

## **THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION OF NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA**

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*One of the fundamental group rights that belongs to ethnic people is self-determination. By this right, ethnic people determine how to control their destiny, life, identity, and resources. This right is often contested especially by modern nation-states as they often see it as a threat to the collective survival of the state. But because of oppression and violation of their group rights ethno-nations often assert their right to self-determination. The peoples in Nigeria's Niger Delta are at the forefront in campaigning for their right to self-determination, not secession. Through a critical analysis and evaluation this right is examined with how it has been championed in the region. The concern here is to argue in support of the right to internal self-determination as only this can guarantee social stability—political peace—and enable the people to flourish and protect their environment that has been damaged by both the Nigerian state and oil multinational forces. The conclusion is that the peoples of the Niger Delta have this right to self-determination and it should be enhanced by the Nigerian state.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Self-determination is a fundamental group right of all peoples everywhere. It is rooted in the essence of a people being a distinct group of people. Part of being a people is that deep within their collective subconsciousness is the inherent power to search and pursue what is good that would bring about their progress and development. Everything in existence is in the process of becoming, moving from potential to actual, from possibility to reality. A people either by themselves or in consonance with others should decide their destiny, and not a destiny imposed on them. A destiny imposed on them without their consent is oppressive and unjust. This is one basic reason why colonialism is wrong and unjust. Colonialism imposes structures and rules without the people's consent and deny them the full development of their abilities and capacities. It impedes their progress as a people and even denies them of their resources.

Every group of people is always in the making. If a group is denied this right to self-determination, humanity is enriched lesser as it will deprive many of the cultural and social riches than if they are allowed to assert themselves. Self-determination, as it would be noted

here, is of two types: internal and external. External self-determination is necessary for all colonized people and these people suffer from continual oppression and gross denial of their cultural identity in their present state. Internal self-determination is within the limit of present sovereign states.

The focus of this paper is on the internal self-determination by the people of the Niger Delta within Nigeria. The challenges of external self-determination of peoples within the sovereign nation-states will not be examined here. It is a fact of history that peoples in sovereign nation-states, such as in Sudan, Indonesia, former Yugoslavia, etc., have gained external self-determination either through wars or peaceful negotiations.

The issue of self-determination is crucial in social and political philosophy. Social and political philosophy, as Joseph Omoregbe (2007) opines, is concerned with how the state should be governed and how this state should provide their life with the optimal good while at the same time protecting their rights. It is concerned with issues of justice, equity, people's participation in the state, the promotion of peace, security, and amenities of life for the citizens. Individual ethnic groups band together with other ethnic groups to demand for self-determination as a way of better participation in the Nigerian state and of having more access to justice and equity in the Nigerian federation.

The right to self-determination is a group right which falls within the ambit of multicultural discourse. As Will Kymlicka (2010) avers, in the liberal-communitarian debate, that this right to self-determination is an important issue in political philosophy. He notes the argument of multiculturalists that group rights are not a threat to individual liberty; it is a way of recognizing and accommodating them along the line of the liberal-democratic theory.

Liberal political philosophy, however, privileges the model of the nation-state and this often leads to nation building policies that have no respects of ethnic minorities and their rights such as self-determination. Kymlicka says that the attempt to homogenize ethno-cultural groups has not often succeeded rather it has caused more conflicts and tensions. He (2010, 380) writes:

The key to citizenization therefore is not to suppress these differential claims, but to filter them through the language of human rights, civil liberties, and democratic accountability. This is what liberal multiculturalism and international minority rights norms both attempt to do.

The question of self-determination as this work will show is a question of justice and equity. Without it peoples who come from minority ethnic cultures are often deprived of essential aspects of what gives them meaning. It is proper then to give a place to people's craving for ethnic belonging. Applying Allen Buchanan (1995, 350) ideas from the morality of secession, there are also moral dimensions to the issue of self-determination which should not be ignored by moral philosophers. Many of the works edited by Kymlicka (1995), Ian Shapiro and Kymlicka (1997), and Kymlicka and Norman (2000) also show the significance of self-determination and other minority rights as important for the philosophical discourse. It is argued here that, for the ethnicities in the Niger Delta, the right to self-determination is applicable to them. These ethnicities existed as distinct ethnic groups in precolonial times and were brought into the Nigerian federation without their consent, thus denying them

many of the rights and benefits they once enjoyed in their ethnic cultures. Ethnocultural identity matters. Individuals are not just formed as individuals but grow within cultures that give them meaning and purpose. The community holds a prime place in African sociocultural thought.

