

Conflicted Frontiers and the Land Question at the Edge of the State



Michael J Watts, The American Academy, Berlin

Lecture to the *Conflicts Over Land and Global Change*
Symposium, Freie Universität Berlin
December 1-2nd 2016

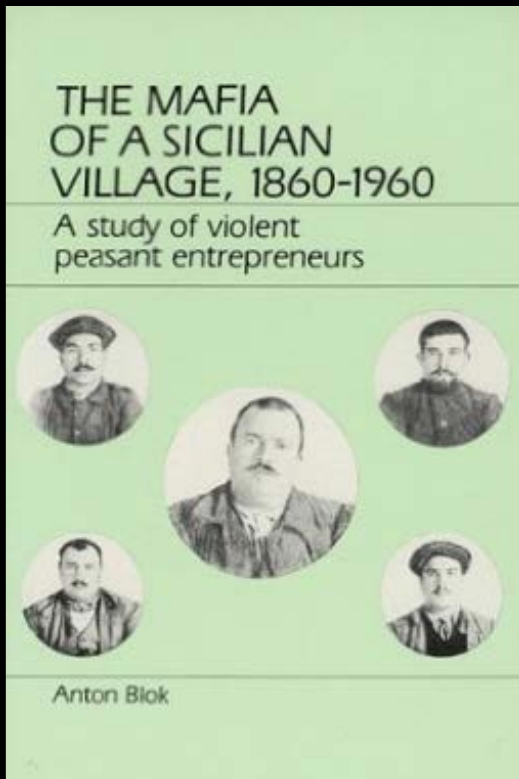
This is the shuddering distrust of every kind of authority—a contempt for the whole political system, its “establishment,” the Congress, its institutions (like the Fed), its “mainstream” media, the international arrangements it has made (not only the trade deals but the treaty obligations under NATO and other defense agreements). This is a staggering injection of bile into the public discourse. It does not answer, or even address, the question: what kind of order can be maintained in a society that does not recognize the legitimacy of any offices?

Garry Wills, *New York Review of Books*, November 2016

Can we then dismiss the dynamics of international capitalism as a major cause of the conflict [in the DRC] —as much liberal scholarship has done? I believe not, and to understand why, we need to look at class. This is something that is deeply unfamiliar in African studies, where it is taken for granted that ‘vertical’ social ties rooted in ethnicity and patron–client relations are inimical to class. But.....one of the fundamental social realities underpinning the disasters of the Great Lakes region has been the huge class of ‘masterless men’—excluded youths in an economically stagnant region, who have been the foot-soldiers of war as well as the diggers of minerals. The haemorrhage of money from the DRC into Western banking systems has produced the worst of both worlds: a violent dispossession, bringing to mind classic accounts of primitive accumulation, which has made traditional peasant life almost untenable in large parts of the Congo just as more and more young people have come of age.

Joe Trapido, *New Left Review*, 2012

Thinking Frontiers through Mafia



The mafia is, essentially, nothing but the expression of a need for order, for the control of a State..... it is a society, an organization, that is, in its own way, juridical and sovereign.

Judge Giovanni Falcone, *Men of Honour: The Truth about the mafia* 1991, Italian prosecuting magistrate killed by the Corleonesi Mafia in May 1992.

Anton Blok on the origins and character of Mafia

Mafia was born of the tensions between the central government and local landowners on the one hand, and between the latter and peasants on the other.

Weak central authority permitted *mafia* to manage these distinct but interrelated tensions and struggles since it provided a specific code through which members of the various social classes and groups arranged themselves.

