

**Youth and the Generational Dimensions to Struggles
for Resource Control in the Niger Delta**



Author

Cyril Obi is the Programme Coordinator, Post-Conflict Transition in Africa, the State and Civil Society, at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden. On leave from the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs where he is an Associate Research Professor, he has published widely on environmental politics and security, globalisation, development, governance, energy, peace and conflict issues in Africa.



Youth and the Generational Dimensions to Struggles for Resource Control in the Niger Delta

Prospects for the Nation-State Project
in Nigeria

Cyril Obi

Monograph Series

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Abbreviations

ACF	Arewa Consultative Forum
APC	Arewa Peoples Congress
ERECTISM	Ethnic Autonomy, Resource and Environmental Control
FDIC	Federation of Delta Ijaw Communities
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
INC	Ijaw National Congress
IYC	Ijaw Youth Council
IYM	Igbo Youth Movement
JVA	Joint Venture Agreements
MASSOB	Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NYCOP	National Youth Council of Ogoni People
MOSIEND	Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta
OBR	Ogoni Bill of Rights
OPC	Odu'a Peoples Congress
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
NDVF	Niger Delta Volunteer Force
NDPVF	Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force
OCU	Ogoni Central Union
NUOS	National Union of Ogoni Students

'If you pollute the land and atmosphere that people breathe, if the state apparatus and the oil companies live in opulence while the people live in servitude and penury, these are conditions that make youths to be prepared to risk their lives to correct some of these anomalies'.

Isaac Asume, Chikoko member
(Quoted in Sam Olukoya, 'Rebel Leader – Voice for Masses, or Skilled opportunist?', Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS), www.ipsnews.net/africa, October 18, 2004).

'We cannot be said to be leaders of tomorrow when we are denied the means of existence. The elders use youths as thugs and revenge of one another' (sic).
Legborsoi Saro Pyagbara, MOSOP member.
(Quoted in *The Guardian* (Lagos) December 19, 2002:6).

Introduction

Across Nigeria's volatile Niger Delta region, as well as in communities in other parts of the country, the nation-state project is undergoing various levels of interrogation. These have been framed in the broad context of resurgent ethno-nationalism and demands for the expansion of democratic space that have become more pronounced since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in May 1999. The struggles have been largely driven by the quest for equal access to critical oil resources and power, self-determination, ethnic autonomy and the decentralisation of a hegemonic federal power in a context of shrinking oil resources. They have also been framed in the context of citizenship rights, particularly in terms of the relationship between ethnic majorities and minorities in Nigeria. As Ake (1993:20), notes:

The vast majority of ethnic and national groups in this country are increasingly feeling that far from being a fair deal, their incorporation into Nigeria is grossly oppressive.

What flows from the foregoing is the growing alienation of most of Nigeria's ethnic nationality groups from the 'national unity' project of the hegemonic elite. This has fed pressures for the convening of a National Conference for the renegotiation of the very basis of the Nigerian nation-state project. It is expected that such a forum would provide all the ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria a platform and an opportunity to restructure the federation essentially through

the devolution of power from the Centre downwards, the decentralisation of power over resources, and the establishment of an equitable basis for belonging to the Nigerian nation-state.

As noted earlier, Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, contributed to a noticeable upsurge in ethnic, communal and religious conflict. At the same time, ethno-political groups and ethnic militia assumed prominence within the expanded democratic space as each group sought to assert its identity in the struggles against perceived exclusion and claims for inclusion in gaining access to power and resources. Examples of such groups include the Afenifere (Yoruba), Igbo Youth Movement, Ohaneze Ndigbo (Igbo), Arewa Consultative Forum (Hausa-Fulani), the Ijaw Youth Council, Ijaw National Congress (Ijaw), Movement for the Survival of the Izon Ethnic Nationality, and the Movement for the Payment of Reparations to the Ogbia, among many others. Among the ethnic minority groups of the Niger Delta, and following the 1990 Ogoni Bill of Rights and the 1998 IYC Kaiama Declaration, there have been Aklaka Declaration of the Egi people, the Oron Bill of Rights, Ogbia Charter of Demands and the Ikwerre Charter of Demands - all seeking the right to self determination and control of their resources.

Alongside these identity groups, and to add force to their demands were the ethnic militia largely, but not exclusively made up of youths. These included, the O'odua People's Congress (OPC, Yoruba) and its affiliate organizations, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB, Igbo), Arewa Peoples Congress (APC, Hausa-Fulani), the Federation of Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) and a motley crowd of smaller militant groups representing minority ethnic or communal interests.

These groups among others have been involved in violent conflicts with the authorities, or against other groups. A lot of these conflicts also involve indigenes versus settlers. At other levels, hostilities assume ethno-religious, sectarian, inter, and intra communal dimensions. Examples include those involving Hausa and Yoruba in Ketu, Idi-Araba, and Sagamu, Ilaje versus Ijaw, Itsekiri versus Urhobo, Tiv versus Jukun, Tarok versus Hausa-Fulani and tensions between Christians and Muslims in those states in central and northern Nigeria that have adopted Sharia or Islamic law, or are enmeshed in conflicts over power, land and cattle. Yet, the crisis in the Niger Delta is perhaps much worse considering the level of violence and militarisation, and the intersection of local and global hegemonic and extractive interests involved in the struggle for the control of the oil-rich region.

There is no doubt that under the strain of interrogation and inter ethnic and inter communal conflict, the glue holding the Nigerian nation-state together

continues to wear thin, with dire implications for Nigeria's future. In this regard, the evidence suggests that the contradictions besetting the Nigeria nation-state are most potent and forcefully represented in the Niger Delta where the struggle for resource (oil) control continues to be expressed in zero sum terms. At the heart of this struggle lies the question of who should exercise control over the oil – the fiscal basis of the Nigerian federation, mined from under the lands and waters of the Niger Delta – the ethnic minorities who inhabit the region, or the federal government of Nigeria, of which the Niger Delta is a part. The reason for this is not difficult to discern. It lies in the history of the alienation of the ethnic minorities from federal power, denial of direct access to oil while the people suffer the loss of their lands and livelihoods, and bear the environmental costs of oil production and pollution. This is further worsened by the reality that they suffer the direct consequences of federal neglect, and the impoverishment and relative underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region by the alliance of the state and global oil capital.

In more ways than one, the struggle for resource control by the oil minorities of the Niger Delta is fundamentally one over the ownership and control of natural resources within a claimed political space, and in the context of the Niger Delta this also significantly includes land that is rich in oil and gas – Nigeria's chief revenue earner(s). It is however important to note that the struggle for resource control is not altogether an undifferentiated one. For within the Niger Delta, there are contradictions and divisions along ethnic, communal, class and inter, as well as intra-generational lines. This makes the adoption of a binary logic in seeking to understand the complexity of the struggles in the Niger Delta to be of limited value. What is more useful is to glean the dynamics of the interplay of forces within and across fluid ethnic, communal, and generational boundaries as the forces of resistance confront the forces of exploitation, extraction, accumulation and repression.

The central objective of this paper therefore is to explore the various ramifications of the involvement of the youth in the struggle for resource control in the volatile Niger Delta. It is based on the analysis of primary and secondary materials, field observations, interviews and interactions with some of the actors in the Niger Delta Youth movements. The struggle for resource control is a complex one. It is essentially hinged upon the youths' interrogation of the inequities in the control of the resources of the Niger Delta and how, they negotiate generational spaces in contesting their alienation, exploitation and impoverishment by the petro-partnership of the Nigerian state and global oil capital. Therefore, it transcends the current effort in statist and oil corporate discourses to criminalise the youth and through these rationalise brutal and

repressive tactics in suppressing protests in Nigeria's oil-rich, but impoverished region. Beyond this, it analyses the nature, and role of the youth in seeking to transform the inequitable power relations and (re)gain ownership of the land and oil in the Niger Delta, and the prospects for the future. On this basis it is important to note that the youth in relation to their identity and consciousness are not an undifferentiated whole. Also in terms of the relationship between the youth and social transformation, just as Mannheim noted (1952: 276-322), there is a difference between the youth as a generation 'in itself' and the youth as a generation 'for itself'. With regard to the Niger Delta, it is possible to discern complex elements at play - in defining who is a youth, and the calculations and local/global idioms that underlie youth engagement with the each other, the elders, the state, local elite, and oil multinationals.

Conceptual issues

The conceptual issues relate to the linkages between intra, and inter-generational relations, ethnic minority rights and the struggle for resource control. It is these that underpin the anatomy of violence, largely driven by youth power, which has become instrumental both in demanding for resource (oil) control, and in interrogating the hegemonic nation-state project that thrives on 'cheating' the oil minorities of their 'God-given' oil wealth. The urgency with which some factions of the youth are agitating for resource control and justice is partly driven by the realization that oil is a 'wasting asset', and that if they do not seize the moment, they would have no future as ethnic minorities and Nigerian citizens once the oil wells run dry.

Inter-generational relations and social transformation

An often hidden element in social change is that of inter-generational relations. Yet, it is clear that we cannot adequately grapple with changes in time, space, and society without the knowledge of the role of generational forces. Thus, along with other notions that deal with social change: class, ethnicity/race, gender, and power, we have generations as 'bearers of time', and under certain circumstances, bearers of change.

In this regard, it could be argued that elements of 'bearers of change' and 'victims/colluders' can be implicated within, and between generations. Yet, we are not unmindful of the argument of the teleological hue, that associates younger generations with protest, social revolutions or violent change, or associates the young with energy, activism and sacrifice, ever ready to work for social transformation as a guarantee for a better and secure future. It is therefore not surprising that young adults (youth) as in the case of Europe in

the 1960s and the heady days of the civil rights movement in the United States of America, the incidents at the Tiananmen Square in June 1989, and the more recent anti-globalisation movement, have been at the vanguard of the movement for change. On the other hand, youth can be engaged in violence, or even in criminality, particularly in contexts where they are either the victims of social decay, or excluded from the distribution of resources and opportunities in society. In other contexts, the place of youths within a given mode of production, and their access/non-access to the social surplus influences their politics.

At another level, youth are conceptualised in terms of their futuristic role as leaders of society. This in itself assumes the non-interrogation of the existing power relations in society, and is a recipe for preparing the youth to perpetuate a particular mode of power relations that suggest a permanence of structures of dominance and interests, but with the entry and exit of occupants over time. It also suggests the subordination of youth to the power structure controlled by elders in order to facilitate system stability, cohesion, and continuity. Political time then becomes a conveyor belt that takes the 'loyal and disciplined' youth into future power, when the elders pass into myth and history.

This logic that comes out sharply from the foregoing is the common saying that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow. It is also reflected in the notion that the youth are the 'successor generation' (Obasanjo 1999:4-8; Mohiddin 1999:127-156), implying that they would in future replace their elders as leaders. It therefore underlines the link between human mortality and the need to maintain the continuity (and structure) of power in a cycle of political timelessness. This perhaps gives the old(er) leaders the responsibility of choosing and grooming their 'successors'.

