Indigenous Resistance: Counter-Hegemonic Movements of the Wixárika and Ogoni

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Abstract

Since the downfall of formal colonialism after the conclusion of World War II, economic policies advocated for by the Global North have been spread around the globe via the development and globalization projects, as well as various structural adjustment programs and neoliberal free trade agreements. In many cases, Indigenous and peasant communities have been drastically affected by the persistence and spread of economic practices oriented towards the extraction of natural resources. This article will critically examine the experiences of the Wixárika of Mexico and the Ogoni of Nigeria— two indigenous cultures that have been terribly affected by neoliberal economic reform in their countries. As a result of this economic reform and subsequent resource extraction at the hands of corporations of the Global North, these cultures' world-views and ways of life, which foster an intimate and irreplaceable connection with the Earth, are being threatened and endangered. Despite this crucial similarity that the Wixárika and Ogoni share, the current state of these peoples' resistance movements differs. This provides us with the opportunity to examine the similarities and differences of these two peoples' experiences, and through doing so we can gain a crucial insight into the current state of indigenous resistance movements around the world, as well as the greater importance and meaning of these movements.

Introduction

After the conclusion of World War II, the world's major colonial empires began to disappear from formal existence. However, these colonial empires were replaced with an international sphere, defined by hegemonic power, that promoted a series of economic policies that only furthered the economic interests of the world's most powerful nations. These policies, diffused through what is known as the Development Project (and later the Globalization Project), were presented under the guise of being a beneficial economic venture for local populations. Feeling pressure to develop and modernize, leaders of many post-colonial states around the world adopted these measures. However, these policies have had disastrous effects on indigenous populations all around the world, depriving countless peoples of their traditional ways of life.

While the Ogoni of Nigeria and the Wixárika[1] of Mexico are located on opposite ends of the globe, both of these groups currently find themselves fighting for their culture and ways of life as the result of economic practices that have been promoted by the Global North and embraced by their state governments. While it is well understood that these groups have both been affected by this economic reform in a negative way, taking a more in-depth look at their specific movements can provide valuable insight. By examining similarities between the Wixárika and Ogoni experiences, and then acknowledging the subtle differences, the complexities of the many challenges facing indigenous peoples around the world can be more adequately understood and then located within a broader counter-hegemonic movement.

Brief Discussion of Indigeneity

To begin, it is perhaps most important to have a brief discussion on the concept of 'indigeneity' and how it relates to the two case studies presented in this article. The term indigeneity and questions regarding "who qualifies as indigenous" have become an increasingly complicated debate for a variety of reasons. As pointed out by Pelican (2009), the term 'indigenous' can undoubtedly mean different things in different contexts, and it can be more difficult in certain parts of the world (such as Africa) to discern who the term is applicable to. While it is not the purpose of this paper to wholly engage the debates surrounding the concept of indigeneity, it is nevertheless important to explain how the term 'indigenous' is being employed within the context of this article and clarify how this usage relates to broader discussions of indigeneity.

The most logical place to begin this discussion is a brief survey of various definitions of the term 'indigenous'. As discussed by Ronald Niezen (2005), the term 'indigenous' being used in relation to people is a relatively new phenomenon that began gaining popularity in the 1970's. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was one of the first entities to begin using the term in relation to human beings, and did so in a manner that "served as a distinct starting point for

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[1] The term *Wixárika* is what the Wixárika people refer to themselves as in their native language. Today, the Wixárika are more commonly referred to as the Huichol, which is the term that was assigned to them by the Spanish. Given the spirit of this discussion, much of which relates to the preservation and protection of indigenous cultures and world views, it seemed more appropriate to refer to this indigenous group by their native term.

claims of distinct identity and rights based upon the principles of original occupation of land and the pursuit of traditional ways of life (Niezen 2005, 588)." By the late 1970's and early 80's, the concepts of indigeneity and indigenous rights began to appear within the realm of the United Nations. By 1986, José Martinez Cabo, the special rapporteur to the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities, completed his study on discrimination against indigenous populations and in the process produced this widely accepted definition:

> Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system (Cobo quoted by Pelican 2009, 55).

