

BEYOND GREED AND GRIEVANCE: UNDERSTANDING THE MULTI-CAUSAL FACTORS OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICTS

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

by

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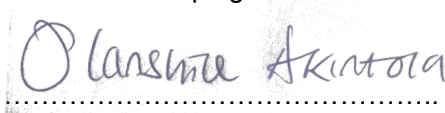
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Abstract

This thesis attempts to highlight some of the factors driving the Niger Delta conflicts. First, by exploring the limitations of economic understanding of conflicts and reviewing the policy implications of assessing these unrests through a singular economic lens, my research sought to underline the need to shift beyond singular issue understanding of the region's unrests. To drive this shift in the assessment of conflicts, I adopted a multifocal, interdisciplinary approach to complement the economic school and its assessment of conflictual issues in the region. This was achieved by assessing the micro dynamics of disputes in four communities in the Niger Delta. Structured as three case studies, emphasis was placed on examining the nuances that undergirded some of the frequent clashes in the region.

In assessing these randomly selected communities, I was attempting to explore in detail, the factors that continue to drive conflicts in the Niger Delta. Through this examination, it was possible to focus on some factors that had previously received very little attention in the study of the region. In a case study exploring militancy, charting Ateke Tom's rise, I was able to show that militant leaders were dextrous actors who leveraged federal government's dependency on the region's oil to secure privileges for themselves and for the people of the Niger Delta. Though commonly understood as 'criminals masquerading as freedom fighters' I was able to show that ex-militant leaders are important actors in a new system of alternative governance in the Niger Delta. This system involves ex-militant leaders providing goods and services in lieu of state provisions. This allows these actors to manage tensions in the region - in return for these provisions, they maintain access to state's decision making and the privileges attached to accessing key stakeholders.

In another section of the thesis, I explored communal conflicts in the region and identified that government's interest in the region's peace is directly correlated with presence of natural resources. Communities with no natural resources were more likely to be ignored by state institutions. Instead of relying on state intervention, communities involved in conflicts appear to depend heavily on the existence of 'sons of the soil'. These actors, in my case studies, were patrons who treated their communities as 'communal clients' who had to be protected from external threats. Often using state resources, patrons who were 'sons of the soil' leveraged their government positions to disenfranchise rival communities. Instead of assuaging competing factions, the process of using federal government resources to protect communal clients was found to exacerbate tensions in the region. The thesis was also able to highlight the frictions emanating from internal governance struggles.

By focusing on a community with ongoing chieftaincy disputes, I was able to explore the source of the tensions between chiefs in the community. Interestingly, the chieftaincy dispute had a generational dimension where youths were pitted against each other, but also against traditional elites. After many interviews, and discussions with opposing camps and interest groups, I was able to challenge the idea of generational crisis where modernity is assumed to be in direct competition with tradition. I conclude by positing that there is in fact a *transgenerational continuum* whereby the interests of youths, the agents of modernity, and traditional elites, the custodian of tradition, are much more aligned than was previously thought.

Overall, the thesis was able to draw attention to some of the multiple causes of the Niger Delta conflicts. It was important to note that the factors driving conflicts in the region are many and are varied, but it was also important to emphasise that the conflicts in the Niger Delta were neither unique nor exceptional. I conclude by challenging the idea of Niger Delta exceptionalism. I argue that, although the region unlike many other regions in Nigeria has been able to leverage its resources to gain attention domestically and internationally, the underlying factors driving conflicts in Niger Delta can be found across Nigeria.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Professor Abdul Raufu Mustapha

Acknowledgements

To be at this stage of the thesis most certainly has a lot to do with countless number of selfless individuals who provided support in ways I never expected. Whilst the process has, at times, been gruelling – I never felt alone, as the African adage goes: *it takes a village to raise a child*, in many ways I can relate. It took a transnational community to fulfil this DPhil ambition.

I would like to start by thanking everybody at QEH who made my time at the department the most enjoyable it could have been. With the utmost gratitude to Gary Jones, who literally kept me moving around Oxford with generous supply of bike parts, and sometimes, actual bicycles – as I have noted numerous, you are a legend. I would also like to thank Penny Rogers (my department mum) for her constant humour and support – you always knew when to pick me up. This process would have been significantly more difficult without the continuous support of Dominique Attala – from the beginning of my journey at QEH up until today; many of your emails have been a constant source of elation, even the ones warning of imminent deadlines. I would also like to thank everyone else at QEH, Professor Doug Gollin, Professor Xiaolan Fu, Denise Watts, Marina Kujic, Nora Novak, Wendy Grist, Rachel Crawford, Sue Garratt, Jane Ashcroft, Sue Chen and Laurence Medley.

QEH was not my only home at Oxford - my final years at Jesus College reminded me of why I had chosen to be a member. I am grateful for the support provided by everyone at the college lodge, in particular – Karen Tarrant (my college mother), John Woods, Helen Cordes, Chris Cox, Jamie Simms, Deborah, Mohammed and Richard. My gratitude to the college extends beyond the lodge, and I would like to thank Carole Thomas, Simon Smith, Sarah Jones, Sailesh Vyas, Megan Daffern, Alex Lumbers, Reudi Bauman, Ros Green, Ruth Bryant, Wendy Dawson, Armand D'Angour, Patricia Daley, Stefan Dercon, David Mead and all of the college's support staff. Special thanks to Gabor, Valentin, the two Cristina, Maria, Debbie, Soma and Steve. All of you have made the academic part of my time in Oxford less daunting by making college an effective sanctuary - thank you.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Professor Raufu Mustapha – I am forever indebted to you for your faith in me and for your contributions. Today is bitter sweet, it saddens me that you did not get to see the final piece of work I produced. Your feedback were always very insightful – and they guided my thoughts and ideas. I hope that the thesis is, at least, in some ways reflective of your guidance and support. My supervisors, Dr Oliver Owen, thank you ever so much for examining my transfer and confirmation of status vivas; and for agreeing to take me on and for being incredibly encouraging as I pushed through the final phase of the thesis. You reminded me again that there was a reason why my research was important. To Professor Jocelyn Alexander, thank you ever so much for supporting me through the despondent phase of rewriting. Your encouraging messages were always very welcomed and did a lot to push me through the final phase. I would like to thank one of my examiners, Professor Masooda Bano, for her very insightful and useful feedback during both the transfer of status and confirmation of status viva. I took on board all that you suggested. Thank you to Professor David Pratten and Dr Pauline von Hellermann for agreeing to examine my final viva. I appreciated your candour and very constructive feedback. It gave me the required impetus to make the essential substantive changes that my thesis needed. To

my dearest friends, Chloé Lewis and Akin Iwilade – you might never know how grateful I am. Through the toughest period of my doctoral journey, you propped me up and sent me endless messages of encouragement. You treated my new deadlines like they were yours and foolishly but very kindly volunteered to do the tedious task of reading through my lengthy chapters. Without you both, I'm confident that this thesis might not have seen the light of day. Akin, it was and still is always a pleasure to discuss Niger Delta related issues with you. Chloé, with everything said, a lot remains unsaid – but I continue to value our friendship – it was a prominent pillar of my Oxford experience. Thank you! I would also like to thank Daniel Agbiboa, William Phillips and Patrick Komolafe for selflessly proofreading my chapters and offering recommendations and corrections. I am grateful for your help – and to be able to call you friends. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Matthew G Watson – without your push and encouragement, I do not imagine I would have applied to do a DPhil. Thank you for believing in me and for instilling confidence in me. Professor Greg Distelhorst and Professor John Tonye – I am very grateful for getting a chance to work with you and thank you for your continued support.

This research would not have progressed very far without the help of Juno Fitzpatrick, Professor Alagoa, David Alagoa, Judy Nwanodi, Professor Derafaka, Joe Croft, Olumide Oyebamiji, Timipere Allison, Sodi Kurubo, Chief Ogusu, and Barrister Obari. Thank you to you all for facilitating my access to many of the communities I interviewed and for providing feedback and insights into the situation in the Niger Delta. Indeed I am grateful to all the participants who agreed to be interviewed on and off the record and to those who literally took me on an excursion of the Niger Delta – without you all, there would be no new insights into the situation in the Niger Delta. I hope that my representation of your stories adds to our understanding of events taking place in the region.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my friends outside Oxford – John A, Paul Seyi A, Mary O, Hewan, Bushra E, Luuk M, Narae C, Zoe M, Femi F, Abiola O, Emeka C, Yomi K, Jewel T, Rebecca Y, Amandine, Tonica H, Mustapha (Staph) G, Emily S and Pius T - you guys kept me attached to the reality outside Oxford and helped me keep things in perspective, I am grateful for your love and support. To my Oxford people, Paula C. R, Andre D, Cinar B, Nelson O, Alpha A, Jeremy C, Rocio, Sarah S, Lipika, Shaomeng L, Viviana P, Sa'eed H - you guys are like family, thank you for being there during the tough times – the future is bright! Now I would like to thank my family – my folks, my mother and father, who never knew what I did, but always seemed to support me nonetheless. My sisters; Mide, Anu and Fareedah and my brothers Dare, Kunle, Fareed – and of course my nieces and nephews – I love you all. I reserve my sincerest gratitude to my esteemed uncle Rt Rear Admiral Abdul Lateef Akintola – thank you ever so much for providing me with security and somewhere to stay throughout the duration of my fieldwork in Port Harcourt. I am grateful for all your help. I can't conclude without thanking Stakeholder Democracy Network, (SDN) in London and in the Niger Delta – thank you for all your help guys.

Finally, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Department of International Development (ODID – QEH), Elder Dempster Ghana and Nigeria Independence Trust, The A. G. Leventis Foundation and Jesus College Oxford for their generous donations.

Contents

Abstract	i
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	vi
Acronyms	viii
Introduction.....	1
A brief history of the Niger Delta.....	3
1914 - 1960 – Amalgamation, Political Representation, State Formation and Independence....	6
1960 -1990 – Independence, Secessionist Movements and Land Use Act.....	11
Recent Conflicts in the Niger Delta	19
Research Questions	24
DEMYSTIFYING NIGER DELTA EXCEPTIONALISM: Contextualising the region’s conflict discourse	31
The 2009 Amnesty Programme.....	33
Greed and Grievance in the Niger Delta Conflicts	40
Petro-violence, Ethnic Pluralism and Political Institutions	51
Conclusion	64
METHODOLOGY: Treading Carefully in a Minefield of Hazards.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Ontology and Epistemology: Challenging the dominance of Hegemonic Epistemic Communities	68
Field-Research: Research Sites, Interviewees, Limitations and Positionality	72
Research Sites	74
Access to Informants.....	83
Limitation of Scope	89
Power, Positionality and the Ethics of Field Research	96
Conclusion	101
THE COMPLEX IDENTITIES OF MILITANCY: A Subjunctive for Criminality or a quest for Access?	103
Introduction.....	103
Instituting the Okrika Vigilante: The Unintended Anointment of the New Kingmakers	108
Alternative Governance Structures: Challenging Marginality by Reconstructing Authority..	138
Conclusion	149
EKPORO (ELEME) AND OGU (OKRIKA) DISPUTES: A Culture of Conflicts without the Oil.....	153
Introduction.....	153
Historical Analysis: This Is Our Land, These are Our Stories.....	158
Disputing Dispute Settlements: Sidestepping a Series of Toothless Judgements	166
Prominent Sons of the Soil: The Patrons of ‘Communal Clients’	173
Land Tenure Acts and Land Reforms: Resolving Unresolved Conflicts.....	181

Conclusion	191
SLOW REVOLUTION OF THE RISING TIDES: Failing Traditional Institutions, Youth Restiveness, and Erosion of Cultural Values.....	195
Introduction.....	195
ONNE an Eleme Community: A Brief History of Chieftaincy Disputes.....	200
Multinational Corporations in Onne: The arrival of the Kingmakers.....	209
Emergence of Youth Groups: Challenging the Domination of the Old Guards	219
Competition or Continuity? Highlighting the Myth of Differences in Intergenerational Disputes	227
Neo-Colonialism Meets the “Transgenerational Continuum”: Challenging the Myth of Opposing Interests.....	237
Conclusion	246
CONCLUSION	251
Reimagining Greed: The Economic Rationale for Grievance.....	257
Revisiting Youth and Disorder: Disaggregating Passive Actors from Active actors	263
The Myth of Niger Delta Exceptionalism	270
Concluding Remarks	275
REFERENCES	280
APPENDICES.....	304
CUREC/1A Form	304
Consent Form:	312
Appendix 1	314
Appendix 2	322
Appendix 3	329
Appendix 4	343
Appendix 5	355
Appendix 6	389
Appendix 7	391
Fieldwork Photos	392

Acronyms

ANPP	All Nigeria Peoples Party
CDC	Community Development Committee
CLO	Community Liaison Officers
CORS	Calabar Ogoja Rivers State
DPO	District Police Officer
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)
FCO	United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FEHN	Foundation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria
OMPADEC	Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission
MEND	Movement of the Emancipation for the Niger Delta
MOSOP	Movement for Survival of Ogoni People
MNC	Multinational Corporations
MNDA	Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs
NANS	National Association of Nigerian Students

NDA	Niger Delta Avengers
NDBDA	Niger Delta Basin Development Authority
NDDB	Niger Delta Development Board
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NDV	Niger Delta Vigilante
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
NPP	Nigerian People's Party
NPF	Nigerian Police Force
NYSC	National Youth Service Corp
PDP	People's Democratic Party
IYC	Ijaw Youth Council
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDN	Stakeholder Democracy Network
TCND	Technical Committee on the Niger Delta

US CSO

United States Conflict and Stabilisation Operations

Introduction

Between 2004 and 2009, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria became host to a number of militant insurgencies spearheaded by groups such as the Movement of the Emancipation for the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) (Watts 2008a: 21). This period in the region's history marked a watershed moment for the Delta and Nigeria as it ushered in an era of intense violence unseen in decades (Chikwem and Duru 2018: 45). Whilst there has been a significant scholarly focus on the region in recent years, a significant proportion of this existing literature offers singular issue, mostly natural resources, oil and economic led explanations. This thesis seeks to depart from this prevailing analytical approach of studying the region – and instead reengages with the Delta conflicts by providing and mainstreaming a multi-causal explanation for the ongoing crises. Researching the region, its conflicts, and the nuances thereof continues to be important, particularly given the Delta's strategic significance to Nigeria.

The Niger Delta, geographically located in the South-South region of Nigeria, is a strategically important area of the country. The region's oil and gas natural resource reserve, which until 2014 accounted for approximately 80 percent of federal revenue,¹ has made it the economic heartland of the country. In spite of the region's significant fiscal contribution to the Nigerian economy, and its centrality to the broader patronage politics in the country, the Niger Delta is impoverished and disadvantaged, even by Nigerian standards (Emmanuel et al. 2009: 227; Ikelegbe 2001a: 437; Tonwe et al. 2012: 37; Alagoa 2004: 4). This economic paradox, though relevant, is just one of the many unfortunate realities experienced by people in the region. The paradox does,

¹ Oil extracted from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is the mainstay of the country's economy and accounts for up to 80% of government revenue, 95% of export receipts and 90% of foreign exchange earnings (See Ikelegbe 2006a: 30; Omeje 2005a: 321; Watts 2004a: 50; Alagoa 2004: 2).

however, create a backdrop for the region's recent history. The combination of high levels of poverty, youth unemployment, environmental degradation, poor infrastructure, ethnic rivalries and, in recent years, military repression have fuelled dissent in the region to unprecedented levels, peaking between 2004 and 2009. Whilst the issues highlighted above offer useful insights into the Delta conflicts, a *longue durée* approach to analysing events in the region shows that this point in the region's conflict history is consistent with past conflict events. The next section will offer a brief historical account of the Niger Delta from 1914 to 2009 to in order to provide some context for recent events.

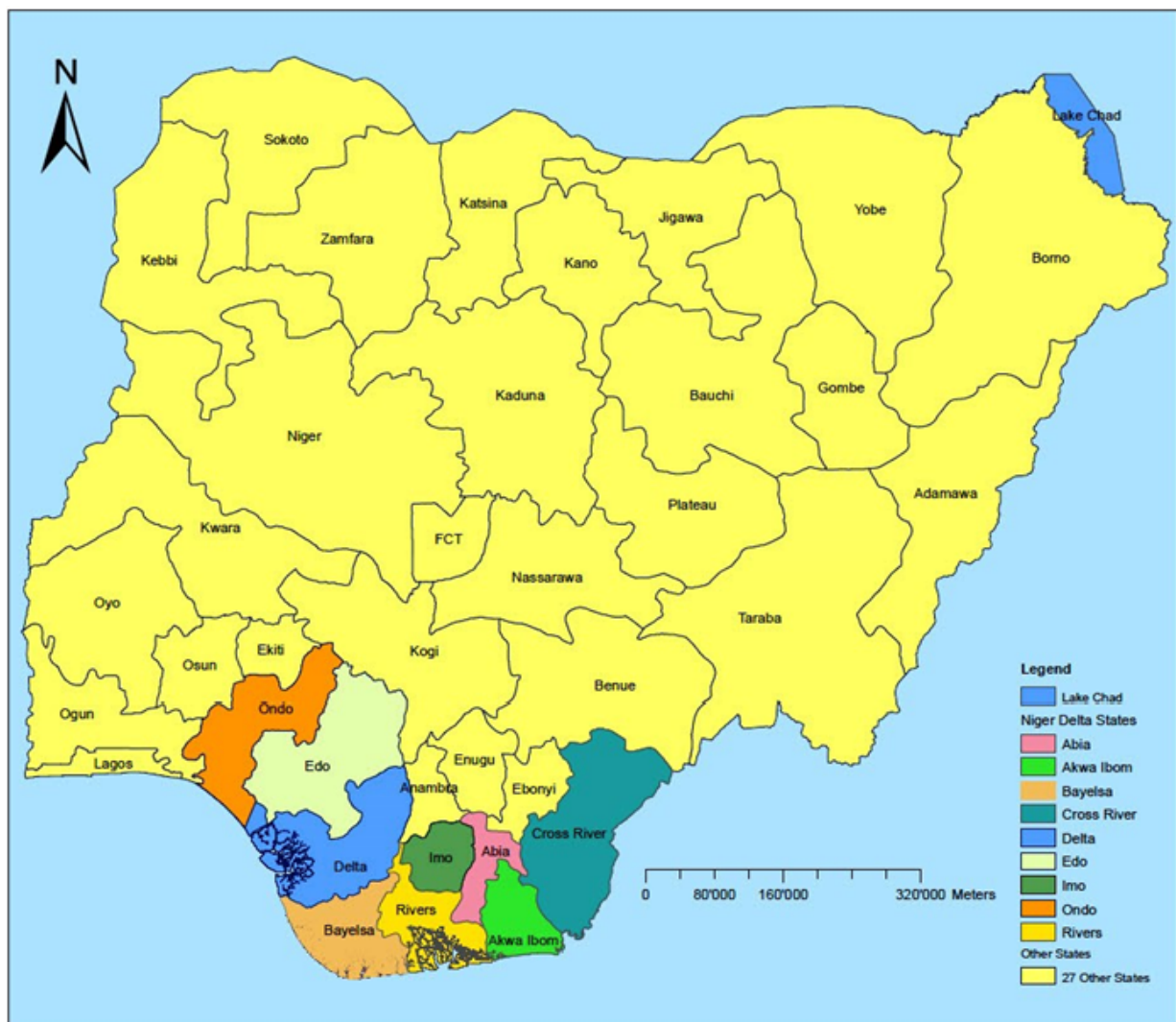


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria highlighting the 9 constituent Niger Delta States – of these nine states, the 3 core oil producing states are Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa State (Source: Ite et al. 2013).

A brief history of the Niger Delta

Archaeological excavations provide evidence to suggest that there had been some form of life in the Niger Delta dating as far back as over a thousand years. Some of these excavations show that the Ijaw people, one of the constituent ethnic groups of the Niger Delta, had developed cultural, social and political systems in the context of their wetland environment – even back then (Alagoa 2004: 7). Indeed, it was suggested that the region was “peopled by three distinct waves of migration from the tribal hinterland” (Dike 1956: 21). The most vital movement of people to the Niger Delta took place between 1450 and 1800 following the development of the slave trade – with predominantly Ibo migrants from the hinterland (ibid.: 24). Drawing from oral tradition and archival documentation from transatlantic slave trade, oil palm produce and petroleum trade, Alagoa (2004:7-8) argues that the “Niger Delta was, for centuries, a central part of the Slave Coast, then became the Oil Rivers (from its supply of palm oil), of the West African coast before it became the centre of the petroleum industry in recent times”. As such, in historicising the region, he suggests that Niger Delta history could be presented as having four significant epochs: “a period of antiquity, a period of the Atlantic [slave] trade, a period of British colonial rule, and the period of independence from 1960-1996” (ibid.). Whilst this chronological categorisation is a useful anchor for understanding major eras of the Niger Delta, past and present, this is only one prism through which one might document the region’s history; it might be a more practical approach, for the purpose of this thesis, to consider the history of the Delta through resurgent narratives about the region.

In more recent times, any mention of the Niger Delta almost always evokes an imagery of incessant conflicts, militancy, oil wealth, poverty, land rights, corruption, chieftaincy

disputes, vigilantism, ethnic tensions, environmental degradation and a slurry of many other positive but often negatively fuelled representation of the region (see, for example, Arowosegbe 2009, Obi 2009, Omeje 2004, Oyefusi 2010, Ukiwo 2007, Watts 2007, and Zalik 2004). It is very difficult to historicise every single issue that has been raised about the Delta. However, a constant thread that appears to run through these various characterisations of the region, both scholastically and in the mainstream, is the focus on oil as the principal analytical and political anchor for understanding dynamics in the Delta region. Oil here, as noted by Bridge and Le Billon (2013: 5), “is a catch-all term that covers a diversity of liquid hydrocarbons”.² Certainly, it is practically impossible to provide an assessment of the Delta without codifying the centrality of oil in any representation of the region.³ Even in its absence, oil is an important part of any Delta narrative. But it is worth noting here that long before the first major oil exploration in Nigeria between 1907 and 1914⁴ (Frynas 2000: 9), the Delta region had in fact recorded a series of notable conflict events that have helped to shape the landscape of socio-political and economic conditions there, even today. Besides oil, another existential issue that has remained consistent is the periodic negotiations around the Delta’s existence and identity within Nigeria, particularly inside the political arena. This contentious relationship has always been framed around resistance emanating from within and outside the region.⁵ As such, understanding the specificity of recent Niger Delta conflicts does require an appreciation for the Delta’s unique position in Nigeria’s complex history.

² “The starting point for most of these is ‘conventional’ crude oil, a form of oil sufficiently liquid to be pumped directly out of the ground and rich enough in carbon-hydrogen atomic linkages to be directly refined” (Bridge and Le Billon 2013: 5).

³ The impact of oil on the Niger Delta, though especially pertinent, is not limited to the region alone. “Nigeria can hardly be understood without oil” (Genova and Falola 2003: 133).

⁴ According to Frynas (2000: 9) Nigerian Bitumen Corporation, a local subsidiary of a German company explored for oil in Nigeria between 1907 and 1914, when it was forced to withdraw from the country due to the First World War.

⁵ Genova and Falola (2003: 137), for example, emphasised how the discovery of oil in eastern and midwestern Nigeria (today’s Niger Delta) exacerbated existing ethnic and political tensions in the region.

It is said that the Niger Delta region is “built on trade; dynamic, fragmented and competitive governance; and fierce sense of independence in the face of perceived domination by outsiders” (Francis et al. 2011: 12). Well documented in *A History of the Niger Delta* is the continued fractious relationship between the various ethnic communities over issues as varied as, inter alia, migration, usurping of rulers, territorial disputes, trade disputes, slave taking⁶ (Alagoa 1972; see also Ikime 1977). It is, therefore, not unreasonable to hypothesise that recent conflicts in the region are rooted in latent historical grievances.

However to unpack all of this means acknowledging the significance of the four eras highlighted by Alagoa, especially the two periods since British colonial rule.⁷ Whilst there are merits to exploring the periods before colonialism, to manage the scope and scale of the historical coverage here, this section will focus primarily on epochs starting from the period of British colonialism and the formation of Nigeria in 1914 through to the period of independence in 1960, ending in 2009, when the recent armistice was signed between Niger Delta militants and the Nigerian government. This particular timeline is significant because it records an era when old Delta norms and tradition came under direct attack from British colonial administration (Nweke 2012: 210, see also Afigbo 1979 and Roberts 2004). The impact of this particular shift in norms and practices continue to influence events in the post independence period. This is reflected in developments surrounding multivariate issues along the lines of ethnic identity within Nigeria, resource control, land use laws, internal conflicts and other issues that have come to define present day Niger Delta. With this knowledge, we can more readily

⁶ Ikime (1977) provides an excellent and comprehensive analysis of the complex and often conflictual interactions between the Itsekiri and Urhobo ethnic clan in the Niger Delta and European traders, colonial rulers.

⁷ This period could be described as the two periods before colonialism, i.e. the period of antiquity and period of the Atlantic [slave] trade.

evaluate the complex conflict situation in the region by highlighting some of the key developments in the Delta since 1914. Adopting a surgical analytical focus, this section will be presented chronologically in an attempt to engage with key issues of the different eras. The next section provides an overview of the period 1914 to 1960, highlighting especially relevant events to this analysis.

1914 - 1960 – Amalgamation, Political Representation, State Formation and Independence

1914 marks a watershed moment in Nigerian history. This was the year of Nigeria's formation when the Northern and Southern protectorates under British colonial administration were amalgamated to form what we now know as Nigeria (Tamuno 1970: 565- 566; Afigbo 1991: 24; Falola and Heaton 2008: 7). Whilst this has been documented in great detail elsewhere,⁸ as it pertains to the Niger Delta, this marked the beginning of a new era and struggle when people in the region began the quest for representation in the newly formed country. According to Oghi (2013: 243), the creation of Nigeria "relegated the people of ... the Niger Delta region to the status of minorities in relation to the numerically superior ethnic groups in the country". This fact matters because Nigeria is a nation with a diverse ethnic composition with the number of ethnic groups estimated at between 250 and 400, depending on the measurement criteria (Mustapha 2007: 3). Despite this diversity, three ethnic groups - the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – dominate, based on population size, with the rest of the country's population represented by many 'ethnic minority' groups (Tonwe et al. 2012: 39). The Niger Delta region is home to more than 40 ethnic minority groups including the Ijaw, the 4th largest group in Nigeria (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 47), the Ibibio-Efiks, Itsekiri, Ogoni, Uhrobo, Annang and Isoko, to name but a few. Despite this diversity, the

⁸ See, for example, Tamuno 1970, Crowder 1978, Falola and Heaton 2008, Adebani and Obadare 2010.

British administration's nation building policy had sought to use social order, which implicitly privileged the three major ethnic groups – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo – to stratify, differentiate and select recruits into the colonial services (Oghi 2013: 243). In so doing the administration had indirectly announced that some groups within Nigeria “were [more] worthy of respect than others” (ibid.). This set the tone for the ensuing tense relationship between the minorities in Nigeria and the majority groups who took up some of the most coveted positions in the political economic space. By the early 1930s and 1940s people in the Delta were politically awoken due to their continued inability to influence and extract resources from the colonial administration (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 52). Instead, as Nwajiaku-Dahou highlights:

Delta communities found themselves in competition for jobs, political influence and land with the vast numbers of Igbo migrants from the north of the Niger Delta. The sheer size of the Igbo migrant population in Port Harcourt changed the demographics of the town. This meant that political organisations based on a ... communal identity alone would be insufficient to counter Igbo ascendancy. In the context of decolonization, the creation of three regional political units in 1946, each with an ethnically dominant 'majority' group and a large number of smaller 'minorities', became the crucible of trans-ethnic 'Rivers'/ 'minority' identities developed to do battle with hinterland Igbo. Throughout the 1950s period of episodic deliberations over Nigeria's constitutional future, a Calabar-Ogoja-and-Rivers political identity also emerged, which included an even larger stretch of non-Igbo minority groups living in three provinces in the eastern region. Both minority political platforms

used notions of cultural simplicity to make a case for greater 'minority' autonomy vis-à-vis the politically and numerically dominant Igbo ethnic group that dominated the Eastern Region and controlled the largest political party... (2009: 52)

Although, from the excerpt above, it would appear that the Niger Delta people had a particularly frosty relationship with the Igbo - and whilst there might be some merit to reaching this conclusion⁹ - the representation of the Igbo here is, in fact, an extension of the three majority ethnic groups and their tight grip on the nucleus of power and resources across Nigeria. What we are seeing at this stage in the region's history is mobilisation by groups in the Niger Delta in response to years of marginalisation. By the 1940s and 50s when Britain granted Nigerians some autonomy to govern within a federal set-up, the three regions - the North, East and West - were still dominated by the three majority groups. The Hausa to the North, Igbos to the East and Yoruba's to the West. This sustained threat of marginalisation,¹⁰ pre-independence, encouraged the formation of the Calabar Ogoja Rivers State (CORs)¹¹ movement to challenge the hegemony of the dominant ethnic groups (ibid. 267; Ojo and Adebayo 2008: 338; Tonwe et al. 2012: 40). The CORs movement began in Uyo in December 1953. The main objective of the movement was to demand the creation of new states. The movement was an effort by ethnic minority groups who wanted separation from the three regions,

⁹ See Dike (1956) who charts the interaction between people in the Niger Delta and various Igbo communities in the hinterland.

¹⁰ Marginalisation is a central reason for recent group formations and protests in the region. For example, Ikelegbe (2001a: 444-449) mapped the grievances of ethnic civil groups and youth associations in the Niger Delta; marginalisation was frequently cited as a grievance issue that they would like to address.

¹¹ Although this section does not go deeply into the CORs movement, to summarise, the CORs movement was for the creation of the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers state. But according to the Crowder (1978: 242) the movement had subsidiaries that focused on establishing an Ogoja state and a River state to include Ijaws from Western and Eastern Nigeria. There is an extensive literature on this subject. Please see, for example, Crowder 1978 and Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009.

North, East and West of Nigeria,¹² so that members of ethnic minorities could be represented at localised state level (Ojo and Adebayo 2008: 334). Groups in the region had specifically requested the recognition of their political identity within Nigeria, which at that stage was to be constituted into a new Rivers Province (Tamuno 1972: 267). However, despite the creation of a Rivers Province, it marked only an administrative success – there had been no “far-reaching improvements in the economic and social welfare of the [Niger Delta] people” (ibid.). The limited success in securing their wishes between 1947 and 1953 meant that there was to be more political action (ibid.).

In response to the continued clamour for an autonomous unit within the newly formed 3-unit federation, in 1956-1957, the British colonial administration set up the Willink Commission of Inquiry into Minority Fears and Means of Allaying Them. But as Nwajiaku-Dahou explains, the commission “resolutely refused to accede to minority demands for state creation” (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 52). The Commission’s view was that a Nigeria, which had to face the outer world after independence, would “find within herself forces working strongly for unity. It would be a pity if at the moment when Nigeria achieved independence; separate states had been created which enshrined tribal separation in a political form that was designed to be permanent” (Nigeria (The Willink Commission Report) 1958: 89). The commission’s position suggested that whilst they acknowledged the concerns of minority groups in and outside of the Delta, they did not believe that it required an urgent redress. The 1957 Constitutional Conference reached a similar conclusion. The commission like the Willink before it, declared that:

¹² In pre-independent Nigeria, the three regions in Nigeria were populated by a majority from the three main ethnic groups: the Hausa Fulani had cultural hegemony in the North, Igbo to the East and Yoruba in the West.

Though the desire for the creation of new States in part arises from the fears of minorities, it would be impracticable to meet all these fears by the creation of new States. There are many different ethnic groups and peoples in Nigeria and however many States were created, minorities would still inevitably remain. It would therefore be the task of the Commission to propose other means of allaying these fears and to consider what safeguards should be included for this purpose in the Constitution. (Report by the Nigeria Constitutional Conference, 1957 – cited in Tamuno 1972: 268)

Despite this conclusion, and those reached by the Willink Commission, actions taken to address the underlying issues remained unsatisfactory. Post Willink Commission, and as a way of addressing these ongoing concerns, both the Eastern and Western regional governments introduced measures to contain potential fallouts. For example, in the East, government used “the newly created second chamber, the Regional House of Chiefs (1957/8), to ensure compliance from chiefs and ordinary people at town and village levels” (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 53). The attempts to carve out autonomous units out of the Eastern region were also inhibited by the reality of the day. People in the Delta had very limited choices but to be seen to support the government because to do otherwise would be costly. Nwajiaku-Dahou (2009: 53) reflects on this conundrum that the Delta people found themselves in. As she explained, “[p]olitical realism made it important to be seen to support the Eastern Government and not to be perceived as anti-Igbo, which would have meant denying oneself and one’s constituents access to political patronage and public resources” (ibid.). Whilst all this was happening on the social and political stage, it is worth noting that around the same period – in 1956 –

Shell, the Anglo Dutch company, had struck oil in Oloibiri in Ogbia, Niger Delta (Obi 2009: 118, Nwajiaku 2005b: 461).¹³ By 1958 Shell was exporting oil from Nigeria and by 1959 was joined by a host of other multinationals (Obi 2009: 118). The impact of this discovery will be considered in the next section, but, as the debate about representation of ethnic minority groups continued, Nigeria secured independence from the British colonial rule on the 1st of October 1960 (Tamuno 1970: 572; Tamuno 1972: 268; Adebaniwi and Obadare 2010: 382; Obi 2009: 115).¹⁴ Immediately after this, the region, and the rest of Nigeria, faced an entire set of new struggles. The next section will reflect on some of the crucial events in the period between independence in 1960 and 1990.

1960 -1990 – Independence, Secessionist Movements and Land Use Act

1960 ushered in a new era of self-governance, which brought about renewed optimism (Diamond 1988: 75). Equipped with economic independence, commercial quantity of petroleum and the largest number of citizens in Africa, there was hope that the country could claim a leading position in African and world affairs, whilst also acting as an example for other colonised countries across the globe (ibid.; Falola and Heaton 2008: 158). However, an underlying and unyielding issue in the country was the question about national identity. Though citizens in the country are known to the outside world as Nigerians – and at the outset, there had been a sense that there was a spirit of national pride and hope (Diamond 1988: 75) – there were always these underlying questions: what was it to be a Nigerian? And how does the country go about governing

¹³ At the time of oil discovery, Oloibiri was and is still situated in Ogbia Local Government Area (LGA). Ogbia was at the time under the Eastern Regional Government before it acquired its own first-class chieftaincy stool under the newly established Eastern Regional House of Chiefs and Traditional Rulers (Nwajiaku 2005b: 472).

¹⁴ At this stage, the country was producing 20,000 barrels of oil per day, doubling within a year reaching a peak of 2 million barrels by mid 1970s (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2012: 297).

the diverse interests and identities within it? The “national question”¹⁵ was a sustained one (Falola and Heaton 2008: 158). It would appear that the challenge to this question had been inscribed into the constitution. At independence, Nigeria’s version of federalism meant that access to power at the national level was to be derived from controlling one of the regional level political space (ibid. 159). This, in essence, intensified regional ethnic competition. This did not bode well or correlate with the earlier optimism that followed the ascendancy into self-governance.

By 1964 in the run up to the federal election¹⁶ - the struggle for political representation and participation in Nigeria had intensified – with various political parties forming complex alliances across ethnic lines and across region. In the eastern region, the Niger Delta Congress – an ethnic minority party representing minority groups in the eastern province - went into alliance with the most powerful political party in the north, Northern People’s Congress (NPC) to form Nigerian National Alliance (NNA).¹⁷ The Niger Delta Congress “‘also indulged in anti-igbo propaganda’ and told the minority peoples of the river delta that only NNA would create their cherished goal of a Rivers State” (Diamond 1988: 202-203).

The election campaign deepened the division between the various ethnic groups across the country, with accusations and counteraccusations of opponents’ plot to break up Nigeria (Anglin 1965: 181). At the time, the President of Nigeria, Chief Nnamdi Azikwe

¹⁵ The ‘national question’ by its very nature is a fluid and dynamic question, which has had “changing definitions and shifting meaning over time for different scholars and people” Momoh and Adejumbi (2002: 3). Here the national question is intended to help to think about what makes Nigeria – Nigeria and Nigerians – ‘Nigerians.’ This is best encapsulated by Obi (2002: 106) who explains that the “national question in Nigeria revolves around the contradiction between the *Nation* and the *State*. It can be conceptualised in terms of the urgent need to work out modalities and reach a broad consensus for a just and equitable basis through which the diverse nationalities in Nigeria can unite, and pursue a common destiny of national development as Nigerians”.

¹⁶ There is a large amount already written about Nigeria’s first republic and the formation of political parties and alliances – see for example Anglin (1965), Jackson (1972), Bamiduro (1982) and Diamond (1988).

¹⁷ This party, formed in the late 1940s, was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Northern Nigeria with Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister of Nigeria (1960-1966) serving as the party’s deputy leader. Both men were assassinated in the first coup in Nigeria’s history in 1966.

warned voters against leaders who preferred "... to crucify the unity of [the] country on the Golgotha of their inordinate ambition for naked power" (Azikwe cited in *ibid.*). Indeed, he had accused Dr Michael Okpara, his successor as Premier of Eastern Nigeria, of threatening to secede the region from Nigeria. The President claimed that "Dr. Okpara [had] threatened that Eastern Nigeria would secede from the Federation" (*ibid.*). This point in the country's history was especially tense. The party and regional politically wrangling as well as the highly contested 1963-1964 census crisis¹⁸ was to be the beginning of the end of Nigeria's first republic. By 1966, Nigeria had experienced its first military coup. Led by the "the five majors", most of whom were from the eastern part of Nigeria, the coup was interpreted by others in the country as an ethnic conspiracy that needed to be avenged (Adejumobi 2002: 163). At the time of the coup, two Niger Deltans, Isaac Boro and Nottingham Dick, who were concerned about a threat of Igbo domination and resource control recruited and led 120 Ijaw men to battle against the state, declaring the Niger Delta region independent for 12 days until they were captured (Tamuno 1972: 269, Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 57-58). After Boro and his men were arrested by the government, fearing that the separation of the eastern region from Nigeria would confine eastern minorities ethnic groups to a status of permanent marginalisation, Boro and his followers joined the Nigerian military to fight against Igbo secessionist during the ensuing 1967 Biafran war¹⁹ (Ukiwo 2011: 21), however, the dissolution of their revolutionary movement was only a temporary suppressant of conflict drivers that remained extant, giving way to subsequent organised politically motivated violence in the region (Davidheiser and Nyiayaana 2011: 48). In fact, whilst

¹⁸ There was 1963 census to allow the Electoral Commission to allocate parliamentary seats to the region based on their populations. Unfortunately, a highly contested political landscape meant that there were high irregularities in the inflated numbers being presented. This caused uproar, disagreements and protests (Ojo 2010: 346-348; Diamond 1988: 131-139).

¹⁹ It is understandable that Boro and his followers would fight against the Biafran secessionist because an independent Biafra would have subsumed the many Eastern ethnic minority and their resources. Indeed, had Biafra separated from Nigeria, the country would have lost over 75% of petroleum resources (Omoje 2007: 217).

we can draw direct connections between recent uprising in the Delta and Boro's revolution, it is also true that Boro's rebellion was fuelled by latent grievances borne out of the dissatisfaction of the outcomes of pre-independence CORs movement and general calls for representation of minority ethnic groups in the Delta. Indeed, Boro's war is said to symbolise the justification for the creation of Rivers State (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 49), which eventually happened in 1967.

1967 was a defining year for Nigeria and the Niger Delta. Amongst a series of evolving events was another dimension wrapped in this complex wrangle about representation and what it means to be Nigerian and the settlements that comes with being a minority in Nigeria. In the same year the evolving question about natural resources, but specifically, the oil question was one that was taking on new forms and characteristics. Prior to this point, Nigeria's state involvement in the oil industry had largely been as a distant participatory, until the 1960s, which marked a period of minimal state involvement in Nigeria's oil industry. Obi and Soremekun (1995 cited in Frynas 2000: 30) refer to this as phase one.

Phase two, starting in 1967, was ostensibly induced by the Civil War, when the Nigerian government realised that oil was strategically important to Western countries, whose interventions had drawn Nigeria into international politics of oil (Pearson 1970: 139 Frynas 2000: 30-31). The war had forced the Nigerian government to tightly regulate the oil industry because the revenue it generated could be used to promote economic development (*ibid.*). This set in motion a series of events, amongst which was the establishment of the Petroleum Decree of 1969, an order that vested the control of petroleum in Nigeria with the state (Omeje 2007: 217, 220). This decision had serious ramifications for the economic relationship between the state and people of the Delta

region. As a result of the Nigerian state's more active involvement with the petroleum industry, the long established 'derivation principle', a formula of sharing locally collected revenue with the federal government, which had previously allowed regions to retain 50% of the tax receipts from that area was progressively reshaped. From its height at 50%, it had been reduced to 45% in 1970 and 20% by 1975 (Frynas 2000: 43; Joab-Peterside et al. 2012: 22).²⁰ In fact, the revenue allocation formula was changed up to six times between 1966 and 1979 (Nwajiaku 2005b: 468). The derivation principle was systematically replaced by a new approach of collecting revenues from all states, pooled into a joint account and shared between the three branches of government before being allocated to states on the basis of population size (ibid.). These changes have become one of the significant flashpoints in the relationship between successive Nigerian governments and people in Niger Delta.

Whilst the fluctuations in the figure might be traced back to the 1960 Petroleum Decree, it is the Land Use Decree of 1978 (later re-enacted as Land Use Act of 1979) that has shaped many of the contentious, land linked, relationships that have now crystallised in the Delta, specifically, in regards to community *vis-à-vis* state relationships and inter/intra community relations.

The 1978 Land Use Decree, in the words of Allott (1978: 136), was "revolutionary because it [imposed] for the first time in the whole of Nigeria a common and uniform system of land titles and land control".²¹ Whilst this seemingly positivist view celebrates the standardisation of land titling and ownership in Nigeria, scholars writing about the decree in relation to the Delta take a different view. They argue that the 1978 act was an

²⁰ This figure was systematically whittled down to 3% in 1990s before the 1999 constitution enshrined the latest rate of 13% (Omeje 2007: 218, 224).

²¹ The implication of this law is more thoroughly explored in chapter 5.

'anti-Niger Delta' decree, inscribed into law to disenfranchise people in the region. Emuedo and Abam (2015:12) capture this sentiment very clearly when they argued that the decree "has as its core objective the neutralisation of the traditional rights of the Niger Delta people over their lands under customary laws." Indeed, they continue by elucidating that "The anti-Niger Delta people's focus of the Land Use Act is exemplified by its technical distinction between payment for land (a property of the state) and compensation for investments (e.g. destroyed buildings, economic trees, farm crops, etc.) made by previous owners on land. The Act, as applied to post-1978 land acquisitions, abolished the transfer fees hitherto paid by oil companies to landowners. The evident disadvantage of the Act to the oil host communities and the abrogation of their customary land rights is further compounded by its ouster of the courts' power to inquire into matters relating to the provisions of the Act ... Through the Land Use Act, the State monopolises all rights of access to all oil-rich lands, precluding legal recourse by the original land owners. Thus, the Land Use Act completely divested the Niger Delta people's right to their ancestral lands and invested same in the state" (ibid.). Whilst the economic impact of the state's involvement in the petroleum industry is felt in the Delta, Emuedo and Abam's contention above, though quite critical, is reflective of some of the other strong views held by people in region. The other layer in their argument is that the region's customary law, as it pertains to land and perhaps other aspects of life, has been indiscriminately subverted. This argument and the fact that the federal government altered the derivation principle six times between 1966 and 1979 has indeed helped to construct the perception of an inherent government-wide anti-Niger Delta bias. which, in turn, forms the backbone of many of the long held dissent in the region (Nwajiaku 2005b: 468).

The state's successive land/natural resources decrees and more prominent involvement in the oil industry not only put it directly against communities dependent on land as a primary source of income, the modification of the derivation principle meant that financial relations between the federal government and states would be under immense and continued microscopic review, which, in fact, led to the ultimate crisis of state legitimacy (Obi 2001: 7). Whilst disgruntled elites and layman alike voiced their opposition to an all-encompassing state, the oil shocks of the late 1970s and early 1980s exacerbated the tension between people in the Delta and the state (Nwajiaku 2005b: 468). Though the first oil shock struck in 1977, the full implications were concealed by the recovery of global oil markets soon after, and a short pricing boom in 1980. The profligacy of the then civilian president, Shehu Shagari, however, was met by another oil shock in 1981, which in effect grounded the economy to a halt (Obi 2001: 32-33). As Obi put it, "...the attempt of the Nigerian ruling class to use petro-dollars to import 'development' had come to grief. The full impact of the global recession and an oil glut triggered Nigeria's economic and external debt crisis" (ibid. 33). The oil crises set in motion a series of events that were to reshape the political and economic landscape of the country once again. Whilst seeking to avert deepening crises, the Shagari administration was forced to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to negotiate a \$2.56bn stabilisation loan, which coincided with the enactment of the Economic Stabilisation Act of 1982 (Bangura 1986: 28). The act was essentially an attempt to reduce government spending by targeting a reduction in public expenditure spending, a wage freeze, import controls and other demand management measures, using fiscal and monetary policies (ibid.). This meant that there were drastic restructuring of social provisions to fundamentally important institutions like schools, where teachers went on strike due to months of unpaid salaries, hospitals were unable

to maintain essential equipment, and other infrastructure investment were halted (Obi 2001: 34). This had a huge impact on the whole country, and especially in places like the Niger Delta, where youth unemployment rate increased dramatically (ibid., Nwajiaku 2005b: 468-470).

With an economy in tailspin, popular unease and a general perception that the 1983 elections were corrupt, the Shagari administration was overthrown in December 1983 in a military coup d'état led by General Muhammadu Buhari, who himself was usurped in another coup d'état in August 1985, this time led by General Ibrahim Babangida. With an economy still in decline, the Babangida regime signed up to the IMF offer of a bailout in 1986 which was partly negotiated by his two predecessors (Anwanyu 1992: 6, Ikejiaku 2008: 6). Whilst his two predecessors had been reluctant to accept the seventeen strict conditions imposed by the IMF, General Babangida was more readily willing to implement all the steps prescribed by the institution to institute a national Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). According to Phillips (1987 cited in Anwanyu 1992: 6), "the specific objectives of the SAP include:

- to restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy in order to reduce dependency on the oil sector and on imports
- to achieve fiscal and balance of payments viability over the period
- to lay the basis for a sustainable non-inflationary growth
- to reduce the dominance of unproductive investment in the public sector, improve that sector's efficiency and enhance the growth potential of the private sector."

The implications of Babangida's regime's acquiescence to the IMF conditions were far reaching. Indeed, the impact of the SAP extended beyond any singular region or sector in Nigeria and affected most of the country. By the late 1980s, the consequences of SAP were felt throughout the Niger Delta. The rising unemployment under the Shagari and Buhari regimes continued amongst university graduates, which in effect contributed to the rising levels of student poverty (Nwajiaku 2005b: 469). According Nwajiaku, "many of those who had been involved in politically opposing SAP through the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) after it became subject to political infiltration, returned 'home' to seek relevance through ethnic associations ... [the long unease about dwindling privilege from the state amongst the disgruntled elite class] created articulate agents capable of transforming what had previously been isolated protests against oil company irresponsibility into a systematically organised challenge to the Nigerian state and oil multinational" (ibid.). This ushered in a different era of more active Niger Delta protests that were directed at the state and oil corporations. The movement gathered momentum in 1990s, reaching a fevered height between 2004-2009. The next section will explore this period in the Delta history.

Recent Conflicts in the Niger Delta

Recent upheavals in the Niger Delta can be traced back to 1990 when the Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), an Ogoni-based non-governmental, non-political organisation of the Ogoni ethnic minority people of South-Eastern Nigeria, was established to, amongst other things, protect the environment of the Ogoni people, protect cultural rights and practices of the Ogoni people and to seek social, economic and physical development for the region (MOSOP 2014). MOSOP, largely known for their peaceful protests against multinational oil corporations and the federal

government, were often faced with repressive state responses. In one such instance, a peaceful protest against Shell, the Anglo-Dutch oil corporation, in 1990 resulted in the killing of 30 people by government anti-riot police (Ojeleye 2011: 146). This seems to have been the template for subsequent state responses to expression of grievances and discontent in the region, culminating in the arrest and execution of nine MOSOP leaders, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, in 1995.

Seemingly grabbing the mantle where the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta left it, youth from the Ijaw ethnic group, the fourth largest group in Nigeria, gathered on 11 December 1998 in Kaiama town in Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta for an All Ijaw Youth Conference. From the meeting emerged the (IYC) and the Kaiama Declaration (Ukeje 2001: 27). Both of these developments are arguably parallels to what the Ogonis, before the Ijaws, had established. IYC was, in essence, an Ijaw youth led group similar to Ogoni's MOSOP and Kaiama declaration like the Ogoni Bills of Right (OBR) also included calls for the rights to self-determination, resource control, environmental sustainability, and safeguard of Ijaw culture (ibid.) As a result of the execution of the Ogoni nine and the subsequent events in the Niger Delta, the Ijaw youth were much more brazen in their demands from the state. The Kaiama declaration included an ultimatum demanding the "immediate withdrawal ... of all military forces" otherwise Ijaw youths would "complement" the military presence by the 30th of December 1998 (ibid. 28). This was a direct challenge to the federal government and efforts by these youths to act on this ultimatum were met with "brute force", looting and razing of villages. This seemed to be the beginning of a new dimension to the conflicts between frustrated Ijaw youths and local and federal government forces (ibid.).

This sort of antagonism between state and the population were perpetuated through further acts of reprisal both from state security forces and dissatisfied youths. However, the state's decision to invade and raze the oil town of Odi in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta, an event which saw the death of some 2,483 civilians, was perhaps the most significant point in confirming the new dimensions of the region's conflicts, particularly in the era of a new democratic led government (Omeje 2004: 432). The Odi Massacre, as it is known, was President Obasanjo administration's way of, it would appear, curtailing the threats of the emerging Ijaw youth activism. Whilst the administration's justification for Odi massacre is commonly challenged, it was the trend of "repeated pre-emptive attacks" by the government on Ijaw youths that intensified the shift towards militancy (ibid. 434). As Omeje notes, "the proliferation of clandestine militant groups and activities in the Ijaw-dominated parts of Niger Delta in recent years culminating in the exacerbation of Ijaw resistance against oil activities and the state are partly linked to the people's collective malcontent over the Odi massacre ..." (Omeje 2004: 434). This view strongly supports some of the registered justification for militancy in Nigeria, the fear that, unless reproached, the state will continue to attack innocent citizens in the Niger Delta.

It is difficult at this stage to conclude whether these events caused subsequent militant activities in the Delta, but Omeje's claim gives ground to considering military aggression as one possible catalyst for post-1999 conflicts in the region. The significance of this observation is that government response to protests in the Delta looks to have been more harmful to the pursuit of lasting peace in the region. This view is supported both by the militarisation of the region's conflicts and, as I show below, the new economic approach to addressing the Niger Delta conflicts. The significance of the militarised

approach is that it has often been pre-emptive, as was stated by Omeje, potentially contributed to the increase of combat in the region. After all, pre-emption is predicated on the prediction of possible rebel insurgencies, either by using intelligence from security services or just by monitoring the trends. As has been argued, the purpose of pre-emptive attack is to use “... high levels of violence in order to arrest a development that is not yet operational and hence is not yet *directly* threatening, but which, if permitted to mature, could be neutralised only at a high, possibly unacceptable, cost” (Shah 2007: 111-112, emphasis in original). For such an approach to be taken, the only requirement, it seems, is that there ought to be “*conjectural* and contingent threats of possible attack” (ibid., emphasis added). The suggestion of military attacks based on conjecture and unverifiable threats is problematic, yet, governments present pre-emptive attacks as a necessary tool for self-defence in an era of global insecurity (Van den hole 2003: 72-73).

In fact, the government might be forgiven for a series of failed pre-emptive attacks that have claimed the lives of innocent victims insofar as the events are isolated and are remote from the consciousness of the general population. In this respect, some of the Nigerian government’s errors that have perhaps exacerbated instead of mitigated conflicts in the region might be attributed to the preventive nature of the approach taken to reduce attacks by militants on government forces, foreign oil workers and innocent civilians. Though contentious, testing the viability of such an argument is beyond the main focus of my research. What the research is trying to unpack is the failures of government’s reactive responses to the region’s conflicts. This is to say that whilst there is a discussion to be had about the failures of successive government’s pre-emptive approaches, it is that some of the failures in government responses to the

region's conflicts were introduced after 'long' and 'thorough' inquests. For example, past and recent administrations set up commissions, inter alia, the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (Oputal Panel), set up by President Olusegun Obasanjo, and the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (TCND), set up by late President Yar' Adua to investigate unrests in the Niger Delta, yet, recommendations by these commissions are largely ignored.

Indeed, despite the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan stating that by incepting the TCND, pillars had been erected to bring "about sustainable solutions to the over five decade-old crises..." in the region, and that the committee's "recommendations will not be treated with levity", the reality was different (TCND Report 2008: iv-v). After the TCND submitted a report to the Nigerian government, the committee's recommendations were ignored with the government preferring to adopt pre-planned offensives against Niger Delta militant groups (Ukiwo 2011: 17). This, it would seem, is the norm rather than the exception. It is thus important to investigate how and why subsequent policies, but in particular, the Amnesty Programme of 2009 have been selected over other comprehensive policy recommendations. Whilst granting amnesty is one of the policy recommendations in the TCND report, it is important to note that this policy is just one of a long list of recommendations proposed by the committee.²² Whilst the design and implementation of the 2009 Amnesty Programme will be assessed in great detail in the next chapter, it is worth taking stock at this stage to reflect on why the historical account above is important and pertinent to the research questions examined in this thesis.

²² The design and implementation of the 2009 Amnesty Programme is more thoroughly assessed in chapter 2.

Research Questions

For all the complexity of the historical background given above, an otherwise rich Niger Delta literature has disproportionately reflected on oil and its politics. Yet, there are many other drivers of conflict in the region. For instance, the initial resentments around representation and marginality in the Delta emerged before oil became a key revenue generator for Nigeria (Dike 1956: 153). So it is clear that the economic opportunity presented by oil was less of an incentive in the calls for state creation. It appeared to have in fact been a genuine reaction to perceived threats of ethno-political marginalisation. As shown above, the grievance of marginalisation of ethnic minorities within the country is one that has retained its significance all through colonialism to post-independence Nigeria.

Indeed, this issue, at least on the surface, would seem to be multi-layered, ranging from localised ethnic strife within newly created states to acts of rebellion against successive governments at the federal level. Both of these have featured in Niger Delta conflicts in recent years (Francis et al. 2011: 29, 56). The perception that the region lacks representation in the federal sphere has assisted rebel leaders to construct narratives that have helped to gain support locally in their quest for self-determination. For example, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) spearheaded by militant Dokubo Asari, have taken inspiration and constructed their ideals along the lines of Isaac Adaka Boro's attempt to cede the Niger Delta from Nigeria.²³ In fact, many of the recent militant groups declared an "all-out war" against the Nigerian State (Francis et al. 2011: 15) - with commitments to break up the country (Nwajiaku Dahou 2009: 59).

²³ In 1966 Isaac Adaka Boro, a native of the Niger Delta, formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) by recruiting local men and declared the region independent for twelve days (Francis et al. 2011: 13; Nwajiaku Dahou 2009: 58). Though this effort was later aborted after the arrest of Boro and his men, it marked the first post-independence rebellion in the Niger Delta where violence was used to express grievances. More recent conflicts have been fought in a similar mould.

However, Asari's NDPVF group and other militant groups in the Niger Delta, including the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), have presented their cases for representation at federal level in such a way that by including calls for resource control, and forging attacks primarily targeting multinational oil corporations, they may have unintentionally helped to support economic of war and the rational choice school of thought which will be further explored later.

Unsurprisingly, consecutive government administrations have sought to prevent a downward spiral into full-blown violence in the region. This has not always been successful in spite of brutal military crackdowns and large-scale financial co-optation. From these initial explorations, I hypothesise that the lack of success in preventive efforts are due to the way that conflicts in the area were, and are still, understood. By and large, efforts to address conflicts in the region have often been embedded in skewed understanding of the causal factors. Typically, conflicts in the Niger Delta are thought, by key stakeholders and policymakers, to be caused by economic opportunities or the lack thereof, and by opportunities for natural resource predation. Whilst there have been many efforts to deviate away from the natural resources and economic led explanation of the Delta conflicts²⁴ the most influential strand of academic narratives appear to come from the economics of war scholars.

Nwajiaku-Dahou (2012: 295), for example, notes that it is no surprise that "public-choice-inspired 'new political economy' approaches [is] increasingly popular in policymaking circles". This, she argues has been helped along by the arrival of two specific tribes of political economists: the "public-choice strands"; and the more "structuralist 'resource curse' traditions" (ibid. 296). The arrival and contribution of

²⁴ Chapter 2 presents a detailed analysis of these arguments *vis-à-vis* the economics of war representation of the region's conflicts.

these actors to the conflict discourse though might appear inconsequential, it is important to reemphasise that their entrance into the arena of conflict analysis continues to distort our understanding of conflicts and the responses designed to reduce clashes in places like the Delta region. Whilst the thesis does not primarily seek to engage intimately with policy discourse and responses, this aspect of the conflict outline is nonetheless an auxiliary part of the research which ought to be reengaged with, even if only peripherally. After all, as Sandole underscores:

... war [or conflicts] is a research as well as a practical (political) problem
... Solving war as a practical problem means, among other things 'taking
... knowledge (assuming it exists) and attempting to influence decision
makers who preside over the political process at various levels' ... If it is not
clear what the causes and conditions of war are, or how war can be
prevented or otherwise dealt with, then war is a research problem as well
... war as a continuing high-cost human tragedy (practical problem)...
requires an appropriate theory for understanding and dealing with it
(research problem) (1999: 1).

Sandole's assertion here justifies precisely why this research is necessary and what it seeks to do. I have inferred from the above that there seems to be a disconnect between the understanding of the causes of conflicts and the policy recommendations from policymakers/decision makers whom have variously arrived on the Niger Delta conflict scene, prescribing multiple, hitherto ineffective solutions. Therefore this study, built on Sandole's argument that policy prescriptions fail in the absence of a comprehensive causal knowledge, seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of the Niger Delta conflicts?
2. What are the motivations behind some of these conflicts?
3. What are the roles of the actors engaged in the conflicts?
4. How do these conflicts interact to shape our overall understanding of the Niger Delta conflicts?

These questions offer a useful starting point to explore a series of causal factors driving conflicts in the Delta. The questions also allowed me to engage with the varying motivations that shaped the approach taken by the myriad actors engaged in the various conflicts.

By taking this approach, the thesis unpacks and focuses on three key areas: the erosion of traditional governance and practices, land disputes, and militancy as a quest for access to the state and its resources. These three areas, though significant, have received very little scholarly attention in analyses of the Niger Delta conflicts, certainly relative to the economics of war paradigm. And where they have been explored, they have not been examined through the multidisciplinary lens this research adopts. As a result of the limited focus on these issues in current literature, they have been used as the conceptual framework for this thesis, around which an alternative narrative of conflicts in the Niger Delta has been constructed. This thus acts as an empirically grounded counterweight to the dominant understanding of conflicts in the region and marks a shift from what Sandole above considers the “practical”/“political” understanding of conflicts (ibid.). Until now, the political understanding has been led by an economic deterministic assessment of conflicts in Nigeria’s Delta region.

Indeed, it is worth noting here that the economists' explanation of conflicts is a significant part of our understanding of the motivations behind conflicts, however, this thesis broadens this understanding of the Niger Delta conflicts beyond the limitations in the monocausal economic perspectives. Our knowledge of conflicts should transcend any singular-issue explanation, which Nwajiaku-Dahou rightly argues "can only take us so far" (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2011:13; Ukiwo 2011: 19). Indeed, while Morgenthau contends that "... Were it possible to reduce all [the] multiple causes [of war] to a single one capable of rational formulation, the solution of the problem of war and peace would no longer seem to be impossible" (cited in Sandole 1999: 10), the reality is more complex and that the challenges of conflict prevention are never ending. Such an understanding and sensitivity to nuance is crucial to examining the multi-causal drivers of conflict, including in the Niger Delta.

Specifically, within the economics of war assessment of the Niger Delta, I complicate the dominant binary 'greed and grievance'²⁵ model to provide more nuanced analyses of the region's conflicts. I do this by looking at three different conflicts in the region that are *not* directly linked to economic opportunism, upheld by this school as the main cause of conflicts in the region. This analysis was conducted by using three main case studies divided into three separate chapters of a total of seven.²⁶ After this introductory chapter the remaining chapters are:

2. DEMYSTIFYING NIGER DELTA EXCEPTIONALISM: Contextualising the region's conflict discourse

²⁵ The 'greed and grievance' theory was first extended by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (1999) as they tried to explore the links between conflicts and natural resources in resource rich nations.

²⁶ The case studies were presented as three empirical chapters to highlight three of some of the main factors and the secondary issues that are a frequent source of conflicts in the Niger Delta.

This chapter reviews existing literatures, specifically those pertaining to the conflicts in the region. Through this review, the chapter highlights the gaps in exiting literature and makes an argument for the relevance of this research. Drawing a link to policy responses to the conflicts in the region, it analyses in some detail, the evolution of the 2009 Amnesty Programme. Doing so, the chapter thus connects the Amnesty Programme to the economic narrative of conflicts, in particular, the greed and grievance argument. As a point of departure from prevailing narratives, the chapter begins to go beyond the dichotomy of greed and grievance by engaging with multi-causal explanations of the Delta conflicts as an alternative to mainstream understanding of the region's conflicts.

3. METHODOLOGY: Treading Carefully in A Minefield of Hazards

The methodology section will explain the processes involved with deciding the methodology used for the thesis. This section will also discuss the important theoretical considerations that underpinned the selection of my methodology as well as how the case studies and interviewees were selected. I will also take this opportunity to document the challenges I faced in the field and how I got around them.

4. MILITANCY AS A 'WAY IN': Euphemism for Criminality or a Quest for Access?

In this section, I present an alternative idea of militancy. Instead of the oft-noted supposition of militancy as criminality, I argue, by charting the rise of Ateke Tom, that militants are opportunist leveraging their position for 'access'. Though often involved in criminal activities, is criminality the objective or a means to an end? This chapter will explore such questions.

5. OGU (OKRIKA) AND EKPORO (ELEME) DISPUTES: A Culture of Conflicts without the OIL

This chapter will analyse the land disputes between the Ogu people (of Okrika extraction) and the Ekporo people (of Eleme extraction). The conflicts between Eleme and Okrika ethnic conflicts have been well documented, but this particular conflict between Ogu and Ekporo, subsets of Okrika and Eleme, lack a key ingredient in their dispute, *oil*. The absence of oil in this dispute aptly illustrates other factors that drive conflicts in the region. Notably, this chapter examines the contentious boundaries and restive youths as key drivers of these particular conflicts.

6. SLOW REVOLUTION OF THE RISING TIDES: Failing Traditional Institutions, Youth Restiveness and Erosion of Cultural Values

Further complicating understandings of conflict drivers, this chapter will examine how weak governance in some of the region's communities has eroded traditional values. In particular, I will look at how a number of youth uprisings empowered by new youth movements are starting to challenge the changing roles of chiefs and traditional rulers. These new contestations are fiercer in communities where there are direct competitions for economic opportunities.

7. CONCLUSION

In this section I will conclude with a summary of the preceding chapters. I will also provide an analysis of the main issues and look at the implications of inaction with addressing the issues highlighted in the chapters above. The next chapter will focus on explaining the methodological considerations.

DEMYSTIFYING NIGER DELTA EXCEPTIONALISM: Contextualising the region's conflict discourse

The preceding chapter provided some context to the current conflict situation in the Niger Delta. However, I have yet to explain why I have decided to focus on challenging the greed and grievance narrative of the Delta conflicts. In order to do that, it is important to continue to embrace Sandole's representation of war/conflict as both a practical and research problem (Sandole 1999: 1). Therefore, to engage with the greed and grievance narrative, it is useful to understand some of the policy background – especially the 2009 government amnesty policy. Although not the only policy recommendation prescribed to relieve the Niger Delta of conflicts, the 2009 Presidential Amnesty was the latest of a series of failed policy recommendations introduced to address the region's conflict crises. An examination of this policy serves two main functions: 1) it offers an opportunity to critically engage with the latest government flagship policy seeking to address the Niger Delta conflict problem, and 2) by reviewing the effectiveness of this policy, it is possible to highlight the existence of any relevant knowledge deficit in the policy making arena. This, in turn, will reemphasise the importance of the academic research being undertaken here.

Prior to the introduction of the 2009 Presidential Amnesty, the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua set up a Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (TCND) on September 8, 2008 to investigate unrests in the Niger Delta. The newly instituted TCND analysed a total of 15 commission reports and recommendations on the Niger Delta, starting from the Willinks Commission Report of 1958, to then, present day Niger Delta. In its own words, TCND's ultimate goal was to "... make and present to Government any other recommendations that will help the Federal Government achieve sustainable

development, peace, human and environmental security in the Niger Delta region” (TCND Report 2008: vi; Courson 2011: 37).

However, the government’s decision to discount huge tranches of the Committee’s proposals is particularly noteworthy. In effect, the then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, a Niger Delta citizen, announced at the Commission’s inaugural address that – by inception the TCND – pillars had been erected to bring “about sustainable solutions to the over five decade-old crises” in the region and affirmed that the committee’s “recommendations will not be treated with levity” (TCND Report 2008: iv-v). The reality was, however, very different. After the TCND submitted a report to the Nigerian government in November 2008, the committee’s recommendations were overlooked. The government instead implemented pre-planned offensives against Niger Delta militant groups (Ukiwo 2011: 17). This, it would seem, represents the norm rather than the exception. Nevertheless, despite choosing to sidestep many of the committee’s comprehensive policy recommendations, the government chose to grant an amnesty in 2009, which had been suggested by the TCND. The amnesty, however, was only one of a long list of recommendations proposed by the committee. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine why this particular aspect of the recommendations were cherry picked from a long list of other complementary policy proposals. Against the backdrop of the discussion above, the chapter has been broken into three sections. The first section, *The 2009 Amnesty Programme*, will explore the 2009 Amnesty Programme and its limitations in greater depth. The section will explore, in some detail, the evolution of the programme and the ideas behind its development and implementation. The next section, *Greed and Grievance in the Niger Delta Conflicts*, will build on the section before by connecting the evolution of the Amnesty Programme to the economic narrative of

conflicts, many of which are embedded in or share the same assumptions as those underpinning Collier and Hoeffler's greed and grievance theory. This section will attempt to highlight the limitations of the theory within the Delta conflicts context. The final section, *Petro-violence, Ethnic Pluralism and Political Institutions*, seeks to go beyond the dichotomy of greed and grievance by offering multi-causal explanations as an alternative to mainstream understanding of the Delta conflicts. The section does this by offering alternative contexts grounded in issues around ethnic plurality and ineffective political institutions for example. This approach will broaden the Niger Delta conflicts discourse and will act as the foundation for the empirical chapters that follow.

The 2009 Amnesty Programme

The introduction of the 2009 Amnesty Programme might be better understood as a pragmatic approach adopted by the government to tackle the spiralling level of conflicts in the region. Despite government's decision to ignore many of the recommendations of the TCND, the upsurge in militancy in the Niger Delta forced the administration to act. The need for a response was augmented when crises in the Delta region began to receive high level of international attention as various militant groups in the region, especially MEND, developed sophisticated methods to engage global observers through the use of ICT (Obi 2008: 418). They also adopted other means such as taking foreign oil workers as hostages and sending emails to international news outlets (Courson 2011: 32). As well as the international attention, there are several other reasons to explain why this policy was pushed through. For example, Okurebia and Daniel (2013: 36) argue that the implementation of the Amnesty Programme was in part due to the "sharp drop in ... oil output from 2.6 million barrel per day (bpd) to 500,000 bpd". This drop in output, according to Nwajiaku-Dahou (2010: 2), accumulated to "losses of 100 billion

dollars to the Nigerian treasury between 2003-2008". There is also a case to be made for the significant influence of the geopolitical context, wherein the Niger Delta is viewed as being directly linked to the United States' national interests and foreign policy post-9/11 and the wars in Iraq/Afghanistan (Watts 2004a: 50-51, Watts 2007: 638, Watts 2008a: 24-26). As a result, there were international and internal pressures on the Nigerian government to mitigate the escalation of conflicts in the region. As such, the administration of President Umaru Yar Adua opted for this pragmatic approach to address the region's conflicts. However, whilst this response offers some redress to the Niger Delta instability, the Amnesty Programme, as a whole, is understood by many to be a stop-gap measure which might be unsustainable (Obi and Rustad 2011: 1).

Given that Vice President Jonathan emphasised the requirement for a "sustainable solution" to the region's decades old conflicts (TCND Report 2008: iv-v), it is surprising that the government's response rested on the short-term Amnesty Programme. Whilst some analysts of the Programme claim that it has been successful in mitigating the continuation of conflicts in the region, others argue that the programme is a short-term solution. Ekumaoko (2013: 1) for example, explains that the "amnesty is only a means to achieving durable peace and not an end in itself". Hinshaw (2012) similarly contends that the programme is a "gilded pacification campaign ... [which] has sent young men in Nigeria's turbulent delta a different message; that militancy promises more rewards than risks". Newsom (2011: 1) like Hinshaw and Ekumaoko suggests that the "amnesty process opened a door for stabilization but did not reduce the long-term potential for violence or deal with root conflict issues". More comprehensively, Nwajiaku-Dahou (2010: 19) notes that "... the absence of a broader political settlement involving the broader Niger Delta population that has borne the costs of conflict, and the politically

motivated staffing of bodies responsible for implementing and coordinating the Amnesty Program, are among the numerous flaws of the Amnesty". Each of these assessments, in particular, Newsom's and Nwajiaku-Dahou's indicate, that the Programme does not deal with the root causes of the Niger Delta conflicts, neither does it address all the conflicts in the region. This reifies the view that the Amnesty Programme is unsustainable, as it does not go far enough to address the multiple and complex dynamics underpinning the conflicts in the Niger Delta and the country more broadly.

In fact, Nwajiaku-Dahou and Hinshaw suggest that the Amnesty Program could in the long-term exacerbate conflicts in the region by, for example, promoting the notion of potential economic gains of militancy. Whilst the Amnesty Programme has been effective in lowering the number of militant conflicts in the region since its peak between 2004-2009, it has to be noted that the rentierism and economic-centrism of the Programme, underlined by the monthly payments of N65000²⁷ granted to ex-militants who agreed to disarm and take up vocational training, was one way of addressing the dissatisfaction of some people in the region (Oluwaniyi 2011: 50). To put this into context, the monthly minimum wage for public sector workers in Nigeria is N18000 per month (Amaechi 2011). The government's decision to almost quadruple this sum suggests a strong desire to end militancy in the region through individual financial gain. Understandably, this offer was well received by militants operating in the region. The 60-day amnesty, which ran from 6 August to 4 October 2009, saw a total of 26, 358 ex-militants register for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme (Ubhenin 2013: 195). However, whilst the disarmament policy is generally perceived to

²⁷ According to sources, prior to the offer of an amnesty-trained militants in the Delta region were commanding over N50000 in monthly salaries (Watts 2008b: 4).

be positive, it is important to note that the number of people enrolled in the Amnesty Programme represent less than 1 percent of the estimated 20million people who live in the Delta region (Geohive 2013). Yet, the 127 Billion Naira (N127bn) allocated to the Programme between 2009 and 2011 represented over 70% of the total N181bn allocated to the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs²⁸ in the same period (Ubhenin 2013: 194). This disproportionate distribution of the overall Niger Delta budget towards the Programme reaffirm the government's commitment to ensuring that the peace process in the region is secured.

However, with a closer analysis of these figures, we get a different insight into the effectiveness of the programme. Of the over 26,000 ex-combatants who signed up by June of 2013, it was reported that just 9,192 had graduated from training in medicine, law, engineering, agriculture, electrical installations, welding and fabrication. Moreover only 200 of those who completed the Programme benefited from formal employment facilitated by the Amnesty office (This Day 2013).

An appraisal of these statistics, against a backdrop of continuing periodical unrest in the region, would lead one to conclude that the attempts to 'buy peace' in the region has had mixed results. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, this is largely because the dynamics of the region's conflicts are more complex than acknowledged in dominant conceptions and, thus, addressed in attendant responses. The Niger Delta conflicts, therefore, require further assessment to better understand and mainstream the multiplicity of factors driving the region's conflicts. This requires, as has already been mentioned, adopting a multidisciplinary lens in examining events in the Niger Delta, because the school of thought that has hitherto informed the amnesty programme, and

²⁸ The Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs is an agency with a mandate to formulate and coordinate policies for the development and security of the region.

many other policies before it, has largely been economic-centric.²⁹ In effect, the impact of using a solely economic optic, is that it provides only a limited understanding of conflict drivers. This, in turn, has an effect on policy recommendations developed in the region. As notably demonstrated by the economics rooted Amnesty Programme, such policy prescriptions offer only partial solutions, glossing over a wide breath of other causal explanations of the region's conflicts. With the oversights come serious long-term effects relating to the ongoing cycles of conflicts in the region. As indicated by Nwajiaku-Dahou above, by seeking only to address the economic demands of ex-militants, the amnesty programme excludes a large percentage of the Niger Delta community who are affected by an array of ongoing conflicts in the region. In particular women, children, the elderly, and youths who have not been members of militant groups, have been excluded from the Amnesty Programme's empowerment projects (Oluwaniyi 2011: 52-53).

