

OIL AND VIOLENCE: EXAMINING THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATION TO NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

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Abstract

At the start of oil exploration in the Niger Delta in 1956, the oil bearing communities had anticipated some measure of industrialization and economic empowerment. Unfortunately, this was not the case as oil exploration orchestrated systemic contradictions in the region evidenced in marginalization, social exclusion and environmental degradation. The situation was further complicated by the unholy alliance between the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals which consequently engendered militancy in the region, thus constituting a grave threat to Nigeria's democratic stability. As a panacea to the crisis, this paper calls for reforms in the country's land use act, restructuring of the Nigerian federation, stringent measures against the oil firms and continued dialogue between the warring parties amongst others. The qualitative research method of secondary data collection was adopted while the frustration-aggression theory was utilized as a framework of analysis.

Keywords: Resource curse, crisis, oil exploration, militia groups, democracy

Introduction

Conflict is as old as human history and an inevitable outcome of human diversity and social interactions. It is a feature of everyday life and subsists in multiple forms and dimensions across the globe (Ajodo, 2011). Nigeria not being an exemption to this, has witnessed many political crisis and upheavals from independence such as the; Census Crisis of 1962, Action Group Crisis of 1962/63, Federal Election Crisis of 1964, Coups and Counter Coups, the Civil War of 1967-1970, the Kafanchan riots of the 1970s, the Oodua People Congress (OPC) militancy, the Maitatsine Jihad of the early 1980's, Jos Crisis of the 2000's, Boko Haram insurgency of the 2010's, farmer/herdsmen clash in recent times and of course the oil violence in the Niger Delta which is the focal point of this research.

The Niger Delta crisis predates the amalgamation of Nigerian state. As a matter of fact, it dates back to the early 19th century when a complex interplay of factors produced volatile responses owing to the pressures for the control and distribution of resources along with a feeling of injustice and inequity (Adebanjoko and Asu, 2013). At this period, struggles were exerted against British domination of oil palm trade as some of the resistances against foreign domination were carried out by kings such as Jaja of Opobo and King William Koko of Nembe. Later resistance against domination and social injustice followed the path of a secessionist move by Isaac Adaka Boro which culminated in the declaration of Niger Delta Republic in 1966 (Odisu, 2017). Rather than look into the grievances of the minority groups in the Niger delta, it was suppressed by the military regime.

Three decades after Boro's attempt to liberate the minority groups in the Niger delta, Ken Saro Wiwa and his Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) continued with the struggle and became the voice of the voiceless in the Niger delta, unfortunately, the Nigerian state was all out ready to repress the civil society in exchange for exclusive control of oil resource (Obi, 1999). The aftermath of this struggle was the hanging of Saro Wiwa and his associates by the federal military government in 1998. Contrary to the assumption that the crisis in the oil producing region would be abated as a result of a fierce clamp down on MOSOP, new waves of civil disturbances and insurrection erupted in the Niger delta shortly after the country's transition to civil rule in 1999 thus producing series of contradictions in the face of an unceasing proliferation of militant groups in the region (Amusan, 2009), consequently posing a grave danger to the country's democratic stability, given that the country's democracy is still nascent and on the path of consolidation.

1. Conceptual Clarification

It is highly pertinent at this point to undertake a clarification of the major concepts which are critical to our understanding of the discourse.

Resource Control

This connotes the rights of a community to generate and utilize income through the taxation of human and non-human elements within its jurisdiction with little or no interference from a central authority.

Conflict

This signifies the contestation over issues of values in which each opponent's aim is to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals.

Violence

This is the spontaneous outburst of chaos resulting from an aggressive expression of opinion leading to physical and psychological damages.

Democracy

The procedure through which governmental processes and decision making in a State are largely conducted through a majoritarian principle while at the same time acknowledging minority rights.

Resource Curse

This signifies the inability of some developing economies, particularly those endowed with natural resources to mobilize and deploy these resources for effective social transformation.

Democratic Stability

The institutionalization of civil norms and practices such that political institutions acquire enduring values and are endowed with the capacity to mediate among the competing social formations constituting the state.

