



**PHD**

**Oil Governance in the Niger Delta  
Exploring the role of the Militias**

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*Award date:*  
2015

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

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# **OIL GOVERNANCE IN THE NIGER DELTA: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE MILITIAS**

Submitted by Ben Tantua  
for the degree of Ph.D.  
of the University of BATH  
2015

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**DEDICATION**

Dedicated to my Dad

**Late Chief Ebikebina Tantua Taingbe II JP**

**1929 – 2014**

For the Sacrifice

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere gratitude to Dr Joe Devine and Dr Roy Maconachie for the encouragement and support in this journey and shaping my thought processes in the academic world. I might one day set “foot in your big boats”. I also thank Prof James Copestake, Dr Ana Dinerstein, Dr Severine Deneulin, Dr Emma Carmel, Dr Kate Woodthrope, Dr Susan Johnson, Dr Palash Kamruzzaman, Dr Althea Maria Rivas, Dr Jason Hart, Dr Hedley Bashforth, and Dr Shahid, for being part of my journey and learning curve.

To Gabby Davies, Tigist, Justin, Tim, Richardo, Luke, Thomais, Emmanuel, Abid, Oscar, Viviana, Sung Hee lee, Roger, Pattharapon, Cheng, Silvia, Anh Vu Ngoc, Didem, Chloe, Sara, Doreen Abalo, Emmanuel Kumi, Sam Webb, Fay Hugh and Luke, for warmth friendship, concern and encouragement at BATH. I remain grateful to late Gen Owoye Azazi, Hon Kingsley Kuku, Arc Miebi Bribena , Oyambo Owei, Nengi Teitei, Nimi Norlan, Roo D’ Roo, Agundu, Arc Kentebe, Julie Okah, Dr Sabella, Newton Owei, Isaac Tee, ThankGod, Dr Ekpos Waritimi, Dr Youpele Banigo, Dr Engobo Emeseh, Andy Apinneh, Dr Felix Tuodolo, Dr Faith Robert, Dr Irani Isukul, for the love and support. My final word goes to my lovely Wife Gesiere Tantua for being there through thick and thin, and my sisters Dear Lady Ebiye Tantua, Akpoutu Gimba aka Akpos Darlyn, Helen Hayford, My brothers Perekeme Tantua, Diseye Tantua, Tari Tantua.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the complex voices of militants, associated with the capture of oil resources in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The persistent violent conflict involving militant groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a major concern for many within the country and the international community. Understanding the conflict in the Niger Delta has triggered a wide range of discussions and debates among researchers, politicians and policy makers. However, these debates have overlooked the views of the militants, who are actively engaged in the conflict over resource governance in the region. Moreover the ideology of self-determination and resource control, which these militants use to legitimise their actions, seem to generate different meanings and labelling that tend to cloud an understandings of the conflict in the region.

In this thesis, I adopt the theoretical assumptions of the New Social Movement literature and the epistemological views of the Interpretivist Social Constructionist approach to explore (a) what features shaped the emergence of militancy and its diverse forms (b) how do militias make sense of their role as militants? (c) how does the role of militias impact on the politics of oil governance in the Niger Delta? I argue that militia actions that appear to challenge the legitimacy and authority of the Nigerian state to control oil resources, are embedded in complex webs involving formal and informal interactions of political elites and militia leaders. From analysis of this research, key dominant concepts such as Identity, opportunism and competition, emerged to give insight as to why and how militancy has become significant in the region.

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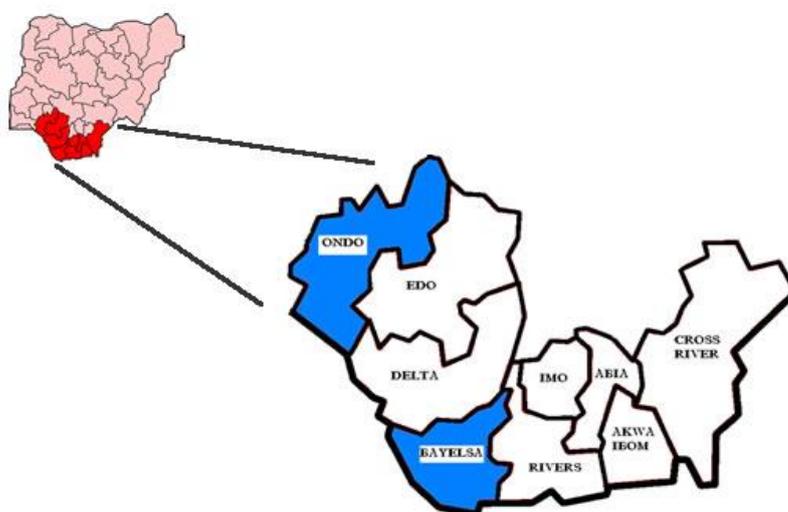
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## INTRODUCTION

The recent March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, general elections, which witnessed a change of political power from incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan to new elected President Muhammadu Buhari, might lead to a renewed violence by militia groups in the Niger Delta. This prediction is premised on the continued voices of discontent that is based on history and politics of resource governance on the one hand, and the frustrations that hinge on ideological platform of 'self-determination and resource' control to access resource benefits on the other hand. Historically, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in 1956, generated hope, expectation as well as opportunities to improve the welfare and livelihoods of host oil bearing communities. However, the reality is a few elites comprised of national and regional politicians and military personnel's, directly benefit from oil revenues, whilst communities see little or no benefits. As a result, a feeling of discontent, agitation and marginalisation in the region, gradually led to protest and armed conflict, in which militants have quickly gained prominence.

From a wider discussion on the contestation of resources, the Niger Delta provides an ample experience of violent militia-based resource conflict, which suffused the region from the late 1990s onwards and especially between about 2004 and 2009. This conflict, as well as causing many deaths, has had a significant impact on Nigeria's oil infrastructure—with global economic consequences—and has spawned an on-going illicit industry in oil theft, home-grown refining, kidnapping and piracy. It has also, through the multiplicity of armed groups that grew up during this period, significantly complicated the already contested relationships surrounding oil resources in the region.

**Figure 1.1:** Map of Nigeria and the Niger Delta. Source: UNDP, 2009.



Whilst, so much has been discussed and written on the Niger Delta conflict, the views of militants who have gained recognition and prominence within the mainstream political structures of resource governance in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Niger Delta, is rarely explored. It is into this gap, that this research seeks to explore the voices of militants, who have so radically altered the political dynamics of the Niger Delta in recent years. To do this, I outlined three central questions (1) what are the features that shaped the emergence of militia and its diverse forms in the Niger Delta (2) how is militancy perceived in the Niger Delta and how do militias make sense of their role as militants and (3) how does the role of militants, impact on the political structure and culture of resource governance in the region.

The thesis consists of seven chapters following this introduction. In chapter one, I begin by introducing the rationale and background context for this study and emphasising that, despite the legion of discussions and articles on the violent conflict involving militia groups in the Niger Delta region, the experiential views of militants who are actively engaged in the conflict, has never been explored. This is the main rationale underpinning my research. On this basis, I have used New Social Movement theory (NSM) to develop a theoretical lens with which to understand the role of militia. The complexity of the Niger Delta conflict and the trajectories in which militants have come to gain significance, raises the question as to whether the militants can be seen as 'social movements' or identity based movements.

In chapter two, I examine the literature on resource extraction and governance. In so doing, I attempt to link macro structures and processes of resource governance with the micro lived experience of individuals and groups. The chapter also examines the literature on historical processes of Nigeria's political economy; the ethnic identity politics of governance in Nigeria, and resource policies and state-society relations. These reviews are examined in order to build a context, rooted in history, of resource extraction and governance dynamics in the Niger Delta. Moreover, the review will help show that militants did not just emerge from random circumstances, but from a deep history of discontent, antagonism, oppression and mobilisation.

In chapter three, I outline my methodology. I locate the epistemological and ontological anchors of my research, as well as, the complex methodological journey required to approximate the subjective world of militants who are 'hard to reach' and prefer to be 'hard to reach'. I therefore adopted an ethnographic approach which allowed for immersion but also required patience and scrutiny of various motivations and expectations. Militants are not a homogenous group, and an important part of my methodological journey meant finding ways of allowing different voices to emerge and of course being aware of the power exercised in sharing information with me. In this way I managed to arrive at an emic understanding of oil governance in the Niger Delta.

Chapter 4, begins to go through the voices/narratives of militants and non-militants, in order to discover the interrelatedness of agency and structures of power. Specifically, the chapter explores the processes of how macro political structures of oil resource governance, simultaneously impacts differently on individuals and groups. Reflections of key historical events appear as dominant discussions for the formation of identity and the mobilisation of collective action by militia groups in the Niger Delta. In particular, the significance of a discourse around deprivation and social exclusion prior to the discovery of oil was key to the development of a collective or unified identity, Access to and control over oil then became the focus and context for grievance, deprivation and frustration for local communities in the Niger Delta. This led the way to armed conflict. The Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) in 1966 militia action that was initiated by Adaka Boro, a former school teacher and policeman in 1966, is now the dominant point of reference for contemporary militias.

The 12 Day revolt of NDVF in 1966 was largely unsuccessful because *inter alia* the militants could not mobilise sufficient resources (guns, money, network, allies), and the military regime being challenged was very strong. However, the revolt challenged the framing of the ideological battle for self-determination and control of resources; and is still used as the platform to justify and legitimise militia action by contemporary militias in Niger Delta region. Much of this can be traced back to the inspiration of Adaka Boro who is celebrated as a martyr, an icon and hero amongst ethnic minority Ijaws in the Niger Delta region. This highlights the importance of charismatic leadership for the successful development of identity formation and collective action (Smelser, 1962).

In chapter five, I appraise what it means to be a 'militant' in the Niger Delta region by drawing on perspectives of militants and non-militants. I also outline the internal organisation structure of a typical militia 'camp' in order to better understand a number of issues such as hierarchy, spirituality, resource mobilisation, network building and leadership. A key finding and argument from this chapter is that the term 'militancy' is not a straightforward one. Although from outside militants are viewed primarily as dangerous and violent, perhaps criminal; the insider perspective reveals a very different and almost heroic identity which plays between a sense of being oppressed on the one hand and an ambition to take control over key resources on the other hand.

The focus of chapter six is on the external relations of militant groups, specifically relations between militant leaders, political elites and non-state actors such as multinational oil company representatives. The boundaries between these actors are very porous and the level of interaction at formal and informal levels, is very high.

At the heart of the relations is a bargain which is highlighted at key moments such as elections, oil thefts, and informal payments to militant leaders, amnesties and so forth. In chapter seven, I reflected on three key dominant concepts: Collective identity, Opportunism and Competition/territoriality to understand the success of resistant movements in resource endowed environments. These concepts are intrinsically linked, and are also tied to understanding why people mobilise, how they mobilise to access resources, and how their mobilisation is impacted by and impacts the unfolding of governance arrangements. These arrangements which are quite informal is key to the success of militancy and not necessarily the identities and ideologies behind the actions.

## ***Chapter One: Militias in the Niger Delta as a Form of New Social Movement***

### ***1.1. Introduction***

This chapter sets out to establish the context and conceptual framework that underpins the militancy in Niger Delta region. It provides the background context and rationale and examines contemporary views of literature on conflict in the region, and considers New Social Movement (NSM) theory as an approach for understanding militancy in the region. The chapter identifies key concepts such as collective identity, resource conflict and power in the process of examining the role and significance of militancy in the Niger Delta vis-à-vis Nigeria. Overall, historical context, process and culture are important to this research as they help to unfold a body of knowledge on how individuals/groups perceive 'reality' to inform collective action in the Niger Delta. Specifically, they tell the way claims are made and contested, within complex configuration of actors. In setting the context and framework of this research, this chapter begins by providing an introduction on Niger Delta region, to help the reader appreciate the web of interactions, meanings and varied interpretations of militia actions around resource governance. However, I argue that whilst crude oil appears to be context for militia action, it does not tell the whole story behind the actions of militancy in the region. As a result, very little is known about the conflict in the Niger Delta.

### ***1.2. Research Rationale and Background Context***

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a major oil producing area and, as such, it is central to the economic stability of the country. For a large proportion of the last decade, the region has been plagued by conflict in which a range of militia groups have emerged to play a significant role. In addition, discussion of militancy is often viewed from a conflict-theory perspective (Courson, 2009; Agbu, 2004; Obi, 2008), which by and large, have not engaged the views of militants. Moreover, the conflict involving these militants, present varied perception and labelling. They are seen and labelled in a particular form as oil thieves, kidnappers, or freedom fighters by the public and media. Prior to conducting this research, discussion and debates on militancy in the region wasn't seen within mainstream political economy of Nigeria, but it has now gained local, national and international recognition and concern. These recognition and concerns, gives a pointer to a complex configuration of actors within the structure of resource governance and the struggles for recognitions, that needs unravelling in order to understand how and why militancy quickly gained significance in Nigeria.

In order to gain an overview of the Niger Delta conflict, I examine some literature on conflict to give insight to the nature of conflict in Niger Delta and how and why militancy emerged in a particular way in the region. Whilst there are no precise definitions of conflict, it can be viewed within unequal distribution of resources and power, where people compete for money, power and

status, and where societal values do not necessarily represent the common interest of all members of a society, but the interest of a few (Mattewman *et al.*, 2007; Vold *et al.*, 2002; Buechler, 2000). In particular, resource endowed environments are viewed as arenas for contested entitlements, frustration and competition (Tilly, 2003), that reveal how protest or insurgencies emerge in shaping a particular political outcome (Ross, 2008). Moreover, conflict can be violent or non-violent. Non-violence are often forms of civil disobedience by individual or groups (Vinthagen, 2006), while violent conflicts are destructive forms of action which usually involve use of arms (Jacoby, 2008). Although violent conflicts often occurs between ethnic groups (Brown and Langer, 2012), it does not necessarily follow that all ethnic groups fight against each other (Stewart, 2008), as ethnically diverse societies can also cohabit peacefully with each other. Furthermore violent conflict can be seen as actions against the state by rebel groups (Mason and Fett, 1996), fighting either to replace an existing government or to create a new nation state.

According to Stewart (2008), the driving force that motivates people to engage in violent conflict, are primarily religion and ethnic identities, which are mostly linked to economic benefits or a political cause. Moreover, violent conflict can be based on ethnic identity groups who seek to achieve their own economic, social, and political positions through violent measures (Stewart, 2008). Others such as Turton (1997) and Fearon and Laitin (1996), respectively considered the underlying political and economic situations within given nations, and its historical composition as the driving force for violent conflict. Such action being labelled as 'militant act' by the national/regional elites, are mostly mobilised around collective identity (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), propel people to fight, kill and even die in the name of that identity. Also, studies on organisational dynamics of militia groups (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Weinstein, 2009) argue, that 'militia groups' emerge from frustration and perception of injustice across a section of a population with pre-existing identity bonds. They may face common constraints or opportunities, through engagement in illegal diversion of natural resources, patronage networks, smuggling, criminal kidnapping, and political activism/opportunities of immediate profits.

Within the purview of violent conflict in this research, the protest and resistance of 'militia groups' in the Niger Delta region can also be seen in line with Tilly *et al.*, (2001)'s view, as organised effort by a significant group of people who feel alienated, dominated, or unequal and, therefore, seek to effect or resist change by acting within and outside the laws of the state. They represent groups with common history taking action to seek specific change at the individual/ collective levels. The action of militia also broadly reflect the issues of territorial space of action, individual or lived experiences, and physical environment (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). They inform sentiments of belonging, a set of belief, values and meaning (Crossley, 2002), where individuals/groups have an image of themselves within forms of socially constructed meanings of everyday life.

These constructed meanings of everyday life, also brings out the complexities of human action in relation to claims making, legitimacy and recognition within the context of resource-rich environment. These complexities do often arise from interactions over resource management and access to its benefits (Adger *et al.*, 2005b). This is particularly so, when such interactions are likely to produce winners and losers that is based on the exercise of power through domination, resistance or cooperation. It is on this ground that this research sets out to examine how militias take action and make claims and how they legitimise these actions to gain recognition. In particular, it will focus on how claims of 'self-determination and resource control' are framed, translated, and activated into collective action. It aims to identify some features that underlie the persistent conflict in Niger Delta, as well as, broaden our understanding of militancy. It is assumed that the direct engagement with militant will provide a rich body of knowledge on the Niger Delta conflict. Besides, it attempts to give insight to the bigger picture beyond the assumed context of resources. The following preceding section therefore attempts to give background information on the political economy of Niger Delta in order to appreciate some feature that promote tensions in shaping the conflict in the region.

The Niger Delta region is politically defined as comprising nine out of the thirty-six states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria (see figure 1.1). This research will focus in particular on three of these states: Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states. These states are where militancy has been most intense. The region, as a whole, is characterised by wetland and mangrove swamps and intersected by a complex network of creeks and rivers. It has an estimated population of over 21 million inhabitants, which accounts for about 15% of Nigeria's current population of 140 million. The rural inhabitants of the region engage primarily in subsistence activities, predominantly fishing and farming.

The region is endowed with substantial hydrocarbon deposits but these exist within a fragile ecosystem that harbours a rich variety of flora and fauna. These hydrocarbon deposits, together with the environmental impact of extraction, lie at the heart of the lingering conflict in the Niger Delta, whereby oil is seen as the defining feature of the Nigerian State. It is what shapes the macro-political structure and economy of Nigeria, as well as the micro interactions and rising tensions that promotes violence in the Niger Delta region (Obi, 2001; Odukoya, 2006) (see also the chapter on resource extraction). As a result, the host oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta region are embroiled within a configuration of multinational oil firms, the Nigerian State, and regional and local political actors. The complexities of oil extraction, together with economic value of oil, figure centrally in the armed conflict in the Niger Delta region.

These structures are argued as operating through an oil complex (Watts, 2004) that creates a sense of identity and dispossession, thereby provoking different forms of claims making, recognition and competition, since the discovery of oil in 1956. Competition for control of the oil resources of the region was a factor in the Biafra War in the early 1960s and this in itself was but one expression of a more fundamental conflict in the Nigerian state between the three dominant ethnic groups of the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The underlying competition between these groups preceded the discovery of oil, but, since the 1960s, the oil revenue generated in the Niger Delta has provided an important context in which that competition can be expressed. These issues will be explored in more detail in chapter 2 on resource extraction and Nigerian politics but, in summary, within this picture of competition between the dominant ethnic groups, the people of the Niger Delta itself (who largely fall into a number of smaller minority ethnic groups) have been excluded. Accordingly, the macro-political competition for control of oil revenue, is linked to the increasing number of militia movements in Niger Delta, which have sought to press the claims of the oil-bearing communities and to reverse their systematic exclusion from the resources of their homeland. Accordingly, these movements have generated a number of figureheads and key events over the years, including the twelve-day revolution of Adaka Boro in 1966, the peaceful protests of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People led by Ken Saro Wiwa up until his hanging by the military regime in 1995, and the Kaiama Declaration by Ijaw nationalists in 1998

From a wider discussion on resource contestation, the Niger Delta provides an ample experience of violent militia-based resource conflict, which suffused the region from the late 1990s onwards and especially between about 2004 and 2009. This conflict, as well as causing many deaths, has had a significant impact on Nigeria's oil infrastructure—with global economic consequences—and has spawned an on-going illicit industry in oil theft, home-grown refining, kidnapping and piracy. These with the multiplicity of armed groups that grew up during this period, further complicated the already contested relationships surrounding oil resources in the region. Thus, the oil complex that Watts talked about in 2004 can now be said to also include a large number of militias and their commanders, as well as disparate elements of the Nigerian military. These new actors on the scene, even if they might be considered to be just modern manifestations of older rivalries and claims making, undoubtedly, further complicate the task of creating sustainable peace in the Niger Delta. Thus, I argue here that, in the context of laying the foundations for peace, it is vital to attain an up-to-date and nuanced understanding of Watts' oil complex which still exists. To achieve this, it is necessary to understand the claims making, motivation and ideology of militants, who have so radically altered the political dynamics of the Niger Delta in recent years. This insider view from in-depth empirical study of militias, which brings in the lived experiences of militias with the conceptual understanding of resource governance, is

seen as the contribution that this research seeks to make. To do these, I outline three central questions which I seek to address in this study. There are;

1. What are the features that shaped the emergence of militia action, and its diverse forms in the Niger Delta?

2. How is militancy perceived in the Niger Delta, and how do militias make sense of their role as militants?

3. How does the role of militants impact on the political structure and culture of resource governance in the region?

### **1.2.1. Contemporary Views of the Niger Delta Conflict**

This section engages with a number of literature to define the boundaries of research, as well as discuss the relevance of NSM as key contribution to this research. It considers militants as relevant key actors in understanding the historical process and ideology of the conflict in Niger Delta. Specifically, it aims to understand the local dynamics and complex narratives which gives significance to the conflict in the region.

Contemporary studies on insurgency and writings on militancy in the Niger Delta region reveal a scarcity of 'insider' views. Amongst the few contributors is Guichaoua's (2010) survey which describes the Odua People's Congress (OPC), a militia group in the western region of Nigeria, as patronage networks of culturally based hybrid creatures with an ideology of self-determination as their core reformist agenda (i.e. their claims making). However, the tactics and homogeneity of the OPC differ from the guerrilla warfare structure/organisation of militias in the Niger Delta region, where oil is the symbolic context of the conflict. Within context of the conflict in Niger Delta region, a plethora of literature exists. Whilst, the perspectives, views or approaches to the conflict may differ, they emerge with commonalities around political and socio-economic dimensions of resource governance (Ukiwo, 2007, 2011a; Le Billion, 2005; Collier, 2000; Collier *et al.*, 2006). For instance, Collier (2007) referred to militants in the Niger Delta, as criminals motivated by economic greed (Sutcliffe, 2011). A view that stands at odds with ideology of emancipation or claim of political and economic marginalisation, insurgents often profess. More so, the greed not grievance school of thought, see insurgents or militia groups as '*criminals or bandits*', taking advantage of conflict, to exploit resources for personal gains (Sutcliffe, 2011). Although, these views are relevant and holds true in certain aspects of this research, it however does not give a true picture of the conflict, because it ignores the historical processes and political structure of resource governance that propel grievance in the first place. Historical grievances which triggered of militancy as voiced in this research (see chapter 4), as well as the work Ukiwo

(2011), provide ample evidence that comes strongly against the greed not grievance school of thought.

In this thesis, I have attempted to engage the grievance and not greed debate, from the role of identity and ideology. Identity that is important in understanding how the actions of militants in Niger Delta, is tied to a particular history. Whilst, I contend to that greed plays an important feature of the conflict in the Niger Delta, I argue that the ideology of militants which changes overtime is critical for understanding the process of mobilisation in the conflict. As illustrated in chapter 4 of this research, there are some instances where ideology of militias, is strongly contested (Adaka Boro and the Ogele procession). In other instances (see chapters 5 and 6), the ideology tend to be weakened by negotiations between militia leaders and political elites or multinational oil companies, thus, revealing the porous boundaries of social and material transformation (exchange of guns for vote, money for pipeline protection, etc.) and enabling militia leaders to gain status and wealth (Ako, 2011). These instances of militia activities, which are very much 'greed/entrepreneurship' a view rightly echoed by other writers such as, Watts (2007); Ukiwo,( 2007); Boas (2012). Nevertheless, this research indicates that militants have gained prominence within mainstream political structure of resource governance. The ideology and entrepreneurship which goes in tandem with significance of militants, enables access to a greater share of the national cake. Ideology is thus important to understand the evolution of militancy, especially the way it is used in mobilising collective action.

As I earlier argued in section 1.3 of this thesis, resource governance, in the context of Niger Delta, is fundamentally about power and distribution or redistribution of resources. The demonstration of power within political economy of resource extraction, partly explains the emergence of militancy and manifestation of violence in the Niger Delta (Obi, 2001, 2008).The work of Obi (2008), which links the conflict in the region to vested interest of 'global hegemonic forces' that sees oil as vital and globally needed. These also explains the militarisation of the region for the continued uninterrupted flow along with the protection of oil investment and workers, at all cost (Osaghae *et al.*, 2007; Ukiwo, 2011b). The exercise of political power is also explained from sophisticated technology needed in the oil industry. According to Ukiwo, (2011), "oil begins to flow only when interest of technology and power coincide" p19. These invariably means that even the technology needed for oil production, marginalises local host oil bearing communities, to spur the violence in region. The exercise of power in process of resource extraction is also evident in the legal framework of resource extraction (Emeseh, 2011). The laws such as the land use act, of 1979, dispossess the rights of host communities in resource exploration or production, is voiced by militants and key informants in this research (see Chapter 2 section 2.3.4 and also empirical 4).

Another key highlight from existing literature and this research, is the labelling of militancy in Niger Delta region. Labelling explains how militants see themselves and how they are perceived by Nigerian state, oil companies, communities and media, to inform utterances and exchange of communication within structure and process of access to resources. Whilst the Nigerian state, see militants as criminals, bandits or restive youths, the militants, see themselves as freedom fighter, liberators or resource agitators (as voiced in this research). The state and non-state actors, locals and the media seem to recognise that the activities of militant groups in the Niger Delta can mean different things to different people. Alternatively, they might be viewed positively as protectors of their community, or even as “businessmen” getting what they can out of the fractured environment in which they happen to live. These labels, however, have not allowed for a more informed and in-depth understanding of militia actions in the Niger Delta region, resulting in the need for this research. Therefore, labelling which reveal power relations and authority within social constructs as well as access to benefits, form an important lens of this research.

However, whilst the labelling, reiterate the greed not grievance debates, it downplays the failures of political elites to maintain social order. Thus we need to look beyond the dominance of interest and greed, to identify how the macro political culture and contest of resources, impact differently on individuals and groups and how these impact influence the restructuring of strategies and tactics, livelihood patterns, and governable spaces in Niger Delta region ( illustrated in chapters 5 and 6). Therefore, it can be argued that criminality of militancy, from the activities of oil bunkering, kidnapping for ransom, bank robberies and sea piracy (Cuvelier *et al.*, 2014; Ukiwo, 2007), only tells the existence of petro capitalism (Watts, 2004, 2007). A situation whereby resource revenues are controlled by few elites within patronage networks. Moreover, resource conflicts, provide incentive to wealth as well as, a means of, or motive for patronage. Such networks which exacerbates inequalities and alters local context of power, induce alternative ways of survival paths in communities (Gore and Pratten, 2003; Osaghae *et al.*, 2007). As Boas (2012), rightly states, if we consider criminality of militants as greed, then it's a greed born out of poverty and inequality inherent to Nigeria's petro-capitalism. Therefore, militancy needs to be understood, as an attempt to address social injustice as well as, a mode of production and a way of living (Boas, 2012). More so, the greed or criminality of militants explains the culture of impunity, and lack of accountability by ruling elites (Courson, 2011). A criminality that aligns with the idea of resource curse, which establishes a relationship between crude oil and incentives for militias to seek ways of accessing wealth (Ross, 2004).

Equally, social relation between varied layers of actors, which revolve around dominant interest, coheres with corruption, poverty and the violence in Niger Delta region. Violence which strongly relates to the nature of response by the Nigerian state that triggers the rise and significance of militancy as empirically voiced in this thesis (see chapter 4). Arguably, patterns of violence and repertoires of contention, also account for ideologies of state and non-state actors, as it influence shifts from non-violence to violent approach (Wood, 2015) as illustrated in chapter 6. Militancy represents a site of violence with varied interpretations of meanings (Omotola, 2010), which can be seen as a continuum of competitive struggle. Also, militant groups in the Niger Delta region are interlinked through formal and informal relationships with state and non-state actors, which has encouraged a clandestine economy of protection, kidnapping and targeting of expatriate oil workers, as well as state-sponsored reprisals against rival warlords (Orogun, 2003). On this account, the violent struggles for resource control in Niger Delta which inform claims of ownership, access and equity, can be argued as grounded in political culture of resource extraction.

Although social movements often do not aim to overthrow regimes (Wood, 2015), when compared to civil wars, the violent actions of militias, (mostly from the poor and uneducated), have demonstrated the ability/ capacity (see also chapter 5 and 6) that threatens Nigeria' oil production. Hence, it can be argued that the conflict in Niger Delta, present features of 'New Wars' (Kaldor, 2013), as coalition of militias, under united platform as Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), which liberalised the exercise and monopoly of state violence. Another feature of New War character of Niger Delta conflict, is the localised presence of crude oil enmeshed in communities along the rivers, swamps and creeks. The militias are well structured and organised heterogeneous groups (Oronto *et al.*, 2004) mobilised around informal social network ties, with the capacity and skills to handle weapons. However, their internal structures are hardly known. They are dynamic, and compete for territorial control, so as to secure access to varied forms of oil benefits. Moreover, members of militia groups tend to exhibit a striking devotion to, and dependency on, their leadership structures. These militia leaders are perceived in complex ways: they are dreaded by the local people or seen as "messiahs" by community members, who view the actions of militants as a legitimate means of gaining access to oil benefits to improve the welfare and livelihoods of people in rural communities. Whether feared or loved, militia leaders are now afforded status and recognition within formally recognised institutional structures of resource governance and informal social network ties in the region. As a result, militias were able to mobilise resources (money, skilled and unskilled individuals/network) and supports within identity, seen as asymmetric warfare, which is distinct from conventional patterns of warfare (Boas, 2012). In sum, militancy, illustrates a violent conflict over the control of resources, illuminating the resource curse paradigm- presence of crude oil within decrepit livelihoods, corruption and mismanagement. Also, the conflict informs the

significance and relations to global political economy of resources, as well as the importance of identity politics within frames of New Wars. It reveals a porous boundary of social interaction between militia and political elites, divulging the failure of the Nigerian state to establish good governance, accountability and strong institutions. A view that further brings to fore the challenges of how themes of 'good governance' should transit to better outcomes, as demonstrated in empirical chapters of this research.

Adopting a sociological lens, this work argues, amongst other things, that the emergence and actions of militants in the Niger Delta region is a reaction to their lived experiences and a reflection of a desire to seek specific change. They are engaged in 'claims making' which is intrinsically linked to perceived injustice and a lack of opportunity, and these claims are validated and activated in forms, and against targets, that are dictated by the unique political, cultural and economic circumstances within which they operate. I argue that they are not interest groups, as they do not carry out their activities only within the formally established political structure, but are a plurality of militant groups taking actions and expressing the meanings of their actions both within formal and informal socio-political space.

In summary, the multi-dimensional effects of crude oil, guns, competing interests and territorial instability create a situation in which conflict is all but inevitable. Whilst there is considerable literature on these interrelationships, very little attention, however, has been paid to the inner meanings of actions as constructed by militants themselves. Undoubtedly, accessing the inner meanings, dispositions and ambitions of militia action from the viewpoint of militants is problematic. Whilst one might acknowledge that these militants may be criminals, oil thieves, kidnappers, robbers or private armies, there remains a need to unpick the complexity of these negative labels if we are to gain a better understanding of militancy in the region by exploring the intersection between the macro structure of oil governance and micro-lived experiences/subjective meanings, which militants bring into the Niger Delta conflict. I, therefore, argue that we cannot understand these complexities fully without accessing the 'inside world' of militancy. It is into this gap in current research, that this study attempts to offer an experiential, insider view of militia action in the Niger Delta region.

### **1.3. NSM: An Approach for understanding the Niger Delta Militancy**

The preceding section has attempt to provide some reasons why this research is important. This section aims to provide the relevance of NSM and why I have adopted the NSM approach to this study. It examines how NSM is defined and what its features and characteristics are. The later sections of this chapter will build on this understanding to show how NSM might be applied to militancy in Niger Delta and thus form a valid initial theoretical model for addressing the questions of this research. And through this lens, identify some specific concepts/issues, which would help to answer the research questions posed in the previous section of this chapter. One of the objective of this research, is to conduct an analysis of the construction of militia action from the perspective of militant. Thus, a potential theoretical model for accessing an “insider” view of the micro interactions, structures, strategies and tactics, which go together is New Social Movements theory. NSM is deemed appropriate for this study as it offers, a strand of appealing ideas and arguments for understanding issues of *identity, conflict and power*.

This research holds the view that resource governance is fundamentally about power and the distribution or re-distribution of resources. And what this thesis attempts to do, is to engage key actors called ‘militants’ involvement in that process of contesting power and access to the distribution of resource benefits. Thus it aims to explore the characteristics of militias, their organisation, aspiration/ambitions within macro structure and context of resource governance. In order to understand how power is been mobilised and articulated, I align with the ideas and perspectives of New Social Movement (NSM) that, helps me to analyse this particular agents called ‘militants’ within structure-agency relations of conflict over resources. In particular, it helps to identify the framing process of conflict over resources, which actuates key issues such as ‘*Identity and beliefs*’. More importantly identity that hinges on solidarity, shared meanings and beliefs, which induce ideology and platform for collective action, as demonstrated in chapter 4 of this thesis. The identity helps to locate the context of what individuals and groups believe and how it affects behaviours, in this particular case, a behaviour of violence and its reproduction within the political economy of resource competition.

In addition, NSM as the potential for examining the issues of (1) collective action, (2) organised structures, (3) shared beliefs, and (4) conflict and power, within macro political processes and contestations around governance of resources. Especially, analysing the processes of collective identities and how these are constituted and legitimised. These four key themes, gives insight to processes and mobilisation of conflict, which are inherently tied to shared-meaning, beliefs and identity, whereby militants, are seen as social actors having the knowledge and capacity to self-reflect on their actions. More so, I find the NSM useful as it focuses more on

micro level agency and these allows me explore the role and activities of militants, in particular, how they position themselves within the structure and political processes of oil governance.

The use of NSM is relevant for this research, as it offers a potential for understanding militancy and conflict from a micro perspective, as it offers a button-up approach that is useful for understanding the local dynamics, the mobilisation of youth/militias and how they see themselves, think and act within the context and political of power over the governance of resource. Moreover, it makes a connection between the organisation of conflict, beliefs and shared identity. In addition, this research contributes to broader literature by bringing the voices of these key actors (militants) from an insider perspective and viewing this from the lenses of New Social Movement (NSM). A voice that is heard, but misunderstood, or a voice that is not just heard or silenced. Nevertheless, I am not particularly tied to the ideas of NSM, but I find it useful because it helps in making sense of mobilisation of conflict, the shared beliefs and identity, which are tied together. Accordingly, I try to provide some definitions and characteristics of NSM in preceding paragraphs.

Social Movements theory has come to be divided into “old” and “new” social movements. Although there is no agreed way of defining the difference between these, the term may take proactive or reactive forms according to varied ideological positions, social locations and context (Melucci, 1989; Castells, 1997). It refers to groups of people with shared history and experiences who are taking action against the state or authorities (Touraine, 1985). It is also viewed as, an organised effort by a significant group of people who feel alienated, dominated or unequal and are, therefore, prompted to effect or resist change by acting within or outside the law, or a combination of both (Tilly *et al.*, 2001). Likewise, the term entails a common purpose and identity within disruptive actions arising from claims making against opponents (Tarrow, 1994). Social movements activate the dynamics and complexities of social interactions within clusters of political practices, where individuals engage in forms of claims making with those who hold the power to influence decisions and behaviours (Guigni, 1999). When viewed in relation to militancy and militia actions in the Niger Delta, these definitions tell us that any form of movement may contain elements of history, context, claims making, domination, identity, collective action and power. Furthermore, the views of McCarthy and Zald (1977) find relevance in analysing the conflict situation in the delta, as they sought to separate what constitutes social movement from a social movement organisation. They defined Social Movement (SM) as a:

*Set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represent preferences for changing some element of social structure and/or reward distribution of society (McCarthy and Zald 1977: p 1217)*

A Social Movement Organisation (SMO), on the other hand, is a complex interaction of informal groups or organisations which identifies with, and attempts to implement its goals in accordance with the preferences of a Social Movement. When applied to this research, I argue that ethnic minorities particularly the Ogonis and Ijaws of the Niger Delta region, represent a social movement, whilst the militants are social movement organisations. Militants are groups with common histories and circumstances taking action to seek some specific change at the individual or group level. They are a plurality of informal groups, whose actions create identity and meanings to achieve a particular end. As McAdam and Snow (1997) and McAdam et al. (2008) argue, social movements constitute shared ideas and activities that are concerned with changing a pattern of social life. While individuals or groups with shared ideas for change do not necessarily constitute a social movement, when such individuals or groups are involved in collective action they can be viewed as a social movement, especially where, in contrast to interest groups, they are operating outside established political institutions.

### **1.3.1. Characteristics of New Social Movement**

New Social Movements theory emerged as a response to a number of socio-political events in Europe from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. It seeks to theorise the rise of contemporary social movements and their relationship with macroeconomic structures, including the role culture plays within such movements (Pichardo, 1997). It presents a distinct view of social movements, as it focuses on issues such as the relationships between identity, personal behaviours and quality of life, including the connections between the macro socio-political system and how individuals fit into, respond to, or change such a system. It constitutes a paradigm shift from social movements of the industrial age (Olofsson, 1988) by moving away from instrumental issues of industrialism to issues concerning quality of life that are common in post-materialistic societies (Buechler, 1995). NSM engages issues that question the structures of democratic representation that constrain citizens' participation in governance (Offe, 1985).

Another feature of NSM is its self-reflective character, which suggests that participants or members of movements constantly question the meanings of their actions (Gusfield, 1994b). This self-reflection induces a conscious choice of action, dictating the kind of tactics and structure adopted by members of the movement. These structures are often fluid and carry an anti-institutional posture, including the type of representative government they desire (Kitschelt, 1993). According to Arato and Cohen (1984), participants of NSM are not defined by class boundaries, but by common concerns, values and ideology rather than common structural locations. NSM places emphasis on the subjective consciousness of actors (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). It represents a shift to post-material values, stressing issues of identity, participation and quality of life. NSM, therefore, is characterised by the increased politicisation of social life and it is the

plurality of the social arena and the proliferation of the political space that lies behind it. A central characteristic of NSM is the rapid spread of new forms of struggle in which every subject position is constituted within an unstable discursive structure (Pichardo, 1997). The proliferation of these forms of struggle is a result of the increasing autonomy of individuals within the social and political sphere. Furthermore, the mode of mobilisation in NSM, is not bound to precedence or conforming to rule (Gusfield, 1994a), rather they do take radical forms distinct from the tactics of working class movements like civil disobedience.

NSM rejects the Marxist theories of social movements which dominated European thought during the 1960s and 1970s. The Marxist view centred on “working-class” actions that were principally concerned with economic redistribution. Scholars within the Marxist orientation were unable to provide a convincing explanation as to why students became the vanguard of protest, and why movements’ demands centred around quality of life rather than economic redistributive issues (Epstein, 1990; Plotke, 1990; Touraine, 1981). NSM also rejects the rationalist notion of the “social” as groundless but tends, rather, to assume its plurality. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), society cannot be seen as a rational and intelligible entity, as the ‘social’ can never be fully constituted in a positivist way. Popular mobilisation, therefore, is no longer based on the model of a homogenous total society, or seen in terms of a single conflict, but constitutes a plurality of concrete demands leading to a proliferation of political spaces. It is about the politicisation of everyday life rather than focusing on the macro state and economy (Calhoun, 2002).

The proponents of NSM argue that every society is centred upon a particular mode of organisation and history, which gives rise to a central conflict (Touraine, 1981, 1985). It departs, however, from the “crude Marxist” view that conflict is inevitably one in which the proletariats of capitalist societies seek to liberate themselves by forcefully seizing control of centralised state institutions in order to reform structures through the means of economic production. According to Touraine (1985), NSM refers to a specific type of conflict which evolves in line with the changing nature of societies. It is concerned with issues of territorial space of action, individual or group-lived experiences, or the physical environment, including cultural, ethnic and linguistic heritage and identity. The central core conflict may often be expressed by embattled ethnic minorities (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). NSM as a theory, therefore, addresses new forms of identity (Melucci, 1989) within areas previously not central to contentious politics (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008), such as gender differences, peace, self-realisation and general quality of life. It represents a shift from conflict over material well-being to conflict over cultural fulfilment focusing on personal identity.

NSM is also associated with a set of beliefs, values and meanings that constitute sentiments of belonging to differentiated social groups (Crossley, 2002), where members have an image of themselves with new forms of socially constructed meanings of everyday life. Within the purview of NSM, a movement is seen as the definition of the individual self, where actions are a complex mix of collective and individual confirmations of identity, drawing attention to the interaction between individual experiences at the micro level and the wider political economy of a system in which personal behaviours are bonded (Crossley, 2002). However, there is the tendency to use the term New Social Movement too broadly to capture issues in all new forms of collective action, or the tendency to give the concept more explanatory power than it empirically warrants. The NSM approach has also been criticised for its narrow focus on normal daily ways of acting and reflecting (Crossley, 2002).

