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The Use of Paramilitary Forces by US/European Multinationals Against Pacifist Resistance in Nigeria/W. Africa

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The history of Pacifism in Nigeria

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Position of Nigeria in Africa

Nigeria is not easily identified with pacifist movements. Violence and military regimes easily come to mind when Nigeria is mentioned. This was what prompted us to undertake this work in order to portray the not oft-mentioned pacifist movement that has been in the foreground of the Nigerian society and polity since its foundation as a sovereign state. Our aim is to find a realistic and feasible solution to the various conflicts in Nigeria today. In the first part of this work, We are going to look at the beginning of the pacifist movement in Nigeria. Then we will analyse its various manifestations with the example of the Christian Ibo pacifist movement in the North and the pacifist movement in the Niger Delta. We will analyse the reactions of the Nigerian government on the one hand, and the reactions of the Euro-American multinational corporations on the other hand. To conclude, we will try to interpret the current problematic situation of the pacifist movement and make propositions towards its resolution.

Pacifism as a movement in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial era when the different tribes living in various parts of the present-day Nigeria resisted the colonial powers by refusing to abide by the laws that they found unjust. These pacifist resistance was often quenched with ruthless violence from the authorities. A good example was the Aba Women's resistance movement of 1929 which started when the women of a town called Oloko started demonstrating after the British colonial administration tried to impose taxes on them. The women chanted, waving palm leaves on the streets and danced around the officials and the buildings of the British administration. Singing and dancing around is a traditional way, among various Nigerian tribes of showing their emotions. In this case, singing and dancing around the officials of the colonial officers shows discontent and the use of palm leaves symbolically shows disapproval of their actions. The colonial administration refused to listen to their pleas and instead sent the armed forces on them. This resulted in the shooting to death of more than 30 women.

Conflicting accounts of the demonstrations were given, mostly trying to tarnish the image of the women and to discredit their movement calling it an unorganized violent rioting by illiterate women aimed at undermining the authority of the Colonial administration. But concrete evidence has shown that the demonstrations were organized by pacifists and that the causes of the few cases where they degenerated were to be traced directly to the violent and most times, fatal responses from the colonial administration. This assertion can be supported by the reported incident of the killing of two of the women participants by a British driver in Aba which led to the destruction of a factory there. It was noted that the women organizers of the protests popularly referred to as the *Oloko Trio* and Nwanyieruwa, another famous figure in the protest, were regularly called upon during the demonstrations by the District Officer Captain John Hills to intervene when tempers were rising, and to his surprise, they repeatedly intervened and calmed down the women, [1] thereby maintaining the demonstrations on a non-violent level. At the end of the demonstrations which lasted more than a month, the British Colonial authorities scraped the planned imposition of taxes on women and the use of warrant officers. These were part of the demands of the women. We may consider this as a victory for the pacifists if not for the 30 lives that were lost in that unfortunate incident.

Another important point in the history of pacifism in Nigeria was during the Biafran War when the Igbo-dominated South Easterners tried to secede. The war which lasted for three years was one of the most devastating blows to pacifist movement in the country. Citizens that were against the war, in both the Nigerian and Biafran sides were

mostly enlisted by force and the ones that resisted were simply executed. No serious study has yet been made to determine the number of these innocent citizens but the high number of refugees that fled the country shows that the number would easily run into thousands of individuals. One might think that the government must have learnt its lessons from the aforementioned Aba women demonstrations, but the reaction of the Nigerian government towards present-day pacifist resistance in Nigeria tends to prove otherwise; the response of the government to pacifist resistance has not changed much. To buttress this point, we are going to look at what we would like to call the Christian Ibo pacifism.

