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# Review Articles

# Dynamics of Leadership Styles Within the Ogoni and Ijaw Movements in the Niger Delta

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## Abstract

Much of the literature on the Niger Delta deals with the Ogoni and Ijaw groups together, as having common lived experiences within a shared geographical location. However, the nature of the leaderships led the two movements to adopt distinct strategies in their struggles against the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies. Successful collective action is often ascribed to effective leadership and to the employment of social identity to drive collective group behaviour. Building on the Comparative Case Studies approach, this article compares the nature of leadership within the two movements, and particularly the choices that led Ogoni leaders to preach nonviolence and Ijaw leaders to advocate violence. The article analyses the role of the leaders in determining the strategies adopted by the movements, and examines the importance of the psychological drivers of the collective narratives developed by the two groups of leaders in accounting for the different trajectories. These issues are investigated within the social and political psychological context utilising three axes of comparison — vertical, horizontal and transversal. Findings suggest that strategic choices are frequently based on charismatic leadership, particularly when group leaders are able to utilise a heightened awareness of identity, and on conscious and unconscious fears linking past and current threats.

*Keywords:* leadership, conflict, Nigeria, Niger Delta, nonviolence, violence, Ogoni, Ijaw

The South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria — the region often referred to as the Niger Delta — is rich in oil and natural gas deposits as well as flora and fauna (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2006); it is home to over 600 oil fields, both onshore and offshore (Umukoro, 2010). Within Nigeria, it is the strategic region (Ikein, 2009) upon which the national economy relies for over 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange income, through crude oil extraction and exportation. The region is made up of the states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Rivers and Ondo. The Niger Delta is home to ethnic nationalities that include the Andoni, Efik, Ogoja, Annang, Ibibio, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Ikwere, Kalabari, Ogoni and Okrika, with some sections of the Yoruba and Igbo (International Crisis Group, 2009). The extremely close proximity of the majority of these communities to the oilfields and pipelines that crisscross their landscapes has led to several environmental, health

and socio-economic problems, with which some communities, notably the Ogoni and Ijaw, have expressed dissatisfaction. In particular, the perceived economic advantage of the region as compared to the quantity of resources expended for its development, has created structural imbalances in the area. The Ogoni and the Ijaw ethnic groups, the main focus of this article, share common lived experiences; theirs are also the loudest voices in the region when it comes to expressing anger at the central Nigerian state and relevant multinational oil companies such as Shell. As a result of this anger, the Niger Delta has been characterised by snowballing spates of uprisings, threats and insecurity, and is often described as a hotbed of violent insurgent militia and terrorist activities.

Perceptions of poor environmental conditions, deficiency in development and the reluctance of the state to attend to the demands made by the Ogoni for political control of their affairs and resources have served as catalysts for protests in the area (Haynes, 1999). These demands were laid out in 1990 in the form of an Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR). Detailing the historical neglect and local misery of the Ogoni, the OBR addressed the question of Nigerian federalism and minority rights and called for active Ogoni involvement in the affairs of the state (Watts, 1999, 2003). Similarly, in 1998, Ijaw youth from over 500 communities presented an articulated set of demands referred to as the Kaiama Declaration, including a specific claim to the ownership of all the land and resources (including mineral resources) within Ijawland. To date the state and the oil companies are yet to address the requests detailed in the OBR and the Kaiama Declaration. Analysts suggest that these protests and disagreements arose due to a clash of values and claims over scarce resources and power (Yusuf, 2007), and were manifested in either a nonviolent or a violent form, or even a combination of both. The Ogoni and Ijaw identify themselves as distinct ethnic groups fighting to retrieve their oil and gas resources as well as their environment, over which they claim rightful ownership (Comfort, 2002; Okonta, 2008; Watts, 1999).

The question at the heart of this study is why the Ogoni and the Ijaw — who live in exactly the same conditions, facing the same structural issues — have followed very different trajectories and choices in expressing their grievances[i]. This article sets out to investigate two key issues: What role did the leaders of the Ijaw and Ogoni movements play in determining the strategies adopted by the movements which reflected the profile, nature and character of the rebellion? And how important were the psychological drivers of the collective narratives developed by the two groups of leaders in accounting for the different strategies in fighting the Nigerian state? Specifically, my main contention is that while the Ogoni have generally displayed one style of leadership, the Ijaw appear to have shifted between two types of leaders; one type similar to the Ogoni in advocating nonviolence, but the other an altogether different type of leaders, promoting violence. Arising from this, the conflicts in the Niger Delta could be regarded from two perspectives: first, the Ogoni example of a nonviolent movement against the environmental destruction of their land by multinational oil companies in alliance with the Nigerian state — a movement led by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa (Zunes, Kurtz, & Asher, 1999). Second, the Ijaw national struggle for self-determination, which assumed a more fluid and radical dimension through its violent forms of expression. The struggle started under the late Ijaw patriot, Issac Adaka Boro (Ojo, 2009) and revolved around the core issues of resource control, environmental protection and political marginalization (Naanen, 2004; Ojo, 2009).

Although these two movements are often seen as sharing the same grievances and therefore forming part of a larger oppositional movement (International Crisis Group, 2006), what makes the leaderships of the Ogoni and Ijaw so compelling within the social and political psychology context is that, if there are so many similarities, how can we account for the difference in choice of leaders and strategies? The distinctive psychological state of each group confers a unique social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988) that is context specific. It might be tempting to essentialise the choice of violence or nonviolence, in the sense that it is inherent to the nature and character of the

groups, or even to attribute it to people simply going along with charismatic forms of leadership. It is known that groups are more likely to choose violence over nonviolence in particular intergroup contexts and are more likely to follow leaders whose narrative of the group's predicament meshes with their own. This invites a closer inspection of the two groups' specific histories and their positioning in the social structure, and a contextualised understanding of the forms of leadership that were mobilised and supported at different points in each group's struggle.

# Leadership

Glowacki and Von Reuden (2015) refer to leaders as individuals who are given differential influence within a group over the establishment of goals, logistics of coordination, monitoring of effort, or reward and punishment. Hollander (1992) defines leadership as the process of guiding the actions of others towards the achievement of group goals. As a relational term, leadership involves followers (Glowacki & Von Reuden, 2015; Messick, 2005): it identifies an affiliation wherein some people are able to influence others into accepting new goals, values and attitudes, and to exert effort on behalf of those values, attitudes and goals (Hogg, 2005). Psychologically, a group exists only when people share a self-conception and the central characteristics of a self-inclusive social category (see Abrams & Hogg, 2001; Hogg, 2001c, 2003; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), specifically amplifying the contextually fluid basis of perception, attitudes, feelings, behaviour and self-conception in the perspective of social identity.

Hogg stresses the role of task-specific and general leadership schemas or leadership categories in group behaviours, which become increasingly significant within the group as well as in the social identity process (Hogg, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003). Collectively these sequences allow the leader to be innovative and effective in motivating followers. Several features can be described as fundamental to the function of leadership, including the leader's capacity to convince followers of the goals to be achieved, as well as a plan for achieving them (Goethals, 2005). For this, a leader must be able to arouse the emotions of his followers: the leader's words "must paint in the most forcible colors, he must exaggerate, and he must repeat the same thing again and again" (Freud, 1921, p. 78). This effort to configure dominant views on the role of charismatic and transformational leadership in movements combines a claim to charismatic leaders' ability to motivate and mobilise their followers with an appeal towards collective goals that transcend self-interest (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Mowday & Sutton, 1993). This critical examination of charisma in leadership research (Bass, 1985, 1990, 1998; Bryman, 1992; Burns, 1978; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1988) spans a leader's capacity to be proactive, change-oriented, innovative, motivating and inspiring, armed with a context-specific vision or mission for the group (Hogg, 2005).

