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The Ogoni Uprising in Nigeria: the Niger-Delta Crisis and its Impact on Nigeria's Unity,
1980-1999

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Gregory Odey
December 2021

Dr. Constanze Weise, Chair
Dr. Daryl Carter
Dr. Elwood Watson

Keywords: Ogoni Uprising, Niger Delta Crisis, Ethnic Domination, Marginalization, Unity,
Social Movements

ABSTRACT

The Ogoni Uprising in Nigeria: the Niger-Delta Crisis and its Impact on Nigeria's Unity,
1980-1999

by

Gregory Odey

In 1956, shortly before Nigeria's independence, Shell BP found crude oil in Oloibiri Bayelsa State marking a turning point in the socioeconomics and politics of the nation. Since then, oil has grown into a major export commodity comprising over ninety-five percent of the nation's gross national product. The region is one of the world's largest ecosystems, but due to the ongoing pollution, a direct result of the oil companies lacks potable water. This study addresses this humanitarian crisis and examines the agency of Nigeria's federal government and the collaboration with multinational oil corporations' contributions to the environmental deconstruction in the region. The thesis further investigates the historical moments building towards the uprising in Ogoniland, centered around the leader Ken-Saro Wiwa, who was killed by the Nigerian government. It examines social movements in the region, and aims to tie the local question to the federal question of unity in the country.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my mom, late Mrs. Juliana Odey.

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It was not an easy task in putting together this research. First, I thank God for bringing me far in my academic pursuits. I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Carter Daryle and Dr. Elwood Watson who showed great interests in my education in ensuring that I succeed. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Carter who initially supervised me before advising me to change my research topic to be more specific in an area of my research interest. In the end, everything worked out well based on his advice. I am very grateful to Dr. Watson who was always ready and willing to read my work. I would forever be grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Constanze Weise who painstakingly supervised my research and provided me with the best advice during the process. She also provided me with the needed research materials, and all the necessary assistance throughout the process of my research in ensuring that I succeed in my academic activities. I would also like to thank my very good friend and colleague Philip DeVries for proofreading and editing my work. I wish to express gratitude to the Chair of my department, Dr. William Burges who was always available to advise me when I needed his counsel. I want to also thank my former program coordinator, Dr. Brian Maxson, and the current program coordinator, Dr. Dinah Mayo-Bobee who were always available to respond to my academic requests (signing letters, filling forms, and approving all the documents) that I needed during the program. My appreciation also goes to Troy Petrie, Ngozi Aleke, the librarians: Sara Whisnant, Cathy Blados and Jasen Bacon who also proofread and edited my work. My appreciation again goes to my family, my dad, Mr. Isaac Odey, sisters; Elizabeth Odey, Joy Odey, and uncles, Professor Joseph Ushie, Jerume Adie, and Francis Odey, my

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian government passed legislation in the 1980s and early 1990s meant to satisfy the needs of the people of the Niger Delta, but a lack of political will and a high level of corruption among political elites impaired the implementation of humanitarian policies.¹ In many cases, private oil companies were allowed to act with impunity due to the connivance of government officials. As a response to these issues, a movement arose in the Niger Delta region which addressed the situation. During that time, Nigeria suffered from the control of military dictatorships which also collaborated with multinational companies, such as Shell, at the expense of the people in the Niger-Delta.² This research takes into consideration the vast amount of secondary literature that has been written about the issue but also examines primary sources, such as letters, memoirs, correspondences, and interviews, with the leaders of the movement, local and national government officials, and voices from the trans-national oil companies. Most scholarship about and research into the Niger Delta crisis fails to address the implications of this protracted crisis on the unity of the Nigerian people (between the ethnic majorities and minorities.) Nor has scholarship considered the autonomous and largely self-governing nature of popular resistance movements in the Niger Delta, motivated by the corruption and inaction of their state government and by the wanton greed of international oil companies. This research seeks to fill that vacuum.

¹ Zacchaeus Adangor, "The Principle of Derivation and the Search for Distributive Justice in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: The Journey So Far," *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*. Vol. 41 (2015), 115.

² Human Rights Watch, "The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities," January (1999). <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/nigeria/nigeria0199.pdf>

Chapter One looks at the state of the research on the topic and Chapter Two details the historical background leading up to the crisis. Chapter Three discusses the uprising as gleaned from documents and eyewitness accounts showing the various sides: those of the people involved in the movement (e.g. Ken-Saro-Wiwia) and those trying to eclipse and silence the movement such as the federal government of Nigeria and the multinational oil companies. Chapter Four assesses the outcome of the movement and the aftermath of the situation in the Niger Delta. This is followed by a conclusion in Chapter Five.

Statement of the Problem

In 1963, Nigeria became a republic after achieving independence in 1960.³ During this time, there were conflicts as a result of the domination of ethnic minorities by the ethnic majorities and the marginalization of the ethnic minorities in the country. This situation led the country into a civil war in 1967. Consequently, the Nigerian military overthrew the government through a coup d'état and became active in the politics of the country.⁴ While Nigeria had civilian governments periodically, the inability of the civilian government to take care of the ethnic crises in the country constantly brought the military back to the corridors of powers through a series of coups. The ethnic minorities who comprised the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta region were most afflicted by the ethnic crises.⁵ From the

³ Paul Kaiser, "Comparative Politics and Government," *Nigerian Briefing Paper*. College Board Advanced Placement Program. Universality of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/apc/ap05_comp_govpol_nige_42255.pdf

⁴ John Aremo & Lateef Buhari, "Sense and Senselessness of War: Aggregating the Causes, Gain and Losses, of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970," *IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 4. (2017), 63.

⁵ Aremo & Buhari, "Sense and Senselessness of War: 63.

1970s on, the Niger Delta region became an area of armed conflicts between the oil producing communities and the federal government over the control of lands. The lands in the region were expropriated by the state following the discovery of crude oil.⁶ Members of the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta region were opposed to this expropriation primarily because those who controlled the federal government were members of dominant ethnic majority groups. Ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta believed that members of the ethnic majorities who largely constituted the federal government were only interested in the oil extraction in the region and were not interested in the development and wellbeing of the inhabitants of the region. This feeling of marginalization generated hate within members of the oil producing communities toward the federal government and the ethnic majorities specifically from the Northern region, namely the Hausa and Fulani. The ethnic hatreds morphed into continuous hostilities between the ethnic minorities and majorities in the country.

Land disputes between ethnic groups also arose in the Niger Delta region beginning from 1990. Although land disputes were ever-present in the region, but the tension that was created as a result of the uprisings against the federal government and oil companies led to intense land disputes that arose beginning from 1990. Most of these crises—including the Ogoni-Andoni, Ogoni-Ndoki, Itsekiri-Ijaw crises, among others—were orchestrated by the

⁶ Sofiri Joab Peterside, Doug Porter, & Michael Watt, et al. Rethinking Conflict in the Niger Delta: Understanding Conflicts, Dynamics, Justice and Security. In *Niger Delta-Economies of Violence*. Working Paper No. 26, 22.

federal government to keep the communities hostile to one another in order for the oil companies to explore the lands for crude oil.⁷

The oil producing communities (Ogoni, Nembe, Ijaw, Bonny, Brass, Obagi, and Oloibiri) regularly protested the activities of the oil companies (Shell-BP and Chevron) who wreaked havoc on the lands on which they inhabited. On October 4, 1993, over five thousand residents in Obagi community were led by a group of angry youths into the Elf facility in Obagi, protesting the environmental hazards caused by the oil company.⁸ (The environmental hazards included oil spills: the oil spills polluted the running streams and the soil. Air pollution, constantly releasing methane into the air causing many health problems like cancer of the lungs, skin and blindness. The oil spills that contaminated the running streams and lakes also killed aquatic lives in which the indigenous population in the Niger Delta relied on for survival).

They disrupted oil production activities in the facility, destroyed properties, and made away with many valuable items such as computers and televisions. Chief Albert Horsefall, the Executive Chairman of Mineral Producing Areas Development, immediately convened a peace meeting to resolve the disturbance.⁹ The meeting was held between the Managing Director of Elf Petroleum Nigeria Limited and the representative of the Obagi residents,

⁷ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria," Vol. 7, No 5, July 1995. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Nigeria.htm>

⁸ This Report is Based on Human Rights Watch, *Nigeria, Interviews with members of Obagi communities. Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis, A Case Study of Military Repression in Southern Nigeria*. Vol. 7 No. 5, (1995). <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Nigeria.htm>

⁹ Ibid.

Professor J.G Chinwar.¹⁰ The Assistant Inspector General of Police and the traditional rulers of Egi clan (of which Obagi is a part) were also present at the meeting. A resolution to the crisis was reached when Elf Petroleum Nigeria Limited agreed not to recover the looted properties. All the youths who were arrested and detained were freed.

Similarly, on November 2, 1994, members of the Brass community of over three thousand carried out a peaceful demonstration at the premises of a local Agip terminal.¹¹ The Navy and the Police responded by shooting into the air, and also threw canisters of tear gas at the protesters, leaving many people injured during the reprisal attack.

Protests arose again on February 21, 1994 when thousands of the residents of Rumuobiokani community, located very close to the Shell facility in Port Harcourt, staged a large peaceful demonstration at the premises of the Shell facility. The demonstrators demanded a meeting with the top executives of Shell to discuss ways of solving the environmental problems in the region. Two Shell representatives, Precious Omuku, and Steve Lawson-Jack, gave audience to the members of Rumuobiokani community. Human Rights Watch stated that, while the meeting was ongoing, another Shell agent informed the protesters to disperse. It was not long after the order was given by the Shell agent that over thirty-armed Nigerian Army, Navy, and Police officers moved into the premises. Army commandant, Major Paul Okuntiwo, ordered the army to shoot at anyone they saw. The army

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

shot indiscriminately into the crowd, threw canisters of tear gas, assaulted protestors, and made many arrests.¹²

In 1992, the youths in Bonny community of the present-day Rivers State in the Niger Delta region burnt police vehicles in protest of the Shell Petroleum Company for not employing the indigenous population at the oil company. The police responded by beating and shooting at the protesters.¹³ Similarly, the youths of Opuekebo in Delta State met in 1994 with sixteen boats strung together with cables to obstruct the installations of Chevron Nigeria Limited. When Chevron called the police for intervention at their facility, the police sent an automotive barge that crushed the sixteen boats and the blockades.¹⁴

These protests were carried out mainly on the oil facilities where the oil companies carried out oil production activities. The protesters from these different communities were met with disproportionate and unlawful repression from the Nigerian military.¹⁵ During those repressions by the police and military, many protesters were killed, and many left injured. In many instances the communities were burnt down and destroyed by the military. The contentious attacks and counter attacks in the Niger Delta region between the oil producing communities and the Nigerian military, and the communal crises, which were

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, "*Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis, A Case Study of Military Repression in Southern Nigeria*," Vol.7, No.5, July 1995. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Nigeria.htm>

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, "*Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis*," July 1995.

incited by the government in the region, impeded development, prosperity, and the progress of the region.

It is very important to note that the late 1970s Ogoni uprising in Ogoniland formed the basis for the many protests and demonstrations by members of other oil producing communities against the oil companies and the government in the Niger Delta region. In the 1980s, the Nigerian government responded to the agitations of the people in the Niger Delta through legislation and the creation of a ministry dedicated to Niger Delta affairs. Despite these governmental efforts, however, a crisis still erupted in the closing decades of the twentieth century. This thesis explores the causes and effects of the Niger-Delta crisis based on the Ogoni uprising.

CHAPTER 2. STATE OF THE RESEARCH ON THE NIGER-DELTA CRISIS AND THE OGONI UPRISING

To date, most of the academic research completed on the Niger Delta crises focuses generally on the factors that generate strife within the region. Some of these studies have also highlighted the activities of the social movements in the region such as the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, and the Federation of Ogoni Women Association, among others. Other studies focus on the way the Nigerian government has addressed the crises. There is, however, a lack of professional studies on the implications of the crises in the Niger Delta region, specifically regarding what affected the county's stability and unity. This research fills that void.

The Niger Delta crises began immediately after Nigeria's independence in 1960. The crises were motivated politically, economically, environmentally, and by ethnic tensions. Ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region (i.e. Ogoni, Ijaw, Nembe, Urhobo, and Itsekiri) protested against the government and the oil production activities of the oil companies in the region. The aforementioned ethnic minorities make up a large proportion of the oil communities and, as such, aimed their protests at addressing the lack of accountability and leadership in a central government biased against the inhabitants in the Niger Delta. Their efforts toward peace and sustainable development in the Niger Delta region are pivotal to the prosperity, progress, and advancement of the country of Nigeria as a whole.

In *Natural Resources, Conflict and Sustainable Development: Lesson from the Niger Delta*, Ibagha Samuel, Ikechukwu Ukaga, and Ukoba Ukiwo observe that for the past two decades the Niger Delta has experienced continuous violent conflicts as a result of bad

leadership.¹⁶ The leaderships that emerged in the country after independence were characterized by nepotism, corruption and marginalization of the ethnic majority over the ethnic minorities. The basis for these conflicts was the genuine desire of the peoples of the region to partake in the rapid development enjoyed by the rest of the country. Furthermore, the people of the Niger Delta demanded development that was sustainable and was centered on fairness, social justice, environmental protection, and equity.¹⁷ The authors argue that the crises in the Niger Delta region were politically motivated and they maintain that the local communities in which crude oil was extracted were poverty stricken, despite their direct involvement in such a lucrative industry. Political corruption, ethno-regional domination, environmental degradation, and general poor governance were to blame.¹⁸ In these circumstances, where leaders who were elected connived with oil companies to exploit the environment and deny a source of livelihood to many, the only option left was armed struggle. In discussing the issues that brought about the crises in the Niger Delta region, however, *Natural Resources, Conflict, and Sustainable Development* did not consider the implications of the crises on Nigeria's unity.

Ben Naanen's *Oil Producing Minorities and the Restructuring of the Nigerian Federalism: The Case of the Ogoni People* argues that internal colonialism was the major

¹⁶ Samuel Ibagu, Ikechukwu Ukaga, & Ukoba, Ukiwo, "*Natural Resources, Conflict and Sustainable Development: Lesson from the Niger Delta*," New York, Rutledge, (2012), 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

factor that led to the Niger Delta Crisis.¹⁹ He contends that the colonial administrators created a structure in Nigeria that gave political domination to more densely populated areas. This ethnic disparity formed the basis for the ethnic crises in independent Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta region.²⁰ This was because the dominant areas used their political power to transfer wealth from the statistically weaker areas to develop their own areas. They also used their elites, who were in positions of authority in the country, and conspired with the multinational oil companies to extract oil in the Niger Delta for their own benefit.²¹ Ben Naanen argues that the inherited colonial administrative system in Nigeria formed the basis upon which ethnic crises prevailed in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta region. The British colonial administration operated a divide and rule system of government in Nigeria during the colonial era. The successive administrations which were headed by the Hausa (one of the ethnic majorities in Northern Nigeria) continued the divide and rule system. It was the divide and rule system that led to the division of regions in the country, that made the Niger Delta region to become an ethnic minority. The status of an ethnic minority made the ethnic majorities (Hausa) to marginalize the region. The marginalization of the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region became a factor that led to uprisings in the region.

¹⁹ Ben Naanen, "Oil Producing Minorities and the Restructuring of the Nigerian Federalism: The Case of the Ogoni People," *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*. Vol.33, Issue. 1, 49-50.

²⁰ Ibid., 50.

²¹ Ibid.

