

The Need for Ethnic Integration in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Focus of Western Niger Delta

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Abstract

This paper examines the ethnical crisis ravaging the Niger Delta region of Nigeria with particular emphasis on the Western Niger Delta, specifically focusing on Warri. With this examination, the study intends to proffer solution on how to remediate future tribal/ethnic crisis with a view to bringing about unity and integration of the various ethnic groups in the region. Given the focus of this study, the paper adopts the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist accounts as the theoretical frameworks in analyzing ethnical crisis in the Niger Delta Region. Academic explanations of ethnic conflict generally fall into one of these three schools of thought. The paper evaluates the various claims, literatures and assertions made particularly on the original position or placement of the headquarters of Warri South local government and repudiates claims that it was initially located in Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw community instead of Ogidigben, an Itsekiri village as gazetted by the federal government of Nigeria. The study advocates and recommends inter alia, the needs to uphold meritocracy and de-emphasize favoritism, nepotism and ethnicity/tribalism as a basis for gaining or obtaining supports, employment, promotion, infrastructural development and development attention either from government, individuals or groups. The paper thus advocates the need for the introduction of socio-cultural recreational centers, specifically created for socio-cultural activities for the Niger Deltans with immense and profound support from government with a view to breeding unity and integration amongst the various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta Region.

Keywords: western niger delta, ethnic, tribes, conflict, crisis, unity and integration.

1. Historical Background

In the Niger Delta Region, inter and intra ethnic conflicts have been rampant during colonial and post-colonial periods. These conflicts have directly or indirectly hampered the unity and peaceful co-existence in the region. However, this study takes the Western Niger Delta as its focus which is an important segment of the entire Niger Delta.

Even though the Niger Delta has about forty ethnic groups with the main ones being Urhobo, Ogoni, Ukwuani, Isoko and Ijaw, three major ethnic groups have been identified in the Western Niger Delta to be in conflict on issues related directly or indirectly to the global conflict situation in the Niger Delta and also the internal political contradictions of these three ethnic groups.

These three groups are the Ijaws whose population of over 7 million makes them the largest in the region, the Urhobo and the Itsekiri whose number is only about 450,000. The conflict between these three groups have been particularly intense in the Warri province now Warri city.¹

One of the most noticeable pieces of evidence of ethnic conflict in Warri province now Warri city, in recent times, flows from an action of the government of Western Nigeria, which officially changed the title of the Itsekiri King from the Olu of Itsekiri to the Olu of Warri province in May, 1952.² Apparently, this was before independence. This change was made at the request of the Itsekiri over the objection of the Urhobo who felt that the title; Olu of Warri province would give the impression that the Olu was a paramount ruler of Warri. The province, however, continues to be regarded not only as a home to the Itsekiris but also to the Ijaws and the Urhobos. The other indigenous ethnic groups in the area who considered the government decision as an imposition on non-Itsekiri people of Warri. The resentment turned into violence when an Itsekiri procession in Warri was attacked by some Urhobo elements near the Catholic Cathedral, a location which accidentally was also close to the Sacred Agbassah Juju Shrine.³ This singular act led to reactions and counter reactions which snowballed to intensive violence in the area.

The parade may have been seen by the Urhobo as an act of provocation but more importantly as a show of authority and power of the Itsekiri in ways that appear to intimidate non-Itsekiri communities in Warri.⁴ The confrontation erupted into a riot that quickly spread all over the city and other places, including Sapele and Itsekiri settlements along the River Ethiope, particularly at Ijun, Idjerhe, Eku and Salubi, with considerable loss of life and property.⁵

While the Ijaws, Urhobo and Itsekiri have live alongside one another for centuries, for the most part in relative harmony, the Itsekiri were the first to make contact with the European traders as early as the 16th century and they were more aggressive both in seeking Western education and in using the knowledge acquired to press their commercial advantages until 1879. Itsekiri chieftains controlled most of the trade with Europeans in the western Niger region. That monopoly was challenged by the Ijaws, yet Europeans continued to find favour with the minority Itsekiri. This again bred resentment among the Ijaws at what they felt to be a form of economic apartheid perpetrated by Europeans against the Ijaws. The departure of the Europeans (British) during the independence of Nigeria in 1960 did not lead to a decrease in tension between the Ijaws and the Itsekiri, instead the foundation of conflict had been laid.⁶

However, from the foregoing, it is explicit that the Itsekiri has been the canopy of which the conflict of the Western Niger Delta region is directly or indirectly directed to. For instance, after the restoration of law and order as a result of the aforementioned discord, the issue that triggered and snowballed this discord remains unresolved.

