Indigenous Colonialism, the Bane of Nigeria's Development

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of indigenous colonialism as a critical, yet underexamined, factor in Nigeria's persistent underdevelopment. Departing from traditional postcolonial critiques that focus on Western imperialism, this study investigates the internal dynamics of domination exercised by local elites who inherited and perpetuated colonial structures for personal and group gain. Using a qualitative approach, the research draws on historical analysis, policy documents, and secondary data to examine the continuity of colonial logic within Nigeria's political and socio-economic systems. Findings suggest that indigenous colonialism, manifested through elite capture, ethnic favoritism, and systemic marginalization, has entrenched inequalities and hindered inclusive national development. Grounded in postcolonial and internal colonialism theories, this research adopts a qualitative methodology that integrates historical analysis, secondary data from policy documents, scholarly literature, and illustrative case studies. The article uncovers how indigenous actors have not only replicated the exploitative practices of colonial administrators but have also evolved new forms of dominance that suppress dissent, institutionalize corruption, and obstruct nation-building efforts. By reframing development challenges through the lens of internal colonialism, this article calls for a radical rethinking of governance and citizenship in postcolonial African states. The study contributes to postcolonial and development literature by highlighting the

internalization of colonial structures as a key obstacle to progress in Nigeria.

Keywords: Indigenous colonialism, underdevelopment, Nigeria, internal colonialism, postcolonialism, elite domination

1.1. Introduction

The struggle for development in postcolonial Africa has long been framed as a consequence of colonial exploitation and the legacy of Western imperialism. However, as African nations like Nigeria have grappled with issues of governance, inequality, and underdevelopment for decades, a critical re-examination of the structures that perpetuate these challenges is necessary. In Nigeria's case, the notion of development cannot be fully understood without considering the role of indigenous colonialism, an insidious force that continues to undermine progress long after the formal end of foreign domination. Indigenous colonialism, a term that captures the ways in which local elites have appropriated colonial mechanisms for their own benefit, has become a central barrier to Nigeria's development.[1]

While the Nigerian state emerged from British colonialism in 1960, the legacy of colonial structures political, economic, and social remained entrenched in the new nation.[2] The post-independence period saw the consolidation of power by a select group of ethnic and political elites who maintained the colonial order through the manipulation of state resources, ethnic patronage, and the suppression of marginalized groups. These elites, both in government and business, inherited and expanded the power dynamics established by colonial rulers, creating a new form of oppression that was no longer externally imposed but internally perpetuated.

This article seeks to explore the concept of indigenous colonialism and its profound impact on Nigeria's development trajectory. The argument centers around the idea that Nigeria's political and economic underdevelopment is not solely the result of

[1] S.J.S. Cookey, 'Colonialism and the Process of Underdevelopment in Nigeria: a review', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1979, p. 19.
[2] J.O. Odeyemi, 'A political history of Nigeria and the crisis of ethnicity in nation-building', *International Journal of Developing Societies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2014, p. 1-12.

external factors, but also the consequence of internal colonial practices that continue to marginalize large portions of the population. Indigenous elites, by consolidating power along ethnic lines and exploiting the country's vast natural resources, have perpetuated inequality, stunted institutional development, and hindered social cohesion. Thus, the article argues that the bane of Nigeria's development lies in its internal colonialism—an internalized version of the colonial project that continues to affect the nation's prospects for true independence and progress.

This paper draws on postcolonial theory, particularly the concept of internal colonialism, which suggests that colonized peoples can themselves become colonizers within their own countries. By examining Nigeria's post-independence history through the lens of indigenous colonialism, the study critiques the ways in which local elites have shaped national policies and practices to serve their interests, at the expense of broader societal development. The research also explores how the continuing dominance of these elites has stifled innovation, compromised governance, and perpetuated social and economic inequalities that prevent the country from fully realizing its potential.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the next section will provide a conceptual clarification of indigenous colonialism and its implications for development. This will be followed by a theoretical framework that situates the research within postcolonial and internal colonialism theories. The methodology section outlines the qualitative approach used to gather and analyze data. In the subsequent section, the findings of the research are discussed, shedding light on the ways in which indigenous colonialism operates in contemporary Nigeria. Finally, the article concludes with a call for decolonizing indigenous power structures and reimagining the future of Nigeria's governance and development.

