving in recent decades.

Keywords: Niger Delta, Oil Politics, Nigeria, Nigerian Civil War

1.0 Introduction

The concept of Niger Delta is a very important theme in the academic discourse and political lexicon of Nigeria. The concept was originally deployed for the purpose of describing a particular region in Nigeria. However, the economic value of the area (Niger Delta) has made its meaning deeper and complex since the discovering of oil on a commercial quantity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In other words, it is believed that the oil deposit in the region is a factor that defines and drives Nigerian politics since the discovering of oil on a commercial quantity in the region.¹

The oil politics of Nigeria is deeply rooted on oil. Nigeria is no doubt a complex country owing to its ethno-religious composition, huge population and colonial heritage. Nevertheless, it is evident that beyond these realities, the oil factor or politics as the case may be, has been its major challenges as a nation. In line with the argument of this paper, different geo-political areas in Nigeria consider it expedient belonging to Niger Delta mainly for economic benefits even when they are not contiguous to the “original” Niger Delta geographical zone. Therefore, it is considered

¹ An interview with Professor C.B.N. Ogbogbo of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, At Ibadan, 10.05.2022.

being part of Niger Delta guarantees huge fiscal revenue (national cake) from the federal government of Nigeria.²

In view of the foregoing, the concept of Niger Delta has a political undertone exploited by the political class of Nigeria. Apart from the political class, the masses in the Niger Delta also see their perceived privileged class as a special status or badge exclusively used as an identity marker. Be that as it may, it has been argued that when fossil oil becomes irrelevant in the global economy; the struggle over the concept of Niger Delta would definitely lose its saltiness.³

Without doubt, the concern and agitation over equitable distribution of rent derived from the oil has remained a source of contention over the years in Nigeria. Following this agitation, the concept of Niger Delta has assumed varied meanings and uses in different ways to suit political interest. With this circumstance of frequent change of name, Tekena Tamuno opines that the area has transited from oil River (palm oil) protectorate to Nigeria new protectorate of oil (crude oil)⁴

Generally, the word delta could be taken as the mouth of many rivers often roughly triangular especially where it flushes down to the ocean. Christopher Ogbogbo explained

² *Ibid.*

³ An interview with Professor S.A. Ajayi of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, at Ibadan, 10th May, 2022

⁴ Tekena N. Tamuno, *Oil Wars in the Niger Delta, 1849-2009* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publisher, 2011), 4.

that the first word “Niger is used to describe the great river covering about 4148km which rises from Sierra Leone and cuts through republic of Mali and Niger into Nigeria through the North Western Flank.⁵ In this vein, therefore, this study examined the concept of Niger Delta and analysed how oil politics has affected Nigeria.

2.0 Evolution of the Concept of Niger Delta and Oil Politics

The word Niger Delta is not indigenous to Nigerian people. It was indeed one of those colonial imposed words on Nigerians since the pre-colonial period. The word, however, connotes an area filled with water body such as river, sea or an ocean with other mangrove features. In this regard, Tekena Tamuno posits that, Niger Delta area was regarded as oil river protectorate by the British imperial authority. Later in 1893 it became the Niger coast protectorate, indicating British more active involvement in the administration of the territories in the Bight of Bonny (Bight of Biafra).⁶

Since the 19th century as affirmed in this discourse, the concept of Niger Delta has remained very fervent with some measures of political undertones. Over the years, therefore, the concept has generated debate due to the nature of Nigerian politics rooted on oil. In line with the foregoing, it

⁵ Christopher Ogbogbo “Identity Politics and Resource Control Conflict in Nigeria’s Niger Delta,” *Nigeria Journal of the Humanities*, University of Benin, No. 4. (2007), 37.

⁶ Tamuno, *Oil Wars*, 4.

would be appropriate to assert that the concept of Niger Delta has assumed different meanings or nomenclature for different reasons over the years. Thus, this is not far from the political machination of Nigerian people and politician. Specifically, the concept was passively used in the early post-colonial era when oil factor and politics were not much heated. At the wake of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the term Niger Delta was just a mere expression for a geographical location in Nigeria totally void of political cum economic sentiment. The region at independence did not represent "national cake" nor invoke mental picture of violence, militancy or agitations as it became in the latter years. The seriousness attached to the area in terms of ownership of its resources was not part of Nigeria's early days of independence at all.⁷ However, the action of Adaka Boro in 1966, when he declared a Republic for the people of Niger Delta, the concept (Niger Delta) gained much national and international attention or publicity as the case may be. Consequently, it became a constant news item due to its rich oil deposit which was discovered in 1956 in a community called Oloibiri in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.⁸ Karl Maier, an

⁷ See paper delivered by Obaro Ikemi at a seminar titled *The Niger Delta: The Past in the Present and the Challenges of the Future* Organised by T.A.S. Associates, Lagos, in Collaboration with the Office of the Governor, Delta State, at the Petroleum Institute, Warri, on 2 and 3 November, 2000.

⁸ See Karl Maier, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (London: Penguin, 2000), 124-125

American researcher in his book titled, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*, sheds light on these facts as thus:

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n February Boro declared an independent republic and state of emergency in the Niger delta. He announced that all oil contracts were null and void, ordered oil companies to negotiate directly with the new republic, and required all “aliens, “or non-Ijaws, to report to the Volunteer Service within twenty-four hours. On February 23 the Service went into action. Three separate operations culminated in the capture of Yenegoa, whose small police garrison fell easily...By the second day government reinforcements were beginning to arrive. Boro and his men watched the army move into position using pontoon boats provided by Shell, a pattern that would be repeated years later when the oil transnational would finance the security forces in their operations against protesters in Ogoniland in the 1990s.⁹

At the post Nigerian Civil War era, the political climate of Nigeria drastically changed with full political powers in the hands of the military who centrally ruled Nigeria without a single regard for the Niger Delta people who have been bearing the heavy burden of baking the proverbial national cake-oil, for the whole country-Nigeria at the expense of their well-being. The various political leaders at the post

⁹ *Ibid*

Nigerian Civil War¹⁰, who majorly hailed from the Northern Nigeria, rather re-positioned the North to benefit largely from the oil rent. In line with the oil politics before the year 1999 when Nigeria was under the military, mostly, the idea of Niger Delta was rather unpopular. In other words, it was the latest democratic era starting from 1999 that gave more impetus afresh to the concept of Niger Delta as it were. Without gainsaying the fact, the re-awakening of the concept Niger Delta has its own way of creating awareness on the enormous oil resources in the Niger Delta. With this oil politics over the years which has often threatened the co-operate existence of Nigeria, the whole issue has become a national malady despite the fact the Niger Delta has been officially recognized as an oil producing region by subsequent governments in the latter years of post-colonial era. Without doubt, this national problem stems from the desire of the Federal Government to have monopoly over power to control total rent from oil without a corresponding improvement in the living standards of the inhabitants of the

¹⁰ See Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. (London: Penguin, 2012). In addition, Chinua Achebe clearly provides with abundant facts, how the Northerners took advantage of the Nigerian Civil War (which they emerged victorious with the help of global West) by tightly re-positioning themselves in the Nigerian politics at the post war era. They, therefore, dictate the affairs of Nigeria with enormous political advantages which other sections of the country are insisting that there must be a restructuring of the entire political arrangement/ structure. The control of oil is one of their political manipulations which had given them much advantage in benefitting more than other regions in the country whereas the oil is mainly flowing from the soil of the Niger Delta people who do not benefit as much as the Northerners.

