

Globalisation, Internationalisation and the Niger Delta Oil Conflict: An Ecological and Human Security Perspectives

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Abstract

It is a fact that there is an oil conflict in the Niger Delta. This conflict manifests in different ways, such as women's protests against oil facilities, ethnic militia attacks, the military invasion of towns to protect oil companies, kidnapping, hostage-taking by militants, intra-ethnic fights over oil resources, etc. Globalization has heightened awareness about the region. The international community has taken an interest in the region's affairs. The central thesis of this paper is that globalization has enhanced a world system of capitalist exploitation of oil resources from the Niger Delta without a commensurate benefit to the people who have experienced oppression and economic deprivation. The Hermeneutics method is used to interpret the basic concepts, while critical analysis is used to unravel and discuss the issues in the paper. The paper finds massive capitalist exploitation of oil resources and underdevelopment have precipitated conflicts. The paper concludes that oil exploitation should be done within the framework of ecological conservation and the provision of the human security needs of the people.

Keywords: Globalisation, Internationalization, Ecology, Human Security, Niger Delta, Oil Conflict.

Introduction

Conflicts are endemic and ubiquitous in human societies. Divergent needs and interests, positions, quests for the satisfaction of human longings, struggles for dominance and superiority, struggles over scarce natural and economic resources, religious dogmatism, political and ideological persuasions, etc, are all things that precipitate conflicts. Among natural resources that have been a source of conflict and are often labelled as a resource curse is an oil called "black gold." Scholars such as Homer-Dixon (1999), Obi (2014), and Adeola (2009) have shown that there is a link between natural resources and conflicts, as resources have often resulted in wars and conflicts. In many regions of the world, especially the global south where oil has been discovered and exploited, it has been a source of conflict, such as places like Angola, Libya, Venezuela, Nigeria, etc.

Nigeria's Niger Delta, where oil has been exploited since 1956, is not an exception. Since the discovery and exploitation of oil in the region, it has been attended with conflicts. These oil conflicts have arisen predominantly from tensions between oil multinational corporations and oil host communities and as a result of massive underdevelopment and negligence of the oil communities by both government and oil companies, corrupt local community leaderships that connive with oil companies, and so forth. Globalization has heightened these conflicts as it has led to an increase in awareness in both local and international media of the sufferings and plights of the people of the Niger Delta, and this has brought about the involvement of transnational organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the United Nations, etc in the conflict. Globalization driven by cultural diffusion has also spread cultural

values and ideas from the Western world that conflict with traditional ideas in the region. Ethnic militia groups/ nationalities groups in the region, such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni people, the Ijaw Youth Congress, Urhobo Progress Union, etc, have utilized instruments of globalization, such as the internet, to make their voices heard, and call upon external actors to come to their support. The fact is that there is also international interest in the oil of the Niger Delta as it is a great part of the global oil supply, and any disturbance in the region does impact to some degree on global oil supply and price.

It is difficult, then to separate the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta from the issues of globalisation and internationalization of conflicts. In discussing the issues of the paper, critical analysis and hermeneutics are adopted. Hermeneutics, which is concerned with the interpretation and presentation of meaning, will be used to break open the meaning of the concepts in the paper for proper understanding. Then, critical analysis will be used to dissect, unravel, appraise, and evaluate the issues that the paper deals with. The research questions that concern the paper are: in what ways has globalization affected the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta? What are the causes and consequences of the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta? And what can be done to resolve the conflict in light of ecological and human security concerns? In giving answers to the concerns of the paper, procedurally, the paper will make some conceptual clarifications, examine the situation of oil conflicts in the Niger Delta, and then examine the impact of globalization on the oil conflicts and the internationalization of the conflict. When this has been done, a conclusion will be made. It is to the conceptual analysis that the paper now turns.

Conceptual Analysis

Arowolo (2008) cites Julius Court and T. Yanagira to say that globalization refers to:

...rapid advances in communication and transportation technologies, expanding the spatial scope for business activities of private corporations and financial institutions, the integration of market across national borders, and a higher degree of uniformity in policy and institutional environments that set the rules of the game for economic actions, political activities and interactions on the part of private agents and domestic governments based on various countries (p. 138).

