



The Interface between Oil Resources, Violence and Conflict: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This work reviews the literature on the concepts of conflict and violence, the paradoxes of oil resources, oil violence and conflict, with an analytical examination of existing debates and assumptions on the so-called oil resources curse. The work aims to understand the effects of oil resources in fuelling violent conflicts using political economy paradigms. This discussion departs from using a macro-level analysis (state-centred perspective) in examining the structures and paradoxes of oil resources, but adopts a micro-analysis perspective (community perspective). The work is about the application of political, economics and sociological scholarships on oil resources and socio-economic changes specifically within oil village communities separately from the central authorities in oil producing states. The paper tries to point out the need to examine the role of non-state (traditional authorities, recognized and unrecognized groups such as chiefs, community development Association, Women's group and Youth Association) governance and struggle for dominance as potential causes of violent conflicts in oil village communities.

Keywords: Violence, conflict, resource conflict, oil resource, oil resource curse, oil communities, governance and struggle

INTRODUCTION

Defining Conflict, Violence, Violent Conflict and Resource Conflict

The understanding and conceptualization of conflict and violence as an integral part of human existence, knowledge and development have widened considerably after the end of the Cold War (Reychler, 1999). This has consequently led to multiplicity of definitions and explanations of what really constitutes conflicts. Therefore as societies and people interact, conflicts develop, and so are definitions and explanations. Pankhurst (2003:154) explains that 'Conflict is a word often used loosely to mean many different things despite its long history in social science. Most types of social, political, and economic

changes involve conflict of some sort, and one could argue that many of the positive changes in world history have occurred as a result of conflict'. Therefore with incessant nature of conflicts in Africa and part of Asia, and most recently, the Balkans, researchers and practitioners are constantly defining and building concepts and definitions of conflicts, violence and violent conflicts, seeking to find out causes and reasons for such conflicts.

Among the main foremost ideas of conflicts is that it is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change. Furthermore, it is an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs emerging from new formations generated by social change (Miall, et al, 1999). Jeong (2000:35) in providing an explanation on the source of conflict opined that "the absence of legitimized structures and policies, along with increasing inequalities of income and opportunities, serves as the primary source of conflict". Fetherston (2000:2) stresses that conflict is about interest, and such interest extends to application of violence in order to satisfy the interest. Violence therefore becomes an application of intent or unintended means of achieving an interest.

As shown by the various definitions, what constitutes a conflict situation could lead to violent situation. According to Reychler (2001:4), "when conflicts crosses the threshold of violence, the costs and the difficulty of managing them increase significantly. Violence becomes the cause of more violence". It therefore implies that in pursuance of different interests by parties in a relationship, conflicts arise. However, where such conflict situations breed violence, or develop into a violent conflict, there are concerns.

Consequently, the idea that the existence of different interests fuel conflicts, therefore makes the position of a 'single cause' in conflicts or violent conflict a contentious one, as there are indications or likelihoods that no conflict will have a single cause, but could have main or major factor supported by other minor or secondary factors. Ginty and Williams (2009:26) also provided a more robust explanation stating that "conflicts can have primary causes that take precedence over secondary causes, but the variegated nature of human politics, economics and society means that a single factor cannot spark a conflict in a vacuum". In many cases, causes such as economics or social exclusion may be easily be considered as violence, especially where they content less or no physical harm.

In examining what constitutes violence, it is pertinent to understand that violence involves more than the absence of physical violence, such as torture, killings, war etc. For instance many violent conflict situations today do not start as physical violence; rather they are less visible, before degenerating into physical violence. Thus there have been misconceptions of what constitutes violence, especially where there is the absence of physical violence. Cramer (2003:402-3) identified the 'fragility of the conceptualization of violence and conflicts in war studies'. His finding on inequality shows that Brazil did not experience civil war but a 'structurally persistent and pervasive daily violence. Guinea-Bissau on the other hand, experienced violent conflict in late 1990s. Thus, inequality may lead to violence and conflict but not necessary a civil war.

