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### **Oil, Environmental Conflict and National Security in Nigeria: Ramifications of the Ecology-Security Nexus for Sub-Regional Peace**

Cyril Obi  
Program in Arms Control, Disarmament,  
and International Security  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Disarmament, and International Security  
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Cyril Obi

*Visiting Scholar*

*Program in Arms Control, Disarmament,  
and International Security*

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Dr. Cyril Obi is a research fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, Nigeria, and holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Lagos. In 1996 he received a Social Science Research Council–MacArthur Foundation Fellowship for research and study at the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security at the University of Illinois at Urbana—Champaign. Dr. Obi’s research interests include international economic relations, regional economic integration, and Nigeria politics and economic development, especially as it concerns Nigeria’s oil production. He is the author of numerous articles on the impact of oil on the politics and economy of Nigeria, as well as a recent monograph, *Structural Adjustment, Oil, and Popular Struggles: The Deepening Crisis of State Legitimacy and Governance in Nigeria* (Dakar: CODESRIA, forthcoming).



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## **Abstract**

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This study critically explicates the ways in which the ecology-security nexus in an oil producing, multi-ethnic developing country like Nigeria, could threaten national and international security. Conflicts over the distribution of resources, and the environmental basis of existence of ethnic minorities are spawned by this nexus.

There is however, a strong external link-external economic agent, reflective of global inequities, which deepen scarcities in collusion with local hegemon, thereby fueling more conflict.

The prospects for resolving the current crises thus lie in broadening the notion of security to include non-military considerations, transforming the authoritarian and rentier context of state power, alongside more humane, equitable, and environmentally responsible practices by global economic actors involved in the third world.



# **Oil, Environmental Conflict and National Security in Nigeria**

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## **Ramifications of the Ecology-Security Nexus for Sub-Regional Peace**

### **Introduction**

This study explores the critical linkage between the environment and national security in Nigeria in a new manner. It transcends existing statist notions of Nigerian security, and identifies oil-based environmental conflicts as a serious threat facing Nigeria both domestically and externally. Indeed the contestations over oil in Nigeria operate at several complex and interrelated levels that revolve around its centrality to the country's political economy. At the center of these struggles is the state and the opposing social forces. With oil accounting for more than 90 percent of national export earnings and 80 percent of state revenue, these contests are waged over the oil producing areas: between the state in partnership with oil multinationals that seek optimal exploitation of the oil resource, and the social forces that oppose this because of its destructive impact on the environment and livelihoods. At another level it is a struggle for power to control oil: to distribute the states' share of oil rents and retain political power within the fluid coalitions of the "national" ruling class whose precarious power base lies in controlling distribution of oil rents.

This context feeds into authoritarianism and patrimonialism as tools of limiting entry into the existing ruling political coalition, particularly in a period of economic crisis and widening of skewed power and class relations. Environmental conflict in the oil-producing areas thus becomes a terrain for contesting not just political space and access to resources, but one for resisting authoritarian forms of state rule and accumulation. It is this clash that informs the recent escalation of tension in the country and the international campaign to isolate Nigeria diplomatically, following the hanging of some oil environment activists found guilty by a tribunal of incitement to murder, late in 1995.

### **Environment and Security: Some Background Issues**

Since the end of the Cold War more prominence has been given to the role of environmental factors in shaping global security and international relations (Klare and Thomas 1994 and Miller 1995: 1-13). More attention is thus focused on transcending state-centric notions of sovereignty and security and facing the reality of global economic and ecological interdependence. In the light of these changes in global security concerns, the ecology-security nexus is important in defining new responses to Nigeria's security and its implications for peace, democracy, and development in West Africa. On the larger global level, it enhances our understanding of the sensitive role played by global economic interests in defining the parameters of environmental scarcities and crises through a system of production and trade that transfers the profits to the industrialized countries, while resource-rich third world countries like Nigeria bear the costs. This way it creates a bridgehead for the integration of issues of equity and sustainable development with the wider issues of regional and global security in the emerging world order.

Still on the global level, the Nigerian case offers a good opportunity to study and explain the role of multinational corporations-oil multinationals as examples of external economic agents whose activities impact on the security of the countries in which they operate. Recently the role of Shell and other oil multinationals in extracting resources, polluting the oil producing environment, deepening resource scarcities, and provoking crises have been the subject of sharp criticism by groups within Nigeria, Europe, and the United States (Brooks 1994; Ake 1994, 1996; Greenpeace 1994, 1995, 1996; and Shelby 1995).

At the Nigerian level, the crisis revolves around the national-global nexus. This demands an objective examination of both internal causal factors and Nigeria's place in the global economy. Internal crises and

a weak externally oriented economy have serious implications for state legitimacy, sovereignty, and security.

This involves understanding how the intervention of external economic agents in local environments deepen scarcities and provoke conflicts. In the context of authoritarianism and external dependence, state security remains dependent on these external economic interests, and the use of force to suppress internal threats. Apart from underscoring the dilemma and vulnerability of the state, its actions provoke further crisis, as the opposition groups attack state policies using the platforms of democracy, human rights, and nationalism.

The possible escalation of the oil environment crisis in Nigeria, poses an immense threat to national and sub-regional security. With its status as Africa's largest oil exporter and market, and home to the continent's largest population and elite, the implications of a possible deepening of tensions on the fragile oil-hinged unity of Nigeria is a grim prospect. The current threat encapsulates the wide dimensions of crisis spun by the struggles around oil and the potentially explosive features of the militarized Nigerian political terrain, where every inch of political space is locked in a zero sum game of the "state takes all". This terrain provides a nationalist veneer for a hegemonic state-building project, blocking out non-military, non-authoritarian considerations in the security and conflict management process. Increasing repression thus feeds an unending cycle of insecurity and instability. This study reveals the limitations of the "official approach," the role of outside forces in shaping security in an oil-rich context such as Nigeria, and the high-risk stakes of the ecology-politics linkage for Nigeria, the immediate sub-region and the emerging global order.

### **Environmental Concerns in Global Security: The Debate**

With the end of the East–West Cold War, a debate has emerged over the redefinition of national security to respond to new global challenges. This in part is owed to the pioneering works of Brown (1977), Ullman (1983), Myers (1989), and Mathews (1989). Their arguments for the broadening of national security to include non-military threats were to constitute the nucleus of a "post-realist" thrust linking the global environment with U.S. security. As Myers opined, the new approach sought to make U.S. policymakers recognize the fast changing character of international relations with regard to the environmental factor, to move away from the narrow to the broad (Myers 1989: 38–41). It was held in particular that environmental degradation and resource wars in areas of strategic U.S. interest in the third world could hurt American interest (Ullman 1983: 129–141). This formed the basis for a debate among those who see the redefinition of national security as part of a project of transforming the international system, those who seek to absorb it as a variable of state-centric neorealist analysis, and others who dismiss it as a passing fad (Matthew 1995 and Dabelko and Dabelko 1995). Most interesting perhaps, is the Homer–Dixon versus Levy debate over the linkage between the environment and national security (Homer–Dixon 1991, 1994, 1995, 1995–96 and Levy 1995). Homer–Dixon hinges his argument on the thesis that human-induced environmental pressures do pose a threat to national and global security. A range of environmental pressures could provoke social conflicts with potentially serious repercussions for the security interests of the developed world (Homer–Dixon 1991: 78). In later works, Homer–Dixon links environmental scarcities with violent conflict in developing countries and draws attention to the dangers this may portend for international security (1994, 1995). Levy, in examining the view that environmental degradation is a security threat to the United States disagrees with the conclusions of the protagonists of the environment-security nexus (Levy 1995: 35–62). He splits the environment-security links into three distinct forms: existential, physical, and political, and argues that of all three, only the physical: ozone depletion and climate change pose any threat to the United States. The challenge therefore is to focus more on political threats posed by regional conflicts rather than use environmental security as a rhetorical device. In taking this position, Levy strengthened the arguments of earlier writers who had opposed the attempt to link environmental degradation and national security (Deudney 1990: 461–476 and Brock 1991: 407–424). What is most relevant for this discourse is the weight or importance attached to environmental factors, which indeed would be a reflection of the specifics of a given case, and the mode of its insertion into existing global

patterns of production and power. This in turn defines the impact of environmental stresses on global security.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the debate, it is clear that changes attendant to the end of the Cold War pose a challenge to global security. As Seyom Brown (1994: 24–25) points out, the explosion in global interdependence, communications, and information technology and crisis in public world order underscore the need to include these changes “occurring within, above, and across jurisdictions of states” into a new perception of global security. What then is the relevance of the foregoing to our immediate context? Most important perhaps is what premium should be placed on environment-related threats to national, regional, and global security and the linkage between national and global security and the mutual transmissibility of impacts and repercussions: be they political or economic. It is however possible to discern some conceptual omissions. First is the preoccupation with U.S. security as the problem. The disadvantage in this approach lies in the possibility of misreading environmental problems in other parts of the world, and the ways external forces worsen these crises. Thus environmental conflicts in the third world become liable to being twisted to “fit the model”. Such that external hegemonic insertions: economic, strategic, political, and historical, and how they fuel and profit from inequitable global relations, are structured out of analysis in discussing environmental conflicts in the developing world. The political corollary of this, authoritarianism—as a modality of states’ threatened by environmental-related conflict to cling to power, is discussed in relation to its threat potential to international security, and not how access and control over natural resources can be democratized. Yet the issues of access and equitable distribution lie at the heart of the crises facing most resource-rich, but poorer countries of the third world. Thus while it is true that the struggle over natural resources promote conflict within and among countries, they do not do so in isolation of external economic stressor-actors, or outside the existence of fundamental and historically constructed contradictions.