#### ***1.4. Militancy: As shared set of opinions/beliefs: identity***

Turning now to apply this understanding of NSM theory in relation to how the militants in the Niger Delta region comprehend their actions, I argue that the importance of the concept of identity within the militancy provides a point of contact with NSM theory. Within such theory, identity is the individual cognitive, moral and emotional aspect that relates to broader community, categories, institutions or practices. It is a perception of shared status that is distinct from personal identities (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). According to Polletta and Jasper (2001), identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities. It is an act of perception and construction, which also includes pre-existing ties, interests and territorial boundaries. It is not fixed, but fluid, and is based on relational things and interactions with bystanders, allies, opponents and news media or state authorities.

Identity as a motivator for social movements is, therefore, viewed as an alternative to the perceived gap of the collective behaviourist approach that views protesters as irrational individuals persuaded by the nature of system in given society (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Mobilisation and process theorists, meanwhile, focus rather on structural and organisational shifts which induce actors/agents to act collectively, while the collective identity approach is used by the political process theorist in explaining how structural inequalities are transposed into subjective discontent (Mueller, 1992). Identity in the context of social movements, violent protests, and resistance or militia actions is a problematic concept, however. While such actions may involve a shared set of opinions and beliefs (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), together with solidarity and identity within an interacting collective (Touraine, 1985; Tilly, 2003), such commonly shared opinions or beliefs do not necessarily entail the presence of shared feelings of belonging (Schlesinger, 1987).

According to Ruggiero and Montagna (2008), while shared collective identity defines the boundaries of a social movement (since only those who share the same beliefs and sense of belonging may provoke the collective action that is characteristic of social movements), this collective identity does not necessarily imply homogeneity, since individuals within groups may not act in the overall interest of the group. Indeed, social movements may well comprise factions, since the presence of shared beliefs and solidarities allows actors and observers to assign a common meaning to specific collective events which may not necessarily be part of a common process (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). Thus, the boundaries of a social movement network are, therefore, identified by the specific collective identity shared by the actors involved in the interactions. Movements may also rely on pre-existing networks, organisational skills, solidarity, tactics and strategies, which are the pre-conditions for collective action, often linked to shared grievances and beliefs, discontent, or structural strains within systems.

Discontent in any given society is determined by institutional changes directly or indirectly affecting individuals' everyday life, including the increasing perception that deprivation can be fought and redressed (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008; Crossley, 2002). Social movements may also emerge from the activities of specific actors who influence collective action. Such actors utilise the political opportunities to challenge existing institutional authorities. According to Smelser (1962), movements are identified by initiating events: a particular individual event at the start of a chain reaction in a given society. These processes may take the form of inspirational leaders or other forms of mobilisation that encourage people to join a movement or engage in a particular movement action. It may be a sustained process, whereby people come to understand a movement goal and empower themselves to take action on behalf of that goal.

In determining the extent to which NSM theory can provide a helpful framework for the understanding of militancy in the Niger Delta, it is necessary to consider the nature of the shared identity within and between the militia groups, particularly in terms of shared grievances and beliefs, and to what extent this shared sense of belonging can underpin and sustain collective militant action. This is further linked to the question raised by this research: do the militants have a shared sense of purpose, or is their sense of belonging an opportunistic and transitory collective identity? Another factor involved is the extent to which inspirational leaders play a role in shaping and defining that identity, within the historical structure of Nigeria's political economy and current militancy in the Niger Delta region.

#### **1.4.1. Militancy: As Collective Action/Strategic Choice**

As implied in the previous paragraph, a shared sense of identity is, in itself, insufficient to provoke a decision to take an active part in a social movement. According to Polletta and Jasper (2001), people will often opt to free-ride irrespective of having a common interest in an issue and, while a shared identity may help to encapsulate the reasons and inner meanings why people might be open to mobilisation, the actual decision to participate is informed by personal identities and personal strategic choice. The strategic choice of people to mobilise is conditioned by what they believe, what they are comfortable with, what they like as people, and who they are (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). In many circumstances social movements that possess a sense of shared belonging and grievance may fail to progress to become active social movement organisations since the circumstances in a given society may not be conducive to persuade a critical mass of members to decide to participate directly in actions to further the group's goals (e.g. other outlets for grievances, effective law enforcement, etc.). In addition, movements that are strongly based on shared identity need to be able to adapt to cultural transformations and changes in social norms, and in how groups see themselves and are seen by others, if they are to remain representative and relevant to their identity constituency. How a group frames its identity (exclusively or inclusively) is argued to depend on the setting and audience to which it is speaking (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), the kind of opposition it confronts, and the organisational linkages it has to other groups or movements.

One objective of this research is to explore how individual interests are linked to structures of movement organisations/collective action, and how meaning or labels attached to militancy/militia action, evolve and relate to the cognitive world of militants. Hence, a significant theme which partly informs militia action in the Niger Delta region is motivation for joining a militant group. Motivation plays a key role in understanding collective action. Authors such as Zald and McCarthy (1987) argue that people do not join movements of collective action because they have a cause; rather, they join for personal gain. Others such as Ruggiero and Montagna (2008), also argue that a group's oriented behaviour remains hidden until some selective incentive stimulates potential for collective action. These arguments which gives a pointer to resource contestation, are what I seek to explore from questions outlined in the previous section of this chapter. Moreover, motivation for collective action is most effective in environments where individuals or groups have the strongest networks to mobilise (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). These networks are activated from similar attributes or positions of individuals or groups, as well as from the opportunities and perceptions created by these network positions (Breiger, 2004). Tilly (1993), on the other hand, explains why a complex web of interactions and relationship, further help to sustain conflict in a given setting, by arguing that:

*The relationship between an activity, the sets of agents that control the means that might make the activity possible, the bargaining that goes on between the agents and the activity, and those who hold the resources, produce unexpected set of structures that themselves constrain the next round of action (Tilly 1993:p6)*

Mindful of these positions, this research will partly seek to explore the complex relationships of militant groups and between the individuals that make up these groups, including the interactions and incentives that tip the balance towards taking action. In addition, in reference to Tilly (as quoted above) the research will look at how these complex interactions between militia group leaders and other agents and actors inform and constrain how a group's actions evolve. All of these issues are particularly pertinent in the context of the Niger Delta militancy due to the fluid nature of the groups themselves, with frequent splits, territorial disputes and rapidly changing allegiances and interactions with other major actors (such as the Nigerian military, politicians and the oil companies). In this fluid context, how group actions evolve and how group identity and purpose is maintained are important issues.

#### **1.4.2. Militancy: as organised structures, tactical identity/transformation**

In order to develop an understanding of how the militants of the Niger Delta region choose strategies, tactics and targets, as well as their group structures, NSM theory also argues that actors/agents have choices/options that relate to who they are. The *old* social movement approaches, such as resource mobilisation and political process theories, tended to lend themselves to classical models of decision making (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), where actors/agents adopt strategies appropriate to their environmental constraints and opportunities based on a rational cost-benefit analysis (Barkan, 1979; McAdam *et al.*, 1988). Making decisions on the basis of collective identity, however, can be seen as an alternative to these instrumental criteria. Identity claims represent a protest strategy rather than instrumental logic. People may choose to adopt a particular tactic irrespective of whether they have the ability to attain their goals. Tactical identities also send unspoken messages such as: "we are people who do these sorts of things in this particular way". The actions and decisions themselves serve to define the identities of members by saying "we are proud of the particular style of action we take" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). The tactical choice of the action or strategy of a movement may originate in collective identities that exist independently of the group (Emmis, 1987). According to Pfaff (1995), actors/agents construct, de-construct, celebrate or enact collective identity through strategies of protest in ways that can inspire increased participation and constrain the actions its opponents can take.

The question worth reflecting on, therefore, is to what extent can militants in the Niger Delta be categorised as making tactical choices, that conform with notions of the conscious expression of a collective identity or, as Whitter (1995) puts it, as people with distinct problems and interests, having a common platform of shared knowledge of their environment. In other words, utilising the argument of Snow and Benford (1992), to what extent do the militants of the Niger Delta construct their strategic actions from their shared understanding of their environment and of themselves? Or, as Tilly (1995) argues, people do not employ routines of collective action they are not familiar with, as each society has a stock of familiar forms of action that are known by both challengers and opponents. This, then, might represent a way of exploring the varied forms of labelling for the actions of the militias of the Niger Delta that were listed earlier in this chapter. To what extent are these labels representative of this shared understanding of the communal boundaries of action? To what extent are the militias adopting familiar forms of action that send a recognisable message? How do militias' identification with territories, social network ties, symbols, language and beliefs serve to construct prototypes of actions based on previous experiences of protest and violent actions in the region? Moreover, writers such as Epstein (1991) and Lichterman (1999) argue that the primary goal of movements is more about changing identity. Identity is not just about building solidarity, but changing individual selves and relationships in ways that extend beyond the movement. Therefore, movement's transforms member's subsequent biographies, whether or not the movement has an explicit goal. Moreover, members of movements, whilst acting to emancipate themselves from alienation or frustration, become subjects of their own histories, thereby redefining their identity and developing a new sense of self.

### **1.4.3. Militancy: Conflict and Power**

The concept of conflict and power are central to understanding the militancy in the Niger Delta region. Indeed, resource endowed environments are often prone to conflicts. They are seen as arenas for contested entitlements and have been described as a theatre of struggles over property rights and the politics of recognition (Nauman, 1996). Studying conflicts in resource-endowed environments entails the careful documentation of an array of differentiated actors, social movements, state agents and institutional networks, as well as exploration of the ways they operate within historically and culturally constituted fields of power. Resource struggles also provide an understanding of how human practice and knowledge are subverted, contested and redefined in relation to a specific environment (Peet and Watts, 1996). Resource-rich environments also induce claims or contestations with similar effects across a wide range of circumstances or events, often attributed to widespread frustration, extremism or competition (Tilly, 2003). These contestations tend to widen the political and social space between claimants during contentious episodes, and this then further polarises and promotes collective violence,

raising the stakes for winning or losing and providing opportunities to initiate action against perceived enemies (Tilly, 2003; Tarrow, 1994).

Developing these arguments into the context of the conflict in the Niger Delta, it can be argued that the militancy reflects a situation of contentious politics, which involves government actors as monitors and claimants and indigenous social movements' efforts in seeking legitimacy and recognition in management and access to resource benefits. In addition, everyday life for most movement members is marked by forms of political oppression and economic misery, in which some form of political power is needed for individuals to survive (Evers, 1985). There is the tendency, therefore, for movements, after mobilising around certain concrete issues, to gain access to established political structures. In order to expand their influence, movement leaders often become engaged with existing political structures, even where this may risk the movement's existence. In other words, social movements cannot exist without some form of political expression to articulate their aims to a broader power structure from which they would otherwise be alienated. The political expression of social movements is, thus, a necessary part of their existence.

### **1.5. Conclusion**

This chapter attempts to explain the context and rationale for this research, and argues that studies on the Niger Delta conflict have not explored the disposition and experiential views of members of militant groups, who are actively involved in the lingering conflict. The chapter provides a background of the context and geographical parameters of the study, as well as the genesis and scope of study. It also sets out the significance of this inquiry and articulates three research questions which the study will ultimately seek to answer. The chapter focuses on one particular sociological theory—namely, New Social Movements theory (NSM), as offering a unique insight into the world of militants as well as providing a framework of potential issues that can be explored further later in the research. Indeed, NSM coheres with issue of identity, power and individual/groups quality of life, as it provides some explanation as to how the macro political system of governance within a given society, intersects with individuals/groups lived experiences.

Furthermore, ideas of NSM, contend with how individuals/groups fit into, and respond to changes within a given system of governance. In this particular case, actions/resistance of militant groups in response to resource governance (oil) in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Niger Delta region. In situating militancy within the ambit of NSM, some key features and concepts such as *conflict*, *collective identity/action and power*, find relevance in helping to describe and interpret militants as people with shared history and experience, taking action and making claims on behalf of communities in Niger Delta, against the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies. Within

purview of NSM, militants can be argued as representing imagined/concrete community, whose actions are based on perception and construction of meanings with pre-existing ties and fluid boundaries of interest.

Given these accounts, I argue that the Niger Delta region can be broadly viewed in line with McCarthy and Zald's (1977) definition of Social Movement (SM), as people with a set opinion and belief which represent preferences for changing some element of the socio-political structure resource governance. It represents an area of contested entitlement that illustrates a struggle of power over right and recognition of resource ownership. The belief and preferences in Niger Delta region, is attributable to the emergence of militia movements, which can be seen as a Social Movement Organisation (SMO), that illustrates a set of belief and meanings that constitute sentiment of belonging. In other words, militants are collective agents with an identity that cannot be easily detached from 'real' interest of its members. Interestingly, the sense of shared meaning and sentiment of belong amongst individuals/groups, does not necessarily mean they are willing to pursue a common collective interest on behalf of the group (McAdam *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, the identity of militants as collective agents is not maintained in isolation, as they appear to interact within a complex web of formal and informal relations with state and non-state actors, which help to define its role and significance within the broader political structure of oil governance in Nigeria.

In general, this thesis does not necessarily seek to argue that the situation in the Niger Delta should be seen as a classic example of a new social movement, given that—the cultural and socio-economic dissimilarities with the principally European and North American contexts in which New Social Movements theory has typically been articulated and applied are too extreme for that. Rather, it seeks to establish the extent to which the militancy in the Niger Delta exhibits aspects of a new social movement which serves as a template through which to develop potentially valid questions about the motivations, structures, interactions and development of militias in the Niger Delta which can then be tested during the course of the research. In summary, this chapter articulates the background, broad rationale and set of questions that the research as a whole will deal with. The following chapter will appraise a review of literature on the significance of resource extraction and governance. The aim is to provide insight on how macro political structures of resource governance directly impact on individuals to trigger protest or collective action.

## ***Chapter Two: Significance of resource extraction***

### ***2.1. Introduction***

This chapter examines the literature on resource extraction and governance. It attempts to link macro structures with micro lived experiences and locate the experience of Nigeria in the wider context of resource governance. Accordingly, the chapter looks at (a) global and regional politics of resource extraction, (b) the history of Nigeria's political economy and identity politics (c) state-society relations and policies of resource extraction, (d) political repression and the trajectory of militancy. Together these aims to inform the processes and features that help shape the emergence of militancy and the particular form in which it emerged. This introduction provides some key events in the Niger Delta, which propelled mobilisation.

Within the Niger Delta region, the culmination of environmental degradation, gas flares, and the lack of participation or capacity to manage resources or seek redress regarding environmental policies, and the deep-rooted political frustration has induced a feeling of marginalisation and secession in the Niger Delta. By the late 1960s through to the 1980s and early 1990s, a number of movements and host oil communities began to mobilise against the alliance of oil companies and the Nigerian state. The first of these was led by Isaac Adaka Boro and his Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) on 23 February, 1966. The NDVF threatened to secede from the Nigerian state by declaring a Niger Delta Republic. The claim and action of the NDVF was for self-determination (Adaka Boro, 1982) and resource control, due to fears of domination and control of resources by the other ethnic majority groups in Nigerian polity. Isaac Adaka Boro's twelve-day revolution was, however, crushed by the Nigerian military in early March 1966. A second uprising began in the aftermath of the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others on 10 November 1995. Ken Saro Wiwa was an environmental activist who had led the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), which had consistently challenged Shell Oil Company and the Nigerian state over the environmental despoliation, human rights' violations, and the unjust control over 'their oil'. The subsequent hanging of the 'Ogoni nine' sparked widespread international condemnation and outrage and became a harbinger for intense conflict and the proliferation of armed groups and communities with burgeoning claims for compensation and recognition in regard to resource rights.

The growing awareness of these issues led to the 1998 famous Kaiama Declaration by Ijaw youths in the Niger Delta. The Kaiama Declaration also helped to set the stage for armed struggles in the Niger Delta. It was an historic gathering of youths from over 500 communities, representing over 40 clans/kingdoms that make up the Ijaw nation. The gathering was aimed at considering ways of ensuring Ijaw survival as an indigenous people within the Nigeria state (Kaiama Declaration, 1998).

The Kaiama Declaration made the following observations:

- That it was through British colonisation that the Ijaw nation was forcibly put under the Nigerian state.
- That but for the economic interest of the imperialists, the Ijaw ethnic nationality would have evolved as a distinct and separate sovereign nation enjoying undiluted political, economic, social and cultural autonomy.
- That the division of the Southern Protectorate into East and West in 1939 by the British marked the beginning of the balkanisation of hitherto territorially contiguous and culturally homogenous Ijaw people into political and administrative units.
- That the principle of Derivation in Revenue Allocation has been consciously and systematically obliterated by successive regimes of the Nigerian state. We note the drastic reduction of the Derivation principle from 100% (1953), 50% (1960), 45% (1970), 20% (1975), 2% (1982), 1.5% (1984), to 3% (1992) and 13% in 1995.
- That the violence in Ijaw land and other parts of the Niger Delta area, sometimes manifesting in intra and inter-ethnic conflicts are sponsored by the State and transnational oil companies to keep the communities of the Niger Delta divided, weak and distracted from the causes of their problems. The various points made in the Kaiama Declaration will be examined in different sections of this chapter. In particular, the chapter will examine the issue of resource governance and revenue distribution in Nigeria, beginning with a comparative examination of how this issue has affected protest, resistance or violence in other resource-rich environments before focus on Nigeria vis-a-vis- the Niger Delta.

## **2.2. Global and Regional Policies of Resource Extraction**

Mineral resources influences a complex configuration of power and interest. It is truly a double-edged sword (Maconachie, 2008). On the one hand it attracts sovereignty (Ross, 2004), gives hope of improved welfare and livelihoods. On the other hand, it brings about frustration, social exclusion, violence and form of insecurity. Moreover, the processes of managing resources, often create complexities in respect to governance for both formal and informal institutions (Adger *et al.*, 2005b). According to Adger *et al.*, (2005a) structures of resource governance can be based on the exercise of power through domination, resistance or cooperation. It also has the potential to raise questions of legitimacy. A number of case studies have shown that many resource-endowed countries lack effective public authority, legitimacy or capacity to manage resource revenues (Unworth, 2010; Maconachie, 2008; Moore *et al.*, 2009). Case studies in Sierra Leone, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, illustrates how the centralisation or de-centralisation of resources, induce struggles of recognition and political interest amongst individual/groups, that either weakens or strengthens institutional capacities (Maconachie, 2008; Unworth, 2010). It also shows how structures of resource governance fail to take sufficient account of pre-existing political and institutional arrangements.

Studies from Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador illustrate how structures of resource governance change the configuration of interest, with implications at the local and regional levels. Peru, for example, adopted a policy of fiscal decentralisation, which enabled the transfer of a significant part of its mining tax revenues back to both mining and non-mining regions. The case of Peru is different with Nigeria, where the structure of resource governance reversed from the regions to the centre. In the Nigerian case, the inconsistencies in the distribution of oil revenue is a major concern to the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta (Ikein, 2003; Ikporukpo, 2004). The significance of resource inform frequent shifts in the process of sharing oil revenues among the geo-political units of the country has served to create disparities in the region's development (Osuntokun, 1979). According to Ikein (2003), the centralised structure of resources, empowers the federal government to collect the bulk of oil revenues to the disadvantage the oil-bearing communities from the benefits of the allocation system. Ikporukpo (2004) supports this view by arguing that the controversial nature of the revenue derivation principle is shown not only in the number of attempts to reach an acceptable criterion, but also in the diversity of literature debating the issue. These inconsistencies and contentions have led to calls for a true federalism, wherein resource revenues should be shared on the basis of site derivation and the level of tax contribution to the central government as practiced in pre-existing structures prior to 1954–58. These issues are explored further in later sections of this chapter.

Contrarily, the case of Peru, the transfer of revenues to the regions led to politics becoming more competitive and fragmented, thus weakening local political mobilisation and well-defined regional interests. Consequently, while Peru had a competent central management of its public finances, it lacked coordination amongst the various layers of governments which ultimately undermined its resource management (Unworth, 2010). In addition, Unworth (2010) study noted that public-private partnerships with mining companies created new actors and interests at the local level, which made coordination efforts more difficult as new sources of conflict emerged. In addition, local governments lacked the capacity to manage resource revenue within the policies adopted. Instead, the policies exacerbated pre-existing public, social and institutional problems which resulted in greater socio-economic inequalities between regions and the spread of social conflicts both in mining and non-mining areas. However, the case of Bolivia differs from Peru's decentralised policy of resource governance. Bolivia had centralised control of its natural resource revenues, similar to Nigeria.

Consequently, the rise in revenues from the resource boom between 2003 and 2008 triggered demands from regional political actors and municipal and regional governments for the redistribution of resource revenues (Unworth, 2010). The resultant conflicts led to the State engaging in bargains with local authorities and actors over resource revenue allocations. In contrast, Ecuador had a similar policy of revenue decentralisation to Peru, but with differences in its nature and structure. Ecuador only decentralised non-oil revenues to sub-national governments, while oil remained under the control of the central government. Ecuador's policy of resource governance made no explicit provision for oil revenues. This exclusion and centralisation of oil revenues made the government the main gatekeeper for accessing public funds (Unworth, 2010). These cases show how, globally, the distribution of resource wealth is both contentious and induces political discord and instability and the use of resource wealth to dominate power. What can be drawn from this section is that whatever side of the coin we view resources, it still triggers dissatisfaction or interest that leads to competition. It also gives pointer to the fact resources in itself is not the cause for conflict, but the nature and structures that generate conflict. It thus, coheres with Maconachie (2008) argument that oil is indeed, a double-edged sword.

### **2.3. Historical structure of Nigeria's socio-political economy**

Oil and politics are inevitable pairs in Nigeria. It is what drives the contest over the power to control access to oil wealth. Oil gives hope of wealth and provokes issues of sovereignty (Ross, 2004); it is lucrative and powerful (Kapucinski, 1982); and it is a tangible and valuable resource that is built into the structure of the Nigerian state. Five major historical events are critical for understanding the on-going resource conflicts in Nigeria. These are: (1) the amalgamation through British colonialism of completely distinct entities in 1914, (2) the politics of ethnic identity, (3) the

discovery of oil in 1956 and the accompanying fears of ethnic dominance within the system of governance, (4) the crushed twelve-day revolution led by Isaac Adaka Boro following the declaration of the Niger Delta Republic, and (5) the hanging of environmental activist Ken Saro Wiwa along with his kinsmen by the Nigerian military regime, which aroused increased environmental consciousness among the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta region.

The year 1914 remains a memorable date in Nigeria's political history. It is the point where over 250 distinct ethnic nationalities were amalgamated into a single entity by British imperialism (Tamuno, 1970; Awe, 1999; OKowa 2005). The amalgamation of distinct ethnic identities is argued to have induced a dysfunctional society with inequitable federalism and limited state autonomy (OKowa 2005; Muhammad, 2007). The complexity of Nigeria's governance system is often attributed to the tendency for particular ethnic groups to seek to protect their own identity with perceived primordial customs (Ojie and Okaba, 2005). As a result, it is reflected in the formation of political parties in the country. Amongst these nationalities are three major ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani, predominantly in the North; the Yoruba in the Southwest and the Igbo's in the Southeast, within a broader religious division between a largely Christian South and a largely Muslim North.

For most of the colonial period Nigeria was administered by the British in two provinces broadly consistent with this religious divide, but in 1960, prior to independence, these two regions were expanded to three (see Figures 2.1.) following fears of ethnic domination and political-economic competition. Whereas the South equalled the North in terms of size and population under British rule, the secession of the Southern Cameroons to join the Republic of Cameroon in 1961 meant that the North became more dominant politically. It is important to note that each of these major ethnic regions also had a large number of ethnic minorities under their dominance, which has been argued to be a form of internal colonialism (OKowa 2005). The country's population now stands at 140 million people with 36 states, a federal capital and 774 local government councils. Within these configurations, the Northern Hausa-Fulani consist of 30% of the country's population, the Western Yoruba 20% and Eastern Igbo comprise 17% of the total population, whilst other ethnic minorities, notably the Ijaw, Nupe, Tiv's, Kanuris, Ibibio, Efik, Edos and Itsekiris etc. constitute 33% spread across the 36 states, although mostly in the South-South and Middle belt regions of the country (OKowa 2005).

### **2.3.1. Processes of State Formations in Nigeria**

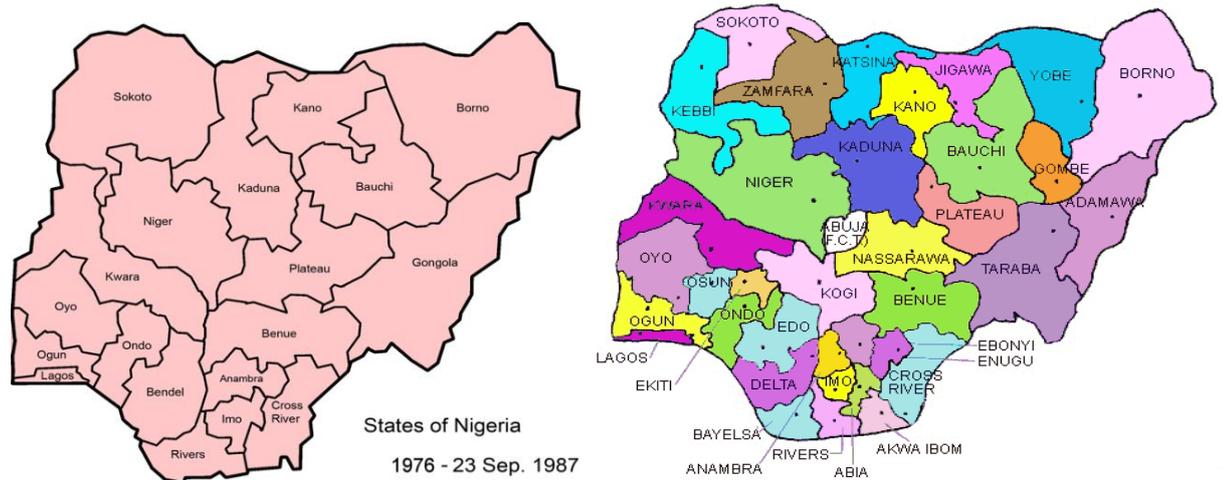
The processes of state formation were traceable to British rule. The Northern region was administered indirectly through its emirs as intermediaries (Muhammad, 2007), whilst the Eastern and Western regions, which had traditional kingdoms and chieftaincy structures, were administered directly by British colonial officers. These varied patterns, however, influenced the lobbying of the centralised colonial authorities for resources along ethnic lines (Thompson, 2004). The decentralised structure of Nigeria's economy prior to discovery of oil in 1956, and its independence in 1960, induced a regional framework that empowered the different regions as legitimately autonomous (Aka, 1995). Each region exercised independent jurisdiction within its defined territories (Osuntokun, 1979; Awe, 1999) which encouraged economic growth and competition in agricultural products, especially cash crops. The early economy and revenues from palm oil and coal from the Eastern region, cocoa from the Western region, and groundnuts from the Northern region influenced the growth and development of Nigeria prior to the discovery of oil.

However, the process of regional autonomy became disrupted through military rule. This replaced the prevailing regional systems of governance with a unitary system based around states (Okoko, 1996). Consequently, military intervention in the early 1960s, witnessed the creation of states due to ethnic agitation. States create was seen as an attempt to loosen the stronghold of the dominant ethnic groups by opening up opportunities for greater self-determination for ethnic minorities that had previously been submerged within the larger regional configurations (Barkan *et al.*, 2001). The effect, however, was to strengthen the relative power of central government vis-à-vis the now numerous but smaller unitary states. The evolution from regions to states, therefore, was precipitated by the fears of ethnic minorities being dominated in the political process. These fears of ethnic dominance had earlier led the British to modify their policies for a viable federation four times (Barkan *et al.*, 2001) in 1922, 1946, 1951 and 1954, out of which emerged the formation of three regional governments (see Figure 2.1 )The development of the current framework of Nigeria's states has been a long and complex process. Accordingly, the military regime from 1966 to 1979 inherited a structure of four regions (See figure 2.1.) but created a new structure of twelve states in 1967. This is seen as response to a number of secessionist threats during this period, firstly the twelve-day revolution in 1966 led by Isaac Adaka Boro which declared the Niger Delta Republic and then the Biafra civil war in 1967.

**Figure 2.1.** Phases of State formation in Nigeria. Source: Nigeria Zip Code, 2015.



The demand for states remained persistent during the period of military rule, it fuelled by the desire for ethnic groups to benefit from the redistribution of oil revenue. As a result additional states were created in 1976, bringing the total number of states to nineteen. These were subsequently increased by military decrees to thirty in 1991 and thirty-six in 1996 (Map 5).



### 2.3.2. Ethnic politics and issues of identity

The adoption of a federal constitution in 1954 laid the grounds for multi-party democracy at independence in 1960. This democracy entailed dividing power amongst central and regional government for national integration and cohesion notwithstanding diverse ethnic identities (Barkan *et al.*, 2001). The federal constitution at independence provided platforms for the formation of political parties which rather emerged along ethnic lines. Political parties developed within the dominant ethnic regions by organising themselves around these regions (Tamuno, 1970). Thus, the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) dominated the Eastern region by organising itself around the Igbo; the Northern People's Congress (NPC) appealed to the Hausa–Fulani ethnic

group; whilst the Action Group (AG) dominated the Western Yoruba region (Osaghae, 1994). This tripartite division of political expression is argued to have ignored the aspirations of ethnic minority groups that could not break the political oligopoly of Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (Muhammad, 2007; Osaghae, 1994; Ndehfru, 2009). At independence in 1960, the Tafawa Belewa-led government was seen in the South as dominating the country by the Hausa–Fulani ethnic group, which subsequently triggered the January 1966 *coup d'état*, that was labelled 'the Igbo coup' (Otite, 2000; Ojie and Okaba, 2005). Subsequently, the 29 July 1966 counter coup by Northern military elements is argued to have been, in part, motivated by the desire to control access to resource benefits (Nnoli, 1978).

Despite these provisions enshrined in the constitution for party formation, the parties that were formed during the 1979 elections continued to be regional parties reflecting their ethnic domains. Thus, the Hausa–Fulani North had the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Eastern Igbo states had the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), whilst the Western Yoruba had the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Even during the 2011 elections the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) were formed by dominant Northern political elites, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) controlled the West, whilst the All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA) was dominant in the East. These formations of parties along ethnic lines continue to defy constitutional provision and structural reforms aimed at changing the character of Nigeria polity. This competitive struggle by each of the larger ethnic groups to dominate the political space is constraints to peace and stability of Nigeria (Ojie and Okaba, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Yagboyaju, 2005). The present political crises in relation to a power shift of the Presidency to the southern part of Nigeria, referred to as the South–South in the political zoning debate, the demand for return of power to the North, and the killing of Christians by Muslims in the North, following the aftermath of the 2011 presidential elections, are strong indices of the effect of ethnic politics and power play in Nigeria. These incidences points to the argument that Nigeria is a mere geographical expression and not a nation state (Yagboyaju, 2005).

Critics often attribute the role of ethnicity in Nigeria's geo-polity to the British colonial policy of direct and indirect rule that consolidated ethnic differences and, in some cases, created new ethnic identities (Osaghae, 1994; Nnoli, 1978; Post and Vickers, 1973; Thompson, 2004). For instance, Post and Vickers (1973) have traced the origin of ethnicity in Nigeria to the Land and Native Rights Ordinance Act of 1910. This Act sought to discourage free migration of Southerners to the Northern region of Nigeria. Other policies, such as Sabongari and Native Authority policies, differentiated civil from ethnic citizenship, and created new meanings of ethnic identity in Nigeria's polity (Otite, 2000). Nigeria's political landscape remains unpredictable since its independence in 1960. Political crises occasioned by competition between the three major ethnic nationalities for

leadership at the federal centre, led to its first civil war from 1967 to 1970. The Hausa–Fulani is seen as the imperial power of the federal government (OKowa 2005) which continues to influence a struggle by the Yoruba and Igbo to wrest political power from the Hausa–Fulani. This struggles for power continues to set the stage for the political development of the country.

### **2.3.3. Structure –Agency relations**

Nigeria's structure of governance is organised in ways whereby the access to oil wealth is competitive and mostly controlled by elites (Dode, 2005). The structures inform the dimensions of predisposed wealth, and the mode of acquiring wealth (Anikpo, 1991). According to Nzimiro (1981), the military and political elites have the power to decide on how the economy should be run, how amenities should be shared and who should enjoy what privileges or rights. Besides the dominant ethnic hegemony, the Nigerian state is constituted in ways in which the dominant hegemonic class is enmeshed in a struggle over the control of resources (Ake 1985; Aka, 1995). Accordingly, the fundamental values and social orientations of Nigeria is seen as feudal. According to Okowa (2005), what appear to be institutions of liberal democracy in Nigeria, are nothing but fraudulent pretence. As a consequence, Nigeria's political structure is said to be driven by systemic corruption and oppression (Okowa 1994). Systemic corruption is a situation where corruption becomes institutionalised and raised to the level that it becomes almost a structural parameter of society—where it becomes a fundamental part and parcel of the culture of a society. This corruption is intrinsically linked to oil wealth which provides the motive and the means for the corrupt acquisition and exercise of power. In a situation where wealth can be made overnight by being connected to powerful actors and elites of the state, people have come to realise that 'hard work' does not pay. The state, therefore, is the key institutional element that engineers systemic corruption, enabling the corrupt to successfully aspire for political leadership to control the state resources (OKowa 2005; Okowa, 1989).

In the past fifty years of oil production, about \$300–\$400 billion is said to have accrued to Nigeria's central revenue, with very little to show for it (Guichaoua, 2009; Frynas, 2000; Obi, 2008; OKowa 2005). Oil and gas account for over 80% of government revenues and 95% of foreign exchange earnings in Nigeria (Guichaoua, 2009). Within this, gas by itself accounts for over \$4 billion in annual revenue (Obi, 2008), in a country described as a rentier state (Frynas, 2000), where resource revenues are extracted from taxes, rents and royalties. The monthly amount distributed to the thirty-six states from gross oil revenue for April and May, 2011 was published as being N615.061 billion and N582.973 billion, respectively, which is approximately £2.4 billion and £2.1 billion (Ujah, 2011). Over 80% of these revenues, however, find their way out of the state coffers to just 1% of the ruling elite class, leaving 99% of the population to scramble for the remaining 20% of revenues (Afeikhena, 2005). This serves to pitch the political actors against the

99% of the rest of the population that are equally torn apart by struggle to access the resource benefits that are left. Afeikhena (2005) argues that the struggle to access oil wealth is what influences and determines state–society relationships in Nigeria for decades. It is what has widened the gap between the state and civil society.

For Thompson (2004), the Nigerian state has no social contract between it and the people. Governance is about maintaining order, balancing budgets, and overseeing the extraction of raw materials for export. It has never been about the provision of public service for its citizens. Public trust and values amongst citizen was not created between the rulers and the ruled and as result, the state institutions have never sought or gained the respect of the people. Moreover, political parties in Nigeria place more emphasis on short-term winning of state resources by gaining access to the levers of power. According to Pakin (1982), the experiences of civil and military regime in Nigeria has created an authoritarian and repressive society, where the political space is left only to those within particular clientele networks to participate in the politics of resource distribution. Thus, the state's structure of resource governance and management becomes a social closure (Parkin, 1982) these networks to maximise reward/resources, by restricting access to resources and opportunities to themselves (Yagboyaju, 2005; Anikpo, 1996).

#### **2.3.4. Policies of resource extraction**

A central issue which generates the mobilisation and emergence of movements in the Niger Delta, is the laws of resource extraction in Nigeria. The resource revenue derivation principle was introduced into governance in Nigeria during the colonial era by the Philipson Commission in 1946 (Adebayo, 1998) to enable regions to benefit from non-declared revenues according to the proportion of that region's contribution to the central purse. Prior to the discovery of oil the resource derivation principle allowed 100% of revenues from agricultural products to the existing regions between 1954 and 1957. The principle was short-lived, with introduction of a new revenue commission—the Raisman commission—was set up in 1957. The commission argued for reduction of the derivation principle from 100% to 50% (see figure 2.1), in order to close the fiscal gap, or imbalance of revenue, between the Northern and Southern parts of the country, given that revenues from the Western region were flourishing from the export of cocoa (Adebayo, 1998).

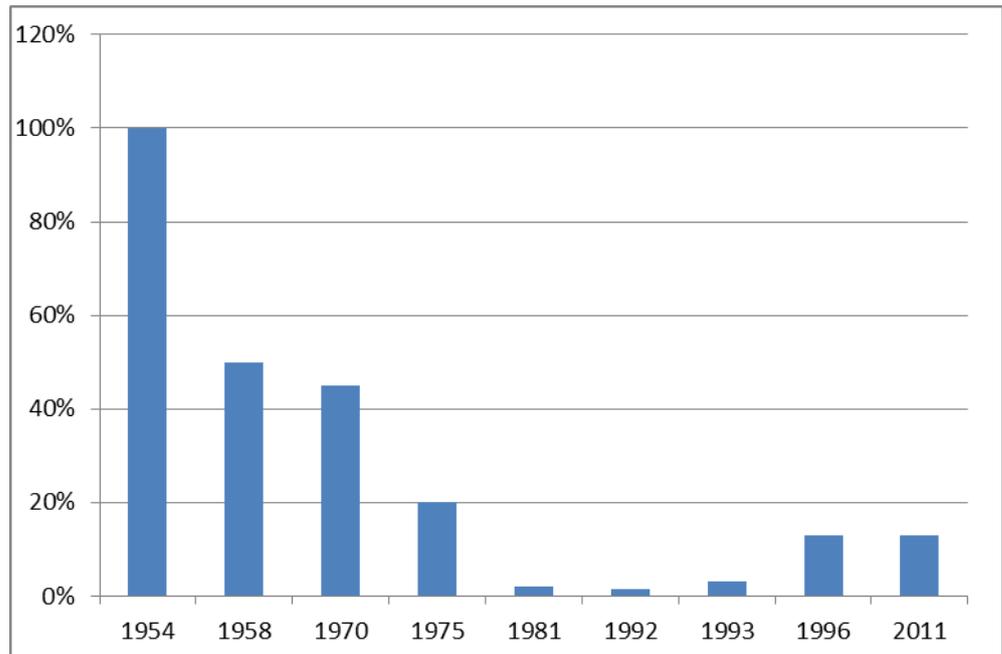
In sum the various constitutional amendments from Richardson Constitution in 1946, the Macpherson Constitution of 1952 and the Louis Chick Constitution of 1954, which earlier favoured a regional structure of colonial, were abolished by subsequent military regimes during the period between 1966 and 1979. In contrast, the military regimes promulgated decrees that centralised resource allocations. Accordingly, virtually all rents, royalties and taxes were collected and controlled by the federal government (Aka, 1995; Ikporukpo, 2004; Ogon, 2006).

In 1970 the percentage of revenue derivation accruing to oil bearing states in the Niger Delta, was reduced to 45% from the prior constitutional provision of 50%. It was reduced further to 20% in 1975, following the increasing demands for state creation and federal capital development

Resource revenues were further reduced to just 2% in 1981, 1.5% in 1982, and 3% in 1993, before increasing to the present 13% in 1996. This increase is attributable to a conscious awakening which prompted protest and agitations across the Niger Delta region, following the hanging to death environmental rights activist Ken Saro Wiwa and 8 kinsmen from the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1995. The death of Saro Wiwa provoked outrage and increased awareness over environmental rights throughout the Niger Delta, eventually compelling the convening of a National Constitutional Conference to discuss the continued unity of the country. The pattern of reduction in the resource derivation principle demonstrates the dominance of military and political power and its effectiveness in alienating the oil-bearing communities from the decision making over resource governance (Ikporukpo, 2004; Ikein, 2003). Subsequently, oil-bearing communities are effectively seen as spectators regarding decisions affecting their livelihoods and environment (Orubu *et al.*, 2004).