However with broader conceptualization of what constitutes violence today, its overall meaning and understanding brought a better and clearer link to conflict processes. In all, it is worth noting that violence is 'a holistic, crosscutting and endemic phenomenon' (Moser and Rodgers, 2005: 4). The oil fuelled conflict under examination in the study did not start as a physical conflict; rather the commercial exploitation of oil brought about some forms of non-violent situations. It consisted of structural, psychological, cultural and environmental violence in the oil villages, which after years degenerated into armed or physical violence. Galtung (1969:168) defined violence as "the cause of the difference between the actual, between what could have been and what is. [...]In other words, when the potential is higher than the actual, the difference is by definition avoidable, and when it is avoidable, violence is present". This definition by Galtung gives credit to the broader meaning and representation of violence. It shows that violence is more than what is expected, known and seen. Similarly, Jacobs and Reychler (2004:5) argue that a conflict situation could be considered as violent:

when two conditions are met:(a) when the quantitative and qualitative life expectancies of a certain group within a population is significantly lower than, for instance, of the dominant group;(b) when that

difference can be attributed to one or more means of violence: physical, structural, psychological, cultural violence and violence caused by bad governance.

Violent conflict on the other hand is equally known as 'deadly conflict', and similarity with 'armed conflict'. Violent conflict contains 'direct, physical violence' which is directly different from other forms of violence including structural violence which is more indirect. (Miall, et al, 1999). Jeong (2000: 20) states that "mass violence such as war and revolution brings about social change and a power imbalance". This as such has one salient meaning, that most conflict situations are first and foremost non-violent, and are most times policy issues, which remained unresolved for a long time. The non-resolution of the conflict, which is mainly in the form of structural violence gradually turns into situations leading to direct violence, and a consequent an armed conflict.

The conditions mentioned above by Jacobs and Reychler (2004), Miall, et al(1999) and Jeong (2000), were more than present, judging from the living conditions and the environmentally related problems the oil communities in the Niger Delta suffer, vis-à-vis the rents and benefits from oil revenues. Considering this submission in line with the situation in The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, violence could be said to have shown all its characteristics and nature. Physical violence became the most present and pronounced, especially in the later part of the conflict; communities are invaded by the Nigerian State using the state apparatus of coercion to suppress the people's protestation and rebellion (Ibeanu, 2000). Therefore, there is clear indication that the Nigerian state has constructed structural violence through developing a set of institutions that support oil related activities in oil village communities whilst maintaining a repressive structure in the communities.

Examining the term resource conflict thus suggests 'that there is something special about the general relationship between natural resources and conflict, and stirring a suspicion that this relationship has an impact on conflict recurrence too'(Rustad and Binningsbø, 2012:533).Therefore, oil resources as exemplified while explaining violent and conflicts situations, have roles of increasing the risk of outbreak of violent conflicts as well as prolonging such situation (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Lujala, Gleditsch and Gilmore, 2005; Lujala, 2010; Ross, 2004 and 2006). As Kaldor (2007:92) explained in her "new wars" classification to which oil resource conflicts are examples, these conflicts are "characterized by a multiplicity of types of fighting units in both public and private, state and non-state, or some kind of mixture". Other argument is that there are changes in the contemporary violent conflicts. Many inter-state wars are replaced by intra-state wars, with ethnic wars, self determination and identity-struggles taking over the front burner on conflict issues. These changes brought about specialised fields such as conflict resolution to tackle the new global problem of Post-Cold War era development (Miall et al, 1999).

The violent conflict in Nigeria's Delta region is a situation that seems to be necessitated by opposing interests in the oil resources region. The discovery of oil in this region changed the entire social relations within most of the oil village communities, amongst the oil village communities, and between the oil village communities and the Nigerian state .For instance, the Nigeria state granted 'oil multinationals the latitude to feign ignorance and deflect allegations of negative social, economic, environmental, cultural and political impact of their operations on host communities' (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2006). Furthermore, the oil resources production may have increased the environmental pressure and resource scarcity thereby escalating violence among the communities (Homer-Dixon, 1999). The resultant oil economy brought with it a change in interest, values and beliefs of the oil communities and the state, especially with regards to governance, leadership, power and access to oil resource opportunities. This goes to confirm another classical idea that conflict arises from imbalances in relations, such as power relations, economic relations and social relations (Jeong, 2000).