Cobo also placed much emphasis on the concept of self-identification (identifying oneself as an indigenous person), which has increasingly been recognized as an important qualifier (Hodgson 2009). The ILO, when replacing their 1950's definition in 1989, similarly regarded self-identification as a 'fundamental criterion' of indigeneity and emphasized peoples' desires for self-determination and maintenance of traditional ways of life in order to retain their cultural identities (Dove 2006, Hodgson 2009). In 2007, the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights of the African Union (ACHR), while acknowledging that the concept of indigeneity in Africa differed from the concept in other regions of the world, also cited self-identification as highly important in addition to "a special attachment to and use of their traditional lands and a state of marginalization because of cultural difference from the national dominant model (ACHR quoted by Pelican 2009, 56)." Then lastly, scholars have approached the concept of indigeneity in a variety of ways (see Figueroa-Helland and Raghu 2015; Hall and Fenelon 2014; Stewart-Harawira 2011). Perhaps most importantly, as mentioned by Stewart-Harawira (2011), large numbers of scholars have begun to identify the relationship of indigenous peoples to their land and environment as one of "the most fundamental aspect[s] of indigenous identity (81)."

While the above Cobo definition is a good starting point and applies to both the Wixárika and Ogoni in several ways, some of the qualifiers presented within that definition can be problematic in some contexts. To demonstrate this, we need not look any further than the regions discussed in this paper. The Wixárika communities being focused on in this paper satisfy the Cobo, ILO, and Stewart-Hawarira criteria in every way. However, where Latin American individuals who have been forced into the modern world system, but can also claim indigenous ancestry, fall within this discussion has been the source of much debate. As pointed out by Harris, Carlson, and Poata-Smith (2013), in many cases various colonial processes such as land dispossession and forced urbanization have fundamentally altered indigenous peoples' relationships to their traditional communities and land base— some people may not even become aware of their indigenous ancestry until later in their lives. Within an African context the discussion becomes even more complicated, as many peoples have histories that are difficult to locate within the 'pre-invasion' dynamic that has been present within many dominant frameworks of indigeneity. This is due to the fact that within Africa, there are long and complex histories of migration, assimilation, syncretization, and conquest between ethnic groups that are all native to the continent (Pelican 2009)— not to mention the diffusion of Christianity and Islam across the northern half of the continent long prior to European colonization.

Despite the previously mentioned complications, there are clearly peoples on the African continent whose experiences are similar to the experiences of indigenous people in Latin America. This is referring to peoples who have historically been identified and self-identified as indigenous— largely as a result of their "*... cultural distinctiveness, ... long history of political subjugation, economic marginalization, territorial dispossession, cultural and linguistic discrimination by colonial and then postcolonial states (Hodgson 2009, 8).*" This is one place that the Ogoni can be located within broader discussions of indigeneity, and this is why they have been included as a case study within this article. As will be shown in greater detail later, the Ogoni are a culturally distinct people who live a lifestyle that conflicts with the economic development models of the post-colonial Nigerian State. As a result, they have been displaced from the land that sustained their cultural practices for thousands of years and when they have tried to resist, they have been suppressed— sometimes violently. In addition to this, they have

consistently self-identified as indigenous peoples and always presented themselves as such (Ogoni Bill of Rights; Pyagbara 2006). Please note however, that while the Wixárika and Ogoni have been located under the banner of indigenous resistance for the purposes of this discussion (for reasons previously cited), this should not be mistaken as an endorsement of a particular definition or rigid framework of indigeneity that is applicable in every context.

Brief Overview of the Wixárika and Ogoni people

In order to fully appreciate the effects of neoliberal economic policies on indigenous peoples around the globe, one needs to understand the strong connections that these peoples have with the land that they interact with. The Ogoni and Wixárika are indigenous peoples living in Nigeria and Mexico, respectively. There are roughly 45,000 Wixárika people who are currently located in western Mexico, straddling an area between the present day Mexican states of Jalisco and Nayarit. Fortunately for them, they are a fairly secluded society, living in somewhat rugged mountain terrain. "The [Wixárika] characteristically maintain traditional modes of production, religion and social organization, as well as cultural traits, with over 90 % of the [Wixárika] speaking the native tongue, and 11% of these not speaking Spanish (Boni, Garibray and McCall 2015, 764)." The Wixárika are traditionally an agricultural society that relies on sustenance farming to maintain their ways of life. Beans, corns, and different kinds of squash produced through slash and burn agricultural methods define the core of the Wixárika economy. Despite the fact that they have remained relatively secluded from the modern world, at least more so than some other indigenous cultures, they do occasionally descend from their mountain towns to sell intricate weaves and other products that have been common in their culture for thousands of years. Given their agrarian way of life, the Wixárika have a very close connection to the land that they occupy and their society can be drastically affected by any changes that occur to this land. It's also important to note, however, that the Wixárika have strong cultural ties to lands as far as 500 km away from the area in which they currently reside. "Specific groups of the [Wixárika] make yearly [400 to 500] km pilgrimages from their communities in western Mexico to Wirikuta, a vast region they consider highly sacred (Boni, Garibray and McCall 2015, 759)..." The Wirikuta is a region that has a special religious significance to the Wixárika people,

comparable to the significance of places such as Jerusalem to Jews and Mecca to Muslims. As discussed by Darcy Tetreault:

> Every year the [Wixárika] people walk 500 kilometers to get to Wirikuta, where according to legend the sun was born. Here, they collect *jíkuri* (peyote), carry out rituals of purification, and enter into communion with their gods, who give them blessings and guidance. In this way they conserve their culture, maintain spiritual harmony with nature, and uphold a thousand-year-old tradition. Located in the state of San Luis Potosi, Wirikuta is one of the most biologically rich and diverse deserts in the world. It has been shaped and maintained by hundreds of years of continuous interaction between the [Wixárika] people and their environment and constitutes an example of successful human adaptation and survival without resource depletion or environmental collapse (2015, 57).

For the purposes of this paper, the Wirikuta and the cultural practices that surround the region are perhaps the most important feature of Wixárika society to understand. This is because the Wirikuta has been threatened by the adoption of neoliberal economic policies and the resulting proliferation of mining throughout the country of Mexico.

The Ogoni, on the other hand, are an indigenous culture in Nigeria that share some similarities with the Wixárika, both in societal character and experiences since the adoption of neoliberal economic reform.

> The Ogoni people live in Rivers State in the Niger Delta, in south-eastern Nigeria, in an area that is about 100 square kilometers in size. They number around 500,000 people who live in six kingdoms. Linguistic studies suggest they settled in the area currently known as Ogoni over 2,000 years ago. The Ogoni were — and still are today — a largely agricultural and fishing society (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001, 76).

The Niger River Delta, where the Ogoni people are located, is a truly rich and diverse piece of land. The area, in its natural state, features large amounts of mangrove swamps, freshwater wetlands, rainforests, and land that is perfect for agricultural use. This biodiverse environment fosters an incredible array of different plant and animal life that has sustained the Ogoni for millennia (Odoemene 2011; Uyigue and Agho 2007). However, as one may guess, the Niger River Delta that the Ogoni have occupied and survived off of is incredibly fragile, and just the

slightest disturbance in climate pattern or land use can have a very destructive effect not only on the land, but also on the Ogoni culture.

While the Ogoni, historically speaking, are similar to the Wixárika people in the sense that they are both agrarian societies that have strong connections to the land around them, the Ogoni currently find themselves in a much different situation than the Wixárika. In Mexico, as previously stated, the sacred land that the Wixárika people currently find themselves fighting to preserve is located roughly 500 km from their current settlement locations. Fortunately, as of now, the land that currently sustains the Wixárika people's agrarian economy has been preserved for the most part. The Ogoni of Nigeria have not had the same experience. Unfortunately, the land that the Ogoni currently occupy and nearly every aspect of their culture relies on, has been continually destroyed by various industrial practices (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001; Odoemene 2011; Uyigue and Agho 2007). Please note that the previous statements about how the Wixárika and Ogoni experiences relate to each other is in no way meant to imply that the Wixárika situation is any less significant. It's very easy for anyone raised in a secular environment, especially in the Global North, to compare the Wixárika and Ogoni experiences and make the assumption that the Ogoni situation is far more dire. However, such a statement would be coming from an ethnocentric perspective that doesn't recognize the importance and centrality of religious practices in some indigenous cultures. In many ways, the destruction of sacred land like the Wirikuta can have just as big of an impact on a culture as the destruction of agricultural lands.

Neoliberal Economic Reform in Mexico and Nigeria

In order to fully appreciate the current state of the resistance movements concerning the preservation of the Wirikuta and the Niger River Delta, it is vital that people understand the economic history of the two areas. Both Mexico and Nigeria have long histories, drastically affected by the colonial tendencies of the Global North and postcolonial attempts at development

and modernization.[2] These histories continue to have a huge effect on their respective countries, as well as the indigenous populations within those countries.

As discussed by Nkrumah (1965) and Winant (2015), by the time World War II concluded, old fashioned colonialism that had allowed countries of the Global North to continually extract resources from the Global South was coming to an end. However, what was left behind was an international sphere that featured a handful of economically and militarily powerful countries from the Global North; and then what was labeled as the "Third World", a group of countries mainly comprised of former colonies that had recently gained independence and were economically inferior by western standards. At this point in the discussion, it's very important to completely understand the concept of coloniality and more specifically, coloniality of knowledge, both of which are a vital component of critical decolonial discourse. Both of these ideas directly relate to the economic evolution of Mexico and Nigeria and by extension, the Wixárika and Ogoni people.

