

Ogoni as an Internal Colony: A Critique of Imperialism

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Abstract

Ogoniland is a geo-cultural rural enclave within the Nigerian state, located in the Niger Delta region. The discovery and commercial production of mineral oil in the area date back to the mid-1950s. Within a period of about 34 years, some 634 million barrels of oil were produced in the area, yielding an estimated thirty billion dollars in earnings for the Nigerian State. Yet, amidst the crisscrossing network of oil pipelines, depleted land and environment, and for all the wealth it generates for the multinationals and the Nigerian state, Ogoniland remains one of the most underdeveloped regions in Nigeria. The region constitutes a periphery within the emerging Nigeria's capitalist economy, characterized by a dual class structure with the dominant groups constituting the ruling class and the minorities—the majority of them in the South—as subordinates. Worse still, within the South the Ogonis constitute a minority within minority, as they are further exploited by an internal ruling class. Political and cultural hegemony go hand-in-hand with economic inequality. This paper explains this situation, not as a reflection of natural disparities in geographical patterns of distribution of natural resources, but as manifestations of the phenomenon of internal colonialism. It further explores the link between this phenomenon and western imperialism.

Key words: Ogoni, Dominance, Class, Economic Inequality, Internal Colonialism, Cultural Division of Labour, Imperialism.

Introduction

A great part of the fundamental problems of the Nigerian state comes from the tension between her core, dominant groups and the 'peripheries'. Over the years, since after the country's independence in 1960, the South has blamed its underdevelopment on its marginalization and exploitation by the North. The lopsidedness of political and economic power in favour of the North seems to warrant the South's claims. Ernest Gellner has noted that 'uneven development of the economy disadvantages peripheral groups and may generate tensions between the centre and margins of a country.'¹ As amply documented, the peoples that make up the country of Nigeria had existed as separate units prior to British colonialism, which was more or less an imperialistic engagement. British colonial rule, no doubt, brought some benefits to the colonies but these were rather incidental and its drawbacks outweigh the gains. Harold Smith, a Briton and one of the architects of the colonial foundations on which Nigeria stands, admits that:

Our (British) agenda was to completely exploit Africa.

Nigeria was my duty post. When we assessed Nigeria, this was what we found in the southern region: strength, intelligence, a determination to succeed, well established history, complex but focused life styles, great hope and aspirations... the East is good in business and technology, the West is good in administration and commerce, law and medicine, but it was a pity we planned our agenda to give power "at all costs" to (one region). Our mission was accomplished by destroying the opposition on all fronts. The West led in the fight for independence, and was punished for asking for freedom.²

Proponents of what has been known as the *colonial conspiracy theory*, such as Okwudiba Nnoli, R. L. Sklar, Y. R. Barongo, Y. B. Usman, and A. Lema, have argued that ethnicity is fully and exclusively the product of western colonialism.³ This work builds on a similar thesis, although it discusses imperialism and internal colonialism as independent and dependent variables respectively.

Our study takes a general look at the concepts of imperialism and internal colonialism, and, then, examines their interconnection. It looks at both concepts from a more general standpoint, and also comes down to situate the discourse within the Nigerian context.

It highlights the philosophical *problem of the counter-factual*, which confronts the validity of the assumption that the colonization of Nigeria and other African states is exclusively responsible for ethnicity, political instability, internal colonialism and overall economic backwardness in these states. The problem, which is essentially logical and epistemological, simply hinges on the difficulty, if not total impossibility, of concluding with absolute certainty that these states would have been otherwise than they are but for their colonial experience. After all, as we find to be the case, those characteristics are not the exclusive marks of all hitherto colonised states nor are they absent in all non-colonised states. Our study suggests that the herding of so many culturally asymmetrical people with unequal strength and opportunities into a single state created a social matrix for domestic exploitation and struggle. Smith observes that “What we have seen since independence is an administration of new internal colonial masters, fellow Nigerians doing more damage to Nigeria.”⁴

Imperialism: Concept and Context

Imperialism is a broad term; it manifests in different forms ranging from literature and culture to politics and economy, but economic drives usually constitute its most crucial initial impetus. This partly explains why much of the existing literature on the concept tends to either omit or downplay other manifestations of it, such as cultural imperialism. Our present work, in suchlike manner, acknowledges its variety of forms but dwells more on its economic and institutional aspects. It is in this context that we find much of the *causal* connection between it and the phenomenon of *internal colonialism* or *domestic colonialism* (or, as Ken Saro-Wiwa also calls it when it occurs within black countries, *black colonialism*).

Claude Ake defines imperialism as “The economic control and exploitation of foreign lands arising from the necessity for counteracting the impediments to the accumulation of capital engendered by the internal contradictions of the domestic capitalist economy.”⁵ There are, according to Ake, about five *contradictions* of capitalism which tend to lead to imperialism. One of them arises as the drive for maximization of *surplus value* leads, necessarily, to the expansion of production. This occurs because capitalist production goes on in a context in which capitalists compete among themselves for the market. At the same time, increase in production or output tends to create excess of supply over demand, which leads to disequilibrium.

