THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WAR AGAINST MILITANCY AND ITS ASSOCIATED VICES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract
Militancy has become one of the hydra headed monsters that acts as bane to the development of the Niger delta region. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has a delicate fragile ecosystem with unquantifiable human and natural resources. The abundant natural resources are known to contribute greatly to more than seventy percent of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP). This also accounts for its economic, social and political relevance in both Nigeria and international communities. The region is currently experiencing myriad of security challenges and this is linked to the perceived unequal distribution of the nation’s resources which has caused the youth and some people of the area to act in a manner as to conspicuously demonstrate their deprivation, marginalisation and exclusion in the management and control of the abundant resources. This paper argues that the ongoing repression accounts for why the youth of the region have organised themselves into different militant groups to unconventionally participate in the sharing of the natural blessings domiciled in the area with the political class who reside in Abuja- the nation’s capital; while the people are daily encumbered by environmental degradation, health challenges and insecurity. Political economy is the theoretical base of this work; the main aim of this work is to describe the role of women in the fight against militancy and its associated vices in the region. This work concludes that in spite of internal structures that militate against women - cultural practices, that women have enormous task to perform as home builders and character molders in the war against militancy, especially with the charge from United Nations in 2017’s international women’s day celebration which states “Be Bold for Change”.

Key Words: Role, Women, Militancy, War and Against.

Introduction
The security challenges which is currently ravaging the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is observed to be a bane to the development of the people and its environment, as it has become nearly impossible for a day to pass without news of attacks on human beings and/or oil installations. The observed assaults are perpetuated by those whose criminal activities in the region have caused scholars to label them as militants. The activities of this group got me thinking as to how this started, who is involved and how this will be resolved. The history of militancy dates back to the nineties when the youth of the region among others were mobilised to Abuja to march for a former military leader of Nigeria, Sanni Abacha to transmute from military President to a civilian one in a solidarity march tagged “one million man march in March” in 1998; (Amuwo, Bach and Lebeau 2001). That became an enigma for the youth to understand the neglect and marginalisation the Niger Delta region suffer under the Nigerian state with its seat of power in Abuja.

The youth having realised that the Nigerian state under the seat of power in Abuja from (NBS, 2016) is thriving on a highly degraded environment, deprivation and alienation from the political class that reside in Abuja decided to organise themselves into different groups in order to demand for what they considered as their rights and privileges.
Their activities which started first with the abduction of expatriate personnel of International Oil Companies (IOCs), indigenous staff of the companies, disruption of oil production and its activities, have now affected everybody who lives, travels and does business in the region. The militant activities have reached such magnitude that it can be better described by using the words of Shakespeare:

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Women are known to be members of any human society no matter how hostile the environment and laws may be and they are known too to have significantly contributed to peace and development of the society even in traditional societies; (Sani 2001). Furthermore, gender studies scholars like Jane Adams and Marianne Weber in (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2014), will always ask, in all of that, are women there? How are they affected? What did they say?

This paper is set out to examine some ongoing social vices that are ravaging the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and commonly tagged as militancy, and the role of women to ameliorate it and its associated vices. First and foremost, let us conceptualise some words of relevance, followed by identifying the remote and main causes why youth of the region decided to engage in life threatening activities for survival in spite of other valuable options.

Conceptualising Militancy and Its Associated Vices

Let us first have a brief description of what the Niger Delta Region means to scholars. In the view of Oguara in (Nsirim OMSH barrier islands at the mouth of the Delta; mangroves, fresh water swamps, forest and lowland rain forests; and the boundaries between these areas are hard to differentiate because, they depend on seasonal river flows ecological zones, which include the Niger Delta Atlantic Continental Shelf (marine). According to Anderson of Royal Dutch/ Shell (Nsirim Worlu 2005), the Niger Delta comprises a network of swamps and creeks covering some 112,000 square kilometers, depending on how you count, or almost the size of England; and it estimates to be home to about 12million people. From the foregoing therefore, the Niger Delta region is endowed with quantum of human and material resources of significance to Nigeria and the world.