Such significant oversight, i.e. the placation of a selected demographic in the Delta region could be linked to a series of factors that have informed the design of the programme. However, I would argue that none is more important than the plethora of recent literatures that have linked the causes of conflicts, including those in the Niger Delta "to the importance of economic agendas as opposed to grievance" (Collier cited in Keen 2012: 757). This school, known as the rational choice school, goes so far as to claim that "grievance-based explanations of civil war [or conflicts as is the case in the Niger Delta] are seriously wrong" (ibid. 757; Collier 1999: 4-57).

This claim effectively dismisses the significance of other literature with varied yet comprehensive causal explanations including, but not limited to, ethnic grievance and environmental grievance explanations of conflicts. Given that there is a huge stock of

²⁹ Many of the current scholarly, policy, and programmatic approaches to understanding and addressing the Delta conflicts are rooted in macro- and micro-economic paradigms.

evidence to support the complaints from the region, it becomes clear that Collier's assertion does not represent the realities of the Niger Delta people. For example, Ifedi and Anyu (2011: 92) argue that the "root causes of the [Niger Delta] conflicts ... are the human rights abuses and environmental degradation that the citizens [of the Niger Delta region] have suffered". Using ethnography, interview and focus groups, Madubuike (2009: 12) similarly concluded that "[c]ommunal conflicts, social identity and resource control agitations in the Niger Delta are products of exploitation, injustice, uneven distribution of common wealth and political marginalization". Emeseh (2011: 55) further drives this argument forward by claiming that the "majority of the Niger Delta peoples feel deeply aggrieved because of their *political marginalisation* and *alienation* from the benefits of oil production and destruction of the environment and to local livelihoods by *oil pollution*, but also because of their *lack of access to justice, redress and compensation*" (emphasis added). These conclusions, though largely representative of the types of grievances expressed in the Niger Delta, are only a snapshot from a long list of grievances expressed in the region and detailed in subsequent chapters. Importantly, however, they signal that beyond the simple economic understandings of conflicts, as extended by Collier and Hoeffler, lie a series of complex realities experienced by people in the Delta region.

By drawing attention to non-economic³⁰ motivations, this thesis seeks to contribute to demystifying the misrepresentation of causes of the region's conflicts. To do so, it will reengage much broader scholarship to address disparate causal explanations offered by myriad Niger Delta residents. Instead of simply accepting or dismissing Collier et al.'s 'greed' explanation, stakeholders ought to try to 'mainstream' the multiple, and easily

³⁰ Non-economic refers to nonmonetary or non-pecuniary interests. This point is important because for example, even economic resources like land have more significant value and meaning to communities in the Niger Delta. These meanings are often unrelated to the underlying economic value of the resources.

overlooked, factors of the region's conflicts to both educationally and practically engage scholars, NGO practitioners, government officials, various stakeholders and, indeed, policymakers as they attempt to design appropriate policies to mitigate future conflicts. This might be done, for example, by drawing direct links between historical events and recent Niger Delta conflicts.

It is clear that grievances exclaimed over *longue durée* continue to play a part in recent events. In pre-independence Nigeria, there were calls by ethnic minority groups located in the region for state creation in 1958 to counter the fear of ethnic marginalisation in the political and administrative sphere of the federation. Since then, there have also been other requests to address issues such as land reforms, environmental concerns and military repression. By failing to account for such historical context, Collier et al.'s claim that grievance explanations of conflicts are wholly wrong grossly misrepresents many of the conflicts in the Niger Delta. Yet, it is this view that 'rebels are motivated by greed and not grievance' that effectively framed the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Policy. It is therefore important to assess, critically, the value added by rational choice neoclassical economists in their analyses of conflicts in resource rich African countries. In this regard, Cramer (2002: 1845) maintains that arguments put forward by the school's approach, "are unconvincing theoretically and where they have empirical content this is largely arbitrary". He points to economists' lowly perception of other social scientists' analyses of conflicts. He makes this point by quoting Hirshleifer's assessment of "the intellectual continent of violence and conflict on which economist have alighted relatively recently" (ibid. 1846). According to Hirshleifer:

As we [economists] come to explore this continent, economists will encounter a number of native tribes – historians, sociologists,

psychologists, philosophers, etc. – who, in their various intellectually primitive ways, have preceded us in reconnoitring the dark side of human activity. Once we economists get involved, quite properly we will of course be brushing aside these a-theoretical aborigines... When these researchers do good work, they are doing economics. (Hirshleifer cited in Cramer 2002: 1846)

Whilst such an assertion could be understood as light-hearted intemperance on the benefits of economic analyses of conflicts *vis-à-vis* other social sciences analyses, when analysing the Niger Delta conflicts, we ought to be cautious not to oversimplify a century old conflict discourse. Still, it is significant to note that Hirshleifer's view is instructive when considering Collier and Hoeffler's formulation of the greed and grievance narrative. For example, the authors used Hirshleifer's argument that the "poor will succeed in using ... political contest to ameliorate their economic position" as a way to entrench the perception that all conflicts, including those resulting from political contests, are undergirded by ambitions of economic self-empowerment (Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 11). To understand this argument, it is worth examining more closely the greed and grievance argument.

Greed and Grievance in the Niger Delta Conflicts

The greed and grievance argument first appeared in Collier and Hoeffler's 1999 World Bank report where the authors aimed to compare "two contrasting motivations for rebellion". In their view, "empirically, many rebellions appear to be linked to the capture of resources: diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone, drugs in Colombia, and timber in Cambodia" (Collier and Hoeffler 1999: 2; Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 1). However, the very basis of the greed and grievance argument is built on Collier and Hoeffler's deduction that the weakness in social scientists' analyses of conflicts is the

emphasis social scientists usually place on *grievance* behind conflicts with little consideration for other variables such as opportunities for resource predation. In other words, social scientist are thought to only consider grievances such as political repression, ethnic differences and inequality as the main motivations behind conflicts. By employing statistical analysis, using data from 1960 up till 2004, Collier and Hoeffler attempt to challenge the *grievance* explanation of conflicts by concluding that “opportunities for primary commodity predation [i.e. greed] cause conflict” (Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 25). In fact, Collier and Hoeffler maintain that the grievance only explanation is a misrepresentation of real causes of conflicts. They argue that instead it is economic opportunity, in other words, *greed* that is the most “robust” explanation for civil strife in conflict regions (ibid. 1).

Collier further asserts that “the evidence on the causes of conflict points to *economic factors as the main drivers of conflict*. The combination of large exports of primary commodities, low education, a high proportion of young men and economic decline between them drastically increase risks. *Greed* seems more important than *grievance*.” (Collier 1999: 14, emphases added). This argument is predicated on the view that grievances in many conflicts are “perceived” (ibid.: 14). Many actors engaged in the Delta conflicts are argued to have embraced grievance narratives only as a short-term opportunistic strategy to justify criminal activities (Ukiwo 2009: 1). However, Collier and Hoeffler skillfully protected the greed narrative by claiming that where grievances do exist in conflicts, these are borne out of the “feedback effect, whereby conflict [fought because of greed] increased the risk of subsequent conflict through generating grievance” (Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 24). In essence, by pursuing economic ends, grievance is manufactured to justify the need for conflict. When conflicts persist,

genuine grievances are established as a result of encounters from such clashes therefore causing further unrests (Collier 2000: 10). However, it is clear that underpinning these assumptions are a series of 'hasty generalisations'. The broad-brush approach to explaining the motivations for conflict actors is problematic. While the consequences of such hasty generalisations are multipronged among the more concerning are the policy implications that emanate from institutionalising such a reductive understanding.

The immersion of economic considerations into the conflicts debates driven by Collier and Hoeffler's greed and grievance thesis, and Hirshleifer's before them, suggests a deeper agenda driving the economic analyses of conflicts. One such agenda appears to be an effort to shift policy recommendations to more economic-centric policies. This looks to be the case if for example we review Collier's perception of current policies, which he describes as being "focused upon on the one hand assuaging perceived grievances, and on the other, attempting to reconcile populations which have deep-rooted hatreds" (Collier 1999: 14). If indeed economists are predisposed to monopolising causal explanations of conflict discourse in the policy arena, there is a serious risk that actors engaged with the practical recourse for preventing conflicts are in fact being deliberately hindered, restricting their efforts to curtail these struggles. The concerted effort to subvert veritable and plural alternative causal explanations of conflicts, and the accompanying knowledge deficit, therefore ought to be redressed. As aptly stated by Sandole:

*'[t]he superficial virtue of the single-cause explanation is that it permits a simple, neat solution' ... single-factor accounts of war provide not only partial ... but usually distorted pictures of reality: 'in any real situation behaviour will be the result of factors from **all** levels' ... Consequently,*

*there is a need to 'put Humpty Dumpty back together again,' to reflect and act on 'the view that no single factor generates conflict among nations, [instead] conflict is the result of a **complex network of causes**' As Jack Levy ... puts it: 'It is logically possible, and in fact often desirable, to combine variables from different levels of analysis in causal explanations'... (Sandole 1999: 10).*

Therefore, as part of the effort to provide a holistic explanation of conflicts, I start here by examining the economists' take on conflicts. To do this, it is relevant to understand why the economic-centric understanding of conflicts have succeeded in gaining so much traction and in many cases informed policy decisions in conflict regions as is the case in the Niger Delta. Cramer, for example, claims that the "axioms, assumptions and logic [of neo-classical economics have] ... filtered into policy debates, especially through their influence on the research initiative of World Bank and the economics of civil war, crime and violence"(Cramer 2002: 1848). Understanding this phenomenon requires an appreciation of the simplicity and clarity with which Collier and Hoeffler have made some insightful, though contentious points³¹ (Cramer 2002: 1848). But also Collier's work has been described as an "attractive oversimplification" accessible to the wider-public and policy makers (Keen 2012: 765), it is thus understandable that the greed and grievance work would receive such wide support.

Of course, it is worth noting here that many of the assumptions and conclusions in the works of conflict economists are indeed plausible. Nonetheless, a scrutiny of the argument presents some important insights into economists' perceptions of conflicts. By essentially focusing on potential pecuniary gains and economic opportunities in

³¹ As explained above Collier's insistence that "grievance-based explanations of civil war are so seriously wrong" directly challenges the legitimacy of grievance induced conflicts (Collier 1999: 4-5).

conflicts, Collier and Hoeffler were able to present a paradigm they argue could help distinguish the difference between economic motivated conflicts and conflicts motivated by grievance. Whilst not totally dismissing grievances as the motivation behind many uprisings, they make an effort to draw distinctions between the types of rebellious organisations that take part in conflicts and how these organisations are shaped. By claiming that rebellious groups are similar to three types of organisation: “protest movements, armies and organised crime,” they were, through a process of elimination using changeable parameters,³² able to conclude that many protest movements in resource rich nations are akin to organised crime. This claim largely rested on the financing demands of rebellions, i.e. the mandates to generate income, through resource booty, to fund such activities. This argument appears well developed and is quite convincing. However, it is important to note that the comparisons between organised crime and civil conflicts are very reductive and serve to redefine the motives underpinning rebellions. They do this subtly; first by comparing rebellions to protest movements, they assert the similarities, perhaps as an effort to convince readers that these distinctive activities overlap. – which possibly explains why those who buy into grievance explanations conflate the implied ‘negativity’ of rebellion, with more ‘justifiable’ actions like protests.³³

They later claim that rebellions diverge from protest movements because rebellion requires people who are more committed. Indeed, rebellions are distinguished as sustained economic activities, unlike protests, which are frequently ad hoc, and thus not

³² Adopting the principle of *self-financing* of conflicts, Collier and Hoeffler claim that since rebellions are often combatants seek alternative methods of financing such as “pillage and plunder of local civilians, extortion of local businesses, smuggling, capture of relief aid, and rudimentary systems of war taxation” (See also, Ballentine and Sherman 2003: 1-3).

³³ Indeed, this is deliberate, the authors astutely designed a constraining analytical framework that forces engagement with their work, both by supporters and critics alike, to take place within a controlled model. This does not only limit the scope for critical review but also allows the authors to further entrench the validity of the frameworks they designed to support their arguments.

full-time, events. Collier and Hoeffler thus posit that rebellions are very similar to the army given that, like the army, rebellions have to deal with issues of hierarchy and cohesion. However, this was where the similarities supposedly end since, unlike army or protest movements, “a rebellion must generate revenue in order to feed and pay its workers” (Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 3.). Therefore, by process of elimination, rebellion must therefore be a criminal activity if it is neither a protest movement nor an army. This understandably raises important questions, with one obvious one being, what exactly constitutes a rebellion? And why can rebellions not just be rebellions? A hybrid form of organised protests or a non-state sanctioned army? The authors failed to engage with these questions directly, but instead came up with their own predictions.³⁴

The notion that rebel leaders are seasoned financial analysts who, at inception, are able or even willing to rationally construct labour or value chain models to ensure the effectiveness of their rebellious venture is very likely exaggerated. Collier and Hoeffler stipulate that “... rebel organization builds its forces from zero, and once they satisfy the survival constraint, [only then does] operation commence” (ibid. 6). Indeed, even if rebellions end up seeming like something of an organised venture, as is implied in the underlying assumptions of the introductory chapter (ibid. pp. 4-14), it would, I would argue be merely accidental, or possibly be as a result of an organic development from organised protests to organised rebellion. If the objective is solely greed, and the rebel leaders are as financially sophisticated as described by Collier and Hoeffler, then it

³⁴ In fact, Collier and Hoeffler may have inadvertently admitted that many of their assessment parameters were drawn from simplified predictions, making their arguments less robust. On the first page of their 2000 publication, as they set up their arguments, Collier and Hoeffler exclaimed that, “since grievance-assuagement through rebellion is a public good which a government will not supply, economists would predict that such rebellion would be rare” (2000: 2, emphasis added). The sentence following this statement does not attempt to clarify the bases on which this prediction was made, instead, it shifts swiftly to discussing how “many rebellions appear to be linked to the capture of resources” (ibid.). However, we need not to go too far to see the tenuousness of their arguments. The authors of one of the most significant academic literature on conflicts admitted that they set up a “simple rational choice model of greed-rebellion and contrast its predictors with those of a *simple grievance model*” (ibid., emphasis added). Though seemingly insignificant, this admission of simplicity is buried within much more substantive representation of what was to frame a new school of economic-centric representation of conflicts.

would seem rather easier for rebel groups, in many of the civil wars cited in their studies, to integrate into organised crime syndicates. This approach would very likely prevent rebel groups from engaging in direct combat with state military. It would be more plausible for rebel leaders who are primarily interested in resource plunder to exploit weak or complicit state institutions, including the security apparatus, to carry out the suggested criminal activities without engaging in direct combat. For example, in cases where reversible commodities are looted and transported overseas, there is significant evidence pointing to the involvement of bribed government officials who are ostensibly disposed to challenging the existence of these very rebel groups.

Keen (2003: 74), Jackson (2005:54) and Grant (2005: 444, 452) all noted the alignment of government officials in post conflict Sierra Leone's illegal diamond trade. Partnership Africa Canada (PAC), a Canadian NGO published a 2012 report with similarly compelling evidence, this time on Zimbabwe. Although not known for its diamond industry or for any recent major civil conflicts, Zimbabwe has a significant diamond and other natural mineral reserves. PAC's report documented the elaborate scheme employed by actors involved in exploiting the country's diamond industry. With seemingly very little interest in active combat, those involved in the exploitation of the industry co-opted corruptible government officials and members of the country's security apparatus in an illegal diamond trade (Partnership Africa Canada 2012: 6, 12). In the Niger Delta, Nwajiaku-Dahou (2012: 297) proved that criminality surrounding the oil industry had long been established, before the advent of 2004-2009 militant rebellion. There had existed a series of "...parallel economies' that developed around the production, sale and marketing of oil since the oil boom of the early 1970s" (ibid.). The sector co-existed alongside the formal state managed oil industry with scant evidence to suggest that the

industry needed militarization. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the additional layer of combat in recent Niger Delta conflicts had less to do with greed, and more to do with grievance.

In further attempts to review the organisational set up in the greed analytical framework, Collier and Hoeffler (2000: 6) suggested that rebel leaders would turn away willing fighters because of the diminishing rate on returns from having too many rebels under their fold. This seems rather counterintuitive, unless indeed, the activity is strictly economically driven. This would then present the same arguments as above, if it is primarily about plundering and exploiting a country's resource wealth, then there are many other non-combative ways to achieve this aim in many of the country's cited in Collier and Hoeffler's data. It is important to note, however, that whilst the simply economic rationale supports the argument of diminishing marginal returns, i.e. to mitigate the rising cost of rebellion *vis-à-vis* the diminishing returns³⁵ from looting, the reality, however, is that Collier and Hoeffler ignore the effects of coercion in rebellious movements. Indeed, many of the rebellions of the late 20th century and early 21st century have relied heavily on coercion as a means of recruiting rebel soldiers. Humphreys and Weinstein (2008: 452), for example, found that "involuntary participation is a fundamental part of revolutionary mobilization and political violence" in the Sierra Leonean civil war. After all, as is to be expected, the agenda is to increase the number of recruits who might challenge the manpower of state sponsored militaries. There are also those rebels who have joined these movements voluntarily to challenge their marginalisation. If, in fact, the rebellion is for the greater good, it is plausible that rebels would forgo immediate financial gains for the rewards in post

³⁵ This idea of diminishing returns is inscribed in equation 10 to suggest that after a while, the benefits of recruiting more rebels becomes redundant because the financial cost of recruiting them outweighs any contribution they (the recruits) might make to the rebellion (Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 6).

conflicts settlements. Which indeed might be the motivation in the first place. Economic induced grievances are no less valid than social or culturally induced grievances.

Collier and Hoeffler make many more similarly tenuous and hypothetical assumptions as they develop their analytical framework for the greed and grievance assessment. For example, with very little evidence, they augmented the role of diasporas, specifically in the global north. Without giving any indication of their sources, they ploughed through with claims about unspecified “evidence [to show] that diasporas are more grievance-conscious than the population from which they originated. Hence *it is possible* that diasporas are willing to finance initiation of rebellion...” (Collier and Hoeffler 2000: 14, emphasis added). The authors may have inadvertently illuminated their inherent multiple biases. This and many other conjectures form some of the strongest bases on which the authors constructed their seminal work. It is difficult not to believe that the development of the greed and grievance argument had a path dependency.

Indeed, by analysing the attention paid to developing the models designed to test the *greed rebellion* versus the models designed to test the ostensibly opposite *grievance rebellion*, it is clear that emphasis was placed on augmenting the significance of greed explanations of conflicts over a large possible representation for grievance led explanations. Further, the real estate dedicated to the greed assessment, i.e. 8 pages for developing multiple variables to test greed explanations against the notably reduced 3 pages designed to test grievance explanations, supports this idea. It is also quite interesting to see that they developed and dedicated 16 models to test greed versus the 3 used to test grievance explanations. While the authors do not provide an explanation for this discrepancy, one explanation might be the requirement for advanced comprehension of economic modelling. Nevertheless, it appears irregular that the

assessments are unequal. In effect, if 'greed' and 'grievance' offer diametrically opposed causal explanations of conflict drivers, as implied by the authors, one might expect the testing for both poles to be close to identical to buttress the apparent certitudes in Collier and Hoeffler's conclusions.

One could further argue that the weaknesses in the authors' assessment and conclusion might be traced back to their primary considerations. As neo-classical economists, their predisposition is to consider the rational choices of humans, which they assume hinges upon economic activities. This point is well presented by Cramer who explains that "rational choice theories of conflict typically lay waste to specificity and contingency, that they sack the social and that even in their individualism they violate the complexity of individual (and key groups) do to monolithic maximizing agents" (Cramer 2002: 1846). This rational choice perception posits that humans are fundamentally homo-economicus, utility maximisers who require economic, not emotional, justification for the activities we partake in. In this respect, Collier and Hoeffler's argument appear well justified, especially to those with economic sentimentalities. To countenance this suggestion, we thus have to assume that the Niger Delta conflicts transcend such primary assumptions and, therefore, the greed and grievances theory. This is because when considering the Niger Delta conflicts, one cannot understate the significance of emotions, and emotionally-driven grievances, in the expression of grievances in the region, or anywhere else. As such in this thesis I engage with grievances as they are articulated by conflict actors and stakeholders, usually, outside of the current frames constructed by external observers – I believe that this is important in order to mainstream the emotional justification of some of the region's conflicts.

In fact, as Jasper (1998: 420) explains, sociologists like Thomas Scheff “bemoan the disappearance of emotions from explanations of political conflict”. Scheff when assessing the representation of emotions in the studies of warfare argues that “... emotions lead only a shadow life these days. Shame, particularly, has dropped out of the discussion, along with other emotions and personal motives. Lust for possessions or power is seen as real; for honor, unreal ... [S]ocial scientists, like most others in our civilization, are too ashamed of emotions to give them serious attention as causal elements” (Scheff cited in Jasper 1998: 420). Scheff does well to list the failings in Collier et al.’s homo-economicus assumptions that economic rationality offers the only credible explanation for the causes of conflicts. On the other hand, given the evidence of illegal activities, such as looting and bunkering tied to the region’s conflicts,³⁶ it should be supposed that some elements of the various rebel factions are criminals purporting to be protesters. Still, the strong feeling of dissatisfaction in the Niger Delta is palpable, be it for economic reasons as suggested by the greed scholars, or for emotional reasons as Jasper and Scheff’s sociological school would argue. For a better understanding, we need to embrace not only the economists’ economic argument for conflicts; at the same time we also need to return to the region’s history as evidence of latent socio-political grievance. After all, people in the Delta region continue to cite unresolved political marginalisation, ethnic rivalry, poverty, unemployment, dissatisfaction with colonial impositions, environmental degradations, and repressive military against protests as some of the reasons conflicts in the region persist (Osaghae et. al 2007: 73-74).

³⁶ For example, in his assessment of conflicts in resource rich conflict zones, Le Billon concludes that whilst armed conflicts in resource rich areas might be driven by political and identity factors, “the control of local resources influences the agendas and strategies of belligerents” (Le Billon, 2001: 580). Whilst accounting for other possible motives of conflicts, the discourse is reaffirmed within the ‘plunder’ and ‘greed and grievance’ narrative.

Whilst not completely dismissing the wisdom of neoclassical economists' explanation of conflicts, we need to expand our understanding beyond their economic perspective. Our understanding of the Niger Delta conflicts should, indeed, transcend any singular-issue explanation, which Nwajiaku-Dahou rightly argues "can only take us so far" (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2011:13; Ukiwo 2011: 19). To address the gap in singular, often parochial understanding of conflicts, this research will aim to bridge the gap between various understandings of the region's conflicts. This entails acknowledging the plausible economic explanations of the Niger Delta conflicts, while combining these with the socio-political considerations that might be found in other areas or schools of thought. This approach seeks to highlight the narratives of frustration that have been superseded by dominant economic-centric literature on conflicts. In this regard, it is worth shifting from the preceding sections, which have shown us some reasons why scholarly narratives of conflicts and policy recommendations have systematically shifted towards a more economic-centric perspective. The thesis hitherto has yet to examine how other schools have characterised conflicts in the region. After all, imbued in this paper is the suggestion that causes of recent conflicts in the Niger Delta are multifaceted and can be assessed from multiple disciplines. At this juncture, it is valuable to consider how other researchers have engaged with the Niger Delta conflicts.

Petro-violence, Ethnic Pluralism and Political Institutions

Beyond the linearity of Collier and Hoeffler's narrow greed and grievance and the broader economic representation of conflicts, there exist an abundance of in-depth analyses of the Niger Delta conflicts, situated both within and outside of the boundaries of greed and grievance. Watts, for example, briefly engages with the economics of war narratives. By exploring the premises on which some of these strands of arguments are

built on, he was able to challenge many of the conclusions being presented. He takes a particularly critical view of Collier's work, which he dubs "'the predation or rebellion as organised crime' theory of oil dependency" (Watts 2008b: 23). Watts challenges the limitation of this school, first by questioning the underlying assumptions of Collier and Hoeffler's arguments, including their "deep cynicism", their "belief that motivation of conflicts is unimportant", their data samples, and, their indication "that insurgent predation is 'worse' than state extortion" (ibid. 24). Watts instead proposes that "insurgency across the Niger delta ... is inextricably wrapped up with the intersection of generational politics, a corrupt and violent petro-state, irresponsible and short-sighted oil company practice, and the existence of a vast oil bunkering network" (ibid. 28). He argues, therefore, that to see "oil theft or hostage as either new or as evidence of a simple linear shift from grievance to greed is not helpful. In part because one person's greed is another's grievance and because inevitably these mix of forces – [are] always open to different definitions and meanings – [and] always operate as part of a complex whole. In this sense, the oil insurgency in the Niger delta is not terribly different from any insurgency in the history of militant political struggles everywhere" (Watts 2008b: 21). Watts continues by stating that the version of "oil insurgency" in the case of the Delta region "emerges from the structured totality of the national and regional oil complex. It all makes for an enormously unstable and volatile mix of political, economic, political and social forces, now located on a larger, and more intimidating, canvas of global oil instability and the Global War on Terror" (ibid.).

Courson similarly burrows into the debate by challenging Collier and Hoeffler's arguments. He explains that whilst greed and grievance may in fact cause conflicts in resource rich countries, conflict researchers ought to consider that this alone might not

explain drivers of conflicts. Courson points out that “local political dynamics” play a part in the complex mix of drivers in conflict zones (Courson 2011:37). Conflicts in the Niger Delta region, he explains, “is [caused by] a complex mixture of grievance, greed, marginalization, deprivation, political repression, and the quest for survival” (ibid.). These authors³⁷ and others not only emphasise where the economics of war explanations of conflicts breakdown, but go further by underscoring the multivariate explanations that, at the very least, complement ideas presented by the economics of war school. As a whole, Courson, Watts and other scholars, sought to resituate the discourse by placing particular emphasis on the social dimensions driving the Delta conflicts.

Amongst these scholars, Ukiwo (2007) for example pushes this idea when he argued that “contemporary violent conflicts and insurgency in the Niger Delta can be traced to issues of longstanding injustice, inter-group inequalities and political and socio-economic marginalization” (590). Not only did he embark on a *longue durée* explanation of the conflict in the region, he argued that “the search for the causes of insurgency [in the Niger Delta] necessitates an examination of the social origins of militant groups” (ibid). Similarly, Nwaijiaku (2005a) importantly points out that another dimension of the region’s conflicts, which is incidentally reflected across Nigeria, is the patron-based set of relations formed across the country (see also, Reno 2002: 840). This, she argued allowed the Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta to become politically conscious during the era of colonisation. In jousting for their political and economic place in a contested Nigerian federation, awakening an Ijaw ethnic consciousness was necessary to help mobilise client support against the backdrop of ethnic majority domination of the

³⁷ See, for example, Nwaijiaku-Dahou 2009, 2010, Oyefusi 2007a and Watts 2007.

Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa Fulani (Nwajiaku 2005a: 6). This particular thinking goes some way in helping to explain the instrumentalisation of ethnicity in calls for self-determination in the Delta. In fact, ethnic tensions and clashes within the Delta might be an incidental response to a series of complex patron-client networks.

Interestingly, though prevalently a feature of many Nigerian minority ethnic groups – including the Igbo who count themselves as an ethnic minority because of their perceived subjugation to the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani (Mustapha 2000: 9, Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 49-57) – ethnically aligned calls for self-determination in the Delta are often anchored in calls for resource control. The side effect of this resource control anchorage is that it quickly raises questions over the real motivations behind these ethnic conflicts. Because, indeed, to those claiming that greed and economic opportunity is the main motivation of conflicts, bifurcating explanation of skirmishes to include calls for resource control confirms their suspicions that social and political explanations of conflicts in the Niger Delta are only a smokescreen (Orogun 2010: 501). We know that this is not the case. It is plausible that advocates and agitators for self-determination are aware that challenging the state's resource control can create "shocks to which the government and national economy are exposed" (Oyefusi 2007b: 2 see also Watts 2004a: 71). This is a strategy that has hitherto forced the government to respond to the Delta crises and has elevated concerns in the region to national and international consciousness.

Still, "... the picture [of the region's crises] is far from clear. What [current studies] do tell us is that violence in the Delta has multiple causes. Military-style security solutions premised on addressing just one of them (as advocated by Collier et al.) therefore pose problems. Rather than see the Niger Delta conflict as insurgency alone, we propose, in

line with Keen's study of conflict in Sierra Leone (Keen 2005), an approach which sees 'insurgency' as one amongst a plethora of conflict scenarios and a rehearsed rather than real one at that, but whose victims are nevertheless real enough" (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2012: 306).

Building on the discussion above, this summary further supports the need to decode the myriad explanations of conflicts. What I seek to highlight here however – particularly within the context of ethnic conflicts and patron-client relationships – is that to study the causes of conflicts in the region, we have to shift away from the inward looking approach commonly taken *vis-à-vis* the region. By only looking inward, it is possible to misdiagnose events considered to be unique to the region. For example, current literatures seldom offer comparative analyses of local ethnic insurgencies in the region with other conflicts within Nigeria. There is, therefore, an inherent tendency to imply that the Niger Delta region and its conflicts are exceptional, even within the Nigerian context. As such, research on the Delta conflicts are regularly insulated, with seemingly little consideration for, and understanding of, how the region's conflicts compare to other localised disputes within Nigeria, and beyond. This approach of inward looking analysis of the Delta's (ethnic) conflicts is perhaps best explained by Ejobowah (2000a) who argued that "in sub-Saharan Africa, citizenship is most meaningful at the subnational level or ethnic group as opposed to the state. Tension between the two levels could be bridged by adopting a pluralist policy by which the subnational (amoral) realm provides a foundation for national citizenship ... This will entail recognising the subnational communities as political communities with right to autonomy within the country" (Ejobowah 2000a: 32).

This offers some insights into the issue of identity politics and, with it, the conflicts that are played out in several different forms and on several different levels. What the Ejobowah excerpt affirms is that ethnic identity is especially contentious across Nigeria, far from pooling together across ethnic lines to address issues of vertical inequalities, ethnic and sub-ethnic groups mobilise along ethnic lines, perhaps because of their loyalty to their ethnic identities as opposed to national identity. The implications of this for understanding conflict drivers in the Delta are at least two-fold: first, it insulates and localises the dissonance between ethnic groups and the state. Second, it also permits the construction of narratives and propagandas, which are then used to mobilise rebel movements, or interestingly, used to instigate local communal clashes, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4. Of importance though is that alignment along ethnic and sub-ethnic lines create an internal 'othering' whereby there is a constructed dichotomy of 'us' against 'them'³⁸ –with members of multiple ethnic groups walking staunchly along ethnic lines. In essence, there is an absence of what Welsh (1993: 65) calls "unity in diversity"³⁹. Within the Delta, the perception of the discord between the state and the local community has proliferated since independence. However, it appears that the increase in state repression in the 1990s and 2000s has done much to encourage this perception of 'us against them'. Indeed, various sub-groups, including rebel groups, have evoked these sentiments to defend their attacks and insurgency against the state with the view that violence is the only language understood by various branches of government (Ukiwo 2007: 588, 609 see also Frynas 2001: 28, Omeje 2004: 117).

³⁸ Here, 'Us' refers to members of a given ethnic group, whereas 'them' refers to the state, other ethnic groups and within the Niger Delta, it appears an identity has also been constructed for Transnational Oil Corps.

³⁹ Welsh posit that nation building in diverse communities have largely been unsuccessful and that the best that can be wished for is 'unity in diversity' (Welsh 1993: 65).

The state's heavy handedness and repressive approach to addressing local community discontent has featured largely in existing literature, and has been offered as an explanation for the increase in the number of rebel movements. However, as argued in relation to economic-centric arguments, this ought not be taken as the single explanation for all of the conflicts in the region. Repressive military action is but one of many explanations for why rebel conflicts in the region has increased. To relegate or dismiss the political objectives of rebel groups and exchange their motives for economistic, culturalistic and militaristic agenda due to their inability to coherently articulate their political agenda is problematic⁴⁰ (Mkandawire 2002: 182-183, 208). We ought to consider the mobilisation of rebel groups in the Niger Delta as "insurgencies derive[d] basically from blocked political aspirations and in some cases also from reactive desperation" (Clapham 1998b cited in *ibid.* 182). These political aspirations, however, could, and possibly should, be observed with a sensitivity to ethnicity, since ethnic identity is inextricably attached to democratic politics in such an ethnically heterogeneous society. As Nwajiaku (2005a) has noted "[in] a political system in which patron-client relationships prevail as the principle channel through which 'citizens' gain access to the state and its resources, ethnicity matters" (Nwajiaku 2005a: 7 see also Watts 2004a: 61). With this in mind, the issue of ethnic politics must be foregrounded as part of any meaningful examination of the Delta conflicts.

Since Nigeria transitioned to the Fourth Republic, when the country shifted from long-term oppressive military rule to democracy, ethnic minorities, particularly those from the Niger Delta, continued to lament that "despite democratization, they remain powerless in the wider structural working of the Nigerian state. They remain victims of

⁴⁰ Chapter 3 reemphasises this error by documenting the complex considerations that influence the decision making of rebel groups.

long-running neglect in the distribution of facilities, appointments and resources” (Mustapha 2000: 12). This representation of political neglect and the consequential ethnic conflicts transcends the Delta region. Indeed, at various points in Nigerian history, tensions around widely held perceptions of ethnic political hegemony have spilled out from the corridors of power, to cause localised clashes between various ethnic groups in the country (ibid. 41-47, Ukiwo 2003: 122-124; see also, Ejibowah 2000a and 2000b). However, as Ejibowah aptly presents it, “[w]hereas in the political history of Nigeria conflicts have been between the major ethnic groups whose elites dominate national politics, in contemporary times they are between politically powerless minority groups and the federal government” (2000a: 30). Between 2004 and 2009, the issue of political representation in the Delta, or lack thereof, was one that was at the heart of much of the conflicts in the region. It is no surprise then that on the list of issues raised by actors involved in the tensest period of the Delta unrest – political representation – on all levels, featured quite prominently⁴¹ (Ikelegbe 2006b: 104-106).

There is, in fact, some plausibility to this assessment; a reflection on recent national and regional politics offers an interesting insight. It is perhaps coincidental, but it should be noted, that since the election of Goodluck Jonathan as president of the federation, there was material decline in reported attacks in the Niger Delta. Though some may contend that this result was uncorrelated or that perhaps it was a result of the Amnesty Program administered by the previous Umaru Musa Yar’adua administration and discussed at length above, there is no doubt that having a fellow Niger Deltan in the presidential seat

⁴¹ Chapters 3, 4 and 5 directly and indirectly engage with the issue of political representation in a multi-layered dimension. Chapter 3, in particular, engages with this argument directly by exploring some militant’s efforts to gain access to political decision-making both locally and on the federal lever. Chapter 4 and 5 explore representation indirectly through the prism of patronage networks and domestic resource control.

allayed fears of, or at least minimised the rhetoric of, political marginalisation (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2012: 305, 308). Nevertheless, beneath the surface of the region's quest for political representation is a deep distrust towards the functioning of various branches of state institutions. This is possibly due to a genuine perception of minority marginalisation, or maybe it has everything to do with ceaseless ethnic jostle for "who [controls] the coercive and extractive apparatuses of the state for private (personal), class or group gain" (Obi 2001: 9). In a broader Nigerian context, recent ethnically fuelled armed conflicts seem to offer credence to the notion that "democratization and nation-building [have proven to be] antithetical in circumstance of ethnic diversity" (Reno 2002: 64). If seen this way, the Niger Delta conflicts could indeed be symptomatic of broader national issues. This view becomes more persuasive when situated within the context of an increased Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast of Nigeria and the ongoing ethno-religious clashes across the country (Agbiboa 2014, Higazi 2016, Aghedo and Osumah 2015). If this is, indeed, a nationwide phenomenon, why then do the Delta conflicts continue to be exceptionalised? What, if anything is exceptional about the Niger Delta conflicts? What explanatory factors, if any, are usefully applicable to conflicts in other regions of the country, and beyond?

At this stage, without making direct comparisons or delving into the nuances and characteristics of each individual conflicts in the various zones of Nigeria, the Delta region stands out in Nigerian parlance. The region is viewed both domestically and internationally, as the allegorical "goose that lays the golden egg" (Ukiwo 2011: 21, Osaghae 1995: 325), in the context of the region's contribution to the nation's income. After all, Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on subsoil natural resources extracted from the region. According to Joab-Peterside (2007:3), "...petroleum derived from the

Niger Delta accounts for about 50 percent of Nigeria's GDP, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and 80 percent of all budgetary revenues that amounts to almost \$20 billion annually or about \$54 million daily". This perhaps explains why natural resources, oil, but petroleum in particular, has enveloped an obsequious scholarship servile to the omnipresence of hydrocarbon in the Delta. The influence of 'nature's gift', or 'curse', on the region's representation in popular imagination and scholarship has done much to distort the framing of debates and narratives engaged with unpacking the already complex multi-layered factors that inform broad understanding on conflicts in this zone. The presence of natural resources in the Niger Delta has not only been enabling for economics of war academics and policymakers as implied above; but has heavily influenced the work of many academics, across various disciplines, that have sought to resituate the discussion surrounding the Delta conflicts. Indeed, 'petrovioleence', as it is sometimes known, is arguably a concessionary new paradigm for assessment of Delta conflicts. It is a stubbornly clever prism through which a variance of analysis of the region's conflicts is fleshed out. The separation of the conflict events in the region from other zones in Nigeria is enabled precisely because of the unique influence of natural resources – and how actors and observers alike – centralised the commodity in many of the discussions on conflicts in the region. Undoubtedly, however, it is quite a leap, and untenable, to suggest that the nature of some of the Delta conflicts have not been altered by the presence of natural resources. This is not the argument presented in this thesis. Instead, the suggestion here is that whilst subsoil natural resources has framed, and indeed, induced some of the conflicts in the region, there are many other conflicts in the Delta unrelated to the presence of subsoil resources. This distinction, though important, is scant in existing understandings of and responses to conflicts in the region.

In fact, although her thesis focuses on the connectedness between the oil industry and specific conflicts in the Niger Delta, Zalik (2004) offers a remarkable analysis by documenting the complex interactions between popular social resistance, state institutions and oil companies in the region. Whilst the assessment reaffirms the multi-layered and intricate factors at play, her work is rooted in status quo Delta oil conflicts scholarship where she entrenches many of the salient arguments. While starting by indicating that the inter-ethnic and inter-community conflicts in the Delta are a reflection of class relations obscured by identity politics, she ends somewhere quite different (Zalik 2004: 403). Perhaps this was the intention all along, however, there seems to be a similar tendency in other works by equally revered Niger Delta scholars. Kenneth Omeje makes a substantial contribution to this discourse. Once again, though determining that separately from petro-violence in the Delta, there exist “a number of less violent protest measures and exogenous forces”, he swings the lasso noose around this argument, pulling it back to oil. Further, he indicates that the other, unrelated to petroleum, conflicts, have the capacity to “pose security threats to petrobusiness given the contemporary volatility of the oil region and the increasing fluidity of violent and non-violent protests” (Omeje 2006: 477-478). He then goes on to explain the seemingly inextricable attachment of oil and social conflicts in Nigeria, and more specifically in the Delta region. According Omeje (2006), Nigeria is “an oil-dependent neopatrimonial state, oil resources and oil rents are central in shaping national political discourses and the broad rhythms of accumulation and social conflicts, including security threats in the oil-producing region” (ibid.). Though he engages with the structural complexity of the region with, *inter alia*, neopatrimonialism, social tensions and security threats, these factors are assessed through a natural resource led prism.

Yet, it would be reductive to insinuate that such a tropist approach underpins all of the most important Niger Delta conflicts scholarship. Indeed, scholars are increasingly uncovering distinct sets of dynamics driving the conflicts in the region. For example, Iwilade (2014, 2015) presents compelling new insights into how Niger Delta youth movements should be understood. He argues that the usual representations of Delta militants as disempowered and marginalised are mistaken. Instead, he contends that youths in many of these militant groups are embedded in a very complex network of clientelism intimately connected to state power (Iwilade 2014: 1203-1204, 1210-1213). This offers a new perspective through which youth engagement in conflicts in the region might be understood – not only are they consenting actors in various networks, they in fact deftly manoeuvre the complex landscape more cogently than was previously understood. Likewise, Charles Ukeje (2004) goes beyond the usual Delta conflicts tautology by exploring the gender dimensions in some of the region's conflicts. He examined the similarities between the 1929 Aba Women's Riots and the 2002 Ugborodo protests in Delta state. Ukeje (2004b: 607) noted that the "the grievances of women during the historical examples represented by Aba (protest against colonial taxation and expropriation policies circa 1928) and Ugborodo (involving non-violent anti-oil company protests) are not contextually or significantly different. In both cases, women embarked on the protest actions after a series of failed attempts by their men to draw attention to the grievances". By comparing the two different unrests, Ukeje emphasised the parallels and continuation of particular traditional practices in the Delta. The most obvious similarity is that the unrests were instigated by women and as Ukeje further notes "recent grassroots protests by women in the Niger Delta are, in many ways, a throwback to two dimensions of anti-colonial struggles: first to negate the crisis of capitalist accumulation; and second to challenge the contradictions that allow the crisis

facing the Nigerian project to fester” (ibid: 607). The reasoning behind the Aba Women’s Riots are quite similar to the objectives of the Ugborodo protest of 2002 (Ukeje 2004a: 75-80, Ukeje 2004b: 613), This observation is significant and offers another layer to the complexity of disputes in the region.

Similarly novel scholarship⁴² has successfully highlighted the varying motivations behind conflicts in the region. By providing broader context to the Delta conflicts – and thus to the analyses presented in subsequent chapters – this overview of disparate drivers of violence in the region begins to demonstrate the limitations of a singular natural resource prism. The dominance of this frame in shaping the landscape of scholarship, policy, and practice in the region has, in broad sweeps, contributed to exceptionalising conflicts in the Delta relative to those in other parts of the country. This, in turn, overlooks any possible similarities and renders a multivariate analysis, and responses, near impossible. In consequence, understandings of the conflicts are re-funnelled through a resource-driven lens, reproducing the exceptionalism of the region and its conflicts. However, it is important to note that my riposte to current assessments is not intended to invalidate their efforts to offer thorough and persuasive insights into the Delta conflicts – but instead, the idea is to acknowledge these well established facts; but also to present my view that Niger Delta conflicts scholarship *vis-à-vis* natural resources has by far dominated the landscape of understanding various struggles in the region. The thesis thus seeks to contribute to expanding the current dominant mono-causal understanding of the region’s conflicts.

⁴² For example, Ikelegebe (2010) explores how youth unemployment increased youth engagement in the Delta conflicts; Nwajiaku-Dahou (2009) looks at how latent grievances formed around Ijaw ethnic nationalism continues to contribute to recent day conflicts; Ibaba (2009) examined how the violent conflicts in the region contributes to the stagnation of development objectives in the region

Conclusion

The forgone has attempted to highlight the dominant narratives in the Niger Delta conflicts discourse. By exploring the 2009 Amnesty Programme put in place to arrest conflicts in the region, it was possible to engage with the dominant economic led explanation of the Delta conflicts. Fronted by the greed and grievance theory, I challenged the notion that a singular issue focus could offer a comprehensive understanding of the causal drivers of the region's conflicts. Indeed, I argued that economic-centric explanations of the Delta conflicts do not go far enough. Instead, it is important to undertake a broader assessment of the conflicts in the Delta. I also argued that many of the alternative explanations that have departed from the economic explanation of the region's conflicts have commonly placed oil at the centre of their analyses. Whilst this is understandable, I argue that this approach has created a myth of a Niger Delta exceptionalism which sought to distinguish the region from other parts of Nigeria. Whilst it is true that the presence of natural resources differentiates the Delta region from other parts of Nigeria – it is also true that many of the conflict situations in the region are consistent and present across Nigeria. With this in mind, the rest of the thesis will attempt to dig beneath the subsoil natural resource led explanation of conflicts in the region, to highlight the underrepresented causes of conflicts in the Delta. The significance of this is three-pronged: firstly, it will highlight the weaknesses in the economic led single-issue explanations of the region's conflicts. Secondly, this will draw attention to common issues that are underrepresented in the broader Niger Delta discourse: for example, the thesis explores the idea of insurgency as a means to gain 'access' to the state, its decision making and also explores the role of ex-militants in 'alternative governance structures'. Finally, the thesis will come full circle by attempting to review the role of oil in the region's conflicts. I argue that although oil plays a

significant role in the region's conflicts, our understanding of this role has been restricted by 'wars of plunder' thesis. Indeed, various actors have used oil as a strategic tool to secure much broader socio-economic and political settlement in the Niger Delta.

METHODOLOGY: Treading Carefully in a Minefield of Hazards

The point of research should not be to give an analysis of a critique of an event, but to deliver an interpretation of the event itself. You need the tertiary materials (texts on texts) and the secondary material (others' work on the event) to position and guide your work and to situate your contribution, but the aim is to complement this with primary or new material or, a novel interpretation. (Grix 2010: 12)

Introduction

As Grix (2010: 11) explains, "... a PhD should be seen as a learning process, an apprenticeship in the art of research in which you will learn to reflect on the origins of theories and concepts, how to theorise, how to mesh theory with practices, and how to prioritise and organise a vast quantity of material into a readable text within a restricted period of time". Engaging with these two positions, i.e. understanding the grandeur of undertaking doctoral studies and at the same time realising the limitations inherent in undertaking such research for the first time, is conceptually challenging – a challenge which continues to be the defining compass for the direction of my thesis. I remember going into a meeting with my supervisor and speaking excitedly about the innumerable things I was seeking to explore. His response was, "... in trying to explain everything, you will end up explaining nothing". Ever since, this quote has been prominently displayed on my desk; it is a constant reminder of the importance of striking this delicate balance of being ambitious, yet realistic about what can be achieved whilst undertaking my doctoral research.

The recognition of the need to balance the dyadic interactions between what I need to know and the knowledge that I can reasonably acquire in the duration of the doctorate was the guiding rod that informed all other aspects of conducting research for the thesis.

These considerations will be set out in this chapter where I attempt to chart the processes involved in conducting this doctoral research. The first section will offer insights into some of the important theoretical considerations that underpinned the selection of my methodology, as well as how the case studies and interviewees were selected. The section will go further by assessing the suitability, practicality, and effectiveness of the chosen methodology. The second section will document the steps taken to ensure that, in pursuit of information, strict and stringent ethical standards were set and adhered to. This section will also describe the steps taken to protect interviewees, i.e. I indicate where data was or was not anonymised and explain why. In the third section I examine the considerations taken when deciding on field sites, i.e. the geographical and demographic considerations when selecting communities, how I gained access to these communities, how these communities represent the Niger Delta, and the limitations of focusing on these communities. In the fourth section I investigate my own positionality by: examining how the position of the researcher as an insider and/or outsider can influence the responses provided by interviewees, and how any inherent biases of interviewees were accounted for, and any measures taken to ensure that these biases did not influence data collection.⁴³ I will also explore the measures taken to triangulate data and assess the processes and steps taken to analyse my data. This part of the chapter will also emphasise the overall limitations of my research methods and how these limitations affected or undermined the research process. I will take this opportunity to document the challenges faced in the field and how they were avoided. But first, I begin by unpacking the ontological and epistemological position, which provides the background to my research methodology choices.

⁴³ Despite all the efforts to mitigate inherent biases from influencing data collection, it is not always possible to achieve this. As a result, the section will also attempt to highlight how some unavoidable factors influenced data collection and how that impacts the research.

Ontology and Epistemology: Challenging the dominance of Hegemonic Epistemic Communities

In choosing to focus my research on the Niger Delta conflicts, I took the position that the existing explanations are insufficient to explain the region's conflicts and that I believed that there are other possible explanations to complement existing work on the topic. Indeed, the preceding chapter emphasised the gaps identified in prevailing literature. However, philosophically, there has been a shift in the prism through which conflicts in the Niger Delta are viewed in existing work on the region. The dominant epistemic community that has led the way in trying to provide explanations for conflicts in the region "have often proved to be significant actors in shaping patterns of international policy coordination" (Haas 2011: 35) to do with the conflicts. This in and of itself is not a negative thing – in fact, epistemic communities, i.e. "intellectual communities defined in numerous, crosscutting ways" (Schwartz-Shea 2006: 91), are significant arbiters of research quality, and are therefore at the intersection of knowledge production (ibid.). As Schwartz-Shea (2006: 91) further explains:

Despite the periodic declarations of the necessity and superiority of a single episteme ... multiple epistemic communities define the landscape of the social sciences, and a diversity of approaches, rather than a unitarian hegemony, is arguably a more appropriate measure of progress or maturity in the social sciences. To fully understand these communities' judgments, one must understand each one's particular research gestalt – that bundle of shared epistemological and ontological presuppositions, theoretical commitments, research goals, evaluative criteria, and methodological and reading practices.

From the above, we can see that a shift from the dominant episteme is not a dismissal of any singular position on the Niger Delta conflicts. In fact, this shift helps us to diversify the approach and perspectives with which we can better understand the conflict

situation in the region. In order to do this, it is important to acknowledge my own philosophical position, and my understanding of the events taking place in the Niger Delta. Economics, the main position from which the Niger Delta conflicts have been examined,⁴⁴ is suffering a crisis of credibility, with questions being raised as to its credentials as a true science. As Robert Shiller (2013), one of the winners of the 2013 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science, explains, "... economics, is rather more like engineering than physics, more practical than spiritual", insofar as we only care about economic data as a guide to policy. He continues by explaining that the "challenge [for economics] has been to combine its mathematical insights with the kinds of adjustments that are needed to make its models fit the economy's irreducibly human element" (ibid.). It is important to shine light on these distinctions because whether economics is considered a science or not has serious implications for the epistemological considerations that form the bases of economic research⁴⁵ (Soiferman 2010: 12). This, in turn, has implications for the findings, and analyses thereof, pertaining to the Niger Delta conflicts. But let us assume that economics is unlike a natural science. As von Mises (2003: x) notes, "the general social science of which economics is the best-developed part has a rather unique logical and epistemological nature. In distinct contrast to the natural sciences it is not based on observation or any other information gathered through the human senses. It relies on insights about certain structural features of human action, such as the fact that human beings make choices or that they use self-chosen means to attain self-chosen ends. The validity of economic theory does therefore

⁴⁴ See, for example, Ikelegbe (2005, 2006a), Oyefusi (2007a and 2007b) and Watts (2001, 2004b, 2007, 2008).

⁴⁵ The difference in epistemological considerations has an effect on the type of research conducted. As Soiferman further explains "in quantitative research, the epistemological assumption is that knowledge is relatively objective (i.e., most people experience the external world in the same way), thus making it possible to assume that changes observed in experiments derive from changes in variables rather than from individual experiences of the external world. This allows researchers to generalize and draw inferences about the general population from a selected sample". These generalisations make it more important to seek alternative explanations to complement what we already know. Indeed, in some ways, by pursuing other lines of inquiry, I broaden my understanding of events and limit the impact of inherent methodological biases.

not stand and fall with empirical investigations. Rather, economic laws are *a priori* laws that cannot be confirmed or refuted by the methods predominant in the natural sciences". This is a nod to economics as a philosophical tool, although there is a marked shift from this position to more empiricism in recent economic studies (Moore 2013).

Notwithstanding this, there seems to be consistency in the ways in which economists of all tribes⁴⁶ view the world. In John Elliott Cairnes's opinion "[t]he economist starts with a knowledge of ultimate causes.' We have at our disposal 'direct knowledge . . . of causes in our consciousness of what passes in our own minds, and in the information which our senses convey, or at least are capable of conveying, to us of external facts.' Thus, the economist is 'at the outset of his researches ... already in possession of those ultimate principles governing the phenomena which form the subject of his study'" (cited in von Mises 2003: 22). From this, we know that economists, both rationalists and empiricists, have a way of viewing the world, which in effect influences the starting point of their research. By and large, the assumption, supported by Cairnes' observation, is that economists most often conduct deductive research, which influences the sorts of questions that they ask and, in turn, the conclusions that they reach. In embracing the deductive approach, economists adopting quantitative methods⁴⁷ tend to focus on hypothesis testing – after which they present their findings as generalised causal explanations that are often later used to make predictions (Snape and Spencer 2007: 14). This approach is satisfactory insofar as we acknowledge the epistemological

⁴⁶ The long-held view is that there are two main kinds of economists, the rationalists and the empiricists. The rationalist is concerned with philosophy, logic, and reason whilst the empiricist uses mathematical models to analyse data or make predictions.

⁴⁷ Another reason for seeking to complement quantitative methods when researching conflicts in Africa is that there is a widely held belief that data gathering on the African continent presents its own sets of unique challenges. Poor data availability or collection is not unique to Africa, but we ought to be cautious not to compromise policy recommendations because of poor data. As Jerven (2013: 4) has argued, "poor numbers fundamentally shape what we know about development in sub-Saharan Africa, which in turn shapes how decisions are made". Of course, as I have argued and will continue to argue through this paper, there are significant implications arising from prescribing and adopting poor policies.

considerations that undergird such deductive approaches. Equally, it is important that we do not restrict our understanding of events by only accepting a singular philosophical approach. Recognising the limitations of such approaches for understanding conflicts in the Niger Delta meant that I had to consider other starting points that could offer alternative, yet complementary, explanations to support my research.

Thus, rather than adopting an economic science understanding of the Niger Delta conflicts, the thesis takes a multidisciplinary approach to compensate for the inherent limitations of deductive methods of understanding conflicts. Unlike deductive methods, inductive methods allow consideration of other possibilities beyond what we already know, or what we may have predetermined. Adopting such an approach permitted me to broaden the scope of my research to include other fields, which are not necessarily known to explain the conflicts in the same ways that the economic narratives have. It permitted me to go beyond hypothesis testing to developing my own theoretical frameworks, i.e. using grounded theory. As Strauss and Corbin (1998:12) explain, grounded theory is a “theory that [is] derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another”. Whether or not the process generates theory or merely introduces new concepts (Bryman 2016: 381), inductive approaches offer an opportunity to start with a ‘blank page’ and consider all the possibilities that may explain the conflicts in the region.

Of course, these conflicts do not exist in a vacuum, so unsurprisingly initial understandings of the issues generally carry their own inherent biases. However, I take measures to ensure that these biases do not inhibit or restrict potential findings – this is

why it is important to broaden the prism through which I investigate the causal factors of the region's conflicts. Indeed, by adopting an interdisciplinary framework, I also embrace a pluralistic epistemology.⁴⁸ This, in essence, means that I ensured that no one single epistemological perspective is privileged over any other. To do otherwise would be to limit the knowledge that might contribute to our understanding of events in the region (Miller et al. 2008: 47). Thus, in seeking to better understand the conflicts in the Niger Delta, my methodology corresponds to the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach and an epistemological pluralism. This is what the next section of this chapter will seek to explain, along with charting other significant aspects of conducting field research, including, for example, highlighting how the research sites and respondents were selected.

Field-Research: Research Sites, Interviewees, Limitations and Positionality

As set out above in the preceding section, research methods are influenced by a number of underlying assumptions, including the researcher's own inherent biases, which are informed by individual lived experience⁴⁹ (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 15). In turn, the choice of research methods could influence the results and the subsequent narratives that seek to address the underlying research questions. With these considerations in mind and, given the nature of the main research questions and the pluralist epistemological⁵⁰ approach, I selected to use qualitative methods. In adopting this approach, the research was able to imbibe within it a string of qualitative research

⁴⁸ For more on *epistemological pluralism* – see Healy (2003), Miller and Erickson (2006), and Miller et al. (2008).

⁴⁹ Rubin and Rubin (2012: 15) explain that, contrary to the positivist approach of seeking the one objective 'truth', naturalists and interpretive constructionists, in particular, acknowledge their own inherent bias and acknowledge that what we know "... is not objective; it is always filtered through people, always subjective".

⁵⁰ "Epistemology is one of the core branches of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge, especially in regard to its methods, validation and "the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be. In short, claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known" (Blaikie 2008: 8)" (Grix 2010: 64).

techniques that allowed me to “get as close as possible to the participants being studied” (Creswell 2007: 18). The strength of this approach was that it provided important context to better appreciate what participants were saying (ibid. 18, Grix 2010: 121). Indeed, beyond this, adopting qualitative methods allowed me to conduct in-depth analyses to acquire richer knowledge and understanding of the events being studied, especially with an opportunity to use disparate methods, such as interviews, participant observation, archival and documentary analyses, as well as ethnography (Grix 2010: 120). Using any single one of these techniques offers a unique set of advantages as well as inherent limitations. To counter the constraints, it was necessary to combine a number of these techniques. As such, I adopted a mixed methods qualitative approach, consisting of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and archival and documentary analysis. Adopting all of these techniques was intended to help to bridge the inter-subjectivities of current and historical sources of grievances that have caused conflicts in the Niger Delta. It is worth noting here though that this methodological flexibility was permissible because my doctoral degree is being undertaken under the auspices of the Department of International Development, a cross-disciplinary Development Studies school. In this school, a number of methods are valid – and it is “pretty much accepted” to use multiple methods (Hentschel 2003: 120). As Sumner and Tribe (2008: 88) put it, “[i]f development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, with development analysis requiring inputs from disciplines covering, for example, social, economic, political and cultural dimensions, then the analysis entails drawing on social theory, economic theory, political theory and cultural theory, as well as on a broader, multi-disciplinary, development theory which links or transcends (particularly in the case of the transdisciplinary approach) individual disciplines and context-specific (or ‘micro’) theory”. This they argue is because “Different disciplines

can throw light on different dimensions of the same socio-economic phenomena...” (ibid.). However, before delving deeply into the process and methods of creating data, it is important to document some very important considerations that helped to facilitate data collection. The following section will start by explaining the processes involved with selecting research sites and research respondents.

Research Sites

Before starting fieldwork in 2014, it was indicated in my transfer paper that access to interview participants would be enabled by the Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) that I had interned with in London in the summer of 2012. I had kept in close contact with them and had asked whether they would help to facilitate my fieldwork – to which they agreed and offered to provide me with access to people of interest in the Niger Delta. On arrival on the field, it was clear that SDN does indeed have extensive local networks that transcend multiple local government areas in all the Niger Delta states. They also have access to important actors, such as national and international political elites, local leaders, youth leaders, activists, dissident leaders and members of the local communities. I considered that leveraging access to SDN’s network would be invaluable in helping to secure the necessary data to support the research. However, even before leaving Oxford for Nigeria, I had to start reconsidering my plans *vis-à-vis* the locations for fieldwork. I was also in touch with a number of people outside the region who had good knowledge and essential relationships in the region. One such person was Arild Nodland, the CEO of Bergen Risk Solutions, a consultancy firm with a strong presence in the Niger Delta. He offered access to a number of people and provided contact information for useful sources in the region. He also agreed to provide further such information as and when it

was required. I had also established contact with the Foundation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria (FEHN), a Nigerian NGO tasked with handling the transformation and re-integration of Niger Delta ex-militants. The organisation, during the time leading up to fieldwork, was providing the training and reorientation phase of the amnesty programme. This made FEHN an excellent prospective institution to partner with in order to gain a better understanding of the amnesty programme's inner workings.

Building a relationship with FEHN meant potentially gaining access to a huge proportion of the 20,192 ex-militants granted amnesty that were supposed to go through FEHN's Post Amnesty Transformation Camp in Obubra in Cross River state of Nigeria. Making these arrangements with FEHN, SDN and Mr Nodland meant that there was going to be unbridled access to a broad range of interview subjects. It also meant that there would be an opportunity to conduct research in different locations across the region and in other parts of Nigeria. By spending time in the core Niger Delta states⁵¹ and in Lagos, I expected to gain direct access to ex-militants as well other key actors in the region's conflicts. It also meant that I would have access to urban and rural areas, which helped to draw a fully representative picture as I collected data. I had anticipated that some of the interviews would lead to other locations that had not been identified before embarking on fieldwork and this was exactly what happened. For example, the snowballing effect of the interviews led me to Obafemi Awolowo University in Osun State, where I conducted a number of interviews.

These steps were supposed to facilitate a seamless research experience. However, just before leaving for fieldwork, my plans were called into question. A significant obstacle arose from my endeavours to comply with the University of Oxford's policy of seeking

⁵¹ The three core Niger Delta states are Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta state.

insurance for fieldwork, it became clear that there was an unforeseen restriction on the places the research could take place. At the time of travel, the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) foreign travel advice warned against all travel to riverine areas of Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River States in Nigeria, and against all but essential travel to non-riverine areas of Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers State. This immediately presented a massive problem for the looming fieldtrip.⁵² As a result of the FCO travel advice, a number of challenges had arisen. The first significant one was the need to convince my department of the importance of my research. Though procedural, it meant that concessions had to be made to ensure that safety was prioritised over knowledge seeking. This included the need to make alternative plans to identify the safest places to visit and places to conduct interviews. The second challenge, which was less obvious, was the psychological impediment caused by FCO's warning. During preparation for fieldwork, I had dismissed fears of potential kidnaps and threats to personal safety as a thing of the past – confined to the pre-amnesty era. However, on reading FCO's warning, an unanticipated level of caution enveloped the outlook of the research.

This meant that new arrangements had to be put in place to accommodate the FCO's warnings. But also, quite significantly, it meant that arrangements were influenced by a fear for my personal safety. The geography of the research was essentially restricted to only include areas that were considered safe to visit – although this could only be done properly after arriving in Nigeria. On arrival in Lagos in June 2014, I made contact with FEHN CEO, Barr. Allen Onyema. The intention was to establish a partnership that would

⁵² The University travel policy explains that "In cases where the proposed travel is to a high risk destination, as defined by the FCO, supervisors and heads of department or institutions must also consider carefully how the research will add to the body of knowledge in a particular discipline, and whether the academic merits of the research justify the risks involved when making their decision whether or not to approve the travel" This can be found at <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety/policy-statements/s3-07/>.

give access to interview subjects in FEHN's Cross Rivers State training camp. Such a move would limit the risk emphasised by the FCO, but would allow unrestrained access to key actors in many of the Niger Delta conflicts – such an arrangement was highly desirable. A further benefit of being based in Cross River was the proximity to the three core Niger Delta states: Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta states. Each state was within a commutable distance from Cross Rivers state that would allow for the occasional trips to meet with other people of interest in the three core states. However, in the meeting with Barr. Allen Onyema, it was revealed that the final phase of the rehabilitation had been completed.⁵³ Immediately after this meeting, it became more urgent to go back to “Plan A” with a less drastic compromise. In essence, the plan to avoid the core Niger Delta states was impractical for the research; it was thus necessary to establish some form of presence in one of the three core states. As a result, I decided to proceed with the partnership with SDN, which has an office in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Even with a much more limited geographical scope, due to the security situation, it made sense to establish a base in the safest part of the Niger Delta. Of the three core states, Rivers State offered the best solution to circumvent the security threats. Unlike Bayelsa State, which is mostly riverine and estuary,⁵⁴ and Delta State, which has a history of unpredictable flare-ups in conflicts, Port Harcourt in Rivers State was a lot safer. It was therefore possible to be based in Port Harcourt city where there was direct access to SDN. These factors had a significant impact on the overall fieldwork experience. Instead of the multiple leads that had been established before leaving Oxford, SDN became my main partner during fieldwork. The plan was to work closely with SDN on their projects

⁵³ There were some unverified reports claiming that FEHN's rehabilitation programme had actually not taken place. In some cases, it was argued that only a negligible number of ex-militants had passed through the camp. These claims were heard in casual conversations with people in the Niger Delta.

⁵⁴ The FCO warning specifically warned against all travel to riverine areas – basing in Bayelsa State would have disregarded this very important warning.

to identify communities where the factors driving the conflicts appeared underrepresented in popular discourse. This opportunity gave me access to many meetings with other NGOs, multinational corporations, community leaders, youth organisations, ex-militants, researchers, and many other valuable data resources. However, it was still very difficult to breakout to pursue the core objective of the research. Whilst SDN facilitated meetings with people of interest, it appeared during fieldwork that access was very much framed along SDN's own core objectives, which were to "support the efforts of those affected by extractive industries and weak governance through rights-based community empowerment".⁵⁵ Although SDN had a great reach in the region, many of the projects they worked on focused on oil rich communities. This was somewhat at variance with the objective of my thesis, so it became important to leverage the relationship with SDN in other ways.

After months of working from SDN's offices and conducting a number of interviews, it was important to try to reimagine the arrangements to reflect the underlying objective of my doctoral project. With this in mind, a new set of relationships were built with SDN affiliates who could facilitate entry into strategically important communities where SDN did not have a presence. With the assistance of Juno Fitzpatrick, a London based SDN staff member; Judy Nwanodi, an indirect affiliate; Professor E. J. Alagoa; and his son David Alagoa, access to myriad of new communities was granted. At an early meeting with David Alagoa, he was able to organise a meeting with the Local Government Chairman of Eleme community, who in turn was able to organise a meeting with the community's legal representative and the Paramount Ruler of Ekporo community. David Alagoa also facilitated the meeting with the disputed Paramount Ruler of another

⁵⁵Stakeholder Democracy Network: <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/about/how-we-work/>.

important community, Onne, as well as the Paramount Ruler of Ogu. The access to these people was invaluable and facilitated access to other key interview respondents during fieldwork. Indeed, access to these stakeholders was key determinant in the selection of research sites. Despite months of scouring through a catalogue of reports of communal clashes to seek out unique and underrepresented conflict events, it was difficult to find reports of such clashes. This was not because they did not exist – but in the quest to follow a symmetric reporting style of these events, they were always directly or indirectly linked with what I considered to be the very well-documented oil conflict narratives. As a result, it was refreshing when, after a number of meetings with the new leads, there was an opportunity to speak with people who did not have a similar platform to share their stories. Many of these people lived in silence, despite being displaced from their communities. In essence, FCO's security warning, the conclusion of FEHN's rehabilitation programme, SDN's focus on natural resource led grievances, and an introduction to David Alagoa and the Chairman of Eleme Local Government, meant that I would now select Ekporo, Ogu, Onne, and Okrika as the research sites.⁵⁶

Despite visiting other parts of Nigeria to conduct interviews – for example, there were trips to Obafemi Awolowo University in Osun State to interview some academics; there were a number of rare trips to Yenagoa in Bayelsa State; and there were also some trips to Lagos and Ibadan – my thesis remained centred on better understanding the causes of the conflicts in the core research sites in Rivers State. Whilst these supplementary trips helped to buttress the overarching narrative that conflicts in the Niger Delta were caused, not only by oil and natural resources, but by myriad less referenced grievances, more specific information regarding the nature, pattern, length, and causes of these

⁵⁶ All of these sites are located in rural parts of Rivers State.

conflicts was retrieved locally within the communities. Sometimes, meetings were held in other parts of Rivers State. For example, there were a number of meetings in Port Harcourt city centre; there were a few trips to the University of Port Harcourt and many other trips across the city. But, indeed, most of the time spent interviewing community members was spent in the rural enclaves of Onne, Okrika, Ogu, Ekporo, Alode, Ogoni, and other areas in Eleme.

The benefits of localising the interviews were numerous. Interviewees appeared able to offer personal accounts of local events that took place in the various communities much more naturally because they felt a level of comfort from being on home turf⁵⁷ (Lindlof and Taylor 2011: 188). Indeed, in some instances, some interviewees were compelled to show geographical evidence of where events took place. They felt that this legitimised their stories, since it provided evidence to support their various versions of events that had occurred. Another benefit was the opportunity to gain a visual understanding of the landscape, geographical terrain, and to be able to attach a visual image to the stories being told. In the absence of visits to the communities where many of the skirmishes had taken place, there would have been a contextual void in my research. Being physically present at the scene of many of the clashes somewhat legitimises the narratives that have been constructed as a result of visiting the research sites. My personal experience from being at the scenes documented in my thesis has enhanced my ability to understand the stories being recounted by interview respondents (Wengraf 2002: 42-43).

⁵⁷ The issue of positionality and the insider/outsider perception during interviews will be considered further below.

interviews conducted in the communities researched, the interviews were often completed with many of the interviewees deciding to offer documentary support. This was largely beneficial because, although there were voice recordings and interview notes, many of the documents handed over after interviews were often very important. Some of these documents contain a lot of sensitive, and sometimes publicly unavailable, information which has supported my research. For example, my thesis has depended quite heavily on some court documents, police petitions, and locally published books and articles that were retrieved during interviews. Without these documents, accounts of events in the region, particularly the historical accounts, would have depended quite heavily on the verbal accounts of those interviewed. Whilst there are some inherent benefits to doing this, there were some obvious challenges to accepting the verbal accounts of those interviewed (Rubin and Rubin 2012: 27).

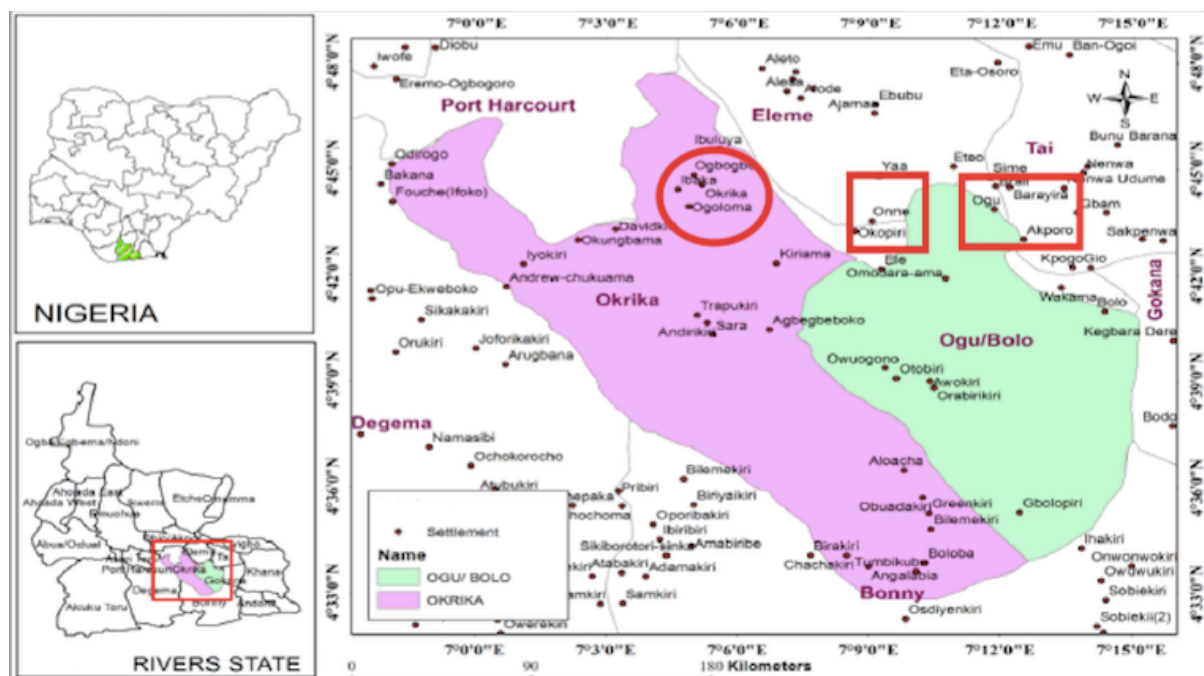


Figure 3: The map above offers a more detailed representation of the Niger Delta field sites documented in the chapters below. These communities are geographically located in rural parts of Rivers State in Nigeria (Source: Nwankwoala et. al 2017)

In the case of the disputes between the two communities, Ekporo and Ogu, documented in chapter 4, when the interviews were conducted with people from both communities,

the stories told by both sides were both compelling and convincing, since people from both communities were confident that their own version of events was legitimate. In a case as complex as the disputes between these two communities it is difficult to take a position. Although the task is not to believe any of the accounts being reported, it was significant to verify the claims that the dispute between the two communities was indeed about land. The court documents and other legal documents provided after interviews had taken place helped to support the information provided during the interviews. The documents contained rich information that recorded the length of the disputes, the cause of the disputes, the process taken to avoid further disputes, court rulings and so much more. For example, having access to these was instrumental in being able to complete the three empirical chapters⁵⁹ of my thesis. In the absence of the supporting documents, these chapters would have been less rich than they currently are. Thus the above reflects how the main research sites were selected and how data was collected from various interviews and supporting documents. The next section of this chapter explains how the interview respondents were selected.