Victor Ojaborodu, in his celebrated *Anatomy of the Niger Delta Crisis: Causes, Consequences and Opportunities for Peace*, convincingly argues that the Niger Delta crisis is traceable to the colonial era, when Britain administered Nigeria, and when ethnic hostilities prevailed in the country. Ojaborodu maintains that British colonial administrators failed to address the disputes between ethnic minorities and religious groups.²² He also shows that the successive post-independence leaderships failed to facilitate the equitable distribution of national resources and to ensure representative equality at the national level. Central to his argument, Ojaborodu underscores how those successive administrations after Nigeria's independence have also failed to solve the problems of the ethnic minorities' agitations in the country. Instead, they have effectively maintained colonial era power structures, which has undermined the abilities of the ethnic minorities to access the resources in their regions.²³ Further, he notes some of the factors associated with the Niger Delta Crises, including disputes over land ownership, problems in the non-implementation of the extant laws that regulate the exploration of oil, and conflict over resource control.²⁴ Unsuccessful government interventions in the region also contributed to organized crime and other violent activities that prevailed there.²⁵

²² Victor Ojaborodu (Ed), *Anatomy of the Niger Delta Crisis: Causes, Consequences and Opportunities for Peace*. Germany, LIT Verlag, (2010), 6.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

In *Restructuring the Public Sphere for Social Order in the Niger Delta through Polycentric Planning: What Lessons for Africa?* Sampson Ranti Akinola argues that the centralized system of government in Nigeria excluded ethnic minorities from the decision-making process, thereby limiting their chances of benefiting from the production of oil. Nigeria, Akinola explains, is the seventh largest oil producer in the world and it is number one in oil production in Africa. The Niger Delta, the source of Nigeria's oil, is therefore a major contributor to the Nigerian economy. Indeed, Nigeria's oil generates forty percent of Nigeria's gross national product (GNP), eighty percent of the gross national income, and ninety percent of the country's total national earnings. Despite this massive contribution to the overall health of the Nigerian economy, the people of the Niger Delta reap few benefits and suffer grave environment consequences, as well as political marginalization.²⁶ The bulk of the oil produced in the area should have benefited the ethnic minorities, yet the windfall of all the income from oil goes to the major ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. Sampson Ranti vividly discusses the factors that triggered the Niger Delta crises but does not address the implications of the crises on Nigeria's unity.

Ethnicity was another fundamental factor that led to crisis in the Niger Delta region. Cyril Obi and Siri Aal Rusted argue in *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence* that the colonization of Nigeria and the British

²⁶ Sampson Akinola, "Restructuring the Public Sphere for Social Order in the Niger Delta through Polycentric Planning: What Lessons for Africa?" *Journal of African and Asians Studies*, Vol. 9, (2010), 55-56.

subjugation of the local entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta contributed to crises in the region.²⁷

The inhabitants of the Niger Delta resisted colonial occupation but they were eventually subdued by colonial administrators. During the colonial era, Nigeria was split into a Northern and a Southern region and the defeat of the peoples of the Niger Delta in the South enabled the more numerous and prosperous Northerners, the Hausa-Fulani, to dominate the peoples of the Southern region.²⁸ In 1954, before the discovery of crude oil, Nigeria was divided into three regions (North, East, and West) by the colonial administration and remained so until after independence in 1960. Because minority agitations over marginalization were intense in the country, the South-South region was created in 1967, carved out of the Western and Eastern regions by General Yakubu Gowon (who would later go on to become the Nigerian head of state in from 1966-1975).²⁹

A total of twelve different states were created out of the South-South region meant to reduce the fears of the ethnic minorities in the country, especially in Southern Nigeria. The new states of the South-South region, where crude oil was extracted, continued to express concerns about the disparities in the revenue sharing formula in the country. They were also concerned about the activities of the oil multinational companies in the region causing

²⁷ Cyril Obi and Siri Aal Rusted, (Eds), "Petro-Violence in the Niger Delta: The Complex Politics of an Insurgency," In *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*. Zed Books, UK, (2011), 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Shehu Mohammad, et. al., "Nigeria Ethno-Religious Tripod Federalism: Character and Complexity," *International Journal of Management and Research & Review*. Vol. 7. Issue 3. No. 11, (2017), 292.

environmental problems. Cyril Obi and Siri Aal Rusted discuss primarily the historical context of the crisis in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta but did not discuss the implications of the Niger Delta crises to the country's harmony and unity. It is therefore important to note that, the ethnic divisions that were created by General Yakubu Gowon after independence, which were aimed at undermining the concerns of the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region, became the major factors that created ethnic domination and the sustained hostilities that have endangered the unity of Nigeria.

Most significantly, the crises in the Niger Delta region were precipitated by economic factors, because the agricultural activities in the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta region had stopped for decades since oil exploration began. Agricultural activities stopped in the region because of the environmental degradation, deforestation, erosion, and pollution that were caused by the activities the oil multinational companies. These issues continued to spark protests, which subsequently led to the emergence of an organized movement called the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the region.

In line with Victor Ojatorodu's argument, in *Implementation of the Oil related Environmental Policies in Nigeria: Government Inertia and Conflict in the Niger Delta*, Fidelis Allen also observes that the discovery of oil and the increase in production destroyed the sources of livelihood for the people in the region.³⁰ Allen also argues that the federal government responded to the environmental problems in the Niger Delta through legislation

³⁰ Fidelis Allen, *Implementation of the Oil related Environmental Policies in Nigeria: Government Inertia and Conflict in the Niger Delta*. UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. (2014), 3.

meant to regulate the petroleum industries under its jurisdiction. Such laws, however, were not effectively implemented due to a lack of political will and irresponsible governance.^{31,32} These pieces of legislation mandated that the Ministry of Petroleum make regulations in line with global best practices by the oil companies in order to protect the environment but successive governments have done little or nothing to enforce the policies nor did they support any of the major legislative reforms.³³ The unwillingness of the government to enforce the legislation led to environmental abuse by the oil companies, which thereby burdened host communities.

Fidelis Allen also argues that the inability of the local communities to get lasting solutions to environmental problems in the region and the dismissiveness of the government sparked violence in the region.³⁴ Even though the federal government and officials of the petroleum directorate have claimed that environmental policies were successfully implemented to protect the environment, none really were.³⁵ Moreover, the fact that there was no cooperation between the oil companies and the relevant government agencies that regulated oil extraction in the region further undermines the government's claims. There were

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Laws that were passed included the Minerals Oil Regulation of 1963 (Safety), Oil in Navigable Water Regulations Act, No. 34 of 1968, Oil in Navigable Water Regulations of 1968, Petroleum Regulation of 1967, Petroleum Decree Act of 1969, Petroleum Regulation of 1969 (Drilling and Production), Petroleum Regulation of 1973 (Drilling and Production Amendment), and Petroleum Refining Regulation of 1974.

³³ Allen, *Implementation of the Oil related Environmental Policies in Nigeria*, 3.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

no collaborative efforts on the use of technology in providing clean water for the people, no partnership to evacuate the waste, and no effort to prevent pollution in the surrounding areas.

In *Understanding the Armed Groups of the Niger Delta*. In, *Council of Foreign Relations*, Judith Burdin aligns with Fidelis Allen's position that the oil war in the Niger Delta not only endangered the stability of the region but also the country's socio-political development and economic growth.³⁶ Burdin maintains that the violent activities in the Niger Delta region assumed an insurgent quality that threatened oil production. Nigeria's economic and political stability are not only crucial to the nation and its environs, but it is also of strategic importance to the Western nations that depend on Nigeria's oil such as Great Britain, Spain, and Netherlands.

Michael Watts repeatedly noted in his *Sweet and Sour*, that the Niger Delta region in Nigeria remains a paradox of progress.³⁷ He contends that the region is so endowed with oil, but is also a space of unrelenting poverty, misery, hardship, and underdevelopment. It is in fact, this irony in the region, that led to uprisings and the many crises in the region.

Interestingly, Cyril Obi & Siri Aal Rusted argued that most post-Cold War scholarship on armed conflicts has made two broad assumptions on resource wars between the government, militant groups, and the oil companies in the Niger Delta region³⁸. Some

³⁶ Judith Burdin, "Understanding the Armed Groups of the Niger Delta," *Council of Foreign Relations*. Working Paper. (2009), 9.

³⁷ Michael Watt, "Sweet and Sour", *Niger Delta Economics of Violence*. Working Paper No. 18. Department of Geography, University of California. 2018, p11.

³⁸ Asuni, "Understanding the Armed Groups of the Niger Delta," 9.

scholars such as Collier Paul and Hoeffler Anke hold that the main factor that led to the emergence of militant groups in the Niger Delta region is greed.³⁹ This view maintains that militant groups claim to represent the will of their communities, but in reality they only take advantage of the situation for their own personal gains.⁴⁰ Collier and Hoeffler further maintain that countries whose major commodity is solely dependent on exportation is likely to face a civil war.⁴¹ Other scholars such as Judith Burdin Asuni hold that although the militants project community grievances, they also look out for available opportunities to illegally exploit the resources in the region themselves.⁴²

These two views reflected the major reason for the protracted conflicts and disputes in the region in the 1980s and 1990s. Peace in the Niger Delta was of great concern to Nigeria because oil is its major export commodity. Oil generated over ninety percent of the nation's gross national product. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)—the state-run corporation responsible for the production of crude oil in the country—refined a substantive amount of crude oil abroad in the early 1980s, primarily by Shell oil company. Nigeria's oil refineries were still under construction at the time, and in October 1980, when the Kaduna

³⁹ Paul Collier & Hoeffler Anke, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford University Papers*, No. 56, (2004), 564.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Collier Paul and Hoeffler Anke, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War". *Oxford University Papers*, No. 56 2004. In Obosedede Babatunde, "An Analytical Evaluation of the Cost of Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta. *Journal of Conflictology*, (2012), 50.

⁴² Asuni, "Understanding the Armed Groups of the Niger Delta," 50.

refinery began operation, 100,000 barrels of crude oil were produced per day.⁴³ In a year, Nigeria made over 37,200,000 barrels of crude oil, amounting to over \$115 million monthly. By March 1989, the fourth oil refinery was completed at Eleme (in present-day Port Harcourt) and the amount of crude oil production was increased to 445,000 barrels per day.⁴⁴ Crude oil was also sold at almost at the same rate, with a difference of an increase or decrease in the amount by a dollar or two. Between 1989 to the late 1990s, Nigeria made well over \$514 million.⁴⁵ Based on the strategic role the Niger Delta played in generating revenue for the country, the federal government of Nigeria often resorted to getting international military support in order to protect foreign workers and often deployed its military to the Niger Delta region to crush dissent, a situation that contributed to the crises in the region.⁴⁶ The constant suppression of dissent by the Nigerian state in the Niger Delta region sparked the conflicts in the region between the oil producing communities and the government. The government's response to the conflicts by militarizing the region escalated tensions and confrontations from the host communities. The situation often led to many deaths, and many injured.

Sabella Ogbobode, in *Nigeria's Niger Delta: Militancy, Amnesty, and the Post-amnesty Environment*, aptly described the Niger Delta as the breadbasket of the nation prior to the discovery of oil. Following the destruction of the nation's agricultural industry as a

⁴³ Helen Metz ed., "Nigeria: A Country Study," Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991, 229.

⁴⁴ Independent Statistics and Analysis: U.S. Energy Information Administration. U.S Landed Costs of Nigerian Crude Oil.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Obi and Aal Rusted, *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, 25.

result of the Nigerian Civil War also called the Biafran War, oil rose to become Nigeria's main source of revenue.⁴⁷ Ogbobode also maintains that when oil surpassed agriculture and became the main export commodity of the country it generated billions of dollars and constituted the largest portion of the country's GNP, but the Niger Delta region suffered severe neglect and marginalization.⁴⁸ Central to her argument, Ogbobode opined that the Niger Delta crisis was not only a regional problem but also a national problem. By extension it was a continental issue that called for concern. The position of Nigeria as 'the giant of Africa', presented the Niger Delta crises as a critical event on the African continent, because any form of instability in Nigeria would directly or indirectly affect the West African sub-region and even the entire continent. The crisis also affected other countries that depended on Nigeria for oil.⁴⁹

The deployment of the Nigerian military in the Niger Delta region to curb violent activities in the oil communities led to violence in the region in 1999. Utoabasi Akpan maintains in *The Niger Delta Question and the Peace Plan* that the decision to deploy the military in the Niger Delta region, instead of using the police, should be reexamined especially in the light of military repression of dissent.⁵⁰ Utoabasi Akpan similarly maintains

⁴⁷ Sabella Ogbobode, *Nigeria's Niger Delta: Militancy, Amnesty, and the Post-amnesty Environment*. US, Lexington Books. (2017), xxiii.

⁴⁸ Ibid., xxiii.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Utoabasi Akpan, *The Niger Delta Question and Peace Plan*, United Kingdom, Spectrum Books, (2011), 95.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

that the federal government should have taken into account the intimate relationship between war and diplomacy.⁵¹ For the total disarmament of the youths and sustainable peace in the Niger Delta region, Akpan argues that the government should have created a “once-and-for-all” program that would have taken care of the plight of the people to avoid continuous disastrous activities in the region.⁵² The government should have invested in human capacity development, infrastructure, and environmental projects.

Omotola Shola’s *Dissent Excesses and State Repression in the Niger Delta, Nigeria* submitted that the cause of the Niger Delta crises was based on the failure of the alliance system that existed between the ethnic minorities in the region and the Nigerian state.⁵³ Shola asserts that the alliance system between the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region and Nigerian state was targeted at addressing the ethnic domination and hegemonic control of the Igbo ethnic group over other ethnic minorities in the then Eastern region.⁵⁴ During the 1960s, just after the country’s independence, the Igbos, who were one of the three ethnic majorities, constantly agitated over marginalization by the Nigerian state. These agitations built up into secessionist demands.⁵⁵ The Igbos began to advocate for secession from Nigeria while at the same time dominating the ethnic minorities in the Eastern region. When the Igbos began their

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Omotola Shola, “Dissent Excesses and State Repression in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism*. Rutledge Taylor & Francis Group. (2009), 130.

⁵⁴ Omotola Shola, “Dissent Excesses and State Repression in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism*. Rutledge Taylor & Francis Group. (2009), 130.

⁵⁵ Ima Orji, “Issues on Ethnicity and Governance in Nigeria: A Universal Human Rights Perspective,” *Fordham International Law Journal*. Vol. 25. Issue 2, 445.

agitations against the Nigerian state the ethnic minorities in the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta region believed that the Igbos were dominating every aspect of their lives, a situation that the ethnic minorities described as “internal colonialism.”⁵⁶ The internal colonialism led the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region to take actions to liberate themselves from the internal colonization by the Igbos.⁵⁷ This also led to the alliance between the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian state.⁵⁸ The Nigerian state entered into the alliance system with ethnic minorities to secure the crude oil in the region for its economic gains and to reduce the influence of the Igbos in their secessionist agitation from Nigeria.⁵⁹

The ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region throughout the 1960s called for the creation of a separate state in the Eastern region to liberate themselves from the internal colonization of the Igbos.⁶⁰ The state-created agitation by the ethnic minorities culminated into a revolutionary movement that was led by Major Isaac Boro in 1966. The revolt, though, was restored in the same year when the first military coup was successfully led by the Igbo soldiers that killed the Prime Minister of Nigeria and many politicians from the Western and Northern regions, respectively. When the call for the creation of a new state by ethnic minorities was ignored by the Nigerian government, the relationship between the Nigerian

⁵⁶ Shola, “Dissent Excesses and State Repression in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,”132-133.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Paul Francis et. al., *Securing Development and Peace in the Niger Delta: A Social and Conflict Analysis for Change*. Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, 13.

state and the ethnic minorities suffered hiccups. The Igbos and ethnic minorities in the whole of the Niger Delta had lived in hostility before, during, and after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967. The question of a united country was out of place since then. The ethnic minorities in the region turned around and cast votes of no confidence upon the Nigerian state.

Consequently, the Nigerian state—a former ally to the ethnic minorities—became an enemy.⁶¹ Hostilities crept in and the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region began to protest the collaboration between the Nigerian state and the oil companies over the land-use system in the region. This collaboration led to the expropriation of lands in the Niger Delta region by the government. The government rented the lands to the oil companies for crude oil production without compensating the landowners. The crude oil production led to many environmental hazards including water pollution, erosion, soil pollution, and air pollution. The environmental hazards were largely caused by the oil companies that operated in the region. The indigenous population of the oil producing communities were greatly affected by the pollution on their environment.⁶² The indigenous population suffered even further from the loss of their lands. The ethnic minorities were also affected because the land was their major source of livelihood. As a result of this, protests ensued at various communities in the Niger Delta.

⁶¹ Shola, “Dissent Excesses and State Repression in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” 133.

⁶² Tambori Bodo & Gimah Batombari, “The Pollution and Destruction of the Niger Delta Ecosystem in Nigeria: Who is to be Blamed?” *European Scientific Journal*. Vol. 16. No.5, 167-169.

The prominent movement that was formed in the region was the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) that was led by Ken Saro Wiwa. Other movements such as the Ijaw Youths Council (IJC) and the Federation of the Ijaw Women Council.⁶³ These movements that were founded carried out protests in the Niger Delta region against the environmental hazards, underdevelopment of the region and the poverty in the oil producing communities. But the Nigerian State responded with reprisal attacks and the region was militarized with a heavy military presence. The Nigerian military intimidated, abused, raped and killed many members of the oil communities who protested the government and the activities of the oil companies in region.

