

## **The Minority Question and Social Justice in Nigeria. The Ogoni Case.**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria passed through the excruciating pain of British colonialism. It was a painful and exploitative process that ensured an unimpeded access to Nigeria's raw materials and unimaginable wealth. This process continued for many decades. By the time a fragile independence was granted in October 1, 1960, a systematic process of grooming those that would inherit political power has been completed and 'extremist elements' consciously sieved out. The new bourgeois class continued from why their predecessors stopped in the consolidation of their economic strength by perpetually hanging on to power. In this wealth acquisition spree social justice, protection of the minorities and good governance becomes forgotten slogans. This paper seeks to examine social justice and the minorities in Nigeria, with a focus on the Ogoni Ethnic Nationality. We relied on secondary sources for our data collection. These include, a review of existing literature, newspapers, magazines, court judgment and browsing of internet for information as they bear relevance to the study. It was discovered that colonialism created a ruling class in Nigeria which has been forcefully and violently reproducing itself through election and military coups. This class use their political power to reinforce and consolidate their economic strength and those of their cronies. The minorities, especially from the regions where Nigeria derive its economic strength, and the poor are flagrantly abandoned and maltreated. This is the root of social injustice in the country. We, therefore, recommend that the resources that accrue in Nigeria should be equitably distributed in Nigeria in such a man that it will enhance the common good. This would minimize the rising discontent and frustration as in Ogoni and other Niger Delta communities.

**Keywords: Colonialism, Niger Delta, Ogoni, Bourgeois Class 'Extremist elements'**

### **Introduction**

All through civilization, human beings have been saddled with onerous challenges of survival. These could be externally induced or an endogenous outburst. Nevertheless, in whatever firm or shape it takes, the aftermath is that a historical lesson is learned and most importantly the production of historical figures becomes an inevitability. Therefore, social

overturns cannot represent the sole achievement of gifted and outstanding individuals, rather it is the dynamism of a people in their quest for material survival. It is this quest for subsistence that is the locomotive of history. In other words, history is not a teleguided phenomenon, but dictated by the material conditions of a people.

Nigeria experienced the harshest and exploitative part of colonial rule. Colonialism was primarily an enterprise for mindless exploitation of the colonies. The abundance of the raw material which were needed to service European industrial economy offered a magnetic attraction in Africa. In other to cloak the real intention of the colonial imperialists, all kinds of unsubstantiated and unverified conclusions were made about the continent. The African was adjudged to be a savage because of his total incapacity for improvement and without a mighty past. In 1831, Fredrick W. Hegel (1770-1831) declared that; the Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. There is nothing harmonious with humanity in this type of character. At this point we quit Africa, not to mention it again, for Africa is no historical part of the world. What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature (Davidson, 1984, p.16), Rodney (1972), Ake (1991) and Fanon (1980) have noted the violence, disarticulation and disorientation which colonialism imposed in Africa. Whatever, policies and programmes the colonial officers introduced only facilitated an unquestionable conformity to colonial agenda and enhanced the unsupervised powers and larger-than-life posture of the white man. They inflated their sense of self-importance, build virtual personality cults and developed bombastic nicknames for themselves (Siollun, 2021, p.314).

By the 1960s when a fragile independence was granted, it became clear that the departing colonial officers had systematically groomed those that would continue the deepening of their exploitative and anti-people polices. There was hope and high expectation that Nigeria would be a rudder state that would propel events in the continent. This was predicated on its endowment and treasured by the colonialists. Eleazu (2020,p.349) stated that:

The colony was the largest of England's African holdings as well as the most profitable and its 'moderate' transition, under England's 'enlightened' tutelage was the pride of the colonial office. Nigeria was represented as the realization of the best intentions of the West in those areas we first attempt to bleed white and then call underdeveloped. In fact, Nigeria was a political legend, conjured out of a patchwork of trading routes in order to make money and gain ground for England. But it was

and is vital to England's idea of itself that the ultimate brutality and greed of Empire be rationalized to more humane and altruistic ends.