"Coloniality.... refers to long standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism (Moldonado-Torres 2007, 243)." Coloniality of knowledge is a slightly more specific idea. As stated by Dastile and Ndolvu-Gatsheni:

> Coloniality of knowledge is very important because it speaks directly to the dilemmas of invasion of imagination and colonization of the minds of [indigenous peoples], which constitutes epistemological colonization. This colonization of consciousness and modes of knowing is pervasive in discourses of development, technologies of organizing people into nations and states, as well as imaginations of the future (2013, 111).

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[2] Please note that while there is some room for debate, within the context of this paper the term 'Global North' generally applies to "wealthy industrialized nations [including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the member states of the European Union]" while the term 'Global South' generally refers to the "less prosperous counterparts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America... [which share] a history of Northern economic and political domination (Atapattu and Gonzalez 2015, 1)."

In countries all over the world, including both Mexico and Nigeria, colonialism fundamentally altered the way societies functioned by destroying traditional cultures and ways of living in favor of an economic system that allowed for the easy extraction of resources. This impact was never going to simply disappear when formal colonialism came to end because what was often left behind were countries led by governments that had come to embrace the economic models of the Global North (See Barreto 2013; Chandra 2013; Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren 2016; Jones 2013; Moldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2000; Quijano 2007; Seth 2011).[3]

As both Mexico and Nigeria gained independence, the leaders that were left behind were individuals had come to believe that the only way for their countries to economically compete was to develop and modernize as the Global North had. After the Global North's final colonial stake-holds disappeared after World War II, they took advantage of the colonialities of knowledge present within the minds of leaders in the Global South. International institutions like the IMF and the World Bank were constructed in a manner that allowed for the proliferation of economic policies that had been endorsed by the Global North. It's important to note that the IMF and World Bank are essentially controlled by the nations of the Global North, and can therefore advocate policies that unequally benefit former colonial powers. Voting power within the IMF and World Bank are weighted by the size of financial contributions member states make to the organizations. In addition to this, the President of the World Bank is directly appointed by the president of the United States, the five biggest shareholders within the World Bank each appoint their own directors to the twelve member board while the remaining five are collectively appointed by all remaining members, and the managing director of the IMF is appointed by the European nations of England, France, and Germany (See Ahmed 2010; Englebert 2000; Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren 2016; The Lancet 2014; McMichael 2012; Scholte 2013).

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[3] Coloniality of Power helps account for the socio-political power structures both within formerly colonized societies and between formerly colonized societies and the Global North. In many states across the Global South, when colonial administrators left, the leaders left behind were individuals who had become socio-political elites due to the fact that they had decided to work with colonial administrators during the colonial era for personal benefit. In some instances even, these people were actually just the descendants of the original colonizers. In addition to this, these states were economically and militarily inferior to the Global North (largely the result of the capital accumulation during the colonial era). These lasting power relations are what is often referred to as Coloniality of Power.

In reality, it was practically impossible for every nation across the Global South to develop as the Global North had. The amount of resources and capital needed simply did not exist. Bear in mind, one the biggest reasons the states of Global North were able to achieve their level of industrialization and development was the accumulation of wealth and resources from the Global South via colonization. Nevertheless, the IMF and the World Bank encouraged nations around the world to pursue western development and modernization, in some cases giving them loans to do so. As discussed by Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren (2016), in some instances during their modernization efforts, states would begin to engage in what could be considered 'sub-imperialist' practices that mirrored the actions of past colonizers. To clarify, the term 'sub-imperialism' is referring to the continued subjugation, oppression, and exploitation of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities within a state's borders (e.g. indigenous peoples and their lands) in the name of economic development.[4]

The fact that export economies, like those found in Mexico and Nigeria, were dependent on the demand of the Global North made these nations vulnerable to the volatile global economy and gave them little leverage in trade negotiations.[5] This, coupled with the previously discussed impossibility of the rapid modernization they were trying to accomplish, caused many economies across the Global South to fail. Once these countries fell into debt, the IMF and the World Bank, in a somewhat predatory manner, approached these countries once again — this time offering them new loans and/or repayment plan restructuring. However, these offers had a huge caveat attached to them. In exchange, these countries needed to completely embrace neoliberal economic policies and open their borders to free trade. This clearly benefited the more economically powerful states of the Global North, which were still hungry for the resources dispersed across the Global South. The Global North pounced on the opportunity to resume the extraction of resources from the Global South at unprecedented rates under these new free trade

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[4] Both the Wixarika and Ogoni could be considered victims of these sub-imperialist practices, since their state governments have helped facilitate the exploitation of culturally significant lands in order to generate revenue. Granted, the term 'neocolonialism' is also appropriate since the corporations engaging their state's governments are based in the Global North.

