Political Economy of Resource Management and Armed Conflict in Africa: A Critique of the Resource Curse.

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Abstract

This study interrogated Political Economy of Resource Management and Armed Conflict in Africa: A Critique of the Resource Curse. It adopted Marxist political economy as the theoretical framework. It argued that the poor management of the proceeds from natural resource endowments in Africa due to governance deficits and credible democratic institutions have often times leading to social exclusion of many groups in Africa. The resource curse blames weak states and absence of institutions in Africa. Attempts to have a fair share of the proceeds from resource endowments result to rebels' contestation for control of the resource space leading to armed conflict. African elites could be held responsible as part of the problem but blaming all the woes in Africa by the resource curse turns historical reality upside down. This work argued that the historic legacies of colonial imperialism and neo-liberalism that championed Structural Adjustment Programme implemented in Africa from the 1980s are keys to understanding conflicts, poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. The neocolonial pillage in Africa continues through Multinational Corporation who bleeds corporate profit from Africa, smuggling, outright robbery and trade rules and conditions which are anti-development to Africa. The absence of institutions to adapt and manage natural resources

crisis as climate change-related disasters makes Africa prone to conflict. The work recommends that good governance is needed in the continent to ensure equity and fairness to bear the burden and reward of citizenship. The state should serve public interest so that the political independence acquires its true political and economic significance.

Keyword: Resource curse, Multinational Corporation, neoliberalism and conflict

Introduction

Natural resources have played a considerable role in the onset of armed conflicts in human history. From scramble for access to wild game to imperialist wars over precious minerals, natural resources have motivated or financed the violent activities of many different types of belligerents (Westing,1986) and become a centre of struggle with benefits claimed, contested and distributed in ways that reflect both local histories and wider political economies of power and accumulation (Fisher,2016,p.1-2). This is even more pronounced in the context of Africa in the light of the sharp drop in foreign assistance to many governments and rebel groups arising from the geopolitical vacuum created by the end of Cold War era (Le Billon, 2001, p.1). Rebels and warlords now dependent on mobilizing private sources of support to sustain their guerilla and political activities thereby defining a new political economy of war (Berdal and Keen, 1997; Le Billon, 2000a). There is a wide range of studies suggesting that growth and human development is impeded by 'resource curse. A term whose provenance by development economists seek to explain the poor performance of countries that depend on resource rents (export of hydrocarbon and other natural resources as copper, gold, diamond and timber etc) as a major source of revenue (Auty, 2001). The point is that two countries with natural resources may perform differently in terms of development outcomes depending on the character of the state and its institutions (political and economic) While many have reasoned that some of the countries with large natural resources endowments do not experience stable and sustained growth (Sachs and Warner, 1995). However, autocratic regimes has much latitude to have an over-bloated military expenditure through resource rents distributed in ways that scuttle democracy and inclusion in the wider political economy.

These disparities in sharing the benefits of resource rewards results to high rates of poverty and inequality (Ross, 2001b, 2004 and 2007) often creating tendency for armed conflict. Collier and Hoeffler (2002, 2004) established the link between resource wealth and the onset, intensity and duration of conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002 and 2004). Degol et al (2011) noted that at the heart of this conflict is not the presence of these natural resources in themselves but the political economy of extraction of these resource with attendant distributional inequities and long-term environmental disruptions of livelihoods. This is coupled with international dynamic to this situation where actors (firms) external to the polity fuel these violence. Sponsoring militias with arms have been a common trend in resource violence in Africa. The illicit purchase of stolen diamond, copper and crude oil from rebel groups embolden the capacity of the rebel groups to continue fighting.

