

Oil: Niger Delta and The Making of Militia Capitalists: a theoretical assessment

¹Luke Amadi, ²Imoh Imoh-Itah, ³Edmund F Obomanu

^{1, 2, 3} Department of Political Science & Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract: As democracy returns to Nigeria in the late 1990s, novel forms of militia agitations and struggle re-emerged and took a different turn which deepened in the decade. The paper is a theoretical and descriptive analysis set within the period 1999 to 2014 which conceptualizes the post amnesty Niger Delta leaders operating within the State orbit as militia capitalists to differentiate them from the brand of struggle instituted by Isaac Boro in 1966 and environmental activism of Ken Saro Wiwa in the early 1990s. A shared historical memory of Boro and Saro Wiwa is built to define, mediate, and construct an ideological leaning at variance with contemporary militia in the region. The aim is to demonstrate the strategies adopted by the militia capitalists and understand how and why such proclivities as resource capitalism may not chart the much expected collective and equitable transformation of the impoverished Niger Delta rather results to inequality, economic empowerment of the few in the guise of militancy and disempowerment of the majority, leading to a more glaring parody best alluded to as resource militia capitalism. Urgent policy intervention is sought to redress this development gap.

Keywords: Post Amnesty, Militia Capitalist, Development, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta is a coastal oil rich minority region in South- South Nigeria. Its resource struggle gained popular attention in 1966 following the Jasper Adaka Boro twelve days revolution informed by marginalization of the resource rich but poor region. This was followed closely by subsequent oil minority agitations. The most prominent was Ken Saro Wiwa's environmental activism of the 1990s which internationalized the struggle. A defining feature of both struggles is their non-capitalist undertone.

Conversely, following the political space provided by nascent democracy in 1999, especially in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States, there emerged a number of ethnic militia groups such as the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People (MEND) and its wing in Delta State known as Camp five, Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) among several others.

In addition to the militia groups, there was a scourge of cultism with groups such as the Icelanders, Greenlanders, Dey Well, KKK, Germans, Dey Gbam, Mafia Lords, and Vultures. Mostly formed in the early 1990s as university fraternities (Osaghae, et al;2011).

Cults are a group of individuals who subscribe to an oath of allegiance and secrecy and rely mostly on violent means to achieve their ends. Their membership, mode of operation, initiation rites which involve oaths of allegiance, remain secret (Osaghae, et al;2011).

Unlike the militant groups, once individuals join a cult, they are in that cult for life. Cult membership as Osaghae, (et al;2011) argue ranges from 20 to 3,000 persons. They contend that some are pro-state or pro-government, others are anti-state, while some have no clear political objectives.

Most of the cult leaders were hired as political thugs during the electioneering campaigns. After the elections, they were dumped by the political elites. The only option left was a more legitimized platform to wage war against the Nigerian State. To consummate this inclination, militancy took a new coloration which deepened during the decade as cult leaders aligned and rebranded their organizations with seemingly pro emancipatory proclivities with militia groups.

Duverger (1976) argues that militia is a kind of private army whose members are enrolled on military lines, and are subject to the same discipline and the same training as soldiers, wearing uniforms and badges, and ready to meet the enemy with weapons in physical combat.

Osaghae, et al; (2011) posit that in the Niger-Delta, the term "militants" refers to gunmen who make political demands, including the release of imprisoned leaders, cash reparations for communities, change of electoral candidates and a greater share of oil revenues, among other issues. They argue that these political demands distinguish them, albeit tenuously, from criminals who simply kidnap people for money.

A striking difference between militias and army according to Duverger (1976) stems from the fact that members of the militia remain civilians who may be obliged to meet and drill frequently, and must always be ready to put themselves at the dispositions of their leaders. They are neither mobilized on a particular basis nor maintained on a full time basis.

The Niger Delta militancy provides a picture of contradictory struggle but interesting insight to understand the underlying concepts and assumptions of post amnesty militant leaders. There are a number of writings propagating either the commemorative or pejorative view of militancy. Also striking was the way in which most references to the militias and militancy in the Niger Delta were built both as a youth emancipatory tact, ethnic minority solidarity, freedom fighters, resource appropriation paraphernalia and national sabotage. All combine to fuel contradictions on the real picture of the resurgent phenomenon.

Some conceive militancy as a moral code in debates about social equality of marginalized, volatile and economically alienated minority groups (Obi, 2001; Osaghae, et al; 2011; Amadi & Alapiki, 2014). Others argue that it is a reinvigoration of long suppressed face of economic exploitation of Nigerian elites and Western Multinationals (Saro Wiwa, 1992; Obi, 2001; Ikelegbe, 2006). Another perspective in popular discourse contends that militia groups in the Niger Delta are instruments to overcome alienation and neglect by the federal government (Ibaba, 2008).

