

From Oil to Oil: A History of The Niger Delta Oil Economy from Palm Oil to Crude Oil, 1900 to 2019

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Abstract: The Niger Delta is a ‘child of irony’, which produces one of the best crude oils in the world and solely sustains the Nigerian economy. Yet, the region wallows in extreme poverty, and lacks some of the most basic social amenities. This paper therefore, traces the history of the Niger Delta in relations to its contribution to the Nigerian economy through its oil wealth. The paper adopts the historical-narrative approach. It also discusses the Slave Trade in the Niger Delta, the Era of Legitimate trade, the discovery and exploration of crude oil from 1956 to 1989. The paper concludes by examining the Niger Delta agitations, beginning with the Ogoni movement to the Niger Delta militancy, amnesty and post-Amnesty periods. The paper finds out that socio-political factors are responsible for the backwardness of the region despite its oil wealth.

Keywords: Niger Delta, Ogoni, Nigeria, Palm Oil, Crude Oil

1. Introduction

For decades, oil (crude) has remained at the heart of the prosperity of many nations. From it, ambitious men grew to become billionaires, and nations have had more than enough. However, like most valuable mineral resources in Africa, it came with a prize, one that ultimately corrupted things on its path, both humans and their environment. With a lush green environment and a rich aquatic life, the Niger Delta region is blessed with an abundance of oil that has continued to service the needs of the Nigerian state. Its coastline stretches for approximately 850 km along the Gulf of Guinea between the countries of Benin to the west and Cameroon to the east. It runs through the southern territories of Lagos, Ondo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River states. The area also boasts of a massive wetland of about 70,000 square kilometres that spreads over ecological zones such as the sandy coastal ridge barriers, saline mangroves, freshwater swamp forests, and lowland rain forests [22]. The Niger Delta area is home to some 30 million people belonging to different ethnic groups that include: the Ijo, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Efik, Etche, Ibibio, Igbo, Andoni, Ikwere, Ogoni, Isoko, Edo, and Kwale-Igbo. Before the first discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri in 1956, the Niger Delta region has been a major supplier of oil. This important commodity became the most sought-after item of the trade when in 1807 the Houses of Parliament in London enacted legislation prohibiting British subjects from

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participating in the slave trade. Though slave trade continued until the 1870s, Palm oil became an exceptional necessity during the latter part of the industrial revolution. It was the cheapest source of lubricants for British machinery. Like Crude oil, palm oil enriched locals who actively took part in the trade until stricter measures were put in place by the British administrators to check their growing competitiveness. Till date, the region continues to vitalize the Nigerian economy as the country struggles to create alternative means to her oil-based earnings. This paper therefore, takes a cursory look at the history of the Niger Delta oil economy from palm oil to crude oil within the period of 1900 to 2019.

2. Slave Trade in the Niger Delta

In 1482, the Portuguese adventurer, Lancarote de Freitas, (Lançarote de Lagos) sailed to the West African coast on an expedition that was backed by his benefactor, Henry the Navigator. Through a series of raids from Nar (Nair Island), Tider (Tidra Island) and Cerina (Serreni peninsula) Lancarote de Freitas and his crew captured about 235 unfortunate Berber natives. By August the same year, the fleet arrived in Lagos with their human cargo, and like a life-stock market, the natives were sold into slavery. In recognition of the great opportunities in trading on African slaves, Lançarote was knighted by Prince Henry. Although his subsequent raids were less successful, this infamous event led to centuries of slave trade activities along the coast of West Africa. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade saw millions of able-bodied young men and women shipped from the Sub-Saharan Africa, which includes the Niger Delta and its environs to plantations in North America, South America and the West Indies. Many historians have maintained that the socio-economic impacts of the slave trade era cannot be adequately assessed by present standards, given the magnitude of man-power it drained from the continent [11]. In addition to this, thousands of lives were also lost to inter-ethnic wars and slave raids (Okonta and Oronto, 2018).