Unfortunately, the bourgeois class that emerged as rulers were ideologically barren, saw themselves as the repository of wealth and power. They were not united on the concept of a progressive Nigeria and most importantly relied on primordialism to consolidate their firm grip on power. This made it possible to expand their economic fortune through a well-orchestrated primitive accumulation spree. In the estimation of this class, entrepreneurial adventure does not ensure rapid wealth as much as privatizing public office to guarantee unimaginable affluence. It is not amazing that this class since 1960 to the twenty-first century has continued to preside over a non-productive economy. Rather, they prefer a dependent economy with a rentier character producing what it does not consume and importing what it consumes. Such a ruling class presiding over such a vulnerable economy cannot experience any macroeconomic stability and would always experience perennial social irrationality. It is therefore, not surprising that Nigeria that was rated as the rising star in the galaxy of emerging African states in the 1960's, has assumed many demeaning epitaphs such as the 'crippled giant', 'open sore of a continent', 'a giant with clay feet', 'hegemony on a shoe string' and 'crumbling Tower of babel' (Jega and Farris, 2010,p.6) in the twenty-first century. In this scenario where governance is measured by ability to engage in rabid wealth aggrandizement, the minorities who have less access to power and wealth would be suffocated and treated as an insignificant extra. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the minority question and social justice in Nigeria: The Case of Ogoni Ethnic Nationality (OEN).

### **Clarification of Concepts**

The objective of this study cannot be accomplished without a comprehension of some of the related concepts that we shall come across. Apart from giving a focus to the work, it would assist the reader to appreciate the theme of the discourse. The concept of minority has become a recurring decimal in Nigeria's political lexicon. Nigeria's ethnic pluralism constitute one of its symbol of greatness if properly harnessed with 389 ethnic groups (Otite, 2000), but the country presents a picture of a tower of diversity. Unfortunately all the ethnic groups are not equal both in human capital and natural resources. Most important is the demographic dimension which has distinguished three groups as the dominant ethnic groups. These are the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani. Their geographical location are North for the Hausa/ Fulani, West for the Yoruba and East for the Igbo. The rest ethnic groups are tagged minorities and are scattered within the geographical position of the majority ethnic groups. An interesting aspect of this categorization is that the

emergence of the Nigeria bourgeois class is not limited to the major ethnic groups. The class is spread though not evenly across the ethnic groups.

According to the United Nations report in 2010, a minority is a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state in a non-dominant position, whose members being nationals of the state-possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characters differing from, those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, tradition, religion and language (UN,2010).

From the above definition, we can see that minority groups are in a non-dominant position, share a common culture, and have a sense of solidarity and social consciousness to preserve, protect and promote their cherished identity. When they are placed in a situation where they cannot fulfill their basic needs, the question of what to do becomes inevitable. Minority question in this context involves all the struggles and strategies to ensure that the minority group is not allowed to be swept into degeneracy and cascading into retrogression. It is the question of survival and participation in the struggle for social reproduction without any systemic inhibition. This is to circumvent fears and apprehensions.

Justice is anchored on goodness and fairness. It is a virtue that emphasizes equity and balanced treatment of people with common standard. Obomanu (2020, p42) noted that justice represents equal and continuously enhanced treatment and opportunities for individual human groups both in law, socio-economic and political quarters. Any community or society that is devoid of justice is on a clay feet waiting for an imminent collapse. It is against this backdrop that Asirvatham and Misra (2006, p350) stated that it gives to each person rights, as his share in the whole system and it thus reconciles the claims of one person with another. It also gives each principle of distribution-liberty, equality and fraternity its share and weight in determining the distribution actually made, and it thus adjusts principle to principle. According to Plato (1969), justice is placing every person in the society where he is naturally endowed. Social justice, therefore means a process of fair and equitable treatment of people in the society regardless of their status creed and identity. In the next section, we shall examine how social injustice has heightened the minority question in Nigeria with a focus on the OEN.

### **The Ogoni Struggle**

What is often regarded as the Ogoni struggle cannot be unrelated with the environmental disorder, grand corruption and the systemic vivisection of the Niger Delta region by the Nigerian bourgeoisie. This has engendered a patently unsustainable paradox of affluence and affliction. The historical aftermath of these anti-people agenda is that those areas that sustain the economic vein of the Nigerian state are perpetually left to float in the tide of rising frustration, vulnerable to extreme poverty and bereft of basic amenities. It is like the future of this region has been mortgaged to a world of motion without movement, development of backwardness and militarization of all facets of social engagement.

The Niger Delta is one of the global deltas. Its grandeur and abundance have had a magnetic attraction to apostles of capitalism. The region has existed for thousands of years with ethnic groups like Ikwerre, Ijaw, Ogoni, the Akalaka group, Bini, Isoko and Etche. It transverses about six states. These include Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Delta. But in 2007 Ondo, Abia, Imo were added to make it nine states. This addition was not strictly on geographical and ecological considerations, but the main factor of oil production. The region accounts for more than 77.4% of Nigeria's wetlands or 33% of Nigeria's total land mass. It lies between latitude 4<sup>o</sup> and 1<sup>o</sup> north and longitude 5<sup>o</sup> and 9<sup>o</sup> east of Greenwich. As the river flows from River Niger into the Atlantic Ocean it forms a forked shape creating an avalanche of creeks, rivulet, streams and rivers such as Num, Farcados and Sombriero (Choba). The marine vegetation and the ecology of the region over the years have influenced the culture and wellbeing of the people. Therefore, to disorient the environment is to dump the people in a perennial morass of misery and pain. During the colonial epoch, the region was the hub of colonial economy both in slave trade and palm oil. Perhaps this was why in 1888, Sir Harry Johnson described it as 'chiefly remarkable among our West African possessions... For the exceptional facilities which they offer for penetrating the interior by means of large and navigable streams and by a wonderful system of natural canalization which connects all the branches of the lower Niger by means of deep creeks' (Dike, 1959, p.19).

