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- 1 On 11 December 1998, 500 youths from 40 different clans, together with representatives from 25 political organisations from an “ethnic” group in the Niger Delta known as the Ijaw, gathered together in Kaiama, a town in the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area (LGA) of Bayelsa state. After prayers, speeches and much deliberation, delegates issued the Kaiama Declaration—a ten-point statement demanding that all oil companies leave “Ijaw land” by 30 December 1998, pending the resolution by the Nigerian federal government of questions relating to the ownership and control of petroleum resources and political autonomy for the Ijaw. Between 29 and 30 December 1998, protest marches and demonstrations took place throughout Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states and were met with the full weight of the Nigerian military. Up to 15,000 soldiers and two warships were sent to Bayelsa by the then military government of General Abusalami Abubakar and a state of emergency declared. An estimated 200 people died during the events of late 1998 and early 1999, whilst many more were injured, tortured and raped.
- 2 Around the same time, violence prevented local government, State Assembly and governorship elections scheduled for 5 December and 9 January, from taking place until 30 January 1999, some three weeks after elections results were already out elsewhere in the country. Again in July 2002, dozens of people were killed when two youth groups in Nembe, Ogboloma/biri¹ in Bayelsa, clashed during the local government primaries for the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP). One of the groups was supported by the former Commissioner for the Environment of the Bayelsa state government, who has since fled to the United States, and the other by a manager of President Obasanjo’s 1999 election campaign in Bayelsa². In 2003, after the presidential, National Assembly, state and local government elections had taken place, the Transition Monitoring Group named Rivers and Bayelsa states, two of the three major oil-producing states (the third being Delta state) as “states that fell short of minimum acceptable standards for any credible elections”³.
- 3 The Kaiama Declaration and its violent aftermath marked a turning point in Ijaw political history and a highpoint in the “restiveness”⁴ that had become a characteristic feature of

life in the Niger Delta. The Kaiama Declaration also gave birth to the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), an organisation which took upon itself the task of co-ordinating and speaking on behalf of all Ijaw youth throughout the Delta to ensure the successful realisation of the goals of the Kaiama Declaration. Many of the brains behind the Kaiama meeting and the formation of the IYC, young men like Oronto Douglas, Robert Azibola and Von Kemedi, had been closely involved in campaigning on behalf of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), which in 1990 issued the Ogoni Bill of Rights and provided a model for the Kaiama declaration to come. It was in the wake of the disintegration of MOSOP which followed Saro-Wiwa's killing in 1995 by the then military regime of General Sani Abacha, that the IYC emerged to try and do for the Ijaw what MOSOP had tried to do for the Ogoni.

- 4 For more than a decade, young men and also a large number of women from different towns and villages, different linguistic and cultural communities as well as different social backgrounds, had been using "direct action" tactics which specifically targeted oil companies. One notable example took place in 1998 in the Ogbia LGA in Bayelsa state when representatives from youth organisations, Councils of Chiefs and Elders, Community Development Committees (CDCs) and a disparate group of young men and women, many of whom were university undergraduates, from three villages (Imiringi, Otuasega and Elebele) known as "Kolo Creek", collectively organised a "general strike". This involved the occupation of the Shell flow station in Imiringi during which all Shell personnel were ordered to leave the premises peacefully, the disconnection of the manifold controlling the conduit of petroleum from all the oil pipelines in the area, and the forced disruption of production from the Kolo Creek area for one week. The action was in protest against the lack of social investment by the oil company, Shell, locally known as SPDC (Shell Petroleum Development Company), which since 1971, as the operating partner in one of many joint venture oil and gas production projects in Nigeria, had been extracting light crude oil from wells in each of the villages in Kolo Creek. The events of October 1998 marked a turning point in relations between Shell and the people of Kolo Creek, who had for many years appealed to Shell for greater levels of investment in development projects, greater opportunities for employment and the awarding of contracts to local people, but to little or no avail. The results of the "general strike" were largely successful, inducing Shell to improve social provisions at least for those in the immediate Kolo Creek area. The events of 1998-1999 also cemented a new composite Kolo Creek political identity as distinct from that of the rest of Ogbia.
- 5 The Ijaw nationalists who formed the IYC wanted to create a popular mass movement out of disparate episodes of "uprising" like the Kolo Creek general strike and to unite the culturally diverse groups that make up the Ijaw people under a single ethnic umbrella. Contemporary Ijaw nationalist narratives claim that an Ijaw ethnic nationality existed in an historical and cultural sense long before the discovery of oil. They describe the Ijaw as 40 clans comprising of 500 "communities" or "sub-groups"⁵ with some seven distinct and mutually unintelligible languages between them (Williamson 1968), scattered across extensive geographical distances, extending from Ondo state in the west of Nigeria to Akwa Ibom state in the east of the country. These narratives hold that the political marginalisation of the Ijaw as an ethnic minority group since the 1950s has prevented them from benefiting fully from the oil resources that sustain the Nigerian nation. It has also prevented them from addressing the environmental and ecological problems caused by over 40 years of oil production and exploration activity in the Niger Delta. So although

oil, they argue, has not *created* the Ijaw nation, the struggle for ownership and more effective control of the revenues accruing from oil, *has* served to galvanise disparate members of the Ijaw ethnic community around a common plight ⁶. Politically the aim of Ijaw nationalists is to use their strategic location in the oil-producing areas as leverage with which to push for a more effective voice for the Ijaw, deemed to constitute a political minority within the Nigerian polity.

- 6 The article examines the background to the general strike and its aftermath, and, through it, explores competing and often violent attempts to redefine ethnic group membership in an “Ijaw” oil-producing community in the Niger Delta. It draws its observations from research carried out in 2002 on the responses of three “host communities” to oil companies in Ogbia LGA, which according to Nigeria’s ethnic nomenclature are classified as Ijaw. It assesses the extent to which the narrative of “uprising and struggle” so frequently expressed in the public rhetoric of Ijaw nationalists in the IYC and INC ⁷, and replicated in academic writings about the Delta (Naanen 1995; Osaghae 1995; Obi 1999) is borne out by events that took place in oil-producing communities in Bayelsa state in the 1990s. It examines whether the “restiveness” in the Niger Delta—the occupations of oil company facilities, the confiscation of oil company assets and kidnapping of personnel, the cases of armed confrontation with federal and state security forces—reflects the appropriation by Ijaw communities living at the site of oil production and exploration activities of new pan-Ijaw nationalist discourses to which “resource control” and the creation of Ijaw ethnically homogeneous states are central.
- 7 Ijaw nationalists within the IYC and INC have been keen to use the “restiveness” of the Niger Delta amongst groups they have defined as belonging to the Ijaw ethnic group to bolster their demands for resource control, the creation of more states within the Nigerian Federation and the greater inclusion and political recognition of the Ijaw within the Nigerian polity, who they claim constitute Nigeria’s fourth largest ethnic group ⁸. Yet, at the micro level, in villages and in the LGAs of Bayelsa state, it is not at all clear that the conflicts between oil-producing communities and oil companies are being articulated on a pan-Ijaw nationalist platform. In many ways the politics of oil and competition at an intra- and inter-village level have fragmented local identities and engendered a degree of detachment from a pan-Ijaw nationalist identity. The proliferation of pan-ethnic nationalist movements in Nigeria and particularly in the Niger Delta over more than a decade suggests that a certain degree of pan-ethnic cohesion or consensus exists amongst members of the ethnic group concerned. However, micro-level studies demonstrate that the question of ethnic belonging is an altogether more complex, widely contested and as yet unsettled one, in which the interests of different generations and social classes collide ⁹.
- 8 The article is divided into five sections. The first provides a retrospective look at some of the conceptual perspectives on ethnicity that have influenced the manner in which Ijaw ethnicity is treated in the article. The second explores relationships between oil and ethnic politics historically within Nigeria as the background against which this particular episode in Ogbia’s history is situated. The third presents Ogbia LGA and explores the history of identity-based cleavages within Ogbia and the place of Ijaw nationalism and oil production in Ogbia’s history. Oloibiri, where oil production first began in Nigeria in 1956, is situated in the Ogbia LGA. It examines how the shift in production from Oloibiri to Kolo Creek impacted upon the political identity of Ogbia more generally and on the appeal of Ijaw nationalism in particular. Recent events are situated within a *longue durée*

perspective, paying particular attention to the points of convergence between, and rupture with, the ideas and activities of Ijaw nationalists in Ogbia in the past and present. The fourth section provides a description of the “general strike” which took place in 1998, likened here to the “uprising” of Ijaw nationalist public rhetoric, tracing its origins, its main protagonists and its outcomes. It also explores the role of the oil company SPDC (Shell) in redefining notions of community and community representation, and in transforming and emboldening the power of formerly insignificant social and political institutions, like the Community Development Committee (CDC) which became its principal interlocutor in oil-related matters. The fifth and most important section looks at the outcome of the “uprising” through an examination of the transformation of Kolo Creek identities.

Ethnicity—A Retrospective Glance

- 9 The unravelling of Ijaw ethnicity in Ogbia underlines the non-static, dynamic nature of ethnicity more generally. Our approach draws heavily on situationalist perspectives which have emphasised understanding how particular situations (external events and processes) shape ethnic identities, which they see as contingent and closely dependent on the contexts within which they emerge (Laitin 1986). It is also influenced by “instrumentalist” approaches which emphasise the role of political calculation (Melson & Wolpe 1971; Glazer & Moynihan 1975). Although purely instrumentalist perspectives at one end of the anti-primordialist spectrum have often come under stringent attack (Williams 1991) for overstating the argument in favour of political calculation, they provide a useful starting point for making the claim that ethnic forms of mobilisation are intelligible political phenomena, rather than simply the outpouring of unrestrained human emotion. Our approach also benefits from the work of Benedict Anderson (1983), whose concept of “imagined communities” has tried to combine several strands in the anti-primordialist vein. Anderson goes beyond simply stating that identities were constructed and explaining why, to ask questions about how and by whom. Equally the work of historians like John Lonsdale (1993), whose study of the emergence of Kikuyu identities in Kenya has shown how the translation of the Bible into local languages by Protestant missionaries enabled people to imagine the existence of an “ethnic public”, a community of brothers and sisters who shared the same language, has provided food for thought in the Ijaw case as they were amongst the first groups of the Delta to have their language used in bible translations in the late 19th century. Lonsdale’s work is particularly helpful as he also proposes one way out of the quagmire of how to go beyond the purely instrumental and political interpretations of ethnicity. He suggests that ethnicity is made up of two worlds: one in which the meaning of concepts such as community and moral worth is struggled over, which he calls “moral ethnicity”, and another, which he calls “political tribalism”, in which members of different ethnic groups compete for political advantage. This binary distinction he draws between the “moral” and “political” spheres, builds on an idea originally advanced by Peter Ekeh (1975) of “two publics”: the ethnic public in which reciprocity and obligation are important and the immoral civic public of the post colonial state, in which anything goes.
- 10 Exploring the contending visions of moral worth within the “ethnic community” is critical to our enquiry. The generation, social class and clan-based conflicts amongst the Ijaw suggest the need to identify which interests are represented at each moment of “ethnic resurgence”. This does not mean that this moral sphere should be conceived of as analytically separate from the public sphere in which inter-ethnic “encounters” take

place. In spite of the idiom of “natural ties” within which ethnic identities are often packaged, the state itself plays a critical role in setting the parameters around which people forge such “ties”. Peter Geschiere (1996) observes quite rightly that it is impossible to separate the two worlds. Exploring the interaction between the state and the internal debates within the ethnic public is central to our approach, which recognises the utility of the “two publics” paradigm but seeks to go beyond it, to tease out how the agents of the ethnic public and the state interact.

