

The Origin of Marginalization and Alienation in the Niger Delta Region

¹John Kalama & ²Asanebi, Daupamowei Henry

¹Department of Political Science, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

²Department of History and International Relations, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Abstract

The origin of marginalization, exploitation and alienation currently been experienced by the Niger Delta people can be traced to the pre-colonial and colonial era when several laws and policies were unilaterally formulated to perpetually and undermine the Niger Delta and its people. Relative deprivation, frustration aggression hypothesis was applied in analyzing and explaining the subject-matter. Descriptive qualitative analysis and secondary sources of data (textbooks, published articles, journals and materials from the internet) were relied upon. Findings in this study revealed that the Native Authority Ordinance of 1804 and other legislations excluded the aborigines of Niger Delta from economic and political activities in the oil-rich region. The study also shows that the introduction of warrant chiefs coupled with the frequent arrest and dethronement of Niger Delta leaders and chiefs further weakened the solidarity and unity among the people. In the same vein, pre-colonial and colonial legacies such as the indirect rule system of administration further marginalized and alienated the Niger Delta people from their environment and resources. Thus, exploitation and alienation became intensified and institutionalized even after independence in 1960 to date. However, to address the issue of marginalization, exploitation and alienation in the Niger Delta region, there is urgent need for political and electoral reforms that will re-structure the present defective federal structure in Nigeria to ensure that only credible citizens emerge as leaders in the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. Efforts should also be made to abolish, amend or repeal all obnoxious and outdated laws and policies that encourage marginalization, exploitation and alienation in the Niger Delta and Nigeria in general hence, the passage of fresh laws such as the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) should be accorded top priority by the National Assembly and the federal government of Nigeria.

Keywords: *Niger Delta Region, Marginalization, Aborigines, Exploitation, Alienation, Laws and Policies.*

Corresponding Author: John Kalama

Background to the Study

Researchers have argued that the present violence and instability in Africa was inherited from the pre-colonial and colonial systems. Thus, Sabelo (2011) also maintained that the current violence and instability plaguing the African continent can be traced to colonialism and its reproduction of African subjectivities, where race was used not only to inferiorize black people into damnes, but to deny their very humanity, so as to justify such forms of violence as slavery, colonial conquest, dispossession, imprisonment, rape, and killing. According to him "the colonized were defined as inferior and obstacles to modernity (in economic, religious or other terms), in many cases justifying the suspension of normal ethical conventions, and so use of violence, to modernize colonized peoples and places. African nationalism then reproduced colonial violence and authoritarianism, bequeathing it on post-colonial Africa as a model of governance".

Pre-colonial and colonial experiences in the Niger Delta also produced unpleasant outcomes as it was based on master-servant relationship. This no doubt led to several protests, demonstrations and revolts by the aborigines and natives of the Niger Delta region who demanded equal rights to participate in trade and commercial activities in the oil-rich region. Pre-colonial attempts to seek justice and equity often led to severe consequences aimed at silencing the voice of the people. Fall-outs of pre-colonial exploitation and alienation include the Akassa Raid of 29th January 1895, the Benin massacre of 1897 etc. The level of pre-colonial exploitation and alienation in the Niger Delta and its post-colonial consequences on the people therefore, form the major thrust of the study.

Methodology and Scope

This section of the study provides a description of the sources of data used and the applicable methodology. Thus, the data used in this study were curled from secondary sources (textbooks, published articles, journals and materials from the internet) and descriptive/content analysis was used. Emphasis was however placed on pre-colonial analysis of marginalization, exploitation and alienation of the people of Niger Delta.

Theoretical Framework

The study succinctly combines the frustration aggression theory and the theory of relative deprivation to buttress the history of marginalization, exploitation and alienation in the Niger Delta. The original formulation of the frustration aggression hypothesis by Dollard et al. (1939), concentrated on the limited interference with an expected attainment of a desired goal on hostile (emotional) aggression. Developments since then have shown that the frustration-aggression hypothesis is intended to suggest to the student of human nature that when he sees aggression he should turn a suspicious eye on possibilities that the organism or group is confronted with frustration; and that when he views interference with individual or group habits, he should be on the look-out for, among other things, aggression (Green, 1941). The frustration aggression theory states that aggression is caused by frustration. When someone is prevented from reaching his target, he becomes frustrated. This frustration then can turn into aggression when something triggers it (Berkowitz, 1980). Aggression is usually directed towards the cause

