ECONOMICS OF RELIGION AND OIL EXPLOITATION IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION: A DIALECTICAL RESPONSE

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Abstract: The Niger Delta region's huge oil deposits have produced significant wealth; nonetheless, the local populace continues to be entrenched in poverty, environmental deterioration, and social turmoil. This paper analyzes the convergence of economics of religion and economics of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region. The article conducts a critical analysis of the interplay between the economics of religion and oil exploration and exploitation, exposing the inconsistencies and tensions that characterize the region's developmental issues. It employs a dialectical method to examine the intricate dynamics involved. The findings underscore the necessity for a sophisticated comprehension of the interaction of social, environmental, and economic elements in the region, guiding policy and practice regarding sustainable development and social equity. The paper contends that religion may either undermine or bolster capitalist objectives, contingent upon its association with grassroots activism or elite involvement. It attacks the monetization of oil revenue, resulting in systemic marginalization and opposition from local communities. This research promotes a theologically grounded economic justice framework that incorporates environmental stewardship, equitable resource allocation, and the empowerment of vulnerable communities.

Keywords: Economics of Religion, Oil Exploration/Exploitation, Niger Delta, Dialectical Method, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is a paradoxical area characterized by substantial oil deposits that have significantly contributed to the nation's economy for decades (Iwejingi, 2013). The region is a crucial economic area, responsible for the majority of Nigeria's oil output. Nonetheless, the region continues to confront poverty, environmental deterioration, and social upheaval. It is one of the most destitute and ecologically compromised regions in the country, due to corruption, resource mismanagement, and environmental deterioration (Kew & Phillips, 2007). Religion plays a predominant role in influencing the worldview, attitudes, and economic behaviour of individuals in the Niger Delta. Religious organizations and leaders enhance the local economy, deliver social services, and influence economic decision-making. The economics of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta involves a complicated interplay of interests among international oil corporations, governmental entities, and local communities. The extraction of oil entails considerable environmental and social consequences, such as oil spills, pollution, and the displacement of communities. The discovery and exploration of oil have resulted in a legacy of destitution and deterioration, leaving the region entrenched in poverty, violence, and instability (Nriagu, Udofia, Ekong & Ebuk, 2016). Notwithstanding Nigeria's economic expansion and its status as Africa's foremost oil producer, the Niger Delta and its inhabitants have endured militarization, insincere peace efforts, relentless military assaults, and methodical genocide (Osuagwu & Olaifa, 2018). The indigenous people have resolved to secure their future by stringent economic self-sufficiency, emphasizing local governance over the resources and wealth of the Niger Delta.

This article seeks to examine the interface between the economics of religion and oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta, emphasizing the contradictions and tensions that characterize the region's developmental obstacles. It employs a dialectical methodology to elucidate the intricate dynamics and propose potential avenues for sustainable development. The research argues that the convergence of religion and oil exploration and exploitation affects the region's developmental results, and the inconsistencies between these domains exacerbate poverty, environmental degradation, and social turmoil. The anticipated findings aim to guide policy and practice, aiding in the formulation of sustainable solutions to the region's developmental issues. The research enriches the current discourse on the political economy of development, sustainability in the environment, and the influence of religion on economic advancement.

The Niger Delta Region: An Overview

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is a heavily populated area formerly referred to as the Oil Rivers due to its prominence as a significant palm oil producer (Oyindamola & Anegbode, 2018). The delta encompasses more than 70,000 km², constituting 7.5% of Nigeria's total area, and is inhabited by over 31 million individuals from over 40 ethnic groups. The region encountered considerable difficulties during the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970, culminating in the formation of South-eastern states and other states. Non-violent opposition emerged post-civil war, with Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni tribe as prominent individuals (Stremlau, 2016). The cohesive oil protests intensified in 1990 following the release of the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which condemned the absence of economic growth, environmental degradation, and the devastation of their land and waterways by foreign oil corporations (Yusuf, 2008). Recent armed conflicts arose when the Ijaw people expressed apprehensions on the relinquishment of resource management to oil firms in the 1998 Kaiama Declaration.

