

papier reste encore, la matière la plus prisée pour la diffusion des connaissances.

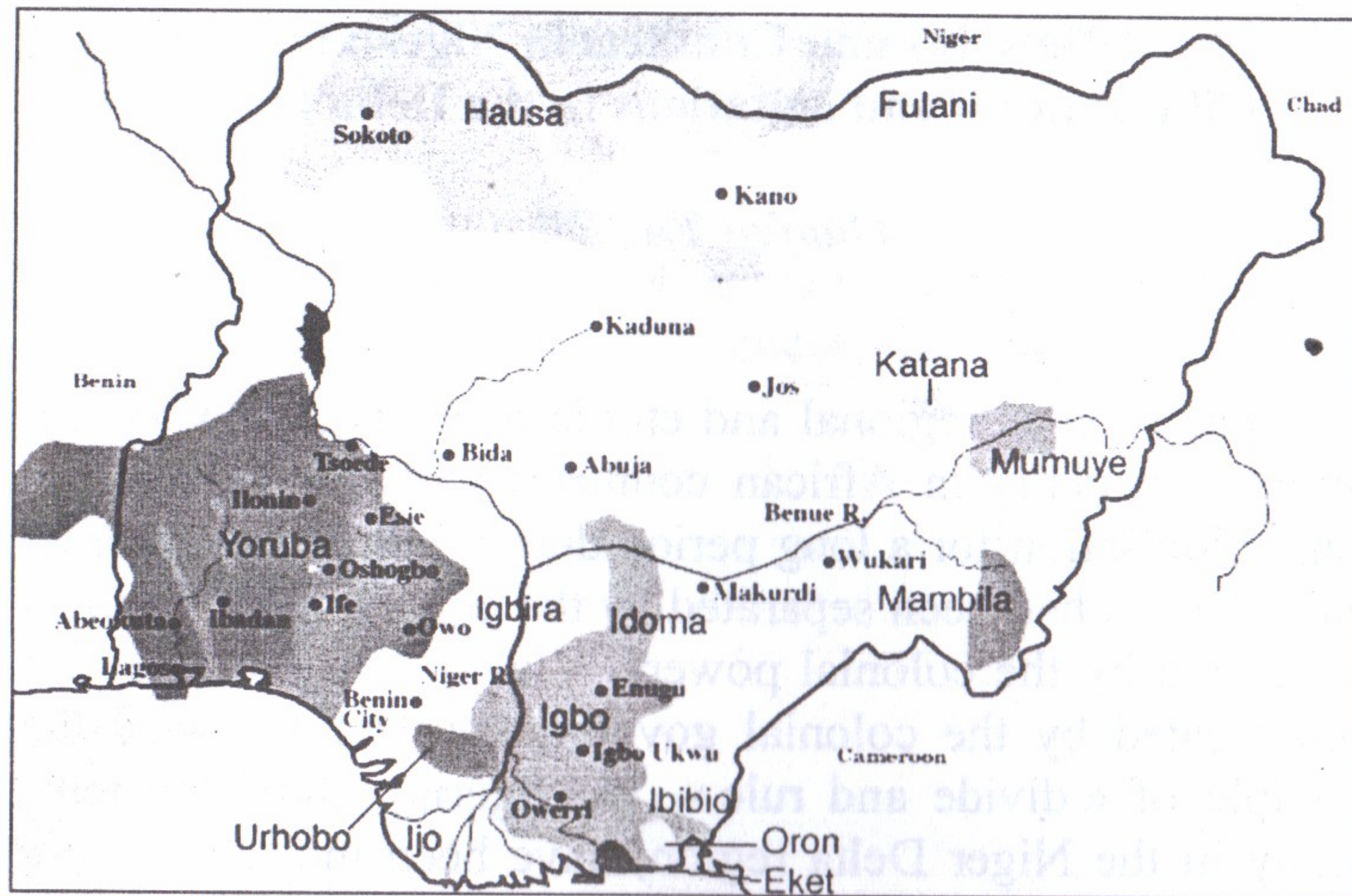
Même si le développement des sciences, induit des changements, le manuel, loin d'être supplanté par le manuel électronique (un concurrent direct), a encore de beaux jours devant lui. Manuel...dites-vous ?

