Nile Journal of Political Science

Relative Deprivation and Armed Conflict in Rentier States: an Overview of the Niger Delta Avengers

Yahaya Yakubu

Department of Political Science & Int'l Relations
Nile University of Nigeria
yahayayakubu@nileunivesity.edu.ng

Abdulkareem Abdullahi
Department of Political Science & Int'l Relations
Nile University of Nigeria
Abdul.abdulkarim@nileuniversity.edu.ng

Hannatu Fika
Department of Political Science & Int'l Relations
Nile University of Nigeria
h.fika95@gmail.com

Abstract

Like most rentier states, Nigeria has witnessed a series of incessant armed conflicts bordering around the redistribution and appropriation of revenue generated from crude exploration. Particularly, the oil rich Niger Delta region has been in and out of armed conflict. The issue of revenue sharing formula has resulted in armed confrontation between social movements such as the Niger Delta Avengers and the federal government. Upon evaluating the social movement theory, the study posits relative deprivation as sufficient cause but not necessary for the emergence of social movements that take up arms. It argues resource mobilization and political process theories as complimentary determinants of the armed confrontations in the Niger Delta. In response to failed attempts at curtailing armed agitations in the region, the study argue the solution to the conflict lies in diversification of revenue sources on the side of the government and exploration of conventional methods for addressing grievances on the side of resource rich communities.

Keywords: Social Movement, Relative Deprivation, Resource Mobilization, Political Process, Armed Conflict and Niger Delta Avengers.

Introduction

Why do inhabitants of certain regions resort to violence as a means to addressing grievances or differences while others don't? Dominant perspectives in varying propensities have identified certain factors, which may include amongst others marginalization, in-access to wealth, political and socio-economic determinants as the major causes of

armed confrontations. Within the confines of this study it is argued that the aggrieved regions resort to armed confrontation borne out of the psychological feeling of or actual existence of deprivation. Hence, the study postulates resource rich regions as more likely to resort to armed confrontations, as opposed to their counterparts that do not house valuable resources. Subsequently, while there may exist numerous causalities of armed confrontation, the predetermined outcomes largely revolves around resource control.

Faced with such confrontations, states resort to certain measures aimed at addressing the un-easy relationship between aggrieved communities, the state and oil exploring firms. This study identifies two viable alternatives, the foremost assuming a diplomatic forms while the latter entails application of coercive state apparatus. With recourse to this study, the Nigerian state has applied both measures in response to the rise of militancy, kidnapping and destruction of oil facilities in the oil rich Niger-Delta Region (NDR). The diplomatic approach adopted encompasses measures such as but not necessarily limited to; renegotiation of revenue sharing formula, amnesty and the recent proclamation by Yemi Osibanjo to modularize illegal refineries in the region. Owing to numerous indigenous and external constraints the diplomatic approach has largely failed to produce predetermined outcomes. Some of the constraints as argued by this study include absence of political will, ethnic-politicization, disregard for rule of law, corruption amongst others. Negotiation of a revenue-sharing agreement should provide define fractions of rents to be shared by relevant stakeholders. In the case of the NDR it takes the form of derivation funds paid to oil producing regions and the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) aimed at fast tracking development in the region. While the amnesty program, entailed a state pardon offered to repentant militants, their re-integration into the society and capacity developments policies amongst others. As for the case of modular refineries to remains no precise policy agenda in line with the Vice President's proclamation. Numerous factors have been identified as the While to Ross (2012) oil revenue-sharing agreements face commitment problems. Because the central government has more complete information about the amount of revenue earned from oil, representatives of the ethnic group fear it will use its control over this information to avoid sharing the agreed amount of revenues.

Should diplomatic measures fail to achieve desired results as in the case of Nigeria, repressive and coercive apparatus were employed by the FG to intimidate, disband and neutralize agitating groups. In the Nigerian context, the Federal Government (FG) at different time intensified military offensive in the NDR with a view of addressing instability in the region. The military offensive was not only criticized by a body of civil society organizations, it also resulted in collateral damages as it also set the tone for the rise of ethno-nationalism. While it is not uncommon to encounter such movements, the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state adversely affected the nature and magnitude of the confrontation. The FG's repressive mechanism has been meet with varying forms of resistance. Which includes amongst others socio-political activism armed agitations, vandalism, kidnapping of expatiate and the likes.

