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The emergence of ethnic militia movements in Nigeria's Niger Delta

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

The study set out to examine the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the oil-rich Niger Delta in Nigeria. The most prominent themes that are related to this process are the federal structure and the predatory character of the Nigerian state, neo-patrimonial rule in the local communities and pervasive economic and social deprivation. Conflict theories of Burton, Collier and Hoeffler and Galtung that provide insight in the causes of insurgencies were applied on three ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. These are the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). In testing the explanatory value of each of the theories the question of greed versus grievance was addressed. Based on the processes of transformation that each of the three militia movements underwent, and what has become clear about the internal structure of and methods used by each of them, it appears that grievance nor greed are the principal motivations of the rebels. Rather, the dynamics that drive these organisations must be sought in the political economy that defines the Niger Delta, the social structures of its communities, and the economy of conflict that hinges on organised crime, violence and even dialogue. Secondary sources have been used for this study, ranging between scholarly publications and popular press articles.

List of Contents

List of Abbreviations	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Nigeria: Background and federal structure	8
2.1. Introduction	8
2.2. The Nigerian post-colonial state	8
2.2.1. Politicized ethnicity	9
2.2.2. Economic decline	12
2.2.3. Minorities in the Niger Delta	16
2.3. Predatory rule, neo-patrimonialism and oil	17
2.3.1. The power of the chiefs	18
2.3.2. Democratic transition	21
2.4. Federalism	21
2.5. Political economy of the Niger Delta	23
2.5.1. Violence and resistance	26
2.6. Conclusion	35
3. Greed, grievance and structural violence.	36
3.1. Introduction	36
3.2. Greed and grievance in a political economy	37
3.2.1. The question of grievance and greed	38
3.2.2. Ikelegbe: Causality and dynamics of conflict and resistance	39
3.2.3. Reno: Structures for social space	40
3.3. The greed model of Collier and Hoeffler	41
3.4. Basic human needs theory of John Burton	44
3.5. Johan Galtung's structural violence	48

3.6. Transition and democratisation	49
3.6.1. Ethnicity	51
3.6.2. State collapse	51
3.6.3. Citizenship	53
3.7. Conclusion: The development nexus	56
4. Emergence of MOSOP, IYC and MEND: a transformation of movements	59
4.1. Introduction	59
4.2. Political economy as a conflict system	60
4.3. Explanatory dimensions	65
4.4. Emergence of MOSOP	67
4.5. Emergence of IYC	74
4.6. MEND	83
4.7. A process of transformation	91
4.8. Conclusion: the development nexus	92
Conclusion	95
Bibliography	104

List of Abbreviations

BYFN	Bayelsa Youths Federation of Nigeria
COC	Council of Ogoni Churches
COTRA	Conference of Ogoni Traditional Rulers
EBA	Egbesu Boys of Africa
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMIRON	Ethnic Minorities Organization of Nigeria
ERA	Environmental Rights Action
EYF	Egi Youth Federation
FNDIC	The Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities
FOWA	Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations
INC	Ijaw National Congress
INYM	Isoko National Youth Movement
IYC	Yjaw Youth Council
IYM	Ikwere Youth Movement
JRC	Joint Revolutionary Council
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MNOC	Multinational Oil Company
MOSEIND	Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta
MOSIEN	Movement for the Survival of the Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
ND-HERO	Niger Delta-Human and Environmental Rights Organisation
NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NDV	Niger Delta Vigilantes
NIDOPCODO	Niger Delta Oil Producing Communities Development Organisation
NYCOP	National Youth Council of the Ogoni People
OBR	Ogoni Bill of Rights
OSU	Ogoni Students Union
OUT	Ogoni Teachers Union
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SEA	Supreme Egbesu Assembly
TOC	Trans-national Oil Company
UYOMO	Urhobo Youth Movement

1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s there has been a phenomenal increase in ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. They rebel against the federal government and the practices of transnational oil companies (TOCs) that operate on their lands. Most of the Niger Delta people live in abject poverty, and unemployment rates are high. A multi-million dollar oil industry, an authoritarian, often partial government, international networks of organised crime and large scale oil theft, proliferation of small arms and environmental degradation create the scene for all kinds of violence. The emergence of ethnic militia movements is the product of a plethora of causes and enabling factors. Originally an expression of discontentment with their marginalised position in the Nigerian polity and the miserable conditions in which the oil-producing communities live, the insurgency in the resource-rich region of Nigeria now appears to have mutated into a new kind of activism.

All the ethnic militia movements clamour for an end to the environmental spoilage that poisons their fishing waters, for more control over their oil revenues and a restructuring of the federal system that has enabled the elites to loot their resources and leave the region impoverished. Yet, many of the movements are involved in clandestine activities such as illegal bunkering, sponsored election violence, kidnapping of TOC staff and pipeline vandalism. The true objectives of some of them may not be the same as the reasons why they were originally formed. Also, one organisation could be involved in both clandestine and legal activities at the same time, while another never professed social objectives to begin with.

The crisis in the Niger Delta is currently a hot item in international media and politics. Two factors in particular have contributed to this fact. Firstly, the kidnapping of expatriates by the militias as a means to grab public attention, as well as that of international stakeholders in order to indirectly extort adherence of the state, is a rapidly expanding practice. Secondly, the strategic importance of Nigerian oil to the global energy market as a major exporter, and as the fifth largest exporter to the United States,

makes whatever happens in its main oil-producing region cause ripples with far-reaching effect. With the use of modern information technology and mass media, the militia movements in the Niger Delta have the proven ability to cause a surge in the price of oil in a matter of a day, by simply issuing a statement warning for new attacks or by taking a fresh round of hostages. Moreover, an explosion of the Niger Delta crisis has the potential of taking the entire Nigerian state with it.

Nigeria is a country in transition. In 1999 the democratically elected government of Olusegun Obasanjo replaced a 30-year long nearly uninterrupted succession of military regimes. But the democratic transition has not yet led to an end of the violent identity conflicts that pervade the country. Nor has democracy delivered the political and economic dividends that most Nigerians were hoping for. A pivotal issue that drives continuous political contention in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta is resource distribution. Oil being the main source of government revenue, regions and states contend vigorously for their share. But the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta, from which the gross part of the oil is extracted, feel that they have been structurally neglected and deprived of what rightfully belongs to them.

It would be impossible to examine all the militia movements in the Niger Delta, so a selection has been made. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) are the cases under review. The study will be limited to literature research. This is mainly due to practical reasons, because for the author of this study there is no occasion at present time to conduct interviews in the field.

Firstly, a number of questions need to be addressed within a theoretical framework. The first refers to the evidence. Obviously, the intention of the author of this study is not merely to provide a historical account of the circumstances and facts that *preceded* the emergence of the ethnic militia movements. The aim is to investigate which of these factors *caused* the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. This requires a fair amount of causality to be established between the factors and their

presumed result. A test procedure that comes to mind is to examine the statements of the leaders of the movements. In many cases the movements have issued official declarations to explain their inception. Other sources are media and academic reports and interviews. Some leaders are involved in intellectual and scholarly enterprises themselves, and have written historical accounts about the nascence and development of their organisations.¹

What factors led to the emergence of the ethnic militia movements? The aim of this study is to reveal the social, political and economic dynamics that caused community leaders, often youths, to organise and fight for either social change or financial gain, and, in some cases, both. The emergence of MOSOP, IYC and MEND is examined and analysed with regard to their nature, objectives, methods and structure. The next step is to examine how different conflict theories relate to reality as it is found in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

The theories of Burton, Galtung and Collier and Hoeffler shed light on the causes of conflict and rebellion. They do this from very different vantage points. The first-mentioned focuses on grievances that motivate rebels and their support base, while the last-mentioned regards greed as the decisive factor, i.e. the opportunities that are perceived to be present for profiting financially from civil war. The proximity of large amounts of natural resources plays a significant role in both constructs. The theory of Galtung focuses less on motivations than on the structures in which peace and violence exist. In his view, a society is a system that functions according to a mechanism of social and political interactions. Galtung's view on society and the role that violence plays in it is helpful with regard to the analysis of the emergence of the ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. It is instructive for an examination of their internal structure and the networks that interlink them, their relationships with their communities and their position in the political/corporate system.

Needs theory is a collection of ideas. It perceives the basis of conflict and rebellion to be unequal distribution of power. Needs that have such weight that individuals are willing to

¹ Oronto Douglas, co-author of *Where vultures feast. Shell, human rights, and oil* (London, New York: Verso, 2003), is one of the founders of the Ijaw Youth Council. The other author is Ike Okonta.

fight, even die for them, and that are so basic to existence that all humans share them, are regarded as 'basic human needs.' Galtung introduced the notion of 'structural violence', which refers to the systematic ways in which a regime can prevent individuals from realising their potential. Collier and Hoeffler use a different approach to examine the causes of conflict and especially civil war. They focus on quantitative factors that relate to opportunity, rather than on social and political motives for starting a rebellion. In Chapter 3 these theories are examined at greater length in order to establish the explanatory value of each of them. In addition, Chapter 3 presents a discussion of analytical perspectives of others like Ikelegbe and Reno,

To facilitate the understanding of the context within which the Niger Delta militia movements mobilised, Chapter 2 presents a description of the political economy of oil in the Niger Delta. The emergence of ethnic militia movements and their nature reveal aspects of the process of transition that the Nigerian state is going through. Is the emergence of the militia movements a feature of this transition and do they augur a revolution of social and political justice in Nigeria, or will they merely contribute to the collapse of the state into ever smaller power units? In Chapter 4 the emergence of MOSOP, IYC and MEND will be reviewed, with special attention to the transformation processes of which they were part, and sometimes a catalyst. In addition, in Chapter 4 the theoretical frameworks of Chapter 3 will be pieced together with the historical account of Chapter 2, and attempt to deliver a conclusion about why the ethnic militia movements emerged and what their nascence, dynamics, nature of the struggle and structure can tell us about them.

2. Nigeria: Background and federal structure

2.1. Introduction

In order to understand the dynamics that interplay in the Niger Delta in government, civil society and social structures the parameters of Nigeria's recent political history will be introduced in the following chapter. The outrageous ethnic pluralism of the state and the various modes by which lawmakers and constitutionalists have attempted to make it viable will be discussed in this chapter as well. The minorities question first came to a head when the Biafra war broke out only six years after the birth of the First Republic (1960). In more recent times, ethnic mobilisation and the politicisation of ethnicity have been common responses to political exclusion and economic hardship in the Niger Delta as well as in other parts of Nigeria. But in the Niger Delta state neglect and the structural violence that the state has visited on its inhabitants has reinforced the detrimental impact of oil extraction on the communities that live in the direct surroundings of its production. In the political economy of the Niger Delta the failures of the extracting state are particularly obvious. Here oil, profit, crime, exclusivist social structures, political machines, environmental degradation and intricate networks of patronage connecting all levels of public administration have colluded, making the Niger Delta a place of rampant poverty and gross violation of human rights: a fertile soil for a thriving economy of war.

2.2. The Nigerian post-colonial state

When Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, its government was structured as a federal system based on three states: Eastern, Western and Northern Nigeria. This division followed the administrative structure of the former British rule, and reflected the 'ethnic triumvirate' of the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria: Hausa/Fulani in the North, Yoruba in the West and Igbo in the East.² Although the aim of the tripartite arrangement was to accommodate the interests of the diverse ethnic groups and curb rivalry between

² International Crisis Group, 'Nigeria: Want in the midst of plenty', *Africa Report*, No.113 (Dakar/Brussels, 19 July 2006): 2.

the three ethnic blocks, it was immediately challenged by the minorities within each state. The civilian government was overthrown with a military coup in 1966. Until this day the National Question, or ‘how to structure the state so that every ethnic or religious group and every Nigerian as an individual becomes a stakeholder’ has remained a prime challenge and focus of Nigerian politics.³

2.2.1. Politicized ethnicity

Nigeria counts over 250 ethno-linguistic minorities, and numerous religious communities. Nigeria’s description as ‘merely a geographical expression’, coined by Chief Balewa Awolowo in 1947, is still fitting today.⁴ Ethnically, the Middle Belt is the most varied region, with more than half of Nigeria’s ethnic groups living there. Some ethnic groups comprise just a few thousand members.⁵

Ethnic identity is commonly understood to be dynamic. In Nigeria, as in most African countries, it exists of ‘historical constructions with political value.’⁶ Osaghae defines ethnicity as follows: ‘The employment and or mobilisation of ethnic identity or difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or co-operation.’⁷ In its politicised form, involving mobilization, demands and political action, it has, and continues to constitute serious threats to the Nigerian state. In the wake of the detrimental social and economic repercussions of economic reforms in the 1980s, ethnicity has resurged as a potent force,⁸ so that currently, ‘[o]f all the claims that rival those of the state – to autonomy, self-determination and loyalty of citizens – none, it can be argued, threatens its existence as much as those made by ethnic groups [..].’⁹

³ ICG No.113: 2.

⁴ ICG No.113: 1.

⁵ T. Lehtinen and N. Ogumbor, ‘The mosaic of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria’, in T. Kivimaki and L. Laakso (eds), *Greed, grievance and weak states. Overview of African conflicts* (Helsinki: Intercontent Books No. 11, 2000): 167-170.

⁶ ICG No.113: 2.

⁷ E.E. Osaghae quoted in C.I. Obi, ‘The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria under economic adjustment: The case of the oil minorities movement of the Niger Delta’, *Research Report*, No.119 (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2001): 12.

⁸ M. Doornbos quoted in C.I. Obi, ‘The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria’: 12.

⁹ E.E. Osaghae, ‘State, constitutionalism and the management of ethnicity in Africa’, *Africa and Asian Studies* Vol.4, No.1-2 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2005): 84.

Osaghae rightly notes that ‘What propels ethnic mobilization is not simply ethnic difference, pride or consciousness, but unequal and unjust conditions – discrimination, resource and distributional inequality, marked inequalities in opportunity and access – that produce the kinds of consciousness that would make people take political action.’¹⁰ Ethnicity and ethnic conflict have infused political competition, class cleavages and social agitation throughout Nigeria.

The main tension in ethnic relations in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial system of indirect rule that gave the bigger groups the advantage. Ethnicity determined to a large extent who was entitled to what, and what resources – both benefits and positions in the colonial administration – one could strive for. After independence the majority groups that had been favoured during colonial rule consolidated their access to and control over power and resources.¹¹

On numerous occasions politicised ethnicity has led to ‘anti-system demands’ and challenged the existence and the legitimacy of the state directly in pursuit of autonomy, self-determination, even secession.¹² The most dramatic instance of this has been the Biafra War (1967-70) when Igbos in the Eastern state declared their secession from Nigeria. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a Hausa, had just eliminated the Igbo General John Aguiyi Ironsi’s junta with a counter-coup in 1966. Undoing Ironsi’s declaration of Nigeria as a unitary state, Gowon instituted the second federal division of the nation by introducing a twelve-state-system; six in the north and six in the south. The first of these ‘ethnic management interventions’ after the birth of the First Republic had been the creation of a fourth state in the Middle Belt region in 1963.

The broad catch-all approach to minority problems of most Nigerian administrations between the First Republic (1961) and the Fourth (1999), the de-federalising

¹⁰ E.E. Osaghae, ‘State, constitutionalism and the management of ethnicity in Africa’: 99.

¹¹ C.I. Obi, ‘The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria’: 9.

¹² E.E. Osaghae, ‘State, constitutionalism and the management of ethnicity in Africa’: 85.

consequences of prolonged military rule and the relative neglect of minority issues have had a negative impact on the capacity of the state to manage ethnicity effectively.¹³ The lack of state legitimacy and the perceived partiality of the state have weakened its capacity as a mediator. Its approach to ethnic conflict has been generally to suppress all organised agitation.

Generally, ethnic conflict and ethnic tension have manifested themselves in two forms. The first is inter- and intra-group conflict, often revolving around uneven distribution of resources and opportunities.¹⁴ Inequality has in some cases been grounded in the constitution. The 'settler versus natives' dichotomy, which has been most violent in its confrontations in the ultra-heterogeneous Middle Belt, has been exacerbated by the effects of state multiplication, combined with a certain provision in the 1979 constitution. This provision states that 'indigenes' of a state are entitled to access to institutions and benefits which 'settlers' are not. In the Niger Delta this dichotomy, which has not been removed or adapted in the 1999 Constitution, blended with the struggle for resources and benefits, and has led to numerous violent confrontations between and within ethnic communities.¹⁵

In other cases, ethnic tensions have been aggravated by the effects of the distributive character of the Nigerian Federation under military rule. Suberu (2001) observes that in Nigeria the federal principle has paradoxically made the central government stronger, instead of dividing government power on a territorial basis. Suberu states: 'Federalism in Nigeria has been assimilated into a distributive strategy that is designed to channel central resources to ethno-territorial or sectional constituencies.'¹⁶ Over-centralisation of the Nigerian federation was caused by a number of factors. Suberu mentions the unifying

¹³ E.E. Osaghae, 'Managing multiple minority problems in a divided society: The Nigerian experience', *The journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No.1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1998): 2.

¹⁴ E.E. Osaghae, *Ethnicity and its management in Africa: The democratization link* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1994): 12.

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, 'Nigeria's faltering federal experiment', *Africa Report* No.119 (Dakar/Brussels: 25 October, 2006): 11-2.

¹⁶ R.T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2001): 16.

impact of the civil war; domination of the Nigerian economy by federally collected oil revenues; and the continued intensity of distributive contention, as opposed to productive accumulation.¹⁷ The intricacies of the Nigerian federal system will be discussed in another section of this chapter.

2.2.2. *Economic decline*

In addition to the appropriation of the state by political elites to serve their own interests, and state repression, which reached an apex under the junta of General Sani Abacha between 1993 and 1998, Nigerians have suffered immensely under the consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The SAP was introduced by Abacha's predecessor Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida who took power in 1983. Babangida was supported by the IMF and Worldbank thanks to his liberal economic policies. He also introduced a programme for transition to democratic rule. However, this programme has come to be known as the 'transition without end'.¹⁸ The failure of the SAP is closely linked to the increase of ethnic tensions and conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s. The neglect of agriculture was reinforced by the oil boom in the 1970s and moved the Nigerian economy to become a virtual mono-economy by the end of the 1980s. In 1965, agriculture accounted for 75,9 percent of total federal revenue; in 1980 it had declined to 2,4 percent. The oil segment of total federal revenue was 2,7 percent in 1960; by 1981 it had grown to 96,1 percent.¹⁹ The demise of agriculture meant a loss of livelihood for a large section of the Nigerian population.

Initial economic growth, that marked the 1970s as a result of the seemingly unlimited influx of petrodollars in the economy, radically reversed by the end of the 1980s. The oil-shocks of '77 and '81 had already triggered significant decline, but the real collapse ensued in the late 1980s.²⁰ The SAP deepened the economic crisis that it was meant to resolve.²¹ The social costs of the Nigerian SAP have affected rural communities

¹⁷ R.T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria*: 2.

¹⁸ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 60.

¹⁹ C. Ake, *Democracy and development in Africa* (Washington, D.C : Brookings Institution, 1996): 49.

²⁰ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 32.

²¹ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 40.

differently than the urban. Although rural dwellers suffered tremendously from the reforms in agricultural policy, the consequences for urbanites were more far-reaching, and affected employment, fuel prices, transportation, health, education, interest rates, price controls, water and electricity provision, post and telecom services. Because the public sector was and remains the largest employer (at least 60 percent), cut-downs of the government bureaucracy hit workers hard. It is estimated that between 1984 and 1989 circa 1 million people were retrenched from the public sector.²²

The crisis of youth is rooted in the rapid population growth that has gripped Nigeria during the last three decades. This demographic change combined with

‘the collapse of the educational system, resulted in the constriction of opportunities in the formal job sector and the relegation of most of the nation’s youth to eking out a harsh existence, either from a difficult informal sector or from the nightmare of an over-crowded job market. Under these circumstances, increasing numbers of youths, particularly in the nation’s major urban centres, have been exposed to living on the streets, in “a culture of marginality” that is rooted in drugs, loose morality, violence, profanity and disrespect for social institutions.’²³

One of the most profound consequences of these processes was the expansion of the informal sector. Many people who had jobs adopted ‘multiple modes of livelihood’, for example by starting small-scale agricultural activities. The growth of the informal sector increased the level of competition, most notably in trade.²⁴ It is no coincidence that the first vigilante ethnic militia in the eastern Anambra State, was conceived by the Onitsha Market Traders Association.²⁵

Because health care and other social services became unaffordable, people turned to themselves in their struggle to make ends meet. The importance of identities of kinship,

²² E.E. Osaghae, ‘Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria’, *Research Report No.98* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1995): 35.

²³ A. Sesay, C. Ukeje, O. Aina, and A. Odebiyi (eds), *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria* (Ile-Ife: Centre for Development and Conflict Management Studies; Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2003): 20-21.

²⁴ E.E. Osaghae, ‘Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria’: 35.

²⁵ J. Harnischfeger, ‘The Bakassi Boys: Fighting crime in Nigeria’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.41, No.1 (Cambridge: University Press, 2003): 23-25.

ethnicity, etc. increased, and organisations that based their membership profile on these identities proliferated.²⁶

There are two, seemingly contradictory, factors responsible for these phenomenal changes in “patterns of social relations”:

1. a shrinking responsibility of the state in the provision of public goods;
2. an increased involvement of the state in other areas, especially rural development and repressing people’s opposition to the reforms.²⁷

In the end, the ‘retrenchments, removal of subsidies, rising costs of food and other essential goods and services, and other hardships which the SAP wreaked on the people were very costly to the government because they led to a massive withdrawal of support, replaced by fierce opposition.’²⁸

The crisis of youth is seen by Sesay et al. as an important factor in the proliferation of ‘ethnic militias, vigilantes and sundry militant and predominantly youthful groups.’ The youths, who litter the streets looking for work, or any kind of income generating activity, would spontaneously amplify any ethnic conflict incident that occurred, and seize the opportunity to loot shops and offices and harass innocent citizens. According to Sesay et al., ‘there is no doubt that many of these youths have acquired ‘respectability’ by subsequently becoming full members of ethnic militias or vigilante organizations.’²⁹ Also, they have been hired by political and ethnic entrepreneurs to employ thuggish activities for the selfish or partisan objectives of their employers.³⁰

Decreasing legitimacy of the state plays an important role in its failure to act as a mediator in conflicts amongst ethnic groups and between ethnic groups and TOCs, which is its fundamental responsibility. Parallel to the civil unrest that ensued from worsening

²⁶ E.E. Osaghae, ‘Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria’: 36.

