Dimensionalising Cultural Implications of The Multinationals in the Niger Delta: A Consequentialist Approach for Resistance

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Key Terms: Nigeria, Niger Delta, multinationals, oil, culture.

Abstract
The presence of multinational oil corporations in Nigeria – which include Agip, Chevron, Elf, Mobil, Shell, and Total among others have come with heavy consequences to the nation’s cultural heritage and identity in the global marketplace. This is particularly the case in the Niger delta region of Nigeria considered as the goose that lays the golden egg, that is, oil, which has been described in many quarters as a major source of the nation’s malaise. The cultural and environmental damage of oil exploration as well as the pauperisation of the locals is inextricably linked to the ruse of global capitalism, which destroys the culture of the periphery nations among other reverses. Apart from other devastating effects of oil exploration by the multinationals, a cardinal consequence of oil exploration is the cultural implication of this practice, which this paper will be interrogating. In cataloguing the cultural implications of this practice, a consequentialist approach will be adopted, which looks at the ethical dimension as well as the morality of actions by the multinationals in the region, including the corporate social responsibility implications of the actions. This is because culture is a cardinal component of determining the effects of cross-cultural business operations in the region as well as a veritable platform of gauging national development in the global marketplace. It is therefore necessary to dimensionalise the implications of multinationals presence in the Niger delta for sustainable national development, competitiveness and productivity.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is built on the cultural implications of the multinationals’ oil exploration in the Niger delta. This paper’s approach is based on the fact that culture is at the heart of national development and self-sufficiency. So cultural relativist investigation will help foster the
region’s march to be economically independent as well as galvanise efforts in her nationalist agitation for identity and recognition given the way the region has been marginalised and impoverished by the activities of the multinationals in partnership with Nigerian political operators. More than this, a consequentialist approach will be taken in this paper in order to unearth the morality as well as ethical dimensions of the activities carried out by the multinationals. Thus, this will be beneficial in appreciating the social corporate responsibility agenda of the multinational corporations as the Niger delta environment, people, economy, biodiversity and culture are withering away on the heels of their activities. It has been observed that a major determinant of an individual’s or a group’s behaviour, nationalist zeal or decision is the dimension of pressures and competition it gets from other cultures as well as the justification of such actions given different environments and ways of life. This is conditioned by the principle of cultural relativity, which takes into consideration cultural disparities of nations for sustainable growth, identity and competitiveness.

Introduction: Culture, the Multinationals and the Niger Delta

The works of Mouton & Blake (1969) and Silverman (1970) support the idea that culture is a much-debated phenomenon in terms of the impacts it has on a people, organisations and nations as well as how it can frame an organisation’s business operations, national identity and development. This was before the advent of the attention, publicity and fascination culture came to have in the 1980s. This is what Turner (1986) characterised as “culture craze” of the 1980s. The significance of culture to organisational behaviour, its effects on a people and its implications in international business is located in the 1980s studies that resonated with the works of writers such as Deal & Kennedy (1982) and Allen & Kraft (1982), among others. Other works followed in the footsteps of these earlier ones. However, the overriding concern
here is the impacts of cultural as well as organisational practices of the multinationals on the quality of life, environment and development of periphery nations. Another facet of this concern is the relevance of nations considered in the domain of development economics as the periphery nations in the global marketplace. The periphery nations are at the cusp of marginality; their identity, advancement and cultural essence are shaped in the global marketplace by activities of core nations mediated by global capitalism.

The dialectics of core-periphery nations or centre periphery-paradigm is not the remit of this paper; rather, what this paper aims to achieve is to establish the centrality of culture on the multinationals’ operations particularly in the periphery nations – the Niger delta. Another dimension of this study is to indicate that culture is critical in the economic development as well as national advancement of a nation or people (Lim, 1995). So, the sustenance of Niger delta peculiarity (culture) on the heels of fierce capitalist project in the global marketplace is of essence for its national development as well as the reinforcement of its values, worldview, individuality and solidarity essential for national identity and cultural renaissance. Deductively,

individualist cultures are societies where individuals are primarily concerned with their own interests and the interests of their immediate family. In collectivist cultures, on the other hand, individuals belong to in-groups or collectivities which look after them in exchange for their loyalty... In contrast, cultures that endorse collectivism ... place a high premium on interpersonal harmony and group solidarity (Robertson & Fadil, 1999: 387).