These imbalances in relations are mostly experienced with regards to growth, changes and development, which are demonstrated in relations to issues such as unequal social status, unequal wealth and access to resources, and unequal power, leading to problems such as discrimination, unemployment, poverty, oppression among other forms of social exclusions (Responding To Conflict, 2000). These factors listed here are not different from definitions provided in the classical definitions of conflicts. In all, it is a demonstration of unequal stake in a relationship among or between parties, leading to incompatibility of goals. Therefore, every conflict such as conflicts on oil resources as experienced in the Niger Delta should

first and foremost be seen from a traditional definition of conflict and violence. In this case study, it comprises of incompatibility of interests and values among parties who are directly or indirectly linked to the oil resources. Therefore, for the oil village communities, this 'perception of incompatibility shapes their attitudes and behaviour towards' themselves, fellow oil village communities, the Nigerian state and the Multinational oil companies (Barnes, 2005:11). Furthermore, conflict is equally an outward expression of imbalance relationship or relations of economic, political and socio-cultural which has cumulated into violent responses. Thus, conflicts take place within a structured framework of a relationship of dominance, resulting in an asymmetrical relationship, as one party is stronger and dominates the other. A struggle by the disadvantaged party in such a relationship for a change in its continuous dominance could result into a violent conflict. Schmid (1968:226) defines conflict as consisting of a social structure 'that one class loses what the other class wins'. The situation in the oil village communities in Nigeria does not actually involve classical economic classes as defined in Marxian teaching, but class as an organised or unorganised groups seeking better welfare individuals, groups or communities are based on their positions and influence nationally or locally within the oil economy.

The divergent views in literature notwithstanding, what stands as a major point of convergence in understanding resources and conflict arguments is that "resources have specific historic, geographic, and social qualities participating in shaping the pattern of conflicts and violence" (Le Billion, 2004:2). Disappointingly, levels of poverty and destitution are found to be high particularly in the areas that harbour such natural resources or where the mining occurs.

Conceptualizing Resource Conflicts and Violence in Oil States

In analyzing conflicts and violence in oil states, it is pertinent to point out that there is the continuous presence of conflicts and violence in most oil rich states, especially in developing states. Such conflicts arise out of the conflict handling styles like competing, avoiding etc., and as well as the disposition of most of such states to the resources coming from oil. Such conflicts and violence have widened and transformed considerably into violent conflicts, and stalling economic development for such states (Klare, 2004). However, even with the resultant violent conflicts that seems to be rising due to the presence, valuation and activities of oil resources, the global demand for oil remains very high. For instance, 2010 consumption exceeded production by over 5m barrels per day for the first year ever, as world oil stocks were in high demand with China's consumption rising "by over 4m barrels per day in the past decade, accounting for two-fifths of the global rise" (The Economist: June, 2011). Klare (2001:15) provides further insight by submitting that the "global demand for many key materials is growing at an unsustainable rate. As the human population grows, societies require more of everything (food, water, energy, timber, minerals, fibres and so on) to satisfy the basic material requirements of their members" Again, as explained by Klare, petroleum stands out among other natural resources as the major resource that drives the global economy. Thus "no highly industrialized society can survive at present without substantial supplies of oil, and so any significant threat to the continued availability of this resource will prove a cause for crisis and, in extreme cases, provoke the use of military force" (Klare,2001:27). This implies how much oil resources are valued and the extent to which groups both state and non-state actor could go in other to maintain the production, especially because of the benefits which it brings.

These arguments lay the foundation for understanding the importance of oil resources to the global economy, both for the producing states and the demanding states, even though it does not provide an explanation for other forms of 'threats' to oil supply which cannot be dealt with militarily. Initial explanations of the use of military force makes oil- fuelled conflict a one sided violence only prosecuted by the state. However in many situations, organised armed groups engage in various non-state violent conflicts over natural resources such as oil. This is contrary to such analyses which look at violent conflicts and violence from a macro level, especially where the state is assumed to be the custodian of natural resources in any given territory. However, the growing nature of violent conflicts fuelled by oil resources activities involves both 'armed conflicts' and 'non- state conflicts', meaning that it may involve other 'formally organised groups' or 'organised group'¹³ other than the state. Thus, oil resources, like other "natural resources have played a conspicuous role in the history of armed conflicts" in various

