

FATAL ATTRACTION: SOCIAL ISOLATION INTENSIFYING KIDNAPPING IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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ABSTRACT: *Kidnapping in the Niger Delta has become a social phenomenon which is now increasingly common in its operations. The lucrative and mesological nature of the crime has made it a copycat form of criminality, with a proliferation of an anticipatory socialization process. However, economic inequality depicts that Individuals are easily cajoled to copy the criminal act, because it is a cheap avenue to survive without having to commit murder. This paper sheds light on kidnapping by untangling the gripping issues with atrocious accounts in the Niger Delta region, as factors fostering the strife and ascendancy of kidnapping in the region. This paper used academic literature as a tool for historical revisionism to expose the deprived state of the Niger Delta region, which underscores with the intention of kidnapping being eradicable in nature. However, some points were shared as recommendations for clamping down the skyrocketing operations of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region.*

KEYWORDS: Kidnapping, Niger Delta, Crude Oil, Militancy.

INTRODUCTION

Establishing the context, background and menace of kidnapping is quite like two peas in a pod in nature, which could be largely linked to excessive expropriation and functional prerequisites. This is because kidnapping has undoubtedly become a scourge in Nigeria, particularly the Niger Delta region, in light of an alternative motive towards economic equity. Tautological cognitions see kidnapping to be a fundamental problem of the government and oil producing companies till this time. Dating back to the embryonic state of militancy in the Niger Delta, which is now been criminalized as a key instrument in kidnapping. So far, the numbers of cases have severely heightened which have shrouded active governmentality. Recent trends of kidnapping have led to severe infractions and criminal negligence in Nigeria. In sum, diverse factors have been thought of as key dynamics of kidnapping.

Central to the definition of Kidnapping, is that by Osumah & Aghedo (2011) who devised it as a crime which necessitates the carting away of an individual and a ransom fee is usually requested. They also ascertained that the pitiful employment rate in Nigeria bringing about economic adversity has spurred individuals into kidnapping. Recent trends in kidnapping have led to a proliferation of studies which include, Odoh (2010) who conjectured that the kidnapping expertise has intensified into excessive kidnappings. Thus, this is because of an inequitable share of dividends from crude oil productions allotted to the Niger Delta major conurbations. Recent evidence purported by Oriola (2012) demonstrated that the insurgency of kidnapping has been factual payable to the cruel attitude and metapower of certain politicians in utilizing unemployed youths as political hooligans, which incorporated the business of kidnapping (particularly in the Niger Delta).

Against the forgoing, Nwaorah (2009) noted that, due to the pattern in which top ranking persons in the civil and public service spend government resources recklessly, it therefore encourages unhappy citizens to vent their anger on them by kidnapping them or their closest

relatives with the intent of moral responsibility. Further investigations noted in Otu (2013) contended concisely that the uproars of kidnapping were invoked due to the clamping down of (419) well known as internet fraud (cyber crime) by the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to a satisfactory condition. So far, however, the socio-economic hazard termed kidnapping has been a phenomenon which also exists in other parts of the world. There is however an increasing concern that those other countries that witness the spate of kidnapping include: Mexico, Pakistan, Mali, Somalia and Syria. Thus, Kidnapping has grown in importance in light of recent reports and publications. According to the Cavell's Group report on kidnapping, it lets us know that thousands of incidents go completely un-reported, some insurance agencies will not divulge figures or details on incidents, companies and government would not disclose details and the many academic or even security intelligence reports do not take into account of all types of abduction or kidnapping incidents (Cavell Group, 2014:1).

More recent mediatisation reveals that kidnapping has become a menace in Nigeria, especially the south-south geo-political zone. The economic diversity shows the unequal distribution of capital in Nigeria. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is made up of the following oil producing states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Rivers. In light of the above, it is imperative to note that these regions have been immensely blessed with diverse natural resources. Some of these resources include: crude oil, timber, cocoa, cotton and palm oil. It is significant to recall, that since Shell BP discovered crude oil in the year 1956 at Olibiri, a misty location in Ogbia Local government area in Bayelsa, there has been an unvarying desolation in the region. The focal concern has largely rested on who gets what and why. The government's improvidence has not been disputed to be one of the factors driving the social marginalization. The