Christian Ibo pacifism

Despite the fact that Nigeria practices a Federal system of government with absolute authority vested on the federal government, the Christian Ibos of the East have been the victims of multiple quasi-genocide attacks from their fellow countrymen in the Moslem-dominated northern part of the country. These attacks are generally provoked by politico-religious issues ranging from the institution of Sharia in the northern states (*in Kaduna February 2000*) to the 9/11 attacks by Muslim extremists in the United States. During these attacks, thousands of Ibo people and Christians from other tribes are murdered by beheading, maiming, mutilations, lapidating and burning. Their houses and properties are looted, destroyed and burnt. There has been over 20 different attacks of this nature since the change to democratic rule in 1999. According to a recent study commissioned by the state of Plateau, the death toll is more than 53,000 in the sectarian violence that erupted in that state alone between 2001 and 2004. [2] The worth of properties destroyed runs into millions of dollars and thousands of lives have been directly or indirectly shattered.

At the face of this aggressive and violent attacks on them, the response of the Christians mostly Ibos from the Southeast have been generally pacific. And that is where the problematic questions of pacifism comes into play. Is pacifism the answer to violence? To what extent can violence be tolerated by pacifists? Can pacifism exist on its own?

A lot of studies and analysis have been made on these unfortunate incidents and various people from the intellectual, political and religious circles have given their own points of view and recommendations. In one of these studies on Christian pacifism in Nigeria, Scott Holland, in his essay *The Gospel of Peace and the Violence of God* [3], pondered on the pacific theory and movement in the world and as seen by Christians. He considered pacifism a good response to violence but noted that in the Nigerian context, it may not be the right option. He invited pacifist theorists and supporters to visit the Nigerian Northern cities, just like he did, before giving their opinions on pacifism.

In our analysis of the repeated violence against the Christians in Northern Nigeria, pacifism in the face of such violence is called absolute pacifism by pacific philosophers. It could be the same thing as committing suicide. It is not just pacifism, it is passivism. We noted that the response or the non response of the Christian/Igbo people, in the face of such violence, which can be considered as the height of pacifism, neither contributed in any positive way to change the frequency of the attacks nor did it lessen the cruelty of those attacks. On the contrary, it fuelled it. This was what led the community leaders and even some of the Christian Bishops of Nigeria to threaten calling the Christians to arms in order to defend themselves when attacked. [4] Their argument is that being a pacifist does not mean eschewing violence when confronted with certain death, it is rather the readiness to embrace pacifism as a solution if and whenever the opportunity arises. In other words, they are supporting *selective pacifism*. And this is what will lead us to the main subject of this paper, Pacifist resistance to American Paramilitary forces in the Niger Delta.

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The Niger Delta

Pacifist resistance to American Paramilitary forces in the Niger Delta

The most popular manifestation of pacifism in Nigeria is that of the people of the Niger Delta. This pacifism cannot be understood unless one understands the reasons and history of the struggle itself. Thus, we are briefly going to give a historical insight to the struggle and the reasons behind the resistance in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta produces almost all the petroleum that yields foreign exchange earnings for the Nigerian government. After the 1956 discovery of petroleum deposits in commercial quantities at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta, the life of the people of the Niger Delta started undergoing dramatic changes. These changes are directly linked to the activities of Multinational oil companies implanted in the area. We are going to look at some of these changes which include but are not limited to the following:

- land ownership reforms which resulted to massive and arbitrary land seizures,
- endemic pollution of the environment as a result of oil industry activities,
- absence and neglect of infrastructures like health facilities, potable water, schools, roads etc
- and economic marginalisation of the entire area leaving a great majority of the indigenes wallowing in abject poverty.

Since the discovery of petroleum, the Federal Government has repeatedly devised various measures intended to ensure that lands where the oil deposits are situated come directly under its control. Among these measures is the oft-amended Petroleum Act of 1969 which vests the ownership rights and control of the entire petroleum resources on the government. This measure resulted in the arbitrary seizure of all lands that are deemed strategic to the easy exploitation of oil. This seizure was done with little or no compensation for the owners of these lands. And the seizures continue with further explorations. But the plight of the people does not stop there.