Another contradiction arises from the fact that expansion of production goes hand in hand with the concentration of a large workforce in intricate division of labour and also an absolute increase in the labour force, who are the victims of capitalistic exploitation. Hence, expansion of production gives rise to the concentration of the proletariat, the potential army against capitalism.⁶ The Third contradiction arises because as production expands, the organic composition of capital increases. However, this increase in the organic composition of capital diminishes the rate of accumulation of surplus value.

Capitalism presupposes perfect competition. In other words, it is a *free enterprise* system based on *laissez faire* practice. Yet, the expansion of production does not only lead to increase in the organic composition of capital as previously noted. Rather, this increased organic composition goes on simultaneously with the concentration of capital or *monopolization* in production, which is a negation of the principle of competition. As competition slashes the number of enterprises to a few large ones which tend to co-operate in order to reduce competition among themselves by fixing prices and dividing the market. However, in fixing prices, production may also be planned and reduced in order not to create excess supply over demand.⁷ This requirement to reduce output negates the tendency and desire to maximize profit through economies of scale.

The final and, according to Ake, the fundamental contradiction derives from the tensions between the forces of production and relations of production. As he puts it:

The forces of production under capitalism develop in the direction of the socialization of production. However, the social relations of production develop in the direction of greater private appropriation, that is, in the direction of fewer people taking an ever large share of that social product. These two conflicting tendencies of the forces of production and the relations of production cannot continue indefinitely.⁸

Imperialism thus emerges as a logical effect of the inability of the domestic capitalist economies to resolve or contain the divergent forces within the system. Michael Barratt Brown offers a rather broader definition of imperialism as:

The outward drive of certain peoples ... to build ... empire, both formal colonies and privileged positions in markets, protected sources of materials and extended opportunities for profitable employment of labour. This concept has thus been associated with an unequal economic relationship between states, not simply the inequality of large and small, rich and poor trading partners, but the inequality of political and economic dependence of the latter on the former.⁹

The above definition of Brown's is useful not only in the sense that it reflects some familiar and commonsense notions of imperialism but also because, in addition to that, it explicitly indicates the relationship between capitalism and imperialism. Walter Rodney also conceives of imperialism in a sense that is similar to Brown's. He asserts that:

Imperialism meant capitalist expansion. It meant that European (and North American and Japanese) capitalists were forced by the internal logic of their competitive system to seek abroad in less developed countries opportunities to control raw material, to find markets, and to find profitable fields of investment.¹⁰

The *internal logic* of the capitalist system is synonymous with Ake's *contradictions* of the capitalist system. In Rodney's view, 'imperialism is essentially an economic phenomenon, and it does not necessarily involve direct political control or colonialism.'¹¹ However, Africa became a victim of colonizing imperialism¹²—that is, imperialism involving direct political control of the 'periphery' by the 'metropole' or imperial power. Hannah Arendt distinguishes between two types of imperialism, namely *continental imperialism* and *overseas imperialism*.¹³ She notes that:

The chief importance of continental, as distinguished from overseas, imperialism lies in the fact that its concept of cohesive expansion does not allow for any geographic distance between the methods and institutions of colony and of nation.... If it shared with overseas imperialism the contempt for the narrowness of the nation-state, it opposed to it so much economic arguments, which after all quite frequently expressed authentic national needs, as an "enlarged tribal consciousness..."¹⁴

Colonizing imperialism can be subsumed under overseas imperialism. One noteworthy point, however, is that whatever its type—continental or overseas—imperialism is rooted in the philosophy of expansionism, and it is essentially economic.

The major classical writers on imperialism (Hobson, Schumpeter, Marx and Lenin) agree—although Schumpeter agrees less—that imperialism is essentially motivated by economic considerations or interests. However, they hold divergent views on the precise nature of the character and manifestation of these interests, and the precise nature of the relationship between capitalist accumulation and imperialism. Hobson considers some of the psychological motives that have been advanced as an explanation of imperialism such as national pride, quest for glory, and bellicosity. He admits that all these factors may be relevant; yet the economic motive remains the most dominant.¹⁵

Schumpeter explains imperialism mainly as an atavism. Imperialism, according to him, is characterized by an aggressive expansion which has no objective beyond itself. This view of Schumpeter's has been widely criticized. Karl Marx posits in his treatment of capitalism that imperialism is a necessary outcome of capitalism. Along this line, Lenin developed his theory of imperialism amid an intensification of European engagement with the periphery. Like Marx, he holds that imperialism grows out of the logic of the capitalist system. Concerning how capitalism led to imperialism, Lenin theorized that:

The concentration of capital (i.e. monopolization) created inequality. Inequality in the core constrained aggregate demand levels. The general population could not absorb the mass commodities achieved by higher levels of productive capacity. Insufficient demand created realization crises. The price of raw materials threatened profits further. The falling rate of profit required economic expansion to open up new regions for investment, sources of raw materials, and new consumer markets.¹⁶

From the premise that the capitalist class has political control of the state, Lenin theorized that the dominant class who own finance-capital used the paraphernalia of the state (metropolitan) to colonize the periphery.¹⁷

In the periphery or colonized states, capitalists would do the following: (i) use oppressed peripheral labour to produce primary commodities and raw materials cheaply; (ii) create an affluent stratum (peripheral elite); (iii) undermine indigenous industry, making the colonies dependent on core investment.¹⁸ Lenin thus sees imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism.¹⁹

Suffice it to note that contemporary writers have criticized certain aspects of the classical theories of imperialism, especially the classical views on its nature. Rather than delve into these details, however, we shall re-direct our focus on the relationship between imperialism and internal colonialism. It has previously been mentioned in passing that imperialism, is not the same thing as colonialism, but it led to colonialism in several cases, for example in Africa. Walter Rodney observes that ‘imperialism is itself a phase of capitalist development in which Western European capitalist countries, USA, and Japan established political, economic, military and cultural hegemony over other parts of the world.’²⁰ In practical terms imperialism radically altered the fabric of African societies, superimposing alien forces, culture and ideologies on the colonized people. Rodney further asserts that ‘colonialism introduced elements of capitalism into Africa. In general terms, where communalism came into contact with money economy, the latter imposed itself.’²¹ Kwame Nkrumah similarly notes that ‘with the impact of imperialism and colonialism, communalist socio-economic patterns began to collapse ... the economies of the colonies became interconnected with world capitalist market.’²²

As capitalism developed with colonialism, the spread of private enterprise together with the needs of the colonial administrative apparatus resulted in the emergence of, first, a *petit bourgeois* class and, then, an urban bourgeois class of bureaucrats, reactionary intellectuals, traders and others who became increasingly part and parcel of the colonial economic and social structure.²³ Colonialism in Africa, as in other places, also resulted in the amalgamation of so many peoples who, though having much in common, had much more areas of divergence in culture, politics, and religion. Yet, they were brought together within defined territorial boundaries by means of the coercive devices and machinations of the imperial cum colonial power. The incidence of inter-ethnic feuds was low during the colonial period compared to what has come to be the case in the post-colonial epoch, but it did occur when it must, and was also: deliberately encouraged when it served to strengthen the hands of colonial administrators.’²⁴

2.3 Theories of Internal Colonialism

Somehow, the theoretical origin of the concept of internal colonialism tends to be difficult to trace precisely. One reason for this difficulty is because the early phases of this phenomenon triggered something like a spontaneous reaction from many a writer and rights crusader across the world. The term refers to a notion of structural, political and economic inequalities between regions within a nation-state. It is used to describe the uneven effects of economic development on a regional basis, otherwise known as ‘uneven development’ and the exploitation of minority groups within a wider society. The relationship between the internal colonizer and the colonized region is similar to that which exists between the metropole and colony in direct colonialism. The first known use of the term was by Leo Marquard in a 1957 book, regarding South Africa.²⁵

Pablo González-Casanova subsequently used the term in an article in 1965 to describe Mexico. Distinguishing internal colonialism from a mere class structure with a geographic or racial aspect, González-Casanova states that:

Internal colonialism corresponds to a structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogeneous, distinct groups.... It is the result of an encounter between two races, cultures, or civilizations, whose genesis and evolution occurred without any mutual contact up to one specific moment.... The colonial structure and internal colonialism are distinguished from the class structure since colonialism is not only a relation of exploitation of the workers by the owners of raw materials or of production and their collaborators, but also a relation of domination and exploitation of a total population (with its distinct classes, proprietors, workers) by another population which also has distinct classes (proprietors and workers).²⁶

According to this definition, internal colonialism requires a dual class structure, a dominant class and a subordinate class, with varying degrees of differentiation. This definition, though very restrictive, is broad enough to accommodate a variety of dominant-subordinate group relationships. González-Casanova’s views influenced, and were critiqued by, Andre Gunder Frank, a leading critic of *development economics* and *modernization theory*.

Focussing on the metropole-satellite (or centre-periphery) relation he observed in Latin America, Frank holds that 'the economic, political, social, and cultural institutions of the underdeveloped countries resulted from the penetration of capitalism....'²⁷ Frank's analysis highlights the contradictions inherent in the underdevelopment of peripheral-capitalist regions and people. The logic of his analysis applies with equal validity to domestic colonialism.