oil producing area. Its attitude to the inhabitants of the area is a direct reflection of its policies which causes agitations in the Niger Delta.¹¹

Furthermore, the major challenge associated with the oil politics of Nigeria in the post-colonial era is no doubt the manner of distributing oil wealth. The communities of Niger Delta are of the view that since oil is mined in their land and because they suffer from environmental degradation emanating from oil production, they therefore deserve the right to adequate compensation which also should ensure a clean and safe environment with a fair share of oil rents. However, the state and its partners (the multinationals), insist on the optimization of rents and profits on the basis of the modalities defined exclusively by the partnership.¹² To this end, a report released on June 30th 2009 by Amnesty International, a London-based global human right lobby has labeled the situation in Nigeria's oil rich Niger Delta a human right tragedy.¹³

Again, Olusegun Obasanjo, one of the Nigerian ex-Presidents and a leading political figure on African affairs, lent his voice on this foregoing in his book titled: *My Watch: Political and Public Affairs*:

¹¹ Wunmi Williams, "Citizenship Question and Environmental Crisis in the Niger Delta: Critical Reflection," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 11, no.3 (2002), 382.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ A CNN Report Released on June 30th 2009 by Amnesty International

. . . The Niger Delta, an area that was described by a colonial special commission even before the discovery of oil in commercial quantities as a difficult terrain requiring special attention. Exploration and exploitation of oil had made things worse rather than better. Oil spillage and pollution made agriculture less profitable, more difficult and impoverishing. The international oil companies built their camps in luxurious comfort side by side with despicable poor local communities that had no pipe-borne water, no electricity and no roads. And nothing was done to improve on their waterways or transportation. The Federal Government had not paid enough attention to the plight of the area.¹⁴

Residents of the Niger Delta have benefited little from the oil industry. Most of the population is poor. The region is a byword for misgovernment and corruption at all levels. Resident have long complained that Abuja¹⁵ is tone deaf to their particular concerns...¹⁶ Thus, these are clearly some of the features of Nigerian oil politics. Corroborating these facts again, John Campbell, a one-time United States of America's Ambassador to Nigeria from 2004 to 2007, acknowledges in his book titled, *Nigeria Dancing on the Brink* thus:

¹⁴ Olusegun Obasanjo. *My Watch: Political and Public Affairs* (Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2014), 301-302

¹⁵ Abuja is the capital of Nigeria.

¹⁶ John Campbell, *Nigeria Dancing on the Brink* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2010), 64.

In 2007, a fellow ambassador in Abuja, an African, who was himself a veteran of the insurrection that lasted many years, made an incognito visit to the Delta. Upon his return, he told me he had no doubt that an insurrection was under way and that it enjoyed significant popular support, even though it was highly decentralized with its political goals muddled by gang warfare, ethnic strife, and criminal significant opportunism. His meetings with militants and community representatives as well as a number of trips into the swamps led him to conclude that it would be impossible for the federal government to suppress militarily the insurrection. The only solution, he said, was to address politically the region's deep-seated grievances and restore popular confidence in government.¹⁷

Going by the highlighted factors as seen above, it is evident the oil politics greatly influence the concept of Niger Delta in many ways. The paper through its analyses interrogates this subject matter.

3.0 Conceptual Clarification of Niger Delta

The place or area called Niger Delta has been defined by various scholars based on certain factors over the years. The definition of the area has been flexible due to some reasons which this paper considers in its analysis. One of the most visible strands holding its definition has remained the

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 65

enormous oil wealth as well as its rich environment. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to assert that the area and the name have existed before the discovery of oil. Kenneth Dike, in his work, "Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830 – 1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of the Niger Delta" highlights more on this claim¹⁸

According to Kenneth Dike, the Niger Delta may be defined as the region bounded by the Benin River on the West and Cross River in the East including the coastal areas where the Cameroon Mountains dip into the sea. It covers an area of 270 miles along the Atlantic Coast and is 120 miles deep. The two mouths of the Niger are the Facades and the Nun, but the River Benin, Brass, Bony, Kwa Ibo, the cross and other separate streams are linked to these by a Labyvinlt of creeks and lagoon.¹⁹

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) formed in 2000, defines Niger Delta as such area or state that has crude oil mineral in its domain. The states that fall in this category are; Rivers, Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Imo, Abia and Ondo State.²⁰ It should be noted that the NDDC definition is based on the administrative mandate given to the agency by the Federal Government of Nigeria. It is a fact that apart from the identified states as seen above,

¹⁸ Kenneth O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of the Niger Delta* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰ Tamuno, *Oil Wars*, 4

there are a number of states that have discovered oil in their domain in a commercial quantity which have not been officially recognized and integrated into the Niger Delta States. Such states are Anambra and Lagos States. More states could join the league of oil producing communities or states as soon as oil is discovered in such places. This lends credence to the fact that the definition of Niger Delta is oil-related. The geographical Niger Delta is inhabited by different ethnic groups such as Ijaw, Itsekiri, Ogoni, Urhobo, Igbo, Ikwerre, Efik, Oron etc.

Niger Delta is also defined based on Nigerian geo-political zone or arrangement. In line with this perspective, Onosode defines Niger Delta in his own words as “states of Nigeria that border the coastal waters of the Atlantic...” They are the oil producing states such as; Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Ondo, Rivers, Abia, Delta and Imo.²¹ According to Ikporukpo, Niger Delta is defined as the territory extending along the coastal area from the Benin River in the West to the Imo River in the East²². The inland apex is at the

²¹ G. Onosode, “Environmental Management and Sustainable in Niger Delta” in Osuntokun Akintokun, *Environmental Problems of the Niger Delta* (Lagos. Elbert Foundation, 2000), 5.

²² The Eastern or Southeastern Nigeria has some affinities with the East African countries, such as Tanzania and Zambia. During the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970, Tanzania boldly recognized the Republic of Biafra and Chinua Achebe, the great African novelist, who was one of the Biafran ambassadors, clearly acknowledged the support of Tanzania to Biafra during the Nigerian civil war in his book: *There was a Country*. Based on the mutual love Tanzanians and Easterners of Nigeria share, the Easterners of Nigeria always long to visit or live in Tanzania till date. This

bifurcation of the Niger into the forcadés and the Nun Rivers somewhere around the settlement of Onyia which are South of Aboh town.²³

4.0 Oil Politics Verses Local and International Conspiracies in Post-colonial Nigeria

Over the years since the discovery of oil in a commercial quantity in Nigeria, the partnership between the Nigerian government and the multinationals has increasingly strengthened the kind of oil politics being played by the Nigerian government. The multinationals such as Shell and Chevron, in collaboration with Nigerian government, have denied the oil producing communities their basic rights. When General J.T. Aguiyi Ironsi was the Head of States of Nigeria, there was some feeling of dissatisfaction in the Niger Delta region with regards to oil exploration in the region.

explains why a good number of them (Igbo) are found in Tanzania plying their trade in different human endeavours. The Igbo of South-eastern and South Nigeria are eternally grateful to the Tanzania for the sympathy and moral support they offered them during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970. This disposition has become a feeling that has become part of their lives forever as they often recount this reality to the younger generations. Therefore, despite the far away location of Tanzania in East Africa, the Igbo and their brethren in Nigeria see Tanzania as an extension of the country home while the people of Tanzania are equally seen as their brothers and sisters. Professor C.B.N. Ogbogbo who once lectured in Tanzania confirmed these facts as stated herein, interview with Professor C.B.N. Ogbogbo of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, at Ibadan, 10th May, 2022.