2. Statement of the Problem

The commencement of oil exploration in commercial quantities at Oloibiri, present day Niger Delta in 1956 was greeted with great excitement and tall hopes for rapid development and accelerated industrialization (Oluduro and Oluduro, 2012). Unfortunately, no one anticipated the pains associated with oil explorations such as; oil spillage, environmental degradation, pollution and other ecological effects that come with it. Today, Oil spillage and gas flaring have devastated the Niger Delta and has resulted in impoverishment, conflict, human rights abuses and despair to the majority of the people rather than development (Onwubiko, *et al.* 2013). Truly, the crisis in Nigeria's Niger delta has a long history. In its historical trajectory and unfolding dynamics, it has become one of the most critical threats to national security in contemporary Nigeria (Chukwuma, 2013). From a somewhat negligible internal security concern, it metamorphosed to a national emergency with far-reaching international implications (Chukwuma, 2013). In its sociological development, it became deeply rooted while at the same time engulfing several actors namely; the state, multinational oil Corporations, civil society organizations and local petit bourgeoisie (Ejumudo, 2013) thus constituting existential and environmental threats (Esikot and Akpan, 2013).

Oil exploration and exploitation changed the dynamics of state relations in Nigeria, since for the most part; the state in collusion with oil multinationals assumed a repressive disposition in an attempt to stifle and contain dissenting voices within her territorial domain with the attendant result being that one of the biggest security challenges in contemporary Nigerian

State is the activities of ethnic militias in the Niger Delta with a concomitant effect on enduring peace, economic development and democratic stability in the country. Land alienation, unfulfilled promises for compensation, political marginalization, socio-economic inequalities, dishonest leadership, communication gap, inadequate research input and cultural disorientation continue to be a feature of oil politics in the Niger Delta (Ibaba, 2005:24). These disturbing indices have been exacerbated by the country's lackluster attitude and payment of lip-service to national unity occasioned by deliberate plastering of wounds through cosmetologized approach to national issues which, on its own has engendered dangerous deformities in Nigerian polity (Ojatorotu and Olawale, 2009). In view of the over centralization of the state as a result of oil politics, one begins to reflect on what could have happened to the resources, particularly the groundnut pyramids, cotton, plywood, rubber, timber, cocoa and oil palm which used to be the mainstay of the nation's economy and which the governments of the defunct regions depended on to fund their respective economic and infrastructural development programs before the commencement of Oil exploration. It is on this basis, that this paper attempts to examine the Niger Delta crisis and its implication to Nigeria's democratic stability, this is all the more germane at this point because fifty eight years after decolonization the country is yet to experience socio-political and economic tranquility.

3. Conceptualizing the Niger Delta

Located in the South-South region of Nigeria, the Niger Delta covers an area of about 70, 000 km², thus constituting 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass (Omosho, 2010). Niger Delta is an agglomeration of people with different cultures, languages and histories, united by their historical status in Nigeria and share a common identity as southern minorities (Ojatorotu and Olawale, 2009). It is composed of nine states namely; Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. The Niger Delta is one of the World's ten most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems and home to some 31 million people who live in about 13,400 aboriginal communities, mainly farmers and coastal fishermen, and belong to over 40 ethnic groups. It is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) all of which culminate in making the region more attractive, lucrative and relevant to the country's survival and by extension global economy (Adebanjoko and Asu, 2013).

The region houses the country's oil and gas industry and accounts for 80 percent of government revenue, 95 percent of export receipts, and 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings (Babatunde, Norafidah and Tapiwa, 2016). Oil related activities in the region have generated over \$600 billion to the country (Etekpe, 2013). Further research reveals that that the region has 6,000 oil wells, 606 oil fields, 355 onshore gas facilities, 10 gas plants, 275 flow stations, 15 export terminals, 7000 kilometers of pipelines and two modern refineries (Ajayi, 2013:35). It has an estimated 40 billion barrels of oil reserves in addition to its huge wealth of forest and water resources (Sampson and Odia, 2009) in addition to a natural gas reserve of 160 trillion cubic feet (Omotola, 2009).

4. Literature Review/ Overview of the Niger Delta Conflict

Given the unfolding and dynamic nature of the Niger Delta conflict, many analyses and prognostications have been offered by scholars of varying shades of political opinions. Each analyst seems to have his own conceptualization of the problem while attempting to proffer solutions (Ojajorotu and Asu, 2009), with Nigeria being at the receiving end of this eclectic and infinite knowledge pursuit engendered and precipitated by fossil politics. The conflict in the Niger Delta is triggered by a number of factors including but not limited to; cracks in the revenue allocation formula, resource control, fiscal federalism, environmental degradation, state predation, unfulfilled political promises to mention a few. In this section, a synthesis of the existing literature regarding the conflict shall be undertaken.

