

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS IN NIGERIA AND THE LAND REFORM PROCESS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The pursuit of equality and social justice remains a fundamental ideal for many societies today. Social justice as a concept may be applied to policies and actions taken by governments, agencies, and organizations. The study weighs the agitations of the ex-militants from Niger Delta, Nigeria and the plight of the former commercial farm workers against social justice principles given the role of their respective governments in implementing fair policies that safeguard all individuals against violation of their basic rights and civil liberties. Accordingly, the experiences of the ex-militants of the Niger Delta, Nigeria were compared with that of the former commercial land owners in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the comparative analysis was to examine the similarities and differences between the two cases with the goal to determining the extent of their resistance to the perceived oppression. The social implication of this study is that the findings exposed glaring social policy gaps, including a broad range of human rights and social justice violations in both cases. The significance of this study is that the findings may be useful in contributing to the development of policies that address political, economic, and social issues in African countries, particularly in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Similarly, key stakeholders equipped with such vital information derived from the result findings may understand, appreciate, identify, and develop appropriate strategies and guidelines that can be used to address the feelings of oppression. The study recommends the need for policy makers and key stakeholders to focus on empowerment, including providing basic education, training, health care facilities, decent housing, and modern infrastructural amenities. These areas will have an immediate positive social impact, address the perception of oppression, and also improve the quality of life of the former commercial farm workers and residents of the Niger Delta region. Empirical evidence gathered from both the doctoral dissertations of Tobor (2014) and Muzorewa (2013) inform the paper.

Keywords: Empowerment, equality, ex-militants, Fast Track Land Reform Program, human rights, informal settlements, land redistribution, Niger Delta, Nigeria, social justice, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

The social justice theoretical framework provides an ample platform to examine the similarities and differences of both the experiences of the ex-militants in Niger Delta, Nigeria and the former commercial land owners in Zimbabwe. According to Muzorewa (2013), the social justice theoretical perspective was deemed appropriate, as it encompasses values and beliefs such as equity, human rights, and democracy. These principles are pertinent to assessing the impact of the land reform program on former commercial farm workers and also the amnesty program on the ex-militants from Niger Delta. Similarly, social justice perspective serves as a platform that provides greater insight into the behavioral responses of the ex-militants in Niger Delta region of Nigeria and also the target population to the land reform process. Freire (1997) emphasized that people who perceive the reality of oppression as a limiting situation will engage in a struggle to transform that situation. According to Omotola (2012), human beings will always resort to violence to either protest or challenge

the existing structure of deprivation and struggle for compensation, reparations, or redress (p. 39). The same analogy represents the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region who resort to militancy in an attempt to bring about positive social change and development to their region. In agreement with this view, Freire (1997) explained that people who feel that they are being oppressed will engage in an incessant struggle to emancipate and liberate themselves in order to regain their humanity. This analogy can also be used to explain what led to the American Revolution against the British Empire. Weintraub (2009) explained that the outspoken American colonists resented paying taxes because they were not adequately represented in the parliament. Weintraub posited that as a solution to their discontent, the colonial farmers, merchants, and craftsmen began proposing a new concept of liberty (p.33). This was the start of a small-scale and unexpected rebellion that blossomed to become what is today known as the United States of America.

METHODOLOGY

Grinnel et al (2012) posited that a qualitative study is exploratory in nature and hence most useful when the research topic area is relatively new, as was the case with Muzorewa (2013) and Tobor (2014). Both studies learned from talking directly with the former commercial farm workers from Zimbabwe and ex-militants from Niger Delta, Nigeria respectively, by allowing them to narrate their experiences in their own natural setting without the impediment of a manipulated or controlled environment. Tobor (2014) and Muzorewa (2013) utilized three primary qualitative data collection techniques including informal and in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis to address the research questions and provide a better understanding of the experiences of the ex-militants and farm workers respectively. The use of three independent sources of data was a powerful validation strategy. An interview protocol was developed prior to embarking on the field interviews. This provided the parameters for conducting the interviews. The studies utilized recording devices (digital recorder) with prior permission obtained from the research participants. Notes were taken during the interview sessions. This provided additional information about the phenomenon under investigation. Direct observation led to a better understanding and a more vivid characterization of the research problem under study.

Additionally, document analysis was used to corroborate the evidence. Sources of documents included media articles, policy papers, legislation, white papers written by international NGOs (e.g. United Nations), documents from Nigeria's Niger Delta Office, and other written academic studies focused on the research problems of both studies. These sources were reputable and had been utilized in several other published studies, some of which have been referenced in this study. Muzorewa (2013) created a database by utilizing computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (NVivo); this tool assisted in data storage and analysis. Coding data using NVivo helped the study to link the responses from the research participants to the research questions and to cluster the responses to generate most recurring themes. NVivo also assisted the study in triangulating data from different sources and cascading voluminous qualitative data into manageable baskets.