[5] Recall that many former colonies had developed their export economies while they were still under the administration of the colonial empires of the Global North. Since their economic infrastructure constructed around the exportation of natural resources and the states of Global North still had a strong demand for these resources, naturally, they turned back to these economic practices in an effort to generate revenue and achieve rapid modernization. This is closely related to the previously discussed concept of coloniality.

laws (See Englebert 2000; Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren 2016; Gonzalez 2015; Jones 2013; McMichael 2013; Nkrumah 1965).

The Mexican and Nigerian economies were no exception to the previously described phenomena. For the purposes of this paper, neoliberal economic policies and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) will primarily be discussed in relation to their effects on the mining industry in Mexico, as this is the primary industry that affects the Wixárika people. However, it should also be noted that these same policies have had huge effects on the manufacturing and agricultural sectors of their economy as well.

As many countries did, Mexico found itself with massive amounts of debt in the early 80's, owing nearly 80 billion dollars to private and public foreign creditors. As a result, the country turned to the IMF for assistance, agreeing to cut state spending and privatize various industries in exchange for debt relief (Hellman 1997). Between 1982 and 1988, to further attract foreign investment in the mining industry:

> ...the Miguel de la Madrid administration introduced a number of measures meant to jumpstart mineral and metal production. These included the elimination of taxes on the exportation of metals and minerals, the reduction of tariffs on the importation of mining machinery and equipment, and differential discount rates for production taxes (Tetreault 2014, 3).

While the administration of Miguel de la Madrid took action that began to attract the attention of foreign investors, the actions of the Salinas administration were far more significant. Salinas pushed for the complete privatization of the mining industry and completely opened it up to foreign investment.

> The Salinas administration made changes to Article 27 of the Constitution and to the country's agrarian and mining laws in order to put an official end to the post-revolutionary land redistribution process and to allow for the buying, selling and renting of ejidal[6] land. The 1992 Mining Law opened the door to the full participation of 100 percent foreign-owned mining companies, under the guise of

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[6] The word *ejidal* means 'relating to the *ejido* system.' The term *ejido* is a Spanish term that refers to an area of communal land that is used for agriculture.

'Mexican Societies', a status that could and can be attained by simply establishing a mailing address in Mexico's territory (Teautrealt 2014, 3).

Any remaining trade barriers were further eroded with the creation of NAFTA in 1994. Today, Mexico is the number one recipient of foreign direct investment in the mining industry in Latin America. 208 of the nation's 288 mining corporations are Canadian owned and destructive mining projects have wreaked havoc throughout the country, spelling disaster for indigenous populations (Teatreault 2015). As previously mentioned, the Wixárika have been lucky to the extent that the land they currently occupy has not been destroyed. However, they are currently embroiled in a fight with a Canadian mining company that is attempting to open operations in the Wirikuta, the Wixárika's sacred land of worship.

Nigeria's economic history has followed a similar trajectory to that of Mexico's. When Nigeria gained independence, they found themselves in a desperate economic situation. Being gifted with an abundance of natural resources and fertile land, and having been an export economy while under British colonial rule, Nigeria turned towards the exportation of resources to generate revenue, develop, and modernize according to western standards. Reminiscent of the previously discussed idea of coloniality of knowledge, in an authoritarian manner, the state began to emulate economic practices that were first implemented under the British.

> Oil, and most importantly the revenue it generated, quickly dominated the Nigerian economy and thus control over oil resources was, and still is, a key concern for any Nigerian government. In order to assure this control, the Nigerian state[7] gradually strengthened its control over the land. The British colonial administration had vested the ownership of all minerals in the Crown. This policy was intensified by the post-colonial Nigerian government through a Land Use Decree, which vested all land in the State and later the Petroleum Act, giving the Federal State the power to seize any land needed for oil exploitation. In the late 1970s, the government further increased its control over the petroleum industry via two indigenization decrees, which virtually nationalized the oil industry and paved the way for establishing the current joint ventures (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001, 76).

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[7] It's important to emphasize the fact that the actions of the Nigerian *state* (government) do not necessarily represent the interests or desires of the populations that reside within its borders— particularly indigenous and peasant populations. This is related to the previously discussed concept of Coloniality of Power (explained in footnote 1).