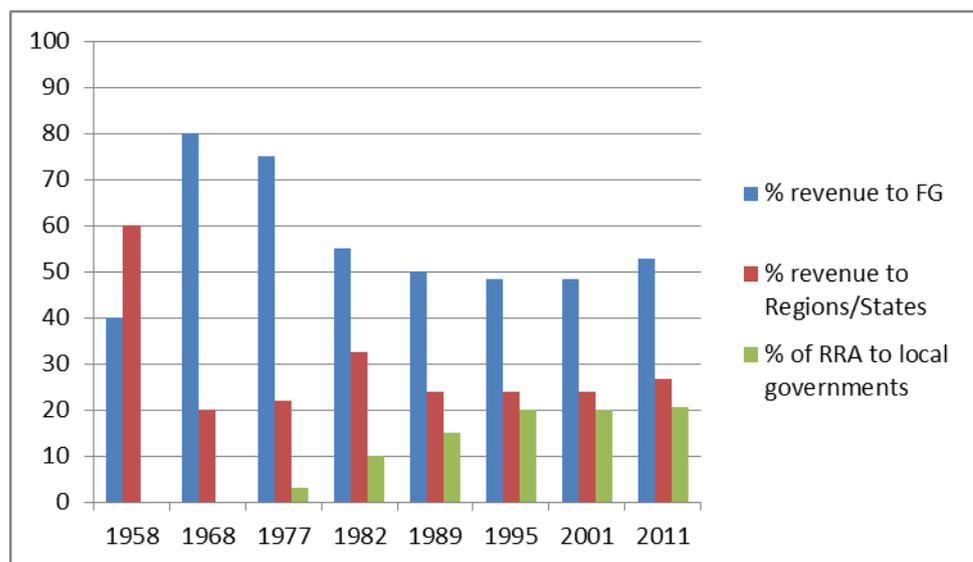
Another aspect in the process of centralising resource revenues is illustrated by the military decree 51 of 1969, which vested the ownership and control of oil resources under or upon any land to the central government. The Petroleum Decree specified the affected land as all land including land covered by water within Nigeria, territory or the continental shelf of the country (Ikporukpo, 2004). The legislation limited the rights of ownership to oil that allowed communities/individuals to be compensated through rent payments for land acquired. Payment of rent, however, was in its turn stifled by the Land Use Act of 1978, which brought land under the control of the Nigerian state. The Act meant that land could be acquired for oil exploration without compensation to communities.

**Figure 2.2:** Changes in the Revenue Derivation Principle



The introduction of the Resource Allocation Act (RAA) and Derivation Principle (DP) by military regimes, also, centralised resource management. The RAA is a formula that uses certain criteria such as equity, population size, social development, landmass and revenue generation in distributing the resource pool from the centre to the states and the federal capital. The DP, on the other hand, is a specific percentage of revenue made available to resource-endowed states by the federal government.

**Figure 2.3:** Changes in Revenue Allocation to States



As a result states had their revenue allocation from the central government reviewed upwards from 22% to 32.5% between 1977 and 1982 (figure 2.3) while the local government councils, that had zero allocation prior to 1977, had their revenues increased from 3% to 10% (Barkan *et al.*, 2001). In 1995 the federal government had its allocation further reduced to 48.5%, with state allocations also being reduced to 24%, while local governments had an increase to 20%, with the remaining 7.5% set aside for ecological funding and 'special projects'. The 2011 allocation to the federal government was 52.68%, with states at 26.72%, and local governments 20.60% (Ujah, 2011). Appropriately, policies of resource revenue allocation and its distribution remain the most contentious issue from oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta. This continues to threaten the peaceful coexistence and stability of Nigeria's polity. Under the circumstances, the access to oil wealth gives the power to influence, directly or indirectly, the content of state policy. The use of landmass and population size to distribute resource revenues is argued as defining citizenship within the Nigerian state (William, 2002). According to Williams (2002), the belief in numerical strength and geographical size by majority ethnic groups to hold power, has succeeded in generating a sense and feeling of alienation among ethnic minority groups. The existence of such an overriding philosophy with respect to the control of oil wealth has enabled the dominant ethnic groups to define citizenship status as that of first-class citizens, and minorities as a set of second-class citizens within the Nigerian state.

Thus, the Niger Delta minorities are viewed as being affiliated to majority-based Hausa–Fulani first-order political groups (Osaghae, 1994, 1991) whereby whatever accrues to the minorities depends mainly on the influence and power of the majority groups. The minorities can only develop from the reflection of political power held by majority ethnic groups within the federal units of the Nigerian state (Osuntokun, 1979; Osaghae, 1991). Also, Ejobowah (2001) criticised the practice of Nigeria's federalism and its dependence on oil, arguing that the federal system in the multi-ethnic context of Nigeria lacks a diversified economy to sustain the practice of federalism. Others such as Yeri-Obidake and Zuokeme (1985), argue, ethnicity is the bane of national integration as revenue accruing from oil is the 'psychological glue' holding the Nigerian state together.

#### **2.4. Political repression**

Indeed, mineral resource is a source for conflicting interest in societies, as state and non – state actors make claims in ways that led to violence. Resources propels the construction of identities and wells the demonstration of power. This is further shown from Selverton's (1993) studies of how cultural, economic and political structures of exclusion triggered uprising in 1990. According to Selverston, indigenous Indians in Ecuador experienced struggles between class domination and ethnicity-centred movements. It reveals how leftist ideologies and struggles for land and political power conflict with the goals and ambitions of indigenous communities.

The struggles of these movements shifted from a class-based to an identity-based struggle for land. This experience is similar to the Ogoni uprising in Nigeria. In the Ogoni context, local resistance as collective action is directed at resisting further alienation of rights, expropriation of resources, and degradation of the local environment. Furthermore, oil exploration and the pollution caused by the activities of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Nigeria have induced alienation, protest and resistance across host communities in the Niger Delta (Obi, 2001). The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People emerged to seek self-determination in their quest to compel Shell and the Nigerian state to accept the right to control their land. The Ogoni resistance illustrates an underlying structural conditions that give rise to collective actions that is globally linked. The crises in Ogoni demonstrate the globalised significance of oil resources, as the oil multinational companies control immense power, political clout and global spread (Obi, 2001). According to Obi (2001b), Shell is located in a global structure of material accumulation, which gives it the power to control certain locales at varied social levels of extraction and dispossession.

Claims of participation or autonomy are often the crux of protest or resistance (Selverston, 1993; Dinerstein, 2010; Ramos, 2006; Watts, 2007). Indigenous movements continue to challenge the state's resource policies. For example, the impact of neo-liberal economic policies and state reforms in Argentina initiated a process of collective action that mobilised around heterogeneous movements (Dinerstein, 2010). The state's privatization and restructuring is argued to have dismantled the pre-existing quasi-welfare policy of social development. The contested character of unemployed movements examined in Dinerstein's (2010) study, shows the relative power of collectives and the autonomy to resist leftist ideologies and political manipulation of the state. According to Dinerstein (2010), the unemployed workers' movement emerged out of spontaneous protests, lacking organisational coherence at first in making their demands known, but built itself up to facilitate a collective identity and influence state resources through confrontation, protest and use of social projects in communities. These processes of mobilisation influenced the institutional framework in which social demands could be made.

Similarly, the land tenure laws in Ecuador affected the environment and livelihood patterns of indigenous people (Selverston, 1993), who became excluded social group from Ecuador's economic and political development. Indeed, these struggles by indigenous minorities reveal the structural imbalances in the political system and ways in which minorities seek to alter the structural defects in the polity (Selverston, 1993). These arguments echo those of Omeje (2005), Oronto et al. (2004) and Ikporukpo (2004), views of how environmental laws of resource extraction in Nigeria adds to the concerns and livelihoods of host communities in the Niger Delta region. Environmental laws such as the Petroleum Decree 51 of 1969, the Anti-Sabotage Decree of 1975, and Land Use

Act of 1978, is seen to dispossess the rights of ownership and participation in decisions affecting the welfare and livelihoods of host oil communities in the Niger Delta.

The Nigerian state is seen as protecting its monopoly of resource governance and interest at all cost, given that it relies on rents, royalties, taxes and profits from its equity shares with the multinational oil companies. Hence, it inevitably protects the prosperity and interest of oil companies at the expense of host oil-bearing communities (Omeje, 2005). This exclusion from the policy processes of resource management has resulted in emerging movements in the region, that see Oil companies as replicas of colonial interests that profit from the extraction of raw minerals, and show disregard for indigenous ownership and participation through their lack of commitment to the plight of host communities (Ikein, 2003). Similarly, Kilgour (2002) argues that multinational oil companies have no basic commitment to host communities in the countries in which they operate, as they prioritise oil competitiveness over ethical concerns. Host communities are in a disadvantaged position to negotiate on environmental policies that affect their livelihoods, as state laws effectively give impunity to the oil companies whilst turning host communities into spectators (Orubu *et al.*, 2004). The non-participation of host communities in decisions affecting their livelihood is also evident in issues of oil spillage and the mode of compensation for spillages. Oil companies privilege themselves in determining the cause of spillages (Ibeanu, 2002).

Under this circumstances, contemporary political economy of Nigeria is seen to be built on using the instrument of state power for self-enrichment. The presidential system of governance, which operates at all levels, means that the state governors and local council chairpersons are directly elected by eligible voters. Similarly, state cabinets, besides the legislative members, are appointed by governors, subject to approval from the state legislators. The functions and responsibilities of the legislative branch of governance, however, are viewed as a rubber stamp under the control of state governors (Okowa, 1989; Muhammad, 2007). More so local councils constitute the weakest tier of government institutions in Nigeria. This is attributed to the inconsistent policies of the federal government, as successive administrations alter the resource allocation policies. They have very little autonomy in respect to either policy making or budgeting, which explains the poor performance of grassroots development in communities.

In conclusion, we have seen how Nigeria's state-society relationship is built on the logic of self-enrichment. Those who hold political power are mainly interested in the glamour and privileges of state offices rather than building capacity and institutions (Yagboyaju, 2005). Politics and governance, meanwhile, are structured in a client-patronage network in the struggle for power to control state resources. Those who hold power rely on ethnic patronage for survival, making it difficult to control the corruption that is endemic in Nigeria.

The decision to centralise oil revenues through the promulgation of decrees imposed through thirty-six years of military rule and adopted by sixteen years of democratic dispensations, is variously argued as exploitation and injustice in journals, articles, and published and unpublished documents in the Niger Delta (Okowa, 2000; Okoko, 1996; Ogon, 2006; Tuodolo, 2007). The centralist structure of resource governance and patterns of its distribution have only helped in transferring oil wealth from the Niger Delta to other parts of the Nigerian state (Ogon, 2006).

### **2.5. Identity formations: individual and collective agents**

Auyero (2003) explored the lived experiences and contention of Argentina's 1990 uprising, revealing the ways in which popular collective struggle is lived, and felt individually and collectively in protest from the participants' point of views. Auyero's work on the lived experiences of two women, involved in uprising in Argentina gives insights of how protesters' lives cannot be separated from their histories of uprising. It tells how particular biographies of individuals shape their actions and how such contentious actions had affected their lives. It shows how protests are not just rooted in biographies, but also within an array of relationships and meaning. It also gives insight to a sense of shared understanding (Auyero, 2003) of protesters. Collective action and contention, give insights to understanding of the ways in which protesters, collectively and contentiously, think and feel about their joint actions, than causal mechanisms that led to the protest (Auyero, 2003). Besides, the ways in which meanings are constructed and explained at the individual and collective levels, inform a structuring of a particular kind of subjectivity in contention

### **2.6. Trajectory of militancy**

Recent studies on militia movements and deviance have criticised previous attempts at defining militias as being too narrow (Freilich *et al.*, 2006). Militias have been defined as locally based private armed groups with command structures. They characteristics of military training and exercise, and claim to fulfil necessary public functions and protect community against tyranny (Barkun, 1997). Also, Freilich *et al.* (2006), define militias as movements having a strong ideology, having intense hostility against the state. They affirm themselves through group-based activities, including paramilitary manoeuvres. Their ideological component consists of lack of trust, fear and hatred of the establishment. Militias are often composed of like-minded individuals, whose purpose is to plan and prepare a defence against perceived threats or to disseminate information that calls for such action (Freilich *et al.*, 2006). They are often alienated from state and popular culture, having community-oriented local support and seek to act out their ideology by raising public consciousness about the perceived injustices perpetrated by the state and the need to defend against such injustices. Informal social networks are amongst the ways of recruiting members: i.e. friends recruiting friends, (kLandermans and Oegema, 1987). Militias are also labelled as criminals

or freedom fighters (Krueger and Maleckova, 2002), as shown in exploration of meanings from the politically motivated violence and acts of terrorism perpetrated by Hezbollah. Krueger and Makeckova (2002) reasoned that acts of terrorism by Hezbollah are a response to longstanding perceived feelings of political conditions which is unconnected to economic activities.

Comparatively, the militancy in the Niger Delta is associated with violent act that underlie ideology, deprivation, frustration, criminality and 'youth restiveness' According to Ayakoromo (2010), militancy in the Niger Delta started with a positive ideology, which drew attention to deprivation and social exclusion. However, the spate of violence and youth restiveness degenerated into all sorts of criminal activities, with varied splinter militia groups engaging in extortion, oil bunkering, and the vandalism of pipelines, piracy, and the kidnapping of oil expatriates. He believes that wealthy individuals and top politicians in the Niger Delta, employed the services of militias as private armies for their personal political gain, only to then abandon them after having achieving their objectives (Ayakoroma, 2010). Political patronage, involving exchange of guns for votes, is believed to have heightened and sustained the momentum of militia activities in Niger Delta. Militia activities opened up space to access resource benefits for both the politically connected militia leaders, state governors and government officials in the Niger Delta. It became a source for making money from the government treasury (Ayakoroma, 2010), through monies meant for security during crisis.

Inter/intra communal conflicts over land boundary adjustments for oil benefits are also source for emergence of militancy in Niger Delta region (*Efemini, 2005*). Unclear boundary demarcation from the creation of states and local government areas heightened tensions and gave rise to clashes over ownership of oil fields, farmlands and waterways. The struggle for oil benefits is argued to have developed a collective response to the tensions amongst communities as wealthy and influential political actors procured arms to fortify their communities against external attacks (*Peterside, 2005*). Peterside (2005) gives the example of Eleme and Okrika, local communities in Rivers State, where claims over land ownership at the site of an oil refinery resulted in bloody clashes. The site of the oil refinery was a contentious space between both communities as they each lay claims to the land. These claims and counter claims led to the first violent clashes involving the use of small arms and light weapons in Rivers State. These clashes witnessed the emergence of militia combatants in Okrika, known as the Bush Boys. These militia youths were treated as nationalists, security outfits and peace makers by the traditional and political leadership in Okrika.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

The goal of indigenous minority movements has shifted from class-based struggles to identity-based struggles. Resource-endowed environments induce expectations of improved welfare and livelihoods, along with frustrations, alienation and forms of protest and violence, within complex formal and informal structures and interactions. This chapter illustrates how centralised or decentralised policies of resource extraction impact on indigenous ethnic minorities, in terms of power and identity, in taking decisions affecting their livelihoods and welfare. Identity politics and the issue of domination informed the early emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These, along with policy shifts in the laws of resource extraction and its distribution, inform the proliferation of social movements with claims and demands affecting their environment and economic livelihoods. Protest, resistance or violence reveals how lived experiences are felt individually and collectively. It provides insight into how those involved in collective action cannot be separated from their histories, as protests not only imbibe individual bibliographies, but also inform an array of relationships and meanings of action. It shows a sense of shared understanding. This literature also informs the broadening sense of meanings of militancy, from a definition of well-structured private armies with ideologies, having intense hostility against the state, to like-minded individuals disseminating information for collective action. They are often alienated from the state and popular culture and acting with support from their immediate community in carrying out their actions against perceived injustices. Militants are also labelled criminals and freedom fighters, with varied motives which might be either political or economic. This labelling is more complex in terms of the Niger Delta, where the lines of criminality and the quest for economic justice seem blurred, within networks and patterns of mobilisation, including political patronages.

## **Chapter Three: Epistemology and Methods**

### **3.1. Introduction**

An objective of this research is to analyse the complex voices of militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These voices which present different meanings and interpretation, gives a pointer to what constitutes knowledge and reality within a social setting and context. In this chapter, I aim to position the research within philosophical and methodological considerations. Consequently, I attempt to explain (1) the negotiation processes that underpin the epistemological stance of this research (2) the fieldwork and the methods used in generating data (3) my experience and position as an insider and (4) the procedure used in analysing the data and conclusion. However, since the chapter is more or less about expressing how I went about conducting this research, a few lines of this introduction section discloses my learning experiences and challenges thus far.

In broad view, the process of social research is complicated and intense (Devine, 1999). It informs experiences that are often contradictory with layers of individual thoughts or perceptions, and as a result social research, can be seen as an act of confession (Howes, 1981), negotiation, as well as challenges. This holds true, conducting research in a highly tensed and complex environment, with layers of actors in a struggle over resources, which becomes quite challenging in many ways. A challenge I encountered being insider is having what, Malinowski (1922) calls foreshadowed problems and preconceived ideas- having a set of question or ideas to be proven prior to engagements at the field, than allowing events unfold based on questions at the field. Truly, I had my own preconceptions, given my past experiences as an activist and having conducted field research to understand what the concept or slogan of 'participatory development' meant to oil-bearing communities in Niger Delta. The research outcome from my MPhil programme in Aberystwyth, Wales in 2007, induced my belief that the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies, are responsible for the grievances and frustration in which militants emerged. This preconceived idea, became my first 'negotiation' with my supervisors, which changed my initial beliefs or thoughts. In essence, negotiation broaden and give new insight or perspective to how we understand a given phenomenon, by adjusting our basic questions or orientations (Devine, 1999). A second challenge or experience in this research, that the construction of knowledge and reality by the militants of the Niger Delta takes place in a context far removed from that of academic discourse and, therefore, the translation of that meaning, through the researcher, and then on to academic readers of the thesis is a process that risks creating divergences of meaning.

### **3.2. Negotiating 'Process'**

The term militancy in Niger Delta means different things to different people. These meanings are learned or created from feelings, emotional attachment and attitudes which are highly fluid within time and space. Consequently, understanding 'reality' from the ways in which militants collectively and contentiously think, feel and voice reasons for their actions, cannot be stable, repeated in exactly same way or described objectively with statistics or numbers. Neither can the thought processes or emotional states of militants can be predicted based on previously observed and explained 'real fact'. On this grounds, I reject the positivist point of view that reality is stable, observable and can be repeated (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Levin, 1988).

In rejecting the positivist stance to understanding knowledge and reality, I align with the assumption that social life is an unfolding process in which the individual interprets his/her environment to act on the basis of that interpretation (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, understanding of truth and meanings, are relative to our cultural context and physical environment in which we live (Putnam, 1983). Likewise, context and concepts do matter in our ideas of reality. They structure what we perceive, how we get around the world and how we relate to other people (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In this context therefore, metaphors are important. Metaphors tend to pervade our thoughts and everyday life. They frame how individuals think, feel and act. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), people's conceptual system which includes a range of values, ideas and beliefs, are products of our being and thus influence the ways in which we interact with our physical and cultural environment. In addition, metaphors inform our subjective mental framework and how our world functions. However, the understanding of 'truth and meaning' is not strictly personal either. When meanings are considered as entirely private, and each individual understanding is termed 'truth', it then becomes a case that exceeds the boundary of subjectivity. As a result, human sense-making becomes a chaotic, unnatural or forced process (Huizinga, 2007). Moreover, people act towards things based on meanings and purpose these meanings have, given that the social world around us is constructed, shaped and influenced by our experience, knowledge and desire (Limpanitgut, 2009).

Consequently, I argue that the ways in which militias make sense and give meaning to their action is socially constructed and based on history and context, and therefore the understanding of 'reality' is interpretive and inherently qualitative. Interpretivist approach serve as a potent tool for understanding how militants makes sense of their actions, particularly how this are actions are framed within ideological platforms to legitimise action. Besides, the experiential world of militants points to the fact that, there is no single reality, which inform the argument that our concept of reality is achieved through meanings and social interactions within contested field of power (Arce and

Long, 1992). Moreover, interpretivist approach prioritises concept such as ideology, language, identity and power, which underlie real world of militants. Besides, the judgements of militias which is not true or false, echoes how intersubjectivity, which coheres with interpretivist constructionism.

Concepts such as Ideology and language, give insight to meaning, action and interaction of individuals in a social setting (De Koster *et al.*, 2004). These concepts find relevance in analysis in this study, particularly the ideology of '*self-determination and resource control*' held by militant groups, which serve as platform to legitimise militia action in Niger Delta region. Ideologies are constructs we make through knowledge and shared ideas with others. Ideology informs how knowledge is negotiated between people within a given dynamic context. Language on the other hand reflects how we name or label things (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Labels inform the process and relations of power and how power is constructed, framed and sustained. According to Wood (1985:5-7), labelling is an "act of politics involving conflict and authority, which portrays position of status, which are created, bestowed and deployed". Labels induce expectations or behaviours, as well as, shape the form of interaction and negotiations that give meaning to specific event (Wood, 1985). Correspondingly, ideology and language induce shared intersubjective states in understanding knowledge and reality. It therefore means reality is not only socially constructed, but intersubjectively constructed (Owen, 2006), where knowledge is shared reflexively between two or more persons (Reich, 2010). Hence intersubjectivity can be seen as a tool that relates to issues of identity and struggles for recognition (Honneth, 1996), and this is particularly so in Niger Delta region, where militant groups are able to establish their own intersubjective states of identity, to justify collective action.

The sense of shared meaning or intersubjective states of militias in Niger Delta, broadly echoes mutual awareness (Laing *et al.*, 1966), where individuals/groups agree or disagree within common definition of a situation/ issue or view of a physical object. This sense of shared meaning or shared subjective states of individuals or groups (Scheff, 2006), on role and awareness of individuals/groups environment, defines and shapes the willingness to act. The willingness to act or constructed shared meaning (Seale, 2004), is seen as an everyday resource to interpret an element of society and culture. According to Gillespie and Cornish (2010), when individuals or groups have a sense of shared meanings, then they share a definition of the situation. It coheres with the argument that, individuals/groups do become aware of the capacity to exercise control over their lives (Lane and Sawaia, 1995). In addition, it implies the individual/group interpretation and understanding of their own world representation and feelings, and that defines their unique individuality, which becomes seen as part of group identity that plays a role in the study of intersubjectivity.

According to Philip (2007), an intersubjective state, is a necessary condition for formation of identity, which infers on personal experience and feelings (Coulthard *et al.*, 2007), expressed through organised action. Rommetveit (1985), on the other hand, sees it as overlap of individual's subjective view or meaning within a particular mode of communication, where a speaker assume beforehand or takes for granted something that is yet to be discussed with a listener. Accordingly, intersubjectivity can be achieved when participants, who are engaged in an activity have same prolepses (Rommetveit, 1979).

Likewise, interpretivist approach is inherently qualitative. Since qualitative research is based on assumption that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social world (Merriam, 1998), it therefore means, qualitative approach adopts interpretivist constructionism to understand human experiences (Nelson *et al.*, 1992). In this respect, emic approach which coheres to this research, see insiders as engaging intersubjectively with research respondents, in order to understand their lived experiences (Clifford, 1983), and it is on this grounds that emic/ethnographic approach becomes relevant and important in this research. For this reason, the ethnographic/emic approach, entails entering and studying the everyday life of people by participating in their lives, talk with them, observing and interpreting them within their lived context (Madden, 2011). It is a process of learning about local meanings, participating in local activities and reflecting upon these lived experiences, to enable rich analysis of different perspective of a phenomenon. In order words, ethnography inform the emic/ insider's point of view that describe thought and action primarily in terms of actors words and self-understanding that is culturally and historically bonded in context (Geertz, 1983; Morris *et al.*, 1999).

It aims to describe and understand meanings as opposed to merely explaining social action (Henning, 2004). Moreover, researchers that adopt qualitative methods, use concepts and constructs as meaningful words that can be analysed, in order to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under study. In addition, it is based on the intensive study of the features of a phenomena under investigation with the aim of acquiring a holistic view (Miller and Brewer, 2003; Patton, 2002). Consequently, qualitative research helps in unravelling contextual descriptions of varied perspectives people experience in given situation, many of which are often contradictory in terms of behaviour, beliefs, opinions, emotions or the relationships of individuals. Contrarily, qualitative approaches have been criticised for use of small sample size in research, as a result, these raises concerns to how generalised conclusions can be drawn (Du Plooy, 2001). Also, results from qualitative methods cannot be replicated in the same way by other researchers. In addition, there is the tendency for researchers establishing close contact with research participants, which may lead to bias or loss of objectivity.

The ontological and epistemological considerations examined in this section have developed a position in which this research is conceptualised as engaging with the militants of the Niger Delta from an ethnographic and emic perspective in order to capitalise on the intersubjective potential of the researcher and in recognition that knowledge and reality are fundamentally socially constructed phenomena and that, therefore, a full understanding of the “reality” of the conflict in the Niger Delta requires a fully developed intersubjective common orientation between researcher and subject such that existing research has, arguably, failed to achieve. In the context of this thesis, therefore the shared (or discordant) knowledge and understanding expressed by militants is accessed and interpreted within context of the researcher’s experience and then re-communicated in the context of academic discourse.

### 3.3. *The Fieldwork: Research Site*

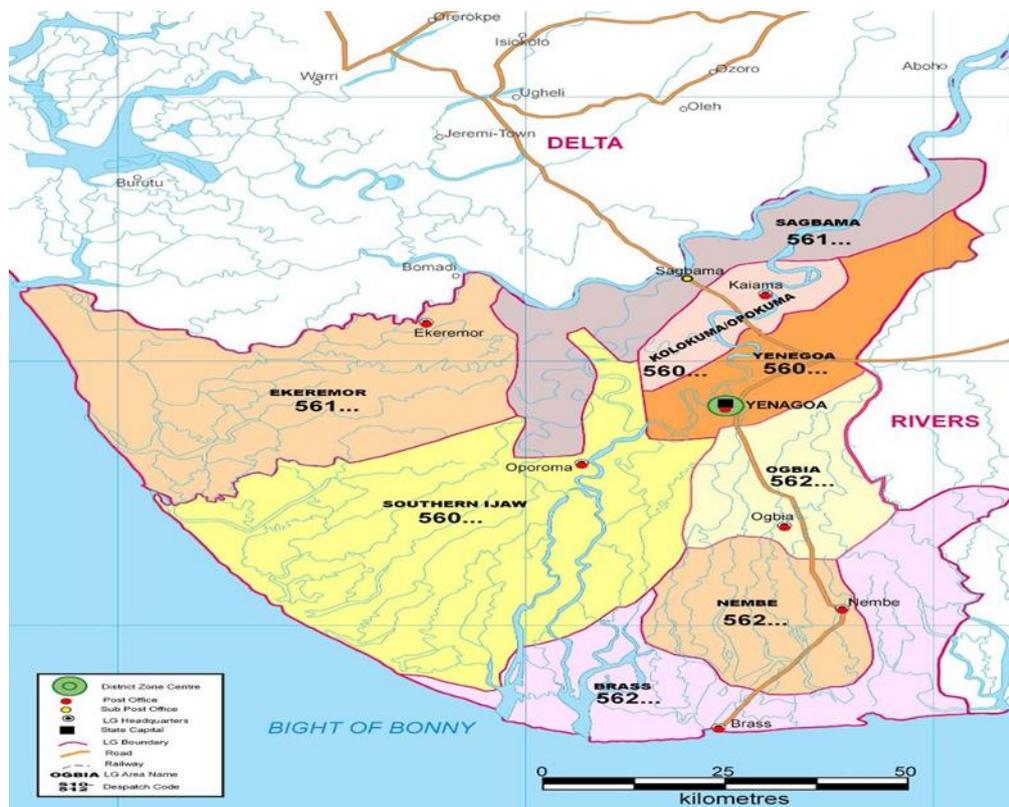
A considerable amount of time was spent in conducting this research within the months of July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 to January, 31<sup>st</sup> 2011. Seven locations across Rivers and Bayelsa States in Niger Delta region of Nigeria were chosen as case study sites (see figures 3.1 and 3.2). These included Port Harcourt Town, Diobu and Abuloma in Rivers State and Yenagoa and other selected communities within the South Ijaw local government areas of Bayelsa State. The specific sites in the South Ijaw local government areas are not named as a matter of ‘my discretion’ in respect to the confidentiality of the participants, even though the respondent did not bother.

**Figure 3.1:** Map of Rivers state. Source: Nigeria Muse, 2010.



The sites in Rivers State were densely populated areas: mainly ghettos and semi-urban areas that could be reached within an hour's drive from Port Harcourt town. These sites were chosen based on my prior knowledge of criminal gangs and violence in these areas. A third site was at Obubra, Cross Rivers State, also within the Niger Delta region. It takes about four hours to get to Obubra by road from Port Harcourt. Obubra was a campsite for militants who had accepted the Federal Government offer of an amnesty. It was the site for militants undergoing disarmament, demobilization, and training and rehabilitation. Yenagoa is a new state capital following the creation of Bayelsa state by the military regime in 1996. It is accessible by road and takes about two hours from Port Harcourt, a much older state capital in Rivers state. The unnamed four sites in Bayelsa State are interior communities that can only be reached by water transport from Yenagoa. It takes between three and four hours by boat to reach these sites. These communities are considered to be battlefield zones and prone to violence, with militias still in regular engagements with the Joint Military Task force (JTF) of the Nigerian state. The sites are surrounded by oil wells, platforms and pipelines that are heavily guarded by the JTF.

**Figure 3.2:** Map of Bayelsa state. Source: Nigeria Zip Code, 2015.



### **3.4. Negotiating Access**

Negotiating access is argued to depend on the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the researched (Lee and Newby, 1983). As an insider, who is native Ijaw, I had privileges, in the process of generating data for this study, so I began re-establishing initial contact. I relied mostly on my prior known activist and key informants who are non-militants. They include the leader of the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), a former president of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), a national coordinator of the Network of Freedom Fighters (NFF), and a Founding Director of the Ijaw Council for Human Rights (ICHR). These organisations, I know have deep knowledge of the dynamics of Niger Delta conflict. This key informants/groups, are also known have been involved in a lot of peaceful, non-violent protest and advocacy since the early 1990's. I am of the suspicion, they have strong ties to armed groups that subsequently metamorphosed into Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) a widely known organisation involved the persistent violent conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Other key informants included a former president of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), an umbrella body representing all Ijaws youth movement and organisations worldwide. The IYC is key and fundamental rallying point for the violent and non-violent activities of the Niger Delta Struggle.

These key informants and activist, help in shaping the direction of generating data for this research. Maintaining friends and prior contacts is thus, key for 'insiders', especially when an activist suddenly becomes a researcher in his/her own environment. This is necessary given the sensitivity of this research, which can be seen as posing potential harm or threat to the researched. Besides accessing a hidden, little known, and fluid militia groups, within highly complex web of networks, requires well known key informants, which 'outsiders' may not be privileged to have. This shaped a collaborative process and nature of generating data for this research. It was collaborative in the sense that it involved a set of complex interactions and iterative process, which can be described as a dual performance between me as a researcher, the key informants and research respondents, in negotiations to getting the right target audiences and reliable data.

### **3.5 Negotiating 'People and Data'**

A central objective of this research is to explore the multiple voices of militants, associated with capture of resources in the Niger Delta region. Thus, this section provides my key experiences of how I gained contact with individuals, who are significant actors to the conflict in the region, from my insider perspective. In negotiating the process of gaining contact with individuals, who are considered to be '*militants*', I argue here that, an ethnographic approach has potential value for accessing and generating data from lived experience of individuals or groups of people. On this account, a qualitative case study approach becomes valid and suitable for this research. Case

studies provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of people by focusing on segments of individual's experiences, events and situations (Guba *et al.*, 1998; Yin, 2003; Silverman, 2010). Case study lay emphasis on historical context and processes, and avoid generalisations; in understanding actions from the perspective of actors, rather than taking a deductive stance (Platt, 1988). Moreover, the approach enhances the understanding of individuals/organisations (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, case studies focus on understanding a particular case within -complex -human interaction and under natural conditions (Key, 1997). In the context of this study, the use of case study is seen to serve as a method that explores the historical processes and meanings behind militia action, which gives significance to a particular phenomenon (Militancy).

As discussed in chapter 5, the militants of the Niger Delta region have a well organised structure and hierarchy. Given the sensitivity and security concerns, it was challenging to establish contact with the top hierarchy of militias known as '*Generals*,' as they prefer to remain hard to reach. However, the middle and bottom rang of the hierarchy, appear proliferated in ways; where everyone seems to know something about militancy, but no one is necessarily willing to admit being a militant. This is the same with '*militia camps*', where people may have an idea of what these are, but where no one may be willing to give information about these camps, given the security concerns. Hence, at the top level, it is assumed that militants do not exist, although some individuals/groups are being labelled as militants. As a result, the 35 interviews conducted in this research, I would argue, are a representative sample of people with shared beliefs: the interviewees all acknowledged having an idea about militancy or admitted to being militants, having engaged in collective action as militias. In addition, the interviewees all had an understanding of what my research was about were willing to assert their voices as key informants of this study. In other words, the individuals interviewed for this research were those who may not openly admit being militants, but appeared to be caught up in the web of militancy. They acknowledged the questions of this research aims to explore and understand their role, representing a group of people who are hard to reach.

In this context, a purposive sampling technique was best suited for this study. Purposive sampling aims to discover, understand or gain insight, learned from a select sample of a population, and based on the unique characteristics, conveniences, or networks of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). It relies on the judgement of a researcher's selection of cases with a specific purpose in mind, as the unit representative of a population. In this particular case, the identification of individuals who embrace the idea of militancy. During the initial negotiations; I discussed about the aim/objective, as well as scope of my research with key informants into gaining contact with individuals who engaged in collective action as militants. The sample sizes were, however, not fixed prior to the fieldwork of data collection, as I had no prior specific target or number of interviewees in mind. Moreover, sample size has been on the availability of the target population (militants) in the

field. In this regard, the possibility of investigating an entire population may seem far off, if not impossible (Berg, 2004). Therefore, I cannot claim that I carried out this research in the entire Niger Delta region, or consider the outcomes as a representation of the total population of the Niger Delta. Rather, the interviewees are seen as representative group of individuals that are key actors involved in militia action or have an idea of militancy in Niger Delta region. As a representative sample, it is therefore, considered as an aggregate of cases that conform to a designated set or specification, i.e. individuals having common characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying (Mouton, 1996). Accordingly, I observed, interviewed, had conversations, made notes, and read local newspapers, whilst engaging with individuals that assumed the role of militias. This was bolstered by interviews with non-militias in order to complement views that would provide an in-depth understanding of the conflict in the Niger Delta region.

As stated earlier in this chapter, trust and prior interpersonal relationships were key to gaining contact with individuals, whose ages ranged from 24-72yrs. It is worth noting that at the time fieldwork the target population of the research, were commonly addressed by public/print media, as 'ex- militants', following the granting of amnesty and the integration of militants back into society. Thus, they were no longer confined to militia camps, hidden within the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta region. The integration of militants from their hidden camps back into society meant that I had to sieve through a larger population of people in Port Harcourt and Yenagoa. My personal experiences as an insider, and having lived in both cities, narrowed my scope of search for individuals who had in-depth knowledge about militancy, and those who had actually engaged in militia actions. Prior to embarking on my field work, I made repeated phone calls to the key contacts mentioned earlier. Upon arrival in Nigeria on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2010, I began scheduling interviews through phone calls to known key informants in Port Harcourt and Yenagoa.

My first set of interviews began in August, 2010 at Port Harcourt in Rivers State, as I met Stone, a long-time friend and environmental rights activist in his early forties. Stone, a non-militant, reflected on his lived experience of militia activity at his native community of Buguma. Other contacts in Port Harcourt included: Alaere, a female activist in her mid-forties and executive chairperson of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), as well as Kponi and Kowa, both non-militias in their late sixties, who were university researchers. Whilst in Port Harcourt, I took time off to visit a class mate of mine, which led to a scheduled meeting with Iburo, a traditional chief from Okrika community. Okrika community is widely known as one of the 'hotspots' for militia activity in Rivers state. My interview with Iburo, snowballed into meetings with other militias, including Buluwei and Boye from Borokiri and Gbundu water fronts, both slum areas in Port Harcourt. Both were unemployed youths in their mid-30's and early 40s, and belonged to two separate militia

groups; the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Volunteer (NDV) located in Rivers state.

-I travelled to Yenagoa, Bayelsa State by the second week of September, 2010 and spent a month scheduling appointments and formal interviews with key informant such as Pato, in his mid-forties, and Oweifa, Alabo, Inemo and Otuan (as mentioned in section 3.4), all in their early and mid-fifties. These key informants, enabled access with Okpuogidi, a senior ranking member of a militia group in Yenagoa. My first meeting with Okpuogidi, who is in his late thirties, was more of an introduction, as he preferred having a scheduled meeting in his community, at Southern Ijaw. A week later, I boarded on a speed boat and travelled 2 hours from Swahli-Waterside in Yenagoa to Okpuogidi's community in South Ijaw area. The interview was eventually carried out at the community's dilapidated primary school building. The visit also afforded me the opportunity to engage in conversations with local youths, which gave me a sense of how youths define, who is a militant, and how they perceive the impact of militia activity on the community. These conversations further led to interviews with Ololo, a 38 year old member of same militia group as Okpuogidi.

As the fieldwork progressed, I developed a separate friendship/relationship with the idea of initiating informal conversations around issues of militancy. These led to meeting individuals such as Otuogidi, a taxi driver in his late thirties, who apparently was a member of a militia group in Bayelsa state. My informal conversation with Otuogidi in Pidgin English took place whilst he was taking me home in his taxi, and this blossomed into a '*social friendship*' which led to subsequent interviews with him. The friendship which developed from the use of Otuogidi's car during the period of my stay in Bayelsa, created further avenues for meeting other militias, like 35-year old Kavelli whom I met in a drinking bar in Yenagoa at Otuogidi's birthday celebration. I took the opportunity of a birthday invitation to schedule further interviews with Kavelli and Otuogidi at designated eateries, where I bought them food and drinks for myself and others. My social friendships opened new opportunities, such as the visit to a night club called V10 with Otuogidi and Kavelli at Yenagoa. Whilst chatting and drinking at this busy night club, I got a sense of how militia leader's social lives are framed, before leaving the club at about 3 am. I travelled to Kaiama community a week after for a scheduled formal interview with 72 year old Pa Okosiwei, the only surviving member of the first militia action of 1966 in the Niger Delta region. I met Pa Okosiwei through a very close friend of my family. My engagements continued with Otuan in Yenagoa, who informed me of his journey to Obubra Camp in Cross Rivers state the following month in November, 2010. During this period of the fieldwork, '*assumed militants*' were undergoing a rehabilitation training programme at a community called Obubura in Cross Rivers state. Otuan, being one of the coordinators of the federal government Amnesty training programme, wanted me to pay a visit to Obubra. For me, such an invitation was a great opportunity for gaining close contact with target population sample of this research,

Accordingly, I left Yenagoa for Port Harcourt by the end of October, 2010. There, I spent a week catching up again with Alaere, Kowa, family and friends, before travelling to Obubra in Cross-Rivers state by mid-November, 2010. My visit to Obubra was indeed rewarding, as it narrowed down my search for 'militants', given that about 2,500 people of the 4<sup>th</sup> batch of rehabilitation programme, were present at Obubra training camp. I spent 3 nights at the camp with Otuan, and was introduced to BV commander, whom I interviewed in the morning of my first night at Obubra. Whilst at the Camp, I took the opportunity of walking around to engage in conversation with trainees, which gave me a sense of the ethnic composition and characteristics of individuals at the training camp. The second day I spent in Obubra camp, I surprisingly came across Akpainfoko, an unemployed graduate, whom I taught years ago at Niger Delta University in 2004/05. Akpainfoko informed me of his role as secretary to a militia group that operated in Bayelsa state, hence his involvement as a trainee at Obubra camp. The surprise meeting with Akpainfoko, propelled my interviews with Timidi, Besu and Ebougha, at Obubra. These individuals, whose ages ranged between 32-42 years, belonged to different militia groups in Delta and Bayelsa state. I also met with 68-year old Kpein, the director coordinating the affairs of trainers and trainees, as well as, a 54-year old militia leader, who simply introduced himself as 'General 00X' during my interviews at the camp.

### **3.5.1. Observations**

It is argued, our observations are structured within power, politics and history. Observation require being reflexive, to register aspects of the field setting and of human behaviour (Madden, 2011). Proportionately, whilst negotiating to generate data of this research at the field, I observed that an informal process of engagement, built relationship and trust, especially in a very sensitive research area such as Niger Delta region. Although I see myself as conducting 'scientific academic research' that may ethically require formal process and written consent in generating data, the case of Niger Delta environment, especially for 'militants' is far different in many ways. Firstly, our society in yet to get acquainted with culture of research were people are often interviewed with pen and paper. It is either seen as invading private space or leaves people wondering what the researcher is all about. Secondly, given the sensitivity of this research, militants were highly suspicious of my motive, as a result, most felt quite uncomfortable with me using a formal approach with well structures and prepared questions to ask. Despite my being Ijaw and an 'insider' asking a 'militant' after a hard search of weeks, and months, for written consent, with well thought written questionnaires and pen, would greatly mar the entire process with highly biased response, where the researcher risk being told, what he/she intends to hear.

So, in the processes collecting data, I also observed that militias had a very well organised hierarchy and command structure. This observation induced my patience to ensure quality, and rigor, by striving to get hold of at least a few high ranked members like 'commanders' or 'Generals', rather than having the –'Okorofos' recruits and low ranked members constituting the bulk of my data. In doing so, I realised that the low ranked members, were more open in revealing the 'hidden secrets' of what's going in these 'Camps' than those in high hierarchy. This may be attributed to either a feeling of being 'short charged for services rendered' by leaders or they felt more relaxed and comfortable revealing the 'unknowns' to me as a 'brother', of which I also observed I was frequently called during my encounter as a researcher.