forms, interstate, intrastate, ethnic, local and communal (Le Billion, 2001:562). Therefore, the idea of the studying the link between natural resources and conflicts arises from the fact that many economies with abundant endowments of such resources have experienced violent internal conflicts, such as civil wars, although not in all cases (Tadjoeddin, 2007). Consequently, the issues of resource conflicts and violence in oil states are commonly examined by scholars using either the resource scarcity argument or the resource abundance argument or both. According to Homer-Dixon (1999:48), resource scarcities come in the forms of supply-induced, demand induced and structural scarcities arising “in three ways: through a drop in the supply of a key resource, through an increase in demand, and through a change in the relative access of different groups to the resource”. These could be a threat to availability of oil resources and a driver for violence and conflicts in oil resource states. Brunnschweiler and Bultey while writing on Natural resources and violent conflict submitted that:

Scarcity is linked to conflict via two mechanisms: it may trigger marginalization of powerless groups by elite scrambling for resource, and it could have a debilitating effect on processes of social and economic innovation (resulting in an ‘ingenuity gap’). (2009:654)

This argument provides a contextual view of assessing how oil resources fuel conflicts and violence. Using Environmental scarcity¹⁴ as the underlying factor causing violent conflicts, especially in resource-rich developing economics, Homer-Dixon (1999) further submitted that such states depend much on their “environmental goods and services for their economic wellbeing, with environmental scarcities as consequence of such activities”. When this happens, there is a tendency for any of these five types of violent conflicts to befall such states, these are:

1. Disputes arising directly from local environmental degradation caused, for instance, by factory emissions, logging or dam construction
2. Ethnic clashes arising from population migration and deepened social cleavages due to environmental scarcity
3. Civil strife(including insurgency, banditry, and coups d’état) caused by environmental scarcity that affects economic productivity and, in turn, people’s livelihoods, the behaviour of elite groups, and the ability of states to meet these changing demands
4. Scarcity-induced interstate war over, for example, water
5. North-South conflicts(i.e., conflicts between the developed and developing worlds) over mitigation of, adaptation to, and compensation for global environmental problems like global warming, ozone depletion, threats to biodiversity, and decreases in fish stocks.

Although these arguments were able to establish the linkage between environmental scarcity and violent conflict, they cannot escape the challenge of using environmental scarcity as the main pivot of resource scarcity which fuels violent conflicts and violence. Again, the consequences listed by Homer-Dixon do not include the politics and economics of resource ownership, which are mainly experienced in local resource-bearing communities, as the clashes may not be fuelled by ethnic colouration but by economic gains and access to resource benefits. In the same way, Hauge and Ellingsen (1998) argue that the environmental scarcity argument fails to include factors such as ‘maldistribution of land’ and income inequality as a cause of conflict in its structural scarcity, as it concerns ‘unequal distribution of resources’ (especially land), which is a consequence of politics and not economic. But rather, the politics of resource distribution has been submerged into the environmental scarcity concept. Welch and Miewald (1983:10) argued that “Scarcity seldom exists as an absolute fact...scarcity as a social or political problem is largely defined by people’s perceptions of the lack of resource in terms of their image of the good life.”

It is therefore evident that the understanding and conceptualization of oil resources-related violent conflicts in the oil states are drawn from all the available theses: the ‘oil resource curse’, the oil resource abundance and oil scarcity theses. It further means that to have a clear understanding of the contribution of these theses in line with the nature of conflict and violence which exist in oil states, the conceptualization should capture every level of governance, authority and social relations (whether formal or informal, state or non-state) associated with oil resources distribution and management.

Oil Resources and the Cultures of Greed and Grievance

In the literature, various perspectives have been raised regarding the causes and natures of natural resources- fuelled violent conflicts. Berdal and Malone (2000:2) were driven by the circumstances of these war economies and violent conflicts into questioning “the complex web of motives and interactions...of the political economy of civil wars.” Consequently, the major divide is between “the conventional wisdom that civil wars and insurgencies originate in perceptions of relative deprivation and social justice... and that people rebel not because of the opportunities available for them to do well out of war.” (Ukiwo, 2007:589). In many instances, it becomes very difficult to differentiate, especially where one party is using violence meted on them as basis for their reaction which is seen as opportunistic.