Access to Informants

During an approximate 8 months of fieldwork,⁶⁰ I conducted between 100-150 interviews. Many of these interviews took place with unwitting respondents who had engaged in informal conversations about the state of affairs in the Niger Delta. These discussions were never intended to be interviews, but when conversations about the region began – sometimes during taxi journeys, bus journeys, casual exchanges during basic transactions, and conversations at bars or many of the other sites frequented daily

⁵⁹ The three empirical chapters are chapter 4, 5 and 6.

⁶⁰ The first leg of fieldwork was between June 2014 and January 2015 and there was a second stint of one month in December 2015 to collect more data to support gaps spotted after returning from the first leg. In total, this amounted to about 8 months, with most of it spent in Rivers State.

– the assertions of conversation participants contributed to my overall view of the region. Whilst majority of the conversations from such encounters do not feature heavily in the accounts documented in my thesis, the views from these encounters were documented mentally and, in many instances, in a journal kept during fieldwork. In most cases they informed the views taken forward by me and influenced the questions I asked during the more formal and prearranged semi-structured interviews conducted with selected interview respondents. So, indeed, credit ought to be reserved for the nameless contributors who inadvertently participated in the research process. However, the first formal interview began in Lagos with the CEO of FEHN who was one of the strategically preselected respondents. Although the interview was cut short because of the demand for his time, it was insightful in other ways, as stated above – it helped to identify the need to move to Rivers State to carry out the research undertakings. On arrival to SDN's offices in Port Harcourt, I gained immediate access to NGO workers who had extensive experience working in many communities in the region.

This was an excellent opportunity to practice my interview techniques. During one of the earliest interviews with an SDN colleague, I quickly became aware of gaps in my interviewing skills. On listening to the interview recording afterwards, it showed that I had been leading the interviewee by prompts. Instead of allowing him to express his views, and only then asking more targeted follow up questions, it seemed like the questions I had asked were laced with a guide of how the interviewee should respond. This obviously presented a huge dilemma, but these errors were quickly ironed out in subsequent interviews. Following interviews with NGO workers, a number of other organisations working on conflicts in the Niger Delta were identified. Soon after some of these meetings, I quickly discovered that interviews with representatives of such

organisations were limited in their usefulness. When interviewed, such representatives often presented generalities, which did not provide new information. I observed a similar trend in my interviews with NGOs practitioners, activists, some academics, affiliated youths,⁶¹ and other respondents. The repetition of similar narratives made it quite challenging to make the intended progress. However, after the introduction to Professor Alagoa, Judy Nwanodi, David Alagoa, and Professor Derafaka, the process of identifying a much more representative set of interview respondents was made possible. The intended sample population was meant to provide voices for the alternative narrative and supposed to reflect the diversity of the Niger Delta. For example, when the plan revolved around speaking with militants at FEHN's training camp, the sample population would have drawn from the multi-ethnic and multi-gendered candidates enrolled at the camp.

However, since the process of identifying the research sites happened through a snowball sampling approach (Browne 2005), it seemed natural to allow the process of identifying interview respondents to evolve organically. As a result, the interview respondents reflected the natural composition of the community spokespeople. This means that in the case study communities explored in subsequent chapters, the voices selected to represent the views of the community were largely dominant patriarchal male voices – both at the level of community elders and also at youth level. Although prior to fieldwork there was a theoretical agenda to seek gender balance whilst in the field, in practice access to female respondents was much more limited than access to male respondents. The reality is that I made no direct efforts to circumvent this discrepancy during fieldwork, because to do so would have been to seek a contextually

⁶¹ These were youths affiliated with some of the NGOs that were interviewed. Often they repeated similar views shared by the NGOs who represented their interests. This made it difficult to construct a narrative that was not publicly available.

unrepresentative 'balance'. This, in essence, means that the sample was self-selecting. In cases where women were interviewed, it was because other respondents identified them as significant players in their communities, the same way the male respondents were viewed as significant voices. Indeed, the absence of a larger proportion of women in the sample population is indicative of the social construct in the communities that were studied.⁶² Furthermore, in some ways, the high proportion of male interview respondents reflect the nature of the topic being studied. The study is about identifying the multi-causal factors in the Niger Delta conflicts; most data points to the absence of women in these conflicts. Despite not being directly involved in the combats, women are still heavily affected by these clashes. This though is not to suggest that women are more affected by these conflicts than other subgroups⁶³ i.e. the elderly and children.

Still, it is imperative that we acknowledge that the male explanation of the conflicts lacks a female standpoint epistemology⁶⁴ (Fawcett and Hearn 2004: 208, 211). Having a larger representation of female voices, in theory, might have enriched the findings of the thesis. Given that there were largely no referrals to female interviewees by the male interview respondents, it perhaps shows the unexplored social dynamics in many of these communities.⁶⁵ Whilst this has not been the focus of this thesis, it is still a notable

⁶² Although this was not a line of inquiry pursued during fieldwork, it was self-evident from the fieldwork experience that many of the communities studied were patriarchal societies, with the men traditionally playing the dominant role. This may or may not be reflective of the true nature of family or community life in most parts of the Niger Delta, but there was strong evidence from conversations and observations to suggest that this was the case.

⁶³ Since there was no effort to establish whether women were disproportionately affected by clashes in the region, the assumption is that they had a similar experience to other members of their communities. For example, when the community in Ekporo was sacked, every member of the community was displaced irrespective of age, creed, or gender.

⁶⁴ Important though this is when considering the gender dimension of the research, there are other issues, to be discussed below, such as the impact of positionality. Kezar (2002: 96) explains how "... [p]ositionality theory advances standpoint theory, which tended to look at one aspect of a person's experience, e.g., gender and associated power conditions. The concept of positionality resists a fixed, static, essentialistic view of standpoints that is associated with many strands of standpoint theory – for example, that all women have a particular unchanging view".

⁶⁵ Indeed, it would be fascinating to explore the gender dynamics in the literary representation of the region's conflicts. Although the inclination is to conclude that the narratives are socially constructed, wherein the reproduction of accounts of events in the region occurs in genderless narratives, this is just an inclination which ought to have been tested, and perhaps will be tested in future interviews.

absence that perhaps may have affected the overall data. To avowed feminists, such an absence might be viewed as an attempt to silence female voices (ibid. 208-209; Seymour 2013: 8). On the other hand, considering the dearth of female representation in the list of interviewees as a negative in and of itself ought to be challenged. To unintentionally omit 'fair' representation of female voices in this study is not to reject the value of female contribution to the narrative, nor is it an attempt to purposefully privilege patriarchy over feminism. It was instead a reactive response to engaging with local social norms in the space where my research was taking place. As argued by one of the most renowned feminist theorists Nancy Chodorow:

*For our parts as feminists, even as we want to eliminate gender inequality, hierarchy, the difference, we expect to find such features in most social settings ... We have begun from the assumption that **gender is always a salient** feature of social life, and we do not have theoretical approaches that emphasize sex similarity over differences (Chodorow 1989: 216 cited in Oyēwùnmí 1997: 15)*

Chodrow makes a number of points here. Whilst it important to continually seek to redress gender imbalance on all fronts, it is also important to understand that, in some aspects of social life or in some cultures, 'making room' on gender bases might not necessarily be as important as achieving results. This does not mean any particular sex should be marginalised – on the contrary, she argues that we ought to emphasise the similarity in sexes instead of highlighting the differences. This is relatable when considering the experience of interviewing male respondents during fieldwork. When they referred other men for interviews, there was no sense that they did so to exclude women. Indeed, I sensed that they just wanted their stories to be told by whoever could tell it best at that particular time. When they felt that women might tell the story better,

they would recommend the relevant women. In essence, not adopting a quota-based representation of female voices was not an effort by male respondents or me as the interviewer to deliberately marginalise female perspectives, but rather the selection and referral of interview respondents was organic. On the surface at least, it all seemed to be driven by a shared goal to tell an alternative Niger Delta story in the best way possible. It is important, therefore, to consider the points Oyēwùnmí (1997: 15) presents when she argues that “the assumption and deployment of patriarchy and ‘women’ as universals in many feminist writings are ethnocentric and demonstrate the hegemony of the West over other cultural groupings”. This is not meant to be a critique of feminist thoughts or ideas, but rather, it is an exercise to reflect on how and why communities engage with the issue of gender representation differently. Overall, it is important to acknowledge that the gender representation in the interview was skewed with higher percentage of male respondents, but it is difficult to say how that has affected the data collected. Still, the perception is that the study could have been richer with more non-male perspectives.

Despite the noticeable absence of women in the sample population interviewed, there was a high turnout of youth respondents. This was aided in part because many aspects of the empirical chapters sought to discuss the role of youths in the conflicts. For example, in chapter 6 where there is a strong focus on the relationship between youths and chiefs. It was important to gain an insight into the position of youths in the disputes in Onne that centred on the disputed Paramount Ruler, King Osaronu, and a large faction of the youth body. Interestingly, when the interviews were first conducted in Onne in 2014, King Osaronu⁶⁶ suggested that there was no need to interview the youth body

⁶⁶ King Osaronu is one of the parties involved in the disputes in Onne over who the legitimate paramount ruler of that community is. The dispute is assessed in great detail in chapter 6.

because every youth in the community supported him and his leadership agenda. As suspicious as the claim was, it was difficult to gain access to the youth body during this period. However, after returning to Onne in 2015, other chiefs in the community encouraged meeting with the youths to gain their perspective. This proved to be exceptionally rewarding, not least because it offered an opportunity to explore the unique viewpoint of Onne's youth members. Similarly, when speaking to other youths across the region, their perspectives were often significant in ways that were not anticipated. After speaking to a number of chiefs who, as expressed above, took on the role of community spokespeople, youth voices represented the perspective of many of the key actors in communal clashes. After all, even if the chiefs, as community representatives, speak on behalf of their communities, youths are frequently at the epicentre of clashes. As a result, it was interesting to listen to their stories to try to understand their motivations. In many cases, the viewpoints of chiefs and youths converged and reflected similar narratives, but in some cases, youth voices represented contrarian views.⁶⁷ Overall, the collective of respondents presented invaluable data, which has helped immensely to better understand the more nuanced aspects of the Niger Delta conflicts. In fact, as well as elucidating areas previously untouched, many of the interviewees were also able to present viewpoints that have helped to challenge contemporary understanding of events in the region.

Limitation of Scope

Chapter one has highlighted the significance of looking beyond the economic factors and resource led explanations of the Niger Delta conflicts. However, by not making the

⁶⁷ The Onne example in chapter 6 is a case in point. In chapter 4, there is the example of the youth members who joined militant groups because they had no alternative options. Their motivations in some cases were purely economic, whilst the militant leaders whom they served were motivated by well-defined and loudly articulated ideologies.

impact of natural resources in the Niger Delta conflicts the focus of the research, it could appear to inhibit attempts to construct a holistic explanation for the region's conflicts. This is even truer when one considers that natural resources, oil in particular, are an intrinsic part of the Niger Delta's identity. To mitigate this risk of constructing a partial narrative, it is important to be more open to discussing the significance of oil and economic factors in the Niger Delta. In fact, by insisting on discussing issues relating to natural resources and economics, whether directly or indirectly, there is a better chance of understanding the extent to which natural resources play a part in the region's conflicts. Otherwise, it would be difficult to confidently discount these factors from conflicts where they were not catalysts. That noted, the studies on resource curse, economics and violent conflicts, resource conflicts, political economy of plunder, and the 'paradox of plenty' are exhaustive – so it would be difficult to contribute to the existing body of work on these subjects. Being aware of this fact made it possible to focus in more detail on analysing other aspects of the Niger Delta conflicts. As a result, it presented the opportunity to construct and offer an alternative narrative – a narrative that challenges the assumptions that oil and other natural resources are the triggers of ***all*** the conflicts in the region. It is obviously not the case that oil and other natural resources have been the sole cause of conflicts in the Niger Delta region, and my time in the field has helped to further entrench this belief in my mind.

By establishing the limitations of the resource narrative thesis, my research has been able to highlight the differences between correlation and causation in analysing the Niger Delta region's conflicts (Tufte 2003: 4). This basically means that sometimes, by coincidence, conflicts do erupt in areas where there is an abundance of natural resources. Evidence shows that even without natural resources, other grievances have

triggered conflict events – chapters 4, 5 and 6 are excellent case studies that reified this view. These chapters have helped to clarify the limitations of the previously dominant assumptions. These chapters have gone some distance to redress the balance by offering broader explanations that extend beyond current understanding of conflicts in the Niger Delta. The case studies within each of the three chapters highlight other deep-rooted obstacles to peace in the region, such as ineffective land reforms, quest for access to political decision-making, disenfranchisement of youth, poor traditional governance, and exploitation of communities by multinational corporations. By focusing on these factors, other issues such as the effects of corruption, industrial policies, patron-client relationships, rent seeking, aid, and natural resource dependence have not been addressed extensively in my thesis. Whilst they are significant, these issues have already been analysed in existing work on the region, and, therefore, I considered that an addition to that literature was nonessential. However, in lieu of a thorough assessment of these issues, the other areas explored in great detail in my thesis provide a rich context for how extant and emerging socio-political issues contribute to conflicts in the Niger Delta region.

Another significant factor that narrowed the scope of the research was the selection of research sites. As explained above, in the section about the selection of research sites, whilst the intention had been to cover an expansive part of the Niger Delta, particularly the three core Niger Delta states, the security briefing from the FCO which advised against all but essential travel to these states was a decisive factor in the ultimate decision to focus the research only on Rivers State. Although the three core oil producing states are often banded together as an unambiguously monolithic group, these states have distinctive characteristics and histories that make them different. For

example, the Niger Delta comprises more than 140 ethnic groups (Asuni 2009: 5), and many of these ethnic groups are represented in various proportions in the region. For example, in ethnically diverse Delta State, the largest ethnic groups are Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Igbo, and Isoko (Mordi 2015: 50). In Rivers State, the largest groups are the Ikwerre, Okrika (Ijaw), and Eleme (Ogoni) (Gabriels et al. 2014: 927). Although the Ijaw people are considered to be the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, they consider themselves a minority and marginalised group in two of the three core Niger Delta oil producing states – except in Bayelsa where they form a majority (Ukiwo 2007: 591, 600, 609). Invariably, the different ethnic composition in these states has had different implications on the social and cultural dynamics within them. In turn, this has had an impact on the nature of the conflicts in each individual state. For example, the late 1990s and early 2000s Warri Crisis was a series of conflicts in Warri, the capital of Delta State. The conflicts involved the Ijaws, Itsekiri, and Urhobo who fought over a number of ethnically charged issues (ibid. 598; Omeje 2004: 434).

The dispute between these communities in Warri, Delta State, concerned, *inter alia*, an “unpopular relocation of the Warri South-West local government headquarters by the state” (Omeje 2004: 434). The move of the local government headquarters was perceived to reflect an entrenchment of Ijaw marginalisation in Warri (Ukiwo 2007: 598 - 599). Whilst this account appears very specific in documenting the experience of Warri, it is an important precedent that informed the narrowing of the scope of my thesis. This is because even from this seemingly specific experience, it was possible to locate a more general trend that reverberated throughout the region. Whilst not advocating the idea of creating theories or promoting generalisations from restricted analyses of events in limited sites, the assessment of the Warri Crisis shows that it is

possible to draw larger conclusions from an analysis of an event that seemed to be geographically confined to Warri. Many renowned Niger Delta academics and experts have deftly situated the explanation of these Warri conflicts within a broader Niger Delta narrative. For example, Ukiwo (2007) does this by locating narratives of Ijaw marginalisation and other pan-Ijaw grievances⁶⁸ within the Warri Crisis. From his analysis of the events in Warri, Ukiwo explains that “... contemporary violent conflicts and insurgency in the Niger Delta can be traced to issues of longstanding injustice, inter-group inequalities and political and socio-economic marginalization” (ibid. 591). By tracing the social origin of the region’s militancy, one is led back to local events like the Warri Crisis.

Similarly, by focusing on the research sites in Rivers State and the case studies in chapters 4, 5 and 6, it is possible to identify patterns that are reflected in other parts of the region. For example, although chapter 5 explores land disputes between two neighbouring communities in Rivers State, such disputes are not unique to that state. Indeed, similar conflicts are common in the region, and perhaps in Nigeria as a whole. In March 2016, the Nigerian national newspaper, Vanguard (2016a), reported the news of clashes between two Delta State communities, Ogbe-Ijoh and Aladja in Udu. The story of the clashes between these two communities, at least on the surface, appears to share similarities with the clashes between the Ogu and Ekporo documented in the chapter 5.⁶⁹ The case study on the complex identity of militancy and militants identified when investigating the role of ex-militant leader Ateke Tom in chapter 4 might also be mirrored in events in Bayelsa and Delta state. It has been widely suggested that the emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), a new militant group, is due to the state’s

⁶⁸ It has been widely suggested that MEND was a reactionary group representing the fight against marginalization of the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta (See for example Ukiwo, 2007; Hanson 2007 and Courson 2011).

⁶⁹ See also Vanguard (2016b) for more stories of communal clashes over land in Delta State.

clampdown on the former ex-militant leader, Government Ekpemupolo, commonly known as Tompolo (Sahara Reporters 2016). Although not popularly documented, Ateke's role in Okrika, Rivers State, and the Niger Delta, is similar to Tompolo's in Warri, Delta State, and the Niger Delta. So there are obvious lessons to learn from examining these individuals and their actions. The final case study on Onne, like the two before it, could inform us of similar issues in communities across the region and more generally, in Nigeria. After all, deciding to base the research in Rivers State to avert security risk has not necessarily impacted the research negatively. Despite the differences and diversity in each of the states, the research sites and case studies are still representative of events that regularly feature in the region. So, perhaps fortuitously, what initially seemed like a limitation may have in fact been a blessing in disguise. In essence, instead of having to make multiple long and hazardous journeys to different states in the region, representative samples of events were located in one of the three core oil producing states. This made it possible to collect the desired data in a relatively safe environment.

In addition to the above limitations, the decision to employ qualitative research methods raised some inevitable difficulties. For example, as is common in the work of many Northern hemisphere-based social scientists, there is a tendency to draw assessments mainly from literature emanating from Western scholars. Such an approach often leads to a biased and unrepresentative account of the events and experiences of the people and the region being examined. Consequently, in an attempt to correct for such biases, where possible my thesis has drawn from a broad pool of literature published by African (mostly Nigerian) scholars, Western scholars, and scholars from other regions, for triangulation purposes. This, it is assumed, has helped to mitigate any unintended partiality that may have been embedded in literature

emanating from only one region. As a result, this is expected to increase the trustworthiness of the findings in my thesis (Baxter and Jack 2008: 544, 555-556; Burnham et al. 2008: 333-334; Bryman 2004: 275; Grix 2010: 122). There are of course other issues which are much more difficult to avoid. In particular, the intrinsic nature of one's scholarly subjectivity/interviewer bias – that is, one's own "creation of meaning"⁷⁰ – is much more difficult to circumvent.⁷¹ However, "subjectivity should be more fully understood as not just a predisposition within the individual but also as a complex interplay between people, for example, between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Wengraf 2002: 10). To mitigate the inevitability of interviewer bias, I conducted constant reviews and appraisals of interviews and my interactions with interviewees.

Despite all the concerns raised above, the strengths of the selected research methods, sites, and interview respondents outweigh any limitations they may seem to present. For example, qualitative case study allows academics to carry out research in a manner that facilitates exploration using a variety of sources, including journals, statistics, books, and the Internet. This widens the pool of information to allow "multiple facets of the [grievance] phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter and Jack 2008: 544; see also Grix 2010: 121; Miller and Brewer 2003: 23). Furthermore, when analysis of these sources is carried out with a critical outlook, this allows for the opportunity to continuously challenge one's own predispositions as much as those of the scholars referenced. This approach has helped my research to achieve the highest objectivity and, as a result, should increase the validity of the findings. These approaches, it is hoped, have helped to lessen the effect of the inherent flaws of qualitative research (Grix 2010: 122).

⁷⁰ Weiss (1994: 211) refers to this as the "experimenter effects" which can be countered by recognising "how vulnerable to experimenter effects the qualitative interview study is".

⁷¹ Whilst interviewee subjectivity is part of the process of creating meaning, it is important to be aware of this bias.

Power, Positionality and the Ethics of Field Research

To acknowledge particular and personal locations is to admit the limits of one's purview from these positions. It is also to undermine the notion of objectivity, because from particular locations all understanding becomes subjectively based and forged through interactions within fields of power relations. (Narayan 1993: 679)

Narayan's words are a salient reminder of the complexities that undergird research. While it is important to remind myself of the perspectives from which I obtained my understanding of events, by doing this I forgo my right to claim objectivity. The result of my proclamation of either being an insider or an outsider is to restrict my research findings which will inevitably be formed around the nucleus, or the starting position where I as a researcher locate myself.⁷² This effort to identify where I am located, is, in essence, an effort to account for my own research bias. As Throne (2013) explains, "... positionality is often used ... as an exploration of the investigator's reflection on one's own placement within the many contexts, layers, power structures, identities and subjectivities of the viewpoint". In the course of conducting research, the starting point of considering one's own positionality, one's own location, is to identify whether one is perceived as an 'insider' or 'outsider' by those with whom one interacts for the purpose of research. In so doing, I reflect on how these perceptions impact the data that I was able to retrieve (Bourke 2014: 1). Merriam et al. (2001) challenge the relevance of this notion by arguing that data is not invalidated by whether a researcher is perceived as an insider or an outside. Indeed, "what an insider 'sees' and 'understands' will be different from, but as valid as what an outsider understands" (Merriam et al 2001: 415). After all, in the course of undertaking fieldwork, a researcher is likely to be considered both as an

⁷²Throne (2013) makes this clear, by emphasising that "positionality allows for a narrative placement for researcher objectivity and subjectivity whereby the researcher is situated with the many aspects of perspective and positionality".

insider and an outsider, depending on the “cultural values and norms of both the researcher and the participants” (ibid. 416). One could thus argue that the agency of perception lies with both the researcher and participants.

However, Merriam et al. (2001) also note in the four case study examples presented in their work,⁷³ that the participants’ perception of the interviewer is informed by participants’ own inherent biases. To mitigate this external bias and other preconceptions coming from research participants, I considered that the best approach was to adopt some feminist interviewing techniques. I felt that this approach would ensure that power dynamics between the research participants and me as the interviewer would be balanced. After all, “feminist interviewing attempts to be more reflexive and interactive, aiming to take a non-hierarchical approach which avoids objectifying the participant. The distinction between the roles of researchers and participant becomes less stark: the interview is seen as a collaboration between them as they share in the process of negotiating coverage, language and understanding. Reciprocity is emphasised. The researcher feels free to step outside the formal role of the neutral asker of questions, expressing their own feelings and giving information about themselves” (Ritchie and Lewis 2007: 140). In theory, approaching interviews like this sounds sensible. However, I discovered that in practice neutrality was much more difficult to achieve. This was largely because access to many of the participants was granted because I was introduced to them as a doctoral student from the University of Oxford. Entering from this point gave me a privileged access to people who embrace hierarchy and seniority as an important part of their daily lives. “Within positionality

⁷³ In the article, Merriam et al. (2001: 406) presented four case studies of “a Black woman interviewing other Black women, Asian graduate students in the US interviewing people from ‘back home’, an African professor learning from African businesswomen, and a cross-cultural team studying aging in a non- Western culture” to show the complexities of conducting research both as ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’.

theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity . . ." (Kezar 2002: 96).

This was precisely how I presented myself. My identity was intersectional. Indeed, presenting myself as a Nigerian, from the South West, who had lived abroad for a decade and a half, studying International Development at the University of Oxford, meant that I transcended any singular identity when interacting with the interview participants. By and large, the impression I got from the field was that they viewed me as someone who was helping to work towards achieving peace and development in the region. Therefore, they were very keen to report the negative things that were happening in their communities that they felt needed addressing. That perhaps meant that they did not discuss issues surrounding things that worked; the positive elements of being in the region; because these things were not considered to be important to my research. Since these were not things that needed to be fixed or repaired, as an international development scholar, the information they felt that I needed was information to do with how I had introduced my thesis, which I had indicated was about fixing things. Of course, this was partly because of my own construction, the representation of my identity. Obviously, the label as an Oxford student gave me access to high level officials and traditional elites, and I was able to ask questions that I may not have otherwise been permitted to ask.

I was granted many concessions that allowed me to float between the insider and outsider labels. I was an insider because, to interview participants, despite being someone from another part of the country, I was Nigerian and still a 'son of soil' in some ways. But at the same time I was an outsider who was taking the story back abroad to inform people who could use the information provided to help avert future crises.

Admittedly, I exploited the ambiguity of my identity. I both spoke with a ‘foreign’ accent⁷⁴ and occasionally spoke with a Nigerian accent. Though seemingly duplicitous, it was a way of trying to control and manoeuvre around how I was perceived so that I could gain insights as both an outsider and as an insider when I felt it was necessary. I used this flexible identity to avoid the perception that in asking questions I was trying to undermine participants. For example, when, as is documented in chapter 5, I asked King Osaronu whether he had the support of his community, he responded calmly. If I had presented myself purely as a local – an insider – he may have perceived my question as an attempt to undermine him and his position. However, as he identified me as a student of the University of Oxford, and also as a person who had lived abroad for 15 years, he was more receptive to otherwise non-permissible questions. I was definitely able to push boundaries with King Osaronu that I would not have been able to push if I had not been affiliated with the University of Oxford. I had the benefit of being an insider and an outsider which allowed me to gain as much insight as I needed. Conversely, had I been a white male or female, perhaps I would have got a lot less of an insider perspective, but a lot more of the outsider perspective, which participants might have found much more compelling to share with such persons. From this experience, it is easy to accept that “positionality and biography of the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in the field as well as in the final text” (England 1994: 84).

Despite jostling between these multiple identities, I aspired to the highest ethical standards during my interactions with interview respondents. In anticipation of fieldwork, I audited the MPhil research methods module, which helped me to think

⁷⁴ My first encounter with Ateke Tom, the ex-militant leader, over the phone was a case in point. When he called me, I picked up the phone and spoke as I normally do – with an ‘English’ accent – and he proceeded to assure me that he had been interviewed by people from Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and many other countries. Then he proceeded to ask for my name to which I responded ‘Ola’, he said – “Ola? You are Nigerian”, I said yes – to which he said, OK – I will call you back. Although I have had a number of short exchanges with him since – it was interesting that he found me much more interesting to engage with when he assumed I was a ‘foreigner’.

about the ethics of conducting empirical research. The training, which offered anecdotal experiences, as well as comprehensive research methods reading lists and access to sociological and anthropological theories and ideas to prepare for fieldwork. In addition, I was required to complete the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) form, which ensures that "... research activities involving human participants are conducted in a way which respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants, and which minimises risk to participants, researchers, third parties, and to the University itself".⁷⁵ In the CUREC form, attached in the appendix, I documented that interviews would focus on people who were older than 18 and were legally able to give consent. I also designed a consent form, which participants would be expected to sign before commencing the interview. In the consent form, attached to appendix, it was made clear that participants had the right to anonymity and to stop the interview at any point, if they felt uncomfortable. The plan was to print the form and present it to all research participants. However, for a number of reasons, this became impractical. Once in the field, it made little sense to present a piece of paper that would require participants to sign their names, whilst also guaranteeing anonymity. I considered that collecting of forms with participants' details on them would prove counterproductive for anonymity if the papers were to end up being stolen or confiscated by law enforcement. As a result, before every interview, I asked participants verbally for their permission and consent. They were informed of their right to anonymity. Many participants decided to go on record, and a few preferred to remain anonymous. For the latter class, they have been anonymised throughout my thesis so that they are protected.

⁷⁵ See, <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/>.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the numerous considerations and decisions that have arisen during the process of conducting my doctoral research. The chapter has clarified the significance of a number of factors that have informed and shaped the outcome of the data mining process. In the section about ontology and epistemology, I established the importance of looking beyond the rationalist and empiricist framework of conducting research. Instead, I described how adopting epistemological pluralism can enable researchers to broaden the scope of a study by adopting an interdisciplinary research approach. This, I argued, would permit a thorough examination of events that were previously usually considered through singular epistemological frameworks. In the sections that followed, I highlighted the groundwork that I undertook before embarking on fieldwork. I documented how a number of unforeseen events influenced the research sites selected. For example, the FCO travel guide advised against all but essential travel to most parts of the Niger Delta, and the discovery that a potential partner organisation, FEHN, was unable to assist, led to me selecting new field sites to adapt to these changed circumstances. The understanding that most parts of the Niger Delta were now restricted areas meant that the research primarily focused on communities in Rivers State. However, efforts were made to visit other parts of the region and other states in the country including, Bayelsa State, Osun State, Oyo State, and Lagos State. Having the opportunity to visit these areas meant that the data collected during fieldwork had richer contexts that would have otherwise been absent. These absence would have created a contextual deficit that would have negatively impacted the data analysis process.

Through well-established connections facilitated by SDN, I was able to gain access to many communities in Rivers State that share similar experiences with other communities in the region. This meant that instead of viewing the concentration of research sites in Rivers State as a negative, it was possible to retrieve the necessary data without having to spend time navigating inter-state road routes, which can occasionally be very hazardous. In the subsequent section, I also referred to process of selecting interview respondents. It was made clear that the representation of women was significantly lower than the representation of male participants. This was not due to a deliberate effort to avoid women, but rather, it reflects the snowball sampling interview technique adopted. The interviewee selection process depended heavily on forward referrals to new interview participants made by those that were being interviewed. I observed, however, that the lack of recommendations of women was not due to any form of overt prejudice, but instead reflect what I consider to be referral of the best storytellers. Driven by a desire to get their story told, interview participants only referred other people who they felt would be able to tell their stories particularly well. Whilst the small number of female interviewees is notable, there is no evidence that such an absence adversely impacted on the quality of the data used to highlight the issues in the empirical chapters. In the final section of the chapter I explored how my position as insider/ outsider affected the quality of data that was collected, and concluded that it was helpful to adopt multiple identities as this enabled me to gain unfettered access and insights as both an insider, identified as a Nigerian ‘son of the soil’, and an outsider, identified as a University of Oxford International Development student.

THE COMPLEX IDENTITIES OF MILITANCY: A Subjunctive for Criminality or a quest for Access?

Introduction

Since 1999 and a return to multi-party democracy, Nigeria has witnessed intensified contests concerning rights over economic re-distribution and judicial authority, and the privileges of representation and patrimony.

(Gore and Pratten 2003: 213)

Nowhere else has this contest for rights and access manifested itself in the country more than in the Niger Delta. Importantly, this quest for access was being fronted by a different set of actors, the vigilantes, who emerged after the liberalisation⁷⁶ of security in Nigeria. Since the end of the military rule, the security landscape shifted from one where security was provided by the state to one where security provisions are appropriated to locally formed vigilante⁷⁷ groups. This new trend of outsourcing security provisions to vigilantes was not unique to the Niger Delta region, in fact as Gore and Pratten (2003: 212) note, the notion of vigilante transcends any singular ethnic group in the country. These agents assumed the role of moral authority in states where governable space had become quite contentious and vigilante took up the position of individuals with moral authority to police disorder and challenge the maleficent governance of elected individuals who had used their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the electorate. The presence of vigilantes in the Delta region offers the foundation on which one can build a better understanding of the emergence of militant

⁷⁶ As Sorgwe (1999: 221) explained, before the introduction of police services in the Niger Delta, local chiefs and traditional persons were responsible for maintaining law and order in their communities, normally through social and religious sanctions. Policing was thus a novelty – which seems to have been replaced here by the traditional mode that preceded it. This is not to suggest that police services was insignificant, in fact – on the contrary – “the extent of their influence is seen in the fact that the oral traditions of many communities still refer to the police as the symbol of government” (ibid.).

⁷⁷ As Gore and Pratten explained, “[v]igilantism is a conservative response to contemporary disorder in Nigeria and draws its legitimacy from familiar and long standing cultural practices. Hence, it expresses a lack of confidence in the capacity of the state to offer security, but does not project a revolutionary or anti-state message” (Gore and Pratten 2003: 232).

groups and their role in acting as the soldiers for people's rights in the region. The linkages between vigilante groups and militancy in the Niger Delta are inextricable and ought to be treated as such. Attempting to understand the region by taking this approach will help us to shift away from the usual economic deterministic literatures. Here we are presented with an academic scholarship which presents an alternative explanation for what drives conflicts. Conflicts and militancy in the Niger Delta are not only about economic opportunities as argued by the economy of war literature. Instead, the rise in militancy in the Niger Delta can be traced in the emergence of a new liberal order which eradicated the state's monopoly of security provisions (Gore and Pratten 2003: 240, Smith 2004: 430-432).

The emergence of a multi-party political system in 1999 was followed by renewed sense of optimism that the country's elites would become more representative and closely align their interests with the rest of the populace. However, the early optimism quickly dissipated and was replaced by dissent, which allowed a new class of disgruntled citizens to emerge. The vigilantes, for example, were representative of a social class that participated in "social activities outside of the regulatory frameworks maintained by the state, they are constructively engaged in creating and engaging in social formations and associations that are often legitimised by long standing traditions that lay claim (in principle if not in practice) to an autonomy from the state" (Gore and Pratten 2003: 213). Militancy, viewed as an extension of vigilantism, can as such lay claim to being a legitimate, though militarised, form of civil society engaged with the struggle of policing an "emasculated and decomposing"⁷⁸ state (Ikelegbe 2001b: 3). Though unorthodox and

⁷⁸ Ikelegbe (2001b) makes this argument by claiming, "the relationship of civil society to the state in Africa has been characterised by struggle and antagonism". This struggle and antagonism led by a militarised civil society began because the state has resorted to using force and repression to restrict the rights of its citizens who had become victims of state's failed objectives of achieving post independence development (2001b: 3).

represented as criminals instead of 'freedom fighters', Niger Delta militants have leveraged their strategic geographical position in the country to challenge the marginalising democratic establishment by creating choke points in the federation's income stream.⁷⁹ Therefore instead of the prevailing narratives that have cast the Niger Delta militants as actors motivated by greed, this chapter aims to offer an alternative perspective where militants are presented as actors engaged in a battle for access to the state in order to redress their perceived communal grievances.

Indeed, by tracking the evolving roles of militants in their communities, as opposed to their antagonism towards the state, a different set of pictures start to emerge. The relationship with the state, forged via the creeks, thus has to be viewed as the means to an end rather than the end in itself. The 'end' represented by the acceptance of the 2009 Presidential Amnesty by over 26,000 Niger Delta militants was the negotiated peace settlement that allowed the state to retake control of the region and better manage its relationship with armed dissatisfied citizens in the region. But accounts and evidence retrieved during an extended period of fieldwork showed that the Presidential Amnesty, which offered Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), was more than just normalising the relationship between the state and the people of the region, it marked the beginning of a new type of governance structure. The reconfiguration of relationships between the state and militants allowed militants, especially the leaders, to take on active roles in managing and ensuring that peace is sustained in the region.⁸⁰ In fact, this allowed a new governance structure to emerge. As Raeymaekers et al.

⁷⁹ Given that militants have attacked the state by targeting the country's oil industry, it is easy to rationalise their objectives as one guided by greed or a desire to plunder for personal wealth. This is where many of the 'economy of war' literature have decided to set camp (See for example, Ikelegbe 2005, Reno 1997, Collier and Hoeffler 1998, Collier and Hoeffler 2001). However, a critical review of the situation offers a different reading for why militants have targeted the oil industry.

⁸⁰ This is not unlike the case in Sierra Leone where ex-Revolutionary United Front (RUF) commanders jealously guarded the interactions between their subordinates and the outside world (Themnér 2012: 206).

(2008: 8) point out, there is a tendency to suggest that African communities are unable to “administer basic public goods, deliver services and determine rights. On the contrary, the evidence illustrates a high level of creativity and mobility on the part of African populations to cope with the problems of weak government and political violence, especially in zones of so-called ‘limited’ statehood”.

Instead of then viewing militants as opportunists seeking to enrich themselves, we must consider the shrewdness in their calculations to secure a place on the table with key decision makers, especially when it comes to decisions that directly affect them and their communities. This of course is not unique to the Niger Delta. In the case of the DR Congo and Sudan, for example, “long periods of low-intensity warfare have produced in turn, a whole series of opportunities for non-state actors (businessmen, militias, youngsters, customary authorities) to participate in local decision-making process and regulate access to markets and resources. In some cases, this has led to new arrangements between state and non-state actors regarding the management of local security, public services and resources” (Raeymaekers et al. 2008: 8). The Niger Delta offers a parallel to the DR Congo and Sudan experience, as militant leaders have now become *de facto* rulers in their respective communities in Niger Delta. This chapter will document this experience in the region by charting the rise and emergence of Ateke Tom from his modest beginning as a vigilante chairman in Okrika. The chapter will follow Ateke’s rise from vigilante leader through his time as militant leader to his post amnesty status as the ‘High Chief’ of Okrika town. To achieve this, this chapter will be broken into two main sections and conclusion: A) *Instituting the Okrika Vigilante: The Unintended Anointment of the New Kingmakers*; B) *The Fluid Dynamics of Militancy*:

Continually changing factors in the Niger Delta struggle; C) Alternative Governance Structures: Challenging Marginality by Reconstructing Authority and; D) Conclusion.

In the first section, I will analyse the humble beginnings of Ateke Tom in his local Okrika community. The section will document the complex factors at play. Firstly looking at Ateke's recruitment as the community vigilante chairman tasked with purging his community of outsiders who came to cause mischief and abuse people in the community. This section will continue by examining how his role as vigilante became complicated after the creation of a rival group, the Bush Boys, with whom he engaged in a long territorial battle. Ateke's role in the dispute will be examined and the section will also document his relationships with his patrons and how he came to be armed to fight the Bush Boys for the chieftaincy stool and the political aspirations of his patrons. The second section, will examine Ateke's decision to move to the creeks and present a challenge to the state in the quest for access to the state and its resources. In this section, I will document how through a series of clever manoeuvres, Ateke and his group were able to hold the state to ransom till they were eventually granted a semi-comprehensive Presidential Amnesty in 2009. The hypothesis is that although the implementation of the amnesty was ineffective, having the ex-militant leaders on side has meant that the state is able to manage its relationship with disgruntled youth. The section also documents how since the 2009 amnesty, ex-militant commanders have used their positions and access to the state to secure favourable deals for themselves and for the Niger Delta people.

The final section attempts to emphasise the misreading of the events in the region. It attempts to show that, for example, whilst militancy has by and large been understood as an insurgent reaction driven by criminal elements in pursuit of resource booty – an

alternative explanation might be that militants adopt violence as a way of challenging the federal government's monopoly of violence and in turn the state's monopoly of governance. As Charles Tilly puts it, "[b]anditry, piracy, gangland rivalry, policing, and war making all belong on the same continuum" (Tilly 1993: 170). This is to say that the use of checked and unchecked violence is a tool adopted by perpetrators "in order to check or overcome their competitors and thus to enjoy the advantages of power within a secure or expanding territory" (ibid. 172). This section argues that in an effort to establish alternative governance structures in the Delta region, militants adopted violence as a tool to help to secure strategically important positions in the federal government's management of their territory. This has enabled them to plug the lapses in the state's service provision.

Instituting the Okrika Vigilante: The Unintended Anointment of the New Kingmakers

The demographic and geographic complexities of the Niger Delta mean that explaining the conflicts in the region requires a broad assessment. To provide such a surgical analysis of all the troubles in the region however would be beyond the scope of this chapter. What this chapter is thus able to provide is a documentation of events that have parallels across the Niger Delta. One such example is the rise of the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), a militant group, which like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), played a significant role in militant insurgencies in the region from 2004 to 2009 when the head of the group Ateke Tom accepted the Presidential Amnesty granted by the late President, Umaru Yar'Adua.⁸¹ To understand the rise of Ateke Tom and the group he

⁸¹ President Umaru Yar'Adua passed away just under a year after granting amnesty to militants in the Niger Delta. This move is recorded as one of the President's key achievements before his term ended prematurely.

headed, NDV, I collected accounts from people in the Niger Delta who were able to chart his rise in his local community Okrika, to become one of the famous faces that took the Niger Delta fight against repression and grievances to the federal government. Local accounts also offer an insight into the multi-layered political and cultural dynamics at play at local, state and federal level. These local accounts were useful to challenge the simplistic explanations which only offered partial justification for the militant movement. Instead, with a clearly charted rise of Ateke Tom, this chapter goes beyond many of the explanations that already exist to link the liberalisation of service provisions to the rise of militancy in the region.

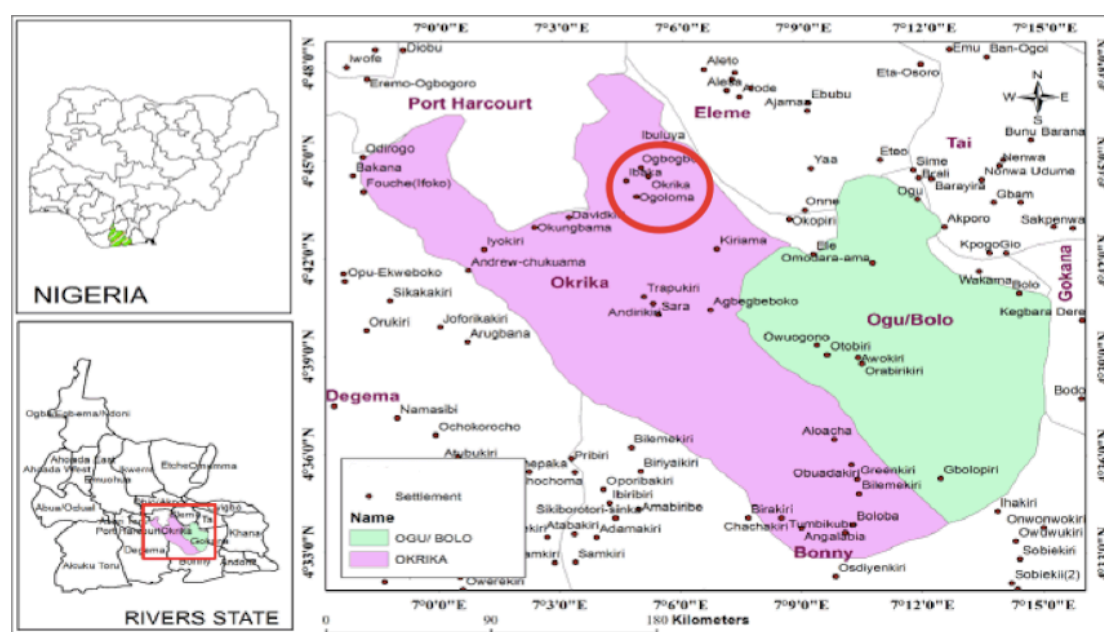


Figure 4: The map above shows Okrika's geographical location (Source: Nwankwoala et. al 2017)

This will be achieved through a brief historiography of Okrika starting from 1999. This particular point is useful for exploring the town's recent history which has been marred by a number of disputes till date. These disputes have varied in complexion but in some ways are linked to the broader Niger Delta struggle. For example, some of the disputes in Okrika were localised and stemmed from internal contestation over rights to ascension to a much coveted chieftaincy title. The Okrika people also faced external

threats from neighbouring communities over ownership of land and access to oil royalties.⁸² These issues and disputes are manifested in one individual's actions throughout the time period documented in this chapter. As a result, I have selected to chart Ateke Tom's rise from a relatively unknown figure to becoming a key and influential person in Okrika, Rivers State and the Niger Delta more broadly. Through his experience, we can track the fluidity that exist between the multiple and often different conflicts in the Niger Delta – with this, we can attempt to understand the Niger Delta and its conflicts a little better.

Ateke Tom's emergence came about when he was appointed by the then Okrika Local government council in their efforts to ward off external threats from out-of-towners from Port Harcourt and neighbouring communities who came to pillage, rob and rape the local girls in Okrika. Tom was recruited as the vigilante chairman as he was viewed to have all the attributes necessary to protect people in the village. According to one of my interview respondents,⁸³ at inception, Ateke and his vigilante group (also sometimes cult group)⁸⁴ worked effectively within their brief, gradually removing the boys who had caused chaos in the community and chased them away from Okrika. However, when the war broke out between Okrika and Eleme community in 1999 and 2000, the

⁸² There was also a sense that the people of Okrika were under attack from other ethnic groups due to their involvement with the new developing ethnic nationalism built on pan-Ijaw solidarity (see Nwajiaku 2005b for example).

⁸³ Interview with Ben, an Okrika local on 05/10/2014.

⁸⁴ According to some other accounts quite different from what was described by the interviewees, Ateke Tom's vigilante group was in fact something with a more questionable foreground rooted in decades old violent confraternity. Ateke Tom ostensibly "took on the leadership of Iclander, a cult group, at the time of its formation in 2000. Iclander drew its membership from its mother cult, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity (SVC), as well as from a street wing of the SVC, Deewell" (Hazen and Horner 2007: 77). Although these accounts may appear divergent, in fact they overlap and are much more closely aligned. What is clear with these accounts is that Ateke did in fact take charge of a group between 1999-2000 drawing from youths from across Okrika and Rivers – it is quite possible that what was referred to by the interviewees as Ateke's vigilante group also doubled as the Iclander cult group. What is consistent is that Ateke led a group, which later morphed into a militant group. It is also worth noting here that this chapter is not primarily concerned with analyzing the culture of confraternities in the Delta – although there are some relevant overlaps. For more detailed analysis of how some of the Niger Delta confraternities and cult groups intersect with the emergence of Ateke Tom, please see for example: Hazen and Horner 2007, Wellington 2007 and Joab-Peterside 2007. It is worth noting here also that law and order in pre-colonial times "were maintained through social and religious sanctions. Secret societies or cults also played roles in keeping peace in the ... various [Niger Delta] communities" (Sorgwe 1999: 221).

community leaders in Okrika, instead of retaining the services of the vigilantes, delegated the task of defending their territory to youths from all the War Canoe Houses in Okrika.⁸⁵ Herein lies the problem - instead of retaining a unified group who represented the interest of the community, the council leaders made an error in undermining the role of the vigilante group that had earlier purged the community of offenders. It was not clear why this particular decision was taken, nonetheless – this decision marks a significant point in the internal conflicts that ensued.

It was indicated by another interviewee⁸⁶ that the decision by the local chiefs to use the boys from the War Canoe Houses, the boys also known as Bush Boys, were widely accepted by the people of Okrika. The Bush Boy's contribution to fend off advances from the neighbouring Eleme community was viewed as a huge sacrifice to protect the local community. This sacrifice was very much appreciated by the people of Okrika to the extent that local women took turns to cook and provide support and sustenance so that their boys, the Bush Boys, would continue to protect them from external onslaughts from Eleme.⁸⁷ The decision to use the Bush Boys therefore appears to be vindicated by popular community support (Hazen and Horner 2007: 109-110). Despite the popular support for the Bush Boys in the community, there was another dimension that informs of the internal divisions within Okrika. These divisions are important and probably explain why there are now two different security camps in Okrika – but importantly these divisions were subverted so that a united Okrika might defeat Eleme during the

⁸⁵ War Canoe Houses, according to Ogan (2008: 45, 247), denote the bravery and courage of the Okrika people – rooted in past (pre-colonial) conflicts and inter-tribal wars over economic and territorial ambitions. War Canoe Houses became an established part of the political constituency wherein groups of War Canoe Houses make up a ward or quarter (*Biri*) in Okrika (ibid). Eicher (1995: 143-150) offers an insight into how the institution came about. According to her, the new structures emerged after restructuring of internal social order which saw the establishment and enforcement of “a male hierarchy of rigidly structured political ranks [wherein] ... traditional family structure was turned into semi autonomous trading and defensive corporation called War Canoe House” (ibid. 142).

⁸⁶ Interview with Paul on 20/11/14.

⁸⁷ Interview with Ben on 5/10/2014.

period's communal clashes. However, it is important to note at this point that despite the fragile peace in Okrika during this period, there was palpable tension in the community between the Bush Boys and Ateke's vigilante group.⁸⁸

The internal peace in Okrika was maintained despite the decision to contract security provisions to the Bush Boys⁸⁹ instead of to Ateke and his group. This might have partly been because this period coincided with the time Shell Nigeria PLC outsourced security contracts to Ateke Tom and the vigilante boys he managed. Shell PLC⁹⁰ had issues with vandalism and oil theft at its Alakri Oil fields between Okrika and the coast of Bayelsa. My interview respondent⁹¹ stated that the deal offered to Ateke's vigilante group was very lucrative. The realisation of the large remuneration received by Ateke and his group from Shell, my respondent claimed, was the catalyst in the eventual dispute between Bush Boys and Ateke and his group. He suggested that the Bush Boys felt that the payments that Ateke was receiving from shell was far higher than any compensation they had received for protecting Okrika. This led the Bush Boys to forcibly remove Ateke and his group from Okrika. In his sworn statement to the Rivers State Truth And Reconciliation Commission in 2008, Asari Dokubo, the former leader of the Ijaw Youth Congress, (IYC), later the head of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) supported the claim that "Ateke was chased by the Bush Boys out of Okrika"(Dokubo 2014b). He claimed that Ateke had been exiled to Port Harcourt where he sought refuge. This statement was supported by Hazen and Horner (2007) who explained that upon returning from conflicts with Eleme, the Bush Boys focused on internal affairs in Okrika.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The decision to replace the vigilantes with the Bush Boys appears to have been a strategic move by some chiefs in Okrika to consolidate their position in the community.

⁹⁰ The role of multinational oil corporations like Shell Plc has been well documented elsewhere (see Frynas 2001 and Okorie 2005 for example). The reference to Shell PLC here is for context only and not an assessment of their role in the region's conflicts.

⁹¹ Interview with Ben on 5/10/2014.

According to the them, after returning "... from initial prosecution of the Eleme conflict, the [Bush Boys] accused those members who had been charged with maintaining security and order on the Okrika home front of numerous crimes against the community. Among those accused was Ateke Tom, the leader of the Iclander cult group. This confrontation drove Tom to seek exile in Port Harcourt in late 2000" (ibid. 109-110).

Ateke, whilst plotting his return to Okrika, solicited the support of Dr Abiye Sekibo an Okrika native, who was then the Secretary to State Government of Rivers State under Governor Peter Odili and later the Federal Minister of Transport of Nigeria under President Olusegun Obasanjo. According to Dokubo, Dr Sekibo refused to arm Ateke and his vigilante group, refusing to be part of the conflicts between Ateke and the Bush Boys (Dokubo-Asari 2014b). My interviewee⁹² informed me that this was not the case. He claimed that Dr Sekibo had armed Ateke because Dr Sekibo was a key player in one of the two conflicting factions that had emerged in Okrika. The response from the interviewee feeds back into the loop of the political thug discourse. The narratives suggesting that many of the militants in the Niger Delta were formerly paid thugs for political aspirants.⁹³ However, in Okrika, this narrative, though pertinent, was only part of a more complex set of contestations in the community. Dr Sekibo had actually been involved in the Okrika disputes on two fronts. Firstly as a stalwart of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), he had interest in ensuring that PDP won the Local Government Council elections in Okrika. Secondly as a member of the Koniju family in Okrika he was an interested party in the contestation over ascension to the vacant

⁹² ibid.

⁹³ See Watts 2004, Omeje 2004 and Asuni (2009) for example.

throne vacated by the late king of Okrika, Sir S.P. U Ogan.⁹⁴ The throne for the Amanyanabo of Okrika (King of Okrika) had been left vacant since Sir S.P. U Ogan passed away on 27th of October 1997. This was a source of fervent disputes as was recorded by Ogan (2008) who noted that:

Following the funeral of King S.P.U. Ogan Ado VIII, internal cleavages became highly charged. Among members of Ado Royal Family for example, there was a lingering controversy over succession to the throne. This was also the major cause of litigation over the site for the new palace. While majority of members of the Royal Family favoured Ibulubo House to produce the next king, a powerful minority, with connections in government and politics supported Abam. (Ogan 2008: 221)

As Ogan reports, the vacant seat had become highly charged between the rival groups who wanted to succeed the late King. A factor that may have fortified the dispute in the community was that the warring families fell neatly into opposing political parties.⁹⁵ This was because there were prominent sons on both side of the aisle who had sought to leverage tensions over the seat for their personal political gains. This mattered in Okrika because between 1997 and 2001, at the time of the struggle to determine the rightful heir to the empty throne, Okrika Local Government Council was being led by a chairman who was a member of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP)⁹⁶ whilst Rivers State and the federal government were led by PDP personnel. As a result, the conflict within Okrika became a little complex taking on multiple identities.

⁹⁴ "A new king can only be crown[ed] at the death of the incumbent and it is not every prince of the Royal family that is entitled to aspire to the stool, rather princes from the house whose turn it is to produce the king out of the six houses that constitute the [royal] family are eligible to contest for the stool." (Joab-Peterside 2007: 8).

⁹⁵ Indeed, the split in Okrika social and political history has a long lineage. Awoala (1998), Alagoa (2005), Ogan (2008) and Joab-Peterside (2007) provide comprehensive documentation of the foundational crises that led to the ultimate tension highlighted in this section.

⁹⁶ All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) won the 1999 general elections in Okrika speaking local government areas thereby affirming Chief Rufus Ada George's (former governor of Rivers State) control of the area. Ibid: 16.

The significance of politics in all this was how it permitted the conflicts in the community to continue till it became more weaponised, as political patrons from both sides were able to provide large sums of money to arm the combatants. Their armament allowed the rivalry between Bush Boys and Ateke to become deadlier and to continue for a while longer. At this stage, the Bush Boys and Ateke were but little pawns in a complex power tussle. My interviewee's view that Dr Sekibo armed Ateke has much relevance here, especially since it is widely documented that Chief Rufus Ada George, the former governor of Rivers State, was sponsoring the Bush Boys (CEHRD 2007: 1-2). It seems plausible that Dr Sekibo was sponsoring Ateke and his boys because there were indications of a rivalry between Dr Sekibo and Chief Ada George. Chief Ada George was the leader of ANPP in Okrika and belonged to Tuboniju,⁹⁷ a member of the Ado Royal House.⁹⁸ The "Tuboniju through the Ado Royal family is vested with responsibility of selecting and installing an Amayanabo. This implies that the process of selecting and installing a new king is limited to the Tubonijus." (Joab-Peterside 2007: 8). On the 10th of April 2001, a few days after the funeral of the late King Ogan, Chief Ada George and other Tuboniju leaders and kingmakers installed Charles Adokiye Dagogo Ibulubo as the new king of Okrika. According to Ogan (2008: 222), the installation was performed "in accordance with Okrika custom and tradition but contrary to official directives and

⁹⁷ The warring families had split into two camps, the Koniju (fisherman) and Tuboniju (traders) (Alagoa 2005: 145). Another interviewee told me that historically, the Konijus produced kings, but that there was a period when the Okrika land had problems, which required sacrifices to be made to resolve the troubles. The deity of the land was reported to have asked for the virgin daughter of Ado, from the Tuboniju clan, to be sacrificed to help alleviate the troubles the land faced. Ado requested from the priest that in return for his virgin daughter, there ought to be an exchange which would help to immortalise his name because this was his only child and he was no longer married, and were he to give his up daughter, there would be no way for him to carry on his legacy through lineage, so he requested the king's stool. Till, date, the name remains as a title for kingship. As part of the exchange, his family earned the right to produce kings – so the Tuboniju became the second family to have succession rights to the throne – the Ado royal house. See Alagoa (2005: 146-147). For more in depth analyses of the conflicts between the Tuboniju and Koniju – see also: Awoala (1998), Ogan (2008) and Joab-Peterside (2007).

⁹⁸ Dr. Abam was also a political grandee. He was a former member of the fiscal and mobilization commission in Abuja (Joab-Peterside 2007: 8).

understanding reached with government”.⁹⁹ He adds that in “line with the provisions of the law on the recognition of chiefs, Okrika Local Government Council, under Hon. Godwin Tamuno, an ANPP candidate (who won the position of Chairman in an earlier election) officially wrote to the government of Rivers state to recognize Charles Dagoho Ibulubo as Amanyabo”(ibid.: 222).

The attempt to install the new king without government approval, even though the new king was said to have received popular local support, looked like a way to fortify the interests of Chief Ada George. The installation would certainly have shifted the balance of power in Okrika to the ANPP and Bush Boys backed Tubonijus. This of course was unacceptable to the other prominent sons from Okrika, Dr Sekibo and Chief (Dr.) Alfred Semenitari Abam. Chief Abam and Dr Sekibo, who both belonged to the opposing Koniju camp, were said to have capitalised on the uncertainty surrounding Ibulubo’s status as king. Since the state government was not forthcoming with ratifying the King’s status, Ibulubo’s position as king remained open to challenge. Knowing of Ateke’s desire to return to Okrika and his dislike of the Bush Boys who had pushed him out of his home, Dr Sekibo and Chief Abam were said to have agreed to arm Ateke’s vigilante group so that Ateke could chase away the Bush Boys who at the time provided backing for Ibulubo and ANPP members in Okrika. Once the Bush Boys were out of the picture, the Konijus would be able to install Chief Abam as the new king.

Now equipped with superior ammunition, my interview respondent claimed that Ateke Tom and his vigilantes appeared to deliberately select to come back into Okrika town on the day Chief Abam’s family had organised a family funeral for a relative. After the funeral, there were reports of gunfire from all around Okrika. This forced the Bush Boys

⁹⁹ Though unclear how, Ogan claims that the installation of the new Amanyababo breached government accord with the Burial Steering Committee and Okrika Chiefs (2008:222).

out of Okrika, at which point it was possible to install Chief Abam as the Amanyabo of Okrika. To reflect, up until this stage, the conflict within Okrika had come from three defining angles: the kingship angle, the political angle and the angle of vigilantes versus Bush Boys. The complex interwovenness of various interests from all three angles created the perfect cocktail for unrests in Okrika. It would seem however, from a *longue duree* examination of events, that Ateke Tom was a major beneficiary from the community conflicts. Ateke's involvement in all three angles allows him to perfectly encapsulate the complexity of the unrest in the region.

Whilst acting as proxy for the other interested parties such as Dr Sekibo and Chief Abam, it would appear that Ateke was actually pursuing his own personal agenda. Though this perhaps was not immediately clear when his sponsors provided him with weapons to fight for their causes – what he later embarked on would suggest that there might have been some shrewd calculations undergirding his earlier desire to join forces with his political and economically powerful patrons. Owning an insurmountable arsenal of weapons later defined his next moves. As another of my other interview respondents¹⁰⁰ shared with me, it is common in Nigeria for politicians to fund the armament of youth groups to help the politicians to achieve their goals of being elected. After arming the youths, the youths become difficult to control as they become powerful enough to go into bunkering and other illicit businesses. She quoted a line attributable to a politician who was reported as saying “I gave [a youth] a gun to protect me not to use it and rob”.¹⁰¹ This was after a youth had been arrested for robbing with the gun provided to him by his political patron. The events that later took place after the installation of the new Amanyabo in Okrika may put Ateke in the same category as

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Egundu on 03/10/2014.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

the youth caught stealing with a politician's gun. However, contrary to the common suggestions that Niger Delta politicians disowned their paid thugs after they had won elections, it could be argued that Ateke cut ties with these politicians as it served his long term interests to do so. His decision to go into bunkering though appear to be criminality for personal enrichment as is often reported, but it is plausible that his objective was to seek independence from his patrons who had direct links to the state he later fought against.

Ateke and his vigilante group 'ruled' Okrika for a long time according to Ogan, but they expanded their franchise beyond Okrika and went into bunkering as a way of securing unfettered income from oil. What bunkering offered was a lot of independence and significant sums of money to acquire more weapons. Given the various accounts confirming that Ateke's vigilante group had pushed out the Bush Boys from Okrika, it becomes clear that making money to buy more weapons could only be an indication of the quest for independence from his financial patrons. However, the undertone from the decision to stockpile weapons is of an expansionist agenda that would take his battles from within Okrika to other parts of the state and possibly to other parts of the region. Indeed, the irony was that Ateke was fighting against the lapses in government security provision, lapses that incidentally provided him with the opportunity to emerge as an employed vigilante. The state had inadvertently allowed his emergence. Ateke had been seeking to redress what he considered to be the imbalance in the way the state had ignored its duty as security provider for the people of the Niger Delta. By embracing the resource control narrative, which was starting to gain traction since the Kaiama

Declaration¹⁰² in 1998, he was able to make claims and arguments about how the people in his community and in the Niger Delta more broadly had been ignored despite the region's contribution to the country's economy.

Whilst examining Ateke's rise is significant for understanding the complex mixture of events that allowed conflicts to fester in the Niger Delta region, this has to be understood in the context of how multiple opportunities allowed these activities to emerge and continue. As is documented, Ateke rose from nowhere as a provider of security – i.e. he was initially employed as vigilante leader to provide security services. The questions therefore have to be, why were services such as security provision being outsourced to vigilantes? What happened to state security provisions? Answers to these questions cannot be removed or ignored when we try to document the causes of conflict in the region. Prior to the recruitment of Ateke Tom as the leader of the vigilante group in Okrika, there had been a rise of vigilantism in Nigeria as a way to curb the increasing crime rate and communal clashes (Gore and Pratten 2003; Smith 2004). Whereas ordinarily, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) would be tasked with managing the rise in crime rate, they were reported to have lacked the necessary capacity and training to ensure that there was a reversal in this trend of increasing criminal activities.¹⁰³

Whilst not a rebuke of the NPF, even though their reported inefficiency and adverse culture could be blamed for societal distrust of their weakened institution, their failings are symptomatic of a broader challenge to the overall governance structure in Nigeria.

¹⁰² The Kaiama Declaration was made by the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) after a meeting in Kaiama in December 1998, where amongst other requests, the group asked for 'Self Government and resource control for the Ijaw people' (IYC 1998).

¹⁰³ According to an Amnesty International report, three years after the switch from military to civilian rule, conditions for policing in Nigeria became quite challenging. This was punctuated by increasing numbers fatal fights with heavily armed gangs who were reported to have killed quite a significant number of police officers. This was attributed, in part, to the tougher working conditions marked by corruption and misconduct within its ranks. (Amnesty 2002) – see also, Ikuteyijo (2008), Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) and Okeke (2013).

Indeed the absence of an effective security¹⁰⁴ force is an indictment of the lapse in state provision to the people of Nigeria. This created a much broader issue of societal distrust of state as a reliable service provider. These sentiments allowed Ateke Tom to leverage the broad societal disillusionment in the Delta to mobilise his supporters. Instead of viewing him and his associates as mere criminals, even though many accounts point to his criminal inclinations, it is prudent to consider him as a maestro of mobilising people, especially youth along the lines of common discontent to express angst against the state. These calculations after his split from his patron should inform us of the events that follow.

The Fluid Dynamics of Militancy: Continually changing factors in the Niger Delta Struggle

The chapter thus far has been attempting to plot the journey of Ateke Tom from an outsider to becoming a key Niger Delta Militant leader. By looking at the Niger Delta through this prism, the chapter has been able to record the evolution of conflicts and the complex mixture of catalysts that have led Ateke's informal vigilante group to grow from its seemingly 'innocent' beginnings to becoming an organisation mired in the disputes of individuals with private interests. This allowed members of the group to go from depending on political and traditional patrons to becoming an independent well-structured group with developed ideological underpinnings. In this section, I will continue to look into how the group rebranded itself from mere vigilantes and sometimes 'political thug' to becoming fully-fledged 'freedom fighters'. This was achievable because the group decided to adopt the narrative of hope and retribution. Adopting such rhetoric allowed it to gain traction and some support within the Niger

¹⁰⁴ It is important to note that the weakened police institution permitted the rise of vigilantism and the rise of Ateke Tom and other militia groups. However, discontent with the state is not only attached to poor security provision, indeed people were also frustrated with poor infrastructure, inefficient education and healthcare systems, for example.

Delta – but importantly, aggression directed at the state were directed at strategic choke points that forced the state to take notice of the group's demands. Here I look at the rise of NDV.

It is difficult to identify the exact point when the vigilantes went from being just vigilantes and sometimes-hired thugs to becoming NDV. What is clear however is that upon taking the decision to go into oil bunkering so that he and his group would be able to afford ammunition, Ateke and his vigilante group had taken the decision to battle the state all in the name of 'self-determination' and 'resource control'. Whereas he had previously fought for the cause and interests of others, this was an opportunity for him and his group to fight for a cause representative of the concerns of the Niger Delta people.¹⁰⁵ It therefore made sense to include the 'Niger Delta' in their moniker to mark a shift from mere Okrika vigilantes to a vigilante force advocating for the cause of the whole of the Niger Delta. However, Ateke's decision to extend beyond Okrika contributed to the dispute between him and another militant leader from Rivers State. Once allies, Ateke and Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, were now at loggerheads. The reasons for their dispute are documented elsewhere,¹⁰⁶ but according to Dokubo-Asari; one of the main reasons for their clashes was hinged on access to the largess of political patronage. Ateke, in what Dokubo-Asari believed to be under government stewardship, had made incursions into other communities outside Okrika including Dokubo-Asari's own in Buguma, River State. One of the reasons apparently was to displace Dokubo-Asari, who himself was an outspoken critic of both federal and state government (Dokubo 2014a).

¹⁰⁵ At this point, they had selected to shift from being passive actors in other people's conflicts to becoming active decision makers. This enabled them to frame the terms on which they engaged in conflicts.

¹⁰⁶ See for example, Ofiebor (2004), Joab-Peterside (2007), and Iwilade (2017).

Dokubo-Asari's belief was that, despite the earlier suggestions of Ateke's independence from his patrons after the 2003 elections and chieftaincy saga in Okrika, Ateke was actually to some extent still functioning as a state agent representing the interests of the state governor and president, both with whom Dokubo-Asari had problems (*ibid.*). While Dokubo-Asari's view is credible, my interview respondent claimed that Ateke's incursion to other parts of Rivers State was actually in pursuant of the Bush Boys who had fled to these other communities to seek refuge. At this point it does seem, as before, that the notion of singular drivers of conflicts – at least where Ateke and his vigilante boys are concerned, is inapplicable. Here once again, there are complex mixes of interests driving conflicts for this particular group. When we try to analyse the suggested continued interactions with state patrons,¹⁰⁷ it informs us of the continuous fluidity in the drivers of conflicts, interests of individuals, and the incentives of continuing to partake in these conflicts. What is clear however is that there are continuous shifts in the factors underlying conflicts in the Niger Delta marked by changing alliances and interests – and of a culture of 'perpetual warfare'.

Behind these clusters of interests and drivers of conflicts, there appeared to be an underlying theme that is repetitive in Ateke's associations. Whether inside or outside the inner circle of state's decision makers, by militarising he occupied a prominent position that allowed him access to key decision makers. As was the case in Okrika during the chieftaincy dispute, he had access to the most prominent and influential political and traditional individuals in his community by aligning his interests with theirs. In the same way he, according to Dokubo-Asari, aligned his interests with the state Governor Dr Peter Odili and the President of Nigeria, President Olusegun

¹⁰⁷ Despite the claims of independence from these patrons after the 2003 elections, there existed a level of continuity that allowed the relationship to be continued insofar as the arrangement is mutually beneficial for all involved.

Obasanjo. This affirms Ateke's shrewdness in his calculations to secure access to key decision makers. Behind the more menacing approach to addressing disputes in the communities where Ateke and his boys engaged in conflicts, there were some subtle yet important calculations at play. It is important to consider that when Ateke and his boys were working with their political patrons, this gave them access to advocate for their personal interests and the interests of their communities. When these interests were not served, the militants deserted their patrons and returned to working with their patrons only when their demands were met. By constantly defining the terms of their relationships with their patrons, they retained a level of autonomy that kept them relevant to key decision makers.

For example, when the situation between Ateke and Dokubo-Asari became too difficult to control even by Ateke's supposed patron, Governor Odili was forced to arrange a reconciliation meeting between Ateke and Dokubo-Asari after publically criticising them both when he decried that "enough [was] enough. How can rascality and gangsterism become the way of life?" (Ofiebor 2004). Governor Odili's administration made efforts to bring both parties to the table for a truce, perhaps innocently for the general peace of Rivers State. But given that the calls for the said truce went all the way to the top in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), it is possible that the new approach to use the proverbial 'carrot' instead of the 'stick' was intended to assuage the militant leaders rather than to provoke them. The idea of appeasement as a tool for realignment of interests is buttressed when in October 2004, Ateke and Dokubo-Asari were both invited to the presidential villa in Abuja by President Obasanjo and Governor Odili encouraging them both to cease the fighting. In President Obasanjo's own words in 2006, two years after the meeting, he said "I brought Ateke and Dokubo (leaders of the

NDV) here. There is no leader who has done that, and the Chief of Staff said why am I bringing young murderers. I said that I want to hear what they will talk, what is their problem so that we can find a solution” (Agande 2006). Having a head of state willing to listen to what they had to say falls within the wish list of these individuals. It was essentially unbridled access to the highest decision maker in the country. Gaining this sort of access could only have been possible because of the strategic position occupied by the militant heads.

The decision to grant Ateke and Dokubo-Asari access disguised as peace talks appear to be grounded in the realisation that these individual posed significant threat to the country. Ateke, and Dokubo-Asari, whilst navigating their way through the difficult political and socio-cultural terrain of the Niger Delta, had amassed such support that a unified attack targeted at the state stood to paralyse the country’s economy.¹⁰⁸ Both of these individuals had tapped into “popular discontent with the government's failure to provide basic services and relieve poverty despite the region's huge oil wealth” (Ashby 2004). Despite Ateke and Dokubo-Asari’s personal rivalry, it was only a matter of time for them to realise that they had in fact been fighting the same battle. Even though they were temporarily fighting against each other between 2003 and 2004, it was likely that Ateke and Dokubo-Asari would reunite and join forces to fight for the Niger Delta cause as they did eventually. After all, through a pan-Ijaw association, they had large local support from the Ijaw youths.¹⁰⁹ The appeal of Ateke and Dokubo-Asari to their boys

¹⁰⁸ Nigeria’s economy is heavily dependent on natural resources – according to Joab-Peterside (2007:3) “...petroleum derived from the Niger Delta accounts for about 50 percent of Nigeria’s GDP, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and 80 percent of all budgetary revenues that amounts to almost \$20 billion annually or about \$54 million daily”. This is significant revenue stream for the federation’s account; a sustained attack on the oil industry would have destabilized the country’s economy.

¹⁰⁹ Both Ateke and Dokubo Asari were members of the Ijaw Youth Council, a pan-Ijaw youth civil rights organization. In fact, Dokubo-Asari led the group between 2001 and 2004 when he left to form the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF).

was their generosity. A local musician,¹¹⁰ with whom I spoke, said that youths decided that “since they had someone like Ateke Tom, who didn’t only use them for fights, but also gave them bread and butter for breakfast”, they were inclined to fight with him. Their ability to mobilise youth who could disrupt the lucrative oil industry would have been alarming for any government – and indeed, this later caused significant problems for the state and federal government¹¹¹ (Watts 2007: 639).

For the boys who joined, the incentives to join militant groups by far outweighed the reality¹¹² of not joining. By default, by canvassing for the services and support of unemployed youths, Ateke had essentially inserted himself in a position the state should have occupied¹¹³ – the position of protector, employer and service provider. Instead of depending on government provisions, youth became dependent on Ateke – in return he had a responsibility for protecting them. According to the musician, once the youths were initiated, Ateke protected them as they expected him to. The musician informed me that in many cases where some of his followers were arrested, Ateke bailed them out and put them through an “orientation of the struggle”. This was only possible because of the void left behind by the absence of government in the lives of many of the people who lived in the Niger Delta at the time. This was noted by the prominent late Niger Delta activist, Oronto Douglas who expressed that “[the] rise of Asari [and Ateke Tom in the Niger Delta] is a clear manifestation of the government’s refusal to adopt a dialogue of reason and respond to the needs of the local people” (Ashby 2004). By 2003-2004, President Obasanjo and Governor Odili realised that they could not continue to

¹¹⁰ Interview with Mr Sensational on 16/10/14.

¹¹¹ According to Watts (2007) between 1999 and 2004, the Nigerian government lost in excess of \$6.8 billion as a result of attacks on oil installations and infrastructure in the Niger Delta.

¹¹² Many of the young men who joined the militant groups claimed that they were unemployed and struggled to find a reliable source for sustenance. Membership of these groups gave them security and guaranteed that they would have their basic needs met – this will be explored in more detail below.

¹¹³ Many of the interviewees, especially the youths, expected the state to provide for their basic needs – in lieu of that, they saw Ateke as an important patron.

ignore the Niger Delta people due to the significant threats of rising militants. These groups were starting to develop an anti-state rhetoric that meant that the state had to take action.

Viewed through these lenses, the meeting at the presidential villa organised by President Obasanjo for a truce between Ateke and Dokubo-Asari may well have been a strategic response to the developing crises in the region. This seems quite clear because as well as requesting a cessation of hostilities, the President set up an amnesty committee headed by the Chief of Staff to the President, Major-General Abdullahi Muhamed, to facilitate a disarmament programme (CEHRD 2005). In conjunction with this amnesty, Governor Odili also set up and headed a Rivers State disarmament sub-committee, tasked with working alongside the president's Chief of Staff to complete the disarmament of the militants (ibid.). More telling is a fact that is hardly referenced. Prior to the October 2004 meeting in Abuja, Governor Odili had initiated the *Arms-For-Cash Programme*,¹¹⁴ a failed Rivers State led attempt at disarmament. The failure of this programme offers an insight into the difficulty of negotiating with these militant leaders. As is often the case, their grievances were misunderstood once again. Instead of trying to identify the underlying issues driving the conflicts, the governor proceeded to offer cash to the militant leaders in his attempt to secure a peace settlement.

