



Securing the Supply Chain: Local Grievance, Militancy, and Global Energy Security in Bonny, Nigeria, 1970–2015

Abstract

Bonny Island sits on the eastern edge of the Niger Delta. For more than three centuries it has been a hub of Atlantic and global trade. It was a leading port for the export of enslaved people in the eighteenth century, and a major palm oil trading post in the nineteenth. Since the mid-twentieth century it has been the chief outlet for Nigerian crude oil, and since 1999, for Nigerian liquefied natural gas. This article traces the modern history of conflict between Bonny's oil-producing communities and the multinational companies and Nigerian state that built this infrastructure, from 1970 to 2015. It argues that the island's central place in global energy supply gives this local history a direct bearing on international energy security. The article draws on oral testimony gathered in five Bonny communities, together with company records, human rights investigations, and press accounts from the period. It places Bonny's experience within a wider wave of confrontation that swept the Niger Delta from the late 1980s onward. Similar crises unfolded at Iko, Umuechem, Egi, Ogoniland, Kaiama, and Odi. The article then traces how local grievance escalated into direct action at Bonny itself. The most consequential episode was the 2001 occupation of Mobil's Bonny River Terminal. The article concludes that companies, the state, and communities have developed responses to this conflict over four decades. These include international frameworks such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. Yet these responses have addressed the conflict's symptoms more consistently than its underlying cause. That cause is the absence of development to match the wealth extracted from the ground.

Keywords: Niger Delta, Bonny, Nigeria, Oil history, Energy Security, Environmental history, Petro-violence.

Introduction

Nigeria's Niger Delta has been a center of Atlantic and global trade for over three centuries. Bonny Island sits on the delta's eastern flank. It was among the region's leading ports for the export of enslaved people in the eighteenth century. After Britain suppressed the transatlantic slave trade, Bonny became a major outlet for palm oil and palm kernels in the nineteenth

century. Since the mid-twentieth century it has served as the principal shipping point for Nigerian crude oil, and since 1999, for Nigerian liquefied natural gas. By the early twenty-first century Nigeria ranked among the world's largest oil producers. It supplied a significant share of United States crude imports, much of it loaded from terminals on and around Bonny Island. The crude grade shipped there, Bonny

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Light, serves as an international pricing benchmark for low-sulphur West African oil. Middle Eastern supply grew less stable through these same decades, and the Gulf of Guinea took on growing strategic weight as an alternative source of seaborne crude. Together these shifts gave Nigerian, and by extension Bonny's, output a significance in international energy planning that reached well beyond the country's own borders.

For much of the same period, Bonny's communities have been in recurring conflict with the oil companies operating on their land, and with the Nigerian state that licenses them. This conflict has produced a substantial body of scholarship. Most of it reads the conflict through the lens of environmental justice, human rights, or the political economy of what has become known, since Terry Lynn Karl's influential study, as the "resource curse." Kenneth Omeje's work on oil conflict and security in Nigeria, and Takena Tamuno's history of the Delta's "oil wars," place Bonny within a wider regional pattern of extraction without matching development. This scholarship has less often connected the same evidence to the history and theory of energy security, the study of how states and markets secure reliable access to the energy they depend on. This article makes that connection, using Bonny's experience between 1970 and 2015 as a case study.

The account that follows draws on oral testimony gathered from elders, women, and youth, and from oil-

company staff, across five Bonny communities. These were Finima, Ayambo, Kuruma, Ayamina, and Orubiri. It also draws on a survey of 595 residents of those communities, set alongside company reporting, human rights investigations, and press coverage from the period. In this respect the article follows a method set by the classic historiography of the Delta's pre-oil city-states. That scholarship relied heavily on oral tradition recorded from chiefs, elders, and canoe-house heads, since written archives for the period were sparse.

What follows traces this history in five parts. The first sets out an interpretive framework. The second traces the making of Bonny as a node in global trade. The third follows the build-up of grievance under oil. The fourth compares this pattern with the wider wave of confrontation that swept the Niger Delta from the late 1980s. The fifth examines the crisis this produced at Bonny in 2001, along with the corporate, state, and community responses that Bonny's conflict has drawn out over four decades.