This has raised various questions among scholars about why and what constitutes the motives behind oil resources driven violent conflicts, and whether such conflicts are singularly motivated by economic opportunity. The situation commonly referred to in literature as ‘greed and grievance’ is today considered to have led to many oil- related civil wars, civil conflicts, non-state conflicts and insurgency. While grievance is regarded as part and parcel of traditional conflict, greed is seen as a new introduction to conflict issues, and mostly associated with economic resources. However, if conflicts are intrinsically linked to human existence and relations in all societies (Isard, 1992:1), this therefore means that grievances could arise out of such social relations and, in combination with other factors, could result in conflict. Therefore, issues such as income inequality and social exclusion are major causes of economic grievances in many societies and have in most cases fuelled violence spearheaded by a disadvantaged group (Gurr, 1970; Alesina and Perotti, 1996).

Similarly, in providing an explanation for grievance fuelled conflicts over resources, Cramer (2006:124) argued that:

The two contrasting arguments about resource and conflict, one about scarcity and the other about abundance, capture two basic ideas of the material dimensions of what drives political violence and conflict. One stresses desperation and inequality, the other calculation and opportunity.

Therefore “grievance...is rooted in a behavioral paradigm, and emphasizes relative deprivation, social exclusion and inequality” (Brunnschweiler and Bultey, 2009:3). This could be exacerbated by factors such as democracy, ethnic or religious fractionalisation and ethnic dominance (Ward, Greenhill and Bakke, 2010) and, in the case of resource-rich societies, by factors such as environmental degradation, poverty, land and unemployment (Rosser, 2006).

However, proponents of ‘greed’ assumption and theory like Paul Collier consider economic opportunity as the driving force behind violent conflicts such as civil wars. Collier and Hoeffler argued that oil abundance can increase the incidence of civil conflicts and war. To Collier and Hoeffler, primary commodities such as oil provide opportunities for extortion “making rebellion feasible and perhaps even attractive” (2004). Again, Collier (2000:110) had previously argued that “the objective factors that might contribute to grievance, such as income, asset inequality, ethnic and religious divisions, and political repression, do not seem to increase the risks of conflict”. Rather that economic factors are the main drivers of conflict, with small identifiable groups doing well out of the conflict. In continuance of the greed theory, Collier further pointed out that, “grievance rebellions are not suppressed by effective government: they are crowded out by other types of rebellion...A rebellion started by idealists in the context of valuable resources becomes swamped by opportunists as it expands” (2005:626). Subsequently, to the rebels involved in such a war, it is not just about “a breakdown in a particular system, rather...the emergence of an alternative system of profit, power, and even protection,” which creates a war economy situation and a favourable environment for looting and plundering existing natural resources (Keen, 2000:22). Interestingly, greed in many occasions develop into warlordism, with the main actor or actors challenging the state in the arena of monopoly of violence, control of resource wealth, and thus becoming ‘competitor for economic resources and local, or indeed regional, political influence’ (Beswick, 2009:338).

Although these arguments setting greed and opportunity as the main motivation for war, insurgency and other forms of violent conflict cannot be totally refuted, they have been criticised for being “less assertive of the causal link between economic incentives and the outbreak of insurgency and civil war” (Ukiwo,

2007:589). Again, the economics of violence thesis neglects the context-specific nature of conflicts, using a 'one cap fits all' theory in examining all cases. It focuses most of its analysis around the state and around armed conflicts, with little consideration for non-state conflicts that occur over resource ownership.

Again, with the specific case study of oil village communities, the war economy thesis does not consider issues of inequality, social exclusion, economic and political marginalisation as important in fuelling violent conflicts, especially where one group is favoured by the state over and above other groups in gaining benefits from such resources. Oluwaniyi (2011:150) submitted that:

Women in the Niger Delta struggle simultaneously against the statepartnership as well as oppressive gender relations. This party finds expression in the collaboration between the local male elites, the state and oil MNCs, which conspire to exclude women from the distribution of the benefits of the oil industry, resulting in their their impoverishment and disempowerment'.