Van den Berghe offered an even more restrictive definition of the term. His view, in part a reaction to the overly broad use of the term, suggests that internal colonialism is an *ideal type* characterized by:

- 1) Rule of one ethnic group (or coalition of such groups) over other such groups living within the continuous boundaries of a single state.
- 2) Territorial separation of the subordinate ethnic groups into "homelands," "native reserves," and the like, with land tenure rights distinct from those applicable to members of the dominant group.
- 3) Presence of an internal government within a government especially created to rule the subject peoples, with a special legal status ascribed to the subordinate groups....
- 4) Relations of economic inequality in which subject peoples are relegated to positions of dependency and inferiority in the division of labor and the relations of production.²⁸

Berghe further asserts that:

Such a definition of internal colonialism excludes mere regional differences in economic development, mere class differences in the system of production, and, a fortiori, differences based on age, sex, slave status, caste, sexual behavior (e.g., homosexuality), physical handicaps, and countless others. The usefulness of the concept to understand the situation of a group is a function of that group's approximation to the characteristics of the ideal type. For instance, in the United States, internal colonialism describes the position of Amerindians quite well, of Chicanos somewhat, of blacks poorly, of Appalachian whites hardly at all, and of women, old people, homosexuals and convicts only by the most fanciful stretch of the academic imagination. This is not to say that some of the groups excluded from my definition of internal colonialism may not be as badly or worse off than the denizens of the internal colonies. Their position is fundamentally *different*, however, and, hence, the internal colonial model is a poor one to understand their predicament.²⁹

In 1973, Sergio Salvi, a poet, essayist, and historian of minority languages, used the term "internal colonies" in the cultural sense, listing Catalonia, Scotland, Brittany and Occitania among the internal colonies of Western Europe.

Perhaps, the earliest profound formulation of the theory was done by an American scholar, Michael Hechter, in his 1975 work, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*. He posited this theory in the course of his study of British nationalism. Hechter was influenced by Karl Deutsch's *modernization theory* (or 'diffusion theory') which posits the view that interaction amongst ethnic groups of different cultural aggregations within a state necessarily leads to cultural homogenization through the diffusion of cultures. In other words, that increasing interaction among the diverse peoples will eventually lead to commonality and ethnic homogenization.³⁰

Hechter, however, rejected the diffusion theory, and in its place posited *internal colonialism*. He maintained that modernization and increased interaction between or among ethnic groups within a state will not necessarily engender ethnic unity as hypothesized in the diffusion theory. Instead, such interaction will be just as likely to endanger unity and cause ethnic cleavages. This is because:

...the inequalities between the regions in a country will relegate peripheral regions to an inferior position, leaving the core region dominant. The reaction to this in the peripheral regions will be hostility to the core, and if these regions are also national in character, this will take the form of nationalism.³¹

In its original formulation by Hechter, the initial, often accidental, economic advantages accruing to the core regions as a result of the interaction tend to lead to an unequal distribution of resources and power in ways that favour the core group at the expense of the periphery. This imbalance is subsequently institutionalized into a rigid system of stratification.

Hechter saw Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalism as the outcome of internal colonialism. Hechter's book was published prior to the emergence of Scottish and Welsh nationalism in the late 1960s, but he published another book thereafter. The major difference between the two publications lies in the modification of his 'cultural division of labour theory' as a hierarchical stratification to that of 'segmental' cultural division, which he explained as a vertical stratification. Thus:

In a situation of internal colonialism, there will be a social stratification of ethnic or cultural groups, with the core group occupying the best class positions and the peripheral groups the inferior positions. This corresponds to a 'colonizing' nation and 'colonized' nations. Thus, in Britain the English are the colonizers, and the Scots, Welsh and Irish are the colonized.³²

But the facts seemed to be at variance with the postulates of the cultural division of labour theory. For example, Scotland has been as much an industrialized and imperial nation as England from the eighteenth century and the Scots are not in practice relegated to inferior social positions. However, there is no denying the fact that there have been significant regional inequalities in Britain, due largely to uneven economic development and to government and commercial policies favouring the South of England.³³

Some criticisms were thus levelled against Hechter's theory based on which he later revised the cultural division of labour thesis (a hierarchical stratification) as regards Scotland to a 'segmental cultural division' (a vertical stratification) in which Scots occupy 'occupational niches' deriving from the distinctiveness of their national institutions, such as law and education.³⁴ Hechter further avers that nationalistic colonized groups have the capacity to attract support. This capacity is as important as the very structure of internal colonialism. Interestingly, although Hechter's original thesis deviates slightly from factual evidence in the case of Scotland the internal colonialism model has a compelling validity in many contexts around the world, including Nigeria. And, as James G Kellas has noted, the existence of a cultural division of labour in most multiethnic societies is particularly striking.³⁵

In a jointly authored work by Derek Urwin and Stein Rokkan, published in 1982, the latter developed a theory of regionalism which, like Hechter's theory of internal colonialism, was a rejection of Karl Deutch's diffusion theory. Yet Rokkan did not totally endorse Hechter's thesis. Rokkan's theory focused on the politicization of peripheral predicaments and the attendant cultural response. Rokkan and Urwing posit that 'There is no simple centre-periphery polarity across culture, economics and politics. Peripheral predicaments and politicization emerge out of the incongruity which has existed on the continent as there have been states.'³⁶ These statements of Rokkan and Urwin foster, inter alia, the impression that states are bound to harbour incongruities by reason of their cultural, economic and political institutions and heterogeneous structuration. Although such an impression can hardly be generalized, their claim about the 'politicization of peripheral predicament' reflects a commonplace scenario. We shall later analyse this within the context of Nigeria.