It is thus perceived that the activities of the federal government, its representatives (IOCs) and political leaders account to a large extent for the emergence of militancy in the region. Militancy which is an act by organised, active, determined and aggressive youth to take arms against the state in a bid to express their perceived oppression, exploitation, neglect and exclusion in the process of producing and sharing the common wealth that is abundant and harbourd in the bowel of their environment. To corroborate this is (Amaraegbu 2011), who opines that corruption of the political class, the inability of the federal government to foresee that its docile attitude to the leeching of terror in the zone and the neglect of the multinational corporations to the Niger delta environment served as springboard for the militant operations.

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(Ebienfa, 2011); and the destruction of Odi in 1999 by Obasanjo administration, the Niger delta militants seemed resolved to take over what belong to them by violence and this was evidenced in the way and manner the crude carrying pipelines were ripped open with dangerous weapons, oil bunkering, attacks of military personnel and even the indigenes and more recently artisanal refining. All these activities sent fear, pain and agony throughout the land as no one is an exception.

This position is in tandem with Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner in (Sutcliffe, 2012), who strongly suggest that connected to natural resources, which drives rebellion. Such behaviour is evidenced in the predatory economic activities seen among militants, often standing starkly at odds with their professed grievances of

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To be able to unleash mayhem to the society, the youth at different locations formed different cult groups. Cultism can be described as group(s) of young people who believe in a local god and therefore indulge in practices that are obnoxious to the people and environment. Their activities though horrendous, tend to attract attention to them. The fact that they believe in small and local gods daily drives them into performing different rituals that involve human blood and parts. There are different cult groups in the Niger delta, some popular and others not. Sometimes rival cult groups clash and their clashes mostly leave on its trail.
destruction of lives and properties, and in worse scenarios will be the sacking of communities; thereby causing the incidence of internally displaced persons (IDPs). IDPs, has become a common phenomenon in the Niger Delta as members of the sacked communities become refugees in neighbouring communities or some move to the cities to live in slum areas, thereby causing overcrowding with its attendant environmental and health challenges. Evidence has shown that the militants are known to carry out most of their activities under the influence of drugs. When drugs are used without adequate supervision by the professionals, such drugs are regarded as being abused. Drug abuse is the misuse of any medication that is ordinarily meant for therapeutics (healing) ; (Lauer and Lauer 2002. In our society, many substances are abused and they include; alcohol, cigarette, marijuana, cocaine, morphine, tramadol and even premium motor spirit (fuel). The consumption of one or more of these substances listed above makes the consumers behave in undesirable manners and most times they unleash mayhem on those around them. Though the statistics on misuse of drugs among milita$\text{nts}$ is not concrete, however, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in performing one of its statutory functions which is enlightenment campaigns always advise parents, schools and religious organisations to collaborate with it in order to rid the society of illicit drugs.

Role Of women In The War Against Militancy In The Region
Women who are traditionally considered as symbols of Peace and Feminity are also traumatised, as they too are members of the society in general and region in particular. The nature of the heinous activities carried out by the varied militant groups has inadvertently cowed the women folk more than ever before. Women are profoundly known to be excluded from decision making processes in most of the communities in the Niger Delta, via the means or ombudsman tagged as cultural practice, a term described by anthropologists (Beals, Hoijer and Beals, 2000) and sociologists (Giddens 2006) as patriarchy. Again, whenever, women

Violence against women should be regarded as a human right issue, Angwe of Human Right Commission (2016).

Nevertheless, women are affectionate, caring, understanding and reasonable; and so they still make war against notable social vices ravaging the region. Especially with the support and pronouncement by the

The family is a very important agent of socialisation, an idea supported by (Haralambos, 2000); and women occupy very significant positions in their various homes as they undoubtedly play very significant role in character molding of their family members. The traditional role women of every clime play enable them to cherish and value children and family; they therefore, show affection to children in their households and the larger society. Women are encouraged to always use kind and soothing words when interacting with people who come around them for whatever reason(s). Though this is not the case all the time, but when family members are socialised to be kind and humane when interacting with others, to eschew greed and bitterness, then the war against social vices will be on the path of suffering a long standing defeat.

As educators, women should be able to demonstrate to both their biological and none biological children the importance of societal norms and mores; that is, by living exemplary life styles. Societal norms and mores are those unwritten rules and regulations stipulated to guide the behaviour of citizens of a given society aimed at making those who follow the prescribed rules to be useful and accepted members of the world. For instance, when women are able to train their children and others around to have respect and obey constituted authorities and whenever they are aggrieved, they should rather employ dialogue and not carry arms then, the war against militancy and its associated vices will be won. Males and females should be educated to indulge in useful and meaningful livelihood activities, as busy minds and hands are not easy tools for nefarious activities against the society.

