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THE SINISTER POLITICAL LIFE OF COMMUNITY

Economies of Violence and Governable Spaces in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

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We seek to recover the . . . life of the community, as neither the “before” nor the “after” picture of any great human transformation. . . . We see “communities” as creatures with an extraordinary and actually . . . quite sinister political life in the ground of real history. Kelly and Kaplan (2001:199)

“Community” is an archetypal *keyword* in the sense deployed by Raymond Williams (1976). A “binding” word, suturing certain activities and their interpretation, community is also “indicative” (Williams’s term once again) in certain forms of thought. Deployed in the language for at least five hundred years, community has carried a range of senses denoting actual groups (for example “commoners” or “workers”) and connoting specific qualities of social relationship (as in *communitas*). By the nineteenth century, community was, of course, invoked as a way of talking about much larger issues, about modernity itself. Community—and its sister concepts of tradition and custom—now stood in sharp contrast to the more abstract, instrumental, individuated, and formal properties of state or society in the modern sense. A related shift in usage subsequently occurred in the twentieth century, when community came to refer to a form or style of politics distinct from the formal repertoires of national or local politics. Here the reference was direct politics, community participation and organization, often but not always populist in orientation, typically working with and for “the people.” At this historical moment we are awash in communities of this kind; in fact the “self-governing community” is one of the defining formulations of neoliberal rule (Schofield 2002). Nikolas Rose (1999) suggests that in the transatlantic economies, this new generation of communities—from community gardening to community partnerships—has arisen from the ashes of state withdrawal and socialist crisis, speaking the powerful language of civic renewal and self-improvement.

Across the modern history of community, there has always been a proclivity to read the concept positively, as an unalloyed “good”—to highlight, to the exclusion of all else, the purportedly ethical, moral, and social virtues of the community as such. Not unexpectedly, the “warmly persuasive” qualities of community (Williams 1976:76) have an echo in the related notion of a civil society—understood as a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected, self-organizing, and self-reflexive nongovernmental organizations in tension with one another and the state (Keane 1998:6—7)—that too is posited in roseate terms, as a realm of freedom, pluralism, participation, and reflexivity. Civil society and community both suffer from a sort of Manicheanism: the state is afflicted with the powers of coercion, while society is the home of freedom, “good living, warm and whole” (Foucault 2000:168).

Community stands, then, as a common currency connecting the differing expressions of modern justice as Nancy Fraser (Fraser and Honneth 2003) sees them: the *redistributive* sense of justice on the one side (communities of class or social strata) and the politics of *recognition* or recognitive justice on the other (communities of identity and difference). Community, not just the modern imagined nation (Anderson 1983) but community claims-making of a much more heterogeneous sort, must be understood as “political” (Pandey, this volume) and as “represented” (Kelly and Kaplan 2001), always read against the history of the modern state. Communities demand visibility, legibility, and enumeration as preconditions for claims-making and thereby for their entry into the modern universe of the political. Whether, as Pandey (this volume) suggests, defining and stabilizing such claims will at some point see a shedding of community’s carapace as it reaches nationhood is perhaps an open question—for the simple reason that not all modern communities have national aspirations (for example al-Qaida). And whether and how such political communities can become something genuinely subversive—what Foucault (1982) called movements of subjugated knowledge—depends in part on how deeply the state and capital have penetrated the trenches of civil society.

My account pays fidelity to community’s modern political usage but at the same time locates community explicitly with respect to contemporary forms of capitalism. Community is both an expression of modern rule (political actors claim community as a precondition for their claims on the state) and simultaneously, as Miranda Joseph (2001) puts it, a “supplement to capital” (it is *in business*). To put the matter slightly differently, communities are as tightly bound up with capitalism and the operations of the marketplace as they are with rule and governance. David Harvey (1987) has made much of the ways in which invented urban communities predicated on lifestyle, culture, or ethnicity produce built environments (and hence are sources of value) that simultaneously work against class antagonisms and absorb some of the surplus production generated by the circuits of urban capitalism. Miranda Joseph sees communities as shoring up the flows of capital in effect by legitimating and creating forms of hierarchy and difference that are “implicitly required but disavowed by capitalism” (2002:xxxii). These forms of analysis conjure up the spirit of Karl Polanyi (1945), who famously pointed out that markets cannot create social order; indeed they can colonize and ultimately destroy it. The market destroys the social character of three foundational “fictitious” commodities (land, labor, and money); its corrosive effects underwrite class-based communities such as Chartism, the cooperative movement, and Owenism, each a reaction to the destructive process of commodification (see Burawoy 2003). Re-embedding of markets, or the reactions to disembedding to put it more positively, produce forms of association (the modern political community) that serve to maintain capitalist accumulation (that is to say, civil society as a counterweight to the anarchy of the market).

Over the last two centuries, many First and Third World utopian populisms—often draped in nostalgia for a community lost—can be grasped as a reaction to the ruptures and costs of industrialization and development (Kitching 1980). Working-class communities, peasant systems of common property management, the moral economy of Islamic schools, and so on are crushed by the unfettered powers of the market, and yet these selfsame conditions of destruction provide a fertile soil in which the ceaseless search for alternative communities can take root and flourish. The construction of

collective identities arises from the broader practices of defining and delimiting communities but at a cost:

As a rule . . . these dissolve internal differentiations within any given collectivity in favor of a common external demarcation. . . . The spread of such claims is only possible in communities where religious (or traditional) norms and affiliations have become shaky or uncertain. Surrogate constructions then offer magical formulae that suggest hidden ways of belonging, delimiting and persisting. . . . Formulaic constructions of collective identity have become a symptomatic signature of the present. They are ubiquitous wherever societies, regardless of their actual differentiation, are transfigured into seamless communities, and assured of continuity by symbolic demarcation and fabrication of meaning. (Niethammer 2003:80–83)

In the unmaking and remaking of *communitas*, whatever its cultural, social, or historical circumstances, the new community must always address questions of representation (how they represent themselves and what forms of political representation they endorse), forms of rule, means of internal discipline, membership and “purity,” styles of imagination, and the relation between the community and the economy.

Within the maelstrom of capitalist modernity, the possibilities for community are almost endless. Yet paradoxically, community is an exemplar of what Ernesto Laclau (1996) calls an “empty signifier”—something that no political actor can monopolize the truth of over the long term. In this light, I seek to emphasize three relatively unexplored facets of community, capitalism, and modern rule: first, the fact that community-making can fail (often dramatically), by which I mean that its social imaginary disintegrates (fails to maintain its social appeal, its ideological function, and its social cohesiveness) and erodes to the point where a base unity dissolves. Community can fail to be defined and stabilized (Jensen 2004). Second, communities typically contain both reactionary (despotic or disciplinary) and emancipatory (liberatory) expressions that are, as it were, in perpetual struggle with one another; communities are not always warm and fuzzy. And third, communities (with their attendant forms of identity, rule, and territorialization) can be produced simultaneously at rather different spatial levels and within different social force fields, and to this extent they may work with and against one another in complex ways. In short, people belong to multiple communities, navigating among them in a way that works against the communitarian presumption that individuals hold fidelity to only one community. These three antinomies have sinister qualities, to which my title refers.

My central task is to explore the antinomies of community in a rather particular postcolonial state, namely the oil nation called Nigeria (Figure 1). Oil states—sometime called petro-states (Karl 1997)—encompass considerable variability, ranging from sparsely populated surplus producers in the Gulf states to industrial semiperipheries such as Venezuela or Russia. But each stands in relation to a particular sort of capitalism (which I shall call petro-capitalism), in which a key resource (oil) and a logic of extraction figure centrally in the making and breaking of community. I wish to focus on the *simultaneous* production of three differing, territorially based communities (or governable spaces). Each community is imagined, so to say, through and with oil—the communities are “naturalized”—but they produce forms of rule and identity that are

fragmented, unruly, and often violent, thereby threatening the very idea of community itself. And standing at the heart of each community is a double movement (a central antinomy) that as I hope to show provides a friction between these communities, making them operate at cross purposes, I think with rather devastating consequences.¹

My argument runs something like this. Modern petro-capitalism operates through a particular “oil complex” (an institutional configuration of firms, state apparatuses, and oil communities) that constitutes a radical—and multifaceted—challenge to customary forms of community authority, systems of ethnic identity, and the functioning of local state institutions. These challenges are generated principally by mechanisms of property and land disputes and by forms of popular mobilization to gain access to first, company rents and compensation revenues, and second, to the petro-revenues of the Nigerian state (largely by demanding and instituting new regional and/or local state institutions). The oil complex generates differing sorts of governable spaces in which identity, territory, and rule are in play. In some cases, generational forces (youth in particular) are predominant; in others the clan, the kingdom (chieftainship), or the ethnic minority (indigenous peoples). Local government councils or authorities, or radical (sometimes secessionist) insurgent movements, can also provide the setting in which new political communities are incubated. My empirical research in the Niger Delta—the oil-producing region in Nigeria—explicates these particular and local dynamics, that is, the ways in which these forces and powers singly, or in complex concatenations, produce different sorts of community and rule (and unruliness), differing styles of imagining (and unimagining), and contrasting forms of making and breaking community—all the while retaining a common structural relation to what I call the oil complex. The three communities I focus on are chieftainship, ethnicity (or indigeneity), and the nation.