For those that still retain their lands, incessant gas flaring, oil spillage and arbitrary disposal of toxic drilling mud and other dangerous chemicals make environmental pollution the most devastating effect of oil industry activities in the Niger Delta. This pollution of the environment renders the remaining agricultural lands highly toxic and infertile. The same goes for the aquatic environment with rivers and the entire submarine life in great danger. It should be noted that most of the people of the Niger Delta are subsistence Fishermen and farmers. The result of the aforementioned factors made most of them to become permanently and hopelessly jobless. The next factor that makes the people to resist further exploitation is the neglect of the Niger Delta people by the different Nigerian administrations and the oil companies.

Different studies conducted in that region have shown that there has been systematic neglect of health and other socio-economic infrastructures. In the words of one of these studies, the United Nations sponsored team stated that

“In spite of the enormous resources it generates for the national coffers, the Niger Delta is perhaps the least-developed area of the country. Less than 5 per cent of federal oil revenue is spent directly on the oil-producing areas. The Delta therefore lacks good roads, electricity, potable water and good schools. Communication facilities are few and far between. Unemployment is high because the rivers, creeks and streams which provide people with their main source of livelihood “fishing” have been extensively polluted through the activities of the more than a dozen oil companies operating in the area.” [\[5\]](#)

As we can see from the above observation, there is generally little or no pipe-borne water in the Niger Delta. The people used to depend on the streams and the rivers for their drinking water but oil-provoked pollution has made the water from these streams and rivers unclean for drinking. The people who mostly have no other alternative, continue

drinking the water and cooking with it. The resultant effects are numerous, from acute diarrhoea to cancerous diseases, malformed babies etc. The Niger Delta is an area where malaria and stomach ache can have fatal consequences because of the lack of basic health facilities and professionals. It would be superfluous to state that cancer or any other chronic disease generally means certain death in the Niger Delta. In the face of all these problems, the people of the Niger Delta have adopted one strategy to resist what they can see as soft but sure genocide against them. That strategy was pacifist resistance.

The origin of Pacifist resistance movement in the Niger Delta

Resistance against the activities of multinational giant corporations is a worldwide phenomena. In the Niger Delta, the resistance started at the earliest stages of the establishment of oil company industry in the area. The people were mostly ordinary men and women without a comprehensive and global knowledge of the functioning of the multinationals on the international level. Nonetheless, they knew what was right and what was wrong, they could identify injustice and most of all they could identify the changes that were occurring in their individual lives and the life of their communities. They tried individually to resist these changes that were obviously detrimental to them but met ruthless repression from the authorities. So gradually, they decided to unite in order to fight for their rights.

The first organized efforts to achieve their objective started in the early 70s and was done by letters written to the Nigerian authorities and to the Oil companies. The most symbolic of these remains the Humble Petition of Complaint on Shell-Bp Operations in Ogoni Division [6], written on April 25th 1970 by seven Ogoni men on behalf of the entire Ogoni people of the Niger Delta. The response to this and hundreds of such letters were outright denials and constant equivocations from the oil companies and the Nigerian administrations. Then the people of the Niger Delta gradually started organizing themselves and establishing pacifist associations. These associations made the foundations of the pacifist resistance movement as we can see in the Niger Delta today. Individual and class action lawsuits against the Federal government and multinational petroleum corporations, peaceful demonstrations, mass rallies, symposia, sit at homes, sit-ins, picketing, theatrical performances, newspaper articles, open letters and official letters were all means of resistance employed and are still being used by these associations to show their refusal and to cry for help.

The most popular of these was a series of massive peaceful demonstrations organized by the Ogoni people under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa to protest against the injustice being meted on them by the Oil companies and the Nigerian government. The Oil companies called on the Nigerian military government which responded by arresting the leaders of the movement. Nine of these men including their spokesman Ken Saro-Wiwa were condemned on fake charges of manslaughter. And in spite of international calls for their liberation, they were executed by hanging on the 10th of November 1995. The protests that ensued resulted in the killing of more than 2000 Ogoni people by the joint armed task force working for the oil companies and the Nigerian government.