²⁷ E.E. Osaghae, ‘Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria’: 35.

²⁸ E.E. Osaghae, ‘Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria’: 37.

²⁹ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 21.

³⁰ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 21.

material conditions the character of Babangida's administration became more and more repressive. The democratisation programme that had been initiated by the military ruler at the outset of his regime remained uncompleted, to the growing frustration of civil society organisations. The politics of structural adjustment provoked a transformation of social movements that had formerly been oriented more toward strengthening of (ethnic) positions within the Nigerian federation, for instance through pressing for new states. This change was reflected in the increasing democratic content of the demands of these ethnic minority movements.³¹

The culmination of the civic opposition against Babangida was reached with the annulment of the 1993 elections and the incarceration of its apparent winner, the Yoruba businessman Moshood Abiola. The formation of the first ethnic militant movement in Nigeria, the Oodu'a People's Congress (OPC) was the Yoruba's response to this blatant disregard of the constitution.³² In the country's south-west, the OPC pressed for Yoruba autonomy and an end to corruption. They also demanded the convention of a Sovereign National Conference where all ethnic groups would be represented and could discuss a radical decentralisation of the Nigerian federal system.³³

'[E]thnicity emerged as one of the most potent strategies for coping with scarcity and the challenge of survival.'³⁴ According to Osaghae, this was probably even more the case for the country's privileged classes, which depended on state patronage for their sustenance. 'The desperate elites (and youths) have pursued largely private interests by organizing militant ethnic organisations which ostensibly demand collective material benefits and rights.'³⁵ The International Crisis Group (ICG) observes that 'the politicisation of ethnicity and religion and factional mobilisation along these same lines is a direct by-

³¹ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 56.

³² O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria' *Research report*, No.127 (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2004): 16-17.

³³ W. Reno, 'The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states', *Government and Opposition*, Vol.40, No.2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 136.

³⁴ E.E. Osaghae, 'Managing multiple minority problems in a divided society': 15.

³⁵ E.E. Osaghae, 'Managing multiple minority problems in a divided society': 15.

product of the monopolisation of power and assets by ruling elites eager to avoid open and fair competition.³⁶

2.2.3. Minorities in the Niger Delta

The failure of the government to curb pogroms on Igbos living in the Northern state and the perceived imbalance of power in favour of the North was the major cause for the attempted secession and the ensuing Biafra war.³⁷ In the East the Niger Delta communities, minorities on both the national and the regional level, pitted themselves against the Igbos' cause and sided with the federal government. This 'betrayal', as it was regarded by the Igbos, is explained by the Delta minorities' fears of living in an autonomous, Igbo-dominated Biafra. If the discrimination and intimidation that was experienced by the Ijaws, Itsekiris, Etches, Ibibios, Ekwerres, Urhobos and Ogoni of the Niger Delta is studied on a day to day basis, it is clear that this fear was not unreasonable.³⁸ As with the Middle Belters, the Nigerian government offered the Niger Delta minorities a measure of self-rule in return for their support of the federal cause. Two new states, Rivers and South East State, were carved out for them. Until today the 'sell-out' of the Niger Delta has fostered resentment between the Igbos and their neighbours in the eastern part of the country.³⁹ After the civil war that claimed between one and two million lives ended in 1970 with the surrender of the Biafrans a period of boundless optimism ensued. General Gowon delivered his famous "no victors, no vanquished" speech on national radio and granted amnesty to all but the most important leaders of the rebellion. The explosive rise of the oil price on the world market coincided with the end of the civil war.

³⁶ ICG No.113: Executive Summary.

³⁷ ICG No.113: 7.

³⁸ V.A. Isumonah, 'The making of the Ogoni ethnic group', *Africa*, Vol. 74, No.3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004): 441-2.

³⁹ ICG No.113: 7.

2.3. Predatory rule, neo-patrimonialism and oil

Oil was discovered in Nigeria in 1956 and commercial exports started two years later.⁴⁰ In 1970 oil revenue was still at a modest \$250 million dollars. Three years later the oil boom that followed the OPEC embargo and the Yom Kippur war raised this number to \$2.1 billion in 1972 and a dazzling \$11.2 billion in 1974.⁴¹ Financial constraints vanished almost overnight. The oil wealth however produced rampant corruption. In 1969 the Petroleum Decree vested the entire ownership of “all oil and gas within any land in Nigeria, as well as under its territorial waters and continental shelf” with the federal government. In 1971 the government nationalized the oil industry by establishing the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC). The NNOC has since then held a majority share in all joint ventures with trans-national oil companies (TOCs) that exploit the country’s oil fields.⁴²

The bulk of Nigeria’s oil is located in the Niger Delta. Aside from oil, Nigeria has proven gas reserves that make it the seventh largest source of gas in the world, but exploitation of these resources is still in its early phase.⁴³ Nigerian oil exports today account for 80 percent of government revenue, 95 percent of export earnings and 40 percent of GDP. As mentioned before, the mono-commodity economy has had a detrimental effect on other domestic industries, most notably the agricultural sector.⁴⁴

The political effect of the oil-centred economy has been, if possible, even more detrimental. The perversion of the federal system by successive military regimes to advance wealth accumulation for the sole benefit of a political elite has been described and decried in numerous accounts.⁴⁵ The northern hegemony that characterised the successive military regimes since the civil war utilised the authoritarianism inherent in military rule to appropriate the Niger Delta oil through ‘an intense centralisation and

⁴⁰ ICG No.113: 19.

⁴¹ ICG No.113: 7.

⁴² ICG No.113: 19.

⁴³ ICG No.113: 19.

⁴⁴ ICG No.113: 19.

⁴⁵ For instance, E.E. Osaghae, *Ethnicity and its management in Africa: The democratization link* and R.T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria*.

concentration of power and resources in the federal government.’⁴⁶ Although billions of oil-dollars flowed into the country between 1970 and the present, the gross part of the population has not benefited from this wealth.⁴⁷ The Niger Delta minorities have persistently clamoured to regain control of their natural resources, or at least a larger share of oil revenue. The principle of derivation has been an important basis for the allocation of government revenue. It allocates revenue on the basis of where it was derived from. In 1954 it was 100 percent, today it stands at 13 percent.

The predatory nature of the Nigerian state, embodied by a hegemonic, over-centralised, authoritarian regime, made it an effective instrument of wealth accumulation for a small political elite. The structure of this system of predation was institutionalised through a network of patrimonial and clientelist allegiances running from the top regions of government to the state and local, formal and informal, administrative units. The system of patronage and neo-patrimonial structures that characterises the Nigerian socio-political order is by no means unique. In fact, the regimes of ‘[m]any developing countries [...] beneath the trappings of formal bureaucracy, procedural rules, and law, [their regimes] are based upon networks of personal loyalty and patron-client ties.’⁴⁸ According to Lewis, by the beginning of Babangida’s rule the Nigerian state had become, a ‘prebendal order.’⁴⁹ The features of this prebendal order are: 1) widespread appropriation of public resources for private gain; 2) these allocations patterned by ethnically-delineated patron-client networks; 3) a distributive arena with a largely centralised structure.⁵⁰ Babangida is said to have fostered a radical change in this prebendal order, which led to the emergence of ‘predatory rule’ in Nigeria from the beginning of the 1990s. The predatory order had the following features: 1) concentration of personal power under coercive auspices; 2)

⁴⁶ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol.14, No.2 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2005): 214.

⁴⁷ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox: Reflections on the violent dynamics of petro-politics and (mis)governance in Nigeria’s Niger Delta* (Pretoria: Africa Institute, 2004): 7.

⁴⁸ P. Lewis, ‘From prebendalism to predation: The political economy of decline in Nigeria’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.34, No.1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1996): 99.

⁴⁹ P. Lewis, ‘From prebendalism to predation’: 80.

⁵⁰ P. Lewis, ‘From prebendalism to predation’: 100.

repression augmented by material inducement; 3) conscious erosion of central public institutions.⁵¹

Eberlein argues that the drive from neo-patrimonial to predatory rule has recently taken a twist to localisation. With regard to the crisis in the Niger Delta, he claims that, rather than constructing it as an example of 'state failure', the establishment of extra-state political formations that preceded it should be seen as a more significant factor.⁵² The fragmentation of neo-patrimonial models of governance is seen throughout West Africa. It leads to a decentralisation (localisation) of power through the authority of traditional rulers who base their authority on customary law and informal state patronage, and state officials, who operate in the grey area of formal state authority and personal patronage ties. Eberlein: '[E]xtreme social exclusion, political ostracism and a profound crisis of gerontocratic rule are common to many violent conflicts.'⁵³

2.3.1. The power of the chiefs

The situation in the Niger Delta is exemplary with regard to the above-described process. Since the colonial era, traditional rulers, their powers based in customary law, have been seen as members of a privileged class that were not adverse to cooperating with the colonial or the post-colonial authorities. Under colonial rule the Chief was the pillar of the system of Native Authority. Indirect rule, which was the system implemented by the British to administer most of their African colonies, has been described by Mamdani as 'decentralized despotism.' Describing the extent of the powers that the legal pluralism of colonial Nigeria allowed the chiefs to exercise over their subjects, Mamdani quotes Padmore: 'The chief is the law, subject to only one higher authority, the white official stationed in his state as advisor. The chief hires his own police... he is often the

⁵¹ P. Lewis, 'From prebendalism to predation': 100-1.

⁵² R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition? Authority and sovereignty in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.44, No.4 (Cambridge: University Press, 2006): 573.

⁵³ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 575.

prosecutor and the judge combined and he employs the jailer to hold his victims in custody at his pleasure. [...],⁵⁴

Under colonial rule, the traditional power structures of the Delta chiefs and kings remained largely intact, and the British paid a type of 'homage' to traditional rulers. After independence, this system has become less clearly defined, although '[c]hiefs and kings have continued to receive statutory government allocations –“comey” in a new form – and, with the growth of the oil industry, have demanded that companies make customary payments for land use.'⁵⁵ Much of the formal political power of the Niger Delta chiefs was diminished, but they continued to wield informal power. Local government reforms and decrees such as the Land Use Act (1978) further reduced the influence of the chiefs. The Land Use Act is said to have 'reduced the interests of individuals and communities to “mere rights of occupancy.” These rights could be summarily revoked for “over-riding public interest”, including development of oil installations and pipelines.'⁵⁶

Although the power of the chiefs has certainly been curbed under the reality of the post-colonial state, in the poor, neglected, remote, mostly rural communities where most Nigerians continue to live, the abolition of the colonial state structure meant no radical empowerment of the former 'subjects' of the Nigerian colony. In general, the formal patronage of the chiefs was morphed to integrate into the emerging hierarchy of patronage and neo-patrimonial power structures described earlier. In the Niger Delta, the gerontocratic class of traditional rulers were often co-opted by the petro-military alliance, taking in their share of the top-down allocations of finance.⁵⁷ The mid-1980s brought mass mobilisation against the unaccountable rule and social exclusion of the ruling gerontocracy.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton: University Press, 1996): 53.

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, 'The swamps of insurgency: Nigeria's delta unrest', *Africa Report*, No.115 (Dakar/Brussels: 3 August, 2006): 20.

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, 'Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis', *Africa Report*, No.118 (Dakar/Brussels: 28 September, 2006): 20.

⁵⁷ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?: 580; C.I. Obi (2001): 68.

⁵⁸ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?: 581.

2.3.2. *Democratic transition*

Even after the democratic elections following the sudden death of General Abacha and the instalment of an elected civilian government headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria has not yet become a democracy with a credible electoral process.⁵⁹ Due to the serious irregularities that accompanied the elections in 1999 and again in 2003, a large proportion of the population still feels disenfranchised and ill- represented in the federal government and by their state and local representatives. Ake points out that the democratic dividends that Nigerians are yearning for are not in the first place the abstract political rights that, though marked with flawed processes, have been won by the transition to democratic rule in 1999. They are rather the concrete social, economic, cultural and citizenship rights that Nigerians want and need, and from this perspective true democracy is inextricably linked to development.⁶⁰

2.4. Federalism

Nigerian federalism has a number of features that make it perhaps not unique, but certainly characteristic of what is seen as the country's perpetual state of collapse. The federal structure, which was originally designed as a system to manage the ethnic, regional and religious differences in the country, became a contradiction in itself when it was seized by military rulers.⁶¹ The Federal Character Principle constitutes the way in which the Nigerian state, at least in theory, has attempted to manage ethnic conflict. Since 1979, the Principle has been enshrined in all Nigerian constitutions. It requires that 'appointments to, and composition of government offices should reflect the kaleidoscope of the country's cleavages to prevent the domination of government by people from one or a few groups or states.' It thus aims to distribute all posts in the public service of the Federation and its 36 states, the Armed Forces, the Nigerian Police Force and other

⁵⁹ ICG No.113: 14-5.

⁶⁰ D. Abubakar, 'Ethnic identity, democratization, and the future of the African state: lessons from Nigeria', *African Issues*, Vol.29, No.1/2 (African Studies Association, 2001): 35; C. Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*.

⁶¹ ICG No.113: 22-3.

government security agencies, government owned companies and parastatals of the states between the different groups.⁶²

Another distinctive management mechanism that has been exploited and depleted by the military rulers is the boundless multiplication of states from a mere, and, arguably too few, three at its independence, to thirty-six at the present. In 1976 the twelve states that had been created by Gowon ten years earlier were raised to nineteen, in 1987 to twenty-one, and in 1991 to thirty. The last wave of six was added by General Abacha in 1996.⁶³

The creation of more states, which was usually welcomed by the ethnic minorities as a measure of decentralization that could promote autonomy for state and local governments, effectually enabled the military rulers to consolidate their power through a network of patronage.⁶⁴ The proliferation of state structures has diluted power on the state level and worked to the advantage of the federal government to exert its will through military appointments and authoritarian decision-making.⁶⁵

Much in line with the original purpose of the administrative structure of the Nigerian agglomeration under colonial rule, the Nigerian federal system has mainly facilitated the extraction of domestic surpluses to service the needs of the centre.⁶⁶ The most striking feature of the Nigerian federation is its oil-centric distributive character. The relentless struggle of Nigeria's multi-level governments for the centre's financial resources has rendered the federal character to become a 'distributive strategy that is designed to channel resources to ethno-territorial or sectional constituencies.'⁶⁷ Suberu describes this as 'Nigeria's basic political pathology'⁶⁸ He makes evident how in Nigeria the federal

⁶² J.N. Paden, 'Unity with diversity: Toward democratic federalism': 27 in R.I. Rotberg (ed.), *Crafting the new Nigeria. Confronting the challenges* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

⁶³ ICG No.113: 22.

⁶⁴ J.N. Paden, 'Unity with diversity': 27.

⁶⁵ ICG No.113: 22.

⁶⁶ T. Babawale, 'The rise of ethnic militias, de-legitimisation of the state, and the threat to Nigerian federalism', *West Africa Review*, Vol.3, No.1 (2001): 13

⁶⁷ R.T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria*: 7.

⁶⁸ R.T. Suberu, 'Reconstructing the architecture of federalism in Nigeria: The option of non-constitutional renewal' *Paper for Solomon Asch Center* (University of Pennsylvania; University of Ibadan: 2006): 3.

principle makes the central state stronger, instead of what it ought to do: delegate and divide the powers of government.⁶⁹ The Federation Account is the common national pool of oil revenues. It feeds an average of 80 percent of the federal, state and local governments' budget.⁷⁰ Because the state is funded almost entirely by oil revenue, and because of the anti-democratic nature of the major part of Nigeria's political history, at each level of the state 'the hierarchy of command [has been] shadowed by a hierarchy of entitlement.'⁷¹ Suberu quotes Ake on this matter:

'[T]he habit of consuming ... without producing... underlies our fanatical zeal for political power, and our political fragmentation. We seek political power avidly because it enables us to accumulate wealth without the bother of producing. We demand more and more states and local government areas because as each group divides itself, it appropriates more from the public coffers. [...] Our predatory disposition has ... ruined our state-building project. For us the state is not so much the incarnation of a corporate political identity as a battlefield. It is an area where the different groups go, armed to the teeth, to battle for appropriation of what should be commonwealth. Every one takes from it, or tries to, and few ever give. [...] where does the wealth which we are for ever scheming to appropriate come from? We do not want to know. All we want to know is whether we can muster the power to appropriate it.'⁷²

The revenue allocation formula has been revised numerous times between 1960 and 2000. The derivation principle guaranteed a 50 percent cut of oil revenue to the oil-producing states under the 1960 and 1963 constitutions. The 1999 constitution set the revenue sharing formula at 13 percent.⁷³ That is nowhere near the original level at the birth of the First Republic, but it is more than the all-time lows of 1,5 and 3 percent that it reached in the 1990s.⁷⁴ In March 2006, the Joint Constitutional Review Committee made a proposal for an increase of the derivation principle to 18 percent for the oil-producing states. Most representatives of the oil-bearing communities claim that no less than 20 or 25 percent is fair.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ R.T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria*: 16.

⁷⁰ R.T. Suberu, 'Reconstructing the architecture of federalism in Nigeria': 3.

⁷¹ ICG No.113: 23.

⁷² R.T. Suberu, *Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria*: 10.

⁷³ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 585.

⁷⁴ ICG No.113: 21; ICG No.119: 5.

⁷⁵ ICG No.119: 6.

Because the power structure of the state is enmeshed in an intricate network of patronage, linking it to the most isolated villages, it is strong when it comes to transmission of resources, power and benefits towards the centre. However, the fragmentation of the administrative system makes it extremely inefficient. Delivery of public services and goods remains abominable. The growth of state-level structures has more negative consequences. It has led to 'over-expenditure of state revenue, administrative rivalry and obstacles to local private enterprise.' Moreover, the proliferation of minorities has been a detrimental effect of the multiplication of states, as each new state meant an opportunity for another group to become dominant, and, subsequently, the emergence of new 'minority' groups on the state level.

2.5. Political economy of the Niger Delta

Before embarking on an analysis of the Niger Delta conflict system, it is worthwhile to establish to what extent and in which respects the antagonisms are ethnic in their nature. The violent confrontations between communities on the local level over resources and administrative units can be seen as ethnic conflicts because they are the result of the marginalisation of ethnic minorities in Nigerian politics and the socio-economic deprivation and inequity that is entrenched in the practice, if not the letter of the constitution. The political economy of the Niger Delta is not driven by ethnicity, but the political structure of which the region's mineral resources are the cement, the financial transactions that it produces, the pyramid of patronage that it supports and the system of deprivation and exclusion that it feeds are lined with the fabric that is ethnicity. Ethnicity underpins the power structures of the Niger Delta political economy, but it is supported by other factors. Some of these are:

- a) The Nigerian federal system and specifically its resource allocation formula;
- b) The detrimental effect of the oil industry on the Niger Delta ecological environment;
- c) Small arms proliferation;
- d) Organised crime and international oil bunkering networks;
- e) Socio-economic neglect;

- g) A political process that is marked by patronage, patrimonialism and ‘the struggle by rulers, counter elites and merchants for access to [...] resources for accumulation [...]’⁷⁶;
- h) The strategic importance of Nigerian oil for the global, especially the US, energy market;
- i) Incentives and opportunities for predation;
- j) The collusion of the state with private interests, namely the trans-national oil companies (TOCs) active in the region.

All the above factors reflect the particular form of state collapse⁷⁷ that has haunted the Nigerian polity for the last few decades, especially since the mid-eighties. In the political, social and economic space that was left open due to this state failure, militant ethnic movements assumed the role of providing public goods, security, and other basic human needs that are essential to human survival.⁷⁸ In the next chapter the notion of basic human needs and its relation to the emergence of ethnic militia movements will be further explored. The following two chapters will address the issues of motivations, social grievances and causality with regard to the agitations of largely ethnic militia movements. Ethnic conflict will serve as a prism to introduce the Niger Delta conflict system, not to simplify or reduce it to a single cause, but to emphasise the pervasiveness of ethnicity, in both the negative and the positive sense, at all levels and dimensions of Nigerian politics. The Niger Delta is a complex production system in which political elites and business entrepreneurs have made and continue to make immense profits from the region’s mineral resources. In the course of this extraction they have, in collusion with a steady succession of predatory authoritarian regimes, engaged with the local population in a fashion that can be determined as both physically and structurally violent.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 209.

⁷⁷ W. Reno, ‘The politics of insurgency in collapsing states’, *Development and Change*, Vol.33, No.5 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002): 838-9.

⁷⁸ W. Reno, ‘The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states’: 130; The notion of basic human needs as used by John Burton is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁷⁹ The term structural violence is coined by Johan Galtung and is addressed in Chapter 3.

2.5.1. Violence and resistance

Structural violence in the Niger Delta context has multiple dimensions, but the most pervasive of these is probably the socio-economic injustice inflicted on the oil-producing communities. Nearly fifty decades of commercial oil exploitation, under the auspices of authoritarian governments that were generally unconcerned with putting anything back into the region from which it extracted most of its revenue, in the form of infrastructure, amenities, or institutions, has left property and land rights obliterated and the natural environment severely damaged. Economic activities such as fishing and farming continue to deliver receding yields. The local population's dissatisfaction with their situation has been expressed in public protest, official appeals to the government, legal action, and violent resistance.

The first armed rebellion against the Nigerian post-colonial state was the Ijaw uprising led by Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966. His proclamation of the Ijaw nation preceded the Biafra secession attempt by a year but contrary to what happened in Biafra, the Ijaw insurgency was quelled within twelve days and its leaders promptly convicted of treason.⁸⁰ However, the legacy of Boro's rebellion would prove to have a sustained impact and it is perceived to be the 'forerunner to the resurgent riverine nationalism.'⁸¹ Others have gone even further back in history to trace the staunch obstinacy of the Niger Delta peoples.⁸²

The Niger Delta region was one of the first places where intensive trade between European merchants and African rulers took place. The coastal kingdoms, located in what are now Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States, enjoy the advantage of holding the threshold to all the riches that lay in the hinterland. To gain access to the slaves and palm-oil that the European merchants were interested in, they had to bargain with the rulers of the coastal nations. These rulers engaged with their foreign counterparts on an equal footing, and they had no scruples against jailing anyone who disobeyed their rule or disrespected a contract. Nor were they hesitant to play one trading company off against another in order

⁸⁰ O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 29.

⁸¹ O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 29.