- 11 Rather than exploring Ijaw ethnicity as an anthropological phenomenon, it is argued that ethnic mobilisation—what we refer to here as “ethnic nationalism”—is an intelligible political phenomenon, rooted in the history, current character and organisation of political competition within the Nigerian state. The Ijaw ethnicities with which we are concerned are not simply the stuff of time-immemorial solidarities rooted in a “traditional” sphere, but the product of socially constructed identities which have arisen as a result of the profound social, economic and political changes that Nigeria has undergone, from colonisation to oil-induced post-colonial transformation.
- 12 We emphasise the need to understand ethnicity as a language of politics rather than as antithetical to the political project and the importance of moving beyond unhelpful preoccupations about the extent to which ethnicity is invented or real. We also recognise the usefulness of approaches which emphasise contingency and construction, but not simply as a way of dismissing the relevance of ethnic identity. Rather, it is argued that only through identifying who the protagonists are, the motivation behind their ethnic projects, the means they use to communicate their message and the circumstances in which their “followers” come to appropriate or reject ethnic discourses, can we map out the contours of the political landscape in Nigeria and understand the salience of ethnicity therein.

Oil, Ethnicity and the Nigerian State

- 13 Any attempt to explore the relationship between oil and the rise in ethnic consciousness in Nigeria would be incomplete without an appreciation of the central role which the Nigerian state plays in determining the contours of ethnic mobilization and mediating, albeit rarely independently, between competing ethnic aspirations of different groups. The metaphor of ethnicity as *governmentality*, both of the state and the oil multinationals which have come to constitute a state of sorts in the “host communities” within which they operate, is used throughout the article. It emphasises the centrality of the state and the oil companies in ordering a hierarchy of preferences which make ethnic belonging, both at micro and macro levels, a relevant social and political cleavage.
- 14 Successive oil booms since the early 1970s and the fiscal centralisation of Nigeria’s oil revenues since the civil war (1967-1970) by the federal government, have increased the power of the latter relative to once semi-autonomous units of the Federation. These were known as regional governments prior to the reforms of 1967 and state governments, ever since. By 1966, oil revenues accounted for 32% of export earnings. At the end of the civil war in 1970, oil revenues rose to 80% of total federal revenues and 90% of export earnings by 1974. In 1974 with the international oil price rises, oil revenues rose by 3.5 times (Forrest 1995). Although oil was not the cause of the war, fears that an independent state of Biafra would control up to 60% of Nigeria’s total oil revenues galvanised the Nigerian federal government to take decisive action in crushing it (Othman & Williams 1999).
- 15 Oil transformed Nigeria into a non-productive “rentier” state where income is derived mainly from foreign sources and not local taxation. As Guyer (1994) has argued, any type

of restraint that payers of income tax and indirect taxes could have imposed on government spending have been minimised. Instead oil resources, which since the 1969 Petroleum Act have been wholly “owned” by the state, have become “national property”—referred to as the “national cake”, a piece of which is seen as the quintessential right of all Nigerians.

- 16 The oil boom of the early 1970s and the political and fiscal centralisation which it encouraged, also dramatically increased the capacity of the state to distribute its patronage. The influx of oil revenues alone did not create this logic. Tom Forrest’s (1995) characterisation of the Nigerian state as a patronage-based set of relations which predate oil, but have become entrenched and consolidated by it, provides a useful way of explaining the linkage between oil, ethnicity and state in Nigeria. He traces the emergence of patronage as governance, to the regionalisation in 1954 of the commodity marketing boards after which regional governments inherited a trading surplus of up to £87 million. This allowed them to use the funds to enhance the capacity of the party in power to recruit influential members, reward loyalty and deny patronage to those who did not support it. Some investments were also made in social infrastructure; for example, in 1960, southern regional governments were spending up to 40% of recurrent expenditure on education with the Western regional government funding free universal primary education.
- 17 The 1954 constitution also created a new type of fiscal autonomy in the regions, reversing earlier legislation (1951) and recommending, in line with the recommendations of the Chick Fiscal Commission, that 50% of all the net proceeds from agricultural exports and 100% of all mining rents and royalties be retained in the region whence they originated (Ezera 1960). Although the western cocoa-producing region, initially benefited most because cocoa was Nigeria’s main export-earner at the time, the legislation was eventually to have important consequences for the East, which initially lost out because palm products upon which it relied were not huge export earners, but which, after the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1956, stood to be the richest region by far.
- 18 Although the regionalisation of the marketing boards was instrumental in promoting patronage as a political way of life in Nigeria, the emergence of the Nigerian state itself right from its colonial inception, would be a more useful place to start. The colonial state was an essentially authoritarian state, which for much of its life was committed to extraction rather than to developmental or welfare goals (Mamdani 1996). Colonial subjects were generally forced to pay the cost of infrastructural developments aimed at facilitating the transportation of agricultural commodities and minerals like tin and coal from hinterland to coast. It was in this context that people were forced to use personal connections to gain access to state resources which were not readily available to all.
- 19 The Indirect Rule system was created to serve the extractive imperative by grafting a semblance of order on a heterogeneous array of colonial subjects. It created a language of clans, tribes and sub-tribes which provided the ideational template from which kinship relations could be mobilised and acted upon. The Ijaw emerged during the colonial period as just one such tribe and became a politically conscious “minority” because of their small numbers. This happened in the wake of decolonization processes of the 1940s and 1950s when political power was conferred primarily on those pan-ethnic groups, best able to mobilise the largest numbers in the constituent regions of the Federation. These were the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba mainly in the West and the Igbo mainly in the East.

- 20 The creation of twelve states to replace the regions, by Head of State Lt. Col. Gowon in May 1967, upon the advice of powerful senior government civil servants, mainly from minority areas immediately prior to the announcement of secession, was intended to break up the divisive three-pronged region-based ethnic politics which had so plagued the First Republic and to introduce a more rational distribution of oil revenues between the different states of the Federation. The reforms were also motivated by the more urgent need to foil the secessionist attempt, by undermining eastern minority support for the Biafran secessionist cause and by granting the states for which they had been campaigning for more than a decade. Although the first round of state creation did, in the short term, break up the power of the regions, it did not break up for good the majority pan-ethnic power blocs that had been dominant within them. These, over time, simply reconstituted themselves to take advantage of the new trend towards state creation. In the light of the federal government's centralisation of oil revenues, they became a means of ensuring greater access to a share of the "national cake". In the absence of any widespread attachment to the nation-state and any commitment on the part of successive governments to re-distribution (Ake 1999) in the form of welfare and social provision, "distribution" in the form of patronage, continues to be a model for a governance, the principal objective of which remains an extractive one. The existence of Nigeria's large population (officially estimated at 127 million in 2003)¹⁰, religious and linguistic diversity (Agheyisi 1984)¹¹, and the legacy of a highly centrifugal state model, has further exacerbated this tendency.
- 21 This distributive logic has engendered new forms of identity-based politics which encourages rent-seeking entrepreneurs to manufacture "difference" or ethnicity as a means of securing the creation of new political units (states or LGAs) created which can guarantee them a greater share of federal grants from oil revenues than would otherwise be the case (Bach 1997). Ethnicity itself is constantly being re-defined, shifting from a static historical notion more akin to tribe, to one which emphasises membership of a given state of local government of origin. In a political system in which patron-client relationships prevail as the principle channel through which "citizens" gain access to the state and its resources, ethnicity matters. By increasing the distributive scope of the state, oil has served to entrench ethnicity as a set of effective codes through which to secure access to networks of patronage.
- 22 Local government creation in particular, which from 1979 onwards has increasingly been directly funded from the federal purse, has encouraged the mobilisation of "sub-ethnic" or micro identities. These correspond in the main to the "clan" divisions that were part of the administrative map of the Indirect Rule system introduced during the colonial period. By holding out the promise of rewards to "communities" best able to demonstrate their distinctiveness, the oil industry operating at the level of "host communities", has also helped to fragment and mobilise identities at a "sub-ethnic" level.
- 23 The consolidation of the principle of indigeneity in Nigeria's constitutions from 1979 onwards, as a criterion of citizenship, whereby rights to public goods (educational grants, healthcare, employment opportunities in the public and often private sector, and the ability to stand for electoral office, eligibility to represent the state or local government at federal level or state levels) are conferred depending on where one's parents or grandparents are from, has heightened the intensity and popularity of ethnic discourses (Bach 1997).

24 Restrictions on party-political activity and nationwide independent political organisation during the 1980s under the military regimes of President Ibrahim Babangida and later under General Sani Abacha in the 1990s, encouraged political forms of resistance throughout Nigeria which adopted militant ethnic forms. The annulment of the results of the presidential elections on 12 June 1993, which were supposed to have installed a new civilian regime, and a popularly elected president (Moshood Abiola), created a new episode in the intensification of militant ethnic politics (Jega 2000). Although the annulment of the elections initially received widespread condemnation across the country, irrespective of region, ethnicity and religion, protests were particularly intense in the south-west of the country, where the annulment came to be perceived as an affront to the Yoruba who had been denied their “right to occupy presidential office”. This perception was manipulated by the interim government and military regime of General Sani Abacha, in order to undermine the countrywide protests and discredit any criticism of the June 12th annulment as a Yoruba affair (Othman & Williams 1999).

Ijaw and the Politics of Oil in Rivers State

25 In the main oil-producing state, Rivers state (prior to 1996 when it was split into two), a rich and powerful political and business elite emerged to take advantage of the revenues derived from oil rents and royalties, 20% of which were shared between oil-producing states alone, up until 1981. The power elite in Rivers was composed mainly of members of the largest ethnic group in the state, the Ijaw. As elsewhere in the country, although the direct clients of this group may have seen some of the benefits from oil, the majority of the population, whether Ijaw or not, did not.