3. The Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Rise of Oil

Beginning from the late 1700s, anti- Slave trade feelings began to grow all over Europe. Many individuals with humanist and religious concerns weighed-in on the debate against the enslavement of another man. Also, the industrial revolution that ushered-in mechanized inventions made the investment in slaves unnecessary and less profitable. As a result, great Denmark outlawed slave trading by its citizens in 1703. Great Britain followed through with an Act of Parliament in 1807, the United States in 1808, Sweden in 1813, the Netherlands in 1814, and France in 1818. The battle against slave trading was a hard and long one. To enforce the Act of Parliament of 1807, the British Royal Navy maintained a squadron in the Niger Delta coast, which was permanently stationed at the Spanish colony of Fernando Po, off the coast of Nigeria. The squadron had the responsibility of patrolling the West African coast for slave trade activities. By 1870, the Anti-slave trade campaign of the British navy had paid off. It had rescued over 130,000 slaves from slave traders and had helped to check the activities of slave runners. One of the decisive factors that eventually led to the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865. The trade-in humans in the Niger Delta was eventually replaced with West Africa's key agricultural produce - Palm oil. Palm oil was very important because it was used amongst many things, as an industrial lubricant for British machinery.

With the abolition of the slave trade in the first decades of the nineteenth century, “legitimate” trade in palm oil became more popular amongst European merchants. The pattern used to conduct the slave trade was largely maintained — from the Niger Delta to Europe and back (Okonta and Oronto, 2018). Besides, serving as a lubricant for the machines in European factories, palm oil was needed as an

important raw material for soap and margarine. The Delta traders played the role of middlemen between European merchants who anchored their ships on the coast and the cultivators of the palm oil in the hinterland (Okonta and Oronto, 2018).

As the trade in palm oil boomed, British trading interests were centred in Lagos and along the Niger Delta Coast. Lagos was strategic for many reasons. One of these reasons might have been easy access to Yoruba hinterlands, from where the European merchants could also connect with the Delta ports, which were the gateways to the interior of eastern Nigeria (Okonta and Oronto, 2018). Bonny, an Ijo town, strategically located on the coast gradually became one of the richest ports found in the Niger Delta. It was reported that by 1856 the port and its hinterland were exporting over 25,000 tons of palm oil a year, a figure that is over half of the total quantity exported from Africa [11].

At first, the European merchants remained contented maintaining a presence at the Niger Delta Coast, while relying on the native middlemen and chiefs from the hinterlands to deliver the produce [11]. But from 1850, the British companies began to seek ways to eliminate the middlemen of Bonny, New Calabar, Brass, and Old Calabar whom they believe were only delivering a fraction of the enormous oil wealth of the interior [11]. They were convinced that by trading directly with the farmers in the hinterland, they would not just eliminate the privileges and charges of the middlemen, but also maximize profit (Okonta and Oronto, 2018). The strategic way they sort to achieve this end was to force the hand of their home governments to intervene on the pretext that it was only necessary to allow missionary works succeed in the hinterlands and protect the lives and properties of their citizens [10].

4. The Monopoly of the Royal Niger Company

There was no doubt that the rise of 'legitimate' trade had enriched local merchants like Jaja of Opobo, a former slave, who became immensely wealthy because of the trade-in Palm Oil. This did not go down well with some of the European merchants, like the Liverpool barons who felt empowering the natives with such stupendous privileges was bad for business. Therefore, the European merchants became wary of the growing influences of these local chiefs and traders. Through hard work and diligence, Jaja transformed Opobo into a significant trade port in the Niger Delta. This port attracted European traders from all over the coast and even surpassing Bonny in wealth and political significance (Okonta and Oronto, 2018).

With years of experience in the trade, Jaja tactfully denied British traders' direct access to the oil markets in the Opobo hinterland, leaving them with no other choice but to purchase the produce from his agents. Jaja argued that he held the right to control the trade in the hinterland since the British traders had a virtual monopoly over trade with the Liverpool commercial houses (Foreign office report as cited in Okonta and Oronto (2018). Following a series of other events that demonstrated Jaja's leadership ability and influence, the British traders began to subtly plan the downfall of Jaja. According to Okonta and Oronto (2018):

The British traders devise means to evade his agents and buy palm oil directly from the hinterland. Jaja retaliated by increasing the volume of his shipments to England. Following a series of skirmishes with the supercargoes on the coast, King Jaja signed a treaty with the local consul in 1884 that effectively placed his town under British protection. But he made sure that a clause was inserted in the agreement that explicitly stated that his people would control the oil markets in the hinterland, he contends that the supercargoes on the coast still controlled the bulk of shipments to England and took all the profits. Oil prices had, however, risen in Europe at this time, and the British supercargoes were getting increasingly impatient

with Jaja. There were enormous profits to be made in the hinterland, and Jaja was in the way. They urged the local consul, H. H. Johnston, to intervene, and in 1887 King Jaja was deported to the West Indies (para.24).