In relation to this study, there is the realization of the problems embedded in the Homer–Dixon–Levy debate. Yet its relevance lies in the focus on environment-security linkages and the transmissibility of such threats across borders and regions. Furthermore it shows the need to address the fundamental question—whose security? While the debate looks at the implications of global developments on U.S. security, we intend to look at the implications of developments in Nigeria for national and regional security as an aspect of global security. And the approach that best suits this purpose confronts the conceptual issues that define Nigeria’s security.

### **Some Conceptual Issues in Nigeria’s Security**

The major issues in Nigeria’s security are linked to the fundamental question—whose security? These issues include the virtual absence of linkages between security and environmental management, the notion of national security and interest, and the influence of the historical and rentier context of state power on threat perceptions.

### **National Security and the Environmental Management: The Nigerian Case**

Several studies show, that the environment has always been seen in narrow and managerial terms as something to be subdued and exploited for the sake of national development (Aina 1992 and Obi 1994a). It was not until 1988, as a result of the attention caused by the dumping of Italian toxic waste at Koko in Nigeria, that environmental management was properly institutionalized (Obi 1994). In spite of this, the emphasis has been on erecting structures for enforcing sanitation laws. These remain largely ineffective as a result of many factors including: conflicting and confusing jurisdictions among the various tiers of government, poor funding, political instability and rapid turnover of top bureaucrats, absence of a coherent legal framework, and excessive federal centralization of power and resources (Akande 1994, Adewale 1994, and Obi 1994, 1996). In addition, the enforcement process often targets the vulnerable social groups and the poor while leaving out the big corporate offenders in the name of promoting economic development.

What comes out of the preceding is the virtual absence of environmental considerations in official perceptions of security, and economic development, and the non-recognition of security linkages in the process of environmental management. Thus the environment is trapped within the view that its subjugation and exploitation is a necessary price for development. This in turn has implications for rentier, multi-ethnic, third world countries immersed in economic crises such as Nigeria. The issues of who gets the fruits of development, and whose environment should be “sacrificed” in exchange for what, become points of domination, alienation, resistance, and conflict. Yet the framework is based on a set of internal and external linkages that live off unsustainable modes of production and consumption and are forced through by the state.

The environmental management process thus reflects the dominance of state and external economic, extractive interests. A conflict situation arises between those who seek optimal exploitation of the environment and those who oppose it for reasons that include non-sustainability, inequity of distribution of proceeds, and the destruction of livelihoods. The struggle over oil resources is compounded by the conflictual relations over the oil producing environment. This vividly captures the Nigerian case, where the ethnic minorities of the oil producing areas have been locked in conflict against the state and the oil multinationals. This is discussed in more detail later.

From the foregoing, it is clear that conceptually, within the state’s view of national security bereft of environmental considerations, lies a source of conflict. In part it also captures the narrow options facing the state itself, when its weakness, vis-à-vis hegemonic local and global forces, impels it to turn on its people and the environment. The theoretical challenge that arises from the foregoing is therefore shaped by three considerations: broadening the notion of national security beyond militarist and elitist perspectives, integrating environmental concerns into national security, and promoting sustainable development and democracy as modalities of protecting the environment and the people.

### **Whose Security?**

In Nigeria there has been an ongoing quest to broaden the concept of national security to include non-military threats and the protection of social welfare. The debate has been centered on: whose interests national security should serve, the economic context of Nigeria’s relationship with the external world, and what core values the nation should defend and project at all times. It must be pointed out that this debate is a fairly recent phenomenon, owing partly to the little scholarly attention paid to internal security among Nigerian academics and the absence of a credible internal security policy (Imobighe 1990: 223).

The Nigerian state’s perception of security is reflective of a realist paradigm of projecting its power within a state-centric system, and a clear separation between foreign and domestic policy. While internal security is directed at maintaining “law and order” (Ministry of Defense 1978), the external is directed at repelling external military threats. This perception is increasingly becoming problematic for two reasons: in a post-Cold War context marked by rapid globalization, a state-centric perspective is becoming more of an anachronism, along with growing internal opposition to the hegemonic statist perspective of national interest and security

Olukoshi (1992), Nweke (1988), and Imobighe (1986, 1987, and 1989) argue that state and dominant class interests clearly eclipse national security in Nigeria. Olukoshi, posits that “the security thrust is directed toward the interests of the governing classes and their propertied allies, while most Nigerians are alienated from the security process that ironically turns on them from time to time”. Like Olukoshi, Imobighe’s critique of the doctrine of internal security (Imobighe 1990: 225) notes the consequence of this conservative approach as the tendency for national security planners to respond by strengthening the coercive apparatus of government anytime the nation is faced with internal security challenges, neglecting non-coercive, social welfare oriented approaches.

From the foregoing it is clear that the official paradigm of national security in Nigeria is statist and is reflective of the skewed power relations in the country. This is more so in the face of economic crises, social stresses arising from the harsh consequences of adjustment and the struggles for democracy. The

state views such “challenges” to its authority and its external economic allies as a threat to itself. Thus external economic forces are distinguished from external military threats. While the protection of the former is a critical part of state security, defense against the latter is the essence of its defense policy. A good example is the link among oil and national security and defense as perceived by General Abacha, then Minister for defense, in a 1992 lecture delivered at the National War College in Lagos:

At present and most certainly in the medium term, the economic survival of the country would depend on the oil sector. Therefore, physical facilities and structures could be objects of attack by countries or groups of people who do not wish Nigeria well . . . Having taken account of these economic threats to our defense policy, appropriate measures would have to be taken not only to prevent such attacks but to counteract them effectively by force of arms if necessary and punish saboteurs appropriately.

Thus the preceding shows that the dominant notion of “whose security” in the Nigerian context refers to state security and the protection of external economic interests. In the next part of the paper we shall consider the historical and rentier contexts of state security, and how these feed into environmental conflict.

### **Historical and Rentier Contexts of State Security in Nigeria**

Colonialism has acted as a watershed both for the conception of security and the evolution and character of the security forces (Nigerian Army Education School and Corps 1992). As noted by several scholars, Nigeria had its origins in a colonial state structure—a coercive British construct designed to define an exclusive territory for its imperial interests. An important part of the apparatus of the colonial state was the colonial army and the police, which later formed the nucleus of the post-colonial military and police force. This security force maintained law and order in colonial Nigeria and protected British imperial interests therein. The Nigerians in these forces saw their loyalty as lying with the British crown rather than their fellow Nigerians. This way they became alienated from the daily struggles of Nigerians, becoming a part of the superstructure of colonialism and its imperial ethos.

The process of decolonization in Nigeria has already been discussed elsewhere, and need not be repeated here. What is important to note is that the essence of the state and national security remained largely unchanged, in spite of its takeover by a Nigerian political class. The majority of Nigerians were alienated from the political process, and the economy remained largely dominated by foreign interests. Unlike the case of India (also an ex-British colony), where the post-colonial government pursued a policy of self-reliance and the strict regulation of foreign economic investments, the Nigerian case reflected foreign dominance, while ensuring that it accommodated local ruling class interests. The Nigerian state became a means of using strategic positions in public office to accumulate wealth. This was done either through direct appropriation of public funds or collaboration with foreign firms doing business in the country. Thus state security became largely defined in terms of the material interests of those who held state power and the external economic actors based in the industrialized countries. Yet the cleavages within the ruling elites (ethnic, regional, and ideological) led to struggles for power, which in turn destabilized the state. This instability led to the collapse of the post-independent democratic government in 1966 and a military takeover. But time has shown that the military has not fared better than their civilian elite allies in the face of coups and counter coups over three decades. Under military rule the structural problems of the economy have deepened, while the intra-elite struggles for power and entry into ruling political networks have assumed an unprecedented prominence (Lewis 1994). Thus the historical context of state security in Nigeria reflects its fragility and susceptibility to internal subversion by feuding factions of the ruling class, and dependence on external economic powers. This explains the tendency toward highly centralized state rule and the further alienation of most Nigerians.