of the frustration, but if this is not possible, the aggression may be displaced on to another person or object. The Niger Delta people have for so long craved to enjoy the proceeds of the oil deposit in their lands but unfortunately, what they get in return is pollution and environmental damage caused by activities of oil companies. The frustration emanating from the insensitivity of the Nigerian state and oil companies eventually turned the region into a complex operating environment, characterized by intra and inter-ethnic conflict, conflict between the communities and the oil companies and conflict between armed groups and the oil companies and Nigerian security forces. Thus, it is appropriate to aver that when people perceive that they are being alienated and prevented from achieving a goal, their frustration is likely to turn to aggression. The activities of oil companies and their agents have turned the Niger Delta, the hitherto peaceful region into a complex crisis region for over half a century as the closer the people get to their goal of enjoying the proceeds of oil which nature deposited in the region, the greater the excitement and expectation of the pleasure.

However, the closer the people are, the more frustrated they get by being held back. Similarly, relative deprivation is the experience of being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled to have (Walker and Smith, 2001). Relative deprivation therefore refers to the discontent people feel when they compare their positions to those of similarly situated and find that they have been less than their peers. It is a condition that is measured by comparing one group's situation to the situations of those who are more advantaged (Beyertz, 1999, Schaefer 2008) explains it as "the conscious experience of a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities" while Beyertz (1999) ascribes it to the social sciences for describing feelings or measures of economic, political, or social deprivation that are relative rather than absolute. The concept of relative deprivation has important consequences for both behaviour and attitudes, including feelings of stress, political attitudes, and participation in collective action. This no doubt explains why the conflict in the Niger Delta increased in the post-colonial era (1960-2008) hence, prompting the Federal Government under President Umaru Yar'Adua to issue the amnesty proclamation for Niger Delta youths who were engaged in armed struggle against the Nigerian state in July, 2009.

Analysis Showing the Origin of Marginalization, Exploitation and Alienation in the Niger Delta

This aspect of the study examined the nature of interaction that took place in pre-colonial Niger Delta between the early aborigines and the colonial masters and their agents.

Jaja of Opobo - British Government Relations in the 19th Century: Born in 1821, Jaja of Opobo rose from a slave boy to a king who founded the Opobo Kingdom from where he controlled the better part of the oil market in the hinter-land. His unrelenting struggles to preserve his sovereignty and the integrity of his people against encroachments by British traders and imperialists no doubt pitched him against colonial agents in the Niger Delta. It is on record that king Jaja was among the very few African chiefs that refused to sign any treaty of protection but demanded to know first the full meaning of treaty (protection). According to J.C. Anene, an eminent Nigerian of the 19th Century, cited in Onwubiko,

1973; p. 235, Jaja alone of all the coastal Niger Delta chiefs, asked for a full explanation of what was meant by protection". In a meeting with the British officials in 1884, Jaja again insisted that the article that provided for free trade should be removed. Although his request was granted, Jaja's powerful position could not remain long un-assaulted in the face of fast advancing British imperialism in the Niger Delta Region. Thus, from 1885 when the British Government declared a "Protectorate" over the then oil Rivers, steps were taken to break down Jaja's opposition to British incursions into the hinterland markets. To achieve their objectives, the British traders and the Acting Consul, Harry Johnston employed character assassination, perfidy, treachery, divide and rule tactic. By 1887, Harry Johnston treacherously lured king Jaja into a waiting warship and deported him to the West Indies in spite of the fact that the Acting Consul, Harry Johnston had earlier promised not to detain him (Jaja) through these words "I pledge you my word, you will be free to come and go" (Onwubiko, 1973; p. 237). From exile, king Jaja continued to appeal to the British Government against his deportation and when he was eventually released in 1891, he died on the voyage home undoubtedly in the hands of his imperialist oppressors (the British Government). Considering his spectacular rise from the unknown slave boy to a king, his great qualities and successes as an African ruler and merchant, and his dogged defense of his sovereignty against European imperialism earned for him a place of honour among West Africa's heroes. In the words of J.C. Anene cited in Onwubiko 1973 "we should regard him as the first Nigerian nationalist of the 19th century"

Nana of Itsekiri – British Government Relations in the 19th Century: Unlike King Jaja of Opobo who rose from a slave boy to the status of a king, Nana Olomu was born in 1852 to a wealthy father who was Governor of the Benin River from 1879-1883. Nana's heroic resistance to British imperialism made him a great African patriot and an ambassador of the Niger Delta Region. According to Obaro Ikime, a renowned historian "he must take his place among African patriots of the 19th century (Onwubiko, 1973 p.239). The table below summarizes the nature of pre-colonial interactions between early Niger Delta leaders and the British Government/agents.