Omotosho (2010) situated the crisis within the context of the structural asymmetry and lopsidedness inherent in Nigeria's federalism, the effect of which has been gross discontentment, conflict and agitation by the two other tiers against the federal government for self reliance. For federations to endure, a level of agreement guaranteeing fiscal decentralization and some measure of financial autonomy has to be reached between the central government and component units. Unfortunately, in the Nigerian state this has been on a reverse gear as the country has witnessed fiscal centralization owing to long years of militarism. Federal-State finance becomes extremely important and controversial because it allocates administrative responsibility, assigns fiscal powers, dictates political balance and defines scope of administration (Watts, 1970). Furthermore, the fiscal centralization of the Nigerian federal state has alienated the oil producing minorities in the Niger Delta from the oil wealth emanating from the region. This has in recent times been consolidated by slow pace of systemic reforms due to over dependence on oil revenue (Usoro, Ekpenyong and Effiong, 2014). This over-dependence on the oil revenues emanating from the Niger-Delta have focused demands on the system and inevitably birthed and sharpened contradictions among different communal groupings in the country. As a result, the politics of oil inevitably locks into the politics of communalism (Olusola, 2013; Ibeanu 2005).

The politics of resource control further animated the conflict, it is on this basis that Shebbs and Njoku (2016) opined that resource control, issues of politics and legality lie at the heart of the conflict. Legality and use of laws for resource control was introduced by the colonial regime-the colonial state, which, through the 1914 'Colonial Minerals Ordinance' granted the monopoly of oil concessions in Nigeria to British or British-allied capital (IDEA, 2010:144). Consequently, the colonial era witnessed the gradual proliferation of resource control protests and agitation. In a bid to stem the tide several committees were set up whose terms of reference were never geared towards providing a lasting solution to the crisis. These structural defects were later consolidated by the post colonial Nigerian state through the enactment of draconian laws such as the Land Use Act of 1978, and the Petroleum Act of 1969 which transferred full ownership and control of both the land, sea and its constituents to the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) (Ngerebo, 2013:4). With the implication being that the FGN appropriates a large share of revenues from economic activities like oil exploration and exploitation (Obi, 1999; Ibaba, 2005). Again, policy measures such as 'Derivation Fund'

and 'Revenue Sharing Formula' have been constantly manipulated to the disadvantage of the Niger Deltans. Even development programs such as the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Niger Delta Ministry were or are either stifled of funds or are tailor-guided to award over-inflated contracts to non-indigenes of the region. Sometimes these contracts are not effectively executed, further throwing the people into endless hopelessness (Ngerebo, 2013).

Adebanjoko and Asu (2013) pegged the crisis around the concerns of gross exploitation, environmental degradation and pollution which in turn have resulted in poverty, unemployment, health hazards, conflicts and death in some cases, since for the most part, 70% of the Niger Deltans live below the poverty line. Some other scholars, (Odisu, 2017) have faulted the federal government and the multinational oil firms for the underdevelopment of the region given that the Nigerian state is weak in relation to the oil multinationals, and consequently lacks the capacity to call the oil firms, who are the neo-colonial agents in Africa to order and do the needful in areas of environmental remediation and corporate social responsibility. Again, the politics of marginalization and social exclusion been perpetrated by the Nigerian state has been a source of worry. The feelings of alienation and political exclusion have been another driver to the conflict (Dialoke and Edeja, 2017).

Explaining the restiveness, Dialoke and Edeja (2017) opined that state sponsored violence and continued suppression of peaceful agitations have been at the core of the conflict, this is aggravated by high levels of poverty in the region coupled with social issues which further animate the conflict. High rate of unemployment among the youths has also helped to drive and sustain the incidence of violence and criminality throughout the Niger Delta region, (Alabi, 2010). The continuous suppression of peaceful agitations leaves the inhabitants with no other alternative other than to militarize the struggle so as reduce their vulnerability to attack. Thus, resulting in the proliferation of many militant groups within the region such as; Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Movement of the Niger Delta People (MONDP), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDVF), Niger Delta People Salvation Front, and Niger Delta Avengers whose sole mandate is to cripple the country's economic activities.