The first casualty of this deceitful treaty was Jaja of Opobo, who was exiled under the clause of "obstruction of commerce". His crime was attempting to export palm oil on his own. Nevertheless, he was pardoned in 1891, but unfortunately died during his return journey back home [11]. A similar fate befell Nana Olomu, a merchant prince and leader of the Itsekiri, who controlled the oil trade on the Benin River in the western Delta [11]. Symbolically, Jaja's struggle against the British mercantile domination is representative of the bitter struggle of the peoples of the Niger Delta to protect their environment and its natural resources from the greed of foreign interest. A struggle that has continued to date.

To establish a British monopoly in trade and check the growing influence of the local chiefs, Sir George Goldie formed the United African Company (UAC) in 1879. With this coordinated move, Goldie effectively took control of the Lower Niger River. By 1884, his company had 30 trading posts along the Lower Niger (Nwanze, 2014). At the end of the Berlin Conference in 1886, Britain had successfully secured favourable terms of agreement with other European countries concerning her operations in the Niger Delta Coastline. Nwanze (2014) maintained that within two years of 1886, Goldie had signed treaties with tribal chiefs along the Benue and Niger Rivers whilst also penetrating inland (para.5). A shrewd businessman, Taubman began an intentional campaign to check the growing influences of the local traders within the Niger Delta. He began by declaring Brass, the chief port of the Nembe Ijo, as being outside the trade zone of the UAC. Therefore, its people must pay about fifty pounds (about eighty dollars) a year for a trading license and an additional ten pounds for each company station they traded in (Okonta and Oronto, 2018). Furthermore, Taubman imposed an extra hundred pounds (equivalent to about \$8,000 today) tax on any Brass merchant who desired to trade in Spirits which was a lot of money at the time (Burns, 1956). This was further compounded by a decree prohibiting locals from shipping their palm oil directly to England, or trading with other companies besides the UAC which required all exports to be routed through Akassa, the company's port (Burns, 1956). By the early 1890s, the company has successfully eliminated the position of the middlemen and was beginning to deal directly with oil producers in the hinterlands [6].

Although the UAC trading agents promised free trade for local traders in the region, these various treaties were laced with the self-serving interests of the British companies and their merchants. The United African Company (UAC) was later changed to the Royal Niger Company (RNC). By 1894, the Royal Niger Company increasingly dictated whom the natives could trade with, and denied them direct access to their former markets (Nwanze, 2014, p. 5). As more African chiefs and traders began to see through the intents behind the mischievous treaty they had signed with the company, some began to revolt. One of such kingdoms was Brass under its Nembe King, Koko Mingi VIII. In an attempt to get The RNC to be more liberal in their trade deals, King Koko led an attack on the headquarters of the Royal Niger Company in Akassa (present-day Bayelsa State) On 29 January 1895. His demand was for the British Company to grant him the right to choose his trading partners. The British refused to negotiate terms with King Koko and he ordered forty out of the sixty white hostages they captured to be killed. In a reprisal attack on 20 February 1895, Britain's Royal Navy, under Admiral Bedford attacked Brass and burned it to the ground. Many Nembe people died, and smallpox finished off a lot of others (Nwanze, 2014, para. 7). King Koko committed suicide while in exile in 1898.

The events of the 'Akassa raid' sparked outrage amongst the British populace back home. As a result, the Royal Niger Company's charter was revoked on December 31st, 1899. At this time, the palm

oil trade alone was worth almost £3.4 million a year to Britain (£175 million today, or \$280 million), and it was felt that the Niger basin was too valuable to be left to a commercial firm to manage (Okonta and Oronto, 2018, para.30). According to Nwanze (2014), the Royal Niger Company relinquished its holdings to the British government for £865,000 (£46,407,250 today). January 1st, 1900, Britain officially took over the administration of the territories in the Niger area (p.12).