Other Human Rights records have been broken by the Joint forces of the Euro/American Oil Companies and their Nigerian government partners. On the 4th of January 1999, peaceful demonstrations were organized by the Opia and Ikenyan communities to protest the adverse effects of oil company activities in their area. ChevronTexaco called on their armed security forces and the Nigerian Joint Task force who shot at the demonstrators and killed seven of them. Their villages were attacked and razed down. ChevronTexaco denied involvement in these attacks but offered to pay \$5,000 compensation to the communities when evidence of their implication was reported. After years of denials, Shell and other multinationals in the Niger Delta have admitted paying and equipping paramilitary forces in Nigeria.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/IMG/gif/truckart.gif>

Jesus I Love You Truck Art

Photo by [Mike Blyth](#)

[Other photos of Nigeria](#)

Another method devised by the Euro-American Oil Companies in the Niger Delta and the Nigerian government is publicised criminalisation and demonization of the pacifist stance of the resistance. The government and the Oil corporations have gradually pushed the resistance to the wall by turning deaf ears to their cries and eliminating their leaders as we have seen in the murder of the Ogoni pacifist leaders. The trick used was that of treating them as diabolical criminals. The aim was to discredit their rightful and well intended cry for fairness and justice. It was intended to make the general public regard the human rights activists as criminals whose claims are unfounded and who are exploiting the location of oil companies in their area as an excuse to terrorize innocent people. Whenever there is a crime committed in the Niger Delta, the government exploit that as an opportunity to vent their anger on pacifist movements of the people. There is no judicial investigation to crimes nor is there any real effort by the police to arrest the criminals, instead mass shootings and destruction have been the response of the government forces.

The case of Odi town on the 20th of November 1999 serves as a good example. When unknown persons attacked and killed 12 policemen in that Niger Delta town, the government instead of conducting investigations, arresting the culprits and bringing them to justice, sent soldiers to destroy the town. At the end of their intervention, 2,483 [7] were killed, the town was totally destroyed. Most of the communities in the Niger Delta are afraid of the Joint Task Force of the government which is partly funded and often called upon by the multinational oil companies whenever there are demonstrations against their activities.

These violent repressions by the concerted efforts of the oil companies and the government has made pacific resistance a dangerous venture. The consequences are the present armed militant groups sprouting up in the area and menacing the security of the entire region and the unity of the Nigerian federalism. These armed groups are now considered by the media as the voice of the people and all hands are on deck to make amalgamations between these groups and the people. The reason for this is that it will be easier for the oil companies and the Nigerian government to continue their systematic killings of members of the pacifist movement and to disintegrate their union. Their classification are gradually being changed from criminal militants to seasoned terrorists as can be supported by the recent statement by the Nigerian Head Of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo in Davos Switzerland at the 2006 World Economic Forum. Responding to fears of the international community over the kidnap of four foreigners working with the petroleum companies and the incessant attacks by militants, he stated "*I do not believe that our oil industry is under threat, this is an aberration. It will come and go. There is an element of terrorism in this and you cannot say we should give in to terrorism.* [8]" The current fight against "terrorism" is a good excuse to further trample and victimize the pacifist movement in the Niger Delta. Press reports indicate that villagers have started fleeing the Niger Delta in order to avoid what they consider as the *Odi option*.

Let's go back to our questions, . Is pacifism the answer to violence? To what extent can violence be tolerated by pacifists? Can pacifism exist on its own? In order to answer this questions, we will like to briefly look at the great symbols and leaders of pacifist resistance in the world, starting with Martin Luther King Jnr. and the Civil Rights movement in the United States and Mahatma Ghandi and his Ahimsa doctrine in India.

