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The Clamor for Oil: An Analysis of Responsibility Gradients in Corporate Oil Exploitation

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Abstract

Oil, often described as "the blood coursing through the world's economy," has been the subject of fierce competition by the players in the global industry, who rush to take advantage of supply in the pursuit of profit. This exploitation manifests in the form of western expropriation in the global south. To date, academics remain concerned about the results of this competition, as corporate exploitation remains encrusted in an industry characterized by the use of loopholes to justify exploitation. This criticism, though relevant, disregards the placement of the burden of responsibility on governments, who, through deliberately lenient policies, enable corruption and exploitation to thrive in the industry. Their role in the creation of policy regulating the actions of the global oil industry must not be downplayed; rather, this paper aims to analyse the relationship between the pressure on governments by TNOCs to create these lenient policies, and the responsibility of governments to respond to this pressure. Ultimately, arguing that the circumstances of a state's involvement with oil corporations are what dictate the nature of governmental influence on regulatory enablement. Considering the emergence of neoliberalist structures facilitating destructive corporate behaviour, the circumstances of their involvement within a state's oil reserves determine whether governmental facilitative policy may be seen as an effect of or an affecter upon the severity of corporate exploitation. Through the lens of two case studies, the Niger Delta region in Nigeria, and the Middle East, this paper will analyse the different causes and results of the presence of oil within a country's borders, allowing a clear picture to unfold. In doing so, its malevolent effects are revealed, enabling the creation of policy which is able to truly address its widespread consequences.

Keywords: transnational oil corporations (TNOCs), resource extraction governance, regulatory enablement, corporate social responsibility (CSR), resource curse, neoliberalism, globalization, Niger Delta (Nigeria), gulf states

1. Introduction: Oil Exploitation and Responsibility Gradients in the Global South

Since the dawn of industrialization, characterized by the shift from agrarian to manufacturing based economies and advancements in technology being central to the growth and maintenance of a rapidly developing market (Scott & Storper, 1992), industrialized states have realized the unending need for the lifeblood of growth: oil. The substance has been present since the dawn of modern capitalism, driving the industrial revolution and providing fuel for continuous unprecedented advancement. However, with the increasing awareness of the devastating impacts of non-renewable energy and carbon emissions, there is now considerable pushback to the monopoly of the oil industry in the energy sector. Among this is criticism of the actions of oil giants in the borders of the global south, where exploitation is rife and natural resources are plentiful, leading to a situation characterized by death, violence, and political uncertainty in the face of crisis (Obeng-Odoom, 2018).

In the Niger Delta region, the involvement of Trans-National oil corporations (TNOCs) has created a perilous situation for the affected community, as the deliberate lack of fiscal and institutional frameworks to mitigate ecological harm and provide recompense for this harm to the community has created an environment which allows militancy and aggression to flourish (Odochi Nwankwo, 2015). The implications of this involvement have manifested as dangerous working conditions leading to death and injury, the institutionalization of slavery through the deliberate underpayment of workers, and severe environmental degradation via the lack of accountability surrounding harmful practices (Odochi Nwankwo, 2015). The reason for the government's neglect of its own people is put succinctly by Vaasuki and Uwadiae "No government can hold stability and peace when it is created on a sea of poverty" (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2010). Governments are unable to maintain stability within their borders, and political and economic pressures drive them towards creating policy facilitating exploitation, which manifests in the expropriation and dispossession of local communities, as well as a marked disregard for guidelines dictating environmental and militant actions in a sovereign country's borders (Odochi Nwankwo, 2015). This policy, both in Nigeria and in the Middle East, most often manifests as that which benefits and enables harmful practices surrounding environmental degradation and harmful working conditions, leading to the magnification of the detrimental effects of TNOCs in both regions' borders. The same pattern is present in Latin America, which jumped from fourth to the first most popular location to invest in mineral extraction, and sees the same cycle of instability being repeated in its countries borders (Rose, 2004). The aforementioned cycle is one of economic pressure shaped by vulnerability, where the government, weakened through years of corruption and instability, is guided by profit incentives towards the maximization of oil production. This pressure results in the legal facilitation of destructive behavior by TNOCs in their borders, leading to eco-terrorism in the form of atmospheric pollution, groundwater and soil contamination, and fluctuations in water salinity in the region, all of which result in devastating health implications for the local population. Thus, the intertwinement of multinational resource exploitation and the subsequent political and economic instability it engenders in a host country cannot be understated. However, there is a second, more dubious possibility in the effects of resource extraction on a country, exemplified by the impacts of oil in the governmental policy in the Middle East. The countries in this region are both similarly the subject of imperialism and in the express interests of multinational resource extraction, though they have somehow managed to avoid the effects which plague the Niger Delta, with the former being synonymous with lavish displays of wealth and a concentration of powerful, influential investors (Rose, 2004). The comparison of their success also extends towards their dependence on oil, Nigeria's economy remains highly dependent on oil, which accounts for the majority of export earnings and around 70%+ of total exports, while production averages roughly 1.3 -- 1.7 million barrels per day (Emediegwu & Okeke, 2017). In contrast, the UAE produces more oil but has successfully diversified its economy,

with approximately 75% of its GDP coming from non-oil sectors (Elhiraika & Hamed, 2006). This paper argues that the disparity present between these two nations is a product of post-imperialist neoliberal development, serving to subjugate countries already disadvantaged in the global economic order, and benefitting those who have the resources to maintain stability and thus, a bargaining chip, in the face of corporate pressures. Therefore, the nature and circumstances of corporate involvement, guided by events such as the end of imperialism, are vital factors in the determination of responsibility gradients within these two states.

