



## BOROISM AS A FUNDAMENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE NIGER DELTA STRUGGLE

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**ABSTRACT:** *Boroism has come to be associated with the fight for political recognition and resource control for the Ijo ethnic group in Nigeria's Niger Delta. A deep respect for the person of the late Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, especially in the face of injustice, poverty, exploitation, and persecution, gave rise to this belief system. Today, activists and militant groups fighting for resource control, political recognition, and equitable treatment from the federal government and other major tribes like the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa/Fulani have made Boroism a core tenet of their beliefs. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how the principles and beliefs of the man known as Boro developed into a potent ideology that is currently serving as a symbol for hundreds of groups and individuals in the Niger Delta region in the struggle against political inequity, exploitation, and oppression. The study reveals that there has been a shift from the fundamental principles of Boroism as some individuals and groups have started to use the Niger Delta struggle as a vehicle to further their own personal agenda and self-serving goals, by spiritedly pursuing the fight against the government, international oil companies, and private individuals that oppress and exploit the Niger Delta, those who sincerely adhere to the ideas of Boroism have managed to preserve the legacies of Boro. This study utilizes secondary sources of data for its analysis and would be descriptive and analytical in nature.*

**KEYWORDS:** Boroism, Fundamental, Philosophy, Niger Delta, Struggle.



## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, organized groups advocating or pressuring governments and corporate entities to change their policies and decisions have been united by a shared set of beliefs that directs their activities and actions and helps them to reach their goals of agitation. Frequently, these highly developed belief systems centre on the traits and dispositions of people who, in their day, had to contend with adverse governmental regulations or battle for the liberation of a harmed or oppressed community. As a result, the idea that one can achieve goals through agitation and passive resistance against using force by law enforcement or other authorities emerged from the strong personalities and morals of individuals like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi. These individuals developed a philosophy that advocates for making demands or stirring up controversy without using violence.

The ideology of Boroism also emerged or evolved in the same way. It is a belief system that grew out of the personality of the Late Major Isaac Adaka Boro, and it has matured into a foundational philosophy in the Niger Delta struggle, since it is the fundamental ideology that provides motivation and legitimacy to the different factions stirring up trouble in the Niger Delta for a variety of reasons, such as demanding political equality and resource control, developing infrastructure, and providing welfare benefits to the region's residents to ease their lot in life. The Niger Delta has long been the centre of Nigeria's oil production, but despite this, the region has endured a great deal of injustice from the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies that explore and exploit the region's oil (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Larry, 2014).

Isaac Boro took action in response to the federal government's disregard for the Niger Delta region. He formed a small militia to fight for the defence of the Niger Delta people's rights and interests in what is now known as "The Twelve Days Revolution" (Tebekaemi, 1982; Ogbogbo, 2013). In light of this, it is important to comprehend what motivated Boro to rebel against the Niger Delta's marginalisation, exploitation, and neglect in 1966 despite strong military opposition, as well as how his philosophy has developed since his death in 1968 to become a key component of the strategies used by the region's various groups in their fight for better treatment by the federal government.

### **The Man Isaac Adaka Boro and the Niger Delta Region**

The Niger Delta is a region in southern Nigeria that stretches from the Gulf of Guinea to the Atlantic Ocean. It comprises the following states in Nigeria: Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Edo, Cross River, Ondo, Abia, Imo, and Akwa Ibom (Derefaka and Okorobia, 2007). Although historically, the Niger Delta was only supposed to consist of three states-Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta, for the purposes of this essay, the current state's designation of the Niger Delta as defined by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act (2000) will be used. According to Nigeria's most recent census, the region is home to over 31 million people. It is the largest wetland in continental Africa and has a significant crude oil reserve (Derefaka and Okorobia, 2007).

