



## **BORO (1938-1968) AND RESOURCE CONTROL IN NIGER DELTA: A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

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### **Abstract**

Resource control in this context depicts a state where the owners of the means of production utilizes and produces goods and services for their profit and gain and as well pay tax to the government. In is operational in system where true federalism is allowed. The struggle for freedom from slavery and quest for the control of resources is inherent in man when obviously marginalization and strangulation creeps into the domain of the oppressed minorities. The Niger Delta is an epitome of poverty, empty in the midst of plenty and neglect. The above angered Isaac Adaka Boro who then reacted against injustice in the region. In the light of this research, attention is given to Adako Boro movement, his fight against injustice in Niger Delta, Boro as pathfinder of resource control in Niger Delta, Boro and the struggle for Niger Delta Autonomy, exploitation, devastation and war in Niger Delta, the need for social justice in the Niger Delta, environmental justice and its principles. The research also looked at Biblical reflection on environmental justice. Historical method of research was used for proper understanding. The research made used of books, journals and internet sources and recommends that host communities should be allowed to control their resources and pay tax to federal government as this will enhance development in the area.

**Keywords: Environment, Injustice, Justice, Niger Delta, Resource Control**

### **Introduction**

The discovery, drilling and exportation of crude oil from the Niger Delta region since it was discovered in 1958 in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, meant more revenue for the Eastern region at a time when the principle of derivation was accorded due prominence. Ikiriko (1999) posits that the coined phrase Niger Delta is derived from a vast space of wet land, including flood plain mangrove, swamps, rain forest, low laying alluvial island and barrier reefs that sprang across the Nigeria's conventional



south-south geopolitical zone, which serves as the discharge basin for the mighty River Niger into the Atlantic Ocean. It covers about 70,000km<sup>2</sup> and constitutes about 75% Nigeria's landmass with over 30 million human inhabitants. NDDC (2006) in the epoch of definition states that:

The Niger Delta region has over 40 percent of the distinct ethnic nationalities in the political Nigerian nation, speaking about 25 dialects and occupying 5,000 communities covering over 70,000 square meters in space, the third largest Wetland in the world, that now includes the oily Niger Delta which emerged as a result of oil politics made up of nine political states and 185 Local Government Areas at present. (p. 20).

Orite (2008) has it that:

Despite all these, the Niger Delta Region is not adequately represented in the scheme of government of the country, thereby affecting the share of the national income that gets to the region from the national coffers. This we feel, is happening because of the nature and character of the Nigerian state that make room for the marginalization of the people from the Niger Delta Region. This to a large extent leads to crisis in the Niger Delta Region (pp. 369-370)

Gowon (2008) unequivocally stated that he considered the oil industry as a blessing to Nigeria and the Niger Delta Region despite the many political, economic, social, environmental and security problems encountered. The problem, however, is that the oil industry does not seem to have been managed to avoid the problem it has created. For example, the problems of environmental degradation due to serious oil pollution, destruction of the ecosystem and vegetation as well as absence of physical development of the area can be attributed to poor management of the industry. There is a justifiable feeling by the communities in the area that much is taken out from them without a corresponding return to benefit the area. However, the problem of the Niger Delta has today become the central political issue, the political albatross of the country, in view of the economic power it commands. It is right to say that, today, the politics in Nigeria is more of politics of oil and gas: oil resources, control and management.

Oil exploration and exploitation in Niger Delta, no doubt has given rise to so many movements in the area, both violent and nonviolent movements to the protection of their ultimate heritage and patrimony. High level of insecurity is found in the region. Edeogu (2008) states "the Niger Delta armed insurrection against the Nigerian State was formally launched after the 1998 Kaiama Declaration" (p. 65). This comprises of ethnic militias of which over 75% are of the Ijaw ethnic origin, the militants accused



the State, and in tandem the oil and gas exploration ventures of systematic looting of their resources, damage to their environment and habitat, denial of appropriate revenue accruable from the materials sales, and absence of political control of their God given resources. The above emanated from the fight against injustice launched by Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966.

