

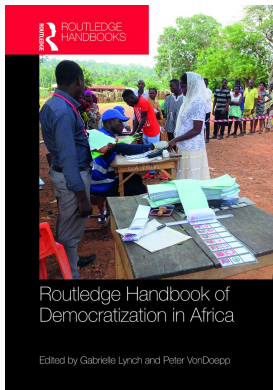
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Gabrielle Lynch, Peter VonDoepp

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Cyril Obi

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5

NATURAL RESOURCES

Cyril Obi

The relationship between natural resources, development, and democracy is often believed to be a negative one in Africa, leading to talk of a “resource curse.” Most analysts agree that this “curse”—a correlation between natural resource wealth, underdevelopment, and authoritarianism or corruption—is not inevitable and depends on the nexus between oil and politics (Watts and Ibaba 2011), with differences emerging over the relevant political problems and solutions. For some, natural resource wealth is a curse because it encourages poor economic policies and governance, which demand market-based and neoliberal reforms that can help to promote economic growth, transparency, and accountability. However, for others (Obi 2014), the idea of a curse is an artificial construct that is symptomatic of a more fundamental structural crisis whereby various factions of the national elite and global capital contest for the ownership of natural resources, while simultaneously enjoying power over the distribution of associated profits, rents, and revenues. The challenge of democracy and development according to this logic is the result not of an overreliance on natural resources, but rather social contradictions and structural distortions rooted in the country’s history and the legacy of a predatory colonial system (Omeje 2016).

This chapter engages with these debates by focusing on the case of Nigeria and oil. Petroleum accounts for over 90 percent of Nigeria’s export earnings and over 80 percent of national revenues. For many, it provides a classic example of a resource curse, whereby a rentier state—which derives all, or most, of its national revenue from the rent or sale of national resources to external actors—captures control of oil revenues to the (unfair) exclusion of others, becomes corrupt, relies on coercion, and fails to foster development. For such scholars, particular emphasis is often placed on a longstanding conflict in the oil-rich region of the Niger Delta between local ethnic groups and the state over the control of, and access to, oil (Osaghae 2003; Naanen 1995).

Certainly, some of the grievances of the Niger Delta ethnic minorities hinge on the view that the dominant (non-oil producing) ethnic groups use federal power to simply expropriate the oil extracted from the Niger Delta to develop other regions. This perception has fed the struggle by residents of the six oil producing states in the Niger Delta for self-determination, local autonomy, and control over oil revenues, as well as the decentralization of federal power over the collection and distribution of oil rents. These demands have been rejected by those in control of federal power who fear that they could snowball into fresh demands for secession,

which they are determined to prevent at all costs. The politics is then further complicated by intra-ethnic and intercommunal conflict within the Niger Delta, and the recent emergence of new groups of ex-militia leaders who are contesting for power against the “old order” of traditional authorities in some communities (Ebiede 2017). However, despite the divisive impact of oil on Nigerian politics, it is also central to the country’s political economy and national unity, and can be regarded as the glue that binds the Nigerian elite together (Onuoha and Obi 2014).

The high stakes involved in seeking control over Nigeria’s oil wealth has implications for democratization. Struggles over oil, framed as a “winner-takes-all game,” tend to undermine the procedural aspects of multiparty democracy, particularly free and fair elections (Obi 2011, 367–8). Those that succeed in winning power over the petrostate face great opposition from those that lose out, who often either cross over to the ruling party or resort to deploying the threat of violence. In turn, almost two decades after Nigeria’s transition from military dictatorship to electoral civilian rule in 1999, and despite the much-heralded electoral defeat of an incumbent president and peaceful transfer of power in 2015, the country witnessed “a political transition without democratic transformation” (Obi 2011, 367). The reason, so this chapter argues, is that power has not been transferred from a small ruling elite to the people, who remain alienated and excluded from decision-making and the distribution of public goods.