During my encounters with some of the top ranked members of the militias, I noticed they kept stating the obvious well-known issues of environmental pollution, gas flares, and repression from the Nigerian army, as reasons for embarking in violent action against the state and oil companies. The top ranked members hardly disclose what goes on behind the scenes in 'camps' What goes on behind the scenes even as a fellow Ijaw and insider, does not necessarily guarantee getting the entire picture of militia world. Interestingly, whilst also socialising at night clubs, were most militia leaders hangout, I noticed "militia General" arriving with posh cars and guarded with well-armed policemen at this night clubs. My instant feeling then, was 'we' say in local jargon, they have 'arrived', meaning they are now rich, having acquired status and recognition by the state and multinational oil companies. These observations at the field, enabled me capture the mental picture of the realities on the social lifestyle and accorded status of militant leaders

### **3.5.2. Interviews**

In-depth interviews constitute part of my data collection methods for this study. They are said to be less structured and intense than standardised questionnaires (*Bryman, 2008*), as it provides a detailed, rich-textured and information on one or more individuals (*Maanen, 1983*).more importantly in-depth interviews enables dialogue and negotiation between the researcher and researched, which strengthens the views and status of the interviewee as a valid, valuable contributor and collaborator in construction of knowledge, rather than just a studied subject (*Berg, 2004*). Furthermore, in-depth interviews allow the interviewer to construct open-ended questions that frees the respondent to express him/herself, with the aim of soliciting subjective responses. The process allows for deeper responses through probing questions, which increases the richness of the data obtained. However, interviewees in this method, can easily become fatigued, it may introduce bias, given the close contact between the interviewer and interviewee.

Accordingly, I utilised an informal and formal approach in collecting data. By informal, I meant going to the field without well planned written out questions to ask militants, but memorising the key questions I need to ask at the field, which were basically (a) why did you become a militant, (b) what does a 'camp' look like (c) what do you do in this camps, (d) what were you doing before joining a militia group? These questions mostly in 'pidgin language', broadly aims to elicit how militia understand they make sense of their collective action, and contentiously think about the actions and more importantly, the processes and context of how these actions quickly gained prominence. The approach opened avenues to probe further, where I was privileged to have audio record 15 out of the total 35 interviews conducted for this research. I considered the audio recorded as extremely rare privilege, despite verbal consent. The consent to have interviews or discussions recorded where mostly refused, even with assurances that my interviews was purely an academic research exercise. Those that agreed to have the interviews recorded did so based on trust that their identity would not be disclosed in any form, as each respondent had the option of being referred to by an alias in order to protect their identity. Some of those that agreed to have the discussions recorded did not bother to insist on an alias, trusting me to use my discretion, and in such cases, I chose to mask their identities.

Most of the interviews or discussions took place in the day, mostly in ghettos, slums, noisy areas, eateries or anywhere that suits the respondents. The interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, sometimes more, depending on location, the mode of the interviewee or how discussion progressed. There were frequent distractions during the field research, especially during permitted recordings of interviews. In these situations, I tried to make the research respondents feel in control and comfortable in directing the research process. The process of formal interviews referred here is by scheduling to visit or being invited by key non-militants informants at offices and homes. This was indeed an intellectual 'business like' arrangement. My key informants and I were much more relaxed to engage and talk. I had more time to ask probing questions in getting 'convincing details', which should validate, complement or identify, contrasting views or ambiguities, particularly regarding context and meaning of militancy. However, there were slight differences in the interviews administered to non-militants. These differences lie on historical context and ideology of militancy.

### **3.5.3. Conversations/language**

Language in terms of understanding jargons, or slangs is key for understanding this kind of research. It has been argued that language is significant for researchers whether insiders or outsiders, in studying cultures with languages boundaries, either through differences in dialect within areas, or slangs, argots and even languages that are particular to an individual (idiolect) (*Madden,*

2011). More importantly, insiders may also face a challenge of translating ideas in a language they understand as insiders, into academic discourse that can be read and understood by readers of the research. Suitably, negotiation and language serve to establish relationships in a field setting. They get people to talk and to keep them talking during a conversation. According to Madden (2011), conversation is everyday act which constitutes human interaction. This indeed hold true as slangs and jargons were commonly used during my encounter with militia. Some I knew, others I learnt by asking what they meant. An example I learnt some new jargon, such “*gbenge the best,*” or “*bust and clamp*” – these are pidgin phrases picked up during field conversations with militias. The former means, confronting oil companies with threats to create opportunities and negotiate for money or award of contract. The latter means blowing up pipelines and getting the contact for its repair. Equally, I had conversation at newspaper stands, nightclubs and mamaput joints (eateries) as way triangulating to validate comments and observations at the field. During these conversations, I realised that the numbers of militants in the Niger delta were far less than the figures presented. I also realised some people supported the actions of militias, seeing it as a way compelling oil communities to intervene in improving the living conditions of communities in the region, others viewed militants as criminals and opportunist.

#### **3.5.4. Field Notes**

Field notes can be faithful representations of real events, and unit of analysis that defines individual or groups (Madden, 2011). They are brief and factual and can be used in analyses, interpretations or conclusions. According to Madden (2011), most field notes do often take place within a noisy environment of active fieldwork, jotting down as much information and details as possible. Field note also formed part of my data collection methods, also, mine was mainly, in terms of tracing the network connections and relationships, whilst listening as they talk. I tried tracing the nature of emerge of militia leaders, which community they came from where did they go to, or how they became known. However jotting down notes whilst listening at the same time to respondent was challenging at keeping pace with what is been said. Again, telling a ‘militia’ to stop halfway from discussion or conversation, to write down what is been said, may create its own suspicion, despite consent. As it may seem getting too serious, as I may lose that emotional space of comfort, since emotions change quickly.

### **3.6. Negotiating 'Reflexivity'**

Writers have argued that changing locations of researchers from institutions to a more private/personal environment can raise unexpected ethical, emotional and methodological issues not covered by professional codes of conduct (*Yee and Andrew, 2006*). Indeed, a number of ethical and methodological issues did arise during the fieldwork for this research. First, is the back and forth scheduling of appointments, and distraction from noisy environments where appointments were fixed. This was quite frustrating considering the cost in terms of time and resources in getting hold of research respondents. Interviews were mostly scheduled at bars, highly populated slum areas, and unusual places with lots of distraction. The choices were obviously out of my control as a researcher. There were instances where I had to stop audio recording in order for the research respondents to attend to phone calls, friends passing by and even remembering pressing personal issues that led to the rescheduling of interviews or conversations. In such circumstances, rescheduled appointments could take days, or a week or more. I found that it was important to remain patient through these challenges and exercise, since it was important to complete interviews in order to ensure detail and substance in the data rather than just a high number of interviews.

Secondly, I became aware of the positioning of power between myself and the research respondents throughout the research process. Despite the fact that I had specific information or themes I wanted to explore, the interviewees had the power to choose how to respond in giving any answer that they found desirable in responding to my questions. Thirdly, I also recognised the inevitable subjectivity and biases I would encounter during the fieldwork. For me, being a native (Ijaw), that considers myself as an insider, conducting research on individuals/groups that are predominantly Ijaw, created a platform and leverage toward building interpersonal relationships with 'militants' and key informants/ non-militants. For 'external outsiders' who are non-Ijaws, these opportunity of relationship cannot or may not be easily done. My contact with key informants, activists and perceived militants led to the direction of the research, snowballing in organic and unpredictable ways, thus placing me in a position where I found myself been controlled by the researched. Despite insiderness, I found myself been directed on where to go and who to meet. This brought home to me how vulnerable I became at the field. Nevertheless, it did not mean, I did not know what I was looking for, but was simply tagging along, and revealing a power shifts in processes of generating data of this study, where consent became a multifaceted balancing act between me, key informants and 'militias'.

One example of these unwritten code of conduct is *'dropping something to open road'*. This local jargon implies a form of unofficial giving and of showing appreciation when meeting someone for information, although whether this was necessary depended upon particular circumstances and the particular information sought. In the context of the Niger Delta, following local jargon and practices is a form of abiding by local ethics and norms that are inevitable. It cannot be avoided in the context and nature of this research. It was also important to be cautious in maintaining an appropriate personality and appearance in order not to make the researched respondent feel inferior or feel that I was well-off, which would have increased my exposure to *'dropping something to open the road.'* These experiences reflect Goffman's (1959) remarks that individuals act intentionally or unintentionally to impress others by keeping up performances.

Hence, consciously and unconsciously, I generally found myself communicating in the local pidgin-English dialects with my research respondents, and sometimes picking up new vocabulary, such *"gbenge the best,"* or *"bust and clamp"* – these are pidgin phrases picked up during field discussions or conversation with identified militias. The former means, confronting oil companies with threats to create opportunities and negotiate for money or award of contract. The latter means blowing up pipelines and getting the contact for its repair. My insidersness, therefore, opened up new avenues that revealed deeper insights into the activities of militia groups. It also created a platform for gaining trust and rapport that allowed respondents to speak more freely and openly about their experiences. For me, there was no need to fake friendship to make research respondents divulge information, as some writers have argued (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). My insidersness enabled the development of trust and encouraged militia members to open up, as shown below:

*"We did not go with arms first, we only went with one "Kpaikpo" (Dane gun) and flag. The law was that arms should not go first. Only three persons went to the flow station and shut down the station, and when they pin the flag, no armed men's guns would function. Their bullet and rifles would not function again. That is the oracle. From there we called our troops to come and join. In that particular night, only ten persons took over the flow station, after the three persons, until the next morning. By then Ama was there, Dobo was there too, so many others during that strike. So the government intervened, at the end of the day, they settled some amount of money, about thirty something million naira. It was from there Ama took his share of the money and went to open a camp"*

The above statement from a militia commander obviously reveals trust in relaying his story about the hidden cultural secrets used by militants in armed confrontations. I felt there was a genuine risk in this statement as the commander revealed his lived experiences and the actors' real names, which I have chosen to edit out in the above extract. There were other situations where my relationship with the research respondents developed to a deeper level, where I was no longer seen as researcher but as a close confidant that could offer advice. I experienced this at the training camp for militants at Obubra. Many respondents became comfortable in asking me to suggest what skills training might be suitable for them. Perhaps, they viewed me as an expert, although I could only give honest advice based on my knowledge, while been wary of blurring the lines between myself and the research subjects. My field encounters also provoked an emotional response that I continually struggled to deal with. Many statements or narratives of events served to rekindle my own experiences of protest and advocacy in the Niger Delta region. My activism in terms of organising protest to confront on issues of oil pollution and poor livelihood conditions of communities, induced empathy.

These ethical issues cannot be avoided, but managed in order to present, unbiased non-judgemental views. An instance of how I struggled with emotions draws on the field conversations I heard with a militia member that lost his six children within the space of one week due to a cholera outbreak in his community. Drinking water is a major feature linked to issues that triggered that armed conflict, as communities get their drinking water from polluted rivers and streams, which they also defecate in. His story reflected my own activism, but I had to manage my emotions and see myself in a different light as a researcher in a different circumstance: that is an evolving process. There were instances at the fieldwork, where I tried to reveal as little about myself as possible in order not to influence responses. These were night clubs, 'mamaput' joints (eateries) and newspapers stands, where the commonly known 'apologia of militancy' are discussed. In these instances, I tried initiating a conversation by provoking the notion of self-determination and resource control to trigger response from by me in these areas. I would not consider this as disguise or lack of ethics, but part of public opinion as Ijaw, insider from observations that feeds into my data as a researcher. Likewise, in many instances of field conversations and interviews, when I tried to tease out how militancy emerged, I was made to reflect on my insiderness. As a respondent commented, *'bros you know wetin dey Na'*— meaning, I know or I am supposed to know that militancy is all about business. His statement was quite challenging, as he felt I had a clue of militant activities. On another occasion, a respondent kept referring to *"you know, you can recall"*, as shown below:

*“You (me) can recall that the Pere of Amabulu was the pioneer chairman of the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA)...You (me) also remember the Oboama flow station, were Felix Tuodolo was going from community to community to sensitize the people, and the soldiers opened fire at them.”*

What the respondent is doing here is illustrating the intersubjective states and prolepses, between the researcher and the researched. The shared reflexive experiences, obviously served to highlight my subjectivity and its influence on the construction process of reality, which makes our involvement inevitable (Quilley and Loyal, 2005). In addition, sieving through a highly tensed, conflict-ridden population to identify ‘real militants’ was another challenge I faced. Despite my insiderness, I had to take precautions on who to meet for interviews, as every youth in the Niger Delta is conceived as or has potential of being labelled as a militant. More so, the aftermath of amnesty programme introduced by the Nigerian state created a welfare package that witnessed claims by many as militants, in order to gain access to the training and opportunities and money. I also realised being an insider, the researched takes for granted his responses, believing I know them (prolepses), thus I filled in gaps through triangulation with other militias or key informants, as certain information may not be elaborate or over-emphasized.

The process is to ensure a valid data, as it is argued that reliability and validity of data is based on experiences of the researched (Leydesdorff et al., 1996; Gluck and Patai, 1991). However, reliability and validity of data does not entirely lie in the hands of the researched experiences. Consequently, there is the possibility or situations where bias, and memories of accounts by the researched, is also questioned, given that reliance upon memories may distort the truth. Also, there is the potential for the researched to tell only what they think researcher wants to hear, excluding other vital details, especially when they perceive the information would become a public document. Furthermore, given that there is no simple or universal truth to a story, since stories are based on one’s own perception, I triangulated to gain the intersubjective state of common beliefs, as well as, utilising the shared experiences of the situation in the Niger Delta.

### **3.7. Positionality**

This research is hinged on a non-positivist stance to argue that scientific research do not produce objective truth (Humboldt, 2008), but claims to truth that rely on particular assumptions and perspectives of reality. Moreover, reality is not just socially constructed, but intersubjectivity constructed. Furthermore, external conditions in which individuals or groups therefore live in, are major influences to how we think, feel and act. Being a native Ijaw and conducting research with Izon militants, constitutes insiderness, which create some privileges as well as, challenges of engagements in the field. I view the shared meanings and perceptions of militants in Niger Delta as

co-construction of knowledge, which appeal to our shared subjectivities and lived experiences. It is an iterative and collaborative on-going process with the researcher and the researched subject mental and emotional states being immersed into the research. As a result, it engages in a face-to-face contact with the research subjects, which induced reciprocity in building trust and friendship, without doing them any harm to the key informant or militants, who have move on with their lives, by been reintegrated back to the society.

Being a native Ijaw and researching my own environment had its privileges and challenges as I could not control what happened in the field. My insiderness was limited in terms of the positions or power in relation to researched respondents and in determining who to interview, what they said in the process of discussions or interviews or where to go in in order to locate members of militia groups. In terms of negotiating objectivity and subjectivity as regards to my research, I did not feel distant or disengaged from the research respondents, rather I felt emotionally connected with the research processes and interviewees, albeit whilst paying careful attention to feedback, in order to grasp the multifaceted perspectives and views of militancy. I acknowledge, the argument that, all research is viewed as a practical activity that requires the exercise of judgment within context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), rather than simply adhering to methodological rules. Therefore, I make no pretence that this research is value-free, as the perspectives, I have chosen and the ways in which I intend to analyse and interpret the data reveal elements of subjectivity. I also, consider this research to be a collaborative effort and process between me, the research data and interviewees, in providing a common sense construct of a particular phenomenon. The process only makes me a co-structor of social knowledge, taking into account the intersubjective elements that come into play in the process of the research (Finlay, 2003).

I had difficulty, however, in locating my identity in terms being an outsider or insider throughout the field research, as I kept struggling to distance myself from being emotionally involved in the everyday realities that I am part of. At best, I can only present a view of the way things are, without making any judgement. Another aspect of locating my identity as an insider or an outsider is the use of conventional third person discourse in academic writing or the first person discourse associated with a more personal literary style. Writers have argued that the third person style emphasise a more "scientific" distance from the work, and a striving to navigate the boundaries between fact and fiction, subjective and objective, and what is true and imagined (Richardson, 2000). I argue, however, that in the context of research such as, this the use of the third person may in fact cloak the dilemma and compromise implicit in such judgements, hence, I have chosen on occasions to use the first person stance. This is to emphasise the challenges of constructing an independent knowledge in relation to the collective identities of the research subjects, as well as, acknowledging the personal and reflexive nature of my authorship of the research. Furthermore, my

passion and subjective biases are borne out of shared experiences and narratives with the interviewees of this research.

### **3.8. Process of Data Analysis**

The process of analysing data generated in this study is suitably an interpretative approach. Although, interpretative data analysis is criticised for its often fragmented or conflictual narrative accounts (Walsham, 2006), it engage a grounded theory procedure that involves a back and forth reading of interview transcripts and field notes with the purpose of discovery, labelling or understanding. Grounded theories are appropriate for single-case studies and studies that require small number of participants, and the pattern of data analysis offer insight, that enhance understanding, and provides a meaningful way to explore new subjects. In grounded theory, coding is often systematic and informal, relying on the researcher's ability to detect clusters of words that could develop further description and interpretation. The researcher is seen as performing the function of identifying issues and concepts and measuring their relative value, as well as researcher having the flexibility to modify his/her approach as needed, including detecting latent content inherent in the subject's statements. The drawback, however, is that being an instrument of analysis, the researcher often lacks the same precision and objectivity that a physical instrument or test might afford.

Accordingly, I engaged the process of multiple reading and interpretation of transcribed audio recorded interviews, words and texts from newspapers and notes from conversation/observation. I attempted categorising the data into dominant themes/concepts within (1) the historical context of emergence (2) the meaning, motivation and ambition of militancy and (3) the role and significance of militancy. I engage reflexively in the process of analysis by breaking down narratives into paragraphs and sentences that is devoid of any personal feeling or bias, as I seek to present a non-judgemental view of militants. The objective of this reflexive and interpretative account of militants and non-militants is to gain a broader picture of how and why militancy gained prominence within the macro political structure of resource governance in Niger Delta. Accordingly, I searched for common recurring themes from the historical, context, and process of militancy. Key concepts from literature such as collective identity, power and opportunism guided the process of categorising data.

In carrying out this study, I attempt to emphasise the shifting frame of militia collective identity questions of; who is a militant (meaning) what and how they do, what they do (internal organisation, strategy and tactics) by scrutinising utterances words from the transcribed interviews, and text extracts from newspapers. The implication of this process is to make explicit the context of varied meaning of militancy, the motivation/ambition and network of relationships that gives

prominence to militancy. Besides, the utterance and texts scrutinised will also inform the processes of social change, which militants appear to be seeking within the macro political culture of resource governance in Nigeria. It will reveal the constraints or opportunities on role of militants in Niger Delta conflict. In trying to make sense of the primary, I also attempt to illustrate how the subjective experiences of militants and common ideology or belief is framed and transformed into new meanings and interpretation. It is however pertinent to note, that the analysis or finding of this study is, mainly concerned with providing a sociological understanding of militancy; what it is, and how it evolves and recurs in sustaining the conflict in the region. I do not intend to present an absolute definitive reality of the lingering conflict and militia action in Niger Delta region, but provide a description and interpretation of the role and significance of militancy. Above all, I assume the violent actions of militants in the Niger Delta region, is one that perpetuates, recreates a repertoire of contention.

However, the process of interpretation is argued as political activity (Walsham, 2006), where the researcher is not positioned as being neutral or insiders been holistic in analysis of interviewees text or adding variation in the findings. In addressing the issue of neutrality, firstly I have no doubt that the data generated for this research is informed by the lived and shared experiences of the research subjects; hence it is subjective not value-free. Secondly, I also consider this research to be a continuous process that changes in time and space, by making constant contact with key informants and the researched, and also been aware of issues presented . Whilst acknowledging the key informant and militia's discretion in disclosing information to narrate their stories and experiences, I also have preconceptions as to what to look for in describing and interpreting the research data. Conversely, my ethnic background may be seen to create subjective biases for analysis, as it would rely on my thinking and choices, thus creating concern on the outcome of this research from assumption perception or interest.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

This chapter examines relevant review of literature in order to underpin this research within epistemological and ontological lens. It advocates for interpretivist social constructionist perspective as suitable for exploring a particular kind of reality, and argues that the 'reality' of militancy/militia action in Niger Delta, is a socially constructed phenomenon. In addition, I hinge on the assumption that our ideas of what constitutes knowledge, never objectively reflect external reality (De Koster *et al.*, 2004), as it is often a creation from our experiences, perceptions and values. Therefore, our choices and actions are often based on social context and values we attach to things within our physical environment.

Among militants of the Niger Delta, we can say that there is intersubjective state relating to the meaning and collective actions in the region, and this assumption is likely to be reflected in empirical chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this study. Broadly speaking, there are challenges faced by academic researcher's seeking to deconstruct intersubjective states. These challenges are more profound for 'insiders' who is at the least, familiar with intersubjective states of the researched. I acknowledge my positioning, that might create bias or emotional attachment in providing a valid constructed reality of militias. However, scholars argue that an element of insiderness can be a useful way of engaging with intersubjectivities of research subject, provided researchers maintain some measure of detachment (Quilley and Loyal, 2005). Given that everyday life is itself a meaningful intersubjective creation (Prus, 1996), then the immersion into the live world of active militias in the Niger Delta, informs ethnographic approach. The choice of ethnographic approach, lies in its naturally occurring source of data and its ability to combine different forms of data. I argue here that an ethnographic approach, from the perspective of an insider, has potential value for accessing the lived experiences of militants in the Niger Delta.

In exploring the nature of knowledge and the complexities in social science research, in terms of acquiring and translating broadly valid meanings from subjects of research, that are socially and culturally remote from the language and values of the research medium, this sections has thus far shown that there is no "easy" point of access to the fully nuanced life-world of militants. Whilst being an 'outsider' conveys advantages in some research situations, there is the risk of 'outsiders' been constrained from attaining any level of intersubjective understanding. Moreover, 'outsiders' might end up imposing external values and judgements that might subvert a full understanding. These risks are relatively great in a research context such as the Niger Delta, where research subjects are likely to view outsider researchers with suspicion. Also, tapping into the intersubjective world of the militants might be fraught with substantial cultural and practical challenges. In this context, therefore, I argue that as a researcher, who is both an insider in some sense, to the world of the militants, and insider to the academic discourse, places me in a position to be able to attain a unique and valuable access to the research subjects (in this case the militants of the Niger Delta), whilst also being in able to reflect and analyse the lived world of militia, in a more nuanced intersubjective discourse of academia. As a researcher engaging with militias, the interface of communication provides an important reminder that the very act of communication can itself may change and reshape both the researcher and militia's knowledge and belief.

Furthermore, perceived power imbalances between the researcher (interviewer) and militant actor (interviewee) might lead to discontinuity in the process of gathering information and reformulation of ideas and meanings. Although my beliefs may be reformulated through the process of interface with interviewees, there is also the possibility that, the questions I posed, the ways they are articulated and the interviewees' perception of my goals, can itself, influence to reinforce or reshape the interviewees' perceptions in articulating perceived thoughts. Whilst face-to-face engagement, therefore, is suggested as preferable methods for this study, it is not does not necessarily provide an objective account, but is equally subject to processes, whereby investigation or exploration, and interaction, creates its own unique and subjective experience. In a nutshell, the epistemological and ontological considerations examined in this chapter have developed a position in which this research is conceptualised as engaging with the militants of the Niger Delta from emic perspective. This is done to capitalise on the intersubjective potential of the researcher's insiderness, and in recognition that knowledge and reality are fundamentally socially constructed phenomena. In addition, an in-depth understanding of reality that is specific to time and space, requires a fully developed intersubjective common orientation between the researcher and militias, in ways that existing research on the Niger conflict, have arguably failed to achieve. The reviews of literatures that highlight the relevance intersubjectivity, interface and insiderness, in the process of construction of knowledge and reality, are further evident at the fieldwork experiences discussed in section three of this chapter.

## ***Chapter Four: The Emergence of Militancy in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria***

### ***4.1. Introduction***

A number of social movement organisations have emerged in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria over the last decade. These movements, which appear to be challenging state power and authority, have remained, to a large extent, unsuccessful in claiming rights or changing the structure of oil governance in the country. Despite confrontations with these movements, the state still maintains its monopoly and exercises control of resources, which are arguably managed through a culture of impunity, with a few state and non-state actors directly benefiting. For many inhabitants of the Niger Delta, life is becoming increasingly precarious. Worse still, the activities of multinational oil companies have had a profound negative environmental impact: waters are polluted, and fishing activities and other methods of making a living have been degraded, leaving communities in squalid conditions (Tantua, 2009). Frustrated with a history of discontent and distrust, indigenous local militias have emerged, becoming recognised for taking direct action in ways seeking specific change.

This chapter aims to describe and interpret the context and processes of emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Thus, this first empirical chapter examines some features that facilitated the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region. Overall, context, political culture and process are important concepts in this research, as they help to unfold a body of complex interaction and relationships around the underlying role and significance of militancy. Specifically, this chapter aims to gain an understanding of the reasons why, and how, militancy has emerged and evolved in a particular way in the Delta, and how the openness or closure of state–society relations help in sustaining the lingering conflict in the Niger Delta region. In this particular case, it is a conflict that raises concerns around the territorial space of action, the lived experiences of individuals or groups, and the physical environment.

The emergence of social movements, such as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and, most recently, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), are seen primarily as minority struggles, especially for Ogonis and Ijaws who seek recognition and rights by making claims and demands. These ethnic groups are at the forefront of a perceived struggle against injustice which appears to coalesce around legitimacy over resource governance. This governance has been challenged by these ethnic groups at various platforms of collective action that hinge on the ideology of “self-determination and resource control”.

Aspects of this chapter also identify the nature of the state's response to these protests, which has led to increasing tension and resistance in the Niger Delta region. The structure of political power, the coercion around it, and localised presence of oil, appear to arouse a conscious awakening amongst ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region. It has induced a sense of belonging amongst individuals and groups, which seems to challenge the legitimacy of the state over rights to land and resource ownership. In addition, the legislative law of resource extraction and the distribution of its benefits, also known as the "derivation principle" in Nigeria, have also triggered a conflict over access, participation and recognition among movements in the Niger Delta region.

In this first empirical chapter, an attempt has been made to gather information, from field interviews, personal observations and experiences, and local newspapers concerning (a) case(s) of political oppression from key moments and events attributed to the emergence of militancy, and (b) the role of the state in response to agitation which has contributed to a proliferation of movements in the region. A second empirical chapter will examine closely how militancy is defined or perceived, the different types of militia leadership, recruitment, and loyalty within a typical "camp" structure of militants. Together, these will shed light on militancy/militias, and how individual interest and collective action involve socially constructed meanings that are not easily discernible or straightforward in the Niger Delta.

A third empirical chapter will explore the relationships and interactions that inform a rise in number of militant groups and what gives significance of militancy in the Niger Delta region. The chapter will also look into the fusion and fission of militancy in terms of unity, competition and splits, amongst militant groups. Together, the chapters will aim to address the key central questions earlier outlined in chapter 1 of this study. However, it is pertinent to note that this research is primarily concerned with a non-judgemental, experiential view of militants rather than the causal mechanisms that led to militancy. Although the views of non-militants were sought, they are meant to validate, or complement the gaps of the narratives of militants.

#### **4.2. *Feeling of Oppression: 1956-1999***

In order to gain an understanding of why and how militancy emerged and the particular in which it emerge, this section will closely examine some features linked to contemporary actions of militants in the Niger Delta. A key historical event attributed to the emergence of militancy was the feeling of political oppression experienced by ethnic minorities prior to the discovery of oil in Nigeria. It signalled early political tensions which established boundaries of majority–minority ethnic struggles for political power in the early 1960s. The fears of political domination of ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region are highlighted in the following interviews. For instance, Kowa an academic researcher and a key non-militant, who was also a former vice president of Ijaw National Congress (INC) point out

the historical roots of contemporary militia action by referring to a perception of oppression. He also reference to a Willink (1957) committee report (see below) constituted during British colonial rule. The report noted the peculiarity of the Niger Delta situation, and the quest for regional autonomy by ethnic minorities, who felt undermined in policy decisions made by Eastern majority Igbos.

*... we had no doubt that the feeling of neglect and lack of understanding is widespread in the region. We consider that a case be made out for special treatment of this area. This matter requires a special effort because the region is poor, backward and neglected.*

The peculiarities of the Niger Delta in terms of the terrain and livelihood patterns, is quite distinct from other regions in the country. This distinction tend to impose challenges of its development needs. These distinctions were noted Willink report that highlight the fears of domination which were expressed as a lack of the minority's representation in policy decision-making, and challenges of infrastructural development in the region. However, the minorities demand for a separate region was denied at the time; as seen above, the report made recommendations that the region be accorded special government attention in terms of physical infrastructure and development. Kowa further maintains that the Willink committee acknowledged the region's neglect and lack of development, and understood that individuals or groups might one day be compelled to take up arms against the state. The recommendations of the Willink report are said to inform the basis for development interventions in the Niger Delta region from successive regimes, such as the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1961, the Niger Delta River Basin Authority (NDRBA) in 1979, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992, and the Niger Delta Development Commission<sup>1</sup> (NDDC) in 2000. The fear of domination resulting from a lack of representation within the political structure of governance, and challenges of physical development, coincided with the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region. Interestingly, the discovery of oil in 1956 is seen to have incited and highlighted a perception of minority status for the Ogonis and Ijaws, as emphasised by Kowa.

#### **4.3. Perception of Minority Status**

*Militancy in the Niger Delta region is a combination of a series of struggles, dating back to the Adaka Boro revolt [...] because of the peculiarities and minority status of the inhabitants of the region, we needed to be separated from the Eastern region [...] These events existed before Oil came into prominence.*

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<sup>1</sup> These were interventions to address the growth and development needs of the Niger Delta region.

Kowa curiously notes the significance of geo-political tensions that existed prior to discovery of oil and the changing trends within structures of governance in the country. Oil became the context and struggle for political power. The exploration of crude oil, gradually turned Nigeria's political economy into a mono commodity economic, upon which the country now heavily depend on. Prior to 1956, the constitutional provision stipulated a structure of regional autonomy that allocated 50% of resource benefits to regions, based on the derivation principle (see Chapter 2 on resource extraction). This percentage was gradually reduced by the state causing protests from minority ethnic groups, shortly after Nigeria's independence in 1960. The centralised structure of oil governance, amongst other features, initiated a struggle for power along ethnic lines, which became evident in the nature of political party formations throughout the country. The ethnic struggles for power threatened the cohesion and unity of the country, as the three major ethnic groups aligned themselves around different political parties: the Hausa–Fulani chose the Northern People's Congress, the Eastern Igbo became attached to the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons, and the Western Yoruba organised themselves around the Action Group. Other ethnic minorities were, however, submerged through these alliances with the dominant political parties. The fear of domination, and struggle for political power which triggered boundaries between majority–minority ethnic identities, coupled with the discovery of oil incited a localised sense of belonging amongst minorities, are some aspects of structural conditions that paved the way for armed conflict to unfold in 1966 and, subsequently, for the Biafra civil war to erupt in 1967, fuelled by ethnic Eastern Igbos.

#### **4.4. Collective Agency: Ideological battles and threats of secession**

A significant feature linked to current militia action in the Niger Delta region, is the influence of charismatic leadership. The fear of domination and oppression, highlighted by Kowa in the previous section, is seen to have spurred the emergence of Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), a movement initiated by a former school teacher, and an undergraduate of chemistry, named Adaka Boro in 1966. The NDVF is seen as a movement speaking on behalf of communities that is excluded from rungs of political governance and, thus, engaged in violent action using threats of secession in making claims and demands for inhabitants of the Niger Delta region. Moreover, the NDVF is perceived by many ethnic Ijaws as carrying a history of martyrs that provides the mechanism and platform for contemporary militias to build on a set of ideas for collective action. The actions of Adaka Boro became, what can be argued within the broader literature of social movement as initiating events (Smelser, 1962), a situation where the actions of a particular individual or series of events trigger repeated action over a period of time, or situation of routine forms of activities and recurring actions that becomes well known to both challengers who engage in collective action, and their opponents (Tilly *et al.*, 2001). For many minority Ijaws today, Adaka Boro is seen and celebrated as a hero, whose actions have inspired current militants in the Niger Delta region. A historical account of militancy is incomplete without reference to Adaka Boro, who inspired

commitment from NDVF members and who recognised the political constraints in framing claims and demands in response to structural conditions of injustice, seen to directly impact negatively on individual lives in the Niger Delta region.

#### **4.4.1. Significance of Ideology: agency and the framing of oppression**

Some aspects of analysis in this section refer to the broader sociological idea of Gamson's (1995) motivational framing, which triggers what he termed "the call for arms". This is a situation where particular individuals or groups are agents with a rationale for engaging in collective action, including the construction of appropriate words known to that particular group. Thus, a memorable event from the action of Adaka Boro indicates how the NDVF, as agents, were able to present a particular incident to demonstrate oil governance and the physical environment of the region. The NDVF illustrates aspects of how individual lives/experiences relate to the broader picture within this context. These aspects can incite collective action, as noted in text extracts accredited to Boro<sup>2</sup>.

*Ijaws are seen as victims of a woolly administration. Year after year, we are clinched in tyrannical chains and led through a dark ally of perpetual political and social deprivation [...] the day will come for us to fight for our long-denied right to self-determination.*

Boro's statements, which are expressed in metaphors, tend to describe the socio-political condition drawn from the context of oil and a feeling of oppression, to justify militia action in the region. Also, aspects of Boro's claims inform effort to frame his ideology within prevailing conditions of poverty and frustration. They seem to compel mobilising support to challenge the legitimacy of the state, and demonstrate partially how structural conditions of injustice are articulated to encourage collective action. Moreover, in a related statement to justify militia action, Boro acknowledged being labelled a robber, thief, bandit and terrorist, a view that appears insignificant in his attempt to shift the focus away to issues of oppression anchored around petroleum. This labelling, from a broader understanding of literature, signifies an act of judgement, from a preconceived opinion that gives a commonly held image of individuals/groups (Wood, 1985). Thus, Boro's statements below describe how efforts to legitimise forms of claims, involve socially constructed meanings of collective action, contradictions, including preconceived labels and opposing views to the actions of the NDVF.

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<sup>2</sup> The Twelve-Day Revolution.

*Today is a great day, not only in our lives, but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps, it will be the greatest day for a very long time [...] we are going to demonstrate to the world, what and how we feel about oppression. Before today, we were branded robbers, bandits, terrorists, or gangsters, but after today, we shall be heroes of our land.... remember your seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats, remember also your poverty-stricken people, remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins and then fight for your freedom (Adaka Boro, 1966:116)*

Interestingly, oil became the central focus, shifting from the perception of a 'minority status' to be primarily defined as the context for militia emergence in the Niger Delta region. This was evident in the interview with Owunaru<sup>3</sup>, a former militia member of the NDVF, now in his mid-seventies. His comments inform a belief and a sense of belonging, from shared experiences of deprivation, which is viewed through the exercise of power—in this case, how power relations intersect with individual lived experience.

*... We felt short-changed, in the scheme of things. I mean we had oil being exploited to benefit other parts of the country; whilst our own area remained underdeveloped and backward [...] realising that the resources are from our area, we felt the solution was armed struggle.*

The perception of deprivation seen from the statements of Boro and Owunaru is contentious discourse and shows contemporary views of militants and non-militants in the Niger Delta region. It urged a platform of collective identities/actions, and a sense of deprivation, to present the idea of 'self-determination and resource control' as an emancipatory struggle, as shown from interviews with Timidi an unemployed active militia in his thirties, who insisted that the lack of basic socio-economic amenities in communities had triggered militia action in the region. His response, like many others, made reference to Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa as leaders who have inspired current militia action. This informs how the context of oil provokes collective action, growing out of a previous situation of conflict to construct a prototype that describes what to do in particular circumstances, as well as a rationale for such action.

*We have been fighting for the cause of the Niger Delta for years. People like Isaac Adaka Boro came on board, he died, and Ken Saro Wiwa came [...] you know we are the people that are feeding the whole country, but if you come to my community, there is no electricity, no roads, no drinking water, nothing, and nothing.*

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<sup>3</sup> The only member of the NDVF still alive at the time of this writing.

Similar views were also expressed by another active militia, Akpainfoko, a school dropout, in his thirties, who highlighted unemployment as a significant feature pushing vulnerable youths into joining militia groups. Together, these comments reflect an overall sense of deprivation and frustration, and present militancy as a struggle against poverty, a struggle involving hope and despair which is felt individually and collectively in the region.

*Our youths lack employment and jobs. We have oil in our community, it is others that are operating in our places and enjoying the benefits [...] when you hear about the struggle, struggle, the Niger Delta struggle, we have the oil, and we cannot taste it?*

Another feature that links this sense of deprivation and frustration to the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region is the role of the media. The media is amplifying the militia conflict in the region by drawing on public sympathy by granting interviews to militia leaders regarding the situation in the Niger Delta. This was evident in a statement accredited to Okusbaba, a militant leader involved with a local newspaper (*The Dispatch*, 25 April 2009) who, like others, attributes the socio-economic conditions in the region as justification for militia action.

*... there is no federal government presence in our area. As far as I know, there are no good schools. There are still thatch buildings and dilapidated structures as schools. Schools without furniture, no laboratory, no library, no teachers, you name it.*

This sense of deprivation and injustice was also apparent in the interviews of non-militants, who expressed their lack of participation and recognition within the structure of oil governance in Nigeria. For instance, Kponi, an academic researcher in his late sixties, questions the structural relationship of power which induces a conscious awakening amongst the indigenous people of the Niger Delta region. According to Kponi:

*When people become conscious of injustice, which in this case, is a question of the relationship between people in the Niger Delta and others, they react; they revolt [...] an expression of their disgust to what is happening, the disappointment, and people becoming disillusioned by the system.*

This view coincides with Kpein's view below, another non-militant in his mid-sixties, who traced the history of militancy to the early threat of secession, linking it to minority status and the lack of physical infrastructural development. These responses reflect a set of beliefs and sentiments within socially constructed meanings of everyday life. It draws our attention to how interactions at a

micro level intersects with broader political structures, in which the actions of individuals or groups coalesce.

*This militancy started in 1998, thirty clear years after Adaka Boro's Tuntunba declaration, declaring the Niger Delta a republic. The Nigerian government thought the present militancy to be another flash in the pan, and condemned what they felt to be the insignificant population of the Niger Delta that cannot resist the Nigerian military force [...] even if Ijaw lands are not developed, we cannot do anything.*

When viewed broadly from a sociological point of view, the narratives in this section offer insight into how conflict can emerge from a particular structure or history of a given society (Touraine, 1985). In this instance, it demonstrates how minority status and the feeling of oppression can induce a shared sense of identity among the lived experiences of individuals/groups, which can then provoke collective action. Identity, in the context of this research, refers to perceptions and the construction of territorial spaces of interest or action, that are imagined or real communities (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). This is an integral part within the context of oil that cannot be easily detached from shared beliefs and experiences in the Niger Delta region. Furthermore, the ideology and actions of Boro, within the context of oil, fostered a sensitivity and platform for collective action. The events around the NDVF can be also argued as the attempts of a movement mobilising support for collective action within an ideology aimed at influencing or changing the power relationships of oil governance—an ideology framed within the context of oil and perceived as impacting negatively on the quality of life of individuals/groups in the Niger Delta region. In addition, Boro's actions draw our attention to Benford and Snow's (2000) idea of frame articulation and amplification, which involves linking events and experiences in compelling ways that highlight and emphasise events or beliefs as being more salient than others. It also describes how individual experiences at a micro level can relate to macro-political structures, in which personal behaviours coalesce (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008).

Truly, the statements and responses in this section partly reflect how individuals and groups fit into or respond to institutional structures and power relationships around the governance of oil in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Niger Delta region. It outlines how shared expectations or beliefs are linked to discontent, which can then trigger claim-making efforts by the NDVF. This discontent is expressed in terms of neglect, and as a lack of participation and recognition within the oil arena, which is symbolic of the construction of meaning and collective action in the region.

#### **4.5. Political repression: The role of the State**

In the following section, I argue in line with the theoretical assumption that violence is a site-specific phenomenon within historical processes and events, and often linked to the wider social interactions of material transformation and power relation (Homer-Dixon, 1994). I also maintain that violence is the result of human beliefs, concepts or values, acquired from their environment which, in turn, propels people to act in conformity to those ideas (Tilly, 2003).