Johari (2012) cites Anthony Giddens to say that globalization “is the intensification of worldwide relations which link distant localities in a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa” (pp. 731-732). According to Wenz (2009), globalization refers to the increasing unifying of the world’s economic order in that there is a reduction in barriers to trade tariffs, import quotas, and export fees, all to maximise material wealth and efficiency. This last definition is restrictive in that it sees it only from the economic perspective. Globalization is understood in the paper as multidimensional and includes all the rapidly extending and coming together of peoples, cultures, values, ideologies, etc, within the shrinking of time and space.

Ocholi and Zhizhi (2023) cite the 1999 World Bank Report and Azaiki to note that the Niger Delta derives its name from the River Niger, and the delta is one of the largest wetlands in the world, covering 70,000 km square, and it has been formed from sediments deposited, transported and accumulated from the Benue and Niger Rivers. Ifedayo (2023) writes that the Niger Delta is made up of 5,000 communities divided among 50 ethnic groups and 250 dialects. Currently, in Nigeria, the Niger Delta is officially made up of nine states named above by the edict creating the Niger Delta Development Commission and also includes Imo, Abia, and

Ondo. The Niger Delta peoples include the Urhobo, Ijaw, Itshekiri, Edo, Ibibio, Efik, Isoko, Ogoni, etc. Mayhew (2009) defines ecology as; “The study of the interrelationships between organism and their surroundings, outer world; the study of animals and plants in relation to each other and to their habitats” (p. 147). Ayoade (2015) states that “ecology is the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment as well as between the organisms themselves” (p. 17). The ecological perspective taken in the paper concerns reading the issues of globalization in the Niger Delta and its impact on the oil conflict from the vantage point of ecological interactions. In resolving the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta, the concern should not simply be with human needs or the capitalist drive for profit, which is one of the driving forces of globalization, but also the welfare and health of the ecosystems in the region. Environmental or ecological conservation should be factored into the discussion of the oil conflict. The life of all organisms, living things, creatures, etc., matter and should be taken into consideration amidst economic, ecological, and cultural globalization.

Together with the ecological, the paper is also carried out from a human security perspective. The term security has various shades of meaning. Kanu and Agbo (2022) cite W Lippman, who viewed security as a country’s ability to uphold and sustain its essential tenets through conquest in war, while R S McNamara sees it as the policy of the government to create a national and international strategic environment to enhance promotion and protection of national values against all threats. But what is human security? It is more than the security of the nation and its borders. In former times, some scholars tend to see security from the nation-statist angle. But today, there is a human dimension to security. The position of former president Olusegun Obasanjo, cited by Kanu and Agbo (2022), aligns with this position, which sees security as the aggregation of security interests (life safety, property protection, economic and psychological wellbeing, freedom to pursue legitimate goals in life) of all individuals, human associations political entities, ethnic groups and all entities in the nation. Human security is about the entirety of people’s well-being, health, wellness, and access to the basic amenities of life.

The next term that requires explication here is oil conflicts. Nwosu and Orji (2023) write that “conflict refers to a situation of interaction involving two or more parties in which actions in pursuit of incompatible goals result to varying degrees of discord as well as violent clashes within and between communities, groups, and state and non-state actors” (p. 161). Ebhodaghe (2023) cites S.A. Faleti, who sees conflict as incompatibility manifested in human behaviors and interests. In Duchi, Iyalla, and Shaibu (2023), conflict is “...the clash of interests between and among individuals in society,” and these three authors also cite Coser, who states that social conflict is a “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals” (p. 283). Madu (2015) defines conflict as incompatible interests, expression of hostilities, or taking actions that hinder the other from reaching their goals. Oil conflicts refer to struggles, disagreements, and grievances over the exploitation of the natural resource of oil and its management.

This paper thinks that the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta have been internationalized. Kraus (2017) defines internationalization as follows:

...as a process through which an explicit and conscious decision is made. The decision to involve international actors in any phase (hostilities or negotiation) of a domestic conflict. The alternative strategy or opposite way toward this action is to isolate the internal conflict and exclude any international actors, which is highly

complicated in a globalized world with many interfering state and non-state actors” (p. 25).

