From Peaceful Protest to Militancy: Historicising Five Decades of Ijo Struggle (1958-2011)

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Abstract

The Ijo people of Nigeria's Niger Delta have a long history of struggle against marginalisation and exploitation, stemming from both colonial and post-colonial governance and the impact of oil extraction. This struggle has manifested in various forms, driven by the desire for self-determination, resource control, and development. This paper aims to examine the Ijo struggle by analysing its evolution across three distinct phases. It explores the key drivers, strategies, and outcomes of each phase to understand the complexities of Ijo resistance and resilience in the Niger Delta. The study employs a historical analysis approach, drawing on existing literature and documented events to delineate and characterise three specific phases of the Ijo struggle: The first phase spanning from 1958-1968, the second phase spanning between 1990-2005, and the third phase, 2006-2009. Findings revealed that the Ijo struggle has shifted from political and peaceful means to violent confrontation and finally to self-serving militancy. The struggles emerge due to the adverse consequences of exploration and production on the Ijo people. It also shows that the federal government's amnesty program led to significant increases in oil production, a return of normalcy to the region, and human resource empowerment. Findings inform a conclusion that the Ijo struggle is a complex phenomenon shaped by political, economic, and social factors. While the amnesty program has brought a measure of stability and economic improvement to the region, concerns over resource control, environmental degradation, and political marginalisation subsist, creating a need for concerted efforts to be directed towards addressing these issues and ensuring that the Ijo people can fully participate in the management of resources within their territories.

Keywords: Ijo, militancy, self-determination, insurgency, protest, oil, petro-violence.

Introduction

The Ijo people, also referred to as the Ijaw, are one of Nigeria's most prominent ethnic groups, predominantly located in the Niger Delta region. United by a common linguistic and cultural heritage, the Ijo people are located across present-day Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Edo, and Ondo States (Oyomolo, 2019). Their language belongs to the Ijoid branch of the Niger-Congo family and is classified into two broad groups—East Ijo and West Ijo—with numerous dialects spoken across their traditional homeland (Abejide, 2012). Collectively, the Ijo people have had a long history of struggle against repression and socio-economic deprivation, making them one of the most well-known of the over 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria.

This preceded the independence of the Nigerian state as the Ijo, along with other Nigerians, actively resisted repression and economic deprivation by foreign elements long before Nigeria's independence (Obi, 2003; Falola, 2004). At independence, the Ijo, along with other minority groups in Nigeria, were ushered into a new phase of 'the struggle'; they were under the mercy of major ethnic groups who controlled the regional governments (Attoh & Soyombo, 2011). All three regions in the country were controlled by a major ethnic group. The North was under the control of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, the West was controlled by the Yoruba ethnic group, and the East was dominated by the Igbo ethnic group which controlled the region (Nnabuihe, Onwuzuruigbo & Ihembe, 2024). These groups controlled governmental institutions and structures as well as resources in their respective regions, leaving minorities almost always dissatisfied.

In the Eastern region, oil revenue which has been primarily derived from the Ijo territories was mismanaged to the detriment of the Ijo oil-producing communities and the Niger Delta region. With the emergence of regionalism during the colonial era, regional leaders had control of revenue exports in their respective regions (Lukpata, 2013). This practice subsisted in the immediate post-colonial era with soaring oil revenue. This intersected with the prevailing ethnic character of politics to create a scenario wherein the Ijo land from which the bulk of oil wealth was gotten remained poor, backward and neglected due to their minority status (Dede, 2017). As a consequence, leaders and people of Ijo and other Niger Delta indigenes at various times engaged in peaceful as well as violent protests against the federal government and international oil companies who were perceived as agents of underdevelopment in Ijo communities and the broader oil-producing regions (Okorie, 2013).

This paper analyses the causes, key events and outcomes of the struggle in the three identified phases. The paper will be historical, and qualitative methods will be adopted for the study. Data would be drawn from relevant publications on the history of the Ijo people and their response to oppression, as well as key informant interviews aimed at gaining insight into the dominant views and perspectives on the subject matter under study. The contention here is that the agitations or 'struggle' of the Ijo people for a fair stake in the oil-dependent Nigerian economy has undergone four phases. The first phase covered 1958-1968, while the second phase of the Ijo struggle covered 1990-2004. The third stage was the militant era spanning five years, from 2005 to 2009. At present, the region is in an era of relatively less agitation due to the presidential amnesty programme.