As Anugwom (2007:62) explained, woman from such oil communities 'suffer a double jeopardy of relative deprivation'. First, they are excluded from internal or domestic politics, decision making and external bargaining or negotiation with oil firms by the male dominated leadership and secondly, they suffer more socio-economic deprivation than average women from other part of the country due to the destruction of their environment through oil extraction activities. Looking at women's social and economic exclusion from benefits of oil in Niger Delta, it is worth noting that although there was an existing oppressive gender relation; *petrobusiness* helped to further worsened the situation by excluding women in the distribution of the new benefit, while degrading their environment, thereby fuelling violent protests and struggle from women.

Ross (2008) observed that new minerals increase inequality leading to an inequality trap and a resultant violent conflict. In situations where an existing socio-economic condition has been adversely affected by the activities of a new mineral resource, in this case oil resources, the tendency arises that, after a prolonged period of grievance, with no considerable improvement, a situation of 'self-help' could emerge and may not be over-ruled. Jackson (2007:275) further explained that "in African wars, politics and economics are frequently difficult to separate. There are a number of different reasons for this, not least that there is confusion over whether or not the desire to better one's self is tantamount to greed. Whilst there are a number of different drivers behind conflicts across the continent, economics do play some part in almost all African insurgencies." This submission tries to solidify the interwoven nature of violent conflicts, in which it may seem difficult to distinguish one factor as the cause of the conflict, especially where it has a lot to do with inequality and livelihood, and in which a critical trace analysis does not rule out the role of politics and influence of governance on the situation.

Therefore, the greed or grievance situation in the oil village communities is about "the context over resources and the resultant conflict between groups" which is depicted by the [in] ability or otherwise of the state to meet the minimum expectations of the citizens (Anugwom, 2005). Ikelegbe (2005:214), putting into perspective a period of grievance in the oil village communities, noted that "the minorities of the Niger Delta region have been agitating since the 1950s. First it was against marginalisation, neglect and the politics of exclusion by the ethnic majority based ruling political parties and governments of the then Eastern and Western regions." And by the 1990s, it has degenerated into large pockets of oil resources fuelled violent conflicts within and among the various oil village communities that make up the Niger Delta. The dichotomy between greed and grievance seems blurred; demonstrating that the transformation from grievance to greed cannot always be equated in economic terms or is examined using quantitative values. In case studies involving local oil village communities, activities seen as greedy, such as illegal oil bunkering, could be a survival strategy for people long denied of their source of livelihoods, therefore, "this is a classic survival strategy for someone living in poverty in an insecure environment." (Jackson, 2007:276).

Despite this explanation, there is wide disagreement about what really constitutes greed or grievance, but one main undisputable fact is that they exist within the same continuum. In many cases, the socio-economic dispositions of a group at a period of time determine their reactions and relations to an existing

or newly discovered natural resources within their domain. As explained by Ikelegbe, a proponent of the economy of war thesis:

Economic opportunism may therefore be incidental to and a perversion of resistance. The nexus between economics and conflict environment is therefore much more than the issues of causality. It may relate to the actual dynamics of conflict and resistance; the funding of both the state and rebel movements, the exploitation of opportunities that emerge from disorder and violence, the multiplication of violence and violence institutions, the proliferation of arms and the intervention of metropolitan centres bent on maintaining supplies of critical minerals, and how all these underpin the prolongation of conflicts in resource rich regions. (2005:213)

However, given the nature of the conflict under study and considering the application of the greed or grievance arguments within the context of the case study, the economy of war thesis focuses so much more on full scale wars than on other types of small-scale violence or revolts that occur in these societies. In most cases, armed conflict cases are *state centric* in nature; such parameters leave out some other issues that could be found at the micro level or as part of non-state violence among non-state actors.

Oil Resources, Power Struggle and Violent Conflict

The discourses around politics and the struggle for power as a cause of oil fuelled violence and violent conflicts in the oil village communities have recently been categorised into many perspectives. Using Nigeria as a case study, Gore and Pratten (2003:212) submitted that: Nigeria's 'political economy of predation' is manifest in an apparent institutional monopoly of violence and rampant prebendalism which reflects the extractive nature of the state and the accumulative base of ethno-regional commercial and bureaucratic classes. (Gore and Pratten, 2003:212)