The relentless exploitation of the natural resources of the area, without due compensation for the environmental hazards it has occasioned, has given rise to youth restiveness which is primarily aimed at seeking redress for over fifty-eight years of neglect, deprivation and the exclusion of the people of the host communities (areas) has aggravated these conflicts. Obviously, the contention over resources and mineral rights is not new in all societies, developed or underdeveloped. Ukoago (2008) states "the current wave of agitations in the Niger Delta is therefore not unexpected nor lack possible explanation" (p. 836). Nowhere within the Nigerian federation has the quest for environmental right been more acute and chaotic as in the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta. Okonta and Douglas (2001) opine that "oil has become a vehicle of injustice against the people" (p. 832). Oil exploration and extraction that ordinarily ought to impact positively on the people is now a permit source of fury and pain for the population from whose sub-soil this endowment comes from. The mineral resources of the region should engender growth and development but paradoxically, majority of the beneficiaries of crude oil are either foreigners or collaborators of foreign finance capital with the Nigerian state supervising and coordinating. The massive oil investments in the region are owned by foreign concerns.

Mazrui (1980) observed that the indigenous population are brazenly alienated thus making a recourse to conflict and violence a preferred option. The Federal Government has mostly observed as posited by Ugbomeh (2008) that they probably perceived the conflicts in the Niger Delta as acts of insubordination to the nation. Hence its management had been that of controlling the conflict. This approach has involved the use of control measure, force, coercion, impatience with dialogue and information gathering. The region will experience peace when they are allowed to control their resources, where the oil companies operating in the area and the Federal Government of Nigeria are ready to develop the area infrastructurally, providing the



people with good jobs, giving the host communities scholarship and every necessity of life.

### **A Sketchy History of Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro**

Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro was the founder of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) in the year 1966. He was a university students' leader, a teacher, policeman and Nigerian Officer. He was an undergraduate student of chemistry and Student Union President at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He left school to lead an armed protest against the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the Niger Delta areas which benefited mainly the Federal Government of Nigeria and a remote Eastern Nigeria regional government. He believed that the people of the area deserve a fairer share of proceeds of the oil wealth.

Odunfa (2006) states that Adaka Boro formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Service, an armed militia with members consisting mainly of his fellow Ijaw ethnic group. They declared the Niger Delta Republic (NDR) on February 23, 1966 and gallantly battled the Federal forces for twelve days but were finally routed by the far superior federal firepower. According to Akumwumi (2004) and Ikporukpo (2002), the declaration of NDR made by Boro was at Tantonabau in the riverine areas with about 150 volunteer forces. The development was a response not only to the travails of the Niger Delta people, epitomized by their exclusion in the politics and policy processes of the government, but also the attempt by the Eastern regional government to frustrate the realization of their struggle for autonomy. Boro (cited by United Ijaw States, 2005) speaks thus:

Today is a great day, not only in your lives but also in the history of the Niger Delta Perhaps it will be the greatest day for a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring haven down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression. Before today, we were branded robbers, bandits, terrorists on gangsters but after today, we shall be heroes of our land (p. 1)

### **Adaka Boro and the Fight against Injustice in Niger Delta Environment**

In 1968 Boro gave further insights on the motivation for the revolt in his post-human's autobiography. Boro (cited by Banigo, 2005) states "year after year we are clenched in tyrannical chains and led through a dark alley of perpetual political and social deprivation, strangers in our country" (p. 2). Boro did not hesitate to take a stand against any issue involving the Niger Delta. He fought against marginalization,



underdevelopment, and oil spillage and so on which are issues peculiar to the minorities in Nigeria. Boro believed that through his Niger Delta Volunteer Service, he can liberate his people by force. He was the first to shout at "resource control", when he called for republic in the 60s, it has been a continuous clamour for the desire. Amanyie (2006) states that Boro was the supreme moral and intellectual soldier in Nigerian Army. Indeed, no one before him has so vigorously and single handedly championed the struggle and agitation beyond empty rhetoric and registered the first major physical expression of discontent of the people. He was brilliant, effective, and perceptive and not for him any act that pointed to injustice. He had no patience for cheats and double dealers. He left the university in 1961 for agitation for the creation of Niger Delta State. He was arrested for this act and brought to trial at Port Harcourt special court to face a nine-court treason charged. The treason charged were read thus as stated by Amanyie (2006): "Adaka Boro with the aim of unlawfully declaring the creation of a Niger Delta area to secede by violence levied a war against the state and should be found guilty of treason" (p. 80). He responded by telling the Judge his reason. There was total neglect of the Niger Delta. He presumed 30 pages judgment read to the crowded court of sympathizers, J. A. Phil Ebosie found him guilty of levying war against the State in order to overthrow the Head of the then military government contrary to Section 37 (1) of the "criminal code".

