

Youth Networks and Amnesty Politics in Nigeria's Oil Delta



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DEDICATION

To my mom whose love was without question and without conditions.

I don't yet fully understand what I have lost,

But in the little things I have come to take for granted,

I will see you, and miss you.

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List of Acronyms

Bayelsa Youths Federation (BYF)

Camp 5 (C5)

Chicoco Movement (CM)

Committee for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMAND)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Delta Oil Producing Communities Association (DOPCA)

Demobilisation Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR)

Egbema National Congress (ENC)

Environmental Rights Action (ERA)

Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN)

Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities (FNDIC)

Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities (FNDIC)

Foundation for Ethnic Harmony (FEHN)

Foundation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria (FEHN)

Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)

General Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU)

German Bitumen Company (GBC)

Gokana Stakeholders Forum (GSF)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Human Development Report (HDR)

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Human Rights Watch report (HRW)

Ijaw National Congress (INC)

Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC)

Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)

Ikwerre Youth Movement (IYM)

Isoko Community Oil Producing Forum (ICOPF)

Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM)

Joint Task Force (JTF)

Mano River Union (MRU)

Matyrs Brigade (MB)

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

Movement for the Survival of Izon Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND)

Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

National Archives in Enugu (NAE)

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)

Natural Resources Governance Institute (NRGI)

Niger Delta-HERO (ND-HERO)

NGO Coalition for Environment (NCOE)

Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (NDAP)

Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)

Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB)

Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)

Niger Delta Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST/ACT)

Niger Delta Freedom Fighters

Niger Delta Freedom Fighters (NDFF)

Niger Delta Peace Network Initiative (NDPNI)

Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)

Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)

Niger Delta Professionals (NDP)

Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDRBDA)

Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF)

Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV)

Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV)

Niger Delta Wetlands Centre (NDWC)

Niger Delta Women's Forum (NDWF)

Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development (NDWMPD)

Nigeria Environment Network (NEN)

Nigerian Coalition for Gas and Oil in the Niger Delta (NACGOND)

Nigerian National Oil Company (NNOC)
 Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)
 Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA)
 Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP)
 Non Governmental Organisation (NGO)
 Oil Watch Africa (OWA)
 Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)
 OX (Full meaning is unclear)
 Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
 (OSSREA)
 Our Niger Delta (OND)
 PANDRILLUS (PN)
 Private Security Companies (PSCs)
 Pro Natura International Nigeria (PNIN)
 Regional Development Councils (RDCs)
 River Ethiope Trust Foundation (RETF)
 Rivers Economic Development Forum (REDF)
 Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission (RTRC)
 Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST)
 Southern Minorities Forum (SMF)
 Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN)
 Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)
 Students of Oil Mineral Producing Area (SOMPA)
 Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA)
 Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA)
 The National Democratic Coalition (NADECO)
 Traditional Rulers of Oil Mineral Producing Communities of Nigeria (TROPCON)
 United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP)
 Urhobo Youth Movement (UYM)

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Abstract

This study provides an alternative explanation for the nature of politics in the Niger Delta by focussing on the forms and contents of relationships within youth networks. While not repudiating previous narratives around historical and contemporary grievances, the study argues that a lot can be learnt from interrogating how social codes like respectability and self organizational tactics like provisionality, shape, not just the nature of youth politics, but also the ways in which youth imagine themselves and their place in fluid and extractive contexts like the Niger Delta. The implication of focussing on issues such as these, the study argues, is that it becomes possible to tease out the critical, yet often ignored, micro-politics of social categories which ultimately frame the way actors articulate their macro level grievances and aspirations. This study is driven by three main research questions. First, what pathways facilitate youth engagement with politics in the Niger Delta? Second, how do Niger Delta youth imagine and organize themselves as actors navigating its dynamic oil political economy? And finally, how has the Amnesty which was declared in 2009 for youth insurgents changed the nature of relationships within youth networks and how has it impacted on their roles as actors in the Niger Delta? As a way of engaging with these questions, the study used the 2009 Amnesty as a historical marker to periodize state interventions in the region and also to illustrate the impact and limits that formal interventions have when seeking to shape the politics of social shifters like youth.

The study's main contributions include a rethinking of the notion of youth which asks for a conscious analytical disaggregation of politically active youth from the general pool of the young. This implies that the idea of youth is dependent on *acts of doing* rather than *of being*. The study also challenged the idea that youth is marginal and argues that even the fact of marginality can be a useful resource for navigating uncertain social contexts like the Niger Delta. Through its engagement with the changing notion of respectability as well as the innovative deployment of provisionality as an organizing strategy by youth, the study provides new ways of analyzing the Niger Delta that can move it away from a fixation on rational choice narratives of scarcity, greed or grievance. Finally, the study provides the first comprehensive mapping of youth networks in the Niger Delta and does so across three pathways, showing how these complex relationships shape and are also shaped by the broader political economy of oil. The study concludes by arguing for new questions to be asked about how the shifting forms and geographies of the Niger Delta's youth networks flow out to other areas of national and transnational life in ways that recognize the regions fluidity, uncertainty and permanence.

Introduction

Since at least the early 1990s, when public order began to unravel across many African states, the importance of youth as a distinct category of political actors has been increasingly acknowledged and studied (Abbink and Kessel 2004, Honwana and de Boeck 2005, Bay & Donham 2006, Reno 2011, Sommers 2015). The processes of violent social rupture and change analysed in these studies indicate the latent instability of the postcolonial state at the same time as they highlight the enduring nature of many of the multiple struggles that youth are confronted with as they try to navigate their social environments. They also show the remarkable adaptability of youth to rapid changes in the nature of the economic, social and political incentives they have to contend with.

While the dramatic explosions of violence like those in the Mano River Union (MRU) countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote D'ivoire got by far the most attention (Alao 1999, Zack-Williams 1999, Boas 2001, Utas 2003, Vigh 2006, Call 2010, Chelapi den Hammer 2010), and deservedly so, there is a broad spectrum between these cases and more benign incidents of youth protests like was seen during the 2011/12 *Yen'a Marre* and fuel subsidy protests in Senegal and Nigeria respectively (Croussouard & Dunne 2012, Iwilade 2013, Demarest 2015). Somewhere in between these near absolute and tragic breakdowns of social order in the MRU states and the largely peaceful protest movements of 2011/12, is a grey landscape of everyday violence and midlevel insurgencies which also take their toll on the livelihoods and futures of young people across the continent. In these everyday articulations of youth discontent, the impact of state weakness is perhaps less evident. Yet, it is perhaps by studying the perceived normality of these social landscapes that one may detect the fundamental weaknesses of the state (in spite of its pervasive tyranny) as well as the

remarkable agency articulated by its social actors in the exploitation of those weaknesses and in the infrastructures that they create to accomplish this.

The oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria provides such an opportunity to explore the innovative ways in which under privileged social actors derive meanings from uncertain times and spaces or to tease out the complex social networks and infrastructures they build in order to find these meanings. Researching the Niger Delta is, in many ways a difficult and perhaps even now, increasingly unpopular endeavour to embark upon. This not least because it is perhaps the most researched region of Nigeria in the last decade and original treatments of its complexities are becoming increasingly difficult to come by. Yet, for all its richness (or perhaps because of it), the Niger Delta literature remains a fertile space for social analysis.

There are various ways in which to review the body of work on the oil rich Delta and thus find out what has been left untreated so as to fill that gap. One way is to use history as an anchor and highlight the key questions that have captured the attention of scholars and popular writers alike within specific time frames (see Genova & Falola 2003). Another way would be to explore themes more broadly and analyse changes in the way specific themes have been framed by researchers (see Omeje 2006). A third approach is to do both simultaneously, constantly placing themes within historical contexts and highlighting the connections not just between different epochs, but also between different ways of thinking about issues in the region. While both the historical and the thematic approach can be useful in their own rights, a more comprehensive view of the region that can account for both the broad sweep of history as well as the sometimes very specific implications of oil extraction on social processes in the region requires the co-insertion of both approaches into one another. This is the approach that will be adopted here.

It appears that there are four main historical epochs around which the Delta has been studied. The first emerged in the 1950s when oil prospecting finally hit the mother lode in the town of Oloibiri in 1958. With commercial quantities of oil found, there was a lot of excitement about the potentials of this resource for transforming Nigeria into a modern industrialised state. Genova and Falola (2003: 136) described this period as filled with ‘optimism about the future of the oil industry’. The writings of early watchers of the Nigerian oil complex like Aluko and Ijere (1965), Jeffreys (1953) and Webb (1960) underline this optimism and indeed indicated that there appeared to have been a general consensus over expectations that the industry would profoundly improve Nigeria’s economy.

Optimism about the oil industry however contrasted sharply with what were then growing concerns about the power of multinational corporations whose capital and technical expertise dominated the domestic post-independence project. Even though the political class put the state at the very center of the post-independence modernisation project (see Awolowo 1981), both the body of literature that focussed on the nascent oil industry (as in the works of Dickie 1966 and Pearson 1970) and those that addressed modernisation more generally (Melson & Wolpe 1971, Hoogvelt 1979), appeared to doubt the Nigerian state’s ability to effectively regulate or control foreign capital. These concerns have survived into contemporary writings about the Niger Delta. From those who focus on irresponsible corporate practices of multinational oil companies (Turner 1976, Okonta 2008, Idemudia 2011, Okwechime 2011a, Emeseh & Ondotimi 2014) to those who question the role of market forces (Ifeka 2004, Harshe 2003, Zalik 2004) which distort local livelihoods; disquiet about the globalization of Nigeria’s oil industry continues to resonate among Niger Delta scholars. Cyril Obi (2009: 271) captures this concern about global capital when he noted that:

the role of oil multinationals as actors in the globalization of the Nigerian oil industry domesticates and connects them to the deepening social contradictions, inequities, tensions, conflicts, and repression in the Niger Delta. Being present in the villages and creeks where oil extraction is done, they bring the face of global presence and might—globalization—home in sharp relief to the people of the Niger Delta who are alienated by the hegemonic power relations underpinning transnational oil production.

This critique of the global oil industry and the way it expresses itself within the Niger Delta, fits fundamentally with corresponding worries about the capacity of the state to regulate it. This inevitably moved the Niger Delta literature away from its early optimistic position towards a somewhat more critical and cautious one. The political turmoil of the 1960s and the oil shock of the 1970s thus effectively triggered the second key epoch in the Delta literature in which analysts began to focus on the new fiscal dynamics introduced by ballooning state revenues as well as its implications for development planning. Interestingly, some of the optimism of the 1950s reappeared in the literature as oil producing states like Nigeria earned massive revenues from oil sales and embarked on huge infrastructure projects (Meyer & Pearson 1974, Madujibeya 1976). Madujibeya (1976: 285-91) in particular detailed what he termed the ‘contributions of the oil industry to Nigeria’ in various areas including employment, GDP, local consumer spending, energy supply, foreign exchange reserves and of course government revenue. This resurgent optimism was of course quickly overshadowed by deep scholarly concern for Nigeria’s political and economic direction when the oil bust hit from the early 1980s until 1990 (Frank 1984, Gelb 1988). The bulk of the post oil boom literature focussed increasingly on questions about corruption in the oil industry (Ugochukwu 1980), on the implications of a mono-cultural economy on agriculture and the peasantry (Badiru 1984, Watts 1987) and on the rapid changes observable in urban centers all across country (Ekekwe 1983, Salau 1984).

The dramatic bust and its impact on the post-independence modernisation project also encouraged important questions about the temporality of oil (Apter 2005). With notions of time and the future measured in the estimates of ‘proven reserves’, the combination of declining oil revenue and rapidly approaching timelines for the post oil era was an ominous sign for many observers of the Nigerian oil industry and led to calls for economic diversification (NES 1987). The diversification literature is in some ways, a critique of the limits of the oil economy, in spite of its huge potential, and a reflection of the apprehension of the disappearing middle class about threatened livelihoods (Inirodu 1995).

Many of these themes have remained relevant into the millennium as the contradictions of oil extraction deepened from the mid-1990s onwards, further distorting livelihoods (Pegg and Zabbey 2013), and ultimately generating social and identity conflict (Mustapha 2000, Owolabi & Okwechime 2007, Courson 2009, Obi & Rustad 2011). The 1990s marked the beginning of a very distinct phase of research on the Niger Delta. This phase was perhaps when the Delta literature really came into its own and became arguably the most researched region in Nigeria. It was also the period that the more familiar themes of environmental degradation, contentious politics, youth violence, dispossession and marginalization became established signifiers of not just how academics think about the Delta region but also of the important ways in which popular narratives now frame it.

A useful entry point to the post 1990s Niger Delta literature is the theme of environmental crisis and violence. There is hardly any study of the Delta, at least since the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa¹ in 1995 that does not engage somewhat with the

¹ Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged alongside eight others by the military government of General Sanni Abacha in November 1995 after being controversially tried and convicted of the murder of four Ogoni elders.

environmental crisis and its securitization in the region. The hazardous fall out of oil extraction, in particular the notion that this is largely a consequence of the irresponsibility of oil multinationals and a weak and corrupt state regulatory system, is central to how this crisis is framed (Okonmah 1997; Manby 1999; Okonta & Douglas 2003; Omeje 2006; Obi 2010; Okwechime 2011b; Oluduro 2012). Scholars like Rowell (1994), Watts (2003) and Zalik (2004) also place international capital and oil multinationals at the center of the environmental crisis and the way it generates conflict in the region. Others point to land degradation and loss and the way these issues intersect with ethnic identity systems in a bid to understand the broader social implications of environmental crisis (Ejobowah 2000; Nwajiaku 2005; Ukeje & Adebani 2008, Omotola 2009).

In an interesting departure from the highly contextualized notion of environmental crisis in the Delta, Cyril Obi (2000, 2009) draws attention to the transnational environmental discourses that shape the meanings that oil bearing communities give to environmental change in the region and points out the relations of power and dominance that impose specific versions on the Delta. While these works appeared in sometimes very different contexts, for instance some at the height of military rule and others during the somewhat more open public space of civil rule, they have all been driven, implicitly and/or explicitly by notions of scarcity created by 'resource capture' by elites.

This framework of understanding why the presence of oil drives violent conflict reflects in part, the works of scholars like Homer-Dixon (1994, 1999) in so far as it treats violence as essentially inspired by scarcity. Scarcity in this sense is not so much of resources, as oil is clearly abundant in the region, but rather, it refers to the lack of opportunity created by the distortions of local economies by oil exploitation and the

consequent violent competition for resources by increasingly beleaguered oil-bearing communities.

This way of thinking about violence in the Delta brings up echoes of Robert Kaplan's controversial but highly influential work, *The Coming Anarchy* (Kaplan 2001) where violence is framed as essentially driven by population growth and consequent pressures on scarce resources. A large swath of the Delta literature focuses on a corollary of this argument which is that the violence is a consequence of state repression of the legitimate resistance of oil-bearing communities to social, political and economic marginalization (Watts 2003; Ifeka 2004; Zalik 2004; Obi 2006). This argument blames the state and multinational oil companies for the violence. Underpinned by environmental security, this school focuses so much on the 'resource capture' logic and securitizes environmental crisis in the Delta to the point that it sometimes ignores the networks of relations that binds the state, multinationals and oil communities together and the way different actors can play multiple, even contradictory, roles in these complex relationships. The scant attention to these linkages is one reason many of the works that address the security-environment connection (Ebiede 2011, Umukoro 2012 Aworawo 2013) often fail to catch the interesting ways in which Delta communities use environmental rhetoric in the pursuit of other urgent concerns about democratic incorporation, identity formation and access to state resources (Iwilade 2012).

The expansion of the repressive reach of the state in the region from the early 1990s onwards, fundamentally increased scholarly attention and the bulk of the writings that appeared from that period were inevitably highly critical of the state and multinational oil companies. This intensified profoundly in the aftermath of the execution of the Ogoni Nine by the Abacha regime. Condemnations of the state and its violent response to legitimate social agitations in the region have thus been justifiably scathing. A good

part of the research agenda of the time also focused on the implications of a brutal state structure for ethnic self-determination (Ejobowah 2000; Obi 2001; Nwajiakwu 2005; Ukeje & Adebani 2008; Umejesi & Akpan 2013) and on the way the political economy of oil tends to deepen state's willingness to use repression in order to maintain its control (Osaghae 1995; Welch 1995; Obi 1997; Watts 2004). The literature often places the Nigerian state in an alliance with the multinational oil companies (Idemudia 2011) as well as conceptualizes this linkage in the context of the insertion of Nigeria into the global economy (Obi 2001; Fleshman 2002). From this apparent close relationship, regulatory weaknesses are considered responsible for oil companies' corporate social responsibility deficits (Ako, Okonmah, Emeseh & Obokoh 2010, Okwechime 2011). Another important strand of this discourse is the implication for human rights of an authoritarian state structure that seeks to guarantee unfettered access to oil resources irrespective of its impact on local communities or the environment (Harshe 2003, Okwechime 2009, Emeseh 2012).

By the mid-2000s, it became difficult to find new approaches to the study of the Niger Delta as the themes appeared fixed in place and the scarcity driven analysis pioneered by the works of Obi and co in the mid-1990s dominated the literature. Various iterations of environmental degradation, dispossession, marginalization, ethnicity and violence appeared, but the macro analytic framework was unmistakable. There was a clear focus on the macro environment and much of the micro-politics and everyday social navigations of individuals or small groups were lost. Equally unmistakable in the literature was the construction of sharp binaries which placed the Nigerian state and oil multinationals on one side and the oil bearing communities on the other. Obi (2001: 1) puts this poignantly when he argued that the fundamental contradiction threatening the Delta, is 'that between an oil rentier state immersed in a crisis of accumulation and

governance, and the growing effectiveness, and militancy of the oil minorities' movements'. While this contradiction does exist, by constructing analytical frameworks in which social movement between and among actors is hardly acknowledged and in which there is little chance of actors occupying somewhat middle spaces or simultaneously playing conflicting roles, it is sometimes inadequate to explain specific patterns of cross cutting relations.

Since the launching of the Presidential Amnesty in 2009, the beginning of a slight shift is visible in that the literature is increasingly focusing on post conflict and peacebuilding paradigms as a way of understanding the changes in the dynamic politics of the region (Ojeleye 2011, Ushie 2012, Obi 2013). Ojeleye (2011: 141) argues that the Amnesty program as currently constituted is an inadequate DDR project that doesn't go far enough in addressing the multifaceted problems facing the Niger Delta. This is the opinion of many others who, to varying degrees, question the long term prospects for peace in the region in spite of the massive infusion of funds and political attention since the Amnesty was launched in 2009 (Ushie 2012, Wapmuk 2012, Obi 2014). This recalibration of the Delta literature into the peacebuilding and DDR paradigms implies a corresponding reduction in the focus on the politics of oil extraction as well as the insertion of international peacebuilding discourses into the Niger Delta literature. This 'new' epistemology has however been a problematic postulation in the opinion of many scholars who have interrogated the neoliberal foundations of dominant peacebuilding paradigms and questioned its long term value. Obi's (2014: 251-2) critique highlights some of the key concerns about the dominant peacebuilding paradigm that is worth quoting at length here. According to him,

'peacebuilding is a composite of neo-liberal problem solving strategies – a form of praxis rather than a theory or concept' (Heathershaw 2008, 598–599). However, there have been long-standing contestations between liberal and radical

perspectives to peacebuilding. While liberal/institutional perspectives leverage multiparty Western-style democracy and free market economics as the foundations of a peaceful order and therefore a model for the non-liberal 'other', their radical critics are quick to point to the false assumptions, ideological and hegemonic designs that underpin the 'liberal peace'. However, between both perspectives lies a grey area in which various actors interact in complex ways and levels which defy neat categorisation, but tend to reproduce or undermine configurations of power upon which particular constructions of peacebuilding are based. A political economy of peacebuilding enables us to understand it as a site of competing political and economic interests, and contending relations of power in which hegemonic forces seek to define the character and outcome of the struggle for peace. Thus, peacebuilding activities are not neutral in their normative orientation (Newman, Paris & Richmond 2009, 12).

The idea that peacebuilding is itself a site of contestation opens up interesting ways of analyzing the 2009 Amnesty. For one, it encourages scholars to question the political motives behind the launching of the programme, looking beyond the declared Demobilisation Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) goals into the intricate patronage networks that stand to benefit from it. The specific details of the participation of young people also raises important questions about the extent of agency they have, particularly with growing evidence that many young people have been able to manipulate the project to gain entry and to accumulate capital (Nwajiakwu 2012, Iwilade 2013). There is also concern that for all its pretensions to being a homegrown project, the Amnesty may have actually deepened the participation of external interests in the region (Oluwaniyi 2011, Obi 2014). The increased roles of organisations like the Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), a UK based advocacy group in the region appears to bear out these concerns and justifies critics who insinuate that the core discourses around the amnesty are hardly locally owned (Wapmuk 2012).

As has been hinted at above, there seems to be two broad gaps in the Niger Delta literature. First is the general lack of attention to the micro-politics of individuals and groups within the region. Roland Millner (2011:155) notes that micro-political concepts assume that there are always 'scopes of action within organizational structures and that

the structuring of interactions within these scopes of action takes place less through formal rules than through various kinds of mechanisms'. With the focus on the broad sweeps of repressive politics, the Niger Delta literature has not fully explored the potential insights to be derived from studying important patterns of individual agency, motivations and local sub-cultures and thus struggles to adequately capture the 'action' or politics within social groups. Indeed, the dominance of the oil narrative, with its inevitably globalized perspective tends to constantly draw the Delta literature into a macro-political frame that glosses over many of the everyday interactions that shape the way young people experience oil extraction. The second gap is that large parts of the Niger Delta literature appear to ignore the fluid interactions between actors, formal institutions and informal structures of authority, and struggles to effectively explain how the same sets of actors can play contradictory roles depending on what the specific demands for social navigation are. To the extent that this approach assumes that social roles are fixed; the state always excluding, and communities always resisting exclusion, it tells a largely incomplete story of the Niger Delta region and of the role its key stakeholders play. Indeed, it offers little insight into how to conceptualize the role of social shifters like youth as clients in a postcolonial rentier state or into the specific nature of the vast array of social assets with which they are able to navigate what is undoubtedly a very difficult, uncertain and risky environment.

This study's focus on the everyday practices of young people within their social networks and its critical engagement with sociological motivations like respectability and the performance of violence inserts a much needed micro-political perspective to what is otherwise a very robust literature based primarily on the analysis of the impact of a globalized commodity on postcolonial states. By highlighting the intricate but nuanced interactions between young people and the localized yet globally aware

counter cultures that they form, this study moves the Niger Delta literature into the space of the everyday. With few exceptions particularly from anthropological research (see Fentiman 1996, Apter 2005, Ugor 2013), it is hard to find studies of the Niger Delta which focus on everyday informalities and which engage with the micro-politics of the many social categories and groups that circulate in the region. Where they exist, they often focus on areas outside of the core Niger Delta where the reach of the oil narrative is not as strong or compelling (see for instance Pratten 2008, Hellerman 2010, Adunbi 2013). It is perhaps understandable that macro-analytical frameworks that draw insights from studies like Homer-Dixon's (1999) scarcity driven conception of contentious politics and Collier and Hoeffler's (1998) ideas about the role of 'greed and grievance' in shaping the economics of violence have been dominant in the Niger Delta literature. After all, the centralizing narrative of oil which underpins much of historical and contemporary thinking on the Niger Delta is global both in its content as well as in its dynamics (Fleshman 2002, Obi 2010, Okwechime 2011b, Watts 2012). Yet, by talking to people on the ground, one gets the sense that the everyday micro-politics linked to the social navigation of profoundly uncertain urban economies is at least equally important if one seeks to build as complete a picture of the region as is possible. Indeed, this is perhaps even more important for the study of social categories like youth who are often in constant motion and who find their social anchors in the most unexpected places. This does not mean that the macro-political issues like dispossession, citizenship and oil extraction have become irrelevant. Rather, focusing on everyday navigation tactics and social agency helps illustrate the specific ways these macro issues reflect in the life choices of ordinary youth. In other words, the point is to build on insights from these earlier studies in order to highlight the important

contributions that everyday micro-politics makes to shaping the universe of the Delta's boisterous youth networks.

These boisterous networks are situated in a context that is profoundly fickle and in a constant state of flux. It is surprising then that the Niger Delta literature has hardly dealt with the very context of fluidity in which all of the macro-political issues that it has engaged with so well are played out. The complexity of network relations within the region, which will be demonstrated later in this study, and the constant shifts, disjunctures and rupturings that are observable in actors, alliances, causes and even values, highlight the need to demonstrate awareness of social change when engaging with the Delta. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case in the literature and is a key gap that this study intends to fill. Overall, this study positions itself at the early beginnings of a new era of Niger Delta scholarship in which the ordinary voice of everyday people is considered as important in understanding the region as the politics of giant multinational oil firms or of a predatory state.

In the light of the above, the main goal of this study is to analyse the micro-level politics of Niger Delta youth networks, drawing due attention to their articulations of agency which stand outside of but are not necessarily autonomous to the politics of oil extraction, and to show how the Amnesty declared for insurgents in 2009 has impacted on this politics.

In order to meet this goal, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What pathways facilitate youth engagement with politics in the Niger Delta?
2. How do Niger Delta youth networks emerge, imagine and organize themselves as actors within its dynamic oil political economy?

3. How has the amnesty changed (or not) the nature of relationships within these networks and how has it impacted on their roles as actors within the Niger Delta?

The goal and questions above indicate that the study essentially explores questions around the social navigation of youth as an autonomous yet embedded actor in the oil driven politics of Nigeria's Niger Delta. It interrogates the innovative ways in which the social networks they build, or, in Certeau's (1984: xiv) words, the 'popular procedures' through which they manipulate the mechanisms of discipline, contribute to their self-making and their ability to navigate a complex environment.

The study uses the Presidential Amnesty Programme declared in 2009 as a historical marker with which to investigate how formal structures of patronage and clientilism can have unexpected impacts on informal spaces set up to facilitate the social adulthood of youth as well as to undermine the reach of the state. With regard to how this is articulated in the context of the Niger Delta's oil politics, the study focusses on identifying and analysing the types of networks dominant in the social landscape of youth, the way these are governed and the nature of changes that can be discerned within them since the Amnesty was introduced. By focussing on the social infrastructure that animates youth engagement with the often violent politics of the region, this study moves the otherwise robust Niger Delta literature away from the already well articulated questions surrounding why there seems to be so much discontent and instability and why oil features so prominently in the Delta's social universe. This new shift focusses instead on the implications of sociological motivations like respectability for the social infrastructures of violence through which

youth respond to the multiple cues of the Delta's oil economy and what these 'intangible' factors mean for the way these networks are governed.

In order to do the above, this dissertation is divided into two parts made up of six interconnected chapters. The first part, set out in three chapters, details the broad context on which the study is set. The first chapter explores the evolution of Nigeria's oil industry and its emergence as the central question in the country's political economy. It also highlights the governance deficits that have combined to undermine transparency in the Nigerian oil industry and ultimately generate the intense discontent that is apparent across the Delta. This discontent is met by a multifaceted state response. Some of these responses are highly violent, as the literature on state repression in the Delta region has established (Zalik 2004, Omotola 2009, Ukiwo 2011) but others have sought to co-opt restive communities through the creation of specialised ad-hoc agencies that are often little more than elaborate patronage rings. The chapter explores the long history of such interventions and ultimately leads up to the 2009 Presidential Amnesty which is by far the largest and the one most embedded within patronage logics of the Niger Delta interventions to date. The chapter also includes an analysis of the important place of youth gangs and their networks and draws on the example of Rivers State, especially urban Port Harcourt, in the years just before and after the 2003 general election.

Having provided a historical overview of the social universe in which Niger Delta youth networks emerged, the next chapter situates the study in its theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The chapter constructs a theoretical framework for thinking about youth politics in the Delta which has as its entry points permanence, social uncertainty and social navigation. The chapter then moves on to operationalize the three central concepts which run through the dissertation. These three concepts are informality,

social networks and youth. Discussing each of them extensively, the sections highlight the way they are used in the dissertation and, in the case of youth in particular, indicates new ways in which scholars may conceptualize the category when analyzing them in violent and uncertain contexts such as the Niger Delta. Finally, this chapter sets out the key methodological questions faced in the study and highlights the choices made and the ways in which they help meet the research goals.

The third chapter moves into more substantive spaces by identifying and analyzing the pathways through which Delta youth had accessed the system of patronage, politics and resistance in the years before Amnesty was declared in 2009. It constructs network maps along Non Governmental Organisation (NGO), youth gang and ethnic militia pathways in order to highlight the extent of social mobilization that existed among youth actors in the Pre-amnesty years as well as the way they appeared to move fluidly between and among the pathways. This chapter is designed to provide an initial pre-Amnesty assessment on which the impact of the Amnesty on youth networks could later be determined and thus answer the first of the research questions, which is about what pathways facilitate youth engagement with politics in the Niger Delta.

The second part of the study answers the other two research questions. It explores questions around how the networks built in the oil context analysed in the first three chapters emerge and are governed, how youth imaginaries of respectability contribute to this process and what impact the 2009 Amnesty has had on all of these. Drawing extensively from interview data, it starts with chapter four which provides an alternative explanation to how youth networks emerge in the Delta. The chapter notes that the literature has done much to identify and analyse the role that identities like ethnicity play in building youth networks or generating social movements, especially with regard to communities like the Ogoni and Ijaw people (Ibeanu 1997, Mustapha 2000,

Nwajiakwu 2005). Yet, evidence gathered in the course of this study indicate that networks of contingency are a crucial mobilizing and organizing tool among Delta youth and there is no evidence that this has been explored by the Delta literature. In many ways, contingent networks also fit within the framework of fluidity and social navigation with which this study is analysed. In this regard therefore, the chapter focusses on contingent networks as a representative typology of the different types of conflict networks used by youth to navigate the Delta's difficult terrain.

The next chapter moves beyond typologies of conflict networks to examine how imaginations of what respectability means contributes to the internal governance of the youth organisations in the region. To do this, the chapter uses fieldwork data from various sites in the oil producing states of Rivers and Bayelsa to explore how respectability is itself a site of politics and contestation, how it is articulated in conspicuous consumption and how its meaning changes in response to situational cues. The chapter highlights another critical yet under researched element of youth mobilization in the Niger Delta and provides insight into one of the most powerful organizational and self-framing tools within youth networks.

In the light of the above, the final substantive chapter answers the final research question by looking at how much the 2009 Amnesty has impacted on the network structures and actors described in preceeding chapters. All the chapters include elements of discussions of the impact of the Amnesty on the specific issue being focused on, so what this final chapter does is to focus on how specific policy decisions in the Amnesty has impacted on youth networks. It draws attention to new patterns of social organization that are emerging among the youth pathways in the region and what these may mean for political mobilization and post Amnesty stability in the region. The final section concludes by providing a summary of the main arguments made across the

chapters, highlighting the main contributions of the study to the Niger Delta literature as well as the broader literature on the framing of youth and their politics. It also draws attention to the theoretical insights that can be gleaned from the broad range of empirical data used in the study and what they mean for how we think of postcolonial extractive contexts such as the Niger Delta.

PART ONE

Chapter One

FROM THE MINING REGULATION (OIL) ORDINANCE TO THE PRESIDENTIAL AMNESTY: A CENTURY OF HISTORY, ACTORS AND CRISES IN THE OIL RICH NIGER DELTA

1.1: Setting the context

In order to meet the goals of this study, it is important to take a long historical look at the politics of permanent crisis, oil extraction and governance which underpins much of what we know of the Niger Delta region. Analysing the long duree of global energy history, Michael Watts (2003: 5089) makes the poignant point that ‘the annals of oil are an uninterrupted chronicle of naked aggression, genocide and the violent law of the corporate frontier’. While this damning assessment may not reflect the reality of states like Norway who seem to have largely escaped the resource curse (Belkina & Sarkova 2014), it is borne out in many ways in the oil rich but volatile Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Far from being a resource for development, oil appears to have become a violent force that has blighted the environment, society and politics of the region, as well as Nigeria more broadly (Okonta 2002, Obi 2006, Iwilade 2012).

In the time between the Mining Regulation (Oil) Ordinance of Southern Nigeria enacted in 1907, the Colonial Minerals Ordinance No 17 of 1914, and the launching of the Presidential Amnesty Programme in 2009, the Niger Delta became both a source of hope as well as a symbol of much of what is wrong with the rentier post-colony. This paradox is articulated in multiple ways across the Niger Delta and highlights the complexity of a region whose constant upheavals signpost the failures of the state and the implications these failures can have for the most vulnerable social categories residing within its borders. From the paradox of wealth and poverty (Imobigbe 2011), to that of a shared sense of deprivation nestling in often violent inter/intra-ethnic

tensions (Welch 1995, Ukeje 2001a, Nwajiaku 2005) and of the difference between state and community conceptions of security (Ibeanu 2002), the region has had the worst that the political economy of oil extraction has to offer. Watts (2010: 61) also captures this paradox quite well when he noted that Nigerian oil-fuelled capitalism contains a:

‘double-movement...on the one hand a centralizing force, that rendered the state more visible (and globalized), and...financially underwrote, a process of secular nationalism and state building. On the other, centralized oil revenues flowing into weak institutions and a charged, volatile federal system produced...corrupt and flabby oil-led development that was to...discredit the state’.

These contradictory impacts of oil in the Niger Delta underline not just the complexity of the resource (or indeed natural resources extraction more generally) as a driver of development but also the specific ways in which postcolonial institutions can shape or be shaped by the flow of a globally relevant commodity.

1.2 The evolution of the Nigerian oil industry

The nature of the evolution of the Nigerian oil industry and its internal contradictions provide a backdrop to social, economic and political life in the country. Cyril Obi (2010a: 446) identified three distinct phases that the industry has gone through since exploration started in Nigeria in the early twentieth century. The first was the concession phase when oil exploration was based on a 1907 Mining Regulation Ordinance and later the 1914 Colonial Minerals Ordinance which granted monopoly of oil concessions to ‘British or British allied capital’. The Nigerian Bitumen Company, a subsidiary of the German Bitumen Company (GBC) was granted exploration rights under this ordinance and was joined in 1938 by Shell D’Arcy (later Shell BP) which got a concession covering the entire Nigerian mainland.² By 1951, documents at the

² Both the 1907 and 1914 ordinances had sections that prohibited the granting of concessions to none British companies. Section 6(1a) of the 1914 Ordinance was particularly explicit in declaring that ‘no lease or license shall be granted except to a British company and its principal place of business within

National Archives in Enugu (NAE) show that Shell D'Arcy's extensive and rapidly growing oil exploration activities meant that it already had a staff number of about 1000 which included foreign workers as well as hundreds of permanent and casual Nigerian staff (NAE: OWDIST 10/1/436; NAE: OP24/1929). Its offices were distributed across the Niger Delta region but also in modern Abia, Imo and Enugu states. It was however not until 1956 that oil was struck in commercial quantities in Oloibiri, current Bayelsa State, and a further two years passed before exports began. One of the key features of this phase of oil industry development in Nigeria was that foreign capital was in full control-understandable given that Nigeria was under colonial rule for most of this period- and the state's participation was very limited to simply granting concessions. The land concessions were however a product of forceful acquisitions from the local people in patterns that have become all too familiar in contemporary Niger Delta (see Chamberlain 1966, Ako 2009) and which laid many of the foundations for resentment against oil companies that still exist today. For instance, as far back as 1947, Chief Nlemedim, the village head of Mbelu-Otampa in Isukwuato of the Okigwe Division wrote a prescient petition to the colonial authorities raising questions about what impact the oil companies would have on the communities and questioning the position of the state. He wrote that:

I have the honour most humbly to forward to your honour this my humble note asking for your kind explanations and advice about a thing I do not understand. It is about the Shell Oil Company as they are called, who have been digging pits of enormous depths here and there at my town Otampa in your district. I am ignorant of what is going to happen in future about the company's adventure in the land. I humbly ask if your honour may kindly explain to me the future conditions of the company such as digging of many pits at many places in my village, and whether this will not in any way affect us (NAE: O.P.24/1929:112).

Her Majesty's Dominions'. The Nigerian subsidiary of the GBC however got the concession in perhaps an early indication of the potential for underhand dealings in the lucrative industry.

These petitions about the transfer of land to the oil companies continued to emerge all through the 1940s and gradually began to take on more forceful forms. For instance, in a November 1949 petition to the District office at Okigwe, a local community wrote that

“We the aborigines of this community, dispute the right of anyone- Nigeria or British empire over our land, water, trees, rocks. In short, everything that grows on top or stays in the ground. We urge you dear sir tell the Shell Company to stay away from our domain” (NAE: OW7915:39).

It is interesting to note that even at this early stage of oil exploration in Nigeria, the connection between the state and oil companies was not lost on the local communities who consistently complained to the colonial authorities by referring to Shell D’Arcy as ‘your company, your people, the oil companies they call themselves’ (NAE: O.P.24/1929:33). By the late 1960s, it became evident that oil would eventually become central to the state’s revenue and the national economy. Decree No. 51 of 1969, thus transferred the ‘entire ownership and control of all petroleum in, under or upon any lands in Nigeria’ to the Federal Military Government (Onoh 1983). This decree must itself be seen in the context of the brutal civil war that gripped Nigeria at the time and which seemed to have deepened the military’s tendency to centralize powers in the Federal Government.

The 1970s oil crisis and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) ‘revolution’ (Mathies 1983, Mabro 1985) further underlined the importance of the resource and increased state interest in direct participation in the industry. As part of its efforts to increase state participation, the Ministry of Petroleum Resources was merged with the Nigerian National Oil Company (NNOC) to form the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). This corporation was meant to operate as some sort of multinational oil company, gaining the required expertise and capital to allow it compete in the tough global oil market. The government also took up equity

participation in all oil multinationals operating in the country, built new refineries and introduced nationalization and indigenization policies aimed at increasing local participation in the oil industry (Hoogvelt 1979, Ovadia 2013, Ikpe 2014) and to ‘incorporate the state into the transnational operations of the MNOCs’ (Obi: 2010: 447). Rather than strengthen the hand of the Nigerian state in the oil industry however, increased participation appears to have simply deepened the dodgy but lucrative reach of corrupt clientelist networks that exploit weak institutional controls to constantly maneuver for access to the huge revenues accruing from oil extraction (Turner 1976, Watts 2010, Idemudia 2012, Iwilade 2014). By the time the oil shocks of the late 1970s and 80s arrived, the country was ill prepared to manage the pressures, having all but frittered away the revenue that poured in during the boom years (Freund 1978, Pinto 1987). This profligacy and corruption put immense pressure on the fiscal health of the Nigerian State as well as generated tensions within its politics. The controversial elections of 1983 amid growing repression and massive corruption eventually brought the military back into office. The military regime of General Buhari had not quite settled into governance before it was itself overthrown some twenty months later by General Ibrahim Babangida (Ergas 1983, Forrest 1986).

Responding to the fiscal and social pressures, the new leaders tapped into growing global narratives of adjustment and state withdrawal, and by 1986, launched the third phase in the evolution of Nigeria’s oil industry. Under the pretext of launching a ‘home grown’ Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the Babangida regime introduced deregulation and state roll-back policies that were obviously inspired by the Bretton Woods institutions across the entire Nigerian economy (Mustapha 1991, Ihonvbere 1993, Olukoshi 1998). This third phase focused on the deregulation of the extraction and distribution oil. For the oil industry, this translated into the privatization of state

assets as well as the internationalization of pricing regimes with little regard for local income conditions. These changes in the oil industry emerged in the broader context of massive cuts to social investments which inevitably produced economic hardship for significant parts of the population and generated social and political tensions (Olukoshi 1998).

Structural adjustment deepened the inequalities that had already blighted the social landscape in the Delta region as elites scrambled to seize the spaces being abandoned by the retreating state. The tensions being generated within the Niger Delta region were further exacerbated by growing regional inequalities across the country as elites from majority ethnic nationalities and regions in the West, East and North of the country became the dominant players in the Nigerian oil industry, silencing whatever remained of local voices and effectively setting the stage for the coming violence. This two-pronged attack on the everyday citizen in the Niger Delta- local inequalities overlaid by the marginalization of the region as a whole- is one of the most poignant paradoxes around which resistance narratives in the region have been framed. It is also one of the most unfortunate legacies of the oil industry and why it has played such a central role in the unending questions that have surrounded citizenship, democracy and politics in Nigeria.

1.3 Nigeria and the Political Economy of Oil

As already hinted at above, the centrality of oil to the political economy of Nigeria is hardly debatable. Indeed, the politics of statehood in Nigeria, as is its relationship with the global community, is bound up with the flow of this finite resource. While oil has created a state that is inherently repressive, disconnected and indifferent to the concerns of ordinary Nigerians, it has simultaneously embedded the country in a subordinate relationship with centers of power that control global capital, energy politics and

military force. Even though it represents a mere 10 percent of GDP (National Bureau of Statistics 2015, The Economist 2015), oil contributes at least 85 percent of the annual revenue of the Nigerian state and is the lifeblood of its institutions, patronage systems and informal, often criminal, networks.

One would imagine that a sector as important as this would be governed as efficiently as possible. However, it is precisely because of its immense value, both materially and politically, that the sector has been plagued with very weak governance mechanisms and systems. These weaknesses have allowed corrupt networks of oil multinationals, national political elite, military officers, local elite, and violent youth to corner significant percentages of the revenues derived from oil exploration.

To properly understand the context of weak governance systems in the Nigerian oil sector, three perspectives can be highlighted. First, the locus of power in the sector is located in oil multinationals who have been able to leverage on access to global capital and technical expertise to impose their will on a weak Nigerian State.³ Because the state operates from a subordinate position relative to the oil multinationals, it finds it difficult to design regulatory frameworks that can hold oil companies to account for their disruptive roles in the region. Even where regulatory frameworks exist, as in domestic gas utilization (Oyewunmi 2014) or environmental protection (Edu 2011) for instance,

³ A good example of such can be found in the tragic case of the Ogoni where many sources have noted the inordinate influence Shell BP had on the Nigerian state in the years before and after the controversial hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa. In a witness report given during the trial of Saro Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni accused of murder by the Sani Abacha regime, the orderly to Lt. Colonel Okuntimo, Commander of the military forces mobilized by government to pacify the restive Ogoni communities, reported seeing Okuntimo receiving large bags filled with cash from Shell officials, a claim which Shell confirmed even though it claimed the cash was meant for field allowances (Rowell & Lubeck 2010). Indeed, beyond the specific case of Ogoni, Shell's influence across the broad spectrum of the Nigerian government, long suspected, was confirmed by leaked US diplomatic cables which note the company has inserted multiple informants in all state ministries and that the company had, according to its managing director, Ann Pickard, 'seconded people to all relevant ministries' and as such had knowledge of 'all that is going on there'. This claim by Shell itself to US diplomats contained in a 2010 Wikileaks highlights the level of influence that multinational companies wield in the context of weak state (for a detailed analysis of the Wikileaks cables see Dickinson 2010, and Sucher, Henderson & Preble 2011).

the government's ability or willingness to enforce the rules has always been suspect. One area in which regulatory frameworks have been particularly weak is in the prevention or punishment of environmental crimes in the region. The degradation and transformation of the Niger Delta environment as a direct consequence of oil extraction is one of the key issues at the center of the last two decades of social upheaval in the region (Obi 2000). Environmental degradation illustrates both the weakness of regulatory frameworks as well as the power of multinationals who often get away with corporate irresponsibility in spite of the impact on the environment (Okonta & Douglas 2003).

The second issue with regard to weak governance in the oil sector relates to the informalization of power in Nigeria. In the context of institutional frailty, power is mediated not by formal bureaucratic or political structures but rather by shady networks of clientelism and neopatrimonialism that are unelected, unaccountable and unrepresentative. This 'postcolonial' politics thrives on an unaccountable mix of elements of Weberian bureaucratic statehood with social networks of informality and clientelism (Chabal & Daloz 1999, Bayat 2004, Meagher 2005, Lindell 2010).⁴ This situation has been described as 'the deliberate culturing of a social infrastructure that simultaneously challenges and strengthens formal structures of power, thereby occupying both a decidedly modern as well as traditional space of power relations' (Iwilade 2014: 578). As Erdmann & Engel (2006) also aptly put it, 'clientelism exists not only in the "traditional interstices" and the "traditional periphery", but also in the "modern center" itself, which itself is not so modern, but very much tainted by, and

⁴ Of course those who focus on clientelism (Chabal & Daloz 1999, Bayart 2004) and those who address everyday informality in Nigeria (Meagher 2008, Lindell 2010) do not necessarily address the same phenomenon and in fact, often disagree vehemently (Meagher 2006 for instance), however I group them together here because they examine two sides of the same coin albeit focusing on different sets of actors – elites and ordinary people respectively.

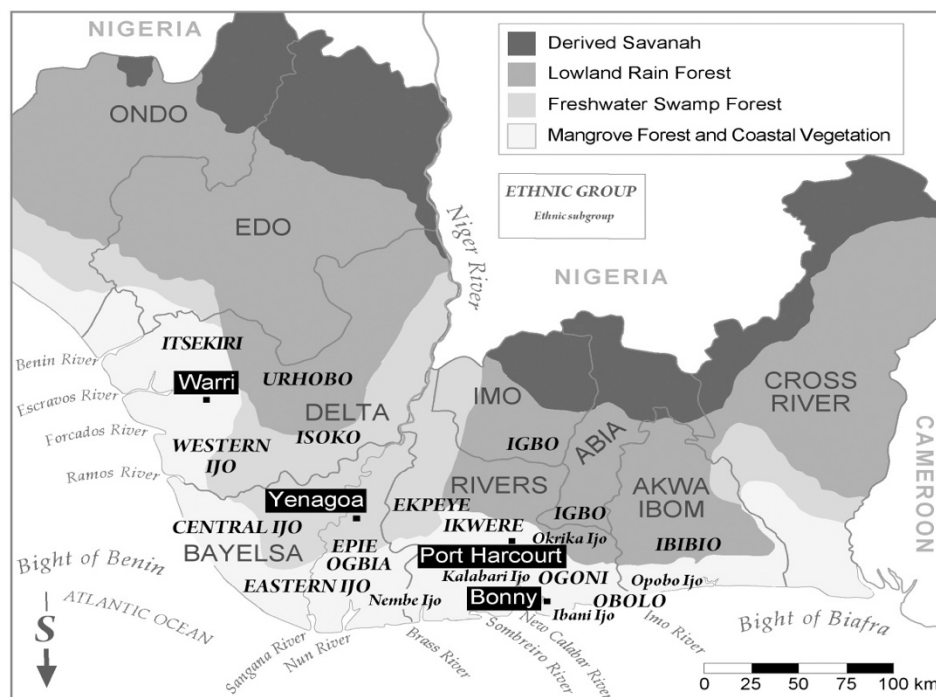
interwoven with, “traditional” elements’. In the context of a formal system of power that is mediated by informal social networks and which thrives on the privatization of the exercise of power, the Niger Delta is at the very heart of power in Nigeria and the oil industry is the engine. In a report on Nigeria’s oil industry, *The Economist* (March 28, 2015) magazine reports that the NNPC is ‘among the most secretive oil groups in the world and is accountable to no one’.⁵ This secrecy is a key element of the informal politics that shapes the extractive and distributive logic of Nigeria’s oil resources and a ‘necessary’ tool for corrupt clientelistic networks. A shocking, although altogether not unexpected, 2015 report by the Natural Resources Governance Institute (NRGI) details the sheer scale of corruption in the industry and highlights the extent of informality, what it calls ‘middlemen’, in the activities of the NNPC (Sayne, Gillies and Katsouris 2015: 46). Oil concessions, sales and refining are rooted in a system that is deliberately opaque, personalized and corrupt and is reflective of broader patterns of clientelism in Nigeria.

Finally, the weak governance structures in the oil sector can be traced to the geopolitical realities of the Niger Delta in itself. Constituted by a network of 70, 000 square miles of mangrove swamps, estuaries, creeks, thick forests and a huge biodiversity, the Niger Delta’s approximately thirty distinct ethnic groups exist within a naturally occurring complexity. The Niger Delta landmass, according to Obi and Rustad (2011: 3), is ‘a vast coastal plain in the southernmost part of Nigeria, where one of West Africa’s longest rivers empties into the Atlantic Ocean between the Bights of Benin and Biafra, in the Gulf of Guinea’. This huge wetland, said to be Africa’s largest, has a huge

⁵ The former Central Bank Governor, Lamido Sanusi Lamido alleged in 2013 for instance, that there was a 20 billion US Dollar leak that was unaccounted for in the accounts of the NNPC. In a special Reuters report, Sanusi’s 300-page dossier of this claim was described as putting on record one of the most comprehensive documentations of waste, mismanagement and leakages of cash in Nigeria’s oil industry’ (Cocks & Brock 2015).

biodiversity and is home to about 31 million people according to the 2005 census in Nigeria. It is a highly heterogenous society, harbouring over 20 ethnic groups, most of which trace their origins to the Yoruba, Igbo and Edo (Okwechime 2011a). The region has four ecological zones namely mangroves, lowland rain forests, fresh water swamp forests and coastal ridge barriers. The communities in the region are traditionally farmers and fishermen; livelihoods that are now being threatened by the ubiquitous oil industry.

Figure 1: An Ecological Map of the Niger Delta



Source: Joab-Peterside, Porter and Watts 2012

Figure 2: A Map of the main creeks criss-crossing the Niger Delta



Source: Edun, Akinrotimi and Makinde (2016: 2)

This complex topography as shown in Figure 1 and 2 above occurs both as imagination and as reality and has important implications for politics as many observers have found (Peluso & Watts 2001, Gregory & Pred 2006, Ugor 2013a). As imagination, the geography of the Niger Delta is an important element of how its indigenes conceive of justice, how they conceive of their history and how they imagine their place within the Nigerian federation. In many ways, the Delta's environmental movement reflects this imagination of self and highlights the spatial ownership claims around which political agitations have arisen (Watts 2012, Ugor 2013a, Courson 2016). The reality of environmental change and transformation as a consequence of oil exploration of course also deepens this imagination and highlights the relationship between the real and imagined geographies of violence in the region. Nigel Thrift's (2006: 174) assertion that 'spaces do not just provide a context' but that they also 'provide a medium and a means and a momentum, as well as a measure' is relevant here as it articulates the

relevance of space as an analytical tool that can illuminate questions of citizenship, identity and resistance. This is particularly important in the case of the Niger Delta as the violence is, as Ugor (2013a: 4) describes it, ‘essentially about space (the Niger Delta Wetland), the natural wealth (crude oil) located within that space, and the struggles by both global and local politico-economic forces over control of that resource’. The violent competition for spatial hegemony in the region, or to control what Watts (2010: 57) called a ‘space of ungovernability’, has turned the Niger Delta wetlands into both an arena of politics as well as a tool of struggle (Ugor 2013a, Courson 2016). It is precisely this dual reality of the region that makes its geography an important element of the violent political economy of oil and one of the reasons governing the space has been so contentious.

Closely related to the spatial complexity of the region, and perhaps partially a consequence of it, is its multi-ethnic diversity. The region is settled by, as noted above, at least twenty distinct ethnic groups (Okwechime 2011) and is made up of thousands of villages, towns and cities, many of which are delineated by creeks, estuaries and such natural ‘borders’. The sheer diversity in the region promotes political divisions and constructed historical differences which often tragically escalate into violent conflict. This complexity is also overlaid by a shared sense of marginalization and disempowerment created by the very nature of Nigerian Federalism which is built around the three dominant groups in the country, all of which are outside of the Niger Delta.

In the context of a weak governing structure, the Niger Delta has inevitably suffered from the long-term implications of unfettered extraction of oil resources. The Delta environment struggles with severe degradation (Green Peace 1994, Okonta & Douglas 2003, Okonta 2008) at a time when the capacity of the most vulnerable social categories

to respond to these transformations is constantly being undermined by distortions to the local economies (Ukeje 2001, Ukeje 2004, Ebiede 2011, Okwechime 2011). As a result, the environmental theme is a constant part of the broader narrative of resistance in the region even if it sometimes has only rhetorical resonance among the leading violent groups (Iwilade 2012).

While the region bears the brunt of the environmental fallout from oil extraction, it has benefited relatively little from the huge revenues that has accrued to the state and multinationals (Idemudia 2012). Where resources are allocated to the region, a good percentage is routinely cornered by local elite, leaving the bulk of the population in appalling poverty. The contradictions of oil wealth and poverty in the region have inevitably generated popular resistance that is often brutally crushed by the state, justifying Watts' (2003: 5089) damning description of oil history as an 'uninterrupted chronicle of naked aggression, genocide and the violent law of the corporate frontier'. The United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Report (HDR) consistently ranks the oil rich Niger Delta as one of the poorest regions in the country. It has high rates of unemployment, huge deficits in infrastructure development and social provisioning and has HIV prevalence rates higher than the national average (UNDP 2006). These developmental problems are further deepened by a social environment that is highly combustible, violent and unpredictable. This has discouraged investments in non-oil sectors of the Delta economy, displaced many vulnerable people from their homes and created a generation of youth for whom violence is often the only rational means of communicating with the state or participating in its politics. The implications of this crisis for the individual life chances of Delta youth or indeed the country in general are inevitably dire, thereby imposing violent politics on many social movements and groups in the region.

1.4 Resistance and State Responses

The deployment of state violence in response to justified popular grievances against the despoliation being wrought on the Niger Delta by oil capital is an unfortunate but expected response of the Nigerian state. In the true fashion of the brutal Foucauldian post colony seeking to impose its control on spaces of governmentality for which it has neither use of nor the ability to fully control (Foucault 1979), the Nigerian state seeks to control people through its control of oil. It does not seek hegemony in the sense of gaining legitimacy by providing basic services, rather it seeks to control social processes, the people's imagination of who they are and the histories upon which these imaginings are based. It recruits the oppressed themselves in this onslaught against freedoms in the region and is itself recruited by powerful forces of global capital as well as by local networks of privilege.

The complex coalitions that emerge from these cross-cutting relationships generate the types of intractable violence that the region has seen in the last decade. While the period between 2003 and 2009 was particularly violent, the Niger Delta conflict has raged on, according to Aghedo (2013: 270), in one form or the other since 1960. In fact, casting a deeper historical glance at the region, Okwechime (2011b) dates the crisis to the 17th century in the time when the currency of the region was not crude, but palm oil. The oil rivers of the Delta have thus always been rivers of blood supplied by the violent relations between the local peoples and multinational capital. The period between 2003 and 2009 was however significant not just in the sheer scope of the violence, but also in the fact that it was the first time that insurrection in the region presented a truly viable threat to the entire architecture of oil extraction. The violence was so widespread and coordinated that oil production was cut by almost 40 percent at its peak in 2007, thousands of people were killed (local youth and members of the armed forces in

particular) and the Nigerian state faced a real danger of disintegration (Courson 2011, Oriola, Haggerty & Knight 2013).