²² Ibid

²³ O.C. Ikporukpo, "Towards the Development of the Niger Delta Region: Development Policies and Analysis," *Journal of Humanities* 2, (1986), 8.

Precisely, on 23 February 1966, Isaac A.J. Boro, Samuel Owonaru and Nottingham Dick led about one hundred and fifty others under the umbrella of Niger Delta Volunteer Force to revolt against the government and equally declared the Republic of Niger Delta. The group carried out the struggle in demonstration of her stand on the oil exploration in the region by the multinationals in collaboration with the government of Nigeria. Isaac Boro declared, therefore, thus, “Remember your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins and fight for your right”²⁴

On those days of revolution, Isaac Adaka Boro became the General Officer Commanding the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS). He commanded the three divisions of NDVS with 159 troops which he strategized for the purpose of dislodging the federal police and taking over Yenagoa. The revolution, however, lasted for just 12 days before his men were captured by the then federal government of Nigeria presided by General J.F. Aguiyi Ironsi who was greatly encouraged by the multinationals and British in particular.²⁵

In view of the foregoing, Isaac Adaka Boro is undoubtedly a strong factor in the discourse of Niger Delta (as a concept) given the level of international awareness he brought in the area in particular and across the globe in general. As

²⁴ Watt Michael, “Sweet and Sour” in Michael Watt and Ed Kashi eds., *Curse of Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta* (New York: Power House Books, 2008), 37.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

examined, he was the first person ever to raise the bar of the concept to the status of a Republic which quickly sent a signal to both the multinational companies and other international actors with vested economic interest in Nigeria. The fervent usage of the concept has since then made the concept a permanent feature in the geographical description of Nigeria. It also became a common register in the oil politics.

There is no doubt that Adaka Boro was defeated with the assistance of the multinational that had huge interest on the oil in the Niger Delta. These interests, however, transcended the oil of Nigeria. The threat to Nigeria's oneness was indeed a frightening shock to the international community, especially the capitalists and politicians from Britain and America.²⁶ This could explain the reason they were determined to crush Boro's led agitation as identified above.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the swift reaction of Aguiyi Ironsi in crushing the rebellion of Adaka Boro was borne out of his personal interest. It should be noted that Nigeria was created to become the biggest country in Africa. Establishing the Republic of Niger Delta then would have reduced the old Eastern Region which comprised of the Igbo and other Niger Delta people. This, therefore, demonstrates that the oil politics has actually been a factor in Nigeria and it is as old as Nigeria itself. However, at the wake of the

²⁶ Frederick Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story* (London: Penguin, 1977), 156- 184

Nigerian Civil War, the defunct Eastern Region where General Aguiyi Ironsi hailed from tried to break away from Nigeria which was vigorously resisted by the rest of Nigeria including her immediate Niger Delta neighbours in collaboration with Britain, Russia and the United States of America.²⁷

Be that as it may, though the revolution in the Niger Delta failed but its impact created a global awareness on the concept which necessitated some prompt politics at the wake of the Nigerian Civil War. It was, therefore, the oil politics that encouraged the granting of amnesty to Isaac Adaka Boro's and his men before the Nigerian Civil War by the General Yakubu Gowon's government in 1967. It should be recalled that it was his predecessor (J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi) that crushed the rebellion of Isaac Adaka Boro group which was shortly before Gowon's ascendancy to the national leadership of Nigeria²⁸. Going by the foregoing, it could be inferred that Gowon's moves at that desperate and challenging moment was politically motivated and not driven by genuine passion to restore the confidence of the people of the area or vigorously initiate plans for future development of the region. Since the agitation was the first

²⁷ R.M. Melbourne, "The American Response to Nigerian Conflict," in *A Journal of Opinion* 3, No 2 (1973) 33-42; J.J. Sremalan, "The International politics of the Nigerian civil war, 1967-1970," in *African Affairs* 78, No. 310 (1979), pp. 125-126, C. Uche, *Oil, British Interest and Nigerian Civil war. The Journal of African History*, Vol. 49, No. 1, (2008), 111-135.

²⁸ Forsyth, *African Legend*.

pronounced revolt in Nigeria and his amnesty declaration was the first ever made by government in that direction, a prompt action in 1967 guided by foresight would have gone a long way in laying down precedents as solution to the problems in the regions for successive governments of Nigeria in the post war era. Yakubu Gowon's government before and after the Nigerian Civil War did not initiate action plan for the development of the region in the future in view of the agitation of 1966 led by Isaac Adaka Boro. Though Isaac Adaka Boro fought on the side of the federal government during the Nigerian Civil War and played a prominent role in guiding the federal troops into the Biafran enclave (and even lost his life during the war) but such commitment did not influence Gowon's administration or successive regimes in the post war years to design a programme that would transform the region successively. This, therefore, implies that the politics of oil gained its root from the consciousness of the value of the national treasure which influenced many actions of the stakeholders in Nigeria including other foreign partners like the multinational companies and world Super Powers.²⁹

It is evident the consciousness of oil in the Niger Delta made the oil politics witnessed shortly before the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War very complex. Based on the analysis as articulated previously, these oil politics factors pitched

²⁹ J.J. Sremalan, "The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War," 125-126; C. Uche, "Oil, British Interest and Nigerian Civil War," *The Journal of African History* 49, No.1. (2008), 11-135.

various oil stakeholders against each other. As a result of these factors, the Northern elites who were not previously bothered on the dissolution of Nigeria suddenly became “apostles of one Nigeria” due to their interest on the Niger Delta’s oil and the influence of Britain and America on Nigeria’s oil politics.³⁰ One could, therefore, argue that the granting of amnesty by Gowon’s government to Isaac Adaka Boro and his men was a product of oil politics. In this regard also, Obaro Ikime affirms that the oil in the defunct Eastern Region encouraged the Igbo to seek for a separate nation out of Nigeria in those days of turmoil preceding the Nigerian Civil War.³¹ Nevertheless, Ikime also reiterates that besides the encouragement by the presence of oil in the defunct Eastern Region, there were other main factors that also compelled them to seek for their own separate nation.³²

The effort made by the multinationals and other international actors (especially Britain) was as a result of their economic interest which then was greatly threatened by the dissolution of Nigeria. These foreign players involved in the oil politics of Nigeria swiftly tutored the Northern elites on the danger and disadvantages of having a

³⁰ A.K. Essack, “Biafra Holds Out”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 5, No. 1. (1970), 8-10; Steven Jervis, “Nigeria and Biafra”, *Africa Today* 14, No. 6, (1967), 16-18.

³¹ O. Ikime, *History, The Historian and The Nation: The Value of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan; HEBN Publishers, 2006), 291-317.

³² *Ibid.*

dismantled Nigeria.³³ On realizing the potential loss of enormous economic gains when Nigeria dissolves, the Northerners hurriedly championed the idea of one Nigeria with support from the Britain. It is also important to note that the British also offered an unprecedented support to Nigeria during the Nigerian Civil War, of which all was because of their interest on the oil in the Niger Delta.³⁴

Nevertheless, there are many factors identified as the remote causes of the Nigerian Civil War. From the perspective of foreign interest, however, the oil in the Niger Delta was the biggest factor that triggered the international dimension of the Nigerian Civil War. In this regard, scholars have argued that the Civil War attracted an immense international publicity and attention majorly due to the economic interest of such nations at that point in time. On the other hand, it could be said that oil politics/interest earned Gowon support from the Super Powers of the world during the Nigerian Civil War. Such interest was, notwithstanding, at the expense of

³³ The British educated the Northern elites on the danger of not having a sea port and oil which was to be the Nigerian economic main stay. They also pointed out other dangers which fully convinced the Northern elites on championing the course of one Nigeria at any cost. This was simply because the British envisaged their national interest will be best protected if the Northerners are in charge of political powers of Nigeria. See Forsyth, *African Legend*.