In examining this issue of self-determination for the peoples of the Niger Delta, the paper will use a critical analytic method to break open, separate, and coherently examine the various issues involved in the debate. The aim is to understand and in order to present a rational and viable position on the tensions between the ethnicities of the Niger Delta and the Nigerian federation. A philosophical foundation for analysis comes from the analytic movement which explores the use of language to enhance a clear understanding of concepts (see Lawhead 2002, 499 and Ayer 1974, 37). Through examining the conceptual use and analyzing the issues surrounding the right to self-determination of the peoples of the Niger Delta, a philosophical investigation is being done in this work.

## TERMINOLOGIES

The word, "right" (see Cranston as cited by Gasiokwu 2003, 1) means "something of which no one may be deprived without a great affront to justice. There are certain deeds which should never be done, certain freedoms which should never be invaded, some things which are suppressively sacred." In another definition, Martin Gasiokwu (2003, 2, citing Frank E. Dowrick) says that (human) rights are "claims made by men, for themselves or on behalf of other men, supported by some theory which concentrates on the humanity of man, on man as a human being, a member of humankind." A human right is rooted in the identity and essence of the human person and that is why rights accrue to all humans. The language of rights implies fundamental duties and responsibilities that should be performed to enhance the human person. This is why, according to Richard Amesbury and George Newlands (2008, 25 and 28), it is right to state that "your rights are entitlements pertaining to those needs and desires that other people are obligated to fulfill, or allow you to fulfill." Once you are deprived of these rights you suffer a great deal. It is important to note that "human rights are the common birthright of humanity, and their possession cannot depend on one's membership in any particular community (other than the human community itself)." The fact is that one should not be denied of these rights as a human being because this is tantamount to oppression and injustice.

Another dimension of rights that is important to consider is that in the evolution of human rights there are now what are called group rights. These are rights that accrue to a group of people based on their humanity and their belonging to a specific group of people. The right to self-determination is a group right. The right to self-determination is enshrined in many human rights instruments. The Organization of African Unity (1981, art. 20) enunciates that "All peoples shall have the right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination. They shall freely determine their political status and shall pursue their economic and social development according to the policy they have freely chosen." The United Nations General Assembly (1966, art. 1) states that "All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development." The United Nations General Assembly (2007, arts. 3 and 4) declares:

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

While it is clear that colonized and oppressed people have the right to free themselves from oppression which may involve external self-determination from colonial powers (Organization of African Unity 1966, Art. 20 sec. 2), that the self-determination of people within modern nation-states is often debated. This is so because modern nation-states are apprehensive of secession. The United Nations General Assembly does not rule out external self-determination, it only affirms that peoples within nation-states have a right to self-determination in as far as it is done within the legal framework of the state. In explaining internal self-determination, Alexander Moro (2008, 148) explains it thus:

[It is one] in which citizens of a particular country want to decide, and determine for themselves the majority of their affairs...without any attempt to seek for a total independence from the country in question, they want to decide for themselves their economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual affairs...[in that] same county.

It is equally true, as Pius Okoronkwo (2002, 3) notes:

The imprecise nature of the right of self-determination, especially outside the colonial context, has led to uncertainties and inconsistencies in its application by various states, as well as by the United Nations. This inconsistency is the result of the inability to reconcile the principle of self-determination with the equally important principle of territorial integrity, and with the need to preserve peace in a particular area. Thus, neither the principle of self-determination, nor that of territorial integrity, is absolute. The preference of one over the other depends on the circumstances of each case.

Now that ethnic peoples of a country have a right to self-determination, the question then arises: how to define “people.” One important definition (*The Chambers Dictionary* 1993, 1261) is that it is a “a set of persons; a nation, a community, a body of people held together by a common origin, speech, culture, political union...” A people generally share a common cultural affinity, trace themselves to a common ancestor, and are bound together by cherished traditions and norms. It is true that various groups of peoples can come together or can be forced together to form one people as have often happened after independence. Take a country like Nigeria; it is made up of many peoples such as the Yoruba, Hausa, Urhobo, Igbo, etc. Finding themselves in one modern nation, they are trying to forge a common identity and build a common people out of the many peoples. This is also what is happening in many other nations, especially in

the so-called "Third World." The process of forging one common people should not obliterate the unique cultural peculiarities and achievements of the various peoples. This is one of the vital reasons why people are arguing for internal self-determination not to break from the nation-state but live within federal system where peoples can develop their cultures. It is shocking to note Udeme Ekpo's (2004, 153) comments:

Although Nigeria is supposed to be a federation, nothing in its structure and administration lends credence to this claim. The only semblance of a federation in Nigeria is the 36 states. Otherwise, the country is, to all intents and purposes, a unitary state. The government at the centre is stronger than the states, with the latter depending on allocations from the former for survival. There is one national police force, one constitution and uniform laws applicable in all the states. The abnormality of having the centre stronger than the states, with everything having been controlled by the centre, is a major factor that account for the cut-throat competition for control of power at the federal level. In an ideal federation, as is being practiced in other parts of the world, including the United States, Canada, and Switzerland, where the system is in place, the states are semi- autonomous, virtually independent of the centre. The states have their constitutions and laws. The states have their police, quite different from the federal police. Above all, the states have control of resources found in their areas, but pay royalty to the federal government. Such areas as defence, foreign affairs and customs, among others are controlled by the government at the centre.

Helen Quane (2011, 260-61) is on target in noting that the statist territorial definition of people is limited and weak and that the overwhelming evidence in the literature is that distinct groups within states either on the basis of ethnic, religious, linguistic or other differences are to be considered a people and can claim the right to self-determination to ensure their identity and interests survives. This is what the various people in the Niger Delta are agitating for. They are not arguing to break away from the country called Nigeria. They want real self-determination in a federal system that guarantees their cultural autonomy and rights as groups of people in a federation.

The Niger Delta is in the southern side of Nigeria. It covers the geographic area through which the river Niger drains into the Atlantic Ocean. In Nigeria's official documents, it is made up of Cross Rivers, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Imo, Abia, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, and Ondo states. Nigeria's oil is produced in this region that is inhabited by peoples such as the Urhobo, Ijaw, Benin, Itshekiri, Isoko, Ogoni, Oron, Efik, Ukwani, etc. Because of the fact that Nigeria's oil wealth and national income come from this region, it is of strategic importance to Nigeria. Decades of oil exploration and gross underdevelopment of the region coupled with environmental degradation has heightened the struggle for the peoples of the region for self-determination.

## **SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE NIGER DELTA**

The question of self-determination in the Niger Delta did not start today. The struggle of

the various groups of people in the region has always been for self-determination. The Adaka Boro with his Niger Delta Volunteer Force demanded secession from the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1966. He ended up in jail and his movement failed. The desire here is not to make a historical survey of the struggle for self-determination in Nigeria. It will suffice to mention some events and issues that portray the struggles for self-determination in the Niger Delta.

In post-independence Nigeria, as in most other modern states, the clamor for self-determination as a right of “peoples” has been gathering momentum. As early as 1967, the very foundations of Nigerian unity and statehood were challenged by the Biafran struggle whose intent was to secede from the Nigerian state and form the Republic of Biafra. Today, over four decades after the botched attempt, the agitation for self-determination by the masterminds of the Biafran struggle has not abated. Thus, the activities of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in recent times are a testimony to this. Similarly, the emergence of other entities such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) represents variants of the struggle for self-determination in contemporary times (see Olayode, n.d, 135).

Ben Naanen (2007, 199) shows that the quest either for more additional states or for a better revenue sharing formula in Nigeria is a demand for self-determination as the people have realized that through more additional states more revenues will accrue to the region. Nigeria’s centralized federation is always a problem. All lands in Nigeria through the Land Use Act belong to the federal government. The following laws in Nigeria are all laws that stragulate self-determination of the various peoples in the regions. They include the 1967 Petroleum Act, the 1993 the Lands/Title Vetting Decree, the 1977 National Inland Waterway Authority Act. The Movements for the Survival of the Ogoni People declare for a fair proportion of the economic resources. The Movement (1990) declares thus:

That the Ogoni people be granted POLITICAL AUTONOMY to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever name called, provided that this Autonomy guarantees the following: (a) Political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people. (b) The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of OGONI economic resources for Ogoni development.