A third factor contributing to the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region was the role of the Nigerian state in response to protest and agitation. The militarisation and coercion used in the “protection of oil facilities/installations” has merely served to intensify tension, and the region remains an area of contested entitlement with struggles for power and legitimacy over resource rights and recognition that focus around issues concerned with resource laws, degradation and continued gas flares. The long years of successive military rule (1966–99) appear to have shaped the militarisation and present behaviour of violence in the Niger Delta. It broadly informs how collective agents perceive and respond to coercion as a technique for social control, that urge individuals/groups to join in collective violence (Tilly *et al.*, 2001).

Aspects of the militarisation of the Niger Delta region were observed from field experiences, from interviews with militant and non-militants, and from the local media. The presence of a joint military task force, comprising army, navy, air force, state secret-service and the police, to provide security for oil companies, attests to the belief that oil is of fundamental importance and the key to armed conflict in the Niger Delta. The repeated strategies of militants and the militarisation of the region by the state points to politics of contention; a situation that involves the government exercising control through coercive means over resources. The use of force by the state is evident from a local newspaper’s comment describing how state brutality facilitates militancy in the region. Pato, a key activist and informant interviewed, insisted that the repressive nature of the state is shown from the number of security outfits and acronyms established for the Niger Delta region—Operation Fire-for-Fire, Operation Sweep, Hakuri 1 and 2, Operation Flush 1, 2 and 3—all designed to intimidate the people of the Niger Delta region by demonstrating federal authority in enforcing law and order. In addition, the response of multinational oil companies to agitation from the surrounding communities is the continued deployment of private and state troops, described as an ‘army of occupation’, to demobilise Ijaws. This response is also reflected in a local Newspaper of Guardian of 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2004, which noted more police and military officers prefer working with the oil companies than servicing the country. These goes to also illustrate the lucrative value of oil to the Nigerian state, from the deployment of security agents to the Niger Delta region.

#### **4.6. The spread of contention: The Ogoni Uprising**

A number of cases have so far been mentioned to describe state brutality in response to protest and agitation from movements in the Niger Delta region. However, the cases of the 'Ogoni uprising' and the 'Ogele procession' are seen to represent key historical moments of state brutality, as well as a conscious awakening to the necessity to resort to arms in making claims over the legitimacy of rights and the protection of the Niger Delta environment. These events were noted by Kponi, a key informant, who took into consideration the political constraints faced by the NDVF in 1966, and the Ogoni uprising by the Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1995, pointing out the response of the military to agitators from both these movements. According to Kponi:

*Adaka Boro was unprepared to engage in the kind of struggle that he embarked on. You cannot just secede from a monster like Nigeria [...] Ken Saro Wiwa was more of an intellectual trying to put agitation into a struggle, but then Ken was dealing with a monstrous structure, the Nigerian military, that did not understand the finesse of a revolutionary struggle.*

An interesting aspect of the comment by Kponi, tells how the openness or closure of regimes shapes the success or failure of movements. Thus, the NDVF's attempt to secede under an authoritarian regime is argued to have failed, given the use of power against threats of secession from an insignificant amount of resources available to NDVF members in 1966. The mention of Ken Saro Wiwa, in reference to agitation from the MOSOP, signifies a collective agent representing a common interest for the Ogonis, in seeking environmental rights and protection from the activities of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). According to Kponi, the MOSOP began its confrontation with claims and demands of compensation for the degradation and pollution caused in Ogoni land from oil exploration activities, demands which eventually led to the prosecution and death of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other members of the MOSOP, by hanging, on 10 November, 1995. The MOSOP members were prosecuted over the alleged murder of four prominent Ogoni chiefs, who were termed vultures and pro-government agents for opposing the Ogoni Bill of Rights for Self-determination. The murder of these chiefs resulted in the raiding and levelling of Ogoni communities by the military.

The authoritarian nature and brutality of the state is also reflected in the manner in which MOSOP members were sentenced to death, by hanging with acid poured over their bodies. Their bodies could not be identified for decent burial by Ogonis. The death of these members also stirred up international outrage and condemnation, in what Kponi describes as kangaroo judgement and murder. In a related event of similar circumstances, Kowa, a non-militant and one-time vice-president of the Ijaw National Congress (INC), a socio-political/cultural group, narrates his personal ordeal during the Ogoni crisis. His account reveals similar experiences of state repression which, in part, reflect on how individuals are constituted as agents, as well as members of a wider collective in particular circumstances or collective action.

*At some point during the Ogoni uprising, tensions were so high, and I argued that the Ijaws must begin to increase their activities, not in terms of militancy, but in terms of advocacy [...] at the end of the day, my house was burnt by a group called the internal security of Abacha<sup>4</sup> [...] mine was just to use words, a cry for justice.*

Kowa recalls how the non-violent approach adopted by Ken Saro Wiwa ended up fuelling the need for armed conflict, by showing how the regime was not receptive to embracing peaceful dialogue and advocacy.

*The only language the oppressors understood was the language of AK-47, because Ken Saro Wiwa never carried any AK-47. He was involved in a peaceful movement, calling the attention of the international community to the injustices going on in the Niger Delta [...] as I said, I narrowly escaped being killed, and my house was set on fire. Lots of horrible things happened under the Abacha regime. Apparently, the youths came to the conclusion that the only language Nigeria understood was that of AK-47. Let AK-47 talk to AK-47. I suspect, I have never had the opportunity of talking to these young men.*

#### **4.6.1. Protest of climate change: The 'Ogele procession'**

As outlined in the previous section, the Ogoni uprising was the beginning of a conscious awakening and a spread of contention across the Niger Delta region. The "Ogele procession", which followed in the aftermath of the Ogoni uprising, remains a remarkable event for Ijaws. It represents a non-violent means of protest, using traditional drum-dance in expressing grievance. The event witnessed a gathering of Ijaw youth organisations and symbolises a turning point in Ijaw history. It signalled the beginning of, and the need to engage in, armed violence as declared by Otuan, an

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<sup>4</sup> Nigeria's former Head of State under the military regime.

eyewitness and participant at the event. Otuan's vivid picture of events, expresses one interpretation of the ways in which struggles of collective agents are lived and felt individually and collectively.

*...We were going about the struggle in a well-structured and non-violent way. We carried placards and leaves without weapons or guns. But throughout the protest expressing our grievances, the federal government used military might, not police, but military might [...] along the hospital road junction, some soldiers led by an army captain opened fire on us. They stood in three lines; the first group kneeled on the ground, another group a little higher and others standing. I was with the boys. They opened fire and four of us were killed. I personally carried a boy from Ogbia, whose stomach was torn by a bullet, in a wheelbarrow to a clinic nearby.*

This peaceful protest eventually took a different direction, becoming a violent affair with the arrest, detention and death of three people by the military. Afterwards, the military declared a state of emergency with dusk to dawn curfew and all forms of gatherings were banned in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. According to Otuan, soldiers mounted road blocks, scrutinised and detained locals. At night, soldiers invaded homes, intimidating residents, and beating and raping women. The fallout of the Ogele procession incited a new meaning and understanding amongst Ijaws. It induced a belief that violence is not only necessary, but an appropriate approach to engage with the oil companies and the Nigerian state. These beliefs are seen in the interview with Pato, an activist and eyewitness at the Kaiama event, who insisted that the introduction of arms became necessary, given the state's refusal to engage in dialogue in meeting the claims and demands of Ijaws. Non-violent protest was seen as not sufficient in addressing agitation in the Niger Delta region.

*[...] The picture we gained from that moment was that the government was not open to peaceful negotiation or resolution of the crisis [...] it was the violent introduction by Ijaw youths that drew the attention of the government. The government does not believe in advocacy, so the process of advocacy has not helped the engagement of communities in the Niger Delta with the federal government.*

The belief that armed violence was the only option available to the protesters is also maintained by Oweifa, an active militia, who stated that the presence of soldiers in oil installations necessitated the need for arms confrontation. Like many other interviewees, he believed the Ogoni uprising and Ogele procession were a rude awakening for the Ijaws that required them to commune with the gods and deities of Ijaw land. The involvement of gods and deities was a significant part of militia strategy and tactics, which helped bind militants together (also see chapter 5, section 5.4.2).

The need to evoke the gods is a unique aspect of culture and identity of Ijaw in times of provocation. According to Oweifa:

*... we had to consult with the ancestors of Ijaw land; our deities had to be reawakened. We had to ask them questions, regarding when to engage in war against the federal government and oil companies.*

#### **4.6.2. Other responses to protests**

A number of cases of state brutality were also evident from my lived experience and personal observations in the Niger Delta region. Previous approaches using non-violent forms of protest from communities often yielded little or no positive outcome. The early forms of demonstrations usually involved activities such as taking over oil platforms, disrupting work at oil company sites, and sending letters of petition to oil companies through community delegates or representatives. Protests at targeted sites of oil facilities, usually manned by state and private armies of the oil companies, resulted in arrests, detentions and, in extreme cases of violence, deaths. Instances of such cases of violence and death were noted in an interview with Otuan, as well as reflecting my own insider knowledge and observations of state-propelled violence in the Niger Delta region.

*Even at the community level, you remember the case of the Ogboinbiri community that was burnt down by the soldiers several times, Ikebiri 1 and 2, Agip controlled flow station; people protesting were killed by the soldiers [...]. So we had now reached a point that even if we embarked on peaceful protests, they kill us. This was what actually triggered the desire for us to get arms to defend ourselves.*

The above statement inform part of the signs of protest over access to oil benefits, which began in the mid 1980's , when various community based groups began mobilising against oil company operations and expressing their dissatisfactions, mainly centred on economic deprivation. In related instances demonstrating how armed conflict emerged in the Delta, Stones, another key informant, recalls how reactions to the destruction of fishing nets by the oil companies induced a mobilised armed youth force in communities. According to Stone, the reaction to the disruption of fishing activity by local fishermen is often tense, as oil companies employ the services of private armies to intimidate, threaten or detain locals protesting in such situations. These reactions have also, over time, created opportunities for youths to gain recognition in communities.

*... there was this incidence in 2005 where a tugboat destroyed the fishing nets of the locals, and the boys had to take up arms to confront them and make them pay. So because these skirmishes and confrontations were not curtailed through dialogue or positive engagements, the youths became powerful.*

#### **4.6.3. Protest against resource policies**

A core feature which seem to propel the emergence of the militancy in the Niger Delta region are the laws concerning resource and extraction. These laws are perceived as dispossessing land without consent from inhabitants of the region. Having lost the ownership of land, communities are left to lay claims to compensations from the state and oil companies for oil pillages and pollution of the environment. Thus, a key historical event that emphasised the laws of resource extraction was the Kaiama Declaration (KD) in 1998, in the aftermath of a spiralling effect from the Ogoni uprising in 1995. As mentioned previously, the death of Ken Saro Wiwa after the Ogoni uprising spurred a conscious awakening towards a unified platform amongst individuals and groups across communities in the Niger Delta region. By 31 December, 1998, following a series of consultations and town hall meetings, a congregation of Ijaw youth organisations gathered at Kaiama community, hometown of Isaac Adaka Boro, to declare what they termed “Operation Climate Change”, a peaceful protest against continued gas flares, degradation and pollution, and to help the socio-economic well-being of inhabitants in the Niger Delta region. The Kaiama Declaration raised the core issues surrounding the resource laws, as well as emphasising the inspired roles played by Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa, pointed out by Otuan below:

*When we started this struggle, please permit me to go back so that you can understand what we actually hold as the struggle, before the arms factor came in [...] what actually triggered the modern day consciousness, the wakeup call was what Ken Saro Wiwa started with the Ogoni people, even though we have in our background what our brother and mentor, the late Adaka Boro started.*

Whilst giving a genealogy of current militia action, Otuan also points to the laws, which are regarded as inciting a proliferation of movements in the region. However, he gave a contrasting view of Adaka Boro’s actions for self-determination, which attempted to give independence to the “Niger Delta Republic” in 1966, noting that the ideology behind the contemporary struggle was not to secede from Nigeria, but to gain the attention of the state regarding the denial of the Ijaws right of ownership to their “God given wealth”. According to Otuan, the Land Use Act of 1978 and the Petroleum Act of 1969 are obnoxious, as they strengthen the state power and authority that denies the rights of minorities to participation, recognition and access to oil wealth.

*... how we can repeal some of the obnoxious laws, like the Land Use Decree, the Petroleum Act of 1968–69 and Decree 13 of 1996. These are some of the decrees that make us slaves in our community. Decree 13 says that 100 meters surrounding every river bank belongs to federal government. So many of our communities reside in areas that belong to the federal government. Oil companies can come and carry out explorations, while the federal government sits, wherever they want to sit, at Lagos or Abuja, and decide to allot our communities into oil blocks and sell them to somebody. And that person could come, anytime, and everything in that community belongs to him, including the community. So we felt that is not right. It is not applicable in any part of the country.*

Similar comments were also expressed by Kowa, who took into consideration the history of resource laws prior to the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region. He maintains that a Mineral Ordinance Act of 1914 established by the colonial regime, set the legal pace and exercise of political power and authority over resource governance in Nigeria. The Act, which was amended in 1925, conferred powers on colonial administrators to grant resource prospecting rights without the participation and recognition of affected people or communities. According to Kowa, the 1925 Act, which was replaced by the Ordinance Act of 25 February, 1946, stipulates that all mineral resources upon any land, rivers, streams or water are vested with the crown. These amended acts of resource laws became the legacy passed on to successive military and democratic regimes, which became part of Nigeria's 1999 constitution. As Kowa puts it:

*Derivation was the central key of the pre-independence constitution [...] the principle became increasingly silenced [...] so people started protesting that at the beginning we had agreed, different nationalities of different regions should control their own resources. Now we have found oil in the Niger Delta, federal government has suddenly jettisoned that fundamental agreement, in order to take over oil resources throughout the land using decrees.*

These narratives illustrate some of historical features which generated tensions and the subsequent armed conflict. The centralised laws of resource extraction is seen to challenge the legitimacy and identity of ethnic minorities such as the Ogonis and Ijaws, over rights to resource ownership. Furthermore, the presence of oil in the Niger Delta region has given rise to organised movements. These were evident from the Ogoni uprising and the Kaiama Declaration, which began to question the neglect and degradation of the environment, including rights to resource governance.

This conflict, from a broader sociological view, symbolises a proliferation of new forms of struggle (Pichardo, 1997), whereby the position of individuals or groups are situated within an unstable discourse. In particular, a discourse within the context of resource laws, which provoke collective action.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

This chapter situates the emergence of militancy within a number of key historical and political processes of events in Nigeria-vis-à-vis, the Niger Delta region. The chapters illustrates a contestation of political power and representation between Nigerian state and individuals and groups making claims and demands over resource rights and ownership. When viewed broadly, these events infer to the ideas of contentious politics Tilly's (2003), which inform a series of interaction that is sustained between the state which wields political power, and these movements claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency that lack formal representation, in efforts to change in distribution or exercise of power.

In this chapter, four key episodes of contention, contributing to the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region were identified. Firstly, the fear of domination from the political process and perception of oppression, which signalled the beginnings of tension and grievances in the country. These were evident from the early quest of minorities for a regional autonomy and struggles for political power amongst the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria, which established boundaries of majority–minority ethnic identities. These events, coupled with a localised awareness of the value of crude oil, facilitated the first militia action in 1966 and subsequent Biafra civil war in 1967. Both threatened to secede as the Niger Delta Republic and the Biafra Republic, respectively.

A second significant factor which facilitated the emergence of militancy and the particular form in which it appeared, was charismatic leadership. The emergence of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), led by Adaka Boro in 1966, induced a united platform and dominant discourse for both militants and non-militants across the Ogoni and Ijaw communities in the Niger Delta. The actions of Boro presented a framing of events in such a way that they became the basis for similar patterns of recognised activities (Goffman, 1974). In this particular case, the framing of structural conditions of injustice and a shared belief to incite collective action with repeated forms of claim making and recognition. The actions of Boro show how events can be modified and interpreted within existing ideas and beliefs of individuals/groups (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Moreover, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in 1956 spurred a segmented and localised perception of political oppression, which enabled the NDVF to project a political ideology of *self-determination* which became the platform and currency for ethnic minorities and contemporary

militias to engage the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies. Interestingly, whilst framing structural conditions of injustice in the region in terms of poverty and frustration, Boro acknowledged he had been labelled a robber, terrorist and bandit, a view that seems insignificant in relation to the ideology of self-determination, within the context of oil governance and political opposition faced by the NDVF in 1966. Nevertheless, the unsuccessful attempt by the NDVF, a movement which can be broadly seen as a network of informal interaction between the plurality of individuals engaged in a political and cultural conflict, on the basis of shared collective identity (Diani, 1992), left much to be desired by ethnic minority Ijaws, who perceived Adaka Boro as an iconic hero and an inspirational leader, with the power to influence current militia action.

A third feature that contributed to the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region was the role of the state. The militarisation of the region was a threat that heightened tensions and violent conflict which, when viewed from a sociological perspective, can be described as an arena of contested entitlements (Nauman, 1996), a theatre of struggles, where the politics of recognition were played out. In this particular case, it was a conflict that required the government to adjudicate how the protests of the Ogonis and Ijaws shaped a particular form of identity and collective action. These collective actions also inform how knowledge of a particular environment is shared reflexively, within sets of constructed meanings. It partly demonstrates the political opportunities or constraints available for the success or failure of movements, and state capacity for repression.

A fourth significant feature which contributed to the emergence of militancy was the legislative laws of resource extraction. These laws are central to the conflict surrounding the Ogonis and Ijaws, as well as other ethnic minorities of the delta. It partly defines the identity and collective actions of movements within the macro-political structure of oil governance in Nigeria. These laws are perceived as strengthening state power and authority, as all lands and resources are vested within the state. This is a view which many of today's militia movements acknowledge and seem to have combined with a sense of identity and the ideology of self-determination, in order to legitimise their actions with claims and demands against the state and oil companies in the Niger Delta region.

## **Chapter Five: Meaning, Motivation and Ambition of Militants**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines in more detail the meaning of militancy and internal organisational dynamics of militants in terms of hierarchy, recruitment, goals and role of militia leaders and nature of its social networks. Specifically, it explores the meaning of militancy from the views of militants and non-militants, the typologies of militia leadership, and the motivation behind becoming a militant, how people are recruited into the hierarchy and the typical structure of militia organisation. This aims to clarify the contested meaning of militancy and how militias make sense of their actions as militants.

Chapter Four examined the emergence of militancy, and issues around identity, political repression and ideological struggles for self-determination, to inform a number of features which urged a collective identity/claim-making effort by Ogonis and Ijaws, against the Nigerian state and oil companies in the Niger Delta region. In this chapter, we shall look more closely at how militancy is constructed and defined, the motivation, recruitment, hierarchy and roles within the organisational structure of militants. From personal experience and field observations, the terms *militant* and *militancy* seem to mean different things to different people in the Niger Delta region. Militants are labelled or framed in various ways, as oil thieves, criminals, kidnappers, cult gangs or restive youths. Militants, on the other hand, see themselves as freedom fighters, liberators or resource agitators. This labelling tends to cloud an understanding of the conflict in the Niger Delta region; thus, an objective of this chapter is to explore the context of meaning from the disposition of militants. It examines a particular kind of reality that focuses on different meanings and interpretations at both the individual and collective levels.

A central argument of this research is that the emergence and actions of militancy is a reaction to lived experiences and a reflection of the desire to seek a specific change. They are not interest groups, but a network of interacting groups engaged in a political and cultural conflict based on their shared identity. They do not carry out their activities simply within formally established political structures, but groups of individuals who take action, rightly or wrongly, in expressing the reasons behind their actions within formal and informal political and social spheres. Moreover, the meaning of militancy is not straightforward. They are not true or false, and they are not a given, but socially constructed. It is on these grounds, that I argue that the socially constructed cognitive world of militants is, itself, a complex one, replete with influence and values (cultural and spiritual) that may seem contradictory or alien to those outside this world. As a result, unravelling these complexities inform how knowledge can be manipulated through the discourse of language, a theme explored earlier in the epistemology and methodology chapter of this research.

In addition, militants appear to have a well-organised structure of hierarchy with mechanisms that ensure followers remain loyal to their leaders. However, these structures are not fixed, but fluid, through processes that are not necessarily moral but transactional, and based on informal networks, money and guns. By morality, in this instance we do not mean acting in accordance with universal principles, but according to how norms or values justify and legitimise action, whether good or bad, harmful, exploitative or socially regressive (Wiegratz, 2012). Also, we argue that militants in the region are heterogeneous groups that mobilise around hidden networks of territorial spaces called 'camps'. In a general sense, camps do not exist, but everyone knows what they are and that they define the spaces controlled by militant leaders. Militant leaders are known, or label themselves, as 'Generals' which, in a sense, depicts status, recognition, strength and control of a large number of followers. These generals are perceived in complex ways; they are dreaded by some, or seen as 'messiahs' by others, who perceive their actions as a legitimate response to long years of neglect in improving livelihoods in host oil-bearing communities.

In the following chapter, I shall attempt to describe and explain (a) how non-militants and militants perceive militancy, (b) cases of how one can become a militia leader, or general, (c) the membership in terms of recruitment and motivation to join, and how militants are assigned roles and responsibilities within the hierarchical structure of a typical militia organisation. In order to do this, I shall refer to the idea of Zald and McCarthy (1987), who argue that people are inclined to join organisations for personal gain rather than the pursuit of an ideological goal. Also, the mobilisation potential of a movement is linked to a set of social relationships that is an interactive and negotiated perception (Melucci, 1996). It gives a pointer to opportunity or constraint of collective action, shared by a number of people in a given environment.

Within New Social Movements theory, which informs the theoretical lens of this research, I argue in line with the perspective that informal interaction and incentives are necessary for collective action (Touraine, 1985). Group-oriented behaviour is hidden, until some incentive motivates the potential for collective action, because individuals do not act to achieve a common interest without some form of coercion or material/well-being inducement. Participation in social movement also changes the personal identity of the individuals involved, as it offers a sense of fulfilment and the realisation of self (Gamson, 1992). Similarly, grievance, consciousness or frustration within a specific geographical space can propel individual or group involvement into social movement organisation. These collective forms of identity are defined by boundaries of friendship or network ties that influence their participation through association with individuals or groups (Klandermans, 1997). Together, these views aim to provide an experiential view of militancy and a better in-depth understanding of the meaning of militia action in the Niger Delta region.

## **5.2. Militancy: Criminals or Fighters for Self-determination and Resource Control?**

This section analyses the meaning of militancy from the perception of non-militants and militants. One argument of this research maintains that crude oil is not the whole story behind the ongoing conflict but, rather, serves as a smoke screen to legitimise contemporary militia action in the Niger Delta region. From the preceding chapter, it is clear that, on one level, militancy in the region is linked to the actions of Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa, who expressed a collective identity with the ideology of self-determination and resource control. Curiously, the difficulty in separating genuine militancy from criminality, is not necessarily a definitional issue in the true sense of it, rather these issues are intrinsically rooted in community ties and identity, where it appears separating those hiding behind community/ identity is not that clear. From interviews, however, the expression and emphasis given to these events appear to vary between views of non-militants and active militias. An example of this shift in meaning can be seen from the interview response of Kponi, a non-militant in his late sixties, who points out that contemporary militia action in the Niger Delta, is a means of survival influenced by leaders whom he described as the brain

*Everybody in the Niger Delta knows who or what militancy is all about, that these are groups of young boys and girls who have taken to arms as a way of making demands, whether these demands are genuine or not [...] those demands could be made from a central brain somewhere articulating the issues, and he manages to get a group of people convinced about it. And many of them are people who see it as a way of survival, depending on how they understand the issues involved.*

Kponi's response illustrates aspects of the complex and contradictory roles of leaders, and how followers understand those roles in mobilising support for collective action. He further relates the meaning of today's militancy to the macro-political culture of governance, describing it as a culture of 'primitive accumulation' motivated by the scramble to access wealth. He attempts to distinguish the ideals of today's militias from the actions of Adaka Boro, whilst acknowledging the constraints faced by Boro.

*[...] I would say that what is going on is essentially a kind of primitive accumulation. Adaka Boro did much better than what these militants have done. The only mistake Adaka Boro made was that he was unprepared to engage in the kind of struggle that he embark upon [...] Adaka Boro was the man who really articulated something that could have been forged into a neat ideology for the emancipation of the Niger Delta.*

Another view on contemporary militia action was also gathered from response of Alaere, a key informant and an activist in the region, relates the meaning of militancy to the nature of political actors in terms of state–society relations, which gives a blanket covering for all sorts of criminality in the Niger Delta. She blames the President for the contradictions in the labelling of militancy.

*[...] it is difficult to draw a line saying, this group of militants are criminals and this group of militants are in the struggle. They are nicely fused. The criminals hide under the disguise, made possible by President Obasanjo, who took both criminals and the actual agitators and baptised them as militants [...] that blanket covering is what took them to where they are now[...] President Obasanjo earlier called them common criminals. Now he wants to talk with common criminals.*

Stone, a non-militant and activist, on the other hand, views actions, such as kidnapping, bank robbery, sea piracy and the extortion of ordinary citizens by cult gangs, as militant activities

*When we talk about militancy, we really do not have a clear definition of what we mean. In the context of the Niger Delta, criminality has been linked with the word militancy and everybody claims to be fighting for resource control and self-determination.*

He further adds that, for him, militancy is concerned with the struggle against poverty (implicitly a paradox, in the midst of such oil wealth) which finds expression in the political agenda of the right to self-determination.

*If you go to our communities in Ijaw land, you see poverty; nobody needs to tell you that the people are poor. They live in shabby houses, there is no portable drinking water, no electricity, and the means of even accessing the communities are not there.*

Such a view is highlighted by Kpein, a non-militant in his mid-sixties, who places emphasis on political self-determination as fundamental to contemporary militia uprising. He points to the declaration of the Niger Delta republic made by Adaka Boro, and the subsequent spread of contention influenced by Ken Saro Wiwa, which led to the Ogoni uprising and the Kaiama Declaration by Ijaw youths (see Chapter Four), as the background to contemporary militia action. According to Kpein, these events are genuine reasons for attacks on oil facilities, as well as for the kidnapping of foreign oil expatriates in the region. For Kpein, such reasons for militia action also provide opportunities for criminals, blurring the lines between criminality and genuine agitation.

*[...] So, what we are saying is that these boys have a genuine reason. These boys are not criminals. The criminal element took advantage of the situation. However, just as I have said, in any anarchic situation do not blame the criminals [...] but the war in the Niger Delta became the excuse for the emancipation of the Ijaw. We are not saying that there are no criminals, but that if the devil were to deliver your baby for you, then you have to worship the devil in such a situation.*

The above response by Kpein contains a duality of ideas. On the one hand, he attempts to pitch militancy within an ideology and on the other hand, he admits by saying that the situation created opportunities for individuals to exploit through varied forms of criminality. He articulates a position in which the meanings and motivation for militancy are derived from expressions of self-determination and collective identity, such as the Kaiama Declaration. Moreover, he accepts that this identity-based movement has been hijacked by 'criminal elements' motivated by opportunities for personal gain. Even so, he does not wish to retreat from the position that, regardless of the criminal element, militancy remains a war of emancipation, even if criminals end up becoming the fighters in that war. In essence, he considers militancy as the means justifying the end, so if an anarchic situation ultimately leads to self-determination, then it is a price worth paying. Indeed, his choice of metaphor, in the final sentence quoted above, "if the devil were to deliver your baby for you, then you have to worship the devil" leads us to think of the possible birth of self-determination and resource control. In a similar response, another non-militant, Alabo, a key activist, insists that militia action in the Niger Delta region is a fight for self-determination and resource control. He insists that oil companies should negotiate directly with communities on the terms and conditions of oil exploration:

*They are fighting for the rights of the Niger Delta people, they are fighting for their own rights, they are fighting for the rights of those who are yet unborn, they are fighting to ensure that the oil and resources in the region are our own bona fide property, and that we should negotiate with the oil companies and not with the federal government as a third party.*

What emerges from the analysis, so far, is that amongst those non-militants interviewed there is a level of awareness of militancy being perceived as an expression of grievance to right the wrongs of a political structure of resource governance in Nigeria. Although the narrative of militancy is seen as an emancipatory struggle linked to ideological figures and events (e.g. Adaka Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa and the Kaiama Declaration), interviewees consistently struggle to make that narrative clear cut, with militancy arising from a sense of injustice, which earlier figures had tried, in various ways, to make clear, but which tends to be portrayed as a debased form of ideological struggle.

Moreover, there is recognition that there are other factors at play—arms, criminality and opportunism—that provide a complex and deeper meaning of militancy. Although, the interviewees struggle with this ambiguity, they believe that the struggle for emancipation and self-determination of resources is a valid goal, whilst grappling with the underlying recognition that the motives behind those fighting under the label of militant, may not always conform to that agenda.

From this basis, it is interesting, then, to compare the views of non-militants with active militias over how they make sense of their actions as militants. One underlying question of this research is: do militants have a shared sense of purpose or is their sense of belonging an opportunistic and transitory collective identity? From an interview with Otuogidi an active militant in his mid-thirties, it was striking to note that there was no mention at all of a freedom-fighting agenda. Rather, the commander articulates the aim of the fighting more in terms of frustration about lack of jobs, and lack of participation and access to resource benefits, rather than political self-expression as such. Clearly, these ideas are linked, but the emphasis from the Otuogidi's interview is, nonetheless, subtly more pragmatic and less idealistic than in the extracts of non-militants. The following quote from Otuogidi (repeated, in part, from section 2.2.1, Chapter Four) shows how we can understand the same statements made in a different context and with a different meaning. In this particular case, the quote is interpreted as both the motivation for collective action, and as the meaning for militancy in the Niger Delta region.

*In the beginning of this struggle, let me speak, see how it started, the agreement is that our youths lack employment and jobs. We have the oil in our community, it is others that are operating in our places and enjoying the benefits. That is the struggle. When you hear about the struggle, struggle, the Niger Delta struggle, we have the oil, but we cannot taste it, it is other people from other places who are enjoying oil from our communities.*

Ololo, another recently active militant, does, however, offer a more detailed description of militancy as the fight for freedom and resource control. Interestingly, he seems to want to draw some kind of distinction between the terms 'freedom fighting' and 'militancy', with the latter being a more recent label for a longer (and implicitly) more noble struggle. Also, the localised presence of oil in the region has induced other forms of mobilising resources (tangible and non-tangible), which became a front to legitimise demands for a just and equitable distribution of resources.

*We started this freedom fighting. The militant name just came on recently. We have been fighting for the cause of the Niger Delta for years [...] so we now change the name to militancy. We are fighting with the government to enable the government to know the Niger Delta situation [...] we cannot go to Abuja to fight them, so we have to destroy pipelines, and embark on illegal bunkering business<sup>5</sup>. From that point onwards, the federal government became involved and we started shooting them.*

To summarise, this section attempts to demonstrate a discernible, shared claims-making narrative amongst those involved with militancy across a variety of levels. This is a narrative fundamentally based on a sense of identity, and of an identity forged around the notion of having been alienated and excluded by others from the political processes and benefits surrounding the resources of 'their' communities. To this extent, therefore, this I think it is valid to see aspects of the militancy as explicable through New Social Movements theory, with its particular focus on identity as a crucible for social movements. This does seem to be taken as a dominant and shared narrative. However, there is a parallel recognition that this narrative is somehow debased by a reality that is more opportunistic and complex. Some, such as Kpein, contend that this is not an issue as long as the outcome is the one foreseen by the dominant social narrative (i.e. to create such chaos that in the end self-determination is achieved). More commonly, however, interviewees tried to draw distinctions between a genuine freedom-fighting militancy, and a more recent phenomenon in which this struggle has been corrupted by criminal opportunists seeking a quick profit.

It is clearly important to those interviewed that whatever obvious imperfections might exist within the ranks of the militia, these do not undermine their perception of the on-going validity of the dominant, identity-based narrative. This tends to suggest that if one digs deeper into the actions of militancy, more complex and malleable motivations may become apparent, which partly inform how the labels that militants themselves identify with evolve. Such an interpretation is in line with a social-constructionist viewpoint which recognises the possibility of changing meanings as subjects' experiences and social circles develop. In other words, a militant recruited straight from a village will operate with a different set of meanings from that same militant, later in his career, if he has become self-sustaining and influential within a wider and more exposed community. A further understanding of militancy is discussed in succeeding sections of this chapter, which explore the typologies of militia leadership and the typical structure of a militant camp, in order to illustrate the various ambitions of militants from an examination of their motivations regarding recruitment in the Niger De

### **5.3. Typologies of Militia Leadership**

The nature of the militia leader's emergence is ambiguous and intertwined within a complex web of interactions. From a broader perspective, pre-existing organisations and the context of culture are relevant to the emergence of movement leaders, who play complex and conflicting roles. They inspire commitment from members, mobilise resources, recognise opportunities, and frame demands in ways that gain legitimacy (Morris and Staggenborg, 2002). Whilst friendship and social network ties are necessary elements for the emergence of leaders, it is an individual's character that is the definitive factor involved (Smelser, 1962). These views find relevance in the number of known and unknown militant groups where leaders emerge within fluid boundaries of pre-existing network ties, youth organisations, criminal gangs or inter/intra-community disputes over access to resource benefit. Militant leaders also seem to align more easily in the process and dynamics of the persistent conflict in the Niger Delta region thereby, transforming the meaning and nature militancy.

These fluid processes change the character and labelling ascribed to militant leaders (from criminals to freedom fighters, or vice-versa) in the region. However, in the following section, this I shall attempt to provide case/s illustrating how Kurowei, leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Seibi, leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), and Oporoza, linked with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), became militant leaders, or 'Generals'. Although the ways in which individuals emerge as leaders are not exclusive or mutually exhaustive, the case/s presented here clearly outline the trajectory for becoming a militant leader in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This process is explained through personal experience, local newspapers, and through an analysis of interviews from selected militants.

#### **5.3.1. Leadership through Youth Organisation (NDPVF)**

The emergence of Kurowei as leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force is intrinsically linked to the platform of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), an umbrella body representing the ethnic identities of Ijaw youths across communities in the Niger Delta region. As discussed earlier in Chapter Four, the IYC represents a platform for grievance and collective action against the oil companies and the Nigerian state. Thus, Kurowei, who became the third elected president of the IYC in 2001, used the already mobilised social-network ties and platform of the IYC to subsequently launch his Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force in 2003. The NDPVF who is interestingly described in a local print media-(the Guardian published on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2007), as a self-styled leader and 'Africa's Robin Hood', commands influence and membership across a vast expanse of communities, which extends beyond the Ijaws, his own ethnic tribe, to other ethnic groups, such as the Ogonis and Ikwerres in Rivers State.

His influence is evident in political elections and community chieftaincy decisions (see Chapter Six section 6.3.1). Kurowei, who dropped out of university on two occasions, used his NDPVF to launch a series of guerrilla warfare, tagged 'Operation Locust Feast' and "Operation Fiberesima", between 2004 and 2005, against oil companies and the Nigerian state. These threats witnessed the increased deployment of military and private armies to protect oil facilities, as well as talks between the NDPVF leader and political actors of the Nigerian state. The NDPVF also gained prominence following a violent conflict with its main rival group, the Niger Delta Vigilante, in which the government was implicated through its patronage of both groups, where politicians were alleged to have, indirectly and directly, funded militia groups and oil-bunkering activities. Violence is often linked to patronage-based politics under the aegis of militant leaders, who take advantage of the porous boundaries of these relationships to enhance their positions of power in communities (see also Chapter Six section 6.2.1. and 6.2.3).

### **5.3.2. Leadership through Criminal/Cult Gangs (NDV)**

The emergence and recognition of Seibi, leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante, as militant leader in Rivers State, has remained a subject of controversial public discussion. Rightly or wrongly, the NDV has become known, respected and influential in policy decisions in his community, Okrika, and Rivers State in general. Literarily uneducated, Seibi gained prominence from criminal and cult-gang activities, where his influence also permeated issues of inter and intra-community wars. He is known as the leader of Icelanders cult gang, which engaged in fierce bloody battles and killings with a rival gang, the Outlaws, over territorial turf linked to patronage at elections, street extortion, drug protection and oil thefts, from 2003 to 2008. In order to gain credibility, Seibi transformed Icelanders, and pockets of its affiliate groups, into what presently is known as the Niger Delta Vigilante in 2005. His expansive control of youths in certain parts of Port Harcourt and his community, Okrika, created a leverage of patronage exchange with political actors at elections (see Chapter Six section 6.2.1). By 2009, Seibi's actions became recognised by the state, despite atrocities committed at Port Harcourt and Okrika. His recognition became evident when he was flown on a presidential flight to Abuja, the country's capital, to negotiate his acceptance of amnesty for militants by former President Shehu Musa YarAdua. This political backing further helped Seibi to gain legitimacy and influence within the rank and file of today's militant leaders in the region.

### **5.3.3. Leadership through Inter-ethnic Wars (Oporoza)**

Inter-ethnic wars over land in accessing resource benefits have also provided an opportunity for individuals to become recognised as militant leaders. A case in point are the inter-ethnic wars between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, from 1997 to 2003, following the decision of the military authorities of the Nigerian state to relocate local government headquarters from Ijaw town to Itsekiri

community in Delta State (see Figure 1.1. in introduction). These crises led to the emergence of the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), a movement aimed at protecting Ijaw communities, in which Oporoza played a prominent role in the fierce wars against Itsekiris during the crisis. Oporoza, who later became the Grand Commanding Officer of the dreaded Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), is known ordinarily within formal and informal circles as a registered contractor to oil companies operating in the Delta region, and also as leader of the famous *Camp 5* (discussed in Chapter Six). For purposes of clarity, the name *Camp 5* does not mean numerical order of militia camps in the Niger Delta; the total number of camps with militant leaders in the region cannot be ascertained. However, Oporoza's influence and control of youths is evident among most communities across Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states in the Niger Delta region. His famous *Camp 5* is considered the apprenticeship ground from which most of today's militant leaders have emerged. This is evident from the interview response of Commander Akpainfoko:

*The only people who independently became warlords are Kurowei and Seibi. Every other name you hear mentioned has something to do with Oporoza.*

In addition, Oporoza wields enormous influence within the political circles of oil governance in the Niger Delta region, having earned a reputation for bravery and his ardent worship of *Egbesu*, an Ijaw deity and god of War (followers of the *Egbesu* deity believe it provides protection from death during times of war). This recognition enabled Oporoza to collaborate with other pockets of militia groups, to lead a new assault against oil companies under the collective platform known as MEND, which opened up an opportunity for Oporoza to gain legitimacy and recognition from state and non-state actors, who patronise his services at elections (see detailed discussion in Chapter Six section 6.2.1).

#### **5.3.4. Other forms of Militia Leadership**

As stated earlier in this section, the opportunity for individuals to emerge as war lords/leaders is fluid and widely open and there are pockets of unknown militias with small numbers of followers who claim to be leaders. From personal field observation, there seems to be a distinction between '*Generals*'. The former are militant leaders recognised by the state and non-state political actors, and the latter are militants who lack recognition from the state. Thus, becoming a *General*, to a large extent, depends not just on the number of followers, but also on one's ability to network informally with relevant state and non-state actors, to gain recognition. This also defines one's access to reward benefits. I noted this distinction during my field visit to the amnesty camp for militants undergoing rehabilitation training. Whilst spending time there, I observed the absence of notable *Generals* who wield influence amongst youths in the Niger Delta region, having gained a

new status. In addition, there are individuals who became prominent and widely recognised as militant leaders by state and non-state political actors, through strong social ties with dominant militia leaders and key state political actors. An instance of such a case is Emomotimi, considered to be spokesperson of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). His contribution as arms dealer and supplier to various militia groups across the Niger Delta region created a situation where he was able to move through his social network to become a high-ranking MEND member.

