



NIGER DELTA

ECONOMIES OF VIOLENCE

WORKING PAPERS

Working Paper No. 25

**Crude Politics:
Life and Death on the Nigerian Oil Fields**

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2009

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The secret of great wealth with no obvious source is some forgotten crime, forgotten because it was done neatly.

—Honoré de Balzac, *Father Goriot* (1834)

It has been a long, hot and violent summer in the Niger delta. The oil-producing region in the south-east of Nigeria, Africa's most populous and arguably most important country, is ablaze, and for the most part ungovernable. Beginning in the late 1990's, the cosy relationship between Big Oil and a despotic Nigerian state was challenged by popular, and increasingly militant, pressure from oil communities, or more properly from armed youth movements. The shift from non-violent protest to militancy, and ultimately to armed struggle, was in many respects the inevitable result of the Nigerian government's brutal repression of the Ogoni movement and the murder of its influential and charismatic leader Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995 (Douglas and Okonta 2003). Popular challenges to the so-called 'slick alliance' between international oil companies (who operated with total impunity) and the Nigerian state, or more properly a Nigerian military junta (who siphoned oil revenues to powerful ethnic constituencies outside of an impoverished oil region populated by what are referred to locally as ethnic minorities), were met with a lethal combination of repression by notoriously corrupt and violent state security forces and by naked attempts to purchase the consent of the political elites. A decade later the Niger delta is home to a fully-grown local insurgency. In late 2005, a new and well organized militant group the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) exploded out of the creeks of the western delta promising to close down the oil industry (Watts 2005). Within a matter of days close to one third of national output was shut-in. According to a report leaked in late 2008 – prepared by a 43 person government commission and entitled *The Report of the Technical Committee of the Niger Delta* – in the first nine months of 2008 the Nigerian government lost a staggering \$23.7 billion in oil revenues due to militant attacks and sabotage.

On May 13th 2009 federal troops launched a full-scale military offensive against what the government sees as violent organized criminals who have crippled the oil and gas industry. Thousands of dirt-poor villagers in the region around Gbaramatu, southwest of the oil city of Warri in Delta State – an area known to harbor a number of militant encampments including the notorious Camp 5 - have been displaced and hundreds of innocent civilians killed. The casualties are almost wholly Ijaw, an ethnic minority who inhabit the creeks and lowland riverine environments where the Niger river empties into the Atlantic. The militants in return launched ferocious reprisal attacks, gutting Chevron's Okan manifold which controls 80% of the company's shipments of oil. Over a two month period from mid-May to mid-July, twelve attacks were launched against Nigeria's \$120 billion oil infrastructure. Agip was forced to declare *force majeure* on its Brass fields while Shell, following several devastating attacks on well-heads and pipelines near Escravos (in the west) and the Cawthorne channel (in the east), was losing \$20

million per day in deferred production from its onshore operations. 124 of the Nigeria's 300 operating oil fields were shut by mid-July. Then late in the night of July 12th 2009, 15 MEND gunboats launched an audacious, and devastating assault on Atlas Cove, a major oil facility in Lagos, the economic heart of the country, three hundred miles from the Niger delta oilfields (a year earlier, to accentuate both their strike capability and the ineptitude of the naval security forces, MEND overran and compromised the massive floating production and storage on the massive Bonga field 75 miles offshore).

Overall the oil and gas industry, on and off-shore, is crippled. Shell, the major operator in the country accounting for 40% of national output, has closed its western operations completely, and the eastern region is barely producing 100,000 b/d. In effect the company is at a standstill at a moment when oil prices are again creeping upward (as I write they are close to \$70.00 a barrel). Agip, Chevron and Exxon-Mobil are equally compromised. Many of the engineering, construction and oil service companies have withdrawn core personnel and in some cases withdrawn completely. In three years they have in effect brought the oil industry to a standstill. Hostage taking – not only of oil workers, but also politicians, even children – has become a major growth industry. In the industry parlance, the international oil companies no longer have a license to operate. Murdered activist Ken Saro-Wiwa's dark premonition - his 1990 prediction of a "coming war" unless the needs of the oil producing communities were met - hangs like a pall over contemporary Nigeria.

The long simmering crisis in the Niger delta proved, however, to be beginning of the Nigerian governments' summer troubles. In the north of Nigeria, the Muslim heartland and the regional base of the powerful ruling northern oligarchy, a Taliban-styled Islamist group – Boko Haram also known as Al-Sunna wal Jamma – was brutally repressed by government security forces in early August. Following co-ordinated attacks by the Islamist on police stations and other state institutions¹ in a number of northern cities, the government launched a massive bombardment of the movement's compound resulted in large numbers of casualties, and culminated in the extra-judicial killing of the movement's leader Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri at the hands of the police. By some estimates more than seven hundred people died in the conflagration. In short, two of the most strategic economic and political regions of the Nigerian federation are in effect under lockdown.

¹ The immediate trigger for the attacks is not entirely clear. The *The New York Times* gave an account of police forces attacking a funeral procession of Islamists on 11 June where 17 people are said to have been killed. Yusuf allegedly threatened revenge and on 24 July, police secured combat material during a crackdown in Maiduguri. Two days later the Islamist militia struck back with a night time attack on a police station (see Ruberlein, <http://rubeneberlein.wordpress.com/2009/08/07/northern-nigeria-fightings-massacre-islamists/#more-752>).

The federal government has failed conspicuously to grasp the gravity of political sentiments across the multi-ethnic oilfields and has misread the temperature among the Muslim faithful, the *umma*, in the north. A large survey of Niger delta oil communities by the World Bank in 2007 (Oyefusi 2007) discovered that an astonishing 36.23% of youth interviewed revealed a “willingness or propensity to take up arms against the state”. Government sees the problem almost wholly in terms of criminality. But history teaches us that any insurgency is a complex mix of greed and grievance - and one person’s criminal or terrorist is another’s liberation fighter. The recent survey poll released in 2009 report shows clearly that local communities have no faith whatsoever in the state and local government but government acts as if they do. The incontestable fact, as Ledum Mittee the Ogoni human rights campaigner has noted, is that there is overwhelming popular sympathy across the Delta for what the militants are doing and saying (cited in Kashi and Watts 2008). This is no less the case with Haram Boko, a movement whose anti-Western and anti-science sentiments speak powerfully to a younger generation of modern Muslims for whom modern development and education has brought poverty, unemployment and a radical souring of the very idea of secular national development. Murray Last, a long-time observer of northern politics put it, the resistance against the state in the north of Nigeria by and large is “more long-term and patient, scarcely audible” but at a certain point “silence could no longer be borne; something “noisy” had to be done” (cited in Ruberlein op cit).

Nigeria is an oil-rich petro-state but its developmental record is one of catastrophic failure (Ahmad and Singh 2003). According to IMF, the \$700 billion in oil revenues since 1960 have added almost nothing to the standard of living of the average Nigerian. Eighty-five per cent percent of oil revenues accrue to one percent of the population and a huge proportion of the country’s wealth – perhaps 40% or more, has been stolen. Over the last decade GDP per capita and life expectancy have, according to World Banks, both fallen. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2005), ranks Nigeria in terms of human development - a composite measure of life expectancy, income, and educational attainment – on par with Haiti and Congo.

