

# ETHICS OF CIVILITY AS A PANACEA TO NIGER DELTA CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*This paper reflects on the violent conflicts in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria that threaten the nation's oil-dependent mono-economy and corporate existence. The Delta region's crises caused loss of lives and properties until government granted amnesty to her militants and created the Niger Delta Ministry to take care of the peoples' agitations. While these measures have yielded some positive results, the peace in the region is marred by a resurgence of violence through activities of aggrieved militant groups that unleashed terror on the Delta communities and vandalised pipelines as they expressed dissatisfaction with the Nigerian state and the Multinational Oil Corporations. As it re-examines the immediate and remote causes of the crises, the paper adopts the methods of historical and conceptual analyses to argue for stakeholder's commitment to ethics of civility as the lasting solution. Thus, identifying social egoism as the basis of the Niger Delta crises, it argues that ethics of civility, which it perceives as the commitment to the well-being of the self, others and the environment without neglecting future generations, is a way of addressing the Niger Delta crises. By construing social egoism as the tendency of a group to act to protect its interests, it debates that the pursuit of group-interest devoid of concomitant consideration for existing and potential (future) generations, and the environment, would continue to impact negatively on crises resolution efforts and impede national peaceful co-existence if not properly addressed.*

**Keywords:** Violent conflicts, Social egoism, Ethics of civility, Government, Multinational Oil Corporations, Stakeholders.

## Introduction

The paper reflects on the violent conflicts in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria (hence, Delta) that threaten the nation's oil-dependent mono-economy and corporate existence. With the mainstay of the country's economy being oil, the oil derived from the Delta region contributes immensely to her revenue. Situated on the continental margin of the gulf of Guinea on the west coast (equatorial) of central Africa, between Latitude 3<sup>o</sup> and 6<sup>o</sup>N and Longitude 5<sup>o</sup> and 8<sup>o</sup>E, the Delta area is in the south-south and south-western parts of Nigeria (Ige 2017: 22). Populated by more than thirty million people (“Nigeria: Current Issues”, 2019: 11). Oil

<sup>1</sup> Frederick E. Crowe & Robert M. Doran, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 3.

covers a land area of about 75,000 square kilometres (UNDP 2000:15), comprising of over forty ethnic groups, such as Esan, Itshekiri, Annang, Ukwuani, Bini, Auchi, Esako, Oral, Igara, Afenmai, Yoruba, Urhobo, Ibiobio, Igbo, Isoko, Kalabari, Ogoni, Okrika, Oron, Ijaw, Ogba, Etche, Ndoni, Ekeye, Ndoki, Ogoja, Obolo, Eppie-Atissa, Ikwerre and Efik peoples, with scores of dialects spread across nine states (Blench, 2012: 5, 7, 37, 40, 70, 98, 99): Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Abia, Cross River, Rivers, Edo, Delta, Imo and Ondo. Oil discovered outside these states are yet to be explored. Antithetical to its natural endowments and vast wealth of natural resources, the oil rich Delta area of Nigeria is a spot where violent conflicts have prevailed for decades. The region's crises caused loss of lives and properties until government granted amnesty to her militants and created the Niger Delta Ministry (NDM) to take care of the peoples' agitations. In these regards, militant youths voluntarily surrendered their arms for peace to reign and the NDM shouldered the responsibility of addressing the region's problems. Prior to this period, there was an occasional review of the revenue derivation principle and poverty alleviation programmes to pacify the people.

While these measures have yielded some positive results, the peace in the region is often marred by a resurgence of violence through activities of aggrieved militant groups unleashing terror on the Delta communities and vandalizing pipelines as they expressed dissatisfaction with the Nigerian state and the Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs). As observed by Eegunlusi (2014: 13), after amnesty was granted, "great doubts exist as to the number of militants that are still landlocked in the creeks and are eagerly awaiting resumption of violence at the slightest provocation. Many of them who are discontented with the allowances and benefits of the current post-amnesty events may perpetrate new insurgencies. At the same time, many of them who still jealously keep their weapons may be waiting to use them in the future, whether to perpetrate crime or to once again fight the nation". True to this observation, the Niger Delta Avengers was one of the most recent militant groups to come out of hiding and destroy oil installations in the Delta region. This depicts the volatile nature of the area which calls for seeking of a lasting solution if human and material resources will be preserved. This pursuit of social egoism (the tendencies of a group to act to protect only its interests or a group interest devoid of considerations for other groups) in the Delta is a negation of the existentialists' notion of *being with others* or *being in the world*. As adopted by Heidegger, *being with others* depict an ontological connectedness with other human beings by which we cannot live without them or which provokes in us the socializing obligation to relate with them and be responsible to them while *being in the world* in its most basic description captures a mood of unreflecting openness, devotion to and integration of the Dasein (the ontic human) into the world. Even though the existentialist descriptions are more emotion driven, which also strongly enhances the basis of human interconnectedness, attention to rational understanding as well as the blend of emotions in

<sup>2</sup>Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1912), 2.