Thus far, analysis of multinational oil expropriation and dispossession centres the corporation as the primary benefactor and perpetrator for the consequences of its presence, placing special emphasis on the importance of corporate social responsibility (Banfield et al., 2005). This approach, while steeped in truth, discourages the analysis of exploitation as a multifaceted issue, centring on the possibility of global economic-sociopolitical structures which facilitate continued exploitation. The current literature also fails to make a distinction between countries at the mercy of imperialism who have experienced vastly different outcomes of corporate influence in their borders, again, disregarding the importance of circumstance and political pressures on the freedom of decision making for governments at the behest of corporate oil. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the vulnerability of each state at the time of corporate involvement, leading to the analysis of responsibility gradients within the context of their emergence.

In light of a more thorough analysis of these pressures through the lens of corporate versus governmental responsibility, this paper makes two contributions: First, to examine the emergence of neoliberal economic structures as mechanisms of neoimperialist subjugation of the global south. These mechanisms emerged as facilitative structures benefitting exploitation within the states of the global south, with TNOCs being particularly significant as they symbolize neoimperialism involvement and are uniquely implicated in the ecological and political breakdowns of the extractive economies they create (Amadi, 2025). Following the emergence of these structures, the subsequent involvement of TNOCs within the resource extraction of newly post-imperialist states, and circumstances around that involvement, dictate the vulnerability of each state, and its ability to act upon its own interests. This vulnerability may be affected by political structures facilitating instability, regional conflict, and collective security and bargaining power.

The second contribution is the determination of responsibility for both parties in the two case studies, more specifically, the argument that the government in the Niger Delta region within Nigeria, being under immense political and economic pressure via the extent of exploitation and the lack of accountability surrounding the actions of oil multinationals, had been forced into an unequal contract for which they must now bear the consequences. Therefore, the burden of responsibility must be placed primarily upon the TNOCs and exploitative international structures, such as neoliberal facilitation, which have forced them into this perilous situation. The actions of the Nigerian government, namely its deliberate facilitation of exploitative practices in the pursuit of profit, will be portrayed primarily as an effect of, rather than an affecter upon, the actions of TNOCs. It will be shown that the case is much different in the context of the Middle East, where oil interests have become a pivotal part of Arab-Gulf development (Azhary, 2023), and where governments are incentivized not by instability, but by their own economic interests in the creation of deliberately facilitative policy for corporate exploitation, ultimately leading to the burden of responsibility being shared by the two co-benefactors of the harmful behavior of TNOCs within their borders.

This article develops these contributions in three parts. First, an analysis of the exact economic-sociopolitical conditions which resulted in the involvement of oil within the Niger Delta and the Persian Gulf, including insight into the evolution of

the oil industry alongside globalization after the industrial revolution. Within this analysis, distinct emphasis will be placed on the ability for each country to negotiate the terms of corporate oil involvement in their borders, and the terms of the initial contract following the collapse of empire and the beginning of neocolonialism, drawing on neoliberal ideals of dysregulation and a supposed "free-market," as well as examining the causes and impacts of neoliberal development. The domestic conditions at the time of corporate involvement in their borders will then be analysed, looking particularly at the political and economic pressures which may have affected their influence in negotiations with TNOCs. Finally, this paper will examine the current situations in these two countries, drawing comparisons which tie directly back to the level of influence within the initial contract with TNOCs in their borders.

The second part will examine the relationship between deliberate regulatory policies which benefit corporate oil exploitation and the level of stability within their borders, drawing distinctions which again, tie succinctly back to the economic-political contexts of these two countries at the end of imperialism and at the beginning of their experiences with corporate influence. This part will also analyse the foreign pressures put on these governments as a result of the presence of oil and how that may alter perspectives on responsibility, particularly in the light of conflict in the middle east resulting largely from American oil interests in the region, eventually providing a thorough comparison of differing pressures, incentives, and benefactors present in both case studies. Via the determination of responsibility for each party, a possible pathway to a solution unfolds, finally providing relief to the victims present in both.

2. A Review of the Existing Literature

Analysing the current state of affairs regarding the actions of TNOCs, much of the existing literature does well in demonstrating the precise actions of oil corporations as the primary perpetrator and beneficiary of the expropriation of the resources within the borders of the global south. With the past decades development in the pressure on corporations to adhere to regulations surrounding the environment, human rights, and other aspects of corporate social responsibility (CSR), existing literature puts special emphasis on the consideration of CSR and conflict prevention in the creation of strategies to mitigate ecological, economic, and political impacts within host states (Banfield et al., 2005). With regards to the origin of exploitation, discussion centres around the emergence of corrupt governments following and exacerbating PCD (poverty, conflict, and development) in the global south. However, again there is a considerable lack of analysis of the relationship between the effects of oil exploitation in the creation of corrupt governments, with only a transient link being found between corporate interests as a manifestation of neoimperialism, and the paradoxical relationship between a wealth of resources and political instability. As Varda Eker put it,

> "Where the bureaucracy is under constant pressure from numberless profit seekers - as notably in the rich and potentially rich developing countries - all clamouring for permits, contracts, certificates, import licenses, and what have you, the temptation becomes overwhelming 'to jump the queue', 'to lubricate one's way', and 'to make certain of results'." (Eker, 1981)