The paper chronicles key issues across each of these phases. For its structure, the paper contains this introductory section, an analysis of the first phase of the struggle to show factors that sowed seeds of discontent in the region and an analysis of the key events and outcomes of the respite and revolution that characterised the second phase. The fourth section focuses on the militant era, showing key actors or militant camps and the manifestation of conflicts.

The penultimate section overviews the Presidential Amnesty Programme and its effects. The final section provides a concluding summary of the key issues.

Seeds of Discontent: The First Phase of Ijo Struggle, 1958-1968

The first phase of the Ijo struggle was informed by the fear of domination by majority ethnic groups that dominated the regional governments, especially the Igbos in the Eastern region under which the Ijo people were grouped. Oil also featured as the basis for the struggle during this phase. Its exploration and extraction were still at a rudimentary stage, and the revenue-sharing formula was based on a 50% derivation principle across regions (Udoh, 2019; Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). However, the benefits from oil were widely known, and there was palpable intent to control oil revenue across all regions and ethnic groups in the country. This has been used as a basis for scholars to link the struggle for control of oil to the Nigerian civil war (Uche, 2008; Undiyaundeye, 2018; Chidiebere, 2016). In essence, oil has been the basis of the Ijo struggle as the people sought political and economic liberation in the face of external attempts at control and subjugation.

The genesis of the Ijo struggle preceded independence in Nigeria. The struggle was led by an Ijo nationalist, Harold Dappa-Biriye, who formed the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) to push for the development of the Niger Delta region (Enemugwem, 2009). He was the earliest known Ijo figure to start the campaign for the development of the oil-producing areas. In 1957 and 1958, when colonial constitutional conferences were held in London for issues concerning Nigeria's independence, Dappa-Biriye organised various groups in the Niger Delta to present the fears of the minorities in the 1957 conference (Enemugwem, 2009). He also personally made a presentation at the conference, agitating for the creation of Rivers State from the then Eastern Region. The clamour for a separate state for the Ijo stemmed from the twin goal of gaining control over oil resources and extricating from the control of the Igbo-dominated Eastern region. As a commentator stated:

> The pattern of revenue sharing between the regions and the federal government encouraged Chief Dappa-Biriye to argue in favour of a state for the indigenous people of the Niger Delta in the absence of outright independence. The regions from the colonial period to the time of the twelve states structure in Nigeria retained a substantial part of the revenue generated within their territories (Quoted in Alagoa, 2004, pp 86-88).

Dappa Biriye and other early agitators calculated that the Ijo and other minorities would be dominated and marginalised if Nigeria got independence with the federation of the then three regions enshrined in the 1954 Lyttelton Constitution. These fears were expressed at the 1957 minorities conference, resulting in the formation of the Henry Willink Commission of Inquiry to assess and address the fears expressed by the minorities. The commission report noted that the people of the Niger Delta Area were poor, backward and neglected (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae,

2010). To address this developmental quagmire, the commission recommended the establishment of a Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) and Political Advisory Councils for Cross River and Mid-West Areas (Nkparom, Ejituwu & Enemugwem, 2008). After gaining independence in 1960, the federal government eventually created the NDDB but the Political Advisory Councils for Cross River and Mid-West was not created by the governments of the Eastern and Western regions.

At independence, the fears of the Ijo and their neighbours reached a heightened dimension. The minority groups in the then Eastern region, especially the Ijo, started to experience political and economic deprivation orchestrated by the Igbo - the majority group of the Eastern region - on the one hand and the federal government on the other hand (Watts, 2013). The perceived maltreatment by the Eastern regional government and the federal governments soon became a source of discontent in Ijoland. With this frame of mind, an Ijo nationalist, Adaka Boro, organised to pursue a republic for the Niger Delta region (Asuni, 2009).

Unlike Dappa Biriye, who toed the line of peaceful struggle in his quest for the development of Ijoland and, indeed Niger Delta region, Boro's approach took a violent dimension. In his preparation to fight for the liberation the Ijo, Boro formed an organisation called the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) in January 1966 (Naanen & Nyiayaana, 2013). This was when the first military coup in Nigeria took place on January 15 1966. Boro, who was frustrated with the treatment of the Ijo under the Eastern regional government, attempted to take advantage of the instability in the country to free Ijoland from the rest of the country in a move to secede. Commenting on the deplorable condition of the Ijo under the Easter region, Boro stated that:

> Today is a great day, not only in your lives but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps, it will be the greatest day for a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression …. Remember your 70-years old grandmother who still farms to eat, remember also your poverty-stricken people and then, remember too, your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom (Quoted in Oriola, 2016, p. 49).