Authority, Law and Political Orders: Social Space of the Land Frontier

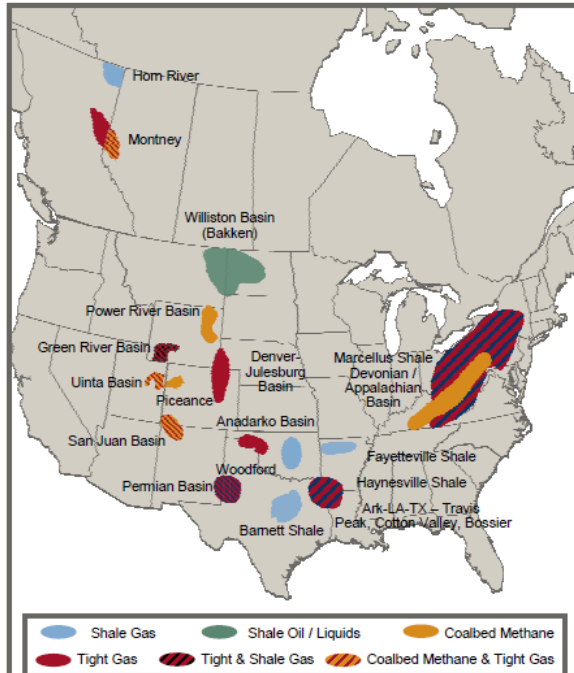
If we, rather broadly, see frontiers as regions at the limits of central power, then it seems likely that a great deal is happening there.....Frontiers.....are places where authority – neither secure nor non-existent – is open to challenge and where polarities of order and chaos assume many guises.

John Markoff, *Barbarism and Civilization*

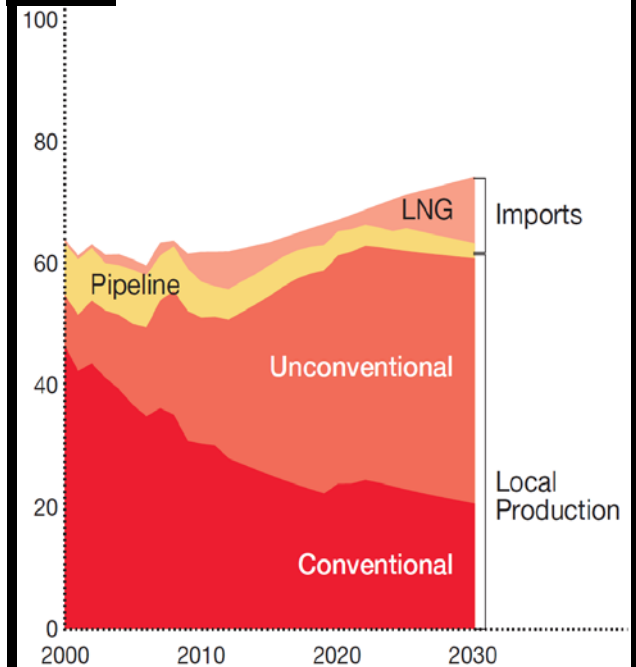
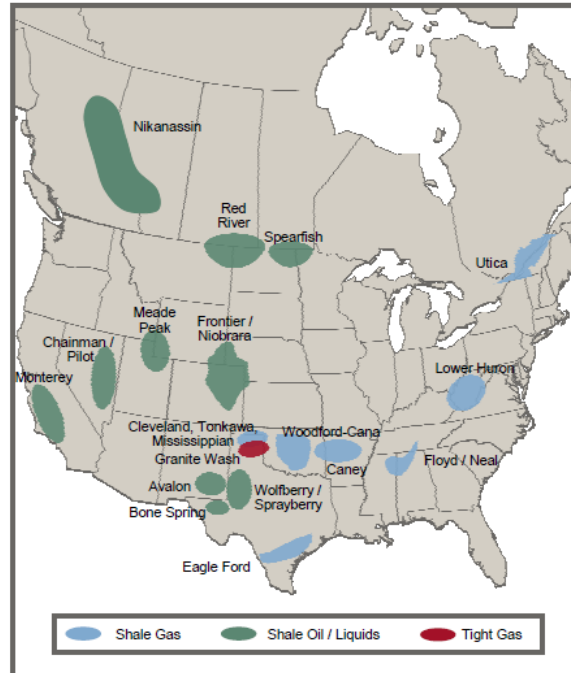
Oil Frontiers: Unconventional Hydrocarbons

Progression from the established shale basins to a range of new plays in North America

Established Basins



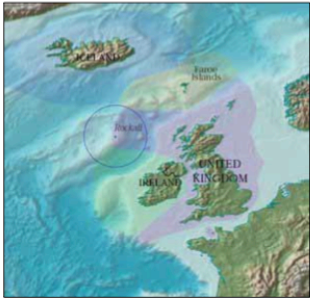
New Plays



Oil Frontiers: The Arctic

Douglas – Westwood

The great deepwater land grab



- 45 countries have potential to claim under UNCLOS
- One proved location can give a circle of seabed of 350 n. miles
- Must be able to show it is an extension of their own topography
- Claims deadline spring 2009
- The rush is underway to gather scientific evidence to support submissions.

