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the aged. Most youths of school age are dropping out of school and relocating to the deep mangrove to indulge in the illicit but lucrative trade. Many of them now see education as a waste of time, especially when a successful deal could fetch them big money and command the respect of their community folks.

In all, it is important to note that the problem of oil theft cannot be solved just by tackling the symptom. The roots that partly precipitate oil theft are the massive underdevelopment of the region, coupled with youth unemployment, economic backwardness, decadent social infrastructures, and embezzlement of oil money by some in power. All these must be tackled even as means are put in place to dissuade people from stealing oil.

Concluding Reflections

This paper has clearly shown that oil theft is unethical and does more harm than good. Oil theft must be stopped if the Nigerian environment is to be protected. There are many things that government, corporate bodies, NGO'S and other social agents can do to stop oil theft. The most important is that there is great need for ethical re-orientation and moral re-armament for people to know that oil theft is not worth it. The risks are too enormous as human lives are devastated, development is hampered and the environment destroyed for decades. The African communalistic values need to be reawakened. Humans have a duty to taken responsibility when unethical and immoral things take place in society. There is also the obligation to act to protect the natural environment. And the Nigerian society should be constructed in such a way that people will not be tempted to food theft. This is the note on which this paper closes calling on all to take action to stop oil theft.

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The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) said it regretted that the pollution associated with oil theft had polluted the flora and fauna of the Niger-Delta which the predominantly fishing and farming people depend on; resulting to diminished catch for fishermen and low yield to farmers. Mr. Omare explained that the pollution by oil theft was worsened by the crude methods deployed by security agencies who usually spill the oil into the environment in the process of destroying materials used for oil theft. 'Though the security agencies may be celebrating this primitive approach of burning camps and spilling oil as a success in the fight against oil theft,' the group said. 'In actual fact it has caused more damage to the Niger-Delta environment than addressing the problem of oil theft.'

Apart from the big oil thieves in public places, there are many petty oil thieves in the villages in Niger Delta. Many of these petty thieves know that stealing oil or illegal bunkering is bad, but they claim they do it out of necessity. Okeowo (2014) in an interview with one Daniel Sekibo (not real name) presents him saying: "It's not OK for us to be doing this, we know, but the government is not looking after us at all,'There were no jobs here, so what do we do?' The situation in the Niger delta is very apathetic." Okeowo (2014) reveals further that:

More than 90 percent of Nigeria's budget comes from oil and gas; until recently, the country was Africa's leading exporter of oil. And yet Nigeria refines less than one-fifth of its own output—so little, in fact, that it has to reimport its own oil, refined elsewhere, at a higher cost. This is the situation that Sekibo and his peers exploit. In their eyes, not only are they stealing oil as a tax on the companies that pollute their communities, but they are also providing a much-needed and more affordable source of domestic fuel. And even though politicians floated the idea of building refineries in the delta, it hasn't happened, and there are few jobs. A 2011 report by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta finds the youth unemployment rate in the region is 40 percent.

There are many ethical issues that need to be attended to on this issue of oil theft. It is immoral when people abandon education, many other legal occupation, and turn to oil bunkering because of the greed for wealth. Oyadongha (2014) indicates that:

While pipelines belonging to the oil majors suffered habitual breaches by vandals and oil thieves, the illegal business of local cooking of crude oil has inexorably attracted the local population, including

of the land and its resources are ceded to communities or individuals in the Niger Delta, oil theft should still be considered an immoral behavior. That an individual or group indigenous to the Niger Delta engage in oil theft if the ownership now belongs to their communities does not make it good or right.

Even if there are Niger Deltans who see nothing wrong in oil theft, they ought to realize that: "Most times these illegal activities lead to huge economic waste, environmental degradation and loss of lives within minutes" (Nwanosike, 2013). Nwanosike (2013) states further quoting Col. Hamza Gambo that: "All of us as patriotic Nigerians, must condemn it. All of us have collective responsibility towards checking bunkering and pipeline vandalism. We owe it as a duty to the country, to ourselves and the future of our children to report the activities of these elements to security agencies." Rather than encouraging deprived and very poor Niger Deltans at the risks of their lives to go and be scavenging for oil from broken pipelines all arms of society such as NGOs, MNCs and government agencies should empower them to be gainfully employed in fields such as agriculture, marine businesses, educational services that are neglected in the Niger Delta.