Why has such extraordinary oil wealth – and the developmental opportunities it affords - generated nothing more than violence, rage, disillusionment and catastrophically failed development? Why has the heart of the Nigerian petro-state degenerated into a zone of insurrection and how has the political nerve centre of the country, the Muslim north, come to be a breeding ground for radical Islamists? Both of these questions are related in complex ways to oil, to the fact that oil (and gas) saturates, provides the ether, the political, economic, cultural and ideological realities of contemporary Nigeria. Which brings me necessarily to the question of how we think about oil.

Thinking With Oil

[I]f oil is something like a strategic natural resource for the planet, which will be exhausted in the near future, it is remarkable how little is known about how large this resource is, and how to manage it...studies of oil remain remarkably underdeveloped given the scale, importance, geographical scope and complexity of oil operations

- Andrew Barry, 2007

There are two important but quite orthodox ways of thinking about oil and society, or perhaps oil and modernity. The first is oil and gas as a *global production network (GPN)* with particular properties, actors, networks, governance structures, institutions and organizations (a global value chain as the industry has it, but what in effect regime of accumulation and a mode of regulation). Gavin Bridge (2008) has provided a far reaching and rigorous account of oil through the lens of the political economy of extraction (but the literature on which he draws is vast: see Mommer 2002 and Labban 2008 for good reviews). He examines the upstream and downstream sectors, the technical and knowledge systems associated with exploration and production, transportation and refining/processing and consumption/carbon captures, and the changing patterns of firm and inter-firm organization (vertically integrated international oil corporations (IOCs), the independents, the oil service companies), cartelization and regulatory structures, the fall of the 'seven sisters' (the IOCs dominance of the 1950s) and the rise – and now the hegemony - of the 'seven misters' (the national oil companies aka the NOCs of the late 20th century) and so on, all of which give shape to the enormous and global oil and gas system embracing everything from gas stations to OPEC to 3D seismic technologies to strategic petroleum reserves. Seen in this way oil and gas is a staggeringly vast on all counts: the value of the recoverable oil and gas is perhaps \$160 trillion (more than the value of all equity markets and equal to the total value of all tradeable financial assets); the value of the oil and gas market alone is over US\$3 trillion. The assets of the entire industry now totals over US\$40 trillion. Not unusually ,200 million barrels of oil can be traded in a day on the New York Mercantile Exchange, much of this being 'paper oil' (never delivered physically as oil), which is to say part of the booming commodities futures market ("index speculation" so-called). The largest oil companies (private and public) market value exceeds the GDP of all of Africa.

The production network is held together materially by a global oil infrastructure with its own particular geography. These the arteries and organs of the oil and gas global value-chain is nothing short of gargantuan. Close to 1 million producing oil wells puncture the surface of the earth (77,000 were drilled in 2008, 4000 offshore); 3300 are subsea, puncturing the earth's crust on the continental shelf in some cases thousands of meters below the sea's surface. More than 2 million kms of pipelines blanket the globe in a massive trunk-network (another 180,000 kms will be built at a capital cost of over \$265 billion over the next four years). 75,000 kms of lines transport oil and gas along the sea floor. Another

156,000 kms of pipelines will be completed between now and 2012. There are 6000 fixed platforms, and 635 offshore drillings rigs (the international rig total for 2009 is over 3000 according to Baker Hughes). 4295 oil tankers (vessels greater than 1000 long tons or more deadweight) move 2.42 billion tons of oil and oil products every year, a figure which represents over one third of global sea borne trade. Worldwide over 700 refineries process crude oil; over 80 massive floating, production and storage vessels have been installed in the last five years. A large field such as the Kashagan reservoir in Kazakhstan might incur over \$150 billion in investment over its lifetime; Sakhalin-II off the eastern coast of Russia, operating in deepwater at winter temperatures of minus 24 degrees Celsius with platforms built to withstand massive ice-flows moving at 2 meters per second, will alone cost more than \$20 billion. All in all there is nothing quite like it.

This oil hardware is fed, literally and figuratively, by a seemingly unstoppable rush to discover and refine more of a resource that everyone agrees is finite. Bridge calls this the technological imperative which manifests itself in the aggressive pursuit of economies of scale in production and refining, and in transportation. there is a dialectical interaction as he sees it between efforts to reduce unit costs (by scaling up production), and the scaling up of transportation (to handle increased product volumes). This imperative drives the oil frontier to the ends of the earth, or more properly a mad gallop to the bottom of the ocean. Deepwater exploration is the new mantra (deepwater offshore production is expected to grow by 78% between 2007 and 2011). On August 2nd 2007, a Russian submarine with two parliamentarians on board planted a titanium flag two miles down under the North Pole. At stake were the lucrative new oil and gas fields – by some estimations 10 billion tons of oil equivalent - on the Arctic sea floor. In late 2006, a consortium of oil companies discovered oil at a staggering depth 150 miles into the Gulf of Mexico. The test well, Jack-2, delves through 7000 feet of water and 20,000 feet of sea floor to tap oil in tertiary rock laid down 60 million years ago. The drill ships – and the production platforms – required to undertake such are massive floating structures, much larger than the largest aircraft carriers and much more expensive, costing well over a half billion dollars (and close to a million dollars a day to rent). In 2007 a the vast new Tupi field in Brazilian coastal waters was discovered in 200 meters of water below a massive layer of salt in hugely inhospitable geological conditions. One test well cost over \$250 million (a dry well in Mexico cost \$1.6 billion). What is on offer is a great deepwater land grab which required a vast floating and submersible infrastructures: Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCC), the Floating, Production, Storage and Offloading vehicles (FSPOs), a massive submersible technologies linking umbilicals, risers, wellheads to floating production and storage devices, high capacity production rigs and refineries capable of turning overnight 250,000 barrels of oil into 10 million gallons of gasoline, diesel and jet fuel. The technoscience of oil and gas is something of a trainwreck: utterly terrifying and compelling at the same time.

Bridge succinct summary of the industry as a global production network is worth quoting at length:

The first is the tension between resource-holding states and resource-seeking firms.....The second is the distribution of value between producers (both states and firms) and consumers. This distribution is a function of the relative power of different actors, and is significantly affected by changes in the price of oil..... [There are] two significant differences about the oil GPN that distinguish it from other, non-extractive networks, and which have implications for the capacity of oil production to contribute to regional development. These differences relate to the two end points where economic processes interface with the natural environment via processes of commodification and enclosure. The first is that significant value can be captured at the very beginning of the chain via the assigning of rights to the mineral resource: much competitive strategy in the oil industry, therefore, relates to control over resource access and the capture (and allocation) of rents from low-cost, high quality reserves. The second is that the enclosure and trading of carbon provides another moment for rapid creation and capture of value, particularly for the owners of land/resources that provide carbon sequestration services (2008: 401-402)

He is properly attentive to the territorial and biophysical properties nature of oil: there is a distinctive petro-geography (five Gulf states account for 60% of known reserves), reservoirs are place-specific with peculiar properties, the oil infrastructure constitutes a space of flows within which there are nodal points of transformation in the carbon cycle (gas-to-liquids for example) and so on. Oil and gas is not simply an old (nineteenth century) but fully globalised industry in which the friction of distance has been overcome and the uniqueness of place has been superseded. It is a dynamic, technologically innovative and hybrid industry constituted by multiple spaces or forms of territoriality (the oil supply zone, the reservoir, the oil-state, the oil field, the oil community).