<A>A Note on Community and Governable Spaces

The idea of communities as governable spaces is derived from Michel Foucault via the brilliant work of Nikolas (1999). For Foucault (2000, 1982; see also Barry et al. 1996; Gordon 1980), the notion of governmentality implies an expansive way of thinking about governing and rule in relation to the exercise of modern power. Government for Foucault referred famously to the “conduct of conduct,” a more or less calculated and rational set of ways of shaping conduct and securing rule through a multiplicity of authorities and agencies in and outside of the state and at a variety of spatial levels. Modern governmentality was rendered distinctive by the specific forms in which the population and the economy were administered, and specifically by a deepening of the “governmentalization of the state” (that is to say, how sovereignty comes to be articulated through the populations and the processes that constitute the administered population). The new practices of the state, as Mitchell Dean (1999:16) says, shape human conduct by “working through our desire, aspirations, interests and beliefs for definite but shifting ends.” It was the task of Foucault to reveal the genealogy of government, the origins of modern power, and the fabrication of a modern identity.

Governing—that is, what authorities wanted to happen in relation to what problems, objectives, and tactics—can be assessed by reference to the “analytics of government” (Rose 1999:21; Dean 1999). For Rose, these analytics of government constitute “governable spaces”, and the spatializations of government are the “modalities in which a real and material governable world is composed, *terraformed*, and

populated” (1999:32; see also Murdoch and Ward 1997; Hart 2003; Mitchell 2002). The scales at which government is “territorialized”—the word *territory* is derived from *terra*, land, but also from *terrere*, to frighten—are myriad: the factory, the neighborhood, the commune, the region, the nation. Each of these governable spaces has its own topology and is, as Rose (1999:37) puts it, modeled in such a way through thought and practice that they become territorialized in various ways (the nation, the city, the village, or the factory). Governable spaces necessitate the territorializing of governmental thought and practice, but they are simultaneously produced at differing scales by the “cold laws of political economy” (Rose 1999:39). The map has been central to the process of objectification, marking and inscribing community, serving as “a little machine for producing conviction in others” (Rose 1999:37).

Governable spaces are produced at differing scales (what Peck and Brenner [2002] call “politicized scalar narratives” and Smith [1992] calls “scale politics”), and they are populated by political subjects and what Clifford (2001) calls their enunciative modalities.² Perhaps the most compelling way in which territory, rule, and identity are currently constituted is, as Rose himself notes, through the idea of community. I want to think about the genesis of differing sorts of governable spaces/communities in Nigeria in relation to the “cold laws” of petro-capitalist development and nation-building that provide the forcing houses within which communities are constantly made and unmade. There is no presumption that the category of governable space or community implies in practice stable forms of government, or the successful definition or stabilization of community as such, or indeed the achievement of rule (Joyce 2003). Quite the reverse, the forms of hegemony in these spaces are typically weak and contested, violent and conflicted, and the communities are subject to different constellations of force and consent—much of which, in the final analysis, looks like *ungovernability*. As Alan Smart puts it: “we need to pay more attention to areas in which control seems to be conspicuously absent, where neglect is more apparent than surveillance” (Smart 2001:31). Neglect, but also incapacity and incompetence.

Economies and Communities of Violence

The “normal” exercise of hegemony is characterized by the combination of force and consent, in variable equilibrium, without force predominating too much over consent. . . [But] between force and consent stands corruption-fraud, that is the enervation and paralyzing of the antagonist or antagonists. (Gramsci 1975 cited in Anderson 2001)

The strategic significance of Nigeria is incontestable. One of every five Africans is a Nigerian (the country’s population is 137 million), and it is the world’s seventh largest exporter of petroleum (providing the U.S. market with roughly 8 percent of its imports). A longtime member of OPEC, in the last three decades it has emerged as archetypical “oil nation.” With reserves estimated at close to forty billion barrels, Nigerian oil provides 80 percent of government revenues, 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and 96 percent of export revenues. Nigerian oil is prized for its “lightness” and “sweetness,” yielding more gasoline and diesel than “sour” Middle Eastern crudes. Crude oil production runs currently at more than 2.1 million barrels per day (a value of more than \$20 billion at 2004 prices). Mostly lifted onshore from about

250 fields in the Niger Delta, Nigeria's oil now represents a vast domestic industrial infrastructure: more than three hundred oil fields, 5,284 wells, 7,000 kilometers of pipelines, ten export terminals, 275 flow stations, ten gas plants, four refineries (Warri, Port Harcourt I and II, and Kaduna), and a massive liquefied natural gas project (in Bonny and Brass).

Nigeria is a multiethnic state and was a British colony until 1960. Colonial indirect rule imposed a "decentralized despotism" (Mamdani 1996) orchestrated through regional rule by powerful ethnic (and regional) majorities. The backbone of each region was an export commodity and a government marketing board. At independence, Muslim northerners sustained a fragile hegemony over a highly charged multiethnic polity, and it was into this weak federal system that commercial oil production was inserted. The breakup of the federation in 1967 (following a succession of military coups), the secession of Biafra (the former Eastern Region), and the civil war (1967–1970) that followed were in no small measure a reflection of the new saliency of oil in Nigerian economic and political life. In the wake of the oil boom of 1973, a huge influx of petro-dollars launched an ambitious (and autocratic) state-led modernization program. In short order, Nigeria became an oil nation. But what began as a boom with untempered ambition in the 1970s ended in the mid-1980s as a bust, compounded by the austerity of World Bank adjustment programs. In 1999, after a terrifying period of military authoritarianism under Sani Abacha, Olesegun Obasanjo became the first democratically elected president in two decades, inheriting an economy in shambles, vast political and economic resentments by oil minorities, and the prospect of building a democracy on the backs of long-standing regional, ethnic, and religious animosities.

Commercial petroleum production, which began in 1956 in Oloibiri in Bayelsa State, seemed to offer a rather different prospect to the awful realities of the new civilian dispensation, not least for the largely neglected ethnic minorities of the southeastern region. But black gold ushered in instead massive environmental despoliation,³ a crisis in forms of traditional livelihood, staggering corruption, deepening social inequalities, and growing local resentments across the Niger Delta, driven by the siphoning off of oil wealth from the oil-producing states to the coffers of other regions (especially the Muslim north). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the beginning of popular resistance (and the call for "resource control") was already evident, but it was the charismatic leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the 1990 Ogoni Bill of Rights, promoted by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), that marked a watershed in the popular agitation against the consequences of oil development in the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa and eight others from the MOSOP leadership were ultimately hung at the hands of a military tribunal in 1995, but their murders ignited a prairie fire of struggles by other oil-producing communities (the Adoni, the Itsekiri, the Isoko, the Urhobo, and the Ijaw, for example),⁴ a growing clamor for compensation across the nine oil-producing delta states, and the development of wide-ranging pan-ethnic political movements (such as CHICOCO, UND, and TROPCON)⁵ calling for "true federalism" (Okonta and Douglas 2001; ERA 2000; Osaghae 1995; Obi 2001; Ikelegbe 2001; Obi 2004). The broadening of civil society in the mid-1980s permitted oil-related grievances to be projected onto the larger screen of what Ikelegbe calls "participatory, highly mobilized, and coordinated platforms of civil groups in a struggle for self-determination, equity and civil rights" (2001:465).

Since the late 1990s, there has been a very substantial escalation of violence across the delta oil fields, accompanied by major attacks on oil facilities (it is estimated that more than one thousand people die each year from oil-related violence). The delta has indisputably emerged as “a region of insurrection” (Ikelegbe 2001:463). A report prepared for the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) and published in 2003 was entitled *Back from the Brink* and painted a gloomy “risk audit” for the delta (ClearWater 2003). NNPC estimated that between 1998 and 2003, there were four hundred “vandalizations” on company facilities each year (581 between January and September 2004), and oil losses amounted to \$1 billion annually (NNPC 2004). The tactics and repertoires deployed against the companies have been various: demonstrations and blockades against oil facilities; occupations of flow stations and platforms; sabotage of pipelines; oil “bunkering,” or theft (from hot-tapping fuel lines to large-scale appropriation of crude from flow stations); litigation against the companies; hostage taking; and strikes. A large group of Ijaw women that occupied Chevron oil refineries near Warri in 2002, demanding company investments and jobs for indigenes (*New York Times*, August 13, 2002), reflected the tip of a vast political iceberg. Mounting communal violence in the following year resulted in many mortalities and widespread community destruction and dislocation around the Warri petroleum complex. Seven oil company employees were killed in March 2003, prompting all the major oil companies to withdraw staff, close down operations, and reduce output by more than 750,000 barrels per day (40 percent of national output). This in turn provoked President Obasanjo to dispatch large troop deployment to the oil-producing creeks. Ijaw militants, struggling to get a cut of the illegal oil “bunkering” trade—some estimates suggest that this innovative form of oil theft siphons a staggering 15 percent of production (WAC/SPDC 2004; see also www.legaloil.com)—threatened to destroy eleven captured oil installations. In April 2004, another wave of violence erupted around oil installations (at the end of April, Shell lost production of up to 370,000 barrels per day, largely in the western delta), this time amid the presence of armed insurgencies, specifically two ethnic militias led by Ateke Tom (the Niger Delta Vigilante) and Alhaji Asari (the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force), each driven, and partly funded, by oil monies.⁶ The periodicity and character of this militancy have certainly been shaped by the conjuncture of recent forces, including local and national elections, the emergence of ethnic militias and armed struggle as a political program for restive youth, and the growing militarization of the oil fields and oil installations throughout the 1990s. However, nobody seriously expects the endemic problems within the oil sector to dissipate any time soon.