The human and state centric debates abound. State – centric literature conceives the State and the multinational oil corporations as exploitative instruments (Obi, 2001; Amadi & Alapiki, 2014). While the human-centric perspective argues that the people of the Niger Delta are deprived of social wellbeing, basic amenities and access to the oil wealth (Isike, 2005). Both in political and economic arena, this revisited philosophy became a growing concern for resource agitation dynamics (Amadi & Alapiki, 2014).

The most popular perception in the area is that their marginalization is related to the minority status of the region in Nigeria (Obi, 2001). The notion of marginalization and alienation of the Niger Delta remains a simple moniker in popular discourse about the region.

More pertinent are debates which examine the transition “from pirates to militants” in explicating a vortex of implications of the resurgent contradictions of oil resource exploitation and dynamics of militia transition (Ukiwo, 2007).

In the heated hostage taking dynamics of the mid-2000s, the rhetoric of violence, insecurity and crisis ignited elite disillusion and anxiety. The Kaiama declaration of 1998 marked the formal launching of armed insurrection against the Nigerian State. Organized largely by ethnic militia youths of which over 70% are of the Ijaw extraction who accused the Nigerian state of systematic looting of their God given resources and marginalization (Onoyume, 2007).

The ethnic militia groups witnessed a novel turn in the public sphere of kidnapping, oil pipeline vandalization, oil theft, illegal refining of crude oil and sales of petroleum products, extortion, abduction of oil workers, hostage taking especially on the creeks of the coastal region as a set of –guiding tactics to have access and fair share of the resources on “their land”.

In the late 2003, in an effort to increase their access to weapons and other resources, many of the cult groups formed alliances with either Asari-Dokubo’s or Ateke Tom’s armed group as the two leaders fought for control of oil bunkering routes. Some others maintained their cultist identity and persisted in the agitation such as Outlaws led by the late Sogboma George. Niger Delta agitation became a platform built on and used by youths to attract national and international attention, chart a common cause, articulate and aggregate some interests, define, mediate, and construct various conceptions of marginalization of the region. It also provides insight into environmental degradation and alternative survival strategy such as artisanal refineries by Niger Delta youths as Ugor (2013) observes among the youths of Gbekor community in Delta State. These perhaps informed the varying underlying assumptions, strategies and ideological underpinnings of the militants.

The details of the activities of the militants are painted in horrific colors often presented as dreadful elements, in another instance implicitly within a revolutionary metaphor. Their tact was often explored and sought for, in order to highlight their esoteric sojourn in the creeks.

The persistent crisis conflagrated with rapid decrease in returns on crude oil, the mainstay of Nigeria's economy and withdrawal of several expatriate oil workers of multinational oil companies to avert further abduction. In 2009 President Yar'Adua granted amnesty to the Niger Delta militants.

In any case, the neglect of the region by the federal government not only challenges the historical narrative that brands militancy as socially unjust but also contests the plausibility of the amnesty programme to rehabilitate the ex-militants especially in the context of sustainable empowerment and self-reliant development.

Similarly, there are a number of writings propagating either laudatory or opposing views of the amnesty programme (Adaramola,2009;Ojo,2009;Olowu,2009; Egwemi,2010). Related accounts and narratives of revisionist history reflect practices of "negative commemoration" of the federal Government on the Niger Delta transformation agenda amidst poverty (Ajaero,2008).

The post amnesty era provides novel insights on recent trends about the ex- militants –the logic of their resurgent struggles and novel strategies within the State orbit is of paramount concern to this paper. Recent debates argue that the agitation was neither an appendage of the previous version of the struggle instituted by Boro and Wiwa nor a collective clamor for self-determination or economic transformation, rather a different version of agitation by a group and for a group (Obadare,2013).

The debate advanced in this paper builds on the latter perspective and makes an original contribution which seeks to identify the political and economic morality of the post amnesty militia as there are increasing concerns about massive poverty and high visibility of inequality and more recently, the novel fraternization of the ex- militant leaders with the federal government.

