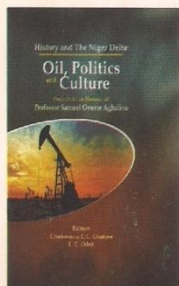


ABOUT THE BOOK

This book entitled History and the Niger Delta: Oil, Politics & Culture is a Festschrift published in Honour of Professor Samuel Ovuete Aghalino for his immeasurable academic and scholarly contribution to the socio-economic, political and educational development of the Niger-Delta region, Nigeria and the world at large. The book discusses the dynamics of Niger Delta history, with particular emphasis on oil, economy and environment. It further discusses the Niger Delta Eco-feminism as well as petro-violence within the region. Some chapters of the work examine the multinationals intervention in the Niger Delta area. Youth restiveness, militancy, popular culture, politics of resource control and peace building initiatives in the Niger Delta area as well as inter and intra-group relations within the Niger Delta area equally received attention. The contributors were meticulous in the choice of topics related to the book title and carried out extensive, thorough and articulated research and analysis of issues on the history of oil, politics and culture of the people of Niger Delta region of Nigeria.



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Festschrift in Honour of Professor Samuel Ovuete Aghalino

Editors
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L. E. Odeh

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Professor Samuel Ovuete Aghalino FHSN

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3

FROM (PALM)OIL TO (CRUDE)OIL: THE CHANGING PHASES OF THE NIGER-DELTA OIL ECONOMY

Aboyeji, Adeniyi Justus, PhD

Introduction

The economic history of the region that is known today as the Niger-Delta has always revolved around oil, palm or crude. Indeed, the rat race from farms to oil firms in the creeks and mainland in this region was occasioned by the change from palm oil economy to that of crude oil. The abandonment of the agricultural sector for the oil sector, following the discovery of oil, came despite the economic sustainability that the former had given prior to the coming of the latter. The methodologies adopted in this paper are largely historical and analytical, employing the use of both primary and secondary source materials, with careful internet surfing. Findings reveal paradoxically that while Malaysia, where the British introduced oil palm to in the early 1870s just as an ornamental plant, is still raking economic fortunes from it till date, Nigeria, part of the tropical West Africa where oil palm groves grow as indigenous plants, abandoned its oil palm for crude oil in the 1970s, despite its humongous contribution to the state economy prior to the discovery of crude oil. It could therefore be said that Nigeria played the prodigal, by selling its birth-right—palm oil—to Malaysia. The consequences of this abandonment, to say the least, have been grim. The paper concludes that while oil palm was a blessing to the Niger-Delta region and Nigeria by extension, crude oil is more of a curse than blessing, as the present realities portend clear indications that the country's economy is heading straight for the rocks. The recent further crash in global oil price, particularly at the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, and general developments in the international energy market further dealt an even heavier blow on Nigeria's monolithic economy. From the foregoing analysis, we therefore recommend, *inter alia*, an urgent and sincere need for the Nigerian government to declare a "state of emergency" on its economic sector for possible resuscitation from the imminent disaster. In tandem with this, urgent and provocative measures need be taken to rescue Nigeria's monolithic economy from the precipice of economic cataclysm.

The division of Nigeria into six geo-political zones had been conceived by Chief Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme, Second Republic Vice President (1979-1983) along with his friend, Bisi Onabanjo, with whom he was serving his prison term, having been sent to the Kirikiri Prison by the General Muhammadu

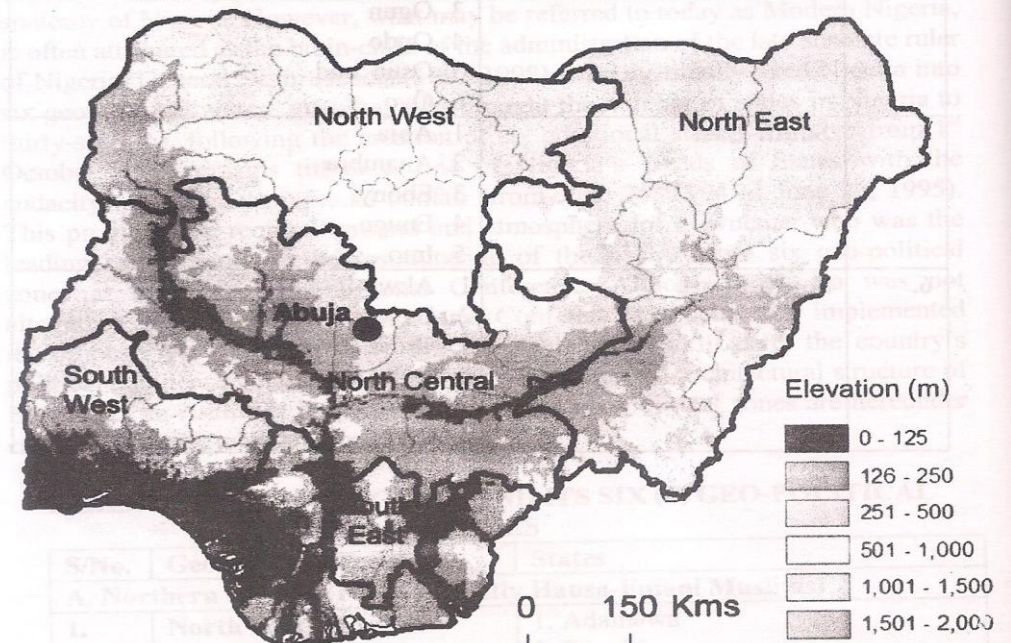
Buhari-led military junta. This, he thought, was what best suits the geo-political anatomy of Nigeria. However, what may be referred to today as Modern Nigeria, is often attributed as the brain-child of the administration of the late absolute ruler of Nigeria, General Sanni Abacha(1993-1998), who eventually axed Nigeria into six geo-political zones. Abacha, who brought the number of states in Nigeria to thirty-six (36), following the creation of six additional states, effective from 1st October, 1996, remains till date, one of Nigeria's Heads of States with the audacity to convene a national confab (from June 26, 1994 to June 26, 1995). This provided the required ground and atmosphere for Ekwueme, who was the leading campaigner for the restructuring of the country into six geo-political zones at the 2005 Constitutional Conference. Although the idea was not altogether adopted at the Constitutional Conference, Abacha later implemented it. Although yet to receive any official legal sanction till date, the country's political engineering has since been tailored towards the architectural structure of Ekwueme, an Architect by profession. The six geo-political zones are hereunder catalogued in the table and map.

