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ETHNICITY AND VIOLENCE NEXUS: A RETHINK OF THE NIGER-DELTA CONFLICT

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic conglomeration that numbers more than 250 nationalities. Its survival as a nation in the making depends on the sense of belonging shared by each ethno-linguistic group. In a bid to make sense of the prevalence of ethno-religious conflicts nationwide, some analysts only blame the British colonial authorities that amalgamated structurally incompatible groups a century ago. Such critics covertly suggest a break-up solution that would only result in a revival of primordial identities. So far, the study of resource-based conflict in the Niger Delta has dominated the literature with issues bordering on marginalisation, exploitation and environmental destruction among other things. There is little or no attempt to link ethnicity/identity to violence. Based on secondary data (review of extant literature), this paper sets out to fill the gap in the literature by arguing that the persistence of an ethno-national consciousness rooted in an adversarial outlook towards the Nigerian state impacts negatively on this resource-based conflict. Put simply, the group consciousness of being Niger Deltan and marginalised people provides the impetus for mobilisation against the State. As a way forward the study proposes a unity-based peace education which celebrates diversity; it recommends the creation of a department of Futures Studies where images of peaceful coexistence in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria can be conceived and turned into reality.

Keywords: Violence, Ethnic identification, Niger Delta, Unity, Peace Education

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic conglomeration whose survival as a nation depends on the sense of inclusiveness shared by each ethno-nationality. Demeaning descriptions of the country as a mere geographical expression, a crippled giant or a textbook case of traumatised state (Animasawun, 2012: 416) suggest that a lot of effort is needed in order to translate the dream of greatness into reality. In a bid to make sense of ethno-religious conflicts affecting many

communities nationwide, some analysts only blame the British colonial authorities that forcibly amalgamated structurally incompatible nationalities a century ago. Such critics covertly advocate a revival of primordial identities that have the potential to undermine national unity. It is against the backdrop of ethnic mobilisation that the cry for self-determination coming out of oil producing communities in Niger-Delta makes perfect sense, going by the Ogoni Bill of Rights and the Kaiama Declaration. Even though the link between oil wealth and conflict in

South-South geopolitical zone has dominated the literature (Obi et al., 2011; Derefaka et al., 2007), the question as to how ethnic mobilisation affects this resource-based conflict has not come out clearly.

This paper sets out to fill the gap by demonstrating how ethno-nationality in the oil-rich geopolitical zone is constructed and sustained for the purpose of engaging the Nigerian state in an endless violent conflict. Based on secondary data (review of extant literature), it hypothesises that ethnic identification construed as a political strategy for access to power and wealth makes the resource-based conflict more enduring in Niger Delta. The argumentation is made of four sections as follows. First, a brief historical background discusses the making of ethnic politics in the early days of the First Republic and during the military rule with the view of stating the problem at the national level. Second, a conceptual framework explains a few concepts and theories related to ethnicity in order to highlight its relation to violent conflicts. Third, the Niger Delta conflict provides a context (case study) in which ethnic mobilisation construed as a strategy for access to power and wealth fuels the resource-based conflict. In the end, the study proposes unity-based peace education as a long-term strategy that has the merits of promoting tolerance and diversity.

A brief historical background

It is widely acknowledged that the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates into a colony in 1914 was nothing more than “a marriage

of convenience of disparate and non-assimilable ethno-linguistic nationalities professing and practicing irreconcilable cultures” (Okodudu, 2007: 266). The incompatibility was such that each protectorate had to be administered separately with the cooperation of traditional and religious leaders without interfering with the religion of the people (Dudley, 1982: 43; Lewis, 2012). Through the divide-and-rule policy the colonial authority was rather interested in grouping peoples along ethnic lines as “a means of social surveillance and control” (Berman 1998). On their part, local peoples responded to this political bait by further splitting themselves into small entities in order to access the state resources but the exercise soon produced political imbalance between minorities and majorities. A series of constitutions attempted to accommodate various ethnic groups into a single political entity called Nigeria before independence (Joseph, 1999; Ejituwu et al., 2007). In particular, the Richard constitution (1946) made room for the creation of three regional councils, including the ‘House of Chiefs,’ thus giving some power to the local authorities in the North, the West and East respectively. This political arrangement was meant to “enable each region to develop at the pace best suited to it; to provide a training ground for future political leaders; and to help create a sense of belonging to a common nation” (Dudley, 1982: 44).