Women are advised to be courageous enough to speak out against perceived ills in the society; they can perform such role by forming themselves into active and functional groups, such as, community women groups, civil society organisations and faith based organisations. The main aim for the formation of such
organisations should be to discourage society from honouring and celebrating those whose sources of wealth
and affluence are questionable and thus encourage meritocracy. They also play the role of advocates as some
speak out against social vices in their homes, community and nations. Currently the wife of Rivers State
radio anchored by Radio Rivers every Saturday morning. This programme serves as a means of advocacy against
social vices, as it is targeted at raising quality youth who will encourage peaceful co-existence where ever
they find themselves through their behaviour.
Furthermore, women should not only become prayer warriors, rather they should live exemplary lives worthy
of emulation by the youth. This can be done by regularly organising seminars and workshops in their
localities which will bring about attitudinal change and peaceful co-existence. For instance, women like
Queen Amina of Zazzau - this is present day Zaria; Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Mrs. Margaret
Ekpo. These women, before independence contributed immensely to the emancipation of women and
Nigerian society politically; (Sani, 2001). In the nineties, persons like Maryam Babangida, created a
programme known as better life for rural women; while Maryam Abacha formed the family support
programme. Their programmes individually and cumulatively brought about improvement in the living
standards of families and the nation at large.
In addition, women will also need to collaborate with other groups both corporate and government agencies
to be able to win this war. This way, better results will be achieved through synergistic endeavours; and
United Nations has created such a template for the attainment of this goal; as there are lots of organisations
working together for the betterment of humanity. Some examples are; civil society organisations, faith based
organisations and community based organisations whose activities are geared towards the re-orientation and
reintegration of youth in the zone who willfully or coercively took arms against the state through their
empowerment programmes. This collective action by different organisations has contributed to the armed
and belligerent youths surrendering their unauthorised arms and ammunitions thereby bringing about
improvement in safety and security in the region.
The Current economic reality of the world and the nation in particular, is such that every woman should
engage in meaningful work in order to contribute to the wellbeing of their varied families; and not necessarily
depending on their husbands, brothers and fathers to be sole providers for the fami
so doing, they will be encouraging dignity in labour and ensuring self worth and relevance. With this, the
youth and other members of the society will undoubtedly understand the importance of the environment to
the sustenance of a

protect the environment and its people, thereby reducing the degree and extent of degradation and
devastation experienced in the region. Of note here, are associations formed by women who are successful
in various fields of life endeavours for instance, women in academics, medical women association,
international federation of women lawyers (FIDA) and women in Nigeria (WIN). These associations and
more in no small measure have in variegated ways also contributed to restoring peace in the zone by being
pictures of peace through their works and activities

Theoretical Support
Political economy is the theoretical backing of this work. Political economy approach is a Marxist
methodological and theoretical framework of analysis based on dialectical materialism; (Ryndina and
out of its economic infrastructure or power base and that, it is from the dialectical conflict between social
classes with opposed economic interests that social change takes place; Farham and Pimlott in (Nsirim-
Worlu, 2005). To support this argument are (Berbeshkina, Yakovleva and Zerkin, 1985); who opine that
dialectical materialism assumes that material conditions, particularly economic factors are the decisive
formative influences on social life and constitute the essential point of departure for discussing the laws of
motion of society and for explaining it.
Nigeria as a nation is solely a mono economy as she depends mainly on crude oil production for its Gross
Domestic Product (GDP), Rivers Chiefs and Peoples of Niger Delta (1992) and (NBS, 2016). Its political
terrain is controlled by comprador political ruling class, whose interest is on enriching itself to the detriment

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exchange and expropriation, with the aid of international oil companies who are the sole proprietors of the oil industries or sectors; as neither the people nor the political class has the political will to check the activities of the IOCs, nor the economic power to harness the raw materials which need a lot of capital (fiscal, technology and know-how).