By the mid-twentieth century, the Niger Delta exposed its mineral abundance when oil was struck in Oloibiri in 1956. From that date to the twenty-first century, oil and gas have remained the major economic support of the Nigerian state. The exploitation and seismic activities that characterize oil and gas production are not environmentally- friendly, especially with a class that is conscienceless when it comes to shameless looting of public wealth. According to Ainabor, Mettuagham and Edeh (2012, pp.105-106), the oil-rich Niger Delta is priced by multinational corporations, chief among them is shell, which derives approximately 10 percent of its global profit from the region. The oil companies have

enormous profits and enriched a lot of Nigerians while despoliation ravages the people's land and drives the local people into poverty.

Apart from Oloibiri, oil was found in various places of OEN such as Bomu, Ebubo and Eleme. According to Saro-Wiwa (1992, p.11), Ogoni covers approximately 202 square miles and forms the eastern most extension of the main land fringe bordering the eastern Niger Delta, lying in an area between approximately latitude 4.05 and 4.20 north and longitudes 7.10 and 7.30 East. From the 1950's to the late twentieth century, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) have been having a field day drilling the Ogoni oil, and as a minority placed in a non-dominant and influential position, SPDC did not hesitate to abandon with impunity their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and even adherence to the globally accepted standards of oil and gas exploitation. Their seamless relationship with the Nigerian state presided over by economic predators made them to engage in a gradual despoliation and extermination of the people. Saro-Wiwa, (1992,p.44) pointed out that 'shell-BP has behaved cruelly, stupidly and in a racist manner'. As in other Niger Delta Communities, Ogoni people were placed in a trajectory of vulnerability. They watched and weakly stood as the blood of their strength was drained to enrich a few people in a dominant political position. As the accumulation of oil wealth increased on the side of the Nigerian ruling class, it correspondingly resulted to accumulation of poverty, militancy, short life expectancy and hardship on the side of the people. Indeed, the state has consigned the Nigerian poor of the Niger Delta extraction to a dream of unconsciousness. The democratization of poor living standards continues to deepen; the ruling class have abandoned the clamour for good governance enshrined in Section 16(2b) of the 1999 constitution as amended. It stated that 'the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good'. In a poetic manner characteristic of his humorous and sarcastic tradition, Ken Saro-Wiwa asserted that 'the flames of shell are flames of hell we bask below their light wrought for us save the blight of cursed neglect and cursed shell'.

By 1967, more than 100,599 barrels of oil have been drained out of Ogoni in 38 oil wells from Bornu, Ebubu and Korokoro (Amanyee, 2001, p.16). This means that enormous damage had been done to the people's environment, aquatic life and agricultural circle. The enormity of this negative effort became a global concern when the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) called for the cleaning of Bodo environment. According to Saro-Wiwa (1992, p.47);

...all entreaties made to shell-BP to provide the people with alternative water- supply have been rebuffed. Our people have been compelled to

sacrifice all life supporting necessities so that the nation may enjoy economic boom from the oil industry.

He went on to recount the woes of the helpless people. There is perpetual high-pitch noise emanating from shell BP, heavy vibrating machines, trucks and Rig heads. The deafening effect of the cumulative frequencies of all such noise can besides being alarming, be very serious. We have turned shouters, hooters and howlers not speakers (Saro-Wiwa 1992, p.67). Apart from the hazards enumerated above, Ogoni people have been subjected to an unending environmental dysfunctionality because of gas flare in most of the flow stations and the two refineries at Alesa Eleme, and constant oil spill. Mmom (2003) noted that from 1972 to 1982, a total of 1,581 spills took place with 1,678,989.42 volume of oil. From 1983 to 1996 there were 9,819 incidents and 43,782.18 volume spilled. Considering the lack luster attitude of the Nigerian state, many volumes of the oil were not recovered. This percolate into the soil to make it permanently infertile. The gas flare into the atmosphere enhances the formation of dangerous substances like cyanide, nitrogen dioxide and nitric acid. These are harmful to humans and can exacerbate climate change. As SPDC refused to ameliorate its injurious violation in the exploitation of oil and gas, Ogoni people and indeed Niger Delta people were left with no other choice than to take whatever cause of action that would attract the attention of the exploiters. In other words, what could be regarded as the flame of activism is a precipitate of the brazen refusal to listen to the looming suffocation, woes and cries of the exploited people of Niger Delta.