There are different ways to understand the internationalization of the conflict. Kraus (2017) writes that ethnic conflicts can be internationalized when leaders of various ethnic groups in the quest for power call upon supranational organizations or the international community to come to their aid, often citing the violation of their human rights. This is a very strong motive for international bodies to intervene or get involved, for by the charters of the United Nations, the world community must protect human rights. This is why, very often, to broaden their appeal, those who desire to internationalize an internal conflict cite profusely from United Nations human rights declarations. Borda (2009) states that: “Internationalization, defined in a general way, is the process through which an explicit and conscious decision is made: the decision to involve international actors in any phase—hostilities or negotiation—of a domestic conflict.”

Impact of Globalization and Internationalization on the Niger Delta Oil Conflict

It is stating the obvious to affirm that globalization has impacted the Niger Delta region and the oil conflicts there. In this time of globalisation, there has been an intensifying and expanding growth of information technology communication. This has made it easier for news and information to flow to the Niger Delta and also from it. Within the twinkling of an eye, any event, such as an oil spill, attack by militants, and youth protests against oil companies, can be heard in Western cities. This has also made it very easy for supranational bodies to get involved from the perspective of human rights and environmental justice. Groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Greenpeace, etc., have gotten involved in the oil conflicts in the region. Amnesty International (2018) produced a document, “Negligence in the Niger Delta: Decoding Shell and Eni’s poor record of oil spills.” The title of the document speaks volumes. The misdeeds of oil companies in the Niger Delta are horrific. Previously, Amnesty International (2009) had issued a document, “Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution, and Poverty in the Niger Delta.” Oil production has produced pollution and poverty in the region. Human Rights Watch (2002) produced a document titled “The Niger Delta: No democratic dividends.” Human Rights Watch (2002) equally recalled that in 1999, they published a book-length report, “The Price of Oil: Corporate responsibility and human rights violations in Nigeria’s oil-producing communities.” The United Nations Development Programme (2006) produced a human development report. The UNDP (2006) acknowledged that the region suffers from crumbling social infrastructure, administrative neglect, massive unemployment, social deprivation, filth, squalor, and abject poverty, and because of all these, there is restiveness as people seem to see no hope in sight.

The reality is that the Niger Delta issue is no longer just a local or national issue. It is global, affected by global issues, and the conflict has been internationalized. Hurrell (2009) notes that it is now difficult for the government to control information and communication/transportation technologies such as the internet, satellites, and computer networks have aided in the diffusion of values, ideas, and knowledge for like-minded groups (transnational civil society) to carry out activities and mobilize across state borders. This has happened in the Niger Delta. International human rights organizations are concerned about pollution arising from oil spills in the region. Even if they are not invited, they are concerned as global corporate citizens and get involved in a non-violent manner. This is another dimension of

the internationalization of the conflict. This point is stated by Edo, Osimerah, and Okolo (2023) when they note that after the Cold War, international politics is now marked by globalization in political and economic liberalization, and as this is happening, transnational movements respond to the patriarchal national state, as people in the Niger Delta develop resistance by aligning with cosmopolitan civic centers. Writing on the effect of global capital on the Niger Delta, Okolo and Anthony (2017) write that globalization which is a form of capitalist expansion creates a world of losers and winners; and negatively impacts the socio-physical environment as it threatens fragile ecosystems, biodiversity, and peasant economy.

Writing on how the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta became internationalized, Ojaborotu (2008) states that the crisis in the Niger Delta, rooted in the exploitation of the people and devastation of the ecology, has made social groups and militant youth groups agitate over their frustration; and the issue is no longer just a domestic issue as it has been internationalized and global non-governmental groups such as Greenpeace, Un-represented Nations and Organization, Rainforest Action Group, Friends of the Earth have gotten involved. Oil remains one of the prime economic goods of the current world system. There are a lot of politics surrounding oil. Oil drives the world economy. Anything that happens to the supply of oil, such as conflicts and violence in the Niger Delta, does affect the price of oil. Not just the Niger Delta, anything that happens to the supply of oil from the Middle East makes the world jitter, as higher oil prices can bring about political and social stability. Most world governments then pay attention to what is happening in the regions where oil is produced, such as the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Ocholi and Zhizhi (2023) rightly note that about 80% of government revenue comes from the Niger Delta.