Citing the case of youth-led identity-based movements, Gore and Pratten (2003: 212), show how, with regard to Southern Nigeria, youths act as the 'spearhead of contemporary political contests between the politics of identity and citizenship'. In this regard the emphasis is on the role of youth as defined by virtue of their vertical insertion into the 'politics of plunder' and how they have mobilised themselves around issues of resource control and community security, by tapping into local/traditional idioms of power, knowledge and accountability. In other words, youth agitate for (re) distribution of resources (oil) in their favour, protest exclusion or marginalisation, and resist the theft of what they consider their natural heritage. Noting the problematic nature of defining youth, both authors none-the-less, capture the varying responses of youth, largely shaped by historical and socio-economic factors, to what they refer to as the 'politics of plunder'. What is important is the problematisation of the notion of youth and its meaning(s) in various contexts. With regard to

this paper, the emphasis is on those youth-led social movements that engaged the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals from the 1990s onwards on the issue of resource (oil) control. Their political identity was largely shaped by their protest against marginalisation and oppression by the State-Oil Multinationals' alliance, and the agitation to control oil (revenues).

It is also important to understand that for some youth, what is paramount is survival. They must first of all survive before they can begin to think of fighting for a future. When the very fact of survival is embedded in conflict, then the struggle for the future is ambushed by more violence that sucks in young people into the vortex of class, ethnic, generational, communal and political agendas. What is at stake then is often defined not by some ideals of social transformation, or inter-generational succession, but the ways in which generations may merge, align, or subvert one another, in the struggle for survival and power. In this connection, what needs to be better understood is why and when intra, and inter-generational ties develop, or disintegrate. In other words, under what conditions will the generational struggle act as a locomotive for social transformation? Is it inter-generational, intra-generational or trans-generational? There are no easy answers, and an answer may include one, or two or all of the preceding combinations. What is important to note is that under certain social conditions, and driven by dialectics/contradictions emanating from a dominant mode of production, generational forces may emerge and in combination with other forces push through, or indeed stall or subvert, social transformation.

Before going further, it is important to dwell for some time on the concept of youth beyond the United Nations range of people between 18 and 24 years of age. Indeed the concept of youth has been subjected to some flexible usage. While the UN has placed the age of 24 years as the upper limit, an organization like the Commonwealth has put it at 29. The emerging trend in some communities in Africa, is that people in their 30s and sometimes 40s still see themselves as youth when they should normally be considered adults. This may be because they are unemployed and unmarried. Increasingly, youth identity has become synonymous with unemployment and poverty, in which young people continue to depend on their parents or relatives, making them in many respects '*adult-youths*'. It also explains why such youth are available to be exploited by older people to act as perpetrators and victims of the '*production of violence*'. Referring to this social category as '*extended youth*', Gore and Pratten (2003: 216) perceive them as being defined, '*irrespective of actual age, through economic and social circumstance and little prospect of future advancement*'.

Yet, the socio-political actions of youth could be the result of impatience with, and rebellion against an older generation that is perceived to be corrupt, compromised or treacherous, leaving the youth to seek justice and forcefully re-claim the moral high ground and their future. In such cases, the youth may act outside of the influence of older people, aligning with only those they feel are principled and committed to their cause for change, but these are often expedient calculations that seek to re-negotiate a relation of power. One is therefore in agreement with Wyn and White (1997:25) on the importance of 're-thinking youth', in 'relational' rather than age terms, by focusing on 'the ways young people are constructed through social institutions, and the ways in which they negotiate their transitions'. In this regard youth identity is constructed by social, cultural, political and economic specificities, and is not defined solely by age, or the experience of being young alone. This perhaps explains why some argue that youthfulness lasts longer in some societies than others. What is most important however is not the binary perception of youth in perpetual opposition to adults (gerontocracy); rather, it is the social construction of youth as a part of adulthood.

Indeed in the case of Niger Delta, the definition of youth is flexible enough to accommodate all those younger than the elders. Being a youth in the Niger Delta often inheres in age, status, ethnic/communal identity, and the politics of resource control. Usually, those below the age of the elders may claim to be youth, even though there could be 'youth' that are chiefs and are by traditional status, elders. Just as there are elders age-wise, that consider themselves by virtue of their social status and politics, to be youth. It is even possible to see instances of some individuals who vary their 'elderhood' and 'youthhood' depending on expedient calculation of benefits and risks. But when it comes to staking claims for resource control from the federal government, mobilising communities to protest against environmental pollution by oil multinationals, and marginalisation by the Nigerian state, it is the youth that are at the vanguard. In very broad terms, the place of the individual in the politics seeking to reclaim resources and power either defines him/her as a youth, an ally of the youth, or an enemy - colluding with the State and oil multinationals to pillage the precious oil resource and pollute the Niger Delta. This however, does not imply that there are no 'adult-youths' opposed to those leading the social movements agitating for resource control. It also does not deny the existence of other spheres of youth action in the Delta, involving youth in cults, or in some cases criminal or violent activities. What is clear is that the youths leading the quest for resource control enjoy overwhelming grassroots support in the oil producing communities. Thus, they define the main concern of this paper.

Youth and conflict in Africa

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in the role of youths as social agents in Africa. Such interests developed against the background of the disruptive influence of economic crises and structural adjustment that had harsh social consequences and worsened the living conditions of vulnerable groups, including the youth. With their present mired in dire straits – the retreat of the welfare state, unemployment, exploitation, suffering, hunger and anger, the youth facing a bleak future have reacted variously to their marginalisation, alienation and dehumanisation, in the quest for survival and a better future. While some have at great risk, played a critical role in the struggles against unpopular policies and authoritarian regimes; others have also been involved in the violent conflicts that have ravaged the continent.

In some contexts defined by violence, the youth have formed the backbone of armed militia and sometimes, conventional armies engaged in low intensity conflicts and full-blown civil wars across Africa. The role of youth as victims and foot soldiers in these conflicts draws attention to another dimension of Africa's multiple crises. While there are some who emphasise the role of youth in conflict as a spin-off of the contradictions spawned by globalisation in which youth violence is part of the struggle for survival and against 'victimhood', others seek to find cultural explanations for youth violence (Ellis 1999). It is also important to note that some scholars have sought to analyse how the youth violently protest against corruption, injustice, and their alienation and exploitation by state, class and generational forces (Abdullah 1998, 2004a, 2004b; Abdullah and Muana 1997; Bangura 1997; Keen 2003; Reno 2003; Utas 2003). There are also studies that focus on the linkages between economic crisis, violence and urban youth (Momoh 2000: 181-203, Yau 2000: 161-180), and yet others that prefer to focus on the involvement of youth in rural conflict (Richards 1996, 2004). What comes out of most of the literature is that the youth engage in conflict for survival, to struggle for justice, driven by the quest for a better future.

The foregoing clearly suggests that there has been a lot of attention on the intimacy between youth, violence and conflict. While some of the explanations have located the youth's response in the conversations of identity and agency within a framework of crisis and the exigencies of violence as a mode of survival (and production), some have sought to evoke stereotypical images of atavistic African barbarism to justify their limited understanding of the violence and destructiveness of the youth-in-conflict. What is important to note is that youth struggles are a part of the larger crises in which Africa is immersed,

and must be investigated based on the historical specificity of each case in order to explain the socio-economic roots of their involvement in violent conflict. This is because a critical understanding of the crises of youth in the continent is fundamental to Africa's future and the quest for sustainable alternatives that can guarantee the youth a stake in a better, just and radically transformed Africa.

Another important point is the less-obvious role of external forces – particularly extractive economic forces whose activities deepen local contradictions that alienate and 'victimise' the youth. Such forces also fuel and benefit from the conflicts that follow by selling ammunitions to the combatants and taking advantage of the collapse of law and order, to export priced mineral and forest resources for huge profits at the global commodity markets.

The debates also include the issue of how African youth have been responding to changes in the world, globalisation, and the challenges of nation building in their own countries. It is more apt to note that the youth in Africa has been one of the most hit social groups as a result of Africa's immersion in multiple crises (economic, political, social, environmental) in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Many of them are unemployed and have little occupational skills. Others have dropped out of school either because of the collapse of the public school system; the inability to pay newly introduced fees, or long periods of closure as a result of strikes by teachers. They have been victims of state repression; or have been drafted as foot soldiers in conflicts and wars across the continent. Indeed, the African youth is in crisis. As De Boeck and Honwana note, 'the narratives of African youth' reflect:

...a deeply felt sense of pain, working through experiences of marginalization, dislocation, violence, and disenfranchisement, but also, and sometimes even because of the pain, about desire, hopes, a powerful longing to create or to partake, as active participants, in other spaces of empowerment (2005:4).

The critical question thus is the modality through which the youth seeks to access 'other spaces of empowerment'. A lot of studies have focused on the youths' use of violence and conflict. This comes out boldly in Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, which presents the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone as a youth vanguard movement of 'excluded intellectuals', fighting for social transformation (Richards 1996), and the sharp critiques of Richards' position by Bangura (1997), and Abdullah (1997, 1998, 2004), among others. What comes out of this critique of what has been critiqued as Richards' glorification of one of Africa's most destructive

and vicious wars, is that the war was neither led by revolutionaries, nor 'excluded intellectuals'. Even worse, it was founded upon the 'rarray boy culture' (Bangura 1997; Abdullah and Muana 1998; Abdullah 1997; Rashid 2004), and was more of 'a hybrid of sorts bringing together and inaugurating a political conversation anchored on the use of violence (Abdullah, n.d.)'. While Richards' treats the youth as an undifferentiated rural force, ignoring the various divisions or strata within it, others have emphasised the role of radical students groups and alienated 'lumpen' urban youth elements in the Sierra Leonean civil war (Abdullah 1997, Rashid 2004)..

At another level, the celebration of youth violence and 'heterodox practices', whether in resisting repression in Senegal (Diouf 1996), rebellion against the state in Algeria (El Kenz 1996), or in the case of Sierra Leone, is linked to globalisation particularly the impact of satellite communications, television, drugs, the internet, culture and entertainment industry. It is argued in some quarters, that the images transmitted by global media feed into youth violence in Africa. Of particular note are the invincible heroes such as 'Rambo' in American war movies. Thus, it is important to point that far from being passive recipients, or imitators, African youth are feeding into processes of globalisation, using their own local idioms, initiatives and cultures to adapt them to address the specificities of their survival and social struggles.

From the foregoing, it can be understood that generational dynamics are essential to social transformation. They include relations of exclusion, inclusion and cooptation, but more importantly are linked to the positions members of these generations occupy in the dominant relations of power and production. It is equally important to understand the dynamics of strata within generations, and how a hegemonic stratum can hijack a social project, advance or subvert it. What cannot be denied is that the generational factor can no longer be ignored in understanding the on-going complex social dynamics in Africa, particularly as it relates to the changing fortunes of the nation-state project in the continent.