Historiography and an Interpretive Framework

Much of the scholarly literature on conflict in the Niger Delta follows Thomas Homer-Dixon's influential argument. Homer-Dixon held that environmental scarcity, meaning the depletion of renewable resources such as land, water, and fish stocks, combines with population pressure and weak institutions to produce group-identity conflict. Cyril Obi's work on the Delta

offers an important corrective. Scarcity-based models, he argues, understate the structural, political-economy dimension of the region's conflicts. These conflicts turn less on the scarcity of oil than on the terms on which oil wealth is extracted and shared out. A related but distinct argument comes from Michael Watts's concept of "petro-violence." Watts claims that oil extraction tends to generate a recognizable pattern of violence wherever it occurs. That violence is rooted not in the resource's scarcity but in the political forms that extraction characteristically produces. These forms include weak regulatory states, absentee corporate power, and communities stripped of any claim over what lies beneath their own land. Read in these terms, Bonny's history looks less like a uniquely Nigerian problem than a local case of a pattern found wherever oil has been extracted from politically marginal communities, from the Niger Delta to the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Karl's account of the "paradox of plenty" supplies part of the explanation for why oil wealth so often fails to produce local development. Drawing on comparative evidence from Venezuela, Iran, and Nigeria, she argues that windfall oil revenues tend to weaken rather than strengthen the institutions of the states that receive them. Because oil rents flow directly to central governments rather than being generated through taxation of a broad productive economy, they loosen the accountability that normally binds a state to its citizens. They encourage short-term and often corrupt spending.

They leave both the national economy and the communities nearest to extraction more vulnerable, not less, to the wealth passing through them. Nigeria's experience since the 1970s, and Bonny's within it, fits this pattern closely. The same decades that saw oil revenue rise to account for most of federal income also saw local infrastructure, health care, and education in oil-producing communities stagnate or fall behind the rest of the country.

The evidence assembled for this article, drawn from interviews conducted across Bonny's oil-producing communities, supports Obi's and Watts's structural readings over a narrowly Malthusian one. Informants did not describe conflict as a result of oil's presence as such, but of oil's presence without a matching flow of development to the communities that hosted it. This article follows the language of the underlying field research and calls this pattern a *developmental trap*. Extraction without development produces insecurity. Development produces security. Security, in turn, creates the conditions for lasting peace.

Historians and theorists of energy security have conventionally organized the field around four concerns. These are the availability of supply, the accessibility of the infrastructure and routes that carry it, its affordability, and, increasingly, its acceptability to the communities and publics affected by its production. Of these four, acceptability has usually

been treated as an ethical or reputational matter, separate from the harder business of securing supply. Energy security scholarship has rarely engaged the Africanist historiography of the Delta in any sustained way, just as that historiography has rarely used the vocabulary of energy security. Bonny's history over the period examined here suggests that this mutual neglect understates the case. At Bonny, failures of acceptability were not merely accompanied by failures of availability and accessibility. They produced them, repeatedly and measurably.

Bonny in Nigerian and Atlantic History, c. 1500–1970

Bonny's own historical traditions trace its founding to a migration from the central Niger Delta, probably between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. A group led by two brothers, Opuamakuba and Kala-Beni, together with a kinsman remembered as Asimini, left the Kolokuma area amid internal conflict and moved south in stages. They paused in what became Ndoki country before settling finally on the site of what is now Bonny town. Kala-Beni, tradition holds, was a hunter who discovered the site and reported it to Opuamakuba as good land for settlement. The community they founded, Okoloama, gave its people the name Ibani, later rendered by Europeans as "Bonny." Its first crowned ruler, Asimini, was followed by a line of rulers known as Amayanabo, a title that endured into the era of Atlantic trade.

By the eighteenth century this settlement, favored by a natural, deep-

water harbour on an eastern distributary of the Niger, had become one of the largest slave-exporting depots in West Africa. K. Onwuka Dike's classic history of the Delta's nineteenth-century trading states describes how Bonny's rulers, and above all the Pepple dynasty that dominated the town from the late eighteenth century, built their power on control of this trade with European ships. In a single year, 1790, an estimated twenty thousand people, most of them Igbo and other hinterland groups funneled down the Niger's tributaries, were shipped from Bonny to the Americas. The "canoe house," a trading and political institution that combined elements of lineage, corporation, and small military unit, organized this commerce, and the commerce that replaced it after abolition.

