

Ending the Vicious Circle: Oil, Corruption, and Violent conflict in the Niger Delta¹

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Abstract

In recent times, there has been much concern about Nigeria's continued survival as a nation. Since its return to civil rule in May 1999, the country, especially the oil producing Niger Delta region, has drifted from one violent conflict to another, often with devastating consequences on human life and socio-economic development. Most analysts blame this violence on the many injustices perpetrated by the central authorities (especially the inadequacies of the current revenue sharing formula that denies oil bearing states their dues), the lack of capacity of the security forces and by extension of the Nigerian state (part of the broader phenomenon of state failure in sub-Saharan Africa), and limited economic opportunities or poverty prevailing in the region. This study however shows that the continued violence in the Delta flows less from skewed revenue sharing formula, economic poverty or lack of capacity among the security forces, than from the predatory nature of politics in Nigeria, as seen in the accumulative instinct of public officials at all levels of government and the increasing determination of 'renegade actors' to violently challenge their quest to monopolize resources accruing from oil.

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In recent times, there has been a growing concern about Nigeria's continued survival as a nation in the face of growing violent conflicts², especially in the south-south region of the country, otherwise known as the Niger Delta. Indeed, since the return to civil rule in May 1999, the region, which hosts the bulk of Nigeria's oil wells, has been the theatre of many forms of violence and criminality perpetrated by armed

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² For an excellent discussion of this issue, see Laurent Fourchard et Richard Banegas (eds), *Le Nigeria sous Obasanjo: Violences et démocratie*, Paris : Politique Africaine N° 106, juin 2007/Éditions KARTHALA.

criminal syndicates. They have often had devastating consequences on human lives and on the socio-economic development of the country. While violent conflicts could hardly be described as something new in Nigeria, or in the Niger Delta for that matter³, the emergence of a multitude of heavily armed militias and cult groups in the nation's oil rich region is certainly a serious challenge. They pose a new kind of threat never seen since the end of the civil war in Biafra in 1970.

As it should be expected, there has been a deluge of scholarly works seeking to grapple with the growing problems and challenges from this very strategic region. Scholars have identified a number of causal factors, ranging from the problems of environmental degradation, rising social-economic inequality in the midst of plenty, absence of basic social amenities (roads, hospitals, schools etc) and youth unemployment⁴, to anti-social or unwholesome practices by multinational oil companies operating in the region⁵. Other studies have pointed to the political neglect of the area (by the central authorities) and its marginalisation in national politics, not to mention the historical injustices perpetrated by the Nigerian state (especially the inadequacies of the current revenue sharing formula), the limited economic opportunities or the poverty prevailing in the region⁶. Many even question whether violence is not due to the lack of capacity of the security forces, and by extension of the Nigerian state (part of the broader phenomenon of state failure in Africa)⁷.

The limitations of most of these arguments have become very obvious, especially in the light of recent political and constitutional developments in Nigeria. Since 1999, state governments in the Niger Delta region have seen their statutory allocation multiply several times⁸, economic development and empowerment programmes spearheaded by the Niger Delta Development Commission, the federal and the state governments have intensified, just as the federal government has built up a massive military and police presence, all in a bid to calm fray nerves in the region. Yet the Niger delta region has not become more peaceful than it was before 1999. Indeed, in

³ Violent conflicts have occurred in virtually all the 36 states of the federation since the return to civil rule in 1999. Some of the most intensives include the conflicts which followed the adoption of the Sharia by 11 Northern states in 2000. See Daniel C. Bach, « Application et implication de la Charia: fin de partie au Nigeria ? », in "Islam et démocratie" (special issue), *Pouvoirs*, n° 104, janvier 2003, pp.117-127 ; *Human Rights Watch*, « Political Sharia ? : Human Rights and Islamic Law in Nigeria », Vol. 16, n° 9, September 2004.

⁴ Aregbeyen, J.B.O et al., "The Oil industry, Environmental Health and Sustainable Development in Nigeria", in *African Journal of Environmental Studies*, Vol. 2, n°2: pp. 8-14; Ikporukpo, C.O, "Petroleum, Fiscal Federalism and Environmental Justice in Nigeria" in *Space and Polity*, Vol. 8, n° 3, pp. 321-354, Dec., 2004.

⁵ Augustine Ikelegbe, "Multinational Corporate Governance, the Emergent Political Economy of Oil and Communal Cohesion in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria", being the final research report submitted to the *French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA)*, Ibadan, 2005.

⁶ Okoh, R. N. and Egbon P. C., «Fiscal Federalism and Revenue Allocation: The Poverty of the Niger Delta», in *The Nigerian Economic Society, Fiscal Federalism and Nigeria's Economic Development, Ibadan*, 1999.

⁷ This was the dominant view expressed by a majority of the academics interviewed at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and at the Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, during our last field research trip to the Niger Delta in September 2008.

⁸ See page 11-12 for more details.

some ways, many of the measures proposed have even intensified the conflict suggesting that much of the violence in the Delta is not directly linked to skewed revenue sharing value, economic poverty or lack of capacity among the security forces.

The central question in this research was therefore to find out why increasing decentralisation of oil wealth in favour of oil bearing states, massive security build-up and rapid economic growth spurred by the rising prices of crude oil since 1999 have failed to bring peace and security to the people of the Niger Delta. To facilitate a proper understanding of the issues raised in the research, the work was based on the “oil curse” theoretical paradigm.