However, in a bid to mobilise popular support during election campaigns, the first generation of Nigerian elites had to contend with two contrasting allegiances, namely affiliation to a political party and identification with a particular ethnic group. Success in this

regard depended on one's ability to strike a balance of dual loyalty without being regarded as less nationalist and more ethnic-minded but in practice this was not the case. Eminent political figures such as Awolowo, Azikwe and Balewa eventually emerged as leaders of the Yoruba-based Action Group (AG) in the West, the Igbo-dominated National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in the East and the Hausa/Fulani cultural/ethnic organization, known as Jamyyan Mutanen Arewa which later became the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the North respectively (Kukah, 2011; Lewis, 2012; Ayatse et al., 2013). Though highly appreciated by the natives of the Middle Belt, the carving of the Midwest region out of the Yoruba-dominated Western region was perceived by the Yoruba nation as a Igbo-led plot to reduce the political base of Chief Awolowo to the advantage of his northern counterpart (Obi et al., 2011).

When local elites began to make use of regional structures of government to develop their respective constituencies, ethno-regional competition soon became more pronounced in "growing political misconduct, violence and corruption throughout the short-lived First Republic" (Lewis, 2012: 22). Following the 1966 military coup, the Ironsi administration diagnosed ethno-regional politics as the mother of all evils to be replaced by a central system of government. However, by selectively targeting the Prime Minister from the North alongside with the Premiers of both Northern and Western regions who were Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba respectively, not only did the junta undermine the unity of the country they sought to preserve, they also fell into the traps of ethnic politics which reduced

the whole saga into an Igbo conspiracy to forcibly gain political control of the entire country (Meredith, 2006, Keller, 2014: 54).

Following the abolition of the federation and the unification of the civil service by the military decree no 34 of 24 May 1966, the Muslim-dominated North became apprehensive of the unitary government that would enable educated Christians from the South to move up and dominate political, economic, social and even religious life. As a result, the short-lived jubilation after the military takeover turned out to be just a nightmare. It is little wonder that the North quickly became the epicentre of anti-Igbo pogroms. The expulsion and arbitrary killing of Igbos in the North sent a strong message to the survivors throughout the country that they were living in a foreign land called Nigeria. Eminent politicians and army officers from the Southeast became convinced that their survival as a distinct nationality depended on their capacity to secede. Consequently, the rule of law which was put in place in the First Republic finally gave way to the rule of the gun when the central government waged war against its own people in the aftermath of Ojukwu's declaration of Biafra Republic on May 30, 1967.

The question as to how the military handled ethnic tensions in the aftermath of the Biafra war is worthy of consideration. Army officers came to believe that it was their duty to handle the ethnically divided Nigeria as one country at gunpoint. The long standing fear of cultural domination which led the Richard Constitution (1946) to espouse regional autonomy was mostly felt among the minority groups in the South. From 1966 onward, successive military

administrations resorted to splitting the four initial regions into smaller units of government in order to satisfy the interests of ethnic minorities and avert another civil war. In other words, the pretext of another civil war helped the military to continually exercise power over an ethnically-divided political environment. According to Lewis (2012: 24), "the logic of state creation exerted a potent influence on successive regimes, as numerous communities lobbied for separate boundaries and revenue allotments." Interestingly as the table below indicates, the in-between civilian regime headed by President

Shagari (Second Republic) did not partake in the creation of new states probably because cultural sensitivities were addressed in the parliament. However, like a double-edged sword, the creation of states and local government areas witnessed incessant intra-communal conflicts over land, rights to service and political representation in numerous states and localities. According to Kukah (2011: 341), "every time we create a new boundary, either yesterday's majority become a minority or vice versa, leading to new fears of oppression and domination."