Recounting the events, an interviewee noted that Boro, Owonaru and Nottingham Dick established a revolutionary camp in Taylor Creek, recruiting young men for the Niger Delta Volunteer Service. They formed three divisions and declared the Niger Delta a republic. However, after 12 days of face-off with Nigerian troops, they were captured and subsequently tried for treason. They were eventually pardoned before the Nigerian civil war of 1967. Boro fought on the side of the Nigerian army and was killed in action in 1967.

Towards an Era of Respite and Revolution: The Second Phase of Ijo Struggle, 1990-2005

Compared to the first phase, the second phase spanning 1990 and 2005 was one of respite for oil-producing communities. Although there was reduced tempo in the agitation against state structures and multinationals, the region continued to witness intermittent community agitations against oil companies but primarily focused on casual employment or compensation for oil spillage (Akpan, 2010). However, this period also marked the germination of violent agitations in oil-producing areas. The federal government, controlled by the Hausa/Fulani group, implemented measures to control oil revenues.

The period also saw the elimination of the principle of revenue derivation in the country, which regions had previously retained (Akinola & Adesopo, 2011). The federal government did not pay significant attention to developing the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta. Oil companies did not effectively discharge their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and industrial quarters enjoyed basic social amenities near some communities. Also, the damaging impact of oil production began to take a toll on the traditional economy, with some peasants feeling the adverse effects of oil production (Tantua & Kumruzzaman, 2016). As a consequence, the phase began with the emergence of several ethnic-based organisations demanding good conditions for oil-producing areas.

These organisations lamented that oil exploitation had caused considerable damage to their environment, leading to the death of leaders like Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine Ogoni others. Other organisations, such as the Ijaw National Congress (INC), Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (1993), and Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), continued to demand development. The emergence of these organisations coincided with the use of excessive force by Nigerian security agents to intimidate unarmed youths agitating for employment opportunities (Ukeje, 2001). Oil companies intensified community development projects, and the federal government demonstrated increased attention to the Niger Delta plight.

The Ijaw National Congress (INC) was the first ethnic-based organisation in Ijoland to cover the entire region in the struggle for the survival of the Ijo people, who have contributed significantly to Nigeria's economic prominence. In 1991, a meeting was organised by Ijo elders to deliberate on the need for an all-encompassing Ijo-based organisation. The INC became the umbrella body for the Ijo nation and followed Boro's principle of one Nigeria in its approach to the Niger Delta struggle. (Omeje, 2004).

The struggles of the INC were instrumental to the creation of Bayelsa State, a state dominated by Ijo stock, in 1996 out of the old Rivers State by the Abacha administration (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1998). The membership of the INC is from the age of 45 years

and above (INC Constitution, 2019), making its approach to issues more peaceful than that of subsidiary, youth-dominated organisations in the regions. However, the INC leadership considered creating a youth wing to supersede various community-based youth organisations in Ijoland. Instead, an independent-minded, ethnic-based Ijo youth body, the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), emerged.

In 1998, the IYC gave an ultimatum of 19 days to oil companies to quit Ijoland unless the federal government met certain conditions. Protest marches, ogele dance processions, candle-light vigils, and demonstrations took place throughout the three main oil-producing states of the Niger Delta: Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. In response, 15,000 soldiers and two warships were sent to Bayelsa and a state of emergency was declared.

Boro's violent revolutionary legacy was used as a legitimising symbol for the INC and the IYC, but some of Boro's principles were disregarded. Asari Dokubo, an eastern delta Ijo from Rivers State, led the IYC with a militant organisation, the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), which invoked the violent and armed aspect of Boro's legacy to put forward his Ijo struggle for development.

