

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Ken Saro-Wiwa's Concept of Erectism: A Paradigm for Sustainable National Development and Unity in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

Nigeria has had a civil war and repeated frequent ethnic and communal wars in virtually all parts of the country ever since it became an independent republic in 1963. It has also witnessed many religious clashes and insurgency. These and other related factors have combined to make the country very unstable, both politically and economically, and disunited. Many scholars regard the multi-ethnic character of the State as its major undoing. On the other hand, political leaders at the national level see the country's amazing ethno-cultural diversity as a social condition for national growth. The politicians have, however, failed to provide the necessary ingredients that would promote national development and unity. This work seeks to examine the appropriateness of Ken Saro-Wiwa's concept of 'erectism' as a paradigm for sustainable national development and unity in Nigeria. Adopting a constructivist approach in the pursuit of that objective, this work critically analyses the systemic anomalies of the Nigerian state vis-à-vis its multi-ethnic structure and concludes that Saro-Wiwa's theory of erectism is a workable formula for promoting national development. The concept entails ethnic autonomy, ethnic ownership and control of resources as well as ethnic control and management of environment.

**Keywords:** Ken Saro-Wiwa, erectism, national development, national unity

### 1. Introduction

Ogoni is one of the more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria located in the southern part of the country. Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian writer and rights crusader, regards the anomalous manner of state politics, economics of resource control, and institutionalised injustice in systems of wealth distribution underlying and sustaining this environmental recklessness and economic strangulation as products of *internal colonialism*. Ogoni, for him, constitutes an internal colony within the Nigerian capitalist structure (*A Month and a Day* 73; Nbeta 9, 12). Hence, the allegations of the Ogoni people and, of course the Niger Delta in general, against the Nigerian government include not only economic exploitation and complicity in environmental degradation by the oil companies but also political marginalization and genocide or ethnocide. As noted by Achim Steiner in his Foreword to the UNEP *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland*:

The history of oil exploration and production in Ogoniland is a long, complex and often painful one that remains seemingly intractable in terms of its resolution and future direction.

It is also a history that has put people and politics and the oil industry at loggerheads rendering a landscape characterized by a lack of trust, paralysis and blame, set against a worsening situation for the communities concerned (6).

The UNEP assessment of Ogoniland, which was conducted for fourteen months between 2010 and 2011 by a team of expert scientists of international repute, established that environmental pollution of Ogoniland has reached such an incredibly high level that it will take between 25 to 30 years and cost an initial one billion U.S. dollars (USD1b) to restore the environment (UNEP *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* 12). It took about six years after the UNEP Report was released in August 2011 before the Federal Government of Nigeria officially launched the Ogoni Clean-up and restoration on 2 June 2016 at Bodo Community in Ogoni. It took barely fourteen months afterwards for the Federal Government to launch the one billion US-dollars (USD1b) Ogoni Clean-Up and Restoration Programme on 7 August 2017 in what seemed to be a political manoeuvre of the ruling party to canvass for votes and support from the Ogoni people in the 2017 general election. Sadly, in a letter written by the Ogoni people under the aegis of Gbo Kabaari Ogoni (Ogoni elders' Forum) to the Minister of Environment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, they lamented that 'a decade after the UNEP report was released and about five (5) years after the flag-off of the Ogoni Clean-up exercise, activities that were considered as emergency measures, and rightly so, are yet to be attended to (Gbo Kabaari 2).

In addition to the findings of the UNEP study, which clearly established that Shell was majorly responsible for environmental pollution in Ogoniland, was a ruling at a Dutch court on 30 January, 2013 in a suit between Bodo Community (in Ogoniland) against Shell over two massively devastating oil spillages. In the verdict, the latter was declared culpable and was ordered to pay damages to the tune of over four hundred U.S. dollars (USD400) to Bodo community. Shell accepted responsibility for those massive oil spillages and opted for an out-of-court settlement in which it offered to pay £55 million (about ₦15.3 billion) as compensation (*Nigerian Monitor*, 'Oil Spill: Shell to pay ₦15.3 Compensation to Bodo Community,' [nigerianmonitor.com](http://nigerianmonitor.com)). However, the process of compensation has been anything but transparent and fair. It

has recently been alleged that Shell is selectively engaging the victims of the spillage with a view to compensating only those that are perceived to be capable of holding it to ransom.

In this study, I seek to go beyond the narrative of oil exploitation and environmental devastation, which have been established matter-of-factly, to examine why these facts constitute a violation of principles of social justice and morality. More crucially, this study seeks to critically analyse the concept of 'erectism' as an appropriate and socially just paradigm for addressing the systemic anomalies in the exploitation and distribution of natural resources in Nigeria. In other words, I seek to examine the principle of *erectism* as a framework for the realization of social justice and national unity with a view to establishing its internal logical consistency and social validity. It would be helpful, however, to first of all provide a definition of the term *erectism*.