The crisis in the Niger Delta must be located on a wider landscape of ethnic and linguistic complexity and deep-seated economic and political resentments across the region. There are five major linguistic categories (Ijoid, Yoruboid, Edoid, Igbooid, and Delta Cross), but each embraces a profusion of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity. The history of the delta captures this cultural complexity, since precolonial trade patterns across the region reflected a rich and complex social division of labor rooted in occupation, ethnicity, and micro-ecology. These commercial and exchange relations were radically compromised by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, however, and subsequently by French, Dutch, and British slavers. The advent of a so-called legitimate trade in rubber and cocoa under British auspices in the nineteenth century (to replace

slavery after abolition) gave rise to an Oil Rivers Protectorate in which a vital commercial life flourished. The establishment of the Nigerian colony and the imposition of indirect rule in the early 1900s marked an end to the brief period of commercial expansion. For most of the first half of the twentieth century, the delta was an economic and political backwater. In the gradual transition to independence in the 1950s, the ethnic minorities voiced concerns to the departing British administration that their interests were virtually invisible in a Nigerian federation dominated by three ethnic majorities (the Hausa, the Yoruba, and the Ibo). What was true at the moment of imperial departure only became more so in the post-colony.

Let me make three fundamental points concerning the political economy of oil in Nigeria (see Watts 2000; Forrest 1995; Frynas 2000; Khan 1994; Obi 2001). The first is that oil capitalism operates through what I call an oil complex, with a broadly similar structure in, say, Venezuela, Gabon, or Indonesia (see Figure 2). It is composed of several key elements including a statutory monopoly over mineral exploitation (the 1969 petroleum law; Revenue Allocation Decree 13 in 1970; the Land Use Decree of 1978),⁷ a nationalized oil company (the NNPC) that has majority holding in its production arrangements with foreign companies,⁸ the security apparatuses of the state along with the private security forces of the companies (to ensure that costly investments are secured), the oil-producing communities themselves (within whose customary jurisdiction the wells are located), and a political mechanism by which federal oil revenues are distributed to government and the states (see Figure 3). The latter is effected by four means: a federal account (rents appropriated directly by the federal state), a state derivation principle (the right of each state to a proportion of the taxes that its inhabitants are assumed to have contributed to the federal exchequer), the Federation Account or States Joint Account (which allocates revenue to the states on the basis of need, population, and other criteria), and a Special Grants Account (which includes monies designated directly for the Niger Delta).⁹ Over time, the derivation revenues have fallen (and thereby revenues directly controlled by the oil states have shriveled),¹⁰ while the States Joint Account has grown vastly (the nine oil-producing states received N886 billion from the Federation Account in 2003). In short, there has been a process of radical fiscal centralism (Furro 1992; Suberu 2004; Toyo 2002; Okilo 1980; Ikporukpo 1996; Ebeku 2003).

The second point is that the dynamics of the oil complex shape the character and dynamics of Nigerian development. Oil is of course a biophysical resource; it is also a commodity that enters the market with its price tag, and as such it is the bearer of particular relations of production and quite specific fetishistic qualities. Oil is “black gold,” the bearer of powers, hopes, and expectations of unimaginable power. Oil is a constant reference point in the popular Nigerian imagination, in films, soap operas, and popular theater.

The third point is that Nigerian petro-capitalism contains a sort of double movement, a contradictory unity of capitalism and modernity. On the one hand, oil has been a *centralizing force* that has rendered the (oil) state more visible and globalized, underwriting a process of state-building and national community imagining. On the other hand, oil-led development, driven by an unremitting political logic of ethnic claims-making and staggering corruption by the political classes, has become a force of *fragmentation* and *illegitimacy*, radically discrediting the state and its forms of governance. It produced a set of conditions/communities that have compromised, indeed

undermined, the very tenets of the modern nation-state. In short, one might encapsulate this double movement as the tension between fiscal centralism and regional/local dispersion. Fernando Coronil (1997) refers to this conundrum as “the Faustian trade of money for modernity,” which in Venezuela brought “the illusion of development.” In Nigeria, too, the double movement brought spectacle and illusion (Apter 2005): an explosive growth of modern infrastructure and a (brief) consumption boom for the middle classes, while 85 percent of oil revenues went to 1 percent of the population (and \$100 billion of \$400 billion simply went “missing”). But it also produced forms of governable spaces (the product of what I call political dispersion) that sit uneasily with the very idea of Nigeria—spaces that generated forms of rule, conduct, and imagining at cross purposes with one another, antithetical to the very idea of a coherent modern nation-state that oil, in the mythos of the West at least, represented. How, then, can one grasp the imagination and creation of communities in and through the oil complex and petro-capitalism?

I. Community as the Governable Space of Chieftainship¹

Nembe community¹¹ in Bayelsa State is one of the centers of Nigerian oil production. In the 1950s, the Tennessee Oil Company (a U.S. company) began oil explorations, but oil was not located in commercial quantities until much later, when Shell D’Arcy unearthed the nearby Oloibiri oil field in Ogbia. Subsequent explorations led to the opening of the large and rich Nembe oil fields near the coast along the Okpoama and Twon-Brass axis. Currently, the four Nembe oil fields produce approximately 150,000 barrels of high-quality petroleum through joint operating agreements between the NNPC and Agip and Shell. Nembe, however, is (and has been for close to a decade) in crisis: it is a major theater of violence and intra-community conflict, largely ungovernable, and pulled apart by intense competition over political turf and the control of benefits from the oil industry. The violence can be traced back to the late 1980s, when the Nembe Council of Chiefs acquired power from the king (*amayanabo*), Justice Alagoa Mingi IX, to negotiate royalties and other benefits with the oil companies. The combination of youth-driven violence and intense political competition has transformed Nembe’s customary system of governance and set the stage for further challenges to the traditional authority of chieftainship (see Kemedi 2002; HRW 2003).¹²

There is also a deeper history. Colonial indirect rule certainly left much of the Niger Delta marginalized and isolated, but it also, in the name of ruling through tradition, built upon and frequently expanded (or invented) chiefly powers of local rule. In the Nembe, colonial structures were grafted onto a deep and complex structure of kingship and gerontocratic rule, though in comparison to its commercial and political vitality in the nineteenth-century palm-oil protectorate, the town had fallen into disrepair and economic ruin. At independence in 1960, Nembe was the chief city of

¹ I am especially indebted in this discussion to the work of Von Kemedi who also assisted me in understanding the case and in setting up interviews. This work is on going in a project involving Kemedi, Ike Okonta and myself. In addition the Nembe Peace Commission provided an exemplary account (Alagoa 2001). The Special Commissioner for Nembe appointed by Bayelsa State also provided much insight.

Brass, a division of Yenagoa Province in the Eastern Region. An amayanabo reigned in Nembe (Ogbolomabiri), but unlike the famous King Koko and his illustrious forbears, he had neither power nor authority (Okonta 2001). Rather, it was the district officer resident in Twon, representing the regional government in Enugu, who exercised effective power over Nembe. The Niger Delta Development Board, founded in 1961 to address the region's problems, and the Niger Delta Congress (the party representative for the division), offered little assistance before the entire oil-producing zone (Nembe included) slid into civil war and tragic violence. By the war's end in 1970, Nembe was a sad, backwater mired in desperate poverty and stagnation. It was in this setting that commercial oil production proved to be so decisive.

To understand the dynamics of contemporary Nembe as a sort of oil-community, recall that practical matters concerning access to and control over land lay in the hands of customary authorities (notwithstanding the fact that the 1969 petroleum law granted the state the power to nationalize all oil resources). Land rights, and claims on oil royalties, were from the outset rooted in the amayanabo, and derivatively the subordinate powers, namely the Council of Chiefs, and the Executive Council. Historically, Nembe community was structured around a rigid political hierarchy consisting of the amayanabo presiding over a descending order of chiefs (or heads of the war canoe houses)¹³ elected by all the war canoe houses. Although the chiefs were subservient to the amayanabo, they acted as his closest advisers, supported the amayanabo in the event of military threat, and in turn were responsible for electing the amayanabo from the Mingi group of houses—that is, from the royal line. The current Nembe Council of Chiefs is an assemblage of the recognized chiefs of Nembe “chalked” by the king (Kemedi 2002).

By the late 1980s, a widespread sense of malaise and frustration colored Mingi rule. In particular, the Nembe monarch's ineffectiveness in dealing with the oil companies led in 1991 to a radical decentralization of his powers to the Council of Chiefs, headed by one Chief Egi Adukpo Ikata. Insofar as the council now dealt directly with Shell and the other oil companies, and handled large quantities of money paid as rents and contributions to “community assistance,” competition for election to the council intensified as various political factions (and families) struggled for office. By 2000 the council had grown from twenty-six to ninety persons. Coeval with the evisceration of kingly powers, an expansion of the council mandate, and the expansion of the council membership was a subtle process of “youth mobilization” - a social phenomenon that extends far beyond Nembe and is transforming the entire Delta. In an age-graded society like the Nembe Ijaw, “youth” refers to persons typically between their teens and early forties, who, whatever achievements they may have obtained (university degrees, fatherhood, and so on), remain subservient to their elders. Central to the emergence of militant youth movements in Nembe Town was the catalytic role of Nimi B. P. Barigha-Amage, a Nembe indigene and former engineer at the ELF oil company. He deployed his knowledge of the oil industry to organize youths of the Nembe community into a force capable of extracting concessions from the oil companies, in essence by converting preexisting cultural organizations into the providers of protection services. In turn, Chief Ikata was quick to take advantage of youth restiveness (attributable to a lack of employment, limited educational opportunities, subservience in a hierarchic and stratified gerontocratic system, corporate neglect and irresponsibility, and the absence of anything like meaningful or participatory oil-funded social development) to pressure

Shell into granting community entitlements (what are called “cash payments”). Chief Ikata and the young engineer in effect manufactured a new social pact: the engineer supplied the youths with information regarding community entitlements, and the chief deployed his knowledge of military logistics to organize the shutting down of flow stations, the seizure of equipment, and sabotage (Alagoa 2001; HRW 2005). In 1994 the military was sent into Nembe to attempt to control the disruption of oil production by militant youth groups aligned with differing local political factions.

