THE STRONG ROLE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN SECESSIONIST CONFLICTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MAIN FEATURES

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ABSTRACT
The paper studies the secessionist conflicts that comprise the significant role of natural resources, which causes, prolongs or in rare cases even shortens the length of the secessionist conflict. Since oil is the most important natural resource of the present day, we have focused on studying the role of oil in secessionist conflicts. For a conflict to be designated as “secessionist”, certain prerequisites have to be fulfilled: a region that has certain uniqueness and an identity felt by the majority of its population, different in some way from the rest of the territory that makes up the state. The identity that is different from the identity of the space surrounding the region can be a product of a different nationality, religion, culture and/or history. If this particular region is abundant with resources, chances for a secessionist conflict with resources playing a strong role i.e. a resource conflict that involves an attempt or attempts for secession (or at least a politico-territorial and economic autonomy) from the state rise significantly. Theoretical perspectives consulted for the purpose of this paper are mostly socioeconomic by their character. They are focused on the socio-economic aspects of the resource conflicts, and mostly quantitative. Secessionist conflicts represent a constant reality of the contemporary world. Interests of developed states and emerging economies, which lie in insuring the continuous, undisturbed flow of natural resources (oil and strategic minerals particularly) from the resource rich, albeit mostly poor and unstable countries represent an important factor of the prolongation of resource conflicts.

Keywords: natural resources, secession, conflicts, oil, rents, Sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia and Oceania.
1 INTRODUCTION

Access to natural resources is a dominant feature of international security. The U.S. State Department has identified 15 resource-rich regions that are vulnerable to immediate outbreaks of violence, primarily in the Middle East and Africa. As resource scarcity worsens and energy demands increase, international powers will intervene in resource disputes to protect their vital interests (Kehl, 2010: 410).

As Klare has put it in “Blood and Oil” (Klare, 2004) there are about 1047.7 billion barrels of proven oil reserves left in the world; once this supply is expended, humans have no way of creating more oil and will have to either switch to alternative fuel sources or invent synthetic replacements.

However, a point resource\(^1\) may be more easily monopolised than a diffuse resource, but that its desirability usually makes it vulnerable to contestation and often depends on international recognition for mobilising investors, hence the likelihood of coup d’état or secession as a function of relative proximity. Rewards from resource control are maximised by insurgents when resources are easily accessible and marketable and sufficiently valuable, such as distant diffuse resources, hence the association with warlordism. Finally, proximate diffuse resources involving large number of producers would be more likely to lead to rebellion or rioting in nearby provincial or national centres of power (Le Billon, 2001: 572).

The exploitation of natural resources in weak and unstable states sometimes causes resistance since it is usually done without the consent of the local population, which often receives nothing or almost nothing from the resource exports rents. The consequences of resource exploitation are often land expropriation, and environment destruction (deforestation, population etc.)\(^2\). One of the causes of resource wars\(^3\) are mining and hardwood exploitation companies, which are destroying the environment and often violently displacing the local population (very often the minority and indigenous) from their habitats. Many of these companies employ private armies (Klare, 2001: 208).

It is impossible to understand the recent violence in South Africa, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Haiti without acknowledging the impact resource extraction can have on food availability and environmental health (Dinar, 2002).

Conflicts tied with the secession of certain areas abundant with natural resources from the countries that they belong to are causing a specific type of natural resource conflicts, secessionist conflicts. When the abundance of natural resources in some area overlaps with a certain degree of uniqueness (ethnic, religious, historical) that has created a separate identity of the inhabitants of this area, demands for secession or at least autonomy are usually the rule, not an exception.

\(^{1}\)Oil can be a point and a diffuse resource. Nevertheless, its exploitation requires a complicated and technologically advanced infrastructure, contrary to diamonds, minerals or hardwood, which can be easily exploited (or looted and smuggled, if illegal exploitation is going on).
See: Le Billon, 2001: 572


\(^{3}\)As a distinction between a conflict and a civil war, the number of thousand combat deaths is usually taken as a limit.
The relationship between relative socio-economic performance and conflict incidence is non-linear: regions that suffer from high horizontal inequalities (Stewart, 2008)—whether relatively poor or relatively rich—in relation to the rest of the country are more prone to secessionism. The presence of hydrocarbon deposits also dramatically increases the likelihood of secessionism (Brown, 2010).

