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## **The Oil Producing Minority States and Marginalization in Nigeria**

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### **Introduction**

Oil and the minority question has become a festering sore in the Nigerian federation. Obviously, it is the most contentious and vexed issue in the Nigerian political economy in recent times. This is essentially because the minority oil producing states from whose soil the major wealth of the Nation is derived are being manifestly and deliberately neglected, in all aspects of human endeavours, by the federal government dominated by the major ethnic groups, of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, in that order of importance.

The only 'offence committed' by these minority states is that they are naturally endowed with oil or 'black gold' in a massively disproportionate ratio, to the rest of all the 'giant' states resources pulled together. What therefore, the 'big' states lost in wealth they gained in the accumulation of state power. The state apparatus is thus being used negatively to impoverish the otherwise wealthy but small and weak states. The use of the Federal might to punish the small states because of their natural wealth is obviously against the principles and tenets of a federal system, which at least, Nigerian political leaders claim to be in practice since 1954. These basic principles among others, emphasize that beyond size, territoriality and constitutionality, the plurality and heterogeneity of the federal constituents must be recognised. By implication the relative autonomy, independence and self-determination of these units must be appreciated and guaranteed in clear terms. And the general welfare of the constituents' members in general must always be assured. As Awa (1976:11) noted "for, only in these terms is it possible to objectively evaluate the relevance of a federal arrangement for all the citizens"

But minority oppressions and suppressions by the major dominant ethnic groups in the operation of the federal system are not new. Naturally and equally not new, are the demands for redress by the minority groups. The earlier minority agitations were essentially directed against the regional governments manifested in demands for the creation of separate regions/States. The national was to allow ethnic minority groups within the regions have their own self-autonomy. Notable amongst the earlier minority agitations were the bloody Tiv riots of 1959 to 1960 in the North, the demand for the creation of a Calabar -Ogoja-Rivers (C-O-R) state from the Eastern region and the demand for the creation of the Midwest region from the Western region.

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The tempo and the intensity, as well as the focus of minority agitations have increased and changed since after political independence on Oct. 1st 1960. The reason being that the major dominant ethnic groups seized complete control of the state apparatus in defiance to the principles of federalism, to the disadvantage of the minority ethnic groups that constitute the federation. To this effect, Maitama (1996:14:15) has argued though ridiculously that:

*Allah has bestowed .on the Hausa-Fulani the gift of political leadership of the countryman, the Yoruba, the genius for education, diplomacy and managerial excellence and the Igbo, the bent and dynamism for economic enterprises.*

The three dominant ethnic groups mentioned above by Maitama are the only ones endowed by Allah with one good quality or the other. the rest of the more than 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria are not reckoned with by Allah. Funny enough, the minority oil producing states richly endowed by Allah-; do not come for mention. This is a clear manifestation of the tripodal political arrangement by the major dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Essentially, oil and the minority question in Nigeria which is the focus of this paper, as distinct from the minority question in general, is basically reminiscent of Rodney's (1972) "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. This is because the minority oil producing states debacle is simply the conscious and systematic marginalization and underdevelopment of these states, while at the same time the North dominated federal government transfers their oil wealth to develop the large but very poor states of the country, especially in the Northern parts.

It is this obvious and outright cheating and the consequent strain and acrimonious relationships between the oil producing minorities on the one hand, the North dominated federal Government and its agents - the oil companies, on the other, that this paper examines. Which area produces the bulk of the Federal Government's wealth? Which area is suffering from adequate environmental pollution as a result of oil extraction from its soil? Which area is marginalised and less developed? What is the Federal Government and the companies attitude to the demands for 'fair deal' by the oil producing minorities These are some of the crucial questions examined in this article.

### **Conceptual Perspective**

Almost all 'minority group' problems and other socio-political problems related to them in Nigeria are invariably traced to ethnicity. Minority and ethnicity are very important factors in the determination of who gets what, 'when' and how in the Nigerian political equation. This is because the Nigerian Federal system is dominated by the ethnic majority groups of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and igbo in that order of importance. 'Minority' and 'ethnicity' concepts represent the opposite sides of the same coin. The two concepts appear to be inseparable.

