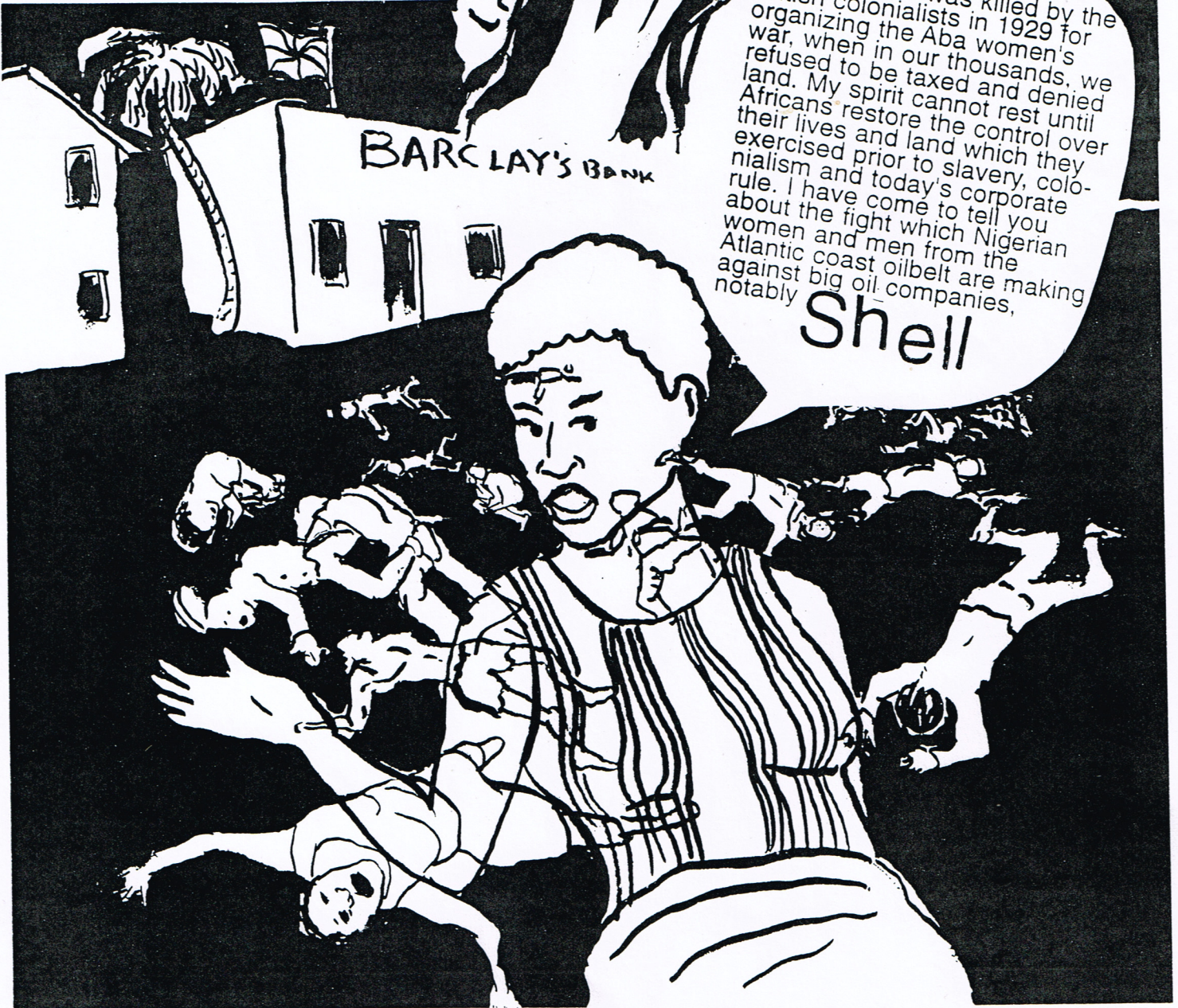


LIFE IN SHELL

TEXT: TERESA E. TURNER + LEIGH S. BROWNHILL
ART: JONATHAN GOLDSTEIN



I am **Hauwa**
I was killed by the British colonialists in 1929 for organizing the Aba women's war, when in our thousands, we refused to be taxed and denied land. My spirit cannot rest until Africans restore the control over their lives and land which they exercised prior to slavery, colonialism and today's corporate rule. I have come to tell you about the fight which Nigerian women and men from the Atlantic coast oilbelt are making against big oil companies, notably **Shell**