### **Manifestations of the Struggle**

The rising frustration discontent and betrayal perpetrated by the Nigerian state in connivance with 'the ardent worshippers of the devil's excrement' snowballed into a systematic and well-orchestrated resistance in the Niger Delta, particularly in Ogoni. According to Ibeanu (2008, p.16).

The devil's excrement must be something made in hell, what with the constant gas flare (towers of fire), agony and massive destruction which are associated with it. The worshippers of this devil are oil companies, stock brokers, government officials, criminal and cult groups. State security forces and private security agencies working for oil companies-practice idolatry and pyromancy through insatiable quest for oil money and fire power (arms and ammunitions).

The first manifestation of the neglect of the Niger Delta poor was the emergence of Isaac Adaka Boro and his Ijaw compatriots. Responding to his father's (Jasper) homily to

abandon his mission and be flown to overseas for further studies, Boro reply undelied the degree of his commitment to his mission and perspicacious understanding of the task ahead. According to him, 'the Ijaws were going into perpetual bondage if we did not strike now, not only our families but also the entire Ijaws would be infernally chained' (Tabekaemi 1982, p.113). It was Obvious that Boro, and his comrade-in-arms were not ready to tolerate the woolly antics of the bourgeois class of Eastern region extraction hence the declaration of Niger Delta Peoples Republic on February 23, 1996. Although, Boro's Twelve Day Revolution was crushed by the Nigerian state, it did not crush the ripple it generated and the root cause of their discontent. It was like crushing and smashing the messenger without looking at the message.

In 1990, Ogoni people formed what became the vanguard of Niger Delta demand for resource control under the aegis of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). In 1991, the organization launched the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBRs). OBRs encapsulated the woes of OEN and the minimum demand of the people from the Nigerian state and the multinational companies.

It unequivocally stated that;

Multinational oil companies, namely shell (Dutch/British) and chevron (American) have severally and jointly devastated our environment and ecology, having flared gas in our villages for 33years and caused oil spillage, blow-outs etc. and have dehumanized our people, denying them employment and those benefits which industrial organizations in Europe and America routinely contribute to their areas of operation (Saro-Wiwa, 1982,p.98).

It further stated that;

The Ogoni people abjure violence in their just struggle for their right within the federal republic of Nigeria, but will through every lawful means, and for as long as is necessary, fight for social justice and equity for themselves and their progeny, and in particular demand political autonomy as a distinct and separate unit within the Nigerian nation with full rights (Saro-Wiwa, 1982, p.99).

Pursuant to the enjoyment of the full rights as a separate unit within the Nigerian State, it demand among others,

1. Control of Ogoni political affairs,
2. Use at least fifty percent of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development
3. Protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degeneration
4. And ensure the full restitution of the harm done to the health of our people by the flaring of gas, oil spillages, oil blow outs etc. (Saro-Wiwa 1982, p.199).

MOSOP which was under the chairmanship of Dr. Garrick B. Leton was a potpourri of Ogoni elites with incompatible ideological bent. This suggests that the seed of irreconcilable differences was already planted in the bowl of the organization *ab initio*. While some of them wanted MOSOP to serve as a channel to locate themselves within the warm embrace of the Nigerian ruling class, another group refused. The latter argued that the mandate of MOSOP would be to actualize the dream of Ogoni people as stated in OBRs. Ken Saro-Wiwa and others belong to this group. The elite crisis manifested when some members of the Steering Committee opted to participate in the June 12, 1993, presidential election, and compromise SPDC's continuation of oil activities in Ogoni land, contrary to the decision of the Steering Committee. The aftermath of the internal maneuvering was the emergence of a new Executive of MOSOP. Ken Saro-Wiwa rose from being the spokesman to become the President, while Ledum Mitee became the Vice President. The emergence of a new Executive reinvigorated unprecedented dynamism and determination in the organization. It became the unchallengeable mouthpiece of Ogoni people.