<sup>3</sup>John Kekes, "Recent Trends and Future Prospects in Epistemology", *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 8, No. 2&3, (1977), 87.

<sup>4</sup>Kekes, "Recent Trends and Future Prospects in Epistemology," 87-8.

societal/human integration and activities of the stakeholders in the Delta community, which can promote civility, cannot be undermined. Considering all these, the wide gap existing between what constitutes the interest and responsibilities of the FGN and the oil communities, on one hand, and the Delta peoples, on the other hand, ought to be properly reconciled or bridged for peaceful co-existence to be experienced in the Delta region and for the nation to continue to benefit economically.

Delving into and re-examining the immediate and remote causes of the Delta crises by considering the above, this paper combines the methods of historic and conceptual analyses to argue for stakeholders' commitment to ethics of civility as a lasting solution to the Delta crises. Thus, seeing ethics of civility as the commitment to the well-being of the self, others and the environment without neglecting future generations, it argues for deeper understanding, tolerance and fellow-feeling in interrelationship as the major stakeholders of the Delta community consider their social egoism. It equally argues that the pursuit of group-interest devoid of concomitant consideration for existing and potential (future) generations, and the environment, would continue to impact negatively on crises resolution efforts and, consequently, impede national peaceful co-existence if left as it is.

### **Agitations for Resource Control in Niger Delta**

As a pluralistic society, Nigeria possesses numerous ethnic nationalities, traditions and belief systems. "Statistics hold that 95% of the total revenue for the Nigerian government is generated from oil and gas" (Haaga, 2015: 199). Apart from human resources and oil, the Delta region is naturally endowed with large deposits of resources that include products from bitumen, forestry and wildlife. Given the terrain of the area, the traditional occupation of the people is farming (planting of crops and fishing). Due to severe environmental pollution caused by oil exploration and exploitation, the existence of the peoples in the Delta region is threatened. This is because reduction in the productive quality of arable land and destruction of wild life and fish reserves jeopardize their means of livelihood. In the past, government's reactionary and retaliatory assaults on Delta communities 'constituted abuse of human rights. Unfortunately, due to this highhandedness, the MNOCs further devastated the region's natural environment. The insensitivity of the state to the plight of the people and the inconsiderate

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<sup>5</sup>Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Pan Books, 1979), 73.

<sup>6</sup>Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Pan Books, 1979), 75.

<sup>7</sup>Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, 78

<sup>8</sup>Catherine Osborne, *PreSocratic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 114.

business pursuits of the MNOCs hardened the people. With strained relationship between the Delta peoples and the MNOCs and government, as stakeholders, the stage was set for incessant conflicts manifesting in the forms of abduction, arson, oil production disruption, pipeline vandalization and ransom requests by the aggrieved and disenchanting youths of the region whose main agitation is to control the natural resources in the region. The conflict was eventually stemmed but resurfaced in recent times with each of the stakeholders to the Delta conflicts pursuing its interests.

### **FURTHER HIGHLIGHT OF THE CORE ISSUES IN THE DELTA CRISES**

**Generally, on close scrutiny, the** Delta crisis is based largely on certain factors, two of which are identified here. First, stakeholders' clash of interests and operating based on conflicting understanding of the situation of things in the region. Second, stakeholders' pursuit of group-interested approaches devoid of a sense of civility and undermining of practical conflict resolution techniques. In earnest, three major groups that constitute the major stakeholders in the conflict are the indigenous people of the oil rich Delta region, the Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs) (represented by Shell BP, Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, Total, etc.) operating in the region and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). At different times, recognizing their legitimate stakes in the resources of the Delta region, they pursue interests that are inimical to effective resolution of the conflict, thus mostly favouring group-based interests rather than what is to the collective advantage of the various groups. In all these, issues of economic justice come to fore.

For years, the Delta people expected the government to protect their interest. In principle, as distinct from the practice, the microscopic lens through which the FGN assesses economic justice is that of the existence of parity in entitlements of federating states in revenues derivable from national resources. The FG invoked the doctrine of interdependence of states and citizens. This it sees as the foundation for national development and capable of ensuring citizens' obligations to accommodate all fellow Nigerians regardless of region. In simpler terms, government believes that any state in the federation should not be excluded in the scheme of development on the ground that nature does not bestow resources on it or that the available resources of the state have not been exploited. Thus, arguing based on constitutional understanding and provisions capable of guaranteeing trust and fair-dealings, each successive national government advocated prioritization of Nigeria's interests and survival above any sectional or parochial interests. Unfortunately, while government advocacy was constitutionally right, the government failed to take care of the region producing the nation's

<sup>9</sup>George B. Kerferd, *History of Philosophy, From the Beginning to Plato Vol. I*, Edited by C.C.W. Taylor, (New York: Francis and Taylor, 2005), 234.

<sup>10</sup>Kerferd, *History of Philosophy, From the Beginning to Plato Vol. I*, 234.