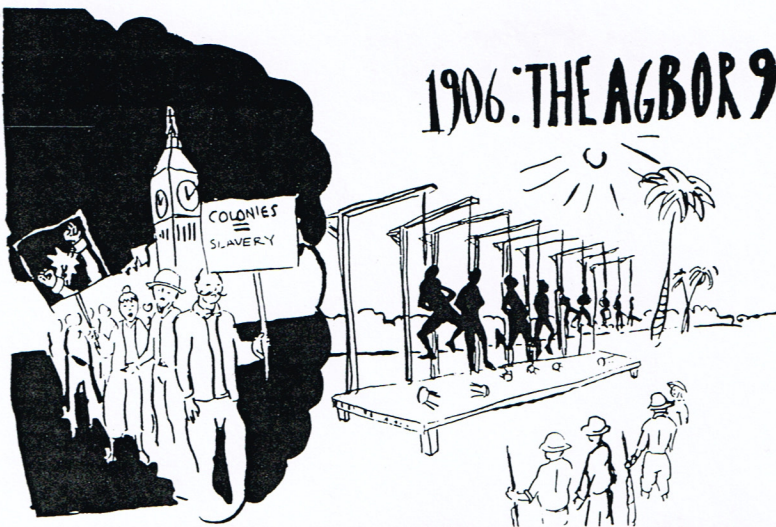
THE MALE DEAL



For centuries certain African men have made deals with European men for their mutual, though unequal, benefit and against the interests of the poor. Our experience in the Aba women's war of 1929 showed that in order to win, women must join together to resist these male deals, and to hold on to our land, resources and community power. Some of our men joined us to fight against the sell-out chiefs and colonialists. The women moved and the men joined. That's what did it.



1906: THE AGBOR 9



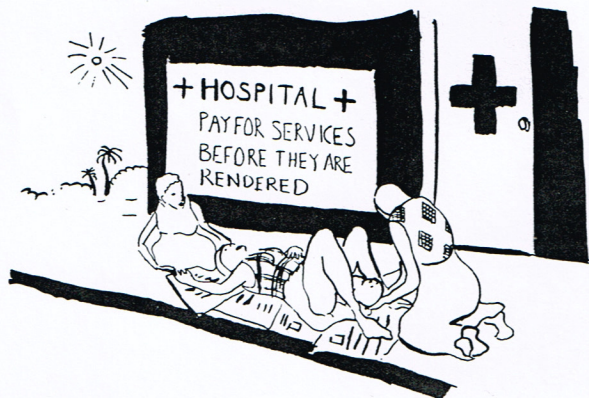
The 'Agbor Nine' were hung by the British in 1906 for standing up for their rights. There was an international outcry. The Anti-Slavery Society protested the executions in the British Parliament. The same Society had helped outlaw slavery the century before.

But the multinational corporations made a 'male deal' with local chiefs in the oil regions. The chiefs were paid off, their children given scholarships and good jobs and in exchange, the chiefs gave the oil companies permission to operate with no regard for common rights in land, and in the most profitable and environmentally destructive way. The male deals resulted in alienation, hardship and death for ordinary people. With their backs to the wall in the 1980s, finally peasant women took a stand.

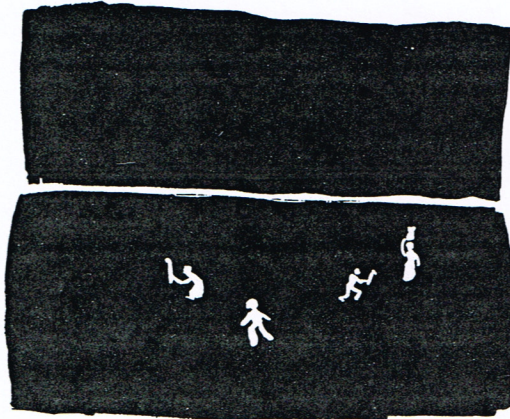
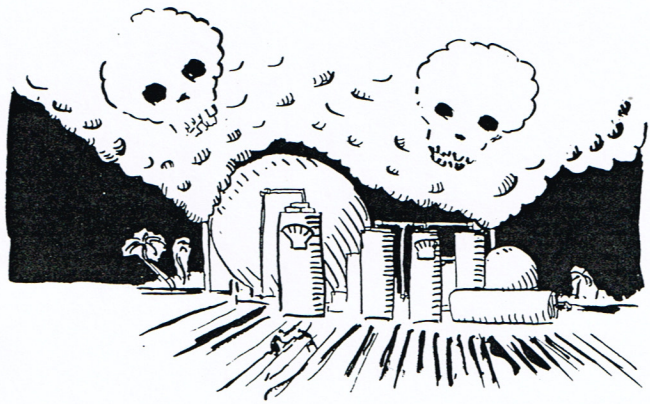


My daughter and her friends staged a demonstration in 1984 to demand an end to the oil companies' practices of pollution and exploitation. Some 10,000 women from the oil town of Warri threw off their dresses to curse the chiefs and the oil company management. Any African man knows that this curse of nakedness renders him permanently impotent.