While a lot has been written on the involvement of youth in the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Angola, Uganda, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, as well as in the urban centres across Africa, interest in just developing in the nature and ramifications of youth involvement in conflicts in oil-rich, but impoverished contexts such as the Niger Delta. It is important to point out that these conflicts are so complex that they defy any simple explanations. Therefore, it is perhaps more challenging to examine critical aspects of the conflicts in the Niger Delta. In this regard the paper devotes its attention to the

nexus between youth and conflict by focusing on the generational dimension. In this context, generation, is socially constructed and is an expression of power relations (Burgess 1999: 30). O'Brien (1996:57), refers to generational consciousness as 'an awareness of a common situation in relation to preceding generations'. It feeds off the contrast between a glorious past, and a parlous present. This awareness is often expressed in socio-political terms, with the young seeking to co-opt various discourses, or adopting violence in re-negotiating their disadvantaged status in state-society power relations. This places the youth in Africa in a paradoxical, yet precarious situation. With its present largely mortgaged by the ruling classes, decades of economic crises, and the options being proffered by new economic reforms lacking in any real project of their social empowerment, the youth remain hanging as it were on the horns of a dilemma, having so much to gain as individuals in being co-opted by the power elite, but losing out collectively, perpetually condemned to the margins, or engulfed by the pursuit of politics by violent means.

In relation to the Niger Delta, the aspect of the generational struggle that would be focused upon is that of the youth versus the elite/elders. This explains how the youth have opposed traditional power relations based on the argument that elders have sold-out or compromised with the exploitative and oppressive State-oil multinationals alliance. This led, in the 1990s to the formation of youth-led social movements such as NYCOP, Chikoko and IYC, which combined local grassroots mobilisation based on local idioms of social justice, rights, and identity, with activism based on a well-articulated national and global rights campaign. By the late-1990s more elders identified with the agenda of the youth as they sought to co-opt the platform of resource control, and (re)capture their position of power over the youths. A closer study of such generational relations help to effectively explain how these struggles and alliances advance, or limit the effectiveness of the oil minorities' campaign for the control of the oil-rich Niger Delta - the resource power-base of the nation-state project in Nigeria.

Political ecology

Political ecology is hinged upon a framework that lays bare the relationship between people, society and the environment. As I have argued elsewhere (Obi 2002c):

...the relationship between society and nature is a dynamic one, defined also by the distribution of power in society and the way(s) such power provides access to, and control over the natural resources needed for survival.

Thus, where power is concentrated in few hands giving them a disproportionately large size of natural resources, by blocking access to others, marginalizing them, or worse, dispossessing them of their resources, conflicts invariably arise.

Thus, political ecology explains a dynamic process of social transformation based on the interface between people and the ecology (Harper 1996). People need resources, which exist in nature for their survival. Such resources either provide livelihoods, shelter, or profit to people. Yet, the relationship between people and nature is often complex, mediated by power relations, which determine issues of access, use and distribution. This explains why people struggle for resources, and why such struggles assume violent forms in contexts of scarcity, disempowerment and inequity.

The analysis that follows includes the political ecology approach because of the advantages it has over other perspectives in facilitating the understanding of the politics of natural resources, and its links with social transformation. In this regard, it provides a most appropriate analytical framework for the examination of the conflict in the Niger Delta and its implications for the nation-state project in Nigeria.

The dialectics of resource control

The dialectics of resource control are intimately bound up with the centrality of natural resources to the daily reproduction of human life, the mode of production and accumulation, as well as the expression and capture of power. As noted earlier, natural resources constitute the raw materials and fuel for capitalist production and the creation of surplus. Thus, those who seek monopoly profit, and want to guarantee free access to land, raw materials and cheap energy, as well as markets for their profits invariably seek to control resources. In the same way, institutions of social control and authority, such as the State play a mediatory role in the allocation of such resources. This implicates the State in the issue of resource control. However in contexts where the state is itself dependent on external forces or factors, its capacity to mediate the struggles for resource control is severely undermined, as it is both a contestant in the struggles, as well as a defender of external interests.

The struggle for resource control therefore is intertwined with the dialectics of capitalist extraction and expansion. As those who originally own the natural resource – usually indigenous peoples are alienated from their lands, usually through violence, and are cut off from their survival base. Thus, they resist the relations of power that expropriates them, hence the struggle. The struggle can be non-violent or violent, depending on historical and cultural

factors, and the balance of power between the contending parties. For the dispossessed, the struggle for resource control is linked to issues of self-determination and democracy – taking back power, and placing it in the hands of the people.

At a third level, the struggle for resources reflect the social contradictions spawned by a dominant mode of production and the inequities that underpin the distribution of the surplus. Thus, issues of power, access, entitlements, justice and survival are all bound up with the politics of natural resources.

In the final analysis, it is the struggle between those who derive their power: political and economic, from monopoly control of resources, and others who seek to broaden the control of resources, so that ordinary people can survive, access their daily sustenance and reproduce themselves.

The struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta: A historical perspective

The struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta is not entirely new. Indeed the struggle has over the decades undergone processes of decay and renewal based on socio-economic factors, and the emergence of new actors and elements in the Niger Delta environment. What this implies is that before the creation of Nigeria, the struggle for the resources of the Niger Delta had begun in earnest.

Since the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta has been largely defined by the political economy of oil. This is because oil or petroleum, has since the 1970s accounted for over 80 per cent of the revenues of the federal government, and 95 per cent of Nigeria's external earnings. Oil is therefore the fiscal basis of the Nigerian state. It is also paradoxically both a factor of unity among the competing factions of the Nigerian power elite, and a source of intense division and competition as a result of the extreme passions linked to the struggles over oil, and the inequities in the distribution of the oil surplus. In relation to the latter point, since over 70 per cent of the oil produced in Nigeria comes from the Niger Delta, the ethnic minorities of the region – alienated from the oil proceeds, feel ripped off by a homogenising (but distant) nation-state project that feeds fat on their oil wealth, leaving them impoverished and their environment severely degraded. Therefore, their protest is against the injustice of belonging to a nation-state, Nigeria, which denies them their rights as its citizens – the right to control and fully enjoy the oil wealth produced from under their lands and waters. It is this that explicates how the hegemonic nation-state project has literally come under fire

in the Niger Delta. The quest of the oil minorities to control 'their' oil is thus underlined by the demand for the restructuring or decentralisation of the presently over-centralised Nigerian federation.

Before going further, it is apposite to return to the roots of the struggles for resource control in the Niger Delta. Firstly, it must be noted that the region was very well endowed in terms of fertile soils, biodiversity, and proximity both in relation to the Atlantic coast as well as the forest hinterland. Thus, over the millennia, the Niger Delta witnessed waves of migration that led to the evolution of city-states and kingdoms which thrived on commerce, agriculture, manufacturing and military prowess. Some of the well-known city-states and kingdoms included Bonny, Opobo, Brass, Calabar and Benin. Today, the region is inhabited by ethnic minorities, so defined because of their small demographic size, especially when compared with the larger ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa-Fulani) which account for roughly 60 per cent of Nigeria's population. The ethnic minorities on the basis of their claims to the 'ownership' of the oil-rich land of the Niger Delta include the Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko, Andoni, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Kwale, and Ibibio etc.

The struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta can be traced back to the sixteenth century when European explorers and traders arrived in the region, or even earlier. For it was this that set the stage for the integration of the region, first on a supplier of goods, slaves, and then, palm oil into the world market. This invariably led to conflictive social and production relations in the Niger Delta as communities raided each other, and those in the hinterland for slaves (human resource). There was also the rivalry between city-states, often rooted in the struggle over lucrative trade routes, or for the control of such routes. The control of such routes was a veritable source of revenue or immense wealth either through the collection of tolls or *comey* on the goods that passed through their territory, or by direct participation as middle men or traders in the trans Atlantic trade.

Even when the slave trade was abolished in the nineteenth century, and replaced with the legitimate trade, a new struggle for the Niger Delta ensued between British trading interests and Niger Delta traders, and even within Niger Delta traders, who acted as middlemen in the palm oil (legitimate) trade between the Europeans and the cultivators in the hinterland (Okonta and Douglas 2001:17-19). While the British traders sought direct access to the source(s) of the palm oil in the hinterland, the Niger Delta trading Houses sought to control the lucrative trade upon which their livelihoods and economy rested. Yet, as the demand for palm oil rose in Europe as a result of its use to produce lubricants for industrial machines, as well as being a raw material for confec-

tionaries, soap and margarine, the British began to seek political means to achieve their economic ends and eliminate the Niger Delta 'middlemen' traders (Dike 1956). It was in this regard that the British through Her Britannic Majesty's Consul in the Niger Delta introduced the concept of 'gunboat diplomacy' into the region from October 1850, thereby:

...forcing dubious treaties upon local Kings and princes and offering them 'protection' in return for allowing British traders to do as they pleased in their domains. Dissenting Kings were either murdered and their towns razed to the ground, or they were dethroned and exiled and quislings put in their place (Okonta, n.d.)

It was through the instrumentality of gunboat diplomacy (violence) that leading merchants and rulers of the Niger Delta were deceived, defeated one after the other, imprisoned or exiled. These included, Nana Olomu of Itsekiri, Jaja of Opobo and William Pepple of Bonny (Obi 2005: 199-203; Okonta and Douglas 2001:21-26; Dike 1956). Thus the way was laid open for the direct expropriation of the resources of the Niger Delta by British imperialism (and the hinterland), and the forceful integration of the region in the world capitalist system as a supplier of cheap raw materials, and a market for the finished products of European industry. The control that the Niger Delta trading Houses had enjoyed over the palm oil trade was destroyed and replaced by the monopoly of British traders, which came to be represented in Taubman Goldie's Royal Niger Company. It was the Royal Niger Company that set off a series of military campaigns and conquests that eventually led to the violent birth of the colonial state, named Nigeria by the British.

Those who sought to resist the role of the Royal Niger Company or the West African Frontier Force were militarily subdued. An attempt by King Koko of Brass to resist the monopoly of the Royal Niger Company over the palm oil trade in the Niger Delta was violently punished as Brass was razed to the ground (Okonta n.d) in 1895. In the same manner, other towns along the River Niger right into the hinterland were subdued or punished.

From the foregoing, it can be gleaned that the struggle for self-determination in the Niger Delta started as far back as the end of the nineteenth century. It was essentially predicated upon the struggle of the people of the Niger Delta for the freedom to control their resources, trade and livelihoods. Beyond this, it was a struggle for democracy - for the right to freely choose their own leaders and the right or power to decide how they want to be ruled. By the forceful integration of the Niger Delta into the new British colony named Nigeria, the very identity of the people of the Niger Delta became transformed, and

subordinated to the hegemony of British economic interests, and the interventionist logic of the colonial state.