The second approach, and there are clearly areas of overlap with the global production network, is to see oil as a *natural resource* and as a very particular sort of resource *commodity*, one of enormous geostrategic and political significance ('blood oil'), as the fuel of hydrocarbon capitalism, and for some (oil-states and 'oilgarchies') the source of a pathological form of 'resource dependency' (the 'resource curse') [Ghazvinian 2007; Shaxson 2007; Klare 2004, Hiro 2006, Youngquist 1997; Huber 2008]. Oil comes to mark a particular epoch (like the age of coal or steam) and to this extent is not only a bearer of particular relations of production but it equally a source of enormous political and economic power and therefore it carries a set of ideological and cultural valencies as is implied in the moniker of 'black gold' or 'petro-dollars' (it is both a commodity and a commodity fetish). In this account oil (and other key resources) has causal powers: it is a purveyor of corruption, it undermines democracy, promotes civil and inter-state wars ('blood for oil'), is the mother

forms of corporate power ('Big Oil') and condemns oil-rich states to devastating economic, political and social pathologies (oil is the 'devil's excrement' as a former head of OPEC once put it). Some of this work, for example micro-economic studies of oil firm production functions (and their implications for employment and sectoral organization) and macro-economic analyses of the effect of price fluctuations (boom and bust cycles) on non-oil sectors (the so-called Dutch disease), have much in common with the global production network approach championed by Bridge, but there are key differences which turn in particular on the purported powers (sometimes not explicit) inhering in oil itself and of the forms of politics which stem from this fact (insurgencies, patronage, and corruption to name but three) [see Soysa and Neumayer 2007; Fearon and Laiton 2003; Lujala, Rod and Thieme 2007; Rosser 2006; Le Billion 2005].

Paul Collier's *The Bottom Billion* (2007) is a canonical text in this regard, though it is part of a now large and complex literature on oil-dependency. Collier argues that most of the bottom billion (the world's chronically poor) live in 58 countries - almost three quarters of which are African - distinguished by their lack of economic growth and the prevalence of civil conflict. Most are caught in a quartet of 'traps', two of which (in Collier's account they are deeply related) concern me here: namely the civil war trap (the average cost of a typical civil war is about \$64 billion) in which 73% of the poor have been caught at one time or another, and a natural resource trap (resource wealth or dependency turned sour) which accounts for another 30%.² Collier's argument is not simply that civil conflict is expensive in human and developmental terms nor that wars are associated with economic stagnation and poverty ("low income means poverty, and low growth means hopelessness. Young men, who are recruits for rebel armies, come pretty cheap....Life itself is cheap" p.20). Rather he sees this nexus of forces as arising from resource dependency ("Dependence upon primary commodity exports...substantially increases the risk of civil war" p.21): that is to say there is a robust relation between resource wealth and (paradoxically) poor economic performance, poor governance (resource predation), and the likelihood of falling into (debilitating and enduring) civil conflicts. Collier's book speaks to a wider interest taken by economists (and political scientists) in what seems like a challenge to economic orthodoxy: namely that resources wealth (as a source of comparative advantage) turns out to be a 'curse'³: the resource curse literature whether emphasizing poor economic performance, state failure (oil breeds corruption or "resource rents make democracy malfunction" (Collier, p.42) or the onset of civil violence (blood diamonds, oil succession and so on) has generated a vast amount of research of which Collier and his colleagues have been central contributors. The drive here is to associate, statically or otherwise, oil with particular behaviors: predation, sabotage, forms of violence (military coups versus rebellion). The research program (implicitly) purports to map forms of determinacy ('petro-causality') in social and especially political life of

² The other two traps are landlocked states with bad neighbours, and bad governance in a small country. See also his earlier work Collier 2003, Collier et al 2006.

³ For a review of this literature see Rosser 2006, Brunnschweiler and Bulte, 2008, Basedau 2005.

those who inhabit, and cannot escape from, the world of oil – that is to say ‘petro-states’ or in non-oil dependent states the powers of international oil companies and their *consiglieri*.

In this account oil has been invested with almost Olympian transformative powers (see Cramer 2006). Oil distorts the organic, natural course of development. Oil wealth ushers in an economy of hyper-consumption and spectacular excess: bloated shopping malls in Dubai or corrupt Russian ‘oilygarchs’. There is even a psychological appellation to describe the condition: the Gillette syndrome. ElDean Kohrs studied the booming coal town of Gillette, Wyoming in the 1970s, and was witness to how a commodity boom brought a corresponding wave of crime, drugs, violence, and inflation. It would afflict new gas fields of Wyoming, indigenous oil communities Ecuador and the rough and tumble Russian oilfields of Siberia. Others like Michael Ross (1999, 2003, 2004) argue that “oil hinders democracy” (as if copper might promote constitutionalism) and hampers gender equality: oil revenues permit low taxes and encourage patronage (thereby dampening pressures for democracy); it endorses despotic rule through bloated militaries, and it creates a class of state-dependents employed in modern industrial and service sector who are less likely to push for democracy. *New York Times* columnist and world class autodidact Thomas Friedmann (2004) has even identified a ‘First Law of Petropolitics’: the higher the average global crude price of oil, the more free speech, free press, fair elections, an independent judiciary, the rule of law and independent political parties are eroded. Hugo Chavez is, of course, the law’s most devious exponent. In sum, the oil world is cursed – a “carbontocracy” impoverished by its wealth.

There is much of value in these approaches but one comes close to commodity determinism (cf. Polanyi 1947; RETORT 2005)), and the other privileges the hard-edges of political economy over the complex intersections of accumulation, culture, technology and I want to suggest something altogether different – in a way a different or complementary vocabulary for thinking about oil – that picks up from Timothy Mitchell’s suggestion that “closely following the oil” means “tracing the connections that were made between pipelines and pumping stations, refineries and shipping routes, road systems and automobile cultures, dollar flows and economic knowledge, weapons experts and militarism, one discovers how a particular set of relations was engineered among oil, violence, finance, expertise and democracy” (2007:39). I shall try to explore some of these inter-connections – all of which as Mitchell says do not respect the boundaries between the material and the ideal, the political and the cultural, the natural and the social – by focusing on one small part of what I call then oil complex (or the oil assemblage), namely that particular territorialization of the oil complex known as the Niger delta.