Table 1: State creation under the military rule (Source: Author)

PERIOD	HEAD OF STATE	REGIME TYPE	STATE CREATION
1960 – 1966	Balewa	Civilian	4 Regions
1966	Ironsi	Military	End of federation
1966 – 1975	Gowon	Military	12 states
1975 – 1976	Mohammad	Military	19 states & local govt areas
1976 – 1979	Obasanjo	Military (transition)	--
1979 – 1983	Shagari	Civilian	--
1983 – 1985	Buhari	Military	--
1985 – 1993	Babangida	Military	30 states
1993 – 1998	Abacha	Military	36 states
1998 - 1999	Abubakar	Military (transition)	--
1999 – 2007	Obasanjo	Civilian	--
2007 – 2010	Yar'Adua	Civilian	--
2010 -- 2015	Jonathan	Civilian	--
2015 – to date	Buhari	Civilian	--

Military dictatorship through state creation had strong bearing on ethnic identification construed as a means for group survival which gave rise to negative perceptions between minorities and majorities. Still haunted by the ghost of

Biafra today, most Nigerians who happen to reside in any part of the country, different from their native locality continue to regard themselves as strangers that live in a foreign land. This fear of the other sheds light on electoral violence and

discriminatory measures against candidates who have lived in the diaspora (meaning outside their hometown) by home-based politicians. In the end, ethnic identity becomes an actuality in Nigeria while national identity remains a potentiality (Animasawun, 2012: 421). The Country Report made by the African Peer Review Mechanism has this to say: "The factor of dual citizenship based on ethnicity or indigeneship at the state and local levels versus civil citizenship at the national level is a major source of conflict in the country (APRM, 2008). This form of indirect violence has prevailed because Nigerians are forced to rely on primordial loyalties in order to survive in a multi-ethnic society. In the next section, concepts and theories related to ethnicity are discussed before addressing the subject matter of the study (impact of ethnic identification on the resource-based conflict in the Niger Delta).

Conceptual and theoretical discussion

Ethnicity

Originated from the Greek word *ethnikos*, ethnicity usually refers to nation and nationality but these two concepts are not synonymous. Varshney (2009) contends that a nation is a group with a political and territorial home whereas nationalities refer to groups without such a home base. In other words, a nation is land-based while a nationality is not. If we take Yoruba as a nation located in the Southwest of Nigeria, any other ethnic groups found there become *ipso facto* nationalities. To describe Nigeria as a conglomeration of nationalities is to lay emphasis on the diversity of more than 250 ethnic groups that interact with each

other and downplay the attachment to a particular land which is exclusionary by nature. The exclusionary attribute of a nation is apparent in the distinction between indigene and settler, citizen and foreigner, us versus them. As such, ethno-national identification is prone to conflict making as long as each group competes over limited resources (water, land and minerals) for the benefit of its members. It is a hidden form of violence that discriminates against outsiders in the name of in-group solidarity. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat (2007: 29), "One of the most frequently used means of creating in-group solidarity comes from framing the out-group as threatening, parasitic or worse (a form of 'scapegoating')."

Violence

Conflicts do occur in almost every human society and they are a valuable catalyst for change and progress. In fact, not all conflicts turn out to be violent. There is thus a need to distinguish between conflict and violence. Whereas conflict denotes the presence of contradiction or incompatibility of goals that gives rise to negative attitudes and behaviours among conflicting parties, violence points to the destructive way of addressing such contradictions. One of the enduring legacies of the military rule is the use of violence as means of compelling the other to surrender and as a result, many people seem to be addicted to it. This is apparent in the tonality of voices that sound like commanding officers and the use of available weapons to intimidate opponents including clenching fists during public debates. Violence can be direct (physical),

structural or cultural/psychological (Galtung, 1969). On the one hand, physical violence occurs between two individuals when physical force is used with the intention of causing damage, injury or death. A direct violence can become collective when it involves a group of people against one individual or two groups attacking each other. Three categories of collective violence are: riot such as Muslim youth attacking a Christian neighbourhood in Kaduna; pogrom in the case of Ife attacking Modakeke (Albert, 2006) and the Nigerian civil war. The difference between pogrom and civil war is that in the former a majority group attacks an unarmed minority while the neutrality of state government is in doubt and in the latter both state and non-state actors are fully armed (Varshney, 2008). On the other hand, structural violence is an indirect but covert form of harm associated with all manners of deprivation stemming from lack of social justice. Put differently, a structural violence takes place when social structures allow a few people to satisfy their basic human needs at the expense of many others who are left to die from preventable diseases, hunger and starvation (Barash and Webel, 2002). As for cultural/psychological violence, reference is made to any form of maltreatment inflicted upon individuals or groups in the name of advancing a particular culture or protecting one's ethnic identity such as violence against widows, gender discrimination, marginalisation of minorities, exploitation of strangers and many more. Girard (1979) argues that primitive cultures and religions are founded on sacred violence whereby a scapegoat is sacrificed in order to placate an angry mob and a myth is

created around such killing in order to not only veil the primordial violence but also to give it an aura of sacredness. Each time a group of people gather together to perform a ritual, a sense of belonging is created and strengthened over the years. What is considered as a cultural value today may conceal a kind of primordial violence.