Ethnicity is a natural phenomenon which makes people be more loyal and attached to the sentiments of their primordial sub-cultural group than to the nation. The manifestations of ethnicity are seen where political decision and exercise of government authority deliberately favour members of some cultural groups at the expense of others. Ethnicity may thus be defined as the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of the differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols (Otite - 1975:60). This definition is most appropriate for our purpose because it has the advantage of

combining the two important aspects of the concept. The two vital aspects are its static and objective structural properties on the one hand, and its dynamic and analytic sense on the other (Otite: 1975:60). Four useful elements according to Kasfir (1976:44) can be extracted from the two senses inherent in this definition.

These are:-

1. Certain objective characteristics associated with common ancestry, such as language, territory, cultural practices and the like (in some cases newly created or recently standardised).
2. Which are perceived by both insiders and outsiders as important indicators of identity.
3. So that they can become the bases for mobilizing social solidarity and
4. Which in certain situations result in political activity.

All these attributes are common to both 'ethnic majority' and 'ethnic minority, groups. Therefore ethnic majority 'and 'ethnic minority, groups are delineable within the frame work of ethnicity defined as 'social for nations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries" in terms of language and culture or both. With language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa (Shepherd Jr. 1987:39-53). We must add however that these groups are not necessarily linguistically or culturally homogenous. This is because occupational and class differentiations exist within an ethnic group. This differentiation is a function of the level of production. Development of productive forces, the extent of the prevailing division of labour and the growth and differentiation of cultural forms within the group (Eteng 1996:116).

Ethnocentrism is the negative evaluation of and response to other people's culture in which the ethnocentric culture is always considered superior. Ethnocentrism is thus attitudinal in form and perceptual in content. It therefore, represents the subjective dimension of ethnicity and ethnicity which subsumes ethnocentrism on the other hand, according to Nnoli (1978:61) is behavioural in form and confective in content. Ethnicity is real, it is not an imaginary phenomenon because it captures the various forms of consensual and conflictual relationships between ethnic groups.

### **Minority Groups**

It is obvious today in Nigeria that ethnic minority groups, especially the minority oil producing states, exist in an antagonistic relations to the ethnic majorities, especially the federal government dominated by the Hausa/Fulani majority groups. The nature of their conflictual relationship in the context of our federal system of government has been consistently outright cheating, marginalization and development-retarding being perpetuated by the dominant majority groups. Minority groups, being the focus of our present concern needs to be analytically clarified in terms of what constitute their major characteristics. According to Wirth (1945:347) a 'minority' is a group of people who, by reason of their physical or cultural characteristics are singled out from others, and who, therefore, regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. This implies that 'minority status' carries with it a sense of exclusion from full and active participation in the socio-economic and political life of the society. Clearly, by this definition Wirth places the 'minority group' in opposition to the 'majority group'. Valien (1964:432) expresses the view that the term 'minority group' sometimes just referred to as minority is applied to an ethnic racial or religious group. He contends, that the term ethnic 'group' is utilized when invidious distinctions are not intended, Awhile the term 'minority group' connotes such invidious distinctions. He however agrees that

both terms, nonetheless, underscore physical, religious, racial and other cultural features of a designated group which distinguish them from other dominant ethnic groups in society. It has not been easy to know the appropriate basic features to be applied\* to designate the minority status of a given group. This is because almost all" variables used in identifying any minority group usually throw up uncertainties as to their meanings and functions. However, the following characteristics are often identified with a minority group. They are, statistical or numerical size, socio-economic and political power distribution, homogenous physical and or cultural traits and differential treatment or status. To these can be added agitations and incessant calls for redress. ,-> In a fundamental sense, therefore, ethnic minority, specifically implies low status in a social power relationship between a dominant power group and a dominated group (Eteng 1996:11:7).

Although A.M and C.B. Rose (1948) consider any purely statistical definition of the term unacceptable, they however place emphasis on the opposition between the dominant and minority groups. Therefore in their opinion, the. more fact of being generally hated and being hated because of religious, racial or national background, is simply what defines a minority group.

