

**Patriarchy and Resource Control in Nigeria:
A Reading of Ben Binebai's *Drums of the Delta***

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Abstract

Nigeria is faced by a plethora of social problems generated from the complexity of modern existence. The complexity of modern living encourages the production of adequate goods and services to meet with the increasing population. The problem investigated here is not the production of goods and services but the control of resources. As a typical capitalist economy the resources produced by the people is controlled and owned by the federal government composed of the major ethnic groups patterned after patriarchal formation. While other developed capitalist countries have replaced clan and tribe relations in resource control, Nigeria is still deep in patriarchal character in resource control. The framework for the paper is based on Karl Marx's Historical Materialism which explains the role of history in material or resources production. The methodology employed is qualitative and relied on secondary data for the analysis of social roles and social justice in federating systems. The analysis of the play, *Drums of the Delta* by Ben Binebai, forms the primary data. The conclusion of this paper is that social justice and natural resources are natural rights of the people. Therefore, the recommendation is that equitable schema should be

adopted in resource control and not patriarchal character in the 21st century.

Key words: patriarchy, character, resource, control, drama, justice

Introduction

No society has ever survived in exclusion and therefore all social groups must form part of the complex whole of modern societies. The beauty of modern societies is the social contract engagement which encourages more participation in the building of the polity. The mode of production in complex societies encourages the evolution of new social relations that meet with the new economic reality. What accounts for most of the plethora of social problems in Nigeria arises from the lack of balance between old social formations and new economic reality. This is in line with Marx assumption that social relations and mode of production compete for open space. As the society develops the old social relations ought to give way to new social relations. The contradictions are so heavy and take toll on the entire society. There is evidence that in all spheres of the Nigerian state, the old institution and relations are not adapted to suit new perceptions. Every society at a given period of its history has the right to adapt the perception that suits its survival.

The Nigerian postmodern society is still locked in patriarchal character. The concept of patriarchy is copiously used by feminists in the campaigns for the rights women. The patriarchal system evident in preindustrial societies where notable elders usually men held almost all positions of economic, political and religious powers. The exercise of such traditional authority denied women active participation in the political and economic spheres. The assumed praxis in patriarchal system is for women to be in charge of domestic labour while the men engage in more economic and

political activities. In this praxis, patriarchy is assumed to limit the rights of women.

However, patriarchy limits the active participation of other categories of the people and not only the women. The father dominated relationship in the family does not limit the women alone but other categories of the family as well. In the traditional family set up, the head of the family is usually the man that control the relationship. In the pre-industrial societies, the hunters presented their game after the expedition to the head of the clan who distributes the shares to the hunters. The hunters do not have authority to influence the sharing of the proceeds of the hunt. In contrast, western civilization is pervasively patriarchal yet the system allows open competition of men and women in the production of resources. The mode of production and the social relations in the Western milieu encourages the engagement of both sexes in resource control. Thus, patriarchy in the west does not limit the equal participation of all categories in the production of resources. It does appear that the Nigerian patriarchy is a closed system.

Sex differences appears not to be the major issue in the Nigerian type of patriarchy as there are excluded men in the control of resources. Recently, patriarchy has intensified the restriction of women in active politics. A man has several children and allocates his wealth to the first child. It may appear normal in this situation. However, the rest of the children who may be men and women have been denied their rights as children of the same father. The female who are children may cry bitterly of patriarchy, but what will the other male children denied of their right cry for? Resource control entails acquiring political power over resources production, management and utilization in the area of location to ensure regeneration of the environment and above all the sustained

development of the people. The issue of resource control has remained a burning agendum in Nigeria. Behind the several constitutional conferences has been the issue of resource control. The control of the various regions resources has been the basis of the political stasis in Nigeria. Marx may have located the economy as the basis of the fit between classes. However, Ralph Darendorf posits that political power is the basis of the fit between social classes. There have been several processes and methods of sharing and controlling, resources in Nigeria. Some scholars have located failure of leadership and failure of the constitution but the thesis implicit in this paper is the character of patriarchy by the major ethnic groups in the control of the resources. In the opinion of Binebai in the *Drums of the Delta*, resources are common patrimony and so are problems associated with resources production. Equitable distribution of resources should be based on pleasurable process that are mutually beneficial to all categories of the federating units.

