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Natural resources and the crisis of nation-building in Africa: the case of oil and violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The preponderance of intrastate violent conflicts in natural resource rich states has been attributed to a number of causal mechanisms. Theorists of conflicts thus tend to explain these conflicts using different approaches, notably path dependency and rational choice. These approaches examine issues such as ethnicity and political marginalization, weak but repressive state capacity, strategic dilemmas, foreign instigators of conflict, and the very pervasive theory of the resource curse. Natural resources usually lie at the heart of many of these conflicts and the resource curse theory has helped explain the effects of states' dependence on the primary resource sector. This resource curse is therefore corroborated by the rational choice approach which insists that economic incentives explain the upsurge in rebellious activities within natural resource rich but poor and dependent states, especially in Africa. This research interrogates the rational choice approach of Collier and Hoeffler against the backdrop of issues in the Niger Delta conflict. It argues that the greed versus grievance theory remains inadequate in the light of the historical and sociological circumstances underlying political struggles in the region. The research report concludes that an integrated but eclectic approach be applied in the study of this crisis.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, Greed and Grievance, Niger Delta, Nigeria, Oil, Resource Curse, Youth Militancy.