TABLE 1: SHOWING NIGERIA AND ITS SIX (6) GEO-POLITICAL ZONES

S/No.	Geo-Political Zone	States
A. Northern Nigeria (Predominantly Hausa-Fulani Muslims)		
1.	North East	1. Adamawa 2. Bauchi 3. Borno 4. Gombe 5. Taraba and 6. Yobe
2.	North West	1. Kaduna 2. Kano 3. Katsina 4. Kebbi 5. Jigawa 6. Sokoto and 7. Zamfara
3.	North Central (Middle Belt)	1. Benue 2. Kogi 3. Kwara 4. Nassarawa 5. Niger 6. Plateau and 7. The FCT (Federal Capital Territory)
B. Southern Nigeria (Predominantly Igbo and Yoruba Christians)		
4.	South-West	1. Ekiti

		2. Lagos 3. Ogun 4. Ondo 5. Osun and 6. Oyo
5	South-East	1. Abia 2. Anambra 3. Ebonyi 4. Enugu 5. Imo
6	South-South	1. Akwa-Ibom 2. Bayelsa 3. Cross River 4. Delta State 5. Edo 6. Rivers

MAP OF NIGERIA AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL ZONES



Source: Okorie, P.N., Ademowo, G.O., Saka, Y., Davies, E., Okoronkwo, C., Bockarie, M.J., Molyneux, D.H. and Kelly-Hope, I.A, Lymphatic.²

Historically however, the Niger-Delta geographical region of Nigeria initially consisted of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States or the area that used to be called the Oil Rivers; as it was once the major hub of palm oil produce. It was initially the British Oil Rivers Protectorate (1885-1893), before it was thereafter expanded to become the Niger Coast Protectorate.³ In 2000, the Obasanjo administration added Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross-River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States. The Niger-Delta area, therefore straddles three geo-political zones of Nigeria, consisting of the six states of the present South-south geo-political zone (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers), two from the South-East (Abia and Imo) and one (Ondo) from the South-western geo-political zone. The Niger-Delta should therefore not be confused with the South-south geo-political zone, as it is often done. It however, refers to Nigeria's vast coastal landmass, the custodian of her oil wealth. It is instructive to note that the same area is also today a Crude Oil rich region. In fact, of the nine aforementioned states, only Cross-River (from where the oil-rich Bakasii peninsula, which was officially ceded to Cameroon, following the International Court of Justice's verdict on October 10, 2002⁴) is not a crude oil-producing state.⁵

Geographically, the Niger-Delta is largely situated in the tropical Rain-forest region, which is well-favoured with adequate and abundant rainfall, rich

From (Palm) Oil to (Crude) Oil: The Changing Phases of the Niger-Delta Oil...

ample fertile/ arable soil and abundant sunshine. This stimulated the production of both food and cash crops, principal among which was oil palm (*Elaeagnaeensisjacq.*), which has a history of being a source of raw materials for indigenous craftsmanship and for domestic utility. Ehiagbanare (cited by Orukpe) who examined the role played by the forest in stimulating the economic activities and development in Edo state, observed that people who live within the forest belt depend on the forest for survival in many ways, such as food, medicine, shelter, clothing, etc.⁶ The Niger-Delta presents such a unique network of waterways that apparently may not be found in any other area in Africa. There, the river, breaking into numerous tributaries, drains itself into the Gulf of Guinea after travelling sluggishly for hundreds of miles from the Western Sudan. Niger-Delta is said to be home to some of the most energetic and enterprising peoples of Western Africa, chief among who are the Isoko, Urhobo, Kalabari, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Ibeno, a large body of Ibos, etc. even though there are said to be over forty (40) divergent ethnicities within this region.⁷