Oil theft is a form of criminality and is a social evil. An Economist Correspondent (2013) relates that:

The trade in stolen oil helps other transnational criminal networks to spread across the Gulf of Guinea, creating global links between oil thieves, pirates and traffickers in arms and drugs. The damage caused by thieves also often forces oil companies to shut pipelines down.

Another critical issue that cannot be ignored is that people in public office are engaged in oil theft. Eziukwu (2014) quotes the Ijaw Youth Council asserting that:

We wish to state for the umpteenth time that the people involved in the business of oil scam are top politicians, serving and retired military personnel, oil company executives and their foreign collaborators. The Niger-Delta locals are used as artisans. The involvement of these high profiled persons in the business of oil theft is the reason why the government and security agencies have not been able to summon the courage and political will to bring oil theft to a stop.

If not for anything the environmental devastation that oil theft causes makes it unacceptable. It is not only human interest and wellbeing that counts. Illegal refineries have done much damage to the environment. This is unacceptable in the light of environmental ethics. [Eziukwu](#) (2014) states that:

protests, intense activism and disruption of oil production. Apart from some Niger Deltans, top government officials, MNC's staff, the navy, soldiers and the police are involved in illegal oil bunkering. To halt oil theft would require the government, MNCs, security officials and the Niger Deltans to act in synergy in curbing the trend.

Even though the socio-economic deprivations and sufferings of Niger Deltans may have precipitated some aspects of oil theft, this should not be used to justify oil theft. Many in government offices have hijacked the yearnings of the Niger Deltans populace to steal oil.

The above argument for oil theft can be countered by the principle of "socialization." The term is used here not in terms of socialization of children into society mores and values but in terms of government bringing resources and properties under social and common control for the benefit of the common good. It is acknowledged that the state has a role to play both in the economy and the management of natural resources. It has a place in socialization and land reforms. Peschke (1993) states that:

Socialization is the transfer of certain properties to the ownership of the state (nationalization) or of other public law corporations, especially municipalities (communalization). Socialization is justified if it is required by the needs of the common good. But in every case in which socialization is under consideration, it must be shown that it is indeed in the interest of the general good, for socialization interferes with the sphere of private ownership and with the right of those whose property is expropriated. (p. 733).

The problem very often is that socialization is poorly managed, individual and communal rights are violated, and the management of resources appropriated by the state is bedeviled with corruption and embezzlement. Much of the agitations and the struggle for resource control would have abated or not even arisen if the enormous wealth that comes from oil and gas is well managed for the benefits of all Nigerians, and a significant proportion given to the communities of the Niger Delta as they are the ones who often suffer the pain of environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration activities. While oil theft is to be denounced and discouraged, the socialization that brought all land into the control of the federal government can be questioned as it came in a military regime and not in a democratic manner. While that critical questioning goes on and people advocate for the review of the Land Use Decree, the laws of the land should be respected, and all agitations should be done in a peaceful manner. Even if the right of ownership and management

humanitarianism and discouraged. No Niger Deltan is permitted to break or vandalize an oil pipeline even if it is in his backyard to siphon oil. A great risk is involved. Breaking an oil pipeline can cause fire disaster that can destroy lives, properties and farmlands.

Oil theft is immoral even if it is carried out at a low level. Stealing is wrong by its very nature. It is not based on the consequence that it brings. Even if someone steals for a good reason, it remains stealing. Stealing is an intentional act. No one steals by accident or by mistake. It is a conscious effort that arises out of choice. People decide to steal. If it lacks a conscious effort or lack the element of choice, then it cannot be qualified as stealing. Oil theft is founded on the spirit of greed. Most oil thieves only think of their profits. They care nothing about the wellbeing of the people and the environment. They care not if they deprive the country of needed fund for development.

