

Globalization of Nigeria's Oil Industry: An Overview of the Unending Terrorism in the Niger-Delta Region

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Abstract

The prevailing and prolong sectional violence perpetuated by militants in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria's South-South geo-political zone informs the position of this paper. The researcher grapple with the very essence of globalize oil sector as root cause of violence in the region, more so that it is Nigeria's economic mainstay as a nation state. At the heart of this discourse is the activities of Shell Oil Company and its roles in the degeneration of arable land in the region without corresponding palliative measures to cushion the effects of the peoples deteriorating socio-economic plight. The paper concludes that an enabling environment created in the region by both government, political gladiators in the region as well as multinational corporations will go a long way in stemming the tide of rebellion among the militants in the region. This paper is designed to boost further research.

Keywords: Globalization, Terrorism, Niger Delta, Oil Politics, Violence, Elitism, Politics of Exclusion.

Introduction

The circumstances conditioning the direction and fortunes of the Nigerian economy shortly after the oil boom in the 1970's has been a major factor in the multifarious crises bedeviling her status as a nation state. Apart from the peculiar crisis of identity arising probably from the diverse multi-lingual and ethnic cleavages: crisis of integration and regeneration, crisis of participation, etc; a major setback in Nigeria's national life is the over-reliance on the oil industry as an economic mainstay. Incidentally, however, the global linkage of the oil industry making the invasion of major stakeholders from overseas for oil prospects in Nigeria has been a source of worry especially for the oil-rich Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

Significantly, however, the problems arising from environmental degradation as a result of oil spillage without the corresponding palliatives in place of cushion the harsh effects of this dangerous phenomenon has rather translated further into sentiment of repression and aggression on the people who feel subverted and sub served over what belongs to them as natures' own gift. In any case, examining the industry as a major contextual issue does not in any sense, elicit the necessary answers to the problems surrounding the Niger-Delta imbroglio. Instead, the research goes further to examine the relative infiltration of the excesses of transnational and multinational entities and their activities in Nigeria and how it portends on the region's socio-economic and political nexus.

This to a large extent, accounts for the unending feud between the federal government of Nigeria and a chunk of minority militant groups who in recent times convoluted its powers to run a parallel government, induce more killings of both military personnel and of course, the police on national assignment while leaving their relations helpless and only reduced to their own fate; high-jacking of major foreign expatriates to an unknown destinations as well as the adoption of such bloody measures by way of guerilla tactics using hand grenades, hard-core dynamites, explosive and automatic rifles to either inflict injuries, disrupt electioneering process (as in the case of the 2007 general elections or even reduce magnificent buildings to shreds. (AIT News Hour, May, 2007). These ugly developments only spell doom for an emerging and evolving democracy like Nigeria.

Therefore this paper intends to inculcate a culture of integration, good neighborliness and the need for government to be responsive to the wishes and aspirations of the 'dying people' in the midst of 'plenty' to forestall anarchy and a drift of the Nigerian nation state to an experience similar to those of the civil war era.

Conceptual Issues in Globalization of Oil Politics in Nigeria

It will not be out of place to state that the conceptual issues surrounding globalization of Nigeria's oil industry is a function of the integration of the world into the global capitalist fold, the acquisition and maintenance of vast natural resources of host countries and the subordination of the people to an untold economic hardship respectively. Thus, the content of this seemingly derogatory socio-economic posture points to the mere fact that the 'rule of the market' is the only determining factor in the allocation of resources within the societal arrangement. This appears to be the root of agitations, revolutions and of course, destructions that have permeated the entire landscape in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Of utmost importance also to this bone of contention is the high rate of social change catching up with the people in their quest for resource control, the transmission of sectional woes to further enhance the already heated Nigerian polity by the so called political 'godfathers' who purported to have links in Aso Rock in Abuja, to mention but a few.

On the other hand, it is equally pertinent to state that this glaring act of terrorism in the oil-rich Niger-Delta region may not be unconnected with the idiosyncrasies and self whims of major indigenous stakeholders and political representatives from that part of the country. The tendency therefore is to sit on the federal Allocations from Abuja, share the same loot under intense cover, dish out a little stipend for the smart ones who might be too inquisitive about the goings-on; and then leave the entire people in their pauperized condition of living. By extension, therefore, the global perspectives of the oil-industry in Nigeria vis-a-vis the over politicization of the same has left the people in perpetual conflict with the Nigerian system. It has also largely manifested in the incessant dilemmas already pointed out in our discourse. It has further spelt doom for an economy that is vigorously skewed along a rentier state with wide ranging implications on Nigerian local politics.

The Content of Globalization

From a conventional angle, the concept of globalization covers a wider usage in almost all life endeavors. It has its root in the security, aviation etc. Systematically, the concept presupposes the integration of the entire world system into a 'global village'. Basically, however, the moral question behind sectional agitations and the corresponding terrorism has its origin from the level of exposure and diffusion of several western cultural values and principles as a matter of fact.