In mobilising group members, the stories that leaders tell are basically about identity — they are fundamentally about the leaders themselves and their groups. Ken Saro-Wiwa's powerful rhetoric, for example, told stories through the process of mobilising grievances particularly about the historical neglect and marginalisation of the Ogoni group (see Mai-Bornu, 2019, 2020), about their past, their present and their future, what was to be feared, and struggled against (Messick, 2005). As Gardner (1995, p. 43) argues, it is "stories of identity narratives that help individuals think about and feel who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed that constitute the single most important weapon in the leader's literary arsenal". Identity has been used to categorise the self and the other, and in social movements it is used in a plethora of ways to describe, label and categorise, but also as belonging, and driving individual and group behaviour (Demmers, 2012). It provides the answer to the

question of who or what we are, which includes social identities in relation to the individual and the environment (Volkan, 2001), correlating with shared understandings and representations (Tilly, 1995). Identity is not static; it becomes fluid as a result of social exchanges between persons; hence, contentions exist in relation to what identity actually signifies (Appadurai, 1998; Kaufman, 2001). As Hogg (2005) summarises, charisma and communicative skills are vital tools in mobilising groups towards achieving targeted goals.

Accordingly, in mobilisation, the powerful and emotive words used by leaders to preach to their followers emphasise the extent to which the grievances felt are judged to be severe enough not only to justify collective objection but to warrant some form of corrective, collective action (Snow & Soule, 2010, p. 24). This touches on the relationship between emotions and social movement leadership and the role that emotions and memories play in movements (Godwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001, 2004). These memories form a continuity with the past, and are relied upon as resources of legitimacy and identity (Gongaware, 2010; Kubal, 2008). The processes of collective identity and collective memory are both established within a process known as framing, which amounts to the transformation of old meanings (Snow & Benford, 1992). These collective memories are real and not simply collections of individual memories (Kratochwil, 2006). At the core of social movements lies contentious collective action — not because movements are always violent or extreme, but because this is the channel through which most ordinary people lay bare their demands and claim their entitlements against stronger opponents, including powerful states (Tarrow, 2011). This perception of "we-ness" or "one-ness" (Hunt & Benford, 2004; Melucci, 1989; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Taylor & Whittier, 1992) demonstrates the correlation between identification with a particular group or collectivity and movement participation (see Snow & Soule, 2010; Stryker, Owens, & White, 2000). Ross (2007) argues that although identities might be formed, shifting them within the short term is not uncomplicated as identity issues comprise several characteristics that are fundamental to a people's sense of being, such as culture, heritage, race, religion and language. Hence, the scope for deep-rooted conflicts can be worrying to states because conflict spreads easily among people who share the same identity.

Activist groups in the Niger Delta emerged with an ideology based on the principle of self-determination as a driving force for ethnic autonomy and were taken up by the various ethnic nationalities in an effort to get their voices heard through the issuance of Bills of Rights and other such charters demanding equal participation, access to basic needs and resources, and protection from devastating environmental pollution (Osadolor, 2004). In this context, the concept of identity becomes very important as both the Ogoni and Ijaw groups regard themselves as having distinct group identities within the Niger Delta. Although most scholars discuss the issues and causal factors of contestation in the Niger Delta in terms of commonalities (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Ikelegbe, 2006; Ukiwo, 2007; Watts, 1999, 2003), I argue that the nature of leadership within the Ogoni and Ijaw movements resulted in different strategies (Mai-Bornu, 2019). The issues in the conflict are not only identity based, but groups also become emotional over what "gives people their sense of themselves, defining a person's bond with her or his community and defining the source of satisfaction for her or his need for identity" (Bloomfield & Reilly, 1998, p. 11), which indicates that individuals are socialised into ethnic identities (Verkuyten, 2005).

Leaders are obviously key actors because of the indispensable role they play in shaping movements (see Mai-Bornu, 2020; Nepstad & Bob, 2006), which are influenced in turn by the social and cultural capital at their disposal (Bourdieu, 1991). I argue that the story of the Niger Delta is worthy of attention as it aids our understanding of the processes and mental strategies employed by leaders to achieve a collective response from their followers (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Strategic choice concerns the active role of leaders in influencing, through a

political process, the structures of their organisations (Child, 1997), allowing the leaders to decide upon particular courses of action (Child, 1972). The ability of such leaders to make a choice depends upon how far they are able to preserve autonomy within their environment. Leaders who are embedded in social bases with strong vertical and horizontal ties use these ties to create choices in integrated organisations. New processes and new functions are built upon pre-existing connections among leaders on the ground and in local communities (Staniland, 2014). Volkan (2001) identifies the importance of the leader–follower dynamic within large group processes when he suggests that leadership is a defining characteristic of groups because members idealise the leaders, giving rise to intra-group unity and recognition. Once movements have emerged, complete with organisations, leaders and members, strategic efforts to shape mobilising identities become imperative (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). This urgency is shown in the way that groups act together in pursuit of shared interests (Tilly, 1984).

# Methodology

Given the complexity of the dynamics of choice involved in the Ogoni and Ijaw movements, the study required a method that was suitable for identifying critical mechanisms and variables of interest that would explain why one group adopted nonviolence while the other chose violence. The case study approach (Yin, 2009) is well suited to the inductive objectives of this study (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 19–21). More specifically, the Comparative Case Studies (CCS) approach was utilised as it addresses the macro, meso and micro aspects of case-based research (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017a, 2017b). Building on a multi-sited fieldwork model that allows analysis through and across sites and scales, CCS encourages simultaneous and overlapping attention to three axes of comparison: horizontal, which compares how similar policies or phenomena unfold in locations that are connected and socially produced; vertical, which traces phenomena across scales; and transversal, which traces phenomena and cases across time (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009, 2017a, 2017b). It encompasses the analysis and synthesis of the patterns, similarities and differences across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal (Goodrick, 2014), making it appropriate for the study of the Ogoni and Ijaw cases. Generally, CCS targets the establishment of empirical relations between two variables by employing the two logics of comparison — the more common 'compare and contrast' logic, and a 'tracing across' individuals, groups, sites and scales. It allows for an understanding of the 'why and how' in conflicts by viewing them through the lenses of the key actors and aggrieved parties that use various strategies to express their grievances. The deep understanding of each distinct and unique case is imperative in determining the foundation for the analytical framework that will be used in the cross-case comparison (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994).

Bartlett and Vavrus (2009) argue that scholars employing contemporary qualitative comparisons should work vertically through levels and horizontally across sites in order to produce rich comparative knowledge. The use of vertical studies here is simply to develop an in-depth perception of the specifics at each level and to analyse how these understandings produce similar and different interpretations of the Niger Delta movements. Barlett and Vavrus particularly encourage comparison across the three axes mentioned above: this paper therefore examines the vertical, horizontal and transversal elements of the dynamics of choice based on nonviolence and violence from the perspective of the leadership.