Resource Control in Nigeria

Nigeria has several mineral deposits that the last count locates about forty-three mineral deposits. Out of the numerous deposits only eleven are mined in commercial quantities. The production for these mineral deposits has generated problems that threaten the corporate existence of the nation.

Nzimiro Ikenna notes that:

In surviving this turbulent political journey, the Nigerian ruling class has had history on their side, the bourgeois history which colonialism assigned to them. In particular, this class found itself in a situation in which it inherited capitalist's policies towards agricultural developments and these same

policies have been actively promoted by all world capitalists' institutions with barely any dissent. (7)

The ruling class of interspersed hegemonies of tribes and the military understood the benefits of this history and so would not alter it. The crude and rapacious nature of colonial production of resources left the sources of resources without any form of control. In fact, the resources were more valued than the people. The people and the environment were plundered and because the polity was more metropolitan in administration the environment was neglected. It was an antic of the colonial administrators to pull resources from the rural areas to develop the urban centres, thereby creating disconnect. This was the beginning of the loss of the control of the resources, the alienation of the people from the distribution of resources and the neglect of the rural areas. The gross misrepresentation of the nations of production and distribution of economic resources in Nigeria raises doubts on the founding fathers' genuine interest on nationhood.

Achebe, Chinua affirms this opinion as he notes that;

In spite of conventional opinion Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership. A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers (11).

The beginning process was faulty and so the products have also been faulty leading to deprivation and contentions. The dearth of intellectual thought has robbed the nation of the right growth processes and the employment of adequate institutions in stabilizing the polity.

Ake, Claude echoes this as he notes that;

The mere notions of development and growth suggest a transition to something that is new from something that is old, that has outlived itself. It can only be achieved through a determined struggle against the conservative, retrograde forces, through a change in the social, political and economic structure of backward stagnant society, since a social organization, however inadequate never disappears by itself since a ruling class however parasitic, never yields power unless compelled to do so by overwhelming pressures, development and progress can only be attained if all the energies and abilities of a people that was politically, socially and economically disfranchised under the old system are thrown into battle against the fortresses of the ancient regime (174).

The ancient regime of mediocrity and rapacious plunder of resources rather than development of resources for equitable distribution has to give way. The call here is not for a violent overthrow but the employment of principles and processes that accommodate moderate values. There is a wide spread perception that the leaders lack the resources to undertake massive policies that will invest in people and their wellbeing, particularly those of minority tribes in which resources are located. Nothing has changed in the lack of initiative and commitment employed by colonial administrators to the present level of political administration. The colonial administrators used brute force in obtaining resources without adequate protection of the people domiciled in the areas of operation. The present ruling class uses the same brute force instead of agreeable processes that are permissive of a modern civil society.

The present regime of resource control and distribution is patriarchal in character; Patriarchy is not only injurious to women.

In traditional societies, descents and family identities were dominated by father or eldest male influence. In such pristine regimes, patriarchy meant the control of all political, cultural and economic powers by certain privileged men in such a way that mostly women were subjugated. The feminist scholars have been able to ride to universal appeal based on this analysis but fail to locate the oppressive impact of patriarchy on other males that are not protected by the regime. The regime of patriarchy which locates the influence and control of resources in the hands a few minority is not only a problem to women but to the entire society. More disturbing is the fact that while such clan, majority tribe and patriarchal relations have been replaced in postmodern societies, Nigeria's resource control is still by and large patriarchal in character.

In fact, the Resource Allocation Committee should metamorphose into a patriarchal character commission. The feudal groups that form the major tribes still hang on to their positions as patriarchs of the nation while the minor tribes pine away in misery. Ironically, the major tribes control the resources located in the minority tribes. Marx's historical materialism is appealing and apropos to this analysis as it explains the history of exploitation and alienation of people in the society.