Employing a descriptive method of inquiry this study represent an objective attempt at interrogating existence of a probable correlation between rent (with emphasis on crude oil) and the re-emergence of armed agitation with a particular interest in the activities of the Niger-Delta Avengers (NDA). The NDA is a social movement cum armed group founded in 2016, with the oil rich Southern Nigeria serving as its stronghold. Ideologically the movement reinforces the notion of ethno-nationalism and regionalism respectively. To address these trends, the study explores the concept of relative deprivation theory, resource mobilization and political process theory respectively.

Conceptual Clarification

By way of complementing the introductory contents, this section is aimed at elucidating and operationalizing pertinent concepts central to better understanding the foregoing debate. By extension Rents are revenues accrued from the sale of resources to other states, Multi-National Corporations amongst other external trade partner. A rentier state is thus heavily depended on sale of its resources to external body for revenue generation. Consequently, internal revenue mobilization mechanisms and initiative are relatively weak in Rent seeking economies. Nigeria attained a rentier status owing to its overburdening dependence on oil rents as revenue base, which is thought to constitute over 70% of total revenue generated. Accordingly, Ross (2001, p. 329) often describe most of the governments of the Mideast and North Africa as "rentier states," since they derive a large fraction of their revenues from external rents. Mahdavy (1970) is widely credited with giving the term its current meaning: a state that receives substantial rents from "foreign individuals, concerns or governments. While rentier states also includes economies dependent on foreign aids such as that of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the likes, this study perceives rentier states as entities that depend on external rents from external sources for a substantial part of their revenues. The overburdening dependence of these economies on rents means states are less prone to push for or have stringent taxation. The multi-facet implication of rentierism may entail amongst other adverse outcomes authoritarian tendencies, personalistic states, repressive government and patronage based redistribution of wealth. Under such political arrangements individuals tend to mobilize along similar ideological and policy preference, this form of collectivity is referred to as social movement.

Social movements lack a global consensus as to what they entail as well as a standard measure of their functions. Rather they are operationalized from varying perspectives or accounted for based on certain contextual and indigenous dimensions. In abstract terms a social movements represent informal attempts aimed at bringing about social change. Hence, the study adopts Weber's charismatic authority and collective idea theory to define social movement and account for the emergence of NDA.

From the standpoint of Weber's (1947, p. 1968) treatment of understanding of charismatic authority provides an overview of his conception of charismatic movements. Weber (1947, p. 362) conceptualized the charismatic movement as a social change force, arguing that within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force. Furthermore, Weber (1968, p. 1121) charismatic movements originate in social systems that are undergoing great stress and are unable to meet the needs of a significant number of people. While proponents of the collective idea theory such as Blumer (1951, p. 1999) defined social movements as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life, and maintained that in the beginning, a social movement is amorphous, poorly organized and without form. Platteau (2000) for example describes collective culture in the context of African development, arguing that productive individuals are seen with suspicion and are coaxed into sharing their surplus with the community. Lang and Lang (1961, p. 490) defined the social movement as a large-scale, widespread, and continuing, elementary action in pursuit of an objective that effects and shapes the social order in some fundamental aspect.

Arguably, charisma remains an integral tool for social mobility, as it tends to not only further perception of ethnic elites as capable leaders it also creates some sort of role model figured in them. While collective idea breaks individual barriers and foster a feeling of belongingness. This is particularly pertinent in entrenching the 'us versus them' paradigm. It will suffice the say the role of charismatic leaders in mobilizing and sensitizing the citizens of oil rich ND against the Nigerian state cannot be undermined. Furthermore, a sense of deprivation serves as a rally point for individuals with similar fate.

While they may be more prevalent in less developed societies, conflicts and confrontations are almost as old as mankind and remain a definite attributes of societies at large. As Morgenthau (1948) argued, men must fight even if they do not possess arms or tools of violence; they resort to applying their fists. Viewed from the perspective of perceived or actual RD in the NDR, the incessant manifestation of conflict in the region can be attributed to political exclusion, anger, quarrel, hatred, regionalism, ethno-nationalism and desire for self-actualization amongst other factor. Nicholson (1992) posits conflict as an existing state of disagreement or hostility between two or more parties. Within the political context Jeong (2000) depicts conflict as a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources, in which the aim of the opponent entails neutralization, injure, incapacitate or do away with rival group or groups. While Kaur (2013) claims political conflict is a contention amongst collective stakeholders over the structure, incumbents or policies of a political regime.