Brief Analysis Of The Great Symbols And Leaders Of 20th Century Global Pacifist Resistance Movements

The goal of Pacifist movements in the developed countries of the Northern Hemisphere seem to be out of reach and their modus operandi tend to yield little fruit. But nonetheless, temporary, few but symbolic achievements has been made. Good examples are Martin Luther King Jnr. and the Civil Rights Movement, the Resistance against the Vietnam War and the two Gulf Wars. Outside the Northern Hemisphere, pacifist movements have made their marks and established their symbols with Mahatma Ghandi and the struggle for independence in India. These achievements were possible because the leaders of the nations concerned know that ignoring the outcry of the people have dangerous consequences. Throughout their history, these countries have experienced big and small revolutions and they understand that a stitch in time saves nine. The political system is 'democratic' and elections are relatively free and fair. That makes them to listen to the voice of the people so as to avoid their wrath at the polls. They are equally aware that history can repeat itself if care is not taken. This is what makes it possible for the pacifist

movements in the Northern hemisphere to be freer to voice their opinion without much fear of violent attacks from their governments. This liberty encourages the pacifist movement and helps it maintain its optimism. It is indisputable that pacifism is ideally the best solution to conflict resolution. The only problem is that in real life, even in the Northern hemisphere, pacifism tends to be a weak tool in conflict resolution and even its few but symbolic achievements cannot stand on their own as entirely pacific.

When we put the victories of pacifism in their chronological and situational context, we can see that they were not totally pacifist victories. The Civil Rights movement cannot be disassociated from its impetus: the American civil war of which one of the major reasons was the emancipation of slavery and equal rights for every American. Thus it is clear that without that bloody and violent war, the civil rights movement would not have had the possibility of being established. On the other hand, we should not neglect the other option to Pacifism in the late 60s which was represented by the armed resistance by organisations like the Black Panther Party which was considered by the then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States." [9] The success of Martin Luther King Jnr. and the Civil Rights Movement cannot be fully apprehended without the contributions of these 'radical' and violent resistance movements.

When we look at the Indian pacifism led by Ghandi, we must consider its success in the context of the World War 2 era. The Success cannot be fully understood without taking into account the weakened state of the British Empire after the two World Wars. Ghandi's pacifism was successful because of this weakness. We should note that the struggle for independence and liberation in India and other colonized territories has been on from the earliest stages of colonial domination. But these struggles were violently repressed by the British government at several occasions. The weakened state of the British Empire after the 2nd World War measurably facilitated the success of the independence movements in India [10] and other former British colonies.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Ghandi's pacifism cannot be considered effective for conventional conflict resolution. This is because it is interwoven with his religious faith. His pacifism cannot easily be applied in every society because without the faith in the existence of life after death, his doctrine becomes highly extremist. This observation can be supported by the advice that Ghandi gave to the Jews when asked about the Holocaust. His words are as follows:

"Can the Jews resist this organised and shameless persecution? Is there a way to preserve their self-respect, and not to feel helpless, neglected and forlorn? I submit there is. No person who has faith in a living God need feel helpless or forlorn. Jehovah of the Jews is a God more personal than the God of the Christians, the Mussalmans or the Hindus, though as a matter of fact in essence, He is common to all and one without a second and beyond description. But as the Jews attribute personality to God and believe that He rules every action of theirs, they ought not to feel helpless. If I were a Jew and were born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest gentile German may, and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon; I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. And for doing this, I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in civil resistance but would have confidence that in the end the rest are bound to follow my example. If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered, he or they cannot be worse off than now. And suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them an inner strength and joy which no number of resolutions of sympathy passed in the world outside Germany can. Indeed, even if Britain, France and America were to declare hostilities against Germany, they can bring no inner joy, no inner strength. The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities. But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. For to the god-fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep." [11]