Data collected was used to corroborate and augment the evidence that was gathered from direct observation and interviews with the research participants. The use of a variety of sources yielded better results for both case studies. For instance, written documents were used to verify correct details mentioned during interviews, corroborate critical details emerging from interviews, and draw inferences that provided insight into the social problem under discussion (Yin, 2009). Tobor (2014) utilized 20 ex-militants from Urhobo origin as

research participants, while Muzorewa (2013) utilized an evolving sampling strategy and sample size because of the controversial and complex nature of the land reform issue in Zimbabwe. The choice of the case study approach utilized by both studies was deliberate, as it allowed the studies to collect the data from multiple sources. Importantly, this approach addressed the historical and cultural context in which both the ex-militants and the former commercial farm workers lived and worked. The studies drew better meanings from the life settings of the participants based on their stories and views of reality. In other words, the case study provided a holistic approach to the social phenomenon.

The studies gave significant prominence to ethical issues. Study participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Enforcing these ethical considerations was necessary to protect the human participants and also to preserve the integrity of the research process. Content analysis was applied to the findings of both studies and generated several similar themes including homelessness, joblessness, health problems, and social exclusion.

Historical Background of the Land Reform Process in Zimbabwe

The issue of landownership has historically been a major cause of conflict and controversy in Zimbabwe. Muzorewa (2013) demonstrated that racially based land policies during the colonial period resulted in the displacement of millions of Blacks from their land, resulting in poverty and underdevelopment among the Black population. According to Muzorewa (2013), at independence in 1980, approximately 5,000 White commercial farmers held roughly 40% of the agricultural land, while Black communal farmers, numbering over 4 million, owned about 40% of arable land, with the remainder of the lands designated as state-owned national parks and forests. Though the government of Zimbabwe was under pressure to reverse this historical imbalance, however, the government was restricted by the terms of the Lancaster House Constitution (Muzorewa, 2013). As such, in 2000, frustration with the government's failure to rectify the land imbalances triggered mass land invasions of White-owned commercial farms, resulting in the displacement of thousands of White commercial farmers and millions of Black commercial farm workers and their families (Muzorewa, 2013). Even though the eviction of White farmers from their estates attracted much international attention, little attention has been given to the plight of the millions of former commercial farm workers who have experienced the destruction of their homes and eviction from their property. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of former commercial farm workers have been rendered jobless and homeless.

Historical Background of the Niger Delta Crisis in Nigeria

Ogege (2011) describes the Niger Delta region as a vast, fertile, and naturally endowed region with enormous gas and oil deposits. The studies of (Anele & Omoro, 2012; Idowu, 2012; Ogbodo, 2010; Ogege, 2011) posited that despite the huge oil revenue derived from the region that sustains Nigeria economically, the Niger Delta region is still characterized by abject poverty, economic impoverishment, exploitation, environmental apocalypse, cultural destabilization, destroyed social structure, polluted environments, impaired health, dearth of serviceable infrastructure, inadequate provision of functional educational system, and destroyed source of livelihoods. Ogege (2011) posited that decades of exploitative and explorative activities of petroleum resources have had an adverse effect on the host communities in the Niger Delta region. Anele and Omoro (2012) posited that the natural endowment of the region has become a source of its greatest predicament. According to

Ewharieme and Cocodia (2012), suitable sanitation is available to less than 25% of the population of the region and water related diseases are a common feature and most likely the main health problem in the region. Omitola (2012) explained that these exploratory activities continued unabated without due regard to the interests, views, demands, aspirations, and agitations of the indigenous people of the oil bearing communities by both the federal government and the multinational oil companies (p.254). Tobor (2016) maintained that the unanswered cries and agitations of the indigenous people to control their own natural resources became a significant root cause of the Niger Delta crisis. Consequently, the region has become a place of frustrated expectations and a hot bed for violence (Ogege, 2011).

The findings of the study

The prevailing situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and in Zimbabwe, which has resulted in the displacement of residents of the Niger Delta and farm workers from their homes, contradicts the principles of justice and equal rights. According to Miller (1999), justice fundamentally requires us to treat people as equals (p. 238). Miller whose principles of justice contained a central element of human rights values described a just society as a society whose institutions provide benefits to its deserving citizenry (p. 155). The discussion of social justice that is outcome-driven versus one that is procedure-driven was pertinent to Zimbabwe's current land reform program and equally serves as an ideal platform to examine the concerns and agitations of the residents of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria.