The lessons from the failure of the Governor's Arms-For-Cash Programme did not deter a repeat of similar errors when the 2004 Presidential Amnesty was implemented. Indeed, Ateke and Dokubo-Asari, again ahead of the intellectual curve, submitted to government's requests to disarm, but once again, it appeared to be on their terms. For

¹¹⁴ According to the CEHRD report, during the *Arms-For-Cash programme* "rewards were given to cult or militia groups who voluntarily returned their guns to the state. They were also granted general amnesty despite the mayhem they unleashed on the state." (CEHRD 2005).

example, during the *Arms-for-Cash Programme*, Ateke reportedly only turned in a small fraction of his arms (Connor and Swartz 2009). Whilst the presidential amnesty was viewed to have made some progress relative to the *Arms-for-Cash programme* by bringing relative peace in the state, the new era of peace was short-lived lasting no longer than one month. According to a Center for Environment, Human Rights, and Development (CEHRD) report, “a full-blown violence later swept through the entire [Rivers] state, even in the schools, local communities, streets and neighbourhoods, throwing the state once again into a state of palpable fear and insecurity” (CEHRD 2005: 5).¹¹⁵ This highlighted the weakness of the 2004 amnesty programme. Rather than being sustainable solutions, the *Arms-For-Cash* program and the 2004 amnesty became moneymaking opportunities for the militant leaders. As well as receiving funds legally, the programs also affirmed their statuses as ‘untouchables’. Government’s desire to pander to their needs, rather than impose reprimand, further granted the militant leaders a level of impunity (ibid. 5). Such elevated statuses stood to serve them well within and outside of their communities.

Even if this elevation was not deliberate, what it did was to heighten the status of militant leaders to a level often preserved for renowned individuals in Nigeria. As Apampa (2005: 239) put it, “[in] Nigeria, political power is synonymous with great wealth and great wealth is synonymous to political power”. Therefore, the decision to offer these militant leaders an amnesty and billions of naira was essentially an unintended procession to equate them to powerful politicians. After all, if as Apampa (2005) argues, wealth equates to power, Ateke’s power could therefore not be disputed. He had made incredibly large sums of money from bunkering, from local godfathers and

¹¹⁵ CEHRD (2005: 8-14).

now from *Arms-For-Cash*. This was essentially an affirmation of his level of influence. From his humble beginnings as a vigilante where he was asked to drive away invading criminals from Okrika; he had definitely come a long way.¹¹⁶ What he did next perhaps presented the biggest challenge he faced in his half a decade of emergence. After the collapse of the *Arms-For-Cash* programme and the refusal to embrace President Obasanjo's call for a ceasefire, Ateke and his boys were now at loggerheads with the federal government. By refusing to take orders of ceasefire from above, he had essentially declared himself as *persona non grata* to both the state and federal government.

This declaration forced his retreat to the creeks where he was able to mobilise his army of disaffected youths to embrace the narratives that governed the Niger Delta militancy struggle. This is often where the challenges of understanding the causes of militancy become more pronounced. Ateke as the leader of the group, with access to political leaders, had a clearly defined ideology built from his experience with engaging with the state, however the same could not be said for his followers. He and his lieutenants were therefore tasked with the reorientation of youth. I was informed that the task of reorientation was such a difficult one for Ateke and his lieutenants because many of the youth who were integrated into NDV had been involved in criminal activities prior to joining the group. This made it more challenging for the new recruits to make the transition from criminality to the 'just cause' of fighting for the rights of the Niger Delta people. As a result, this created a two-tier system where the leaders of these groups had a clear agenda attached to clearly articulated grievances, whilst many of their followers could not be trusted as being fully attuned to the causes to which they had submitted

¹¹⁶ As recorded above, as part of his journey to prominence, he drove away a rival gang from his community and helped to install a chief in Okrika, then was able to take on much larger rivals in Dokubo-Asari.

themselves. Whilst these youths were loyal to Ateke, they also had their own individual agendas that led them to criminality. And despite Ateke's effort to reorient them, after bailing them from jail for example, it is clear that some of these youths are unable to articulate their grievances in the same refined way the militant leaders do.¹¹⁷ In fact, it would appear that the narratives are constructed by the commanders and passed down to the foot soldiers.

Nevertheless, the criminal disposition of the foot soldiers does not void their claim of state neglect and exploitation. Indeed it reaffirms the view that lack of opportunities for the 'Niger Delta's forgotten youths' had forced them to engage in criminal activities. The act of joining the militancy struggle could in of itself be considered a narrative of grievance. Therefore the shift from mindless criminality to a consolidated effort to attack the state through a formalised network has to be seen as Ateke's way of taking control and managing the interactions between disaffected youth and society. This also explains why a rhetoric built around disaffection and marginalisation was used to represent the overarching agenda of the militancy struggle. Despite this, it is clear that rhetoric fed down a chain of command does not always completely take hold in the same ways with all the fighters because of their varying underlying interests. This has made it quite challenging to therefore tag all participants in the militant struggles as a group united along the same overarching sets of objectives.¹¹⁸ Because it is conceivable that some elements in the group were only in the struggle for sheer expedience, for

¹¹⁷ This view was gathered from formal and informal conversations during fieldwork confirmed during interviews with Mr Sensational on 16/10/14. Furthermore, an analysis of Andrew Berend's documentary, *Delta Boys* also supports this conclusion.

¹¹⁸ In the *Delta Boys*, a documentary video captured by Andrew Berend, showing the lives of militants under the leadership of Ateke Tom, there were various scenes where militants were being disciplined in their camps for various offences deemed to go against the code of the struggle. It was an unscripted evidence of the seriousness and the internal policing structures to ensure that members of the group adhered to the principles behind the struggle.

example, some saw it as a means to gain easy money.¹¹⁹ Notwithstanding they embraced their roles in NDV and represented the group in combat against the state. This dualism of engaging in criminal activities and participating in the struggle contributed to delegitimising the militancy struggle. To observers, because of the criminal activities, the militancy struggle was viewed as a smokescreen for criminality (Watts 2007).

In a seminal documentary that followed Ateke and his boys during their time in the creeks, it was evident that there was a two-tier structure in the militants' camp. In interviews with Ateke, he clearly articulated the ideologies behind the militancy movement and some of the reasons that drove him to the creeks. The same cannot be said for the lower ranked militants. Rather than fully imbibing the grand narrative of militancy, some of the boys in the documentary seem more committed to Ateke himself than to the struggle of 'liberating' the Niger Delta. For example, Chima, one of the boys in Ateke's camp gave an honest opinion. Instead of making a grand ideological claim for why he was engaged in the region's conflicts, Chima simply stated that as a militant "you eat 24 hours a day. You eat in the morning, you eat in the afternoon, you eat in the evening. There is drinks for you, there are cigarettes for you to smoke, so it's a better livelihood".¹²⁰ The benefit of being a militant, to Chima, was that he had access to daily sustenance. But just as important, he also felt protected being part of the group. To Chima, Ateke was "the man that takes care of the Niger Delta".¹²¹ In the documentary, this idea of Ateke being a liberator and the protector of the people's interest was

¹¹⁹ Interview with Joel Gombo, an ex-militant and ex-military personnel who took part in a US sponsored anti-violence documentary leading up to the 2015 elections. Interview on 29/09/2014.

¹²⁰ Captured in the Andrew Berend's documentary Delta Boys (Delta Boys 2012 22:00mins).

¹²¹ Ibid: 17:20 mins.

perpetuated throughout. Ateke himself claimed that he was not “stingy” and that he took care of so many people.

In an attempt to reject government statements that he was a criminal, Ateke declared “I send people to school. Anybody that brings matters, I solve the matter for them. That’s why they call me ‘Godfather’, because I save people. I can’t be a criminal, it’s a lie”.¹²² Whilst seemingly challenging the allegation of criminality, he was actually highlighting the state’s failure to provide simple services such as free access to education and social security for people like Chima. By doing this, he was drawing attention to the philanthropic objectives underlying his fight against the state. Ateke did not only feel responsible for the boys who were part of the ‘struggle’ but for the whole of the Niger Delta. According to him, the fight against the state was not a political issue; it was a fight to get development for the Niger Delta, a fight for resource control, a fight for good roads and schools just like in Abuja. “Everybody knows that the money they are using to develop Abuja and Lagos are Niger Delta people’s money. Everybody knows that. So we want them to use our money to develop our Niger Delta, if they refuse to do that ... I have already said it [we will continue to fight]”.¹²³ Whilst his foot soldiers might be unable to articulate these set of demands, Ateke’s view was that he spoke on their behalf and on behalf of the Niger Delta people. Such demands and ultimatums were very common at the height of the region’s militant insurgencies. Indeed, various groups including Dokubo-Asari’s Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement of the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and other militant factions in the region embraced this tactic of listing their demands and offering ultimatums.

¹²² Ibid: 26:40mins..

¹²³ Ibid. 13:35mins.

To arrest the criminal activities that sought to undermine the legitimacy of the militancy struggle, there were indications within Ateke's camp of strict internal policing to ensure that members of the group did not veer too far from the objectives of the struggle. For example Ateke and some of his high-ranking lieutenants meted out harsh physical punishment to transgressing youths who they felt delegitimised the objectives of the Niger Delta militancy struggle.¹²⁴ Despite being a firm disciplinarian, Ateke continued to maintain significant following during the struggle. A possible conclusion could be that his followers were local unemployed youth with nothing better to do, but the picture was slightly different. Ateke's followers were not committed to him out of blind ethnic loyalty, according to Chima; many of the fighters were not even from Rivers State. Chima claimed that some of the fighters came from as far as Cross Rivers and other parts of the country.¹²⁵ The question therefore must be, how much of the struggle was really a Niger Delta struggle? After all, other parts of Nigeria had developmental needs. What seems to differentiate the Niger Delta struggle from other parts of the country is that the region has a large natural resource reserve. This has contributed significantly to the militants' quest to secure 'resource control'.

The perception was that with resource control, the region could better manage its developmental aspirations. During my fieldwork in Rivers State, I observed that some of the schools were underequipped; there were a number of unemployed youths around Port Harcourt and neighbouring communities, oil pollution was noticeable in some places, the roads in the region were incredibly hazardous to use. However, I also noticed that many of these same challenges were present in other parts of the country that I had

¹²⁴ Captured in several scenes in the *Delta Boys* documentary.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

visited.¹²⁶ But these parts of Nigeria, till date to my knowledge have not engaged the government in combat in the same way Ateke and other militant leaders in the Delta have. Apart from the geographical and cultural differences that mark these societies apart, natural resources also plays a role in underlining the differences between the Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria. Going by Ateke's own words, the struggle was not a political one, but was a struggle to make the people of Delta region better off. Instead of seeing oil as a source of personal enrichment, Ateke identified oil as the much-needed leverage to gain access to decision makers who he perceived to control the fate of the Niger Delta people. Oil did not just present an opportunity for greed; it also presented access to the highest level of government. The decision then by Ateke to refuse President Obasanjo's earlier call for a ceasefire was deliberate. He realised that he had supporters and an army to challenge the state, but very significantly, he realised that with oil, he had a leverage that would allow him to negotiate for more favourable terms that would exceed the *Arms-For-Cash* ceasefire settlement.

At the height of militancy in the Niger Delta between 2004 and 2009, the battle lines were drawn around oil. Oil installations were attacked, oil workers were kidnapped, oil pipelines were sabotaged, and oil tankers were hijacked. Oil formed the backbone of the militants' strategy to force the president into negotiations. By attacking the oil industry the militants realised that they could force a dialogue on their terms. Indeed this later proved to be the case in 2009. At the peak of the insurgency, oil production in Nigeria fell by a third (Soremekun 2011: 108). As a result of these events, the federal government was losing about 200,000 barrels per day in 2002 (Ikelegbe 2005: 222). Watts (2007: 639) estimated that the government had lost more than \$6.8billion over a

¹²⁶ During fieldwork in Nigeria, though I was primarily based in Port Harcourt in Rivers State, I also visited Ibadan in Oyo State, Lagos State, Osun State and Bayelsa State.

period of 5 years between 1999 and 2004. In the meantime, the militants used the territorial advantage gained during the battles to engage in oil theft and illegal bunkering. Oil was spoils of war, an instrument monetised for the purchase of weapons to be used in combat against government forces. In spite of the numerous calls for resource control, unfettered access to oil through theft and bunkering was not the intended objective. It was a means to an end, yet it is this 'means' rather than the 'end' that has come to define the Niger Delta conflicts. Oil bunkering has to be viewed as a means by which militants are able to earn resources used to purchase weapons. However, instead of being viewed as such, oil bunkering became a tool used to discredit the ideology behind militancy (see for example, Asuni 2009 and Katsouris and Sayne 2013). This tactics of using oil bunkering to fund the conflict against the state led to the eventual decision by the President to grant the militants an amnesty in 2009. Although, as Ikelegbe points out, there "... were grey areas over the comprehensiveness, short and long term goals, specific policy packages, the funding component and exact content of the amnesty programme (2010: 60), the *Arms-For-Cash* and the 2004 presidential amnesty pale into relative insignificance when they are compared to the more comprehensive 2009 Presidential Amnesty granted by President Yar'Adua.

Indeed, the 2009 Presidential Amnesty had a seemingly well-considered DDR programme undergirding it. Despite the shortcomings of the implementation of the programme, the disarmament resulted in more than 26,000 combatants laying down their weapons (Ibaba 2012: 85). This makes the DDR the largest in Nigerian history. The demobilisation and rehabilitation aspect of the programme meant that those who signed up to the amnesty would receive monthly stipends from the government.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ex-militants were reportedly receiving 65,000 naira per month as part of the amnesty agreement. This is more than treble the Nigerian minimum wage of 18,000 naira per month.

However, the most significant part of the programme was the training provided to the ex-militants. Whilst the completion rate of the training has been staggeringly low because of poor planning and implementation (Ikelegbe 2010: 61), some of the intentions behind introducing the amnesty offers the programme some credibility. Indeed, since the introduction of the programme, the level of conflicts in the region has reduced dramatically. However, the relative peace cannot be completely attributed to the disarmament of 26,000 ex-militants – one of the main complaints about the programme is that it is a temporary remedy for a set of complex issues. This might be traced back to lack of comprehensive understanding of what the main concerns are in the Niger Delta. Wilfully, or inadvertently, the most important recipients of the Presidential Amnesty are the ex-militant commanders. As part of the amnesty programme, the militant commanders, including Ateke Tom were received by their communities as heroes and ‘freedom fighters’¹²⁸ and were able to become the managers of the relationship between state and disaffected youth. Ateke now had direct access to key decision makers and was able to discuss and negotiate directly with the state to get the best deal for the people of the Niger Delta and for themselves. This was the case with all the other ex-militant commanders around the region.

¹²⁸ Interview with Mr Sensational on 16/10/14.



Figure 5: A picture taken during fieldwork in Okrika Town in October 2014. It shows an Ateke Tom campaign just before the 2015 gubernatorial elections. The poster lists his credentials as the 'liberator' of the people of Rivers State.

If for example we look at other militant leaders in the region, we will find that the strategies taken by the hierarchies of these groups were similar. During fieldwork, there were rumours about the role of Government Ekpemupolo, aka Tompolo,¹²⁹ in President Goodluck Jonathan's government. He was rumoured to be influential in both Delta State and the federation's politics. And for his role, he was rewarded with lucrative security contracts to keep the peace in the region (Odivwri 2013; Oritse 2012). The decision to offer lucrative deals to ex-militant leaders is often perceived as payoff by the government to maintain the peace in the region. This is accurate both superficially and in more complex ways. Indeed, paying ex-militant directly means that they feel a direct connection to patrons in the heart of government. In turn they will continue to maintain

¹²⁹ Tompolo was one of the main commanders of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, (MEND), one of the most recognized militant groups at the height of militancy in the region.

relative peace in the region and allow safe passage for continued operation of the oil industry in the region. However, what I discovered during fieldwork were the less visible and less spoken about functions played by ex-militant leaders. On several visits to Okrika, where Ateke resides, his role as the pseudo government was immediately clear. Speaking to several National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) on a number of visits to Okrika, I was informed that whenever they had issues or money problems, they would go to Ateke's house for support and he often provided them with assistance¹³⁰. This was visible walking through Okrika. All over the town, there were Ateke Tom posters promoting nonviolence, promoting Ateke sponsored scholarships, Ateke Tom sponsored football competitions and many other posters announcing his presence in the town. Ateke's influence was reiterated by the Divisional Police Officer (DPO),¹³¹ who despite his position as the official security provider in the community, advised us to also seek Ateke's permission before organising a US Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) sponsored nonviolence election rally.

On visitation to his house, though big, it was relatively modest when compared with many other large structures in Rivers State. Ateke, on this Saturday morning had been granting audience to people in his community. He was meeting with different families who needed him to help resolve family issues, meeting with local members of the community who needed him to provide economic aid, the Local Government Council Chairman and many other people waiting for him to attend to their needs. He was indeed playing up to the role of 'High Chief of Okrika' who was responsible for the welfare of his people. Even though Okrika Town is relatively small in comparison to

¹³⁰ Discussions with National Youth Service Corps at Okrika during preparations for a US Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) roadshow to promote non-violent elections in the Niger Delta (19-21/08/2014).

¹³¹ I and a Kelechi, an SDN consultant, met with the DPO to present the plan for the roadshow and request police permission before the rally could go ahead (19/8/2014).

many other large communities in the country, what Ateke had established in his community is a direct connection to federal government through him. The people were able to make their requests, and he would serve them when he was able to, and when he could not, he would return to his patrons in government to request support. In return, he provided peace and stability in his community, other parts of Rivers State and also supported the incumbent political party, PDP. This was a measure of the level of access he gained especially when considering his humble beginnings. It is important however to emphasise the fluidity of his alliance and continued quest to maintain this access. Even though Ateke had supported President Goodluck Jonathan's presidential bid in 2015 and, he himself was mooted as a possible gubernatorial candidate for Rivers State running on the PDP platform, he was very quick to reassure the newly elected APC President Muhammadu Buhari that the new president had his support (Onoyume 2015; Onukwugha 2015). If needed, this is an affirmation of the complex requirements to continually change alliance in order to maintain access to the state in Nigeria.

Alternative Governance Structures: Challenging Marginality by Reconstructing Authority

*Contrary to the widespread belief that African conflicts are little more than complex and highly intractable instances of anarchy and chaos ... [there is] tangible evidence of non-state governance by constituencies attempting to manage the perils of long periods of violent strife and state failure. These examples involve the mostly invisible but practical attempts by populations and individuals – households, entrepreneurs, but also administrators, customary rulers and **militia** members- to cope with the consequences of long-term political crisis. (Raeymaekers et al. 2008: 7, emphasis added)*

Recent analyses of conflicts in Africa have brought to light the episodic governance vacuums that emerge as a result of these skirmishes. Indeed a lot has been written

about “ungovernable spaces” within the African contexts, in some cases there have been direct references to the Niger Delta (Watts 2004a: 53; Vlassenroot and Buscher 2009: 162). What Raeymaekers et al. argue above is that within these so called “ungovernable spaces”, there sometimes exists pragmatic redress that allows non-state actors to provide governance and services to the people in periods of long-term political crises. Reaffirming foregone arguments, I go a step further by arguing that non-state actors create political crises, and with it governance vacuums, in order to establish a more representative, effective, though arguably unaccountable¹³² replacement to state’s monopoly of service provisions and use of violence. With evidence of this, we must thus reconsider how the issue of governance or lack thereof, induce conflicts in and around Africa – and specifically within the Niger Delta. However, before examining the practicalities of alternative governance structures, it is perhaps significant to consider an interesting pattern that pre-exists post-independence Africa. Taking a *longue durée* approach to examining governance in Africa, starting from the 1950s,¹³³ we know from various accounts that there was a crisis of governance on the continent. Soon after independence, it was commonplace for military juntas to overthrow Africa’s newly elected democratic regimes (Cooper 2002: 85, 162-163, 172, 200). For example, since 1960, Nigeria has witnessed eight military coup attempts of which six were successful (McGowan 2003: 367). The military often justified these coup attempts as an effort to “restore competence and regularity” to self-interested, corrupt and incompetent civilian regimes (Cooper 2002: 172). It should therefore be no surprise that coups are embedded in the popular imagination of Nigerians.

¹³² See Briscoe (2008: 3), for example, where he argues that there is a lack of accountability in clandestine state operations. Interestingly however, his account shines some light on how formal state institutions in post 1945 developing world are often caught up in clandestine practices. Such accusations lends itself neatly to the premise extended above, where it is argued that militants or other proprietors of parallel states – forge their roles as a response to state-led marginalisation.

¹³³ Independent African countries secured freedom from colonisers between 1847 and 2011. However, a large percentage gained independence between the 1950s and 1970s.

These events matter. In a functional democratic system, one with a long uninterrupted history, the electorates are typically empowered to vote; a process that in theory would enable disaffected voters to express their views. In practice, in many established democracies, voters are able to replace an ineffective regime through ballot. In countries like Nigeria however, the military has often stepped in as the arbiters of good governance. History obviously holds a different account of military rule. What is significant in the pattern of military government ousting elected officials is the parallels that are now replicated in places like the Niger Delta. It is interesting that although dialogue is often sought as a first attempt to address issues of concern – evidence from conflicts in the region has shown that the failure of successive government administrations to respond to the region's concerns has led militants to emerge as the *de facto* governance arbiters, in a similar mould as the military juntas of yesteryear. Institutional memory of displacing democratically elected governments in Nigeria appears to transcend the military. Indeed, failure of the state¹³⁴ to respond to the issues raised by people in the Niger Delta created a governance deficit, which was capitalised upon by militant groups in the region. Viewed as an opportunity, groups in the Niger Delta found the void in service provision¹³⁵ as a chance to exercise a displacement of ineffective state institutions¹³⁶ from the region. By turning the Niger Delta into an ungovernable space – militants were in essence exercising a non-military coup which

¹³⁴ Whilst state here primarily refers to democratically elected governments, it also represents successive military regimes that have led the country at various junctures since independence.

¹³⁵ As Meagher (2012: 1091) records in her account of the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group that has links to the Niger Delta militancy, the group became service providers in lieu of the state. Meagher also noted that the group focused primarily on providing security and justice without necessarily taking on other forms of governance. Militant groups in the Niger Delta operated in a similar way, however, empowered by resource booty – they were able to extend their service provisions to include economic redistribution to cover costs of sustenance, scholarships and healthcare provisions for members of the groups and members of local Niger Delta communities.

¹³⁶ Unlike an orchestrated military coup, which is usually followed by a wholesale displacement of previous administrations and in many cases dissolution of the state organs (executive, legislative and judiciary), militants in the Niger Delta were only able to displace some of these branches to very limited extents (see Meagher 2012, for example). However, the principle remains the same. In reaction to their marginalization, perceived or real, the various groups in the region sought to eliminate the presence of the state – and to varying degrees they excelled.

saw the replacement of formalised state institutions with ad-hoc and pragmatic non-state actors who pledged to offer their people better representation and services insofar as they had control of the natural resources that was going to offer them wealth (Obi 2009: 120-122). Although such an idea may seem outlandish, the militarised approach adopted by militants in the region is in effect akin to regional displacement of 'ineffective' democratic governance; slightly differing from wholesale military coups which have often been exercised nationwide. Beyond the geographical scale, the ideas underpinning military led coups and militant led coups are pretty identical.

In essence, the avowed motivation for displacing or challenging a democratically elected government in places like the Niger Delta region can be located, even if only tenuously, within an embedded institutional memory of coups d'états. This is to suggest that effects of coups in the Nigerian consciousness is much more prominent than scholars perhaps account for. Without seeking to focus too heavily on the implications of historical military coups, it is significant to document the similarities between past coups and militant actions in the Niger Delta insofar as it points to the potential origins of militant aggression and displacements of state institutions in the region.¹³⁷ More significant, however, is the effort to reimagine how militants operated within the region. Although the sections above inform us of the emergence of one particular strand of the militancy movement in the Niger Delta, it is the activities of some of these groups, as *de facto* local administrators that is of great interest. With their new positions, the unelected *de facto* militant regimes purveyed a narrative of marginalisation.¹³⁸ In so doing, they positioned

¹³⁷ The observation is paradoxical because it implies that now that the military is fully imbibed within the organs of democratically elected government, they represent an extension of this unrepresentative and ineffective institution. As such, militants in the Niger Delta have taken their position as the arbiters of morality.

¹³⁸ The concept of marginalization is in itself quite interesting within the Niger Delta context. Whilst marginality in the region is often framed as the federal government marginalizing local communities, it is also true that marginalization exist within communities. For example, from some of the evidence presented in this thesis – it was

themselves as freedom fighters representing the cause of the Niger Delta people (Obi 2009: 121). Whilst many of these groups have been described as criminals posing as freedom fighters (Asuni 2009: 7), indeed as documented above, the reality lies somewhere in between. Despite the questions surrounding the legitimacy of the grievance claims – it is true that many of the militant groups in the Niger Delta created parallel institutions that served, at least on the very basic level, to provide welfare for some of their foot soldiers (Delta Boys 2012). In some cases, the welfare and some service provisions to members of the militant groups were extended to local communities (ibid.).

As mentioned above, the opportunity for militant regimes to exist as service providers was perhaps only possible because these militants created a scenario in which the Niger Delta became ungovernable for elected officials. This argument is plausible and is one that should be taken seriously. However, when we adopt a longer-term analysis of state presence and service provisions in the region, it becomes clear that even when the Niger Delta was relatively peaceful and was a governable space before increased militant activities, there was a widely shared perception that successive governments were neglecting people in the region (Obi 2009: 115-116). In essence, whilst the militant leaders stepped up to the mantle and took up their new roles as unelected governments, this was enabled not only by militants enforcing their will on the people in the region and displacing a well-functioning state – but was also in part enabled by an “absent state” (Misra and Pandita 2010). Militants capitalised on pre-existing governance vacuums and only sought to take on expansionist projects of self-government and service provisions when they started challenging the state’s authority

clear that local elites i.e. chiefs, controlled institutions which they used to marginalize members of their own community.

in relation to oil wealth primarily located in the region. Militants challenged the state's presence in the region by challenging its monopoly of violence. As Tilly (1993: 172) explained, even "when a government's use of force imposes a large cost, some people may well decide that the government's other services outbalance the costs of acceding to its monopoly of violence". Unfortunately, however, the case in the Niger Delta was such that many residents were unconvinced by the government's ability to provide other services to people in the region. So when President Olusegun Obasanjo came to power in 1999, and soon after authorised military attacks on Odi community, in Bayelsa State; Oleh Town, in Delta State; Erema and Choba community in Rivers State (Ugochukwu 2013; Elkin 2008: 70) and other communities across the region, he had perhaps unwittingly offered justification for some of the militant groups in the Niger Delta to retaliate by also using force.

It is important to note that the use of force was not the goal for either the state or the militants; these actions were a means to an end. For example, on the side of the militants, we can refer to history where "popular resistance to war making and state making made a difference. When ordinary people resisted vigorously, authorities made concessions: guarantees of rights, representative institutions, [and] courts of appeal" (Tilly 1993: 183). Some of the concessions granted by European authorities at the time, as explained by Tilly, also feature in the peace settlement in post-amnesty Niger Delta. At the behest of the federal government, institutions such as the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) were created as part of the 2009 amnesty negotiations and peace settlement. Militant combatants were also granted reprieve and a stipend as part of the package of the amnesty. These examples intimate a level of success, particularly the allusion that state authorities have become more responsive to the calls of the Niger

Delta people. Whilst to some degree this is the case, the more significant outcome of the Niger Delta militant struggle is the formalisation of the *de facto* positions of militant leaders. Although the misconception is that the amnesty of 2009 would arrest activities of ex-militants, it did the opposite. Whilst immediate years after the amnesty saw a massive decline in the number of reported antagonism towards the state and people in the Niger Delta, this result was achieved not by the amnesty itself. Rather, an appendage of the amnesty is the emboldening effect it had on ex-militant elites. These factions of the militant networks were able, through the amnesty, to formalise and expand previously clandestine alternative governance and service provisions.

Whereas previously, militant leaders operated in remote garrisons in the Niger Delta creeks, setting up networks of opaque but effective attacks on the state – whilst also seeking to ‘protect’ and ‘serve’ local communities (Asuni 2009: 7; Onah 2009) – the post-amnesty era ushered in a new *modus operandi*. The clandestine alternative governance structures that had been in place at the height of militant insurgency was no longer to be concealed. Instead, this form of alternative governance was imbibed within state networks of governance. Ironically, this step was more insidious than the clandestine framework that had been adopted before the implementation of the 2009 amnesty. Usually during periods of insurgency, service provisions by militant groups in the Delta were exclaimed and presented as an alternative to state failure. In the post-amnesty period, these services were still being provided by the militant leaders in their communities. This time, however, they did it without necessarily highlighting the state’s failures. Instead, they provided services in lieu of the state’s service provisions using income both from stipends received from the state, incomes from multinational oil corporations as well as from other sources. The paradoxes of this setup are many. In the

first instance, militant leaders became legitimate services providers with unintended support from the state. This limits the antagonism from militants towards the state,¹³⁹ because militant leaders were now partly dependent on the state in order to be able to provide the services to their people. As such, the ex-militant leaders were *in-hoc* with the institutions they once battled against. Unlike the experience of the south-eastern Nigeria vigilante group, Bakassi Boys, as documented in Meagher (2012: 1093) where “high levels of popular legitimacy were undermined rather than bolstered by the vigilante groups’ incorporation into patrimonial structures”, the case of Niger Delta ex-militant service providers was different.

Reno (2002: 838-839), like Meagher, is on to something when he investigates the capture of youths by corrupt rulers. He argues that whilst many youth start off as “social bandits struggling to overturn a deeply corrupt political order,” they often end up serving the interests of the same corrupt political elites they set out to challenge because doing this allows them to enter into a social system from which they are normally excluded. Reno continues by arguing that this “undermines rebellious organizations” (ibid.). Indeed, ex-militants in the Delta are at risks of being co-opted in the same ways by the political elites they acted against at the height of insurgency. As documented above, part of the militant cause has to be considered to be a quest for access to the exclusive political class. Nevertheless, the experiences of ex-militants in the Niger Delta could be considered as different, because unlike vigilante youth groups such as the Bakassi Boys, co-opted by the political elites they set out to challenge (ibid.; Gore and Pratten 2003: 219; Meagher 2012: 1093), ex-militants negotiated a more

¹³⁹ The antagonism from non-militants is also reduced for a number of reasons. As the *de facto* service provider, backed by the state, ex-militants now occupy a grey area. They are able to operate within the confines of law by offering largess to needy members of their communities. At the same time, they could met out punitive measures to those that attempt to subvert their authority and that of the state.

comprehensive settlement before associating with the political classes. This distinguishes ex-militants from co-opted vigilante groups like the Bakassi Boys.¹⁴⁰ However, it would be imprudent to make categorical claims about the insusceptibility of ex-militants to co-optation. Still, from evidence collected during fieldwork and from recent events in the region, the state has an embedded interest in ensuring that ex-militants, particularly ex-militant leaders retain a significant level of autonomy and authority within the Niger Delta. Insofar as the Nigerian state depends on oil from the region as the main source of federal revenue, ex-militants from the Niger Delta occupy a strategic position, which makes them invaluable to the state.

As a result, it is true that the federal government, particularly under the administration of the ex-president Goodluck Jonathan, allowed the ex-militants to serve as the nexus between the state and the people of the region. This is an acknowledgment of the new governance structure that operates in the Delta region. When this new form of governance is challenged, it can lead to a return of militant insurgencies rising to heights seen during the pre-amnesty era. And indeed, we have witnessed periodic flare ups since President Buhari came to power for exactly these reasons. Before and during the 2015 presidential elections, it was interesting to observe the positions of ex-militant leaders/*de facto* Niger Delta service providers. Many of them threatened to return to the creeks and return to militancy should the status quo not be reinstated (Eziukwu 2015). To many observers, these threats were made in support of President Jonathan – because of ethnic kinship (Eziukwu 2015). However, as soon as President Muhammadu Buhari was elected, many ex-militants leaders/ *de facto* service providers, including Ateke

¹⁴⁰ Since this section focuses on the service provision of ex-militants, it would take us away from the main focus to look into the types of actors in the region's conflicts. However, this point is further explored and elaborated upon in chapter 7 where I distinguish between two types of actors engaged in conflicts; the passive actors and the active actors.

Tom, Ebikabowei Victor Ben (known as General Boyloaf¹⁴¹) and Chief Government Ekpemupolo (known as Tompolo) quickly congratulated the newly elected president and promised to maintain peace in the region¹⁴² (Ogunleye 2015; Olaniyi, 2015; Vanguard 2015). Despite the overtures from these renowned ex-militant leaders, as part of President Buhari's anti-graft policy, the government's anti-corruption agency the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) froze the assets of Tompolo and summoned him for questioning.¹⁴³

After the EFCC's indictment and the issue of an arrest warrant for Tompolo, the reaction of people in Niger Delta showed how much individuals in the region relied on these ex-militant leaders' connection to the state. After all, it was through these connections that people in the region gained access to services that were indirectly provided by the state. The arrest warrant also highlighted how policymakers and some academics have completely misunderstood the role of ex-militant leaders in stabilising the region. A lot of locals in support of Tompolo came out in waves intimating their support for the ex-militant leader, asserting that the EFCC summons was a witch-hunt (Sahara Reporters 2015a; Godwin 2015). Beyond this, elements of militant groups¹⁴⁴ returned to the creeks denouncing the government's violation of terms agreed upon during the 2009

¹⁴¹ Within weeks of President Buhari's inauguration and his appointment of Brigadier Gen Paul Boroh (rtd) as the Coordinator of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, Boyloaf accompanied the new coordinator of the amnesty programme to give a talk at University College London (UCL), to discuss the benefits of the amnesty programme and how it can be made more effective. I attended the event at UCL in London and felt that Boyloaf's presence as a guest of General Boroh indicated the continued embeddedness of the ex-militant within the new regime.

¹⁴² The continuation of the peace was conditional; it was tied to continued receipt of amnesty stipends.

¹⁴³ Whilst the EFCC has keenly gone after numerous notable politicians since the inauguration of President of Buhari, it is still unclear why Tompolo is the only high profile ex-militant commander targeted by the anti-corruption agency. Rumours circulating in 2014 and 2015 suggested that Tompolo had a significant level of influence in the Niger Delta, but quite importantly he was said to have a similar level of influence in the corridors of power in Abuja. Perhaps the new administration felt threatened by Tompolo's ability to gain wide support across all arenas.

¹⁴⁴ Soon after EFCC's indictment of Tompolo, groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and many other less prominent militant groups emerged, initially as protest groups defending Tompolo and requesting his acquittal. Whilst the relationship between Tompolo and these groups remain unclear, suspicions are that Tompolo himself might be bankrolling their activities, although there is little evidence to support these claims. Irrespective of who their sponsors are, the reality is that these groups have destabilised the Niger Delta once again – and in the process, they affirm the significance of ex-militant leaders like Tompolo in maintaining peace in the region.

amnesty negotiations (O'Neil 2016; Premium Times 2016; Osakwe 2016). This, I would argue, confirms to a significant degree how integral Tompolo and other ex-militant chiefs are to sustaining peace in the Delta. If the roles of these ex-militant leaders in the newly formed governance structures are to be questioned, the questions should not be whether or not they are service providers or whether indeed there are alternative governance structures in place; the questions we as researchers should perhaps be asking is why ex-militant leaders maintained their roles as services providers, 'High Chiefs' and *de facto* governors in post-amnesty Niger Delta. I would argue here that their post-amnesty role as service providers reflects the continued anaemic state service provisions in the region.¹⁴⁵ This unchanged landscape of weak state interaction with Niger Delta people was one of the underlying motivations that led many of the ex-militants to the creeks in the first place. And indeed, the cautionary tale from this observation is the continuation of state absence in the region. This noticeable abstention by the state to deliver good governance to the people in Delta lent itself to inducing conflicts between the early 2000s and 2009, and indeed, the same argument applies in 2015-2016. One of the main factors that has kept the region relatively peaceful between 2009 and 2016, compared with the pre-amnesty conflict levels, is the precarious but very important role being played by these ex-militant leaders who currently act as the cog in this highly complex governance machine. As Mustapha once exclaimed, Nigeria persists in a state of "unstable equilibrium" (Abdul Raufu Mustapha cited in Adewunmi 2010), nowhere has this delicate balance of governance been more profound in Nigeria within the last two decade than in the Niger Delta region. Incidentally, the issue of governance in the region is reflected in other aspects of daily life. Chapter 5 will explored explore how this is manifested in land disputes.

¹⁴⁵ It is worth mentioning here that the conditions of state neglect are not exceptional to the Niger Delta region, indeed, there are similar reports around the country.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to highlight the complex and constant manoeuvring of the Niger Delta militants in their quest for access to the state and its resources. This presents an alternative account of the militancy struggle to highlight the limitations of the 'economy of war' literature that have come to define common understandings of the Niger Delta militancy. Instead of viewing militants as a monolith of criminals masquerading as freedom fighters, in this chapter the struggle is framed as conflicts reflective of a series of shrewd and astute calculations intended to hold the state to ransom in order for the militants, especially the leaders to gain access to decision makers, so that they might be able to implement the necessary developmental projects in the Delta region. This objective of presenting an alternative account of the militancy struggle was achieved by charting the rise of Ateke Tom from Okrika vigilante chairman through his time as the leader of NDV to his current status as the High Chief of Okrika where he has become the *de facto* leader who provides for the welfare needs of the people in his community. Ateke's participation in holding the state to ransom by creating choke points in the oil industry meant that the government was forced to respond to the demands of the militants.



Figure 6: This photo with Ateke Tom and SDN colleagues was taken at Tom's house during a visit to request his permission for us to organise a nonviolence rally in Okrika.

First adopting a militaristic approach to countering the insurgency in the Niger Delta, President Olusegun Obasanjo realised that it was important to engage with both Ateke and Dokubo-Asari if there is to be any hope of a ceasefire. Whilst the meeting between the parties sustained a short-lived ceasefire, the militant leaders were quick to return to the camps to restart their combat against the state because the peace settlement negotiated between Dokubo-Asari, Ateke, Governor Odili and President Obasanjo was but a superficial redress to the complex collection of Niger Delta grievances. After several more years of fighting against the state, Ateke and other militant commanders including Tompolo and Dokubo-Asari accepted a more comprehensive Presidential Amnesty in 2009, offered by the late President Umaru Yar'Adua. Despite the

shortcomings of the 2009 amnesty programme, the initiative led to the disarmament of over 26,000 militants and sustained relative peace in the region. However, the key benefit of the 2009 amnesty is that ex-militant commanders now have direct access to the state and are thus able to manage the relationship between state and disgruntled youths. In return, the ex-militant commanders including Ateke Tom are compensated with very lucrative security contracts to protect the oil pipelines that run through the region.¹⁴⁶ Whilst this may appear like a superficial continuation of the previous amnesty efforts, the continued payments to ex-militant commanders mean that these commanders can continue to secure the region's relative peace whilst they also ensure that they have direct access to the state.

In Okrika, for example, Ateke continues to manage the youth and ensures that they do not return to the creeks to attack the oil industry. Another significant observation was that, despite the perceived limitations of the amnesty programme which only targeted the over 26,000 ex-militants in the region, government payments to the ex-militant commanders is being used to provide goods and services to communities and people in the Niger Delta. This though may be an unintended result of the amnesty programme, but it represents a significant shift in the way the Niger Delta people access state resources. Through direct access to militant leaders, as the people of Okrika do with Ateke, the people in the region now have indirect access to the federal government. They can therefore continue to make their requests and express the issues that are important to them. Despite the temptation to link the ex-militant commanders' access to the state to the presence of an ethnic kin, President Jonathan, as President, as Ateke

¹⁴⁶ After the death of President Yar'Adua, his successor, President Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw indigene from the Niger Delta extended the amnesty programme informally by granting ex-militant commanders huge pipeline surveillance and security contracts (PIND 2015).

demonstrated through his rise, the quest for access to the state is constant. Ex-militant commanders have demonstrated a capacity to shift alliance to whomever is able to address the Niger Delta issues. As President Jonathan was replaced by President Muhammadu Buhari after the 2015 presidential elections, the ex-militant commanders also pledged their commitments to work with the new president. This demonstrates their desire to be continually present at the heart of decision-making especially when it comes to Niger Delta matters. It perhaps also shows their attempt to retain significant positions and relevance in the region by acting as Niger Delta arbitrators with direct links to the federal government.

EKPORO (ELEME) AND OGU (OKRIKA) DISPUTES: A Culture of Conflicts without the Oil

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the complex factors that have contributed to the extended disputes in the Niger Delta. This chapter focuses on the long-term battle between two communities in Rivers State. Ekporo, a town formed by people of the Eleme extraction, and Ogu, their neighbours, formed of the Okrika extraction. In previous chapters, I documented the continued and cyclical unrests between the people of Eleme and Okrika. However, this case study of the conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu marks a shift from the focus on 'natural resources conflicts', which has frequently been used to define the unrests between these two ethnic groups. Whilst the conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu tie into the overall conflicts discourse between Eleme and Okrika, the clashes also take on unique identities because they are conflicts fought over issues unrelated to the broader natural resources conflicts that have come to define the relationships of the two ethnic groups.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Ekporo and Ogu have been in disputes over land way before the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta. In fact, both communities remain oil barren – yet the conflicts between the two neighbours continue to exist with the most recent unrest occurring in January 2013. This chapter attempts to present a counter-narrative to the usual oil explanations that have dominated the understanding of the region's conflicts.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ This matters because, as noted by Chief Awoala, an Okrika chief, "[w]here a town of Okrika is attacked by a neighbouring people, other Okrika towns will automatically join to fight the enemy" (Awoala 1998: 4).

¹⁴⁸ Natural resource-centric explanations of conflicts in the Niger Delta have dominated and framed the narratives of disputes in the region (see, for example, Ikelegbe 2005; Watts 2007; Zalik 2004; Obi 2010 and Omeje 2006). Such limitations have affected the way the conflicts in the region have been addressed; for example, the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme was a reactionary policy to address oil conflicts. This myopic focus has meant that other conflicts in the region have been left unaddressed.

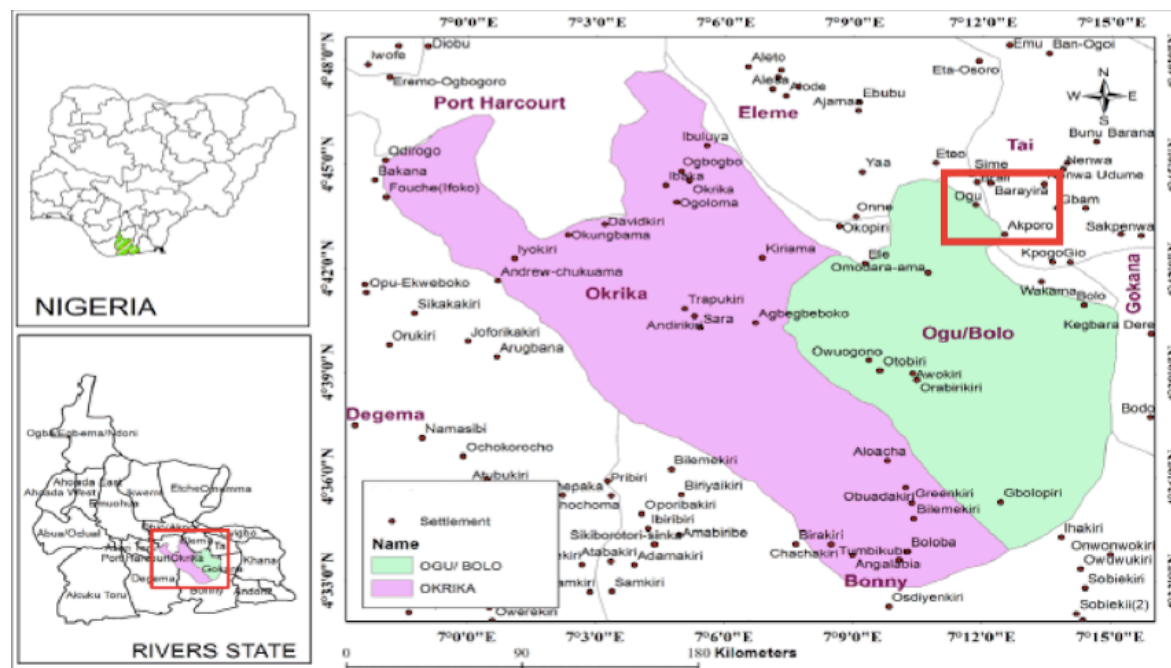


Figure 7: The map above shows the proximity of Ogu and Ekpoko (spelt Akporo) (Source: Nwankwoala et al. 2017).

The first section will present historical analysis of the two communities and will allow us to explore, from written documents and interview data, how they became neighbours and how the conflicts between the two communities emerged and the solutions that have been recommended to resolve the issues between them. The second section will review the court decisions and Commission of Inquiry that have sought to address the disputes between the two towns and will assess how they have both interpreted and responded to these rulings. Highlighting these areas is significant in helping us to identify the main issues that have persisted and that have continually flared up tensions between the Ekpoko and Ogu. In the third section, I take on a socio-political analysis of the conflicts between the two communities by reviewing how the prominent sons from both ethnic groups, at different times, have leveraged their influential positions in government to inflame or resolve the disputes between the two towns and the impact their contributions have had in the long-term resolutions of the conflicts. With this we can pinpoint issues that have allowed the conflicts to persist despite there being a clear Supreme Court judgement passed to clarify legal rights of both communities in regard to

the disputed parcel of land. The fourth section will continue to develop a theoretical framework around the key themes that emerged from the sections above. Whilst a lot of work has been done on the environmental impact of resource extraction in the region, and on the notion of resource control – an overarching, yet unexplored aspect of land as a resource, is the idea of land ownership. Indeed, since the issue of ownership remain largely unresolved, land disputes in Nigeria are pretty common insofar as they extend from the Northern part of the country to the Southern part of the country¹⁴⁹ (Arowosegbe 2016: 261). This section will reflect on how unresolved rights issues contribute to the Niger Delta conflicts. The final section will allow us to review and summarise the sections before. At this point I will highlight the key themes and issues that that have allowed the conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu to persist. By documenting the persistence of the conflicts, we can start to highlight the short-sightedness of the Nigeria government's response to broader Niger Delta issues; in particular we can look at the weaknesses of the amnesty programme that has sought to address the Niger Delta issues.

To complete the stated objectives, it is important to refer to the nature of land disputes in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta more specifically. Understanding the nature of land disputes in Nigeria requires a brief assessment of tenure rights, land reforms, and the land registration system in the country. Various studies in recent years, including *Nigeria's Presidential Technical Committee on Land Reform* refer to the significance of implementing a successful land reform in order to “ensure that the land tenure laws, the operating regulations and procedures for land transactions are made uniform, open and

¹⁴⁹ Arowosegbe (2016: 261) gives examples of the conflicts around the country. He cites the example of conflicts that “include those of Ife –Modakeke in Osun State; the Jukun –Chamba conflict in Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State; the Tiv – Jukun conflict in Benue and Plateau States and the Umuleri –Aguleri war of attrition over the Otuocha piece of land in Anambra State”.

'business friendly' so as to facilitate and promote modern economic and developmental process with minimum bureaucratic hindrance" (Magbogunje 2009: 23). Equally, Freeman (2014) argues that the lack of titled land makes doing business in Nigeria difficult because investors run a risk of being affected by land disputes. This way of analysing land use and tenure rights in Nigeria has gathered momentum in recent years especially within the development industry, where land reforms and effective land registration systems are viewed as the key with which a country like Nigeria can unlock potential funds for national developmental objectives – and create a friendly business environment for foreign direct investments. Indeed, these observations are pertinent to the overall economic development of the country – but like oil, limiting the significance of land titles and registration to the potential economic gains it offers, means that little attention is paid to the human and social¹⁵⁰ costs caused by ineffective land registration system.¹⁵¹ It is important to note here that these communities' attachment to land is not formed by their desire to enrich themselves by, for example, commodifying land for export crop production. Rather, both Ekporo and Ogu are disputing land ownership because of increasing population and more urgent need for access to space for residential dwelling.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Paul, a fieldworker in the Niger Delta on 20/11/14. He is also from Ogu/Bolo local government area and has access to local information about conflicts throughout the region.

¹⁵¹ For example, Toulmin and Quan explain that "[in] the last two decades, almost all countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been undertaking land reform in one guise or another. The aims have been to promote economic growth, encourage more suitable management and reduce poverty (2000: 1). Here again, the notion of the symbiosism of land reform and economic development is highlighted at the expense of social interactions and costs of an effective land registration system (see also McAuslan 1998).



Figure 8: A picture taken in Ogu showing recently reclaimed swamped land. On tour of the town – a number of new structures had recently been erected indicating an increasing demand for land in the community.

Freeman (2014) points out that as well as the economic impact of lack of titled lands, the dysfunctional land registration system has led to a lot of land disputes that have clogged up the legal systems with cases that run for decades. His observations are apt because as we further explore the disputes between Ekpore and Ogu, we start to see that underlying the conflicts between the two neighbours are the claims and counterclaims over the ownership of land. Though the disputes between the two communities over land are not immediately to do with national development as described by Freeman (2014) and Magbogunje (2009), the conflicts nevertheless highlight the failure of land registration and ownership rights in Nigeria. And as Freeman alludes to, many of these cases have been taken to courts, yet the land registration system remains ineffective. As we will discover later, after further exploration into the Ogu and Ekpore land disputes, despite decades of legal wrangling,

the conflicts between the two communities remain ever present, even after clear judgements issued by the highest courts in the country. We must, therefore, consider that contestation over the court rulings exist, partly because the courts' decisions are perceived to be ambiguous due to a combination of factors, including the fact that land titles and land reforms issues are still largely unaddressed in the whole country.¹⁵² But before delving into the assessment of the disputes between the two communities, we must consider that "[if] a single lesson emerges from recent scholarship on African landholding, it is that it is complex, variable, and fluid" (Shipton and Goheen 1992, 318). Land is important, not just for personal enrichment, but important "to gain control over others, and to define personal and social identities" (ibid. 307). It is from this perspective that this chapter analyses the land disputes between Ekpore and Ogu.

Historical Analysis: This Is Our Land, These are Our Stories

Stories have given shape and meaning to our sense of ourselves as individuals, cultures, and nations, we are both connected by these stories and connected by their different truths. Whether Jew or Arab, black or white, Muslim or Christian, Catholic or Protestant, man or woman, our stories hold us in thrall and others at bay. (J. Edward Chamberlain, cited in Wiwa 2009: 126)

Indeed, the story from Ekpore and Ogu about their claim to the disputed land, even though they might be contradictory, offer us an insight into their different perspectives of how the two communities have come to become part of one another's narrative and experiential reality. For this purpose, this section will synthesise the narratives emanating from both sides of the aisle of the land disputes in the hope of offering a sensible account of the evolution of the conflicts between the two neighbours.

¹⁵² According to Freeman, as few as 3% of lands are officially registered with the Nigerian government (2014).

According to the Ogu community version of historical accounts obtained during fieldwork, the moniker Ekporo derives from the name of the founding father of Ekporo community. This account claims that the man was an Eleme wizard chased from his community in Ogoloma, Onne because he had been causing problems by killing people for unsanctioned rites, which resulted in the people of Onne requesting that he be exiled from their community. After being exiled, he moved to Ebubu, another Eleme community 10 kilometres from Onne. Once he settled in Ebubu, the news of his settlement reverberated back to Onne. Upon discovering this news, the people of Onne sent emissaries to Ebubu to warn them of the evils that follow Ekporo. They informed the people of Ebubu of what Ekporo had done in Onne and warned them that the people of Ebubu would face a similar fate unless they expelled Ekporo from their community. For the second time, Ekporo was expelled from his community and passed through many other Eleme communities before finally arriving at Ogu. In Ogu, a man called Tende,¹⁵³ out of sympathy, offered Ekporo residence. On arrival, Ekporo and his followers were settled in the riverine area of Ogu, but upon consultations with his hosts about the struggles he and his people, who are land dwellers, faced on the river, Ekporo and his followers were relocated to dry habitations next to Ogu – this space is where the present Ekporo community resides.¹⁵⁴

This version of history was supported by the Amanyabo-Elect of Ogu.¹⁵⁵ The Amanyabo corroborates this story by claiming that the people of Ekporo had to be

¹⁵³ Although my interviewee referred to the main sympathiser as Tende, in a pamphlet written by Davids (2014) given to me by the King of Ogu, titled *Kporo-Ogu: A Historical Fact*, the sympathiser was named Pa Inyanaboiamuno Okuje. Chief Tende was in fact one of the 'progenitors' of Ogu and has several monuments and locations named after him. His involvement with the earlier Ekporo settlers was when he was consulted to help them relocate due to the unsuitability of riverine area to their craft. This is only a slight discrepancy, but is worth documenting.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Dr George Obuoforibo, lecturer at the University of Port Harcourt and a member of Ogu community on 11/11/14.

¹⁵⁵ The Amanyabo of Ogu (King of Ogu) King Nicholas Nimenibo Ibiebele Loko IX, had recently reconciled with Ogu Divisional Council of Chiefs after a leadership tussle over a large investment on a new palace for the Amanyabo-Elect.

resettled by their Ogu hosts. He repeated the earlier version as above and added further context by explaining the request of the Ekporo people who asked to be relocated to dry land. According to the Amanyanabo-Elect, the Ekporo people like the rest of the Eleme community are known land dwellers and farmers, whilst their hosts, the Ogu people are fishermen who preferred to reside in riverine areas. Upon arrival at Ogu, the Ekporo people complained about loss of life in the surrounding waters and their inability to farm in the riverine areas, this led their Ogu hosts to allocate the new settlers to a more suitable location that would allow them to live safely and carry on with their farming activities. To show their appreciation, the people of Ekporo were said to have paid an annual tribute every December to the people of Ogu for granting them residency.¹⁵⁶ An interview respondent claimed that in his lifetime he had witnessed the Ekporo Elders and Chiefs come to Ogu to pay tribute to their Ogu hosts. As he explained:

I witnessed that thanksgiving that Ekporo people often do every December. When they come to do that thanks visit, what do they normally come with? A calabash of palm wine, a goat and some yams. They will come to a particular compound that the [descendant] family of those who helped them to settle down [still reside]. They will come there to present these gifts, and our people in turn will wear our traditional attire called don. After wearing don,¹⁵⁷ music will be played, [people] will dance and while they are coming, there is a particular song they used to sing. I witnessed it, [they sang] in my language, though they were not very well versed in Ogu language, they use Ogu language [to sing] 'Ekporo people who owns you people? Ogu people own us'. This homage stopped after the end of the [Nigerian] civil war. When the father of the former Minister of State for Water Resources, Precious Ngelale, enlightened his people that

¹⁵⁶ Interview with the Amanyanabo of Ogu (King of Ogu) King Nicholas Nimenibo Ibiebele Loko IX at his Port Harcourt office on 12/11/14.

¹⁵⁷ Don is a type of traditional ceremonial robe worn by people in the Niger Delta – normally for important events or ceremonies.

'in this modern era, we don't need to do that again'. From that time onwards, Ekporo people became antagonistic towards Ogu people.¹⁵⁸

The Amanyanabo also referred to the discontinued tradition of paying tributes to Ogu:

They [the people of Ekporo] stopped the tribute because of civilisation. One of their headmasters, by name Ngelale as he became councillor, came back to his community to say 'this is twentieth century; we cannot do those things'. That is why they stopped. We [are not] even bothered, but they started making claims. The present generation now pretend like [their history with Ogu never existed]. I'm nearly sixty years old, and I witnessed them paying tribute in the early 60s, singing and jubilating, but right now they are denying that this ever happened.¹⁵⁹

The people of Ekporo understandably have a different record of their history with their neighbours. They argue that they had always resided in Ekporo as early migrants. It was inconceivable to them that they, farmers and land dwellers, would seek permission from fishermen who resided in riverine areas to reside on this disputed land. Chief Samuel Obe, the monarch in Ekporo stated that:

Ekporo people were known as farmers, just as Ogu people were known as fisher men and women. They were living on the first island, not even the second island. Ekporo was there right from time immemorial. Then how can a fisherman who has no knife or machete deforest an area and give to an upland man to live there? So, that document is false. (Chief Samuel Obe cited in Dikewoha 2014)

Further investigations into the disputes between the two communities show that the narrative presented by the Ekporo people fell within a broader Eleme versus Okrika dispute. According to the Eleme version, the people of Okrika and Eleme lived amicably

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Dr George Obuoforibo on 11/11/2014.

¹⁵⁹ Amanyanabo of Ogu (King of Ogu) King Nicholas Nimenibo Ibiebele Loko IX 12/11/2014.

next to each other for a very long time. The two neighbours traded by barter, the Okrikans trading their fish for the Eleme's farm products. The land disputes between the two communities started to emerge when the Okrikans who dwelled in neighbouring riverine areas asked their Eleme neighbours whether they could erect shelters on Eleme land. This request was made because the Okrika traders who had made the journey onshore to trade with their Eleme neighbours had difficulty trading in the open. They required market space and somewhere to stay after market hours because of the difficulty of returning home late at night. They then chose to ask their Eleme trading partners for some space on which to build some shelter. The people of Eleme, according to a widely circulated pamphlet, granted their neighbours somewhere to set up market stalls. "The parcels of land granted to the people of Okrika belong to the people of Eleme. Soon there sprang up at the market sites, clusters of huts built of thatches, sticks and mud because it was not always possible for the fish traders to go back to the islands after trading on market days. These small hamlets were dotted along some Eleme coastal areas." (Osaronu 2004: 9-10).

According to some interviewees, the Okrikan's decision to build up a settlement in Eleme was not an issue for the Elemes, they were happy to have their Okrika neighbours nearby. However, during the time of the settlement, the people of Eleme and their Okrika settlers resided in the Degema Division of the state where taxes were collected from the fishermen by the Divisional Administration. This changed between 1935 and 1937 when Eleme was moved from the Degema Division to the Opobo Division. This decision by the government to move Eleme from Degema to Opobo complicated the collection of taxes from the Okrikans. Even after this move the Eleme chiefs continued to ask the Okrikans on their land for taxes; the Okrikans apparently

refused to pay these land taxes to the Opobo Division through the Eleme chiefs. This decision not to pay taxes to the Eleme people, combined with the expansion of the Okrikans further upland onto Eleme territory, led to many small clashes between the two communities but nothing significant was recorded until 1946. On May 7, 1946 the Okrikans were reported to have attacked an Eleme community in Alesa where they killed more than 12 people. This to the Elemes marked the point in history where the battle over land had come to a violent head (ibid. 10-27; Rivers State of Nigeria 2000: 2-3).

This reflection provides a history of the relationship between Ekporo and Ogu through the historical prism of broader Eleme and Okrika relations. Indeed, the conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu may be proxy wars fought over a more general ethnic strife related to land. But an observation that is worth documenting is that the conflicts between the people of Ekporo and Ogu, though part of the broader Eleme and Okrika conflicts, appears to be one of the few conflicts between the two ethnic groups that has remained constant. Historically, both from an Ogu perspective, as well as from the Ekporo perspective through a broader Eleme prism, we can start to see that conflicts between Eleme and Okrika date back to the late 1930s early 1940s, almost two decades before the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta.¹⁶⁰ This observation is relevant because when we explore the conflicts between the two ethnic groups from contemporary narratives, the representation of the conflicts have shifted from what was primarily boundary disputes to become a dispute about access to oil and gas royalties (Bassey et al. 2002). Understandably, this has influenced government's reaction to the conflicts between the two groups.

¹⁶⁰ After decades of exploration, oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1956 by Royal Dutch Shell (formerly Shell British Petroleum) at Oloibiri, Bayelsa State. However, commercial production did not begin till 1958 when Nigeria started to export oil to the rest of the world.

The Ogu and Ekporo conflicts are unique because whilst they share some similarities with broader ethnic strife between Eleme and Okrika, they stand apart because both Ekporo and Ogu remain natural resource barren. The lack of oil in either Ekporo nor Ogu is apparent in the cyclical conflicts between the two communities. Even though there have been minor complications such as clashes from spill overs from the broader ethnic clashes in the surrounding areas, conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu have largely remained about the ownership of land. As stated above, land to these two neighbours was more than just an economic commodity. To varying degrees, both communities claimed autochthony. The fact that conflicts between the Ekporo and Ogu have always been about land should have led to a permanent peaceful resolution between the two towns. However, it appears that despite multiple calls, from people in Ekporo and in Ogu, for assistance from formal state authorities,¹⁶¹ attempts to go through legal channels have all been unsuccessful in permanently stopping the conflicts between the two communities. The impasse between the two neighbours to secure a permanent resolution that would allow them to live side by side peacefully offers an insight into how non-oil producing communities in the Niger Delta are treated by the government.¹⁶²

Indeed, the continuation of conflicts between these two non-oil producing communities is an indirect symbol of the symbiotic relationship between government and oil in Nigeria. Within the Niger Delta, there appears to be a pattern that shows that unless

¹⁶¹ Representatives from both communities claimed that despite their decision to send letters of appeal, file complaints to several presidential committees and state government to highlight the problems between the two towns at state and federal level, they have been unsuccessful in receiving external support from the government. Interview with Amanyanabo of Ogu (King of Ogu) King Nicholas Nimenibo Ibiebele Loko IX on 12/11/2014 and interview with the Paramount Ruler of Ekporo and Barrister Obari O Obari on 05/11/14.

¹⁶² We can borrow Ehwareme's term, "Oloibirinization", to describe this phenomenon where state neglects communities that do not directly offer economic benefits to the state. In his words, "... a classical situation in which the decline in economic importance of a town, community or region leads to its political oblivion social obscurity and developmental neglect and decay in what we may label or refer to as "Oloibirinization" (Ehwareme 2011: 6). Ehwareme used this term to describe successive governments' desertion of Oloibiri, the location of the first oil well in Nigeria, after the oil well in the village stopped producing oil in 1978.

there is an immediate threat to the production of oil, the state's engagement is often represented by apathy and foot-dragging. The King of Ekporo and Ekporo's legal representative, Barrister Obari O Obari informed me that they had made several efforts to get senior officials involved in the disputes so that the people of Ekporo could be returned home after the most recent conflicts that led to their displacement in September 2014.¹⁶³ However, at the stage of our discussions in November 2014, there appeared to be no response apart from an acknowledgement of receipt of the petition sent by Barrister Obari.¹⁶⁴ From my discussions with the Paramount Ruler and the barrister, it was clear that they both realised the limitations imposed on them because of their status as a non-oil bearing community and, as such, suggested that they would write to the United Nations to seek a resolution. Even if such a claim was a protest statement – it was an indication of the frustration felt *vis-à-vis* the futile efforts to resolve the dispute up until that point.

Part of the frustration was because of the continued inaction by the government and the courts even after the lawyers for Ekporo had submitted another legal petition to the courts in Rivers State. However, the inaction of the courts at that point was due to unrelated events. The judicial system in the whole of Rivers State had come to a complete halt since the 9th of June 2014 because of wrangling between the then State Governor, Rotimi Amaechi and the then incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan.¹⁶⁵ The

¹⁶³ Appendix 2 is a letter from the community's legal representative to the Minister of Education. Copies of the letter were also sent to the Presidency, Senate President and Speaker of the House amongst a list of high-ranking officials in the country.

¹⁶⁴ Interview conducted with the Paramount Ruler of Ekporo at his makeshift accommodation after he and the people of Ekporo were allegedly displaced from their community by the people of Ogu. Also present at the Interview was Barrister Obari O Obari who was the legal representative for the whole of Eleme community. Barrister Obari represented the community in their disputes with Okrika (05/11/14).

¹⁶⁵ Former Governor of Rivers State, Governor Rotimi Amaechi and Former President Goodluck Jonathan were in the middle of a very public rift that led to the defection of Governor Rotimi to the then opposition party All Peoples Congress (APC). This affected the relationship between the two men to the point where there were constant threats of impeachment of Governor Amaechi. It was rumoured that President Jonathan had tried to appoint a new Chief Justice in Rivers States to push through the impeachment of the Governor at the end of his term in 2015. However,

suspension of the judicial system contributed to the frustration experienced by both sides in the dispute. However, the people of Ekpore, through their representative, Barrister Obari sought urgently to resolve the issues between the two communities. He presented multiple documents to support the claim that they had been taking formal channels to settle the disputes. These formal channels, largely through courts have been unheeded due in part to the state-wide judiciary strike. We must however review whether things would have been different if the courts were in session. The legal approach taken in 2014 to address the disputes between the two communities was not novel; both communities at several points in history have sought to resolve these disputes in courts. And despite several court rulings, the disputes between the two neighbours have persisted because of what must be considered as the ambiguity of the court rulings. Both sides have appealed against several judgements for varying reasons thus leaving court judgements futile to resolve the disputes. In the next section, I will review the court cases that have sought to address the disputes between the two communities and investigate the main points of contention in multiple rulings that have been passed to stop the disputes between Ekpore and Ogu.

Disputing Dispute Settlements: Sidestepping a Series of Toothless Judgements

After several meetings and discussions with the people of Ekpore and their representatives and after meetings with their Ogu counterparts, a reference that was continually cited was a Supreme Court judgment of 1958.¹⁶⁶ The continuous citing of this ruling by both sides appeared strange because both factions claimed that the

the Governor put a stop to the appointment and this led to an impasse in the justice system. (See also Abia 2014, Agbamuche-Mbu 2015, for example).

¹⁶⁶ As well as the oral reference to this ruling, this Supreme Court judgment also appears in legal correspondence between the legal representative of Ekpore and the Commissioner of Police of Rivers State. On page two of Appendix 1 a reference was made to the Supreme Court judgment of 1958 - **Suit No. FSC/123/1957**, which helped to determine the boundary between the people of Eleme and their Okrika neighbours.

rulings favoured them, yet they remained hostile towards one another in contempt of the said court decision. The expectation was that the ruling was a decision that specifically looked into the disputes between Ekpore and Ogu. However, it was revealed that the court judgement of 1958 came as a result of separate class actions taken by the whole of the Eleme community including Ekpore and the whole of the Okrika people including Ogu. Both class actions were consolidated and the resulting judgement was delivered on the 24th of March 1958. This judgement built upon an earlier decision in January 1957, delivered by G.F Dove-Edwin, puisne judge who stated that:

... my decision, therefore, is that the whole of the land in dispute right down to the water edge belong to Elemes and they will have their declaration accordingly, but that the Okrikans have right of occupation under Native Law and Custom to all that portion in which they have settlements shown on the plan and verged yellow and they not be disturbed in their occupations of these 101 settlements. (Rivers State of Nigeria 2000: 4)

The decision by Judge Dove-Edwin was challenged by the two parties immediately after his ruling in 1957. Despite there being a clear judgement about the ownership of the land, the ambiguity of the same judgement in allowing the Okrikans to remain on the land after long residency means that the contention between the two communities remained. This was particularly the case since there were no explicit financial settlements or compensation, except for the permission that was granted to the Elemes, allowing them access to the surrounding rivers. The Supreme Court in response to the unhappiness of the two parties stated that:

... since the Appellants (Elemes) were granted an injunction as to all the land with the exception of the extensive 1000 feet strip bordered by the Okrika River or Creek and edged yellow on the Respondent's (Okrikans)

plan, it becomes clear that the Appellants' contention is that they are entitled to an order restraining the Respondent from the use and enjoyment of the area of land which, by virtues of their early settlement and user thereof without payment of rent or tribute to the Appellants has been made an express qualification of the Appellants declaration of the title. It is true that the ultimate or radical title and, therefore, the reversionary right to this strip of land remains, in the Appellants, but the judgment appealed from declares and rightly protects, the possessory title therein of Respondents. This is recognised form of Native Customary tenure under which the individual members of the Okrika community may have rights of enjoyment, and even a right to transmit their beneficial enjoyment, as members by transfer inter vivos or by succession ... the Appellants should be content that their rights of access to the Okrika River, creek is preserved. (Rivers State of Nigeria 2000: 5)

This judgement passed under **Suit No. FSC/123/1957** became the reference point for both the people of Eleme and people of Okrika. The “1000 feet strip” reference in the judgement became the yardstick by which the people of Ekporo tried to determine their rightful ownership of the land on which they resided. They claim that Ekporo was located beyond this particular point in the 1958 judgment; as a result, they could not be in contravention of the judgement passed by the Supreme Court.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the 1958 Supreme Court resolution seemed to mitigate the tensions between the two communities, at least for almost two decades. The people of Ogu expressed that they and their neighbours lived in relative peace till 1975-1977 when an Ekporo resident, Mr David Lekwa, attacked a Mr. Kiani Oba Gbobbo from Ogu (Davids 2014: 12). This was an unprovoked attack, which rendered the victim permanently disabled. The attack was reported to the police division in Okrika and a case between the Commissioner of Police vs. David Lekwa and 3 others was generated under case **NO. PHC/134/77** on

¹⁶⁷ Interview with the Paramount Ruler of Ekporo and Barrister Obari O Obari on 05/11/14.

the 7th of December 1977. Though it is unclear what judgement the court passed, this attack on Mr Gbobbo was not an isolated incident that year. According to the people of Ogu, they were victims of sustained attacks between July 1977, when Mr Gbobbo was attacked, and January 1978¹⁶⁸ (Appendix 3: 3-5).

Close examination shows that many of the attacks in the 1970s revolved around contestations to do with the development of new projects in both communities. As far as the people of Ekporo were concerned, the 1970s conflicts only emerged when the people of Ogu took on new development projects like, for example, the construction of a new hospital and road and many other infrastructure projects, often on Ekporo land. Whilst doing this, they displaced Ekporo residents (Dikewoha, 2014). This understandably led to renewed tension between the two communities. As Barrister Obari explained, the conflicts between the neighbours often re-emerge because “at anytime [the Ogu people] feel that they have calls to encroach [on Ekporo land], they do, [leading] to one conflict or the other”.¹⁶⁹ Given the clarity of the 1958 Supreme Court judgement, which gave a clear reference point of the boundaries between the two communities, an encroachment by Ogu as reported by Ekporo, would reflect a contempt of the Court’s judgment. However, discussions with King Ibiebele Loko IX (King of Ogu) revealed that despite the Supreme Court Judgement, there is no clear demarcation between the two communities.¹⁷⁰ This suggestion is supported by a letter

¹⁶⁸ See appendix 3, *KPORO CRISIS*, a letter from the representatives of Ogu community to the Commissioner of Police of Rivers State. This letter documents the series of events that have cumulated to lead to 2013-2014 crises between the people of Ogu and the people of Ekporo. In the letter, references were made to sustained attacks meted to the people of Ogu by the people of Ekporo. (See page 3-5).

¹⁶⁹ Interview Barrister Obari L Obari on 05/11/14.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with the Amanyano of Ogu (King of Ogu) King Nicholas Nimenibo Ibiebele Loko IX on 12/11/14.

and supporting documents sent to the Commissioner of Police of Rivers State on behalf of the people of Ogu.¹⁷¹

The document makes explicit reference to the refusal of the Ekporo people to participate in the demarcation process. According to the document, after an incident instigated by the people of Eleme, including some people from Ekporo in 1993, the then Military Administrator of Rivers State, Colonel Dauda Komo appointed a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) to demarcate the boundary in accordance to the Supreme Court Ruling of 1958. However, the Eleme Community refused to provide a surveyor and lawyer to represent them during the process; they also failed to attend subsequent meetings organised to discuss the implementation of the Supreme Court Judgement (Appendix 3: 3-5). This has contributed to the frustration experienced by both communities. The ambiguity surrounding the boundary as well as latent ethnic rivalry has led to further tensions between the two neighbours. In further developments, on the 4th of October 1999, there was an ethnic wide conflict between the people of Eleme and the people of Okrika. According to an interview respondent, Paul,¹⁷² the community wide clashes were due, in part, to contestation over naming rights of the Eleme Okrika refinery, which, despite being on Eleme land, was expected to also reflect an Okrika name, thus giving the people of Okrika entitlements to royalty payments. These communal clashes, though undergirded by land disputes, were, therefore, also about access to royalties from an oil plant. And although neither Ekporo nor Ogu were directly involved in this particular dispute, by virtue of being members of the broader Okrika and Eleme ethnic communities, they were dragged into the conflict.

¹⁷¹ See Appendix 3.

¹⁷² Interview with Paul on 20/11/14.