Another area which provides opportunities for individuals to emerge as militant leaders is the local community structure of youth leadership, known as the Community Development Committee (CDC). The CDC serves as a platform for direct engagement with oil companies in prioritising projects and awarding contracts in communities. However, the CDC is often the subject of intense competition amongst youth groups, leading to gruesome murders, such as beheadings, and the destruction of homes, mainly over the spoils of contracts and payment from oil companies (Tantua, 2009; Isumonan *et al.*, 2005). In the course of informal conversation, a community leader mentioned Azuzuama as an example of someone who had emerged as a militant leader within community structures, albeit with social network ties to Oporoza. According to the community leader, Azuzuama is seen as messiah, warrior, freedom fighter, philanthropist and leader with overwhelming qualities for providing free nursery and primary education and compelling the oil companies to improve the welfare and livelihood of his community. This view was also reflected in a written pamphlet given to this author in the field, where the writer perceives Azuzuama as a *messiah* of some sort:

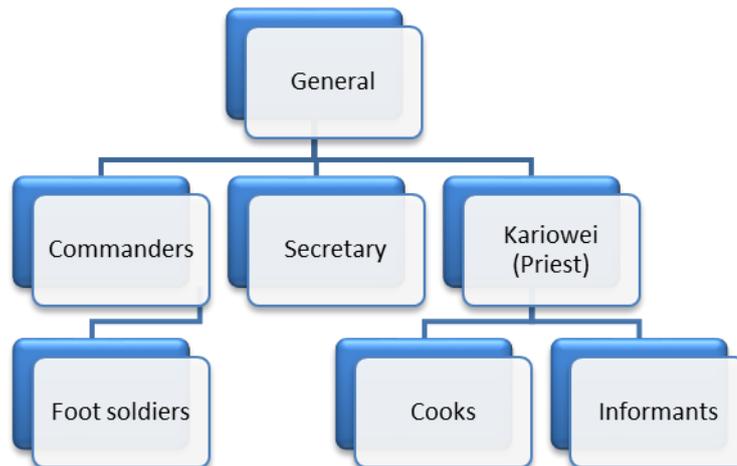
*Azuzuama is a militant leader fighting today to secure the freedom and total liberation of unborn generations of Ijaw people [...] where the youths will no longer have to survive by the gun. (Toughedi, 2009: 14)*

#### **5.4. Structure of a typical militia 'camp'**

This section analyses the structure of militancy in terms of mobilisation and recruitment, the internal hierarchy surrounding it, and the ambitions of militant leaders. I argue that although militants in the Niger Delta region present an ideology which gives them an identity as enemies of the state and multinational oil companies, in reality, this is not the case. The political ideology of recognition for self-determination and resource autonomy presented by the militants is a superficial appearance, but important at particular times in serving particular purposes. These are groups competing to be in the best position to gain access and secure resource benefits, using such an ideology as a platform to legitimise militia actions (see also Chapter Six section 6.6.1).

This chapter looks more closely at key roles within the militia and how people are recruited into these roles, including the terms and conditions which keep, or do not keep, members within these structures. It attempts to identify (1) what these roles are, and (2) how people move into these roles and what keeps members loyal to leaders.

**Figure 5.1:** Hierarchy of Militia Organisation



From the broader literature, militias are defined as locally based private armies with command structures. This characteristic of military training enables members to take action and fulfil public functions, including the protection of communities against oppression (Barkun, 1997). Militant organisations are, thus, viewed as having the ideology and strategies they adopt against perceived enemies, through collective activities and paramilitary manoeuvres (Freilich *et al.*, 1999). However, this does not seem to be the case for militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Whilst militants in the region seem to have a command structure, the hierarchical structure of militias does not necessarily imply loyalty of followers to leaders. What keeps militants within the structure is insecurity, in terms of unemployment and access to wealth. The mobilisation process of the militia is mainly transactional and rarely connected to the protection of the community, or community ties, as the General needs to be in the best possible position to obtain more money, by whatever means, to be able to pay his followers.

Accordingly, a 'General's camp is the largest he can afford to maintain and therefore, militant leaders strive to mobilise resources by recruiting foot soldiers, getting food supplies through a well-coordinated networks from the creeks and nearby villages to communities/towns, obtaining information on the strategies of perceived enemies, and embarking on illegal activities such as oil bunkering, kidnapping, intimidation, and other forms of patronage exchange with state and non-state actors.

These activities clearly illustrate the degree of network required in order to achieve success in movement organisation. One idea regarding the cost of financing a militia camp was revealed by an ex-general:

*Let me tell you something, fighting is not a poor man's business. A man with just 10 million naira<sup>6</sup> cannot go to the creeks because that amount cannot last beyond four days.*

This response tells the importance of network for mobilising of resources (both tangible and intangible) required for setting up a militant camp in the creeks of the delta region. From a broader sociological perspective, the structure of militia organisation in Niger Delta region can be seen in terms of transactional groups involving the exchange of services (Bailey, 2001). According to Bailey (2001), leaders of transactional groups often raise the hopes and expectations of followers, as they strive to keep their followers loyal by meeting their needs. At the same time, a leader risks losing disappointed followers, who may jump ship and find another leader. Likewise, leaders of moral groups do face situations where followers/subordinates compete with each other to be considered more important than others, within the organisational structure. Alternatively, they may accuse one another or their leader of ideological weakness (Bailey, 2001). This was rightly observed during my various conversations with militias at the field, where most members of these militia groups did jump boat, when they feel their leaders were becoming greedy or when they feel their welfares are not well taken care of by these leaders. Moreover, the view of Bailey (2001) find relevance in explaining the structure and roles of militant organisation in this section.

#### **5.4.1. Structure, Hierarchy and Roles**

In the introductory chapter on the emergence and significance of militancy, it was argued that militia organisation in the Niger Delta region is well structured, within fluid and dynamic processes. These structures are necessary to enable leaders to maintain order and achieve their ambitions. They facilitate how orders are taken from generals or commanders to foot soldiers, in a military fashion, even at the risk of losing foot soldiers (see Figure 5.1). This top-down arrangement is necessary as a means to an end for militia leaders. Thus, their positioning and control within this setting enables the communication of command to subordinates, which is required for generals to achieve their ambitions within the hierarchy. As illustrated in Figure 5.1, a typical internal structure of militants in the region is marked by a chain of subordinates, with a militia leader known as the General at the top, followed by commanders, who are mostly family members, trusted friends, or members of the same community.

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<sup>6</sup> £10,000 pounds.

Accordingly, a strong sense of shared community and the decision to participate in collective action is said to shift individuals or groups from being sympathisers to being active militants (Weinstein, 2009).

Under the commanders are foot soldiers, who are mostly recruits divided into sub-units called *crews*. According to Kavelli and Otuogidi, both active militants, about 24 to 30 persons constitute a crew with a unit commander. In discussing with key informants and militants, it seems to me that the maximum number of crews in a militia camp is not more than ten. There is also a secretary, whose duties include making shift-duty rotas for the in and out movements of members, and acting as a human resources person in terms of payroll schedules and monthly salary payments to members of the camp. By in and out, we mean militia members taking a break/off duty, from carrying out activities/schedules determined by militia leaders. This period is used to visit families and friends, as well as seek information and recruitment of new members. In addition, the chief priest, known as Karowei, carries out spiritual cleaning by selecting members who should and should not go out for any “major operation or threats of attack”.<sup>7</sup> Under the control of Karowei are cooks and informants. These are placed under Karowei in order to monitor what is cooked for members to eat, as well as engaging spiritually to divine which forms of information pose a threat to members in the camp.

#### **5.4.2. Spiritual belief: induction**

This section examines the role of spirituality in resistance movements, such as the militants in Niger Delta region, where spirituality appears to play a vital role in terms of mobilisation, courage and the sense of identity/belonging. Although, it has been argued that belief, deities, and immortality are puerile (Freud, 1927), designed to shield the individual from the truth, there seem to be concerns on role spirituality as resource in social movements (Hutchison, 2012). According to Poonamalle (2011) participants in movements are activated by a sense of a sacred that builds an “interconnectedness not only people but also with the universe at large”p147. Taking this into account, spirituality informs an interconnectedness amongst militants believe, the Egbesu deity is an important in playing spiritual roles in Niger Delta conflict. Hence, spiritual cleansing serves as a protection from the deities and gods of Ijaw land, and it is not necessarily as a blessing of some sort. It also, broadly echoes the role of deities in other loosely knit societies, such as Apollo in ancient Greece, believed to be a representation of peace. In this particular case, Egbesu is seen to offers some of form protection against death during wars. Hence, it is clear that militants believe in the *Egbesu* deity and this can be seen through their lived experiences, as reflected by Otuogidi.

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<sup>7</sup> Kidnapping, pipeline destruction and other forms of claims making through actions.

His spiritual experience, outlined below, reveals such rituals to be a necessary part of the terms of induction and initiation for membership of a militia group.

*So when I went to join, I saw three other people, and the place was a shrine. When we went in, they performed some spiritual rites over my body, and afterwards Kariowei<sup>8</sup> said I was finished. Then they told me to walk backwards out of the shrine. As I was walking backwards, they shot me twice at close range with an AK-47. At first I thought I was dead. However, I only felt severe pain. As they shot me, others shouted Kurokeme!<sup>9</sup> Kurokeme! That was my initiation into the group.*

Otuogidi's description illustrates role of spirituality, which creates a sense of belonging and belief to actuate collective action by members of these militia groups. These aspects of spirituality were further commented on by Commander Bulouowei, who also reveals how *Egbesu* is identified with militia membership.

*At first we did not go with arms, we only went with one Kpaikpo<sup>10</sup> and a flag. The law stated that arms should not go first. Only three people went to the flow station and shut it down, and when they pinned up the flag, none of the guns belonging to armed men would function. Their bullets and rifles would not function again. This is the oracle.*

The initiation of spiritual power for protection was also demonstrated by Kavelli's lived experiences and encounter with the Joint Military Task Force of the Nigerian Army. He describes how the spirit of *Egbesu* was evoked during fierce battles or confrontations in the swamps and creeks of the Niger Delta region.

*Ahhh! Not once, not twice, not thrice, but any of the times we confront the JTF with their gunboats, they either run away or we capture the boats. We kill every one of them because they hate us. Those brandy<sup>11</sup>, as soon as we invoke the spirits the brandy<sup>12</sup> just seizes up. Karowei would invoke the spirits and just by looking at the gun, it would not be able to shoot again. We have something we put in the water to invoke the spirits during the shootouts, and their entire engine boats will stop running, and so we kill them. We have many things we use.*

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<sup>8</sup> Priest.

<sup>9</sup> Strong man.

<sup>10</sup> Dane gun.

<sup>11</sup> An automatic machine gun.

<sup>12</sup> Local jargon to describe AK 47

More generally, Kavelli explains the strict compliance to rules, by militias, required for their spiritual protection.

*When you violate the laws, they fail [...] as soon as you violate them, if you go into any combat; you are the first person to die. As long as you do not violate them, nothing will happen to you. Even if they throw dynamite, grenades or rocket launchers, nothing will happen to you, because I have seen it so many times during our operations.*

These statements show how spirituality, like in many other societies, plays a significant role in organisations and social movements in Nigeria. Regarding involvement within the militia of the Niger Delta, it occupies a central place. Indeed, Kavelli and Ebuogha make it clear that priests are senior members of the militia structure with influence over missions.

*We have a priest and cooks at the camp. The priests are those watching our backs. It is their job to select those of us who have to go on a mission. If they do not select you and you go, you may die.*

Likewise, Commander Ebuogha states:

*In my camp, I am a commander. Before we go out on a mission, we perform a ritual involving no guns. We just use our strength and the spirits to guide us. When our priest gives us things to eat and binds us with ordinary cloth, you would think it is ordinary cloth, but if you are shot, nothing will penetrate it.*

The methods used for recruitment into the militia are not necessarily the same, with some roles requiring specialised skills. For instance, the priest known as Karowei needs to be an ardent worshipper of the *Egbesu* deity, which is fairly rare. Thus, the available Karowei's operate on a freelance contract basis, often moving from camp to camp. As a case in point, Besu, a militant who believes he has spiritual powers, mentions these when asked about his role, which also reveals his broad network of ties. For people like Besu, becoming a militant is more about entrepreneurship, rather than simply about gaining employment or finding a means to survive, like most other foot soldiers of militia camps in the Niger Delta region.

*I joined because I had no job. I was a boat driver before things became difficult for me. I believe I have spiritual powers, so I perform prayers before the boys go out for battles. I know all the camps in existence from Rivers and Bayelsa, to Delta and Ondo states.*

### **5.5. Mobilisation Process**

The organisational structure of a militant camp is clearly described by Commander Otuogidi, an active member amongst the many militant groups in the region. His response illustrates the hierarchy and command structure of camp life, revealing how order is maintained between leaders, commanders and foot soldiers, as well as illuminating the roles of secretaries and priests. However, these militia structures are shaped in accordance with the lived experience of a militia leader's mobilisation strategy and tactics to pursue his goal. An interesting observation of militancy in the Niger Delta region is that militia leaders had no prior experience in organising these structures; rather, they were developed from lived experience and a knowledge of the history of the conflict, such as the strategies and tactics of Adaka Boro's armed struggle in 1966.

*In the camp, there is a hierarchy and as we were new, we were assigned to various groups. Within the camp, we have soldiers, the camp boss, cooks, informants and priests, and those for duty post. I was assigned to one of the soldier groups, as I was a soldier. Those at the duty post do duty shift for two weeks. Some would work during the daytime throughout the week, and the following week, you would be on night duty.*

He goes on:

*We have the General, the head of the camp, we have the secretary, we have the camp commandant, in charge of the armoury and posting of workers, we have the camp boss; we also have the Kariowei, the spiritual leader, who provides the spiritual security of the camp, cooks, and soldiers.*

Commander Otuogidi's description shows a more detailed structure of camp life than any of the other interviews. It indicates clearly that one cannot view the militias as spontaneous and unorganised collections of young men, but rather, in many respects, the term *private army* might be a better description. This view is also portrayed by another active militant, Kavelli, who, amongst other issues, commented on the fact that promotion to the rank of commander or general, within the structure of militancy, is based on the number of risks taken at the frontline of a battle, or a person's ability to split from in setting up a camp. His response indicates a well-structured organisation, well-coordinated internally, with a timetable and appointed shifts for members.

*We have two crews in our camp. One month in, one month out. In my own crew, we have up to six-hundred and seventy-something boys. The General, Azuzuama, is the overall boss, and then we have the commander.*

The organisation of militants is also seen to be well-structured from the interviews of non-militants. For instance, Alabo, a key activist, argues that militias in the Niger Delta region are much better organised than the Nigerian army, having demonstrated the skill, competence and ability to withstand Nigerian military force. He based his argument on the formidable structure of the militia, which enables it to engage effectively with the Joint Military Task Force in the region.

As he puts it:

*It is well-structured; even better than Nigerian army. It has a command structure from the lowest rank to the top. There are the lieutenants, welfare units, surveillance units, intelligence units, operational units, and execution units, the strikers, very formidable, very formidable. In my opinion, it is better than the Nigerian army, which is why the Nigerian army cannot withstand them, apart from the federal government's use of sophisticated weapons.*

#### **5.5.1. Mobilising for Material Gains: Becoming a Militia**

As a way of recruiting members to participate in collective action, militia leaders draw on the political ideology of self-determination and resource control. This serves as a moral justification for mobilising membership, whilst presenting opportunities to gain oil benefits to satisfy the personal ambitions of leaders. Although individuals who join militia groups are drawn by material incentives (money) in exchange for services determined by leaders, during my observations, I found that foot soldiers often expressed disappointment, pointing out the ideological weakness of their leaders. For instance, Kavelli's response below indicates an awareness of a political agenda as a means and motivation for militancy, but suggests that he quickly became disillusioned with the realisation that militia leaders appeared to be using militancy simply as an opportunity to gain influence and wealth for themselves. The issues of opportunism and political instrumentation between militants and government political actors are discussed in detail in Chapter Six. However, Kavelli clearly has an awareness of the issues of oppression and a desire for emancipation. This is all part of claims making and a shared perception of the militants and the social movement within his community, but he has come to realise that this is not the whole story.

*I thought they were fighting for the freedom of the Niger Delta. But when I joined the movement, I began to see that our leaders in the government were not fighting for the Niger Delta, but to enrich themselves and then abandon the rest of us. I joined it because that kind of oppression in the Niger Delta is too much. The way the military is maltreating us is too much. At the same time, I found out that our leaders are using us. They are just using us to get what they want. They are fighting not for the freedom of the Niger Delta. They are fighting to make themselves rich.*

Prior to Kavelli's engagement in militia activities, he was involved in criminal activities of oil theft, as a means of survival. His frustration over the destruction of illegal bunkering activity by the Joint Military Task Force pushed him into joining the movement. His responses reveal how individuals can change from pursuing criminal activities to becoming militants. It illustrates aspects of the complex labelling of genuine and non-genuine militancy in the Niger Delta region. Kavelli was just "surviving" in Port Harcourt before joining the bunkering business back in his own community (implicitly, because this gave more money), and from there he went into militancy.

*I was at Port Harcourt doing any odd job to survive, before joining the bunkering business. Then I came back to my village, Okpoama, to join Lodo<sup>13</sup> in bunkering business. While with Lodo all our goods were burnt during clashes with the JTF. Then I had to relocate to join Azuzuama's camp.*

A commander with the Bayelsa State Government Volunteer Force, which was established to curb piracy and the incessant kidnapping on the waterways, was less explicit in his engagement with militia activities. However, Kavelli's comment presents a duality of thought; an awareness of the political ideology of emancipation as motivation for militia membership, which then led to disillusionment when he realised that the ideology behind Adaka Boro's actions of self-determination merely served as an opportunity for militia leaders to make themselves rich. This indicates a desire for emancipation, as well as a sense of shared belief and solidarity. For Kavelli, and many others like him, things did not appear to be the way they were made out to be, which also reminds us of Kponi's (a non-militant) earlier comment that the meaning of militancy in the Niger Delta region depends on how militant leaders frame or articulate demands in mobilising support for participation and collective action. In addition, it is important to emphasise, however, that these are not factions in the sense that one militant group has a basis in ideological values, while another does not, and yet another is criminal. As shown in the preceding section, all the militants essentially subscribe to the

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<sup>13</sup> A criminal gang leader.

core ideological narrative at some level, but their individual motives for taking part may also include issues such as the desire to get an income and to escape from poverty.

### **5.5.2. Mobilisation as a Means for Gaining Employment**

In addition to the narrative of self-determination contributing to the armed violence in the Niger Delta, poverty is also identified as a factor motivating people to become militants. Commander Otuogidi makes this very clear in his comment below. The lack of employment and the expectations of oil wealth, reasons expressed by Kavelli, only add to the discourse over why individuals or groups join militia organisations in the region. For militants like Otuogidi, besides frustration linked to unemployment, the face-to-face interaction through friendship ties is also an influencing factor in joining a militia organisation in the region.

*Actually, before I joined, things were very rough for me. No job, nothing. So one of my friends, we used to call him General, saw me in the village and asked me what I was doing for a living and I told him I was doing nothing. So he invited me to come and join him; that at least I would be getting something to survive on. Before then I used to know a few boys who belonged and I saw how they survived. That was how he invited me.*

Otuogidi's understanding of militancy is more about survival, having seen how membership of a militia organisation provided some material benefits in the region. A theme of his is 'something to survive on'. Thus, from commander Otuogidi's lived experience; he was penniless and struggling in the village before being recruited into membership of a militia group, through a friend. For these militants, therefore, the reason for joining appears to be less about ideology, than about gaining access to oil benefits as a source of livelihood and survival.

### **5.6. Militia ambition and reward distribution**

Changing identities is often the primary goal of movement organisations. Whilst identity builds solidarity amongst the membership of militia, the primary aim remains to change the individual self or relationships in ways that extend beyond movement goals (Epstein, 1991; Lichterman, 1999). Movement leaders often pursue personal interest at the expense of organisational goals, as different types of leaders may influence and shape their goals at different stages of a movement organisation. These arguments find relevance within the hidden ambitions of militants in the Niger Delta region, where militia leaders ride on ideological platforms of self-determination to access wealth for themselves. They become major players having influence and networks with political

actors in government. For instance, Kavelli views his experiences within a broader political culture of oil governance, as being embedded in the understanding of militia struggles in the region.

*Everything about Nigeria is politics. That is where the corruption is. As a militant, I have come to understand that struggle [...] see Azuzuama<sup>14</sup> is now a politician<sup>15</sup>, before he was not a politician. To pay his boys is very hard for him, despite the money he sees now. So if you look at it, it is still the Niger Delta people who are making the Niger Delta people suffer, not the Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba or Igbo. It is still the Ijaw who are making the Ijaw suffer. That is the problem we have.*

Kavelli's statement reflects the dominant view of self-determination and minority status which further tells us that membership of militia is about achieving the ambitions of members. He believes it is the Ijaw manipulating and exploiting each other, in order to gain access to resource benefits. As he puts it: "it is still the Ijaw who are making the Ijaw suffer" and not the perceived political domination of the Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba or Igbo majority ethnic groups in Nigeria. Militant leaders have gained a new status and recognition from negotiating monthly payments on behalf of their followers. The privileges of militia leaders now put them in a new social class of affluence and luxury, as recalled by Otuogidi from a conversation at a night club.

*All our Generals are driving big! big!![raises voice] cars and building houses in Yenagoa. They are now politicians staying in government houses, driving around with their girlfriends, whilst we are suffering.*

Commander Otuogidi continues:

*That is General Gobos<sup>16</sup> convertible sports car. He has two different convertible cars. Jeeps are up to three [...] his boys would have killed him. This is someone who escaped from Ahoada prison and was given arms by Ateke Tom<sup>17</sup> for the movement<sup>18</sup>. Today Gobos is untouchable.*

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<sup>14</sup> A militant leader.

<sup>15</sup> Politician, in this context, is viewed from the interaction and influence of militant leaders with political actors.

<sup>16</sup> A Militant leader.

<sup>17</sup> A militant leader.

<sup>18</sup> Movement, in this context, means oil theft and criminal activity hidden within the ideology of self-determination.

Reward distribution has also been a subject of discussion among militia followers. Whilst collective action does not necessarily mean an equitable distribution of oil benefits or rewards for services rendered by followers, foot soldiers, who take the main risks at the frontline, express disappointment with their leaders over this issue. According to Kavelli:

*At our level, as strikers, compared to people like Don Wannu, we see nothing. Sometimes Azuzuama gives his commanders about 500,000 naira each, although he is not supposed to give them that kind of small money because men like Don Wannu, they are strong, they have done a lot.<sup>19</sup>*

And:

*When we are in camp, the second-in-command receives about 1.6 million naira as a basic salary every month [...] for us, the ordinary soldiers; he pays 70,000 to each crew member. Every month they pay you 70,000 naira, but we are the people who are taking the highest risks, we die for nothing.<sup>20</sup>*

In the following quote, Commander Okpouogidi describes how oil companies and the government pay large sums as payoffs to the militant groups (the figures he mention equate to between £14,000 and £20,000) whereas an individual soldier might receive just £10 or £20 out of those payoffs.

*Sometimes they [the oil companies and the government] pay 3.5 million naira, or 5 million, and other times less, depending on the negotiations. Now I came to find out that from those monies we normally collect, when that money is being paid, what we get, what they give us, we, who face the greatest risks of shooting, what they give us is too small. You see the Ghana Must Go bag they bring for payment, but when we go back to camp, they only give 3,000 or 5,000 naira to those who carried out the operation. This is too bad. I went there to make money. I had no job and that is why I went there—for the money.<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Don Wannu is the commander of a company within a militia; he has done a lot, i.e. he is an effective commander and has led many assaults. 500,000 naira is equivalent to about £2000.

<sup>20</sup> 1.6 million naira is equivalent to £6400; 70,000 naira is equivalent to £280.

<sup>21</sup> Ghana Must Go bag is a very large canvas holdall bag commonly used throughout Africa and called Ghana Must Go since they came to symbolise scenes during the mass expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria during military rule, when the Ghanaians packed their belongings into these bags.

The Bayelsa Volunteer Force commander reports a similar scenario where the oil company paid a large settlement fee to the militia in order to secure the return of their facility. These payoffs are commonly negotiated between oil companies and militant leaders or their representatives:

*The oil company paid 35 million naira. At first, the oil company paid 4 million naira although they demanded 5 million naira to open negotiations [...] Later; I left Highest, as I did not get a fair share of the money that was agreed on for the Ogboinbiri operation. I braked out from them [...]*<sup>22</sup>

These insights into the division of spoils from militant operations reveal a further element in the motivation to become involved. If the poor just want to make enough to survive, those who already have connections and influence can use the militia to generate significant additional income and, even more importantly, further political connections and influence.

And Alabo questions:

*Look, there are categories, freedom fighting, you are fighting for a people naturally, a people without bargaining that you want to get rich. Freedom fighters are contended people. You do not need to get fifteen jeeps, you do not go everywhere in the world to get houses, no. Have you seen Nelson Mandela's house in Nigeria? Have you seen Nelson Mandela with fifteen jeeps in his house? Have you ever heard of Martin Luther having so many millions of naira?*

From this, it can be seen that militancy provides various forms of opportunity. For the ordinary foot soldiers, it can be a means of getting something to survive, but for those who become leaders, it can become an avenue to very substantial wealth and influence, which then feed off each other to generate more opportunities for gathering wealth and influence. It is clear, however, that this can create a sense of unease or resentment amongst those who are taking the risks without getting much reward, and amongst leaders, such as Alabo and Kpein, who are not active militants. There is a sense that some leaders have violated expectations in terms of how much money they have acquired and a troubling undercurrent that perhaps these leaders are little different from the oppressors (e.g. government, politicians) in the dominant ideological narrative that was explored in the preceding section. As we saw there, however, this narrative remains dominant and therefore the interviewees find various ways of attempting to maintain the narrative whilst acknowledging this unease.

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<sup>22</sup> Highest is a militant leader. Braked out from them is a Pidgin English phrase meaning broke away from or split.

## 5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that militant groups have a well-structured hierarchy, which is more like a contract team, where followers do not seem or feel they owe militant leaders much gratitude for being recruited. They evaluate their leaders on the basis of ambitions of status, recognition and wealth. Furthermore, money is central and material means of attracting and keeping followers. Also, relative access and use of resources tend to distinguish small camp generals from Generals. In addition, those interviewed during the course of this research have revealed a variety of motivations for their personal involvement in militant activities. Clearly, there is a nexus of intersecting issues around feelings of dispossession and awareness which most of the interviewees expressed. These views represent a cultural history that is imbued with a struggle for 'freedom' expressed through desire for control of resources.

Although most of the respondents demonstrate an awareness of these issues, there are interesting variations in emphasis between the more intellectual and influential respondents, and the soldiers and commanders with less influence. The former tend to prioritise the freedom-fighting agenda as being the dominant motivation and tend to portray the militancy as being fundamentally about freedom, even where they recognise that it may have become a corrupted and imperfect means of achieving that goal. The latter, on the other hand, tend to have a more immediate and pragmatic resentment about lack of employment and immediate benefits arising from resource extraction in their communities and see their militant activities as a means to securing those benefits, even if in a debased form. It is clear from the interviews, however, that these political motivations, whether idealistic or pragmatic in form, co-exist in the minds of many militants with the more immediate motivation of achieving some means of "survival". This mix of motives is perhaps nicely captured in a comment made by Commander Akpainfoko:

*Actually, we are fighting for the Niger Delta cause, but later on, we are hungry, we are not working, we stay in the villages, throughout the whole year, nobody is going to school, so we all decide to take up the fight.*

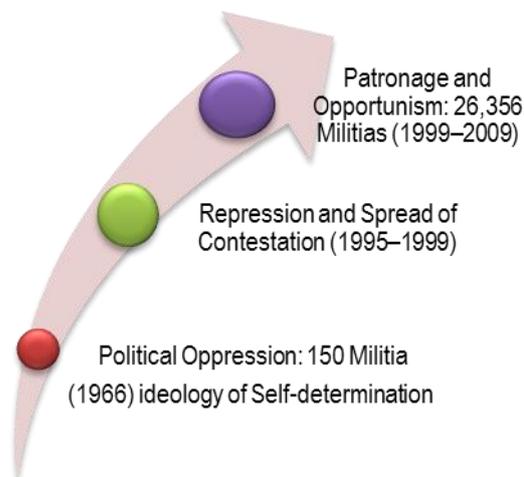
The opportunity to make a living, therefore, is a key motivation, with some militants being recruited directly into the militias in the context of their desperation to "survive" (e.g. Commander Otuogidi), while others went into militant activities having become involved in bunkering, through the same need to make a living. We have also seen that the leading commanders may be motivated by the potential to secure both wealth and political influence through their control of militant groups and through the resources within those groups' areas of control.

## Chapter Six: The Significance of Militancy

### 6.1. Introduction

This empirical chapter examines the space of 'porous boundaries' that shape a particular form of conflict, which give rise to the number and significance of militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (see Figure 6.1). It is split into three sections, which are not mutually exclusive but rather an interlocking web of features linked to the significance of militancy. The chapter attempts to describe and explain: (1) the role of political elites at elections and its link with oil theft and informal payments to militias, (2) the ascendancy of youths in terms of gaining social power to influence political and commercial cult/criminal activity as well as community chieftaincy tussles, and (3) the unity and fragmentation of militant groups that reveal a threat and opportunity, whereby today's militants carry out coordinated attacks on oil facilities to heighten the ideological struggle of self-determination and resource control in the public media. The united platform of militants, I argue, is only a front-stage political performance, creating a breathing space for engaging political elites and oil multinationals, while also competing amongst themselves to gain recognition in accessing resource benefits. The unity and fragmentation of militant action tend to complement one another, whilst transforming the ideological frames built up around militia action into the meeting of personal needs.

Figure 6.1: Hierarchy of Process



In broad terms, societies, or any part of a given society, are not always in harmony but in constant competition over resources (Buechler, 2000). Within the context of this research, oil is central to the dynamics of contest within variegated layers of formal and informal relationships, which enable militants of today to be seen as a force to be reckoned with. Whilst it is difficult to

discern the number of clandestine militant groups in the region, but it is estimated at 26,356<sup>23</sup> (see Figure 6.1.). These militants, however, did not emerge out of a spontaneous, frenzied mobilisation, but through a series of historical events within the formal and informal structures of oil governance in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Niger Delta region.

In previous empirical chapters (4 and 5) of this research, an attempt was made to situate the ideological battles of self-determination and political repression (see Figure 6.1), as well as the meaning, typologies, hierarchy and ambition of militancy, within the context of oil governance, in order to address the key question of how militants make sense of their actions, and the contested meanings of militancy. The meaning of *militancy* is not straightforward, but a socially constructed phenomenon, with internal fluid leadership structures that are dynamic and often based on the ties of community, family and friendship, or one's ability to network with other militias, political actors or external bodies. Conversely, I emphasise that the motivation for membership of militia is not driven by the notion of self-determination and resource control, but ambition to gain recognition and access to oil wealth. Although the actions of Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa signalled flashpoints for agitation and rights to self-determination and resource control (see Chapter 4), these notions, over time, seem to serve the dual purpose of: (a) making claims to entitlements, and (b) seeking recognition and access to oil wealth. Furthermore, the ideology of self-determination and resource control which can be broadly seen as useful disguise (Wood, 1985) seem to serve a dual purpose. It helps to legitimise militia action on the one hand, and spaces of opportunities to negotiate with the state and multinational oil companies.

Moreover, militants are not a homogenous or monolithic entity and they do not belong to any single group, even though they frequently couch their differences in ideological terms to seek a particular end. Rightly or wrongly, militants have successfully gained international, national and local recognition which informally positions them as 'new actors/chiefs' to externally represent and internally control communities. They make formal claims through actions known to the public and media, and relate with state and non-state actors and multinational oil companies on issues that should improve the welfare and living conditions of communities in the Niger Delta. However, the formal and informal positioning of militias also induce unity and competition amongst militant groups that impact negatively on traditional structures of communities in the region. Militia actions have, more or less, dismantled local authority structures, rendering local chiefs relatively inconsequential in community policy decisions. Although militants have steadily gained legitimacy, recognition and space with regards to oil-wealth distribution, they appear to lack a clear and convincing ideological path.

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<sup>23</sup> Comment from the Special Adviser on the presidential amnesty for militants in the Niger Delta region

Part of the argument of this research maintains that the phenomenal rise in militancy cannot be isolated from the roles of political actors and youth/cult gangs. These roles are intertwined in a web of interlocking episodes of patronage relations involving guns, money and oil-theft activities, in exchange for votes to fulfil political ambition. For the purpose of clarity, the terms *youth*, *cult gangs* and *militancy* present mutual realities that impinge on one another; thus, they are used interchangeably in this chapter. Whilst I do not wish to generalise by labelling all youths in the Niger Delta as militants, it is clear that the widespread frustration, insecurity and porous boundaries between the interaction of state and non-state actors (Peterside, 2007), create ideal conditions for individuals or groups (irrespective of biological age) to become militants. The region symbolises a breeding ground for the mobilisation and recruitment of state and non-state actors to instigate forms of violence to achieve various ambitions. Besides, to ignore the role of youths in an understanding of militancy would be grossly misleading, in presenting myopic view of conflict in the Niger Delta region.

In the following chapter, an attempt is made to pitch the porous boundaries which underlie the significance of militancy within a number of features. Specifically, the role of political elites, the ascendance of youths, the fission and fusion of militias as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is examined. In doing this, two key themes, *opportunism* and *competition* will be integrated to underlie the analysis of this chapter. These themes find expression within the perspectives of patronage and contentious politics (Tilly, 2003), where the government is seen to be part of the object of claims making and collective violence. According to Auyero (2008), contentious politics highlight grey zones, that reveal a clandestine invisible connection between state actors and the instigators of collective violence. These relations are enacted from the mechanism of, what Tilly (2003) describes as, brokerage, bringing individuals and groups who are previously excluded into mainstream socio-political alliances. It reveals the production of new connections/relationships from previously unconnected individuals or groups. It also informs clientelism—interaction that brings about recurring action (Tilly, 1984). The clientelism and patronage herein, refers to the distribution or promise of resources (money, guns) by political actors or candidates seeking political office (Kitschelt, 1993) in exchange for citizens' votes. They highlight a particular form of transaction—the exchanges of votes for direct payment or protected access to particular goods or service.

Besides, the nature of relationship and militia response to their action, reveal the idea of framing (Benford and Snow, 2000) which explains how the re-alignment of events can give new insight and interpretation. Framing describes how events can add new meanings to something based on, but independent of, an initial meaning and understanding. More so, the idea of labelling in terms of access to policy benefit (Wood, 1985) and the principle of fusion and fission (Evans-Pritchard, 1940), will together, form the background and analysis of this chapter which aims

(1) to identify the features and processes that shaped the rise of militancy from a 150-man militia to 26,356 militants (see Figure 6.1) between 1966 and 2009, and (2) to address the research question of how militias make sense of their actions and how these impact on the structure of oil governance in the region. Although this chapter highlights structure–agency relations linked to the significance of militancy, the dynamic interaction and shifting ideological frames of militia action is the central focus of departure.

## **6.2. *The Role of Political Elites: The looseness of things***

This section attempts to identify and describe the complex web of roles played by political elites, from elections and oil theft, to the informal payments made to militants in Rivers and Bayelsa States (see Figure 1.1). It aims to unravel the porous boundaries attributable to the significance of militancy in the Niger Delta region. In analysing the roles of political elites, an assumption is made that violence is a site-specific phenomenon within historical processes and events, often linked to the wider social interaction of material transformation and power relation (Homer-Dixon, 1994). Furthermore I argue that individuals and groups perceive and evaluate their world individually or collectively (Bourdieu, 1984) to inform inter-subjective interest linked to macro-political structures in governance. More so, the idea of human agency is central to social action, given that individuals process social experiences, including devising ways of coping with life under various situations (Long and Long, 1992). It is on these grounds that I see militant as agents who think, reflect, desire, and make sense of their actions. The action are based on cultures inherited from interactions and their environment. As a result, their actions are shaped by the macro dynamic social world. Thus, the specific context and location of political elites, youths or militants, does shape their specific frames of action and behaviour in the Niger Delta vis-à-vis Nigeria.

### **6.2.1. *Elections***

One feature which permeates the activities of militancy is the political culture of transition, in terms of regime change at elections. Violence is an integral part of elections in Nigeria, which can be argued as instrument for accessing wealth, status or forms of security. This mechanism is linked to a clandestine informal exchange of guns, money, and protection of space for oil bunkering<sup>24</sup>, in return for votes. These processes of resource exchange can be seen as avenues for social and economic transformation that enable political elites and militias to achieve ambitions and positioning in deciding who gets what, when and how, in accessing oil wealth in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Niger Delta region. Today's militants do not commit to any particular party of ideological conviction. They are patronised by political elites to achieve specific goals. The patterns of patronage are fluid and based on short-term interest and gratification. These fluid relationships inform the recurring episodes of

contention, a view rightly noted from the interview response of Kponi, a non-militant, who highlights the temporary relationships between politicians and militants, and how militants have created other forms of contention and survival strategies.

*In terms of the militants and politicians, there was some kind of coalition at the time, or a kind of togetherness. The youths, having acquired these militant spirits [...] some politicians saw them as veritable tools to achieve political ambition, and they started paying and using them. Some politicians ended up using militants to become governors [...] the militant group that was used to achieve this political objective found itself alone, and they started attacking the state through the destruction of pipelines and all forms of criminality. They have to find ways to survive ...*

These cases of patronage relations were evident in the 2003, 2007 and 2011 governorship and presidential elections in the Niger Delta region. For instance, in Rivers State (see Figure 1.1) prominent militia leaders, such as Kurowei of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Seibi of the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), both at some point had close ties and relationships with the governor of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). A key interviewee, Stone, supports this by saying that Kurowei's NDPVF was instrumental to Peter Odili winning the 1999–2001 governorship elections, when the NDV had its support from opposition candidates of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). By 2003, in the governorship re-run election Governor Odili switched sides, changing allegiance from the NDPVF to the NDV, a rival group in the state. This new alliance caused a bloody clash in Rivers State involving the use of sophisticated weaponry. The fierce battle between the NDPVF and the government-backed NDV led to a number of deaths, especially in the Buguma and Okrika communities, territories under the control of both militia leaders.

According to Stone:

*Kurowei came into Buguma [...], which led to many deaths. Come to think of it, one AK-47 raffle costs about five-hundred and something thousand naira, and then a youth that is from a very poor region can have up to 2000 of them [...] they were financed by politicians. The initial set of weapons that came in, came in through politicians. I cannot say in confidence, but I also know they do oil for arms.*

Stone points to politicians financing arms and their proliferation at elections, insisting that it was impossible for youths from an impoverished region to afford the cost of so many arms in their possession. Interestingly, the government backed violence through the NDV against the NDPVF at the 2003 governorship elections in Rivers State, had labelled the NDPVF leader a criminal, a label

that implies how power relationships are expressed at various levels of personal interaction (Wood, 1985). Labels show how power relations of class interest are constructed and sustained. Aspects of labelling can also be seen in Kurowei's attempt to dispel being seen as a terrorist, bandit or criminal following a broken alliance, by reframing it as an emancipatory struggle of self-determination with reference to Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa. These were evident in Kurowei's media<sup>25</sup> comments prior to 'Operation Denni Fiberesima', where he began targeting oil facilities to exert pressure on the federal government in mid-2004.

*We must avoid falling into the throes of what Adaka Boro foresaw forty years ago. Let them call us terrorists, let them call us bandits, but it is important and critical that we remain resolute in the pursuit of the ideals of our fallen heroes, like Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa and a host of others.*

The above statement present the ideas of Hunt and Benford (1994) that tell how individuals can use frames to manipulate reality by selectively omitting and emphasising different aspects of their world. In this instance, we see how the NDPVF leader systematically framed a ruined patronage relationship with political actors, to prevent being labelled a criminal. Interestingly, the threat from Kurowei's NDPVF induced a space for negotiation with Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo in October 2004, which later collapsed following a series of disagreements over the process for peace. By 20 September, 2005, the NDPVF leader was imprisoned for treason. The front-stage performance of labelling used by the government also played out at macro-level political discussion on militancy, where Nigeria's President Obasanjo invited militia leaders to negotiate for peace. According to Nigeria's President Obasanjo:<sup>26</sup>

*We are talking to those I described as rascally elements from the Niger Delta in an effort to open the lines of dialogue and peace, as they feel aggrieved...*

President Obasanjo had earlier labelled militants in the Niger Delta region as 'criminals and rascals', only to withdraw his comment and create an opportunity for dialogue with them. Alaere, a key activist, notes that the introduction of violence became an opportunity for all sorts of people to be termed *militants* in order to gain legitimacy, rather than focusing on issues of widespread frustration and grievance, which spurred on the threats of self-determination and resource control in the Niger Delta region. Alaere points out:

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<sup>25</sup> Ijaw nation, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> President's speech to mark Nigeria's forty-fourth year of Independence (*The Dispatch*, 15 October, 2004).

*[...] criminals also hid under the same guise. They were lucky. They had a man who wanted to trivialise the issue, Obasanjo. And so he took both the criminals and actual agitators and baptised them all as militants. So they now have a common baptism [...] your name defines your character. Everybody now has a blanket covering. That blanket covering is what took them to where they are now [...] if you want to remedy that, your best first step is to go back to the main issue and begin to address the problem, not the individuals that Obasanjo had earlier called common criminals.*

Similar events of politicians and militia alliances were witnessed in Bayelsa State. Agregha, a community chief, describes the role of a militia leader at the 2007 governorship elections as an 'ugly situation' fraught with violence and the intimidation of citizens who had no opportunity to vote for candidates of their choice. He maintains politicians of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) used all sorts of 'do or die'<sup>27</sup> tactics to win the 2007 elections, in order to encourage further corruption and looting of monthly oil revenues by state politicians. Oil revenues are distributed monthly by federal government from a central purse in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, to all states based on the principle of derivation (see also chapter 2 section 2.3.3 and figures 2.2 /2.3)

According to Agregha:

*Even before letting go of arms in the rerun elections [...] the situation was ugly in southern Ijaw communities. One of the militant leaders ordered that all the election materials be brought to his community, even those belonging to other communities. And all the thumb printing<sup>28</sup> was done in that guy's place, by his order. We are not even allowed to vote. So the looting will continue...*

The above comment reveals how violence at elections is fuelled by the relationship between government political actors and security agencies, and militants. These porous boundaries of relationships are also shown in the media<sup>29</sup> statement of Oporoza, a militia warlord, believed to control large expanses of territory in the Delta State (see map in figure 1.1 introduction page)

*I personally installed most of the politicians in government...*

Oporoza's claim cannot be far from the truth, given the influence and strong ties he wields with most politicians across the Niger Delta region. He played a major role in mobilising support from

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<sup>27</sup> A slogan used for winning elections by any means available.