For the purpose of this study, conflict is understood to denote a demonstration of cross-purposes of distinct or similar groups, often resulting in violence. Empirically backed statement depicts the various propensities and motivation for

which conflicts manifest. Contextually the prevailing conflict in the NDR is coined man against society. This form of conflict ensues as a result of difference in opinion or policy preferences between man (citizen) and the sovereign (state). Morell (2009) contends this form of conflicts ensues when man defies institutions or legally laid down rules. Under normal circumstances this form of conflicts arises when individuals mobilize into groups, in response to disputes and variations on pertinent issues or against another group. Some of which includes; resource control, self-determination, marginalization, exclusion and relative or absolute derivations.

One of the contending paradigms as to why armed conflict persists remains Relative deprivation (RD). RD is the judgment that one is excluded or short-changed compared to some standard. In the early stages of its development Gurr (1970) contends RD is the term used to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the "ought" and the "is" of collective value satisfaction, and that disposes men to violence. Within the precepts deprivation, relative and absolute forms of deprivations remain particularly more pronounced. While this study places more emphasis on the relative forms, it argued absolute deprivation to denote systematic exclusion, segregation and marginalization respectively.

McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988) employ RD to describe group in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis some other group in that society. While Runciman (1966) defines the preconditions of "relative" deprivation as follows (where Person A feels deprived of object X): Person A does not have X; Person A wants to have X; Person A knows of other people who have X; Person A believes obtaining X is realistic. Clare (2011, p. 6) on the other hand conceives the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration aggression mechanism, the anger induced by frustration, is a motivating force that disposes men to aggression, irrespective of its instrumentalities.

Controversially, while deprivation in its forms may serve as springboards for armed confrontation, conflicts, unilateral decision to secede or instability. It largely fails to account for instances of empirical existence of deprivation which does not necessarily bring about social movements. In buttressing these assertions, Anindya and Omer (2016, p. 126) claim,

> The deprivation theory, seemingly, provides a powerful reason as to why some social movements may be born. However, it does have one major disadvantage that is difficult to explain away. It fails to explain why in some cases deprivation fails to ignite the birth of a social movement. This gives rise to the suspicion that while the existence of a deprivation may be a necessary condition for the birth of a social movement, it may not be a sufficient condition for the social movement to be born.

Against this backdrop, the study posits, RD resulting in collective frustration and aggression as sufficient but not necessary determinants for the rise and growth of armed social movements. Having acknowledged the centrifugal roles of RD in the NDR conflict, in isolation it is less likely to produce similar outcomes. Thus, the study will explore

the NDA within a broad auspice of the social movement theory; this will give room for interrogation of plausible existence of multi- causal determinants of conflict as obtained in the NDR.

Theorizing Social Movement

Social Movements (SM) undoubtedly remain one of the most loosed concepts in social science. This is thought to be so, owing to diverse contextual determinants, variants, modus-operandi and objectives they pursue. However, the task of theorification tends to in its minimal capacity elucidate what can be identified and deduced as defining attributes of an underlying social phenomenon. The inability to exhaustively interrogate SM in its totality, informs its purposeful analysis. They include relative deprivation, resource mobilization and political process theories respectively.

The depth elucidating appeal of RD has led to its appropriation to account for varying social phenomena across a vast array of multi-disciplines in the social science and psychology. Thus, the foremost task is the establishment of a consistent and abstract understanding of what RD entails. Based on the claims of proponents of deprivation theorist, social movements emerge as a reaction to the feeling of exclusion, marginalization, in-access to services and resources amongst other. Against this backdrop, Pettigrew (1991) argues RD to denote a subjective state that conditions cognitive emotions and behaviour, which connects individuals with the interpersonal and intergroup. It melds easily with other social psychological processes to provide more integrative theory—a prime disciplinary need. Runciman (1966) conceives certain preconditions of "relative" deprivation as follows (where Person A feels deprived of object X): Person A does not have X; Person A wants to have X; Person A knows of other people who have X; Person A believes obtaining X is realistic. Subsequently, Heather, Pettigrew, Pippin and Bialosiewicz (2012, p. 204) developed a pattern for RD, which states;

> RD comprises of three steps. First, there must be comparisons made by an individual. Second, there must be a cognitive appraisal that leads the individual to perceive that the individual or his/her in-group is at a disadvantage. Third, the perceived disadvantage must be viewed as unfair. The perceiver thinks the perceiver or his/her in-group deserves better, and this results in angry resentment.