Indigenous Economy of the Niger-Delta

Over time, agriculture has been identified as the economic mainstay of most of the peoples of the forest region of Nigeria. Although the agrarian economy was essentially based on food crops such as tubers or roots, grains, cereals and other tropical crops such as yams of different species, cocoyam, cassava, maize, beans, groundnuts, peppers, banana and plantains, indigenous cash crops such as oil palm, cotton and rubber were also planted. Aghalino maintained that oil palm is indigenous, not only to the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, but to the entire tropical Africa.⁸ Palm oil is also identified among other principal items of trade around Benin from the 15th century to the advent of the British.⁹ Although they also later embraced other new crops such as cocoa and kolanuts, which were introduced from tropical Southern America and West Indies,¹⁰ Aghalino indicated that the economy of Niger-Delta, prior to colonial rule, to a large extent, revolved around the oil palm.¹¹

Figure showing Oil Palm



Source: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/08/pind-to-revitalise-oil-palm-business-in-Niger-Delta/>

The people proved beyond reasonable doubt that they could put their ingenuity to fruition to adapt to, and conquer their environment by exploiting their environmental opportunities. All the resources in the rain forest region were therefore successfully taken advantage of by the people, as they complemented the farming with animal husbandry and fishing.¹² The economy of most of these areas, although basically agrarian, also spurred the growth and development of agro-allied industries, both of which, in turn, stimulated robust commercial activities. Indeed, demonstrating the dynamic nature of pre-colonial West African economy generally, Falola argued that they obviously operated beyond the subsistence level as against what most Eurocentric bigots will like us to believe.¹³

The role of women in the agrarian economy of this region cannot be overemphasised. For instance, Emordi argued that cloth weaving and soap making were feminine occupations.¹⁴ This argument was corroborated by Orukpe, whose research borders on Esanland. He added that the cultivation of crops like banana, plantain and cotton (and the attendant weaving industry) was largely the prerogative of the womenfolk, usually undertaken as subsidiary crops in their husbands' farms.¹⁵ In most areas within the tropical rainforest belt of the Niger-Delta, soap-making was a considerable local craft industry, which depended solely on locally sourced raw materials from the forest environment. Meanwhile, the quality of soap from the soap-making industry largely depended on the quality and quantity of the palm oil used. Soap making, like palm oil production,

one of the oldest industrial support in the Niger-Delta region, apart from its industrial use as raw materials also served a domestic utility as it provided the means of bathing, washing utensils and local fabrics, as an item of social gifts, marriage parcels and as a commodity in the internal and long-distance trade in which the womenfolk were involved.¹⁶ To sustain this viable industry therefore, the availability of quality and abundant palm oil must be ascertained.

In view of this, James Welsh remarked that, 'there were great stores of palm trees, out of which the people gathered great store of wine, as well as good store of soap'.¹⁷ Among other things, the abolition of slave trade and transition to legitimate trade in forest cash produce, principally palm oil and kernel, made this region to become an economic satellite of European industrial economy, as it provided one of the principal raw materials needed by European growing industries. Palm oil trade in the 19th century came as a substitute for the trade in human merchandise, dubbed as slave trade, after its abolition.¹⁸ While providing a vivid description of manufacturing industry and soap-making in Ubulu-Uku, Delta State, Emordi posited that in exchange for the exported raw materials, European more refined industrial soap was imported, made from palm oil, which affected the indigenous soap products and industry.¹⁹

Oil Palm and Foreign Influence on the Economy of the Niger-Delta

The area that eventually snowballed into Nigeria believably experienced agricultural revolution during the 19th century, consequent upon the introduction of new crops and new techniques of processing her indigenous crops. This formed the basis upon which the colonial economy in Nigeria was predicated.²⁰ Even though colonialism has the negative reputation of being antithetical and anathematic to most aspects of the indigenous economy, it particularly encouraged the production of cash produce. Indeed, the exploitation of oil palms, among all other principal colonial export commodities was paramount in British imperial motives. Palm produce, especially palm oil and kernel, have the longest histories as they were among the earliest exported commodities from the Nigerian region.²¹ Certain factors, which particularly favoured oil palm produce are considered below. Aghalino identified the following factors that promoted the socio-economic importance of palm produce, more importantly from the second half of the 19th century.²²

i. The Industrial Revolution in Europe and later America, which shifted emphasis from manual labour to the use of machines. In these industries, palm oil was used in the manufacture of soap, candles, margarine and as cooking fat. These voracious machines required enormous raw materials for optimal performance. The machines also needed to be lubricated by palm oil, for optimum operation.

ii. Abolition of slave trade: With the Industrial revolution, slave labour became obsolete as slaves became more of liabilities that the assets they had hitherto been.