Armed with insider knowledge of the companies and an understanding of a loosely defined set of rules regarding company compensation for infringements on community property, Barigha-Amage pushed further for the creation of youth “cultural groups,” which gradually, with the support of some members of the Council of Chiefs, intermediated with oil companies and their liaison officers and manipulated the system of compensation in the context of considerable juridical and legal ambiguity over land ownership and compensation rates. Company liaison officers (CLOs), colluding with community representatives, invented ritual or cultural sites that had ostensibly been compromised or damaged by oil operations in order to defraud the oil companies (the CLOs took a percentage of the cash compensation). As the opportunities for appropriating company resources in the name of compensation proved successful (indeed lucrative), other sections of the youth community (often distinguished by differing familial or political affiliations) began to competitively organize to gain access to company rents—often through extortion, sabotage, intimidation, and sometimes hostage taking associated with occupations of flow stations on the Nembe oil fields.

By 1994 new political actors had emerged to lead youth factions, and the situation began to spiral out of control. Former university lecturer Lionel Jonathan formed a group called Isongoforo (House of Lords), and a year later Mrs. Ituro-Garuba, wife of a well-placed military officer, established Agbara-foro. With much at stake financially, and control of the space between community and company in the balance, conflicts within and among youth groups inevitably proliferated and deepened (Alagoa 2001). In turn, growing community militancy spilled over into often-violent altercations with the much-detested mobile police (“Mopos,” locally known as “kill and go”) and local government authorities. The regional state and governor attempted to intervene as conditions deteriorated, but a government report was never released for political reasons. As a result, a subsequent banning of youth groups had no practical effect (HRW 2002, 2005).

Slowly, the subversion of royal authority, the strategic alliances between youths and chiefs, and the growing (and armed) conflict between youth groups for access to Shell resulted in a ferocious struggle for power and the ascendancy of a heavily armed Isongoforo. In an environment of rampant insecurity, tension, and lawlessness, including the occupation and closure of flow stations, Isongoforo forces were provided “standby” payments by the companies; in effect, the companies were hiring protection services. Isongoforo occupied the center of a new governable space, which it ruled through organized violence and terror in effect funded by the large quantities of monies commanded from the companies. In the run-up to the 1999 elections, the youth groups were further armed and funded by competing political candidates and political parties, since many of the youth leaders had political aspirations or were well connected to the statehouse.

This volatile state of affairs collapsed dramatically in 2000 as local resentments, conflicts, and disorder proliferated. In February a “Peoples Revolution”—ostensibly precipitated by the humiliation of the Council of Chiefs at the hands of Shell (backed by Isongoforo)—overthrew Isongoforo. The chiefs now became more actively engaged in the newly emerging power struggles for access to the oil companies, orchestrating the occupation of flow stations and undermining the powers of Isongoforo by recruiting and supporting other youth groups. By May 2000, Isongoforo had been sent into exile, but it was promptly replaced when Barigha-Amage returned as high chief of Nembe and promoted his own “cultural group,” Isenasawo/Teme. Teme instituted a rule of terror and chaos far worse than its predecessors. It, too, proved unstable and split into two factions, staging counter coups with much bloodshed. A government Peace Commission was established in January 2001 in a desperate effort to bring peace to one of the jewels in the oil-producing crown (Alagoa 2001). The governor of Baylesa State appointed a special adviser to the town to facilitate peace and a return to normalcy. While efforts have been made to negotiate the return of some of the influential youths banished from the town, as it currently stands Nembe is ungovernable; many of the chiefly notables are no longer resident in Nembe itself.

The slide into violence and armed struggle was stimulated by gubernatorial politics and competition among political parties because of its concurrence with the 1999 elections, in which some of the key youth leaders were expected to deliver votes for the incumbent gubernatorial candidate. In the creation of a sort of vigilante rule, there were complex complicities between chiefs, local youth groups, political parties, the state political classes, and the companies. The occupation of oil flow stations (for purposes of extortion) were often known in advance and involved collaboration with local company engineers and community development officers. Youths were de facto company employees providing protection services, while local compensation and community officers of Shell and Agip produced fraudulent compensation cases and entitlements. Nembe, a town with its own long and illustrious history and politics, had become a sort of company town in which authority had shifted from the king to warring factions of youths working for and against the companies. The Council of Chiefs stood in a contradictory position, seeking to maintain control over revenues from the companies, as a legitimate source of authority, while being intimidated and undermined by the militant youth groups on whom they partly depended.

What I have described is a case of the radical displacement of a specific form of customary authority (chieftainship) through the creation of a governable space of civic vigilantism, a sort of “thickening” of civil society but not of the sort that Robert Putnam (2000) might endorse. These sorts of intra-community struggles can be multiplied many times over across the oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta. Indeed, one of the most important transformations of the last two decades is the extent to which youths have now confronted and often overturned chiefly powers (Ojo 2002).¹⁴ As I write, three recent stories in the Nigerian press signal the depth and extent of these insurrectional youth politics: King Agari of Mbiama was dethroned by youths who caned him publicly with sixty strokes (*Weekly Trust*, January 24, 2004); in the Irri community in Isoko South, Chief Ovuse Eba Ogame was abducted by youths (*Vanguard*, March 22, 2004); and the *oba* of Benin is under threat from so-called youth rebels over oil corruption (*This Day*, March 15, 2004). Youth militancy is not always directed inward to the ruling dynasty—it might be primarily targeting the oil companies (for example, when

youth militants in Elelenwo or Agalabiri occupy company installations) (Ojo 2002). But the most striking commonality is the extent to which a generation of youths—restive youths as the press and the politicians dub them—have channeled their right and proper anger into a variety of well-organized and sometimes armed political movements. The Niger Delta Volunteer Force, discussed below, is the paradigmatic case. Against this background one can begin to understand the constellation of forces by which in so many oil-producing communities restive youths have directly challenged chiefly rule, often in a dramatic and public way. The case of Nembe is compelling because youth mobilization—whose political affiliations and ambitions in any case were complex, reflecting an unstable amalgam of clan, family, and local electoral loyalties—has thrown up the figure of the youth militant, representing a tense alliance between civic organizations (presenting themselves as cultural youth organizations) and private oil companies. Rule in Nembe now took on a vigilante form. In the context of a weak and corrupt local state and powerful local class forces (the companies and chieftainship), the character of this power nexus bears striking resemblances to the genesis of the Mafia in nineteenth-century Sicily (Blok 1974). It is youth—communities of youths as political actors—that is in full-blown insurrection, detonated by oil but inserted into a variety of political situations and assuming a panoply of organizational forms—from well-organized ethnic youth movements such as the Ijaw Youth Council to mobile parliaments to rebel insurgents and local “mafias” such as Teme in Nembe. As a consequence, oil-producing communities as the locus of chiefly rule have been turned upside down.

II. Community as the Governable Space of Ethnicity and Resource Control

The Niger Delta is a region of considerable, perhaps one should say bewildering, ethno-linguistic complexity. The Eastern Region, of which the Niger Delta is part, is dominated statistically by the Ibo majority, and this fact speaks to a long history of excluded ethnic delta minorities dating back to the Willink Commission’s (1959) observations on the simmering political resentments in the region. Throughout the colonial period and prior to the onset of commercial oil production, some minorities, anxious to remove the shackles of what they saw as Ibo domination, endeavored to establish political entities (native authorities) of their own. All this work amounted to very little, however. In fact, it was a measure of the deep disenchantment of the minorities, and of the Ijaw in particular, that shortly after the January 1966 military coup in which young military officers led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu attempted to take over the central government, a group of young Ijaw militants led by Isaac Adaka Boro, Nottingham Dick, and Samuel Owonaro formed a paramilitary organization, the Niger Delta Volunteer Service, and proclaimed a Niger Delta Republic (based on a desire to secede from the Nigerian Federation). The revolt was crushed within a couple of weeks (hence the name Twelve Day Republic), and its leaders subsequently joined the federal side when civil war broke out in the country in July 1967. But Boro’s short-lived revolution dramatized the widespread feeling of powerlessness of the delta communities “reduced to ‘divisions’ in ‘provinces’ in a ‘region’ where previously they had been masters of all that they surveyed” (Okonta 2004:3). Boro proved to be a forerunner of the resource control movement that came three decades later.