This resulted in the displacement of the people of Ekpore from their community (Appendix 1: 2). The Rivers State Governor, Peter Odili, reacted to the events by setting up the Granville Commission of Inquiry, led by the late Justice S. Charles Granville. The commission reviewed the events that led to the clashes, including the disputes between Ekpore and Ogu. The commission returned with a report and recommendations published as a white paper by the Rivers State Government. In paragraph 5(I)(g) of the report, the Panel concluded that the “main crux of the remote causes of the continuing conflicts between both parties”¹⁷³ is the refusal of the Okrikans to accept the decision of the 1958 Supreme Court judgement stipulating that the “land areas right down to the water edge or coastline, belong to the Elemes, and that even the 1000 feet from the high Water Mark allowed [to] them both [by] the Arbitration Panel and Court of competent jurisdiction was given to them by the Elemes for settlement for trading purpose only” (Rivers State Of Nigeria 2000: 5). Specifically regarding the 4th of October 1999 conflicts, the Commission concluded in paragraph 5 (I)(h) that the conflicts was caused because of the “continuing misunderstanding arising from the failure of Okrika to abide and respect the Supreme Court Judgment in **Suit No. FSC/123/1957** which leads to an unnecessary clamour for the naming of Federal State projects sited in the area to reflect the names of the contesting Communities” (ibid. 6).

As part of their concluding remarks, the Commission presented a six-point recommendation to the State Government. The recommendations directed the government to, with immediate effect, take steps to enforce the implementation of the 1958 Supreme Court judgement. The Commission also recommended that the state government set up a Conflict Resolution Committee to take charge of fostering dialogue

¹⁷³ “Both parties” here refer to the broader Eleme and Okrika communities not, Ekpore and Ogu specifically.

between persons that may have breached the 1000 feet strip resolution clause in the 1958 Supreme Court judgement.¹⁷⁴ The Commission also concluded that the “ultimate and radical title of the entire parcel of land right to the water edge is vested in the Elemes” (ibid. 6). This, in essence, was a renewed affirmation of Elemes ownership of the lands being disputed.¹⁷⁵ In specific reference to the conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu, the Commission concluded that the Ogu people were the aggressors who attacked, destroyed, and caused the complete annihilation of Ekporo on the evening of 4th October 1999. The Commission therefore recommended that the Ogu/Bolo Local Government Council, assisted by the State Government, should compensate Ekporo for reconstruction and resettlement back into their community. Whilst the government accepted the brief of the Commission and condemned the destruction of Ekporo by the Ogu people, the State Government rejected the recommendations made by the Commission regarding the compensation to be paid by the Ogu people and the compensation payment formula (ibid.: 14).

Both sides argue that government’s unwillingness to take the necessary actions to put a permanent stop to the intermittent conflicts between the two communities is often tied to claims that, at various points in history, a prominent son who has influence in government has worked to favour their community. In the case of the government refusing to accept recommendations 8(II)(a) and (b), which favours the people of Ekporo over their Ogu neighbours, the people of Ekporo believe that some of the Commission’s recommendations were not heeded due to the influence of Ogu/Okrika indigenes who were prominent members of the State Government. George Sekibo, the

¹⁷⁴ Those found to have exceeded the 1000 feet strip on either side, i.e. on the Eleme or Okrika side of the boundary limits, were expected to consult the community where they had encroached to negotiate their continued stay in that community. The Commission expected the proposed Conflict Resolution Committee to help facilitate any disputes resulting from the breach of terms in the initial Supreme Court judgment.

¹⁷⁵ They did, however, make an allowance for concessions that permitted the 1000 feet strip clause to be inserted to protect the Okrikans’ long-term residency status and rights.

former Special Adviser on Projects and Special Adviser on works to the Governor of Rivers State between 1999 and 2002, was thought to have influenced Rivers State government's policy towards the dispute settlement between Ekporo and Ogu to favour the Okrikans. Such accusations are not uncommon. A similar allegation was levied against the Ekporo people, who at various points in history, also had representatives in government who allegedly lobbied for their interests. This has helped both sides to develop the narratives that describe the significant roles that prominent "sons of the soil"¹⁷⁶ play in securing judgments that benefits their community at the expense of rival communities. Allegations of this pattern are very common and has been blamed for the prolonged impasse between the two towns. In the next section of the chapter, I will focus on the impact of prominent "sons of the soil" on the conflicts between the two communities.

Prominent Sons of the Soil: The Patrons of 'Communal Clients'

... the 'common man', whether rural or urbanised, is still wrapped in the myth that his real hope of socio-economic betterment lies in the success of his relative, or other son of the soil, in getting a lien on the public purse and trickling a few coins down to him. (Joseph 1978: 90)

... the patron-clientele relationship – an exchange relationship between roles – may be defined as a special case of dyadic (two person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher social-economic status (patron) uses his own influences and resources to provide protection or benefits or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron. (Scott 1972: 92)

¹⁷⁶ The Commission's report also alludes to the role of "Okrika Elites" in the conflicts that have ensued between the two communities. In Recommendation 5(II)(e), the Commission advised against the procurement of documents of "shared title", a systematic ploy by the Okrika Elites to, through acquisition of shared title on land, secure a stake and similar rights earned by the Elemes on that particular parcel of land.

The above quotes, taken from Richard A. Joseph and James C. Scott, offer a different dimension from which to analyse the conflicts between Ekpoko and Ogu – and the involvement of sons of the soil who occupy prominent positions in Government. Joseph (1983) further explains how the sons of the soil act as the nexus that connect their ethnic kin to the centre. He explained that “[c]lientelism, and more broadly ethno-clientelism, provides the linkages between village and provincial or state capitals in Africa. Despite the apparent sharp discontinuities in economic benefits and life-styles between those at the centre and the periphery of the statist distributional system, the former can be shown to be linked to the latter through a pyramiding ‘of ethno-clientelistic networks’” (Joseph 1983: 29). In the summations above, “sons of the soil”, “patron-clientelism” and “ethno-clientelism” are theories by which we can define the relationships between rural communities and the ‘centre’ (the state/federal government). These relationships are ostensibly formed through a dyadic association between the patrons and the clients, who through ethnic associations and a sense of kinship, mutually benefit from direct access to “a piece of the state” (Joseph 1987: 56). Though pertinent, these frameworks narrowly focus on the quest for access to state resources both by the patrons and the clients. This quest for access ostensibly results in the rise of ethnic support to install an ethnic-kin in powerful positions for the basic social and material goods that trickles down the pyramid (ibid.). The disadvantage of such a system is that patrimonial politics and ethno-clientelisms are thought to generate conflicts between ethnic groups, because of one ethnic group’s exclusion of the other when cornering state resources (Ikpe 2009: 692-694).

The divergence from these above positions is three pronged. Firstly, the expectation that the relationships are dyadic limits the patrons’ associations to ‘one on one’

personal relationships. This assumption ignores the idea of ‘communal clientelism’, whereby a patron does not only serve the interests of individual clients but represents the interests of his whole community. Secondly, implicit within the explanations of ethno-clientelism, patron-clientelism and Joseph’s notion of ‘prebendalism’, is the idea that these relationships mostly only offer economic gains. This position offers very little attention to the strategic noneconomic benefits that having a patron in government could offer. Thirdly, Ikpe’s supposition that exclusion from state resources leads to conflicts is one-dimensional.¹⁷⁷ It does not take into account how conflicts between ethnic groups can lead one ethnic group to exclude the other from access to state resources. As we shall see as this section develops, all three observations apply to the people of Ekpore and Ogu. The role of the sons of the soil in the conflicts between the two communities offers us an alternative perspective into how the relationships between patrons and their clients take on nonconventional forms – that in some instances help to exacerbate disputes, as is the case in the Ekpore and Ogu conflicts.

In this particular section, I explore the roles of the prominent “sons of the soil” in Ekpore and Ogu, who use their influence in politics and business to benefit their communities, or the ‘soil’ to which their identity is attached. Whilst in the conventional sense of patron-clientelism, the relationships between the patrons and the clients are often defined by how patrons repay their clients through economic incentives in the form of contracts, stipends, employments or other means of economic compensation; there is seldom references made to accommodate other provisions that these relationships deliver. In the Ekpore and Ogu disputes, the role of the prominent sons,

¹⁷⁷ Ikpe (2009: 692) cites some examples where he claims that a number of conflicts have been caused by patrimonial politics and its tendency to lead to the inclusion or exclusion of specific ethnic groups from “cornering state resources”. Whilst plausible, he runs a risk of ignoring the inverse whereby conflicts that already exist between groups might lead one ethnic group to marginalise another from accessing state resources.

the patrons, is redefined to reflect their attachments to ethnic sentimentalities. These attachments have manifested in a new guise of patron-clientelism, one where the interests of 'communal clients',¹⁷⁸ not individual clients, are served to preserve ethnic supremacy over their rivals. In these settings, provisions from patrons to their communal clients are not only economic, they come in the form of services or as is the case in Ekpore and Ogu, in the form of security and strategic disadvantaging of their ethnic rivals. During several meetings with the people from both communities, references were made to the roles played by prominent sons from the other community to disadvantage their rivals. These interferences and both sides resistance to accept the 1958 Supreme Court judgment are partly to blame for prolonging the conflicts between Ogu and Ekpore.

However, the role of the sons of the soil seems to be built upon difficulties that predate the emergence of these new patrons. Prior to 1999, before the creation of the Fourth Republic, the conflicts between the two communities existed even in the absence of supportive political patrons. This changed in 1999 when civilian rule emerged and created opportunities for the emergence of new patrons who had direct access to, and influence over, the power nucleus. In 1999 an Ekpore indigene Chief Precious Ngalele was appointed as the Federal Minister of State for Water Resources and later Minister of Commerce. According to the King of Ogu,¹⁷⁹ he was instrumental in ensuring that the interests of the Ekpore people were looked after at the expense of the Ogu people. According to another interviewee from Ogu,¹⁸⁰ Mr Ngalele used his position as Federal Minister to protect the Ekpore people. He did this by making the community a federal

¹⁷⁸ Communal clients refer to a collective of individuals or a group of clients aligned along ethnic lines with their patrons.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with King Nicholas Nimenibo Ibiebele Loko IX on 12/11/14. This story was also supported by several other interviewees, including Dr Obuoforibo (11/11/14).

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Paul on 20/11/14.

territory as a strategic means of deploying security personnel to protect his communal clients in Ekporo. After instructions from Chief Ngelale, The Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA)¹⁸¹ set up a pineapple farm in Ekporo. By doing this, the land became the property of the NDBDA, and by default a federal government property. To protect government's interests and its surrounding area, NDBDA brought with them, military personnel, mobile police and other security agencies to ward off the threats posed to Ekporo by their Ogu neighbours. During this period, Ogu had no one at federal government level that could counter Chief Ngalele's calculations. Ogu only had one member in the House of Representatives with comparatively less power, so the Ogu people were unable to do anything about the asymmetrical balance of power that emanated from the nucleus of the Federation through Ekporo's powerful patron. However, when Precious Ngalele's term as Minister ended – the power balance returned to the centre. Indeed, the balance of power pendulum now swung in favour of the Ogu people.¹⁸²

Just as the patron of Ekporo was leaving his position of prominence, the patrons of Ogu started to emerge. First in 2003, George Thompson Sekibo, an indigene of Ogu was elected to the House of Representatives. After one term, in 2007, he was elected to represent Rivers State Senatorial District where he was appointed chairman of the Senate Committee on Solid Minerals and a member of the Committees on Gas, Federal Character, Niger Delta, Environment and Commerce. During his second term he was appointed Chairman of the Senate Committee on Defence and Army and member of the

¹⁸¹ The Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) is a parastatal agency set up by General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976 to develop plantation of food crops and to meet the water needs of the people of the Niger Delta Basin. The agency was overseen by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources, and therefore was under the stewardship of Chief Ngelale, the then Minister of Water Resources.

¹⁸² According to those I spoke with, the military presence was successful in staving off attacks from Ogu – it was not intended to intimidate or exclude the Ogu people, but was intended to secure a level of peace between the two communities. The military presence was nevertheless viewed by Ogu people as part of the intimidation tactics employed by Ekporo's prominent sons.

Committees on Niger Delta, Solid Minerals and Housing. This period marked a new era for Ogu. Their patron, who had spent a significant amount of money on community development, took an interest in the disputes between Ekporo and Ogu. According to Barrister Obari, the Senator's prominent position had given the Ogu youth extra impetus to proceed as they felt. He argued that "whilst these people [the youth] are busy carrying out demolition and vandalism of properties in Ekporo, these youths are being given protection by soldiers; drafted there at the insistence of Senator George Sekibo Thompson".¹⁸³¹⁸⁴

During this period, the Ekporo people were unable to fight back because they did not have prominent sons or daughters who could offer them the same level of support the people of Ogu were receiving from Senator George Sekibo Thompson. People from Ekporo claimed that despite police orders to both sides (Ekporo and Ogu) to stop any construction work on the disputed area, the people of Ogu allegedly flouted the orders because they could count on the support of their powerful patrons, the Senator and the First Lady, Patience Jonathan, a fellow Okrikan. The fact that Ogu had powerful patrons meant that police were unable to do anything to stop contravention of police orders. The people of Ekporo claimed that this happened because the police were being hamstrung by the powerful forces who were protecting Ogu. "The police are unable to do anything because they have to protect their individual interests because if the commissioner of police takes action against one or two persons in Ogu, the First Lady uses the IG [Inspector General of Police] to deploy [the commissioner] elsewhere or

¹⁸³ Interview with Barrister Obari on 05/11/14.

¹⁸⁴ At the time of the interview in November 2014, Senator Sekibo was Chairman of the Senate Committee on Defence and Army and member of the Committees on Niger Delta, Solid Minerals and Housing. The senator was previously the chairman of the Senate Committee on Solid Minerals and a member of the Committee on Gas, Federal Character, Niger Delta, Environment and Commerce.

demote or make them suffer.¹⁸⁵¹⁸⁶ Indeed, during the time of my fieldwork, the First Lady, Patience Jonathan had established herself as the person to defend the interests of the Okirka people. This was apparently the pattern of events in Rivers State:

When a particular tribe [ethnic group] has control, access, or is found in the corridor of power, they use that office to advance their tribal quest especially for land. Most of political office holders do not come out openly. They use proxies to cause problems. At the end of the day, they take decisions. Even the Onne Ogu issue concerning the wharf, is all about that too. Presently, one of the top management staff in Onne Oil and Gas Free Zone is from Ogu. He is now advancing the cause of the Ogu people at the wharf. When it was an Onne man, he did similar things to champion his community. It was the First Lady, Patience Jonathan, that has planted many of the Okrikan office holders in their positions.¹⁸⁷

What all these accounts confirm is that where there are no direct gains or losses to the federal government, as was the case during the Niger Delta oil crises, there is very little interests taken by police to manage communal battling as was the case between Ogu and Ekporo. This has allowed patrons and other actors to leverage their direct access to state resources to offer, not only pecuniary support, but also security and protection to their communal clients at the expense of rival ethnic groups. This approach has helped to exacerbate the age-old conflicts between Ekporo and Ogu. It is worth noting that these conflicts between the two rival communities could be simply solved with a little commitment from the state or federal government to enforce the clear ruling passed by the Supreme Court in 1958, which, in very clear terms, has complete instructions of where each community's territory begins and ends.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with the King of Ogu and Barrister Obari on 05/11/14.

¹⁸⁶ The King of Ekporo gave an example where the Commissioner of Police had deployed 50 officers to protect Ekporo, but an order came from above to stop the deployment. The Commissioner was apparently posted elsewhere. The next senior police officer who attempted to protect Ekporo was promoted and was similarly posted elsewhere just so the Ekporo people would not get the security provisions they had demanded.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Paul on 20/11/14.

Whilst it is clear that the disputes are centrally about land, the government's inaction to resolve the conflicts between the two communities might be reversed after discovering new information. Despite Ekporo and Ogu's oil barrenness, it was claimed by an interviewee that oil was indirectly fuelling the conflicts between the two neighbours.¹⁸⁸

*There is a pipeline that runs through Ekporo. There is an oil pipeline that runs through Ekporo. For some time, most of the Ogu boys were siphoning crude from that pipeline. This is why they might have thrown them [the Ekporo people out] so that they will have control over that point. Because the crude they cook, they would have to go to Bodo to get crude, and it is a long distance. Navy, army all those things will begin to worry them. So, if they can find their own pipeline in a neighbouring community there [then they have an incentive to push out that neighbour]. The recent conflicts between the two communities might be tied to that.*¹⁸⁹

Whilst this came as a bombshell as I concluded my interview with Paul, I was able to track down some information showing that there is indeed an oil pipe in Ekporo, which according to Shell, has been tampered with by unspecified assailants.¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, however, I have been unable to verify whether this has contributed to the tensions between the two communities. Although even in the absence of verification, I would argue here that if the conflicts are directly linked to oil as implied by Paul, then perhaps since it is tied directly to the federal government's economic interests, this new threat to national security might force the state to take action to resolve the tensions and conflicts between the two communities. The next section will explore the state's role and capability in managing land disputes.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Paul on 20/11/14.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ See appendix 7.

Land Tenure Acts and Land Reforms: Resolving Unresolved Conflicts

Land is a precious commodity on which all our existence depends. The management of land therefore requires careful treatment with all the seriousness it deserves. Communities, clan, groups, individuals are competitively acquiring land by which the nature of its transaction is every complex. The demand for land is daily on the increase due to population pressure. Therefore any form of management arrangement developed to alleviate and ... [smoothen] land transactions that will be free from all complexity will certainly be a welcome relief. (Saidu 2015: 1).

When it comes to analysing the Niger Delta conflicts, especially with respect to land, there is a tendency to quickly relate land as a resource to other sub-soil natural, oil and gas resources that have been a source of conflicts in the region. Indeed, within the Niger Delta context, land lends itself neatly to the grievance discourse insofar as the other explanatory framework imbibes sub-soil assets within the equation. This is to say that when land grievances are being discussed in relation to Niger Delta communities, it almost always hinges upon whether there are some other sub-soil assets or whether there has been some sort of environmental disaster related to land as a result of these sub-soil assets (see for example Fryna 2001; Watts 2004a; and Ikelegbe 2005). Whilst assessments from these perspectives are incredibly relevant and inform us of the complexity of the Niger Delta conflicts, it is important to consider land in the way Saidu (2015) describes it. In the above excerpt, Saidu makes it clear that land is an important commodity, which our everyday existence depends upon. This dependency is exacerbated by endogenous pressures such as rising population, and with it, competition over access to land. As a number of scholars have observed, the population in Nigeria has increased at an accelerated pace for the past few decades and this increase is taking place in different regions across the country. For example, the

population in northern Nigeria is said to have grown from approximately 16.8 million in 1952 to 47.3 million in 1991 (Boudreaux 2005: 64).

While the census figures in Nigeria are subject to accusations of irregularity because of a tendency for manipulation¹⁹¹ (Adele 2009: 312), it is true that the population in the country is growing at a fast pace, nowhere is this felt more than in the Niger Delta. Some of the cities in the Niger Delta rank highly amongst the most densely populated parts of Nigeria. Many local government areas (LGAs) in two of the three core Niger Delta states, Delta State and Rivers State, are thought to be three to five times as densely populated as an average Nigerian LGA (Ichite 2015: 4). Unsurprisingly, this has implications for competition for space and land.

To mitigate the tensions arising from the stronger than usual competition for land thus requires a well formulated land rights/land tenure system. After all, the “fundamental purpose of property rights, and their fundamental accomplishment, is that they eliminate destructive competition for control of economic resources. Well-defined and well-protected property rights replace competition by violence with competition by peaceful means (Alchian cited in Boudreaux 2005: 62). Alchian’s proclamation is particularly noteworthy especially when we consider the empirical evidence recorded above. As has been already shown, the ambiguity surrounding land ownership in the region has been a source of continued tension causing inter- and intra-communal conflicts.¹⁹² Highlighting the incidence of land disputes in the Niger Delta, the case

¹⁹¹ The politics of census in Nigeria is an issue that has received a lot of attention. However, it is beyond the remit of this study, for further reading see Adele 2009 and Adepoju 1981, for example.

¹⁹² It should be noted that communal land conflicts are not unique to the Niger Delta. Indeed, there are a number of ongoing clashes over access to land in pockets across the country. According Ichite (2015: 13-14), the worse affected part of Nigeria with the highest number of fatalities from land disputes can be found in the northern part of Nigeria. For example, he states that between 2006 and 2014, there were a total of 2170 fatalities in North Central and North East of Nigeria resulting from land related conflicts. The total number in the south was 1047, of which 628 are victims of clashes in the South South geopolitical region, which represents the Niger Delta (ibid. for more on land conflicts in Nigeria see, for example, Harnischfeger 2004; Saidu 2015; Conroy 2014).

studies of Ekporo and Ogu offer an insight into the multiple layers of complication stemming from these initial disputes. For example, whilst the conflicts between the two communities are primarily about access to land, they quickly spiralled into a competition wherein political powerful patrons from the respective communities leveraged their access to state institutions to persecute their neighbours. This particular example speaks to an interesting pattern of patron-clientelism where the patron in a dyadic relationship with his community seeks to represent communal interests in non-economic terms. The irony, of course, is that as a result of some of the land disputes between communities in the region, the state becomes much more involved with warring communities. However, the state's engagement seems to be partial or skewed to represent the interests of the communities with significant political capital within state networks.¹⁹³

Events such as these only serve to exacerbate tense relationships between communities. Evidence also shows that it fosters distrust towards state institutions in warring societies. For example, in lieu of a well-defined unambiguous land tenure and titling system in the case study of the two neighbouring communities in Rivers State, the disputes were taken to court at various times between 1957 and 2015. Despite the courts' unambiguous judgements that both communities ought to demarcate the parcel of land over which the two neighbours were in dispute, at specifically established points, judged by the courts to represent a fair settlement, the reaction from both

¹⁹³ It is important to note, however, that the state's presence in these disputes is not necessarily sanctioned from the top as it should be. In fact, I would argue that state institutions are typically hijacked by powerful political patrons from communities who have access to state networks. This obviously speaks to a number of issues, one of which is an exercise in prebendalism, a subject matter that has been discussed in some detail above. It also gives an impression that the federal government is inherently disinterested in local political disorder and tensions in rural communities – like those in the Niger Delta. Or perhaps that the state lacks the capacity to govern in conflict areas. Both of these conclusions are not particularly ideal for those affected by ongoing discord around land disputes. This is why it is important to get the state involved in helping to resolve conflicts such as this one, between and within communities in and outside of the Niger Delta.

communities has been to ignore the judgement and to proceed with their disputes. This has framed the relationship of both communities for over five decades with periodic skirmishes. The protracted period of unresolved tensions between the two neighbours has, in fact, been passed from generation to generation. When conducting interviews, it was clear that although the older members of both communities were familiar with the history of the disputes because they had been present at the onset, younger members of the sample communities seemed to go by the oral history passed down to them by community elders. Whilst there have been flare-ups in recent years that have helped to crystallise the negative perceptions held by neighbouring youth groups, it is the historical narratives shared by the older members of the communities that the youth groups use to justify their actions to wage war against their neighbours. Of course, these examples are an extension of the main source of land disputes in the Delta. Nonetheless, it demonstrates how resolvable conflicts can easily be compounded with secondary grievances. The consequence, as was the case for the people of Ekporo, is the displacement of entire communities within and outside of the Niger Delta.

With this knowledge, it is imperative therefore to take steps to address the land question in the Niger Delta, and in Nigeria more broadly. To begin, what does the current land tenure system look like in Nigeria? Prior to the introduction of the Land Use Act of 1978, Nigeria's property law was policed under any one of the three laws in the operation at the time: customary law, English common and statutory law, and post-colonial legislation (Boudreaux 2005: 49). According to Nafziger (1992: 176), land tenure across Nigeria was governed under customary laws. With the exception of Lagos, all of the land in southern Nigeria was administered under the Native Land Acquisitions of 1900 Act, which later became the Lands and Native Rights Ordinance of 1916

(Famoriyo 1973). In the North of the country, British conquerors declared all land held under the Fulani administration public property (Nafziger 1992: 176). Under this arrangement put in place by the British colonialists, northern authorities were in charge of supervision and protection of the indigenous population's traditional rights and they had control of the customary land tenure system (ibid. 176-177). Whilst individuals had usufructuary rights to land, by and large, land was considered to be community property (ibid. 176). Within this arrangement, individuals could possess land insofar as it was used for the benefit of their families or their society. They could also pass down land to their descendants; however, individuals could not sell or mortgage land that they had under their possession. This could only be done by the community traditional authorities, and had to satisfy customary laws (ibid.). In essence, land was administered under a community-based tenure system where it would be allocated to family heads by community headman or by a traditional chief (Boudreaux 2005: 71). In turn, family heads would allocate land to family members (ibid.).

Within this arrangement, traditional chiefs as trustees on behalf of their communities played an important role of ensuring that property rights were respected in accordance to customary laws. The chiefs were also responsible for adjudicating disputes to do with land use rights. Through the process of managing land ownership by community and family, an informal property registry emerged. This system depended heavily on local knowledge and oral history (ibid. 72-73; Aderinto 2013: 5). The localised tenure system with informal registration and land rights allocation meant that, in theory, dispute management was also localised. For example, when there was a disagreement between families or between communities, those in dispute would approach the sub-chief of a

third group who would act as the mediator¹⁹⁴ (Boudreaux 2005: 73). This was the method under which disputes were settled under customary laws. Where communities were unhappy with the decision of the appointed adjudicator, they could appeal against these decisions, and in some cases, they would escalate it to involve councils from neighbouring communities or even involve spiritual leaders (ibid. 73-74). Overall, the customary land tenure system allowed for an informal policing of land use. Within it, there were established norms that allowed for due process and proper management of land ownership as well as the management of any potential fallout. Whilst Williams (1992: 588) contends that the introduction of the 1978 Land Use Decree epitomised the expansion of the Nigerian state apparatus in that period, others argue that the 1978 decree was a response to a flailing customary land tenure system. The 1978 land reform,¹⁹⁵ which vested all the land in Nigeria in the hands of the government,¹⁹⁶ was a response to a changing landscape and government of the day's desire to "harmonise and unify" Nigeria's land acquisition system (Saidu 2015: 8). Since the new law vested the "ultimate title to land" in the hands of the government, chiefs, family heads and local communities were no longer responsible for land administration. Instead, the federal government created administrative agencies responsible for these functions, including sales, lease or inheritance of land (Boudreaux 2005: 76, 83).

¹⁹⁴ Whilst the suggestion is that under customary laws, land dispute settlements were localised, the reality, at least from the case study in previous sections above, is that sometimes communities seeking a solution go outside their immediate surroundings for solutions. Perhaps, this might be explained by the ethnic composition in this particular part of Rivers State. Indeed, People of Ogu felt closer to their Ogoni neighbours than the people of Ekporo did. There are underlying tensions between the people of Eleme of which Ekporo is part of and the people of Ogoni. It is thus understandable that the people of Ekporo might view any ruling by the Ogoni authorities as biased.

¹⁹⁵ The Land Use Act superseded existing alienable land laws and replaced them with two types of rights of occupancy. The first was the statutory rights, which granted rights of occupation of land under statutory laws and the second, which was customary rights, granted occupation to land users under customary laws (Modum 2012: 90; Uchendu 1979: 71).

¹⁹⁶ The land decree of 1978 (revised in 1990) was an "Act to Vest all Land comprised in the territory of each State (except land vested in the federal government or its agencies) solely in the Governor of the State, who would hold such Land in trust for the people and would henceforth be responsible for allocation of land in all urban areas to individuals resident in the State and to organisations for residential, agriculture, commercial and other purposes while similar powers with respect to non-urban areas are conferred on Local Governments (27th March 1978) Commencement" (Federal Government of Nigeria 1978: chapter 202; see also Boudreaux 2005: 83-89).

From the above, it is possible to understand why land disputes, especially those between two rival communities could continue for a protracted period. After all, under customary law, asking a third community to settle a dispute between two neighbouring communities, could in itself present unforeseen challenges. For example, where there is an alliance between an adjudicating community and one of two communities involved in a communal land dispute,¹⁹⁷ there could be a legitimate question over fairness and due process. This is one area where land tenure under customary laws could be challenged. This is not to suggest that land tenure under customary law was completely ineffective, I argue the contrary. Indeed, the localisation of land tenure under customary laws¹⁹⁸ was very positive as it helped with land management and some dispute settlements mechanisms (ibid. 73). Still, it was important to ensure that land tenure system would be impermeable to questions of injustice. This is perhaps why the state introduced the 1978 Land Use Act. Some of the key objectives of the 1978 Act, according to Butler (2012: 1) included: “1) reducing land conflicts among citizens; 2) unifying and simplifying land tenure concepts and land administration procedures throughout the country; 3) achieving a more equitable distribution of and access to land rights for all citizens regardless of wealth or position; and 4) facilitating greater government control over land use and development”. These objectives set out in the Act, in particular the first three, should please most Nigerians as it meant every Nigerian citizen could have access to property rights in any part of the country (Agbosu 1988: 5; Uchendu 1979: 69). The involvement of the state was meant to help with the formalisation and

¹⁹⁷ This point is relevant because during fieldwork, it became clear that the Ogu community has a close alliance with their Ogoni neighbours, who were also a neighbouring community to Ekporo. Throughout interviews, interviewees from Ogu kept suggesting that people from Ogoni should be interviewed because they could verify the Ogu narrative. It soon became clear, however, that there were tensions between the people of Ekporo (an Eleme community) and the Ogoni people. These sorts of alliance was strewn all over the area, so it would be difficult to eliminate bias in judgement should adjudication be sought from a third community.

¹⁹⁸ It is worth noting that in rural areas, customary rights are preserved under the law. This essentially gives rights of occupancy in accordance to customary laws to whoever seeks them in rural parts of Nigeria (Butler 2012: 2).

standardisation of the land tenure system in Nigeria, and in turn was to help with clarifying ownership, especially when there are disputes between and within communities (Modum 2012: 90). This goal was pronounced in a speech given by the incumbent president at the time. General Obasanjo exclaimed that the purpose of the reform was to ensure the “limiting, inhibiting and divisive nature of land tenure in [Nigeria]” (President Olusegun Obasanjo, cited in Boudreaux 2005: 84). This particular objective seemed unequivocal.

Almost four decades after its introduction, many of the stated objectives of the 1978 Land Use Act have not been met. Rasak (2011) argues that the introduction of the Act has had no real impact on the way Nigerians engage with the issue of land. According to him, the “... practical result of [the Act] is that there is no change at all in the attitude of the citizens to land or indeed the number of land disputes. The overlords still go to court to ask for forfeiture of the right of the customary tenant. In the same vein, families still sue for a declaration of title to land. In fact, the struggles for land still linger despite the Act” (Rasak 2011: 66-67). The failure of the 1978 Land Use Act has been attributed to the “countless hiccups” surrounding its drafting and implementation¹⁹⁹ (Otubu 2010: 141). Okpala (1982) was especially pessimistic about the chances of the Act achieving its stated objectives. To Okpala, “... the expressed intentions of the Land-use Decree [were] philosophically and theoretically unassailable ... [they were] pious expressions of good intentions [which were] ... not enough in themselves. The highest degrees of equity, integrity, technical efficiency and commitment (of both conviction and funds) are required for a successful and socially desirable outcome of the Decree. To achieve these, the Decree as it stands requires substantial review” (ibid. 584). Unfortunately, his

¹⁹⁹ This section does not seek to assess the intricacies of the 1978 Land Use Act, it seeks only to highlight how the tenure system has impacted the land disputes in the Niger Delta. For a more rigorous analysis of the 1978 Land Use Act, see, for example, Otubu (2010), Modum (2012), Uchendu (1979), Okpala (1982), Williams (1992).

warnings were not heeded to (Modum 2012:21). Instead, the Act has remained pretty much in its original form. The very limited success of the Land Use Act affects Nigeria as a whole, but the Act has made a particularly unique impression on the Niger Delta people. It evokes a different set of sentiments in the region. Beyond governing land, the failure of the system in the Niger Delta can be located in other explanations.

There is a widely shared perception that the Land Use Act has had direct negative impacts on the economic wellbeing of people in the Niger Delta. Some scholars go as far as claiming that the Act has “manifestly entrenched poverty” in the region (Emuedo and Abam 2015: 9). Though misleading, some people in Niger Delta have interpreted the introduction of the 1978 Act as an attempt by the federal government to curtail access to vast wealth of natural resources found in the region (ibid. 14). This is reflected in the narratives around resource control that have emanated from the region in the last few decades. Whilst there might be a case for the people in the region to challenge the federal government on issues relating to resource control, the Act governing ownership of natural resources in Nigeria is a completely different one; the 1969 Petroleum Act. This act was introduced “... to provide for the exploration of petroleum from the territorial waters and the continental shelf of Nigeria and to vest the ownership of, and all on-shore and off-shore revenue from petroleum resources derivable therefrom in the Federal Government and for all other matters incidental thereto” (Federal Government of Nigeria 1969). Whilst revenue generated from natural resource exploration were to be directed to federal government, the operation of oil companies in the region required the corporations to lease land from local oil bearing communities²⁰⁰ (Akpan 2005: 148). This meant that communities could expect direct compensation from corporations

²⁰⁰ Prior to the introduction of the Land Use Act, typically, once an area was identified by oil corporations as the location for exploration, community liaison officers ascertained the ownership rights, after which they start compensation negotiation with the respective owners (Akpan 2005: 148).

setting up operations in their area. There was a direct system of compensation between host communities and oil corporations. This was said to have changed after the introduction of the 1978 Act (ibid.; Emuedo and Abam 2015: 15). As a result of the Act, which vested all land in the hands of the state governor, it was believed that direct compensation to oil producing communities stopped (Emuedo and Abam 2015: 14-15). Whilst this perhaps reflects the 1978 Act's vesting of all land in the hands of the governor, Akpan (2005: 149) explains that the stoppage of payment to communities could not be blamed unequivocally on the 1978 Act. Indeed, land expropriation was included in the 1969 Petroleum Act. It is therefore plausible that the stoppage of rent and compensation to communities is a result of the earlier Act²⁰¹ (ibid. 148).

The misinformation and uncertainty surrounding oil in the Niger Delta and the various Acts that govern ownership of oil and land has had serious implications for communal land disputes in the region. As presented above, the lack of clarity as to which act governs what, and the consequential distrust of successive governments has meant that communities are not particularly confident in the executive branches as an adjudicator of communal land disputes. This much was revealed during fieldwork when some interviewees responded that they would rather go to court than to seek the assistance of the governor.²⁰² Despite this reluctance, many still petition the state because of their desperate need to have the disputes resolved. Still, a very present, almost tangible, feeling is the latent perception that the state has encroached on their land and is stealing from them. As a result, the people are distrustful of the state and its institutions. This might explain why the other branches of the state, except for the judicial branch, have not been involved in the adjudication of disputes in the region. In terms of being

²⁰¹ Akpan's discussions with some communities in the Niger Delta revealed that some corporations had stopped paying rent and compensations to host communities even before the introduction of the 1978 Act (Akpan 2005: 149).

²⁰² Interview with the Paramount Ruler of Ekporo and Barrister Obari O Obari on 05/11/14.

directly involved in local land disputes, the state does not seem to have any particular presence despite some people requesting that the state get involved. So there is evidence of petitions sent to the state government and federal government – with no response.²⁰³ This contributes to the larger Niger Delta conflicts, because these conflicts spill over to other parts of the region. For example, youths from Ogu were apparently collected and inculcated into the militancy struggle. This was problematic, because when they returned to their homes in Ogu, as hardened ex-combatants, they were much more hostile to their neighbours. Thus, if not addressed, this attendant revolving vicious circle will continue to contribute to the unrest in the region.

Conclusion

Whilst the usual oil-centric explanations of the Niger Delta conflicts have a space in the study of the region's struggles, this chapter has begun to demonstrate the importance of shifting some attention from this arena to other areas. We should broaden our focus to address issues that have received very little coverage, yet continue to be prominent in the daily experiences of people in the region. Oil is unquestionably important to the Niger Delta and is very important to the Nigerian federation as it contributes a significant percentage to the national coffers. However, it has too much of a dominant position in the conscious and subconscious considerations that determine how the state engages with Niger Delta citizens (Ehwarieme 2011: 6). This has led to a lopsided association whereby the state's decisions to react to particular sets of problems, particularly in the Niger Delta context, are determined by whether there is an immediate threat to 'national security,' i.e. oil revenues, or whether the issues are

²⁰³ Some respondents showed copies of letters sent to the state and federal government requesting assistance with settling the disputes.

localised such that a decision can be taken to ignore them.²⁰⁴ Taking such a position in dealing with the communities in the Niger Delta has many unintended consequences that fundamentally confirm the assumptions that only direct threats to oil, is a threat to national security (Okoli and Orinya 2013). Indeed, there are confluences of fluid factors that interplay to determine how the Niger Delta citizenry react to the state.

The Ekporo and Ogu conflicts offer alternative perspectives from which we can analyse Niger Delta conflicts. Despite the conflicts being primarily about contending claims to parcels of land, there were additional layers that offered secondary dimensions to the disputes between the neighbours. For example, there were several but very limited indications that the disputes between the neighbours had an ethnic dimension to them.²⁰⁵ However, the difficulty with resolving the conflicts between the two communities appear to be related to a number of issues such as the conflicting oral history provided by the different sides. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this research to verify the accuracy of the conflicting narratives, the ruling of the Supreme Court Judgement of 1958 was clear and precise about where each community's land begins and ends. Unfortunately, however, the Supreme Court Judgement has not been heeded because of what appears to be a lack of appetite from the state and federal government to enforce the Court's decision. As a result of the 1999 conflicts between the two communities, the Rivers State Government, led by Governor Odili, set up a Commission of Inquiry to review the disputes between the two towns and between their ethnic kin, the Eleme and Okrika. The Commission returned with a decision published by the Rivers State government in a white paper. The Commission built on the decisions of the

²⁰⁴ Indeed, this may not be unique to the Niger Delta. There is an assumption that the state only responds to threats directed at the center. Therefore, it ignores issues that *only* threaten local peace.

²⁰⁵ During an interview with an Ogu resident, he suggested that the conflicts might be resolved if the people of Ekporo joined their Ogu-Bolo Local Government (instead of remaining with the Eleme Local Government). The impression was that this would therefore allow Ekporo to imbibe the culture and traits of their neighbours who were much closer geographically to them than the rest of their Eleme kin. Interview with Silas on 21/11/2014.

1958 Supreme Court Judgement and implored the state government to enforce the rulings of the 1958 arbitration.

To date, the federal and state government have failed to implement this ruling and to take actions to resolve the issues between the neighbours. Beyond the court rulings, the lack of state's involvement in dispute settlement between the two communities has allowed prominent sons of the soil from both communities to leverage their political and economic clout to defend the respective interests of their people. Between 1999 and 2003, an Ekporo politician, Precious Ngelale, who at the time was the Minister of State for Water Resources, used his access to state institutions to deploy the military and security agencies to offset any counters from the citizens of Ogu. Between 2003 and 2014, Ogu prominent sons (and daughters) of the soil have also leveraged their connections to the state to offer support to their community. Their role as the defenders of their communities is a different take on the classic patron-clientele relationship whereby relationships with patrons are dyadic and are often economic-centric. In the conflicts between these two rival factions, their patrons have offered their 'communal clients' protection and security from outside attacks. This has, instead of assuaging the tensions between Ekporo and Ogu, exacerbated the disagreements between the neighbours. As a result of the power imbalance in 2014, skewed in favour of the Ogu people, the people of Ekporo were displaced from their community in January 2013 and remained in exile till January 2015 (Dikewoha 2015).

The final part of this chapter analysed the role of Nigeria's ambiguous land tenure system. Relating the current tenure system to the disputes between Ekporo and Ogu, this section was able to explore the overall land tenure framework in Nigeria. By examining the effectiveness of the customary laws, I was able to highlight the

informality and possible challenges surrounding this process as a means of regulating land use in the region. I also examined the mechanisms used under customary laws to settle land dispute. In theory, whilst having a localised dispute settlement mechanism is beneficial and has many advantages, there were possibilities that these systems would be bypassed by some communities who perceive judgments to carry inherent biases. I also explored the shift from customary laws to a formalised land tenure system introduced through the 1978 Land Use Act, which vested all land in each state solely in the hands of the Governor of the state. This new system was meant to introduce new institutions that would help to maintain cordial ownership and use of land in the country. However, these institutions, it was found have failed to arrest the incidence of land disputes in the region. Indeed, within a Delta context, the vesting of land and the entire sub-soil asset to the state has led to complications between communities in the region and the federal and state government. Despite having jurisdiction over land dispute settlement across the country, it was found that the state was notably absent in dispute settlements in the Niger Delta. Despite numerous court rulings, communities in the region have carried on disputes that in theory have been resolved in the country's courts. This section in essence is a reminder that the state has a duty to properly police the land disputes in the region, and across Nigeria because as we have seen in recent months and years, this is one of the main issues that pits youths from neighbouring communities against each other. The theme of youth involvement in communal conflicts will be explored in the next chapter.

SLOW REVOLUTION OF THE RISING TIDES: Failing Traditional Institutions, Youth Restiveness, and Erosion of Cultural Values

Introduction

In the absence of formal election processes and democratic institutions of community government, ordinary people are forced to resort to a range of other means to gain some control over their rulers and curtail abuses of patrimonial power... "Youth", with all its multiple roles and meanings, and despite the ever present manipulations of rivalling patrons, presents the main expression of resistance against the worst abuses of patrimonial power in Nigeria; it is as "youth" that ordinary people seek accountable rulers where other opportunities for democratic involvement are missing. (Von Hellermann 2010: 280)

If chieftaincy could be used as a shorthand for community composition, economic changes is its antithesis ... The introduction of new companies revealed fractures not only between the elders and the younger more educated farmers, but also among elders themselves. Economic change exposed, provoked and facilitated conflicts within the community in general and the chieftaincy institution in particular. In the process, both chieftaincy and community were gradually redefined. (Mustapha and Jones 2005: 237)

The above quotations position "youth" at the centre of resistance in Nigeria. What makes Von Hellermann's argument salient however is the agency and identity ambiguity afforded to occupiers of the moniker 'youth'. To Von Hellermann, youth is not simply a body or group defined by age – youth is an idea, any group that poses a challenge to the institutional status quo of the socio-political order. This observation is particularly important when we come to analyse recent uprisings in the Niger Delta. Many of the conflicts in the region have been manifestation of youth disaffection – though funnelled through one central theme of collective resistance against the

oppression of monolithic groups, i.e. the state and multi-national (oil) corporations (MNCs), youth resistance in the region harbour more nuanced characteristics which will be teased out in this chapter as in the ones before.

In this chapter, youth's challenge to authority will be analysed within the context of a modern uprising posing a threat to the traditional status quo in Nigeria; although, the focus will be on the Niger Delta more specifically. This will be done by positioning youth as the challenger to traditional institutions – in particular, this chapter will focus on youth's challenge to dominant chieftaincy positions that have been eroded in recent years due to myriad factors, including economic changes. Despite the usual suggestions that the roles and position of chiefs and paramount rulers are rigid and interminable (Vaughan 2005: 115-116), the reality as Mustapha and Jones (2005:253) explained is much more complex. They argue that it is erroneous to depict chiefs as "...‘custodian[s]’ of culture and tradition", because the very essence of chieftaincy institution changes. They elaborate on this point by asserting that the

... institution of chieftaincy is located at the meeting point of many forces and tendencies in contemporary African society. It lies between the past and the present, between ‘tradition’ and modernity, between elites and the people, between power and community. It is precisely because of this intersection that the institution is open to pressures and multiple definitions ... [C]hiefs try to use their positions to corner public benefits, and ‘tradition’ is nothing but a fig-leaf to hide self-interested behaviour (Mustapha and Jones 2005: 254)

From Mustapha and Jones' explanation, we can infer that the idea of chieftaincy²⁰⁶ is inherently vague and is thus open to contestation from actors with varied interests.

²⁰⁶ The idea of chieftaincy here refers to how the role of chiefs are understood both by those who control it and those who challenge the legitimacy of the role and the occupants of the role.

These contestations might emanate from within²⁰⁷ a community, wherein agents with vested interests present a challenge to the stool in order to have their underlying objectives served. This might manifest in various guises – for example, contestation could be competition amongst chiefs for access to a stool and the largesse attached to it, or – as will be presented in this chapter – it could be disputes between chiefs and their commune. In recent years, dissident groups, especially “youths”, have been known to challenge their chiefs for mismanagement of the stool (Asuni 2009: 12 and Vaughan 2000: 213). These two examples of potential challenge to chieftaincy institutions are situated within the boundaries of tradition and modernity. In one sense, competition for chieftaincy stools might be described as an unintended means of honouring the significance of the position. After all, in accordance with the usual methods of emphasising self-proclaimed rights, chiefs use cultural parlance, embedded in traditional history, as the anchor of their legitimacy and rights to rule over their community (Vaughan 2000: 214).

Whilst a cultural justification for ruling could be situated within a context of preserving tradition, the newly emerging ‘modern’ class – the youth – seem undeterred by the grandstanding of tradition. Indeed, youths are more prepared to challenge the authority²⁰⁸ of chieftaincy institutions. The tensions in the relationships between the defenders of tradition, the chiefs, and the bastions of modernity, the youths, is one worthy of serious consideration, especially within the Niger Delta context. As documented in the preceding chapters, recent conflicts in the Niger Delta have largely

²⁰⁷ Chieftaincy institutions also face external challenges from competing institutions – for example, the new colonial administration transformed the idea of traditional authority in South Western Communities in Nigeria (see Vaughan 2000: 22 – 43).

²⁰⁸ Pratten (2006: 708) in his study of Annang youth makes a larger point about the resurgence of youth actors who through activism, either through “familiar frameworks” or through other social practices, mobilise to either capture the state or protect themselves and their communities from its marginalisation. For other accounts of youth challenge to authority in Nigeria, see for example Pratten (2008), Smith (2004), Reno (2002), Nolte (2004).

been understood through a limiting, unifocal, and economic determinist perspective. This chapter contributes to the overarching premise of the thesis by charting the conflict experience in Onne, an Eleme community in Rivers State. In the context of the conflict in Onne, I explore the tensions between tradition and modernity, the conflicts between chiefs and youths, and the role of new economic actors in fermenting communal tensions between these two competing factions. Indeed, economic change in the community plays a visibly significant role, but only as far as to augment and exacerbate pre-existing communal conflicts.

In the last five decades, Onne has registered a number of disputes relating to competition over the rightful heir to the community chieftaincy stool.²⁰⁹ However, in recent years, the fragmentation in Onne has extended beyond the usual disputes surrounding ascension to the throne. Whilst there are still competing claims over rights to the chieftaincy stool, the emergence of a disparate collective of MNCs has destabilised the social order that prevailed prior to the arrival of these new corporations. Their very presence is symbolic of the change that has engulfed Onne; it represents the disruption of traditional practices by modernisation and incursion of these neo-colonial agents. Although we can use von Hellerman's and Mustapha and Jones' conclusions to explain some of the communal clashes in Onne – that is, we can use agency of youths and the ephemerality of chieftaincy institutions as the theoretical underpinning of the communal clashes in Onne – the neo-colonial theory would help us to neatly identify the points where the agency of youth and the ephemerality of traditional institution intersect. It is possible that these two factors run parallel to each other and never

²⁰⁹ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

crossover at any point – however, evidence from interviews during fieldwork suggests that presence of these MNCs has allowed these two points to intersect.

To make the above arguments, this chapter will be broken down into five sections. In the first, *Onne an Eleme Community: A Brief History of Chieftaincy Disputes*, I present the contextual background of the chieftaincy disputes in Onne by historicising the multiple events that have led up to the current impasse in the community.²¹⁰ I will examine the paradox of chieftaincy institutions – that is, instead of being an agency for community harmony – the institution has been a source of many communal conflicts in recent years. The second section, *Multinational Corporations in Onne: The arrival of the Kingmakers*, analyses the role of MNCs in altering the relationships within the community. The section will attempt to combine the idea of chieftaincy institutions as being fluid and subject to change with the notion of youths as the agents of modernisation. Through this insight, the section explores how MNCs have exploited the perceived intergenerational differences between chiefs and youths in Onne in order to maximise their profits. The third section, *Emergence of Youth Groups: Challenging the Domination of the Old Guards*, will explore the idea of youths as agents of modernisation in the community. Whilst the region as a whole faced a period of youth revolt, uniquely, the youths in Onne turned inward to challenge the role of chiefs in the perceived marginalisation of the community's youth body.²¹¹ The fourth section, *Competition or Continuity? Highlighting the Myth of Differences in Intergenerational Disputes*, focuses on theorising the localised disputes in Onne. It questions whether there are actually more commonalities than differences within the identified interests of youth groups and the

²¹⁰ Onne currently has two chiefs recognized by different factions in the community as the legitimate titleholder. Although, to my knowledge, this has not resulted in direct combat between the two factions, the ramifications of having two people claiming to be the legitimate occupier of the stool could have serious implications.

²¹¹ This is significant because the prevailing literature asserts that youth conflicts in the region were against MNCs and the state. But, as the Onne experience will show, some of the youth uprisings in the region were intra-communal and were targeted at actors believed to be colluding with outside agents.

interest of the traditional elites. The section concludes by trying to offer a conceptual framework from which to examine the myth of difference between tradition and modernity.

The final section, *Neo-Colonialism meets the “Transgenerational Continuum”: Challenging the Myth of Opposing Interests*, explores the frictions between modernity and old practices. Often overlooked as a significant catalyst of conflicts in the region, evidence shows that there are serious tensions between ‘youth’ groups, the stewards of modernisation, and the old traditional elites, the gatekeepers of tradition. The ***transgenerational continuum*** theory developed in the sections above will be further explored in this section. In the section I argue that although there is competition between youth modernisers and the traditional elites, the preservers of old ideas, the economic inducement supplied by the neo-colonial MNCs keeps the interests of these factions aligned – even if they seem to run parallel to each other.

ONNE an Eleme Community: A Brief History of Chieftaincy Disputes

Geographically located 25 kilometres south of Port Harcourt, Onne Community is one of the ten sub clans of the Eleme Kingdom.²¹² Within Onne, there are four constituent communities: Agbeta, Alejor, Ekara and Ogoloma. These communities are broken down into compounds which are further fragmented into smaller family units. These compounds are headed by local chiefs. For example, in 1937 Alejor had three compounds and those compounds were headed by three different chiefs (Osaronu 2013: 10). The other three communities also had a corresponding number of chiefs to match the number of compounds within the community. Before the arrival of the

²¹² Eleme Kingdom consists of ten towns and several adjoining villages. These ten towns belong to two subgroups: the Nchia and the Odido. Nchia towns are Ogale, Agbonchia, Aleto, Alesa, Alode, and Akpajo. The Odido towns are Ebubu, Onne, Eteo, and Epkoro.

colonialists, the four communities in Onne had leaders that were looked up to by their people. Although their roles were not specified or well defined, along with other nobilities in the community, the chiefs worked to ensure community cohesion and to represent the interests of the people whom they served. Historically, the chiefs were responsible for organising wrestling matches, and the Yam Festival (ibid. 16). After the British colonial officers arrived, they reshaped the chiefs' role to include tax collection. The chiefs' positions were important to the new arrivals insofar as it allowed the colonial office to forge an indirect relationship with people in the communities. The chiefs were effective conduits between the colonialists and the people, generating income for the colonial office in Britain and working to maintain peace in their communities (ibid. 14-15).

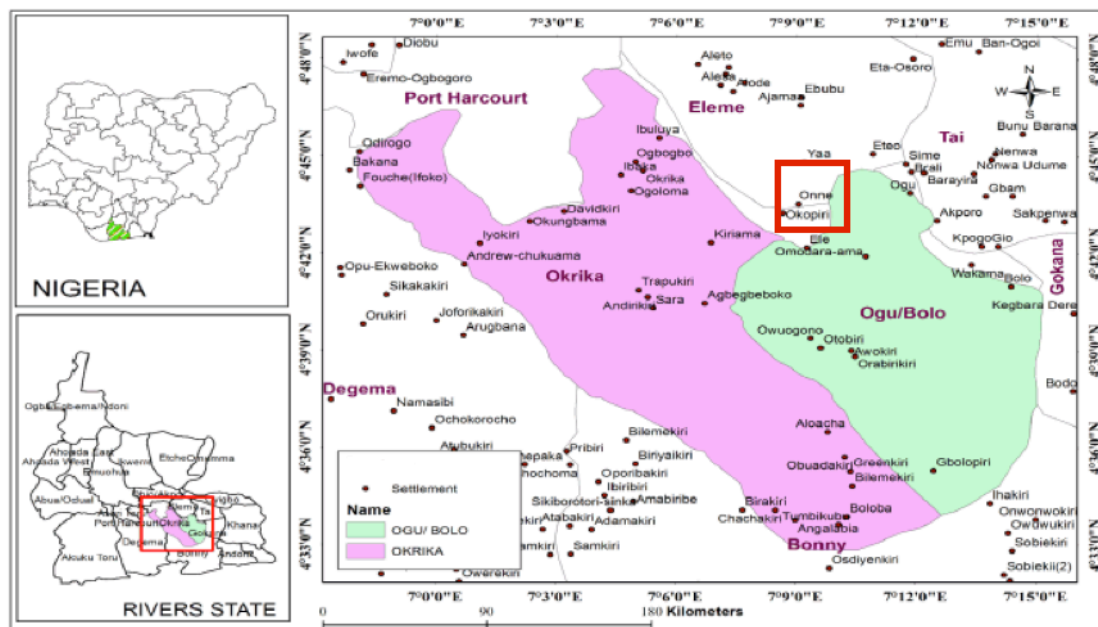


Figure 9: The map above shows Onne's geographical location in Eleme (Source: Nwankwoala et. al 2017)

Since independence, the traditional institutions in Nigeria have generally become more formalised and better structured, but this advancement is not reflected in Onne (Adjaye and Misawa 2006: 8-9). In Onne, there is a Paramount Ruler who oversees the affairs of the four constituent communities. The four constituent communities – Agbeta, Alejor,

Ekara, and Ogoloma, respectively – have sub-clan heads who report to the Paramount Ruler. These constituent communities also have individual Land Priests responsible for “appeas[ing] the gods of the land” (Osaronu 2013: 16). There are also eleven village heads and chiefs who are part of the traditional governance structure. The land priests are also tasked with finding replacements for a deceased or dethroned sub-clan head. In the case of a deceased or dethroned Paramount Ruler, the Chairman of the Council of Chiefs is expected to fill the vacancy. These measures were put in place to prevent the sully of the high esteem attached to these traditional stools; it was also expected to mitigate disputes that may arise as a result of uncertainty. Unfortunately, despite these arrangements, competition over ascension to chieftaincy stools has led to a number of noteworthy disputes in the community. One of the main causes of this phenomenon is the ambiguity surrounding the selection of chiefs. As one of my interviewees, Chief Casca-Ogusu, explained to me, the chieftaincy stool in Onne is often open to contestation because “[it] is not hereditary”,²¹³ as there are no royal houses.²¹⁴

Although there is some wisdom in Chief Casa-Ogusu’s suggestion, as is shown in chapter 5 of this thesis, even in communities where chieftaincy is hereditary and where there are royal houses, other factors – such as, determining the next, rightful family or royal house to ascend a stool – can lead to chieftaincy disputes.²¹⁵ Indeed, it would seem that Onne has a more functional selection process. Onne’s Paramount Ruler is selected by election – and for a person to be eligible, “... he must be an indigene of Onne with proven integrity and mature in age. The election would normally be ratified by the Land Priest of Ogoloma – Onne (Head of all Land Priests in Onne)” (Indorama Eleme Petrochemicals

²¹³ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogusu on 12/12/2015.

²¹⁴ See appendix 4, Corrupt Practices, Misrule, Desecration of the Stool of the Oneh-Eh-Eta Onne and Conduct Likely to Cause a Breach of Peace by One J.E. Nkpornwi and Barr. J. D. Osaronu, as Paramount Rulers of Onne, a letter from the land priests and elders of Onne sent to the Police Commanders and Governor of Rivers State.

²¹⁵ See chapter 4 for example.

Ltd 2012: xxxiii). This seems pretty straightforward, yet the community is currently engaged in ongoing chieftaincy disputes with multiple interested parties. But these recent disputes are not the first of the kind in Onne. In a documented account of the history of chieftaincy in Onne, the community was described to have had only six paramount rulers. The first, Chief Bellor Osarokwu was succeeded by Chief Osarowaite, who in turn was replaced by Chief B.L. Osarowaite. After being accused of being a traitor, Chief Osarowaite was replaced by R.O. Ogosu, who was deposed by his brother, retired Justice Chief Wai-Ogosu²¹⁶. Chief Justice Wai-Ogosu was in turn replaced by King Osaronu (Osaronu 2013: 15). Told this way, the story of kingship in Onne appears relatively straightforward, but unique circumstances surrounded the ascension and deposition of Chief Osarowaite, and the ascension of his three successors.

According to Chief Casca Ogosu,²¹⁷ the son of fourth Paramount Ruler of Onne, Chief R.O. Ogosu, the current chieftaincy disputes in Onne are rooted in a series of events that transpired between 1959 and 1999. After the chieftaincy stool for the Paramount Ruler of Onne became vacant in early 1950s, it moved on to Agbeta from Ekara (where the previous Paramount Ruler, Chief Osarowaite was from). When the stool arrived in Agbeta for Chief R.O Ogosu to be crowned the next Paramount Ruler, he was unable to ascend the throne. Chief R.O Ogosu was, at the time, a federal civil servant, which, according to convention, precluded him from holding a chieftaincy position, given the perceived conflict of interests. Unwilling to forgo the opportunity to fulfil the role, Chief R.O. Ogosu tasked Chief B.L. Osarowaite with the job of deputising for him as the Paramount Ruler of Onne. This arrangement was met with approval and there was no known public resistance to the idea. This enabled Chief R.O. Ogosu to continue with his

²¹⁶ Indeed, there is historical precedence for this in Nigeria. In one example, Dike (1956: 130) documents the account of ex-king Akitoye deposed by his nephew 1845 even before the advent of colonialism.

²¹⁷ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

position as civil servant whilst the stool remained in Agbeta awaiting his retirement from the civil service. This allowed Chief B.L. Osarowaite to become the third Paramount Ruler of Onne. However, Chief Osarowaite's tenure as deputising Paramount Ruler was short-lived, as he was removed from the position for transgressing.²¹⁸ The vacancy forced Chief R.O. Ogosu to take up the position and in 1959 he became the fourth Paramount Ruler of Onne.

Chief R.O. Ogosu presided over Onne up until the 1980s, when his brother, [Chief] Justice S.A. Wai-Ogosu, retired from service as the acting Chief Judge of Rivers State and challenged him for the stool. Justice Wai-Ogosu's nephew²¹⁹ claims that the retired Justice's move to depose his brother as the Paramount Ruler of Onne was highly political. He argues that the followers of the retired Justice had intended to leverage his connections in government. Being acting Chief Judge during the tenure of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was perceived to mean that Wai-Ogosu was closely aligned with the governing administration. Fostering a close relationship with the NPN would have offered great socio-political and economic dividends to the community, especially at a time when the incumbent Paramount Ruler was believed to support the opposition party, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP). The support from constituents encouraged Justice Wai-Ogosu to seek to become the Paramount Ruler of Onne, and his quest to achieve this was ostensibly aided by his connections to the key decision makers in Onne, Eleme, and Rivers State, as a whole. The political inflection of this dispute is all too prevalent in chieftaincy disagreements in the Niger Delta and perhaps elsewhere in

²¹⁸ The circumstances surrounding Chief Osarowaite's removal are unclear, but he was said to have committed offences that warranted his removal from the stool.

²¹⁹ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

Nigeria.²²⁰ It is habitual for disputes surrounding governance in the region – even traditional governance – to have formal institutional political dimensions. This point has been explored to varying degrees in chapters 4 and 5, but it is necessary to be reminded of the deep divisions caused by party politics, even at the local and traditional government level (see for example Mustapha and Jones 2005: 245-253 and Vaughn 2000: 69-137, 155- 193).

The dispute between the Ogosu brothers marked the beginning of what was to become the new norm of chieftaincy dispute in the community. Indeed, the division between the brothers allowed other interested parties to manipulate and restructure the weak chieftaincy system to reflect their immediate interests. This is revealed in the actions of the then future Paramount Ruler, Chief J.D. Osaronu,²²¹ who at the time was secretary to the Paramount Ruler, Chief R.O. Ogosu.²²² The disputes between the two Ogosu²²³ brothers²²⁴ became a judicial issue, and ended up in Rivers State High Court, Bori. The court ruled in favour of Chief R.O. Ogosu remaining as the Paramount Ruler of Onne²²⁵ whilst Chief Wai-Ogosu was made the Chief of Agbeta, one of the four constituent communities. The issue at the time was that, as is indicated above, to be eligible for Paramount Ruler's position, the candidate must be the current leader of one of the four constituent communities. In essence, despite the Court's ruling, which in theory favours

²²⁰ A popular traditional ruler in the Southwest of Nigeria, Odemo of Ishara, Oba Akinsanya, is noted to have said that traditional rulers are "never out of politics". He famously asserted that "... [w]hat else is more than politics when government speaks to the people through the obas [or traditional rulers] and the people to the government through the same channels ... Obas must follow the taste of the people on party politics - as experience had shown obas who refuse to toe the line of their people had often fallen into trouble." (Vaughn 2000: 140-141)

²²¹ King J.D. Osaronu is one of the two recognized Paramount Rulers of Onne. The other being Chief Johnson Nkporiwi.

²²² Whilst serving as secretary to the Paramount Ruler of Onne, Chief Osaronu was sponsored by the Paramount Ruler and won the elections to become the minority leader of the Rivers State House of Assembly in 1978.

²²³ Chief R.O. Ogosu was represented in court by his secretary who was also his attorney, Chief Osaronu. Mr F.G. Peters represented Justice Wai-Ogosu.

²²⁴ Although the word 'brother' in Nigerian parlance can be ambiguous, sometimes representing extended kinship – the Ogosu brothers were in fact biological brothers.

²²⁵ The Court ostensibly delivered this judgment because, prior to the filing of this case, there were no official records to help to determine the normal processes for selecting Paramount Rulers in Onne - interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu 12/12/2015.

the incumbent Paramount Ruler, the real beneficiary was Justice Wai-Ogosu, as upon being made the Chief of Agbeta, he automatically became eligible to take up the Paramount Ruler's stool.

In support of the Court's ruling was evidence given by another interested party. The overall King of Eleme, Onneh-eh-Eleme, who was the head of the whole of Eleme community including Onne, gave to the Court. He helped to reaffirm the Court's position by claiming that to be eligible for the chieftaincy stool, one only ought to be an illustrious son of the community and that there was no need to be head of any of the sub-clans or any of the four constituent communities. This claim, apparently only served to buttress the King's own position. The King, who was not a chief of any of the sub-clan of Eleme, had been installed to his stool by his own younger brother, so the evidence he provided ostensibly helped to cement his own position as the king, since the Court's ruling dissuaded potential challengers from contesting his stool.²²⁶ Despite wanting to challenge the ruling of the Court, and being encouraged to do so by his legal representatives, Chief R.O. Ogosu was convinced not to bring such a challenge by his son, Chief Casca-Ogosu. Chief Casca-Ogosu at the time felt that his father, the Paramount Ruler, had already invested irrecoverable sums of money and a lot of energy in the action.²²⁷ This resulted in a period of relative calm, but former supporters – especially Chief J.D. Osaronu, who felt that the Paramount Ruler had left himself exposed to being deposed – moved camp to support Justice Wai-Ogosu.

Chief J.D. Osaronu mooted the idea to the retired Justice that the two of them, with a wealth of legal expertise, could work together to usurp the incumbent Paramount Ruler.

²²⁶ The King was an "illustrious son" who had not been a chief in his community. By making the above claim, he was seeking to preserve his own position therefore discouraging any potential challenge to his stool.

²²⁷ Chief Casca Ogosu explained that he felt at the time that a legal process would be undignified.

Justice Wai-Ogosu was said to have agreed to this plan, emboldened by his status as the sitting Chief of Agbeta. Chief Osaronu was believed to have drafted a letter retiring Chief R.O. Ogosu from the position of Paramount Ruler. Immediately after the Chief's deposition, Chief Osaronu and Justice Wai-Ogosu colluded to create new institutions to consolidate their statuses. Justice Wai-Ogosu was installed as the King of Onne, whilst Chief Osaronu became the Chairman of the Council of Chiefs. The position given to Justice Wai-Ogosu was only ceremonial – whilst Chief Osaronu as Chairman of the Council of Chiefs wielded huge influence in the community. This was reflected in how activities and meetings were planned. Chief Osaronu hosted many of the important meetings at his residence thus securing his status as the *de facto* Paramount Ruler of Onne. Despondent at how things had transpired between the former Paramount Ruler and his brother, the King of Onne, Justice Wai-Ogosu, the younger members of Chief R.O. Ogosu's camp decided that they would challenge the King's status by installing Chief Johnson Nkporonwi²²⁸ as their own recognised king. Under Chief Johnson Nkporonwi, Chief Casca-Ogosu was made the Secretary of Onne Council of Chief – but in his own words, “after just two years, [he] resigned”, because he felt that Chief Nkporonwi was unfit for the position.²²⁹

Chief Nkporonwi's tenure as the rival King of Onne coincided with a period of increased industrial activity in the community. Chief Nkporonwi leveraged his position as rival king to seek rents from enterprises that did business in and around the community. Though perceived to be illiterate, he managed to secure wide support, especially from youths, as a result of his approach towards the MNCs that had business interests in the community

²²⁸ Chief Nkporonwi had worked for Justice Wai-Ogosu before being installed as the competing King. The steps to install Chief Nkporonwi were taken as a direct affront to King Justice Wai-Ogosu who was believed to have betrayed his younger brother, Chief R.O. Ogosu.

²²⁹ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

at the time. For example, “he used to ask young boys to go and catch company executives, when brought to his house, [Chief Nkpornwi] would flog them, he asked them to pay him money, that was the language the company executives understood then. When you go for a job and the executives tell you there is no vacancies, when they heard of [Chief Nkpornwi] – vacancies suddenly became available”.²³⁰ He was widely liked and supported by the youths and security agents who had benefited from his generosity. In return for the benefits they had received, the latter turned a blind eye to Chief Nkpornwi’s actions, which often pushed legal boundaries. “[Early in his tenure] he would send youth, they’ll go and capture white men and bring them back to him, he’ll give them this hot drink, ‘kai kai’, this illicit gin to drink, under a hot sun, tell them to pay this for libation, pay that, pay that”.²³¹ Though initially widely supported by a strong delegation of youths, Chief Nkpornwi was disliked by the elite class, as they felt that he lacked the necessary decorum²³² for the position he occupied. As a result, there was some resistance to his reign and when the King, Justice Wai-Ogosu, died, it gave Chief J.D. Osaronu an opportunity to express an interest in the ‘vacant’ position.

Despite the high level of mistrust of Chief J.D. Osaronu following the number of incidents he was involved in, including the usurpation and duping of the Ogosu brothers, the Chief was preferred to Chief Nkpornwi. The view at the time was that installing Chief Osaronu as King of Onne would help the community prepare against external threats presented by neighbouring communities, including Ogu and Okrika.²³³ Though viewed to be

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Chief Nkpornwi was said to lack the social etiquette necessary for the position he occupied. It was said that he sometimes went to state functions and against all protocol would sit in the seats of more senior dignitaries. He would sometimes be dragged on the floor out of functions. These actions were never enough to embarrass Chief Nkpornwi, but it embarrassed his followers and his community.

²³³ A common view shared by the people of Eleme, including people from Onne, is that Ogu and Okrika people have access to powerful patrons who at any point can be called upon at the disadvantage of the whole Eleme community. This view was expressed by some interviewees, as noted in Chapter 5 of this thesis, and was repeated during interviews about chieftaincy disputes in Onne.

internally divisive, “when it came to the issue between Onne and the neighbouring communities, Chief Osaronu stands supreme, he stands tall”.²³⁴ The view that Chief Osaronu was a powerful patron, capable of defending the interests of the people of Onne when in combat with other communities, secured him considerable support. He was, as a result of this belief, elevated to succeed King Justice Wai-Ogosu as the widely supported King of Onne. His promotion to this position, though viewed with pessimism from some quarters, also created the hope that the King, who is widely regarded as an intellectual,²³⁵ would deftly negotiate the best deals for the community. However, as soon as he was installed as king, the early optimism quickly faded and was replaced by angst and disenfranchisement. Indeed, the subsequent challenge to Osaronu’s status as the King of Onne is grounded in his interactions, not only with the other chiefs, but also – as the representative of his community – with MNCs and his engagement with members of the community. The next section will explore in more detail, the relationship between King Osaronu and companies hosted in Onne.

Multinational Corporations in Onne: The arrival of the Kingmakers

*[King Osaronu] is a nice man but terribly greedy (Interview respondent)*²³⁶

*The more structured a community is, the better for us, the more structured a community is, the better for them (MNC Executive)*²³⁷

The two quotations above represent two anchoring messages that reflect the interactions between the Onne monarchy and the MNCs hosted by the community. The first is an exemplary view shared by people who have inside knowledge of the usual and

²³⁴ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

²³⁵ Chief Osaronu received a First Class degree at Obafemi Awolowo University and subsequently established himself as a prominent lawyer in his community and beyond. This gained him reverence amongst his peers and equally amongst dissenters

²³⁶ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

²³⁷ Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

regular negotiations between the traditional hierarchy and MNCs in Eleme and in Onne more specifically. The second view, expressed by an MNC executive, indicates the intrinsic alignment of interests between MNCs and community stakeholders. Indeed, a community with a more functional governance structure would, in theory, offer mutual benefits to MNCs and their host communities. As has been shown in the preceding section, however, Onne's traditional hierarchy is not particularly well structured because of the constant contestations amongst rulers and would-be contenders for the stool. This in turn is reflected in the ways in which MNCs engage with the community. Without thoroughly examining the facts, it is easy to ascribe blame to MNCs hosted in Onne for exploiting²³⁸ the host community and for invariably contributing to the conflict triggers that have fermented divisions between sections of the population. If there was any exploitation by MNCs, this exploitation would have been facilitated by the dysfunctional traditional governance structure in the community. The following section will reflect upon these weak structures, the role of MNCs in Onne's communal disputes, and the ephemerality of chieftaincy institutions brought about by 'greed'.

Situated in the rural enclaves of Rivers State, Onne's economic prowess is derived from the presence of a large number of MNCs that reside in and operate from the Onne Oil and Gas Free Zone.²³⁹ Modern incursions into Onne began between 1972 and 1974, when 1,707 acres of land was acquired by the Government for the construction of the River State Institute of Research and Training, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, the Naval College, and Lighter Terminal, all located in Onne. This initial

²³⁸ There is a plethora of literature that link the exploitation of Niger Delta communities by MNCs to the ensuing conflicts in the region (see, for example, Ikelegbe 2005). Whilst the broad links between exploitation and some of the Niger Delta conflicts must be acknowledged, I explore the idea of exploitation in this section by analyzing the internal dynamics within the community. By seeking to understand the interactions between the chiefs, the youths and MNCs – a new picture emerges of the complex interactions between these various interest groups.

²³⁹ The Onne Oil and Gas Free Zone, which was opened in 1997, is the only free zone in the world exclusively designed to serve the oil and gas industry. Since opening, over 30 international oil and gas companies have registered their operation in the facilities.

period predates the *1976 Public Land Acquisition Decree*²⁴⁰ and *1978 Land Use Act*,²⁴¹ which in essence gave the federal, state, and local governments the right to acquire land without having to make financial compensation. After the *Land Use Act of 1978* was enacted, the 1980s saw the federal government acquire approximately 4000 hectares of land for the construction of a number facilities in Onne, including the National Fertiliser and Petrochemical facility, the Federal Ocean Terminal (Onne Port), and an Industrial Complex. With these land acquisitions and construction of new government facilities in Onne came the emergence of a new commercial industry, with significant impact on the local socio-political economic landscape. As intimated above, chieftaincy disputes in Onne only became a significant issue in the 1980s, coinciding with the arrival of the MNCs, which – in large numbers – domiciled in the community. Although the number of MNCs operating in Onne in the 1980s and 1990s is unknown, as of 2005, there were over 100 MNCs operating in the community – including many smaller subsidiaries of large international conglomerates.²⁴² During interviews in 2014 and 2015, some respondents claimed that this number had increased dramatically.²⁴³

It could be argued that the arrival of these new tenants in Onne in the 1980s helped to sow the first seeds of division in the community, perhaps unintentionally. Indeed, during interviews, there were no indications that MNCs came into the community in the 1980s with an agenda. Still if their impact in the community was unintended, their

²⁴⁰ One of the provisions of the *1976 Public Land Acquisition (Miscellaneous Provision) Decree* was that it ensured that payments were made to compensate for compulsory land acquisition by the Government. However, this was replaced by the *1978 Land Use Act*.

²⁴¹ The *1978 Land Use Act*, introduced on 27 March 1978, replaced the preceding land Acts and “vested all Land compromised in the territory of each State (except land vested in the federal government or its agencies) solely in the Governor of the State, who would hold such Land in trust for the people and would henceforth be responsible for allocation of land in all urban areas to individuals resident in the State and to organisations for residential, agriculture, commercial and other purposes while similar powers will with respect to non-urban areas are conferred on Local Governments”. For a more detailed explanation of how the *1978 Land Use Act* directly contributed to the Niger Delta conflicts see: Ebeku (2002), Rhuks (2009), and Obi (2010).