The Nigerian government deployed forces to Bayelsa and Delta states, resulting in the deaths of some demonstrators and the detention of others. The frequency and intensity of local Indigenous opposition to commercial petroleum refineries and pipelines in the region escalated. To placate the people of the Niger Delta region, Governmental and corporate initiatives well established to advance the Niger Delta region, including the Niger Delta Development Commission and the Development Initiative. Uz and Uz Transnational have implemented strategies for the development of impoverished communities in the Niger Delta, particularly in Rivers State. In 2008, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) proclaimed an "oil war" against pipelines, oil-production facilities, and the Nigerian soldiers tasked with their protection (Oyindamola, Goddy & Anegbode, 2019). The Niger Delta is experiencing administrative neglect, deteriorating social services and infrastructure, elevated unemployment, social hardship, extreme poverty, filth and degradation, and persistent war. Affected individuals by oil spills comprise several communities, frequently including indigenous populations, who depend on local resources for sustenance, water, livelihoods, and cultural traditions.

Nigeria's oil sector, the cornerstone of its economy, has produced two-thirds of its revenue. Nonetheless, the nation's oil affluence has adversely affected social communities, resulting in state violence and destitution in the Niger Delta region. The delta, a biogeographic region comprising over forty ethnic groups, hosts more than forty individuals involved in fishing, farming, craft making, wood carving, and monumental sculpting. The discovery of oil wealth generated elevated development expectations, accompanied by federal capital investments in health, environment, education, infrastructure, and employment. The cultural, social, and economic environment of the Niger Delta was severely impacted by oil spills, pipeline breaches, seismic activity, land shifts, and river erosion (Imobighe, 2015). This led to the substitution of indigenous cultures with an individualistic cultural ethos centred on wealth and power as indicators of social rank. Nigeria was under British colonial rule until it attained political independence in 1960. The Nigerian economy appeared to have a favourable outlook, evidenced by a GNP growth rate of 7% in 1961 (England, 2012). Oil exploration commenced in the late 1950s; however, the outlook soured 35 years later. A hydrocarbon economy persisted, characterized by a 1:27 GDP per capita disparity between the wealthiest and poorest nations, with food imports totalling N 440 billion from 1990 to 1998 (England, 2012). Notwithstanding Nigeria's huge oil reserves, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Survey designated it as the most corrupt nation globally in 1998.

An Overview of Oil Exploration and Exploitation in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has abundance of crude oil and natural gas. The region hosts over 78 ethnic nations and has been affected by oil exploration since the 1950s. The oil industry has discharged hydrocarbons and detrimental effluents into the environment via activities such as drilling, gas flaring, and oil spills (Erhun, 2015). This has resulted in environmental, social, and economic adversity for the residents, encompassing the devastation of fishing zones, livelihoods, agricultural land, and crops, fluctuating income, displacement, traffic obstructions, and demonstrations. Although the oil business has provided certain social amenities such as water, education, and banking, their quality is subpar. Globalization, the formation of novel political economies, the reversion of numerous nations to civil rule, and the economic ascendance of countries such as Nigeria have exerted significant pressures on the authority, influence, and capabilities of nation-states like Nigeria. This has led to a reduction in the power and influence of nation-states such as Nigeria.

The Niger Delta contains more than one-third of Africa's oil reserves and output. The delta, drained by the Niger River and its tributaries, spans approximately 75,000 square kilometers, or 9% of Nigeria's total surface area (Iwejingi, 2013). Nigeria attained independence in 1960 and became fully functional in 1961. Prior to the discovery of oil, the populace engaged in fishing, hunting, foraging for forest goods, trading, and agriculture. The discovery and exploration of oil catalyzed swift development, resulting in the transformation of cities such as Warri and Port Harcourt among others into contemporary urban centres. The British colonization significantly influenced marketing and investing during this era. The creation of the Nigeria Ports Authority facilitated the export and import of products, rendering the process efficient and cost-effective, as transportation occurred via maritime routes. The establishment of this port, together with enhancements in power supply and road infrastructure, facilitated the transfer of products and individuals. Communication networks were developed via telephone lines, postal systems, newspapers, and printing companies, creating employment opportunities and an educated workforce. Urbanization and urban expansion occurred via infrastructure and socio-economic advancement.