A great challenge with regard to oil theft is that many people in high places are benefitting from it and so they pay lip service to stopping it. An Economist Correspondent (2013) says

Politicians, security forces, militants, oil-industry staff, oil traders and members of local communities all profit from 'bunkering' of oil, so few have an interest in stopping it. When so many are feeding from the trough, it is doubtful if anyone in Nigeria has the political will to stop it.

There are those who argue that oil theft is not a criminal activity and that it is the right thing to do. They argue that the oil and gas resources originally belonged to Niger Deltans and were wrongfully and unjustly appropriated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Why oil theft on a massive scale by those who use it to enrich themselves may be criminal, low scale oil theft to basic survival by poor and impoverished people in the Niger Delta is justified, they argue. There is also the problem of inability of government to fully meet the development needs of the people of the Niger Delta. This has made some to turn to oil theft and other forms of criminality. Ufuoma and Omoruyi (2014) aver that:

Oil theft is perceived as a consequence of the state's incapacity to bring succor to the populace in the Niger Delta and their desperation to meet their necessities. An analysis of oil theft in the context of the political economy theory reveals that it is a consequence of government's exploitation of the Niger Deltans: the horrors brought about by oil exploration; the desperation of the Niger Deltans to change the social order; government's repression of Niger Delta agitations and economic scarcity experienced by the Niger Deltans. Oil theft is part of a continuum which started with mild agitations to

He propounds further that:

Food theft is lawful because in extreme need the common ownership of things by all takes precedence over the division of goods by private ownership which is normally necessary. Life, health, liberty or other comparable goods are of greater value than material possessions not necessary for human life. Therefore in a case of conflict the material goods as the lesser values must give way for the higher ones. (p. 703).

In moral thought there are conditions under which food theft is permissible. The conditions according to Peschke (1993) are: extreme need not just grave need, acquiring what is necessary cannot be done through other means such as begging or asking, the owner of what is to be appropriated is not in equal need, only the little needed to alleviate need is permissible; and if the good to be appropriated can be obtained through a loan or restored later it should be done. Oil theft falls short of some of these conditions and should be discouraged and eradicated. While it is true that some very poor and impoverished persons in the Niger Delta may be in the extreme need, what they need to avert hunger can be obtained through asking and depending on charities from their communities. The extended family system in Africa that provided some form of social security against life adversities is still present in many communities in the Niger Delta. Much of the oil theft in the Niger Delta is rooted in greed and gluttony and is not aimed at taking a little to avert hunger. Many people even among the poor and the youth who engage in oil theft have some form of petty trade or work that can enable them survive. The dangers and the risks involved in oil theft and bunkering are too much for it to be permitted or taken lightly. Many have died through oil fire in the process of oil bunkering. It should be discouraged and government should rise to its responsibility for providing access to basic social amenities including food. Oil multinationals should rise up to their corporate social responsibility to ensure that poor people are not tempted to oil bunkering. The rich who engage in oil bunkering need to be prosecuted.

Even if a resource like petroleum oil which is not food was to be allowed to be taken illegally by people who claim that their lives are endangered or threatened, it will only create more problems for the nation and the society. The oil theft or oil bunkering that is discussed here and that is very often present in the Niger Delta is carried out not by individuals or groups who face threat of extinction or death but by powerful cabals who either see it as an entitlement or a way to enrich themselves at the detriment of the poor masses of people in the Niger Delta. If peradventure oil theft is carried out on a low level by poor people in the Niger Delta who want to eke out a living, then their action though not legal must also be judged within the paradigm of

starvation can be excused. The person is not stealing to enrich himself rather it is to fulfill the basic human need to survive. The Vatican (1994) states that:

The seventh commandment forbids theft, that is, usurping another's property against the reasonable will of the owner. There is no theft if consent can be presumed or if refusal is contrary to reason and the universal destination of goods. This is the case in obvious and urgent necessity when the only way to provide for immediate, essential needs (food, shelter, clothing . . .) is to put at one's disposal and use the property of others. (no. 2408)

Brown (2009) quotes the Reverend Tim Jones, an Anglican priest who told his parishioners that when they are tempted to crime to feed their families, they can shoplift since this is less harmful than prostitution, burglary, or robbery. Brown (2009) notes that Jones is standing in the main stream of opinion championed by Aquinas; and that Jones wanted to draw people attention especially that of business institutions and government to the plight of poor people,

