

Liquid Gold: Oil

by The reasons why
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The reasons why

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Accompanying Notes

A journey with a drop of oil. From extraction, via pipelines to refineries before it reaches the consumers (whose Governments fight wars, & organise finance to keep it flowing to us)

Oronto Douglas

Leading human rights lawyer (and acted as one of Ken Saro Wiwa's lawyers) and Deputy Director, Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Nigeria.

Nigeria can be seen as a creation of the Royal Niger Company, whose business interest was in extracting many natural resources from the area, including Palm Oil. The RNC had little regard for the inhabitants, and suppressed them, with the aid of the Royal Navy when they rose up. Over a hundred years later other oil companies in what is now called Nigeria are involved in extraction with scant regard to human rights, human health and the environment. Oil spills, gas flares, polluted lands, destroyed forests, contaminated waters, oil companies working with military regimes, executions, debt to 'developed' countries from those military regimes... this is part of the story of the following one hundred years.

Clayton Thomas Muller from the Indigenous environmental network, USA. He is of Mathais Colomb Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba, Canada, is a Sundancer, traditional Pipe carrier, singer and activist for indigenous self-determination and environmental justice. He is the Indigenous Oil Campaign Organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network. He works across Alaska, Canada and the lower 48 States of the USA with grassroots indigenous communities.

Around the world, extraction of natural resources, including oil and gas, takes place predominantly in land remote from the centres of power, who may be poorly represented in the government (as e.g. in Nigeria) and often on land occupied by indigenous peoples. These people may gain nothing, and may only suffer as a result of their activities on their lands.

Resources Indigenous Environmental Network "A network of Indigenous Peoples empowering Indigenous Nations and communities towards sustainable livelihoods, demanding environmental justice and maintaining the Sacred Fire of our traditions."

<http://www.ienearth.org/>

Daris Cristancho, an indigenous leader of the U'wa tribe of Columbia

The 5000 U'wa live in the Amazon region of Colombia. Daris describes the U'wa's ongoing struggle to preserve their sacred land and culture and their resistance to the oil companies and the government of Columbia.

They gained international visibility in a 14-year long struggle to prevent oil drilling on their land, which secured the withdrawal of

Royal Dutch Shell

and

Occidental Petroleum

(Oxy), and continues as

Ecopetrol

and

Repsol YPF

seek to drill on their land. The conflict came to a head as Oxy prepared to drill at the Gibraltar 1 test site. The U'wa, who had previously threatened to commit mass suicide if the oil extraction project went forward, constructed a small village on the site of the drillsite. They also set up numerous roadblocks and a coordinated (together with neighboring campesinos and the Guahibo

people

) a regional social strike that paralyzed the surrounding area. Although the Colombian military dislodged the protesters from the site, no commercially viable deposits were found. The U'wa are now in a new dispute with Ecopetrol, which is seeking to prospect for oil on their lands.

(text from
wikipedia
)

The Colombian Government has given backing to this, despite no agreement from the U'wa, saying "it is impossible to negotiate with the U'wa". The U'wa do not want compensation in any form (whether as infrastructure, part-ownership, or allocation of funds), but demand simply that their lands are not desecrated, and the blood of Mother Earth not drained " that is that there are no oil activities on their land.

Sandra Alvarez, from the U'wa Defense Project, translates.

resources:

www.amazonwatch.org

www.oilwatch.org

Nnimmo Bassey is a poet and environmental and social activist from Nigeria. He is the Executive Director, Environmental Rights Action (ERA).

He starts by taking us on a word trip through the Niger Delta. Environmental problems caused by the oil industry has a direct impact on the lives of the people: gas flares, and oil spills result in polluted land, water and air. The people living in the Delta, and living from the land, are the ones who are the most affected.

Gas flaring " that is gas that is burnt off during the extraction of oil " no longer occurs in the global North. It is not only wasteful and a contributor to global warming, it is also polluting. It has however been going on for over 40 years in Nigeria, and continues to the time of writing, and continues not just on oil rigs, but in the middle of communities. There has been a law suit brought against oil companies gas flaring in Nigeria, which was recently won in Nigeria, but against which Shell are expected to appeal.