Ethnicity theories

Ethnic conflict takes place when a particular ethnic group rebels against the state as a result of discriminative and exploitative policies. Denny et al. (2014: 200) argue that ethnic groups are more apt to have grievances against the state because political power has historically been divided along ethnic lines; they are better able to mobilise because they live in concentrated areas, and more likely to face difficult bargaining challenges compare to other groups because ethnic allegiances tend to be more fixed than other types of allegiances. Four mainstream theories explain the rationale behind ethnic mobilisation. These include primordialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and institutionalism (Varshney, 2008). Firstly, a primordialist perspective posits that ethnic particularities are of ancestral origin and irreconcilable. Membership of ethnic group is not negotiable as long as it is by birth, fixed and passed down across generations. Because people claim ascendancy to a particular land, primordialism sheds light on the exclusionary nature of ethnicity when group members are ready to die in the defence of their God-given resources; they express fear of domination by external forces, hatred and anxiety towards

outsiders. However the theory does not explain the peacefulness which is found in some multi-ethnic societies. Secondly, Instrumentalists view ethnicity as a strategic basis for coalitions that seek a larger share of economic or political power (Esteban et al., 2012). It is a means of restricting scarce resources to a selected few on the basis of affinity and nepotism. In the context of mineral-rich but conflict-torn societies in sub-Saharan Africa, group mobilisation is therefore a rational decision driven by not only grievance but also greed as two inextricably fused drivers of conflict behind the mask of self-determination (Collier, Hoeffler and Sambanis, 2005). However, Instrumentalism fails to explain why political elite use ethnicity as a tool to manipulate the masses for personal gains. As Varshney (2008: 282) contends, "one could propose that people are coerced into participating in ethnic mobilisation but that would have to be demonstrated, not assumed." Thirdly, Constructivism views ethnicity as a construct of the modern epoch. In colonial Africa, ethnicity was formed as a group reaction to the demeaning and contemptuous pictures of indigenes, autochtones (French colonies) or natives in contrast with the civilised people (Europeans). Having internalised this categorisation of superiority / inferiority, the native population responded by regrouping themselves in such a way that dominant groups would also treat minority groups with contempt and the latter would resist stereotypes with a call for self-determination. In order to explain ethnic conflict, Constructivism claims that each society has a historically constructed master cleavage which put people in boxes: Blacks and Whites in US, Hindus and Muslims in India, Catholics

and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Christian South and Muslim North in Nigeria. The same master narrative is reproduced at the local level, pitting natives against settlers, indigenes against outsiders, sons of the soil versus foreigners. Because conflict is locally originated, conflict makers (entrepreneurs) insert local events into the master narrative in order to incite violence. Lastly, Institutionalism posits that ethnic violence reflects the type of institutions put in place in a multi-ethnic society especially when residents hold particular loyalties which conflict with national identity. Such political institutions include majoritarian democracy, consociationalism, federalism or unitary government and the like. The right choice matters and it justifies the fact that some multi-ethnic societies are more peaceful than others. Institutionalism is concerned with institutional arrangement at the national level but it downplays the role of local players at the grass root level.

Each of the listed theories has its own strengths and weaknesses but they overlap when it comes to explaining the formation of ethnicity and its attribute of conflict making. More importantly the traditions that produced these theories are not static but evolving (Varshney, 2008). Nevertheless, this study subscribes to the instrumentalist tradition that perceives ethnic identity as a mask which a particular group wears to conceal their struggle over scarce resources. The strength of this theory rests on the fact that some ethnically divided societies choose to cooperate with the state rather than fighting when the perceived benefits are higher than the cost of rebellion. More importantly, the perception of ethnicity as fluid makes this theory relevant because

members of a particular ethnic group easily shift ground and pick different sides of their multiple identities any time anywhere as need be. In the light of Instrumentalism as ethnicity theory, the next section discusses the impact of ethnic mobilisation on the resource-based conflict.