NIGERIA AND THE “OIL CURSE” PARADIGM

The presence of oil, and the benefits or costs it brings to states that have some, have been a subject of intense academic research for a long time⁹. A leading work in this regard is Karl Terry’s 1997 book, which highlighted how the contraction of non-oil sectors (caused by the rise in oil production) and an inevitable circle of oil boom, which usually accompanies the exploitation of oil, sow the seed of economic and social instability¹⁰. Subsequent studies undertaken within this perspective have called attention to other consequences, especially the role of oil in stiffening democratic culture and festering corruption¹¹ as well as autocratic rule, thereby laying foundations for more violent forms of political participation¹².

Despite its analytical strengths, only a few scholars have attempted to apply the “oil curse” theory to the analysis of Nigerian politics in general and to conflicts in the Niger Delta in particular. One of these writers is definitely Smith, who in a more or less empirical work devoted to Nigeria showed how a “culture of corruption”, largely

⁹ K. Oneje (ed.), *The Rentier State: Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007; J. D. Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports and Civil War”, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, n° 4, 2005. pp 483-507.

¹⁰ Karl L. Terry, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

¹¹ The linkage between oil and corruption was vividly described by Schubert, when he argued that: “Oil dependence leads to a skewing of political forces. It concentrates production to geographic enclaves and concentrates power into the hands of a few elites. It becomes a fisherman’s market for rent-seeking behaviour, where those with money jockey for positions and influence to acquire lucrative contracts, the revenues from which are used to further bribe and manipulate those in power. Consequently, those in power secure the positions of their benefactors, creating a vicious circle of corruption and patronage”. See Samuel R. Schubert, “Revisiting the Oil Curse: Are Oil Rich Nations Really Doomed to Autocracy and Inequality?”, in *Oil and Gas Business*, 2006, p. 1.

¹² Andy Jacques (ed.), *Fuelling Poverty: Oil, War and Corruption*, London: Christian Aid, 2005.; Samuel R. Schubert, “Revisiting the Oil Curse: Are Oil Rich Nations Really Doomed to Autocracy and Inequality?”, in *Oil and Gas Business*, 2006.

induced by massive oil wealth, is fuelling popular discontent across Nigeria potentially leading to widespread social unrest¹³.

Yet the oil curse paradigm is very relevant to any understanding of politics and violence in the Niger Delta. As recent events will appear to show, it will seem that oil not only spurns corruption and predatory activities among the ruling elites in the Delta, but also a strong determination by marginalised actors and groups (usually younger elements) to violently challenge what they perceive as their exclusion from an increasingly important source of rent. This hypothesis has been partially evoked in a previous work by Ikelegbe, which covered Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states. According to Ikelegbe:

“The oil economy has not only engendered a lumpen bourgeois class, driven by primitive accumulation, whose only basis is the romance with and compromise by the foreign oil companies, but it also engendered intense struggle and contests between those (communities, groups, elites and lumpen bourgeois) that have had access to oil benefits (compensation, largess, contracts and employment given by oil companies) and those that have been marginalized and pauperized. The disagreements, contentions, challenges and conflicts within and between the lumpen bourgeois, local leaders and local groupings undergird the disarticulation, in-cohesion and violence in the host communities, ethnic groups and the region¹⁴”.

The point could be raised whether a single factor, such as the presence of oil or the corrupt appropriation and the misuse of oil rents, can explain all the violent conflicts in Nigeria, or even in the Niger Delta for that matter? After all, it is a well known fact that violence usually results from many causes and has multiple dynamics and consequences. Indeed, some studies have shown that some of the violent conflicts in the Niger Delta actually have their roots in age long ethnic/communal rivalries or animosity (the Warri crisis is an example)¹⁵, chieftaincy and land disputes between neighbouring communities¹⁶, bad government policies, or even insensitivity of oil companies to local demands¹⁷, which may or may not have to do with the control of oil rents.

However, as we found out during our research trip to the area, it is still the view of most residents and even academics working in the Niger Delta that the struggle for *oil space* is an important cause of the current conflicts in the area¹⁸. Most of these

¹³ Daniel J. Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

¹⁴ Augustine Ikelegbe, *Multinational Corporate Governance*, op cit., p. 3.

¹⁵ T. A. Imobighe et al, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002; William Ehwareme, “Peoples and Places in Violent Conflicts in the Niger Delta: the Case of the Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw of Delta State”, being the final research report submitted to the *French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA)*, Ibadan, 2005.

¹⁶ Onigu Otite and Issac O. Albert (eds.), *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999.

¹⁷ Jędrzej G. Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflicts and Litigations Between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

¹⁸ These studies include the one by Ikporukpo in 2005. The study, which was conducted in Bayelsa state, indicates that the struggle for *oil space* has been a significant cause of violence in the state. The operations of Shell, Texaco, Agip and to an extent Conoil (an indigenous oil company) were particularly identified as having been significant factors. Chris O. Ikporukpo, “The Struggle for Space and the Space

conflicts, including disputes that started before the discovery of oil such as the Ishekiri-Ijaw-Uhrobo conflict in Warri (Delta State) studied by Imobighe *et al*, have in many ways been fuelled and energised by the emergence of oil rents and the corruption it has spurned¹⁹. The exacerbating influence of oil is also clearly reflected in several other violent conflicts such as the inter-community conflict in the Soku Gas Plant area in Rivers State. According to a Shell Petroleum Company of Nigeria (SPDC) sponsored study:

“The Inter-Community conflict between Soku, Elem-Sangama and Oluasiri has both past and contemporary roots. The three communities were part of historical conflicts between the Kalabari (Soku and Elem Sangama) and Nembe (Oluasiri) Kingdoms. As recent as 1992, Oluasiri fighters sacked Elem-Sangama over a dispute about access to sand for house construction. During the fighting approximately 30 people were killed on both sides. Today, the conflict between the three communities is over who owns the Soku Gas Plant and as a consequence who derives most benefits from SCIN (Shell Companies in Nigeria)²⁰”.