The paper argues that what has emerged is militia capitalists and substantially develops this theoretical debate in light of recent changes and novel trends taking place between the ex-militant leaders and the federal government. While there appears to be agreement that there is marginalization of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian State which resulted to militancy and subsequent amnesty by the federal government, there is little empirical data supporting the negative effects of the capital expropriation of the militia capitalists on the wider Niger Delta society at post amnesty. This empirical rigor is a limitation to this study which relies largely on secondary data as it is open to further research. While this seems to make the article one that is concerned with policy implications, it is first and foremost preoccupied with the understanding of militia capitalism, its resurgence, theoretical conceptualization and in particular the poverty implications for the wider Niger Delta society.

What follows is the theoretical framework, exploration of militia capitalism, systemic exploitation and the paradox of poverty, Identifying the militia capitalists and conclusion.

1.1 Theoretical Framework:

This paper is an analytical exploration which derives from desk review of existing secondary data and similar theoretical literature. The intractable nature and character of Niger Delta oil resource exploitation and exploration has resulted to the loss of huge human and material resources.No issue in contemporary Nigerian politics is more convoluted than the oil resource dynamics in the Niger Delta. Since 1956 following the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in the Niger delta, there has been contradictory images of oil exploitation in Nigeria (Amadi and Alapiki,2014).This dynamic is explored from the resource curse theoretical framework.

Sachs and Warner (1995) popularized the resource curse debate which demonstrates poor economic development of the natural resource abundant States. Resource curse is concerned with countries at the other end of the spectrum, with failed states (Collier, 2007). These are countries either trapped in a vicious cycle of low income, weak states, non-consensual politics, low and inefficient investment or have slid back principally through conflict, invariably civil conflict (Collier, 2007).

In recent years, the existence of natural resources in developing countries has been seen as a source of conflict and, therefore, a threat to national security (Okogu, 2007). The Niger-Delta which shares similar fate is what Ibeanu (2005)

termed ‘the paradox of plenty’, which refers to the tendency for petroleum wealth to create enormous poverty within the Niger-Delta. Major implications have been environmental and ecological breakdown, marginalisation, resource conflicts, bloodletting, weak institutional structures, poverty etc, which mediates relations between global oil multinationals, the federal government and the local people of the oil-bearing communities.

This framework is most suitable in studying oil resource failure in the Niger Delta in connection with militia capitalism and failed economic transformation of the region. A brief genealogical mapping of oil resource exploitation in the Niger Delta since 1956 provides a gloomy picture as poverty, conflicts, alienation, violence, marginalization and extra judicial killings are common features such as the Umuechem killings in Rivers State in 1990 by the Nigerian State, the Odi massacre, a community in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta, during President Obasanjo’s administration, the Gbaramatu extra-judicial killings in Delta State by a Military Joint Task Force(JTF), during President Yar’Aduah’s administration. The “Ogoni genocide” of 1994, environmental degradation and massive pollution in Ogoni land(UNEP,2011).Threats to women’s vulnerability arising from environmental security challenges such as acid rains, gas flaring, water pollution, communal crisis and killings arising from oil rents, sea pirates, resurgence of local cult groups and internal rivalry, oil theft and bunkering, oil pipeline vandalization and hostage economy etc.

These underscore the increasingly volatile nature of the region as well as massive poverty and systemic crisis of natural resource exploitation and exploration endemic in the region which falls within the resource curse dynamics. Amadi and Alapiki (2014) provide divergent perspectives to explore oil and the resource curse in the Niger Delta such as environmental, ethnic, conflict, elite, political, geographical, economic, etc.

‘Blood Oil’, ‘Petro-Violence’ are now popular mantra that form major discourse in the resource curse debate in the Niger Delta. Since the amnesty programme, a political history of post militancy is sought and tends to take the shape of myth-building, youth activism and local cultism—Indeed, militancy in historical contexts has entailed exemplification of the complex intricacies of novel brand of ethnic minority agitation in a nascent democracy which evokes scholarly concern in development debates.

2. MILITIA CAPITALISTS

2.1 Identifying the Militia Capitalists:

The militia capitalists from our analysis are a set of ex-militant leaders that gained access to the State and capital at the post amnesty Niger Delta. Such lucid explication is extant in providing a distinct debate that seeks to clearly demonstrate patterns of social interaction and resource accumulation ethos that point to this direction. A theoretical literature identified the militants in the Niger Delta with the following features;

- a) They are mostly youths
- b) They operate surreptitiously and clandestinely in cities and towns
- c) They are sometimes known as activists
- d) Are based in camps during the weekdays but return to towns and cities during the weekends
- e) Their camps are established far from towns and cities, deep in the mangrove swamps
- f) The camps are owned and controlled by those that are called bosses or commandants
- g) The camps are numerous and each may house 2000 or more youths
- h) The commandant obtains resources by extorting from the state and government using security threats.
- i) They carry sophisticated arms such as machine guns, explosives and cluster bombs
- j) They indulge in drug abuse, mainly alcohol (local gin) and Indian hemp (Marijuana)(p.16)

The militia capitalists in the Niger Delta include; Henry Okah, leader of the defunct Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which emerged in late 2005, and has been in militancy in the Niger Delta including oil bunkering, arms deal, abduction of oil workers and terrorist attack. For instance in the October 1st 2010 attack on the Eagle Square, MEND claimed responsibility, which resulted the arrest and 24years jail term for Okah in South Africa.