The ill-fated republic proved prescient. General Gowon’s creation of twelve new states in the federation—three for the ethnic minority groups in the Niger Delta—in May 1967, and the commercialization of oil production after the civil war ended in

January 1970, moved Boro's struggle toward the invention of "oil minorities." The bulk of the oil fields were located in three new states—Midwest, Rivers, and South-Eastern—and the political elites quickly appreciated the strategic significance of oil to the federal exchequer (Okonta 2001). The origins of communities' self-definition as ethnically defined "oil minorities" lay on a wider field of what I described previously as deepening fiscal centralism and the demise of derivation beginning in the 1970s. But the oil minorities drew sustenance from two further developments in the following decade. The first was the devastating consequences of structural adjustment in the mid-1980s, when the hardships imposed by the Babangida government and the World Bank further deepened resentments in the delta among communities that had, after all, missed out on the oil "boom" and were compelled to swallow the bitter pill of austerity. The second development occurred at roughly the same time (in 1986), when Babangida inaugurated a "Political Bureau" tasked with, among other things, instigating a national political debate and providing "an objective and in-depth critique of our past political experience in order to serve as background information for the debate." (Nigerian Federal Government, 1987:226). The Babangida regime's attempt to "mobilize" Nigerians for a new political culture as part of its transition program deployed such agencies as the Directorate of Social Mobilization (DSM) for mass mobilization for self-reliance, for economic recovery, and for social justice (MAMSER). In practice, all were coopted as Okonta has shown, in ways unanticipated by the military junta, by an angry citizenry that used DSM to nurture autonomous social forces opposed to the state (Okonta 2001).

The political career of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the famous Ogoni movement was a product of this conjuncture of forces. Saro-Wiwa brilliantly built upon the confluence of ethnic exclusion, oil minority politics, and the flourishing of civil society to construct the ethno-nationalist community in search of resource control. He was in fact a director of DSM at its inception but resigned after a year and went on to found MOSOP, along with similarly aggrieved Ogoni notables, in 1990. By Saro-Wiwa's own account (1989), his short stint in MAMSER opened his eyes to the possibilities of mobilizing the Ogoni to demand a better dispensation within the Nigerian political arena. A number of other minority groups followed MOSOP's lead. The Movement for the Survival of the Izon (Ijaw) Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) presented the Izon Peoples Charter, modeled on the Ogoni Bill of Rights, to the press in October 1992; the Ogbia Charter, drafted by members of Movement for Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO), an Ijo clan, made its appearance a month later; the Ikwerre, an oil-producing group neighboring the Ogoni, established the Council for Ikwerre Nationality in 1993.¹⁵ Out of this firmament emerged the clamor for a Sovereign National Conference and the delta-wide movement—now central to the so-called South-South Alliance of oil-producing states—for "resource control" and "true federalism"¹⁶ (Ukeje 2001). I shall concentrate here on the Ogoni case because its political trajectory reveals the making and ultimate unmaking of an ethno-nationalist political community—in fact, an oil minority that politically fell to pieces. At its core was a profound tension between community qua ethnic identity and community qua civic populism that proved (among other things) to be its downfall.

The Ogoni are typically seen as a distinct ethnic group, consisting of three subgroups and six clans dotted over 404 square miles of creeks, waterways, and tropical forest in the northeast fringes of the Niger Delta. Located administratively in Rivers State, Ogoniland is one of the most heavily populated zones in all of Africa. The most

densely settled areas of Ogoniland—with more than 1,500 persons per square kilometer—are the sites of the largest wells. Its customary productive base was provided by fishing and agriculture until the discovery of petroleum, including the huge Bomu field, immediately prior to independence. Part of an enormously complex regional ethnic mosaic, the Ogoni were drawn into internecine conflicts within the delta region, largely as a consequence of the slave trade and its aftermath, in the period prior to arrival of colonial forces at Kono in 1901. The Ogoni resisted the British until 1908 (Naanen 1995) but thereafter were left to stagnate as part of the Opopo Division within Calabar Province.

As Ogoniland was gradually incorporated during the 1930s, the clamor for a separate political division grew at the hands of the first pan-Ogoni organization, the Ogoni Central Union, which bore fruit with the establishment of the Ogoni Native Authority in 1947. In 1951, however, the authority was forcibly integrated into the Eastern Region. Marked by tremendous neglect and discrimination, integration raised long-standing fears of Ibo domination among the Ogoni.¹⁷ Ogoni antipathy to what they saw as a sort of internal colonialism at the hands of the Ibo continued in their support of federal forces during the civil war. While Rivers State was established in 1967—which compensated in some measure for enormous Ogoni losses during the war—the new state recapitulated in microcosm the larger “national question.” The new Rivers State was multiethnic but was presided over by the locally dominant Ijaw; this situation did nothing to allay the fears of the minorities.¹⁸

During the first oil boom of the 1970s, Ogoniland's fifty-six wells accounted for almost 15 percent of Nigerian oil production,¹⁹ and up until the withdrawal of Shell in 1994 an estimated \$30 billion in petroleum revenues has flowed from this Lilliputian territory. It was, as local opinion had it, “Nigeria's Kuwait.” Yet Rivers State as a whole saw its federal allocation fall dramatically in absolute and relative terms. At the height of the oil boom, 60 percent of oil production came from Rivers State, but it received only 5 percent of the statutory allocation (roughly half of that received by the Kano and Northern states and by the Ibo heartland states). Between 1970 and 1980 it received in revenues one-fiftieth of the value of the oil it produced. Few Ogoni households have electricity, there is one doctor per 100,000 people, and child mortality rates are some of the highest in the nation. According to official statistics, 80 percent of the population is illiterate, unemployment is 85 percent, and close to half of Ogoni youths have left the region in search of work. Life expectancy is barely fifty years, substantially below the national average.

If Ogoniland failed to see the material benefits from oil, what it *did* experience was something the European Parliament referred to as “an environmental nightmare.” The heart of ecological harm stems from gas flaring and oil spills. Three-quarters of natural gas in the oil-producing areas is flared (compared to 0.6 percent in the United States). As an environmentalist visiting the delta in 1993 noted, “[S]ome children have never known a dark night even though they have no electricity” (*Village Voice*, November 21, 1995, p. 21). Burning twenty-four hours per day at temperatures of 13,000 to 14,000 degrees Celsius, Nigerian natural gas produces 35 million tons of carbon dioxide and 12 million tons of methane per annum, more than any other country in the world, making Nigeria probably the biggest single cause of global warming. The oil spillage record is even worse. There are roughly three hundred spills per year in the delta, either from the pipelines that crisscross Ogoniland (often passing directly through villages) or from

blowouts at the wellheads. Ogoniland itself suffered 111 spills between 1985 and 1994 (Hammer 1996:61). Figures provided by the NNPC document 2,676 spills between 1976 and 1990, 59 percent of which occurred in Rivers State (Ikein 1990:171), 38 percent of which were due to equipment malfunction.²⁰ The consequences of flaring, spillage, and waste for Ogoni fisheries and farming have been devastating. Two independent studies completed in 1997 reveal total petroleum hydrocarbons in Ogoni streams at 360 and 680 times the European Union's permissible levels (HRW 1999).

The November 1995 hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni nine—accused of murdering four prominent Ogoni leaders—and the subsequent arrest of nineteen others on treason charges represented the summit of a process of mass mobilization around the environmental, political, and economic costs of oil development. It began after the civil war with a “supreme cultural organization” called Kagote, which consisted largely of traditional rulers and high-ranking functionaries and laid the foundations for the establishment of MOSOP. A new strategic initiative began in the late 1980s with a program of mass action and passive resistance on the one hand, and on the other a renewed effort to focus on the environmental consequences of oil (Shell's role in particular) and group rights within the federal structure. Animating the entire struggle was, in the words of an Ogoni leader, the “genocide being committed in the dying years of the twentieth century by multinational companies under the supervision of the Government” (Naanen 1995:66). A watershed moment in MOSOP's history was the drafting in 1990 of an Ogoni Bill of Rights (Saro-Wiwa 1992), documenting a history of neglect and local misery. The bill took on the question of Nigerian federalism and minority rights, calling for Ogoni participation in the affairs of the republic as “a distinct and separate entity,” and outlined a plan for autonomy and self-determination in which there would be guaranteed “political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people . . . the right to control and use a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources . . . [and] adequate representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions” (Saro-Wiwa 1995:11). In short, the bill of rights addressed the question of the *unit* to which revenues should be allocated—and derivatively the rights of minorities (HRW 1999; Okonta 2001). If the Ogoni could not have direct control of oil, at the very least it deserved its own state. It was a casebook example of claims-making by a modern political community.

In spite of the remarkable rise of MOSOP between 1990 and 1996, its ability to represent itself as a unified pan-Ogoni organization—as a political community—proved to be contentious. There is no pan-Ogoni myth of origin (characteristic of some delta minorities), and a number of the Ogoni subgroups engender stronger local loyalties than any affiliation to Ogoni nationalism. The Eleme subgroup has even argued on occasion that it is not Ogoni. Furthermore, the MOSOP leaders were actively opposed by elements of the traditional clan leadership, by prominent leaders and civil servants in state government, and by some critics who felt Saro-Wiwa was out to gain “cheap popularity” (Osgahae 1995:334); relations between the movement, the leadership, and the youth always proved to be fraught. Saro-Wiwa nevertheless was able to build upon more than fifty years of Ogoni organizing and upon three decades of resentment against the oil companies, providing a mass base and a youth-driven radicalism—and it must be said an international visibility after he refigured the Ogoni struggle in largely environmental terms for a number of European constituencies such as Greenpeace—capable of challenging state power. Yet at its core, the oil-producing

ethnic minority proved internally contentious and intractable. Ike Okonta (2001) has brilliantly showed how the very idea of the Ogoni community ultimately unraveled into fragments of class, clan, generation, and gender. Community was made and unmade in the course of Saro-Wiwa's short political life. While the 2001 Oputa Commission (Nigeria's truth and reconciliation commission) marked a public "healing" of the differing Ogoni factions, as it now stands there is much acrimony and division within the Ogoni, compounded by the divisive role of the companies and the state. MOSOP, despite its ability to keep Shell from returning to its oil operations in Ogoniland, is something of a spent political force.