It also exposed the literary expertise, international reach and leadership antics of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Oyirinde (1998,p.68) averred that 'he was a man of spectacular many-sidedness. He was a writer, TV producer, organizer, entrepreneur, publisher, publicist, politician, environmentalist and elder statesman'. He had strong connection with many international pro-rights organizations, such as the Human Rights Watch, Vice President of the United Nations Unrepresented Peoples Organization (UNUPO), United Nations Human Rights Commission, the World Council of Churches and the International Commission of Jurists. It was therefore not difficult to propagate the gospel of Ogoni to the heart of the global community. The aftermath was that Ogoni people that was adjudged to be a people of the backwoods, and wallowing in naivety and timidity suddenly became conscious for themselves. The plight of Ogoni people almost eclipsed that of the Niger Delta. Apart from the internationalization of MOSOP activities through the linkage of the aforementioned organization, there was an array of sub-organizations which facilitated the work of

political and economic conscientization. Such organizations include the National Youth Council of Ogoni (NYCOP), the Federation of Ogoni Women Association (FOWA), Ogoni Teacher Union (OTU), the Council of Ogoni Right (COR), the Conference of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA), Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP), Ogoni Welfare Association (OWA) and Ogoni Students Union (OSU). These organizations had their specific responsibilities in the furtherance of OBRs. Ken Saro-Wiwa came from the Ken-Khana extraction of Ogoni. He was born in 1941 at Bori in what became Ogoni Division. By September 1954 when he was admitted to the Government College, Umuahia, he started experiencing the assumed inferiority status ascribed to Ogoni people. He was told by one of the stewards in the dining hall that 'Ogoni people na stupid people'. Their stupidity arose from the fact that they voted in favour of Action Group Party instead of the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) during the 1957 election in the Eastern Region House of Assembly. According to Saro-Wiwa (1989,p.45).

On my way home at the end of the term, I met with great derision at Aba. Was I going to Ogoni? Those stupid people? They voted Action Group. The Ogoni were always known to be stupid, anyway. The few traders who came from Bori to Aba to buy goods found it necessary to hide their place of origin, otherwise it was likely they would be derided, beaten and subjected to other indignities.

In 1962, when he went to university of Ibadan to read English Language, ethnic consciousness and jingoism did not abate for a pan-Nigerian feeling. As he reflected on these development, he came to the conclusion that;

In all, my experience in Ibadan showed me how deep and how important it is to take cognizance of it in any Nigerian settlement. Additionally, I began to see the need for creating an identity for the small ethnic groups in the county who to their detriment, were not wont to be lumped together with the major groups. (Saro-Wiwa, 1998, p.47).

His reading of Nigeria made him conclude that it was buoyed up by the majority ethnic groups that have less concern for the suffocation of the minority groups. It was against this backdrop that he plugged himself into a trajectory that would uphold, protect, and promote the identity of Ogoni people. What became the genesis of this agenda was the publication in 1968 of the *Ogoni Nationality, Today and tomorrow*. According to him 'my worry about the Ogoni has been an article of faith, conceived of in primary school, nurtured through

secondary school, actualized in the Nigerian civil war in 1967-70 and during my tenure as a member of the Rivers State Executive Council, 1968-73 (Saro-Wiwa, 1999 p49). This passionate drive to rescue Ogoni from cascading into irrelevance within the Nigerian state made him reject the secessionist demand for the Republic of Biafra. He was convinced that Ogoni people and other Niger Delta minorities would witness more gnawing pains and gnashing of teeth in a Republic of Biafra. His fears could be gleaned from the activities of the Eastern Region leadership and their agencies before and during the Nigerian civil war. The secessionist army became uncontrollable. They threw all sense of decorum and civility to the wind, and acted as an army of occupation. Most notorious of this group is the Militia made up of young men and women. Their torture and lawlessness knew no limit. It was as if they had unimpeded license to harass, intimidate and conscript people forcefully into the army.

Not only did the general populace have to contribute towards their food. In fact, each Ogoni village was made to cook for them in each day, but these roguish thieves on their own raided farms, villagers and homes in search of money, wine, food and women. Their propensity to rape women was the most disquieting aspect of them. In my journeys to Enugu, Umuahia, Aba, and other places, I had never heard of raping and murderous beating of husbands, and fathers. But that was the order of the day in my own home (Saro-Wiwa, 1998, p.113).

The philosophy behind the vigorous campaigns of MOSOP so that Ogoni might occupy a pride of place, is anchored an ERECTism- Ethnic Autonomy, Resource and Environmental control. It is a self-reliant strategy where each group no matter the demography would be allowed to control and manage its resources and environment. Unfortunately, this was an anathema to the Nigerian state. In the estimation of the Nigerian ruling class, making the minorities self-reliant in the control of their mineral resources, would automatically deprive them from participating in the siphoning of petro-dollars. Therefore, MOSOP's aggressive campaigns which have affected and influenced events in other Niger Delta communities have to be checkmated with available military might. Consequently, members of MOSOP were placed on state surveillance including all its affiliates.