26 Instead, the capital-intensive and historically badly regulated oil-production industry itself disrupted and sometimes destroyed the traditional livelihood base of the inhabitants of oil-producing regions who are mainly farmers and fishermen, whilst giving the vast majority of them little in return by way of qualitative improvements in their lives. Throughout the Niger Delta, where most of Nigeria’s onshore resources are located, huge and highly visible social and economic disparities continue to exist between those linked to the oil industry, either through employment within it or as public office holders, who enjoy access to modern conveniences associated with a high-tech industry and those obliged to live in poverty in “host” communities, who drink from often oil-polluted river water in which they fish, wash and also often defecate. Okorobia (2001) describes a process of the “proletarianisation” of population of the Niger Delta, particularly those engaged in the traditional fishing economy of the Eastern Niger Delta. This results from the multiple disruptions caused by the oil industry and the inability and unwillingness of what is essentially a capital-intensive, although not labour-intensive, industry to absorb a largely unskilled population. This in turn has created rising levels of unemployment and poverty in the Delta. The inability of the state, from the early 1980s onwards and particularly after the introduction of structural adjustment policies in 1988, to provide basic services, and the inability of increasingly impoverished communities to pay for them, exacerbated the situation. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s isolated incidents of protests against the manner in which oil companies conducted their business became widespread throughout the Niger Delta.

27 Up until 1981, the existence of the “derivation principle” which allowed oil-producing states to retain a significant proportion of locally derived revenues within the state itself, as a pillar upon which fiscal relations between the central government and states were organized, enabled oil-rich state governments to enjoy the benefits of their fortuitous

situation. Between 1966 and 1979 the revenue allocation formula was altered six times (1966/1967, 1968/1969, 1969/1970, 1971/1972, 1975/1976 and 1979) (Othman & Williams 1999: 28). Throughout the 1970s the bulk of oil revenues retained by the federal government increased substantially, whilst the revenues retained in the states from which they derived declined. Whereas during the First Republic, federal and regional expenditures were equal, in 1975-1976 federal expenditure increased to 70% of total expenditure. By the 1980s, during the civilian government of 1979-1983, public pressure and the clamour for an increase in the states' share of oil revenues, forced the government to reduce the federal government's share to 55% of oil revenues.

- 28 The demise of the derivation principle in favour of the growth of a distributable pool account which was divided between three tiers of government and distributed to the states on the basis of population size and need as opposed to derivation, worked to disadvantage the oil-producing states. It also created a nationwide political schism between oil-producing and non oil-producing states, which most sharply played itself out in 2001/2002 during the "offshore/onshore" saga, provoked by the decision by the newly instituted civilian presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo, to seek clarification from the Supreme Court over whether revenues from offshore oil resources should be considered along with onshore-derived revenues, when calculating the derivation-based revenues (increased to 13% under Obasanjo) to be credited to the oil-producing state governments. The Supreme Court ruled in the federal government's favour, provoking outrage in the oil-producing states, particularly from Cross River state which was initially required to pay back funds already received by the federal government.
- 29 The frustrations that the loss of derivation aroused amongst members of the Ijaw political class encouraged the emergence of new alliances with discontented groups, which had emerged in the wake of structural economic reforms introduced in the late 1980s (Obi 1998). By the late 1980s, the consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) were felt throughout the Niger Delta as elsewhere in the Federation, particularly in the rising levels of unemployment amongst university graduates and rising levels of student poverty. Many of those who had been involved in politically opposing SAP through the National Union of Students (NANS) after it became subject to political infiltration, returned "home" to seek relevance through ethnic associations. Isaac Osuoka, former spokesperson of the IYC, was one such former NANS activist¹². There they found rural people, more destitute than themselves, particularly in the context of adjustment, and particularly ripe for mobilisation.
- 30 The existence of cohorts of unemployed university-educated men and women and a frustrated class of disgruntled elites, who since between 1981 and 1999 had seen the derivation formula upon which they had relied for privileged access to oil rents virtually disappear, created articulate agents capable of transforming what had previously been isolated protests against oil company irresponsibility into a systematically organised challenge to the Nigerian state and oil multinationals. In the context of economic crisis and state shrinkage, more radical strains of ethnic consciousness, which I refer to here as "ethnic nationalism", emerged amongst the Ijaw.
- 31 Because of their place within popular accounts of Nigeria's political history as a "minority" excluded from power by the "majorities", the Ijaw are equipped with a collective "memory" of a "long history of marginalisation" as a minority group. Being from the "Niger Delta" they are also able to enjoy the political purchase that comes with the Niger Delta name tag, made famous as a site of struggle by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa

and his Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), whose battle against the oil major Shell imprinted the Niger Delta on the Nigerian and international popular consciousness. The Ijaw nationalist struggle, which broke out in the wake of the Ogoni struggle and saw the proliferation of ethnic nationality organisations, each with their own “bill of rights” of sorts, is often presumed to have emerged from precisely the same set of historical and political circumstances as that of the Ogoni. Ike Okonta (2002) once described the Ogoni movement MOSOP as a “civic communal” movement which is led by Ogoni elites who for decades have found themselves hovering on the fringes of the national political class, elbowed out by larger minority and majority groups alike. MOSOP’s strength lay in its ability to galvanise men and women throughout Ogoni who support the political quests of their leaders, whom they view as true patriots, whose victory will enable them to become true citizens, and get more out of a truly democratic Nigerian state.

- 32 Unlike the Ogoni, whose avenues to state power during the Babangida years were highly circumscribed, many members of the Ijaw political class were able to ensure their continued access to political power. During the most repressive episodes of military rule, prior to and after the structural adjustment reforms of the late 1980s, Ijaw elites were among the few minority elites to be successfully “incorporated” into the institutional apparatus of the state, at the level of the Rivers state bureaucracy and at a federal level within the armed forces (mainly the Navy), within the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) and as well-paid civilian advisors to the military regime. For this reason and because most of the Rivers state governors indigenous to the state have been Ijaw, they are resented amongst many smaller minority groups in the Niger Delta who consider them to have been unduly “favoured”.
- 33 The Ijaw political class throughout the Babangida period, like other groups throughout Nigeria and particularly in the Niger Delta, had to contend with the threat posed by rising numbers of unemployed Ijaw men and women, leaving universities with no prospect of employment and who joined forces with the masses of unemployed and increasingly frustrated men and women at home, suffering the disruptive social, environmental and economic impact of the oil industry in their backyards. Their embrace of an Ijaw nationalist discourse through their creation of an Ijaw nationalist organisation, the Ijaw National Congress, in 1991, was in part an attempt to seek relevance in the face of an increasingly threatening class of dispossessed and at the same time to vie for more political units (states and LGAs) and a revision of the revenue-sharing formula in favour of “derivation”. This was in line with the traditional motivations of Ijaw political elites and other ethnic entrepreneurs in Nigeria.
- 34 Mustapha and Osaghae have rightly argued that the Ijaw, like other minority groups, have shirked off the “minority” paraphernalia in order to present themselves as “ethnic nationalities” in their own right, able and willing to re-negotiate the terms of their inclusion within the Nigerian state. It is worth noting that Ijaw nationalism, articulated as a call for the recognition of rights as an “ethnic nationality”—“no longer as a minority”—and as the “fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria”, and as a call for a sovereign national conference, is being spearheaded by two distinct political constituencies. It is significant that two principle umbrella organisations, and not one as in the case of the Ogoni, emerged to take forward the struggle: the Ijaw National Congress and the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND) which eventually became absorbed within the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). Although linked, MOSIEND/IYC and the INC have

distinct social origins: the latter is an organisation bringing together past, present and would-be political heavyweights, whilst the former at its outset, represented those who challenge the manner in which members of the Ijaw political class to date, have behaved.

Kolo Creek

Source: SPDC.

Identity-Based Cleavages in Ogbia—An Historical Perspective

- 35 Ogbia is situated in a fresh-water inland site in the south-eastern part of Bayelsa state (see map, p. 471), to the North of Nembe, and to the north of which lies a large expanse of forest. Prior to the building of the Ogbia-Yenagoa road, this forest separated Ogbia from much of the northern and central parts of the Delta. Under the Eastern Regional Government after 1955, Ogbia became a County Council of Brass Division, and acquired its own first-class chieftaincy stool under the newly established Eastern Regional House of Chiefs and Traditional Rulers. It was only in 1991, after another federally inspired state-creation exercise, that Ogbia became a separate LGA, one of eight in Bayelsa state.
- 36 Ogbia is home to speakers in three language groups which linguistically are classified as Edo, i.e. more akin to the languages of Benin than any of those within the Ijo cluster. Ogbia has nevertheless produced an important batch of nationally renowned political leaders who have championed an Ijaw nationalist cause. Melford Okilo, from Amakalakala in Ogbia, became MP for Brass South in the National Assembly under the Niger Delta Congress party banner during the First Republic and later the first civilian governor of Rivers state (1979-1983) and senator for Brass Senatorial District (1999-2003). Oronto Nantie Douglas, human rights lawyer and founding member of the Ijaw Youth Council along with a number of Niger Delta-wide civil society organisations, is also from Ogbia. The political relevance of Ogbia sons may not be unrelated to the fact that Ogbia is also home to Oloibiri, where oil in commercial quantities was first struck in 1956. Although Oloibiri's oil wells have since dried up, oil production activity continues in the "Kolo creek" area of Ogbia.

Emergent Ogbia and Ijaw Identities

- 37 The trans-Atlantic slave trade and subsequently the palm-oil trade which developed first with the eastern Ijaw city state traders playing a prominent role as intermediaries between European merchants and palm cutters, created the context within which residents of today's Ogbia LGA established contacts with each other and with "others" throughout the Niger Delta and beyond. Prior to the slave trade and during the Atlantic slave trade, they supplied the neighbouring slave-trading city state of Brass (today known as Nembe) with food products in exchange for salt-water fish. The slave trade created some opportunities for those geographically close to Brass (Nembe) to establish themselves as agents, whilst the palm product trade saw the expansion of production and processing of palm products beyond domestic consumption throughout Ogbia. Although the economic and social transformations occasioned by the development of the palm product trade affected communities along the three creeks in Ogbia, the establishment of the colonial administrative apparatus and the development of missionary culture tended to benefit communities which were culturally and geographically closer to Brass (Nembe), notably descendants of the Olei/Oloi group in and around Oloibiri creek (Amakalakala, Okoroba/Okoroma) and not Kolo and Anyama.

- 38 There are a number of conflicting accounts of the origins of the people of Ogbia, a diverse mixture of Edo-speaking peoples whose languages are broadly mutually intelligible, although dissimilar. On the one side are those who claim that Ogbia emerged after multiple migrations by communities into the area from the 15th century onwards, each of which established distinct groups of settlements. One such settlement was established by descendants of a person known by the name of Igbeyan who came from Benin and founded five distinct groups of settlements¹³. The opposing view denies the existence of any such eponymous ancestor and by extension the existence of an Ogbia (a derivative of Igbeyan) people per se. Instead, they refer to descendents of Olei, the founder of Oloibiri, whose descendants migrated from Benin, founded Nembe and moved on to establish Oloibiri, and whose vassals established settlements throughout what is today considered as Ogbia, killing off any other groups they encountered. The Oloibiri group, with close connections to Nembe, argues that the name Ogbia is in fact a 1940s intellectual modification of *Ogbeyan*, the detrimental term used by the Nembe to describe their neighbours across the water: “those people who throw sticks and stones and are always fighting”¹⁴. The early contact between Nembe, European traders and later colonial administrators, and the use of Nembe versions of events in colonial texts and administrative practice into the area from the 15th century onwards, each of which established particularly outside Ogbia.
- 39 The first Ogbia warrant or court chief was from Oloibiri. Chief Apata, who was the father of G. I. Amangala and other compound chiefs from Oloibiri itself, took it in turns to be represented at the Native Court¹⁵. Church Mission Society (CMS) mission culture, and the pervasive influence of Nembe speakers within it, also did little to endear many Ogbia residents outside the Oloibiri axis to CMS Christianity, which was widely associated with Nembe expansionism.