Numerous divided communities that house Nigeria's ethnic populations can be found in the region. As the home ethnic group of Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, the Ijo ethnic nationality is regarded as the most influential in modern times. It is also the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta and the ethnic group from whence the concept of Boroism developed



(Sorgwe, 2014). The Niger Delta region was and still is underdeveloped, exploited, oppressed, and treated unfairly; poverty, diseases, environmental degradation, pollution, underdevelopment, and hardship are all part of the region's lot. These conditions persisted from the 1950s to the 1960s, the decade that brought Boro to national attention. The Niger Delta is intended to retain the cow while the rest of the nation milk from it, in the words of Osaghae (2001).

The story of the people living in the Niger Delta remains largely unchanged, as the region remains largely underdeveloped even after producing a president. This places the region among the least developed globally, and it is also one of the most exploited, with little development to make up for the suffering of the Niger Delta's inhabitants. Chief Jasper Pepple Boro and Mrs Lydia Boro (née Gozi of Agbere), of blessed memory, gave birth to the man Isaac Adaka Boro on September 10, 1938, at Oloibiri, in what is now the Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The birth took place in a region marked by extreme oppression and injustice (Olali, 2013, Ogbogbo, 2005). His natural surroundings and the human community he came into contact with, greatly influenced the person or man that Isaac Boro grew up to become.

As far as his natural surroundings were concerned, Boro was a very perceptive and intelligent person who at a young age started to notice many negative environmental factors such as the yearly flooding, the absence of a reliable transportation and communication system in his immediate area, and the pollution of the local waters brought on by the operations of oil exploration companies. He, therefore, formed an opinion about the society surrounding him based on his observations of his natural surroundings and his interpretation of these variables. As a native of the Niger Delta, he felt obligated to improve the harsh situation he found himself in for the benefit of all the locals, especially the young and old who felt powerless in the face of such circumstances.

On the side of human society, Isaac Boro was fortunate to have a well-refined upbringing, full of empathy and education, which helped shape him into an extremely self-assured, intelligent, and selfless young man with a very high moral standard and value system. This made him a force against social vices like oppression, injustice, inequality, corruption, and any other acts that he believed to be detrimental to the harmonious and peaceful living of people in society (Olali, 2013). Thus, the human society that he interacted with as a young man influenced his personality as he grew up to become an empathic, selfless and sacrificial young man who was ready to do what was good at whatever cost and to oppose and fight against what he perceived to be wrong at whatever cost.

Due to his mentality and character qualities becoming incompatible with Nigerian society in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, these two variables combined to create a man with a great deal of promise but also a great deal of responsibility. Throughout his short life, the incompatibility of his personality with Nigerian society was a persistent problem. When Boro was a teacher in 1958, his eloquent and brilliant personality helped him realize that there were more important issues to deal with, issues that were affecting him personally, and he wanted to be in a position of authority, respect, and power so he could shape the way his society behaved. His passion for justice, truth, and integrity put him at odds with his superiors in the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) throughout his tenure as an officer in the 1950s and early 1960s. He was fired from the Nigerian Police Force in 1961 for allegedly exhibiting indiscipline and



disobedience to established authority. It goes without saying that these accusations were unfounded (Tebekaemi, 1982).

During his time at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, he encountered difficulties due to his distinct character and personality. He was a well-bred, intelligent, and temperamental young man with a strong moral code who was always willing to stand up against oppression and injustice (Tebekaemi, 1982). At the age of 23, Isaac Boro applied to the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, where he was accepted to pursue a degree in chemistry. It was during his time there that he became acquainted with the political climate of 1960s Nigeria, a country rife with ethnicity, nepotism, tribalism, and segregation based on religious affiliations (Tebekaemi, 1982).

During his two campaigns for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Student Union President, Isaac Boro witnessed how ethnicity and tribalism were influencing the political climate there. Tebekaemi (1982) states that he was compelled to abstain from his first election in favour of a fellow protestant, Kele Okereke, based on religion after receiving calls from "Protestant Igbo Students". At the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he won the presidency of the Student Union Government in his third election. He showed an unwavering dedication to prioritizing the needs and interests of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka students over his own after winning the Student Union presidential election. He did this by exhibiting a brave, expressive, innovative, and tough leadership style. Because of the socio-political issues that beset the university and were especially harmful to minority groups like the Ijo ethnic nationality, his leadership style which was clearly greatly influenced by his upbringing and experiences brought him into conflict with members of the faculty as well as students.