It should be noted however, that 50 years after the 1952 discord, another phase of the crisis sprang up again. This led to a series of confrontations following the decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria to relocate the headquarters of a Local Government Area from Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw community in Warri to the Itsekiri Village of Ogidigben. However, it should be noted that the original placement of the Warri South Local government as gazzetted by the Federal Government was Ogidigben an Itsekiri Village not Ogbe-Ijoh as asserted by some literatures. Disturbance is reported in many places, most noticeable in Sapele, Koko and Benin River, but the tempest was unleashed with the burning down of the Warri residence of Chief E. K. Clark in the early hours of March 25, 1997, allegedly by some Itsekiri youths.⁷ The reaction from the Ijaw was swift and it did not take long before Warri City of the Western region in the Niger Delta was plunged into one of the most vicious and destructive armed conflicts known in the area, which was to linger on for over 2 years. Even in the absence of reliable figures, hundreds of lives were believed to be lost and damage to properties belonging to members of both opposing ethnic groups was extensive. In spite of their supposed non-involvement, the Urhobo community was not spared the atrocities generated from these rounds of clashes. The Urhobo community of Okere in Warri was reported invaded on June 4, 1999, early in the day, by the Itsekiri youths, again with loss of lives and massive destruction of properties, including the palace of the Ovie of Okere-Warri, whose appointment the Itsekiri Opposed.⁸

With the discovery of large petroleum resources in the Niger Delta region in the late 1950s, a new bone of contention was introduced as the ability to claim ownership now promised to yield immense benefits in terms of jobs and infrastructural development expected to be provided by the oil companies. Tied to this economic expectation was the question of local political ownership within the Niger Delta region. The Ijaws feel that the allocation of power in the region does not reflect their superior numbers. This is especially seen in the largest metropolitan area of Warri which has become the prime source of political patronage and the hot spot of political contest.⁹

It should be noted however, as well as truism, that competition for wealth has fuelled violence between these two ethnic groups leading to the ethnic militarization of nearly the entire region. We can accurately assert that the three indigenous communities of Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo have lived independently of one another in relative peace before the arrival of the Europeans in the coastal area. The British who eventually gained control of the area, ushered in an administration that brought together these people who are culturally different into the same political unit, purely for commercial ends, without regards for lack of cultural affinity and common will among those involved.¹⁰ "Such a society" according to Horowitz, "held together by the dint of the force of colonial power is inherently a precarious and unstable social form".¹¹

It is also pivotal to note that the issue of Local Government Ward allocation has proven particularly contentious. Control of the city of Warri, the largest metropolitan area in Delta State and therefore a prime source of political patronage, has been an especially fiercely contested area. This has given birth to heated and unbridled disputes between the Ijaw, the Itsekiri and the Urhobo about which of the three groups are "truly" indigenous to the Warri region, with underlying presumption being that the "real" indigenes should have control of the leavers of power, regardless of the fact that all three groups enjoy ostensibly equal political rights in their place of residence.¹²

However, the crisis in Warri, arose each time, from the struggle to dominate local politics. The conflict is centered on the use and distribution of community land in Warri, which for the most part can be attributed to the failure of British colonial policies. The Colonial arrangement created an obvious abnormality which unfairly gave an Itsekiri chieftain, Dore Numa, the authority as a political agent, to lease land. The leases of land were contracted without the consent of the communities concerned and clearly a violation of treaties signed earlier between the British colonial government and the communities that owned the land dispute. The question of who

owns the land and who is entitled to rents accruing from them has become problematic. Land disputes, however are not unique to Warri but have become a major factor in political conflict in many areas of Nigeria including Kafanchan in Benue State, Ife-Modakeke in Oyo State, and Umuleri-Aguleri in Anambra State and around the world in such places as the region of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia; of course, ethnic conflict are recurrent phenomenon in human history. Much of Eastern Europe and certainly the Balkans have experienced waves of disturbances based on ethnicity before and after the emergence of modern States.¹³ A recent study indicated that between 1945 and 1980, State-Sponsored killing of members of various ethnic and political groups were responsible for a greater loss of lives than all other forms of deadly conflicts combined.¹⁴