Government Reaction;

As we stated above, the Nigerian state reacted forcefully and acted on the side of the multinational companies. Like in Umuechem in November 1, 1990 and Choba, the whole of the Niger Delta, especially Ogoniland was militarized. This was because 'the Ogonis constituted a threat to those who ran Nigeria. By targeting the oil industry, the foundation

of more than 90 percent of Nigeria's export earning they had tweaked hundreds of billions of dollars Nigeria had earned in oil revenue since becoming a world-class oil export' (Maier, 2000,p.76). The kinetic strategy of the Nigerian state to the resolution of the Ogoni struggle was epitomized in a Nazi-like military outfit christened the Internal Security Task Force (ISTF). ISTF was headed by Major Paul Okuntimo, a blood-thirsty army officer comparable only to Adolf Hitler's hitman Joseph Goebel. Major Okintumo harboured an 'eliminationist' ideology expressed in the slogan that Ogonis must die. With a well-focused tapestry of anti-Ogoni sensibility, he erroneously convinced himself that Ogoni people were susceptible to heinous acts. It is not amazing that in order to justify the confidence of his masters, Ogoni land became a repository of the worst part of barbarism and bestiality. His strategies included a wasting operation, psychological tactic and stifling of voices of dissent. According to him, 'so the option we had made was that we should drive all these people into the bush with nothing except their pants and the wrapper they were using that night (Amanye 2001, p.132).

It is important to state that the mindless treatment of the Niger Delta sufferings cannot be unconnected to the poor estimation of the people of that region by the ruling class. As poor people occupying the fringe of political power within the Nigerian state, their woes and pains were seen as insufficient to generate any noticeable crack in the country's political economy. In a lecture in 1980, Mr. Philip C. Asiodu, one time Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Mines and Power and a Director in Chevron Nigeria Limited asserted that;

Like (sic) in many other areas of the world, the regions where oil is found in this country are very inhospitable. They are many swamps and creeks. They require injection of money if their conditions and standards of living are to compare with what obtains elsewhere in the country where possibilities of agriculture and diversified industry are much greater. There is a nudging acceptance of the special needs of oil areas in the latest proposals, being discussed by the government, but I believe there is a long way to go to meet the claims of the oil producing areas which see themselves losing non-replacing resources while replaceable and permanent resources of agriculture and industry are being developed elsewhere largely with oil revenue. Given, however, the small size and population of the oil-producing areas, it is not cynical to observe that even if the resentment of oil producing states continue, they cannot threaten the stability of the country nor effect its continues economic development (Saro-Wiwa 1992, p.17).

It was alleged that during the war between Ogoni, Okrika and Andoni, the Nigerian military was solidly on the side of the last two communities. This created the needed opportunity to convert Ogoni land to a minefield of death and devastation. Indeed, this was the most difficult period in Ogoniland. As the place witnessed a massive exodus of professionals and those who had relatives in Port Harcourt. Ogoni land became a dreaded and desolate place. All these were part of the stratagem to ensure that the stability of the country is not threatened by the oil producing areas. But the illusion and unscientific rating of the exploited poor in the Niger Delta was exposed when the coming war in the Delta with its cataclysmic consequences overwhelmed and over powered the invisibility of the Nigerian State. From 1991 to 1999, there was an avalanche of Bill of Rights, Declarations and Charter. All these centered on the pains of the Niger Delta people and the need to protect their natural resources. By the twenty-first century, a new phase of the struggle anchored on militarism emerged. Unfortunately official responses, such as the Niger Delta Development Board, Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Commission, Niger Delta Development Commission and Amnesty Programme to mention a few have not been able to address the root cause of the Niger Delta question. According to Ajayi (1992) 'the national question is the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have the same rights and privileges, access to power and equitable share of national resources'.

The national question is the beacon which the Ogoni struggle is anchored. But it was misjudged, misinterpreted and unreservedly vilified. The internal contractions within MOSOP dichotomized the organization into factions between pro-government, tagged 'vultures' and pro Ken Saro-Wiwa known as MOSOP (Etekpe, 2007, p.170). This was exacerbated by the vociferosity and ubiquitous activities of NYCOP. As a vibrant youth body, it coordinated all the activities of MOSOP and was intolerant to Ogoni deviants, and those with anti-MOSOP sentiments. This was the background for the killing of Chief Edward Kobani, Chief Samuel Orage, Chief Theophilus Orage and Chief Albert Badey on May 21, 1994 at Giokoo in Bodo city. The killing of these distinguished Ogoni men created the enabling alibi to close the noose on Ken Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots. In what could be described as a premeditated action scripted to achieve a predetermined agenda, on May 22, 1994 the then Governor of Rivers State Lt. Col Dauda Komo issued a press statement condemning MOSOP and NYCOP of complicity in the death of the four chiefs. This was followed by the arrest, detention and manhunt of MOSOP officials and their sympathizers. Consequently, fifteen MOSOP and NYCOP officials were arrested and charged before the Civil Disturbances (Special Tribunal) Act of 1987 Cap.53 laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990. The accused persons were arraigned in three batches, for committing murder as