By extension, however, globalization aptly describes the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide inter-connectedness in all aspects of social life (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, 1992:2; Held et al, 1999:4). For the purpose of this research, however, globalization connotes the inculcation of backward countries of Africa, Asia, Middle-East and Latin American countries into a 'global terror' groups as exemplified in several countries, especially of the Maghreb extraction. This perhaps accounts for the high level of sophistication assumed by an atom of restive militants whose powers have gone beyond the capabilities of government to handle not until the recent amnesty granted by the federal government of Nigeria. Further contention here is to say that the spate of inequality brought about by globalization is capable of steering up still waters into confusion. The argument in connection with this idea hovers around the school of thought of the liberals and the radicalists respectively. In the first place, while the liberalists tend to celebrate the triumph of a single global market (to which there is allegedly no alternative), the radicals tend to argue in favor of the pernicious consequences of the same bearing in mind the monumental injuries it is likely to cause backward political entities (Hoogvelt, 1997; Amin 1997, Chomsky, 1999; Gills, 2000). Conversely, as Chomsky (1999:8) argues:

The economic consequences of these globalization policies have been the same everywhere, specifically to peripheral states, and exactly what one should expect: a massive increase in social and economic inequality, a marked increase in severe deprivation for the poorest nations and peoples of the world, a disastrous and an environment, an unstable global economy and an unprecedented bonanza for the wealthy (my emphasis added).

Yet the leftist school of thought proclaims the oddities of globalization in relation to the conditions of the poorest of the poor viz:

- 1) protection of the interest of capital and the expansion of the process of capital accumulation on the world scale;

- 2) a tendency towards homogenization of state politics and state forms to render them instrumental to the protection of capital and the process of capital accumulation on the world scale, via a new ‘market ideology’; and
- 3) the political exclusion of dissident social forces from the arena of state policy making, in order to dissocialize the subject and insulate the neo-liberal state against the societies over which they preside, thus facilitating the socialization of risk on behalf of capital and their indigenous acolytes (Gill, 2004:44).

Either ways, however, globalization connotes a process operating at varying degrees of differentiation driven by the tactical use of market logic. This scenario is created to further isolate and alienate the common people who may not withstand the shocks of a market-driven economy. Thus the available alternative is to resort to abrupt violence of any magnitude (Zyman, 1996; Madelay, 1999 and Obi, 2000).

The Elitist – Multinational Configuration in the Niger-Delta: An Assessment of Shell as a Moving Force in Emerging Terrorism

An attempt to x-ray the import of multi-national corporations in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, primacy will be given to a Royal-Dutch company, Shell Nigeria Plc whose area of concern ranges from oil exploration to production, refining, marketing, gas, chemicals and real estate. Nonetheless, Shell Oil Company is believed to have a massive global spread with about 3000 major companies cutting across 100 countries around the world (Madelayt, 1999:4). Incidentally, Shell is believed to derive about 15 per cent of its global oil from the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria with its attendant environment disaster strongly telling on the inhabitants of the area ranging from water pollution as an off-shoot of excessive gas flaring as well as uncontrolled rate of toxic wastes into the high seas.

Again, there has equally been glaring cases of loss of environmental beauty ranging from extinction of exotic species of Flora and Fauna, destruction of arable land and the near-homelessness of the legitimate inhabitants of the Niger-Delta region. Thus, the profitability of the Niger-Delta region to Shell oil company notwithstanding, Shell’s policy framework in relation to the corporate existence of the people in the region is grossly inadequate. The argument in the light of the above is that Shell’s position in Nigeria’s political economy and its role as the cutting edge of the global control of Nigeria’s oil offers Nigeria as its partner, an equal autonomy in relation to the dictates of globalization. Obviously, however, Nigeria is only interested or rather remains acquiesced as she lacks the will power to contend with both political and social forces in position to the arbitrariness of Shell (Obi, 2000, Ohmae, 1995 and Lobomari, 1976).

The foregoing analysis appears to be a veritable avenue for vigilant and over-ambitious political ‘big-wig in the region who may wish to play smart for ‘hot cash’ no matter whose horse is gored. Therefore, the stage for terrorism is set between the villagers who have now formed themselves into guerilla warfare to protest against the usurpation of their farm land, homes and fishing grounds, or who have rather suffered the widespread impact of oil pollution and environmental degradation (Ashton, et al., 1988). At the heart of this development lie the linkages between the elitist-multinational configurations with drastic implication on the common people in the area.

The matter is worse off when several attempts have been made by the federal government of Nigeria to keep peace and tranquility in the region to no avail. Available statistics shows that more than 200 foreign oil company staff have either been hijacked on board while on air across high seas or bluntly abducted by armed militants whose powers are said to be metaphysical and beyond human comprehension (Lawal, 2000). The source of sponsorship of these terrorist groups, from informed opinion emanates right from the seat of government in Abuja through several local champions and arrow heads planted as bigots and sectional heads in the area. The attempt by the Obasanjo administration for close to a decade to salvage the South-South geographical zone from a replication of some kind of rebellion in the 1967 political era was not too good enough to quell the mayhem. Neither is the recent amnesty recipe fair enough to carry the villagers along as there has been no end in sight to the crises. Thus, in the Niger-Delta today, there is still high level oil theft even in the broad day light, breaking of oil pipe lines and kidnapping of innocent citizens. It is also interesting to note that while conscious efforts are being made to guide the unsavory condition of things here, the international-local mobilization through social and ethnic identity movements and their trans-territorial networks through vibrant civil society bodies may be another obstacle.