Impact of ethnic mobilisation on the Niger Delta Conflict

Since the end of the military rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an increase in the number of ethno-religious conflicts nationwide. These include the Tiv-Junkun conflict in Taraba State, Zangon-Kataf crisis in southern Kaduna, Urobo-Itsekiri conflict in Warri (Delta State), Ife-Modakeke crisis in Osun State, the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict in Anambra State, the Jos crisis in Plateau State to name but a few (Aluaigba, 2014). Even though some analysts attempt to categorise them into clusters of religious, political or resource-based coloration, these conflicts share a common denominator, namely the indigene-settler divide. As Aluaigba (2015) contends,

The practical demonstration of the damage caused by the dichotomy along indigene-settler lines is that such concepts as 'settler', 'native', non-native, host community, foreigner, native foreigner, stranger element, squatter, non-squatter, immigrant, migrant, indigene, non-indigene, *mbak*, *Gambari*, *Hausa-Fulani*, *nyamiri*, *masara*, *ngwa*, *arna*, *kirdi*, and *baro*' are commonly used to discriminate against Nigerians by fellow Nigerians. This creates a

sense of alienation among certain groups and heightens tensions in community.

Going by oral tradition that has dominated the history of sub-Saharan Africa coupled with the context of group migration, it is however difficult to distinguish between indigenes and settlers: "virtually all ethnic nationalities migrated to their present settlements in the country" (Okocha, 2005 cited in Aluaigba, 2014: 162). The master narrative of 'majority versus minority' which plays out in these conflicts also sheds light on the resource-based crisis affecting the Niger Delta (ND).

Historical accounts underscore the privileged status of ND geo-political zone back to 16th century as an important market during the slave trade. Soon after the abolition of the triangular trade, the region became a big supplier of palm oil and kernel to Britain, thus laying the foundations for an independent protectorate in the South (Alagoa et al., 2009). During the 1957 and 1958 constitutional conferences held in London, able delegates from ND appealed before the British Crown on behalf of the Rivers Chiefs and People's Conference that their pre-colonial status as 'a separate state' alongside the three main regions be restored while supporting the motion for Nigeria's independence. It is worth noting that a paragraph on human rights was inserted in the 1959 federal constitution to accommodate the interests of the minority voices within the federation as a follow up to the Willink Commission Report that recommended that the ND be treated as a 'Special Area' (Ejituwu et al., 2007: 79). In the aftermath of the first military coup, Major Isaac Adaka Boro took a step further and declared the creation of an

independent State of Niger Delta with no success.

Today, the geopolitical zone has been extended to nine oil producing states as a government strategy of defusing tension in the ND. The economic Niger Delta is home to an estimated population of 31 million people clustered into more than 50 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups which include the Ibibio, Efik, Edo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko, Ikwerre, Annang, Andoni, Eleme and Ogoni (Akpan, 2007: 221). Apparently, they stand united against one common foe perceived to be a new colonial master, namely the Federal Government of Nigeria. As Okowa (2007: 49) contends, what goes on in the Niger Delta is perceived by many as a form of "internal colonisation and domestic imperialism." The most articulate group in the geopolitical zone is probably the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) which, according to its Bill of Right, demands among other things political autonomy for Ogoniland, local control of its economic resources and protection from further environmental degradation.

Since then the marginalisation of ethnic minorities has remained an authoritative narrative that informs the development deficit in the oil-rich region of ND in spite of numerous government interventions such as Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of the Niger Delta among other things. How does ethnicity fuel conflict in the Niger Delta? The privileged position occupied by Niger Delta as an important market for slaves, palm oil and recently a source of petroleum product

combined encapsulates a common fate which sets the people of the region apart and provides a primordialist explanation for their continuous struggle for autonomy (Ejituwu et al., 2007). However, the marginalization-driven grievance conceals some negative forces under the banner of self-determination of indigenous people within the context of an independent state. These include elevation of ethnic identity above any other identities with reference to tradition rule, ownership claim of oil wealth and pandemic resistance among other things. They constitute a counterforce to national unity and peace.