Bonny's commercial dominance did not go uncontested. Jones's study of the Oil Rivers states traces a persistent rivalry with the neighbouring trading state of New Calabar, and, from the 1870s, with the breakaway state of Opobo, for control of the hinterland trade routes feeding the coast. European traders and, increasingly, British consular officials became parties to these rivalries. They extracted a series of commercial treaties from Bonny's kings across the middle decades of the nineteenth century that progressively formalized British claims over the terms of trade. The 1836 and 1850 treaties between Britain and the kings of Bonny, renegotiated and expanded through the following decades, illustrate a pattern that would recur, in different form, a century later. Outside powers secured

preferential access to a valuable commodity through agreements negotiated with a narrow slice of local authority, and the legitimacy and terms of those agreements remained sources of dispute within Bonny itself.

Britain's suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, enforced with increasing determination through the 1830s and 1840s, did not diminish Bonny's commercial importance so much as redirect it. The same canoe houses that had supplied captives turned to the export of palm oil and palm kernels. Bonny remained, through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, one of the principal "oil rivers" ports from which the region as a whole took its European name. The transition was not without its own conflicts. A civil war within Bonny in 1869–70 drove one faction, led by a trader remembered as Jaja, to found a rival trading state at Opobo. Jaja went on to become one of the most formidable indigenous rulers in the Delta before his exile by the British in 1887. His career illustrates both the profitability of the palm oil trade and the volatility of the political order built upon it. Bonny's commercial primacy waned gradually thereafter, particularly after 1916, when the opening of Port Harcourt as a railway terminus thirty-five miles upstream diverted much of the Delta's trade.

Oil returned Bonny to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century, for much the same reason that had made it valuable for the slave trade and the palm oil trade alike. It had a deep, sheltered harbour close to

the Atlantic. Since 1961 the island has served as the Niger Delta's chief oil-shipping point. In 1964 its harbour was further deepened to accommodate larger tankers. A further transformation followed the incorporation of Nigeria LNG in 1989. Construction of a liquefaction plant at Finima, on Bonny Island, began in 1996, and the first two production trains came onstream in 1999 and 2000, with additional trains following in 2002, 2005, 2006, and 2007. By the early 2010s the plant, jointly owned by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and by Shell, Total, and Eni, supplied a meaningful share of the world's liquefied natural gas. Bonny Light crude had by then become a reference grade for African crude more broadly.

Bonny's history, in other words, is not a story of oil's arrival in an otherwise unconnected place. It is the latest chapter in a much longer history. Bonny has long served as critical infrastructure for whatever commodity the Atlantic economy most wanted from the Niger Delta at a given moment, whether captive people, palm produce, crude oil, or liquefied gas. What changed with oil was not Bonny's structural position but the scale of the wealth passing through it, and the distance between that wealth and the people living alongside its point of export.

Oil, Grievance, and the Making of a Developmental Trap, 1970–2000

The same decades that saw Bonny's oil and gas infrastructure expand also saw the build-up of

grievance in the communities that hosted it. Pipeline spills and leakages affected farmland, fishing grounds, and drinking water. Gas flaring and the construction of canals and causeways that altered local hydrology were also recurring complaints across Bonny's communities, echoing a pattern documented across the wider Niger Delta. Failures of pipeline maintenance periodically produced fire disasters. Among the incidents most often cited by Delta residents of the period were pipeline fires at Egborode and Jesse, in Delta State, in 1998 and 2000, and at Onicha-Amiyi Uhu, in Abia State, in 2003. Each of these fires killed scores of people who were scavenging leaking fuel. Years later, the United Nations Environment Programme conducted an independent scientific assessment of contamination in neighbouring Ogoniland. It found soil pollution with hydrocarbons to a depth of several metres. It also found drinking water contaminated with benzene at levels hundreds of times above World Health Organization guidelines. This scale of environmental damage matched what Bonny's communities had long reported of their own experience. Compensation and benefit-sharing arrangements, communities said, had not kept pace with either the environmental cost of extraction or its profitability.