The Nigerian government used violent approaches to suppress dissenting voices and to crush the militant groups in the region. This action constantly created a chaotic, harsh, and violent atmosphere in the region for both the oil producing communities and the oil companies, leading to many deaths, arrests and worse economic conditions in the region.⁶⁴ The oil companies that were operating in the region also collaborated with the Nigerian military governments of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha to suppress members of the oil producing communities who wanted them to stop oil production in the region. The members of the oil producing communities who were illegally arrested, detained and tried by the military tribunal did not have justice. *Amnesty International* in its report noted that Shell

⁶³ Beloveth Nwanko, "The Politics of Conflicts Over Oil in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Review of the Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies of the Oil Companies," *American Journal of Educational Research*. Vol. 3. No.4, (2015), 384.

⁶⁴ Oluyemi Opeoluwa, "The Military Dimension of the Niger Delta Crises and Its Implication on Nigeria's National Security," *In SAGE Open*, 7.

paid two people who were witnesses in the trial to give false information.⁶⁵ The false witness which was championed by Shell strengthened its relationship with the Nigerian military government. Corruption in the oil sector increased, and General Ibrahim Babangida & Sani Abacha looted lots of public funds for their personal use, leaving the oil producing communities impoverished.⁶⁶ The good relationship enjoyed by the oil companies and the Nigerian state, encouraged the oil companies to produce oil in larger quantities to earn more income from the sales of exported crude oil. According to Chris Hejzier, the Nigerian federation's account increased from a deficit of four hundred and twelve million dollars (\$412 million) in 1979 to five thousand, two hundred and ninety-five million (\$5,295 Million) surplus in the 1980s. The surplus continued to the 1990s.⁶⁷ The large production of crude oil in the early 1990s led to worse environmental problems in the Niger Delta region. It was the environmental problems that triggered the emergence of social movements and protests that were carried out by the oil producing communities against the Nigerian state and the oil companies in the region.⁶⁸ The hostilities between the oil producing communities against the Nigerian State and the oil companies kept Nigeria disunited. Solely because the leaders of the Nigerian state were majorly members of the ethnic majority. A factor that led

⁶⁵ Amnesty International, "In the Rock: Shell's Complicity in the Arbitrary Execution of Ogoni Nine". *Amnesty International*. 2017.

⁶⁶ Habiba Musa, "Conflicts in the Niger Delta: Analysis of the Causes, Impacts and Resolution," (PhD Dissertation. Coventry University. 2018), 75.

⁶⁷ Chris Hejzier, "Nigerian Oil Economy: Development or Dependency," Accessed May 15, 2021. https://artsandscience.usask.ca/economics/resources/pdf/hajler3.htm#_ftnref1

⁶⁸ John Agbonifo, "Territorializing Niger Delta Conflict: Place and Contentious Mobilization," *Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements*. Vol. 3. (2011), 240.

the ethnic minorities in the oil producing communities to feel dominated and marginalized, and therefore was unacceptable.

Ethnic domination in the country was a major cause that led to the Niger Delta crisis and is further expounded upon by Opeyemi Odukoya and Haldun Canci in their *Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Specific Analysis Upon Identity (1999-2013)*. Odukoya and Canci explicitly state that the unity of the country would not be achieved due to the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state where religious, ethnic, and ideological groups compete for domination.⁶⁹ The competition between the ethnic majorities for domination over the ethnic minorities weakened the basis upon which unity could be achieved.

Many scholars have discussed the factors that led to the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria by identifying the political, economic, and ethnic factors as the major causes. An overall study, however, has not been done on the implications of the Niger Delta crisis on the unity of Nigeria. As stated above, this research sufficiently fills in the lacuna.

⁶⁹ Opeyemi Odukoya and Haldun Canci, "Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria: A Specific Analysis Upon Identity (1999-2013)," *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Vol. 16. No. 1. (2016), 105-106.

CHAPTER 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND LEADING UP TO THE CRISIS

The Niger Delta and its People

The Niger Delta region is in the southern part of Nigeria, situated in the Niger River natural delta.⁷⁰ Six states comprise the region, namely, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo and Rivers States. According to the 2006 national census conducted in Nigeria, the region is home to over ten million inhabitants.⁷¹ The region is also the third largest wetland in the world and the largest in Africa. The bulk of the nation's oil deposits are in the region, which makes it center of the nation's economy.⁷²

The region is located in the Gulf of Guinea at the top of the West African coast between a latitude of approximately 40°N to 60°N and a longitude of 50°E to 80°E.⁷³ Annual rainfall in is always very high but differs within various states.⁷⁴ In 1958, the Willink Commission that was set up by British administrator Sir Henry Willink identified three divisions as the main components of the Niger Delta, the Ogoni, Degema and Brass.⁷⁵ These divisions are in the present-day Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers States. The region is supplied with

⁷⁰ Paul Francis, et. al., "Securing Development and Peace in the Niger Delta: A Social and Conflict Analysis for Change," *Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars*, 9. www.wilson.centre.org.

⁷¹ Daupaniomei Asanebi, "A Concise View of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: An Interpretation of a Nigerian Historian," *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*. Vol.11, Issue X, 56.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Bodo & Gimah, "The Pollution and Destruction of the Niger Delta Ecosystem in Nigeria, 162.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 57

⁷⁵ Ibid.

plenty of water from the two largest rivers in the country, the Niger and the Benue. The two rivers flow from the region through Lokoja in Kogi state and empty into the Forcados and the Num.⁷⁶ The present-day Niger Delta region consists of over fifty ethnic groups including the Ogoni, Ijaw Itsekiri, Orhobo, Isoko, Andoni, Okrika, Engenne, Kalabari, Ikwere, Odua, Abua, Ogbia, and Epie-Atissa.



Figure 1. The Nigeria Map showing the States in the South-South Region.⁷⁷

Agriculture was the dominant economic activity in the Niger Delta during the precolonial and colonial eras. The inhabitants used the land to cultivate crops and the water for fishing. Traditionally, Ogoni has majorly six sub-kingdoms namely, Tai, Nyo-Khana, Eleme, Ken-Khana, Barbe and Gokana respectively which are presided by a paramount ruler of the area.⁷⁸ It is also divided into four local governments, namely Tai, Khana, Eleme and Gokana for administrative purposes.⁷⁹ The Ogoni are found in the present-day Delta State,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁷ Ime Udotong, Map of the Niger Delta region. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-the-Niger-Delta-region_fig5_320450251)

⁷⁸ Nwamaka Okeke-Ogbuafor, et. al., "Reconciling Traditional Indigenous Governance with Contemporary Approaches to Decision Making in Ogoni Communities in River State, Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 9. No. 1, (2016), 55.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

while Oloibiri and Nembe are found in the present Bayelsa state. The Ogoni, Oloibiri, and Nembe communities have lived in those settlements for over two thousand years largely dependent on land for survival.⁸⁰ The land provided food security and income for the communities. During the agrarian period, the community leaders were selected on a succession basis and age was an important criterion in the selection process. The oldest in the communities were selected as community leaders, sometimes based on their abilities. The selection system continued throughout the pre-colonial, up to the colonial era, and continued in the post-colonial period. Leadership in the Ogoni communities and its environs was also hereditary.⁸¹ The community leaders asserted a lot of influence and were respected by other members of the communities.

The traditional leadership is a colonial invention in the Niger Delta region, a carryover from when Nigeria was under the British administration. The colonial administrators used the chiefs and the paramount rulers to indirectly rule the communities in the Niger Delta region. These traditional positions that were created by the colonial administrators made the occupants of the offices (chiefs and paramount rulers) prone to corruption and were easily manipulated against members of their communities. They were vulnerable to manipulation and harm against their communities because they were not

⁸⁰ Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day: A Detention Dairy*. USA, Penguin Books, (1995), 95.

⁸¹ Nwamaka Okeke-Ogbuafor et. al., "Reconciling Traditional Indigenous Governance with Contemporary Approaches to Decision Making in Ogoni Communities in River State, Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 9. No. 1, (2016), 55.

answerable to members of their communities but to the colonial administrators. The chieftain system was also adopted by successive administrations after independence. The federal government collaborated with traditional rulers and expropriated lands from landowners to extract oil. Over time, the chieftain system changed and was conferred on the oldest men as started before in the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta.

For Ogoni communities, the land on which they lived on and the water in which they fished were very important, not only for the sustenance they provided, but also as ancestral inheritances.⁸² The Ogoni honored the fruits of the land, yams in particular, and they celebrated the New Yam Festival annually.⁸³ The Ogoni placed special importance on the planting season because of its significance as a social occasion marked with religious and spiritual activities. There was, therefore, minimal deforestation or contamination of the rivers in the period prior to the discovery of oil. The Ogoni communities believed that “Ogoniland,” as they call it, was an inheritance of their forefathers and that the land and waters that surround them are blessed. Due to its practical, social, and spiritual significance, the land and every feature that constituted the environment are sacred to the Ogoni Communities.⁸⁴ As a

⁸²Ken Saro-wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*. Port Harcourt, Saros International Publishers. (1992), 11-12.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.

result, the inhabitants in the Ogoni communities did everything to protect Ogoniland, to carry their ancestors into the present and preserve the land for future generations.⁸⁵

Throughout the pre-colonial era, the people of Ogoniland, Oloibiri, and Nembe used land on a communal basis. Everyone had access to land for the cultivation of crops and other agricultural activities. During this time there was surplus of food because everyone was engaged in farming activities in one way or the other. During the colonial period, however, the communal land system was abolished by the government. Land was commodified and monetized for commercial purposes in the country.⁸⁶ Consequently, the lands in Ogoni, Oloibiri, and Nembe were taken by the government.

In 1969, when the Petroleum Law was enacted, granting states the right to nationalize every oil resource in the country, the lands in Ogoni, Oloibiri, and Nembe were appropriated by the government. As a result, the government began to rent and issue licenses to oil companies to explore the lands for an increase in crude oil production⁸⁷. This paved the way for Shell-BP and other multinational companies to increase exploration for crude oil in the Niger Delta region, which led to much environmental degradation and pollution.⁸⁸ In the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Michael Watt, "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics*, 9:1, (2004), 14.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Ogoni, Oloibiri, and Nembe communities the oil companies disconnected the inhabitants from their environment.

Colonial Legacy in Nigeria

At its inception at the turn of the twentieth century, Nigeria existed as two protectorates and a colony, the Northern and Southern Protectorates and the Colony of Lagos. The British administered the two protectorates independently until 1914 when British administrator Lord Fredrick John Lugard merged the two protectorates into one state, Nigeria. The unification was the result of colonial administrators' unwillingness to fund the growth of the Northern Protectorate compared to the Southern Protectorate whose budget was large enough to also sustain the North, hence the merger. Unfortunately, the unification of the two protectorates led to many conflicts that occurred in Nigeria over ethnic domination after independence with the eventual emergence of social movements and other militant groups in the present-day Niger Delta Region.

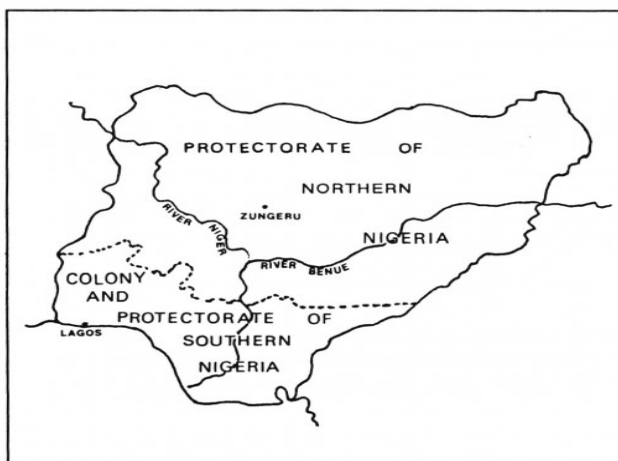


Figure 2. Map of Nigeria during colonial rule before Independence in 1960⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Y. Turaki, Map of Nigeria 1906-1914. Pinterest, 1982.

Before Nigeria's independence in 1960, ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region expressed displeasure and concern about the unequal distribution of natural resources in the country.⁹⁰ These concerns were expressed mainly by those in the oil producing communities—such as the Ogoni, Nembe, and Ijaw—who felt marginalized by the federal government. They argued that even though much of the country's wealth came from the Niger Delta, the region was nevertheless the most impoverished and undeveloped of all the regions in the country.⁹¹

As oil production increased, locals' activities and the reckless practices of companies like Ag Chevron, Total, Exxon Mobil, and Texaco created many environmental problems for the people in the region.⁹² As crude oil production increased in the region, the exploration carried out by the oil companies led to gas flaring, oil spillage, soil erosion, depletion of biodiversity, coastal erosion, water pollution, noise pollution, loss of soil fertility, deforestation, and land degradation.⁹³ The gas flaring, erosion and soil infertility caused by oil spillage disrupted all forms of agricultural production in the region and the extensive pollution to water sources deprived locals of clean drinking water.

⁹⁰ Michael Watt, "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics*, 9:1, (2004), 14.

⁹¹ Simon Erin et. al., "The Niger Delta Crises in Nigeria: Pre and Post Amnesty Situation," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 4, No. 6, 422.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Adati Ayuba, "Oil Exploration and Spillage in the Niger Delta of Nigeria". *Civil and Environmental Research*. Vol. 2, No. 3, 2012, 38.

Despite these environmental problems, oil exploration continued, and the country's oil exports increased. The large quantity of oil exportation contributed to Nigeria's economic growth and prosperity. However, local communities in the Niger Delta who generated these revenues for the nation through their labor did not enjoy the same economic benefits as other parts of the country. The environmental problems caused by the oil companies, and the feeling of marginalization fostered by an aloof government created a hostile atmosphere in the region.

In 1958, at the peak of the ethnic contentions over marginalization in the region, the colonial administration set up the Willink Commission to investigate the concerns of the minorities. Based on the Commission's recommendation, the Niger Delta Development Board was established in the same year Nigeria gained independence as an attempt to take care of the needs of the area.⁹⁴ The Niger Delta Development Board did not achieve the purpose for which it was established. The Niger Delta Development Board failed because of inadequate funding and the funds that were available allocated to the Board were mismanaged. The failure of the Niger Delta Development Board led to the establishment of the Niger Delta River Authority, created through decree No. 37 in 1976 by the Military Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo.⁹⁵ Like the Niger Delta Development Board of 1960, the Niger Delta River Authority of 1976 also received inadequate funding to satisfactorily

⁹⁴ S.A. Aghalino, "The Olusegun Obasanjo Administration and the Niger Delta Question, 1999-2007," *Stud Tribes Tribal*. 2009, 58.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

administer its duties. To make matters worse, the few funds that were available were grossly mismanaged by the authority.

The government's inaction and indifference to the plight of the people in the region compelled some to resort to armed struggle.⁹⁶ It was, however, unfortunate that Nigeria moved into an era of self-government without addressing the major problems that confronted the nation at the time. Measures were put in place to foster national unity in the country after independence, including state education programs, but ethnic issues created by the colonial administrators continued after independence.

The Oil Quota System

As ethnic minorities' demands continued into the late 1950s, the quota system was introduced, providing equal representation and equal resource control in the country. Before the discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta, the Philipson Commission was created in 1946 to discuss the need for a derivation principle to ascertain what percentage regions ought to enjoy from the natural resources produced by the entire nation. Between 1954 and 1957, the derivation principle became the basis for revenue allocation to the three regions in the country, but the 1966 coup that ensued disrupted the process.

According to Kingdom Orji, the coups that ushered in military regimes in Nigeria altered the principles of federalism.⁹⁷ When military dictatorships took over via coups

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Kingdom Orji, "Revolutionary Pressure in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience," *An International Mufti-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*. Vol. 5 (3), No. 20, (2011), 160.

d'états, the dictators discarded the principles of federalism which shared powers and responsibilities to the three federating units. Federalism is a system of government that was initiated in Nigeria by the British colonial administrator, Governor-general Barnard Bourdillon in 1939, at which point the Northern, Eastern, and Western provinces were first created. By 1946, federalism was adopted as a system of government in the Richard's Constitution and the system continued through present day.