In northeast Africa, the cases of Eritrea and Somaliland are examples of nationalist rather than ethnic or religious narratives that led to separation. In both cases, early post-independence disputes over state allocated resources, including currency and taxation of trade, contributed to violent conflicts, partly with the former (successor) state and internal. Elsewhere in Africa, politically credible secessionist movements in Angola (Cabinda), Democratic Republic of Congo (Katanga), Nigeria (Biafra), and Senegal (Casamance), have all occurred at the intersection of economic incentive (mineral wealth or agricultural resources) and ethnic or regional identity. It is rare indeed to find a resource poor province seeking to secede from a richer mother country (De Waal, 2014: 42).

The capture of the prize (resources) when resources motivate secession does not require the control of the country but only the de facto sovereignty of the areas necessary for resource control and trade. Resources can thus greatly influence the control, transformation and production of territories. Similar to conflicts over state control, popular political agendas or more personal greed-driven initiatives can motivate secessions. The likelihood of political secession increases when ‘outsiders’ are perceived to extract ‘local’ resources without sharing the wealth, and when local populations are displaced by the extractive industry or suffer from its environmental costs (Le Billon, 2001: 574).

Not only the material price of resource wars (in general, not just the ones for oil) is high, the price in human lives can also be very high. Studies have shown that in 2001 about 50 wars and conflicts had a strong resource dimension. The human toll of these resource-related conflicts is simply horrendous. Rough estimates suggest that more than 5 million people were killed during the 1990s. Close to 6 million fled to neighbouring countries, and anywhere from 11 to 15 million people were displaced inside the borders of their home countries. But some people—warlords, corrupt governments, and unscrupulous corporate leaders—benefited from the pillage, taking in billions of dollars (Renner, 2002: 6).

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES CONSULTED: SECESSIONIST CONFLICTS AND RESOURCES

In the studies of secessionist conflicts where resources play a strong role, two main groups of theories have crystallized: the socio-economic and political.

Political theories are mostly focused on the political constitution of the country, the ethnic composition and the identities that define the political orientations and/or affinities of particular groups within the society. Socio-economic theories are mostly oriented on the socio-economic standing of the group and/or region.

Researchers have divided the proponents of socio-economic theories of resource conflicts into two groups with regard to the resource abundance or resource scarcity as the cause of conflict, and therefore the object of study. Le Billon (2001: 564) states: “According to advocates of the scarce resource wars hypothesis, people or nations will fight each other to secure access to the resources necessary for their survival: the more scarce the resource, the more bitter the fight“. (…) According to the abundant resource wars argument, primary commodities are easily and heavily taxable, and are therefore attractive to both the ruling elites and their competitors. In the first group are, among others Collier and Le Billon, and in the second
Homer-Dixon and Renner. Among the studies of resource conflict proneness, interdependence between resource abundance, countries’ dependence on resource exports that are part of the socio-economic theories, which were consulted for the purpose of this paper, quantitatively based studies of Collier (2004, 2007) as well as Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2005) stand out. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) have analysed 54 large-scale civil wars that occurred between 1965 and 1999 and have found a higher share of primary commodity exports in GDP significantly and substantially increases the risk of conflict. They have compared countries with 10% and 25% of their GDP coming from resources, holding other characteristics constant at the mean for low-income developing countries. The risk of a civil war for these countries in the subsequent five years rises from 11% to 29%. They have investigated whether there were significant differences between groups of commodities and found that oil is the only one, which is distinctive. High levels of oil dependence are even more likely to be associated with conflict than similarly high levels of dependence upon other commodity exports (Collier, 2004: 2). Many commentators argue that oil scarcity increases the likelihood of armed conflicts, with oil price considered an index of scarcity (Klare 2004).