⁸² I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast. Shell, human rights, and oil* (London, New York: Verso, 2003).

to get the best deal and maintain dominance in the transatlantic trade.⁸³ Obi traces the roots of the Niger Delta political economy to this historical context, where some minorities became extremely influential. Ethnic groups like the Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Efik were able to extend and consolidate their commercial and social links 'with which they were able to dominate their neighbours, especially those in the hinterland.'⁸⁴

Militant agitation against the state and the TOCs in the Niger Delta reached another pivotal moment when a group of Ogoni community leaders and intellectuals founded the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990. Even though MOSOP has from the start professed a non-violent approach to obtain a fair share of oil revenue, an end to environmental pollution and a degree of local autonomy, as declared in the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the movement became internally divided and some factions displayed increasing militancy.⁸⁵ The violent response of the Nigerian government to the demands of organisations like MOSOP has contributed to a transformation of the struggle. Obi states that as a result of state patronage and state repression, the drying up of international support for human rights, environmental activism and new opportunities brought about by the return to democratic rule, 'certain factions of the movements have been drawn into the circuits of violence[.].'⁸⁶

The MOSOP leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his consorts were executed after a kangaroo tribunal in 1995. But the MOSOP legacy was set, showing that 'a well-organised civil society group can press for change.'⁸⁷ One significant strategic move of MOSOP in their struggle has been the co-opting of international environmental organisations and the generation of international publicity for their cause. Since Shell was

⁸³ ICG No.115 (3 August, 2006): 2-3; W. Reno, *Nigeria after military rule: Federalism, resource allocation, ethnic politics* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 2003): 36; O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 7.

⁸⁴ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 18.

⁸⁵ ICG No.115: 4.

⁸⁶ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 19.

⁸⁷ ICG No.115: 5.

forced to close down production in Ogoniland in 1993 due to ‘intimidation of its staff’⁸⁸, it has not resumed its activities in the area.

In the wake of MOSOP, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) pitched its own campaign against state repression, abuse and neglect of its lands and people. In 1998, some Ijaw youths who had departed from, but were still supported by certain elites of the mainstream Ijaw National Congress (INC), convened in Kaiama, the birth town of Isaac Adaka Boro, and drew up the Kaiama Declaration. They demanded that all oil multinationals should leave the Niger Delta until they had obtained a satisfactory degree of resource control through a sound democratic process. They denounced the acts and laws that had lended legitimacy to the structural robbing of their land and property by TOCs and the government. Moreover, they demanded immediate withdrawal of all military forces from Ijawland.⁸⁹

The transitional government of General Abdusalami Abubakar responded with a military crackdown on all major Ijaw towns and villages. Kaiama was sacked, villages were torched and thousands of lives were lost. After Nigeria’s return to democracy Ijawland, and indeed much of the Niger Delta region, has remained a militarised zone. Violent military interventions have continued to mark the history of its communities from the sacking of Umuechem in 1990, the destruction of Odi in 1999 and the recent attack on Odioma in 2005.⁹⁰ These crackdowns have usually included lethal shootings, rape and mutilation of innocent civilians and destruction and seizure of property.

The proliferation of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta since the 1990s has led to a current array that is, in the words of Agbu, ‘simply mind-boggling’. They include: the Ethnic Minorities Organization of Nigeria (EMIRON), National Youth Council of the Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSEIND), Movement for the Survival of the Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM),

⁸⁸ ICG No.115: 5.

⁸⁹ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 23.

⁹⁰ ICG No.115: 7.

Urhobo Youth Movement (UYOMO), Egi Youth Federation (EYF), The Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Ikwere Youth Movement (IYM) and Bayelsa Youths Federation of Nigeria (BYFN).⁹¹

The youth has been the vanguard of this resistance, but women, religious, environmental and other groups have been highly active as well, and at times yielded impressive results.⁹²

Youth activism has been directed against the federal government and TOCs, but the object of their anger has also been the gerontocratic rule of their traditional leaders. By the mid-1980s authority began to make a shift from the chiefs to restive youths who were no longer willing to wait patiently for 'their turn' at a grab of power and rent. '[The] rule by chiefs and their houses legitimised by age, family history and settler status,' was unaccountable and nurtured social exclusion. Many chiefs were seen to have colluded with the TOCs, and elders were increasingly shunned when making their plans of action. The consequences of youth empowerment in the conflict dynamics of the Niger Delta cannot be overstated. Disgruntled youths organized alternative power structures, enabling them to circumvent the involvement of their chiefs in negotiating with and applying pressure on TOCs and governments.⁹³ According to Obi, the '(inter-generational) interrogation of traditional authority by the youth' is a pervasive reality in most oil-bearing communities.⁹⁴ However, the reality is that often the collaboration between the chiefs and the TOCs was simply replaced by equally usurping liaisons between youth groups and TOCs. Some of these groups engaged in violent confrontations with each other over the right to cash in on keeping relations with the local TOC good. Often, TOCs

⁹¹ O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 30; A. Ikelegbe, 'Civil society, oil and conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: Ramifications of civil society for a regional resource struggle', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.39, No.3 (Cambridge: University Press, 2001): 443.

⁹² C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 20.

⁹³ ICG No.118: 21; ICG No.115: 20.

⁹⁴ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 18.

had several competing youth organisations on their payroll, in addition to keeping the bonds with elders and chiefs alive.⁹⁵

The variety of social protest movements and struggles in the Niger Delta that make up the political economy of conflict is dumbfounding. The dynamics of a changing political environment, coupled with a rising of the stakes –violence, petrodollars, political power– has transformed the struggle to fit, in part, a ‘looting model.’⁹⁶ However, it would be too simplistic to regard the Niger Delta struggles as merely revolving around oil profits.

Reno demonstrates that the transformation of civil society movements in Nigeria to reveal more militant and violent inclinations was partly driven by General Abacha’s short-term security strategy to aggravate and exploit conflicts within the army and special paramilitary units. Both Abacha and his predecessor Babangida formed ‘private armies for their self-succession bids.’⁹⁷ In lieu of this strategy, local and state-level military factions were supplied with arms, military expertise and disproportionate power to keep each other in check, and not pose a threat to the central command.⁹⁸ The long-term impact of this strategy has been the proliferation of arms in the region after the civilian government took over power in 1999 followed by the demobilization of paramilitary and security forces. Another important cause of the proliferation of arms in the Niger Delta, and more generally in Nigeria, is the active involvement of Nigerian troops in peace operations in West Africa, most notably in Liberia and Sierra Leone between 1990 and 2000. Demobilized Nigerian soldiers that had served in the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) returned with their weapons, which they either sold, or kept for their own use. A great number of these demobilized soldiers would be absorbed in vigilante and militant organisations across the country.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ R. Eberlein, ‘On the road to the state’s perdition?: 581-2.

⁹⁶ W. Reno, ‘The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states’: 140.

⁹⁷ W. Reno, ‘The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states’: 139.

⁹⁸ W. Reno, ‘The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states’: 132.

⁹⁹ W. Reno, ‘The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states’: 138.

Another development after the demise of military rule has been the privatisation of security and the decentralisation of violence, as described by Eberlein.¹⁰⁰ As a consequence of the new democratic rule, argues Eberlein, oil companies had to look for new ways to provide their own minimal security, 'in order to continue production in an environment of poverty, social exclusion and open hostility.' National police and army were no longer the 'sole security sub-contractors of MNOCs.'¹⁰¹

The utilisation of private armies by local and state political elites to compete for political power has become increasingly popular in the 1990s.¹⁰² Several state governors, for whom the eastern Anambra State Chimaroke Mbadinuju led the example with his vigilante Bakassi Boys, co-opted these contingents of unemployed 'Area Boys' to secure their political consolidation. This strategy gained a new dimension when the return to civilian rule and the 2003 elections heralded the relative obsolescence of patronage networks that had existed under military rule.¹⁰³

In the Niger Delta, a similar phenomenon occurred in Rivers where the state governor Peter Odili allegedly forged an alliance with the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari. Asari is claimed to have provided muscle for the governor's 2003 re-election, but their relationship soured after the NDPVF clashed with security forces and other militias, such as Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), who were reportedly supported by the 'machiavellic governor.'¹⁰⁴ After mutual raids between security forces, the NDPVF and the NDV, the NDPVF declared all-out war on the Nigerian state.¹⁰⁵ ICG reports that:

'From mid-2003 to late 2004, Asari and Ateke Tom engaged in a turf war that killed hundreds and left tens of thousands homeless. The sizeable, centuries-old towns of Buguma, Bukuma and Tombia were badly damaged and areas of the Rivers capital Port Harcourt also razed. Some residents have alleged that the fighting centred around control of areas noted for their oil theft. The

¹⁰⁰ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 581, 583-4.

¹⁰¹ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 581.

¹⁰² W. Reno, 'The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states': 140.

¹⁰³ W. Reno, 'The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states': 140.

¹⁰⁴ ICG No.118: 3.

¹⁰⁵ ICG No.118: 4.

conflict also allegedly revolved around competing bids for control of tribal chieftaincy titles in Buguma and Okrika and other positions with access to government and company oil revenues.¹⁰⁶

In 2005 Asari was arrested and remains in jail until this day.

2.5.2. *Resistance, civil war or ethnic conflict?*

From the previous it becomes clear that there is a vast variety of struggles going on in the Niger Delta. Obi divides these into four levels:

- State-oil multinational alliances versus the oil-producing communities;
- Inter-community struggles;
- Intra-community struggles;
- Struggles involving social movements.¹⁰⁷

Although all these struggles are in origin about ‘power and the quest for democracy’, oil complicates them and has raised the stakes significantly, fuelling violence.¹⁰⁸ It appears futile to make a clear-cut distinction between organizations that engage in militant or non-violent protest to obtain social change and others that are involved in criminal and sometimes terrorist actions. The boundaries between these organizations are said to be ‘blurred and fluid.’¹⁰⁹

Ikelegbe describes how a regime of violence has pervaded the Niger Delta.¹¹⁰ The Nigerian Armed Forces, ‘community, ethnic and youth militias, armed gangs and networks, pirates, cultists and robbers’¹¹¹ are the institutions that maintain this regime. Aside from the sponsorship of local political elites to consolidate their power and manipulate elections, and inter-communal struggles for administrative units that offers access to state revenue, there are two dimensions of the Niger Delta ‘conflict economy’¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ ICG No.118: 4.

¹⁰⁷ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 21.

¹⁰⁸ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 21.

¹⁰⁹ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 18.

¹¹⁰ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 208-9.

¹¹¹ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 209.

¹¹² A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 209.

that have impacted the criminal, and some say terrorist, character of the region's rebellion. The persistent kidnapping of expatriate oil employees for ransom or socio-economic benefits on the one hand and illegal bunkering on the other have broadened the scene on which the Niger Delta conflict dynamics are played out.

The amounts of oil that are siphoned off on a daily basis and the equipment that is required to transport the spoils out of the country reveal that those who are involved in illegal bunkering are highly placed and well-connected.¹¹³ The Nigerian Economic Summit Group estimates that on average circa 100,000 barrels of Nigerian oil, valued at about \$2.8 million, are stolen per day.¹¹⁴ The oil-bunkering industry functions much the same as the illegal trading in diamonds did in Sierra Leone and Liberia's wars¹¹⁵, and the international drug trade that fuels the violence in Columbia, with one significant difference.¹¹⁶ Whilst drugs and diamonds are relatively easily tucked away in baggage or containers, the transportation of oil in slow-moving barges and ships is very difficult to hide. A sophisticated security and transportation infrastructure are required to collect, transport and sell large quantities of oil. Moreover, to load the stolen oil on barges and tugboats and transport it over the rivers and creeks that scar the Niger Delta landscape – sometimes in broad daylight- to tanker ships for resale to regional refineries and as far as South America, Europe and Asia, the complicity, or at least a deliberate ignorance of local and foreign officials, border and port patrols is essential.¹¹⁷

The end of military rule heralded a transformation of the relationship between local communities and the oil companies. TOCs saw a greater need to invest in corporate social interventions, one of the consequences of which was the rise of community liaison

¹¹³ ICG No.118: 8. Noted is that: 'In 2002, a report by Nigerian security forces, government officials and multinational oil company executives, spoke of a "cartel or mafia" of "highly placed and powerful individuals [who] run a network of agents to steal crude oil and finished products from pipelines in the Niger Delta region. They operate in similar fashion to drug barons and their activities are purely criminal, with financial benefits as their motive... The activities of these cartels have become a serious threat to the economy of the nation.'; A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 221-4, 227-8.

¹¹⁴ A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 209.

¹¹⁵ A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 211.

¹¹⁶ ICG No.118: 8.

¹¹⁷ ICG No.118: 9.

officers. The enormous increase of expenditure of TOCs on community development and scholarships for secondary and tertiary education was another effect.¹¹⁸ Perhaps the main consequence of the end of the military security regime was the policy of TOCs to sponsor ethnic militia movements to secure their protection and the sustenance of their operations. The close relation between the security needs of TOCs and the formation of militant youth groups in the Niger Delta has been argued by Kemedi, among others.¹¹⁹ One effect of this close relationship was described in an internal report for the Shell Petroleum and Development Company in 2004 as follows: '[A]t times oil companies seek or receive protection from [armed ethnic militias and warlords] reinforce their financial base and as a consequence enable them to buy more arms.'¹²⁰ In the following chapter, the dynamic relation between predation and rebels' social agendas is addressed.

One group that has emerged recently in the wake of the NDPVF' demise and with strong links to the IYC is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).¹²¹ Since January 2006 the organisation has been involved in violent clashes with state security forces, hostage-taking of expatriate oil company employees and the destruction of oil installations and even two car bombings.¹²² However, it is inappropriate to regard MEND as a straightforward terrorist organisation. According to Okonta, MEND is internally fragmented, with radical elements that are responsible for the violent attacks.¹²³

In Chapter 4 the activities and origins of MEND will be examined. For now it is sufficient to mention that MEND has heralded a new phase in the Niger Delta rebellion. Although its leadership and support are largely Ijaw, it professes a pan-ethnic cause¹²⁴, with the intellectual sophistication of MOSOP and the fire-power of the NDPVF, it has managed to attract the attention of the national as well as international press, and it was

¹¹⁸ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 583.

¹¹⁹ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 583.

¹²⁰ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 582.

¹²¹ ICG No.118: 5.

¹²² ICG No.118: 5.

¹²³ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia', *Pambazuka News* (2 November, 2006) <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/38119>.

¹²⁴ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask', *Pambazuka News* (26 October, 2006) <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/38005>.

invited to take part in a conference of dialogue with the federal government to come closer to resolving the conflict in April 2006.¹²⁵ Unfortunately, the dialogue got stuck in its first rounds.

2.6. Conclusion

The political and social context in which ethnic militia movements have emerged in the Niger Delta is complex, as may be expected. On the basis of ethnic and regional claims, minorities clamour for resource control and self-determination. The Nigerian state is, even after a democratic transition, ill equipped to deal with the challenges that are posed by its internal malcontents. In the Niger Delta, where a political economy evolves through informal structures of political patronage and neo-patrimonial rule, clandestine and official oil transactions and deep-rooted social, political and economic grievances, violence is just another political, and sometimes economic, currency. But what does the predatory nature of its surroundings say about the ethnic militia movements that operate in the region? Are they to such extent enmeshed in the system in which they must operate that they can no longer be regarded as genuine social movements? Taking in account that most, if not all the movements of our focus have come to existence in a predatory system it is legitimate to question what factors and motivations caused them to emerge.

¹²⁵ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Restoring the rights of citizens', *Pambazuka News* (9 November, 2006) <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/38222>.

3. Greed, grievance and structural violence.

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter a number of analytical perspectives on the causality of rebel movements and civil war will be introduced. The pivotal debate in this chapter refers to the greed versus grievance theory, the former propagated by Collier and Hoeffler and the latter by John Burton – among many others. While Collier and Hoeffler place heavy emphasis on the nexus between resources, revenues and civil war, their opponents, who propagate the grievance view, argue that while resources might be a factor in –ethnic- conflict, root causes of insurgencies and civil wars are more likely to be social and political. The question whether rebel movements and civil wars in resource-rich areas generally emerge and are motivated by economic incentives to make profit, i.e. greed, or by social grievances has shown a tendency to be oversimplified. The analytical perspectives of Johan Galtung on structural violence and, less thoroughly discussed, the looting models of Ikelegbe and Reno will enhance an understanding of the nature and the dynamics of the system in which the ethnic militia movements operate, and the impact these may or may not have on the processes of transformation that they are subjected to.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ One initial point should be made here. With regard to the Niger Delta, there is no agreement about whether the agitation embroiling the region can in fact be dubbed a rebellion or a civil war. Certain factions have declared war against the Nigerian government, and several announcements of secession have been made. But the response of the government has always been to take away the impression that anything more than a problem of law and order is at hand. The rebel movements involved in the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional struggle for rights and resources in the Niger Delta are numerous, amorphous and ill-organised as a single movement. Moreover, their demands may vary greatly from jobs for unemployed youths to the release from prison of a notoriously corrupt godfather-Governor of Bayelsa state. Also, the armed opposition in the Niger Delta does not involve a clear and bi-polar confrontation between a rebel movement and a state. As noted in the previous chapter, there are numerous conflicts being played out in the Niger Delta, involving varied actors on different levels of society.

Even if those leading the criminal syndicates that operate this sophisticated enterprise are involved in the activities of armed militia movements, it is highly unlikely that their objectives include delivering justice to the Niger Delta. Indeed, it is reported that militias are 'given control' over rewarding oil-bunkering routes, by virtue of a strategic collusion of oil company staff, army elements, vigilante groups, militias and their political patrons, in exchange for one particular political machine.²³⁰ But the co-optation of social movements, whether they are militant or not, by corrupt state and local administrations and even TOCs in their efforts to increase their security, must be seen as an, at least partial dislodgement from political, social engagement. The simple reason for this is that the actions of the movements are no longer directed at achieving their stated social, economic and political goals - although this could be claimed with the 'direct form of resource control argument'- but rather at ensuring their own share in the profits from the Niger Delta war economy. One result is that, instead of directing their actions to the TOCs and the government, the militia movements turn their weapons on each other. The turf war that was played out between NDPVF leader Asari Dokubo and NDV leader Ateke Tom, with active sponsorship of Delta state governor Peter Odili in 2003-4, is one example of this scenario, with dramatic consequences for the Delta population.²³¹

Another source of income for the new wave of militant groups that emerged in the Niger Delta in the late 1990s is hostage taking of expatriate staff.²³² Starting as a last resort of autonomously operating groups of aggrieved villagers venting their frustration to TOCs and the federal government about their miserable situation and demanding jobs and other forms of redress,²³³ by the turn of the century the kidnapping of TOC staff was becoming a full-fledged industry. In 2006 MEND and similar groups are said to have taken more than 150 TOC staff hostage, of which half are foreigners.²³⁴ MEND deploys the strategy as its number one tool for extorting acquiescence from TOCs and the federal

²³⁰ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 586.

²³¹ ICG No.118: 4.

²³² *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria. Delta tactics' (Blackwell Publishing: March, 2006): 16585-6; K. Maier and L.A. Javier, 'Nigerian rebel group says it didn't kidnap Filipino sailors', *Bloomberg.com* (21 January, 2006). <http://wealth.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601080&sid=a7AGFpdL7pzQ&refer=asia>

²³³ K. Maier, *This house has fallen. Nigeria in crisis* (London: The Penguin Press, 2000): 112.

²³⁴ K. Maier and L.A. Javier, 'Nigerian rebel group says it didn't kidnap Filipino sailors'.

3.2. Greed and grievance in a political economy

*'It is often at the intersections of wealth and poverty, and extraction, dispossession and pollution, where violent conflict emerges. This is because oil invariably fuels dreams of an 'El Dorado' in the hearts and minds of many, who are nonetheless shocked out of their reverie by the appalling poverty and pollution that oil leaves in its wake, and the way it violates social institutions, cultures, norms and values. In this context, those who are excluded from the 'spoils of oil' are often very bitter, and seek to gain access or power over oil through any means. Due to the high premium placed on oil, the stakes in controlling it are exceedingly high, and for the most part, this is a matter of life and death. It is in this way that the oil paradox is at the very epicentre of violence. Oil power is seized rather than negotiated, and, once taken, is often defended by force. In the volatile world of oil politics, power is largely defined by the capacity to deploy force, either to seize or defend the control of oil. It is fundamentally about the survival of the strongest.'*¹²⁷

What Obi fails to mention in this accurate summation of the 'oil paradox' that forms a breeding ground for the grievance-greed nexus, is that oil does not merely violate social institutions, cultures, norms and values, it transforms them. What Ikelegbe¹²⁸ calls 'institutions of violence' emerge and evolve within the parameters of a violent system. In chapter 4, a discussion of these institutions of violence is to follow. In the current chapter an analytical framework is laid out by virtue of which the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta may be explained. Their emergence is not limited to the moment when these movements came into existence, but includes the process through which they adapted themselves to changing circumstances and became what they are today. The structure of the Nigerian social order, including its federalist arrangement, the 'oil paradox', neo-patrimonialism and patronage networks on the state and local levels, exclusivist consequences of traditional rule and customary law in a society that has been subjected to an explosive population growth in the last decades is the vantage point from which the process will be analysed.

The theory of Galtung seeks to utilise definitions of peace and violence as a 'scientific strategy'¹²⁹ in order to come to grips with the structural conditions in which violent

¹²⁷ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 4.

¹²⁸ A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 209.

¹²⁹ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.6, No.3 (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, Sage Publications, 1969): 168.

rebellion occurs. His analytical framework will serve as a guiding light for identifying the social dynamics of the Niger Delta system. Within this system the driving forces of rebellion can roughly be abstracted into two models: the grievance-driven, i.e. organised mass-based resistance against social injustice; and greed-driven, i.e. opportunities seen and seized by a political and economic elite for making financial gains from armed conflict. To discern the explanatory power of both models the ideas of Collier and Hoeffler¹³⁰ will be discussed for the greed view, and Burton's basic human needs theory for the view that emphasises the significance of grievance.¹³¹

3.2.1. *The question of grievance and greed*

There is no denying that what Ikelegbe calls an 'economy of conflict'¹³² has emerged in the Niger Delta. The bloody struggle for oil resources and benefits is rampant, as has been described in the previous chapter. A clandestine market in bunkered oil, arms and elections muscle has pervaded the Niger Delta 'civil society'. But the struggle for oil resources and benefits (greed-driven) can not easily be divorced from the social struggle that is pursued against 'the nature of distribution of costs and benefits of oil that has disinherited, marginalised and neglected [the oil-bearing communities].'¹³³ In a way, the two struggles are one and the same, waged against a Northern hegemony that has usurped power as much as it has done oil.

Because of the nature of the Nigerian socio-political order with its pyramids of patronage, the struggle against the Northern hegemony that has accumulated both power and oil wealth, is inextricably connected to the struggle against the lower echelons of this pyramid. Thus, the struggle against a local gerontocracy of traditional rulers who rely on customary law to exclude youths, settlers and women from power, can not be separated from the struggle against an exclusionist, over-centralised regime, because the lower levels of the pyramid derive their power and their resources from the top.