Although some studies have shown that the struggle for *oil space* is an important cause of the current conflicts in the Niger Delta²¹, the question why it is so, has never been fully addressed. This study was based on the understanding that there was a need to interrogate the impact of the style of management of oil resources, especially at the local levels. This led us to the following question: what is the impact of local corruption on violence in the Niger Delta? Before analysing this issue, we first looked at the genesis of the Niger Delta rebellion.

EMERGENCE OF OIL IN THE NIGER DELTA: GENESIS OF A PROBLEM

Nigeria, Africa’s largest oil producing nation, first discovered oil in commercial quantity in a remote town called Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State²² in 1958. This is a key state in the Niger Delta Region. Subsequent discoveries were made in different parts of the region and beyond. Production rose from under 400,000 barrels per day in 1970²³ to over 2.5 million barrels in the early 2000s. This translates to over \$45 billion in annual income. Indeed, Nigeria’s current production capacity stands at 3 million barrels per day while plans are on in order to raise that figure to 4 million

of Struggle: Oil, Youths and Community Conflict in the Niger Delta”, being the report (preliminary results) of a research submitted to the *French Institute for Research in Africa* (IFRA), Ibadan, 2005.

¹⁹When asked what they thought was the causes of the Warri violence, over 90 % of the respondents in one of the feuding communities identified oil as a major cause of trouble. See T. A. Imobighe et al, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta*, op. cit.

²⁰ Cited in Chris O. Ikorukpo, “The Struggle for Space and the Space of Struggle: Oil, Youths and Community Conflict in the Niger Delta”, being the report (preliminary results) of a research submitted to the *French Institute for Research in Africa* (IFRA), Ibadan, 2005. See p.4.

²¹ See note 18.

²² Olayemi Akinwumi, *Crisis and Conflicts in Nigeria: A Political History Since 1960*, London: Transaction Publishers, 2004. p. 117.

²³ Ibid.

barrels by the end of 2010-2011. Given such a huge inflow from crude oil export, it is not hard to understand why oil has remained the mainstay of the finance of the federal, state and local governments in Nigeria, accounting on the average for between 70 and 90 percent of their total revenue.

The dangers inherent to the reliance on a single commodity have been evoked by successive leaders. Yet, the most important challenge for these leaders, and indeed their followers, has not been how to move away from a single commodity-based economy to a more diversified one. The most difficult challenge has rather been how to ensure “equitable” distribution of the revenues from oil, which is considered as being the Nigerian “National Cake”²⁴. In the words of one observer, “*the motivation for sharing this oil revenue is one of self-survival, a matter of life and death, exciting the deepest concern and strongest emotion*”²⁵. It is not surprising that, instead of rapid socio-economical development, the growth in oil production has been accompanied by a rise in corruption, poverty, and most importantly, violent conflicts, especially in the oil producing region of the Niger Delta²⁶. From what were largely peaceful protests in the early 90s, these conflicts have metamorphosed, with the help of state repression, into a more-or-less full-blown armed rebellion against the Nigerian state. This rebellion is carried out by locally nurtured emancipatory social movements, such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People [MOSOP], the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force [NDPVF] and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta [MEND] to name just a few²⁷.

The outbreak of open rebellion in the Niger Delta coincided with the arrival of a supposedly liberal democratic regime under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo in May 1999. President Obasanjo initially favoured dialogue with various groups in the Niger Delta. But disturbed by rising losses in oil rents (on the average 50% of total collectable oil revenue according to some estimates), threats to human lives and properties, and the possibility of the disintegration of one of the most unstable federations in the world, the President had soon to change course. Three major initiatives were subsequently introduced and pursued simultaneously. These included a constitutionally backed increase in revenue allocation in favour of the major oil bearing states (which came into effect in 2000), more development projects in oil producing areas via a Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and military action aimed at routing out the militants from the creeks.

During our interviews with individuals from different backgrounds conducted in September 2008, we found out that very few people in the Niger Delta were ready to

²⁴ On this issue, see Rotimi T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria*, Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001.

²⁵ Quoted in Olayemi Akinwumi, *Crisis and Conflicts in Nigeria*, op cit. p116.

²⁶ According to Ikporukpo, these conflicts could be categorized into: intra-community, inter-community, inter-local government, community-local government, community-state, local government-state, inter-state, state-federal government, inter-ethnic, community-oil Company and local government-oil company. Chris O. Ikporukpo, *The Struggle for Space and the Space of Struggle*, op cit., p. 1.

²⁷ Isaac Olawale Albert, “Emancipatory Social Movements in the Niger Delta: Goals, Strategies and Critical Lessons for Peace Practice”, being the final research report submitted to the *French Institute for Research in Africa* (IFRA), Ibadan, 2005, p. 1.

admit that these measures were adequate. Indeed, several years after their implementation, it is now common knowledge that they have not succeeded in effectively convincing the militant groups in the Niger Delta to tone down their demands for more ‘resource control’ and to embrace peace²⁸. Military deployment, seen as an essential part of the federal government’s ‘carrot and stick approach’, has been the most controversial and ineffective measure²⁹. Thus, despite federal government’s initial hesitation to employ extreme force, military presence in the region served only to intensify resentment among the general populace and to harden the resolve of the militants, rendering any peaceful resolution of the conflict difficult. Similarly, the increase of funds retained by oil bearing states from 3% to 13% have been dismissed as grossly inadequate by both the leaders and militants in the region. But as we shall soon see, the issue is not really whether the 13% oil revenue is adequate or not. More important is the question of how the funds allocated have been used. As a matter of fact, the potential benefits of the federally allocated 13% oil revenue have largely been eroded by massive corruption and mismanagement by local officials in the Niger Delta. Thus, while the quest to control benefits of oil remains central to conflicts in the Niger Delta, conflicts have in many ways been encouraged by the mindless looting of public funds by those in charge in the oil producing states. The example of Bayelsa State, discussed in the next section of this report, offered us an opportunity to test this hypothesis.