I first compare the Ogoni and Ijaw conflicts horizontally, across leaderships, briefly setting out the historical narratives of the Ogoni and Ijaw, uncovering the socio-structural explanations for grievances and different strategies employed, drawing upon the social identity of each group. According to social identity theory (Simon et al., 1998; Tajfel,

1978a, 1978b; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the extent to which leaders mobilise their people to engage in collective action is equivalent to the degree to which followers assume their identity as members of the group (Hornsey et al., 2006). Horizontal comparisons juxtapose cases that follow the same logic to address topics of common concern (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009, 2017b). Secondly, the vertical axis shows how the deliberate adoption of international narratives acceptable to the United Nations affected the two movements in quite distinct ways. It draws out and connects the differences in leadership response. Vertical comparison traces the linkages among local, national and international forces and institutions that together shape the situation (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2009). For example, during fieldwork for the study, it became clear that debates within the Niger Delta have been shaped both by developments within Nigeria and internationally, and that international experiences had discernible impacts on the choices made by leaders in the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups. The third element — the transversal comparison of the two cases — is integrated within the first two axes and traces the various forms of leadership in different time periods, from the 1950s to the present day. I demonstrate that leadership is contingent on the support of groups by focusing on the different responses related to the changing intergroup contexts: a strong sense of agency in the Ogoni movement and, on the Ijaw side, a rather fluid and fluctuating stance against the state. As rightly pointed out by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017a, 2017b) different questions are better suited to one logic or another, but all must be considered. Therefore, the framing of the case studies towards an explanatory question advances a more rigorous and pertinent account, even if this does not ultimately result in the emergence of a single causal inference (King et al., 1994, p. 45).

To carry out meaningful qualitative research in the Niger Delta, primary sources relating to the Ogoni and Ijaw movements, as well as government sources, were identified as the target data. Secondary sources were also used, including a discourse analysis of the existing literature, archival materials and newspaper articles relating to conflicts. The primary site for this research was the Niger Delta itself, where the Ogoni and the Ijaw are located. Interviews were conducted in English and occasionally in pidgin English and were spread over a period of twelve months; they involved actors in several locations in Rivers and Bayelsa states as well as Abuja, and with some interviewees in other parts of Africa, as well as Europe and the Americas. A total of 41 interviews were conducted with key actors from the Ogoni and the Ijaw movements, activists, retired government representatives and scholars on the Niger Delta, recruited using a snowballing process. The interviewees were purposefully selected, mindful of their knowledge and involvement and in particular the roles they played in shaping the two movements. Participants were supplied with consent forms and research information sheets which described the purpose and nature of the study, as well as providing contact information through which the participants could be informed of questions that may arise at a later stage. It is important to mention at this stage that ethical issues were minimal: the discussions did not include sensitive material and all the participants were elite actors who were used to giving interviews to researchers and other interested groups. Government sources were not directly included, given that the current study was aimed at exploring why certain groups adopt one strategy rather than another. The insider perspectives of some of the reformed militants — or ex-agitators, as they are referred to — were key, especially in finding out why the Ijaw took up arms against the state.

The questions were asked in a systematic way in which one question led to another, enabling interactive discussions in which the participants engaged positively. Some of the broader questions asked were: 1) Why is the Niger Delta region one of the least developed in Nigeria, compared to other regions, despite its oil and financial allocations?; 2) What factors were responsible in constructing the rebellion against the Nigerian state?; 3) What is the nature/profile of the protest?; 4) Are all the groups in the region fighting the same cause or are there differences in the issues? However, specific questions were posed to each interviewee depending on which group they rep-

resented and the position they held, in relation to the main research questions. In the remainder of this paper, the text is interspersed with interview scripts, references to the existing literature, and newspaper and archive materials, deliberately aimed at ensuring objectivity and enhancing the scope of the analysis. Employing discourse analysis helped clarify how specific discourse structures affected the decision to use different strategies to fight for related problems, and the outcomes of those decisions. For elite key informants and actors, face-to-face structured interviews were undertaken; semi-structured and even unstructured interviews were sometimes used, especially during the latter part of the research, when certain clarifications were needed, occasionally through telephone conversations. Unstructured questions were used more frequently during discussions with some of the ex-agitators, in particular, in order to uncover information that was relevant for this study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and identify common themes based on the rich interview material.

## Horizontal Comparison: Historical Contexts of the Ogoni and Ijaw Grievances

In their work on societal change, Sweetman, Leach, Spears, Pratto, and Saab (2013) put forward legitimacy, efficacy and identity as the psychological bases that account for support of specific forms of social change, which they describe as change in the absolute or relative social value possessed by a group. In trying to attain social change, the Ogoni ethnic identity — as a minority group within the Niger Delta — was constructed under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa in the 1990s, revolving around their specific lived circumstances as a distinct nation facing immense economic and political challenges (Okonta, 2008). Saro-Wiwa's passionate pursuit of the emancipation of the Ogoni developed over a sustained period of time (Comfort, 2002; Okonta, 2008; Osaghae, 1995; Osha, 2007). Senewo (2015) maintains that Saro-Wiwa not only appreciated the difficulties faced by his people but also courageously challenged those difficulties against the might of the Nigerian state. The Ogoni themselves argued that their leaders had faithfully co-operated with the rest of Nigeria but had been seriously misdirected as each ethnic group had its own agenda, entirely unconnected to the value of collaboration in a multi-ethnic country (Saro-Wiwa, 1992, p. 92).

A number of explanations have been offered for the primal relationship between the Ogoni and the land. Saro-Wiwa contended that the Ogoni had inherited a valuable portion of land endowed with the rich plateau soil that provided agricultural blessings, while the rivers flowing along the borders of the area abounded with fish and seafood (Saro-Wiwa, 1992, p. 12; see also Mai-Bornu, 2020). This idyllic existence, according to Osaghae (1995, p. 392), was dramatically interrupted by oil production activities which "changed the circumstances of intra-Ogoni relations as well as those of its relationship with other groups and the state". This particular emphasis on environmental degradation and its disastrous consequences for the sources of livelihood of the Ogoni provided a new basis for forging closer ties to deal with common problems. In the words of Saro-Wiwa: "Ogoni was always a blessed land. The plateau soil was extremely rich, the fresh water streams and the surrounding seas brimmed with fish, and the forests had an abundance of animals and hard woods" (Saro-Wiwa, 1992, p. 18).

Saro-Wiwa identified Ogoniland as a paradise where socio-economic, environmental and religious issues were combined into specific rituals and procedures:

> The land is god and is worshipped as such. The fruit of the land, particularly yams are honoured in festivals and, indeed the annual festival of the Ogoni is held at the yam harvest. The planting season is not a mere period of agricultural activity, it is a spiritual, religious and social occasion. (ibid., p. 12.).

He reiterated the importance of mobilising every Ogoni person based on their unity in terms of their culture, language heritage, and the need to cooperate with one another on the Ogoni agenda (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). As Dr Alubabari Nbete explained in interview, the Ogoni agenda postulates the equality of all ethnic groups within Nigerian federalism, as well as the evolution of proper, undiluted federalism in the nation.[ii] In support of this, Mitee (1999) stressed that the Ogoni decided to take charge of their destiny due to the nature of the state created by the British, which, although intended to be a federal system, was transformed into an oppressive unitary set-up. Mitee argued that through violence and political corruption, succeeding governments, in collaboration with multinational oil companies, consistently ignored the rights of minority groups.

The perception of the Ogoni being a minority within a minority in the Delta created a sense of internal colonialism (Naanen, 1995), in other words, the substitution of foreign colonialism with a local version (Mitee, 1999) by the Ijaw and the Igbo. British colonialism, Saro-Wiwa argued, forced alien structures onto the Ogoni and steered them into domestic colonialism, starting with the administration of Ogoni as part of Opobo division in 1908, up to the creation of Rivers state in 1967 (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). This model of political supremacy and oppression was talked about by the Ogoni as a new form of colonialism, enforced not by foreigners but by influential local and national groups that enjoy the control of power, in which benefits that should have gone to the Ogoni were seized instead by the stronger dominant ethnic groups (Naanen, 1995). Internal colonialism in Ogoniland was presented as a crude, unfeeling and brutal practice involving the aggressive usurpation of economic resources and dehumanisation of the Ogoni (Saro-Wiwa, 1995).