Nevertheless, the oil-producing regions were overlooked or omitted from the development process, leading to many socio-economic issues. Since 1970, oil has emerged as the cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, serving as the primary source of revenue (Iwejingi, 2013). Oil corporations have emerged as significant employers, resulting in extensive importation of expatriate labour and a heightened influx of foreign nationals. Oil contamination in the Niger Delta is distinctive, resulting in both human and ecological catastrophes. Refineries constructed for the processing of crude oil and subsequent sale to global markets result in social, infrastructural, and residential devastation. Oil spills cause harm to human health, agricultural land, aquatic ecosystems, water resources, and social environments. Numerous riverine oil-producing and fishing-dependent towns suffer from pollution, and agricultural fields have been compromised due to oil contamination.

The Niger Delta region has encountered several environmental challenges stemming from oil drilling since 1965. Oil spills from production wells, pneumatic flow lines, depots, flow stations, and terminals have significantly impacted wetlands and freshwater ecosystems. The oil refining industry in Nigeria presents significant risks owing to geological, climatic, vegetative, and hydrological dynamics, in addition to varied land utilization (Kew & Phillips, 2007). Wetland Rivers are heavily contaminated by crude oil, rendering the aquifer unfit for aquaculture and agriculture. The aspiration to transform the region into a premier tourism destination is thwarted, and the community relations of governmental and oil businesses are severely hindered. The direct result on economic activity is a complete collapse, with marine life perishing within three days of oil contamination. The pollution of rivers may lead to the extensive annihilation of fish populations, including paddlefish, shrimp, fingerlings, crabs, mollusks, and other delicate organisms (Nriagu, Udofia, Ekong & Ebuk, 2016). For numerous individuals in the region, these aquatic resources constitute their sole means of life. In contrast to soot from pipelines in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, fish from contaminated regions do not reach Lagos, the nation's commercial centre.

Religion in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has a longstanding legacy of religion, originating from indigenous belief systems. Christian missionaries encountered a society with established religious ideas and practices prior to the arrival of Western faiths. The Nasara (Muslim) Faith was introduced to the region by business interactions with certain Muslims in northern Nigeria before to the Nigerian Civil War (Heerten & Moses, 2017). The Vatican II Council localized religious denominations in the region and Nigeria overall by standardizing local language liturgies. This resulted in the founding of Nigeria's inaugural Christian University, the University of Port Harcourt, alongside the founding of Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, and Evangelical churches and their affiliated private schools. Religious institutions have evolved into instruments of economic empowerment via Micro financial institutions, cooperatives, and ad-hoc committees for marginalized individuals in society (Meagher, 2009). These institutions have facilitated access to soft loans with minimal or no interest rates for the impoverished and disenfranchised. Cooperatives and microfinance banks have enhanced the living conditions of certain families, while churches, through orphanages, have financially and materially empowered the underprivileged. Ad-hoc committees for widows, orphans, and the elderly have also rendered aid to the impoverished in the Niger Delta region. Nevertheless, several families in the Niger Delta region endure severe poverty attributable to oil contamination, inadequate sanitation, and the inability to get a daily meal. This distress parallels that of other depressed economies globally.

Islam, Christianity, and New Religious Movements (NRMs) have had a significant impact on the wide variety of religious practices and beliefs found in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The region's ethnic groups practice folk religion that involves ancestors, spirits, and mystical powers; they are polytheists and nature-loving. Shrine structures, totemic trees, creative expression, and intricate dances are frequently examples of how these beliefs are expressed. However, the rise of Islam and Christianity is causing a decline in the number of people who practice traditional religions. While the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, traditional evangelical churches, and the new Pentecostal churches are the most common Christian denominations in the Niger Delta, Islam is one of the prominent religions among the Ijaw and Urhobo-speaking communities. NRMs, which combine Christian, Islamic, and folk beliefs, have become well-liked substitutes for traditional religions in recent years. These NRMs have a syncretic attraction and are primarily found among the educated elite. Intense rivalry and conflict between followers of various religions, especially between indigenous and global religions, is mirrored by the Niger Delta's diversity of religious practices and beliefs. While other denominations, especially evangelical churches, are widely practiced by the educated elite, Christianity remains the predominant religion in areas used for heavy oil exploration and production.