OIL AND CORRUPTION IN THE NIGER DELTA: THE CASE OF BAYELSA STATE

«This restiveness we have been witnessing in the State is as a result of its reckless spending. If our money is judiciously used you will find peace in the State and the youths would be appropriately engaged...When the head is rotten, everybody in the government is rotten....They keep on misbehaving, building houses of their own everywhere, buying flashy cars, while the masses are suffering on the streets ». Newswatch (Lagos), 24 October, 2005

While there is an abundance of literature devoted to oil and violence in the Niger Delta, there has been a dearth of studies highlighting the role and linkages of corruption in all these conflicts. Yet the persistence, the increasing frequency and the intensification of corrupt acts among political actors, community leaders and private oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have for some time been the hallmark of politics in the region. Out of the four immediate past governors of Nigeria’s major oil producing states (Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers), three have either been accused or convicted for large scale corruption. One has been convicted and jailed for

²⁸ Until late September when we carried out our field work in Rivers and Bayelsa states, expatriates and highly connected individuals (including relatives of top government officials) were being kidnapped on a daily basis.

²⁹ Most intellectuals and members of the political elite we interviewed in Rivers and Bayelsa states considered the troops deployed in the Niger Delta as an “occupying force”.

plundering the resources of his state on a massive scale (Alamieyeseigh of Bayelsa State). A second was recently arrested and charged on 105 counts for looting up to 10 billion naira from his state (Ibori of Delta State). The third is under close investigations over the same offences (Odili of Rivers State). In this report, we are only presenting the case of Bayelsa state, especially under governor Alamieyeseigha. This is done only for illustrative purposes.

A Profile of Bayelsa State: the Glory of all Lands

Created in October 1996, Bayelsa state is a relatively new state in Nigeria; yet, it is reputed to be one of the richest in Nigeria. According to official sources, the state accounts for some 30 percent of Nigeria's 2.5 million barrels a day of crude oil production³⁰. Such achievement was the reason why the state has been christened the "Glory of all Lands". In the past, Bayelsa state (governed as part of the then old Rivers state) derived very little from its oil wealth, at least in terms of transfers from the central government. But thanks to a new revenue allocation formula, which stipulates that at least 13 percent of all crude oil receipts have to be paid to the 9 oil-bearing states on the principle of derivation³¹, Bayelsa, along with Akwa Ibom, Delta and River states, which account for roughly 80 percent of Nigeria's crude oil production, have been receiving huge funds since 1999. Between June 1999 and December 2005 for instance, Bayelsa state alone received some 260 billion naira (or \$2.5 billion) in federal transfers. In comparative terms, non oil producing states such as Ekiti, Nassarawa and Plateau, got only N61.471 billion, N60.967 billion and N52.530 billion respectively (see tables next page).

³⁰ <http://www.bayelsagov.com>

³¹ This formula came into effect in the year 2000, even though it had been a constitutional requirement since May 29, 1999.

Table 1: Zonal breakdown of Revenue Allocation: June 1999- December 2005

Zones	Amount (billions of Naira)
South-South (or Niger Delta)	N1,259,349,337,581
North West	N627,887, 924,953
South West	N550,525,715,451
North East	N458,194,734,800
North Central	N425,398,456,878
South East	N374,502,676,653
Total	

Table 2: Breakdown of Allocations to Selected Oil and “Non-Oil” States: June 1999- December 2005

States	Amount (billions)
*Delta	N321.002
*Rivers	N286.395
*Bayelsa	N259.882
**Ekiti	N61.471
**Nasarawa	N60.967
**Plateau	N52.530.

* Oil producing states; ** Non-oil producing states

Source: Federal Ministry of Finance, “Detailed Breakdown of Allocations to Federal, States and Local Governments: June 1999 to December 2005”, Abuja, 2005 (*The Sun*, Lagos, Monday, May 8, 2006). This document was prepared as part of the ministry's Transparency in Action programme

Ironically, instead of rapid socio-economic development, Bayelsa, and many other states in the Niger Delta, has been characterised by widespread poverty induced by misallocation of resources and corruption to a large extent. Rather than serving as a source of prosperity and happiness, decentralization of oil wealth appears to have sharpened the greedy appetite of the local power elite while facilitating the abandonment of public welfare. The question of poverty in the Niger Delta is clearly linked to this paradox of plenty, common in resource rich communities³². Even by

³² On this, see Andy Jacques (ed.), *Fueling Poverty: Oil, War and Corruption*, London: Christian Aid, 2005; Sachs, Jeffrey and Andrew Warner; « Natural Resources Abundance and Economic Growth », *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Cambridge: Working Paper 5398, December 1995; La Commission pour l'Afrique, *Notre intérêt commun: rapport de la commission pour l'Afrique*, Londres, 2005.

local comparison, Nigerian oil rich states have tended to lag behind others in the area of socio-economic development.