The presence of natural resources has generated fortunes for the continent of Africa. The expectation is that these huge natural resource windfalls should have make modest impacts in the lives of the citizenry. This has not been the case in Africa. Africa manifests a continent with huge potentialities for development but is crawling due to mismanagement of the proceeds from natural resource revenues. This mismanagement results from lack of credible institutions and governance deficits. The disparities in sharing the benefits of resource revenues leads to inequality, exclusion and poor service provision as in health, income and education. Resource economy fuels corruption as state managers appropriate huge sums from natural resource rents**.** This exclusion from sharing the proceeds from natural resource and environmental degradation of livelihoods sets the stage for rebels to contest the resource spaces**.**

The resource curse blames the underdevelopment in Africa to their inability to govern themselves where the incidence of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment are outcome of poor governance and corruption of African potentates. This assertion is faulty and inappropriate from the fact that corruption is part and parcel of corporate capital behavior in resource politics. Again, historical imperial and neocolonial pillage of African wealth couple with structural Adjustment Policies of neoliberalism is at the root cause of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment of African states. The asymmetry of power

between the multinational companies and African states make it that the corporate moguls have their ways in almost everything**.** All these inform the basis of this paper. The objectives of the study are; examine the key drivers of resource wars in Africa and to provide a critique of resource curse in Africa

Apart from this introduction, this paper is divided into four parts. Part one focus on methodology and theoretical framework, part two focuses on literature review, part three focus on data analysis why part four focus on conclusion and recommendations.

PART I

Methodology

This study adopted secondary method of data collection; it involves the collection of data from textbooks, seminar papers, journal and conference papers etc. Content analysis was utilized in analyzing the data

Theoretical Framework

The work adopts the Marxist Political Economy theory as the theoretical framework. Political economy has seen so many changes in its history of development. There was and still is bourgeois political economy (Ekekwe, 2009 p.13). According to him, scholars such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John M. Keynes were the political economists of the bourgeois tradition. There are the scholars such as Jeffrey Sachs and Francis Fukuyama who follow the bourgeois tradition. This study is persuaded by the radical Marxist school of political economy to probe the issue of National Social Investment Programme in Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari civilian administration.

Marxist Political Economy could be seen as a field of study and as a framework of analysis. As a field of study, it has topics such as capital, surplus value, labour theory of value, colonialism, imperialism and the role of the state (Ekekwe, 2009). In this study, it is a tool of social enquiry it is deployed in this study.

It is an approach that pays attention to the primacy of material circumstances of a people, particularly the economic factors in understanding social life (Ake, 1981, p.1). According to him:

> Once we understand what the material asset and constraints of a society, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social relation arise from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious system, its political system and even its modes of thought (Ake 1981, p.1-2)

The relevance of this analytical tool in analyzing social processes arises from its comprehensive view of social phenomenon. To this extent, we utilize it in understanding the political economy of natural resource management and armed conflicts in Africa. It situates the issue in production and accumulation by the elites which engenders its own contradiction vis-à-vis environmental degradation and marginalization of the ethnic minorities in Africa. It is the insight it throws into the dialectical forces shaping natural resource politics which have given rise to armed conflict in Africa we situate its usefulness to this study.

PART II

Political Economy of Resource Management in Africa

The African continent is a paradox of poverty, all types of inequality-horizontal and vertical, unemployment while poor health management pervades almost all countries with natural resource endowments.

The efficient management of natural resources and the revenues derived from it requires better institutional frameworks and a political system that will instill confidence in the populace. Antonio and Kunal (2021, p.216) suggested that, resource dependent countries tend to have autocratic regimes with bloated military expenditure. Military budgets far outweigh allocations on education and health combined. Such a state is characterized by systemic corruption and lacking in transparency. This is hinged on the fact that due to privatization of the state, managers of the state uses public resources as a personal resource without accountability. This reinforces the absence of credible institutions for maintaining responsible management of public resources to foster confidence in the life of the citizens.