A History of Ijaw Nationalism in Ogbia

- 40 Ogbia is undeniably inhabited by people of diverse origins, whether or not they were there subsequent to or prior to the arrival of the descendants of Olei. The fierceness of the debates over the history does not stem simply from the desire of lay historians to split hairs over details about the past, but from the importance of “historical facts” in determining how patronage and the material and social opportunities emanating from it are shared between those who can lay claim to longevity of stay or status ascendancy. Promoters of the Oloibiri-centred version of events have a heavy stake in ensuring that Oloibiri enjoys continued headship status over the rest of Ogbia. In 1955, a first-class stool, known as the Ogbanobhan of Ogbia, was created by the Eastern Regional Government within the newly created Eastern Regional Council of Chiefs and Traditional Rulers. Rev G. I. Amangala, a native of Oloibiri and author of the first “Ijaw history” written by an “Ijaw” entitled *A Short History of the Ijaw* (Amangala 1939) became the Ogbanabhan. This was after years of campaigning for the creation of such a paramount ruler position for the whole of Ogbia and a single Native Court through the Ogbia Brotherhood, the socio-cultural/political organisation he founded in the 1940s and to which all Ogbia sons ostensibly belong.
- 41 Amangala’s aspirations were for an Ogbia-centred political identity, rather than an exclusively Oloibiri one, which could fit into a broader pan-Ijaw identity. His Oloibiri origins, however, meant that his project, irrespective of its pan-Ogbia and pan-Ijaw leanings, bore the hallmarks of an Oloibiri-centred political project. Amangala himself played a formidable role in claiming an Ijaw identity for the Ogbia, whilst at the same

time forging an Ogbia identity itself. Prior to this, there had been very little of a cohesive Ogbia identity to speak of. Amangala's dual enterprise—creating a strong Ijaw identity rooted in a strong Ogbia identity—resonates with the enterprise of today's pan-Ijaw nationalist umbrella organisations, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and Ijaw National Congress (INC), for whom forging a strong Ijaw political identity is predicated upon forging strong “clan” identities.

The Politics of Oil and Oloibiri

- 42 In 1956, some four years before political independence was officially granted to Nigeria, petroleum “in commercial quantities” was discovered in the town of Otuogidi, in Oloibiri division. The creation of the position of Ogbanobhan as a first-class chieftaincy stool recognised by the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC)-led Eastern Regional Government, the discovery of petroleum in the same year and the increasing political power of the Ogbia Brotherhood both inside and outside Ogbia, all concentrated around the Oloibiri axis, compounded already existing fissures within Ogbia. Support for, or antagonism to, the NCNC was a major fault line throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Although the existence of NCNC party stalwarts turned some villages pro-NCNC, the majority of Ogbia, particularly outside the Oloibiri axis, was anti-NCNC. The emergence of an Ogbia son, Melford Okilo, as the Niger Delta Congress party candidate and later as MP for Brass district in 1959, provided a figure around which the anti-Igbo/anti-NCNC camp in Ogbia could rally. Okilo was from Amakalakala, a village not too far from Oloibiri, but which subsequently became a bastion of opposition to Oloibiri's dominance. The reprisals from which Ogbia as a whole suffered after Okilo's electoral victory, in terms of losses of patronage and the denial of access to Eastern Regional Government funds, as the ruling NCNC party sought to recover its lost seat, set the stage for the realignment of political forces during the Biafran War (1967-1970), which also saw villages divided along pro-Biafra and anti-Biafra lines, with former NCNC supporters falling within the pro-Biafra camp. The reprisals against Biafra supporters after the war throughout the 1970s, as elsewhere in the Delta, were severe in Ogbia where village-level extra-judicial killings took place.
- 43 In 1967, Alfred Diète Spiff, a native of Twon Brass and Nembe, was appointed military governor of the newly created Rivers state, a post which he held until 1975. This meant that the pro-Nembe Oloibiri axis within Ogbia, continued to be the recipients of state patronage at a time when petroleum receipts from Oloibiri were increasing and when the derivation formula was sufficiently high to work in favour of the oil-producing states. In 1971, 45% of onshore oil rents and royalties were retained in the states where they came from. Rivers state at the time received 17.1% of all oil revenues whilst Bendel received 23.7% (Forrest 1995). By the time civilian rule had returned and Melford Okilo was elected governor of Rivers state in 1979, the derivation payments to oil-producing states had significantly declined. Reforms introduced in 1975 ensured that the derivation principle applied to only 20% of all oil revenues (Forrest 1995; Naanen 1995). From 1976 onwards “derivation” was replaced by full fiscal centralisation. In 1981, a special fund was established replacing derivation, which gave oil-producing states the equivalent of 2% of the share of federally collected funds allocated to all states of the Federation. This was to be divided between them on the basis of derivation (Oyovbaire 1985). With this reduction in the disposable income of Rivers state, Ogbia saw a dramatic shift in political power away from the Oloibiri axis. Melford Okilo, through his support for infrastructural projects in Ogbia, deliberately sited outside Oloibiri, the most notable of which was the

creation of Ogbia town itself, further served to consolidate Oloibiri's decline. In 1971, petroleum was discovered in other parts of Ogbia, notably in what became known as the Kolo Creek area, which fell within the former Kolo/Emeyal Native Court and clan area. Petroleum was also discovered in parts of Anyama, the site of one of the former Anyama Native Court Areas. These oil finds dented the power that Oloibiri had once enjoyed.

Uprisings in Kolo Creek
A Background to Shell in Kolo Creek

- 44 Since 1971, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the operating partner in one of many joint-venture oil and gas production projects in Nigeria, has been extracting light crude oil from wells in three villages in Ogbia¹⁶: Elebele, Imiringi and Otusega, known in Shell-speak as "Kolo Creek" or Area A of SPDC's Eastern Division. Imiringi is the site of twelve oil wells or "locations", a flow station (where oil, water and sand are separated out and gas is burnt off) and a helicopter pad shared with Otusega, which has five oil wells, one gas field and one manifold (where all pipelines transporting crude oil meet). Otusega is also the site of SPDC's local offices and accommodation (otherwise known as Shell camp). Elebele contains eleven oil wells¹⁷. The designation "Kolo Creek" did not exist prior to the advent of oil production. A much older Kolo/Emeyal clan area existed, covering an area which extended beyond the present Kolo Creek. The three villages are located next to each other, with Elebele in the extreme east, Imiringi in the middle and Otusega to the west. They are bordered on their western flank by the non oil-producing village of Emeyal, which lies to the west of Elebele, and, on their eastern flank, by the non oil-producing village of Oruma. These neighbouring villages are described in Ogbia as non oil-producing because they do not contain oil wells, although the use of lateral drilling techniques could mean that oil is extracted from Oruma and Emeyal lands, although pumped through wells in the neighbouring villages. To the south of Otusega lies Edepie, in Yenagoa LGA, whilst to the south of Elebele, along the route to Yenagoa, lies Okaka. Each village is divided into compounds, generally established by descendants of the founder of the village. Imiringi has eleven compounds, Otusega has ten and Elebele, seven. In 2002, three new compounds were created in Elebele. The official reason given was that the existing compounds were so big that "the compound chief was unable to control the compound again"¹⁸. Compounds are to oil companies what LGAs and states are to the federal government. They are all units for the distribution of oil-related goods.
- 45 The environmental impact of oil production and exploration in Nigeria has been extensively covered elsewhere (Frynas 2001; Hutchful 1998). Opinions differ about the precise contribution of oil production alone to environmental degradation in the Delta. While some authors (Ashton-Jones 1998) cite problematic farming and fishing methods, there is a general consensus that environmentally irresponsible practices by oil companies and the prevalence of faulty or obsolete machinery in the absence of a sufficiently robust and effective federal regulatory apparatus, have contributed to the environmental pollution problems which prevail in the ecologically diverse and fragile Niger Delta region. Since the mid-to-late 1990s, oil companies, spearheaded largely by Shell, have shown higher levels of public commitment to improving their environmental record. Yet the social disruption caused by the introduction of a capital but not labour-intensive industry in the midst of a predominantly subsistence rural economy with some localised domestic (Niger Delta) markets, has been the background against which increasing number of conflicts between oil companies and their hosts have taken place. Frynas (2001) has documented the difficulties encountered by the victims of oil-related

pollution (notably spillages) who have tried to legally oblige oil companies to adequately compensate them for oil-related damages. In line with Frynas' thesis, it is argued here that the full effects of the cumulative impact of environmental problems were felt only by the end of the 1980s. This was a period when a generalised feeling of "enough is enough" on the part of oil-producing communities, contributed to unleashing the wave of protests during which oil companies' facilities were directly targeted. This period also coincided with the loss of the derivation principle, a general economic crisis, high levels of inflation and rising unemployment, all at time when federal and state governments were unable to make good commitments to investment in welfare spending (health and education).

- 46 Although the above narrative, which has gained the status of an "official" discourse to explain the plight of people in the Delta, emphasises the generally negative impact of oil production on the livelihoods of those in oil-producing communities, it should neither be presumed, relative to (often neighbouring) non oil-producing communities, that the livelihoods and security of "oil producers" have only been negatively affected nor that the burden of oil-induced disruption has been uniformly shared by all social groups. Indeed, the oil production and exploration processes themselves have engendered high levels of social differentiation, enriching some whilst impoverishing others both materially and politically.

The Changing Politics of Community

- 47 Gerd Bauman (1996) suggests that the term "community" softens the edges of what might otherwise be perceived as problematic racial or ethnic categories. It gives the semblance of an unthreatening "natural" assemblage of people in which authority is fixed and uncontested. References to the Asian "community" or the Afro-Caribbean "community" tend to ring much less problematically than would references to "Asians, Afro-Caribbeans or Blacks". "Community" is a dishonest word... Ethnic minorities are called "communities" either because it makes them feel better, or because it makes the white majority feel more secure... Yet the word retains connotations of interpersonal warmth, shared interest and loyalty (Bauman 1996). Dominic Bryan (2000) has also observed that the mobilisation of the language of "community" can mask what he terms "fascist" tendencies which seek to restrict the freedom of "community members" to dissent or diverge from what is presented as being in the interests of the community¹⁹.
- 48 Politics in the Delta is replete with references to "community". Federal government-speak refers to "oil-producing communities", a nebulous category which extends beyond the boundaries of the "host communities" as defined by Shell, to include all the people living in states that are predominantly oil producing. Since the introduction of federal government directives for the establishment of "Community Development Committees" (CDCs) in the late 1970s, community has come to replace the terms of "town" or "village" which were formerly more commonly used. Shell and other oil companies claim to operate in 1,500 "host communities"²⁰. The emphasis on "community assistance" and "community development" and improving "community relations" since the (late) 1990s within Shell, has also increased the political salience of the term. Those who benefit from the oil economy tend to be those deemed to "represent" the "community", who by virtue of their position within long-established institutions, notably the "Paramount Ruler" or "Council of Chiefs", or more recent creations such as the CDCs and the plethora of youth organisations (associations) and youth governments that have emerged, have access to networks within and around the oil industry itself. Yet what actually constitutes "the community" remains highly contested, particularly in the Delta, where belonging to a

“community” suggests the possibility of gaining access to oil company resources, given their emphasis on improving relations with “the community”.