Douglas – Westwood

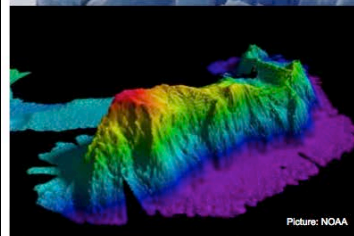
Arctic issues



- Arctic could hold massive reserves (estimates 160 – 300 bn boe)
- Major environmental concerns
- 5 fields under development
- 14 commercial discoveries & 73 prospects (source: Statoil)
- Russia may have control over 60%
- But Russia will need partners
- And huge investments will be needed

Douglas – Westwood

NEW OPPORTUNITIES – THE ARCTIC



Picture: NOAA

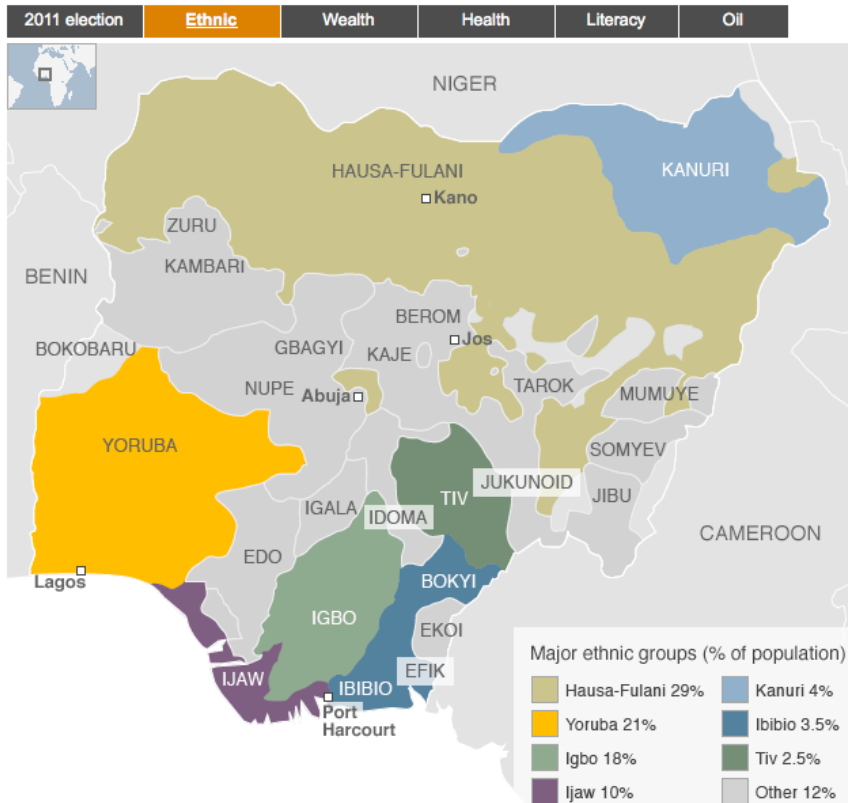


Extraction and Conflict In Nigeria



Nigeria: Multi-Ethnicity Meets Fiscal Federalism

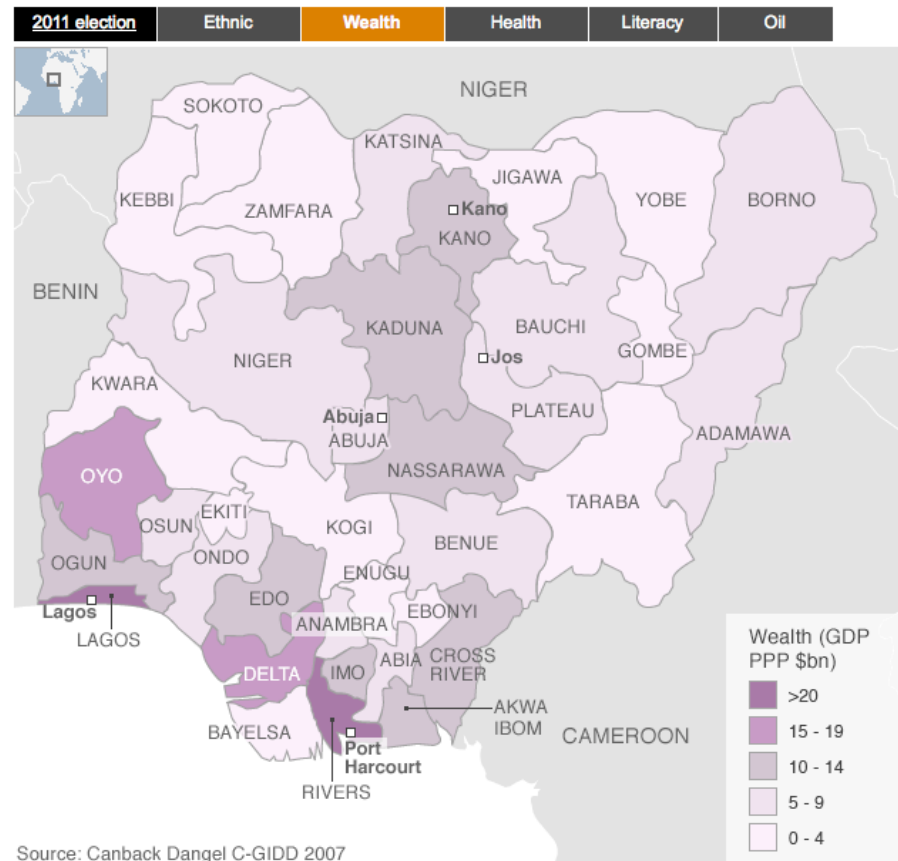
Nigeria: A nation divided



Source: Ulrich Lamm

Nigeria's 160 million people are divided between numerous ethno-linguistic groups and also along religious lines. Broadly, the Hausa-Fulani people based in the north are