²⁴² Some of the companies hosted in Onne include, Daewoo Nigeria Limited, Schlumberger Support Nigeria Limited, Saipem Nigerian Limited, Maersk Nigeria Limited, Intels Nigeria Limited, and Prodeco.

²⁴³ Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

arrival has unequivocally contributed to the restructuring of communal relationships and the erosion of norms and values in Onne. This has manifested in many ways, firstly their arrival in the 1980s helped to induce the aforementioned chieftaincy contestation – the first of the type in community²⁴⁴ - thereby setting a precedent for events that followed. Previously ceremonial and uncovetted roles became extremely lucrative, because of the perception that presiding chiefs or kings were entitled to largesse from the new MNC tenants. Whilst this may provide valuable context for the wrangling amongst the competing chiefs, what direct roles have the companies played to help with fomenting these divisions remain unclear. Even though chieftaincy disputes in Onne began when MNCs started to arrive in the community, this might be presented as being correlative to rather than being the cause of the 1980s conflicts. One could even argue that tensions predating the arrival of MNCs in the community are the real cause of communal and chieftaincy conflicts in the 1980s. However, evidence show that recent actions by MNCs located in Onne have had profound consequences in recent years.

The very presence and influence of MNCs has permeated through multiple layers of community cohesion, creating both parallel and horizontal disputes. Conflicts have emerged across all socio-political economic strata in Onne. As well as the chieftaincy disputes, which, to a large extent, exist only within the elite clans; there have also been disputes that transcend social or economic demographics within Onne. Indeed, youths now pose a serious challenge to the ruling elites who, in partnership with MNCs, have been the architects of community marginalisation. By singularly aligning their interests with those of the MNCs, chiefs have managed to ostracise members of their communities. Though largely in alignment with these foreign institutions hosted in the

²⁴⁴ As explained in the previous section, the first true chieftaincy dispute in Onne was between the Ogosu brothers, a conflict which began in the 1980s around the same time a number of MNCs arrived in the community.

community, chiefs in Onne have also been victims of exploitation. A number of accounts during fieldwork point to the level of consciousness and influence that these MNCs had in disrupting the community in recent years. For example, one interviewee²⁴⁵ expressed that many of the corporations implement a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy, often supporting whomever best represents their interests. Similar views were expressed in a memorandum submitted by the Council of Chiefs, the elders, and the people in Onne to a committee set up by Eleme Local Government. In the document, the representatives claimed that:

*Companies operating at Onne should and ought to be a blessing to Onne people and indeed the entire Eleme. But the companies operating at Onne have contributed to the Chieftaincy disputes in Onne as well as the disintegration of the community through their policies of divide and exploit*²⁴⁶

In the list of 26 accusations levied against the MNCs in the memorandum submitted to the local government, one was that companies “deliberately” offered money to Onne Chiefs instead of undertaking and overseeing community projects listed in their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. This is said to happen despite the companies being aware that the monies provided to chiefs or to other members of the community are used to fuel crisis in the community.²⁴⁷ Such claims and accusations are not entirely speculative. One executive working at an MNC in the community expressed similar views. He noted that engaging with multiple stakeholders in Onne was challenging. In particular, due to the ongoing chieftaincy disputes, his company is forced to offer gifts and to engage with all the chiefs involved in the disputes separately,

²⁴⁵ Interview with Chu Onwinkpe (Youth President, Onne Youth Council) on 13/12/2015.

²⁴⁶ See appendix 5, Memorandum submitted by the Council of Chiefs, Elders and the Entire Good People of Onne to The Committee for the Resolution of Chieftaincy Disputes in Onne Set Up by the Executive Chairman, Eleme Local Government Council (12/02/2010).

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

because failure to do so could result in disruption to the company's business.²⁴⁸ The threat to destabilise the company's operations is ostensibly real, as evidenced by the large presence of uniformed military personnel behind sandbags guarding the entrance to the company's site.²⁴⁹

On the surface, gift giving does not confirm MNCs' deliberate ploy to exploit the people of Onne. Even in more peaceful parts of Nigeria, the notion of gift giving by MNCs to members of host communities is not in itself unusual, especially when implemented as part of their broader CSR strategy. Medupin (2013: 195) for example notes that modern CSR is built on two principles: "the charity principle; and the stewardship principle". MNCs have been known to freely and voluntarily offer gifts to communities in need of their support, an act described as the equivalent of "the modern expression of the charity principle. A brief survey of the Nigerian business landscape shows that several companies in diverse sectors of the economy appear active on this principle..." (ibid. 196). Medupin continues by stating that the "stewardship principle involves company managers recognising that their decisions affect the lives of many people in society and that they have a responsibility to balance the interests of many groups rather than focus on any one group alone" (ibid.). Given the operational principle, gift giving should thus not be perceived as being entirely negative. However, implementation of these principles in Onne indicate that some corporations exploit the charity and stewardship principles for their own personal gain.

In one of my many meetings with executives working at some of these MNCs, it was made clear that there are ambiguities in the implementation of gift giving to host

²⁴⁸ Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

²⁴⁹ During fieldwork in 2014, news of youth revolt outside the company spread across Onne and the surrounding communities. Youths from a number of communities descended on the site to protest against the MNC's actions, or lack thereof.

communities. I was informed that the process of gift giving to communities was entirely dictated by stakeholders in the respective communities. In one example, Onne was directly compared to its neighbours. Ostensibly, one of the functions of MNCs operating in the community was to provide facilities including palaces to their host communities. Ogu, one of the supposed host communities, along with Onne and Okrika, was said to have asked for the construction of a new palace for their king.²⁵⁰ The request for a new palace was honoured by the corporation.²⁵¹ Around the same time, Onne had also asked for the construction of a new palace, but this request had come from Chief Osaronu, one of the three chiefs claiming to be the rightful king in the community. Surprisingly, despite the ongoing chieftaincy contestation, the corporation proceeded to construct the palace for him. When asked why they had agreed to build a palace for Chief Osaronu, the representatives of the MNC responded that Ogu was more structured and that there was order in dealing with Ogu – this simplified their engagement process with the community. Onne on the other hand was much more complicated to deal with because of the serious ambiguity surrounding the chieftaincy structure in that community.²⁵²

From this, one could come up with multiple conclusions. On the one hand, one might say MNCs are unscrupulous and will engage in divisive processes to help to achieve their own goal. On the other, one might argue that MNCs are victims of the environment within which they operate. Both conclusions make MNCs complicit to varying degrees in the erosion of tradition in these communities. By engaging with contentious actors, MNCs have helped, perhaps once again unintentionally, to reframe the socio-political

²⁵⁰ Around this time, there was an ongoing chieftaincy dispute in Ogu. However, the palace was being constructed for the whole community, so if a king were deposed, he would have to vacate the new palace for his successor. This is because in Ogu, they have a clearly defined traditional succession plan for kings. So, despite having disagreements from time to time about who the rightful king should be, the structures in place reduces the risks and frequency of chieftaincy squabbles.

²⁵¹ Whilst conducting fieldwork in 2014, the palace was still in the process of being built.

²⁵² Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

and economic dynamics of Onne. This reframing presents its own unique set of challenges. As presented in the aforementioned memorandum, provisions from MNCs to competing actors help to maintain the divisions in the community. For example, economic provisions and symbolic endorsements from the MNCs operating in the community are partly legitimising King Osaronu's position as king. By building him a personal palace, and by seeking his permission before things are done in the community, the MNCs help to buttress his position. And, indeed, King Osaronu himself perceives this to be the case. For example, in one letter sent to one of the companies operating in the community, he unashamedly solicited "regular allowance for the upkeep of [his] palace ... [because even] fuel and diesel to operate 10 small generators [was] becoming too expensive that some time when there is light cut by NEPA, which is rampant ... the services of the Palace are paralyzed completely".²⁵³

Although it is unclear whether the company responded to this particular request, the letter indicates that other corporations in the community paid regular allowance for the palace upkeep.²⁵⁴ The receipts of these rents have been a source of major contestation in the community. Indeed, in the letter King Osaronu requested that this "allowance should be paid not through CLO [(Community Liaison Officers) because] ... rumours are rife that some packages sent to the Palace through CLOs never get to the Palace".²⁵⁵ This excerpt points to the internal divisions and distrust in the community. The CLOs are usually elected members of the community responsible for liaising with companies on behalf of the whole population. King Osaronu's wariness of the CLO could perhaps indicate that they are misappropriating funds, but it could also indicate that he is trying

²⁵³ See appendix 6, Special Palace Request.

²⁵⁴ This suggests that MNCs are more or less responsible for paying for the upkeep of chieftaincy positions in this particular community.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

to bypass middlemen who are not related to him as a way to conceal his dealings with the companies. In place of the CLO, he requested that payment should be made to a Dr Jima Osaronu, an unspecified relative. Whilst corporations working in the community seem unconcerned with these crucial internal dynamics, the repercussions faced by the community are serious. The secrecy surrounding dealings between the MNCs and multiple interested parties has led to rumours that have ravaged the community.

One such rumour is the often repeated claim that scholarships and jobs offered to young people in the community are sold by community representatives to the highest bidder.²⁵⁶²⁵⁷²⁵⁸ Such tales are repeated often and seemingly transcend any singular Niger Delta community. But in Onne, such claims have had a serious impact in fermenting the divisions within the community. The reality is that the economic wellbeing of most individuals in Onne is tied directly or indirectly to the operations of MNCs in the community. This is both through rents receipts – for the elites, as shown above – and through waged manual labour – for the less esteemed members of the community. Therefore, when job offers and scholarships allocated to young people in the community are instead exchanged for cash with “outsiders”, the tensions between the youth and community leadership is further intensified.²⁵⁹ These particular strains between the chiefs and the youths are much more unique than those between competing factions for chieftaincy stool. Due to the competition for economic rents and economic opportunities from the MNCs, youths are now in direct competition with the chiefs who were once revered as the leaders of the community.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Barrister Obari L Obari on 05/11/14.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Chu Onwinkpe on 13/12/2015.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

If nothing else, the conflicts between chiefs and youths demonstrates that chieftaincy institutions are not as rigid/stable as suggested in some quarters. Indeed, the evidence above affirms this claim. Since the new economic actors arrived in the community, the role of the chiefs has changed to fit around the new actors – the MNCs that have arrived in the community. The fact that these corporations have come into the community to erode the sanctity of the traditional institution is clear evidence of this. The structure of chieftains has largely been eroded by the self-interested agents who have occupied that role. In the following section, we will see that the positions of chiefs has been further eroded by the response from youths, who have questioned the legitimacy of the stool – based on the self-interested actions of chiefs – to such extent that they have unequivocally demanded fairer representation and inclusion in the decision making process. They find the chieftaincy institution itself to be corrosive, have revolted against it, and do not respect the institution anymore because of the contentious practices exhibited by some chiefs in Onne. In essence, chieftaincy is still important, but it is for sale, since chiefs appear to be disinterested in the reverence of their community. Chiefs now appear much more interested in money. This means that the role of chiefs is perceived to have changed from one of reverence to one of disrepute.²⁶⁰ The presence of MNCs and the pressures from youths are driving chieftaincy further into disrepute. Having already explored the impact of MNCs on community cohesion in Onne, it worthwhile exploring other disruptive agents in the governance structure of Onne. Thus, the next section will explore youth mobilisation in the community.

²⁶⁰ Chiefs used to settle disputes, now they seem to be one of the main causes of disputes in their communities.

Emergence of Youth Groups: Challenging the Domination of the Old Guards

If the king mentioned that the youth body is indeed loyal to him, that can't be the absolute truth (MNC Executive)²⁶¹

Whilst the preceding sections have sought to explore elite disputes revolving around the chieftaincy stool in Onne and on the role of MNCs in helping to prolong these disagreements, this section will focus on youths' involvement in Onne's communal clashes. Indeed, youths in Onne, as in other parts of the Delta, are an important demographic at the intersection of where modernity and tradition collide. Despite seemingly being disposed to engaging in intra- and inter-communal youth conflicts (Ajayi et al. 2009: 35-6 and Gambo 2013: 172), it is the challenge, in recent years, of youths to traditional authority that is worthy of further reflection. Although this area has received some attention, many of the analyses have explored youths' challenge to authority within a linear framework, wherein youths take action against a united exploitative and ineffective traditional authority. For example, Ikelegbe (2006b: 114) states that "unemployed youths, in some cases have simply pushed aside, sometimes with intimidation or violence, their elders and traditional authorities seen as 'ineffective against the external and internal agents that exploit the people.'" Whilst representative of many youth actions in many Delta communities, including in Onne, the dynamics of the relationship between youth and traditional authority is complicated by the factionalism at both the traditional elite level and, to a lesser extent, at the youth level.

As presented above, the chieftaincy dispute in Onne has exposed the weaknesses in the traditional structures and authority. Another dimension to this failure of authority is the traditional authorities' management of the relationship with the community, in

²⁶¹ Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

particular the relationship with youth. Concerned with securing legitimacy as the rightful paramount ruler in the community, the three contending chiefs are engaged, to varying degrees, with securing enough support amongst community stakeholders. But in particular, they seek the support of youths. As has been documented, elites take up the position of patrons and employ youths as their clients in order to use these actors to help to pursue their own goals (Iwilade 2014; Ibaba and Ikelegbe 2010). In Onne, there is a similar practice put into action – when asked whether there was cohesion in the community, King Osaronu claimed that he had the support of the entire youth body.²⁶² This claim has since been rebutted both by youth members and other community stakeholders.²⁶³ But King Osaronu's claim that he had the entire youth body support is an acknowledgment of sorts, that youth are a significant force in his community. However, his engagement with the community's youth is a fractious one. When speaking to Onne's elected Youth President, Chu Onwinkpe, one of the main issues he expressed was that members of the traditional leadership were undermining the 'development' process in the community.²⁶⁴ Instead of seeking to bring the community together, the chiefs are said to only pursue self-interested agendas to the detriment of members of the community.

During a visit to Onne in 2015, the youth leader presented video evidence to convey the hardship faced during the raining season. Ostensibly, the chiefs had diverted funds allocated to build flood defence systems into other projects unrelated to communal welfare. As a result, over 100 properties in the community had suffered crippling

²⁶² Interview with King Osaronu on 07/11/2014.

²⁶³ Interview with Chu Onwinkpe on 13/12/2015; interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015; interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Chu Onwinkpe on 13/12/2015.

damage.²⁶⁵ This example – and a host of other complaints – clearly conveys the dwindling reverence of youth in the community for the traditional rulers. This has had significant ramifications for the community as a whole. The division in the ruling elites is reflected in intra-communal youth interactions. Like the contenders for the chieftaincy stool, youths in the community are separated into different camps, and these camps have been known to engage in violent squabbles. Up until July 2015, different youth ‘cult’ groups had ravaged the community with endless violence. In the space of one year, over 20 youths were reportedly killed (Puoreports 2015). This had happened in part because of the lack of respected leadership in the community to curb the dissonance.²⁶⁶ Remarkably, the youth groups themselves took initiative and called for a truce, which was later supported by nonpartisan elders and religious leaders in the community²⁶⁷ (ibid.).



Figure 10: This image shows a woman walking in flood water past the lifeless body of one of her ten goats that perished during the flooding in Onne. The 2015 floods is said to have been caused by poor guttering in the community.

The youth-instigated truce is a symptom of the youths’ clamour for independence from traditional authorities in the community. As expressed by the elected youth president:

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*

“we are not against the chiefs, we are not here to choose who to be the chief of Onne, they have their case in court – so whatever the court [decides regarding who our chief is], we will follow; but for now, I think we the youth are on our own, we are not against the chiefs”.²⁶⁸ This declaration is an explicit distancing of the youth body from any particular faction in the ongoing disputes surrounding the chieftaincy stool. The youth representative did acknowledge, however, that the youth body is much more connected with the whole community, at least more than the traditional authorities are. As a result, the youths requested that they become the community’s proxy representative and interlocutor in negotiations with external agencies, because the youth interests are more aligned with the overall community interests. For them, the youths had become the voice of the marginalised, because they themselves had been marginalised by the traditional elites who had exploited their positions at the expense of the whole community. Whilst a wholesale replacement of the traditional governing authorities appears to be an extreme request, it comes as a reaction to forgoing events.

Youths in the community have in the past sought to engage with the traditional authorities under less combative arrangements by seeking to adopt a more generally prescribed Niger Delta community governance structure. The structures adopted in many Niger Delta communities to mitigate conflicts is typically reflected by a system that co-opts representatives from all demographics within a given community (Agba et al. 2013: 130-132). In fact, in Onne this structure is meant to consist of the Paramount Ruler, Council of Chiefs (Heads of the component villages), the Community Development Committee (CDC) as well as age grades, and youth and women groups (Indorama Eleme Petrochemicals Ltd 2012: xxxiii). The idea is that by building consensus around people

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

in the community, the population will be more cohesive, which in turn will lead to successful implementation of development agendas. In truth, however, the mechanism has been undermined by some of the traditional elites. Their objection to community wide development was ostensibly driven by greed and a desire to control and manipulate internal dynamics within the community and external relationships with foreign agents, *inter alia* MNCs that have provided rents to the community. This was precisely what the structure was introduced to mitigate. Within the prescribed structure, the Community Development Committee (CDC) and the youth body are crucial organs for maintaining peace and stability in communities across the Niger Delta, especially when it comes to bridging the intergenerational gap between the typically older traditional authorities and the broadly younger population (Agba et al. 2013: 139).

The issue of control or intermediation with the outside world – be it for self-enrichment purposes, as has been suggested by some interviewees, or simply as a means for validating leadership status – is at the heart of the disputes between the youths and traditional authorities in the community. For example, one of the explanations offered by disenchanted youths and some other community stakeholders for the outbreak of conflict was that Chief Osaronu constantly overruled the decisions of the community by appointing his preferred candidates to youth and CDC positions. This was against a backdrop where people in the community ostensibly preferred to elect their favoured candidates. Chief Osaronu's decision to overrule his community's preferences is commonly seen as a way for him to safeguard the largess he receives from the rent providers, i.e. the MNCs in Onne. To a very large extent, this is perhaps true, because, as evidenced in *appendix 6*, he preferred rents to be sent through closed channels – ideally

through his trusted handpicked assistants. However, the notion that his insistence on appointing sympathetic youth representatives as a ploy to remain the community's gatekeeper *vis-à-vis* rent receipts from MNCs is somewhat simplistic. In reality, by continually undermining his community's preferences and imposing his preferred candidates, Chief Osaronu is in some sense attempting to exert control. This is an important observation because, although there was still a lot of ambiguity regarding who the paramount ruler was, the community and the youths were constantly forced to engage with King Osaronu in hope that they might reach a compromise that catered to their interests as well as his. These engagements and exchanges helped to elevate Chief Osaronu's status in the community, at least more than the two other disputed kings.

King Osaronu is aware of this fact, and, indeed, during our interviews, he declared that he had the support of the majority of the youths in the community, and that his opponents are unable to secure as much support as he commands. When asked how he managed his relationship with the youths, he declared that, when interacting with MNCs hosted by the community, he led a delegation of youths and stakeholders for discussions with those organisations, thereby offering youths some involvement in affairs concerning them. He also took the opportunity to emphasise that it was his own delegation that was recognised by the MNCs, and that when the other opposing chiefs attempted to engage with the MNCs, they were turned away because they were not recognised as being legitimate.²⁶⁹ This approach shows a level of dexterity from King Osaronu. In essence he seeks to place himself in a strategic position that enables him to manage the interactions between the community and the MNCs. This is important because he is able to achieve multiple objectives. He presents himself to the MNCs as the

²⁶⁹ Interview with King Osaronu on 07/11/2014.

legitimate leader by insisting on appointing the youth leaders and then leading a delegation to talks with these organisations. In so doing he is able to discredit his challengers and block their access to MNCs. By acting as the gatekeeper and leading the delegation of youths to MNCs, he seeks to weaken the resolve of previously unsupportive youths, who he claims have now come around to support him. By doing this, he is seeking to establish credibility within the youth body. Of course, the assumption is that these steps are part of his calculations to establish authority as the legitimate paramount ruler. But in essence, he is attempting to use access to MNCs to attract the youth body, and access to the youth body to attract the MNCs – both of which help to establish him as an important figure in the community.



Figure 11: Shows the Onne Estate, on the Onne Port Site belonging to one of the MNCs operating from Onne. The estate boasts constant energy supply and recreational facility provided exclusively to MNC workers on the company site. Despite promises to build similarly good infrastructures and facilities, host communities are ignored and faced challenges such as flash floods as shown in figure 10(Source: [Prodeco](#)).

To the youth body, which claims to be unaffiliated with any specific chieftaincy faction, King Osaronu's insistence on appointing a youth leader was viewed as a means of

gatekeeping. They thought his agenda was driven by greed and self-interest. They argued that King Osaronu acted against the community's will by refusing to allow the elected youth leader to do his work. The view was that King Osaronu was doing so because offering youths the opportunity to engage with the MNCs independently would serve as a direct threat to the King's and the other contending chiefs' interests. That is why chiefs apparently select their own youth leaders who can speak in the same voice as the respective chiefs and further represent their interests. To resolve the disputes, the appointed and elected youth leaders have taken the case to court, with a large measure of success. They claim that they wanted the world to hear their voices and wanted people to see what the youths were going through. In asserting this position, the youth leader exclaimed: "... let the federal government, let the state government, let the investors come to Onne and see what's happening. With what we have, over 99% of the youths are not working in this place... 99% with what we have?".²⁷⁰ Indeed, the investors themselves had started to take notice. As one investor disclosed: "... the pattern that has evolved before now appears to be that the king appoints a youth leader ... a letter comes from the King saying 'that is the youth leader', and that flies ... [but after taking the case to court] the court recognised that the process in a democracy of electing a youth leader was not out of context, this now gave leeway for that argument to stack ... [but] sometimes these things seem to work out rather neatly, just as the elected guy was pushing it, the selected guy took up a position where he said, 'well OK it's in court let's wait for the court.'"²⁷¹ In essence, as soon as the case was taken to court by the democratically elected youth leader and his supporters, the incumbent youth leader who had been appointed by King Osaronu conceded and left the position.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Chu Onwinkpe on 13/12/2015.

²⁷¹ Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

Although this was the case when the interview was conducted in November 2014, a news report exactly one year later found that the dispute was still unresolved (Obellemi 2015). In fact, there had been a spate of killings because of the conflicts. This was later confirmed when interviews were conducted in December 2015 with a number of people in the community. Despite some parties suggesting that progress was being made towards achieving a more cohesive youth environment, the indication is that the dynamics in the community had shifted permanently to the extent that the community youth body was seeking to carve out an unaffiliated independent identity, which would offer them a great level of agency, one previously denied to them by their traditional rulers. At the very heart of this goal is a deliberate attempt to bypass and reject instructions from a splintered traditional authority in the community. If nothing else, this goal is instructive in helping to identify the shift in the ways in which traditional authority is now perceived by a new modern class, the youth. And indeed, their seemingly civilised, well-oiled movement has secured them direct access to MNCs that previously waited for instructions from the King. If actions and acknowledgement by MNCs are an indication of status, then, indeed, the youth body has broken through the proverbial barriers and have secured autonomy from a fragmented but marginalising group of traditional authorities.²⁷²

Competition or Continuity? Highlighting the Myth of Differences in Intergenerational Disputes

The forgoing sections have explored the internal governance structures and challenges in Onne, but where can we situate these accounts within a theoretical context? Indeed, there are several notable challenges that require further assessment and theoretical

²⁷² The relationship between the MNCs and the King comes into focus here again. We can infer from the experience that the King is only deemed useful to the MNCs insofar as he has access to the youth body. Inability to control the youths would very likely weaken the King's leverage on the MNCs.

explanation. Although explored in some detail already, the following questions still persist: Are there any roles and practical functions for traditional authorities in a modern Niger Delta? Is there a need to formulate new structures to govern interactions between MNCs and host communities? How can youths be integrated within old cultural norms and still be at the forefront of bringing about much needed change in a modernising world? Answering these questions is essential in the quest to better understand communal conflicts in the Niger Delta. Undeniably, these questions allow me to examine my own assumptions that have underpinned the assessments of the conflicts in Onne. An overarching theme that has been echoed through the preceding sections is the notion that there is a clash between modernity, fronted by youths, and tradition, fostered by intransigent chiefs who are wedded to derelict ideas of governance. Using these assumptions as a starting point for assessment allows us to indulge in the fallacy of existing intergenerational tensions between the chiefs and youths. In fact, if we strip the two factions of the avowed identities used to describe them, and place them as agents similarly in pursuit of identical gains, then the arguments are refracted in new complexions. Before continuing to explore this line of inquiry, what does it mean to be traditional and/or modern?

Inherent within the conceptualisation of the disputes between the chiefs and the youths is the polarisation of the two groups, by conceptually placing the groups on two opposing sides. We intrinsically problematise their relationship. In essence, this creates a false dichotomy and what is implied is that there are tensions, perhaps unresolvable ones, between two opposing factions and opposing ideas. The narratives, as presented above, often favour the idea of modernity as the superior in the contest between itself and old tradition. However, Gusfield (1967) points to the error of such assumptions. He

soundly challenges the deception of contrasts when he contends that "... the all too common practice of pitting tradition and modernity against each other as paired opposites tends to overlook the mixtures and blends which reality displays. Above all, [the dominant representation of modernity] becomes an ideology of anti traditionalism, denying the necessary and usable ways in which the past serves as support, especially in the sphere of values and political legitimation, to the present and the future" (ibid. 362). Gusfield's quote points to the continuum of ideas between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, the point about the errors of favouring modernity over tradition is quite a significant one. In fact, I would argue that youths, though presented as the bastion of modernity, are a reflection of old traditions.

Whilst seemingly adopting a different language to articulate grievances and ostensibly pushing for the displacement of traditional authority, the action of youths is in large part a continuation of the action taken by their forbearers. We could therefore quite easily conceive modernity and youth discordance as progression from decaying traditional moral authority and ideas, but as Taylor has indicated, the actions "invoked ... are often motivations that are non moral. By that [he means] motivations that can actuate people quite without connection to any moral ideal... so we very often find these social changes explained in terms of the desire for greater wealth, or power, or means of survival or control over others. Of course, all these things can be woven into moral ideals, but they need not be" (2001: 7). Indeed, the motivations that drive a perceived change in social norms are not as binary as: old ideas against new ideas; wealth versus poverty; morality or lack thereof – the reality is much subtler. The example of Onne is a gateway through which the nuances of disagreements within the Niger Delta have been explored. Despite the clear tensions between chiefs and youths, are the two worlds

really on divergent moral paths or is the dissonance driven by factors a little more nuanced?

These questions are important, and they might be answered by two theories. An explanation could be found within the theory of a *transgenerational continuum*. This idea refers to the notion that perhaps the actors involved in the intergenerational disputes, i.e. the youths and the chiefs are in fact fighting for the same things. Instead of viewing youth as the agent of change, which has come to alter the status quo of ineffective traditional governance structures, the role of youth in the intergenerational dispute could be considered as continuation of old practices. In essence, there is a case for considering youths to be an extension of traditional authorities. Though seemingly acting as agents who seek to redress the malfunctioning traditional institutions, their action could be considered to mirror those of the chiefs. As alluded to, the chiefs themselves failed to follow any synchronised traditional governance structure, which in and of itself is an act of denouncing the legitimacy of constraining structures. In so doing, the two factions are, perhaps inadvertently, seeking to reconstruct the parameters of governance. Thus, instead of viewing these two groups as opponents, their actions may be seen on a continuum, which allows us to see that what differentiates them has less to do with moral ideas of generation, as exclaimed by Taylor.

A second explanation could perhaps be identified after we deconstruct what it means to be a 'youth' in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta more specifically. Doing this will highlight the continuum between tradition and modernity in Onne. If we are to adopt Gore and Pratten's (2003: 215) notion of "youth" as a Nigerian parlance for exclusion, then it is easy to situate youth revolt in Onne as an action taken by disgruntled opponents of

exclusionary actions. After all, “youth is a complex, fluid and permeable category which is historically and socially situated” (ibid.). Youth thus cannot be assumed to be a monolithic group bounded by age and ideas, youth within the Delta, represents a body of resisting actors, thus imbibing within it a broad intergenerational demographic with competing interests. Some of those interests may be identical to the supposed traditional ideas that are being pushed back against. What is clear however is that the battle lines are being drawn on a familiar economic-centred landscape. But this landscape is not necessarily economic-centric in the same way as portrayed by the economic deterministic literature. It may be economic-centric in much subtler ways, where the battle for access to economically enriching institutions represents not greed but an avenue through which a whole community believe that their agencies are being respected within the unusually designed political economic governance structure in Onne.

This means that instead of viewing the clamour by chiefs and the youths for access to MNCs as driven by greed, an alternative explanation could indeed be that engaging with MNCs serves as an extension of the competition between the two groups²⁷³ for legitimacy to represent their constituent interest groups. The question of legitimacy in the Delta region is one that is seldom asked. However, experience from fieldwork shows that people in the region and elsewhere rely upon titles and affiliations, formally or informally, to legitimise their roles and positions within their community (Ewokor 2007). Therefore, we could perhaps view the engagement with MNCs by these actors as an extension of this tradition. Although, that is not to suggest the absence of an economic undercurrent in the motivations to engage with these institutions, after all

²⁷³ These engagements with MNCs reaffirm the *transgenerational continuum* idea. By pursuing the same or similar interests, even as ‘competing’ factions, the linearity in the pursuits of all the actors involved represents some continuity in their actions.

“the mentality of the people is not independent of their material reality”.²⁷⁴ Naturally, there are economic incentives in pursuing these interactions. Still, it is important not to criticise the complex considerations that undergird the actions of the people involved in these disputes. Whilst the interactions between the multiple factions in the community with the MNCs are open to questions, from the community’s perspective the interest of the MNCs in engaging with the communities is unambiguous. But how can we theorise the effect of MNCs on the host communities?

A host of commentators have sought to situate the modern day operations of MNCs within a generalist *modus operandi*. For instance, Korten (1996: 131, 70-71) explains that “their operations are premised on an ideology of relationship that: corporations should act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to impacts; absence of loyalty to place or community, and that relentless pursuit of profit leads to optimal results”. This view is appropriate when we consider the evidence above wherein MNCs working in Onne have primarily focused on maintaining an uninterrupted production line to maximise profit whilst seemingly fostering communal divisions. However, simply submitting to this explanation absolves the MNCs and other actors of greater responsibility, when in fact we should be exploring the relationships between these agents much more closely. It is true that in pursuit of profit, many MNCs exploit their host communities, as in the case of Onne – but closer inspection shows that this approach has only been successful in communities where the base components for division already existed. MNCs operating in Onne also consider neighbouring communities as their joint hosts. Yet, the nature of the engagement between the MNCs

²⁷⁴ Interview with Prof. Ibaba. S. Ibaba on 12/08/2014.

and host communities differ quite significantly from one community to the other. The palace example above illustrates this point.²⁷⁵

The grand narrative of MNCs' engagement in developing countries borrows from a rich literature and idea that many of these institutions work to a template of marginalising host communities (Ikelegbe 2001a: 452). The experience in this part of the Niger Delta confirms this, but also show that many of these institutions possess an incredible level of agency that allows them to tailor their engagement approach to fit various specifications. Indeed, many of these institutions are pragmatic in the ways that they interact with their host communities. Whilst a strong case could be made about their neo-colonialist credentials, there is something less sinister about their approach when we consider that large parts of it are driven by expediency. Without seeking to veer too far off course, we need to engage with the idea of *pragmatic neo-colonialism* and how to possibly interact with its ill effects. According to Kwame Nkrumah:

The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of less developed parts of the world ... Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony, those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case. (Nkrumah 1965: x-xi)

The first part of this quote is exemplified above; there is an expectation that neo-colonial institutions exploit host communities for profit. The second part of the quote

²⁷⁵ See page 215.

helps to clarify the challenges of having such institutions in developing communities. Since many of these institutions are transnational, they lack accountability and often they avoid reprimand from their home countries since the expectation is that they should be free to earn revenue to contribute to the tax receipts in their countries of origin. However, what differs in recent times – in Onne and in a broader Niger Delta context – is the idea of the helpless communities. Whereas previously these companies operated with impunity as they were able to subjugate governance structures and government policies they found unfavourable, and instead operated using their preferred methods to bypass community stakeholders; since the early 2000s community mobilisation in the form of protests, and in extreme cases, kidnapping of foreign workers, and the shutdown of facilities by militant groups has helped to shift the operational paradigm of these MNCs. Many of the MNCs working in the region have now been forced to take account of the interests of the people in the region. This has helped to increase the number of CSR engagements being implemented by MNCs.

However, instead of viewing the increased number of CSR engagements as a form of compensation, and as a symptom of wholesale reform, there has to be caution wherein these interactions are understood as a pragmatic new approach to continuing on neo-colonial pathways. In essence *pragmatic neo-colonialism* is borne out of the survival needs of MNCs. Increased CSR engagement with communities has not equated to redressing the fundamental flaws in asymmetrical relationships between MNCs and host communities; it has actually been an effort to window dress the exploitation. Where possible, these companies will continue to take advantage of communities that are typically less experienced in determining the sorts of legally binding relationships between host communities and MNCs. The Onne experience is a case in point. Where

there is an opportunity to sidestep serious investments into community developments, MNCs have shown remarkable deftness in only offering host communities the minimum amount of capital they can get away with. And they have been enabled in this by the weak leadership in many host communities in the Delta.

[After all] ... the rulers of neo-colonial [communities] derive their authority to govern, not from the will of the people, but from the support which they obtain from their neo-colonialist masters. They have therefore little interest in developing education, strengthening the bargaining power of their workers employed by expatriate firms, or indeed of taking any step which would challenge the colonial pattern of commerce and industry, which it is the object of neo-colonialism to preserve. 'Aid' [in the form of rents], therefore, to a neo-colonial [community] is merely a revolving credit, paid by the neo-colonial master, passing through the neo-colonial community and returning to the neo-colonial master in the form of increased profits. (Nkrumah 1965: xv)

This is exactly what the Onne case has shown. The competing chieftaincy factions, and the youth representatives have sought legitimacy and authority to govern and lead their people through their interactions with MNCs. Chiefs seeking to enrich themselves at the expense of larger community development and job security for youths in the community have been a source of many disputes in the region, and this is no coincidence. As communities have become more emboldened to request greater accountability from MNCs operating in the region, the response by these institutions has been to encourage divisions within communities. By funnelling resources to chiefs in lieu of greater community investments, MNCs have been able to carry on business as usual. In place of MNCs, chiefs have become the targets in their communities, as they are viewed as an extension of exploitative institutions. This has helped many MNCs in the Delta region to create buffers between themselves and members of host communities.

MNCs are then able to continue as before, extracting resources and maximising profits destined for their shareholders and countries of origin.

Viewed through these lenses, it is clear to see that chieftains, at least in the Niger Delta, do not only derive their legitimacy through the stools. Whilst the stools hold cultural significance, chiefs are indeed at the intersection of 'tradition and modernity', which means that although their positions are rooted in history, chiefs are forced to be adaptable to their changing surroundings. Their roles and operations change and evolve in lockstep with society. To many, the ephemerality of the position indicates the dearth of culture, but this view is situated in the dominant perception that modernity is a threat to tradition. This false dichotomy has of course already been challenged above.²⁷⁶ What is significant, however, is the need to situate the current position of chiefs within a functional context. Chiefs now occupy a space in modern society where they will quickly compromise the interests of their community in favour of sharing in the enormous profits earned by MNCs. However, it is important to reaffirm that chiefs "can be populist in the sense that they capture and give meaning to the collective aspirations of their subjects. Such aspirations may be for recognition, access or communal pride. Indeed chieftaincies come to symbolise the very life of their communities" (Mustapha and Jones 2005: 254). It is from this other perspective that a large number of people across communities in the Delta view their chiefs. The failure to live up to the high standards that rear-guard communal pride has given way to pessimism and a desire by local rivals to try to reclaim the stool. As much was said by one interviewee who expressed that one of the chiefs:

²⁷⁶ See page 229.

J D [Osaronu] will drive to companies to go and beg for 200,000 naira, he goes to company to go and beg for water to drink, he goes to beg for generators, oh my God, no chief does that. I say [to him] put some honour on this title, not for you, but because of the people ... [but he has not stopped] dragging the stool to shame.²⁷⁷

To the people in the region, symbolism matters as well. Respect and decorum are things that are part of the minimum expectation from esteemed representatives. The sooner the chiefs understand this aspect of their role, the less likely it is that they will face challenges to their authority. However, it is still important to note that the chieftaincy positions are non-static. Indeed, they will forever change. But “the institution [has] to appeal to the young, and hence the future, it has to be seen by youngsters as being responsive to issues that affect their world. Chiefs may have lost some constitutional and legal authority over the centuries, but they still retain considerable traditional legitimacy. Chieftaincy today stands at a delicate confluence of tradition and modernity. Paradoxically, there is an increasing appeal in chieftaincy today, even to outsiders and non-Africans” (Adjaye and Misawa 2006: 8). What do these all add up to? The next section will attempt to highlight the intricate intertwinedness of MNCs’ pragmatic neo-colonialism and the transgenerational continuum that nourishes the conflicts in Onne and possibly elsewhere in the Delta.

Neo-Colonialism Meets the “Transgenerational Continuum”: Challenging the Myth of Opposing Interests

In assuming that new economic and political processes face an unchanging and uniform body of institutional procedures and cultural values, the linear theory of change greatly distorts the history and variety of civilizations ... It is fallacious to assume that a traditional society has always existed in its present form or that the recent past represents an

²⁷⁷ Interview with Chief Casca-Ogosu on 12/12/2015.

unchanged situation. What is seen today and labelled as the 'traditional society' is often itself a product of change (Gusfield 1967: 352-353).

The excerpt from Gusfield is particularly pertinent when considering some of the conflicts in the Niger Delta. This particular passage challenges a number of misconceptions about the supposed rigidity of traditional societies. For example, to many, references to 'tradition' or to 'cultural values' imply inflexible ideals and practices rooted in unbending old customs (Ranger 1997: 454). Whilst this representation of tradition and culture might accurately characterise some societies, it is inaccurate to assume that such a description represents **all** traditions, and **all** societies with proud cultural histories. Emphasising this significant misconception is important if we are serious about understanding some of the true causes of conflicts in the region. Instead of the oft-noted examples of the causes of conflicts, such as the contestation between tradition and modernity, i.e. the conflicts between community elders and youth groups, it is an appropriate time to seek an in-depth understanding of the more nuanced causes of conflicts between generations. Indeed, the detailing above of events in Onne has been an important exercise in doing just this. Despite what we have come to know as the dereliction of morals by the swath of new globally integrated youths who seek to challenge traditional authority; perhaps as intimated above, the reality has a lot more to do with the misconceptions, the myth, that youth and elders have varied interests. I have already shown in preceding sections that the opposite is true – but it is worth reemphasising here once again.

Interestingly, whilst reflecting on the challenges surrounding the study of events in the Delta region, a less obvious but important observation is the risk that scholars perpetuate an idea by epitomising the theory about which they argue. This is to suggest

that scholars reflect in their analyses the ideas they argue communities exhibit. For example, in the study of the conflicts in the Delta, the tendency is to assume that youth groups were inherently powerless and had to resort to conflicts in order to challenge the status quo, i.e. the dominance of traditional elites. Youth were assumed to have been marginalised using what could be described as “obscurantism”. Obscurantism, according to Samora Machel when he reflected on women’s position in traditional Mozambican societies, was the beginning of the process of marginalisation. In more detail, Machel opined that: “Obscurantism is the beginning of the process [of marginalising women] ... All superstitions and religion find their most fertile soil among women, because they are submerged in the greatest ignorance and obscurantism. In our society, rites and ceremonies are the main vehicle for the transmission of society’s concept of women’s inferiority, and their subservience to men ... All are deliberately kept in ignorance, obscurantism and superstition with a view to making them resigned to their position, of instilling in them an attitude of passivity and servility” (Machel 1974: 28). Whilst Machel’s analysis here refers to the systematic marginalisation of women in Mozambique, it is true that the word ‘women’ could quite easily be replaced with the word ‘youths’, and the quote would represent the depiction of some analysts’ idea of youths in some Niger Delta communities.

In literatures analysing youth conflicts in the Niger Delta, there is the underlying perception that youth groups were and should be subservient to traditional elites, and as such any challenge to these elites indicates an erosion of those systems that have been in place for generations. Obi, for example, reports that “[i]n a region where respect for age and seniority has from earliest times been an important aspect of indigenous culture and tradition, the ascendancy of youth power does not merely interrogate the

basic of traditional power, authority and control, it feeds into the existing revolutionary tensions and pressure ... ravaging the Niger Delta" (Obi 2001: 77). Whilst this may be reflected in some communities in the region and in Nigeria, this idea of youth entrapped by obscurantism is possibly a myth perpetuated by analysts and observers. Indeed, I would argue that the creation of this idea that youths should be passive and subservient to elders is reflective of how analysts of youth conflicts in the Delta are themselves entrapped by obscurantism. It is worth noting here that some work have been done to emphasise youth agency in the disputes in the region. Indeed, some records show that in the Delta "[y]outh organisations have multiplied and metastasized: they often refigure cultural traditional institutions like egbesu, agaba or mutual support clubs. Since the 1980s they have directly attempted to capture organs of community power (for example Community Development Committees), but also challenge directly gerontocratic rule; not least they have adopted an increasingly militant stance acting as the erstwhile liberators - vanguard movements in effect - for the oppressed of the region" (Watts 2007: 640). Iwilade (2017) similarly captures this sentiment by offering an equally accomplished representation of youth. He notes that youths in the region express their agency whilst instrumentalising their marginality to exploit their relationships with their patrons (ibid. 268).

Whilst this is a timely and very useful representation of youths in the Delta conflicts – it is also true that other leftfield representations of these same actors helps to perpetuate a myth of youth docility in the Delta and in Nigeria. There is a tendency to assume that youths engaged in conflicts receive their instructions from powerful political economic patrons who use them as expendable political pawns (Okonofua 2013: 10, Onwudiwe

and Berwind-Dart 2010, Ebiede 2016, Sahara Reporters 2015b).²⁷⁸ We know that this is not completely true in the Delta from what Iwilade and Watts above have shown. But this is also not the case across Nigeria – even historically. After all, as Falola and Heaton have shown, as youths - some of the founding fathers of Nigeria, including Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo were part of the Nigerian youth movement that challenged the dominance of Herbert Macaulay and his National Democratic Party²⁷⁹ (Falola and Heaton 2008: xx-xxi, xxvii, 141; Coleman 1971: 218-226). Indeed, when analysing youth protests and activism elsewhere, particularly in the global north, there is seldom references made to traditional structures that should prevent such mobilisations. Therefore, it is important to sidestep the risks associated with cultural determinism as we start our assessments of conflicts in so-called traditional societies. Only then will it be possible to avoid the myth of “generational differences”. It is only after this that it becomes possible to locate and therefore highlight the root causes of some of the Niger Delta youth conflicts.

With this new broadening of our understanding of youth protest *vis-à-vis* tradition, we should more readily be able to challenge the notion that “traditional rulers/elders ... [are unilaterally the] custodians of cultural and traditional authority” (Obi 2001: 96). In fact, as Mustapha and Jones (2005: 254) argue, rather than solely being custodians of culture and tradition as presented by Obi above, chiefs and traditional elites are located at the pressurised intersection where modernity meets tradition. After collecting data

²⁷⁸ Although I make a similar claim in chapter 4, there was emphasis on making a subtle distinction. By breaking down the monolithic representation of youths into segments of leaders and followers, it becomes clear that within such groups, there are actors, like Ateke Tom directing the actions foot soldiers.

²⁷⁹ Given historical accounts of youth activism dating back as far pre-independence Nigeria, it is misleading to suggest that it is countercultural for youths in Nigeria to challenge the authority of older generations. As has been shown in the work of Falola and Heaton (2008) and Coleman (1971), some of the notable actors in the founding of Nigeria were youth activists, who were members of the Nigerian Youth Movement, a group that went on to challenge the dominance of Herbert Macaulay’s National Democratic Party who up until 1938, had won all the seats in the 1923, 1928 and 1933 elections. It is therefore important to start reimagining the myth of docility of Nigerian youths.

from fieldwork, I would extend this argument by suggesting that youths in Nigeria, certainly within some part of the Delta, occupy exactly the same position as traditional elites, by being situated at the same intersection where modernity meets tradition. In fact, beyond evidence collected during fieldwork, this notion of youths sharing the same space as traditional elites can be traced when one consults another of Obi's work where he challenges the notion that:

At another level, youth are conceptualised in terms of their futuristic role as leaders of society. This in itself assumes the non-interrogation of the existing power relations in society, and is a recipe for preparing the youth to perpetuate a particular mode of power relations that suggest a permanence of structures of dominance and interests, but with the entry and exit of occupants over time. It also suggests the subordination of youth to the power structure controlled by elders in order to facilitate system stability, cohesion, and continuity. Political time then becomes a conveyor belt that takes the 'loyal and disciplined' youth into future power, when the elders pass into myth and history. This logic that comes out sharply from the foregoing is the common saying that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow. It is also reflected in the notion that the youth are the 'successor generation' (Obasanjo 1999:4-8, Mohiddin 1999:127156), implying that they would in future replace their elders as leaders. It therefore underlines the link between human mortality and the need to maintain the continuity (and structure) of power in a cycle of political timelessness. Thus perhaps gives the old(er) leaders the responsibility of choosing and grooming their 'successors' (Obi 2006: 5).

Indeed, it is true that youth – by the virtue of human ephemerality, will inevitably become the 'leaders of tomorrow'. This means that, whilst being identifiable as agents of modernity, youths also interact with tradition, even if only as has been supposed above, they only do so as a result of 'grooming' to succeed traditional elites. It is important to

note, however, as recent youth contestations have shown, that youth groups in the Niger Delta are not waiting around for permission from traditional elites to exist. Many of the youths in the Niger Delta are vying for stakes in the current socio-economic political arrangement in the region. Obi's own riposte to the above-cited passage actually places emphasis on this by highlighting the Delta region's youths' eminent need for survival in the present (ibid. 6). In the same vein, chiefs and other traditional elites are also seeking to exist and to survive – which is perhaps why, as shown above, they seek to maintain their dependency on MNCs. From these clear observations, it is obvious to identify the convergence of interests amongst these two factions with supposedly different objectives. Whilst to date, it has been acceptable and trendy to subordinate youths to older traditional elites because of the gerontocratic social system, and whilst youths' resistance to this subordination has been cast as a decay of morality – perhaps, the error in various analyses that reach these conclusions is the perception that age differences is a conclusive factor that helps to neatly demarcate interests of youths from those of older 'traditional' elites. To ascribe modernity to 'youth' and in turn 'traditional' to the older generations in communities across Nigeria – we commence our analysis of some the Niger Delta conflicts using false dichotomies. Preceding sections have proven this. Whilst youth groups appeared to be challenging the traditional institution in Onne, it is also true that there were some intra-generational conflicts fought between rivals for the same interests. For example, the competition between elites for the throne is a notable one. Equally, the dispute amongst youths over who the legitimate community youth leader is another case in point.

What we learnt from the experience of Onne, which ought to be reemphasised here is the existence of a *transgenerational continuum* when trying to locate where the

interests of various community factions lie. Referring back to the above citation on page 242, Obi makes explicit references to the idea of continuation. Although in his explanations, his references to 'continuation' only mention this in relation to the preservation of structures.²⁸⁰ Since the thesis has not set out to test the durability of the structures mentioned by Obi – there is very little point expanding on the analysis of said structures. Something that could be taken away from his assessment is this idea that there exists a form of continuity in the actions of youth groups and traditional elites. Although in his presentation, he suggests that the continuity is achieved through succession, i.e. youths replace traditional elites in the future. The Onne example showed this to be false – indeed, the pursuit of similar interests by both youths and traditional elites, it was found, was done simultaneously. The simultaneity of these two factions' pursuits seems to be the reason why analysts suggest that there are clashes between modernity and tradition. As has been mentioned above in this chapter and has shown by Gusfield (1967:355), it is a "fallacy" that modernity and tradition are always in conflict. Whilst existing literature has erroneously emphasised this dichotomy, MNCs have benefited significantly from the tensions borne out of the false conception of competition between youth and traditional elites. What is clear is that MNCs benefit from said divisions. For example, in her study of MNCs and host communities, Calvano (2008: 796) found that MNCs donate a miniscule amount of provisions to hosts to pit individuals against each other. This, she says allows MNCs to divide and conquer their hosts, and in the process they subdue any opposition that may come from within these communities (ibid.). It was found that MNCs purposefully nurture all generations, youth and elders within host communities, although they are known to favour the patronage

²⁸⁰ In his work, Obi refers to the preservation of political structures. These structures, though cited as political also infer traditional political structures which youths are supposed to inherit once the older generation of traditional elites retire from their stools.

of elders and elites (Obi 2006: 36). The idea is that, by forming close alliances with elders, the MNCs can influence key decisions within host communities.

The plan by MNCs to divide people in host societies is said to serve two main functions amongst many: firstly, by creating internal divisions, MNCs can prevent the formation of a united front against them; and secondly, MNCs realise that by inciting conflicts within host communities, actors will be too distracted to join a pan-Delta movement (*ibid.*). These points are salient, but there is no denying that the overarching objective of MNCs operating in these environments is to maximise profits. Whilst it is important to highlight the negative actions taken by the corporations to further their own ends, this section is not meant to be a critique of MNCs, in fact, on the contrary. There are huge opportunities for communities to identify the traits exhibited by companies operating within their territory. And it is their responsibilities to respond to the divisive measures taken by MNCs who seek to operate in their area. Indeed, it is incumbent on members of the myriad communities within the Delta region and across Nigeria, to realise that despite claims and counterclaims of competition across generations, the reality is very different. Once the various groups including women, youth groups and traditional elites unite and mobilise with a singular voice, societies like Onne could benefit from sustained period of relative peace. Paradoxically, this suggestion was made during informal conversations with an MNC executive²⁸¹ who during several meetings indicated that there was a need for host communities to seek the assistance of consultants, or trained representatives who could negotiate better deals on behalf of entire communities. His assertion reaffirmed two things: first, it confirmed at that point, the misconception of competing interests across generations; and secondly – but very

²⁸¹ Interview with MNC executives on 18/11/2014.

importantly – it offered an insight to how ill-prepared societies in the region are when it comes to negotiating the best deal on behalf of entire communities. These two points, helped to highlight the susceptibility of communities to be divided and in turn showed why many youth groups and traditional elites in towns and villages across the region are constantly at war.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the complexities of the Niger Delta conflicts by focusing on the internal dynamics of the disagreements in Onne, River State. The chapter has adopted a three-pronged approach, focusing on chieftaincy disputes, youth restiveness, and the impact of MNCs on community dynamics. In doing so, it has unpacked some of the underlying factors that have been central to fermenting long-term tensions, which have resulted in recent conflicts in the community. The chapter also highlighted the weaknesses in the chieftaincy structures in the community, and particularly the ambiguity-surrounding ascension to the throne which allowed for a free-for-all pursuit of the much coveted stool. Despite being a well-respected chieftaincy stool in postcolonial Nigeria up until 1980s, things changed when Chief R.O. Ogosu was deposed from the stool by his elder brother, Justice Wai-Ogosu. Colluding with his younger brother's legal representative, J.D. Osaronu, Justice Wai Ogosu was able to successfully remove his younger brother from the stool. However, despite being proclaimed the new King of Onne, his role was deemed by observers to be ceremonial. Instead J.D. Osaronu unofficially took up the position and managed proceedings from his *de facto* palace.

This arrangement created multiple factions in the community, with new challengers emerging to contend the legitimacy of Justice Wai-Ogosu as the king. During his reign as the King of Onne, a group loyal to the deposed Chief R.O. Ogosu installed Chief Johnson

Nkponrwi as their recognised chief to compete with Justice Wai-Ogosu. The disputes between the two kings ensued till the passing of Justice Wai-Ogosu. But despite the opportunities to secure popular support from his constituency, Chief Npornwi was thought to be unfit to rule and represent the people of Onne because of his irrational behaviour, which was directed both at his citizens and representatives of MNCs hosted in the community. After the death of Justice Wai-Ogosu, J.D. Osaronu received wide support to ascend the throne because Chief Npornwi was widely unpopular in the community. This maintained the factional arrangement in the community whereby there were two camps claiming to be the rightful Chief of the people of Onne. Despite efforts by the Council of Chiefs to install the appropriate candidate to the stool, its authority was subverted and its members were unable to formally remove the challengers, even though they had sought legal recourse.

This competition between multiple claimants has resulted in deeper divisions in the community. Despite suggesting that he had the support of the entire youth body in Onne, Chief Osaronu is seen by some youth in the community as being unsuitable to govern because of their view that he was using the position to enrich himself at the expense of the people. Whilst considered to be a suitable leader in the quest to defend Onne from external threats from neighbouring communities, Chief Osaronu was also viewed to be unfit to lead. This latter view emerged largely because of Chief Osaronu's interaction with many of the MNCs hosted in the community. During interviews, a number of respondents claimed that the Chief had redirected rents paid by MNCs to his personal account, whilst also using his position to appoint only close family members to important positions in the community. Affronted by these practices, the youths²⁸² in the

²⁸² As has been noted above, according to Gore and Pratten (2003: 215), the word 'youth' in the Nigerian context is parlance for exclusion.

community have sought direct engagements with MNCs, so that their interests can be served directly by these agents.

Youths in Onne mobilised to resist the autocratic rule of King Osaronu by bypassing his decision to appoint his preferred candidate for Youth President. Coming together under shared interests, the youth in the community formed a recognised group to engage in dialogue with external actors that had business interests in Onne, negotiating what the youths perceived to be the best terms for their community and themselves. However, despite appearing to undermine 'traditional' values as the 'modern' face of the community, there is in fact some transgenerational continuity in the ways in which the chiefs and the youths operate in Onne. Rather than being a contest of ideas between tradition and modernity, elders and youths, the contest between the two groups is competition for the same things. The chiefs and youths in Onne have sought legitimacy in their community through their interactions with MNCs – as the spokespersons for the people. Furthermore, by selectively ignoring the traditional constitution, both groups in essence are reformulating the old ideas to reflect their own ideas of what their positions should entail. In interacting with the MNCs, both parties highlighted the self-interested actions taken by many of the companies hosted in the community.

Although espousing traditional modes of neo-colonialism, many of the MNCs in Onne and in the Niger Delta more broadly are forced to be pragmatic in the ways in which they interact with host communities. Whereas previously MNCs were only concerned about maximising profit at the expense of host communities, challenges to these institutions in recent years by an empowered group means that they have been forced to become *pragmatic neo-colonialists*. This, in essence, means that MNCs operating in the region are now more aware of the need to engage with all stakeholders in host

communities. This has increased the number of CSR engagements undertaken by many of the companies, but despite being centrally interested in making profits, MNCs now commonly heed to the requests of the people in host communities. This is no different in Onne. Whereas previously MNCs would only engage with recognised chiefs, due to the nature of the chieftaincy disputes in Onne, the corporations operating in the community now respond to the multiple chiefs and the youths in the community. Failure to do so would result in the operations of the MNCs being interrupted.

The final part of the chapter explored the myth of conflicts between modernity and tradition. Building on preceding sections in which I explored the conflicts between youths and traditional elites in Onne, the section was able to challenge the notion that these conflicts reflect the competing interests between these two groups. I argue that this myth is perpetuated by analysts who wrongly assume that youth are historically docile and passive. Citing examples of historical youth movements involving the founding fathers, including Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, the section sought to nullify the suggestion that youths' challenge of traditional authority or of older elites is a new phenomenon in Nigeria. The section also challenges the foundation on which the analyses of youth resistance are constructed. By highlighting the continued quest of youth groups to engage with the socio-economic and political arrangements in the region, I emphasised the commonality of interests between youth groups and traditional elites. The section takes a step further to highlight how the perceived difference in interests is being exploited by MNCs in the region, whose primary motivation is to maximise their business profits. This chapter along with the two empirical chapters before are a useful beginning to help us rethink our understanding of the Niger Delta conflicts. Whilst seemingly unrelated, there is an

overarching pattern that emerges from emphasising the issues surrounding alternative governance structures, Nigeria's land tenure systems, and disputes between youths and traditional elites in the Niger Delta. Governance, in particular people's interaction with the state at all levels, was a consistent undercurrent that featured in the various conflicts highlighted in the empirical chapters. The next chapter will conclude the thesis by highlighting the significance of the lessons we have learned from analysing the conflicts in various communities in the Niger Delta. In the chapter, I will reengage with the *Greed and Grievance* framework and assess how it can constrain the study of conflicts. I will also attempt to contextualise the different types of youth actors engaged in some of the region's conflicts by segmenting them into passive and active actors in conflicts. Exploring these issues will further entrench the arguments made in chapter 1-6.

CONCLUSION

At this juncture, it is useful to reflect on the research, its questions, findings and implications for scholarship, policy, and practice. It is worth restating the objective of the research here and the questions it set out to explore:

1. What are the causes of the Niger Delta conflicts?
2. What are the motivations behind some of these conflicts?
3. What are the roles of the actors engaged in the conflicts?
4. And, ultimately, how do these conflicts interact to shape our overall understanding of the Niger Delta conflicts?

With these questions that led such a lengthy and challenging research journey, it is quite easy to lose sight of the underlying motivations that led to the undertaking of the study in the first place. As a result, mainstreaming the salient findings from the thesis helps to speedily acquaint the reader with a summary of key discoveries. Before doing so and as a spring board from which to assess the conclusions drawn from this thesis, I begin by sharing an excerpt of my fieldnotes taken during my first few days in the field. The lengthy reflections represent two separate journal entries documenting my first two days in Port Harcourt, in Rivers State. No sooner had I arrived in the city than I was confronted with the difficult task of trying to unpack the contextual intricacies of events in the region:

Insecurity in Port Harcourt/ the Niger Delta

On my first day in PH, the level of insecurity was palpable. I woke up to accompany my aunt to the covered market, the one-off Port Harcourt Aba Expressway, near the Niger Delta Development Commission building. It was a Saturday morning, a fairly ordinary day and as we go about getting

the things we needed in the midst of the usual hustle and bustle and haggling. Soon the conversations around us turn to the court case of the University of Abia cultist who had subjected their fellow students to months of harassment, assault and sheer horror.

The conversation quickly evolves to discussing the state of insecurity in Nigeria in general. Though the gathering consisted mostly of vendors and passing customers, a security personnel (a navy officer) joins in and testifies to the complicity of the security arm. As someone who had only been in the city for under 12 hours, I found this discussion to be deeply unnerving - but this wasn't unusual, it is common to hear these sorts of things tinged with mild exaggeration. I convinced myself of this, to calm my nerves, I had to do this if I was to survive in Port Harcourt for the next 7 months

I sit diligently observing my surroundings and preparing myself for things to come whilst I spend the coming months trying to answer my PhD questions that have brought me here. Soon after, a Lexus Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) pulls up, the driver jumps out, and immediately after, an armed policeman (a common vista in Nigeria) jumps out of the passenger's seat toting his gun, combat ready to protect the very important person (VIP) at the back of the SUV. Whilst the tinted windows obscured the VIP's face, his silhouette was clear enough for me to see that he was on a call.

A glance at this view would suggest that combat, kidnap or any sort of trouble was imminent. But I guess, this is Port Harcourt - from what I had read in endless reports, this is the place where such things happen, indeed, very frequently. A few minutes later, less than 5 minutes in fact, the driver jumps back into his vehicle, the policeman surveys his surroundings, and does the same. The VIP is whisked away ... life goes on as usual uninterrupted by these events for the people in the market. I guess there is no better way to be welcomed to a city notorious for insecurity. Even though the conversations between the market vendors and customers

seemed unrushed as they deliberated on the state of current affairs, it seemed to me at that point that the city was in a state of flux. So far, it appeared that all I had read in newspapers and journal articles might be true.

Sunday Morning: Give praise to the Lord

The next day, my assumptions and views of the region was to be challenged. On the Sunday morning after my second night in Port Harcourt, I embarked on a journey to the airport to see off my aunt who had generously chaperoned me to the city, my new residence for the next quarter.

It seemed to be another opportunity to explore the yet to be explored self-stylised "treasure base of the nation".²⁸³ Given the very many conspicuously gaudy structures, mostly private residence, it was quite evident that many in the city had unearthed the proverbial treasures.

In this sense, this was not the city I had expected. I had arrived in the region expecting to be faced with impoverished, uneasy and angst residents. Port Harcourt was in fact littered with gigantic houses and churches, of course. Being a Sunday morning, it meant many would be on their way to church to give thanks to the lord who had endowed this land with its liquid treasures.

My observation, however, led me to question what the population of Port Harcourt was (I'm still yet to find out how many people live here). The number of churches, and many of them quite vast in size, must exceed the number of faithful worshippers, but as I had discovered in Lagos, churches are big business in Nigeria - so why should it be any different here?

We proceeded to the airport only to be met with, I've been told, the habitual couple of hours Aero-Contractor delay. For the first time, I flew

²⁸³ The phrase 'treasure base of the nation' denotes the nickname given to River States. Indeed, all states in Nigeria have individual nicknames, which can often be found on the number plates of cars registered in the corresponding states. In the case of River State, the assumption is that the nickname represents the state's resource wealth and its general contribution to Nigeria's income.

with Aero-Contractor on Friday on my way to Port Harcourt, and you guessed it, our 5pm scheduled departure left closer to 7pm- but the flight to Port Harcourt was uneventful and reasonably pleasant.

Today's delay was going to give me an opportunity to observe my surroundings a little closer and that's exactly what happened. As we stroll from the VIP lounge to the main departure lounge, I noticed the 'Ferrari man', a chap so readily wanting to be identified as either very wealthy, sporty or simply 'down with the kids' in his Ferrari baseball cap and a shirt to match. He took the brand matching pretty seriously - the ready Ferrari outfit matched the brand new red Audi R8 he had overtaken us in on his and our way to the airport.

When I saw the car on the dual carriageway to the airport as I did at the airport, the same question emerged - is this the city where the "impoverished, even by Nigerian standards" live? Surely not. The reality is, I am in Port Harcourt – and contrary to what many journal articles have claimed – the Audi and the gaudy houses are exemplars of the presence of uncurbed wealth in this city and, as I was later to discover, in the whole region.”

The challenge as I had foreseen before arriving for fieldwork, was that the context and events in the Niger Delta extended beyond the binary summation often used to describe the region's conflicts. As demonstrated in this thesis, popular imagination of the region fashions the Niger Delta conflicts in a manner that pits greed against grievance, wealth against poverty, security against insecurity. Many of these binaries, equating to opposing absolutes, reflect the optics through which assessments of conflicts are habitually conducted. And without overt acknowledgment, I had become complicit in reproducing these parameters. The above journal entries affirmed just that.

On my first day in the Niger Delta, seeing an unknown VIP being escorted by armed police officers had confirmed to me that the Niger Delta was in fact under siege – a

conclusion that supported and was supported by my extensive literature review. As my time in the region extended into weeks and months, I was able to find nuances in such encounters. For example, the clearest reason a VIP might need armed escort is because they are supposedly the targets of kidnappers and armed robbers which fits neatly into the insecurity pole, argued in journal and newspaper articles. However, the more common explanation offered by my local acquaintances, who transcend any singular ethnic or social-economic status, was that armed police escort was a way for wealthy Nigerians to affirm their importance. After all, armed police escorts could help VIPs get through traffic for example, can queue-bust at ATMs, can intimidate dissenters, and most importantly, they affirm the importance of the VIPs being detailed.²⁸⁴ Any of these explanations might be true, but instead of seeking a singular ‘valid’ explanation, it was important to embrace the possibility of *multiple explanations* when reviewing the police escorts *vis-à-vis* insecurity in the Niger Delta.²⁸⁵ Indeed it was important to accommodate the idea that there were multiple competing explanations for events witnessed and accounts provided to me by stakeholders during fieldwork.

A sensitivity to such nuances provides deeper understanding of the contexts of conflicts in the Niger Delta. Moreover, accepting nuances was, in essence, an opportunity to undergird the study with intrinsic research reflexivity. With very little doubt, another example of my own prejudice that required continuous scrutiny was the assumption that the people in the region largely engaged in conflicts because of the socio-political and economic marginalisation that they had experienced in relation to the federal government. Whilst I am still rooted to this notion as one of the explanatory tools for

²⁸⁴ Chidiebere (2013), notes this and attributes some of these characteristics to “Nigeria’s ‘big man’ syndrome”.

²⁸⁵ I had spent the weeks before in Lagos and had observed the seemingly common practice of police escorts, but it had been from a distance. My experience in Port Harcourt was different, partially because on my way from the airport the night before my experience at the market, I had gone through several police checkpoints before arriving to where I was to be stationed for the foreseeable months that followed.

assessing the region's conflicts, it is clear that this represents but one of many explanations underpinning the conflict narrative. However, at the outset of the study, in a quest to gain traction with the 'grievance' explanation of disputes in the region, it seemed prudent to anchor the research around a grievance experience, which was formulated on the supposition that people in the Niger Delta were abjectly impoverished, even by Nigerian standards. In doing this, however, we limit the boundaries within which the research can be conducted. In effect, my experience in my first two days in Port Harcourt, as documented above, were very important in helping to challenge my own preconceptions of the Niger Delta. Whilst the frequent sightings of large structures and very expensive vehicles seem incongruous to the narrative of extreme poverty in the region, one need not go too far to identify this incongruence as a clue to the numerous subtleties underpinning the number of conflicts in the region. These sightings were only part of the complex portrait of the Delta region – and, as such, had to be viewed with this recognition in mind.

The thesis has been precisely about seeking to unpack these nuances that underpin the very complex set of events that have engulfed the Niger Delta region for over sixty years. The previous substantive chapters established a coherent explanation that provides additional, complementary accounts, at times, contradicting prevailing narratives of the region, and its conflicts. Indeed, the narratives woven through the six preceding chapters offered a rigorous combination of contextual and analytical assessments of key drivers of conflicts in the region, beyond the economic-centric explanations that dominate scholarly and policy discourses.

As such, in the remainder of this concluding chapter, I present three overarching themes emanating from my research findings that go some way towards complicating

understandings of the complex dynamics underpinning conflicts in the Niger Delta. To do so, I proceed in the following three sections: The first section, *Reimagining Greed: The Economic Rational for Grievance*, contextually challenges the supposition that explanations for conflicts in resource rich regions can only be found in a singular analytical paradigm within the ‘greed and grievance’ and economy of war literature. The second section, *Revisiting Youth and Disorder: Disaggregating Passive Actors from Active actors*, seeks to highlight the two main types of youth actors engaged in the Niger Delta conflicts. The first, passive actors, are identified as followers engaged in conflicts without necessarily subscribing to the objectives for which they are fighting and the active actors, are identified as those who are much actively involved in framing and driving some of the conflicts and protest movements in the region. In the third section, *The Myth of Niger Delta Exceptionalism*, I challenge the very notion that the Niger Delta conflicts are unique. Although I argue throughout the thesis that the study of conflicts in the Niger Delta requires contextual and historical nuance, drawing similarities from events across Nigeria instructively demonstrates that, to a large degree, the structural components for conflicts exist across the country, even if the proximate components exist in different forms across Nigeria. Taken together, then, this thesis ultimately demonstrates that the Delta conflicts are driven by myriad of complex overlapping but sometimes-unrelated factors.

Reimagining Greed: The Economic Rationale for Grievance

... the evidence on the causes of conflict points to economic factors as the main drivers of conflict. The combination of large exports of primary commodities, low education, a high proportion of young men, and economic decline drastically increases risks. Greed seems more important than grievance.

Although societies as a whole suffer economically from civil war, some small identifiable groups do well out of it. They thus have an interest in the initiation, perpetuation, and renewal of conflict. Naturally, these interests tend to remain low-profile. Hence, the discourse of grievance is much louder than that of greed, even if it is less significant. (Collier 2000: 110)

To Collier, and many economists, economic factors are *the main drivers of conflicts*. Above, he presents a simplistic analytical framework to support this position. Through this lens, the presence of export commodities, as well as other seemingly unrelated factors, provides support for a greed-led explanation of conflicts. He contends that the greed explanation of conflicts is, in essence, contextually more relevant than grievance explanation of the same activities. In Collier's critique of the grievance explanation of conflicts, he makes a series of compelling cases. For example, as shown throughout this thesis, Collier writes about how grievance narratives are habitually instrumentalised to justify conflicts. In one case, Collier argues convincingly, if simplistically, that rebel commanders sometimes used grievance narratives to recruit from the elevated numbers of disgruntled youths (ibid. 92.). Reno in the same edition makes a similar argument (Reno 2000: 50-51; see also, Reno 1996: 215). Exploring the intricate calculations at play in the evolution of Ateke Tom and his militant group as they sought to gain access to social, political and economic leaders in Nigeria, chapter 4 – *The Complex Identities of Militancy: A subjunctive for criminality or a quest for access?* – provided evidence to support the influence of Ateke in mobilising some youth to become combatants in the Niger Delta.²⁸⁶ While tangible factors, this thesis has demonstrated that – beyond the instrumentalising of grievance for rebel recruitment, as

²⁸⁶ Although in the case of Ateke Tom in chapter 4, his lieutenants and his recruits, it was found that grievance narratives and indoctrination actually often took place *after* the foot soldiers had been recruited. There is a sense that the foot soldiers were committed not necessarily because of any real sense of grievance but became attuned to the grievance narrative to justify the cause for which they fought.

argued by Collier and Reno – there are much more complex overlaps and interactions between greed and grievance in the inducement that led some of the youths to participate in militancy. By emphasising where greed and grievance overlap is not intended to be a wholesale dismissal of the greed and grievance or economy of war literature. In fact, on the contrary, instead of understanding conflicts through paradigms framed to reflect polar opposites, i.e. rather than seeking to provide explanations of conflicts that fit neatly into either a greed paradigm or a grievance model, it is perhaps important to refashion how we conceptualise drivers of conflicts by giving significant consideration to the fluidity and dynamism that govern conflict and actors engaged in them.

As shown in chapter 4, which documents the experience and rise of Ateke Tom and members of the Niger Delta Vigilante, a snapshot of militant operations at any single point of the Niger Delta militant insurgency might place the motives of actors engaged in the conflict in a greed category. At other points, these actions would fit neatly into the grievance framework. What is clear from this experience is that there are dyadic interactions between actors driven by greed and those driven by grievance. Indeed, in some instances, it was possible to identify actors who are driven by both greed and grievance. I would in fact argue that Ateke Tom and many other militant leaders fall into this third category, which is not necessarily surprising. As Mitchell (1981: 33) argued, “... conflicts are not a static phenomenon, and hence the dynamic aspects of conflict which alter both structure and interplay relationships over time, are essential aspects of any satisfactory analysis”. Therefore, if we are to use the greed and grievance and economy of war model to examine conflicts, we have to account for the fact that at any

given point, actors in conflicts might be motivated by either greed or grievance and, in some cases, both.

Even with this caveat, I demonstrated that it is nevertheless important to examine *how* we understand greed and grievance. If, indeed, greed is to be conceptualised as motivations underlined by economic interests, then in reality all conflicts are to a degree driven by greed. For example, if we are to equate the strife by the people of Ogu and Ekporo,²⁸⁷ documented in chapter 5, as an economically driven conflict – after all, land is an economic resource – then, indeed, we can conclude that people from both communities are motivated by ‘greed’. However, in analysing the disputes more thoroughly, this chapter, and the thesis more broadly, presented a more convincing argument, specifically, one which locates the conflict in a compelling grievance narrative. In effect, chapter 5,²⁸⁸ in particular, demonstrated the value of adopting a multidisciplinary approach when analysing the Niger Delta conflicts. Notably, whilst the conflicts centred on land disputes, it became an avenue for political competition between powerful patrons. In doing so, it also showed the ineffectiveness of the multiple decades old court decisions that have failed to abate the continuation of the conflicts between the two communities.

This analysis made it clear that the decision to partake in conflicts is not always exclusively instructed by a motivation to get rich or a motivation to seek recourse for latent and genuine grievances, independent of economic costs. Collier and Hoeffler (2000: 16-19) deftly point to this by speaking to the opportunity cost for engaging in conflicts. Of course, by taking part in conflicts, there are underlying economic

²⁸⁷ The disputes between these communities were primarily about land, although at various points it became about other factors unrelated to land. For example, it became an avenue for powerful political patrons to use their position to protect their communities at the expense of their neighbour.