## 2. The Concept of Erectism

Ken Saro-Wiwa coined the word 'erectism' from the acronym for Ethnic autonomy, Resource control and Environmental Control (Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* 193). The concept, which can be regarded as the cornerstone of his political theory, has three key underlying principles or components, namely, *ethnic autonomy*, *ethnic resource control*, and *environmental control*. To put it more succinctly, the philosophy of *erectism* regards the various ethnic aggregations (nationalities and nations) that make up the Nigerian State as autonomous, co-equal, and as constituting the proper federating units within the State. Deriving from that postulate is the view that the ethnic groups should control the natural resources in their respective domains, including their physical environment. Saro-Wiwa considers either a well-adapted federal system or a confederation as the only suitable arrangements for a multi-ethnic state such as Nigeria.

Ethnic autonomy as an element of *erectism* does not imply separatism or a sovereign status for the ethnic groups. It rather seeks recognition of the ethnic groups as the basic federating units and emphasizes the granting of constitutional rights to each group to preserve its cultural heritage and advance its cause. The concept of resource control means that the ethnic groups should own and control all the natural resources, including minerals, within their respective territories. The constitution, which should emanate from the people and not foisted on them, should spell out the percentage of the proceeds that accrues to the various tiers of government. The third component, namely environmental control similarly seeks to vest ownership and control of environmental resources in the communities within an ethnic group. This would promote responsible and productive management of the environment and its resources contrary to the reckless manner in which it is exploited by those less affected by the fallouts of such reckless exploitation. A situation in which those who suffer the greatest harm or loss arising from the exploitation of resources receive less or none of the benefits of such exploitation is unjust if unfair.

Before analysing the three principles of *erectism*, it would be methodologically proper to survey the factors that provide theoretical justification for them. Saro-Wiwa's formulation of *erectism* was informed by certain factors, the most determinant of which are the multi-ethnic character of the Nigerian State and the prevalence of certain fundamental and systemic anomalies. We can rightly regard these factors as the arguments for the principles, which I shall discuss next.

## 3. Arguments and Discussion

Saro-Wiwa's formulation of *erectism* can be said to be premised on three main factors, namely: (i) the multi-ethnic character of the Nigerian State, (ii) social and economic injustice, and environmental injustice. Let us briefly examine each of these.

### 3.1. Argument I: The Multi-ethnic Character of the Nigerian State

The multi-ethnic character of the Nigerian state cannot be gainsaid. Nigeria is composed of over 250 ethnic groups of varying sizes and place within the socio-economic and political matrix. As is natural, without a workable institutionalised framework to curtail injustice and promote governance, the group with political and other advantages over the others tend to become oppressive and to marginalise those over which it has advantage. It is, therefore, necessary to have constitutional and institutional safeguards to protect politically, economically and culturally vulnerable individuals and groups in the state.

The Ogoni agenda which Saro-Wiwa championed was anchored on the philosophy of *erectism*. According to him, 'This agenda postulates the equality of all ethnic groups, big or small, within the Nigerian federation as well as the evolution of proper, undiluted federalism in the nation (*A Month and a Day* 76). He was primarily concerned with 'the development of a stable, modern Nigeria which embraces civilized values; a democratic nation where minority rights are protected, education is a right, freedom of speech and association are guaranteed, and where merit and competence are held as beacons (*A Month and a Day* 82). The principle of ethnic autonomy

### 3.2. Argument II: Prevalence of Systemic Injustice

I shall discuss two major forms of injustice identified by Saro-wiwa, namely, economic strangulation and political marginalisation. These constitute the second set of arguments for *erectism* as a paradigm for sustainable national development and unity in ethnically diverse states.

#### 3.2.1. Economic Strangulation

The concept of economic strangulation, or simply economic injustice, is an institutionalized and systemized process of economic exploitation. Exploitation in Nigeria is varied and complex in form, and thus requires an equally complex mode of analysis. From one perspective, exploitation takes the form of class antagonism, Karl Marx identified two

*principal* economic classes in all post primitive communalist societies preceding communism. The five stages of social progression, according to him are primitive communalism, slave-owning society, feudal society, capitalism and communism. Colonial and post-colonial Nigerian States fit into his capitalist stage. The capitalist stage is principally composed of the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletarian* classes, which are the 'exploiter' and 'exploited' respectively. The bourgeoisie class consists of a privileged few who own and control the means of production, that is, capital; whilst the proletariat is the class of the economically and politically underprivileged masses of wage-labourers or workers as well as the *reserved army of labour*.

The Nigerian proletarian class lacks the level of organic cohesion that is required for it to translate into a formidable *antithesis* to the bourgeois class. However, the labour union, an organization of the working people across the country, has on some occasions had impressive impacts on certain national issues. The strike of the oil workers and their supporters in defence of the late Moshood Abiola who won the annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election is a case in point. As Ali A. Mazrui, a Director of the Institute of Global and Cultural Studies and Albert Scheiter Professor in the Humanities, SUNY Binghamton, remarked.