Tensions and Conflicts in Nigeria: Oil resources and agitations in the Delta region

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Questions such as regional and ethnic balancing are very important, especially in African countries which have suffered from colonisation for a long period during which the different ethnic groups had been separated by the geographical frontiers established by the colonial powers. Violent tensions had also been created by the colonial governments that followed the principle of « divide and rule ». In Nigeria, ethnic tensions, mainly in the Niger Delta region, have been more and more important since the 1960's. In addition to the inherited colonial policy, the natural resources, mainly oil, had been the most important factor for these tensions.

Nigeria is West Africa's largest country which is a former British colony. It comprises 250 ethnic groups. The tensions between those groups became very violent after Nigerian independence because of the Nigerian Government policy influenced by the colonial system that was based on the predominance of the Northern region over the Southern one. The result of those tensions was a bloody civil war, the Biafra war (1967-1970), which caused 2 millions of victims ⁽¹⁾.



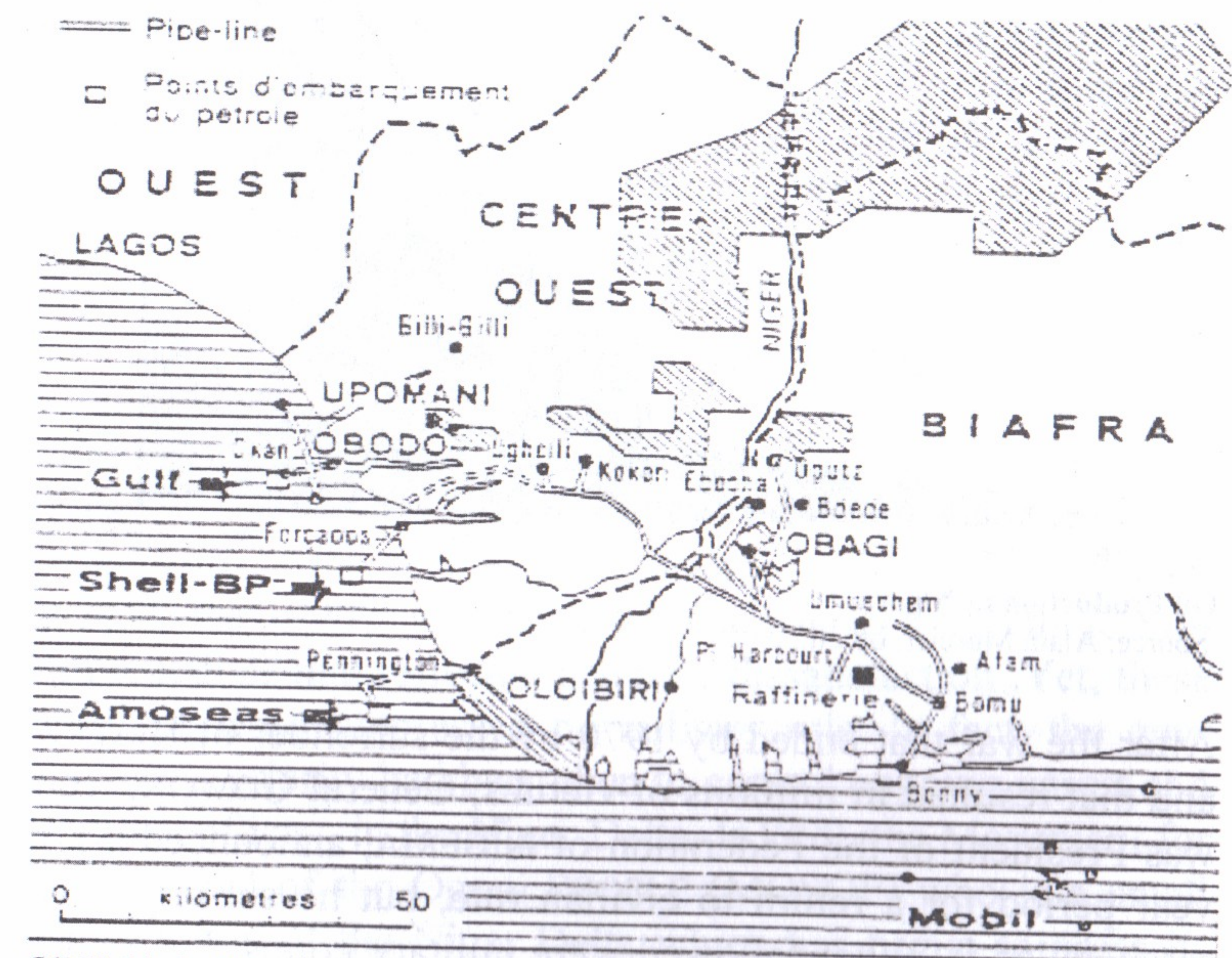
Main Ethnic Groups of Nigeria