The above is significant in assessing the impacts of the presence of the multinationals in the Niger delta, where collectivist cultural practice defines its way of life. A proper understanding of Niger delta’s
(Nigeria’s) culture that is *prima facie* collectivist in orientation and scope is crucial in identifying ways of developing the area. Thus, cultural relativism is important in understanding the region’s path to economic self-sufficiency, development and group identity.

In his “Examining the Organisational Culture and Organisational Performance Link”, Bernard Lim indicated that “culture refers broadly to a relatively stable set of beliefs, values, and behaviours commonly held by a society” (1995: 16). Culture is the defining features of any group, race, society and organisation. It is the totality of beliefs, values, structure and mores that give form, characteristics and meaning to a particular people’s *modus operandi*. In the preface to his *Organisational Culture and Leadership* (2004), Edgar Schein extends the confines of this perspective by stating that “culture has come of age. Not only did the concept have staying power but it is even being broadened. As it turns out, culture is essential to understanding inter-group conflict …” (2004a: xi). In the same mould, in his seminal study, *An Introduction to the Study of African Cultures* (1979), the Ghanaian anthropologist, Eric Ayisi confirms the need for African nations not to be in the shadow of imperial culture, which in the contemporary period, amounts to global capitalist project or multinational presence that destroys the Niger delta ecology, environment and wealth.

The paradigm of world politics is conditioned by the forces of globalisation and global economy, which have become prominent features of today’s world order. Thus, the dynamics of global politics is preoccupied with attention on the balancing claims and criticisms of the multinationals or transnational corporations. The undercurrent of multinationals relevance in global politics is their influence and power given the dynamics of core-periphery thesis. Thus, the multinationals’ ability to control international investments as well as cross-cultural business enterprises has had tremendous bearing on the economies,
environment, politics and culture of developing nations. Using a consequentialist perspective, this paper argues that ethics of global responsibility is basically that of the state, and that, in the perspective of neoliberal globalisation, the culprits are usually the multinationals, whose activities endanger the Niger delta.

Nigeria’s recent political debates have focused a lot on the Niger delta, Nigeria’s “oil bearing enclave” (Eteng, 1997: 21), where most of the country’s wealth is deposited. Oil exploration in the Niger delta by the multinationals has come with a plethora of negative consequences, which have been identified above (Aghalino, 2011; Ojakorotu, 2008). Of all the reverses catalogued, the concern of this paper is centred on culture, which drives the behavioural patterns of any people, organisation and nation. In articulating this state of affairs, it is relevant to look at the nexus between the presence of the multinationals in the Niger delta and the cultural manifestations of their presence in major facets such as group identity, environmental health, ecological equilibrium, socio-political development and economic growth, among others. No doubt, cultural and environmental conflicts in the Niger delta are globalised in the sense that global actors are implicated in the activities in the region’s local communities. Also the melding of the region’s oil production with global economic system, the importance of oil to world economy and the internationalisation of multinationals’ activities in the region following grand abuse of human rights as well as environmental rights violations have further globalised the drama in the area. One of the issues in the region that caused international furore was the killing of the Ogoni eco-activist, Ken SaroWiwa, including eight others, who were in the forefront of challenging the human, cultural, political and socio-economic dimensions of oil exploration in the region.
Culture and Power Distance: Understanding Self-Referencing and Stereotyping

There exists an internecine relationship between culture and power distance. Also embedded in the dynamics of culture and power distance are self-referencing and stereotyping that sustain power distance and national domination through the reinforcement of values as well as “false consciousness” that they create. Power distance is a concept opined by the Dutch cultural anthropologist Geert Hofstede in his book, *Culture’s Consequences: International Difference in Work-Related Values* (1980). By definition, power distance deals with the extent to which the less powerful members in a nation or institution or in the world expect and accept that power is unequally distributed. This process of understanding the loci of power and its distribution in intercultural relations comes to represent the dimensions of social stratification and hegemonic structures in the mental programming of a people in a given cultural milieu. This also underpins how marginalised nations in the global marketplace interpret, value and cherish their own culture.

National, economic and organisational structures impact society and its culture via the domination that institutionalised practices and ways of sense-making bring. Thus all the paraphernalia of structures and networks that help shape cultural practice are better understood in reframing cultural hegemony. Understanding how different cultures operate in terms of how these cultures perceive one another impact on their relationships and power bases. This is also important in diffusing power from the locus of core nations to periphery nations, which is a basic factor for national renewal and development. The need to diffuse power is critical for cultural development and competitiveness. Parallel discursive arenas and power contestations, which enable members of subordinated groups...
(Spivak’s subalterns), reinforce as well as reinvent their identities and peculiarities as forms of counter-discourses or alternative power bases help to shape oppositional interpretations of their identities, worldview, interest and culture. In articulating these parallel forms of power and their associated phenomena, it should be seen as a kind of power project for national supremacy and cultural recognition. In consonance with this position,

power is dispersed across complicated and heterogeneous social networks marked by ongoing struggle. Power is not something present at specific locations within those networks, but is instead always at issue in ongoing attempts to (re) produce effective social alignments, and conversely to avoid or erode their effects, often by producing various counter-alignments (qtd. in Gutting 1994: 112-113).