Emerging at a time when the US led fight against terrorism had effectively securitized energy production and was militarizing various regions, including the Gulf of Guinea from which Delta oil was exported (Fleshman 2002, Volman 2003, Klare and Volman 2006) it was impossible for the government to ignore the conflict or indeed to continue in its preferred path of brutal suppression. The federal government thus decided, in July 2009, to grant 'Amnesty' to 'all persons who directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities' (Yar'adua 2009: 1). The offer of amnesty was targeted principally at young men who had been socialized into a culture of violence by the incentives and constraints of a badly managed oil political economy and was intended to stop the insurgency, restore order and guarantee the unfettered extraction of crude oil from the region. A brief history of state intervention in the Niger Delta would be a useful way of providing the context in which the 2009 amnesty offer was made.

To start, it should be noted that a deep sense of alienation and marginalization that has grown steadily for decades underpins violence in the oil rich region. The Willink Commission of 1958 was both one of the earliest sites of social agitation by the minorities of the Niger Delta region for some sort of protection from the majority dominated Nigerian state and also an early indication of the nature of state interventions in the region (Willink Commission Report: 1958, iii). The recommendations of the commission discarding the idea of creating a minority dominated state in the region did not just disregard minority demands for self determination dating back as far as 1953 (Willink Commission Report 1958: 49) but also did not envisage the centralizing impact of military rule and the way it would develop what Richard Joseph (1987: 8)

later called a 'prebendal system' which rests on the 'justifying principle that [state] offices should be competed for and then utilized for the personal benefit of office holders as well as of their reference or support group'. By the mid 1960s, the complex social dynamic that pitted various ethnic groups against the other in the Niger Delta had become even more challenging as oil revenues entered the equation. The civil war of 1967-70 was in many ways as much a battle over oil as it was about elite contestations and the ghastly massacre of Ibo civilians in northern Nigeria in the years 1965-66 (Williams 1982). Isaac Adaka Boro's (1982) 'twelve-day revolution' led by a small group of young insurgents from the oil producing Niger Delta and aiming to secede from the Nigerian federation in 1966, had earlier underscored the extent to which minorities could go if their demands for protection and fair treatment were not met and had indicated the role that oil was going to later play in the political economy of the country.

As noted earlier, the reluctant acknowledgement but ultimate discountenancing of many minority concerns and demands by the 1958 Willink Commission was a precedence that was perfected in far more egregious state interventions that emerged throughout the first five decades of Nigeria's independence. In fact by the end of the civil war in 1970, by which time oil had become the chief revenue earner for the government and a new centralizing ethos had been imposed by the military, the demands of Niger Delta communities for relative autonomy and increased developmental investment began to receive even less attention. For instance, before oil became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, the derivation principle of then revenue allocation formula oscillated between 100% to the regions from which such revenue was generated as designated by the Chick Commission in 1953 (FGN 1953) and the 50% enacted after the Raisman Commission Report of 1958 (Colonial Office 1958). With the rise of oil however, and

in the wake of the centralization brought about by military rule from 1967 onwards, the revenue accruing to regions through the derivation principle dropped substantially to 20% in 1975 (FGN 1975) and to 0% as suggested by the Aboyade Commission in 1979 (FGN 1979). Many attempts have now been made to review this upwards in response to growing agitation from the oil bearing Niger Delta region and this has resulted in a token of 13% derivation rate being allocated.

As the derivation debate shows, rather than give communities the sense of inclusion and freedom they demanded, successive Nigerian governments began to place more and more powers at the federal center, further deepening the apprehension of minorities all over the country and their sense of alienation. This does not imply that the federal government did not respond to growing social agitations and tensions in the oil producing region but rather that federal interventions often further undermined the little freedom that these communities had. For instance, in 1967 (Cross River and Rivers States), 1987 (Akwa Ibom State), 1991 (Delta State) and 1996 (Bayelsa State), states were created partly to assuage the feeling of neglect expressed by oil-bearing communities. However, these states were controlled directly from the federal center through the appointment of military administrators. This demeaned the value of having states since they could not be platforms for the expression of sectional interests. Apart from state creation, the government also tried various special interventions in response to social agitations from the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta.

One key method of the Nigerian government is the creation of special agencies that were tasked with the responsibility of providing infrastructure in the region. To give a few examples, in response to the Willink Commission Report in 1958, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was established in 1961 as an advisory body for the federal government and the old Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria where the Niger

Delta communities had earlier been placed. The board did little to develop the region and certainly did not assuage the feelings of marginalization and disempowerment that the oil producing communities felt. In fact, complaints about the ineffectiveness of the NDDB forced the chairman, Chief I.S Anthony to publish a detailed defense of the board in the defunct national paper, the West African Pilot in 1964 (Anthony 1964). Interestingly, the excuse that ‘changes necessary for such implementation are necessarily time consuming’ is one that is very familiar fifty years after. By 1976, the board was replaced by a Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDRBDA) established by military decree. This organisation also did little to answer the identity and inclusion questions that were increasingly becoming important to politics in the region.

Since 1981, there has been a gradual return to the committee strategy and various individuals were called on to provide adhoc advice on different aspects of the Delta conflict. These committees include, the Belgore Commission of 1992, the Popoola Committee of 1998, the Ogomudia Special Security Committee of 2002, the Presidential Committee on Peace and Reconciliation led by retired Major General Muhammed in 2003, the Standing Committee on Good Governance and Corporate Responsibility led by Edmond Daukoru in 2004. Other committees set up to address the Delta’s growing insurgency, include the 2004 Presidential Standing Committee on the Niger Delta headed by James Ibori, the Presidential Committee on the Niger Delta headed by President Obasanjo in 2007, the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta headed by Ledum Mitee (who was tried alongside Ken Saro-Wiwa by the Abacha regime in 1995) in 2008. Each of these committees addressed pretty much the same issues but it was not until the Niger Delta Technical Committee of 2008 did the report of a committee get any serious attention from the government. It was the culmination

of this committee's work that eventually led to the creation of the Niger Delta ministry and the launching of the Amnesty programme.

To be sure, the various state interventions described above did not come without substantial prodding from social movements in the Niger Delta who became increasingly vocal about their dissatisfaction with issues ranging from the widespread ecological damage that the oil industry had wrought on the region (Greenpeace 1994, Okonta and Douglas 2008), the contradictions of wealth extraction and infrastructural deficits that is so starkly evident (Ifeka 2004, Idemudia 2011), and the violent clampdown on social protests (Ibeanu 1997). These various state driven projects were therefore conceptualized as ways of placating restive communities by making a larger pool of revenue available and by systematically embedding Niger Delta elite within the broader national system of patronage while ramping up the brutal violent suppression. In the more recent history of state interventions in the Niger Delta, disarmament programmes were launched in an attempt to arrest the slide towards full-blown insurgency. Some of these programmes focused on ending localized violence as was the case of the Delta state driven disarmament projects between 1997 and 1999 aimed at resolving the communal crisis among Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw that had torn the oil city of Warri apart.⁶ In 2004, the Rivers State government also launched a cash for arms project that was derided as 'the millionaire's programme' which paid militants from two main groups- the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)- to give up weapons. These two groups had been embroiled in a very violent and brutal conflict particularly around the waterfront slums of Port Harcourt aimed at controlling transport routes, drug peddling territory, oil bunkering sites and access to political patronage (HRW 2004). Despite being directed from the

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the Warri crisis of the 1990s see, HRW 2003 and Turshen 2004.

very top of Nigeria's political leadership (President Obasanjo met personally with the leaders of the two groups), the Rivers State arms buy back programme failed to end the violence and in fact contributed to the escalation that eventually created the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). It was in the wake of these multiple failures and in the context of the escalation of the violence that the Amnesty was conceived.

1.5 Youth, gangs and the collapse of public order

Before I analyse the 2009 Amnesty in detail however, it is important to insert into the above context a description of the politics of youth gangs in the region and the more general rise of violent youth mobilizations across Nigeria. This will put the Amnesty in proper context and explain why the Niger Delta is often framed in the language of discord, youth violence and resistance. Implicit in the earlier description of the last century of Delta politics is a society that has had to survive in uncertain conditions. This is more so for the young people at the prime of their capacities who are faced with limited options for attaining social adulthood and independence. Across the timelines described above, being young in the Niger Delta is a mixed bag of both opportunity and disadvantage. The basis of the disadvantage is perhaps pretty obvious as indicated by poverty levels, economic distortions and infrastructure deficits (UNDP 2006). It bears repeating though that in spite of the huge oil revenue, the region is a very poor one, and the young who often lack the capital to launch themselves into a sustainable economic path, find it very difficult to gain independent livelihoods.

While many of the descriptions of gang or indeed youth activity in the region, as well as across Africa, tend to focus on politically themed insurgencies (Richard 1996, Hubbard 1998, Utas 2003, Ukeje 2001, Bay & Donham 2006, Boas & Hatloy 2008), there are a complex multiplicity of articulations of youth agency and public engagement that

result in violence. Across Nigeria, it is not uncommon to see the emergence of youth gangs whose goals are not overtly political in the sense of seeking to overturn the state but which nonetheless may have implications for the way politics plays out. Examples include organisations like the Bakassi Boys (Harnischfeger 2003, Smith 2004, Meagher 2007) in Eastern Nigeria, which focusses on creating alternative spaces of justice and private security and others with more nebulous goals which often come across as criminal like the Yandaba in Northern Nigeria (Cline 2011, Salaam 2011) and Area boys across the South (Salaam & Brown 2012). Many of these organisations often times become active in the political scene during elections as agents of disorder and disruption.

Generally, contemporary youth gangs in Nigeria greatly expanded due to the economic and social pressures created by structural adjustment in the 1980s. This period provided the perfect storm for the deepening of a youth culture of violence and defiance which has endured into the 21st century political landscape. This period is especially pivotal for a number of reasons. First is the increase in violent state repression as successive governments sought to impose painful economic reforms. This repression produced a militant culture that, even though it encouraged the expansion of civil society (Ikelegbe 2001), it also ironically provided groups which had no real democratic agendas with the perfect rhetorical cover and legitimization that allowed them to disrupt and reconstitute public life. Many of these groups were youth led and have gone on to become the centers of gang life in the country. The second key feature of that adjustment era was the widespread economic distress which pushed increasing numbers of people into the sidelines of the formal economy (Gibbon & Bangura 1992, Olukoshi 1997, Jega 2000). It is instructive to note that there is a positive correlation between the informalisation of economic life and the survival strategies and navigation tactics that

have been observed with youth groups across the world (Haines & Wood 1995, Burnett 1999, Vigh 2011, Thieme 2013, Ugor 2013b, Dolson 2015). For instance, Thieme's (2013) ethnography of youth entrepreneurs operating the informal waste economy in Nairobi's Mathare settlement illustrates this point about how informalisation could generate a social life that is at once disruptive and creative. By exploiting the absence of effective formal waste management infrastructure, Thieme (2013) shows how youth frame their 'hustle' as a livelihood strategy as well as a counter point to the failures of state capacity to manage life on its margins. The point to be made is that as the state withdraws or fails to create the institutions that can effectively occupy the spaces in which people seek livelihood, the creative spirit of citizens are unleashed and it sometimes results in the type of activities observed in youth gangs.

Finally, the adjustment era also generated contradictory forces of openness and closure which have encouraged the specific type of mobilizations evident in youth gangs. Olukoshi (1997) describes the openness induced by the adjustment period when he talked about the growth of 'associational life' in which communities, workers groups and so on bond together to forge collective material alliances for the purpose of surviving the intense pressures of adjustment. This openness is also implicated in the expansion of civil society mentioned earlier. But with this openness also came the need for closure, for constructing social boundaries of otherness and exclusion. To form associations in order to defend narrowly defined interests, groups often invariably have to compete with others for what is in reality a very small resource pool. In this process of inclusion and exclusion, competition sometimes becomes violent as multiple groups respond to limited and rapidly shrinking opportunities. In many ways, the ethnicisation of trade across Nigeria can partly be explained in this way, so also the ethnic themed violent eruptions that sometimes occur in response to perceived resource capturing or

marginalization (Hagher 2002, Arowosegbe 2016). Arowosegbe (2016) draws attention to these ethnic themed patterns of resource competition in everyday life in Nigeria by pointing to the constant articulation of ethnic narratives in resource conflicts between Yoruba farmers and Fulani pastoralists for instance, or between Igbo and Hausa traders in Northern Nigeria.

Many youth gangs that expanded out in response to adjustment had many of these features of openness and closure. Openness in the sense that the groups sometimes cut sharply across traditional boundaries of ethnicity and religion (especially in university campuses and urban centers). But they were nonetheless closed in so far as they promoted values of secrecy, and sought to make clear distinctions between those who belonged and those who did not. Belonging here was on two levels. First is the level for those who belonged to any of the many gangs occupying the underground social life of youth. Then, within this level, belonging was further disaggregated in the violent eruptions between gangs where membership of a specific group was what mattered rather than membership of the general universe of cults and gangs.

In the Niger Delta, this politics of belonging and exclusion is deeply felt in the constant violent skirmishes involving university cult groups, ethnic militias, street gangs and political mercenaries. The impact of these groups is however ultimately magnified when their activities intersect with the competitions for power and for access to the massive oil revenue that flows into the coffers of the Nigerian state. Perhaps nowhere does this play out more intimately than in the politics of youth gangs in urban Port Harcourt.

There are numerous gangs operating in Port Harcourt and some have estimated the number at somewhere around one hundred (Concannon & Newsom, 2004) and the Rivers State Government actually announced a ban on 103 cult groups in 2004 (Rivers

State 2004). Massive as this number apparently is, it conceals a more complex universe of gangs, constantly shifting alliances, membership and reach. In deed, the gang landscape in the city is so complicated that one former member of the Vikings, Tarela (int 2014) told me that one of the biggest problems faced by members sometimes is ‘you never know who is fighting who or where the fighting is going to happen’. In his words, ‘we just tag along anywhere the belly faces’.

It is enough at this stage to note that the disruptive effect of participation in formal political competitions further complicates the gang universe in the region. The intensity of these largely money driven episodes of violence sometimes becomes so much that it conceals the turf wars for control over drug, oil bunkering and extortion territories that go on simultaneously and sometimes out of sight. The 2003 general election was a particularly pivotal year in this case as it highlighted the explosive mix of gang relations and broader formal political competition as well as unleashed the latent violent capacities of youth gangs, ultimately snowballing into the full blown insurgency that forced the government to launch the 2009 Amnesty.

The return to civilian rule in 1999 had opened up many of the cleavages of the Nigerian federation at the same time that it emboldened social actors to challenge, sometimes violently, the authority of the state.⁷ An entry point to this is the clamp down on the ‘resource control’ discourse by President Obasanjo who resented the appropriation of a popular register of grievance by local politicians seeking to shore up their influence. The harassment of local elites culminated in the arrest and impeachment of former Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief Diepeye Alamaseiegba who had become central to

⁷ There are numerous detailed accounts of how the liberalization of the political space in 1999 opened up a Pandora’s box of ethno religious resentments, grievances and conflict. These incidences were recorded right across the country and resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. Incidentally, these incidents were also one of the earliest excuses with which the state reverted to the despotic impunities that had marked the years of military rule. For useful analysis of this issue, see Omotola & Aremu 2007, Amuwo 2009).

ethno-nationalist claims against the Federal Government.⁸ This clampdown by the FG generated a precarious context for alarmed Niger Delta patrons that created disincentives for maintaining links with clients in the region's youth militias and gangs. The appropriation of the 'resource control' discourse had been critical to the continued relevance and legitimacy of the Delta elite, particularly in the face of growing generational challenges to their leadership from increasingly impatient youth. By forcing them to abandon its active propagation therefore, the Obasanjo government denied them an important lever of control that ultimately disrupted the patron-client linkages through which they had kept the youth gangs in relative check. Many studies corroborate this point by linking the collapse of public order and rise in the scope and ferocity of insurgencies during that period to the abandonment of youth gangs that had been used by politicians to rig elections and intimidate opponents (Human Rights Watch 2004, Ukeje 2006, Courson 2009, Osaghae et.al 2011, Ukeje & Iwilade 2012). This point can be illustrated by the examples of Mujahid Asari-Dokubo, leader of the NDPVF and first vice president and later president of the IYC and Ateke Tom, leader of the NDV in the politics of Rivers State. A Human Rights Watch report (HRW: 2004: 14-19) detailed the extent of violence and criminal intimidation that was deployed to challenge for the various offices on offer during the 2003 general elections in Rivers State. In a situation quite common all over the country but even more endemic in the oil producing states of the Niger Delta, many young men were recruited for these violent acts by promises of 'money, cars and trips to the US in exchange for their efforts

⁸ Chief DSP Alamasiegha was impeached by the Bayelsa State House of Assembly over money laundering and corruption charges on December 9, 2005. Earlier in September 2005, he had been arrested in the UK on money laundering charges and 1 million pounds in cash was found in his London home. His impeachment by the Bayelsa State Assembly came after he had jumped bail and returned to Nigeria, allegedly disguised as a woman. Many of his followers claim that his travails were a witch hunt born out of his ethno-nationalist championing of Ijaw interests and he is still considered a hero by many in his native Bayelsa State. He was later pardoned by former President Goodluck Jonathan who had been his Deputy while DSP Alamasiegha was governor.

to “canvass the votes” for the PDP’ (HRW: 2004, 15). One of the youth groups most visible during this period were Asari-Dokubo’s Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) and Ateke Tom’s NDV. In a report on the crisis in the Niger Delta in 2006, a US based geopolitical intelligence firm, Stratfor (2006: 2), identified the connection between Asari-Dokubo and Odili in the lead up to the 2003 general elections in Rivers state when it noted that:

“Until his arrest, Dokubo-Asari headed the IYC, a militant group that has worked with MEND under the banner of the Joint Revolutionary Council. The council has a close relationship with Odili, who is thought to have provided the IYC with weapons, cash and information on oil installation locations. In turn, the IYC has surveilled oil companies, conducted bunkering operations (the illegal tapping and sale of crude oil) to generate more money and campaigned for Odili, including issuing threats to his opponents”.

Ateke Tom himself, in an interview with HRW (2007: 81) acknowledged the role they played in the 2003 elections and, more importantly the link to Governor Peter Odili. HRW reports that in return for ‘cash and jobs in great quantities for himself and his “boys”, Ateke Tom said ‘any place Odili sent me, I conquer[ed] for him. I conquer[ed] everywhere’. Shortly after Peter Odili won re-election as Governor of Rivers state with the help of these youth gangs, he began to project a more national vision of politics partly as a way of enhancing his national appeal for a presidential run he was planning for 2007. This required the tempering of the rhetoric of ‘resource control’ which was not that popular with governing elites from other parts of the country, a move that gradually diminished his standing with youth groups like the IYC. His ambition also came in direct conflict with President Olusegun Obasanjo’s brewing agenda to remove the constitutional term limit and contest for a third term in office. In his autobiography, Odili (2012) details the intrigues and betrayals that allegedly forced him out of the presidential contest in 2007. He notes how the intimidation had started sometime in 2004 and how he had done all he could to win the confidence of leaders like President Olusegun Obasanjo. Some of these attempts to win the confidence of Obasanjo included

disowning youth groups like the IYC who were becoming increasingly vocal in appropriating the local social and environmental justice rhetoric.

By June 14, 2004 Odili had signed the Rivers Anti-Cult Law, which criminalized in one fell swoop erstwhile youth collaborators of political and ethnic elites. In an attempt to crush the out-spoken Asari-Dokubo, Odili is alleged to have given funds and arms to the NDV under Ateke Tom to aid him in the violent struggle with Asari over control of oil bunkering operations in the state. Why he decided to offer support to NDV instead of NDPVF can be easily seen. As HRW (2007: 20) notes, Asari-Dokubo, owing to his IYC background, was lacing his public comments with the narrative of social justice and resource control, a move that made it quite politically inexpedient for Odili to continue to show overt public support for him. It is interesting to note that the NDPVF which was later to play a central role in the formation of MEND was created only in 2004 and largely in response to these pressures. Asari's initial engagement was on the platform of the IYC.

The violence that erupted in that period was so intense that hundreds of youth militia members from both sides as well as scores of civilians were killed. The FG had deployed troops who also worsened the situation by committing indiscriminate violations of human rights and destruction of property⁹. The collapse of mediation efforts resulted in the declaration of war against the FG and multinational oil companies by Asari-Dokubo claimed he was 'provoked by the government's attack on his base [...] and his recognition that the state government's behind-the scenes diplomatic effort to resolve the crisis threatened to marginalize him' (HRW: 2007, 20). The NDPVF

⁹ The chaos of that period and the complicity of both youth gangs and the armed forces was widely reported in the newspapers at that period. For details see, Tell Magazine (Lagos), June 28, 2004 p. 3-7, The Port Harcourt Telegraph (Port Harcourt), Vol. 111, No. 59, September 13-19, 2004, p.9, The Hard Truth (Port Harcourt), May 27-June 2 2004, P.6, The Guardian (Lagos), July 8, 2004, p. 35)

however did not simply declare war. Ever the astute manipulator of media and public discourse, Asari-Dokubo cast his struggle in pan-Ijaw nationalist terms declaring that:

[the struggle] has something to do with our Ijawness. The Nigerian state is stealing from us, we say no more stealing of our resources. Give it back to us. Our language and our culture which the Nigerian constitution has dubiously eliminated and said that it is Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba [...] that will be taught our children, we say no, we want to speak our Ijaw language, exhibit our culture (Newswatch 2004: 13).

As Human Rights Watch (2007: 20) rightly points out however, this pan-Ijaw nationalist posturing does not fit with the evidence presented by the violence in and around Port Harcourt in 2004 or, for that matter since then. It is important to note that MEND, which became the flagship for the insurgency was not formed until 2005 and it was created by an objective alliance of these very same groups who had obviously morphed their narratives from simple armed groups responding to betrayal by their patrons to ‘resistance’ movements seeking social and environmental justice (Courson 2011, Oriola 2013).

What is obvious from this account of gang life and politics in the region is that ‘resistance’ has become an idiom that rationalizes, legitimizes and sustains different kinds of social tensions, breakdowns and struggles. As the above shows, even though marginalization remains a legitimate source of grievance in the region, the escalation of violence that necessitated the 2009 amnesty was in part a consequence of a breakdown in patron-client relations, only legitimized and rationalized with varied registers of ethno-nationalist and resource control grievances.

Table 1: Varieties of Conflict in the Niger Delta

Type of violent conflict	Key actors	Main issues of contention	Main sites
Anti-state Rebellion	Militants, armed forces, oil multinationals, youth groups,	Oil rents, citizenship rights, political inclusion, self determination,	Creeks, waterways, oil installations

	ethnic militia, women's groups	human rights, environmental rights	
Criminal violence	Cult groups, armed street gangs, fraternities, youth militia	Turf wars, political patronage, personal relationships, organized crime	Urban sites
Inter-communal	Chiefs, youth groups, youth militia, women's groups	Land, oil rents, state access, political access	Rural areas, border villages, farmlands
Inter-ethnic	Chiefs, youth groups, armed ethnic militia	Land, political access, oil rents, history	Urban sites, town borders
Intra-communal violence	Chiefs, kinship groups, armed street gangs	Land, power struggles over traditional authority, oil rents	Towns, historical sites, urban sites
Political violence	Youth groups, political interest groups, NGOs, Political parties, women's groups	Elections, party primaries, political patronage, civil protests, human rights, environmental rights	official spaces, urban sites, open spaces

1.6 The 2009 Presidential Amnesty

As Table 1 above indicates, the crises in the Delta is a complex mix of actors, motivations, spaces and historical moments. In response to the devastating escalation in violence created by these multiple pressures, the Nigerian government declared its intention in June 2009 to offer a 60-day period of amnesty for combatants. The official goal was to stabilize the region through a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme in furtherance of a broader agenda to ensure the medium and long-term development of the long marginalized region. In making this

declaration, President Yar'Adua acknowledged two important things: First that the Nigerian State realized that its violent suppression of the various armed militias was not achieving the desired effect and could not be expected to do so in the foreseeable future. A military stalemate had thus been achieved rather than a clear victory for the Nigerian Armed Forces. Second, he acknowledged that the region had been marginalized, if not unfairly treated, by the Nigerian state thus implying that there was some sort of justification for those who had taken up arms against the state. These two factors have underlined the design of the post Amnesty agenda, particularly with regard to pay-offs and constant cuddling of ex-militants since 2009.

The 2009 DDR process was created on the back of the previous attempts already noted above. However, it was the Niger Delta Technical Committee Report of 2008 that expressly recommended the Amnesty as part of what it referred to as 'a compact with stakeholders on the Niger Delta'. The report advised that the government should launch:

Within 6 months, complete initial steps to support a disarming process for youths involved in militancy. The process should begin with some confidence building measures on all sides. These measures include ceasefire on both sides, pull back of forces, open trial and bail (with a view to an eventual negotiated release) for Henry Okah. Also credible conditions for amnesty, setting up a Decommissioning, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) Commission and a negotiated undertaking by militant groups to stop all kidnappings, hostage taking and attacks on oil installations (Niger Delta Technical Report 2008: 56).

The Amnesty Programme was structured in three parts, addressing each segment of the DDR process and designed to last about six years. The first goal, as is usual for DDR processes, was to secure a cessation in violence and mop up arms from the system. This was to last between 6 August 2009 and 4 October 2009 when the offer to take up the Amnesty being offered was to expire. This disarmament process focused specifically on the collection of arms, ammunition and explosives from the 'repentant militants' and their biometric registration.

Table 2: Number of Youth Granted Amnesty as at 2010

S/No	States	Male	Female	Total
1	Abia	155	8	163
2	Bayelsa	8900	117	9017
3	Rivers	8963	89	9052
4	Akwa-Ibom	571	29	600
5	Cross River	159	1	160
6	Edo	450	0	450
7	Delta	4396	20	4416
8	Imo	297	3	300
9	Ondo	2198	2	2200
	TOTAL	26,089	272	26,361

Source: Amnesty Office Abuja, 2010

Table 3: Arms handed over to government by militants at the commencement of the Amnesty in the main oil states of Rivers and Bayelsa on August 20, 2009.

Town/State	Locally Made Guns	Rifles	Mortar Bombs	Gun Boats	GPMGs	Grenades	Rocket Launchers	Ammunition
Yenagoa/Bayelsa	520	385	79	18	108	107	17	95,970
Port Harcourt/Rivers	35	109	50	6	34	60	3	23,023
Total	555	494	129	24	142	167	20	118,993

Source: Poland Ogbonaya (2009). *This Day*, November 1: 12, pp. 14 and 34.

Figure 3: Militants surrendering arms to the Joint Task Force at the beginning of the Amnesty in October 2009.



Source: NWGAV (2013: 81).

It was a very public part of the Amnesty which was designed to symbolize both the end of the worst years of violence but also the patrimonial ‘forgiveness’ that the state could offer for ‘erring youth’. This indicates that even in the very act of ‘reconciliation’, of ‘acknowledgement’ or of ‘admission’, the intricate relations of power and domination were evident. The next stage was that of Demobilisation/Rehabilitation. This was designed to run for between 6 and 12 months and involved verification and documentation of ‘repentant’ militants. Enrolled persons also received training in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, counseling, as well as what was called ‘transformational training’. The main part of this stage of the amnesty was organized in ‘rehabilitation camps’ scattered across the region and was handled mainly by peace contractors like the Foundation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria (FEHN) for whom the Amnesty has been an extremely lucrative venture indeed.

The final stage, which is also referred to as the Post Amnesty Programme was the reintegration phase of the DDR project and was initially expected to last up to five

years, terminating in December 2015. This has however been extended indefinitely partly as a consequence of fears that terminating the programme could trigger a return to the trenches by youth militia (Kuku 2012, Peter int 2013, Boroh 2015) and disrupt oil extraction. With an eye to more long term empowerment of former insurgents, the reintegration phase proposes to create opportunities for knowledge and skills acquisition, financial empowerment, micro-credit and education. It is also expected to encourage and facilitate reconciliation with the local communities, and to eventually prepare youth for exit from the amnesty.

By September 24, 2011 at the official conclusion of demobilization, a total of 26,361 ‘ex-militants’ had been processed and provided with non-violence training (Ushie 2013, Obi 2014, NDAP 2015) at a cumulative cost of about N127 billion (\$600 million). The number of demobilized ‘ex-militants’ has since risen to about 30,000 and the cost now expected to rise to around \$2 billion (NSRP 2014). The huge financial investment by the Federal Government on the Amnesty meant that whereas the region had been said to have a conflict economy (Ifeka 2004, Ikelegbe 2006) where various stakeholders sought to extract value from the violence that ravaged the region in the pre-amnesty years, a ‘peace’ industry has now emerged which takes advantage of the Amnesty programme. This industry is driven primarily by complex networks of clientelism which determines the allocation of contracts to multiple stakeholders (Obi 2014, Iwilade 2014). The new peace industry has therefore simply reproduced what Vanessa Ushie (2013: 32) aptly describes as an ‘entire state architecture and political system underwritten by a profitable network of distributive patronage between competing ethno-regional interests, lubricated by enormous oil rents’. The new champions of the clientilistic peace industry in the Niger Delta include senior ex-militants like Government Ekemupolo, and Ateke Tom who ‘won’ pipeline protection contracts

worth billions of dollars, politicians, military officers as well as NGOs like FEHN that were awarded training and education contracts (Obioroh 2014, *The Guardian* July 6, 2015). Many ordinary youth have also demonstrated their ability to manipulate the system by ‘acquiring the status of militancy’ and finding their way into the amnesty programme even though they had not taken up arms against the state nor were they the key targets of the programme (Nwajiakwu-Dahou 2012, Egb int 2013, Bonga int 2013). The huge amount of money devoted to the Amnesty project is supplemented by even greater transfers to the Niger Delta states in derivation funds as well as resources provided for the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of the Niger Delta. These funds totaled about \$11.2 billion at its peak in 2012 alone as illustrated by Table 4 below (Ushie 2013: 33) and have fuelled a number of major infrastructural projects as well as massive corruption in the region. The oil industry has remained a hotbed of corruption and the political climate of the Niger Delta region has remained highly dependent on corrupt networks and violent social mobilization (Sayne, Gillies and Katsounis 2015).

Table 4: Budgetary Allocations to the Niger Delta 2010-2015 (in billion Naira)

Agency	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Amnesty office	8.0	102.1	66.1	66.7	35.5	63.3	3,41.7
NDDC	240.5	261.1	250.1	315.8	322.6	299.5	1,689.6
ND Ministry	64.4	56.6	59.7	64.8	111.1	59.7	416.3
ND States	1,343	1,695	1,941	1,946	2,043	1,795	10,763
Total	1,655.9	2,114.8	2,392.7	2,393.3	2,512	2,217.5	13,286.2

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, Newspaper Reports, Federal Allocation Account Committee Reports

The relative peace created by the Amnesty has facilitated a remarkable increase in the

volume of oil produced in the Niger Delta region from a low of about 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) to an average of 2.2 million bpd, and earning the country an extra \$39.3 billion in 2012 alone (Abazie-Humphrey 2013, Ushie 2013). Between 2009 and 2015, the full blown insurgency appeared over, leaving only sporadic and often isolated incidences of violence that have not fundamentally threatened the extraction of oil from the region's thousands of oil wells or the transport of crude through its thousands of kilometers of pipelines. This however changed early in 2016 with the emergence of new groups like the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and a return of coordinated attacks on oil infrastructure. In spite of this however, there has been a steady stability in the oil industry relative to what obtained before the Amnesty was declared in 2009. This increase in production, particularly in the years between 2010 and 2013 when oil prices were at all time highs, generated progressively higher revenues which continued to fuel the complex system of patronage upon which the peace apparently depended. Thousands of young people personally benefited in the area of skills acquisition and education and some of them have been able to break the vicious cycle of poverty, violence and disempowerment into which they had been socialized before the amnesty. Indeed, many of the youth involved in the Amnesty that I spoke with expressed gratitude for the opportunity and believe that they have become better prepared to face the uncertain social conditions in the region as a consequence of their new training. For many ordinary people, the ability to go about their daily business without molestation from the Joint Task Force (JTF), the combined armed forces and police force enforcing peace in the region, or the various unruly armed militia is the biggest blessing of the amnesty. While many young people remain excluded from the material benefits of the amnesty which have been cornered by actors with access to networks of clientelist privilege in the region, engaging in everyday social circulation, something which is

taken for granted in times of peace, is arguably the biggest gift of the amnesty.

The relative calm and stability however conceals the soft underbelly of what is in fact a DDR project designed to co-opt armed youth back into clientelistic networks that had broken down around 2003. The Niger Delta remains a highly militarized region where violence and impunity are ever present social realities. Within the oil complex itself, illegal bunkering and kidnappings remain significantly high. According to Katsouris and Sayne (2013), in the first quarter of 2013 alone, about 100 thousand barrels of crude oil was stolen from the Niger Delta. The country loses an estimated \$7billion per annum to illegal oil artisanal refiners who constantly vandalize pipelines in order to procure crude for their activities. This is often framed in survivalist and even revolutionary narratives which consistently link what is often simply an economic venture to the broader social issues confronting the Niger Delta region. Paul Ugor's (2013) study of artisanal refining in Gbekebor highlights the complex interface between illegal artisanal refining and the broader questions of disempowerment and resistance in the region and points out how everyday people can encroach on the spaces of power appropriated by the elite.

Paying off aggrieved violent groups may have paid off in the short term but it is obviously not a sustainable model for guaranteeing long term peace and stability in the region. The lack of progress in key social issues like poverty alleviation, economic opportunities, environmental security and infrastructure investments justifies the criticism that has been levelled against both the logic of and implementation of the Presidential Amnesty Programme. Scholars like Cyril Obi have also raised questions about the ownership of the DDR process itself, arguing that 'while it deals with DDR in a highly globalized, oil-rich, but impoverished region, involving one of the world's most strategic resources, the Niger Delta and national elite are keen to legitimize it as

a model ‘Nigerian solution’ to a rather intractable crisis, while at the same time seeking international support and endorsement’ (Obi 2014: 252).

A corollary to this ownership issue is the neoliberal peacebuilding logic and problem solving strategy underpinning the programme. The environment in which ‘peace contractors’ like FEHN operate does not only impose neoliberal profit making logics on the NGOs, in spite of their ‘peacebuilding’ credentials, but has encouraged the merchantalist approach that has permeated the amnesty project. Many stakeholders appear to have lost sight of the over arching developmental agenda for which the ordinary people of the Niger Delta have sacrificed so much. The procurement contracts, competitive bidding (albeit mediated by shady networks of privilege) and renewable contracting strategies of the Amnesty office, its partner NGOs and Donors have created a peacebuilding project that is more profit making than developmental. Indeed, by failing to focus on the social issues that generated the conflict in the first place, the Amnesty and its subsequent projects justify Reid’s (2011) assessment that it was designed to simply maintain the status quo.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter paints, in broad strokes, the key turns in a century of oil exploration and politics in the Niger Delta. It provides a contextual background on which the rest of the study is based and offers a window into the environment in which the youth networks to be analysed later are situated. It also touches on some of the historical events and interventions by the state in the region in response to long running concerns by the minority groups who occupy the territory about the distribution of resources and political power. The important place of youth gangs and their networks was also discussed drawing on the example of Rivers State especially urban Port Harcourt in the years just before and after the 2003 general election. The chapter also addressed the

2009 Amnesty and linked it to a long history of state interventions dating back to the 1958 Willink Commission on minorities. This particular intervention is however unique in that it is the most comprehensive programme that focused almost entirely on youth considered disruptive to the activities of the oil industry.

Chapter Two

FINDING NECESSARY THINGS, LOSING THE UNNECESSARY: THEORY, METHODS, CONCEPTS AND THE STUDY OF VIOLENT YOUTH NETWORKS

2.1 Introduction

What the descriptive context provided above shows is that in order to fulfil the goals of this study a new framework for thinking about the Niger Delta is needed. This new way necessarily engages anew with familiar concepts like youth, informality and networks but also takes greater care than is currently done by analysts to account for a bewildering register of grievances, relationships and actors.

This chapter's goal is to explore theoretical entry points to the study of an oil political economy in which politics is uncertain and is dominated as much by the reality of extraction as it is by complex affectations of identity, power and meaning. The chapter also explores the main methodological issues raised by researching in this region, for all its complexity, as well as those that arise out of probing into the lives of social shifters like youth will also be discussed in order to further localize the context and ultimately position this study within what is a very rich and diverse body of knowledge.

2.2 Permanence, social uncertainty and social navigation: A Framework for thinking about the Niger Delta

A useful way to start this is by asking that how does one move the Niger Delta literature away from the 'scarcity' (see Homer Dixon 1999) and resistance (see Obi 2009, Oluwaniyi 2010) frameworks into one that is able to recognize more intimately these complex relationships that exist among the various social categories that circulate within the oil economy? And how does one subject the region to micro rather than macro level analysis in order to capture the everyday workings of its social networks? Is this shift even necessary? There are three theoretical entry points which, taken together, can serve as a new guiding framework with which we may think more clearly

about the changing micro-politics of the Niger Delta. The first one is *permanence*. Here, the violence that permeates the region is conceptualized as a part of everyday life rather than an aberration, thus making it possible for its re-constitutive and constitutive qualities to be highlighted. Vigh (2008: 5) explains this when he noted that it is possible for violent crisis to be ‘endemic rather than episodic’, thus social ruptures are not temporary incidences that occur *in context* but are sometimes *the context*. The second entry point is *social uncertainty*. Here, the precarious nature of social relations is used as a framework for explaining what Georg Simmel (1969) called the frenetic tempo, the unbounded multiplicity and infinite complexity of life. By doing this, one can better account for the constant shifts and ruptures in social relations in the Delta region. The third entry point is that of social navigation. This allows us to explore the important ways in which supposedly marginalised clients are able to manipulate complex social systems, thereby renegotiating the bases of citizenship and carving out effective spaces of living. Taken together, these three ways of framing social relations provide a more accurate account of the complexities of life in the Delta region than current frameworks and are in particular suited to analysing constantly shifting youth driven social networks. In other words, these three concepts combine to highlight the way youth agency interacts with a social environment in which uncertainty is no longer temporary but rather a permanent fixture of life; in which youth must deal with this permanency with tools that are themselves constantly shifting and in which they also have to do so for goals that are fluid.

2.3.1 A Permanent Haze of Violence

Henrik Vigh’s (2008, 2010) ethnography of life in war ravaged Bissau describes what he calls a constant ‘presence and possibility of conflict, poverty and disorder’. He explained that with conflict so endemic in Guinea Bissau, young people had lost a sense

of peace as *the normal* and had sunk into a ‘dense feeling of deterioration related to social, economic political and even identificatory decay’ which meant that ‘critical events become figured upon a background of persistent conflict and decline; on chronic disorder and disruption’ (Vigh 2008: 6-8). What Vigh describes here is not just a society in which violent conflict is never far away, but also one in which social actors have accepted that reality and have built a capacity for tactical agency that helps them navigate through it. This description of Bissauian society mirrors the permanent haze of violence that hangs over the oil rich Niger Delta region too. Yet, this haze, as the metaphor suggests, obscures the reality of everyday life which apparently trudges on in spite of the violence. In this regard, even though violence permeates social life profoundly, it is easy for many who live within the region to ignore it, perhaps even forget that it is there, while at the same time living within the very limits it imposes.

There are two general ways in which violence manifests in the Delta. First is the inherent structural violence of the oil economy and the way this is expressed in state repression and social insurrections (see Ifeka 2004, Omotola 2009; Umeje & Akpan 2013). Second is the violence in everyday social relations. This type of violence is implicated in many of the gang related incidences that complicate the conflict landscape in the Niger Delta. What is striking however about this violence is not so much that it is sometimes very brutal and odious, but that within the youthscape, it has taken on an apparent, if disturbing, normality.

Violence within the Delta youth networks has become such a normal impulse that it brings up visions of Hannah Arendt’s (1963) notion of the ‘banality of evil’. In her work on the holocaust and politics of social order in Nazi Germany, Arendt does not suggest, and neither do I, that violence is somewhat irrational. Rather, she argues that one must consider the implications for rationality and intentionality where social action

does not appear to require reflective thinking and where it has become a routine way of engaging with life's events. For Arendt (1963), evil had become 'banal' not because it was an exceptional rupture from the otherwise peaceful drudgery of daily life, but precisely because it had become routinized and social groups could become inserted into its everyday articulations without any need to reflect upon its implications. Of course this does not in anyway absolve actors of responsibility, neither does it deny their inherent agency, it simply captures a social universe in which acting in specific ways have become incentivized as to be the rational choice for actors. It is difficult to use the analogy of the holocaust when writing about social formations or insurrections in the Niger Delta. Indeed, it is perhaps not even an appropriate analogy to the extent that the holocaust sits precisely on the repressive space of the state that the Niger Delta communities often challenge. Yet, the routinization of Nazi atrocities, especially in the everyday lives of its ordinary operatives, fits with what cruelty and violence has become for many youth in the Delta. Ufuk (int 2015), one of my informants in the oil city of Port Harcourt (int 2015) describes this pervasiveness thus:

You know, when you see people shout in Yoruba land (South Western Nigeria) and you see people running all over the place, but no one will beat up the other. I just look at them, you know? That cannot happen in my Port Harcourt, in fact 8 out of 10 times, someone must be injured if there ever is a quarrel. Even if you see someone being beaten up, it doesn't move you. You just hear people talking flippantly about punching people, stabbing people, killing people. And its not just talk. It is what happens, you know? Very normal. People even enjoy talking about it, even if you tell them you did that, no one sees it as special, they'll even say you didn't do it well enough. You know? Even young boys of 8, of 10 years. Even small girls. That's the way things are.

What Ufuk describes often occurs when a society has had a rather long and persistent experience of violence. In cases like these, it is usual for violence to become *the context* rather than for it to happen *in context*. Henry Vigh's (2008) work on chronicity is particularly useful here to explain how 'conflict, violence and poverty can become so embedded in the social fabric that they become indistinguishable from it' (Das 2007:

80), 'making crisis chronic and forcing people to make lives in fragmented and volatile worlds rather than waiting for normalization and reconfiguration' (Vigh 2008: 8).

Focusing on the permanence of violence, the chronicity of crisis (Vigh 2008) or on the 'devastation in the everydayness of life' as Mbembe (1995: 338) puts it, helps us to rethink what we define as normal. It encourages an engagement with social relations in their actuality rather than through normative frameworks of what ought to be. This is particularly important for understanding the complexities of youth driven conflict networks as it affords analysts the flexibility to follow the remarkable life stories without pre-determined notions of what a normal life should read like. Thus, one will be able to see how long term everyday violence has become routinized and how this has encouraged the emergence of specific social skills through which youth can pursue a multiplicity of goals all ultimately leading towards social maturity and respectability. By identifying and acknowledging these skills, the agentive capacity of youth is highlighted and moves the Delta literature away from narratives that focus on their manipulation by clientelist forces.

2.3.2 Social Uncertainty and Social Navigation

In spite of the sense of stability that the notion of a permanent haze of violence hovering above Delta society elicits, there is still a lot of uncertainty about the nature of opportunities, the actors who would compete for them and the specific spaces in which these contests will take place. Any analysis of the contemporary Delta must therefore embrace the interaction of both stability (or permanence) and social uncertainty. Zeiderman, Kaker, Silver and Wood (2015: 282), describe uncertainty as 'a domain of knowledge and nonknowledge that generates controversies of authority and expertise'. These controversies ultimately represent both opportunities and constraints for those who live within the sprawling metropolises of post colonial cities (Simone 2004; De

Boeck 2011; Robinson 2013; Marr 2016). Studies of spaces such as the Niger Delta will thus benefit a lot from taking into account the impact that uncertainty has on framing youth action.

As a tool for analyzing youth action, the focus here is on uncertainty as both a *product* and *producer* of social action. Zeiderman, Kaker, Silver and Wood (2015: 285) describe this dialectical relationship between uncertainty and social action as one in which its (uncertainty's) 'dynamic, processual and recursive nature' are emphasized. But then, how is uncertainty a product of social action? And in what ways can it produce social action? To answer the first question, we need to explore oil driven social change in the Delta as a way of showing how the extraction of this global commodity has dislocated important historical markers to which the social life of ordinary people were anchored, thereby producing instability and thus uncertainty. From environmental displacement (Rowell 1994, Okwechime 2013) to livelihood distortions (Pegg & Zabbey 2013), oil extraction has constantly ruptured established social patterns in the region, forcing community members to regularly pause to find their bearing in a bewildering world of compelling paradoxes, violent repression and shifting opportunities. In a study of the aftermath of a 2008 oil spill in Bodo, a small Ogoni community in Rivers State for instance, Pegg and Zabbey (2013:399-400) detail how household vulnerabilities increased significantly with the destruction of farming and fishing resources. This livelihood loss was, bad as it was, further exacerbated by the near impossibility for many members of that community to find alternative sources of income generation. The implications of this sudden disruption in the life of the inhabitants of Bodo at the time profoundly affected their ability to plan for the near future and forced many into unwanted outward migrations. This pattern of sudden displacement and forced migration is also documented in the work of Okwechime (2013) who explored case

studies from across six Delta sites to highlight the scope of social dislocation that the oil industry often induces. These massive oil induced displacements of course trigger desperate responses from social actors eking out meagre livings from the region. As Ugor (2013) identified in the village of Gbekebor, a good percentage of artisanal refineries which have been criminalized around the Niger Delta emerge out of the adaptations of Delta youth to both the devastation of traditional livelihoods as well as the consequent abundance (or perhaps accessibility) of crude oil from faulty pipes.

Oil extraction, to the extent that it disrupts old livelihood patterns and constantly reconfigures social incentives through disproportionate introduction of capital as well as its tendency to distribute this unequally, is a major producer of social uncertainty in the region. Yet, the very presence of this uncertainty induces specific patterns of social action, some of which are expressed in widespread violence, social mobilization and ultimately insurrection. The way this uncertainty induced action reflects in youth politics will be addressed shortly. What is clear however, is that uncertainty is a pervasive feature of life in the Delta and efforts to analyze the region must at least show awareness of this.

A framework that focusses on uncertainty should not be taken to imply that there are no anchors in the social life of Delta youth. Indeed, there is evidence that social imagination can be based on vast and sometimes age-old repertoires of justice which give form to the uncertainties of life in the oil Delta. Writers like Ifeka (2004), Adunbi (2013, 2015), Anugwom (2011) and Okwechime (2015) have written about the important role that occult imaginations and historical myths play in serving as reference points for youth politics in an otherwise constantly shifting and violent social universe. Equally potent as anchors of stability are the multiplicity of rules through which the alternative spaces of citizenship that youth are forced to create are governed. What these

imply is that, to adequately understand the role of uncertainty in Delta spaces, it is important to acknowledge the pockets of stability that is generated by social categories like youth in their struggle to make sense of a rapidly changing context. There is a sense in which the metaphor of the earth moving as a singular object in planetary orbit around the sun yet moving also on its own axis captures the point being made here. While the Delta is a very uncertain social space, the various responses of actors ultimately create a sense of stability. This interaction of uncertainty and stability is at the core of life in the region and one of the key windows into youth politics.

Perhaps no one captures this theoretical point better than Henrik Vigh in his 2009 article on social navigation. Describing the relationship between uncertainty and stability in Bissauian society, Vigh (2009: 421) argues that:

‘This is not to suggest that everything in Bissau is adrift and afloat. There are, in fact a multitude of both cultural and social institutions that seem relatively stable and enduring, one of which, ironically, is the existential uncertainty caused by the dire economic situation and political unrest’

He goes on further to note that ‘Bissau is a world of uncertainty, of anticipated yet uncontrollable difficulties and hardship’ (Vigh 2009: 422). The key here is that the uncertainty is anticipated, yet hard to control, indicating that it has become the context of life rather than a temporary rupture.

McGoey (2009: 155) argues that social uncertainty ‘creates a demand for solutions to the ambiguity it perpetuates’. The question then is: how do Delta youth respond to this demand? This question refers primarily to the agentic capacity of youth and this is where social navigation comes in; as a response to the uncertainty that permeates life in the Niger Delta’s oil economy. The youth networks analysed in this study all indicate very high levels of agentic capacity and in order for analysts to grasp their complexities it is critical to frame the discussion in a way that acknowledges this. Scott (1998) writes that due to the intersection of the multiple factors constituting our social environment,

it is 'always emergent and unfolding' thus requiring that agents have the 'capacity to adapt and read capricious environments (Scott 1998: 331).

Delta youth are adept at these constant adaptations and readings of the volatile social environment in which they have to survive and, where possible, thrive. There are of course very individualized responses to this social environment. However, as Mbembe and Roitman (1995: 324) note, there is also often a 'regime of subjectivity' in which one may identify a 'shared ensemble of imaginary configurations of everyday life, imaginaries which have a material basis and systems of intelligibility'. Pursuing individual social goals within the context of the Delta is often difficult and many youth have discovered the value of inserting themselves into networks that help speed up the process of social maturation. This is perhaps one of the most potent social navigation tactics that youth have discovered in the region. It is therefore important for any framework for studying the region to acknowledge the interactions between individual and group imaginations and identities and place them within the intersection of uncertainty and stability.

Exploring social navigation as a concept of practice, Vigh (2006, 2009) brings up interesting images of 'motion within motion', what he calls 'motion squared'. He argues that it 'encompasses both the assessment of the dangers and possibilities of one's present position as well as the process of plotting and attempting to actualize routes into an uncertain and changeable future' (2009: 425). His point is that social navigation is primarily about motion and that it inherently encompasses both the present and the future and ultimately that one cannot adequately analyse agency without linking actions to imaginations about the future. This focus on flexibility of action within a social context that is itself very fluid is particularly useful for grappling with the politics of youth in the Niger Delta.

It, first of all, helps to illuminate more clearly the role that agency plays in the social life of youth. By highlighting how youth express themselves within constantly changing environments, this framework makes it possible to break away from the constricting perspectives of scarcity or of the binary frames of resistance and repression. It recognizes that these factors exist within the social imaginaries as well as in the realities of life for Delta youth, yet, it is able to see beyond them and account for important processes of change. It does this by placing the entire analysis of youth action within the context of constant motion and change, treating both the analytical space as well as the human subjects of research as fluid and changing. With an analytical frame such as this, it becomes untenable to see social positions as unchanging or to ignore the constant reconfigurations of relationships, of networks and indeed of goals that are evident in the Niger Delta. The dominant frameworks of scarcity, resistance and repression that have driven the Niger Delta literature can only effectively capture the broader macro contexts of oil politics but, as shown here, are not as effective when they are applied to everyday social networks around which life is organized in the region and which are the focus of this study. It is in the light of this that this study adopts the sociological and anthropological insights derivable from the interrogation of permanence, uncertainty and navigation as frameworks for thinking about the the Niger Delta's youth networks.

2.4 The Operational Concepts

The framework analysed above also requires the contextualisation of the concepts through which we analyse the politics of youth in the Delta. Underpinning this study are three important concepts- informality, networks and youth. I will explore each of them in order to outline how they are conceptualized in this study as well contextualize them within the Niger Delta. These concepts are dealt with here primarily because they

run, implicitly or explicitly through the entire dissertation and it would be inappropriate to deal with them in every chapter that they occur.

2.4.1 Encountering the informal, the formal and the marginal

One of the great contradictions of the political economy of oil in the Delta is that whereas it has a centralizing effect by rendering the state more visible and globalized and by financially underwriting a process of secular nationalism and state building, it simultaneously creates a revenue flow that generates weak institutions and ultimately fragments, pulverizes and discredits the very state it seeks to build (Watts 2004). At the core of this state-building (and tear down) process is the dynamic mixing of the formal and informal spaces and the implications of the different articulations of power through which competing interests occupy them. As products of global production processes, both the formal and the informal reflect the exploitative nature of capital (as constituted primarily in the formal economy) as well as the everyday agency of poor people who struggle to make sense of a highly constraining context.

Any study of the politics of youth inevitably includes at least an awareness of the informal. This is a consequence of their tendency to occupy alternative (read informal) spaces in the moral economy, shaping counter-mainstream conceptions of citizenship, of modernity and progress. In highly charged political contexts like the Niger Delta, this alternative space is all the more relevant and deserving of interrogation. What this section intends to achieve is to explore the theoretical questions raised by the dynamic relations between the formal and the informal, analysing the key debates, and showing that circulating in the informal does not necessarily imply marginality.

There are a number of dominant perspectives in how the literature has treated the relationship between the formal and informal spaces. The first conceptualizes the spaces as dualist and distinct sites of economic activity in which production processes

are largely separate (Bacchetta, Ernest & Bustamante 2009). The dualist perspective sees the informal as inferior and those who circulate within that space as marginalised. Drawing insights from research on capitalist development, the informal sector is treated as a misnomer, a product of the disruptive criminality of less productive social groups (Huntington 1968, Kings 1997) or of the wanton corruption of the powerful (Chabal & Daloz 1999). Thus, for societies to ‘institutionalise political power’ (Posner & Young 2007), they need to bring the informal and the informal people into the orbit of formal bureaucratic state power. By assuming that informality appears only as a consequence of the failure of the state to fully occupy or filter through to the multiple institutions of political authority, markets and society within its territory, the dualist perspective constructs for the informal, a false contradictory and epistemologically external space. For one, as is evident in the casualization of workers or global outsourcing of labour by multinationals for instance, the informal space sometimes emerges as a deliberate policy of capitalist production in order to maximize profit (Gallin 2001, Lindell 2010). This is what Altrock (2012) refers to as the ‘complementary’ relationship between the formal and informal sectors. There are multiple examples of this type of interaction between formality and informality within the Niger Delta’s oil complex. For instance, oil companies often create hybrid security infrastructure which utilizes the state’s armed services, Private Security Companies (PSCs) as well as networks of youth paid to protect infrastructure or undermine popular struggles. A report on Rumuekpe town in Rivers State where Shell BP runs its Trans Niger Pipeline as well as booster and flow stations for instance, details how the company paid hundreds of thousands of US dollars of protection money to whichever gang had control of the town (Platform 2011). As one of the gang members interviewed for the report claimed, they were given money to buy bullets, arms, and for food by Shell. This relationship between Shell and irregular

armed youth groups corroborates the argument many have made about the co-dependence of formal and informal systems of authority (Hariss-White 2010). A blanket view of informality as a site of exclusion ignores the important ways in which the process of work for instance shows that informalization is itself prosecuted precisely through mechanisms of inclusion (Phillips 2011: 382). Hariss-White (2010: 171) addresses this issue when she talks of an interstitial informal economy in which informal activity happens in and around registered economic processes or state bureaucracies. Indeed, the powerful potential of the informal becomes even clearer when the political is considered. Studies of informal articulations of political power often show the potential of the informal operating, in fact, as the superior arena of power in which the formal is merely a tool deployed by interest groups for its multiple contestations (see Joseph 1987, Chabal & Daloz 1999, Adebani & Obadare 2013).