Taking into cognizance all these analyses as regards the crisis in the Western Niger Delta Region particularly in Warri, we would be quick to argue that the root of the Warri crisis is the Kaiama Declaration of the Ijaw youths which was essentially a declaration that the entire Niger Delta Region of Nigeria to some extent Belonged to them. This of course is not a truism as it is a common knowledge that several other ancient ethnic groups like the Ibibios, the Itsekiri, the Andonis, the Urhobos, the Efiks, etc. alongside the Ijaws inhabit the area. The Warri crisis was the beginning of the implementation of the Kaiama declaration by the Ijaw youths. The Itsekiris, a tiny minority occupying lands containing some 20% to 40% of the total oil wealth of Nigeria, were a prime target of the Ijaws and they were to be quick and gain as the Ijaws envisaged that they could easily be run over, considering their status as a minority of minorities and the fact that they, unlike the Ijaws were unprepared for war. Simultaneously, in the hope of making quick work of the Itsekiri, Ijaws took their expansionist agenda also to Edo State as well as to Ondo State where they were brutally halted by the majority ethnic groups in those States as claimed by some scholars. The trigger or opportunity for the commencement of the implementation of the Kaiama Declaration and thus of the so called Warri crisis was when the then Military administrator of Delta State, Colonel David Dungs, was seen to have unilaterally announced in a broadcast to the state that the Headquarters of the newly created Warri South-West Local Government Area was Ogebe-Ijoh, an Ijaw settlement, contrary to Ogidigben, an Itsekiri town, as was dully gazzeted by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The Colonel Dungs maneuver is believed to have been sponsored by the Ijaws, he being not from the area but from far away Plateau State in North Central Nigeria and therefore ought not to have had any vested interest in the matter and considering that the action was solely to the benefit of the Ijaws. That the Itsekiris put up no resistance initially buttresses this point. That the Ijaws commenced a war rather than a protest and even went on to "capture" and retain known traditional Itsekiri territories like Kantu and Okenrengigho (which they said to have re-christened "Okenrenkoko" contrary to what is on every map of the Area) also buttressed this point. The so-called Warri crisis therefore was not a crisis but a war of attrition waged by the Ijaws against their Itsekiri brothers with whom they had co-existed peacefully before advent of Ijaw nationalism.¹⁵

However, with these various ethnic crises ravaging the peaceful co-existence of the Western Niger Delta, particularly in Warri which the paper identified as hot spot, the paper therefore tends to provide academic strategies for combating these ethnic crises that would eventually restore lasting peace and unity among the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta.

2. Theoretical Framework

Given the primary focus of this study, three schools of thought have been adopted; Primordialist, Instrumentalist and Constructivist. More recent scholarship draws on all three schools in order to increase our understanding of ethnic conflict. All three schools of thought will be taken in turn for explanation:

2.1 Primordialist

Proponents of primordialist accounts of ethnic conflict argue that "(e) ethnic groups and nationalities exist because there are traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects such as biological features and especially territorial location".¹⁶ Donald L. Horowitz argues that this kinship "makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances".¹⁷

Primordialism builds on anthropological theories with emphasis that members of the same ethnic groups have a common cultural/ancestral bond that determines their ethnic identity and community mode of livelihood different from the 'other' History books are replete with fact that Ijaws are the most ancient and indigenous inhabitants of wherever they are found in the riverine areas in Benin, Warri and Ugbu. In fact, it is the verdict of history that the Ijaws are the most ancient people in the whole Nigeria, and are among the most ancient West Africa.¹⁸ This argument has brought a lot of controversies as the Itsekiri was fast to react and also laid claim for ancestral territory. According to P. A. Talbot, once acting Resident of Benin Division (1920), calls the Ijaws "this strange people – a survival from the dim past beyond the dawn of history-whose language and customs are distinct from those of their neighbors and without trace of any tradition of time before they were driven-southwards into these regions of Sombre Mangroves. In another context, Dr. Talbot submits firmly; "their (Ijaws) origin is wrapped in mystery. The people inhabit practically the whole coast, some 250 miles in length,

stretching between the Ibibio and Yoruba. The Niger Delta is therefore, occupied by the strange people. This assertion by Talbot was jettisoned by the Itsekiri when they claimed that the Itsekiri kingdom extends to Ijaw and Urhobo communities in Warri with some laying claims that the whole of Niger Delta is the Ancestral land of Itsekiri'.¹⁹