In seeing oil as a complex (as opposed to a production network) I want to emphasize the variety of actors, agents and processes that give shape to our version of carbon capitalism: this is obviously the IOCs, the NOCs and the service companies and the massive oil infrastructure but also the petrostates, the

massive engineering companies and financial groups, the shadow economies (theft, money laundering, drugs, organized crime), the rafts of NGO's (human rights organizations, monitoring agencies, corporate social responsibility groups, voluntary regulatory agencies), the research institutes and lobbying groups, the landscape of oil consumption (from SUV's of pharmaceuticals), and not least the oil communities, the military and paramilitary groups, and the social movements which surround the operations of, and shape the functioning of, the oil industry narrowly construed. This massive assemblage resembles, in some respects, what Andrew Barry has called a "technological zone"

A techno- logical zone can be understood, in broad terms, as a space within which differences between technical practices, procedures or forms have been reduced, or common standards have been established. Unlike the territories of nation-states and empires, technological zones cannot be marked on a map, yet they do have limits. Moreover, they may also imply particular demands on the identity of objects and persons that exist within them..... A zone is an *agencement* or assemblage that accelerates and intensifies agency in particular directions, and with unpredictable and dynamic effects (2006:239-241).

Barry sees such a zone as containing or producing different and multiple spaces (some of which have no boundaries as such) through the operations of metrological (measurement), infrastructural (connection) and qualificatory (assessment) standards. To pursue the analogy, an oil assemblage or technological zone is a center of economic, political and scientific calculation – Mitchell (2007:16) calls it a coordinated but dispersed set of regulations, calculative arrangements, infrastructural and technical procedures that render certain objects or flows governable. An oil assemblage is a sort of governable space (or spaces) [see Rose 1999 and Watts 2005].

Much could be said about the properties of the oil assemblage. In spite of its formal market character is an industry shrouded in secrecy and produced ignorance, a world in which even the most basic statistics can be meaningless. Agnotology is the order of the day (Bowden 1985). It is a system that is at once visible and invisible (above and below ground); oil constitutes its own currency (oil is money); the assemblage has a peculiar temporality oriented to the future (the forecast (see Mason 2006), the curse) and exhaustion (peak oil); ideologically it is draped in the discourses of nationalism, security, scarcity (petro-Malthusianism) and violence (Barnes 2005; Frynas and Paulo 2007); oil is fugitive and fungible (one barrel of oil can produce gasoline, distillate fuel, liquified gas, asphalt, charcoal, wax, naphthas, electricity, lubricants and a vast array of petrochemicals required for everything from polyester shirts to telephone housings); the oil assemblage is expected to become as Barry and Mitchell point out, a vehicle for democracy, transparency promotion, the thickening of civil society and of popular empowerment; drugs and militarism are the assemblage's handmaidens (Lipschitz et al 2007; UN 2009; Glenny 2008; De Oliveira 2007) and

not least the assemblage is a zone of economic and political calculation that can only be understood as a form of what Marx called primitive accumulation (Arendt 1958; RETORT 2005), that is to say serial and repetitive violent dispossession and appropriation (a sort of permanent frontier of exploration and abandonment). All of these properties operate side by side with the more formal attributes (metrology, qualification, infrastructure) of the technological zone outlined by Barry. Much could be said about each and all of them.

I want to emphasize two particular dimensions to the oil assemblage, namely space and territoriality, and the notion of the oil assemblage as a regime of living (see Collier and Lakoff 2005). Take for example the following. Houston is popularly known as 'the oil city'. It has siblings bearing the same name in the great oil-producing regions of the world: Baku, Kirkuk, Luanda, Fort McMurray, Midland-Odesa and Murmansk. Some cities carry the appellation because they are the hubs of corporate power in the universe of Big Oil (San Ramon, California and Irving, Texaco come to mind). Others, like Dubai, are the products of vast oil wealth, spectacular excretions of a particular sort of financial and consumerist excess: as Mike Davis says Dubai is the Miami of the Persian Gulf sutured to a "monstrous caricature of the future" (2007, 53). Oil cities are centres of political and economic calculation, nodes within a vast but partially visible network of flows and connectivity. If oil has its onshore and above-ground pipelines, rigs, platforms, flowstations, floating production and storage vessels (FPSO's) and export terminals, it is also encompasses an invisible underworld of reservoirs, subsea pipelines, submersibles and risers.

Overlaid on the oil and gas network is an astonishing patchwork quilt of territorial concessions – the oil blocks acquired under long term lease by the international and national oil companies - spaces within which exploration and production. Spatial technologies and spatial representations are foundational to the oil industry: seismic devices to map the contours of reservoirs, geographic information systems to monitor and meter the flows of products within pipeline, and of course the map to determine subterranean property rights. Hard rock geology is a science of the vertical but when harnessed to the market place and profitability it is the map, detailing the spaces of oil, which becomes the instrument of surveillance, control and rule. The oil and gas industry is a cartographers' wet-dream: a landscape of lines, axes, nodes, points, blocks and flows. These spatial networks are extensive in their connectivity within unevenly visible in their operations. As a space of flows and connectivity the oil and gas universe is one of geostrategic operation, saturated by considerations of power, calculation, security and threat. The hubs, spokes, flows, and nodes that make up the oil-military-construction-drug-finance network (the defining qualities of the oil assemblage) led David Campbell (2005) to see the oil and gas system as capsular in form: "capsules are enclaves and envelopes that function as nodes, hubs, and termini in the various networks and contain a multitude of spaces and scales" (p.951). Oil rigs, floating storage vessels, flow stations, refineries, gas stations, and of course cars, are all capsules within the global oil and gas network. In turn, oil cities might also be read as particular capsules, composed of other capsules,

which emerge from and are given shape by a network in which the visible and the invisible, secrecy and duplicity, spaces of flow and immobility, forces of power and security all operate to produce a perfect storm of violence, inequality, militarism and corruption. The assemblage as a governable space contains, in other words, many sorts of other spaces or forms of territorialization (Mbembe 2001).

Finally, to return to the idea of Petrolia, of oil cities, there is a larger issue namely between oil and urbanism as a way of life. Virtually all American cities in their morphology and geographical dispersion – what John Urry (2004) has insightfully called the unbundling of home, leisure and work to produce a “splintered” urbanism - are the products of hydrocarbon capitalism: that is to say, of a culture of automobility predicated on the availability of cheap gasoline to fuel the particular form of the internal combustion engine otherwise known as the car (installed in historically specific and dominant forms – in the US it is the sports utility vehicle). Much of what is modern in the modern city is, in other words, the by-product of oil. The various oil crises – measured in terms of the politics of the gas pump, namely price – have always been cast as a threat to “the American way of life”. But the imbrication of oil and ways of life is no less the case in oil states like Nigeria where oil has saturated virtually every aspect of economy, polity and sociability.

