

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/06/25/militancy-in-the-niger-delta-petro-capitalism-and-the-politics-of-youth/>

JOE SUTCLIFFE, JUN 25 2012

Oil has become a serious topic of academic discussion, largely pertaining to the developmental prospects it may confer and the links it has to conflict. Literature on the 'resource curse' has suggested that natural resources such as oil can create violent competition and protracted conflict over access to resource wealth. The forms this violence takes have been connected to the nature of the particular resource (Le Billon 2005; Ross 2003). This literature forms part of a broader research agenda considering economic explanations for conflict and civil war. A leading figure in this area, Paul Collier has proposed the 'feasibility hypothesis', stipulating: 'where rebellion is materially feasible it will occur' and that the motivations behind violent rebellion 'are incidental to the explanation of civil war' (Collier *et al.* 2006, 5). Collier strongly suggests that it is economic greed, the wish to gain access to resource wealth and the clientelist rents commonly connected to natural resources, which drives rebellion (2006; 2007). Such behaviour is evidenced in the predatory economic activities seen among militants, often standing starkly at odds with their professed grievances of political and economic marginalisation. The disavowal of grievance explanations of conflict has led Richards to term the perspective of Collier and related scholars (such as Kaplan 1994; Keen 2000; Reno 2000) as 'greed, not grievance' (2003, 20).

The ongoing violence and militancy seen in the Niger Delta has provided fertile analytical grounds for the 'greed, not grievance' perspective. Collier has referred to youth militants in the Niger Delta as mass criminal groups offering only an ideological facade of political grievances and concern for their communities (2007). Many offer a more circumspect reading than Collier, deeming economic factors alone to be insufficient to explain militancy (Ballentine and Sherman 2003). Nevertheless, 'greed, not grievance' analysis is echoed in much of the media coverage (The Economist 2007; Walker, 2009) of the Niger Delta, and in statements by oil companies in the region (Amnesty International 2011), all of whom portray militants as 'bandits' or 'gangsters' (Richards 2003, 19) whose actions are based in greed and criminality. Much of this literature – academic and journalistic – displays a 'troubling fixation with the so-called economic incentives of insurgency' (Ukiwo 2007, 588), a fixation more akin to ideological framing than serious analysis.

This research report will attempt to critically engage with the 'greed, not grievance' literature by emphasising two important elements of the Niger Delta conflict that are lost in the 'greed, not grievance' scholarship. The first is the nature of the political economy of oil within the particular context of Nigeria. By only considering the supposedly objective characteristics of certain resources, such as their lootability (Ross 2003), and positing militancy as greed strategies directed by these characteristics, 'greed, not grievance' scholars have attributed quasi-agentive power to oil, almost as if it were an actor in its own right. This fatally ignores the extent to which the role of oil must be considered within the political context in which it arises, engendering a particular form of political economy which can exacerbate grievances and inculcate militancy (Watts 2005a). To understand the rise of militancy and its contemporary nature requires an analysis of this political economy of oil, and its enduring role and influence. The second important theme lost in the 'greed, not grievance' scholarship is the youthful constitution of the Niger Delta militants. Youth make up the majority of the population of Africa (Osaghae *et al.* 2007), yet they are frequently depicted as a youth in crisis (Ikelegbe 2006), a 'lost generation' or 'restive youth' (Watts 2007) who are disproportionately represented in the continent's conflicts (Abbink 2005).[1] These 'voiceless *enfant terribles*' (De Boeck and Honwana 2005, 2) are an important force in African society, yet they are demonised in a 'greed, not

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

'grievance' literature which characterises youth militants as utilising violence for aims of personal economic enrichment whilst simultaneously offering youth no analytical attention as important political actors, considering their agency only in relation to economic predation.

This report will draw from literature regarding the relationship between oil and conflict, from both orthodox and critical perspectives. Yet it will also introduce a burgeoning literature on the politics of youth in Africa into these debates, in an attempt to garner fresh insights into youth-led militancy. In doing so, this report can be connected to two related projects. Firstly, it is situated within a radical scholarship which critiques the 'greed, not grievance' perspective and its orthodoxy among many policymakers, and secondly, it contributes towards a wider intellectual project attempting to introduce youth factors as critical to the study of Africa (Abbink 2005; Durham 2000), not least in conflict situations where youth are so disproportionately represented. The insights gained from this report will form the basis of a research agenda that is beneficial to the aims of both these projects.