However, facts had it that the Ijaws attempted to claim part of Lagos. Furthermore, an analysis of the traditions of some of the Ijoh groups in the Western Niger Delta fringe suggest that the Egbema had visited the vicinity of Lagos Ukuroma or Iko (Eku, Lagos) in early times. The traditions of Olodiana Ijo agree with those of Benin that Oba Orhogbua (1550-1578) on his return journey from Lagos attacked the Ilaje people of main (Okiti-Pupa) and executed its ruler as a traitor. And that after Oba Orhogbua defeated the Ilaje, he stopped at Ikoro, a major town of the Olodiana Ijo on his return from Lagos to Benin. It is worth to note that this claims by the Ijaws and other discords resulted in the violence and mayhem between the Egbesu of the Ijaws and the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) of the Yoruba in Lagos in October 1999.

There are a number of political scientists who refer to the concept of ethnic wars as a Myth because they argue that the root causes of ethnic conflict do not involve ethnicity but rather institutional, political, and economic factors.

2.2 Instrumentalist

Anthony Smith notes that instrumentalist account "came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s in the United State, in the debate about (white) ethnic persistence in what was supposed to have been an effective melting pot".²⁰ This new theory sought to explain such persistence as the result of the actions of community leaders, "who used their cultural groups as sites of mass mobilization and as constituencies in their competition for power and resources, because they found them more effective than social classes".²¹

Instrumentalist, do not think of psychological bonding. They perceive ethnic as one of the many means or resources available to elites to be used to achieve political or economic goals. In this account of ethnic identification, "ethnicity and race are viewed as instrumental identities, organized as means to particular ends."²² The primordialist and instrumentalist approaches however are not mutually exclusive. As Solomon Gashaw put it: The primordialist emphasis on ethnicity as a quasi-ontological object does not preclude it from being used as a manipulative instrument by the elites (Gashaw, 1993).²³

Whether ethnicity is fixed perception is not crucial in the instrumentalist accounts. Moreover, the scholars of this school do generally not oppose neither that ethnic difference is a part of many conflicts nor that a lot of belligerent human beings believe that they are figuring over such difference. Instrumentalists simply claim that ethnic difference is not sufficient to explain conflict.^{24, 25}

With reference to the Ijaw and Itsekiri conflict, incessant political interference has quite often escalated what would have been normal tensions. According to a Press Release by the Urhobo national Forum in America in 1999,²⁶ the Ijaw – Itsekiri conflict arose from a close friendship between the King of Itsekiri (Olu of Warri) and the late Military President of Nigeria, Gen. Sani Abacha. This is a good example of the manipulative instrument by the elites as Gashaw analyzed.

2.3 Constructivism

The popularization of the theory of constructivism is generally attributed to Jean Piaget, who articulated mechanism by which knowledge is internalized by learners. He suggested that through processes of *accommodation* and *assimilation* individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences. When individual assimilate, they incorporate the new experience into already existing framework without changing the framework.

It should be noted however, that constructivism is not a particular pedagogy. In fact, constructivism is a theory describing how learning happens. It would be a constructive account when we have an historical retrospection of the conflict in the Western Niger Delta i.e, Warri, from Colonial and Post-colonial periods. The theory of constructivism suggests that learners construct knowledge out of their experiences. The paper therefore posits that this age long crisis in the Western region has become empirical knowledge developed by Western Niger Deltans through experiences. However, constructivism is often associated with pedagogic approach that promotes active learning.

Constructivists, according to George Ngwane, hold the opinion that the Itsekiri and Ijaw crises are based not on the real or perceived differences between the two tribes but rather on distributive sectional struggles for the

largesse of the oil industry including infrastructural and financial compensations provided by the oil multinationals. He concluded that as soon as all groups needs are taken care of through good-enough Governance, all ethnic differences and hence ethnic clashes become minimized.²⁷

More recently, scholars of ethnic conflict and civil wars have introduced theories that draw insight from an all three traditional schools of thought. In *the Geography of Ethnic Violence*, for example, Monica Duffy Toft shows how ethnic group settlement patterns, socially constructed identities, charismatic leaders, issue indivisibility, and state concern with precedent settings can lead rational actors to escalate a dispute to violence, even while doing so is likely to leave contending groups much worse off.²⁸

These theories of conflict help us in providing the foundation for a proper study of tribal/ethnic conflicts ravaging the Western Niger Delta and advocates the need for unity and integration which this paper is anchored on. The other segment of this paper intends to rigorously look at The Niger Delta area and the concept of ethnic and tribal groups.