The strike became the most impressive utilization of labour power for democratic ends in the history of post-colonial Africa— regardless of whether or not the strike ultimately succeeded. Its capacity to sustain itself for many weeks and hold the nation's economy to ransom on an issue of national democratic principle has already earned it a place on post-colonial history (Mazrui 21)

A pure class analysis approach to explaining economic exploitation in Nigeria, however, tends to becloud certain important dimensions of social relations within the state. It is important to note, for instance, that neither religion nor class ideology has been able to unite the diverse peoples of Nigeria beyond all the trappings of ethnicity. Thus, ethnicity tends to shape the character and pattern of organized exploitation in Nigeria. The politically cum numerically dominant groups have organized exploitation in Nigeria. The politically cum numerically dominant groups have utilized the paraphernalia of state power to exploit the disadvantaged minorities. A careful survey of the elements of fiscal federalism, particularly revenue allocation, in Nigeria clearly depicts the magnitude of economic odds meted out on the country's hapless minorities.

There is no gainsaying that effective and agreeable allocation of revenue remains one of the most crucial determinants of stability in a federal state. As Eme O. Awa has rightly noted, 'the basic problems in federal finance is how to allocate revenue between the two levels of government and among the units so that each government may have the financial capacity to perform the functions assigned to it' (Awa 62). The effectiveness and agreeability of revenue allocation formulas, in turn, depend on the justificatory essence and social effects of those formulas. The principles of revenue allocation in Nigeria include derivation, fiscal autonomy, Population, balanced development, social development and absorptive capacity. Each of these principles has carried varying weights at different policy periods. The twists in revenue allocation principles are part of the mechanisms of domestic exploitation or *internal colonialism* described by Saro-Wiwa as 'a crude, harsh, cruel, unfeeling and monstrous system whose method has been an outrageous usurpation of economic resources and dehumanization' (A Month and a Day 73).

A number of revenue allocation commissions have been set up in Nigeria. They include the Sir Sydney Phillipson's Commission (1946), Hicks-Phillipson's Commission (1951) and Loius Chick's Commission (1958). Based on the terms of reference given to the Phillipson's Commission, two kinds of revenue were identified – *declared revenue* and *undeclared revenue*. The former referred to regional revenue such as direct taxes, receipts from licenses, etc, collectable and distributable within the region. The undeclared revenue was meant to be shared among the regions. The Commission recommended *derivation*, by virtue of which the north had 46% the west 30% and the east 24%. The Hicks-Phillipson's Commission added the *principle of need* as a revenue sharing principle, and population was used as the determinant of needs. Regrettably, there has never been a reliable census in Nigeria, mainly because some sections of the country inflated the census result in order to have a numerical edge over others (Udoidem 33). In response to the disagreements over the recommendations of the Hicks-Phillipson's Commission, the Chick's Commission granted greater fiscal autonomy to the regions and recommended a complete reversal to *derivation*.

In 1958 oil was found in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta region comprising a good number of Nigeria's minorities. In addition oil became (and has continued to be) the country's main source of revenue. The implication was that given the huge amount of petro-dollars flowing into the economy, the states in the oil-bearing Niger Delta region would receive greater allocations on the basis of derivation principle. This realization triggered a stern rejection of the derivation principle by those who were not favoured by it. These were mostly the majorities and, regrettably, their interest prevailed on the Raisman's Commission set up after Chick's (it was Chick's Commission that recommended derivation). Raisman's Commission, influenced by pressure and manipulations from the majorities, de-emphasized derivation and emphasized *need* based on doctored census figures.

The Rasiman's Commission did actually recommend that oil export, import and excise duties on a variety of other goods should continue to go to the regions. However, in order to trim down the revenue accruing to the oil bearing minorities, it further recommend that only 50% of mining rents and royalties should be paid to oil producing regions. It also recommended the creation of a *Distributable Pool Account*(DPA) into which 30% of the mining rents, royalties and import duties on a variety of goods were paid for distribution among the region. Of this, it recommended 40% for the North, 24% for the West, 31% for the East and 5% for the South (*Leading Issues in Public Finance* 37). These percentages were entrenched on the 1960 Independence Constitution.

Revenue allocation has remained a contentious issue in Nigeria even after independence and a number of commissions have also been set up to examine or re-examine it. Post-independence fiscal commissions include the R.J. Binn's Review Commissions (1964), I.O. Dina's Interim Revenue Allocation Committee (1968), Aboyade Technical

Committee on Revenue Allocation (1977), Pius Okigbo's Revenue Committee (1980), among others. The Binn's Commission was mainly concerned with the DAP and how to distribute the revenue from that account among the regions. The Commission increased the DAP from 30% to 35%. The 35% was to be shared as follows: Northern Region – 42%, Eastern Region – 30%, Western Region – 20%, and Mid-Western Region – 8% (*Leading Issues in Public Finance* 37-38). This was to the disadvantage of the densely populated oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta.