Arguing along this direction, Eke (2004) observed that the main causes of the Niger Delta crises include greed, selfishness, deprivation, poverty and social injustice. Aside from the poverty of the people, another issue worth mentioning here is that of corporate complicity, that is, the role of oil multinationals in pitting one group against the other in the host communities. This is sometimes evident in the execution of 'development' projects that have caused more social divisions and problems in the Niger Delta (Okojie, 2009). Related to this is the role of the Nigerian state, its politics and mode of surplus extraction which make it possible for the oil corporations to conduct their businesses in a veiled manner (Okojie, 2009:3). The response of the Nigerian state to the crisis in the region has been to militarize the region by stationing an 'army of occupation' with the main objective of keeping militancy at bay while trying to maintain peace. This state predation whether expressed or implied

comes in the form of repression of legitimate agitations as well as military invasion and occupation of host communities in the pretext of civil unrest (Okumagba, 2012; Chukwuma, 2013).

In line with socio-economic practices in oil bearing communities especially in developed climes, oil discovery always brought hope and great excitement that civilized and modern infrastructure would be the attendant consequences of its exploration, this was not to be the case in the Niger delta as initial hopes and excitements were dashed due to unrestrained and unhealthy exploration by oil multinationals. On the whole, the politics of failed expectation alongside poor human capital development gave credence to the Niger delta struggle; it was thought that as oil companies commenced their operations and implement the ideas embodied in their corporate social responsibility, more people would have the opportunity to be gainfully employed. However, in the context of prolonged denials and frustrations, neither the oil companies nor government ever came to terms with these pervasive social expectations (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009). Recent clamours by the elite in the region for distributive justice have compounded several attempts at mediation and peaceful resolution. For the people of the Niger Delta, the struggle for a just revenue allocation formula is a manifestation of a collective sense of deprivation on the part of a people who see themselves as the producers of the entire Federation's wealth (Babalola, 2014:2).

From the foregoing thus, the crisis in the Niger delta can be seen to revolve around some fundamental issues which include but not limited to; colonial legacy, distortions in the country's legal system, state predation and kleptocracy, marginalization and social exclusion, unbridled exploration by oil multinationals and cracks in the country's revenue allocation formula all of which have bred systemic contradictions in the centre's relations with its constituent units.

5. Theoretical Framework

The crisis in the Niger Delta becomes more evident if examined from the lens of the frustration-aggression theory. This theory was propounded by John Dollard and his research associates in 1939. It has been expended and modified by scholars like Leonard Berkowitz (1962) and Aubrey Yates (1962). The frustration-aggression theory appears to be the most common explanation for violent behaviour in that it perceives violence as a fall out of human's inability to meet its most basic needs. Theorists who rely on this explanation employ psychological theories of motivation and behavior as well as frustration and aggression (Anifowose, 1982). In a bid to explain aggression, scholars point to the difference between what people feel they want or deserve to what they actually get- the 'want-get ratio' (Feierabends, 1969), as well as the difference between 'expected need satisfaction' and 'actual need satisfaction' (Davies, 1962), where expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions (Ademola, 2012). This was the central argument contained in Ted Gurr's Relative Deprivation thesis that 'the greater the discrepancy however marginal, between what is sought and what seem attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result' (Gurr, 1970).

On the whole, the thrust of the frustration – aggression theory is that aggression is not undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct, rather it is an outcome of frustration, thus in situations where an individual's or group (s) legitimate demands are denied whether by design or construct by the indirect consequence of the way a society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may compel such a person or group to express their anger through violence that will be directed at those considered responsible or indirectly linked to them (Ademola, 2012). It further presents the idea of relative deprivation as a perceived disparity between value expectation and value capabilities, or the lack of a need satisfaction defined as a gap between aspiration and achievement (Midlarsky, 1975). Thus, when there is a gap between the level of value expectation and the level of value attainment, due to lack of capacity to synchronize both levels, tension builds up due to the pressure of an unfulfilled aspiration or an unsatisfied urge or need. Failure to arrest this on time, leads to frustration. Frustration, when it accumulates, leads to the rising up of suppressed emotions of anger, which is oftentimes directed against the party considered to be the source of deprivation of satisfaction. This finally finds an outlet through aggressive and violent disposition towards the environment.