Before the Ogoni people made such declaration, it evolves out of decades of exploitation and degradation of their environment. The United Nations Environment Programme (2011, 12) report on the Ogoni land affirms that it will take up to 25 to 30 years to be able to remediate the Ogoni land environment. This is equally applicable to other areas of the Niger Delta. The Ogoni people demanded both political autonomy and economic freedom. The Ijaw Youths of the Niger Delta—another ethno-nation under the auspices of the youth of that region—also made their demand for autonomy. They (1998) proclaimed:

All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival. We cease to recognise all undemocratic decrees that rob our peoples/communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources...

The Oron Indigenous Ethnic Linguistic Nationality (1999)—another ethnic nation in the Niger Delta—proclaimed theirs as follows:

The regions should form the federating units each with the power to manage its affairs particularly development according to its cultural realities. Every region should control its resources 100% from which it will allocate funds for running the central government. The Central Government should only handle a small number of policies such as Foreign Affairs, Immigration, Currency, Customs, etc.

The First Urhobo Economic Summit (Urhobo Foundation 1998, no. 3) also demanded:

The Summit notes with great concern the economic enslavement of the oil producing areas through the massive reduction of the application of the principles of derivation from 100% to 50% (1951), and further to 45% in 1970. Between 1971 and 1985, derivation principle was removed by the Okigbo Commission and Aboyade Technical Committee. Following wide protest and discontent, derivation which was 1.5% was increased to 3% in 1990, and the constitutional Conference of 1995 recommends 13%. The Summit wishes to replace the principles of derivation, with complete ownership and control of oil and gas wealth in our domain as the only way out of forty years of marginalisation and deprivation. Government at all tiers as earlier stated can then charge and be paid taxes by the Oil Producing Communities (OPC).

Commenting on the bill of rights (OBR) proclaimed by the Ogoni people (1990), one of the foremost demanders of self-determination, Naanen (2007, 202) writes:

The OBR asked, among other things, local autonomy, adequate representation of the Ogoni people as a matter of Right in the government and other institutions of the Nigeria state, participation in the control of Ogoni resources and protection of the Ogoni environment, compensation of environmental damage by the multinational oil companies. Participation in the control of resources of Ogoniland, meant payment of oil royalties to Ogoni people, including arrears. OBR represented self-determination as convinced by the Ogoni community.

The quest for resource control in the Niger Delta as demanded in the various bills of rights above is a quest for self-determination. You may ask, what is resource control? It “involves, as Augustine Uranta (2009, 58) says, three major components:

The power and right of a community or state to raise funds by way of tax on persons, matters, services and materials within its territory; the exclusive right to the ownership and control of resources, both natural and created within it (sic) territory; the right to custom duties for its territory and excise duties on goods manufactured in its territory.

The various peoples and ethnic-nations in the Niger Delta are clear on what they

desire and want. They desire resource control. The issue of resource control is a highly contested issue in Nigeria. Nigeria is essentially a mono-economy that depends on oil and gas revenue. There is over-dependence on oil wealth. Anything that affects oil supply—such as youth restiveness, ethnic militancy, pipeline vandalization, low oil prices, etc.—affects the economy and the lives of people. Any argument of more revenue to the regions from which oil is produced often draws the wrath of the federal government.

It is true that the government has implemented various projects and initiatives to quell agitations for self-determination and manage the demands in the Niger Delta. These include the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission, the present Niger Delta Development Commission, and Niger Delta Ministry. Compared with the billions of monetary resources that the region has produced these efforts are piecemeal and have also been marred by corruption. These government efforts are aimed at developing the region, but unfortunately the region is grossly underdeveloped. Ekpo (2004, 133) maintains:

For more than four decades, the people of the Niger Delta had lived with the anomaly of having to feed on the crumbs of the national cake which is baked in their territory, but which is shared in the nations's capital...with hundreds of Nigerians, who know nothing about the negative effects of oil exploration and production, who are the highest beneficiaries.

There is no doubt that what the Niger Delta is experiencing is a chronic case of internal colonialism. The peoples of the Niger Delta are subordinated to the “dominant” ethnic groups. Although their region is the dominant producer of Nigeria’s income, the peoples therein are deprived of the major benefits of producing wealth. The “dominant” ethnic groups “appropriate and transfer resources from the periphery to develop core areas especially in the North, while creating immiseration, increased inequality, underdevelopment, wanton ecological destruction...” in the Niger Delta (Adeola 2009, 153).

In arising to proclaim various declarations of rights and demanding resource control of the peoples of the Niger Delta, they are asserting their destiny and self-determination. The government often resorted to tough brutal force in meeting the demands of revolutionary activities in the region, but the people of the Niger Delta have continued to demand for their rights. It is in this light that a critical examination of this right to self-determination is done.