Background to the Conflict

In order to understand the complex processes that have influenced the rise of militancy, it is necessary to consider the broader political economy of oil, and its interaction with the historic modalities of inequality in post-colonial Nigeria. This kind of analysis is lacking from 'greed, not grievance' scholarship of Niger Delta militancy, but is vital for understanding the rise and nature of youth militancy.

Nigeria, Petro-Capitalism and the Plight of the Oil Minorities

Nigerian oil was first discovered in the Delta town of Oloibiri in 1958 by Shell. Since then, the extraction of oil by western – and more recently Chinese (Obi 2008) – oil companies and the revenue this has accrued to the Nigerian government have become central to the political economy of Nigeria. Since the late-1960s a 'radical fiscal centralism' has been noted (Watts 2007, 642), whereby the federal government has increasingly controlled the country's oil wealth, with derivations to the regions dropping from 50% in 1966 to 3% in the 1990s; recovering only to 13% by 1999 (Cawthra 2011). Furthermore, the 1969 Petroleum Act and the 1979 Land Use Act saw all oil deposits and land declared as national assets, 'removing any idea of local ownership or control' (Asuni 2009, 6). These developments have cemented the status of Nigeria as a petro-state (Watts 2007), in that the vast majority of state revenue is attained from the sale of oil, the gains from which are distributed by the central government through clientelist networks; enriching a small elite and perpetuating corruption (Ifeka 2010). The Nigerian petro-state forms a part of what can be understood as the 'oil complex' (Watts 2005b, 54), used to describe the broader institutional structure surrounding the political economy of oil. This includes the Nigerian petro-state, multi-national oil companies (MNCs), state and private security apparatuses, and foreign military interest in regional oil wealth epitomised by the US AFRICOM strategy (Ifeka 2010). It is within this oil complex that struggles and competition over oil and oil rents take place; Watts has termed this particular form of economic interaction, 'petro-capitalism' (2005b, 54).

Fuelling Nigerian petro-capitalism is the mass extraction of oil which takes place in the Niger Delta (see fig 1), accounting for 75% of national oil production (Cawthra 2011). A central feature of petro-capitalism is the utter lack of developmental benefits gained by the people who suffer the worst consequences of oil extraction. The Niger Delta has seen soaring rates of poverty (over 50% in the majority of its states), severe environmental degradation, a public health crisis, mass displacement, loss of traditional livelihoods, high unemployment and a mass of disaffected youth (Jike 2010). The Niger Delta may not be the poorest region in Nigeria, but it contains the highest youth unemployment and income inequality (Ukiwo 2011). The mass destitution seen in the Niger Delta, the lack of development gains from oil extraction and community consciousness of clear inequality in the distribution of wealth accrued from their oil forms the basic narrative of most grievance explanations for militancy in the region (Idemudia and Ite 2006; Cawthra 2011).

The impact of oil extraction in the Niger Delta is not just connected to the economic privation of the region but also to political marginalisation and Nigerian identity politics. Contemporary militants are predominantly Ijaw, who constitute the most prominent ethnic group in the Niger Delta yet remain a minority in the Nigerian federal system which is dominated by Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo interests. Petro-capitalism is the form of political economy engendered

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

by the interaction of oil wealth with pre-existing grievances of political marginalisation and the quest for local autonomy by those who have come to identify themselves as 'oil minorities' (Obi 2001, 5). It therefore contributes to the exacerbation of the perceived and material inequalities present within post-colonial Nigeria. Minority agitation on the Niger Delta has been evident from 1966, with the short lived secession of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (Asuni 2009), but it is the subsequent oil crises of the late-1970s and 1980s, along with the nefarious impact of structural adjustment and its failure to reverse economic decline, which have caused 'ethnicity (to gain)...more prominence as a tool of survival, mobilisation and struggles to redefine power relations in society' (Obi 2001, 6). The Ijaw, and a number of other oil minorities in the Niger Delta, provide evidence of hardening ethnic identities and an increased consciousness of their economic deprivation in comparison to the dominant ethnic groups (Obi 2001).

Figure 1.



Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

The Rise of Militancy

Direct action in the Niger Delta thus emerged from the context of heightened inequalities, hardened ethnic identities and ethnicised perceptions of oil ownership. These characteristics were evident in the Ogoni protests of the early 1990s, which set an important precedent for later Ijaw action. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), headed by poet Ken Saro-Wiwa, utilised Gandhian tactics of peaceful protest and demonstrations against Shell in an attempt to ensure a fairer allocation of resource wealth and increased autonomy for the Ogoni people (MOSOP 1990). However, with the Nigerian state owning half of all oil assets and MOSOP's campaigns proving effective in attracting attention to the gross misconduct of the MNCs, the Nigerian military began using oil concessions as bases from which to enact a brutal repression of the Ogoni (Owolabi and Okwechime 2007, 7). The eventual execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight other leading Ogonis in 1995 for the supposed murders of four opposition leaders within MOSOP is regarded as a key moment in de-legitimising the idea of non-violent action among communities in the Niger Delta (Owolabi and Okwechime 2007).