Thus, during the period between June and July 2005, an independent and comprehensive evaluation of the state of governance in the 36 states was organised by the “National planning Commission”, in collaboration with some international institutions (World Bank, DFID, EU and UNDP) and members of civil society. This exercise, the first of its kind since 1999, was based on four measuring indexes, “policy”, “fiscal management and budget process”, “service delivery”, “communication and transparency”. Scores were awarded to each state according to their performance in these four areas, with the highest score being 100%. According to the evaluators, none of the four main oil producing states (Bayelsa, 0%, Delta, 45.1%, Rivers, 49.8% and Akwa Ibom, 37.6%) figured among the seven best performers (Enugu, 62.0%, Ekiti, 61.7%, Abuja FCT, 55.7%, Kano, 55.4%, Lagos, 55.3%, Jigawa, 51.3% et Ebonyi, 51.0%)³³. Ironically, Bayelsa state was the only state that was not evaluated, having refused to submit itself to such exercise for some undisclosed reasons³⁴.

All these remarks were confirmed by yet another study carried out in 2002 on three Nigerian states (Kano, Delta and Ondo). This study, authored by Leonard Wantchekon and Tamar Asadurian, found out that, in general:

« The States that are the highest recipient of transfers have experienced increased income inequality and poor economic indicators, suggesting that there is little accountability. Surprisingly, states that have benefited the least from oil rents have fared much better³⁵».

In fact, as will be vividly demonstrated by the data published by the *National Population Commission* in 2004, apart from its superior western educational attainment, which is largely explained by historical factors³⁶, Bayelsa state hardly shows any advantage in the area of socio-economic development over states with far slimmer resources or budgetary allocations such as Zamfara state (see table next page). An examination of the management of public resources in Bayelsa state under DSP Alamieyeseigha (1999-2005) will help shed more light on this.

³³ Marcel Ekwedike, « Seeds Benchmarking: The Assessment Of Reform And Quality Of Governance In States » : <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/content/view/1917/55/> (posted on 13 November 2005).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Leonard Wantchekon and Tamar Asadurian, « Transfer Dependence and Regional Disparities: The case of Nigeria », in *Center for Research on Economic Development and Policy Reform*, Working Paper, n° 152, August 2002, p.4.

³⁶ Ebenezer O. Aka, *Regional Disparities in Nigeria's Development: Lessons and Challenges for the 21st Century*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2000.

Table 3: Comparative Socio-economic Data for Bayelsa and Zamfara States (in 2004)

	Bayelsa	Zamfara	National
Population *	1,703, 358	3, 259, 846	140, 000, 000
Literacy level (English Language)	59.32 %	10 %	44.2 %
Literacy level (Nigerian Languages)	62.83 %	69.195 %	45.23 %
Rate of primary school enrolment	96.07 %	69.92 %	81.19 %
Access to Energy (gas/electricity)	4.8 %	12.5 %	32.17 %
Access to potable water	13.17 %	64.91 %	50.52 %

* Federal Government of Nigeria, *National Population Commission*, Abuja, 2007.

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria, National Planning Commission, *The Nigerian Statistical Fact Sheet 2004*, Abuja, 2005.

Giving such level of poverty in the midst of plenty, the state has, not surprisingly, been one of the major theatres of youth violence. Kidnappings and sabotage of oil installations by local people demanding a fair share of the oil wealth became a regular feature of the social life³⁷. Most people in the Niger Delta hold the federal government and oil companies operating in the region responsible for the widespread poverty and underdevelopment in the region, which explain why they and their facilities have been the principal target of militant violence³⁸. Local officials have been spared until recently, notwithstanding their complicity in perpetrating poverty and underdevelopment. These officials have, despite substantial inflow of resources to their region, failed to pursue policies and programmes that would improve the lives of their people. They chose to misappropriate and divert whatever funds are available, to their own personal pockets instead. Governor Alamiyeseigha, who is believed to have diverted close to 1 billion dollars in office, has furthermore filtered away most of the \$2,5 billion he collected as Bayelsa state's share of Nigeria's oil rents on white-Elephant projects. This is a case in point for our study.

Corruption in Bayelsa State: The Alamiyeseigha example

During the presentation of Bayelsa State 2005 Appropriation Bill to his State House of Assembly in December 2004, Governor DSP Alamiyeseigha declared that his:

³⁷ John Donnelly, « Burdens of Oil Weigh on Nigerians: Ecological Harm, Corruption Hit Hard », *University of Boston Occasional Articles*, October 3, 2005.

³⁸ This was the view of an overwhelming majority of our respondents, including, surprisingly, individuals who had lost their employment or source of livelihood as a result of attacks on oil facilities.

“Government is determined to restructure, re-professionalize and fortify public institutions, eliminate waste, inefficiency and corruption, and ensure greater transparency, accountability and efficiency in the delivery of services”³⁹.

Paradoxically, twelve months after this speech, Mr Alamiyeseigha was impeached by his state’s legislature for “gross misconduct”, corruption and abuse of power. Alamiyeseigha’s impeachment on the 8 of December, the very first under the Fourth Republic, followed his arrest and detention in London on the 15 of September 2005 for money laundering offences⁴⁰. The uproar and international embarrassment raised by this arrest as well as the covert political pressure and threats emanating from the central government⁴¹ paved the way for his speedy removal and subsequent arraignment before a Lagos High Court on charges of corrupt enrichment.

Although Alamiyeseigha’s impeachment was facilitated by his arrest in London, the events which culminated in his December 2005 impeachment and his subsequent conviction by a Lagos High Court preceded his arrest and trial in London. Throughout his first tenure in office (1999-2003), Mr. Alamiyeseigha and several high ranking officials of Bayelsa state had figured prominently on the list of corrupt officials being investigated by the main federal anti-corruption agencies (ICPC and EFCC). In one particular case following an investigation initiated by the ICPC in 2003, this Governor was accused of “*approving several dubious contracts and payments totalling 1.7 billion naira in favour of 8 fictitious companies*” among those contracts was a new state university; the Niger Delta University (NDU). The governor was also said to have awarded other contracts totalling 667,258 million naira to another set of fictitious companies through the “Bayelsa State Tender’s Board”, which he presided.