- iii. The development of legitimate trade in farm/agricultural produce also greatly encouraged oil palm farming in the tropical rain forest in response to their geographical particularities.
- iv. Development of the railway, which required palm oil as a lubricant
- v. Pharmaceutical Use: With time, the importance of palm produce increased. For instance, while palm oil was also used in Pharmaceutical industries for the manufacture of drugs.
- vi. Livestock Feed: The residue of palm kernel was used as feed for livestock.
- vii. Domestic Utility: All the above were apart from the domestic use among the locals for various domestic, industrial and religious use, as highlighted in the table below:

Table 2 showing the different Uses of Palm Produce among the Indigenous Peoples of the Niger-Delta Region

S/No	Palm	Usage	
1.	Palm oil	Religious/Veneration	The palm oil industry also had its venerated pantheon deity, since it occupied such a central place in the socio-economic lives of the people of this region. Among the Yoruba, oil or kernel is used as libation by being put on the head of some of their idols/gods.
		Domestic cooking	Used for cooking, either domestically or ceremonially. The 'banga' and 'owo' soups, special delicacies are made from the oil.
2.	Oil palm	Wine for consumption	The oil palm was tapped to extract palm wine, which is consumed both domestically and ceremonially
3.	Palm kernel	Human Consumption	Chewed alone or with gari or maize as snacks
		Animal feed	Fed to goats and chicken
	Palm kernel shell	Construction	Used in marshy areas in compounds and foot paths as cement, after removal of the kernels from the nuts
4.	Palm fronds	Religious	Used for burial ceremonies and in the propitiation of the gods

	Building Construction	Used for the construction of thatched fences around the compound or shrines
		Fed to goats as fodder
Palm trunks	Building Construction	Used as planks for building houses, especially for roofing. It is notable that termites cannot devour them like other planks.
Palm veins		Used in making brooms for sweeping, etc.
		The palm pomade is a therapeutic sloan liniment oil.
Palm fibre	Fishing	Woven into fishing nets and traps

Oil palm is a plant that has no waste. Every part of the palm was utilised by the people for various utilities, as demonstrated above. As such, the economy of most areas within this region prior to the establishment of British colonial rule centred around collecting palm nuts from which oil, kernel and other products were extracted. For instance, A.F.R Stoddart, Acting District Officer (A.D.O.) of Obudu Division, during the late 1920s and early 1930s, noted of the Beto-Bendi people of Old Obudu Division (present-day Cross River State) that as people appropriated their time between farming, hunting and palm wine drinking.²⁴ Attesting to agrarianism as the vortex of the stable egalitarian indigenous economy of the micro society of the Northern Cross River State of Nigeria, Imbua and Tabi pointed to their gross involvement in oil-palm related socio-economic activities. Many of their men were, even if secondarily, engaged as palm wine tappers.²⁵ The centrality of oil palm tree even found its way into their folklores and folk verses:

If it's a kernel we found,
Let us share it among us all;
If a palm nut we find,
Let us share it among us all;
One mouth's itching for excess
Would lead to witchcraft.²⁶

Furthermore, because of its economic value, oil palm was a traditional source of revenue for the people. Besides meeting the domestic consumption needs of the people, most men required cash earned from the produce to fulfil socio-economic obligations such as payment of tax, purchase of essential article

items such as salt, or luxury items like gin and gun powder and later, payment of school fees. Essentially therefore, oil palm contributed immensely towards meeting the socio-economic needs of the people in pre-colonial, through the colonial epochs.²⁷

Little wonder that even before the colonial years, the export of oil palm produce reportedly doubled from West Africa between 1865 and 1910 with Nigeria blazing the trail. By 1900, it reportedly constituted 89% of Nigeria's total export. As from 1910, the British colonial administration started to be directly and radically involved in the oil palm industry in the Niger-Delta region through her economic policies. Overall British imperial motive influenced the colonial administration to prioritise the exploitation of cash crops such as oil palm, cotton, cocoa, groundnuts and rubber in Nigeria. In 1923, pressure from the joint West Africa Committees of the Liverpool, London and Manchester Chamber of Commerce forced the Secretary of State for the colonies to organise a committee to study the Nigerian oil palm sector with a view towards making recommendations for its improvement.²⁸

However, from the 1920s, demand for and patronage of Nigeria's palm produce began to suffer decline due to certain factors: one, the emergence and exploitation of other products, such as cocoa and rubber; two, the growth of higher quality oil palm in Malaya (present day Malaysia), Belgian Congo and Sumatra; and three, the global economic depression of the 1920s/1930s.²⁹ The British colonial administration, however, had to swiftly design some whimsical measures to checkmate this ugly trend threatening its economic interest by initiating a number of colonial policies. The concern of the colonial administration in Nigeria was the improvement of the quality of oil and the need to regulate and ensure the exportation of quality oil from Nigeria, which will favourably compete with other major palm oil producers. Hence between 1920 and 1960, the British colonial administration introduced a number of initiatives to improve the quality and of course quantity of palm oil. The colonial policy on cash crop production, for instance, modified the existing indigenous production methods, while government introduced experimental/demonstration plantations by 1932. In addition, to boost the quality of extracted oil, the colonial government introduced the use of hand presses and crushing mills in 1949.³⁰

Even though the situation in British colonial West Africa may not be as callous as it was elsewhere, as in German Tanganyika, Portuguese colonies and French Equatorial Africa or Sudan around the 1930s, where and when Africans were literally forced to grow cash crops by guns and whips,³¹ the British also came up with whimsical policies, which were altogether anathematic to the people. Obaro Ikime recorded European coercion to resume trade with the people of this region by a threat of force beginning from as far back as 1886.³² Ultimately too, the colonial policy on taxation was designed to coercively make Africans become labourers in European farms and firms or cash crop farmers.³³ This is done in such a way that the colonial tax was payable in European currency and not in the cowries or other local currencies of the people.