The chapter starts with a discussion of some of the different frameworks for thinking about the oil–politics nexus. This includes mainstream approaches, such as the resource curse framework, the greed/grievance thesis, and the political settlements approach. However, the chapter adopts a structural and radical political economy framework, which presents the “resource curse” as neither inevitable nor as primarily the result of poor economic policies or governance (although both are often a problem), but as a construct that hides a deeper structural crisis whereby natural resource wealth is captured by a small domestic and global capitalist elite. This is followed by a critical analysis of oil-related politics, focused on Nigeria. The conclusion examines the prospects for politics in the country and other resource-rich countries, and suggests some avenues for further research.

Conceptualizing the oil–politics nexus

The discourse around the oil–development nexus has been largely framed by the debate over how oil impacts a country’s political economy, particularly its economic growth. This has assumed greater resonance in a context marked by the “high dependence of African economies on natural resources” (UN-ECA 2015, 1), the pressures the demand for oil places on host communities, and the fragile ecosystems of oil-rich countries. However, the emphasis in most debates is on the natural resource or oil “curse,” which is used to explain the “correlation between resource endowment and negative developmental outcomes” (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Shaxson 2005; Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian 2013, Alao 2011; Oyefusi 2008). The classic “resource curse” literature views this correlation as due to a combination of “the Dutch Disease, Expansive Spending and the Rentier State” (Roll and Sperling 2011, 9–10). In this regard, expansive spending often refers to unproductive accumulation and waste; “rentier state” refers to a state that derives all, or most, of its national revenue from the rent or sale of national resources to external actors; and the term “Dutch Disease” was coined to explain the negative effects that North Sea oil revenues had on Dutch industrial production in the mid-twentieth century. The argument about the “Dutch Disease” is twofold: first, that the mass exportation of natural resources leads to an appreciation of the country’s currency, which renders the country’s other exports less competitive on world markets; second, that a booming resource sector draws capital and labor away from the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, thereby increasing their production costs.

However, as Ross (1999, 306) has argued, governments have various policy tools that they can theoretically use to mitigate the negative effects of oil production. It is also clear that not every country suffers from a resource curse, nor to the same extent. As a result, proponents of the resource-curse theory have largely shifted their focus from economic problems—such as currency appreciation and the instability of commodity prices—to politics and the idea of a “rentier state” (Chabal and Daloz 1999). More specifically, many talk of a link between oil, authoritarian politics, elite predation, and misgovernance (Yates 2012; Soares de Oliveira 2007; Sandbakken 2006), or what Yates has called “neo-petro-monialism,” whereby a patron distributes the “spoils of oil” among his/her clients or loyalists. Such an analysis poses the challenge of how to reverse rentier effects and promote “good governance.”

When applied to the Nigerian case, protagonists of the “oil curse” approach are of the view that oil fuels corruption and violent conflict, and subverts development, thereby contributing to multiple crises and insecurities (Karl 1997; Dowden 2011; Obi 2014, 2016; Lalji 2007). Crudely extrapolating from the oil curse, oil dependency is framed as the prime determinant of negative economic and political outcomes, particularly instability, corruption, and maldevelopment. In turn, liberal ideas of democratization, transparency, accountability, and economic deregulation are prescribed as the best cure.

The resource curse approach, which links the presence of natural resources to negative economic effects or poor policies and governance, has been severely critiqued on several grounds (Obi 2014; Stiglitz 2012; Lalji 2007; Omeje 2016). For example, Magrin and Vliet (2009, cited in Omeje 2016, 95) argue that, “most studies that defend the resource curse thesis are based on a confusion between correlation and causation thereby drawing unwarranted conclusions concerning links between resources and conflict.” Omeje faults the resource curse on two grounds: “ahistorical narrativism and the over-simplification inherent in its state-centric explanation.” He also points to the empirical limitations of the resource curse approach, noting that it “was devoid of relevant historical depth” and ignored the structural problems inherent in “the colonial political economy of resource extraction and its unaccountable political superstructure” (Omeje 2016, 95–7).