Describing his brother, Charles Okah stated;

Henry's return (from Lagos) to his family's ancestral home in Bayelsa at the age of 19 was the formative experience in his turn towards militancy. Having witnessed firsthand the marked difference between his upbringing in Lagos State and the endemic poverty in the Niger Delta, he retained these images while a student and in his work after graduation (McNamee, 2012).

Henry Okah earned a Bachelor's degree in marine engineering from the Maritime Institute and, and was known as a door-to-door handgun salesman in Lagos in the 1990s. He began his militancy in the late 1990s and early 2000s (McNamee, 2012). In 2003 he left for South Africa and has remained in prison for an alleged October 2010 Independence day terrorist attack at the Eagle Square, Abuja Nigeria.

Government Ekpemopolu also known as Tom Polo heads a network of other sub groups operating under MEND known as Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) in Delta state and more importantly the notorious Camp Five.

Victor Ben, also known as "General" Boyloaf operated under the MEND umbrella in Bayelsa State. Another cult group the Outlaws was formed by Soboma George who was former second in command in the NDV. There are those who also saw him as a philanthropist. He was very rich no doubt, and so could afford to affect lives in his way (Onoyume, 2010).

Farah Dagogo another militia capitalist formed the defunct Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF) in 2005 which also was operated as an appendage of MEND in Rivers State.

Asari Dokubo was Law drop out from the University of Calabar, Nigeria and leader of the former Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF). He hails from Buguma in Asari Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State. The NDPVF broke from the more political mainstream activist Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) in 2004 shortly after Dokubo trained in guerilla warfare in Libya. He was the only ex-militant that opposed the amnesty deal alleging that amnesty was a thing worthy of criminals and not for people who fought for emancipation, fairness and equity (Nigeria Elite Forum, 2012). He is reputed among the Ijaw as the second Ijaw man after Isaac Adaka Boro to decidedly take up arms against the Nigerian security forces in order to redeem his people (Nigeria Elite Forum, 2012).

Critical perspectives explore the political space provided by the injustice of the federal government on the Niger Delta in relation to Asari's self-proclivities. Nigerian sociologist Obadare (2013) captures this essence;

First is his (Asari's) emergence from a proper order of injustice: the crisis of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. Second is his astute reading of the social mood and readiness to capitalize on a glaring leadership vacuum. Here, you have to go back to the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995 by the Abacha regime, the emasculation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, and the overall tranquilization of opposition throughout the region. Finally, there is his personal rebranding and self-representation. For instance, the distinctly Islamic turban has been jettisoned, though the bushy beard (part Mohammedan, part Che Guevara) is still in place. Furthermore, although there is a notional forswearing of violence, this is strategically counterbalanced by frequent threats to "return to the creeks" (p.1).

Ateke Tom is another ex-militant leader from Okrika, in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. He formed the defunct Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) in 2003. More recently ahead of the Nigeria's 2015 general elections, posters of the ex-militant leader as a gubernatorial candidate adorned the streets of Port Harcourt the Rivers State capital. The row which meant various things to different people was not in the context of questioning his candidacy as he is free like every Nigerian citizen to contest for any elective post, but for our purpose, the ex-militant demonstrates novel real or imagined quest for state power, which underscores our argument on "process transformation" of the ex-militant leaders both in ideology and practice.

Similar inclinations are demonstrated by all the ex-militant leaders, contrary to their supposed stance as vocal "agitators" of the people against the oppression of the Nigerian State.

Soboma Jackrich also known as Egbiri Papa was leader of the former People's Liberation Force (PLF) which operated in Bayelsa. He was among the well-known aggressive ex-militant leaders.