Firstly, within the purview of primordialism, ethnic identification presupposes an allegiance to a common ancestry whose continuous influence is carried out by traditional institutions. In colonial times, the indirect rule needed the backing of the traditional chiefs in order to be more effective. The authorities either approved of existing traditional leaders or appointed new ones in charge of ethnic groups and they entrusted them with the difficult task of extending the system of oppression and exploitation in remote places on their behalf (Waibinte et al., 2008). Brought into the corridors of power, the traditional chiefs ipso facto became clients of their masters at the expense of the natives. Their tacit cooperation led to ethnic fragmentation and competition over power and wealth (Berman, 1998). In Nigeria, traditional rulers are on the government payroll and whether they are classified as paramount rulers, first or second class chiefs, they all claim to possess sacred powers as they sit on the thrones of their respective forefathers. Consequently, their political influence with regard to the choice of new political leaders at the local, state and

national levels of government cannot be overemphasised. In the Niger Delta, such influential powers are often coated in 'petro-violence' involving the government that bestows legitimacy upon contending candidates and the oil companies that pay royalties to the host thrones. In reality, 'oilified conflicts' as Omeje puts it, are mostly triggered by the rivalry between two aspiring kings targeting the location of a disputed local government headquarters. It is only then that what begins as personal ambitions of self-styled village chiefs to the status of paramount ruler will pit peaceful communities against each other. However, commenting on the country review report, the Nigerian government acknowledges the role of traditional rulers as custodians and promoters of the culture and tradition of the people but the report strongly recommends that the institution of Royal Fathers be insulated from partisan politics and made accountable to higher authorities (African Peer Review Mechanism Country Review Report, 2008: 12).

Secondly, ethnic identification provides a fertile ground for the resource control ideology to prevail. Central to the resource control discourse is the claim of land ownership. Usually, the location of oil wells on a piece of land can trigger violence over the ownership of such land not only between two communities but also between two families with regard to entitlement (royalties). Going by the customary legislation, each party stands to win the case in the absence of any written evidence to back up the land ownership claim. As a result, frequent intra-communal clashes over a disputed piece of land are common in the Niger Delta and they are best understood as "part of

the scramble for control of the land containing oil wells among different Niger Delta communities" (Omeje, 2004: 436). The resource control ideology carries the simple message that the region must be left to manage its God-given resources, particularly its oil, and pay taxes and/or royalties to the federal government (Ako, 2011: 42).

Proponents of the resource control solution do not fathom why "a corrupt Nigerian state controlled by ethnic majors decides on what portion of the region's oil wealth is to be returned to the region" (Okowa, 2007: 44). In the face of environmental devastation, the resource control discourse begs the question as to whether environmental destruction will be kept in check if oil companies were to obtain their operating licences from their respective host communities directly. It is unlikely that community leaders will succeed where the government fails to act, with regard to the externalisation of the cost of oil production (oil spill and gas flaring). Instead, "let the communities, which stand to suffer from the direct negative impact of environmentally unfriendly oil production practices be in control of the oil companies" (Okowa, 2007: 48). The Kaiama Declaration (December 11, 1998) captures this renewed struggle over the control of the oil resources by the Ijaw Youth and it reads: "all land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to the Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival" (Obi 2011: 8). In fidelity to the Kaiama Declaration which demands 100 per cent of control over local resources, the ND delegates were unable to reach any negotiated compromise at the National Political Reform Conference

held in Abuja (2005). They rather left the proceedings in protest over their demand for further increase of the oil derivation allocation. Their action reverberated at home with the creation of the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and similar armed groups thereafter. The same discord dominated the 2014 National Conference with no tangible solution in the making. However, in the absence of checks and balances at different levels, locally controlled allocations are left to the discretion of state governors who transform the ND question into a propaganda tool that blindfolds the grassroots while causing large-scale financial embezzlement and corruption scandals to thrive (Ako, 2011). Meanwhile the waterside people that continue to lack potable water are mobilised to continue the fight as part of their rights for self-determination, against the Nigerian State perceived as a new colonial power.

Thirdly, ethnic identification strengthens group resistance. Any resistance is either oppositional or transformative. Agents of oppositional resistance perceive the other party as enemy that must be brought down by all means whereas transformative resistance seeks alternatives for a better society. Various forms of oppositional resistance against external forces have dominated the ND narrative long before Nigeria became a colony (Ukiwo, 2011). Such a rebellious resistance goes on from one generation to the next with the help of community elders who have spent their energies on defending themselves against the interests of the colonial masters and of the ethnic majorities thereafter. As it is suggested, "The historical legacies of mistrust are not genetically transmitted; rather they are

handed over from generation to generation, thus becoming a vivid part of current reality through myth, socialization and education" (Atemie et al., 2008: 375). This kind of indoctrination explains why the youth in Niger Delta allow themselves to be used and dumped at the end of the day by conflict entrepreneurs. Through manipulation, they get entangled in protracted conflicts for a mess of potage whether in the oil-rich south or the Islamic north.