Arguing that the resource curse was a construct that failed to take historical context and specificities into consideration, Omeje (2016, 95–101) also notes how the approach “privileges the state over other social actors and glosses over other variables, particularly the role of international actors, including global powers, multinational companies, international NGOs and private security contractors.” It also falls short of explaining why oil endowment in places such as the Norway, the UK, US, and Canada turned out to be a “blessing” beyond an oversimplistic assertion that these countries enjoy “good governance,” while countries in Africa suffer from “bad governance.” The limitations of the resource curse approach clearly suggest that it is an inadequate framework for explaining the politics of natural resources.

Studies on oil politics and conflict in the Niger Delta are also influenced by another related discourse hinged on the “greed-versus-grievance binary” (Obi 2014; Omotola and LaMonica 2014), which seeks to explain the trajectories of violent conflict by focusing on the mixed motives of various actors. In this vein, some analysts have focused on the greed of the political elites, the petrostate, insurgent militias/criminal gangs, and oil multinationals as the primary drivers of violent conflict (Ikelegbe 2006). Others, however, see the primary driver as the grievance of ethnic minorities of the oil producing communities who bear the brunt of oil exploitation, pollution, and alienation from the proceeds of oil production (Watts and Ibaba 2011; Naanen 1995).

There are also studies that reverse the roles, seeing the militias as being driven by opportunism and greed, and the companies/states as victims seeking to protect themselves from

criminal gangs and local officials (Ikelegbe 2006; Idemudia 2017). When linked to the debate around responsibility for resource conflict, such analyses tend to either focus on how oil governance has fueled inequality, corruption, criminality, and violent conflict, or how the oil curse can be reversed through governance reforms that can promote transparency, accountability, restitution for environmental degradation and pollution, and corporate social responsibility. While these partly reflect some of the drivers of conflict, they do not go far enough to establish the roots of conflict and how it undermines democracy.

A subsequent approach to oil politics in the Niger Delta explores the linkages between “political settlements and organized violence and crime” (Schultze-Kraft 2017, 613–14). Building on previous studies on elite coalitions in Niger Delta oil politics (Eke 2015), Schultze-Kraft (2017, 614) argues that a “political settlement involves elites and other powerful groups who through processes of bargaining and compromise establish a political equilibrium in which the distribution of power and political resources is congruent with the distribution of income and rents.” Based on this political arrangement, he goes on to note that

it is impossible to dissociate the renegotiation and reproduction, indeed robustness and stability of Nigeria’s extractive political settlement from organized violence exercised by political, economic, and military elites associated with the centre as well as a range of state and non-state actors in the oil bearing delta regions, including the militant groups.

(Schultze-Kraft 2017, 624)

However, while Schultze-Kraft offers important insights, he does not analyze the factors that shape the dynamics of political settlements, or how they include, connect, or reflect the interests of specific actors linked to local, transnational, or global capital (Obi 2017b, 2018). In turn, while such an approach can help us to understand the role of violence in complex elite political configurations and how this coheres with the militarization of security governance in the context of high-stakes oil politics, one still needs to unpack the balancing of political settlement versus state-led coercion.

Given the limitations of these frameworks, there is a need for a more critical approach that can disaggregate these competing interests, as well as consider how these are rooted in particular contexts, time, and space(s). In turn, this chapter suggests that a radical approach, which shifts attention away from the presence of natural resources to power relations, can help us to understand the histories, structures, actors, and forces that shape how oil impacts power and society. The underlying idea is that, outside of specific social relations of power, oil possesses no intrinsic power beyond the value attributed to it by society and the market. The way that oil is produced, and its benefits accessed and distributed, is the product of specific social relations of production. Oil governance is thus understood as an expression of how social power over oil is organized.