Ijaw agitation became pronounced in 1998 with the release of the Kaiama Declaration and the founding of the Ijaw Youth Conference (IYC), an umbrella organisation of Ijaw youth associations with the motto: 'resource control by any means' (Ebienfa 2011). Direct action among the Ijaw has quickly embraced more violent methods than MOSOP, including attacks on oil pipelines and offshore oil installations, as well as kidnappings. Leading this direct action are the Ijaw youth, who asserted themselves as a political force in the late 1990s and early 2000s, often through pushing aside local elders (Obi and Aas Rustad 2011). Local elders and leaders had traditionally directed negotiations and dealings with the state and MNCs (HRW 2005), yet they appeared increasingly marginalised in the face of an activist youth who began to capture community organisations and dominate the agenda, with the IYC coming to play a pivotal leadership role. Whilst some leaders do sympathise and even support the aims of militants, it is clear that these youth now operate beyond the authority of their local elders (Ikelegbe 2006, 98).

Youth Militancy in the Niger Delta

In order to understand the rise of militancy in the Niger Delta, the ascendancy of youth as political actors needs to be understood, focusing particularly on why this ascendancy occurred and the motivations which underlay it. Firstly, the 'tectonic shift in inter-generational politics' (Watts 2007, 640) in Ijaw communities will be analysed, considering the relationship between the ascendancy of youth as actors and the increasingly violent nature of direct action, alongside an analysis of inter-generational politics within the context of the oil complex and petro-capitalism. Secondly, economic motivations for militancy will be considered with regards to the specific youth grievances created by petro-capitalism; utilising insights from the politics of youth in Africa to address questions of greed and livelihood. In doing so, an analysis of the rise of militancy can be offered which engages with youth as actors, considers the rise of militancy in relation to the inequalities of petro-capitalism, and critically engages with 'greed, not grievance' explanations for militancy.

Inter-generational Politics.

The roots of violent militancy and its youth led nature must first be considered. As has been mentioned, peaceful action in the 1990s was met with brutal military repression, emanating from MNC oil concessions, and this has continued even under civilian government with widespread human rights abuses against the Ijaw well documented (Basse 2006). Successive militarisation of the Niger Delta, exacerbated by increasing US involvement in the Gulf of Guinea (Ifeka 2010), has further delegitimised non-violent action as an effective strategy in the eyes of the oil

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

minorities. When connected with the concurrent increased accessibility of weapons, this is argued to have directly led to the violent nature of contemporary action (Ebienfa 2011; Idemudia and Ite 2006). It should be noted that the relationship between militarisation and the de-legitimisation of non-violent action provides strong evidence that militancy only occurred in the Niger Delta as a last resort, due to the failure of non-violent methods to achieve gains (Ikelegbe 2006); a point ignored by 'greed, not grievance' scholars. Equally, the cooperation between MNCs and the state military is indicative of the oil complex at work; underlying the visceral dislike of both among communities in the Niger Delta (Ikelegbe 2006).

However, the shift to violence was concurrent with the rise of the local youth as political actors. This positive correlation is connected to the inability of the elder generation of local leaders to stand up to the state and MNCs to achieve gains for local communities (Emeseh 2011). As Jake states, 'the typical Niger-Delta youth sees the elder as the epitome of the colossal failure in the bid to harness the resources of the area' (2004, 696), and accuse them of 'failing to provide good leadership' (Ukiwo 2007, 600). Youth accuse their traditional leaders of turning a blind eye to the plunder of their lands by oil companies, to the 1969 Petroleum Act and the 1978 Land Use Decree and the acceptance of paltry compensation (Jake 2004, 696). In a series of interviews with militants and local communities, Osaghae *et al.* (2007) found that a loss of faith in local elders and leaders and their ability to provide development was the single largest reason given for the emergence of youth at the centre of struggles against the state and MNCs. Inter-generational disenchantment therefore provides a local power context through which the de-legitimisation of non-violent action surfaced, potentiating the simultaneous rise of youth and militancy.