In the same way that Foucault (2007) sought to link resources to territory, security and forms of rule, so oil in its current iterations is a compelling form of biopower. Oil and gas appear as not just indispensable to but constitutive of a modern way of life, of an ethics of care and security, of the projection of imperial power and of forms of living.

It is this centering of the life of the population rather than the safety of the sovereign or the security of territory that is the hallmark of biopolitical power that distinguishes it from sovereign power. Giorgio Agamben has extended the notion through the concept of the administration of life and argues that the defense of life often takes place in a zone of indistinction between violence and the law such that sovereignty can be violated in the name of life..... the role of biopolitical power in the administration of life is equally obvious and ubiquitous in domains other than the extreme cases of violence or war (Campbell 2005: 949-950).

The oil assemblage as a site of biopower from which a regime of living is constituted – replete with all of its contradictions, namely what passes as the preservation of life can violate sovereignty either through violence and the rejection of law or through the ecological consequences (mass death) of global warming – sheds rather different light on oil as a global production network or as a commodity (fictitious or otherwise).

Oil as Regime of Life and Death: Niger as Petro-State

Nigeria, the eleventh largest producer and the eighth largest exporter of crude oil in the world, typically produces over 2.4 million barrels per day (b/d) of oil and natural gas liquids. The new government, coming to power on the back of notoriously fraudulent elections held in April 2007, expects to invest over \$75 billion in oil and gas over the next five years, congruent with its expectations of offering 4million b/d to the world market by 2015. This petroleum-driven vision of Nigeria's future is now, of course, question. The vertiginous descent of the oilfields into a strange and terrifying shadow world of armed insurgency, organized crime, state violence, mercenaries and shady politicians and businessmen gives Nigeria's rosy oil future a very different hue. Nigeria in fact has become a vast shadow economy and shadow state in which the lines between public and the private, state and market, government and organized crime are blurred and porous. The coastal waters of the delta are, according to the International Maritime Bureau, a pirate-haven, comparable to the lawless seas surrounding Somalia and the Maluccas. A new study, *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa* by the UN Office for Drugs and Crime, estimates that 55 million barrels of oil are stolen each year from the Niger delta, a shadow economy on which high ranking military and politicians are deeply involved. Amnesty International's report *Petroleum, Pollution and Poverty in the Niger Delta* released in June 2009 grimly inventories the massive environmental despoliation caused by 1.5 million tons of spilled oil, describing the record of the slick alliance of the international oil companies and the Nigerian state as a "human rights tragedy". Nigeria's oil complex is vast space – with and without boundaries – of economic and political calculation, a world in which rationality, calculability, accumulation and order operate through means which appear, from the outside, as a world of anarchy and disorder. It is, my view, a sort of permanent frontier of continual primitive accumulation (what Mike Rogin (1991) describing Jacksonian America called the 'heroic age of capitalism'), spectacular capitalism combining the most brutal forms of early dispossession amidst the wreckage of a modern high-tech global oil and gas industry.

At base, the picture from the slums of the oil cities or the oilfield communities in the creeks is largely one and the same: what one might call a space of ungovernability. Between January 2006 and the summer 2009 over 400 expatriate oil-worker hostages have been taken and more than 75 military attacks have been launched on oil installations crippling the operations of the industry. 1 million barrels of output are currently shut-in as a result of the insurgency and Nigerian as a consequence fell from its perch as the largest African producer in the summer of 2008. Writing in mid-2007 *International Herald Tribune* (April 22nd 2007) captures vividly the brave new world of Nigerian oil:

Companies now confine employees to heavily fortified compounds, allowing them to travel only by armored car or helicopter.....One company has outfitted bathrooms with steel bolts to turn them into "panic" rooms, if needed. Another has coated the pylons of a giant oil-production

platform 130 kilometers, or 80 miles, offshore with waterproof grease to prevent attackers from climbing the rig. Some foreign operators have abandoned oil fields or left the country altogether. "I can't think of anything worse right now," said Larry Johnson, a former U.S. Army officer who was recently hired to toughen security at a Nigerian site operated by Eni, an Italian oil producer. "Even Angola during the civil war wasn't as bad".

By November 2007 oil revenues were down by 40%, and Shell alone has lost \$10.6 billion since late 2005 and late 2008.

By any estimation, the costs of this oil insurgency are vast. Between 1998 and 2003 there were four hundred 'vandalizations' (this is the term of art deployed by the oil industry) on company facilities each year; oil losses amounted to over \$1 billion annually (WACS 2003; Best and Kemedi 2005). Already by 2003, 750,000 b/d were shut-in as a result of attacks on oil installations and beginning in April 2004 another wave of violence erupted this time triggered by so-called ethnic militias, representing for the most part the ethnic interests of the Ijaw the largest of roughly forty ethnic groups residing in the Niger delta. The most visible militias operating in the wake of the gradual mobilization of popular militancy since the late 1990's are led by Ateke Tom (leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante [NDV]), Alhaji Asari Dokubo (leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force [NDPVF]) and since 2005 the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta [MEND] associated with Henry Okah and Tompolo aka Government Etemupolo. Each of these militias are funded in part by their local control of the oil 'bunkering' (theft) trade – by some estimations 100,000 barrels of oil are stolen each day by an organized criminal syndicate involving high ranking military, politicians and businessmen - but they sprung to life during the 1999 and 2003 elections, employed as political thugs and armed by local politicians (ICG 2006a and b). NDV is a vehicle for political thuggery and organized crime rather than any political project whereas NDPVF and MEND, whatever its involvement in illicit oil trade and back room politics, has articulated a platform of militant Ijaw nationalism and resource control focused on the state and the oil companies. The militias however are part of a much wider field of violence nourished by a gigantic reservoir of anger and dissent which now embraces a welter of groups of differing degrees and forms of political commitment and criminality (Peterside 2007; Ginifer and Ismail 2005; Briggs 2007; Wellington 2007).

By 2005 the reality on the ground was a dizzying, bewildering array of militants, militias and cults: the Niger Delta Militant Force Squad (NDMFS), the Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), the Grand Alliance, Niger Delta Coastal Guerillas (NDCG), South-South Liberation Movement (SSLM), Movement for the Sovereign State of the Niger Delta (MSSND), the Meinbutus, the November 1895 Movement, ELIMOTU, the Arogbo Freedom Fighters, Iduwini Volunteer Force (IVF), the Niger Delta People's Salvation Front (NDPSF), the Coalition for Militant Action (COMA), the Greenlanders, Deebam, Bush Boys, KKK, Black Braziers, Icelanders

and a raft of other so-called cults. Over fifty operating military camps are dotted around the creeks. Nobody however doubts their capacity, either individually or collectively, to inflict massive and debilitating damage. In an extraordinary assault in June 2008, MEND militants – to demonstrate their capabilities and authority – stormed a massive floating production and storage installation 70 miles offshore and shut down operations of one of the largest fields (Bonga) in the entire Gulf of Guinea oil-producing region.