According to this approach, how oil impacts society cannot be predetermined, but is rather the outcome of a particular historical configuration of social power and mode(s) of production. Even when it appears that oil is framed within the extractive ethos of state and corporate actors, and their connection to global oil capital, it is the structures of power and production that will ultimately determine how oil impacts development and democracy. A radical approach demonstrates that the state is both a site and a mediator of the deep-seated contestations for power/control over access to, and exploitation of, natural resources for profit and resistance by those whose livelihoods are threatened by large-scale extraction. This understanding of the state helps us to establish two things: the state enjoys agency over oil; yet the control of oil in most postcolonial societies is not the exclusive preserve of the state, but also involves certain external actors. As a result, the state

is in the grip of a Janus-faced elite whose factions jostle for power while balancing its interests with those of a transnational energy elite keen to maintain uninterrupted access to cheap oil and optimal profits. It is a system where the mode of oil production defines and lubricates the political economy, and politics is pervasive and synonymous with the capture of state power—the power to control access to a strategic and non-renewable natural resource.

Oil politics in Nigeria

The foundation and structure of the Nigerian state was already in place before the oil boom of the late 1960s, which coincided with the country's first coup d'état and onset of military rule. This meant that, rather than transform the state, oil served to reinforce these structures for extraction, predation, and pacification. It also meant that the Nigerian state and its ruling elite became the authors of a convoluted version of a political transition without democratic transformation. Although the military faction of the ruling elite has since left government, it continues to exercise power both as individual actors in the (post-military) democratic politics as well as on the economy. The militarization of politics is in turn linked to the percolation of certain values, ideologies, and tactics of institutionalized “war-making” and violence into the political sphere (Obi 2017a). This form of politics is antithetical to the liberal values of multiparty democracy, but nevertheless continues to influence political discourse, practices, and actors. It is therefore hardly surprising that elections in Nigeria are approached much like war—with vast resources deployed to win at all cost, while, once ensconced in power, victors settle down to share the spoils, with the opposition treated as enemies. Indeed, a retired general turned elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo, referred to elections as a “do-or-die” affair. Such is the premium placed on winning that those defeated often either retreat into oblivion or cross over to the winning side. They are also quick to abandon the winning side when they lose out in factional squabbles, to plot future victory in a new party, or reposition themselves in the opposition ahead of the next elections.

Apart from the zero-sum approach to controlling oil power, the other perspective is framed around the linkages between oil, ethnicity, and (in)justice. According to this narrative, a coalition of hegemonic non-oil producing majority ethnic groups and their minority allies control the oil, while those in the oil-rich Niger Delta are deprived of the benefits as their lands and water are damaged in the course of oil production and export. This justice-injustice binary has been used by many to explain and justify why these “ethnic (oil producing) minorities” of the Delta have struggled for local autonomy and the right to control the oil found in their region (resource control). This campaign was globalized in the early 1990s in the wake of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) revolution (Obi and Oriola 2018, 1–3), which was buoyed by the popular protest of the Ogoni people against the Nigerian state and Shell. Oil-related protests by ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta increased in the form of an insurgency in 2006, before being curbed by a presidential amnesty program in 2009 (Oluwaniyi 2018). However, tension and violence continued to fester in the background.

The nexus between oil and ethnicity is highly militarized at the local, national, and transnational levels. Militarization is a feature of securing the oil-rich territory of ethnic minorities for extraction, and repressing protests against the state–oil partnership. For example, when MOSOP activist, and one of its Ogoni founders Ken Saro-Wiwa organized the aforementioned non-violent protests against Shell and the Nigerian government in the 1990s, military force was used to crush their resistance. However, as a discussion of the multiparty period will show, the military was also used to quell violent resistance following the return to multiparty politics in 1999 by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in 2006, which led

to a fall in oil exports and the declaration of a presidential amnesty for ethnic minority militias in 2009 (Obi and Oriola 2018).

While Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP leaders were executed on November 10, 1995 on the orders of a military tribunal, and Ogoniland was occupied by the military for several years, MEND was able to successfully wage an insurgency that targeted oil installations, but which could not defeat the military. Being a pan-Delta organization that could not be easily identified with one leader or coordinating body, it was difficult for the military to isolate and target its leadership. The damage to oil infrastructure and loss inflicted by MEND attacks on oil production prompted the government to sue for peace. After they embraced peace, several erstwhile commanders of MEND were awarded lucrative security contracts by the government, which ran into millions of dollars. The capacity to mobilize violence has become a key factor not just in staking claims and repressing protests, but also in influencing some of the political deal-making and coalition-building that seeks to capture power of the Nigerian state.

The militarization of social life and the emergence of several generations of young people in the Niger Delta with no experience of living in a demilitarized society—many being socialized into a life of “politics as war-making”—has rendered democratization a difficult prospect (Obi 2017a). There have been episodic outbreaks of inter- and intra-communal violence, and a resurgence of (anti-state and anti-oil company) protests by groups that are adept at staking claims and mobilizing violence ostensibly on behalf of aggrieved communities, but in reality driven by a mix of complex motives (Ebiede 2017; Eke 2015; Watts and Ibaba 2011).

The militarization of oil politics in the Niger Delta

The trajectories of oil politics in the Niger Delta reflect the mix of opportunism of various actors and the militarization of resource governance in the region. On the one hand, despite the expansion of democratic space to accommodate a vast array of elected and appointed political office holders and non-military actors, high levels of political violence persist for expressing grievance or protest, as the state and private security apparatus of oil companies seek to protect and facilitate the conditions for oil extraction. On the other hand, and closely related, competitive politics entails a sometimes violent pursuit of spoils. As Ake (1994) reminds us, elections are more of a means to an end—i.e., to political power—than a means of achieving political transformation or restructuring.

Since Nigeria’s return to democratic rule in 1999 following several decades of military dictatorship, the legacy of militarism has continued to haunt oil politics in the Niger Delta. Hopes that the opening up of the political space would help to demilitarize the oil region and address longstanding grievances of its people gradually evaporated, leading to renewed agitation and a new wave of militarization and violent politics. By 2006, various groups of ethnic minority/community-based militias had come together under MEND as a coalition of local armed groups, which waged a violent campaign that targeted state security forces and oil companies.

The state’s response primarily consisted of sending in the army to guard oil installations and escort oil workers, while seeking to coopt the regional Niger Delta elite into a national ruling bloc. The latter was achieved by giving select militants access to the spoils of oil through partnerships with oil companies, private security contractors, the military, and developmental assistance (in the form of training, equipment, and weaponry). At the same time, the government allocated more resources to the deployment of military force in an attempt to crush the threat posed by MEND, and later on, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA).

In 2009, a presidential amnesty for Niger Delta militants and the subsequent election of Goodluck Jonathan—the first Nigerian president from the Niger Delta—in 2010 (following

the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua) helped to quell violence in the region. However, after Jonathan lost the 2015 elections, the oil war between the military and Niger Delta militias saw a resurgence in 2016 with the emergence of the NDA (Onuoha 2016, 5–7; Obi and Oriola 2018, 32; Ebiede 2017; Oriola and Adeakin 2018, 138–40). The oil war rages episodically with the Nigerian army launching several special military operations, alongside the continuation of the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP).

Party politics has provided the Niger Delta elite with platforms to claim the region's share of the benefits of oil. More specifically, it has provided the elite with some legitimacy to stake claims as representatives of an aggrieved marginalized region, even if this does not translate into any real difference in the lives of the masses, or their inclusion in decision-making. Indeed, at best, it has provided opportunities for the inclusion of a few individuals in patrimonial networks of power or ruling party structures whereby they enjoy access to some of the spoils—not as representatives of the people, but as loyalists. In such a context, there is little or no democratic oversight over the actions of the security actors, particularly the military whose presence has at best reduced the level of attacks on infrastructure and criminality, but failed to end them. Political institutions in the region reinforce militarism rather than prioritize the democratization of social relations.