Ejovi, Ebie, and Akpokighe (2014) write: “Due to the interdependent and interconnectedness of the global economy, activities in a sub-structure directly affect the whole. It is thus factual that whereas globalization has facilitated the exploration and production of oil by multinational corporations from the West in developing countries, it has also made it possible for the Niger Delta crisis to have an impact on the price of oil in the global market.” (p. 148). Freedman (2014) writes:

...internal security crises, from environmental disasters, extreme poverty and deprivation, armed conflicts, or ethnic or religious conflict, provide sites of opportunity for those seeking to internationalize conflicts. Domestic conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia have started as internal problems but have taken on regional and international dimensions as parties to the conflict within the country and sympathetic external forces have joined forces with each other for mutual gain.

The exploration and exploitation of oil, which has been propelled by global capitalist forces, have caused many destructive impacts on the culture and environment of the Niger Delta. The reality in the Niger Delta region is that oil and gas activities have caused ecological damage and environmental degradation, destroyed farmlands, and made them unproductive, oil spillage has killed aquatic life and caused the extinction of species, and all these have caused discontentment among the people. In terms of cultural values, global oil companies came with their set of values.

Globalization is a big factor that has contributed to the internationalization of the Niger Delta oil conflicts. Ojaborotu (2008) states that the globalization of the internal system made it possible for the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) to use information

technology to mobilize and make their plights known to the international community. The international community now gives attention to issues of the oil conflict more than ever before as a result of the internationalization of the conflict. Ojakorotu (2008) notes that the killing of the Ogoni 9 was condemned by the Commonwealth of Nations, and the United Nations on 22 December 1995, in resolution 50/199, condemned human rights violations in Nigeria. In this time of globalization, it is difficult for conflicts to remain internal and local. Macak (2018) states that amid world fragmentation and globalisation, only very few conflicts can remain internal, and so conflicts in Ukraine, Yemen, Iraq, Rwanda, Syria, and ex-Yugoslavia have all been internationalized. Tor and Egbe (2018) concur with the idea that the international community has gotten involved in the conflict in the Niger Delta, as demonstrated by the fact that in 1997 the United Nations commissioned a special rapporteur to report on the human rights situation in Nigeria (the rapporteur visited in 1998 and visited the Niger Delta especially Ogoniland among other places in the country), and also the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2003 collaborated with the Niger Delta Development Commission to organize the first international conference on Niger Delta sustainable development, the 2006 UNDP survey of the Niger Delta region. All these measures are aimed at resolving the oil conflicts in the region and promoting human and environmental sustainability.

Resolution of the Niger Delta Oil Conflict in the Light of Ecological and Human Security Concerns

There is a need for globalization with a human face. Profit should not count over the welfare of people. One of the devastating effects of globalization is that it has led to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region. As oil multinational corporations with their oil technology prospects for oil, they do damage to the environment. Think of the phenomenon of gas flaring in the region. Environmental damage, with its negative attendant consequences, is one of the things that has precipitated people in the Niger Delta to protest against the oil companies and the policies of the government. Globalization has complicated the oil conflicts in the region. In line with human rights and environmental conservation values promoted by global civil society and the people of the Niger Delta, there is a need for globalization with a human face. Corporate social responsibility of oil multinational corporations should not just be piecemeal of digging boreholes or provision of scholarship rather they should remediate and restore the environment, they should use technology that does less damage to the environment, and they should follow the same standards that they follow in North America and Europe. When this is done, it will help to ameliorate the conflicts in the region. Mayhew (2009) cites Falk, who argued that a human face globalization requires that it is based on the consent of the citizenry, participation, human rights, and accountability. Oil multinational corporations, the community leaders in oil-bearing communities, and indeed, the Federal, State, and Local Governments should be made more accountable for the funds that come from oil in the region.