<sup>11</sup>Richard H. Popkin & Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 473-4.

<sup>12</sup>Edith Hamilton & Huntington Cairns, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 2159.

<sup>13</sup>Popkin & Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 474.

<sup>14</sup>Popkin & Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 461-2.

resources and did not properly check the activities of the MNOCs to ensure that social-cum-distributive, economic and moral injustices are not perpetrated. Conceptualized, social-cum-distributive injustice debars fair sharing of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation in ways that will allow everyone to partake in sharing of social goods and services and take responsibilities for the consequences of their actions, which include redressing injustices inflicted on others that hinder them from enjoying social goods and being morally responsible to others in a community. Economic injustice hinders just economic practices, just state reaction to the protection of the economy and just pursuit of interests for derivation of economic benefits while moral injustice is the unjust, wrong and unfair action hindering proper protection of the interest of all in society. The FGN and the MNOCs became perpetrators of these types of injustice.

Going by the above description, intra-wrangling crises plagued the nation as economic injustice thrived. Sadly, the Delta problem lingered because of the conflicting perceptions of what economic justice meant to the stakeholders in the crises. What constitutes economic justice to the government and the MNOCs passed as economic injustice to the oil producing communities of the Delta region who thought of justice as giving each region its dues from its contributions or sacrifices made to the country. The power of exploration and exploitation of mineral resources, including oil, is constitutionally and exclusively, vested in the government even though it cedes this right to the MNOCs on contractual and business terms. In principle, government also distributes revenues accruable from the resources among the federating states, with the mind-set of ensuring even development among these federating states. Since this situation engendered the problem of social-cum-distributive justice with the oil producing areas alleging governmental marginalization and their deliberate exclusion in proper distribution of resources, government ought to follow three criteria in addressing the problems associated with the distribution of social goods in the region: considerations of needs, qualifications/merit and equality. For long, the criteria adopted by the government have not been so clear but the emphasis of the oil bearing communities has been that benefits (of the resources) in the Nigerian society should be shared according to the amount each area contributes to the social goods of the nation. Suffice to say that the proper intra and inter group relations among the different players in the Delta situation can foster better and peaceful co-existence enhanced. Obviously, in any socio-political sphere, calm and peace exist anywhere personal interests of members of a group or interests of smaller groups within a larger group are sufficiently reconciled or satisfied.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION AND THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT**

Broadly speaking, by virtue of the direct or indirect concern or impacts which the activities in the region have on their existence, all Nigerians are stakeholders in the Niger Delta project but, as earlier observed, the activities of the state, the militants and the MNOCs depict major

<sup>15</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Trans. by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), Pt I; 2, Pt II;11, Pt III;13, & Pt. IV;18.

conflict of interests. In all these, the activities of the MNOCs operating in the Delta region remain the core causes of the violent conflicts prevalent in the region. One problematic area of the conflict, among other things, is that the MNOCs violated the “traditional environmental ethics of the people” (Ogungbemi, 2010: 169). This is part of what necessitated agitations for resource control. For long, the operations of the MNOCs in the Delta environment has been adjudged to be detrimental to the existence of the ecosystem and human inhabitants as well as capable of negatively impacting the survival of future generations of human and non-human entities. To checkmate the reckless exploitation and pollution of the environment and forestall havocs to future generations, the militants in the Delta region resorted to violence. In this regard, activities of groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Deltans (MEND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and, very recently, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), threaten regional as well as national existence. Obviously, the agitations of the Delta militants are compounded by the fact that their indigenous peoples seem to be too passionate about the environment because of the importance Africans attach to land. Traditionally, Africans see land, which is one of the components of the environment, as what should be held in trust by the living for the present and future generations. They think that it binds humans with the ancestral communities and the sacred forces of the universe (Magessa 1997: 244). Plants of medicinal value, rivers of traditional significance and some species of animals have either gone into extinction or become polluted by oil spillages, thereby depriving younger generations of the practical description or benefits of such plants, animals and rivers.

Environmental preservation is essential as nature has a way of preserving human existence. Writers like Meginnis (1982: 705) and Taylor (1986: 99) stressed the necessity of regarding the natural world through cautiously treating or dealing with nature. To them, nature deserves to be nourished just as humans are nourished because to harm nature is to directly or indirectly harm humans that are part of it. Taylor conceives the natural world as constituting a community of elements that possess biological life and existence in which an interdependent relation between humans and the environment can make conducive living possible for both

<sup>17</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 18-19.

<sup>18</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 20.

<sup>19</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 22.

<sup>20</sup>Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge (London: Clarendon Press, 1978), 187, argues that the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity.

human and non-humans. He observed that every organism is teleologically natured and pursues its own good. Even though all humans have worth, they are partners in the natural world alongside other entities with inherent worth. Thus, humans cannot claim inherent superiority over other living entities and things (Taylor, 1986: 99-100). In as much as we share the sentiments of these scholars and think nature should be treated with due care and respect, we are concerned about the future generations of humans and non-humans in the Delta environment. Thus, we affirm that depleting the environment without due consideration for future existence should not be allowed. Efforts at environmental sustenance require a sense of obligation on the path of all stakeholders.