Issues in the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta

The main issue in the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta, is that the oil (ethnic) minorities that are indigenous to the region want to regain ownership and control of their resources (land and oil), which they lost to the forces of British colonialism at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, they had even 'lost' the control of oil before it was discovered in the region at Oloibiri in 1956. According to colonial legislation in 1889, 1907 and 1914, the monopoly of all oil concessions in Nigeria was granted to British or British-allied capital (Obi 1997:140). This effectively marked out the oil resources of the colony (of which the Niger Delta was a part) as the property of the British. It was on the basis of the 1914 law that colonial authorities in 1938 granted Shell D'Arcy (later Shell-BP), an oil company with substantive British interests, an oil exploration licence covering the entire Nigerian mainland, an area of 367,000 square miles (Soremekun and Obi 1993:216). Shell held unto this monopoly until 1959 when it surrendered the less promising acreages of its concessions to other oil multinationals that had arrived on the Nigerian scene.

At independence, due to the ethno-regional poles of Nigerian federalism (north, east and west), the minorities of the Niger Delta found out that they still did not have control of their resources, even after oil became the economic mainstay of Nigeria in the late 1960s, and three states had been created for them in 1967. During the Nigerian civil war, the oil minorities largely backed the federal side (and the dominant Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba elite) in opposing Eastern region's (Biafra) (Igbo) secessionist bid and claims to the rich oil fields of the Niger Delta. Part of the calculus, was that with the defeat of Biafra, and states of their own, the oil minorities would gain control of the oil resources in their own territory. This was proved to be wrong, as the Federal Military Government enacted laws vesting the ownership of all oil mined in Nigeria in itself. These laws were the Petroleum Decree No. 51 of 1969, and the Offshore Oil Revenue Decree (No. 9) of 1971. The spirit of both laws was retained in section 40(3) of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution and Section 44(3) of the 1999 Constitution, which states that:

...the entire property, and control of all minerals, mineral oils and natural gas, under or upon the territorial waters of Nigeria shall rest in the Government of the federation.

It is important to also note that the Federal Military Government's Land Use Decree of 1978 had vested the ownership of all land in the state (regional) governments. By this decree, the people of the Niger Delta and other communities in Nigeria were divested of ownership, and alienated from their oil-rich land. They thus belonged to a federation that had stripped them of power over their resource-rich land. Thus, for them the issues in the struggle for resource control lay in the denial of access to land and oil, discrimination against ethnic minorities by the majority ethnic groups and the exploitation and pollution of their lands and waters by oil multinationals. In real terms the decrees of the military disempowered and impoverished the oil minorities. The latter, it has been pointed out further placed the people at the risk of genocide (Saro-Wiwa 1992, 1995). In order to protect themselves from further exploitation, environmental degradation, and possible 'genocide', the oil minorities believe that only their control of the resources in their region can guarantee their survival and development. Beyond this, resource control is seen as an act of seeking justice or recompense from a nation-state project and a national ruling elite that has benefited so much from the oil-rich region, and given it virtually nothing in return. In this regard, the discourse on resource control is based on the following arguments:

- i. that the citizenship and national question cannot be separated from the manner in which the colonial state was imposed on many nationalities at the beginning of the twentieth century.
- ii. that a situation in which the oil minorities, whose region produces the bulk of resources on which the nation-state thrives, are denied access to their resource is unfair.
- iii. that the people of the Niger Delta have been alienated from their oil resource because they are ethnic minorities, in a nation-state project dominated by the hegemonic ethnic majority groups operating in partnership with oil multinationals.
- iv. that the most appropriate political framework for managing the diverse pluralities that exist in the multinational Nigerian state is 'true' federalism, which would provide ethnic groups with autonomy, and the right to control their own resources (OBR, Kaiama Declaration, Saro-Wiwa 1995; Sagay 2001).
- v. Elders prefer dialogue and politico-legal approaches, while youth in the Niger Delta prefer activism, confrontation, and violence (Obi's interview with Aribiah, 2002).

From, the foregoing, this study is based on the assumption that the struggle for resource control (of oil and land) manifests at the following levels:

- i. the oil producing states versus the federal government
- ii. oil producing versus non-oil producing states
- iii. oil producing versus non-oil producing local governments
- iv. oil producing versus non-oil producing communities
- v. oil minorities versus majority ethnic groups
- vi. intra oil minority group conflict
- vii. North versus South
- viii. Oil minorities versus oil multinationals

In fundamental terms, the struggle for resource control is driven by the 'deepening material and political grievances of the people of the Niger Delta, and their quest for the widening of local access to oil revenues' (Douglas, Von Kemedi, Okonta and Watts 2003: 2). As such, it is tied to the political economy and political geography of power in Nigeria with direct implications for the Nation-state project.

Implications for the nation-state project in Nigeria

As noted earlier, the struggle for resource control between the people of the Niger Delta, and British merchant and political interests led to two simultaneous effects: the forceful integration of the Niger Delta into the Nigerian colonial state, and the forceful integration of the region into the international capitalist system. Most fundamental of all, is that the people of the region lost their autonomy, and became defined as 'ethnic minorities' within the context of the territorial space of Nigeria created by British imperialism. They had become 'Nigerians' on the basis of the loss of their sovereignty to the British Crown rather than their own free will. This had far reaching implications for the Nation-state project after the country's independence. Since the colonial project - Nigeria, was imposed without the consent of the people of the Niger Delta, it hardly represented their collective wishes or aspirations; rather, it projected the interventionist and exploitative ethos of British colonialism. At another level, the people lost their power over their resources and environment, which also reverberated in their minority status vis-à-vis other larger ethnic groups in the Nigerian colonial state.

Thus, when regionalism was introduced into Nigeria in the mid-1940s (Okpu 1977), ethnicity became politicised and was deployed by the emerging elite in the competition for resources, power and welfare. In this context, the oil minorities of the Niger Delta, split between the Western and Eastern Regions,

ended up being marginalized by the hegemonic Yoruba and Igbo elite that held power in the West and East respectively. This was further complicated by the North-South dichotomy in Nigerian politics. The ethnic minorities, both of the north and south, found that they were denied access to opportunities, welfare facilities and surplus, while their areas were the least developed. It was this that informed the minorities forming their own political movements or parties as it became imminent after the Second World War that the British would withdraw from the political scene in Nigeria. In the Niger Delta, about four ethnic minority movements or parties emerged: the Calabar - Ogoja - Rivers State Movement, Midwest State Movement, the Niger Delta Congress and the Ijaw Peoples Congress.

A common thread that linked the ethnic minorities movements in the Niger Delta was the demand for regions/states of their own that would guarantee them self-determination and autonomy within the context of Nigerian federal nation-state project. In that way, they placed a condition on their belonging to the future post-colonial Nigeria. A condition in which they would own their exclusive political space based on their identity as ethnic minorities, enjoy relative freedom and control the resources within the context of an ethnically heterogeneous Nigerian federation. This much was expressed in the pressures they mounted on the colonial administration, which in turn set up the Willink Commission to Enquire into the Fears of Minorities and the Means of Allaying Them. According to the Report of the Commission (cited in Ake 2000b:100) :

The fears of the minorities in Nigeria arise from two circumstances, first the division of the whole country into three powerful Regions, in each of which one group is numerically preponderant, and secondly, the approach of independence and the removal of the restraints which have operated so far.

As Ake correctly notes, the ethnic minorities did desire incorporation into the nation-state project, but 'were demanding federation to give them more local autonomy, to secure human rights and to improve their access to political participation' (Ake 2000b: 101). Yet, the Willinks Commission's Report stopped short of fulfilling the demands of the minorities:

Beyond the insertion of some constitutional guarantees and the setting up of a board for the development of the Niger delta, the recognition of the peculiar needs of the delta minorities and the deprivations they suffered did not translate into the creation of states nor any development effort until well after independence (Obi 2001a: 19).

It has been argued that if the Willinks Commission had sought to fully address the minority question, it would have delayed Nigeria's independence by at least two years, an idea unacceptable to the Nigerian political elite and the British. Thus, with independence, the ethnic minority parties went into opposition against the ruling party and dominant ethnic group in each region, and continued to agitate for the creation of their own exclusive political space(s), regions, or states.

What flows from the foregoing is that the background to the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta has had far reaching implications for the nation-state project in Nigeria. While seeking incorporation into the Nigerian nation-state project, the ethnic minorities have remained consistent in their quest for self-determination and autonomy within a federal framework, a demand further sharpened by the political economy of oil, military authoritarianism, economic crisis, and the emergence and legitimacy of a global rights discourse largely supportive of minority and environmental rights. It is this position in which the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta have continued their age-old quest for resource control, and the reform of the nation-state project to accommodate these concerns alongside the recognition of their right to control the oil of the Niger Delta that is the crux of the matter. As noted earlier, the struggle is not an undifferentiated one. As shall be seen in the following sections, the generational dimension has influenced the nature and intensity of the on-going struggles.

The nation-state and the minority question

As noted earlier, the Nigerian nation-state was created by Britain. This was done through the forcible bringing together of diverse ethnic nationalities who had different autonomous existence in polities ranging from city-states to kingdoms. This act invariably created inequalities and competition between these groups, whose consent was not sought when Nigeria – driven essentially by the economic logic of British imperialism was imposed on them. Furthermore, some of the demographically small groups became ethnic minorities and were at a disadvantage in accessing power, resources and representation in the regionalised majority ethnic group-led politics that took root in Nigeria particularly from the late 1940s. This coupled with the divide and rule tactics of the colonial administration ensured that ethnicity became a modality for asserting identity and loyalty, and for mobilising people to compete for access to power and resources (Nnoli 1980). The project of the colonial state in Nigeria was radically different from the way the nation-state emerged in Europe. The latter 'arose out of the social and political crises in Europe associated with the rapid

national territorial spread of capitalist social relations and productive forces during the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (Olukoshi and Agbu 1996:11). Also, it was assumed that there was a correspondence between the Nation and the State.

It was the essentially culturally homogenous and modernising state project developed to suit the specificity of Europe (Olukoshi and Agbu 1996:12) that was uncritically imposed on 'Nigeria' in 1914, when the Northern and Southern colonies which were neither capitalist nor culturally homogenous, were merged. By so doing, the British sought to implant an interventionist state that would arrest all pre-colonial modes of production in its new territory, and integrate them into the international capitalist system, as well as establish capitalist relations within the 'national' borders. In this manner the logic of the interventionist state was imposed on the 'multi-ethnic' Nigerian nation. Thus, independence in 1960 was more of a process of indigenising the colonial nation-state project in Nigeria. The ruling elite that inherited power continued with a project of nation building that emphasises modernisation and national unity, which would deepen capitalist relations in Nigeria and eliminate the 'disruptive' element of ethnic diversity. This logic underlines the various national development plans since independence, the propaganda of national unity on which the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) was fought and 'won', and the federal character principle on which basis all federal public appointments are made. The essential idea has been to privilege the Nigerian nation over and above divisive ethnic origins. This centralised hegemonic and integrative notion of the nation-state reached its peak in the decades of military rule.