<sup>28</sup> Using fingers and palm-kernel shells as casted votes.

<sup>29</sup> *National News*, 14 September, 2009.

other militias and youths during the regime change, which ushered in President YarAdua and Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan in 2007 and 2011. For instance, prior to presidential and governorship elections in 2007, at the height of threats from militants in the Niger Delta, Nigeria's out-going President Olusegun Obasanjo held meetings with top 'Generals' of militant groups on 5 and 8 April, 2006, at the country's capital. The meeting, led by Oporoza, was seen as a strategic move for the ruling People's Democratic Party to retain power in 2007. These views were expressed by Kponi, who mentioned that President Obasanjo, having served his two terms for eight years, intended to hand over to his ruling party. According to Kponi:

*[...] all the meetings of politicians in the camps of militant leaders are nothing but an attempt to seek support and collaboration to win elections. That is why these boys can do anything and get away with it.*

The comment from Kponi bring out a particular 'reality', moreover, given the regime change in 2007 that altered the geo-political structure of power in Nigeria. The country's national political power, since independence in 1960, has revolved around the country's three major ethnic groups (see Chapter 2), through either military or democratic regimes. Thus, the 2007 elections, which coincided with rising tension from the actions of militias in the Niger Delta, provided an opportunity for politicians to form alliances in order to facilitate the South-South region contest the presidency. These ambitions became glaringly obvious when Niger Delta governors began a campaign for resource control which militants used as a reason for militia action at hidden creeks and camps. These political agitations seem to pay off as Dr Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw from the Niger Delta, gained the Vice-Presidential ticket with Umaru Musa YarAdua as Presidential flag bearer under the People's Democratic Party for the 2007 elections. On 29 May, 2007, both men were sworn in as President and Vice-President. By 28 June, 2007, roughly a month later, Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan visited Oporoza at the militia leader's den, known as *Camp*, to negotiate for peace in the Niger Delta region.

### 6.2.2. Significance of Oil theft: 'Bunkering'

*Let us look at the so-called gain from oil bunkering. Who is actually benefiting? Does any real money go to any community? There is large-scale bunkering going on, yet you will find people wallowing in poverty, sometimes abject poverty. There are always a few that succeed in building a new house and buying a new car [...] some government officials are probably compromised in these activities; if not, how can we explain the lack of government action?*

The above response from Inemo, an environmental-rights activist, illustrates how the activity of oil bunkering is well-known by political elites and the militias. To Inemo, militancy is only one strand of a complex web that is propelled by foreign oil traders, shippers, refiners and high-level political and military elites. Oil bunkering provides funding for elections and quick money for both state and non-state actors. However, oil bunkering has been in existence since the mid-1970s, but it only became part of a public discourse in the 1990s, becoming more widespread as more sophisticated weapons and greater violence were used (Isumonan *et al.*, 2005). These forms of violence, such as the spread of contention (see Chapter 4), along with incessant inter/intra-communal warfare, and a sense of rising insecurity caused by the activities of criminal gangs, gradually resulted in opportunities for oil bunkering in the Niger Delta region. Oil bunkering is at the centre of informal governance in Nigeria. In 2005, David West, a former minister of petroleum in Nigeria, reported the unofficial revenue loss from oil bunkering activity as \$4 billion per year (Human Rights Watch, 2005). The informal governance of oil bunkering, seen as a shadow state (Reno, 2002), is intrinsically linked to complex local and international webs of connections. This complexity were also revealed from local print media; Guardian (2010), which reported relations in oil theft, from comment made by Alamieyeseigha, a former governor of Bayelsa State (see map in figure 1.1. introduction page) in the Niger Delta:

*Crude oil is not garri<sup>30</sup> you sell across the counter; it has to be processed. Nigerians know it; the international community knows where our stolen oil is taken to. It is only that we are not decisive; it is a leadership problem [...] how many times have I and Mr President gone to the creeks to save kidnapped people? (Alamiesiegha, 2010:71-73)*

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<sup>30</sup> An easily affordable source of food in Nigeria.

His statement provides insight into relations between politicians and militias, and how militancy is resourced and legitimised. Whilst absolving militia/youths from the complex process of oil-bunkering activities (the complex process referred to is the technique required to steal crude oil from wellheads and not the process of human interactions), he tends to shift the blame to the weak and ineffective government, claiming that the youths/militants are merely being used for surveillance at bunkering points (Peterside, 2007). The exchange of ground rent payment for protection to local gangs/militant leaders also increased the power and recognition of militant leaders. Having provided private armies to oil cartels, militant leaders also learned the sophistication involved in bunkering and they began to engage directly in oil theft, making more money without paying for security. One case is the rise to prominence of Kurowei, the leader of the NDPFV, and Seibi, of the NDV. Both leaders became wealthy from the informal governance of oil theft. Kurowei has constantly denied his involvement in oil theft saying, “he cannot steal what belongs to him”, referring to the struggle of resource control.

For leaders like Kurowei, it is the Nigerian state that is stealing crude oil from the Niger Delta region, as he believes Nigeria’s structure of governance should be based on fiscal federalism and self-determination, and the right to resource control.<sup>31</sup> Added to the thriving shadow economy of oil bunkering, is widespread frustration and unemployment, which provides a source of survival for youths, as well as factional wars over the control of strategic areas for oil theft. According to *Human Rights Watch* (2005), the intensive fighting between the NDPFV and the NDV in Rivers State is about access routes for oil theft, under the guise of chieftaincy tussles or some other form of structured political violence. As noted earlier, the patron–client relationship involves guns and money for votes by political elites, in exchange for privileged protection for militias to engage in oil bunkering. One such case is Kurowei and Seibi at the governorship and presidential elections in Rivers State where militia leaders had privileged rights to manoeuvre in oil bunkering.

In other cases, clashes involving Nigerian security agencies and militants are often seen as clamping down on militants, whilst what usually happen behind these scenes are disagreement over local fee payments. According to Peterside (2007), militia leaders were able to establish governable spaces by control over oil theft. As a result, threats from the government to clamp down on militants from activities of oil bunkering are fiercely contested by militia leaders. Conversely, these leaders resort to ideology of self-determination as a platform for fighting back. For instance, the clash between Nigeria’s Joint Task Force (JTF) and Oporoza, on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009 at Gbaramatu, wherein the government declared Oporoza ‘wanted dead or alive’ in Delta State, was the result of an informal disagreement over payment of the ‘local fee’. The government raiding of Camp 5 may be seen by the public media and political front as a clamp down on militants. According

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<sup>31</sup> *The Tide*, newspaper report, 9 October, 2003.

to Okobo, a key informant, who gave insight to these clashes, the reason behind the clash was the seizure of an oil ship belonging to undisclosed top retired military elite, who refused to pay the local fee in Oporoza's territory. The disagreement left eleven army officers, who had been guarding the oil ship, dead from gun battle with Oporoza's militias. At other times, international pressure to curb oil bunkering puts the Nigerian state against firm resistance from militias, as noted by Nigeria's former minister of petroleum, who links oil bunkering to the proliferation of arms, earlier emphasised by Stone in chapter 6, section 6.2.1)

*[...] bunkering alone cannot explain arms proliferation  
[...] other factors could include the vigorous attempt by  
the federal government to check oil bunkering, triggered  
the determination of bunkerers to continue in their very  
lucrative trade.*

This resistance by the federal government to bunkering is also evident from the interview with Kavelli, a member of a militia group, who mentioned government attacks on bunkering locations. He perceives oil bunkering as not being an illegal activity, and sees state repression as disrupting their means of survival. His view corresponds with the idea that such collective action by the militias is a survival strategy.

*[...] because we do not want to steal or do evil things,  
but now the government does not want to allow us to do  
anything. They keep killing us, and destroying and  
burning our boats and that is why we formed MEND.  
Sometimes we shoot steadily for hours, but only two or  
three persons amongst us will die, but then we have  
killed many of them.*

Contrary views were expressed by Bibi, a key informant, asserting that the oil-bunkering activities of militants only serve as a means of funding the political quest of self-determination and resource control. He believes there are 'genuine militants' engaging in oil-bunkering activities to sustain the 'struggle'. His response further reveals the complex web of political and economic patronage within the dynamics of militia contention and boundaries of state–society relationship, which helps in legitimising militancy.

*We have genuine militants who are concerned with the freedom of the Niger Delta. Some are armed, whilst others are intellectual. Some were into oil bunkering to fund the armed struggle. [...] we now have militant by day and political thug by night: those who are into armed struggle but rent out their services to politicians to achieve power. All the Niger Delta governors are implicated in this, as well as federal politicians who have oil bunkering interests; we have militant by day and criminal by night: those who commit odd crimes to get rich. They found a lucrative side-line and their interests coincided with the dark forces that control the oil thefts of the Niger Delta—the corrupt elite of high society in Nigeria.*

A similar response was also narrated by Otuogidi, an active militia. His comments again reveal the opportunities which sustain militancy, from how arms are supplied, to the strategies involved in keeping contracts with oil companies on-going from cooperation with militants, the staff of oil companies, and the Joint Military Task Force (JTF), which are meant to secure oil facilities in the Niger Delta region. Otuogidi's experiences as a militant made him understand the reality from the illusion of ideological struggle for self-determination. For militants like Otuogidi, political elites can never be trusted, as he opens up complex relations that give relevance to militants.

*My brother, from experience, I have come to realise that our society is very bad. The government is involved, the so-called JTF is involved, and the oil companies too are involved. Why I conclude this is because the boats we use, the speed boats we use, while I was in the camp, Agip Oil Company bought those new boats for us. One double 75 and one single. I witnessed it myself, when those boats were being delivered. You see, the game is that when a particular camp acquires a particular territory and control of it, it now tends to ensure the security for all the pipelines in that territory, for all the companies, so that other groups cannot come and vandalise these pipelines. Now, from time to time, we negotiate over the price that the Agip Oil Company pays for securing these pipelines. Like in our own area, they were paying 1.5 million naira<sup>32</sup> a month for security...*

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<sup>32</sup> About £4,000 pounds.

Commander Otuogidi continues:

*Now, as time goes on, when we feel the money they pay for security is not enough, we blow up the pipelines or threaten to blow up the pipelines, and they would then come and negotiate a new price. [ ] The military is also aware of our activities; they have their own quota in any negotiated payment we make with the oil companies. Before we make any “movement”, we would call the JTF commander to inform them that we are going to pass along this route to carry out operations and warn them not to patrol that area. And they would cooperate. It is the same thing, too, when the JTF wants to go on patrol; they would call us to tell us the route they are going to patrol. Now, in every movement we make, the JTF and some staff from the oil companies have their quota too. So that is the game.*

Explaining further on the sources of arms:

*We have arms dealers, people who supply us. Most of them are in the government too. Those top military generals in the Nigerian army. From my personal experience, my boss, who knows them, has contact with these dealers. I had an experience where we went to sea, and anchored somewhere, and when I saw a helicopter dropping two drums my thinking was that it was fuel, but when we went back to camp, I saw it was bullets. So you can see that everybody is involved in this game.*

Otuogidi's experiences reveal a web of interaction involving the oil companies and the state security in facilitating and legitimising activities of militancy. The payments for surveillance contracts partly illustrate a source of competition and cooperation for militia groups to sabotage oil pipelines, as each group is desperate to gain privileged access to oil-company patronage (this competition is explained in detail in section 3). The pervasive nature of oil-bunkering activities in the Niger Delta region continues to raise doubts over the amount spent yearly in securing oil facilities despite a heavy security presence. These doubts, for an interviewee such as Kponi, are attributed to a culture of primitive accumulation, created by the elites of Nigeria's society, where various layers of actors scramble to gain access to oil benefits. The cultural values of Nigeria are viewed as an opportunity for militants to present an emancipatory struggle as a means of survival.

*[...] I would say that what is going on is essentially a kind of primitive accumulation. If you take it from the point of view of the entire Nigerian system, which has been operating in an ideological vacuum anyway, the militants are just trying to get their own part of the National cake*

### **6.2.3. Informal payment of money by State actors to militia leaders**

Informal payments of money by some governors to militant leaders in the Niger Delta region illustrate one aspect of the porous boundaries legitimising militancy. These payments serve a dual purpose: (a) an opportunity for state governors to capitalise on the tension and insecurity in the Niger Delta to increase spending on a “security vote” from the state treasury (these amounts are left solely to the discretion of state governors to spend without questioning), and (b) a means to strengthen relations with key militias during election times. At the level of the public media/political arena, these payments are viewed with mixed reactions. Pato, a key informant, regard the payments made by some state governors to militant leaders as ‘buying peace’, given the fall in oil production, which affected the monthly revenue accruing to oil bearing states. Interestingly, the payments made to militias also induced the appearance of a proliferation of militia camps, as the state political actors gave recognition to militia leaders having strong network ties with other political entrepreneurs or key political actors of the state. According to Pato:

*Apparently, what happened was the fact that when the violence reached a certain level, state governments in the Niger Delta, in an attempt to engage and buy temporary peace, decided to place most militant leaders and commanders on the government payroll. And so when it became clear that several large sums of money were being paid on a monthly basis to these leaders, it created some discomfort when the money did not filter down through the ranks of these militant camps [...] several issues led to the creation of new camps. Those that broke away also got their own payment directly from the various state governments.*

Although the exact amount of money paid to militia leaders is uncertain, field conversations and interviews seem to place it between £20,000 and £30,000 pounds, or their equivalent, in monthly payments to eight key militant leaders in Bayelsa State. These payments were made from 2007 to 2010, with threats to destabilise the state should the payments be stopped. According to Chief Ikpaikpai:

*[...] until now [2012 at time of writing], even after the so-called amnesty, the ex-militants still carry guns at Olugbobiri<sup>33</sup> when guiding their leader, even though the federal government had granted amnesty and mop guns in the creeks [...] a governor who cannot embark on any concrete project can waste over 8.6 billion naira<sup>34</sup> on militants in three years [2007–2010], stalling all development projects in the state. While millions have no jobs and cannot afford their daily bread, one man is collecting 30 million naira<sup>35</sup>. [...] when the effect of the money was weighing heavily on the state government allocation, the governor wanted to stop the payments, but the ex-militant leaders threatened they would make the state ungovernable for him, hence, he continued the payments.*

This narrative of Chief Ikpaikpai shows a demonstration of power and influence within informal governance structures of the state by militias. However, with the regime change in 2010, the payments were stopped by the new political actors, albeit with low-level informal relationships. Also, further analysis indicates the distribution of payments trickled down in uneven patterns within the structures of militant groups. As a case in point, Kavelli, an active militant, discussed payments made by the government to militants, and how these payments were unevenly distributed within militia structures.

*[...] Yes, it is still the government that is paying our salaries while we are in Camp. These are secrets that I am telling you. It is still the government that is paying! I have seen things, I cannot speak about [...] us, the ordinary soldiers, they pay us 70,000 naira<sup>36</sup> but we are the people taking the risks, we die for nothing. Apart from the things we do<sup>37</sup>, the government still pays. You see, I know the amount because my uncle Jack, my father's first cousin, receives a salary of 1.6 million naira<sup>38</sup> from the government every month. The money will not even last a month; because we deal in drugs [...] the government is so corrupt that nobody wants to say the truth...*

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<sup>33</sup> A community in Bayelsa State.

<sup>34</sup> £33 million pounds.

<sup>35</sup> About £20,000–25,000 pounds.

<sup>36</sup> About £270 pounds.

<sup>37</sup> Oil bunkering and kidnapping for ransom.

<sup>38</sup> About £6,000 pounds.

### **6.3. The Significance of 'Youths'**

*The socio-cultural category of youth is more of an ascribed social role than a physical state of being.*  
(Bourdieu et al., 1986: 164)

The influence of youths is fundamental to understanding the dynamics and significance of militancy. Terms such as *restive youths*, *cult gangs* and *militants* are common words used interchangeably in everyday discussion of Niger delta conflict. These terms, which pervade daily life, are the lenses through which violent actions of militants are more generally interpreted. Broadly speaking, categorising the term 'youth' is argued as ambiguous (Rodger, 2008), as it relates more to individual behaviour patterns and activities, rather than one's age. For example, the western world views adulthood from the legally considered age of eighteen-years-old, whilst this may not be the case in developing countries (Rodgers, 2008). Besides, cultural boundaries that separate youth from adult status are subjective and based on individual will or judgment (Mario, 1997). Hence, individuals may not be necessarily considered as adult, until they take on adult responsibility and behaviour patterns (Bourdieu, 1986). It sees the social role played by individuals, as being the deciding factor, rather than a physical state of being.

In the attempt to define 'youth' within context of the Niger Delta, which appears to be mainly categorised by the biological age brackets of 15–45 years, we argue in line with the perspective of Rogers (2008) that age alone does not define youth, but rather dependent on characteristics such as one's ability to network and strengthen bonds with political elites, how dependent one is, or how frustrated one is, are what constitutes 'youth' in Niger Delta. Therefore the frustration amongst youth is intricately embedded in varied forms of violence and insurgency as noted by Gore and Pratten (2003), where youths are used as tools for violence and disorder. Consequently, the characteristics of youth in Niger Delta region became influential in issues of chieftaincy.

#### **6.3.1. Youths and Chieftaincy**

The rise in the number of militia activities is firmly situated within the increasing influence of youths in local communities. This influence has increased predominantly due to the presence of oil in the region. The growing influence of youths is traced to the early 1990s that witnessed inter/intra-community violence, involving the use of small-scale weapons by youths (Isumonan *et al.*, 2005). These wars, along with the patronage relationships of oil companies with community chiefs, are the dominant features for ascendancy of youths. Prior to the 1990s, traditional authority resided solely with the chiefs. Traditional governance was composed of households/compounds with communal ownership of resources (mainly farmland or fishing pots), vested in the hands of family heads as presiding chiefs. These households/compounds constituted a unit of social aggregation in the management of resources, disputes and cohesion, with the chiefs seen to represent communities

with the external world (mainly oil companies and political elites). However, the influence of oil engendered a new twist to the role and responsibilities of local chiefs, situating chiefs in an attractive position. This positioning enabled chiefs to engage directly with political elites and staffs of multinational oil companies on issues of concerning community development, royalties and other forms oil benefits. As a result, chieftaincy became lucrative and fought-after position, to further forge alliances and the fragmentation of communities. Chieftaincy therefore, became competitive and intense, with increasing dissatisfaction amongst youths who now perceived themselves as being marginalised and manipulated by the chiefs.

Youths who felt left out from rewards of oil benefits, began to create their own governable spaces through various forms of violent gangs and organisations for survival. To illustrate this, Kurowei, who used the platform of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) to become a militia leader, had a running battle over chieftaincy with Seibi, who emerged as a militia leader through a cult group known as Icelanders, which later became the Niger Delta Vigilante. It is also claimed that the government of Rivers State had an interest in who became chief, as Kurowei controlled a community in Buguma, so the government hired Seibi to create tension, and intimidate and influence the chieftaincy decision in the government's favour. According to Stone, a key informant interviewed:

*In terms of the community, I can cite an example. In Buguma there was this chieftaincy tussle over who was to become the next Amanayabo of the Kalabari Kingdom and the militants played a major role with gun battles between Kurowei's NDPVF and government-backed Seibi of the NDV in installing the current Amanayabo of Kalabari.*

Stone's narrative shows a micro-level violent conflict intersecting with the broader framework of militancy in the Niger Delta region. The battle between the NDPVF and the government-backed NDV over the chieftaincy at Buguma in Rivers State, a community that is host to major oil companies, shows the complex configuration of chiefs, politicians and militia of sorts, in a scramble for position and recognition to access oil benefits at the local community level. In a similar manner, youth influence over chieftaincy decisions was also witnessed at Okrika, another Ijaw community in Rivers State. Okrika community became notorious from the late 1990s up until 2004, with persistent inter/intra-community warfare, which helped to mop-up arms in the region. The chieftaincy crisis within Okrika community reached the heights of bloody confrontation involving factions of a criminal/cult group, the Bush Boys, backed by the opposition political party, the All-Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and Icelanders (later the NDV), which had support from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Iburo, an eye witness interviewed, reflected on the event, seeing it more in terms of lawlessness, where vandals instilled fear in the community, rather than in terms of militancy.

*A town gripped by such paralysing fear, where men were brutally killed, daughters beaten and raped [...] elders and chiefs that were once respected, revered and seen as custodians of traditions and customs became objects of ridicule and subjected to unimaginable humiliation. In some instances, they were subjected to public flogging for speaking up. Nobody dared stand up to these vandals. Okrika culture and festivities were breached. Funerals and burials became impossible to hold. Okrikans were made to beg and pay money to these vandals against their will in order to bury their dead.*

The influence of youths did not only permeate chieftaincy decisions, but was also present in negotiating contracts or development interventions with oil companies on behalf of communities. The oil companies have also learned the act of protecting and maintaining business activities in line with the challenges they face, on a daily basis, in the region. They patronise youth leaders who demonstrate superior capability in the conquering of territories and threatening of oil facilities. This was evident in my conversation with Bibi, a key informant, who reflected on a case concerning the Ogbungebene community in Bayelsa State. Aggrieved youths of the community, excluded from a pipeline surveillance contract awarded to a youth leader who controlled the area, went on a rampage, threatening the community chief and destroying oil pipelines, presenting the damage as spillage in order to demand compensation payment.

### **6.3.2 Youths and Cultism**

*Politicians have not only learnt the act of using police and other security agencies against the people; they have also perfected the art of using cultism against society.*

Cultism is linked to the ascendancy and influence of youths in the Niger Delta region. In broad terms, the definition of *cultism* is ambiguous, and it is not this author's intention to engage in the expansive debate on defining the meaning of *cult/cultism* in this research. However, for the purpose of clarity, the concept of *cult/cultism* refers to political and commercial groups, where members relate to certain values and practices (Langone, 1993). It is characterised by dependency, loyalty and protection from leaders, with a mechanism for reward and punishment. Within the Niger Delta, cult gangs can easily transform into militias by relabelling in order to suit prevailing conditions. Such conditions are economic and political in nature, and often linked to use of gangs for violence at elections. These youths/cult gangs, to a large extent, represent a social process of transformation from criminality to militancy, and vice-versa, that further blur lines of identity, criminality and militancy in the Niger Delta region. The gangs are united by a common interest and territorial boundary, and found mainly in urban slums known as 'watersides' residential areas or rural communities, with affiliations to other social organisations having secret initiations and rites in universities.

Cult gangs are strongly patronised by politicians and governments in the Niger Delta region, which helps in creating a fluid transition from criminal to militant, and vice-versa. For instance, cult gangs in Rivers State, such as Bush Boys, Icelanders, Greenlanders, Dey Gbam, Dey Well, the Italians, KKK, Angels, etc. were dominant criminal gangs with territorial areas of control. These groups later became submerged into conquered rival factions or through cooperation, into two prominent and widely known militant groups, known today as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force in 2001, and the Niger Delta Vigilante in 2003. Cult/criminal activities were an established feature in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Various cult gangs had a reputation for stealing phones, committing assault and robbery, and engaging in frequent shootings. These activities rendered the state capital completely helpless, as people were forced to be in-doors as early as 5pm. According to Stone, the cult groups terrorised the city in ways that grounded social and economic activities, making the government look incompetent in handling the rising insecurity in the state.

*At some point in Port Harcourt, there was a lot of cult-gang activity, people not being able to move freely on the streets, and if you went to some areas of Port Harcourt, you would be stripped of your possessions; there was much crime and the government was quiet about it. It was as if the government could not do anything about what was going on in society.*

Relations between cult gangs and political elites provided an easy transition from cult gang to militant. According to Alaere:

*In Rivers State, we had militants who had once been part of cult groups. Before this, cult groups came from groups of political thugs [...] when they were political thugs, created by politicians and political parties, their business was to get whoever was in the opposition out of the way, or be in charge of security during elections, writing the results because nobody was allowed to vote.*

She further explained about the protection cult gangs received from politicians, which enabled them to intimidate and perpetuate crime in the state.

*[...] they began to form oppressive groups to oppress the common man who owns a shop, knowing that if anything went wrong, my commander can call my general, who is in touch with the government, and the government can get in touch with the commissioner of police and I would be released. Or my general worked with the commissioner of police during elections, he knows him one-on-one, so I cannot be put in jail.*

Similarly, leaders of cult gangs are paid by drug traffickers to provide security protection. These leaders, in turn, paid settlement fees to the district head of police in the area (Peterside, 2007). This settlement to police made it impossible for these area to get raided, thereby, giving an opportunity for other crimes to perpetuate in these area. Therefore, instances of raids were rare, and if it happens, it is mainly linked to the non-payment of settlement fees or the greed of cult leaders. The use of cult gangs by political elites was evident at the July 2002 elections in Bayelsa State. For instance, Morris alleged, the campaign manager of the ruling People's Democratic Party used the Isonguforo cult group to intimidate people and rig the election in favour of the ruling party. The clash with a rival cult group, the Isenasawos, which was backed by the opposition party, left a number of youths dead.

A key theme clearly emerging from this section is opportunism, created from an interlocking web of interactions of political actors, which tended to give legitimacy and recognition to militancy. The section describes the process of formal and informal relationships, at various levels, to describe the features that give significance to militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It clearly demonstrates a proliferation of new forms of struggle in which every subject position is constituted within an unstable structure (Pichardo, 1997). Moreover, the section point to how the success of militancy is attributable to opportunity structures, made available from political transitions to democratic rule, which open up access to power shifts in the ruling alignment and the availability of influential allies (Tilly, 2003). By regime change, we mean how the interaction of government and its political actors provide an opening for those actors poor in resources to use in the creation of movements (Tarrow, 1994). Thus, the functional roles of political elites in instigating violence at elections in order to fulfil political ambitions with the militias/youth/cult gangs, coupled with the lucrative avenue of oil-bunkering activities that provide resources for mobilisation, are the mechanisms for the significant rise in number of militants in the region.

#### **6.4. MEND: A pseudo community**

This section explores the unity and fragmentation of militias, under a common platform of collective identity, as members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Specifically, it aims to give insight to MEND's build up and how it evolved in terms of its internal politics/evolution, its external pressures and opportunism and combination of external and internal pressures. One argument of this research is that militancy cannot be isolated from the cultural environment in which it is embedded. They evolve in response to the changing political opportunities, which impact differently on individual and collective identities of militant groups. These identities seem more personal than ideological, even though they frequently couch differences in ideological terms to meet particular ends. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta represents a clear example of a pseudo community that comes together at certain times to act as an

external representation of communities. It makes claims and demands on behalf of communities in a formal manner, and acts at other times as an individual entity in order to compete for resource benefit. Their collective identity/action only serves as an ornamental platform in legitimising militia action. Viewed broadly, the unity and fragmentation of militants relate to the principle of fusion and fission (Evans-Pritchard, 1940) in explaining how social unity and differentiation between segments result from different forms of violence.

In analysing the fusion and fission of militia, we can assume that collective identity defines the boundaries of a social movement, as only those who share the same belief and sense of belonging may provoke collective action. It does not necessarily imply homogeneity, as individuals within groups may not act in the overall interest of the group (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). In addition, the collective identity of militants in the Niger Delta can be categorised in line with Whitter's (1995) idea, as people with distinct problems have a common platform of shared knowledge of their environment. They construct strategic action, which is seen as a subjective process of conscious strategic decision-making (Moore, 1999). Also, militancy in the Niger Delta region goes with varied forms of labelling and familiar forms of actions that send a message. It constructs a prototype of actions based on previous experiences by adopting a particular form of action (Tilly, 1995). These tactical identities send an unspoken message that says: "we are people, who do these sorts of things, in this particular way" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), which defines the identity of members themselves.

#### **6.4.1. MEND: Evolution**

MEND emerged in late 2006, following a series of individual fragments of militant groups engaging in attacks on oil facilities for reasons that are mainly economic. Although the coalition of militias which emerged as MEND is linked to agitation and protest, it also illustrates coalition building. However, some key events, such as the political tension which led to the imprisonment of Kurowei, leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, and Emomotimi, a commander of MEND and former governor of Bayelsa State, along with the government's heavy deployment of military troops in the Niger Delta, spurred the need for militia coalition. For instance, Otuan, a key activist, who reviewed the coalition of militant groups comprising leaders of the Movement for Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationalities (MOSIEND), the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Arogbo Freedom Fighters (AFF) and the NDPVF, points to the need for coordination with a strategy of shadow leadership, given the disorganised form of action by varied militant groups, and the increasing threat of federal government attacks on communities in the Niger Delta region.

*The key issue is the imprisonment of our kinsmen. The imprisonment of our Governor and Kurowei was motivated by President Obasanjo. You can see from our encounter with the Nigerian army after Operation Climate Change that we need to change tactics, since everybody now claims to be in the struggle, doing different things.*

In general, MEND's coordinated attacks from 2006 until the period of amnesty in July 2009, accounted for about 300 deaths and for 119 oil workers being held hostage<sup>39</sup>. Its actions within this period drastically reduced the daily oil production from 2.6 million barrels of oil per day to just 700,000 barrels per day<sup>40</sup>, despite the \$3 billion dollars spent by the federal government and oil companies yearly on security to protect oil facilities in the Niger Delta region. This spending obviously shows that MEND's success cannot be based only on its strategy and tactics, or display of skills with regards to the use of weaponry, but also depends on the boundaries of relationships, within an antagonistic cooperation, where threats of militias create opportunities of cooperation with political actors and oil companies. The ideology behind the attacks of MEND appears to be a front-stage political performance, eliciting mixed responses from interviewees. For instance, in MEND's first series of attacks on Shell Petroleum Development Company facility, and the abduction of four foreign oil workers on 6 January, 2006, the spokesperson Jomo Gbomo conveyed political reasons for its action in the public media<sup>41</sup> by reciting the ideology of resource control with demands for the release of the NDPVF leader and Chief D. S. P. Alamiyeseigha. Both men are Ijaws, and were held for treason and misappropriation of state funds, respectively. According to Jomo Gbomo:

*Our ultimate goal is the control of oil wealth in the Niger Delta by its indigenes. This we desire to achieve through the use of arms, as fifty years of dialogue has borne no fruit.*

Whilst reiterating the ideology of resource control and ethnic identity to draw public sympathy in legitimising militia action, the federal government's response was reprisal attacks by the Joint Military Task Force on oil-bunkering areas or communities suspected to be under the control of militia leaders. These government attacks, intensified with counter-attacks from MEND, resulted in an increased number of hostages, as mentioned by Otuan, a key activist:

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<sup>39</sup> Niger Delta Technical Committee Report, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Official records from Nigeria's special adviser on amnesty for Niger Delta militants.

<sup>41</sup> *The Dispatch*, newspaper report, 9 January, 2006.

*[...] MEND's first incident of kidnapping was on the 6th of January, 2006, as a result of Chief D. S. P Alamiyeseigha's <sup>42</sup> incarceration in the United Kingdom. It was MEND's demands that secured the release of Alamiyeseigha and the NDPVF leader [...] but after the government agreed with MEND to release four foreign workers, the same government made a massive attack [...] which angered the boys, who then went and kidnapped sixteen more foreigners as hostages. So that was the start. The original groups that did this were using hostages as human shields to win political points and not for ransom purposes.*

Otuan believes MEND's actions to have been political, as opposed to criminal, a view that coincides with Pato's, another key informant, who also insists MEND's actions were not intended to be violent, but to express political demands, even though both interviewees could not separate the militia's political demands from those involved in kidnapping for ransom. According to Pato:

*Take, for instance, the activities of MEND. It was not interested in taking hostages for ransom, wanting instead to drive home a political point, but some saw it as a way of making money from the process, which is basically what has happened until now. The real key issues of the Niger Delta, even as the government implements the Amnesty programme, are in the background.*

For militia foot soldiers like Kavelli, the unified platform and actions of MEND resulted from government attacks on oil bunkering. He believes oil bunkering is legal and not stealing, the perception of militia leaders which is passed on to their followers to discourage hidden agendas. MEND's actions, which appeared as front-stage political demands and back-stage economic concerns, partly inform the processes and conditions at various levels of militia contention. On one side of the coin, MEND leans on the ideology of self-determination and resource control with political demands for the release of its kinsmen, and on the other side, it kidnaps for ransom and to protect oil-bunkering activities. This is a view Otuogidi, an active militant, seems to agree with from his own experience:

*Actually, MEND's aim as a body is freedom fighting. We are fighting to control our natural resources, but at the end of the day, I discovered that this is not what we are really fighting for. Everybody is fighting for his own selfish interest.*

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<sup>42</sup> A former governor of Bayelsa State who fled Nigeria but returned to face trial on corruption charges.

These mixed responses refer to the dynamics of contention and shifting ideologies, a shadow of reality, which blurs the lines of public discussion in terms of understanding militia action in seeking justice and self-determination, on behalf of impoverished communities in the Niger Delta region. However, the collective actions of MEND, viewed from a series of attacks on oil facilities between 6 January, 2006 and December, 2012, and its engagement with government and political elites, opened up a new vista of opportunity for militant groups. This time, there was a phased implementation of the amnesty programme for militant groups across the Niger Delta region. As pointed out earlier in section 2.1 on elections, Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan's visit to the dreaded Camp 5 on 28 June, 2007, signalled the start of the peace process and new relationships with militia leaders. By 2 July, 2007, the Vice-President inaugurated the Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC) to mediate between MEND and the Presidency. This historical development paved the way for the process of granting amnesty on 25 June, 2009. The amnesty programme, which involved disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and the reintegration of militant groups, also became a process which brought recognised militia leaders into an informal form of brokerage, with the opportunity to hoard resource benefits.

#### **6.4.2. MEND: External Pressures**

*What we have now, littered around the corridors of power, are loud mouths seeking relevance and big mouths spewing threats [...] What they all forget is that the population of snitches has also increased geometrically.*

The government's introduction of amnesty into the dynamics of militancy further illustrates the shifting ideology of self-determination. It highlights the process of bringing militants into formal and informal macro-structures of resource benefit, which opens a space for key militia leaders to access mainstream reward distribution. The government introduction of amnesty to militants, alludes to idea of control, regulation and management (Wood, 1985), wherein a policy agenda is established within structures of political discourse. In this particular case, establishing a policy of managing and controlling militants through a regulatory programme of amnesty, within the context of power and collective action. In alluding to Wood's (1985) labelling in development policy, what can be inferred here, in regard to amnesty, are expressions of power at varied levels of personal and interpersonal interactions. It also informs how policy benefits of institutions or government are constructed and sustained, which in turn raises concerns of conditionality, differentiation and dependency. Moreover, the amnesty policy tells how structures of formal and informal interaction, over access to resources (Adger *et al.*, 2005b), are based on the exercise of power through resistance and cooperation. These accounts illustrates to how the bureaucratic process and procedures of amnesty announced by Nigeria's President in May, 2007, appear to have two distinct

but interconnected components which determine a militant's access to oil wealth. These are (a) the policy of amnesty towards individual militants (leaders and foot soldiers), and (b) the policy targeting senior MEND commanders through special package reward in the form of government contracts.

These policies serve as a dragnet to keep both militant leaders and their followers under the control of government politicians in exchange for awards of contracts to militant leaders and training/education programme for followers. Thus, the regulation and point of entry into an amnesty welfare programme requires being a militant either through family, friendship ties, or network to a militant 'General' Therefore, the first condition for the amnesty reward distribution system for both militant Generals and followers (MEND) is to disarm within sixty to ninety days (June–October, 2009). This condition also include signing accord with Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC), a government agency mediating on behalf of Nigeria's President. Prior to the granting of amnesty on 25 June, 2009, the federal government under the presidency of Umaru Musa Yar Adua had invited MEND commanders for talks and negotiations at the nation's capital, Abuja. Unfortunately, he died in early 2010, before the actual implementation of the amnesty programme began under Dr Goodluck Jonathan, who took over as Nigeria's president. However, the process of the amnesty programme between MEND and the federal government from June, 2009 to late 2011, led to pronouncements, opportunities, hoarding and splits within MEND. A case in point is the oil pipeline attack by MEND splinter group on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, 2009. The group mentioned delayed talks in implementing the amnesty programme, and infrastructural development in the Niger Delta region as reasons for the attack.

*The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta can confirm that a warning strike involving thirty-five fighters armed with assault rifles, rocket launchers and heavy-calibre machine guns was carried out at 0200 hrs today<sup>43</sup> on major Shell/Chevron crude pipelines. Whilst wishing the President speedy recovery, a situation where the future of the Niger Delta is tied to the health and wellbeing of one man is unacceptable.*

According to MEND's statement in the media<sup>44</sup>, its spokesperson Jomo Gbomo accused the NDPRC of using the health of the late President YarAdua to delay talks in order to exploit the amnesty process and offer bribes to faction militant leaders in the form of contracts. Interestingly, the statement below also inform the development of 'political entrepreneurs' exploiting the process of mediation.

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<sup>43</sup> *The Punch*, newspaper report, 11 December, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> *The Punch*, newspaper report, 11 December, 2009.

*[...] Abbe and his cohorts<sup>45</sup>, rather than encourage the presidency to address core issues as demanded by true agitators for justice in the Niger Delta, is still busy inaugurating one dubious committee after another to continue stealing funds allocated for the development of the Niger Delta. We also note the government has been offering bribes to militants who surrendered their birth rights under the amnesty programme in the form of contracts.*

Apparently, the statement was made from a faction within MEND's high command which emerged following the death of late President YarAdua. The disagreement over the processes of amnesty within the ranks of MEND induced a split into two main factions: the Emomotimi faction and the Oporoza faction. The former had close ties with the late President YarAdua, whilst the latter had close ties with President Goodluck Jonathan. These alliances caused the attacks and the accusation of the bribe of a contract to the Oporoza faction, which seemed to exclude the Emomotimi faction during President Jonathan's regime. In addition, signs of disagreement emerged when the Oporoza faction thought that Emomotimi, who was earlier considered MEND's spokesperson and leader prior to President YarAdua's death, had used his close relationship with the late president to manipulate the process of negotiation to his advantage. He was accused of hijacking the negotiation process without due consultation with other members of MEND. The alleged hijack of the amnesty process, following a meeting with late President YarAdua on 1 October, 2009, was rebuffed in a media<sup>46</sup> statement accredited to the Emomotimi faction of MEND:

*[...] resolving the Niger Delta crisis is not a tea-party affair that should be left in the hands of fighters who fought in the creeks; it is a matter for our intellectuals who are schooled and grounded in the dynamics of the struggle of how to handle such things.*

Emomotimi was referring to the Oporoza splinter group as not being educated enough to sit at the negotiation table. In response to Emomotimi's statement, the Oporoza group also issued its counter statement below...

*We generals in the Niger Delta struggle to know that we are all school drop-outs, who have signed our death warrants and sacrificed our lives for the Niger Delta liberation. We know we cannot speak big grammar, but no individual should feel larger than life with the chains of university degrees hijacking the struggle of our lives.*

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<sup>45</sup> Nigeria's Defence Minister and members of the Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Reconciliation Committee (NDPCRC).

<sup>46</sup> *Vanguard*, newspaper report, 22 November, 2009.

During my field conversations, I observed that most militants in the Niger Delta region lack any formal education, which they also admit. Most could hardly read or write. This goes to show that the mobilisation and success of a movement do not necessarily depend on how well-educated one is, rather, the knowledge and values inherited from the environment in which individuals live in is key. It is what informs the strategy and tactics and repeated forms of actions in the region. In addition, the internal pressures of MEND, which lead to splinter groups, given the opportunities introduced by the government, also, illustrate the strength of relationship between militants and political elites. This is shown from the print media newspaper<sup>47</sup> in which a splinter group of MEND pledge support for President Jonathan elections in 2011 with threats of intimidation against any opposition.

*We have all unanimously endorsed that the President is our brother and leader. We will not hesitate to undermine any element of undue opposition against him. Finally, we are going to collaborate with the Ijaw Youth Council in putting together institutions to ensure free and fair elections in Ijaw land. We are ready for politicians who think that they can get away with rigging the elections in 2011 and 2012.*

The official amnesty to militants, informally strengthens the relationship with the Presidency and key political actors in the Niger Delta region. For militant leaders, the amnesty programme offered an opportunity to gain recognition and access to oil wealth. For foot soldiers, the amnesty became a sort of social benefit, where they began to receive monthly stipends. Consequently, the amnesty programme, offered an opportunity whereby militias would have remained excluded from mainstream political structure and culture of oil governance in the country. Nevertheless, President Goodluck Jonathan had control of most of the key militant leaders in the Niger Delta region, through the instrument of the welfare package for militants. This also laid a strong support base for his 2011 presidential re-election.