¹³⁰ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, 'Greed and grievance in civil war', *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol.56, No.4 (2004).

¹³¹ J. Burton, (ed.) 'Conflict: Human needs theory', (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

¹³² A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 209.

¹³³ A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 209.

Chiefs and traditional rulers in the Niger Delta have received statutory payments since before the beginning of colonial rule, when British and other traders would pay homage to the kings and chiefs of the realms that they wanted to trade with. During colonial rule this practice was kept alive, but adapted to modern circumstances: the chiefs were provided with allocations to fulfil their governing role. When the oil industry emerged, oil companies were included in the 'tradition', and until this day, they too are expected to pay customary payments for land use. While the influence of the chiefs was reduced under laws such as the 1978 Land Use Act, they continued to wield considerable informal power. Chieftaincy titles have proved very valuable commodities as corruption became endemic and rulers began to collaborate with oil companies and government to serve their private financial interests.¹³⁴

3.2.2. Ikelegbe: Causality and dynamics of conflict and resistance

Ikelegbe lists three explanatory dimensions of his 'economics of war thesis', which is based on a version of the greed model. The first relates to the cause of rebellion and wars. The second dimension refers to the rebellion being sustained and prolonged by 'war economic opportunities and trade networks.' The third is that the economy of war is seen to underpin violence in conflicts. With this in mind, the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta can be broken up in three dimensions: 1) their nascence, and what caused it; 2) their sustenance, or dynamics once they came into existence; 3) their violent, at least in certain cases, nature.¹³⁵

Although Ikelegbe applies the greed-model as an analytical framework to examine the interfaces linking the Nigerian state, TOCs, the international community and youth militias, he does not put all his money on one horse. In fact, he states that 'there is no innateness of natural resources that compels conflict. It is rather the hegemonic struggles between superordinated and subordinated groups and the nature of management and

¹³⁴ ICG 115: 20.

¹³⁵ A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 212.

appropriation of resources that engender conflict.’¹³⁶ Ikelegbe warns against the danger of oversimplifying the content of conflicts, and adds that most conflicts have a ‘fairly high political content.’¹³⁷ In its causal potency, Ikelegbe deems his model to be weak. Because the economy of war may be a by-product, rather than a cause of conflict, he posits that economic opportunism is ‘incidental’ and ‘a perversion of resistance.’¹³⁸ He states that:

‘The nexus between economics and conflict environment is [...] much more than the issues of causality. It may relate to the actual dynamics of conflict and resistance; the funding of both the state and rebel movements, the exploitation of opportunities that emerge from disorder and violence, the multiplication of violence and violence institutions, the proliferation of arms and the intervention of metropolitan centres bent on maintaining supplies of critical minerals, and how all these underpin the prolongation of conflicts in resource rich regions.’¹³⁹

The problem that arises inevitably from the question of grievance or greed is pin-pointed in the paragraph above. To say that either grievance or greed is the cause for the emergence of armed militia movements is to miss a very important point. Not only are the two closely connected, but the environment in which ethnic militia movements emerge consists of a plethora of factors, variables and dynamics that are radically more complex than merely greed or grievance.

3.2.3. Reno: Structures for social space

Reno places the emergence of armed groups in the context of collapsing states that provide a multitude of structures facilitating predatory behaviour, and a socio-political order consisting of ‘systems of personal rule behind the façade of formal statehood.’ He posits that ‘armed groups that develop in this type of regime reflect a political economy in which power is tied to exclusive control of even clandestine economies.’¹⁴⁰ Reno uses the Nigerian experience as a case to enhance his ‘looting model.’ He argues that it is in the networks of political elites, which were constructed in the process of Nigeria’s perpetual state collapse ‘to control economic opportunity and in order to exercise power

¹³⁶ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 213.

¹³⁷ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 213.

¹³⁸ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 213.

¹³⁹ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 213.

¹⁴⁰ W. Reno, ‘The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states’: 128.

and control people,'¹⁴¹ that the social space in which armed groups could form was created.

The grievance model allows a focus on deeper causes of conflict. Grievances are perceived as results of the frustration of basic human needs. Burton's ideas about these needs and how they relate to violent conflict will be discussed in the next section. Here it is important to underscore the difference between the two models. Although grievance can not always be completely disconnected from greed, as driving forces they are distinct. Especially where social structures put certain groups at a disadvantage, and the distribution of resources occurs through an unsatisfactory process, the subordinated groups may turn against the institutions that facilitate this unequal distribution, possibly with violent means.

The importance of ethnicity as a component of either the greed- or the grievance-induced agitation should not be underestimated. Perceptions of exclusion can propel ethnic mobilisation, and the structures for profit transmission are often ethnically defined. The latter is directly connected to the fact that patronage networks are usually shaped along ethnic lines.

3.3. The greed model of Collier and Hoeffler

In the previous section much has been said about the greed model that can be helpful when examining the causes of rebellion. Yet, a more thorough understanding of the ideas of Hoeffler and Collier with regard to their greed model is required if it is to be compared with other models for its power to explain the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. Collier and Hoeffler attempt to explain why rebellion occurs, in order to develop an econometric model that can predict future rebellions. The desire to predict rebellions is a feature of the current international paradigm emphasising - or calling for - 'crisis prevention' and 'early warning'. Scholars have objected that this preoccupation is at the expense of urgent attention for the structural causes of violence.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ W. Reno, 'The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states': 129.

¹⁴² L. Nathan, 'The four horsemen of the apocalypse. The structural causes of crisis and violence in Africa', *Peace and Change*, Vol.25, No.2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001): 193-194.

In their argument, Collier and Hoeffler list a number of quantitative indicators of opportunity that create the circumstances in which rebellion is likely to occur. Firstly, they say, there should be the opportunity to finance rebellion.¹⁴³ The authors identify three sources of financing:

1. extortion of natural resources;
2. donations from diasporas;
3. subventions from hostile governments.

Another quantitative indicator is the low cost of starting a rebellion.¹⁴⁴ One of the aspects of this is the cost of mobilising a rebel army. For young men to decide that they leave whatever income source they have at the outset in change for the measly payment that can be expected from a rebel movement, topped up with whatever revenue can be collected from loot, there are three 'proxies for foregone income'. These are:

1. income per capita;
2. male secondary schooling;
3. growth rate of the economy.

Collier and Hoeffler present some proxies for 'grievance rebellion' too:¹⁴⁵

1. ethnic or religious hatred;
2. political oppression;
3. political exclusion;
4. economic inequality.

Other factors that may be significant in the grievance model are: ethnic fractionalization, democracy, mountainous terrain, land inequality and geographic dispersion of the

¹⁴³ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, 'Greed and grievance in civil war': 565.

¹⁴⁴ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, 'Greed and grievance in civil war': 569.

¹⁴⁵ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, 'Greed and grievance in civil war': 569.

population.¹⁴⁶ However, after ‘robust testing’ the authors conclude that the greed model works best.¹⁴⁷

Interestingly, through a different route, Collier comes to a similar conclusion as Ake when he argues that in efforts to prevent civil war or rebellion there is more sense in focusing on economic development. But while Collier maintains that this process alone will eliminate the factors that make a country prone to conflict¹⁴⁸, Ake, supported by Nathan, Odendaal and Amoo¹⁴⁹ stresses that while development and economic growth are important, real improvement in the lives of the masses will come with their social empowerment. Without it, economic development and growth will remain skewed, and ‘ethnic’ conflict and rebellions continue. ‘In fact,’ so say Odendaal and Amoo, ‘they could contribute to inter-group conflict, particularly when economic growth is perceived by aggrieved groups to be accompanied by inequitable distribution.’¹⁵⁰ Collier says almost exactly the opposite, namely that democracy can lead to more conflict in societies that lack economic growth.¹⁵¹ A later section in this chapter will briefly discuss the development nexus.

In the same line rests the problem of an anticipated rise of the derivation formula in favour of the oil-producing communities, which means that the revenue allocated to the Niger Delta states would increase, while corruption and patronage networks continue to siphon off of a large share of this money. There are different opinions about this. Some Niger Delta activists say that corruption on a local level is something they can deal with after they have achieved an increase of their share of oil revenues.¹⁵² Others stress that

¹⁴⁶ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, ‘Greed and grievance in civil war’: 586.

¹⁴⁷ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, ‘Greed and grievance in civil war’: 588-9.

¹⁴⁸ P. Collier, ‘Development and conflict’, *Lecture for Centre for the Study of African Economies* (Oxford University: 1 October, 2004).

¹⁴⁹ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1994): 3; L. Nathan, ‘The frightful inadequacy of most of the statistics. A critique of Collier and Hoeffler on causes of civil war’, *Track Two*, Vol.12, No.5 (Cape Town: Centre for Conflict Resolution, December, 2005): 16-18, 24; S.G. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict. A human needs-based approach’, *Track Two*, Vol.11, No.4 (Cape Town: Centre for Conflict Resolution, September 2002): 22.

¹⁵⁰ S.G. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 22.

¹⁵¹ P. Collier, ‘Development and conflict’.

¹⁵² ICG No.115: 25.

there is no point in increasing the oil-bearing states' share in oil revenue, as long as the local and state elites will put the lion's share in their own pockets.¹⁵³

The greed-model of Collier and Hoeffler has been subjected to sharp criticism. Nathan identifies deep flaws in Collier and Hoeffler's model, one of which is the lack of actual analysis and understanding of their subject. The greatest problem, according to Nathan, is that: '[Collier and Hoeffler] seek to ascertain the causes of civil war without studying civil wars, and attempt to study the motives of rebels without studying rebels and rebellions.'¹⁵⁴ According to Nathan Collier and Hoeffler's proxies are 'arbitrary and often spurious' and the meaning assigned to them is too restricted. Moreover, he observes a lack of testing of the causality between the proxies and what they are presumed to precipitate.¹⁵⁵

The greed paradigm of Collier and Hoeffler has profound ramifications for the way in which movements such as MEND and MOSOP are regarded. Firstly, it requires that a distinction is made between violent, 'entrepreneurial', predatory organisations on the one hand and non-violent, social activist, grievance-driven organisations on the other. The accounts of the emergence and evolving structures of MOSOP, MEND and IYC that will follow in chapter 4 reveal that the possibility of this distinction is a phantom. So, what role do heterogeneous organisations like the above-mentioned play in the diced-and-sliced view of socio-economic dynamics that Collier and Hoeffler propagate? In the next chapter, these and other questions will be addressed.

3.4. Basic human needs theory of John Burton

Human needs theory is a collection of ideas that aim to provide a framework for the principles that are known from humanistic psychology and applied social psychology. In order to construct a human-centred approach to conflict, where there is not merely focus on interests, but on needs, John Burton has incorporated 'the individual, and identity

¹⁵³ ICG No.119: 9.

¹⁵⁴ L. Nathan, 'The frightful inadequacy of most of the statistics': 6.

¹⁵⁵ L. Nathan, 'The frightful inadequacy of most of the statistics': 11.

groups of the individual as units of analysis in social sciences and particularly conflict theory.’¹⁵⁶ The concept of identity provides a key link between needs theory and conflict resolution theory.¹⁵⁷

Needs theory is traditionally focused on human development. It assumes that humans have ‘basic, universal socio-psychological needs that underpin their growth and development.’¹⁵⁸ These basic human needs not only drive human behaviour, but the pursuit of the satisfaction of these needs is what defines people’s perception of being human. In this view the basis of conflict is unequal distribution of power, because it frustrates people’s ability to satisfy their needs. Some basic human needs are: recognition, inclusion, identity, security and participation. Because the pursuit of the gratification of these needs is what defines ‘being human’, it is impossible to compromise on them.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to foresee a problem occurring on the level of societies in which often one individual or group’s needs can conflict with another’s. Even when the needs themselves do not conflict, satisfiers, which are the means people and groups adopt to pursue their needs, can. So, while a development process can reduce the risk of conflict, or even resolve conflict, it can equally help produce conflict.¹⁵⁹ One example given by Burton is the satisfier known as ‘role seeking’, which occurs in pursuit of ‘recognition’. Role seeking can manifest itself in competition for scarce resources.¹⁶⁰

Potapchuk examines how processes of government can be evaluated from a human needs perspective. He states the basic human needs that individuals harbour towards their government to be these:

- (a) To be treated as well as others are treated no matter how they are linked to a particular identity group;

¹⁵⁶ J. Burton, ‘Conflict’: 1.

¹⁵⁷ R.J. Fisher, ‘Needs theory, social identity and an eclectic model of conflict’, in J. Burton, ‘Conflict’: 94.

¹⁵⁸ S.G. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 13.

¹⁵⁹ J. Burton, ‘Conflict’: 3.

¹⁶⁰ J. Burton, ‘Conflict’: 3.

- (b) To have some level of surety in forecasting the result of interactions with others;
- (c) To be safe or protected from others as each pursues his/her individual goals.¹⁶¹

These needs are also known as the right to self-determination. To speak of a right to self-determination shifts the perspective of analysis from a psychological to a legal-political point of view. The consequence of this is not as profound as the power-rights dichotomy discussed in the previous section. Rights enable people to pursue their self-realisation, i.e. the gratification of their needs. The state offers the freedom, and the limits within which this pursuit can take place in the form of laws. The fundamental law that encodes the basic freedoms and limits within which groups and individuals may pursue the satisfaction of their human needs is, obviously, a constitution. The need for self-determination and the gratification of this need can be regarded in process terms and in outcome terms. Processes of governance that gratify people's need for control (i.e. self-determination) must allow participation plus 'the development of the social and political capacities of each individual'.¹⁶² With regard to the outcomes of needs-oriented processes of governance, Potapchuk states that: 'The role a federal government has in creating and implementing state and local processes, judicial and administrative processes and international processes is enormous. One of the types of outcomes of systems of governance is thus the creation of systems for participation.'¹⁶³

Odendaal and Amoo warn that in conflict situations protagonists are invariably tempted to harbour scepticism about the genuineness of the other's motivations. 'Suspicion, distrust and fear inspire such conspiracy theories, which see the reason for the conflict primarily in terms of greed, malevolence or unreasonableness of the other party.'¹⁶⁴ Burton's approach departs from the assumption that individuals are neither 'naturally good', nor 'naturally bad'; they are 'naturally needy'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ W.R. Potapchuk, 'Processes of governance: can government truly respond to human needs', in J. Burton, 'Conflict': 275-8.

¹⁶² W.R. Potapchuk, in J. Burton, 'Conflict': 275.

¹⁶³ W.R. Potapchuk, in J. Burton, 'Conflict': 276.

¹⁶⁴ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, 'The political management of ethnic conflict': 17.

¹⁶⁵ John Burton quoted in G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, 'The political management of ethnic conflict': 18.

Because conflicts occur as ‘people experience perceived or real obstructions in their drive to meet their needs and interests’¹⁶⁶, resolution of conflicts is to be found in the (re)structuring of social and political institutions. The importance of respect for and implementation of a human rights regime is underscored by Odendaal and Amoo as the ‘best framework for the political accommodation of basic human needs.’¹⁶⁷ Moreover, they stress that the challenge that governments face in catering for basic human needs is fundamentally political, and not, as Collier and Hoeffler have it, economic.¹⁶⁸

With regard to the federalist structure of the Nigerian state, even more critical than the derivation formula is the *process* of allocating resources, which is a political issue.¹⁶⁹ Nigeria’s ‘federal character principle’ is in its initial purpose a wonderful tool aimed to ensure that all the country’s regions were represented at central decision-making levels. However, the sustained legacy of over-centralised authoritarian rule rendered this opportunity defunct, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter.¹⁷⁰

In their discussion of a human needs-based approach for the political management of ethnic conflict Odendaal and Amoo propose a number of measures that are deemed to advance solutions. One of these is the principle of proportionality in the distribution of resources and opportunities amongst groups. This principle is seen to offer solutions for the Nigerian contention over the distribution of oil revenue between the oil-producing and other regions.¹⁷¹ Constitutional arrangements are instrumental in this because it is the framework in which the locus of power, state structure, structure of parliament and the electoral system are determined.¹⁷² ‘Elections are about allocating power’, Odendaal and Amoo confirm.¹⁷³ It is therefore no surprise that the fiercest violence, both state-

¹⁶⁶ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 18.

¹⁶⁷ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 18.

¹⁶⁸ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 18.

¹⁶⁹ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 22.

¹⁷⁰ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 29.

¹⁷¹ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 29.

¹⁷² G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 29.

¹⁷³ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 29.

community and inter-community violence, in the Niger Delta has occurred during elections.

3.5. Johan Galtung's structural violence

Quite similar to Burton, Galtung connects psychological processes to structural social dynamics. Galtung comes up with a definition of violence that changes the way peace and peace research is regarded. After he presumes that 'peace is the absence of violence,' he discerns multiple dimensions of violence.¹⁷⁴ Personal violence is the violence that is most commonly known to us, because it is manifest. It is direct and physical, and it involves a person who performs the violence and another person who is subjected to it. Structural violence is indirect, inflicted by circumstances, not by individuals directly, although individuals remain responsible. There is no actor who can be identified as a perpetrator of the violence, because the violence is built into the structure of society, '[..] and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances. [...] Resources are unevenly distributed, as when income distributions are heavily skewed, literacy/education unevenly distributed, medical services existent in some districts and for some groups only, and so on. Above all the power to decide over the distribution of resources is unevenly distributed.'¹⁷⁵

Although Galtung states that the two types of violence, structural and direct, are independent, and the one does not presuppose the other, there is a causal relationship between the two.¹⁷⁶ To explore this causality further, he asks 4 argumentative questions, of which the fourth is most relevant to this issue:

1. structural violence is sufficient to abolish personal violence;
2. structural violence is necessary to abolish personal violence;
3. personal violence is sufficient to abolish structural violence;
4. personal violence is necessary to abolish structural violence.

¹⁷⁴ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research': 168.

¹⁷⁵ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research': 171.

¹⁷⁶ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research': 178.

The fourth, a 'revolutionary proposition with a certain currency'¹⁷⁷, is tempting, but disqualified by Galtung on empirical, theoretical and axiological grounds.

The best known example of a social order that is structured on the basis of unequal opportunities, where limited access to health, education and power are linked to a low income, is the class society.¹⁷⁸ Galtung's view on society and its dynamics with relation to peace and conflict can not be understood without a regard for the role of class disparities in the social structure.

3.6. Transition and democratisation

With regard to democratisation processes in Africa it has been argued that this has not in the least bit led to an emancipation of the masses. Ake speaks of an imminent "second independence", this time not from colonial masters but from incompetent and exploitative indigenous rulers.¹⁷⁹ According to Ake, this second independence will involve a democratisation that is not liberal, but socially oriented. The reality that African life is still predominantly rural means that the focus on individual political rights of liberal democracy has little meaning for many Africans. Rather, a truly democratic 'human rights regime', i.e. a regime that means something to the masses, would harbour notions of freedom, well-being and democratic participation that are appropriate to people in rural communities. 'For in that setting, freedom is embedded in the realities of communal life; people worry less about their rights and how to secure them than finding their station and its duties and they see no freedom in mere individualism.'¹⁸⁰ Ake puts the 'basic human need' for participation in perspective. In a market society the notion of political participation arises from the autonomy of the individual, and the 'real or potential clash of its claims with others.'¹⁸¹ But in a communal society, where the well-being of

¹⁷⁷ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research': 181.

¹⁷⁸ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research': 171.

¹⁷⁹ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 2.

¹⁸⁰ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 5.

¹⁸¹ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 5.

everyone depends on how everyone fills 'his/her station and its duties', one does not participate against others, but with others for the well-being of the society as a whole.¹⁸²

Ake contends that real democratisation needs more than elections. A transformation of the autocratic, post-colonial state, which has, in the case of Nigeria, retained the concentration of power and the command structure of preceding military regimes, is required.¹⁸³ Although Ake is a strong advocate for the development/democratisation nexus, he denounces the prejudice that is 'implicit in the tendency to put economic development before democracy.'¹⁸⁴ The implementation of SAP under the guise of market liberalisation and democratisation plays a key role in Ake's argument. Indeed, he observes how none of the parties involved in the adoption of the SAP appear to have had any problem with the undemocratic nature in which it was adopted and implemented. It is important in the context of this study to understand that SAPs were deliberate government policy for economic reform. In Nigeria, as in other African countries, their effect can hardly be overstated. They have caused 'deep despair, widespread malnutrition and premature death, and [...] much of the burden falls on children.'¹⁸⁵ There will be further discussion on the detrimental effects of SAP further in this chapter.

Ake argues that development policies and strategies can not be understood 'without referring constantly to the nature of the state and the dynamics of the social forces in which it is embedded.'¹⁸⁶ Because of circumstances that reach back to the colonial experience, the relationship between the African state and the bulk of the population tends to be hostile. The state has been privatised to serve the interests of a dominant faction of the elite, who compete with other elites to capture and exploit the state. None of these elites' objectives is to transform the social structure of the state. In fact, 'Given a

¹⁸² C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 6.

¹⁸³ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 9.

¹⁸⁴ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 16.

¹⁸⁵ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 17.

¹⁸⁶ C. Ake, *Democracy and development in Africa*: 42.

choice between social transformation, especially development, and political domination, most African leaders choose the latter.¹⁸⁷

Osaghae argues that in addition to the first liberation movement in Africa, which led to decolonisation, the second liberation process, which took place in the post-Cold War period, has now failed as well. The political and economic reforms of the second liberation movement have largely remained inconclusive. This, according to Osaghae, is due to the 'unresolved crisis of the state, the lack of relative autonomy on the part of local citizens.'¹⁸⁸

3.6.1. *Ethnicity*

The issue of ethnicity in the context of transition and democratisation in Africa is highly relevant. Osaghae argues that ethnicity should be approached as 'a combination of an emancipatory ideology, a pedestal for challenging and exacting concessions from the state, a principle of state organization and a critical resource for political competition.'¹⁸⁹

Osaghae sees the transitional society as a political environment that provides, due to its inherent turbulence and crisis, 'opportunities for political access and competition and for ventilating frustrations, grievances and seeking redress, all of which encourage more intense and desperate political action.' Osaghae discerns that ethnic political parties and organisations, including ethnic militias, become driving agents in these processes, which have the potential to alter power configurations.¹⁹⁰

3.6.2. *State collapse*

Nigeria is a country where democratisation has on many fronts been shallow, development has meant ruthless economic measures aimed at growth, but resulting in

¹⁸⁷ C. Ake, *Democracy and development in Africa*: 42.