In response to President Buhari's order to the Nigerian military to “crack down” on the NDA (Soriwei, Adetayo, and Akinloye 2016) and an estimated loss of national revenues, which has been put at “over N1.5 trillion at a result of the vandalization of oil assets in 2016,” the Nigerian state spent an estimated N4.62 trillion on security and defense in five years between 2011 and 2015 (Olufemi 2015). According to figures obtained by *Premium Times*, “the figures for 2011 and 2012 were N920 billion and N924 billion respectively while N923 billion each was thrown at the sector in 2013 and 2014” (Olufemi 2015). By the same logic, the Oil Producers Trade Section (OPTS) of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI)—a group of oil multinationals operating in the Niger Delta—spent “five times more on security than their global peers” in 2017 “with a large chunk of expenditure on security services such as escort vessels, convoys and guards” (*This Day* 2018).

Whichever way it is viewed, security spending in the Niger Delta is related to the militarization of oil politics in the region. Underlying this approach is the role of politically connected elites, international oil companies, and private sector security actors who seek to reinforce their capacity to crush or neutralize the threats to continued oil extraction, profits, and state revenues. It is believed that the capacity to mobilize such violence will also help to discourage community protests as well as coopt “repentant” ex-militia fighters. The balance of forces will also give the state–oil partnership leverage in addressing the grievances of some host communities through selective community and development assistance projects. This is not an approach that easily lends itself to democratic oversight or debates, but reflects the exigencies of the power play in oil politics in the region (Obi 2017a).

Oil politics and civil society

Another aspect of oil politics relates to the role of civil society, particularly social movements and trade unions. Since a lot has already been written about social movements in the Niger Delta such as MOSOP (Ukeje 2011; Ibeanu 2002; Ako 2015; Naanen 1995), more attention in this chapter will be placed on trade unions. These include, but are not limited to, the country's central labor unions—the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC)—and the specialized trade unions in the petroleum sector, such as the Petroleum and

Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG).

While trade unions in Nigeria tend to stay outside of party politics, they engage in collective bargaining on behalf of their members, and organize protests against unpopular or harmful government policies. With a history of being at the forefront of nationalist struggles in the decade leading up to independence, the labor unions came under the NLC as an umbrella organization in 1978. The NLC became a thorn in the flesh of several military administrations, leading to it being banned in 1988 and then again in 1994.

In the 1990s the NLC went through a tumultuous relationship with the government, as it led nationwide protests against the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed on the country as a result of socially harsh austerity measures by international donors. Even after the country returned to democratic rule, the NLC and NUC continued to organize to protect the interests of Nigerian workers. This included protests around workers' rights, but also against unpopular government policies, such as those pertaining to corruption and impunity by public officials, and against increases in the domestic price of refined petroleum. However, the impact of labor agitation has been limited and the unions have always settled for a compromise with government after short-lived strikes.

In turn, the oil unions PENGASSAN and NUPENG—which are both affiliated to the central labor unions—have been at the forefront of struggles against the erosion of oil workers' rights and the downsizing of the labor force in the oil and gas sector sectors. Of note is their campaign against the casualization of labor and the use of contract labor by oil companies, including government labor laws that encourage such practices. The oil unions also fought for the reform of the oil industry in ways that advanced Nigeria's interests and economic development. In many cases, the leaders of the unions sought to conscientize oil workers about their rights, expose sharp practices by some oil companies, and protest against removing subsidies from refined petroleum products. The unions also backed calls for transparency of oil revenues and state accountability, as well as for greater national control of the oil industry.

However, in spite of its best efforts, trade unions, and civil society more generally, have been structurally weak and largely ineffective (Obi 2018, 201–18). The collapse of many industries and the retrenchment of workers since the mid-1990s resulted in a sharp decline in the influence and resources of the unions. Their position was then further undermined by their limited capacities and leadership tussles, which have contributed to their ineffectiveness in organizing nationwide campaigns.