What sort of articulation of community, then, did Saro-Wiwa pose? What sort of governable space did the Ogoni political project represent? It was clearly one in which territory and oil were the building blocks upon which ethnic difference and minority rights were constructed. And yet it was an unstable and contradictory sort of articulation as Okonta (2001) has brilliantly shown. As we have seen, there was no simple sense of "Ogoniness," no unproblematic unity, and no singular form of political subject (despite Saro-Wiwa's claim that 98 percent of Ogonis supported him). MOSOP itself had at least five somewhat independent internal strands embracing youth, women, traditional rulers, teachers, and churches. It represented a fractious and increasingly divided "we," as the open splits and conflicts between Saro-Wiwa and other elite Ogoni confirms (Ogoni Crisis 1996; Obi 2004).²¹ Second, Saro-Wiwa's political vision invoked Ogoni culture and tradition, yet he also argued that war and internecine conflict had virtually destroyed the fabric of Ogoni society by 1900 (Saro-Wiwa 1992:14). His own utopia was *restorative*, demanding a sort of restitution of Ogoni culture based on a quasi-mythic invocation of the past, and yet this definition proved difficult to stabilize and often hard to control. Finally, ethnicity was for Saro-Wiwa the central problem of postcolonial Nigeria—organized corruption as a way of life—yet it was also a panacea, the means for the multiplication of minority power. Invoking the history of minority exclusion and the need for more than simple inclusion as the basis for federalism led Saro-Wiwa to ignore the histories and geographies of conflict and struggle among and between ethnic minorities.

What, then, does the Ogoni case disclose about the construction of oil and community? Its most powerful message is how a particular set of circumstances (the oil complex) are used by a charismatic and entrepreneurial leader to provide an explicit political program for a preexisting notion of an oil minority. Its language was resource control and true federalism, and it launched, or helped launch, a raft of other such political communities including the powerful Ijaw movements (the Ijaw National Council and the Ijaw Youth Congress). Paradoxically, MOSOP surfaced as a founding minority and resource control community even though its strategic significance as an oil-producing region was diminishing. But within a decade it had catastrophically fallen apart as a movement and intra-group struggles deprived it of much of its previous momentum and visibility. Ogoni community was not exactly a case of what Laclau calls an "empty signifier," but it did prove beyond the means of Saro-Wiwa, and the leadership that followed, to fully stabilize and imagine its political character. What was at work in this failure was a tension between a national democratic project and narrow ethno-nationalist claims-making—both united in some way by the common concern to control "our oil." In the case of the Ogoni, this tension ultimately compromised a certain sense

of political community and made the imagined community in some respects unimaginable:

The Ogoni evidence suggests that MOSOP and the Ogoni Bill of Rights were, at inception, driven by a civic language. The goals were democracy and development. But the demands of nation-building, and competing alternatives with regard to how this project might be realized within a wider and more powerful Nigeria-wide political arena that exerted its own pressures on the nation builders, triggered shifts in positions, and with it a bloody Ogoni civil war. Shell, in aiding federal troops deployed to the area to protect the oil fields, ensured that what began life as a non-violent social movement quickly became drenched in blood. Personality clashes, rooted in the politics of the Nigerian civil war, also played a role in shaping the denouement of the Ogoni drama. (Okonta 2004:7)

Within a decade of Saro-Wiwa's death there was outright hostility and conflict between Ogoni villages, clans, and ruling elites. Indeed, it is not clear in what sense one can now talk of the Ogoni as a political community even if MOSOP continues to function.

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, there has been a proliferation of such oil-minority movements—in part the “demonstration effect” of MOSOP—spanning the entire delta and speaking the political language of “resource control,” “true federalism,” and a call for a National Sovereign Conference.²² Some communities have slid into conflicts with other oil-producing minorities (often over territory and access to company revenues) or have lost political ground as the weapon of resource control was captured by the southern governors and the political classes. What has transpired is not a reconfiguration of federalism or more effective control of oil by the communities but a rush of windfall oil profits to the states associated with increased derivation and the vast flows of company and state monies to the new regional development organization, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). In other words, more corruption, more contracts, and more venality: in sum, business as usual. Not surprisingly, the ethnic communities have turned their frustrations to militancy (Alhaji Asari and Ateke Tom are the two most public militias²), their fires stoked further by the sorts of intra-community conflicts I described for Nembe. The delta has become ever more engulfed in civil strife: militant occupations of oil flow stations, pipeline sabotage, intra-urban ethnic violence, and of course the near anarchy of state security operating in tandem with company security forces. The making and unmaking of these sorts of governable spaces—compounded by corrupt police and security forces and by a large and violent military—has produced a situation in which it is not clear whether the oil industry can continue to operate (WAC/SPDC 2004). The massive dislocations of oil supply in 2002, 2003, and 2004 suggest it's a close call. In a desperate effort to keep the oil flowing amid this contentiousness and conflict, Shell has spent hundreds of millions of dollars as “cash

²² Both Asari and Ateke began their political careers by grounded in ethnic youth politics and then were promoted by politicians in the elections in 1999. Asari's struggle took the form of a struggle against the state but each fought over access to territory and oil bunkering which funded their arms supply.

payments” each year in the hope that youths and elders alike could be rendered pliant and quiescent.

I have documented the multiplication of modern political communities that stand in some tension, or even contradiction, with each other. Only in this way can one understand the explosion of intra- and interethnic tensions in the delta, even if each has been aided and abetted by the state and other political forces. It is the relation between ethnicity, oil minorities, and Nigeria as a modern nation (the imagined community) to which I finally turn.

III. Community as the Governable Space of the Nation

One striking aspect of the oil-minority communities as they emerged in the delta is that they become vehicles for political claims, typically articulated as the need for political institutionalization: sometimes as local government councils (this is one of the struggles under way in Warri as I write), other times as a new state within the federation (like the Ogoni). The demand for new local governments and states necessarily raises the question of a third community—that of the nation and the nation-state, an entity that preexisted oil and came to fruition in 1960 at independence. Oil came to constitute, after the civil war, the basic means for the nation-building process—the making of an “oil nation” (Coronil 1999; Apter 2005). Nature and nationalism, one might say, become inextricably linked. But how did petro-capitalism stand in relation to the creation of the governable space called modern Nigeria? Or to put the matter more directly, what are the consequences for Nigeria as a nation of the multiplication of (oil-fuelled) state and local governments as the vehicles for community aspirations?

Here one can usefully begin with the work of Mamood Mamdani (1996) and his observations on postcolonial African politics. Colonial rule and decentralized despotism were synonymous says Mamdani. The native authorities consolidated local class power in the name of tradition (ethnicity) and sustained a racialized view of civic rights. The nationalist movement had two wings, radical and mainstream. Both wished to deracialize civic rights, but the latter won out and reproduced the dual legacy of colonialism. They provided civic rights for all Nigerians but bonus “customary rights” for indigenes. The country had to decide which ethnic groups were indigenous and which were not a basis for political representation, a process that became constitutionally mandated in Nigeria. Federal institutions are quota driven for each state, but only those indigenous to the state may apply for a quota. As Mamdani (1998:7) puts it, “The effective elements of the federation are neither territorial units called states nor ethnic groups but ethnic groups with their own states. . . . Given this federal character every ethnic group [is] compelled to seek its own home, its own state. With each new political entity the non-indigenes continues to grow.” Once law enshrines cultural identity as the basis for political identity, it necessarily converts ethnicity into a political force. As a consequence, postcolonial political struggles came to be ethnic not racial, and such ethnic clashes, which have dominated the political landscape in the last three decades, are always at root about customary rights to land, and derivatively to a political machinery—local government or a state—capable of empowering those on the ground as ethnically indigenous.

Into this firmament enters oil, a valuable, centralized (state-owned) resource. It is a *national* resource—this is the juridical claim of the laws I glossed earlier, which established a statutory monopoly—over which citizenship claims could be constructed.

As much as the state uses oil to build a nation and to develop, so communities use oil wealth (or the possibility of future discoveries) to activate community claims (typically predicated on territorial claims over the oil fields themselves) animated by what is seen popularly as the unimaginable wealth conferred by black gold (for example, mega-construction projects such as a new capital city in Abuja or a massive new iron and steel industry near Abeokuta). The governable space of Nigeria is as a consequence “reterritorialized” by the newly enfranchised oil minorities. Access to oil revenues in turn amplifies what I call subnational political institution making; politics becomes a *massive state-making machine*. Only in this way can one understand how, between 1970 and the present, the number of local government areas grew from 100 to 774 (and is still growing) and the number of states grew from three to thirty-six (see Figure 4). Nigeria as a modern oil nation-state has become a machine for the production of ever more local political institutions, and this process is endless. The logic is ineluctable and of course terrifying.