Yet, the limited autonomy of the Nigerian state meant that it could not effectively hegemonise a homogenising nation-state project. Indeed some ethnic elite factions captured state power and were able to appropriate oil surplus. In a context of zero-sum politics, those who lacked access to power, lacked access to resources, as the State was the main agency of appropriation (Ake 2000a). Those ethnic groups or factions that lacked access to power therefore felt left out or cheated. These feelings of alienation, oppression and injustice grew as Nigeria became immersed in economic crisis in the 1980s, and worsened after the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election believed to have been won by a Yoruba businessman Moshood Abiola (from the South West), by then Head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida (a Nupe, from the North), in spite of the elections being declared free and fair by local monitors and international observers. Although Babangida allegedly acted under immense pressure from a group within the military and a faction of the ruling elite, this act was particularly sensitive. This was because of the widely held view

(particularly in the South) that northerners had ruled Nigeria and monopolised the nation's vast resources for most of its post-colonial existence. Without going into the merits and demerits of the case, the crisis that followed clearly undermined the legitimacy of the hegemonic centralist nation-state project as it was seen as not being representative of the will or interests of all Nigerian people. This crisis of legitimacy of the Nation-state project continues to express itself in the upsurge of inter communal and sectarian strife in Nigeria, ethnic assertiveness, the emergence of ethnic political organizations and militia, and demands for the convening of a sovereign national conference to re-negotiate the Nigerian federal union.

Thus, at the heart of the current crisis lies the contradiction between the hegemonic homogenising nation-state project and the rights of the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta to own and 'control' the oil produced from their region. While the hegemonists are of the opinion that since the Niger Delta is a part of the country, 'its oil' belongs to Nigeria, but the oil minorities counter this by asserting that the Nigerian nation-state project has been unfair to, and neglected them, and they have a right, and prefer to control the oil which is produced in their region. It is this push and pull between oil minorities, the federal state and oil multinationals, and how this would be eventually resolved that remains critical to the future of Nigeria.

It is against the foregoing background that the Niger Delta youth emerged as a social force seeking to transform the current state of alienation and impoverishment of the region. But they have been confronted both by the contradictions within their own generation as well as the power of some elders backed by the immense force of the state and multinational oil corporations. Thus, the generational dimensions to the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta are as complex as they are deep. Yet, they provide a concise architecture within which an understanding of the crisis of the Nigerian nation-state can be properly situated.

Case studies

In examining the generational dimensions to the struggles in the Niger Delta, the analysis will focus on two oil ethnic minority movements formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s: the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). While MOSOP is an umbrella organization of the Ogoni, with many affiliates, including the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), the IYC as its name implies is a youth-led organization.

While the youth had largely been under the leadership of adults/elders in the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta, in 1966, a group of Ijaw youth led by Isaac Adaka Boro, a former university undergraduate and policeman, decided to seize the initiative. Precisely on 24 February 1966, Isaac Boro, Sam Owonaro and Nottingham Dick led (trained and armed) a group of Ijaw youth militants in an attempt to establish a Niger Delta Republic, by seceding from Nigeria.

Table II: Affiliate Organizations to MOSOP

1. Federation of Women Associations
2. National Youth Council of Ogoni People
3. Council of Ogoni Churches
4. Council of Ogoni Professionals
5. Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers
6. National Union of Ogoni Students
7. Ogoni Students Union
8. Ogoni Teachers Union
9. Ogoni Central Union

Source: D. Bariko Wiwa (1996), 'The Role of Women in the Struggle for Environmental Justice in Ogoni', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 21, 4.

Their group, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) as noted elsewhere (Obi 2001a: 21), was based on the:

...desire to end the marginalization of the delta minorities, the suspicion that the Ironsi government would seize the oil resources of the Niger delta and a determination to assert Ijaw control of oil.

This attempt took place against the background of the January 1966 coup that had led to the killing of the Federal Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and brought General Aguiyi Ironsi an Igbo of Eastern region origin to power as head of state, just as oil had begun to have an impact on national revenues. No doubt Boro and his co-travellers, who had experienced marginalisation in the Igbo-dominated Eastern region, were determined to prevent the Igbo from laying their hands on the oil in the Niger Delta. Boro in one of his addresses to the short-lived NDVF urged the young Ijaw fighters to 'remember your seventy year old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty stricken people; remember too your petroleum which is pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom' (Tebekaemi 1982:116-

17). It was clear to Boro then that the Ijaw had to own and control their resources – land and oil, in order to escape poverty, and the Ijaw youth had to lead the fight for the emancipation of the Ijaw people. This was also partly an expression of Boro's disappointment with the elders who in his view were sucked in by partisan politics and greed and had no time for the people. Even though Boro's 'twelve day revolution' was defeated by the federal police and army, and the group was tried on charges of treason, found guilty, and sentenced to death, the July 1966 counter-coup led by northern officers brought them some reprieve (Tebekaemi 1982). The new head of state, Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon pardoned and freed Boro and his men. Boro joined the federal army during the civil war and died fighting to defend the resources of the Niger Delta from capture by the Biafran forces (Obi 2002b). In terms of the inter-generational relations, it is instructive that after his rag-tag militia had been defeated, and he gave himself up and was arrested by federal troops, Boro recalls that while he was under detention awaiting trial, 'tribal capitalist tycoons walked into the police station to spit and rain abuses at me' (Tebekaemi 1982:155). Thus underscoring the intersections of generation and class in defining the fundamental question, 'whose youth?' In the case of Boro, his youth army conceived itself as a liberation army that would transform the Niger Delta in favour of the Ijaw people.

It would appear, that the sharp thrust by the Boro group in 1966 did not have a domino effect immediately because of the 1966 July counter-coup which changed the 'ethnic balance of power' in the country from the East to the North, returned the country from a unitary to a federal framework, and resulted in the creation of three states for the oil minorities in 1967.

As noted earlier, there were also high hopes that with the creation of three oil minority states, Midwest, Rivers and South Eastern, the age-old neglect of the Niger Delta region would be reversed by a guaranteed access to oil. The reason for this optimism was not difficult to fathom. Under the regional structure, the allocative principle of derivation had held sway. With this principle, regions were allocated revenues on the basis of the size of their contributions to the federation account. It was on this basis that the dominant ethnic group in each region had cornered the regional cash crop revenue base; and marginalised the minorities. Thus, when new states (the equivalent of regions) were created in 1967, the oil minorities expected that based on the principle of derivation, they too would control the bulk of oil revenues. Rather, the opposite happened as the derivation principle was increasingly reduced until it reached an insignificant 3 per cent in the 1980s. After Nigeria's return to democratic rule and as a result of the MOSOP campaign and the agitation by other groups in the Niger Delta, the derivation principle was raised to 13 per cent.

However, the struggle for resource control assumed a new dimension when the oil producing states of the Niger Delta sought access to revenues from offshore oil production that had been the exclusive preserve of the federal government.

It was in the context of economic crisis, impoverishment, shrinking oil revenues, state authoritarianism, and an international environment broadly supportive of minority rights that the youth re-emerged as a catalytic force from within the social movements of the oil minorities, to struggle for the control of resources in the Niger Delta.

Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was the logical outcome of Ogoni nationalism, particularly its quest for self-determination within the Nigerian nation-state. The Ogoni Central Union (OCU) had acted as a kind of rallying point for the Ogoni since the 1950s. In the 1980s, particularly due to the activities of the Ogoni elite and the need to strengthen Ogoni nationalism, MOSOP was born between 1990 and 1991. The Ogoni people had in 1990 listed their demands based on wide consultations with all sections of the community and endorsed by the traditional rulers, chiefs and organizations, in the Ogoni Bill Of Rights (OBR), which was presented to the Federal (Military) Government of Nigeria. This was not replied by the government, prompting MOSOP to send an addendum to the OBR to the government in 1991. When this too was ignored, the MOSOP campaign went global (Obi 1999a, 2001b). It was in the setting up of MOSOP and the pursuit of its goals, that the youth emerged as a distinct force. They were made up of high school students, university students, women, the unemployed, graduates, professionals and others who were below the age of those considered elders. They were organized under the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), which was affiliated to MOSOP.

While it could be argued that the idea of MOSOP was broadly defined by the Ogoni elite, and approved by the elders, who also provided the leadership of the organization, most of the actual grassroots mobilization was done by Ogoni youth (Obi 2001a: 75; 2002b):

They were the ones who welded the OBR onto local discourses and dialects, winning the villagers over and heightening their faith in the possibility of realizing Ogoni national autonomy and control of oil.

The youth thus represented a new force, representative (but not definitive), of a generational shift in power and a seeming decline in the moral authority and influence of elders and gerontocrats. Most of the youth played critical roles in

spreading the ideology of resource control as a cardinal point of social transformation in the Niger Delta. Its essential message was the need to stand up and fight, reject apathy, and work together for the common cause of freedom from internal colonisation by the hegemonic ethnic groups that controlled federal power and expropriated Ogoni resources.

The National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP) (and the National Union of Ogoni Students, NUOS) the representative body of Ogoni youth emerged as a critical rallying point in MOSOP's struggles. NYCOP became the activist wing of MOSOP, the foot soldiers that organized and led the various acts of protest and local resistance, and worked towards providing support for a radical leadership that would be more amenable to pursuing an emancipatory agenda. At the same time, the youth were a potent restraining force against the excesses, opportunism and greed of some of the elders and the colluding elite (Obi 2001a: 76).

One of the points at which the nature of Youth-Elders relations can be gleaned is in the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR), and the Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights. The OBR was debated at all levels of Ogoni society and adopted by the general acclaim of Ogoni People on 26 August 1990. Furthermore, the kings and elders/elite of the various Ogoni Kingdoms signed the Bill before being presented to the federal government. The main demand of the OBR was:

That the Ogoni people be granted POLITICAL AUTONOMY to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit.

It asserts that its demands were based on its rights as equal members of the Nigerian federation who 'contribute and have contributed to the growth of the Federation and have a right to expect full returns from that federation'. Equality was therefore a claim hinged upon Nigerian citizenship. The quest for political autonomy was among others to guarantee for the Ogoni:

The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development.

The foregoing concerns were reintegrated in the Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1991), which also sought to draw the attention of the international community to the plight of the Ogoni.

Within the Ogoni locality, the youth and the elders collaborated closely on the 'MOSOP project'. It was however possible to glean that the youth, particularly those at the grassroots were suspicious of the elders and those they regarded as the Ogoni colluding elite – that sided with the federal government and the oil multinational, Shell to betray their own people. Thus, the youth were not

only mobilising the Ogoni people along the lines of a popular emancipatory agenda, but also acted as watchdogs of the Ogoni elders. This position was fuelled by the belief, that the little concessions or crumbs that fell from the table of the state-oil multinational alliance either in the form of lucrative contracts, juicy public appointments and compensation money, usually ended up in the pockets of the elders/elite, while the future of the youth was mortgaged. This fuelled frustration, anger and impatience among the youth, who then sought to popularise the struggle by building an alternative locus of power at the grass-roots. Part of the paraphernalia of alternate power included a formal Ogoni constitution, an Ogoni anthem and an Ogoni flag – all symbols of nationhood. For the very first time in Ogoni history, the people had been given an alternative popular voice to assert their dignity as Ogoni, and claim their entitlements from the Nigerian state and oil multinationals. The Ogoni politics of local resistance was thus driven largely by youth power. What they sought for was the transformation of the power relations in the Niger Delta in ways that would transfer power over oil from the state-oil multinational alliance and their local clients, to the people, who would then have access to their oil wealth, and participate in it deciding how it would be used to develop their society.