Like Mexico, in the early 1980's Nigeria found itself in a dire economic situation, having accrued massive amounts of debt once their first attempt at western development failed. In 1986, like Mexico, the Nigerian government resorted to SAPs in a desperate attempt to attract foreign investment and revenue (Ogbonna 2012). This SAP introduced sweeping economic reform to the country, revaluing their currency, eliminating import and export barriers, and lowering taxes for corporations conducting business within Nigerian borders (The World Bank 1994). Once the doors to Nigeria's vast amounts of oil wealth were opened, companies like Shell quickly began conducting business in the Nigeria. Over 600 million barrels of oil have been sucked from the land that the Ogoni occupy (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001). This doesn't include other oil operations around the Niger River Delta and the greater country of Nigeria. According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, "with a maximum crude oil production capacity of 2.5 million barrels per day, Nigeria ranks as Africa's largest producer of oil and the sixth largest oil producing country in the world (2016)." As of 2015, petroleum accounts for up to 90% of Nigeria's export revenue and roughly 70% the Nigerian government's total revenues (Harcourt 2015). As one would expect, massive amounts of activity within the oil industry have had a disastrous effect on the natural environment and begun to threaten indigenous people's ways of life, including the Ogoni.

Degradation and Resistance

To begin, it is important to emphasize the fact that while the Wixárika people have been fortunate enough thus far to avoid mining exploration on the land which they currently live, mining has had a disastrous impact on the natural environment nearly everywhere the industry has operated. Throughout Mexico, many companies have used open-pit mining techniques.

> Open-pit mining completely destroys the land that contains minerals, leaving behind gigantic craters and heaps of contaminated rubble that emit toxins into the environment. Aside from aesthetic considerations, this implies the loss of habitat for wildlife and, more important for our analysis, deprives local communities of the use of the land for agricultural, forestry, or other purposes (Tetreault 2015, 51).

Open-pit mining has repeatedly destroyed important pieces of land that indigenous communities all around Mexico have relied on for thousands of years, forcing these communities to change their ways of life and often relocate to urban centers. Other mining practices like leaching, which are used in both open-pit and underground mining practices, use massive amounts of water that agrarian indigenous communities rely on. Leaching simultaneously releases toxic chemicals into the environment that degrades land and harms plant and animal life. Bear in mind that the vast majority of these mining operations are done without the consent of the indigenous peoples that they most drastically affect. To add insult to injury, the economic benefits of these operations almost never reach these communities. In some instances, mining projects are sold to peasant populations with the promise of jobs and economic prosperity. However, describing this as a mutual agreement is extremely disingenuous. In many instances these local populations realize the companies will continue to pursue their operation regardless of whether or not they have the support of the local community. Additionally, the jobs promised to local populations often turn out to be either low paying or short term.

The Wixárika people have found themselves continually fighting to keep the Wirikuta region from falling victim to mining practices that have already destroyed vast amounts of land in Mexico. This land has been within the sights of a Canadian mining company called First Majestic Silver for quite some time now (Boni, Garibray and McCall 2014; Tetreault 2014; Tetreault 2015). While the Mexican government has classified the whole area as a reserve, in 2000, the Mexican government divided the land into special zones that were to be used a particular way. One of those zone types, known as a special use zone, was specifically made to allow mining companies to use the land as they wished without facing legal consequences. In response to this, the Wixárika people have allied with various NGO's and multiple indigenous rights groups to form the Frente en Defensa de Wirikuta (FDW) (Boni, Garibray, and McCall 2014). Led the by the whole of the Wixárika population, this group has continually argued with the Mexican government that this land is vital to their social and cultural reproduction and cannot be replaced in any way. They have demanded the halt of mining operations in the area and taken the case to court. Federal courts have recognized the Wixárika claims to the land but the fight is ongoing (Tetreault 2014; Tetreault 2015). This movement, throughout all of its stages, has been largely non-violent and remains so to this day. One complicating factor is that

First Majestic Silver claims that the local populations who live right next to the Wirikuta (recall that the Wixárika live 500 km away) actually support the mining operations. As previously mentioned though, the sincerity of local support can be called into question fairly easily.

While reforms in Mexican law have affirmed the importance of cultural rights, the Wixárika and others have argued that these reforms do not go far enough (Boni, Garibray, and McCall 2014). Many media outlets from all around the world have begun to follow and support the Wixárika cause. International support has grown since the start of their movement and definitely helped place pressure on the Mexican government and First Majestic (Tetreault 2015). The case in Wirikuta represents much more than the protection of land that is sacred to Wixárika culture. To those involved with the movement, this fight represents the convergence of anti-capitalist, anti-neocolonial, and environmentalist resistance— as it is capitalist and neocolonial practices that have the potential to steal from people like the Wixárika and have already stolen so much from other indigenous cultures around the world.