On September 27 2004, Dokubo threatened war against multinational oil companies and the federal government, which led to world oil prices rising to a new high of $50 per barrel (Nwajiaku-Dahou, 2012). The federal government invited Dokubo and his archrival, Ateke Tom, to Aso Rock Villa, Abuja, where they negotiated a ceasefire and disarm all militia groups. Under the weapons-buy-back clause, an equivalent of US$ 1,800 would be paid for any single weapon surrendered by the two groups. Dokubo's overt criticism of the federal government and Obasanjo's third-term bid created hostilities between him and the federal government (Courson, 2009). In September 2005, Dokubo was arrested and arraigned on sedition charges, coincidentally with Alamieyeseigha's arrest on money laundering charges. This arrest led to the militant era (2006-2009) in the Ijo struggle (Amadi, Imoh-Itah & Obomanu, 2016).

The Militancy Era, 2006-2009

The militant era, considered the third phase of the Ijo struggle, was marked by a shift from community collective youth agitations and ethnic-based organisations to camp-based groups. The struggle focused on individual self-development rather than host community development, aiming to protect oil theft businesses and secure surveillance contracts from oil companies (Ebienfa, 2011). This was achieved through hostage-taking, kidnapping for ransom, destruction of oil installations, indiscriminate killing of Nigerian security forces in creeks, building revolutionary camps, frequent fighting between camps, and intermittent killings of innocent fellow Ijo indigenes (Ezirim, 2018).

The militants took advantage of the unsatisfactory situation in the Niger Delta due to the federal government and oil companies' unsatisfactory development efforts, the failure of the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) and the INC to secure self-government and resource control pursuit, and the arrest of Alamieyeseigha and Asari. They formed youth camps and made a living using illegal ways of sourcing money in the oil environment of the Niger Delta (Ezirim, 2018). The terrain provided protection for the militants, as it was difficult for federal security forces to check their activities in the creeks and rivers in the area. Militants built camps along narrow creeks where gunboats of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) could not easily gain access to, using them as their military base to continue their illegal activities (Asuni, 2009).

In addition to the preceding, the arrest, detention, and trial of the leaders of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Chief D.S.P. Alamieyeseigha provided further opportunity for the militants to justify their actions (Courson, 2009). The major camps had the strength of about 200-500 militants, kidnapping both foreign and local oil workers, wealthy non-oil workers, and their family members. Although militant camps were numerous across the Niger Delta, they were mostly situated and operated in Ijoland of Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Edo, and Ondo States. Table 1 shows the leading camps in the Niger Delta.

Table 1: Militant Camps in the Niger Delta as of June 30, 2009

S/No	Name of Camp	Location	Status	Leader(s)	Ethnicity
1	Olugbobiri	Southern Ijaw LGA (SILGA), Bayelsa State	Major	Joshua Mckiver	Ijo
2	Korokorosei	SILGA, Bayelsa state	Major	Africa Owei	Ijo
3	Okigbene/Ebrigbene (Ikebiri 1& II)	SILGA, Bayelsa state	Major	Gidson Kala (Prince Igodo)	Ijo
4	Robert creek	Nembe, Bayelsa state	Major	Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo) & Henry Okah	Ijo
5	Cowthorne channel	Nembe, Bayelsa state	Major		
6	Camp 5	Warri, Delta state	Major		
7	Okerenkoko	Warri, Delta state	Major		

S/No	Name of Camp	Location	Status	Leader(s)	Ethnicity
8	Opuraza	Warri, Delta state	Major		
9	Azuzuama	SILGA, Bayelsa state	Major	Jackson	Ijo
10	Gbekenegbene	SILGA, Bayelsa state	Major	Not available	Ijo
11	Ezetu	SILGA, Bayelsa state	Major	Victor Ben	Ijo
12	Agge	SILGA, Bayelsa State	Minor	Ebikabowie (Boyloaf)	Ijo
13	Kursetiye, Forupa & Okubie	SILGA, Bayelsa state	Minor	Not available	Ijo
14	Ken Camp	Odi, Bayelsa State	Minor	Ken	Ijo
15	Egbeme Camp	Warri, Delta state	Minor	Kem Agbakara	Ijo
16	Ubefan	Warri Delta state	Minor	John Togo	Ijo
17	Berger Camp	Warri, Delta state	Minor	Inilo sinite	Ijo
18	Niger Delta People Volunteer Force	Akuku-Tori, River state	Major	Asari Dokubo	Ijo
19	Niger Delta Vigilante Movement (NDVM)	Okirika, River state	Major	Tom Ateke	Ijo
20	Borokiri (Icelanders/ outlaw cult	Borokiri, Port Harcourt	Minor	Soboma George	Ijo
21	Yeghe	Bori, Ogoni, Rivers State	Minor	Solomon Ndigbara (Osemabiri Laden)	Ogoni

Source: Except for the ethnic column, the table is adapted from Ambily Etekpe's, *The Political Economy of Post Amnesty Management in the Niger Delta Region: Prospect and Challenges,* pp10-11.