Source: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/countries/NIGERIA.html>

Yet, the bloody war of Biafra, would not have taken place had the secessionist state not controlled the oil fields situated in the Niger Delta which serves as the economic nerve center of Nigerian Federation. In fact, before the civil war the production of oil in Nigeria was about 20 million tonnes a year, and 60 per cent of the oil was extracted from the region of Biafra by different multinational oil companies such as American Mobil and Gulf oil. However, the British company Shell B.P. was the most important one which exported 5.9 million tonnes of oil by 1965, and increased its exports to 20.5 million tonnes by 1966. The Company estimated that 30 million tonnes would be exported by 1967 and 50 million tonnes by 1970 ⁽²⁾.

Thus by 1967, the Nigerian government expected to gain 360 million francs thanks to taxes imposed on multinational oil companies. Yet, the division of these revenues was one of the reasons that led to the secession of BIAFRA from the rest of the Federation. These oil revenues were expected to be divided as

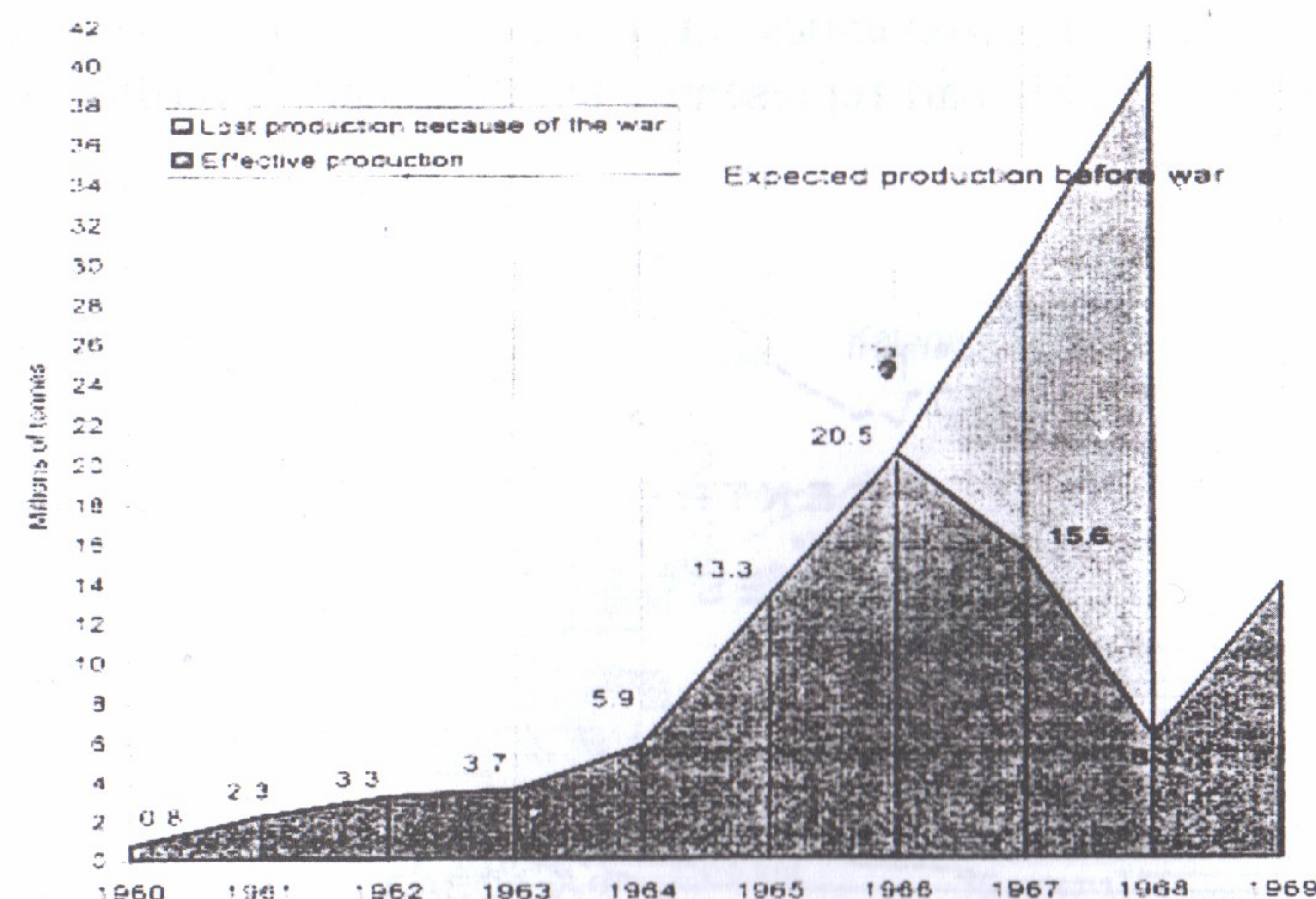
follows: half of the revenues was planned to be for the Federal government. This part represented the taxes on oil profits and direct taxes.