The repressive military regimes ignored the derivation rights of the oil and mineral producing states.⁹⁸ The repression of the quota system gave rise to dissenting voices and led to the emergence of protest movements in oil producing areas. Oil communities in the Niger Delta region expressed dissatisfaction due to their long endurance of a poor standard of living, and due to the environmental hazards in the region. They maintained that the government ought to provide infrastructure and an improved standard of living for citizens in those communities as it did in other regions.⁹⁹

Post-Colonial Crisis in the Niger Delta

Nigeria witnessed economic prosperity and self-sufficiency after independence in 1960, and the era ushered in good hopes and promises for the citizens in terms of economic growth and infrastructure developments. Falola and Heaton observed that Nigeria in 1962 was focused on industrialization, investment, and education leading to the introduction of the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

First National Development Plan.¹⁰⁰ The multiyear plan was an ambitious framework targeted at the nation's goal of self-sufficiency. During this time, Nigeria recorded growth in the manufacturing of food, beverages, and the production of tobacco, among other commodities.¹⁰¹ The government instituted policies that discouraged the importation of foreign goods, thereby boosting local production and economy. There was also an increase in crude oil production, as well as a boost to the mining sector.¹⁰²

Post-colonial development and growth in Nigeria were possible because of the deliberate efforts made by politicians and elites to unify the country. These efforts were made through public lectures and publications in newspapers and journals.¹⁰³ These led to all-round progress and development in the country. In education, for example, schools were built and students were admitted across the regions of the country fostering unity and national identity. These deliberate attempts by the post-colonial administrations to foster unity in the country a response the colonial administrators seed of disunity sown in the power structure of the country by giving political domination to the Northern region.

Marginalization and disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities were predominant during the post-colonial era as a result of the colonial administrators' failure to solve those problems

¹⁰⁰ Toyin Falola & Mathew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, United States, Cambridge University Press: 158-180, In Siyan Oyeweso, '*Nigeria: Post Independence Crisis and the Civil war*': In Tony Oyema, *Nigeria's Golden Book*, Lagos, The Sun Publishing Limited, 2010, 98.

¹⁰¹ Falola, & Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 98.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

during the colonial era. Successive administrations after independence also failed to respond to the concerns of the ethnic minorities, all of which together became known as the “National Question.”¹⁰⁴ The government’s failure to address the National Question, and specifically its failure to respond to the agitation of the Igbo ethnic group eventually led to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967.

Siyan Oyeweso aptly posited that this post-independence crisis not only disrupted the inherited regional political system created by the colonial administrators, but also brought about unique social changes that impacted contemporary politics in the country.¹⁰⁵ These changes would be seen in the crises in the Niger Delta region upon the discovery of crude oil and its mass production. Independent Nigeria was marked by a series of conflicts that were caused by the federal government and the oil companies in the Niger Delta region. The discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta region sparked controversies in the country over revenue allocated to states, especially the oil producing states. Ken Saro noted thus:

The Men who argued for Nigerian Independence, and particularly Obafemi Awolowo, clearly knew the forgoing and argued convincingly that the only way for Nigeria was to allow each ethnic group to exercise autonomy and grow at its own pace using its genius and political system.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ The National Question was the consistent agitations from the minority ethnic groups especially those from Southern Nigeria such as the Ogoni, Ijaw, Elem, and Nembe for the government to operate on a more inclusive government, where all regions and its people were represented equally at the central government.

¹⁰⁵ Eme Awa, *Federal Government in Nigeria*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964: 7, cited in Siyan Oyeweso, ‘*Nigeria: Post Independence Crisis and the Civil war*’: In Tony Oyema, Nigeria’s Golden Book, Lagos, The Sun Publishing Limited, (2010), 94.

¹⁰⁶ Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day: A Detention Dairy*. USA, Penguin Books, 1995, 191.

The oil producing communities maintained that the federal government ought to have developed their communities, which were ravaged by the destructive process of oil extraction. But the federal government never yielded to the plights of those communities. Elders and traditional leaders together with the youths had consistently advocated for the oil companies, especially Shell-BP and Chevron, to shoulder their share of corporate responsibility, yet these companies did nothing. In many instances, Shell-BP refused responsibility and claimed it was the duty of the government to take care of its citizens. Consequently, Niger Delta communities began to resist the activities of the oil companies and the production of crude in the region.

Following the same pattern of neglect, the state, federal government, and oil companies did little or nothing to respond to the plights of the people of the Niger Delta. The government was only interested in the crude oil that was produced in those communities. The inhabitants of the oil producing communities endured the marginalization and the environmental hazards caused by Shell and Chevron for decades, and as a result they began to search for alternative means of survival. At the height of their hardship the inhabitants in the region, especially the young people between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five, began to agitate and protest. Militancy grew predominant in the Niger Delta region because of the marginalization of the region, and more importantly as a result of the environmental degradation and the underdevelopment of the oil producing communities.

CHAPTER 4. MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA

Shell and the Oil Crisis in the Niger Delta

The destruction of the ecosystem in the Niger Delta region throughout the 1960s and 1970s negatively impacted the indigenous economy that had been practiced for over two thousand years. Meanwhile, the Nigerian government knew little about the practices of the oil industry and the standards of operation with which they were to comply.¹⁰⁷ There were not enough trained staff in relevant government ministries to adequately draft oil extraction laws and regulations in line with global best practices.¹⁰⁸ As members of the Ogoni, Oloibiri and Nembe communities suffered, their traditional leaders, youth activists, and religious institutions began to resist the government and oil-related activities carried out in the region.

Shell-BP refused to respond to the Niger Delta agitation. Even as Ogoni traditional leaders were busy expressing their displeasure through protests, Shell was hard at work at the Bomu oil field carrying out oil production.¹⁰⁹ A massive oil spill occurred there further damaging an already weakened environment. Shell took weeks to contain the incident.¹¹⁰ Members of the community organized into protests often resulting in the destruction of oil facilities. Shell took the case to court, arguing that the company had a right to the land under

¹⁰⁷ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*. Port Harcourt, Saros International Publishers. (1992), 11-44.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Lewis, "Blood and Oil: A special Report.; After Nigeria Represses, Shell Defends its Recorded-Correction Appended," *The New York Times*. Section A, Page 1, Column 1, Foreign Desk, Special Report. February 13, 1996.

¹¹⁰ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, 11-44.

dispute. Shell won the case, and the land was renamed to become an oil field under their control.

The Ogoni leaders agitated constantly to the River State government against Shell-BP and its activities throughout the 1960s. By 1965, Shell-BP had also discovered the EP field in Southeast Warri, a community located in the Niger Delta region.¹¹¹ The activities of the oil companies in the region increased steadily from that point, exponentially so following the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970.¹¹² The end of the civil war coincided with a rise in the world oil price. The increase in the oil production therefore added to the country's wealth and prosperity. Thousands of barrels of oil were produced daily for export.¹¹³ By 1971, Nigeria joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and by 1977 the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was incorporated.¹¹⁴ NNPC is a Nigerian state-owned oil company that is responsible for upstream and downstream sectorial activities in the country.¹¹⁵ Other multinational oil companies that operated in Nigeria after the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region also included Texaco, Nigeria Agip Oil Company (who discovered an oil field in Obagi), and Elf Aquitaine (who discovered an oil field in Ebocha).¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, *History of the Nigerian Petroleum Industry*; Nigeria: Discovery of Oil Field in Eastern Zone. BBC of World Broadcast. January 8, (1985).

¹¹² Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, *History of the Nigerian Petroleum Industry*.

¹¹³ "New Oil Discovery in Nigeria," *The Xinhua General Oversears News Service Xinhua General News Service*. Monday, April 30, (1990).

¹¹⁴ "NNPC/Mobil Joint Venture Announces Two Oil Discoveries," *PR Newswire*. Wednesday, February (1995).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

As production of crude oil increased to meet global demands, the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta, through their exploration, engaged in activities that violated environmental protection guidelines and preservation laws provided by the Nigerian government.

Zibima Tubodenyefa observed that the environmental guidelines and standards for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria issued in 1991 by the Department of Petroleum Resource at the Ministry of Petroleum Resources remains an important working document in the Nigerian petroleum sector.¹¹⁷ The guidelines and safety standards provided by the Department of Petroleum Resource sought to protect, minimize, prevent, and control pollution in all aspects of the petroleum operations in the region.¹¹⁸ The opposite was true in the Niger Delta region.

Based on the *Environmental Guidelines and Standards for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria*, it was the responsibility of the oil companies to clean up their waste. The guidelines also state that it is mandatory for oil companies to locate all sources of spills from the facilities and thereafter:

...have an estimate of the size of every potential spill, determine possible containment sites, and also predict the movement of spills, and choose what the response time that is required. Determine the likelihood of the occurrence of more than one spill and the effects of such incidences. Examine the material and equipment used for such clean-up of oil spill. Examine the inadequacies of personnel and equipment, and modifying them on continual basis...¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Tubodenyefe Zibima. *Review of the Environmental Guidelines and Standards for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria*. November 2018, VI.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VI.

¹¹⁹ *Environmental Guidelines and Standards for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria (EGASPIN)*, Revised (2002), 145.

Unfortunately, the guidelines were not strictly adhered to by the oil companies in the Niger Delta region.¹²⁰ Civil society organizations and many human rights groups maintained that millions of barrels of crude oil spillage occurred over the years thereby polluting the rivers and farmlands that served as a source of livelihood for the indigenous communities. The oil companies instead blamed oil leaks in the region on local vandals, armed groups, and criminal activity.¹²¹ Absolving themselves of responsibility, the oil companies continued to violate the provisions of the guidelines and standards issued by the federal government.

Over the years, the activities of these corporations adversely affected the ecosystems. Okhumode Yakubu maintains that both the federal government and the oil companies have paid little or no attention to regional development or locals' means of livelihood, and consequently the ecosystems in this part of the country were greatly impacted.¹²² Meanwhile, the blame game carried out between the federal government of Nigeria and the oil companies continually passed the buck as local standards of living worsened.

By 1970, the Ogoni community wrote a petition addressed to the Military Governor of Rivers State against Shell-BP and its activities. Copies of the letter were also sent to the relevant federal cabinet members and the Head of Operations of Shell-BP.¹²³ The petition

¹²⁰ Ali Hakeem, "New 'Green' Protest for Shell in the Niger Delta". *Platt's Oilgram News*. August 19, 1997.

¹²¹ James Bourne, "Shell Under Attacks: Sets Nigeria Under Study; Focus is on Environmental Niger Delta," *Platt's Oilgrims News*. February 6, (1995).

¹²² Okhudome Yakubu, "Addressing Environmental Problems in Ogoniland Through Implementation of the United Nations Environmental Program Recommendations: Environmental Management Strategies," *Environment*. Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

was the only one of its kind and was signed by prominent members from the Ogoni communities. It alleged that returning Ogoni civil war veterans were encouraged to farm for sustenance but could not do so because their lands were destroyed by Shell's excavating machines.¹²⁴ The petition also stated that Shell was producing oil in a careless and repugnant manner, causing oil spillages and pollution, especially in the Gokona area of the Division where most inland rivers and waters were contaminated as a result.¹²⁵ The Ogoni traditional leaders insisted that neither Shell-BP nor the Nigerian government had taken into consideration the effects of oil extraction on the Ogoni people's local economy, nor had they considered the effects of the oil activities on the lives of the people themselves.¹²⁶ The Ogonis acknowledged that the petroleum industry had helped Nigeria to prosper overall, but also insisted that the government and Shell-BP had never given serious consideration to the effects their activities would have on the inhabitants in Ogoniland.¹²⁷ Even when the Ogonis had made grievances known in the past, they had been ignored. They stated in their petition that before Shell-BP began exploration in the region, the Ogonis had serviceable roads through their lands, but with Shell activities in their communities, the roads were

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, 11-48.

¹²⁶ John Osayere, "Development as Conflict: Ogoni Movement, the States and Oil Resources in the Niger Delta, Nigeria". (PhD Diss. Erasmus University Rotterdam). The Hague-Netherlands. (2009): 134.

¹²⁷ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, 11-48.

destroyed.¹²⁸ When they requested that Shell-BP work on the road, Shell-BP responded that it was not their responsibility to maintain the roads in the Division, but rather that of the government.¹²⁹

In terms of demands, the Ogoni's petition requested that all further acquisition of land owned by the government should be on bilateral basis, between the landowners and whichever oil company was a prospective new buyer at any given time. They asked further that a rent payment of not less than one thousand pounds per annum be given to all landowners whose lands were offered for oil production.¹³⁰ The petition also demanded that the government hold oil companies responsible for the destruction they caused, insisting that oil companies ought to provide communities with alternative means to subsist and survive whenever their actions deprived those communities of their primary means of doing so.

After the petition was signed and submitted, the government once again did nothing to respond. Two months after it was submitted Shell-BP responded to the petition by reiterating their position and stating that it was the responsibility of the government to respond to the requests for the development of Ogoni communities. Shell-BP insisted that local community development had not been part of the initial agreement reached between them and the Nigerian government, and thus that they had no obligation to help in any way. Shell

¹²⁸ See the Ogoni Bill of Rights Presented to the Government and the People Nigeria, October 1990. With Appeal to the International Community by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), December 1991.

¹²⁹ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*. Port Harcourt, Saros International Publishers. (1992), 11-48

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

submitted that most of the issues raised in the petition submitted by the elders of Ogoni were either exaggerated or simply untrue:

...As you know, the main aim and purpose of an oil Company must be to find and produce hydrocarbons as efficient as possible. This is the area in which it makes a very clear significant contribution to an overall economic development of any country in which it operates. As in the case with the other oil Companies operating in Nigeria our obligation and responsibility are clearly delineated in the agreement made with the Federal Government and by the Laws and Regulations relating to oil industry in Nigeria. These have always been meticulously observed by this company...¹³¹

As Shell activities continued in the Niger Delta region throughout 1970s and 1980s, up to 1990, the Ogoni people saw that measures were not put in place by the government to address the challenges in their communities.¹³² The Ogoni communities thus began to advocate for political and economic restructuring in the country.¹³³ They demanded more autonomy within the states so that they could gain full control of their resources. In 1990, the Ogoni youths formed the Committee for Ogoni Autonomy (COA), which met regularly in Port Harcourt. The youth group organized and educated themselves about the problems that bedeviled Ogoniland and sought for ways to address the challenges in Ogoni communities.¹³⁴ During this time, most of the elders and politicians in Ogoniland actively supported the struggles for a better life in their communities. With the active participation of people from all walks of life in Ogoniland, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed. MOSOP was founded in 1990 as a platform upon which members of the Ogoni

¹³¹ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, 11-48.

¹³² Tempo Lagos. Nigeria: What the Niger Delta People Want. Africa News, October 13, (1999).

¹³³ "Nigerian President Blames Oil firms for Niger Delta Crisis". *Copyright 1999 Xinhua News*. AgencyXinhua News Agency.

¹³⁴ Ken SaroWiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Dairy*. USA, Penguin Books, 1995, 78.

expressed their grievances in the region through organized rallies, and protests at the oil facilities in Ogoniland.

Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was founded in 1990.¹³⁵ Dr. Leton Garrick was its first President and Ken Saro-Wiwa its spokesperson.¹³⁶ Ken Saro-Wiwa eventually became the leader of MOSOP who promoted its activities internationally.¹³⁷ MOSOP was a confederation that brought together multiple organizations in the Niger Delta region, including the Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers, the Federation of Ogoni Women's Association, and the National Council of Ogoni People. As a non-violent organization with nonpartisan inclinations, they protested the activities of the Nigerian government and the oil companies active in the region.¹³⁸ The movement became prominent nationally and gained international recognition.

Following the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, MOSOP drafted the Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990.¹³⁹ Clifford Bob observed that this formative document was used effectively

¹³⁵ Tijen Demirel-Pegg, & Scott Pegg, "Razed, Repressed, and Bought off: The Demobilization of the Ogoni Protest in the Niger Delta," *Extractive Industries and Society*, Vol. 2, 566.

¹³⁶ Michael Birnbaum, "Nigeria: Fundamental Human Rights Denied. Report of the Trial of Ken Saro Wiwa and others," *Published by Article 19 in Collaboration with the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales and the Law Society of England and Wales*. June (1995).

¹³⁷ Ken Saro-Wiwa was a popular writer, publisher and tv presenter in Ogoniland. He published many books, poems, plays, novels, and articles on the environmental problems in Ogoni land, and the whole of Niger Delta. Some of which included: *Genocide in Ogoni*, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*, amongst other.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Oyo Remi, "Nigeria-Human Rights: Ogoniland, Minority Rights and Murder," *IPS-Inter Press Service*. December 27, (1994).

from August 1990 during the Ogoni struggle before the official launch of MOSOP in the same year.¹⁴⁰ Throughout 1991, MOSOP sent copies of the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the Nigerian Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida, and to the United Nations. Additionally, they sent several articles about the marginalization of ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region. The Bill of Rights highlighted the enduring historical grievances in the region and asserted the distinct lack of benefit from the production of oil in the Niger Delta region.¹⁴¹ The people of Ogoni argued that they had no representation in the national government, no pipe-born water, no electricity, no social services, and no job opportunities in the state, federal, or private sectors.¹⁴² Further, the Bill of Rights made provisions for the effects and consequences of the environmental degradation caused by the oil companies.¹⁴³

The Bill of Rights also addressed the need to bring lasting peace to the region and stated that the Ogoni people should be granted political autonomy in order for them to participate effectively in the national government as a separate unit.¹⁴⁴ Political autonomy in this respect included the right to use a fair proportion of the natural resources in Ogoni land

¹⁴⁰ Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgent, Media and International Activism*. New York, Cambridge University Press. 2005: 61.