³⁴ L. Fay Myles, "Priest and Politics: Biafra a year After", *The Furrow*, 22, No.2 (1971), 114-117; Achebe, *There was a Country*, 229-236.

proffering enduring solutions to the challenges at the Niger Delta Region.³⁵

Based on the findings of this research, it is abundantly clear that the bulk of Nigerian challenges often leading to periodic violence and threat to the existence of its entity are traced to the oil politics right from the early 1960s. The problem has remained unabated and persistently kept on rocking the boat of Nigerian polity. Oil consciousness created Nigerians without a single sense of genuine nationalism. From the early stage of Nigeria's independence, the effort to build a nation based on single national ideology/ patriotism was not realized. Each ethnic group rather devoted more effort on how to position herself in the oil politics for the maximum benefit of her group. This situation, unfortunately created Nigeria without "Nigerians"³⁶ as Obaro Ikime has often argued.³⁷

A careful look at all the major national problems Nigeria had ever had could be traced to the kind of politics being deployed by Nigerian politicians due to the influence of oil or the interest to control the oil rents through the government at the centre /federal might. This national question often times forces people to ask whether the oil

³⁵ M. Davis, "Negotiating about Biafran Oil," *A Journal of Opinion* 3, No. 2, (1973), 23-32.

³⁶ This implies that Nigeria is gradually becoming an entity comprising of people without any form of nationalistic feeling or patriotic allegiance attached to it as a result of the oil politic

³⁷ Ikime, *History*, 83-141

given to Nigerians by God is a curse or a blessing. Unfortunately, even after 57 years of Nigeria's independence, the oil politics is still a big contentious issue in Nigeria. The Civil War was fought over 50 years ago but unfortunately, the same section of Nigeria (southeastern Nigeria) whose people lost the war are still agitating for the realization of the same sovereign state of Biafra. People have attributed the calls for their own separate nation to the level of marginalization the zone and people are being subjected to since the end of the war in 1970.³⁸

The area is said to suffer greatly from infrastructural decay among other visible political marginalization. One of it is that even after 57 years, despite their enormous contribution to the socio-economic developments of Nigeria and their status of being one of the major ethnic groups; they have not been allowed to produce the president of Nigeria. However, it is important to note that many other agitations are being witnessed across Nigeria. This reality also indicates that apart from the present south east of Nigeria, other sections of Nigeria are equally victims of marginalization. All these indicate that some fundamental things are wrong with the foundation of the country³⁹.

Given the spate of agitations and feelings of marginalization across the nation, experts in different fields have called for

³⁸ Interview with Dr Marklene Ogbogu of the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ede at Ede, On 20th April, 2021.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the restructuring of the nation so as to fix the anomalies weighing the country down but a section of the country (North) who benefit more from the oil politics have always resisted the move vehemently. In another vein, it is believed the rest of the country calling for the restructuring do so because the present structure of Nigeria is not in their favour. This implies the North whose people have majorly been in power since the end of the Nigerian Civil War⁴⁰ have so much skewed the system in their own favour with maximum economic benefit.

In view of the foregoing, Nigeria is regarded as one of the most unsafe countries in the world due to the constant agitations across the nation, coupled with the issue of security exploited by the dreaded terrorist group-Boko Haram. All these are products of oil politics. This fact has made Nigeria's election a war-like adventure which the late Nelson Mandela of South Africa confirmed at the last phase of his life. It should be recalled also that due to the much-heated political atmosphere in Nigeria, the former Secretary of States of the United States of America (John Kerry) visited the Northern part of Nigeria for a sensitive deliberation with the political leaders of the region. The actual content of the meeting was not disclosed to the public but it is believed such visit was done in line with their national (Western) interest and perhaps due to the frightening political

⁴⁰ National Archives Enugu (N.A.E.), MM IX 9 Proclamation of the Republic of Biafra, 1967. 3

atmosphere of Nigeria. The rest of Nigerians, especially from the southern part did find such action (visit) uncomfortable as it appeared discriminating. This further strengthens the notion alluding that the Western countries have always been teaming up with the Northern part of Nigeria since Nigeria's independence as a result of oil politics as seen in the days preceding the Nigerian Civil War⁴¹, during the War and at the post war era. Similarly, the former Prime Minister of Britain, Tony Blair, also paid Northern leaders a visit in the same pattern John Kerry of United States of America toed within the same period in 2017. All these facts underscore the role of world politics and the conspiracy of Western world in the oil politic of Nigeria.

5.0 The Place of Nigeria's Oil in the Global West and Asia-China

Historically, Nigeria's creation coincided momentarily with Churchill's switch of Britain's battleships to oil. ⁴²The British therefore found it crucial to explore the heavy oil deposit in Nigeria. Western countries around the world for similar economic interest eyed Nigeria's oil deposit after her independence. Indeed, Nigeria has a big strategic importance for the multinationals- and their home countries- because of the size and quality of its energy reserves, its geographic

⁴¹ National Archives Ibadan (N.A.I) CWC CWC 1/2/3 Federal Republic of Nigeria/ Government Statement on the Current Nigeria Situation, 1967, 1-4

⁴² Michael Peels, *A Swamp Full of Dollars: Pipelines and Paramilitaries at Nigeria's Oil Frontier* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 88.

position and its government. Its crude is much prized because of the ease with which it can be refined into petrol, while its huge and still expanding proven gas reserves are already playing a big part in the worldwide shift towards the fuel. Nigeria is physically closer than the Middle East to the USA, reducing shipping costs. It is also more of a political friend. In 2007, Washington launched a special military command, known as Africom, partly to improve the security of oil reserves in Nigeria and elsewhere on the African continent.⁴³

During times of full production, Nigeria is the largest oil exporter in Africa and one of the top ten in the world. According to the US Government's Energy Information Administration, in 2006 it was one of half a dozen countries that had net average exports of between 2m and 2.6m barrels a day, compared with the mega-exporters of Saudi Arabia, which exported 6.87m. Nigeria's peers at that time included Iran, Kuwait and Venezuela, all centres of great geopolitical interest. The Niger Delta's oilfields are explored and drilled by a group of foreign multinationals from the Western world and-increasingly –elsewhere. The largest operators are Shell, Exxon and Chevron of the USA, France Total and Eni of Italy. Much of the crude is drilled and processed through unguarded wells and pipelines in the creeks, passing onwards through junctions known as flow stations to export terminals on the coast. The inherent vulnerability of these

⁴³ *Ibid.* 6-7.

production and distribution networks is part of the reason the companies have begun to develop operations offshore, hoping that attackers would not fancy an assault on deep ocean fields of oil and natural gas.⁴⁴