For instance, the Ijaw religion is a theistic faith, purportedly guided by Domey Agbonagbe, the creator of both the planet and humanity. Ijah, a prophet and messenger, guides humanity on worship and the pursuit of an improved existence. He guides the Ijaws' history and future, playing a crucial role in the creation of items like as fish traps, bamboo skimmers, rivercraft, and musical instruments. Ijah declares the cessation of disputes, envy, and conflict; promising paradise for adherents of his doctrine, while condemning dissenters to perdition. Traditional procedures are conducted during life and posthumously to guarantee proper veneration. Divine compassion and generosity are seen in the provision of plants for human necessities, while malevolence pervades the land in the guise of "ogbiri." Nonetheless, this novelty is consumed by the passage of time, resulting in competition, conflicts of interest, disputes over intangible matters, and alarming occurrences. The Ijaw religion is a nature-based faith that venerates certain natural objects as sacred (Ibube), as they are seen to possess divine qualities. Ritual artefacts are positioned on the head or placed adjacent to the shrine, where the deity is enthroned. The Word (the 'Big God') is a profound enigma accountable for creation, existing alongside God, and facilitating salvation. Certain Ijaws assert their literacy in comprehending the Quran. Religion stabilizes agricultural life despite hostility towards their deities, which is reflected in their character.

Economic Theorization of Religion and Oil

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria encompasses three economic theories that connect oil production with economic effects: institutional structure, informal economic structure, and social capital. The Nigerian constitution stipulates that the Federal Government own all resource rights, including oil, and engages in a Joint Venture Partnership with foreign oil giants (Ibietan, Abasilim &Olobio, 2018). This framework has resulted in elite cooperation, reciprocal rent-seeking, and corruption inside the oil sector, with estimates indicating that political elites have misappropriated over $600 billion since independence (Meagher, 2009). The indirect consequences of oil operations on the local economy encompass persistent poverty and wealth disparity at the community level. Unseen economic and political systems regulate how local populations obtain rights for oil extraction and allocate the resulting profits within the community (Meagher, 2009). These elite factions further govern the conduct of local populations by regulating access to superior education, employment opportunities, and financial resources. Social capital denotes the connections of trust or confidence, reciprocal obligations for informal economic collaboration among kindred, ethnic, and communal links, as well as the mechanisms for informal dispute settlement and economic assurance within a region. Diverse familial lineages, clannishness, tribal and geopolitical locations, gender, and religions influence informal social capital, while socioeconomic organizations serve as platforms for novel economic behaviours and relationships.

Neoclassical economics, emerging from 1900, underscores supply and demand as fundamental determinants in the production, price, and consumption of commodities and services (Kenton, 2024). Neoclassical economics, grounded in the theory of free markets, posits that economies advance towards optimal conditions and the equilibrium hypothesis (Cory, 2006). Nonetheless, it has faced criticism from contemporary economic methodologies, evidence-driven policymaking, rational organizational theories, and growth frameworks. Development economics expanded upon Keynesian principles to build models for market intervention to foster development, whereas evidence-based policymaking sought to underscore the prescriptive shortcomings of the Washington Consensus (Cory, 2006). Institutions, encompassing rules, norms, and microeconomics, have been a prominent subject in literature, especially regarding land use conflicts (Meagher, 2009). The assertion is that effective regulations and institutions foster growth and progress, whereas ineffective ones obstruct it. The Neoclassical Theory of Urban Land Use (NTULU) has been significant, characterized by notable quotations and a thorough rationality that includes self-interested preferences, ambiguous equilibrium, agent-structure analyses, and temporal considerations (Kenton, 2024). The NTULU elucidates how the microeconomic actions of land users and suppliers generate aggregate patterns that are both predictable and probabilistic. For instance, the influence of institutions on economic performance has garnered attention after the collapse of the USSR.