¹⁴¹ Orobo History Society. "Ogoni Bill of Rights Presented to the Government and People of Nigeria." November 1990. <http://www.waado.org/nigerdelta/rightsdeclaration/ogoni.html>

¹⁴² Tijen Demirel-Pegg & Scott Pegg, "Razed, Repressed, and Bought off: The Demobilization of the Ogoni Protest in the Niger Delta". *Attractive Industries and Society*, Vol.2, 566.

¹⁴³ Ogoni Bill of Rights Presented to the Government and People of Nigeria, November (1990).

¹⁴⁴ Ogoni Bill of Rights, Presented to the Government and People of Nigeria. November 1990). http://www.waado.org/nigerian_scholars/archive/docum/ogoni.html

for the development of the Ogoni communities, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment from continuous degradation.¹⁴⁵

The movement continued to protest the activities of the oil companies and against the federal government. In response to the many agitations by Ogonis, the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta region at many instances blamed the Nigerian government for the lack of development in the region. Shell's spokesperson Stephen Lawson-Jack maintained, "We cannot be made scapegoats on issues outside our scope. We have operated within the guideline set out by the government."¹⁴⁶

General Ibrahim Babangida had banned all political activities in the country and banned politicians and elders from Ogoniland from participating in the politics of the country.¹⁴⁷ During this time, most of the politicians and the traditional leaders were actively involved in the activities of MOSOP. By 1991, Ibrahim Babangida lifted the ban on the political activities in the country and all the politicians went back into politics.¹⁴⁸ Most of the politicians and traditional leaders, however, did not leave MOSOP, they remained in the movement to work for the Ogoni people.

By the early nineties, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People was suffering from an internal crisis due to disagreements between some of the elders and other members

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁴⁶ Kenneth Noble, "Kidere Journal: Atop a Sea of Oil, Nigerians are Mired in Misery," *The New York Times*. September 9, 1993.

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Noble B, "Nigeria's Experiment: A Special Report; Marching to Military's Cadence, Nigeria Moves back to Democracy," *The New York Times*, May 21, 1991.

¹⁴⁸ Kenneth Noble B, "Nigerian Ruler Cedes Power to Civilian," *The New York Times*" August 27, 1993.

of the movement.¹⁴⁹ Some of these elders were chiefs and traditional leaders and they disagreed with the leadership style of MOSOP because of the radical approach adopted by the leader Ken Saro-Wiwa. Ken Saro-Wiwa adopted reorientation, protest, and advocacy approaches, which he used to engage both the Ogonis, the government, and the oil companies. He gave instructions to the Ogonis on the need for peaceful protest in their communities. He believed that constant demonstrations against Ibrahim Babangida's military regime were going to resolve the environmental problems in the Niger Delta regions.¹⁵⁰ When a large number of the younger members of MOSOP supported Ken Saro-Wiwa's style of leadership many chiefs and traditional leaders broke away from the MOSOP giving Ken Saro-wiwa the ability to become the leader of the group.¹⁵¹

Ken Saro-Wiwa maintained that MOSOP was formed to liberate the Ogoni people from oppression of the government that did not care for the welfare of the people of the Niger Delta region.¹⁵² The Ibrahim Babangida's military regime was also under pressure from the larger ethnic groups in the country such as the Igbo and Yoruba over marginalization. Nevertheless, Babangida continued to undermine the organized protests in the Niger Delta

¹⁴⁹ The News Lagos. "Nigeria: MOSOP in Crisis," *Africa News*, November 9, 1998.

¹⁵⁰ See The Nigeria Human Rights Practices, Department of State Dispatch, United States. February, 1994.

¹⁵¹ Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgent, Media and International Activism*. New York, Cambridge University Press. 2005, 64; Moses Uchendu. Nigeria: MOSOP Cracks Over Money. *Africa News*. December 6, 1999.

¹⁵² John Agbonifo, "Oil, Insecurity and Subversive Patriots in the Niger Delta: The Ogoni as Agents of Revolutionary Change," *Journal of Third World Studies*. Vol. 26. No. 2. Third World Issues and Problems. Past and Present. (2009), 77.

region. Ken Saro-Wiwa described the Babangida administration as bandit-like, insensitive regime that expropriated lands in the Niger Delta, especially in Ogoniland, and destroyed the environment. MOSOP quickly organized and mobilized support both at home and abroad.

The Ogoni believed that the government's scorn of their protest was based on selfishness—that the government was only interested in oil extraction and completely uninterested in local development or societal well-being.¹⁵³ Leaders of other larger ethnic groups, such as Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, were also perceived to be selfish by the ethnic minorities because they showed no interest in the plight of the Ogoni people, but were only interested in the oil extracted from the region for personal profits.¹⁵⁴

MOSOP continued to try to alert the international community to their cause, turning to the United Nations in particular. They hoped to bring about some form of intervention by the international community that might pressure the Nigerian government to change its position vis-à-vis the Niger Delta region. While they advanced the Ogoni challenges internationally, they continued to also validate their needs locally and nationally. In August, 1991, MOSOP published the Addendum for the Ogoni Bill of Rights, wherein they reiterated that the people of Ogoni land be granted the right to enjoy fifty percent control of their resources.¹⁵⁵ For sixteen months, MOSOP committed resources to advertise their plight to the global community, stating that the activities of the Nigerian government and the oil

¹⁵³ Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion*, 66.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion*, 66.

companies in the Niger Delta region were unacceptable.¹⁵⁶ Ken Saro-Wiwa attended environmental conferences, international human rights summits, and NGO conferences giving presentations on the state of affairs in the Niger Delta. Ken Saro-Wiwa popularized the Niger Delta predicament at the global level using his position as a writer and journalist. As the MOSOP-led protest movement gained wider publicity General Ibrahim Babangida, acting “in harmony with the philosophy of the transition program” and under pressure from MOSOP, created nine more states, making a total of thirty states in the country.¹⁵⁷

The creation of more states by General Babangida divided the already fractured and factional ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta into even smaller groupings. The Ogoni ethnic group was reduced in size and divided and their protests were therefore more easily ignored by the government. Consequently, members of the ethnic minorities who are predominantly in the Niger Delta region became more agitated when the federal government undermined their concerns. More hostilities toward the federal government from ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta region were triggered as a result of a federal government composed largely of members from the ethnic majorities. General Ibrahim Babangida recognized that the hostilities in the Niger Delta region were capable of leading Nigeria into another civil war, potentially leading to Nigeria’s demise.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “Nigeria: President Announces Creation of Nine New States,” *IPS-Inter Press Service*. August 27, (1991).

¹⁵⁸ The United Nations Refugee Agency, “The Ogoni Crisis: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria,” *Human Rights Watch*. July 1, (1995).

However, as MOSOP continued in its agitations and clamored for autonomy, the roles of some of the politicians in the movement became questionable.¹⁵⁹ Members of MOSOP believed that the activities of some of the elders and politicians who worked for MOSOP appeared to be compromised by the government. Even though the objectives of MOSOP were politically motivated, most of its young members were not involved in the politics of the country. These young members of MOSOP were largely affected by the government's inability to create jobs in the communities effected by oil spills in the Niger Delta region. When angry youths in Ogoniland led a protest against the state, on the grounds that the government and the Shell-BP company had subjected them to sufferings over the years, Dr. Leton and Saro-Wiwa, addressed the youths who converged during the protest. It was during that time that Ken Saro-Wiwa encouraged them to take action but in a peaceful manner in order to deal with the problems that confronted them.¹⁶⁰

Ken Saro-Wiwa drafted a motion and called upon the three oil companies that operated in the region (Chevron, Shell, and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation) to pay for damages amounting to \$4 billion as compensation for destroying Ogoni land. The oil companies were to pay \$6 billion extra for unpaid rents and royalties to the landowners in Ogoni communities. Finally, the oil companies were given a thirty-day ultimatum to comply to the demands, otherwise it would be assumed that they had vacated the land.¹⁶¹ After

¹⁵⁹ Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day: A Detention Dairy*, 101.

¹⁶⁰ Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day*, 102.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

reading the contents of the motion, the youths were satisfied and dispersed to their various communities. The resolution was effectively carried out throughout Ogoniland. Ken Saro-Wiwa drafted and vetted the resolution and sent it to the three oil companies that operated in the region even though he believed that the companies would ignore him.¹⁶² All but the 1970 letter were ignored, and the response came from Shell-BP company only.

The Ogoni traditional leaders and the youths again unanimously planned to carry out a protest on January 4th, 1993, to bring about the promulgation of the resolutions. Ken Saro-Wiwa strategically chose January 4th, 1993 for the protest because General Babangida was to hand over power on January 2nd, 1993.¹⁶³ providing the opportunity of presenting the new government their resolutions and specific demand for autonomy. But Saro-Wiwa also believed that, should the Babangida regime refuse to abdicate, the Ogoni traditional leaders and youths could confront him regardless and face the consequences.¹⁶⁴

As the Ogoni community prepared for the protest, Dr. Leton and Ken Saro-Wiwa were invited by the State Secret Security Services for questioning about the planned protest. Ken Saro-Wiwa took responsibility and explained that the Ogoni community was preparing for Christmas celebration, and that the protest coincided with the festivities. Ken Saro-Wiwa and Dr. Leton were again invited by the governor, Rufus Ada George, to the state house on

¹⁶² Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day*, 103.

¹⁶³ Guido de Bruin, "Human Rights: Nigeria's Ogoni People Fight on Against Oil Company," *IPS-Inter Press Services*. The Hague. May 24, (1993).

¹⁶⁴ Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day*, 103.

Christmas day in December 1992.¹⁶⁵ Governor George supported MOSOP activities abroad but was against Saro-wiwa's commitment to educating Ogoni youths about their rights and their environment they were meant to enjoy. The governor and the state security officer informed Ken Saro-Wiwa to call off the protest.¹⁶⁶ Dr. Leton also informed Saro-Wiwa to call off the protest but Saro-Wiwa was determined to carry on the protest, disappointed by Dr. Leton's sudden change of mind after preparing for the protest for a year.¹⁶⁷ Saro-Wiwa believed that if the protest was successful, it would bring more attention to Ogoni challenges and a brighter future for the young ones.

As MOSOP prepared for the January 4th protest, Ken Saro-wiwa led them to the Methodist Church in Yeghe community in Ogoniland for a service before the day before the protest, serving as a message to the government that the region was predominantly Christians and would act as such. The Church was also a way to control the crowd during protest.¹⁶⁸ People from across Ogoniland were in attendance; the Chiefs and people of all ages joined, even the youth came out and drove to the church service and sermon. After the service, the religious leaders who supported MOSOP were comfortable enough to join the protest. The leaders of MOSOP, Dr. Garrick Leton, Edward Kobani, and Saro-Wiwa addressed the large

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 106-107.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 115.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 120.

crowds, and they reassured them of safety on their land, and also boosted their morale to join the protest billed to take place the following day.¹⁶⁹

On January 4th, 1993, all the six kingdoms in Ogoniland—Eleme, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, Babbe, and Tai—came out in large numbers. They were led by MOSOP leader, Edward Kobani, to take over the Bomu oil filed in K-Dere. The large crowd consisted of Chiefs, men and women, and children, all of whom marched to K-Dere to reclaim their land from the oil companies in Ogoniland.¹⁷⁰

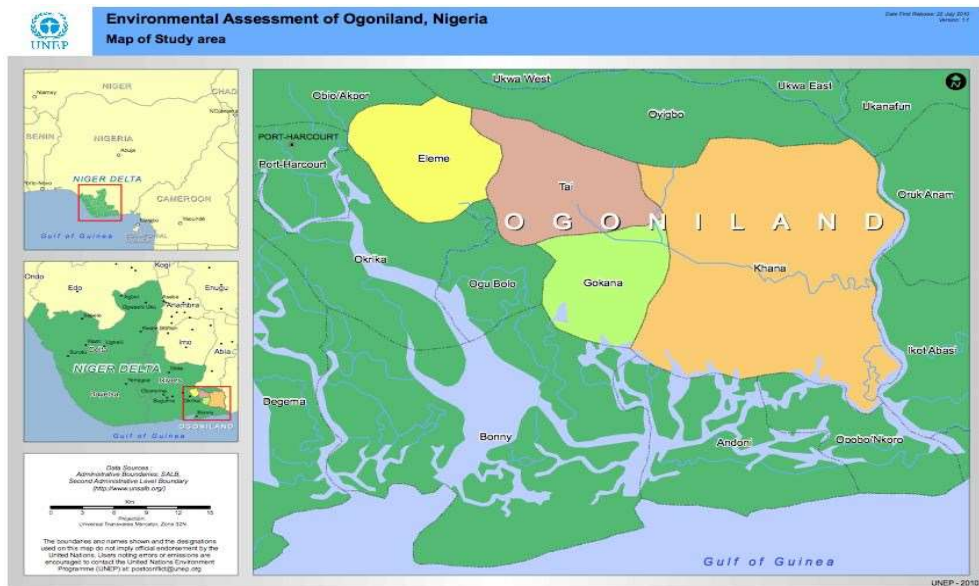


Figure 3: Map Showing the Ogoni Kingdoms.¹⁷¹

The protest coincided with the celebration of the Ogoni day, a celebration held in Ogoniland to celebrate the International World’s Indigenous People of Ogoni. As

¹⁶⁹ Ken Saro Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 121.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 125-127.

¹⁷¹ <http://prosperngo.weebly.com/ogoniland.html>

masquerades, revelers, and dancers moved and paraded around the protest center, the Chiefs and elders who supported MOSOP in all its activities jointly carried out their traditional responsibilities by pouring libations and invoking the spirits of their ancestors to bless Ogoni land and their endeavors.¹⁷² Ken Saro-Wiwa began to moderate as Edward Kobani addressed the crowd and asking them a traditional African adage: “Did the thieves not run away when the owners of the land arrived?”¹⁷³ Three speakers including Saro-Wiwa highlighted the situation and the sufferings of the Ogoni people, and affirmed their rights to life and the fruit of their land. He also spoke about the environmental abuses of the oil companies and their impact on the environment. Ken Saro-Wiwa also informed the protesters that the international community supported their struggles.¹⁷⁴

As MOSOP intensified its efforts to deal with the environmental issues in the Niger Delta region the federal government began to thwart the efforts of MOSOP by instigating ethnic crises to distract its members from their objectives. The government was responding to the advancement of MOSOP’s cause in the international community. The international community became aware of the human rights abuses and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region and, consequently, the federal government resorted to the use of force. The government began to use the military deployed to the Niger Delta region to incite ethnic crisis among the oil-producing communities with the intent of changing the narrative of the

¹⁷² Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day*, 128.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

causes of crises in the Niger Delta region. Most of the ethnic crises that occurred in the Niger Delta region, in fact, were orchestrated by the federal government.¹⁷⁵ The Ogoni and Andoni ethnic clash in July 1993, for example, was incited by the federal government when the army that was stationed in the region instigated the communal crisis. Further, the Ogoni and Okrika in December 1993 had a communal clash over land as the two communities fought for control of land. In 1994, the Ogoni again was engaged in another ethnic conflict with Indoki community over another land disputes.

Human Rights Watch maintained that the federal government of Nigeria fomented the ethnic antagonisms that occurred in the Niger Delta region, noting that most of the attacks that were attributed to the rural ethnic minorities were carried out by the soldiers deployed to the region by the federal government.¹⁷⁶ The situation further deepened the hostilities that existed between the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region as well as between the oil producing communities who believed that the federal government was responsible for the protracted ethnic crisis in the region.