With the end of the Cold War the proliferation of small arms in conflict zones around the world also made it easy for disgruntled youth to move into gun battles as militants using violence as a bargaining tool (Alade, 2007). As Nils Duquet (2011: 140) puts it, "Youths in the Niger Delta have grown up believing that violence, especially if backed with weapons, is the way of gaining respect, power and material benefits." In the absence of a unified leadership in the ND coupled with the lack of clear purpose, different armed groups in the oil-rich region are determined to wage endless guerrilla war against the central government through criminal acts such as vandalism, hostage-taking of foreign workers, oil bunkering, politically-motivated assassination and many more. The militants continually update their grievances regardless of the regime change and the pressure only gets harder by the day in the logic of never-ending resistance because in any struggle there is a continual demand. The struggle must continue until oil-producing states are left alone to use their resources for the development of their individual communities in the spirit of true federalism. Granted that the oil exploration in the region has caused

irreversible damage to the ecosystems, attachment to ancestral land in the hope that the environment will be restored to its primordial state before the oil discovery can only be perceived as an ideology at the service of an endless conflict.

This pandemic resistance flows from a dominant narrative of the conflict as a form of internal colonisation: "A people whose environment and resources have been alienated are a colonized and castrated people. It is unnatural to put a rape victim in the care of the rapist" (Okowa, 2008: 49). Ejituwu and Enemugwen (2007:83) contend that "the Ijaw are almost synonymous with the Niger Delta." Again, with reference to the Kaiama Declaration, the Ijaw people in particular position themselves as an ethnic majority in the South and claim to speak with authority for all minorities in the region. This apparent coalition of minorities against a common enemy in the ND is a demonstration of "how a minority, reaching majority, seizing authority, hates a minority" (The Webster's, 1999: 222). It conceals further fragmentation underpinned by a never-ending competition over access to power and scarce resources. It is unlikely that the Ijaw's agenda would reflect the interests of other minorities in the region without provoking a domino effect whereby non-Ijaw populations will also stand up for their own rights. As Kukah (2011: 342) contends, "these so-called minorities have nothing in common apart from their claims of bondage and marginalisation from the centre of power or by the dominant ethnic group in their areas." Not only does a pandemic resistance fuel popular grievance, it also creates mistrust which, in turn antagonises negotiation and

cooperation among different stakeholders and eventually jeopardizes national unity.

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the link between ethnic identification and the resource-based conflict in the Niger Delta. The claim of tradition rights to land, control of God-given oil wealth as well as group resistance against outsiders perceived as colonisers are among the many peace breakers that only add more fuel to the crisis. The question as to how such negative forces can be circumvented requires critical thinking which calls for applied education for peace.

Why education for peace matters

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen traces the causes of violence in the world to the process of 'miniaturisation' of human beings who nevertheless hold multiple identities. To single out one identity, say race, ethnicity, religion is to put individuals in small boxes for the purpose of debilitating and exploiting them thereafter. As he puts it,

The advocacy of a unique identity for a violent purpose takes the form of separating out one identity group – directly linked to the violent purpose at hand – for special focus, and it proceeds from there to eclipse the relevance of other associations and affiliations through selective emphasis and incitement (Sen, 2008: 175).

By projecting long-term solutions to the miniaturisation of identities, the need for education which is synonymous with empowerment becomes a priority. If you are planning for one year, goes an Indian

proverb, plant rice; if you are planning for ten years, plant trees and if you are planning for 100 years, plant people (Malone, 2005: 18). The article 26.2 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) spells out the nexus between peace and education:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

According to *The Oxford Library of Words and Phrases* (1993), the Latin word for education – *educare* – means the ability to draw forth, to bring out and to develop from a latent condition. Education therefore implies a progression toward togetherness and harmony rather than a revival of a dead past in the name of promoting one's tradition and identity. Generally understood, education in whatever discipline is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge which is informed by the human need to be, know, do and live together. Danesh (2008: 149) contends that "unity, not conflict, is the central governing law of life and that once unity is established, conflicts are often prevented or easily resolved." Whatever one claims to be in life, the level of knowledge they possess or the kind of things they do may endanger the life of others if the fourth pillar of knowledge (togetherness) is missing.