Changing “*interlocuteurs valables*”—The Rise of the CDC

- 49 In 1967 Jones argued that the emergence of hereditary monarchs and highly developed city states in what were formerly eastern delta fishing villages stemmed in large part from the “gaze” of the European merchant trader (Jones 1989)²¹. The Atlantic slave trade emboldened the status and authority of the institution of chieftaincy, as it conferred monetary power and created an institutional framework within which power was necessarily structured around a central figure which could guarantee the repayment of goods held in trust by European merchants and be rewarded through forms of commission or *comey*. Kings, dukes and regents emerged, albeit sometimes with equivalent local names. In a similar way, the power of the CDC chairman and CDC post holders has been emboldened by the “gaze” of oil companies, for whom they have become the first point of contact for questions relating to “community assistance” and, since the late 1990s, “community development”. If Shell wants to establish a licence to operate in a given area, “it is the CDC chairman and his cabinet who would discuss. [. . .] The best thing to get to the town is to see the CDC chairman, it will be later that you see the Council of Chiefs [. . .] but when the oil companies were not there, nobody cares about them”²².
- 50 Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Shell tended to work directly with “traditional rulers” or “paramount rulers”, using them as vehicles to “pacify” potential opposition at the village level. Informants generally explain the ease with which “paramount rulers” dealt directly with the oil companies and captured related material benefits for so long by the low levels of “awareness” or “exposure” and the lack of education amongst the general population. This allowed them to be generally accepting of Shell’s operating practices, making few demands. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, emboldened by the increasing interest shown by returning elite groups of men and women, victims of state retrenchment policies in the wake of structural adjustment, who sought chieftaincy positions as a means of also gaining access to oil-based patronage at the village level, Councils of Chiefs, began to demand the right to “represent” the community in its dealings with the oil companies. Chiefs effectively wanted to ensure themselves a share in the material benefits which up until then had accrued to the Paramount Chiefs alone. A partnership subsequently developed in Ogbia between the Council of Chiefs and Elders and the CDCs of Kolo Creek, which throughout the 1980s and particularly 1990s had seen their relevance as an intermediary body increase.
- 51 In 1978 CDCs were established in the light of the federally inspired programme of local government reform, as representative institutions at the village/town level and as the principle vehicles through which development initiatives were to be co-ordinated. In many cases, they replaced earlier models of youth organisation of the *Ogbogokum* (“errand boy”) type which were essentially answerable to the Council of Chiefs, and continued to work hand in hand with the existing village-level government structures. In Elebele no distinction is made between the CDC and earlier forms of youth organisation. Each compound is represented on the committee, which has its own executive and chairman. Increasingly, at least to “outsiders” in Otusega, the CDC and Council of Chiefs and Elders attempt to create the impression of a “united front”. They claim that “the CDC is the watchdog of the community from day to day. They are like the labourers. They enforce the will of the Council of Chiefs and Elders. The Council of Chiefs and Elders give their

backing and decide on their functions. It is an alliance. They engage in peaceful demonstrations and letter writing. The CDC people see the elders and come to discuss”²³.

- 52 In non oil-producing communities, elections to CDC positions have remained largely unpoliticised, whilst in oil-producing communities, where elections are hotly contested affairs, attempts have been made by the Councils of Chiefs and Elders to deliberately avoid them, particularly where CDCs have become powerful enough to directly challenge the authority of “traditional” institutions such as the Chiefs Council and the Paramount rulership. Since 1990 and in the light of changes in oil companies’ approaches to “community relations”, CDCs have become important interlocutors in their own right which deal directly with oil companies. CDC positions have therefore become important sites of accumulation and are highly fought over, determining access to employment opportunities as well as a share in oil-related community compensation. In Elebele and Otuasega, there have been attempts to strictly control the appointment of CDC post holders with nominations by the Chiefs Council rather than by open elections.
- 53 The diktat of the “community” also prevents individual families who are most affected by oil spills or land acquisitions from having a say in the way compensation payments are distributed. When land is acquired for the sinking of a well, “compensation” or “public relations” payments are made in the form of a salary equivalent to that of a casual labourer over a given period. The CDC is directly involved in establishing the nature and the level of compensation to be paid, and how it is to be distributed. The family upon whose land the well is to be sunk often receives one third of the compensation whilst the remaining two thirds are distributed to the “community” by the CDC and the Council of Chiefs and Elders. If compensation in the form of employment is to be granted for acquired communal lands, the community as a whole benefits. This still allows members of the CDC and Council of Chiefs to gain a greater share. In the case of Imiringi where there are eleven compounds, out of a total of twenty jobs, “each compound may receive one, the remainder is divided up between the Council of Chiefs and the CDC members”²⁴. In Elebele, one former third-class chief was severely sanctioned because he was accused of having signed papers with a claims agent to authorise the sharing of compensation money between family members after the case went to court. No money was given to CDC members or to the youth organisations. He was subsequently dethroned (lost his chief status) because he allegedly signed the papers without CDC members or youths being present, a claim which he denies²⁵.
- 54 The CDC chairman is not an officially remunerated post, but the post holder through his direct access to Shell’s Community Liaison Officer (CLO) based in Kolo Creek and Community Development Advisors based in Port Harcourt, has unhindered access to unofficial channels for accumulation. The CDC chairman plays the role of gatekeeper, determining the access of would-be oil servicing company contractors and job seekers to the oil company, given the critical role the CDC plays today in securing the company’s licence to operate. The CDC chairman’s post has become much sought after, particularly by young male graduates, or those with some level of higher education who have also gained a reputation in village-level youth politics. Indeed leadership of youth organisations is seen as a stepping-stone to eventual CDC chairmanship and, in some cases, political office²⁶. Leaders of youth organisations tend to cultivate their relationships with the oil company field representatives with a view to securing both short- and medium-term goals. The CDC chairman of Elebele in 2002 had been a youth

leader for four years before becoming CDC chairman, during which time he cultivated a close relationship with Shell's CLOs. Today these contacts give him the clout as CDC chairman to mobilise young men when necessary to "descend on Shell offices in Imiringi [. . .], make noise and bring pressure to bear on the CLO" to extract social provisions²⁷.

- 55 Women are not represented on any of the community decision-making bodies which determine access to compensation and other oil-related goods from Shell. Even when women have tried to use men as intermediaries to submit proposals to Shell, these proposals have remained in the pipeline but have never been implemented. Since the introduction of the Land Use Act in 1978, compensation is granted to those whose land is acquired or disturbed by oil production but only for economic crops or trees lost. Women tend to own the farms, i.e. the crops, even if they do not own the land upon which the crops are farmed. However, they rarely receive compensation for economic crops lost. If they do, it is generally only for marginal sums especially because the "community" insists on receiving two thirds of the compensation paid where individual farms or property are concerned²⁸. Prior to the general strike, social provision for women from Shell was minimal and, where at all existent, was channelled through organs like the Elebele Women's Co-operative Society. The only women who could participate in the co-operatives were "land owners", which in Shell speak means being from land upon which Shell's oil locations are sited. Support to these co-operatives is sporadic and inconsistent and dependent on the good will of the staff appointed as outreach co-ordinators. An evaluation by one member of the women's co-operative concluded that "after 15 years in existence, Shell has not done as much as one machete, one hoe, one wheel barrow, one spade and a small amount of fertilizer". This was for a group of ten people in the co-operative who were beneficiaries of loans of N 5,000 (euros38) per woman—a total of N 50,000 for the whole group²⁹.

ELIMOTU—An Uprising of Sorts

- 56 In August 1998, Maxwell Oko, an undergraduate student in Architecture at the Rivers state University of Science and Technology and active member of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), who had lived for most of his life in Port Harcourt in Rivers state, left university half way through his course to "return" home to Otuasega, in order to "mobilise his people in Otuasega" and bring pressure to bear on Shell. According to Oko, "undergrads had status amongst the people who would listen to them... [we] wanted to make Shell bring basic benefits to the community as it had done in other communities... [there was] 'nothing, no roads, electricity or water'"³⁰. After several unsuccessful meetings with Shell's CLOs, Shell's reluctance to listen encouraged Maxwell and others from neighbouring Elebele and Imiringi to come together to present Shell with a joint proposal. ELIMOTU was born, the name taken from the first letters of the names of each village: EL-ebele, IM-iringi, and OTU-asega. A co-ordinating committee was established with Maxwell Oko as the committee chairman. Monday Eribor, also from Otuasega, was another ELIMOTU committee member who had also left university before graduating and had a similar activist background but was particularly rooted in Ogbia-wide activism and linked to similar movements throughout the Delta. His early activism began with MORETO (Movement for Reparations to Ogbia), of which he was a founding member alongside IYC founder Oronto Douglas. Eribor also participated in the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) campaign (made famous by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa) in the early to mid-1990s³¹. The preponderance of university-educated men

amongst the ELIMOTU leadership is said to have frightened off many lesser-educated young men in Kolo Creek who feared a divergence of interests³².