Generally, two stratagem discernible in the workings of the militants were, first; the claim to follow Isaac Boro's footsteps which remains a common stand among Niger Delta struggle from all hue and cry. The understanding and practice of his style of "civil revolution" is minimally internalized. Whereas Boro was more of a consensus builder and

collective civil crusader with less capitalist inclination, the militia capitalists were a group specifically for themselves with the aim of “grabbing” a fair share of the “national cake” but cloaked in emancipatory garb with little or unknown ideology. They claim to tow Boro’s line and strive to build their personal legitimacy around Boro. This has given some legitimacy to the struggle and agitation for resource control especially among the Ijaw ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta. Secondly, they adopted localized and less violent resistance. Osaghae, et al;(2011) contend that;

Localized Resistance is basically rights-seeking resistance and protest involving obstruction of access routes, petition writing, delegations to state governments and oil majors and demands for social amenities by community based organizations. The repressive response of the federal government and oil companies to localized resistance spurred the adoption of more overtly violent methods such as attacks on state personnel and infrastructure (police stations, army camps, government offices) as well as hostage taking of expatriate and local oil workers and attacks, blockage and shutting down of oil pipelines, flow stations and other installations.(p.5)

Table1. Major Militia Capitalist Leaders and their Groups

Nameo of Group	Leader	Location within the Region
Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)	Henry Okah	Bayelsa State
Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force(NDPVF)	Mujahid Asari Dokubo	Rivers State
Niger Delta Vigilante	Ateke Tom	Rivers State
Niger Delta Strike Force(NDSF)	Farah Dagogo	Rivers State
	Victor Ben Ebikabowei (a.k.a)Boy Loaf	Bayelsa State
	Solomon Ndigbara(a.k.a) Osama Bin Laden	Rivers
	Soboma Jackrich (a.k.a)Egberipapa	Bayelsa State
Camp 5/ People’s Liberation Force (PLF)/MEND	Egberipapa and Government Ekpemopolo (a.k.a)Tompolo	Delta State
	Major Africa	Bayelsa State
Outlaws	Soboma George	Rivers State

Source: Authors

2.2 Militia Capitalism: A Theoretical Exploration:

The transition from agitation in an alleged unjust social order to capitalist accumulation is discernible in theorizing the dynamics of the emergence of the militia capitalists. Though a complex process, certain details in this process is instructive. Following the identification of the militia capitalists, the article provides broader illumination of the militia capitalist theoretical model.

There are divergent views in the literature on the concept of militia capitalism. Militia capitalism in this article is conceptualized within the Marxist theoretical exploration as an emergent elite necessitated by violent capitalist accumulation ethos. Alfred and Andeshi, (2014)observe that the violence in the Niger Delta has degenerated to a level that, former war lords and militants are now discreetly and officially given crude oil facilities and sometimes personnel to protect. Obadare,(2013) rightly describes the mode of capitalist militia exploitation as “violent entrepreneurship”, which constitutes the basis for social prominence and material wealth accumulation of the ex-militant leaders. He contends that violence entrepreneurship avoids legitimate questions like; how endemic insecurity threatens the short-term stability and long-term existence of the Nigerian state. Rather, it prioritizes the need to make violence coherent as a political phenomenon, meaning that the most ostensibly unrelated acts of violence are understood and made meaningful solely in relation to politics and the dominant ethos of the political order.

Alfred and Andeshi, (2014)argue that the sheer number of war entrepreneurs that are benefitting from the war economy of the conflict is a pointer to the fact that the elongation of the conflict in the Niger Delta is a huge advantage to these actors’ economic wellbeing.

Within the Marxist tradition's legacies of enlightenment, militia capitalism is explored in both bourgeois and socialist transformation (Welmer, 2012). The efficacy of militia capitalism in explaining post amnesty Niger Delta is built on process structure transformation a strand of Marxism (Welmer, 2012).

As Marx and Engels (1977) argue that the history of all hitherto existed society is the history of class struggle. Thus, the class struggle explains the agitation between the exploited Niger Delta (militants) against the exploiters namely; the Nigerian State and the multinational oil companies and in turn the emergent systemic exploitation of the region by the ex-militant leaders who gained access to the State. In this particular systemic circumstance, the Marxist process structure transformation debate is discernible as it underscores how the ex-militant leaders through access to state power transformed to militia capitalists who operate within the state orbit as they worked their way some distance up the state power and gained new access to the oil as "guardians of the creeks" and pursued capitalist accumulation ethos at variance with the popular Niger Delta struggle.

Obadare (2013) argues that to track Asari's movement from the swamps to the corridors of the state is to apprehend a sociological dynamic in which social agents gain entry into the domain of the state, via, in this specific case, "the instrumentality of violence".