After he led his ragtag guerrilla army into a war against Nigeria and declared the NDR, he was distressed about the marginalization of the minorities of the Niger Delta. He had been a victim of such discrimination while in the university of Nigeria, Nsukka where he twice lost his quest for presidency of the Student Union due to his status. Although, he never forgets the discrimination he suffered, fired the revolutionary real in him to liberate his people from the shackles of oppression. According to Amanyie (2006), "to achieve this, he went to Ghana to solicit for financial support in 1963. during his final year long vacation. He was disappointed as the Cuban Ambassador in Ghana turned him back" (p. 81).

During the final judgment of the Court, the court was like a graveyard with men and women holding their breath in mute prayers as the judge handed down the final judgment. The sentence of the court as read by the judge indicated thus as declared by Amanyie (2006) "Boro and his men were to be hanged by the neck until they are



dead" (p. 81). This statement triggered some kind of weeping around the court premises. During this period there were still political crisis in the country, which had degenerated each passing day, until twelve states were created on May 27, 1967. Within the month, the sentences were committed to life imprisonment. The dream of Boro has been realized. As Boro was still in prison, he smuggled out messages of appreciation to General Yakubu Gown. Boro (cited by Amanyie, 2006) thus states "congratulation for your good guided, God protected actions" (p. 81). He was finally pardoned on August 4, 1967 and conscripted into the Nigeria Army where he helped to crush the Biafran presence in the Niger Delta. From the rank of a "Second Lieutenant", Boro rose to "Major" in the army, where he died in the battle on May 16, 1968 fighting to keep Nigeria United

### **Boroism: The Pathfinder of Resource Control in Niger Delta**

Eseduwo (2008) saw the agitation of Boro to be a follow-up of several other failed peaceful agitations of the chiefs and politicians of the area in search of a State. Prominent amongst such movements were the Ijaw State Movement, Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference led by Chief Harold Biriye, and so on which were nipped in the bud by politician from preponderant ethnic nationalities in the Nigerian State. Most importantly, the Willinks Commission concludes that a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread, that the area needed special treatment because the area is poor, backward and neglected. Boro (cited by Banigo, 2005) aptly summarized the politics of the Commission thus:

However, when the minorities' Commission sat, many things happened. Cash, as it was alleged, flowed freely undergrounds. Nevertheless, the British government perhaps did not want to blur totally the future of the people of Niger Delta, and so insisted on its being entrenched in the independence constitution that there should be a Niger Delta Special Area whose development was to be catered for by a board which gave rise to the post-independence birth of the Niger Delta Development Board. (p. 26).

Eseduwo (2008) states that the failure of the Nigerian government, after independence in giving the desired attention to the development of the Niger Delta Region in spite of its enormous contributions to the wealth of the country stimulated Boro's dream for self-determination. Boro (cited by Eseduwo, 2008) states thus:

The Ijaw as may be seen from the list of Nigerian tribes were that pronounced victims of a woolly administration. Year after year we clenched in tyrannical chains and through a dark alley of perpetual political and social deprivation.



Strangers in our own country! Inevitable, therefore, the day would have to come for us to fight for our long denied right to self-determination (p. 495).

Boroism therefore saw the independence Nigeria as a country besieged by almost all well-known social vices ranging from tribalism, corruption, avarice, marginalization, oppression, political killings, falsehood and electoral malpractice.

Boro (cited by Amanyie, 2006) posits:

Under these strange circumstances, democracy was raped. Nigeria was built on sinking sand from the word go, torn as it was amongst the most monstrous social and political vices. There grew a class of persons riding from abject poverty to aristocracy and fame; they were tribally bound and socially indebted to one clique or the other. The club, like a colossus held the fortunes of the nation on its palm (p. 83).

Thus, it was against this foregoing backdrop that Boro rolled out his Niger Delta volunteer services to revolt against the Nigerian government in a war of liberation and declared a Niger Delta Republic at 6:30pm on February 23 1966.