¹⁸⁸ E.E. Osaghae, 'State, constitutionalism and the management of ethnicity in Africa': 1.

¹⁸⁹ E.E. Osaghae, 'Political transitions and ethnic conflict in Africa', *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol.21, No.1 (Association of Third World Studies, 2004): 229.

¹⁹⁰ E.E. Osaghae, 'Political transitions and ethnic conflict in Africa': 234-5.

shattered lives, and elections have enabled people to 'vote without choosing'.¹⁹¹ Authoritarian state structures and informal patronage networks have remained in place, rule of law is nominal and government accountability is weak. The failure of development strategies like SAP in Africa in general, and in Nigeria in particular, is an essential component of the hostile relationship between the state and its people.¹⁹² The failure to deliver basic public goods and services, guarantee security, equality before the law, and accountability has made the state seem all but irrelevant.

However, when it comes to the power conceded by the federal government and its control over resource extraction and distribution of revenue the state is not weak at all. The power that the state exerts with its control over the military, and its proven willingness to use the federal armed forces to suppress domestic revolt, is immense. The state may be irrelevant in some aspects, which has caused many to seek refuge and security with identity groups, both ethnic and religious organisations. But in other ways the state has become an enemy, rather than a void, 'to be evaded, cheated, or defeated, as circumstances permitted.'¹⁹³

'Throughout Nigeria's independent history, the police and military, while failing to curb rising crime and politically inspired violence, have used unrestrained force on fellow citizens and caused thousands of deaths. The restoration of democracy has not ended widespread harassment, abuse, torture and extrajudicial murder by security forces. Massive reprisal killings have occurred, such as in 1999, when an army unit destroyed Odi, a town in Bayelsa State, allegedly in response to the assassination of twelve policemen by local youths. According to research published in 2002, 2,483 people died in the massacre. In 2001, following the abduction and killing of nineteen soldiers by an armed group, about 200 civilians were killed in a retaliatory operation in Benue State. There have been numerous similar, though less murderous, incidents ever since.'¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ C. Ake, *Democracy and development in Africa*: 137.

¹⁹² C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence: The case of ethnic Ijaws in Nigeria's delta region', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.13, No.4 (London: Frank Cass, 2001): 20.

¹⁹³ C. Ake, *Democracy and development in Africa*: 137.

¹⁹⁴ ICG No.113: 26-7.

3.6.3. *Citizenship*

In his book, 'Citizen and subject', Mamdani argues that the countries of equatorial Africa inherited from the colonial period a particular form of rule that maintained a *bifurcated* state, recognizing two types of political identities. One was civic, preserved for *citizens* who had (differentiated) rights under civil law, enforced by the central state. The other, inferior, identity was ethnic, preserved for *subjects* who lived under the authority of customary law, administered through the Native Authority.¹⁹⁵ With these two identities, the colonial powers had created a tool for administering a system of indirect rule that would allow them to extract the necessary taxes, labour and whatever other outputs they needed from their colonies with minimal means. The colonial doctrine went that the subjects were *natives* to the colonized land and the (differentiated) citizens were *settlers*. The proto-type settlers were obviously the whites.¹⁹⁶

In the context of Rwanda and its neighbouring countries the dichotomy described above had profound consequences for people's access to land and, in connection with this, identity politics. For poor *subjects*, who could by definition not own private property, the ethnic space was the only way of gaining access to land. Citizens could buy land, given that they had the financial resources, but they had no claim to 'customary' land from an ethnic group's home area. This is significant, as Mamdani explains how the advantage of being subjected to customary laws and belonging to an ethnic sphere, was the motivation for many of the rural poor to remain attached to their customary rights, even when after independence they had, at least theoretically, gained access to civil rights.¹⁹⁷

In Nigeria, the British instituted their own system of indirect rule on the amalgamated nations of what became Nigeria in 1914. The variety of these nations existed of much more than simply a difference of cultural heritage and language. They consisted of

¹⁹⁵ M. Mamdani, 'When does a settler become a native? Colonial roots of citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa', *Inaugural lecture as AC Jordan Professor of African Studies* (University of Cape Town: 13 May, 1998).

¹⁹⁶ M. Mamdani, 'When does a settler become a native?'

¹⁹⁷ M. Mamdani, 'When does a settler become a native?'

different historical political units, social orders and economies. The Northern muslim theocracies, which had been dominated by the Sokoto Caliphate, were allowed by the British to maintain their rule so that the colonial power could utilise their administrative structures.¹⁹⁸ One of the liberties that the northern societies were granted was their 'exemption' from missionary influence. Preserving the Islamic religion, and the feudal, centralised social structure of the North, which the British found to be more sophisticated than the polytheistic religions, and smaller, less hierarchical states and societies of the East and the South, had various consequences.¹⁹⁹ Firstly, it led to a great disparity in education levels between the North and the rest of the country. Literacy in the North has remained low in absolute numbers as well as relative to levels in the East and South-West. In the Southern regions, through Western education, a nationalist consciousness emerged.²⁰⁰

Moreover, the system of indirect rule led to the 'invention of a politically unified, though not ethnically homogenous, North that had never existed before.' The British offered the Northern emirs control of the Middle Belt, which consists of more than half of the 250 Nigerian nationalities, and the emirs added the territory to their Northern influential sphere. The disastrous consequences of the distrust generated by the colonial state structure that was largely left intact after independence, of which the apotheosis was the civil war, have been addressed in Chapter 2. The native versus settler dichotomy related by Mamdani has a parallel, in Nigerian societies, which does not appear to have its root in colonial legacies. Although the British fanned ethnic prejudice in the North by housing southern immigrants, many of whom Igbos, in segregated foreigner's quarters²⁰¹, the current antagonisms between so-called 'indigenes' and 'non-indigenes' of states must be attributed to a provision in the 1979 constitution, which granted certain rights to 'a person whose parents or grandparents historically originated from a community within that state.'²⁰² The 1999 constitution uses the term indigene, but does not define it more

¹⁹⁸ ICG No.113: 3.

¹⁹⁹ ICG No.113: 3.

²⁰⁰ ICG No.113: 4.

²⁰¹ ICG No.113: 4.

²⁰² ICG No.113: 24.

precisely. This continues to fuel local conflict and violence in all Nigeria's regions, particularly in the Middle Belt.²⁰³

The "native versus settler" dichotomy has been exacerbated by the proliferation of states²⁰⁴, and has fuelled violence in the Niger Delta. The most intense confrontations have taken place between Itsekiris and Ijaws in Delta and Ondo States. The Warri crisis, as the conflict has been coined after the capital of Delta State where violence has been particularly intense, has cost thousands of lives and destroyed villages and property since its commencement in 1997.²⁰⁵ The first flare up of the conflict started after the relocation of local government headquarters from the Ijaw town of Ogbe-Ijaw to the Itsekiri community of Ogidigben. During the first three months of the conflict, hundreds are believed to have been killed. In addition, Shell flow stations were seized, and Shell staff taken hostage. The first stage of the crisis caused a cut in Shell's Nigeria output by 210,000 barrels of oil per day for more than a week.²⁰⁶

The handover of power from military to civilian rule in 1999 was accompanied by another flare up of violence leaving 200 people dead in raids between Itsekiri and Ijaw militias. The elections of 2003 were the setting of more violent confrontations, this time between Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo militias and Nigerian security forces, leaving thousands dead and many more homeless.²⁰⁷

According to ICG 'some 40 per cent of the country's oil industry was shut down for weeks and some areas still have not returned to production. Chevron suffered \$500 million in infrastructure damage in addition to significant oil production losses. For a select few militant leaders – some of whom were front-line fighters in the attacks of 1997 and 2003 – the rewards were lucrative. In 2004, several key Ijaw and Itsekiri militants were appointed to state and local government positions. In 2006, President Obasanjo's

²⁰³ ICG No.113: 24.

²⁰⁴ ICG No.113: 23.

²⁰⁵ ICG No.118: 2.

²⁰⁶ ICG No.118: 2.

²⁰⁷ ICG No.118: 2.

government reserved an oil block drilling license for a company linked to members of the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), which actively coordinated and led Ijaw fighters during deadly conflicts in 1997, 1999 and 2003. Shell has admitted giving service contracts to FNDIC members.²⁰⁸

The Niger Delta is home to 40 ethnicities, 250 languages and more than 3000 communities. The Ijaw nation with 2 million members is the largest ethnic minority group in Nigeria, and divided in seven language groups and many dialects.²⁰⁹ It is tempting to reduce conflicts between and within groups to a competitive struggle for oil wealth, high positions in the state and local administration and power. But enmities such as the Itsekiri-Ijaw conflict have historical roots as well. The Itsekiri, for instance, who are a small group consisting of a few thousand members are perceived by the Ijaw as having been historically favoured by both the colonial regime and the successive military rulers of post-independence.²¹⁰

3.7. Conclusion: The development nexus

Burton, Galtung and Collier and Hoeffler address the causes of conflict and rebellion from very different vantage points. The former focuses on grievances that motivate rebels and their support base, the latter on greed, i.e. the opportunities that are perceived to be present for profiting financially from civil war. What makes the theory of Collier and Hoeffler relevant to the Niger Delta situation and to the three ethnic militia movements that will be discussed as cases in chapter 4? They argue that the factors causing rebellion and civil war are not political, but economic, as insurgent groups are usually motivated by control over resources. With their theory in hand, one could easily conduct a study to establish why an all-out civil war in the Niger Delta *has not* commenced. But whatever conclusions that analysis might deliver, the fact remains that the Niger Delta violence causes more than 1,000 deadly casualties per annum, which renders it the status of a high-

²⁰⁸ ICG No.118: 2.

²⁰⁹ ICG No.115: 26.

²¹⁰ K. Omeje, 'The state, conflict and evolving politics in the Niger Delta', *Review of African Political Economy*, No.101 (ROAPE Publications, 2004): 439.

intensity conflict –or conflicts.²¹¹ This should legitimise at least *treating* the Niger Delta agitation as a rebellion or a civil war, and taking the ethnic militia movements that are the focus of this study at face value. The proximity of large amounts of natural resources plays a significant role in both constructs. The theory of Galtung focuses less on causes than on the structures in which peace and violence exist. A society, in his view, is a dynamic system that functions through social and political interactions. Galtung's view on society and the role that violence plays in it is helpful with regard to the analysis of the emergence of the ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. His and Burton's emphasis on the process of resource distribution, rather than on the allocations themselves, is especially significant where economic development and growth are concerned. Both Collier and Burton mention the risks that are part of 'open competition' for scarce resources, in Collier's view brought on by undue democracy, and according to Burton by conflicting 'satisfiers'.

Popular participation in the process of distribution is considered to be an important way to avert or manage escalation of conflict. Odendaal and Amoo reason that the political content of ethnic conflicts is a given, since the underlying drive is usually related to a flawed process of resource distribution.²¹² The means through which this process and its outcome are challenged can vary in such degree that the border between the struggle for a just and equitable distribution of resources and rights on one hand, and a struggle for personal wealth accumulation and power on the other is blurred. Indeed, power and rights lie in each other's extension. However, while power is a relationship between one who can enforce his will on another, and this other, who can not, rights are means through which people can achieve their self-realisation. The nuance between greed-driven and grievance-driven rebellion appears correspondingly to lie in the objective as an opportunity to attain, for example, education, self-determination, health and employment, rather than these attainments as objectives themselves.

²¹¹ C. Bob, 'Merchants of morality', *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2002): 37-8.

²¹² G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, 'The political management of ethnic conflict': 22.

This would explain why community development projects of TOCs and promises from the federal government to deliver jobs and infrastructure have received less than enthusiastic response from Niger Delta activists.²¹³ Hospitals and schools built by TOCs have often been neglected and dilapidated because of a lack of long-term planning and financial sustenance. The oil-communities have stated that the development projects offered to them were merely interventions to alleviate the symptoms of their complaint, but not the complaint itself.

The focus on process explains the significance of economic development as one of the attributes of peace. This comes clearly forward from Galtung's analytical perspective. It also shows how, without the political power to ensure a long-term involvement in the decision-making process that shapes the distribution of resources and opportunities, for the bulk of the people there is little value in economic development and growth. Ake notes how development is inextricably connected to peace, not merely because it delivers the dividends that people expect from peace and democratisation, but because it provides the environment in which individuals and groups can strive for their self-realisation.²¹⁴

²¹³ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria', (Blackwell Publishing: April, 2006): 16619; ICG No.119: 8.

²¹⁴ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 3.

4. Emergence of MOSOP, IYC and MEND: a transformation of movements

Introduction

In this chapter the theory on rebel movements and armed conflict will be connected with three cases. In Chapter 3 the theories of Galtung, Burton and Collier and Hoeffler were introduced and the additional viewpoints of Ikelegbe and Reno on the emergence of rebel movements in Nigeria and the Niger Delta political economy were discussed. However, the three case movements were merely glossed over in passing.

The emergence of the militia movements in the Niger Delta is described as a process, with special regard for the issues that came forward in the discussion of theory in the previous chapter. The aim is to establish in which respects the theories are in concordance with the reality of the cases and where they fail. For a sufficient answer to the research question it is not just important to know why or how the movements emerged. It is essential to understand what it was exactly that came to exist, and how it was structured. What was the internal logic of these movements, and how did they transform as their internal and external environment changed?

Two aspects in particular reveal something about the nature of the militia movements, rather than just why they emerged. These two aspects are: 1) internal and external organisational structure, and 2) the transformation that took place within the organisations and the larger entities of which they are part, after they were born. The interaction between these two values and the dynamics between all the elements that make up the Niger Delta political economy will draw a picture that is expected to improve understanding of the nature of these organisations and what drives them.

In addition to shedding new light on the emergence of the Niger Delta militia movements the explanatory value of the theoretical frameworks introduced by Burton and Collier and Hoeffler will be assessed in the following chapter. Moreover, the nascence, dynamics,

nature of the struggle and the structure of the three case organisations: MOSOP, IYC and MEND will be reviewed, and assessed with the use of the analytical tools of Galtung, Burton and Collier and Hoeffler.

4.2. Political economy as a conflict system

According to Reno, in a political economy “power is tied to exclusive control of economies.” Seen from this vantage point the Niger Delta is a political economy where economic factors blend with social and political drives. Resistance against the state and TOCs has been infected and transformed by the multilevel struggle for resources that pervades the reality of Nigerian politics. In addition, a ‘regime of state repression and corporate violence has further generated popular and criminal violence, lawlessness, illegal appropriations and insecurity.’²¹⁵

It will have become clear that greed and grievance, like political, social and economic power cannot be divorced. Not only that, they reinforce each other in a process that causes a transformation of institutions. Ikelegbe speaks of a ‘proliferation of arms and institutions and agencies of violence ranging from the Nigerian Armed Forces to community, ethnic and youth militias, armed gangs and networks, pirates, cultists and robbers.’²¹⁶

Ikelegbe asserts that ‘it is not greed per se that underpins wars.’ In fact, state collapse and conflict provide an environment where armed groups fight for control over natural resources.²¹⁷ This could cause an armed group that was previously or fundamentally a ‘genuine’ resistance movement with social and political objectives, to transform into a predatory organisation. Underscoring his point that ‘opportunism for primary commodity predation is not the cause of violent conflicts,’ Ikelegbe comments that ‘nowhere in Africa has a band of criminals grown into a rebel movement.’²¹⁸

²¹⁵ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 208.

²¹⁶ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 208.

²¹⁷ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 213.

²¹⁸ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 213.

As perceived by the aggrieved oil-minorities, the Nigerian government and TOCs structurally impinge on their rights by denying them control over and benefits from their mineral resources, but they nonetheless expect that these same communities bear the burden of social, environmental and economical costs that the extraction of oil and gas brings about. That does not mean that the communities' resistance against this injustice, even when it assumes the form of regaining control over these resources, can be simply determined as either greed- or profit-driven.

Moreover, by the turn of the millennium TOCs and, to an extent, the government were beginning to apply new approaches when dealing with the Niger Delta agitators. The setting up of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2001 was one clear manifestation of this change in attitude. The NDDC's objective was to 'diffuse the feeling that the region's oil wealth was being used largely for other parts of Nigeria.' Despite its ambitious spending on building schools, health centres, roads, and bringing water and electricity to local communities, the NDDC has not impressed the oil-bearing communities, and in particular the armed youths, much.²¹⁹

It appears that efforts, however genuine in their intentions, to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Niger Delta population, are often met with scepticism. Some individual beneficiaries may be thankful and see their lives changed, but the militant actions continue and have even intensified since the year 2000. MEND's rejection of Obasanjo's promise to deliver jobs in oil, navy and police, to build a new motorway through the Niger Delta and instigate environmental repair, the building of schools, healthcare facilities and electrification, makes one thing quite clear. The conditions for peace might be mainly socio-economic demands, but these are meaningless without the constitutionally guaranteed power to participate in the decision-making process leading to better socio-economic policies.²²⁰ This notion is supported by the basic human needs

²¹⁹ F.N. Ikome, 'Conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria: Issues and dynamics', *Global Insight: A focus on current issues*, Issue 44 (Midrand: January, 2005): 9.

²²⁰ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria' (April 2006): 16619: The demands stated by the INC at a recent conference convened by Obasanjo to address the grievances of the oil-bearing communities were: 1. More political and economic participation; 2. Two new states for the Ijaws; 3. Employment for the youths; 4.

argument of Burton, and in particular the views of Potapchuk with regard to participative government. Indeed, it is not so much the results of participative policy-making, but the process that gives people the feeling that their needs are met, and, most importantly, that they have at least the opportunity to influence their own situation.

As noted in Chapter 3 power and rights lie in each other's extension.²²¹ Rights in this context pertain to the opportunities that individuals and communities have to achieve their self-realisation, while power, or the pursuit of power to control one's own resources and to exert influence over the process of distribution, constitutes their relationship with government and TOCs. In the political economy of the Niger Delta the connection between rights and power is profound, precisely because here, in the words of Reno, 'power is tied to exclusive control of even clandestine economies.'²²²

The opening up of dialogue and the deployment of so-called community liaison officers to negotiate security with restive communities led to the emergence of a whole new dimension to the interactions and exchanges in the political economy of the Niger Delta. Invitations - and financial incentives - to take part in dialogue; local and international NGO's implementing their conflict resolution projects, and the increasing power of mediators and interlocutors have contributed to a new transformation of the Niger Delta political economy.²²³ Dialogue, it seems, is becoming just another currency in the Niger Delta. The virtual impossibility of verifying who is a militant, who is an oil-bunkerer, who is a hired thug for the governor's political machine, who yields authority over a large constituency, who is a warlord, who is a local politician-to-be, who is contending for a chieftaincy title, and who is all or a combination of these at the same time makes this 'dialogue' a rather tricky addition to the Niger Delta interactions. It has been said that the regular state-level conventions, and even the odd national-level conferences that are currently being organised are for a large part utilised by militia leaders and other actors in

environmental repair; 5. control over oil resources; 6. the release of Asari Dokubo and Governor Alamiyeseigha.

²²¹ See page 55 of this study.

²²² W. Reno, 'The politics of violent opposition in collapsing states': 128.

²²³ ICG No.115: 23; R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 583.

the Niger Delta violence, to meet with their colleagues, strengthen their networks and decide on future actions.

Contention over resource control is a political issue. But the illegal appropriation of and trade in mineral resources that take place on a large scale in the Niger Delta, is quite a different matter. Even if part or most of the profits derived from illegal bunkering is put back into the movements' structures to ensure their sustenance it cannot pass easily as a political action.²²⁴ Other arguments have been used by militia movements to legitimise illegal bunkering and other clandestine activities as being a part of the struggle for social justice. In fact, illegal bunkering has been downplayed by militia leaders who say that they are not stealing since they just take back what belongs to them.²²⁵ By many in the Niger Delta it is seen as 'a direct form of resource control.' The profits of this clandestine industry are estimated at between \$1,5 and \$4 billion per year.²²⁶

Although illegal bunkering is said to be a key source of income for armed anti-government groups in the Niger Delta, it is necessary to question who profits most from this industry. More and more indicators show that the real profiteers from grand-scale oil-bunkering in the Niger Delta are not located in the region, or even in the country.²²⁷ According to ICG, a "cartel or mafia" of "highly placed and powerful individuals" who "run a network of agents to steal crude oil and finished products from pipelines in the Niger Delta region [...] operate in similar fashion to drug barons and their activities are purely criminal, with financial benefits as their motive[.]"²²⁸ Oil is being paid for with arms and logistics. Police and army look the other way while giant container ships make their way from the Niger Delta creeks to the open sea.²²⁹

²²⁴ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria. Delta tactics' (Blackwell Publishing: March, 2006): 16584-5.

²²⁵ ICG 118: 8.

²²⁶ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 586.

²²⁷ ICG 118: 8-9; C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 12; A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 221-3.

²²⁸ ICG 118: 8.

²²⁹ ICG 118: 9; C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 12-13.

Even if those leading the criminal syndicates that operate this sophisticated enterprise are involved in the activities of armed militia movements, it is highly unlikely that their objectives include delivering justice to the Niger Delta. Indeed, it is reported that militias are 'given control' over rewarding oil-bunkering routes, by virtue of a strategic collusion of oil company staff, army elements, vigilante groups, militias and their political patrons, in exchange for one particular political machine.²³⁰ But the co-optation of social movements, whether they are militant or not, by corrupt state and local administrations and even TOCs in their efforts to increase their security, must be seen as an, at least partial dislodgement from political, social engagement. The simple reason for this is that the actions of the movements are no longer directed at achieving their stated social, economic and political goals - although this could be claimed with the 'direct form of resource control argument'- but rather at ensuring their own share in the profits from the Niger Delta war economy. One result is that, instead of directing their actions to the TOCs and the government, the militia movements turn their weapons on each other. The turf war that was played out between NDPVF leader Asari Dokubo and NDV leader Ateke Tom, with active sponsorship of Delta state governor Peter Odili in 2003-4, is one example of this scenario, with dramatic consequences for the Delta population.²³¹

Another source of income for the new wave of militant groups that emerged in the Niger Delta in the late 1990s is hostage taking of expatriate staff.²³² Starting as a last resort of autonomously operating groups of aggrieved villagers venting their frustration to TOCs and the federal government about their miserable situation and demanding jobs and other forms of redress,²³³ by the turn of the century the kidnapping of TOC staff was becoming a full-fledged industry. In 2006 MEND and similar groups are said to have taken more than 150 TOC staff hostage, of which half are foreigners.²³⁴ MEND deploys the strategy as its number one tool for extorting acquiescence from TOCs and the federal

²³⁰ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 586.

²³¹ ICG No.118: 4.