Table 1: Showing the Nature of Pre-colonial Interaction between Early Niger Delta Leaders and the British Colonial Government/ Agents

S/N	Early Niger Delta Leaders	Nature/Purpose of interaction and the Colonial Agent Involved	End Result of the Interaction/ Transaction
1.	King Jaja of Opobo	Control of trade in the hinterland (Acting British Consul Harry Johnson).	Deportation, exile and the eventual death of king Jaja in the hands of his abductors.
2.	Nana Olomu of Itsekiri Kingdom	Control of trade in the Benin River (British Government).	Deportation and exile of Nana Olomu.
3.	King William Dappa Pepple of Bonny	Control of hinterland trade (British Merchants and British Consul Beecroft).	Deportation, exile and replacement with Prince Dappo Pepple (British Puppet) which marked the collapse of Bonny Monarchy.
4.	King Achibong of Old Calabar	Control of trade in the Qua-Ibo River (British Consul Beecroft).	Led to the death of King Archibong in 1852 and also marked the beginning of direct British control with British Consul Beecroft presiding over the election of a new king.
5.	Oba Ovonramwen of Benin Kingdom	Pursuance of British economic interest in the Benin and Ethiope River (Gallwey, British Vice Consul for the Benin-Ethiope River) and Acting Consul Phillip.	Arrest and detention of the Oba including the invasion and destruction of Benin Kingdom in 1897. The event also led to the bastardization of Benin culture and tradition and the massive looting of artifacts bronze plaques and other ornaments by the British invaders.
6.	King Koko of Brass	Introduction of harsh and unfriendly trade policies that excluded king Koko and the Akassa people by the Royal Niger Company and the British Government.	Let to the famous Akassa Raid of 29 th January, 1895 when the indigenous Akassa people shut down operations at the Royal Niger Company due to discriminatory trade policies which excluded the natives.

Source: Kalama 2017

Analysis of Findings

Using content analysis as the basis of this study, it is therefore obvious to observe that economic factors and the struggle for the control of trade in the Niger Delta hinterland was the major underlying factor responsible for pre-colonial conflicts, marginalization and alienation of the people from their resources. The scramble for Africa which led to the partitioning of African territories by Europe in 1884-1885 further destroyed the culture and language of the Niger Delta people, Nigerians and Africans in general. The table above also showed that effective direct colonial intervention in the Niger Delta Region was carried out systematically and indirectly through trade, Christianity, and

humanitarian activities by early missionaries. The introduction of discriminatory trade policies and the use of force through gun boat diplomacy eventually set the stage for resistance and violence in the Niger Delta Region which continued even after Nigeria's independence in 1960. The picture below shows Niger Delta children in Tungbo Community in the Sagbama LGA of Bayelsa state, learning without modern facilities.

Fig 1.: Niger Delta children in Tungbo Community in the Sagbama LGA of Bayelsa state, learning without modern facilities



Source: Kalama 2017.

Post-independence State Interventions in the Niger Delta Region

Systematic marginalization, exploitation and alienation of the Niger Delta people led to protests and demonstrations which propelled the colonial government to establish the Willinks Commission of 1957, to look into the fears expressed by the Niger Delta minorities. Apart from the Willinks Commission report, there have been:

1. 1960 Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB).
2. 1970 River Basin Development Authority (this was to develop the entire country's River Basins).
3. 1993 Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) following the Belgore Commission's report.
4. 1998 Major General Popoola Committee set up by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar to look into the problems of the Niger Delta. The report was not implemented.
5. 2000 Act of the National Assembly established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).
6. 2002 LT. Gen. Alexander Ogomudia, special security committee report on oil producing areas – Not implemented.
7. 2003 presidential committee on peace and reconciliation headed by Major General A. Mohammed (RTD) chief of staff to the then president.
8. April 2004 standing committee on good governance and corporate responsibility headed by Dr. Edmond Daukoru, former minister of state for petroleum.
9. July 2004 presidential standing committee on the Niger Delta headed by former Governor James Ibori of Delta State.
10. 2006 presidential committee on the Niger Delta headed by former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