Attempting to respond to critiques of the dualist view, the legalist school of thought insists on the notion of separateness but focusses instead on the effectiveness of governing regulations on either space. They argue that the informal economy is the unregulated arena in which micro entrepreneurs choose to operate in order to lower costs (Light 2004, Maloney 2004, Phillips 2011). The formal is therefore the realm of ‘rule of law’, of ‘good governance’ and bureaucratic institutionalism while the informal is the chaotic arena of contingency, disruption and crime. The problem with this point of view however is that the informal sector is hardly unregulated. In fact, many studies of informality have highlighted complex regulatory mechanisms through which values, rules and a governing moral universe are imposed.¹⁰ The fact that the rules of the

¹⁰The very rich literature on vigilantism for instance illustrates how informal arrangements can and do generate very strict forms of social control through the construction and enforcement of alternate moral universes. See a brief discussion of vigilantism in Chapter Three. More detailed analysis can be found in Anderson 2002, Harnisfeger 2003, Buur & Jensen 2004, Meagher 2007, Pratten & Sen 2007, Pratten 2008; Petrus 2015.

informal sector are often unwritten and sometimes fluid, is no indication of their non existence. The tendency to see the informal space as unregulated, chaotic and decadent often owes much to an unwillingness to let go of a very western notion of the ideal, which tends to reify rigid legal structures while dismissing as aberrant anything that doesn't quite conform to that ideal. The very nature of informality however requires categorisations that are consciously fluid and which are capable of responding to different sets of governing logics. The focus on regulation does not make up for the analytical weakness inherent in the failure to see the structural connections between informality and formality. As the treatment of contingent network relations will show later in Chapter Four, the Niger Delta provides interesting illustrations of why recognising fluid governing frameworks are important.

The third perspective responds to this weakness by proposing a structuralist view which acknowledges a direct connection between the formal and the informal. It argues however that despite this structural connection, the informal is essentially subordinated to the formal as a central process of capitalist development (Mosser 1978, Portes *et al* 1989, Altrock 2012). Phillips (2011) highlights how this structural connection can be a tool in the hands of the powerful for the exploitation of workers or for the maximisation of profit by companies and argues that both informalization and formalisation processes proceed simultaneously and exist within each other. The structuralist perspective, like the previous two, assumes that informality simply exists and is available to the cause of accumulation by those who control the formal levers of power. However, the informal space is obviously also a space of protest, resistance and struggle. Where it is not engaged in explosive violent resistance like in the Niger Delta, there is hardly an informal space where elements of Bayat's (2004) 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' are not visible. This underscores the analytical weakness of any conception of

informality that proceeds from a position that assumes its lack of social agency or potential for effective collective organisation.

A corollary of this is the notion of adverse incorporation popularised in studies of chronic poverty (du Toit 2004, Hickey & du Toit 2007, Phillips 2011). Adverse incorporation refines the structuralist argument in many ways. For one, it explores more deeply the intersection of the two spaces and challenges the idea that informality is necessarily about social exclusion. Du Toit (2004) argues that linking informality to social exclusion is conceptually problematic because it ignores the nature of inclusion itself and how it often reproduces subordinate social positions. This implies that unlike the other perspectives which tend to locate exploitation only in the informal, adverse incorporation highlights the tendency to exploit even those who participate in the formal economy. In this regard therefore, focus is not on the excluded but rather on the terms upon which the included are made to participate. This perspective raises interesting questions about how we think about marginality. It implies for instance that participation in an economic process does not automatically mean that all actors do so on terms favourable to them. As du Toit (2004: 1001) puts it, 'what defines marginality is not exclusion (or even imperfect inclusion!) but the terms and conditions of incorporation'. Amin (2001) makes a similar point with regard to Africa's insertion into the global capitalist system by arguing that in spite of its lack of power, it is situated right at the center of the global economy. He links this to the nature of its incorporation and how this reproduces subordination in spite of decades of nominal independence.

While the structuralist perspective (and adverse incorporation) takes a major step forward in placing informality within analytical boundaries that reflect the reality of its dynamic relations with the formal, it still does not quite capture the role that social agency (both individual and collective) plays in most self-regulated spaces. Admittedly

this reflects less the flaws in their analytical frames as it does the specific type of social processes they investigate. For instance, these perspectives all have a bias for economic conceptions of informality, or more accurately, for how informality is articulated in capitalist production. This means that extraordinary political processes that emerge out of and which consciously utilise informality are excluded from how agency is viewed. The question of whether informal actors are marginal is addressed in part by the idea of adverse incorporation. What is missing however, especially in relation to social actors like youth militia which are investigated here, is the recognition of the ability of such actors to impose their will on elements of the system relevant to their specific incorporation. Of course the macro system is controlled by powerful forces whose locus of action rest in the extraction of surplus value and the accumulation of capital all over the world. However, outside of a grand macro analysis, more nuanced investigations of the specific ways in which individual youth navigate the system reveals the innovative ways agency is expressed. Far from being ‘adversely incorporated’ into the system as tools of capital (Gallin 2001, Altrock 2012), the evidence on the ground suggests that many youth are able to insert themselves into the opportunities unwittingly opened up by weak state institutions or by difficult economic circumstances. Bayat’s (2004) notion of ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’ is more appropriate here because it does more to recognize the agency of the ‘weak’ and highlights their ability to subtly impose their needs on the system in ways that often undermine rather than strengthens the hold of the state on their autonomy (also see Scott 1985). These questions around informality and marginality are reflected in various examples discussed throughout this study.

2.4.2 Ties that Bind: Survival Networks, Accumulation Networks and Conflict Networks¹¹

Another important concept that runs through the entire dissertation is that of networks.

Even though social mobilization and interpersonal ties are evident in the dynamic politics of the Delta region, the existence of ties that are regular, overlapping and regulated enough to generate large scale patterns of social interaction and behaviour cannot be taken for granted. It is important to question how these networks emerge, in what specific types of spaces they thrive, who the actors are, what fluidity can be discerned, what power relations mediate them, how they relate with the state and how membership is determined and maintained (Granovetter 1973, Mitchell 1989, Coleman 2000, Susser 2002, Hansen and Vaa 2003, Meagher 2005, 2006; Vega-Redondo 2007, Castells 2010, Lindell 2010a, 2010b; Lindell & Utas 2012). What these questions suggest is that social networks, where they exist, are in themselves highly contested sites hardly immune from the inequalities and constant negotiations for power that exist in the broader society. As Granovetter (1973: 1360) points out, studying inter-personal relations can give profound insight into broader social patterns and is an effective ‘micro-macro bridge’. In one way or another, it is through these networks that small-scale interaction becomes translated into large-scale patterns, and these, in turn, feed back into small groups.

In order for small scale interactions to evolve into social networks, what Meagher (2005: 219) described as ‘informal organizations and arrangements based on social ties’, a collective identity has to be constructed through which ‘boundary formation and social othering’ (Lindell 2010a) can occur. These boundaries within which the group mobilizes its collective social capital are constructed as Lindell (2010b) suggests, through

¹¹ Large parts of this section have now been published in A. Iwilade, “Oil, Youth and Networks of the ‘unconnected’ in the Niger Delta”, *Society and Natural Resources*, Vol. 28, No 11: 1203-15, 2015.

discourses that identify and popularize historically specific contradictions, grievances and collective imaginations. Some of these serve as markers of unity and often include ethnic, spatial, gender or class identities. Perhaps, in no place is this strategy for the construction of social networks more evident in Nigeria than the Niger Delta where the contradictions of oil extraction and decades of state neglect have created narratives of marginalization and discrimination and have also generated incentives for participation in the informal underground economy. Recent examples of these types of social mobilization that have appropriated discourses of ‘boundary formation and social othering’ in the region include the mobilization of ethnic nationalism among the Ijaw (Nwajiaku 2005, Ukeje & Adebani 2008, Ibaba 2011), the Ogoni movement for self determination (Ibeanu 1997), and broader resource control and identity struggles throughout the region (Osaghae, Ikelegbe, Olarinmoye & Okhomina 2007).

While ascriptive identities like ethnicity and gender are often important entry points into social networks as well as the initial basis for solidarity within them, they are usually not enough to sustain or expand them. As Granovetter (1973) argues, weak ties are crucial for bridging social cleavages because strong ties like those created by ethnic or gender solidarity for instance create what Coleman (2000) describes as ‘network closures’ and solidifies social boundaries in ways that discourage expansion and adaptability. For highly fluid and uncertain environments as has been earlier described of the Delta, where the ability to respond to rapidly changing social and economic cues are key to survival, this could easily be a weakness rather than a strength for the social network. This justifies the approach of analysts who situate social networks within broader discourses of economic informality (Meagher 2005, 2006; Lourenco-Lindell 2002, Lindell 2010a, 2010b) thus linking the nurturing of social ties to the politics of accumulation and redistribution.

With a social terrain as fluid as in the Delta, one can expect frequent episodes of what Meagher (2005: 229) describes as ‘disembedding’. In this, one of the many modifications that social networks constantly go through, actors are able to develop new ties in order to ‘extricate themselves from existing communal allegiances and obligations’. This rational strategy for engaging with social networks, which is a clear indication of individuals’ ability to assert agency in spite of being embedded in local realities, has been described in the case of Zambian commercial farmers who become Jehovah’s witnesses in order to escape obligations to village communities (Long 1968), Igbo business people who convert to evangelical Christians partly to extricate themselves from the demands of hometown associations (Meagher 2005) and the even more recent example of young Gambian Tablighi Jama’at members who create separate moral communities partly to avoid the heavy costs of kinship relations (Janson 2013).

If social networks have become primary resources for the survival of social categories eking out a living on the margins of liberalizing economies, how can we situate youth within this milieu? What does the process of social becoming in the context of an uncertain political economy mean for networks? There are no easy answers to these questions because the experiences of specific youth categories are bound to be mediated by local material and historical realities. Recent work on the everyday struggles of youth around the continent however indicates their centrality to informal economies and the critical ways in which their peculiar challenges shape underground citizenship claims (Vigh 2009, Hoffman 2011). With youth asserting increasing agency in the face of uncertain life chances and sometimes even violent conflict (Durham 2000, Comaroff & Comaroff 2006, Vigh 2008, Ugor 2013), it is difficult to discount their role in the kinds of social networks I have briefly described above. Indeed, in spite of their perceived listless impatience and mobility, youth are not ‘loose molecules’ but are deeply

connected to the rest of society through the infrastructure of social networks. Evidence from many studies of youth in Africa (Ukeje 2001, Maxted 2003, Zegeye 2003, de Boeck & Honwana 2005) demonstrates that even within social networks, their tendency to challenge boundaries and constantly renegotiate the nature of power remains very much alive. Indeed, they engage with and challenge network logics in unique ways informed by their position within society (Lindell and Utas 2012). For them, social networks provide critical access to the respectability that rapid changes in the structure of economic incentives has made increasingly more difficult to attain and thus are very crucial social assets which they strive hard to gain access to and cultivate. Lindell and Utas (2012: 410), writing about youth in urban Africa argue that, ‘for marginalized groups, participation in networks and associations may also constitute channels for the creation and assertion of social identities and for attaining a sense of respect and dignity’. These questions further underline the reality that social networks are complex constructs that have to be understood within a framework that is capable of accounting for the interfaces between multiple fields of power and fragmented sets of identities constructed for the purpose of creating, according to Lindell (2010), ‘proximities and distance’. We must also grapple with the questions surrounding the specific ways in which social networks are deployed in the service of individuals, groups and ideals as well as their embeddedness within local realities. It is by taking note of these complexities that social networks can be a useful framework for exploring broader questions relating to the politics of youth, of marginality and of violence that this study addresses.

2.4.3 What does ‘youth’ mean?

The story of African youth is often told with pity, fear and disgust. Pity is obvious when scholars and policy makers attempt to deal with the impact of violence, disease and patriarchal systems on African youth (Dane & Levine 1994, Stohl 2002, Murphy 2003,

Macmullin & Loughry 2004). Fear is often palpable when the issue being addressed involves generational tensions; where youth is framed as capable of, or actually violently destabilizing familiar patterns of authority (Baumeister 1996, Abbink & Kessel 2005) or where youth participation in armed conflict is being addressed (Zegeye 2003; Ifeka 2006). ‘Disgust’, in its case, often dribs from accounts of youth criminality in Africa (Glaser 2000) or of perceived misbehavior or social deviance. In a 1970 article in the *Daily Sketch*, a defunct Nigerian newspaper, a writer talked about the ‘disgusting gluttony of youth who only come to department stores to buy food’. This reflects a certain intolerance of young people’s very circulation within the public sphere and it is still visible in the contemporary popular press. For instance, in a 2015 opinion piece in a National Daily Newspaper, *The Vanguard*, a writer condemned the ‘youth’ thus:

“You complain about the problems and challenges but that’s all you do. You follow the same people who created the problems and eulogize them to high heavens. You are guilty of lack of depth and originality. Your level of thinking is pedestrian. Since no one can rise beyond the level of their thinking, you have remained at the aboriginal state of being- the same with your progenitors” (Vanguard October 27, 2015).

This damning critique of the politics and life style choices of young people is also reflected in many popular analyses of social problems like drug abuse, public rowdiness or drunkenness which reflect systemic failures more than they actually do the choices of individual young people. Yet, these stories are by no means inaccurate readings of specific contexts of youthhood in Africa or of the incentives and constraints that shape their engagement with social crisis. However, they inadequately describe what ‘being young’ means in Africa. This is so, first because they often deny the specific agency of youth and thus focus disproportionately on how society shapes youth, thereby ignoring how youth also shapes society. Second, many of these accounts are quick to ignore or even dismiss the fact that society and its structures are, in fact, an interactive whole where, as Jon Abbink (2005: 9) notes, ‘the actions of individuals and minor groups play

a role and ‘realize’ as well as transform structures’. Thus, youth and their specific nature(s) are often not integrated as a necessary element in the social make up of society.

To have a more accurate reading of what ‘being young’ means in Africa, one must account not only for the way society shapes youth but also how youth is a part of society and thus, one of its key shapers. Such inclusive conceptualization of youth will accommodate four basic perspectives. First, it will view youth as a social category within an intergenerational discourse. Second, it will place this intergenerational discourse within a broader discourse of power, authority and control. Third, it will take due note of the shifting nature of the inherent relations of power and control and how it affects the social notions of youth. Finally, it will view youth as a lived experience rather than an imagined one (Bayart 2009; Ukeje & Iwilade 2012).

With regard to these four perspectives, one can discern that generational categories, such as childhood, youth and adulthood, are not neutral or even natural, but rather a ‘part of the struggle for influence and authority within almost every society’ (Christiantine, Utas and Vigh 2006: 11). Related to this struggle is a growing youth appropriation of the public sphere, a situation made largely possible by the emergence of new media technologies and all the empowering characteristics that they bear. As a consequence, youth has become a very critical category through which we may understand the dynamics of power, influence and control in the public sphere.

The contemporary history of the Niger Delta is in some ways a narrative of the coming of age of youth who, in the face of state repression and multinational oil company irresponsibility, discovered voice and activated latent agency. Yet, the narrative is also about young people in the grip of manipulative patrimonial relationships who are recruited to violent causes that they neither believe in nor which they will significantly

benefit from. Somewhere along this spectrum of agency and helplessness, young people experience the social, political and economic implications of oil extraction in both its most vicious form (see for instance accounts of the massacre by the Nigerian Army at Odi in HRW 1999) as well as in its most benevolent (see the massive amounts of money devoted to the Amnesty). But the notion of *youth* or of *the young* in the Niger Delta is perhaps as complex as the region itself is and to understand it, I turn first to the debate in the youth literature.

2.4.3.1 Youth as a life-stage

One of the earliest ideas of youth is that it is a life-stage sandwiched somewhere between childhood and adulthood (McKeon 1941, Feuer 1969). This perspective draws insights from psychosocial and biological knowledge about the development of the natural human body and locates ‘youth’ in adolescence. This conflation of youth and adolescence assumes that youth is a specific period in the development of a human in which the body goes through profound psycho-somatic changes that ultimately leads towards adulthood. In this regard, one becomes youth when the body clock changes in such a way that procreation becomes a biological possibility. Adulthood comes when one actually does so, and often within the boundaries of socially accepted marriage (Hendin 1975, Elder 1975, Johnson-Hanks 2002). The life-stage perspective thus flirts with a naturalisation of human development that links social behaviour to hormonal changes rather than socialisation. As Chrisantzen, Utas and Vigh (2006: 16) described it, this approach ‘positions youth as an undifferentiated entity locked in a predefined process towards physical, psychological and social maturity, thereby running the risk of portraying youth as necessarily following a natural process of development’. The life-stage approach is contradictory on a number of fronts. First, while it is predicated on transitional hormonal changes which are inevitably destabilising as humans struggle

to construct a ‘final’ adult identity (Erikson 1974, Jansen 1975), the outcome is assumed to be pre-determined and fixed- arrival at adulthood. It doesn’t seem to account for the sometimes very different individual experiences of that hormone induced destabilisation. A second contradiction is that whereas the life-stage approach depends on biology, it locates the implications of biology in very social terms. This of course questions why socialisation is generally ignored in the initial conception of youth itself. In spite of these contradictions, the life-course approach does not avoid dealing with the implications of age for political behaviour. Adelson (1971, 1980) for instance writes about youth as the time to strive for independence, form an identity and strive to determine the relationship between the society and the self. As a result, youth supposedly have a natural ‘predisposition to generational conflict, rebellion and revolution’ (Braungart & Braungart 1986: 210). The problem with this approach however is that it hardly takes into account the actual complexities in the individual experiences and assumes that people move on a linear path towards adulthood. It neither accounts for those who become stuck (Hansen 2005) nor for those who wallow in waithood (Hashemi 2015) and certainly not for the over-youth category who are neither youth nor fully adults.¹² It also does not deal adequately with youth agency, rather, it locates social development along a linear trajectory that is essentially driven by supposedly biological processes of ageing and psychosocial development over which the rational individual has little control.

2.4.3.2 Subcultures of Youth

Another approach is to view youth as a distinct cultural category, a sub-culture that is produced from the interactions that young people have with each other and from the

¹² The articulation of this so called over-youth category in the Delta will be dealt with extensively later in Chapter Five

way they set themselves up against mainstream social norms. Latysheva (2011:74) describes youth subcultures as ‘the aggregate set of the aesthetic, political, and other value orientations, symbols, patterns of behaviour, lifestyle, and outward trappings of some group of young people representing an independent integrated formation within the framework of a nation’s general culture’. This is what Durkheim (1901: xlix) was describing when he stated that ‘what the collective representations convey is the way in which the group conceives itself in its relation to objects which affect it.’ Thus, the idea of a ‘subculture’ is clearly considered to relate to autonomous social categories who carve out alternative ways of being with respect to broader society.

In the study of youth however, the notion of a subculture is often taken even further by conceptualising youth cultures as cultures in their own right and with their own worldviews and lifestyles. With the tendency to reify the alternative spaces that youth can often build for themselves and which is sometimes designed to insulate them from the pressures of the ‘outside’ however, notions of youth sub-cultures can be quite problematic. One false assumption is that youthscape (see Maira & Soep 2005) are somewhat autonomous. The problem with this however is that alternative cultural spaces are actually not separate from society. They make society as much as they are made by it. Therefore, defining a sub-culture as distinct and ‘outside’ ignores that process of constant renegotiation and construction through which both individuals and social categories take up new identities. Importantly, youth is neither outside nor detached from the rest of society. If anything, they are important elements of the identity of society in that they capture both the energy of its present as well as the dreams of its future.

There is a major connection between the life-stage and the subculture perspectives of youth in that they both seem to derive their core assumptions from biological and

naturalist conceptions of human development. At the core of the early subculture perspective is an attempt to explain supposedly deviant youth behaviour through evolutionary biology. This, according to Blackman (2014), draws from early works on eugenics. In Cyril Burt's (1925) book, *The Young Delinquent*, the biological roots of the sub-culture conceptualization of the meaning of youth is laid bare and in that work, delinquency and deviance are considered to reflect something abnormal for which society was meant to guard itself against. The concept of 'subculture' emerged from this early discussion about deviance.

Admittedly, the more recent uses of youth subcultures no longer draw so much from the biological roots of the concept (Wulff 1995). However, they are still based on a conception of the young that detaches them from the rest of society, thereby creating an autonomous social category whose positionality within society is ignored. Chrisantzen, Utas and Vigh (2006: 16) provide a useful critique when they argued that 'youth risks, in this perspective to protrude analytically as an almost autonomous group, capable of constructing worlds of its own and living lives separated from the surrounding society'.

2.4.3.3: Youth as lived and as imagined; youth as being and as becoming

Recent research on youth has turned up more sophisticated insights into how we can conceptualize this social category. Over the last two decades, young people have become a particularly important window through which analysts can peer into the dynamic politics of many societies. In the light of the violent youth themed insurrections of the 1990s and early 2000s in West Africa (Peters & Richards 1998; Jike 2002; Peters, Richards & Vlassenroot 2003; Vigh 2006; Osaghae 2011; Day & Reno 2014), a flurry of scholarly work emerged that began to focus increasingly on the agency of the young. This new agenda stands in sharp contrast to the previous two

which tended to either outrightly deny that agency (life-stage perspectives) or to detach it from the rest of society, thereby obscuring and *othering* it (sub-culture perspectives). Two contrasting pictures of youth emerged. One was triumphalist and saw youth as vanguards of a new democratic culture and age while the other questioned young people's roles in violent social disruptions and described them more as vandals. Yet, it was possible for youth, as the various essays in Abbink and Kessel's (2005) aptly titled book, *Vanguard or Vandals* show, to play both roles in society. Indeed, it is even possible for those roles to constantly shift, to ebb and flow, depending on what the requirements of tactical agency impose on socially active youth and at what time those calculations are made (Waage 2006, Vigh 2009, Boas 2013). Further complicating the conundrum, Smith (2011) even argues that it is possible to be neither, that is, for young people to be 'rebels without a cause' but not without effect.¹³

The very diverse experiences of youthhood clearly calls for a conception of youth that is deliberately contextualised rather than generalised. The idea of studying youth *as lived* therefore draws from this important notion that what it means to be young is produced by very particular historical, economic, social and political processes and that individual youth tend to experience these processes in different ways. As a result of this variation, accurately defining youth is dependent on an understanding of how these processes shape specific people or groups and on how these play out in specific historical moments. It is also dependent on an understanding of how those who either claim the status of youth or are placed there by the boundaries erected by society constantly negotiate the reality of their *youthness*, or how they use it to guarantee social survival or mobility.

¹³ For earlier use of this phrase in various other contexts, but generally expressing a similar idea, see Bailey 1990; Stella 1994 and Cox 1998.

Yet, what is *young* is sometimes imagined rather than lived or even both lived and imagined. In this regard, relations of power and positionality are reflected in the deliberate framing of specific individuals and groups as youth. Where, it brings benefits as in the Niger Delta Amnesty programme, it is not uncommon to see people appropriate the youth label. It is also not uncommon to see the same people reject the label where it infringes on their abilities to express agentic autonomy. Ultimately, youthness is embedded within the broader structures of power and authority and is a space of intense competition and contestation. This is what Gore and Pratten (2003: 215) meant when they described youth as a ‘complex, fluid and permeable social category which is historically and socially situated’.

With regard to this social embeddedness of youth, Chrisantzen, Utas and Vigh’s (2006: 11) point that ‘people are not passively part of a socio-generational category’ becomes relevant. This implies that to understand youth, the constant shifts in meaning associated with the way young people position themselves and are positioned by society, what Vigh (2003, 2009) conceptualizes as a position in movement, have to be taken into account. In this regard, youth is a *social being* with immediate needs and autonomous identity, as well as a *social becoming*, an unfinished product in constant motion.

2.4.4 Being ‘Youth’ in the Delta: Interventions

The above represents a snapshot of how the concept of youth has been used in the literature. But how is youth used in this study? What does it really mean to be young in the Niger Delta and what does it mean to be youth? In what ways have the Delta networks being studied positioned the notion of youth hood and what is its value to the dynamics of politics in the region?

2.4.4.1 The verb of the young: youth as ‘a doing’ concept

*How can you call yourself a youth when you just sit down there doing nothing?
What is the purpose of your strength? (Bozi, int 2014)*

At the start of any sustained engagement with young people in the Niger Delta, it quickly becomes apparent that ‘youth’ is an active concept. To be a ‘youth’ among the violent networks I studied, your ‘youth’ needs to be active in the sense that it is constantly navigating the unstable urban spaces, circulating within what Maira and Soep (2005) called ‘youthscapes’ and participating in the many shady (often violent) activities through which life acquires meaning. By constructing youth as verb, the concept becomes intertwined with connotations of agency as well as of responsibility. It places the idea of being ‘youth’ in a social struggle (often, but not always, generational) that ultimately means that it is a social space into which individuals cannot seek inclusion except through groups.

Being youth is profoundly different from being young. To be young, one needs to be in a marginal social position in which one is subject to the rules of society and dependent on its benevolence. To be ‘youth’ however, one cannot ‘sit down there doing nothing’, therefore, one must ‘belong’.¹⁴ What this indicates is that youth is essentially an acquired status only available to those who can access the violent networks that shape political life in the region. One of the most constant refrains I heard during fieldwork in various parts of the Delta as well as with various groups of Delta youth outside of the region is the idea that youth has a distinctly active connotation, often referring to those who ‘have street credibility’ who are ‘not civilians’ and who ‘belong’. It hardly ever refers to young people in the general population who are not actively involved in

¹⁴ Those who ‘belong’ are those who are members of any of the many cult groups, youth gangs, vigilantes or militias that dot the Niger Delta region. This is a cult slang that is quite popular across Southern Nigeria. Those who do not belong are referred to variously as civilians, ‘Jew men’ or young men.

politicised or large scale violence. Interestingly, this category is the large silent majority of young people in the Niger Delta. What Bozi who I quoted above meant by ‘doing nothing’ was not that those in the general population were idle, but that they did not participate in the many opportunities for violence, macho performances and politics available in the oil economy.

This is an interesting angle to the conceptualization of ‘youth’ in that it highlights two key things. First, one has to actually be ‘doing things’, that is participating in the dangerous gang culture to qualify to be youth. Being of the right generation or having similar experiences of social life means little if one is not within the networks of violence involved in the multiplicities of disruptive activities in the region. I use disruptive here not in a pejorative sense but to capture activities designed to challenge social norms or to renegotiate social relations. Therefore ‘youth’ as used in the region is a ‘verb’ rather than a ‘noun’.

Second, while youthfulness is individual in itself, to acquire that status in ways that matter to social navigation, it has to be expressed within the context of a social group. This means that ‘youth’ is not just a verb, it is also a plural one.

The implications of this verb(*ial*) conceptualization of ‘youth’ are profound. In the first place, it fractures the generational category of the young and ultimately privileges those whose activities can be most disruptive of the social order. This way of conceptualizing youth is apparent in the way the Amnesty was structured in which the benefits were directed at ‘youth’ rather than the young. It is also apparent in the measures many young people took in order to acquire the status of ‘youth’ as a way of inserting themselves into the lucrative space of youthhood. As it appears, youth cannot simply be ‘imagined or lived’, it also has to be ‘done’ in order to separate social actors from a less forceful and marginalised generational category.

Secondly, this conceptualization of youth almost always excludes females. In fact, I did not find any instance in which ‘youth’ was inclusive of young women in the way the concept was used. This is strange given the important role that many young women play in the politics of the region and indeed within the youthscape itself. However, their visibility is practically written out of the discourse of youth in the Niger Delta and it is hard to find women in the popular discursive space referred to as ‘youth’. Where women’s roles are included in the narrative, ‘women’ or ‘girls’ are actually the preferred terms rather than youth. This is also applicable where respondents are female. What this means is that when people refer to ‘the youth’, in the region, they almost exclusively mean young men. This is of course a problematic way of thinking of the term. However, I maintain fidelity with this all male conceptualization in this study primarily because my focus is actually on young men and that conceptualization does no analytical damage to the questions I explored. This is not to be taken to mean that young women played no part in the networks that I studied. The networks are however overwhelmingly male and, perhaps more importantly, the space is very masculine. In fact, in the cases in which young women come up, they seemed to take on masculine identities. It is thus a part of ‘doing’ youth that masculinity has to be performed.

In the subsequent mapping of youth conflict networks that will be done in this study, it should be noted that youth is defined along the lines of its usefulness as a verb of action and in its predominantly masculine form. Youth thus is taken to mean people, mostly men, who, by virtue of their participation in various social actions which renegotiate or aim to renegotiate social relations, are willing and capable of claiming to belong to a younger generation for the purpose of appropriating the spaces of contentious politics.

2.5 Researching youth networks in the Niger delta: methodological issues

Two points of clarification about the nature of the individuals and groups as well as the events engaged with in this study are necessary in order to justify the methodological choices made. First, the events described in this study occurred in two epochs. One was before 2009 when the Amnesty was launched. Some of the narratives in the period stretch back as far as the early 1990s which was the time when gang related activity began to become endemic in the Delta region. The other epoch covers the years since 2009 and mostly deals with recollections about experiences of the Amnesty and post amnesty network dynamics. Second, the study focussed on mostly young males and the experiences described and analysed are thus inevitably masculine. This, as I noted earlier in the section on youth as a concept, does not imply the absence of women in the networks being analysed but is rather a choice occasioned by the very obvious masculinities that underpin social relations in the youthscape being studied and a determination that no analytical damage is done to the questions of interest by focussing on a gender that represents some 98 percent of the actors.

Much of social science data are rooted in cultural meanings and symbols which are embedded in a material context. This material context is itself bound up in the interactions of cultural meanings and symbols with critical historical moments. Social science data are therefore ‘constituted through meanings, motives, definitions and typifications’ (Scott 2013: 2). This is also the case with the data which has informed the analysis in this study. In the case of the Delta, the material context is profoundly influenced by the political economy of oil and even where observers move away from oil based explanations, it must be noted that the global resource continues to hover around the analytical edge, imposing subtle influences and serving as a constant signpost for understanding the region’s complex politics.

There are three main data types generated by social science research according to Wellman and Berkowitz 1988. First is the attribute data which focusses on the attitudes, opinions and behaviours of agents to the extent that this can be linked to them as autonomous individuals or groups. The second main data type is relational. These tend to explore the contacts, ties and connections which link one autonomous agent to the other. This type of data seeks information that, while based on the behaviour of individuals as autonomous units, cannot be derived simply through understanding these atomized actions but rather by a broader view of how they connect or 'relate'. The purpose of data sets like these is usually to tease out patterns in social relations which highlight both autonomous action as well as group behaviour. The third main type of social science data is ideational. In this type of data, researchers focus on finding the meanings, motives and definitions of individual and group action. The data essentially retroactively explores why people or groups do the things that they do.

For a study that focusses on the experience of youth and the social networks that they build in order to construct meaning out of a highly fluid and violent social terrain, the three data types have their unique usefulness and they were all employed in developing the arguments. Even with the three types of data however, it is still difficult to grasp the nature of social movements because as Diani McAdam (2003: 1) put it, 'they cannot be reduced to specific insurrections or revolts but rather resemble strings of more or less connected events, scattered across time and space'. This is especially true of social relations in uncertain environments where the actors, their goals and the spatial reality itself are constantly changing and always contested. The Niger Delta is one such environment and many of the methodological options and choices made in this study are reflective of the need for nimble, adaptable and reflexive tools of analysis. As a result, the study oscillates quite frequently between an individual driven and a broader

social network focussed analytical lens. The individual lens probes at motivations that are often very personal and based on the retroactive recollections by youth of their participation within group contexts. The social network lens on the other hand is derived from aggregating the results of multiple individual sources who explore events from the inside out with that of external sources who analyse group action from the outside. These two optical approaches to studying youth politics collectively illuminate the interesting micro-politics of youth networks in a region that is highly volatile yet full of opportunities for social maturity.

This study draws primarily from in-depth interviews conducted with four categories of young people. These are ex-militants currently benefiting from the amnesty programme, non-militants benefiting from it, ex-militants who have not gained access to the programme and finally young people who are neither militants nor involved in the amnesty. By focusing on these categories of youth and the young, it is possible to address both the workings of conflict time networks, as well as their continued salience since the amnesty was declared in 2009. Many of the interviews were conducted in Ibadan, Lagos and Okada where a significant number of 'ex-militants' are currently undergoing various forms of training as part of the rehabilitation process. Interviews were also conducted in Yenagoa, Amasoma, Ogboinbiri and Port Harcourt, where a significant number of 'ex-militants' live, some of whom have found themselves on the margins of the amnesty, as well as young people (non-militants) who lived through the violence in the region, particularly between 2003 and 2009, and who have not gained access to the amnesty programme. The interviews touched on a diverse range of issues from personal pre-militancy circumstances to their hopes for the future as individuals and as members of oil producing communities. In conducting these interviews, the focus was not so much on their activities as militants or on their motivations for joining

various militant groups, but rather on how they came to be involved in pre-amnesty violence, what kind of social assets they relied on and how they defined who was ‘in’ or ‘out’. Discussions were also focused on how they came to be involved with the amnesty itself and what kinds of networks helped facilitate these. In discussing how they came to benefit from the amnesty programme, emphasis was placed on their access to networks of privilege and what difference it may have made for them with regard to being able to take advantage of it.

Interviews were also conducted with key informants with verifiable close ties to the top leadership of the amnesty project as well as with the leadership itself. These interviews were particularly important in showing how social networks may have been reproduced by the amnesty programme and the overall impact on the super-structure of ‘resistance’ and violence that is often used to legitimize and rationalize all of what is going on in the Delta. Interviews were also conducted with academics working on the Niger Delta and oil politics in general. These were consulted for contextualised perspectives of the Delta, youth and the amnesty and what it all tells us about the nature of social relations in Nigeria.

These interviews were conducted intermittently between March 2013 and March 2015. Over about four weeks between March and April 2013 during a short field trip as part of study for the MSc in African Studies, I interviewed 12 ex-militants studying for degrees at the Lead City University Ibadan and made a short trip to Port Harcourt where I met with 3 other ex-militants. In follow up interviews between August 2014 and March 2015, I met again with many of the ex-militants from the 2013 group. Some of them had graduated and returned to live in Port Harcourt, Yenagoa and a few in Lagos. With the study’s focus on mapping the social networks of youth in the region, there was a deliberate strategy to allow informants to lead the discussions and to choose

informants based on their own connections. Thus a snowball sampling technique was used. To clarify, snowballing is 'a technique for finding subjects in which one gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third' (Vogt 1999).

After a purposive initial selection of 9 of the 2013 group of 'ex-militants' interviewed within universities, subsequent informants were based on their recommendations. The initial group was purposively selected based on the range and depth of the information they had provided in the 2013 interview round as well as on my determination of how embedded they are within their individual networks. Another initial group of gang members, 'ex militants' and NGO youth were selected from study sites within the Niger Delta (mainly from Yenagoa, Port Harcourt and Bori). This group were mostly 'ex-militants' who were not within the university training space. These were those who had completed training in vocational skills from sites across the world including, South Africa, Greece and India. Of these group, 9 respondents were selected and their networks were mapped by the same snowballing technique. On average, each respondent in the initial groups recommended two people, and the first and second line groups referred one person on average. In total fiftyseven respondents were suggested out of which fortysix gave interviews. This made it possible to construct an insurgent map that is based on actual personal networks rather than generalized sound bites. The value of this is that it not only helped show the range and depth of conflict networks among the youth, it also provided opportunities for corroborating some of the information provided and having multiple angles to the same events.

Many analysts have written about the value of the snowballing technique as a way to gain insights into otherwise closed or inaccessible networks like those being examined in this study. Faugier and Sargent (1997) note that link-tracing methodologies like

snowballing are usually a response to the problems associated with sampling populations that may be concealed or unwilling to engage without the assurances of a familiar face or name. Snowball sampling techniques can thus give researchers crucial access to sites and people. This is based on the assumption that a link or connection exists between the initial sample and others in the target population and that such referrals would be crucial to gaining access (Berg 1988, Thomson 1997).

In spite of this, the snowball method has raised questions about whether it can generate samples that are representative enough to accurately explain social phenomena (Van Meter 1990). The challenges of representation emerge out of a number of biases inherent to the snowballing technique. The first is a selection bias. Because samples are derived from the subjective choice of respondents in the initial group, it is usually difficult to generalize the data across broader contexts. Griffiths (1993) notes for instance that using the technique for social analysis will exaggerate the cohesiveness of networks since participants would likely refer the researcher to others with which they have strong connections that will then bias the study. Another concern is that given the subjective nature of referrals, the chances that a researcher will miss 'isolates' who are not connected to any of the initial contacts but are nevertheless within the network are high. This problem could mean that analysis of the network would miss crucial leads and thus present an inaccurate picture (Van Meter 1990).

The second bias is related to 'gatekeepers' who for various reasons could shield certain parts of the network from the researcher (Grogan, Mayberry & Straker 1999). This bias can come up frequently where the other links in the referral chain may have information which could present the gatekeepers in unfavorable light. It is difficult to determine where a gatekeeping respondent is deliberately referring the researcher to other

respondents who merely reinforce the preferred view point rather than provide the alternatives necessary for a holistic analysis.

There are a number of ways to avoid or at least mitigate these difficulties. One is to carefully select the initial respondents from a range of actors that are representative of the perspectives, themes, events, or sites being investigated. In this way, the researcher is able to guarantee that the data generated both from the initial group and the referrals are wide ranging. To further improve the representativeness of the sample, the researcher could encourage each respondent in the initial group to recommend people outside of their immediate circle. For instance, if there is an ongoing discussion about gang violence between NDV and NDPVF, the respondent can be encouraged to refer the researcher to not just the members of his own network but also to members of the opposing group. Long term interactions with respondents and a reflexive approach which ensures that the researcher continually moves between the initial group and the referrals also increases not just the level of trust but also the chances that referrals will be as reflective of the wider network as possible.

In selecting the snowball sampling technique, this study recognized the potential difficulties and took the steps above to mitigate them as far as is possible. It also used other methods to be discussed below to compliment these interviews and to ensure a triangulation of the data generated and thus improve the prospects of generalization.

One of the other methods used was that of Focus groups. Focus groups were conducted mainly in Yenagoa and Ibadan (on the sidelines of a seminar on contentious politics in the Niger Delta) which allowed cross cutting ideas to be discussed and network relations to be observed first hand. The focus groups were for mainly groups of five youth from different militant or gang backgrounds. In Yenagoa, the group was made up mainly of ex-members of the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), Niger Delta Vigilantes

(NDV) and ‘Germans’. In Ibadan, the focus group was made up of former members of the Vikings Konfraternity, Klansmen, and Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF).

For the in-depth interviews, a biographical or life story approach was mainly followed which allowed me to construct network maps based on individual stories, motivations and recollections. The life-story approach was selected because it tends to allow researchers pay more attention to the individual as a story teller whose personal history reflects his notions of identity and culture. Personal stories do not merely tell about the life of the story teller but they are important windows into the broader society and the processes of self making and identity fashioning that sign posts individual actors’ attempts to navigate its complex terrains of action. The life story, being a recollection of past events from the perspective of the story teller is a unique data source partly because it allows a social history of sorts to be constructed which fragments macro analytical frameworks and makes it possible to look more closely at how these broad social processes are articulated in the everyday.

As has been noted in previous chapters, the launching of the Amnesty created a major new gateway into state resources for many youth. As a result, many young people who were not ordinarily involved in violent network activities ultimately found their way into the programme, acquiring, as it were the status of youth militants (Nwajiakwu 2013, Obi 2014). As a result of this, guaranteeing that informants were actually involved in the 2003-9 violence was a bit problematic. The use of biographical narratives of youth is fraught with many methodological and analytical dangers. For one, it is difficult to ascertain the truthfulness or otherwise of the accounts being rendered. However, this method is both inevitable and problematic. It is inevitable because it is the most obvious and appropriate way of locating the personal stories of

young men within a broader context of complex social relations. Since documents do not often record the workings of the social networks that are critical to the way resources and access are allocated in the informal arena, there is little choice but to explore what the personal stories of individual youth can tell us about broader systems of social interaction. It is however important to recognize the problematic nature of such oral evidence. Determining the appropriate value to place on the evidence of each individual respondent is difficult. However, by focusing on interpretation, emphasizing the significance of events to an individual rather than the facts of the events themselves, it is easier to address the core sociological questions around which this study has been framed. These questions about respectability and social relations within networks, engage, by their very nature, with youth transitions and temporality in ways that see life as something both lived and imagined, thus making it possible to use the self-narratives as a window into the social construction of identity which is central to the emergence of social networks. Somers (1994: 614) refers to narratives as a part of the social construction of identity and argues that 'people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories' (also see Ochberg & Rosenberg 1992 and Plummer 1995).

This study therefore uses the personal narratives of target groups of young people as a window through which to figure out self-identity formation and how this relates to broader processes relating to the emergence and sustenance of social networks. This method has been used successfully in analyses of youth violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Paul Richards' (1996) and Krijn Peters and Paul Richards' (1998) accounts of the Sierra Leonean civil war are particularly useful examples of how conflict in an African post colony can be successfully linked to 'a crisis of the patrimonial state' (Richards, viii) using the personal stories of young people. A number of others have

also have also used this method with varying degrees of success (Abdullah 1998, Vigh 2006, Reno 2007, Utas & Jorgel 2008, Utas 2012). The biographical approach is particularly useful for this study for a number of reasons. One, as the review of the literature has shown, there are really no existing empirical data on the subject matter with which one may explore questions relating to network dynamics in the Delta region. As a result, the personal accounts of those who circulated in the youthspheres of the region are one of the few authentic windows into life as a networked youth in the Delta. Indeed, the paucity of empirical data focusing on the important sociological coming of age issues explored in this study makes building a-priori hypotheses very near impossible and leaves one with little choice but to engage youth in order to get their account of the period and the way it fits within their personal trajectories. A second factor that justifies this biographical approach is that the sociological issues of maturation and respect being explored are dependent on internal motivations and better teased out through personal accounts. Third, given that 'being youth' is a major pathway to social respectability in the region both in the pre and post Amnesty periods, the life story approach is perhaps the most effective way to get young people to open up. Of course, as noted above, this comes with the danger of exaggeration or even fabrication by informants eager to prove their mettle as 'youth'. However, in a region so volatile and in which performing masculinity is sometimes central to the self fashioning of youth, getting to talk about their exploits within a personal rather than group narrative proved critical to the data gathering process itself. This point leads up to the fourth factor justifying a biographical approach which is that life stories encourage informants to delineate their lives as a whole and identify key periods of crisis, of renewal and identity formation. This is particularly important to a study that explores the often tortured process of social maturation in which youth seek

respectability through non-linear pathways. Finally, by telling their life stories, respondents can retrospectively consider the meanings of their past choices as well as project future behavior. This reflexivity is important both for the data gathering process as well for subsequent analysis partly because it provides information on what motivated respondents at the time, their retrospective views on it at the time of the interview and finally on how they may encounter such issue in the future.

Overall, the biographical approach provides a living account of the dynamic politics of youth in the Niger Delta and fits with the analytical framework of uncertainty, social navigation and permanence. This framework emphasizes constant movement and reflexivity and it is best captured by a methodological strategy that is equally constantly engaging, adaptable and fluid. The life-stories, in the way they are told over time and in informal contexts (sometimes even performed), are very fluid windows into the lives of Delta youth.

The study did not however depend solely on these remarkable life-stories. In order to determine the cross cutting relationships in the various youth networks being mapped in a systematic way, the interview data was coded using the *Gephi* social network software. *Gephi* is a software that helps to analyse and display patterns of connections in social relationships. The coding was done by analysing interview data, publications and newspaper reports where indications of communication and/or collaboration between each of the groups or individuals in the specific network type being analysed. For instance, in analysing the experience of the NGO universe by youth, values from 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 being the highest) were allocated to indicate the depth of the interaction, depending on how many times interaction was reported, or the intensity of the relationship. This data was then fed into *Gephi* which created statistical values for the nature of network relations. To understand the implication of each statistical

value/category, for instance page rank, modularity or eccentricity, see a comprehensive discussion of the Gephi software in Cherven (2013). Each statistical category will however be explained briefly when they appear in the study. By using the *Gephi* software, it is possible to detect patterns that may not be immediately obvious from multiple separate interviews. It therefore helps to make sense of what is often a mumbled mass of data detailing rapidly changing and complex relationships. The statistical measures generated by *Gephi* also introduce a quantitative element which serve as a sort of control tool for the qualitative data that are the heart of the study. They thus serve the purpose of aiding the triangulation of data.

The qualitative and quantitative data described above were supplemented with extensive use of archives. The newspaper archives of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Library, the University of Lagos Library, the Guardian Library, Lagos, the Champion Library, Lagos and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs Library, Lagos were consulted. The focus was on newspaper reports and publications about the Niger Delta in general and the Amnesty in particular between 2003 and 2013. Since most of the collections in these libraries are dominated by Nigerian newspapers with a national focus, the Rivers State Library and Archive in Port Harcourt was also consulted for more contextualised news reports and opinions on and from the Niger Delta. The National Archives in Ibadan, Lagos, Enugu and Port Harcourt were also consulted, particularly their holdings on early colonial categorizations of youth, court records on cultural representations of respectability and official papers relating to the evolution of the Nigerian oil industry. There was also an extensive textual analysis of more recent records of Appeal Court judgements on oil bunkering cases between 2009 and 2013. Official reports and documents from the Presidential Amnesty Office, the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) and the Foundation for

Ethnic Harmony in the Nigeria (FEHN) were extensively consulted and insights drawn to inform analyses of youth circulation within the NGO universe as well as specific workings of the Amnesty

Apart from the obvious value of gaining more information, one of the reasons diverse data sources were employed was to cross check some of the information provided in the life stories. For instance, stories of the neighbourhood of *Colombia* in Port Harcourt, which will be more adequately discussed later on, were validated with numerous news reports and official reports that do not cover the specific individual stories told, but did give a general context of what it was like to live in the neighbourhood in those years. To ensure the reliability of the information given, many of the stories were ‘member checked’ from the time of initial interview and through the writing up period. This was meant to cross check unclear accounts and to encourage informants to continuously reflect upon their stories, thereby drawing out the process of self formation and identity making. I also sought to corroborate stories from multiple sources. This was not always possible, but in most cases, the stories told could be corroborated from other human sources; other network members for instance. As much as possible, the cases selected were the ones that could be double checked, from other sources through triangulation. Of course the personal stories are hardly in public accounts of the recent history of the region, however, it was possible to corroborate the general frameworks of these accounts by finding publicly available historical markers (for instance in news reports) that could provide indication of how the general context played out in the personal stories being told.

Another important element of the methodology is the selection of research sites. As noted above, the focus was on training sites outside of the Niger Delta or on the fringes of the region in which ex-militants were concentrated (Ibadan, Lagos and Okada) and

in main oil cities in the region. The city of Port Harcourt was a major site primarily because it has been the center of a good percentage of the urban violence in the region and has perhaps the highest concentration of gangs. Yenagoa, capital of Bayelsa state was selected mainly because it provided a less urbanized window into the Niger Delta that was a mid point between urban Port Harcourt and the rural Ogboinbiri or Bori. These two towns served as windows into rural Niger Delta, helping to illuminate issues like oil theft and artisanal refining that appear concentrated outside of the main urban centers.

Of course it would have been possible to do a delineation of the region along ethnic lines and thus select sites based on that. One could also explore a site selection based on divisions between the core oil producing states of Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa and the ‘fringe’ states like Cross River, Edo and Ondo. However, it is perhaps no coincidence that these ‘fringe’ states are not anywhere near as violent as the core oil producing states. Since the study focusses a lot on violent social mobilization, it is more useful to select sites that actually have endemic youth violence. There is occasional mention of other sites across the region, but these were engaged only to the extent that informants connect parts of their life-stories to them.

The full details of each site and the social context in which they are used in this study are discussed in the chapters in which they first come up. This is to ensure that the reader does not have to return to this methodological section in order to locate the material context of the analysis.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a conceptual and theoretical framework through which the social mobilization of youth and the individual agentic capacities that drive the process in the oil rich Niger Delta can be analysed. It started by taking a sweeping look at the

key themes that have driven the Niger Delta literature. In doing this, the chapter establishes the parameters around which analysts have engaged with the region, taking care to locate these in the historical moments in which they emerged. The review highlighted the important work that scholars of the region have done in illuminating environmental crisis, human rights issues, corporate social responsibility deficits and the impact of multinational capital. It also highlighted the conflictual responses of both the state and the multiple social formations that compete for access to oil revenues in the region. This review also simultaneously exposed the limits of a Niger Delta literature that appears fixated on fossilized categories that do not adequately account for the constant changes apparent in actors, issues and spaces in the region. The section that followed used the concepts of permanence, social uncertainty and social navigation as theoretical windows into the region. By doing this, the goal was to construct an analytical framework that is able to capture very fluid realities in ways that previous scarcity driven frames were unable to. The in-depth analysis of the interaction of these core concepts with the Delta context and with one another demonstrated that seeing social positions as fossilized, does not account for the very real evidence that relationships, networks, goals and actors are constantly being reconfigured and renegotiated in the region. Over the following three sections, the analysis moved on to explore the operational meaning of the central concepts underpinning the study. In these sections, conflict networks, informality and youth were contextualized. The penultimate section then lays out the methodological strategy, demonstrating the relevance of the biographical or life-story approach upon which the study is based and discusses its limits. It also outlines the sampling strategy, and the safe guards introduced to ensure reliability and rigour in data gathering, interpretation and analysis. In the light

of the above, this chapter has thus completed the core foundation on which subsequent analysis is based.

Chapter Three

YOUTH AND THE PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION IN PRE-AMNESTY NIGER DELTA

3.1 Introduction: Pre-2009 Social Networks in the Delta region

Having established the conceptual, theoretical and methodological parameters that underpin this study in the first two chapters, this chapter sets out to explore the nature of youth networks in the Niger Delta before the Amnesty was launched in 2009. The goal is to show the different pathways through which youth entered into the political landscape of the region.

As the previous chapters suggest, the ubiquitous imagery of ‘youth actors’ operating in the Niger Delta (see for instance Oluwaniyi 2010 and Osaghae 2011) conceals a reality that is often far more complex. As distinct categories, three pathways of engagement are broadly visible across the canvas of Niger Delta youth politics. These pathways include the activist youth who are embedded within NGO networks (both local and transnational) and often focus on specific aspects of the ‘Niger Delta crisis’ (Ifeka 2001, Ikelegbe 2001); the street gang youth who are usually a motley mix of members of university cults, urban gangs and vigilantes (Gore & Pratten 2003, Pratten 2008, Isumonah 2013); and finally the militant youth who have joined insurgent groups like MEND or participate in militant ethnic based organisations like the IYC and clearly frame their violence and /or participation in political terms (Ukeje 2001, Oriola, Hagerty & Knight 2013). As is usually the case in the fluid social environment of the Niger Delta, the complex interrelationships and ambiguous borders between these pathways mean that youth actors often move fluidly across them, further complicating the resistance landscape.

The years before the Amnesty was launched in 2009 were particularly active periods for all three categories of youth. At the height of the violence, it was, for instance,

sometimes difficult to draw a line between a ‘student activist’, a gang member, an ethnic advocate or ‘a militant’, as many youth tended to become one of these depending on the specific period, space or opportunity. As one informant described it, many active members of Students’ Unions in schools like the University of Port Harcourt also doubled as ‘youth leaders in their communities or as soldiers in militant camps’. Paul Ugor’s (2013) ethnography of illegal artisanal refining in Gbekebor, a small oil bearing community in Bayelsa state mentioned earlier for instance, also includes life stories of young men who, though full time students, became members of oil bunkering gangs as a sort of holiday job. His work also shows how they expertly navigated the different social contexts that inevitably existed between the grounds of the university and the oil blighted creeks of bunkering hideouts.

Exploring youth experiences of these different pathways helps to illuminate the nature of interaction both within and between the various networks that make up the insurgency landscape in the Delta. These pathways are conceptualized as being made up of specific networks whose internal logics turn around the highly charged political spaces of organised civil society, urban gangs or militant groups as appropriate. As nodes of citizen political action, these pathways not only highlight the different social experiences and opportunities available for youth, but also demonstrate the relevance of understanding how collective action (in this case a multifaceted insurgency) is shaped by social ties (Tilly 2005). This deconstructs the experiences of youth in ways that allow us to see critical but often subtle nuances in the conflict landscape. By exploring the fluid processes of transition between the identified pathways, the questions surrounding the apparent ambiguity of the borders that ‘divide’ but also simultaneously ‘link’ them are easier to answer or at least clarify.

After having identified the different pathways for youth engagement, I showed how the effective mobilisation of all of these networks created a social environment so violent and unpredictable as to be impossible for the various powerful interests who had fed fat on the corrupt patronage politics of the Nigerian state to control. While a relatively low level insurgency appeared to have facilitated rather than obstructed the corrupt enrichment of the many players in the Niger Delta conflict, the 2003-9 outbreak represented a distinctively new challenge for which few were prepared. The implication was that powerful stakeholders, (youth, the military, oil multinationals, NGOs, political and traditional elite and high government officials), realised that a new objective compromise had to be reached and a new coalition had to emerge. The foundation for this renegotiated coalition was the 2009 Amnesty.

3.2 The NGO Pathway: local advocacies, transnational networks and hybrid identities

The density of the Niger Delta's advocacy map must be seen within the context of the global popularity of NGOs as a vehicle for social action as well as the local contradictions that forced underserved groups into the margins of state politics (Giles 2002, Hillhorst 2003, Obi 2009, Watts 2010). In the context of a globalization movement that sought to shift the locus of power to privatized social forces, NGOs were both products as well as agents of neoliberal capital (Mittelman 2011). The goal of globalization, as Obi described it (2009: 469), is to 'totalize the hegemony of global capital over society', and thus it 'integrates or subordinates other viable social systems, and drains democracy of politics, reducing it to the managerial enterprise for running the 'new' market society'. As a consequence, the political space that supposedly opened up for the voluntary sector to engage with the state in Nigeria was essentially constrained by its ideological commitment to neoliberal values and thus limited in its ability to challenge the structural inequalities that had created many of the problems it

sought to address.