mostly Muslims. The Yorubas of the south-west are divided between Muslims and Christians, while the Igbos of the south-east and neighbouring groups are mostly Christian or animist. The Middle Belt is home to hundreds of groups with different beliefs, and around Jos there are frequent clashes between Hausa-speaking Muslims and Christian members of the Berom community.

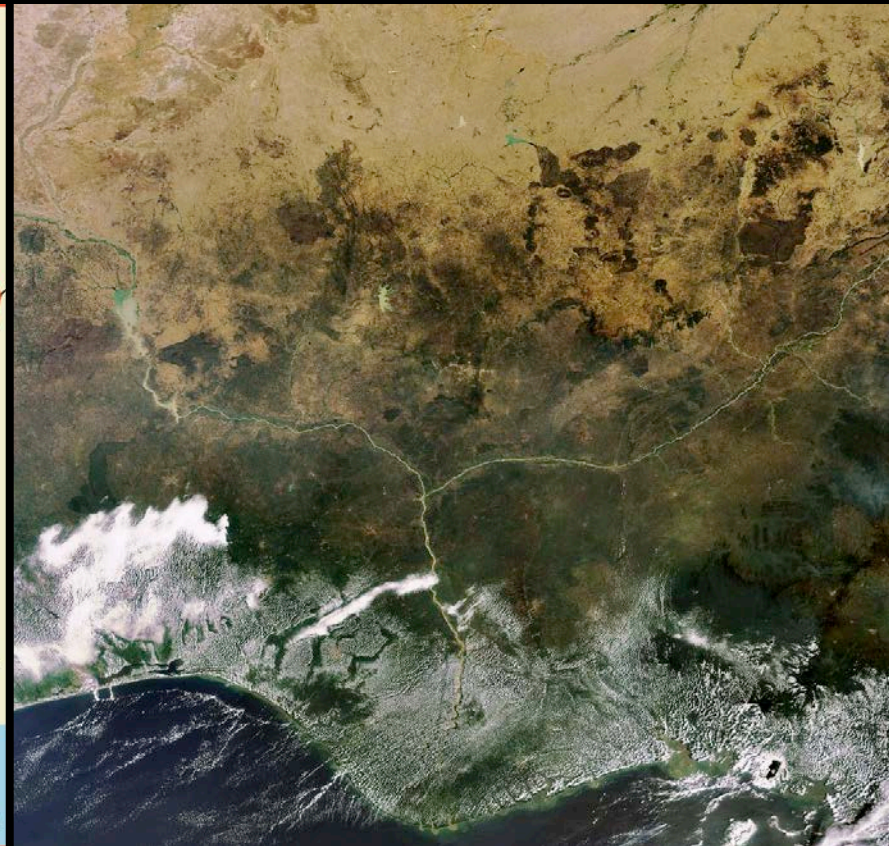
Nigeria: A nation divided



Source: Canback Dangel C-GIDD 2007

Despite its vast resources, Nigeria ranks among the most unequal countries in the world, according to the UN. The poverty in the north is in stark contrast to the more developed southern states. While in the oil-rich south-east, the residents of Delta and Akwa Ibom complain that all the wealth they generate flows up the pipeline to Abuja and Lagos.