Federal government has been labeled as sadistic in formulating the nation's policy. In furtherance to this, it has been lucid that crude oil has been the bedrock of Nigeria's economic strength. The revenue gotten through the sales of crude oil to foreign partners has been remarkable. In this view, Nigeria as at today has been bestowed with the most impressive economy in Africa. This accounts as prejudice, when we peer at the distasteful social, economic and health care characteristic of the Niger Delta that represent an insidious fragmentation. However, far too little attention has been paid to the perpetual gas flaring activities by the oil producing companies which makes the environment unsafe for people to live in. In recent years, the gas emitted as waste can exterminate a whole community if not properly managed. Thus, the evidence for this relationship remains logical in a retrospective outlook on the high mortality rate and poor ontological security that the region faces. In light of the coherent dehumanization of individuals who live in the regions where the intermingling of gas flaring and industrial wastes occur, they have witnessed a trend of chronic diseases cutting the life span of their brothers, sisters, mothers and father. Budding reports explain the populace is subjected to a harsh environment which makes some contract or being susceptible to diseases. Like in Bayelsa, it goes beyond hearsays that some of their rivers which serve as a core sphere for livelihood have been polluted by industrial wastes deposited in them. The ascription of the environment disparages the fishes in the rivers. In other words, most of the fishermen are disengaged from the fishing business due to the factor of polluting the rivers with industrial wastes. The factor of gas flaring has undeniably contributed to the depletion of the ozone layer and a huge lack of ecological modernisation. However, that seems to be quite subtle in comparison to the ND's plight. On the other hand, the economic sector of the region has been distorted lately due to the fluctuations in fuel price. This gratuitous system has hampered the growth of private businesses from flourishing. Most people who would have been able to

has been criminalized and commercialized in various facets. Citing Akasike (2008) in Akpan (2013), documented some kidnapping events which one from the numerous is captured below.

*.the trend of kidnapping reached a climax when
they (kidnappers) stormed Ikot Abasi*

*local government area last year (2007) and
whisked away six Russians working for an*

aluminium company. The white men stayed

*with their captives in an unknown place for two
weeks before they were released. The*

Militants had asked for a N100 million ransom

before they would release their victims”.

In the next section of this short write up I use existing literature to show the deprived state of the Niger Delta region.

A feature of Kidnapping in the Niger Delta

The philosophical background of kidnapping in Nigeria could be crafted out of what Townsend (2008) referred to as “natural resource nationalism”. This means seeking for a larger share from natural resources. A number of studies, like Akpan (2010) determined that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been bested with an unfair share of accolades from crude oil earning, which has evolved into various forms of militancy, violence, and kidnapping. An article by Onduku (2001) noted that the current state of kidnapping of oil workers in the Niger Delta region by the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) began in the year 2005. In this instance, the various kidnapping events were anchored on the basis of alarming the world to rescue them from the years of injustice, exploitation, marginalization and underdevelopment. Previous studies carried out by Akpan and Akpabio (2003) be evidence for the marginalization of the people in the Niger Delta, the impairment of their environs, combined with regular exploitation of oil produce by the government and oil multinationals since the late 1950s, have incited chaos in the region. While factors thought to be influencing militancy by Ngwama (2014:138) shed light on the political economy of the Niger Delta has originated kidnapping. Thus, this implies that the inequality in resource allocation and systemic injustice have subjected the Niger Delta indigenes to economic adversity. Odoh (2012) discovered that the primitive infrastructure present in the Niger Delta due to unfair share of crude oil by the federal government has created the social movement known as the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The refusal of the Federal government and Multinationals oil companies to come to an agreement in meeting the needs of the Liberation fighters (MEND), has been a controversial inaction that has dampened the hope of the Liberation fighters (Akpabio and Akpan, 2003). As this lingers on, the kidnapping occurrences in the Delta region have heightened.

From the time when the Shell-BP discovered oil in Oloibiri in the Delta region, there has been distressing warfare undertaken by the Niger Delta people and the government, as a consequence of an unjust distribution of surplus from crude oil productions. An added exponential factor is the unreasonable gas flaring undertaken by multinational oil companies that has destroyed lives

and livelihoods and led to environmental degradation. The diametrically opposed interest between the Niger Delta people and the government has led to a rise of terrifying militancy. Particularly, militancy is linked to kidnapping in the Niger Delta region. However, societal laws have consistently shown that it is legitimate for the government to be in possession of land and property in its usual location.

Despite this fundamental right, it then turns out to be marginalization once the government loots rewards from profits of natural resources as it has been demonstrated in Niger Delta region. One observer has already drawn attention to the oil extraction has a disastrous impact on the socio-physical environment of the Delta region (Arong and Egbere, 2013:19). Wherefore, it is menacing the fragile subsistence peasant economy, bio-diversity and entire livelihoods. The misleading guiding principles of the government and multinational oil companies have initiated the dissimilar modes of confrontational groups since the early 90s, surfacing as militant groups. The Ogoni people Account for the first faction of militant group in the Niger Delta. The people of Ogoniland in the Niger Delta region; all discovered all throughout the 1970s and 1980s that the government promises were not being kept, so therefore, they opted to start the social movement called the Ogoni people, in order address the problem. The group was shortly rebranded by Ken Saro-Wiwa to the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the year 1992. The aim of the group was to foster socioeconomic progress in the Ogoniland. Equally, the faction called the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) started a revolution against the government, which was meant to support the struggle for freedom, self-determination and ecological justice in the Ijaw land due to the primitive infrastructure in their community. These social movements (Ogoniland and Ijaw Youth Council) have merged into the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), whose goal is to fight for liberation from oil exploitation (Oriola, 2012; Odoh, 2010). In response to the reoccurring conflicts, former President of Nigeria, late Umaru Musa YarAdua, instigated a social policy “an official pardon programme” in the year 2007, which has been able to sponsor some of the ex-militants in the Niger Delta in the areas of trade and education. Even with this intervention, little progress has been made in rigorously tackling the hazard of militancy in the Niger Delta region. Due to the cynical hearts and choices of legitimate authority, the desires of the Niger Delta people have been passively addressed and subsequently tossed aside. This has resulted to unwarranted kidnappings of foreigners within the region, in order to get the attention of the government so as to meet their demands. Kazeem (2009) has examined some of the kidnapping cases in the Niger Delta which are as follows:

In January 10, 2006, militants kidnapped foreign oil workers from Shell’s offshore E.A oilfield. They also blew up crude oil pipelines in November 2, 2006. British and American employees of Petroleum Geo-Service were kidnapped from a survey ship off the coast of Bayelsa State and a huge ransom fee of about £18,000 was demanded (Kazeem, 2009:30).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence garnered from this paper suggests that the conflict in the Niger Delta over the unfair share of crude oil earnings and gas flaring activities has caused a feud between the people and the government that has spawned into vicious kidnappings. Thus, this paper emphasizes some key recommendations to suppress and eliminate this quandary. To begin with, the Federal government should establish a platform where all the Niger Delta stakeholders, consisting of traditional rulers, state governors, heads of multinational companies, youths etc will be given

the prospect to air their plague and need. This will be the first step of action that will direct subsequent course of actions. Succeeding the former, the Federal government is greatly urged to strictly address the distribution of earnings from crude oil production to the Niger Delta regions. The funds allocated to the Niger Delta should be increased by at least 10%, which will enable the commencement of infrastructural development in the region. It has been long isolated that the Niger Delta environs are too primitive in nature, while basic amenities are extremely lacking. As a result, the increment in fund allocation will tremendously go a long way to rectifying issues like provision of pipe borne water, high-quality roads and invariable electricity supply. The multinational oil companies are therefore advised to reduce the process of gas flaring in the region. This has damaged the bio-diversity and established colossal environmental pollution. The various oil producing companies in the region should henceforth restrict the process of gas flaring to obscure locations which do not have residents and other living entities. Crucially, an agreement should be drafted between the Niger Delta people and multinational oil companies mandating them to desist from depositing industrial wastes in rivers and streams that are of great worth to the Niger Delta people. Consecutively, a fine of about ₦15, 000,000 should be inclusive which will serve as deterrence to those that may not comply. An additional vital area of policy recommendation is that of the restive youths in the region. The Federal government should promptly address the issue of restive youths flaunting themselves as liberator fighters (MEND). In carrying out this task, vocational and technical skill acquisition schemes should be created, which should meet the need of training interested youths in the area of barbing, carpentry, welding, auto-mechanic etc. These various vocational and technical skills put forward have been justified of late to blossom in the Nigerian market. In spite of this, the Federal government should incorporate grants to those that will undertake the training in order to set them up economically. A stipend of ₦50, 000 should be employed to sustain the participants, thereby drawing in more youths into the skill acquisition scheme. Finally, welfare packages should be put in place for the aged in the region, which should reduce the dependency ratio mounted on some youths that propels them to engage in militancy so as to feed their aged parents. A monthly stipend of ₦20, 000 should be considered by the Federal government. Regarding conflict resolution, these various recommendations will establish a cordial relationship between the Niger Delta people and the government.

CONCLUSION

This short paper has been able to illustrate the plight of the Niger Delta by utilizing existing literature and gripping issues that exist in the region. It gives insight on why the Niger Delta region has become a warzone. It has been made present in the region, due to the sadistic policy of government and repressive multinational oil companies. The government has not been able to reinstate the glory of the Niger Delta. Therefore, relinquishing their deserved quota from the crude oil allocation.

The undue political trivialization by the Federal Government vis-à-vis the Niger Delta has incurred socio-economic dispossession. This has amplified the need for certain persons who tag themselves as militants to strive. If the government is assiduous to an extent, they should be able to galvanize a policy that soothes everyone's need. Conflict resolution is an act of settling both parties and which accommodates everyone's aim and aspiration. The past administrations had been saddled with the responsibility to deliver equity in the lingering disputes, but failed to discharge the assignment effectively. The onus now lies on the new administration to input a new approach that is amiable to everyone. The antecedents have been

that the Federal government and oil producing companies meet with the militant leaders and void of carrying the indigenes along. The problems surmount when indigenes of the Niger Delta region are tenaciously left in the dark when core resolutions are being made with regards to their community. The triumphing state of gas flaring activities in the region is impious in nature. The fine placed on gas flaring activities is yet to be utilized in uplifting the state of the Niger Delta region. The region is adversely polluted with industrial wastes. These cause the extermination of bio-diversity in the region. When it comes to employment, these oil producing companies do not absorb qualified indigenes of the region. In contradiction, they are predisposed to collecting outsiders to fill in vacant spaces in the companies. The victim has been the people of the Niger Delta, while the government acts as a bystander. This abnormality has to stop, for unity and peace to be reinforced in the region.

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