There are diverse opinions by ethicists on whether or not the non-human elements within the environment deserve any obligation concerning how it should be treated by humans. It is common among humans to cite rationality as the basis of this treatment. Thus, non-human elements are often thought to be non-sentient beings by humans. In this respect, Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant maintained that *rationality* does not only differentiate humans from non-humans but also determines whom humans have moral responsibilities towards. In the same vein, Bentham, Mill, Pojman and Singer argued for sentience as a veritable factor of assessing things humans should not harm. As is prevalent among traditional Africans, consideration of what transcends rationality and the sentience parameters of Western thinkers make Delta's indigenous peoples to think that animals, plants and mountains need to be treated with care or that some of them possess healing powers and constitute metaphysical links between the ancestral world as well as the worlds of deities, spirits and living peoples. Thus, they avow that they should be revered instead of being destroyed. Though the metaphysical links and assertions may be difficult to verify the way scientific phenomena are observed, they remain significant to the people who are ready to go to any extent to defend such worldviews.

By regurgitating on these things, without any prejudice to the debates on environmental preservation, what is good and capable of enhancing the wellbeing of the present and future generations of humans and nonhuman elements of the environments can be rationally derived. Whenever the environment suffers a monumental degradation, as is happening in the

<sup>21</sup>David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>22</sup>John Perry, Michael Bratman & Martin Fischer, *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings 7th ed.*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 198.

<sup>23</sup>Jeremy Stangroom & James Garvey, *The Great Philosophers*, (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2007), 69.

<sup>24</sup>Jacobson Anne Jaap. "David Hume on Human Understanding", In *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment Vol. 5*, Edited by Stuart Brown. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 125.

Delta area, manifesting is human and non-human species wide endangerment and possible extermination. In simpler terms, the survival cum continuity of generations of humans and non-human entities in the environment is endangered. Environmental naturalness (regarding the air we inhale and the water and food that we consume) is threatened. As such, people become dependent on others for survival rather than being self-sufficient in the supply of basic existential needs like food, since farmlands, crops, water sources, economic trees and other essential resources are already wasted or destroyed. Before the situations got worse, the members of the Delta communities expected the MNOCs to be more sensitive to the issues involved in the degradation of the environment, devise means of replacing devastated components of the environment and be more committed to compensations for the human and natural resources lost to environmental degradation. For long, the MNOCs failed in these areas. Even though it is true that the primary goal of any business is profit maximization, business organizations taking pride in engaging ethics in its operations tend to run smoothly and profitably than others relegating the roles of ethics in business to the backseat. Putting these in perspective, it is clear that an application of social-cum-distributive justice is necessary. To a large extent, while this type of justice deals with the sharing of goods and services between states and their constituent parts, and expects individuals in the states to perform necessary moral and social obligations to the state when the state performs all necessary obligations in return, it also demands that those responsible for or benefiting from injuries intentionally or unintentionally inflicted on communities should be responsible for bearing the burdens of social cooperation by redressing whatever injustice has been perpetrated, which may include paying for damages. In applying this to the Delta situation, Olanrewaju thinks that “oil companies should take account of the social, ethical, and environmental perspectives of their operations” (Olanrewaju, 2014). In earnest, having done this, in relation to the Delta people, the responsibility of redressing injustices perpetrated through their business activities rest on their shoulders. Taking this seriously is essential for peace to reign in the region and for economic development to be experienced nationally. Part of what exacerbated or worsen matters for long is that the Delta communities instead of the MNOCs bore the brunt of the burdens of environmental pollution in the Delta area. Experiencing this and thinking that no other stakeholder takes responsibility for addressing things gone wrong warranted violent conflicts in the region.

<sup>25</sup>John Cottingham, *Western Philosophy: An Anthology 2nd Ed.*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 38.

<sup>26</sup>Kekes, “Recent Trends and Future Prospects in Epistemology,” 96- 97.