The Niger Delta Oilfields



A Petro-State: Land and Marine Frontiers



Oil and Failed Secular National Development



According to the IMF:

“Oil did not seem to add to the standard of living” and “could have contributed to a decline in the standard of living”.

International Monetary Fund 2003:4.

Nigeria's Petro-State and Crises of Legitimacy

Poverty

1965-2005 per capita income fell

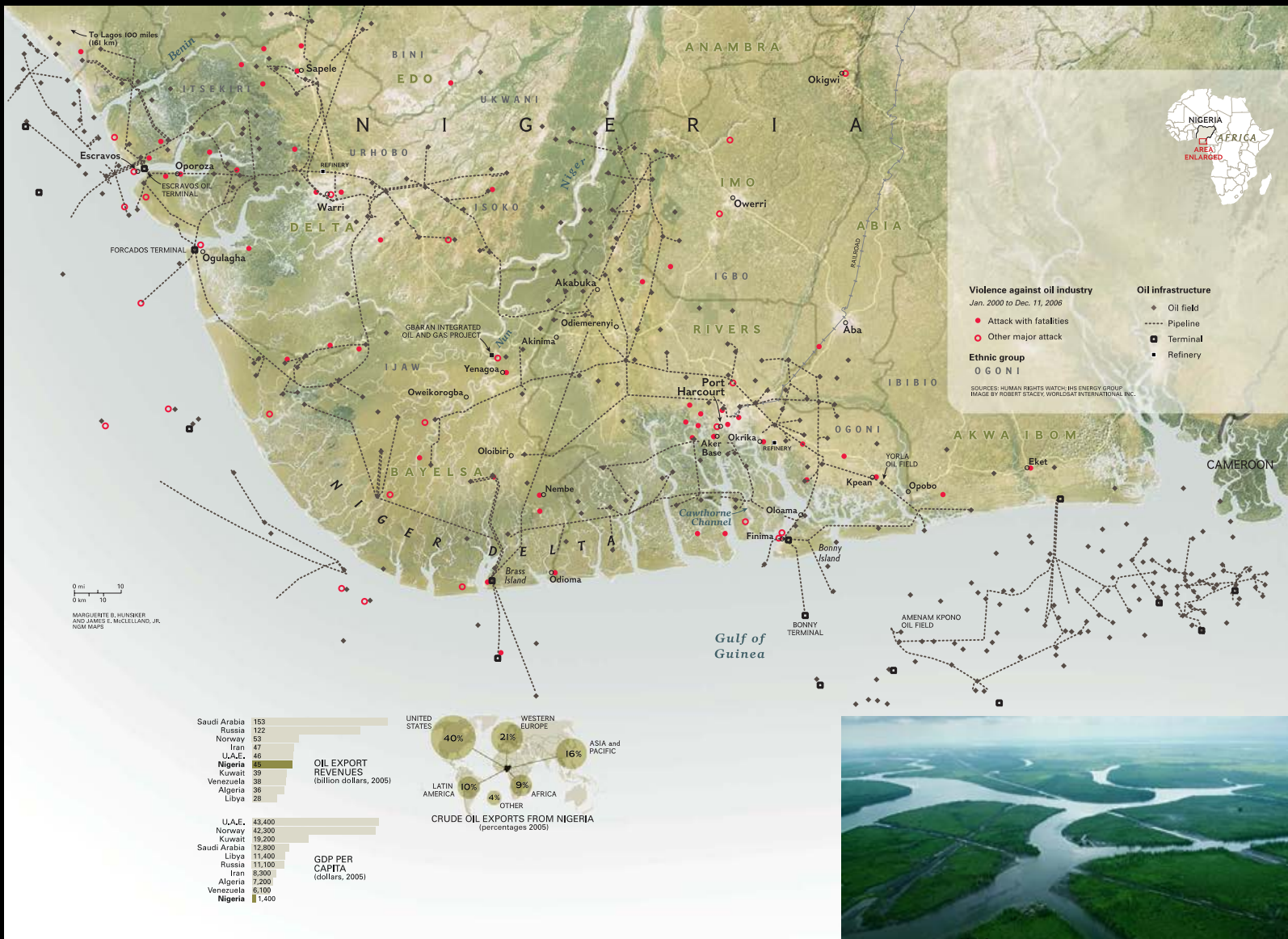
1970-2000 the number of people below \$1 per day increased from 36% (19 million) to 70% (90) million.