As the price of crude oil in the international market rose from 2003 to 2005, it brought unprecedented windfall for oil-bearing states of the Niger Delta and evidence of looting and diversion of public resources on a grand scale in Bayelsa state continued to multiply itself. By 2005, all known transparency and accountability enhancing rules were dispensed with while budgetary appropriations were systematically exploited to enrich those who were in charge, including the state governor. One way of achieving the later goal consisted in concentrating huge public expenditures on overpriced white elephant projects. They had little or no relevance to public welfare but they usually offered unlimited opportunity for officials to line their pockets through kick-backs paid by contractors. Conversely, important social services such as education, health, portable water and other anti-poverty initiatives, offering far less opportunities for criminal enrichment, were underfunded.

³⁹ *The Guardian* (Lagos), December 20, 2004.

⁴⁰ Few weeks after his arrest, Governor Alamiyeseigha was arraigned before a London Court on charges of laundering funds derived from corruption. Rather than waiting for the conclusion of his trial to prove his innocence, Alamiyeseigha, taking advantage of a temporal bail granted to him by the presiding judge, fled to Nigeria where he enjoyed constitutional immunity against arrest and prosecution on November 21, 2005. According to media reports, Alamiyeseigha disguised as a woman, fled London with the help of fake travel documents. *Newswatch* (Lagos), 12 December, 2005.

⁴¹ *Daily Independent* (Lagos), 24 November, 2005.

A close review of the management of public expenditure in Bayelsa state between 1999 and 2005 confirmed this. For example, according to figures pieced together from the state's 75.6 billion naira or \$560 million 2005 budget proposal⁴² (as posted on the state's official web site) all the state's secondary schools put together⁴³ (managed by the Bayelsa State Post Primary School Board) would receive 118 million naira only for renovation and maintenance, purchase of learning materials and equipments. 106 million naira was offered for the same purposes in 2004⁴⁴. To purchase books (5 million naira) and equipments/furniture for libraries in the state, the *Bayelsa State Library Board* was offered only 7 million naira. The budget for 2004 was more or less identical.

The pattern of expenditure also showed little attention to the health sector. The Ministry of health, which is in charge of running all the state health institutions, including 16 newly established hospitals, got 37 million naira as budgetary allocation in 2005 compared to the 29,2 million received in year 2004. A breakdown shows that the allocation of 9.5 million naira was voted for office furniture and equipments, 10.5 million were funds set aside to equip the new hospitals while 18.5 million was allocated to medical equipments. Water supply, under the supervision of the *Bayelsa State Water Board*, did not fare any better with a meagre 20.5 million naira allocation. Out of this amount, 500,000 naira were given for office equipments and furniture while 20 million for the purchase of reagents/water analysis equipment. The same sum was given in 2004.

Electricity supply, under the *Bayelsa State Electricity Board*, also got a scant attention. In 2005, a total of 7 million was allocated: 2 million for office equipments and furniture, and 5 million for spare-parts. This was still higher than the 2 million naira spent on the same item in 2004. But by far the most ridiculous item in this 2005 budget drafted by governor Alamiyeseigha, is the 2.9 million naira offered to a so-called "Poverty Eradication Committee", an institution whose function was never clearly stated but widely understood to have been created to fight poverty in the state.

The selfish agenda of the Bayelsa leadership is more clearly underlined by some carefully crafted expenditure designed to benefit only those in power. Thus, a clinic serving the Office of the Governor was given a whopping 100 million naira for the year 2005. The same Office of the Governor got another hefty 100 million naira for office equipments and 'minor' repairs, while a further 85 million was expended on ...unknown expenses. A total of 145.1 million was set aside for the same "expenses" in 2004. The largest chunk of the budget, as we noted earlier, was reserved for some "white elephant" projects, such as the construction of a secretariat for civil servants in the state which gulped some 1.7 billion naira (excluding the 400 million expended on the same project in 2004) and the construction of an official residence for the governor and his deputy at the cost of 1,2 billion naira. To secure and equip this huge edifice, 800 million naira and 300 million naira were allocated in the 2005 budget, bringing the total cost to 2.3 billion. It should be noted that this sum does not include

⁴² « Bayelsa State 2005 Appropriation Bill », in *The Guardian* (Lagos), 20 December, 2004.

⁴³ These numbered 149 in 2004. See « Profile on Ministry of Education »: <http://www.bayelsagov.com>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the 600 million naira spent on the project in 2004. Thus, according to official records, the construction and equipment of a residence for the governor and his deputy has cost the state close to 3 billion naira between 2004 and 2005. Other independents estimates are higher. One source, for instance, has estimated the expenditure on this project at around 3.2 billion naira⁴⁵.

Grand corruption and systematic misallocation of funds of the sort described above were in no way unique to Alamiyeseigha's Bayelsa state. Other oil producing states that have experienced serious levels of violent conflicts were also neck-deep in similar malfeasance, a good example being Rivers State which was governed by Peter Odili between 1999 and 2007. In his 2006 budget, estimated at 160 billion naira (\$1,2 billion), governor Odili spent 10,7 billion naira to maintain his office (the Governor's Office). This sum excluded the 500 million naira spent on 'gifts' and 'souvenirs' for his visitors, the 4.3 billion naira used as 'Grants' and 'Donations'⁴⁶ and the hefty 5 billion naira in security vote, to be spent according to his discretion. In the same budget, Governor Peter Odili also reserved himself 3 billion naira (translating to \$60,000 per day) to take care of his frequent trips overseas (Transport and Travel Allocation), which is even far above what the President of Nigeria gets. The 32 members of his state legislature got 690 million naira (about \$5.4 million) for their own travels, \$2.8 million of which were meant for foreign trips. This is separate from the \$2.8 million given to the legislature as a sitting allowance (not salaries). But interestingly, Peter Odili is not as generous when it comes to social services, which would benefit a greater number of his state's often poor citizens. A meagre sum of 2.8 billion naira was all that was given to the state's ministry of health out of a budget of 160 billion naira, in spite of having been coined a "Priority Ministry"⁴⁷.