### **The Rentier Context**

The other equally important aspect, is the linkage between the rentier context of the economy and state security. As mentioned earlier, the Nigerian economy since the 1970s has remained dependent on earnings from oil exports. This has had several implications: the economy remains vulnerable to oil price

fluctuations in the global market, the oil multinationals producing the oil for export are critical to the fortunes of the state and the economy, while Nigeria's oil forms an important source of energy for the industrialized world, outside the volatile Middle East region. Thus when the Nigerian economy slipped into crisis, following the crash in oil prices in the early 1980s, an important aspect of the security calculations of the state was to preserve the interest of oil multinationals as the producers of its "lifeblood".

How then, does the foregoing relate to the rentier context? The thesis of the "rentier" as put forward by Beblawi and Luciani (1987) in their study of oil-rich Arab states, describes a political economy based on the "sharing of a produce or natural stock of wealth without contributing to it". This scenario fits the Nigerian case since the 1970s, where the state and the economy have become totally dependent on external oil rents (receipts). The term "rent" captures the non-involvement of the state in the actual process of oil production, and its dependence on a share of the proceeds from oil sales to the global market. Not only is the state vulnerable to the fluctuating fortunes of a single commodity, the rentier economy has over time undermined the real sectors of the economy. With little productive activities taking place, power calculations revolve around the control and distribution of oil rents, by a small hegemonic group. The rentier state is often characterized by authoritarian, arbitrary, and extractive rule. Power is highly personalized, emphasizes is on connections and loyalty to the "grand patron" rather than merit or efficiency, loyalty is rewarded, opposition is ruthlessly repressed. Thus neo-patrimonialism becomes the modality for distribution and defining power relations. Although the state is strong because of the numerous resources at its disposal, it nonetheless remains very vulnerable to social pressures, intrafactional feuds, and the need to protect the patron-client networks from the alienated populace. Rentierism thus defines state security as the protection of "political coalitions converged around the creation and allocation of oil rents" (Beblawi and Luciani 1987: 424). Apart from the grim portends of renter contexts for any possibility of democratic opening, and the emergence of a strong productive economy, environmental calculations become "threats" when they seek to disrupt the realization of rent. The real threat does not lie in the tensions inherent in a polyethnic society or external attacks, it is rooted in the manipulation of these by internal and external interests keen on preserving rentierism. In the rest of the paper, we explain how this is played out in the Nigerian case.

### **The Economic Dimension of Environmental Conflict in Nigeria.**

Having established the background and thrust of the study, this section shall briefly discuss the economic dimensions of environmental conflict in Nigeria in order to bring out the local-external linkages in the Nigerian crises.

The economic dimension of environmental conflict in Nigeria revolves around several issues: dependence on oil revenues, domination of the oil industry by oil multinationals, the deepening of the economic crisis since the 1980s, and the adoption of an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Bank program of economic adjustment. Others include the absence of linkages between the oil industry and other economic sectors and the historically determined structural weaknesses of the economy. With oil accounting for about 96 percent of all foreign exchange earnings and 85 percent of all government revenues, the monocultural economic context in a period of recession and crisis has become, in combination with social and political factors, a trigger for environmental conflict.

Unlike many African countries, the deleterious impact of the global recession of the 1970s was masked in Nigeria for a while by massive oil rents. Nigeria after independence had built upon its structurally weak economy that was directed toward providing cheap raw material exports for the world markets (cocoa, peanuts, hides and skin, tin, and later, oil), and act as a ready market for semi and fully manufactured commodities from the West. The adopted import-substitution strategy of industrialization did not only commoditize development as something that could be bought, it reinforced the dependence of Nigeria's industrial sectors on imported technology, skills, and raw materials. Furthermore, the country became frozen in the global economy as an exporter of oil to earn foreign exchange while importing manufactured goods and other needs from the industrialized countries. This was unlike the situation in some other third world countries in Asia and Latin America, which were rapidly industrializing and



becoming competitive in the export of manufactures. Thus indigenous entrepreneurship in Nigeria remained at a low level, unable to provide any meaningful competition to foreign capital, which dominated the rentier economy while the state assumed a central role in domestic accumulation. Lacking a strong economic base itself, the Nigerian state in the quest of promoting economic development and its own legitimacy, sought to attract and protect foreign capital. Those in power manipulated it to accumulate wealth, basically by strategically locating themselves at the centers of the creation and distribution of oil rents, and spinning patron-client networks around themselves. The “patrimonial politics of economics” thus prepared the ground for the crisis that engulfed the country in the wake of the collapse of the external oil sector.

At the peak of the oil boom in the early 1980s, with oil selling at \$40 per barrel, Nigeria earned about \$24.9 billion. The bulk of the oil boom that had started seven years earlier had gone on expanding the import-dependent industrial sectors, public bureaucracies, the educational sector, importation of luxury goods, and the processes of class formation and consolidation. It also spawned a rentier culture that neglected internal production, as the country could easily live off oil rents.

When oil prices collapsed in 1981, the economy could not withstand the sudden contraction in foreign exchange earnings. By 1985, when oil earnings had fallen to \$12.5 billion, the industrial sector had virtually collapsed, while government was finding it difficult to meet its internal and external obligations (Olukoshi 1990). It was against this background that the military regime of General Babangida, which had come to power in a palace coup in 1985, announced the adoption of a World Bank-IMF approved program of economic adjustment. Babangida’s first step in this direction was the announcement in 1986 of an 80 percent removal of “oil subsidies” to “raise revenue for providing social infrastructures, promoting agriculture, and discouraging the smuggling of Nigeria’s petroleum products to neighboring countries (Obi, forthcoming). The real logic behind this, was a ploy to subject local prices to international pricing, reduce local consumption while raising oil sales tax, attract western creditors, and free more oil for exports. As Olorunfemi, a top bureaucrat at the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) put it, it was a period of throwing “completely overboard some of the over nationalistic economic policies that had closed the doors to the inflow of foreign capital” (Olorunfemi 1988). It was against this background of the liberalization of petroleum products’ pricing that structural adjustment was formally adopted on 27 June 1986. Although adjustment opened up the Nigerian industry to external economic penetration and deepened Nigeria’s dependence on oil for economic recovery, it bred a lot of hardship domestically. The inflationary spiral arising from the periodic removals of oil subsidies ruined the fragile manufacturing sector, wiped off wages, and resulted in a steady decline in the quality of life. The centrality of oil to the Nigerian program of economic adjustment and accumulation, underscores its importance to the national and transnational hegemonic projects. The failure of structural adjustment to resolve the Nigerian crisis is well documented (Lewis 1994: 437–449 and Olukoshi 1994). What is relevant to this study however, is the impact of crisis and adjustment on the oil environment. The starting point as noted is the close connection between the harsh economic conditions imposed by the IMF-World Bank and the escalation of social crisis in Nigeria, a crisis, which acted as a trigger for the escalation of environmental conflict. The managers of the Nigerian state hinged their hope of economic recovery on optimizing earnings from oil through the following ways: increasing oil reserves through aggressive promotion of foreign investments in oil exploration, diversifying the downstream operations of the oil industry, maximizing foreign exchange earnings from oil exports by pumping more oil into the global markets, and raising the domestic prices of petroleum products to provide more revenue for the government and oil companies (Obi 1992, 1995). Unfortunately, low oil prices meant that more oil was produced to earn less foreign exchange while the glut in global oil markets placed a limit not only on the amount of oil that can be offered for sale, but also reduced the bargaining power of the Nigerian state vis-à-vis the dominant forces in the global oil markets. The removal of subsidies from refined petroleum products, as demanded by the IMF, leading to price hikes of more than 800 percent in ten years not only led to inflation and runaway industrial manufacturing costs, it led to violent opposition to structural adjustment and the legitimacy of the Nigerian state (Obi 1995b, forthcoming). This opposition took the form of demands for the return to democracy, civil rights, and the termination of structural adjustment. For the state, the best way to push the externally imposed project of structural adjustment in the face of organized domestic resistance was to resort to the repression of such

opposition, while ensuring that external as well as dominant local interests were protected. State security thus thrived on the maximization of oil rents internally as well as externally.