When Isaac Boro, then the president of the student union, sued the Nigerian federal government in 1964 over claimed irregularities and other electoral vices during the general elections, it was the first time he had ever openly fought against injustice, persecution, and marginalization. This was a very brave gesture by a young man from a minority group, in any other case. He was under pressure to withdraw his lawsuit, but by then, he had already lost control of his university career. This was the Nigerian society in the 1960s, full of socio-political difficulties, so even though his action was correct, it lacked the essential support. However, as a result of his activities, which thrust him into the national spotlight, people began to notice him and his personality as a powerful humanist prepared to take on the struggle against oppression, injustice, and marginalization against anyone (Boro, 2011).

Isaac Boro was shaped into a radical social crusader by his experiences as a police officer, a student union activist, and an indigene of a minority ethnic group in the Niger Delta. His lifelong mission was to fight for social welfare, justice, and freedom from oppression, injustice, and marginalization for everyone in his path (Olali, 2013). Therefore, Isaac Boro's personal philosophy was that like-minded people should band together to fight for the Niger Delta peoples' freedom and self-determination against the government and oil multinational corporations, whose main goals were to explore and exploit the region's oil resources without considering the widespread destitution, neglect, pollution of the environment, and exploitation that the region was subject to by those in authority in the regional and national levels. Isaac Boro used this kind of mentality to direct his actions and strategies in an attempt to raise awareness of the Niger Delta's dire situation on a national and worldwide level. It is important to remember that Isaac Boro believed that using violence was the best way to achieve social liberation rather than having conversations. This was a major influence on the agitation



techniques he used, which are still a vital component of the agitations of many groups in the Niger Delta.

Isaac Boro believed that every social component of society should be acknowledged and permitted to participate freely in socio-political circles without facing any kind of discrimination or segregation. This idea of equality and mutual inclusiveness is another crucial component of Boro's philosophy towards social justice (Olali, 2013). Consequently, Isaac Boro found himself in an awkward situation where he had to fight against what he perceived to be acts of injustice, oppression, discrimination, and exploitation of his beloved Niger Delta due to his personality and legacies, which have evolved to form the foundation of the philosophy of Boroism.

Isaac Boro's determination to put an end to all wrongs within his power and use violence as his only ally in the fight for a better Niger Delta was strengthened by his acute awareness of the acts of injustice, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination that the people of the Niger Delta endured at the hands of the government and multinational oil companies. Isaac Boro's battle with the Nigerian Military Government of Ironsi, which he believed to be encouraging "oppression and exploitation," reached its zenith on a fateful day in February 1966 when he led a twelve-day revolution against the federal government (Tebekaemi, 1982). Because of this, his actions during those twelve days of opposing the federal government and, alongside his fellow members of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, establishing the Niger Delta Republic continue to stand as the most audacious move made by a member of a minority group to address national issues that directly affect his people. What he said on that devoted February day in 1966 explains a lot about the nature of the Niger Delta conflict.

"Today is a great day, not only in your lives but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps it will be the greatest day in a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring the heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world, what and how we feel about oppression. Therefore, remember your seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats, remember also your poverty-stricken people, remember to your petroleum which is pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom" (Tebekaemi, 1982).

With those comments, the twelve-day revolution of Isaac Boro began, marking a turning point in the history of the Niger Delta's fight against exploitation and injustice. He succeeded in his mission of bringing attention to the suffering of the Niger Delta people, even though the military government led by Ironsi put an end to his movement. Despite the odds being stacked against him, Boro managed to alter the course of the story of the exploitation and tyranny that the people of the Niger Delta endured in just twelve days. Before his demise on May 16, 1968, amid the Nigerian civil war, Isaac Boro imbued the Nigerian Army with his ideology and attitude of lofty moral standards, intelligence, bravery, discipline, and vitality (Boro, 2011). His magnetic personality served as a defence against injustice, prejudice, exploitation, and persecution, and during his brief tenure in the Army, he left a lasting effect on everyone he encountered. In fact, he was so fearsome that everyone feared him. The aforementioned legacies and the ideological framework that Boro established together comprise the fundamental beliefs and tenets of the "Philosophy of Boroism."