Britain's new acquired territory was reorganized into three important administrative areas, the Lagos Colony, the Protectorate of the North and the Niger Coast Protectorate, which was merged with other territories to form the Southern protectorate under the name "Nigeria" [7]. The colony of Lagos and the Southern protectorate were merged into Southern Nigeria in February 1906 [13]. In 1914 the Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated under a single administration headed by Lord Fredrick Lugard with Lagos as its capital territory.

5. From Oil to Oil (The Era of Crude Oil)

Modern Oil (Crude) exploration did not begin in Nigeria until 1937. Earlier in 1846, Russian Major Alekseev working with the data of Nikoly Voskoboynikov dug one of the first oil well in the world in the South Caucasus region of the Russian Empire [14]. In 1859, Edwin Drake's drilled the first modern well near Titusville, Pennsylvania, in the United States of America (Mau et al, 2015). Drake's well was modern by many standards. It was drilled, not dug; a steam engine was employed; it was associated with a registered company; and enjoyed a major boom [20].

The Pennsylvania oil boom sent a wild hunger for oil all across the world, rousing the ambition of men and imperialist nations alike. In 1937, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) (then known as the Shell D'Arcy, an affiliate of the Shell-BP) from its base at Southern Nigeria (modern-day Owerri) began exploring the colony for oil [4]. After failing severally to strike oil, the company narrowed down its exploration to 103,600 km² around the Niger Delta basin [14]. The company drilled its first exploration well at Ihuo near Owerri (now in Imo State) in 1951, but no oil was found [14]. Two years later at Akaata, a relatively small quantity of oil was discovered. However, it was not until 1956 that the company struck its first commercially viable oil well at Itokopiri, a land jointly owned by the Otabagi and Otuogidi communities in the Oloibiri clan of the present Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State [14]. At the tail end of that same year, Afam in the Eleme clan, sometimes classified as part of the larger Ogoni ethnic nationality in the present Rivers State of Nigeria yielded some more oil in commercial quantity [14].

Through pipeline connections conveying the crude oil to Port Harcourt, the first cargo of crude oil was shipped in February 1958 in a quantity estimated at 4000 barrels daily (SPDC, 1982). According to Atei et al (2018):

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta promoted Shell to move its base from Owerri in the Igbo heartland to Port Harcourt. This was because, unlike the other cities in the delta proper, Port Harcourt, though young, already had the entire infrastructure necessary for the expansion and success of the company's activities, including adequate harbour and port facilities to handle the freighting of materials and heavy equipment. The city also had an airport and telecommunication links with the world (p.19).

In 1959, a general election took place in Nigeria to determine the first leader of an independent Nigeria. On October 1st, 1960, Nigeria became an independent and sovereign nation under the leadership of Alh. Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister, and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as the President. A year

later, the first phase of the oil terminal was built-in in Bonny in the Eastern Part of the Niger Delta with four tanks which had a total capacity for 300,000 barrels of crude oil (Atei et al, 2018). The terminal was connected to Bomu and Afam by pipelines (SPDC, 1982). From 1963, Nigeria's oil began to witness a consistent growth rate and value appreciation.

In recognition of the limitless opportunities in the Niger Delta, other oil exploring companies began to troop down to Nigeria from 1965. Some of these companies include the Gulf Oil Company, Mobil Unlimited, Texaco, Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC), Safrap and Sunray, Ashland, Pan Ocean, Tenneco and Philips, among others, (Atei et al, 2018, p.20). With the presence of these various oil companies, the SPDC lost its monopoly in the Niger Delta. From 1963 to the early 1970s, several oil wells and fields will be discovered by these oil companies. Safrap (Elf) successfully discovered oil in the Obagi fields in 1963. By 1965, the NAOC has found its first oil at Ebocha. By 1966 Elf had commenced commercial production of oil in Rivers State with 12,000 bpd [4]. In 1967, Phillips drilled its first well at Osari-I, and later in Gilli-Gilli-I.