Within the authoritarian and patrimonial political context, economic crisis and total dependence on oil heightened the intensification of the extraction of oil and its attendant ecological degradation of oil producing areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, which were mostly excluded from the higher rungs of power and distribution.

Oil extraction under structural adjustment thus raised tension in the oil-producing ethnic-minority communities, which, unable to find expression within the defined political space and suffering from the harsh consequences of adjustment, increasingly assumed the form of violent conflicts. Oil companies and installations were also attacked or blockaded by protesting villagers for polluting their environment and destroying their livelihoods without any comprehensive program of compensation and repair (Obi 1992a). According to Shell, Elf, and Agip, all oil companies operating in the Niger delta, they lost about \$200,760,000 in 1993 to such protests and blockages (Lukula 1994). Shell has also alleged that it loses N 9.9 million daily in Ogoniland since 1993 when it was forced to stop operations by angry villagers. In response to the perceived threat to oil that is the lifeblood of Nigeria and economic adjustment, the state responded with maximum force to this threat against itself. Armed troops were drafted to protect oil installations and crush the protests. Rather than eliminate the threat, the resort to repression has raised tension within Nigeria and attracted worldwide condemnation for the abuse of minority rights. The situation is further crystallized as part of the democratic struggle against authoritarianism in Nigeria and the protracted struggle to place its centralist federal experiment on a more equitable footing.

Thus several issues stand clear in the current buildup of tension: the intensification of state authoritarianism and militarism in the effort by hegemonic power blocs to retain control over the distribution of oil rents, the intensification of exploitation and degradation of the oil producing environment, and the continued absence of distributive equity and access. The last point perhaps is particularly potentially explosive especially when seen against the background of a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, where ethnicity is a tool for intra-class, inter-class and trans-class action and struggles. This brings out the salience of the ecology-politics linkage and how it feeds into perceptions of historical injustices and fears, providing a fertile ground for distrust, violence, and insecurity.

### **Oil and Environmental Conflict and National Security in Nigeria: The Ecology-Security Nexus**

Oil and environmental conflict are rooted in the inequitable social relations that undergird the production, and distribution of profits from oil, and its adverse impact on the fragile ecosystem of the Niger delta. It involves the Nigerian state and oil companies on one side, and the six million people of the estimated eight hundred oil producing communities concentrated in the seventy thousand square kilometer Niger Delta, on the other (Rowell 1994). In contention is the oil-rich environment, the manner of distributing its wealth, and the survival of its inhabitants who depend on the ecosystem for their basic needs and livelihood. The host communities contend that because the oil is mined in their land, and they suffer from the pollution and environmental degradation attendant to oil production, they have a right to adequate compensation, a clean and safe environment, and a fair share of oil rents, while the state and its partners, the oil multinationals, insist on the optimization of rents and profits on the basis of modalities defined exclusively by the partnership. The tension arising from this conflict situation has been further escalated in recent times by two factors: the economic crises that engulfed Nigeria since the 1980s leading to the adoption of a World Bank-IMF inspired monetarist economic rescue package in 1986, emphasizing the principles of the free market and the maximization of export earnings as a strategy of crises and debt management, and the rise of authoritarianism in its most desperate form. These two factors have combined to exert the greatest pressure on the oil producing environment, heightening the effects of pollution, and arousing the anxieties of the people that they will lose out totally in the politics of Nigeria's skewed federalism that has historically marginalized ethnic minorities.

In retrospect, the control of the oil producing areas had been a decisive, but hidden factor in the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. Specifically the other regions of the federation (north, west, and later the midwest) had opposed the attempt by the eastern region to stake an exclusive claim to the oil-rich ethnic minority areas within its territory, more so in the wake of declining prices for traditional cash crop exports in the global markets, which had formed the fiscal basis of these regions. The ethnic minorities in the eastern region, seeing an opportunity to end majority Igbo ethnic domination, largely supported the federal side during the war, and defeated eastern claims to its oil. Although they were “rewarded” with three states of their own in the twelve state structure that replaced the old four region structure of the Nigerian federation, the oil producing minorities’ elite soon discovered that although the quest for self-determination had been largely won, they had “lost” the control of oil to the strong, central federal government and the “big” ethnic groups that controlled political and economic power in Nigeria. Thus started another struggle within the elite for a larger share of oil rents based on the argument that those contributing most to the national wealth should get the largest share. Because oil accounted for the bulk of national revenue, the argument was that the oil minorities should get a larger share, more so as they also bore the environmental costs of oil production. They further argued that because under the old regional system, the big ethnic groups controlled the bulk of revenues generated within their territories, it was only fair that now that the minorities “baked the national pie” they should get the largest slice. This was stoutly resisted by the other ethnic nationalities, whose counter argument was that it was absurd for a “few” to get more than the “most”. Others even went further to contend that because the minorities did not “put the oil there,” they had no right to claim it as being exclusively theirs (Adebayo 1993). This way the struggle over oil defined the question of the rights of ethnic minorities as a critical issue in Nigeria’s troubled federal experiment. The creation of more states by the federal military government (the number has increased from twelve in 1967 to thirty in 1991) as a strategy of dispersing centers of conflict, and creating local fiefs for factions of the elite that would have otherwise engaged in the struggle for entry into federal power, has failed to resolve the zero sum struggle to control the oil patrimony. Oil therefore remains the ultimate prize in Nigerian politics, and constitutes the core interest of state control and security. Beyond this it sums up the complex contradictions embedded in the society, and the ways in which external interests enter, shape, and deepen these contradictions that explode from time to time in the cycles of conflict, repression, and crises.

From the above, it can be gleaned that environmental conflict reflects the contradictions embedded in Nigeria’s federalism. The most critical point perhaps, revolves around the oil producing minority-nationalities of the Niger delta and the Nigerian state, and its destabilizing potential, when combined with other internal contradictions.

Environmental stress and state repression against a background of exclusion and marginalization constitute the explosive elements of the unfolding scenario. The tension has also been intensified by the impact of structural adjustment in widening socioeconomic cleavages, undermining the welfare basis of state legitimacy, which in turn has reinforced social crises and authoritarianism. All these constitute threats to the Nigerian state and its rentier context that is immersed in a crisis of accumulation, and faced by the increased militancy of oil minority movements and democratic forces in civil society. Furthermore they raise critical questions about the viability of monetarist models of development, democracy, and the future of the nation-state in Africa (Obi 1995; Gibbon, Bangura, and Ofstaad 1992). The eco-politics of oil in Nigeria is thus a critical prism through which these questions can be addressed and their links to security gleaned.

### **The Nigerian State and Oil Multinationals: Unequal Partnership**

Oil multinationals feed the Nigerian state. An apt description of the relationship of the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals is that of an unequal partnership. It is formalized through the three types of joint agreements in the industry: the joint venture agreements, the production sharing agreement and the risk sharing contract (Omorogbe 1987: 277–279, 1991). Of all the three, the joint ventures currently account for the bulk of production and oil exports, although one can discern a gradual shift toward production sharing

agreements in the new acreage opened up for exploration in the 1990s. What this implies, is that most of Nigeria's oil is produced by the oil companies as "operators or technical partners" of the state. Their monopoly of technology in the oil industry provides them ample leverage to undercut the state in terms of sharing costs, profits, and the transfer of technology and skills (Edogun 1984 and Obi 1995a). A former chief executive of the NNPC, Amu, observed that these companies built their costs into their profits, and made the state pay for these (Amu 1982). More recently there have been observations about Nigeria's helplessness in the oil industry (Soremekun 1994). A situation made worse by shrinking external oil rents since the mid-1980s. The recent policy of production sharing contracts in newly allocated blocs that puts all financial liabilities for exploration on the operating companies is partly a response to the difficulty of the state to meet its financial obligations to its joint venture partners over time, and the logic of opening up the oil basins on shore and off shore to more exploration. State oil policy in Nigeria in recent times has exposed its much weaker bargaining position vis-à-vis the operating companies (Khan 1994: 94). Indeed, at no other point in time has the state been so dependent on the oil multinationals to increase oil reserves and provide revenues for resolving the economic and political crises in which Nigeria has been immersed.

With scant environmental sensitivity, the World Bank-IMF program of adjustment adopted since 1986, further acted as an impetus for imposing the logic of the market place on the oil industry, increasing the predominance of external economic interests more than internal ones, and deepening the contradictions within the Nigerian society.