Carmichael and Hamilton developed internal colonialism as a theory for explaining racism in the United States. Defining racism as "the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group"³⁷, they use the term (racism) interchangeably with internal colonialism and institutional racism. This view is also held by Barrera who defines internal colonialism as:

A structured relationship of domination and subordination which are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines when the relationship is established or maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group...in which the dominant and subordinate populations intermingle.³⁸

The internal colony, which in most cases constitutes the economic nerve centre of the colonial economy, is thus marginalized and alienated. Robert Allen similarly posits that internal colonialism emerged as a historically evolved system of 'racialization'. As he puts it, the racial system is 'a historically evolved structure of inequality aimed at securing total control of the labour of victimized group....'³⁹ Peter Bohmer, in a paper entitled *African-Americans as Internal colony: the Theory of Internal Colonialism*, engages in a historical analysis of the theory of internal colonialism. Bohmer's study centres more on the United States. The theory, according to him, attempts to '...expose, analyze and critique the history of racism.

It explains the oppression of African-Americans and other people of color in the United States, particularly people of Mexican and Puerto Rican background...as internalized colonies.⁴⁰

Bohmer traces the intellectual origin of the theory (of internal colonialism) to European colonialism and the advancing of an anti-colonial national liberation strategy by Kwame Nkrumah and, most influentially, Frantz Fanon. In his analysis, the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in the Third World and their victories in Ghana, Cuba and Algeria became the single most inspiring influence of early proponents of the theory in the United States, such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture). To them, the understanding of the oppression of blacks and other people of colour in the United States could be most suitably enhanced by the critique of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

They found relevant the analysis of the domination of oppressed people based on the violence of the colonizer, the exploitation of their (colonized people's) land, labour and natural resources, and the systematic attempt to destroy the culture of non-European people in the search for profits.⁴¹

In the late 1960s and 1970s, anti-racist analysis and activism increasingly worked from within a developing internal colonial framework. This framework converged with the long tradition of Black Nationalism, the movement for black power, and the growing radicalization of many activities. From this emerged a theory and practice that defined the Third World extensively to also include black people within the United States, requiring political and economic independence to end their oppression. Although organizations such as Black Panther Party, the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) after 1965, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers described their ideology and strategy as *revolutionary nationalism*, they implicitly subscribed to the theory of internal colonialism.⁴²

Building on the thesis of Stokely Carmichael and Hamilton as well as Robert Allen, Peter Bohmer proceeds to note that as a theoretical framework, the theory of internal colonialism rejects integration as the solution to the problem of oppression and exclusion. Instead, it sees the *ghetto* as the site of oppression and simultaneously the base for black resistance and power. The state, according to Bohmer, maintains white capitalist domination in two main ways. It represses demands for black power and self-determination but also sponsors social programmes, such as poverty reduction measures, and affirmative action to co-opt political challenges. Like the class-based Marxist and Neo-Marxist theories, the theory of internal colonialism locates the root of racial oppression in capitalism, and sees the accumulation of capital as a key determinant of earnings, profits and economic change. The theory of internal colonialism however departs from the orthodox Marxist approach in the sense that it does not reduce nationality or race relations to pure class relations and class struggle. Rather, one's race or ethnic origin is seen as central to the determination of one's identity, one's work and one's life.⁴³ In Bohmer's view, the focus in internal colonialism is on racial oppression itself, rather than on racial division as merely an instrument of capitalist control and as an impediment to the unity of the working class.⁴⁴

David S. Walls distinguishes between an 'internal colony' and an 'internal periphery'. This followed his view that the internal colonialism model is less than adequate in the analysis of the underdevelopment of Central Appalachia. Mainstream social scientists had initially, in the course of the 1960s, explained the 'stubborn persistence of poverty and underdevelopment' in Appalachia based on either the *subculture of poverty* model or the *regional development* model—which, in addition to the internal colonialism model, were first developed in the context of underdevelopment in the Third World and later applied analogically to Appalachia. The analytical failure of these models and the social policy that followed from then led radical intellectuals and activists to develop an internal colonialism model for the Central Appalachian region. The comparative edge of this framework over the other two consists essentially in its explanation of inequality and exploitation; it suggests the need for an anti-colonial movement and a radical restructuring of society with a redistribution of resources to the poor and powerless. But Walls still considered it inadequate in the Appalachian context and, thus, formulated the *internal periphery* model, which suggests 'that Central Appalachia is best characterized as an internal periphery within an advanced capitalist society.'⁴⁵

Walls acknowledges the usefulness of the theory of internal colonialism, but suggests that it is more useful when it is defined in a rigorous sense than if it, as often abused, is used as 'an all-inclusive catchword.'