However, inter-generational disenchantment lies only at the surface of the issue. Local elders and leaders have forged strong corporatist ties with MNCs, providing them with 'low penetration costs and cordial relations' (Ikelegbe 2006, 114) whilst receiving contracts and large sums of money under the guise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in order to ensure continued community compliance (HRW 2005; Watts 2007). Contracts and frequent cash payments to local leaders are reflective of the clientelist relations inherent to petro-capitalism, whilst the failure of a raft of symbolic community development projects has done nothing to ameliorate community grievances (Watts 2007). The corporatist ties between local leaders and MNCs have not gone unnoticed, with communities and militants labelling local elders and leaders 'selfish, opportunistic, sycophantic, corrupt and compromised' (Osaghae *et al.* 2007, 65) and accusing them of taking bribes and colluding with oil companies (Osaghae *et al.* 2007). Local leaders and elders did not simply fail to prevent the current environmental devastation and marginalisation of the oil minorities; they form a part of the oil complex which caused this catastrophe, through a reciprocal relationship with MNCs. Local youth correctly perceive their elders as connected to the clientelist networks of the oil complex in ways which have led to the further privation and marginalisation of their position (Osaghae *et al.* 2007, 27). Youth militancy therefore invokes not only a resistance to MNCs and the state, but also to the gerontocratic rule of local leaders.

In summary, the violence of contemporary militancy is born in the military repression enacted by the oil complex, and its generational constitution is reflective of the complicity of local elders and leaders in the catastrophe wrought across the Delta. The impact of youth militancy has seen a shift in the local 'governable space' (Watts 2005a, 53) in the Niger Delta, whereby youth militancy and vigilantism has come to dominate a political space previously filled by the traditional rule of local elders. This shift is vital to understanding contemporary militancy, and is not explicable without understanding the consequences of petro-capitalism for local inter-generational politics. Youth has come to provide 'an idiom in a gerontocratic and authoritarian setting in which power, secrecy and sometimes violence can be harnessed as a sort of counter-movement, built on the ruins of failed oil development' (Watts 2007, 640). This purported counter-movement provides evidence of youth entering political space 'as saboteurs' (Durham 2000, 118), reflected in 'specific modes of violence, and the emergence of new cooperative units such as gangs' (De Boeck and Honwana 2005, 4) and associational groups. Armed with an understanding of the rise of this counter-movement, it is now necessary to consider the alternative narrative for youth militancy offered by the 'greed, not grievance' scholars.

Economic Motivations: Greed and Livelihoods

'Greed, not grievance' scholars have failed to consider youth militancy within the deeper historical processes of the oil complex and petro-capitalism referred to above, preferring instead to explain away militancy as a greed-driven

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

strategy to gain access to oil wealth and rents through clientalist networks (Collier *et al.* 2006). At first glance, evidence for the blatant greed and criminality of youth militants appears convincing. Many militant groups are involved in illegal forms of economic predation including oil bunkering, where oil is tapped from pipelines and sold on the black market. The money raised is used to buy arms, fund further militant activity and enrich militants, particularly leaders (Asuni 2009). Collier argues this reveals youth militants to be nothing more than a vast criminal syndicate operating across the Niger Delta, offering social justice rhetoric whilst following strategies of self-enrichment (2007). Much of the current literature concurs with the perception that militancy has become 'systematically criminalized' (Malone and Nitzschke 2005), with any legitimate grievances having disappeared and militancy transformed into criminality and greed (Collier *et al.* 2003).

However, by ignoring the role of petro-capitalism in exacerbating historic inequalities and altering local power contexts, this perspective fails to properly conceptualise the nature of contemporary militant activity. The consequences of petro-capitalism upon the Niger Delta are particularly virulent for youth, and these consequences offer critical insights for analysing 'criminal' militant behaviours. At the core of these issues is the 'extended youth' (Gore and Pratten 2003, 216) faced by many youth in the Niger Delta and across the African continent (Abbink 2005). Alongside poverty and a decline in the environmental viability of traditional livelihoods, petro-capitalism has caused employment prospects in the formal sector to remain scarce, and youth are very much aware of their status as surplus labour (Ifeka 2010). The dearth of employment opportunities and social mobility has left many youth economically reliant upon their parents and elders, increasingly into the period when youth would be expected to establish independent households and families (Whyte *et al.* 2008). Research by Asuni (2009) provides evidence for this, finding that the vast majority of militants are young, single, unemployed, economically powerless and barely literate. An inability to achieve the transition into independent adulthood also includes cultural frustrations, as youth are unable to acquire full political voice in their communities (HRW 2005). The realities of an extended youth can lead militancy to become a particularly viable form of livelihood (Abbink 2005; Idemudia and Ite 2006). Osaghae *et al.*'s findings provide evidence of this, with militants citing a struggle for livelihoods and survival as forming part of their motivations for militancy (2007, 55). If this is greed, it is greed born out of poverty and the inequalities inherent to Nigerian petro-capitalism, so militancy must be understood as 'an attempt to address social injustice as well as a mode of production and a way of making a living' (Boas 2012).