One theme that runs through all the definitions is the placing of the minority group' in opposition to the majority group. This is because of the powerlessness and the low social status of the minority group. made even worst by the over bearing attitude of the dominant group especially in the Nigerian federal system. Based on this we accept the ethnic minority group definition by Eteng as our operational definition. According to him, an ethnic minority group is regarded as:

- (a) A social category, a collectivity, a social class, large or small.
- (b) Which exists within a Socio-Culture
- (c) Whose members are distinguished from the majority or dominant ethnic group in power.
- (d) On the basis of inherent or contrived homogeneous physical/biological, national, racial, cultural and social characteristics.
- (e) And are, therefore, hated and consciously and deliberately excluded - Socially, physically and sometimes legally - from participating in the social economic, political economy or some sections of the larger society.
- (f) On account of which, they are self-conscious of their minority status, and hence often exclude themselves from the mainstream culture.
- (g) A minority group is thus almost always embroiled in a discriminatory, unequal and clientelistic power relationship with the dominant ethnic majority groups in which they often consequently assume a subordinate status as the exploited, expropriated, disempowered, isolated, marginalized and then targeted (Eteng 1996:119).

This definition properly situates our topic, oil and the minority question in Nigeria. What follows now is an examination of how the minority oil producing states, produce the nation's wealth and their paradoxical poor situation in the geo-politics of the Nigerian federation.

### The structure of the Nigerian economy

That Nigeria is an oil based economy is no longer controversial. This is because Nigeria which hitherto, had been a major agricultural export economy during a substantial period of the colonial administration began to export oil in the late 1950s. Although, it is true that the search for oil began as far back as 1937, it was not until 1951 that the first deep exploration well was drilled. In 1956 oil in commercial quantity

1993		1994				
Month	Production (mb/d)	Export (mb/d)	Spot Market	Production (mb/d)	Expo (mb/d)	Spot Market price (\$) Bonny light
Jan.	1.95	1.67	17.89	1.93	1.63	14.84
Feb.	2.00	1.65	19.10	1.90	1.61	14.28
March	1.88	1.62	18.7-	2.00	1.70	14.16
April	1.90	1.60	19.19	1.95	1.63	15.54
May	1.90	1.62	18.99	1.95	1.63	16.16
June	1.88	1.60	18.17	1.95	1.63	17.14

SOURCE: CBN MONTHLY REPORTS, 1994

was discovered and the first shipment to Europe was in 1958 (Agbu 1998:3) and by 1985 oil constituted 97,1 percent of total export earnings (Diamond 1983:50). This is essentially because by the 1970s oil had become the fiscal basis of the Nigerian federation, decisively and effectively replacing agriculture as its major basis for the nation's wealth. In fact, Nigeria's oil earnings shut up from N4.733 billion in 1975, to NIC billion in 1979 and M15 billion in 1980 (Olukoshi 1990:84) We present below a table to illustrate the centrality of oil to the Nigerian economy. The table reveals that Nigeria's average production figure for the first six months of 1993 and 1994 and 1994 were 1.92mb/d and 1.94mh/d respectively while the spot market prices for 1993 and 1994 were \$18.63 and \$15.35 per barrel respectively. It becomes obvious, that Nigeria earned on the average, \$30.37 million for the first six month's of 1993 and \$25.17 million for 1994 (Agbu 1998:4) Nigeria, therefore, would have earned an estimated oil revenue of N200.64 billion, at an official exchange rate of N22 to \$1, by 1995.

To further demonstrate that oil is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, we present a comparative table of crude oil and non-oil export earnings in Nigeria from 1970-1991.

Year	Total earnings current US & Billion	Non oil export oil export eatnings currents US & Million	Earnings current US & Million	Export earnings in total export earning (%)
1970	1.23	513.90	714.00	58.15
1971	1.79	457.80	1335.40	74.47

1972	2.16	367.50	1793.60	82.99
1973	3.45	558.10	2889.90	83.91
1974	9.20	647.60	8547.40	92.96
1975	7.99	540.00	7452.00	93.24
1976	10.57	609.30	9959.30	94.23
1977	11.85	829.30	11019.00	93.00
1978	10.56	984.10	9575.90	90.68
1979	17.71	1062.50	16650.00	94.00
1980	25.97	1071.80	24896.20	98.87
1981	17.85	1087.80	16758.20	93.90
1982	12.15	664.90	11489.10	94.53
1983	10.37	790.80	9579.20	92.37
1984	11.89	675.50	11214.40	94.31
1985	12.57	363.20	12202.80	97.11
1986	6.77	398.10	6370.90	94.12
1987	7.37	663.80	6701.20	90.99
1988	7.01	832.60	6773.40	88.12
1989	8.88	401.40	7475.10	94.90
1990	13.67	405.51	13265.30	97.03
1991	12.26	471.99	11792.57	96.15

Source: (1) NNPC Annual statistical Bulletin (1987)  
(2) CBN Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (1988-1992)