In his appraisal of Gonzalez-Casanova's and Berghe's definitions (previously quoted in this work), Walls notes that Gonzalez-Casanova's criterion of a dual class structure appears to mean the same thing as the dominance of one group (or coalition of groups) over another (or others) and relations of economic inequality in Berghe's *ideal type*. The latter would also require territorial separation and a special governing unit for full correspondence to the internal colonialism model. On this note, Walls asserts:

I find it most useful to adopt a definition between González-Casanova and van den Berghe, thus requiring economic exploitation, a dual class structure based on ethnic differences, within one or more distinct geographic regions. In other words I would place internal colonialism as a special case within the theory of dependent capitalist development.⁴⁶

Walls' eclecticism makes his definition most suitable. Applying his definition to our present study, Ogoni does not fit into his internal periphery categorization of Appalachia. Rather, I suggest, as will become obvious in due course, that constitutes an internal colony within the larger Nigerian state.

Ogoni as an Internal Colony

As our preceding analyses have indicated, capitalism in the West, logically, prompted overseas imperialism, which involved the acquisition of overseas colonies. The creation of Nigeria was considered as an expedient formula for the advancement of the economic motives of the imperial state. Thus a state was foisted upon the many geo-cultural entities that are now known as Nigeria. This was a direct form of colonialism involving a core, metropolitan state of Britain as the imperial power, and the marginal, peripheral colony of Nigeria. The colonial economy hinged on a 'master-slave' relationship in which both the land and peoples of the colonies were willy-nilly exploited by their colonial masters.

As anti-colonial agitations and nationalist struggles intensified within the colonies towards the 19th century, direct colonialism became increasingly unpopular. The colonies eventually gained, their independence, but capitalism gathered incremental momentum, leading as it were, to the metamorphosing of direct overseas colonialism into neo-colonialism. In this new arrangement, the colonies are 'ruled' by proxy with the unseen hands of their erstwhile colonizers. Since, exploitation can only thrive on either the ignorance or powerlessness—or both of these—of the victim, it became a matter of strategy for the colonialists to manipulate conditions in the new states. This explains why conditions were manipulated in Nigeria prior to independence, and even afterwards, to ensure that her economy continued to be an appendage to the metropolitan state. It is needless to delve into the details of the intrigues that led to the institutionalisation of the northern hegemony which has fostered the economic exploitation of minorities by a coalition of the dominant groups. However, as I have earlier noted somewhere 'it would be thoroughly naïve and, perhaps, logically imprecise to oversimplify the analysis of Nigerian hegemonic system into a watertight compartmentalized North-South dichotomy.'⁴⁷ The argument is that pure economic class antagonism does not go perfectly along ethnic cleavages—which is a major limitation of orthodox Marxian framework in the analysis of underdevelopment and ethnic domination within post-colonial African states.

Nigeria, as we have pointed out, is a product of imperialism. That is not to claim, as a matter of absolute certainty and universality, that imperialism constitutes both the *necessary* and the *sufficient conditions* for internal colonialism. In points of fact, it is difficult to resolve the problem of the 'counter factual', that is, to predict precisely what would have happened without colonialism, which according to the advocates of the *theory of the counter factual*, is formally unknowable. But there is no denying that western imperialism created the political, economic and other conditions that have engendered internal colonialism in Nigeria.

Ogoni is a rural community of farmers and fishers numbering about 832,000 according to the 2006 National Census. It is located in the Niger Delta in South-eastern Nigeria. Oil and gas reserves were discovered in the area in 1957, a year after the first discovery in Nigeria was made in Oloibiri. Commercial exploitation commenced a year later. From then till 1993 when oil exploration and exploitation in the area were stopped, the operations were handled by Shell Petroleum Development Company (Nigeria) Ltd. (SPDC), a joint venture between the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), Shell International, Elf and Agip. There are 12 oilfields, 205 oil wells, and 5 flow stations in Ogoniland with a drilling capacity of 185 barrels per day.⁴⁸ Within about 34 years of operation some 634 million barrels of oil were produced in the area⁴⁹ and 'Ogoni nationality have provided the Nigerian nation with a total revenue estimated at over forty billion naira, or thirty billion dollars.'⁵⁰