The dramatic emergence of MEND in 2005 seemed to represent a major escalation of militancy but also the possibility of some form of centralized leadership among and across the variety of groups and militias (Okonta 2006). The incontestable fact is that there is overwhelming popular sympathy for what the militants are doing. Some sources estimate the number of trained militants now operating in the creeks at over 25,000 commanding monthly salaries of over 50,000 naira (US\$400)– well above the wage that might be secured by an educated youth employed in the formal sector. For their part the oil companies have lost their license to operate (Oyefusi 2008; Ikelegbe 2006, 2006a; Ukeje 2004, 2001; Omeje 2000, 2006a, 2006b). How did it all come to this?

First Oil

A rusting sign sits next to the ‘Christmas tree’ – the capped wellhead – at Oloibiri. Well No. 1. It reads: Drilled June 1956. Depth: 12,000 feet (3,7000 meters). It is a monument to an exploit-and-abandon culture, just as Oloibiri itself is a poster child for all of the ills and failed promises of Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski calls “the fairy tale of oil”. In the 1960’s the town had a population of 10,000; it is now a wretched backwater, a sort of rural slum home to barely one thousand souls who might as well live in another century. No running water, no electricity, no roads, and no functioning primary school; the creeks have been so heavily dredged, canalized, and polluted that traditional rural livelihoods have been eviscerated. “I have explored for oil in Venezuela and.... Kuwait” said a British engineer “ but I have never seen an oil-rich town as impoverished as Oloibiri”. In the last few years the town has been rocked by youth violence. A local armed “cult group” called Aso Rock has dethroned the community chief amidst allegations of corruption and half-finished community development projects. Poverty and capped wellheads are all that remain now.

Oloibiri’s intimate association with oil contains another crucial lesson, this time a sort of prophesy. It was here that Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service was born at midnight on September 10th 1938. Declaring an independent Niger Delta Republic on February 24th 1966, Boro’s famous “Twelve Day Revolution” was a foretaste of what was to come twenty years later as the abandonment and despoliation felt so harshly by Oloibiri was replicated, with terrifying fidelity, across the Niger Delta oil fields. Boro’s immediate successors in the struggle for self-determination and resource control were Ken Saro-Wiwa, an internationally known writer and poet, and the Ogoni people during the early 1990s. The meteoric rise of the Movement for the

Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) during a brutal period of Nigeria's sad parade of military governments, ended with a kangaroo court and the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and eight of his compatriots in November 1995 (Douglas and Okonta 2003; Eberlein 2006).

As Saro-Wiwa had predicted, and feared, the non-violent struggle could turn very ugly. The power of the pen has now been replaced by the figure of the masked militant armed with the ubiquitous Kaloshnikov, the typewriter of the illiterate. But even Saro-Wiwa's gravest fears could not have anticipated the calamitous descent into violence over the last decade, culminating with the dramatic appearance MEND in late 2005. Claiming to be a "union of all relevant militant groups" MEND's public face is a shifting, and sometimes contentious cadre of aliases: Major-General Godswill Tamuno, TomPollo, Oyinye Alaibe, Cynthia White and an articulate spokesperson Gbomo Jomo. Beginning with a massive attack on the Opobo pipeline in Delta State in December 2005 MEND subsequently destroyed the off-shore Forcados loading platform, the Ekeremore-Yeye manifold and the state oil company Escravos-Lagos gas pipeline in Chanomi Creek. In a single day something like 20% of output was compromised. MEND insurgents, claimed their spokesperson Gbomo Jomo in 2006, "were not communists...or revolutionaries. [They] are just very bitter men". By the summer of 2007 in the wake of the Presidential elections, MEND did seem to operate as an umbrella group, drawing together many of the fragmented and politically heterogeneous groups across the delta in a series of secret meetings held near Warri and indeed was able to achieve a consensus among them on the preconditions for negotiation with the Nigerian state.

Oil as Potemkin Development

Nigeria is archetypical oil nation. Oil has seeped deeply and indelibly into the political economy of Nigeria. In 2007 over 87 percent of government revenues, 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 96 percent of export revenues and almost half of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is accounted for by just one commodity: oil (de Oliveira 2007). With oil prices now close to \$100 a barrel, oil rents – what economists call unearned income - will provide the Nigerian exchequer will at least \$50 billion annually. Nigeria is an oil-state, driven by two cardinal principles: how to capture oil rents and how to sow the oil revenues? Like other OPEC countries – by most estimates the thirteen OPEC members will pocket over \$700 billion in oil revenues in 2007 alone - Nigeria is currently awash in petro-dollars. What this oil wealth has wrought, and is likely to bring, is another question entirely.

Flying into the oil cities of Port Harcourt or Warri at night – viewing the panorama of harsh gas-flares burning bright – conveys a sense of the Dantean universe one is about to enter: the unforgiving, ruthless, and austere world of oil. To compile an inventory of the achievements of Nigerian petro-development is a salutary if dismal, exercise: according to former World Bank President Paul

Wolfowitz, at least \$100 billion of the \$600 billion in oil revenues accrued since 1960 have simply “gone missing”. Nigerian anti-corruption czar Nuhu Ribadu, claimed that in 2003 70% of the country’s oil wealth was stolen or wasted; by 2005 it was “only” 40%. By most conservative estimates almost \$130 billion was lost in capital flight between 1970 and 1996. Over the period 1965-2004, the per capital income fell from \$250 to \$212 while income distribution deteriorated markedly. Between 1970 and 2000, the number of people subsisting on less than one dollar a day in Nigeria grew from 36 percent to more than 70 percent, from 19 million to a staggering 90 million. Over the last decade GDP per capita and life expectancy have, according to World Bank estimates, both fallen.

Nigeria appears close to the top of virtually everyone’s global ranking of corruption, business risk, lack of transparency, fraud, and illicit activity. Nigeria is not country, as someone once noted, it is a profession. To suggest, as the International Monetary Fund has, that \$600 billion dollars have contributed to *decline* in the standard of living – that most Nigerians are poorer today than they were in the late colonial period is mind boggling and at the same time a gigantic failure of leadership and governance. Nigeria has become a model failure. After the discovery of oil in Mongolia, a local leader pronounced: “we do not want to become another Nigeria”.

What is on offer in the name of oil-development is the catastrophic failure of secular nationalist development. It is sometimes hard to gasp the contours of such a claim. From the vantage point of the Niger Delta—but no less in the barracks of the vast slum worlds of Kano, Port Harcourt or Lagos—oil-development is a pathetic and cruel joke. It is not simply that Nigeria is a sort of Potemkin economy – it is of course - but the cruel fact that the country has become a perfect storm of waste, corruption, venality and missed opportunity. To say that Nigeria suffers from corruption – organized brigandage is how Ken Saro-Wiwa once put it - does not really capture the nature of the beast. Money-laundering and fraud on gargantuan scales, missing billions and inflated contracts in virtually every aspect of public life, areas boys, touts, mobile police all taking their cuts and commissions on the most basic of everyday operations. Perhaps there is no better metaphor for this oil-fuelled venality than the stunning fact that huge quantities of oil are simply stolen every day. Over the last five years between 100,000 and 300,000 barrel of oil have been stolen daily (perhaps 10-15% of national output), organized by a syndicate of bunkerers linking low-level youth operatives and thugs in the creeks to the highest levels of the Nigerian military and political classes and to the oil companies themselves (HRW 2007, 2005; UN 2009;). Managing Director of Chevron Nigeria, Jay Prior, once observed that he had “run companies that have had less production than is being bunkered in [Nigeria]”. The stolen oil, siphoned from the manifolds and flowstations, shipped onto barges and transported to tankers off shore, is a multi-billion business run *through* the state. The head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission [EFCC] Nuhu Ribadu put matter with great precision: the state is “not even corruption. It is organized crime”.