stated in the first schedule item 13 of the law. The Act which came into force on March 18, 1987 was 'to provide for the investigation and trial of persons involved in civil disturbances, in any part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria'. The trial which commenced on February 16, 1995 ended on October 31, 1995. It attracted international attention as people eagerly waited for the outcome of the Tribunal headed by Justice Ibrahim N Auta. The Tribunal's conviction of the complicity of the accused persons was anchored on the alleged statement of Ken Saro-Wiwa. It noted that 'the vultures there at Giokoko Sent you to stop me', was made by the first accused person because security people have stopped the constitutional election campaign rallies organized at Gokana by MOSOP and NYCOP (Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 1995, p.141). According to Falana and Ogunye (1998, 253), the state alleged that, thus prevented, Saro-Wiwa who spoke in an Ogoni (Gokana) dialect to some of his supporters, who had massed round telling them that they should deal with the 'vultures' in Giokoo were hirelings of the military junta and who were responsible for the security forces 'action'.

The condemnation of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Comrades on October 31, 1995 and eventual hanging on November 10, 1995 elicited various reactions from local and international community. It was not a mere emotional effusion, but because the trial was characterized by the ugliest manifestation of anti-MOSOP feelings, prejudice and distortion of the basic rules of procedure in a trial of this nature. Falana and Ogunye (1998) asserted that it was 'Murder. Plain murder'. They noted some contradictions in the whole process. The Act provided for an investigation and trial of persons involved in civil disturbances, and since no investigation, as mandatorily prescribed by the Decree was conducted into the said killings, arraignment of the Ogoni 15 before the Tribunal was illegal and could not be justified under the Decree (Falana and Ogunye, 1998, p.279).

There were allegations that witnesses were induced to appear and witness against the accused persons. For instance (Amanye, 2001, p.221) stated that Charles Danwi, an Ogoni musician and star prosecution witness confessed that he was bribed and forced to implicate ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others. He declared that 'Government gave him ₦30,000.00 bribe. He was also promised contracts from OMPADEC and Shell. The Tribunal only completed its work on October 31, and the PRC confirmation of the sentences took place on November 8, 1995 (Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 1995, p.6). But in confirming the sentences, the Provincial Ruling Council (PRC) brazenly flouted part II section 7(1-2) of the Act. It stated that;

Where a tribunal finds the accused guilty of any offence referred in this Act, the record of the proceeding of the tribunal shall be transmitted to the

confirming authority for confirmation of the sentences imposed by the Tribunal. Any sentences imposed by the tribunal shall not take effect until the conviction or sentence is confirmed by the confirming authority and pending such confirmation the convicted offender shall be kept in such a place of safe custody as the tribunal may determine.

In order to ensure the consummation of a colonial-like pacification, the Nigerian State was in no mood to adhere to such legal niceties as required by its own law. It is practically impossible for the record of proceedings of the tribunal that finished its work on October 31, 1995 to be transmitted to PRC on November 8, 1995 (within nine days). Perhaps it was this deliberate disobedience that prompted the former Prime Minister of Britain Tony Blair to declare that the execution of the nine Ogoni men was a 'judicial murder'. General Sani Abacha who presided over the confirmation was seen to be a good example of bestiality. President Nelson Mandela of South Africa described him as an insensitive frightened dictator, 'sitting on a volcano and I am going to explode it under him' (Tar and Ukham, 2018, p.101). Archbishop Desmond Tutu led a delegation to Nigeria from South Africa on behalf of the convicted Ogoni men. They were assured that the convicted persons would not be killed. The outburst of South African Government was just an expression of betrayal by a Government that cannot keep and respect its commitment. According to Tutu (1995);

The most spectacular slap in the face of my President however, came when General Abacha hanged the writer and human right activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight of his colleagues. Mr. Mandela, already facing criticism from Nigeria pro- democracy activist, was humiliated, how ironically sad it is that a land which helped South Africa to become free should today be seen as such a humble example of injustice, brutality and gross violation of human right.