Rodney also decried how the notorious British-controlled trading companies such as the United Africa Company (UAC), served as conduit pipe for siphoning a great deal of Africa's enormous wealth produced through the efforts of the peasants. It is particularly pathetic to note that African peasant farmers were double-squeezed by the capitalist companies, which on the one hand, regulated the prices paid on cash crops exported to Europe to feed their industries, while on the other hand, they also controlled the prices of imported goods such as bicycles, clothings and tools. For instance, Rodney cited the unequal exchange of African exported cash produce used as raw materials in Europe vis-à-vis European imported manufactured goods. He observed, for instance, how the UAC and other companies in Nigeria severely reduced the prices of palm products in 1929, whereas prices of imported manufactured goods soared beyond the capacity of the average man, thus, escalating the cost of living. During the years of depression, therefore, despite the fall in the supply of palm oil per tons, yet, the profit margin of the trading companies, widened geometrically, accruing handsome profits. This unequal exchange in favour of the British was coordinated by the colonial produce Marketing Boards.³⁴

Orukpe argued that Esanland stimulated the production of oil palm, cotton and cocoa to support the colonial economy of Nigeria till independence.³⁵ Aghalino and Aboyeji also argued that prior to the discovery of oil in Nigeria, other economic sectors, particularly agriculture, including food and cash crops such as cotton, millet, maize, sorghum, cassava, cocoa, oil palm, rubber, groundnuts, rice and beans, were vibrant and viable.³⁶ Those were the good old days when each region was self-sustaining and self-developing with what it had, thus, developing at its own pace, with its own programme.³⁷ As at that time, proceeds from the agricultural sector, were used to develop a virile and viable economy, as all the regions successfully carved a niche for themselves through policies that best suited the peculiarity of each. This way, globally, the country became the highest producer of groundnut (coming from the north), rubber, palm oil and palm kernel (coming from the Eastern Region); and second only to Ghana in cocoa export, deriving from the thriving cocoa plantations of the Western Region. As a matter of fact, under the 1963 Federal Constitution framework, each region controlled its resources, contributed 30 per cent to the Federal Government, 20 per cent to the common pool, which the existing regions shared and retained a good deal of 50 per cent of income generated for regional development.³⁸

However, post-colonial authorities, especially following the oil boom era of the 1970s, abandoned this sustainable sector, for the depleting Oil and Gas sector. Orukpe decried the neglect of the enormous agricultural potentials of Esanland and its prospect for the diversification of the modern Nigerian economy since independence and since the economic exploration of crude oil, despite its robust economic history and potentials to contribute to the national GDP and per capital income.³⁹ Akinwale decried the monolithic trend the economy precariously tilted towards as the country became virtually reliant on the oil and gas sector,

which accounted for as much as 95% of the export accrual and 76% of government's total revenue during the last decade.⁴⁰

Although much has been documented on the depleting attribute of oil, it is indeed, shocking that years after, despite spurious white papers that successive administrations have come up with towards the revitalisation of the agriculture sector, such as the Green Revolution, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), etc. government's acclaimed efforts to improve the non-oil sector have not yielded significantly. As at present, index still shows that although oil revenue may account for just about 15% of Nigeria's GDP, oil exports may still account for closely 90% of government's foreign exchange revenue.⁴¹ Paradoxically however, despite Nigeria's huge oil and gas resources over the years, rather than bettering the lot of the populace, the country had lost her position among the comity of world fifty richest countries since the 1970s and is now enlisted among the poorest and most indebted countries.⁴² This is largely because Nigeria abandoned her inexhaustible natural resources for exhaustible mineral resources, with the paradigm shift from farm to creeks.

From Farm to Creeks

While it has been conspicuously made clear that the present heavy, almost exclusive reliance of Nigeria on the crude oil economy has not always been the case, it is instructive to note that the creeks of the Niger-Delta, which were once always bustling and buzzing with robust agrarian, agro-allied industrial, commercial, aquatic (fishing) and other riverine activities, became interrupted with the discovery of crude oil in the region.