Ross (2003) also found that resource abundance plays an important role as a cause of the conflict. He has supported this and other theses by studying 13 different resource conflicts, mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, while oil, non-fuel minerals and illicit drugs appear to influence conflict, other types of primary commodities – notably legal agricultural commodities – seem to be unrelated to civil war, at least in 13 cases studied. Resource abundance, however, does not have such a clear effect on the longevity of resource conflicts, according to (Ross, 2004: 35-36).

When it comes to oil, besides increasing the possibility of secession, price increases would exacerbate a mix of “greed” and “grievances,” increasing the likelihood of civil war, coup or even foreign intervention through growing nationalism, allegations of corruption, or desire to capture a (greater) share of larger revenues (Le Billon, 2009: 839).

In a study confined to African civil wars, Buhaug and Rød (2006) differentiate between (1) territorial conflict that is more likely in sparsely populated regions near the state border, at a distance from the capital, and without significant rough terrain and (2) conflict over state governance that is more likely to occur in densely populated regions near diamond fields and close to the capital. The secessionist conflicts are clearly type 1 conflicts, since they are usually fought in the regions near the state borders, which make up the state's periphery and have certain uniqueness (geographical, historical, ethnic cultural etc.). Buhaug and Gates (2002) conclude that the type of rebellion and of the rebel group influence where the conflict will be located and suggest that secessionist and identity-based wars tend to be located further away from the capital than other types of conflict.

In the context of “peak oil” debates, rising energy consumption, and the Iraq war, oil scarcity has recently been a focal point for geopolitical accounts of “resource wars” (Klare 2004; Heinberg, 2005). Whereas the number of conflicts declined after the Cold War, it doubled among oil producers between 1989 and 2005 (Ross 2008), and the proportion of conflict zones overlapping oil-producing areas increased from about 20 percent to 40 percent (in Le Billon, 2009: 837). Failure by governments and consumers to reduce oil demand reinforces scarcity, and an associated politics of tension around “strategic” oil areas leads to the banalization of geopolitics of fear and force, such as in the Middle East. This “banal” violence is also expressed at the individual oil project level. Faced with the spatialities of oil concessions and operations, and constitutive of petro-states’ political geography, “communities” and political entrepreneurs shape geographies of contestation and insecurity to
improve access to revenues from and conditions of oil exploitation (Watts 2004, in Le Billon, 2009). However, the location of oil and type of conflict also matter; overlapping conflict and oil areas are associated with longer governmental conflicts (over central government) but not with territorial (secessionist) ones (Lujala, Rød, Thieme 2007).

3 RESOURCE CONFLICTS: SECESSIONIST AND NON-SECESSIONIST

Resources appear to play a different role in separatist conflicts than in non-separatist conflicts. Grievances over the distribution of resource wealth helped initiate two of the three separatist wars in the sample (Sudan, Indonesia), but played no role in the ten non-separatist wars, except for the ambiguous case of Sierra Leone. These two separatist conflicts were also the only ones to face pre-emptive repression, which is a government’s use of terror to suppress rebel movements that may interfere with resource exploitation. This implies that the geographical distribution of natural resources across a nation’s territory may be important: if resource wealth is located in a region with separatist aspirations, it may help precipitate a war, and increase the war’s casualty rate (Ross, 2003: 38-39).

Unlike in the case of oil, secessionist wars involving diamonds have been extremely rare since 1946. Whereas diamond wealth should entice secession in producing regions “dispossessed” by central authorities. Easier access to diamonds by local populations in the case of secondary deposits, according to Ross (2003), would reduce incentives to pursue diamond control through secession. Cases of secessionist wars include South Kasai (1960–1962), and when considering independence struggles, Angola (1961–1974) and Namibia (1966–1988). In each case, diamond reserves included alluvial deposits, but colonial authorities and licensed corporations strictly prohibited access to them by the population (Le Billon, 2008: 358).

The people living near the natural resource endowment have an obvious economic interest in claiming the resources for themselves to the exclusion of their fellow nationals. Since natural resources are almost everywhere treated as public rather than private property, such a claim for local public ownership is tantamount to a claim for independence (Collier, 2006: 3). On the other hand, in most cases, the central government does not return more than a couple percent of profits earned from natural resources exploitation to the areas from which these resources are exploited.