#### **6.4.3. MEND: External and Internal Pressures: Differentiation and Exclusion**

The split within MEND were born out of dissatisfaction amongst MEND's high commanders over the process of negotiation, as well as over some gaining special treatment in terms of contracts awarded by federal government. The government applied a combination of formal and informal processes of engagement and negotiation in its amnesty programme. Thus generals with strong ties and relationships with politicians and the presidency were wealthier than other *generals*. Moreover, a feud within MEND, which witnessed factional attacks on oil facilities and kidnapping, is linked to complaints concerning the government's grant of a pipeline surveillance contract to Oporoza's

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<sup>47</sup> Punch Newspaper 23/03/2010

MEND. A case of such factional attack was evident on 7 January, 2010, in which the Emomotimi faction of MEND accused President Goodluck Jonathan of doing nothing for the people of the Niger Delta region.

*Our attack on oil installations is imminent, seeing that the government of Goodluck Jonathan has nothing to offer the people of the Niger Delta.*

Apparently, these events were happening around the time of President YarAdua's illness which eventually led to his death in early March, 2010. With Vice-President Goodluck, from an Ijaw ethnic minority in the Niger Delta, taking over the reins of power as president, this meant new informal alliances with key militia leaders, whilst those with strong ties to late President YarAdua would wane. It also meant that the 'special agreement' President YarAdua had with militants prior to the process of amnesty implementation, had to be reviewed in favour of his new allies. These soon became evident as the Emomotimi faction of MEND struck on 7 January, 2010.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the splinter group leaders of MEND, never went to war over differences in the processes of amnesty implementation; rather, each splinter groups carried out attacks on oil pipelines as a means of gaining recognition and where they are then called to federal capital for negotiations. Another case in point is that which took place on 30 July, 2010, six months after its earlier attack. In a media report<sup>49</sup> following the Emomotimi MEND's attack at Agip oil facility in Bayelsa State, spokesperson Gbomo Jomo showed interest in engaging in dialogue with the federal government, whilst framing its actions around resource control.

*[...] whilst we prefer dialogue to armed conflict, MEND will not participate in aimless talks that avoid the core issue of resource control. We will shun any gathering that beats about the bush and any meeting that does not deal with the root issue that created the problem on the agenda. Our fight is not for Jonathan's presidency or for social amenities, but for the recovery of our stolen land. Our plans are not tailored to fit into the political agenda of any individual, but for the emancipation of the people of the Niger Delta.*

Whilst these attacks were going on, the government, on the other hand, was making attempts to lure aggrieved militias into the amnesty programme, despite the deadline given for all militants to disarm. The arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Emomotimi in South Africa, following the explosions that occurred during Nigeria's fiftieth anniversary, led to the few remaining factions left being finally drawn into the amnesty welfare programme. In addition, the grievances of

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<sup>48</sup> Ijaw nation, 9 October, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> National newspaper, 30 July, 2010.

those side-lined after welfare package of the amnesty were vividly described in a media comment accredited to a JTF commander in the region.

*[...] a close look at the Niger Delta situation today will reveal that some key former militant commanders and a few lucky apprentices are now well-established businessmen. They have gone legitimate with loot garnered during the creek years. They now live in splendour and affluence. Similarly, the on-going rumble in the creeks has been orchestrated by former apprentice militants who feel left behind by their superiors and who also want to be Generals (Antigha, 2010)*

The resultant coordinated attacks on oil facilities by disgruntled splinter groups of MEND, following the process of amnesty implementation, highlight how key militia leaders with strong ties to the political establishment have gained recognition and wealth, at the expense of other militants. For example, Oporoza, a well-known militia leader, was allegedly awarded a pipeline surveillance contract worth \$103.4 million dollars<sup>50</sup> through a front company known as Global West Vessel Specialist Limited. This seems to have caused anger amongst members of Oporoza's militia group, who felt excluded, as the benefits did not filter down to lower levels of the group, a view expressed by Firstborn, a commander within Oporoza's militia:

*We left our families and homes to live in the creeks as commanders of MEND, living like animals for the purpose of emancipating our people from marginalisation by the federal government, before embracing amnesty, but Oporoza and his cohorts have refused to allow us to benefit from the struggle.*

Bowei, a member of Oporoza's militia, also pointed out the process of exclusion from the amnesty benefit, which was blamed on Oporoza.

*[...] when the amnesty programme was proclaimed by the then President YarAdua, we made every effort to convince Oporoza, but he was obstinate. We were able to persuade him to accept the amnesty offered by the federal government, but to our dismay, he was flown to Abuja and back to Gbaramatu for official disarming without consulting us.*

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<sup>50</sup> *Daily Independent*, newspaper report, 24 February, 2011.

Whilst internal wrangling from the preferential treatment given to Oporoza caused discomfort amongst members of Oporoza's militia structure, a MEND splinter group, the Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF), led by Gojo, also felt short-changed, as a General of the same ranking as Oporoza threatened to resume attacks<sup>51</sup> following failed negotiations with the NDPCRC mediation team.

*[...] we accepted the federal government amnesty without negotiation [...] we therefore declare that we are no longer part of the fraudulent amnesty which is full of deceit and betrayal [...] we have resolved to resume fresh attacks and this time we will operate on land and sea, and we urge all foreign diplomatic missions to call home their nationals in the Niger Delta region immediately, as we cannot guarantee their safety. Soldiers of the Joint Task Force should stay away from oil wellheads and our area of operations, as we may be more violent than during the earlier first phase of the oil war.*

The renewed threats of attack also indicate instances of opportunity hoarding where political elites and militia leaders with stronger ties manipulated the amnesty process to their own advantage, whilst coordinating affairs on behalf of other militant groups. Thus, the NDLF threat, which was later carried out, was similar in sequence and ideology, and known to government and fellow militias, to Tilly's (2003) ideas of contention. Interestingly, the episodes of militia actions reflect similar patterns, with the usual statements portraying them as emancipatory struggles with hidden agenda. The desire for militia action, as stated below, is, however, a legitimate smokescreen for less reputable agendas of militant groups in the Niger Delta region. Nonetheless, the threats and renewed threats from aggrieved members of MEND gradually came to an end with the imprisonment of Emomotimi and the death of Gojo, who died in a gun battle with the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) around Ayakoromo community, which was also completely destroyed during the raid.

*From his actions so far, President Jonathan does not understand why MEND struck. This government believes the fight in the Niger Delta and the loss of thousands of combatants and civilians was solely to do with the lack of roads, schools and other social amenities in the Niger Delta. MEND is fighting to reclaim the land of the Niger Delta stolen over fifty years ago by oil companies and certain collaborating Nigerians.*

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<sup>51</sup> *The Guardian*, 21 November, 2010.

These performances show how a diverse understanding, within a fluid and cohesive clandestine network, of the exchange of patronage, helps in shaping and sustaining militancy in the region. They reveal a shifting in the framing and transformations of self-determination and resource control to personalised agendas—a view succinctly noted by an interviewee who simply gave his name as Shine ya eye, during field conversation:

*Can you imagine the MEND war-horse being hinged on an insignificant amnesty programme? I thought MEND fought for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta people. Everything has suddenly narrowed down to the amnesty allocation of agitation.*

The ideological shifts at play behind militia actions are further shown in a media statement made by the military commander of the JTF in Niger Delta region. He highlights his experiences by describing militancy as an enterprise within various networks and relationships:

*[...] a small but powerful group of individuals within the region view the JTF as human-rights abusers and war criminals. These allegations are intended to hoodwink the federal government to demobilise the JTF, so that they can have their way. The reality is that this powerful cartel is the group behind the Niger Delta crisis. They employ all kinds of smear tactics to achieve their aim. This group is a blend of professionals, such as lawyers, journalists, businessmen, retired public servants and politicians, and non-professionals, such as ex-militants. They are people the Niger Delta least suspect could be part of their problem. The so-called militant struggle is an enterprise masterminded by these powerful individuals and their underlings. (Antigha, 2010).*

#### **6.5. MEND: Exploitation and Opportunity hoarding**

On the other hand, there is recurring evidence of exploitation and opportunity hoarding as witnessed by a number of militia foot soldiers, interviewed regarding amnesty implementation for militants. At the informal state and individual level are various procedures showing different interpretations of events that emphasise differentiation, and the categorisation of needs, aspirations and roles. At this level, militia leaders exaggerate the number of their followers, reduce the amount meant to be paid to them, or delay payments to members in order to enhance their dependency. This was evident from field conversations and interviews with some militia members. For instance, Kariowei, a free-lance militant who moves from one militia camp to another, disputes the official figure of 26,356 militants across the Niger Delta. Although without a precise number, he maintains

the real figure is far less than what the public has been made to believe. His view supports that of Otuogidi, another militant, who also questions this figure, revealing how militia leaders can take advantage of the amnesty programme for their own selfish interests.

*[...] like in Bayelsa State, I know we are not more than, say, twenty camps, but the record they presented is about sixty-something camps [...] like in my camp we are not more than twenty-seven members, but when the approval list of amnesty camps came, my boss presented 150 members. Now also there was a procedure during the amnesty, where passport photographs are required, and my boss brought in all his relations and friends who are not from the barracks (camps). They are not barrack boys, so when they cut their money, they cannot complain.*

Although Otuogidi's camp is relatively small compared to other camps of militia leaders, his revelation provides a general picture of opportunity hoarding from the processes of reward distribution for beneficiaries of the amnesty programme. In addition, Otuogidi doubts if the amnesty will work, seeing how militia leaders gain status, recognition and wealth which does not filter down the ranks, despite fighting for resource control as claimed. He perceives the amnesty reward process as rather heightening violence during the time to come, basing his assertion on shared hidden secrets, and the strategy and tactics of militia actions in the creeks. According to Otuogidi:

*[...] most of our leaders now have big cars and big buildings, while we are still like that [...] so this amnesty thing, I do not think it will work. It will not work because if, today, I have served you as my boss and I know all your secrets, the source of your spiritual power, where you get your arms, and I know I have been working for you and you are not doing right by me [...] we do not benefit at all because when the federal government approves 65,000 naira<sup>52</sup> there is an arrangement between our Ogas<sup>53</sup> and the banks, so they can still cut our money. Out of that 65,000 naira, they pay some people 30,000<sup>54</sup>, others 20,000 naira<sup>55</sup> or even 15,000 naira<sup>56</sup>, however much they like.*

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<sup>52</sup> About £250 pounds.

<sup>53</sup> Militia leaders.

<sup>54</sup> About £120 pounds.

<sup>55</sup> About £76 pounds.

<sup>56</sup> About £58 pounds.

## **6.6. Competition: Fission of Militias**

The exercise of patronage exchange often triggers disputes between splinter groups and social groups, when they compete for social power and material resources (Devine, 1999). According to Devine, the size or number of a group is fundamental to leaders in order to maintain power and security; thus, leaders devise strategies to recruit as many followers as possible. Faction leaders require power to compete with other similarly organised groups in order to influence or gain control over material resources. These ideas explain how militia splinter groups appear in the Niger Delta region, where militias compete for territorial space. Based on this author's experiences as an Ijaw and field researcher, there are two ways in which factions are expressed by militants themselves. A faction is normally referred to as a splinter group or groups, with the same characteristics, that often compete with each other for territory in order to control some political or economic activity in that area. Secondly, members of militant groups are identified by the names of leaders and the communities which these leaders influence and control.

Complementary to the collective actions of militant groups are the individual struggles for physical space known as camps. These camps are situated in between communities, and range from loosely dispersed to tightly coordinated networks of militia groups, hidden in the swamps or creeks of the region. Militant leaders in the Niger Delta region are recognised by the territorial spaces they occupy. These spaces are necessary for leaders to label themselves as Generals and gain recognition from government and oil companies. More so, the boundaries of these camps are often tense, members fight and kill for supremacy, or split in separate ways. Militia leaders that are better resourced (guns, money, members) tend to control more governable spaces. This displays how humans, as interacting agents, are differently disposed and unequally resourced within the boundaries of specific networks (Crossley, 2002). In this section, using cases of family/community and friendship ties this author will illustrate how these splits occur and how militias gain control of particular territory.

### **6.6.1. Territorial Controls: Family/Community Ties and Proxy Wars**

Individual militias identify with family/community ties in contested territories. These communities are mainly oil-bearing and host oil company operations. The idea behind these identities is to draw community support in mobilising followers from the immediate community, to gain recognition to "represent" the community internally, and to award contracts from oil companies. Whether feared or loved, militia leadership for territories are fiercely contested, often putting oil communities into positions of constant tension and fear of attack over territorial control. Otuan, a key interviewee, points out how these territories are contested through family/community ties, whilst also

highlighting how most militia leaders in Bayelsa State were once apprentices to Oporoza in Delta State (see Figure 9).

*[...] Shuajo<sup>57</sup> left Oporoza for his mother's community to open a camp at Ikebiri. De yong<sup>58</sup>, also from Oporoza, held sway in his community and controlled that area, and Fishbone<sup>59</sup> had a camp in his community area. So it was more of a community or clan-based thing, except for Oporoz who controlled more communities and extensions.*

Curiously, Otuan repeatedly mentions Oporoza in his interview responses, revealing strong and friendly ties between militants at particular times. Oporoza represents a central figure of identity amongst militants in the Niger Delta region. His Camp 5 in Delta State appears to be the training ground for most militia leaders of today, who were given support from Oporoza, in terms of boats, guns and foot soldiers, in opening up camps at their respective communities. However, the opening of camps is contested keenly between those coming from the 'outside', but who identify themselves as belonging to a particular community through parentage, with already existing militia/youths in these communities. This gives a picture of "outsider-insider" community battles of either resistance or cooperation, where militias that are better resourced gain control of conquered territories, as aptly noted by Buluowei, a high-ranking militia commander. According to Buluowei, existing community youths who feel oppressed by pipeline contracts awarded to "outsiders" often fight back to chase them out.

*At first, communities who have oil wells and pipelines were not in charge of the security contracts. They later discovered that the money which had been made from these oil wells was in the hands of other militant leaders that were not from their community. They would now find arms to chase out those controlling the security contract in their community.*

*If one man has about fifty to a hundred guns, he immediately opens a camp to fight other camps for a security contract. Like Gobos<sup>60</sup> and Continent<sup>61</sup>. Continent was the chief security officer in charge of the pipelines in Gobos' community and other territories; Gobos had to fight back to take control of the pipeline contract in his community.*

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<sup>57</sup> Militia leader in Bayelsa State operating under his own name as territorial identity.

<sup>58</sup> Militia leader.

<sup>59</sup> Militia leader.

<sup>60</sup> Militant leader.

<sup>61</sup> Militant leader.

The ability to access resources (guns and money) largely determines the opening of camps and in Buluwei's opinion, militia leaders that are better resourced and connected to other militias or political actors control more governable territories. This is irrespective of community support. In similar situations, the proximity of camps within the same territories can create problems of identifying boundaries of control. Such tightly clustered boundaries induce tensions and power tussles over pipeline contracts. Buluwei recalls a case in which Continent and Shuajo, who once had friendly ties, later battled for supremacy in order to expand territories.

*When Continent opened his camp at the entrance between Korokorosei, Ikiebiri and Ologbobiri, he started negotiating with Octopus<sup>62</sup> to be given security contracts for all the pipelines and wells in that territory. While Continent was making his connections, Shuajo arrived from Oporoza's<sup>63</sup> camp in Delta State and opened a camp immediately at Ikiebiri. His camp was called Kurukurubou. Shuajo started operating as a camp owner along with Continent in the same territory. Again, Isaac<sup>64</sup> also came back to his community Ogboinbiri to open a camp to rival Continent in the same community.*

Buluwei recalls cases of how militants collaborated to oust the supremacy of existing leaders in particular communities. Again, we see that members, who are resourced through other networks and connections, often return to their own communities to fight for territorial spaces of control.

*During that time, Gobos, Gidiboy and Fitpro<sup>65</sup> came to open a camp, attacking and killing Prince Dogilo to take over his territory. The trio of Gobos, Gidiboy and Fitpro later had a disagreement over control for supremacy, which led to the killing of Fitpro by Gobos, who now gained control of all the territories around that area.*

Other instances of splits arising from the ambitions of trusted commanders of militia leaders are also mentioned in the course of field interviews with Buluwei. His response highlights the fluidity of militia relationships and how disloyalty is spurred on by greed or the frustrations of individual members of militia groups in Niger Delta region. It also reveals the patronage received from oil companies that also play safe in securing its oil facilities and operations from being attacked. Oil companies tend to give recognition and award pipeline surveillance contracts based on

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<sup>62</sup> An entrepreneur who works with the oil companies.

<sup>63</sup> A militant leader.

<sup>64</sup> A militant leader.

<sup>65</sup> These are all criminal gang leaders who later became militant leaders.

the supremacy of militia leaders. This recycles processes that sustain and give significance to militancy.

*This struggle started when Lodo was in charge of security of all pipelines and wellheads around Soku. Then Dogilo was working with him. Then came a time Prince Lodo authorised Dogilo to take charge of some areas, since the coverage was too vast for Lodo to handle. They divided the area into two. After the division, Dogilo became arrogant; he no longer respected his master Lodo. They both clashed and Dogilo was chased out of the territory. Then Dogilo had to relocate to Okigbene, his community in Bayelsa State.*

However, despite internal tensions, frustrations and wars amongst militants in the Niger Delta region, militias cooperate amongst themselves. This unity and fragmentation can be argued as a source of organisational strength and unity of discourse, which presents a common front. For instance, Pato, a key activist in the Niger Delta, argues that although militias disagree amongst themselves, they often have common concerns which bring them together.

*There were rivalries, but they also had common concerns. There were rivalries, there were misunderstandings but I think that it also had to come to the point where they also have to come together. Some had areas of influence, especially areas of bunkering, that they were engaged in. The areas of common interest were probably more than the areas of division.*

Commander Otuogidi, an active militant, elaborated on these areas of common collaboration amongst militants, in terms of mobilising resources, such as food supplies, money and logistics, as part of their strategies and tactics.

*Yes, we cooperate from time to time. Like my boss, who sometimes goes to Gobos' camp to collect our salaries, fuel, food and other things Gobos was helping our camp. Any operation we go to, Gobos is aware of, so whatever comes up, he has his own share too. Like our monthly allowances which come from Gobos. These allowances are from the oil companies and the state government.*

Otuogidi further explains how militants coordinate and network in building up resources from their collective activities/actions in the Niger Delta region.

*The big camps have more soldiers and sophisticated guns, which the smaller camps sometimes borrow for their field operations. We have some understanding, where one camp would kidnap expatriates and transfer them to another camp in another location for custody.*

### **6.7. Impact of Militia Action on Community**

Militant leaders, having acquired guns and money, become more daring in establishing governance spaces, where they owe no alliance whatsoever to local chiefs.

*[...] militants found out they could do quite a number of things without the help of politicians, so they set up their own kingdoms, what they call militant camps, where whoever is within that enclave is under their authority. Even the traditional rulers that operate in those places, they intimidate them enough to either put chiefs under their power, or set chiefs aside, as being inconsequential, ineffective or ineffectual—the chiefs cannot do anything. So they do whatever they want. And wherever they are, everybody there is intimidated, so scared that you cannot complain, you cannot even report them. The best you can do is be part of what is going on.*

The above comments bear similarities with those of Otuan and Pato, when asked how the actions and activities of militants have impacted on communities in the region. Their responses also show how the territorialised spaces of militia have completely dismantled the local community structures of authority. According to Otuan, such governable spaces and the presence of the Joint Military Task Force reveal an unexpected alliance between militias and the JTF to oppress and hold communities hostage. He buttresses his argument by making a comparison between the Oporozal militia actions in Delta State to what is happening in Bayelsa State.

*We felt we were held hostage by both the Joint Military Task Force of the Nigerian army and the Ijaw militant groups in our communities. If somebody wants to do anything in the community, you must first ask permission of the militants or militant leaders. So we saw these were eroding the traditional institutional system of the Ijaw.*

*Our host communities are now slaves to these militant leaders, just as the JTF has also enslaved us. They were not making any attempt to drive away the JTF, whereas, in Delta State, Oporoza drove away all the JTF and closed all the flow stations. Here, from Yenagoa waterside, you must continue to raise your hand for the JTF to allow you to go anywhere. So we now start to ask ourselves, what kind of struggle is this? If you are actually there to liberate the people, you are not supposed to hold the communities hostage as well as allowing the JTF to operate freely.*

### **6.8. Conclusion**

This chapter analyses why and how militancy quickly gained prominence and significance within a short period of time and space in the Niger Delta region. This number when viewed from the development and emergence of 150 Man militia, initiated by Adaka Boro in 1966 and its significant rise to 26,356 militias from 1999 to 2009 (see figure 6.1) clearly, points to spaces of opportunities. Prior to 2002/3, the term 'militant or militancy' was hardly mentioned or known in the daily discuss/vocabulary in Niger Delta region, but for the quick ascendance of militants, who are now firmly rooted in mainstream political thinking and action. This phenomenal rise and significance of militancy gives a pointer to broader ideas and perspectives of (a) Homer-Dixon (1994) that view violence from social interaction, material transformation and power relations within specific environment, (b) ideas of Tilly (2003) on political opportunity and brokerage which inform the success and significance of militants within mainstream political structure of resource governance

In this chapter, I attempt to pitch the significance of militancy within porous boundaries, which reveal processes of social and political transformations in Niger Delta region. These boundaries inform the spaces for exchange of resources and values (guns, money, status, recognition and wealth) from social interactions between political elites and militant leaders. From analyses thus far in this chapter, elections, oil theft and informal payments to militant leaders, present the porous boundaries of social relations, which tells how militancy quickly gained prominence. They reveal the spaces of opportunities made available from the political culture of elite relationships with militants. The relationships, thus induces the processes of social and political power transformations of individuals and groups, as evident during elections in the Niger Delta vis-à-vis Nigeria. Elections, therefore is central and key to understanding how militants quickly gained recognition and significance in Niger Delta region. It gives pointer to structure-agency relations that is conducive for the success of violent actions of militias, as well as the political culture and context for its significance.

Accordingly, the violence at elections in Nigeria is arguably informed by a culture of resource extraction and governance, learned from the nature of structure and agency relations (see chapter 2, section 2.3.2). As a result, elections tend to present a culture of competitive struggles for power in order to access and control resource benefits. Therefore, the cultural context of violence at elections reveal the social and political processes of transformation. The social and political transformation referred herein, is a process of change (through violence) for social and political positioning of power to influence, gain recognition, status and access to control resource wealth between political elites (structure) and the militants (agency). For this reasons, the cultural context of violence at elections in the region is part of the social and political processes of transformation, either individually or collectively. Similarly, these processes of transformation, appraise the cultural norms and ideas that the militants hold individually or collectively about the role of political actors. In order word, the roles played by political elites herein, reflexively generate expectations or reactions from militias, which appear to complement each other in terms of the social and political positioning of power and influence to access resource benefits.

Consequently, the established state of violence at elections alludes to the idea of violence as specific site that which reveal social interaction, material transformation and power (Homer-Dixon, 1994) from the structure-agency relations of a given society. In this particular case, a violence that reveals the political culture of institutions (structure), and accounts for the action or inactions of militants (agency) that leads to a relationship of interdependence, involving exchange of guns, money, tangible and intangible resources, in order to achieve social or political change. Furthermore, the porous boundaries of interactions between political elites and militants evident herein, tells on the political opportunity and brokerage which Tilly (2003), talks about. The boundaries of interactions in terms of oil theft and informal payment of money by state political actors to militia leaders, disclose on the one hand, the processes of material transformation in terms of money for peace, which is exchanged for increase in oil production and revenues for state political actors. On the other hand is the exchange of oil for guns from the complex configuration of actors involved in oil theft. These boundaries, create the opportunities for militants to position themselves in influencing policy decisions that gives them recognition.

Finally, what gives significance of militancy, alludes to the statement of Melluci (1996) that illustrates “an interactive and shared definition, produced by several individuals and concerned with the orientation of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which action takes place” p44. This view coheres with evolution of MEND, although the processes in which MEND emerged and evolved, in building coalition, shows they are homogenous or monolithic in some sense. MEND represents example of a pseudo community that integrates at certain times as external representation of communities by making claims/demands, and fragmenting at other particular times

as individual entities competing for resource benefits. However, the fusion only serves as an ornamental platform in legitimising militia action. Therefore, fusion of militias as MEND does not necessarily mean a collective, homogenous interest of members, as common platforms only serves particular purpose at particular times. Nevertheless, the unity and fragmentation appear to be consistent with each other.

Nevertheless, MEND, represent a collective identity within spaces of opportunities from complex layers of varied actors and structures. The actions of MEND inform a framing of ideology within unity and fragmentation of its members. As a result of the processes of unity and fragmentation, from MEND's interactions and negotiations with state and non-state actors, as demonstrated in the chapter, it failed to sustain its political ideology of self-determination and resource control, rather members of these militia groups, achieved a social change of recognition and wealth. In sum the analysis of chapter in varied forms of militia action over resource entitlements, territoriality and competition, and attempts to illustrate the ways in which claims are made, contested and negotiated with state political actors and multinational oil companies. It also examined the homogeneity/heterogeneity of militants in terms of what polarises and what unites them as MEND. Moreover, I explore the processes through which collective identity of militias are constituted in gaining 'legitimacy' and significance. . Similarly the perspective of Benford and Snow (2000) which explains how interactions and alignment of events, provide new insight and interpretations, and how such events is amplified and transformed into something patterned on, but independent of an initial frame (Manning, 1992), find relevance to this chapter.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **7.1. Introduction**

Mineral resource extraction and its structure of governance, is key to understanding resistance or violent conflict from individuals or groups. This is particularly so, when such resource is located within regions with boundaries set along of community and ethnic identities. Moreover, mineral resources, and the politics around it, is important for understanding identity movements, as well as, how they evolve in gaining prominence, not just in Nigeria but, in other countries in Africa or the global world. In this study, I have attempted to demonstrate how the significance of mineral resource (crude oil), triggers a particular kind of armed conflict, within a complex web and relationships of actors. It reveals some features or elements that may have similar bearing in other resource-endowed countries. Globally, resource rich environments are often prone to conflict (Ross, 2004), that reflect expectations and hope of access to resource benefits; or disappointments, frustrations, or feelings of injustice. In other words, mineral resource is in itself, a double edged sword (Maconachie, 2008), given that the structures and processes of resource extraction, cohere with dynamics of power that underlie complex configuration of actors (Unworth, 2010). This complex configuration reveals varied interests, from local and community to identity based movements - both of which are covered in this thesis.

In the thesis, I argue that militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria did not emerge from a spontaneous or frenzied mobilisation, but through a series of historical process of events within the structure and culture of resource governance (oil). These episodes of contention are pitched within key events such (1) the perception of minority status from communities in the Niger Delta region prior the discovery of oil; (2) the ideological battle for self-determination and resource control initiated by Adaka Boro's Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) in 1966; (3) the Kenule Saro Wiwa's Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP); and (4) the Kaiama Declaration by the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). These key historical events laid a platform for identity based armed groups, which subsequently metamorphosed into today's Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Interestingly, the violent conflict in Niger Delta region is a highly fluid one, rooted in community/ethnic identity (Ijaws or Ogonis), in which militia movements have emerged. This fluidity enables individuals and groups to hide behind community agitation, frustration or perception of injustice, to carry out violent acts, whether rightly or wrongly, formally or informally, against the Nigerian State and multinational oil companies.

As a result, militias in Niger Delta region can be seen as identity movements, in the sense that they are localised, neatly fused and rooted in communities across the Niger Delta. Hence the violent groups are not militias in a classic sense of the word, but armed groups that are rooted in communities and cultural norms, where the boundaries between been youth and militia is not that clear; where being a community member and an accomplice for criminal activity is also not clear because these are all tied to a constructed identity. Identity here, implies imagined or concrete communities (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), shared construction of meanings which are layered on and impact on pre-existing ties, interest or territorial boundaries. In addition, the meaning of militancy is not straightforward since it is a socially constructed phenomenon, with internal fluid leadership and dynamic structures based on community or friendship ties or on one's ability to network with other militias, political actors and actors of multinational oil companies. Thus, the trajectory of militancy in Niger Delta region is one that operates within networks and community identity, where it becomes difficult to separate 'genuine militants' from 'criminals'. Furthermore, the motivation for being a militia is not driven by the ideological notion of '*self-determination and resource control*', but by the prospect of economic benefits and the ambition of militant leaders to gain status, recognition by access to oil wealth. In addition, militias in Niger Delta appear to seek social change by violently engaging the Nigerian state and oil companies in ways that create opportunities to improve their quality of life, individually or collectively. At the political 'front-stage', 'militants use the 'freedom fighting or emancipation' label and notion of self-determination' to legitimise action, a process that eventually paves the way for the social change they seek to achieve.

Consequently, the Niger Delta conflict is a response to the political structure and cultural transformations of resource governance, articulated around the formation of specific identities. The fluid platforms in which militants in Niger Delta engage in challenging the legitimacy and authority of the State and multinationals, to gain prominence and significance, offers insights to the sociological dynamics of governance and resource extraction for countries with similar experiences. What is of particular interest is when – as this thesis shows - relatively small local based armed groups gain recognition within the political structure of governance by scaling up their activities. Accordingly, militias in Niger Delta region, offer three main insights on the significance of militancy as an identity based movements; namely: (1) the significance of collective identity/agency; (2) opportunism; and (3) competition that informs territorial boundaries of control in order to access resource benefits.

## **7.2. Understanding Militancy as Collective Agency/Identity**

The concept of collective identity is seen as an effective tool and strategy of militias in the Niger Delta region. Resources and opportunities alone do not necessarily provide explanation for the success and significance of militants in the Niger Delta region. The collective identity of militias play a part in its strength to bargain or negotiate with external agents such as the state, oil companies and the Joint Military Task Force (JTF). Identity implies, individuals or groups have the ability and knowledge to act independently or collectively. Individuals as agents can create plausible grounds as justification for challenging institutions. By definition, collective identity entails solidarity amongst groups of individuals having commonly shared meanings, opinions or beliefs (Touraine, 1985; Tilly *et al.*, 2001); or the shared definition of a given situation, that is produced by individuals or groups at different levels of interaction (Melucci, 1995). As a process, collective identity, informs the internal dynamics, motivation or goals of a group (Gamson, 1982; Hunt and Benford, 1994; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). They inform cultural meanings and how these are created and transformed into action. Indeed, repeated interactions in identity construction reveal the dynamic processes in which actors understand and negotiate their actions. Therefore, it involves a mental judgement about ends, means and the field of action (Fominava, 2010).

A number of key historical context of events underpinned the cohesion of identity movements across the Niger Delta region. These identities hinge on the localised presence of crude oil and political structure of resource governance, which induced expectations and common interpretation of meanings amongst individuals and groups in the region. Firstly, the feeling of domination and oppression from external political structures of governance, created a sense of solidarity and identity amongst ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This sense of identity was evident from the early quests of minorities for regional autonomy, and the struggles for political power amongst the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria, which established the boundaries of majority–minority ethnic identities. These events, with a localised awareness of the value of the discovery of oil, facilitated the first militia action in 1966.

A second significant factor which facilitated the emergence of militancy as a collective agency, and the particular form in which it appeared, was charismatic leadership. The emergence of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), led by Adaka Boro, induced a united platform and dominant discourse for both militants and non-militants across the Ogoni and Ijaw communities in the Niger Delta. The actions of Boro defined the framing of events in such a way that they became the basis for similar patterns of recognised activities (Goffman, 1974) - in this particular case, the framing of structural conditions of injustice and a shared belief to incite collective action with repeated forms of claim making and recognition.

The actions of Boro show how events can be modified and interpreted within existing ideas and beliefs of individuals/groups (Benford and Snow, 2000).

A third feature that contributed to the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region was the role of the state. The militarisation of the region was a threat that heightened tensions and violent conflict which, when viewed from a sociological perspective, can be described as an arena of contested entitlements (Nauman, 1996), a theatre of struggles, where the politics of recognition were played out. In this particular case, it was a conflict that required the government to adjudicate how the protests of the Ogonis and Ijaws shaped particular forms of identity and collective action. These collective actions also informed how knowledge of a particular environment was shared reflexively, within sets of constructed meanings. This partly demonstrates the political opportunities or constraints available for the success or failure of movements, and state capacity for repression. These coupled with political transformations in terms of legislative laws of resource extraction, which strengthened state power and authority, helped trigger the current violent conflict in the Niger Delta region.

In sum, the repressive nature of response by the Nigerian state against protest tends to rather strengthen a belief and collective platform for individuals and groups in the Niger Delta region. The construction of collective identities was evident in the Ogoni uprising and conscious awakening of Ijaw youths (see chapter 4) who began mobilising against perceived oppression and repression, first by a non-violent approach through seizing oil platforms; and then resorting to arms – a move which led to a proliferation of groups. Events such as Operation Climate change and ‘*Ogele procession*’ (also see chapter 4), nurtured a collective identity of Ijaws that triggered collective action of militants in the region. These mobilisations subsequently metamorphosed to the widely known Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). Thus, the trajectory of collective identity of today’s militia’s movement’s hinges on the historical processes and context of resource extraction, which is seen as dispossessing the rights of ownership and participation of Ijaws and Ogoni’s.

Furthermore, these forms of identity struggles show the increasing power of individuals or groups within the social and political environment of the Niger Delta. In addition, the Ogoni uprising and Kaiama Declaration also informed the cultural meanings in which the lives of individuals and groups intersect with macro political transformations and contention over resource benefits. Nevertheless, identity is only established when individual lived experience intersects with the collective. Examples include the shared experience or knowledge by unemployed and uneducated youths who became ‘militants’; or of course, Adaka Boro who was once a teacher and policeman but then went on to be such a pivotal and foundational force behind militia action against the Nigerian state.

Culturally, the identity formation of Ogoni's and Ijaws informs the unified platform that rallied around issues of sustainable environment and the abrogation of laws which constrain rights to participation. In addition, the conscious awakening and identity formations in the Niger Delta region broadly informs an understanding of collective violence (Tilly, 2003), in which individuals/groups goals or beliefs are based on knowledge from their environment.

### **7.3. Understanding 'Spaces' of Opportunity**

Movements do not exist in a political vacuum, but emerge and act in accordance to the nature and culture of a given political system or environment. They operate within formal and informal structures that provide both incentive or disincentive for mobilisation (Wald *et al.*, 2005; Evers, 1985). Consequently, the space for militia interaction is key to understanding their success. These spaces are anchored in relations of power and militia position themselves between different actors. In this thesis, I identified three spaces for interaction, which serve as platforms for social and political transformation and which directly or indirectly reinforce and sustain conflict in the Niger Delta region. These are (1) Elections (2) Oil theft / 'bunkering' and (3) Informal Payment of Money to Militants by state political actors.

The transition from prolonged years of military rule to civil democracy (1966 -1999), appears to have created the leverage and opportunity for an increase in the number of militants from around 150 in 1966 to current official figure of 26, 356 militias in 2009 (see chapter six). Elections and electoral politics play a key role in understanding this growth. Elections in Nigeria and the Niger Delta region in particular, are seen as means to an end. Winning elections into political office in the region, gives political power to directly access and control resource benefits. As a result, elections inform an established intersubjective state of violence within forms of patronage, in terms of exchange of guns and money for votes. This exchange further positions 'militants' in terms of achieving their desired social change (status, recognition, wealth). Hence, elections tends to serve a dual purpose, on the one hand, they give political power to politicians to directly access oil wealth, on the other, the strengthen the bargaining power of militias to indirectly improve the quality of their livelihoods individually or collectively.

However, the positioning of militants within the spaces of interactions with state and non-state political actors had a direct impact on the macro political structures of governance in Nigeria. It induced a shift of political power within the geo-political structure of Nigeria. The actions of militants in the Niger Delta region introduced a recognition of ethnic minorities, especially for the Ijaws. This is reflected in the role of militants (see chapter six) in President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's ascendancy as Nigeria's first ethnic minority President from the South-South, geo-political zone of the country. A second feature that gives prominence and significance to militants is oil theft.

Oil provides quick money as well as a source of funding for individuals seeking political authority. The clandestine network of oil theft involves a highly complex configuration of actors. As evident in this study, oil theft involves a network of multinational oil companies, politicians, military elites, and local youths/ militias. This configuration partly informs how militants are resourced in terms of their capacity to mobilise guns and ammunition. Oil theft accounts for the informal diversion of oil wealth into the private pockets of individuals in Nigeria. These informal structures impact heavily on the nature of political power transformation in the country.

A third factor which gives significance to militancy is the informal payments made by state Governors to militant leaders in the Niger Delta region (see chapter six). This informal structure of relationship is seen to legitimise and sustain the actions of militias in the region. For political actors, such transactions help secure their positions of political power. These transactions, which can also be viewed as an exchange of 'money for peace', are closely monitored and controlled. As illustrated in chapter six, the porous boundaries between militant leaders and politicians, helps facilitate spaces for interactions.

#### ***7.4. Understanding principles of fission and fusion: Territoriality***

In this thesis, I used the idea of fission and fusion (Evans Pritchard 1940) to describe the dynamics of relations within the militia. Thus, militant leaders of various groups trace their identity to a particular community in order to mobilise support from the community against external threats, usually other militant leaders. Accordingly, militant leaders recognise the need to strengthen family and community ties in order to protect their territory against more distant community members of other militant groups. The protection of territories is vital and necessary for militant leaders to gain recognition, and be awarded pipeline surveillance contracts from multinational oil companies or the Nigerian state. The control of territories engenders fierce battles among militia groups (see chapter six)

However, when militia groups face common threats from externals (the Joint Task Force (JTF) of the Nigerian state or multinational oil companies), competition for territorial spaces of control is abandoned and coalitions are built to confront these external threats. In this sense, militants are not a homogenous or monolithic entity and they do not belong to any single group. However they will come together in order to deal with external threats. In coming together, they often turn to the ideological notion of '*self-determination and resource control*' as a collective unifying motif. The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), represents a good case of this in that various known and unknown militia groups united under a common platform in order to show strength to a common threat. Militant groups therefore 'antagonistically cooperate' with each other, as they can both compete and be internally divided, and be unified and cooperate.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

The porous boundaries of interactions and relationships are key and fundamental to understanding how violent movements are resourced and mobilised. This informal arrangements gives insight to success of violent conflict and how such arrangements are sustained by state and non-state actors. Indeed, the resource context which individuals or groups intersubjectively construct meanings to justify violent action against state authority or perceived enemies, reveals processes of social change and material transformation. In the case of the Niger Delta region, the positioning of power appears to have established a subjective state of violence, whereby violence is seen as means to an end. Consequently, violence informs part of the socio-political processes of transformation in the society. The successful use of violence leads not just to resource access but also to social honour in terms of status and recognition. Whilst the presence of mineral resources can, create meanings, around which identities are mobilised to induce collective action, as illustrated by the Ijaw struggle, success of violent social movements depends mainly on spaces of interactions and relationships made available by the political culture of a given society, not identity. Identity only serve as platform to legitimise action, as it cannot succeed without being resourced; guns, money and membership which require strong links to the structures of political power. A key element of the finding, is the fluidity of the boundaries where militias can easy move to become elected into political office and where community youth can easy become militia leaders. This easy transition becomes key to understanding the significance of militancy. Beside the issue of identity of these militias that is problematic, the fact political actors and other non-state are also embroiled in patronage exchange of gun, money oil theft and votes, within an established state of violence in the region, opens the space for militancy to recur.

Empirical /Conceptual contribution of this thesis

1. Bringing the voice of militants who are key actors to understanding the conflict and governance of resources in the Niger Delta region and demonstrating how macro structure political structure of resource governance impact differently of individuals and groups, from a bottom up approach
2. Adopting New Social Movement (NSM) approach from a critical lens that focuses on Identity, and beliefs and how these are tied to mobilisation, articulation and contestation in the struggles for power and access to resource benefit. The identity within context of this research, is one that is fluid and mobilises, thus enabling members to use different identities in different circumstances to suit their actions.

3. It comes against the greed not grievance debate, by showing that the violence and criminality is very much embedded within dominant interest from the process of political culture and structure of resource governance in Nigeria vis-à-vis Niger Delta. Thus, the greed-grievance informs a recursive social order and disorder that sustains the violence and significance of militancy. And this are clearly demonstrated in my empirical chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis.
  
4. The research adds to the existing literature on relations of power and distribution of natural resource. This is particularly so as my research demonstrates that the distribution of resources is often taken over by the state within various configuration interest and layers of actors.

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