2.1. Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1. Indigenous Colonialism

Indigenous colonialism is a term that refers to a form of internal domination and exploitation, in which the postcolonial elite class within a country perpetuates systems of control, marginalization, and inequality that mirror those established during the colonial era. While colonialism traditionally refers to the external domination of one nation over another, indigenous colonialism operates within the boundaries of the postcolonial state.[3] It is a concept that highlights how newly independent nations, instead of breaking free from colonial frameworks, often replicate the structures of power, exploitation, and oppression that were characteristic of colonial rule. In indigenous colonialism, the local elites, whether political, economic, or military, use the state apparatus to control resources, enforce social hierarchies, and sustain systems of inequality, all of which undermine the development potential of the nation.

The notion of indigenous colonialism is rooted in postcolonial theory, particularly the works of scholars like Frantz Fanon[4] and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,[5] who observed that after the departure of colonial powers, the social, political, and economic structures designed to maintain colonial control were not dismantled. Instead, local elites in many postcolonial states simply inherited and continued these exploitative structures, often replicating colonial practices to serve their own interests. These elites, many of whom were often complicit with the colonial powers, retained control over critical resources and economic sectors, perpetuating a new form of domination over their own people.[6]

In the context of Nigeria, indigenous colonialism is particularly evident in the way political and business elites have captured state resources, especially the nation's oil wealth and used their positions to enrich themselves and their ethnic groups, while neglecting broader national development. The system of ethnic patronage,

[3] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts*, Routledge, 2013.
[4] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, 1961.
[5] W. Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, James Currey, 1986.
[6] S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa*, African Books Collective, 2013.

which has come to define Nigerian politics, is a manifestation of indigenous colonialism. Instead of fostering national unity and inclusive development, the elites foster division and inequality, keeping the wealth concentrated in the hands of a few while the majority of the population remains impoverished.

Indigenous colonialism is a complex, often overlooked dimension of postcolonial theory. It occurs when indigenous elites within a country, after independence, maintain and even strengthen the systems of dominance, inequality, and exploitation originally established by foreign colonial rulers. Unlike external colonialism, which involves a foreign power controlling and exploiting a territory, indigenous colonialism sees local elites using the same tactics of exploitation but for their personal or group benefits, at the expense of the wider population.

One key characteristic of indigenous colonialism is elite co-optation.[7] After independence, the power vacuum left by colonial rulers often allows indigenous political elites to take control. These elites frequently maintain the political and economic structures established during colonial rule, systems that are inherently exploitative, non-representative, and unequal. However, instead of deconstructing these structures, the elites reinforce them to maintain their own privileges. They often rely on clientelism, where resources and political favors are distributed to loyal supporters, ensuring their continued dominance.[8]

Indigenous colonialism is most clearly seen in the way that political power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of a few ethnic groups or political factions, with others being marginalized. For example, after Nigeria's independence, the regional divisions, largely a result of British colonial policy, continued to shape the distribution of resources and political power.[9] The creation of a centralized state under Nigeria's first independent leaders did little to break down these divisions,

[7] M.P. Goloviznina, 'The Agencies of the 'Co-Opted': Indigenous Peoples Organisations and Contestation of International Indigenous Rights Norms in Russia', *International journal on minority and group rights*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2022, pp. 849-876.
[8] P. Keefer, and R. Vlaicu, *Democracy, credibility, and clientelism*, World Bank Publications, vol. 3472, 2005.
[9] S.E. Oyovbaire, 'Structural change and political processes in Nigeria', *African Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 326, 1983, pp. 3-28.

allowing for the continuation of regional political dominance. The ruling elites, many of whom were from the same ethnic groups as the colonial administrators, continued to extract resources, perpetuate economic inequalities, and use the state to cement their grip on power, much like the colonial rulers did.[10]

This form of indigenous domination maintains the colonial legacy of dependence by promoting policies that favor certain regions, ethnic groups, or classes, while other segments of society remain economically underdeveloped and politically disenfranchised. The exploitation of resources, such as the oil wealth in Nigeria, often benefits the elite at the expense of the broader population, particularly those living in resource-rich but politically neglected areas such as the Niger Delta.