The economy worsened for ordinary people through the 1980s and 1990s. My rural sisters were especially worried because polluted land and water meant hunger and death for their children. Clinics and schools were closed down and prices rose as the government agreed to World Bank and IMF demands to borrow more and channel more and more oil money to foreign banks for debt service.

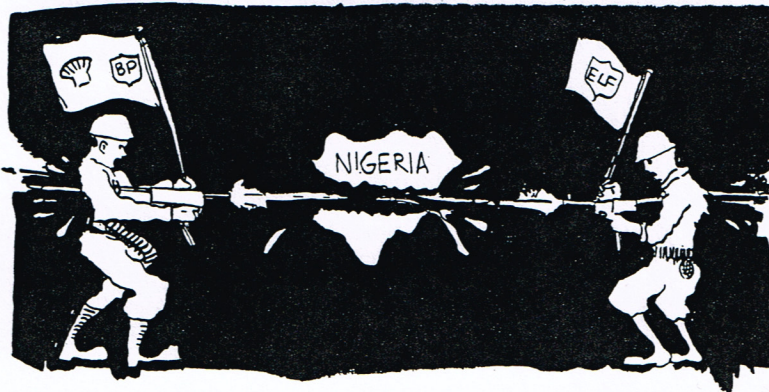
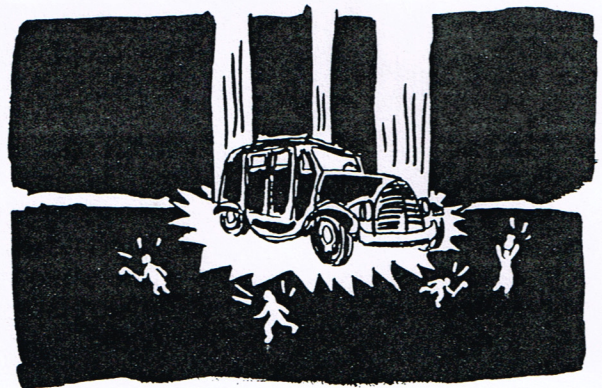


Shell and British Petroleum (BP) came to Nigeria and, from 1937 until 1967 when they were halted for three years by the Biafran War, drilled for oil and in the process laid waste to the countryside and waterways on the coast.



Before the Europeans began taking our land for oil exploration, production, refining and transport, our land was held communally. We divided it up with the guidance of elders who held the history and the interest of the communities in their hearts. There was a division of labour; men and women worked the land together and women had a lot of say over all farming matters.

When the Europeans came, they bribed many elders with high ranking positions, riches, even cars. These elders forgot our communities' history and interests. Men were taken to work in petroleum stations. Women were left with all of the farm work. Worse, whenever the oil companies wanted more land, the corrupt elders found it easy to give away land that was only worked by women. They learned to disrespect women, and they taught that disrespect to other men. They came to despise we who still worked the land that oil companies coveted.



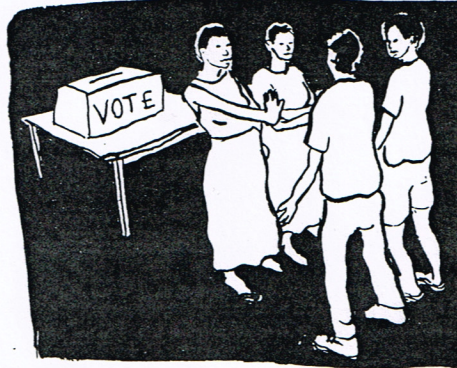
From 1967 to 1970, a civil war was fought for control over oil. The oil-rich area in eastern Nigeria was renamed 'Biafra' and soldiers fought to make it a separate country. The French armed the Biafran successionists while the British and Russians armed the Federalists. All contenders wanted Nigeria's fabulous oil reserves. Over a million died. But a fierce determination to control the black gold beneath their lands and waterways was born among

the farmers and fishing peoples of the Niger Delta. At the forefront were the half million Ogoni people who lived near Port Harcourt on land criss-crossed by hundreds of pipelines, funnelling crude to tankers offshore.