Between 2010-2011, resource revenues accruing to Liberia was more than US$117 million in receipts from the forestry, oil, mining, and commercial agriculture sectors. This figure was more than four times of overall figure of official development assistance to Liberia in the fiscal year of 2010-2011 (Gborgia et al, 2013 in Coyne and Baruch, 2016, p.1). In the case of Nigeria, oil rents accounted for more than 60% higher than all total international assistance to all Sub-Saharan Africa combined. The challenge is poor resource management by these countries. It is important to argue that huge revenues accruing from natural resources have the potential for sustainable peacebuilding and state-building projects in Africa if strategically invested in health and education as well as other areas of national priority with capacity to buy political legitimacy. However, the SAP policies over the years have scuttled the capacity of the various governments to develop the social sectors. The imposition of red flag in increasing the developmental state is a key challenge confronting African states whose development process needs serious state intervention to a point where the productive forces would be fully developed.

Poor resource management as in renewable resource such as forest and water constitute a serious trigger to resource conflict. For example, in Liberia, forests have religious and cultural significance; they provide communities with timber and non-timber forest products like resins, wild fruits, wild animals for local protein, and medicine. Timber is harvested commercially for export; timber concession revenues are an important income stream for the government while forests provide important ecosystem services like soil and water conservation, and carbon-sequestration. Degol et al (2011, p.14) pointed that:

> ….. many different users rely on water, land, and other renewable resources, crisis emerging from poor governance, scarcity, or transboundary dynamics have the potential to become contributing causes of armed conflict where there is no efficient institutions to manage these dynamics. Africa is characterized by weak legal frameworks in land tenure management. This has seen many crisis resulting from claims over land ownership between local communities.. most often times, where land disputes have not contributed to armed conflict, they can still be a source of tension.

This scenario reflects localized conflicts in CAR, Somalia, and Sudan over access to scarce water resource worsened by climate change dynamics in the region (Coyne and Bruch, 2016).

PART III

Key Drivers of Resource Wars in Africa

Natural resource extraction shapes social, economic and political relations in Africa in dynamic manner. One logical thing to note on its impacts is the tendency to bring series of violent conflicts from low-intensity tensions as seen in the Zambian copper belt to large-scale insurgencies in the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria , the contestation of oil space by rebels groups and government forces in Darfur, Bakassi Peninsula in Cameroun, Angola and Libya. The diamond business is heating Sierra Leone with violence that has become an everyday occurrence.

Jagger (2012), World Bank (2016) contended that these conflicts are shaped by environmental implications of resource extraction and by illicit capital flows as well as tensions generated by inequitable distribution of revenues as a lack of local participation. As the complexities of extraction and distribution of resources deepen, the need to intervene in the governing of the process also naturally increases, as do the attempts to accomplish this (Grant, Nadege-Compaore and Mitchell 2015). The crux of the matter is the environmental destructions from resource extraction on the sources of livelihoods of the rural people is at the rason d'ter of resource conflicts in Africa. This could partly explain the Niger-Delta experience and Darfur region where their living conditions were so traumatic that their means of sustenance were threatened amidst marginalization from the central government in Khartoum.

The drivers of resource conflict is climate change. This is a well-established fact that climate change is altering the availability of water for farmers and the grazing areas for herders (Fishman and Miguel, 2010). According to German Advisory Council on Global Change's report, World in Transition (2007, p.1 in Richard, 2008, p.2): Climate Change as a Security Risk stated that "Climate change will overstretch many societies' adaptive capacities within the coming decades". The report identified a set of "conflict constellations" related to climate change to be among others:

> The degradation of fresh water in areas that "lack the political and institutional framework necessary for the adaptation of water and crisis management systems. This could overstretch existing conflict resolution mechanisms, ultimately leading to destabilization and violence." The decline in food production that could lead to "regional food crises and further undermine the economic performance of weak and unstable states, thereby encouraging or exacerbating destabilization, the collapse of social systems, and violent conflicts". An increase in storm and flood disasters, undermining crisis management systems and triggering out migration and other social problems. A rise in environmentally-induced migration, especially in agricultural economies where climate change contributes to drought (Richard, 2008, p.2-4).