The role of religion in Nigeria has been extensively discussed as a mechanism of economic governance, overseen by informal, market-driven community institutions. Since the late 1980s, informal religious congregations have expanded in major urban areas, especially among Yoruba and Igbo merchants, craftsmen, and industrialists. These communities possess their own internal enforcement mechanisms, administering punishments and rituals for transgressors. Amidst swift economic destabilization following the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, informal religious communities have offered the institutional support network esteemed by many. The rise of organized group violence is mostly an issue of state ineptitude and informal political dynamics. Informal market participants are deeply engaged in the administration of group violence due to their routine economic activities. Shifts in economic governance paradigms signify conflicting grassroots methods for regulating informal trade. Religion serves as a catalyst for institutional innovation, fostering economic credibility and trust within informal economies characterized by fluctuating laws and regulations. Structure-induced conditions elucidate the formation of religious communities, but agency-induced mechanisms account for the subsequent dissolution of this enforcement model. Group violence is contended to be mostly intra-ethnic, influenced by elite rivalry across ethnic boundaries.

Nigerians experienced political scepticism and cynicism stemming from natural calamities and voter disenfranchisement, resulting in diminished trust in the electoral process and formal politics. The political elite faced growing ostracism, leading to the emergence of a new leadership comprised of those formerly assigned to subordinate positions. Prayer assemblies were swiftly organized, and communities were urged to "return to God." A millenarian cloud began to loom over Nigeria, deriving power from the nation's discontent with the political process and signalling heightened mistrust towards official politics. This coalition comprised vigilantes, martial entities, protectors, and defenders of foreigners, representing intermediary movements between orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholicism (Meagher, 2019; Andersen, Bentzen, Dalgaard & Sharp, 2017). The ecumenical environment witnessed recently converted Catholics and former Anglican clergymen together as equals. Two focal points of interest were the emergence of hidden groups outside conventional Churches and groupings contesting established ideals by creating or co-creating new natural laws.

Economics of Religion

The economics of religion is a discipline that employs economic approaches to examine the interplay between religion and economic behavior (Iyer, 2016; McCleary, 2011). It stemmed from Smith's (1776; cf. Ottuh & Akpotor, 2021) *The Wealth of Nations,* which emphasized the impact of market dynamics, motivations, and competition on religious institutions. In 1905, Weber (2012 [1905]) identified a link between religion and economic behaviour, attributing it to the Protestant Reformation (Andersen, Bentzen, Dalgaard & Sharp, 2017). Religious orthodoxy profoundly impacts moral conduct, with diverse interpretations of the Golden Rule common across major faiths. Religious tenets promote cooperation and trust among culturally defined communities; nonetheless, some contend that association with religious communities may result in bias or discrimination (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). The believing aspect of religious practice emphasizes divine reputation, whereas the belonging aspect pertains to social relations within religious communities. Studies demonstrate that religion affects economic outcomes via thrift, work ethic, integrity, and trust (Ottuh & Akpotor, 2021). The development of human capital is additionally affected by the religious importance ascribed to reading. The connection between religion and economic outcomes may be perceived as intrinsic or correlated with religion.

Dialectical Method in the Economics of Religion

The interplay of positive and negative religiosities illustrates the intricate and complicated dynamics of socio-ethical economic transformation, wherein the social structure of class both appropriates and is appropriated by conflicting logics (Waterman, 2002). The former is progressive in addressing contradictions in the public domain while being restrictive in managing inclinations towards radical, performative dissent in the moral domain. This dialectical perspective is essential for examining issues of agency and the influence of religion in economic life, especially as traditional market theologies are adapted and complicated by emerging religious groups and shifts in belief systems. Although the impact of religious groups on economic life is increasingly acknowledged, their influence is frequently trivialized or exaggerated, portraying the relationship of interdependence as a simplistic correlation between beneficial religious resources and detrimental economic exploitation, or alternatively, the detrimental nature of religion (Ottuh, Idjakpo & Uviekovo, 2022). Since the emergence of neoliberal political economy in the 1990s, the prevailing belief has been that economic transformation will depend on the simultaneous development of contemporary moral frameworks about economic existence. Comprehending this dialectical relationship necessitates the modelling of the moral economies of the formal aggregate economy alongside the dis/contents of the informal economy as disparate and nonlinear.