During the Ogoni-Andoni conflict, the Nigerian military government of General Ibrahim Babangida appointed Professor Claude Ake to investigate the causes of the conflict between Ogoni-Andoni communities. After his investigation, Ake noted:

There is really no reason why it should be an ethnic clash and as far as we could determine, there was nothing in dispute in the sense of territory, fishing rights, access

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria," Vol. 7. No 5. July (1995).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

rights, discriminatory treatments, which are the normal causes of these communal clashes.¹⁷⁷

Professor Claude Ake's report on the causes of the Ogoni-Andoni conflict did not meet the expectations of General Ibrahim Babangida's military government. However, the government brokered a peace accord that had representatives from the Ogoni and Andoni communities. The representatives from the two communities met in October 1993 under the auspices of the National Council of the Inter-governmental Relations and the Rivers State Peace Conference Committee to resolve the ethnic crises.¹⁷⁸ After the conference, a Peace Agreement was drafted, but Ken Saro-Wiwa refused to sign the agreement, mainly because the government had failed to investigate the real causes of those ethnic clashes before drafting the peace accord. Professor Ake also criticized the government for the sophistication of the military weaponry in the region during the communal crises. The heavy military presence in the region during the ethnic conflict suggested that the Ogoni-Andoni conflict was more than a communal one.¹⁷⁹

Human Rights Watch supported Professor Ake's assertion and ¹⁸⁰ his claim was also corroborated in an interview conducted with two soldiers who admitted that they carried out secret military raids in 1993 in Ogoniland. Under the guise of a peacekeeping mission, the

¹⁷⁷ Key Bishop, "The Drilling Fields". Britain's Channel 4 Documentary, Catman Films. May 23, 1994. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEX4yhW_TSU.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria," Vol. 7. No 5. July, 1995.

¹⁷⁹ Key Bishop, "The Drilling Fields," May 23, 1994.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria," Vol. 7. No 5, July 1995.

military raids, they explained, were designed to appear like inter-communal clashes between the Ogoni community and the Andoni community.¹⁸¹ Upon arrival, their commandant immediately changed the orders given to them, and informed them to go into Ogoniland to attack the communities that had been causing all the troubles in the region. The soldiers sided with the Andoni community and went into Ogoniland following the orders of their commandant and opened fire on the civilians.¹⁸² After the shootings in Ogoniland, the troops went into the Ogoni villages and burnt down houses and looted properties.

In another interview, a private security force informed Human Rights Watch that those who shot civilians in Ogoniland in 1993 were largely ex-military men who kept their uniforms only to repurpose them in them during the crisis.¹⁸³ An Amnesty International Report further maintained that the removal of the Nigerian Police from Ogoniland three weeks before the ethnic clashes and the military deployment show that the federal government's intentional orchestration of the regional conflict in an attempt to control land and resources.¹⁸⁴

Similarly, the failure of the Nigerian military to intervene in the Ogoni-Andoni crisis supported the claims that the government was responsible in the incitement of the ethnic

¹⁸¹ "Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria," Vol. 7. No 5. July, 1995.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Amnesty International. "Fear of Extrajudicial execution/death: Members of the Ogoni Ethnic Group," *Urgent Action*, UA 179/94. AI Index: AFR 44/02/94, London, May 4, 1994: Human Rights Watch Interview with a Local Church Worker.

clashes in the Niger Delta region. By 1994, members of Ogoni and Andoni communities signed a peace agreement and normalcy was returned among the ethnic minorities in the region.¹⁸⁵ Throughout the period of the crisis in the Niger Delta region, Shell and other multinational oil companies in the region continued oil production activities. As a result, many women lost ownership of their small portion of lands which they used for subsistence farming, further enflaming their protests against Shell and its activities in the region.

Women Resistance to Shell-BP in Ogoniland

Because they were the backbone of the region's agricultural economy, Ogoni women suffered the most throughout the years of Shell activities. In a traditional African society, women take care of the home by providing food for the family and taking care of the children. If an Ogoni woman is married, the man is expected to provide her with a piece of land to cultivate crops. Women harvest from the land and, in many cases, sell some of the produce in order to buy other necessary household items.¹⁸⁶ This practice in Ogoniland gave women a fair degree of independence. The fertile land enhanced agricultural activities and women and their household benefited tremendously from its bounty. The stable and productive agricultural activities led to their ability to invest in cultural activities such as the arts, pottery and dancing.¹⁸⁷ When Shell activities increased in Ogoniland, however, the

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises," July 1995.

¹⁸⁶ Dianna Bankor-Wiwa, "The Role of Women in the Struggle for Environmental Injustice in Ogoni," in *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*. 1997. www.culturalsurvival.org.

¹⁸⁷ John Osayere, "Development as Conflict: Ogoni Movement, the States and Oil Resources in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," (PhD Diss. Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Hague-Netherlands. 2009), 145.

women were disproportionately affected because the land which they depended on for all aspects of their lives was degraded and taken away from them for more oil wells to be dug. Furthermore, the streams which were the source of drinking water polluted, resulting in anger and protest in Ogoniland.¹⁸⁸ As Fatoumata Binta aptly noted, the women in Ogoniland were the most affected by the environmental health effects because they were out working the land, and they were more involved in the agricultural activities than the men.¹⁸⁹

When the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was founded in 1990 to protest the activities of Shell and other oil companies, such as Chevron and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Ogoni women also founded a movement as a unit of MOSOP to fight for their needs. The Federation of Ogoni Women's Association was founded under MOSOP and became one of the movement's strongest and most effective units.¹⁹⁰ The role played by the women in Ogoniland brought them in close contact with the activities of the oil companies. As a result, they had first-hand experience of the attacks and fierce reprisals masterminded by the Nigerian army and the oil companies.

Four months after the January 1993 protests, Mrs. Korgbara went to her farm to find a Caterpillar owned by Willbros (a subcontracted company that worked for Shell-BP)

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Fatoumata Binta, "Environmental Injustices: Health Hazards in the Niger Delta. Substantial Research Paper. The American University. (2010), 58.

¹⁹⁰ Diana Bankor-Wiwa, "The Role of Women in the Struggle for Environmental Injustice in Ogoni," in *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*. 1997.

bulldozing her farmland.¹⁹¹ In an attempt to protect what she had left in the farm, Mrs. Korgbara left and informed the other villagers about what had happened to her. Her neighbors came out in thousands to protest the activities on their land, prompting the army to shoot into the crowd, killing one man and leaving many more injured. Mrs. Korgbara was severely injured, and had to have her arm amputated.¹⁹²

By August of 1993, the Nigerian military was engaged in another wave of attacks on the Ogoni, destroying their communities. Within that year, over two thousand persons died and more than three thousand were injured according to the official count.¹⁹³ Also, hundreds of Ogoni people were internally displaced and became refugees because their homes were destroyed by the military. The Ogoni women helped these refugees by giving them monetary assistance and by seeking external assistance. The Catholic Relief Agency of Nigeria and the Daughters of Charity also took care of the displaced people in Ogoni. When military attacks destroyed the market square which the Ogoni women used for trade with neighboring communities, the Federation of Ogoni Women's Association took on the responsibility of placing these families with existing households in order to accommodate the internally displaced people.¹⁹⁴ These incidents were not an isolated events, as Amnesty International

¹⁹¹ John Osayere. "Development as Conflict: Ogoni Movement, 145.

¹⁹² Ibid

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Diana Bankor-Wiwa, "The Role of Women in the Struggle for Environmental Injustice in Ogoni. 1997.

noted throughout 1993 the peaceful protests in Ogoni land and the Niger Delta in general were met crushed by the Nigerian army who resorted to lethal force.¹⁹⁵

As agitations continued in Ogoniland, the military government of Ibrahim Bagangida formed an Internal Security Task Force with the intention of silencing protestors. The Task Force was ordered to “sanitize” Ogoniland and the military rampaged, raped, maimed, killed, extorted money, and looted Ogoni communities in the process. Women were the primary targets of these attacks. In June 1993, the Ogoni communities attacked the Task Force in self-defense but they were defeated.¹⁹⁶ Many families fled their homes for safety while some ran into the forests to avoid being hunted and killed. Those who could not leave were again raped, assaulted, maimed, and murdered.¹⁹⁷

As the crisis continued in Ogoni land, the women continued to support community services by providing food to the hundreds of the activists who were arrested and detained by the government. Shortly after the military attack on the Ogoni community, another communal crisis erupted between Ogoni and Ndoki over a longstanding land dispute. This conflict, like the Andoni conflict with the Ogoni community, was also believed to be stimulated by the federal government. Human Rights Watch reported that the Ogoni and Ndoki had been non-violently disputing on land, but the federal government encouraged the Ndoki community to

¹⁹⁵ Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Possible Extra Judicial Execution /Legal Concern,” AI Index AFR 44/04/1993. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/188000/afr440041993en.pdf>

¹⁹⁶ John Osayere, “Development as Conflict: Ogoni Movement,” 145.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

attack the Ogoni community with force. Twenty people were killed and over ten villages in Ogoni were destroyed. The Military took side with the Ndoki community and went into Ogoniland and burnt down many villages, including the famous Tumbe and Ledor villages. A former MOSOP member Lieutenant-Colonel, Paul Okuntimo—who had earlier denounced MOSOP to become the commander of the Rivers State Task Force—took responsibility of the communal violence in Ogoniland.¹⁹⁸ The Ogoni women throughout the time of the crisis provided food for the men, took care of the victims and continued to provide for their families in the heat of the crisis. At the time of the ethnic clashes, oil production continued and the federal government deployed more military personnel to the Niger Delta region to protect the oil companies in their activities. More environmental problems were created by the oil companies and the members of Ogoni and the neighboring communities continued to suffer from the effect on the environment.

Even though the lands were destroyed by the oil companies, the women looked for alternatives to feed their families, and they supported themselves in many ways, for example, through the Federation of the Ogoni Women's Association which provided assistance in terms of crops and money. The Federation of Ogoni Women's Association was instrumental in the local resistance of the environmental degradation and destruction of the ecosystem by the oil companies, and the Nigerian government. They engaged in protests against the activities of Shell. These protests grew into a large movement that led to the April 25, 1997

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises," July 1995.

declaration of the Ogoni women in Ogoniland. The women resolved that Shell must not be allowed in Ogoniland, proclaiming, “We say no to Shell as it remains *Persona non grata* in Ogoni.”¹⁹⁹ This declaration and five other pronouncements were signed by over three hundred women leaders in Ogoniland, including the fifty-seven members of the Federation of Ogoni Women’s Association.²⁰⁰

The women in leadership were organized in their activities and, most importantly, they were non-violent like MOSOP. The activities of Ogoni women under the auspices of the Federation of Ogoni Women Association in supporting the objectives of MOSOP motivated other units of MOSOP to be active in the movement. The units included the National Youths Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ogoni Traditional Ruler Association (OTRA), and the National Youths Council (NYC). Eventually, these movements became prominent, and they played vital roles in the local resistance to the government, and the activities of the oil companies in the Niger Delta region

The Ogoni Crisis

In 1993 an internal disagreement broke out within the leadership of MOSOP that created a rift in its leadership. Dr. Garrick Leton the President of MOSOP led a faction that opposed the structure and strategies adopted by MOSOP in addressing the environmental

¹⁹⁹ Diana Bankor-Wiwa. “The Role of Women in the Struggle for Environmental Justice in Ogoni,” in *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*. September, 1997.

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch Report, “Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria”. Vol. 7. No 5. July 1995.

challenges in Ogoniland. Dr. Leton's faction disagreed that MOSOP should not become the nucleus for the other subgroups that arose in the Niger Delta. Leton's faction also alleged that Ken Saro-Wiwa wanted to take full control of the movement and that he had encouraged his supporters and followers to adopt the military tactics at all times of their protests. Ken Saro-Wiwa, on the other hand, consistently implored members of Ogoniland to act peacefully in their course. He noted in his memoir, "It is also very important that we have chosen the path of non-violent struggle. Our opponents are given to violence and we cannot meet them on their turf, even if we wanted to."²⁰¹

By June 1993 the democratic presidential elections were set to be conducted.²⁰² The military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida, was supposed to hand over the government to a civilian leader. Babangida annulled the elections when his candidate lost the election. Ernest Shonekan was immediately announced the interim President to conduct another election, but Shonekan was ousted by General Abacha through a military coup.²⁰³

During the June 12th presidential election, MOSOP's joint steering committee agreed to boycott the elections, however, the decision was not welcomed by Leton's faction. MOSOP's decision to boycott the presidential election drove Dr. Leton, the president, and the vice president of MOSOP, Edward Kobana, to resign from the movement. The resignations of Dr. Leton and Edward Kobana from MOSOP provoked the Ogoni youths into an armed

²⁰¹ Ken SaroWiwa. *A Month and a Day*, " 195.

²⁰² Ibid.

confrontation against some prominent elders in Ogoni community whom they believed to be traitors to the Ogoni course. In the heat of the crisis, four prominent chiefs were brutally murdered. The chiefs played active roles in MOSOP activities before they sided with the government. Their deaths created armed hostilities between the Ogoni community and the Nigerian military. The crisis led to mass incarcerations of MOSOP activists, including Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Saro-Wiwa and other activists who were arrested were charged with incitement and murder.²⁰⁴ Despite a lack of substantial evidence, many members of MOSOP were put on trial.²⁰⁵ All nine of the imprisoned members, including Saro-Wiwa, were convicted as charged and sentenced to death by hanging by the Sani Abacha military tribunal.²⁰⁶ The tribunal blatantly ignored the fundamental human rights of the Ogoni people, due process was eschewed, and the defendants were also denied the right to appeal their convictions.²⁰⁷ Ken Saro Wiwa noted that “I was found guilty even before I was tried.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ “A Dead Sentence in Nigeria”. *The New York Times*, November 9, 1995.

²⁰⁵ Chuks loegbunam, “The Death of a Writer: Somebody wanted to know the meaning of Saro Wiwa’s death. Simple. It means that nothing has changed,” *The Guardian*. November 11, 1995.

²⁰⁶ Chris McGreal, “A Tainted Hero”

²⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch, “*Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis, A Case Study of Military Repression in Southern Nigeria*,” Vol.7, No.5, July 1995. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Nigeria.htm> ; Michael Birnbuam, *Nigeria-Fundamental Human Rights Denied. Report of the Trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Others*. Published by Article 19 in Association with the Bar Human Rights of England and Wales, and the Law Society of England and Wales. June 1995.

²⁰⁸ “Rights Leader in Lagos Gets Death Penalty,” *The New York Times*. November 1, 1995.

The death sentence was criticized nationally and internationally. In the United States, the White House condemned the death sentences of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots. The White House noted that the outcome of the trial of the nine Ogonis was an imposed system that gravely flawed the judicial process and therefore called on the Sani Abacha's military government to commute the sentences of the Ogoni.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the U.S. government asserted that the defendants should be allowed to appeal and be tried in a fair judicial system in line with international best practices.²¹⁰ The Ogoni communities pleaded with the government to pardon the Ogoni nine. But unfortunately, all these appeals fell on deaf ears.²¹¹ During the activists' incarceration, prior to their execution, the Commonwealth of Nations, of which Nigeria was a member, condemned their convictions.²¹² As a result of the human rights abuses by the government, Nigeria was sanctioned and suspended from the Commonwealth Organization.²¹³ Despite these international efforts, the Ogoni nine were all executed, including Ken Saro-Wiwa.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Rose Umoren, "Nigeria-US., White Protests Saro-Wiwa's Death". *IPS Inter-Press Services*. Washington DC, November 9, 1995.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² "Nigeria Faces Expulsion from Commonwealth Over. Major Calls it Murder," *The Herald*. (Glasgow). November 11, 1995.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Samita Dasgupta, "Outrage". *Down To Earth*. December 15, 1995

Between 1994 and 1995, over twenty activists believed to be members of MOSOP were arrested in connection with the 1994 murders.²¹⁵ They were detained in the poor conditions of the Port Harcourt prison.²¹⁶ Inmates were hardly fed once a day, stuffed into small cells ten at a time, and were very often deprived of sleep.²¹⁷

Nevertheless, members of MOSOP continued to protest against the state of affairs in the region. As the agitations and protests continued, members of the Ogoni community who were not members of MOSOP, as well MOSOP activists, were arrested and detained without any formal charges.²¹⁸ As a result of the mass incarceration of MOSOP members, a great number of its members fled Ogoniland for safety²¹⁹ When Abacha died in 1998, MOSOP reorganized, and the protests resurfaced.

At the height of the protests and crises, the local communities and MOSOP accused the oil companies of colluding with the federal government against the people, even though the companies had ceased production in the region.²²⁰ Human Rights Watch maintains that there were allegations of leaked memoranda between the federal government and Shell Oil

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis," July 1995.

²¹⁶ Danielle Knight, "Rights-Nigeria: News Accusations of Arrests and Torture," *IPS-Inter Press Services*. January 15, 1998.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Ogoni Crises: A Case Study of Military Repression in Southeastern Nigeria," Vol. 7. No 5, July 1995.

²¹⁸ Nigeria: Human Rights Group Protest at Government Arrests of Ogoni Activists. *BBC Summery of World Broadcast*. August 15, 1995.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Peter Da Coster, "Nigeria-Environment: Troops May Move Against Ogoniland," *IPS-Inter Press Service*. May 5, 1994.