The devastating effects of climate change has been so challenging for countries in Africa struggling with institutional weakness to adapt its policy option to current realities. For example, a French company, Areva is a uranium producer is decimating the environment of Niger Republic. According to Carmody (2011) pointed the effects of this company in worsening climate related challenges in Niger as gleaned from Boutali Tchiwerin, a Tuareg spokesperson, who maintained that:

> The exploitation of uranium by Areva and its subsidiaries has contributed to the impoverishment of the area by accelerating the phenomenon of turning the area into more of a desert by plundering of the natural resources and the draining of the fossil deposits. It is undoubtedly an ecological catastrophe and a continuing human rights tragedy which threatens the existence of one of the oldest civilizations of the Sahara (Carmody, 2011.p.128).

Coping with such changes puts a disproportionately severe burden on nations least able to manage them. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change data projection hinted that adaptation mechanism could cost 5-10% its overall gross domestic product (Baher, 2016).

These weak states are at the risk of scarcity-induced violence between local communities and herders due to persistent drought feedbacks to already polarized systems and heightens conflict over claims to scarce resource such as water and land as in North Africa. The water scarcity and population growth has undermine agricultural output and increase migratory pressures in the Sahel with weak state capacity and institution are battling to manage the climate change effects (Richard, 2008). For instance, UNEP (2011a, p.11-13 cited in Degol et al, 2011) hinted the pictures in these parts of Africa are in order:

> with the effects of climate change, existing demographic pressures and heavy reliance on agriculture, pastoralism, and other natural resource– based livelihoods are expected to increase food and water insecurity, as well as exacerbate challenges to public health in the Sahel region. UNEP has observed that in the Sahel these resource demands may lead to "competition for resources, local-level conflict, migration and ultimately … broader political destabilization."60 Similarly, predictions suggest that in North Africa, soil salinization, soil erosion, and water scarcity may increase due to climate change. The subtropical climate belt in Southern Africa is projected to experience a decline in precipitation and crop production.

However, the political economy of resource conflict hints the outbreak of violence in resource rich countries to be the scramble to have access and control of the resource as the force propelling conflict among groups. These problems largely come from oil and gas, diamonds, columbium tantalite (coltan), drugs, gold, platinum, uranium and other gemstones; and also timber, coffee, water, land, grazing pasture, livestock and rubber. In some cases, resource conflict is embedded in the social and economic greed and grievance narrative. A typical example where violent conflicts from natural resources have had its toll on human lives and whole community is the Democratic Republic of Congo former Zaire. A country known for its richness in tin, copper and gold to columbite- tantalite, also known as coltan. Coltan is a major component in the production of microelectronics. Yet a village, Southern Kivu, where coltan is extracted has no cell phones. Competing local groups and guerrilla armies have laid claim to the mines

of the resource rich regions of the DRC's east and south, extracting vast sums via both "legal" and "illegal" trade circuits, as Bassey (2012,p.49-50) stated that:

> At the height of the conflicts in the Congo axis there were up to nine armies in the fray. The diamond market that thrived in Kigali, even though Rwanda does not have any diamonds, highlighted the plunder of the DRC's resources. A United Nations report issued in 2001 accused Uganda and Rwanda of plundering diamonds, copper, cobalt, gold and coltan from DRC. Since the war began.

These warlords were spearheaded by Colliers thesis of greed to loot natural resources. It is ironic to point that with about $41 billion in mining revenue generated from 2007 to 2012; only 2.5 percent went into the national budget (Burgis, 2015).