There is no doubt that the state oil corporation, the NNPC, is no match for its partners and competitors. Although a lot of the activities of the company are clouded in secrecy, it is still possible to glean the wide disparity between them and the NNPC. First and most obvious, is the gap in technology between the NNPC and the oil service companies that in most cases is either local subsidiaries of the oil multinationals, or those in which they hold substantial interests. In terms of the global spread of their investments and their sophisticated operations, the NNPC is totally outpaced. For instance Shell, the largest operator in Nigeria accounting for about 51 percent of Nigeria's oil production, operates in more than one hundred countries flung across Africa, Europe, the America's, Asia, the Middle East, and New Zealand, with combined assets and operations running into trillions of dollars in oil, chemicals, mining and real estate. Mobil, Nigeria's second largest producer also operates in more than one hundred countries in the world, with an estimated global oil and gas reserve of 6.6 billion barrels. It has twenty-one refineries in twelve countries, and about twenty thousand service stations in 120 countries (Mobil, 1994). Like Shell, it has substantial interests in chemicals, mining, and real estate. Chevron, Nigeria's third largest producer, operates in twenty-three countries with a worldwide refining capacity of 1.9 million barrels per day. It has 7,900 marketing outlets in the United States, two hundred in Canada, five hundred in the United Kingdom and about eighteen thousand through its Caltex affiliate worldwide (Chevron 1994). Like the preceding "sisters" Chevron has substantial interests in chemicals, mining and real estate.

On the other hand their Nigerian "partner," the NNPC, produces (in partnership with the "sisters") about 1.8 million barrels of oil per day of which more than (1.6 million barrels) 80 percent is exported to the United States and Western Europe, has four refineries operating below their installed capacities, with the domestic products market controlled by local subsidiaries of the "sisters". The NNPC does not have any substantial investment outside Nigeria, while its internal operations reflect a great deal of dependence on foreign technology and expertise. Although it is theoretically autonomous, in reality, it is firmly under state control.

Thus the three companies that account for more than 65 percent of Nigeria's oil, operate in a highly integrated manner globally in both upstream and downstream operations, controlling resources that are many times more than Nigeria's estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$29.7 billion. These companies in the face of OPEC's waning clout and the opening up of the Pacific Rim, Eastern Europe's, Russia's, and the former Soviet Republics' oil fields, have been able to diversify their sources of oil, expand their share of global oil reserves, and gradually regain their monopoly of global oil. Attempting to further compare NNPC with the oil majors' will not be necessary as it is totally peripheral in the distribution of global oil power. It has remained totally dependent on the western oil markets and oil

technology, while its forays into downstream diversification also remain dependent on western capital, the oil multinationals, and their technology.

What then is the link among oil production in Nigeria, the oil multinationals, and the energy demands of the West? Because the oil multinationals are based in the West and supply cheap, high quality Nigerian crude to western markets, they are an important part of the strategic energy calculations of western industrialized societies. As such, these strategic calculations reflect the need for uninterrupted flow of Nigerian oil, and the security of operating personnel and capital investments. This way, the security of the Nigerian state becomes fused with its capacity to protect the oil multinationals, and the creation of oil rents. The picture becomes clearer with the growing desperation of black Africa's biggest debtor country (owing an estimated \$32.585 billion, externally) to optimize the gains from oil exports, a desperation worsened by the absence of real growth in the non-oil sectors domestically, and the absence of linkages between the oil sector and other sectors of the economy. Whichever way it turns the Nigerian state is captive to the fortunes of "its oil," which, paradoxically, it has little control over. It is this lack of control that defines the states' place in oil-based accumulation and its subservience to the yoke of an unequal partnership that exports resources and profits, leaving it to bear all costs to its people and the future of their environment.

### **The Struggle for Oil Minority Rights**

The background provided by the preceding discussion of the "unequal partnership," enhances a closer treatment of the struggle for minority rights, and its response to internal and global stimuli.

The struggle of the minority nationalities goes back to the first decade of the century (Tamuno 1970: 563–584). Its origins lie in the "bringing together of diverse nationalities and economic modes at various levels of development by the Nigerian colonial state" (Obi and Soremekun 1995). They became a minority in relation to the numerically dominant nationalities: the Hausa–Fulani, the Igbo and the Yoruba, which corresponded with each of the three regions that Nigeria was divided into. This majority-minority relationship was defined both at the regional and national levels and served to open up and reinforce internationality cleavages. Because colonial patrimonialism favored the majority groups, their elites were integrated into the system of colonial spoils. The marginalized minorities thus began to ask for a right to self-determination as a way of protecting themselves from further domination and oppression. In most cases they demanded states or regions of their own, or in extreme cases threatened separation from Nigeria (Tamuno 1970). In spite of the agitation of minority nationalities during the period of decolonization, the issue of states creation was left to the post independent government at the regional and federal levels. Expectedly it became a highly politicized issue with each of the regional parties seeking to use it to undermine the political base of the other. Thus a new region was carved out of the then western region in 1963 (midwest region) controlled by the opposition party, the Action Group, while the other regions remained intact. The Action Group retaliated by supporting minority struggles for self-determination and state creation in the other regions.

In the case of the oil minorities, they were bound as neighbors by centuries of economic, political and sociocultural ties. Integrated into global trade as far back as the sixteenth century, and more recently the global palm oil trade in the nineteenth century, the area of the Niger delta was referred to as the "oil rivers". As mentioned earlier, the creation of Nigeria turned the people of the Niger delta to minorities, while they lost their lucrative middleman status in the international trade between European merchants at the coast, and the people of the hinterland. The discovery of oil by Shell-BP in the Niger delta in 1956 opened the path to their becoming within Nigeria's political vocabulary, the oil minorities, and redefined their relationship with international capital. Although their struggle for self-determination predates the discovery of oil in the Niger delta, oil has added a potentially explosive dimension to it. The struggle evolved into the quest for self-determination, a clean and safe and an equitable share of the proceeds from the oil industry. As far back as 1966, there was an abortive attempt to secede from the Nigerian federation and declare an autonomous Delta Republic led by Adaka Boro (Kaemi 1982).

To the oil minorities the denial of direct access to oil revenues and insensitivity to the degradation of their environment by the federal government amounts to injustice and expropriation (Ikein 1990: 47–69, Obi 1992, and the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) 1990). It is perceived as a form of “internal colonialism” or “ethnic-based political domination, which is used to expropriate the resources of oil communities for the benefit of the dominant groups” (Naanen 1995: 50). The solution they argue, lies in the radical restructuring of the federation to give more autonomy to ethnic groups and control over their resources, or to opt out of an unjust union. These protagonists of the “internal colonialism” school point to the steady reversal of the derivation principle in revenue allocation that gave regions or states the greater share of revenues generated therein since 1970 when oil had effectively replaced cash crop exports as the chief foreign exchange earner, as a ploy by the majority nationalities to continue to enjoy the oil wealth that belonged to the minorities (Saro–Wiwa 1984, 1992, 1994). The replacement of the derivation principle with population and need gave the bulk of oil revenues to states with large populations and emphasized the need for balanced development, which put the bulk of oil beyond the reach of the oil minorities.