Ryan, Michael corroborates that:

Marx conceived of human life in its most basic terms. It is organized around the production of goods for human consumption and survival. Marx noticed that all societies are arranged in such a way that a large group of workers does the labour of production while

a small group of owners reaps the benefits and accumulates wealth. (52).

The assumption above forms the main worry of this paper that the Nigerian situation is so arranged that it favours wealth or resources distribution and not production. The major ethnic groups form the ruling class and appropriate a larger part of the resources that from the national cake. Like all typical primitive capitalist societies, Nigeria is still inundated with primordial institutions and processes that defy modern systems.

The clan or major ethnic cleavage is the basis of selection and sharing of leadership as well as resources. The major ethnic groups have so arranged and deeper the patriarchal character that everything is cantered on quota rather merit. Modern societies have outlived quota system as a means of addressing national issues. It is regrettable that the quota system is not applied in the production of goods and services which agrees with the Marxian query on why the small group of owners reaps and accumulates the resources of the nation. The major ethnic groups depend on the exploitation of crude oil and generate ownership of the land and the crude oil deposits to the extent that the land and the oil belongs to the central or federal government for which they form the majority. The inclination is that the major ethnic groups own the mineral deposit found in the Niger Delta region and not the people found in the region. The question that is on the front burner is who owns the resources and who controls the resources.

This scenario flashes back to the colonial days when the land and the resources in African colonies were owned as well as controlled by the Queen of England. Nothing seemed to have changed from the feudal lords that owned the land tilled by slaves and the conquered territories by the Queen. The colonial hegemony

is very much enforced by the central government of Nigeria where the minority tribes with resources are conquered territories. This explains the brute force and the military occupation of the Niger Delta region. The occupation, of the Niger Delta by the federal forces is not for the protection of the people but to aid the effective control of the abundant resources in the region.

Dharam, Ghai warns that:

No society has ever been developed by intensifying exclusion and polarization between those with resources and those without. On the contrary, societies have developed best when their public policies have promoted equity and cohesion. This is an important lesson and one that is reflected in the declaration and programme of action of the world summit for social development (1)

The question then is whether the Nigerian society should intensify state control of resources or the people should control their resources. Slavery, which had been justified for centuries as natural and was long thought to be inevitable was eliminated because it became ethically and morally impossible to maintain it. This antiquated means of expressing relationships has long been abandoned by modern civilized societies but rather they are glorified systems of justice and control in Nigeria. The minority tribes with mineral deposits are the slaves that toil for the survival of the nation. As the slaves do not own their resources and production so do the Niger Delta people do not own nor control the resource in their natural habitation. Another fallacy introduced by the Nigerian state to further impoverish and control resources is the constitutional provision that annexes all land. Decree 29 enacted by the military places control of land by the federal government. The implication of

this is that the land and the resources belong to the federal government. The inhabitants who are Nigerians do not own the land and the resources. This brings into focus the treatment of slaves by the land owners. The slaves even if they live and toil on the land, their labour, resources and the land belong to the owners.

Geoff, lamb explains that:

...land consolidation was to complete the work of the emergency: to stabilize a conservative middle class based on the loyalists: and as confiscated land was to be thrown into the common land pool during consolidation, it was also to confirm the landlessness of the rebels (12).

The intention to annex and consolidate all land particularly the oil communities of the Niger Delta is to create a restless region too busy to worry about political agitation. The groundnuts pyramids of Northern Nigeria were owned by individual farmers and so the land on which they farmed. The Cocoa produce of Western Nigeria were produced and owned by the individual farmers. More so, the Coal Corporation in Enugu did not place the land where the coal is found in the hands of the Federal Governments. The Federal government collected taxes which formed the revenue base. The obnoxious decree 29 of 1978 came with the oil boom which placed control of the land and the oil in the Niger Delta in the hands of the federal government. Okaba, Benjamin and Irikana, Irikana inform that:

The Marxist theory of development for instance, recognizes the central element of change in the development process and identified universal laws of dialectical and historical materialism as the articulating focus of development irrespective of time and place. The 'Juche' (Korean transaction of

‘self-reliance’) philosophy explains that it is the responsibility of any human group anywhere to use their own initiative and creativity to harness their own resources by themselves for their own development (75).