With regard to traditional African culture, Amadi (1982) states that in many African cultures, stealing food is often overlooked and not punishable or the punishment was very light. But Amadi quickly notes that "these days when thief pleads hunger in court, they are more likely to provoke laughter.... If the plea of hunger were allowed now, all food sellers, including supermarkets will immediately go out of business" (p.16). It could be seen then that it is problematic to apply the traditional idea of permissible stealing in case of food to satisfy hunger to the contemporary context of oil bunkering. While in moral theology and philosophy, stealing in extreme need to satisfy hunger is permitted (Peschke 1992, p. 701); petroleum oil is not food. Though it can be argued by some that the immediate financial benefit from the sale of petroleum oil will be used to buy food to alleviate hunger. The viewpoint of Peschke (1992) is worth considering again when he writes:

Necessity is an extreme when person is expose to the certain or very probable periled of loosing life, health, liberty or goods of similar importance, and is unable to help himself. The right to appropriate goods of others in this situation also applies when one alleviates the need of a third party. Since most of the time the goods which are needed and taken in extremes necessity are foods, this kind of appropriation is also called food theft. But this does not mean that only food may be taken in extreme need. Also clothing, fuel and other basic commodities can be appropriated for the same reason. (p. 703).

Another way that oil theft affects the environment is through what could be called environmental vandalism. Oil thieves very often carry out their illegal trade during the night and through illegal routes and roads. Oil thieves drive trucks and other vehicles and clear illegal roads through the forest thereby destroying vegetations. There is no doubt that the movement of vehicles and even flying boats across streams destroy organisms and other plants in such places.

Ethical Evaluation of Oil Theft

Can oil theft be justified? When oil theft is spoken of, it is important to ask, who is stealing from whom? The land and the resources originally belonged to individuals or communities in the Niger Delta. Since the Land Use Decree is considered unjust by almost all Niger Deltans, does individuals or groups that take oil out of the pipelines in their neighbourhood and communities, commit any crime? It should be realized that if this is allowed, it will open up a Pandora's Box. The laws of the land should be respected. The laws can be resisted peacefully but until such a time when the laws are changed, the citizens are not permitted to take the laws into their hands. This is why taking oil illegally from the pipeline is considered theft; it is immoral. It is unjust to the corporate existence of the nation. Even if it was to be granted that the original owners who have been deprived of their resources can enrich themselves through oil bunkering, other problems still arise. Very often, oil theft is carried out by greedy individuals and even corporate bodies who are only interested in enriching themselves to the detriment of the community and other citizens.

There is also another issue when it comes to the issue of oil theft. In both moral philosophy, moral theology and in African traditional thought, there were situations in which theft seems to be judged with the eyes of compassion. This has to do especially with cases in which people took food to satisfy their immediate hunger so that they will not starve to death. Glenn (n.d) cites Thomas Aquinas who opined that:

When a person is in extreme need of material things, and there is no way of emerging from his extremity but by taking what belongs to another, the *surplus* which another possesses becomes common property, and the taker is not guilty of theft. Thus a starving man, or one whose dependents are starving, may take, openly or secretly, the food that will save human life. This, of course, is on condition that the taker of the food has no other means of getting it, and that he does not leave the person from whom he takes the food in as desperate a situation as his own.

For Thomas Aquinas, someone who appropriates food that is not his own to satisfy immediate hunger instead of dying of

sources, it could range from 150,000 – 200,000 BPD. Ndubuisi (2013) reports that Honorable Kingsley Kuku, the special adviser to the president on Niger Delta bemoans the situation that; if oil theft is not tackled, it will lead to an economic perdition. Kuku as cited by Ndubuisi (2013) relates that about 400,000 barrels of crude oil is stolen daily and this should be considered as economic crime that requires the Nigerian military to act. Kuku compares oil theft to blood diamond of Sierra Leone and that oil theft will drain the nation of fund for development. It is painful to note that according to him, what is stolen daily is higher than Ghana's total oil production. The solution to oil theft according to Kuku as cited by Ndubuisi (2013) is to make Niger Delta indigenes part owner of the oil resources and also get them involved in securing oil infrastructures; there should also be cooperation between the oil companies and states in the Niger Delta. As it is, oil thieves are economic saboteurs and criminals.