On 22 May 1967 the Federal Military Government promulgated Decree No 15 which created 12 States out of the previously existing three major Regions: six from the North, three each from the East and the West. The Northern States shared 42% on the basis of 'equality of states.' The three Eastern states shared 30% as follows: East Central State - 17.5%; South-Eastern States - 7.5%; Rivers State - 5.0%; and the three Western Region States shared 28% (i.e., 20% and 8% of the Western and Mid-Western Regions respectively) as follows: Lagos – 2%; Western State - 18%; and Mid-Western State – 8% (*Leading Issues in Public Finance* 38-39).

The 1967 revenue allocation arrangement was largely criticized on the ground that it was arbitrary and haphazard. The attendant rift informed the appointment of the late Chief I. O. Dina's Commission in July 1968. Dina became the first Nigerian to head a revenue commission in Nigeria. The appointment of Dina's commission was based on the observation that the revenue allocation arrangement in Decree No. 15 of 1967 failed, either by intent or by default, to take cognizance of the elements of the previous allocation system, namely population, development, needs and derivation. The Dina Report specified that:

- Import on all commodities should be shared equally between the two levels;
- Rent in respect of off-shore mining operations should accrue wholly to the national government;
- Rent and royalties from in-shore (or on-shore) mining operations should be shared between (sic) the federal government, the regions and a special account in the ratio of 15%, 80% and 5% respectively (Awa 71).

The recommendations of the Dina Report were rejected by the Federal Military Government on the ground that 'it over-stepped its terms of reference.' Hence, the federal Government relied on the interim arrangement, which specified as follows:

- About 90% of duties from fuel went to the states of consumption and the rest into the DPA;
- 45% of mining rents and royalties on on-shore production went to the producing state, 50% to the DPA and 5% to federal government;
- 100% mining rents and royalties on off-shore production went to the federal government;
- 50% excise duties went to the federal government and 50% to the DPA.

In 1977 the Aboyade Committee was appointed. It identified a state's Joint Account from which revenue will be shared between federal and state governments, and amongst the states on the basis of the following – equality of access to development opportunities, national minimum standard for national integration, absorptive capacity, independent revenue and minimum tax effort, and fiscal efficiency. It completely jettisoned with the principle of derivation, arguing that derivation had no place in a cohesive fiscal system for national political and social development. The report was rejected by the National Assembly on account of its dubious statistical foundations, attendant measurement problem and the extreme 'technicalities' involved in it.

Following the rejection of the recommendations of the Aboyade Committee, the Dr Pius Okigbo's Committee, (1980) was set up. However, the Bendel State Government was dissatisfied with the recommendations of the Okigbo Committee and, thus, instituted a suit against it, as a result of which the Supreme Court nullified the Allocation of Revenue (Federation Act, etc) Act of 1981 which emerged from the Committee Report. Consequent upon the nullification, leaders of political parties conferred and came up with new formulas which were incorporated into the Revenue Bill and passed by the National Assembly on 10 December 1982. The bill provided for distribution of revenue among the three tiers of government as follows:

Federal Government	-55%
State Government	- 35%
Local Government	- 10%

Out of the 35% allocated to the states, 30.5% was shared on the basis of the following criteria:

Equality of state	- 40%
Population	- 40%
Primary school enrolment	- 15%
Internal Revenue Effort	- 5%

The remaining 4.5% (that is, 35% meant for the state - 30.5% shared as indicated above) was allocated as follows:

Federal Fund for Ecological Problems in all states	- 1%
Allocation for Mineral Producing Areas	- 2%
Federal fund for the Development of Mineral Producing Areas	- 1.5%

The same criteria used for the states were also adopted for the sharing of the 10% meant for local government areas.

An amendment to the revenue allocation formula in 1985 provided, *inter alia*, for 2% of the Federal Account revenue to be paid directly to the mineral producing states and the 1.5% Federal Fund for the Development of Mineral Producing Areas to be calculated as a percentage of the total value of minerals extracted rather than of the total revenue in the Federation Account (*Leading Issues in Public Finance* 42). Derivation continued to receive a paltry 1.5% between 1982 and 1992 when it was reviewed following agitations from aggrieved states and regions to 13%. Below is a table showing the pattern of petroleum revenue distribution in Nigeria from independence to the present.