Even though oil prospecting in Nigeria first began around 1903, it took over fifty years (that is 1956, four years before the country's independence), before oil was struck in commercial quantity at Oloibiri, River State. Starting from a rather humble beginning, Nigeria's production capacity for export rose steadily and later geometrically from 5, 100 to 450, 000, 2.0 million and 2.4 million barrels per day in 1958, 1966, 1972 and 1979 respectively. By this time, Nigeria had become ranked as the sixth petroleum exporting country globally and second in Africa.⁴³ Today, although there are five refineries in Nigeria, according to Nigeria's Department of Petroleum Resources official website, apart from private refining companies, the four government owned were built by successive administrations, coordinated by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), namely, the:

- i. Port Harcourt refinery, Alase Eleme, near Port-Harcourt, Rivers State, constructed in 1962, commissioned in 1965.
- ii. Warri refinery, Warri, Delta State, officially opened in 1978.
- iii. Kaduna refinery, Kaduna State, commissioned in 1983.
- iv. Eleme Petrochemicals Company Limited (EPCL), Rivers State, now Indorama Eleme Petrochemicals Company Limited (IEPL), acquired from NNPC during the privatisation programme by Indorama as the core investor in 2006.

The fifth is the Ogbelle refinery, Ogbelle, River State (Niger-Delta Petroleum Resources Limited—NDPR), commissioned 2012.⁴⁴

As expected, the discovery of crude oil in the Niger-Delta region did not come without its attendant challenges, much of which have been aptly captured in extant works. Aghalino and Aboyeji chose to be rhetorical as they probed into whether it is a blessing or a curse.⁴⁵ Alabi, who decried how the arable lands in the Niger-Delta became taken over by oil fields, oil pipelines and oil companies, identified the negative impacts on the land and people. According to him, due to crude-oil related activities, the people have been deprived of their God-given asset—arable land, good water, health, wealth and lives to environmental degradation, oil spillage and the likes.⁴⁶ Apart from oil spillage and its effect on environmental degradation, even more lamentable is the effect of the new (crude) oil economy on the re-conditioning of the psyche of the people of the region. As such, ever since, the oil fortune had become erroneously seen as an inexhaustible national cake sharable by all.⁴⁷

Espousing more on the effects on land and waters, the major natural assets of the people, it is appalling how oil discovery and production in the Niger-Delta region has altered the economic pattern of the region. Aquatic life was destroyed since the fresh waters where the fishes had thriven became poisoned. Ancestral farmlands were also taken over by the oil wells and pipelines. The cheap money scavenged from oil companies and contractors turned the hard-working, law-abiding and ardent believers in the principle of dignity of labour to lazy bones, predators, vampires and hangers-on who now resort to idleness, militancy and lawlessness for survival, rather than work. Occasioned by the inequality arising from the distribution of oil proceeds, this new-found wealth distracted the people from their hitherto vibrant economic activities.⁴⁸

Locally, the fight for the scarce resources has often taken the form of intra- and inter-tribal feuds among the minority groups. The grave consequences of government takeover and thus, denial and deprivations of ancestral lands and waters—their indigenous sources of livelihood, oil spillage, the sacking of some communities and government's collaboration with the foreign oil companies and contractors, injuries of countless locals and failing health due to strange, oil-related pandemics, have all often spurred grim agitations and heinous crimes. These have taken various forms such as manslaughter/homicide, oil theft and bunkering, pirating, pipeline vandalism, illegal refineries construction, human trafficking, thuggery, kidnapping/abduction and/or killing of expatriates or indigenous oil contractors, staff or suspected local collaborators, arson and homicide. These were further fuelled by government's inapt response to the plight of the frustrated locals, the proud landlords of Nigeria's oil wealth. Until recently however, these nefarious activities, which came to become norms and commonplace eventually, were more like fairy tales.

Tensions between foreign oil companies and minority ethnic movements escalated in the 1990s, when the people conceivably resorted to the apparently

only available option—self-help. The apex and boomerang effect of this was the rise and proliferation of the 'Creek Boys' and ethno-cultural survival movements or militant groups such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) founded in 1990, led by the late International Playwright and author—Ken Saro Wiwa, Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) formed in 1998, Niger-Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), formed in 2004, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (which launched itself into international recognition in January 2006), Niger Delta Avengers which emerged 2016, among many others. It was in this course that Ken Saro Wiwa and the eight other Ogoni freedom fighters were killed in 1995 by the Abacha-led government, in spite of global outcry against the carnage.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, rather than de-escalating tension in the Niger-Delta, the carnage only led to a surge in the rate of criminality in the region. While decrying the rate and spate of criminality in the Niger Delta area, Odeigah established a connect between unemployment and criminality. She harped on the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas and the austere adverse effect on the land and water resources of the people. Farming (particularly in oil palm), fishing and salt-making, the major occupations of the people, had long lost their viability due to the recurrent oil spillage and degradation of the eco-system.⁵⁰ The resultant effect is the abandonment of the farms for the creeks and oil firms. Ever since the discovery of oil, the agricultural sector has suffered successive deteriorating neglect. The table below demonstrates the acute decline in the contribution of the agricultural sector and increasing dependence on the oil sector vis-à-vis the Nigerian economy.