The presence of oil failed to usher in the prosperity usually associated with resource exploitation, and instead subjected the Ogoni ecosystem to substantial damage (Okonta, 2008). In this context, Saro-Wiwa argued that the achievement of political autonomy and the right to use a fair proportion of Ogoni resources for regional development was a responsibility of all Ogoni, but he clarified that this was not a call to violent action (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). Although Saro-Wiwa challenged the damage caused by the activities of oil exploration, which, he claimed, had destroyed the spiritual connection the Ogoni shared with the land, he opted pragmatically to lay claim to the revenues gained from the oil, as both a right and a way to redress the people's suffering. The impact of this narrative was the intensification of disagreements between the oil companies and the Ogoni people. It was the power of the multinationals and the forceful apparatus of the state that ultimately defined the outcome of the Ogoni struggle (Obi, 1997).

The Ijaw, like the Ogoni, are represented as traditionally being farmers, fishermen and producers of palm oil. One dimension of the Ijaw grievance in relation to the environment also relates to the pre-independence era, as explained by Isaac Asume Osuoka:[iii]

> Even before independence, the peculiar situation of the environment and how it affects the lives of the Ijaw were presented, and that led to the setting up of the Willinks Commission. The Commission [Report] highlighted the environment [...]; it proposed the setting up of a special development focused programme for the region. That was before oil added a new misery into the complex developmental challenges of the Niger Delta.

The Willinks Commission Report referred to by Osuoka forms a vital element in understanding the Niger Delta conflict. Prior to Nigeria's independence, and stemming from anxiety over apparent marginalisation and neglect, political leaders from the region, including the Ijaw and Ogoni, advocated a self-governing region to avoid being subsumed under the control of the major tribes. This led the British colonial government to establish the Willinks Commission[iv] in 1957 to carry out a review of the fears of domination presented by the minority groups. According to the Ijaw, the vital recommendations of the Commission which aimed at moderating ethnic-based control politically and enhancing development were not implemented in independent Nigeria (Anele & Nkpah, 2013, p. 15; Watts & Ibaba, 2011). This perceived failure to mitigate political and ethnic domination and improve development outcomes was emphasised in interviews with Patterson Ogon:[v] "The Nigerian state did not take the recommendations made by the commission as important. Even the Niger Delta Development Board that was created did not perform according to expectations".

Even before the Ogoni movement gained momentum, the late Ijaw patriot Isaac Adaka Boro accused the Nigerian state in the 1960s of not finding it important to provide the inhabitants of the Niger Delta with piped water. In 1963, Boro claimed to have conducted a political sampling of the Ijaw and to have discovered a frustrated group of youths who were angry with the general neglect and were ready for any action led by an outstanding leader to gain liberty. Prior to the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war, Boro and his band of followers were able to capture almost all of Ijaw territory within two weeks (Osha, 2006; Watts, 2003) and to declare a Delta Republic, which Watts (2003, p. 21) referred to as a "desperate cry for some sort of political inclusion". Prior to the uprising, Boro specifically expressed his frustration with the Nigerian state for not doing enough for the Niger Delta; in his words:

> Year after year, we were clenched in tyrannical chains and led through a dark alley of perpetual political and social deprivation. Strangers in our own country [….] the day will come for us to fight for our long denied right to self-determination […]. If Nigerian governments refuse to do something drastic to improve the lot of the people, a point of no return will be reached. (Boro, 1982, p. 66)

The metamorphosis of the Ijaw grievances and how they are currently expressed are attributable to natural human psychological factors of frustration and anger. In this situation, the group decided to consider a mix of options from the orthodox to the unorthodox. The interview with Ijaw leader Iniruo Wills highlights that: "Through the military years, there was a lot of advocacy and appeals by the leaders of the region. That advocacy continued and most of the intellectuals wrote tons and tons on issues of greater autonomy, fiscal federalism, resource control. Instead of heeding the cries of the people, the government did nothing".[vi]

What seems to emerge from the Ijaw are historical feelings of real frustration and a sense of impotence at being faced with a government that refused to address their complaints and issues. Some of the Ijaw leaders argued that the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, the three major ethnic groups in the country, dominate the Nigerian state. Gbomo (2011) relates this domination to what he terms "uneducated and unexposed Northern Nigerians who the British judged most obedient and easy to control from England". Right from independence, he argues, each Nigerian ruler loyally submitted to serving the British, totally indifferent to the interests and well-being of the people. The state is not extracting with the intention to replace; rather, it is creating an infrastructure that will result in the land being wasted, which is seen by the Ijaw as violence on nature. Ideally, the idea of a state is a political community, but in the view of Osuoka, when you have a postcolonial state that has not achieved community, although it has political force, and you have individual communities that are in conflict and competition with it, then you have a major problem.[vii]

In seeking social change, the Ijaw laid a strong claim to the oil, which they argued belongs to their communities, saying that whatever comes out of their land should benefit them first. In addition to resource control, and mirroring the Ogoni, the Ijaw also painted a picture of severe environmental degradation, inadequate capacity to manage resource extraction or pursue avenues aimed at rectifying environmental policies, as well as intense feelings of neglect. The nationalisation of all land under the administration of state and local governments through the Exclusive Economic Zone Decree and the Land Use Decree was an attempt to harness the various land tenure systems within the central Nigerian state and to place all land in the trust of local state governments (Obi, 2006; Omeje, 2006). The Ijaw perceive the impact of these laws to be deeply unjust because, as they argue, no discussion or consent was obtained from the host communities.

Reports released by the World Bank (1995) and Human Rights Watch (1999) have stressed the negative impacts of oil production activities that have ruined the environment and caused a range of health problems and injuries. The region has witnessed outbreaks of Ijaw youth protests, some of which resulted in direct confrontation with state and multinational forces and damage to oil industry infrastructure (Osaghae, 1995). Research done by Bob (2002) suggests that ethnic leaders of groups such as the Ijaw formed associations tasked with lobbying the state for a greater proportion of oil revenues and enhanced political participation, but most of them witnessed severe military action by the state forces (Human Rights Watch, 1995). For decades, appeals from communities in the oil-producing areas requesting compensation for environmental damage received unfavourable responses, as oil companies argued that their agreements were with the central state authorities, which were also responsible for developing the area (Osaghae, 2008).

# Vertical Comparison: Nature of the Ogoni and Ijaw Leaderships

## Ogoni Leadership

From the late 1940s, Naaku Paul Birabi was the first notable Ogoni leader to recognise the significance of the Ogoni being organised around a common political platform. Birabi believed that, for administrative autonomy to take place, the Ogoni had to be politically mobilised in order to sway the regional government's policies. Okonta (2008) argues that, realising the Ogoni were not united around a common political platform, Birabi embarked on a campaign aimed at raising their political awareness of the need for formal education. The adoption of grassroots dialogues and participatory discussions by Birabi suggests an early inclination towards nonviolence and a collective unity under one organisation.

Some years after Birabi, Ken Saro-Wiwa emerged as leader of the Ogoni, becoming President of MOSOP[viii] from 1993 to 1995. Osha (2007) argues that self-determination was not at the forefront of Saro-Wiwa's thoughts until the 1970s. Saro-Wiwa, who had served the government in various positions, was moved to challenge the central state and the multinational oil companies due to the environmental degradation triggered by the exploration and exploitation of the Niger Delta resources (Amusan, 2009). This perception of the political insignificance of the Ogoni and, in particular, being shut out of the formal institutional structure thereby negating the meaningful self-representation of the Ogoni, stimulated Saro-Wiwa's desire to lead the group in charting a new course. In his own words: "I am creating the Ogoni people, first and foremost, to come to the realisation of what they have always

been which British colonisation tried to take away from them. My effort is very intellectual. It is backed by theories, thoughts and ideas which will, in fact matter to the rest of Africa in the course of time" (Saro-Wiwa, 1993b).