Furthermore, in attempting to 'cast all insurgencies as an extreme form of common criminality' (Ballentine and Sherman 2003a, 7), 'greed, not grievance scholars' fail to comprehend how livelihood strategies and politically-motivated militancy can exist concurrently (Watts 2007, 650). When considering the plethora of militant groups and organisations, historic and contemporary, in the Niger Delta; some scholars have attempted to draw a conceptual distinction between grievance and greed-driven militancy on the basis of motives (Ako 2011). This line has proven impossible to draw. The Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), considered a respected forum for youth and community grievances and following a highly grievance driven agenda, funded its activities based upon the illegal oil bunkering of the militant wing, trained and led by Government Tompolo (Asuni 2009). Furthermore, the most active militant group in recent years, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), is a loose umbrella organisation strongly connected to oil predation and kidnapping, yet MEND also offers a clear political manifesto and meets this rhetoric with action (McNamee 2012; Ukiwo 2007). To add another layer of complexity, groups such as MEND and the FNDIC are constituted of a plethora of smaller militias and cult gangs (Osaghae 2007) connected to university confraternities in Rivers State and known for inter-group violence, turf warfare and criminal behaviour (Asuni 2009). In the Niger Delta, different militant groups 'interact in somewhat symbiotic relationships' (Ako 2011, 46) and individual youths can be involved in multiple forms of militant organisation and associational grouping, all of which have highly porous boundaries. A broad characterisation of militancy as criminal therefore appears further ill-founded, not least when considering that militants still receive high levels of support from local communities (Osaghae *et al.* 2007).

Conclusion

By analysing the inter-generational politics inherent to the rise of youth militancy, it becomes apparent that this militancy has erupted from the consequences of the oil complex and petro-capitalism; namely the devastation of the Niger Delta and local livelihoods. Importantly, petro-capitalism impacts upon multiple actors and networks – with local

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

leaders even forming a part of the oil complex – influencing the political context of these actors in various ways, but with shared consequences of social, political, economic and environmental devastation. The manifestation of petro-capitalism at the local level evidences the need to consider youth militancy as emerging against not only MNCs and the state, but also against local gerontocratic rule, as revealed in the shift towards youth power in the local governable space. However, the consequences of petro-capitalism also formulates specific youth grievances related to social mobility and livelihoods; an ‘extended youth’ (Gore and Pratten 2003, 216). This mixture of individual economic needs and ideological motivations underlie the complex and at times contradictory nature of militant activity. When considered alongside the symbiotic relationship between many militant groups and the fluid allegiances of individual youths within them, the ‘greed, not grievance’ characterisation of mass criminality in the Niger Delta is shown to be fundamentally misleading.

Resistance and Accommodation

The complex nature of youth militancy is apparent, yet one final characteristic of militancy requires consideration; the connections between militancy and the oil complex, and how militants use petro-capitalism even as they resist its consequences for their communities. By utilising the insights into youth’s ascendance as political actors and their motivations garnered above, these connections can be considered with regards to processes of resistance and accommodation.

Connections and Contradictions

The evidence for militant connections to the various levels of the oil complex is vast, including cooperation and ties with military and government figures, MNCs and local politicians. During the shift in the local governable space of communities, many local youths were paid by MNCs to provide protection services at the same time as they were usurping the power of local leaders and even conducting anti-state and MNC activities; there is even evidence of violence due to competition over these rents (Boas 2012). Whilst this activity links strongly to militancy as a livelihood strategy, it also points to the active role MNCs have played in fuelling and sustaining local conflict dynamics through their connections with militants (WAC 2003). This signifies that the oil complex and petro-capitalism do not simply create the deplorable socio-economic conditions from which militancy emerges, but are active in sustaining and even exacerbating militancy; yet another reality lost upon ‘greed, not grievance’ scholars. Further examples of this include cult gangs who have been co-opted by local politicians to provide intimidation during election periods. A number of politicians, local and national, are members of the university confraternities from which cult gangs emanate, and retain close links with these groups when it is politically expedient (Asuni 2009). A final connection of militants to the oil complex can be seen through oil bunkering. Illegally bunkered oil is generally moved out to sea by militants on small barges, before being sold onto the international oil market. It is a badly kept secret that high ranking figures in the Nigerian government and military are involved in this process, accepting bribes and a cut of the profits in return for letting barges slip by ‘unnoticed’ (Asuni 2009).