- 57 At a meeting in Imiringi town hall in October 1998, a decision was taken to organise a “general strike”. A joint communiqué was signed between the representatives of the Council of Chiefs and Elders and the CDC and Youth Body of all three villages, signalling their intention to engage collectively in “peaceful protests”. “The morning before [the general strike] everyone [Shell staff] was asked to come out of their rooms and sit outside. The caterers and cooks came out and locked rooms. The Engineers gave us two vehicles. We turned off the [gas] flare and locked the flow of oil. We went on hunger strike until afternoon. Everybody was out of the premises so there was nothing to destroy”³³.
- 58 During the general strike of October 1998 the flow station was shut down, disrupting Shell’s activities for one week. A process of dialogue was initiated by the CDC chairman, but few immediate concrete benefits were seen. Unlike in similar demonstrations throughout the Delta (Umuechem and Ogoni earlier in the 1990s), the response of the state security forces to the general strike was not coercive. Colonel Obi, the then military administrator in Bayelsa, even participated in the dialogue with the oil companies that followed the general strike. Things took a dramatically different turn some three months later, after the Kaiama Declaration of December 1998. This was the result of years of disparate youth protests throughout the Niger Delta and organised by a small group of mainly Ijaw environmental rights activists associated with ERA (Environmental Rights Action, Friends of the Earth Nigeria). The all-Ijaw youth meeting in Kaiama town, in the Kolokuma-Opokuma LGA north of Bayelsa state, which was attended by representatives of forty Ijaw clans throughout the Niger Delta and beyond, gave birth to the Ijaw Youth Council and a declaration containing a list of ultimatums to the Nigerian government and the oil companies, with respect to political and fiscal autonomy (resource control), cleaning up environmental pollution, and the provision of jobs and sustainable livelihoods for the Ijaw. The aftermath of violence and the heavy-handedness of the state security forces which it unleashed, particularly in and around Yenagoa, created chaos in Bayelsa for much of 1999. The governorship elections which had been scheduled to take place (since) the previous year, had to be halted for three months because of the unrest. The presidential elections of May 1999 were also shrouded in violence.
- 59 Shell was forced to halt its operations in the Kolo Creek area for one year, and only resumed activities in October 1999. Throughout Shell’s absence, the process of dialogue that had been initiated with ELIMOTU after the general strike in October 1998, continued. In fact, the Kaiama Declaration gave ELIMOTU’s campaign greater political clout and made Shell more amenable to ELIMOTU’s demands. Throughout the year of Shell’s absence and somewhat in contradiction with the precepts of Operation Climate Change, one of five ultimatums given during the Kaiama Declaration, which threatened to force all oil companies to withdraw from the Niger Delta pending the resolution of the resource control issue, ELIMOTU activists pursued a strategy of “surveillance” guarding Shell’s locations. “Because this is our area, we don’t want to destroy [. . .]. That would make matters worse.” Instead, the uprising of 1998 transformed itself into a security outfit, guarding Shell’s assets in such a way as to permit their return in October 1999. ELIMOTU activists were subsequently to ask to be compensated for security services rendered.
- 60 In October 1999, a meeting once again took place between Shell executives and the coordinating committee of ELIMOTU in Imiringi Town Hall. The meeting was also attended by

a number of Bayelsa state government dignitaries, the paramount chiefs of each of the villages concerned and representatives of Shell's executive in Port Harcourt. All participants witnessed the signing of an agreement between Shell and ELIMOTU in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) detailing the benefits which would accrue to the community once Shell resumed work.

- 61 Multiple accounts abound as to whether Shell offered N 22.8 million, or whether a request for this amount was made by ELIMOTU but declined by Shell. Whichever version of events is correct, the deputy governor himself intervened to request that 51 jobs (17 per community), whether real or fictitious, be created. In addition, 20 items were listed as requests from ELIMOTU to Shell, amongst which were demands for training and skills acquisition, one vehicle, a hospital and a health centre, a road, a water system and a training programme for drivers from the each of the communities. ELIMOTU also made requests for villages outside the immediate Kolo Creek area. These were declined. In total only six of the requests made were actually accepted³⁴.
- 62 Problems erupted after the agreement had been signed over who was to benefit from the "17 employment chances" per village, whether it was to be the committed ELIMOTU activists who personally carried out the surveillance work or the wider "community" as represented by its governing bodies and those whom it deemed eligible for the "job opportunities" in question. The Council of Chiefs and other "free-riding" members of the community felt that although ELIMOTU members had carried out the "surveillance" (read security) work, the "community's name" had been used in vain to give political legitimacy to ELIMOTU's actions. For this reason they felt that ELIMOTU members could not justifiably "chop alone".
- 63 A struggle ensued in each of the three villages. In Imiringi, on 24 December 1999, a young man, Mr Otobu, was fatally shot in the head. Maxwell Oko, who had subsequently emerged as the IYC's Central Zone chairman (representing and organising IYC activities in Bayelsa state), Monday Eribor and other members of the ELIMOTU co-ordinating committee, were subsequently banished from Otuasega village, and the houses of ELIMOTU members burnt down. In Otuasega, families were divided down the middle. The family members of those closely associated with ELIMOTU were also forced to leave the village and to reside in neighbouring Imiringi. By the end of 2002, although some sort of reconciliation was underway to reintegrate those excluded back into the community, five court cases were still pending over rights to employment chances in recompense for surveillance services rendered. Maxwell Oko and other ELIMOTU members from Otuasega were defended in court by the solicitors' firm of Uche Onyeagucha (Chinda and Chinda Esquire, Port Harcourt), now a member of the House of Representatives for Imo state since the May 2003 elections but then lawyer and environmental rights activist with ERA (Environmental Rights Action), the NGO out of which the IYC emerged.
- 64 In Elebele, the strong-arm tactics of the paramount ruler and the Council of Chiefs and Elders, managed to keep community conflict to a minimum. The Council of Chiefs and the CDC decided how each of the 17 "employment chances" were to be distributed. They were eventually made to rotate between each of the compounds so that, every two months, a new set of young men would benefit from "salaries" which were simply shared out. However, those who were actually involved in the surveillance work received the equivalent of two employment chances for every one shared between the other fortunate community members, many of whom were elders, compound chiefs and deputy chiefs. In

Otuasega, because of the cases of litigation that followed, no more than six boys in “the community” became recipients of the “employment chances”, whilst the remainder were divided between ELIMOTU members, possibly as a result of the legal support they enjoyed.

- 65 In spite of the conflicts that it brought to the surface, the ELIMOTU episode meant that some of the social amenities which groups in the three villages had been fighting for, began to be provided. In Elebele, after October 1999, an MOU was signed guaranteeing Shell’s investment in one community project per year, in addition to the 17 “employment chances”. Unlike neighbouring non oil-producing communities which rely on the inconsistent and often non-existent electricity supplied by the gas turbine, Elebele, since the general strike, has also been receiving electricity via Shell, albeit at “half-current”. Women also began to receive much greater attention through Shell’s new outreach programmes, notably the Women’s Action Committee (WAC), whose specific remit was to build resource training centres for women in Kolo Creek and beyond (similar WAC initiatives were initiated by Shell in other “host communities”, notably in Oporoma, Southern Ijaw LGA). This seeming turnaround in Shell’s approach to community development in which it now believes it has a role to play after having spent decades arguing that social investment was the responsibility of the Nigerian government, needs to be read against the background of Shell’s continued recourse to the coercive apparatus of the state and to ad-hoc measures intended to disorganise local protests when community demands appear to be overwhelming.

Ijaw Nationalism and ELIMOTU

- 66 ELIMOTU is often heralded as the “earliest of all IYC movements”³⁵. In the words of Oronto Douglas, “it was also amongst the ‘militant organisations’ that formed COOL (Committee of Organizational Leaders), a central policy-making body within the IYC”. The link between the IYC and ELIMOTU as reflected in the leadership of Maxwell Oko, chairman of the IYC Central Zone and chairman of the organizing committee of ELIMOTU, temporarily strengthened the political clout of hitherto excluded groups in Kolo Creek, notably university graduates and university drop-outs allied to young men with limited formal education who had remained in the village but who were also excluded from political and therefore economic power at a village level. ELIMOTU was to some extent an alliance of a cross section of interest groups. This alliance came apart as soon as the political tussles arose over how material benefits were to be shared. The nasty taste that the ELIMOTU experience has left in the mouths of those who sought to hang on to their role of representing “the community” and of others who, in spite of ELIMOTU’s efforts, continued to remain on the margins of political power at the village level, suggests that statements portraying ELIMOTU as a popular community uprising need to be qualified. The ELIMOTU experience reflected underlying antagonisms between competing generations and classes within the three villages.
- 67 The links between the IYC and ELIMOTU meant that the IYC also came to be associated with a group that was politically “excluded” from some villages and highly criticised in others. One informant noted that “Imiringi has not been part of that [the IYC]. It is dominated by IZONS [. . .] because they have their man at the top, as the governor³⁶ [. . .] many of these formations have been politicised, and many people go into these things for selfish basis [. . .] you see someone leading you, but after some time, when he got something, some dollars from all these oil companies, he step aside and feed himself”. Others blamed the IYC for the conflict that arose between ELIMOTU activists and others in the villages.

- 68 In spite of the association in people's minds of ELIMOTU with the IYC, in many ways ELIMOTU marked a departure from the IYC's philosophy which had been inspired by organisations like MORETO, the Movement for Reparations to Ogbia, founded in 1993 by Oronto Douglas and friends in order to enable "oil-producing communities" as a whole, rather than host communities alone, to be at the forefront of the struggle. Here "oil-producing community" refers to a group broader than the locality from which oil is extracted, but the wider community within which the "host" community is situated. MORETO was concerned with "reparations" for the whole of Ogbia in the light of Oloibiri's fate, an area devastated after years of oil production, then abandoned when the wells ran dry in the 1970s³⁷.
- 69 Members of ELIMOTU's executive committee are explicit about the need to distinguish between oil-producing and non oil-producing communities, because of the manner in which government officials from non oil-producing parts of the state have been able to use their authority to capture oil rents. Federal initiatives intended to alleviate oil induced disruptions, through ministerial and commissioner appointments or through its sponsored Niger Delta development initiatives like OMPADEC (Oil and Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission) and more recently the NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission), established in 1999, have tended to benefit parts of the state where oil is not drilled, like the Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA, but not the Kolo Creek area itself, because of the prevalence of highly placed politicians from these areas³⁸.
- 70 There is, therefore, an inherent tension within Ijaw nationalism as advocated by men like Maxwell Oko, who represents a Kolo Creek-centred aspiration (albeit one which is opposed to serve the interests of established elites within Kolo Creek), and the Ijaw nationalism advocated by men like Oronto Douglas, who is not from an oil-producing part of Ogbia and whose MORETO trajectory sets the tone for his Ijaw nationalism. For Douglas, the bulk of Nigeria's petroleum resources are found in "Ijaw land"; oil "belongs" to all Ijaw. He and others have tried to argue that all members of the Ijaw nation as a whole are "oil producers", as have those in Kolokuma/Opokuma, who, in spite of the absence of oil, still see and feel the effects of gas flaring and pollution³⁹. The association of pan-ethnic Ijaw nationalism historically with a particular geographical and political axis (Nembe-Oloibiri) in Ogbia, as evidenced by the work of G. I. Amangala, writer of the first published work by an Ijaw on Ijaw identity, founder of the Ogbia brotherhood, first Ogbanobhan of Ogbia, and a native of Oloibiri, may also explain why Kolo Creek residents have been reluctant to take up the pan-Ijaw ethnic banner.