Various obnoxious land cum mineral resource policies have been crafted to enrich and empower the dominant class at the expense of the minorities. As a marginalized minority, Ogoniland is thrown into a situation that is the same as what Terry Lynn Karl describes as *Paradox of Plenty*⁵¹, Karl Maier laments that:

The Ogonis received much of the harm but few of the benefits the oil industry had to offer. Poverty is endemic in Ogoniland and the Niger Delta as a whole. Education and health facilities are primitive at best, and few Ogoni homes enjoy the most basic services, such as electricity and running water. Under the government's revenue sharing scheme, first 1.5 percent, then 3 percent, and most recently 13 percent of income earned in a particular area was supposed to be returned to that region. The fact that a succession of military governments have failed to honor these commitments is the one thing on which Ogoni radicals and Western corporate executives agree.⁵²

After a squashed fierce resistance to the imposition of colonial rule on them Ogoni was finally forcibly acquired by the British as a protectorate in 1914, the same year that Nigeria came into existence following the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates. Thus, as asserted by Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni writer, environmentalist and minority rights crusader, British colonialism 'forced alien administrative structures on us and herded us into the domestic colonialism of Nigeria.'⁵² In the new arrangement, the North with more states and an allegedly inflated population, became politically dominant over the South. Nigeria has 'more than three hundred distinct ethnic groups with differing cultures, languages, and religions'⁵³, among which are three dominant groups—the Hausas in the North, the Yorubas and the Ibos in the South. The Ogonis are thus one of the country's many ethnic minorities. Ogoni—and, by extension, the entire Niger Delta—constitutes the subaltern and an internal colony within the context of the Nigerian political economy, with a northern hegemony. As noted by E. U. M. Igbo in a paper published in 1997, but probably written in 1995,

One of the most controversial issues between the major ethnic groups in Nigeria is the mon[o]poly of power by the north. Of the 35 years of political independence, the north has been in power for 31 years: Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966); General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975); General Murtala Mohammed (1975-1976); Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983); Major General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985); General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993); and General Sani Abacha (1993-date). The only exceptions where southerners have occupied the seat of power were 'circumstantial' as in the case of (1) Major-General J T Aguiyi-Ironsi (January-July 1966) after he hijacked the military coup by young army officers; (2) General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979) after some military officers assassinated the Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed, and (3) Chief Ernest Shonekan (1993) after General Ibrahim Babangida stepped down from power. Indeed, it is believed in some circles that the annulment of the 1993 election was because the candidate believed to have won was from the South⁵⁴

It may be relevant to add that General Abdulsalami Abubakar, also a northerner, took over power as Head of State following Abacha's death in 1998. For the first time after about 39 years of Nigeria's existence as a self-governed state, a southerner in the person of the retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, effectively occupied the office of civilian President of Nigeria in 1999. He ruled for two consecutive four-year tenures and was then succeeded by a northerner, Musa Yar'adua, whose death in office ('circumstantially') ushered in Goodluck E. Jonathan, his Vice President from the South, as President to complete their four-year mandate. On completing his tenure under the Yar'adua/Jonathan administration, Jonathan contested for the Presidential seat in 2011 and won. Some analysts have expressed the view that the North would probably have schemed Jonathan out of the 'Big Boys' Game' if he was not overseeing the election as an incumbent. Interestingly, the recent unprecedented spate of violence and aggression against the Nigerian State by the Boko Haram, a north-based terrorist group, tends to lend credence to the allegation in some circles that it is a sponsored subversion by some members of the northern ruling class. This speculation has been further supported by the shocking revelation by the State Security Service (SSS) that a northern member of the federal parliament was sponsoring the activities of Boko Haram.

However, as previously noted, the 'unholy' alliance of the Hausa-Yoruba-Ibo triad renders a strict North-South dichotomy problematic and somewhat imprecise. Thus, while the North exercises hegemonic control over the South, the Ogonis, according to Tom Mbeke-Ekanem, constitute 'minority within minority.'⁵⁴ This derives from the fact that beyond the marginal status they share with their neighbours in the South, they, like the Andonis, Ikwerres, Etches, for example, are further marginalised and 'colonized' by their relatively more dominant minorities such as the Ijaws.

Describing the condition of the Ogonis and similar minorities, Mbeke-Ekanem asserts: 'Left out of the equation of governance and control in their own country are the minorities, from whose land much of the resources are exploited.'⁵⁵ Ogoniland is one of the most underdeveloped regions in Nigeria in spite of its very high percentage contribution to the country's total earnings. This state of underdevelopment is not a direct reflection of geographical patterns of distribution of natural resources. Rather, it is majorly the result of systematic exploitation that alienates them from their resources, coupled with a cultural division of labour that excludes them from the most lucrative jobs and appointments. The condition of the oil producing minority of Ogoni in Nigeria is very similar to that of the *ghetto* as analyzed by Bohmer. Ben Naanen also subscribes to the suitability of the theory of internal colonialism in the analysis of the politics of oil and resource control in Nigeria. He asserts that "in regard to oil-producing minorities and the Ogonis in particular, an appropriate conceptual framework to help explain the situation giving rise to their present struggle is that of internal colonialism."⁵⁶ By the 'present struggle' in the preceding excerpt, Naanen is referring to the various faces of the 'politics of nationalism' and minority rights struggle. He accepts the basic thesis of the theory as contained in its original formulation by Michael Hechter. He, however, seeks to advance a modified version of internal colonialism as a suitable framework that will 'substantially help in illuminating the relationship between the central Nigerian State and its oil-producing periphery.'⁵⁷ Such a modification, in my view, fits into Walls' definition above.