## **A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL**

The right to self-determination should be clearly recognized and exercised in the Niger Delta. In stating one of the fundamental reasons for self-determination, Moro (2008, 148-49) stresses that distinct plural interests, distinctive ethno-cultural attributes, and language identities should be fostered and not submerged into one national identity. Nigeria’s attempt to build projects in the desire to consolidate unity has often marginalized the identities and attributes of various cultures. Many peoples have a deep sacral reverence for their ethnic customs and traditions and often this has led to tensions and conflicts in the country (Moro 2008, 149). Only through genuine self-determination can these tensions and conflicts be reduced. It is painful to note that Nigeria as a federal state ought to respect the right to

self-determination. Nigeria, however, has implemented the principles of federation very poorly and the country has is a lopsided centralized federation. According to Victor Ojatorotu (2010, 63), Nigeria is a skewed federation that is in the process of disintegration as it fails to adequately recognize the rights of ethnic minorities. He (2010, 67) is forthright in propounding that “there is urgent need for series of reforms in terms of the practice of federalism.” One such vital reforms is for the Nigerian state to grant autonomy to various regions so that they can develop their ideals based on their veritable and cherished cultural values.

It is painful and illogical to note that the response of the federal republic has been high-handed and has met agitators for self-determination with brutal force. It would not be right to totally absolve all voices of agitation for self-determination as all wrong-doing. There are, of course, criminal gangs and militants, who kidnap, kill, destroy, and vandalize oil facilities.

To speak of a Nigerian people does not deny the fact that it is composed of various ethnic groups, who have their own cultural heritages, language rights, spiritual traditions, etc. It will amount to a great injustice to destroy these cultural diversities in the name of building a nation. The landmark achievement of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is against this.

The value of a people’s cultural rights cannot be overemphasized. When a people’s culture is destroyed by marginalizing their language, infringing on their ancestral sites as is done through oil exploration in Nigeria, destroying their cherished environment, etc., the values and ideals that culture can contribute to the nation are lost. Internal self-determination is for the good of the nation-state as the various cultural endowments are still within the state. It is important to restate that there are genuine reasons for self-determination in Nigeria, especially in the south. There is a deep sense of economic and political marginalization in the country. Writing of various ethno-nationalist groups in Nigeria such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, the Afenifere, etc., Olayode (n.d, 18) argues:

They became involved in political struggles, sought major restructuring, focus on collective grievances and were highly selective in their use of human rights language. The basis of their struggle is “self-determination” within a national entity. They often used traditional symbols and cultural solidarity for grassroots mobilisation. Their sense of unity was defined to a large extent by resentment against exploitation by “outsiders” – even though these “outsiders” were citizens of the same country. For instance, the Ogoni and Igbo nationalisms were motivated by deep-seated feelings of economic injustice and political marginalisation. Almost the same logic drives the Afenifere’s resolve to roll out a political party. Perhaps, more than the Igbo, the Yoruba feel a sense of political marginalisation in the deliberate frustration of their past attempts to capture federal power, the most recent being the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election.

Denial of the rights of a people to internal self-determination has often led to conflicts and violence. Eritrea violently seceded from Ethiopia. Look at the various conflicts that took place before South Sudan gained independence from Sudan. All over the world there are regions in which ethnic peoples are demanding autonomy such as Scotland in the United

Kingdom, Catalonia in Spain, the Kurds in Syria, Quebec in Canada, the Oromo in Ethiopia, etc. This self-determination has to be worked out in various ways in the various regions. But to deny a people of this right to self-determination can only court more conflicts, violence, and perpetual instability in those regions. If not for anything, the government should have channels of dialogue available for the people to express themselves. Citing scholars such as Neil MacCormick, Avishai Margalit, Joseph Raz and David Miller, Donald Horowitz (1997, 441) contends that the self-determination of a group is akin to an individual moral autonomy and the self-determination of a group enhances individual welfare and wellbeing. It follows that individuals whose sense of identity and wellness is deeply rooted in the consciousness of their ethnic group. To deprive them of their ethnicity through self-determination impedes their own happiness.