Changing Identities in Kolo Creek

- 71 The ELIMOTU episode highlighted inter-class and inter-generational cleavages within and between each of the Kolo Creek villages. It also consolidated relationships between each of the three villages signalling the coming of age of a distinct Kolo Creek identity, whose emergence was facilitated by successive years of oil production activity, consolidated by the establishment of a link road in 1997.
- 72 Before oil arrived in 1971-1972, relationships between the three villages and their neighbours were based on "inter-marriage, wrestling and football". In spite of the emergence of a more cohesive Kolo Creek identity, when competition for jobs and oil-related benefits is acute, village identities have tended to supersede the three-village "host community" or "landlord" identities. There is a contested boundary between Otusega and Imiringi. The advent of oil production and exploration from 1971 onwards

led to a series of renewed disputes over land ownership (earlier boundary disputes had taken place in the 1960s) and court cases in 1974, 1975 and 1976, to establish which community was to be awarded compensation for any area and/or crops destroyed⁴⁰. In 1994-1995, Wilbros, a US company, began oil and gas pipeline construction in Otuasega and started paying casual labourers higher salaries than Shell and other oil servicing companies had been paying. Many from neighbouring Imiringi and Elebele flocked to Otuasega to seek work. Previously people could migrate between the three villages in search of work as long as good contacts were established with the site foreman. Once the stakes had been raised, Otuasega residents tried to stop Elebele and Imiringi boys from taking up potentially more lucrative jobs in their village; “it was then that people became enlightened and conscious that everyone should now begin to work within their territory”⁴¹. Today, casual workers are no longer allowed to migrate between the three villages in search of work. The same rules do not apply with respect to local contractors, particularly where pipeline security (surveillance) is concerned, as workers from the three villages are still known to work together⁴².

- 73 The oil-bearing nature of each of these villages has created a consciousness of difference between them and non oil-producing members of the same Kolo/Emeyal clan and the wider population of Ogbia. In 2000, when Governor Alamiyeseigha of Bayelsa state unilaterally created 24 new LGAs within the state, Kolo Creek LGA was amongst them. It was carved out of Ogbia LGA. All 24 LGAs, however, later had to be disbanded because they had not been approved by the National Assembly. They were replaced by caretaker committees responsible for overseeing their transition to “development centres”. Although now defunct, the “unofficial LGA” has left its imprint on the popular imagination of Kolo Creek residents and given them a foretaste of what it could mean to gain political recognition for the separate identity which oil has created. This identity is predicated on the need to restrict the flow of amenities to the communities in which oil locations are sited.
- 74 The advent of the oil economy has exacerbated already-existing divisions between Kolo Creek and its neighbours, dating back to the days of the Eastern Regional Government (1946-1966) and civil war (1967-1970) which divided an NCNC/Biafra-supporting Emeyal from an NDC-Nigerian government-supporting Imiringi⁴³. Attempts made to restrict the distribution of oil-related benefits to the Kolo Creek communities alone, and Shell’s reluctance to listen to requests for social investment from “non-host” communities have also created deep divisions between Kolo Creek and its neighbours. “These communities that don’t have oil, they hate us, we have a common boundary but there is oil here and not there. Imiringi and Emeyal hate each other”⁴⁴. In 1996, a violent conflict broke out between Emeyal and Imiringi which led to one fatality. The neighbouring communities of Otuasega and Oruma have also clashed to such an extent that each village no longer attends the wake-keepings of the other.
- 75 Throughout the Niger Delta, in areas where the geographical spread of oil production and exploration activities does not coincide with pre-existing community identities (village, clan, ethnic), oil has tended to fragment and undermine them, giving rise to new micro-identities. Neighbouring villages like Otuasega and Emeyal, both of which are part of the Emeyal “clan”, still take part in the same festivals (e.g. the the Kolo fishing festival) and participate in the same clan meetings. The Emeyal Council of Chiefs is held every month and often discusses the extension of Shell provisions to the rest of the clan. Although relations have been quite strained because of the unequal distribution of oil-related

benefits across the clan, some progress has been made through the intervention of the Ogbia Brotherhood. This has led to the extension of the link-road between Otuasega and neighbouring communities. Other benefits have, however, been withheld. This is not just the result of the “bad faith” of Shell, but also of protests mounted by residents of the oil-producing Kolo Creek communities themselves who argue that “Emeyal cannot expect to have that which people from an oil-producing community have fought for” and “which are even insufficient to meet their needs”. This is the background against which, in the event of oil spillages, residents of Kolo Creek using buckets and spades attempt to stem the spread of the oil spilled by blocking it off so that neighbouring communities will not be able to claim compensation for damage done to their lands and waterways ⁴⁵.

76 The schism between the Kolo Creek communities and the rest of Ogbia is also reflected in the politics of patronage at the level of the Ogbia local government, from which Kolo Creek residents tend to be excluded. As one informant noted, the Local Government Council “has done nothing for Elebele. Only during the time of the death of Melford Okilo’s mother, a casual (temporary) road which is being used until now” was built ⁴⁶. The LGA government chairman position is supposed to be “zoned”, alternating between the three districts in Ogbia (Kolo, Anyama and Oloibiri) for the duration of each electoral term. Prior to the 2002 dissolution of the Local Government Councils after the expiration of their mandates, the chairman of the LGA Council was from Emeyal. During his tenure, boreholes were sunk in Kolo (another village/town outside the Kolo Creek area) and Emeyal, but none were sunk in any of the three Kolo Creek villages.

77

78 ELIMOTU was an alliance of a cross section of classes, sexes and generations in the three villages, protesting at the lack of oil company investment in their social and economic development. It was linked to the IYC, through its leadership in the person of Maxwell Oko who also became chairman of the IYC central zone and organisationally because ELIMOTU was a member of an IYC central co-ordinating body. When the intra-village alliance broke down, ELIMOTU and the IYC were widely ostracised and rejected as part and parcel of the same disruptive self-serving movement. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that ELIMOTU was actually cut from a very different cloth to that of pan-Ijaw nationalism. It grew up in the Kolo Creek area, which was part of Kolo, whose elites had traditionally stood outside an Oloibiri-based, Nembe-centric Ijaw nationalism, inspired by the work of Rev G. I. Amangala. Secondly, ELIMOTU was in favour of the rights of oil-producing host communities, over and above the rights of non oil-producing communities, whether or not they were neighbouring members of the same clan or part of the wider Ogbia or wider pan-Ijaw ethnic group. ELIMOTU and MORETO, the movement for reparations to Ogbia, modelled along the lines of MOSOP, and founding pillar of youth-led Ijaw nationalism of the 1990s, were ideologically distinct currents.

79 The consequences of these observations are far reaching for how we interpret and understand the motivations behind people’s attachment to ethnic group or ethnic nationalism and even to nationalism per se. Ijaw nationalists in order to strengthen their political clout, model themselves on the national stage as Nigeria’s fourth largest ethnic group, a description that would by right entitle them to a greater share of the nation’s political and economic resources. They package the widespread unrest in the Niger Delta as the revolt of an Ijaw nation, sick and tired of suffering the negative effects of oil production, and of being excluded from having a say in how the billions of naira that

come from oil are distributed and spent. When viewed from a micro perspective, just as the alliances between members of this would-be pan-ethnic ensemble, this narrative however begins to break down.

- 80 Firstly, many of those engaged in the protests can be seen to display an ambiguous attachment to the idea of belonging to a pan-Ijaw group, preferring to reserve the benefits of protest to oil producers, and when push comes to shove, to members of their village, and when really under pressure to members of their “community”, family and so on. Secondly, protesters themselves, far from being simply antagonistic to the nefarious activities of oil companies, seek to impose themselves as alternative interlocutors, in order to capture the benefits of oil production and exploration for themselves as new “community representatives”. What the pan-Ijaw packaged narrative often misses out is the complexity of social struggles taking place within oil-producing communities themselves over what it means to belong to the community and who has the right to speak on its behalf. ELIMOTU members were challenging the rights of those who have traditionally served as interlocutors with Shell (Councils of Chiefs and community development committee representatives), suggesting a call for new sorts of accountability. They were at the same time challenging other contending social groups (less educated men in particular) who also seek to stake their claim to be alternative interlocutors. The preponderance of undergraduate or university drop-out men, and some women, in the leadership of ELIMOTU is evidence of this. ELIMOTU chose to “guard” instead of “destroying” Shell installations at a time when chaos reigned in Bayelsa and most oil companies had halted their operations. ELIMOTU’s decision to protect Shell facilities was also a means of containing what could have been a more violent response by young men in the three villages, whose access to decision making and direct contact with Shell had been repeatedly blocked by members of the Council of Chiefs and whose influence over the ELIMOTU executive was also limited.
- 81 These conclusions are not intended to suggest that community-wide protests against oil company excesses have not taken place, sometimes with positive and negative effects. However, to presume that everything that calls itself “youth led” or “community led” is the product of a “popular uprising” or that everything that packages itself as “anti-oil company” is purely descriptive, is to underestimate the ideological charge associated with these labels, which are part of a set of legitimising discourses used by Ijaw nationalists and other pan-ethnic entrepreneurs, seeking greater political relevance at the federal and state level within Nigeria.
- 82 The Kolo Creek experience and the disintegration and reformulation of cultural identities which have accompanied struggles over oil-related goods, also suggest that we interrogate more closely the cultural content of Ijaw nationalism in particular, with which Kolo Creek “nationalism” has at times allied itself, and nationalism more generally. Nigeria’s history, from the heady days of Nigerian nationalism in the 1940s and 1950s, to the ethnic nationalisms engendered by the never-ending saga of federally sanctioned state and local government creation which have continued up until the present, is littered with examples of convenient culturally grounded alliances. Indeed what appears to have taken place in Kolo Creek simply mirrors what has been taking place throughout Nigeria on a nationwide scale, ever since fiscal centralisation was introduced from 1967 onwards and ever since the federal government assumed responsibility for the distribution of oil-derived revenues to the different states of the Federation. The Nigerian state plays a critical role in creating incentives for new “ethnicities” to emerge around

existing or desired states and LGAs. With the withdrawal of the Nigerian state from its role in social welfare provision in the wake of economic crisis and the introduction of the SAP, oil companies have now replaced and surpassed the role of the state in many host communities. Their ability to distribute patronage in much the same way as the state has done has set in motion similar processes of ethnic imagining and the proliferation of new and useful micro-identities capable of securing access to oil-related whilst denying access to “others”.

83

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NOTES

1. There is a history of the conflict between the two communities that make up Nembe Local Government Area. Ogboloma or Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri. Ogboloma/biri is a

composite of Ogboloma and Ogbolomabiri. The use of either appellation is deemed to reflect a particular political bias in favour of one side or the other. Ogboloma is used by indigenes of Ogboloma/biri, whilst Ogbolomabiri is used by indigenes of Bassambiri. Both communities are separated by a small creek and a bridge which has been deliberately destroyed and left unrepaired for many years since 1991.

2. Human Rights Watch Reports, http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/nigeria2/P327_87031, and <http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/04/nigeria041003.htm>.

3. Chuks OKOCHA, Chuks AKUNNA & Lillian OKENWA, "Observers Note 'Significant Flaws' in Five States, TMG Name Rivers, Bayelsa, Enugu, Imo, C/River", *Thisday*, 22 April 2003.

4. Politicians and journalists frequently refer to the "youth restiveness" in the Niger Delta. The term suggests a reluctance to seriously investigate the causes of the problems in the region and to attribute blame to "youth" as a homogeneous antisocial category.