The Ogoni of Nigeria have had very different experiences than the Wixárika of Mexico. As previously mentioned, like the Wixárika, the Ogoni are an agrarian society but have also used fishing to supplement their diets. They rely on the fertile and diverse land of the Niger River Delta to sustain their ways of life. Unfortunately, since Shell and other oil companies have been allowed into the region by the Nigerian government, much of what the Ogoni rely on has been destroyed. According to Bond (2013), "an estimated 1.5 million tonnes of oil have spilled since drilling began in the late 1950's, the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez spill each year, costing more than 5 billion dollars in annual environmental damage (215-216)." Between 1976 and 1990 alone, over 2500 oil spills affected the region and they were rarely cleaned up properly. This has had an absolutely devastating impact on the land and waterways that the Ogoni have traditionally relied on for agriculture and fishing; so much so that most of the land and waterways affected by oil spoils are practically useless to the Ogoni people at this point in time (Etiosa and Agho 2007; Jike 2004; Odoemene 2011). Only furthering the problem, petroleum companies like Shell often construct canals through the Niger River Delta. This is done for transport and various other purposes but has a very problematic effect on the wetlands environment. As mentioned earlier, the Niger River Delta features many freshwater swamps and wetlands that are very fragile. The

construction of canals throughout the region has allowed saltwater from the sea to penetrate inland, salinizing the water in the swamps and wetlands. This has a very harmful effect on the freshwater fish and plants that the Ogoni depend on (Aluko 2004). Gas flaring is another very destructive practice that is used widely in the region, but rarely given the amount of attention it deserves. The problem with gas flaring is the amount of chemicals and gases that it releases into the atmosphere above the Niger River Delta. These gases then condense and form acid rain. In Nigeria, this acid rain has been known to be so potent that it is sometimes capable of eroding the aluminum sheets on peoples' homes. Additionally, the acid rain in the Niger River Delta has significantly harmed the biodiversity of the region, altering vegetation and poisoning waterways (Uyigue and Agho 2007; Jike 2004; Odoemene 2011).

At this point, it is quite obvious that the petroleum industry has directly affected the Ogoni way of life. Unlike the Wixárika people of Mexico, they currently find themselves in a situation where many of their traditional modes of livelihood (agriculture and fishing) are virtually impossible to follow. Similar to the situation with the Wixárika and many other indigenous groups in Mexico, this has been done without the consent of the Ogoni people (Aluko 2004). In the 1990's, given all of the injustices that have been committed against the Ogoni, a fairly powerful resistance movement emerged in the Niger River Delta.

> With the established Nigerian political system having largely failed the Ogoni, they believed they had little choice but to revert to direct social action. The Ogoni movement decided to engage in a non-violent struggle drawing on the language of minority/indigenous peoples' rights and social and ecological justice. In October 1990 they launched the Ogoni Bill of Rights. In the Bill, the Ogoni people, while underlining their loyalty to the Nigerian nation, asserted their right to self-determination and articulated their demands for environmental, social and economic justice (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001, 79).

Shortly after this, the signatories of the Ogoni Bill of Rights formed the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Since the creation of this resistance group, the struggle has been brutal. Throughout the 90's, demands from MOSOP and large peaceful protests were met with violence by the Nigerian government, whose authoritarian leaders ordered Nigerian troops to attack their own citizens. Throughout this entire process, Shell turned a blind eye to the brutal treatment of the Ogoni people at the hands of the Nigerian government. Lack of

substantial support from the international community (contrary to what the Wixárika in Mexico have experienced) has caused others in the Niger River Delta to resort to more desperate measures (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001). Other resistance groups, such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have formed and taken a much more violent approach (Obi 2009; Odoemene 2011). MEND has repeatedly used tactics that include sabotage, property destruction, theft, and guerrilla warfare (Hanson 2007; Kline 2011). The stated goal of MEND is to end the exploitation of the Niger River Delta's resources at the hands of foreign investors, secure reparations, and return total control of the oil wealth and autonomy to the indigenous groups inhabiting the region (BBC News 2006). The level of violence used by groups like MEND distinctly separates the situations surrounding the Niger River Delta and Wirikuta (Obi 2009; Odoemene 2011).