²³² *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria. Delta tactics' (Blackwell Publishing: March, 2006): 16585-6; K. Maier and L.A. Javier, 'Nigerian rebel group says it didn't kidnap Filipino sailors', *Bloomberg.com* (21 January, 2006).

²³³ K. Maier, *This house has fallen. Nigeria in crisis* (London: The Penguin Press, 2000): 112.

²³⁴ K. Maier and L.A. Javier, 'Nigerian rebel group says it didn't kidnap Filipino sailors'.

government²³⁵, but in general the approach has not yet yielded much result. Instead, President Obasanjo has made it clear that the criminal dimension that the youth agitation has assumed makes it liable to be crushed.²³⁶ In March 2006 the Nigerian House of Representatives agreed that the militants should be 'flushed out' and increased military action is the way forward.²³⁷

A practical problem of this approach is that it is not always clear who the kidnappers are. For instance, in October 2006 on three different occasions hostages were taken from Exxon Mobil (7 hostages), Shell (25 hostages and 14 soldiers killed) and an Agip ship was attacked, killing 9 soldiers. In January 2007, 6 Filipinos were abducted from a cargo ship. MEND was said to be responsible, and even the kidnappers introduced themselves as members of MEND. But MEND has denied all involvement in these actions and, in the case of the October actions, responded that the actions had 'not been planned.'²³⁸ In the case of the Filipinos MEND said that the kidnappers must be local villagers.²³⁹ The problem that arises out of the amorphous structure of the new generation of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta will be addressed in another section of this chapter.

4.3. Explanatory dimensions

Ikelegbe concludes that although economic underpinnings do not cause the conflict, they become a part of the resistance and 'a resource for sustaining it.' An extensive proliferation of arms and the emergence of 'institutions of violence,' along with a dramatic increase of violent crime and more conflict are significant factors underlying the sustenance of resistance and conflict.²⁴⁰

²³⁵ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

²³⁶ A. Ikelegbe, 'The perverse manifestation of civil society: Evidence from Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.39, No.1 (Cambridge: University Press, 2001): 14 .

²³⁷ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria. Delta tactics': 16585.

²³⁸ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria. Niger Delta clashes' (Blackwell Publishing: November 2006): 16832-3 ; E. Amaize, 'MEND threatens to kill hostages', *Vanguard* (AllAfrica.com: 22 January, 2007).

²³⁹ K. Maier and L.A. Javier, 'Nigerian rebel group says it didn't kidnap Filipino sailors' (21 January, 2007).

²⁴⁰ A. Ikelegbe, 'The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria': 208.

According to Ikelegbe the economics of war thesis has several explanatory dimensions. The three that are relevant for the analysis at hand are: 1. nascence; 2. dynamics; 3. nature. The first focuses on the actual causes of rebellion, i.e. the social and political grievances that are regarded by some to be merely a front for greed-driven motivations. The second, dynamics of a rebellion, refers to the objective of self-sustenance by warring groups and possibly prolongation of the conflict.. The third dimension refers to the violent nature of the conflict. This violent nature is aggravated by the economy of war as more actors ‘struggle for economic space to further extraction of resource benefits.’²⁴¹

There is another dimension, not mentioned by Ikelegbe, but inherent in all three of the listed. The nature and the structure of the rebel organisations will be shaped by whatever caused them to emerge, whatever keeps them in existence and determines their violent nature. On the other hand, there might be certain organisational characteristics of a social movement that enables it to fend off the lure of violent and or criminal engagement.

Could MOSOP, for instance, have remained a non-violent ethnic movement if its internal decision-making structure had been different? Like many of the ethnic militant movements in the Niger Delta, MOSOP experienced factionalisation from the early stages of its history. This internal friction was due to a number of factors which will be discussed in the following section, but the question is whether a more open, multi-faceted organisational structure like IYC and MEND would possibly have allowed MOSOP to sustain its internal contradictions and survive the opposition of its most conservative chiefs.

Another aspect of the structure dimension has less to do with factionalisation, and more with the way that the ethnic militia movements function. The most apt summation to describe this phenomenon, which is perhaps a brilliant strategy, perhaps inherent in the nature of the social organisation of the Niger Delta human geography, is Okonta’s

²⁴¹ A. Ikelegbe, ‘The economy of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria’: 212.

observation that MEND is not an organisation at all, but an idea.²⁴² His claim is corroborated, with specific referral to the IYC and its militant wing the Egbesu Boys of Africa, in the interviews of Sesay et al. from which emerges that many of the members are either formally or informally connected to more than one ethnic militia movement.²⁴³

Ikelegbe's dimensions of the economy of war, supplemented by the fourth dimension, namely the internal and external structure of rebel movements, are useful in the following analytical accounts of the emergence of MOSOP, IYC and MEND.

4.4. Emergence of MOSOP

The Ogoni are a small minority of roughly 500,000 people inhabiting a total land area of between 400 and 1000 square miles in Rivers State.²⁴⁴ They consist of three ethnic groups, the Khama (120,000 based on a 1963 census), Gokana (94,000), and Eleme (29,000). They are divided into six clans. They do not share a myth of common origin and constitute an ethnic group only on the basis of sharing a common language and culture.²⁴⁵ Still, the Ogoni are said to be a close-knit community of mainly farmers and fishermen, who, for millennia, managed to sustain a livelihood from their extremely densely populated land. The vital and careful management of their natural environment was abruptly disrupted when in 1958 Shell opened its first oil well in Ogoniland. By 1993, when Shell was forced to suspend its operations in Ogoniland until further notice, the oil multinational was exploiting five big oil fields with ninety-six wells and five flow stations in the area.²⁴⁶

²⁴² I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

²⁴³ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 82-3.

²⁴⁴ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 26; I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 75, 117. On a total population of between 120 and 150 million, as counted in the latest census: R. Lalasz, 'In the news: The Nigerian census' (Washington: April, 2006).
<http://www.prb.org/Template.cfm?Section=PRB&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=13767>

²⁴⁵ C.E. Welch Jr., 'The Ogoni and self-determination: Increasing violence in Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.33, No.4 (Cambridge: University Press, 1995): 639.

²⁴⁶ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 75.

Like in other Nigerian oil-bearing communities conflict with the TOCs began as isolated and sporadic peaceful protests against their activities, and evolved to well-organised mass movements posing a serious challenge to the oil-state alliance.²⁴⁷ It would, however, be a misinterpretation to regard MOSOP as an organisation of grassroots activism. In many ways, MOSOP was the reincarnation of a succession of elite cultural organisations and political pressure groups. The former was formed after the end of the Biafra War and had a firm base in traditional leadership of the Ogoni and high government functionaries,²⁴⁸ while the latter emerged from the Ogoni ethnic solidarity that was constructed at the dusk of the colonial era for fear of being dominated by the Igbos under a new dispensation.²⁴⁹

The Ogoni ethnic mobilisation was, starting in the 1950s, led by Ogoni elite through 'social clubs, political parties or state creation movements.'²⁵⁰ At the Willink Commission Inquiry, which was established by the British to investigate fears of Nigeria's minorities of being dominated by the three majority groups after the imminent birth of an independent Nigeria, the Ogonis asked for a separate state for Ijaws and Ogonis.²⁵¹ The creation of Rivers State in 1967 was a partial victory for the Ogoni elites, who were at the time organised in the Ogoni Divisional Union, a not entirely inclusive ethnic political association.²⁵² Not until 1990, after extensive consultations by, among others, Ken Saro-Wiwa with all Ogoni sub-groups, would MOSOP become the second all-inclusive Ogoni ethnic association – representing all Ogonis- after the demise of the first, the Ogoni State Representative Assembly, formed in 1950.²⁵³

The idea of MOSOP was contrived in part in Ogoni elite social clubs that had emerged in the 1980s. These clubs, together with a revival of the old nationalism of the 1950s were instrumental and provided the leadership for MOSOP. However, so stresses Obi, the

²⁴⁷ F.N. Ikome, 'Conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria': 7.

²⁴⁸ C.E. Welsh Jr., 'The Ogoni and self-determination': 640.

²⁴⁹ V.A. Isumonah, 'The making of the Ogoni ethnic group': 440.

²⁵⁰ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 68.

²⁵¹ V.A. Isumonah, 'The making of the Ogoni ethnic group': 440.

²⁵² V.A. Isumonah, 'The making of the Ogoni ethnic group': 441.

²⁵³ V.A. Isumonah, 'The making of the Ogoni ethnic group': 440-2.

legwork and the mobilisation of the grassroots was done by the Ogoni youth.²⁵⁴ 'They were the ones who welded the OBR onto local discourses and dialects, winning the villagers over, and heightening their faith in the possibility of realising Ogoni national autonomy and control of oil.'²⁵⁵

Under the influence, and later leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa MOSOP incarnated the Ogoni uprising which was without a doubt the first 'mass action mobilization in direct confrontation with the state,' since the rebellion of Adaka Boro.²⁵⁶ However, both internal and external Ogoni divisions were present from the beginning and manifested themselves in the opposition against Saro-Wiwa and against MOSOP representation of Ogoni interests in the 1990s.²⁵⁷

Local resistance against the detrimental impact of Shell's exploration and production activities began soon after the first oil wells were drilled, and mostly took the form of letters written by community leaders to Shell officials. Complaints initially focused on the flaring of gas that is released from the oil wells as a by-product of the extraction of oil, and related noise. Another grievance featured in these letters was the network of pipelines that was being laid out over community farmlands. All protests were ignored.²⁵⁸ Protests increased after the first major incidents concerning oil-spillage occurred in 1970, shortly after the Biafra War. These left whole towns and significant amounts of farmland severely devastated, water contaminated and air polluted. More than thirty years after the oil blowout in Kegbara Dere the effects are still visible.²⁵⁹ The impact of the disaster in Kegbara Dere at the time can hardly be overstated:

²⁵⁴ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 75.

²⁵⁵ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 75.

²⁵⁶ E.E. Osaghae, 'The Ogoni uprising: Oil politics, minority agitation and the future of the Nigerian state', *African Affairs*, Vol.94, No.376 (Oxford: University Press, 1995): 326.

²⁵⁷ E.E. Osaghae, 'The Ogoni uprising': 334; C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 76.

²⁵⁸ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 75-6; One of the first of these letters was the "Humble Petition of Complaint on Shell-BP Operations in the Niger Delta," signed by chiefs and members of the Ogoni elite. C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 29.

²⁵⁹ I. Okonta and Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 76.

'The blowout lasted for several weeks, during which time crude hydrocarbon, sulphur, and effluent toxic substances were violently emitted in dense fountains. The emissions formed a thick layer over the surface of the adjoining land, destroying farmland, crops, and economic trees and natural vegetation of the impacted areas with the resultant desertification of the impacted area of about 1,500 acres [belonging to several families] in K-Dere town.'²⁶⁰

The high-pressure pipeline networks snaking over Ogoni farmland and across people's homes have made land that was once used for agricultural purposes economically useless. In addition, in 1993, when Shell pulled out of Ogoniland, the bulk of the pipelines were overdue and corroded, increasing the risk of leaks.²⁶¹

Although the environmental damage described here caused physical harm, the violence that was inflicted on the Ogoni population was of a structural nature as well.²⁶² It can be debated whether the political marginalisation of the Ogonis has been exaggerated, especially when compared to the position –and often exclusion– of other Niger Delta groups in public office on the state and the local, even the national level. Osaghae observes that their grievance needs to be examined against the background of the expectation harboured by the Ogoni elites 'that their oil-producing status entitles them to a greater share of state power.'²⁶³

In 1990 a group of Ogoni community leaders from the six Ogoni clans, one of which was writer, activist, and former state government official Ken Saro-Wiwa, established the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). They presented the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR), adopted two months earlier, demanding among other things: 'The right of the Ogoni people to self-determination as a distinct people in the Nigerian Federation; adequate representation as a right in all Nigerian institutions; the right to use a fair proportion of the economic resources in Ogoniland for its development; and the right to control their environment.' The OBR declared the non-violent stance of MOSOP.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ I. Okonta and Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 76-7.

²⁶¹ I. Okonta and Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 77-8. E.E. Osaghae, 'The Ogoni uprising': 329-30.

²⁶² See discussion of Galtung's theory on structural violence in Chapter 3, page 46.

²⁶³ E.E. Osaghae, 'The Ogoni uprising': 332.

²⁶⁴ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 117.

The OBR did not cause as much as a ripple in the national politics, and received but a brief mention in the Rivers State newspapers. In November 1992 however, MOSOP issued a thirty-day ultimatum addressed to Shell to pay back-rents, royalties and compensation for damages done over the past thirty something years, or leave the land. Other demands mentioned in the memorandum were that all high-pressure pipelines currently lying exposed in Ogoniland be buried underground, and that active steps were taken to establish dialogue between community representatives, Shell, and the federal government.²⁶⁵

This time, MOSOP had made sure that their protest would not go unnoticed. A simple but efficient project of mass mobilisation, launched shortly after the declaration of the OBR two years earlier, had involved nearly every Ogoni, young and old, man and women, in the struggle. To ensure that MOSOP had a truly democratic, grassroots base its leadership had formed and facilitated a plethora of sub-organisations of which MOSOP remained the umbrella. Organisations such as the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations (FOWA), Conference of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA), Council of Ogoni Churches (COC), Ogoni Teachers Union (OTU) and Ogoni Students Union (OSU) are but a few examples. These organisations were aimed at strengthening MOSOP, and simultaneously providing platforms for participation, dialogue and decision-making.²⁶⁶ Saro-Wiwa's supporters were mostly within NYCOP, of which he was president.²⁶⁷

The division and growing opposition between the conservative elders within MOSOP and the radical youths of NYCOP was a manifestation of the generational shift of power towards the youth that has been described earlier in this paper, and the subsequent decline of the 'moral authority of the gerontocrats.' Obi adds to these developments the gaining

²⁶⁵ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 117.

²⁶⁶ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 118; C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 76.

²⁶⁷ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 64.

of prominence of women groups. The role that this gender profile plays in the Niger Delta struggle is significant.²⁶⁸

MOSOP, through its grassroots sub-movements, managed to mobilise some 300,000 Ogoni for a formidable peaceful protest in January 1993 against the continued denial of their rights by both Shell and the Nigerian government. The protest, cleverly planned to coincide with the opening of the United Nations Year of Indigenous Peoples, took place without a single incident of violence, and marked a turning point in the MOSOP campaign. Having finally raised attention on a national scale, the MOSOP leaders were invited by General Babangida for 'dialogue'. This turned out to be no more than an attempt to frighten the MOSOP leaders by intimidation into giving up their activities.²⁶⁹

After some violent confrontations involving Shell staff and local farmers, which left one young Ogoni dead and eleven others injured, Shell pulled out from Ogoniland. The MOSOP leaders were again invited to Abuja. Ken Saro-Wiwa, Dr. G.B. Leton, A.T. Badey and Chief E.N. Kobani represented the Ogoni case, but again, the conference turned out to be a stooge.²⁷⁰ It was Kobani and Leton who accused Saro-Wiwa of personalisation of the MOSOP agenda, taking over its decision-making process and using NYCOP as his private army.²⁷¹ Leton became the leader of a faction within MOSOP that tried to restructure the organisation while Saro-Wiwa was detained along with two other MOSOP activists on the basis of the new Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree. Leton's suggestion was that MOSOP cease to be an umbrella organisation for the sub-groups such as NYCOP and COTRA. He was out-voted. One interesting feature in the MOSOP decision-making structure that demonstrates the disfranchisement of the chiefs is that, although traditional political institutions have a place in MOSOP, the chiefs had only three votes out of twenty-seven.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 76; E.E. Osaghae, 'Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria': 446.

²⁶⁹ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 119.

²⁷⁰ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 121.

²⁷¹ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 76; E.E. Osaghae 'Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria': 435, 444.

²⁷² E.E. Osaghae, 'Structural adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria': 446.

Internal opposition came to a head in the run-up to the 1993 elections, which MOSOP had pledged to boycott. When the same Dr. Leton and Chief Kobani tried to subvert the decision of the Steering Committee to boycott the elections, and failed, they resigned from their positions as president and vice-president of MOSOP. In July 1993, Saro-Wiwa was elected president in absentia by the Steering Committee.²⁷³ The schism between some of the Ogoni elders and the radical youths would not diminish. The conservatives, who were defeated by the young radicals' control over the grassroots, responded by strengthening their alliances with the state and the TOCs, and attempted to expose Saro-Wiwa as a radical and an agitator.²⁷⁴

Around this time sudden and inexplicable attacks were visited on Ogoni by their neighbouring communities, the Andoni, Okrika, and Ndoki, with whom they had always maintained good relations. There is evidence that the inter-community violence was provoked by state-agents to stifle the agitation against the state and Shell. Some say this violence was sponsored by Shell. It was certainly tolerated by the oil giant that was hoping to reassume its operations in Ogoniland sooner, rather than later. The increased insecurity and pervasive fear led to the establishment of local vigilante groups to offer protection to the besieged communities.²⁷⁵

The military crackdown on the Ogoni communities took an unprecedented form after four MOSOP leaders, among whom Chief Kobani and Chief Badey, were murdered by an angry mob. The circumstances of the murders were extremely shady, and although Saro-Wiwa was nowhere near the place of the crime, he was apprehended that same evening. While Saro-Wiwa was tried before a kangaroo tribunal and sentenced to death, hell descended on Ogoniland. Villages were raided and thousands of Ogoni men, women and children were slaughtered by the Nigerian Armed Forces, while the area was cordoned

²⁷³ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 121.

²⁷⁴ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 77.

²⁷⁵ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 121, 128-9.

off from the media.²⁷⁶ Thousands more were raped, tortured, robbed and extorted, turned into refugees and detained in detention centres that were opened especially for this operation. On 10 November 1995 Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others who had been found guilty of the murders of the four Ogoni chiefs were hanged.

Obi asserts that, instead of silencing the other ethnic minority movements, the beheading of MOSOP propelled 'another change of form in the protest movement, the rise of the militant Ijaw movement and an escalation in the intensity [...] of the pan-delta quest to end internal colonisation, personal rule and the federal expropriation of the oil resources of the Niger Delta.'²⁷⁷

4.5. Emergence of IYC

Presumably, the federal government and TOC's lack of response to the peaceful protest of oil-producing communities, followed by brutal violence, hardened the activists and instigated the emergence of movements with a broader agenda demanding democratic development and self-determination.²⁷⁸

In comparison with MOSOP's sophisticated structure, IYC has been described as 'loosely organised and weakly accountable, right from the beginning, both upwards and downwards, which made it easy for potent forces to buy themselves in and capture the organisation.'²⁷⁹ Whether the latter is true remains to be seen, but with the conglomeration of numerous youth groups under its umbrella, IYC has tended to 'lose control.' Actions that have been ascribed to the IYC turn out not to have been related to the IYC at all, like the killing of twelve policemen in Odi, which sparked a brutal state reaction and the destruction of the village.²⁸⁰ The elusiveness of the Ijaw uprising and particularly the IYC in comparison with MOSOP have been linked to the difference in the physical sites of the two struggles. The Ogoni territory is relatively easily accessible,

²⁷⁶ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 131.

²⁷⁷ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 67.

²⁷⁸ F.N. Ikome 'Conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria': 7.

²⁷⁹ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 587.

²⁸⁰ A. Ikelegbe, 'The perverse manifestation of civil society': 13.

land-based and the Ogoni people do not live dispersed over six states as the Ijaws do. Ijawland, on the other hand, is predominantly riverine, with 'thick mangroves, swampy areas and poorly demarcated creeks and rivers that serve as strong barriers to effective policing.'²⁸¹

One of the first movements that were established in the wake of MOSOP in 1992 was the Ijaw-based Movement for the Survival of the Izon Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND). MOSIEND issued a charter based loosely on the OBR, in which they called for political autonomy for the Ijaw nation, restructuring of the Nigerian Federation, control over their own natural resources and adequate compensation for ecological adversities suffered as a result of oil exploration and production. In 1994 MOSIEND 'joined forces with' the Ijaw National Congress (INC), to further pursue its objectives through non-violent means. The INC is the umbrella organisation for all Ijaw speaking people in Nigeria.²⁸²

The impact of MOSIEND and a fleet of other ethnic, pan-ethnic, social, environmental, political, non-violent, militant, one-issue and multiple-issue groups that arose in the Niger Delta in the next few years came nowhere near what the IYC would soon bring about. According to Okonta and Douglas, the junta of Sani Abacha faced 'an increasingly restive Niger Delta, and the emergence of a new generation of educated youths who were now not only openly challenging corrupt chiefs and community leaders, but were also successfully mobilizing their communities to resist the oil companies[.]'²⁸³

This is said to have motivated Abacha to establish a new security outfit named Operation Salvage in August 1997 to, purportedly, 'tame the youths in Bayelsa State.'²⁸⁴ At about the same time, in Rivers State the military administrator there set up Operation Flush, declaring that he had obtained 'special emergency powers from Aso Rock [government

²⁸¹ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 26.

²⁸² I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 142; I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

²⁸³ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 144.

²⁸⁴ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 144.

HQ in Abuja] to deal “ruthlessly with economic saboteurs”.²⁸⁵ In April 1998 details leaked about a massive military operation being prepared by the junta to establish a new National Coastal Guard, ‘comprising the army, navy, air force, antiriot police, and customs, to ensure uninterrupted economic activities’ in the oil-producing communities.²⁸⁶

Ikelegbe notes that the persistent repressive, insensitive, non-responsive, arrogant character of the state that, even after the transition to democratic rule, was agitated merely by force or the threat of force, has contributed greatly to the development of violent tendencies of civil society groups in the Niger Delta.²⁸⁷ The history of the emergence and the transformation of the IYC exemplify this view. The IYC is also an example of a movement that descended into criminality and violent confrontation because it could not exercise firm control and leadership over its members. Another view is that these were merely expressions of grievances and frustrations as a result of injustice, oppression, marginalisation and inequity ‘by groups in a federation that has been anything but fair.’²⁸⁸

The Ijaw nation is the largest ethnic minority group in Nigeria. With a count of two million people, they are by far the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta. The bulk of the Ijaw live in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States, but they also inhabit non-coastal states such as Akwa Ibom, Cross-Rivers, and Edo. More than half of Shell’s crude oil output in the Niger Delta is extracted from Ijawland.²⁸⁹

The military build-up for Operations Salvage and Flush was interrupted for some time after the sudden death of General Abacha in June 1998. But once his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, took office in November of that year he immediately resumed equipping the navy and the army for a major offensive on the short term.

²⁸⁵ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 144.

²⁸⁶ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 144.

²⁸⁷ Ikelegbe, ‘The perverse manifestation of civil society’: 21.

²⁸⁸ Ikelegbe, ‘The perverse manifestation of civil society’: 20.