Company conveying the federal government's intentions to deploy the military into Ogoni land to ruthlessly carry out military operations against the Ogonis in an effort to enable Shell maintain oil production. The memoranda further alleged that Shell agreed to pay for these military operations.²²¹

Responding to the allegations, Shell and the federal government claimed that the documents were forged.²²² When Shell decided to resume its activities in the region amidst the crisis, Human Rights Watch noted that a government-corporate memorandum dated May 12th, 1994 stated that all Shell activities in the region were impossible due to growing hostilities and recommended that a ruthless military operation was required to bring Shell activities back on track.²²³ It is noteworthy that most of the crises in the Niger Delta region at the time were secretly instigated by the Nigerian security officers. The situation made members of the oil producing communities throughout the Niger Delta region believe that the federal government, dominated by the Hausa Northern ethnic majority, did not have good intentions in the region.²²⁴ The intercommunal conflicts created by the federal government in the Niger Delta region further heightened hostilities between the ethnic minorities in the region and the ethnic majorities in the North.

²²¹ Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Cooperate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*. January 1999.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ John Vidal. "Nigerian Troops Killed and Tortured Tribes which Opposed Shell Operation," *The Guardian*, London. May 12, 1994.

The police officers that were permanently attached to Shell by the Nigerian government maintained that they deliberately incited violence and conflicts between ethnic groups in the region.²²⁵ The officers who harassed and intimidated protesters throughout the 1993 and 1994 MOSOP protests were attached to Shell.²²⁶ In response, Shell denied such action and distanced itself from the allegations. A 2017 Amnesty International report maintained that Shell stated clearly that they were not in support of the repressive attacks by the government of the Ogoni people and the violent dealings of the local communities with the federal government.²²⁷ Shell also maintained that it gave the government points on how to peacefully deescalate the crisis. Shell recognized that MOSOP had a legitimate grievance but still denied having any involvement with the federal government in the ruthless execution of a military engagement against the local communities.²²⁸

Amnesty International claims that Shell's internal documents revealed senior members of the company resigned because they could not keep up with the connivance with the Nigerian government against its citizens. Head of environmental studies for Shell, Bopp Van Dessel, stated in his resignation letter that he felt unable to defend the companies' environmental records.²²⁹ He did not want to tarnish his reputation by documenting

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Demirel & Pegg, "Razed, Repressed, and Bought off, 566.

²²⁷ Amnesty International, "A Criminal Enterprise? Shell's Involvements on Human Rights Violation in the 1990s," Amnesty International Limited, 2017, 6.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

falsehoods or writing things that were contrary to reality. According to Amnesty International Report Bopp Van Dessel in a 1996 TV interview maintained that:

Shell managers were not meeting their own standards: they were not meeting international standards. Any Shell site that I saw was polluted...It was clear to me that Shell was devastating the area.²³⁰

Regarding the human rights violations by the security forces in the region, Shell was under national and international pressure to intervene in the trial of the Ogoni nine, but the company refused outright claiming that it was dangerous for them to intervene in a sovereign nation's trials. Consequently, Shell was faced with international pressure to have its oil supply boycotted in the United States and Europe.²³¹ There were also international calls to place sanctions on Nigerian oil until Shell worked out its position in its relationship with the military government.

Eventually, it became clear that Shell had damaged its reputation internationally because of human rights violations and because the company downplayed the Ogoni protest, dismissing it as a largely economic problem.²³² In May of 1996, Shell declared its commitment to the International Declaration of Rights.²³³ When Human Rights Watch questioned Shell as to whether it intervened in the 1995 killings of the Ogoni nine, the company responded:

²³⁰ Amnesty International. Shell: A Criminal Enterprise? <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/shell-criminal-enterprise>

²³¹ Amnesty International, *A Criminal Enterprise? Shell's Involvements on Human Rights Violation in the 1990s*. Amnesty International Limited, 2017, 70.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ United Nations, "The International Declaration of Rights provided for the respect of Human Rights, and the protection of the natural environment". <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

You have called for Shell to become involved in, and to take public stance on, several issues arising from the current situation—all of which are political. There are clearly issues where we as a commercial organization have neither the right nor the competence to become involved, and they must be addressed by the people of Nigeria and their government.²³⁴

However, the oil producer maintained that the responsibility to investigate the murder of the Ogoni leaders in 1994 was entirely on the Nigerian government. During the investigation, they lacked the local standing or jurisdiction to interfere in the outcome of the trial. Shell argued that it was wrong for them to intervene politically or legally in Nigeria, and that a large multinational company must not interfere with the sovereignty of any nation.²³⁵

The Ogoni uprising formed the basis upon which other neighboring communities like the Ijaw community in Rivers State also protested against the federal government. The fate that earlier befell MOSOP was a strong signal to other ethnic minorities that the government would not take it lightly with anyone that may have wanted to contest the control of oil in the Niger Delta region. That notwithstanding, the Ijaw youths founded a movement called the Ijaw Youth Council (IJC) in December 1998 to protest the activities of the oil companies in their community. The conflicts in the Niger Delta region continued until 1999 when Nigeria moved into a civilian government led by General Olusegun Obasanjo. Despite the transition to a democratic system of government, ethnic hostilities continued to thrive in the country, especially between the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region.

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch, “The Price of Oil. Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria’s Oil Producing Communities,” January, 1999.

²³⁵ Ibid.

The hostilities were also intense between the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt regions against the ethnic majorities like the Hausa, for example, who dominated the political and economic activities in the country. The ethnic minorities across the country felt excluded by the majorities from the political and economic benefits in the country. The ethnic majorities were believed to have only developed their own regions, and to only be interested in accumulating wealth for themselves, leaving the minorities behind. This situation was detrimental to regions inhabited predominantly by ethnic minorities, thus creating constant hostilities and protests against a federal government dominated by the ethnic majorities.

CHAPTER 5. OUTCOME OF THE Ogoni UPRISING AND IMPACT ON THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS

Throughout the Niger Delta region, the Ogoni uprising was a precursor to the subsequent conflicts that occurred in the region between the oil communities and the government. MOSOP was weakened by the government through the killings of its leaders and the mass incarceration of its members.²³⁶ As a result, major activities of the movement such as rallies and protest were suspended.²³⁷ On the other hand, Shell had also stopped oil production activities in Ogoniland during the trial and execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others. The suspension of oil production activities in Ogoniland by Shell during the time of Ken Saro Wiwa's trial and execution was because Shell personnel feared attacks or worse.

One year after the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, thousands of Ogoni from their communities celebrated the Ogoni Day with a particularly high number of participants in the wake of the leader's death. There was a heavy military clampdown as the police and the soldiers fired canisters and live ammunition that killed three people.²³⁸ A United Nations fact-finding team stated that over fifty young people in Ogoniland who were suspected to be members of MOSOP were arrested and detained.²³⁹ Consequently, over one thousand Ogonis fled Ogoniland into neighboring countries like Benin Republic in March.²⁴⁰ By September of

²³⁶ United States and Africa: 1997 State Department Human Rights Report-Nigeria. *US Department of State*.

²³⁷ "Military Names Abacha's Successor". *Associated Press Online*. Lagos. June 8, 1998.

²³⁸ Human Rights World Watch Report 1997-Nigeria; Nigeria: Ogoni Repression Alert. *Africa Policy Information Center - Africa News*. January 19, 1998.

²³⁹ Soldiers Clash with Activists in Niger Delta. *Deutsche Press-Agentur*. July 9, 1996.

²⁴⁰ Greenpeace Put Testimonies of Dr. Owens Wiwa on the Internet. *Greenpeace-M2 Presswire*. December 4, 1995.

the same year, over six hundred of the Ogoni who fled to Benin Republic were registered refugees in the Internally Displaced Camps.

In the same month, Shell began to hold meetings with the Ogoni Chiefs, Rivers States Internal Task Force, and Community Development Committees without inviting MOSOP. The meetings were held to discuss the resumption of its oil production activities in Ogoniland. After the meetings, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the chiefs, however, MOSOP later accused Shell for paying the Chiefs the sum of ₦50,000 each to sign the MOU.²⁴¹

In addition to the suppression of the Ogoni Day celebration, when the death anniversary of Ken Saro-Wiwa approached armed policemen and soldiers went into Ogoniland and raided their communities. Many activists were arrested including Christian ministers who mentioned Ken Saro-Wiwa's name in their churches during sermons. Even with the heavy military presence in Ogoniland, thousands of Ogonis defied the military presence and held remembrance church services in honor of Ken Saro-Wiwa at different locations throughout their communities.²⁴² Though, the military raided the communities, raped women, and shot many protesters who came out for the Remembrance Day in Ken Saro-Wiwa's hometown.

At the same time, Shell paid for the services of journalists from Britain, Germany, and Denmark to give its version of the story in the Niger Delta. The journalists published articles

²⁴¹ Steve Kretzman, "Hired Guns: Shelling Out for Murder". *These Times*. February 3, 1997.

²⁴² Owens Wiwa, "Shell and the Ogoni People". *The Irish Times*. May 17, 1996.

favoring Shell's perspective.²⁴³ The aim was to regain a positive public relations image. It was not long after the journalists went to Niger Delta that many articles were published in international presses that dismissed the human rights abuses, the claims in Ogoniland, and the many environmental hazards caused by Shell in the region. One of the journalists, Richard North, made fortunes from his publications in the *Independent Newspaper* in attacking Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Throughout 1996 to 1998, the Ijaw community violently confronted Chevron, Shell, and Texaco against the oil production on their land. The confrontation led to an estimated damage of over \$50 million and the death of over two hundred people. Inspired by the activities of MOSOP, the Ijaw youths formed the Ijaw Youths Council and immediately took centerstage and began to protest for resource control in the region.²⁴⁴ When the Ijaw youths became active against the oil companies, most of the activists who were arrested alongside Ken Saro-Wiwa were released from prison because their charges were dropped. While in prison, the activists were tortured, and they were denied access to lawyers and medical personnel. The bad prison conditions led to death of one of the activists, Clement Tusima, while some other activists went blind. Upon their release, the activities of MOSOP declined, and the Ijaw Youth Council became prominent in the region. Like MOSOP, the Ijaw Youths Council advocated against environmental degradation caused by the oil companies. They

²⁴³ "Dutch Journalists Visiting Nigeria as Guests of Shell," *Agence France Press*. November 5, 1996.

²⁴⁴ Okafor Ofiebor, "Nigeria: Ijaw Youths Condemned Government Response to Boat Mishap," *Africa News*. P.M. News Lagos, April 9, 1999.

demanded that all the oil companies leave the Niger Delta region before the end of December 1998.²⁴⁵ To solidify their claims, the Ijaw youths adopted the slogan “*Operation Climate Change*”²⁴⁶ to enforce their demands. The Ijaw youths also mobilized a wide range of ordinary people.²⁴⁷

The Ijaw youths also drew from their local culture of resistance and from their Ijaw idioms. One of the idioms they adopted was the *Egbesu* which literally means the “Ijaw God of War.”²⁴⁸ Members of the Ijaw community hold strongly the world view that Egbesu was a symbol of spiritual protection for the Ijaw people during war times. Motivated by the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Ijaw Youths Council drafted the Kaiama Declaration on December 11th, 1998 stating their demands.²⁴⁹ Youths across the twenty-four clans of Ijaw communities converged in Kaiama to consolidate their demands in the Kaiama declaration.

These resolutions were carefully drafted to reflect the realities in the Niger Delta region, and more specifically the oil producing communities in the region. On environmental degradation, the Ijaw youths resolved that the “unabating damages done to our fragile natural environment and to the health of our people is due in the main to uncontrolled exploration

²⁴⁵ *Politics*: Published by the PRS Group/International Country Risk Guide. February 01, 1999.

²⁴⁶ Operation Climate Change was the adopted slogan that boosted the morale of the Ijaw youths during the Ijaw uprising against the activities of the oil activities in the region.

²⁴⁷ Igbokwe Casmir, “Turmoil in Ijaw Nation,” *Africa News*. April 12, 2000.

²⁴⁸ In the African Traditional Religion, ethnic groups have different believe systems. There are so many interpretations to the importance of the elements that constitutes the environment, language and culture. Some also spiritual meanings and implications based on their context of usage.

²⁴⁹ Chioma Anyagafu, “Nigeria: Niger Delta Asked for Justice,” *African News-Vanguard Daily*, Lagos. November 11, 2000.

and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas which has led to numerous oil spillages, uncontrolled gas flaring...”²⁵⁰ The Ijaw youths also recognized that the federal government was responsible in the ethnic conspiracies in the Niger Delta region that led to ethnic conflicts, declaring that the “intra and interethnic conflicts are sponsored by the state and transnational oil companies to keep the communities of the Niger Delta area divided, weak, and distracted.”²⁵¹

Upon making these observations known, the Ijaw Youth Council resolved that all the lands in the Ijaw community belonged to the Ijaw people because the lands formed the basis for their survival.²⁵² They also resolved not to recognize any military decrees that robbed their communities the rights of ownership of their lands. Even further, they demanded an immediate withdrawal of all the military forces and repressions of the Nigerian State from Ijawland. Importantly, the Ijaw resolved not to secede from Nigeria asserting that they wished “to remain within Nigeria but to work for self-government and resource control for the Ijaw people”.²⁵³ Rather than adequately responding to or negotiating with the demands of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), the federal government deployed military troops to Boro

²⁵⁰ The Kaiama Deceleration by the Ijaw Youths of the Niger Delta. Being Communique Issued at the end of the All Ijaw Youths Conference which held in the Town Hall of Kaiama this 11th day of December 1998.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Tajudeen Suleiman, “Nigeria: Drumbeats of War,” *The News-African News*. November 11, 1999.

²⁵³ Ibid.

where the IYC often convened to protest and forcefully brought the Ijaw uprising to an end.²⁵⁴

General Sani Abacha's military regime was very instrumental on the escalated ethnic crises in the Niger Delta region. Michael Fleshman notes that Abacha's decision in 1997 to move the Local Government Authority from Ijawland to Itsekeri created hostilities between the Ijaws and the Itsekeris.²⁵⁵ The Local Government Authority was in Ijawland because a majority of the Ijaw population resided there. However, General Sani Abacha moved the Local Authority from Ijaw to Itsekeri, an area with a minority population with the sole aim of reducing the powers and influence of the Ijaws in the region.

The Ijaw communities, like the Ogonis who were always opposed to the activities of the federal government and oil companies in the region, were also very agitated against the government's failures to provide basic social amenities as well as its involvement in creating ethnic crisis between the oil-producing communities in the region.²⁵⁶ As such, General Abacha's military government sought to reduce their political powers and influence. This was actualized in his 1997 decision to successfully move the local government authority from Ijaw to Itsekeri. The transnational oil companies in the region continued their oil production

²⁵⁴ Michael Gold, "No to Military Deployment to Niger Delta. Vanguard Daily News-African," News, Lagos, October 26, 2000.

²⁵⁵ Africa Policy Information Center. Nigeria: Niger Delta Crisis Report. *Africa News*. June 13, (Washington DC), 1999.

²⁵⁶ Kemakola Egbuns, "Nigeria: The Niger Delta Habitat of an Aggregation of Ethnic Nationalities," *The News*, Lagos. June 10, 2000.

activities.²⁵⁷The military repression left many injured, and the youths fled for their lives.

Those who had the *Egbesu* tattoo on their bodies were declared wanted by the Nigerian army.

This hunt continued until the death of Sani Abacha.

The death of General Sani Abacha in 1998 led to the introduction of civilian rule the following year when General Olusegun Obasanjo took over power.²⁵⁸ Since independence, Nigeria was ruled by military dictators and it was only in 1999 that the first democratically elected president came to power.²⁵⁹ Ethnic rivalries that existed throughout the military regimes between the Southern and Northern regions were never addressed by the military heads of state; instead, they only suppressed dissent from ethnic minorities and favored ethnic majorities. Ethnic majorities therefore dominated Nigerian politics. The disunity that resulted from this majority tyranny slowed development in the country, as minority communities were neglected and ignored.

In a diverse country like Nigeria, national unity is essential to development and advancement. Counterintuitively, ethnic tensions continued to grow after the transition to civilian rule as the federal government failed to put in place the necessary measures to ensure equality between the ethnic minorities in the Southern region and the ethnic majorities in the Northern region. Again, the failure of the federal government to institute policies that provided for the equal distribution of the nations' resources across all regions, as well as the

²⁵⁷ Foreign Companies in Nigeria's Niger Delta Scramble to implement Security, Stakeholders Initiatives as situation Threatens to Worsen. *Oil and Gas Journal*, No. 3. Vol. 98. January 17, 2000, 44.