Table 3: Decline in the Contribution of the Agricultural Sector to the Nigerian Economy, 1958-1992

YEAR	AGRIC % CONTRIBUTION	PETROLEUM % CONTRIBUTION	OTHER % CONTRIBUTION
1958	66	22	12
1960	33	57	8
1966	10	83	7
1978	8	86	6
1982	8	86	6
1988	5	88	7
1992	3	87	10

Source:⁵¹ Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) 2020 "Daily Crude Oil Price" <https://www.cbn.gov.ng>

Attributes and Qualities of Crude Oil

Although the unique role of oil has been highlighted to include common national heritage of a country and motor of globalisation,⁵² its qualities and attributes also include its price volatility, consequent boom and bust cycles, especially high capital intensity and technological sophistication, enclave nature, and the

exceptional generation of profits that accrue to both the state and the private sectors.⁵³ Moreover, it is also very versatile and flexible, non-reproductive, depleting, natural (hydrocarbon) resource, a fundamental input to modern economic activities, provides about 50 % of the total energy demand in the world, excluding the former centrally planned economies.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, as widely posited by Aghalino, countries that depend on mineral resources as the basis of foreign exchange earnings and overall development do so at their own peril. They are vulnerable to the volatility of prices in the international markets and live at the mercy of policy framers in the buyer-countries in the major European capitals and the metropolises in North America.⁵⁵ For Nigeria, the situation appears even more precarious as there is increasing bad news, specifically vis-à-vis her monolithic economy and almost total reliance on oil wealth.

To begin with is the proliferation of global oil discoveries including African countries such as Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda plus the fact that not less than forty sub-Saharan African states are now oil producers.⁵⁶ Worse still for Nigeria, since early 2011, US, the major traditional importer of Nigeria's oil, with China, began to back out of the deal for cheaper energy sources as they search for viable alternatives, a development that is not particularly healthy for Nigeria. Consequently, oil import from Nigeria has begun to suffer decline. US and Canada, since 2014, had also projected to totally stop crude oil importation from West African marketers. Recent US Energy Information Administration (EIA) report shows that, driven primarily by higher production in the Permian region of Texas and New Mexico, the US is expected to beat its previous projection to rise by 1.06 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2020 to a record of 13.30 million bpd and 13.7 million bpd in 2021. Oil supply from non-OPEC oil-producers, particularly United States, Norway, Brazil and Canada, has been projected to bring a surge in the global supply and consumption of oil in 2020, although to the detriment of the traditional producers. U.S. EIA recently reported that "A shale boom has helped make the United States the world's biggest producer, overtaking Saudi Arabia and Russia."⁵⁷

Even more destabilising is the downward turn in oil prices as presently experienced today, that economies are not stable worldwide and when the prices of oil and its allied products fluctuate in the world market.⁵⁸ Partly coupled with the effects of the various nefarious activities in the Niger-Delta, government's accruals from the oil and gas sector have been greatly depleted.⁵⁹ This is even more so, further worsened by the sharp and intermittent crash in the prices of oil products in the global market. Data from the table below attest to this claim.

Table 4 showing Slump in Daily Crude oil Price, from 10-23 March, 2020

S/No.	DATE	Crude Oil Price in \$ US
1.	23/03/2020	25.000
2.	20/03/2020	27.930
3.	19/03/2020	25.380
4.	18/03/2020	27.560
5.	17/03/2020	29.610
6.	16/03/2020	31.470
7.	13/03/2020	34.250
8.	12/03/2020	33.020
9.	11/03/2020	38.830
10.	10/03/2020	37.570
Source: ⁶⁰		

The table above clearly shows that global oil price slumped to as low as \$25 per barrel in March 2020, from over \$65 in early 2020;⁶¹ and there are further indications that with the global lockdown amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, oil prices are expected to slump even further, to as low as \$10 per barrel, as the market faces the lowest demand in twenty-five years.⁶² This is coming in the face of the extant research efforts for green energy and other alternative fuels, in addition to the discovery and development of more viable oil wells by several nations with no previous prospects for oil. The prospect for alternative fuel, which may further relegate oil to the background and the production of electric automobiles are even more sombre threats to economies still subsisting on oil. The above are further worsened by the projection of Nigeria's probable oil depletion by 2069, going by the nation's depletion rate and life index, which stand at 2.04 % and 49.03 years respectively, according to the country's Department of Petroleum Resources.⁶³ Perhaps, more than any other thing, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic even further aggravated the situation, thus making the future bleaker for oil-dependent economies like Nigeria.

The toll that this ugly development in the global energy market takes on the country and its component states, most of which are not financially buoyant or economically viable enough to survive outside of the windfall from the Federal government's monthly subvention/allocation is not better imagined than described, but unimaginable. Even at this, revenue allocations to states, accruable from the oil proceeds, are not only dwindling and shrinking, but no longer prompt.⁶⁴ In a reaction to the recent face-off between the Federal Government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) vis-à-vis the non-payment of two months' salaries of Nigerian academics, the Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education, Mr. Sonny Echonu, remarked: "It was a challenge we had and people know that we are going to have this revenue challenges, corona virus now is taking a heat on our oil prices."⁶⁵ As such, although Sylvester Monye's "Diversify or Die" Campaign, may appear rather aggressive,⁶⁶ nonetheless every

analysis now points to the candour that the time to look elsewhere, more than before, is now.