Other communities and activists are demanding not just a cessation of activities, nor even compensation - but that their lands and waters are restored to clean and fertile conditions.

Leslie Lefkow a human rights specialist with Doctors without borders and Nyang Chol a senior official with RAS, the humanitarian wing of the rebel SPDF faction Sudan talk about the situation in Sudan.

Since Sudan gained independence from Britain in 1956, it has been a nation divided, plagued by religious, ethnic, and economic tensions between the primarily Muslim north and the predominantly Christian and animist south. The nation saw its first civil war soon after independence, and peace did not return until 1972. In 1983, the Sudanese government imposed Islamic law throughout the country, and partitioned the south into three administrative territories, sparking a second devastating civil war.

For the last 20 years, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, or SPLA, and shifting alliances of other rebel groups have engaged in fierce combat against the Sudanese government and government-backed militia. Civilians have paid the overwhelming price. In 1997, oil exploration and growing inter-factional rivalries among armed groups in the south led to an escalation in the conflict and a disastrous new phase in the humanitarian crisis.

The Western Upper Nile (particularly Dafur) is a region in which violence, malnutrition and infectious disease go hand-in-hand. Cattle, the lifeblood of the south Sudanese economy and diet, are looted by roving soldiers, and the severity and reach of epidemics is intensified by displacement and the destruction of public health structures and supply lines.

After two years of bargaining the government and rebels signed a comprehensive peace deal in January 2005. The accord provides for a high degree of autonomy for the south, where rebels say they have been battling oppression and marginalisation. The region will also share oil revenue equally with the north. While decades of fighting have left any infrastructure in tatters, the economic dividends of peace could be great. Sudan has large areas of cultivatable land, as well as gold and cotton. Its oil reserves are ripe for further exploitation.

Benny Wenda, West Papuan tribal leader, in exile in Britain.

After experiencing the brutality of the Indonesian state early in life, Benny campaigned peacefully in West Papua but was arrested, tortured and threatened with death. He managed to escape to Britain, from where he now coordinates the Free West Papua Campaign.

West Papuans have never been given a free vote on their self-determination after the invasion by Indonesia in 1961. Nonetheless, the Indonesian occupation has been recognised and supported by the US, UK, Australia and other international powers. Repression of West Papuan peoples has increased markedly since 1998, when West Papuans seized an opportunity with the fall of Suharto to organise for independence. Against the backdrop of decades of violence and brutality, US and UK-owned Freeport gold mine (the largest in the world) operates "with dire social and ecological impacts. Recently (2006) this site has again become a site of resistance.

Benny talks about the fact that agreements with multinationals for resources (including metal ores, oil and gas) are made with the Indonesian Government, not with local people.

Benny discusses the impacts of BP's activities on the local people due to environmental pollution.

British Petroleum (BP) has begun to operate in the Bintuni Bay area of West Papua where it plans to extract and export gas. Human rights abuses in Wasior sub-district have led to fears that the Indonesian military will continue to abuse West Papuans and increase its presence in the area. BP however claim they are trying to learn the lessons of the past (e.g. their activities in Colombia) and are committed to engaging the local community.

For a balanced but sceptical eye on BP's plans and engagement with the local community -see:

<http://www.newint.org/issue344/beyond.htm>

resources.

<http://www.freewestpapua.org>

Chief of Umeuchem community, Nigeria

On October 30 and 31, 1990, a protest took place at Shell's facility at Umuechem, east of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, that led to the police killing some eighty unarmed demonstrators and destroying or badly damaging 495 houses. This incident was the first to bring the situation in the Niger Delta to international attention, and remains the most serious loss of life directly involving oil company activities. Youths from the Umuechem community demanded provision of electricity, water, roads, and other compensation for oil pollution of crops and water supplies. On October 29, 1990, the divisional manager of SPDC's eastern division had written to the Rivers State commissioner of police to request "security protection with a preference for the paramilitary Mobile Police, in anticipation of an "impending attack" on SPDC's facilities in Umuechem allegedly planned for the following morning. Following peaceful protests by village youths on SPDC's premises on October 30, SPDC again made a written report to the governor of Rivers State, a copy of which was sent to the commissioner of police. On October 31, Mobile Police attacked peaceful demonstrators with teargas and gunfire. They returned at 5 a.m. the next day, shooting indiscriminately, in a purported attempt to locate three of their members who had not returned the previous evening. A judicial commission of inquiry established by the government found no evidence of a threat by the villagers and concluded that the Mobile Police had displayed "a reckless disregard for lives and property." No