Of the 21 militant camps recorded here above only one is non-Ijo. It should also be noted that there were so many other camps that existed simultaneously with the above tabulated ones. But some of them were not as notorious as the above enumerated camps. An assessment of a recent gathering of the ex-militant leaders at Uyo, Akwa Ibom State shows the ethnic

composition of the militants. Among the 68 attendees, approximately 91% were Ijo. (Gains of Presidential Amnesty, pp 17 – 22).

The attendance list of Niger Delta ex-militants at Uyo Akwa Ibom State reveals that out of the 68 former militants, only about four are non-Ijo indigenes, while the rest (64 persons) are from Ijo across the Niger Delta. This reveals the degree of involvement of the Ijo people in the Niger Delta unrest during the militancy period. Between 2006 and 2009, kidnapping and hostage-taking were the order of the day for these ex-militants in their various camps. The militants operated in several ways, including destruction of oil installations, which could be a retaliatory measure. They often fought among themselves to own a territory for the purpose of extracting oil money, which was derived through oil bunkering, surveillance contracts to protect oil facilities, and sea-going oil vessels. To gain recognition from the oil companies about a camp's occupation of a particular territory, the militants had to engage in destruction of oil installations, and sometimes killing of innocent indigenes.

During the militant era, no oil-related project could be successfully executed in such areas without proper negotiations with the militant leader controlling the area. In most cases, such negotiations eventually ended up in settling the militant leader with surveillance or other forms of contract award or some pecuniary commitment. The Ijo people live in islands with rivers and creeks, which explains why marine services are common with the oil industry in Ijoland. For a sea-going vessel to safely pass through the rivers to its destination, financial settlement must have been made in favor of the militants controlling specific segments of the terrain. If ignored, they could create an unsafe environment. In July 2007, General Obekuma of Agada hijacked and diverted a Brass-bound petroleum product laden vessel to his camp at Agada, siphoning and selling off all the products in the vessel as a reaction to the failure of the supplier of the product to properly negotiate with the militant in charge of the area.

Illegal oil bunkering is a significant factor in the Niger Delta's militancy, as it allows for the continued and spread of oil theft and illicit buying and selling of crude oil. The geographical location of Ijoland supports this business, with numerous crisscrossing rivers, creeks, and seas supporting it. The federal government's attempt to stop illegal oil bunkering was a major cause of militancy in the Niger Delta. The federal security forces deployed in the oil-producing areas were callous and atrocious, making the environment unfriendly for oil theft to thrive. To protect their lucrative engagement, oil thieves in the form of freedom fighters had to react violently to the excesses of the security forces, making the Niger Delta environment a turbulent zone. For successful engagement in the illicit oil bunkering business, militants needed to be well-armed to escort the product vessel, leading to the proliferation of arms and ammunitions in the region. However, the presence of federal forces in the creeks did not necessarily inhibit illegal oil bunkering; in some cases, they may prove dependable allies of the oil thieves.

Another factor behind militancy in the Niger Delta was the quest to exercise or gain control over community leadership. In the Ijo oil-producing communities, community leadership is synonymous with wealth and plays a major role in the distribution of oil wealth among members. Militant leaders aimed to control the leadership organs of their communities. Indeed, some like Osei Clever, Tom Ateke, and Asari Dokubo succeeded in doing this as they gained strong influence in their communities. Some individuals, including ex-militants like John Kalama and Alabo Munabo, joined militancy due to their community's interest in controlling the disputed oil facilities. These conflicts have resulted in hostilities between Nembe in Bayelsa State and Kalabari in Rivers State, where they have been in ownership battles over SPDC's Odema Creek flow station.

The use of force and intimidation by federal forces to guard oil installations has also contributed to militancy in the region. Armless restive youths demanding better treatment from oil companies often face violence or death from the military. To counter this, these oppressed youths organize and coordinate themselves in camps, leading to militancy. Intra-community crises are another common phenomenon in the Niger Delta, with defeated youths often being chased out of their communities and forming camps to fight back.