²⁸⁹ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 144.

The Ijaw youths did not wait for the imminent crack-down. On 11 December 1998 over five thousand youths, drawn from all five hundred communities and forty clans that make up the Ijaw nation, gathered in Kaiama. The conference had chosen this particular site for its location in reverence of the first Ijaw revolutionary, Isaac Adaka Boro, who had launched an unsuccessful uprising against the Nigerian federation in 1966 shortly before the breakout of the Biafra War.²⁹⁰ The gathering adopted the Kaiama Declaration, which presented an ultimatum for all oil companies to leave the Niger Delta by 30 December 1998, or it would eject the TOCs and take control of all oil wells in Ijawland.²⁹¹

The Kaiama Declaration is said to contain the 'essence of Ijaw nationalism.'²⁹² It proclaimed that all land and natural resources in Ijawland belong to the Ijaw communities and are the basis of their survival. It ceases to recognise all undemocratic decrees, such as the Land Use Decree of 1976 and the Petroleum Tax Decree of 1969 that 'robbed our communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent.'²⁹³ Another demand was the immediate withdrawal of 'all military forces of occupation and repression' from Ijawland, and further that '[a]ny oil company that employs the services of the armed forces to "protect" its operations will be reviewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people.'²⁹⁴

Like the Ogoni the Ijaws had started agitating against the neglect and abuse of their people and land long before the 1990s brought matters to a head. Between the 1970s and the late 1980s protests had taken the form of non-violent public demonstrations, petitions, advertisements in national newspapers, litigation in the courts and sending community delegations to TOCs, state and federal government.²⁹⁵ Obviously, the results of these

²⁹⁰ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'; C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 27.

²⁹¹ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 144; C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 23.

²⁹² O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 31.

²⁹³ O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 31.

²⁹⁴ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 23.

²⁹⁵ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 16.

were unsatisfactory. Starting in the 1990s protests assumed a more militant form and hostage-takings of TOC employees, occupation, disruption and vandalism of oil installations began to occur.²⁹⁶

The IYC is said to be a break-away movement from the mainstream, more conservative INC that had been using the same ineffectual approaches to advocate Ijaw rights for decades. As is the case with other movements, intergenerational tension is apparent in the IYC relationship with the INC.²⁹⁷ The agenda of INC had long been focused on the creation of a state for the Ijaws, who were 'passed by' during the splurges of the 80s and 90s.²⁹⁸ When Bayelsa State was finally established, the INC lost much of its urgency, although until this day it continues to press for yet more Ijaw states.²⁹⁹ But the INC supported the youths, who presented themselves as the radical wing of Ijaw nationalism and an alternative to the conservative INC.³⁰⁰ Certain INC cadres must have felt that the non-violent avenues chosen by the INC had been exhausted.³⁰¹ Although the Kaiama ultimatum was temporarily suspended after pleas from elders and other 'well-meaning Nigerians', and the Declaration moulded into a declaration of intent, violent actions across the Niger Delta by various ethnic Ijaw organisations has since then increased exponentially.³⁰² Eberlein mentions the 'rise and consequent co-optation of the IYC by actors within Rivers and Bayelsa State administrations.'³⁰³ Moreover, it has continued to constitute a problem for the leadership of IYC to control its highly diversified membership.³⁰⁴

It is important to bear in mind that, whatever the transformation of the struggle after the issuing of the Kaiama Declaration, its official stance was fundamentally non-violent. On December 28 the IYC unfolded its plans for Operation Climate Change. This constituted

²⁹⁶ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 16.

²⁹⁷ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 77.

²⁹⁸ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

²⁹⁹ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria': 16619.

³⁰⁰ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 588.

³⁰¹ A. Ikelegbe 'The perverse manifestation of civil society': 19.

³⁰² O. Agbu, 'Ethnic militias and the threat to democracy in post-transition Nigeria': 31.

³⁰³ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 586.

³⁰⁴ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 586.

a series of non-violent actions, starting with the ‘Ogele’, a traditional Ijaw dance where the spirits of the ancestors are invoked through song, stories and mime to cleanse the land, chastise the erring and heal the injured, which was to take place all over Ijawland for ten consecutive days in an atmosphere of joy, drink, and hope. The Ogele was meant to raise environmental awareness among the Ijaw nation and, rather than to provoke the government and TOCs, it was aimed to celebrate a period of regeneration and cleansing as a people.³⁰⁵ This was not how the military authorities saw it. Okonta and Douglas recount:

‘On the morning of December 30, the day marked by the Kaiama Declaration as the commencement of activities to implement its resolutions, young women and men all over the Ijaw nation trooped out to the streets and village squares in the thousands to dance and sing and voice out their grievances. They were not armed. They were not violent. They did not molest anybody. In a letter dispatched to all Ijaw villages and clans on December 28, the [IYC] had emphasized the need for participants in the Ogele/Operation Climate Change festivities, to be peaceful, courteous, and orderly. This was obeyed to the letter.’³⁰⁶

In the meantime, firepower of an unprecedented size was being ranged on Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa and the heart of Ijawland.³⁰⁷ What followed was a ‘wanton slaughter of unarmed dancers.’³⁰⁸ By the end of the day on 30 December Kaiama, Yenagoa, Odi, and Oloibiri were razed and, according to Human Rights Watch estimates, more than 200 people from these towns and nearby communities had been killed, and many more driven into the swamps.³⁰⁹ Soldiers set out on a rampage, looting, raping and molesting whomever they came across. The campaign of violence and death by the federal troops continued for days. In several instances there was active involvement of TOCs in the massacres, which offered helicopters and other resources for military expeditions.³¹⁰ The crackdown on the Ijaw nation left many communities destroyed, traumatised, and utterly resentful of a state that had revealed itself irrevocably as an enemy of its own people.

³⁰⁵ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 146.

³⁰⁶ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 147.

³⁰⁷ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 147.

³⁰⁸ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 148.

³⁰⁹ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 152.

³¹⁰ I. Okonta and O. Douglas, *Where vultures feast*: 154.

According to Sesay et al. the Egbesu Boys of Africa are the fighting arm of the IYC. The IYC is claimed to coordinate all Ijaw groups in the Niger Delta, and not, as Okonta and Douglas state, the INC.³¹¹ The creation of the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA) was a measure of defiance and growing militancy against the reign of terror that was unleashed on the Ijaws, and the militarization of the Niger Delta region. Sesay et al. argue that the consistent military pacification as the government response to all agitation in the region is what gave birth to the plethora of militant groups currently active in the Niger Delta.³¹² During the military attacks in January 1999, the Egbesu Boys stormed military checkpoints and posts in Kaiama, Yenagoa and on the express road, and they sacked police stations in Kaiama and in Odi.³¹³

Three weeks into January 1998 the IYC announced that Operation Climate Change would be indefinitely extended.³¹⁴ The anarchic (or utterly democratic?) character of the Ijaw struggle was complete, or so it appears. Has the struggle for justice among the Ijaw youths morphed into a bush fire of seemingly autonomous youth actions, violent incidents and confrontations, hostage-takings and intimidations?³¹⁵ Or have the 'vibrant mass-based movements' of the 1990s that were shaped from previously amorphous groups begun to acquire 'politically visible organisational structures [?]'³¹⁶ To what degree there was structure and organisation present in the militia at the time is not entirely certain. The leadership of the EBA is derived from different Ijaw organisations and communities. The assembly of this leadership, the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA) is headed by the Egbesu chief priest, who administers initiation rituals, spiritual fortification and communication with the Ijaw deity: Egbesu.³¹⁷

³¹¹ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 44; Ukeje also contends that the IYC provides an umbrella for all other Ijaw micro-groups. C. Ukeje 'Oil communities and political violence': 27.

³¹² A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 45.

³¹³ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 48.

³¹⁴ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 29.

³¹⁵ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 46, 51.

³¹⁶ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 31.

³¹⁷ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 45.

In 1998 the executive of the EBA comprised the chief priest Alex Preye, flanked by Felix Tuodolor as general secretary, F. Denumighan as director of mobilization, Clayton Daunumingnan as director of finance, Ambah Binaebi as director of environmental affairs, and Patrick Ziakede as director of public relations. The SEA was chaired by Sergeant Were Digifa. Former president of MOSIEND Timi Ogoruba was general secretary for some time, and Felix Tuodolor later became president of the IYC.³¹⁸

Although Sesay et al. note that it is difficult to assign specific actions to the EBA because its members are active in different militant organisations simultaneously, they continue to list a range of incidents and confrontations in which the EBA were purportedly implicated.³¹⁹ The EBA are said to have been the fighters in the Itsekiri-Ijaw conflicts in Delta State in 1997-1999, the Ijaw-Ilaje conflicts in Ondo State in 1998-2000 and from 2002 onwards, and the IYC-OPC clashes in Ajegunle suburb in Lagos in 2002. Moreover, they get ascribed to them ‘[m]ost of the seizures and takeovers, occupation of oil installations (sic), kidnapping of oil workers, hijacking of oil facilities, as well as bloody encounters with state security agencies in many parts of the Niger Delta have been traced to the Egbesu Boys in different militant movements in Ijawland.’³²⁰

Ijaws have complained that they are being singled out and stigmatised as being members of the ‘most violent, most militant uprising in the Niger Delta. The short-lived leadership of Asari Dokubo at the IYC has had far-reaching consequences for the organisation. The year 2001 is regarded as a break in the character and focus of the IYC. Allegedly, governor Peter Odili financed the rise of his close friend Asari Dokubo to the IYC presidency. ‘What started as a militant socio-economic movement was transformed into a ‘private security outfit of actors within the Rivers State government.’³²¹ Felix Tuodolor, who had been IYC president before Asari’s election challenged his vote, which resulted in a brief but violent stand-off.³²² Asari was too radical for the moderates in the IYC, who

³¹⁸ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 45-6.

³¹⁹ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 46.

³²⁰ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 47.

³²¹ R. Eberlein, ‘On the road to the state’s perdition?’: 587.

³²² ICG No.118: 4.

tried to remove him from the organisation. After the 2003 elections Asari Dokubo and Odili fell out, and the former declared war on his former patron.³²³

When president Obasanjo offered him and the NDV leader Tom Ateke an amnesty deal in exchange for their disarmament, Asari accepted. Although the militia leader denied having made a profit from the deal, Obasanjo allegedly paid \$1,000 for every rifle and \$10,000 for each machine gun handed in. Whatever the truth of this may be, Asari moved in to a comfortable villa in Port Harcourt and bought a couple of SUVs shortly after he signed the peace agreement. He has been accused of using the struggle to enrich himself with payments from both government and TOCs.³²⁴

Because he would not refrain from his separatist struggle, repeatedly making public statements about the imminence of secession, if the Nigerian government would not allow a National Sovereign Conference to debate the future of the nation, a demand that has been issued by almost all ethno-political groups in and outside the Niger Delta from the early 1990s onward, Asari was arrested in 2005. Despite his amnesty deal he was charged with treason, conspiracy and unlawful assembly.³²⁵

The elusiveness of Ijaw nationalism is partly due to the geography of Ijawland. Very different from Ogoniland Ijawland is spread over six states, large parts of which, especially in Bayelsa State, are poorly accessible, tucked away in a maze of thick mangroves, swamps, creeks and rivers.³²⁶ More than geography, it is the structure of the IYC and its central position in a web of militant and non-violent, social, environmental, human rights and other organisations, that makes it so difficult to pin down. The overlap of membership with some of these groups, and the impression that the IYC network exists as a 'militant wing', in the form of the EBA, a 'scientific wing' and an 'intellectual wing' in the form of Environmental Rights Action (ERA) and the Niger Delta-Human

³²³ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 589; ICG No.118: 4.

³²⁴ ICG No.118: 5.

³²⁵ ICG No.118: 5.

³²⁶ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 26.

and Environmental Rights Organisation (ND-HERO)³²⁷, basically means that the conceptualisation of IYC as an organisation as such is useless.

The IYC is administered by a collegiate body, a national executive and a zonal executive in the east, west and centre of the Niger Delta.³²⁸ In 2001 its leadership was collegiate made up of the leaders of the IYC satellites. These were at the time: Felix Tuodolor, Oronta Douglas, Bedford Abuele, Valentine Kuku, Roland Oweinanabo.³²⁹

Militant affiliates to IYC that are mentioned by Sesay et al. are: MOSIEND, FNDIC, NIDOPCODO, the Niger Delta Resistance Movement and the Membutu Boys.³³⁰ The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) is named by Sesay et al. as one of the main armed wings of the IYC. It is known to have been involved in insurgency, seizure of oil installations and violent confrontations with State security agencies. They have close ties with the EBA and its leader, Asari Dokubo, rests in detention.³³¹ The release of their leader is one recurring demand that 'kidnapping groups' in the Niger Delta make to the government.

4.6. MEND

The emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is closely linked with both IYC and the likes of NDPVF. It is the latest and the most impressive of the new militant movements that mushroomed in the Niger Delta after the turn of the millennium. The first actions of MEND occurred in January 2006 when militants attacked an offshore Shell facility, firing at Nigerian soldiers who were guarding the installation, and kidnapping four foreign contractors. That same day, a Shell pipeline was blown up.³³² Some days later, an attack on a Shell flow station in Benisede in Bayelsa State killed fourteen soldiers and two foreign contract workers and was claimed

³²⁷ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 30.

³²⁸ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 47.

³²⁹ A. Ikelegbe, 'The perverse manifestation of civil society': 12.

³³⁰ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 48-9.

³³¹ A. Sesay et al., *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*: 49-50.

³³² ICG No.118: 6.

by MEND, stating that it was a response to a shooting by soldiers at a community protest the previous year.³³³

Others have suggested that the arrests of Bayelsa State governor, Alamiyeseigha, and Asari-Dokubo has led to a new phase in the Niger Delta struggle, and the beginning of a low-level war.³³⁴ Alamiyeseigha was arrested, impeached and imprisoned on charges of money laundering in September 2005. The immediate release of Alamiyeseigha and Asari-Dokubo has been a constantly recurring demand of MEND and many of the new-wave militias that have become active in its wake.³³⁵ The emergence of MEND has been suggested by some to be a direct response to the arrests and an attempt of the governor's hired thugs to force the release of their 'godfather.' But others have an entirely different view of the nature and the origins of MEND, and blame all other impressions on 'impersonators' riding on the back of the socially engaged MEND, looking for some profit.³³⁶

More attacks and counterattacks followed, bringing the MEND militants into violent encounters with the military, and at the forefront of the militant struggle against the 'state-oil multinationals alliance.'³³⁷ The military has performed air strikes on Ijaw villages where MEND militants were supposedly hiding. Two car bombings, the first ever in the history of Nigerian politics, have so far been carried out by MEND, although it has refuted the claim for responsibility of one of these.³³⁸ One popular tactic of MEND is the kidnapping of expatriate staff of oil companies and sub-contractors. This, combined with being extremely savvy when it comes to gearing publicity and manipulating mass media,³³⁹ has not only brought MEND into the centre of the Nigerian public eye, but put it into a position where it could impact global oil price fluctuations by its actions, even

³³³ ICG No.118: 6.

³³⁴ R. Eberlein, 'On the road to the state's perdition?': 574.

³³⁵ Oil Spill Intelligence Report, 'Nigerian militants kidnap more oil workers', Vol.29, No.51 (Aspen Publishers: 14 December, 2006): 1-2.

³³⁶ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask' and 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³³⁷ C.I. Obi, *The oil paradox*: 22.

³³⁸ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 'Nigeria': 16619.

³³⁹ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

merely by its threats.³⁴⁰ Under the pseudonym of its spokesman, John Gbomo, MEND sends e-mails to journalists informing them about imminent attacks on pipelines, kidnappings and releases of expatriates, sometimes accompanied by visual material.³⁴¹

The degree of cooperation with other militant organisations is difficult to establish. MEND too has demanded the release of Dokubo Asari, but Gbomo emphasised that the relationship with the NDPVF is one of collaboration and influence, not of authority. According to ICG, MEND tries to position itself as an umbrella group for the militants in the region, but Gbomo says that MEND does not take in just anybody as a member. Militants who fight for MEND cannot be of 'dubious character.'³⁴² Yet, outsiders who perform operations that contribute to the MEND cause can usually count on the organisation's approval. Gbomo comments that:

'In any struggle there are bound to be several version as seen through the eyes of different participants. Some are fighting for a car, some for pride, some for a job or even food to eat; the more ambitious the hope that they may someday be governors, or local government chairmen, legislators etc in new states. This is normal. In the United States or Canada, what percentage agrees with government policies? These individuals for now are as leaves adrift and will go where we take them. For them, anywhere is better than here.'³⁴³

ICG interviewed another militant who offered insight into the current structure of command for militant action in the Niger Delta. The informant, a former member of NDPVF, explained that since Asari's arrest, militants had organised themselves in cells of five to fifteen people, with limited communication between the cells. The cells are quite free to carry out operations in the manner that they prefer. Some of the more radical cells leaned toward executing expatriate oil staff, as a next step in the campaign.³⁴⁴

After the arrest of Asari, most of the militant movements in the Niger Delta went underground, including MEND. Publicity is still being used as a tool to generate attention for the oil-producing communities' plight and to intimidate the state-oil multinational

³⁴⁰ ICG No.118: 8; I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask'.

³⁴¹ ICG No.118: 6.

³⁴² ICG No.118: 6.

³⁴³ ICG No.118: 7.

³⁴⁴ ICG No.118: 7.

alliance, but the organisations' leaders no longer venture out in public. Infiltration by government agents has been a concurrent fact, but the decentralised nature of the movements has kept this strategy reasonably in check. One militant leader commented: 'our disunity is our strength', confirming that if the militant groups of the Niger Delta were united, they would probably have been destroyed by now.³⁴⁵

Gbomo compared the structure of the militant groups to a hydra, the mythological Greek serpent with many heads, which, when one was cut off, would grow two back.³⁴⁶ This visualisation of MEND is akin to the interpretation of Okonta when he asserts that this movement is not so much an organisation, as it is an idea, 'a general principle underlying the slew of communal, civic and youth movements that began to proliferate in the Niger Delta, and particularly in the Ijaw-speaking areas, in the wake of General Babangida's failed structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s.'³⁴⁷

The consequences of the SAP were felt severely in the Niger Delta region. Lacking government jobs in the first place, and the only industry present being the capital-intensive oil industry, thousands of Ijaws who had been retrenched from their jobs in the cities and towns began to stream back to their homes in the swamps of the Niger Delta.³⁴⁸ Many of these youths were educated, and politically knowledgeable. They would become the driving force of a new insurgency in the Niger Delta. Obi has described the ways in which the youth, after economic crisis and structural adjustment, lost confidence in their elders and traditional rulers. Most of them are educated, with high school diplomas and university degrees. Yet they remain unemployed. Those without education are even worse off, because there is little farmland and fishing has become a high cost/risk venture that most cannot afford.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ ICG No.118: 7.

³⁴⁶ ICG No.118: 7.

³⁴⁷ I. Okonta, MEND: 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³⁴⁸ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask'.

³⁴⁹ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 78.

Contributing to the amorphous militancy of the Niger Delta have been the possibilities offered by modern ICT. The use of cell phones, satellite television and internet has broadened the possibilities of communication and cooperation between militants and other groups in remote areas, heightened their awareness of what the impact of their actions could be on the global stage, and opened new avenues to involve Nigerians and the global community in what is happening in the Niger Delta.³⁵⁰ On the other hand, the ICT revolution has not passed the government by either. Cell phone signals can be pinpointed accurately with electronic devices, making the MEND leadership extremely cautious in using them.³⁵¹

The militancy of MEND and its violent, even if calculated, tactics cannot be denied. However, the leadership makes it clear that its involvement in criminal activities is marginal. Oil bunkering is something that only a minority of their membership has 'drifted into,' and some have offered protection services for corrupt politicians and oil companies.³⁵² MEND hostages have never been harmed, or so they claim, and although the government claims that hostages' release has often been in exchange for ransom, and not, as the explicit political stance of MEND would have it, for concessions of a social kind, the objective of hostage-taking is said to be 'fundamentally political', as it focuses the attention of western media on the grievances of the oil communities.³⁵³ MEND does not prioritise a non-violent approach, but armed force is regarded as merely a tactical tool.³⁵⁴ In February 2006 its violent actions reduced Nigeria's oil output by 25 percent.³⁵⁵

Okonta asserts that the military helicopter attack on Okerenkoko in Gbaramatu kingdom, purportedly aimed at stamping out an 'oil-bunkering epicentre', and that killed several innocent civilians, induced the creation of MEND.³⁵⁶ But this attack took place one month after the first MEND operations in January 2006. But this is not to argue that the

³⁵⁰ ICG No.118: 8; I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask'.

³⁵¹ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³⁵² I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³⁵³ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³⁵⁴ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask'.

³⁵⁵ ICG No.119: 6.

³⁵⁶ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Behind the mask'.

MEND insurgency was unprovoked, but from the previous it becomes clear that its nascence is not as readily accounted for as was the case with IYC and MOSOP. Like IYC, MEND is an Ijaw movement. It perceives its birth to be a direct roll-out of the Adaka Boro revolution of 1966.³⁵⁷ The youths' disdain for their traditional leaders, who, in their perception, 'sold out' the Niger Delta communities to the TOCs and the federal government in exchange for benefits and power, was a catalyst for the movement's inception.³⁵⁸

The founding core of the MEND membership comes from the Gbaramatu clan, states Okonta, who at the same time emphasises that MEND is not a formal organisation with a clear membership structure, or a chain of command.³⁵⁹ Okonta confirms what was concluded by the ICG that MEND operates as a loose coalition of separate units, which basically make their own decisions.

The inception of MEND appears to have merged with its first activities, the attacks at Benisede flow-station and the hostage-taking of four expatriate staff-members.³⁶⁰ According to Okonta, a key grievance of MEND is the exclusion of Ijaws from political participation since the instalment of the democratic regime of Obasanjo in 1999.³⁶¹ But *Tell Magazine* states that the four major demands of MEND, which were issued during one of the early episodes of hostage-takings, must have been 'contrived to be rejected'. These were the release of Dokubo Asari and Alamiyesiagha; an increase in the derivation formula of 25 percent that year and 20 percent the following years annually until the Niger Delta states have complete resource control; and finally, that Shell should pay the \$1,5 billion in reparations for 50 years' environmental violence against Ijaw communities, which it was summoned to pay by a Port Harcourt high court.³⁶² A *Vanguard* article went as far as to posit that the main drive of the MEND agitation is the

³⁵⁷ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³⁵⁸ ICG No.119: 6.

³⁵⁹ I. Okonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

³⁶⁰ ICG No.118: 6.