It was in the light of the preceding that the radical leadership of the Ogoni Youth – NYCOP, with the support of elites aligned to the charismatic writer and Ogoni rights campaigner, Ken Saro-Wiwa, at the peak of the Ogoni struggle in 1993 decided to purge the leadership of MOSOP of those it considered to be traitors – the conservative (pro-federal) elders or moderate elite. These, elders/moderates were themselves afraid that MOSOP was moving too fast and raising the hopes of the people to unrealistic levels (Obi 2001a: 76). In other words, these elders sought to resist what they saw as a generational shift in power that would leave them powerless and irrelevant. They complained that Saro-Wiwa and his NYCOP supporters were (unrealistically) promising the people victory in the struggle based on the ideology of ERECTISM – Ethnic Autonomy, Resource and Environmental Control, and the international legitimacy and support for the Ogoni struggle. Thereby raising the expectations of the people that victory for the Ogoni (MOSOP) cause would free them from poverty and pollution and bring them lots of oil wealth. It was also alleged that Saro-Wiwa was using the youth to pursue his personal agenda for power. Thus, the generational critique of the power of elders in MOSOP by the youth, merged with the struggles for power among the Ogoni elite, and fuelled fractionalisation within the organisation.

Thus, during the Political Transition Programme of General Babangida designed to transfer power to democratically elected civilians, MOSOP was di-

vided over whether the Ogoni should participate in the 1993 Presidential elections. While the elders/moderates wanted to participate in the elections, the 'radicals' rejected any participation, saying such an action would imply conferring legitimacy on the federal (illegal) military government, which did not represent Ogoni interests. Although Ken Saro-Wiwa was in detention when MOSOP voted on the matter, his NYCOP supporters ensured that those in favour of the boycott won. Thus concretely underscoring the generational shift in the balance of power in favour of the youth and the elite faction allied to them. This alarmed the conservative forces that branded the NYCOP as Saro-Wiwa's private army and a weapon for intimidating his enemies (Orage 1998), and they resigned from the MOSOP executive in protest. Those who resigned were Dr. Garrick Leton, MOSOP President, Chief Edward Kobani MOSOP Vice President, Albert Badey, Dr. Kenneth Birabi and Chief Orage, who were elders/elite and had held, were holding, or aspired to hold top positions in the public service or political office at the local state or federal levels.

With this generational shift in power in MOSOP, came a zero-sum factional squabble within MOSOP, with the conservatives/moderate elite labelled as 'vultures' or 'sell outs' and the youth militants who clearly controlled power at the grassroots voting Ken Saro-Wiwa, the new President of MOSOP. Denied of grassroots support, and with their legitimacy and traditional basis of authority deeply undermined, the elders/conservatives became desperate and an inevitable clash became imminent. It was in this atmosphere of anger, suspicious and popular power that four conservative Ogoni chiefs/elders (Ogoni 4) were murdered by a mob in Giokoo on 21 May 1994. This set the stage for the backlash from the Nigerian State. The militarised Nigerian State was intent on teaching the forces of Ogoni national resistance a lesson so that the MOSOP uprising did not have a domino effect on other oil producing communities in the Niger Delta and directly subvert federal and multinational interests. There were also concerns within the federal security and military establishment that MOSOP resistance was clearly assuming secessionary dimensions (reminiscent of Adaka Boro's revolution), and that if this was not checked and severely dealt with, it could pose a grave danger to Nigeria's strategic oil interests as well as the territorial integrity of the country itself. In the months that followed a military siege was imposed on Ogoni land. MOSOP activists, NYCOP militants as well as the ordinary Ogoni bore the full brunt of military occupation and State repression. Ken Saro-Wiwa and the leadership of MOSOP were charged under the Civil Disturbances (Special Tribunal) Decree No. 2 of 1987 for inciting the murder of the Chiefs. After a widely condemned trial by the Ogoni Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal, and world wide pleas for their release that were

ignored, nine MOSOP leaders (Ogoni 9), including Ken Saro-Wiwa were hanged on the orders of the General Sanni Abacha-led federal military government.

After the literal beheading of the MOSOP 'revolution', NYCOP cadres were targetted by the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force, which was specifically set up by the government to repress the Ogoni, and set an example to other oil communities seeking to wrest resource control from the state and Shell. Many NYCOP officials were gaoled, went underground or into exile. Twenty Ogoni, mostly youths were arrested and detained on charges of complicity in the murder of the Ogoni 4. In spite of a High court ruling granting 15 of the youth bail, they were not released, and continued to suffer from torture and diseases in the congested cells of a Port Harcourt prison. MOSOP waged a major local and international campaign to prevent the Ogoni 20 from suffering the same fate as the Ogoni 9, and to ensure that they had a fair trial that would prove their innocence, and lead to their release. Those MOSOP members remaining behind kept the flames of Ogoni resistance alive, but paid a heavy price for it. The struggle then went global, with the Ogoni movement in exile (US, Canada and Europe) lobbying for international support to put pressure on the federal government and Shell to release the Ogoni 20, and respect the rights of the Ogoni (Obi 2001b, Carr, Douglas and Onyeagucha 2000, Douglas and Ola 1999). Apart from the efforts of the human and environmental rights community in Nigeria, the international campaign to save the Ogoni 20 involved organizations such as Amnesty International, Sierra Club, Project Underground, Essential Action, Bodyshop, Society of Threatened People, the World Council of Churches, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations, Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch, among others. However, it was not until the death of General Abacha in June 1998, and the takeover of power by General Abdulsalami Abubakar that the Ogoni 20 was released from prison.

What the struggle of the Ogoni does show is that the generational dimension, particularly the role of the radicalised youth was critical to the popularisation of the Ogoni movement, and the way it engaged the Nigerian state, and internationalised Ogoni resistance in the 1990s. It also shows how the targeting of militant youth by security forces leading to their arrest, detention, or exile served to reverse the Ogoni revolution. But it did not altogether extinguish the flame of Ogoni resistance. Even now, the Ogoni youth are a critical element in the struggle for resource control, human and environmental rights in the Niger Delta. It should be noted that although MOSOP as a social force has been weakened by the fractional squabbles that followed the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa, it has continued to agitate for Ogoni rights. MOSOP's struggles today are largely non-violent and low-keyed, but they should not be seen in

anyway as the abdication by the Ogoni youth of their role as the vanguard of the struggle for resource control.

Ijaw Youth Council

The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) is a youth-led movement that emerged in the Ijaw ethnic minority area of the Niger Delta. The Ijaw are the largest ethnic minority group in the oil-rich region, and can be found in all the states in the Niger Delta region. They also claim to be the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Thus, the reach of the IYC is pan-Delta in scope. It was in part inspired by the heroic exploits of the Isaac Boro-led Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and Saro-Wiwa's Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) to contest federal-state and oil-multinational control of the environmental space in the Niger Delta.

Unlike in the case of MOSOP to which NYCOP was affiliated, the IYC is autonomous, even if every Ijaw belongs to their mainstream organization – the Ijaw National Congress (INC) that was founded in 1991. According to an environmental activist and IYC member, Dofie Ola, they decided to create an autonomous space for their struggle for power as the INC, led by the elite, elders, contractors, businessmen and government officials, could not be used to achieve radical aims (Ola 2002b). He also pointed out that the youth were of the opinion that respect (of the elders) had to be earned through support for radical transformation of the power relations in the Niger Delta. It is against this background that the IYC has been broadly critical of the INC, even if they work together on matters of mutual interest. But, this has not prevented the IYC on some occasions from rejecting agreements made by the INC on behalf of the Ijaw people, with the federal government. This comes out clearly in the refusal of the IYC to heed the advice of a faction of the INC on postponing 'Operation Climate Change' a mass action directed at expelling oil multinationals operating on Ijaw soil. In another sense, it also found expression in the refusal of some Ijaw elders to recognize the IYC Kaiama Declaration, which sought to assert Ijaw control of the oil (and land) within its 'territory' in the Niger Delta.

The IYC came into existence on 11 December 1998, at Kaiama, the birthplace of Isaac Adaka Boro, the hero of Ijaw resistance. It was the outcome of a meeting of 5,000 youth, and 25 representative organizations drawn from 40 Ijaw clans across the Niger Delta. The youths drew up the Kaiama Declaration in a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting. Significantly the IYC resolved in the Kaiama Declaration that:

All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis for our survival.

Furthermore, they refused to recognize 'all undemocratic decrees' that robbed the Ijaw of 'the right ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent'. It is however important, that the youths 'agreed to remain in Nigeria, but to demand for self-government and resource control for Ijaw people'. In their opinion, the way forward for Nigeria lay in a federation of ethnic nationalities established on the basis of 'equality and social justice'. What the IYC was asking for was the radical re-definition of the Nigerian nation-state, based on the decentralization of power, as opposed to the present highly centralised structure. In terms of the struggle for resource control, the IYC was opposed to the ownership and control of Ijaw land and oil by the federal government and the oil companies, and sought for (like Boro) the Ijaw control of the land and oil (Douglas and Ola 1999:337; Ola 2002a).

Shortly after the Kaiama Declaration, the IYC launched 'Operation Climate Change', in which it ordered all the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta to quit the region, until the issues of resource control raised in the Declaration were resolved in favour of the Ijaw people. The ultimatum given to the oil companies by the IYC expired on 30 December 1998, without the oil companies budging. Rather a state of emergency was declared in the Niger Delta, and the entire region was flooded with federal troops and contingents of the Nigerian Navy. In the weeks that followed, many Ijaw youth were arrested, others shot during demonstrations in support of the Kaiama declaration (Obi 2001a, Ukeje 2001a: 29).

More recently, some militant Ijaw Youth groups have engaged the Nigerian military in guerrilla-like operations, partly emboldened by their belief in the Ijaw god of war and justice - Egbesu. The Egbesu metaphor to which IYC members subscribed, adopted a militant and confrontational approach to the Ijaw struggle for resource control and the restructuring of the Nigerian federation. Since December 1998, the Ijaw youth movement has been engaged in propagating the ideology of radical Ijaw nationalism and confronting the state and oil multinationals. The repression of youth movements in the Niger Delta has been well documented, and will not detain us any longer (Human Rights Watch 1995, 1999, 2002; Esparza and Wilson 1999). It is also important to note that although the youth constitute the arrowhead of the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta, they have now largely been co-opted into an alliance with the politi-

cal class of the region, in particular the governors of the states. Most significant in these alliances are those involving the governors of Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom states, whose governors have been most vocal in the campaign for resource control.