Years	Producing Areas	Federal Government	Distributable Pool
1960- 1967	50	20	30
1968- 1969	50	50	-
1969- 1971	45	55	-
1971- 1975	45 minus off-shore proceeds	55 plus off-shore proceeds	-
1975- 1979	20 minus off-shore proceeds	80 plus off-shore proceeds	-
1979- 1981	-	100	-
1982- 1992	1½	98½	-
1992- 1999	3	97	-
1999	13	87	-
2000-2006	13	87	-

Table 1: Federal-State Percentage Share in Petroleum Proceeds (1960-2006)

Source: Federal Office of Statistics

As the figures above indicate, there was a progressive decline in derivation percentage from 50% in 1960 to zero in 1981. Even when it was re-incorporated in 1982, it received an embarrassing 1.5%. It rose conservatively to 3% and 13% in 1992 and 1999 respectively. Beside the figures, a far more irritating odd was the dishonest practices involved in the release of funds by the federal government. According to H. A. Ajie and C. Tom Ezi, even the so-called Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) was a hoax, essentially a cruel joke on the oil producing states (Ajie and Ezi, cited in Inoka 47). Figures produced by the Commission's first Chairman, Chief A. K. Horsfall, during his three year tenure (1992- 1995) indicate that going by the 30% derivation formula, the Commission should have received ₦77 billion, but it only received ₦1 billion. It received ₦2 billion in the period 1995-96 when professor Opia was chairman. These figures sharply contrast with the ₦346 billion that the Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF), jocularly referred to as the 'Northern OMPADEC' received in the three-year period of 1994-97 (Ajie and Ezi, cited in Inoka 47).

To further exacerbate an already repulsive situation, the Government, on 6 February 2001, surreptitiously filed a suit at the Supreme Court of Nigeria against the 36 states of the federation. The Federal Government, in the suit prayed the apex court to determine the seaward boundary of a littoral state within the country. Such a boundary would, in turn, determine how much revenue would accrue to the Federation Account directly from natural resources derived from that state pursuant to the provision of Section 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of the Nigeria (as Amended). The Supreme Court judgment, delivered on 5 April 5 2002, vested full ownership of *off-shore* oil with the Government. The practical effect of that is that the 13% derivation formula will only apply to on-shore oil. Thus, states such as Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, etc whose bulk of oil lies off-shore are robbed of what should have become their allocation from the Federation Account based on the derivation principle. As Victor B. Inoka rightly asserts:

... the justice embodied in ... the laws and policies of revenue allocations is not social justice which seeks to promote the wellbeing and welfare of all with equity and fairness, but a 'social justice' that resonates the geopolitical political lop-sidedness of Nigeria's polity in which some groups are regarded as residual or peripheral while others are regarded as central or important (33).

Saro-Wiwa observes, as is evident in the revenue allocation policies, that exploitation has often been legalized by decrees and acts as well as obnoxious court rulings. Much of the exploitation of the oil producing regions is done by conspiracy among the ruling class and the multi-national oil companies – shell, Chevron, Texaco, Elf, etc. Saro- Wiwa declares that:

For a multinational oil company, Shell, to take US thirty billion dollars from the small, defenceless Ogoni People and put nothing back but degradation and death is a betrayal of humanity. For the Nigerian government to usurp the resources of the Ogoni and legalize such theft by military decree is armed robbery (131).

Although Saro-Wiwa, in the above excerpt, refers to the harrowing plight of the Ogoni people, the economic injustice which lies at the heart of his condemnation of the situation is common to all of Nigeria's minority groups and other politically disadvantaged individuals, especially the oil bearing communities. Apart from the oil producing minorities, other minorities in Nigeria also suffer injustice of an almost equally perturbing magnitude. The huge revenue earned by the Nigerian government is scarcely expended in the general interest. As Vincent Amanye laments: 'Nigeria receives about seven billion dollars (US) per year from oil, but most of it seems to have disappeared into the national economy and /or private hands without a satisfactory account of the funds to the people from whose land the oil is extracted' (32). Amanye further reveals that in just two months in 1994 when petrol pump price was hiked from \$11.00, Nigeria made \$23 billion and in 12 months \$138 billion accrued (35). The World Bank estimate in a joint report with the Federal Office of Statistics published in March 1997 conservatively declared that Nigeria earned almost \$200 billion from 1970 to 1990 alone.

A new paradigm called the *paradox of plenty* (Karl 18-22) has been formulated to describe the circumstances of the African petro-states. While this term concisely depicts the status of the oil exporting reporting republics, for example Nigeria, it even more aptly captures the absurdity of the poverty of the oil rich Niger Delta. According to a report by the *Catholic Relief Services*, 'About 13 million people live in the Delta which, in contrast to the revenues produced there, has the highest level of poverty according to government statistics' (Karl 50). Indeed, there are countless instances of state controlled processes of economic exploitation through the implantation hegemonic influences and institutions in Nigeria.

Suffice it to state that given the importance of economic needs to human existence, the magnitude of exploitation in the country warrants the rapidity and intensity of political crises the Nigerian State has witnessed.