Nowhere are the failures more profound and visible than across the oilfields of the Niger Delta. For the vast majority, oil has brought only misery, violence and a dying ecosystem. A new United Nations report (2005) on human development in the delta was unflinching in its assessment: the “appalling development situation” reflects the shameful fact that after a half century of oil development “the vast resources from an international industry have barely touched pervasive local poverty”. The current population of the nine oil-producing states is 28 million of the total population of 150 million. Yet the majority of the oil wealth is captured by the federal state and distributed to the so-called ‘ethnic majorities’ in the politically dominant northern and western states. By conservative oil-industry estimates there were almost 7000 oil spills between 1970 and 2000, more than one each day (the real figure might be twice or three times that number). An equivalent of one gallon of oil has been spilled for every 100 square meters of the Niger delta. Nigeria still produces 70 million metric tons of carbon emissions a year from gas flaring, that is to say “a substantial proportion of worldwide greenhouse gas” according to the World Bank. Two independent studies completed in 1997 reveal total petroleum hydrocarbons in Ogoni streams at 360 and 680 times the European Community permissible levels. Canalization dredging, large scale effluent release, mangrove clearance, massive pollution of surface and groundwater, these are the hallmarks of a half century of oil and gas extraction.

By almost any measure of social achievement, the core producing oil states are a calamity. The UNDP (2007; 2007) in the most systematic account of development trends estimates that between 1996 and 2002 the Human Development Indices actually *fell* in the core oil-producing states. Literacy rates in the core states are barely 40%, the proportion of primary school children enrolled is, according to an Niger Delta Environmental Survey, 39%. The decree of decrepitude in primary schools –whether in Port Harcourt or the further reaches of the riverine areas - is simply staggering: no desks, no teaching materials, no teachers, and not unusually no roof. There is one secondary health care facility for every 131,000 people serving an area of 583 square kms. The number of persons per hospital bed is three times higher than the already appalling national average. Electricity is a running joke.

Around the massive Escravos oil installation with its barbed wire fences, its security forces, and its comfortable houses are nestled shacks, broken down canoes and children who will be lucky to reach adulthood. “You will just shake your head” says Ugborodu resident Dorothy Ejuwa casting an eye on the glare of the nighttime lights of Escravos: “For how long can we remain like this? That is our bitterness”.

Oil Insurgency

The history of oil development in Nigeria is the history of the politics of oil revenue distribution (Suberu 1991; HRW 2007; ICG 2006; Moore 2004). Since 1960, the shifting geometry of the politics of oil-revenue allocation has a clear

trend-line. There has been a process of radical fiscal centralism by the state which controls all oil revenues through various statutory monopolies and diverts oil to powerful states within the 36-state Nigerian federation (dominated by so-called ethnic majorities). As a consequence, the oil-producing states (populated by so-called ethnic minorities) have lost and the non-oil producing ethnic majority states, and the federal government, have gained. Currently roughly half of all the oil wealth is captured by the federal government; roughly one third is devoted to the states but until the late 1990's a disproportionately high share of this revenue allocation end up in non-oil producing states. In 1960 the oil producing states through a principle of 'derivation' took at least half of all the oil revenues produced in their state; by the 1980s this had fallen to 1%. Driven by the popular pressures for resource control, Niger Delta states were able to roll back the secular decline in the derivation income. As oil prices rose after 2001 enhanced derivation inserted a vast quantum of monies (driven by high oil prices and the increase in derivation from 1 to 13%) into the oil-producing states through the machinery of state and local government.

This new fiscal situation has produced new political alignments on the ground. First corruption has flowed downward - in effect been decentralized - with the vast local takings to be had since 1999 as more oil revenues flowed to the oil-producing states, especially Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers. Second, there has been something like a democratization of the means of violence as militants of various political stripe, often armed by politicians and a porous military, have come to control large swaths of territory in the creeks and demonstrated that they can disrupt the operations of the oil and gas industry at will. And third expanded increased derivation income has fuelled the rise of a political class - 'Godfathers' as they are called - who become not only counterweights to the federal centre but machine politicians in their own right. It from this trio of forces that the current wave of violence has emerged (HRW 2007).

The current crisis extends beyond an armed insurgency in the creeks. According to a UNDP report in 2007 there are currently 120-150 'high risk and active violent conflicts' in the three core oil producing states. The field of violence operates at a number of levels. There are a number of insurgent groups like MEND and NDPVF engaged in armed struggle against the state and the oil companies. There are also inter-community (both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic) conflicts often driven by land and jurisdictional disputes over oil-bearing lands (and correspondingly over access to cash payments and rents from the oil companies). There is urban inter-ethnic warfare - most dramatically seen in the decade-long battles between Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekeri communities in Warri over "who owns Warri". Central to these struggles in which perhaps 700,000 people have been displaced and thousands killed, is the ethnic delineation of electoral wards and local government councils (undertaken by the states but with federal backing) which are the means by urban ethnic communities can access to the oil wealth, either which as rents paid by oil companies for land used for oil infrastructure (refines, pipelines and a so on) or to the revenue allocation process which now ensures that local government coffers are awash with so-called

“excess oil profits”. Other communities are torn apart by intra-community youth violence – the famed city-state of Nembe is case in point – in which armed youth groups do battle with one another and their chiefs in order to provide protection services to the oil companies and get access to various sorts of standby (a salary for doing nothing) and cash payments dolled out in the name of “community development”. Into this mix of endemic turbulence and volatility enters federal security forces widely known for their indiscipline, violence and corruption. The extraordinary state violence meted out on communities like Odi (1999) and Odiana (2005) by federal forces allegedly seeking out militants is legendary.