## **Boroism as a Fundamental Philosophy in the Niger Delta Struggle**

At this point, it is important to clarify that "Boroism" is an ideological concept that emerged from the philosophical and practical legacies of Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro. It is the main ideological creed of the various groups, activists, and even opportunists who have taken over the fight against oppression and exploitation in an effort to improve the Niger Delta region. It is the belief that it is better to live a short life and make a positive impact on the world than to live forever and leave the world in chaos and suffering under one's watch. Several organizations in the Niger Delta region, such as the Ijaw National Congress (INC), the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and others, have continued the Niger Delta struggle that Boro initiated several years after his death. These groups use both non-violent and violent tactics to draw the attention of the federal government and multinational oil companies to their demands. The same demands were made by Isaac Boro, for whose cause the philosophy was developed.

While some youth groups have started to use the Niger Delta struggle as a vehicle to further their own personal agenda and self-serving goals at the expense of the starving and suffering Niger Delta residents, it is evident that the Niger Delta struggle has changed since Boro's time. There has been a shift from the fundamental principles of Boroism in this regard. By spiritedly pursuing the fight against the government, international oil companies, and private individuals that oppress and exploit the Niger Delta, those who sincerely adhere to the ideas of Boroism have managed to preserve the legacies of Boro.

Two organizations that have carried on the Niger Delta struggle by the fundamental ideas and precepts of Boroism are the Ijaw National Congress (INC) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), which serve as the common forums for the Ijo people of the Niger Delta to voice their opinions regarding activism, exploitation, and oppression in the Niger Delta. For example, the Ijaw Youth Council is made up of brave, intelligent, and visionary people who have brought the Niger Delta fight to the attention of the world. In an effort to draw the attention of the federal government to the predicaments of the people living in the Niger Delta region, various groups engaged in agitation in the region from the late 1990s to 2010. They used violence against government oil installations and multinational oil companies, much like Boro did in the past to emphasize his points (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

The emphasis of Boroism's doctrine has shifted away from violence since the start of the Amnesty programme and the issuance of amnesty to organizations resisting exploitation, political and economic negligence, and oppression in the Niger Delta. Due to the fact that it serves as a reminder to activists, former agitators, and everyone else in the Niger Delta region of the necessity of fighting against oppression, injustice, neglect, and exploitation, Boroism's ideology is still very much relevant to the Niger Delta struggle in these altered conditions. And to accomplish this, agitators and activists in the Niger Delta must acknowledge the importance of empathy, high moral standards, and education in the Boroism philosophy.

At this point, these elements of the philosophy are what is required to maintain the Niger Delta struggle and establish an environment in which those with high moral standards and integrity are the front-runners in the fight for a better community. By adhering to the fundamental principles of Boroism, activists and agitators in the Niger Delta would gain the respect of other Nigerian communities as well as the global community. This is because the people in the Niger Delta will no longer be perceived as touts and criminals whose sole



expertise lies in using militancy and criminality to advance the region's agenda. Despite everything mentioned above, the use of violence is a fundamental component of the Boroism doctrine and should only be used in the most dire situations of exploitation, oppression, and injustice.

## CONCLUSION

It is crucial that young people, activists, and agitators understand the core values and principles that made Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro endearing and allowed him to leave behind such high standards and admirable legacies that are now celebrated by everyone associated with the Niger Delta region. Boroism is a belief system that developed out of the legacy and personality of the blessed memory of Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro. Since the philosophy serves as a source of inspiration and guiding principle to the various groups involved in the Niger Delta struggle, it has become extremely fundamental in the fight for a better Niger Delta. In light of this, young people, agitators, activists, and everyone else in the Niger Delta should thus put the betterment of this region above themselves and refrain from acting like opportunists whose sole goal is to utilize the Niger Delta conflict to further their own self-serving political and financial agenda.

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