When the Nigerian Civil War broke out in 1967, both the Federal Government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra strategically acknowledged the crucial role that oil could play in determining the outcome of the war. To ensure its rival did not get war funding and supplies, the Nigerian government imposed economic sanctions on the Republic of Biafra, beginning from May 1967. A strategic part of the economic sanctions was the imposition of a total littoral blockade on the entire Eastern Region [23]. This move was specifically targeted at controlling the activities of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region. In a counter move, the leadership of Biafra wrote to Shell-BP insisting on royalties for their oil exploration in the region. To protect their business interest, Shell-BP decided to pay Biafra the sum of 250,000 pounds [9]. When word of this financial arrangement reached the ears of the Federal Government, a ban was immediately placed on the exportation of crude oil and the activities of oil tankers in the Niger Delta (Chibuike, 2008). Furthermore, the Nigerian government also demanded that Shell-BP pay its outstanding oil royalty immediately [9]. Caught between two elephants, Shell – BP was unable to meet any of the demands of the two opposing parties and in the last move to control the oil of the south, the Biafra government ordered Shell-BP to stop operations in Biafra while she took over the company.

Unfortunately, Bonny Island became a prioritized target for the Federal troops until July 1967, when the federal troops and its Navy captured the Island from the Biafrans. When Port Harcourt was recaptured by Federal troops in May 1968, Shell – Bp moderately resumed Operations and its export activities. In the same year, Mobil Producing Nigeria Limited was established [4]. By 1969, a new terminal was established at Forçados which increased oil production from 142,000 barrels/day as of 1958 to 540,000 barrels/day in 1969 [4]. In 1970, this figure doubled to 1,080,000 barrels/day [4]. The proceeds from royalties collected from the oil companies allowed Nigeria to purchase more weapons, recruit more soldiers and hire mercenaries. Ultimately, the Biafrans in the face of hopelessness, bowed to the superiority in manpower, military equipment and foreign aid of the Federal Government on January 12th, 1970, bringing the three years' war to an end [21]. Oil activities began to pick up pace following the end of the Biafran conflict. Mobil began oil production from its four oil wells at the Idoho Field [4].

By 1971, Nigeria was ranked the seventh-largest oil producer in the world and was admitted as an official member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). At the time, over 70 per cent of all commercial firms operating in Nigeria were foreign owned [3]. This became a major concern for the administration of Yakubu Gowon. Consequently, an indigenization decree was passed in 1972 to allow for more indigenous participation in key sectors of the Nigerian Economy [3]. As a

result, the Federal Government signed a Participation Agreement with the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta in 1973. This agreement gave the Federal Government 35% shares in the operation of the oil companies (Atei et al, 2018). Also in 1973, Ashland secured a working understanding with the then-NNOC (NNPC), while Pan Ocean Corporation drilled its first discovery well at Ogharefe-I [4]. In 1974, the Second Oil Participation Agreement was signed to increase the Federal Government equity share to 55%, while Ashland's first oil discovery was struck at Ossu-I. The year 1975 saw the first oil lifting from Brass Terminal by the NAOC and the upgrading of the DPR to the Ministry of Petroleum Resources. In 1976, Pan Ocean commenced production via Shell-BP's pipeline at the rate of 10,800 bpd, while in 1977, the federal government established the NNPC by Decree 33 to absorb the Nigerian National Oil Company and the Ministry of Petroleum Resources [4].

The Middle East Crisis in the 1970s led to an unprecedented boom in the Nigerian Oil sector. As a result, the military administrations of Yakubu Gowon embarked on ambitious national projects, including road networks, Theatrical infrastructures and extravagant labour policies. During this era, University expansion in Nigeria saw dramatic and extravagant development. According to Freund (1978), the oil boom transformed Nigeria into a consumer nation.