Again, when socio-political, economic and cultural processes are monopolized by a group, it creates the condition that force people to adopt adversarial approaches to conflict. Going further, Scarborough reveals that in situations where existing structures are tilted in favour of one ethnic group while putting the other(s) at a disadvantage, where cultures are seen as exclusive; where holders of certain power or privileges are unwilling to acknowledge the right of others to be different or where people find it difficult to identify with the political and economic ideas of a political regime, the chances are that conflict will emerge and escalate if nothing is done to rectify such anomalies (Scarborough, 1999). In this regard, we may argue that the tendency to aggress is most visible when groups are subjected to unjustified frustration or sustained frustration. Again, a history of humiliation, oppression, victimization and injustice could become triggers which may eventually cause an ethnic group to resort to vengeance, thus, making ethnicity pathological. It is however important to note that the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members of a collectivity. If there is a fundamental discrepancy between what is sought for and what was eventually attained, there is a likelihood of rebellion. On the whole, just as frustration produces aggressive behaviour on the part of an individual, so does relative deprivation give rise to collective violence by social groups (Maire, 2004).

One is not unmindful here of the shortcomings of the frustration aggression thesis, and this is where political tolerance comes in. An aggressive response to frustration may be dependent upon the individual's level of tolerance, and frustration may not necessarily culminate in aggression and even in cases where violent response is undertaken, it could be positive and constructive. Nonetheless, it is an established fact that frustration sometimes produces a temporary increase in motivation, and thus lead to more vigorous responses (Berkowitz, 1962), and this is perceived to be of sufficient generality to serve as an anchor for the explanation of virtually all forms of aggressive behavior including political violence. This is perhaps why men who are disadvantaged and frustrated by society's structural configuration have an innate

tendency to engage in violence in proportion to the intensity of their frustration. This is of course a most appropriate description of the situation in the Oil bearing and contiguous communities of Nigeria's Niger delta area.

From the foregoing thus, it is observable that the crisis in the Niger delta has psychological drivers to it. For the most part, the Niger Deltans whether by accident or design have been deliberately marginalized by the asymmetrical and lopsided configuration of the Nigerian federation, thus the present conflict is a fall out of the sour relationship engendered by long of marginalization and social exclusion. The politics of exclusion and the reduction of the political space to the detriment of other minority ethnic groups in the Nigerian state further animated the conflict by engendering the accumulation of frustration which now finds an outlet in the form of expressed struggle, thus culminating in violence. The Niger Deltans had hoped for a better political arrangement and an all-inclusive government in the face of oil discovery and subsequent exploration, unfortunately what has been evident has been a perceived disparity between value expectation and value capabilities by the ethnic groups in the Niger delta. Feierabends (1969) calls this 'the revolution of rising expectation' and this aptly explains the reason why the 'frustrated' have chosen to 'rebel' against a political arrangement perceived to be tilted to their disadvantage.

6. Implications of the Conflict to Nigeria's Democratic Stability

The crisis in Nigeria's Niger Delta has metamorphosed from being localized to a monstrous epidemic with severe global implications, thus, calling for urgent attention. Nigeria's external relations vis-a-vis developed democracies have been badly affected as the country is now considered a threat to foreign direct investment (FDIs). It is seen as an unstable economy and a sinkhole that could swallow FDIs in the twinkling of an eye because of past crises like 'Isaac Boro's Rebellion' and 'Ogoni Eight Saga' (Adebanjoko and Asu, 2013). The saying that 'crude oil is the life blood of Nigeria's economy' is a truism given the country's heavy reliance on petro-dollar. Unfortunately in recent times, the country has witnessed a cut in crude production as a result of the incessant attacks being perpetrated by ethnic militias in the Niger delta whose mandate is to cripple the country's economic activities. This has, by and large affected the capacity of the Nigerian state to deliver the dividends of democracy to her citizens. The consequence of this has been the gross alienation of the citizens from the state, where for the most part the masses perceive state institutions as enemies to be cheated whenever occasion permits. This, in the author's opinion could stifle all attempts at consolidating the country's nascent democracy.