Table III

S/No	Percentage Shares of Crude Oil States (Figures without two States)	Calculated with the two states' figures
1. Rivers	55.4	55.0
2. Delta	30.50	29.4
3. Edo	7.63	7.4
4. Imo	3.44	3.0
5. Abia	2.30	2.2
6. Akwa Ibom	0.59	1.0
7. Cross River	-	1.0
8. Ondo	-	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: OMPADEC Quarterly Report Vol. 1, No 1, 1993, p. 98

It is abundantly clear from the table that the percentage share of oil export earnings in total export has been on the steady increase until it amounted to 96.15 percent in 1991. This situation remains and in fact, it is always on the increase as compared to all other non-oil export earnings.

The important fact to realize about the massive wealth of the nation, is that it is specifically derived from the minority states, all located in the southern part of the Nigerian federation. Essentially, of all the 36 States and Abuja (FCT) which constitute the constituent units of the Nigerian federation, only eight states are richly endowed in oil. These states are Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo and Abia. Others are Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Ondo. Table III shows percentage shares of crude oil by States.

This table clearly illustrates the hard fact, that all the rest constituent units of the Nigerian federation are economically dependent on the oil producing minority states. This economic dependence on the small but rich states by the large but poor states creates problems for the Nigerian federal system. This is essentially because the phenomenon violates, especially in terms of resource distribution, one of the cardinal principles of fiscal federalism, which is, that "the ownership and control of the material resources of the community must be so distributed as to serve the common good" (Awa, 1976:63) Obviously, this is not so in Nigeria. The reason being that the oil producing minorities are being neglected by the Federal Government dominated by the majority ethnic groups of Hausa/ Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, especially the Hausa/ Fulani hegemonists.

This outright disregard for the socio-economic and political interests of the oil producing minorities has resulted in the issue of the distribution of the nation's wealth being the most heated, controversial and vexed in the political economy discourse of the country. Indeed, it has resulted in recent and frequent violent and virulent protestations and agitations directed against the Federal Government and the extractive oil companies by the southern oil-bearing enclave minorities.

As Soremekun and Obi succinctly put the matter:

*Oil became inextricably linked with the national Question because the bulk of the oil produced and sold is mined in the minority nationalities' areas of the Niger Delta, who are not in a position of advantage (in terms of numerical strength and political power); particularly as the Federal Government has been dominated by the majority nationalities*

*since the late 1960s and have since the post-civil war period expropriated the oil revenue (Soremekun and Obi; 1993:210).*

It is, therefore, clear that oil which is the mainstay or life-wire of the Nigerian State is extracted from the politically powerless southern oil producing minorities by the powerful Federal Government dominated by the majority nationalities.

### **Incidence of Marginalization and Minority reactions**

The minority oil producing areas are agitating and asking for redress because the Federal Government dominated by the Northerners, it is evidently using the nation's oil-wealth to develop the North at the expense of the oil producing minorities. This is because the enormous oil-wealth derived from the small oil producing states of the south has been consistently and constantly diverted by the Federal Government to massively develop the regions, states, towns and villages of the Northern ruling oligarchy and their ethnic majorities, to the chagrin and complete neglect of the oil host communities. Examples of this one sided developmental strategy are seen in the massive federal funding and continuous economic patronage, in terms of extensive dam and irrigations complexes, heavily subsidized agricultural and social development projects in the North. Others are the geo-politically motivated state-owned socio-economic projects such as the high strategic Kaduna Refinery, 900 kilometers from the nearest Southern oil field, including several educational, administrative and military institutions with their headquarters in the North (Eteng: 1996:132).

This situation results in the oil rich minorities living paradoxically, in abject poverty, which has become their objective condition. This is because these communities, as a result of the Federal Government's neglect, lack education, employment opportunities, basic socio-economic infrastructures, utilities and social amenities in comparison to the Northern non-oil producing communities. This paradox of extreme poverty amidst abundant oil-wealth is best illustrated in Ogoni land which is obviously the most industrialized in the oil producing enclave of Rivers State. Ogoni is estimated to have provided the Nigerian State with a total revenue from oil of about \$40 billion over the last 34 years (Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) 1992:94 items). In spite of this huge financial contributions to the nation's wealth, Ogoni, today can only boast of seven oil fields, Nigeria's only major fertilizer plant, a large petro-chemical plant, Nigeria's fourth largest ocean port, and several oil servicing companies located within a few kilometers of each other (Naanen, 1995:66:67).