Therefore, education for peace consists of unlearning what has proven to be counterproductive over the years so as to create a room for assimilating what works for peace and unity. Put simply, education for peace and not for war is a process of adding value to our traditions and cultures in order to meet the needs of today's consumer who happens to live in a multi-ethnic society. As Sen (2006) argues, "education is not about getting children, even very young ones, immersed in an old, inherited ethos. It is also about helping children to develop the ability to reason about new decisions any grown-up person will have to take." In the context of ethnic rivalries over scarce resources, education for peace implies a paradigm shift from exclusiveness that guides ethnic cleavages towards inclusiveness driven by the quest for properly governing the commons. Any attempt to revive or promote ethnic cleavages impinges on the main goal of education which is unity and peace. It is therefore a tautology to conceptualise peace education given that peace and education are two sides of a coin called 'unity'. However, as a knowledge-based skill acquisition, peace education is about transforming members of a particular nation (ethnicity) into agents of social change when they are able to interrogate social structures that are responsible for direct and hidden violence. Exposition to violence predisposes people to develop more reactionary behaviours and less creative thinking. It is not enough to describe what goes on in a society but to envision the world we would like to live in (Galtung, 2008). Education for peace entails critical thinking in the tradition of Paulo Freire (1970/1990), who championed the cause of problem-posing model of education "bases itself on

creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (Bartlett, 2008: 41). Though Nigeria is made of more than 250 ethnic groups the fact remains that people that make up the grouping are not confined to a particular space. Neither do they live inwardly so as to preserve their traditions. Once one moves out of their native land and settles into a cosmopolitan city, he or she rediscovers the power of belonging to different interest groups. The more we play out our multiple roles effectively in the society, the more we become appreciative of the diversity of cultures, languages and traditions around us. Any attempt to zoom out one particular identity constitutes an affront to human rights and freedom.

Conclusion

Mutual understanding is difficult if not impossible in a fragmented society characterised by contrasting loyalties. A focus on the ND conflict has revealed that the disgruntled are constantly brainwashed by their local leaders and meant to believe that they have to fight for their birth right in order to reclaim the absolute control of their God-given resources. The nexus between ethnicity and resource-based conflict in the ND is such that various government interventions (enlargement of political Niger Delta with an increase in the derivation formula of 13 %, NDDC, Presidential offer of amnesty to the militants, Ministry of ND and more recently the cleaning of the Ogoni land) amount to the planting of rice and trees instead of people if we apply the Indian

wisdom. In the spirit of persistent resistance that continually fuels the conflict in the ND, many critics considered the coming to power of the then Ijaw-born vice president after the death of President Yar'Adua in 2010 and his eventual election as President Jonathan (2011) as window dressing. This study has associated ethnic identification with a structure of violence that perpetuates discriminatory attitudes (Indigene/Settler) and endangers national unity and peace. Little wonder that more than fifty years after independence, Nigerians are still lamenting the north-south amalgamation while reference to one nation called Nigeria remains elusive. What's more, the most populous black nation on earth appears more like a conglomeration of conflicting nationalities that militate against the birth of a nation-state. In the absence of a credible ideology and unifying leadership, there seems to be no end to the deep-rooted antagonism between minorities and majorities perpetrated by a primordialist view of ethnicity. Samora Machel of Mozambique once observed that "for the nation to live, the tribe must die" (Berman, 1998: 306).

As a way forward, the realisation of a cosmopolitan society which is based on toleration, mutual respect and understanding requires a national commitment that ensures that, on the one hand people's traditions are kept in the museums and the job of curators created for the traditional authority in the countryside so as to boost the tourism industry nationwide. On the other hand, citizens ought to be assisted with adequate programmes of education so as to overcome the culture of violence and death through creative thinking. Given that the same methods only produce more

of the same results, it is beneficial that our education system identifies with the people's right to peace which is synonymous with unity by providing them with innovative ideas rather than feeding their minds with hateful slogans. Progress towards innovation and creative change translates a vision of the kind of society we all want to live in and as far as peace education is concerned, there is a need for a paradigm shift toward a problem-posing model of education (Freire, 1990; Kester, 2010) which encourages young researchers to diagnose the real problems affecting the society and craft appropriate solutions as opposed to the banking model of learning by simply repeating what has been taught in the classroom. Given that education is a preparation for the future, this paper recommends the creation of Futures Studies Centres in tertiary institutions for the purpose of encouraging students to dream of "Where do we want to get to and How do we get there" (Hicks, 2008:128).

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