51.6% of Nigerians were living below US\$1 per day in 2004, but this increased to 61.2% in 2010 (roughly 100 million people).

HDI indices: Nigeria stands in the 156th position out of 187 countries slightly below the sub-Saharan Africa average and roughly on par with Haiti

Governance

World Bank estimates \$300-400 million in state revenues “missing”
Nigeria ranks below the 25th percentile on the World Wide Governance Indicators on political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption



A Zone of Insurrection 1998-2016

The Crisis of Chieftaincy



Militant Youth Groups and “Cults”



Violent Economies: Oil Theft



Urban Conflicts over Electoral Wards and Local Governments



Inter-Ethnic Land Conflicts Among Oil “Host Communities”



Community-Corporate Struggles



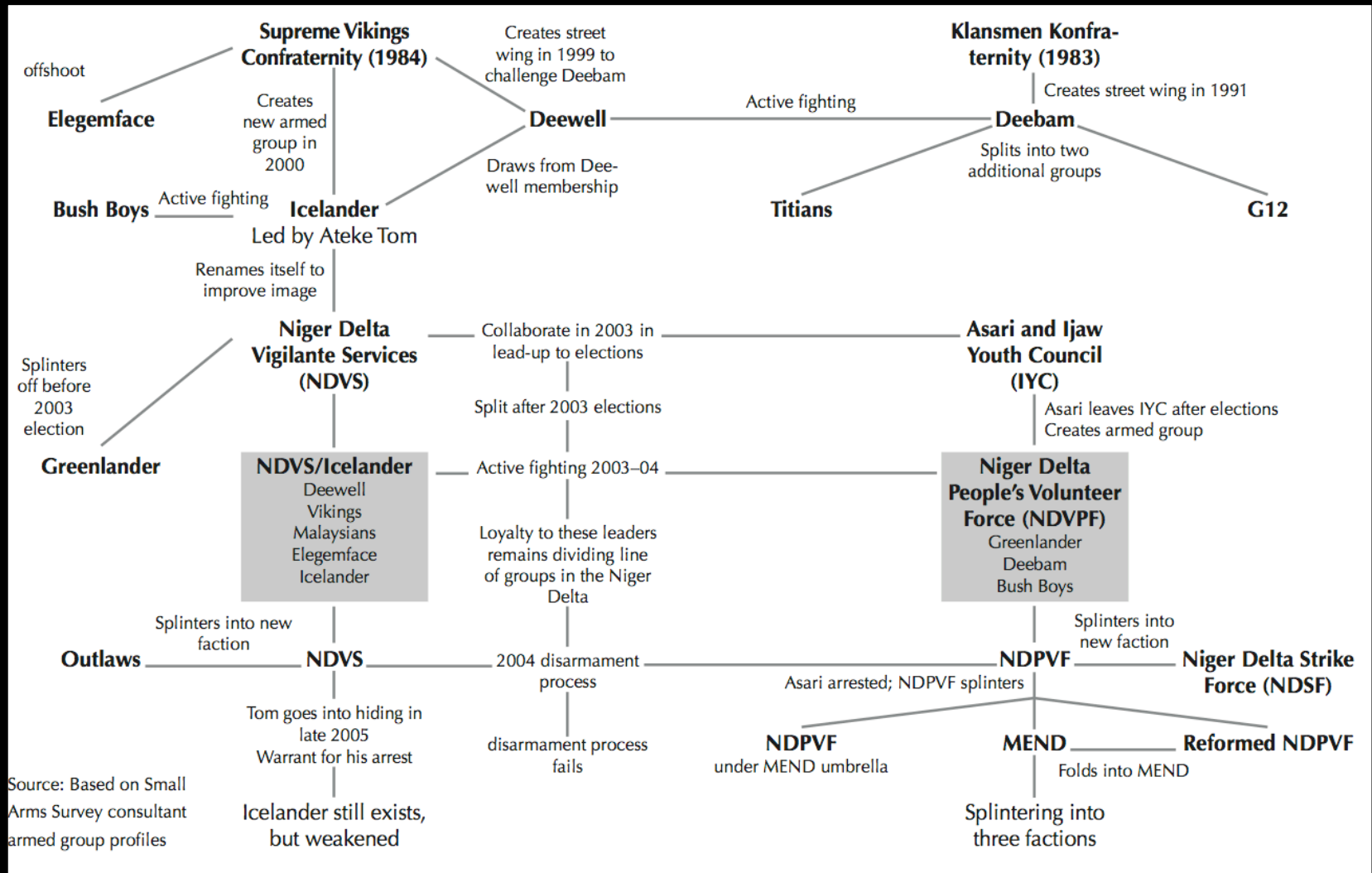
State Security Forces and Community Repression