One of the controversial topics in metaphysics is that of determinism and freedom. Determinism affirms that humans are not free in determining their destinies. Advocates of various forms of determinism include Gottfried von Leibniz, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Baron Von Holbach. While on the other side, those who argue for freedom includes as Thomas Aquinas and Asint Augustine, among others, and affirm that humans are free to determine their own destinies.

This paper sides with freedom, especially the freedom to self-determination. To deny this freedom is to destroy the whole fabric of ethnic humanity. While it is true that, to a certain degree, humans can be constrained by factors in acting, they are still free. Aristotle argues for the philosophy of potency and actuality. Everything is in a state of becoming. Not only individuals but groups are in social evolution. A people collectively are in the drive to become more than what they are now. Even from a metaphysical viewpoint when a person is oppressed and alienated, the person has this right to self-determination to free himself from that oppression, as in the case of a colonized people. But this equally applies to peoples outside the purview of colonialism. It will be unjust to say that people suffering internal colonialism and other forms of oppression should not seek to set themselves free. Citing Obiora Chinedu Okafor, Okoronkwo (2002, 105-106) asserts:

...self-determination is not just achieved by securing independence and emancipating peoples from alien colonial rule, but also by liberating peoples from tyranny and oppression. Consequently, “there is no reason why any oppressed people should not enjoy this right to shake away the oppressor, be him from across the seas or from the same racial stock!” All “oppressed peoples, whether under colonial or internal oppressive domination, are entitled to assert the right of self determination.”

Freedom speaks of that innate self-drive in a human to be continuously free and aspire or quest for more than what is now manifest in him/her. The criminal activities of various groups of youths and militants vandalize, maim, kill, and kidnap, are not the acceptable means of demanding for self-determination. Criminal violence produces no good in society. The desire for self-determination should not be at all cost.

Sometimes people can have self-determination and gain autonomy only to be oppressed by rulers among their own people. While national independence, for instance,

was good, it is painful to note that it often gave room to new oppressors who are as oppressive as the colonial masters. This is clearly noted by Franz Fanon (1961) when he discourse on national consciousness. This is not to say that people should not seek self-determination. It should be done in such a way that what results from it should not be more oppression. The example of South Sudan is a case in point. South Sudan gained independence from Sudan with high hopes and expectations. But those hopes have been ruined with the continuous civil conflicts that raged among the leaders. It is hoped that the recent peace deal among the once divided leaders will work and bring true peace. Horowitz (1997, 443), while citing Kymlicka, writes that there is no guarantee that when external self-determination or outright secession is achieved, it will produce the wellbeing of the people; it can produce an illiberal regime, more miseries, oppression of other minorities in the group or a weak state. This notwithstanding the fact is that many scholars such as Allen Buchanan and even Per Bawn concede even to secession when the group's rights are seriously and continuously violated and their survival is endangered. Self-determination can never be a cure -all to the problems that the group faces in the state. That is why internal self-determination should be encouraged to enhance the expression of the ethnic cultural identity, language rights, social cohesion, and autonomy.

Internal self-determination is necessary for the preservation of the environment of the Niger Delta. The environment of the Niger Delta has been greatly devastated by oil exploration activities. There is no doubt that very often only the people who live in the environment of the oil exploration directly feel the impact and likewise suffer from the devastation. They are the ones who are more determined to preserve the area than those who are in there for profit making. The people of the Niger Delta have suffered disproportionately and negatively various environmental consequences (Nwaomah 2011, 92). Environmental justice requires that they are never left out in environmental policies that affect them (Nwaomah 2011, 92) and this can be greatly enhanced when their right to self-determination is guaranteed.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Self-determination is a fundamental right of all peoples. The Niger Delta has suffered from various forms of internal colonialism. The exploitation of their environment for oil and the environmental damage are examples of this. As noted, the environment of the Niger Delta is so degraded that it will take up to thirty years to remediate. Through resource control and political, economic, and cultural autonomy, the people of the region will be able to chart their own affairs within the Nigerian federation and devote more time to preserve their cultures and environment. The people in the region are the ones who have suffered directly the impact of oil and gas exploration. Following the endogenous principle, they are the ones better equipped, with the help of the federal government, to be in charge of their land.

The point has been made that when a people are gravely and continuously oppressed and deprived of commensurate benefits of their resources, then they have a right to demand self-determination. In the case of Nigeria this can be done by operating a more balanced and just federation where the peoples of the Niger Delta have a predominant

control of their cultural, socio-economic, and political resources. How this can be worked out can be the subject of future reflections.

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