## **VIOLENT CONFLICTS, GOVERNMENT RESPONSES, SOCIAL EGOISM AND THE NECESSITY OF ETHICS OF CIVILITY**

Culminating in the frustrations and grievances that led to the rise of ethnic militancy in the oil-rich Delta are the observed violations of the traditional ethics of the indigenous peoples, cases of unemployment, deprivation of means of livelihood and neglect of the region by the FGN, which resulted in abject poverty among its populace. Survival instincts may have made their aggrieved youths to form militant groups to promote and protect the heritage and interests of the communities. While we cannot assure that the rise of ethnic militia in the Delta was devoid of ulterior motives, it is glaring that what began as pockets of resistance was what eventually metamorphosed into violent agitations for oil control. The initial neglect of the Delta youths' agitations amplified the crises in the region. By the time the Ogoni Bill of Rights of 1990 and the Ijaw Youth's Kaiama Declaration of 1998 were drafted, the real battle lines had been drawn. For long, the Delta people premised their activities on the belief that the social, political and economic dislocations of the region would automatically transmute into fortunes for them through the control of oil. The vision for resource control which gained momentum and expanded could be said to be a manifest political right of regional self-determination. Consequently, as common with multi-ethnic states in which tribes take cue from the behaviours and actions of others as the precedence for their operations, the agitations of the Deltan youths further fuelled the activities of the various other people groups such that the allegiance of the peoples drifted from the Nigerian state to their respective minority groups, a position considered by the government as inimical to national unity, and the sovereignty of the state and its constituted authority.

With serious crises looming in the Delta, government responded by setting up Commissions, Development Committees and State Departments to attend to issues of concern. These include the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB); Okigbo Revenue Commission, (ORO); Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC); Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. The rationale for these programmes was the fast-tracking of development in the region and ameliorating of the hardships the people were/are subjected to. However, the implementation of the programmes were like national financial drain pipes as corruption, politicization and ethnicity combined to undermine their

<sup>27</sup>George Santayana *Scepticism and Animal Faith Introduction to a System of Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publication, 1955), 69-70

success. Most culpable in these acts are the government, the MNOCs, some privileged Deltans and others elsewhere who were trusted with the affairs of the region.

The contests over resources became more pronounced due to the Nigerian state's politicization and ethnicization of the proceeds from oil, as well as the “pursuit of developmental paradigm that further polarized the different social and economic groups” in the country (Adedeji 1999:32). To this end, Delta's minority groups believed that the above arrangements favour the dominant ethnic groups to their detriment. According to Nwankwo (2015) the principle of derivation which was intended to resolve the developmental quest of the region was a mere palliative. Prior to the oil boom, when agriculture was the nation's mainstay, the derivation principles was 50% of a state's income. However, this changed with the oil boom. The change was based on government's argument that location of oil is an accident of geographical location. As analyzed by Etekpe (2007:95-96), the major Nigerian ethnic groups played politics to reduce and manipulate the “derivation principle of revenue” to favour themselves, contrary to the interest of the Delta communities. Thus, they

...reduced it to 45 percent under the exigencies of civil war conditions and reconstruction of a war-torn economy during Gowon's Administration in 1970. It was hoped that once the economy was stabilised, the 50 percent would be reinstated but this did not happen. Instead, under Murtala's Military Administration in 1975, it was further reduced to 20 percent. When Alhaji Shehu Shagari took over, he brought it down to 2 percent in 1982, and Buhari further reduced it to 1.5 percent in 1984. With the intensification of agitation in the Niger Delta, I.B. Babangida raised it to 3 percent in 1992 and later to 13 percent by the Abacha Government during the Constitutional Conference in 1995. This was eventually entrenched into the 1999 Constitution, but the total sum has never been faithfully implemented by President Obasanjo's Government up to 2002 when the South-South Peoples Conference (SSOPEC) impressed on him to fully implement the 13 percent derivation principle.

This Delta people's lopsided treatment resorted to loss of faith and hopes in the Nigerian federation and project, hence the agitations for regional autonomy, greater allocation of revenue derivable from oil or the renegotiation of the agreement underlying the existence of Nigeria as a corporate entity. Although, the derivation principle in relation to the Delta peoples improved over the years from 1.5 % to 3% and was at 13%, as at the time of founding the Niger Delta Ministry, it did not douse agitations. Very recently, one billion United States dollars was approved by the Buhari-led administration from the excess crude account to combat insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country. In response, the Delta militants

demanded a release of same amount by the government to tackle developmental challenges in their area and threatened to embark on massive destruction of oil pipelines and facilities if denied. In actual fact, is their region not the one giving the national economy its backbone?

Even though the militants' threats raise the question of patriotism, the whole Delta crises raises certain moral questions bordering on social justice and ethics of civility. On one hand, does the Nigerian government's use of the resources derived from a neglected region to combat insurgency in another region conform to natural justice? Following up on this, can we say that the government is sufficiently committed to the welfare of the inhabitants of Delta region such that it has adequately implemented the laws protecting their communities or justly distributed the resources generated from the sale of crude oil in their favour? Are the Delta people averse to the use of benefits accruable from oil to develop other regions of the federation or it is just concerned with addressing the neglect of its region in terms of developmental projects? Have the oil bearing communities of the Delta region sufficiently shown understanding to the nature and processes involved in oil exploration? Are there no constructive ways for them to channel their grievances (caused by pollution and other hazards they are exposed to because of the activities of the oil firms)? Will control of oil resources automatically change the region into a socio-economic, geo-political or communal *El Dorado*? Will the control of oil resources by the people of the region eventually guard against deep rooted corruption of Nigerians (including the members of the Delta communities), the MNOCs and the expatriates that see the region as one to milk to satisfy business and diplomatic interests? Concerning those trusted with the management of resources in the region, what happened to the chunk of funds released to the region for development overtime? Regarding rights violations, do the MNOCs see the need for rights protection in the region? Or, are there environment rights in the region for the MNOCs to respect and protect? While doing real justice to these questions is beyond the scope of this paper, taking them into proper consideration raises another question: How precisely should benefits and burdens of social cooperation be distributed in a nation such that the distribution can be morally defensible and address fundamental issues of human existence?