The human security of the people of the Niger Delta should be prioritized. Security is beyond the safety of those in power or those who run oil multinational corporations. The total welfare and well-being of the people also matter. This paper does not advocate for the abolishment of globalization. The world is now interdependent, and it will be difficult to retreat totally from the influence of globalization. What is needed is an ethical form of globalization. This is akin to what is called peaceful globalization. Lamorde (2023) cites the United Nations to state that peaceful globalization fosters global interconnectedness and interdependence among peoples and cultures for the security and mutual well-being of all people

and promotes sustainable development. As the world becomes globalized and interdependent, and Western industries and corporations come into the Niger Delta for business and trade, they should carry out their trade in concert with the moral values of the people and take into consideration ecological wellbeing. External governmental bodies should be interested in the oil of the Niger Delta not just to secure their oil prices but to influence the government of Nigeria to promote the welfare of the people, especially those of bear the burden of mineral exploitation. This applies not just to oil but to other mineral resources in the land. Supranational organizations and the international civic society should continue to campaign and advocate for eco-justice and social justice for the people of the Niger Delta. The instrument of the law should be harnessed by the government to promote human and environmental health by truly holding multinational corporations accountable. They should not be allowed to go scot-free, violating the environmental standards of the land. It is important to emphasize human security in Nigeria, for as section 14(2b) of chapter two of the Nigerian Constitution states: “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.” Government has an obligatory duty to ensure that there is stable peace and non-violent living in the Niger Delta by securing the lives and properties of people, protecting them from environmental harm and damage, and mitigating whatever threatens life. Ocholi and Zhizhi (2023) note that the environment is an essential part of security for pollution, and the destruction of the natural environment affects food, water, and the quality of life that people can live.

Since the Niger Delta oil conflict has become internationalized, ethnic nationalities and different groups in the Niger Delta must keep harnessing the power of the global community to put pressure on the Nigerian government and oil multinational forces to do what is right. At the heart of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations is environmental sustainability. The United Nations should leverage the Nigerian government to ensure that environmental standards are met. The values of capitalist globalization, more often than not, simply see the natural world as a material source to be harvested for human good. There is no consideration for Ecocentric flourishing. The only valuable thing is what has utility. There is a vital need to do an ecological evaluation of globalization. The internationalization of the Niger Delta conflict that has happened should not be just for more capitalist development. Principles of ecological sustainability should guide internationalization. Oil technology is doing damage to the Niger Delta environment and culture. African traditional ecological values should be brought into play in the discourse.

One thing, among others, that literature on the Niger Delta reveals is the human insecurities, economic deprivations, massive underdevelopment, and ecological damages in the region. This is why the human security perspective on the issue mustn't be discounted. The human needs of the people of the Niger Delta, and this includes ecological justice and socio-economic advancement, should be given priority. If the human needs of the people are adequately met, it will greatly assuage the conflict situation. If the dilapidated social infrastructures in the region are upgraded, there will be optimal and abundant life for the people. It will go a great way to minimize conflicts in the region. Many Niger Delta peoples look at oil-bearing communities in the world, such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and places in the United States like Texas, and they wonder why such development cannot take place in the Niger Delta.

As a way forward and by way of further recommendation, practical steps must be taken to mitigate the Niger Delta oil conflicts. Outside the ideological framework of human security and ecological justice, the government and the international community should ensure the