As the world oil price climbed steeply between 2004 and 2008, so the battles over Nigeria's crude became more violent, the Niger Delta turning ever closer to a Mad Max world of roving bandits. Yet, paradoxically-and worryingly-Nigeria and the broader West Africa region were at the same time assuming an increasingly important role in the energy security policies of Washington and Washington and Western allies such as Britain, who are keen for a bulwark against troubles in the Arabian Gulf. Nigeria has historically sent about half its oil production-between 2m and 2.6 barrels of oil daily- to the US, where it has accounted for about 10 per cent of total imports. Nigeria crude oil is particularly prized, because its low level of impurities makes it ideally suited for refining into gasoline.⁴⁵

The craving for Nigeria's oil has grown also outside the West, reflecting shifts in the global economic balance of power. China is capturing exploration contracts and promising investment in infrastructure projects. In September 2008, Russia's Gazprom signed an agreement to form a joint venture with the state Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation; within a fortnight, the European Union,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xix.

anxious to reduce its dependence on Russian gas that can be cut at a moment's notice, offered Nigeria financial and political support for a 15bn dollars 13.3bn pipeline to send its gas across the Sahara to Europe. In September 2009, the *FT* revealed that the Chinese state-owned oil company CNOOC was offering tens of billions of dollars to buy 6bn barrels of oil, or one-sixth of Nigeria's proven reserves.⁴⁶ Foreign oil companies operating in a joint venture or under joint production contracts with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation extract most of the oil and natural gas. Shell, Exxon-Mobile, Chevron, Total, and Agip are the largest producers.⁴⁷ These realities are clear indications of the vital place Nigeria occupies in the world oil economy. And historical trajectories have shown how these Super Powers countries alongside their multinationals have consistently exploited the region in collaboration with the Federal Governments of Nigeria since the independence of Nigeria in 1960.

6.0 The Re-Construction of Niger Delta as a Concept in the Oil Politics of Nigeria: Post Biafra War Glimpses

The years between 1980 and 1990 gave serious impetus to the re-construction of the concept Niger Delta. Unlike the pre-war era where the term was passive without much economic

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, xix-xx

⁴⁷ John Campbell, *Nigeria Dancing on the Brink* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2010), 64.

undertone attached to it, this era rather became associated with long agitation that laid the foundation for the unending agitations in the Niger Delta geo-political zone of Nigeria. The perception attached to the region necessitated the reconstruction of the concept from mere geographical expression to an area synonymous to the treasure base of the entire nation. The agitations and the renewed reconstruction of “Niger Delta” made the area prominent and well-known to not only Nigerians but to the whole global community. In this era, the usage of the term Niger Delta became very apt and appropriate for the pressing home of demands mainly for the oil producing community, especially those in the present South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria.⁴⁸ Having separated the peoples of Niger Delta of today’s South-South from the Igbo people of present-day South East by Gowon’s government at the wake of the Biafra War, their identity marker became more of Niger Deltans and no more “Igbo” as some referred to them before.

Their quick embrace of Niger Delta as a new zone at the post war era, speaks volume on their fear of domination by the Igbo who were the major ethnic group in the defunct Eastern Region. Going by this, therefore, one could argue that this singular act of fear of domination was responsible for their withdrawal of support for Biafra. These tendencies clearly demonstrate the influence of oil politics which had serious

⁴⁸ Matthew H. Kukah, *Witness to Justice: An Insider’s Account of Nigeria’s Truth Commission* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2011), 89-157.

grip on the sub-consciousness of Nigerians. The naming of the stadium at Rivers State after the name of Yakubu Gowon who played a vital role in their “liberation” from the Igbo in the former Eastern Region by establishing states which automatically altered the hitherto regional arrangement of Nigeria speaks volume on the feelings of the Niger Deltans of today’s South-South on the issue being discussed.

Furthermore, 1980-1990 was indeed characterized by protests, mass rallies and demonstrations against the oil companies by their host communities. For instance, in 1981, large numbers of villagers in Rukpokwu, Ikwerre community in Rivers State blocked the route to about fifty Shell oil wells.⁴⁹ The features of this phase were protests, rallies and boycotts. The early 90’s witnessed the activities of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). This group spearheaded by Ken Saro Wiwa moved the struggles of the Niger Delta people towards the international community. Ken pleaded the case of the Niger Deltans at the United Nations general assembly through the Ogoni Bill of Rights. His activities were curbed when he was killed ex-judicially alongside seven others for allegedly committing murder. Nevertheless, the killing of Ken and his kinsmen created a wider publicity and awareness in the international scene on the challenges confronting Niger Delta. Thus, this

⁴⁹ CBN Ogbogbo, “100 Years of the South-South Zone in the Political Economy of Nigeria: The Pains and Gains” (PhD Diss., University of Jos, 2014).

situation thereby advanced the concept of Niger Delta in the international arena.⁵⁰

Based on the foregoing, the last phase of agitation started from late 1990's till the present era. The agitation in this era is characterized by armed struggle between the federal government and the Niger Delta youths. At this stage, the concept of Niger Delta was solidified and totally embraced by the Niger Deltans in the South South region of Nigeria. It could be added also that this era highly popularized the concept of Niger Delta such that even the militants in the region saw it as a source of inspiration and used it religiously for their campaigns. In the words of Nitel "the guns were carried because people were not happy and they have been cheated."⁵¹ This ugly situation, however, resulted in the emergence of different armed groups such as the Egbesu Boys (EB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and a host of others. A look on how the names of these militant groups were crafted indicates their obsession with the concept "Niger Delta" which also influenced their actions. This situation, however, gave some unrecognized and insincere groups the impetus and room to carry out criminal activities in the name of agitation. Such activities centre on hostage taking, oil bunkering and bombing of the federal government properties. According to Shell, within a

⁵⁰ A Report Delivered by Amnesty International on Petroleum Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta in Year 2008.

⁵¹ Nigeria Tribune, Wednesday, Not Seared to Fight, March 17th, 2008 p.5.

space of three years, in the phase considered in this foregoing, 133 Shell Petroleum Development Company (Shell's subsidiary company in Nigeria) employees and contractors were kidnapped while five people working for its joint venture were killed in assaults and kidnapping.⁵²

7.0 Interrogating the Policies and Politics of Oil in Nigeria at Different Phases

Without gainsaying the fact, the whole issue surrounding oil exploration in Nigeria derived its foundation from the policies and politics of various governments of Nigeria. It is this phenomenon that has given rise to the projection of Niger Delta concept and all forms of struggles in the Niger Delta region, particularly in the present South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. A critical analysis in this direction will definitely shed some lights on the foundational issues rooted in policies and politics of oil of Nigeria.