While the above catalogue of questions constitute the basis of the grouse that each of the parties in the Delta conflict continually raise while defending their group's actions and inactions, their choices and decisions are dependent on their answers to these questions. Their answers have been mainly amplified by egoistic concerns, especially as relating to social

egoism. Philosophically, egoism is human action being motivated solely by a moral agent's self-interest. The goal of an agent's action is directed towards the promotion of his desires. Under egoistic considerations, emphasis is on the “self” (me, I), thus construing individualism or the ethics of the self as the ultimate. The individual's action is considered right when motivated by the ego or self-interest. From the social perspective, the actions of (a) group(s) can also be regarded as being *group-centred* or *group-interested* just as the action of an individual is self-interested. This is the case when a particular group sees its own good as first and superior. When emphasis is on the promotion of what advances group interests, and perhaps at the detriment of other groups within a larger group, groups manifest social egoism as against social ethics (the ethics regarding proper human interaction in which cognizing what is good and promotes the values of social and moral responsibility, social utility, solidarity and egalitarianism, or what is in the interest of all for continual cordial and altruistic relations, are considered or taken seriously).

The above suggests that egoism has both the individual and group psychology that relate to social relationships. As Hobbes argued, humans are by nature selfish and pursue what fosters their survival as individual entities. Going by the idea that humans are by nature social beings, it is within the community of persons that the individual's potentials, goals and aspirations could be actualised. Nigeria, as a pluralistic state, is populated by members of different ethnic groups. In Delta's case, its different communities are not strictly bonded by primordial ethnicity but by the concerns for economic injustice allegedly meted out to them by the combined forces of the FGN and the MNOCS. This is the reason for their protests against the neglect and devastation of their environment. Unfortunately, the violent pursuance of interests disallows Deltans' giving due consideration to the overall interests of Nigeria. The adoption of violent methods in pursuing group's interest is inimical to both regional and national development. These approaches will not only scare away investors but also occasion the devastation of the existing, but inadequate, social infrastructure in the region and the thriving of national socio-political instability. Thus, to forestall the escalation of the problematic Delta case, the unjust situations in our discussion so far must be adequately addressed. Towards achieving this, giving attention to ethics of civility in pursuit of social egoism will cater for the interests of all stakeholders in the Delta crises.

## **SOCIAL EGOISM AND ETHICS OF CIVILITY: SEEKING A PANACEA TO THE NIGER DELTA CRISES**

Ethics of civility is the caring commitment to the well-being of the self, others and the environment such that situations that do not compromise the interest of future generations are promoted. In other words, it is the intelligent and objective concern restraining humans from embarking on deleterious activities, on the self, others as well as its environment, in their attempts ensuring immediate survival. As such, ethics of civility incorporates or countenances the moral principle of enlightened self-interest which is based on the trust and understanding that actions performed towards enhancing the quality of life of others also amounts to enhancing one's wellbeing. Thus, enlightened self-interest guarantees protection of individual interests in ways that take cognisance of others' interest in society. By it, the moral duties of gratitude and malfeasance we owe others, either as corporate or private individuals, are consciously performed in the interest of all. Also, taking this into consideration, a pursuit of enlightened self-interest will then involve deliberately caring for the ecosystem or the environment inhabited by others in society so as not jeopardize their existence and, consequently, trigger actions injurious to everyone's interest. Following from this, sharing the concerns of ethics of nature-relatedness or ethics of care for its attraction towards protecting nature, but different from it for emphasizing the interaction of humans with the environment alone, ethics of civility is disinclined towards the unrestrained freedom to destroy nature in order to satisfy human needs and interests. However, beyond ethics of nature-relatedness, ethics of civility concerns itself with human interpersonal relations such as: the relation of co-dependence or interdependence between occupants of the Delta communities and others within Nigeria at large; the relation between the Deltans and the MNOCs responsible for oil exploration in the region, and the relation between the corporations and the ecosystem.