What is important to note is that oil in the post-1970 period became a central mediating factor in majority-minority ethnic nationality elite relations: conflictual, collaborative, and potentially destructive. A more fundamental view aptly roots the struggles over oil revenues in “the contradictions and conflicts among the different factions and fractions of the ruling elite who are in competition over access to the country’s wealth” (Adebayo 1993: 3). Indeed, the process of state creation became a modality of federal mediation of inter-elite squabbles, while ensuring that federal power is enhanced vis-à-vis the states. This provided a leeway for federal control, cooptation and legitimacy. In terms of the national ruling coalition it offered avenues of entry for elite factions of ethnic minorities into lucrative patrimonial networks in exchange for their loyalty, acceptance of the national hegemonic hierarchy, and project. It is partly the refusal of a radicalized faction of the oil minorities elite to continue to accept the legitimacy of the national ruling class and its foreign oil allies, in the face of deepening economic crises and environmental degradation, that has led to the escalation of environmental activism in the Niger delta, and the violent reprisals on the social movements by the federal military government. A very important aspect of the conflict is the violent deconstruction of the oil minorities’ elite into two sharply divided pro-federal elite that favors reforms within the national hegemonic hierarchy based on widening access and providing a measure of redress, and the radicalized self-determination group that seeks a transformation of the national coalition and the framework for distribution of oil revenues to reflect equity, social justice, and internal autonomy as bulwarks against continued marginalization, expropriation, and environmental degradation. While the former sought to crush the latter with the aid of its oil company and federal allies, and the manipulation of sub-ethnic, clan, patrimonial, and personal sentiments and connections, the latter sought to discredit the former as traitors and collaborators who had lost the legitimacy to the leadership of the oil minorities (Don–Pedro 1994 and Obi 1995c). The most visible of the radical faction was MOSOP, led by the writer, Ken Saro–Wiwa, which brought the environmental degradation of the Niger delta to global limelight. The radicals provided an alternate leadership whose viability lay in the worsening living conditions in the oil communities, effective local and international mobilization, and the inability of the pro-federal oil minority faction to extract a visible commitment to halt the march of environmental degradation from their allies, or stem the growing resentment to their continued opulent living in the midst of their poverty stricken kinsmen. Unfortunately the remedial “carrots” being dangled before the oil minorities have been either too little or too skewed to make much impact on healing the bitter cleavages within the oil minorities. The establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Agency (OMPADEC) by the federal government in 1992, to administer the new 3 percent Oil Derivation Fund and promote development projects in the oil producing communities as well as resolve conflicts between the oil companies and their host communities, did not stem the tide of conflict. Apart from the fact that OMPADEC is funded by, and remains under the firm control of the federal government, it was soon caught up in the complexities of the politics of oil at the local level, especially the intra-elite, inter-communal, inter-ethnic, and personality conflicts. OMPADEC has been careful not to “offend” the oil multinationals or the federal government that “gave it life”. This greatly undermined its legitimacy as a neutral umpire or agent of development in the oil communities. At best, it is perceived as a source of oil patrimony at the local level: kind to its friends and hostile to its enemies. Thus the intra-class conflict in the Niger delta

has had critical implications for the hegemony of the “national” ruling coalition, and poses a serious challenge to the security of the Nigerian state and dominant local and international interests in oil-rentier nexus.

### **Global Stimuli**

Although international interests were embedded in the oil-rentier nexus, the struggle for oil minority rights was in part stimulated and sustained by certain developments at the global level. These included: the collapse of global oil prices, and the imposition of socially stressful programs of economic adjustment on distressed third world economies, the rise of social movements in the erstwhile one party states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at the forefront of successful struggles for self-determination, freedom and democracy, the emergence of the environment as a major issue in the post-Cold War world, and the support by groups in industrialized societies for social movements in the third world, struggling against the abuse of human and peoples rights, and seeking to install a democratic-national agenda. The post-Cold War order provided a context for the universalization of the model of democratic liberalism, and even institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, abandoned their apolitical stance to impose “pro-democracy” political conditions on states requesting for aid packages. The globalization of communication and information dissemination also enabled the building of cross-global networks between human and environmental rights groups in authoritarian states and a faction of “international civil society,” keen on constructing a more equitable, democratic, and environmentally safer world order. Within the Nigerian context MOSOP quickly latched on to the global movement, and with the support of environmental and human rights groups in the west, launched an intensive campaign at global fora and in the west, against the degradation and exploitation of the oil communities and minorities by the state and Shell. This put the state and Shell under some pressure from world opinion, while environmental activist groups in the Niger delta put up the pressure domestically, and were able to force Shell and the state to accept that the situation required serious attention. Unfortunately the rentier nexus was complicated by the political crises, and increased tension within the ruling coalition, following the annulment of presidential elections in 1993. As the social movements in the Niger delta advanced, the state, trapped deeper in the rentier nexus and political crisis, militarized the conflict. Armed troops replaced regular police in quelling the explosion of protests in the Niger delta. It had become clear that the survival of the state and that of Shell’s operations were threatened by the intensification of the struggles in the oil-rich Niger delta. The contradictions between economic globalization and the push for a democratic post-Cold War order had come home to roost in Nigeria. A local conflict had become internationalized, and the contradictions of globalization had been domesticated in Nigeria. Neither the state or the multinationals could afford to loose control over the oil producing environment. For the state it could lead to the loss of power and possible disintegration, for the multinationals, it will lead to heavy losses, and disrupted global projections. Yet neither can afford to totally ignore the international outcry over the plight of the oil minorities and the degradation of the oil producing environment. The global stimuli are thus played out in the current stalemate in which narrow perceptions of security are creating new problems for the state in the face of unresolved crises and international hostility.

### **Conflicts in the Oil Producing Environment**

As can be gleaned from the preceding, the actors in the conflict are the state-oil multinationals partnership against the radical oil minorities factions and its popular allies in the oil producing communities. While the state-oil multinationals partnership seeks more oil, the oil communities seek to block access as a means of forcing the partners to address certain grievances. Of all the oil companies, Shell has been a prominent actor in the conflict. There are several reasons for this: Shell is the oldest and largest producer of oil in Nigeria (51 percent) and the largest contributor to export earnings, most of its operations are in the Niger delta where the oil minorities live, and Nigeria provides between 8 and 14 percent of Shell’s oil outside the United States. Thus the relationship between Shell and the Nigerian state is bound by an economic mutuality that is underscored by the states’ dependence on Shell for oil rents, while Shell is

dependent on the state to guarantee the conditions necessary for oil extraction. Shell's business ethic in the rentier nexus is hinged on reducing its costs and maximizing profits, an ethic that reaps the full advantages of operating in a political context marked by the lack of accountability and responsibility.

At stake, is the right of the oil communities to save their environment against state-oil multinational extraction and degradation. Oil pollution and degradation strike at the heart of the survival of the oil producing communities: polluted rivers and ponds render the water unsafe for drinking, fishing, and recreation, polluted land results in the killing off of plants and fauna, adversely affecting their natural habitat, and putting an end to local economic practices and livelihoods such as hunting, farming, craft-making as well as a multiplicity of nutritional, health related and sociocultural practices (Aina and Salau 1992, Ifeadi and Nwankwo 1989, Obi 1992, 1995, Obi and Soremekun, Omoweh 1995, and Brooks 1994). They therefore resorted to all forms of environmental activism directed toward drawing attention to their sad plight such as campaigns in the print media and later, through violent protests, demonstrations, and blockades of oil installations (Obi 1992a and Turner and Oshare 1993).

According to a study on oil spills involving Shell operations in Nigeria from 1982 to 1992, 1, 626,000 gallons of oil were spilled in twenty-seven separate incidents (Rowell 1994). In its defense against the charge of oil spills that pollute the oil producing communities, both Shell and the state officials put the blame on sabotage of oil pipelines by inhabitants of the host communities (Adewale 1990, Shell 1993, 1994, and Lewis 1996). Yet, a report of the Nigerian Ministry of Petroleum Resources puts "the largest cause of spill as equipment malfunction" (38 percent) and "corrosion of equipment" (21 percent) (Oyekan 1991). According to the study cited earlier, four of the twenty-seven oil spills recorded from Shell operations in Nigeria were because of sabotage (Rowell 1994). This shows that most of the oil spills were not caused by sabotage.

Decrying the disastrous impact of oil pollution in a report submitted to the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Environment and Development at Rio's Earth Summit in June 1992, prominent Rivers' state chiefs noted *inter alia* (Rowell 1994):

Thus apart from the oil pollution from the oil industry's emissions and flares day and night, producing poisonous gases that are silently and systematically wiping out vulnerable airborne biota and otherwise endangering the life of plants, game and man himself, we have widespread water pollution and soil-land pollution that respectively result in the death of most aquatic eggs and juvenile stages of life of fin-fish and shellfish and sensible animals (like oysters) on one hand while on the other hand agricultural land contaminated with oil spills become dangerous for farming, even where they continue to produce any significant yields (Dappa-Biriye, Briggs, Idoniboye-Obu, and Fubara 1992).

Arguing on the same lines, and based on a European community study, Ake (1996) points out that "the waters of the Niger delta contain at least 6 percent of petroleum and often up to 60 ppm". He also vividly captures other horrendous dimensions of oil pollution in the Niger delta based on figures obtained from a 1995 World Bank study "Defining an Environmental Strategy for the Niger Delta":

as much as 76 percent of all the natural gas from petroleum production in Nigeria is flared compared to 0.6 percent in the United States, 4.3 percent in the UK, 21 percent in Libya. The flaring is a serious hazard. At temperatures of 1,300 to 1,400 degrees centigrade, the multitude of flares in the Niger heat up everything, causing noise pollution, and producing CO<sub>2</sub>, VOC, CO, NO<sub>x</sub> and particulates around the clock. The emission of CO<sub>2</sub> from gas flaring in Nigeria releases 35 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> a year and 12 million tons of methane, which means that Nigerian oil fields contribute more in global warming than the rest of the world together.

