

**ETHNIC MILITIAS AND CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA
REGION OF NIGERIA: THE INTERNATIONAL
DIMENSIONS (1999-2009)**

By

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the
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Political Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was not used. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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DEDICATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DPR	Department of Petroleum Resources
EBA	Egbesu Boys of Africa
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMOs	Environmental Movement Organisations
EPNL	Elf Petroleum Nigeria Limited
ERA	Environmental Rights Action
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
FEPA	Federal Environmental Protection Agency
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FME	Federal Ministry of Environment
FNDIC	Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IYC	Ijaw Youth Council
JTF	Joint Task Force
LGAs	Local Government Areas
MASSOB	Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MNOCs	Multinational Oil Companies
MOSIEND	Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
MPNU	Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited
NAOC	Nigerian Agip Oil Company Limited
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NDV	Niger Delta Vigilante
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NOSDRA	National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NPRC	National Political reform Conference
OMPADEC	Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission
OPC	O'odua People's Congress

PDP	People's Democratic Party
PRONACO	Pro-National Conference Organization
SNC	Sovereign National Conference
SPDC	Shell Petroleum Development Company
TOPCON	Texaco Overseas Petroleum Company of Nigeria Unlimited
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation

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ABSTRACT

Since the commencement of the 4th Republic in Nigeria in May 1999, one relatively permanent characterisation of the country's political landscape has been belligerent ethno-nationalism or ethnic militancy. The activities of ethnic militias exacerbated insecurity; confronted the status of the state as the sole legitimate monopolist of the instruments of force and violence; exposed the weak loyalty and allegiance of the populace to the Nigerian nation-state project; and threatened its continued existence as a corporate entity. Decades of marginalisation and injustice foisted on the Niger Delta people by the Nigerian state in tandem with major Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs), precipitated the nasty experience of frustration and deprivation, which triggered a section of the youth in the region to embark on the formation of militia groups as an extra-constitutional method for negotiation, and redressing the political cum socio-economic dehumanising conditions of the region. Thus, there is a historically established case of grievance instigated by environmental degradation and despoliation, neglect, poverty, political exclusion and intensified military repression of the Delta people by the Nigerian state in collaboration with the MNOCs.

However, though there are ethnic militias in other parts of the country, its rampant proliferation and seeming sustainability in the region -- in the face of organised state violence -- is unprecedented and deserves scholarly investigation. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which the quest for opportunism and predation by the ethnic militias has led to the escalation of armed conflicts in the Niger Delta region during the timeline of this research. It seeks to establish a linkage between economic gains (through hostage taking for huge sums of money and illegal trading in petroleum products) and the intensification of armed conflicts by ethnic militias in the region. Further, the study systematically interrogates the extent to which international commercial collaborators boosted the violent activities of ethnic militias in the Delta geopolitical landscape.

Using the qualitative research approach and data from both primary and secondary sources, the study establishes a correlation between economic opportunism, the proliferation of militias and the escalation of armed conflict in the region during the timeline of this research. Several young people also became highly attracted to belligerent ethno-nationalism in the region as a result of the greed to corner resources from illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping, outright patronage from the political elite and the MNOCs. There was rampant multiplicity and mutation of militias and armed gangs whose main purpose appears to be their involvement in the highly lucrative criminal business of hostage-taking for ransom rather than a principled struggle for resource control and socio-economic justice. Clearly, several people and groups have used such injustices as a rationale for justifying what otherwise would be criminal activities: oil theft, armed robbery and hostage taking for ransom. The quest for various forms of gains therefore motivated the 'democratisation' of ethnic militancy purportedly fighting for the Delta region; while in reality, criminality was being deployed as a veritable instrument for illegal resource exploitation, political patronage and primitive accumulation. The phenomenal attraction of people to militancy in the region reached alarming proportion in 2006 when kidnapping for ransom became a strategic weapon popularised by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Generally speaking, it has been estimated that militias may not have been more than 20,000 persons in the region during the pre-kidnapping years. But by January 2009, field studies revealed that no fewer than 50,000 people were involved in militant activities -- a figure that represents more than 50 % of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Further, this research also establishes a linkage between the activities of ethnic militias, illegal oil bunkering, foreign opportunistic traders and the sustainability of conflict in the region during the study period. The purchase of stolen crude oil by opportunistic international commercial traders from various countries of the world was the major source of sustainability of militia movements until 2005. It provided the much-needed arms and money for the cycle of violence and conflict and, thus, became a source of attraction to more militias. With the improved performances of security forces in the region and the consequent diversification of the militias into hostage taking, however, the level of conflict sustenance through oil theft and foreign networks reduced drastically between 2006 and 2009 in comparison with the pre-kidnapping years of 1999 to 2005.