Gas flaring compounded the damage caused by spills and formed a grievance in its own right. Nigeria's military government outlawed the practice by regulation in 1984, but oil companies continued for decades to flare the gas produced alongside crude

rather than invest in re-injection or capture technology, on the grounds that flaring remained the cheaper option. Independent estimates in the 2000s put the volume of gas flared in the Niger Delta at some 2.5 billion cubic feet a year. This represented a loss to the Nigerian treasury estimated in the billions of dollars in forgone revenue, and it was a source of chronic respiratory and other health complaints among communities living near flare sites, including in Bonny. Successive government deadlines for ending the practice came and went through the 2000s without full compliance. Officials attributed the shortfall in part to the cost of the necessary infrastructure, and in part to joint-venture funding arrangements that left the state itself, as part-owner of the ventures in question, financially responsible for much of the investment required.

The scale of environmental damage across the Delta, of which Bonny's own experience formed a part, is documented in the region's own development literature. The United Nations Development Programme's Niger Delta Human Development Report recorded more than 6,800 oil spills across the region between 1976 and 2001 alone, with a cumulative loss of approximately three million barrels of oil into the environment. Government officials periodically acknowledged the scale of the problem while disputing its cause. Nigeria's Ministry of Environment reported 3,203 recorded spillage incidents between 2006 and 2010, attributing under a quarter of these to equipment failure or corrosion

and nearly half to sabotage and vandalism. Communities in Bonny and elsewhere in the Delta consistently disputed this distribution. They argued that companies had strong financial incentives to categorize spills as sabotage, since Nigerian law relieved companies of compensation obligations for spills attributable to third-party interference.

Grievance was compounded, in Bonny's case, by disputes over the local institutions meant to channel whatever benefits oil brought to communities. Finima's chieftaincy dispute is illustrative. Two rival claimants to the paramount chieftaincy of Finima, the position through which compensation from Mobil was negotiated and disbursed, contested the position from 1970, and the dispute turned violent in the 1990s. Human Rights Watch investigators later documented how one claimant's supporters brought in the Mobile Police to intimidate rivals. They also documented how a sum of more than three million dollars, paid by Mobil into an account for the "Brown family," became the subject of years of unresolved dispute over who was entitled to disburse it. Because "host community" status, and the employment, contracts, and development projects that came with it, hinged on which claimant was recognized, this governance dispute determined in practice whether compensation defused local grievance or inflamed it. Human Rights Watch, reporting on Nigeria in the early 2000s, found little evidence that the country's return to civilian rule in 1999 had yet

produced what could be called a democratic dividend for communities like Finima.

Patterns of Confrontation: Comparative Crises across the Delta, 1987–1999

Bonny's experience did not unfold in isolation. Between the late 1980s and the end of the 1990s, a sequence of confrontations took place across the wider Niger Delta. These confrontations established the pattern that Bonny's own crisis would follow in 2001. They also set expectations, on the part of companies, the state, and communities alike, that shaped how each side responded when the crisis came.

The first widely reported clash between a multinational oil company and a host community took place at Iko, in Akwa Ibom State, on 7 July 1987. Youths occupied a Shell flow station for three days, protesting the closure of fishing creeks, the health hazards of gas flaring, and the absence of local employment. Shell's response was to call in the riot police, whose operation destroyed some forty houses and left many villagers destitute. A second, deadlier clash followed in August 1995, when the Mobile Police burned houses in Iko and killed a schoolteacher. The community's subsequent efforts to secure compensation from Shell were unsuccessful, and no member of the security forces was prosecuted for either episode.

Three years after Iko, in July 1990, a similar pattern played out at Umuechem, in the Etche area. A Shell

manager's written request for police protection against a peaceful community protest led to a Mobile Police assault that killed approximately eighty people, including the community's traditional ruler, and destroyed some five hundred houses. Neither the state nor Shell offered compensation to survivors, many of whom took refuge in the surrounding bush for months. A visiting observer described the town in the assault's aftermath as resembling a battlefield, its streets littered with corpses, an image that would recur, on a still larger scale, at Odi nine years later.

A comparable clash occurred at Egi, in Bayelsa State, involving the French company Elf. A dispute in early 1995 escalated into the killing of a policeman sent to recover stolen equipment. The police reprisal that followed left an unknown but substantial number of residents dead and prompted a contemporary journalist to describe the town as reduced to a "ghost town."