The various laws promulgated at different epochs of Nigeria's history, vested the ownership of all minerals (including the Niger Delta region's oil resources) in the federal government. Section 1 of the 1969 Petroleum Decree provides that:⁵³

The entire ownership and control of all petroleum in, under or upon any lands to which this section applies shall be vested in the state. The section shall apply to all land

⁵² *Op cit.*

⁵³ Ogbogbo, "100 Years of the South-South Zone in the Political Economy of Nigeria" 116

(including land covered by water) which is in Nigeria or is under the territorial waters of Nigeria, or forms part of the continental shelf.⁵⁴

Ironically, the sons and daughters from Niger Delta minimally featured in the federal government. It is to be noted that while the Civil War was still on, opposition to the actions and policies of the federal government could be interpreted to mean taking sides with the Biafrans. The minorities in the Niger Delta of today's South-South zone, therefore viewed the Petroleum Act as "a dispossessional Act" against Biafra. It is against this background that the Petroleum Act of 1969 was enacted with little or no resistance from the oil-producing communities of Niger Delta of today's South-South geo-political zone. The last legal straw was the Land Use Decree of 1978. By this decree, which has continued to be preserved in subsequent Nigerian constitution, the occupier of any land merely enjoys surface right while the federal government owns the mineral rights. These laws dispossessing the oil-producing communities of Niger-Delta of their mineral resources have been a source of pain to the Niger Deltans. Its abrogation remains one of the demands of the activists from the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 116-117

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 116-117

Another source of economic discomfort is how the revenue generated from the sales of crude oil has been shared over the years. Before the discovery and exploitation of oil, the derivation principle was very important in the determination of revenue allocation. The derivation principle implies that each unit of a federating state should receive revenue from the federal government in proportion to its contribution to the centrally-collected revenue. In Nigeria, this principle became operative in 1946. From this period when it became operative, most of the Niger Delta states of today' South-South suffered a disadvantage as they were not frontline cash crop-producing units of the federation. The principle of derivation as a formula for revenue allocation was entrenched in the 1954 constitution.⁵⁶

By the second half of the 1960s when oil was fast becoming a significant factor in Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, there was significant reduction of the derivation principle as a formula for revenue disbursement. In 1966, crude oil figure had increased to 112,419,500 barrels. In 1969, the percentage allotted to derivation dropped to 45%. This shrinking of the derivation principle at a moment in time when revenue allocation was almost synonymous with oil revenue did not augur well in the psyche of the oil-producing states. The pain from the lop-sided application of the derivation principle was further worsened by the Decree No. 9 of 1971. By this

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 118; Tamuno, *Oil Wars*; Ogbogbo, "The Legal Basis for Ownership and Control of Oil Resources in Nigeria, 1960-2000", *African Journal on Economy and Society* 8, No. ½ (2008).

decree, the federal government introduced a dichotomy between offshore rents and royalties and that derived from onshore. While onshore revenue paid to oil-producing states further dropped to 20 percent. This was at a time when revenue from oil sales had increased astronomically due to OPEC price rise in 1973. Indeed, by 1980 derivation principle had ceased to feature in the country's revenue allocation formula.⁵⁷

It is therefore realistic to argue that in the post-civil war years, when revenue from crude oil continued to increase, the idea of fiscal federalism was gradually jettisoned. Control of oil revenue became more centralized and so fell under the whims and caprice of those in power. The effect of the political powerlessness of the Niger Deltans, especially those in the present-day South-South zone became manifest to them in the economic sphere. Today the picture is not fundamentally different. After series of acrimonies debates and eventual adjustments in the formula, since 2005 and as at 2014, derivation principle is allotted a paltry 13% to the oil-producing states. The percentage allocated to derivation principle has remained a source of grievance to the Niger Deltans.⁵⁸

In a nutshell, various governments have used the instrument of governance (politics and policies) to marginalize and

⁵⁷ Ogbogbo, "100 Years of the South-South Zone in the Political Economy of Nigeria", 118-199

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

sideline the people of the Niger Delta. The successive military governments of the Federal Republic of Nigeria have altered the revenue allocation indiscriminately. For example, it was reduced from 50% to 45% in 1970, while in 1975 it became 20%. It became 1.5% in 1982 and 1992. Their perceived position as minority has been used against them in terms of revenue allocation. Based on the structure of Nigerian federalism, larger percentage goes to the “majority” in accordance with the formula for revenue allocation. In most cases, their protest is labeled criminality and military force is used to keep them silent especially those Niger Delta states in today’s South-South geo-political zone.⁵⁹

Moreover, the nature of the present Nigerian federalism avails the opportunity for those in power (“majority”) to gain more from the oil rent or revenue. This explains why those that have been in power ensured that their region (North) has more states than any other geo-political zone in the country. Writing in the Guardian Newspaper on this issue, Pat Utomi, a seasoned Economist and a one-time Nigerian presidential aspirant in 2007 observes that:

Nigeria in 1963 had four regions, three in the South and one in the North. Then came 1967 when new states were created, six in the South and six in the North. The permutation continued until by 1995 there were 36 states, 19 of them, with

⁵⁹ CBN Ogbogbo, “Historicizing Minority Agitations in the Niger Delta up to 1995,” *Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies* 2 (2005)106.

419 local governments in the North whereas in the South, there were 17 states and 355 local governments. The writer then comments: "You do not have to be a genius to tell that what has happened was that soldiers who had political powers, and were predominately more Northerners, saw oil revenue and wanted to get more to their part of the country through the instrumentality of fiscal transfer. Net result, the North got more..."⁶⁰

Having examined the oil politics and policies created and sustained by most Nigerian leaders, it would be apt at this juncture to also interrogate the roles of Niger Delta peoples in this regard. Although the peoples of Niger Delta have not been given equal opportunity to participate in the national politics of Nigeria, it is however, important to state that they are to be blamed to an extent for being involved in the politics of oil in one way or the other as examined in this paper.

Over the years, various militant groups have emerged, especially from the late 1990's, making serious demand on behalf of the Niger Deltans. Nevertheless, it could be argued that their mode of operation and hypocrisy portray their selfishness and lack of collective interest in their so-called struggles. This, therefore, implies that most of the militants

⁶⁰ P. Utomi, *The Guardian*, 21 August, 2008; G.A. Akinola, *Leadership and Post-colonial Nigeria Predicament* (Ibadan: Book Wright Publishers, 2009), 17.

in the area are only out to enrich themselves with little or no concern for the welfare of their own people whom they claim to fight for. Events have shown that such movements lack ideological frame work as well as passion for genuine humanitarian activism. What drives them is selfish agenda like what they claim to fight against. In this regard, these militant groups easily compromise their stand on issues bothering on the plights of the Niger Deltans whenever their leaders are engaged in negotiations with political leaders. It is worthy to note that these leaders of militant groups have amassed enormous wealth for themselves through many illegal activities, especially oil bunkering which has further devastated the Niger Deltan environment. Yet the masses of Niger Delta have over the years remained in their tattered penury and advanced squalor even in the midst of black gold (oil) with no meaningful effort ever made by the super-wealthy militant groups to improve their standard of living.⁶¹

Given the realities of the discourse, it is apparent that the issue of oil politics in Nigeria is a complex one. The narrative has proven that the stakeholders involved appear too powerful and at the same time very much entrenched in the oil politics of Nigeria. One could, therefore, assert that the

⁶¹ See “Ex-militant Tompolo Breaks Silence over Alleged Ownership of War Ship,” *The Nation*, December 20, 2014; “Minister, Niger Delta Monarchs, Others Meet over Oil Theft,” *The Guardian*, April 25, 2014; FG Earmarks N155 Billion to Tackle Oil Theft, Other” *The Guardian*, March 24, 2014; “JTF Shut 17 Illegal Refineries,” *The Guardian*, Monday, March 3, 2014. 3

politics was heated by the international gladiators who even turned blind eyes to the humanitarian disaster of the Biafra War due to their national interest in Nigeria's oil. As a result of this said oil politics from the international perspective, these Super Powers ensured they maintained influence that would constantly guarantee their interest even in the post-war era. Of course, the multinationals became their "ambassadors" in the Niger Delta and across Nigeria. The local politicians in the Niger Delta and the militant groups could be described as the last "actors" that emerged in the mindless oil politics of Nigeria. On the whole, it is, therefore, evident the masses of the Niger Delta have no place in the oil politics of Nigeria notwithstanding its complexity. Michael Peel, a legal correspondent for the *Financial Times* affirms all these points being made here⁶². He reiterates thus:

Together, Odili,⁶³ the state assembly and the region's ruling party-dominated local governments controlled about £500m a year of oil money, about twice the entire national annual income of Liberia, a little further down the West African coast.⁶⁴

The observation made by Michael Peels shows how governors and various political leaders from the region have access to stupendous oil rent, yet the region remains neglected and lacks basic social amenities. It should be

⁶² Peels, *A Swamp Full*.