This is glibly reinforced with the award of multi million naira contracts to the ex-militant leaders by the federal government such as Tompolo's company- The Global West Vessel Specialist Limited (GWVSL). These groups of domestic capitalist militia became interlocutor variables meaning negotiators worth talking to (Hall, 1972; Ogege, 2011).

However, in Marxist tradition in order to understand the transformation of both bourgeois and socialist enlightenment, Welmer, (2012) shows how Adorno attempts to modify the schema of the history of civilization drafted by Marx and Engels so as to make understandable why bourgeois society did not bring about a classless society but rather a civilized form of barbarians.

Already Marx and Engels had seen in the transition from the archaic prehistoric societies to the class state not only organized society at the beginning of civilization but at the same time a catastrophe namely; the beginning of organized exploitation of man by man (Welmer, 2012). Such systemic exploitation became discernible in the Niger Delta with the novel strategy of the ex-militant leaders.

While the theoretical orientation of militia capitalism can be understood as a direct continuation of a tradition that underscores the Marxian capitalist exploitation, the attempt to link this theoretical model to the post amnesty economic exploitation of the Niger Delta is apt. As Ake (1985) had argued that state in Africa assumes an elitist character, such realities as evident in the sudden shift from stern opposition to support for the Nigerian State reinvigorates the elitist proclivity of the ex-militant leaders. This essence is captured in Asari's new relationship with former President Jonathan. Obadare (2013) aptly explains;

A while ago, Mujahid Asari-Dokubo's visceral defense of the Jonathan regime against all real and perceived enemies left many observers bewildered. Is this not the same individual, it was widely asked, who had made a name for himself by his charismatic leadership of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and vocal enunciation of the cause of Nigeria's oil-producing riverine minorities? How did Asari metamorphose from a feared Mohammedan of the creeks (complete with the elaborate head gear) to a megaphone of state power? (p.1).

Such changes in tact and ideology have been characteristic of variation from the present militia capitalists and the proletariat militia of Boro as the latter supposedly constituted the founding ideals of the Niger Delta struggle.

This theoretical perspective sufficiently elucidates our conceptualization of militia capitalism and reveals the motive behind the resurgent militia capitalists and how they became instrumental in the wider Nigerian state and capitalist accumulation agenda. Equally, the model explains the gory dialectics of corruption and how the political elite is mismanaging the oil economy and further linked to underdevelopment and poverty in the Niger Delta.

In what follows, the article builds on this theoretical exploration to identify the militia capitalists, their systemic exploitation and the paradox of poverty.

3. SYSTEMIC EXPLOITATION AND THE PARADOX OF POVERTY

The federal government oil contract awards are central capitalist strategy of the ex-militant leaders. Alfred and Andeshi, (2014) recount that the federal government of Nigeria, the major multinational oil firms and the local industry players like the servicing companies were bent in ensuring that they are protected by warlords and former combatants. The \$383 million security fund and the \$200 million community development expenditure that SPDC spends per annum are protection and security fees.

In 2011, the Federal government awarded a pipeline surveillance contract worth \$103.4m (about N15 billion) to Tompolo's company—Global West Vessel Specialist Limited (GWVSL). It was argued that the aim was to protect the nation's water ways against the theft of crude oil.

The underlying argument was that since the militants are from the creeks, they have mastery of the creeks and are in a better position to provide security to the pipelines, repel pirates and oil thieves who usually sail into the Nigerian waters at night to steal oil (Ogege,2011).

Besides Tompolo, other ex-militant leaders like Asari Dokubo, Dagogo, Egberi Papa, got N2billion contract to also secure the oil pipelines in Bayelsa and Rivers States. N580m contract was awarded Boyloaf's company (Ogege,2011).

The American Wall Street Journal reported that Dokubo-Asari, leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force earns \$9million (N1.420billion) annually, guarding pipelines of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), while Tompolo is paid \$22.9million (N3.614billion) for a similar contract (Ajiboye and Olaniyi,2011). It is also reported that the NNPC, gives \$3.8million each annually to Boyloaf and Ateke (Fabiya,2012).

The federal government contract awards resulted to inequality between the ex-militants and the wider impoverished Niger Delta people which underscores the paradox of poverty. For instance, while the seminal UNDP (2006) Niger Delta Human Development Report(HDR) shows low Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.453, the area rates far below countries or regions with similar oil and gas resources. For example, the HDI for Saudi Arabia in 2000 stood at 0.800, while in 2003 the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Libya, Venezuela and Indonesia achieved scores of 0.849, 0.844, 0.799, 0.772 and 0.697, respectively(UNDP,2006).