This is not to, in anyway, diminish the important role that many NGOs, particularly environmental and women focused groups, have played in global politics generally or in the Delta region specifically. The point however is that the very nature of the voluntary sector appears to impose a neoliberal logic on NGOs that forces them to behave just like firms do in markets. This argument has been previously highlighted by the work of Cooley and Ron (2002) who assessed how neoliberal market practices like renewable contracting and competitive bidding essentially transformed NGOs operating within the humanitarian industry in Kyrgyzstan, Goma- DRC and Bosnia into *de facto* business concerns in which organizational security and survival became the *raison d'être*. Similar patterns have been seen in Nigeria's pro-democracy NGOs (Iwilade 2011) and are evident in Delta focused NGOs too. As a result of this, organizational survival, rather than the Niger Delta's particular problems is sometimes the driving force of how they carry out their activities.

NGOs are also driven by the language of constructive engagement that encourages a gradualist and non-confrontational approach to politics (Backer & Carroll 2001). This inevitably makes it possible for them to work collaboratively with the very same multinationals that they purportedly challenge. A detailed analysis of the relationship between Shell Petroleum and Living Earth International, an NGO based in Port Harcourt, by Heap (2000) for instance, highlights the ways in which well meaning NGOs can be inadvertently incorporated into the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda of oil multinationals. Similar questions have been raised about such collaborative stakeholder 'partnerships' between NGOs and corporations in other places including Sweden's lumber industry (Bo-Jacob & Ibsen 2007), business parks in Brazil and the Philippines (Gold 2004) and in South Africa (Mueller-Hirth 2009). As

will be shown later, this collaborative relationship between oil multinationals and NGOs in the Niger Delta is one of the key drivers of the network building trends in the region.

Faced with these challenges as well as others related to their accountability to the local communities for who they supposedly speak, NGOs are often unable to address the structural issues of power that are at the very heart of the violence in the Niger Delta. Ike Okonta (2008: 265-66) highlights this problem when he notes the limitations and dangers of the 'one issue' campaign of international NGOs that take on the cause of 'local people' and end up imposing 'a hegemonic discourse on an otherwise complex problem'. Adunbi (2015:65) raises similar concerns about local NGOs in the Delta, highlighting how the economic pressures of the 1990s and the liberalization of the political environment at the turn of the millennium forced many activists to abandon direct confrontation with the state over apparent structural inequalities in favour of 'constructive engagement' and objective alliances with the state. In his words, 'these new modes of organizing preserved the state but also opened up new ways for activists as well as citizens to engage with it' (Adunbi 2015: 66). Smith (2007: 89) is however even more critical of NGOs by linking the emergence to the 'refinement of corruption as an art form'.

Crucially, because fund raising is usually dependent on the maintenance of vertical relations with foreign 'partners' rather than horizontal relationships with Delta communities, transnational connections have to be sought, cultured and used. In spite of this however, the important role that local conditions play cannot be ignored. While the global expansion of the voluntary sector was a critical catalyst, without the oil extraction induced local upheavals within the Niger Delta and without the collective organizing agency of ordinary people which generated citizens' action, the explosion

in the civil society sector would have been impossible (Ikelegbe 2001).

NGOs' focus on human and environmental rights embeds them in the transnational narrative of neoliberal civil rights (Ikelegbe 2001; Obi 2009; Adunbi 2015) and the young people whose entry point into the politics of the Delta is through this pathway inevitably articulate a vision of governance that is dependent on the 'international community' and its many prescriptions on 'good governance' (OSSREA 2009). Organisations like Our Niger Delta (OND), Foundation for Ethnic Harmony (FEHN), Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), Oil Watch, Niger Delta Human and Environmental Resource Organisation (ND-HERO) and so on, all reflect, to varying degrees, a bias towards technocratic rather than political solutions. Inevitably, these NGOs tend to attract certain categories of young people. These are often educated career activists operating within a middle class space and subsequently liberalized by the growing democratic pressures in Nigerian politics. It is striking though that unlike in militant groups, NGOs operating in the region are far more reflective of the diversity of Nigeria in their staffing and less by the ethnic colouration of the Niger Delta itself. It is unclear why this is the case, however, given that some sort of higher education is often required to gain employment in the voluntary sector and in light of the low levels of education at that level in the Delta region (UNDP 2006), this may simply be a consequence of skill shortages.

In order to gain legitimacy as a young person working in the NGO sector, it is important to be able to express western modernity through international travel, contacts and knowledge of civil society speak (often reflected in acronyms, buzzwords and catchphrases). Adunbi's (2015: 71) anecdote about a member of ERA who, rather than sit through the 'boring' meetings of an environmental conference in New York, stood outside the venue, taking pictures and updating his Facebook and other social media

accounts with pictorial evidence of his international connections and importance, is instructive in this regard. It highlights the important role that transnational networks play in the way young actors in NGOs imagine themselves as well as how they extract legitimacy among their peers. In spite of this apparent culturing of a transnational identity, legitimacy still requires contact with the local and the most successful are often those who are able to balance this hybridity. Partly represented by the gang and militant pathways, the ‘local’ is the space in which difficult political and structural questions are asked and power is truly contested.

Table 5: Selected NGOs Operating in the Niger Delta¹⁵

Name of Organization	Focus Issue Area(s)	Main Location
Environmental Rights Action (ERA)	Protection of Environmental Rights	Port Harcourt (PH)
Our Niger Delta (OND)	Environmental protection, resource rights	PH
Foundation for Ethnic Harmony (FEHN)	Peace training, amnesty contracting	PH
ND-HERO (Niger Delta HERO)	Human rights protection, peacebuilding	Yenagoa
Gokana Stakeholders Forum (GSF)	Resource control, environmental protection	Gokana
Niger Delta Peace Network Initiative (NDPNI)	peacebuilding	PH
NGO Coalition for Environment (NCOE)	Environmental control	PH
Niger Delta Women’s Forum (NDWF)	Women’s rights, peacebuilding	PH
Niger Delta Women’s Movement for Peace and Development (NDWMPD)	Women’s rights, peacebuilding	PH
Niger Delta Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST/ACT)	Environmental protection	PH
Nigeria Environment Network (NEN)	Environmental protection	PH
Oil Watch Africa (OWA)	Environmental protection, CSR, business ethics	PH
Pro Natura International Nigeria (PNIN)	Poverty alleviation, environmental protection, sustainable development	PH

¹⁵ These NGOs were selected mainly from those which came up in some form or the other in my interviews. Since the goal was to map participation through specific pathways, I felt it was wise to focus on the NGOs that informants actually belonged to or were at least aware of or in some form of contact with. Some of these NGOs are currently inactive (SOMPA and GSF for instance) but were included because they were important to the individual youth before the Amnesty was launched.

PANDRILLUS	Environmental/specie conservation	Calabar
Rivers Economic Development Forum (REDF)	Rural economic growth	PH
Niger Delta Wetlands Centre (NDWC)	Poverty alleviation, conservation	Yenagoa
Chicoco Movement (CM)	Environmental protection, community rights, resource rights	PH
Delta Oil Producing Communities Association (DOPCA)	Community rights, resource rights	Warri
Students of Oil Mineral Producing Area (SOMPA)	Students' rights, youth	PH
Southern Minorities Forum (SMF)	Resource control, political inclusion	PH
Niger Delta Professionals (NDP)	Resource control, political inclusion	PH
River Ethiope Trust Foundation (RETF)	Community solidarity, conservation	Ethiope
Traditional Rulers of Oil Mineral Producing Communities of Nigeria (TROPCON)	Resource control, Derivation	Niger Delta wide

The youth who play a role in the NGOs captured in Table 5 above often do so with a very deep awareness of the value of collaborations and network building. Indeed, there is a growing shift towards actual formal NGO coalitions across the Niger Delta. Here, attempt is made to leverage competencies and thus strengthen NGO positions in relation to other actors. For instance, since 2008, new coalitions of NGOs like the Nigerian Coalition for Gas and Oil in the Niger Delta (NACGOND) and Foundation for Partnership Development in the Niger Delta (PIND) have brought together some 60 NGOs to pool resources and collectively focus on various advocacy projects (NAGCOND 2014). Lawal Africas (int 2016), a senior member of PIND whose job it is to nurture such networks explained that:

If you work within the NGO world, you will realise that building networks is critical. We try to identify advocates, you know? Individuals whose voices are not being heard and try to bring them together as a network so that we can start doing interventions. It's not been easy but this is what we must do.

While this is of course interesting, it is even more so if one considers the networks of personal relationships that such coalitions appear to be generating and how those relationships are key infrastructures that enable young people to participate in the Niger Delta NGO space.

Allen (int 2015), a staff of ERA also explained that building relationships does more than simply facilitate his ability to fulfil professional mandates but is actually a key source of social security and mobility for him. In his words:

working with all these community groups and NGOs gives you contacts. You see before I came to ERA, I was with Ogbia. I got to know of ERA through another NGO guy who was with them. So for my own sake, because all these NGOs are not always stable, if there is no money for project, then you are out on the street searching for a job all over again. So one way to protect yourself, that is if you like the NGO work o!, you have to network.

What is apparent from Allen's comments is that networking is perhaps more about self making and the construction of social safety nets for an individual than it is about efficiency and consensus building for civil society as indicated by Lawal Africa's of PIND. Those two motivations for developing relationships across the broad NGO landscape have however created a complicated map of criss-crossing relationships and connections.

Table 6: Statistical Representation of Niger Delta NGO Relationships¹⁶

NGO	Modularity Class	PageRank	Betweenness Centrality
ERA	0	0.038	7.599
OND	2	0.407	12.902
FEHN	1	0.015	0.628
SDN	0	0.038	15.401
ND-HERO	2	0.043	12.373
FOTE	0	0.030	2.009
GSI	2	0.033	3.776
NDPNI	1	0.046	20.403
NCOE	0	0.027	1.443
NDWF	1	0.039	9.481
NDWMPD	1	0.034	10.884
NEST-ACT	0	0.035	6.315
NEN	0	0.038	11.085
OWA	0	0.043	11.728
OY	2	0.033	7.563
PNIN	0	0.049	25.437
RDI	0	0.030	1.336
REDF	2	0.033	6.946
UW	1	0.025	2.012
ICHR	1	0.043	11.907
IHRHL	1	0.043	10.560
CM	2	0.043	13.427
DOPCA	0	0.020	1.600
NDPF	1	0.023	1.426
SOMPA	2	0.023	1.169
SMF	2	0.046	19.197
NDP	1	0.029	3.641
UND	1	0.036	7.383
TROPCON	2	0.026	3.365

Table 6 above illustrates the various patterns of relationships between and among NGOs in the Niger Delta. Drawing on the relationships built by and described to me by youth activists working within the NGO landscape, Table 6 also indicates the nature of networking that goes on. The first pattern noticeable is that there are three observable

¹⁶ See a comprehensive detail of the coding data in Appendix 1 and 2. Also see the methodology section in Chapter 2 for a description of the *Gephi* software.

clusters denoted by the modularity class¹⁷. The first cluster (with Modularity Class of 0) appears to have been built around environmental NGOs like ERA, FOTE, NCOE and NEST/ACT. This is consistent with the very intense levels of environmental mobilization in the region from the early 1990s and was a particularly popular entry point into social activism for many youth (Obi 1998, Okoji 2000, Peel 2011). The second cluster (with Modularity Class of 1) is made up mainly of NGOs focussed on peace or empowerment advocacies. These organisations, like FEHN, NDP, NDWF and ICHR also had high levels of youth involvement and there is evidence of interaction across the cluster. The empowerment and peace advocacies are also quite reflective of the intensity of the ‘constructive engagement’ message that many NGOs began to preach shortly after the return to civilian rule. Of course this atmosphere of constructive engagement as well as the myth that the state had somehow been transformed by the return to civilian control was to be shattered by the perfect storm of deepening inequalities, rising resentment and state repression by 2003. Yet, in spite of, or perhaps because of, growing realisation of the false promise of Nigeria’s democratisation given the steady rise in state repression, advocacy groups like ICHR which focussed on human rights and NDWF which focussed on women’s empowerment continued to be popular spaces through which young people engaged with the politics of the Niger Delta.¹⁸

¹⁷To clarify, the modularity class divides the network into communities to capture data on the scope of relationships, their frequency and breadth. Modularity thus is a measure of how many links *within* communities there are, compared to how many links *between* communities there are. The *Gephi* software used in this analysis works to build a snapshot of the organisations with the most cross-cutting relationships and thus can show specific observable nodes within the broader network. The higher the modularity index, the lower the levels of interaction that that specific cluster has with the rest of the network. The organisations in the same modularity group have the most interactions with each other compared to how they interact with the rest of the network.

¹⁸ Within months of the return of civilians to power, the Nigerian state, in response to an attack on police by gangs, ordered the near total destruction of the town of Odi. This led to the extra-judicial murder of hundreds of innocent people, including children and shattered what may have been an initial sense of euphoria over the return of democracy. There are multiple examples of such mass attacks by security agencies in other parts of the Niger Delta including Odioma and Gbaramatu

The third cluster (with Modularity Class of 2), is made up mainly of organisations that focus on community mobilization like TROPCON, GSF, SMF and ND-HERO. The networks they built are apparently thinner than those at the center, yet, they are far from loose molecules. The youth who operate from these organisations maintain varying levels of interactions with other youth across the spectrum. These organisations tended to focus on community advocacies that privilege ‘elder’ participation rather than youth. This may explain why they have a modularity class of 2 which is an indication that they are less connected to the broader network than those with lower modularity indexes.

What is immediately apparent from these clusters is that Delta NGOs tend to cluster around advocacy themes. This is perhaps to be expected given that social proximities are often determined by similarities in interests and thus, the tendency of networks to replicate themselves according to Sugden (1989). Yet, this clustering is remarkable if one considers the intense competition for donor funding from mostly the same sources that these organisations often have.

Table 7 below is extracted from Table 6 to bring the modularity groups of the NGOs into clearer relief and thus make it easier for the reader to see the relationships described above.

Table 7: NGO Modularity Class

0	1	2
ERA	FEHN	OND
SDN	NDPNI	ND-HERO
FOTE	NDWF	GSF
NCOE	NDWMPD	OY
NEST/ACT	UW	REDF
NEN	ICHR	CM
OWA	IHRHL	SOMPA
PNI	NDPF	SMF
RDI	NDP	TROPCON
DOPCA	UND	

The second observable pattern from Table 6 is that the network is strengthened by high levels of inter-NGO relationships across the entire space. In order to establish the way NGOs facilitated youth networks across the advocacy landscape, respondents were asked to indicate the organisations in which they had relationships with other youth and to rate the relationships on a scale of 1-5, 5 being highest. While the data shows that some organisations were particularly central to the sustenance of the networks, it also shows that the relationships varied and do not depend on a single group of organisations. This is captured by the betweenness centrality measure in Table 5 which is extracted and presented separately in Table 8 below.

Table 8: NGO Betweenness Centrality Measures

NGO	Betweenness Centrality
Group A	
PNIN	25.437
NDPNI	20.403
SMF	19.197
Group B	
SDN	15.401
CM	13.427
OND	12.902
ND-HERO	12.373
ICHR	11.907
OWA	11.728
NEN	11.085
NDWMPD	10.884
IHRHL	10.560
NDWF	9.481
Group C	
ERA	7.599
OY	7.563

UND	7.383
REDF	6.946
NEST/ACT	6.315
GSF	3.776
NDP	3.641
TROPCON	3.365
UW	2.012
FOTE	2.009
DOPCA	1.600
NCOE	1.443
NDPF	1.426
RDI	1.336
SOMPA	1.169
FEHN	0.628

The betweenness centrality is essentially a measure of the importance of each individual NGO to the development and sustenance of the wider network (Borgatti, Everett & Johnson 2013, Cherven 2013). The higher the value, the higher the importance of the organization as a network builder. In practical terms, it means that where a relationship is started with a youth involved with NGO ‘1’ within the network, there is a high likelihood that it will eventually come to involve another youth working within NGO ‘2’, provided the latter has a high betweenness centrality.

The data suggests that PNIN, with a betweenness centrality of 25.437 is the NGO most embedded in the youth networks engaging with Niger Delta politics through the NGO pathway. To identify the key, primary and secondary stakeholders in this network, one can divide the betweenness centrality into 3 percentile groups by simply dividing the highest measure (25.437) by 3. The result is groups A, B and C as stated in table 7 above.

Before going further, it is important to note here that since the focus of data gathering was primarily on how youth interact and build relationships within the NGO landscape, the picture painted by this data may not necessarily reflect the official inter-NGO relationships. However, where NGOs show commitment to collaboration, they significantly improve the links between youth actors circulating within them. This point is illustrated by the General Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU) created by the oil company, Chevron which will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

This caveat given, it is apparent that Table 8 shows three levels of betweenness centrality which correspond with the key, primary and secondary stakeholders in the Delta NGO network. The organizations in group A appear to be so central because they pursue a pan Niger Delta agenda. They represent some of the best illustrations of the convergence between institutional commitments to collaboration and individual youth reaching out and making useful relationships. The Pan Niger Delta agenda of these organisations make them particularly useful to a wide range of other NGOs and provide multiple opportunities for engagement.

The organisations in group B seem to be advocacy groups with high levels of visibility. For instance, SDN, CM and OWA are constantly in the news and this may explain why they resonate with youth actors. The organisations in group C are generally less well known or focus on very specific areas or issues which may explain why they are not as central to the youth networks.

What Table 8 also shows is that some 40 percent of NGOs (Group A and B) register relatively high levels of centrality. The implication of this is that a significant percentage of the activities of NGOs in the region involve high levels of collaboration. This is a critical finding because it underscores the argument being made earlier about the very high levels of collaboration between youth working within the NGO pathway.

It also explains why despite the NGO saturation in the region and in spite of the very wide variety of issues being addressed, there appears to be a uniform narrative of disempowerment and state repression. This is interestingly also the case for areas like Cross Rivers State with relatively low levels of violence and where it can be reasonably expected that the language of state repression would not be as high. Yet, as Ukpong (1993) highlights about NGO operations in that part of the Niger Delta, the perception of marginalisation and state-driven violence is deep seated even in rural areas that are actually peaceful.

3.2.1: NGO network building and Oil Multinationals: the case of Chevron's General Memorandum of Understanding

The relationships captured above are in many ways driven as much by a very well documented collective and enduring narrative of disempowerment (See Peel 2009, Obi 2010) as they are by the intervention (or perhaps interference) of oil capital. Funnelled through multinational oil companies' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) budgets (Frynas 2005, Shoaga 2015), there is a growing pattern of MNOC funding of NGOs in the region that seems to encourage precisely these types of relationships. This is illustrated by the so called GMoU launched by Chevron Nigeria Limited in 2005 and involving hundreds of communities as well as tens of NGOs across much of the Niger Delta. This particular model is a useful window into the role of oil capital in building the relationships described above because it is so comprehensive in its scope and breadth of engagement. It also helps show the infrastructure that underpins the networks being described earlier.

Chevron is one of the major oil multinationals and operates a Joint Venture agreement with the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). As at 2015, the company produced a daily average of about 224,000 barrels of oil, 246 million cubic feet of natural gas and 6,000 barrels of liquefied petroleum gas (CNL 2016). This massive

extraction operation spans parts of the main Niger Delta states and covers the territory of some 420 communities. The company also has large interests in the Agbami field; a 182 sq kilometer offshore oil field which produces about 129,000 barrels of oil per day; as well as in other large oil fields in the central and eastern parts of the Delta region.

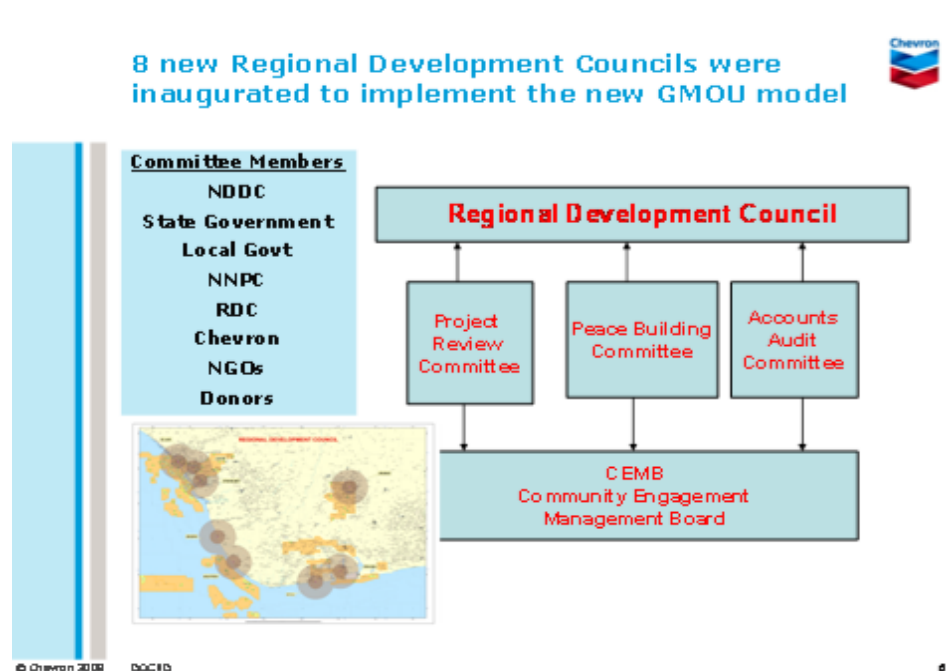
As was the practice of most of the oil majors operating in the Niger Delta, Chevron used to base its CSR projects on individual MOUs signed with the various communities who held claims to the lands in which the company did business (Hobben *et al* 2012). But as most companies also quickly realised, it became apparent that these MOUs were not only divisive but were actually ineffective models through which the oil multinationals could show good faith to communities that had become immensely cynical about ‘development interventions’ framed by corporate profit motives. As Frynas (2005: 598) argued, ‘the key constraint on CSR’s role in development is the business case, that is, the subservience of any CSR schemes to corporate objectives’.

In response to an outbreak of violence in many of the communities in which Chevron operated and consequent increase in attacks on its facilities as well as against the schools, hospitals and other such similar social projects the company had provided as CSR, the company began to rethink its CSR strategy. This became especially urgent by March 2003, when major violence erupted in and around Warri in Delta State mainly between various groups of Ijaw and Itshekiri communities. As a result of this renewed outbreak, Chevron was forced to pull out of the Niger Delta and declare Force Majeure on its exports (Oil Journal 2004) losing more than 1 billion US dollars in the process (Hobben *et al* 2012).

Later that year, the company drew up a GMoU that had, among others, the explicit goals of promoting ‘unity rather than competition among communities’ and reducing ‘400 individual agreements to a more manageable set of relationships’(Chevron 2016). With

this, Chevron began to harmonise and consolidate its CSR infrastructure. It started by encouraging the formation what it referred to as Regional Development Councils (RDCs). These were to act as representatives of clusters of communities hosting Chevron installations and were grouped by region and ethnicity. Eight of such RDCs were formed across the five core Niger Delta states of Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Cross River and Akwa Ibom. These RDCs were helped in their ‘development work’ by Project Review, Peacebuilding and Accounts Audit Committees. Figure 3 below shows the way the GMoU worked.

Figure 4: Chevron Nigeria Limited GMoU Model



Source: Chevron: 2016

This deliberate harmonisation of Chevron’s CSR programme had the impact of streamlining the company’s funding agenda to its host communities and ostensibly increased both their participation and sense of ownership in the interventions funded by Chevron.

This process however had significant unintended consequences for the way NGOs worked in the region. By bringing the different NGOs under a single funding and

operational structure, Chevron inadvertently increased interaction between many of the participating NGOs at a time when competition for donor funding was especially high.

‘Loye, an officer of PNIN who was involved with the project described it thus:

That Chevron project was good. It came around the time we were working on our own community development foundations, I think that was sometime in 2004 or 5. They had this idea of improving CSO participation in their CSR projects, they even involved communities in picking projects. It was also good to see different NGOs working together for a change. You know sometimes this grant seeking race gets unduly hot. Afterall we seek the same funds from pretty much the same people. But what can we do? The Chevron project was well resourced so many NGOs, especially the small ones even made it their main full time gig. We all worked together thanks to Chevron. Many of the networks I built at that stage in my career were through the Chevron RDCs. Some of those networks still remain good friends today and we work together on projects, we share consulting information and invite each other to programs. That’s the way this thing works.

Chevron’s GMoU also eventually helped create multiple NGO coalitions from which enduring networks were built. It also incidentally brought many of the NGOs that worked with it closer to community activists operating from either the ethnic/militant or the street gang pathways. It is striking to note that six of the nine NGOs with the highest betweenness centrality levels (see Table 8 above), were involved with the Chevron GMoU project. These NGOs (OND, SMF, CM, NDPNI, PNIN and OWA) have some of the highest levels of collaboration observed in that landscape and many officers trace that trend to the launching of Chevron’s GMoU.

The above highlights the highly collaborative landscape of the NGO world through which youth entered into the political environment of the Niger Delta. It also demonstrates that a Delta wide narrative of disempowerment as well as the unintended consequences of oil multinationals’ CSR policies did much to encourage the emergence of these patterns of relationships. Youth activists used this cross cutting organisational alliances as critical tools for self making in ways that allowed them to extract legitimacy from peers as well as from transnational sources of capital. As noted earlier, the group of youth involved with organised advocacies were largely better educated than their

counterparts in the other two pathways to be discussed shortly. They were also in many ways more reflective of the national diversity of Nigeria and tended to imagine themselves through the lens of transnational civil society and its global neoliberal 'doing good' image.

3.3 Pathway of (and through) the streets: Gangs of Violence in Pre-Amnesty Delta

Petrus (2015: 29) describes the street gang as a 'dynamic entity, capable of undergoing transformations in response to both external and internal dynamics'. This image of fluid organisations that are constantly redefining their external boundaries, challenges static notions of gangs that sometimes cling to descriptions of wanton criminality or illegality (Klein and Maxson 2006). Niger Delta gangs (or cults as they are locally known)¹⁹, reflect the dynamism described by Petrus (2015) in that they combine the crime fighting and moral universe constructing features of vigilantes (Harnischfeger 2003, Pratten 2008) with the wanton violence and illegality of criminal groups. By straddling these two important spaces, Niger Delta cults have been able to play a very important role in the region's conflict landscape.

In the first place, they create a localized conflict dynamic centred around specific spaces of power (universities, streets/neighbourhoods, bars and so on). These spaces are often detached from the broader politics of oil in their everyday logics and highlight instead, the central role that sociological notions like respect, belonging, masculinity and social maturation play in generating violence. By so doing, Niger Delta cults tend to

¹⁹ One way to decode the different organizations is to look at the labels with which they describe themselves. Cults or Fraternities are usually based in university campuses, especially University of Port Harcourt and the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST) in Bori. Militants are usually based in the creeks or around the city itself and often actively frame themselves in the language of resistance and ethnic community. In reality however, their activities are very similar to those of cults or the other groups for that matter. Then there are those groups which tend to veil their activities in the language of vigilantes, occult groups or artistic performances like the Agaba, the Egbesu Boys, Njemanze Vigilante and the Ugliers. These are usually based in the various waterfront slums across the city as well as in neighbourhoods like *Colombia*. These divisions however tell little about the shifting alliances or indeed what the dispute or collaboration is about at any given time.

complicate the conflict landscape, making it difficult for both analysts and policy makers to determine which pipeline blow up or kidnapping is actually directly connected to an ‘insurgency’ and which is simply a part of the macho performance of a criminal gang.

Secondly, while their day-to-day operations are driven by very localized power struggles, they often insert themselves into broader insurgent narratives in response to specific external contexts. So, for instance, in response to changes in local political dynamics as a result of electoral competition, Delta cults have been known to play critical roles in the power (re)alignments that inevitably occur (see for instance HRW 2008, Asuni 2009). These roles often include protection rackets, violent assaults, public disruptions and ballot stuffing. In this specific historical moments, street cults inevitably become a part of the broader political or insurgency landscape and often withdraw into their localized power struggles as soon as the moment passes. This constant shifting between local (as in street level violence) and regional (as in Delta wide insurgencies) spaces of relevance reflects the important role that ‘machine politics’ plays in mobilizing support in Nigeria’s democratic competitions (Ibeanu 2007). It also illustrates that the localized struggles for social maturation that many young people face is one in which broader concerns (as captured by the narrative of the ‘Niger Delta crisis’) often provide only a backdrop rather than the everyday catalyst for social action and thus should be analysed on its own merit. In a detailed description of the evolution of urban gangs in Rivers State, Joab-Peterside (2007) links their emergence to the many irregular settlements and slums (locally referred to as ‘watersides’) around the city of Port Harcourt and surrounding towns like Okirika, Ogbakiri, Diobu and Tombia as well as to the militarization of society brought on by military rule.

In order to circulate in the violent undergrounds of the Delta, many young men have to belong to cult groups like the Icelanders, Deybam, Deywell and Klansmen Konfraternity. One of the main basis for membership of these groups appears to be space contrary to popular assumptions of ethnic affiliation. My interactions across Rivers and Bayelsa states actually showed that an important indicator of what group a young man joined was the neighbourhood he happened to stay in rather than his ethnicity. If you lived in Okirika in the early 2000s for instance, you were likely to be a member of the Icelanders cult controlled by Ateke Tom, this also applied if you were a resident of Amadi-ama where the Bush Boys cult were in control. In that sense, there was little choice as to what group from the wide variety available that a young man could choose from. Tonye (2014 int), one of my informants who lived in the *Colombia* neighbourhood of Port Harcourt and now lives in Borokiri, another part of the city, city said of cult groups:

If you live in Okrika, you can't join Bush Boys, in fact, you no fit [can not] just do business [mostly illegal rackets] if you don't belong unless you are an angel [those who pay protection money rather than join cults]. So where you belong depends on the people in charge in your area.

In spite of constant violence among these groups, each cult group appeared to be a node in a broader social network that depended on violence and brutality for its legitimization. By using court records, interview data and official records and documents, one can build a social network map of these organisations which illustrates their intricate connections and shows that narratives of constant intergroup violence (see for instance Oruwari and Opuene 2006; Eguavoen 2008 and Ezeonu 2014) tend to conceal the immense levels of cooperation, coordination and collaboration that exists between them. Inter-organizational exchanges among Delta cults is often driven by overlapping membership or by deliberate building of coalitions. These methods of developing social networks have been described as highly efficient (Ansell 2001) as well as illustrative

of the way the structure of social movements can be key to understanding the complex relationships between individuals, groups and movements (Ray and Katzenstein 2001). The cross-cutting interactions that emerged from actually mapping the relations between and among the Niger Delta's cult groups provide fascinating insight into the social infrastructure that facilitates violence in the region.

Table 9: Selected Cult Groups Operating in the Niger Delta

Name	Main Area
Bermudians	PH
Big Five	PH
Big20	PH
Buccaneers	PH
Bushboys	Okuru-Ama
Cairo	PH
Cork and Shoot marines	PH
Cyprus	Okrika
Dey Well	Diobu/PH
Dey Bam	Abonema Wharf/PH
Gberesako Boys	Ogoni
Germans	Okrika/PH
Greenlanders	PH
Icelander	Okrika/PH
Isaka	PH
Junior Vikings Confraternity	PH
Klansmen	Unical/Bukuma
Mbacho	Ogbia/Egbema/Andoni
Njemanze Vigilante	PH Waterfront
Onyegwu	PH
Peacemakers	Okuru-Ama
Supreme Viking Konfraternity	PH
The Outlaws	PH
The Ugliers	PH
Vultures	Diobu

Sources: Interviews, Edo State Anti Secret Cult Bill 2000, Rivers State Cult Prohibition Act 2004, Police Records, Court Records

The groups listed in Table 9 above represent some of the most active and violent youth organisations across the Delta region in the last twenty years. Collectively, they have been responsible for the deaths of at least 2500 people (mostly gang members) across the Niger Delta (Ukoji and Okolie-Osemame 2016). Some fifty percent of these deaths

happened in and around Port Harcourt. The constant pitched battles they conduct in order to control gang territories or extract patronage from politicians however belie a convergence of interest and efficient network building that has made the cult landscape so tight knit and the relationships these generates so adaptable and thus difficult to control by authorities. Table 10 below illustrates these relationships

Table 10: Statistical Representation of Inter-Cult Relationships in the Niger Delta²⁰

Cult	Modularity Class	PageRank	Betweenness Centrality
Bermudians	2	0.04	24.98
Big Five	1	0.01	0.25
Big 20	2	0.01	0.39
Buccaneers	2	0.04	25.47
Bushboys	0	0.05	31.09
Cairo	0	0.04	20.83
CS Marines	0	0.04	25.88
Cyprus	0	0.04	25.49
Dey well	2	0.04	29.03
Dey bam	0	0.04	29.57
Gberesako	1	0.02	3.48
Germans	2	0.04	23.09
Greenlander	1	0.04	20.79
Icelander	2	0.03	11.38
Isaka	0	0.05	31.38
J. Vikings	0	0.04	28.59
Klansmen	0	0.04	26.44

²⁰ Like in the NGO network statistics in Figure 2, the coding for Table 10 was done mainly by analysing interview data, newspaper reports and published work in order to get information on the relationships between youth involved with cult groups and gangs across the region. Extended interviews revealed the nature of relationships and alliances between these groups and this was coded on the basis of frequency and intensity on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 being the highest). The data was then fed into *Gephi* which created statistical values for the nature of network relations.

Mbacho	1	0.02	3.78
Njemanze	2	0.04	25.40
Onyegwu	2	0.04	21.00
Peacemaker	0	0.05	32.48
S. Vikings	2	0.04	25.27
The Outlaws	0	0.04	24.27
The Ugliers	2	0.04	24.56
Vultures	0	0.05	33.58

Table 10 shows, among others, two clear network patterns that are useful for analysing the relationships youth build in Delta cults. The Modularity Class (as extracted and shown in Table 11 below) captures the three main gang coalitions. The groups with Modularity Class of 0 represent a coalition often loosely referred to as DeyBam. DeyBam however is actually one organisation among many others. As Table 10 below shows, Dey Bam is joined in a very close relationship with other ‘Decks’²¹ like the Cork and Shoot Marines, Klansmen, The Outlaws, Junior Vikings and Peacemakers. The second large coalition are the groups with Modularity Class of 2 made of groups like Icelanders and its coalition partners like the Supreme Vikings, The Ugliers, Onyegwu, Buccanneers and Bermudians. This coalition is sometimes also broadly referred to as Dey Well, even though Dey Well, like Dey Bam is one organisation among many.

The literature on gangs in the region, especially the part that deals with violence around Port Harcourt (Oruwari and Opuene 2006; Ezeonu 2014), has long established the existence of two broad gang coalitions. Oruwari and Opuene (2006:7) for instance note that two major groups have defined the violent gang landscape in Port Harcourt and by extension the rest of the Niger Delta. They argue that the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV)

²¹ Organizational units of cult groups are often referred to as *Decks*

and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) are 'ethnic militias' who represent the biggest violent threat to social order in the Niger Delta. This report is significant because the membership of the two organisations that Oruwari and Opuene describe roughly coincide with the Deybam and Deywell led coalitions shown by Table 11.

The third group with Modularity Class of 1 (Big 20, Gberesako and Big Five in particular) tended to have separate operations and occasionally collaborated with others across the spectrum. This meant that they served as bridges of a sort in what was a very brutal period of gang violence that engulfed Port Harcourt, Okrika and Diobu in 2004 especially (HRW 2004, 2007).

Table 11: Cult Modularity Class

0	1	2
Bush Boys	Big Five	Bermudians
Cairo	Gberesako	Big 20
CS Marines	Greenlander	Buccaneers
Cyprus	Mbacho	Dey Well
Dey Bam		Germans
Isaka		Icelander
Junior Vikings		Njemanze
Klansmen		Onyegwu
Peacemaker		Supreme Vikings
The Outlaws		The Ugliers
Vultures		

Table 12: Cult Betweenness Centrality Measures

Cults	Betweenness centrality
Group A	
Big Five	0.25
Big 20	0.39

Group B	
Mbacho	3.78
Gberesako	3.48
Group C	
Icelander	11.38
Group D	
Bermudians	24.98
Cairo	20.83
CS Marines	25.88
Greenlander	20.79
The Ugliers	24.56
Buccaneers	25.47
Cyprus	25.49
Klansmen	29.03
Dey Well	26.44
Njemanze	25.40
Dey Bam	29.57
Germans	23.09

Junior Vikings	28.59
Onyegwu	21.00
The Outlaws	31.38
Supreme Vikings	25.27
Group E	
Vultures	24.27
Isaka	33.58
Peacemaker	31.09
Bushboys	32.48

Table 12 shows in very stark terms the extent of interaction that goes on within the cult and gang landscape of the Niger Delta. As noted earlier, betweenness centrality measures the importance of the individual cult group to the sustenance of the wider network. A good 80 percent of the cult groups fall within the highest two groups of betweenness centrality measures highlighting a level of collaboration (or at least individual group relevance) that belies the inter gang violence that has blighted the Niger Delta youth landscape. This tendency to collaborate even at times of violent conflict is a major factor in the eventual emergence of the grand MEND coalition that was to bring Nigeria's massive oil industry to its knees by 2009. Unlike the NGO map which

indicated clear clusters but which are nonetheless constantly relating across the entire spectrum of organisational types, the network map of cult groups (with its two relatively equal and a much smaller cluster) highlights the level of animosity that existed among cult groups. This is understandable given that violence and its performance were key to the self-making of the individual youth operating within this cult landscape and was also a key element of group identity and cohesion. Yet, the data also points at a very high level of collaboration between cult groups.

3.3.1 The *Colombia* Example of Gang Making: relationships, legitimacy and violence

Very few places symbolize the politics of gang-making and the fluidity of gang networks like the *Colombia* neighbourhood of Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State. *Colombia* appeared to have been conceived as a neutral place in which all gangs could freely circulate. As an informant described it,

In *Colombia*, what mattered was that you lived there or came there to relax. People were in different groups. I know friends who were Axe-men, Vikings or Bucca boys in school. But in *Colombia*, everybody was OS²². This is how Colombia was. (Tonye int. 2015)

This conception of *Colombia* as a free common space was one of the reasons it was able to function as a site for inter-cult networking in Port Harcourt in spite of a wider atmosphere of conflict. The fragility of this type of space was however, as will be shown shortly, brought into view from 1996 onwards when the death of a key figure ruptured the peace and sent violent ripples all through the Niger Delta gang underground.

²²The accurate meaning of ‘OS’ is unclear. Some say it referred to ‘Operation Squad’ a sort of militarized description of youth organizing which reflected the prevailing atmosphere of military rule in pre Fourth Republic Nigeria. Others say it meant Onyegwu Sons. There is currently a cult group in the Delta region that is simply called Onyegwu. However, it is doubtful that the OS of *Colombia* meant Onyegwu as many other larger gangs and cult groups operated around that time and since *Colombia* was a sort of centralizing space, it is unlikely that a relatively small group like the Onyegwu could have been so central to its development.

3.3.1.1 A brief description of Colombia

The neighbourhood that local youth refer to as '*Colombia*', partly, I am told, in reference to what they consider its similarities to the violent drug driven reputation of the Latin American state itself, comprises of residential streets officially known as Victoria, Niger and Bende. The heart is at Niger and Bende streets which had between them, in the years before Amnesty was offered in 2009, a large open playground called the 'Number One Field' that became a hub for drug dealing, gang hangouts and violent clashes. This open field was bound on one side by small temporary wooden shacks where young women sold bottles of locally made gin, fish pepper soup and sex. Close to the field was a large brothel called the Romeo Night Club which provided more permanent fixtures for illicit transactional sex and drug dealing. Young people gathered there every evening to hang out, play football and of course do all sorts of illegal activities within a space that offered relative protection from the law.

Underneath the criminal, chaotic and tough façade of *Colombia* was a highly complex system of collective organization, social order and mutual support that prided itself in its precarity and thrived on its distance from formal authority. The Number One Field itself was a relic of a previous attempt by the state government to provide sports infrastructure for local youth that was later abandoned in the late 1980s as the pressure of structural adjustment began to bear down on the fiscal health of the government. The relative prosperity since the return of civilian rule has however resuscitated the project, and the open space which was the center of the *Colombia* life being described here has since been reclaimed by the government and a mini sports complex built on it. The stories that relate directly to the open field that adjoins the Niger-Bende streets are therefore the recollections of community members who were active in the area from about 1995 to 2009.

Colombia was a space where young people created alternate cultures and realities, driving out as far as they could, the reach of the state as well as traditional notions of social order, normality and respectability. *Colombia* illustrates the way social groups can, according to Routledge (1997: 70), ‘endow space with amalgams of different meanings, uses and values’. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, the very name *Colombia* indicated acute awareness of the transnational implications of urban violence and instability that few societies encapsulated better in the 1990s than the narcotics and corruption fuelled violence in the real Colombia. By naming their space *Colombia*, young toughs in Niger, Bende and Victoria streets were acknowledging the violent reality of their society while expressing active agency to live within that reality, indeed to shape it until it bends to their will. As Amadi (int 2014), who grew up in Bende street and frequented *Colombia* in those early years as a secondary school kid told me,

‘I didn’t really know the meaning of *Colombia* until I grew a little older and began to hear about drug lords in that country. It was then that I understood the meaning. We were simply expressing our freedom by changing the street name. Sometimes even in public transportation we will ask the driver to stop at *Colombia* rather than use the official street name. He dares not pretend to not know the place. you know the official name is Niger-Bende? We were in charge, those were good days!’

Many of the young men who frequented *Colombia* between the late 1980s and early 2000s did not actually live there. Some of them lived in adjoining streets and quite a few lived as far away as Okirika, Diobu and Eleme; towns surrounding the city of Port Harcourt. *Colombia* was therefore more of a meeting point for violent youth around the city than it was a living space. This role as a socializing space was particularly instrumental to the exaggerated reach that *Colombia* youth had in the period being examined.

3.3.1.2 *The Making of the 'OX'*

The complex gang landscape in *Colombia* was held together in the 1990s by a local tough called Gowon, originally from Okrika. Gowon controlled the drug peddling, prostitution and other illegal rackets in the neighbourhood. He however also doubled as chief social organizer, holding parties, carnivals and generally maintaining social order. According to Bright (int 2014) who was resident in Colombia in that period:

Gowon was the boss in *Colombia*. The guy was tough. You can't mess with Gowon, he can kill anybody. It surprised everybody when we heard the police had killed him around UTC Roundabout....This was a Senior Man²³ ...he organized every body very well. Sometimes he would bribe the police when they come to arrest people. If there is a problem with the police, everybody just went to meet Gowon... all the prostitutes also pay a fee to Gowon if they wish to ply their trade in *Colombia*. If anybody messed up, Gowon will instruct that s/he be beaten to within an inch of life. But everybody liked him in spite of this, because he was a leader. He would organize football tournaments at the Number One Field and carnivals every Christmas period where everyone had fun.

It was during one of these Christmas carnivals organized by *Colombia* youth that the police came in to break up a scuffle and wounded Gowon severely. As the story went, upon return from the hospital, Gowon brought together disparate informal groups of youth from adjoining streets, including Victoria, Bende and a few from Creek Road and formed what they called 'OX'. The group tapped from existing gang cultures that were becoming a major problem in Nigerian higher institutions at that time and from other modes of youth organizing framed around cultural expression like the Agaba. What was particularly interesting with the *Colombia* example was that gang members in the neighbourhood simultaneously belonged to a large variety of cult groups outside of the place as well as to masquerade and cultural formations like the Agaba Boys..

The OX began to organize themselves into what they referred to as 'Decks'. These small organizational units' nomenclatures obviously drew inspiration from nautical

²³ a local slang for a tough guy who deserved or had to be respected

imagery and the transnational narratives of sea piracy, freedom and resistance that had been made infamous by western popular culture. The organizational units were controlled by commanders called 'nationals' and they began to play greater roles around the community as enforcers, defenders and occasionally oppressors. Just as Kate Meagher (2006: 96) noticed in her study of the origins of the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group in the South Eastern Nigerian city of Aba, the OS originated 'not from a traditional organization' or necessarily from the need to defend an ethnic identity as parts of the vigilante literature (Gerschier & Nyamnjoh 2000, Nolte 2008) would suggest but from the practical immediate need of the young toughs of *Colombia* to defend their illegal enterprises from police interference as well as incursions from rival neighbourhood youth if necessary. They were, to all intents and purposes, law unto themselves, imposing new forms of dominance that drew legitimacy from their ability to control a specific geographical space but also from being able to command the allegiance of multiple actors whether legally or otherwise.

This fluid gang identity helped keep the peace among youth in *Colombia* as they built order within what was clearly a chaotic context. One reason for this was that *Colombia* was a lucrative and relatively well protected space in which youth could carve out alternative sites of citizenship and claim-making against both state and society. The sustainable pursuit of the illegal economic activities that underpinned social order in the neighbourhood required the enforcement of a peace agenda that could effectively make it into a sort of cult no-man's land in which the collective good of gang members of all shades was the overriding interest. Secondly, although the external gang conflicts (especially from cults at the University of Port Harcourt and the Rivers State University of Science and Technology) occasionally spilled over into *Colombia*, the charismatic presence of Gowon who was able to keep the different gangs in check was a major

factor of stability. Another reason for the collaborative nature of relations in *Colombia* was that, in spite of the wide spectrum of youth gangs operating around Port Harcourt, they were actually often very similar in organizational structure and they certainly generally recognized that they- the youth- who ‘belonged’ lived in the same moral, if violent, universe and were distinct from the young people who did not belong. This collective sense of identity was thus a key entry-point into the *Colombia* space that allowed it to operate as a sort of no man’s land in which all gangs or cults could interact. *Colombia*’s role as a melting pot of the various cult identities was maintained by the OX which acted more like a high council of multiple cult groups rather than as a single organization. As noted by many informants privy to the working of both 1990s *Colombia* and more contemporary cult groups, the neighbourhood typifies similar spaces in the Niger Delta which cult groups are able to mingle, network and build relationships. (for instance UTC Bus Stop around the Isaac Boro Park in Port Harcourt from the late 1990s which separated Port Harcourt township from Diobu).

3.3.1.3 From *Colombia* to the Niger Delta’s Regional Politics

The limits of this sort of gangland peace however became evident with the extrajudicial police killing of Gowon sometime in 1996. Gowon’s death ruptured the system of control that held the gangs of *Colombia* together and the resulting power struggle was at the heart of the so called ‘Town-Diobu’ gang violence²⁴ that eventually flared up and ultimately got subsumed under the broader NDV-NDPVF violence led by the better known, and better armed, Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo.

Gowon had been so dominant in *Colombia* that no one could immediately take over after he was killed by the police. Gangs hitherto kept in check by the sheer force of Gowon’s charisma and reputation for brutality saw an opportunity to seize control of

²⁴ For details of this conflict, please see Wellington (2007).

the lucrative *Colombia* space and a violent power struggle began. In spite of his brutality, it appears Gowon was something of a benign dictator whose large heart was at the core of the social network of the neighbourhood. David Pratten's (2007: 97) account of the nostalgic song still sung in his honour around Port Harcourt does corroborate the point being made here as to Gowon's charisma and folk hero status across the Port Harcourt gang landscape. Gowon is honoured in song thus:

Gowon- eh
Gowon no be thief – eh
Gowon no be robber
Na rugged Gowon rugged
Na winchy people getting' money
Fire Gowon die- eh
*Italian no vex- oh*²⁵

With a figure so revered gone, less tolerant rivals fought out bloody street battles in and around *Colombia*, rupturing delicate social relations. As Tonye (int 2014) described the post Gowon chaos:

After Gowon died, it became like a power tussle between town boys and Diobu boys. I think some people realized that even though Gowon was working with everybody, he was a Klansman. There was one guy called Occasion Boy, he was a student of Unical that time, he was a cult boy too, I think he was a Viking and he used to come to *Colombia* before Gowon was killed.... Anyway, after Gowon died, the Occasion boy wanted to take charge. But the Town boys who lived in *Colombia* area were like, no this can't happen. That was how the problem started. They just started to kill each other. Everywhere, you know, Diobu, Abonema, Colombia, Okrika, everywhere just became like a warzone.

The collapse of *Colombia's* cult alliance released a flood of violence that cost hundreds of lives from 1996 and continued well into the early 2000s (Naagbaton 2012). By 2003, the ongoing feuds were taken into the political sphere as opposing politicians bestowed

²⁵ *Gowon-eh*
Gowon is not a thief- eh
Gowon is no armed robber
Gowon is just tough
It's the police people who got paid
And shot Gowon to death
The cults are not angry

patronage on the two main coalitions that had emerged (Deewell and Deebam). These two coalitions gradually evolved from unpretentious violent gangs into what we now know as militant groups. The two most prominent, with their membership roughly coinciding with that of the old Deebam and Deewell coalitions, were the NDV and the NDPVF led by Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo respectively (See Section 1.5 in Chapter One).

The core difference between these successor coalitions and the old ones was that the former began to frame their actions in clearly political terms. The change of name from Deebam and Deewell to Niger Delta Volunteers and Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force signaled that shift into a more political space from which they quickly appropriated a very popular region wide struggle against the state and oil multinationals. It should be noted of course that this account tracing the emergence of NDV and NDPVF partly to the breakdown of order in *Colombia* by no means captures the full spectrum of issues involved. However, it illustrates how the breakdown of network coherence can quickly have unintended consequences far from the initial origin.

The shift in the priority of youth gangs in the region from *Colombia* politics into the wider oil themed regional conflict that had been on for much longer in the Niger Delta eventually created for them an external enemy powerful and threatening enough to warrant another objective alliance. With the political support and advocacy capacities of ethnic themed organizations like the IYC as well as others like the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), MEND eventually appeared as a loose coalition of virtually all of these organisations and the focus of conflict largely shifted from one another towards the oil multinationals and the Nigerian State. It is interesting to note here that many of the gang actors in *Colombia* were to become leading militants in 2006 when MEND

was formed. Informants pointed out for instance that Soboma George,²⁶ a leader in MEND, was one of the prominent actors in the post Gowon collapse of *Colombia*.

3.4 Liberation Movements, Militant Groups

Militant groups appear to be the most visible actors in the Niger Delta in the last decade. Their activities, mobilisations and the pivotal role of youth in them have been so well documented that it is unnecessary to intimately map the social networks as done for the NGO and gang pathways. In fact, since a full blown insurgency was launched around 2006, accounts of everyday violence in the Niger Delta have tended to focus on the actions of organisations like MEND, NDPVF and NDV.²⁷ This is partly because these organisations frame their actions in political terms and efficiently occupy the insurgency landscape; owning the narrative and extracting the bulk of the concessions offered by the state and multinational oil companies. Closely connected to these groups though are organisations like the Ijaw Youth Congress and the Egbema National Congress (ENC) who frame their politics around legitimate ethnic discourses (Ukeje and Adebaniwi 2008) and are able to command broad-based open popular support in ways neither NGOs nor cult groups can hope to. The key connecting thread between militant groups and ethnic based groups is that both categories efficiently used the idea that they defend specific publics as the basis of their existence and most openly defend the use of violence as a legitimate instrument of negotiation.

Unlike cults or street gangs, liberation movements and militant groups expertly use multiple local idioms of justice and ownership to frame their activities and are often

²⁶ Soboma George was to later become a leading member of MEND when his gang The Outlaws helped form it in 2006. He was the commander of MEND in the Eastern Niger Delta. He was eventually killed in an internal dispute on August 24th, 2010, about a year into the presidential Amnesty Programme.

²⁷ Extensive studies of youth militancy which highlight the various social relationships between the groups have been carried out and published in the academic literature as well as in the 'grey' policy focussed literature. Notable examples include Ejibowah 2000, Obi 2001, Okonta and Douglas 2002, HRW 2007, Watts 2007, Oriola *et al* 2013 and Adunbi 2015.

able to operate in the open as legitimate members of the Delta civil society. These idioms draw attention to both historical and contemporary notions of citizenship and use these to rationalize their violent mobilizations against the state and oil multinationals (Adunbi 2013).

Youth whose entry point into the violent social environment of the Delta is through liberation movements and militant groups often use a pan Niger Delta language of dissent even though their local ethnic affiliations are usually a central element of their identity.²⁸ This pan Niger Delta narrative is what connects the various ethnic themed organisations and justifies analysing them as part of a single, if diverse and often fractious, social network. In spite of often deadly inter-ethnic violence²⁹ the centralising narrative of a ‘Niger Delta Struggle’ is at the heart of the external identity formation of these groups. By tapping into regional discourses of disempowerment and marginalisation, ethnic themed youth organisations are able to stake their claim in the highly lucrative space of anti oil industry resistance. They do this as part of a network of youth representing their specific ethnicity but also acutely aware of a regionally shared sense of marginalisation.

As is the case of Delta cults, frequent inter-ethnic conflicts may seem to highlight the ideological and strategic separateness of these groups. However, they are far more interconnected than the history of violent conflict suggests. For instance, the formation of MEND illustrates how the different groups can and do coalesce in spite of their many differences. It also demonstrates the important role that the centralising narrative of a ‘Niger Delta struggle’ plays in building this coalition. Morten Boas (2012) captures the

²⁸ Ijaw Nationalism for instance has been expanded in many ways to fit into a broader Niger Delta narrative without it losing its localized context and essence (see the works of Nwajiaku 2005a, 2005b as well as Imobigbe Bassey & Asuni 2002 and Ifedi & Anyu 2011).

²⁹ A number of examples of deadly inter-ethnic/community clashes easily come to mind. These include the Ogoni-Andoni of the 1990s, Eleme-Okirika of 2001, Ijaw-Itsekiri of the 1990s and so on. For a comprehensive list, see Okwechime 2013:15-16.

nature of this coalition when he described MEND as an

‘organization without organization’ ...just as much an idea as it is an amalgam of several groups operating across the Delta. It is much less of a cohesive force than a brand name for different groups of insurgents, militias and gangs, and due to its networked and fragmented nature also very hard to crush with one decisive military blow.