In another forum Saro-Wiwa stated that:

> I have lived through most of the period covered by this sordid story, I watched as they [the Ogoni] went into decline. I have watched helplessly as they have been gradually ground to dust by the combined effort of the multinational oil company, Shell, the murderous ethnic majority in Nigeria and the country's military dictatorship. Not the pleas, not the writing over the years have convinced the Nigerian elite that something special ought to be done to relieve the distress of the Ogoni. (Saro-Wiwa, 1992, p. 7)

This suggests that Saro-Wiwa considered carefully before setting out to attract the peoples' support to the Ogoni struggle. The misfortunes faced by the Ogoni provided Saro-Wiwa with a clearer distinction between minority and extreme minority standings. Comfort (2002) describes Saro-Wiwa's political development as both logical and contradictory, formed to an extent by his activism on the Ogoni cause within both national and international contexts. This assessment is backed up by Saro-Wiwa's autobiography, in which he notes that "certain conclusions have since conditioned my attitude to change and society in Nigeria" (Saro-Wiwa, 1995, p. 61). He elaborates: "Trudging over the 100 rural villages, in which the Ogoni lived, I was able to see for myself what the Ogoni as a people needed […], the formation of a mass organisation to press their rights" (ibid., p. 40).

The importance of bringing the Ogoni together to challenge the Nigerian state became Saro-Wiwa's principal philosophy, promoted through representations in person and in writing, and using the tools of nonviolent advocacy. Tam-George (2010) views Saro-Wiwa's efforts to re-territorialise his area of expertise to the grassroots, as a way of galvanising communal backing and involvement, as contributory factors to his determination to offer some philosophical resolutions to Nigeria's problems. His clear observation and understanding of the prevailing political conditions in America and the Western European states he visited helped him to integrate and accept certain universally valid generalisations influencing political actions of the state (Nbete, 2006). To Saro-Wiwa, ethnic domination causes disintegration of the cultures of the controlled vulnerable groups, and suppresses the fulfilment of personal potential, while ethnic autonomy provides a path for groups to advance specific political institutions to maintain their own culture and identity (Saro-Wiwa, 1995).

Saro-Wiwa connected ethnic autonomy to resource and environmental control based on the correlation of natural resources with the physical environment as well as the importance attached to environmental issues in the international arena (Nbete, 2006). Environmental justice became for him a vital notion within which to engage the state and the oil giant, Shell (Nixon, 1996). In Saro-Wiwa's view, a unitary constitutional framework was not right for a highly multi-ethnic state, and this thinking informed his proposal of an Ogoni agenda (Nbete, 2006). In the words of Saro-Wiwa:

> Three events have encouraged me to now place the issue before the world: the end of the Cold War, the increasing attention being paid to the global environment, and the insistence of the European Community that minority rights be respected […]. What remains to be seen is whether Europe and America will apply in Nigeria the same standards which they have applied in Eastern Europe. (Saro-Wiwa, 1992, p. 7)

This quote indicates Saro-Wiwa's awareness of the importance of shifting from previous narratives of internal colonialism towards an emphasis on minority rights and the environment in order to achieve the Ogoni objective. He thus linked the Ogoni agenda with the potential of effective federalism to offer a solution to their problems. He

portrayed the Ogoni as fighting a war of genocide while in the process of reconstructing their proud heritage as a primordial nation. Acknowledging that the environment is also a resource, Saro-Wiwa argued that substantive control over the environment exercised by the regions, rather than the centre, would promote a culture of environmental protection (Nbete, 2006).

## Nonviolence as a Strategy

Saro-Wiwa's brother, Owens Wiwa, explains that Ken's leadership role was characterised by an unwavering commitment to nonviolence, including ensuring that MOSOP adhered to nonviolence as a strategy. *"Alo be, iko be, nale begin"* was his slogan in the Ogoni language, meaning "we will fight with our brains, not with a knife" (Hunt, 2005, p. 64). Nbete (2006) suggests that Saro-Wiwa's inclination to nonviolence was shaped by the ideas of charismatic leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and Desmond Tutu, as well as by his passion for classical literature. Nonviolence was introduced to the Ogoni through various strategies including dialogue, protests at national and international levels, mass mobilisation, boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience.

Being informed by the Gandhian philosophy meant that the Ogoni struggle — like all nonviolent narratives — was driven mainly by the power of its ethical argument and the creativeness of its methods of protest against the Nigerian state (Mai-Bornu, 2020, p. 145). Further ideologically based explanations have been offered by other Ogoni leaders who support the adoption of nonviolence; in an interview, Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, the current MOSOP President, explained that:

> We didn't see those who oppressed us in the classical sense as enemies, we saw them as largely those who are not practising the real tenet of love. For us, it was also going to be suicidal to march a population of less than one million in a violent rebellion against a powerful army. MOSOP wanted to breed new grounds, we felt the need of using a new strategy of engagement with the state. It also helped us gain more sympathy than a violent struggle.[ix]

In the same vein, Saro-Wiwa had argued that:

> Violence is not the answer to a fascist government. We must continue a nonviolent struggle. It is very expensive to do that, it is hard. But it is the only way that our way can proceed. There is no other way. We will never resort to violence. But we will tackle the irresponsible leadership of this country. Our struggle has been well defined and has been well thought out. (Saro-Wiwa, 1993b)

It is important to state that Saro-Wiwa's leadership was not without its critics. Osaghae (1995) reports that Saro-Wiwa was publicly accused of wrongly calling the struggle an Ogoni struggle. He was particularly criticised for not championing the Ogoni cause and not helping the Ogoni when he had held positions in government, as well as being "testy, inflexible, self-aggrandizing and presumptuously ambitious" (Nixon, 1996, p. 10). However, in spite of these internal disagreements, after Saro-Wiwa's execution in 1995, the Ogoni maintained the principle of nonviolence that he had introduced as well as the internationalisation of the Ogoni struggle, thus retaining the legacies of Ken Saro-Wiwa.

## Internationalism

Saro-Wiwa gained international attention and recognition based on his works as a writer, publisher, environmentalist and human rights activist (MOSOP, 2004). His environmental and human rights quest provided him the opportunity to frame the Ogoni agenda within internationally recognised parameters, especially in the United Nations

where he spoke as the voice of the Ogoni, and where he successfully depicted the specific challenges faced by the Ogoni as a minority group in Nigeria. His exposure to the UN and other international organisations such as Greenpeace armed him with a knowledge and understanding of nonviolence as the only acceptable language for ensuring that grievances would be internationally recognised. It was largely thanks to Saro-Wiwa that the Ogoni mobilised effectively in spite of the internal divisions and challenges the movement faced. He embarked upon massive sensitisation campaigns on the importance of charting a nonviolent course for the Ogoni agenda if they wanted to succeed.