Uneven distribution of development projects within oil-producing states by governments and federal commissions also contributes to militancy. Governors of some oil-producing states often focused more on the development of their home towns rather than the entirety of oil producing communities. This partiality often leads to anger among the youths from oil-producing communities, who choose to join militancy to take their share of the oil wealth through activities such as oil theft, kidnapping, and hostage taking. The militancy period continued until the declaration of amnesty to the militants by the federal government.

The Presidential Amnesty and Beyond

The militants' activities in the Niger Delta reached a point where the continued effective existence or the profitability of the oil industry in the country was seriously threatened. Therefore, to proffer a possible solution to the deep unrest in the Niger Delta, President Yar'Adua's administration took the option of granting pardon to the militants who would surrender their arms and ammunition to the federal government. Indeed, after some consultations, President Yar'Adua proclaimed amnesty for the militants on June 24, 2009, which was to take effect on October 4, 2009. The essence of the amnesty declaration was to disarm, demobilise and re-integrate the militants into the society so that there would be peace in the Niger Delta region for development to take place.

In pursuant to the amnesty offer, on August 7, 2009, the then governor of Bayelsa State, Governor Timipre Sylva led the first batch of repentant militant leaders (32 in number) to Aso Rock. In addressing them, President Yar'Adua stated the need for peace and stability in the

region: "we have reached a situation, as you know, where even contractors are afraid to take contracts and execute works in the Niger Delta states. Throughout the world, peace, stability and security are necessary conditions for development and prosperity, but we need this peace a lot in the Niger Delta states" (Adeniyi, 2011).

The visit to Yar'Adua by the militants from Bayelsa State was significant. It inspired confidence in the militants who were yet to embrace the amnesty to begin to surrender their arms. In Rivers State, on August 13, 2009, Soboma George, leader of the Iceland group with about 400 supporters accepted amnesty and handed over his weapons to State Security Service (SSS) in Port Harcourt, and others followed subsequently. From Delta to Rivers State, the militants began to come out en masse to accept the amnesty offer of the federal government. Between June 25 and October 4 2009, the number of militants that accepted the amnesty offer was 20,192. By November 2010, 6,166 more additional militants accepted the offer. Consequently, as of August 15 2011, a total number of 26, 358 youths had been documented for amnesty (Kuku, 2012).

The federal government amnesty declaration to the Niger Delta militants has so far yielded some conspicuous positive effects in certain areas. These areas among others include oil production; human resource empowerment; peace and security in the Ijo nation; and boost in the traditional economy, especially fishing and farming. The oil industry suffered a great setback because of the activities of the militants in the Niger Delta region. As has been pointed out elsewhere in this work, oil theft has been a very lucrative business in the Niger Delta area, especially in Ijoland where the creeks and rivers are numerous and serve as a factor friendly to the business. Oil theft is a quick source of money, which all the leaders of the militants engaged in. In this illicit oil business, the sourcing for the crude oil itself is an act of vandalism. This means that an oil installation, pipeline or oil wellhead must be tampered with before oil could be available for stealing. The theft of oil which witnessed a lot of patronage in the Ijo territories was extremely high during the militant period. It greatly adversely affected the production of oil in the Niger Delta. Added to the illegitimate oil bunkering were the outright vandalism of oil installations and the steady kidnapping of oil workers, which created a precarious environment for the oil industry to blossom. All these combined to detrimentally affect oil production in Niger Delta.

Before 2006, Nigeria was able to maintain its OPEC quota supply of 2.4 million barrels of crude oil per day. However, following the escalation of militant activities in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria began to experience a shortfall in the production of oil to meet official OPEC quota in 2006. In fact, in the last quarter of 2006, Nigeria was losing 660,000 barrels of crude oil daily (Jones, 2008). This situation worsened to the extent that at the peak of the crisis in 2009, Nigeria's production was reduced to as low as 800 barrels per day (Oluniyi, 2017).

However, this changed when the federal government proclaimed amnesty to repentant militants and subsequently implemented the amnesty programme for the ex-militants. The amnesty proclamation lured the militants away from the creeks which resulted in a positive change in the quantity of oil production. Expectedly, by 2011, Nigeria had totally recovered from production shortage. Kingsley Kuku, Special Adviser to former President Goodluck Jonathan on Niger Delta and former Chief executive of the Federal Government Amnesty Programme for Niger Delta Ex-Militants, commented during the third anniversary of amnesty on the effect of the federal government amnesty declaration on oil production and the Nigerian economy thus:

> Today, under the watch and able guidance of President Jonathan, the tranquility in the once restive Niger Delta has led to an astronomic growth in the nation's economy…. From a paltry production level of 800,000 barrels of crude oil per day at the peak of the Niger Delta crisis in the first quarter of 2009, Nigeria currently produces between 2.4 and 2.6 million barrels of crude oil per day… (Quoted in Mugbo, 2011).