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is recognized for its abundant oil resources; nevertheless, the exploitation of these resources has not resulted in local development and prosperity (Joab-Peterside, 2018). Consequently, there has been a surge of evangelistic campaigns and the emergence of numerous new religious movements in the region. Economic interpretations of religion have developed, accompanied by a historical overview of these interpretations and a discourse on their use in understanding the Niger Delta Region. Religion shapes individuals' life organization and directs their approaches to business, investment, and development (Ottuh, Ottuh & Aitufe, 2014). Religious organizations shape the characteristics of economic systems emerging in regions or nations and play a vital role in mobilizing financial resources. Certain religions advocate for saving, frugality, and enhancing wellbeing, whilst others condemn capital accumulation, extensive agriculture, and aristocracy. New religious movements are primarily or significantly shaped by social and economic transformations, and their impact on the character and manner of economic participation in their respective locales is currently a burgeoning area of research regarding the role of religion in economic performance.

The Niger Delta Socioeconomic Challenges

The Niger Delta, inhabited by 32 million individuals, is distinguished for its varied flora and fauna, plentiful fish species, and multiple rivers that supply fresh water and support agricultural land. Nonetheless, the region is socio-economically deprived of these advantages, making it the most impoverished in Nigeria. The geological history of the delta's development and silt accretion from the Niger and its tributaries has resulted in neglect and hindered progress, access, and benefits related to contemporary human existence. The consequences of oil exploration and exploitation on the Niger Delta populations have resulted in environmental degradation, sickness, infertility, and conflict. The overall health condition of these individuals falls short of basic standard guidelines due to oil pollution affecting air, land, and water, with various socioeconomic issues. The extensive fish species and biodiversity are compromised and submerged in sediment as a result of oil spills, resulting in malnutrition, especially in children aged zero to five years (Osuagwu & Olaifa, 2018). The extensive cultivable terrain that has sustained humanity for millennia is now desolate and devoid of production as a result of oil exploration and exploitation. Immediate strategies are required to effectively address the social, health, environmental, security, and political issues stemming from oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region.

Nigeria, notwithstanding its oil boom, is confronted by poverty and unemployment owing to the intricate management of the oil sector. Although crude oil constitutes more than 85% of Nigeria's exports, the nation is positioned 151st out of 174 on the global human development index (Khan, 2015). The Niger Delta's oil area, reliant on subsistence agriculture, hunting, and non-timber forest resources, experiences economic depreciation, lack of development, oppression, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses. The 1956 discovery of offshore oil transformed the sustainable development and environmental conservation potential of the Niger Delta (Dakolo, 2021). Nonetheless, oil drilling resulted in detrimental outcomes and extensive demonstrations, culminating in vandalism and the embrace of bush churches, spirituality, and esoteric belief systems. Corporations have expended billions to engage many stakeholders in averting violent conflicts and pipeline sabotage. Notwithstanding the presence of oil installations, Nigeria's social and economic metrics are subpar, as the oil-producing towns in the Niger Delta endure pervasive poverty and unemployment. The nation's extensive oil finance system has faced criticism for its detrimental outcomes and the necessity for peace negotiations.

The Niger Delta region is recognized as the most contaminated ecosystem on the planet, with oil spills constituting a major long-term catastrophe. This contamination originates from multiple sources, including oil production spills, corrosion of pipelines, sabotage, accidents, and inadequate maintenance. The devastation impacts the ecology and the inhabitants of the Delta, compromising the delicate ecosystem, potable water supply, agricultural land, and overall terrain. Oil contamination results in both immediate and enduring soil issues, as well as persistent disruption of agricultural supplies (Otoabasi, 2011). Rivers and estuaries deplete their traditional supplies, resulting in socioeconomic upheaval for communities reliant on these waterways for millennia. The Ogoni nation, located within Nigeria's Niger Delta Basin, represents a significant crime against humanity. Ogoni's national territory constitutes a segment of the Niger Delta Basin, which is a source of persistent, detrimental socio-economic conditions. Oil corporations such as Shell Nigeria Exploration and Production, Exxon Mobil, and state-owned oil development entities are accountable for acts of shooting, poisoning, mutilation, arrest, incarceration, kidnapping, torture, and execution (Isumonah, 2015). The present expenses incurred by these firms' illicit activities must be borne by them, as this constitutes a reprehensible and indefensible conflict.