²⁸⁸ Despite focusing on different areas of conflicts in the Niger Delta, all three empirical case studies charted in chapters 4, 5 and 6 offer overarching lessons, which help us to challenge a singular focus understanding of conflicts.

expenses²⁸⁹ that have to be addressed. However, seeking to keep a conflict enterprise afloat does not devoid the initiative of genuine grievance or ideological foundations. Chapter 4 to 6 highlighted precisely this. Those engaged in conflicts are forced to make decisions that ostensibly compromise the legitimacy of their grievance claims. For example, by working closely with large oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta,²⁹⁰ whilst at the same time accusing them of environmental pollution and lack of investment in local development projects, militant leaders ran the risk of appearing incoherent and contradictory. However, some of these contradictions are insignificant in a world where the justification for waging war is to secure peace (see, for example, Suhrke 2012).

Still, as we examined Niger Delta militant groups more closely, we saw that these contradictions are borne out of a number of overlapping interests. Though engaged in a battle with the state and large oil corporations for a series of highlighted grievances – notably including political marginalisation, resource control and environmental degradation – these same groups have to fund their resistance and in some cases, as shown in chapter 4, fill the void in service provision left by an absent state. Therefore, we ought to reimagine economic activities in war,²⁹¹ in some conflicts, as a pragmatic way to negotiate a minefield of sometimes conflicting motivations. Acknowledging and understanding the reasons for these contradictions is perhaps the singularly most important starting point when researching the Niger Delta conflicts.

²⁸⁹ There are economic costs to waging war. As well as the funds required to pay for war munitions, there were also costs involved with paying the wages of rebel members and in some instances, the cost for providing services to local communities.

²⁹⁰ Chapter 4 highlighted examples of when vigilante/militant groups offered security services to oil corporations at the height of militancy. This process by Niger Delta based oil corporations of contracting now ex-militants as security personnel is still pretty common in the region. It speaks to the delicate balance of power in the region and the anemic state security service provision across the region.

²⁹¹ It is worth reiterating at this point that there are of course cases where the only reason for conflicts is because of economic factors. Acute economic inequality between groups could indeed contribute to a sense of grievance which in turn could be a catalyst for conflicts (Porto 2008: 64).

As was found, after separating from the inelastic and dualistic analytical framework of greed versus grievance, it became possible to start unpacking and identifying conflict drivers more effectively. The findings in the three empirical chapters reflected this approach. Since the intention was to understand and prevent future conflicts in the Niger Delta and elsewhere, it was determined from the onset that it was important to adopt a more expansive analytical framework. As Sandole (1999: 4) argues “... in order to prevent or otherwise deal with conflicts and war, we must know something about the underlying factors: the identities, sequences, relative weights, combination, and interactions. We require, in other words, theory which enable us to explain these processes, not only as an otherwise noteworthy academic objective, but as a prerequisite to attempting to manage, control prevent, or otherwise deal with them”. This meant that whilst accepting the greed and grievance and economics of war literature as the contextual foundation for the research, it was important to further explore nuances to provide deeper understanding of factors driving the region’s conflicts. Rather than attempting to delineate genuine grievances from ‘false’ justifications for conflicts, the thesis instead focused on understanding the issues exclaimed by stakeholders involved in and affected by the region’s conflicts. This required broadening the thesis’ focus from single issue explanations to adopting a more expansive multi-layered analytical framework. In fact, the research was built on Porto’s (2008: 52) recommendation that conflict analysis should be focused on three interlinked clusters. As he stresses, the analyses in the thesis focused on reviewing the structural and proximate dimensions of conflicts; analysis of actors or conflicts stakeholders; and on an analysis of conflict dynamics (ibid.).

This approach allowed the thesis to evolve organically. By adopting greater analytical flexibility and not pursuing rigid lines of questioning, the responses from interviewees were neither cultivated nor guided. As a result, it was possible to secure expansive narrations of events relating to conflicts in the region. This allowed us to locate, in these narratives, a number of overlooked factors, which are crucial to the continuation of conflicts. Some of these key issues, as earlier argued, fit neatly within the greed framework and others in the grievance paradigm. However, many more issues fell somewhere in between the broad spectrum of the two opposite poles. Indeed, by engaging within this dipole, some recurrent issues re-emerged, e.g. resource conflicts, environmental degradation and lack of political representation. Less expectedly were factors situated outside of these confines. Though represented heavily in the conflicts discourse, I sought to re-emphasise their importance by examining them through new dimensions. One such topic is the issue surrounding youth representation in the Niger Delta. Whilst the Niger Delta youth have received significant representation in Niger Delta conflict discourse, this thesis elucidated new dimensions surrounding youth and their interactions with key stakeholders. The next section of this concluding chapter will focus on this element of the Niger Delta conflicts.

Revisiting Youth and Disorder: Disaggregating Passive Actors from Active actors

... those [youths] who are able to violently animate their grievances are invariably part of a very complex network of clientelism that is intimately connected to the structures of state power at the same time as they are opposed to its very logic. To put it in another way, members of this category of youth in the Niger Delta region are not necessarily disconnected from opportunities or responding to its lack, but rather are a part of an “elite” group who have access to the social infrastructure

required to take advantage of the perverse incentives and opportunities of the oil economy. (Iwilade 2015: 1204)

Iwilade here speaks about the opportunities available to youths who are part of an elite group. In his assessments, membership of the elite networks gives untold access and opportunity to the Niger Delta oil economy. Indeed, this conception drives away from the prevalent narrated theme of youth in the Niger Delta. Often represented as disenfranchised and marginalised in the region's political economy, as Iwilade has shown, there are complex arrangements in place that grant youths access to key stakeholders and powerbrokers in the region (Iwilade 2015: 1204, 1207). Whilst we should view this new representation of youth and networks in the region as an interesting addition to how we understand the Niger Delta, drawing on the analyses presented in chapters 4 and 6, this section will go a step further by disaggregating how we understand youth memberships to protest movements in the region. Iwilade like many analysts examining youth involvements in conflicts in the Niger Delta (2014: 573-574, see also, e.g. Smith 2004, Gore and Pratten 2003), has sought in one way or the other to track the access to patron-client networks. Often, even when youth are portrayed as agented actors in conflict activities, the existence of youth in conflicts is often represented within the clientelist framework. While significant, it only offers one version of the many ways patron-client relationships can be understood. The position of youth in the Niger Delta conflicts is plural and should not be assessed through any singular paradigm. As a result, it is important to disaggregate youth involvement in conflicts in the region by categorising youth²⁹² factions into two main groups, the passive actors and the active actors.

²⁹² It is important to note at this point that this categorisation is only relevant for youths involved in conflicts or protests in the Niger Delta.

However, before proceeding with this analysis, as in chapter 6, this section will continue to use Gore and Pratten's (2003: 215) understanding of "youth", which they argue is a Nigerian parlance for exclusion. Youth, here, "... is a complex, fluid and permeable category which is historically and socially situated" (ibid.). Von Hellermann (2010: 280), describes "youth" as the "main expression of resistance against the worst abuses of patrimonial power in Nigerian". Oyefusi (2010:333)²⁹³ adds to this by explaining that in "Nigeria, 'young men' of up to 50 years still feature as members, even leaders, of 'youth' movements". As previously discussed, these conceptualisations of youth are significant to the ongoing debate. Whilst the Von Hellermann, Gore and Pratten description of youth as the excluded seems contrarian to Iwilade's description of youth, as an included part of the elite class²⁹⁴ – in fact these authors speak to the same theme. Youths, to them, are defined in some ways by their connections, either through exclusion or through inclusion, to the same powerbrokers.²⁹⁵ This is a salient point, however, if we continue with the descriptions and reintroduce Oyefusi's argument that men as old as 50 years old sometimes categorise themselves as youths, then we can begin to draw a different picture where youths are not only defined by their associations to a patronage network. Instead, as stated in the preceding paragraph, we can view some youths' involvement in conflicts from multiple perspectives. However, for the sake of simplicity, I would argue that youths involved in the Niger Delta conflicts can be classified into two categories: passive actors and active actors.

²⁹³ Nolte (2004: 62) gives a more comprehensive definition. She argues that "'youth' is defined in opposition to those who are established as adults and 'elders'. Thus, it is not so much circumscribed by biological age as by status and behavior: the group includes all those who do not (yet) have material means and the recognition to establish themselves as providers for others" (ibid.).

²⁹⁴ It can be inferred from Iwilade's (2014) work that by 'elite group' he refers to a hierarchical order, which sees prominent individuals as the true powerbrokers – and youths as the foot soldiers that help to maintain and secure the order. In serving and connecting with the powerbrokers, the youths are accorded access to the cog of the Niger Delta oil economy.

²⁹⁵ Gore and Prattens' article, for example, "locates youth and their organizations within the 'deep', vertical politics of patrimonialism" (Gore and Pratten 2003: 216).

These categorisations usefully helped to trace youth agency in conflict participation. Whilst the general representation of youth in the region's conflicts implies a significant lack of individual agency,²⁹⁶ I highlighted that emerging literature is starting to reframe how we understand youth conflicts in the region. Instead of the usual understanding of youth engagements in these conflicts as an activity undertaken by uninformed and impressionable passive young actors, authors such as Joab-Peterside (2007) subtly present the idea of increased individual and youth group agency in some of the conflicts in the region. Although Joab-Peterside continued with the dominant narrative of youth capture by politicians and traditional rulers, he also implicitly emphasised the role played by the new emerging class of youth leaders who framed the conflict agenda (ibid.: 8-10). Iwilade (2014) goes a step further by explicitly identifying and highlighting youth agency in the region's conflicts. Iwiliade attempted to shift "... focus from those who hold the visible reins of power (the patrons) to highlighting the important and innovative ways in which clients are able to express remarkable agency by instrumentalising the very fact of their marginality as a resource with which to engage with opportunities for accumulation" (ibid.: 578). Iwilade is, in essence, arguing that youth who get involved in conflicts have agency, including *vis-à-vis* the decision to get involved in conflicts. However, I would argue that whilst they contribute to the conflicts by choosing to participate, they do not necessarily have the power to frame what the conflicts are about.

In essence, whilst Iwilade introduced the idea that youth have the agency to get involved in conflicts, he does not refer to their lack of control over the strategy or agenda of conflicts they get involved in. In fact, what he does is to indirectly highlight

²⁹⁶ Youths' participation in the Niger Delta conflicts are often explained away as either a response to socio-political economy marginalisation or unwitting co-optation by political and economic elites (See, for example, Arowosegbe 2009, Ebienfa 2011, Ibaba 2008 and Akinola 2011).

youths as passive actors in these conflicts. Because by considering youth engagements in these conflicts through the prism of subservience to their patrons, he takes away their agency once they commit to other people's wars. Even if, as he argues, youth signatories of war become part of the elite by reaping the rewards of the oil political economy (Iwilade 2015: 1204), we are nevertheless inclined to view the youths in his study as riders on the coattails of the main instigators of the conflicts.²⁹⁷

In the course of this research, however, it was possible to locate an alternative stream of youth actors. This group, whom I identified as active actors, are typically involved in framing the agenda and implementing conflict strategies. This was highlighted in chapters 4 to 6. In chapter 4, with the case study of Ateke Tom²⁹⁸ and his legion of soldiers, I underlined how they were at one point passive actors in other people's conflicts. However, he along with his lieutenants morphed into an independent youth led militant group. Not only did they frame their own agendas, but they competed on many fronts with people who they had previously served. Indeed, they were the new breeds of *active* youth actors.

Interestingly, the autonomy and agency available to these youth leaders of rebel groups was not shared across their organisations. Whilst this emergent elite youth class had formed, they were served by foot soldiers, who though actively joined, only had passive roles in these organisations. So, like before, these groups had a two-tier system where at the bottom there were passive actors who joined these militant organisations to gain

²⁹⁷ The incentives for doing this, as he highlights, would primarily be motivated by these youths' desire to gain economic benefits from joining various groups (Iwilade 2014, 2015).

²⁹⁸ Ateke Tom was once the leader of a vigilante group before morphing to become the leader of one of the leading militant groups in the Niger Delta region; for more on this, please go back to chapter 4.

economic rewards.²⁹⁹ However, unlike before, the drivers of the conflicts were not disconnected politicians or traditional elites, but instead were youth³⁰⁰ actors who ostensibly drove a 'liberation' and 'representation' agenda on behalf of the Niger Delta youths. Despite claims of representing the interests of Niger Delta youths, many of these groups were run as autocracies with limited accountability.

Relatedly, I demonstrated that there exists a different form of youth led protest movement in the region. Like youth led militant groups discussed above, this tranche of active actors has a hierarchical order, but were formed to represent consensus with the view that all participants in such movements can help to frame the agenda and implementation of the groups' agendas. For example, this was found in the Onne youth group who protested against the chiefs and MNCs. Those involved in this organisation were a group of youths who had come together to elect their representative, who was a leader of the group and had a legitimate mandate to fight on behalf of the youths in his community. Those who elected the youth leaders were able to help to frame the agenda and define the terms on which the protest was to be shaped. Beyond Joab-Peterside's (2007) and Iwilade's (2014 and 2015) reference to youth agency in conflicts participation, this extra layer showing how youth actors help to shape or frame protests movements or militant groups is a necessary supplement to what we already know about youth involvement in the Niger Delta conflicts. This aspect of youth involvement in conflicts is significant, because if, indeed, one is to speak about 'youth conflicts' in the Niger Delta or elsewhere – it is important to see how much of the conflicts are framed by youths, on what terms, and why.

²⁹⁹ As shown in chapter 5, many of the passive actors who joined these groups were from other parts of Nigeria. However, they joined Niger Delta militant groups because of the underlying economic benefits from being part of these groups.

³⁰⁰ Some of these youth leaders were in their 40s and 50s when they led their various militant factions.

It is significant to disaggregate these groups so that specific prescriptions for redress are targeted at the different actors. This is likely to help reduce future conflicts. Given the evidence presented in the preceding chapters, I would contend that one of the most notable policies to reduce youth engagement in conflicts, the 2009 Presidential Amnesty, has only been partially successful because it has been able to serve the needs of some of the passive actors who had joined militancy primarily for economic reasons.³⁰¹ However, whilst we can broadly categorise some of these passive actors as economically motivated fighters, the picture of active youth actors is less clear. It was underscored that these actors are not a monolithic group because their agendas are specific to their individual or community experience, needs or desires. So, for example, whilst militant leaders expressed state-wide and national feeling of socio-political economic marginalisation and disillusionment, youth groups in Onne had a more localised dispute about the traditional governance of their community. In a different vein, the youths in Ekpoko and Ogu had a perceived ethnic rivalry driven by attacks and counter-attacks fought along those trench lines. It is, therefore, important to try to understand the idiosyncrasies of specific conflicts to be able to address them.

We know that the Federal Government Presidential Amnesty of 2009 was partially successful, despite being largely hamstrung by the shortcomings in its implementation, and it may have been more successful had there been a better understanding of the microdynamics of the region's conflicts at a localised level. Only with a richer understanding of the local complexities could there have been a join effort led by the

³⁰¹ A very important point to realise is that many of these passive youth actors, even those who accepted the amnesty, are beholden to the elite members of various militant groups. As explained in chapter 4, Ateke Tom for example, is still served by a large number of ex-militants who continue to see him as their 'Godfather'. He is viewed as liberator and a provider for their personal needs. We also saw this in recent years when a number of Ijaw youths and elders came out in defence of former leader of MEND – Tompolo. They saw his impending arrest by the state's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as persecution of their leader (Amaize 2016).

Federal government with the support of the state government and local governments. Indeed, in order to cover all the margins of possible youth led conflicts in the Niger Delta, there would have to be an increased emphasis on trying to understand local level formation of youth led protest movements in the region.

The Myth of Niger Delta Exceptionalism

What the youths of the Niger Delta region are doing is not unique to the region. It is being duplicated in all the violent conflict situations in the country... youth groups constituted the main instruments of violence in all the case studies of ethnic conflicts spread over Nigeria's six geo-political zones. What is happening in the Niger Delta is the consequence of long years of apparent neglect of the youths of this country. Why the Niger Delta situation seems to be more pronounced is that they operate in a region where the country is most vulnerable. (Imobighe 2004: 110-111)

A large body of work has sought to emphasise Niger Delta exceptionalism in one form another to explain the conflict situation in the region. For example, it is routine to find the region described as relatively more corrupt and economically worse off, even by Nigerian standards³⁰² (Emmanuel et al. 2009: 227; Ikelegbe 2001a: 437; Tonwe *et al.* 2012: 37, Nossiter 2009, VOA 2009). This was often used as pretext for the Niger Delta conflicts, but Imobighe's above summation shows that some of the conflict activities in the region are not unique to the Niger Delta. He alludes to the fact that most of the actions taken by youth in the region are in fact commonplace in other parts of Nigeria. Whilst the primary aim of this research was to identify the underlying factors driving the region's conflicts, at various points, my preconceptions about Niger Delta

³⁰² Although this claim is often presented as pretext for conflicts in the region, the reality is a little more complex. According to 2006 UNDP report, the Niger Delta "human development index (HDI) score, a measure of well-being encompassing the longevity of life, knowledge and a decent standard of living, remains at a low value of 0.564 (with 1 being the highest score). While these ratings put the Niger Delta at a slightly higher level than Nigeria's overall HDI of 0.453, the area rates far below countries or regions with similar oil and gas resources" (UNDP 2006: 15). Within a Nigerian context, the Niger Delta fares better than many other regions. Still it is worth noting that the HDI does not capture all other aspect of life in the region (ibid. 15-16).

exceptionalism³⁰³ were continually challenged. As shown in the field journal entry presented above, the pictures painted by various academics and observers of the Niger Delta being a more impoverished part of Nigeria seemed inconsistent with the evidence discovered during fieldwork. Whilst this research focused on unpacking the idiosyncratic characteristics that distinguish events in the Niger Delta from similar events in the country, this method presented some unexpected results. Instead of simply highlighting the differences between the Delta and other regions, this approach enabled me to draw out important parallels between the conflicts in the Niger Delta and those taking place across Nigeria. In other words, by challenging the myth of Niger Delta exceptionalism, this research was able not only to highlight a more complex array of factors underpinning the violence in the region but was thus able to contextualise these within a broader national context. As underscored throughout this thesis, viewing the Niger Delta through an exceptionalised and singularly economic (whether micro or macro) lens, has important repercussions for policy mechanisms designed to redress the violence. In consequence, socio-politically and historically constituted grievances remain overlooked and unaddressed in the region.

Examining some of the key issues identified in the three empirical chapters – in particular, issues such as marginalisation, land tenure and intergenerational conflicts – it became clear that some or all of these issues are a regular feature in many disputes across the Nigeria. If, for example, we take a closer look at chapter 4 again, whilst it was possible to draw out the nuances surrounding the rhetoric of marginalisation, and highlight the complex mechanisms used to secure access to key stakeholders, I also identified the underlying grievance to be a sense of real and perceived marginalisation.

³⁰³ These preconceptions were important because they contributed to shaping the overarching objectives of the research.

Even though the chapter, to a degree, focused on the series of calculated steps that were taken by key actors in the conflicts to redress their grievances, the catalysts that drove the conflicts in the first place echoed across the region and elsewhere in Nigeria.

Throughout the chapter, it was emphasised that many of the steps taken by the actors engaged in the conflicts were a means to an end, what is also remarkable is the realisation that many similarly marginalised youths across Nigeria located outside of the Niger Delta have taken a different approach to seeking redress for their being neglected by the state. The important question here then was why were youths more predisposed towards engaging in conflicts in the Delta region? If we are to adopt a cultural deterministic approach, as presented by people like Obi (2001: 77),³⁰⁴ in seeking to understand why there is a prevalence of conflicts in the Niger Delta compared to other parts of Nigeria, then we falsely explain away the Niger Delta conflicts in purely cultural terms when there is little evidence to support such claims. Indeed, data presented in the thesis demonstrated that many of the youths involved in a particular strain of the region's conflicts are, in fact, from other parts of Nigeria, so the claim of a cultural disposition to conflicts is not very robust.

The other two issue identified above - that is, land disputes and trans-generational tensions - as some of the other causes of conflicts in the Niger Delta are similarly widespread across Nigeria. Inter-communal land disputes are universally common across the country. In different strains and forms, actions taken to tackle tensions have had varying results, just like in the Niger Delta. Still, these events are pretty regular, even if they take on different guises and are represented under different banners. For example,

³⁰⁴ As was shown in chapter 6, Obi (2001: 77) contends that "age and seniority has from earliest times been an important aspect of indigenous culture and tradition, the ascendancy of youth power does not merely interrogate the basis of traditional power, authority and control, it feeds into the existing revolutionary tensions and pressure ... ravaging the Niger Delta".

Conroy (2014) identified three main categories of current regional land issues in Nigeria. He highlighted the farmer and pastoral clashes in Northern Nigeria, urban and peri-urban land conflicts, and land and mineral resource conflicts in the South – as the key land related conflicts. Whilst these are general examples, the point is to show the prevalence of these types of conflicts in the country. It is worth mentioning still that many of these conflicts are localised even though they share an intrinsic foundation of poorly formed land tenure system.³⁰⁵

As was shown in chapter 5, there are localised land disputes taking place throughout the region and elsewhere. In many ways, they have similar characteristics insofar as the conflicts are being framed along ethnic lines. Arowosegbe (2016:262) offers a more comprehensive insight into three local government areas with the highest occurrence of ethnically motivated land-based conflicts in South-West Nigeria. Recording the tensions between the main actors, the Yoruba communities and the Hausa-Fulani pastoralists, he speaks of the tendency of both groups to “... resort to ‘jungle justice’ through the deployment of self-adjudication and self-defence based on violent exchanges” (ibid. 272) instead of formal legal channels. This of course has parallels in the Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria (see, for example, Obioha 2008; Harnischfeger 2004; and Conroy 2014). The phenomenon surrounding land disputes in the Niger Delta thus should not be perceived as unique only to the region if, as evidence shows, these same conflicts take place elsewhere. We can make similar arguments about the existence of intergenerational conflicts and challenges to traditional rulership, which was found to be a crucial issue in Niger Delta, as shown in chapter 6.

³⁰⁵ Chapter 6 emphasised the root causes of many of Nigeria’s land disputes wherein an incipient and poorly formed land tenure system creates ambiguity around land ownership in Nigeria.

In light of this knowledge, why are the Niger Delta conflicts more distinguished in comparison to other uprisings in Nigeria? What makes the Niger Delta socially, politically and economically different from other parts of the country? This thesis indicates that not very much, or certainly less than habitually presented. However, the principal distinguishing feature of the region is the large reserve of natural resources deposit, which in effect renders the Delta economically important to the federal government. This, then, is the key marker of Niger Delta exceptionalism. All throughout the region, there is a shared awareness of the region's significance to the federal government's economic prowess. Those in charge of the country at various points have also identified the significance of the region. As a result, any attempts by people from the region to evoke separatist sentiments have often been met by the federal government aggressively, often militarily. This has enabled multiple interest groups, especially organic intellectuals to forge a narrative, which pronounces the potential economic and social supremacy to be achieved should the region cede from the rest of Nigeria^{306/307} (Briggs 2017). Since the late 1990s, this narrative has been hijacked and instrumentalised by a more militant wing of the Niger Delta people (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 59-65). Strategically exported to the rest of the world through multiple mediums,³⁰⁸ the region has drawn the attention of international scholars, journalists, and all other observers, thus further canonising this mythical exceptionalism used to characterise the region's uniqueness within Nigeria (Obi 2008: 418). No doubt, the

³⁰⁶ For example, in 1966 prominent Niger Deltan from the Ijaw ethnic group, Isaac Adaka Boro, launched an offensive to establish the Niger Delta Republic (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009: 58). Although his revolution only lasted 12 days, his intention was "to reclaim the Niger Delta for the Ijaw alone" (ibid.).

³⁰⁷ According to William Reno, activists and Niger Delta elites such as Ken Saro-Wiwa "envisioned a world where everyone [in the Niger Delta] would become a millionaire, and own a Mercedes Benz car" if the region were to separate from the rest of Nigeria (Reno 2000: 59).

³⁰⁸ One of the main militant groups, MEND, was known to send emails to international news outlets. In one such email in 2006 MEND expressed that they "... wish[ed] to warn the Chinese government and its oil companies to steer well clear of the Niger Delta' [and added for chilling effect that], 'The Chinese government by investing in stolen crude places its citizens in our line of fire (BBC News, 2006; China Daily, 2006).'" (MEND cited in Obi 2008: 418).

Niger Delta is an important region to Nigeria, but many of the ills faced by the people in the region are no different from those faced by many residents all over the country. Therefore, the justification for the region's conflicts cannot be confined within a narrative of exceptionalism.

Concluding Remarks

At this stage of the thesis, it is worth reflecting on the processes and the journey that led to this point. This DPhil thesis was borne out of research curiosity and a desire to better understand the drivers prolonging the Niger Delta conflicts. Whilst finishing an MA thesis on the divergence between Nigeria and Botswana's development trajectories, it became immediately clear that the Niger Delta occupied a significant role in Nigeria's political economic development aspirations. An hypothesis that emerged after completing the MA thesis was that if the Niger Delta with all of its natural resource reserve faced sustained unrests, then Nigeria as a country would have very little chance of achieving its development goals. This view is broadly shared in the Niger Delta region, across the country and in the diaspora. Indeed, after extensive discussions with peers and fellow Nigerians, it was important to test this theory, but to do so would require an examination of the issues facing the Niger Delta.

The first few academic and newspaper articles visited to situate the region's story contextualised the Niger Delta's relationships with the rest of Nigeria within a resource led framework. But despite the ubiquitous focus on the region's resource wealth there remained a constant undercurrent of conflicts. This continued even after the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua granted the 2009 Presidential Amnesty. With over 20000 surrendering ex-militants and loud drumbeats to mark the occasion, the real tensions in the region seemed only to have been temporarily subverted. By October

2012, at the beginning of the DPhil, there were continuous reports of flashes of violence all across the region, which at the time confirmed the need to conduct this study. If, indeed, as had been argued, natural resource is the main cause of conflicts in the region, why have numerous resource-focused policy recommendations failed to completely arrest conflicts in the region? Why was the presidential amnesty only partially effective in its attempt to eradicate the Niger Delta conflicts? Were all these conflicts really just about natural resources?

The hypothesis in 2012 was that natural resources was but a commodity instrumentalised by conflict actors in the region, in their attempts to secure broader settlements that transcend any singular issue. The predominance of this assumption across scholarship and policy discourses has been highlighted throughout the thesis. The clearest outcome of this project has been the opportunity to empirically interrogate the assumptions that have guided the study of the region for the past 20 years. However, rather than seeking to depart from the prevailing narratives about the region completely, this thesis was designed and framed to complement existing work addressing the critical issues facing the Niger Delta region, its people and Nigeria as whole. Whilst the initial starting position of this thesis perhaps differs from that taken by researchers of conflicts in other academic discipline, notably in economics, the assumption here is that, there exist an underlying curiosity and interest in the Niger Delta that has led researchers from various intellectual disciplines on this same path to reflect on ways to secure sustainable peace in the region.

On my part, this quest was not borne out of a completely disengaged position – the decision to engage with this research was largely driven by an innate diasporic aspiration to redress Nigeria's seemingly inert developmental trajectory. Overall, then,

this thesis has sought to show that while the economy and economics offer an important frame for understanding the conflicts in the region, violence – and those participating in it – are far from singularly driven by economics, or economic factors.

Indeed, the data collection process, in particular, was very illuminating. There seemed to be an abundance of information shared by the very generous respondents who offered invaluable insights into some of the challenges faced in the region. In particular, then, this thesis highlighted the role of a weak land tenure system, weak governance structures, and a clamour for socio-political and economic representation as significant, but frequently overlooked, drivers of conflict in the Niger Delta region. However, it would be remiss to imply that the research was able to address all the major issues relating to conflicts in the Niger Delta. Many of these other factors were not left out deliberately. With unlimited time and resources, the research would explore some of these other factors. For example, during a number of interviews, references were made to the decay of family units. Often, young men with children are said to abandon their offspring and families, thus leaving a void where young men might otherwise benefit from the influence of positive male role models. The absence of strong male figures is thought to cause dereliction in family values, especially amongst young men who later join groups who engage in conflicts. This idea relates in some ways to the next two factors that should be explored in future research on the Niger Delta.

How does the absence of positive male role model lead to idleness and unemployment? And how does that lead to the indoctrination of young men as they seek and gain access to cult groups, militant groups and vigilante groups? What this research has in some ways shown is the paternal relationship militant leaders, in particular Ateke Tom, has with members of his various groups. Whilst there was no explicit exploration of this

relationship, it is plausible that some young men joined his group in search of male authority. Chima, one of the militants referred to in chapter 4 of this thesis, implied that the reason he had joined Ateke's group was because Ateke provided paternal security, by providing food and, in fact, security. This, indeed, would be an interesting line of questioning to pursue in future studies. Equally, maternal roles and the role of women,³⁰⁹ in general, in the Niger Delta conflicts is a factor that has not been explicitly addressed in this research. Before commencing fieldwork, there had been a conscious attempt to investigate the role of women in the Niger Delta conflicts.

This is essentially signposted in chapter one with explicit references to the Aba Women's Riots of 1929 and the Ugborodo conflicts in 2002. However, despite an attempt to question women's roles in the Niger Delta conflicts, due to the nature of the methodology adopted, it was difficult to fulfil this ambition. Since many of the spokespeople for the Niger Delta continue to claim that one explanation for the region's conflicts is socio-political and economic marginalisation, it is troublesome that the region's most marginalised constituents, women, children and the elderly continue to lack a voice in the narratives about the region. As we continue to seek a holistic understanding of the Niger Delta and its conflicts, it is incumbent on us as researchers to continue to push the envelope so that no voice is left unrepresented. Though not extensive, these as yet unaddressed gaps may offer a good starting point for future research on the Niger Delta conflicts. I hope this thesis serves as a springboard for further research into the experiential complexities underpinning the Niger Delta and its conflicts, as T.S. Elliot opined:

³⁰⁹ There had been an attempt to interview women, but the interviews were conducted through referrals. Since most interviewees mostly recommended other male interviewees, it was difficult to get a fair female representation. This has been addressed in some detail in chapter 3.

*... And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start
from...*

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APPENDICES

CUREC/1A Form

University of Oxford

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

CUREC/1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities

The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure that the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution. They start from the presumption that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research on human subjects is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate. Please check the CUREC website to ensure that you have the correct form for your project.

This form does not cover research governance, satisfactory methodology, compliance with the requirements of publishers when administering their tests or questionnaires, or the health and safety of employees and students. As principal investigator, it is your responsibility to ensure that requirements in these areas are met. Please carry out a risk assessment of the project, in consultation with all researchers involved, using the checklist and CUREC's other documentation.

The use of an asterisk in this form indicates a phrase defined in the glossary. The glossary and further information on the University's research ethics procedures are available from the CUREC website:

www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec

This form is designed largely for research that falls within the Divisions of Social Sciences and Humanities and which does not involve a high level of risk to the subjects. Elite interviews, fieldwork and oral history are included in the CUREC process. Please take a moment to read through it and if you have any questions or doubts as to whether it is the appropriate form, please review Section A or consult the CUREC website.

Note on anonymised data and audit: you do not need to obtain ethical approval for your study if:

- you are using previously collected **anonymised data** about people which neither you nor anyone else involved in your study can trace back to the individuals who provided them (e.g. census data, administrative data, secondary analysis). Please refer to the definition of *personal data in the glossary and FAQ A4 for further guidance; or
- you are conducting research on behalf of or at the request of a service provider that matches the definition of *audit in the glossary.

If your research is audit or uses prior-anonymised data, please check this box:

☐

You do not need to seek ethical approval from CUREC, and you do not need to complete any more of this form. However, please check with your department's requirements, as some departments require you to lodge this form with them.

Office use only: IDREC Ref. No. _____

Date of confirmation that checklist accepted on behalf of IDREC: // //

SECTION A	Yes	No
1) Are you using research methodologies commonly used in biomedical or behavioural laboratory sciences?		✓
2) Is there a significant risk that the research will induce anxiety, stress or other harmful psychological states in participants that might persist beyond the duration of any test or interview in which they are participating?		✓
3) Will the research involve human participants recruited by means of their status as present or past NHS patients or their relatives or carers?		✓
4) Does the research involve *human participants aged 16 and over who do not have *capacity to consent for themselves? See the Mental Capacity Act 2005		✓
5) Is the study to be funded by the US National Institutes of Health or another US federal funding agency?		✓

If you answered 'yes', please **stop** work on this checklist and

- for questions 1 and 2, complete CUREC/1 instead (available from www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec);
- for questions 3 and 4, submit your proposal to the appropriate NHS ethics committee (see www.nres.nhs.uk and www.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/=ctrg for further information);
- for question 5, or if you answered 'yes' to questions 1, 2 or 4 and your research will take place outside the EU and is a biomedical study, submit your proposal to [OXTREC](#), which uses separate documentation. Applications to OXTREC using this form will not be accepted. If your research is not a biomedical study and does not have US funding, but will take place outside the EU, you may use this form to submit your application for approval to the Social Sciences and Humanities IDREC.

If you have answered 'no' to all questions in Section A, please complete Sections B-E. This form and any supporting materials should be typewritten.

SECTION B

*Principal investigator/ supervisor/student (title and name):	Olanshile Akintola
Name of supervisor (STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS ONLY):	Dr Abdul-Rauf Mustapha
Degree programme, e.g. DPhil, MPhil, MSc (STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS ONLY):	DPhil
Department or institute:	Department of International Development
Address for correspondence (if different):	Jesus College, Turl Street, OX1 3DW
Email and phone contact:	olanshile.akintola@qeh.ox.ac.uk ; 07712157817

Title of research project:	<i>Niger Delta Conflicts: Beyond Economic Explanationa</i>
<i>Title and brief lay description of *research (about 150 words), plus description (about 200 words) of the nature of participants (including the criteria for inclusion/exclusion & method of recruitment, how professional guidelines are being applied (if applicable) and use to which the results/data will be put.</i>	
<i>Please describe how you will obtain informed consent, citing and attaching, where applicable, documentation produced in support of your application such as generic recruitment and advertisement material, participant information sheet(s), consent form(s) and defriefing document(s).</i>	
Title: <i>The Niger Delta Conflicts: Beyond Economic Explanations</i> My research aims to analyse conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria by looking beyond economic-centric explanations that have informed recent policies designed to mitigate further unrest in the region. By examining the long history of grievances in the Niger Delta, the research will highlight issues of discontent that have continued to act as catalysts in the upsurge of regional conflicts in the Niger Delta. With this additional information, a more holistic policy design can be recommended to ensure that unrests in the region are a thing of the past. Participants I have identified my target participants as key actors involved in policy decisions in Nigeria. This will in essence give me access to the information I expect will illuminate the study. Though I am currently working on my interview questions, I have already started sending interview requests by the form of email stating who I am, what my project is about and that I would like to request an interview or discuss my research topic if those contacted would be interested to participate. Of those contacted, I have received positive feedback and recommendations on further leads to contact. Since this recruitment drive has been largely successful, I have no intentions to use other recruitment techniques to attract participants. However, should I need more interview participants, I have contacted an NGO in London with whom I had previously interned, Stakeholder Democracy Network, to discuss the possibility of conducting field research with them. They have access to notable figures in the Niger Delta and in Abuja because they are very active in the policy side of the Niger Delta development project.	
<i>List actual or probable location(s) where project will be conducted, if known:</i>	Enugu, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja
<i>If your research involves overseas travel or fieldwork, have you completed and returned a travel risk assessment form? (Bear in mind that this may be necessary to ensure that the travel or fieldwork is covered by the University's travel insurance – see http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travel/.)</i>	YES
<i>Anticipated duration of project:</i>	6 months
<i>Anticipated start date:</i>	15/02/2014

Anticipated end date:	30/08/2014
Name and status (e.g. 3rd year undergraduate; post-doctoral research assistant) of others taking part in the project:	N/A
Please indicate what training on research ethics the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the online or in-person course, and date completed (online training available at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/integrity/human/):	

SECTION C

Methods to be used in the study (**tick** as many as apply: this information will help the committee understand the nature of your research and may be used for audit).

	Please tick
Interview	☒
Questionnaire	☐
Analysis of existing records	☐
Participant performs verbal/paper and pencil/computer based task	☐
Measurement/recording of motor behaviour	☐
Audio recording of participant	☒
Video recording or photography of participant	☐
Physiological recording from participant	☐
Participant observation	☒
Covert observation	☐
Systematic observation	☐
Observation of specific organisational practices	☐
Other (please specify)	☐

SECTION D

Have you read one or more of the following professional guidelines and do you undertake to use the principles listed there as a guide for your own work? Please note that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Links to the guidelines listed below are included on the CUREC website.

	Please tick

<i>British Society of Criminology: Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology</i> [www.britsocrim.org/codeofethics.htm]	
<i>British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</i> [www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines]	
<i>Academy of Management's Code of Ethics</i> [www.aomonline.org/aom.asp?ID=&page_ID=242]	
<i>Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics</i> [www.aag.org/cs/resolutions/ethics]	
<i>Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines</i> [http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/index.php]	
<i>American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science (Section H)</i> [www.apsanet.org/content_9350.cfm]	
<i>Political Studies Association Guide to Good Professional Conduct</i> [www.psa.ac.uk/psa]	
<i>British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct</i> [www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards]	
<i>Ethics Guidelines of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth</i> [www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml]	
<i>Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines</i> [http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines/]	
<i>Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice from the Socio-Legal Studies Association</i> [www.slsa.ac.uk/content/view/247/270/]	
<i>Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association</i> [www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx]	
<i>Other professional guidelines (please specify):</i>	

SECTION E

Please put a tick in the yes/no column as appropriate to indicate your response.

1) Will you obtain informed consent according to good practice in your discipline before participation?	Yes	No
	☒	☐
2) Will you ensure that *personal data collected directly from participants or via a *third party is held and processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act?	Yes	No
	☒	☐
3) Does the research involve as participants *people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question?	Yes	No
<i>Note: participants aged under 16 are generally considered to require consent of a parent or guardian (only answer 'no' to this question if you can cite one of the protocols listed under 'children'). For participants aged 16-17, consult FAQ C13</i>	☐	☒
4) As a consequence of taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of rendering themselves liable to criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes	No
	☐	☒

5) Does the research involve the *deception of participants, as part of the investigation/experiment?	Yes	No
		☒
If any of your answers above are in a shaded box, please indicate whether those aspects of your project are fully covered by the following.		
6) Research protocol(s) which has/ve received IDREC/CUREC approval?	Yes	No
If yes, please give protocol number(s):		☒
7) Professional guidelines that you will be following, as noted under Section D?	Yes	No

If any of your answers in Section E are in a shaded box and are not covered by a protocol or by professional guidelines, please complete CUREC/2, available to download from the CUREC website. Then submit both this form (you need not complete section F) and the CUREC/2 to the Social Sciences and Humanities IDREC.

If all your answers in Section E are in the unshaded boxes or your answers in shaded boxes are covered by a protocol or professional guidelines, complete Section F and submit this form and any accompanying documents to the Social Sciences and Humanities IDREC or to the relevant officer/committee at departmental level (see notes and address below).

FINAL CHECK

Please check each of the following before submitting the checklist. **If the appropriate supporting documentation is not included with your application, you will then be asked to provide this separately. This may well delay the ethical review process, and thus the start of your research.**

- Have you completed Sections A-E? ☒
- Have you defined all technical terms and abbreviations used? ☒
- If you have produced any documentation in support of your application (which might include questionnaires, participant information, consent forms/form or note of procedure for recording oral consent, advertisements and surveys), have you attached a copy of these? ☐
- Are all pages (including appendices and attachments) numbered? ☐

SECTION F

You can submit this checklist by email and/or as a signed hard copy; if it is being sent by email only, the checklist, and any email from the head of department or nominee separately endorsing its submission, must be sent from a University of Oxford email address (i.e. as a minimum, the checklist and supporting documents must be submitted by the head of department or nominee indicating his/her approval from a University of Oxford email account).

Complete this section only if you do not need to submit form CUREC/2.

I understand my responsibilities as principal researcher/supervisor/student researcher as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe my research as presently designed and that I will submit a new checklist should the design of my research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC/2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if

I cease to be the principal researcher on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signed by principal researcher/supervisor/student researcher:.....

Date: 20/12/2013

Print name (block capitals) OLANSHILE AKINTOLA

Signed by supervisor:.....(for student projects)

Date:.....

Print name (block capitals).....

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal researcher properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signed by associate/other researcher:

Print name (block capitals).....

Date

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

(i) consider the principal researcher/supervisor/student researcher to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;

(ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved protocols, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed without further formal ethical scrutiny at this stage (noting the principal researcher's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC/2 full application);

(iii) am satisfied that the proposed project has been/will be subject to appropriate *peer review and is likely to contribute something useful to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the *public interest.

(iv) [FOR DEPARTMENTS/FACULTIES WITH A DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (DREC) OR EQUIVALENT BODY - PLEASE DELETE IF NOT APPLICABLE] confirm that this checklist (and associated research outline) has been reviewed by the Department's Research Ethics Committee (DREC)/equivalent body, and attach the associated report from that body.

Signed:.....

(Head of department or nominee e.g Chair of DREC, Director of Graduate Studies for postgraduate student projects)

Print name (block capitals).....

Date:.....

If your research involves participants recruited by means of their status as current or former NHS staff, or the research will, in whole or in part, be carried out on NHS premises, use NHS facilities or assess NHS facilities or services, please see FAQ B3 (www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/faqs/).

Please check with your department about its procedures for the approval of CUREC forms. If your department indicates that the checklist should be submitted directly to the IDREC, please send it, together with any supporting documentation, to the following address(es), keeping a copy for yourself:

Secretary of the Social Sciences and Humanities IDREC
University of Oxford Social Sciences Division
Hayes House, George Street
Oxford, OX1 2BQ

Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk

IDRECs and/or CUREC will review a sample of completed checklists and may ask for further details of any project.

Revised July 2013

Consent Form:**Doctoral Research Project***THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICTS: Beyond Economic Explanations***Statement of Consent****Purpose of the Study**

I understand that I am being asked to participate as an interviewee in a doctoral research project titled *THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICTS: Beyond Economic Explanations*. The research is conducted by Olanshile Akintola, who is currently a DPhil student at Oxford University. The purpose of this study is to understand how stakeholders in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria understand the causes of conflicts in the regions and how these stakeholders perceive government response to the region's conflicts.

Your Participation

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate and withdraw myself from the study without giving any reason, and without any penalty or consequence. I can request that my information and responses be stricken from the record. I can also skip or choose not to answer any question that I am uncomfortable with. I also understand that my participation in this study will be audio recorded.

Study Procedures

I understand that if I choose to participate in the study it will take place on one day, for approximately one to two hours. I may be asked to participate in a follow up interview, which will also be voluntary. During the interview, I will be asked a series of questions about my personal background, and my experiences of conflicts in the Niger Delta and how I understand government's response to conflicts in the region. The researcher will have some prepared questions, but may also ask questions based on my personal experiences or to gain clarity on previous responses.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for me, but the findings from this project will help to better understand some of the underlying causes of conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and ways in which some of the grievances should be addressed in the future.

Confidentiality

No individually identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others, except if necessary to protect my rights or welfare; or if required by law. I have been assured that all the information collected through this project will be kept in a secure place at the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford. Only the person conducting this research and his supervisor will have access to this information.

After participation, the researcher will code my results to make sure that my name and responses cannot be directly linked. After data analysis is complete, the researcher will keep the recordings but will destroy the key that connects my identity and results.

Risks or Discomforts

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to me associated with participating in this research study. Should I become uncomfortable during any stage of the interview, I have the right to terminate my participation.

Authorization

I have read this form and decided that I (*name of interviewee*), _____ will participate in research project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible hazards and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant: _____

Place and Date: _____

Names of Researcher: Olanshile Akintola _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. Should you have questions, concerns or complaints at any stage before, during or after the interview please feel free to contact me at the address/email/phone above and I will be sure to respond to your query as soon as possible.

-- Olanshile Akintola



O-E'la Obor Eleme

(THE ELEME GENERAL ASSEMBLY)

NCIMA CIVIC CENTRE WASTE,
Obor Eleme, Km-15, East/West Expressway, Alade,

Eleme Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Mobile: 08033391988, 08189141114, 08034945524, 08175134705

E-mail: info@o-e'laoboreleme.com Website: www.o-e'laobor eleme.com

08/10/014

The Commissioner of Police,
Police Headquarters,
Rivers State Police Command,
Moscow Road, Port Harcourt.

Sir,

SACK OF EKPORO COMMUNITY AND ACTS OF CONTINUOUS TRESPASS ON EKPORO COMMUNITY LAND, IN ELEME LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA BY THE PEOPLE OF OGU, IN OGU/BOLO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA ADMIST FAILURE BY THE AUTHRITIES TO DO THE NEEDFUL.

A REQUEST FOR POLICE PROTECTION BY THE PEOPLE OF ELEME IN ELEME LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE FOR A PEACEFUL PROTEST.

I hereby write on behalf of **O-e'laobor Eleme (The Eleme General Assembly)**, a Non-governmental Organization duly incorporated with the Corporate Affairs Commission. A photocopy of its certification of incorporation is attached herewith for your view.

In view of the failure of the government and the relevant authorities to heed to the calls of the people of Ekporo Community and the people of Eleme in general to intervene and stop the acts of continuous trespass on Ekporo land and ensure their return to their homes, the entire people of Eleme, in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State have resolved to embark on a **PEACEFUL PROTEST** on Monday, the 13th October, 2014 to draw the attention of the world to the injustice being meted to the people of Eleme. It is in that regard that we are using this medium to request for the deployment of a team of police personnel to protect us as we express our constitutional right on that day.

The facts that necessitated our resolve to embark on the proposed **PEACEFUL PROTEST** are as follows:

Ekporo Community is one of the coastal communities in Eleme Local Government Area that shares boundary with Ogu Town in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area. On the 4th October, 1999 the people of Ogu launched an unprovoked onslaught on Ekporo Community, destroyed and burnt houses; economic trees and livestock were not spared. That was besides previous documented acts of aggression on Ekporo Community by Ogu people. The people of Ogu are ethnic Okrikans, although they have a separate local government for political administrative purposes.

The sack of Ekporo Community in 1999 was part of a coordinated unprovoked onslaught which the people of Okrika launched on all the Eleme coastal communities on the 4th of October, 1999. The scale of violence and carnage recorded prompted the Rivers State Government to set up a panel of inquiry presided over by **Honourable Justice S. E. Charles Granville**, now deceased, to determine the immediate and remote cause(s) of the violence.

The report and recommendations of the Panel constituted a white paper on the means of resolving the disputes. One of which was the constitution of the State Boundary Commission to determine the boundary between the people of Eleme and our neighbours in Okrika and Ogu respectively, in accordance with the terms of the Supreme Court judgment in **Suit No. FSC/123/1957**, a case between the people of Eleme and the Okrikans. A copy of the white paper is herewith attached for your perusal.

The Boundary Commission which was headed by the former Deputy Governor, Sir Gabriel Tobi could not complete its assignment before the end of the tenure of **Sir (Dr.) Peter Odili** administration, thus the present administration inherited the unfinished task of State Boundary Commission. The State Boundary Commission as presently constituted under the chairmanship of the Deputy Governor commenced the exercise, but is yet to finish.

However, while there has been fragile peace between the people of Eleme and our neighbours in Okrika and Ogu since 1999, it is very clear that the relative peace being enjoyed has been largely due to the continuous display of high degree of tolerance and restraint by the people of Eleme, in spite of repeated fresh acts of aggression and provocation by our neighbours in Okrika and Ogu, as they have continually build on the disputed areas with impunity. On some occasions our women were physically molested, assaulted and violated on their farms, besides

destroying their crops in the course of clearing the disputed areas for erection of buildings.

While these acts of aggression is common in virtually all the Eleme coastal communities such as Alesa, Alode and Onne, the experience in Ekporo since January 2013 is quite unprecedented and alarming. Sometime in January, 2013 one **Mr. Isaac Sekibo**, alleged to be the younger brother of **Senator George Sekibo** (the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Defence) procured a bulldozer and cleared a vast parcel of land belonging to Ekporo Community. Ekporo Community reported the matter to the then State Commissioner of Police who invited both parties to his office on 24th January, 2013 and advised the parties to maintain status quo, pending the completion of boundary determination exercise by the State Boundary Commission. The State Director of the State Security Service (SSS) also interviewed the parties the next day (25th September, 2013) in his office wherein both parties signed an undertaking to be law-abiding.

Few days after signing the undertaking, the people of Ogu commenced the erection of over twenty units of houses on Ekporo Community land earlier cleared by **Mr. Isaac Sekibo**. Besides the area earlier cleared in January, 2013, in July, 2013 **Mr. Isaac Sekibo** once again procured a bulldozer and cleared about ten hectares of Ekporo Community land and immediately thereafter, he hired masons and commenced fencing the entire area cleared. The members of Ekporo Community who embarked on a peaceful protest against these acts were dispersed by gun wielding soldiers and youths of Ogu on the instruction of **Mr. Isaac Sekibo**: The people of Ogu have also commenced rebuilding a disputed Police Station in front of Ekporo Community which they destroyed in 1999 when they sacked the community, alleging that the area falls within Ogu Town.

In a bid to prevent the situation from escalating, the authorities of Eleme Local Government Council formally reported the development to the then State Commissioner of Police through a letter dated 17th September, 2013, wherein a detailed history of the disputes were stated, and specifically requested for the immediate deployment of the police to the area to restore order, but the police took no steps to that effect.

On 18th September, 2013 Ekporo Community published an open letter addressed to President, the Senate President and the Inspector General of Police on this subject-matter in the September 18-24 2013 edition of National Network Newspaper, but regrettably there has not been any response from any quarters to our knowledge till date. A photocopy of the open letter is hereby annexed herewith for your perusal.

Information available to us from an unconfirmed source is that the on-going forceful acquisition of Ekporo Community land is being sponsored by **Senator George Sekibo** for the citing of a project for Ministry of Defence. Besides that, on the 10th September, 2014 the youths of Ogu invaded the premises of Ekporo Model Primary School, Ekporo Community, they vandalized and demolished the school buildings and adjoining property and buildings of individuals under the cover of armed soldiers and policemen. On the 12th September, 2014 the Minister of State for Education, **Hon. E. N. Wike** visited the said school premises and performed the ground breaking ceremony for the building of a proposed Federal Government Girls' College for Ogu Community.

While the people of Eleme are not against the acquisition of their land by the State and/or Federal Government for any public use, such acquisition must be done in accordance with the provisions of the Land Use Act. We are totally against the willful and illegal annexure of our land by the people of Ogu under the guise of any government project.

There have been several attempts of forceful acquisition of Ekporo Community land by the people of Ogu in particular, and Eleme land generally by the people of Okrika after the 1999 crises, but on each occasion we called on the police authorities and policemen were deployed to the area to maintain law and order; however, the situation in the area at the moment is quite precarious and volatile, as the police and other security agencies have refused to respond to our distress calls, and we perceived that there seems to be a directive from higher authorities that they should no longer respond to us.

At the moment the entire population of Ekporo Community which has barely recovered from the 1999 violence has once again been displaced by armed youths of Ogu who have plundered the entire community and are still doing so even as I write. On 2nd October, 2013 **Hon. Nelson Ogbuji**, who until his death was a serving Councilor representing Ekporo(Ward 5) in the Eleme Legislative Assembly was murdered in cold blood by Ogu youths who ambushed him on his way to his community to pick his vital documents, as he was out of town when the acts of hostility commenced. His corpse is still lying in the mortuary till date, as his kinsmen cannot access his community to conduct his burial.

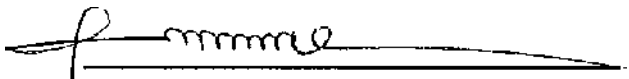
The refusal of the law enforcement agencies to rise up to their responsibilities has no doubt foisted a serious degree of apprehension on us as a people, and we are indeed very disturbed that our youths who though have continually exhibited

restraint in the face of these aggressions, especially in the situation where the law enforcement agencies have been compromised may soon be forced to act in self defence, if no practical steps are taken to restore order in the area.

It is sequel to the above that we deemed very imperative to embark on a peaceful demonstration, hence our instant request for police protection.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Evang. Jonah Chujor
(President General)

Cc:

1. The Inspector General of Police, Force Headquarters, Louis Edit House, Abuja, Nigeria.
2. The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Police Zone 6 Headquarters, Calabar, Cross Rivers State.
3. The Governor of Rivers State, Governor's Office, Rivers State Government House, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
4. The Care-Taker Chairman, Eleme Local Government Council, Ogale, Nchia, Eleme, Rivers State.
5. The Divisional Police Officer, Nchia Divisional Police Headquarters, Ogale, Nchia, Eleme.

(Signature of the Divisional Police Officer, Nchia Divisional Police Headquarters, Ogale, Nchia, Eleme)

CAC/IT/NO 69884



**CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMISSION
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA**

Certificate of Incorporation
of the Incorporated Trustees of
O-E'LA OBOR ELEME ORGANISATION

I hereby certify that

HRM. EMERE (DR. & SIR) EJIRE, EVANG. JONAH CHUJOR, SIR (HON) OBIANKO NWOLU ELECHI, SIR (DR) NNATOSEMI WOKOMA, SIR EMMANUEL ENOD DIBIA, ELDER JOHN ABBEY, REV. CANNON MANASSEH OGURU, HRH. (BARR. & DR.) OSARONU DENNIS (JP), CHIEF JOB SANWI, ELDER GOMBA OSAROLLOR,

the duly appointed Trustees of O-E'LA OBOR ELEME ORGANISATION have this day been registered as a corporate body, subject to the below mentioned conditions and directions.

Given under my hand and the Common Seal of the Corporate Affairs Commission at Abuja this Fourth day of June, 2014

CONDITIONS AND DIRECTIONS

This certificate is liable to cancellation should the objects or the rules of the body be changed without the previous consent in writing of the Registrar General or should the body at any time permit or condone any divergence from or breach of such objects and rules.

Note:

This certificate does not bestow upon the Organization the right to establish any institution, engage in any business and the like without permission from the appropriate authority.




BELLO MAHMUD

Registrar - General

734477

OPEN LETTER TO MR. PRESIDENT, SENATE PRESIDENT, IGP

President Goodluck Jonathan
Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces
Of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
Aso Villa, Abuja

Sen Dr David Mark
Senate President
National Assembly Complex
Abuja

Allh. Mohammed Abubakar
Inspector-General of Police
Force Headquarters
Abuja

Sir;

The Unprovoked Acts Of Aggression Against The People Of Ekporo In Eleme Local Government Area Of Rivers State By The People Of Ogu In The Ogu/Bolo Local Government Of Rivers State.

The State remembers that in the wake of this democratic dispensation one of the first victims as it were of the democracy is Ekporo clan in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State. She was the victim of an evil machination by Ogu Community in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area of Rivers State. Ekporo Community was completely burnt down and forcefully occupied by Ogu Community. The Hon Justice S.E. Charles-Granville Commission of Inquiry set up by the Rivers State Government under the administration of Sir Dr. Peter Odili made the following findings in respect of the destruction of lives and property in Ekporo:

b) *"The Commission on the visit of the locus found that Ekporo had been completely destroyed. No house was seen standing; no human lives in the village now; there was no livestock of any kind seen, and even economic crops and trees were utterly and wickedly cut down."*

c) *"In view of the above findings, the commission was satisfied that the level of destruction on Ekporo Community could not have been self inflicted, as that suggestion was very unnatural and incredible. The attack and eventual destruction of Ekporo was the machinations of Ogu people who had continued to occupy and inflict further destruction of economic trees at Ekporo. The commission found fresh evidence in support of this allegation on the day of the visit to the locus. The commission declares the Ogu people the aggressors, on the unprovoked attack, destruction and total annihilation of Ekporo in the evening of 4th October, 1999."*

Through the support of well meaning Nigerians and the Rivers State Government we were able to return home in 2001 to rebuild our shattered lives.

We continue to be grateful to the Government of Sir (Dr) Peter Odili for

creating a conducive environment for our return home.

Since 2001, we have enjoyed relative peace. This relative peace was shattered when in January this year, one Isaac Sekibo the younger brother on Senator George Sekibo, the Senate Committee Chairman on Defence brought in bulldozers and began clearing vast parcel of our Community land.

The matter was reported to the Police who invited both parties to a meeting on the 24th of January with Commissioner of Police. The Police Commissioner advised both parties to desist from entering the land. The next day, on the 25th of January, the Director of State Security Service (SSS) also invited both parties to a meeting in his office where both parties signed an undertaking not to enter the said parcel of land to do any work. Needless to say that the Ogu people despite signing the undertaking got home and commenced construction of over twenty houses on the disputed land and nothing was done to stop them.

In July this year, Isaac Sekibo again brought in bulldozers to clear about ten hectares of cassava farm land. The community protested the destruction of their crops but Isaac Sekibo accompanied by some military personnel threatened to unleash mayhem on the protesting villagers. He claimed to have orders from 'above'. They proceeded to erect massive fence around the land. This incident was also reported to the police but nothing happened.

On the 8th of September 2013, this same Isaac Sekibo and one Walter Anga delivered about fifty thousand blocks at the only entrance into the Ekporo Community intending to fence in the community. This was also reported to the Police who now stepped in to stop them from continuing. These blocks are there for everyone to see.

The very next day, heavily armed youth of Ogu numbering over two hundred invaded the Ekporo Community shooting sporadically, scaring people to flee for their lives. The Ogu youths proceeded to destroy economic trees. The evidence is there for all to see.

Ogu youths numbering over five hundred returned in the early hours of the 13th of September

2013 under the pretext of clearing the old Police Station that was burnt down during the 1999 assault on the Ekporo Community. In the process they destroyed economic trees and crops. We are at a loss to understand how Ogu people would come to government Police Station in another Local Government Area to clear the site.

With all the boast and impunity of their actions, can the Chairman Senate Committee on Defence, Senator George Sekibo pretend not to be aware of all the acts of provocation being carried out against the people of Ekporo by his brothers and kinsmen? Why would Isaac Sekibo who is not a Government functionary be entitled to over six military personnel who escort him to terrorise hapless villagers?

These same persons have on some occasion dropped the name of our dear mother, the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as the person on whose behalf these forceful land grab are being made. We definitely know that this is not true.

We therefore are sending this urgent appeal to the Federal Government to come to our aid and stop Senator George Sekibo and his people from destroying our community as they did in 1999.

We appeal to the Government not to allow another round of communal violence orchestrated by these men to shatter the relative peace in Rivers State.

Thank you.

Chief Samuel Obe
Paramount Ruler
Ekporo Community

Mr. Godspower Late Lekwa
Youth Leader
Ekporo Community

Madam Comfort Lekwa
Woman Leader
Ekporo Community

Appendix 2

ALTAR ADVOCATES
LEGAL PRACTITIONERS

Top Floor, Abenu Plaza, Jaka Bus Stop, Akpajo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
08037112289, 08033272490, inowista@yahoo.com

03/10/014

The Honourable Minister for Education,
Federal Ministry of Education,
Abuja, Nigeria.

Sir,

RE: THE SACK OF EKPORO COMMUNITY IN ELEME LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA BY THE PEOPLE OF OGU, IN OGU/BOLO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, BOTH IN RIVERS STATE, AND FORCEFUL ACQUISITION OF LAND AND DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY THEREOF BY THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION.

We are Solicitors to Eleme Local Government Council of Rivers State (hereinafter referred to as "our Client") and we have its mandate and instruction to write this letter to you on the above subject-matter.

Our Client briefed us as follows:

1. That on the 10th of September, 2014 the youths of Ogu Community, in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area of Rivers State invaded the premises of Ekporo Model Primary School, Ekporo Community, in Eleme Local Government Area and vandalized and demolished the school buildings and adjoining property and buildings of individuals under the cover of armed soldiers and policemen.
2. That on the 12th of September, 2014 the Minister of State for Education, **Hon. E. N. Wike** visited the said school premises and performed the ground breaking ceremony for the building of a proposed Federal Government Girls' College for Ogu Community.
3. That the entire parcel of land upon which the proposed project is to be built belongs to the people of Ekporo Community, in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers State. Ekporo Community is one of the seven coastal communities in Eleme that have been in land feuds with their Okrika neighbours since 1930, besides Akpajo, Aleto, Alesa,

L. Obari, Esq., LL.B (Hons) Ife, BL
C.T. Obiajunwa, Esq., LL.B (Hons) Ife, BL
J.C. Olu, Esq., LL.B (Hons) Uyo, BL
N.B. Gbarade, Esq. LL.B (Hons) RSUST, BL
B. Boro, Esq., LL.B (Hons) RSUST, BL
N. Onungwe, Esq., LL.B (Hons) Madonna, BL
S.Q. Epelle, Esq., LL.B (Hons) RSUST, BL
F.O. Chumu, Esq., LL.B (Hons) RSUST, BL
Ajuri Ogbe-Nwor, Esq., LL.B(Hon) Uniben, BL
H. K. Ololuka, Esq., LL.B(Hons) Madonna, BL

Alode, Onne and Eteo. The people of Ogu are Okrikans by origin and they were part of the political administrative structure of Okrika from time immemorial until the creation of Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area.

4. That the above development is very worrisome, disturbing and disheartening when considered in the light of the antecedents of the protracted land dispute between Ekporo Community and other coastal communities in Eleme and Ogu community which assumed an unprecedented violent dimension in 1999 when Ekporo Community was sacked by Ogu in an unprovoked onslaught in which Ekporo Community lost many lives, besides houses and property that were completely destroyed and or burnt.
5. That these disputes culminated into a series of legal battle which ended in the Supreme Court in favour of the people of Eleme in 1957, in Suit No. FSC/123/1957, but the Okrikans have continually and willfully flout the terms of the judgment.
6. That the unprovoked onslaught by the people of Ogu on Ekporo Community in 1999 was part of the series of violence which the Okrikans unleashed on all the coastal communities in Eleme in 1999 for resisting the acts of aggression and trespass by the Okrikans on their lands in utter disregard for the Supreme Court judgment.
7. That the people of Ekporo Community had barely recovered from the loss and hardship they suffered from the 1999 onslaught when their community was again sacked by the youths of Ogu sometime last year, and the Counselor that was representing the community in the Eleme Legislative Assembly, **Mr. Nelson Ogbuji** was ambushed and murdered in cold blood on 2nd of October, 2013. Ekporo Community has ever been besieged by armed youths of Ogu and soldiers deployed at the instance of **Senator George Sekibo** till date. His corpse is still lying in the mortuary because his family and kinsmen cannot access their homes and community, **Senator George Sekibo** who is an indigene of Ogu is the Chairman, Senator Committee on Defence, representing Rivers-East Senatorial District.
8. That the degree of violence and its associated carnage and material loss in the 1999 crises were unprecedented; not even economic trees and livestock were spared, hence the Rivers State Government

constituted a panel of inquiry presided over by **Honourable Justice S. E. Charles Granville**, now deceased, to determine the immediate and remote cause(s) of the conflicts and make recommendations to the state government. Both parties to the conflict appeared before the panel and presented their cases. At the end of which the panel submitted its reports and recommendations to the Rivers State Government in January, year 2000.

9. That the Panel made the following findings amongst others:

a. That from time immemorial, the Elemes were the owners of all the

land right down to the coast running from the North to the South and East to West. On the other hand, the Okrikans lived on the Island, They (Eleme and Okrika) were good neighbors. While Okrikans were fishermen, the Elemes, on the other hand were farmers, although they fish as well. With time, trade developed between the two communities along the coast. Elemes gave lands to Okrikans who traded with them to erect shelters, in form of huts for their trade. This was beyond living memory. At that time, the two communities were under the Degema Division, and they lived peacefully throughout the years.

However, between 1935 and 1937, the Elemes were put under Opobo Division for administrative purposes, while the Okrikans remained under the Degema Division. This administrative act resulted into trouble because the Elemes demanded that the Okrikans on their land should pay taxes to them, which Okrikans refused to do. The Okrikans claimed that the portion of land they occupied along the coast was not given to them by the Elemes at all, but was theirs by right of occupation. This led to disputes, riots and some Elemes lost their lives. For fear of reprisals, the Okrikans abandoned their settlements along the coast and went back to the island.

c. Consequently, an inquiry under the Inter-tribal Boundaries Ordinance was ordered and one Mr. Wodehouse, a District Officer, was appointed to look into the dispute. He could not conclude the inquiry and so one **Mr. Harding**, another District Officer was appointed to complete the

inquiry. He submitted his report on the 11th December, 1942, and held:

"that the Elemes were the owners of all the lands up to the water's edge by Native Law Custom .. "

10. That the findings of the panel were founded upon the judgment of the Supreme Court herein referred to above, and the Panel recommended amongst others that the Rivers State Government should take immediate steps to enforce the judgment of the Supreme Court; and that in view of the fact that the ultimate and radical title of the entire parcel of land right to the water edge is vested in the people of Eleme, all future projects sited thereat either by Federal or State Government and companies in the area should bear the of Eleme which has the reversionary right as per the judgment of the Supreme Court.
11. That pursuant to the report and recommendations of the Panel, the Rivers State Government published a white paper, stating its position on the disputes; one of which was the need constitute a State Boundary Commission to enforce the terms of the Supreme Court judgment. A copy of the Rivers State Government White Paper referred to is attached herewith for your perusal and guidance.
12. That the Boundary Commission which was headed by the former Deputy Governor, **Sir Gabriel Tobi** could not complete its assignment before the end of the tenure of Sir (Dr.) Peter Odili's administration, thus the present administration inherited the task. The State Boundary Commission as presently constituted under the chairmanship of the Deputy Governor commenced the exercise, but is yet to finish.

Sequel to the above, our Client hereby resolves as follows:

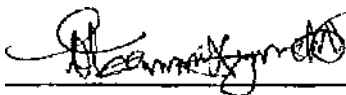
- a. That the action of the Federal Ministry of Education as stated herein above amounts to forceful acquisition of land and property and as such violates the right of the affected individuals in the community of their fundamental right to own moveable and immovable property as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and shall be duly contested in court to a logical conclusion.
- b. That in the event that the Federal Government retraces its steps by acquiring the portion of land concerned in compliance with the law, the project to be sited thereof shall be name to reflect the fact that it is on Ekporo land.

- c. That the continuous occupation of Ekporo Community by meg of the of Nigerian Army, the refusal of the Police to prosecute six youths of Ogu arrested in Ekporo in December 2013 with sophisticated arms and ammunitions, and the uncivil manner in which the Federal Ministry of Education has recently deprived the people of Ekporo of a section of their land and property suggests that the Federal Government is either aiding and abetting or directly sponsoring the criminal activities of the people of Ogu in Ekporo, and therefore demands explanations on why the Federal Government failed to respond to an open letter written by the Ekporo Community to President, the Senate President and the Inspector General of Police published at page 7 of the September 1824 2013 edition of National Network Newspaper on the acts of aggression by the people of Ogu against them.
- d. That in spite of the frequent spate of violent acts of aggression being unleashed on them with impunity by their Okrikans negibours before and after the 1999 crises, they have continually chosen to be law-abiding and civil; even in the face of intentional provocation, not because they lack the capacity to physically defend themselves and their territory against the acts of aggressign, but to ensure that peace reigns. However, the recent action of the Federal Government in Ekporo Community has seriously offended their youths who are now poised to spill the last drop of their blood to defend and protect their territory from all forms of aggression and injustice.

In the light of all the above, we hereby humbly request you to use your good offices to do the needful to nip the looming blood-bath between the people of Eleme and the Okrikans in the bud by ensuring that your Ministry and/or the Federal Government does not take any step that will trigger off violence between the people of Eleme and the Okrikans or any of their neighbours.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



L. Obari, Esq.

Cc:

1. The President,
The Federal Republic of Nigeria,

Aso Rock Villa, Abuja.

2. The Senate President,
The Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, National
Assembly Complex, Abuja.
3. The Minister of Justice & Attorney General of the Federation, Ministry of
Justice, Abuja.
4. The Honourable Speaker,
House of Representatives,
National Assembly Complex, Abuja.
5. The Acting Inspector General of Police, Force Headquarters,
Louis Edet House, Abuja.
6. The Executive Governor of Rivers State,
Rivers State Government House, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
7. The Speaker, Rivers State House of Assembly, Port Harcourt.
8. The Commissioner of Police,
Rivers State Police Command, Moscow Road, Port Harcourt.

Appendix 3

OGU COMMUNITY

OGU/BOLO LGA, RIVERS STATE.



Our Ref:.....

Your Ref:.....

Date: 9th July, 2014.....

The Commissioner of Police
Rivers State Police Command
Moscow Road
Port Harcourt.

Sir,

KPORO CRISIS

Introduction:

This position paper/submission shall within the framework of the sub-headings address the cases of persistent acts of hostility and aggression against the Okrika Communities (Ogu Community inclusive) by the people of Eleme Communities, a situation that led to series of administrative arbitrations and law suits which culminated in the historic Federal Supreme Court judgment of March, 1958 in **Suit No. FSC/123/1957**. The Supreme Court Judgment is attached as **Appendix '1'** refer

It has been established that the Eleme Communities have over time persistently defied the express orders made in the said Federal Supreme Court case and have continued in their acts of belligerence towards the Okrika people (Ogu people inclusive), hence the underlisted provocations on the people of Ogu.

1. Brief Historical Insight Of Ogu Community

Ogu, Headquarters of Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area is the second largest ancient town among the Wakirike Comity of Communities. It is about 45 minutes drive from Port Harcourt. A Chieftaincy Community with respectable chieftaincy institution that binds the community together. It is one of the 24 designated urban areas in Rivers State,

Gazette No. 2 of 1987. Ogu with her satellite settlements is surrounded by Eleme LGA in the West, Tai LGA in the North, Bonny LGA, Bolo and Wakama Ama Communities in the South and Okrika LGA in the South-West. It could be reached by sea, air and land. It has well over 20 satellite villages and fishing settlements that could be reached. through sea on Ogu Creek and Bonny River, while some by land through Eleme and Tai LGAs.

2. Neighbouring Communities Of Ogu

Neighbouring Communities include: Sime, Barale, Barayira, Nonwa and Norkpo, all in Tai LGA. Others are Onne and Eteo in Eleme LGA, and Mgbemgbe boko in Okrika LGA as well as Bolo and Wakama Ama in Ogu/Bolo LGA.

3. The Migration Of The People Of Ekporo

The migration of Ekporo from Onne to Ebubu and from there to Ogu is narrated in the book written by Charles Ibasimama Davids titled: **KPORO-OGU: A HISTORICAL FACT**, is attached as **Appendix '2'**, please refer.

4. Ogu Settlements Along The Ogoni Axis

S/N	NAME OF	SETTLEMENT NUMBER AS DESCRIBED BY THE SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT OF 1958
1.	Anigoboka Ama	89
2.	Old Iga Fe (Market)	90
3.	Nemieboka Ama	91
4.	Chuku Ama	92
5.	Olobulo (Market)	93
6.	Olomu Soko	94
7.	AO Iwofe (Market) <i>44 Fe</i>	95
8.	Ada Ama	96
9.	Tende Ama	97
10.	Tende Fe (Market)	98
*11.	Kporo	99
12.	Yude Ama	100

13.	Tamuno/Ofunguru Ama	101

SOURCE: Please refer to the Federal Supreme Court judgment of 1958 in **Suit No. FSC/123/1957** as described in **Pan No. AB/84/66**.

5. **Specific Acts Of Provocation, Hostility And Threat Against Ogu Community By The People of Ekporo And Their Cultural Hornologues In Eleme.**

With the passage of time, Ekporo people distorted history to favour their kith and kins of Berne and also perpetrate unprovoked attacks on Ogu Community in recent times. Example of such attacks and distortions are as follows:

- a. In July, 1977, Ogu people embarked on a road project to connect the Ogu General Hospital. During the execution of the communal project, one Mr. Oba Gbobbo from Ogu was matcheted by one Mr. David Lekwa from Kporo. The matter was reported to the police at Okrika as Ogu was under Okrika Police Division and the victim was rushed to the General Hospital, Port Harcourt for treatment. The incident resulted in the permanent disability of the victim. The case was in court vide case **NO. PHC/135/77-Commissioner of Police Vs David Lekwa and 3 others** of 7th December, 1977.
- b. On the 10th September, 1977, Ogu people traveling from Port Harcourt to Ogu by sea were shot at in Ogu creek near the site of the Port Complex. The assailants were none other than the Elemes (inclusive of Ekporo people) who used barges as cover. A school boy then (Master Nemitari Tende) was wounded whilst the others jumped into the river for safety on the other side of the Creek. This was also reported to the police at Okrika but nothing came out of it.
- c. On the 13th September, 1977, barely three days after a Peace Accord at the Refinery three Ogu villages-Ikpokiri, Siere Ama and Daso Ama were attacked and burnt down. The inhabitants fled the area and later returned. These incidents were also reported to the State Police Command, Port Harcourt since others reported at the Okrika Police Division yield no result.