This fragmented amalgam of different ethnicities are brought together by shared notions of marginality and underline the networked nature of the insurgency landscape in the Delta. Operating from within ethnic militias ironically encourages young actors to network across ethnic lines while simultaneously highlighting the specific challenges faced by the primary ascriptive identity. As a former militant and member of the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA) puts it,

I am Ijaw, and even though we are the biggest group in the Niger Delta, in fact we are not even [a] minorit[y]ies, we must work with others. Look at the Ogoni, Ikwerre, Urobo, all of us are fighting the same battle. During the struggle anywhere we go, we can just stay. It doesn't matter whether you are Ogoni or Ijaw, we must work together. All the problems between us is caused by oil companies and the government. We get to a village, they don't ask whether you are Ijaw or Ikwerre, they just provide food and where to sleep. If I sleep in Andoni village its not because I have become one of them, but we are one in the struggle against a common enemy (Kinglsey Urban Gorrilla int 2014).

Table 13: Selected Ethnic based organisations in the Niger Delta

Name	Representative Group
Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)	Ijaw
Ikwerre Youth Movement (IYM)	Ikwerre
Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM)	Isoko
Urhobo Youth Movement (UYM)	Urhobo
Movement for the Survival of Izon Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND)	Ijaw
Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities (FNDIC)	Ijaw
Bayelsa Youths Federation (BYF)	Ogoni,
Isoko Community Oil Producing Forum (ICOPF)	Isoko
Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)	Ogoni
Egbema National Congress (ENC)	Egbema
Ijaw National Congress (INC)	Ijaw

Table 14: Selected Militant groups in the Niger Delta as at the launch of the Amnesty in 2009

Name	Main Area	Leader
Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)	PH	Asari Dokubo
Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF)	PH	Prince Fara Ipalibo
Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV)	Okrika	Ateke Tom
Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)	Pan Delta	Collegiate
Committee for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMAND)	Pan Delta	Collegiate
Matyrs Brigade (MB)	PH	Cynthia Whyte
Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA)	Yenagoa	
Camp 5	Gbaramatu	Government Ekemupolo
Niger Delta Freedom Fighters	Egbema	Egbema One
Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities (FNDIC)	Gbaramatu	Oboko Bello

Table 15: Known Major Militant Camps in the Niger Delta as at 2009

	Camp	Location	Leader
1	Olugbobiri	Southern Ijaw(SI), Bayelsa State	Joshua Mckiver
2	Korokorosei	SI	Africa Owei
3	Okiegbene/Ebirighene (Ikebiri I &II)	Nembe	Gideon Kala (Prince Igodo)
4	Robert Creek	Nembe	Government Ekemupolo (Tompolo)
5	Cowthorne Channel	Warri South, Delta State	
6	Camp 5	Gbaramatu/Warri	
7	Okerenkoko	Warri	
8	Opuraza	Warri	
9	Azuzuama	SI	Jackson
10	Gbekenegbene	SI	Unknown
11	Ezetu	SI	Victor Ben Ebikabowei (Boyloaf)
12	Agge	SI	
13	Kurutiye, Forupa and Okubie	SI	Unknown

14	Ken Camp	Odi	Ken
15	Egbema Camp	Warri	Kem Agbakara
16	Ubefan	Warri	John Togo
17	Berger Camp	Warri	Inilo Sinite
18	NDPVF	Akuku-Tori, Rivers State	Mujahid Asari-Dokubo
19	NDVM	Okirika	Ateke Tom
20	Borokiri (Icelanders/Outlaws Cult)	Borokiri, Port Harcourt	Soboma George
21	Yeghe	Bori, Ogoni	Solomon Ndigbara (Osama Bin Laden)

Source: Etekpe: 2009

3.5 Fluid Boundaries and Collective Organisation

As briefly noted earlier in the chapter, the period between 2003 and the launching of the 2009 Presidential Amnesty programme was one of the most effective for resistance organisations in the long history of the Niger Delta insurrection. It was effective not just because it severely hit the Nigerian oil industry in an unprecedented way, cutting production by almost 40 percent at its peak in 2007, but also because it was the first Delta violent wide insurrection since the ill-fated rebellion led by Adaka Boro in 1966. The previous decade had been dominated by the resource rights and environmental struggle led by Ken Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP in Ogoni. After Saro-Wiwa's controversial hanging however, many other groups across the Delta began to remobilize, taking advantage of the liberalizing political climate, and eventually created a regional insurrection.

The process of crafting a regional coalition required the interaction of all three pathways described above. Two important factors helped in moving this process along. First, there were a number of youth whose participation straddled two or more of the pathways. These served as critical bridges between the pathways, ensuring fluidity in

the conflict landscape. Many of the youth who were in street gangs or cults sometimes deployed their violence in support of the claims of ethnic groups in a specific confrontation with oil companies or as a part of a broader pan Niger Delta struggle. The intriguing story of Kamedi Atai, a member of both the Icelanders cult group as well as the IYC illustrates the role that bridge actors play in creating a broad social network of violence efficient enough to challenge the state.

Kamedi joined the Icelanders group while living in Okirika in oil rich Rivers State sometime in the early 2000s. He eventually rose to become a ‘national’ (mid level commander) in the Onyegwu ‘deck’ (command unit operating like a brigade) in Port Harcourt. As a ‘national’, he often mobilized his group to join up with ethnic movements protesting against specific oil company (in)actions or fighting perceived infractions by other ethnic groups. In 2003, he was invited by Ijaw youth groups in Warri, Delta State to participate in a violent onslaught against Ugbuwangue, an Itsekiri settlement. During the violent confrontation which drew in the Nigerian Navy and in which later news reports indicated about 25 deaths (*Daily Times* April 15, 2003) Kamedi operated essentially as a member of the local Ijaw Youth council rather than an Iclander. In his words:

As a national, they called me that [there was a] problem dey for [in] Warri with the Itsekiri. You know that time the Warri crisis still dey hot [was still raging]? We follow join [joined] the IYC. All the *kpai* chiefs (key hitmen) that were there that time were from Iclander but we were all IYC. You know I am an Ijaw man, and we must defend our people.

This ability to morph into different groups in order to pursue specific short term agendas was critical to the creation and sustainability of the violent social networks at the heart of the Niger Delta’s conflict. It was not uncommon to find young people acting out different roles in the different but complimentary pathways of resistance generated by the oil economy of the Delta. In fact, a majority of the ex-militants I spoke with (about

87 percent) indicated membership of organisations across at least two pathways. A good 26 percent actually had active membership in the three pathways.

Table 16: Interlocking Participation in Pathways

Name	Cult	Ethnic Org.	Militant Group
Akpan			
Amadi			
Bright			
Darlington			
Douglas			
Egbekun			
Kamedi			
Kingsley			
Louis			
Louis			
Opuowei			
Peter			
Tarela			
Tema			
Tonye			
	10	10	9

Source: Fieldwork Interviews

Shading indicates participation in that pathway

Belongs to cults: 10

Belong to Ethnic Org: 10

Belongs to Militant Groups: 9

Belongs to at least 2 Pathways: 13 (87%)

Belongs to all pathways: 4 (26%)

In Table 16 above, I took a snap shot of the main youth cited in the study and use these to demonstrate the nature of the interlocking memberships that exist across the three pathways. The implications of the cross cutting participation in the different spaces of youth politics in the region meant that the terrain was highly fluid and youth were able to take on specific identities depending on what social navigation required at a given

time. It is also apparent that multiple affiliation meant that it was possible for organisations as diverse as an environmental NGO and a cult group to ‘collaborate’ in the pursuit of common interests. Of course this collaboration was often unofficial, however, simply having networks in the various youth pathways was a profoundly useful way of navigating the violent youthscales of the Niger Delta. In order to do their work, environmental NGOs for instance, depended on the good will of violent gangs who often negotiated and guaranteed safe passage for activists and researchers. Without these sorts of informal collaborations, the position of advocacy groups in the region would be untenable and they would be unable to serve as critical entry points for external interests (like international human rights organisations) who often seek access to the region.

The second key factor was that a truly regional narrative existed from which all groups could tap without sacrificing local legitimacy. This narrative was framed by the politics of oil extraction and the many decades of disempowerment and marginalization that social groups across the Delta had been subjected to. It is also a reflection of the political implications of the minority question in the Nigerian federation and the legitimate issues raised by their marginalization. The militarization of the Delta region from the mid 1990s deepened local resentment of the implications of state power for inhabitants of the oil producing region and helped cement the notion of a permanent crisis for which social mobilization must aim to fight. The NGO pathway played a very critical role in this regard in that it helped to legitimize, rationalize and publicize local perceptions of marginalization in a language that was not just acceptable to the global community but which was efficient in gaining sympathy for the different social causes at play in the region. Organisations like MOSOP, ERA, NDWJ for instance, tapped into global narratives about environmental rights and women rights at a time when these issues

were gaining immense recognition from social movements across the world.

The very diverse insurgency map of the Delta inevitably meant that groups tapped into this regional narrative of disempowerment in very different ways. While the NGOs and militant groups used it as their *raison d'être*, street gangs often only tapped into it during those periods of flux described earlier. NGOs and militant groups also sometimes focused on specific aspects of the crisis, depending on the context. For instance, militant groups sometimes abandoned a pan Niger Delta discourse when fighting what is essentially a localized ethnic struggle. In spite of this however, the backdrop to inter-ethnic struggles is almost always the broader regional sense of marginalization. It is common place to hear both sides in an ethnic conflict come to the conclusion that oil companies and/or the Nigerian state were deliberately playing one side against the other. This issue came up in virtually all inter-ethnic complaints raised during the 2004 Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by Justice Kayode Esho (Rivers State TRC Report 2005).

As a result of these two factors, it was possible for young actors in the Delta to not just build autonomous social networks through which violent accumulation could be facilitated, but also to build coalitions across the region and across pathways in ways that created a conflict network that was highly efficient and was controlled by its own logics.

3.6 Conclusion

As was highlighted in the previous chapters, information on the social infrastructures that facilitate youth violence (or indeed politics) in the Niger Delta region is very sparse. The literature appears to focus almost exclusively on answering the question of *why* youth navigate the region in the way that they do. Yet, the questions of *how* they execute

these maneuvers and what infrastructures facilitate these maneuverings are crucial to grasping the politics of Niger Delta youth.

What this chapter has provided is an analysis of this infrastructure by showing the different pathways through which youth entered into the Niger Delta's political and social universe in the years before the Amnesty was launched in 2009. It identified NGOs, street gangs/cults and ethnic militia as the three main pathways and conceptualized them both as independent spaces but also as a collective, fluidly interacting canvass of youth organisation. Drawing from fieldwork data as well as official reports, published work and the popular press, the chapter showed both the nature and depth of the social networks of youth in the region.

It is interesting to note that the interlocking nature of the relationships described above does a lot to validate the frameworks of social uncertainty, navigation and permanence being used to engage with questions surrounding youth mobilisations in this study. In the first place, in order to effectively take advantage of the pathways available to youth, it is crucial for actors to be nimble in their social navigation and to be able to articulate tactical agency. The constant shifts between pathways as well as the uncertainty that surrounds the social options within them highlight the precarious nature of social mobilization for youth in the Niger Delta. They also highlight the fluid context of youthful self making which is often defined both by the nature of social order within the alternative spaces of citizenship in which they circulate as well as by pressures imposed by an over arching oil driven political economy.

The framework of uncertainty is also brought into clearer relief by various factors highlighted above including the precarity of funding for NGOs which encourages collaborations, competitions and practices that would otherwise be frowned upon if the organizations were self sufficient or at least dependent on local sources. Another

example is the sheer fast paced violence of many of the youth gang hotspots in the region which makes long term planning or even formalization difficult. As one youth described it; '*na only death sure*'. This literally translates as 'only death is certain'. The apprehensions that youth have about everyday life is responded to through constant transitions from one pathway to the other as well as transformations from one kind of youth to the other. It is precisely in the ability to execute and articulate these changes that youth show mastery of their environment and guarantee, as far as is possible, their social survival- if not mobility.

PART TWO

Chapter Four

NETWORKS OF CONTINGENCY: EVERYDAY NARRATIVES OF PROXIMITY AND SPONTANEITY IN THE VIOLENT POLITICS OF DELTA MILITIA

you have to shine your eyes in this Port Harcourt. Everything may look normal, but this can change in one second. People that will bribe the police man now, can just suddenly begin to attack him. Sometimes you will wonder why they are doing this, but if you look under the whole thing, it may just be that the policeman slapped the wrong person that day. (Ufuk int 2014)

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter has provided insight into the various pathways through which youth networks were built in the Niger Delta. These networks act both as the tools through which youth enter into the dynamic politics of the region as well as the spaces through which self framing efforts were hatched and articulated. Even though we now know that these networks exist or that youth are important within them, it is still unclear exactly how they are constituted, what kinds of relationships and/or identities make them possible and under what circumstances are they useful as infrastructures for social and political mobilization? In short, how do Niger Delta youth networks imagine and organize themselves as autonomous, yet embedded actors in a dynamic oil economy? To address these issues, it is interesting to note first that many studies of the Niger Delta often describe clusters of relationships that are driven by ethnic affiliations, generational solidarity, environmental mobilizations, gender and sometimes class (Watts 2004, Nwajiaku 2005, Osaghae 2011, Okwechime & Iwilade 2013). There is little question about the relevance of these affinities for how people imagine and organize themselves in the region. However, these affinities are often not enough to explain, by themselves, the diverse social actions (some of which are violent) that occur so regularly in the region. While they capture some of the basis of identity formation in the region, they do not necessarily explain the ways in which the groups that embark

on such actions organize themselves in their day to day activities. One particularly important element of collective organisation and social violence in the Niger Delta that is hardly ever taking into account is the role that fortuitous, sudden and provisional actions or events play in generating these popular movements. It is often taken for granted that grievances or motivations for political action are rooted in the turbulent history of the region and that social categories (especially youth) constantly respond to cues from years of state neglect and marginalisation. Yet, contingent and provisional actions are sometimes at the core of social mobilisation and those other affinities are tools deployed by youth in the service of tactical agency. What is obvious from the literature though is that contingency is notably ignored by analysts in spite of considerable evidence that it is a pervasive form of organizing in the region. This chapter is thus meant to both provide an example of forms of network formation as well as fill a yawning gap in the literature on social movements and contentious politics in the Niger Delta.

But what do we mean when we talk of contingency or of contingent networks? A few things come to mind. The first is the role of ‘chance’, ‘spontaneity’ or ‘unpredictability’. Making a living or simply surviving within spaces where state presence is at best weak, infrastructure is inadequate and in which multiple social formations compete to impose alternative visions of citizenship often requires delicate social navigation skills that thrive on its spontaneity, flexibility and adaptability (Evans & Furlong 1997, Vigh 2009). Often unacknowledged in studies of the Delta conflict is the implication of this fluid context for social action. Framing youth politics and collective mobilization through contingency therefore indicates an acknowledgement that historical identities, important as they are, often require contemporary triggers that

transform deep seated emotions into political action. It is the unpredictability of what this trigger would be or when it would come that is 'contingent'.

This leads to another important aspect of contingency which is temporality. In order for a social action to be 'contingent' it has to happen within a specific temporal space in which it is able to fundamentally shape the direction of individual life choices and ultimately of group action. As Doug and Sewell (2001) brilliantly put it, it is really 'about time'. In that 2001 article, Doug and Sewell make a strong case for the timing of fortuitous events and conclude that in order for contentious social action to even occur at all, the time must be right for it in that it must occur when it is able to feed off enabling social structures (towards collective organising, shared sense of grievance and actionable goal). Temporality in this sense also indicates elements of chance and unpredictability.

Finally, the fact that the initial provisional action occurs does not necessarily mean that a contingent network can emerge. For instance, in order for outrage over the self immolation of the Tunisian fruit seller, Tareq Mohammed Boazizi³⁰ to grow into the kind of coordinated protest movement that became the *Arab Spring*, provisional individual or group responses must be able to morph into what Beissinger (2011: 26) described as 'interrelated contingencies [in other words] a linkchain of events in which the outcome of one link became an important initial condition for another'. Contingency is therefore not just about unpredictability but it also highlights that sometimes there is no opposition between spontaneity and organization and that youth networks often have

³⁰ Tareq Bouazizi was a College graduate who eked out a living as a fruit seller in the small town of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia. On December 17th, 2010, he was accosted by police for allegedly selling fruit without a license. His wares were confiscated including his electronic weighing scale. The humiliation of the arrest and the refusal of the town governor to meet with him or redress the situation caused him to douse himself with paint thinner and set himself on fire. His self immolation triggered massive protests in Tunisia which brought down the government and eventually spread across the Middle East and developed into what is now referred to as the Arab Spring.

to combine these two features in a continuous iteration that helps them create social organizations that are simultaneously nimble and fixed.

Yet these interlinked contingent actions cannot happen in a vacuum. They are dependent on shared histories, citizenship and goals and the dynamics of mobilization are ultimately embedded in the broader political economy. This point is important because arguing for the relevance of contingency in Delta youth networks should not be taken to imply a dismissal of other forms of social identity formation or other entry points to collective organisation and network building. Rather, my goal is to strengthen our understanding of how these other affinities work in the light of the practical self organising realities often faced by youth groups operating in alternative spaces of modernity. In these spaces, ethnicity is perhaps not as important to self framing as spatial friendships, gang memberships and such other basis for interaction. Therefore, the focus here is not just on the utility of contingent networks but even more on the relationships between contingent actions and the social structures that bind and enable them.

In order to explore the reality of contingency in Delta youth networks, this chapter first builds a framework that draws insights from important concepts like proximity and spontaneity as a tool for analysing the politics of violent youth in the Delta. The next section then employs this framework to analyse fieldwork data. Insights from the study of the *Colombia* neighbourhood of Port Harcourt was used to show what role contingency has played in the social mobilisation of violent youth in the region.

4.2 Proximity and Spontaneity in Contingent Network Relations

In his work on the navigation of everyday uncertainties in postcolonial African cities, AbdulMaliq Simone (2004:13) writes about ‘a wide range of provisional, highly fluid yet coordinated and collective actions’ that are being generated in ways that ‘run

parallel to, yet intersect with, a growing proliferation of decentralized local authorities'. He locates the generation of provisional actions in the very nature of urban life in which familiar social anchors like kinship, space and government are themselves in constant motion and life chances can hardly be calculated with any certainty. To him, provisional action emerges out of a permanent 'state of emergency' in which 'there is a rupture in the organization of the present' and in which social actors must constantly improvise in everything, not the least in the way they define social boundaries of both otherness and belonging.

Underpinning Simone's (2004) conceptualization of *the provisional* is the notion that social fluidity and uncertainty in these contexts (see Vigh 2009) force inhabitants to make efforts to juggle contradictory scenarios and work out what he called 'highly particularized relationships' designed to help them mitigate uncertain life chances. These relationships are often driven by spontaneous and fortuitous action. In a 1989 article titled *Spontaneous Order*, economist Robert Sugden (1989: 86) writes about how 'rules regulating human behaviour can evolve without conscious human design and can maintain themselves without there being a formal machinery to enforce them'. He argues that when certain courses of action become convention, they often become self-perpetuating, and that they survive 'not necessarily because they are the most efficient option but because 'they are more successful at replicating themselves than other patterns' (Sugden 1989: 97).

The idea that institutions develop from unintended design created by a series of autonomous actions responding to specific localized cues is of course not new and can be found in the classic works of David Hume, Adam Smith (Cordasco and Bavetta 2015). These arguments are relevant in the analysis of contingent networks as they illustrate how spontaneous action- a chance meeting or sudden unexpected event or

even improvised responses- can profoundly shape the emergence of a social relationship between individuals or groups and how they can morph into contingent networks through self-perpetuation. Hmed (2012: 50) explains that these spontaneous actions in spite of being “embedded within social, political and cognitive structures”, “nevertheless provokes a breakdown in intelligibility whose rationale we need to reconstruct and whose differential effects must be measured”. These breakdowns in intelligibility constantly shift the goal post for social actors who have to improvise in order to cope with its dynamics. It is from iterations of these improvisations that contingency becomes the prevailing social logic and from which networks are born. Simone’s (2004) work captures a very comprehensive range of social actions that urban populations have to engage in in their bid to navigate these everyday realities. In more recent studies of the so called Arab Spring on the other hand, Choukri Hmed (2012) and Killian Clarke (2014) identify similar patterns of social relations which they describe as ‘contingency’ but they do so within the context of protest movements rather than everyday life. In these articles, one analysing the Egyptian uprising (Clarke) and the other its Tunisian version (Hmed), they describe how protesters seize one-off opportunities to both trigger and coordinate anti-state street riots. Like in the more stable³¹ everyday context of postcolonial cities in Simone’s work, these contingent actions are derived from the ability of social actors to identify and seize opportunities which sometimes emanate from the most unlikely places, and are underpinned by the very unpredictability of life in these contexts. By focussing on protest movements rather than everyday urban life, these studies of contingency tend to extend Simone’s (2004) argument by illustrating even more clearly the critical role that social change plays in

³¹ *Stable* in this contexts should not be taken to imply predictability. Vigh (2009) explains the stability of motion in his work *Motion Squared*

enabling contingent action and showing that this is as much relevant in ‘more stable’ contexts of urban life as in the rapidly changing contexts of street protests.

This chapter further extends these arguments by looking specifically into how these series of provisional social actions imposed by uncertainty as well as by the breakdown of familiar contours of statehood can morph into contingent networks – that is into social networks built around a multiplicity of chance and difficult to predict events.³² This implies an analysis of social networks that is dependent on the deliberate de-centering of familiar tropes like ethnicity from how we think of the Delta and drawing attention to the contingent nature of social connections within the region. Of course this does not suggest that ethnicity is irrelevant or that such affinities do not play a role in the emergence of networks in the region as many studies have alluded to (see Nwajiaku 2005, Osaghae 2011), but that fortuitous links are an important but thoroughly under researched part of network building in the Delta and that elements of youth mobilization can be understood through the interrogation of these sorts of relationships. Indeed, the ability to constantly identify and seize these contingency opportunities is itself, it seems, a product of uncertainty and is a tactical response of youth to the constant shifts in the social universe in which they are compelled or choose to attain social adulthood. Drawing insights from Granovetter’s (1985) argument that ‘weak ties’ are significant in network diffusion because they create more and shorter paths through which influence, values and power can move, it is easy to imagine that contingent relationships create even shorter paths and are thus often very effective tools for building the type of

³² As noted earlier in the dissertation, in order for small-scale interactions to evolve into social networks, what Meagher (2005, 219) described as “informal organizations and arrangements based on social ties,” a collective identity has to be constructed through which “boundary formation and social othering” (Lindell 2010a) can occur. Contingent networks are however built through relationships that are the very opposite of these. Rather than evolving from a defined collective identity, it evolves precisely from the absence of such identity, thriving instead on its unpredictability, unattachedness and ultimately its dependence on ‘chance’.

broad networks that are apparent in the Niger Delta primarily because they can often bypass (or appropriate) strong identity markers like ethnicity and religion that have been known to create closed rather than diffused social networks as well as occurring in unpredictable spaces.

In order to access the opportunities for/of provisional social action, some form of contact, that is proximity, is of course necessary and this is a useful entry point to the conceptual discussion of contingency.

The concept of proximity was developed by economic geographers (see Storper and Venables 2004, Broekel & Binder 2007) seeking to explain the role geography plays in the innovation process. They argue that geographical proximity is key to the development and emergence of innovation networks through which firms are able to collaborate in the manufacturing process. In this vein therefore, they argue that the ‘need for interaction and communication between agents is supported by geographical proximity in a context of radical uncertainty’ (Bouba-Olga *et al* 2015: 901). Economic geographers analyse the co-location of agents by endogenizing space as a tool for building models of networks and cooperation. By doing this, they highlight that being co-located within certain social space enhances interaction between groups but also that it facilitates the emergence of other types of proximity (Nooteboom 2002, Breschi and Lissoni 2003, Broekel 2015). Proximity types like institutional, cognitive, organizational and social were identified by the so called French School of proximity Dynamics (see Boschma 2005) as representing powerful theoretical bases for approaching mechanisms behind networks’ emergence, evolution and structural change (Cantner and Graff 2006).

Particularly useful for our analysis of proximity in the context of the Delta’s youth groups is geographical proximity. Before addressing geographical proximity however,

it is important to note that Balland (2012) and Broeckel & Boschma (2012) were right to suggest that proximities are often simultaneously relevant for the evolution of networks thereby implying other types of proximity may occur in any one network even if impacting it to different degrees³³.

Geographical proximity, as the name implies, refers to the impact that spatial co-location plays in the emergence of contingent relationships. It appears commonsensical to assume that geographical proximity between actors, provides a strong platform or at least opportunity for social relations to evolve into meaningful networks. Where actors co-exist within the same space, even when relations are conflictual or competitive as is the case with many of the gangs and militias that operate in the Niger Delta, the opportunities for interaction are greatly multiplied. This is magnified even more where the groups are socially conscious and politically active and thus can be expected to compete or collaborate over access to power and resources of the state. The specific nature of the Niger Delta wetlands and the poverty ridden sprawls of its urban centers also means that the relevance of space is immensely magnified and it becomes not just a tool for fighting insurgent revolts (as described by Peel 2007, Watts 2010, Ugor 2013) but also the prize of conflict itself.

Even though geographical proximity offers opportunities for the building of relationships, the pressures of constant interactions also generates conflict and violence in the oil economy of the Delta. Simone (2004: 4) agrees when he notes that ‘the very acts of mooring and taking apart social ties become the locus of intense contestation and concern- that is, who can do what with whom under what circumstances becomes a domain so fraught with tension and even violence that clear demarcations are deferred and opaque’. Implicit in this statement is the idea that the constant proximity of bodies

³³ Other proximity types in the context of the Delta include ascriptive and patronage

in the urban space generates both network openness and network closures. Contingent relations easily develop where bodies have to rub against each other so constantly in a climate with so much uncertainty.

Proximity and spontaneity are key elements of the contingent network, and as the above indicates, they become especially useful tools for network building in the context of uncertainty. This is what Simone (2004) called a ‘state of emergency’ and Vigh (2009: 421) referred to as a type of everyday ‘which swings in tune with its proximity to disorder’. In order to demonstrate how these patterns emerge, the next section explores fieldwork data from *Colombia* to illustrate how contingent networks are important parts of the architecture of youth mobilization and organization in the Delta.

4.3 Something out of Nothing? Everyday narratives of contingency

How do we then situate Niger Delta youth politics in this framework? A useful approach is to look at contingency first as a response to specific ruptures in the normal flow of urban life (Simone 2004, Zeiderman, Kaker, Silver and Wood 2015) and then to demonstrate how the contingent responses become a part of the ‘normal’ thus enabling social relations to morph into self replicating actions that ultimately create viable social networks.

4.3.1 Contingency in the everyday urban context: Port Harcourt’s Colombia

The emergence of the OX in the neighbourhood of *Colombia* of Port Harcourt described in Chapter Three provides interesting illustration of contingency as a tactical response to the realities of urban life. It will be recalled that while the young people in the neighbourhood obviously mingled extensively in the pursuit of highly individualized struggles for social maturation, it was the attack by the police during the Christmas carnival of 1994 which resulted in the grievous wounding of Gowon³⁴ that triggered

³⁴ see Chapter Three

the initial action that eventually galvanised the collective organising instincts of the *Colombia* youth. Some of the actions that followed that incident sometimes in 1994 or 5 have already been described in Chapter 3 so I will focus on actions and events directly related to the question of contingency.

As noted above, the fact of contingency does not divorce specific trigger events from the social universe in which they occur. As Marx wrote in the case of the proletarian revolution, movements usually rise gradually and that rise culminates (inevitably he avers) in a revolution which is tied irrevocably to the historic unfolding and deepening of the inherent contradictions of capitalism (see McAdam and Sewell 2001: 90). This means that even when we identify trigger events, they still need to be situated in history. To illustrate in this context, the police raid that led to injury to Gowon was not, by itself, an unexpected event in Colombia, the rest of the Delta or in fact Nigeria more generally. In fact, police harassment of *Colombia* youth was such a regular occurrence that one of the residents of the neighbourhood at the time described young people as Automated Teller Machines from which police drew bribes whenever they felt like it. Why then was this particular event of particular significance and why did it trigger Beissinger's (2011) so called 'link-chain of events' that eventually created a viable, vibrant and constantly evolving resistance network?

One key factor was that unlike other raids in which unofficial arrests were made by the police, often with minimal violence, and in which the arrested youth were simply roughed up for small bribes and released almost immediately, this particular raid turned violent very quickly. As it was described by Louis (int 2014),

the police always came here. That was normal, especially during a carnival or any party. They always showed up to take money from the boys. You know how these things are! That day however some boys from Diobu were there and they didn't really know the police people. you know some of them were not in uniform. The Diobu boys thought it was Axe men (a violent cult group based mainly in the

Universities) or something, so they began to fight them. As Gowon tried to intervene to resolve the matter, one of the police men hit him with his gun, everything just scattered after then.

It appears that had the youth from outside *Colombia* not been present at that event, the police raid could be expected to have ended the way the many previous ones had- a minor shakedown and rapid return to normalcy. The resistance put up by the non-*Colombia* youth could have caused a fracas more intense than usual, but was perhaps not enough, on its own, to have triggered the reaction to create a more institutionalised form of resistance that Gowon and his acolytes created soon after the incident. It is perhaps conceivable that if Gowon himself had not been attacked and seriously injured by the police, the dynamics of their (*Colombia* youth) precarious but obviously stable relations with law enforcement would not have changed so fundamentally to the point that violence became an acceptable tool for communication.

But perhaps most instructive is the broader context of the police raid and what was going on within the Niger Delta around that time. From 1993, MOSOP had reignited the debate about resource and environmental rights in the oil producing region and there was growing resentment of the repressive response of the military government of General Sani Abacha. By the time of the *Colombia* incident sometime in 1995, Ogoni was in turmoil following the arrest of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others for alleged complicity in the murder of four Ogoni elders. Of course these Saro-Wiwa incidents did not happen in *Colombia*, but it had profound impact on the narratives of citizenship and belonging in the entire Delta region (and perhaps even across the country). What is significant was that the police raid on *Colombia* occurred at a time when the repressive apparatus of the Nigerian State was generating intense public resentment and the MOSOP example was highlighting both the precarity of resistance as well as its necessity and inevitability. It is also important to note that there was a long history of social change

and resistance to the state especially with regard to minority rights and the questions surrounding the fair distribution of oil revenue in the region and thus even the MOSOP movement prevailing at the time was not occurring in a vacuum. Louis (int 2014) alluded to the influence of the Ogoni movement for the way leaders of the *Colombia* gangs framed what was a relatively common occurrence. In his words,

Everyone was tired of the army people, just harassing everybody and the police beating people up. You know that time was Abacha time? You remember NADECO³⁵ and all the problem with Saro Wiwa? You see, all that taught us a thing or two.

While some studies of social action tend to argue that movements are responsive to sudden dramatic disruptions in people's lives which supposedly motivates them to seek a restoration of more acceptable orders (see Gurr 1971, Turner & Killian 1972), in finding an explanation for the response of *Colombia* youth to police harassment, it is useful to combine the relevance of the moment (the specific police attack) with that of history. Contingency emerges precisely from the fortuitous combination of the present and history as demonstrated in the establishment of the *Colombia* vigilante and subsequent years of violence against the police.

4.3.2 Creating contingent networks where the provisional is the 'normal'

Beyond bursts of violence as described above, patterns of contingent action can also be seen in the fits and starts of everyday navigation of urban life in *Colombia*. These 'fits' are individual provisional actions that sometimes follow no other logic but self advancement or preservation. Taken together however, they represent the emergence of a distinctive type of network that is built around what Simone (2004:22) called a 'recombination of contingent relationships among bodies, spaces, signs, infrastructure

³⁵The National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) was one of the main pro-democracy groups challenging the annulment of the June 12 1993 Presidential Election by the military and which continued to oppose General Sani Abacha's dubious transition programme.

and other urban materials' which provides 'tentative links between different ways of life and different kinds of actors'.

One important factor to note in this context is the geography of *Colombia*. Writing in the *Port Harcourt Telegraph* in August 2007, Patrick Naagbaton described the neighbourhood as being made up of 'behind-the-times market stalls and shades'. These 'stalls and shades' evolved organically when people from the neighbourhood took over empty state owned lands and built makeshift stalls in order to make a living. Poor people moved to neglected parts of the oil city like *Colombia* mainly in response to rising costs of living in central Port Harcourt as the state and social services retreated in the 1980s adjustment era. The neighbourhood, like many others in the sprawling city of Port Harcourt, was an unplanned one, thus its very existence and culture was contingent. It was thus not just a contingent response of the poor, its social structures actually enabled contingency as the only viable tactic with which to navigate the uncertainties of urban life.

To explain this, the core of the neighbourhood was small and densely populated, a factor that ensured that bodies rubbed constantly against each other as hundreds of people crowded into the recesses of the Romeo Night Club, Number One Field and Naagbaton's 'stalls and shades', going about their business. In this circumstance, geographical proximities were inevitably extensive. Marked by dilapidated road infrastructure, where any exists at all, physical movement around the neighbourhood was painfully slow in spite of the frenetic pace of social interactions, further providing incentive for continuous interaction and sometimes conflict. To further compound this spatial reality, the state's absence meant that living was quite precarious and residents had to call on a vast repertoire of social skills in order to make sense of a constantly changing present as well as an unpredictable future.

The creation of a vigilante group of sorts in the neighbourhood in response to growing instability occasioned largely by the youth members of *Colombia* themselves was one of such occasions in which residents had to dig deep in order to respond to rapid changes in their environment. The determination of *Colombia* youth to renegotiate the terms of their interaction with a corrupt and brutal police force, as well as increases in armed robberies forced the landlords in the area to call meetings that eventually legitimized the OX as protectors of the neighbourhood. These meetings clearly ignored the role that key members of the group had played in the eruption of violence in the first place and simply endorsed their evolution from a ‘criminal gang network’ to vigilantes. Louis (int 2014) described it thus:

When the elders saw that there was violence all over the neighbourhood, they called Gowon to a meeting but he didn’t show up. He believed that some elders were informing for the police. Not long after one landlord was killed and everybody believed that Gowon killed him. Anyway, at the meeting, we agreed that we should form a vigilante group so that we can protect our community. What could we have done? It was the same boys that became the vigilantes.

It was in this grafting of the needs of a criminal gang with those of an apparently helpless broader *Colombia* community that the vigilante in the area was incubated. No one officially called them vigilantes even though they began to provide typical vigilante services; securing the community at night, deciding on curfews and occasionally organizing neighbourhood wide cleaning at weekends. Not calling them vigilantes appears to reflect a general unease among residents about violent youth actions even though their centrality to social life in the neighbourhood was acknowledged.

As I have hinted at above, the quasi institutionalisation of the private security arrangement in the neighbourhood conceals how securing *Colombia* continued to depend not on the institution of the vigilante but on very loose social relationships based on improvisation and contingency.

In the first place, the membership of the OX group which circulated in *Colombia* was not fixed, and those who participated in its everyday security activities were even less stable. One indication of this ambiguity in membership is the wildly varying estimate I got from informants when I enquired about the actual number of people involved with the group. From a conservative estimate of twenty young men to a probably exaggerated two hundred, it was never clear throughout my interviews just how many people were considered members of the OX. My interpretation of this ambiguity is that the membership changed quite regularly as people moved into the neighbourhood, left it or were otherwise absent. This is consistent with the highly fluid environment that informants described and with the constant deadly violence which resulted in occasional murders of some of the most active young men involved with the vigilante. I also observed that I tended to get a higher estimate from people who were relatively young between the late 1980s and mid 1990s when *Colombia* was at its peak. This is perhaps because the community elders were only fully aware of the leadership as well as the young men who actually lived within the Bende, Victoria street axis. However, there were many members of the armed groups within *Colombia* that did not actually live in the neighbourhood but only came around to mingle in the main social areas (Romeo Night Club and the Number One Field in particular).

A fluid membership structure is particularly conducive for provisional relations. As membership ebbed and flowed, *Colombia* residents were compelled to constantly renegotiate the nature of their interactions thus instituting what Simone (2004) would have called a permanent ‘state of emergency’ that generated Beissinger’s (2011) so called ‘link-chain of events’ from which a network based on provisional rather than stable affinities emerged. The young men from outside of *Colombia* in particular created multiple complexities that prevented a social network based on kinship to

emerge. This is particularly true after the death of Gowon who had held everything together.

Tonye (int 2014) spoke about the implications of the shifting membership for cohesion in *Colombia*:

The death of Gowon caused many problems. Even before then, all the boys coming from Diobu, Okrika and other areas have their own decks. So to make everything go on smoothly, you just have to open eye. All those boys were not always loyal. They will come to loyal because they want to sell their drugs, but after that, nobody knows what they are doing. So you see, people just kept changing.

The situation being described by Tonye indicates a precarity in the relationships between the different armed groups that constituted the *Colombia* vigilante. This precarity meant that gang members had to constantly renegotiate the basis of their relationships and it is no wonder that everything fell apart shortly after Gowon's murder by the police. Even though Gowon's force of character appeared to have welded together the disparate groups and maintained some sort of order, the ascendancy of the less capable Onengiye Terika (Occasion Boy) described earlier in Chapter Two and his attempt to create a more rigid structure of authority (deviating from the otherwise effective contingent network model) ruptured relations profoundly and the key groups quickly fell under the influence of militant lords like Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo.

Secondly, the vigilante was a front for something more sinister. Underneath the law enforcing façade of *Colombia's* violent youth groups hid the seedy and deadly face of cultism. With overlapping membership of violent cult gangs, the quasi vigilantes of *Colombia* were breaking the peace as much as, perhaps more than, they were keeping it. Some of these gangs (Deebam, Klansmen Konfraternity and Icelanders were particularly active in *Colombia*) were in constant street battles that had nothing to do with the dynamics of the *Colombia* neighbourhood. Inevitably however, these battles

got imported into the neighbourhood, further complicating carefully built social relations and constantly rupturing the basis of solidarity among *Colombia* youth. In this circumstance, it is easy to see how provisional and contingent relations were key to the maintenance of social order. It was necessary for the youth actors to constantly pause to gauge the social environment in ways that ensured that stability could only be defined in the very consistency of motion and, as Estroff (1993: 259) so brilliantly put it, in the ‘persistence of dysfunction’. The networks that emerged out of this complex landscape were profoundly precarious and unstable. Yet, their members were sufficiently similar in background and self actualisation goals that they were able to consistently cobble together the alliances, coalitions and movements that were to join up with broader (perhaps similar) networks across the Delta and construct a resistance movement that shook the Nigerian state to its very foundations. This effective yet precarious network built on the backs of constant renegotiations illustrates the point this chapter has made about contingent networks.

4.4 Contingency and the 2009 Amnesty

Many of the surviving members of the *Colombia* OX eventually got into the Amnesty. But so did many of the young men who did not ‘belong’ but only happened to have lived within the neighbourhood or in other parts of the Niger Delta. Many observers of the 2009 Amnesty have noted how the very process of inclusion in the programme reflected the corruption of Nigeria’s oil economy as well as the remarkable agency of ordinary youth who proved themselves adept at manipulating the terms of their engagement (Nwajiakwu-Dahou 2012). Others like Ebiede (int 2016) have noted that inclusion was based mostly on unwritten rules of patronage and had little to do with ‘genuine engagement with the Niger Delta struggle’. These critiques of the politics of inclusion in the Amnesty are of course right in many ways, yet they only tell us the

‘problem’ after the fact. How exactly do youth manipulate these processes and with what infrastructures do they do so? One interesting answer to the question of ‘how’, is to point to the considerable evidence that contingent relationships and provisional actions played key roles in the innovative ways youth inserted themselves into the 2009 Amnesty. The remarkable story of Tony Obiakolor provides insights into how provisional actions aided youth entry into the Amnesty.

Tony had lived for a while in the oil city of Warri before leaving for Lagos. He returned to Warri some six years later sometime around 2007 and found that the city had changed considerably. While the spatial landmarks remained largely unchanged, the gang landscape was a bewildering one for someone who had moved away for six years. Tony could hardly fit back into the Warri gang network and eventually had to move away to his home town of Ekeremor, a small village in Bayelsa State. There, he found the pace of life slower but also found fewer opportunities to explore the rugged life (Pratten 2011) he so craved for. Eventually, he found God and joined a Pentecostal church around his Ekeremor neighbourhood. This was what occupied him until 2009 when the Amnesty was launched.

Tony’s trajectory does not quite fit within the narrative of ‘militant youth’ around which the 2009 Amnesty was crafted. Yet, he was in many ways a youth in so far as he continued to perform the youthful life through conscious associations with ‘senior men’ and boys who belonged. But when the offer of amnesty was announced, Tony understood that there may well be an opportunity for him irrespective of who the government meant by ‘militant youth’. Tony (int 2013) narrates his first feelings:

‘I was with Pastor ‘R’ in his office when I heard over the radio. Something told me that my time has come to escape this poor man life. I was worried since I never joined real militants. I knew it will be very difficult but I trusted God for

his favours. I called my brother in Warri who knew some politicians to ask him about the details. I was just there calculating, the pastor was praying.

Between June and October 2009 when the amnesty offer was to expire, Tony contacted many different people to make enquiries about how he could be included. By late September 2009, there was a sense of urgency in Tony who was concerned that if he missed this opportunity, he may never get the kind of access to state funds that it guarantees. It was then that he remembered that a very senior politician from neighbouring Cross River State was close to his pastor. In his words:

After running around with no luck, I realized that Pastor R had one big politician who he always prayed for over the phone. I picked up his phone one day and got the man's number. I then sent a threat text to the man [pretending] to be from the Black Axe. I knew he was going to call pastor. I then started that God says he should pray for the man. By the time the man called him, I convinced pastor to about joining the amnesty. I know this is not Godly, but how for do? Opportunity come only once.

I had doubts about this story initially because it sounded too good to be true, but a search through the newspapers around the period he claimed to have sent these text messages, turned up the story of cult threats to a very senior politician from Cross River state (*This Day*, September 21, 2009, p.6, *The Punch* September 22, 2009, p. 19). This may or may not be Tony, but it does lend credence to his story and illustrates the ability of many young people to subvert and/or manipulate the process of inclusion in the amnesty. It also highlights how actions with profound implications for self framing and social mobility of individuals as well as for the advancement of groups could depend on loose associations like that between Tony and the 'big politician' and on provisional

spur of the moment actions like his decision to blackmail him as a way of forcing him to get in touch with his patron.

4.5 Conclusion

It is apparent from the above that one of the major consequences of social uncertainty is that a global sense of contingency is imposed as well as generated by the struggles of youth. The *spontaneous* and the *provisional* seem to respond specifically and efficiently to the unpredictable nature of urban life. This is especially magnified in the postcolony as demonstrated by Simone's (2004) interesting study of cross African case studies. It is however not simply that these types of relationships are useful but perhaps more important is that they are absolutely critical to the tactical agency of youth and without contingent skills, it is difficult to navigate the multiple uncertainties that they are daily confronted with.

The need to improvise often opens up opportunities for both conflict and cooperation, for building bridges as well as walls and for creating as well as tearing down. The tensions apparent in the construction of the identity of youth are partly a product of these constant renegotiations of the rules of contingency. Yet, this ultimately makes it easier for social groups to transcend traditional differences and hostilities which would have otherwise made them function autonomously, thereby co-creating a self replicating network of contingent actions and relationships. Social ruptures are sometimes, it would seem, a consequence of breakdowns in provisional paths to communication and signifiers like ethnicity are reservoirs that people fall back on when it becomes difficult to improvise.

The relationship between history and the present also comes up here. How does one account for history when the social movement is constantly punctuated and moved along by seemingly autonomous yet interlinked actions? Where history is itself in

contention and the present is hardly fixed, on what foundations should social analysis be anchored? Contingency is one such anchor that can allow analysts to move with the tide of social action without losing sight of the broad sweep of competing histories.

Colombia demonstrates the implications of these struggles for Delta youth. For one, it shows that crossing the boundaries between multiple identities, from cult to vigilante and vice versa for instance, produces contingency as much as it is produced by it. It also indicates that macro framings that focus on a broad shared history, may offer only weak foundations for explaining localized social relationships and actions and that perhaps we can learn a bit more if we looked more deeply at the tactical agency of young people in the Niger Delta. Ultimately however, it provides another tool with which the complexities of networks and the modes of their formation and organization in the Niger Delta can be explored and understood.

Chapter Five

BECOMING “KEMOWEI” IN VIOLENT PREDATORY CONTEXTS: CULT(URE)S OF RESPECTABILITY AND YOUTHFUL IMAGINATIONS OF THE SELF IN DELTA NETWORKS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed one of the often ignored ways that individual youth navigate the gang universe as well as how the networks organize themselves. This chapter addresses a corollary of that by looking at the dimension of imagination. How do Niger Delta youth imagine themselves and how does that imagination shape goals and encourage youth to seek participation in networks that promise so much precarity and danger? There are various answers to these questions. One may for instance, as Adunbi (2015) argued, claim that they are driven by the need to fulfill ancestral promises or, in Obi's (2010) opinion, driven by an acute awareness of the marginalization of the region by the Nigerian State. One may also link it to criminality (Ezeonu 2014, Ingwe 2015). All three have been addressed quite richly in the literature and there is evidence that these motivations interact in complex ways and together can explain a great deal of youth politics in the region. Yet, for all their dominance of the literature in trying to explain youth mobilization and politics in the Delta, my fieldwork data suggests that something else is also at least as important to the sociality of youth as is history, marginalization or criminality. This often ignored, yet, important driver of youth sociality in the Niger Delta is the search for respectability.

Among the Ijaw people of Ekeremor in the oil state of Bayelsa, it is said that the main goal of a man in life is to become *Kemowei*. The word *Kemowei* is derived from *Keme*, meaning 'human' and *Owei* meaning 'male'. The etymology of the word indicates a linkage between gaining respect and being human. The implication is that one's very humanity is in doubt until one can claim the status of *Kemowei*. The notion of who

qualifies as *Kemowei* reflects both the social imaginary of a people who look to a largely sanitized past in which basic values of respect and community are supposedly central to social organization as well as the demands of a new modernity in which social mobility often demands acts of violence, corruption and exploitation. Combining these two spaces of respectability (the sanitized past and the violent present) brings to mind the distinction that Roitman (2006) makes between illegality and illegitimacy. In her chapter on the “ethics of illegality”, she argues convincingly that even though social actors are often aware of the legality or otherwise of their actions, the fact of illegality does not necessarily make the action illegitimate. Indeed, the pursuit of legitimate but otherwise illegal action is sometimes the source of the moral legitimacy with which actors claim respect. This conception of ethics within illegal social action illustrates the struggle of social groups to reconstruct respectability (or if you will; legitimacy) from the hallowed ruins of a distant value driven past and the realities of a violent materialist present. The past in this context represents the *legitimate* while the present represents the *illegal* and gaining respect or becoming *Kemowei* thus requires an artful balancing of these two competing worlds, creating constantly shifting notion of respectability.

For thousands of young men trying to survive within the Niger Delta’s violent oil political economy, this idea of respectability resonates profoundly and becoming *Kemowei* is the climax of a lifelong struggle to attain social maturity and adulthood and to do so by fulfilling the needs of the imagined past as well as the real present. It is the end for which various social tools, structures and systems are simply the means to attaining. It is however an ‘end’ that is quite undefined- an end that often ends in itself- sending its victim back to the starting line, often in a daze as to what exactly is respectable within that space or time or in fact what will be respectable after this phase of the struggle is done.

This chapter explores the role that notions of respectability, in all its complexity and fluidity, play in creating, shaping and governing youth networks in the Niger Delta. It conceptualizes ‘respectability’ as a sociological goal which is itself a site of intense contestations for power and argues that those who are able to define its parameters are also able to use it as a tool of social control. Baxter and Margavio (2000: 400) make a similar point when they argue that ‘the virtues respected by a code of honour form the basis of a most effective method of domination’. In line with Baker’s (2009: 276) point that, ‘liberated from conventions, people’s lives are less shaped by the certainties associated with habitual practice and institutions and more by the self-construction of personal biographies’, the focus here is not just on how youth strive to meet social expectations of respectability but also how they inscribe self-defined meanings through their creation and control of autonomous spaces of citizenship. I analyzed this within the context of youth construction of a violent social infrastructure that facilitates access to broader networks of clientelism in the country.

Fieldwork data is used to address three important aspects of respectability in the Delta region in order to show the role it plays in the governance of youth driven social networks. First, I explored the idea of respectability as a site of contestation. To do this, the focus is on the shifting meanings of masculinity in the context of social struggles for power between Delta youth and elders as well as within youth groups. In the case of youth groups, the relationship between the ‘real youth’ and those who are often derisively referred to as ‘over youth’³⁶ illustrates the specific ways in which youth notions of respectability can and are often manipulated in order to maintain group

³⁶These are often men in their late thirties to early fifties who circulate within the Delta youth culture but have aged before being able to attain social adulthood. They are usually experienced in the politics of the Ijaw Youth Council and other similar youth organisations but still dependent on patrons for their basic material needs. They are not really ‘youth’ in the sense of being young, but they are also not elders in the sense of social independence. They are therefore referred to by youth in the region as ‘over-youth’.

cohesion and preserve the authority of men who circulate within the youth spaces mainly because they have been unable to attain social maturity in spite of their relatively advanced ages.

Second, I addressed the role that conspicuous consumption plays in the imagination of the young and how it is an important element of respectability within Niger Delta youth networks. While personal consumption is important, I also explored the role that group consumption plays, highlighting in particular the way it promotes network cohesion and identity formation. The third issue relates to the fluid and vicarious nature of respectability itself as well as its situationality. I explored the specific ways in which constant changes in the meaning of respectability and in the role that it is able to play in the governance of youth driven social networks provide an uncertain canvas upon which youth politics of power, accumulation and control is played out. This uncertainty is exploited by youth on various levels of the social network to both imagine themselves as well as the social group. Here I explored how the concept changes over time and how it is experienced in the youthful imagination. I also traced its alternation across contexts as well as the coexistence of a hybrid of both respectability and disrespect within youth networks in the Niger Delta and how it all impacts on the ability of individual youth to extract value from difficult social situations.

5.2 The Changing Face of Respectability in Nigeria: From Gentlemen to Revolutionaries

Before going on to explore the specific ways in which respectability plays out among Delta youth, it is important to take a broad look at the nature of respect itself and place it within the broader Nigerian context. This helps to place the Delta narrative in context. One of the most powerful shapers of everyday culture is the notion of what it means to be respectable and how this status, when/if acquired, can be deployed in the service of social ends. As a sociological concept, respectability's 'starched exterior', in the words

of Goodhew (2000: 241), can hide a surprising flexibility that is illustrated by its varying meanings across spatial and time boundaries and across social contexts. An inference to be drawn from this is that respect is a product of specific social relations and that it is both experienced and imagined by those who define it and whose lives are oftentimes simultaneously defined by it. At various temporal and material moments, the notion of respect has reflected the needs of relevant social actors. This section traces the evolution of respectability in Nigeria from the colonial period to the modern Niger Delta. Through the lens of popular music, I will explore the impact of structural adjustment on how respect is defined and what role masculinity played in framing the concept as a tool of social ordering and order.

5.2.1 Colonial Respectability: Gentlemen and ‘Men’

The colonial period is one such era in which respectability reflected the social changes of the time. In a 1994 article, Crawford Young described the colonial state as *bula matari* or ‘the crusher’. This description is apt on many levels not least because it exposes the injustice of a ruthlessly extractive alien entity and highlights the nature of relations between it and subject societies. Yet, beyond its brutality, colonialism’s impact on less visible aspects of the sociality of subject societies- like respectability- was also a significant element of the social order that underpinned European hegemony. Writing about anti-colonial resistance movements in the Western Cape between 1935 and 1950 for instance, Corinne Sandwith (2004: 33) notes how a generation of intellectuals considered ‘the acquisition of the behavioural, social and cultural norms of a privileged western culture’ as an important route into socio-cultural respectability and through that, hoped to set themselves up as viable successors when/if freedom came.

This craving by the educated elite to connect culturally with gentrified Europe was a feature of early colonialism in other parts of Africa too, as Watson's (2006, 2014) study of literacy in 1920s Ibadan shows. In her analysis of the papers of Akinpelu Obisesan, a missionary educated Christian who kept a meticulous diary for decades, she found that notions of respectability were shaped by the political currents of the time in which western education curiously (at least for the educated Nigerians) provided no guarantee of power in the colonial state. This class apparently struggled to reconcile their exclusion with the claims of the colonialists that they were working to build a modern state. The educated class in the colonial period also struggled with how to reconcile the Pan-African/racial message of activists like Marcus Garvey with the emerging nationalist movement which sometimes focused inwardly on the everyday realities of colonialism. As Zachernuk (2000: 104) said of the Nigerian middle class educated elite of the time, they 'began to identify themselves as part of a West African middle class within the Black Atlantic, renegotiating but not rejecting racial affinities'.

This choice was not really an ideological one in that it was reflective of the broader concern about gaining relevance within the colonial state, which, to all intents and purposes, was more relevant to their everyday construction of respectability than the abstract notion of blackness preached by Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The preference of the colonial state for traditional chiefs in fact meant that those with formal western education could call only cautiously on notions of blackness as an identity marker. Rather, they sought to highlight their affinity to the imperial metropole by virtue of having gained formal western education. Citing Akinpelu Obisesan's diary, Watson (2014: 16) reports his opinion that he 'must praise the British People in our heart and soul' because 'they are the great civilizing agency who have rescued us from woes'. The woes of course refer, among other things, to the

pre-colonial lack of formal western education or ‘book reading’ as he put it, the recent mastery of which he felt ‘privileged to be conscious’ (Obisesan as cited by Watson 2014: 16).

Of course respectability did not mean quite the same thing among the less educated ordinary class in the country. Literacy held little currency for how societies perceived of respectability in rural areas where the colonial state’s reach was less visible and among a peasant class that had little if any dreams of taking over from the imperial overlords or from the nationalists that eventually took over from them.

A 1963 High Court Case in the old Eastern Region³⁷ highlights the very different focus of the non-educated about the meaning of respectability. The accused, Nwankpa Pepple had been charged with the attempted murder of Helina Andrew and of causing grievous bodily harm to another person Gabriel Ogolo who had tried to rescue her. As the court records show, one Mina Ubani found the wife of the accused in the act of stealing crops from a farm which belonged to the victim, Helina Andrew. He consequently detained her in his house while he arranged for the arrival of Helina and others who had farms in the vicinity. Outraged by the detention of his wife and the accusations of theft, Nwankpa Pepple attacked Helina Andrew ‘with a machet in a most savage manner’, dealing her several blows on various parts of her body one of which ‘completely severed her left palm from the left wrist’(A/45c/1962: 62). The details of the attack, brutal as they are, indicate the outrage of a man whose wife had been harassed, but do not illuminate the underlying sociological drive that, in the eyes of the accused, legitimized his actions.