By the spring of 1978, Lagos port was doing 97% of its business in imports and only 3% in exports while airports received even more goods than the seaports. In 1974, Nigerian imports were worth N1, 737m; by 1976, they reached N5, 140m and in 1977, N7, 297m. By mid-1978, they were running at an annual rate of N8, 760m. Some of this reflected capital expenditure but the consumption of imported consumer goods also increased dramatically. At the end of 1974, the Udoji commission recommendations on wage and salary increases were put into effect at the recurrent cost of £3 50m p.a., with the wage hikes frequently matched in the private sector... Into Nigeria poured a flood of luxury goods on an unprecedented scale. The supermarkets were sporadically filled to the brim with imported foodstuffs, clothing and consumer goods of every type. For example, Nigerian imports of high-fidelity equipment, tape recorders, etc. increased from N1 .7m in 1973 to N15m in 1976. Colour television broadcasting was launched and intended for expansion to each of Nigeria's nineteen states, although prices of imported receiving sets began in the neighborhood of N1, 000 in the mid-1970s (p.94)

In 1979, the Third and the Fourth Oil Participation Agreement was signed to raise the Federal Government's equity to 60% and 80% respectively (Atei et al, 2018). A decade after the fourth oil participation agreement was signed, a fifth agreement was reached to consolidate the NNPC/Shell Joint Venture In 1989. This agreement gave the NNPC 60%, the SPDC 30%, Elf 5%, and the NAOC 5% [4]. Later in 1993, a Sixth Participation Agreement was arrived at, which gave the NNPC 55%, SPDC 30%, Elf 10%, and the NAOC 5% [4].

6. Africa Kills Her Sun: Oil and agitations in the Niger Delta

Oil exploration in the Niger Delta came with a very grave cost. It leaked up almost every form of life and livelihood in the region [12]. Though the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari created the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) in 1980, no practical step was taken to remediate the worsening human and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta [12].

With the ruling elites in the pockets of the big oil companies, oil exploration activities were carried out in the most mindless and hideous ways imaginable. As long as these oil companies made a good profit, they cared less about what becomes of the people and land of the Niger Delta. With continued environmental degradation and hundreds of oil spills every year, the condition became intolerable by the people whose backyards accounts for over 80% of the countries revenue [24].

From 1990 local communities in the Niger Delta began to be more vocal about the abuses of their lands by the different oil companies. The Ogoni community led by a young writer and Activist, Ken Saro Wiwa drew global attention through their struggles. Saro Wiwa and a few others, formed the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) as a voice to pursue some important demands, which included the autonomy for the Ogoni people, a fair share of the proceeds of oil extraction, and remediation of environmental damage to Ogoni lands [8]. In particular, MOSOP struggled against the degradation of Ogoni lands by Royal Dutch Shell [8]. In 1992, Saro- Wiwa presenting evidence to the UN Working Group, submitted that,

The Ogoni have been gradually grinding to dust by the combined effort of the multi-national oil company, Shell Petroleum Development Company, the murderous ethnic majority in Nigeria and the country's military dictatorships." (Saro-Wiwa as cited in Internet Archive, 2009, para.24).

At first, it did not seem much what Saro-Wiwa and his movement represented, but in time, it soon became obvious that their non-violent movement for social and ecological justice would stop at nothing to achieve its purpose. The MOSOP campaign was so effective that by 1993, the oil companies had to pull out of Ogoni (Internet Archive, 2009, para. 10). After going in and out of jail from 1992, Saro Wiwa was finally arrested in 1994 alongside other MOSOP members for inciting violence in the Niger Delta. They were found guilty and sentenced to death by a specially convened tribunal [18]. Their conviction was followed by international outrage and calls for their immediate release. Nevertheless, On 10 November 1995, Saro-Wiwa and eight others (popularly known as Ogoni nine) were publicly executed by hanging in Port Harcourt. In reaction, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth, while Several nations including the United States and the United Kingdom placed an arms embargo on Nigeria calling it a "judicial murder" [24]. At his death, Saro-Wiwa's last words were prophetic, he prayed, "Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues" (Auckland and Maier, 2011). He was right, the struggle did continue after his death and through the 1990s until the restoration of democracy in 1999. By this time, the youths of the Niger Delta were already engaged in the sabotage of oil facilities, forcing the hands of the Federal Government to create the Niger Delta Development Commission in 2000 [12].

By 2004, militant groups with sophisticated arms began to emerge from the Niger Delta creeks in a new campaign dubbed 'Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)' (Ering et al, 2013). Unlike the MOSOP which believed in non-violent approaches to resolving the issues in the Niger Delta, the MEND group got the world's attention vandalizing oil pipelines, sabotaging crude oil production in the region; kidnapping and hostage-taking of expatriates; and destruction of government offices and facilities [26]. These militant groups were also neck-deep in oil theft, and vessel robbery [27].