⁶³ Peter Odili was a one-time Governor of Rivers State in Niger Delta.

⁶⁴ Peels, *A Swamp Full*, 170.

recalled that ex-President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who was Nigerian President for good six years is also from the Niger Delta. Unfortunately, it is a common knowledge that the people of Niger Delta benefited less from his government. He did little or nothing to remedy the politics and policies of oil in Nigeria throughout the period of his reign as the president of Nigeria. Goodluck Jonathan was rather pre-occupied with the interest of second-term tenure such that he channeled his energy in granting the request of Northern region at the expense of his own people. Unfortunately, due to the factor of oil politics in Nigeria, strong political forces in the same North ensured he lost the election as an incumbent president.⁶⁵

8.0 Reflections on the challenges of Niger Delta: The Product of Oil Politics

The United Development Programme (UDP) describes the Nigeer Deltan region as suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, squalor and endemic conflict.⁶⁶ The destruction of the vegetation during exploration and production activities compounds the already hard environmental situation. Itse Sagay has noted that by 1995, about 95 percent of gas produced along with crude oil was flared to the detriment of the environment. At other times, unburned carbon is transported into the homes

⁶⁵ An Oral interview with Dr Olatunji Alao of the Department of History and International Studies, at Ede, 10th April, 2021.

⁶⁶ *Nigeria Tribune*, "Not Seared to Fight," March 17th, 2008.

and working areas of the Niger Delta inhabitants.⁶⁷ Still on the effect of oil exploration, Mrs. Chizoba Gabriel Onumonu in Oguta area (Nnebukwu) of Imo State lamented thus: “before the exploration of oil in our area, our farm produce, especially cassava, was always big but now we no longer enjoy that because of the effect of the exploration on our soil.”⁶⁸ This situation is a common phenomenon in such places oil exploration takes place. In some cases, the soil is rendered useless due to the adverse effect of the oil exploration on the land. Yet, these areas do not enjoy the proceeds of oil nor have a feeling of government presence despite the displacement of the people from their traditional fishing and farming exercise due to the adverse effect of oil exploration in their environment. Hence, unemployment is, therefore, the order of the day in such areas. In Oguta area, many water bodies including the Oguta Lake are part of the features of the environment. Till date, one of the major means of transportation is canoe, speed boat and pontoon. Appeals have been made to the governments at various levels by the people for the construction of a bridge but this is yet to be realized. Unfortunately, this development has led to the loss of lives in periodic boat mishap. The economy of the

⁶⁷ Ogbogbo, “Historicizing Minority Agitations” 106.

⁶⁸ An interview with Mrs Chizoba Gabriel O. of Nnebukw Community, c. 70 Years on 7th January, 2016

area is also affected due to the lack of a single bridge in the area.⁶⁹

In the view of Rufus Dieworie, an Ijaw youth leader, the Niger Delta has continued to be marginalized in the citing of amenities by the federal government. This explains why cities like Lagos and Abuja where no oil well was ever sunk have abundantly fly-overs, bridges, roads, and skyscraper buildings etc while others like Oloibiri, Nembe, Bomadi, Kwale and Aboh (all in the Niger Delta) have remained forgotten, neglected and grossly underdeveloped. The situation is one in which the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, which produce the bulk of Nigeria's wealth, live in abject poverty and tattered penury.⁷⁰

Generally, the activities of the multinational companies, especially Shell and Chevron have actually brought serious calamities on the people of the Niger Delta. The most notorious action of both companies (Shell and Chevron) has been the flaring of gas, sometimes in the middle of villages or very close to human habitation. This action has destroyed wildlife and plant life, poisoned the atmosphere and

⁶⁹ An interview with Mr Ndupu Chukwudifu of Oguta Ameshe community, c. 80 Years on 10th June, 2017

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

therefore, inhabitants in the surrounding areas are made half-deaf and prone to respiratory diseases.⁷¹

The heat generated in the course of flaring creates considerable discomfort and scotches the flora and fauna around the flaring site. Also, thick soot from the flaring site is washed off and black-like water running down the roofs whenever there is rain is believed to contain chemicals that adversely affect the fertility of the land.⁷² The gas-flaring, in emitting atmospheric contaminants, affects adversely the quality of rain. The gas-flaring, in emitting atmospheric contaminants, affects adversely the quality of rain water, surface water, and ground water. It produces acid rain, which suppresses the growth and flowering of plants and the depletion of the ozone layer.⁷³

The consequences of the massive degradation of the environment as an outcome of the activities of the oil industry, has been the destruction of vegetation, farmlands, human settlements, and a major disrupting influence on the ecosystem. The inhabitants of these oil producing communities in the zone are subjected to considerable health challenges. The production of poisonous gases like

⁷¹ Ogbogbo, "100 Years of the South-South Zone in the Political Economy of Nigeria"; K. Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (Port-Harcourt: Saros International, 1992), 1-6

⁷² Obioh, Oluwole, Akeredolu, "Atmospheric Lead Emissions and Source Strengths in Nigeria: 1988 Inventory." In *Heavy Metals in the Environment*, eds. R.J. Allan & J.O. Niragu (Edinburgh, 1993), 271-274.

⁷³ Ogbogbo "100 Years of the South-South Zone in the Political Economy of Nigeria"

nitrogen oxides, ammonia and sulfur dioxide accounts for the prevalence of diseases like sore throat, sore eyes, nausea, and running nose. Thus, apart from the negative effect on the people's source of livelihood, their health is also directly jeopardized. Therefore, the neglect/failure of the government to enforce its environmental laws has made the South-South an ecological nightmare. The peoples of the zone groan from the deleterious consequences of the continuous denigration of their environment. It has remained a persistent pain in their being part of the Lugard's house-Nigeria. This is because these negative externalities of oil production are not only borne by them, but there is complete failure of government to empathize with them and then take steps to address the issue.⁷⁴

Before leaving the arena of pain, it is pertinent to briefly mention the ones being felt in the socio-cultural life of the people. Emma Wonodi asserts that the activities of the multinational oil companies have led to the desecration of religious places and shrines of the people. This, invariably, is tantamount to the subversion of their customs and traditions. Places of traditional worship have had to give way to oil wells, oil pipelines or even roads leading to the wells of black gold. The psychological distress/damage arising from the dislocation of the people from their traditional practices and sacred places remains immeasurable.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

9.0 Conclusion

The concept of Niger Delta and oil politics in Nigeria are unarguably the most forceful factors that have shaped the history and destiny of Nigeria from the pre-colonial era. The Nigerian Civil War has remained the biggest historic event that greatly turned around the course of Nigerian history and shaped it into the present ugly form.⁷⁶ The War indeed recorded the highest humanitarian disaster in African history.⁷⁷ Nigerian Civil War is, therefore, the source of many challenges Nigeria is grappling with till date.⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ AHM Kirk-Green, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 463; Akachi Odoemene, "The Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, 1967-1970: Reconsidering a 'Rejected History' in CBN Ogbogbo, *Perspectives in African History* (Ibadan: Book Wright Publishers, 2011), 91.