In the view of (Ake, 1981), political economy has three major characteristics; first, it gives primacy to material conditions. This means that man is primarily a producer and a product of his environment and so, the wherewithal why material conditions or economic factors are considered as the basis of any material conditions or economic needs of man are the most fundamental needs and must be satisfied first. So, the socio-economic stage of a society determines the productive forces or production pattern in existence in that society. Second, that it emphasizes the dynamic character of social reality as it treats the world as something which is full of movement and dynamism. This movement and dynamism are provided by the contradictions which pervade existence and that it also creates the awareness; that continuity is essentially very complex and problematic. The third characteristic of this theoretical framework is its favour for holism. This approach enables us to systematically account for the continuous interaction and relationship existing between the various facets of society, as in the economic, political, social and even belief system. This explains that the holistic approach to studying society enables the scholar to understand explicitly the relatedness and complicity with which all social structures interact.

This political economy approach makes the reader to understand that Niger delta people depend primarily on their environment for their survival before the coming of the colonialists, however, the nation and its people are under the heavy weight of imperialistic tendencies. This means that though the nation is not directly being administered politically by any foreign nation(s), but that foreign nations have great economic influence on the productive activities of Nigeria through the activities of the IOCs who have in several ways denied the people access to their natural means of livelihood. It further explains that the social reality is that, the people have to find a way to make a living; which is why the youth have adopted unconventional approaches to survival. Finally, the observed continuous interaction and relationship existing between the political class, IOCs and the people of the region is better described as unequal, depravation, denial and exclusion, and as such accounts for the militancy and its associated vices that are still ravaging the region and its people.

Summary/Conclusion
In the light of the foregoing therefore, this paper concludes that militancy has eroded the social matrix of our society as the leadership of the communities is unwittingly handed over to the youth who have achieved this power acquired through illegitimate means such as kidnapping, bunkering and financial sponsorship by their political god fathers have made them demigods and law breakers. It is found out that the women of this region have used every opportunity within their means to campaign, enlighten and advocate against numerous and varied as the militant groups. The reason being that the political leaning of each group, the pecuniary benefits each group expects and the ethnic agenda of some of them have not allowed them to achieve commiserate positive outcomes. Which is why this paper is of the view that when the women of the Niger Delta region are able to harness their role in a systematic and conscious manner and also receive equal opportunities within the region, the political class and the communities; then the women are on their way to contributing their invaluable quota to the winning of the war against militancy and its associated social vices which are cultism, drug abuse, pipe line vandalisation, kidnapping and the likes. It also means that women can become the face of development when the war against militancy is won, in that, all and sundry will perform their time honoured duties without fear of molestation, deprivation and denial. Finally, this paper is of the view that the United Nations which is an umbrella organisation for comity of nations of the world and who has whose activities are antithetical to women achieving this noble function should be sanctioned.
Recommendations

This paper therefore recommends that women who are from time immemorial are endowed with special function and responsibility should consciously realise that as the society is becoming much more complex and dynamic so too is their role which is unwittingly expanding. In this era of information explosion, caused by revolution by information, communication and technology, women in their various homes and organisations should also endeavour to adopt the new techniques in monitoring the relationships their children and relatives keep, indulges and much more their moral obligations.

To be able to carry out their time honoured duties with minimal harassments, families, communities and governments should provide suitable conditions which will make the youth and the entire society to respect and honour women. When women are cherished and valued in the society, their varied efforts in the curbing of militancy and its associated vices will yield fast and positive results.

The women for instance, should form habit reforming clubs, where the youth will be taught how to maintain and lead quality life styles by showing them those men and women who had been successful by leading humble and hard working lives. In these clubs, the youth will be instructed through television, social media and verbally; the idea is to introduce peer review package as a form of transforming those who are involved in militancy and other vices. Peer review package will enable the target group to evaluate their life styles against those who have made names through decent and honourable means of livelihoods.

Finally, it is recommended that the government should make militancy and other societal vices very unattractive. This can be done by the government of the day ensuring that meritocracy is allowed to thrive in all our institutions. Meritocracy is a practice that allows for the selection and placement of right people into right offices based on merit. This eliminates, godfatherism, nepotism and who do you know syndrome.

As a rider, the political class should ensure that any offender, that is; those caught should be brought to book and also severely punished. This stance, will serve as a deterrent for other youth who are not already militants and also engage in its associate vices.
References