7. Amnesty, the Ogoni Clean Up and the Future of the Niger Delta

After an exhaustive campaign against the militants in the creeks and along the coast, the Nigerian Government brought an amnesty bargain to the table in 2009. In Exchange for laying down their arms, the repentant militants were 'rehabilitated' through an established Amnesty programme. In addition to this, President Umaru Yaradua's administration established the Niger Delta Ministry in the same year. The amnesty deal was sufficient enough to get the attention of the young agitators. Ering et al (2013) stated that:

Some of these major groups and their leaders operating in the area were, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF); Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the survival of the Ogoni People; Nigeria Niger Delta Vigilante, Niger Delta Liberation Front, Joint

Revolutionary Council and the Ijaw Youth Council. And the key leaders were Henry Okah, Asari Dokubo; Ateke Tom; Government Ekpemupolo (AKS Tompolo); Soboma George, Brutus Ebipodei, Solomon Ndigbara, Tubotamuno Angolia, John Togo, Ebikabowei Victor-Ben Godswill Tamuno and others. The Federal Government made this declaration to restore normalcy to the oil-producing area. Several activities were planned for the many repentant militants, these included training in various skills both within and outside the country. In most cases, large sums of money were paid to the leaders of the various groups. A few were given contract running into billions to protect the oil pipelines from vandalism (p.425).

At the end of the Amnesty deal, over 8000 militants surrendered their arms and ammunition and pledged full allegiance to the Federal Government (Akpan and Ering, 2010 as cited in Ering et al, 2013, p.424) [12]. Unfortunately, nothing substantial has happened in the region since the amnesty deal leading to a resurgence of militant activities in the region.

In 2011, a ground-breaking report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) on oil pollution in Ogoniland acknowledged the devastating impact of the oil industry and made concrete recommendations for clean-up and immediate support for the affected communities [2]. Following a detailed assessment of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) by the Nigerian Government and the oil companies, the United Nations Environment Programme compiled a comprehensive report since early 2019 that reveals an embarrassing level of negligence (Amnesty International, 2020). These documents were a follow up of a report titled 'No Progress,' published in 2014 by the same organizations, which documented the failure of the first attempt by the Nigerian government and Shell to implement the UNEP report [2]. For over nine years since the UNEP report, the people of Ogoniland still wait for a thorough clean-up of their environment. Amnesty International (2020) reported that:

In one particularly shocking case – that of the Nisisioken Ogale community - the report found that community members were drinking water from wells contaminated with benzene, a known carcinogen, at levels over 900 times above the World Health Organization (WHO) guideline. The wells were close to a Nigerian National Petroleum Company pipeline (p.7).

With millions of dollars sunk into the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), there are questions from several quarters including the United Nations Environment Programme as to the sincerity of the government and the oil companies to remedy the devastations caused by years of oil exploration and exploitations in the Niger Delta. Yet in 2019, Nigeria was ranked as the 8th highest exporter of crude oil with revenue of about \$41 billion representing 4.1% of the total export [25].

Though the environmental remediation in the Niger Delta promises to be the world's largest terrestrial clean-up ever seen (UNEP, 2017), the pace at which work is ongoing is slow and discouraging [2]. If all parties concerned are committed to the task at hand, it has been agreed that the results will be transformative: ecosystems can recover, livelihoods can be restored, and everyday life will be much improved (UNEP, 2017, para7).

8. Conclusion

Experts estimate that it could take up to 25 years before ecosystems are re-established in the affected communities in the Niger Delta (UNEP, 2017). Yet, some of the important organizations and agencies established to serve the people and interest of the communities in the Niger Delta have become ill-fated cows for greedy and self-serving individuals who milk them dry of millions of dollars meant for the

growth and development of the region. The July 2020 corruption scandal involving the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is a recent reminder that when projects, are not overseen and monitored by men of proven integrity and genuine interest for the cause of the people, so many things can go wrong (Agbese, 2020). This paper explored the trade in palm oil and crude oil in the Niger Delta, from the coming of the Europeans in 1444 through the era of colonialism to the post-independence era up until 2019.

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