PENGASSAN and NUPENG have also been hard hit by massive retrenchments in the oil industry and by the casualization of labor, which has effectively reduced the number of workers that can be unionized. Casualization has also meant that an increasing number of oil workers are not protected by unions and are subject to short-term contracts with employers. The result is that the oil unions have become marginal players in mainstream democratic politics. They also have to deal with hostile state policies that tend to equate any decision by oil unions to go on strike as an act of economic sabotage. The same situation obtains in relation to environmental and human rights and pro-democracy groups. Additionally, individuals/groups operating on social media who seek to influence oil policy or politics in Nigeria usually end up providing a lot of information, but with little uptake from or impact on, the larger society (Abutudu, Garuba, and Banwo 2012).

Oil politics in Nigeria therefore tends to be dominated by the state, transnational, and non-state actors. The political game itself is underpinned by militarism, which favors those with the ability to threaten the use of, or to actually mobilize, violence as a means to achieve political

ends. In this regard, oil itself is subordinated to political power, rather than being the driver of politics.

Conclusion

Given the structure and trajectories of oil politics, it can be argued that democratization has neither opened up political space to greater participation by the majority, nor addressed the structural inequalities within the Niger Delta or the larger Nigerian society. Since democracy in Nigeria stops short of addressing inequality and poverty, and in fact appears to have reinforced them in several important ways, the dominant logic of the militarization of politics will continue to drive up the stakes of capturing oil power, and so undermine democratization and development.

With politics focused excessively on maintaining this securitized space, there is little impetus for development by a domestic elite that seeks to accumulate, rather than create and reproduce, wealth. The persistence of structural violence and inequality, and the brittleness of state institutions (backed by international partners) is paradoxically compounded and confronted by the mobilization of violence by some non-state actors who seek a space within existing power relations, but lack the capacity to overturn them.

Oil and ethnic politics continues to fuel a combustible mix, which is only prevented from exploding by a complex but delicate act of balancing, bargaining, and reaching political settlements. This includes the use of rhetoric and protest by elites from ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta to push for fiscal redress and environmental justice in the form of greater access to an increased share (or control) of oil revenues, employment in the oil industry, and compensation for oil pollution.

While oil may provide the fuel that drives up the stakes of gaining power over the state, it does not define the stakes. It is therefore not very useful to seek to explain the democratic deficits and maldevelopment of Nigeria solely on the basis of an “oil curse.” The presence of oil may have helped to accentuate some of the structural defects in the Nigerian social formation, but it did not create them. Their origin lies elsewhere: in the structural defects that were created by—and which became embedded in—the colonial project, which in turn became indigenized at independence. This includes the nature of the country’s integration into the international division of labor as a supplier of natural resources, raw materials, and cheap energy, and as a market for finished goods.

The democratization of state–society relations and the transformation of Nigeria’s place in the global political economy of oil are necessary steps towards renegotiating the power relations over the oil-rich ecosystem in ways that ensure the connection of oil governance to people’s quest for justice, dignity, and equality. The politics of oil needs to be posed as the challenge of how Nigerians can build the social cohesion and momentum for an alternate politics hinged on a social democracy movement that seeks an environmentally and socially just, equitable, and more peaceful society.

Future studies of the natural resource–development–democracy nexus should pay greater attention to the historical and structural contexts in which resource-rich countries are able to transform natural resources, including their place in global power relations and the international division of labor. A lot can also be gleaned from approaching democracy in Africa beyond its procedural forms. Attempts to build liberal democracy in Africa, particularly in resource-rich countries, need to be radically interrogated and its impacts subjected to a transformational critique. For in the final analysis, the question of democracy and development in Africa is a political one—how best can both serve the interests of the people? Posing this fundamental question

in relation to existing realities specific to resource-rich countries and exploring the prospects for people-centered politics and participatory developmental democracy would allow for a research agenda that would hopefully connect with an agenda for transformation based on the negotiation of a new social contract.

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