Again the ecological degradation and despoliation being experienced in the Niger delta has a grave implication for human existence. Human life can only be sustained in an environment with favourable climatic conditions. However, this has not been the case in the Niger delta. The unbridled exploration and exploitation being perpetrated by oil multinationals in the region have contributed to the existing global climatic issues such as; ozone layer depletion, global warming and green house effect. Quite a few scientific findings have shown that environmental degradation negatively impacts global security and prosperity (Adebanjoko

and Asu, 2013:11). Little wonder America's foreign policy particularly in the last two decades have revolved around environmental issues and its resultant effects in terms of social dislocations, health challenges, terrorism and unrestrained migration all of which have the potential to constrict its resources and make human life more miserable.

Furthermore, if the socio-economic and political underdevelopment continues unabated in the Niger delta, the crisis may spiral and become difficult to resolve. The cost of oil exploration and distribution could eventually sky rocket, with inflation being the corollary effect. Already, kidnapping and political killings are now lucrative businesses in the region. This new wave of crime further adds salt to injury and complexifies the situation. Studies (Banon and Collier, 2003) have shown that poverty, hopelessness and cruelty lead people to violence and terrorism. As a matter of fact, these are the sort of environmental factors that aid and sustain the activities of international terrorist groups, and since these variables are apparent in the region, disgruntled elements and dissenting voices could use it as launching pad for the recruitment of terrorists. Continued crisis in the Niger delta poses an increasingly significant threat to the peace and stability of the West African region. The country's neighbours are at risk should the conflict persist since they have economic and security interests at stake in the country, particularly in ensuring a continuous flow and supply of crude products.

Conclusion and Recommendation

When oil exploration began in the Niger delta in 1956, the inhabitants of the region had thought that oil exploration would accelerate rapid development in the region. Unfortunately, time tested and proved their assumption wrong. Rather than facilitate development and improve the well being of the host communities, it sank them into deplorable conditions leaving them with; abject poverty, poor human capital development, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation. The consequence of which has been the rise and proliferation of ethnic militias in the region with a grave threat to Nigeria's democratic stability. On the whole, the crisis in the Niger delta owes its origin to; the lopsided nature of the Nigerian federation, the politics of exclusion and alienation being perpetrated by the Nigerian state, the predatory character of the Nigerian state, the unrestrained exploration of crude deposit by oil multinationals without any recourse to adequate corporate social responsibility, fractures in the country's revenue allocation formula etc. To stem the tide, the following measures are highly expedient and must be urgently undertaken if the country's democracy is to be fully consolidated.

Firstly, the country's land use act has to be reformed. The decree as enshrined in the 1979 constitution ceded all lands to the government. The implication of this is that the government has been appropriating lands in the Niger Delta for mineral purposes without genuine intentions to remediate the environmental degradation that follows. Unfortunately, the Niger Deltans have been at the receiving end. The suggestion here, is that a comprehensive agreement should always be reached by the government, oil multinationals and stakeholders before the commencement of any exploratory activity, this agreement will help; define the modus operandi of such operations, impose limits on the multinationals and guarantee some

adequate compensation to the host communities. Secondly, a constitutional conference should be called for where ethnic groups and major stakeholders would ventilate their angst against the state. Issue such as resource control, fiscal federalism and reparations would have to be looked into since they have generated a lot of grievances which have over heated the polity, whatever outcomes and decisions reached at this conference must be binding on all parties.

In addition, effective restructuring of the Nigerian federation should be carried out. The situation where political power is seen as the exclusive preserve of some ethnic groups to the detriment of other constituent units does not augur well. Federalism demands that some measure of autonomy and self rule be granted to the component units; this has not been the case in the Nigerian federation, the consequence of this has been a ‘disunited unity’ or unity by ‘gun powder’ as some have chosen to call it, this, on its own constitutes an obstacle to effective democratization.

Furthermore, fierce measures must be taken against the oil companies operating in the region. The situation where they are allowed to operate unfettered must be looked into, since for the most part they operate without due considerations to the sustenance of human lives and the preservation of the ecosystem for subsequent generations. Laws should be enacted that will ensure that these oil firms undertake remediation in the case of oil spillage while paying adequate compensation to host communities in line with international best practices. Lastly, dialogue should continue unabated. No nation achieves economic development on violence, an appeal must continue to be made to the aggrieved parties on the need to sheath their swords and embrace peace which is the only panacea to ensuring peace and democratic stability in the Nigerian federation.

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