Nation states are usually recent agglomerations of previously distinct political entities, and this process of assimilation has often been contested. Hence, in many situations, natural resources will be located in regions where some political groups – albeit often on the fringe – are already claiming autonomy (Collier, 2006: 3)4. Most of the states outside of Europe did not have a process of nation-building characteristic for Europe. Nations and national identities were not formed in a way and up to a degree that is familiar in most of Europe5. Economic motives and interests in claiming autonomy, uniqueness or even secession are tied with the political and social interest of protecting the identities of certain groups of the population living in a certain area rich in natural resources.

Central governments very often inflict violence on the population that inhabits the areas rich in natural resources through a repressive apparatus that is financed mostly from rents that are

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4 Geographic variables are also significant – civil wars are more likely to be secessionist the larger and more dispersed the population. This is consistent with the natural resource thesis: if there is a large and highly dispersed national population then inequality of resource endowment is likely to be more pronounced – a minority of the population is likely to be located on top of the natural resources. See: Collier, Hoeffler, 2002: 14-15.

5 The best example is Sub-Saharan Africa, with mixed and multiple identities, colonial, super-imposed borders, instability of central governments, and secessionist movements.
earned from exactly the same resources found in the areas where the violence is conducted. Local populations normally get less than 10 percent of what is left from resource rents, after the corruption takes its share. After all, a majority of resource dependent countries rank very high on the scale of corruption perception index, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Post-Soviet Space (see Kurečić, Hunjet, Perec, 2014).

Violence and complete non-participation or negligible participation of the local population in resource rent spending have been the main causes of low-intensity conflicts, which have in some cases turned into civil wars. A common feature in all these conflicts is the fact that minority populations at the state level represent a majority in the area where resources are exploited. These populations are usually on the margin of society, despite the fact that they live in resource abundant areas. Examples of conflicts that have arisen because of these situations are the conflict in the Niger Delta, the conflict on Bougainville Island, and the conflict in the Indonesian provinces of Irian Jaya (West Papua) and Aceh (on Sumatra Island).

Rather than full-fledged war, these conflicts usually involve smaller-scale skirmishes, roadblocks, acts of sabotage, and major human rights violations by state security forces and rebel groups. A number of these conflicts, however, have evolved into secessionist struggles (Renner, 2002: 8).

What were initially resource conflicts have turned into secessionist conflicts, in which one population wanted to secede or at least receive full autonomy from the central government, and consequently get what they consider a fair share of resource rents. Secessionist conflicts often pose a very difficult issue when it comes to determining their character. What starts out as an internal (intra state) conflict, can become a civil war, and it can turn into an international (interstate) conflict. Due to the uncontrolled and therefore porous borders, rebels often use other states’ territories to conduct military and looting operations in order to fight against the government forces of the state from which they want to secede, or simply bring down its regime. Foreign companies and smugglers, as well as neighbouring states are also often involved in these conflicts. Smuggling of conflict or “blood” diamonds is probably the best example of this practice, which occurred in Angola and Sierra Leone. The Central African War, as well as the conflict in Sierra Leone, both of which occurred in the 1990s are probably the best examples of such conflicts, which had a strong resource component. Most internal conflicts, or civil wars, that did not breakout as resource conflicts, in the areas rich in natural resources very soon become resource conflicts. Resources also became means of prolonging conflicts, which can be positive for one side, usually the rebels. However, government forces are also overseeing and securing resource exploitation, which is usually needed to finance warfare that is expensive. At the same time, these extraordinary conditions represent a very good opportunity for corruption. Regimes, which are dependent on resources for its financing, can become more prepared to negotiate peace if rebels are successful in blocking resource exploitation⁶.