In a world where self-referencing as well as stereotyping has rendered cultural relations abrasive and hegemonic, it is important to renegotiate the bases of power, which have been framed by these variables for national development.

At the root of stereotyping and self-referencing is ethnocentrism, which is basically the tendency to regard a nation’s culture, values and people as superior to other cultures and ways of life. Naturally, ethnocentrism brings cultural strife and violence as cultures affected by this practice negotiate their identity by any means possible. The ongoing violence and militancy drama unfolding in the Niger delta is a glaring example of a nation at the cusp of marginality as well as a nation in the cauldron of identity agitation for cultural rebirth and environmental rebuilding. Self-referencing and stereotyping feed from the same source: ethnocentrism. While (cultural) self-referencing is about unconscious presupposition by an individual that their culture is the appropriate one against which
other cultures should be measured and regarded, stereotyping deals with attribution to a people or individuals by other people some characteristics that are assumed typical of such people. This oftentimes leads to cultural discontents, which is a harbinger of violence and other reverses. The multinationals’ cultural practice as well as organisational behaviour is in tandem with how cultural self-referencing and stereotyping could damage national relations and culture on a global scale. This is also part of the underlying reasons for the global capitalism project initiated by the West.

Taking a cue from Hofstede (1980) and Burnes (2004), it has been has indicated that within a society, people are continuously faced with myriads of issues and problems that are peculiar to such people. Therefore how these issues are managed and resolved form the foundation of cultural differences. This is because cultures are different; the transposition of cultural practices from one nation to another will fuel identity problems and power struggle. In the Niger delta, where culture is a serious source of conflict than of synergy, cultural disparities are time and again at best mere disaster. This scenario is essentially why the political and socio-cultural landscape in the region in the wake of multinationals’ presence has rather spawned more conflict than peace and development as there exists incongruence between the organisational paradigm (culture) which their presence brings and that of the host communities, who are technically in the shadow of the whole drama taking place in the region.

**In the Shadow of the Multinationals: A Consequentialist Reading**

As has been identified above, Niger delta has long been in the shadow of the multinationals and Nigerian political compradors. Although so much scholarship has been done in assessing the upshot of their presence in the region in terms of corporate social responsibility and
ethics, little has been done in identifying the cultural knock-on effects of oil exploration (Azaiki, 2003; Aghalino, 2011). In consonance with this train of thought, it was Bartels (1967), who for the first time traced the role of culture in ethical business operations. The approach by Bartels (1967) will be explored further in the context of this paper. This study will also take into consideration the consequentialist as well as ethical dimensions of cross-cultural business dealings by the multinationals in the region.

It is well known that culture accounts for the economic prosperity of any nation as well as reinforces any nation’s competitiveness in the global marketplace (Hofstede, 1980; Lim, 1995). Consequently, in his *The Long Revolution* (1984), the Welsh cultural theorist, Raymond Williams averred that culture is “the relations, the true interaction between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions and institutions” (55). Thus, the way in which the multinationals make active their cultural agenda in the Niger delta is surmised here:

The link between unsustainable petroleum exploitation in the Niger delta and the destruction of the indigenous homeland and the culture of the people is undeniable. Traditional lands have been sacrificed on the altar of irresponsible oil policies. The point of interest is that the environmental degradation occasioned by oil pollution and gas flaring is instrumental to the cultural crisis in the region (Aghalino, 2011: 5).

The above is what Oni & Oyewo (2011) mean in their analysis to be the negative consequences of culture on the life, aspirations and group identity of the Niger delta people. The dimensions of the multinationals’ presence are highlighted below.
Loss of cultural soul  
Corrosion of nationalist spirit  
Economic disempowerment  
Continuous dependence on foreign assistance  
Decline in socio-cultural values  
Militarisation of social space  
Armed conflict, social unrest and militancy  
Cultural imperialism  
Displacement of people  
Inferiorisation of local labour and personnel  
Culture conflict  
Sex trade or commercialisation of sex  
Lack of moral rectitude  
Environmental and ecological devastation  
Impoverishment of locals  
Dissipation of marine life and biodiversity  
Leadership failure and oil politics  
Institutionalised crimes  
Mass unemployment.