Naanen also opines that internal colonialism began in Nigeria, not through economic domination (it was the lack of it), but through political penetration deriving from a skillful pursuit of political control, aided crucially by numerical preponderance. Political power then becomes an instrument for transferring resources from the numerically weaker groups to develop the dominant areas, creating thereby an economically advantaged and powerful *core* alongside an impoverished and weak *periphery*.⁵⁸ He further points out that in the case of Nigeria's oil producing communities, this process of ethnic domination and peripherisation was aided by the presence of multinational corporations (MNCs) as well as state-owned enterprises. Using their numerical advantage and privileged access to the existing opportunity structure, the dominant class was able to infiltrate the MNCs, thereby constituting the comprador class that mediates between the MNCs and the dominant group at the expense of the minorities. From Naanen's analysis of the dynamics of internal colonialism in Nigeria's oil producing communities, there are three key elements involved in the process:

...internal colonialism in Nigeria's oil producing communities, can be located at the conjuncture of three principal developments: first, ethnic-based political domination, which is used to expropriate the resources of the oil communities for the benefit of the dominant groups; second, the alliance between the dominant groups, the oil companies and state enterprises, which restricts the minorities, access to modern and more rewarding sectors of the oil economy ;and. Third, oil-based environment degradation, which undermines the traditional peasant or fishing economy of the oil-producing areas without providing a viable economic alternative.⁵⁹

From our preceding quotation it becomes adequately clear that the cultural division of labour which Hechter highlighted in his theory of internal colonialism would, in the Nigerian context, derive from the restriction of the minorities' access to the modern and more rewarding sectors of the oil economy. It becomes further clear from our analysis thus far that in the present post-colonial era, internal colonialism is no less an evil than was the barefaced colonialism of the pre-independence era. It is even grimmer because, as Zeyaul Haque asserts, 'internal colonialism oppresses and de-humanizes as relentlessly as its predecessor. To top it all, it blames the victims for their plight.'⁶⁰ Haque also notes that:

A major problem of the post colonial world is what is called internal colonialism, the relentless oppression and exploitation of the masses at the hands of the elite that replaced colonial administration. The result is that large chunks of population in the former colonies hardly feel the distinction between white masters and the new upper class....⁶¹

One important point is brought out by Hague; namely the fact that despite the tendency to collectively regard the core-periphery as more or less a class boundary, only a privileged 'sub-class' of people within the core region do actually appropriate the benefits from its dominance over, and exploitation of, the periphery. Thus, internal colonialism cannot be rationalized even on the basis of an appeal to the democratic principle of "the rule of the majority". It seems, then, that the dominant group in the context of internal colonialism is actually a privileged and 'powerful minority' sub-group or sub-class of a dominant group (and sometimes a majority within a minority) in a polarized society.

Conclusion

Nigeria is not yet an *advanced* capitalist state, but rather an *emerging* capitalist state with domestic structures and institutions that knit her fragile economy ineluctably within the global web of capitalistic imperialism. This, as we have seen, is not a purely economic phenomenon; it rather involves a complex interplay of economic, political and even sociological variables. Thus, Ogoni is not just an internal periphery within an advanced capitalist society. Such a categorization, with all its analytical benefits, blurs the institutional framework and some cultural variables that are relevant in the analysis of the nature of economic exploitation and domination in our present context. Our also study reveals the dual class structure of the Nigerian society, within which Ogoni constitutes an internal colony in a complex relationship that involves hierarchies of exploitation. At the global level, the institutions and economy of the Nigerian state are enmeshed in the harsh realities of dependence which Third World economies generally have had to grapple with. At the national level we find an untidy divide of North South as well as an unholy triad of the major ethnic groups utilizing the paraphernalia of state power to perpetuate dominance. All these go hand-in-hand with a third level of dominance which consists in a neo-colonial mechanism of an indigenous stratum of officials ruling in the interests of the dominant group. The internal colonialism model, especially as postulated in Wall's blend of Gonzalez-Casanova's and Pierre van den Berghe's definitions, is thus an appropriate theoretical model for explaining Ogoni's (and by extension the Niger Delta region's) relationship with the dominant groups within Nigerian society.

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