Illegal bunkering has also precipitated conflict and violence. Nigeria has set up various security forces to tackle the problem of oil theft and illegal refineries. In the process of these security forces carrying out their duties, they are often resisted by oil thieves and oil bunkers. In the ensuing violence, lives and properties have often been lost.

Human Rights Watch (2003) indicates that oil theft is perhaps Nigeria's most lucrative private business. It should be noted that this is an illegal business. Because it is so lucrative, many young men and women have abandoned educational pursuit and other viable businesses to enter into the creeks of the Niger Delta to bunker for oil. In all of these, human capital is being wasted.

Oil theft also constitutes great problem for the natural environment. Oil theft which is often done by violently breaking pipelines or siphoning oil from pipelines often spills crude oil on the land, rivers and marine environment. A visit to places where oil bunkering has taken place or where you have illegal refineries shows a scoured earth or burnt down vegetation in the premises. In the process to stop oil bunkering or illegal refineries, security forces has burnt down illegal refineries. In the process, the vegetations, plants and organisms in the soil are mercilessly destroyed. The rivers and streams are polluted by leakage from vandalized pipelines. The pollution of the environment drives animals and birds from their habitations; and endangered species of plants and animals are destroyed.

Because oil theft drains the nation of needed fund, it also affects environmental protection and conservation activities. Money that could have been used to promote environmental education, aid environmental agencies and plunged into solving environmental problems such as soil erosion, desertification, deforestation and environmental pollution is stolen through oil bunkering.

The Niger Delta Region which occupies an area of 75,000 sq. km is located in Southern Nigeria. It stretches from the Nigeria-Cameroon boundary in the East; bounded by Ondo-Ogun boundaries in the West; by Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Kogi and Ekiti States to the North and the Atlantic Ocean forming the general boundary in the south. It is Africa's and the world's third largest mangrove forest: one of the world's most expensive fresh water swamps in western and central Africa and Nigeria's major concentration of high biodiversity. The Niger delta is the home of over 30 million people who live about 13,400 long settled aboriginal communities made up of the Ijo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ishan, Ilaje, Ibibio, Anang, Efik, Ekpeye, Ikwere, Edo, Ogoni, Ogba Engeni, Ukwani, etc ethnic nationalities. Over 75% of this settlement lies along the coastal region of Nigeria. (p.29)

The Niger Delta is too important in Nigeria's political economy and global politics to be neglected. Uranta (2009) citing The Niger Delta Development Commission brochure, says the Niger Delta is the third largest wetland in the world, accounts for 90% of Nigeria's revenue, has oil reserves of about 30 billion barrels, has gas reserve of about 160 trillion cubic feet and is rich in various agricultural products. The neglect of the Niger Delta for many decades has led to the agitation for resource control and ethnic militancy. Arising from the suffering of the people, some agitators and greedy people have hijacked the situation to illegally bunk for oil.

The Impact of Oil Theft

Oil theft has grave impact on the human and social environment. Money that could have been spent on human and infrastructural development is lost through illegal bunkering. Even though government has made giant strides in terms of development of infrastructure through the Niger Delta Development Commission, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and other government agencies, there is still more to be accomplished in the Niger Delta. There are still many roads that are yet to be constructed. There are still many people suffering from poverty. There are still many unemployed youths. Many government facilities such as health centres are poorly equipped. Educational institutions are poorly staffed. Nigeria and the region is already suffering from the effect of corruption and embezzlement by public officers. The problem is now complicated by illegal oil bunkering through which enormous financial resources is stolen and wasted. It is difficult to quantify the amount of oil that is stolen away from the Niger Delta. Human Rights Watch (2013) states that according to some

by Islamic law and precedent. For theft to be established, the stolen goods must have been in custody, namely, in a location belonging to someone, such as home or a shop, or under watch” (p. 456).