What flows from the foregoing is that the power relations between and within the generations in the Niger Delta is undergoing transformation, with direct implications for ethnic minority movements and the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta. As noted elsewhere (Obi 2001a):

In a region where respect for age and seniority has from earliest times been an important aspect of indigenous culture and tradition, the ascendancy of youth power does not merely interrogate the basis of traditional power, authority and control, it feeds into the existing revolutionary tensions and pressures from below ravaging the Niger Delta.

Yet, the anger of the youth though understandable, is not altogether undifferentiated considering the various strata of youth concerned. There are the youth with education – university degrees, polytechnic and high school diplomas that though literate and well educated are unemployed. And there are those with little or no education who cannot farm either because land is scarce or polluted, or cannot fish because fishing equipment is too costly or fishing grounds have been polluted, or have been drawn into networks of ‘benefit capture’ which involves seeking payoffs from oil companies, the state and local notables. The emergent elite youth with the international connections seem to be able to project the struggle for resource control internationally, while engaging in the national debate for minority rights and the restructuring of the Nigerian federation through a Sovereign National Conference of ethnic nationalities, but the grassroots youth, lacking such connections grow angrier and more desperate. Thus, the youth movement is itself riven by divisions along the lines of the personality of those contesting its leadership, communal identity, historic specificities, strategy and tactics, and class. While some of the youth are more amenable to the use of non-violent means in pursuing the struggle for resource control, others seek the use of violent means. The argument of the latter is that the only language that the oil companies and the federal government understand is force, and that with the wasting nature of oil wealth, time is not on their side. This position has been further reinforced by the militarisation of the Niger Delta during the long years of military rule and the proliferation of small arms in the region.

The construction of youth identity is therefore not entirely non-problematic. Indeed, there are instances when the intersection of youth and class, lead some

youth to work against popular interests, or others in which youths with a 'double-identity' i.e. those who may be chiefs, or state officials, carry out unpopular activities. At the same time, you do have some progressive elders and chiefs who side with popular interests and work for the campaign for resource control in the Niger Delta (Ola 2002b).

More recently, the activities of violent youth operating through ethnic militia, or criminal gangs leading to bloodshed, destruction and insecurity in the Niger Delta has dominated discussions among policy makers, corporate actors, civil society groups and scholars in Nigeria and beyond. As noted elsewhere, the conflicts that rage across the Niger Delta communities is often over land, power and oil company payoffs. Of particular concern are the violent conflicts over contesting claims to the ownership of city and local governments of Warri, involving youth militia from the Ijaw, Urhobo and Iteskiri ethnic groups (Human Rights Watch 2002, 2003; Imobighe, Bassey and Asuni 2002). Accordingly, the Warri war has forced the oil companies to suspend oil production on several occasions leading to an estimated loss to Nigeria of \$1,167,125.00 (Igbikiowubo 2003).

Apart from ethnic conflicts involving neighbouring communities and usually fuelled by conflicting claims to land, there is also the issue of illegal oil bunkering, in which crude oil is stolen by well armed gangs and smuggled out of the country. The gangs are reportedly made up of youth with links to powerful individuals in the community, military or the State. According to the Nigerian Defence Minister, Dr Rabiu Kwankwaso, the country had recently lost the equivalent of \$2 billion dollars as a result of the illegal activities of youth (Ikhurionan 2004). The implication of youth in violence in the Niger Delta is the culmination of several factors that include alienation, repression, poverty, militarisation of the region, the corruptive activities of oil multinationals and the proliferation of small arms.

It must however be noted that only a minority of the Niger Delta youth is involved in criminal activity and the kidnapping of oil company expatriate workers. In most cases these youth are armed by local politicians or state officials, and receive payoffs from oil companies that are used in buying arms in the context where violence is a mode of survival and production. In a context of poverty, unemployment, alienation and anger, some youths are lured in networks of violence as foot soldiers. This implication of youth in criminal activity is often either overstated or taken out of context by those who seek to blame then for the spiralling violence and insecurity in the Niger Delta, but the real issues lie deep in the political and economic inequities in the region.

The gender dimension to the on-going struggles should not be downplayed. Women have played an important role in the struggles in the Niger delta (Obi 2003a). It should however be noted that youth activism, potent as it is, tends to deny women high visibility in the mainstream youth movements, even if women bear the brunt of state repression in the Niger Delta (Yowika 1999). Yet, women organizations in the Niger Delta are themselves potent, even though they tend to play more of the 'second fiddle' role in the struggles for resource control, and are rather 'episodic' in terms of openly leading protest against the exploitation by oil multinationals and marginalisation by the state.

In the final analysis, class, culture and ethnicity intersect and mediate the generational dimensions to the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta. What comes out boldly is that youth activism is not so much a symptom of an inter-generational conflict, rather it is an indication of youth engagement in a generational critique of the dominant power relations in society in which the elders claim the control of power. For the radicalised youth, the power of the elders is not relevant if they cannot use it to liberate the people and reclaim the ownership and control of the resources of the Niger Delta for their benefit. It is even worse when such elders collude with the forces of 'internal colonialism' to expropriate their own people, thereby leaving the youth with no option than to lead the struggle for the restructuring of the power relations in the Niger Delta. It is within this socio-generational critique that the struggle for resource control is being reframed and waged in the Niger Delta.

External linkages to the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta

The external linkages to the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta exist at the two opposing levels: those of expropriation and resistance. They are also implicated at the levels of production, accumulation and distribution. It is the interaction between these levels that propels and sustains the struggles in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta is crucial to the international political economy of oil. Considering that oil is the most viable source of energy for modern capitalism, it is both strategic to the energy calculations of the highly industrialised countries, as well as the profit motives of the sophisticated oil multinationals. In this regard, the Niger Delta 'is transformed via capitalist (oil) relations into a local site for global accumulation in Nigeria. MNOC's are deeply immersed in the control of resources and the environment with implications for political, economic and social life' (Obi 2001b: 175).

From the preceding, it is clear that global oil capital is domesticated in the Niger Delta, and is directly part of the hegemonic bloc in the dominant social relations in the region in its quest for the monopoly control of oil. This means that the Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs) through their sophisticated technology, and control of the actual extraction of oil, directly alienate and dispossess the local oil rich communities, and are therefore the direct target of community protests and anger. By virtue of their control of the technology of oil production, the oil companies have a critical leverage of its partners' – the federal government that 'owns' the oil. In this regard, federal ownership of oil provides unimpeded access to oil by the oil multinationals, and gives them indirect control of the resource through their monopoly of the technology that produces the oil. In the Nigerian case, the oil multinationals prefer a centralised nation-state project that guarantees direct access to oil on relatively 'soft terms'.

It is important to note the symbiotic relationship between the Nigerian State and the oil multinationals. This relationship is underscored by the concrete dependence of the Nigerian state on the MNOCs for its share of the rents from the oil produced from its 'territory'. At the same time, the MNOCs need the oil from Nigeria for their home markets, and the profit calculations of their shareholders who are also based in the West. Indeed, Shell, the second largest oil multinational in the world depends on Nigeria for about 14 per cent of its annual global oil production, just as Nigeria depends on Shell for 51 per cent of the country's total production (Obi 2001a: 88). This 'unequal' partnership in which the MNOCs clearly have a leverage over the Nigerian State was formalised through oil contracts, particularly, the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA).

According to the JVA, most oil companies and the Nigerian state had a 40:60 ratio for the sharing of oil profits after the operating company had deducted the costs. In the case of the Shell-NNPC JVA, the government (through NNPC) owns 55 per cent, with 10 per cent owned by Elf, five per cent by Agip and 30 per cent with Shell (Obi 1997:141). Since the Nigerian state is over 90 per cent dependent on oil (hence its being a petro-state) and it lacks control of oil technology and the sophisticated politics of the oil market, the real power over oil, that is resource control is in the physical sense exercised by the oil multinationals. While the federal state is far – thousands of kilometres away from the oil communities, the impoverished villagers in the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta do not feel its presence, what they see are the oil rigs, flow stations, gas flares and oil pipelines operated by oil companies. Hence, it is the visible agent of oil exploitation and expropriation – the oil companies that is first confronted by the people.

In the light of the foregoing, it is not difficult to understand why the role of the MNOCs in the Niger Delta is clearly interventionist, taking away resources, power and authority from local communities, and even the state. As shown elsewhere (Obi 2001b: 175):

As far as the struggles in the Niger Delta show, at the level of extraction and repression, transterritorial producers reinforce the power and authority of the state and those of local leaders and groups aligned to it.

Thus, the MNOCs backed by the Nigerian state have engaged in the repression of the social movements struggling for the control of oil in the Niger Delta (Human Rights Watch 1999, 2002). The scale of destruction, including the razing down of towns, arrests, beating, rape, murder and intimidation of inhabitants of the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta is well documented (Okonta and Douglas 2001; Human Rights Watch 1999, 2002; ERA 2002; Robinson 1996; Esparza and Wilson 1999; Obi 2002b).

From the generational perspective, the oil multinationals nurture a local network of collaborators across the generations. However due to their position in local accumulation and institutions of authority, the elders/elite are more favoured in terms of oil company patronage. They are the ones that get contracts, lucrative public appointments as well as compensation money paid to them 'on behalf' of their communities by the MNOCs. In reality the oil companies expect the elders/elite within their patronage networks to 'smoothen' the operations of the MNOCs, ferret out potential troublemakers and flashpoints of conflict, and put the company in the know of these. At the same time, oil company payoffs are also meant to divide the oil communities in two ways: by preventing the formation of a united local front against the companies, and breeding a culture of 'benefit capture' in which local communities are bogged down with struggling for company handouts, 'development projects', and compensation money. In some cases the communities even turn against each other, thus distracting them from joining broader pan-Delta struggles for resource control.

At another level, 'belligerent' local youth receive payoffs from the oil companies for providing 'protection' or 'security' for the oil companies and their installations. They also act as agent provocateurs in resistance movements in the Niger Delta, subverting them from within or attacking those opposed to their tactics of 'benefit capture'. It is not uncommon to see some renegade elements engaged in the kidnapping of oil company staff, particularly white expatriates, car jacking and other violent acts; which are then used by oil companies to tarnish the image of genuine resistance movements in the Niger Delta. Other

factions of the youth are victimised by the oil multinationals, either indirectly through oil company-backed state violence and repression, or directly through the non-employment of youth, or the destruction of the ecological basis of their livelihoods as a result of oil pollution.

Even though external agents reinforce the hegemonic and monopoly control of the resources of the Niger Delta, other fractions of the 'global' support the local forces seeking the decentralisation of power over the resources in the region. In this regard, the youth in the Nigeria have been able to access global centres of power, particularly the international/global civil society movement in empowering its local claims and struggles. The earliest success story in this regard was the MOSOP case (Obi 2001b: 184):

The insertion of the Ogoni cause into the global rights agenda from 1991 underscored the Ogoni people's success in waging one of the most sophisticated struggles against the excesses of the oil companies. MOSOP strengthened their case, and won the support of significant sections of the INGO community to the cause of local resistance.