3. The Niger Delta

Nigeria Delta, the delta of the Niger River in Nigeria, is a very densely populated region sometimes called the Oil River because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The area was the British Oil River Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Coastal Protectorate.²⁹

The Niger Delta, as now defined officially by the Nigerian government, extends over about 70, 000km² and make up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. In 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime included Abia, Edo, Imo and Ondo States in the region. Some 31 million people³⁰ of more than 40 ethnic groups including the Bini, Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, and Ogoni, are among the inhabitants in the Niger Delta, Speaking about 250 different dialects.

The Niger Delta and the "South South Zone", which includes Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State, are two different entities. While the Niger Delta is the Oil producing region, the South-South Zone is a geographical zone.³¹

The delta is an oil rich region and has been the centre of international controversy over devastating pollution and ecocide, kleptocracy (notably in the Abacha's regime) and human rights violations in which Royal Dutch Shell has been implicated.³² It is pivotal to note in concrete terms/phases historically that during the colonial period, the core Niger Delta was a part of the eastern region of Nigeria, which came into being in 1951 (one of the three region, and later one of the four region). This region included the people of Colonial Calabar and Ogoja divisions, which are the present Ogoja, Annang, Ibibio, Oron, the Efik people and the Ibo people as the majority and the NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon) is the ruling political party in the region. NCNC later became National Convention of Nigerian Citizens, after Western Cameroon decided to separate from Nigeria. The ruling party of Eastern Nigeria did not seek to preclude the separation and even encouraged it.

In 1953, the old Eastern region had a major crisis due to the expulsion of Professor Eyo Ita from office by the majority Igbo tribe of the old Eastern region. Eyo Ita from Calabar was one of the pioneer nationalist for Nigerian independence. He was an Efik man. The Ibibio, Annang, Efik, Ijaw and Ogoja, demanded a state of their own, the Calabar – Ogoja River (COR) state. The struggle continued and was a major issue on the status of minorities in Nigeria during debates in Europe for Nigerian Independence.

In 1961, another Major crisis occurred in then Eastern region of Nigeria, when the leadership of the region allowed the present South Western Cameroon to separate from Nigeria (Akwa Ibom and Cross River) through a plebiscite while the leadership of the then Northern Region did what they had to do to keep North Western Cameroon in Nigeria that is the present day Adamawa and Taraba States. Without the 1961 plebiscite, Nigeria would not have the current problem with Cameroon about Bakasi as Bakasi would have been an interior part of Nigeria (Akwa Ibom and Cross River) territory.

A second phase of the agitation saw the declaration of an independent Niger Delta Republic by Isaac Adaka Boro during Ironsi's administration, just before the Nigerian Civil War.

During the Nigerian Civil war, South Eastern States of Nigeria was created (also known as South Eastern Nigeria or Coastal South Eastern Nigeria), which had the colonial Calabar division, and colonial Ogoja division. River State was also created. South Eastern State and River State became two States for the Minorities of the old eastern region, and the Majority Igbo of the Old Eastern region had a state called East Central State. South

Eastern State was renamed Cross River State and was later split into Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State. River State was later divided into River State and Bayelsa State.

The *third phase* saw the request for justice and the end of marginalization of the area by the Nigerian Government with Ken Saro Wiwa as the lead figure for this phase of the struggle. The indigents cried for lack of development even though the Nigerian oil money is from the area. They also complained about environmental pollution and destruction of the land and rivers by oil companies. Ken Saro Wiwa and other leaders were killed by the Nigerian Federal Government under Sani Abacha.

Unfortunately, the agitation for a good Niger Delta got out of control, and the present phase, the *phase four*, became militant. The deprived and exploited Niger Detans went violently unbridled. This phase saw the kidnapping of expatriates and vandalization of oil pipe lines. As a result of the degree of this violent – struggle and the taking up arms against the State, there became a need for the government to introduce the amnesty programmes as a way of shielding their swords. This led to the *fifth phase* which is the present Niger Delta.^{32a}

However, for a proper historical anchor of the Niger Delta, a retrospective of the various segment of the old Niger Delta should be analyzed.