Another form of corruption that became prevalent in Bayelsa state under Governor Alamiyeseigha was the direct payments to top officials and to the co-opted members of the political class in the state, apparently made to stave off demands for greater transparency and accountability. It was in furtherance of this policy that the governor approved and paid 100 million naira to each of the 24 members of the state legislature in 2005, under the pretext that the lawmakers were going to build projects (Constituency Development Projects) in their respective constituencies. To begin with, these payments were never contained in the original version of the state 2005 budget submitted to the state House of Assembly in December 2004, suggesting that it was an afterthought. Furthermore, it is a flagrant violation of the principle of separation of powers that underlines Nigeria's presidential system. The 1999 constitution reserved the powers to execute projects to the executive arm of government only. In other instances, governor Alamiyeseigha also resorted to

⁴⁵ See Lydia Polgreen, «In Nigerian Hall of Shame: A New Low», in *This Day* (Lagos), 30 November 2005.

⁴⁶ Governor Peter Odili's generosity to clients and friends was so phenomenal that his regime was christened "Peter Dey Pay", which translates to 'Peter Odili is a giver'. Ukoha Ukiwo, L « Le Delta du Niger face a la démocratie virtuelle du Nigeria », in Laurent Fourchard et Richard Banegas (eds), *Le Nigeria sous Obasanjo*, op cit. pp. 128-147.

⁴⁷ «The Governors Dues: Oil Shut Downs and Political Violence are Escalating despite Record Budgets in the Delta », in *African Confidential*, Vol.47, N°15, 21 July, 2006.

regular purchase of luxury cars for the top officials of the state government. These cars became a major distinguishing factor between an affluent and flamboyant politico-bureaucratic elite and a dispossessed population steeped in misery.

Such high level of waste and corruption by those charged with the responsibility of steering the ship of the state government had several consequences for governance in Bayelsa state, one of which being the spread and proliferation of similar malfeasances at the lower levels in the 24 local government councils in the state. A clear picture of the extent of decay among these lower levels of governments was given by the governor himself, in a February 2000 speech:

“The expectation was that the new local government areas would provide a veritable training ground for up-coming leaders. This is in spite of the numerous advantages of decentralising government programmes. In the same vein, the new local government areas were created to check the spate of rural-urban drift, and to provide employment opportunities for our teeming youth population. From our observation, however, most of the people entrusted with the responsibility of administering the new local government areas lacked basic leadership qualities. They were found wanting in probity, transparency, mature judgement and sense of direction. I have learnt to my utmost dismay that some of the former chairmen exhibited financial indiscipline through over-inflation of contract values, frivolous spending and gross mismanagement, among other sharp practices. Some chairmen used their station in the local government councils as conduit-pipes to siphon scarce resources. These vices are not only damnable, but negate the very purpose for which the local government areas were created⁴⁸

When complaints against these heads of government persisted, governor Alamiyeseigha simply replaced them⁴⁹. None of them was charged or punished for any offence.

In some other societies, Mr. Alamiyeseigha’s conduct would have earned him instant challenge from civil society, immediate removal from office through the process of impeachment and then speedy trial by the law courts. Much of the accountability problems associated with Nigeria’s oil bearing states derive from the absence of effective institutional checks on executive powers, whether by civil society groups or by other arms of government. Although notable for his extreme generosity towards favoured clients, Governor Alamiyeseigha, like other governors in Nigeria, did all he can to tame any potential rival and autonomous institution capable of checking his power⁵⁰.

For instance, throughout its tenure in office, the Alamiyeseigha administration ran a policy requiring that all expenditures (contracts and purchases) by the state or any of its agencies amounting to a million naira and above must be done with the expressed approval of the governor. Also, a move by the state House of Assembly in 2002 provoked an epic political battle between the legislators (who are

⁴⁸ See « Charge to Chairmen of Caretaker Committees of Local Governments », in Nengi Josef Ilagha (ed.), *DSP Alamiyeseigha: The Landmark Speeches*, (Volume One), Yenagoa: Bayelsa State Government House, 2001, p. 173.

⁴⁹ *This Day* (Lagos), 6 June 2005.

⁵⁰ Governor Alamiyeseigha, who also goes by the appellation of the “Governor General of the Ijaw Nation”, once boasted that no one could challenge him in Bayelsa State. *Newswatch* (Lagos), 24 October 2005.

constitutionally charged with overseeing the activities of the Executive). It concerned a bill seeking to empower each of the three arms of government (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary) to control its own budgetary allocations with a view to insuring their independence vis-à-vis the executive, and the governor, DSP Alamieyeseigha. This conflict ended with the impeachment of the incumbent Speaker of the State House of Assembly, and subsequently the abandoning of the proposed bill, entitled the *Self Accounting Bill*⁵¹.