In all of this the oil companies themselves, as they have come reluctantly to acknowledge, play a key role (Watts 2005; WACS 2003; Douglas and Okonta 2003). What passes as community development in the delta and their related interactions with what are called ‘host communities’ is a central part of conflict dynamics. It is estimated that Shell spends \$60 million per year on community development yet ‘cash payments’ amount to at least double that figure. In total these payments amount to \$200 million per annum, perhaps 10% of the operating budget; some companies spend up to 15-17% on such activities. They represent a massive infusion of cash designed to purchase consent or compliance but in practice they are central to the dynamics of rebellion and community violence. One the one hand the companies are constitutionally obliged to pay rents to local communities in which they have operations. These legal commitments are vague and over the last fifty years have been inconsistent and often limited. Typically the companies cut deals with local chiefs (many of which operate as unaccountable fiefdoms), a number of whom are not even resident in their communities. Community projects and Memoranda of Understanding, to the extent that they exist at all, are shrouded in secrecy and ambiguity. In any case community expenditures by the companies were trivial and insignificant for the better part of thirty years. Corporate social responsibility on the ground typically appears as a raft of unfinished community projects all of which have contributed to festering resentments among the youth. Environmental Impact Assessments are rarely made public and the record on spills and compensation is deplorable. The companies have always thrived on a policy of divide and rule. There are only too happy to invoke national sovereignty when pressures are placed on them to improve their human rights or social responsibility records; and yet they are equally content to operate in a military or militarized authoritarian environment in which they could get away with just about anything.

Oil Futures

And what of the future? Curiously, the immediate crisis is something of a paradox. The April 2007 elections were widely held to involve massive electoral fraud and ballot rigging and nowhere was the fraud and intimidation more pronounced than in the Delta. Nonetheless, the elections produced an Ijaw Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, from Bayelsa State, with strong connections to a younger generation of activists and civic groups. All of this was a source of

guarded optimism as regards the Delta question. A number of the IYC 'graduates' and veterans of the delta struggle were drawn into government at various levels – providing another window of opportunity. There was talk of a Niger Delta summit, the release from detention on June 14 2007 of Asari Dokubo, and the July 27 freeing of Chief Alamiyeseigha all of which met key demands of the militants. Several all night meetings were held in July and August 2007 in the creeks. Senator David Brigidi and other representatives of the oil states' Peace and Rehabilitation Committees were present; the Vice President himself met with a number of key actors in the Warri creeks in June. There was talk of rebuilding of Odi and Odiana, two towns destroyed by federal forces, as well as the demilitarization of the Delta on the part of federal forces and a one-month truce was declared by MEND and the Joint Revolutionary Council, a group that purportedly speaks for all militant groups.

But it all fell apart very quickly amidst ineptitude and acrimony and fundamental lack of trust and understanding. It is easy to blame government and the hawks within and outside of the security forces. But any government must have a disciplined and, in political terms, an internally coherent movement or organization to negotiate with. Whatever MEND may be - Ike Okonta (2006) calls it an idea not an organization - it has not been able to provide this function, neither for that matter have civil society organizations. An militant movement with a strong ethnic coloration and a program consisting of rhetorically colorful emails communiques can hardly claim to be a cosmopolitan and progressive representative of "the Niger delta". There are, in seems to me, failures on both sides.

Which brings me to the current amnesty plan announced by Yar 'Adua on June 25th 2009 and the release of Henry Okay on July 13th 2009. Good news in principle. Except that Asari Dokubo and his group have rejected the amnesty and immediately prior to the release of Okah after 23 months of incarceration, MEND launched an extraordinary attack on Atlas Cove in Lagos. There are two things to be said here. First, an amnesty may well draw the criminals and political thugs out of the creeks (people who were put there in effect by their political Godfathers in the 2003 and 2007 elections). But this assumes that the problem is largely or wholly criminal - which it is not. Those with a political project will not be so easily convinced. And why should they? Those that take the amnesty will be fickle in their commitments. For the others, the history of state promises has been one of duplicity, violence and repression. Trust is a word rarely heard in the creeks. So an amnesty is hardly a solution. As Okah himself said upon his release: "no one is fighting for an amnesty". It is, as the latest MEND missive says, an opportunity for "frank talks" and discussions of "root problems". But there is precious little of this in the offing right now. Second, the attacks of the last two months raise the question of strategy. And this is why the attack in Lagos is so ominous - perhaps even a tipping point. After closing down the oil installations MEND's new frontier - unless convinced otherwise by more than an amnesty - will be Lagos, Abuja and Kano. The security forces cannot fight an insurgency in the creeks: how can it possible do so in the slum word of major

Nigerian cities? The Nigerian press mocks the short-sightedness of attacking Lagos, but MEND has always exhibited an acute sensitivity to getting attention and retaining a foot in its own constituencies. From the outside, over the last four years it is surprising what MEND has *not* done in relation to its obvious capacity to cause irrevocable harm. It is now flexing its muscle and making that capacity clear to all.

The descent of the region into its current state of violence and pent up anger means that radical changes - and enormous political courage - will be required if there is to be lasting peace. Some of these, such as large-scale training programs and mass employment schemes, major infrastructure projects, and environmental rehabilitation, will take many years, perhaps even generations. To confront resource control – not as a matter of money or percentage of revenues but as a constitutional and political project - will require a radical rethinking, and perhaps a restructuring, of both the constitution and institutions of governance. But for the immediate present the temperature within the Delta must be reduced and a meaningful peace established capable of providing a ground on which serious dialogue can occur.

Another failure of will, at this juncture, could prove to be catastrophic. The amnesty covers the period August 4th to October 4th: the MEND ceasefire, in principle, until September 15th. Something bold has to happen soon. And yet the new Defense Minister refuses to consider a withdrawal of federal troops from the region until “normalcy” returns can and must occur on and with the ruins of two decades and more of broken promises, suspicion, and violence. Profound changes will be required if there is to be lasting peace. Some of needs - large-scale training programs and mass employment schemes, major infrastructure projects, and environmental rehabilitation - will take many years, perhaps even generations. To confront resource control – not as a matter of money but as a legal, constitutional and political project - will need to address questions like corruption, the reform of the electoral commission, and transparency within a notoriously ineffective, indeed pathologically unaccountable system of local government. The oil companies must radically rethink by the same token what passes as responsible business practice. It will necessitate building new democratic institutions from below, perhaps trust funds for oil-producing communities and a radical strengthening of the weak citizenship that currently passes for Nigerian democracy.

Oil as a Regime of Living

Oil has helped to unleash a set of forces in Nigeria that have at once held Nigeria together and pulled it apart. This is, one sense, a defining quality of the operations of the oil assemblage in most oil-states. Oil as a regime of living has shaped identities, geography, ideologies and politics in myriad ways. The deployment of oil wealth to purchase political consent through massive corruption and state multiplication has probably prevented another civil war or state collapse. At the same time it has fuelled a sort of dispersion and

fragmentation – multiple territorialities- seen in the hardening of local and ethnic identities and, in the Niger delta, in the explosion of insurgent politics. All of this has contributed to a profound sense of the unraveling – the un-imagining – of Nigeria as a nation. The patchwork quilt that is Nigeria is now deeply frayed, it's stitching pulled apart by at the seams by all manner of forces. At Independence in 1960 Obafemi Awolowo, the first Nigerian Premier of the Western Region, said that Nigeria was not a nation but a “mere geographical expression”. Today after a half century of oil, it is the same, only more so. Sowing Nigeria's oil has planted many different sorts of seeds, the germination of which has produced a particular regime of living within the oil assemblage that is contemporary Nigeria.

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