Comparatively speaking, Muzorewa (2013) demonstrated in the literature reviewed (Bernstein 2004; Goebel, 2005; Rukuni, 2012; Sachikonye, 2003) that the land reform has failed to create a just society that upholds the rule of law in an environment that guarantees equitable access to services to all persons. On the other hand, the findings of Tobor (2014) suggested that the introduction of the amnesty program by the Nigerian government was widely accepted and thus brought relative peace and stability to Niger Delta, Nigeria. In support of this findings, Tobor posited that the literature reviewed (Amaragbu, 2011; Oluduro & Oluduro, 2012; Oluwaniyi, 2011) indicated that the amnesty initiative had been partially successful, but maintained that the main reason for its inability to achieve an overwhelming success was because the program failed to address the root causes of militancy in the region.

Donnelly (2003) described the concept of human rights as the rights one has simply because one is a human being. Rawls (1999) suggested that a just world order is viewed as a society of peoples that maintain a well-ordered and decent political regime, not necessarily democratic but fully respecting basic human rights (p. 402). Therefore, it was appropriate to hold up the land reform program in Zimbabwe against both the social justice principles and the concept of human rights, noting that both concepts describe rights that are relevant in constitutional democracies, albeit in theory and not necessarily in practice. Findings from Muzorewa (2013) suggested that in social and economic terms the land reform program has left the former farm workers homeless and impoverished, thus generating a humanitarian crisis that will necessitate considerable social investment. Similarly, Tobor (2014) demonstrated in the literature reviewed that despite abundant oil resources, the residents of the Niger Delta endure extreme poverty, high unemployment rate, poor infrastructure, and polluted environments. For instance, Egbe (2012) maintained that the chemicals produced by the gas flares can cause heart problems, chest pain, breathing problems, bad odors, cancer, eye irritation, global climate change, induce asthma attack, increase death rate, and reduce ability to exercise (p.168)

Muzorewa (2013) explained that some of the rights that have been violated by the Government of Zimbabwe in its violent implementation of land reform, included the right to protection against torture, equal protection of the law, legal remedy, protection and assistance of families, just and favorable working conditions, freedom from hunger, compulsory primary education, and access to health (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2010). The Universal Declaration of Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948); as such, social justice was inseparable from the concept of human rights and equality.

The principle of social justice can be applied to improving the situation of the commercial farm workers in Zimbabwe and in accessing the justifiable rights of the residents of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria. Justice is an important weapon in the fight for freedom and growth for any indigenous group of people. Researchers (Agbonifo, 2009; Amaraegbu, 2011) suggest that there is a connection between environmental degradation, dispossession, infrastructural development issues and perception of injustice that provides the context within which to understand the persistent violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This is consistent with the findings of Muzorewa (2013) that suggested the former commercial farm workers have been victims of the land reform program and have become one of the most marginalized, least visible, and greatly disempowered groups in the country, victims of the country’s century-old internal dynamics, dominated by racial and intergroup conflict. Muzorewa (2013) maintained that the current land reform program in Zimbabwe has failed to address the fundamental social justice principles of inclusion, fairness, and participatory democracy that ensure that all voices, including those of the poor, are fully heard.

Similarly, findings from (Tobor, 2014) indicated that the indigenous inhabitants of the Niger Delta region felt a sense of oppression because their main source of livelihood which is farming and fishing had been destroyed without adequate compensation. This was the reason why they joined militant groups in the first place. This downside of justice can be properly managed and optimized if developmental programs in the region are properly implemented. According to Tobor (2014), such developmental programs such as the amnesty program are perceived to be an adequate compensation for the destruction of their homelands and also viewed as an avenue to empower the indigenous residents through job training and subsequent employment. If such programs are successfully implemented then the residents of the region would feel that their sense of justice had been accommodated (Tobor, 2014).

This was a significant difference between the findings of Tobor (2014) and Muzorewa (2013). Muzorewa demonstrated that the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) was inconsistent with the doctrine of equal treatment and had marginalized farm workers’ capacity for self-determination. According to Muzorewa, research findings uncovered massive and widespread problems of poverty, deplorable living conditions, and serious health concerns. The situation of the former commercial farm workers was precarious and potentially explosive if left unaddressed. Muzorewa maintained that the literature review showed that land reform in Zimbabwe remained a highly politicized process and research findings demonstrated the failure of both market-led and state-led models of land acquisition. Both models failed to take into account social justice principles of fairness and equality. It was on this note that Muzorewa advocated for the need to achieve a sense of balance between the market driven land acquisition strategies and State led land acquisition programs. Muzorewa maintained that the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) in its current form had failed its primary objective of redistribution of land from the few to the landless majority. Most importantly, the program was in conflict with social justice principles of fairness and

equality in the distribution of goods and services (Muzorewa, 2013). The program was not inclusive and had left millions of former commercial farm workers living a life of destitution. Based on research findings, Muzorewa suggested certain public policy social actions that can be undertaken to secure the fundamental rights of the former farm workers and improve their lives, thus bringing positive social change to this population. If such policy actions are taken and properly implemented then the former commercial farm owners may feel that an upside sense of Justice had been achieved.

