In order to understand the various ramifications of the Ogini crisis, it is necessary to track how the combination of local and international oil interests and the unleashed peculiar brew that has transformed in ecological terms not only Ogini land but the Niger Delta as a whole. It is the nexus of local and international oil production that created the volatile situation that affects the entire region. The expansion of capital, to a large extent, must be blamed for the various factors that have caused the supposed explosion of the Niger Delta. We are often reminded that “The Niger Delta has substantial oil and gas reserves. Oil mined in the area accounts for 95 percent of the country’s oil production and Nigeria has proven oil and gas reserves and about one-fourth of Gross Domestic Product” (p. 18). It is necessary to provide various interpretations for political trends in relation to the crisis in the Niger Delta. In order to do so, I will address Ike Okonta and Oronto-Douglas’s study of the ecological crisis in the Niger Delta and suggest ways in which it can be construed theoretically. I shall also address broader phenomenological of political violence which their study does not completely foreground even though it provides excellent descriptions of gross governmental corruption and the duplicity of multinational capital. In this instance, there are two main ways to proceed: one cannot have an entirely political violence one has in mind. The first is to analyse the political violence caused by multinational capital and the second, the violence endured through colonial condition.

In this regard, Shell is the biggest oil corporation operating in the Niger Delta. Before the discovery of oil, we will recall that the region was known for its significant palm oil exporting zone in Africa. The palm oil exporting business created an opportunity for the beginning of colonial relations that were later manifested by expansion of global capital. George Goldie Taubman, a British merchant, was instrumental to the making of modern Nigeria and we are informed that he “embarked on trading practices that cut off the once flourishing Delta ports from the outside world which plunged the populace into unprecedented poverty from when it had never been able to recover” (p. 13).

Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil by Ike Okonta and Oronto-Douglas point out: “everybody wanted a piece of the action, not least British officials, who looked at the oil as an opportunity to strike it rich, to control this money spinner is waged. The oil is the field on which the vicious battle was merged by British merchants and soldiers who were essentially driven by the expansion of political violence which their study does not completely foreground even though it provides excellent descriptions of gross governmental corruption and the duplicity of multinational capital. In this instance, there are two main ways to proceed: one cannot have an entirely political violence one has in mind. The first is to analyse the political violence caused by multinational capital and the second, the violence endured through colonial condition.

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flora, and to the need for preservation of the biodiversity of the area because of its rich biological resources” (p. 63). However, it is unlikely that the biodiversity of the region would be preserved due to fact that the company is “one of the biggest contributors to global warming” (p. 67). Indeed some of the damage already done cannot be undone: “approximately twenty-two square miles of mangrove has been cut by Shell in its Eastern division alone in the course of its seismic operations and a considerable amount of fauna and flora have been destroyed, expelled, or damaged beyond repair during the period” (p. 69). Bush pig, iguana, monkeys (some rare) have had to flee the destroyed and polluted forests. Some species have become extinct. Acid rains corrode not only zinc roofing but also contribute to the destruction of fauna and flora.

Creeks and swamps are not left out of the relentless assault:

In the course of separating the oil from water, Shell officials use chemicals to induce settlement in the tanks. The end product of this separation process is thick, oily sludge which combines with firefighting chemicals like Halon, already in the tank, to form a potent mixture. This hazardous substance is then discharged into the swamps and rivers. The Bonny River estuary, the swamps around Forcados, and the Warri River near Ughelli, where Shell discharges its production water, have been contaminated after nearly four decades of receiving this cocktail of dissolved and dispersed hydrocarbons, sludge, and fighting agents (p. 87).

The above description gives a picture of what life is like in the rural areas. In major cities such as Port Harcourt, the politics of oil production has also affected the manner and quality of life as “the poor majority are banished to the sprawling waterfront slums and the other ghettos where there is no electricity, water supply, or sanitation facilities. Here also, refuse collection and dumping is inefficient and badly managed, and waste dumps have taken over whole streets, vying with human beings for space” (p. 192). Also, in cities such as Warri and Port Harcourt, “armed robbery, hooliganism, prostitution, and sudden, seemingly inexplicable explosions of street violence have become a way of life” (p. 192). Okonta and Douglas claim that Shell practices ecological racism, as the standards the company applies in Western nations are much better than what the Niger Delta receives.

In order to cover up the violence of its activities, Shell has had to resort to spin-doctoring. The authors write: “Shell has found common cause with the trinity of Andrew Neil, former editor of the London Sunday Times; Donu Kogbara, another journalist, who is, incidentally, Saro-Wiwa’s niece; and Richard D. North, the ex-Independent journalist whose controversial book, Life on a Modern Planet: A Manifesto for Progress, is a battering ram of the resurgent right-wing attack on the environmental movement in the United Kingdom” (p. 172).

The book is a graphic account of how global capital in collaboration with local power unleashes terror on the poor, of how it destroys human beings and the environment and also how it erects elaborate mechanisms to hide the extent and gravity of its violence. It not only destroys human lives but constructs elaborate lies to conceal from history the extent of its destructive activities. Okonta and Douglas offer a vivid description of the modes of collaboration between Shell and the Nigerian ruling class in undermining important facets of Nigerian life.

There are detailed explanations of instances of corruption and charges of ecological racism. A sentence sums up the main argument of the book: “the oil-producing minorities of the Niger Delta have become living carrion on which successive regimes in Nigeria and their foreign collaborators, like insatiable vultures, have feasted, are still feasting, without letup (p. 115).

On the whole, the book presents an angry and graphic picture of life being slowly destroyed in the Niger Delta without bothering to provide useful theoretical insights for more clues into the nature of this particular kind of structural and political violence. The nature of this kind of violence indeed has global dimensions and can be better understood via numerous critiques of neo-liberalism. Such necessary critiques of neo-liberalism are absent from the book. Okonta and Douglas write as activists and sometimes allow their anger to get the better of them. Nonetheless, their book remains one of the most engaging accounts of systematic ecological destruction available.