sustainable development of the region. Government agencies set up for the region that have been mentioned above should be made to work, they should be rid of corruption and bureaucracy. There is a crucial need for the enforcement of environmental laws and standards in the Niger Delta. There is no reason why, in this decade, there is still massive gas flaring with all its associated health consequences in the region. There are many gas laws regarding the healthy management of gas, but they are violated by the oil companies. Many laws on pollution are just there in the books. Oil spillage clean-up takes time to carry out in most places in the region. Ojakorotu (2010) states that establishing environmental agencies is not all that is required rather, the government should ensure they and multinational oil companies are all held accountable, and the welfare of the people should not be compromised for profit. With good enforcement of environmental laws, conflicts can be mitigated in the region. There is also a need for effective local governance and local elites who don't connive with oil companies but work for the good of their communities. One problem that the region has experienced is local leaders and elites who swindle their people once money comes to the communities from the oil companies. Education for peace and non-violent resistance is also important. Abotutu (2015) calls for creating awareness of sustainability and respect for natural processes in mitigating environmental degradation. There must be education for sustainability in the region. Many in the region are not aware of their harmful environmental practices. There are militant groups in the Niger Delta who turn to violence and even criminal activities to make their voices heard. It should not be so. All social agents in the region should be engaged in peace building. Conflict mediation processes such as traditional institutions, religious bodies, etc., should all be employed to mediate conflicts within their vicinities. Since the conflicts have been internationalized, more pressure needs to be mounted on the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies for them to act justly and for the oil companies to rise to their social responsibilities. Corporate social responsibilities should not be piecemeal but should be solid interventions to uplift the lives of the people. The media has a great role to play in setting the agenda for society. Both the local, national, and international media should be vociferous in highlighting the plights of the people of the region.

The world system theory, developed by Wallerstein (1974), is relevant in examining the Niger Delta oil conflicts. The theory reveals the blatant injustice and how the world is structured in favour of the core countries. Right from the time of colonial adventures into native lands in Africa and other countries in the global south, the historical injustice of colonialism and capitalism, with the transatlantic slave trade, and the brute use of force to oppress Indigenous and native peoples, the cards are always screwed against once colonized people. Nigeria, to a certain degree, still produces raw materials, including crude oil, to export to the West. Nigerian refineries for many years have not worked adequately. In terms of industry and technology, there is much that can still be done to take Nigeria to a technologically developed country. The West and the so-called countries in the core countries will always act in their favour. Global economic policies are made and controlled by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc., are controlled by the West. It is difficult to get funding from these institutions without doing their bidding. Take, for instance, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) that were introduced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in some countries in the global south in the 1980s. Even when they caused hardship and pain to the people, the governments were required to implement them. There are countries in the West that have conditioned their fund on African countries accepting LGBTQ rights. On TVC news on 21st October 2024 at 8.35 am, some economic experts disagreed with the World Bank that Nigeria should continue with economic reforms for the next 15 years. Muda Yusuf, CEO of Centre for Promotion of Private Enterprise, in the TVC program, spoke of the need to review reforms. The point is that Nigeria

as a nation should assert its right to resist global economic policies that strangle the people. This is why Nigeria and other countries outside the West should rise and confront the world structure. Nigeria produces crude oil but, at present, is still importing finished petroleum products to meet her needs. Nigeria should also harness oil technology to protect its people and its environment.

Conclusion

The paper has studied globalization and some of its impact on the Niger Delta oil conflict. Globalization, the paper discussed, refers to the integration of the world's peoples and cultures and the shrinking of space and time through the rapid advancement of the use of information communication technology. Globalization has brought people closer together more than ever before. It has also led to expanding trade, businesses, commerce, education, technology, and cultural diffusion. With globalization, news, ideas, and information spread rapidly, making the whole world a global village and making it difficult to separate the local from the global. As the wind of globalization spreads, it also instigates conflicts as Western ways of life threaten traditional cultures, as global companies devastate and degrade environments and ecologies, taking only their profits for their shareholders as the primary priority. In the process, the rights of people are violated, and conflicts are precipitated. As conflicts are instigated, they are also brought to the global community's attention. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, people have to fulfill their basic needs for survival, identity, meaning, and belonging in a world system that is structurally unjust and oppressive. A world in which the so-called core states exercise hegemony to the detriment of nations in Africa and other places. In their sufferings and plights, the people of the Niger Delta have internationalized the conflicts as they have called upon supranational bodies to come to their support. It is important that as the conflict has become internationalized, the international community works within the framework of environmental/ ecological values and prioritizes the human security of the people. Indeed, globalization should be humanistic. Only such globalization will benefit the people of the Niger Delta as they struggle only against an inept national leadership but world hegemonic oil powers.

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