This interpretation alludes to the impact of resource wealth on struggling African nations, and how corruption is not a moral failure of its society, but rather a consequence of human greed in its presence, however like many before it, it fails to expressly name TNOCs as the explicit perpetrators of this consequence. Additionally, the current literature surrounding CSR, presenting it as the primary framework through which to address the harmful actions of TNOCs, fails to consider the limitations set by the geopolitical conditions within the global south, hindering the ability to enforce corporate social responsibility and sustainable practices. This indicates the need for the inclusion of the circumstances surrounding the creation of unstable geopolitical environments within the global south as crucial when addressing possible improvements

in the nature of TNOC involvement within this region. This paper concedes that the negative impacts of oil in the Niger Delta cannot be attributed solely to the corporations, it must be acknowledged that corruption does play a part. As mentioned by Odochi Nwankwo, who provides a scathing remark against the incompetence of a government system incapable of creating a financial and institutional mechanism to address the impact of extraction and dispossession the environment (Odochi Nwankwo, 2015), the onus must be placed upon the governments themselves to regulate the behaviors of TNOCs within their borders. However, the systems which created the current climate of political upheaval must be discussed and TNOCs held accountable for the role they have played in its evolution. In a 2018 study published in the journal International and Public Affairs, Olure-Bank and Abraham found a decisive correlation between oil revenue and corruption, with a 1% increase in oil revenue leading to an increase in bribery, embezzlement and forgery in Nigeria by 15-43%. The reason for this correlation may be found within an explanation centering corruption as a result of vulnerable circumstances following the end of imperialism, evidently magnified by the involvement of TNOCs in oil extraction (Abraham & Michael, 2018). Therefore, a decisive conclusion about the role and responsibility of each party involved in the expropriation of resources and dispossession of native populations must be derived from a conclusive overview of the facts of TNOC involvement. This paper re-engages Kenneth Omeje's discussion on extractive economies states and the impact of corporate influence on vulnerability, shaping the inevitability of the paradoxical "resource curse" nations find themselves in. As he says in his book *Extractive Economies and Conflicts in the Global South*, "ecological conflict" is intrinsically correlated with resource wars and the "formation, aggravation, and escalation of conflict" (Omeje, 2013). Using this analysis, paired with discussion of the origins of contracts between Nigeria and oil TNOCs, this paper draws attention to the reframing of the narrative of corruption and governmental incompetence around the exploitative structures that gave it rise. Building upon Omeje's theory, this paper will advance the analysis of the aggravation and escalation of conflict through the deconstruction of international economy mechanisms which facilitate instability; recentring the argument for blame around exploitative international structures which perpetuate a system within which corruption thrives. This will allow for a comprehensive assessment of responsibility for each party involved in the detrimental effects of oil extraction within the Niger Delta, providing insight into effective, informed policy to address the impacts of TNOC involvement

With regards to the influence of oil within the Middle East, the current literature does well in placing emphasis on the history and creation of oil contracts between western corporations and the nascent states within the region, however analysis of the evolution of facilitative policy is both sparsely mentioned and disregards the responsibility of governments who create it. While the shift away from oil is ultimately beneficial, its roots not in the acknowledgement of the negative environmental impacts of the resource, but rather in the acknowledgment of a global shift away from non-renewable energy redirecting profit streams, is also disregarded, with the former perspective being largely prioritized (Shayah, 2015). This perspective shifts the blame away from governments and towards the resource itself, a view which may be criticized as reductionist for its failure to consider the roles of all parties involved. This lack of consideration may lead to insufficient restrictions being placed on responsible parties when looking to address these issues. To remedy this, this paper redirects discussion of the actions of TNOCs within the borders of the middle east as intentionally enabled by the state governments, who have been elevated by their unique position as beneficiaries of western imperialism, and who must bear the burden of responsibility for its detrimental effects.

Finally, the primary gap this paper will fill is comparative analysis between Nigeria and the Middle East, in the pursuit of drawing conclusions of responsibility gradients between both parties involved in oil contracts in the two regions. Ultimately, what is lacking in the existing literature is a deliberate analysis of the circumstances and vulnerability of a state

at the inception of TNOC involvement as a direct contributory factor towards the eventual outcomes of this involvement. This paper will bridge the current gap between the analysis of exploitative neoliberalist structures which subjugate the global south and the emergence of facilitative policy as guiding the destructive actions of TNOCs, recognizing the causal nature between the two. Then, shifting away from the existing research, there will be consideration of the influence of vulnerability, caused by the end of imperialism, on the nature of that facilitative policy. Comparing states which experienced lower levels of vulnerability and those whose vulnerability limited its agency during the inception of TNOC involvement. This comparative analysis will allow for the conclusive determination of the roles and responsibilities of each party within oil extraction to help guide informed policymaking to curb the impacts of regulatory enablement.

3. Theoretical Framework: The Mechanisms Dictating Vulnerability and Responsibility

The analysis within this paper is guided by the determination of "responsibility gradients," which refers to the allocation of blame between state actors and TNOCs as variable rather than fixed, influenced by the extent and nature of political pressures and constraints acting upon the states. These pressures are recognized as a direct consequence of the circumstances surrounding the state's position at the end of imperialism and constitute that state's vulnerability. Building upon this, the vulnerability of a state may be defined as the strength of the factors dictating its resistance to the paradoxical resource curse which has thus far plagued rentier states such as Nigeria. From this viewpoint, the factors dictating the role of the government in the creation of facilitative policy may be seen as a combination of the nature of its independence, the tendency of its political system towards instability and corruption, the threat of external pressure, the existence of regional conflicts, and the strength of its bargaining power. The following analysis will build on the analysis of vulnerability work by analysing negotiation power in conjunction with the creation of collective bargaining operations through organizations such as OPEC, as well as the outcomes of the failure of collective bargaining for Nigeria. This will be used alongside criteria including political and economic instability to provide a thorough assessment of the vulnerability of each state.