The Urhoboland, another oil producing enclave in Delta State is even less fortunate than Ogoniland. This is because in the past 39 years of the petroleum industry in Nigeria, Shell, Pan-ocean and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) have reaped from Urhoboland revenue amounting to N2,185,000,000.000 (or 2.2 Trillion Naira). This translates to an average of 56 Billion Naira per year. (Yet the entire budget of Delta State is about Four Billion Naira per annum, and Delta State accounts for no less than 36 per cent of gross national total. On each day of the year about 68 Million Naira worth of Urhobo natural gas is wasted through reckless flaring (communique of the Urhobo National Assembly, Guardian Wednesday. August, 19. 1998:40). It is agonizingly painful that in spite of this (or is it because of it?) enormous financial contribution to the nation's treasury, Urhoboland cannot boast of any significant Federal Industry, apart from the epileptic Warri Refinery and the almost moribund Aladja steel complex.



Of course, there is the constant reminder of the Federal presence by the continuous and reckless gas flaring it at Erhos-Ike near Kokori Inland. There is no federal higher institution in Delta State, except the petroleum Training Institution (PTI) established by the Obasanjo regime targeted at the training of skill manpower for effective oil extraction. Whereas, almost all the states in the North have one form of federal higher institution or the other (JAMB Brochure 1996/97, 1997/98 (ed) ch.4).

The oil producing minorities also complain about environmental degradation and in particular the occupation of these communities. It is not actually possible to adequately describe the extent of environmental havoc that have been wreaked on these communities because of oil exploration. Oil spillages into land, swamp and offshore over the years have definitely deprived these communities of their economic life span. In fact, the extent of environmental devastation is better seen than imagined! Table IV below illustrates the volume of oil spilled into different Ecosystems between 1976-1986.

Leaking oil pipes as a result of corrosion, equipment malfunction or outright sabotage are all causes of oil spill which pollute the environment. The recent Jesse town (Delta state) horrifying tragedy which occurred on the 17th of Oct. 1998, in which a valve pit was vandalized by people suspected to be unscrupulous oil bunkerers (Tell Magazine: Nov. 2. 1998:10-15) is just one of such episodes. The 'wretched of the Earth' of Jesses and its environs oil producing communities, living amidst abundant oil, oil everywhere but none to use, decided out of want and need to make use of the gushing and wasting petrol and damn the consequences. This is because petrol and kerosene in the country since 1994, had become like the Hailey's comet' seen once on earth every once 76 years. Of course, the lives of about 1,200 (Tell Nov. 1998 people 10-15) were wasted by the inferno that resulted from the expected explosion. This is the gory situation constantly facing the oil producing minorities in their everyday life.

Another issue that agitates the minds of the oil producing minorities, is that of political marginalization depicted in their non-representation in Government. This is because qualified people from the Oil producing minorities are seldomly appointed into top Government positions, which is usually the yardstick for measuring access to state power. All topmost Government positions are usually occupied by the Northerners. This Northern dominance is often reflected in the control of strategic positions both in the public service and Government owned parastatals.

For example, out of the 11 Heads of Government since political independence on 1st Oct. 1960, 8 are from the North and they ruled for a total of 34 years, while 3 are from the South, ruling for a total of 4 years, and out of the 9 Inspector- General of Police since 1964 to date, 6 are from the North and only 3 are from the South. (Tribune 25/7/98:20)

Most instructive and revealing in the marginalization policy of the Federal Government, of the Oil producing minorities, is in the 'appointment into oil related Federal Government parastatals. One would have expected that in making such appointments

TABLE IV

VOLUME OF OIL SPILLED INTO DIFFERENT ECOSYSTEM 1 976- 1 986		
Type of Environment	Quantity of oil Spilled (Barrels)	% of Spill incidents
Land	101.764	81.1
Swamp	513.231	12.6
Offshore	1,191,404	6.3

Source: Isichei (1993)

indigenes from the oil producing communities should be considered. But in total disregard to one of the basic principles of federalism which emphasizes that a 'Federal Government is device by which the Federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected (Livingstone 1952:22) appointments are usually made to protect only the interest of the Northerners. A look at the following appointments clearly illustrates the Northern dominance over the oil producing minorities even in the oil related industries. They are: Chairman, Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) Major-General Muhammadu Buhari-North, Managing Director, Pipelines products Marketing Company (PPMC) was until recently, Alhaji Haruna Abubakar North, Managing Director Port Harcourt Refinery, Alhaji Mansuri Ahmed-North (Tribune 25th July: 1998:20).