Appreciating militant accommodation with the oil complex is important for two reasons. First, it draws attention to the active role of the oil complex in integrating militants into petro-capitalism in such a way as to sustain their activity. ‘Greed, not grievance’ scholars have not only misunderstood the nature of youth militancy, but have painted the Nigerian state and MNCs as fully legitimate actors facing a tide of criminality and violence. Such a perspective defies the reality that MNCs are active players in local conflict dynamics, as admitted in a working paper for Shell (WAC 2003), and the connection of state and military figures to militancy evidences that the state is ‘not even corruption. It is organised crime’ (The Economist 2007). The failures of ‘greed, not grievance’ analysis are especially dangerous when considering they can lead to the legitimisation of brutal state crackdowns on militancy and further ineffective, inhumane policy (Obi 2010). Secondly, it is apparent that youth militants utilise the very structures that allowed and created the devastation of the Niger Delta as a means with which to sustain their activity and to fight against it. This is the central contradiction in militant behaviour: the symbiosis of resistance and accommodation. This symbiosis describes the ways in which militancy emerges out of the social, economic and political consequences of petro-capitalism and in direct opposition to the different axes along which this is represented (environmental and economic degradation of oil extraction by MNCs, state repression, and local elite complicity and self-enrichment), yet also connects strongly to the oil complex in order to use the clientelist networks of petro-capitalism to ensure livelihoods

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

and fund continued resistance. It is this contradiction which makes the behaviour and rhetoric of youth militants so difficult to understand, and indeed what has led it to be so woefully mischaracterised by 'greed, not grievance' scholars.

Contemporary Implications and a Rationale for Further Research

Today, the Niger Delta provides the backdrop to an uneasy amnesty agreed in 2009, which has seen major militants, such as Ekpemupolo Tompolo and Ateke Tom, lay down their arms; with the government pledging considerable sums toward the rehabilitation of ex-militants and the creation of alternative livelihoods (Boas 2012). This situation is a microcosm of the complexities of youth militant behaviour and motivations. On the one hand, the willingness of militants to end their activities in return for an amnesty and the large numbers that turned up for education in alternative livelihoods reveals how livelihood necessity and legitimate grievances underlie militancy far more than an unquenchable thirst for accessible oil wealth. Equally, this points to the willingness of militants to accommodate with the government if this proves effective in ensuring their livelihoods and achieving gains for their cause. However, much of the money put towards alternative livelihoods training and abating youth grievances has disappeared within the clientalist networks of the Nigerian state, elevating the cynicism of many militants towards the government's genuine commitment to providing them with alternative livelihoods and abating grievances (Boas 2012). This situation is indicative of petro-capitalism at work, with the diversion of government rents from their official use and continued support of the Nigerian state for MNCs potentiating further militant grievances and violence. Indeed, a lack of noticeable progress towards addressing the grievances of the oil minorities has led simmering resentments to turn back towards a violence that was never completely eradicated (Otuchikere 2010). One youth has described the amnesty as the equivalent of 'sweeping dirt under the rug', and a number of militant groups have continued attacks on oil installations, claiming to speak on behalf of MEND (Otuchikere 2010).

This situation requires analysis and understanding that goes beyond the potentially dangerous perspective offered by the 'greed, not grievance' scholars. Research must consider the links between militants and the oil complex in order to tease out how these processes are occurring within the amnesty, and the potential this may hold for further rounds of violence. Instead of characterising all militant activity as criminal, or indeed suggesting it is all grievance inspired, a more holistic and penetrating analysis of youth militancy must ensue, considering the interplay of processes of resistance and accommodation and how these are navigated and understood by youth militants, based upon the realities of petro-capitalism and the youth motivations and strategies elucidated in this report.