The dichotomy of vulnerable states rests in whether the creation of facilitative policy may be seen as primarily an effect of or an affecter upon harmful corporate behavior. Those with a low vulnerability at the have considerably less economic and political pressure to adhere to the demands of TNOCs, with a far higher capacity for regulation than those with a low vulnerability. Their actions must be seen as an effect upon the severity of corporate behavior, as they have a greater capacity to act in their own interests. Alternatively, states with a high vulnerability are influenced by the political and socioeconomic pressures which guide their policymaking, limiting the freedom for regulation. The creation of their facilitative policy is intensified by the harmful situation created as a result of corporate behaviour, existing within a context driven by violence and political instability.

With regards to the determination of the placement of blame, it must be conceded that the role of TNOCs in states with low vulnerability must not be disregarded in favor of the placement of blame on governmental facilitation. The obligation of TNOCs to adhere to the principles of social corporate responsibility must be continuously exercised and those who defy it held accountable. However, when considering their role in a comparative analysis, it must also be considered that their incentives remain constant throughout, driven by economic growth and the tendency to take advantage of vulnerability or facilitative policy wherever possible. While they may share the responsibility for their destructive actions alongside the government, the burden of regulation must be placed upon the governments with whom these TNOCs operate, contributing to their responsibility. Building upon the aforementioned criteria, in order for a party to be deemed highly

responsible, it must have a low vulnerability, meaning it has considerable capacity to act in its own interests. When these interests manifest as facilitating destructive behaviour, the blame for that destructive behavior must be placed on the state actors who create that policy and the TNOCs who execute it. Those who are not able to act with complete agency, such as a vulnerable state, may not be absolved of their responsibility, but the allocation of blame in their case must be primarily upon those who have aided in the creation of inequitable circumstances. Therefore, the TNOCs themselves and the economic structures, such as neoliberalism, which enable their freedom to do so, are the actors most implicated in this scenario.

4. Globalization and Neoliberal Development: The Creation of a Facilitative Status Quo

While oil has been credited for much of the advancement following the industrial revolution, the increase in dependency of the natural resource to the extent seen today is primarily a post WWII phenomena, as weapons manufacturing and the increase in population from 2.5 billion to nearly 4.4 billion in three decades led to a twofold increase in global energy usage, to 8.7 billion tonnes in the period between 1979 and 1980. Expectedly, the rise in demand led to a booming oil market, which multinationals such as OPEC quickly sprang up to fill (Rose, 2004). The history of oil, however, is ultimately shaped by political attitudes towards the actions of multinationals, as despite the increase in demand, facilitative policies and responsibility gradients between the global north and the global south cannot emerge without the economic structures which enable the expropriation of a country's resources. The economic structure in question is neoliberalism.

With reference to the debates surrounding the origin of neocolonialism, the relevant interpretation in this context regards the origins of neocolonialism to be deeply rooted in the creation of neoliberalist structures used by TNOCs within states in the global south (Hanson & Hentz, 1999), and made possible by the accelerating pace of globalization which necessitated rapid technological advancements across the supply chain and within manufacturing, all of which required oil. This time period was marked by significant international political upheaval, with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan spearheading the rise of neoliberalism, an ideology characterized by the advocation for a "free, dysregulated market" and a laissez faire approach to governmental regulation, the ideology quickly began outpacing the principles of Keynesian economics which had preceded it (Steger, 2020). Ultimately, its effect was globalized, resulting in its principles of dysregulation becoming synonymous with attitudes towards multinational corporations and being a significant driving factor in the facilitation of exploitative actions within the global south. The timing of its introduction was also impactful, as it came during a time of the modernization and development of global supply chains, which are again, synonymous with the very principles of the exploitation of labor and the lack of oversight which are present in the actions of TNOCs within the global south (Özalp, 2021). Therefore, the development of neoliberal ideology has effectively paved the way for dysregulation of the global oil market, creating an environment within which corporations are free to take advantage of the collapse of traditional colonialism. Thus, in turn issuing a new era of "extractive economies" where the local population is stripped of financial incentives and prospects (Michalopulos & Papaioannou, 2017). This pattern is echoed in Nigeria, and as will be seen, was a significant contributing factor in the creation of oil dependency following the collapse of traditional European imperialism.

The role and history of emerging extractive economies provide a possible answer to the question of the "resource curse" (Auty, 1994) which has plagued economies in the global south; namely, the paradoxical nature between the supposed blessing of an abundance of natural resources and the pattern of poverty and war amongst it all. The emergence of extractive economies, defined as those dependent on the extraction of non-renewable materials at the expense of the host country, is characterized by the tendencies of transnational corporations to assume an unprecedented role in the

furtherance of western imperialist actions in the global south. As a manifestation of their tendency to exacerbate harm, many TNOCs in particular are afforded the liberty of salaried armies to ensure compliance within war-ridden states where they have resource interests. Western states, for their part, created an environment which desecrated the sovereignty of host extractive economies and made possible the continued impunity of corporations whose expropriation and dispossession of native populations became institutionalized within the host country's government. The backdrop of the emergence of neoliberalism then allowed for unaccountability within the exploitation of labor and the transfer of sovereignty from the host country to TNOCs (Omeje, 2013). Therefore, a clear picture begins to emerge which paints the emergence of neocolonialist patterns in the relationship between multinational corporations and states in the global south as embedded in neoliberalism, which was itself a reaction to an increasingly globalized economy.