The principle of community participation to encourage empowerment can be applied to both studies. Oakley (1989) defined community participation as a means of including people in decision making processes, involving them actively in developing, implementing, and evaluating programs, and also sharing in the benefits derived from there. Community participation provides a platform for empowerment. Larkin et al. (2008) empowerment as a process that develops as individuals gain control over their lives and increasingly take part in decisions that affect them. According to Aujoulat et al. (2006), empowerment places emphasis on the abilities and rights of the communities and individuals and not on their needs and deficits. Empowerment is a process that is often equated with liberation. Tobor (2014) demonstrated that involving community members in any developmental initiative is a form of empowering them to take leading roles to address their own peculiar issues, needs, and problems with the support of key stakeholders.

Similarly, Muzorewa (2013) recommends an all stakeholders' land conference with a mandate of formulating a new comprehensive land reform program that is inclusive, apolitical, and restores rule of law in the agricultural sector. Such a land conference should ensure protection of property rights, guarantee security of tenure, fair land valuations leading to fair compensation for White farmers, and promote discourse and cooperation between the government and the farming community (White farmers and Black commercial farm workers). In agreement with this view, Tobor (2014) indicated that adopting the concept of community participation is a strategic and tactical approach to foster maximum community support and cooperation throughout the implementation phase of any development program. Meaningful participation of key stakeholders in the community can lead to an enhanced understanding of their communal obligations and their human rights (Tobor, 2014).

Muzorewa (2013) recommended the establishment of a grant for re-training of former commercial farm workers who wish to develop new non-farming skills. This may entail investment in adult education, apprenticeship, and entrepreneurial skills programs to facilitate their reintegration into society. This view was also reinforced in the study of Tobor (2014). According to Tobor, the responses from the study participants indicated that the training education received through the amnesty program facilitated their successful reintegration back into society. The authors maintained that education plays a pivotal role in preventing and transforming conflicts. Many former commercial farm workers already have the technical skills but lack the formal certificates to allow them to pursue opportunities in other economic sectors. An upside of justice would be optimized if such training programs address the social justice principles of fairness, equal opportunity, self-determination, and empowerment. In agreement with this view, Muzorewa (2013) maintained that such an approach should lead to improvement of incomes and quality of life of the former commercial farm workers. More importantly, retraining would wean the farm workers from their dependency on farm employment to sustain a livelihood. Education is a long term-development process that can be used for developing ideas, help in economic growth and development (Odubo & Tobor, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the similarities and differences between the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria and the land reform process in Zimbabwe with the goal to determining the extent of their resistance to the perceived oppression. The study demonstrated that the two cases had certain similarities and differences; however the degree of resistance was different. For instance, a fundamental similarity in both cases is that the problems of the residents of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria and former commercial farm workers in Zimbabwe can be associated with their aspirations as a people for effective representation in government that would translate to political, social, and economic emancipation. The study demonstrated that in both cases, the social justice perspective as a theoretical model can be used to bring about positive perception of upsides of justice.

In terms of resistance, a significant difference is in the degree of acceptance of the policy initiated by the governments of Zimbabwe and Nigeria. In the case of the land reform process in Zimbabwe, the study illustrated how the current land reform policies have marginalized, disempowered, and disenfranchised thousands of former commercial farm workers. It advocates for the official acknowledgement of the plight of the farm workers, considering that without such an understanding it is difficult to challenge or spur policy makers and stakeholders to take viable action. On the other hand, the amnesty program introduced by the Nigerian government in 2009 was widely accepted by the indigenes including the ex-militants in Niger Delta, Nigeria. Tobor (2014) demonstrated that the amnesty program which offered trainings in education, vocational, and skill acquisition, education, and employment opportunities upon successful completion of the program brought relative peace and stability to Niger Delta, Nigeria. In spite of this partial success, Tobor (2014) noted that a lot still needs to be done given the responses of the study participants.

Muzorewa (2013) and Tobor (2014) demonstrated that both groups of people have been grossly underserved, underrepresented, and thus feel marginalized. The study recommends the need for policy makers and key stakeholders to focus on empowerment, including providing basic education, training, health care facilities, decent housing, and modern infrastructural amenities. These areas will have an immediate positive social impact on the livelihoods of the Zimbabwe commercial farm workers and residents of Niger Delta, Nigeria. The expectation is that this study's findings will spur viable policy frameworks and strategies that will translate into a durable solution to the land problem and the perceived oppression that has been perpetrated against the former commercial farm workers from Zimbabwe and the residents of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria.

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