The worst scenario for any government is accepting (de facto if not de iure) the broad autonomy or even secession of some piece of a state’s territory abundant in natural resources, which also has certain uniqueness (whether it is geographical, ethnic, linguistic, cultural,

⁶Rebels from the Niger Delta region in Nigeria represent a very good example of this practice. The political goals and ideology of the rebels from the Niger Delta quite rapidly gave way to interests that wanted only one thing: more money from the oil that would be distributed among local authorities and clans, which started to fight among themselves about the participation in the “protection” of oil fields. Until 2004, the rebels managed to decrease the production of oil in Nigeria by 40 percent. They forced the central government of Nigeria to recognize them as a party in negotiations (Collier, 2006: 3).
historical etc.) and whose demands for broad autonomy or even secession can be fulfilled by the international community or at least some of its most important factors (the most powerful states). The examples of such areas and their successful and unsuccessful attempts to secede can be found in Tab. 1.

Tab. 1: Examples of resource abundant areas that wanted or want to secede

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful attempts of secession</th>
<th>Area that seceded, tried secession or is trying to secede</th>
<th>State from which the area has seceded or has tried to secede</th>
<th>Natural resources found in the area that has seceded, tried or is trying to secede</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Rare minerals, oil, natural gas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Oil, natural gas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful attempts of secession</td>
<td>Biafra</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cabinda</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bougainville*</td>
<td>Papua-New Guinea</td>
<td>Copper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aceh*</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Natural gas, oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irian Jaya (West Papua)*</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Gold, tropical hardwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Katanga/Shaba</td>
<td>Dem. Rep. Congo (Zaire)</td>
<td>Copper, diamonds, rare strategically important minerals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western Sahara</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Phosphates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These provinces have managed to gain autonomy inside the states from which they wanted to secede. However, real economic autonomy has not been fulfilled. The key issue remains the natural resource exploitation i.e. the distribution of natural resource rents and environmental degradation.

Leveraging financial aid is not highly effective in resolving natural resource disputes because the benefits of fighting to control the resource outright might outweigh the benefits of cooperation, which is often the case in disputes over oil and diamonds. The strategies that are effective in natural resource disputes include leveraging market access, building domestic capacity, institutionalizing accountability, external monitoring and enforcement of coherent resource policies, and military mobilization in the short term to stabilize volatile resource-rich regions (Kehl, 2010: 410).
4 EXAMPLES OF SECESSIONIST RESOURCE CONFLICTS: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND OCEANIA

A good example of a secessionist conflict tied with oil is the Sudan secessionist conflict, which finally resulted in the secession of South Sudan in 2011. Supported by a U.S. government opposing neighbouring “communist” Ethiopia, Chevron obtained an oil and gas exploration license for Sudan’s interior in 1974. Chevron’s venture also followed the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement ending nearly two decades of secessionist struggle in southern Sudan. Chevron’s oil discoveries in the south led the central Sudanese authorities to renege on the Peace Agreement, redrawing provincial borders and creating a new “Unity” province around the main oil fields (Rone, 2003). The “peace” required by oil companies in production area was in part secured through the 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement (which included oil revenue sharing) between the central authorities and southern secessionist military factions (Young, 2003). Amore recent conflict, which ended briefly in the partition of the country, and the new internal conflicts that emerged in South Sudan, cannot be explained only by the traditional North-South, Arab (Muslim)-Christian division. Identities can be constructed in diverse ways, and Sudan’s identity politics emerged from interlocking dynamics, including the legacy of militarized tribalism inherited from imperial conquests and colonial administration of frontier regions, Mahdist millenarianism and Sudanese nationalism, and the stratagems used by rulers and contenders in north and south, centre and peripheries, to mobilise political constituencies and armed groups7. (De Waal, 2014: 37). It is a more complex issue than the simple North-South division would suggest. Therefore, the political division of the country, which occurred in 2011, cannot permanently solve it. The South Sudanese case for secession is unusual as the identity arguments have been so obvious and so prominent. The analysis that links identity narratives to political economy and especially the material benefits that elites can obtain through possessing control over a recognized state brings the South Sudanese case more closely into line with other accounts of secessionism and post-secession conflicts (De Waal, 2014: 42).