Within this origin, there must also be consideration of the role of globalization and the subsequent emergence of neoliberal structures on the extent of vulnerability in African nations as opposed to those in the middle east, who have by every standard been able to effectively avoid the paradoxical resource curse which claims African states (Khatib, 2014). As has been discussed, the rise of neoliberal development made possible by the pace of globalization was a major driving factor in the enablement of the derisive actions of TNOCs within the global south, however, the impact of these actions is made worse by the pressure put on governments to enable their continuance. After the end of WWII, the industrialized global north began developing their economies towards labor and production through their dependency on oil for transportation. This caused states in the pre-industrialized global south to view oil as "the key to their economic prosperity and higher standards of living" leading to a sudden increase in oil consumption within the global south. Ultimately, leading states to allocate oil income towards domestic needs rather than exports, and behind this increased consumption was the aggressive promotion of the seven biggest oil corporations with interests in both the Middle East and Africa (Rose, 2004). Unfortunately, with increased consumption came increased dependency, leading to a perilous situation where the governments of poorer states are forced to concede to corporate interests in their borders, creating policies which benefit and enable TNOCs who use their privileged position to place pressure upon struggling economies and perpetuate the cycle of enablement (Brown, 1984).

With regards to the placement of blame, the criteria for the responsibility of a state are in part measured by the impact of the aforementioned circumstances on that state's vulnerability. In order to understand why nations within the Middle East were able to avoid Auty's "resource curse," here, we must point towards the importance of timing, stability, and leverage within negotiation as crucial factors dictating the vulnerability of governments in the creation of the terms of contracts with TNOCs. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the impact of their presence within negotiations in the GCC and lack thereof in Nigeria, leading to immensely different events and outcomes. Ultimately, the process of globalization and its influence on the creation of neoliberal structures which benefit the exploitation of the global south by TNOCs are a considerable influence upon state vulnerability and thus, responsibility. The circumstances of both the Middle East and the Niger Delta being both shaped by neoliberal development, but which have resulted in such dichotomous outcomes lends credence to the argument of the allocation of responsibility considering all aspects of their circumstances.

5. The Cyclical Curse of Corruption and Exploitation in the Niger Delta

In order to examine the reasons and specificities of the relationships between TNOCs and governments in the global south, there must be the examination of one of the most prolific cases of resource expropriation, the dynamics within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. For years now, the agents of western neocolonialism have wreaked havoc in the state's borders,

with citizens enduring untold hardship through environmental degradation, oil pollution, political instability, and horrific working conditions caused by the involvement of TNOCs (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2010). Being Africa's largest oil exporter and oil making up 87.7% of Nigeria's economy, Nigeria is subject to the same paradoxical curse brought on by the presence of oil as many other states in the global south in its very position. The reasons for this are debated on, with some attributing it to the extent of corruption within government, as put by Akinola, "the wealth created by the oil boom and the centralization of its revenue has expanded the scope of corruption at the federal level, while the oil sector becomes the theatre of corruption and high-level fraud" (Akinola, 2022). However, This paper advocates for a more multidimensional consideration of the emergence of Nigeria's current political climate and policies which cater to the exploitation of TNOCs, demonstrating how governments at the behest of systems designed to subjugate and undermine their decision making power cannot be held responsible for the actions of TNOCs to the same extent as these systems themselves, and any criticism or suggestions of possible solutions to the issue should address this perspective in turn.

The history of oil in Nigeria began relatively late after the emergence of oil as a tool for growth and industrialization, with its discovery by Shell British Petroleum in 1956, the Niger Delta became the well from which 37.1 million barrels of crude oil reserves were extracted in 2018 (Osunmuyiwa et al., 2018), though exploratory practices had begun as early as 1908. Shell B-P continued extraction and control of the oil market in Nigeria through into the 1960s, a representation of colonial power in the region, ending only with Nigerian independence in the 60s, when oil extraction rights were extended to other TNOCs such as Mobil (now Exxon-Mobil), Agip, Elf Petroleum (Total), Gulf Oil, and Texaco (Hosman, 2009). While this may have stripped shell of its monopolistic status, it is still a clear representation of the extent of colonial influence within the state driven by monetary incentives, as the legal framework dictating the power of these TNOCs involvement in Nigeria remained the same as the one governing Shell-BP's monopoly, outlined within the Mineral Oils Ordinance of 1914. This "vestige of colonial influence" ensured menial taxes being placed on each barrel of oil that was sold, as well as a concession period of 50-100 years (Hosman, 2009, p. 616) . 1979 saw the establishment of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), replacing its predecessor, the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC), in 1979. It acted as an independent oil monopoly driving oil production and extraction on behalf of the Nigeria government, and in 1977, the Indigenization Decree allowed for the NNPC to engage in joint ventures with the aforementioned TNOCs (Akinola, 2022), immediately redistributing the benefit of oil income away from the people and towards TNOCs (Adalikwu-Obisike & Obisike, 2019).

An analysis of the legal aspects of the agreements between these TNOCs and the Nigerian government paints a picture of exploitation and a clear power imbalance putting Nigeria at a perilous disadvantage in negotiation. Because these agreements usually arise in newly independent states, such as Nigeria, there is likely no established legal framework for these contracts and the terms must be agreed upon through negotiation. The TNOCs in these interactions have considerable leverage in these negotiations, with sole access to technology relevant to the resource, experience with the process of oil extraction and negotiations, as well as access to expansive legal advice. The host country on the other hand, has none of these things, and Nigeria's awareness of its own position made it susceptible to exploitation and incompetency. The concessions granted by the Nigerian state to foreign oil corporations before independence demonstrate this to its full extent, with the state receiving little to no compensation other than royalty payments which constituted a fraction of the declared profits of TNOCs from the sale of oil. Despite this, however, Nigeria would achieve considerable relative success in the following years.