On the contrary, a report recently described Government Ekpomopolo as a "Billionaire Militant" and states;

For those who haven't heard, 43 year old ex-militant, High Chief Government Owezide Ekpemupolo (*aka* Tompolo) on Monday 26th August 2013 received his LearJet 60SE produced by Canadian aerospace company Bombardier. The Jet according to aviation sources cost a whopping sum of \$13.3 million (N2.12 billion) (Ileowo,2013).

Similarly, Temitayo Odunlami writes; "Tompolo: The Billionaire Militant" (Odunlani,2012). The central contradictory image which characterizes these groups as capitalists is not their mode of material wealth accumulation but supposed alignment with the Nigerian state as exploitative junta propagating similar mode of state predator and capital accumulation like the Nigerian state elites which ordinarily ought to have been their common foes.

In the particular case of Asari Dokubo, Obadare (2013) identifies a perfect encapsulation of this logic, precisely in Asari's sheer transformation from radical revolutionary and purveyor of violence, to a more or less bona fide member of the state nobility.

With all the conceits and appurtenances of the Nigerian political class, Alhaji Asari Dokubo is a millionaire that has a University in Benin Republic known as King Amachree African University, (KAAU).He is well known for highly exotic cars.

Obadare(2013,p1) further posits that; "there is of course the desperation to undo the obvious disadvantages of class cum educational cum professional pedigree, often through regular appearance in social circuits (weddings, burial ceremonies, etc). In short, there is an enactment of the whole "Big Man" repertoire, complete, it goes without saying, with personal channels of patronage. The Dr. or Chief prefix is just a matter of time".

Chief Ateke Tom equally has massive mansions and estates in choice areas in the Niger Delta and Lagos. His political ambition and mode of capitalist accumulation underscores his brand of class alignment and transition to a political elite.

Henry Okah who has long been involved in arms dealing including sell of small guns is a well-known millionaire and has sprawling edifice including his palatial residence in South Africa.

The wealth of the ex-militants contradicts the increasing environmental degradation, poverty and insecurity in the Niger Delta. There is environmental degradation by the oil multinational companies such as gas flaring, acid rains etc. This has resulted to insecurity of lives, land and water pollution in places like Ogoni, it affects crop yield, decimates fishes and similar aquatic animals-the sources of food and income for the poor region.

The recent UNEP report on environmental degradation in Ogoni shows that it could take up to 25 to 30 years to clean up the pollution that has accumulated over 50 years of oil operations in the Niger Delta(UNEP,2011).

Poverty remains on the increase (UNDP.2006;Amadi, 2013), which largely contradicts the promise for a collective transformation of the region as envisaged from the militants. Amadi(2013)provides salient relics of poverty including environmental degradation ,acid rains ,oil spill and women impoverishment as their subsistence rely on tilling the soil through farming and also water pollution and negative effects on drinking and fishing.

The growing plight of the Niger Delta at some point made popular headlines in the local and national media—sometimes acting as simple paraphernalia and channel for a reflective moniker on the forgotten peoples of the Niger Delta.

The press has been particularly active, reflecting on the hardship faced by the impoverished region, marginalization of women who are mostly bread winners as a result of environmental degradation have been popular discourses (Ajaero,2008).

There are also popular discussions about present-day hardships, unemployment, insecurity and massive killings arising from inter cult group rivalry. This results to increasing criminalization of militancy, volatility and instability in the Niger Delta. It further affects business transactions, free movement of people in most communities where such well known groups operate such as the Icelanders, Greenlanders, Dey Well, KKK, Germans, Dey Gbam, Mafia Lords, and Vultures, (Osaghae, et al;2011) .

4. CONCLUSIONS

The article has shown contrasting repertoire in the popular Niger Delta struggle demonstrated by the change among the ex-militant leaders from supposed freedom fighters to owners of companies and procurers of multi- billion naira contracts from the federal government, the long perceived “enemy” of the marginalized Niger Delta.

The logic of this change in orientation and what it means to sustainable development of the Niger Delta is the research agenda the article attempted to examine as it substantiated that militia capitalism is the expedient theoretical expression for the inclinations of the resurgent ex-militant leaders.

Contemporary trends in the Niger Delta oil minority struggle is consequently revisited in the light of the capitalist militias, their wealth and the contradictions of massive poverty in the Niger Delta linked to the wider corruption matrix of Nigeria, thus, the making of militia capitalists is one of the symptoms of Nigerian corruption.

The article has demonstrated a realignment of the ex- militants with the Nigerian state. These implicit contradictions have made several analysts skeptical of the amnesty program as discussed.