### 3.2.2. Political Marginalization and Social Injustice

Political marginalisation simply consists in the exercise of political power to the full or partial exclusion of other individuals or groups. More often than not, political marginalisation involves the use of political and economic advantages to influence political processes and governmental policies. Politics in a practical sense is primarily concerned with the organization of social life for the distribution of resources. The concept of *power* is perhaps the most central in politics and constitutes a resource of no mean sort. But political power is essentially an instrument, or a means for the acquisition of economic and other material resources. That, perhaps more than anything else, explains why the control and mode of acquisition of power, and whether and how it is shared have always constituted matters of serious concern in every state. Politics in Nigeria has, contrary to the norm, been a travesty of social justice characterised by domination and oppression. The geo-political structure of the country, as we have clearly seen, comprises three major ethnic groups, namely the Hausa-Fulani, the Ibo, and Yoruba, together with over 200 'minority' groups. A few privileged people, especially within the 'major' ethnic groups control the instruments of state power; they dominate the press, national agencies and parastatals, diplomatic services, public as well as private sector investments, etc. The situation can simply be described by what has been referred to as a *cultural division of labour*, a phenomenon in to which the ethnic and cultural identity of the people determines the type of occupation to which they have access and the opportunities open to them. This is reflected at a microcosmic level in Saro-Wiwa's observation at a typical workplace in Nigeria that:

Downstairs you would meet men and women from the slave areas of the modern slave-state called Nigeria. Upstairs were (and still are) the indigenous colonizers. They were not necessarily well spoken or well educated either. But they had power at their fingertips and knew it (7).

In the above passage, Saro-Wiwa describes the pattern of staff placement in the Port Harcourt office of the State Intelligence and Investigation Bureau (SIIB) where he came face to face with injustice at the beginning of the final episode of his struggle.

At the SIIB Saro-Wiwa noticed that the highly placed Intelligence Officer from the northern state of Sokoto who, with his kinsmen, occupied the upstairs' offices was not necessarily the most qualified. In his judgment the man looked quite ungainly and his bearing undignified. Much of this injustice derives from what S.I. Udoidem referred to as the *hegemonic mentality*, according to which some privileged people mythically believe that they have something of a divine right to lord it over others. This mind-set is captured in a statement by a northern politician, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, who asserted that in Nigeria, 'Allah has willed it that someone must hold the cow by the horns while another does the milking' (Udoidem, *The Philosopher in the Market Place* 50). Similarly, Maitama Sule, another northerner declared that:

God has wisely shared different talents among us Nigerians. The Easterners, the Igbos for instance, are the business entrepreneurs. The west, the Yoruba, make excellent administrators, civil servants and teacher. The North, the Hausas, are blessed with the gift of leadership and must be accepted as such cited in Udoidem 51).

The above mentality, as Udoidem further highlights, is not only skewed, it is also negated by common sense and experience.

Political marginalisation also involves unfair distribution of basic infrastructure using political instruments. Contrasting the pitiable level of infrastructural development in the South with the relatively high level in the North, Saro-Wiwa noted thus of Warri in Delta State:

The state of the road irked me. It was one of my overriding concerns. Not the road itself, but the fact the in this rich, oil bearing area, the road should be so rickety, while in the north of Nigeria, in that arid part of the country, there were wide express ways constructed at great cost with the petrodollar which the delta belched forth. The injustice of it cried to the heavens (*A Month and a Day* 19).<sup>40</sup>

Like Rivers State where the Ogoni live, Delta State is one of the oil bearing states in the Nigeria area. Regrettably, the entire region has been plagued with the 'resources curse,' a term that is used to describe the 'negative development outcomes associated with petroleum and other minerals ... (or) the inverse association between growth and natural resources, especially minerals and oil' Gary and Karl 21). The term resource curse is used to highlight the irony that countries that are resources poor (without petroleum) grew more rapidly than resources rich (with petroleum) developing countries. Researches by economists at the World Bank and IMF have indicated that 'the greater the dependence on oil and mineral resources, the worse the growth performance (Gary and Karl 21), which is due largely to corruption and mismanagement of public resources by political leaders and the absence of strong political and economic institutions. The absence of those institutions has also enhanced the exploitation of the hapless minorities.

The Nigerian state over-dependes on the resources of the regions at the expense of the politically marginalised regions. As stated the *Ogoni Bill of Rights*, the Ogoni like the other politically disadvantaged peoples of Nigeria are grossly denied the right to adequate and popular representation in government at federal and state levels. The system also reinforces domination at the local level. Omotoye Olorode observed that 'The Ogoni situation of land alienation, environmental degradation and government neglect of popular rights to education, health services, roads portable water and electricity is replicated in all the oil producing areas of Nigeria (cited in Olorode, *et al* 2). The point to be noted here is that the injustice meted out on the Ogoni people is also unleashed on other politically disadvantaged peoples in Nigeria. However, the people of the Niger Delta consider their own case as the most dehumanizing and most atrocious because of the colossal resources drained out of their land by a coalition of the Nigerian ruling elite and the multinationals.