The land consolidation and annexation have alienated the people of the Niger Delta the initiative to develop the area. All efforts are moved by the federal government propelled by the major ethnic groups to limit and maintain the minority status of the region. The abundant mineral oil that forms the main stay of the Nigerian economy and found in the Niger Delta would have made the region a major stakeholder. An adage has it that in the “court of the cat, the rat is always a pleasing victim. Sometimes the cat will play with the rat but that does not mean that they are equal? The federal government will always remind the region of its minority status. A cursory look at the palliatives created as remediation and ploys to appease the region will explain the brazen affront on the people. Firstly, the derivation policy allocates a paltry 3% of the total oil revenue to the region which was quickly adjusted to 13% due to public outcry. The Oil Mineral Producing, Development Commission(OMPADEC) was a giant starved of policy and funds. The Niger Delta Ministry with location at Abuja is headed by a majority tribe man. The ministry has no major policy direction and is not replicated in the component states of the region. Rather than initiate clear cut policies of addressing the problems generated as a result of hazardous oil exploitation, the government has created an amnesty programme where alleged militants are paid monthly incomes. The huge money paid to militants could have provided meaningful development of the region. Rather as effort to maintain

colonial antics, the government pays loyal friends and creates divide and rule tactics to deny the people of any genuine political agitation. Dago, Fubara maintains that:

These peculiar conditions of the Niger Delta make infrastructural development cost up to more than ten times the cost in other parts of Nigeria. Manmade problems arising from non-sustainable and destructive economic activities of oil and gas industry, without necessary and adequate remedial protection and restoration of the environment made oppressive by the lack of political goodwill and justice required for redress through resource control in true federalism or equitable revenue allocation for adequate investment in socio-economic infrastructural development and environmental protection. Unjust and oppressive petroleum industry regulatory laws and the land use act now entrenched in the constitution (149-150).

In similar position, as presented above, Nurit Yaffe corroborates that:

When the state becomes more politically solid, the environmental organizations face their greatest challenge. Therefore, it is important to utilize both the certainty and the division, the increased involvement and the global influences to strengthen the environmental agenda, for the state is also stronger (the current debate over the gas royalties- with the demand to increase the public share of the profits from oil and natural gas is an example for both

the social-environmental convergence and the power of the state to ignore the public debate). (13)

The state of Israel may apply humanistic measures in sharing the royalties accruing from oil and natural gas. The public sharing of the profits from oil and allowing the debate are levels of discourse that will not be allowed in Nigeria. The policies are not public friendly as they seek to reinforce the status quo. The play, *Drums of the Delta* by Ben Binebai presents the Nigerian state as a retrogressive force welding a hypocritical polity. The play synopsis reveals a parody of the Nigerian nation where the Queen of Odokoland takes Ebitimi as her husband. Prince Ebitimi is the prince of Delta and the heir apparent. The action of the Queen of Odokoland enrages the people as narrated by the character Sam.

One day, the Queen of Odoko land came to Delta and took away Ebitimi. We put up a fight...but we were overpowered. Since then the battle for freedom ranges on. (45)

The seizure of the young prince who is also a good dancer resulted in a freedom fight. The play which is a miniature of Nigeria has such characters as Oko, Ahmed, Okoye and Dudu who reflect the dominant tribes in Nigeria. The struggle for the freedom of Ebitimi revolves around Major Boro who abandons his university career to fight for freedom of the Ijaw nation his father Pepple, Boro explains that

You have abandoned your university education for

The liberation of the Ijaw people. I can foresee a ruinous reaction. (24)