As can be seen from the above instruction, Ghandi's pacifist doctrine is not primarily focused on emancipation in this world but rather in the world hereafter. If we should follow his doctrine, we should be ready to commit 'suicide' and if the Jews and the allies followed his advice, the Jews would be extinct today. Another weak point in this pacifist doctrine is its failure in the resolution of the internal conflict in the then newly independent Indian State. The conflict between the Hindus and the Moslems led to over a million casualties and the breaking down of the country with the creation of Pakistan. At the height of the hostilities, Ghandi advised the Hindus fleeing from Moslem insurgents in these words:

"I would tell the Hindus to face death cheerfully if the Muslims are out to kill them. I would be a real sinner if after being stabbed I wished in my last moment that my son should seek revenge. I must die without rancour. (...) You may turn round and ask whether all Hindus and all Sikhs should die. Yes, I would say. Such martyrdom will not be in vain. [12]"

When we compare this statement to the one made regarding the Holocaust, it becomes clear that this sort of pacifism is extremist pacifism and can be neither realistic nor practical in our world today. With the above examples, I came to the conclusion that Pacifist movement is in essence the ideal option in conflict resolution but that in the real world, pacifists movements in their current situation still have a long way to go in order to achieve their set objectives.

Returning back to Nigerian pacifism, we could observe in the case of both the Pacifist response of the Christian/Igbo to incessant attacks in the North of the country, and the Niger Delta pacifist movement, that pacifism is easily abused by the aggressor as a weakness. Thus the persecution of the Christians in the North continues. In the Niger Delta, the case of Ken Saro-wiwa, that of the Opia/Ikenyan communities, and the other uncountable cases corroborates this assertion. Pacifist response to violence is good but it should have a limit. In the different cases that we presented in this paper concerning Nigeria, the limit seems to have been attained long ago. But apart from weak voices and endless studies, investigations and reports, nothing tangible has been done by the international community to bring to an end the use of violent repressive measures by the Nigerian State and the Euro-American oil conglomerates in Nigeria to quell pacifist resistance. So the main question remains: "What strategies can be proposed by pacifist movements towards a peaceful resolution of conflicts in Nigeria?"

Given my analysis of Nigerian pacifism, the brief glance at the US Civil rights Movement, and the Indian pacifism led by Ghandi, it is obvious that pacifism cannot exist on its own. It needs an understanding partner and environment in order to exist. Pacifism in the midst of continued violence can only lead to extinction. Another important finding is that pacifism metamorphoses. Its metamorphosis depends on the socio-political environment and the response from the other parties involved.

In the Niger Delta, the socio-political situation and the time limit on the petroleum deposits, of which present estimations have predicted to run out by the next three to four decades at current production level, tends to hasten this metamorphosis of the pacifists. Real pacifists are gradually being overshadowed by armed militants who resort to violence in order to achieve more or less the same thing as the pacifists. What is disheartening in this is that the response by the government and the oil companies tend to encourage armed militancy rather than the pacifist one. They yield to the threats of the militants by paying big ransom in order to rescue kidnapped employees, they pay huge sums of money against arms renditions whereas the pacifist movements are attacked with teargas and automatic weapons when they organize peace marches and rallies. Could it be that the government and the oil companies have a stake in the actions of these groups? We have noticed that whenever these violent attacks and riots in the Niger delta occur, the world oil prices increase and the only people benefiting from these price increments are the multinational companies and their collaborators in the financial sector. The mega profit earnings of the oil majors last year tend to corroborate this point.

To conclude this work, I recommend that International pacifist movements undertake to find pragmatic solutions and devise better strategies that can actually oblige the Nigerian government and the Multinational oil companies in Nigeria to change their habitual use of violence in resolution of conflicts. Asking the Christians in the North or the people of the Niger Delta to sacrifice their lives and their lands in order to show that they are pacifists does not seem to be a good strategy in the Nigerian case. Until this is done, any other action to lasting peace will be an effort in futility. Pacifist movements need to mobilize people towards a real change in the political and economic fields. Remaining outside the political and economic realms of the society is not going to bring any significant change in the quest for a more peaceful world.

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