The Katanga secession is similarly intimately related to the fact that this was the mineral heartland of the Congo. There was overt involvement in the secession by South African mining interests, so that it could more plausibly be interpreted as an external and commercial movement than as a bottom-up cry to protect a historic identity. As in Nigeria, thirty years after the initial secession was defeated, there is renewed secessionist pressure, far more intense than in Nigeria, and quite evidently related to natural resources (Collier, Hoeffler, 2002: 19).

A relatively successful example of potential conflict prevention tied to resources was the construction of the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline. In February 2003, the governments of Chad and Cameroon agreed to cooperate with Exxon Mobil, Petronas, and Chevron to settle disputes under the oversight of the World Bank. There were a few remaining legal disputes but comparatively little military mobilization and violence. Even non-state actors have been able to appeal to the World Bank to resolve disputes with the oil corporations, and there have been very few terrorist or rebel attacks on the pipeline since the 2003 agreement (Kehl, 2010: 408).

7 The unresolved dispute over whether Abyei Area, inhabited predominantly by ethnic Dinka, should remain in the north or be transferred south, is the most striking but not the only example of this. The (northern) Sudanese state is defined by default as an “Arab” and/or “Muslim” identity state, but the partition of the country left substantial “African” populations, many of whose members fought as part of the SPLM/A or its sympathizers on the “wrong” side, leading to the continuation of existing wars in Darfur and re-igniting of others in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Identity conflicts within South Sudan, such as between the Dinka majority and others, notably the Nuer, were not addressed.

Conflicts in Nigeria are also indivisible from the role that oil has in the Nigerian economy and politics. These conflicts are also secessionist (unsuccessful secession of Biafra and secession attempts in the Niger Delta during the 1990s and 2000s). The discovery of oil in Nigeria changed the patterns of alliances between the dominant tribes. Northern and South-western tribes quickly formed an alliance against the oil-rich Southeast, where the Niger Delta is located. Therefore, the Biafra conflict started. This was decidedly not a war of ethnic identity – the oil resources being fought over were actually off the coast of Port Harcourt, whereas the Ibo heartland was inland, around Enugu. When Biafra was defeated, many small ethnic groups redefined themselves as non-Ibo: identity fluctuated according to convenience. It is unmistakable: Biafra was a natural resource grab (Collier, Hoeffler, 2002: 17-18).

Unfortunately, Biafra illustrates what happens when law fails: societies revert to trial by combat. In a world where authority is derived from physical power rather than democratic processes, Biafra deserves to be free, but does not have the military strength to secede. Biafra exemplifies the ugly alternative to referenda and diplomacy—where justice falls victim to power (Lyle, 2005: 715).

However, the conflict in the Niger Delta is even more tied to the geographical scope of natural resources i.e. oil. Interventions of the Nigerian central government have done nothing but boosted secessionist attempts further. Watts traces ‘the variety of violence engendered by oil (2004: 53), the entanglements of oil wealth and the complex history of social (dis)order in Nigeria with its spaces for violence, claims making and community building’. The three states that produce most of the Nigerian oil, Rivers (until the split of this state into two states, Rivers and Bayelsa, it produced about 40 percent of all oil from Nigeria), Bayelsa and Delta (it produces about 35 percent of all Nigerian oil)9 receive an especially small proportion of oil rent money from the central government.

In the last National Political Reform Conference, the people of the Niger Delta, in fact, delegates from the South-South initially demanded 100% control of their naturally endowed mineral resources while they would pay tax to the Federal Government. This position was vehemently opposed until the demand rested on 25%. At the end of the debate, the Conference recommended a paltry 17%. Here lies the dilemma of the resource control question. While the demand for a total of 100% resource control based on derivation may be termed outrageous, the fact remains that 17% as recommended by the Conference will not make for sustainable development in the Niger Delta region (Orji, 2005: 3), Sagay (2005: 8), sum up the raison d’etre for resource as follows: (i) environmental degradation and neglect (ii) the scourge of wasted gas (iii) absentee landlordism and environmental devastation. While working on globalization and the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, Jike (2003: 56), observes that multi-national oil companies in the Niger Delta have a chequered history as a result of boisterous reaction of host communities intermittent oil spillages and indiscriminate gas flaring which have diametrically undermined the ability of local environment to sustain life (In: Orji, Jaja, 2007: 5-6).