3.1 Western (Or Northern) Niger Delta

Western Niger Delta consists of the Western section of the Coastal South South Nigeria which includes Delta, and the Southern part of Edo and Ondo States. The Western (or Northern) Niger Delta is an heterogeneous society with several ethnic groups including the Urhobo, Delta Ibo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ijaw (or Ezon) and Ukwuani groups in Delta State, along with Yoruba (Ilaje) in Ondo State. The livelihoods are primarily based on fishing and farming. History has it that the Western Niger was controlled by Chiefs of the five primary ethnic groups the Itsekiri, Isoko, Ukwuani, Ijaw and Urhobo with whom the British government had to sign separate “Treaties of Protectorates” that later became Southern Nigeria.

3.2 Central Niger Delta

Central Niger delta consists of the coastal South South Nigeria which includes Bayelsa and Rivers State. The Central Niger Delta region has the Ijaw (Opobo, Bonny etc.), Okrika, and Andoni Kalabairi etc clans, the Ogoni and other groups which consist of the Ekpeye, Ndoni, Etche, Ikwere and Ndoki in Rivers State.

3.3 Eastern Niger Delta

Eastern Niger Delta Section consists of the Eastern (or Atlantic) section of the coastal South South. South Nigeria which include Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. The Eastern Niger Delta Region has the Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ogoja (including Ekoi and Bekwara) people, who are all related with a common language and ancestors.

Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups, with varying languages and customs, creating a country of rich ethnic diversity. The largest ethnic groups are the Fulani/Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo accounting for 62% of population, while the Edo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Jukun, Urhobo, Igala, Idoma and Tiv comprise 33%, other Minorities make up the remaining five percentage (5%). The middle belt of Nigeria is known for its diversity of ethnic groups, including the Pijem, Goemal, and Kofjar.

The number of languages currently estimated and catalogued in Nigeria is 521. This number includes 510 living languages, two second languages without native speakers and nine extinct languages. In some areas of Nigeria, ethnic groups speak more than one language. The official language of Nigeria, English, was chosen to facilitated the cultural and linguistic unity of the country.

However, one of the primary focuses of this paper is to examine the concept “Tribe/Ethnic” in the Niger Delta region with a view to mapping out strategy to create unity amongst these tribes/ethnic groups with a view to ensuring peaceful co-existence and rapid development in the region.

The social structure of a tribe can vary greatly from case to case, but, due to the small size of tribes, it is always a relatively simple role structure, with few (if any) significant social distinction between individuals. With this analysis, an explicit conceptual clarification of the concepts “tribes” or and “ethnicity” should be viewed.

4. Tribe/ Ethnicity

Tribe is viewed, historically or developmentally, as a socio-cultural groups exiting before the development of, or outside of, States. Many anthropologists use the term *tribal society* to refer to societies organized largely on the basis of kinship, especially corporate descents groups (*see clan and kinship*).³³

Some theorists hold that tribe represents a stage in social evolution intermediate between bands and states. Other theorist argues that tribes developed after, and must be understood in terms of their relationship to states.³⁴

'Tribe' is a contested term due to its roots in colonial anthropological foundation and the connotations that these hierarchical definitions have. To avoid these implications, some have chosen to use the terms 'ethnic group' or 'nation' instead.^{35, 36, 37}

It should be mentioned however, that care is needed to avoid the use of the term "tribe" to describe into to, ethnic groups. 'Tribe' according to Ukpo is largely a racist term. The Ibo and Hausa, Fulani, of Niger Delta are each made up of 5 to 10 million people, a figure comparable to the number of Say or Croats. Yet we do not refer to the latter groups as "tribe".³⁸ The term "tribe" is almost exclusively, and very indifferently, applied to people of Native American of African origin. It is a label which emerges with imperialism in its application to those who were non-Europeans and lived in a colonial or semi colonial dependency. In Asia, Africa and Latin America.³⁹ As we are attempting to discard the prejudice of imperialism it is in our best interest to discard the use of the term "tribe" when referring to the ethnic group of Nigeria.⁴⁰

Nigeria, Africa's most populated country is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups; the following are the most populous and particularly influential. Hausa and Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%.⁴¹

From the above it comes clear that the Ijaw in the Niger Delta has the highest population when compared with other ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region as this study is pre-occupied and concerned with ethnical related issues in the region.

However, the study intends to take a glance at the Western Niger Delta. The Western Niger Delta has five ethnic groups; Ijaw, Isoko, Itsekiri, UKwani and Urhobo. The map below illustrates the position of these ethnic groups but does not display Isoko, which lies to the Southeast of Ijaw. It also does not display Ukwani, which lies to the North and Northeast of Urhobo.