Apart from INGOs, MOSOP lobbied foreign parliaments, statesmen and multi-lateral organizations such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth. It was the youth that did the legwork for the seeking of global partnerships in support of the struggle for local autonomy and resource control. Support came in the form of the provision of access to global platforms and media to communicate the local cause and claims, dissemination of information on the violation of rights by the state-oil alliance, grants for travel, campaigning, and support for resource centres, research and publicity. The ways in which local movements have gained support from global movements is well captured and would not delay us any further (Obi 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b; Carr, Douglas and Onyeagucha 2001). What is important to note, is that global civil society particularly those linked to human rights, environmental, minority or indigenous peoples rights, have acted as transterritorial partners to the youth in their quest for the social transformation of the Niger Delta. It is however important to note that since the fractional crises in MOSOP, the global support for local resistance and the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta has waned, but has not stopped altogether. There is however an increased trend towards developmentalism, in which international NGOs largely funded by oil multinationals (Obi 2003), and international agencies are partnering with local NGOs to fund community based projects in the Niger Delta. These projects are mainly designed to provide some small scale enterprises and training for communities in the Delta, eliminate the incentives for violence as 'a mode of

production', and hopefully discourage attacks on oil companies. It has even been argued that such projects are also framed by oil multinationals in the discourse of a new corporate social responsibility, which is in real terms a public relations exercise to refurbish their image that was badly battered by the MOSOP and other campaigns (Obi 2003b; Peddleton et al. 2003). The local NGOs involved in the community development projects often target Youth and Women's groups, but their efforts are often localised, uncoordinated and too few to have any serious impact on the Niger Delta crisis.

In the wake of the 9/11 tragedy in the US, there have been attempts, particularly in the US, to 'securitize' the Niger Delta as a vital source of US energy supplies and as a breeding ground for a potential terrorist threat as a result of 'mounting unrest by Ijaw militants' (Cesarz, Morrison and Cooke 2003:1). This has been framed in the new discourse on the link between African oil and US national security and the concerns of US oil multinationals to protect their vast investments in the Gulf of Guinea, also known as the New Gulf States (Wihbey and Shutz 2002; Krueger 2002; Knight 2003). It is instructive that in the article by Cesarz and others, they note that '...Ijaw youth leaders have become radicalized. They now consistently reject the authority and legitimacy of the federal government and operate outside of the effective control of Ijaw elders' (2003:2). In a quick rejoinder, Douglas and others counter their position by correctly asserting that 'we believe that this account is wrong headed on a number of accounts. It misdiagnoses the nature of the political crisis in the Niger Delta, fails to understand the political dynamics of the Ijaw and minority politics in general, and makes unsubstantiated comparisons with the likes of Aceh and Columbia' (Douglas, Von Kemedi, Okonta and Watts 2003).

There is no doubt that Cesarz and others' account of the threats from rising youth militancy the Niger Delta had some 'spin' clearly intended to seduce the policy and security establishment in the US. The struggle in the Niger Delta is not about terrorism, for indeed they are the victims of the ecological terror that the oil companies backed by the coercive apparatus of the State have unleashed on the region for over four decades. It is clear that the increased globalisation of the Niger Delta and its increased importance in global hegemonic and US national interest and security calculations shows in bold relief the external linkages to the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta and the formidable challenges that face its youth in their quest for survival, justice and equity, and a sustainable future.

Thus, the external linkages to the struggles for resource control in the Niger Delta simultaneously disempower and empower the opposing social forces. Without any doubt, this is partly explained by their respective positions in the

global accumulation and the social relations in the Niger Delta. Yet, it should be noted that, the forces of monopoly accumulation have the upper hand, even as the youth continue to tap into local and global idioms, movements and platforms to empower their interrogation of the hegemonic power relations in the Niger Delta.

Prospects of the struggles in the Niger Delta for the nation-state project in Nigeria

From the foregoing, several issues are clear. The struggles in the Niger Delta have a direct bearing on the survival of the Nigerian nation-state project (Obi 2002b). Yet, what confronts us is not a clear-cut inter-generational conflict as there is ample evidence that the two dominant generations elders/elite and youth work together, with strata within each of them adopting contradictory positions, that weaken arguments in favour of clear-cut generational boundaries.

The complexity that the intersection of generation and class casts upon the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta is therefore not difficult to fathom. It however complicates a close reading of the tides and ebbs of revolutionary pressures in Nigeria's most volatile oil-rich, but impoverished region. What cannot be denied is that the growing militancy of youth movements, in which some groups deploy the use of sophisticated firearms, and are shunning non-violent forms of negotiation, spell dire implications for the Nation-state project in Nigeria. It raises the real possibility that the struggle for resource control can spin out of control and plunge the entire region into turmoil. If such violent conflict explodes in the Niger Delta, and cuts off the oil supply to the Nigerian State, the hegemonic Nation-state project would simply suffocate, and collapse. Such an event would unleash a crisis of unimaginable proportions in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

At another level, the struggles in the Niger Delta are radically altering the nature of the 'national' ruling class. There a sense in which the base of the struggle for resource control is broadening beyond the Niger Delta to include the South (of Nigeria). This much can be gleaned from the court action of the eight littoral states that lost the legal case for their claim to offshore oil to the federal government at the Supreme Court in April 2002, and the repeated demands of the governors of the Southern states for resource control in their periodic meetings. Although the federal government has subsequently acceded to giving the littoral states a share of the proceeds from off shore oil, emerging trends do indicate a possibility of a southern solidarity front at the level of the 'national power elite', which would further widen the chasm between the north

and the south, and feed into the pressures for decentralisation and restructuring of the Nigerian federation.

It is also important to note that the federal government has offered some 'carrots' to the Niger Delta in response to their demand for resource control. This includes an increase in the allocative principle of derivation from 3 per cent to 13 per cent, the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and recent overtures to the states of the Niger Delta for a political settlement to the furore generated by the ruling of the Supreme Court granting the federal government control of all offshore oil revenues. In spite of all these, the federal government has not ceded an inch of its control of the oil revenue in the Niger Delta. Even when the federal government reaches a political settlement on what share of offshore oil revenue it would give the littoral states, it will still retain its power to collect all oil revenues on behalf of Nigeria. This will still stop short of the demands of the youth, who are not just demanding the ownership and control of (land and) oil, but are also asking that the benefits should directly go to the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta (Douglas 2001; Joel 2002).

In the final analysis, the struggles for resource control in the Nigeria Delta are instrumental to the quest for the decentralisation of the highly centralised nation-state project in Nigeria. By virtue of its political ecology, the minorities of the Niger Delta possess leverage for pushing its agenda because it hosts the 'golden goose that lays Nigeria's golden eggs'. As such, it can exert pressure on the hegemonic elite and its international allies by disrupting or blocking the flow of oil – the very lifeblood of the Nigerian state. It is this same calculation that underscores the determination of the Nigerian ruling class to do everything in its might to destroy resistance in the Niger Delta, deny them access to 'too much oil', lest it also unleashes a 'secessionary' spiral that could lead to a break-up of 'Nigeria'. In between, the middle ground for dialogue, bargain and compromise wears thin, as the opposing forces reinforce their positions.

Thus, the prospects of the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta for the nation-state project cannot be over emphasised. Indeed, the future of the Nigerian nation-state is inextricably tied to the outcome of the struggle for resource control in the oil-producing region. What the generational dimension does portray is the complex and underlying features that define the social content and nature of the interrogation of the hegemonic project of the Nigerian state in the oil minority region of the Niger Delta. Since 2003, the trends in the youth-led struggles for resource control have shown two tendencies: the cooptation of youth activism and activists by the governors of some oil producing states, and growing militancy among some groups. Between 2003 and 2004, a

youth-led militant group, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Asari Dokubo, a former university undergraduate (and an ex-IYC leader) fought pitched battles with the Nigerian army forcing oil companies to suspend operations in the region. While Dokubo claims he is fighting for 'Ijaw autonomy' and control of 'our oil resources' (Quoted in IRIN 2004a, 2004b), the Nigerian authorities have sought to portray him as an opportunist and criminal engaged in stealing crude oil from pipelines in the region. In spite of this, the federal government did sign a peace agreement in the federal capital, Abuja, with the NDPVF in 2004, while Dokubo enjoys grassroots support in his part of the Niger Delta (Olukoya 2004).

In the light of the foregoing, it is important to note that except the generational factor is given a central consideration in the construction of a 'new' national bargain upon which the nation-state project would rest, Nigeria would risk further crisis and tension. Already the youth in the Niger Delta is moving the debate beyond resource control. In an interview with a Nigerian newspaper (Joel 2002:10), Oronto Douglas, one of the signatories to the IYC Kaiama Declaration and the Deputy Director of Environmental Rights Action (ERA), notes that the youth are transforming the struggle for resource control (apparently hijacked by elite/elders or local and state authorities) into one for 'communitisation'. According to Douglas, 'communitisation':

... is the final frontier in resource control advocacy and realization. It is based on community self sufficiency and control in all matters relating to our communities and its ultimate aim is the reclaiming of the mis-appropriated resources and its return to communal rebuilding and repositioning agenda for our people.

In this regard, the broad outlines of the future forms of struggle for resource control, its dynamics and the explosive element of 'youth power' in the Niger Delta, would continue to remain a central factor in the quest for the restructuring of the Nigerian nation-state. Returning to the broader context of youth and conflict in Africa, what the Niger Delta case does underscore is that the youth is a key player in African society, and therefore critical to the understanding of Africa's crises. By the same logic, they remain central to any project of social transformation, and indeed the future of the continent.

Conclusion

The implication of the youth in the generational struggles for resource control in the Niger Delta is likely to increase, and perhaps become more militant, as long as the contradictions between the nation and the Nigerian state continue to

thrive on the inequitable distribution of oil revenues, to the disadvantage of the people in the oil rich region. Material poverty, violence, zero-sum politics, and social crises in the region would continue to push the youth to the vanguard of the struggle for minority rights, self-determination and the restructuring of the Nigerian federation, as patience runs out and grievances grow in the oil-rich land.

There is no doubt that the challenges confronting the Niger Delta youth both at the local and global levels are formidable, but the real concern lies with how intimately tied the Niger Delta is to the Nigerian nation-state project (Obi 2002b). The fundamental issue lies in the democratization of power over oil in ways that ensure that real control resides in the hands of the people of the Niger Delta, based on a National Bargain or Social Contract that is relevant to their survival and development. This should take place alongside the guarantee of social justice and equal rights to them as Nigerian citizens. It should also ensure that the economic base of the Nigerian State is diversified away from its dependence on oil revenues and the global political economy of oil. Therefore, transformation will be based on the real restructuring of the Nigerian State, and a change in the ways of global oil capital, particularly how its forces ride roughshod over the people and oil-rich environments in third world countries. It is within such possibilities that the youth of the Niger Delta can survive and enjoy its rights, and find hope and faith in Nigeria. For invariably, Nigeria's existence, and indeed its future is inextricably linked to that of its youth.

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