compensation has been awarded for the attack to those whose relatives were killed or homes destroyed; nor have the perpetrators been brought to justice.

(text from Human Rights Watch)

Demo at Shell petrol station on Islington High Street, London UK

A report from a demonstration in London in 2006, which closed down a Shell petrol station in central London, to highlight the activities of the oil industry. This was as part of an action linking up with those in County Mayo, Ireland, who are resisting an oil pipeline being built.

Actions have happened around the world against the oil industry, frequently taking inspiration from each other and acting in solidarity with each other. In County Mayo, the 'Solidarity Camp' makes direct reference to the situation in the Niger Delta. Worldwide demonstrations took place in 1995, and on anniversaries of the execution of 9 activists and organisers from the Niger Delta, including writer Ken Saro Wiwa – executions in which Shell had been heavily implicated. During the 2001 invasion of Iraq, women in California, USA took up the idea of nude protests against a war for oil, directly drawing inspiration from the women of the Niger Delta, who, at that time, as part of their ongoing campaigns, were using their naked bodies to stop oil production. This itself inspired other similar anti-war actions.

Resources and links

Manana Kochladze from CEE Bankwatch, and winner of the Goldman Prize for her work against the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.

The BTC pipeline runs from Baku in Azerbaijan, through Georgia to the Mediterranean in Ceyhan, Turkey. It has been criticised for failing to adequately address environmental impacts, and for human rights issues. Nonetheless, it is being supported by the UK Government. BP are one of the main parties in the pipeline.

Despite its damaging impacts, the oil industry receives public funding from the UK Government to support new pipelines and operations via publicly-funded financial bodies, such as the World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

resources

www.bankwatch.org

Asume Osuoka, from Oilwatch Africa, Nigeria

Asume shows that it is not just the multinationals themselves who are implicated, the Northern Governments themselves play a role. Not just by providing risk insurance and direct financing of oil developments through development banks, but also through 'aid packages' which, many argue, are designed for the benefit of the donor nation.

Fillipe Quispe (Gen. Sec. of the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB), Aymara leader)

Felipe Quispe Huanca "El Mallku" (Aymara language: "prince") is a radical Bolivian political leader. He heads the Pachakutik Indigenous Movement (MIP) and is general secretary of the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB). In 1984, he was one of the leading organisers of the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army, a failed armed insurrection against the government. Quispe was arrested for his involvement in the movement on August 19, 1992. Quispe has worked for the establishment of an indigenous republic which would take the name "Collasuyu" in the Aymara-majority regions of Bolivia. A staunch opponent of the neoliberal Washington consensus, Quispe has been classified as a terrorist by the U.S. FBI. He is strongly against U.S.-led coca eradication schemes, which he sees as destroying a critical part of Aymara culture, and was a major player during the Bolivian Gas War. Quispe ran a failed campaign in the 2005 presidential elections, which saw the victory of indigenous Evo Morales, leader of the MAS.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felipe_Quispe

Robbie Madden, a member of London Rising Tide, UK

resources:

www.londonrisingtide.org.uk

www.artnotoil.org.uk

recording details

Oronto is speaking at McGill University, Montreal. It was recorded by Terna Gyuse, and first broadcast on CKUT 90.3FM Montreal, on the programme Amandla! on 08-12-2001. The full speech is linked at <http://www.radio4all.net/proginfo.php?id=3945>

Oronto is speaking in Seattle in 1998. It was recorded by Mike McCormick and aired on KEXP 90.3 FM's (formerly KCMU) Mind Over Matters on 09/23/98. The full speech is linked at <http://216.162.217.3/audio.html>

Nnimmo was interviewed by Diversity Radio in World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil 2005. The full interview can be found on

<http://www.diversity-radio.net/archives/basseyy-pt1-ol.mp3>

Daris is speaking in Los Angeles, as part of a trip to the U.S. to speak both at a United Nations hearing on Indigenous Peoples. Los Angeles is the home of Occidental Oil and Gas Corp (Oxy). The recording was made by the L.A. Sound Posse.