From the late 1980s, the Ogoni situated their claims within a global discourse of social justice and human/environmental rights, aimed at controlling oil resources and achieving the right to self-determination (Obi, 2009). Embracing the internationally recognised discourse on human rights in the 1990s, for example, Saro-Wiwa highlighted UN regulations procedure 1503: "if a case is presented and the UN investigates and sees a consistent pattern of rights violation, a reference will be made to the Nigerian government and action will start from there" (Saro-Wiwa, 1993a; see also Mai-Bornu, 2019). This implies that the main aim was to raise clear-cut issues related to the UN as a means of attracting attention to the plight of the Ogoni, which would draw automatic and immediate consideration from the Nigerian state. This underscores the Ogoni belief that structural change is possible through peaceful means, employing a strategy that appealed positively to the UN. To quote Saro-Wiwa himself: "The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) was a real find, the great appeal for me was its insistence that its members forswear violence in their struggle" (Saro-Wiwa, 1995, p. 94). He had earlier stated: "My contact with them, other organizations and activists such as Michael van Walt van der Praag, introduced me to the nature of nonviolent struggle for rights, and I thought I could do the same for the Ogoni" (Saro-Wiwa, 1993a).

In the course of his interview, Ben Naanen reiterated that adopting a narrative of nonviolence that was acceptable to the UN gave the Ogoni the legitimacy they needed to attract international attention:

> The UN recognises all manner of rights, it enforces rights of minorities. They give them rights within their present states because they don't encourage secession. In the case of Ogoni, human rights abuses were very rife. You have to know where to tag your struggle, to be able to identify issues that the international community would support. Nobody would have encouraged the Ogoni to struggle for an independent state, which is the main reason for remaining nonviolent; with violence, nobody would have supported us.[x]

This shows that the Ogoni made a deliberate plan, knowing full well the importance and recognition attached to all manner of rights by the UN, whose support would provide them with the moral and political legitimacy they needed. Using a politicised collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) in their struggle for power and recognition, they acknowledged the role of third parties. The interview with Naanen indicates a narrative of clear understanding, choice and strategic inclusion of human rights in the Ogoni agenda during the period of the military administration (1983–1999), which was generally regarded as authoritarian. Further justifying the use of rights, Pyagbara notes:

> After the collapse of the Cold War, the rights of communities were actually maturing, the UN in 1992 had passed the Declaration on the Rights of Minorities and by that time, the working group on Indigenous Populations had almost concluded a 10-year draft of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. We saw ourselves as a community that has indelible rights, and felt most of our issues were actually

bordering on denial of rights, not from a needs based perspective, which is why the entire theory of the Ogoni people was cast in terms of violation of rights.[xi]

This highlights an obvious awareness of the power of collective action in a group of people with a shared identity, irrespective of size (Haslam et al., 2011), in championing an internationally recognised legitimate cause. What emerges from the Ogoni leaders' narratives is thus a sense of positive agency, as exemplified in the linkage of their movement to global environmentalist movements. It goes without saying that Saro-Wiwa's leadership practice employed the three 'R's of identity leadership: Reflecting, Representing and Realising (Haslam et al., 2011). The principle of leadership was another strong norm; he was able to effectively mobilise the Ogoni leaders, women, men and the youth to participate in collective action through the speeches he made during the meetings and gatherings he attended. This indicates the existence of interdependent roles and statuses (Hogg & Abrams, 1988) for the Ogoni group, especially within the formation of MOSOP and its 10 affiliated bodies which included the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ogoni Students Unions, National Union of Ogoni Students, Ogoni Teachers Union, and the Federation of Ogoni Women Association (FOWA).[xii] After the execution of Saro-Wiwa, leadership passed to Ledum Mitee in 1995; Ben Naanen only served as the Chairman, Provisional Council, of MOSOP in 2012, after Ledum Mitee was removed from office; the presidency subsequently passed to Legborsi Pyagbara in 2008. To date, the Ogoni agenda and its perspective on the social world and the Ogoni people's place in it (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), as advocated by Ogoni leaders, continue to adhere to the principle of nonviolence.

With the concept of ethnic autonomy, Saro-Wiwa put forward the right of preservation of the cultural heritage of different peoples, and in terms of resource control, he contended that the allocation and distribution of revenues accrued from oil should be the prerogative of the producers of the resources and not the central state apparatus. The wide-ranging educational capacity possessed by some of the Ogoni leaders including economic history, law, social and political philosophy, as well as English, provided the enabling platform for critically gauging and expressing their grievances. They were conversant with new developments in international thinking, which facilitated the understanding and acceptance of the norm of nonviolence preached by Saro-Wiwa, especially in the establishment of MOSOP, and the development of the Ogoni Bill of Rights. In addition, almost all the Ogoni leaders have had professional jobs or high-ranking positions as civil servants. This is not to suggest that having leaders with professional jobs or government positions makes a movement nonviolent. The intention is to demonstrate how these experiences and relationships facilitated group mobilisation and engagements with the state. The Ogoni leaders had links with, or at least access to, state institutions and agencies and could engage in a dialogue with them at various levels. This was not necessarily the case with the Ijaw leadership, as will become clear below.

## Ijaw Leadership

In contrast to the consistency of the Ogoni leadership, the Ijaw leadership displayed a much more erratic approach. The early leadership preached violence, then, in the 1990s, came a leadership that tried to follow the Ogoni style, seeing that the Ogoni seemed to be obtaining so much international support and its strategy therefore seemed to be working. It was a leadership that attempted, on the one hand, to explore the benefits of this strategy and yet, on the other, was unable to make the best out of the conditions (Nepstad & Bob, 2006). Finally, in the early 2000s, there was a return to violence from at least a section of the Ijaw leadership.

Like the Ogoni movement, the Ijaw struggle began as far back as the 1960s, spearheaded by the late Ijaw patriots, Isaac Adaka Boro, Samuel Owonaru and Nottingham Dick (Osha, 2006; Watts, 2003) from the Kaiama community

in Rivers state. Adaka Boro argued that receiving an equitable portion of the oil revenues was a right of the Ijaw ethnic group. Boro's aim was to secede from the central Nigerian state and create an independent state of the Niger Delta (Omotola, 2006): to this end he led a group known as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), in what has been called a 12-day revolution. The Boro rebellion represented the peak of the injustice, political frustration and suffocation felt by the Ijaw in an independent Nigeria (Darah, 1995) — a frustration expressed by Boro when he wrote: "My sharp sensibility to injustice in my fellow creatures made matters worse and only aggravated my resolve to right all wrongs that lie within my reach" (Boro, 1982, p. 31).

Boro was noted to have made several complaints before the uprising that marked the start of an epoch of insurgency and militia activities in the Niger Delta. In February 1966, he declared the independent Niger Delta, proclaiming:

> Today is a great day not only in your lives but in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps, it will be the greatest day for a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring the heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression …. Remember your 70 year old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty stricken people; remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins; and then fight for your freedom. (Boro, quoted in Agbo, 2008)

With this call to arms, the NDVF sailed into the creeks and took over several oil facilities belonging to Shell (Darah, 1995). This stands in marked contrast to the Ogoni movement which, under Birabi's leadership, was more concerned with educating and sensitising the Ogoni people than calling them to arms. Boro's preaching clearly advocated violence; he did not try to hide his intentions. However, the rebellion was short lived, lasting only 12 days. Boro and his closest comrades were subsequently captured, tried for treason and sentenced to death. The death sentences were not carried out, however, and the three men were later granted amnesty by the military government led by General Yakubu Gowon, after they opted to join the army and fight on the side of the state against the Igbo.[xiii]

Boro's revolutionary approach became a model for agitations in the Niger Delta in which armed militia groups took part. Even though the strategies have changed noticeably over the past four decades, the demands have remained basically the same: recognition of the ecological devastation caused by oil exploitation and the inadequate compensation and development of the oil-bearing communities (Watts, 2003). Boro emerged as a political figure determined to lead the region out of the terrible situation of neglect in which it found itself. For Boro, calling the attention of the world to the situation of the Ijaw represented success, even if it was achieved through violence. After Boro's death in 1968, however, no significant armed struggle was recorded within Ijawland until the Kaiama Declaration was issued in 1999.