As a result, many see a 'resource curse' in Africa, in which easily accessible lootable natural resources and commodities have essentially hurt the prospects of several African national and regional economies by fostering political corruption and feeding violence and rebellion(Sylvester, 2012, World, Bank,2016, Antonio and Kunal,2021, Fisher,2021). Many theoretical models have explained the outbreak of civil wars. For example, Collier and Hoeffler (2000, Grossman, 1999 cited in Sylvester, 2012, p.2-3) pointed that most wars are motivated either by greed or grievance. This perspective models rebellion as an industry that generates profits from looting, so that 'the insurgents are inseparable from bandits or pirates'. According to Grossman (1999 cited in Sylvester, 2012) rebellions of this nature are motivated by greed, that is very common that profitable opportunities for rebellion will not be unused. This perspective could explain what happens in most parts of Africa which Niger-Delta region. To begin with, the militia in the region were first motivated by environmental concerns and marginalization of their people but as the conflict progress, the grievance pendulum moved towards greed as enormous avenue was created for looting natural resource. This oiled the conflict. The grievance approach is anchored on a behavioural tendencies on relative deprivation, social exclusion and inequality, due to structural cleavages. In the context of resource-rich societies, grievance might be exacerbated by insufficiently compensated land expropriation, structural cleavages, resource

scarcities, migration and a lack of employment opportunities for the resource bearing communities. In a conflict of resource type, different sets of gangsters are identified. One is those whose interest in preserving the state or its people, but are simply intent on loot; and those who take control of the state and seek to maximize their own profit by encouraging stability and growth in their new domain.

From this thinking, we can locate the rebels of MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total independence of Angola) rebels to engage in protracted combat each enjoyed enormous wealth from diamonds while the citizens bore the brunt. The Sierra Leone case was the same and the Niger-Delta. Their ability to sustain the conflict depends on their access to lootable natural resource. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) concluded that a relatively high dependence on primary commodities exports is strongly related to the occurrence of violent armed conflict. They assert that natural resources constitute 'booty' which, in many cases, is far more valuable than possession of the state itself. As a result, belligerents may feel no regret at destroying state institutions if they can directly control and mine the country's natural resource wealth. Sylvester (2012) hinted the fact rural areas produce commodities with high economic rents, such as the blood diamonds of Angola and Sierra Leone, it is a relatively easy matter for belligerents to run rackets extracting revenue by force. Indeed, diamonds accounted for the high incidence of conflict in those countries.

A Critique of Resource Curse

The resource curse thesis as an explanation for the reasons of underdevelopment, poverty and democratic deficits in countries that depend on natural resources rents do not provide a sufficient account of other resource rich countries in other regions of the world. It is stated that this explanation is faulted on the premise that it fails to account for the success of other countries that are rich in natural resources but are better-off in terms of economic performance. Therefore, key empirical evidence challenges resource curse explanation. Paul, Glada and Jaako(2015,p.13) cited countries as Chile, Botswana, Indonesia and Malaysia as examples that were resource rich countries had recorded excellent economic performance before 1997. To be included here is Norway which had overcome the burden of the curse from natural resources. These countries had implemented policies that lifted people out of poverty at faster speed more than the capitalist advanced countries.

For example, Auty (2001) comment is very instructive. To begin with, rent entails income not earned from productive labour in a country. This could come from diverse sources- foreign aid from another country or multilateral agencies, government price manipulation as well as remittances from employees of a country. What is suggested from the above is that revenue streams as identified in the above sources of rent could also exhibit the same curse but are glossed over in the theory of resource curse thesis. The point is that revenue derive as rent other than the one from natural resource extraction has the tendency to produce same distortions in the economy.

In another sense, the theory is criticized on the ground of prejudice. Prejudice stemming from the selection of those countries on the sense of being resource rich (Paul, et al, 2015). Paul et al (2015, p.13) raised fundamental flaws in the resource curse thesis when they argued therefore:

> ..... a useful distinction between resource-abundant economies, such as the US, and resource-dependent economies, such as Venezuela, and attributes resource-curse symptoms to resource dependence ..... In other words, the term 'resource-rich' tends to be applied to countries whose prospects of developing the productive sectors of their economies are poor. As a result, the selection of countries may be instrumental in determining what is presented as the evidence for the impact of the resource curse.