The war for the freedom of Prince Ebitimi from the queen of Odoko who controls the delta in the play encourages people who benefit from the war. In the play, Ebitimi finally regains freedom with the emergence of Isaac Boro (MIJAB) the symbol and martyr of the Delta struggle. The analysis of the play reveals the central theme of injustice and resource control. The play is a reflection of Nigeria, and amalgamation of minority and majority tribes. The Niger Delta with the resources epitomized by the prince Ebitimi is the minority while Ahmed and Okoye represent the majority tribes. The tension between the minority tribe and the majority tribes is best captured in the voice of Chief Biri:

You accuse yourselves of ganging up against each other, don't you people prey on us, I am from the Delta; take it from this day that the hatred between your people and those of Okoye is the political strength of Ahmed and his people. The day your disunity collapses is the day the perpetual domination of Ahmed and his community will crumble. It is very certain that we cannot go on like this. The simple truth is that this kingdom refuses to be a kingdom from the day it was created. (35-36)

The trouble with Odokoland as in Nigeria is that the major tribes are not interested in production of resources but in controlling the little available. There should have been mutual agreement on the allocation of resources based on merit but as presented in the play, the resources belong to the state and not the people. The contractual relationship in modern periods entails mutual benefit and equality in resources as well as capacity building. The patriarchal character is evident as Ben Binebai presents the character Ahmed who is from

the major tribe and obviously benefits from the majority status. Ahmed says that:

Your majesty, chief dudu is very right. The prince genetically descended from the upper Odokoland and besides he has been proclaimed a property of the state. This means we collectively own the prince, why should these people come here with huge greed to claim what properly belongs to us all we are even the indisputable senior partners in this union of Odokoland (37).

The senior takes it all as a reflection of the patriarchal character has been the basis of resource allocation and control in Odoko. The seniors in Odoko as well as in Nigeria, are not interested in the production and maintenance of the resources. The toils and pains of the minorities producing the wealth are not important to the senior partners in Odokoland. The state exercises so much violence and brutality on the people to control the resources. The people of Delta suffer misery, pain and destruction. More so The women are raped, kidnapped and brutalized. But the end of the play, the will of the people prevails and Ebitimi is rescued from the Queen. Though the play ends with the victory of the Delta people regaining their prince but the ending is surrealistic since the contrived ending cannot be realized in Nigeria. So much violence has been used in the struggle for the people's control of the resources in the Niger Delta and The struggle has earned more military occupation. The elite who form a greater majority and from the major tribes have not thought it wise to reconsider the land consolidation decree that alienates the people from their resources. The manifest violence, kidnapping and disruption of oil production processes in the Niger Delta are last resort effort. It is not that the people are violent by their nature but

been dragged to the wall, the only response and weapon of dialogue available to the oppressed people is violence.

Ledum, Mitee, confirms the assumptions of this paper as he asserts that;

It is organized violence at the top that creates individual violence at the bottom. It is the accumulated indigenization against organized wrong, organized crime, organized injustice which drives the political offenders to act (82).

Conclusion

The assumption of the paper that, it is not the production of resources but the sharing of the resources that is the major problem in Nigeria has been established. The dependence on oil as the main source of revenue in Nigeria has destroyed the development of other industries that would have increased the revenue base, mopped up the unemployment and reduced the crime rate. Presently all the industries are operating under low capacity and so all policies are geared towards the control of oil. In America the state of California with knowledge based industries competes with the state of Texas that has oil. The Nigeria case is quite different that the abundant resources are left underdeveloped and efforts are moved towards the Niger Delta and the oil alone. In the 21st century with vast increase in knowledge capacity production, what decree will the Nigeria state use in the control of ICT industries. It is the modest consideration of this paper that the state should expand its production capacity even in the oil and gas industries to increase revenue and employment. More so, the expansion of the productive capacity of the economy will reduce most of the contentions between minority and majority

tribes. Finally, merit rather than quota or tribe should be the basis of resource control in multi-ethnic Nigeria.

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