Minority peoples, by virtue of their being denied rights to popular and adequate representations in national politics, are also largely sidelined from policy-making processes and activities that affect them. A case in point is the frustration of Saro-Wiwa's efforts to be appointed into the 1977 Constituent Assembly from which emerged a constitution that left the 'minorities totally unprotected in terms of their economic and cultural resources (Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* 55). The constitution de-emphasized the resource allocation principle of derivation in favour of such dubious criteria as equality of states, population, and land mass, etc. The major cum dominant ethnic groups were split into numerous small states with large number of local government areas based on manipulated census figures. As Saro-Wiwa rightly noted:

The state creation exercise (1976) was soon turned into an instrument of internal colonialism. The Hausa got spilt into eight states, the Yoruba into six, and the Igbo into four. Meanwhile, the smaller ethnic groups were herded into unitary states, where they continue to suffer political and social discrimination. Thus, a group like the Ogoni, rich and viable as a unit capable of practising self-reliance, find themselves in Rivers State, where they have to scramble for survival with nine other ethnic groups who are together marginalized by the Nigerian centre (*A Month and a Day* 192).

It thus become easy to allocate more resources to the major groups on the bases of state, land mass, population figures, etc which have been fraudulently doctored.

The chances of survival as a minority in Nigeria are actually very slim. As an instance, the All States Trust Bank which was owned by Ibitimi Banigo got enmeshed in a serious crisis which culminated in its liquidation. Banigo, who hails from Nigeria's south-south minority state of Bayelsa, is said to have been a victim of circumstance. It is rumoured that the allegation of illegal foreign exchange deal with the Bayelsa State Governor, Alamiesiegha, was politically motivated. Not that his bank did not have any case to face under the law, but that far more substantial cases have been ignored, and could still have been, were he not who he was – a 'disloyal' minority, who should be taught a lesson. Well, all that could be a mere figment of imagination, but historical antecedents tend to lend credence to the allegations against the government.

As Mbeke-Ekanem asserts, one of the high point of being minority was brought to bear on May 20, 1991 when a strange drama unfolded in Port Harcourt. On that day, a certain Umanah E. Umanah, a managing director of the defunct Resources Manager Limited (RML) was bundled off to jail. According to one of his employees, 'His crime was that as a minority he broke into the 'big boys' club,' and 'He became too successful' (Mbeke-Ekanem 247).

Umanah's RML was a savings and loans institution located at 13 Aba roads, Port Harcourt. It was vigorously advertised, paid a whopping 40 to 60 % interest on customer's deposits compared to the 12% paid by local banks, and was thus, able to attract a staggering 500,000 customers within just one year of its existence. It became a real threat to the existing local banks. But who was this Umanah, and what did he do? He was a shrewd businessman of Akwa Ibom state extraction, who was able to apply the capitalist formula of using money to make money. His loans went to the multi-million dollar importing firms and his quick turnover enabled him to almost double every deposit. The existing local banks were consequently losing depositors, so they sent distress calls to the Federal Government through CBN, and RML faced what it faced thereafter. The MD and five of his employees were arrested and charged with 'operating a finance house illegally,' and 'transferring money without prior authorization.' The sum of ₦77million (approximately \$10m then) in cash was seized and its accounts with other banks, containing over ₦300 million were frozen under the Freezing Accounts Acts Decree 6 of December 1984.

Extensive investigations were carried out into the allegations; yet, no shred of evidence emerged. The first judge that was assigned the case was very uncomfortable with the charges – 'He could not with good conscience preside over the case,' and thus openly requested that 'he be taken off the case.' When he was replaced about four months later with one Justice Mamman Kolo, justice Alfa before ordered a fresh trial with seven new to replace the original three. When the trial resumed at the same court in Port Harcourt with Justice Kolo presiding they (Umanah and those five employees):

... were alleged to have between Januarys and may 1991, invited the public through advertising to deposit money with RML without being licensed under the Banking Business Law and without being a public company, contrary to provision of the Companies and Allied Matters Act. They were charged to have unlawfully offered 60% interest rate on deposit and failed (sic) to keep proper accounting records of their activities, contrary to the Security and Exchange Commission Act and the Companies and Allied Matters Act respectively (Mbeke-Ekanem 247)

Umanah and his five employees pleaded not guilty to all he charges.