Figure 1. Map Depicting Ethnic Groups In Western Niger Delta, Borrowed and adapted from O.Edevbie by the authors

Table 1: Tribes / Ethnic Groups in the Niger Delta Region

Abia	Bayelsa	Akwa Ibom	Cross River	Delta	Edo	Imo	Ondo	Rivers
Igbo	Izon/Ijo	Anang	Abayor	Igbo	Bini	Igbo	Egbirra	Abua (Odua)
Ibibio	Izon or Ijaw	Andoni-Ijaw	Adim	Isoko	Ebirra		Izon/Ijo	Andoni
		Eket	Adun	Itsekiri	Ebu		Yoruba	Ebana (Ebani)
		Ibeno	Agbo	Izon/Ijo	Esan/ Ishan			Egbema
		Ibibio	Akaju- Ndem	Ukwuni (Kwale)	Etsako			Engenni (Ngene)
		Okobo/ (Okkabor)	Anyanu	Urhobo	Okpamheri			Epile
		Ovon	Bachere	Agbor	Owan			Etche
		Mbo	Baumono	Ika	Uneme/ Ineme			Gokana (Kana)
		Humbuno	Bekwara	Ijaw	Akoko- Edo			Igbo
			Bette	Okpe				Izondjo
			Boki(Nki)					Degema
			Efik					Ahonda
			Ejagham					Ikwere
			Ekajuk					Kana
			Ekoi					Ekpeye
			Etung					Ogba
			Ikon					Opobo/Nkoro
			Iyala(Iyalla)					Ibani
			Mbembe					Okirika
			Mbube					Ogoni
			Nkim					Obolo
			Nkum					
			Ododoe					
			Olulumo					
			Qua					
			Ululle					
			Yyanga					
			Yeche					
			Yakur					

Source: The Study

The table above shows the various tribes/ethnic groups in the Niger Delta. In the table, it is explicit that the Cross River has the highest number of tribes/ethnic groups

5. The Need For Unity and Intergration Amongst Niger Delta Tribes/Ethnic Groups

With the avalanche of tribal/ethnic crises that have ravaged the peaceful co-existence of Niger Delta Unity, the study therefore shows and reveals steps that are supposed to be followed to achieve the mushroomed unity and integration among the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region.

Before the advent of colonialism, the different ethnic tribes had their traditional system of government that helped them lived peacefully. Thus, the various tribes that existed before colonialism began were able to live in harmony because their lands were not seized from them. So, there was no acrimony as we have today where the government seized lands from the people and steal their wealth. The Niger Delta people are being oppressed under The Land Use Decree No.6 1978 which put all lands in Nigeria under the control of the government and made them became tenants in their ancestral land. For the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta however, oil has been more of a curse than a blessing. "In communities where oil exploitation and production are carried out onshore, deforestation, erosion and destroyed farm lands are the main signposts for this gift of nature" (Udeme, 2004⁴² Okolo,2008)⁴³

Unity cannot be imposed on the people of Niger Delta when the ingredients of unity are lacking. The study therefore suggests the following:

1. That there is the need to uphold meritocracy and de-emphasize favouritism, nepotism and ethnicity/tribalism as a basis for gaining and obtaining supports, employment, promotion, infrastructural development and development attention either from government, individuals or groups. This will go a long way in breeding ethnic integration as people in the Niger Delta region would be employed and supported on the basis of meritocracy and not on tribal or ethnic affiliation.
2. The paper posits the need for the introduction, establishment or formulation of socio-cultural recreational centres specifically created for socio-cultural activities such as sport, cultural activities, etc for the Niger Deltans with immense and profound support from government with a view to breeding Unity and integration amongst the various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region.
3. It therefore calls for equity in terms of sighting of developmental projects in the region. For instance, if a College of Education is being built in any of the ethnic groups in the region, let's say, the Urhobo area, such College of Education is also expected to be built in all other ethnic groups in the region irrespective of size and population of such ethnic group as this will make every ethnic group in the region to see themselves as equal and no one is as much important than the other. This will unprecedentedly breed unity and integration amongst these ethnic groups in the region as the spirit of nepotism and favouritism in terms of sighting development projects that have been responsible for the various ethnic conflicts during colonial and post colonial areas would be witted down significantly.
4. Niger Deltans can effectively fight for their course if they realize the need to be bound together, share common ties, the belief that they can live happily together, not satisfied when disunited and can not tolerate subjections to people who do not share this ties. Through this, they can effectively agitate for resource control, the principle of derivation and even the issue of Onshore- Offshore Dichotomy.
5. The study advocates for the need for a more integrated and articulated programmes of ethnic conflict prevention. Such programmes should be to effectively remedy and prevent ethno-tribal conflict as the case may be. Here, the youth should be carried along. Emphasis should be on Early Warning Signals (EWS) with a view to monitoring and detecting any tribal/ethnic differences among the Niger Deltans before it snowballs and degenerates into an unbridled tribal/ethnic crisis.
6. Sentiments must be stopped: Sentiments are one of the major problems that are threatening the cause for unity and harmony in the Niger Delta. The war of words and tribal feuds are being squabbled by Nigerian all over the country. We must stop making sweeping generalization on other tribes, and reserve our emotions towards other tribes in the Niger Delta for peace to reign in the region.
7. Sense of Brotherhood: This is very pivotal not only in maintaining peace and unity in the Niger Delta but also in upholding peace and tranquillity among Niger Deltans. Niger Deltans should regard all and sundry as one. Parents at home and teachers in school should orient the kids about the significant of unity. The Niger Deltans should believe that they belong to one family. The notion of `We` vs `Them` should be abrogated and expunged from the minds of Niger Deltans with a view to being stronger, safer and more United. In other words, the Ijaws and the Itsekiris in addendum, with the Urhobos and other Niger Delta ethnic groups should see themselves as one blood and as such, no need for disintegration.