In assent to these assertions, RD arises from comparison to another, resulting in a feeling of unfair or unequal treatment, which breeds anger and resentment. Having acknowledged the centrifugal roles of RD in the NDR conflict, in isolation it is less likely to produce similar outcomes.

Resources remains a defying determinants of conflicts over, who controls what and has access to what are considered the essence of politics and governance in itself. The resource mobilization theory dwells on the cognisance of the availability of valuable resources in the birth and rise of social movements. Curti (2008) states resource mobilization (RM) theory was developed to challenge social breakdown and relative deprivation theories that claim individual

grievances as the dominant cause of collective action. However Mann and Schreibman (2015) claim the rise of social movement organizations, and the capacity of these movement to gather resources from potential supporters, both labor and money, are the critical determinants of any social mobilization. Anindya and Omer (2016, p. 126) argue that when some individuals in a society have certain grievances, they may be able to mobilize necessary resources to do something to alleviate those grievances. The term resources according to Dobson (2001) encompasses money, labor, social status, knowledge, support of the media and political elites, etc. Subsequently, RM theory does substantially account for why some social movements have been able to grow even in the presence of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It however places too much emphasis on materialism. As in the case of NDA resource control remains the root of the conflict, the movements however are affecting the revenue base of the Nigerian state without necessarily accessing the resource generated in the region. Adversely, they aim at the destabilization of revenue with a view of having greater or autonomous control of the resource rich region.

Subsequently, the study also interrogates the precepts of political process theory as a plausible joint determinant of the conflict in NDR. Political process (PP) theory treats social movements as forms of political movement in that their roots are tied to the existence of political opportunities. Accordingly to Dobson (2001) argues the theory in precision examines social movement in question to that of the state – or the power of the government in charge. Dobson's conceptive of PP revolves around state capacity. In the sense that in strong states with efficient repressive apparatus SM are less likely to have impacts. While in their relatively weak counterparts, SM's are likely to thrive owing to inability of the state to monopolize the legitimate use of force.

The political opportunity to which the NDA emerged can be rightly tied to inability of the FG to monopolize the legitimate use of force as well as deficiency in provision of public goods and services. A close evaluation of the movement and their agenda points to its political orientation aimed at attaining control of the oil rich region. While it the PP theory may be criticized for overburdening emphasis on politics as determinants of SM's, it complements the RD and RM theories in accounting for the NDA as armed social movement groups.

Evolution and Nature of the Niger-Delta Avengers

As earlier state the NDA is an armed social movement group based in the oil rich Niger Delta Region. They oppose the FG and carry out vandalization of oil facilities, with a view of disrupting Nigeria's main source of revenue. As culled from the Vanguard Editorial (November 3rd, 2017), the group claim their next line of operation will not be like the 2016 campaign, which we operate successfully without any casualties. This outing will be brutish, brutal and bloody, as we are shall crush everything we meet on our path to completely put off the fires that burn to flair gas in our communities and cut every pipe that moves crude away from our region. In response, as stated in the Vanguard

Editorial (November 14th, 2017), the Chief of Naval Staff asserts, no individual or group including the Niger Delta Avengers has the audacity to threaten the country and we will also make sure that Nigerians can use the maritime space unhindered.

On the official webpage of the NDA, inflammatory messages of stern warning as displayed. Directing the FG amongst other stakeholders to hands-off oil exploration in the NDR. The drive behind their emergence could be their opposition to the All Progressive Congress (APC) led government. This paper argues ethno-nationalism as the drive behind the activities of the group. This is thought to be so because, during the People's Democratic Party led government armed militancy and other forms of social agitations where at their barest minimum. Repentant militant groups benefitted from questionable oil facilities protection contracts running into billions of Naira. The termination of such contracts arguably led to the emergence of the NDA. While the activities of the groups may have been curtailed, the likelihood of their re-emergence cannot be completely ignored.