- d. On the 6th October, 1977, in spite of the series of petitions, reports, peace meetings with Commissioners of Police and the State Security Services, the Eleme (Ekporo people inclusive) still launched an attack on Orubie Ama and Ekerekanabie behind Okrika Grammar School, Okrika. Staff and students of the school including patients of the Okrika General Hospital, Okrika and the villagers scampered for safety. Some of the students and patients were Ogu people. Ogu people had to defend their territory. A further report on this incident was made to the State Police Command. This report was greeted with the familiar silence. We recall that prior to this incident, the Eleme children were removed from Okrika Grammar School, Okrika and Government Secondary School, Ogu. No one suspected what was in their mind, and every one wondered why, not until the attack commenced.
- e. On the 8th October, 1977 between the hours of 2 and 3pm, the Elemes (Ekporo people inclusive) attacked Owukiri, an Ogu village opposite Ogu Town, firing ceaseless volleys of gun shots and destroyed houses. Fishermen fishing at the waterside were seriously wounded. The Police Sergeant in-charge of Ogu Police Post was an eyewitness. A report from him on the incident exonerated Ogu people.
- f. On that same day, this time around between the hours of 6 and 7pm, the attack was repeated as armed persons advanced into Ogu from behind the Government Secondary School, Ogu. The officers of the Police Post at Ogu and about 200 Police reinforcement which had earlier arrived in the day took cover when they found that they were hopelessly outnumbered. The Elemes (inclusive of Ekporo people) by that time had advanced into the Primary School field at Ogu. There was general panic at Ogu and the only alternative open to every human being was to defend his/her life and property when attacked. The Ogu people succeeded in repulsing the attack and

drove the Eleme attackers to Kporo when a pitched battle ensued. An impartial report from the Sergeant in-charge of the Police Post at Ogu then should put: the incidents in the right perspective. •

- g. In order to avoid this ugly experience, in January, 1978, Okrika Community (Ogu inclusive) petitioned the then Military Governor of Rivers State, Col. Zamani Lekwot, after the encounters in 1977 stopping the Eleme Community' (inclusive of Ekporo people) from cutting of bush within the 1000ft by 27miles for farming. The petition was investigated and His Excellency directed that crops already planted could be harvested by both sides, but no new farmland should be cultivated by either side for planting purpose until a boundary demarcation is drawn up. This directive was however not adhered to by the Elemes and Government was silent over the matter.
- h. In December, 1993, for no just cause, the Eleme Community (inclusive of Ekporo people) attacked Okrika and Ogu women who went for trading mission to Nchia, Headquarters of Eleme LGA and students from Okrika and Ogu Communities who were posted to Eleme for their General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination at Ascension High School, Eleme. This situation led to the then Military Administrator of Rivers State. Col. Dauda Komo appointing a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) to demarcate the boundary in accordance with the Federal Supreme Court Ruling of 1958 in **Suit No. FSC/123/57**, as a solution to the problem. The work of the committee was frustrated by the Eleme Community which refused to nominate and make available to the committee a lawyer and surveyor to represent their community interest. The Okrika Community nominated their representatives and as a result of the refusal of the Eleme Community to participate in the exercise, the assignment was not carried out and the problem remained

unresolved.

- i. In same vein, our Eleme brothers have refused to respect this very illuminating judgment of the Federal Supreme Court and their diSrespect and disobedience have culminated in the inevitable result of clashes between the two communities (i.e Okrika and Eleme Communities) as foreseen by Coussey Ag. F. J. They have resorted to frequent attacks on some of the 101 Okrika Communities mentioned and covered by the said Federal Supreme Court Judgment. However, it is worthy to note that in the late 1958, shortly after the judgment of the Federal Supreme Court, an attempt by the County Councils of Okrika and Eleme to implement the terms of the judgment was frustrated by the Eleme County Council by its refusal to attend meetings fixed for the purpose.
- j. On the 4th October, 1999 disgruntled Ekporo Youths attacked the Divisional Police Headquarters at Ogu as an extension of aggression of an unwanted violent attack by the Youths of Eleme on the Okrika Youths at the gate of the Port Harcourt Refinery situate between Okrika and Eleme. The wide scale violent hostilities occasioned by this inter-communal conflict led to the inauguration of the late Hon. Justice S. Charles Granville's Commission of Inquiry by the then Governor of Rivers State. His Excellency, Sir (Dr.) Peter Odili on October 11, 1999. The Commission had since completed its assignment and submitted report to Government for acceptance and implementation since January, 2000, yet nothing is done assuage the fears of Ogu people.
- k. k. On December 28 and 29, 2001, the end of year pleasantries and activities suddenly turned into moments of anxiety for the imminence of danger occasioned by the flagrant trespass, destruction of building and holy sites in Ada Ama by Chief (Hon.) Precious O. Ngelale, former Minister of State for Water Resources and later Trade and Investment. Earlier, a Notice Board bearing **"EKPORO IN ELEME LGA,"** maliciously calculated in the positioning, was placed at the junction of Ada Ama in Ogu to

encapsulate the Divisional Police Headquarters, Ogu in order to provoke the people of Ogu. The Police station which has served Ogu Community and the Local Government for more than a decade was abandoned by the Police for fear of attack at the behest of Chief (Hon.) Precious O. Ngelale till date.

- Prior to this time, Chief (Hon.) Precious Osaro Ngelale drafted Mobile
- l. Police to occupy the Police Station at Ogu and pressurized the Inspector-General of Police to build Kporo Police Station on Ogu land. Thanks for the understanding of the then Commissioner of Police, Sir Karean Daudari who dialogued with Ogu for the piece of land. The Police Commissioner did not see the wisdom in building two Police Stations within the same compound. He (CP) also directed that both parties should stay clear from the area until boundary demarcation is carried out. Yet the people of Ekporo refused. All these happened in the year 2001.

m. Chief (Hon.) Precious Osaro Ngelale as Minister of State for Water Resources in 2001 graded settlements 100 and 101 (Yude Ama and Ofunguru Ama) areas destroying graves and artifacts in order to establish a farm settlement and the matter was reported to the then Governor of Rivers State, Sir (Dr.) Peter Odill and other security agents in the state, yet nothing was done.

- n. Chief (Hon.) Precious Osaro Ngelale, a son of Ekporo, in injunction with his brother Chief Kingsley Ngelale and Ekporo people in same 2001, gave settlements 100 and 101 to the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) for use without the consent of the people of Ogu. To that effect a petition was sent to the Honourable Minister of Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources on 11th September, 2009. Chief (Hon) Precious O. Ngelale quickly connived with the Honourable Minister and he directed the legal department of his ministry to write Ogu people that they have no case. Letters are attached as **Appendix '3'** and **'4'** respectively.

- o. In September, 2005, a Gas Turbine Sub-station was located at Ada Ama to serve both Ogu Community and the people of Ekporo by the Ministry of Power. This project was violently stopped by Eleme, inclusive of the people of Ekporo.
- p. These actions of Chief (Hon.) Precious Osaro Ngelale and his people were reported to the appropriate authorities because Ogu people are often criticized for any retaliatory measures from any person or group against Ekporo people, no matter the circumstances. Even when Ogu people were complainants, the matter was viewed with some reservation that was the reasons Ogu Community presented these cases before the Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2007 for settlement and peace to reign, yet they (Ekporo people) are not satisfied.
- q. It is most respectfully recollected that these same persons in Kporo misinformed the Rivers State Police Command that the Israeli who was kidnapped sometime in September, 2008 in Port Harcourt was allegedly kept at Chuku Ama, one of the villages of Ogu Community, Based on this false information, a team of investigative Police Officers led by an Assistant Commissioner of Police was dispatched to Ogu and on arrival apprehended six (6) youths from Ogu. These innocent youths were in detention for seven (7) days under torture before their release.
- r. In the midst of these provocative acts, the people of Ekporo on 23rd October, 2008 went back again to design an orchestrated mutiny against Ogu Community in conjunction with their Eleme brothers, using the Police Officer, Inspector Akugbo from CIB, Port Harcourt attached to Eleme Local Government Council to prepare false security reports against Ogu people in an attempt to feud crisis, chaos and remain as tension provocateur in our relationships. His security reports and information were investigated by the Police and

found baseless. It would have tarnished the image of the Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

- s. That people of Ekporo not been satisfied with the ransacking of the

Police at Ogu Police Station went back to burn down the Station on 12th March, 2009. The matter was reported to the Commissioner of Police and the matter was under Police investigation. Investigation was to nd avail.

- t. Ogu people observed some sinister movements by the people of Ekporo with very strange faces around the vicinity of Government Secondary School, Ogu doWn to the pipeline towards Nonwa-Tai and kporgor Community axis on 28th October, 2009 and called for an investigation of the movement by the Area Commander of Boni Area Command of the Nigeria Police Force. Not quit long, just in the month of November, 2009, the people of Ekporo accused the people of Ogu for the kidnap of Chief (Hon.) Precious Osaro Ngelale's mother. When eventually she was released, Ogu people were exonerated from the accusation.

- u. Due to the manner in which the people of Ekporo give out our lands to State agencies without our consent, the Ogu Community through the Amanyabo of Ogu put up a Public Notice/Caution as regards the said lands and warned all affected to desist on 8th March, 2010. A photocopy of the said letter is attached as **Appendix IT**.

- v. As if their earlier actions are not enough, in 2012, the Wife of the Rivers State Governor, Mrs. Judith Amaechi under the auspices of her pet project decided to build a Nursery School in Ogu, Headquarters of the Ogu/Bolo LGA and requested for land to execute the project. The people of Ogu gave her an expanse of land in settlement 98(Tende Fe) in respect to her request. It will be of surprise to you that the people of Ekporo stopped the project violently by claiming ownership to the land. Matter was reported to the Police and the JTF. at Ogu.

- w. On October, 2nd, 2013 the people of Ekpore without any fracas agitated the people of Ogu by killing Pastor John Isaac. The matter was reported to the Police and the JTF at Ogu. The culprit, Inspector Franklin Weeba, a serving Police Officer, serving at Oji River was arrested with exhibits such as pistol and matchet found in his possession, yet granted bail in November, 2013 in a murder case under investigation that is yet to be concluded. Attached is a photocopy of the deceased picture as **Appendix '5'**.
- x. TO still justify their conspiracy against the Ogu people, on 2nd June, 2014, the people of Ekpore came into Ada Ama and picked one Mr. Tokube Obiesika who was in company of one Mr. Imboy Adie who escaped the fake arrest. They all wore Police and Army uniforms to perpetrate the act. Up till date Mr. Obiesika's whereabouts is not yet known. Matter is incidented with the Police at Ogu. Attached is a photocopy of his photograph, as **Appendix '6'**.
- y. The people of Ekpore planned another attack on Ogu people which have been made public to the world through the media on 30th June, 2014. With the discovery of their evil plan, they ran to the Area Commander's office at Bori and urge him to give them Police coverage to go to their home-Kporo.

THE STAND OF OGU COMMUNITY

Based on these provocative acts mentioned, Ogu Community is appealing that:

1. The Ekpore people should be reminded of the killing of Pastor John Isaac and the kidnapping of Mr. Tokube Obiesika by them. The culprit, Inspector Franklin Weeba be re-arrested and prosecuted for the criminal offence committed in order to deter others from such acts in future.
2. The Ekpore people should be stopped from disturbing Ogu people whenever they want to carry out developmental projects on their lands.
3. The Ekpore people should please confine themselves to settlement 99 which is Kporo. The boundaries between Kporo and Tende Fe which settlement 98 and that of Yude Ama which is settlement 100 will be shown to them by the owners of the settlements (Ogu people).

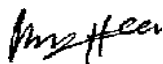
4. The people of Ekporo should be part and parcel of Ogu in Ogu/Bolo LGA for permanent peace to reign between both parties, since Kporo settlement is settlement 99 of Okrika Community, on Ogu territory.
5. The Ekporo people should be made to respect the Federal Supreme Court Judgment of 1958 and give peace a chance by desisting from their provocative acts of violent attacks, hostilities and intimidation henceforth.
6. A Peace Agreement be signed by both parties to ensure lasting peace.

On behalf of the Amanymanabo, Chiefs and the people of Ogu in Ogu/Bolo LGA, we thank you for perusing our lamentations over our woes in the past and present, as we wait patiently for peaceful settlement. In same vein, we wish you a better understanding to handle this matter without fear or favour.

Thank you and God bless.

Chief Engr. Mark Derefaka-Daso Derefaka Chairman
Ogu Divisional Council of Chiefs (ODCC)
Tel: 08033088789

Chief J. G. Iniayemana-Taritoku, J
Secretary
Ogu Divisional Council of Chiefs (ODCC) Tel:
08038829795



Chief (Hon) Anthony Ibifuro Tamunonime
Spokesman of Ogu Community
Tel: 08034017434
(for and on behalf of Ogu Community)

Appendix 4*1st January 2010*

THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE,
RIVERS STATE POLICE COMMAND
PORT HARCOURT.

THRO:

THE DIVISIONAL POLICE OFFICER,
ONNE POLICE DIVISION
ONNE-ELEME, RIVERS STATE.

Dear Sir,

**CORRUPT PRACTICES, MISRULE, DESECRATION OF THE STOOL OF THE °NEIL-
EH-ETA ONNE AND CONDUCT LIKELY TO CAUSE A BREACH OF PEACE BY ONE
J. E NKPORNWI AND BARR. J. D. OSARONU, AS PARAMOUNT RULERS OF ONNE.**

We the undersigned for ourselves and on behalf of the people of Onne, write in respect of the above subject.

The chieftaincy stool of the Oneh-eh-eta Onne is the property of the entire Onne people and not hereditary. The stool is only occupied by one person from any section of Onne at a time and can not be occupied by two persons at a time. It is incumbent on the occupant of such highly revered office to conduct himself with decorum and leave above board.

The occupant is the father of all and he is to represent/protect the interest of both the rich and down trodden members of his domain without fear or favour at all times, no matter who is involved. Amongst other services, he is to fight for the general development of the community and the well-being of her people.

It will be time consuming to enumerate all the atrocities of J. E. Nkporonwi because in the present matter, he is not in issue. We only know that during the lifetime of Late Justice S. A. Wai-Ogosu the incumbent paramount ruler of Onne, he instituted an action in suit no. BHC/68/89 against J. E. Nkporonwi for ridiculing his position as the paramount ruler of Onne. At the demise of the Late Hon. Justice Wai-Ogosu (rtd), the case automatically ended leaving the stool vacant. Since then till now, we know J. E. Nkporonwi as a contestant of It ⁷.M Eleme kingdom stool. Nkporonwi has filed several suits and lost both in the high courts and appeals on the stool of Eleme. See Suit numbers NHC/26/2003, CA/PH/92/2005, CA/PH/190/05 respectively and see particularly the case of Nkporonwi Vs Ejire (2009) 9 NWLR, (Part 1145) at pages 131-192, you will find the detailed decision of the superior courts.

It is on record that since John Denis Osaronu ascended the throne on the 13th day of February 1999, development eluded the community. The said Chief J. D. Osaronu abdicated from the noble role of Paramount Ruler and father of all to a sectional leader bent on turning all his children and immediate family members to money-bags at the detriment of all members of the Onne community. Below are some of the verifiable excesses of the said chief.

1. He has usurped the functions of the Chairman of Onne Council of chiefs and unilaterally transferred same to his son, not minding that the stool of Onne-Eh-Onne is not hereditary. (Instances abound) See Okey Owhonda & Co exhibit 'A'
2. The community is now being administered as a private business entity by the chief and members of his immediate family alone to the detriment of the entire community. See exhibit 'A'
3. Bribes are openly being collected from applicants seeking for jobs in the name of "Palace Charges" to the embarrassment of all well meaning natives.

See S. Wai-Ogosu & Co exhibit B paragraph 3

4. Chief Osaronu has seized and refused to disclose the contents of an 1VIOU entered into between Notore Chemical Industries Ltd and Onne community to, since 3rd of December 2007. This is now generating tension in the community and has led to litigation by a section of concerned citizens of Orme. See suit No: NHC/28/08 before the Nchia High Court division. See palace of HRH exhibit C line 1.
5. He seized and converted to his private use the compensation money due his mentor and predecessor, the late paramount ruler of Onne, His Royal Highness, Chief R. O. Ogosu despite all entreaties from well-meaning citizens of Onne. See exhibit D attached, is the list of names of the family members of Late Chief R. O Ogosu for the compensation.
6. Chief Osaronu connived with some of his cronies in the community and misappropriated over 50% of the monies paid by PRODECO Nigeria Ltd for economic crops destroyed on the farms of peasant farmers in Onne. This is also currently a subject of litigations in the Nchia High Court in Eleme.
7. The insatiable financial demands and greed of the "POWERFUL" chief has made him to appoint almost all his children as Community Liaison Officers (CLO's) to all the major companies in Onne for the sole purpose of collecting tolls for him to the detriment of the community. (See attached list of some of his children who are CLO's in companies in Onne).
8. Community meetings are no longer held in town halls but in his well-fortified palace where well placed and highly respected leaders of thought, youths and even members of his council of chiefs are either humiliated or physically assaulted for having dissenting opinion on issues of general interest. See exhibit F
9. Despite the chiefs stupendous wealth, scholarship awards by corporate organizations in Onne have been converted to his private use as some of his

drop-out children are beneficiaries of several awards at the expense of children of the poor masses.

10. The chief is not concerned about the welfare and progress of majority of the people most of whom are jobless despite the existence of over 150 companies operating in Onne community.
11. Chief Osaronu's penchant for illegal acquisition of wealth has made him to forcefully convert to his private use, a six-classroom block built by Mobil Producing Nigeria to Onne community.
12. He has also converted to private use, all the skills acquisition tools and equipment donated by Intels Nigeria Ltd which has been in his custody since the year 2000.
13. Due to his excesses, Chief Osaronu has dragged the reputation of members of the community to public ridicule and odium in the eyes of corporate organizations within and outside Onne.
14. It is an aberration of the customs and practice of the Eleme people as applicable to Orme clan that a vast land of over 50 hectares will be bulldozed, crops and economic trees destroyed by trespassers without the chiefs accounting for it or informing the people in a public gathering.
15. Unfortunately, S. D. Osaronu threatens to carry out his offensive acts with the aid of thugs and his gun runners. Worse still, he has started arresting those whom he suspects to be discussing the above issue. See exhibit F1 — 5 and upon exhibit F1 — 5 Nkporonwi and Osaronu never respected any of the invitations to defend their petitions because they are above the law and had boasted to use the police to intimidate the law abiding citizens of Onne.
16. He creates problems for companies by removing any CLO who refuses to convert monies meant for community projects for his private use. See

exhibit `CI

17. Sometimes in about 2007 four 300KVA transformers were given to Onne Community through Chief Barr. K. N. Waite who delivered it to J.D. Osaronu. Three of the transformers were collected for the extension of electricity supply in Agbeta , Alejor and Ekara but that of Ogoloma had been sold by J. D. Osaronu and till now he can not account for it. The people of Ogoloma town are suffering in darkness.
18. Emanating from a protracted and seemingly unending chieftaincy tussle over the paramount stool of One-eh-Onne between Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkpornwi over the years while only two of them are benefiting tremendously from the regular largesse from over 150 surrounding companies to the detriment of the community.
19. Tension and incessant youth restiveness in the town due to mass unemployment and deliberate instigation of such vices by the leadership to cause strife and confusion. The ancient town of Onne clan in Eleme kingdom witnessed a new dawn on Sunday 14th day of September 2008, as a tumultuous crowd of who is who ranging from the highly placed chiefs, leaders of thought, business tycoons, politicians, technocrats, professionals, religious leaders, women , youths, old and young etc. gathered at the central town square traditionally called "Eken Okin" Onne to find a lasting solution to the seemingly protracted chieftaincy tussle that has factionalised the once peaceful and united city. See a copy of the final resolution of chieftaincy matters in Onne clan. Exhibit G.

Based on the exhibit `G', which was duly received by the Commissioner of Police Rivers State, who re-directed the Eleme Local Government Chairman to look into the matter and settle. In an invitation by the L.G.A. Chairman to the major representatives of the parties for a meeting slated

to hold on the 4th of August 2008 to resolve the matter before the LGA Chairman, Chief J. D.

Osaronu deliberately refused to attend showing that he has accepted the verdict of the community. (See letter as exhibit 'H')

Since the 1st of September 2008, the entire community became one united body under the leadership of the four Land Priests of Onne pending the appointment of a new Paramount Ruler that will be accepted by the entire people of Onne. Document entitle Onne Land Priests remains in control herewith attached as exhibit 'I' explains further on the leadership of Land Priests.

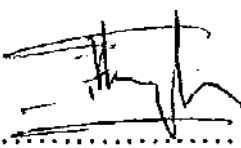
The time is ripe for the clan to have just one leader to fast track rapid development hence the Council of Traditional Royal Priesthood should hold forte while the people scout for a competent and level headed leader to feel the vacant stool of One-eh-Onne.

From all indications and the foregoing Chief Osaronu's continuous complaints to the Police is part of his bigger schemes to cause unrest and confusion in a peaceful community of Onne.

The security agencies are hereby advised to disregard and discountenance his false claims while the Government and security agencies again are hereby invited to call Osaronu, his son and his entire family to order and properly advise them to accept the true position in Onne and allow peace to reign.

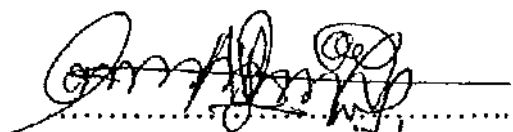
Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Chief Godwin O. Obeyh

(Land Priest-Ogoloma/Chairman



Chief Benjamin O. A. Laaka

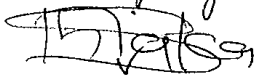
(Land Priest- Agbeta/Secretary

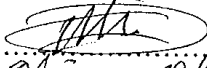
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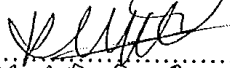
Onne Royal Priesthood Council)

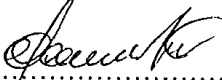

 Chief Donald Onungwe
 (Land Priest- Ekara / Member
 Onne Royal Priesthood Council)

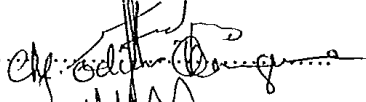

 H.H. Chief Augustine Onge

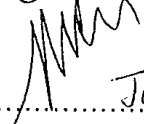

 Elder Sunday S Siaka

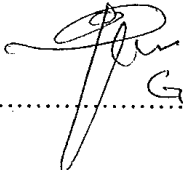

 Eld Oliver Ollor


 Chief P. A. Nwagwu

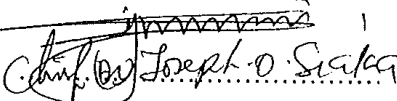

 Clement Uechi

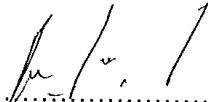

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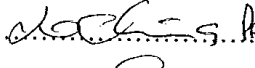

 John Aforji


 Gomba Kale

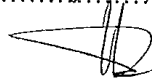

 Chief T. L. Ejor
 (land Priest – Alejor / Member
 Onne Royal Priesthood Council)

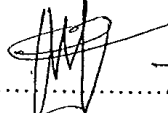

 Chief Joseph O. Siaka


 Arthur Atamaru

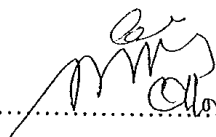

 Joseph S. Prince Nwafor Nethima


 Olorin Gomba


 F.R.T.Y. H. Oha


 James Oba


 Khie Nkpinwu


 Olor Oseranu

See distribution:

HIS EXCELLENCY, THE GOVERNOR RIVERS STATE

COMMISSIONER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT & CHIEFTAINCY AFFAIRS

COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, RIVERS STATE

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, STATE C. L D

DIRECTOR STATE SECURITY SERVICES, RIVERS STATE

D. P. O ONNE POLICE DIVISION.

Appendix 5

MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED BY

ORIGINAL

**THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS, ELDERS AND
THE ENTIRE GOOD PEOPLE OF ONNE**

**c/o HRH (BARR.) GODWIN OLLOR
Oneh-eh Onne VII
*Paramount Ruler of Onne***

TO

**THE COMMITTEE FOR THE RESOLUTION OF
CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTES IN ONNE
SET UP BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN,
ELEME LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL**

DATED: 12TH FEBRUARY, 2010

MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED BY
THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS, ELDERS AND THE ENTIRE GOOD PEOPLE OF ONNE
C/O HRH (BARR.) GODWIN OLLOR
ONEH-EH ONNE VII
ONNE, ELEME, RIVERS STATE

The Chairman,
Committee for the Resolution
of Chieftaincy Disputes in Onne
c/o Eleme Local Government Secretariat
Ogale Nchia, Eleme

"WITHOUT PREJUDICE"

RE: PRESENTATION OF OUR MEMORANDUM

1.0 Introduction:

- 1.1 We, the undersigned for ourselves and on behalf of Onne Council of Chiefs and Elders and the entire good people of Onne Community thank our Chairman, Hon. Oji Ngofa for his wisdom in setting up this Committee headed by Arch Bishop I.C.O. Kattey and other Eminent sons of Eleme with the sole objective of determining the root cause(s) of Chieftaincy Crisis in Onne and ascertaining and recommending the Paramount Ruler who is the popular wish and desire of the people of Onne to the Executive Chairman of the Eleme Local Government for recognition.
- 1.2 We believe that the root cause behind the Crisis as an overview is the personalization of Onne Chieftaincy Stool, gross maladministration, misappropriation of Onne Community rights and benefits and the seemingly encouragement of Factionalization of Chieftaincy Stool for personal aggrandizement and finally the *"I must be or the Community should burn"* syndrome by persons who believe that they are colluders in Onne.

2.0 Historical Background of Onne Chieftaincy Installation/Stool

- 2.1 The chieftaincy Installation in Onne is as old as Onne Clan itself. It is the History that the Landpriests of Onne usually performed the dual functions of Landpriests and Traditional Rulers until the Chieftaincy position was ceded to late Chief Bellor Kalewa of Blessed memory who hailed from Agbeta Onne Eleme due to the advent of appointment of "warrant Chiefs" in Eastern Nigeria in those days.
- 2.2 Thereafter, late Chief Osarowate Obibia Onungwe of Ekara Onne was elected and installed and he died in 1958. Late Chief R. O. Ogosu was elected in 1958 to take over but left for his Public Service work and handed over the Stool to

late Chief Benedict Osarowate the 1st son of late Chief Osarowate Obibia Onnungwe who ruled from 1958 to 12/4/1972 when he was dethroned for what the community believed was gross misconduct by assenting to a very important and controversial document without consulting with Onne people first.

- 2.3 The procedure was to invite the Chief to the market square, and the charges read out to him and allowed to defend himself or plead for forgiveness. If he is intransigent dethronement will follow and reins of governance handed over to the most senior Landpriest to be supported by the other members of the Royal Land Priesthood Council .
- 2.4 It should be emphasized that after the dethronement of late Chief Benedict Osarowate whence Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkporonwi participated actively, Chief Benedict Osarowate retired to his house and accepted the peoples verdict with candour without encouraging any faction nor strife in the Community.
- 2.5 Power was then ceded to Chief R. O. Ogosu again after an election between him and late Elder Sydney A. Ollor in 1974 after a transitional Landpriest ridership of Chief Nwafor Akate for a period of 1 year 3 months.
- 2.6 Late Chief R. O. Ogosu ruled Onne until August, 1988 when it was alleged that he ordered Bulldozers in collusion with Government officials to clear• the Land at NAFCON Estate whereby premature food crops were destroyed. Onne women who resisted were arrested and maltreated by security agencies. He was invited to answer the charges which were read at Onne market square (Echieta Onne) and he was booed and jeered.
- 2.7 In 1983, late Justice S. A. Wai-Ogosu was elected and installed the Traditional Ruler of Agbeta and declared same in 1986 by the Judgment of Rivers State High Court sitting at Bori, and he was installed the paramount Ruler of Onne in August, 1988 and ruled from 1988 — 1989 when matters bordering on corruption were cited against him, especially the payment of compensation to persons and his misappropriation of 4500,000.00 earmarked for Onne Electricity Project. The said project was not fully executed.
- 2.8 Notice of Charges were served on late Justice S. A. Wai-Ogosu to render Account at 'Echieta Onne. But Chief J. D. Osaronu advised him not to attend, whereat charges were read and he was dethroned and reins of governance handed over to late Chief Mathias Osaro-Okpoo who was the Acting Landpriest of Ekara Onne because late Justice Wai-Ogosu ignored the invitation of the Community.

2.9 Chief J. E. Nkpornwi was elected and installed that same day when Justice S. A. Wai-Ogosu was dethroned from amongst the following nominated persons Chief Gabriel Ngolo (Jr.), Mr. Olu Andah Wai-Ogosu and himself.

- 2.10 Late Justice Wai-Ogosu sued Chief J. E. Nkpornwi in respect thereof because he was not given enough time for fair hearing but died in September 1998 and was buried on 8/12/1998 before Judgment could be delivered. Chief J. E. Nkpornwi capitalized on his death and assumed absolute ridership of Onne..
- 2.11 However, to encourage factionalization of Chieftaincy in Onne, Chief J. D. Osaronu got himself nominated on the 13th Feb. 1999 at Ogoloma Onne and was surreptitiously and hurriedly installed on the 25th February, 1999 at Ogoloma town square by very few persons numbering less than 20 but was never customarily installed at Echieta Onne at all till date.
- 2.12 This trend of factionalization continued until all the four (4) Landpriests and the entire good people of Onne became dissatisfied and very uncomfortable and met at Echieta in June, 2008 after inviting Chief J. D. Osaronu and his Council of Chiefs where charges were read out against Chief J. D. Osaronu for his penchant for destruction and mismanagement as he refused to honour the invitation of the Community.
- 2.13 Chief J. D. Osaronu and his Council of Chiefs were accordingly dethroned and reins of ridership handed over to the Council of Landpriests headed by Chief G. O. Obeyh yet both Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkpornwi continued their factionalization of Orme Community unabatedly.
- 2.14 On the 14th September, 2008 when both parties were invited at Echieta by the Community, Chief J. E. Nkpornwi attended and surrendered his factionalized Onne seat and declared his concentration on the battle for Oneh-eh-Elleme Stool alone! *See video of that meeting.* But Chief J. D. Osaronu refused to attend again giving the reason that his late father had advised him never to attend any Onne meeting at the "Echieta Onne".
- 2.15 Consequent upon the above, the whole good people of Onne Community from all the four (4) subclans i.e. Ogoloma, Ekara, Alejor and Agbeta respectively there and then handed over the unified Stool of Onne to the Royal Priesthood Council headed by Chief G. O. Obeyh.
- 2.16 On the 9th January, 2010 after a period of about one (1) year and four months within which Chief J. D. Osaronu refused to show any remorse, HIRE (Barr.) Godwin 011or was elected and installed the Paramount Ruler of Onne at "Echieta" Onne by the entire Onne people from amongst other nominated persons i.e. Chief Augustine Ngaa and Chief Joseph Siaka whose score card was as follows: (i) HRH (Barr.) Godwin 011or -- 60 votes; (ii) Chief Augustine Ngaa — 11 votes; and (iii) Chief Joseph Siaka — 10 votes. *See attachment "A"*

3.0 Rise and Fall of Chief J. E. Nkpornwi

Chief .J. E. Nkpornwi has been the most violent and diabolic leader ever to emerge in Onne. His reign which was an aberration brought untold destruction and hardship on the good people of Onne amongst which are:

- 3.1 He invited the Mobile Police Men and Soldiers who shot at Mr. Emmanuel Nwodu from Ogoloma.
- 3.2 He brought Soldiers to shoot Mr. Tobiah Tete from Ogoloma Onne in the leg at the house of Anwi Eze.
- 3.3 He brought in Soldiers to arrest Onne Women who were taken to Kpor in Gokana, brutalized, raped, molested and harassed for daring to embark on peaceful demonstration at Orme.
- 3.4 He has desecrated Onne Public Cemetery by forcefully confiscating the land to his private use; bulldozing skulls and skeletons of people buried time immemorial. The Committee is hereby invited to visit the locus *in-quo*.
- 3.5 He also converted the public water scheme meant for and installed by Onne people to his personal use.
- 3.6 He has also converted to his private use the mono pump donated by NISSCO Nig Ltd. and fenced it into his Hotel. *See attached Photographs. - Attachment "B"*.
- 3.7 He has confiscated some part of Onne Market Land for his personal use.
- 3.8 He is the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) of Saipem Nig. Ltd. and has refused to defend the Onne Youths when they demanded for their rights but rather instructed the company to sack all Onne Indigenes which was done.
- 3.9 He appropriated and converted to his private use 600 bags of cement meant for the construction of Onne market stalls donated by NISSCO Nig. Ltd. and used same in building his "KANYA HOTEL" rooms. *See attached Memo from NISfSCO Nig. Ltd. — Attachment "C"*.
- 3.10 He collected huge sums of money from INTELS Ltd and he became silent over the Community land that was sold to PRODECO Ltd. and INTELS Ltd.
- 3.11 He committed adultery with the wife of one Mr. Aloysius Chu from Ekara Onne and begat a child named Master Sunday Gomba Ngolu (Jnr.) from her and finally appropriated the lady as one of his concubines which is a taboo under Onne Custom.
- 3.12 Chief J. E. Nkporonwi is responsible for the death of late Mr. Eddy Mgbornwi on 16/2/2001 when he unilaterally installed one Mr.

Francis Emere Amasi as Chief of Agbeta Onne on 14/02/2001 that resulted in that crisis.

- 3.13 Chief J. E. Nkporonwi on behalf of his subjects demanded, received and converted to his personal use the relief materials granted to Onne

victims whose houses were burnt during the bitter Chieftaincy crisis between Chief J. D. Osaronu and himself arising from the death of the said late Mr. Eddy Mgbornwi.

- 3.14 He initiated the "*Palestinian cult*" group who terrorized and have been terrorizing Onne Community.
- 3.15 He initiated and installed a parallel and rival Youth body that challenged and obstructed the functioning of Onne Youth Council.
- 3.16 He has embezzled and misappropriated N10.5 Million of Onne Community Money paid by Julius .Berger for the reconstruction of the demolished market stalls at Onne Market along Wharf Road. *See Judgment delivered in Suit No. PHC/497/2007.*
- 3.17 He frustrated the Contractor who was awarded contract to build Onne Model Primary School on the ground that the Land belong to his father. And has been frustrating contracts/projects meant for Onne Community.
- 3.18 lie refused and obstructed the usage of market stalls built by Atlas Cement Ltd. by locking up the shops which were not put in use until Julius Berger demolished about Eighty (80 Nos.) lock-up shops during the dualization of the Wharf Road.
- 3.19 He demanded money in-lieu of physical chairs meant for Onne Primary Schools from Atlas Cement Co. Ltd. and appropriated same into his private pocket.
- 3.20 He has been monetizing Employment quota meant for Onne indigenes.
- 3.21 He has concentrated CLO's positions into the hands of his children.
- 3.22 He deceives his subjects by using counterfeit letter headed paper for recommendations for job placements which were usually turned down by companies.
- 3.23 He personally appropriates gifts meant for Onne Council of Chiefs to his personal use.
- 3.24 He instructed NOTORE Ltd. not to give Onne Community the original copy of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) entered into with the Onne Community. The monetary value of same worth N86 Million (i.e. 2years accruals) has been shared by him and Chief J. D. Osaronu who have both resisted its implementation till date since 3rd December, 2007 when it was signed. And have commercialized job placements thereunder the MOU to strangers.

4.0 The Rise and Fall of Chief J. D. Osaronu

The reign of Chief J. D. Osaronu had also marked an era of constant conflict in the Community, gross embezzlement of Community funds, privatization and

personalization of Onne Chieftaincy Stool. It also marked an era wherein graduates were decimated mysteriously. Further to the above, is the confiscation of Community projects and properties into his personal Estate unilateral outright sales of Community Land. Such examples are:

- 4.1 He concentrated Community Liaison Officers (i.e. CLO^s) positions for about 120 Companies in himself and his children. *See attached List. Attachment "D".*
- 4.2 He monetized and commercialized employment chances meant for Onne indigenes for instance:
 - (a) In Addax Petroleum Nig. Ltd., Chief J. D. Osaronu sold it to Mr. Papa Bush Bar (nee Njoku's) son for N300,000.00 i.e. "materials officer position".
 - (b) He collected from one Mr. Dennis 011ubeonwi the sum of N100,000.00 to enable job placement in FMC Technology Ltd. as a storekeeper.
 - (c) Mrs. Stanley Egbe (nee Oyelepo) paid N100,000.00 to Chief J. D. Osaronu to enable her secure job at FMC Technology Ltd. as an accounts officer.
 - (d) With his collaboration, the wife of Mr. Redford of INTELS Ltd. replaced an Onne indigene as Admin. Officer for Monetamy value paid into his pocket.
 - (e) He demanded and received N100,000.00 from Mr. Harrison Akara 011or from Ogoloma Onne to be appointed CLO to ADAMAC Nig. Ltd.
- 4.3 He collected and coveted into his pocket N15 Million paid by CopperCameron Ltd. through Mr. Nwakaji Osaro from Ogoloma Onne for the procurement and energizing of a transformer for Njuru Ogoloma Community which was never done till date.
- 4.4 He sold the Transformer which was donated by SHELL Plc. to OgolomaOnne Community and embezzled the money.
- 4.5 Chief J. D. Osaronu in collusion with Mr. Ngowah Ejor appropriated and commercialized 100 job placements meant for Onne people at Dangote Nig. Ltd. and gave same to outsiders at various sums of money paid to them.
- 4.6 He colluded with Mr. Bellor K. N. Waite to monetize contracts at BREDERO SHAW LTD. meant for Oime Community and paid same into Chief J. D. Osaronu account for private use.
- 4.7 Chief J. D. Osaronu collaborated with Bredero Sliaw Ltd. to sack fifteen (15) Onne indigenes with non-Natives because the Onne employees requested for formation of Trade Union in the company. The matter is presently

pending at Port Harcourt High Court before Justice B. A. Georgewill in Suit No. PHC/1872/06.

- 4.8 He replaced Elder Akara David with his son Rev. (Dr.) Olaka J. D. Osaronu as CLO to PRODECO Ltd. for no just cause.

4.9 He encouraged and promoted the use of pay contractors (i.e. Labour Contractors) in companies at Onne for his selfish motives and has appointed his sons, daughters and cronies as Labour Contractors who exploit Onne indigenes and sexually abused Onne females, for example:

- (a) Rev. (Dr.) Olaka J. D. Osaronu handles payment for PRODECO Ltd. Estate.
- (b) Jima J. D. Osaronu handles payments for another part of PRODECO Estate Staff; West African Catering Ltd; Maersk Ltd.; F.M.C. Technology Ltd.
- (c) Askia Osarolai handles payments for Seatruck group of companies with about ten (10) companies including WAD Ltd., and M. I. Ltd etc.

4.10 Furthermore, by the pay contractor system we mean where a staff should be paid N90,000.00 per month the staff is paid N30,000.00 while the contractor receives N60,000.00 thereby spreading poverty in Onne and creating unemployment in Onne for those who will not work under such barbaric and satanic conditions.

4.11 The conversion of infrastructure meant for Onne Community to his personal use, for instance:

- (a) The Skill Acquisition building donated by Mobil Producing Unitd has been fenced into his Christ Victory Church premises for their private use. Committee members are invited to visit the locus.
- (b) Portable water scheme provided by Mobil Producing Unitd. has been converted for private use by his Christ Victory Church.
- (c) The Ogoloma land hitherto used as football field has been confiscated and the cathedral of the Christ Victory Church built OD it.
- (d) He single handedly donated part of the UPE Onne School buildings and land to his Special Adviser on Chieftaincy Chief J. T. Ogosu who has converted same to his personal use. And he has used some portions for his palatial Country home and private Cemetery.
- (e) He has been using the Esther and Dennis Foundation to appropriate Onne widows Charity assistance from companies. He instructively appointed his two (2) sons as Executive Directors of the "ghost" Foundation to extort funds from Companies to his private pocket. *See attached letter. Attachment "E".*
- (f) He has fenced up the Ogoloma ancient road and erected two (2) giant gates restricting the movement of citizens to and from farms and fishing.

- (g) He has forcefully seized and confiscated the only portion of a widow's land in his family which was lawfully owned by her late husband and constructed a transformer• house thereupon and has been subjecting the widow and her only two (2) daughters to different forms of hostilities and harassments.
- 4.12 Money paid as Allowances to members of Onne Council of Chiefs by Companies operating in Onne is usually embezzled by Chief J. D. Osaronu solely.
- 4.13 Conversion of money donated by Joint Free Zone Community Relations Committee meant to assist Onne People defray NEPA Bill payment to his personal use.
- 4.14 Encouragement of the installation of Industrial Meter to enable him embezzle funds and equally appointed himself the Community Liaison Officer CLO of NEPA; as well as that of MR. BIGGS; and INTELS Ltd.
- 4.15 Non-Accountability and Embezzlement of levies collected from Onne inhabitants meant for NEPA bills.
- 4.16 Chief J. D. Osaronu colluded with Chief Paul Nkporonwi former PTA Chairman and the former Principal Mr. Asah and collected N3Million paid by Julius Berger Plc. meant for the replacement of the demolished fence of GSS Onne but refused to rebuild the fence till date.
- 4.17 The encouragement of cultist/Security Forces to shed Innocent blood of Onne People, for instance:
 - (a) Late Mr. Patrick Odejobi (a.k.a. PALO)
 - (b) Late Mr. Eddy Mgbornwi (on 16/02/2001)
 - (c) Late Mr. Gabriel Okanje on 19/11/2008
 - (d) The shooting of numerous Onne Youths on various parts of their bodies.
 - (e) In 2002, he drafted Security operatives in collusion with Chief Joe Siaka to shoot, brutalize and manhandle Onne Youths who went for peaceful demonstration at Atlas Cement Co. Ltd. for Employment. See: High Court Judgment on this case in Suit No. PHC/395/2005. Dr. ASOGU OHAKA Vs. ATLAS CEMENT Co. LTD. i.e. Demand for settlement of medical bills Mewed in the course of treating 28 Onne Youths wounded during the crisis.
 - (t) On 17th July 2008, 3 youths were shot i.e. Godwin Onungwe, Bright Mgbere and Kingsley Okanje on the false alarm of Chief J. D. Osaromt to Police that they were armed robbers who robbed Fidelity Bank Plc. at Onne Wharf.

- (g) Two (2) vehicles belonging to Miss Joy Okanje and Mr. Philemon Bellor Obo were destroyed during that crisis of 17/7/2008.

- (h) He unilaterally disbanded the Onne Youth Congress under the Leadership of Mr. Obarilormate 011or for not being loyal to him. *See attachment "F"*.
 - (i) He has attempted and failed woefully to disorganize the Onne Youth Council under the Leadership of Mr. Philemon Bellor Obo for not being loyal to him even against the Youth Council's Constitution. *See*
- 4.18 On his false allegation to the Police that Onne Youths went to commit Armed Robbery at Fidelity Bank Plc., FOT, Onne boys were shot, arrested and taken to special Armed Robbery Squad Office Port Harcourt, only to be released when Police investigations found the said allegation to be false.
- 4.19 Youth Secretary's house (i.e. Mr. John Sunday Osaronu) and that of his parents and property were burnt and damaged by Chief J. D. Osaronu and his children.
- 4.20 Youth Security Chairman's house (i.e. Mr. Ezekiel Ejor) and property was burnt down by Chief J. D. Osaronu's boys and he is on exile.
- 4.21 He also petitioned to companies not to release the Coaster "BUS" meant for and donated to Onne Youth Council. The said Bus is lying there parked at INTELS Company premises till date because the Youth President Philemon Bellor Obo is not loyal to him, whereas that of Ogu Youths has since been released to them. Committee can verify it.
- 4.22 He used his good offices to instruct INTELS Ltd. and other companies alike to sack Onne indigenes who were not loyal to him, for instance:
- (a) Miss Joy Okanje sacked from SOCOTERM Ltd.
 - (b) Miss. Christiana Obeyh sacked from WAD Ltd. etc.
- 4.23 Chief J. D. Osaronu usurped the Function of Landpriests when somebody died in WACT Ltd. by drowning. He collected the money meant for sacrifice and did not do the cleansing. Petition concerning the matter is pending at Rivers State House of Assembly vide the petition written by the Landpriest of Ekara.
- 4.24 Onne Community has about ten (10) practicing Lawyers but Chief J. D. Osaronu directed that no Company should engage their services even as employees nor on retainerhip.
- 4.25 The land reserved for Onne Community future expansion and development which is 1-kilometre radius by Rivers State Government, Federal Government and Nigerian Ports Authority based on Onne Community request and petition through Chief J. D. Osaronu engaged as the Solicitor to Onne Community vide letter dated 21/1/1983 has been unilaterally sold by Chief J. D. Osaronu

to IN ILLS Ltd. and PRODECO Ltd. The said sale is for his private and personal use. It is

note worthy that, Chief J. D. Osaronu admitted that the request was granted by Government vide the letter dated 28/12/1995. *See attachments "H"*.

4.26 Chief J. D. Osaronu in collusion with PRODECO Ltd. and INTELS have demolished and confiscated private individuals properties on the said land in dispute, such as:

- (a) 16 houses
- (b) 1 Church Cathedral.

The Governor of Rivers State has been notified of the destruction and confiscation vide their Solicitor's petition dated 20/02/2009. *See attachment "J"*.

4.27 To further buttress the point, after the initial protest, the PRODECO Ltd. and TNELS companies have left the initial imaginary boundary lines and adjusted same without recourse to their earlier claim. Again that same 1-km stretch of land was proposed to be sold to CLEAN WATERS and STAREX Petroleum Ltd. and a Memorandum of Understanding (IVIOW) was entered into between CLEAN WATERS and Onne Community who offered N200,000.00 per plot and STAREX offered N250,000.00 per plot which was executed on behalf of Onne Community by Chief J. D. Osaronu after the companies paid the mandatory customary rites to Onne people. *See attachment "K"*.

4.28 Chief J. D. Osaronu is the obstacle who encourages the denial of opportunities and benefits from Government institutions meant for Orme Community which he appropriates to himself solely.

4.29 The annual 30 slots of scholarships from INTELS Ltd. meant for Onne students is appropriated by Chief J. D. Osaronu through conversion into cash for his private use.

4.30 All the SHELL Nig. Ltd. Scholarships and facilities meant for Onne Community has been converted into his private pocket and use.

4.31 NNPC drainage project has been converted and monetized by Chief J. D. Osaronu into his pocket.

4.32 Chief J. D. Osaronu has degraded Onne Chieftaincy Stool by selling Chieftaincy titles to Indians, Italians and other worthless and questionable characters for monetary rewards.

4.33 Chief J. D. Osaronu has personalized Chieftaincy through appointing his sons as Chiefs and suspending Chiefs serving under him unilaterally and at will.

4.34 Chief J. D. Osaronu has turned the noble objective of Chieftaincy institution into obsessive demands, for cows, goats, yam, rice and drinks

from companies every Christmas period in lieu of development projects and infrastructure. (*See shatmfill photographs in Inside Eleme Newspcipei*) dated 29/Jan., 2010 — 4th Feb., 2010 .

- 4.35 lie has coveted the wife of late Chief S. N. Ndor (i.e. Honey Ndor) to become one of his numerous concubines till date without refunding the dowry to the late Chief S. N. Ndor even till his mysterious death. And has even retain the children of the lady as his own children contrary to the custom and tradition of Eleme people.
- 4.36 Chief J. D. Osaronu has also coveted the wife of Mr. Abel Akara Ogosu who is resident in the United Kingdom without refunding the dowry till date yet he has retained the children of the concubinage affairs as his children. contrary to the custom and tradition of Eleme people.
- 4.37 Chief J D. Osaronu has again gone to Bodo City and coveted a Gokana "first daughter" who are normally not given out for marriage under the Ogoni custom and has continued to cohabituate with her till date resulting to one male child from such concubinage affairs and has refused to release the boy to the Giadom family of Bodo where he rightly belongs.
- 4.38 Chief J. D. Osaronu has continued to retain the services of his Secretary (Mr. Jude) who was fingered alongside with him to have been involved in the ritual killing of one teenage Ogoni virgin girl for the purposes of elongation of life as widely published in one of the Newspapers. And the case is pending at Chief Magistrate Court, Bori.
- 4.39 He appointed his younger sister Mrs. Yaya Omu Ogbuji to divert all the relief materials sent by Government to widows through Mrs. Elizabeth Mba Ngei.

5.0 **The Role of Onne Traditional Royal Priesthood Council (Oku-Nkiken)**

The Onne Royal Priesthood Council (Oku-Nkiken) are the traditional custodians of the Land of Onne, they also ensure that the tradition of the people are upheld, and they are the Kingmakers as they perform chieftaincy installations solely.

It is also their duty to ensure that traditional Rulers usher in prosperity, peace, progress and development to the land.

The Orme Landpriests also act as the voice of Restraint to the traditional Rulers and equally act as Regents in times of vacuum or change of Government.

5.1 **Further below are some of the Functions of Landpriests:**

1. They represent the owners of the Land/place.
2. They are the owners of the land.
3. They act as umpires who approve the people's consultative decisions.
4. They are the custodians of Administrative policies. Their consent is vital and fundamental during the convocation of every town meeting.

5. They act as checks and balance on the Youths and town Chiefs.
6. In crisis time, the Landpriests authorize traditional Youth leaders to convoke town meetings.
7. They act as transitional Chiefs/Regents during vacancy on the stool or dethronement.
8. They enthrone traditional Rulers as they perform the Chieftaincy installation ceremonies solely.
9. They perform rites of passages to commence new farming seasons.
- 10. They perform rites of purification on pre-marital pregnancies.
11. They perform rites on accidental deaths, spilling of blood inter/intra Onne People.
12. They perform rites on first daughters.
13. They convene Owe-Nkporon in respect of poisonous killings and mysterious deaths of indigenes of Onne.
14. Landpriests enforce denial of participation of pregnant girls at the Onne traditional marriage festivals that are held once a year.
15. They participate in approving the number of girls to be married and participate at the Onne traditional marriage festivals yearly.
16. It is a taboo for Owe-Nkporon to be summoned against a Landpriest.
17. They perform Nmi-Otaanaa (i.e. burial rites).
18. They receive and recognize traditional Rulers and not *vice versa*,
19. They repel evil spirits from the land.

5.2 **Role of Landpriests in Onne Chieftaincy Crisis**

The Onne Royal Land Priesthood Council ensures customarily that the custom of the people in relation to dethronement and enthronement was followed as shown below;

1. The entire Community must state the misconduct and allegations leveled against the erring traditional ruler in the form of a charge.
2. The traditional Ruler must be invited to the town square or Central market square Echieta as the case may be.

3. The traditional ruler must be given sometime to respond or to show remorse.

4. The traditional ruler if transigent will be suspended or dethroned depending on the circumstances of the case.
5. The traditional ruler will be pronounced dethroned and power transferred to the most senior Landpriest in concert with other Landpriests as the case may be.
6. The Landpriests will rule for sometime still awaiting the reaction or response of the dethroned traditional Ruler.
7. A new Traditional Ruler is elected and enthroned at Echieta Orme.

5.3 It is noteworthy, that what amounts to misconduct is what the Onne people consider misconduct for the time being. Following from the above, the married traditional Youth Leaders summoned Chief J. D. Osaronu to answer charges on the sale of the Community Land i.e. 1-kilometre radius, as well as the shooting of Orme sons and other offences. Chief J. D. Osaronu did not respond to the traditional Youth Leaders rather he threatened to deal with them. They are: (1) Mr. Paul Jorbe, Ogoloma; (2) Mr. Lawrence Ekiye, Ekara; (3) Mr. Emmanuel Eppie, Alejor; (4) Mr. Sunday Amasi, Agbeta.

5.4 From this provocation, the married traditional Youth Leaders summoned a second meeting which Chief J. D. Osaronu further refused to attend. Thus, the traditional Youth Leaders bought drinks according to custom and presented to the Landpriests stating their protest. The Landpriests invited both Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkpornwi to the Echieta Onne. Whereas Chief J. E. Nkpornwi responded and gave his own explanation, Chief J. D. Osaronu ignored the meeting/invitation. Chief J. D. Osaronu rather reported to the Rivers State Commissioner of Police and the four (4) Landpriests were arrested.

5.5 All the Factional Chiefs in both Chieftaincy factions were dethroned by the Onne people paving way for Interim period within which to elect and install a unity traditional Ruler which was done on the 9/1/2010. It is gladdening that Onne has once more witnessed unity, peace, hope, harmony and growth since then till date.

6.0 The Election and Installation of HRH (Barr.) Godwin Ollor on 9/1/2010

The Onne people converged at the Onne market square (Echieta Onne) for the purpose of electing and installing a new Paramount Ruler on 9/1/2010. The above is consequent upon the Notice served on the Onne people in November, 2009 by the Priesthood Council that they are tired of ruling the Community as custom demands.

- 6.1 At the Echieta Onne, everybody converged, and nominations were made concerning Chief Joseph Siaka, Chief Augustine Ngaa and Chief Godwin Ollor who were personally present and actively participated. After the

traditional consultation session called "Eken-olaa" Onne, held in the premises of Lutheran. Church of Nigeria (L.C.N.) Onne as usual, Chief Godwin 011or was announced as the new Paramount Ruler by popular wish as he pulled 60 votes while Chief Augustine Ngaa got 11 votes and Chief Joseph Siaka got 10 votes. Chief 011or was installed immediately and he declared that each Community should go and elect their Chiefs who have been presented to HRH Chief Godwin 011or and his Council of Chiefs has thus been formed. *See video coverage, and attachment "L".*

- 6.2 On the same 9/1/2010, the Community went agog with celebrations and Jubilations round Onne in a colourful convoy and motorcade and up to Nchia where the Landpriests of °nue presented Chief Godwin 011or to FIRM King S. O. Ejire the Oneh-eh Eleme. The said King received HRH (Barr.) Godwin 011or with open hand and received the traditional one bottle of hot drink that was presented by the Onne people. Upon return to Onne HRH (Barr.) Godwin 011or and indeed Onne Community has witnessed peace, harmony and congratulatory messages from all walks of life since then till date.

7.0 Relationship between Onne Community and various Multi-National Companies operating in Onne

Companies operating at Onne should and ought to be a blessing to Onne people and indeed the entire Eleme. But the companies operating at Onne have contributed to the Chieftaincy disputes in Oime as well as the disintegration of the Community through their Policies of divide and exploit.

The following are examples:

7.1 The deliberate promotion of the policy of 50/50% sharing of benefits accruable to Onne with her neighbouring Community of Ogu/Okrika by INTELS Ltd. and its tenants Companies has led to problems in Onne even against the Government white paper on Justice Granille's Judicial Commission of Inquiry.

7.2 Employment Quota of grade levels 01-06 which ought to be given to Onne people is never implemented by the companies at Onne.

7.3 There is no senior staff or managerial position occupied by any Onne indigene in virtually all the companies operating in Onne.

7.4 The companies rather than executing development projects/social corporate responsibility to Onne people deliberately monetize the projects and pay cash to Onne Chiefs who use same to fuel crisis in Onne either between the Chiefs and/or between the people and the Chiefs. Thus when PRODECO Ltd. constructed some roads in Onne, the people welcomed them and thanked and hailed them for that act.

7.5 The Joint Free Zone Community Relations Committee has never executed any project, rather they are a conduit pipe to siphon money from companies operating at Onne which is gotten into private pockets rather than developing the community. For instance sometime in 2005,

all the Companies in the Free Zone numbering about 110 were levied at the least N2 Million to N20 Million each for the development of Onne. At the end of the day, what was allocated to Onne is laughable. Mr. David Allagoa and Mr. Nwakaji Osaro who were the surrogates of Chief J. D. Osaronu diverted the money to him and his stooges and no project has ever been embarked upon in Onne. *See attachment "111".*

- 7.6 INTELS Ltd., PRODECO Nig. Ltd. and Chief J. D. Osaronu confiscated the I - kilometre radius of land meant for Onne future expansion and development. The action would have engulfed Onne but for the timely intervention of the Elites and Stakeholders of the Community.
- 7.7 The companies also do connive with Chief J. D. Osaronu, his cohorts and surrogates to engage pay contractors specifically for Onne and Eleme workers thereby discouraging Eleme people from working. The pay contractors pay $\frac{1}{3}$ of what is due the staff e.g. where a person should earn N90,000.00 they are paid N30,000.00. Some of the pay contractors include: (i) Jima Osaronu; (ii) Rev. (Dr.) Olaka Osaronu; (iii) Askia Osarolai; (iv) Ngowah Ejor; and (v) Ms. Gregory 011or etc.
- 7.8 The companies operating in Onne introduced divide and exploit system by encouraging factionalization of Chiefs at the detriment of the Community. For instance: they send Christmas gifts to the deposed two (2) factional Chiefs simultaneously. They also appoint two (2) Community Liaison Officers CLO^s from the two (2) Chiefs factions in the same company; and also pay homages to both of them contemporaneously.
- 7.9 Both Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkporonwi have colluded with Dr. Dennis Minimah and have kept away the original copy of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) entered into between the NOTORE Ltd. and the Onne People thereby sabotaging the spirits and letters of the M.O.U. Further• to the above is the monetization of derivable funds under the M.O.U. and paying same to the two (2) former factionalized Chiefs leaving the Community without the original copy thereof which would have enabled Onne people seek legal redress. *See attachment "N".*
- 7.10 Chief J. D. Osaronu and SHELL Nig. Ltd. colluded with Barr. K. N. Waite through their policy of handing over• projects to an individual and appropriated SHELL scholarships and exercise books donated to 01111e Community. It took a petition to Rivers State Commissioner of Police for cartons of exercise books to be retrieved from Waite's bedroom which he was holding forte for• Chief J. D. Osaronu. All the

children of Barr. K. N. Waite and those of Chief J. D. Osaronu only enjoyed SHELL Scholarships to the total exclusion of indigent students of Onne.

- 7.11 It is also on record that companies operating in Onne prefer to promote individual interest above Community interest in order to create disharmony between its indigenes. NOTORE Ltd. has extended light from its Gas Turbine to the private Estate of Chief Ngowah Ejor with the connivance of Chief J. D. Osaronu but cannot extend same to the entire Orme people who are in darkness and under the bondage of NEPA Bill. The above almost caused crisis but for the timely intervention of Onne Elites and Stakeholders.
- 7.12 Chief J. D. Osaronu could not account for the NDDC Water Project awarded to Onne Community during his tenure. The said project has been fully paid for to the tune of about N500 Million to Chief Ngowah Ejor's Company which Chief J. D. Osaronu and himself diverted the funds into their private pockets and no portable water in Onne till date.
- 7.13 The companies operating in Onne always use incumbent Local Government Chairmen to cause disaffection in Onne. Their policy is executed through raising and sustaining one faction of Chieftaincy group against the other. They further blacklist one group so that crisis will occur while all Community benefits are siphoned, for instance: They used Chief Ngowah Ejor to empower Chief J. D. Osaronu and his faction while he was Executive Chairman of Eleme Local Government Area.
- 7.14 The other policies of the companies are to close their eyes and ears to complaints and appropriate all Community allotted benefits. For instance One Mr. Mbie Kenwi Okparaji sells and pockets the value of 800 litres of AGO allotted to Onne Community every week by M. 1. N. T. Ltd. This enables the said Mr. Mbie Kenwi Okparaji who is not a traditional ruler to sponsor crisis and violence in Onne with the connivance of Chief J. D. Osaronu who is his in-law.
- 7.15 INTELS Nig. Ltd have built Magnificent Palace for Ogu traditional ruler but has not built any for Onne Community its Landlord due to divide and exploit policy in Onne.
- 7.16 In 2003, INTELS Ltd. awarded and fully paid for Civic Centre Project for Onne Community which was embezzled by Chief J. D. Osaromi who connived with the company owned by Chief Ngowah Ejor that got the award and the project was not executed till date.
- 7.17 The companies in Onne usually direct Community contracts and jobs to Chief J. D. Osaronu who diverts the same to non-indigenes at sell away prices.

7.18 The Nigerian Ports Authority Onne in order to restrict Onne People from benefitting at the Wharf has introduced Ports pass with the active connivance of Chief J. D. Osaronu.

- 7.19 Offshore jobs meant for Onne people are sold by Mr. Askia Osarolai and Chief J. D. Osaronu and others with the connivance of the Companies, e.g. Edison Chouest Nig. Ltd., Globestar Nig. Ltd., SEATRUCK Group of Companies are major culprits. Yet the indigenes of Onne who possess the required relevant papers and documents are idling away at home.
- 7.20 Companies in collusion with fictionalized Chiefs have refused to employ Onne indigenes of all cadres leaving Onne with 95% unemployment rate and able bodied Youths roaming the streets aimlessly. See attached list of unemployed indigenes. See Attachment
- 7.21 The Company policy of "destroy Onne Ecosystem, cultural and economic survival system" has led INTELS Ltd. and PRODECO Ltd. in collusion with Chief J. D. Osaronu to the blockage of the only access of the people to the Rivers and swamps used for fishing and farming leading to starvation of Onne people. The wall fence is akin to Berlin wall with Soldiers stationed there harassing, intimidating, molesting and raping our women along that axis.
- 7.22 Onne has no portable water and the only source of Natural spring water locally called "Abibe Elee" has been damaged and destroyed by PRODECO Ltd. and INTELS Ltd. with the approval of Chief J. D. Osaromi.
- 7.23 Rather than provide physical development and infrastructure, the companies buy cows, yam, rice, drinks and send them to the Palace of Chief J. E. Nkporwi and Chief J. D. Osaronu and pay stupendous homages running into millions of Naira into their private pockets to forestall companies from developing Onne. *See photographs in inside Eleine Newspaper of cows, rice, drinks shamelessly displayed by Chief J. D. Osaronu and his stooges. See Inside Eleine Newspaper of 29/1/2010 — 4/2/2010 Edition.*
- 7.24 PRODECO Ltd. and INTELS Ltd. are conniving with Chief J. D. Osaronu and his cronies to lease Onne land at exorbitant sums of money to private companies for private use. Cases are pending in Courts. *See attached List of cases in Court and those not in Court. Attachments "P".*
- 7.25 PRODECO Ltd. and INTELS Ltd. have destroyed and damaged buildings belonging to Onne Indigenes and earmarked some for further demolition with the collusion of Chief J. D. Osaronu. About sixteen (16) affected individuals have petitioned the Executive Governor with pictures attached.

7.26 Inexperienced pay clerk Mr. Gregory 011or paid N20 Million to affected persons whose crops were damaged and paid N6 Million to Chief J. D. Osaronu who accepted receiving the money before the Deputy Commissioner of Police.

8.0 Suggestions and Recommendations

Finally, we humbly urge this Committee to discountenance all the submissions from the factional Chiefs and all their purported claims to remain on the throne as their main objective is to sustain the Chieftaincy dichotomy which feathers their nest to the detriment of the entire people of Onne.

We hereby make the following suggestions and recommendations as a way forward:

- 8.1 The popular choice and wish of Onne people for a united Traditional Rulership and unified throne is **HRH (Barr.) Godwin Ollor** made on 9/1/2010 at Echieta Onne. The cabinet of the 9/1/2010 should be upheld to ensure continued peaceful co-existence of all and sundry in Onne. Please the jurisprudential doctrine of "Necessity" which emphasizes that the Community interest is greater than an individual interest must be applied. See the current case of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and the whole Country and President Yaradua. Also see Lakanmi's case. Attachment
- 8.2 The new regime of **HRH (Barr.) Godwin Ollor** has ushered into Onne peace with hope rekindled amongst Onne people and should not be disrupted but rather encouraged.
- 8.3 Under Eleme Custom applicable to Onne, Chiefs are not selected, elected and installed more than once at the Echieta. It is a taboo to go back to conduct a re-election and installation of Chiefs installed at Echieta Onne. Any thing contrary will lead to calamity and no member of the Land Priesthood Council will go back again. Furthermore, nobody is enthroned twice at Echieta Onne town square, therefore, the election and installation of **HRH (Barr.) Godwin Ollor** and his Council of Chiefs should be upheld and the choice of Onne people respected.
- 8.4 This Honourable Committee should urge companies to stop divide and exploit policy in Onne and focus on corporate social responsibility role in Orme Community rather than dabble into local politics of Chieftaincy in Onne.
- 8.5 It has been part of the traditional Rulership system in Onne that Chiefs are usually retired with full benefits as was done in the case of Retirement of late Chief R. O. Ogosu. Both Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkporonwi should be directed to accept their retirement in good faith as usual without sticking their necks out as if the throne is hereditary to their families alone. *See attached copy of letter of Retirement sent to late Chief R. O. Ogosu by Chief J. Osaronu and others. Attachment "R".*
- 8.6 The Committee is urged to direct NOTORE Ltd. to release the Original Copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U.) meant for Onne to **HRH (Barr.) Godwin Ollor** and make available the sum of N86 Million meant

for the development of Onne and equally provide jobs opportunities as envisaged under the (M.O.U.) to Onne indigenes.

- 8.7 The Committee is further urged to direct NOTORE Ltd. to submit the list of persons employed from Onne for scrutiny to enhance compliance with the MOU as well as other companies operating at Onne.
- 8.8 The Committee is equally urged to direct NOTORE Ltd. to link Onne Community up to their 25KVA gas turbine being grossly underutilized as the company is currently consuming about 7.5KVA only.
- 8.9 The Committee is also urged to direct all other companies in Onne to enter into M.O.U. with Onne Community as demonstrated by NOTORE Ltd.
- 8.10 It is also recommended that Rivers State Government should recognize the Stool of Oneh-eh Onne as presently occupied by HRH (Barr.) Godwin O11or and classify same. The reason adduced is that once a Stool is classified and incumbent recognized, the stool is no more challengeable thus insulated from incessant selfish protracted litigations.
- 8.11 Committee should impress on the companies to provide infrastructure, developments, projects, scholarships, skill Acquisition, gainful employment, and contracts direct to the people without monetizing same to the Chiefs and without passing through INTELS Ltd., nor NPA or any Committee or authority whatsoever.
- 8.12 Committee is urged to direct the companies in Onne to abrogate "pay contractor" system or "labour contractor" as it is Anti-Nigeria Labour Law and evil in the eyes of God because it is akin to slave Labour and satanic.
- 8.13 Committee is also urged to direct companies to settle all the outstanding cases in Courts in respect of the claims for compensation on damaged crops and property on the land in dispute numbering about twenty six (26) pending in different Courts in the State and pay compensation to the parties. *See attached List of affected litigants.* And equally settle those persons who could not pay and hire Lawyers to file their claims but whose lands/property were affected.
- 8.14 Committee should direct the over 150 companies operating in Orme to retain the Chambers of Eleme indigenous Lawyers on retainership and offer gainful employment to those willing to work.
- 8.15 Committee is urged to direct that the CLO's in the over 150 companies operating in Onne should be distributed to all Orme indigenes and not concentrated in one hand or family.
- 8.16 Committee is equally urged to direct that all criminal matters currently pending in Courts arising from Chieftaincy crisis and victimization

should be discontinued forthwith and fair compensations be paid to victims and/or their families. They include:

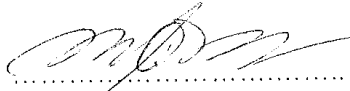
- (i) NHC/1^C/2002: THE STATE Vs. FORTUNE ONORNWI & ORS.
(i.e. in connection to the death of Mr. Eddy Ngbornwi)
- (ii) NHC/6^C/2009CR: THE STATE Vs. PHILEMON BELLOR OBO & 2 ORS.
(i.e. in connection to the death of Mr. Gabriel Okanje)
- (iii) PMC/234^F/2008: COP Vs. PHILEMON BELLOR OBO & ORS.
(i.e. in connection to the alleged destruction of PRODECO LTD. & INTELS LTD. property on the land in dispute by the Youths)

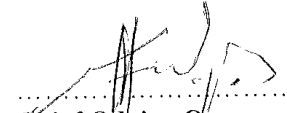
8.17 Committee is finally urged that Chief J. D. Osaronu and Chief J. E. Nkpornwi should be referred to the EFCC and/or ICPC and the Police for proper investigation and prosecution for abuse of office, questionable enrichment and complicity in the deaths of the Onne Youths

We thank the Commission for its patience in perusing our response.

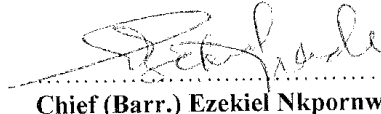
Thanks very much.

Yours faithfully,

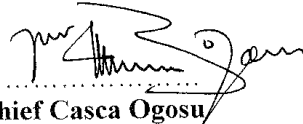
1. 
HRH (Barr.) Godwin Ollor
(Oneh-eh Onne vii)
Paramount Ruler of Onne Eleme

2. 
Chief Odejor Onungwe
(Oneh-eh eta Agbeta)
Traditional Ruler of Agbeta Onne

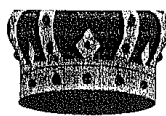
3. 
Chief (Barr.) James Akara Okanje
(Oneh-eh eta Ogoloma)
Traditional Ruler of Ogoloma Onne

4. 
Chief (Barr.) Ezekiel Nkpornwi
(Oneh-eh eta Alejor)
Traditional Ruler of Alejor Onne

5. 
Chief Augustine O. Ngaa
(Oneh-eh eta Ekara)
Traditional Ruler of Ekara Onne

6. 
Chief Casca Ogosu
(Chairman, Onne Elites and Stakeholders Forum)

Appendix 6

**PALACE OF HRH HON. (DR) J.D. OSARONU****BARRISTER -AT-LAW**

ONE-EH ONNE VI
PARAMOUNT RULER OF ONNE
NANA ROYAL PALACE-OGOLOMA, ONNE
RIVERS STATE -NIGERIA

" E "

P.O.BOX 117
NCHIA -ELEME
RIVERS STATE

Your Ref:

Our Ref: JDO/REC/

Date: 15-12-2009

General Manager
Addax Pet.
F.L.T.-Onne

Dear Sir,

SPECIAL PALACE REQUEST

We are grateful to your company for being community-friendly and for whatever effort you are putting into developing Onne, your host community.

However from our records only Intels Nig. Ltd, Dangote Industries Ltd, Maersk Line Shipping Company, Edison Chouest, I.T.S. and Brawal Nig. Ltd. pay regular allowance for the up-keep of this Palace, notwithstanding that they contribute their quota to the Free Zone Community Relations Committee for Community Development in Onne such as tarring of some of our Feeder Roads and training 20 of our women in different skills.

It is possible that you are co-operating with the Committee in execution of projects but we wish to draw your attention to the up-keep of this Palace, which is becoming financially burdensome. The Palace maintains several workers and provides equipments and office stationeries for efficient execution of its services. Even fuel and diesel to operate our 10 small generators is becoming too expensive that some time when there is light cut by NEPA, which is rampant these days, the services of the Palace are paralyzed completely.

We also maintain several committees appointed by the Palace and the Community not only for community development but for the proper training of youths to always embrace dialogue instead of violence.

For confirmation please call any of this phone numbers: 08037071759, 084791021 (former letter head invalid)

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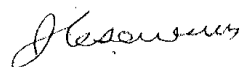
You will appreciate that since the establishment of Onne Port and the Oil and Gas Free Zone, there have never been unnecessary strike and violence demonstration not to talk of the dehumanizing act of kidnapping and hostage taking. Onne is one of the most peaceful areas as far as those vises are concerned.

We therefore appeal to you to favourably consider the Palace request of providing monthly allowance to sustain the Palace. The allowance should be paid not through the CLO but through the Palace co-ordinator Chief (Dr) Jima Osaronu or the Palace P.A, as rumours are rife that some packages sent to this Palace through CLO^s never get to the Palace.

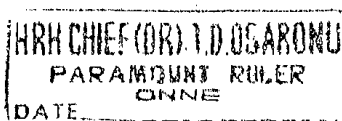
Please this is a serious request deserving your serious attention.

Thanking you in advance as always

Yours faithfully,



King (Dr) J.D. Osaronu
Paramount Ruler/Clan Head of Onne



Appendix 7



Overview: Part of spill impact on 28" Nkpoku-Bomu Pipeline right of way at Ekpoko. Picture was taken during Joint Investigation of 19th January 2014.



Close-up: Illegal fitting on 28" Trans Niger Pipeline at Ekpoko. Picture was taken during Joint Investigation of 31st July 2014.



Close-up: Illegal fitting on 28" Nkpoku-Bomu Pipeline at Ekpoko. Picture was taken during Joint Investigation of 21st January 2014.



Closeup: Illegal fitting on 28" Nkpoku-Bomu Pipeline right of way at Ekpoko. Picture was taken during Joint Investigation of 19th January 2014.



Overview: Part of spill impact on 28" Nkpoku-Bomu Pipeline right of way at Ekpoko. Picture was taken during Joint Investigation of 21st January 2014.

Fieldwork Photos



Figure 12: On an exploration of Okrika Town, I was walking across some of the pipelines that cross through the town.



Figure 13: An image taken in Okrika Town, a few minutes walk from Ateke Tom's house. The pipeline runs across the town – symbolising in some ways, the direct connections between Ateke Tom and the federal government.



Figure 14 (above) and Figure 15 (below): These images show some new structures being constructed on newly reclaimed swampland in Ogu. Indeed, there were a number of large newly built houses in the community. One suggestion was that powerful clients with direct links to the then First Lady, Patience Jonathan, were benefitting from the First Lady's patronage.