⁷⁷ See Zdenek Cervenka, *A History of the Nigerian War 1967-1970* (Ibadan: Onibonjo Press, 1972) 149; Emma Okocha, *Blood on the Niger: The First Black-on-Black Genocide-The Untold Story of the Asaba Massacre* (New York: Gomslam Books, 2012); Alabi-Isama Godwin, *The Tragedy of Victory: On-the Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra War in the Atlantic Theatre* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2013); Diliolah Chukwurah, *The Last Train to Biafra: Memoirs of a Biafra Child* (Ibadan: Constellation Publishers, 2015); E. Ezeani, *In Biafra Africa Died: The Diplomatic Plot* (London: Veritas Lumen Publishers, 2013); Gould Michael, *The Biafran War: The Struggle for Modern Nigeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); AA Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and Biafra War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1980); Bola Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1995)

⁷⁸ See Achebe, *There was a Country*. The bulk of the estimated three million persons that died during the Nigerian Civil War were children who died of kwashiorkor due to the extreme scarcity of food and protein owing to the blockade imposed on Biafra by the Federal Government of Nigeria within that period of War. This humanitarian waste during the War and other forms of conflicts in Nigeria since she gained

Without doubt, this ugly historical fact was due to oil politics this paper has examined. Without the oil politics in Nigerian history, the avoidable Nigerian Civil War would not have taken place. It should be noted, therefore, that the national/international interests of various actors as has rightly emphasized earlier on, were the underpinning factors that fueled the political climax of Nigeria, which eventually led to the fratricidal encounter with the full support of Britain and her Western allies in favour of Northern Nigeria. It is interesting to also assert that if Nigeria did not experience the War, the whole of Niger Delta in today's South-south geo-political zone with the exception of Edo and Delta States, would most probably have remained as area under the defunct Eastern Region like in the days before the Civil War. Be that as it may, it is the oil politics as have explained before that changed the political equation of Nigeria at the eve of the War⁷⁹. This marked the era of “de-structuring” of Nigeria which many people are now agitating and calling for the re-structuring of Nigeria to guarantee equity, justice, fairness, peace and patriotism.

In line with the foregoing as clearly articulated, the concept of Niger Delta with regards to oil consciousness gained

independence is traced to her very faulty political foundation laid by the British and consolidated by Nigerian political class.

⁷⁹ N. A. E., CW/A/20/CP/X9 CW21/4 Introducing Biafra, 1967, 6; N.A.E., FRP/D2 The Biafran Possibility, 1968, 3; N.A.E., SD/O/6 As We Go to Kampala: Speeches by His Excellency Lt.-Col. C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Republic of Biafra, 1968, 4-5.

prominence as injustice of Nigerian state grew as touching oil politics with oil producing communities at the receiving end. As a result of this, it could be argued that the oil politics was the very basis upon which Niger Deltans found it most necessary to project their “Niger Deltanness” instead of their “Nigerianness” for the purpose of advocacy. It should be noted also that it is the nature of Nigerian oil politics that has encouraged the rise in ethnic consciousness at the expense of national consciousness or nationalism. It could be, therefore, inferred that if the right structure has been in place, the quest and drive for the projection of Niger Delta would have not emerged in the first place. Indeed, its constant projection reminds Nigerians of the politics and benefits of oil, thereby establishing that oil is the most important thing in Nigeria and everything humanly possible must be done to possess it at any cost. This kind of understanding is rather wrong and does not encourage development in any human society as it fervently breeds and nurtures all kinds of negative vices capable of collapsing any existing socio-political structure of any society. More interestingly also, some experts have rightly indicated that in the nearest future, oil will become irrelevant in the world economy considering the aspiration of leaders from the global West to replace the use of oil with renewable source of energy and ensure that electronic cars are massively produced.⁸⁰ In order words, one could infer that this “global

⁸⁰ *Punch*, “A Nation of Churches, Mosques, and Petrol Stations”, July 25, 2017

West aspiration” is genuinely driven by their desire to achieve great technological advancement that would in turn usher in a new era in the global system. Surely, this is rather not good news for countries like Nigeria whose leaders are not thinking towards the direction the world is moving. Ironically, while the Western world is seriously making serious efforts at exploring newest technology that guarantees alternatives for oil and gas, the Nigeria government in her national news broadcast that, Aliko Dangote, the richest man in Africa, would soon build an oil refinery in Nigeria so as to end the importation of refined crude products into Nigeria.⁸¹ What will become of Nigeria when the aspirations of the West are realized? And what will particularly become of Niger Delta region whose environment has been badly destroyed with serious damages for more than 50 years? This is a food for thought for all Nigerians (especially her political class) and her sincere friends around the world.

It is also interesting to note that prior to the presidency of Barack Obama of the United States of America, he had already designed a blue print for his government which he actively talked about across the United States of America. His speeches reveal that he even talked about the issue of renewable energy/ solar power so much and seriously indicted leaders in the category of Nigerian leaders. He in

⁸¹ National Review of Newspaper on 1st August 2017 in Splash F.M, Ibadan, Nigeria

this regard relentlessly promised to help make oil less depended on in the global economy in order to slow global warming and achieve some goals related to the American dreams.⁸²

Obama clearly reiterates his commitment and promises to take some steps as seen below:

Launch a new energy policy that will help ease the burden of high gasoline prices, free us from relying on monarchs and tyrants for our energy supplies, and slow global warming. The Obama plan will make significant investments in clean, renewable sources of energy, and create up to five million new jobs.⁸³

Nigeria is indeed one of the major suppliers of oil and gas to the United States of America. In view of the above, what is Nigerian leadership doing as a counter measure to cushion the effect that will definitely affect Nigeria in due course in the nearest future? What are the plans of Nigerian leadership with regards to technological advancement?

Finally, it could be argued that the root cause of the problem in the Niger Delta is inherent in the contradiction regarding the nature of federalism in Nigeria⁸⁴. There is, therefore, a

⁸² Barack Obama, *Change We can Believe in: Barack Obama's Plan to Renew American's Promise* (London: Canongate, 2009), 21-24

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21

⁸⁴ See Peter P. Ekeh & Eghosa E. Osaghae ed., *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books 1987).

need to localize resource control and make provision for practical democratic policies that would in turn have a direct impact in the lives of the inhabitants of Niger Delta. Put differently, there is a need for the adoption of true federalism. Each unit of a federating state is supposed to receive revenue from the Federal Government in proportion to its contribution to the centrally collected revenue.⁸⁵ Contrarily in Nigeria, the reverse is the case. No nation under the sun can develop and survive for too long under the influence of injustice and inequity. The need to consider restructuring Nigeria is now more urgent than before given the degree in which things are falling apart. In the words of Obaro Ikime, there is the need to build the Nigerian citizenship based on fair play and equity.⁸⁶ There is the urgent need to build Nigeria based on lasting principles with strong ideology that would endure turbulence and any form of human challenges. All humans are equal and every human life is very much sacred before God. Instead of saturating the atmosphere with intense hatred, bitterness, nepotism, tribalism, chaos, bloodshed and all sorts of barbarism, the leaders should seek for ways of truly uniting every section of the country by upholding the principle of justice, equity and fairness while the politics of oil should be jettisoned as quick as possible.

⁸⁵ Ogbogbo, "Citizenship and Resource Control Issues in the American Constitution"

⁸⁶ Ikime, *History*, 324