Bibliography

ABBINK, J., (2005) 'Being Young in Africa: The Politics of Despair and Renewal', in Abbink, J., and van Kessel, I., (eds) *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth Politics and Conflict in Africa*, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1-34

AKO, R., (2011) 'The struggle for resource control and violence in the Niger Delta', in Obi, C., and Aas Rustad, S., (eds) *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 42 - 54

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (2011) 'Shell accused over misleading figures on Nigeria oil spills', <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/shell-accused-over-misleading-figures-nigeria-oil-spills-2011-01-25> (Accessed: 24th March 2012)

ASUNI, J., (2009) 'Understanding the Armed Groups of the Niger Delta', Council on Foreign Relations Working Paper, www.cfr.org/content/.../CFR_WorkingPaper_2_NigerDelta.pdf

BALLENTINE, K., AND SHERMAN, J., (2003b) 'Beyond Greed and Grievance: Reconsidering the Economic Dynamics of Armed Conflict', in Ballentine, K., and Sherman, J., (eds) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 259-283

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

BASSEY, N., (2006) 'Trade and Human Rights in the Niger Delta', Pambazuka Issue 257, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/34801> (Accessed: 24th March 2012)

BOAS, M., (2012) 'MEND: The Nature of an Insurgency', *e-International Relations*, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/05/11/mend-the-nature-of-an-insurgency/> (Accessed: 11th May 2012)

CAWTHRA, M., (2011) 'Collusion and Criminalisation: Fuel Conflict in the Niger Delta', *Conflict Trends*, Issue 2, ACCORD, http://www.accord.org.za/downloads/ct/ct_2011_2.pdf

COLLIER, P., (2007) *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

COLLIER, P., HOFFLER, A., AND ROHNER, D., (2006) 'Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War', Centre for the Study of African Economies, Working Paper 2006-10, <http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/workingpapers/pdfs/2006-10text.pdf>

DE BOECK, F., AND HONWANA, A., (2005) 'Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity and Place', in Honwana, A., and De Boeck, F. (eds), *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 1-19

DURHAM, D., (2000) 'Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts 1 and 2', *Anthropological Quarterly* 73 (3), 113-120

EBIENFA, K., (2011) 'Militancy in the Niger Delta and the Emergent Categories', *Review of African Political Economy* 38 (130), 637-643

EMESEH, E., (2011) 'The Niger Delta crisis and the question of access to justice', in Obi, C., and Aas Rustad, S., (eds) *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 55 – 70

GORE, C., AND PRATTEN, D., (2003) 'The Politics of Plunder: The Rhetorics of Order and Disorder in Southern Nigeria', *African Affairs* 102, 211-240

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2005) 'Rivers and Blood: Guns, Oil and Power in Nigeria's Rivers State', Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/background/africa/nigeria0205/nigeria0205.pdf> (Accessed: 15th March 2012)

IDEMUDIA, U., AND ITE, U., (2006) 'Demystifying the Niger Delta Conflict: Towards an Integrated Explanation', *Review of African Political Economy* 109, 391-406

IFEKA, C., (2010) 'War on "terror": Africom, the kleptocratic state and under-class militancy in West Africa-Nigeria', *Concerned African Scholars, Bulletin* 85, 30-49, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85ifeka.pdf>

IFEKA, C., (2006) 'Youth Cultures and the Fetishization of Violence in Nigeria', *Review of African Political Economy* 110, 721-736

IKELEGBE, A., (2006) 'Beyond the Threshold of Civil Struggle: Youth Militancy and the Militia-ization of the Resource Conflicts in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria', *African Study Monographs* 27 (3), 87-122

JIKE, V., (2010) 'Oil Companies and Host Community: A Probable Scenario for Reciprocal Empowerment', *Journal of Human Ecology* 30 (2), 131-142

JIKE, V., (2004) 'Environmental Degradation, Social Disequilibrium, and the Dilemma of Sustainable Development in

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

the Niger-Delta of Nigeria', *Journal of Black Studies* 34 (5), 686-701

KAPLAN, R., (1994) 'The Coming Anarchy', Atlantic Magazine, February Edition, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/4670/?single_page=true (Accessed: 28th March 2012)

KEEN, D., (2000) 'Incentives and Disincentives for Violence' in Berdal, M., and Malone, D., (eds) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 19-42

LE BILLON, P., (2005) *Fuelling War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflict*, INS Adelphi Paper 373, Abingdon: Routledge

MALONE, D., AND NITZSCHKE, H., (2005) 'Economic Agendas in Civil Wars: What We Know, What We Need to Know', World Institution for Development Economics Research (WIDER), Discussion Paper No. 2005/07, www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working.../dp2005-07.pdf (Accessed: 5th April 2012)

MCNAMEE, M., (2012) 'Have the Niger Delta's MEND Militants Resumed Operations in Southern Nigeria?', *Terrorism Monitor* 10 (4), <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4f4b5b532.html> (Accessed: 28th March 2012)

MOSOP, (1990) 'Ogoni Bill of Rights', http://www.mosop.org/Ogoni_Bill_of_Rights_1990.pdf (Accessed: 1st April 2012)