³⁶¹ I. Okonta, 'Niger Delta: Restoring the rights of citizens'.

³⁶² A. Agbo and A. Ero, 'Operation Black Mambo begins', *Tell Magazine. Nigeria's Independent Weekly* (Lagos: 20 March 2006).

release from prison of Alamiyesiagha, who was allegedly their ‘godfather’. ‘It is suspected that the group included Asari-Dokobo and the agitation for resource control to give their terror campaign a semblance of acceptance by Niger-Deltans but that has not worked so far in the minds of many.’³⁶³

The same article expresses severe doubt about the identity of the militant group that emerged in Bayelsa State. ‘A leader of an Ijaw group contacted [...] Saturday [by] Vanguard said that the boys are known as Bushmen and expressed surprise that they identified themselves with the new name of MEND.’ The confusion is portrayed by the article as an attempt of MEND to mask its private interests in the local conflict economy with a broader, but flimsy social agenda. ‘It is a product of some careful planning by the bunch of hooligans. The gameplan is to make it look as if the trouble is a Niger-Delta affair. They started from Rivers State before retreating to the creeks of Bayelsa where they are lords.’³⁶⁴

If this was the case in January 2006, it seems that what happened in the course of the next few months was a classic example of a criminal gang turning into a rebel movement. Another, perhaps more useful, scenario is that Ijaw activists retroactively appropriated the activities of this independent cell of the struggle as they caught the attention of the world. MEND, in this vision, is not just an idea, but a construct, contrived from a convergence of circumstances. This, of course, is only viable if the allegations in the quoted article are true.

Even if the sources that the authors of the article claim to have spoken with are real, it is difficult, if not impossible to establish whether they spoke the truth. The problem with a movement that is structured as a hydra is that there is no way to assess which of its elements is really part of the movements and which is a ‘fluke’. On the other hand, as long as the response of the government remains to ignore their demands, or to call in the

³⁶³ E. Amaize, ‘Killings, kidnap in Niger Delta. Villagers flee en masse from troubled spots as pressures mount over abducted foreigners’, *Vanguard* (Lagos: 21 January 2006).

³⁶⁴ E. Amaize, ‘Killings, kidnap in Niger Delta’.

armed forces, it does not matter much. It only becomes a handicap when negotiations are imminent.

In October 2006 an attempt to initiate dialogue with the militant groups of the Niger Delta was finally made by the government. Forty representatives from groups in Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers States participated in a three-day brainstorming session in Delta State with top government officials and peace groups. The focus of the brainstorming session was how to resolve the Niger Delta crisis in general, and to bring an end to the wave of hostage-takings in the region in particular.³⁶⁵

In November, another meeting was convened in Bayelsa State, this time between the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Owoye Andrew Azazi, and militant youths. Azazi commented to *Vanguard* that this intervention was required due to 'the increasing level of crimes in the region committed under the guise of fighting for the Niger Delta.'³⁶⁶ Some of the youths who were present at the convention subscribed to that viewpoint, conceding that '[the] continued incarceration [of Dokubo Asari] had given room for all kinds of crimes to be committed in the region under the guise of seeking his release. They expressed hope that the release would bring an end to hostilities in the region.'³⁶⁷ As dialogue was taking place, attacks continued to occur on flow stations in Bayelsa State, and several expatriate oil workers were kidnapped. A certain Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC) issued a statement, saying that they would continue to commit and endorse violent actions until Dokubo Asari is released from prison.

'We have thus far allowed those who conspired to keep Dokubo-Asari in jail roam around our states and region peacefully. We have allowed them to dream up high political challenges. It shall come to pass that our anger will no longer be directed at the oil and gas companies. [...] Desperate situations demand desperate measures. At this point, we lack the ability to maintain restraint [...]'³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ E. Amaize, 'Niger Delta militant groups, govt meet to end hostage-taking', *Vanguard* (AllAfrica: 4 October, 2006).

³⁶⁶ S. Oyodongha and J. Onoyume, 'Niger Delta: Army, militants hold dialogue', *Vanguard* (Lagos: 13 November, 2006).

³⁶⁷ S. Oyodongha and J. Onoyume, 'Niger Delta: Army, militants hold dialogue'.

³⁶⁸ S. Oyodongha and J. Onoyume, 'Niger Delta: Army, militants hold dialogue'.

4.7. A process of transformation

The emergence of militia movements in the Niger Delta cannot be regarded as a linear process. The multi-dimensional structure of the organisations and their mutual external linkages, with members that are committed to more than one organisation at the same time, and a continuous regeneration of groups, show that it is impossible to attribute a certain action, or a series of actions, to one particular movement. The ongoing transformations of the movements reflect the contradictions and factions within the movements: elders versus youths, democracy versus dictatorship, conservative versus radical. However, as Obi notes, these contradictions are fluid because they do not preclude alliances across the trenches when the situation requires. Issues that bring all the movements together are 'the increased share in oil revenues, repeal of exploitative laws, bigger compensation for oil pollution, development for the Niger delta, employment and provision of good social welfare.'³⁶⁹ For the same reason, it is difficult to ascribe a violent, non-violent or predatory nature to either one of the movements. Like MEND, and even IYC, they can be both violent and non-violent at the same time. Because the ethnic militia movements are part of networks in which different cells, groups and movements take up different facets of the struggle, and use varying means to achieve their goals, their approach does not necessarily conform to a set of principles proclaimed by any 'umbrella movement.' Although MEND advertises itself as an umbrella organisation, this does not counteract the ambiguity of its own nature and the circumstances of its nascence.

The role of leadership should not be underestimated. When the battle over the IYC presidency broke out between Dokubo Asari and Tuodolor in 2001, it was the nature of IYC - Asari's radicalism, including an inclination toward separatism versus Tuodolor's more moderate stance - that was at stake.³⁷⁰ The execution of Saro-Wiwa, in addition to the persistent obliteration of the Ogoni civil society and social infrastructure by the pacification tactics of the government, brought MOSOP to near expiration. It continues to press for economic and political reforms, but it has lost most of its strength and

³⁶⁹ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 94.

³⁷⁰ ICG No.118: 4.

international leverage.³⁷¹ The internal disagreements between Saro-Wiwa and more moderate figures in the movement's cadres about the degree of radicalism that MOSOP should support have not been resolved. The internal dispute was decided by the government's heavy-handed intervention. MOSOP is seen until this day as the proto-ethnic militia movement in the Niger Delta.³⁷² But its non-violent stance sets it far apart from most of the movements that followed in its wake.³⁷³

4.8. Conclusion: the development nexus

As organisations especially, IYC and MEND are not distinct, autonomous entities. They are part of networks and allegiances of organizations and movements, and they are internally fragmented. Even MOSOP functions as an umbrella for a variety of sub-organisations, contributing to the struggle through diverging means - peaceful, political and civil advocacy, militant and violent. IYC and MEND's apparent lack of official membership further complicates matters with regard to constituency and 'ownership' of activities.

An interesting demand of MEND, in addition to the adaptation of the derivation formula so that 25-50 percent of oil revenue will be assigned to the oil-producing communities, is that these funds should be channelled through foundations in control of people from the community to prevent the money from disappearing in the process.³⁷⁴ For Collier and Hoeffler, there is no problem in paying the money that would come from a serious increase in the percentage of the derivation formula directly to Bayelsa State. More money in the state budget means, for Collier and Hoeffler, more money for development, which is deemed to be primarily an economic affair. From economic development would automatically follow economic growth and this in turn creates circumstances adverse to rebellion. But Galtung explains that class cleavages – and thus unequal distribution - are

³⁷¹ E.E. Osaghae, 'The Ogoni uprising': 325-44.

³⁷² E.E. Osaghae, 'The Ogoni uprising': 325-6.

³⁷³ ICG No.115: 5.

³⁷⁴ ICG No.118: 5.

tioned in the social structure. Structural violence will only end when there is social justice for the people of the Niger Delta.³⁷⁵

Ake holds a similar view. He argues that development is connected to peace because it provides an environment in which people can strive for their self-realisation.³⁷⁶ Economic growth does not necessarily mean a rise in all people's incomes, nor is it synonymous with equality and social justice. Ake was more concerned with social and economic rights that are the dividend of development and democratisation, while Collier considers that the latter might even increase the risk of armed rebellion.³⁷⁷

While Collier and Hoeffler are mainly concerned with economic development as a cure for the emergence of rebel movements, Burton focuses rather on human development. All the grievances, or needs, that have come forward in this chapter, be they environmental justice, a more favourable outcome of the revenue derivation formula, protection of land rights, opportunities for employment or general security, pertain to the current situation of unequal distribution of power.

Collier and Hoeffler might not disagree with the conclusion that a struggle for self-determination is at hand in the Niger Delta, but they would differ with Burton about what caused it, or, as they prefer to put it, what were the factors that made the rebels take up arms in the first place to claim their right to self-determination. The proxies that they name are only partly present in the Niger Delta. There is a dependency on natural resources, but not so much on donations from a diaspora. Subventions from hostile governments also seem to be a source of financing for the Niger Delta ethnic militia movements. However, the income derived from illegal bunkering is a good substitute for those two 'missing' sources of income. Moreover, Collier and Hoeffler do not mention the funds that can be, and in the Niger Delta are certainly being gathered from state politicians in exchange for election muscle. Another source of income is the cash

³⁷⁵ J. Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research': 171.

³⁷⁶ C. Ake, *Democratization of disempowerment in Africa*: 3.

³⁷⁷ P. Collier, 'Development and conflict'.

payments and rents that TOCs pay to community members, and finally, government inducements to submit arms or sign a peace agreement can spice up the account of another organisation that was not included in the peace deal. The low cost of starting an army in the Niger Delta is in large part due to the pervasive youth crisis in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. Still, opportunity and availability of funding do not equal cause or even motivation.

The best way to guarantee that the basic human needs of the Niger Delta people are met is a human rights regime in the region and in the country, or so Odendaal and Amoo claim.³⁷⁸ Constitutional reform, for example a change or removal of the indigene/settlers dichotomy, is one urgent step.³⁷⁹ It is no wonder that nearly all the militia movements clamour for a Sovereign National Conference in which the future of the federation, in other words the constitution, can be reviewed. Obasanjo has kept this prospective at bay. He has no desire to open up possibilities to abolish the Nigerian nation in its present form. Osaghae states that:

‘[...] constitutionalism is crucial to salvaging the weak state with regard to creating or enhancing its relative autonomy and thereby strengthening its capacity to manage conflict. If [...] constitutional law has to do “with the creation, distribution, exercise, legitimational effects and reproduction of power,” then it is reasonable to expect well-directed constitutional reform to at least help insulate the state from the abuses and excesses that attend lack of autonomy.’³⁸⁰

Another important aspect of constitutionalism and the possibility of a Sovereign National Conference are the opportunities they offer for participation. A system for participation is one key outcome of a needs-based process of governance.³⁸¹ As opposed to the current institutions of violence, there is a need for a restructuring of social and political institutions. However, the level of participation that people enjoy in ‘their’ ethnic militia movements must not be underestimated. Osaghae reckons that in Africa, ethnicity forms the inevitable foundation of civil society structures.³⁸²

³⁷⁸ G.S. Amoo and A. Odendaal, ‘The political management of ethnic conflict’: 33.

³⁷⁹ E.E. Osaghae, ‘State, constitutionalism and the management of ethnicity in Africa’: 86.

³⁸⁰ E.E. Osaghae, ‘State, constitutionalism and the management of ethnicity in Africa’: 88.

³⁸¹ W.R. Potapchuk, in J. Burton, ‘Conflict’: 276.

³⁸² E.E. Osaghae, ‘Political transitions and ethnic conflict in Africa’: 234.

Conclusion

To say that either greed or grievance brought MOSOP, IYC and MEND into being does not correspond to the complexity of the situation in the Niger Delta. Moreover, after they emerged the militia movements did not remain in a vacuum. Rather they became part of, or were bred in the dynamics in the Niger Delta political economy that evolves around competition over resources and administrative units, criminal activities such as oil bunkering and extortion of TOCs to obtain redress and privileges.

Clearly, the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta has been a process of transformation, rather than a break with and a totally new development from what agitation had been there earlier. MOSOP was the product of Ogoni elite minority politics, and coupled with the radicalism and the militancy of an angry new generation. The IYC came in the wake of MOSOP, and embodied a continuance of the intergenerational polarisation that had ushered in MOSOP's fatal divisions. But contrary to MOSOP, the IYC did not institutionalise the power of the chiefs. Rather, it was an expression of a deliberate disengagement of the youths from their elders. Their social goals were not shared, and the IYC even publicly rejected certain agreements that the INC had made with the federal government previously on behalf of the Ijaw nation.³⁸³ The transformation of the Niger Delta struggle after the demise of MOSOP is exemplified by the emergence of IYC. While both were shaped as umbrella organisations, for MOSOP this fragmentation was an instrument in its continual attempts to connect an elite leadership to a grassroots base. For IYC, the fragmentation was not a tool, but inherent in its nature. IYC was, and for a large part remains, a truly mass-based, grassroots organisation.

Because its base is fragmented, even literally dispersed between the creeks and the swamps of the delta, the IYC organisation must accordingly be heterogeneous, flexible

³⁸³ C.I. Obi, 'The changing forms of identity politics in Nigeria': 77.

and inclusive. This has resulted in the impression that the movements is 'out of control.' It may be true, but it is important to recognise that there are many more Ijaws than there are Ogoni, and the latter inhabit a small and well-defined territory that is much easier to penetrate and consequently to 'tame', because it lacks the mangrove swamps, creeks and rivers that make Ijawland so conveniently to be a maze.³⁸⁴ Similarly, it has been argued that it is precisely the amorphous structure of the IYC that saved it from the fate that befell MOSOP.

The birth of MEND is even less a process in its own right than the emergence of MOSOP and IYC. When MEND manifested itself through its first radical actions in January 2006, it was merely a new name that was labelled to groups and operations that had been pervading the Niger Delta since the turn of the millennium. True, developments in the political environment and the renewed resolve of the federal government to clamp down on the insurgency in the Niger Delta, of which the arrest of Dokubo Asari and even the incarceration of governor Alamiyeseigha were clear examples, had again made it imperative for the movements to become ever more elusive. Even Okonta, who is a proponent of MEND, confirms that the movement is 'an idea', a construction that offers coherence, or at least the semblance of coherence to 'the slew of communal, civic and youth movements that began to proliferate in the Niger Delta, and particularly in the Ijaw-speaking areas in the wake of General Babangida's failed structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s.'³⁸⁵

With MEND, the fragmented structure of the ethnic militia movements has become, after the instrumentalism of MOSOP and the inherence of IYC, 'umbrellism' in its truest form. Its function is to incorporate, not to contain or to control. Moreover, its objective is not to mobilise or to politicise the issues that afflict its popular base. It is merely to put the reigns on, and ride the forces that are already raging within their aggrieved communities. Whether these forces are directed toward social and political change or whether they are profit-focused does not make a real difference for MEND, as long as the

³⁸⁴ C. Ukeje, 'Oil communities and political violence': 26.

³⁸⁵ I. Ikonta, 'MEND: Anatomy of a people's militia'.

benefits flow in the direction of its nucleus and consequently are sure to advance the goals of MEND. And here comes the crux of the matter, which is that the goals of MEND, i.e. the objective of the umbrella, are nothing less than social, economic and political justice for the Niger Delta people. However practical, *realpolitik*-driven the construction of MEND might be, its lack of a principal ideology – for example, it did not issue a Bill of Rights or a Declaration, like MOSOP, IYC and so many other movements-should not be confused with cynicism or worse, war-entrepreneurialism. If there is indeed a central leadership of MEND, it is highly unlikely to profit much from what the Niger Delta political economy has to offer. Note that this can change, and probably already has changed radically within the context of the presidential elections in 2007. But this exceeds the matter that is the focus of this study.

The internal dynamics of MOSOP, with its polarisation of youth vs. elders, radicals vs. conservatives and militancy vs. advocacy, has brought to the fore how the rise of the youth transformed the struggle of the Niger Delta. The youth ‘hijacked’ MOSOP, formed IYC and make up a large part of the slew of movements that are brought together under MEND. Other parts of this slew, that have been rudely neglected in this study for lack of time and space, but are crucial in the struggle for justice in the Niger Delta, include women’s movements and other civic, especially environmental organisations. The youth movements, including IYC have often worked in close collaboration with these and they are an integral part of the networks that line the Niger Delta rebellion. Their emergence, fortification and radicalisation were equally linked to the ramifications of SAP, economic crises, authoritarian government and the revolution against the local gerontocracy. Democratisation weakened the powerbase of the traditional ruling class, much as it was weakened by the end of colonial rule. Under both the colonial administration and the military regime it let itself be co-opted by the powers that be at the expense of those who were subjected to their ‘native authority’: rural youth, women, and indigenes.

Although democratisation has weakened the power of the chiefs, it has not in turn brought about the emancipation of their subjects. What Ake has called a second democratisation, and what Osaghae says should follow the failed second liberation, will

occur through a social transformation taking place within mostly rural communities. The rights that are appropriate to communal life: participation, well-being, freedom within the limits of the community, rather than as an individual, are more important than elections or any of the civil, and political rights that are usually promoted as the pillars of a democratisation process, Ake has argued. Political democratisation is meaningless without a social revolution that guarantees participation for those who are excluded from power within their communities. Economic growth and development are equally meaningless without ‘a constant referral to the nature of the state and the dynamics of the social forces in which it is embedded.’³⁸⁶

What does all this mean with regard to the debates around greed versus grievance? The aim of this study is to reveal the social, political and economic dynamics that caused community leaders, often youths, to organise and fight for either social change or financial gain and, in some cases, both. When does a revolt against the social injustice of a few elderly men, who keep all benefits derived from TOCs and government patronage for themselves, become a struggle for profit? Is it when the disenfranchised, in this case the youth, make it their objective to replace these usurpers, instead of just to dethrone them? Or is it when they themselves become stakeholders in the political economy that forms the original basis of power for the elders and the political elite? How is a group able to operate within a system, without becoming part of that system? How can it advance its goals, and increase its power –which is just another way of saying that it is capable of furthering its objectives- without entering the competition for access to resources? According to Reno access to resources is exactly what power constitutes in a political economy. These questions will not be answered here, but the evidence shows that it would be extremely difficult.

Collier and Hoeffler attach little value to structural causes like social and political grievances that might lead to the escalation of conflict. For their purpose they expect more result from a focus on quantifiable factors. This is why, rather than spending much

³⁸⁶ C. Ake, see page 48 in this study.

time on structural causes, they examine those factors that in their view make rebellion viable.³⁸⁷ In this approach motives are less decisive than opportunity in predicting the outbreak of civil war. Collier and Hoeffler confuse enabling factors with causes. Moreover, the perspective of Collier and Hoeffler on the conflict system of the Niger Delta precludes historical context and change. Their system is a simple mechanism, in which the different parts drive other parts that will invariably come back to drive the same parts. Low costs of raising an army, opportunities to finance a rebellion and, more particularly: income per capita; male secondary schooling; growth rate of the economy are some of the proxies that in their view support the likeliness of the occurrence of conflict and, in this case the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. There are two short remarks to be made with regard to these proxies. Firstly, they leave no room for a transformation of either the struggle, or of the movements that are said to be driven by these proxies. Social dynamics, internal cleavages and polarisation simply do not fit within the model that Collier and Hoeffler propose. This is hardly surprising, since it is exactly why they have eliminated complicating factors such as historical context and social dynamics from their analytical framework in the first place. Yet, they are important aspects of the process. The second is that at least one of the proxies appears not to be true at all, namely the level of male secondary schooling. As comes forward in the study, it is precisely the frustration that came with having obtained high school diplomas and university degrees and yet not being able to find employment that intensified the crisis of youth in the wake of SAP, economic decline and social marginalisation. Other factors, such as the privatisation of security, ethnic exclusion, the collapse of state legitimacy and government centralism may be linked to some of the proxies of Collier and Hoeffler. So, the privatisation of security, which was a direct consequence of the end of military rule and its state-fostered security alliances – at least formally, since, with the continuing militarization of the Niger Delta it can be argued that the state continues to provide security for the TOCs with deployment of the army, navy and police - can be seen as enhancing the low cost of raising a rebel army. But in no manner does this explain how the emergence of the ethnic militia movements has been

³⁸⁷ Collier and Hoeffler, 'Greed and grievance in civil war': 563.

caused by the privatisation of security, nor how the privatisation of security itself was brought about. More importantly, it fails to reveal anything about the dynamics that are affected by the privatisation of security and the effects that this mutation of the conflict system may have with regard to the youth, the state and the Niger Delta political economy. Other factors that have contributed to the transformation of the youth resistance are the military pacification tactics and the intensification of community development projects.

Burton's perspective of basic human needs leaves more room for the 'transformation argument', which includes the growing opposition against not only the federal state and TOCs, but also the traditional and the local political elites who continue to accumulate wealth, while excluding youth, women and settlers from access to economic and social resources. Although earlier generations of agitators for oil-minorities' rights might have suffered from at least relative deprivation of their basic human needs, and they obviously had economic incentives that correspond to Collier and Hoeffler's greed proxies, it was this deprivation aggravated by the combined forces of SAP, economic crisis, gerontocratic and neo-patrimonial exclusivist rule that made the ethnic militia movements emerge in the form in which they did. This aggravated deprivation on top of the original marginalisation of the oil-minorities and the state-oil alliance's violation of human rights is what caused the youths of the Niger Delta to rise, engage in the conflict system of the Niger Delta, and transform it socially, politically and economically by doing so.

The significant differences between MOSOP, IYC and MEND demonstrate the dynamic nature of the system in which they emerged. The proxies, as described by Collier and Hoeffler, as far as they were ever relevant, have not changed much between the rise of MOSOP and the manifestation of MEND. The changes in the social dynamics and the political and economic context informing these dynamics are related to the basic human needs described by Burton and, in particular those linked to the need for participation and self-determination, described by Potapchuk.

But the basic human needs perspective of Burton has little explanatory value with regard to the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta without bringing in the contextual element of Galtung's structural violence. Only when it is understood that the exclusion and denial of basic human needs like participation, well-being and freedom is a case of structural violence, inflicted by the gerontocracy of traditional rulers on its youth, women and other marginalised, does its full impact and meaning become clear. The structural violence of the traditional elite is enmeshed in the structural violence of the state and the TOCs. Unequal distribution of power is what propels the emergence of ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta. In the political economy of the Niger Delta the pursuit of rights and especially the right of self-determination is a direct claim to the power structures that determine the distribution of oil revenue. But the struggles that occur for claims for power and rights are in the first place of a social nature.

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