The recent re-organization of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) that replaced professor Eric Opia, from Delta State; with Assistant Inspector-General of police Alhaji Bukar AH, a Northerner, to head OMPADEC, is like rubbing salt into a festering sore. This appointment by the General A. Abubakar's regime is a clear illustration of the marginalization policy of the Federal Government. The protestations that followed Bukar Ali's appointment (punch 10/27/98, Guardian, 11/27/98, Punch 2/11/98, Concord 23/11/98) and his subsequent replacement with Rear Admiral Preston Omoshola from Delta State, only points to the regrettable fact that the oil producing minorities can only get a fair hearing through vehement agitations and protests.

It will be recalled that OMPADEC was established in 1992 by the President Babangida's regime essentially in response to the complaints of neglect by the oil producing minorities. It was charged with the responsibilities of administering judiciously, the 3 percent allocation fund and to coordinate development projects in the oil producing communities.

However, OMPADEC has not been a success story since inception. This is because its impact is not being felt in the areas in terms of development projects. It has always beer, a story of abandon project and more complains here and there as it becomes a contract rather than development outfit. In fact, OMPADEC now constitutes an additional issue of complaint by the oil producing minorities.

Another problematic issue in the operation of the Nigerian Federal system, is the manipulation of the principle of derivation in revenue allocation by the three major ethnic groups. The derivation principle determines the amount of revenue accruable to a state from its economic resources. The principle has always been manipulated and favourably applied to the advantage of the dominant ethnic groups because its usage has always been characterized by serious political and partisan considerations, at every point in time. For example, the principle was applied on 100% basis, between 1953 and 1959. This was because

the major bulk of the nation's wealth was from then cash crops such as groundnuts in the North and Cocoa in the West. In fact, the derivation principle has been favourably applied to other revenue generating sources of other regions, states and majority ethnic groups but not to oil which is found in abundance in the southern, oil producing minorities.

Indeed, the derivation principle has been on the decline with the growing importance of oil. For instance, at Independence that principle was applied on a 50-50 percent basis. This was because oil was then replacing cash crops gradually but steadily, as the main source of the country's revenue. By 1975 when oil has become the mainstay of the nation's economy, the Obasanjo's regime reduced the derivation principle to 20 percent. Under Shagari's administration, the allocation was reduced to 2 percent and further reduced to 1.5 percent by the Buhari regime, but was slightly increased to 3 percent by the Babangida's regime (Eteng: 1996:138). As Ovwasa (1995:110. elsewhere observes:

*The dominant power blocs defended the derivation principle at that time on the grounds of equity. They argued, that equity demands that the area from where the bulk of the revenue is obtained should receive an extra share beyond what every other area received. It is, however, interesting to note that as from the 1970s to date the principle of derivation has paled into an insignificant fact in revenue allocation.*

It is, therefore, obvious that the enormous oil wealth from the oil producing minorities is being consciously diverted by the Federal Government to develop the Northern non-oil producing region of the country.

The oil producing minorities also hold grudges against the oil companies operating in the host communities. The oil companies are accused of massively exploiting their oil wealth with the backing of the Federal Government without ploughing the money back into the communities by developing the areas. The oil companies being the agents of the Federal Government, are the ones directly involved in the physical degradation of the environment as well as the dislocation of their economy.

This is because the companies in collusion with Federal Government seized community's land for oil prospecting. The oil companies have also assisted the Federal/State governments, in the brutal repression of the aggrieved communities' demands for fair hearing, justice and equity, in the distribution of oil wealth derived from their lands.

These companies by destroying the lands through oil exploration with its attendant environmental hazards are waging a war akin to genocide on the host communities. As Ken Saro Wiwa (1992:42-48) poetically puts it:

*It is an ecological war in which no blood is (apparently) spilled, no bones are broken no one is (assumedly) maimed, so few are alarmed but men, women and children die; flora, fauna and fish perish, air, soil and water are poisoned; and finally, the land and its inhabitants die.*

This ecological warfare situation is not peculiar to Ogoni, but the entire Niger Delta region where oil is being extracted. The Jesse town disaster in Urhoboland of Delta State, earlier referred to, is a clear case in point.