Attacks on Ogoni communities and arrests of MOSOP activists continued throughout the 90's until the country returned to democratic rule. Since then, violence towards the Ogoni has subsided somewhat, but dialogue between MOSOP and Shell has been met with limited success. While Shell has, on multiple occasions, announced plans geared towards reducing environmental degradation and improving relations with the Ogoni people, the vast majority of these plans have been created without the actual input of MOSOP. This, coupled with the fact that Nigerian land is still being destroyed, has led to continual tension between MOSOP and Shell because MOSOP feels that Shell is dismissive of the Ogoni cause (Boele, Fabig, and Wheeler 2001). Currently, given the fact that destruction of their land has already occurred on a massive scale, their situation seems far more bleak than that of the Wixárika in Mexico. Some reparations (15 million dollars) were secured on behalf of Ken Saro-Wiwa's family, who brought a case against Shell to a US court (Bond 2013). Obviously, however, this very limited monetary reparation cannot undue decades of damage. To be blunt, it's unlikely the Ogoni culture will ever be completely the same. Too much irreparable damage has been done to the Niger River Delta, which the Ogoni people need to sustain their traditional ways of life. As with the Wixárika in Mexico, the fight the Ogoni face in the Niger River Delta is for much more than just their own well-being. The fight that the Ogoni have been undertaking represents a resistance against neocolonial and capitalist forces that have harmed many more people than just the Ogoni.

Moving forward, it is the responsibility of the entire globe to embrace these indigenous movements and hear what they are saying. Citizens of the Global North need to learn about such movements, listen to their discourse, and reflect critically on their own countries' roles in creating the problems that indigenous peoples, and the planet as a whole, are currently facing. One of the first things that needs to be challenged is the culture of consumerism, which drives the demand for the mass extraction of minerals, metals, petroleum, and other non-renewable resources. In addition to this, the intrinsic value of diversity (both cultural and environmental) needs to be recognized and embraced. As previously stated, the Mexican federal courts have recognized the precedence of cultural rights within their country, but far more needs to be done. Some countries, such as Bolivia, have enshrined ideas such as *Buen Vivir* in their constitution, establishing the inherent value and rights of the natural environment and future human generations (See Harcourt 2013; Kothari, Demario, and Acosta 2014; Safransky and Wolford 2011). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the entire idea of development needs to be deconstructed, critically analyzed, and rethought. For too long, development has only been thought of in terms of western modernization and it is this standard that has been applied to cultures and countries all around the world (Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014). Once the idea of development, as defined by the West, is reconsidered, more radical alternative lifestyles, modes of governance, and epistemologies of progress can be considered. Please note that the previous list of prescribed actions is by no means exhaustive. It only represents some of the more fundamental and broad changes that need to occur.

Concluding Thoughts

Neoliberal economic policies have had disastrous consequences for indigenous communities all around the world. In Mexico and Nigeria, respectively, neoliberal economic policies advocated for by the Global North resulted in an unprecedented level of environmental destruction at the hands of the mining and petroleum industries. These industries have continually alienated indigenous communities like the Wixárika of Mexico and the Ogoni of Nigeria, two communities who now find themselves to be a part of a massive global resistance against neoliberal economic policies, environmental degradation, neocolonialism, and western hegemony. To the Wixárika, the Ogoni, and other societies all around the world, land is not just

an invaluable resource, but inherently connected to their culture and being. As discussed by Figueroa-Helland and Raghu (2015),

> Although indigenous cultures are richly diverse, they tend to share the following principles: Indigenous peoples do not conceive themselves as separate from or superior to Mother Earth or the rest of the life-web. Instead, indigeneity understands itself as a life-form that is organically coextensive with, embedded in, and communally co-responsible for the cycles, forces, and relational networks that constitute Mother Earth and the encompassing cosmos. Indigenous worldviews often conceive human society as an organ with specific functions inside a larger fully living geo-body.

Fenelon (2014) was correct in identifying what could be considered a rather twisted and unfortunate irony, which is that the indigenous peoples that have long been thought of as 'primitive' and 'underdeveloped' may very well hold the key to humanity's ability to overcome many contemporary civilizational crises. Continuing to destroy the environment that sustains various indigenous populations will only further erode their socio-cultural structures, potentially to the point where they are completely destroyed. At that point, humanity as whole will lose a vital piece of itself and lose the ability to admire and learn from these cultures that have survived for hundreds of thousands of years, in harmony with this Earth (See De Sousa Santos 2014; Escobar 2015; Fenelon 2014; Figueroa-Helland and Raghu 2015; Ikeke 2015; Le Grange 2012; Pierotti and Wildcat 2000; Stewart-Harawira 2005). This is why the movements being spearheaded by the Wixárika and Ogoni are about much more than just their societies. These indigenous resistance movements are about reversing destructive economic trends and the development of the human/non-human dichotomy that will one day doom humanity (See Ahmed 2010; Ahmed 2011; Bowden 2011; Fenelon 2014; Figueroa-Helland and Lindgren 2016; George 2010; Houtart 2010).

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