OBI, C., (2008) 'Enter the Dragon? Chinese Oil Companies & Resistance in the Niger Delta', *Review of African Political Economy* 35 (117), 417-434

OBI, C., (2001) 'The Changing Forms of Identity Politics in Nigeria under Economic Adjustment: The Case of the Oil Minorities Movement of the Niger Delta', Research Report 119, Nordic Africa Institute, 129.132.57.230/serviceengine/Files/ISN/95530/.../en/119.pdf (Accessed: 9th March 2012)

OBI, C., AND AAS RUSTAD, S., (2011) 'Introduction: Petro-violence in the Niger Delta – the complex politics of an insurgency', in Obi, C., and Aas Rustad, S., (eds) *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books

O'BRIEN, D., (1996) 'A lost generation? Youth identity and state decay in West Africa', in Werbner, R., and Ranger, T., (eds) *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, London: Zed Books, 55-74

OTUCHIKERE, C., (2010) 'Nigeria: Renewed Militancy and 2011 Elections', allAfrica, <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/201011221260.html> (Accessed: 28th March 2012)

OSAGHAE, E., IKELEGBE, A., OLARINMOYE, O., AND OKHONMINA, S., (2007) 'Youth Militias, Self-Determination and Resource Control Struggles in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria', CODESRIA Research Report No. 5, http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/CDP_Nigeria2-2.pdf (Accessed: 10th April 2012)

OWOLBAI, O., AND OKWECHIME, I., (2007) 'Oil and Security in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Crisis', *Africa Development* Vol. XXXII (1), 1-40

RENO, W., (2000) 'Shadow States and the Political Economy of Civil Wars', in Berdal, M., and Malone, D., (eds) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 43-68

RICHARDS, P., (2003) 'The Political Economy of Internal Conflict in Sierra Leone', Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Working Paper 21, www.clingendael.nl/.../2003/20030800_cru_working_paper_21.pdf (Accessed: 29th March 2012)

Militancy in the Niger Delta: Petro-Capitalism and the Politics of Youth

Written by Joe Sutcliffe

THE ECONOMIST, (2007, April 26th) 'Big men, big fraud and big trouble', <http://www.economist.com/node/9070922> (Accessed: 3rd May 2012)

UKIWO, U., (2011) 'The Nigerian state, oil and the Niger Delta crisis', in Obi, C., and Aas Rustad, S., (eds) *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the complex politics of petro-violence*, London: Zed Books, 17 – 27

UKIWO, U., (2007) 'From "Pirates" to "Militants": A Historical Perspective on Anti-State and Anti-Oil Company Mobilization among the Ijaw of Warri, Western Niger Delta', *African Affairs* 106 (425), 587-610

WAC GLOBAL SERVICES, (2003) 'Peace and Security in the Niger Delta', Conflict Expert Group, Working Paper for Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, http://www.npr.org/documents/2005/aug/shell_wac_report.pdf

WALKER, A., (2009) 'Will Nigeria Oil Offensive Backfire?', BBC, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8068174.stm> (Accessed: 24th March 2012)

WATTS, M., (2007) 'Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict and Violence in the Niger Delta', *Review of African Political Economy* 34 (114), 637-660

WATTS, M., (2005a) 'Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', in Le Billon, P., (eds) *The Geopolitics of Resource Wars: Resource Dependence, Governance and Violence*, Abingdon: Routledge, 51-80

WATTS, M., (2005b), 'Righteous Oil? Human Rights, the Oil Complex and Corporate Social Responsibility', *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 30, 373-407

WHYTE, S., ALBER, E., AND VAN DER GEEST, S., (2008) 'Generational Connections and Conflicts in Africa: an introduction', in Alber, E., van der Geest, S., and Whyte, S., (eds), *Generations in Africa: Connections and Conflicts*, Lit Verlag: Berlin, 1-23

[1] In Nigeria, and indeed across much of Africa, the term 'youth' is used to encompass men aged approximately 15-40 (Ifeka 2006). It is a culturally significant term, denoting those that have not yet reached full adulthood, and Nigerian youth will often have separate youth associations in local communities which are not deemed part of formal community structures (HRW 2005). It is this understanding of youth referred to throughout this report.

--

*Written by: Joe Sutcliffe
Written at: University of Leeds
Written for: Professor Ray Bush
Date written: May 2012*

About the author:

Joe Sutcliffe is an Associate Editor of e-IR. He holds a BA (Hons) in International History and International Politics from the University of Sheffield and an MA in Global Development from the University of Leeds. His research interests include sub-Saharan Africa, social and labour movements in the global south, and global development.