This absence of effective check from organised and independent civil society groups was also notable. To be sure, there were a few courageous moves instituted by concerned citizens seeking to force a change of policies. In 2001, a former collaborator of governor Alamieyeseigha filed a suit against him before an Abuja High Court alleging widespread mismanagement of resources⁵². This complainant, in his suit, specifically requested the court to order the establishment of a “special committee” whose purpose would be to manage and oversee the proper use of all available resources for the development of the state⁵³. Unfortunately, the court rejected this request, and indeed the entire suit. A second suit brought by a group of two indigenes of the state in 2005, seeking to halt payments being made to the state legislators (in the name of Constituency development Projects) and to all projects already commenced in that respect⁵⁴, suffered the same fate. Having bought the support of other members of the civil society (armed militia groups, NGOs, traditional rulers, cultural movements, etc.), the looting of Bayelsa State resources on a massive scale went uninterrupted.

The Alamieyeseigha saga has also helped expose another loophole in the Nigeria criminal justice system: the weakness of the central anti-corruption agencies vis-à-vis the 36 state governors. Thus, despite these flagrant abuses committed by Mr. Alamieyeseigha, ICPC could neither arrest nor arraign governor Alamieyeseigha before the law courts. The section 308 of the Nigerian constitution indeed granted the 36 state governors and their deputies immunity against such legal actions. The EFCC had to adopt a very innovative approach to get around this dilemma by transferring Alamieyeseigha’s files to the British authorities once he embarked on one of his numerous foreign trips. The strategy paid off when the British arrested him in September 2004 while on a private visit to London.

⁵¹ This information was given to the author during an earlier interview with a member of the State House of Assembly, Nelson Belief. The interview took place in September 2004 in Yenagoa, the capital of the state.

⁵² Perekeme Richard Kpodoh, former Governorship candidate of the *All Nigeria People’s Party*, ANPP, and one time *Director of Operations* in the cabinet of Mr Alamieyeseigha from 1999-2001, explains the reason for his action thus: «*This restiveness we have been witnessing in the State is as a result of his reckless spending. If our money is judiciously used you will find peace in the State and the youths would be appropriately engaged... When the head is rotten, everybody in the government is rotten.... They keep on misbehaving, building houses of their own everywhere, buying flashy cars, while the masses are suffering on the streets* ». *Newswatch* (Lagos), 24 October, 2005.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *The Guardian* (Lagos), 10 August, 2005.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND DIRECTION OF FUTURE STUDIES

This study has attempted to examine the vicious circle of oil, corruption and Violence in the Niger Delta as a whole, and Bayelsa state in particular. The principal objective has been to show how oil and corruption help us to understand much of the violent conflicts ranging in these key Niger Delta states. While not denying the fact that no single factor can explain all the violent conflicts in these states⁵⁵, evidence produced in this paper suggest that corrupt misuse of oil rents by political leaders and the determination of “*political outsiders*” to get a piece for themselves (if possible through violent means) as a *struggle for oil space*, to borrow Ikporukpo’s phrase⁵⁶, is a principal cause of the armed conflicts in this volatile part of Nigeria⁵⁷.

What all these suggest is that popular perceptions and the dominant scholarly perspectives, which view violent conflicts in the Niger Delta as arising from either ethnic rivalries, poverty, injustice in the revenue allocation formula, or even from the incapacity of the state to secure its territory, are inadequate. Consequently, there is a need for a more inclusive approach. Such an approach must acknowledge and take into account the negative and harmful effects of oil, especially the bad governance, waste and corruption it breeds. Only by tackling corruption and financial mismanagement, which have helped to fuel violence in the Niger-Delta, through wide governance reforms could help restore a relative peace and stability in the long run. Consequently, there would be a need to gain a better understanding of the deep roots of violent conflicts through empirical analysis of concrete cases of corruption, and on

⁵⁵ Some studies have shown that some of the violent conflicts in the Niger Delta have actually their roots in age long ethnic/communal rivalry or animosity (such as the Warri crisis), chieftaincy dispute and land disputes between neighbouring communities, bad government policies, or even insensitivity of oil companies to local demands, which may not have anything to do with the struggle for control of oil rents. T. A. Imobighe et al, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta: The Warri Case*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2002; William Ehwareme, “Peoples and Places in Violent Conflicts in the Niger Delta: the Case of the Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw of Delta State”, being the final research report submitted to the *French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA)*, Ibadan, 2005; Onigu Otite and Issac O. Albert (eds.), *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 1999; Jędrzej G. Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflicts and Litigations Between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

⁵⁶ Chris O. Ikporukpo, *The Struggle for Space and the Space of Struggle*, op cit.

⁵⁷ Even the so called ‘non-oil conflicts’, like disputes that predated the discovery of oil, such as the Ishekiri-Ijaw- Uhrobo conflict in Warri (Delta State), have in many ways been fuelled and energized by the emergence of oil rents and the corruption it has spawned: When asked what they thought was the cause of the Warri violence, over 90 % of the respondents in one of the feuding communities, identified oil as a major cause of trouble. The exacerbating influence of oil is also clearly reflected in the inter-community conflict taking place in the Soku Gas Plant area in Rivers State. According to a Shell Petroleum Company of Nigeria (SPDC) sponsored study:

“*The Inter-Community conflict between Soku, Elem-Sangama and Oluasiri has both past and contemporary roots. The three communities were part of historical conflicts between the Kalabari (Soku and Elem Sangama) and Nembe (Oluasiri) Kingdoms. As recent as 1992, Oluasiri fighters sacked Elem-Sangama over a dispute about access to sand for house construction. During the fighting approximately 30 people were killed on both sides. Today, the conflict between the three communities is over who owns the Soku Gas Plant and as a consequence who derives most benefits from Shell*”. T. A. Imobighe et al, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger Delta*, op cit; Chris O. Ikporukpo, *The Struggle for Space and the Space of Struggle*, op cit. See p.4.

how that encourages and sustains violence. This preliminary study, therefore, ought to form the basis of such future studies.

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