³⁷ High Court sitting in Aba, February, 1963, Case Number- A/45c/1962 (Q v Nwankpa Pepple). The old Eastern Region included much of what is now referred to as the Niger Delta.

While giving evidence, Nwankpa Pepple, the accused, noted that his wife, whose arrest for theft triggered the incident, was a relative of Mina Ubani who had arrested her. This, he argued was against custom and that having paid a dowry at the time of their marriage, no member of her family had a right to detain her in his/her house no matter what crime she was suspected of having committed. He argued that by detaining her, Mina Ubani had impinged on the honour of his family and called to question his masculinity. His response was thus legitimate and essentially in self defense.

This ‘curious story’ (*ibid*: 63) as the presiding judge put it in his judgement, was no legal defense for attempted murder but was certainly a culturally valid basis for outrage, if not his brutal attack. As one of the witnesses in the case stated, ‘you cannot detain a man’s wife in your house. This is an insult to the man, if he does nothing, who will respect him?’ (*ibid*: 98). It is interesting to note that Nwankpa Pepple made no attempt to argue that his wife had been detained wrongfully. In fact he agreed that she was given to petty theft and that they had been estranged before the incident. His actions were thus solely to defend his outraged honour. This case illustrates a notion of respectability that draws on cultural idioms of masculinity and gender. Respectability in the view of Nwankpa was defined not by the state or by its modernizing pretensions but rather by the very traditional beliefs that intellectuals like Obisesan disdained as ‘woes’ from which the British had rescued them.

This case also highlights the importance of marriage as a path through which respectability is attained. Scholars like Davidoff and Hull (2002) have written about marriage as a form of respectable domesticity. Respectability through marriage is however very gendered in how it reflects on women (see for instance Chrisantsen 2013) and how it does on men. For women, respect through marriage is essentially one of the tools through which female sexuality is policed (Dewey 2011, Ekpo-Otu 2013,

Chesney-Lind & Melo 2015). The emphasis is on domesticity and reproduction. For men however, marriage fulfills the social image of a male as patron and draws extensively from masculine notions of control and expansion. This notion of control is particularly evident in the way Nwankpa responded to the perceived challenge to his authority over his marriage and by extension the person of his wife.

While Nwankpa's notion of respect is in many ways defined by the individual, respectability is also framed within the sociality of group identities and politics (Zachernuk 2000, Sandwith 2011). This perspective of respectability is captured by another historical case, which this time went all the way to the Privy Council in 1950 colonial Nigeria. The case is set in the oil city of Port Harcourt and spotlights some of the inter ethnic animosities that have become all too familiar in contemporary Niger Delta politics.³⁸

In this case, eight adult indigenes of Okirika had been earlier sentenced to death and a minor ordered 'incarcerated at the King's pleasure' for the 1949 murder of a certain Mr. Braide and the grievous assault with intent to murder of Dora Braide (wife of Mr Braide) and George Hamilton, a friend of the deceased. In the transcripts from the trial,³⁹ the trial judge reported thus:

The deceased went in a canoe with his wife and children and a friend; he and the friend disembarked at a place, leaving the wife and children behind. The wife, seeing four canoes coming, sent the children to fetch them, and deceased and his friend came back. Deceased told the occupants of the canoes, who had landed that they had no business there, whereupon they returned to one canoe, and shouting the war cary of their tribe, landed, surrounded the deceased, whom they killed, and having also done grievous harm to the other members of his party, took his canoe and left' (1950 19 N.L.R 128: 449).

³⁸ Privy Council judgement by Lords Oaksey, Radcliffe and Tucker and Sir John Beaumont and Sir Lionel Leach, sitting in December 12, 1950 and with special leave for appeal from the Supreme Court of Nigeria. Case Number (1951) 12 W.A.C.A 128 (Sunday Kala Alagba and Others {appellants} vs The King {Respondent}).

³⁹ Case Number (1950) 19 N.L.R. 128 (Sunday Kala Alagba and Others {appellants} vs The King {Respondent}).

This brief report of how the deceased came to be murdered apparently excludes the underlying motivations and the complex social relationships that could have driven the Okirika 9 into murder. This is however illuminated in transcripts from the lengthy cross-examination of the accused. In a statement of claims ultimately dismissed by the trial judge as fabrication, a decision upheld on appeal, one of the convicted men explained that on that fateful day, they had been hailed by two of their Okirika kinsmen whose boat had been stolen and who had been pushed over into the swamp by Kalabaris. They rescued them and proceeded to investigate the attack on their kinsmen by Kalabaris. According to the accused,

‘when they reached Elemiama, they saw a party of Kalabaris, more than five in number sheltered in the water and then landed and engaged in stick throwing with the Kalabaris who were defeated without serious injury on either side’ (*Ibid*, p.452).

Justifying the attack, the accused argued that the earlier Kalabari assault on the canoe party of Okrikans was an insult to the dignity of the group and it was their responsibility and duty to avenge. They noted that in the process of stealing the boat, the Kalabari assailants had insulted Okrika by referring to them as ‘sons of crayfish with neither strength nor history and questionable virility’ (*Ibid* p. 456). In cross examination, one of the accused was asked why they did not report to the local authorities what had happened, he responded thus:

‘are we not men? If a man does insult to Okrika, we do Adu Osu Uye.⁴⁰ How can a man return home without defending the honour of his village when it is so insulted? We did not kill anybody. This is just a misunderstanding, you cannot insult a people’s honour and not expect Adu Osu Uye’.

Of course the trial judge rejected the account of the accused and labelled it as mere fabrication. Even if this were the case, it is instructive to note that these men, facing the prospect of a death penalty upon conviction, believed that a defence based on the need

⁴⁰ Adu Osu Uye, was reported in the court transcripts as the ‘tribal war cry of Okirika’.

to defend the honour of their social group and on upholding their respectability as men was not just viable but acceptable. This highlights the important place that notions of respectability plays in framing social behavior. The fact of its fabrication, as found by the trial judge, also indicates the utilitarian value of respectability and the innovative ways in which social actors can manipulate it for the purpose of legitimizing specific actions. The court judgment reports that this episode occurred in the backdrop of a recent crisis between the groups (Kalabari and Okrika) which had only just been resolved in 1948. This indicates that the accused were aware of the ethnic context in which their case was being held and sought to manipulate this reality for the purpose of navigating the legal quagmire they found themselves.

Masculinity, as shown by the two historical cases briefly touched on above as well as the Obisesan diaries, is undoubtedly embedded within a universe of respectability that is united in its projection of independent images of the male self at the same time that it is divided by conflicting versions of modernity. The Obisesan diaries indicate a respectability that is constructed around the western notion of the ‘gentleman’ and around an acceptance of a western vision of statehood in which sovereignty is bequeathed to a bureaucratic (and alien) order. The two court cases however highlight a very different view of masculinity, respectability and statehood. They speak to a masculine respectability that is rooted in group identities and to a statehood where sovereignty is bequeathed not to a bureaucracy but to ties of kinship and its ordering norms. These conflicting views of respectability came into even higher contestation as the pressures of structural adjustment began to bite in the 1980s.

5.2.2 Economic Pressures and Pushback against the educated gentlemen in Popular Music

It would appear that the ‘literate’ respectability of the Obisesan age eventually gave way to a more bourgeois type of honour as the elite began to accumulate capital and

participate in the modern economy. Bourgeois respectability focused increasingly on economic power as the lives of the small but growing middle class were transformed. To become 'civilised' was thus to, according to Sandwith (2011), become middle class. In that sense, notions of respectability that focus on values such as economic orderliness are in fact elements of a middle class value set (Sandwith 2011). Writing about the impact of protest music on social processes in Nigeria in the 1960s and 70s, Justin Labinjoh (1982: 129) described the changes the postcolonial economy generated as having created the 'embourgeoisement' of the middle class. He argued that this was a 'a process whereby many individuals achieved middle-class standards and styles of living, as well as a process whereby those who had already achieved that position were able to consolidate it'.

This new respect however did not fully abandon the conscious effort to perform European gentrification, rather it drew a connection between this and material resources as the newly educated gained jobs in the Nigerianisation programs that followed independence.

The romance of the educated elite with European culture was to come under pressure in the late colonial period when nationalist sentiments began to rise. This was more visible in the violent anti-colonial struggles of Kenya for instance than it was in Nigeria. However, by the time the pressures of adjustment hit in the 1970s 80s and 90s, bourgeois respectability became much derided by popular culture. One reason was that a significant percentage of the educated elite could no longer afford the luxuries of gentrified respectability neither were they as well educated as the previous generation. But frustration against the corruption of the political and business class was perhaps the major reason the educated lost the respect of the popular class. It should be noted though

that through this, education itself did not lose value, it was the educated (read westernized) that did.

Perhaps few elements of Nigerian popular culture capture this disdain for bourgeois respectability better than a track from the famous Nigerian musician, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. The track, appropriately titled *Gentleman* was released in 1973 and highlighted growing popular disdain for the westernized elite that could no longer afford his appropriated status but still insisted on aping the west. In one of the stanzas, Fela condemned one of the most visible signs of bourgeois respectability at the time- the Western dress style:

*Africa is hot, I like it like that
I know what to wear but my friends don't
He wears his socks, he wears his shoe
He wears his pant, he wears his singlet
He wears his trousers, he wears his shirt
He wears his tie, he wears his coat
He then covers it all with his hat
He is a gentleman
He will sweat all over
He will fall down faint
He will smell badly
He will urinate in his pants, but he won't know
I am not a gentleman like that!
I am not a gentleman at all
I am an original African man.*⁴¹

Tejumola Olaniyan (2001: 79) provides an apt description of Fela's 'Gentleman' when he characterized him as 'clad in a three-piece suit with hat to match in steaming tropical Lagos, and displaying excessive and sham civility at the slightest pretext, this African man can only be of dubious pedigree, a white man in black skin.' The album cover perhaps conveys the message far more powerfully than words ever can. Playing on offensive racial descriptions of black Africans as monkeys, Fela illustrates the popular

⁴¹ Translation mine

disdain for bourgeois respectability and captures the connection between that definition of respect and the desperate aping of western civilization with which it defines itself.

Figure 5: Fela's Gentleman



The global racial consciousness of the time, encouraged not least by Apartheid and white aggression in Southern Africa and the American Civil Rights Movement, also played a role in shaping popular opinions of bourgeois respectability. By linking the black middle class (and its bourgeois respectability) to the cultural and economic imperialism of the post colonial state, popular culture appeared to condemn its perceived collaboration. Even though many members of the educated intelligentsia showed acute awareness of this problem and were far from collaborators with imperialism, adjustment dealt a deep blow to the identity of the middle class and continued to encourage popular disdain for its trappings. For one, it hit the educated elite circulating within the formal sectors of the economy hardest. While undermining the purchasing power as well as social reach of the educated elite, it simultaneously generated an expansion of the informal sector (Olukoshi 1997, Hansen and Vaa 2003, Meagher 2006, Lindel 2010). Indeed many of the educated elite were compelled to operate in the informal interstices that opened up as a result of the harsh realities of structural adjustment, effectively undermining the exclusivity of the gentrification

project and demystifying bourgeois respectability.

Another musician, Tunji Oyelana, released his album '*Double Face*' in 1976 which also expressed similar popular sentiments about the gentrification of the middle class and linked the deterioration of bourgeois respectability to the seasonal nature of pay as well as to its limited ability to fund the lifestyle of the educated elite. The track '*Alakowe*', literally meaning 'the one who writes' is taken from a Yoruba word for the educated elite in salaried (mostly civil service) jobs. Interestingly, the term *Alakowe* does not refer to students even though they probably do a lot more writing than civil servants. This illustrates its working class connotation and justifies linking it to the educated elite.

In the track, Oyelana describes the agony of the ill-paid civil servant:

*When the civil servant's account is in the red
They will scowl about town
When the month is pregnant with debt
They will remember the popcorn stand
Popcorn everywhere, peanuts everywhere*

*His account is in the red
But his pockets are full of peanuts
Popcorn everywhere, peanuts everywhere*

*When the civil servant finally gets paid
They will strut about town
Can I have a pint? Can I have chicken? Can I have snail? Can I have stout?
When the month nears that time again
In comes the roasted plantain
Popcorn everywhere, peanuts everywhere⁴²*

In 1970s Nigeria and through to the 90s, popcorn was the snack of the poor. Hawked about town in glass and wood boxes mostly by women, it was certainly visible primarily in the informal space. Tunji Oyelana's parody of the ill-paid educated class did not just highlight their precarious financial positions but by linking their survival to rendezvous in the informal economy, the identity markers that separate the educated from the

⁴² Translation mine.

unschooled was torn down in profound ways. Indeed, Tunji Oyelana's disdain for their pretensions when they finally get paid (*Can I have a pint? Can I have chicken? Can I have snail? Can I have stout?*) is not unlike Fela's condemnation of the suit wearing intelligentsia and illustrates the low esteem in which popular culture held bourgeois respectability.

His description of the pre and post pay behaviour of the intelligentsia illustrates the struggle to perform middle class respectability in the face of harsh economic conditions and social precarity. The album cover, like Fela's *Gentleman*, also says all that the lyrics left unsaid. Aptly titled *Double Face*, it depicts a worker dressed in clean respectable western shirt and trousers in one half of the body and in rags (and interestingly non western dress) in the other. It also shows young women on both sides. On the left smartly dressed half of the body, the young woman walks expectantly towards the outstretched hand filled with wads of currency. On the right pauperized half, the young woman is walking away briskly.

Figure 6: Double Face



This album art is highly textured and is a profound commentary on social life in the 1970s and the constant struggles for respectability faced by all classes. It expresses among other things, the gender stereotypes of female relationship with money and seems to suggest that these gendered relations are one of the driving forces of middle

class respectability. Of course this is a very sweeping generalization and is even less relevant now in the twenty-first century. It however struck a chord at the historic moment it appeared, highlighting all of the contradictions of middle class respectability. As will be shown in subsequent sections of this chapter, the politics of respectability for youth in modern Nigeria and in the Delta in particular, shows many of the same signs of constant self doubt, self imagination and social contestation reflected above. What is respectable, who is respectable and who gets to make those distinctions are important elements of a broader social struggle for control of the extractive and distributive levers of the oil economy.

5.3: Respectability as a site of contestation: masculinity, violence and performances in youth networks

“...you need to show yourself in order not to be intimidated” Tonye (int 2015)

“Violence is the only source of recognition....so that was how I got involved in cultism and the people that got involved, we are the people that have the street cred, the street credibility” Tarela (int, April 8, 2013).

“If you don’t join them you are a lazy man. In fact you are not a man. They won’t respect you” Peter (int April, 9, 2013)

In addition to the more familiar competition for access to oil resources and revenues, the Niger Delta ‘crisis’ also included a struggle that was bound up in the sociological needs of a younger generation caught up in an environment where social maturation had become necessary for everyday survival at a time when its very contours were under intense questioning and the meanings of success or failure had become blurred. For young people living in the Niger Delta, social maturation depended on, among other things, becoming *Kemowei*. However, becoming *Kemowei* was far from a straight forward process, it required a keen awareness of the environment that was perhaps only possible through insertion into its everyday activities. It also required participation in a constant, and oftentimes violent, struggle between youth and established centers of

adult authority as well as within the youthscape itself where different categories of the young compete to define what it means to be respectable. These contestations are important elements of a broader struggle for control of the social environment of resistance that guarantees access to the proceeds of oil extraction and distribution. Those who succeed in claiming the right to define who was respectable, invariably gain a measure of social control that ensured they could bend the network to their will. Therefore, respectability became as much a goal of network building as it was a site for intense competition between different social groups both within and outside of the networks.

5.3.1 Respectability and the Generations

Few places embody this dynamic more than the neighbourhood of *Colombia* in the oil city of Port Harcourt. As described in Chapter Three, the ‘OX’ was formed by the *Colombia* youth as a response to the arrest of a local tough called Gowon in the 1990s. Members of the community allege that the main reason for the constant police harassment was actually to extort bribes rather than to clamp down on illegal activities. As Darlington (int 2015), a former member of the OX put it, ‘we were like ATMs for the police. They need money for beer, they arrest, they need money for pepper soup, na [its] *Colombia* they will come [to].’ The survival of the gangs and their consequent metamorphosis into vigilantes and/or militant groups by the early 2000s seems to justify this cynicism.

The running battles between the OX and the police generated unprecedented solidarity among the young people of 1990s *Colombia*, but also created tensions that often boiled over into violence when the different decks clashed over how to respond to the multiple challenges the group faced. While the problem with the police was the initial drive, the emergence of rival groups around Port Harcourt and a growing national university cult

crisis meant that increasing attention was devoted to clashes with other youth gangs. It was in this new violent frontier that masculinities were being created and constantly tested. As Darlington (int 2015) explained:

... but many boys were forming their own groups. The boys in Diobu, all those university boys, everywhere, Benin, Warri, Lagos. Everything just turned messy all of a sudden. It was even worse after Operation Crush killed Gowon. It was that time trouble started between town and Diobu, as there was no one to talk to people. In no time, the problem was no longer the police but Deewell. As the inter gang clashes unfolded by the late 1990s and early 2000s, pitching different armed groups of young men against one another, the main basis of solidarity among *Colombia* youth which was a common enemy in the police began to fracture and not even the creation of street wide vigilantes could guarantee solidarity in the way it existed before the death of Gowon. It was in the context of these fracturing solidarities that greater demands began to be placed on young men to earn respect by proving their masculinity. As the three opening quotes in this section indicate, masculinity was defined in violent terms, it required a capacity to inflict violence as well as endure it. It also depended in good part on the ability to perform violence, to act it even when actual violence is not or cannot be used.

According to accounts, in the midst of the turmoil, the OX met sometime in 1999 and drew up a code requiring members to ‘act with reason, with courage and like men’. They were also required to ‘never forgive’, and to ‘leave the last man’. Darlington who was at that meeting described the motivations:

That night we held a meeting in Occasion’s house. Occasion just got to the area, but he was connected and was trying to bring people together. Many of the boys causing trouble since Gowon was killed didn’t like Occasion mainly because he was new. But this Occasion boy was a senior man. He was courageous. Because some of the boys were formerly from *Colombia*, and moved to Diobu because of all the trouble, it was hard for people to agree to murder them. So we set rules. You know? Something like a code of conduct. You must not act like a woman, you must never forgive, you know? No retreat no surrender. Anybody that can’t prove himself and act like a man cannot be a national. You can’t be a leader in OS. So everybody began to behave.

It was clear from my conversations with Darlington and other men who had been active in *Colombia* in those years that one of the reasons the masculine codes were drawn up was to resolve lingering doubts among lower level members of the gang about the propriety of inflicting sometimes fatal violence on people who were former members of the *Colombia* community but who had fled as a result of disputes over the transfer of power to Occasion after Gowon's death. The codes were essentially designed to blackmail these members into action by targeting one of the core sociological motivations that recruited them to participation in the first place- being respected by peers. By constructing a social code that linked violent masculinity to respectability, the OS leadership effectively created a tool of control that was subtle in its visibility yet powerful in its overall effect. Bright, another former member of the OS, explained the aftermath of this meeting:

Immediately it became that if you don't fight nobody will recognize you, many new boys even joined. They wanted to be seen, to prove themselves. Some of them even went overboard. That was a time of real men, not these boys shooting indiscriminately now.

The way violence was inscribed into notions of masculinity by the OX validates Lake's (1986) argument that men are socialized into masculinity rather than born into it. Tapping into broader ideas about the 'fighting man' as well as a popular history of many communities in the Delta where according to one of my informants, Tonye (int 2015), 'every family has a war canoe', the OX appealed to a sense of worth that is mediated by violence in all its ramifications.

However, it was not only the OX that was tapping into the local historical repertoires in order to construct visions of masculine respectability. The elders of *Colombia*, faced with an increasingly rowdy and uncontrollable youth attempted to impose an alternative notion of respectability that allowed them to re-exert control. The elders' version of masculinity produced an image of youth that was wild, disrespectful and juvenile. It

painted young men as lacking in the delicate skill of negotiation and survival. They called to a mythical past when young men listened to the old warriors. The dilemma however was that the elders were using a past that the youth had already appropriated by imagining themselves as its contemporary articulations. The youth of *Colombia* had effectively become both the occupiers of the present as well as keepers of the past. The struggles of *Colombia* elders to contest the OX version of masculinity and respectability is perhaps best captured by the lament of Chief Bereni (int 2014) who was a key figure in the neighbourhood at the time. In his words:

You know those boys thought they were smart. But how can fighting over girls, killing one another for nothing be smart? We tried to give some direction to their energy by creating the vigilante. But no! they will rather be in cults. We were all young once, in our days, we were tough- is this toughness? Running about with guns. Can they kill and stay there? But fighting must have a purpose. How can you take care of your family, marry, send your children to school when you can't even sleep at home? But there was nothing you could tell those boys then. They had to revenge one thing or the other, to right one wrong or another. I am not even talking about militants. Thank God for the Amnesty, we have some peace now and anyone that misbehaves will explain to police people.

In a bid to re-exert control, the elders of *Colombia* tried to highlight their violent credentials ('in our days, we were tough- is this toughness?') but also encouraged young men to 'take care of ... family, marry, send ...children to school'. This was a version of masculine respectability that would easily bring the youth back into a more conservative orbit. Unfortunately however, the economic and social conditions of the region at the time had already foreclosed this option for most young men involved in the gang networks. It was precisely the paucity of these specific opportunities that pushed many to consider the gang route in the first place. Having carved out alternative spaces of authority and citizenship, they were clearly not giving it up without a fight.

5.3.2 Age(ing) and Respect: The Dilemma of the ‘Over Youth’ Category in the Post Amnesty Age

While the struggle to create what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) referred to as hegemonic masculinity was between the youth and elders in *Colombia*, it is occurring within two categories of youth in the ex-militant networks of Yenagoa. These categories are the so-called ‘over-age youth’ (men in their late thirties and forties, sometimes even above fifty) and the younger elements within the networks. Within ex-militant networks, there are a number of men, usually in their late thirties and forties, who had relatively high positions during the insurgency but have now become sad reminders of the politics of abandonment in the region. One of such men is the colourfully nicknamed Kingsley Urban Gorilla. I first heard of him through recommendations from a contact in Yenagoa who thought he was in a good position to tell me all I needed to know about ex-militants in Bayelsa. When his name again came up a number of times in conversations with ex-militants in Port Harcourt, I knew he was someone I had to speak with. After weeks of phone calls mediated by my contact in Yenagoa, who is a young civil servant in the Bayelsa State service, Urban Gorilla eventually agreed to meet with me at his home on Yenagoa.

I met Urban Gorilla drinking with friends and comrades just by his small run down apartment. Parked outside his door was a brand new commuter bus belonging to the Ijaw Youth Council and which had been donated by the former minister of petroleum resources, Mrs Diezani Allison-Madueke. He was obviously a popular figure in the neighbourhood as many people greeted him warmly and I even got to see him in action when he was invited to help evict a guard whose boss had fired, but who refused to leave.

His home bore little evidence of how high up he had been within militant networks. It was clean but very sparsely furnished. It was also damp, a sign that it was not fully

protected from the heavy moist in the Yenagoa air. He had a very distinguished air but it was obvious that frustration ran deeply below the surface as he spoke a lot about abandonment, the ‘inferiority complex’ of the local politicians who now run the area and how the Niger Delta still has not gotten a fair enough deal from the Nigerian state. Urban Gorilla did not tell me his age, but he appears to be in his early forties since he spoke of his activities in the mid 2000s as a ‘thirty something year old man’. Before the Amnesty, Urban Gorilla had been a prominent mid-level commander in the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA) and Niger Delta Freedom Fighters (NDFF). He had also worked directly with the leadership of the IYC, in fact he was personal assistant to Felix Tuodolor, first president of the IYC. He also had personal connections with senior militant commanders including Asari Dokubo, Igbifa (head of SEA) as well as links all across the Niger Delta. One would expect that an ‘ex-militant’ of his stature would have personally benefited much more from the millions of dollars in state patronage that have been channeled towards militants through the Amnesty and Post Amnesty Programmes as well as the lucrative pipeline protection contracts (Ubhenin 2013). After all, there is evidence all over the Niger Delta of the dramatic changes in the personal circumstances of militants (Ubhenin 2013, Wall Street Journal, August 22, 2012, The Nation August 28, 2012, National Mirror, January 13, 2013). Urban Gorilla himself made clear of this when he told me that:

Those who thought we are bad guys, you know you hardly see pastors in militancy, but you know people that were written off have built big houses. Even most of those who even went straight, went through the normal education system, kept to the law, who are maybe lawyers or doctors don’t have anything to show for it. If you move around my state now, most beautiful houses you can find are owned by ex-militants. Some of them are using their money to try to mend their ways, I know people who now help widows and so on. Maybe they were not like that naturally, you know the environment can change people. Not all of us got that kind of money...Me? Well you have seen my house, do I look like someone that made millions or billions? As I am, I have known many people from years back, when we were nothing. But today, fingers are not equal. Some of them have

become big, if they hear my name today they will be happy ‘asking ah, where have you been?’ I am still the same man, but no money.

After years in the Delta’s militant networks, Urban Gorilla is acutely aware of the missed opportunity he has had with regard to making it big through the Post Amnesty Programme. Seeing many youth, some of whom had been much lower in the militant pecking order or who in fact were not even involved with militancy but had somehow acquired the status as a result of connections to all sorts of patrons, make personal strides, fills him with both consternation and pride. He is proud that the sacrifices they made had at least brought some measure of advancement to the personal lives of many youth within the region. He is however bitter that he himself had not been able to make much of the Amnesty. Even though he was enrolled and got to travel to South Africa for training, his personal circumstance does not seem to have changed much. This material deficit, coupled with his advancing age, places him squarely in the over-age youth category.

Anthropologists have often argued that age is one of the many ways in which people produce and inhabit social time (James & Milles 2005, Johnson-Hanks 2006, Cole 2010, Meiu 2014). For the over-age youth in Yenagoa’s ex-militant networks however, age appears to be a major constraint if it is not accompanied by other indices of social maturation like financial independence. Indeed, becoming over-age within youth networks is linked to new constraints to social maturation and inhibits the movement of affected persons into *Kemowei* status. Over-age youth inhabit a space where notions of failed masculinities are particularly evident, a kind of limbo in which the ‘temporalities of ageing’ (Meiu 2014: 4) as well as the reality of poverty conspire to subvert the respectability many had attained during the heady days of violent militancy. The Post amnesty period represents for many over-age youth in the Delta, the type of space Nauja Kleist (2010) described in the case of diaspora Somali men in London and

Copenhagen. Kleist describes their attempts to negotiate respectable masculinity in the context of displacement in these Western cities. Here, the inability of Somali diaspora men to maintain old systems of recognition and privilege is deepened by a gendered empowerment of women in the West, thus creating acute feelings of failed masculinity which is over compensated for by the creation of 'alternative social spaces of recognition in which respectable masculinity can be re-enacted' (Kleist 2010: 187).

For individual actors like Urban Gorilla, the possibility of re-enacting the old measures of respectability, which were of course violent, has also been put paid to by the Amnesty through its relentless demand for peace. They are thus left to create versions of masculine respectability that is legitimated by their violent past but dependent on their ability to maintain links with far more materially successful and often younger/junior comrades. The transition is far from an easy one for the over-age youth who, having failed to become social adults, have to circulate within youth spaces; claiming the 'high table' at meetings or becoming 'patrons'. Urban Gorilla explained this by saying that during the 2003-9 violence, he had no fear, that if he wanted to do anything, he just did it. Now however, according to him, his 'only fear is age' (Urban Gorilla int 2014). He does have a reason to fear ageing. Having made little money from the DDR process of the Amnesty, he is still too poor to claim his place within the Ijaw National Congress (INC), which is the parent body for the IYC but has become too old to participate fully in the IYC. In order to retain a hold on old respect, Urban Gorilla and people of his generation have become latter day peace advocates who try to shape the respectability debate away from violence, wealth and consumption. They call to values like consistency, philanthropy, integrity as new sites of respectability and attempt to steer the more privileged youth towards it. It is evident, that even when they are not exactly conscious of this social tactic, they are articulating tactical agency in ways that allow

them to re-invent themselves in order to cope with the changing nature of the post amnesty Niger Delta as well as its implications for youth politics. Urban Gorilla's personal story highlights the dilemma faced by the so-called over-age youth. He expresses many of these sentiments when he told me, in relation to keeping younger militants in check:

You know the type of people you are talking about, most of them are stark illiterates. For you to assemble such people together its not easy. You know for we the Ijaw, Ijaw means truth. Anything we do, we like to apply that truth. We must be truthful in all that we do. We also have the Egbesu, the god that will punish you if you do something wrong. The moment you steal or rape, you will die. You must be pure. We even fast, sometimes you can't eat food prepared by a woman or sleep with a woman; you must be pure. It's not easy. There must always be a repercussion for bad behaviour. There is wide discipline in the camps, otherwise you can't control them. That is why people can be guided.

He also highlights the new forms of respectability the so-called over-youth category consistently tries to create when he told me, in response to the question 'how would a youth earn respect?' that:

Respect is not just fighting about or showing off with money. Some people just have money, but you have to believe in something. You can't be going about just because of money. Your relationship with people is what matters most. If someone dies today, it's not the cars or money that makes someone cry, it is the relationship he has with people. To be respected, you have to build trust with people around you. In South Africa they have a slang they call Ubuntu. It has three legs, which symbolizes respect, communalization, and ...I forgot the third one. But you see that no matter what you do, someone can tell something about your life style. That is when you begin to get respect from people, command. If you keep to your words, people will trust you. Like Jesus Christ [said] 'silver and gold I have none'. I go to places to buy things, they don't know my house, but they give me things on credit, because they know I will pay back. That is why I say my name anywhere I go. Some of these boys have made money, so they don't know how to be good people. We the old ones must teach them. That's the way.

This value set is fundamentally different from that of everyday militant youth or indeed of youth gangs as was described in Port Harcourt's *Colombia* neighbourhood who seem to prioritize violence as well as conspicuous consumption. Indeed, it is a major shift from Urban Gorilla's own admitted values in the years when he himself was an everyday rather than 'over-age' youth for whom violence and its performance were key

to respectability. These dramatic changes in the notion of respectability as well as the specific social situations of those who champion one version or the other, justifies the conceptualization of respect as a site of contestation and highlights one of the most important dynamic of youth politics in Post Amnesty Niger Delta.

It would appear that mid-level commanders in Delta militias occupy very similar social positions as that described by Themner (2012:205-23) in the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Their struggles for respect are intimately bound up in the very nature of post-conflict peace-building projects that tend to focus on the co-option of two levels of youth militias –the most senior commanders and the foot soldiers. This deepens the challenge of post-conflict transitions for mid-level commanders who often lose their authority as well as sense of self worth and respectability. The story of Urban Gorilla, the OS and the elders of *Colombia* however show that social networks can often recreate themselves in an attempt to respond to these challenges.

5.4: Youth cultures of conspicuous consumption

Thorstein Veblen's classic work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899[2005]), is a natural entry point to a discussion about conspicuous consumption. Veblen's theory espouses the idea of the evolution of a leisure class whose members can appropriate the economic surplus of the working classes and thus are exempted from the 'indignity' of industrial labour. To be a part of Veblen's leisure class, one must belong to that higher social hierarchy defined by its ownership of property and its accumulation of wealth. This leisure class establishes itself as deserving of honorific privileges through the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods as well as the unproductive consumption of time. This is what Trigg (2001: 100) described as 'the social performance of the leisure class'.

More recent iterations of the idea of conspicuous consumption shifts attention away from class and focusses instead on how this social behavior is productive of citizenship and also how it is critical to the ability of young people to navigate the difficult terrains of the shadow economy (Featherstone 2007). Perhaps one of the most successful illustrations of this is captured by Sasha Newell's (2012) research about consumption in modern Cote d'Ivoire. In his book *The Modernity Bluff*, Newell writes about both the performative and aspirational aspects of conspicuous consumption. She notes for instance that the *les bluffeurs* act out the 'superior person' they hoped to become if they had the money for it and declared it 'a display of potential'. She also focusses in particular on imitation as a strategy for self making and expression among the young bluffers of Cote d'Ivoire and shows how urban performances like wearing ill afforded expensive clothing and overt (read conspicuous) display of designer brands, or in fact of outright fakery, are an essential element of succeeding within a postcolonial environment in which 'real' success was increasingly hard to come by.

While similar patterns of consumption can be seen across the Niger Delta, it is important to note a key difference. Delta militants were not really creating a new class in the sense in which Veblen describes his so called 'leisure class'. This is because their very construction of respectability through consumption was dependent on continued fidelity with the repressed class of ordinary Niger Deltans whose interests they purportedly represent in their activities. Without this, they would jeopardise not just their source of wealth but also their social standing within the Delta society.

Yet, their growing wealth as a direct result of proceeds from protection, bunkering and kidnapping rackets was a signifier that could neither be hidden nor ignored. For instance, before the Amnesty was declared in 2009, one of the defining moments of weekend nightlife in many of the Niger Delta's cities was the arrival of militants from

their two-week shifts in the creeks. As an ex-militant from Tsekelewu in Bayelsa State, described it:

If there is a party in a particular place and they went there, you will see them, they will be honoured, they will give them that power, that right, they have money because they are involved in kidnapping, they will pay them a lot of money, for bunkering, vandalizing pipes, they will sell crude oil to, you know, they have money [...] so you see these things and you embrace it. Friday night is militant night, all clubs are full of them. Ah girls! (Peter, interview, April 9, 2013).

Another (Urban Gorilla, int 2014) pointed out how their presence within the city of Yenagoa in the Post Amnesty period is marked out by displays of wealth and property ownership:

If you move round my state now, most beautiful houses you can find are owned by ex-militants. Some of them are using their money to try to mend their ways, I know people who now help widows and so on. Maybe they are not like that naturally you know the environment can change people...if you don't build a big house, how can people know that you are a big man? Many people think militants are touts, thugs, riff raffs, it is that time you will hear different sorts of English [words] to describe people. But when people see that you are doing well for yourself, they have to notice.

In the light of this, perhaps even more poignant in the Delta context is the consumption of symbols (colours, slangs and even certain brands of alcohol) not necessarily directly tied to income, but perhaps more steeped in the underground identity systems that shape youth gangs in the region. These symbols are important as identity signifiers but they also often mark out subtle but critical differences in notions of respectability within the groups themselves and the internal politics that underpin them. They also help youth who had become wealthy to retain affinity with the lower classes whose voices they had appropriated and whose continued support was critical to their own sustained social mobility.

In an article on taste and class in modern Spain, Noel Valis (2002: 147) argued that 'all social interactions are an artificial and conscious realization of one's "ideal" place in society- a theatre of behavior' which 'becomes a kind of property' an 'object produced and utilized for a variety of purposes'. This description of the bourgeois class in

contemporary Spain captures the broad outlines of the role that conspicuous consumption plays in the construction of respectability among ex-militant youth networks in the Delta. Indeed, consumption for youth militants not only fulfills material or practical needs, it is also often a performative symbol of defiance, a certain sense of 'being like the oppressors' that signals to society as well as militants themselves of their 'victory' in the battle against multinational oil capital and an irresponsible state. It is also an attempt to reform the image of the 'criminal youth' (Ingwe 2015) that militants have within the communities in spite of widespread support for the broader narrative of resistance that underpin their pre amnesty actions. As Urban Gorilla's (int 2014) statement quoted above indicates, ex-militants consciously use money earned 'to try to mend their ways' by which he actually means that they try to buy their way into social respectability.

While individual youth use consumption to signify their successful masculinity (as expressed by money gotten from kidnappings and so on) thus obtaining status among their peers, gaining the respect of the broader community appears to be dependent on collaborative efforts of the group. As Goldring explained in the case of Mexican men in the US, associational involvement in an environment characterized by stigma produces and reproduces 'zones of sociocultural intelligibility' (1998:75). It is within these zones that social networks are able to become sources of respectability for its members. Group consumption is thus the vehicle with which youth signal to the community who they are, forming identities as well as simultaneously extracting respectability.

One of the central signifiers of group identity is the consumption of social commodities like body art, colour and language. While these social commodities are products of specific ways of thinking about respect, they are also important producers of

respectability. A good example of the way the consumption of body art and inscriptions can provide critical insights into the construction of respectability among youth groups in the Delta is captured by the experiences of those involved with a group called ‘The Ugliers’. This group was known initially as a dance group and its key identity was the deliberate culturing of grotesque body art, hairstyles and modes of dressing. This counter-culture was created in defiance of bourgeois notions of respectability that appears to emphasize western education, formal dressing and ‘gentlemanly’ behavior. In the chaotic and violent streets of Port Harcourt however, these notions of respectability hold little meaning for thousands of youth who have to daily navigate very uncertain and dangerous social environments. The Ugliers emerged in Okirika and became quite popular around the waterfront slums of the oil city of Port Harcourt. Tonye, a resident of Borokiri told me about the activities of The Ugliers:

The whole Port Harcourt was full of different types of people. For instance there was this group who called themselves ‘The Ugliers’. They used to barb their hair in strange ways. Like barbing one part and leaving the rest. Or wearing lipstick, or their clothes inside out. They were just doing things upside down to show that they were different. They were like street dancers. Even old women will come out to watch them and dance with them.

This rather benign face of The Ugliers conceals a very brutal and violent background. What Tonye did not say was that the organization had underground connections to the Iceland street cult which later metamorphosed into the Niger Delta Vigilantes led by the warlord Ateke Tom. It is curious that an arm of a gang as brutal as the Icelanders who were implicated in hundreds of deaths between 2003 and 2009 could wear such a benign, even adorable public face. This curious oddity, led me to ask deeper questions about the internal workings of The Ugliers and to seek interaction with its members. I eventually tracked down one of them who now lives in Lagos and who was introduced to me by one of my Amnesty contacts at the Lead City University in Ibadan. His story about the Ugliers highlights the interesting ways in which the consumption of social

commodities like body art plays a key role in group identity formation as well as illustrates the validity of Noel Valis' notion of social interactions as 'theatres of behaviour' (2002: 147).

Egbekun joined The Uglies sometime around 2005 (int 2015). He explained that he had not been initially aware that underneath the benign public face, The Uglies were really a part of an emerging brutal gang machine that was going to be involved in multiple killings and disruptions of public peace. In his words:

It was long before even me realized that the Uglies were violent. They were good at dancing. So everyone thought they were just ordinary street dancers. I liked music then you see? I wanted to be a ghetto singer like those Father U-Turn⁴³. So one day, I was at Borokiri and the boys were dancing at a carnival, you know those street carnivals? After the dance, people were drinking so I went to see one boy. I asked him how one could join. He told me to come to Okirika to see one Senior Man. That was how I joined. That day in Okirika, they just made me barb one side, like this, and joined them in a bus to Bori. But I heard that when you join the Icelanders new, sometimes they add you to The Uglies. The real Senior Men in the Icelanders are not in Uglies.

So I asked him why only the lower levels of the Icelanders were in this dance group.

His response was:

How can Senior Men be dancing? The Uglies is for the new guys. You start like a boy, but become a man later. Is that not how it is? But when I saw how the Senior Men enjoyed, I just wanted to leave Uglies. Not that I was not enjoying it, but sometimes you want to be where the action is. Many boys in Uglies also wanted to be involved but as you have not yet been involved in high stakes violence, nobody notices you. So as many boys saw the situation, some people will just be making stupid jokes, saying we are women or boys. But inside The Uglies there were really courageous boys, I tell you! So we just started to show what we could do. We would wear anything, like mad people. Ha ha Ha. But at least people began to notice. In a way, it the mad thing that made us popular. After that I began to like Uglies again. But when one grows up, who would not like to join the big boys?

What his response indicates is that The Uglies created a counter culture partly in response to the humiliation of being excluded from the real world of the gang where

⁴³ A popular local reggae musician in the 1990s. He was based mainly in Ajegunle, a notorious and violent slum in Lagos.

they could get respect through violence. They therefore constructed an identity that depended on the adoration of outsiders, what Wisman (2011) referred to as ‘seeking outward validation’ thus creating ‘alternative social spaces of recognition’ (Kleist 2010). In contrast, the leaders of the Iclander cult could call on a repertoire of social tools to produce respectability for themselves. They did not just gain respect among their peers through overt acts of violence or its performance, they also sought to gain it by creatively exploiting the proceeds of this violence in a way that allowed them to fit a more bourgeois middle class notion of respect that the rest of society appeared to relate to.

Because the gains of militancy were not equally distributed, the lower level cadres like many members of The Uglies could only seek respectability from outside of the group through the creation of alternative sites and notions by the consumption of social commodities and symbols like dance, body art and colour codes. This again highlights the point being made in the previous section about respectability functioning as a site of contestation and leads to the next section where the shifting nature of respect is discussed.

5.5 Fluid, situational and vicarious respectability

What the preceding sections in this chapter have shown is that respectability in the Delta is a critical site of competition where different actors often seek to impose the versions of respect and honour that most adequately serve their interests. The different versions of respectability that naturally result from this intense competition indicate that in order to adequately understand how notions of honour and respect influence youth politics in the region, we need to take into account its fluid, situational and vicarious nature. This section therefore explores the important questions of how the various types of respectability described in the two preceding sections interact? How does this

interaction shape youth politics? How does the idea of respectability itself change over time? How does it alternate across contexts? Can there be a hybrid of both respect and disrespect? And ultimately, how do all these work in the Delta networks?

It should be noted that the fluidity of respectability is itself partly a consequence of what Nilan and Feixa (2006:2) described as ‘hybrid identities’ in which young people’s lives and cultures are shaped by a ‘process of cultural interactions between the local and the global, the hegemonic and the subaltern, the center and the periphery’. This means that changes in the idea of what it means to be respectable among violent youth networks are bound up in part on the interactions between multiple youth identities and the broader relations of power and control that mediate extraction within the oil economy. Recognizing the shifting nature of respect, Baxter and Margavio (2000) talk of the existence of what they called ‘multiple sources of honour’ which exist in ‘a medley of statuses on display in differential interaction’.

As one of the key thresholds in the Niger Delta’s long years of violence, the institution of the Presidential Amnesty programme in 2009 did much to co-opt youth militias and gangs and impose relative stability that has allowed the unfettered extraction of crude oil. The Amnesty however did not just allow the oil industry to re-emerge from its nearly one decade of violent siege by militants, it also allowed youth involved in the violence, directly or indirectly, to re-invent themselves as peaceful members of society. The new social identities that inevitably emerged from this re-invention of course required new sets of ideas about what it meant to be respectable. Notions of respectability were therefore reconstructed to reflect changes in the identities created by young people in response to changes in the structure of incentives in the oil economy. In order to show the important changes in the nature of respectability that occurred in the Post Amnesty period, I explored the remarkable stories of young ex-militants who

grew up in various towns of Bayelsa state, including Amasoma, Bori and Ekeremor but are currently being sponsored by the Amnesty training programme at the Lead City University in Ibadan. They spoke to me about their motivations in the pre-amnesty period as well as what has changed since the programme commenced. I used insights from their recollections of what motivated them in the pre-amnesty period as a window into their constructions of respectability and then contrast it with the post amnesty period to trace what changes may have occurred.

A good place to start is the story of Tarela, who was born in Amasoma, an oil producing town in Bayelsa State and had belonged to the Greenlander cult that operated in Yenagoa, the state capital and only disengaged from the group in 2009 after accepting the amnesty. He had spent some of his childhood in Lagos and only moved back to the Delta in 2003 at about the age of 19. He spoke to me about his activities within the Greenlander cult and for much of the time, he underlined the important role that violence played in the construction of masculine respectability when he noted that:

‘Violence is the only source of recognition. You can’t just sit back and watch your people suffering and expect your father to cater for you. So I just took it as a challenge to join other men because I saw them as the strong people. I saw both agitators and non agitators, as stronger people, and felt that maybe by the time I joined them, we fight, enter into one or two activities, I will get some money to take care of myself and all that, so that was how I got involved in cultism (Tarela 2013 int.).

With the perpetual presence of the narrative of violence in the region at the time, it is easy to ignore subtle changes in its relevance as a tool for the construction of respectable social identities. Indeed, there were important shifts in the specific version of respect that was performed by youth depending on the socio-spatial context. This meant that Delta youth were able to re-invent themselves as the occasion and space demanded, showing the remarkable adaptability often identified within informal spaces (Mitullah 2007, Hansen 2005, Lindel 2010) and fundamentally shaping social perceptions of what

was good and bad. Tarela highlights the subtle and sometimes not so subtle attempts to perform respectability in certain ways when he told the story of his travels between Yenagoa and Amasoma his hometown. According to him:

...the people that got involved, we are the people that have the street cred, the street credibility. There was no way you won't want to be a strong man in Yenagoa those days. We had the street credibility. The way people look at you when you belong, its very different. The civilians⁴⁴ can't even say anything. If you hear people talking, you just have to be quiet. Nobody recognizes you. I remember one day when the boys were drinking, it was at one bar around Onopa, some civilians just came in and began to show off. But you have no gun, who are you? We just slapped them around and told them to 'sit down there!'. That's the way. If you can't belong (to a cult or gang), nobody can respect you or your money. Everybody just tried to show he can scatter things (cause some trouble), no other way to be a man you know?

While touching on his interactions with in his native Amasoma however, a very different Tarela emerges, a Tarela that understands that the rural social environment defines respectability in very different ways:

...forget it, Amasoma is dull. These elders controlled everyone. And those politicians? Everywhere! My mother was also there and all her pastor people. Not that I don't like church o! but you know, you just have to calm down when you are in the village. When I go, sometimes you can mistake me for a church boy. Believe me. One day one of my people from Yenagoa just appeared in my village, I think it was 2007 Christmas time. It was hard to even talk about Yenagoa, I told him to just behave himself. Amasoma is different! you can't be a Greenlander where where there are so many old people.

The Tarela that emerges during visits to Amasoma is one that understood that, removed from the violent spaces of youth gangs in Yenagoa, respectability depended less on a reputation for criminal violence than it did on deference to local elders and some Christian spirituality. He therefore played this performance deftly, providing a public face that conformed with the requirements of rural Amasoma and its dependence on conservative community notions of what it meant to be respectable. In spite of the concealment of his gang personality however, Tarela still appeared to need it in order

⁴⁴ Young men who are not members of any cult group

to circulate freely within youth networks in Amasoma. As he put it, he had to ‘become himself’ when he is with other boys visiting from urban centers all over the country. Even though Tarela appears to imagine himself primarily as a ‘fighter’ with ‘street credibility’, and considers his more benign face while in Amasoma as a mere performance to satisfy his mother and the customs of the village, a more accurate description of his identity is perhaps that of hybridity. He is somewhere in between the two carefully calibrated social identities, his insistence on the ‘fighter’ version of himself to me is also another performance necessary to validate his ‘ex-militant’ status- to gain respect. He exploits cultural (both youth and broader) tropes to construct a respectable image of himself in ways that indicate what Bannerji (2000) called an ‘emancipatory use of culture’. He also negotiates, according to Nilan and Feixa (2006:3), ‘competing identity discourses on offer by filtering, synthesizing, judicious choice- generative dispositions which encode habitually reflective and reflexive processes’.

Identity hybridities that may seem contradictory to an older generation are a necessary tool for surviving the globalized fast paced world that young people grow up in. Being able to meet the fluid conditions that social respectability imposes is therefore a fundamental part of the maturation project that youth constantly grapple with and few places highlight its complexities like violent regions like the Niger Delta.

The Amnesty in 2009 changed the way respectability is performed by youth in the region. While the pre-amnesty urban youth culture was clearly dependent on violent articulations of masculinity and social becoming, the post Amnesty period has modified the incentives in ways that now promote less overt violence and therefore new notions of what it means to attain the status of *Kemowei*.

I spoke with Prince and Tammy, two young ex-gang members of the group Dey Well from Bori, in Bayelsa State currently benefiting from the Post Amnesty training programme about the implications of their militant history for how they are perceived in the community. As a background, the two were demobilized as a part of the first phase of the Post Amnesty DDR process. They have been receiving approximately 200 Pounds Sterling monthly from the Amnesty office since about June 2010. They have also been sponsored to South Africa to train in pipeline welding, a skill they seem to have put into use working odd jobs with indigenous oil services companies around Bayelsa and Rivers States. They valorized their violent past, taking care to highlight how their actions contributed to the ‘liberation’ of the Niger Delta. They are however acutely aware of the very different social climate they have had to navigate since the Amnesty was declared in 2009. Prince (int 2015) puts it this way:

Things have changed. You can’t just vandalize pipes anyhow now. There are people still doing that, but not officially, I heard! But it is still happening but now it is real petrol from all those NNPC fuel reserves pipes, at least in my area. But these things are covert now not like that time when you will go about saying you are a militant or that you burst [vandalize] pipeline. These days, it is about money. Youths that were agitating at their prime age, they have now renounced or accepted amnesty, they can’t fight anymore. Its like you are retired, like ex-service men. If you renounce, you have to find other ways to be relevant, even to be safe. You have to carry your bible very tightly, because renouncing means forgetting everything they used to do. For instance, they⁴⁵ musn’t catch you with a girl or in [a] beer parlour, they will just kill you.

His analysis of the dilemma that ex-gang members face when they leave the gangs is an experience that appears to be widespread mainly among former members of street cults. In spite of the amnesty, getting out of gangs still remains a major risk for many youth in the volatile streets of the Niger Delta. Indeed my interviews with them were conducted in December 2015, a time when inter-cult violence was spiking markedly in the Bori area of Bayelsa State between two groups, Dey Well and Dey Bam, partly as

⁴⁵ currently active gang members

a result of involvement with opposing sides in the local 2015 election campaigns. Those who accept the Amnesty however, often have to leave the gangs, at least nominally, in order to access the training programmes and opportunities offered by the Presidential Amnesty. This means that many of them find alternative routes of self-expression like religion or in fact music, thus constructing a new identity that inevitably shapes respectability in very different ways. Tammy pointed out that many of the young local musicians creating a new layer of popular music are ex-militants.

Among youth who were in militant groups however, acquiring the status of an ‘ex-militant’ carries little risk and is in fact highly sought after. It is however not enough to become ‘ex-militant’ in the struggle to gain the higher status of *Kemowei*. As Urban Gorilla, an ex-militant whose story I had earlier touched on notes, to become respected, ‘ex-militants’ now have to show society that they have become changed men and in particular, they must be able to share their gains from the amnesty with the rest of society in whose name they purportedly struggled. Constructing a *Kemowei* that is peaceful and philanthropic, is indeed a major change for ex-militants whose notion of respect was mediated primarily by violence in the pre-amnesty period. In his words, ‘you see that no matter what you do, someone can tell something about your life style. That is when you begin to get respect from people, command. If you keep to your words, people will trust you. Like Jesus Christ said ‘silver and gold I have none’ (Urban Gorilla, int 2014). He went further to say that:

I even trust ex-militants more than politicians. These people have seen life, so they know what the problem is. It’s not like these people coming from rural areas who don’t know anything, maybe they didn’t even finish primary school. You see the problem? But the environment you leave influences your character. Change the environment of a man, and that will change his character. That is what I see in the ex-militants. I know many who are helping people. They use the resources they get now to paint themselves away from the bad names they used to have before, to better their lives. Some of them, like I told you before, they help widows, give people money, you know, just to mend their ways. As for small

small militants, in their own little way, they also give people things, maybe someone asks you for two thousand naira, you just give, just to help.

What this quote shows is the way respectability itself changes in response to the social cues imposed by a rapidly changing system of incentives in the oil rich Delta. Indeed, youth militants and gang members have to grapple with a social system that is so fluid that discerning what is respectable is one of the central questions that shape their engagement with its dynamic politics. With the constant struggle by different social categories as well as groups within specific categories to impose a hegemonic notion of respectability, it is no surprise that respect as a goal of social maturation is so situational.

5.6 Conclusion

As a tool for determining who fits within the social space; what Amit (2015: 12) called ‘an abstract realm where social relationships are imagined and enacted’; the cases described above illustrate the importance of respect as a governing idiom in Delta networks. They collectively highlight how individual actors imagine their place within the youthscape as ‘a man’, as ‘a senior man’ and as *Kemowei*. When Pratten (2007), writes of Delta youth reminiscing about ‘the rugged life’ he is in fact articulating how their search for respectability is bound up in the social navigations within an oil political economy that offers few formal opportunities but in which informal opportunities abound.

The various biographical materials used above also draw attention to the different contexts that frame respectability and tease out the tensions between self framing and social expectation. This tension is partly why studying respectability is so important to understanding the Niger Delta’s youth networks. Wright Mills (2000) makes a similar point about these sorts of tensions in his classic work ‘*The Sociological Imagination*’ when he argued that illuminating the relationships between changing social structures

and the personal challenges that individuals encounter in their context was the worthwhile task of social analysis.

This chapter answered the second research question about how youth imagine themselves and their networks, by arguing that they do so by seeking to become *Kemowei* and that the multiple contestations that attend that process of becoming is one of the central defining features of networked youth organizing in the Niger Delta. Tracing the tortuous process of becoming *Kemowei* for the thousands of youth caught up in the violent political economy of oil opens up a whole new vista through which we can understand the region.

Chapter Six

CHANGING PATHWAYS, BUT UNCHANGING POLITICS: THE AMNESTY AND CONTEMPORARY YOUTH SPACES IN THE NIGER DELTA

“You can’t say that nothing has changed, I mean look at the way things have changed! the peace, the commanders who have come out in the open, the boys who are training, everything. But then what has changed? nothing! It’s the same Niger Delta only a different one”

-Kingsley Urban Gorilla (int 2015)

6.1 Introduction

As Kingsley Urban Gorilla’s quote cited above shows, there appears to be a general sense of *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose* (the more things change, the more they remain the same) in the Niger Delta. Actors acknowledge the impact of the Amnesty in bringing a new age of ‘peace’, but remain acutely aware of the brittleness of that peace as a result of the continued salience of multiple contentious issues. While the Nigerian state tends to play up the supposed stability imposed in the oil sector as a consequence of the Amnesty (Abazie-Humphrey 2014), the multiple ruptures and convergences in the networked pathways through which youth insert themselves into the Delta’s politics are difficult to ignore. This is because these ruptures continue to unsettle the region and justify the cynicism of social actors like Kingsley Urban Gorilla. This chapter aims to accomplish two things. First is to analyse specific policies within the Amnesty programme which generated these ruptures and convergences and second is to explore how these may have transformed the nature of relationships within the three pathways of youth engagement in the Niger Delta. The idea is to explore how these changing pathways continue to be rooted in the same governance logics that had earlier driven the region into violent social mobilisations and insurgencies.