What sort of national governable space emerges from such multiplication, in which incidentally the political entities called states or LGAs (local government areas) become vehicles for the disposal of oil revenues? The answer is that the process works precisely against the creation of an imagined community of the sort that Benedict Anderson (1983) saw as synonymous with the modern nation-state. Nation-building, whatever its imaginary properties, whatever its style of imaging, rests in its modern form on a sort of calculation, social integration, and state/bureaucratic rationality, which the logic of rent seeking, petro-corruption, ethnic-spoils politics, and institutional multiplication (of states and LGAs) works systematically to undermine. Lauren Berlant has said that every national community—and hence every national governable space—requires a “national symbolic”; a national fantasy that “designates how national culture becomes local through images, narratives and movements which circulate in the personal and collective unconsciousness” (1991:61). But the manufacture of communities through the oil complex suggests that the Nigerian National Symbolic grew weaker and more attenuated. There was no sense of the national fantasy at the local level; it was simply a big lie (or a big pocket of oil monies to be raided in the name of ethnic possession). Forms of identity that mattered were irreducibly local.

The logic of political dispersion, coupled with the growing competition for an ever more centralized pot of black gold, deepened the process of politics as community-based claims-making, which demanded a more robust sense of subnational identification at a moment when the process of nation-building (through schools, institutions of national integration,) was less capable of achieving its nationalist aspirations. Structural adjustment pulverized the state in a way that further compromised the federal state’s capacity to nation-build, at the same time the flowering of civic organizations in the 1980s provided a political space in which identitarian politics could flourish. Not only did petro-development fail to deliver, but so did petro-nation-building and petro-nationalism. The measure of this sort of national evisceration—or nationalist “unimagining”—was the shocking extent to which ethnic xenophobia in Nigeria, largely suppressed in the wake of the civil war, has flourished in the most public of ways (carried forth violently by the proliferation of ethnic militias) since the return to civilian rule in 1999.

At independence, Obafemi Awolowo, the great western Nigerian politician, said that Nigeria was not a nation but a “mere geographical expression”; forty years later

this remained true but more so. Any construction of a robust, meaningful, national identity requires, as Clifford (2001:114) says, a “rigorous survey of the social body” to determine its makeup and nature. A petro-state of the Nigerian sort, wracked by corruption-fraud in the Gramscian sense referred to earlier, is the very antithesis of surveillance, or indeed of rigor. It is at best, as Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe called it in *Anthills of the Savannas*, a big crummy family.

What is on offer is not the imagined community of Nigeria as a modern nation but perhaps its reverse: the *unimagining* or withering of a particular sense of national community. Nicos Poulantzas (1978) said that national or modern unity requires a historicity of a territory and a territorialization of a history. Oil capitalism and its associated complex have achieved neither of these requirements. The governable space called Nigeria was always something of a “public secret” (Taussig 1993): everyone fully understood that Nigeria as a community was something of a fiction never to be fully aired in public. Forty years of postcolonial rule have made this secret more public as ethnic segregation and local particularisms have continued unabated, undermining the very idea of the production of governable subjects. The double movement of petro-capitalism within the frame of a modern nation-state has worked against a robust sense of Nigeria as an imagined national community. This is certainly the case across the Niger Delta, but the same might be said of the impact of oil on the Muslim communities of Nigeria (Watts 1998; 2000). The dreadful operations of the oil complex have produced an increasingly *unimaginable* national community on which the question of Nigeria’s future now hangs.

Oil, Community, and the Crisis of Secular Nationalism

Oil creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free. . . . The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident. . . . In this sense oil is a fairy tale and like every fairy tale a bit of a lie. (Kapucinski 1982:35)

Petro-capitalism in Nigeria functions through a particular sort of oil complex that is strongly territorial, operating through local oil concessions. Like oil complexes everywhere, it is a militarized and violent center of economic calculation. It is an instance of what Michael Klare (2001) calls “economization” of security, of which Colombia is perhaps the paradigmatic case. Oil presents itself as a challenge to forms of community authority, interethnic relations, and state institutions. The oil complex generates differing sorts of communities—contrasting forms of governable spaces—in which the dialectics of order and disorder are playing themselves out with calamitous consequences.

A striking aspect of contemporary oil development in Nigeria is the *simultaneous* production of differing “scalar” forms of community. The styles of imagining in my three cases are inseparable from oil, but their forms of identification and the robustness of their spaces are often incompatible, indeed maybe antagonistic, with one another. Furthermore, standing at the center of each governable space is a community *contradiction*. For the local oil-producing community, the overthrow of gerontocratic authority has generated “restive youth” that resemble a Mafia-style violent rule. At the level of the ethnic community, it is the tension between civic nationalism and a sort of

exclusivist, militant particularism expressed through resource control (“our oil”). And at the level of the nation, one sees the contradiction between the oil-based state and fiscal centralization on the one hand, and radical state fragmentation characterized by an “unimagining” of Nigeria as a basis for full citizenship and national identity on the other. I have tried to root these contradictions in imperial oil which serves as a forcing house for the production of community unstable, contradictory, and contested communities. To understand, as Achille Mbembe (2001:282) puts it, why “regions at the epicenter of oil production are torn apart by repeated conflicts” is in my view to unravel the complex and unstable geographies of “communities of violence” in contemporary Nigeria . . . or Iraq.

At the heart of my oil and community story is the deception that Kapucinski refers to: that is to say, the terrifying and catastrophic failure of secular nationalist development. It is sometimes hard to gasp the full consequences and depth of such a claim. Between 1970 and 2000 in Nigeria, the number of people subsisting on less than one dollar a day grew from 36 percent to more than 70 percent, from 19 million to a staggering 90 million. All the oil revenues (\$400 billion), according to the IMF, “did not seem to add to the standard of living” and “could have contributed to a decline in the standard of living” (Martin and Subramanian 2003:4). From the vantage point of the Niger Delta—but no less from the vast slum world of Kano or Lagos—development and oil wealth is a cruel joke. But perhaps it is something more: bankrupt and to be abandoned altogether?

It is here that my story of oil, community, and a secular nationalism in crisis in Nigeria meets up with September 11, the occupation of Iraq and the “new imperialism” as Harvey calls it (2003). It provides the ether within which Islamism of various sorts draws its enormous political energy. “Petro-Islam” said al-Azmeh, describing the oil-rich Gulf states, “has broken the secularist and nationalist cultural, mediatic and, to a lesser extent, the educational monopoly of the modern Arab state” (1996:32). Oil, empire, neoliberal capitalism, and the cold war made for a ferocious assault on, and radical destabilization of, a number of postcolonial states. Out of this maelstrom of failed secular nationalist development have emerged powerful communities of opposition and dissent articulated against both failed local states and American hegemony. From the ashes of failed secular nationalism can emerge all manner of communitarian alternatives: drug-fueled child militias and warlords in Sierra Leone, the most retrograde forms of Muslim orthodoxy among the Afghan Taliban, and ferocious ethnic xenophobia in the Balkans.

Nothing in the failure of secular nationalism can justify the tactics of the ethnic cleaner or the violent Delta militant. These are exemplars of cold and unlovable communities. But they are not simply premodern excrescences either. They are modern political communities for whom there is, at best, a cool skepticism about the secular national development project. For al-Qaida it is outright rejection. This is not the case in the Niger Delta—even if the Pentecostal movement has drawn enormous strength during the oil period—but the communitarian responses did not necessarily fit comfortably with secular nationalism either. Communities growing out of the ashes of what are blithely termed “rogue” or “failed” states can be radical and oppositional, and indeed may be bulwarks against empire (the companies are uniformly detested in the Delta); some retain a secular or nationalist thrust, others may propose a religio-political project only loosely anchored in the community of the nation-state. But radical

community movements are not necessarily democratic any more than cosmopolitan movements are involved in the business of social justice (Buck-Morse 2003). Running through my story of community in Nigeria is precisely this struggle between a rickety secular nationalism and the ceaseless search for alternatives, all forged within the crucible of an imperial oil complex.

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1. The relations between oil (indeed natural resources in general), governance, democracy, and violence have emerged as an object of substantial scholarly attention, not least by economists and political scientists. Paul Collier (2001, 2003) of the World Bank, using resource dependency as a way of thinking about rebellion, especially in Africa, sees oil as central to the *economics of civil war*. It permits, indeed encourages, extortion and looting through resource predation (at least up to the point where 26 percent of GDP is dependent on resource extraction). It is the feasibility of predation (by states or rebel groups) that determines the risk of conflict. Rebels “predate” (they are predatory) through secession. For Michael Ross (2001) oil is a “resource curse” and “authoritarian” due to its *rentier effect* (low taxes and high patronage dampen pressures for democracy), its *repression effect* conferred by the direct state control over sufficient revenues to bankroll excessive military expenditures and expanded internal security apparatuses, and a *modernization effect*, namely that the “move into industrial and service sector jobs render them less likely to push for democracy” (357). But if oil “hinders democracy” (as though copper might encourage parliamentary democracy?), one needs to surely appreciate the contradictory centralizing and dispersive effects of oil in relation to nation-building on the larger canvas of a segmented political economy that predates oil (see Watts 2004).

2. “The subjectivity of individuals, the so-called speakers and hearers of political discourse, who actually, or even ideally, populate a state, needs to be understood in terms of enunciative modalities—the statuses, sites, and positions—of their existence as political subjects. Enunciative modalities refer to the ways a discursive practice is attached to bodies in space” (Clifford, 2001:56).