The situation after independence saw some improvement, with strides being made in the collection of royalties and a shortening of concession contracts, especially after the Petroleum Decree of 1969, emerging as Nigeria's first attempt at

agency in the extraction of its oil, greatly improving the nature of TNOC involvement by defining the rights and obligations of oil licensees (Hosman, 2009). For some time, Nigeria was able to reap the benefits of oil, but the real change came after Nigeria joined the Organization of Petroleum producing Countries (OPEC) in 1971 (*Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, n.d.), when Nigeria was able to create a real legal framework for the extraction of oil in its borders and gain significant ground in its own involvement with its resources. Unfortunately, this relative success was not to last, as a series of oil price increases in the 1970s and a coup d'etat following allegations of corruption within the government created a situation which both discouraged indigenous participation in oil extraction and encouraged more lenient measures for TNOCs in a desperate attempt to regain stability (Hosman, 2009).

Building upon this, this paper argues that Nigeria's failure to avoid the resource curse may be more suitably attributed to factors which emerged at the very beginning of its relationship with oil extraction, culminating in their magnification following the end of imperialism. Therefore, the impacts of colonialism on Nigeria's political instability must be considered before determining the extent of the responsibility of the government within TNOCs actions. The circumstances surrounding Nigerian independence were wrought with power struggles emerging from Nigeria's ethnic diversity, and a lack of will on the part of British post-colonialists to address the implications of a fragmented state, further lessened by the potential that they may benefit from it. Through a pattern of manufactured dependency, Britain's failure to instate comprehensive frameworks to address the issue of diversity led to a system which facilitated fragmentation (Adiele, 2025). The creation of a federalist system, where the pre-colonial notions of ethnic loyalty are encouraged and institutionalized, leads to a situation characterized by short-term governments and military dictatorships (Goldpin, 2017). Unfortunately, as fragmentation and instability increases, so too does governmental corruption.

Considering this, many are quick to consider pointing the finger at the corruption of these governments and their inability to judge a proper course of action in relationships with TNOCs, however it is prudent to consider the origins of corruption as being deeply intertwined with the actions of these TNOCs themselves, as well as the neoliberalist structures they benefit from. Analysing it from this perspective reveals corruption as both a facilitative entity and one created by the actions of the TNOCs it benefits. The pattern of corruption almost always begins with a period of rapid development and accelerated change, creating multiple possibilities for the amassing of wealth by both domestic and foreign entities. This incentivizes the political climate to become increasingly facilitative towards the interests of these entities, as wealth gravitates towards power in return for preferential treatment (Klaveren, 1989). The period of rapid development occurred after the discovery of oil and Nigerian independence, and the political instability caused by the coup d'etat as a result of corruption within the government was a considerable driving force in the vulnerability of the country at the behest of major TNOCs who control the majority of its most profitable resource. Additionally, the failure of OPEC as an arbitrator of collective bargaining was insufficient to ensure Nigeria's continued success in negotiations, as collective bargaining is only successful when paired with the ability to strategically limit oil production when needed. Due to the manufactured dependency on oil, resulting from the monopolistic nature of imperialist extractive ventures, Nigeria was unable to uphold this criteria, weakening its bargaining position further (Olumide, 2019).

Linking back towards the question of responsibility within the actions of the government, we see a clear picture emerging where the current situation, when analysed through the lens of vulnerability, the uncontrollable factors relating to changing oil prices, governmental vulnerability, a lack of experience and leverage, and an imbalance of power, places Nigeria as a state with extremely high levels of vulnerability. The lack of experience guiding its initial relationship with oil, the monopolistic nature of neo-colonialist involvement after its independence, the creation of a fragmented, federalist

state, and the failures of collective security all point towards circumstances contributing heavily to the inability of Nigeria to act with agency when negotiating with oil corporations. Building upon the aforementioned framework of vulnerability dictating responsibility, it must be concluded that the Nigerian government, while still implicated due to the onus of regulation ultimately being placed upon the government, must be decentralized in the discussion of final responsibility.

6. The Case of the Middle East: Success as a product of Unique Circumstances

For many years now, the relationship between oil and the countries within the Gulf cooperation council (GCC), whose countries include Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, seems an inevitable, agreed upon norm of our international system. The two have become interchangeable, interrelated entities which both rely on each other and feed upon each other in the name of endless, unsustainable growth. The development of the oil industry is therefore distinctly absent of the supposed "resource curse" theorized by Richard Auty in 1933, even in the very neocolonialist context which has victimized so many other states in the global south (Owen, 2008). The Middle East currently has significant control of the global oil market, accounting for 754 billion barrels, constituting 51% of the world's oil reserves (Khatib, 2014), while also remaining major global players dictating international relations between the region and states such as the US. However, the most prolific case of oil industrialization in the GCC has occurred in the UAE. This section of the article will analyse the role of oil income as a significant catalysing factor in the UAE's development and longevity, placing them on the map of global affairs and heightening their status in further negotiations regarding the resources in their borders.