Devastations of Oil Exploration and Religious Mobilization in the Niger Delta Region

The oil exploration endeavours of multinational corporations in the Niger Delta have resulted in economic, social, political, and environmental repercussions, inciting protests and counter-protests from impacted communities. These communities have organized to articulate their dissatisfaction with oil firms and governmental entities concerning allocation of resources, revenue distribution, and environmental destruction. Traditional reactions to oil exploration encompass negotiations, dialogue, and peaceful protests, but controversial tactics involve unfair violent assaults, bombings, sabotage of oil infrastructure, hostage-taking, and armed patrols of oil facilities (Isumonah, 2015). The responses have led to the disintegration of oil firms' visionary objectives in the Niger Delta states, resulting in oil spills and the neglect of spill sites, hence heightening the risk to local water bodies. Multinational oil corporations operating in Ogoni ceased non-sustaining damage payments, exacerbating discontent with Niger Delta Environmental Justice Campaigns at the community level, and later caused spills involving silt and equipment. The Niger Delta in Nigeria constitutes one of the most affluent oil and gas regions globally, contributing around 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange revenues (Iwejingi, 2013). Nonetheless, oil exploitation has engendered severe environmental contamination issues persisting for decades, culminating in poverty, starvation, underdevelopment, and a pervasive deficiency of infrastructure. Oil wealth has been identified as a catalyst for corruption among government contractors and officials.

As the Nigerian State increasingly relies on oil revenue, it tends to infringe upon oil-producing local communities. This year, oil corporations and the Nigerian government have allocated substantial resources to asphalt and related products, while the Nigerian government has complemented upper side dose-rate detection with a novel southern strategy utilizing fully autonomous recorders and underground detection systems with an extensive range of detection capabilities. Spills have devastated ecosystems in streams and surface water bodies, resulting in heightened bug populations and catastrophic repercussions for agriculture, which was the cornerstone of the economy before to the emergence of oil. The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has been contending with the intricate challenges of oil exploitation and environmental deterioration.

The Ogoni Bill of Rights, submitted to the Nigerian government and populace in November 1990, articulates the issues of local populations over their circumstances in life, education, and work opportunities. The region experiences extensive discontent and assaults on oil facilities, since the Ijaw Youth Council has designated Ijawland a "no-go area" for oil company operations (Iwejingi, 2013; Imobighe, 2015). The management of oil extraction in the Niger Delta is shaped by the institutional framework that connects numerous global and local entities. This research examines the grassroots reaction to oil exploitation and environmental degradation, emphasizing the rise of quasi-legal religious movements within oil-producing areas. Concerns around the loss of religious authority or credibility have resulted in the development of desperate methods to alleviate animosity (Barro & McCleary, 2003). The emergence of churches advocating the notion of "are we not all worshipping the same God" has further strengthened the initiatives of the government and oil corporations.

These movements contest the state's definitions of legitimacy, legality, and morality. They present a persuasive theology of a "deity preoccupied with land" that seems disconnected from the concerns, aspirations, and daily anxieties of the Niger Delta inhabitants and their religious institutions (Meagher, 2009). A dialectical relationship characterizes the impact of the West on the religious economy in Nigeria's Niger Delta region and vice versa. Religious engagement has not merely been enforced upon the religious market by Western agents; rather, it has mutually transformed the perspectives and methodologies of these Western agents in their interactions. Religion, in conjunction with ethnicity, family, and indigenous knowledge, has emerged as a more prominent force in the Nigerian religious economy, resulting from a synthesis of concepts and practices from pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras.

The increasing theological diversity and radicalism in the Niger Delta region has necessitated a reevaluation of operational strategies by other religious organizations, leading to the production of propaganda pamphlets aimed at undermining competitors. Researchers of Nigeria's religious economy must consequently reevaluate the processes, methods, and ramifications of religious engagement and rivalry within resource markets, as well as production and consumption behaviours in Nigeria's burgeoning mega-cities. Religious denominations in the Niger Delta region have assumed a pivotal role in engaging with globalization, necessitating an understanding of the religious economy within this broader framework. The modelling of the ontology and phenomena of religious sects in the Niger Delta region must account for how their knowledge production and distribution have been influenced by increasing interaction with globalization factors and their consequent effects.