The most internationally consequential of these confrontations involved the Ogoni people and Shell. Ogoni communities organized from 1990 under the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by the writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. They mounted a sustained, largely non-violent campaign against Shell's operations. The campaign prompted the company's withdrawal from Ogoniland by January 1993. The response of the Nigerian state, under the military government of General Sani

Abacha, was severe. Following the killing of four Ogoni chiefs in May 1994, Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP leaders were tried by a military tribunal and executed in November 1995. The act drew international condemnation and, within days, Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth. The execution reshaped the political economy of protest across the Delta. Where communities had previously petitioned and demonstrated with some expectation that the state might respond, Ogoni's fate suggested that non-violent methods carried little protection. That lesson fed directly into the more confrontational tactics of the following decade, including occupation, hostage-taking, and pipeline vandalism, Bonny's own crisis of 2001 among them. Long afterward, the United Nations Environment Programme's independent assessment of Ogoniland would confirm the material basis of the community's original grievance. It documented soil and groundwater contamination whose remediation, the report estimated, would take up to three decades and cost in excess of one billion dollars.

The clearest statement of the more assertive politics that followed came from the Ijaw Youth Council, formed at a conference of some five thousand youths representing more than forty Ijaw clans at Kaiama, in Bayelsa State, on 11 December 1998. The resulting Kaiama Declaration asserted Ijaw communities' ownership of the land and resources of Ijaw territory, and repudiated federal petroleum legislation enacted without community consent. It called on "all oil companies' staff and

contractors" to withdraw from Ijaw territories by 30 December 1998, pending resolution of the question of resource control. When the deadline passed without such a withdrawal, Nigerian troops occupied several Ijaw towns. More than thirty youths were reported killed. This security response, as at Umuechem and Iko before it, did more to radicalize than to pacify the movement it targeted. It fed directly into the militant groups that would dominate the following decade, first the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, and from it, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta.

The bloodiest of these confrontations came at Odi, in Bayelsa State, in November 1999, less than a year into Nigeria's return to civilian government under President Olusegun Obasanjo. A group of policemen sent to the town in connection with the deaths of oil-company contractors were killed. In response, the federal government deployed troops who razed most of the town, leaving an estimated fifty thousand people displaced and only a handful of buildings standing. Coming so soon after the promise of civilian rule, the invasion confirmed for many Delta communities that a change of government in Abuja had done little to change the character of the state's engagement with the region. This was the same absence of a democratic dividend that Human Rights Watch would document for Rivers State barely two years later.

By the time youths occupied Mobil's Bonny River Terminal in June

2001, then, the script was in a sense already written. On the community side there was a repertoire of occupation and direct action inherited from Iko, Ogoni, and Kaiama. On the state's side there was a reflexive reliance on the Mobile Police that had already proved counter-productive at Umuechem and Odi. What was specific to Bonny was not the form the crisis took, but the particular local dispute, over the Finima chieftaincy and the compensation it controlled, which gave it its immediate cause.

The 2001 Bonny River Terminal Crisis and the Wider Insurgency

This accumulated grievance found direct expression in June 2001, when youths from Finima occupied Mobil's Bonny River Terminal for three days. They beat company employees and vandalized equipment, and asserted that compensation for the community's earlier relocation had been both inadequate and paid to the wrong claimants in the chieftaincy dispute. Mobil's production fell by more than 650,000 barrels a day for the duration of the occupation, and the company was forced to declare force majeure on its supply contracts. This was a direct, measurable link between an unresolved local dispute and an interruption to Nigeria's oil exports. The episode was not isolated. Shell's own reporting for 2001 recorded 245 community disturbances across its Niger Delta operations, against 244 the year before, and forty-five hostage-taking incidents, alongside production losses running into the millions of barrels.

Bonny's crisis unfolded, moreover, against the backdrop of a Delta-wide insurgency that gathered force through the middle of the decade. Militant groups attacked pipelines and installations, took foreign oil workers hostage, and forced the shutting-in of dozens of on and offshore fields, including Shell's Bonga field. Among these groups was the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, which had emerged from the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force. By one contemporary estimate, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and its joint-venture partners lost tens of billions of dollars to the insurgency between 2006 and 2009, and several hundred expatriate workers were kidnapped over the same period. Separately, pipeline vandalism across the country produced more than sixteen thousand recorded breaks between 2000 and 2010, with losses reported in the hundreds of billions of naira.