When, in October 1992, the authority decided to refund the deposits to the RML customers, a contest over leadership role in the disbursement process arose among the federally appointed disbursement committee, Rivers State Government and the Cross River State Government. The Akwa Ibom State Government opted for a 'spectator' position 'out of sadness and sympathy for Umanah ... (and) were saddened by the whole episode, as one could ... hear a familiar scream for justice for another victim of ethnicity (Mbeke-Ekanem 247). The saddened sympathizers were quick to point out that:

For years northern (Hausas) had been stacking and exchanging foreign currencies even when it was illegal, as could see them in hundreds in local and international airports with millions of foreign money without anyone being arrested. Yet this had been the job designated for the same ethnic men along Broad Street at Lagos or Kano than bundling these men to jail, their activities were suddenly legalized and recognized officially. And the parallel market was invented to replace the internationally known name, black market.

What else, other than politicization of injustice, can explain the twists in judgement and perceptions as regards the cases of Umanah, Banigo and the northern dealers in foreign currencies? In much of the 1980s, the exchange rate of the dollar in the black market almost doubled official bank rate. In 1987, for instance, the black marketers exchanged a dollar for ₦4, while the official bank rate was ₦1.50. It was no crime then, but it became serious crime for Umanah to pay interest

of between 40-60 percent on deposits, not even on foreign currencies. It also became a crime for Banigo's All States Trust Bank to 'be engaged in illegal foreign exchange deal'.

### 3.3. Argument III: Ecological Degradation (Environmental Injustice)

Crude oil was discovered in Ogoniland and commercial production commenced in 1958, after Oloibiri in 1956, making Ogoniland the second earliest part of Nigeria, where crude oil was discovered and produced in the country. Extensive exploration facilities were established during the following three decades (UNEP *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* 24). According to Section 44 (3) of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999)* as amended, permanent sovereignty, ownership and control of mineral resources (oil and gas) found within the geographical location of Nigeria is vested in the Federal Government, with the Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources acting through the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) serving as the regulatory authority. Consequent upon that provision of the constitution, oil and gas exploration and exploitation operations in Ogoniland were, up until early 1990s when the operations were disrupted, handled by a joint venture (JV). The joint venture is made up of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which controls 55 %, Shell 30 %, Elf 10 %, and Agip 5 %. The Oil Mining Licence (OML), known as OML11, under which Ogoni oilfields are covered, was operated by Shell on behalf of the joint venture. These operations have been carried out in manners that contravene international best practices; thus, ruining the environment and impoverishing the peoples of the oil bearing and producing communities.

Since after its commercial production, oil has remained the commanding height of the Nigerian economy and the oil sector the dominant sector. According to Brian Anderson, a head of the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) of Nigeria, there is 'no doubts about the benefits Shell has brought to Nigeria through its massive operation involving more than 90 producing oil fields in the Niger Delta area that daily produce some one million barrels of oil – almost half the country's export' (*Africa Today* 16).

Sadly, the activities of the oil companies have adversely affected physical environment. Oil spillage, for instance, which occurs incessantly on land, in rivers and streams, has caused depletion of soil organic matter, destruction of aquatic lives, sicknesses and death of human beings, especially for those 'condemned' by fate to live in the precincts of the oil regions. The crisscrossing network of oil and gas pipelines has reduced the size of cultivable land. Some of the pipes run through backyards and kitchens. What is more, gasses are flared with reckless abandon, causing further emission of pollutants the environment. The oil companies and the government do not manage the environment in a responsible manner. Shell once made a dubious claim of spending above \$150 million a year on environmental projects (*Africa Today* 6). In a similar way, successive Nigerian governments have failed to honestly expend even the paltry 1 percent of 45% of the revenue accruing to states, which the 1981 revenue bill recommended as federal fund for ecological problems in all states. In the *Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR)* presented to the federal government of Nigerian in November, 1990, it is stated that:

The multi-national oil companies, name shell (Dutch/British) and chevron (American) have severally having flared gas in our villages for thirty-three years and caused oil spillages, flow-outs etc... the Nigerian elite (bureaucratic, military, industrial and academic) have dehumanization by the ethnic majority.... (Saro-Wiwa 98).

Saro-Wiwa deduced from the premises of heinous devastation of the physical environment of the Niger delta by oil companies and the complicity of the Nigerian government that the 'collaborators' mean to force the peoples of the Niger delta into extinction. That is why he sees ecological degradation as an ecological warfare or an act of terrorism and postulated the concept of erectism as a solution to the problem.

## 4. Conclusion

This work has highlighted the need for a solid institutional framework that sets out and guarantees the cultural, political, economic, environmental and other rights of individuals and groups as a basic condition for sustainable national development an ethnic and culturally diverse state such as Nigeria. Ken Saro-Wira's concept of erectism, which emphasized ethnic autonomy within a federal or confederal structure is, indeed, a workable paradigm and is recommended as a model of pluralism for multi-ethnic states. This model has the benefit of reducing inter-ethnic or inter-regional conflicts and, thereby, promoting inter-ethnic cooperation and national unity.

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