Oil Fields in Nigeria.

Source: Alain Murcier, "Pétrole et guerre au Nigeria", *Revue Française d'Etudes Africaines*, N° 47, 1969, p.56.

The other half was to be divided into 20 per cent for the federation, so that the Federal government would have 70 per cent of the fiscal revenue of oil, and the remaining 30 per cent would be divided between Nigerian regions according to their population, noting that the rich Delta region had a small population as compared to the populated North. This unbalanced share of oil revenues spread a feeling of frustration and anger among the Niger Delta population that declared their secession from the rest of the federation. Yet, it was not possible for the Federal government to abandon its richest region, and a long war had begun by 1967.



Oil Production in Nigeria

Source: Alain Murcier, op.cit., p.05.

After the war that ended by 1970 by the surrender of BIAFRA and that resulted in millions of victims, General GOWON, who was President of the Federation of NIGERIA, announced a six year period for a return to civilian rule, but he subsequently rescheduled it. What followed were military coups during the 1980's and the 1990's.⁽³⁾

It is worth mentioning that despite its rich Delta region, Nigeria had become one of the 20 poorest and least developed countries since the mid 1970's. At the same time, the country's crude oil extracted from Bonny in the Niger Delta was of exceptional quality and high value in the world market. Yet, oil revenues did not influence the low standard of ordinary Nigerians, under a government characterized by corruption, bureaucratic wastage and fraud. There were even regular fuel shortages in one of the world's leading oil producing countries. During the same period, the Nigerian military government had produced more millionaires than any profession. The si-

phoning off of oil revenues by the Nigerian government created problems in the country with its employees underpaid and basic services neglected. In fact, the prospecting and export of crude Petroleum was controlled by foreign private companies as Shell. As a result, only a small proportion of oil exports represented Nigeria earnings. These earnings were monopolized by the ruling class that became richer while the rest of the Delta ethnic groups suffered from misery.