²⁵⁸ Anthony Kirk-Green, "Obituary, General Sani Abacha," *The Independent* (London), June 10, 1998.

²⁵⁹ "Obasanjo Hails Return to Democratic Government," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*. Monday, May 29, 2000.

inability to develop the regions evenly, kept the country disunited.²⁶⁰ This bred further resentment and hostility among regions and ethnic groups.

This is not to say that the civilian government maintained the status quo wholesale. The political atmosphere in the country did change significantly and Nigerian citizens began to enjoy some form of freedom in their country. For example, members of MOSOP who were arrested and detained by Sani Abacha without trial were freed and most of the activists of MOSOP who were in exile returned home.²⁶¹ But agitations for resource control and autonomy continued in the Niger Delta region.²⁶² Ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta continued to argue that the Nigerian government was only concerned with developments in other areas with large populations. Crisis in the region became an issue of national concern because such insecurity threatened the indivisible nature of the Nigerian state. Other regions, like the Eastern region, began to clamor for secession due to marginalization.

In an attempt to address the crises in the Niger Delta region, in 1999 General Olusegun Obasanjo proposed a bill to the National Assembly for the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission.²⁶³ The bill proposed a development framework for the impoverished Niger Delta region to be funded with 0.5 percent of the country's annual

²⁶⁰ Ojawale Olu, "Nigeria: Their Stand on Nigeria," *NewsWatch*. October 23, 2000.

²⁶¹ Richard Boele, et. al., "Shell: Nigeria and the Ogoni. A Study in Unsustainable development: The Story of Shell, Nigeria and the Ogoni People, Environment, Economy, Relationships: Conflicts and Prospects for Resolutions". In *Sustainable Development*. Vol. 9. 2001, 82

²⁶² Owei Lakenfa, "Nigeria: Cry Wolf only when one is near (Opinion)," *Vanguard Daily (Lagos)*. July 25, 2000.

²⁶³ "Nigeria; NDDC Act: Now that the Feud is Over," *This Day*, Lagos. October 9, 2000.

budgets. Additionally, the bill required half of the thirteen percent of oil revenue which, in line with the provisions of the constitution, to be given to each producing region. The NDDC Bill was said to have inspired hope in the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region, especially for the oil-producing communities.²⁶⁴

The bill had the potential to reduce the crises in the Niger Delta, or even completely eradicated them, if adequate measures were taken to implement the provisions of the bill. Ijawland leader Chief Edwin Clark maintained that not only did the government not negotiate and consult with the members of the oil producing communities in the drafting of the bill, but also that the provisions of the bill were not sufficient.²⁶⁵ “All we are saying is that the beneficiaries of the bill were not consulted.”²⁶⁶ In a protest to the National Assembly, Chief Clark said, “The bill is defective in certain aspects...[and] we are saying if the bill is passed in this form, it is not our bill.”²⁶⁷

Not only did the Ijaw community protest the bill, the three core states of the Niger Delta also contested the government’s definition of the Niger Delta which included the neighboring oil producing communities of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo, and Abia states, contending the inhabitants in those areas had suffered years of abject poverty. As a result, MOSOP also felt that the bill was weak and was easily manipulated, just like earlier

²⁶⁴ Boele, et. al., “Shell, Nigeria and the Ogoni,” 82.

²⁶⁵ Ali B & Ali Dinar, IRIN Special Report on the Proposed Niger Delta Bill, 1999-09-06. https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Newsletters/irinw_9699.html

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

bills enacted by previous regimes, all of which failed to address the challenges in the Niger Delta region. MOSOP also argued that the NDDC Bill was drafted by lawmakers who sat at the National Assembly in the nation's capital of Abuja (without having the proper knowledge of the challenges of the inhabitants in the Niger Delta region).²⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Shell International had since 1996 began a process of transformation. Following the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues, Shell-BP introduced a project called the "Society's Changing Expectations." It was a compendium of the views of the stakeholders of the company. The project uncovered that Shell-BP was recognized for its product quality, and its technological leadership. On environmental care and human rights, Shell was poorly rated by the community and the general public. Accordingly, the Chairman of the Managing Directors admitted that Shell had acted arrogantly toward the inhabitants of the Niger Delta.²⁶⁹ Consequently, Shell-BP began a process of an evolution by engaging in dialogues with stakeholders in the Niger Delta.²⁷⁰ Shell also began to dialogue with human rights organizations, including Pax Christi and Amnesty International.²⁷¹ Shell-BP reiterated its commitments to respect and support fundamental human rights and also to protect the environment.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Onanuga Bayo, "Nigeria: Shell Sheds its Shell," *The News*, Lagos. June 21, 1999.

²⁷⁰ Boele, et. al, "Shell, Nigeria and the Ogoni," 83

²⁷¹ Ibid.

As oil producing communities in the Niger Delta continued to clamor for autonomous control of their resources, they also demanded that the government should develop the region. They maintained that there should also be evidence of corporate social responsibility by the oil companies in the region. Shell again reiterated its commitments to contribute to the develop of the region.²⁷² In terms of employment, over ninety-five percent of Shell workers in the region were Nigerians throughout 1998 and 1999. Forty-three percent of whom were from Ogoni communities.²⁷³ Shell also claimed that it spent more than twenty million dollars each year on community development and spent over thirty-six million dollars between 1996 and 1997 on a new community development program in the Niger Delta.

Members of the communities in the region, however, argued that Shell only made empty promises without taking actions to contribute to the development of the region. Shell again promised to rehabilitate areas affected by oil spills, to renew production infrastructure, to bury all flow lines in the region, and to initiate environmental assessment programs but these promises were not actualized.²⁷⁴ As a result, Shell was again accused of being stingy, incompetent at development work, and unwilling to consult with community members on issues of land usage.²⁷⁵

²⁷² Oyo Remi, Development-Nigeria. Unrest in the Niger Delta May Soon be Over. *Interpress Service*. April, 15, 1999.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p 84.

²⁷⁴ Boele, et. al. "Shell, Nigeria and the Ogoni," 84

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Consequently, oil producing communities in the Niger Delta began an open confrontation with the oil companies. One of the confrontations by members of the Odi community in Bayelsa State against the Nigerian police, who were protecting the oil facilities in their land, aggravated the Choba incident. This event led to the intervention of the Nigerian military, which left thousands of the inhabitants dead, an incident popularly known as the Odi Massacre.

The Odi Massacre

On November 4th, 1999, a group of armed young men mobilized against the activities of the oil companies and protested for a fair share of the oil wealth in the region.²⁷⁶ The armed group killed seven policemen each day in two days of protests. The murders of the fourteen police officers in the Odi community of Bayelsa state immediately got the attention of the newly elected government of Olusegun Obasanjo. President Obasanjo quickly wrote to the Bayelsa State governor, Mr. Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, and threatened to declare a state of emergency should the culprits not be apprehended within two weeks. Before the expiration of the two-week ultimatum, the Nigerian army moved into Odi, a community of about fifteen thousand inhabitants, and opened fire against those they suspected to be the murderers of the police officers, killing many.²⁷⁷ After this confrontation, the soldiers

²⁷⁶ Nigeria: "Human Rights Watch Report: The Destruction of Odi and the Rape in Choba". December 22, 2000. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/press/1999/dec/nibg1299.htm>.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

advanced into the community and destroyed properties, demolishing and burning houses.²⁷⁸

The soldiers also barred the popular Anglican church in Odi and restricted operation of the local banks and hospitals. Many youths and gang members fled the community for safety.²⁷⁹

Ironically, the newly elected democratic government charged with protecting the fundamental human rights of its citizens that had itself been oppressed by military dictatorships for decades prior became the main architect of mass killings in the Niger Delta region.

After the massacre in the Odi community, members of neighboring communities began to organize a protest in solidarity.²⁸⁰ When the government learned of the planned protest, hundreds of soldiers were deployed to disperse the protestors gathering in nearby Choba, where Willbros Nigeria Limited (a subsidiary of an American Pipeline Construction Company) was located. When the soldiers arrived at Choba, four men were killed, and many women were raped by the soldiers who were deployed to those areas. The government, however, denied the killings and the raping of the women in Choba by the Nigerian army. But eyewitness accounts and testimonies support that the soldiers killed and raped the inhabitants of Choba.²⁸¹ It was not until the governor of Benue state, George Akume, in an exclusive interview with the *New York Times* maintained that the Nigerian Army killed over

²⁷⁸ Norimitsu. Onishi, "Nigeria Army Said to Massacre Hundreds of Civilians," *New York Times*, October 30, 2001.

²⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch Report, "Nigeria: The Destruction of Odi and the Rape in Choba". December 22, 2000.

²⁸⁰ "Nigeria; Choba: Healing the Wounds". *This Day*, Lagos. November 7, 2000.

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch Report: "Nigeria: The Destruction of Odi and the Rape in Choba," December 22, 2000.

five hundred people in Choba community that the Nigerian government accepted responsibility of the killings, albeit with a underexaggerated number.²⁸²

Suffice it to say that the civilian government led by General Olusegun Obasanjo, which was hope to have a mode of operation in the Niger Delta communities different from the previous military regimes, did worse things than the previous regimes.²⁸³ General Ibrahim Babangida's regime suppressed dissent and crushed all forms of opposition from members of the oil producing communities, but the Obasanjo government was responsible for more atrocities than all the military regimes put together.²⁸⁴

The constant militarization of the Nigerian federal government in the Niger Delta region since independence, throughout the military era, and up to the democratic era, sparked and inflamed ethnic hostilities in the country. The question of marginalization was never adequately addressed by successive administrations, and that kept the country disunited. It was a situation that almost led Nigeria into a second phase of civil war in 1993. The Niger Delta situation was a similar scenario to that which had caused the 1967 Civil War. The constant failure of the federal government to address the issues of resource control and ethnic domination from independence up to 1999 created more hostilities in the country, eventually leading to an all-out armed conflict by members of the oil producing communities.

²⁸² Onishi, Norimitsu. "Nigeria Army Said to Massacre Hundreds of Civilians," *New York Times*, October 30, 2001.

²⁸³ "Nigeria: Troops Deployment: Fresh Tension Grips Niger-Delta". *Vanguard Daily*, Lagos. October 7, 2000.

²⁸⁴ "Nigeria Human Rights Practices", *US Department of State Dispatch*. February, 1994.

The mostly youthful militants believed the federal government was controlled by members of the ethnic majorities. As a result, many armed groups emerged in the region beginning in 2000. Such groups included, but were not limited to, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), which was led by Asari Dakubo; the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), led by Ateke Tom; the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); and the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF). Some of the groups consolidated around the ideals of MOSOP, while others unleashed mayhem in the region. These groups bombed oil facilities and installations, staged armed attacks, and took popular foreign oil workers hostage in the region. Due to this mayhem, the region descended into lawlessness and anarchy prevailed. Many inhabitants fled from different communities in the region, and many companies were relocated back to their home countries.²⁸⁵ The lack of determination by federal and state governments to effectively implement legislation to address the needs and aspirations of the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta kept the region in perpetual crises.

Another impact of the Ogoni uprising in the Niger Delta region was the politicization of environmental issues.²⁸⁶ After the Ogoni uprising, one might have thought that all the environmental issues that caused the uprising would be resolved. None of those issues were addressed, however. Other communities in the Niger Delta grew restless because of the

²⁸⁵ Bodo, & Gimah, "Oil Crises in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," 151.

²⁸⁶ Bodo, & Gimah, "Oil Crises in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," 151.

government's inability to address environmental problems. The federal government made promises to resolve the environmental issues, but those promises were perceived by members of the Niger Delta communities as mere tricks to calm them. The government never acted on those promises and the environmental problems continued into the year 2000. In the absence of governmental intervention, the youths embraced illegal activities.²⁸⁷ The restlessness and violent activities of the youths in the region led to oil bunkering and theft. Even more drastically, millions of dollars had been reported to have been paid for kidnapping victims.

The corruption and bribery became predominant in the Niger Delta region after the Ogoni uprising. The Niger Delta Development Commission, set up by the federal government in 1999, was marked by corruption and bribery. The leaders of the commission became so corrupt that the purpose for which it was created was defeated.²⁸⁸ Crises, armed conflicts, and environmental problems continued in the region due to the failure of the Niger Delta Commission to meet the needs of the inhabitants of the region. The crises continue to the present day as ethnic domination still holds sway in the Nigerian political system, encumbering progress, and the unity of the country.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 152.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 153.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, which started during the colonial administrations, became more prevalent when the country became independent in 1960. The discovery of crude oil in 1956 prior to Nigeria's independence was another major factor that formed the basis for the Ogoni uprising, the Ijaw uprising, and other conflicts in the Niger Delta region. In this study, it has been established that the federal government of Nigeria contributed largely to the crises in the Niger Delta, first, by not responding adequately to the needs of the inhabitants in the region, especially those in the oil producing communities in the region. Also, the constant militarization in the oil producing communities, the suppression of dissent, and the incitement of communal clashes kept the region in a continuously hostile state. This situation negatively impacted the region, because the federal governments at the time took advantage of the communal clashes, which were partly instigated by the military, in order to constantly exploit the region for the benefit of other regions.

The Northern region, which constitutes the ethnic majority in the country, benefited more from the oil fortune because the officers who made up the federal executive council of the federal government were disproportionately from the Northern region. Ethnic domination, a major problem before the independence of Nigeria, continued after independence and was sustained by the successive administrations without redress. Unfortunately, the failure of successive administrations in addressing this factor caused the country's indivisible nature to become unachievable. The Niger Delta region continued to be hostile against the Northern region, even after the country had moved into a civilian rule. The activities of the federal

government, even among the Niger Delta communities, sustained intra- and intercommunal hostilities. This situation kept the ethnic minorities disunited and resentful to majority groups, especially the Northern region that was believed to have been exploiting and taking away their resources and leaving their communities underdeveloped.

The Niger Delta crises of the 1980s and 1990s had a huge impact on the region. The Ogoni uprising, led by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, completely changed the oil politics in the Niger Delta region whereas his death gave rise to the many protests against the government and the oil companies in the Niger Delta region, most of which developed into brutal crises). These crises were inspired by the objectives of MOSOP. Members of oil communities also mobilized against environmental degradation, and the unemployment of members of their communities. Although some of the oil companies, such as Shell-BP responded to some of the demands of unemployment in the Niger Delta, with regard to environmental degradation no proactive measures were taken.

In 1998 and 1999 most of Shell's employees were Nigerian.²⁸⁹ Shell also claimed that it spent more than twenty million dollars each year for community development and spent over thirty-six million dollars between 1996 and 1997 in a new community development program in the Niger Delta. Members of the communities in the region believed, however, that Shell only made empty promises without taking the necessary actions to contribute to the development of the region.²⁹⁰ On the part of the oil companies, there was a sense of

²⁸⁹ Boele, et. al., "Shell, Nigeria and the Ogoni," 83.

²⁹⁰ Boele, et. al., "Shell, Nigeria and the Ogoni," 83.

commitment to addressing the problems that were raised by members of the oil producing communities. In terms of employment, Shell employed many Nigerians into the company, majority of whom were from the oil producing communities. Even though the bulk of the responsibility of addressing the issues in the Niger Delta rested on the government, the government only initiated policies, and passed legislation without having to implement them. Also, the government did not employ the inhabitants from the oil producing communities into the federal and state ministries or into government parastatals.

The government's inability to address the marginalization of ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta as well as the underdevelopment of the region led to the formation of very hostile and deadly militant groups. More recent activities of these militant groups—attacking, kidnapping, and destroying oil facilities and their employees in the region—clearly shown that until there is a dedicated government intervention in the region, the country at large will have no peace. As the issue of ethnic domination prevails in Nigeria and ethnic minority marginalization continues, the indivisibility of the Nigerian state continues to be threatened. If the federal government fails to act swiftly to meet the needs of the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region, the Nigerian nation-state may come undone.

Suffice it to say that, throughout the 1990s leading up to the transition to a democratic rule in the country, the environmental problems, underdevelopment in the oil producing communities, and the constant ethnic crises continued to hold sway in the Niger Delta region. It is therefore recommended that further research be carried out to ascertain the dynamics of the sub-groups that emerged in the Niger Delta region in relation to the activities of the oil

companies in the region. Considering the current situation in the Niger Delta region, the government needs to respond to the challenges in the region to harmonize the interests of the ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities in the country. Finally, the research should investigate the policies and steps taken by the oil companies operating in the region in protecting the environment in accordance with global best practices.

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