### **Boroism and the Struggle for Niger Delta Autonomy**

Following the declaration of independence for the Niger Delta people, a state of emergency was pronounced in the territory to give adequate protection to the Niger Delta people against aggressors by Boro (cited by Amanyie, 2006):

All former agreements as regards the crude oil of the people undertaken by the new defunct Nigerian Government in the territory have been declared invalid. All companies are hereby commanded in their own interest to stop exploration and renew agreement with the New Republic. Defiance of this order will result in dislocation of the company's exploration and forfeiture of their right of renewal of such agreements. All aliens are asked to report within 24 hours to the nearest NDVS agent to ensure their protection. An alien is one who is not, by origin of birth, of the Niger Delta Peoples Republic. All schools are hereby closed until September to enable the New Republic advance a thorough and totally free educational system for the people. All former district and country courts and revenue collection organs are hereby declared closed and the territory shall be tax free until fully industrialization. The Niger Delta Volunteer Service henceforth, and hitherto referred to as NDVS, shall be the law enforcement body and the standing armed force of the people. All citizens of our new nation are to report to the nearest NDVS agent. There shall be a provisional senate, consisting of 84 members, six from each of the fourteen clans. The provisional senate shall advise the Liberation Government on a new constitution for the people. Adequate protection will be given to all members by the NDVS. (pp. 90-91)



Aside the above, the Niger Delta State of Emergency had operations of Internal Security force which Boro put forth in the NDR. Boro (cited by Amanye, 2006) states the operation on internal security thus:

No river or creek craft shall ply any of the waterways of the Republic till further notice. All canoes shall be clear from the waterways as from 11pm to 7am until further notice. Dusk to dawn curfew is hereby imposed on all towns until further notice. The Mbiama, Joinkrama, Okaki line, the Niger-Nun estuary at Kiamani, Gbekebo, Forcados, Akassa, Brass, Abonema, Okirika and Patani are hereby declared Agression Repulsion Centres (ARC). Please keep clear of NDVS Operations. Any craft or canoes defying NDVS orders shall bear full responsibility for their non-compliance, as the NDVS frogmen will torpedo any boat obstructing the survival of the Republic. Mutilation and/or removal of government notices and posters: any found or suspected of removing or mutilating Government notices or posters is liable to a punishment by death. (p. 95).

### **The Need for Social Justice in Niger Delta Environment**

Eboh (2003) states that the ideal justice is hinged on the principles of distributive justice and corrective or rectificatory justice. It involves the distribution and continual redistribution of the benefits and burdens in the society through all jural relations—rights, claims, liberties and so on. The ideal social justice points to the law-maker's objectives which they ought to keep in view and which should be attained through continuous improvements in the functioning of law in a given society since justice is not a static quotient. Social justice stipulates the way in which burdens and resources should be distributed so that every individual is favoured by this distribution. Udechukwu (2007) says that social justice caters for the welfare of the individual with respect to his relation with others in the community, family or state in his effort to contribute to the realization of the common good.

Vatican Council II (1965) unequivocally states:

All men are endowed with a national soul and are created in God's image: they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all men and it must be given ever greater recognition. (p. 817).

All forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. It is regrettable that these basic personal rights are not yet being respected everywhere. Vatican Council II still maintains that it is up to public and private organization to be at the service of all the



dignity and destiny of man; let them spare no effort to banish every vestige of social and political slavery and to safeguard basic human rights under every political system. If it takes a considerable time to arise at the desired goal, these organizations should gradually be brought into harmony with spiritual realities, which are some sublimes of all. Omeje (cited in Sibani 2009) state categorically that:

Where the church acts, the poor, the humiliated, the oppressed, the marginalized will get what they have been yearning for- a religion that is consoling, reassuring and promising. They want to hear of a loving God that provides food for the hungry, health for the sick, deliverance for those under bondage, joy for the sorrowful and peace for the troubled. (p. 134)

### **Environmental Justice and its Principles**

There are principles that govern environmental justice. Udechukwu (2007) categorically states that environmental justice affirms the sacredness of mother earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species and the right to be free from ecological destruction. It calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic hazardous waste and poisons, which threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water and food. This affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples. It demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous waste, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and containment at the point of production. This also affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It carries with it the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards. Environmental justice protects the right of all victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparation for damages as well as quality health care. This also opposes the destructive operations of multinational corporations. Environmental justice requires that we as individuals, making personal and consumer choices to consume as little waste as possible, and make the conscious decision to challenge and re-prioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

### **Biblical Reflection on Environmental Justice**

#### **Natural Resources as an Allotted Heritage:**



The idea that everything created by God in the world belong to Him cannot be debated upon. Divine creation of the world presumes divine ownership of the same. In Psalm 50:10-11 the Lord said "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air and all that moves in the field is mine". It is obvious that man in his act of exploitation goes a long way of dispossessing the animals of their place of habitations. This is done through the act of indiscriminate deforestation. The Bible calls for care for domestic and wide file with respect (Deut. 24:4, 22:6).