The late 1990s witnessed the emergence of some moderate Ijaw youth leaders in the persons of Oronto Douglas, Felix Tuodolo, Isaac Osuoka, Patterson Ogon, T.K. Ogoriba, and others. Ijaw agitation took on a more intellectual tone, led by Ijaw youth who were graduates of local and international universities. Their genuine concern was for a truly developed Niger Delta (Afinotan & Ojakorotu, 2009) as depicted in the Kaiama Declaration, in the form of demands to the Nigerian state. The wide-ranging educational capacities of the Ijaw leaders in this period were similar to those of the Ogoni in the areas of political science, social and political philosophy, environmental studies, and chemistry. Ownership of such varieties of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) facilitated the articulation of major Ijaw grievances, indicating an awareness of international strategic trends within which the Ijaw could situate their

issues, along with a nonviolent disposition demonstrated in the establishment of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and the presentation of the Kaiama Declaration.

An important characteristic of these Ijaw leaders was their engagement in student union activism while at university. Ukiwo (2007) notes that some of these former Ijaw student union activists embarked upon the formation of various pan-ethnic youth organisations, notably the Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN), the Movement for the Reparations to Ogbia (MORETO), and the IYC which was conceived as the umbrella organisation of Ijaw youth associations at the grassroots level. For instance, Osuoka — who went on to be an Ijaw leader — had been an active member of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) while at university; in fact, he was part of the National Executive Council of NANS, who later decided to mobilise the local Ijaw youth that were more impoverished than themselves (Nwajiaku, 2005). The IYC is similar to the Ogoni MOSOP, with the significant difference that the latter did not stop at the Ogoni youth association, but rather encompassed women, professionals and traditional councils, as well as church groups including elders.

In terms of communication and connections to international networks, while the Ogoni are able to demonstrate strong ties to international organisations such as the UN, the same cannot be said of the intellectual moderate Ijaw leaders, even though they were able to link up with some institutions. Interviews suggest that the subsequent shift to a strategy of violence was determined by the level and quality of the militant leaders' education. Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah stated that:

> Looking at the militant leaders in the Niger Delta, the first thing was the quality of education or lack of it, they did not have the articulation of Saro-Wiwa. The best they could do was to take up their struggle through violence because the struggle came from the bottom rather than the top. Compare them against the Ogoni people and you will see that the context was different; had that struggle been started by some of their elites, let's say President Jonathan himself, then perhaps the outcome would have been structured in a slightly different way.[xiv]

This clearly indicates the lack of leadership capital within the radical Ijaw leaders, which left them unable to engage in or establish social networks within which they could channel their grievances effectively through civil activities and dialogue. Rather, their close links to the grassroots tied them to one line of thinking and action and meant that they were primarily concerned with standing up and defending their people from state forces. The social status of the militant leaders similarly suggests that they were from a more limited social background; while they were in a position to interpret and represent local grassroots discontent, they were more constrained in terms of the direction in which they could lead their followers. Violence was seen as the only way and no other strategies were on the table.

## Juxtaposing Nonviolence With Violence

The moderate Ijaw leaders thus found themselves in conflict with others who wanted to follow a different path. According to Wills:

> A dialogue ensued among those who were leading this movement that we've made nonviolent efforts, and you see the response. How can we continue to follow this nonviolent method? Some sections of the group decided that the more effective way to deal with these issues is to go violent, but there were some who decided to stay the course of nonviolence. December 1998 into January 1999, was really the turning point from nonviolent intellectual political agitation to partly violent struggle.[xv]

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This indicates the juxtaposing of nonviolence against violence before the violent option was adopted. It is reminiscent of the classic situation in which those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable, as exemplified in the history of South Africa: the African National Congress (ANC) became involved in the struggle against apartheid through peaceful methods until the 1961 Sharpeville massacre that led to the establishment of the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe.[xvi] According to Demirel-Pegg and Pegg (2015), while moderates spearhead the struggle toward more established forms of collective action such as strikes and demonstrations, smaller and newer groups become uncompromising as they engage in fierce strategies to make a clear distinction between themselves and the moderates. Interviews with some of the reformed militant leaders such as Azazi[xvii] back up this argument: "We were angry and tired, we didn't look back, let them give us what belongs to us". Similarly, in a media interview, Tompolo[xviii] disclosed that, "If the joint military task force had not woken up the sleeping lion the violence would have been avoided. But they attack my boys and people and I have promised them that I must revenge. We will succeed, kill them and burn down the place" (The Punch, 2008). These quotes suggest that violent confrontations are the last resort of the civil groups, embarked upon because of the perceived failure of peaceful methods (Ikelegbe, 2001). This supports the assertion that the nature of the state response to conflicts in the Niger Delta has exacerbated rather than solved the conflicts. In the same vein, Ateke Tom[xix] adds that: "We have already crossed our minds long time ago, we are ready to face anything that comes our way because we have the Egbesu God of war behind us. He is not afraid of anybody. The oil companies are on our land and it is our business to get rid of them, what we want is our land" (The Guardian, 2008).

The years 2003 and 2004 saw the emergence of some notable radical militant leaders in the Ijaw movement, but nothing comparable in the Ogoni struggle. This category of leaders are similar to criminal cult gangs formed by political godfathers mainly for intimidation of political rivals, kidnapping for ransom, and crude oil theft (Mukoro, 2010, p. 82). Speaking of the differing groups of leaders in the region, Benaebi Benatari, a member of the Ijaw Nation[xx] classified the militant leaders into three groups:

> We have genuine leaders concerned with the freedom of the Ijaw in the Niger Delta, some are armed while others are intellectual. Some are into oil bunkering to fund the armed struggle. We have leader by day and political thug by night, those who are into armed struggle but rent out their services to politicians to achieve power. Then we have leader by day and criminal by night, those who are in the armed struggle, but commit the odd crime on the side to strike it rich and maybe fund the armed struggle. (Benatari, 2010)

This suggests that not all the leaders in the region are fighting an Ijaw cause or have the genuine interest of the Niger Delta at heart; rather, some of the leaders, especially those that became active in the 2000s, acted because of financial benefits — particularly those armed by local politicians to rig elections in their favour, scare and intimidate voters.

Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom (2001) point out that uprisings are mainly caused by severe injustices such as extreme inequity, lack of political space and discriminations in society. An interesting characteristic of the Ijaw movement is its fluidity between violence and nonviolence. In the 1960s, it took the form of a short-lived but violent rebellion under Boro; in the l990s it manifested in a nonviolent form, similar to that of the Ogoni; in 2003–04 the Ijaw struggle took a turn towards violence once again, exemplified by the emergence of more radical armed leaders such as Asari Dokubo (see Mai-Bornu, 2020). The psychological antecedents (Ayanian & Tausch, 2016) of the Ijaw radical leadership in terms of anger, frustration and impotence suggest a clear awareness of the success associated with armed militancy towards achieving their goals. Asari Dokubo, for example, protested against what he perceived as the Nigerian government's lack of concern about the area and the adverse effects on the livelihood

of the people resulting from large-scale petroleum production activities (Etemike, 2009). He set out to emancipate the Ijaw from state oppression by taking control of their destiny. Playing on experiences of poverty and prolonged oil exploitation grievances, Asari found a willing group of youth ready to engage in the realm of bombs and bullets, and was able to exercise a significant influence within his community. He waged a propaganda war that appealed to the opinions and received the backing of many in the region (Hazen, 2010).