6. Conclusion

Ethnocentrism, tribalism, persecution and prebendalism have played a visible role in Niger Delta politics both prior and subsequent to independence in 1960. In the larger picture, kin-selective altruism has made its way into Nigerian politics, spurred (spurred?) various attempts by tribalists to concentrate federal power to a particular region of their interests.⁴³ Ethnic violence over the oil producing Niger Delta region and inadequate infrastructures are some of the current issues bedeviling the region.

It would be foolhardy for the Nigerian government to address the ethnic conflict ravaging the Niger Delta, particularly in the Western Niger Delta, paramount among them are the Ijaw, Itsekiri and the Urhobo as separated from the greater collective identities that make Nigeria and that has been referred to as the National question. With the picture of Nigeria as a whole that encompasses Niger Delta which is a unit/segment, it is believed that the regionalization of Nigeria into North, East and West without South leading to three major ethnic languages, three major political parties and the distribution of resources in an unbalanced manner have been one of the banes of the surge in ethnic violence.

One of the fundamental challenges would be a thorough ethnic conflict transformation exercise that has inbuilt conflict preventive mechanism either in governance relation or in constitutional engineering. Yet they would be like in most resource blessed countries, a case for grievance against greed in the Niger Delta and even changing ethnic belligerent even when the root causes of conflicts may have been examined and addressed.⁴⁴

The intensity of the conflict on the surface is hard to explicate to writers like Lloyd and others in the Western World who consider ethnic riots as urban issues that involve working class people. Lloyd in his attempt to explain the ethnic politics in Warri posed the question: **What had the Itsekiri common man to gain from these struggles?** The conflict does not appear to have much to do with economic competition between the groups. Warri has not been known for any labour unrest that arose from factory closings or evidences of businesses that are specifically limited to any one group. Lloyd may have sensed the real reason for the ethnic problem, when he remarked that "...one ought to look closely to see which individuals gain from exploiting this tension and study the means by which they seek to gain their ends".⁴⁵

Warri has become heterogeneous and polyglot. The reality of urbanization, means that the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, and in fact, all groups of people in Western Niger Delta regardless of race, ethnicity or religious background must learn to live together in peace and harmony, sharing common goals and working for a common destiny. The medieval doctrine of feudal over lordship of Warri, imposed by the British, has long been deposed in Nigerian Courts. Besides the lack of legal basis, using the notion of over-lordship to establish privileges for some while denying them same to some other indigenes of the same area, is archaic and has no place in a modern society. Many members of the three ethnic groups, in spite of cultural differences and obstacles created by their leaders, much to their credits continues to intermingle through marriage and business interactions, making the need for peaceful co-existence all the more imperative.⁴⁶

The paper therefore calls for unity and integration amongst the indigenous communities with a view to improving on this trend by coming together through credible leaders to fashion a course of action to halt the theft of oil wealth and to wrest the control of the resources of the area from the Federal Government. This integration among these ethnic groups can lead to a unified and consolidated Niger Delta ideas, opinion, belief and political aspirations that will be so concrete and difficult to be disintegrated and disunited.

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