Underpinning much of this violence was a thriving illicit economy in stolen crude oil, often described by analysts as "bunkering." Armed groups, sometimes with the reported complicity of security personnel and oil-company staff, tapped pipelines and loaded stolen crude onto barges and tankers for sale on regional and international markets. Contemporary estimates placed the volume of oil stolen in this way at tens of thousands of barrels a day, worth several million dollars daily at prevailing prices. This shadow economy gave militancy a self-sustaining financial base independent of any single grievance or negotiation. It complicated

efforts by both companies and the state to resolve the underlying conflict through compensation or dialogue alone.

Some de-escalation followed the presidential amnesty programme announced in 2009, under which thousands of militants surrendered weapons in exchange for cash stipends and training. The arrangement produced several years of relative calm and a significant recovery in Nigerian oil output. Renewed militant activity within a few years, however, suggested that the amnesty had addressed only the insurgency's immediate symptom, armed mobilization, without resolving the developmental grievance that had produced it in the first place. This was a pattern consistent with Bonny's own experience over the preceding three decades.

Because Bonny Light functioned as an international benchmark grade, disruption to loading at Bonny carried a transmission channel into global markets that a purely domestic disruption elsewhere in Nigeria would not. Interruptions to a benchmark cargo affected the reference price used for a wider basket of comparable crudes, not Nigeria's export volume alone. A dispute over compensation in a single Bonny community, in other words, sat unusually close to the mechanism by which international oil was priced.

Responses in Historical Perspective: Corporations, the State, and the Communities

Shell's response to the international scrutiny that followed the 1995 execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa set the

pattern that other companies in the Delta would follow. In March 1997 the company adopted a new Statement of General Business Principles, committing it, among other things, to give proper regard to health, safety, and the environment. It subsequently built a dedicated community-development unit within its Nigerian subsidiary, and began publishing an annual account of its Niger Delta operations, *People and the Environment*, from the late 1990s onward. By 2001 that unit was spending approximately fifty-two million dollars a year on community development across the Delta. Yet an evaluation commissioned by Shell itself found fewer than a third of 408 funded projects fully successful, and Bonny's communities in this study consistently described such spending as inadequate to what had been extracted. As Bronwen Manby argued at the time, the responsibility of oil multinationals operating in a weak-governance setting like Nigeria's extended beyond compliance with local law, to the human rights conditions their own operations helped create. This was a standard that Human Rights Watch's investigations of the same period applied directly to Shell's and Mobil's conduct in the Delta. Read historically, corporate community-relations spending functioned less as a resolution of Bonny's underlying grievance than as an ongoing premium paid against the risk of its recurrence.

Not every company followed the same course, and by the late 2000s the roster of firms operating in the Delta had itself diversified. Chinese state-owned companies, in particular, which

by then held stakes in several Nigerian blocks, published far less detailed community-relations reporting on their Nigerian operations than Shell, Chevron, or ExxonMobil did. They tended to concentrate their published sustainability disclosures on domestic Chinese projects and to say comparatively little about the Delta specifically, a gap noted by scholars working on the broader comparative political economy of extractive investment across the Global South. This uneven disclosure across companies operating in the same communities made it harder, for both researchers and communities themselves, to assess which firms were meeting even the modest standards Shell and its peers had, however imperfectly, come to publish.

Part of the corporate response operated at the level of international soft governance rather than local spending. In 2000, several parties came together to establish the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. These included the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, a group of oil and mining companies led by Shell, BP, Chevron, and Texaco, and human rights organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These were a set of non-binding guidelines governing how extractive companies should engage public and private security forces without becoming complicit in abuses. Shell and the other companies operating in Bonny were, at least nominally, bound by these principles by the early 2000s. Yet the persistence of Mobile

Police abuses in Finima during exactly this period tells a different story. These abuses occurred at a company facility, guarded by state security forces the company helped fund, and implicated in the intimidation of one side of a local chieftaincy dispute. They illustrate the gap between international commitments of this kind and their enforcement on the ground, a gap that recurs throughout the history traced in this article.