Conclusion

Having explored the nature of the armed confrontation in the NDR, the study argues the conflict to be a product of multiple causalities. Amongst which includes the feeling of deprivation, marginalization, elements of ethnic sentiments, in-access to housed natural resources amidst other masqueraded determinants. Particularly, the mobilizing role of ethno-nationalism as well as the mediating role played by the availability of resources as the bane upon which the said conflict thrives. In lieu, it proposes the need for the FG to focus on alternative means of generating revenue. The need for economic diversification, which will likely go a long way in addressing the incidence of claims been laid to resources in particular regions. More so oil has proven over the years to encumber certain properties that are accommodative and conducive for the existence of conflict as it is thought to be hostile to democratic advancements, particularly in the Middle East. Conclusively, a viable solution to the multi-dimensional and persisting conflict abounds in the ability of the state to diversify sources of revenue, monopolize the legitimate use of force and foster integrative policies aimed at dousing extreme ethno-nationalist sentiments.

Bibliography

Anindya, S and Omer, A. (2016). Why Social Movements Occur: Theories of Social Movement. *The Journal of Knowledge Economy and Knowledge Management,* Vol. XI Spring, pp. 125-130.

Best, S. G. (1999). *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa,* Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.

Blumer, H. (1951). *Collective Behaviour,* pp. 166-222 in Alfred M. L, (eds), *New Outline of the Principle of Sociology,* New York: Barnes and Noble Books.

Byman, D. (2005). "*Deadly Connections: State and Sponsored Terrorism.*" New York: Harper Perennial.

Claire, R. (2011). *Relative Deprivation Theory in Terrorism: A Study of Higher Education and Unemployment as Predictors of Terrorism Senior Honour Thesis*, New York: University of New York.

Collier, P. (2002). Policy for Post Conflict Societies: Reducing the Risk of Renewed conflict. *Economic of Political violence conference,* March 18-19, 2002, Princeton University Centre for International Studies.

Curti, G. H. (2008). From a Wall of Bodies to a Body of Walls, *Emotions, Space and Society Journal,* Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 106-118.

Dobson, C. (2001), *The Citizens Handbook: A Guide to building Community in Vancouver,* Retrieved March 10, 2018 from http:www.vcnbc.ca/citienshandbook/movement/pd

Esman, M. (2004). *An Introduction to Ethnic conflict,,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gurr, T. R. (1970). *Why Men Rebel,* New Jersey: Princeton University, Centre for International Studies.

Heather, J. S, Thomas, F. P, Pippin, G. M and Bialosiewicz (2012), Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytical Review, *Personality and Social Psychology Review,* 16 (3), pp, 203-232.

Jeong, H. (2000). *Peace and conflict Studies: An Introduction,* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Kaur, S. (2013). Oil as a Source of Political Conflict in Niger Delta, *African Journal of Business Management,* Vol. 7, No. 2, pp, 33-37.

Mahdavy, H. (1970). *The Patterns of Economic Development in Rentier States,* London: Oxford University Press.

Marx, K. (1974). Thoughts on Neglected Category of Social Movement Participants: the Agent Provocateur and Informant, *American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 80. Pp, 402-442.

Oakland, K. (2005). "Race and Racism." *Daily Kos,* http://dailykos.com/storyonly.

Pettigrew, T. F, Stephen, C and Stephan, W. (1991), *The Future of Social Psychology,* New York: Springer-Verlag.

Platteau, J. P. (2000). *Institutions, Social Norms and Economic Development,* Newark New Jersey: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Relative Deprivation and Armed Conflict in Rentier States: An Overview of the Niger Delta Avengers

Ross, M. (1993). *The Management of Conflict Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective,* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Runciman, W. G. (1996). *Relative Deprivation and Special Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth Century England,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Vanguard Editorial, November 3rd, 2017.

Vanguard Editorial, November 14th, 2017.

Viera, B. (1998). The Construction of National Identity on Primordialism and Instrumentalism, *Human Affairs,* Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 29-43.

Weber, M. (1947). *Theory of Social and Economic Organization,* Talcot Parsons (eds). New York: Free Press.

Weber, M. (1968). *Economy and Society,* New York: Free Press.