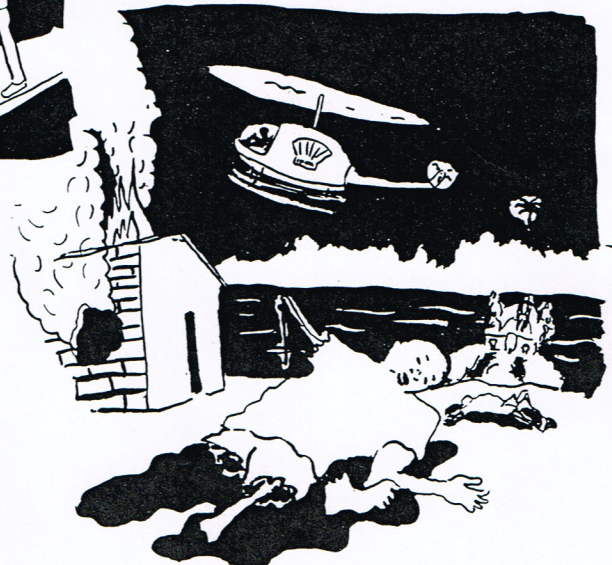


In 1993, 300,000 demonstrators gathered in Bori in Ogoniland to expel Shell for its support of the military dictatorship and its pollution of Nigerian land and water. The members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People or MOSOP declared Shell "persona non grata" in Ogoniland and put a stop to most oil activities in the area. This also meant putting a stop to male-dealing. The sell-outs were exposed and isolated. Any deals they made with Shell were denounced by the small farmers..

On 2 June 1993 Ogoni women stopped their own menfolk from standing for elected office. No more 'elected' elites, selling out the people to the military dictators and big oil.

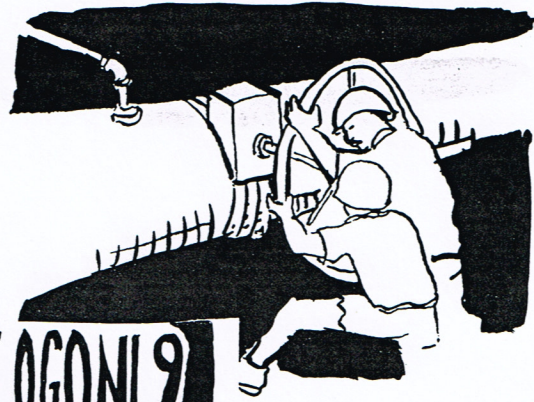


The women were prominent in MOSOP, and Ken Saro-Wiwa, writer and ecology activist, was their champion against Shell. Saro-Wiwa accused Shell of environmental racism. .

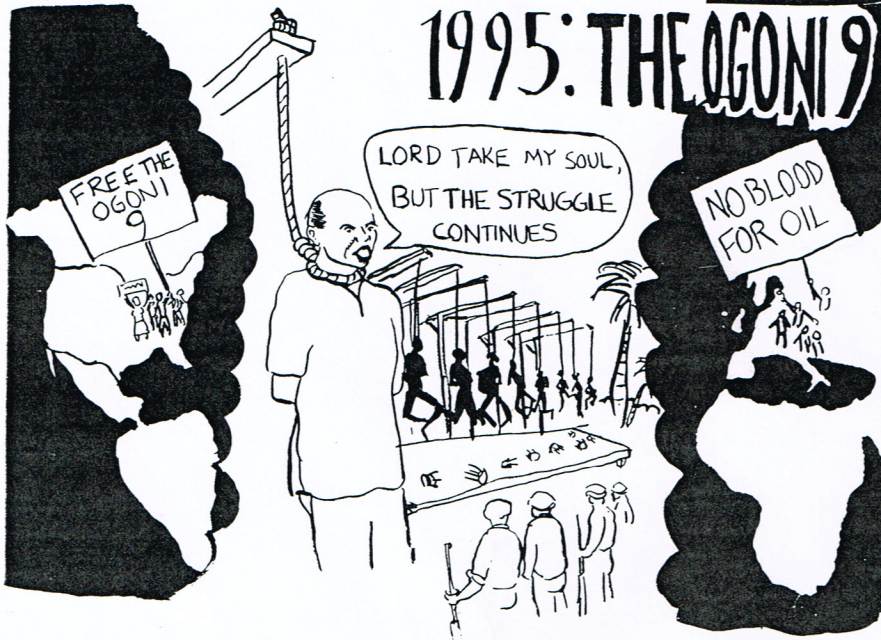


Nigeria's military, armed with weapons purchased by Shell, retaliated by killing villagers, lying to the media that the deaths resulted from 'tribal conflict.'

Oil workers went on strike in protest against the killings of villagers and against rampant corruption in the military government. Using extreme violence, the dictatorship broke the ten-week long strike in 1994 and jailed union leaders.