In its defense, Shell maintains that it does not site flares or pipelines near places of human habitation, and that its practice is to relocate pipelines when they interfere with a community. It also claims that villagers encroach on such sites only to turn round to make claims on the company (Tookey 1992 and Lewis 1996). What the evidence suggests, is that contrary to its claims, oil communities are not involved or consulted in the laying of oil pipes, or gas flares. Indeed, the legal framework for oil production provides no space for local participation in decision making. Thus Shell and the other oil multinationals backed by the state have been able to operate with maximum leverage. Worse still, Shell and others have been unable to show concrete evidence of detailed environmental impact studies of its activities in the Niger



delta. Thus exhibiting their scant regard for environmental considerations in their pursuit of profits. Very little is ploughed back into the oil communities that bear the heavy environmental costs of oil production, and are impoverished by it (Brooks 1994). To cite part of the report of a judicial panel of inquiry set up by the Rivers' state government to investigate the shooting of Umuechem villagers in 1990 by security forces invited by Shell to disperse protesters who had blocked one of its installations:

Their streams get polluted with the disposal of waste products from oil operations rendering the river void of fishes . . . their farm crops planted on the remaining areas of farmland get damaged by oil pollution; their economic trees are hewed down; their economic situation bites and there is no help for them. These deprivations without any compensatory benefits cause frustration. . . . The compensations paid for these deprivations are just pittance, meagre pittance, on which people cannot subsist for even six months and they become frustrated with life (Inko-Tariah and others).

According to some estimates, the money spent on community assistance in the past twenty-five years is just 0.000007 percent of the value of oil extracted (Rowell 1994). What is important to note is that the oil companies operate with very low environmental standards in Nigeria for reasons earlier discussed. The impact has been the severe degradation of the oil producing environment and the rising impoverishment, anger and frustration of the inhabitants of the oil producing communities. Of course the oil companies have continued to shirk their social responsibilities to the communities, insisting that because they pay their taxes to the government, it is the duty of government, not the oil companies to develop the communities. And when security forces brutally crush protests in the oil communities at the invitation of the companies, the companies are quick to absolve themselves of any wrongdoing or involvement in local politics, even where it is clear that they directly contribute arms and logistical support to these security forces (Ake 1996, Duodu 1996, and Greenpeace 1995). It appears that the tragic development in the oil communities has become a public relations challenge (especially for Shell) in which all blame is placed on the inhabitants and the actions of the Nigerian government—which the companies claim they have no influence over (Lewis 1996: 4). This way the cost of oil production—in terms of environmental stresses and damages and the lives lost in the brutal repression of activism in the oil communities—is borne entirely by Nigeria. Unlike the impression being promoted that activism has been localized to Ogoni (Osaghae 1995), the evidence shows that it is a delta-wide phenomenon. Rowell documents eight other major communities that had protested against Shell between 1990 and 1993: Ogbia, 1992; Igbide, 1992; Diebu, 1992; Umuechem, 1990; Irri, 1993; Uzere, 1992; and IzonYouth Vanguard—Burutu and Bomadi, 1992. Other studies have also confirmed the spread in activism and activist groups in the delta, while the specificity of the Ogoni struggle has been properly addressed by Naanen (1995) and Welch (1995).

The three levels of conflict, local, national, and external, clearly bring out the actors and the stakes involved in the struggles around oil producing environment. The oil companies operate standards of environmental practices in Nigeria that are very low compared with those in Europe or North America, by taking advantage of the weak environmental-legal framework, the weakness of the state and the absence of an enforceable set of international regimes directed at protecting the oil environment in third world countries. Their quest for profit, and the virtual autonomy they enjoy vis-à-vis the state and societies in which they operate have drawn them into the crises of governance, particularly in Nigeria, where they are central to the sustenance of the state and the pattern of power relations prevalent in society.

What comes out boldly from the foregoing is that extant statist conceptions of security based on the short-term view of maximizing oil rents and forcibly eliminating threats to the exclusive control of oil by the state-oil multinational alliance, fail to deal with the wider ramifications of the conflict. Except this is addressed militarizing the conflict will continue to achieve very limited success at a huge cost. Indeed the real threat—the rentier trap in which the state is immersed—will further spawn unsustainable patterns of oil production, inequitable distribution of its proceeds and its harsh environmental consequences, and further crises whose impact may transcend Nigeria's borders.

### **Ramifications of Environmental Conflict in Nigeria for Sub-Regional Peace in West Africa**

The ramifications of environmental conflict in Nigeria for peace in the relatively unstable West African sub-region, are wide. As the sub-region's major power, the possible escalation of its national crises will have dire consequences for peace in the entire region. However, it is best to approach the subject in two ways: the conditions in the sub-region, and Nigeria's role in managing sub-regional security.

Today, West Africa is in the midst of economic and political crises. The regions' fragile and externally-oriented monocultural economies are currently undergoing socially harsh programs of economic adjustment. While democratic pressures from below are unleashing social convulsions that challenge the legitimacy of several decades of authoritarian misrule and corruption, no doubt buoyed by the global trend toward multipartyism. While in some cases, the process has been channeled into formalistic motions of multipartyism and elections, in others, it has become intractable, resulting in crises, civil wars (as in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone), or even reversals by military coups. Yet in a few cases leaders have clung to power by manipulating their power of incumbency and patron-client networks, including the support of ex-colonial powers. In all the newly won democracy has shallow roots, and is steadily being reversed by economic crises that have been compounded by adjustment, and authoritarian political coalitions whose interest lies in controlling the resources of the sub-region. It is hardly surprising that in the post-Cold War world, West Africa is the only part of Africa (with the exception of Sudan) and possibly, the world (with the exception of Myanmar), where new military governments have emerged (Gambia, Nigeria, Niger, and Chad). Yet tensions have not subsided in the face of deepening socioeconomic crises. From the preceding it is clear that West Africa is in crises. Any trigger from Nigeria, will turn the crises to a major conflagration. It is therefore easy to see why it is important for Nigeria to resolve its environment-security nexus. This is tied to its role and position in the sub-region.

The role of Nigeria in promoting sub-regional peace operates at two levels: the bilateral, and the multilateral—through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This role is best explained by the factors of: history, its defense and foreign policy, its prominent economic status in the sub-region, and its leadership role in the drive toward regional economic integration. A fundamental lesson that the Nigerian foreign elite has learned, is the close link between economic integration of the sub-region and Nigeria's national interest. This has promoted a drive toward a pan-African response to the issue of economic development through a process of sub-regional economic integration (Obiozor, Olukoshi, and Obi 1994). The founding of the Economic Community of West African States in 1975, under the pioneering leadership of Nigeria was thus an early attempt to pursue this goal. Several security and strategic calculations were embedded in this project of regional integration. It fit in within Nigeria's defense posture based on the "theory of concentric circles"—the immediate sub-region, Africa, and the world. The emphasis on security of the immediate sub-region was partly informed by the role played by some neighboring Francophone countries and France in providing logistical and diplomatic support to secessionist Biafra during the Nigerian civil war. Thus after the war part of the calculations of national security was to pursue a policy of good neighborliness as a modality of reducing the threat of such countries allowing their territories to be used by hostile forces to attack Nigeria. However, the economic crises and the view held in certain quarters that Africa's strategic importance has declined in the post-Cold War world has contributed to some shifts in Nigeria's foreign and defense policy. As Vogt has argued, Nigeria's defense posture in the 1990s has been directed toward reducing French economic influence in the sub-region and responding to the challenges of promoting regional security in the face of waning global strategic interest in Africa (Vogt 1990, 1993). This, in itself suggests a greater profile for regional approaches to Africa's problems: economic, security, and political in the post-Cold War world.

Nigeria's role in West Africa is also tied to its status of being the largest economy in the sub-region. With the largest population (88.5 million, 1991 census figures), market, and industrial base, Nigeria has all the potential of a sub-regional power. This potential has been the main propelling element in the theme of a manifest destiny as Africa's leader in Nigeria's foreign policy. In terms of the project of regional economic integration, regional security is an important component, as the "integrative process cannot be pursued in the midst of political turmoil generalized instability" (Nwokedi 1992: 19). Thus Nigeria has not

only been the pillar of ECOWAS, it remains the major facilitator of the ECOWAS Cease Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that effectively contained the Liberian civil war (Vogt 1993: 204) and has managed to enforce a truce among the warring Liberian factions. Part of the calculations behind the ECOMOG initiative was to respond regionally to a source of instability as the Liberian conflict had begun to involve neighboring countries and guarantee regional peace to enhance the process of economic integration.