Before The GCC was established through an agreement in 1981 between its member states on the basis of shared interests, incentives, culture, and politics (Aluwaisheg, 2020). The history of its member states' involvement with oil, however, begins much earlier, rooted in colonialism and western interests. The first instance of oil in the GCC began with its discovery in Bahrain in 1932, and in Kuwait and Saudi in 1938 (Azhary, 2023). The first concession granted by the UAE, then still referred to as the trucial states, was in 1939 to the Petroleum Development Trucial Coast (PDTC), formed as a conglomeration of the oil companies of the allied states of World War One. These included, but not limited to, British Petroleum Company, Shell Petroleum Company, Near East Development Corporation, and many more belonging to the UK, France, the Netherlands, and the United States. The PDTC soon gained concession rights within each of the seven emirates, placing the whole region at its disposal (Rizvi, 1993). Here, we again see the pursuance of western interests in a region under the control of a western power, and the pattern of these agreements follow the same pattern of agreements present in less fortunate states in the global south. For example, the terms required absolute coverage of land and territorial waters, extended up to 75 years—a relatively long period in the age of modern concessions—were extremely monopolistic and excluded the host state from participating in the capital of these corporations, did not include any clause specifying the prioritization of the country's nationals in employment, in fact doing the very opposite in an effort to introduce dependency on foreign skilled labor. And perhaps most blatantly, these corporations were under no obligation to contribute to the industrialization of the host country at all (Rizvi, 1993). These terms of the *old concessions* provide justification for the linkage of oil interests in the middle east with the perpetrators of western colonialism. And the measures used by the Trucial states to renegotiate these terms are key events in the split between the experiences of the Arabian Peninsula and the rest of the global south.

After the end of the second world war, the creation of OPEC introduced a new strategy of collective bargaining, as states realized the only way for them to overcome their hurdles was through dialogue and cooperation. The UAE joined OPEC in 1967, and along with Saudi Arabia, created participation agreements with oil corporations in 1972. These agreements, as the name suggests, introduced an era of true participation by the host country in the extraction of oil both legally and

financially, with the scope of this participation varying from 50% to 80%. Of their terms, one of the most significant involved a recovery of a more significant fraction of the profits resulting from oil which would have otherwise gone to the TNOCs. This allowed for noticeable strides in the development of each state as oil income could be re-invested into the host economy for their own benefit (Rizvi, 1993). The ascension of host states from the status of tax-collector to one of equal partners in the relationship is therefore a considerable factor in the creation of equal contracts between the UAE and TNOCs. This makes them a key factor in the consideration of the placement of blame, as blame must be distributed more equally in the case of equal status.

While this ascension did take place, it did not completely remove the effects and perpetrators of imperialism within the region, as well as their impacts on the political structure of the UAE after it gained independence in December 1971. The circumstances of the creation of the UAE are also considerably unique, as instead of demanding independence, the British left of their own accord, and in order to soften the transition, tried to unite the emirates into a sovereign entity. Because of this, there was no effort to re-instate new systems of government and the union happened relatively peacefully, preserving the dynastic monarchies of the region which further aided in stability as they had no channels through which to allow for political dissent (Aartun, 2002). This put the state in a privileged position in relation with other states in the global south fighting for stability in the creation and sustainment of oil contracts with TNOCs.

The impact of this position is therefore felt in the incentives of the UAE government in its creation of facilitative policies towards oil corporations. Since the 1980s, Abu Dhabi arranged a range of new concession agreements to foreign oil investors granting up to $1 billion dollars to be spent in exploration by TNOCs. This is the first of a pattern of deliberately created agreements and policies with the express intent of economic incentive. The status of the UAE in these agreements as an equal therefore puts it at significant possibility of blame in the effects of the oil industry, of which there are many. The impact of oil on the industrialization of the UAE, while ultimately economically beneficial, has led to significant environmental impacts, as the increase in human activity involving the burning of oil and fossil fuels through transportation, increased household energy consumption, and the ratio of imported goods has led to the industrial sector being responsible for 57% of the country's total carbon emissions. Unfortunately, given the placement of responsibility upon the government alongside TNOCs, their responsibility in the issue cannot be absolved before the cessation of their involvement in the deliberate facilitation of harmful practices (Kazim, 2007).

7. Comparing The Effect of Corporate Pressures on Vulnerability

These states succinctly present the two sides of the dichotomy of oil, one where a state pushed into the agreement is left fumbling through negotiations, and one where a state, guided by the interests of western imperialism, is able to reap the benefits of the resources present in their land. Ultimately, a key factor in the determination of the outcome of oil within these two countries is the extent of their vulnerability during the beginning of its involvement, as well as the incentives which guided western nations in their pursuit of power and resources within each region. Along with analysis of their origins, consideration must be placed on the fact these incentives were ultimately guided by the backdrop of globalization. The process of globalization bolstered the oil industry while coinciding with the emergence of a neoliberal order, which facilitated its own regulatory enablement, giving corporations effective free reign to exploit, dispossess, and expropriate (Kotz, 2010). However, globalization was also a key method through which the UAE was able to achieve a significant standing on the global stage, with its ability to successfully integrate into the global market being one of the primary factors in its emergence and growth (Dehnavi & Safavipour, 2023). Therefore, it may be concluded that the same

vulnerability which dictates whether a state is successful in harnessing oil as a tool for good, is the same vulnerability which dictates the capacity of that nation to take advantage of globalization as a tool for progress, rather than feel its role as a method of furthering western interests as a form of neocolonialism (Adesina, 2012).