In the book of Leviticus 25:23-28, gives account of land ownership of the people of Israel. It has been given to them for possession and should not be sold. Obviously, even if it is sold, it should be redeemed and where it cannot be redeemed, in the year of jubilee, the land must be release and return to its owner. The land used decree of 1978 makes it difficult for the people of Niger Delta to benefit from their property. Whereas this land is not sold to the Government and Companies in the region but the act of force and selfish law enacted by the Government of Nigeria is aim at obtaining the oil and gas-bearing land in the minority region to dispossess and displace them without any compensation. This is injustice, where the military era of Nigeria took by force large portions of land from the people of any community without developing them. So many politicians emerge into power and intimidate people of the minority and low-privileged, took their land without any ransomed and where there is an outcry, it even becomes worse than the land dispute between King Ahab and Naboth in 1 Kings 21:1-16, but specifically verses 15-16 says:

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead. Jezebel said to Ahab, arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead. And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

The priestly writers conceive of God as the creator, the origin and the Lord of all that exist (Gen. 1.1-2:4a). Hartley (1992) viewed it that even though the creator entrusted the earth to humans, the Creator's sovereignty over the land and its deposits prevails. Humans are more than resident aliens, or tenants in a land owned by God (Lev. 25:22. Exod. 19:5: Psalm 104:24)

God's dominion over the world and its inhabitants' rests on the fact that he created it (Psalm 24.1-23. Humanity's relation to the earth is expressed in the fact that God



entrusted the earth to human (Psalm 115:16). This gift does not, however, grant humans' sovereign control over the earth and its deposits. Rather the world and its resources are an "allotted heritage" (Psalm 2:7-12). An earth of abundance" (Judges 18:10) provides for humanity's need and survival (Gen. 1:26-28. 9:2-5). This calls for humans' responsibility to preserve the "land" and respect for the ecosystem. Each generation exists only as "sojourner" or "pilgrim". Humans hold the resources of the earth as a "trust" for future generations. Daniel (2016) avers that the combined emphases upon God's ownership and our trusteeship call for care on the part of humans in dealing with the world and its resources. From the foregoing, humans must not fail to ask what will be the implication of the exploitation of nature's treasures on the environment.

### **Pollution and Degradation in the Bible:**

The over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution of the natural environment and the growing effects of climate change are changing the face of the earth. Paul (2016) opines that the death of life in the Old Testament and the extinction of species on a scale was not experienced by humanity. One of the biggest threats to human survival in today's world is the threat of a completely devastated environment. Bassey (2001) warns that "if this situation continues unabated, then humans may soon find themselves at a threshold of environmental disaster" (p. 4). Biblical prophets lacked modern day scientific knowledge but they were highly sensitive to the interactions that knit the human community to the environment. The issue of challenges of oil spillage and indiscriminate gas flaring from oil exploration were not there but it was very necessary for them to address other common environmental pollution and degradation problems.

Prophet Isaiah and others were concern with the damages which human activities can inflict on the landscape. Isaiah 24:4-6 presents thus:

The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statues, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt, therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

Is the light of the above, the prophets, therefore called for a reestablishment of a just, respectful relationship with God, the society and nature. The book of (Isaiah 28:14-



18, 22-23) gives reasons why the creator is not pleased with those who have indiscriminately exploited the earth and calls for repentance for His mercy to prevail. Obviously, Frank (2016) holds that humans must recognize the otherness of nature and respect the intrinsic and autonomous value of every being on the planet. They must either change their attitude towards nature or they head straight for greater ecological calamities

### **Conclusion**

Isaac Adaka Boro, a very young man, fearlessly fought the federal government and oil companies' workers over the injustice and exploitation, marginalization and economic strangulation in the Niger Delta with his armed militia group. He demanded for resource control which became very difficult for the federal government to accept. The struggle has not ended but continues to the present. The solutions to this environmental injustice are infrastructural development and provision of basic amenities, respect for life and the abolition of gas flaring in the region, rescuing the area from further oil spillages, provision of employment for her youths and scholarship for its inhabitants amongst others. If the above become difficult for the federal government, then the people should be allowed to take absolute control of their resources and pay tax to the government. If the suggestions above are not met, then it may be difficult for peace reign in the region. Armed militia groups may be multiplying on daily bases for resistance which will not be healthy for the people and the Nigerian nation.

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