The Nigerian state's characteristic response was militarized protection of infrastructure. Mobile Police and army or navy detachments were posted to company facilities, paid for in practice by the companies themselves, and reinforced periodically by larger federal operations. The precedents, as the previous section showed, were not encouraging. The security responses at Umuechem in 1990 and Odi in 1999 had already demonstrated that heavy security responses tended to generate new grievance rather than resolve old grievance. Bonny's own experience with the Mobile Police in Finima, in the early 2000s, repeated rather than corrected this lesson.

The Nigerian government's structural response took two main forms. The first was the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission in 2000, as a successor to the earlier and widely criticized Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission. The second was periodic revision of the federal revenue-allocation formula. Together these represented an attempt to address the developmental deficit

directly, rather than merely policing its consequences. Communities and independent analysts alike criticized the allocation formula for failing to reflect the fact that the Delta generated over eighty per cent of national resource revenue. By the mid-2000s the region's human development indicators continued to lag national averages despite its oil wealth. An SPDC-commissioned baseline study reached a conclusion that anticipated much of the later literature. It found that access to the benefits of oil production, not the mere fact of extraction, was the central trigger of conflict. This was true both between companies and communities, and between communities themselves.

What is most striking, set against this record, is what Bonny's communities themselves identified, when interviewed directly, as the changes that would actually stabilize their relationship with the oil industry. These were withdrawal of the military, more consistent employment, a sustained company presence, education and skills training, and functioning partnerships with both company and government built on genuine communication and visible infrastructure. This was, in effect, a locally generated diagnosis of what four decades of corporate and state policy had not yet supplied. It is striking how little of it appears, even now, in the formal record of how oil companies and the Nigerian state have planned for security in the Delta.

Conclusion

Bonny Island's history over the centuries touched on here, and the four and a half decades examined in detail, sits at the intersection of two bodies of scholarship that have rarely been read together. These are the history of conflict in the Niger Delta, and the study of energy security. Read together, they suggest a single underlying pattern, visible across all three of the island's great commercial eras: slaves, palm oil, and hydrocarbons alike. In a community whose land and waters have supplied, in turn, enslaved people, palm oil, crude oil, and liquefied natural gas to the wider world, security has followed development rather than preceding it. Its absence has produced consequences that reached well beyond Bonny's shoreline. A three-day occupation once cut Mobil's output by two-thirds. An insurgency later cost Nigeria's national oil company tens of billions of dollars over just a few years in the late 2000s. The Voluntary Principles of 2000, the Niger Delta Development Commission of the same year, and the presidential amnesty of 2009 were each different in kind. But each represented an acknowledgment that the earlier approach had failed on its own terms. That earlier approach had treated unrest primarily as a security problem to be policed. Each nonetheless left the underlying developmental deficit largely intact, and each was followed, within a few years, by some recurrence of the very unrest it had been designed to end.

This is a single, historically bounded case. The wider relevance of the pattern traced here deserves testing against other extractive communities. Iko, Umuechem, Egi, Ogoni, and Odi all suggest that Bonny's experience is not unique. The pattern also deserves testing against comparable oil and gas-producing regions elsewhere. What Bonny's history does establish is that the pattern is not speculative. It has already produced measurable interruptions to a benchmark international crude stream and to a facility that supplies a meaningful share of the world's liquefied natural gas. For historians of the Niger Delta, this suggests that the region's local conflicts deserve to be read as part of the global history of energy, not merely as its domestic footnote. For students of energy security, it suggests that the security of a supply chain may be inseparable from the history of the communities through which it runs.

None of this is to suggest that Bonny's history offers a simple lesson easily applied elsewhere. The specific shape of grievance traced here, a contested chieftaincy, a particular relocation agreement, a particular set of Mobile Police officers billeted in a particular town hall, is irreducibly local. It is the product of decisions and disputes that a purely structural account of "petro-violence" or the "resource curse" can describe only in outline. What the structural literature and the local record agree on, however, is the direction of causation. It is not conflict that causes underdevelopment. It is underdevelopment, amid plenty, that

causes conflict. In a community like Bonny, the old formulation still holds. Development brings security, and security, in the end, brings peace.

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