For emphasizing group interest above the interest of all, or for promoting the tendencies of groups to act to protect their interests without minding the interests of other groups, thereby failing to pursue interests in other-regarding ways, social egoism is antithetical to enlightened self-interest. For peaceful co-existence in society, the enlightened self-interest provision of ethics of civility should be amplified. This will take care of the conflicts of interests such that as groups seek one another's interests the overall interest of all the groups will be taken care of. In efforts to achieve this, the virtues of tolerance, mutual trust, truthfulness, empathy, and respect for the rights and dignity of others will need to be promoted. The absence of these traits, and a proper understanding of the principle of enlightened self-interest, in inter-group relations (between the MMOCs, the FGN and the Delta communities) has prolonged the Delta crises for decades. Serious attention to these traits will make prioritizing others' interest sacrosanct, thereby eliminating the tribal, divisive and prejudiced tendencies of social egoism. Also, invoking the nature-related and nature respecting aspect of ethics of civility will promote respect for the environment in manners that will not jeopardize human existence and make the Deltans to have an

environment that can support their means of livelihood and hopes and aspirations. Ethics of civility will, hence, promote civility to both nature and humans, against incivility in interpersonal relations which only affords human insensitive dealings with others.

To apply ethics of civility to the Delta situation, it is important for the FGN to prioritize the welfare of the Delta peoples in the interest of all. Since the Delta region, which constitutes the goose laying the golden eggs, has been severely marginalised in the scheme of things, the FGN needs to draw out and faithfully implement feasible plans of actions that would properly address the developmental needs of the region. The authors admit that what Nigeria lacks are not good developmental plans but faithful execution of plans. Ethics of civility requires FGN's doing the needful with sincerity of purpose rather performing actions deriving from political deceptiveness and high-handedness. Similarly, the activities of the MNOCs operating in the area should be based on best global practices, with the orientation that corporations whose activities give priority to proper “ethics and civility are more successful” (Chakravarty 2017: 39) . According to Oyebode (2000: 59), the failure of “Good oil field practices” in the operations of the MNOCs, to a great extent, contributes to the Delta crises. One of the ways to address these is to follow the ideal of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which allows oil firms to be socially responsible to the communities in order to douse their grievances.

As much as the FGN and the MNOCs are acting to promote activities capable of endangering harmonious relations and peaceful coexistence among the players in the Delta crises, and directly dealing with injustice in the region, the militants and communities in the Delta area should allow options of dialogue and peaceful resolution. These, as against the option of violence, depict civilized approaches to conflict resolution. When allowed, violence only disrupts or obliterates what has been built without being able to start new things, which brings retrogression rather than progress in nation building. In this respect, the Delta people should allow a peaceful resolution of the region's crises through effective negotiations rather than adopting the option of violence. In supporting this position, quoting Nyerere, Diana E Axelsen (1979:193) argued that “Violence is a short cut only to the destruction of institutions and power groups of the old society; they are not a short cut to the building of the new... For violence cannot be welcomed by those who care about people”.

To avoid wasting human and material resources, FGN should refrain from perceiving the

disgruntled and irate Delta people's opting for dialogue as a sign of weakness on their part. It is natural or innate for humans to resist oppression and protect themselves from it. Oppression is definitely a violation of people's dignity. Since possessing a sense of dignity gives a feeling of possessing moral worth, crisis looms wherever people are made to lose their dignity. To protect their dignity, people always agitate against oppression and equally always summon courage to surmount it, being happy with themselves when they are eventually able to triumph over it. In the Delta case, the people suffered decades of failed promises, oppression and unjust treatment from within and without their spheres. Will it then be wrong for them to agitate for freedom from oppression, like people from many other tribes did in the past? Based on enlightened self-interest, as palliative measures that will make the people feel justly treated, FGN must implement policies and programmes that are capable of assisting the Delta people to realise their dreams, maintain some sense of dignity and be at peace with themselves and others within Nigeria. This is necessary if the people will trust that justice will be done in their case.

For long, lips service by different governments to the people completely eroded their trust in government's and MNOC's promises and activities. For instance, when oil was discovered in commercial quantity in Otuabagi (/Otuogidi) in Oloibiri District of Ogbia in Bayelsa State in June 1956 (England, 2012: 29), the first in West Africa, government and the MNOCs made deceptive promises to develop and turn the place to an El Dorado. This first oil well situated in the town dried up after sixty years of oil exploration without any of the promises being fulfilled. The people have nothing working for them: no pipe borne water, no health facilities, no development and they live in abject poverty, a stark paradox to the extent of wealth the land ever produced. Many of those who were children and youngsters in 1956, who witnessed the start of oil exploration in the area, are now old men and women who were victims of failed promises and injustice, who tell their children and their grand-children the history of government's failed promises of many years. To cut things short, the once sleepy and quiet town that was awakened for sixty years by oil activities, which the aboriginal people did not benefit from, has since returned to its deplorable pre-exploration state, with the once booming oil wells now covered by weeds since no one has further uses for them. Under President Shehu Shagari's regime, he visited Otuabagi and laid the foundation for an oil museum which never materialized (Etekpe, 2007: 104, 139). In the early stages of President Olusegun Obasanjo's

democratic regime, government considered what to do for the people and raised their hopes again by promising to build a petroleum research institute in the town. As happened under Shagari, Obasanjo laid the foundation of the institute in 2001 (Eribake, 2016). Like every moribund national project, the institute, not being built, remains at the foundation stage. Yet, the people were deceived for six decades.