Here the term “oil” can now be defined. The oil that is the concern here is petroleum oil. Chambers (1999) defines petroleum as, “naturally occurring oil consisting of a thick dark liquid mixture of hydrocarbons, distillation of which yields a wide range of petrochemicals e.g. liquid and gas fuels, asphalt, and raw materials for the manufacture of plastics, solvents, drugs, etc.” (p.1036). Petroleum oil is a natural resource found in the ground. In Nigeria, it is found in the Niger Delta. It is proper to understand that various countries have various definitions on the ownership of natural resources found in the ground. Before the Land Use Decree of 1978, the land especially its mineral resources were owned by individuals or communities. With the Land Use Decree everything especially the mineral resources in the land was brought under the control of Nigeria’s federal government. Nobody can exploit or drill from mineral resources such as petroleum oil without a license from the federal government. Though the Land Use Decree is considered to be an unjust decree and has been challenged in many quarters, the fact remains that legally in Nigeria, the land and its resources have been appropriated by government. From the legal perspective, any act of drilling or exploiting for petroleum oil outside what is permitted by government becomes oil theft. This is technically called bunkering in Nigeria. Human Rights Watch (2003) is right to state that:

Under the Nigerian constitution, all minerals, oil and gas in Nigeria belong to the federal government. Oil extraction outside the framework of an agreement with the federal government is illegal as is the possession of crude oil by any one not licensed to do so; specific crimes have also been created relating to damage to oil installations (including for the purpose of siphoning off crude oil or petroleum product).

An Economist Correspondent (2013) states that: “The standard depiction of oil theft in Nigeria shows a young man, knee-deep in a swamp, with a bucket or wooden canoe full of pilfered thick black sludge. But a besuited banker in Geneva or a slick shipping trader in London might provide an equally apt image. A report by Chatham House, a London think-tank, unravels a complex network that arranges the theft of oil worth billions of dollars a year.” Oil theft mainly occurs in Nigeria’s Niger Delta and the Gulf of Guinea. The Niger Delta is located in the south-south of Nigeria.

Okaba (2008) citing Alagoa and Okaba states that:

happiness; it is equally natural and the law of nemesis must always be kept in mind. Ethics is aimed at human wellbeing.

Since the rise of environmental ethics, it is now understood also that it must aim at environmental wellbeing and protection. Every form of human conduct directly or indirectly affects the environment. The environment is understood to mean all that surrounds an organism or entity. All that surrounds human persons make up their environment. The environment is inclusive of humans, plants, animals, mountains, streams, the atmosphere, and so forth.

It is important to understand what environmental ethics is here. Light (2005)

Environmental ethics is that branch of applied ethics that has been most concerned with the moral grounds for the preservation and restoration of the environment. But, unlike many other areas of applied ethics, it has evolved more as a series of debates concerning issues in meta-ethics rather than as a straightforward application of normative ethical theories to environmental problems, such as the provision of moral arguments for the protection of rainforests, or moral reasons for requiring a comprehensive global agreement on the production of greenhouse gases. Since its inception as a field of professional philosophy in the early 1970s, the principal question that has instead occupied the time of most philosophers in this area is how the value of nature can best be described such that it is directly morally considerable in and of itself, rather than only indirectly morally considerable because it is appreciated or needed by humans. (p.633)

Today ethics is not just concerned about human behaviour with respect to just how it affects humans. It also has to do with how it affects the natural environment – the plants, the animals, the mountains, the rocks, the oceans and so on. It is on earth that humans carry out their life activities. All human activities then affect the earth. In examining the question of oil theft that is the central concern here, how oil theft affects the natural environment is also discussed.

It is proper here to define what oil theft is. To understand oil theft, the term “theft” must be defined. According to Chambers (1999), the word “theft” means, “Stealing, an act of stealing someone else’s’ property, with the intention of permanently depriving them of it; something stolen” (p.1461). In Peschke (1992), “theft is the secret appropriation of what belongs to another against his reasonable will. If the appropriation is done openly and forcibly, it is robbery” (p. 701). Glasse (2005) rightly notes that in Islam, “the conditions of theft are minutely detailed

moral means through which the people of the Niger Delta, militants, and those who steal oil can advocate for the restoration of their neglected rights. Oil theft is unethical and immoral. Little attention has been paid to this problem in much of the literature on the Niger Delta from a moral perspective. It is important to examine this issue. To examine this issue, this paper will examine the concept of oil theft; define what ethics is and give the meaning of the term environment, and environmental ethics. Also the concept of the Niger Delta will be examined. Thereafter the paper will examine the situation of oil theft and its impact on the human and natural environment of the Niger Delta. This will be followed by an ethical examination of the immorality of oil theft. The need to eradicate oil theft will also be analyzed. After this the paper will make some recommendations and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