The situation remained unchanged during the 1980's and the 1990's during which the country witnessed a series of military regimes characterized by corruption and crime and the rise of ethnic tensions that became endemic. Nigerian oil which is a "blessing" had become a curse for the people of the Niger Delta who suffered economic poverty. As a logical consequence, the 1990's was a period characterized by ethnic violent reactions that reflected people's dissatisfaction. Yet, these reactions were suppressed by military rule. In fact, the government's priority had been then to control ongoing unrest and ethnic conflicts in the Niger Delta. In 1990, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni PEOPLE (MOSOP) who is a small ethnic group of the Niger Delta which has begun to press its claims in recent years, was established with widespread popular support, launching an "Ogoni Bill of Rights" as its manifesto. It called for "political autonomy" for OGONI within the Nigerian Federation including the right to control and use a fair proportion of oil resources for economic development. MOSOP activists were repeatedly arrested, and in one incident 11 people were injured when troops opened fire on a demonstration called to protest against the laying of a new oil pipeline⁽⁴⁾. By 1996, KEN SARO-WIWA⁽⁵⁾ and leaders of the OGONI people in the Delta region were hanged by the military regime. Oil companies had then demanded prompt action by government to deal with the increasingly violent opposition.

Opposition to central government and to the oil companies had reached explosive proportions by 1998 when a group of ethnic IJAW activists shut down 20 pumping stations, halving onshore output for 2 months. During the same year, over 200 people had been killed in clashes with state forces in oil-related riots. Shell Oil reported that during 6 months 50 of its workers had been kidnapped, and 150 of its installations had been occupied by youth who demanded aid, jobs, and compensation for the pollution that was devastating the whole Niger Delta.

By the election of O. Obasanjo in 1999 and the coming of civil rule after 15 years of military rule, it was an uphill task for the Nigerian government to control ethnic tensions. O. Obasanjo inherited an economy weakened by corruption and crisis. Thus, Nigeria faced enormous economic and social problems; despite being the world's sixth largest oil exporting country, it was the world's 13th poorest nation. Health and social service facilities were almost non-existent, and even petrol had to be imported and unemployment was around 30 per cent.

Moreover, despite the coming of civilian rule, Nigeria was still a military state run by a military Commander, Obasanjo, whose response to any situation in the country was to send in the army. In fact, Obasanjo made it clear in a BBC interview that he wanted to impose political order in order to enable foreign investment to flow into Nigeria. His government was regularly to resort to the kind of brutal methods for that aim.

During the year 2004, the war on Iraq disturbed the world and world markets. The result was that the price of oil increased. Nigeria was the sixth major oil producer in the world that provides 2.3 million barrels of crude oil per day. Oil extraction in Nigeria, however, continued to be a source of violent conflicts between government and oil companies on the one hand, and

the angry ethnic groups of the Niger Delta who did not take profit from the rise of prices on the other hand.

As a reaction, some armed groups declared a war against the Nigerian state. The most important of these groupings is the People's Volunteer Force of the Niger Delta formed by Ijaw rebels and headed by Mujahid Dokubo Asari. The aim of these rebels was to achieve self-determination for their people. But, this group was considered by the government as a group of terrorists, and all means had been deployed to dismantle it. Moreover, these rebels had very few arms, so their rebellion was shown by organizing attacks on oil companies, on their pipelines and on their technicians and managers. They also kidnapped workers of the oil companies. The members of this group were subsequently crushed, their villages burnt, bombed and drowned in blood. One example is that in 2003, the military deployed 3,000 soldiers in Ijwa areas to protect oil installations and combat the rebels. It is noteworthy to mention that oil industry experts estimate that presently up to 10 per cent of Nigeria's oil is lost to gangs as Asari's that damage pipelines and steal crude oil for sale to tankers waiting offshore. Hundreds of millions of dollars are then lost by the government and oil companies each year. This phenomenon is called "bunkering".

Broadly speaking, presently the actions of rebels such as the People's Volunteer Force of the Niger Delta continue to undermine the struggle for autonomy and resource control by peoples of the Niger Delta. On the other hand, the government is adopting a very violent strategy of suppression. Thus, the Niger Delta region is a source of richness as well as a source of disturbance for the Federal government. Yet, as long as the feeling of frustration and alienation of the Niger Delta people is still existing, multinational oil companies' presence in the