The strategies adopted by oil producing minorities in presenting their position to the Government include peaceful appeals to violent demonstration, seizure of flow stations and direct confrontation as the last option. This systematic approach is to draw the attention of the federal government and the oil companies to their plight. At first, peaceful avenues such as verbal appeals, press releases, communiques, legislative debates, press interviews vigils and church services are exploited.

Other peaceful avenues through which demands are made, include hearings at various local and international fora.

Group leaders also adopt the strategy of making the peoples themselves have a stake in the struggle. This objective is usually achieved by the leaders making monetary promises to the people if and when their demands must have been met. The leadership of the Ogoni uprising in Rivers State of 1990-1993, made effective use of these strategies. For example, throughout 1991 press conferences were held to explain Ogoni action and to elicit the support of the various pro-democracy groups in the country. Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (Mosop) and the National Youth Council of Ogoni people (NYCOP) also raised the awareness of the injustices suffered by the Ogoni's through campaign tours of the nooks and corners of Ogoni land so as to secure the support of the masses. And to make the people themselves and lump sum monetary compensation if the struggle succeeded (Osaghae: 1995:325-344) Outright-seizure of oil wells, violent demonstrations and direct confrontations constitute the last options when all peaceful avenues for peacefully negotiated settlements of demands failed. The recent seizure of the oil flow stations by youths suspected to be Ijaws in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is an attestation to the use of this tactic by the oil producing minorities to press home their demands. (The punch. Oct. 26, 1998:1-2).

### **The Government and the oil Companies Responses to the oil Producing Minorities Agitations**

The responses of the Federal/State and oil companies to the demands of the oil producing minorities, have always ranged from double-talk, unfulfilled promises and most prominently, arm-twisting strategy. This arm-twisting strategy is commonly seen in the numerous repressive responses in which combined team of the army and the police are quickly drafted to the 'troubled' areas to forcefully evacuate towns and villages. Specific instances of such violent repressive measures by the Government include: Egbona crisis (1980-81) Oburu violence (1989) Umuechem (Etche) holocaust (October 31 -November 1, 1990) Bony Ikgba square tragedy (July 21, 1992) Egi-Obaji mayhem (February 19, 1994) Tai - Biara (Ogoni) massacre allegedly instigated by Wilbrose, a company that services shell (1994) and Ubima Tragedy (1995) (Etang, 1996:140) among others.

The Government also respond through the use of draconian decrees. This is to give legality to the repressive and oppressive action of Government. The rationale is to intimidate the oil producing minorities from asking for their rights in the face of obvious cheating and marginalizations. A classical illustration of this strategy by the federal Government was during the Ogoni uprising between 1990-1993.

The leaders of the Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (Mosop), in December of 1992, after unsuccessful numerous peaceful pleas, decided to write to shell Chevron and NNPC, to comply with their demands within 30 days or face the disruptions of their operations in Ogoniland. The demands were:

1. Payment of US \$6bn for accumulated rents and royalties for oil exploration since 1958,
2. Payment of US \$4bn for damages and compensation for environmental pollution, devastation and ecological degradation,
3. Immediate stoppage of environmental degradation and in particular gas flaring in korokoro, Yorla and Bomu,
4. Immediate covering of all exposed high pressure oil pipelines;
5. Initiation of negotiations with Ogoni people with a view to reaching meaningful and acceptable terms for further and continued exploration and exploitation of oil from Ogoniland and to agree on workable and effective plans for environmental protection of the Ogoni people' (Osaghae: 336).

It is, however, revealing that as soon as the Federal Government got wind of this letter to the three oil companies operating in Ogoniland, her immediate reaction was to announce a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations. This move was in clear anticipation of the threatened mass rally of the Ogonis if their demands were not met. Instead of an invitation to the Ogonis for a dialogues, the Federal Government went ahead to give legal backing to the announced ban by promulgating a decree which declared demands for a right to self-determination and disturbances of oil production activities to be acts of treason attracting capital punishment.

Obviously, the decree was directed at the Ogonis and all other oil producing minorities in the country. The rationale for the decree, was essentially to discourage the Ogonis from carrying out their planned mass rally and other threats. Bu: this strategy did not succeed in weakening their determination, because as observed by Osaghae (1995:336).