The Politics of Exclusion and the Niger-Delta Rebellion

Aside from the elite-multinational conjectures as a road-map to the unending crisis in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, the politics of exclusion equally plays a vital role in the conflicts. The exclusive nature of arrangement finds expression in the issue of ownership.

Conversely, the power of ownership further defines 'who gets what, when and how much' in the scheme of resource allocation. The analysis that follows reveals that the oil is owned by the federal government of Nigeria who reserves the right to go home with the booty in a ratio of 60:40 as spelt out in the Joint Ventures Agreements (Obi and Sorekun, 1993). The implication in this state of affairs is to say that the Niger-Delta people are expressly excluded from the ownership of oil and control of it proceeds therein.

To further buttress this point, the Land Use Act of 1978 vests ownership of land to the state and the same reserves the right to revoke the said land if it is required for mining or oil sector activity. This statute can be said to be conflicting with the people's agitation on resource control. Besides, the region which hosts the highest concentration of global capita is one of the least developed in Nigeria, (Ola, 1999; Douglas, 1999:636). Thus the people are left in their pauperized condition of want, squalor, disease and poverty in the midst of plenty. This tendency is capable of propelling rebellion by any such groups anywhere. Unfortunately, this trend is equally being hijacked by several vested interests that have rather helped to fuel the crisis to a very disgusting level. The crisis was further transposed to the then in-coming administration of Umar Yar'Adua as his deputy who hails from that part of Nigeria directly had his mansion wrecked in shreds by a group of heavily armed militants numbering more than 30.

There is no mincing word that exclusion breeds resentment and raises the issue of the morality of expropriation, especially in a context in which the impact of the oil industry transcends the place it occupies, and where the people of the Niger-Delta have suffered government neglect over the past decades (Obi, 1999). Therefore, the contention here is that the politics of exclusion appears to pitch the 'excluded' against the 'owners'. Struggle in the ensuing crisis involving the social movements of the Niger-Delta versus the oil multinationals and the Nigerian state on the other hand attests to the rising tide of criminality in the region, worse, still, the privatization of security apparatus in the region is a clear manifestation that there is still a dark end in the tunnel and the needed peace and tranquility is still elusive. In the final analysis, therefore, the politics of local resistance in the light of the aforementioned can be seen from the point of view of collective action direction at blocking further alienation, expropriation and environmental degradation in the scheme of things.

The Way Forward

From the foregoing commentaries, it appears that the level of conflict in the Niger-Delta requires a holistic approach to avoid the degeneration of the region into further anarchy. In the first place, conscious effort can and must be put in place to diversify monolithic Nigerian economy. The tendency here is to deemphasize the over-reliance on oil as the nation's mainstay. This will equally reduce tension in a people whose lives and purported existence are tied to oil for survival. Besides, while Nigeria awaits possible switch over to another source of national wealth, the already battered landscape in the region can be reactivated by putting forward necessary environmental laws to conserve natural resource endowments so the people can subsist. Furthermore, over politicization and privatization of security apparatuses with the sole aim of appropriating economic surpluses can only aggravate tension among the already furious and angry militant groups who may feel cheated in their own 'soil'. At this level, mutual dialogue round the table is the last resort to forestall any further pandemonium. Again, an all-inclusive policy framework of decision making in relation to resource allocation should to be, some extent, reflected on the derivation principle. This has the capability of getting the people involved in a fair share of resources accruing to them. Lastly, any international and inter-territorial forces fanning the embers of violence overseas may not necessarily be helping matters as it concerns the undue negative pressures and inducements to push the people at home to fight. This is very likely to boost further rebellion which could be threat to the much cherished global peace and security in all its ramifications.

Concluding Remarks

It is worthy of note that so much emphasis has been placed on the Niger-Delta imbroglio in most public discourses.

It is equally important to stress the relative benefit of utmost peace and tranquility in the Nigerian nation-building process. The carnage perpetrated by militants not only in the Niger-Delta region, but also in most Northern states of the federation including Bauchi, Gombe, Kano and Maiduguri axes, is capable of reducing the Nigerian state system to another war zone in this era of fragile socio-economic and political meltdown. It is equally fashionable to stress that overall government approach at resolving these conflicts must reflect the color and character of a civil setting and not the kind of fire-brigade measures being orchestrated by the current administration.

Thus carving out a surrender camp for militant to submit their arms in the midst of excruciating poverty of the mind, idea and morality is not a very significant panacea to peace making. Nigerian government must go beyond mere rhetoric and political jamboree on critical national matters so the nation can move forward in the 21st century.

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