5. See text of "The Kaiama Declaration", p. 5.

6. Interview with Oronto Douglas, 29 March 2002, Port Harcourt. Douglas is an environmental and human rights lawyer, former member of the Ijaw Youth Council and leading thinker within contemporary Ijaw nationalist politics.

7. The INC (Ijaw National Congress) founded in 1991 and the IYC (Ijaw Youth Council), founded in 1998 are two pan-Ijaw political organizations.

8. This is based on the often quoted "between 8 and 12 million" figure. Sokari EKINE (2001) quotes the figure of 12 million; HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (1999: 92) quotes 8 million. The accuracy of these figures is, however, a little compromised by the absence of reliable census data. Population census figures from 1952 (the least disputed of Nigeria's many controversial subsequent census exercises), suggests that at the time the Ijaw, both in the Eastern and Western regions, were no more than 900,000. Since the 1952-1953 census, the total size of the Nigerian population, then roughly 30 million, has at the most quadrupled, standing at 127 million. It is unlikely that the Ijaw population would have increased up to eightfold during the same period. However the manner in which Ijaws were categorised and counted could have led to an underestimate—Kalabari, Nembe, Okrika, Ibani, Opobo, Andoni, Ogbia, Epie-Atissa and all those groups which today form part of the Ijaw political universe, may not have been counted as Ijaw during the 1952 census.

9. The article does not cover the recent so-called manifestations of Ijaw ethnic nationalism that have taken the form of an armed battle between competing militia, and expressed as threats to disrupt oil company facilities in Port Harcourt, leading to the intervention of the Nigerian Army in and around Port Harcourt, in September 2004. The coverage which these events have received in the international press as well as the decisive military response of the Nigerian civilian government, is not unrelated to the manipulation by the leader of the main militia group, Alhaji Asari Dokubo, of his Muslim identity and his adoption of the name "Muhajid". The dramatic increase in oil prices which at the same time rocketed to \$50 per barrel, have also been a cause for international concern (MANBY (2004)). The central role of the one time much disputed IYC president, Dokubo (2001-2003), in the main armed gang, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, and his use of Ijaw nationalist rhetoric, explains why recent events are being portrayed in an Ijaw nationalist light. This article is however more concerned with the IYC as conceived by its founders, prior to 2001. Dokubo's recent adventure although not the subject of this article is understood as directly related to party politics and to the deterioration in his once close relationship with the Rivers state governor, Dr Peter Odili, today enjoying a second term in office, which Dokubo claims to have been instrumental in

securing. Today Odili nurses vice presidential ambitions in the forthcoming 2007 elections and is suspected of financially backing other militia gangs, notably Ateke Tom, to deal with the Dokubo threat.

10. Official estimates, based on the 1991 census figures, put the figure at 126.6 million. See *Vanguard*, 6 June 2003. The National Population Commission recently had to dispute the claim by the former minister for internal affairs that the nation's population could be as high as 160 million. The NPC instead maintains that the nation's population as projected by the commission stands at 126 million based on the 1991 census figure of 88.9 million and a growth rate of 2.83% per annum. Census data has been particularly controversial in Nigeria since the 1963 census, because of a tendency to inflate figures in anticipation of political rewards.

11. AGHEYISI suggests that there are 400 language groups in Nigeria, 390 of which are spoken by 20% of the population.

12. Interview with Mr Okpara, Kolo town, Ogbia, 20 June 2002.

13. Interview with Isaac Osuoka, January 2002, Port Harcourt.

14. Interview with HRM J. C. Egba, Olei X, Ogbanobhan of Olei (Oloibiri), Port Harcourt, 8 June 2002.

15. Interview with Chief Atata, Imiringi, Ogbia, 28 June 2002.

16. The term village here is used as opposed to the more nebulous term "community"—which has entered into popular discourse in response to state policies (notably the introduction of "community development committees" in 1978/1979 and oil company-inspired discourses of "community development", "community assistance", "community relations", "host community". Locally there is a reluctance to refer to these entities as villages, because of the "backwardness" implied by the term, which does not convey the size of the unit in question, the availability of pipe-borne water, varying levels of electricity supply, oil-production activity, the influx of outsiders from all over Nigeria. The term "town" often used particularly in the Igbo hinterland areas to the north of the Delta to refer to an agglomeration of villages, could be used instead, as "town council" and "town hall" are often referred to, although the term "community" tends to be reserved for describing an associated group of compounds.

17. Agip actually has the deepest oil well in Ogbia, in Opribeni oil fields, in Epebo in Anyama, which in 2001 was the site of bloody clashes between Epebo and Emadike. However, this field lies outside the site of our enquiry.

18. Interview with Gabriel Michael Ogbara, Elebele, Ogbia, CDC chairman, 22 June 2002.

19. Ideas also articulated in a presentation at Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) workshop: "Ethnicity: Division or Cohesion? New challenges in a changing world", 17 December 2003, London.

20. Interview with Theo Wellington, SPDC, Port Harcourt, July 2002.

21. See also E. J. ALAGOA (1971), who challenges the view that city-states and sovereigns emerged merely as a result of the European gaze, but argues that they had begun to emerge independently prior to the arrival of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

22. Interview with Eluan Ebelha, civil servant, teacher, working with Anyama Government Secondary School, Ogbia, but from Imiringi, 18 June 2002.

23. Interview with representatives of Council of Chiefs and Elders and CDC, Otuasega, 22 June 2002.

24. Interview with Eluan Ebelha, Anyama, 18 June 2002.

25. Interview with Chief Abott D. Edum, Elebele, Ogbia, 21 June 2002.

26. See the case of Honorable Target Segibo, English graduate of the University of Ibadan, who at the age of 24 became the Youth President in Oporoma, a stepping-stone for political office subsequently. In 1999, he became the APP member of Bayelsa state House of Assembly Representatives for Southern Ijaw II Constituency.
27. Interview with Gabriel Michael Ogbara, Elebele, Ogbia, CDC Chairman, 22 June 2002.
28. Interview with Ayekite Jackson, women leader, Otuasega, June 2002.
29. Interview with Florence Abugo, Elebele, Ogbia, 22 June 2002.
30. Interviews with Maxwell Oko, Yenagoa, Bayelsa state capital, August 2002.
31. Interview with Monday Eribor, 3 August 2002.
32. Interview with Ama Benson, Otuasega, 26 June 2002.
33. Interview with Maxwell Oko, Yenagoa, Bayelsa state capital, August 2002.
34. Interview with Stanley, Elimotu activist, Imiringi, June 2002.
35. Interview with Oronto Douglas, 6 May 2002, Port Harcourt.
36. Since the creation of Bayelsa state in 1996, and the reintroduction of civilian rule, the governor of Bayelsa state has been from the “Izon” group, i.e. speakers of one of the many Izon or Ijaw dialects, popularly referred to in Bayelsa as the “core Ijaw” as opposed to the “non-core Ijaw” made up of speakers of other languages who at national level are nevertheless also considered as Ijaw.
37. Interview with Monday Eribor, Maxwell Oko’s House, Yenagoa, 3 August 2002. Eribor, one of the youths active in IYC and ELIMOTU was also kicked out of Otuasega.
38. Dan Etete, Petroleum Minister under Abacha 1993-1998, from Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA where there is no oil, Timi Alaibe presently in charge of Finance and Administration in NDDC, and also from the Kolokuma/Opokuma. Otuasega has however persistently turned out powerful federal and state politicians, notably Ronami Abah, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) secretary during the Second Republic, and Claudius Enegesi, Commissioner for Agriculture and Natural Resources, and later for Transport, PDP stalwart and “kingmaker” for Bayelsa state Governor Alamiyeseigha.
39. Interview with Oronto Douglas, Port Harcourt, April 2003, in which he expressed outrage at the extreme and violent response of the federal forces in Odi in 1999, ostensibly to quell threats to oil production, despite the fact that there is no oil in Odi. Odi is in Bayelsa state, and Bayelsa is associated with oil.
40. Interview with Chief Edum Atata, Imiringi, Ogbia, 28 June 2002.
41. Interview with Eluan Ebelha, Anyama, 18 June 2002.
42. Interview with Moses Adolphus Ogbara, Elebele, Ogbia, 20 June 2002.
43. Interview with Chief Atata, Imiringi, Ogbia, 28 June 2002.
44. Interview with Daniel Udogu, Elebele, 22 June 2002.
45. Interview with Gabriel Michael Ogbara, Elebele, Ogbia, CDC chairman, 22 June 2002.
46. Interview with Gabriel Michael Ogbara, Elebele, Ogbia, CDC chairman, 22 June 2002.

ABSTRACTS

The paper explores competing and often violent attempts to redefine ethnic group membership in an Ijaw, oil-producing community in the Niger Delta. The proliferation of pan-ethnic nationalist movements in Nigeria and particularly in the Niger Delta over the last decade, suggests that a certain degree of pan-ethnic cohesion or consensus exists amongst members of the ethnic group concerned. The paper argues that the question of ethnic belonging is an altogether more complex, widely contested and as yet unsettled one, in which the interests of different generations and social classes collide. Micro-level studies reveal that instead of pan-ethnic consensus in oil-producing villages in Ogbia, there has been an unravelling of an attachment to a pan-Ijaw identity and the emergence of new ethnic identities, which are more useful in the immediate struggles over the spoils of oil at a village level. This points to the need to re-evaluate our understanding of ethnicity and of pan-ethnic movements more generally, in this case those of the Ijaw, as non-static, dynamic phenomena, whose purpose and composition can only be understood relative to the contexts within which they emerge and the audience for which their discourse is intended.

Entre discours et réalité. Politique pétrolière et nationalisme ethnique ijaw dans le delta du Niger. — Cet article explore les tentatives conflictuelles et souvent violentes de redéfinition de l'appartenance à un groupe ethnique, les Ijaw, dans une communauté productrice de pétrole dans le delta du Niger. La prolifération de mouvements nationalistes pan-ethniques au Nigeria et particulièrement dans le delta du Niger depuis dix ans montre qu'un certain degré de cohésion et de consensus existe au sein des groupes ethniques concernés. L'article avance que la question de l'appartenance ethnique est une question complexe, contestée et non résolue où entrent en conflit les intérêts divergents des différentes générations et classes sociales. Les études menées dans la région pétrolière d'Ogbia (État de Bayelsa) montrent qu'on n'observe pas de consensus pan-ethnique à Ogbia mais, qu'on assiste, au contraire, au développement d'un attachement à une identité pan-ijaw et à l'émergence de nouvelles identités ethniques qui sont plus utiles dans les conflits immédiats liés aux gains tirés du pétrole au niveau du village. Ces observations nous incitent à reconsidérer l'ethnicité et les mouvements ethniques comme des phénomènes non statiques et dynamiques dont les objectifs et la composition ne peuvent être compris que dans le cadre du contexte de leur émergence et de l'audience envers laquelle leur discours est destiné.

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