Within the Niger Delta, during the creation of the contract with Shell British petroleum, the region was synonymous with tumultuous politics and inexperience with international negotiations, a fact Shell, and all other corporations to follow, were able to take advantage of to the fullest extent. However, as has been conceded by many in academia, the tipping point in the ability of Nigeria to maintain some semblance of power in negotiations with TNOCs was a series of coup d'etats following oil and gas price increases, crashing the nascent economy. These coup d'etats were in response to an increase in corruption, endemic in the state after its violent resistance for independence (Anene, 2022). This was therefore a time during which Nigeria was extremely vulnerable, with British forces struggling to keep hold of the region before it fell in 1960. Their incentives were rooted in the pursuit of profit, and their actions served to ensure Nigerian vulnerability kept them complacent in the creation of exploitative contracts with TNOCs, while breeding the environment of corruption which makes possible the consistent creation of facilitative policies towards them in the state today. The failures of collective bargaining, emerging as a result of manufactured dependence upon oil following the exploitative concessions contracts with Shell BP, intensified Nigerian vulnerability. Because of this, Nigeria was never able to take advantage of its resources the way it should have, and was impacted deeply by the emergence of neoliberalist structures, which, in the words of Dr. Olubukola S. Adesina, meant "industrialized countries are essentially entrenching a global capitalist system and consumer culture by establishing a global market controlled by the most dominant interests within the ruling elites of these multinational companies" (Adesina 2012, p. 194).

The case was much different in the Middle East, where independence occurred peacefully, with the British even facilitating conversation among the Trucial states, culminating in the creation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971. The peaceful withdrawal of British forces is a far cry from the violence of Nigerian independence and is a key factor to consider when attempting to explain the differences in their results. Without political violence, as well as a monarchical system which disallows the presence of political discontent, the UAE never experienced the process of political upheaval which leads to corruption and civil unrest. The extent of its vulnerability was capped as western interests allowed for its industry to thrive untethered to the anchor of the "resource curse." This meant that when opportunities for international cooperation came via OPEC, it was able to use them as a stepping stone towards international legitimacy, increasing both its negotiation power and the availability of trade opportunities. Through this, the nation has been able to place itself at the forefront of all forms of globalization (Eno et al., 2016), demonstrating that because western interests allowed for a situation which minimized vulnerability, the UAE was able to take advantage of globalization and its oil resources as a tool for progress and growth, along with many other states in the GCC.

Ultimately, through comparison of these two states, we can conclude that the effects of corporate influence, and the way they perpetuate western imperialism, have a direct impact on the ability of these nations to cope with, and perhaps benefit from, the processes of globalization. Through their determination of the extent of a state's vulnerability, they dictate the capacity of that state to hold their own in the face of corporate influence and maintain negotiation power in oil contracts. One factor demonstrating their power is their influence in the nature of the state's independence, emerging as a manifestation of the impact of western imperialism, it impacts the state's vulnerability, and thus their ability to negotiate. We have already seen the impact of status in negotiations to be significantly impactful, as the ability of a state to dictate the terms of oil concession contracts was the primary difference between the two case studies, and arguably the primary

deciding factor in the results of these contracts for each state. All these factors dictate how well the state is able to fare with the neoliberal structures that gave rise to corporate influence in their borders from the beginning, and whether they are able to take advantage of it, such as the UAE, or must live at the mercy of their detriment, like Nigeria.

8. Conclusion

This paper has ultimately argued that the current discussion of the impact of oil must centre around the determination of guilt of each party involved, analysed via the origins of the involvement of oil through the lens of globalization. These two states provide a distinct opportunity for comparison between two countries at the mercy of foreign oil corporations, where one has been forced into unequal contracts and through conditions outside their control, have been pushed to a situation of unrest, instability, and political upheaval, and the other has been uplifted through international cooperation and political stability into the enabler and benefactor of corporate greed. Nigeria, acting largely alone against the behemoth of western imperialism, without access to the same resources as the corporations it was up against, and with the emergence of political corruption as a response to the discovery of a profitable natural resource, was unable to achieve the success of the UAE, instead, the political situation became dire as corruption took hold and the population was left with the remnants of corporate greed left behind. The UAE and all countries in the GCC demonstrate the alternative possibility. Where Nigeria acted alone, the UAE had the collective bargaining power of OPEC and the rest of the Gulf, allowing it to secure the second concessions and participation agreements. Its experience with Independence also differed significantly from Nigeria, as instead of being born from public dissent and realized through revolution and instability, the UK protected its interests in the states, preserving the monarchical government and maintaining cooperation between the emirates. The effects of these two conflicting situations are, as a result of their emergence, extremely different, and the extent of responsibility is consequently dissimilar. The placement of blame within the parties of the Niger Delta can only be skewed on the part of the TNOCs which exacerbate its dire situation, whereas in the case of the UAE, the blame for the environmental effects of the oil industry must be placed on both benefactors of its prevalence. Of course, beyond all this is the context of a neoliberalist society which has effectively paved the way for oil corporations to continue acting without oversight and accountability. Therefore, in the creation of possible solutions to the issues present in both situations, consideration must be placed on the responsibility of the governments, the corporations, and the facilitative structures which make all of it possible. Only then will the true picture of oil involvement unfold, and its victims awarded redress.

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Anaya Toor is a high school student with a strong academic interest in political science, law, and global affairs. Her work focuses on the relationship between state power, infrastructure, and political consequences, particularly in contexts where governance decisions shape social and regional outcomes. She is especially interested in how legal and political institutions evolve in response to economic pressures and conflict, and how their implications can be just as devastating as they are beneficial.

Mentor Contribution Statement

Anaya Toor, author of "The Clamor for Oil: An Analysis of Responsibility Gradients in Corporate Oil Exploitation" independently developed and finalized her under the mentorship of Dr. Ida Danewid and Dr. Tanja Weist.

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