The impact of the Nigerian economy on the economies of neighboring states is immense. While figures of official trade flows remain low, studies of informal trade flows indicate a high degree of integration of regional markets, and the predominance of Nigerian manufactures and petroleum products (Olukoshi and Obi 1994). While the Francophone neighbors are concerned about the flooding of their markets with cheaper Nigerian goods (because of the free fall of the Naira exchange rate), the Nigerian authorities seek to stop the illegal cross-border trade in petroleum products that is resulting in losses in revenue, running into millions of Naira annually. Two things are important to note: the process of integration is not formal nor are the policies well blended, and the high degree of informality feeds into all forms of coping mechanisms in neighboring states and capital flight from Nigeria.

What the preceding shows, is that Nigeria stands to gain a lot from regional economic integration if the process becomes efficient. Other countries in the sub-region can take advantage of the large Nigerian market and industrial base, in what can become a viable alternative to failed programs of economic reform, and a response to growing economic regionalism at the global level. Either way, Nigeria remains central to the project of regional economic integration in West Africa as well as regional security.

Therefore any crises in Nigeria has serious consequences for the rest of West Africa. Apart from the fact that ECOWAS and economic integration would suffer more serious setbacks, sub-regional peace would be shattered. The fragile neighboring economies can neither cope with the interruption of trade flows, or a wave of refugees who would compete with their nationals over scarce resources. Nigeria's contributions to keeping the peace in Liberia and also Sierra Leone would be threatened and expose these countries to a possible return to fratricidal conflict.

The consequences of the continued escalation of tension in Nigeria, thus transcend its immediate borders, to include the entire sub-region, and eventually, global peace. Environmental conflict opens up possibilities through which matters could come to a head. It could combine with other anti-hegemonic elements to trigger off more bitter power struggles to bring about change, or even lead to a forcible breakup of the federation. Because the contradictions embedded the oil environment—state relations mirror those in the larger society, the possibilities for a merger of local with national struggles remain high and therefore constitute the real threat both in the narrow state-centric and in the collective sub-regional sense.

### **Conclusion: Toward an Alternative Sustainable Security Framework**

The foregoing study has shown how the wide dimensions of the oil environment conflict in Nigeria are not adequately addressed by the “official” and limited notion of security. Also, the roles played by external actors—the oil multinationals, the global oil market, and the International Financial Institutions (led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), and the internal actors in the rentier context, and how these spawn environmental conflict are clearly demonstrated. Within the rentier context, the present conjuncture blocks out possibilities for equity, democracy, and economic development. The hegemonic, but unstable oil-fed patrimonial networks fear that any major shift in the locus of power, either through democracy, increased autonomy for oil minorities, or even the emergence of a strong indigenous business class, autonomous of the state, and outside the rentier sector, could spell disaster for its legitimacy, rule, access to, and control over oil-based accumulation. The issue of whose security, includes the skewed nature of power relations within Nigeria, the current inequities in global economic relations that exploit the fragile resource-rich third world ecosystems, degrade them, and export the profits. The alternative framework, must contend with the transformation of the rentier context, before security can be rooted in

the welfare of the people, equal access to power and resources, and the protection of the ecosystem from unsustainable exploitation.

The logical question that follows, is how can this alternative framework come to life? The starting point for this process is to establish a democratic framework to realign the currently skewed power relations, and remove the distributive and unsustainable inequities that fuel scarcity, conflict, and insecurity. Closely related to this is the need to dislodge the rentier basis of the economy. At present the Nigerian state confronted with a crisis of legitimacy (Obi forthcoming) as well as its increased dependency on the external sector is structurally incapable of transforming itself. The task of transforming rentierism thus lies in the hands of social forces outside the ruling rentier coalition, sustained by a productive economic base outside the oil sector. Hopes for the emergence of a benevolent dictator, who can impose the rules of fairness within a rentier context, and reduce crises, are too late. The complexity of the politics of ruling coalition in a multi-ethnic context, coupled with the shrinkage in oil rents over the years, render it impossible for such a leader to emerge and operate successfully in late twentieth century Nigeria. The resources for the across-the-board buying out of the opposition, and to engage on grandiose populist programs and projects are no longer available, besides the international financial institutions and their programs of fiscal discipline will not permit such expenditures.

How then can rentierism be transformed by the social forces outside the oil nexus? The first step is to accept the possibilities of transformation. There are several examples of third world states that have successfully crossed the threshold from resource exporting to rapidly industrializing societies. The cases of oil exporting Indonesia, with its large population and Malaysia, and to some extent India, readily come to mind. The basic issue remains that of a productive economic base that does not cede control to external economic agents. A note of caution must be sounded here, that the examples given do not in any way suggest the Asian “miracle” as the model for Nigeria. It is merely to demonstrate that the transition from a resource-exporting to a productive, industrial economy is a practical possibility. Possession of resources like oil need not be a curse or blessing, they only become one or the other, through unfair relations of production and distribution involving local and external exploiters. This is why only a democratic framework can provide succor to Nigeria at this critical juncture, and create the political space necessary for the transformation of the state from its current authoritarian form to a people-centered one. Transformation would then pose the problems of legitimacy, development, participation, and equity differently, and open up channels hitherto blocked for dialogue, negotiation, and the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Again, democracy offers the best platform for resolving the national question, and making elected rulers and even external economic agents accountable to the people. More fundamentally, the interest of the people becomes the basis of policy. A democratic ethos is better placed to deal with, and negotiate better terms of equitable interactions with external economic actors. That way, a more sustainable form of security, sensitive to the fragility of the oil producing environment and the rights of the oil producing communities can be forged.

For the external actors, it is time in response to recent global changes, to respect the humanity of the people in the countries it does business with. It is illusory to believe that security can exist outside the balancing of profit motives with environmental considerations. As the president of the World Resources Institute observed (Pearson 1987), “It is now plainer than ever that self interest bids multinational business to help protect and enhance economically important resources no matter how far from headquarters they may lie”. Multinational oil corporations must realize that the notion in the west that environmental considerations constitute an important aspect of sustainable global security, is applicable in Nigeria, and to Nigerians. And this should inform the universality of their environmental practices and standards in the west and the third world. The consequences of the failure to do this, in the guise of cutting costs, or cynical attitudes toward states in the third world, may turn out to be too costly in the long run, or too late.

Although the World Bank has begun to show some interest in environmental issues, this is only a recent development. Therefore one of the major shortcomings of its programs of structural adjustment is the “failure to address environmental deterioration” (Reed 1992: 3). Basically, adjustment programs have

viewed the environment as just another resource to be optimally exploited for economic growth. It was therefore “irrational” to spend money on protecting what was to be exploited! As Reed rightly observes, “macroeconomic instability and environmental degradation were seen as two separate issues”. Because adjustment was essentially about restoring macroeconomic stability, its focus has remained that of using monetarist tools, to regulate ailing economies. The consequence of this has been twofold: increased public expenditure to protect the environment would not be acceptable as it would make achieving fiscal balance impossible or difficult, and the natural resources sector continue to reflect the interest of the most powerful sectors of a given society, not the interests of the society as a whole (Reed 1992: 3, 157).

Transposed to the Nigerian context, the IMF-World Bank sponsored structural adjustment program, imposed a logic that was bereft of environmental considerations, except where this coincided with its project of liberalizing the economy or achieving fiscal balance. Thus the state found the environmentally insensitive adjustment program a good ally in subduing the oil environment as the price for economic recovery and growth.

An alternative framework must exclude economic adjustment in its current form as a modality of economic reform.

It is clear that the logic of unbridled market forces cannot promote an environmentally sustainable security framework. The resolution of the crises of insecurity and degradation can only come through a philosophical and democratic framework that “sensibly combines effective state intervention with accountable market processes, with a view to promoting economic rationality, without being insensitive to the demands of social development” (Olukoshi and others 1995: 98). Thus while the market is accountable to the state, the state itself must be accountable to the people. Thereby providing a tool for breaking the present gridlock over the ecology-politics nexus.

At this point in time, the prospects for change and peace appear dim. They reflect the resistance of the forces that control the rentier nexus. And yet they constitute a point of transcendence for an environmentally sound and sustainable national security system for Nigeria, which in turn will promote equity, development and peace in Nigeria, and provide the West African sub-region with a good measure of stability and resources for integration and growth.



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