The Prospects of Oil Exploitation and Religion in the Niger Delta

The Nigerian government is entangled in oil exploration, presenting a considerable challenge to the country. Militancy in the region has grown more prominent, garnering local support against foreign intervention. Hostage-taking operations and pipeline damage have begun in the region, specifically in some areas of Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom states. The Nigerian military and other security agencies have been vigorously yet ineffectively pursuing the culprits of the unprecedented attacks on oil installations and mitigating the surge of hostage-taking incidents (Dakolo, 2021). The government's reactions to the crisis in the Niger Delta appear to be an emotional struggle between power and force, lacking any authentic effort to genuinely address the region's grievances. Government's reactions to militancy in the region have included military operations, the obstruction of waterways, the suppression of militant organizations, the establishment of ad-hoc committees, the creation of new states from Niger Delta territories, and the declaration of amnesty for Niger Delta militants. In 2009, Nigeria's President Yar'Adua culminated his peace initiative for the Niger Delta region by declaring amnesty for all militants, including those from the MEND militia, alongside a military build up to neutralize remaining militant factions.

Global oil demand declined in 2009, as the financial crisis exposed factors that would hinder growth in oil consumption in 2009 and thereafter. The responsiveness of oil consumption to economic growth rates has declined during the past fifty years. The short-term outlook for global oil demand is uncertain, with the agency forecasting a more favorable recovery of up to 1.5 million barrels per day in 2010 (Afshar-Mohajer, Fox & Koehler, 2019). Nonetheless, certain fundamental concerns articulated in 2009 regarding the likelihood of enduring long-term decreases are anticipated to continue in the forthcoming years. The low-price environment constitutes a structural rather than cyclical disruption in the demand forecast, reflecting a collective mindset from the 1990s that indicates industrial oblivion to the new normal. Worldwide, oil consumption decreased significantly by 3.6 million barrels per day (b/d), or 4%, reaching a seven-year low of 84.8 million b/d (Philibert, Lyons, Philibert, Tierney, 2019). Non-OECD demand, focused on cost-effective growth, has had declining growth rates for several years, in sharp contrast to OECD countries, where demand has diminished.

Religion parallels the oil industry in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Religion can significantly contribute to transforming its perception from a source of violence to one of healing and reconciliation. Religious reconciliation can be facilitated through peaceful interreligious dialogue, inclusive planning with stakeholders, engagement of religious, traditional, and civil society representatives in discussions, back-channel negotiations, strengthening regulatory institutions, and the promotion of literature and films focused on religious reconciliation. These strategies can be customized to align with the phases of the crisis: prior to a crisis, crisis, and post-crisis periods. A notable correlation exists between the extent of oil exploration activity and the degree of underdevelopment in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The government is urged to collaborate with oil corporations in the Niger Delta to determine appropriate compensation for rural communities according to their specified needs. Oil companies in the Niger Delta must rigorously comply with operational safety protocols to avert oil spills, enhance their response time by promptly addressing oil pollution upon occurrence, formulate contingency plans for spill prevention and mitigation, and deter sabotage by prosecuting offenders to discourage further incidents.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the interplay between the economics of religion and economics of oil extraction in the Niger Delta, highlighting the inconsistencies and tensions that characterize the region's developmental obstacles. This research has indicated that the quest for economic profit through oil exploitation has resulted in environmental deterioration, societal turmoil, and human distress, undermining the tenets of sustainable development and social equity. The economics of religion has offered hope and resilience to the local populace, although it also highlights the necessity for a more nuanced comprehension of the interaction among economic, social, and environmental issues. Policymakers and practitioners should account for the intricate dynamics in the region, integrating perspectives from both the economics of religion and oil production into development measures. Future research directions encompass additional studies and multidisciplinary methodologies that integrate perspectives from sociology, economics, environmental studies, and religious studies hence, engaging with current dialogues regarding equitable development, social justice, and the influence of religion on economic development.

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