Consequentialism focuses mainly on the consequences of human conduct and actions in our environment. Contemplating moral dimension of issues has been considered in the field of philosophy, ethics and religion about the time of Aristotle. But in making efforts this is linked to how organisations’ or people’s behaviour or conduct is implicated in the overall cultural as well as ethical impacts of this is yet to be given more illumination (Fritzsche & Becker, 1984; Railton, 1984). In defining the relationship between cognitive activity and decision-making, it is vital to rethink consequentialism. The mainstay of consequentialism is evaluating actions as well as conducts in relation to the dimension to which desirable results are achieved. This is also referred to as teleological philosophy, which essentially considers the end result of human
action as surpassing the idea of right and wrong (Hare, 1981; Railton, 1984; Robertson and Fadil, 1999). So, in the Niger delta, the question of “right” or “wrong” should not really matter; what should be central in the whole drama that is going on in the region is the morality as well as ethical bases of the activities by the multinationals in the region. If matters are analyses from this perspective, these multinationals would be more socially responsible and ethical in their dealing regarding oil exploration and its associated issues.

In assessing the consequentialist dimension of the multinationals’ actions in the Niger delta, it is pertinent to look at the two main divisions of consequentialism as they are fundamental in the corporations’ conduct in the area. The first one is ethical egoism or objective consequentialism that deals with the concept of right action as a function of individual’s personal good and benefit (Railton, 1984: 152). On the other hand, another type of consequentialism is called utilitarianism. Utilitarianism or subjective consequentialism considers one’s decision that would promote the most good. Thus, anybody acting in a utilitarianist manner “attempts to maximise the overall desired benefits of society” (Robertson and Fadil, 1999: 390). Thus, multinational organisations would find these distinctions relating to consequentialism necessary in the way they conduct businesses in the Niger delta. It will also help in shaping the way the locals – and Nigerians – perceive how these organisations do business in the area in terms of ethics, culture and social desirability.

Lumped together, for a social responsible and ethical oil exploration in the Niger delta, the actions of the multinationals in cahoots with Nigeria’s political operators have to be weighed in the balance in order to ascertain their implications for the overall good of the stakeholders. In doing this, the multinationals would be acting in an ethical manner, which would not endanger the region’s cultural endowment and environment as well as jeopardise the inhabitants’
means of livelihood. This is critical to preserving the region’s culture for development; it is also crucial in understanding if the multinationals are socially responsible to the environment in which they carry out their operations. For about three decades, the issue of corporate social responsibility has dominated the centre stage in business and ethics. This is also true of the reawakened efforts in the academia as well as in international development circuit to understand the consequentialist dimensions of multinationals dealings in the developing countries (Amaeshi, Osuji & Nnodim, 2008; Freeman, 1984). Taking these issues into consideration is essential for cultural development of the Niger delta.

Resistance and Cultural Nationalism: Towards a Dialectics of CSR, Ethics and Justice

In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire trenchantly stated that “violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognise others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognised” (41). This is the case in the Niger delta, where the multinationals have turned into theatre of war, violence and militancy (Naanen, 1995; Watts, 2008; Ikelegbe, 2005; 2006; Ukiwo, 2009). The nature of violence in the area is a strategy to perpetually asphyxiate the nationalist zeal of the inhabitants of this region in order to take their inheritance by way of oil exploration. It has been observed that in Nigeria, the nature of violence that is going on in the Niger delta is calculated; it is also aimed at clobbering opposition as well as deepening the misery that multinationals wrought on the locals and their environment. Thus, violence in this region goes beyond oil exploration; it certainly resonates with methods and ease to gain access to the regions resources and natural bequests. The type of violence in the Niger delta is essentially cultural violence, which looks at complete annihilation of the cultural foundations of the area for economic benefits of the West (the
multinationals). Ironically, in crossing cultural boundaries, the uniqueness of a people should be seen as sacred and thus should be respected. This is sadly not the case with the activities of the multinationals in the Niger delta. Cultural violence is a process that legitimises violence performed directly or structurally by sanctioning such act via the conduit of symbolic violence that is built into cultural practices (Galtung, 1969).