It is particularly instructive and paradoxical that the same palm oil industry that was abandoned by Nigeria for crude oil in the 1970s, received renewed government attention in Malaysia in the early 1970s, in response to their government's call for increased industrialisation. It is therefore, plausible to conclude that Nigeria sold her birth-right as one of the largest exporters of palm oil then, to Malaysia. This is because, today, Malaysia, is not only industrialised, but is also one of the world's largest palm oil exporters. From records, it currently accounts for 28 % of world's palm oil production and 33% of world's total exports.⁶⁷ In the contrary, Nigeria, which drifted to crude oil from palm oil and other agricultural products, now ranks among the importer-cum-consumer nations. What is even more interesting to note is that the oil palm, is indigenous to West Africa and its tree was introduced to Malaysia (then Malaya) by the British in the early 1870s just as an ornamental plant. Certainly, if Malaysia could be making so much fortunes from its oil palm industry, Nigeria's corresponding sector could do even better. After all, Nigeria topped this industry globally in the 1960s despite the fact that most of her palm oil then came from the natural grove of unplanted oil palm. This sector, *inter alia*, is a viable sector that should be accorded serious consideration by any well-meaning and serious-minded government in our urgent quest for rejuvenated economic revitalisation and repositioning.⁶⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the economy of the Niger-Delta region, from pre-colonial, through the colonial to post-colonial and post-independence epochs, has always revolved around the oil economy—palm or crude.

Unarguably, Nigeria is massively endowed with green, fertile and vast arable land, in addition to the massive human, natural, and mineral resources crucial for national economic growth and development. During the pre-independence epoch, the various ethnic identities that were coercively amalgamated into the present Nigerian state developed a rich and dynamic agrarian and agro-allied industrial economy, which sufficiently addressed the needs of each of the component regions, in tandem with their different geographical peculiarities. The economy that evolved did not only sustain and satisfy the people's needs, it also stimulated both intra and inter-group as well as short and long distance, even international trade.⁶⁹ At independence, Nigeria demonstrated remarkable prospects as an emerging economic stalwart within its sub-region, continent and world at large. The economy was predicated on agriculture, where each region was self-sustaining.

The turn in the tide came after oil was struck in commercial quantity at Oloibiri, River State in 1956. Steadily and later geometrically, her production capacity for export rose to the point that the country soon became enlisted among the ten largest producers of crude oil and gas in the world.⁷⁰ Not long after,

Nigeria rose to become the largest producer of oil continent-wide and sixth largest exporter the world over. Intoxicated by the fortunes from this new-found sector, regrettably, successive administrations blatantly abandoned the sector(s) that had hitherto sustained the country's economy. Although the country was lobbed into the era of "Oil Boom", an era which was marked by so much spendthrift, squander mania and kleptomania, however, after the boom, the bubble burst and the kitty, which was thought to be inexhaustible, began to prove otherwise as oil prices began to fluctuate.

Hence, whereas oil palm, along with its allied products, was a blessing, not only to the people of Niger-Delta in the pre-colonial through colonial epochs, but Nigeria at large, crude oil has proved to be more of a curse than blessing. Crude oil itself is not the curse, but the abandonment of its previous means of sustenance and drift towards a monolithic economy. This has been aptly dubbed by scholars of economic history as 'resource curse', 'Dutch disease' or 'resource trap'—a paradox of economics elucidating why rich countries are poor. It explains a situation in which a country that is so rich in non-renewable natural resources paradoxically experience stagnant economic growth or even economic retrogression or contraction.

Recent developments in the international energy market such as the fall in global oil price and the attendant ripple effects portend clear indications that Nigeria's economy is heading straight for the rocks. The recent further crash in global oil price fall at the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak dealt an even heavier blow on Nigeria's monolithic economy. This sharp downward trend of oil price for a country whose economy is so heavily dependent on the oil wealth, has gone beyond a serious danger-signal; it is cataclysmic! This unfortunate development has also clearly revealed the concealed truth that in spite of the so much political propaganda making the air of the waves being made by successive administrations in Nigeria towards diversification and economic re-vitalisation, the country is still, after all, heavily, if not totally dependent on the proceeds accruable from the oil sector. It is unimaginable that a whopping 90% of her foreign exchange earnings still comes from crude oil.

From the foregoing analysis, among other measures, the Federal Government needs to declare a State of Emergency on its Economic Sector for possible resuscitation from the imminent disaster. In tandem with this, therefore, urgent and provocative actions must be taken to rescue Nigeria's crumbling oil economy from the precipice of economic lockdown, especially now that the price of crude oil in the world market has crashed beyond the imaginable; no thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic. If Nigeria had missed her best time for this, her second best time is now, which must neither be missed nor handled with kid-gloves. It is always never too late until it is already too late.

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