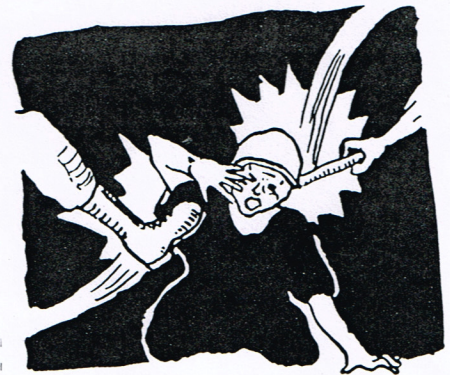


1995: THE OGONI 9



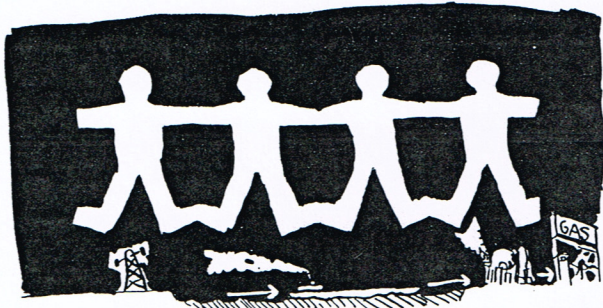
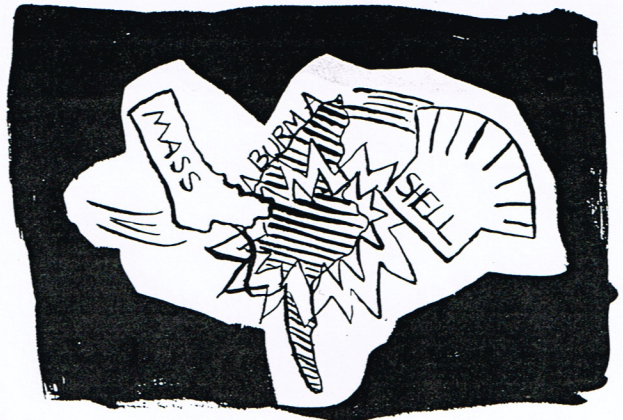
Then on 10 November 1995, after a kangaroo court trial, the dictator, Sani Abacha hung the Ogoni Nine, including the most prominent anti-Shell activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. Shell ignored pleas to halt the executions. An international outcry gathered force. "Boycott Shell! Boycott Nigerian oil!"

The military refused to release Ken's body to his mother. They banned the wearing of black in Ogoniland in an attempt to suppress public mourning of the nine. Ken's mother plus other women went to the prison wearing black to demand the body of Ken Saro-Wiwa.



Nigerian activists who were not killed or forced underground fled into political exile. Many MOSOP members escaped to other African countries, to Europe and to North America. They built resistance to Shell's devastation and solidarity with prisoners and peoples of the oilbelt. This focused attention on Shell's support for dictatorship and its bad oilfield practices elsewhere, including in Burma.

The government of the state of Massachusetts passed the 'Burma Bill' to ban state purchases from any companies doing business in Burma. Shell quickly got out of Burma but joined with other corporations to secure a legal ruling in 1988 to criminalize consumer boycotts, calling them 'rogue foreign policy making.' Consumers and citizens appealed the US court ruling and asserted their right to buy products produced in ways consistent with respect for the ecosystem and human rights.



The international oil workers' organization, ICEM demanded and got the release of Nigerian oil unionists from prison. In its 1998 convention, ICEM pledged to replace the power of big oil corporations with an international network of oil workers' national organizations.

The time is coming soon when people who say they will not buy oil from Shell will look to buy directly from the people who live on oil-rich lands over which they have asserted control.. Much progress has been made in Nigeria on two fronts: building grassroots democracy and building international connections between the Nigerian democratic organisations and their counterparts elsewhere in the world. How can we expand these two forces for change?



By strengthening our grassroots groups, standing against male dealers, controlling our resources and building power. By joining with other democratic groups who are doing the same. This way we can undermine corporate power by trading directly with other democratic groups elsewhere which have taken control of their resources. Only then will my spirit rest, when Africans and people everywhere restore the control over their lives and land which they exercised prior to slavery, colonialism and today's corporate rule.

Info:ONLINE::shell-nigeria-action@essential.org, mosop.can@istar.ca WRITTEN: Africa:Nigerian Women & Grassroots Environmentalism. Labor, Capital, & society 30:(April, 1997), Terisa Turner. Ogoni: The Struggle Continues.(1995) World Council of Churches (1996), Deborah Robinson. VIDEO:Delta Force,Glenn Ellis.THANKS: Michael Fleshman, and Deborah Robinson, and Diana Wiwa.