Besides these, government's history of paying lips service extends to failed actions and non-engagement of dialogues in relating with the people. It is unfortunate that government often portrays itself as capable of developing listening ears for violent acts instead of non-violent ones. With the people understanding this attitude, they are always prepared to go violent at the slightest provocation and are ever ready to match government's efforts at exercising violence if faced by government's security apparatuses. Government ought to be committed to using all avenues that will ensure that violence is completely undermined in the region, such as adopting peaceful conflict resolution methods and giving attention to satisfying the Delta people's interests through intentional commitment to their welfare. Failing in these areas does not just harm the Deltans and occasions a resurgence of violence but equally frustrates efforts at national cohesion. For instance, UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme), after its environmental assessment in August 2011, recommended the cleaning up of Ogoniland to the FGN, the consortium of oil and gas corporations and the communities. Unfortunately, in the final quarter of 2017, as lamented by MOSOP, PANDEF and others, the progress of the work was too slow. This somehow flaccid disposition of the government to the happenings in the region leaves room for doubts about its real intentions. According to Chakravarty (2017: 41), government is duty bound to play the role of an umpire and argue for people sensitive industrial governance that can allow for imbibing well described moral standards and civil behaviours among all corporate groups.

As part of its duties, government is to protect the lives and properties of the inhabitants of Delta's communities, the expatriates and all Nigerians. In this wise, government must hold the MNOC's accountable for the consequences of their activities and ensure that environment is not polluted by oil spillages and gas flaring. Furthermore, government is duty bound make sure that the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic constituents properly fuse into a homogeneous country. In achieving these, certain basic things, such as minerals, that are “communally owed” ought to be shared without jeopardizing any group's interests. Since

government is fully aware that the principle underlying the activities of any business organization, especially those of capitalist extraction, is profit maximization. With the MNOCs operating in the Delta being guided by this principle, government ought to have instituted proper control measures to cater for the welfare of the people. The firms that are business players in the region are aware of globally recommended standards of handling the environment as well as its inhabitants as they strive to maximize profit. This is why corporations carry out Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (which are capable of contributing to sustainable community development, addressing local grievances and improving human livelihood. Sadly, the MNOCs with operations in the Delta have deliberately violated necessary standards and perform CSR as merely an obligation towards fulfilling all righteousness (Idemudia, U. 2009). It is possible they considered real practical commitment to the growth of the Delta communities as limiting their profit margins. Even though it is on record that the MNOCs embarked on certain social services and development programmes in their efforts to assuage the Delta people's suffering, the gap between what they have done and the expectations of the people wide. Imperatively, as panaceas, the MNOCs operating in Niger Delta region must strive to ensure that the perceived oppression of the Delta communities with the backing of the FGN is halted. They can achieve this through making justice and fair play their underlying principles of operation. They should not jettison the globally recommended standard of treating the environment and constantly promote and execute CSR.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we reflected on violent crises in the Niger Delta and the ways out of the crises. We observed that the conflicts are due to the activities of the main stakeholders, viz: the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Multinational Oil Corporations and the Delta peoples. Besides these, we identified others who are also interested in the affairs of the region that are bent on satisfying their own interests at its detriment. As the different groups constituting stakeholders pursued their interests, the people of the Delta region bore the brunt so heavily. To protect their interest, make their grievances known and realise their freedom from state and corporate oppression and injustices, they embarked on violent activities.

As is common, pursuits of group-centred interests allow reduced or no commitment to what is in the interest of all in society. The aftermath of this is that the commonwealth will suffer

damage. This is what is responsible for environmental devastation through mindless and inconsiderate oil mining in the Delta region. To guarantee positive change, as far as the orientations, attitudes and behaviours of the stakeholders in the Delta conflict are concerned, such that the Delta environment can be preserved in the best interest of current and future members of society, this work argues for ethics of civility. As long as the MNOCs, the FGN, the other stakeholders and the Deltans are not allowing conscientious, reasonable and civil dialogues and activities capable of engendering peace, while refusing to work assiduously for the common interest of all, the incessant conflicts may not end. By the determination to be (morally) altruistic, give attention to just actions and deal fairly in all things, the most important assignment of all stakeholders should be to ensure that the interest of the Deltans are sufficiently catered for. Though FGN should deal impartially with every region in the nation, it should concentrate efforts in helping the Delta region to develop through regulating the practices of the MNOCs and the activities of the other stakeholders who are trusted with the welfare of the region. This may then require that the Delta region be allowed to gain more from the wealth generated from the region. FGN should adopt openness, fairness and civility in sharing national assets and adopt and execute its policies to greatly alleviate and poverty in the area for the people to first be at peace with themselves and then be cordial with others outside the region. While the FGN does these, the militants should employ dialogues and civilised crises-resolving methods to deal with issues. Adopting these approaches can lead to lasting peace in the region.

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