We discovered that Lt. Col. Komo was pressured by some Ogoni elites and Rivers Chiefs to ensure the demise and riddance of Ken Saro-Wiwa for peace to reign in Ogoni land. They were alarmed by his international connection that would mediate his freedom. The reverberation of the death by hanging of the Ogoni Humans Rights Activist led to the establishment of a Fact – Finding Mission by the Secretary- General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghalhi. The Mission was made up of John P. Page V.A. Mallimath and Kofi Amega. Their Mission was to look into the procedures of the Special Tribunal Act of 1987 that convicted Saro-Wiwa and other human right violations. They visited Lagos and Port Harcourt. In Port Harcourt, the Rivers State human rights delegation was led by Chris Akani, now Eze Chris Akani. The position of Rivers State was widely acclaimed and

greatly exposed the lies of Komo and his praise-singers (Akani, 2000, p.121). After its hearing and consultation, the Mission stated that the Government did not conform to section 7(i) of the Special Tribunal Act of 1987. It declared that in case of the trials of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, that the government of Nigeria consider establishing a Panel of Eminent Jurists nominated by the Chief Justice of Nigeria to establish the modalities to determine who and what extent financial relief could be accorded to the dependents of the families of the diseased. (Akani,2000,p121). It went further to declare that all trials pending and completed under the Civil Disturbances (Special Tribunal) Act should be suspended and further action taken only after the amendments aforesaid are carried out (Akani,2000,p.122).

Today, Ogoni people are still wallowing in poverty with a devastated environment, almost degenerating to a condition of helplessness. Indeed the loss of the four Ogoni Chiefs and the nine human rights activists cannot and never be erased in the collective conscience of the people, neither can the vacuum created by their loss be filled in a short period.

### **Conclusion**

The Nigeria post- colonial state can be described as the extension of the colonial state. It inherited most of the economic norms and political iniquities of the colonial state. Most important is the ruling class which did not border about structural disjointedness and externalization of the economy, but were interested in the plums of office. The orientation which was the continuation of the colonial capitalist ethic laid the foundation for the lingering political and economic disorder in the country. Their self-aggrandizement and exaggerated claims to hang on to power perpetually reduced political struggle to a zero-sum game. In this scenario, survival of the fittest becomes the enduring slogan. As the race for political power betrays all democratic norms, Nigerian peoples are forced to face the harsh realities of what Shraeder (2004,p.177) described as ‘the great expectation – minimal capabilities paradox’.

A ruling class of this extraction, that is selfish, engaged in ostentatious consumption without production can only end up producing a failed state, and incapable of protecting the life and property of the non-ruling class. This is the lot of the Niger Delta minorities. Their demand for enjoyment of living amenities have met with desperate acts of disproportionate brutality. The unyielding desire to suppress the demands of the exploited peoples almost turned the Niger Delta to a killing field. According to Iyayi (2007,p.42);

Beginning with the violent regression of the Niger Delta volunteer force which was formed in the early sixties under Isaac Adaka Boro through the

Macabre murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots by the Nigerian state under Abacha in 1998 to the pillage and massacre of the Odi people, a pillage and massacre reminiscent of medieval wars under the current Obasanjo region, the life of the people of the Niger Delta has been soaked to blood, soot and humiliation.

The fate of Ogoni is an exemplar of the fanatic supremacist culture of conformity and uniformity in which the exploited people have been subjected to. Unfortunately, despite this show of deceit and insensitivity, the Niger Delta people and in fact exploited Nigerian have remained resolute, gradually coming out of their legendary docility and demanding a democratic order as the irreducible minimum. The Ogoni heroes represent all those who died, maimed and suffered for their ethnic nationality to subsist. This is a noble sacrifice. Therefore, we must close ranks in a well-organized manner to circumvent the penetration of cracks induced by internal saboteurs. We must be convinced of the forthrightness of our cause and be courageous to boldly promote and defend our identity. According to Saro – Wiwa (1998,p.374),

I have no doubt at all about the ultimate success of my cause no matter the trials and tribulation which I and those who believe with me may encounter on our journey. No imprisonment nor death can stop our ultimate victory... On trial also is the Nigerian nation, its present rulers and all those who assist them. Any nation which can do to the weak and disadvantage what the Nigerian nation has done to Ogoni, losses a claim to independence and freedom from outside influence.

The noble lesson to be gleaned from the Ogoni heroes is that we should be doggedly committed to a cause, a cause of the exploited and humanity. This occasion, therefore affords us an opportunity to inscribe an epitaph of unity and cohesion in our consciousness. We should endeavour now to nurture a leadership that has a historical consciousness, virtue to decipher when to strike and retreat, a leadership that has the vision of the python, and with ears keen enough to hear even the soft football of the ant (Alagoa, 1979,10). This is the challenge before the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People. Without these virtues, social justice for ogoni people would remain a fleeting illusion.

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