The discourses around politics and the struggle for power as a cause of oil fuelled violence and violent conflicts in the oil village communities have recently been categorised into many perspectives. Of note in these discourses are "prebendal, neopatrimonial and high stake rentier discourses," in which decisive politics in Nigeria are rooted (Omeje, 2006:6). These discourses hinge upon the 'understanding' that "routine relationships between state and society in Nigeria are currently dominated by...the illegitimacy of instrumentalised distribution and disorder. It is this very illegitimacy which shapes individual and collective local responses. On the one axis, the politics of distribution, people are organising themselves within familiar frameworks to 'capture' the state" (Gore and Pratten, 2003:212). Therefore, "the heart of the Nigerian petrostate state is unearned income, and its central dynamic is the fiscal sociology of the distribution of and access to oil rents," which is what projects these acts of capturing the state through politics (Watts,2007b:642). Interestingly, as at the centre,"the local system is liable to be high jacked by local strongmen seeking political influence or may neglect vulnerable groups and minorities," (Baker and Scheye, 2007:508), with the sole aim of monopolising oil rents and opportunities, thereby fuelling fierce violence.

These discourses have been able to throw some light onto the nature of politics in Nigeria. However, understanding politics alone will not provide enough insight and knowledge about other forms of power struggles or forms of authority in many oil village communities or at the local community level. Distribution and access to oil rent can also be routed outside the formal authorities and power, or outside the state.

Again, it is worth noting that neo-patrimonial or patrimonial cultures re-enforce informal structures, making them serve as legitimate access to power and in-turn access to oil rents and benefits. According to Ohlson and Soderberg, in "a patrimonial system rulers base their claim to power, their authority and legitimacy on powerful, but informal structures of vertical patron-client relationships, with rewards going top-down and support going bottom-up in the system," (2002: 9). Hence where the environment is ripe for informal governance and is supported by illegal rent seeking and oil resources benefits and opportunities, it creates room for violent struggle for such informal power and authority.

For instance, Human Rights Watch in their article "Rivers and Blood: Guns, Oil and Power in Nigeria's Rivers State" wrote that:

As traditional leadership positions became more lucrative and the tribal elders more powerful, the competition to occupy them intensified. Beginning in the mid-1990s, prominent local leaders competing to assume top chieftaincy positions in an area recruited youth leaders and provided them with money and weapons to assist in their often violent struggles to control villages. Such violent clashes occurred in several villages. (2005:7)

Therefore if occupying any traditional or informal forms of leadership guarantees access to oil benefits and opportunities, it subsequently could often fuel violent struggles for such positions, as they know that “patronage is a selective activity benefiting specific groups,[therefore] those excluded are pushed to use violence to demand for and access their own share of the rents” (Olarinmoye,2005:30). In the case of oil village communities, as selective patronages become the basis for determining who benefits from opportunities from oil resources, the outcome are the negative impacts they bestow on the existing socio-economic conditions, social relations, governance, power and leadership roles. Thus leading to fierce struggle(s) for the control and occupation of such positions, as such positions is synonymous to getting patronage from oil resource. Based on this assumption, the result is the use of violence to reach the position that gives access to such patronage. In this case study, it is mainly between groups within the same oil village community or between oil village communities, and not necessarily between the state and the oil village communities or between oil communities and oil MNCs.

CONCLUSION

This work reviewed the state of knowledge regarding oil resources fuelled conflicts. Based on the introduction to the concepts of violent conflicts and paradoxes of oil resources which form the logic of oil resources conflicts. Reviewing oil resources curse and abundance, and environmental scarcity and degradation literature, it argues that oil resources have specific effects on informal sectors like subsistent farming; on-state institutions and non-formal authorities like traditional institutions and community leadership. Oil resource curse and abundance create a new socio-economic relations and social relations such as denial of sources of livelihoods, social exclusion and power struggles in oil village communities, thereby fuelling violent conflicts as groups and actors struggle for local control due to the new conditions. Oil produces a particularly centralising tendency internationally due to the levels of investment, the need for access to international markets and the large size of the contracts. This means that a relatively small elite benefit from oil, but they benefit hugely. At the same time, there is not much for the local communities unless the central elite decide to give the wealth away. In reality, the state and the oil MNCs tend to ally themselves with those who can maintain the security of the oil installations, so at a local level some chiefs and some influential members of communities might benefit while the majority will not benefit.

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