Niger Delta Insurgents

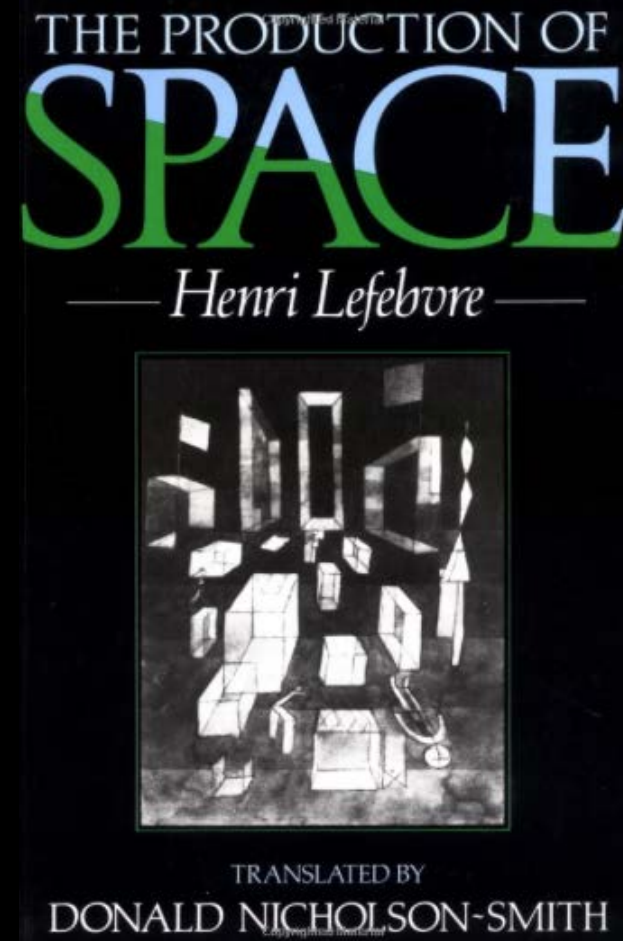


Parcellized Sovereignty and the Complex Fragmentation of Conflict



Nested, Overlapping and Fissioned Spaces

- The local does not disappear....the national and regional take in many places...world space does not merely subsume national space but even precipitates the formation of national spaces through a process of fission. All these spaces are traversed by a myriad of currents. The hypercomplexity of space should now be apparent....each fragment of space...masks not one social relationship but a host of them...
- Henri Lefebvre, *The Social production of Space*



Youth and Life Without Authority



One of the fundamental social realities underpinning the disasters of the Great Lakes region has been **the huge class of 'masterless men'**—excluded youths in an economically stagnant region, who have been the foot-soldiers of war as well as the diggers of minerals.

Joe Trapido, 2015

A Crisis of Masculinity?



The Frontier and the Edges of the State

“the dynamic morphology of the frontier resembles an incessant sea dotted with multiplying archipelagoes of externally alienated and internally homogenous....enclaves.....[It is] a unique territorial ecosystem (in which) various other zones - ...political piracy,...barbaric violence,...of weak citizenship....- exist adjacent to, within or over each other.

Eyal Weizman *Hollow Land*, 2007

Frontier Life and Precarity

Precarity is to a large extent dependent upon the presence or absence of sustaining infrastructures and social and political institutions. Managing populations entails distributing precarity and vulnerability in a way which determines who is worth protecting.

Judith Butler, 2015