11. 2007 President Umaru Yar'Adua's 7 Point Agenda (listed the Niger Delta security issue as the primary focus of his administration).
12. 2008 Establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs by the Umaru Yar'Adua's administration.
13. July 2009 proclamation of amnesty to armed Niger Delta youths who had engaged in armed struggle against the Nigerian state (by the Umaru Yar'Adua – led administration).

Source: Authors field work 2015.

The picture below also shows the face of poverty in the Niger Delta Region which leads to frustration, aggression and frequent conflicts in the oil rich region of Nigeria.

Fig. 2: Face of poverty in the Niger Delta Region which leads to frustration, aggression and frequent conflicts in the oil rich region of Nigeria



Source: Kalama 2017.



UNEP scientists on a guided tour of a contaminated site in Ogoniland



UNEP officials at the site of an oil blow-out in Ogoni

The above images clearly show that marginalization and exploitation through gas flaring and environmental pollution by multinational oil companies with the active support of the Nigerian state go on daily in various communities in the Niger Delta hence, indicating that the federal government's amnesty programme is yet to address the issue of development and environmental justice in the region which accounts for over ninety percent of Nigeria's revenue. Much as the Nigerian state has set up committees to find lasting solutions to minority problems in the country, especially in the Niger Delta region: very little positive results have been achieved. In fact, most of the committees had been mere talk shows while the reports of several others have not seen the light of the day. The endless debate of the revised 2012 version of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) by Nigeria's House of Representatives and the Senate coupled with the continuous use of obnoxious legislations such as the land use Act, 13% derivation after several years clearly indicate that post-colonial conspiracy, marginalization and alienation of the Niger Delta region and its people have become institutionalized and more sophisticated from all fronts. The activities of neo-colonial agents (multinational oil companies) and political elites from the region have also not helped the situation as what was popularly regarded as Niger Delta struggle has become what is now known as stomach infrastructure (self/ family development) at the expense of the community and collective development of the entire Niger Delta region.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is obvious that frustration and alienation breeds violence and aggression which equally promotes conflict and instability in any political system or society. Thus, the pre-colonial and post-colonial policy actions against the Niger Delta people clearly explains why the conflict in the Niger Delta region degenerated into uncontrolled armed struggle against the Nigerian state with its attendant socio-economic and political consequences. It will be recalled that prior to the proclamation of amnesty by the Umaru Yar'Adua – led federal government in July 2009, Nigeria's oil production dropped drastically, paving the way for Angola to emerge as the largest oil producing/prospecting nation in Africa. It is, therefore, imperative for the federal government and all stakeholders to revisit all legislations and policies relating to the Niger Delta.

Recommendations

In order to address the issue of development and growth in the Niger Delta, the following recommendations are hereby proposed:

1. All draconian and obnoxious policies and legislations that promote and encourage marginalization and alienation should be repealed or discarded in order to promote equity, fairness and justice in the country.
2. All Niger Delta related committee reports should be revisited and implemented without further delay. In addition, the Petroleum Industry Bill and other important development oriented bills should equally be given accelerated

- hearing and passed into law by the National Assembly in order to give the minorities in Nigeria a sense of belonging.
3. There is need for a comprehensive review of the on-going federal governments amnesty programme to ensure that the disarmament, demobilization and re-integration (DDR) exercise truly transform combatants and ex-agitators back to the civil society as productive and resourceful men and women. The current monetization of the amnesty programme should be de-emphasized while community development and skill acquisition should be the driving force of the programme.
 4. Harmful practices such as gas flaring and environmental pollution perpetrated by foreign multinational oil companies should be checked and controlled while erring companies should be sanctioned accordingly.
 5. Priority attention should be given to the Niger Delta environment through the urgent implementation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report on Ogoni land and the entire Niger Delta as a whole.
 6. The issue of environmental justice should also be addressed via the prompt payment of compensation and repair of damaged oil installation facilities in the Niger Delta Region.

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