The above citation underscores the positive effect of the amnesty proclamation on the Nigeria's oil economy. But the local traditional economy also suffered during militancy in Ijo territories. The activities of the militants created an unsafe environment for not only the oil workers but indigenes as well. As has been mentioned earlier, the destruction of life and property had been a significant component of the militants' activities in Ijo areas. For territorial claim and show of superiority, in some cases, the militants fought among themselves. In other times they destroyed oil installations or killed poor innocent indigenes of Ijo.

However, with the declaration of amnesty and subsequent engagement of the ex-militants in the amnesty programme, things almost returned to normalcy. Fish could be comparably found easily in Nembe as against the militancy period. That also resulted in the reduction of the price of fish. The same size of fish sold for N5, 000.00 during the militancy era came down to about N3, 000.00 (KII/Female/Fisherman/2011). Travelers have also enjoyed a reduced sea piracy rate. It has been observed that from the last quarter of 2009 to the end of 2011, no more than 10 cases of sea piracy were reported. Implementing the amnesty programme is essential to the Ijo nation and the country's oil industry.

The amnesty programme sets out a line of action for the rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-militants. Though the programme has not been successfully managed, many repentant militants have been trained locally and internationally in various skill acquisition programmes and other fields of study. This has been done in batches. For example, through the amnesty programme, 53 Niger Delta ex-militants have been trained as pilots in South Africa, and 57 ex-militants have graduated from the under-water training programme from the Nigeria Navy

Warfare School in Lagos (The Nation, 2013). Apart from other kinds of stipends, the ex-militants have been paid N65,000.00 monthly since the start of the amnesty programme in 2009 (Ebiede, 2017; Ebiede et al., 2020).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is pertinent to re-emphasise that the Ijo struggle has or otherwise called the Niger crisis, has been discussed here under three interconnected phases. Each of these phases at least has a factor that provoked and determined the direction of the struggle. In the first phase, Harold Dappa Biriye took an armless political struggle for the Ijo people to be independent of Igbo domination in the then Eastern Region. On the other hand, Isaac Boro leaned on armed revolutionary tactics to lead his campaign against the Igbo domination of the Ijo minority. Though this violent campaign was ostensibly made against the Federal Republic of Nigeria as he sought to create a Niger Delta Republic, the most discernible source of his grievances came from the Eastern Region.

After Boro's death and the Nigeria civil war, further armed struggles were halted in the immediate post-war years. However, the period 1969 to 1989 played a provocative role in furthering the Niger Delta crisis. This period witnessed all the draconian laws and decrees that alienated the oil resources from those under whose soil oil was found. The period between 1990 and 2005, regarded here as the second phase of the Ijo struggle, witnessed a proliferation of ethnic-based organisations and agitations for resource control and self-government. All attempts by the organisations to actualise their dreams in this direction failed. This failure later enthroned the third phase, identified in this study as the militant era (2006-2009). This era, in mostly Ijoland, brought in place various camp-oriented groups who were sometimes out for self-centred ends under the guise of the Niger Delta struggle. The era witnessed the climax of the Niger Delta crisis when groups organised themselves in military fashion across the Ijo territories and beyond for an increased stake in the oil industry. This was a period characterised by kidnapping, hostage-taking, oil installations vandalism, indiscriminate killing of men of the federal forces, and sea piracy, among others, with little or no genuine struggle for the development of the oil-producing areas.

While the introduction of the Presidential Amnesty Programme has resulted in a seeming end of the third phase, there is a subsisting risk of renewed agitation as the issues at the root of the struggle remain. The development issues the Willinks Commission report aptly captured in their description of the region as poor, backward, and neglected subsists. More so, the benefits communities derive from oil industry activities are not commensurate with the level of development in the region. This is compounded by environmental challenges that render life in the region difficult. Considering the place of these issues in the emergence and escalation of the Ijo struggle from one peaceful protest to a violent arms struggle, these challenges should be addressed to prevent another phase of the struggle.

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