According to Omoregbe (1993),

Ethics is connected with the question of right and wrong in human behaviour. It deals with how men ought to behave, and why it is wrong to behave in certain ways and right to behave in certain other ways. In other words, ethics studies the reasons why certain kinds of actions are morally wrong and why other kinds of actions are morally right and commendable. Good and bad (or right and wrong) actions are known in classical moral philosophy as 'virtues and vices'. Hence the British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, defines ethics or moral philosophy as, 'the science of virtue and vices.' (p.ix)

There is no domain of reality that is outside the scope of ethics. Ethics examines all of human behaviours to see whether they meet up to the standard that promotes wellbeing and welfare. In Kehinde (2008), "Ethics is the study of values that guides and guards our interactive, interpersonal and personal behaviours. It is that aspect of philosophy that evaluates the principles which we live by or we ought to live by" (p.36). It should be understood then that ethics is an important human discipline. Imagine if there are no standards for measuring the quality of human behaviour whether they are right or wrong, then there will be no basis for laws, rules and regulations to guide human society. And if that is the case, there will be breakdown of law and order. Life will be chaotic and unruly. There will be no basis for government to make policies and control her citizens. Ethics is important to guide and regulate human conduct. It is important for social order and the common good. As Omoregbe (1993) indicates, ethics helps humans to live a moral life and it is important for humans to live a moral life because they are created to be social beings and members of a society; they are rational beings; it helps to create

**Ethics, Oil Theft and the Environment of Nigeria's Niger
Delta**

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Abstract

Oil theft has and is posing a serious challenge to Nigeria, her people and environment. Oil theft in the Niger Delta involves the illegal siphoning and draining of crude oil from pipelines of oil companies in the region. It brings about degradation of the land and marine environment, insecurity and conflict between oil thieves and security forces, and the quick wealth from oil theft has precipitated greed and some have abandoned their occupations and educational pursuits to enter the illegal oil bunkering trade. Though the poor developmental state of the Niger Delta, insecurity, and unemployment have precipitated oil theft; the fact remains that oil theft is unethical and a criminal activity. It is the unethical dimension of oil theft that is the main concern here and the need to combat it. The paper highlights the fact that oil theft is unacceptable and there is need among other things for moral rearmament to tackle it.

Keywords: Ethics, oil theft, environment, Niger Delta, pollution, and degradation.

Introduction

One of the greatest problems that Nigeria is facing, especially the Niger Delta is the problem of oil theft also called oil bunkering. The reason why this is a problem is that millions of naira is lost on a daily basis as a result of oil theft. Oil theft has also resulted in militancy and violence against innocent citizens and the state security forces. Many people who are caught in the crossfire between state security forces and oil thieves have often lost their lives. This is so because those responsible for oil theft can go to any length to illegally acquire oil from the soil of the Niger Delta to enrich their private coffers. Oil theft is also a problem as it leads to environmental pollution and degradation. Those who steal oil do not care anything about environmental protection. They are willing to vandalize pipelines in order to steal oil. In the process a great volume of oil escapes and drains into the environment, destroying various organisms and species of plants and animals.

Even though the people of the Niger Delta have suffered a great deal of socio-economic environmental injustice, the proper way of righting the wrongs that have been meted out against them, should not be through oil theft. There are many legal and

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realization of equal citizenship in Nigeria. Citizenship should not be ethnically determined for our national best interest. An Igbo man can become mayor in Hausa/Fulani land, whereas a Yoruba man or Hausa/Fulani man can become mayor in Igbo land without any restrictions. There should be no superior citizenship and inferior citizenship, such parochial allegiance and loyalties should be banned by legislation for the good of the Nigerian state.

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