As in most popular struggles, keeping alive the memories of the founding fathers of the Niger Delta struggle ought to have redirected the sense of purpose and mission of the post amnesty militants, ironically the reverse was the case. For instance in sane struggles the acquisition of aircraft by High Chief Ekporomopolo, the establishment of King Amakri international School in Benin Republic by Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo,the erection of sprawling edifices by Emma Okah in South Africa, Chief Ateke Tom in Lagos former capital of Nigeria, etc, point to the opposite direction in the Niger Delta struggle as they are in contrast to the plight of an average Niger Deltan. This further contradicts the sense of cherished memory of Wiwa in the prosecution of the struggle who was not only committed to Niger Delta transformation but was executed by the federal military government in 1995 in the cause of the struggle.

The activities of the ex-militant leaders equally vitiate the dissemination of their brand of struggle as they often try to gain or reassert socio-political legitimacy by claiming to walk in Boro’s footsteps and represent his moral legacy. Among Ijaw youths, the popular memories of Boro and of the implications of the revolution reinforced in the Kaiama declaration of 1998 demonstrates a sense of liberation and palpable self-determination.

The strategies propagated and reproduced by the ex-militants and employed as a device to maintain strategic relevance in the state, revive political legitimacy, and control popular protest is unequivocally contestable yet eulogistic in some quarters despite criticisms. For instance, a number of youths in the Niger Delta eulogize the ex-militants as a product of aggression, self-determination and resilience in an oppressive and predatory state(Oramudia,2012).

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The article has substantially explored both commemorative and opposing perspectives of the ex-militant leaders and contend that any analysis of the post amnesty Niger Delta struggle and contemporary key actors needs to go beyond an assessment of their claims to emancipation of the Niger Delta rather explore in more critical terms the affluence of the ex-militants at variance with the impoverished region they claim to be protecting and in particular how such claims are productive and emancipatory in relation to the present economic hardship in the region.

Odivwri(2013)corroborates this paradox of poverty after exploring the wealth of the ex-militant leaders and contends that what has been the lot of the people of the Niger Delta four years after the so-called amnesty programme was granted. He asked what the fortune line of the region has been at post amnesty and argued that although, former insurgents are being trained in local and foreign institutions and centers, he asked what has happened to the vast majority of the people of the zone with emphasis on the promised roads, hospitals, schools, bridges, and all the accoutrements of better life, whose absence, ab initio, he argued powered the protests in the region.

Specifically the emergent militia capitalists as discussed have provided for themselves a distinct class within the dialectics of state resource accumulation and alienation of the poor majority. Novel policy for a more inclusive and equitable resource allocation and rehabilitation of the Niger Delta is inevitable.

Policy priority should be given to the development challenges of the Niger Delta region with emphasis on massive youth empowerment. Policy focus on resource transparency and stronger institutional capacity on implementation of fiscal federalism and revenue allocation formula on the basis of derivation, efficient and equitable use of oil resource revenue and corporate responsible and accountable multinationals to strengthen human and sustain such institutional capacity is important.

There is need for policies to provide an overall development plan with realizable targets and specific time frame including prioritizing the alleviation of environmental degradation and clean up as identified in the UNEP 2011 report on the Niger Delta.

A radical and strategic novel Niger Delta Master plan should be developed and implemented not the politicized existing plan rather a committed pro poor and pro -environment policy framework. There is need to recognize the adverse effects of poverty and embark on massive poverty alleviation programme in the Niger Delta, in particular draw up functional policies to enhance human development.

Since the 2006 Niger Delta human development report that demonstrated the increasing evidence of poor Human Development Index (HDI), policies at improving human development in the Niger Delta have been elusive. This is essential for bridging the inequality gap in the region and also impacting the skills of the youths and the workforce.

Corruption has been a major problem to the development of the Niger Delta, institutional reform is important for strategic overhaul of the Niger Delta including institutions such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC),Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and similar institutions to chart a genuine development cause and novel focus.

There is need for urgent policy to provide inclusive participatory and sustainable post amnesty empowerment programs for the ex- militants also non- militant youths including women and the girl child who are often relegated in the over- all development planning of the Niger Delta.

A strategy to foster and promote the culture of hard work and dignity of labour in the Niger Delta is necessary for a sense of redirection for the youths. More specifically, the strategy should focus on empowerment, self- reliance, creativity and targeted interventions to deal with problems of cultism, proliferation of small arms and light weapons(SALWs) and in particular security problems in the Niger Delta.

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