*such reactions from the state only strengthened the people's resolve. Thus, at the expiration of their thirty-day ultimatum and in defiance of the state order, a mass rally was held at Bori on 3 January 1993.*

The oil companies on their part quickly increased and tightened security around their oil installations using the troops dispatched to them by the Federal Government. Both the Government and the oil Companies must have adopted this arm-twisting strategy to demonstrate their unassailable position vis-a-vis their weak and economically asphyxiated Ogoni peoples and to send a warning to other equally exploited oil producing communities who might be nursing similar ambitions.

Another 'deadly' strategy adopted by the oil companies in response to the oil producing minorities agitations is that of divide-and-rule through the instigation of confusion and violence in the oil producing enclave. The oil companies creates intense intra-community and intra-movement hostilities. These are in form of conflicts between and among community leaders, between community and the masses, between youths and elders. They also foment conflicts between political opponents and between 'village' and 'Urban' elites. The violent clashes which broke out between Ogonis and the neighbouring Andonis between July and September 1993, and Okirika in Port-Harcourt in December, 1993, were all the manifestations of the divide-and-rule tactics of the oil companies. This was because both parties to the conflict claimed that they have no case against each other. They also believed that the attacks were instigated and financed by the oil companies with the support of the Rivers state and Federal Government.

It was on the basis of these denials that the Guardian editorial (12 Oct.-1993:p8) rhetorically queries ‘The two sides have said they have no case against each other. Who then engineered the conflict? The answer remains a mystery till now.

## CONCLUSION

We have revealed from analysis that Nigeria is an oil based economy. The oil wealth of the Nigerian state is specifically derived from the eight minority states of the Federation, all located in the southern part. Paradoxically, as illustrated from analysis, these states are being neglected and marginalized because of their minority status in the federation. This is because the states are being peripherized by the Federal Government dominated by the majority ethnic groups of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, in that order of significance.

This deliberate marginalization policy of the oil producing minorities, by the Federal Government, had, as expected, led to violent and virulent agitations and protestations against the Federal Government and the oil companies involved in the extraction of oil in the host communities.

The central thrust of these protests is a demand for justice, fair play and equity in the distribution of the oil resources. This is because the present distributive system has placed the oil producing minorities at a disadvantage, as the oil wealth is essentially being used to develop non-oil producing states of the Federation, most especially in the Northern parts of the country.

The calls of the oil producing minorities on the Federal Government to redress this imbalance, is often met with repressive measures as seen in the arm-twisting strategy of the Government. This approach rather than solve the problem has indeed exacerbated it because it is counter-productive.

The ad-hoc and rather palliative approach adopted by the Federal Government as represented in the takenist gift of the oil Minerals Producing Areas Commission (OMPADEC) established in 1992 for oil producing minorities has not solved the problem. This is because OMPADEC is largely a contract rather than a development organisation. The few selectively executed infrastructural projects and amenities sometimes donated by these oil companies in response to agitations are also of no significance. This is because they represent a very minute percentage in terms of their total development and welfare impact on the host communities in comparison to the enormous oil wealth expropriated daily from these communities.

To address the oil producing minorities demands adequately and concretely, the following minorities demands adequately and concretely, the following measures are suggested.

A national dialogue conducted through the convening of a National sovereign conference (NSC). The conference should be constituted in such a manner that all shades of opinions in the country are adequately represented. Membership should be by election. This NSC should be convened by the civilian administration expected to be in place on May 29th within six months of its inauguration. The NSC is to specifically negotiate the corporate existence or otherwise of the Nigerian State.

Meanwhile, the oil producing minorities should be given special attention because they possess the wealth of the Nigerian state as presently composed. This attention can be achieved by getting qualified indigenes from the areas into the mainstream decision-making organs of the Federal Government.

Essentially, all the compost positions in all the oil related industries should be occupied by- qualified indigenes from the oil producing minorities.

On the vexed issue of revenue allocation, the derivation principle should be applied on 50% basis as against the recommended 13% in the 1995 draft constitution. The 50% coming to the states from derivation should be shared as follows 30% for the oil producing communities within the states and the remaining 20% for the remaining areas of the states. These measures have the potentials of eliminating the problem of inequitable distribution of oil resources which has been the bane and bone of contention in the Federal system of Nigeria. The adequate representation of the people from the oil producing minorities in the Federal Government and in oil related industries, for example, can also asuage the marginalization policy of the majority ethnic groups dominated Federal Government.

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