6.2: Patterns of Dispersal, Convergence and Contestation in the Niger Delta's Post Amnesty Networks

It is argued here that at the core of the Amnesty programme's influence on how youth imagine their role in the region are three seemingly intangible policy logics which, combined, have profoundly impacted on the nature of youth politics. The first is a *pattern of dispersal* where youth networks have been reconfigured mainly by the geographical dislocation of its actors. The second is a *pattern of convergence* which reflects the creation of new networks based on the location of training sites and which reinforces the disconnection from the region that dispersal inevitably generates at the same time that it creates new levels of social awareness. These two patterns have generated new sites of contestation that tend to focus less on the state and more on internal contradictions within the militant groups, structures and logics. This third *pattern of contestation* is reshaping old networks in interesting new ways and may provide critical insight into the potential next phase of violence in the region.

In order to address these claims, I used insights from in-depth interviews with ex-militants who held various levels of authority in the pre Amnesty years, especially between 2003 and 2009. I also used the stated and inferred goals of the Amnesty as a frame with which to analyse its impact but focussed more on the actual ways in which the policies were implemented. In doing this, the bureaucratic agency of the Amnesty coordinating office itself, as well as the impact of the various contracting agencies who delivered the training and rehabilitation services to ex-militants becomes apparent and highlights the micro-level politics that allowed the Amnesty to influence the micro-politics youth networks.

6.2.1 "Move them to the four winds": Dispersal as coercion

Taking a page from oil industry terminology, the Amnesty Programme places beneficiaries (delegates as it calls them) into 'onshore' and 'offshore' categories. As is

to be expected, ‘onshore delegates’ are those whose DDR and training schedule keeps within Nigeria while those described as ‘offshore delegates’ have been sent for training or education abroad. According to Amnesty Office documents, some thirty thousand youth were registered under the programme. Of this, about 14,000 were deployed for long term training or certification outside of the Niger Delta region. Many of these were actually sent abroad for training in aircraft maintenance, marine engineering, aviation, pipeline welding and other such oil industry relevant skills. They were sent to various countries across the world including the US, Greece, India, South Africa, the UK and Ukraine (int Egbekun 2013, Amnesty Office 2013, Abazie-Humphrey 2014).

Even though one may question the quality, it is important to note that facilities to provide these sorts of training exist within the country and in fact, in many cases, within the Niger Delta itself. For instance, the Petroleum Training Institute, the University of Port Harcourt and the Niger Delta University, all located in the core oil producing states of Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa provide many of the training programs Amnesty beneficiaries wanted sponsorship for. These could have also been produced far cheaply than the foreign institutions and in some cases even at the same level of quality. A part of the huge training budget could have been invested in strengthening the capacities of these local institutions, thus guaranteeing a longer term impact on human capital development in the region.

But why did the policy framers of the Amnesty not see this apparent opportunity to develop local capacity, provide sponsored training for more young people and fulfil the rhetorical goal of ‘development of the Niger Delta’ that the political class claimed? I asked an official of the Amnesty office in Port Harcourt this question and his answer was quite instructive and highlights the important strategic value that was placed on the dispersal of young militant elements from the region as a way of guaranteeing stability.

The informant noted that there were two key reasons underlining the decision to send young people outside of the region for training. The first was corruption. In his words:

The foreign agenda makes it easy to make money for everyone. There are many people whose children made the Amnesty who won't consider it a part of the national cake if they are in Port Harcourt. What does that cost? That's nothing. But send your child to London, yes. That's a big deal. For the contractors (the service providers facilitating the trainings on behalf of the Amnesty office), foreign schools mean more money too, same for the students. So everyone prefers that (Akpan int April 2013)

News reports about large scale fraud in the Amnesty programme seem to bear out this claim about the use of the foreign training programmes to siphon state funds. In a petition sent to the Senate Committee on the Niger Delta in January 2015, some Niger Delta indigenes living in Greece complained about management of the training contract for trainee pilots by the Jet Stream Academy in Athens as well as alleged racism levelled against the accommodating hotel (Mone 2015). The petition alleged that some of the prospective trainees had not been enrolled for some 15 months despite funds having been appropriated and presumably disbursed in Abuja. They also raised issues of the confiscation of the passports of the trainees to intimidate them into silence and protect the identity of corrupt Amnesty and Embassy officials. In another case reported by the *National Mirror* (October 18, 2012), some Amnesty beneficiaries were sent to South Africa with the expectation that they would study for trade certifications in Oil and Gas drilling. Upon arrival in South Africa, their passports were seized and they were intimidated into registering for courses in carpentry instead of the Oil and Gas drilling the Amnesty office had paid for to the provider, Northlink College, Cape Town. The report detailed the fraudulent transactions involved in this and particularly noted that the facilitating company in Nigeria (one Tubos International Nigeria Limited) was owned by a senior officer at the Amnesty office.

These types of complaints about the non-payment of allowances, arbitrary deductions from same when paid or outright criminal deception have become near constant features of local news reporting on the Amnesty's 'offshore delegates' (*National Mirror* October 18, 2012, *Vanguard* October 20, 2015). Indeed, one of my informants who is currently a beneficiary of the Amnesty and is studying for a degree in International Business at Coventry University complained to me about what he termed 'illegal deductions' in his allowances and a 'constant presence of intimidation and fraud' in the way the Amnesty Office is handled (Paul, int April 26, 2015)

As important as corrupt enrichment was in facilitating and encouraging these foreign deployments however, one of the reasons it remains an optimal policy option is because of the strategic goal that informed moving thousands of violent youth out of the Niger Delta region in the first place. At the heart of these foreign deployments was the need to disrupt and disperse the dense networks of violent young men whose social and political activities nearly crippled the huge oil industry. Disrupting and dispersal of these networks was central to the Amnesty's strategy of co-option and was identified by my informants as the second key reason that Foreign training was necessary. To clarify this point, it should be noted that dispersing these networks did not mean that elite actors were prepared or in fact intended to lose contact with former partners or to de-politicise the youth. Quite the contrary, the goal appeared to have been to reconstitute old ties of control on the ideational level while at the same time dispersing the younger actors across a wider geographical space, away from the vulnerable oil fields of the Niger Delta.⁴⁶ Akpan (int 2013) the Amnesty official described it this way:

⁴⁶ In my previous research on the MSc, African Studies programme, I established the connections between ruptured patron-client networks and the Amnesty. Drawing from interview data and official documents, I argued that the Amnesty's real goal was to reconstitute rupturing relations between senior state officials, politicians, members of the armed forces and corrupt oil industry staff on the one hand and their former clients (youth militants) who had become very powerful and were disrupting, through overt politicised violence, the highly lucrative rackets in the oil sector. The incentives and pay-offs that

...another thing is that these boys can't stay here in the Niger Delta and you expect peace. We need to move them out, put them in different places and let them see the world. Maybe they will not fight again. Or maybe we can at least prevent them from planning or banding together. So that's also a reason for the training outside the Niger Delta. It has worked hasn't it?

This strategy could be understood first in the light of the critical role of geography in the Delta conflict. By training ex-militants outside of the region, the state was not only providing a much needed human capital development intervention but was also depriving violent youth actors of one of their most potent spaces and instruments of violence- the complex networks of creeks and wetlands and swamps.

Many scholars have written about the critical role that geography plays in the Niger Delta conflict (Watts 2004, Ugor 2013). This view of violence in the region focusses on the implications of the Niger Delta's geography for the way insurgent groups imagine themselves. It addresses, in particular, the implications of the social construction of space as well as the spatial construction of 'the social' for insurgent violence in the oil rich wetlands of the Niger Delta. It argues, for instance, that insurgencies in the oil rich region are fundamentally shaped by the specific nature of its wetlands and the historical interpretations of invincibility, invisibility and ownership drawn from it (see Adunbi 2013). By highlighting the way ecology, both as a mobilizing narrative and as a spatial reality, shapes the violent strategies of insurgent youth as well as that of the state, geography provides interesting insights into how we can think about the complex conflict in the Niger Delta.

As can be expected, this complex labyrinth of creeks and waterways features prominently in the discourses of resistance and pacification by ethnic militias, pirates,

were deployed through the Amnesty did a lot to restore these old ties and thus encouraged the current tenuous peace. In this process of reconstitution however, I also identified patterns of resistance mostly by 'ex-militants' on the lower levels of the organizations that indicate that the current peace may only be temporary and that new sites of violence may emerge. See Iwilade (2013) and Iwilade (2014).

oil bunkerers and gangs in the region in important ways. First as the main site of violent conflict, then as a key weapon of conflict in and of itself, and finally as the prime prize of the violence. As a consequence, competing actors have unique relationships with the Delta wetlands and draw on various local idioms of citizenship and justice to claim ownership.

Of course the argument could be made that since they had accepted the Amnesty, the incentive for violence as a resistance or negotiating tactic had effectively ended anyway, so moving them out of the Niger Delta was moot. However, two sets of evidence indicate that dispersal away from the Delta was a key peacebuilding strategy and that it was effective in delegitimizing violence in the region.

First, this policy was not accidental. It was deliberately designed for the purpose of moving the most ‘problematic’ youth actors in the region away from oil infrastructure. In interviews with officials with or close to the Amnesty Office, I often asked why it was not considered more cost effective to train the ex-militants in the available institutions in the Niger Delta or at the least in other parts of Nigeria. The most common and representative response was to the effect that:

These boys are trouble makers. If they continue to stay here, go to the creeks, or walk around Port Harcourt, there is no way anybody can control them. It is as if a spirit here keeps telling them “fight! Fight! Fight!” they have to be scattered to the four winds. So that they won’t see each other and talk about violence. How can you preach non-violence to violent people in a violent environment like this? They have to be isolated from the society. That’s the idea behind these foreign school(ing) (int. April 2013)

This tendency to view dispersal as a viable strategy for disrupting the violent conflict networks with which militant youth threatened the oil complex has been corroborated by some other scholars who have done fieldwork in the region (Adunbi 2015: 229-34). Adunbi in fact goes further to argue that dispersing networks away from the Delta was necessary in order to de-link youth from mythic connections to ancestral sites around

which narratives of disempowerment as well as resistance are framed. While I did not find (or in fact look for) any specific evidence that suggested that there is a ‘mythic’ connection here, his extensive ethnographic work does suggest that patterns of dispersal are key elements of the coercive agenda of the Amnesty programme.

Dispersal was perhaps even more crucial in the light of the unprecedented access to oil infrastructure that senior militant commanders suddenly gained through state contracts as well as their increasing embeddedness within a state bureaucracy which seemed to have privatized state security concerns to them. For example, the control of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) was effectively handed over to ex-militants by the government of President Goodluck Jonathan when he appointed Patrick Akpobolokemi as its Director General. It is general believed that Mr Akpobolokemi was himself a member of Government Ekemupolo’s (Tompolo) Camp 5 militant group which had operated from the Gbaramatu Kingdom in Delta State and that he had in fact been nominated by Tompolo. It was therefore no surprise when he Akpobolokemi promptly awarded a multimillion dollar pipeline protection and shipping contract to his former commander through the latter’s company Global West Ltd (Africa Confidential 2016).

This NIMASA case is one of the many examples of the intricate hybridization of the state’s oil regulatory infrastructure which created immense wealth for the most privileged ‘ex-militants’ and ultimately generated resentment from many of their followers. This growing resentments, especially from mid and lower level militant cadres appeared about the scale and distribution of these contracts, made dispersing all but the most loyal out of the Niger Delta a crucial element of the Amnesty’s coercive architecture.

In spite of the Amnesty Programme's consistent claim to being a locally designed and administered DDR project, it is interesting to note that the policy of sending youth out for training outside of the Delta region was often legitimized by its officials in the language of international DDR. For instance, Margaret Abazie-Humphrey (2014) a senior official in the Amnesty Office in Abuja highlighted the importance of training beneficiaries outside of the region and legitimized this strategy using the language of UN DDR which often encourages demobilization to be done in areas largely unfamiliar to the former fighters. By asking that ex-militant youth focus on the injustices rather than the institutions that perpetrate them (as if it were possible to separate the two), and shipping them out of the geographical location in which these injustices occur, the Amnesty Programme sort to disrupt the social infrastructure that facilitated conflict. Indeed, many 'ex-militants' I interviewed at different times and in different sites alluded to the disruptive implication of absence from the Niger Delta for their ability to connect with old networks. One of them, Tarela, who was then a student at the Lead City University in Ibadan, complained that:

What can someone do? We are far from home. The Amnesty has taken us outside our base, if I say anything here, it looks like violence. But these are normal things back home. Apart from a few new friends here, there is nobody like me. Its even hard sometimes to know the truth about what is going on. Even with phones. If you do any struggle here, where is the creek to hide? So they have succeeded in hiding us away from the Niger Delta and the Niger Delta away from us (int. June 2014).

Tarela's point illustrates the impact of the strategy of dispersal on youth networks. He talks about there being 'nobody like him', not in the sense of ethnic or other such difference, but in the context of disconnection from familiar social networks. This physical disconnection is deepened by acute awareness of personal dependence on the state, through the Amnesty programme, for everyday survival and the threat to that survival that reconnection may constitute.

If the sense of disconnection in ex-militants like Tarela going through training within Nigeria is high, one may imagine how those abroad would feel given that, in addition to being away from the spaces of power that the Niger Delta environment represented for most of them, they also had to contend with cultural changes associated with social distance from their host countries. Paul (int 2015) an Amnesty sponsored student at Coventry, had mixed feelings about this disconnection noting that:

‘it is good to have this international experience and it will help me later. But, I tell you, it is just a tactic to kill the militant in me. Even the cold will remove fight from one’s spirit! Look at the distance. Look at all the different things one must start to learn. It is difficult to even keep track of what is going on in Bori or Port Harcourt. They have finished us my brother. But its good. We will still go home and we will see.’

Many of the gangs, militias and youth groups whose members streamed into the Amnesty could no longer operate as before for the simple reason that key actors had taken up residence in cities all over the world. The Amnesty, by creating a new incentive structure and locating its distribution across the world, clearly challenged both the incentive for as well as the logistical capability to mobilize along old network patterns.

6.2.2 Knowing each other and the world: Network Convergence and Post Amnesty Politics

While the Amnesty is apparently dispersing and disrupting the semi autonomous conflict networks young people had built in the years before it was launched, it is also simultaneously generating new patterns of alliances and connections that are proving critical to the working of new organisations like the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) who are rejuvenating the insurgency.

From all the interviews and informal discussions I had with my informants it appears that there are two main factors that underpin the logic of convergence around which post Amnesty relationships are being reformulated. First is the very nature of the

Amnesty orientation and training itself. Even though the declared goal of the nonviolent training in the ex-militant orientation camps (mainly at Obubra in Cross River State) was to “extinguish the belief of the ex-militants in violence and provide him a more powerful alternative- nonviolence” (Niger Delta Amnesty Programme 2011) in their engagement with the state and multinational oil companies, it also had the effect of encouraging them to paper over the many gang histories and differences that used to divide them, thus creating a near homogenous body of actors within the individual sites in which they received training.

By bringing the ex-militants together in the camps, the Amnesty appeared to have generated a group solidarity that often came under tremendous strain pre-Amnesty among the violent gangs in spite of the best efforts of pan Niger Delta groups like MEND. In an evaluation of the relationship between members of the various gangs at the point of entry into the Camp and at the end of their orientation, FEHN staff declared that one could ‘see a change in their attitudes towards one another. Vikings no longer called Buccaneers bastards, they could get along’ (int 2014) One reason for this was perhaps that the camps created a space in which the old rivalries did not matter much in defining who accessed what; thus sharply reducing the incentives for macho performances and violence.

The orientation camps themselves, for all their pretensions to reconciliation and rapprochement, were coercive spaces reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s (1975) charge that post enlightenment forms of power and control focussed on the domination of the soul rather than the body. While the camps were not set up as prisons in the traditional sense of the word, they represented a profound change in the social life of the ex-militants and fit within the Foucauldian world view of the carceral archipelago.

Foucault makes four observations that are relevant to the social role of imprisonment and incarceration that resonate with the role that orientation camps play in DDR processes in general and which I observed in the experiences of youth who passed through the Amnesty's camps. First, he argues that the concept of imprisonment includes the idea of rehabilitation and correction which is intended to prepare the prisoner- or in the case of the Delta, the pardoned- for eventual re-entry into normal society. The orientation camps provided such a space in which ex-militants could be separated from the rest of society and 'rehabilitated' in values that allow them to function as normal members of society. Second, Foucault intimates that such separation from society allows for as well as justifies the constant surveillance and accumulation of knowledge about the incarcerated individuals. This was also a major feature of the camps as ex-militants were placed in a social space where they faced constant monitoring and in which information about them, including bio-medical details like finger prints, blood data, photographs and physical data were collected and archived with the security agencies. This remains a powerful tool of control as many ex-militants told me. They worry that the government has collected so much personal data that they could easily be tracked down should the need arise. Of course many of them are also acutely aware of the limits of state capacity and one joked that the finger print machines probably did not capture anything and that even if they did, someone would have mishandled the records anyway. This doubts nonetheless, the pardoned ex-militants are aware that the state has extracted a part of them for which they can never really be sure how it will be used.

Foucault makes a third point that the ultimate goal of the carceral process is to craft a new type of citizen whose behaviour has been re-engineered to fit accepted notions of social order. This process described by Foucault is epitomized in the Niger Delta by

what Adunbi (2015) described as the ‘crafting of peaceful citizens’ in which the ex-militants were taught by ‘peace consultants’ to effectively ignore the large scale inequalities upon which their political engagements were legitimized and pursue a bland form of citizenship that is fundamentally disengaged and accepting.

As noted earlier, these processes were ultimately part of a broader agenda aimed at disrupting the social networks that threatened oil production in the Niger Delta. However, they also created a tool of power that inadvertently created strong personal bonds among many members of otherwise opposing gangs. Forming these personal bonds was possible largely because the camps stripped ex-militants of the pressures of everyday life that had triggered many of the conflicts between their various gangs. With personalized relationships within the tightly regulated space of the orientation camps, the overarching political agendas appeared to recede into the background. As one of my informants described it, staying inside the camp helped to

‘make friends among the ‘bastards’. If not for all the peace talk during the orientation, these are boys that we should ‘fall’ who became friends. It is the oil companies dividing us, now we are together’

Apart from the very incarceration of camp itself, the details of the orientation training was designed to strip ex-militants of their macho performances of violence which had been at the center of many of the inter-gang conflicts that had blighted the Delta landscape. Following so-called ‘Kingian’ non-violence training approach, contractors like FEHN attempted to craft a new citizen based on six core principles (FEHN 2011) namely:

1. Non violence is a way of life of the courageous
2. The beloved community is the framework of the future
3. Attack forces of evil not the persons doing evil
4. Avoid internal violence of the soul as well as external violence

5. Accept suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause and in order to achieve the goal
6. The universe is on the side of justice

The whole point of these principles appear to be to divert attention away from narratives of marginalisation that has aided the social mobilization of youth in the region and to refocus it towards a bland version of citizenship that privileges the creation of ‘change agents’ and bureaucratic accomplices of the state rather than political actors. As was the case of the physical space of the camps however, these principles simultaneously strengthened the bonds of friendship across gang networks in profound ways, allowing them to converge in ways that could eventually thwart the logic of dispersal.

The Amnesty programme’s orientation camps and training feed into the second key factor that drives the logic of convergence which is a shared sense of history, marginalisation and social distance. After leaving the orientation camps, many of the ex-militants were sent off to various places to train in relevant skills or to gain an education. At these new sites, mostly located outside of the Niger Delta, communities of ex-militants or of amnesty beneficiaries inevitably emerged. These communities are bound together by a shared history of violence and marginalisation. Often unable to fit well into the social life of their host communities,⁴⁷ Amnesty beneficiaries tend to lean on each other for support. A few examples illustrate the difficulties these youth face in fitting into the new lives they had been thrust into by the Amnesty program.

Early on the 18th of July 2012, violence broke out at the Igbinedion University, Okada where about 208 ex-militants were studying under the sponsorship of the Presidential Amnesty programme. The violence was a result of disagreements over social relations between certain ex-militants and members of the Vikings cult group at the university.

⁴⁷ These are mostly Universities

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Eghosa Osaghae confirmed this in an interview with the Guardian Newspaper on the 20th of June, 2012. The violence was so intense that police had to be called in and by evening, at least two students lay dead, one of whom had reportedly been beheaded (Vanguard June 18, 2012).

The significance of this incidence is in what it tells us about gang alignments in the post amnesty period. Of the 208 'ex-militants' studying in Igbinedion University a significant number had belonged to the Vikings cult group in the years before the Amnesty (int 2014). Other groups with significant numbers among the ex-militants were the Klansmen and the Buccaneers. When the violence broke out between ex-militants and Igbinedion University Vikings however, the ex-militants banded together irrespective of previous gang affiliations in a pattern that meant that pre-amnesty relations had become irrelevant to how Amnesty youth imagined their place in the violent social universe of gangs in the Niger Delta.

In my discussions with Amnesty beneficiaries at the Igbinedion University who witnessed and participated in the June 2012 violence, I asked if members of the Vikings cult group who had accepted the amnesty still considered themselves as Vikings. Drawing on nautical imagery which underpins the internal language of the group, they answered that 'you never leave the ship until it sails to panama', implying that one actually never ceases to be a member. I then asked why they could have felt comfortable attacking Vikings members who were not amnesty beneficiaries and if this did not contradict the never leaving the boat slogan. One of them answered that:

'You see we are all Aromate⁴⁸ but these Igbinedion boys have no consciousness. What have they seen? Just fighting over girls? Some of us have faced the army! If you attack any ex-militant, it is my brother you are attacking and I will have a problem with you'

⁴⁸ 'Aromate' is a slogan of the Vikings Group.

Officials of the University note that the ex-militants face immense social ostracism not just because of their violent past, but also because of their relatively lower economic position in relation to the upper-middle class student population. As a consequence, they tend to stick together and react sensitively to perceived slights and infractions.

The social life of the ‘ex-militants’ studying in Igbinedion University does provide some indication as to how the structure of amnesty training generates incentives towards the convergence of the post amnesty networks and the everyday logics that drive this process. After passing through the Foucauldian carceral space of the orientation camps in which the state attempts to capture their souls through peace training, biomedical archiving and constant surveillance, ex-militants eventually create a social bond at the sites of training that ultimately helps them to paper over pre-amnesty patterns of conflict, while creating new network logics upon which future social mobilization may rest.

6.2.3 Ruptures, resistance and contests in new spaces of citizenship

In a detailed study of the political lives of ex-combatants in Liberia, Johannes Soderstrom (2011: 1147) wrote about how their fear of the re-eruption of violence results in self-censorship in ways that tend to delegitimize any form of open criticism of the state. This pattern of engagement came on the back of brutal civil wars and what appears to be a general apathy to violence. Godfrey Maringira (2015) also observed something similar in his study of South African ex-combatants and exiled Zimbabwe National Army veterans living in South Africa’s Gugulethu region. Maringira (2015: 83) notes however that this new found love for peace does little to unsettle military identities and that ex-combatants remain fault lines of violence (also see Hariss 2006). My observations of Niger Delta ex-militants also reflect elements of self censorship about the state. There were however important distinctions which indicate that counter

hegemonic processes are emerging in spite of overt acquiescence to the process of recapture that the Amnesty represents.⁴⁹ In the first place, whereas, as noted earlier, the gangs tended to converge in patterns that cross pre-amnesty inter-gang boundaries, the programme seems to be unsettling specific types of relationships. Key among these relationships is that between senior militant commanders and former lower level members. As will be shown later, this raises important questions about the continued validity of pre-Amnesty gang (network) labels and illustrates the need for new ways of thinking about the roles of ex-militants in the renewed violence in the region. It also highlights how changes in the structures of militant networks may impact on the post conflict landscape itself.

Another pattern evident in these networks is that many of these youth are moving into non-youth spaces (for instance with greater participation in the Ijaw National Congress and starting families) and this is changing the dynamics of control within the networks. With growing family responsibilities, it appears many ex-militants are attaining social adulthood precisely at the time when the youth identity is critical not just to their everyday lives but also to the ability of senior commanders to maintain control over them, thus unsettling the balance of power within the gangs.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that one major reason that Delta youth have refrained from any full scale assault on the Amnesty or the state that sponsors it since 2009 is the fact that former President Goodluck Jonathan was himself from the region. There is a sense in which maintaining the peace was an ethnic imperative for many Delta youth. This pattern was threatened in the run up to the 2015 election when it became increasingly likely that President Jonathan could lose the election. In fact, Asari Dokubo, perhaps the most vocal militant in the region, granted several interviews threatening that the Amnesty would breakdown and oil production would once again be disrupted should Jonathan lose the election. In fact, he even threatened a breakdown of the Nigerian state itself (See *Premium Times* September 3, 2013, *Channels TV* September 3, 2013, *Sahara Reporters* February 3, 2015). Of course this threat has not materialized in the aftermath of Jonathan's loss and the return to office of former military ruler, President Muhammadu Buhari. However, there are growing incidences of oil infrastructure targeting, kidnappings and piracy that are reminiscent of the heady days of insurgency from 2003 to 2009. It is not clear how much this would degenerate into a full scale insurgency; an uncertainty that is perhaps one of the biggest signs that the logics of dispersal described earlier have actually been effective (See reports on new waves of bombings, kidnappings and violence since the inauguration of the APC led Federal Government in Bizley: 2016, *The Nation*, March 5, 2016, *Leadership*, March 16, 2016).

Tarela, a former member of the Vikings cult whose story has appeared in several places in this study, captured this dynamic when he described the tensions with senior commanders who he alleged had been ‘converted from freedom fighters to NGOs’. This sense that senior commanders have been co-opted by the state on the one hand and that they have cornered a disproportionate portion of the dividends of Amnesty on the other, reflects the complexity of ex-militants’ views of the Amnesty. On the one hand, some of them reject the abandonment of revolutionary rhetoric and view it as, at worst, a betrayal of the cause or at best, a premature capitulation. On the other hand, they largely accept the Amnesty on its terms but complain about the disproportionate state focus on and feting of senior militants. This disgruntlement is palpable among the lower level ex-militants I interviewed. With regard to relations with ex-militant commanders, my most insightful data source came from a focus group I held with six ‘ex-militants’ who had belonged to different militias (SEA, NDPVF and NDV) between 2007 and 2009. None of them had direct contact with the most well known militants at the very top of the conflict networks in the Niger Delta. However, their views indicated that the pre-amnesty allegiances that appeared water tight had degenerated into post Amnesty discontent over disproportionate access to resources. This discontent, to be sure, did not impact lower level everyday relations among ‘ex-militants’, rather, these lower level militants tended to focus their resentment and reproach on senior commanders who they allege ‘take commission from our small allowances even though they have millions from contracts’ (int 2015).

It is striking that in spite this sense of resentment about senior commanders, many of the lower ranks still retain a deep respect and admiration for their immediate mid-level commanders, some of who, ironically, have also gained extra-ordinary wealth from the Amnesty. It appears therefore that the resentment is not really about the massive wealth

being accumulated by militant warlords but about the social distance they maintain from lower level members. Johnson (2008) notes, in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone, that power was often delegated to mid-level commanders as militias expanded their reach which often meant that they were closer to lower cadres and inevitably wielded immense post-conflict influence. This seems to be the case with Niger Delta militants too as indicated by the very different reactions that the lower level militants have to very similar (if on different scales) levels of self aggrandizement that the Amnesty has facilitated. The changes in the personal circumstances of many individual militants, especially with regard to gaining elements of social adulthood (marriage and income) meant that allegiance to senior commanders was no longer key to social navigation and could thus be subject to critical reconsideration without serious consequence.

With inclusion in the Amnesty virtually irreversible except in unusual circumstances, 'ex-militants', particularly those who had been dispersed outside of the Niger Delta region had little incentive to remain loyal to senior commanders who had become socially distant anyway. The growing gap between former senior commanders and ordinary militants however appeared to strengthen the bond between mid-level commanders and the lower cadres.

At the focus group mentioned earlier, participants talked about their disdain for senior commanders irrespective of whether they controlled the groups they belonged to or not. In the same vein, they talked about their friendly relations with mid-level commanders who they considered more trustworthy. Many also pointed at instances of personal generosity by their immediate commanders at various points of their militant careers thereby rationalizing their continued loyalty. What these inter-level ruptures and realignments show is that the Amnesty has fundamentally changed the way youth

imagine themselves within the resistance landscape and highlights the importance of mapping these networks if one is to grasp their meaning.

6.3 The Amnesty and changing youth Pathways

What the above indicates is that the various youth pathways have been transformed by the spatial and scalar incentives of the 2009 Amnesty. For instance, as a direct consequence of the Amnesty's policy logics of dispersal, convergence and contestation described above, one can discern important shifts in the Delta gang universe among which are the emergence of new *decks* situated abroad and the consolidation of groups under central leadership in places like Port Harcourt. One can also discern the transformation of the NGO landscape from an activist advocacy space to one that exists to service the emerging Niger Delta peace economy. Finally, the evidence is palpable of the emergence of new militant groups seeking to rupture old relationships and torpedo the Amnesty settlement itself. Together, these transformations show that the Amnesty program has had profound impact on the universe of youth in the region. In spite of this impact however, there is very little doubt that the clientelistic logic of politics as well as the fluidity of social relations in the Delta have changed only very marginally, if at all.

6.3.1 “We are all Icelanders now”: New Gang Geographies in post Amnesty Niger Delta

Exploring the shifting relationships between violence, space and territory in youth gangs in Central America, Winton (2012) writes about the impact of transnational migration on identities and structure. He notes in particular how the US' deportation of members of Los Angeles' *mara* gangs into different parts of Latin America created new relations and structures not just for local gangs in the Latin American States but also for gang culture within the US itself. In many ways, this pattern of displacement of

gang members across the Niger Delta appears to have had similar impacts on the mutually constitutive role that identity and space plays for its youth.

In a BBC report (BBC 2016) on Nigerian criminal gangs working within sex trafficking rings in Spain for instance, it was revealed that their activities have spiked significantly in the last six years. Citing a Europe wide police investigation, the BBC revealed the role of cult groups within the gangs and hinted at a growing transnational migration of members of these groups to Europe. Similar connections were described in a separate investigation into Nigerian run internet scams in North America (CBC 2015). Of course youth involved with cults in Nigeria have always been part of the immigration wave to Europe, North America and now increasingly to Malaysia and Thailand. The expansion of cult activities within Nigerian immigrant communities in recent years is however an interesting entry into the changing geographies of gangs in the Niger Delta as a consequence of the Amnesty's policy of dispersal. There appears to be a growing demand within organized criminal networks for members of cults and gangs to serve as enforcers in various illicit enterprises. This was noted in the both the Spanish case cited above as well as another in Canada in which immigrant youth organizing around Delta cult identities have become the violent arm of fraud rings (CBC 2015).

While this cannot solely be attributed to the Amnesty, it should be noted that the dispersal of youth across the world under this programme has facilitated the entry of many individuals who, in spite of the ongoing peace narrative in the region, remain firmly embedded within a social universe that valorizes violence. Indeed, suspicions about the involvement of some Amnesty 'delegates' in these new transnational centers of cult activity is confirmed by Kingsley Kuku, the former head of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (*Premium Times September 13, 2013*). In an address to departing amnesty recipients, Kuku (2013) noted that as at 2013, some 690 recipients have had

to be repatriated or had their scholarships withdrawn as a result of violent activities outside Nigeria. Many of those whose scholarships were withdrawn in the UK have refused to return to Nigeria and instead melted into the large Nigerian communities in places like Moston, Manchester and parts of London.

More significant however is the role that these particular troubled category of Amnesty recipients now play in grafting local Delta gang mores into the savvy networks of Nigerian organized crime abroad. What this does to the street gang pathway is that new communities of Delta gangs and cult groups are appearing across Europe and they are establishing new patterns of relationships within the transnational networks they are now embedded in (mainly by introducing violent components such as harassment, beatings and intimidation) as well as retaining connections to members who remain in Nigeria.

Describing these new patterns of relationships, Paul, himself an Amnesty sponsored student (int 2015) noted that:

Enough (many) Bucca(neer) guys from PH are now here in the UK. But once you are in, you are in. that is it. They are helping 'yahoo boys', selling drugs and sometimes causing trouble. Go to London, they are there. Its funny because the government sent them to read. But some boys can't change. Government people don't know that. And those boys still travel home to do jobs. You know nobody will recognize them easily. They do hits and just come back to the UK to hustle. That is what is happening.

The sentiments Paul describes here is echoed by many 'ex-militants' and gang members and fits with independent investigations being conducted by security sources as far as North America (CBC 2015).

While this dispersal of youth is occurring on the transnational scale, thereby transforming the nature of opportunities open to individuals who now straddle a glocalised stage, there is a growing consolidation of cult groups in the Port Harcourt

area under the iron grip and umbrella of the NDV and Icelanders Cult group led by Ateke Tom.

This process can be traced almost entirely to the impact of the Amnesty. Ateke Tom is one of the main beneficiaries of the redistribution logic of the Amnesty in that he was awarded a massive multimillion dollar pipeline protection contract, alongside others like Government Ekemupolo ‘Tompolo’, Boyloaf and Asari Dokubo (See section 1.6 in Chapter 1). This huge payoff was also significantly strengthened by the political support Ateke Tom received from Patience Jonathan, the former first lady who hails from Okirika, the same town as Ateke.⁵⁰ Finally, Ateke has remained rooted in the dynamics of the Port Harcourt gang universe, and has used the surge in resources and state access to strengthen his position among cult groups in ways that many of the other commanders appear not to have managed. One of the reasons for this is that Ateke is the most high-profile ex-militant commander who remained in a serious and violent political contestation in spite of having accepted the Amnesty. This time however, rather than confronting the state and oil multinationals, he has been intimately involved in the local politics of Rivers State which pitched former President Jonathan, his wife and their allies against the then Governor of Rivers, Rotimi Amaechi. As is often the case in the Niger Delta, this political battle was being fought out on the streets as youth gangs took sides.

With his massive financial muscle from the Amnesty settlement as well as ample political support from the Federal Government, Ateke appears to have effectively used

⁵⁰ The disagreement in the then ruling party the PDP had pitched former President Jonathan against Rotimi Amaechi who was the Governor of the oil rich Rivers State. The vocal former first lady, Patience Jonathan, naturally took her husband’s side and engaged in sometimes very public spats with Amaechi. This broader national political tension within the PDP was partly fought out in OKrika, a suburb of Port Harcourt where Patience Jonathan was born. She enlisted the support of ‘ex-militants’ like Ateke Tom to undermine Governor Amaechi’s authority. Ateke Tom of course also used this state of affairs to deepen his control of gangs and cult groups in the State. For details of the Jonathan-Amaechi conflict, see Jakpor in *The Vanguard*, August 13, 2013 and Xan Rice in *The Financial Times*, July 21, 2013.

this broader political conflict to stamp out (or perhaps more accurately- force underground) the multiple cult identities that once dominated the Port Harcourt gang universe. As one former member of the Black Axe who has now joined the Icelanders put it: “In Port Harcourt now, we are all Icelanders. If you don’t pledge your loyalty, Ateke will kill you. Its as simple as that”!

It is unlikely that this outcome would have occurred without the Amnesty. As described in Chapter Three, there were two main coalitions of gangs in the Rivers State area- the Deybam and Deywell (Oruwari and Opuene 2006). The Icelandic confraternity was one of the leading groups within the Deywell coalition. By strengthening and legitimising Ateke Tom, the state fundamentally changed the balance of power in these groups in such a way that to be able to operate within the region, many erstwhile independent groups have had to pledge some form of allegiance to Ateke’s Icelanders.

The implications of this consolidation of gang structures within Port Harcourt for the varied self framings of youth and social mobilizations are immense. For one, it significantly increases the chances that youth gangs will expend more of their energies in highly politicised engagements and ensures the existence of reservoir of youth who can be co-opted into relationships with the political class. This was evident during the 2015 Federal and State elections in Rivers which was unusually violent even for a Niger Delta state and more so for a relatively peaceful election.⁵¹ Second, it has ironically also been one of the key basis of relative peace within the gang landscape. Whereas inter-

⁵¹ Before the local and federal elections in 2015, there were numerous credible news reports of violence in Rivers State. I was conducting fieldwork in Port Harcourt and its environs around that time and it was truly a very tense period. In an upscale neighbourhood I lived in briefly during that time, I and a colleague almost ran into a gun battle by ex-militants who were squabbling over the sharing of funds for a political rally. Reports from various sources indicate that tens of people were killed in the lead up to the election and the election itself was violent in many areas-leading to calls for its cancellation by the opposition APC. The ruling PDP retained the local offices but lost the Presidency. A commission of enquiry was eventually set up to look into the violence and its report highlighted the disruptive role played by ex-militants. See Rivers State Commission of Enquiry Report 2015. For news reports on the violence before the elections, see Ben Ezeamalu in *Premium Times* May 13, 2015.

cult wars were quite common in the pre-amnesty years, they have become less frequent. They also seem to have moved out of the typical urban spaces like *Colombia* into rural sites like Bori and Ogboinbiri (See *The Vanguard* June 11, 2015, *Leadership*, November 10, 2016) where illicit oil extraction and refining continue to generate tensions.

For youth seeking to enter into, return to or maintain circulation within the Delta's gang or cult universe, choice has been significantly restricted. This has impacted on the way membership aids in the social maturation project of many youth. Tammy (int 2015) expressed it this way in Bori, Bayelsa State:

Those days, you can just do your own thing. Call yourself Bushboys or anything you like and start obtaining people. You can even join militants and become a freedom fighter. Meanwhile you are really just a cult boy o!. But now, things are different, if you can't wrk with Ateke in Port Harcourt or his people here in Bori, then you can't call your self a cult boy. You are just a robber. And one day, someone will just burn you.

The point Tammy was making was that the consolidation of the various cults under the control of Ateke has taken agency away from many youth and closed the door to the autonomous use of revolutionary claim making as a path towards the legitimization of what are often criminal cult enterprises. To be youth now means being loyal to Ateke Tom's cult organisation for many within the Port Harcourt space. It is unclear if this consolidation is happening in other parts of the Niger Delta and what it means for youth politics. However, it is apparent that the Amnesty is changing the landscape of cults by imposing new entry criteria on the old gang logics.

6.3.2 NGOs and a Post Amnesty Peace Economy

The pre-Amnesty Niger Delta bore many of the trademark indices of a conflict economy in which 'economic relationships and transactions which cause, sustain or prolong periods of physical political violence or instances where actors take advantage of

political violence for financial gain' abounded (Peterson 2014:4). As actors within a petro-economy of conflict (Zalik 2004, Watts 2007), NGOs operating within the Niger Delta were not immune from the context and, as shown in Chapter Three, were important parts of both the architecture of resistance and of repression. In the wake of a DDR project like the Amnesty which sought to change the scalar and spatial character of incentives for youth in the Delta however (Aghedo 2013, Ushie 2013, Obi 2014), the landscape in which NGOs operate has inevitably been transformed to reflect the new priorities set by the Nigerian State and its multinational oil partners.

The new priorities have developed around a narrative of peace which requires the recapturing of clients in ways that allow for unfettered access to oil. In the circumstance, NGOs like FEHN and PIND were recruited by the state and multinationals to ensure the new peace agenda seeped into the advocacy map (FEHN 2013, PIND 2014). The universe of incentives that created the Niger Delta's conflict economy is thus being transformed into a new peace economy. This new peace economy does not meet Galtung's (1969) optimistic vision of peace in that it neither fully eradicates direct physical violence nor does it eradicate structural forms of violence, including less tangible forms of inequality and injustice (see Obi 2014 for instance). It is more appropriately described as the peace of oil in which actors who are able to operate on behalf of or on the side of powerful interests can manipulate its terms to push back against physical violence but ultimately shield structural inequalities from questioning. It fits more with Peterson's (2014) idea of a negative peace economy in which economic relationships are generally 'no longer reliant on overt physical violence' but in which structural violence and inequalities remain central to how the system functions. This view of negative violence has been discussed recently by various other scholars including Thies (2010) and Diehl (2016).

This transformation has however not fundamentally changed the way youth experience the NGO pathway itself. In any case, as shown by the Chevron GMOU case described in chapter three, internal NGO structures in the Niger Delta have generally been designed to facilitate interactions with funding agencies and the new peace economy in which the state began to contract DDR provisioning to NGOs did little to change that. NGOs like FEHN have simply shifted their channels of accountability away from oil multinationals and foreign ‘partners’ to the Nigerian state which has become their main funder. In a speech at the Nigeria Economic Summit Group meeting in 2015, FEHN founder Allen Onyeama described the situation thus:

The government recognizes our work in peace training and gave us the contract to run the orientation camp at Obubra. We have done it very well and have contributed our quota to peace in the region. It is important that we work with government to bring peace, nobody can accuse of not delivering on that. We give regular reports and monitor the delegates to ensure that our non violent training is still valid in their minds.

Ultimately however, there does not appear to be a noticeable change in the NGO pathway. Rather, the Amnesty appears to have reinforced the way NGOs work and engage in the Niger Delta. It has deepened the impact of the neoliberal context of the voluntary sector described by Ron and Cooley (2002), particularly in the way it structures the organisational agenda and ultimately security of NGOs. The Amnesty has changed the focus and context of NGO operations but has left the internal structures and logics that drive their neoliberal agendas pretty much intact.

6.3.3 Re-emergent sites of power: the Niger Delta Avengers and futures of resistance

The same cannot however be said about the insurgency landscape. This is perhaps where the Amnesty has had the greatest impact and where the youthful experience has shifted most profoundly. The most obvious change since 2009 is that new militant organisations like the Niger Delta Avengers have appeared and they now not only

threaten the oil infrastructure in the same way that the old ones like MEND did before the Amnesty, but they also highlight profound fractures within the youth universe itself. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) was launched sometime in January of 2016. It is still too early to know definitively who the actors behind the organisation are or what political dynamics helped create it. There is growing consensus however that the formation of the organisation was made possible by a combination of factors. The first is the uncertainty within the violent networks of the Niger Delta about the Amnesty and about lucrative pipeline protection contracts that was created by the PDP's loss of the presidency in the 2015 general election (*CNBC* 2016). This loss was significant principally because it signalled a shift in the locus of Nigeria's governing coalitions back to the North and thus away from Niger Delta politicians led by then President Goodluck Jonathan. The second contributing factor relates to the internal fractures within youth coalitions in the Niger Delta. These fractures are as much the implications of shifting internal alliances as youth groups tried to navigate to take advantage of the new structure of incentives created by the Amnesty, as they are a consequence of broader political competition between the two leading political parties, the APC and PDP.

These internal fractures within the youth alliances that had created MEND are perhaps the most relevant to this study. This is to the extent that they significantly unsettle the militant pathway and are creating new ways for youth to experience what are essentially old pre-Amnesty Niger Delta conditions. Many press briefings and website messages of the NDA illustrate the tensions within the pre-Amnesty militant networks. For instance, on June 18, 2016, the NDA released a statement in which they directly attacked one of the leading ex-militant commanders, Ebiakawoei Ben, as well as prominent politicians in the region.

The high command of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) condemn in strong term the continuous efforts of Mr Ebikabowei Ben (Boyloaf), Ayiri Emami, Timipre Silva, Adams Oshiomhole and their paymasters to link and catch-in our activities to promote their political MEND that has purportedly named a team to negotiate with the Federal government. We are not however surprised by the resurrection of the defunct MEND by these personalities because these are groups of settled Ex-fighters that they have been arming, regrouping and rebranding over the years. The people of the Niger delta knows that the likes of Timipre Silva, Boyloaf and Ayiri Emami are professional conflict merchants in the region, the only surprised entry is the outgoing Governor of Edo state Adams oshiomhole which reason is not far fetch as such he want some assistance and machineries from the criminal elements of the defunct MEND.

We are making the last appeal and warning to this so-called MEND to excuse the NDA from their criminal ways and gangs ups. Nobody can ambush the struggle, the world knows that Boyloaf and his group of bank robbers have been settled since 2009 of which he is still collecting stipends for ghost names in the presidential Amnesty program (PAP). Please Mr. Victor Ben (Boyloaf) if you and your criminals want to resurrect the defunct MEND and negotiate with the Government that is your business but stop using ghost names to collect money from the Presidential Amnesty program. That is our only advise and remember we know all your activities. (NDA 2016)

This strong condemnation of Ebikabowei Ben in particular, follows a growing pattern of competing attempts by opposing sides in the newly emerging militant alliances to delegitimize each other. For instance, MEND released a statement in July 2016 noting that:

“MEND notes with grave concern the recent renewed spate of unprovoked and persistent attacks on Nigeria’s oil installations by the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)...Many of its (NDA) members were MEND commanders and fighters who jumped on the presidential amnesty gravy train without knowing why they took up arms in the first place. (MEND 2016, reported in *The Nigerian Tribune*, July 3, 2016).⁵²

There is also increasing evidence that outside of the organised movements like the NDA and MEND, many of the pre-Amnesty personal contingent networks that allowed the insurgency to thrive so much are also breaking down profoundly, thus creating low level tensions that continue to eat away at the solidarities that built organisations like

⁵² See similar condemnations from the IYC and other Delta youth groups in *The Vanguard*, July 8, 2016 and *The Punch*, July 3, 2016.

MEND. This is evidenced by the growing social distance between senior commanders and the lower cadres discussed earlier.

It is also interesting to note that the locus of the Niger Delta insurgency appears to have moved away from the oil state of Rivers to Delta and Bayelsa. The NDA is based out of the Warri South West Local Government, Gbaramatu Kingdom and villages around the Forcados River in Delta state. This geographical shift is of course reflective of these same ruptures within militant ranks where key commanders like Ateke Tom who operate in the Rivers and Bayelsa state axis appear to have settled into the Amnesty while others like Tom Polo, who are based in Delta state continue to have serious misgivings and frictions with the government.

Figure 7: Main Sites of NDA oil infrastructure attacks



Source: Risk Intelligence 2016

Whatever the direct triggers for the emergence of the NDA, what is not in doubt is the massive impact the organization has had on the Nigeria's oil output and the threat it poses to the peace imposed by the Amnesty settlement. The NDA has launched no less than forty attacks on oil installations since January 2016 and has shown remarkable resilience and sophistication that at least rivals that of MEND in the pre-Amnesty years.

At some point in May 2016, NDA successfully cut Nigeria's oil production by 800,000 bpd to 1.4million (Steffen 2016). This is as dramatic as the 2007 cut in production orchestrated by MEND.

Table 17: NDA attacks on oil infrastructure between January and October 2016

S/N	Date	Attack Details	Site
1	January 14	Several gas pipelines and oil installations	Warri South West
2	February 10	Bonny-Soku Gas Export Line	Bonny
3	February 14	Underwater Forcados 48-inch Export Pipeline belonging to Shell	Forcados Export Terminal
4	February 19	Clough Creek-Tebidaba Pipeline belonging to ENI	Bayelsa
5	May 4	Chevron Valve Platform	Abiteye
		Underwater Forcados 48-inch export pipeline	Forcados
6	May 5	The Escravos-Lagos Pipeline System, linking Warri to Lagos	Escravos
		Chevron oil installations resulting in the destruction of Chevron Well D25	Abiteye
7	May 6	Chevron Oil pipelines	Alero, Dibi, Otunana, and Makaraba
		The crude oil pipeline linking Warri to Kaduna as well as a gas line that supplies both Lagos and Abuja with electricity.	Warri
8	May 9	Attack on Nigerian Army Personel, 3 Soldiers killed	Foropa, Southern Ijaw LGA
9	May 13	The Chevron pipeline was blown up for a second time in 7 days following repairs done by Chevron.	Makaraba
10	May 20	The Escravos-Lagos Pipeline System was once again blown up by NDA militants following the commencement of repairs being done on the pipeline following the May 5 attack.	Escravos
11	May 25	Chevron's main electricity feed pipeline was blown up at the Escravos Tank Farm	Ciera Creek.

12	May 27	Eni and Shell's pipelines 1, 2, and 3 Several gas and oil pipelines belong to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation	Nembe Warri.
13	May 30	Attack on the Armed Forces resulting in 20 civilian deaths and unconfirmed numbers among the militants, the Police and Army personnel.	Gulobokri and Eweleso, Brass
14	May 31	Chevron's Oil Wells RMP23 and RMP24 said to be the company's highest producing wells in the Niger Delta, were blown up.	the village of Dibi, Warri South-West LGA
15	June 2	Ogboinbiri-Tebidaba and Cough Creek-Tebidaba pipelines, belonging to Eni, in Bayelsa State.	Ogboinbiri and Cough Creek
16	June 3	Shell's Forcados 48-inch Export Pipeline for a third time following a series of repairs done by Royal Dutch Shell. Eni's Brass-Tebidaba oil pipeline	Forcados Bayelsa State.
17	June 8	Chevron's Well RMP20	near the Dibi Flow Station in Warri North LGA.
18	June 9	Chanomi Creek oil facility, belonging to Royal Dutch Shell	near the village of Ogidigben, Warri South West.
19	June 10	The Obi Obi Brass Trunk line, belonging to Eni.	Bayelsa
20	June 16	Crude oil pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation	Oruk-Anam LGA, Akwa Ibom
21	July 1	Crude oil Trunk line belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation linked to the Warri refinery	Warri
22	July 2	Two major crude oil trunk lines belonging to the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company were bombed	near the Batan flow station in Delta State.
23	July 3	Chevron Wells 7 and 8 bombed	the Abiteye flow station in Warri South West

			LGA.
24	July 5	Chevron Well 10 bombed Manifold belonging to the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company, as well as two crude oil trunk lines belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company were destroyed	near the Otunana flow station. near Banta,
24	July 6	Chevron manifolds RMP 22, 23 and 24. These manifolds are major convergence points for numerous crude oil pipelines operated by Chevron Corp.	Delta State
25	July 8	Nembe pipelines 1, 2, and 3, belonging to Shell and Eni Brass-Tebidaba trunk line	Nembe, Bayelsa Rivers State.
26	July 11	The "Qua Iboe 48" crude oil pipeline belonging to Exxon Mobil was bombed.	Bight of Biafra
27	July 12	Natural gas pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation blown up	Ogijo, Ogun State
28	July 18	crude oil trunk line near the Batan Flow Station belonging to Shell was blown up for the second time in barely two weeks	Warri South LGA
29	July 24	Militants blow up a natural gas pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation	Nsit-Ibom LGA, Akwa Ibom
30	July 31	The Trans Ramos crude oil pipeline, owned by Royal Dutch Shell, was bombed	Odimodi, Burutu LGA, Delta State
31	August 30-September 3	About 20 Nigerian Soldiers killed in action by heavily armed NDA militants during the first 4 days of "Operation Crocodile Smiles", 16 were killed along the River Ethiope while the other 4 were killed in the creeks of Bayelsa State	River Ethiope Bayelsa State Creeks
32	September 23	militants blew up the Bonny 48-inch crude oil pipeline, owned by Royal Dutch Shell at the Bonny Export Terminal	Bonny
33	October 25	Militants blew up the Escravos Export Pipeline, owned by Chevron which supplies the Escravos GTL petroleum refineries with thousands of barrels of crude daily	Escravos

Source: News Reports, Wikipedia

It is also interesting to note that other hitherto unknown militant groups have emerged including the Red Egbesu Water Lions and the Concerned Militant Leaders. These groups further complicate a still emerging and very fluid militant landscape and show that youth networks in the region are splintering in interesting ways.

The complications generated by these new unsettling changes to the militant pathway, coming as they are on the heels of six years of relative stability, has impacted on the legitimacy of insurgency as a tool for negotiating with the state in the Niger Delta. The 'new' insurgent youth cannot hope to extract the same levels of legitimacy which helped the pre-amnesty militants to escape condemnation for their actions. Indeed, perhaps as a tribute to the Amnesty programme, the language of support from the Delta region is at best cautious but often silent altogether. This implies that 'new' youth would likely experience the militant pathway very differently.

Speaking about the re-emerging episodes of violent militancy in the region, a number of ex-militants I spoke to noted that navigating the uncertain legitimacy conundrum is perhaps one of the biggest challenges 'new' militants would face. Kingsley Urban Gorilla for instance argued that:

Personally, I support the avengers. Look at all the place, what development can you see? Even the amnesty, how many people are enjoying it? But this is me. How about others? People are now used to the Amnesty and don't want anything that will cause unnecessary trouble. Some people are even angry that militants cornered all the money for the Amnesty. So why should they support a new set just to make those ones rich again?

Urban Gorilla's sentiment partly illustrates the dilemma faced by people in his unique position- that is those who were involved in the pre-Amnesty insurgencies but have not been able to attain social adulthood in spite of the Amnesty settlement. Yet, it also highlights the challenge that 'new' militants would face in convincing the broader Delta public of the legitimacy of this new round of violence. It raises important questions as to whether they would be able to extract social respectability from militant action in the

same way that pre-Amnesty youth did. What is clear is that the Amnesty has changed youth self framings in ways that suggest that they would experience the militant pathway differently. Difference here does not of course suggest that key parameters like state violence and in fact some sort of compromise would be absent, but rather that as a space for constructing alternative youth identities, they cannot take social legitimacy and respectability for granted in the way in which pre-Amnesty youth did. This ultimately means that rather than simply confronting the state and oil multinationals, the NDA would have to delegitimize both the Amnesty settlement and the youth who support it. Social respect for the ‘new’ militant would therefore come from imagining difference in complex ways that is dependent on highlighting internal divisions and ruptures within the youthscape.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that specific implementation logics inherent in the Amnesty Programme’s design has had a profound impact on the nature of youth networks in the Delta region. It identified patterns of dispersal, convergence and contestation as the three ways in which the Amnesty is changing militant youth networks in the Niger Delta. Drawing on interviews with officials of the Amnesty and ex-militants, it was established that the logistical implications of geographical disconnection of the militants from the Niger Delta’s network of creeks has not necessarily unravelled youth incentives to build networks, rather, it has redefined the nature of connections, spaces and scope of their organisations. This has happened in ways that undermine the ability to effectively mobilize against oil infrastructure, at least on the scale seen before the Amnesty was launched.