3. According to the conservative estimates of NNPC, between 1976 and 1996 there were more than 4,800 spills, accounting for 2.4 million barrels (the entirely daily output of Nigeria)—that is, each 100-square-meter plot within the Niger Delta received roughly two gallons of spilled crude oil over the period. Nigeria is also the largest flarer of gas in the world (historically, more than 80 percent of locally produced gas has been flared), accounting for a staggering 12 percent of world flaring (down from more than 20 percent in the late 1990s).

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4. The Southern Minorities Movement (SMM), comprising twenty-eight ethnic groups from Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, and Edo states was founded in 1993.
 5. The Union of Niger Delta and the Traditional Rulers of Oil Producing States.
 6. In the last six months, in the context of a deepening political crisis in the Delta (a fragile truce was signed in October 2004), at least five hundred people died in the Port Harcourt area alone.
 7. The civil war and an impending federal government victory over Biafra provided the military regime of Yakubu Gowon with the opportunity to pass the Petroleum Act of 1969, placing all minerals in the domain of the federal military government. This act provides in Section 1 that “the entire ownership and control of all petroleum in under or upon any land to which this section applies (i.e, land in Nigeria, under the territorial waters of Nigeria or forming part of the continental shelf) shall be vested in the state.” The spirit and intent of the Petroleum Act was further consolidated in 1978 when the government enacted the Land Use Decree, removing land from the control of local communities to be held in trust for the central government by the state governors, and extended in 2003 by the inclusion of deepwater offshore oil reserves (Khan 1994).
 8. The Nigerian national oil company (NNPC) is Nigeria’s largest company, with a turnover of more than N200 billion. It operates through five joint ventures with oil supermajors (accounting for 95 percent of total output) that are granted territorial concessions (or blocs). The largest joint venture (JV) (accounting for half of Nigerian output) is between Shell and NNPC. Its full title is the Shell Petroleum Development Company/SPDC, in which the latter has a 55 percent holding. Historically NNPC has owed substantial monies—cash calls—to its partners (Shell, Chevron/Texaco, Exxon/Mobil, ENI/Agip, Total/Fina/Elf) as part of its obligations to the JV. NNPC’s commitment to its partners for 2004 is \$7 billion. Since the mid-1980s, the Nigerian oil industry has been under pressure to privatize, and in 1988 NNPC created eleven subsidiaries with the expectation of sale. In 1991 new memoranda of understanding were offered to the oil companies, but calls to sell off NNPC, as of 2004, had been unheeded.
 9. The state has created a number of special revenue accounts deploying oil revenues for specific development purposes for the Niger Delta: the Petroleum Fund (set up in the late 1990s), OMPADEC (Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission), established in 1992, and now the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC),

established by Obasanjo in 2002 and funded in part by the oil companies. All have been the source of spectacular corruption and waste, deployed to buy consent among increasingly angry delta constituencies. In the pre-oil period, in 1960, these agencies were preceded by the Niger Delta Development Board, which suffered from an equally checkered history.

10. The principle of derivation was the pivot of fiscal federalism in the country until May 1967. In that year, new states were created by General Yakubu Gowon in a setting in which oil was assuming greater economic significance. Derivation was then complemented by a distributable pool account (DPA)—subsequently named the States Joint Account/Federation Account—wherein the federal government raised and retained certain revenues to be distributed to the regions. Based on financial need, population size, contribution to revenue, and balanced development, 42 percent of the DPA was allocated to the Northern Region, 30 percent to the East, 20 percent to the West, and 8 percent to the Midwest. In practice, the derivation formula favored oil-producing states (50 percent of mining rents and royalties was allocated to the state of derivation), which in turn made these states the envy of the more populous ethnic majority states in central and northern Nigeria (each largely dependent upon declining primary commodity earnings) (Adebayo 1993). The complaints of these “disadvantaged” states led the federal military government to devise a new revenue allocation formula, Decree Number 13, in 1970. Previously, 50 percent of mining rents and royalties had been allocated to the state of derivation, 15 percent to the federal government, and 35 percent to the DPA; they were now shared in a 45:5:50 percent arrangement. The allocation principle for the DPA was also revised; one-half was divided equally among the states, and the other half was divided on the basis of population size. In effect, this change began the slide toward fiscal centralism and the diminution of derivation. By 1979 derivation had fallen to 3 percent, and it was 1.5 percent in the early 1980s. Obasanjo increased derivation to 13 percent in April 2000 (See Okonta 2004; Suberu 2004).

11. Nembe in its macro usage refers to six towns (Bassimbiri, Ogbolomabiri, Okpoama, Odioma, and Akassa and Nembe town)—which are part of the sixteen towns that comprise Nembe Kingdom. For the purposes of this paper, however, Nembe Town refers to Ogbolomabiri only.

12. The data for the case study was collected during a visit to the Niger Delta in January and February 2001. I also relied on the assistance on Von Kemedi and his work (Kemedi 2002) and the Nembe Peace Commission (Alagoa 2001).

13. The war canoe houses were the units of the kingdom's defense forces. A war canoe house consisted of the head of the house and a formidable number of able-bodied men who were responsible for defending the house and the king.

14. Ojo describes two similar cases. In the Ogbogoro War, the arrival of two oil service companies in Ogbogoro Town (15 kilometers southwest of Port Harcourt) in 1993 led to a dynastic struggle over the rightful accession to the stool (Eze Oha) in the context of the ruler's superintendent role over disbursements of monies, contracts, and employment. A ferocious struggle ensued (seven lawsuits are pending) between four rival ruling families; differing youth groups took up arms for their candidates. A bloodbath occurred in late 1998, and a government commission of inquiry was established. In the Urhobo community of Ewreni near Port Harcourt, youths killed the traditional ruler (*ovie*) in the context of accusations over the use of community funds provided by the oil companies. Between 2000 and 2002, the regicide unleashed a war between differing factions of youths similar to the situation in Nembe.

15. I am focusing here on what one might call social movements from below, but at the formal political level, there was a parallel movement from above in which well-placed delta nationalists such as Alex Ibru, Chief Essien, Professor Isoun, and others established organizations such as the Association of Mineral Oil States in the early 1990s, the Southern Minorities Movement in Eku in 1994, and later the South-South People's Conference.

16. Curiously, there is no formal or official definition of resource control; the southern governors (who appropriated the term from the social movements of the minorities) imply three things: the power and right to raise funds within their territory, the executive right of ownership of resources within their territory, and the right to customs and excise on trade to and from their territory. MOSIEND and MORETO, for example, both rejected constitutional provisions granting a statutory monopoly over minerals to the Nigerian states. The Izon Peoples Charter, drafted by MOSIEND in October 1992, called for "political autonomy, exclusive control over Ijaw natural resources and restitution for the harmful effects of oil exploration." The Ogbia Charter demanded the repeal of legislation granting the federal government authority over revenue allocation and sought 50 percent

of the profits from oil taken from the Ogbia area, as well as greater representation in national institutions. According to the Kaiama Declaration of Ijaw youth in December 1998: "All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival." True federalism, then, is a reframing of the revenue allocation process.

17. As constitutional preparations were made for the transition to home rule, non-Igbo minorities throughout the Eastern Region appealed to the colonial government for a separate Rivers State. Ogoni representatives lobbied the Willink Commission in 1958 to avert the threat of exclusion within an Ibo-dominated regional government that had assumed self-governing status in 1957, but minority claims were ignored (Okpu 1977; Okilo 1980).

18. The Ogoni and other minorities petitioned in 1974 for the creation of a new Port Harcourt State within the Rivers State boundary (Naanen 1995:63).

19. According to the Nigerian government, in 1995 Ogoniland produced about 2 percent of Nigerian oil output and was the fifth largest oil-producing community in Rivers State. Shell maintains that total Ogoni oil output is valued at \$5.2 billion before costs!

20. The oil companies claim that sabotage accounts for a large proportion (60 percent) of the spills, since communities gain from corporate compensation. Shell claims that 77 of 111 spills in Ogoniland between 1985 and 1994 were due to sabotage. According to the government commission, however, sabotage accounts for 30 percent of the incidents but only 3 percent of the quantity spilled. Furthermore, all oil-producing communities claim that compensation from the companies for spills has been almost nonexistent.

21. Saro-Wiwa (a Bane) was often chastised by Gokana, since most of the Ogoni oil was in fact located below Gokana soil. In other words, on occasion the key territorial unit became the clan rather than the pan-Ogoni territory (Saro-Wiwa 1989, 1995).

22. For the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, the legal case for "resource control" has a colonial reference point, colonial Minerals Ordinance of 1916, which provided that "the entire property and control of all minerals, and mineral oils in, under, or upon any lands in Nigeria, and of all rivers, streams, and watercourses throughout Nigeria, is and shall be vested in the Crown." Resource control and true federalism proper emerged seventy years later as the product of social movements across the oil fields. In the wake of the election of civilian governors in the oil-producing states in 1999, however, the center of gravity of the resource control struggle shifted from youth-led social movements to the

states and their political apparatchiks. The governors' populist aspirations were enhanced by jumping onto the resource control bandwagon; yet they simultaneously hoped to use but also dampen the flames of youth groups as a potent political force. At stake was the prospect of an increase in the oil states' share of the Federation Account. In 2001 the governors led the agitation against the dichotomy between onshore and offshore oil, which claimed offshore revenues for the central government (in February 2003, a compromise was reached in which all deepwater oil accrued to the state). A bitter 1999–2001 struggle between the oil-producing states over a definition of the Niger Delta, as a basis for determining which states would benefit from NNDC funds, was part of the same political struggle (see Okonta 2004).