Her full talk (in Spanish with following English translation) is linked

at <http://www.radio4all.net/proginfo.php?id=14605>

Benny was interviewed by Diversity Radio in the Art Not Oil exhibition, London, organised by London Rising Tide in 2004.

A report of the Shell Hell demo, in Islington's Shell petrol station 2006, by Devlish May. Full report <link>

From National Radio Project Deadly Extractions: Oil and Mining Interests in Africa (Leslie Lefkow and Nyang Chol)

<http://www.radioproject.org/archive/2003/3003.html>

Oil and Outrage Flare: An Audio Journey Through the Niger Delta (Chief of Umeucheum)

<http://www.radioproject.org/archive/2002/4802.html>

Shell Hell audio

<https://www3.indymedia.org.uk/en/2006/02/334335.html>

More resources

Books

Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil, by Ike Okonta & Oronto Douglas. ISBN: 1859844731 Published by Verso

Links

Environmental Rights Action
www.eraction.org

Project Underground

www.moles.org
Niger Delta Women for Justice
www.ndwj.kabissa.org
Friends of the Earth International
www.foei.org
Human Rights Watch:
<http://hrw.org>
Amazon Watch:
<http://www.amazonwatch.org/>
Indymedia.org:
<http://www.indymedia.org>
Shell to Sea Network (Ireland):
<http://www.corribsos.com>
Carbon Trade Watch:
<http://www.carbontradewatch.org>

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Running Order

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00:13 Miracles of Petroleum

00:44 Oronto Douglas (Friends of the Earth Nigeria)

02:20 Abdul Raufu Mustafa (lecturer in African Development at Oxford University)

03:01 Let's follow that drop of oil

03:10 Clayton Thomas Muller (Indigenous Environmental Network) USA

03:57 Search to find the crude oil

04:16 Sandra Alvarez (U'wa Defense Project) and Daris Cristancho (U'wa Leader) Columbia

05:51 Nnimmo Bassey (Executive Director, Environmental Rights Action) Nigeria

07:00 Leslie Lefkowitz (Doctors Without Borders)

07:31 Nyang Chol (RAS, the humanitarian wing of the rebel SPDF faction) Sudan

08:12 Benny Wenda (West Papuan tribal leader, in exile in Britain)

08:45 Clayton Thomas Muller (Indigenous environmental network) USA

09:09 Pumping back magic - lines of pipe racing with oil

09:21 Chief of Umecheum community, Nigeria

11:10 Demo at Shell petrol station on Islington High Street, London UK

14:15 Manana Kochladze (CEE Bankwatch)

15:10 Asume Osuoka (Oilwatch Africa) Nigeria

16:29 Oronto Douglas (Friends of the Earth Nigeria)

16:57 Oil thirst nation, refineries

17:15 Global voices - health around the refinery

19 Norman Philip (Grangemouth) Scotland

19:29 Nnimmo Bassey (Executive Director, Environmental Rights Action) Nigeria

20:05 Oronto Douglas (Friends of the Earth Nigeria)

20:47 Bolivia strikes

21:07 Felipe Quispe (Gen. Sec. of the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB), Aymara leader)

23:03 Daris Cristancho (U'wa Leader) Columbia

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27:03 RobbieMadden(LondonRisingTide)UK
27:47 PleasingMrs.Martin
28:01 NnimmoBassey(ExecutiveDirector,EnvironmentalRightsAction)Nigeria
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29:11 OrontoDouglas(FriendsoftheEarthNigeria)
29:39 Theincrediblerealmofofpetroleum
29:55 Outro.

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Historic material was made available on archive.org.