What is observed from the above, the selection criteria do tend to beam their light on the poor countries. There is an inbuilt bias since the policy options or advice on offer toes the line of the argument of the late 1960s in accepting foreign technology and following the footsteps of the West as a means to achieve development. That policy option saw the destruction of the economies of these developing countries with monument of debt burden. Paul et al (2015, p.14) asked whether resource-rich countries as US and China with huge below-ground resources and resource production but are included in the 'resource-rich' category because they have other economic strengths.

The resource curse is not rooted on the historical dynamics of the relationship between Africa and other advanced countries and by extension the impacts of colonialism/neocolonialism on the states in Africa. Lee (2018) pointed to the fact this theory mistakenly links causality to a mythical attributes to natural resources rather linking them to historical legacies of colonialism and neoliberal orthodoxy. To begin with, the West's role in Africa in the colonial old days have to be placed in clearer perspective. We could gain a better understanding of conflicts in Africa by locating them within the context of historic roles the West had and continue to play in Africa. The West has supported authoritarian rulers and dictators in Africa and elsewhere in support of their proxies and interests. During the Cold War era, both Western and Eastern powers jostled for influence in the continent which was brutal leading to assassinations, coups and guerrilla warfare and support to dictators who were on their good book either to scuttle the spread of communism or stood against capitalism.

Oil companies have been a source of communal conflict as evidence show in Nigeria. In the Brass-Nembe crisis in Bayelsa and Andoni-Ogoni and Okrika crises in Rivers State attested to the dubious roles Shell Petroleum Company and Agip Oil Company of Nigeria played in arming the communities to fight over claims of land. The conflict trap supported by the resource curse thesis fails flat on the heal of evidence from the Reconciliatory Committee inaugurated by Bayelsa State Government to settle the Nembe-Brass conflict in Bayelsa State. The report hold Agip and Shell oil companies culpable for instigating the violence. According to Lee (2018, p.195), she argued that natural resources in Africa is not associated with conflict trap. Rather, conflict in Africa is rooted in the historical legacies of colonial imperialism. The lumping of Africa into states with artificial boundaries and pitting these countries with one another provides the scientific ground for understanding the spate of violence and conflict in Africa. In what follows, civil wars are not specific to Africa alone. Obi (2011) point to the fact that civil wars and conflict are located in the history of scarcity and inequality and not only to resource-rich states and has to be sought for from the world system. It has to be stressed that the era of possessive imperialism of nineteenth century when Europeans were not contented with what they have marked epochal stage in the rise of conflicts over control of natural resources in all parts of the continent. From this period, African continent experienced aggressive plunder and violent

conflicts over natural resources such as in South Africa, Belgian Congo and Rhodesia, present day Zimbabwe etc**.**

PART IV

Conclusion

Natural resources have exerted considerable influence in the political economy of many nations starting from earlier times. The presence of natural resources have been a source of blessing and tension over time arising from the ways in which these resources are harnessed and utilized for improving the human conditions. There is a wide agreement that resource management could be a source of blessing to countries who have them in abundance but are failing to benefit from its proceeds due to the negative impacts it has brought to people as a result of poor management. This is hinged on the theory of resources curse which points that the inflow of rents from natural resources results to distortions in the function of the economy in such a way that other sectors of the economy especially manufacturing is neglected. The logical outcome of this is the emergence of rentier state with preponderance of its revenue derived from rents as against productive labour and tax from its citizenry. The elites who manage the state institutions engages in patronage politics and state capture. This impedes the efficient use of public funds to invest in development infrastructure thereby widening poverty, inequality and exclusion of the majority of the poor. The demand for access to the oil rents and benefits by groups marginalized results to violence and wars over the contestation of the oil resource space.

Recommendations

i. Good governance is needed in the continent to ensure equity and fairness to bear the burden and reward of citizenship. The state should serve public interest so that the political independence acquires its true political and economic significance.
ii. Building genuine democratic structures on the bases of rule of law is needed to move Africa forward in the international system.

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