This turn to violence as the preferred method of engagement by some leaders demonstrates the divided nature of the Ijaw leadership. It corresponds with Idemudia's (2009) observation that the concentration on violence witnessed in the area is the consequence of the opportunistic atmosphere that emerged out of the multifaceted interface of need, creed and greed. The escalation of violence in Ijawland attracted much criticism and condemnation from some of the moderate leaders. For instance, Sobomabo Jackrich, the leader of the Kalabari Unity Forum who was at one time one of the agitators, and Alabo Charles Harry, the President of the Ijaw National Congress (INC), explained that the combative approach underlying the latest outbreaks of violence in the region not only impacts negatively on the socio-economic lives of the people but also creates indescribable environmental risks that may have damaging consequences for people's well-being and health (Hart, 2016). Jackrich emphasised his opposition to this strategy: "I am against agitation centred on violence and destruction, I believe in the nonviolent approach. I have continued to preach against violent agitation, even after accepting amnesty I have been deeply committed to advocacy for nonviolence and have taken my campaign to the youths" (Jackrich, quoted in Hart, 2016). In the same vein, the President of the INC argued that:

> The time is rife for us to jointly and responsibly take our destiny in our own hands, and to, however, embrace nonviolence agitation. We know Niger Deltans are aggrieved and are justified to agitate against injustice and marginalization but we must do it in the most nonviolent manner to attract global attention and intervention, this is the path INC has chosen. (Harry, quoted in Hart, 2016).

Leaders who advocate nonviolence thus argue that violence has aggravated the problems faced by the people in the region because, as Jackrich puts it, the greatest Ijaw resources are being wasted — the Ijaw youth (Hart, 2016). Although the Ijaw movement's turn towards violence was seen as a means to an end, the group is yet to achieve long-term political change: the employment of violence seems to act as a stumbling block (Ayanian & Tausch, 2016).

# Conclusion

In this paper, I used the CCS approach to examine the nature of the Ogoni and Ijaw leaderships, emphasising the simultaneous and overlapping attention to three axes of comparison: horizontal, vertical and transversal. Until recently, debates on the Niger Delta have focused almost exclusively on issues of oil, exploitation and marginalisation, and the paradoxes and contradictions of environmental degradation (Okonta, 2008; Ukiwo, 2007; Watts, 1999, 2003). My analysis suggests that choices made by leaders of the Ogoni and Ijaw movements underpin the framing and implementation of the movements' forms of resistance. Understanding the why and how of the dynamics of choice demands an examination of the processes that create social identity and promote collective action through effective leadership.

Several aspects of this paper deserve particular attention. First, the collective actions of the Ogoni and Ijaw movements, including sustained campaigns of protest and rebellion, have been shaped by the strategic assessments

and tactical decisions of the leaders of these politically mobilised groups. Second, while the Ogoni and Ijaw share certain geographic and socio-cultural characteristics, they are separated by routines that maintain the social construction of their identities and norms, distinguishing one from the other. While the Ogoni have had a generally more disciplined and intellectual leadership, exemplified most clearly in the person of Saro-Wiwa, the Ijaw have experienced several fragmented leadership styles ranging from nonviolent intellectuals such as Osuoka to more radical and violence-prone militants such as Asari Dokubo, Tompolo and others. Ogoni leaders have consistently preached nonviolence, a notion promoted by Saro-Wiwa, whose informed knowledge and observation of prevailing international conditions gave him an appreciation of universally valid generalisations regarding the governing of political actions, based on historical facts and processes. These became integrated into the Ogoni agenda to the extent that, even after Saro-Wiwa's execution by the state, nonviolence remained the guiding principle of the group; in spite of all the internal divisions experienced since then, the group still maintains its nonviolent stance.

Third, for the Ijaw, on the other hand, evidence suggests that the movement began with a violent episode in the 1960s; in the 1990s it shifted to a more intellectual basis, which continued through to the establishment of the Kaiama Declaration; but as a result of the excesses of the state, the movement escalated into full violence and saw the emergence of several armed leaders in the 2000s. In contrast to the Ogoni case, the fragmentation of the leadership allowed the character and nature of the Ijaw movement to mutate into an armed struggle. The execution of Saro-Wiwa, along with the nature of state responses, have been identified as factors responsible for the Ijaw's slide from nonviolence to violence. A period of silence in the region in the 1990s was transformed into a violent confrontation against the state when a democratic government came into power in 1999. Fourth, the shifting positions of the Ijaw leadership laid the foundations for the adoption of violence while the Ogoni, despite their issues, were still preaching nonviolence. The militant Ijaw leaders did not have the necessary levels of strategic knowledge to identify what would attract international and local support. Rather, their approach was largely based on anger and loss of faith with the state, which generated the call for violence in the region. In summary, the strategic choices of the two groups depended heavily on the active role of their respective leaderships in influencing, through a political process, the structures of their organisations and their courses of strategic action (Child, 1972, 1997). The leaders' ability to make such choices showed how far they could preserve autonomy within their environment. The Ogoni and Ijaw leaders, embedded in social bases with strong vertical and horizontal ties, used these ties to create choices in integrated organisations.

Finally, I suggest that the leaders and their followers discussed in this paper are connected together by a shared group belonging: the distinctive natures and processes of the Ogoni and Ijaw ethnic groups are bound up within their social contexts. It is essential to understand that leadership and social identity go hand in hand: leaders are not only embedders of identity, they are entrepreneurs and in-group upholders of identity. My analysis implies that the story of the Niger Delta conflict is incomplete without a critical understanding of the dynamics of choice between the different ethnic groups engaged in the region's conflicts. This paper contributes to recent literature highlighting the important role of leaderships in movements by creating a framework for understanding the variations and nature of the leaderships of these two movements. This framework can be applied to other movements locally and internationally; it could, for instance, be used in future research to capture articulated sets of demands from other groups in the Niger Delta, providing a wider and more detailed understanding of the differences and similarities among the various Niger Delta conflicts.

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## Notes

i) This research has been published in more detail in my book – Political Violence and Oil in Africa: The Case of Nigeria, published in 2020 by Palgrave Macmillan.

ii) Dr Alubabari Nbete, Ogoni, interviewed 27 July 2015, Port Harcourt.

iii) Isaac Asume Osuoka, Ijaw, interviewed 31 July 2015, Abuja.

iv) Chaired by Sir Henry Willinks, a respected Queen's Counsel, and commissioned in September 1957.

v) Patterson Ogon, Ijaw, interviewed 30 July 2015, Port Harcourt, Rivers state.

vi) Iniruo Wills, Ijaw leader, interviewed 29 July 2015, Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

vii) Isaac Asume Osuoka, Ijaw, interviewed 31 July 2015, Abuja.

viii) Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People – the umbrella body of the Ogoni movement

ix) Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, MOSOP President, interviewed 31 July 2015, Abuja.

x) Professor Ben Naanen, Ogoni leader, interviewed 31 July 2015.

xi) Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, MOSOP President, interviewed 31 July 2015, Abuja.

xii) Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, MOSOP President, interviewed 31 July 2015, Abuja.

xiii) The Igbo form one of the largest ethnic groups located in the southeastern region of the Nigerian state.

xiv) Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese Sokoto, Chairman of the 2005 Ogoni–Shell Reconciliation Committee, interviewed 1 August 2015, Abuja.

xv) Iniruo Wills, Ijaw, interviewed in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State 29 July 2015.

xvi) Zulu for "Spear of the Nation".

xvii) General Andrew Azazi, Ijaw (ex-agitator), interviewed 10 August 2015.

xviii) Ijaw militant leader and a hero of the struggle for the emancipation and development of the Niger Delta.

xix) Leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante.

xx) An Ijaw intellectual group in the Niger Delta.

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The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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