The uprising of Cabindan separatists throws into relief a much larger and more basic conflict. The right to self-determination is among the most fundamental concepts of international law, and is central to the U.N. Charter. Angola argues that it simply wants to maintain its territorial integrity. The presence of oil casts doubt on Angola’s pure intentions, because Angola has

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8Oil is as much a biophysical entity, a commodity, as it is a source of imagination and meaning. Watts’ analysis emphasizes the simultaneous production (and reworking) of different forms of pre-existing rule and governable space(s) that evolve as a result of the insertion of oil revenue into the Nigerian political economy (Watts, 2004: 54) and result in civil vigilantism.


little economic incentive to allow Cabinda’s secession. Cabinda’s wells supply over sixty percent of the oil revenues that account for forty-two percent of Angola’s gross national product and ninety percent of the state budget. For many years, Cabinda received none of these profits, and its citizens found themselves struggling to feed their families while living in sight of monstrous oilrigs. The situation is seeing moderate improvement. Ten percent of Cabindan oil revenues now go into the province’s coffers rather than Angola’s national fund (Lyle, 2005: 703, 705).

Secession of East Timor has been successful, and that of Aceh, at the other end of the archipelago, has been contained. Both of these provinces are rich in natural gas with small populations, whereas the island on which most of the Indonesian population lives, Java has neither oil nor gas. Aceh has a per capita GDP triple the Indonesian average, although this is not reflected in living standards, since the oil income accrues nationally rather than locally (Collier, Hoeffler, 2002: 19). East Timor is an excellent example of a U.N.-led referendum leading to an expression of the self-determination of the people (Lyle, 2005: 710).

In Bougainville (an island that is part of Papua New Guinea), similar issues led to a decade-long war. The world’s largest open-pit copper mine, owned jointly by mining giant RTZ (80 percent) and the central government (20 percent), started operating at Panguna in 1972. But the severe social and environmental impacts of the mine reinforced demands for secession (Renner, 2002: 44).

5 CONCLUSION

Seven of the world’s eight bloodiest conflicts are in Africa. The African Union has so far failed to protect populations, but the continent’s first emergency force could be established this year (Leymarie, 2015). Some of these conflicts are also secessionist by their character, and in almost all of them, resources play an important role. By their role in financing conflicts, resources generally prolong conflicts. The history of secessionist conflicts in Africa is highly connected with the role of natural resources. Conflicts in Nigeria (Biafra, Niger Delta), DR Congo (Katanga), and Angola (Cabinda) as well as the conflict in Sudan (now Sudan and South Sudan) are the best examples of these kinds of conflicts. Nevertheless, secessionist conflicts are also occurring in the other parts of the world (Southeast Asia for instance). Bolivia almost experienced an internal conflict when its eastern natural gas rich regions demanded a broad political autonomy. The increasing demand for natural resources, especially in the emerging “resource-hungry” economies (particularly China and India) are making the resources ever more important. At the same time, developed economies of the dominant states of the world, despite their technological advancement and development, are still highly dependent on natural resources that are mostly found in the poor, developing states of the world, usually multinational and very often torn by internal differences, greed, and grievance, that altogether cause permanent instability. These factors contribute to the possibility of resource conflicts, and some of these conflicts are secessionist by their character. A significant number of states in Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and Southeast Asia are under the risk of becoming stages for secessionist conflicts, which can quickly turn

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10 Both East Timor and Aceh indisputably have distinct historic identities that can be tapped. However, this is true all over Indonesia. The ability of these particular secessionist movements to function effectively over long periods may, however, be related to the perception on the part of the populations of these areas that secession would confer ownership of important resources. See: Collier, Hoeffler, 2002: 20.
into full-scale secessionist resource wars. The interests of “resource-hungry” economies are making these conflicts even more probable in the future. Support of the world powers to either the central governments or the rebels from some region of a particular state in pursuit of independence have so far mainly represented the rule.

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