The chapter also argued that in spite of the dispersal of Amnesty delegates across wide geographical spaces, a process of convergence is also emerging in which those who are

placed in the same training space tend to band together irrespective of previous gang affiliations. Training spaces like universities, orientation camps and the like have therefore emerged as the new identity markers for many ex-militant youth. I linked the emergence of these sorts of spaces as identity markers to Foucault's treatment of the prison and showed how the orientation camps in particular fulfil the four elements of the carceral process. The chapter argued that partly as a consequence of gaining some financial independence as a result of the Amnesty, many militant youth are beginning to claim their place in non youth spaces like the Ijaw National Congress and by finally forming families of their own. Occurring as it is at precisely a time when the youth identity is critical to their access to resources being availed by the Amnesty as well as to the control that senior ex-commanders have over them, the movement into non youth spaces is profoundly shifting the dynamics of control within Delta networks by strengthening lower level solidarity at the expense of loyalty to charismatic senior commanders. The implication is that ordinary militant youth are more able to forge their paths independent of former commanders.

These implementation logics of the Amnesty and the different nature of incentives it has imposed is changing the three youth pathways into Delta politics discussed in chapter three. Apart from the NGO pathway which doesn't seem to have changed fundamentally, this chapter showed how the spaces of the street and the militant universe have been profoundly impacted by the Amnesty. These structural changes to the nature of youth networks, alongside with changes in the way incentives are structured through sociological motivations like respectability as discussed in Chapter Five, represent some of the key impacts the Amnesty programme has had on the way youth mobilize as well as imagine themselves in the oil rich Niger Delta.

CONCLUSION

7.1 Two Events

On the 1st of February 2012, a group of armed men, dressed in military fatigues attacked the home of ‘General’ Africas Ukparisai, a former militant commander who had accepted the Amnesty. In that attack, the assailants blew up a building within Africas’ compound that housed the headquarters of Bajero, a private security firm which had won a pipeline protection contract from the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Africas himself was a director in that company and had secured the multimillion naira contract on the strength of his status as a militant commander. During the attack, policemen guarding Africas’ home were tied up and left in the Bajero building before it was set alight. One of them was killed and the others sustained serious injuries. Other structures within the compound were bombed with dynamite before the attackers were forced out. To repel this attack, it took the intervention of men of the Nigerian armed forces tied to the JTF’s Operation Pulo Shield based at the Ogboinbiri Flow Station and owned by the Nigeria Agip Oil Company. As soon as the day broke, the chairman of Southern Ijaw Local Government of the oil state of Bayelsa where the incident occurred visited the scene and strongly condemned the attack. The Deputy Governor of the State, Werinipre Seibarugu, also toured the scene and issued a statement on behalf of the state government, strongly condemning the attack. News reports after the attack indicated that it had been carried out by aggrieved members of Africas’ own gang who resented his capturing of the large multimillion dollar pipeline protection contract and refusal to adequately compensate them from the largesse.

To look at another incident. Sometime in late 2011, a number of ex-militants receiving training in Universities across Nigeria were invited to the Amnesty Office in Abuja. They had been involved in protests against corruption in the Amnesty programme,

especially against what they called illegal deductions from their allowances. When they arrived Abuja, they were met by a hostile group of Amnesty officials who accused them of threatening the Presidency and who handed them over to armed men from the State Security Service. These men, with the aid of soldiers from the Army quickly whisked them off to an unknown location. One of the ex-militants who had been a protest leader at the Lead City University, Ibadan reported the incident thus:

They called me to Abuja [...] other people from other schools were there. [...] without even giving me an opportunity to speak, they said by protesting I was threatening the presidency [...]. Before I [understood what was going on] the SSS [State Security Services] came in, handcuffed me and one of my colleagues and took us to the guardroom. They forced us to write undertakings. All those things were being done to shut us up [...] they seized our ID Cards and told us we were no longer in the programme. We were even beaten up, you know? By Soldiers and SSS [...] the most painful part of it is that when I reported to my commander, he just said I should shut up. That what was I complaining about. We are just managing the situation [enduring the situation] now because there is no choice'. (Tarela int 2013).

On their release, Tarela returned to Ibadan thoroughly disillusioned about the Amnesty but more so with senior members of his group who appeared to have taken the side of the state when he reported the harassment to them. Many of the affected ex-militants at Lead City University met and began to discuss actively about cutting ties with their former groups and commanders who they believe had betrayed them.

The two incidents described above illustrate very starkly the complex ways in which the Amnesty has reformulated the social relationships of youth in the Niger Delta. They also show how youth have responded by taking advantage of the changing climate of politics. In the former, Africas, a former militant who, just three years ago was bombing pipelines was now a director in a company charged with protecting the very same oil installations. His former foes, the police, gave their lives defending his home and place of business. His former foes, the Army, mobilized forces from an oil flow station nearby to aid him to repel the attackers. The attackers were his former gang members unhappy

about the new relationships. By inviting the armed forces to defend his home and business, Africas showed that he understood the profound shifts that have occurred in the insurgent landscape and the side of whom he now was. Apparently, history turned full circle on that February night and provided important lessons about the need to understand social fluidity and change in the politics of Niger Delta youth.

For the Lead City University ex-militants, the coercive face of the Amnesty was brought into the open with their harassment and torture by soldiers acting on the orders of officials of the programme. Their experience also underscores the role the Amnesty plays in rupturing social relations within Delta youth networks as it exposed the complicity of senior militant commanders in the coercion of ex-militants. Yet, their response to that harassment was directed not at the Amnesty but at their old allies who were at the apex of gang leadership. This showed that they understood not just what had changed as a consequence of the Amnesty, but also the important alliances they needed to be able to stay ahead of the shifting landscape.

Honwana (2013: 165) wrote that young people are ‘aware that existing socioeconomic systems have no place for them and that the state is not upholding the social contract with its citizenry’. In response, she notes, the youth are ‘creatively piecing together independent spaces for sociability, livelihood and survival outside hegemonic power structures’. To understand these ‘independent spaces of sociability’, one must dig into the micro-politics of youth to identify how they imagine, organize and govern the alternative sites of citizenship they construct in order to navigate a bewildering social system. This study was an interrogation of one of the contemporary examples of such articulation of youthful agency in a context that is unique in its precarity, locality and globalism.

As was stated in the introduction, the main goal of this study was to analyse the micro-level politics of Niger Delta youth networks, drawing due attention to their articulations of agency which stand outside of but are not necessarily autonomous to the politics of oil extraction, and to show how the Amnesty declared for insurgents in 2009 has impacted on this politics. To meet this goal, the study asked what pathways facilitate youth engagement with politics in the Niger Delta? how do Niger Delta youth networks emerge, imagine and organize themselves? and what has been the amnesty's impact on the nature of relationships within these networks?

7.2 Summary of Chapters

In order to address these issues, the analysis was presented in six interconnected chapters divided into two parts. The first part consists of three chapters which provided a comprehensive context to the study. The first chapter introduced the long history of extractive politics in Nigeria's Niger Delta. It started by analyzing how the oil industry evolved through three interconnected phases marked by colonial oil concessions, increased state participation and structural adjustment. These phases, the chapter argued, do not just signpost changes within the oil industry but also simultaneously reflect the impact of local and global political transitions on social relations in Nigeria. It also argued that some of the explanations for the recent insurgencies and violent social interactions in the Delta region can be located in the *longue durée* of oil history some dating as far back as the 1907 colonial Oil Mining Regulation. The chapter drew on political economic insights to point out that while one would expect that a resource so central to the fiscal health of the country would be governed efficiently, it is precisely because of this centrality that its governance has been deliberately constructed in opaque forms in Nigeria. This opacity means that oil industry regulation is often weak, left unimplemented or non-existent. The resulting governance deficit expresses itself in

an external locus of power (where foreign capital and multinationals maintain immense control), in growing informalization of state processes and in the spatial realities of the Niger Delta itself.

The implications of weak and corrupt governance of the Delta's extractive sector have been dire and include the emergence of a multifaceted and constantly changing insurgency landscape. These insurgencies have ultimately complicated Nigeria's many citizenship and identity questions and pushed themes like environmental crisis, livelihood distortions, self determination and minority rights to the center of the national discourse. As was highlighted in Chapter One, the response of the state to these questions has often been brutal. Yet, there are numerous examples of attempts to incorporate rather than co-opt the Niger Delta into the lucrative oil driven national patronage system. The chapter drew attention for instance, to special state agencies like the NDDB of 1961 and the NDRBDA of 1976 as historical examples of state led incorporation projects which nevertheless failed to generate the sense of belonging that was required to dam the tide of resentment that was raging in the region. These agencies and the numerous adhoc committees on the Niger Delta over the years indicate that the 2009 Amnesty programme around which this study is based is itself derived from a familiar patronage logic and, while unique in its near exclusive focus on youth, is far from the revolutionary intervention that its proponents claim it is.

On the back of a youth insurrection that unsettled the region in unprecedented ways, the Amnesty was designed to reconstitute ruptured clientilistic relations in ways that did not necessarily undermine patronage as a logic of governance but rather strengthened it enough to impose the stability required for unfettered extraction of oil. The chapter concluded with a comprehensive analysis of the details of the Amnesty and raised questions about its neoliberal peacebuilding credentials.

Chapter Two extended this background by constructing an analytical framework for the study which detailed its theoretical, conceptual and methodological entry points

It argued that filling the gaps in the Delta literature requires developing a new analytical framework that not just treats violent social transitions and complexities as if they were merely bizarre products of a repressive system, but which recognizes that they have become the very context of social life itself and that actors live within that reality. It then used social navigation, permanence and social uncertainty as theoretical entry points into proposing this new framework which aims to move the Delta literature on from scarcity and resistance frameworks (as in Homer-Dixon 1999, Omeje 2004, Obi 2009 and Oluwaniyi 2010). These entry points answered questions that would emerge from an empirical study of the politics of Delta youth. For instance, how does the ever present reality of violence shape youth choices? How does uncertainty interact with that fact of violence? and with what strategies do youth manipulate these complexities?

The three theoretical entry points all combine to inscribe normality onto the overwhelming evidence of violence in the Delta region and to suggest that rapid social change is both a product of as well as a producer of social action. In that regard, they allow for a nuanced engagement with the interesting ways in which youth interacts with an environment where uncertainty is a permanent fixture of life; in which they must deal with this permanency with tools that are themselves constantly shifting and in which they also have to do so for goals that are fluid. This framework is further clarified in by a detailed critique of the concepts of youth, networks and informality which run through the entire dissertation. Each of these concepts were contextualized in order to show not just how they applied to the Delta in general but also how they were used in the study. The methodological questions raised by the study of social shifters like youth within a violent extractive context were also dealt with in this chapter. Here, the various

methodological choices made were clarified and descriptive details of data sources and analytical strategies were also provided.

The third chapter moved the study into a more substantive space. It focussed on answering the first research question which was about the pathways that facilitate youth politics in the Niger Delta. To do this, the chapter provided a detailed analysis of the nature of the social infrastructure through which youth both create and navigate the Niger Delta's conflict landscape. It focused in particular on how the three main pathways of NGOs, streets gangs and ethnic militia served as funnels that aided youth entry into politics before the Amnesty was launched. It also mapped the complex relationships between individual youth actors as well as between the various organisations through which they participated in these pathways. By doing this, the chapter provided the first comprehensive view of what it was like to engage as youth from different vantage points in the Delta conflict landscape. The *Gephi* social network analysis software was used to systematically examine the multi-sited and multi-typed data being used. The focus was on spotlighting patterns of relationships and connections between and among organisations that would otherwise be invisible without a systematic process for coding what is a mix of qualitative data sources.

The study then moved into the second part whose main goal was to highlight the sociological processes, motivations and notions that govern the Delta's youth networks. Starting off Part two, Chapter Four answered the second part of research question number two which was about how youth organize themselves and started by questioning if prevailing explanations for how youth mobilize in the Delta which tend to use certain identity signifiers like ethnicity as organizing principles provided complete pictures. The chapter acknowledged that these signifiers were indeed relevant in certain cases, but pointed out that the role of contingency had been ignored and that

it was a uniquely useful explanation for youth mobilization in the region. This approach fits with the theoretical frames of uncertainty and social navigation adopted earlier and helped to explain how it is possible for such a fractious network of youth to build coalitions so effective in challenging the dominance of the state and oil multinationals at the same time that many of the same individuals involved within it often help to advance state driven agendas.

The chapter explored the role that chance, spontaneity and unpredictability play in the emergence of youth networks as well as in the constant reinventions of their forms and memberships in response to the Delta's shifting social environment. It argued that in order for provisional actions to become 'a linkchain of events in which the outcome of one link becomes an important initial condition for another' (Beissinger 2011: 26), they often have to be embedded in shared histories and a common political economy. The chapter drew on ethnographic data from the *Colombia* neighbourhood of Port Harcourt to show the connections between spontaneity and shared experiences and the interesting ways in which they can help build the type of youth networks visible across the Delta. The chapter also drew parallels between the Delta and other urban landscapes in which contingent networks have been shown to be critical to the social mobilization of youth. In particular, it looked at the work of Abdul Maliq Simone (2004) in various African cities as well as the insights that could be drawn from the Arab Spring. The chapter concluded that one of the major consequences of social uncertainty is the imposition of a global sense of contingency and that within this climate, being able to improvise is absolutely critical to the tactical agency of youth and is central to their ability to build bridges as well as walls. It also argued that the tensions observable in the path towards social adulthood for youth are partly a product of the constant reinventions and renegotiations that are necessary for constructing the contingent networks that can cope

with a shifting social terrain. The nimbleness that this imposes on youth networks ultimately makes it possible for them to transcend traditional differences and hostilities thereby co-creating a self replicating network of contingent relationships based on the needs of the moment rather than on traditional identities like ethnicity. In the case of the Delta, the chapter showed that while contingency is the key ingredient that allows youth to fluidly flow between the different identity markers available like cults, street gangs, vigilantes, NGOs, ethnic militias, political thugs and so on, those identities are themselves constantly produced by the fact of contingency.

After dealing with contingency as a typology of youth networks and highlighting its absence from the Niger Delta literature, the study then moves on to consider the first part of research question two which was about how youth imagine themselves within their networks. Chapter five explored the sociological motivations that drive the participation of youth within their social networks. The idea was, as noted in earlier chapters, to look beyond oil and scarcity driven narratives of social action in the Niger Delta in order to construct a more complete (and accurate) picture of youth politics in the region. It was noted that various explanations have been given, either explicitly or implicitly for the motivations that drive youth to participation in the Delta's politics. The dominant ideas have focused on marginalization (Obi 2010), criminality (Ezeonu 2014) or tradition (Adunbi 2015) and the important ways they all generate alternative citizenship forms. Chapter Five acknowledged these different motivations but argued that there is substantial evidence that other types of sociological processes are often implicated in the mobilization of youth. In particular, it argued that notions of respectability play important roles within youth networks in the Niger Delta and that these have often been written out of the mostly macro-analytical studies of the region.

The chapter started by conceptualizing respectability around the Ijaw notion of *Kemowe* where one's very humanity is determined by the ability to claim respect. It then moved on to explore the political economic roots of the concept of respectability from colonial contact to more recent iterations in the urban contexts of the Niger Delta. The chapter used popular music, historical court records and archival material to analyse changes in the meaning of respectability and to situate these changes within broader social transitions. The chapter confronted the concept of respectability from three primary vantage points. The first of these was that respectability was a site of contestation and power relations itself. In this regard, the chapter drew again on the *Colombia* neighbourhood of Port Harcourt to show how various actors try to impose order by constructing a hegemonic notion of respectability. This process highlighted the important ways in which the ability to impose or cast off certain conceptions of respectability indicates shifts in the locus of power within youth networks on the one hand and between youths and established centers of authority on the other. The idea that respectability is a site of contestation was also illustrated by the dilemma faced by the so called 'over youth' category. Using the biographical account of a prominent ex-militant in Yenagoa, Kingsley Urban Gorrilla, the chapter showed how the temporalities of ageing complicates the landscape of respectability within youth networks and how it deepens the tensions associated with managing relationships in the post Amnesty Delta context. The dilemma of the over youth category also highlights the tensions between various levels of militant Delta youth networks and how contests over hegemonic masculinity can be a crucial window into these relationships.

The second vantage point through which respectability was dealt with in Chapter Five was through the analysis of youth cultures of consumption. Here, the chapter contrasted the tendency of materially accomplished ex-militants to use wealth as a mark of respect

and that of less accomplished ones to focus on the consumption of intangible social codes like body art. In particular, it explored the emergence of a group called The Uglies, which had emerged around Okirika on the outskirts of the oil city of Port Harcourt, and the intricate ways in which they used the consumption of body art and dance to both produce and consume respectability. It linked the different notions of respectability to the varied impact the Amnesty has had on the attainment of social adulthood by different categories of youth. On the one hand are those who had accumulated wealth through the Amnesty settlement and who thus tended to appropriate respectability through philanthropy and conspicuous consumption. On the other hand, however are those like the members of The Uglies who have been on the margins of the Amnesty and have had to seek other less material ways like body art and performances to carve out identities and thus gain respectability. Finally, the chapter analysed how respectability is itself spatially and socially located so much so that it shifts vicariously as individual youth try to navigate changing social conditions. This again reconnected the analysis to the frameworks of uncertainty and social navigation around which the politics of youth in the Delta was being examined. In this regard, it used the biographical accounts of two ex-militants in Bori, a small town in Bayelsa State to show the subtle ways youth manipulate their public images to fit hegemonic respectabilities where they cannot out rightly shape it.

As shown above, chapters four and five provided compelling evidence about the making and governance of youth networks in the Niger Delta and they highlighted that within the context of a constantly changing environment, it is important to look beyond essentialising identities like ethnicity to explain the politics of youth. This done, the study then moved on to consider the final research question which was about how the amnesty has changed the nature of relationships within youth networks. Chapter six

intimately considered the way the Amnesty had impacted on the networked relationships that shape the politics of violent youth in the region. It asked that what is it about the Amnesty as a DDR project and as a patronage agenda that has allowed it to impact on youth imagination and politics in the Niger Delta without necessarily having a corresponding impact on the logic of governance in the region? To answer this question, the chapter focused first on important policy logics within the bureaucratic construct of the Amnesty. It argued that within the Amnesty project, important patterns of dispersal, convergence and contestation can be found which have profound impact on the nature of post Amnesty youth networks. Drawing on interviews with Amnesty officials, news reports and documents from the Amnesty office, the chapter started by arguing that one of the central goals of the Amnesty was to disperse militant youth outside of the Niger Delta as a way of coercing them back into the networks of patronage and clientilism that had guaranteed some sort of stability in the region. The chapter argued that while opportunities for corruption was a major factor that determined the sites for post Amnesty training of ex-militants, dispersing youth outside the Niger Delta also served important tactical purposes. One of such was that it deprived youth of the use of the Delta's complex creek systems for attacks on oil infrastructure especially in the early days after the Amnesty was launched and its viability was in doubt. Another purpose was that it was hoped that dispersing militant youth across the world as a part of the Amnesty settlement would disrupt the networks with which they had organized to challenge state authority.

Dispersal however had some unintended consequences in that it led to a convergence of youth networks in new sites. Chapter Six showed that underpinning the dispersal logic was an inevitable parallel process of convergence. This emerged first with the decision to create orientation camps with which to process and introduce 'ex-militants'

to the Amnesty settlement. The chapter drew from Foucault's (1975) work on incarceration to show how the orientation camps were sites of coercion even though they were promoted as sites of reconciliation. It highlighted in particular how the working of the Amnesty's orientation camps fit into Foucault's (1975) four observations about post enlightenment forms of coercive control. These four observations relate to the collection of biomedical information on the offenders, the shift from punishment to rehabilitation, the creation of a surveillance society and the goal of crafting new types of citizens. Highlighting how each of these steps were embedded within the post Amnesty orientation camps, the chapter argued that at the same time as the camps were recapturing ex-militants as re-incorporated actors in the network of patronage that underpinned oil extraction in the Niger Delta, it was also creating new sets of solidarities that solidified rather than ruptured youth networks. This new network convergence was facilitated unwittingly by the very process designed to unsettle them. It was argued that the camps fed into a shared history and social experience of youthhood in profound ways so much so that communities of ex-militants inevitably emerged both within the camps as well as in the sites all across the world in which they were later sent for further training.

This convergence, the chapter argued did not however imply that youth networks and relations were not being unsettled by the Amnesty. Drawing insights from focus groups held with groups of ex-militants, the chapter showed how internal group ruptures were emerging between different layers of ex-militants. It showed in particular that a gulf was emerging between senior commanders and lower level members of militant groups as a result of the growing social distance between them as well as changing personal circumstances. The tensions between a youth category that was moving into non-youth spaces like marriage, financial independence and peaceful relations precisely at the time

when being youth was crucial to maintaining social standing were explored as a way of showing how the Amnesty was unsettling network solidarities and reforming them in profound ways.

The chapter then moved on to take a second look at the pathways of youth earlier analysed in Chapter Three in order to examine how the Amnesty may have changed them and what this means for how youth experience them. Starting with the gang pathway, the chapter showed that the Amnesty's impact has been spatially specific. For instance, while it has caused the consolidation of gangs under near single leadership in the Port Harcourt area, new decks and new centers of power were emerging in other places, including outside of Nigeria that could be directly traced to the impact of the Amnesty. In Port Harcourt, the chapter drew from interview data to show that the new centralization was coalescing around the Icelanders cult led by Ateke Tom which appears to be taking over turfs and memberships across the city and its suburbs. The chapter argued that this consolidation would have been highly unlikely were it not for the Amnesty which has deepened Ateke Tom's personal pockets and ultimately his control of youth across Rivers State in general but Port Harcourt, Okirika, Bori and Diobu in particular. Records of police investigations as far as North America also corroborate interview data which suggest that new *decks* of cult groups were emerging in places like Manchester and London in the UK, Johannesburg in South Africa Toronto in Canada and in Rome, Italy. Interview data suggests that these new *decks* include significant numbers of Amnestied militants and youth who were able to secure visas to train or study abroad. The chapter also noted that some of these new *decks* were already stretching Nigerian gang loyalties and solidarities in these new sites as well as introducing new dynamics into gang relations back in the Niger Delta.

With regard to the NGO pathway, the chapter argued that while a noticeable shift has occurred as voluntary organisations moved from an activist advocacy narrative towards a focus on providing contractual services in an Amnesty driven new peace economy, nothing else has changed fundamentally with how youth experience the pathway. In this case, the pathway has retained its look and the experience of youth operating from within it has remained largely the same in spite of the over all impact of the Amnesty on other areas of youth circulation.

Chapter Six also established that the militant youth pathway is arguably the most profoundly impacted by the Amnesty. It used the emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers and the internal tensions within the militant space it has brought to the fore to explain how the Amnesty has fractured militant solidarities. It also noted that because the Amnesty has introduced some six years of relative stability, many social formations within the Niger Delta appear less inclined to legitimize new insurgencies even though resentment of the Federal Government still persists. In this regard therefore, it argued that youth who now operate within the militant pathway as adversaries of the clientelist system are unlikely to gain the sort of legitimacy and acceptance that made a disparate coalition like MEND and ultimately the large scale Amnesty itself possible. The chapter concluded that while the Amnesty has had a profound impact on many aspects of youth framings and mobilizations in the Niger Delta, not much has changed in the core logics of governance and incentives in the region- indeed it is *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

7.3 Main contributions of the study to the literature on youth and violence in the Niger Delta

What do all the above mean for how we study youth and violence in extractive contexts like the Niger Delta and in fact even in more general postcolonial and postmodern

contexts? This study makes five main contributions to the literature on youth and violence and expands our understanding of the Niger Delta in important new ways.

7.3.1 A Rethinking of ‘youth’

The first is a rethinking of what it means to be youth, especially how violent contexts can profoundly reframe its meaning both as a descriptive notion and as an operational one. In this study, there was a conscious disaggregation of politically active youth from the general pool of the young (both biologically and socially so). This disaggregation was informed by the highly politically charged connotation that the use of the term ‘youth’ often implies in contexts where violence is driven wholly or in part by insurgencies either themed around specific generational tensions or in which generational boundaries play a critical role in mobilization. In this respect, the idea of who can claim to be youth or who is characterized as youth is dependent on *acts of doing* rather than *of being*.

Bourdieu (1993) was right to have argued that neither youth nor age is self-evident as they are both ‘socially manipulated and manipulable’ (p. 95). Yet, the assumption that those who manipulate the meaning of youth are necessarily embedded in adult power centers itself misses the point of youth as a social construct. In periods of rapid and uncertain social transitions, in which the youthful category is both the threat as well as an opportunity, the notion of youth is connected simultaneously to acts of doing things- of intervention and of participation- as it is to the implications of not doing. This distinction between those that do and those that do not (or between *youth* and *angels* as in the Niger Delta) is central to understanding how violence spatially and socially shapes how youthhood is viewed. Its framing is also largely determined by those who operate within the youthscape rather than from outside it. In other words, the

legitimacy of that label flows outwards from the youthscape into society rather than the other way round.

In places of calm and peace, the notion of youth could be accurately captured by the very fact of being. *Being* in this context refers both to biology as it does to sociality and is constituted by a striving for social adulthood. The exact articulation of this strife as well as its outcome is framed by prevailing modernities and hegemonies. As the Comaroffs (2005: 20) put it modernity, ‘casts ‘youth’ as both the essential precondition and the indefinite postponement of maturity’. But what is clear is that what makes a youth in this type of context is not so much what youth do or do not do, but more about where they are on the social ladder- what they are (or have). This generalized notion of youth however struggles to apply where social relations and the norms governing them are ruptured by long periods of violence. It is even more so where violence has become *the context* rather than happening *in context*, in which case, *doing youth* becomes more important than *being youth*.

One should also listen to what youth means when the label is used by people living within contexts of generationally themed violence. When they say ‘youth’, do they refer to a state of having not attained social adulthood (as in O’Brien 1996, Abbink 2005, Coulter 2009, Honwana 2013) or do they refer to the very act of intervention, of resisting and of challenging established authority? It appears that what the so-called ‘marginal’ people do or do not do, is more crucial to their self framing as well as to how they are framed than what they are. This is why the question that ‘how can you call yourself youth when you sit down there doing nothing?’ (Bozi int 2014) is an important illustration of what is meant when people on the ground describe anyone as youth.

To ensure greater analytical clarity when analyzing contexts of permanent violence, this study suggested that scholars discuss being youth as distinct from being young (whether socially or biologically). In this sense, youth takes on verb form and describes actions, aspirations, and agency rather than marginality or becoming. Through careful examination of evidence from the Niger Delta, this study builds on rather than dismisses contemporary understandings of youth. It merely proposes that youth be treated within a frame disaggregated by context and understood through action.

7.3.2 Youth Marginalization as myth; marginalization as resource

The second implication of this study relates to how we think about marginality. The reality for many active Delta youth is that they live, as Chernoff (2003: 41) describes of the so-called ‘marginal people’, in a ‘realm where norms and their limits are often highlighted’ and as such, they are particularly ‘well informed about points of breakdown, weakness and ineffectiveness in the institutions of competing systems’. This awareness implies that they are well suited to exploiting the very notion of their marginality in ways that allow them to exert subtle influences on political power. This is hardly the realm of the disempowered, the weak or indeed, the marginal.

The story of *Colombia* highlights, for instance, the way youth can creatively carve out spaces of alternative citizenship for themselves and thrive in the very articulation of their exclusion from a formal system that has lost meaning to the way their lives are both experienced and imagined. Perhaps more critically is the way the toughs of *Colombia* also show how the meanings they create in those alternative spaces can be grafted unto the broader society, thus creating a hybrid of experiences as well as of actors who can move fluidly between centers of both acquiescence and resistance. By purporting to solve the community’s security problems- a consequence of course of the failure of the state to guarantee protections- the youth of *Colombia* were able to

establish their dominance of the system without upsetting the balance between modernity and tradition, between formality and informality or between youthhood and adulthood. As Chernoff (2003:41) puts it, they are ‘in-between the competing realms of modernity, they are so out of it that they seem attached to neither’. They are effectively what Smith (2001) described as ‘rebels without a cause’ in the revolutionary political sense, even though their everyday survival and autonomy from the state was an imperative goal.

The alienation of significant parts of the Niger Delta population from the formal economy is perhaps so overwhelming that the informal has become the mainstream and hustling for survival through acquired social skills has replaced traditional paths to adulthood. It stands to reason then that where these shifts in the boundaries of the formal/informal occur, power is itself to be conceptualized in its fluidity and those who started off as marginal can, under the right conditions, influence power in the mainstream. One may draw further insights from the interesting work that is being done on the politics of informality and the potential for collective action and organizing by people operating in the informal economic and social spaces that dot the post-colonial world (Bayat 2004, Meagher 2008, Lindell 2010). It is undeniable that a growing informal sector has created massive opportunities for accumulation and power for social categories across a very broad spectrum. While we can identify the manipulation of the informal space for political advantage by politicians who see them as, in Mitlin’s (2004) words, ‘vote banks’, it is important to not ignore the very real ways ‘informal people’ also exploit the fact of exclusion to renegotiate the very nature of their engagement with the state and society. Indeed, as many of my informants’ life stories showed, marginality is itself a resource that creates a living social infrastructure that is an important tool for navigating complex but constraining systems.

It also indicates a new imperative to reconsider what we conceptualize as the ‘margin’ because if the overwhelming majority of young people in the oil Delta operate within a space that is not just excluded from the overt expressions of formal statehood but crucially that which also consciously excludes the formal articulations of statehood- a situation captured quite aptly by the politics of the youth of *Colombia* - it is their space that is truly centered and normal. The formal is actually, to all intents and purposes, the marginal and abnormal. Indeed, as Judith Butler (2009:144-5) counseled, ‘we must devise new constellations for thinking about normativity if we are to proceed in intellectually open and comprehensive ways to grasp and evaluate our world’.

The implications of analyzing youth in the context of centrality rather than marginality are profound. For one it raises important questions about the way we think about the Niger Delta insurgency and the narratives around which policy interventions have been framed. It questions, for instance, the tendency to address the violence as if it were possible to make clear distinctions between the state and the insurgents. By ignoring the complex networks of privilege that connect activists to young insurgents and to the State and Oil multinationals, policy frameworks have often failed to grapple effectively with the social infrastructure that facilitates violence in the region. By focusing on the agency of youth, it is possible to highlight their role as autonomous actors within these complex networks and to understand the continuous shifts in the nature of their relationship with traditional centers of power. This, of course implies that they cannot be defined as marginal in a system in which they obviously have such a central and powerful role to play both in its survival as well as its potential collapse.

7.3.3 A fresh look at the evidence

Another contribution of this study is that it offered major alternatives to the current ways of thinking about the social mobilization of politicized youth in the Niger Delta.

It suggested that the dominant macro-level analytical frames could be improved by a closer attention to the micro politics of meaning, belonging and organizing which are often written out of the narrative. This introduces alternative ways of thinking about the motivations of Delta youth that can move the literature on from the (too) familiar narratives of oil, ethnicity, grievance and criminality. In this regard, the study introduced respectability and contingency as new sites of analytical enquiry and applied them to a wide range of youth self framing and making contexts.

7.3.3.1 Respectability as a tool of youth mobilization in the Delta

While youth has been a major theme in recent studies of the Delta (Ifeka 2006, Osaghae 2011), how they define or extract respectability or what these mean for mobilization has been largely ignored, in spite of pervasive evidence that it is an important part of youth politics. In the few cases where this has been a consideration, the focus has been on what I would call the young rather than the youth. A good example is in Gilbert's (2015) work on how contested notions of feminine beauty and respect are evoked by pageants in Calabar. This study on the other hand explored respectability as a tool of social ordering and analyzed its impact on the network governing lives of violent youth. By moving away from

By focusing on respectability and its tendency to encapsulate the reality as well as the imaginary of youth, this study calls on analysts to examine how the identities they study so rigorously in the Niger Delta interact with one another within the self-making universe of individual youth as well as within the youthscape more broadly. For instance, while ethnicity is clearly an important entry point to politics for many Delta youth (Ifedi & Anyu 2011, Okoh 2016), how they express it and in what spaces this may matter is determined by how it intersects with their other identities- class, gender and the like. In a 1993 article, Claude Ake (p.1-3) draws attention to this point by

highlighting the co-location of class and ethnic identities in the social process. He described ethnicity as a ‘living presence produced and driven by material and historical forces’. He argued that ‘it begins, becomes and passes away’ and ‘can only be understood and interpreted through the complex dialectics of its being, dissolution and reconstitution’. By connecting the production of ethnicity to material forces, Ake recognizes how the two interact.

In the tortuous process of self-making for Delta youth, how they conceptualize as well as perform respect can provide interesting insights into the many other relevant identity systems.

Within youth network contexts, these identities shape a sense of belonging that is framed by struggles for respectability. Thus ‘being Ijaw’ or ‘being Ogoni’ or in fact ‘being a man’ for an individual youth are important routes towards gaining respect, belonging and social relatedness. If, as the evidence shows for the Niger Delta, the everyday formations and fragmentations of what it means to be youth are shaped by small acts that either endow or revoke respectability and by the constant revisions of the very meaning of respectability itself, it is analytically helpful therefore to enter into a conversation about their lives through interrogating the way the concept impacts on it.

There has been widespread use of respect as an analytical entry point into youth lives in many parts of the world. For instance, observers of urban politics in post Apartheid South Africa have explored how notions of respect shape youth culture within its violent spaces from various dimensions including gender (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger 2012), enactment of kinship on the street (Margaratten 2011), politicized masculinity (Faull 2016) and the politics of HIV/AIDS (Gibbs, Sikweyiya & Jewkes 2014). Similar evocations of respect have appeared in studies of urban violence in Kenya (Lebas 2013,

Henningsen & Jones 2013) as well as in the Mano River Union states of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone (Moran 1995, Abdullah 2002, Richards 2005, Utas 2009 and Duriesmith 2014). These examples highlight how respectability could provide a viable analytical schematic for understanding the micro-politics of youth and questions why it has been virtually absent from the Niger Delta which has been one of the most significant examples of youth led insurrections in Africa in the last two decades.

Focusing on respectability also strengthens understanding of how belonging and social relatedness are developed, governed and contested within youth networks. As Carsten (2004: 82) notes, belonging and social relatedness are driven by reciprocal connectivities and ties of commonality which bind individuals to one another on the one hand and constructs (or reinforces) their difference to others on the other hand. These connectivities reflect notions of appropriateness (or respectability) that are generated by the fact of a common history and shared social experiences. It is also generated by the objective realities imposed by how youth perform or act out their youthness. What this study does therefore is to draw scholarly attention to the important ways in which respectability can illuminate.

7.3.3.2 Contingency as an organizing principle of youth networks

Another area in which this study made a fundamental intervention is in the explanation of the processes through which youth networks are produced. Drawing inspiration from the theoretical frames of permanence, social navigation and uncertainty, the study argued that to understand the innovative ways Delta youth cope with a fluid social environment, one must look beyond familiar grounded identities and take due note of how seemingly unconnected provisional social actions produce effective networks of youth action.

Many observers of youth politics in the Niger Delta tend to frame social action in terms of rational, predetermined and often historical sets of grievances against the state and oil companies. This approach inevitably assumes that grounded identity systems like ethnicity and minority groupings predetermine social mobilization in profound ways. While this may partly be true of established orders in the Delta region, especially as they relate to traditional organizations, indigenous rights movements and others like them, they enter into far weaker territory when applied to social shifters like youth. For instance, the approach hardly accounts for what happens when youth migrate to urban spaces and what this movement means for how they understand identity. Of course many studies of ethnicity and urbanization have noted how ethnic identity can be a key organizing principle (and tool) in urban spaces (Bates 1983, Osaghae 1994) or how informal organizing in urban areas often have ethnic foundations (Epstein 1958, Osaghae 1994b, Meagher 2010). Yet, there is also considerable evidence that suggests that the realities of urbanization can also unsettle ethnic identities and render them less relevant to the social mobility of individual youth (Bannon, Miguel & Posner 2004). Even where initial mobilization is driven by these sorts of identities, how they produce efficient and sustainable networks still remain largely unexplained.

If these established ways of thinking about the rubrics of social mobilization are inadequate to explain the evidence emanating from a fluid political economy like the Delta, it is important for analysts to begin to engage with new possibilities. One of such new possibilities is that social mobilization and youth organizing are not necessarily identity or even history based but that they emanate from provisional actions that are often taken in the spur of the moment and often independent of one another, yet connected by the very factor of spontaneity and by a shared understanding of both individual as well as generational goals.

This study is the first analysis of the role of youth in the so called Niger Delta crisis that tries to understand the emergence of social networks by drawing on the immanence of provisionality and linking that to the fluidity and uncertainty in its oil driven social environment. The example of the *Colombia* neighbourhood of Port Harcourt highlights not just the importance of provisional actions for youth movements, but also shows the intricate connections these have to the social universe (spatial, historical as well as material) in which they occur. Approaching youth networks in this way is a fundamental departure from the Niger Delta literature in so far as it unveils the small everyday actions that ultimately add up to become the big picture of an oil driven violent insurgency. It also fits with the goal of this study to disaggregate the ‘Niger Delta crisis’ or ‘youth insurgencies’ within it in ways that take into account small level actions bound not by identity but by social action produced in response to everyday realities which are often only loosely connected.

7.3.5 Amnesty as network maker/breaker

Finally, this study expanded knowledge of the impact of the Amnesty on youth networks and joins a yet nascent debate about the political underpinnings of the project. The study of the peacebuilding process initiated by the Amnesty has of course been done by many others. These different studies have mostly engaged with the successes or failures of the Amnesty as a political settlement (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009, Adegboyega & Adesote 2013, Mohammed, Jackson & Aliu 2014) and addressed the re-emergence of violent activities like kidnappings in its aftermath (Osumah 2013, Aghedo 2015, Eke 2016). What this study brings to the emerging literature on the Amnesty is that it is the first assessment of how the Amnesty settlement impacted on the complex networks of youth relationships that underpinned the pre-Amnesty violence. Analysing the ways in which the Amnesty has unsettled the old networks of

relationships through which youth navigated the oil political economy, rather than simply analysing the failures (or successes) of the programme to bring lasting peace to the Delta, offers unique insights into how to assess the value of DDR projects where they are designed around clientelistic logics.

In this regard, it suggests that the technical details of DDR projects matter only as much as they reflect the local realities. As many observers have noted, it is common to find DDR projects designed along a globalised liberal peacebuilding model (Knight 2008, Peterson 2014). This point is mostly true of both DDR projects imposed by external forces as in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Klem, Douma & van Laar 2008, Kilroy 2014) and those ostensibly ‘home grown’ as in the Niger Delta (Obi 2013, Abazie-Humphrey 2014). While these DDR projects may conform to ‘international best practice’, by adapting a ‘catch all’ model, peacebuilding efforts often miss important local nuances that are key to confronting the inequalities and exclusions that generate violence.

In the case of the Niger Delta, a focus on how the Amnesty unsettles local youth networks offers insights into the architecture of violence in a way that an assessment of the ‘success’ of the Amnesty in bringing peace, as is common in current Amnesty studies, does not provide. It also opens up opportunities to explore recalibrations of youth relationships that may be key to understanding both the old and the coming conflicts, first as continuums but also as distinct historical phases.

7.4 Niger Delta Youth and the Future: Final Reflections on what comes next

In many ways the recent social, economic and political history of the Niger Delta, some of which is covered by this study, illustrates the limits of power as reposed in the postcolonial state. For one it shows that whereas the state can dream up big interventions like the Amnesty, it has limited capacity to predetermine the impacts they will have on its hegemonic relations with society or indeed how they will reformulate

the micro-politics of contending social forces. It is even less able to determine how the processes of reformulation will change the parameters of power or the social spaces around which social shifters like youth imagine their lives and place within this milieu. The Niger Delta's experience with Amnesty also underlines the remarkable agency of youth at a time when the state attempts to engineer a recapturing of forces seeking alternative definitions and platforms of citizenship. The fluid (re)alignments within youth networks, the changes to social meanings of crucial self framing tools like respectability, and the innovative deployment of provisionality, all point to a social category that is able to see what Mbembe and Roitman (1995: 324) called an 'ensemble of imaginary configurations of everyday life'. They also point to the capacity of youth to deploy tactical agency in forms that allow them to shape these 'imaginary configurations' in profound ways and across a variety of spatial, temporal and material contexts.

The above notwithstanding, perhaps an equally fundamental take from this is that whereas the grievances, goals and motivations that drive social relations in sites of contentious politics like the Niger Delta are important ways of framing our understanding, the specific forms that social organizing takes and how actors place themselves within these forms are critical entry points to explaining contexts such as this. It is difficult to move the analysis of the Niger Delta forward beyond the familiar narrative of oil driven resistance if one does not take into account the social infrastructures that are constructed in order to facilitate the alternative citizenship framings that everyone agrees is going on in the region. This study is therefore, on the one hand, a major attempt to see the Niger Delta through the eyes of youth driven social networks, and on the other to see these networks through the lens of the region as a site of contentious politics. In doing both, the study presents unique new vantage points

from which analysts across the disciplines, as well as policy makers can begin to engage more robustly with the bewildering register of meanings, grievances, organizations and interests that have imposed sometimes converging, but also sometimes diverging influences on the oil rich region.

There are many paths that have been uncovered by this study though which future research can engage anew with the interesting politics of the Niger Delta. For instance, there is a long history of Nigerian gang networks establishing transnational connections out from sites like Benin City (a city on the margins of the oil rich Niger Delta), or setting up operations in the diaspora (Taliana 2012, Mancuso 2014). Over the last few years, reports about gang activity among Nigerian diaspora youth has increased in places like Palermo, Barcelona and Toronto (CBC 2015, The Guardian 2015, BBC 2016). This apparently growing transnational activity reflects, in part, the shifting geographies of illicit groups operating across the *youthscapes* of Nigeria's oil Delta and discussed extensively in this study.

While Nigerian gangs have operated in the diaspora well before this recent rise, the connection with the Niger Delta has deepened significantly since the 2009 Amnesty through which thousands of ex-insurgents were sent abroad for education and vocational training, some of whom have reconnected with their gang networks. Suspensions about the involvement of some Amnesty recipients training abroad was confirmed by Kingsley Kuku, the former head of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (*Premium Times September 13, 2013*). In an address to departing amnesty recipients, Kuku (2013) noted that as at 2013, some 690 recipients have had to be repatriated or had their scholarships withdrawn as a result of violent activities outside Nigeria. Many of those whose scholarships were withdrawn in the UK for instance, have refused to return to Nigeria and instead melted into the large Nigerian communities in places like

Moston, Manchester and parts of London. New research is needed to investigate how changes in the spatial location of actors, such as was created by the 2009 Amnesty which dispersed Niger Delta militants across the world, impact on youth driven covert networks. One assumes that covert networks often have to be reconstituted in new forms after a period of disruption and that this impacts fundamentally on how they frame, imagine and govern themselves. If this is the case, how does the re-imagination of covert networks occur in the context of spatial dislocations- how for instance do tensions between memories of the old site and the realities of the new interact? how do modern connections like Facebook affect the re-imagination of covert networks since they may guarantee social contact in profoundly meaningful ways at the same time that actors are inevitably physically disconnected? is there anything about being youth that affects this process in unique ways?

One may also explore questions about how changes to youth networks and the social environments in which they emerge is impacting on the West African trans border trade in illicit fuel which is emanating from the Niger Delta. The evidence suggests that these youth networks which control the illicit distribution of fuel across the West African region are not just directly connected to the 'youth of the Delta' but provide similar mobilisation logics. To this end, one may ask about what kinds of relationships these youth fuel vendors build in order to pursue their precarious livelihood choices? Are small scale vendors connected to the global oil economy in any meaningful way and if so, how are they inserted into this economy? What is the nature of state border controls in these cases and what types of citizens do they create? What does this tell us about how biotechnical infrastructures shape sovereignty? What are the connections between formal fuel supply infrastructures and the small scale vendors and in what ways do these connections interact across state borders?

What these two uncovered paths illustrate is that if we explore more deeply the forms of youth networks, we can see in much clearer detail the broader connections that link the Niger Delta and its youth to global and national politics. We can also tease out important multidisciplinary advantages that are often papered over by the dominant commitment to a rational choice framing of the Niger Delta 'crisis' which sees 'resistance' in a pipeline bombing but not 'opportunity', or which sees a repressive state but hardly acknowledging how the state is constituted and how that process of constitution pulls it in multiple directions.

This study has not answered all the questions that can arise from the eclectic range of data that it generated and it did not set out to do so. It has however provided, as promised, alternative explanations for politics in the region through a focus on the forms and contents of youth networks rather than on the underlining grievances that shape their relationships with the political economy of oil extraction.

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- Lawal A. PIND Staff in Port Harcourt in charge of NGO networking, interviewed repeatedly between April 2015 and June 16.
- Loye, PNIN Staff, interviewed in 2015
- Tonye. Port Harcourt Youth, lives in Borokiri neighbourhood and spent considerable time in *Colombia* in the early 2000s. Interviewed at various times in Ife, Ibadan and Yenagoa between 2014 and early 2015.

Amadi. Grew up in Bende Street in the *Colombia* neighbourhood, interviewed twice at the University of Port Harcourt in October 2014 and later in Lagos in January 2015

Bright. *Colombia* resident in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Now lives in Yenagoa. Interviewed in Yenagoa over two weeks in November 2014.

Louis. Former resident of *Colombia*, now resident in Yenagoa. Interviewed intermittently between August and November 2014.

Tony. From Ekeremor in Bayelsa State, Didn't quite succeed in joining up with gangs even though he tried. Lived in mostly in the Okrikpen neighbourhood of Warri and later in Lagos.

Tarela. ex-militant, from Amasoma. Belonged to the Greenlander cult. Received Amnesty and schooled at lead City University Ibadan. Interviewed mostly at lead City university in 2012(as part of a different project) and then in April 2013, and intermittently in 2014 and 15.

Ebiede. Academic from Bayelsa State.

Peter. Ex militant from Tsekelewu, Received Amnesty and schooled at lead City University Ibadan. Interviewed mostly at lead City university in 2012(as part of a different project) and then in April 2013, and intermittently in 2014 and 15.

Darlington. Ex-militant, formwr resident of *Colombia*, now resident in Lagos. Received Amnesty and spent time in Igbinedion University, Okada. Interviewed at Okada in September 2014. Follow up phone interviews between 2015 and 16.

Chief Bereni. Community organizer and elder from Niger Street in *Colombia*, Port Harcourt. Lived through much of the violent periods of the 1990s and 2000s. Interviewed in Port Harcourt in 2013 and 2014.

Kingsley Urban Gorrilla. (nickname). Midlevel commander at SEA, senior member of the IYC in Yenagoa, Amnesty recipient and community organizer. Interviewed in Yenagoa in January 2012 and later in October 2014 and January 2015.

Akpan. Amnesty Official. Interviewed 2013 and 2014.

Paul. Amnesty 'delegate' at Coventry University, non-militant recipient of the Amnesty.

IK. FEHN Staff, interviewed in Lagos, September 2014.

Tammy. Icelandor cult member. Lives in Bori, Ogoni

Ufuk. Port Harcourt resident, interviewed in Ife, September 2014

Bozi Icelandor cult member. Interviewed in Yenagoa October 2014

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Id	Label	Nodes	Degree	Weighted	Eccentrici	Closeness	Betweenr	Authority	Hub	Modularit	Compone	PageRank	Clustering	Number o	Eigenvect
1	ERA	ERA	13	46	2	1.535714	7.599189	0.038356	0.038356	0	0	0.037666	0.576923	45	0.846004
2	OND	OND	14	38	2	1.5	12.90218	0.041096	0.041096	2	0	0.040706	0.450549	41	0.86162
3	FEHN	FEHN	4	10	3	1.964286	0.628218	0.013699	0.013699	1	0	0.015353	0.333333	2	0.248648
4	SDN	SDN	13	41	2	1.535714	15.40098	0.038356	0.038356	0	0	0.038435	0.423077	33	0.799474
5	ND-HERO	ND-HERO	15	40	2	1.464286	12.37334	0.043836	0.043836	2	0	0.042635	0.485714	51	1
6	FOTE	FOTE	10	30	2	1.642857	2.009671	0.030137	0.030137	0	0	0.030032	0.755556	34	0.667892
7	GSF	GSF	11	33	2	1.607143	3.776118	0.032877	0.032877	2	0	0.032557	0.618182	34	0.756712
8	NDPNI	NDPNI	16	40	2	1.428571	20.40354	0.046575	0.046575	1	0	0.046255	0.425	51	0.967758
9	NCOE	NCOE	9	31	3	1.714286	1.443694	0.027397	0.027397	0	0	0.027486	0.777778	28	0.600536
10	NDWF	NDWF	13	40	2	1.535714	9.480994	0.038356	0.038356	1	0	0.038521	0.474359	37	0.768983
11	NDWMPD	NDWMPD	11	32	3	1.642857	10.8837	0.032877	0.032877	1	0	0.034003	0.454545	25	0.632594
12	NESTACT	NESTACT	12	39	2	1.571429	6.315062	0.035616	0.035616	0	0	0.035453	0.606061	40	0.751513
13	NEN	NEN	13	38	3	1.571429	11.08483	0.038356	0.038356	0	0	0.038096	0.538462	42	0.801876
14	OWA	OWA	15	49	2	1.464286	11.72751	0.043836	0.043836	0	0	0.042723	0.533333	56	0.961725
15	OY	OY	11	34	2	1.607143	7.563223	0.032877	0.032877	2	0	0.033311	0.490909	27	0.693189
16	PNI	PNI	17	53	2	1.392857	25.43741	0.049315	0.049315	0	0	0.048675	0.411765	56	0.997041
17	RDI	RDI	10	30	3	1.678571	1.336362	0.030137	0.030137	0	0	0.029992	0.8	36	0.669926
18	REDF	REDF	11	29	2	1.607143	6.946068	0.032877	0.032877	2	0	0.033136	0.472727	26	0.69027
19	UW	UW	8	21	2	1.714286	2.012049	0.024658	0.024658	1	0	0.025116	0.607143	17	0.547331
20	ICHR	ICHR	15	39	2	1.464286	11.90685	0.043836	0.043836	1	0	0.04308	0.514286	54	0.946634
21	IHRHL	IHRHL	15	43	2	1.464286	10.56047	0.043836	0.043836	1	0	0.042986	0.504762	53	0.959284
22	CM	CM	15	45	2	1.464286	13.42683	0.043836	0.043836	2	0	0.042859	0.485714	51	0.944262
23	DOPCA	DOPCA	6	16	2	1.785714	1.600379	0.019178	0.019178	0	0	0.020256	0.6	9	0.386941
24	NDPF	NDPF	7	21	2	1.75	1.426125	0.021918	0.021918	1	0	0.022806	0.619048	13	0.451656
25	SOMPA	SOMPA	7	19	3	1.785714	1.169192	0.021918	0.021918	2	0	0.022627	0.619048	13	0.481795
26	SMF	SMF	16	43	2	1.428571	19.19675	0.046575	0.046575	2	0	0.046234	0.408333	49	0.941766
27	NDP	NDP	9	24	3	1.714286	3.640648	0.027397	0.027397	1	0	0.027885	0.5	18	0.576233
28	UND	UND	12	29	2	1.571429	7.383204	0.035616	0.035616	1	0	0.035526	0.515152	34	0.757505
29	TROPCON	TROPCON	8	21	3	1.75	3.365423	0.024658	0.024658	2	0	0.025589	0.428571	12	0.47837

Appendix 2

Id	Label	Nodes	Degree	Weighted	Eccentrici	Closeness	Betweenr	Authority	Hub	Modularit	PageRank	Componer
1	Bermudia	Bermudia	8	39	4	2.333333	24.98372	0.037037	0.037037	2	0.040032	0
2	Big Five	Big Five	2	3	4	2.625	0.25	0.012346	0.012346	1	0.014411	0
3	Big 20	Big 20	2	3	3	2.208333	0.39	0.012346	0.012346	2	0.014327	0
4	Buccanee	Buccanee	9	38	3	1.75	25.47236	0.041152	0.041152	2	0.045285	0
5	Bushboys	Bushboys	12	51	3	1.791667	31.09333	0.053498	0.053498	0	0.051519	0
6	Cairo	Cairo	10	45	3	1.916667	20.83449	0.045267	0.045267	0	0.041477	0
7	CS Marine	CS Marine	10	48	3	1.916667	25.88832	0.045267	0.045267	0	0.041477	0
8	Cyprus	Cyprus	10	47	3	1.916667	25.49012	0.045267	0.045267	0	0.041477	0
9	Dey Well	Dey Well	8	39	4	2.333333	29.03002	0.037037	0.037037	2	0.040032	0
10	Dey Bam	Dey Bam	11	54	3	1.833333	29.57391	0.049383	0.049383	0	0.04553	0
11	Gberesaku	Gberesaku	5	13	4	2.458333	3.486111	0.024691	0.024691	1	0.027987	0
12	Germans	Germans	8	40	4	2.333333	23.09367	0.037037	0.037037	2	0.040032	0
13	Greenland	Greenland	9	25	4	2	20.79365	0.041152	0.041152	1	0.042827	0
14	Icelander	Icelander	7	35	4	2.5	11.37834	0.032922	0.032922	2	0.035672	0
15	Isaka	Isaka	12	52	3	1.791667	31.38135	0.053498	0.053498	0	0.050251	0
16	J Vikings	J Vikings	11	50	3	1.583333	28.59351	0.049383	0.049383	0	0.045607	0
17	Klansmen	Klansmen	11	53	3	1.833333	26.44871	0.049383	0.049383	0	0.04553	0
18	Mbacho	Mbacho	4	12	4	2.5	3.789135	0.020576	0.020576	1	0.021958	0
19	Njemanze	Njemanze	8	38	4	2.333333	25.40267	0.037037	0.037037	2	0.040032	0
20	Onyegwu	Onyegwu	8	40	4	2.333333	21.00703	0.037037	0.037037	2	0.040032	0
21	Peacemaker	Peacemaker	12	55	3	1.791667	32.48329	0.053498	0.053498	0	0.050158	0
22	S Vikings	S Vikings	8	40	4	2.333333	0.510714	0.037037	0.037037	2	0.040032	0
23	The Outlaw	The Outlaw	12	50	3	1.541667	24.27103	0.053498	0.053498	0	0.049802	0
24	The Uglies	The Uglies	9	42	3	1.791667	24.56071	0.041152	0.041152	2	0.043683	0
25	Vultures	Vultures	12	54	3	1.833333	33.58333	0.053498	0.053498	0	0.050828	0