The concept of symbolic violence is what Bourdieu (1977) characterised as “soft violence”, which finds nodal points in different social and cultural domination. In the contention of Michel Foucault, these forms of domination or Gramscian hegemony find expression in institutionalised modes of “discipline and punishment” (Foucault, 1975) that have acquired positive social values; and in such cases people do not see them as violence, rather, a sanctioned way of life or “habitus” as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) considers it. As a consequence, in order to transform the area for cultural renaissance and development, cultural violence should be challenged through the instrumentality of nationalist agitation and cultural rebirth programmes that would help facilitate this change. Another dimension of this transformation project is its possibility to change the nature of human rights abuses in the region, which is a form of violence. According to Meyer’s (1998) study on the implications of the multinationals’ dealings in the developing countries (Third Worlds), there is some ambivalence in the multinationals’ presence in these nations. While acknowledging some positive aspects of their presence such as employment and cross-cultural interactions, there exist a lot of antinomies such as human rights abuses and cultural erosion, among others.

Critical to resisting as well as dismantling the foundations of Western cultural practice that universalised Western values, mores and culture at the expense of periphery nations’ culture is located in
the pioneering study by Hofstede’s (1980). This study is steeped in repudiating Mintzberg’s (1973) thesis that universalised Western paradigm as well as entrepreneurial style in dealing with disparate cultural settings. Al-Yahya, Lubatkin & Vengroff’s (2009) argue that

the work of Mintzberg (1973) is indeed central to what is known today in the comparative management as “the universality hypothesis”. This hypothesis suggests that Western management theories, particularly organisation theories, are applicable worldwide regardless of culture or historic experience of a society (2).

However, studies have demonstrated that Western culture is different from Africa’s way of life (Ayisi, 1979). Culture is an integral facet of organisational composition and culture in terms of how businesses are carried out internationally. This should be taken into consideration when assessing the presence of the multinationals in the Niger delta. No doubts, there are variations between Western cultural practices and Nigeria’s culture and value system.

At the core of freedom, nationalism and cultural renaissance, is the question of resistance. Resistance in this instance is imbued with a clarion call to reject domination and subjugation that come in the wake of cultural imperialism as well as cultural marginalisation by the multinationals. In his magnum opus, Dialectics of Negation (1966), Theodor Adorno, offers the justification for cultural resistance by the native, the Niger delta people, in order to bring to fruition the dialectics of economic empowerment, nationalist agitation, protest against environmental/ecological damage, and campaign for cultural relativity (Aghalino, 2011; Obi, 2010). For Adorno, the entrapment of periphery culture by core ones is a rectilinear consequence of the “false condition” (1966: 11) made possible by gradual cultural erosion of the native’s culture. This argument also finds resonance in Fanon’s
position in his thesis called “fighting phase”, when the natives become fighters for the cultural emancipation of their people as well as the rejuvenation of their environment.

Cultural resistance rhetoric is enshrined in sense-making as understood from the prism of cognition that cuts across the binary of differences and separation between two cultures: the dominant and the passive. In taking this further, cultural identity in this regard is about asserting individuality and difference that needs to be recognised by other cultures. This follows that cultural intervention through identifying the impacts or the implications of marginalising the Saidian “Other” is crucial in dimensionalising the consequences of multinationals’ presence in the Niger delta. Thus, given the wholesale dismissal of nationalism, a movement for the emancipation of Niger delta cultural heritage, it is not surprising that globalisation is more of a cultural and economic agency for further marginalisation of the periphery groups’ identities as well as inferiorisation of the Other. Deductively, resistance dialectics inheres in transcending neo-liberal agenda of “commodification of social life” (Shantz, 2003: 145) as well as fierce capitalist entrepreneurial operations wrapped up in the rhetoric of globalisation. It is vital to note that another advantage of resistance is lodged in identifying the ruse behind the idea that globalisation is mere intensification as well as magnification of the level of interactions and interdependence amongst nations in the global circuit. More than this, resistance would usher in social justice in the Niger delta.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it has been argued that the presence of the multinationals in the Niger delta has negative cultural consequences to the environment, ecology, biodiversity, people and socio-political wellbeing of this region. What this study attempted to do was to bring
to the fore the place of culture in the overall activities of the multinationals in the region as these activities pose grave danger to the region’s identity, development, and environmental sustainability. Thus, in order to revamp the region as well as empower the natives – and Nigerians – in the final analysis, cultural dimensions of the multinationals’ business operation in the area need to be addressed. This is crucial for culturally re-invented Nigeria in the global marketplace. In doing this, a consequentialist approach was adopted that resonates with the ethical implications of the practices by the multinationals as well as the social desirability and responsibility of their actions in the region. It is also within this frame that the paper proposed cultural resistance movement to tame this cultural domination.

References