Indigenous colonialism also manifests through cultural hegemony. The political elite often use their control over media, education, and public discourse to maintain their version of history and their dominance, ensuring that alternative voices, particularly from marginalized ethnic and regional groups, are silenced. This process of ideological domination has a profound impact on social cohesion, as it fosters a sense of cultural superiority among the elite while reinforcing the inferiority of marginalized groups, often along ethnic and regional lines.

In essence, indigenous colonialism is the continuation of colonial domination, but instead of foreign oppressors, it is perpetrated by indigenous actors who adopt colonial mechanisms of power and exploitation for personal or group gain. This phenomenon impedes genuine national development, as it entrenches systemic inequality and corruption, ensuring that the state apparatus serves only the interests of the ruling elite and their supporters.

2.1.2. Development

Development is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including economic growth, social progress, political stability, and cultural transformation. In the context of this article, development refers not just to the economic growth of a nation but also to the improvement in the living standards, education, health, and overall well-being of its citizens. It is a process that seeks to

[10] C. Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Brookings Institution Press, 1996.

enhance people's quality of life, provide equal opportunities for all members of society, and reduce inequalities.

The concept of development is widely debated and can be understood through different theoretical lenses. Economic development, in the traditional sense, refers to the increase in a country's wealth, typically measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, this narrow view of development often fails to address disparities in wealth distribution, social inequalities, or environmental sustainability. Therefore, modern definitions of development focus more on human development, which incorporates factors such as health, education, income equality, and human rights. Sen's capability approach, for example, stresses the importance of providing individuals with the freedom and resources to lead lives they have reason to value, going beyond mere economic growth to focus on the well-being of the population.[11]

In the postcolonial context, development must also take into account the historical and structural legacies of colonialism. In many African countries, including Nigeria, colonial powers established economic systems that were designed to benefit the colonizers, often at the expense of the local populations. These systems created deep economic and social inequalities, which persisted long after independence. In the case of Nigeria, colonialism left behind an economic structure based on the extraction of natural resources, such as oil, for export to the global market, rather than fostering a diversified and self-sustaining economy.

Postcolonial development theories argue that true development in formerly colonized countries cannot be achieved unless the structural and economic disparities that colonialism created are addressed. This includes not only achieving economic growth but also ensuring social justice, equity, and political stability. As such, development must also involve institutional reform, with a focus on creating democratic governance structures that promote transparency, accountability, and inclusion. For development to be meaningful in postcolonial societies, it must be inclusive and sustainable, ensuring that the benefits of development are distributed equitably among all citizens, particularly marginalized groups.

[11] A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

In Nigeria, development has been stunted by various factors, including political instability, corruption, ethnic tensions, and the exploitative practices of the political elite. The country's vast natural resources, particularly oil, have been a source of economic wealth, but they have not translated into broad-based development. Instead, the wealth has been concentrated in the hands of a few, exacerbating inequality and social unrest. This uneven distribution of wealth, combined with a lack of effective governance and infrastructural development, has led to widespread poverty and underdevelopment, despite the country's rich resources.

For Nigeria to achieve true development, it must move beyond the systems of governance and power that perpetuate indigenous colonialism. This requires not only reforming economic policies to ensure equitable resource distribution but also addressing the political structures that allow elites to capture and exploit state resources. True development in Nigeria, therefore, is closely linked to overcoming the internal forces of colonialism that hinder progress and creating a society that is more just, inclusive, and sustainable. Development, as a concept, is far more than the economic growth typically measured by gross domestic product (GDP). Traditional economic measures often miss the complexities of what it means for a society to truly develop. In recent decades, scholars and practitioners have moved toward a more nuanced understanding of development that focuses on human well-being and social equity, not just economic output.

Human development, championed by scholars like Sen, emphasizes that development should be about expanding people's capabilities, the ability to do things they value in life. This perspective argues that development must be judged by how it impacts human freedoms, opportunities, and choices. For instance, while an increase in national income is a common measure of development, it doesn't account for how that wealth is distributed, or how it translates into tangible improvements in education, healthcare, or the reduction of poverty and inequality. A more equitable distribution of resources, access to quality education, and health systems that serve all citizens are key elements of human development.

Sustainable development further extends the concept by considering environmental and intergenerational impacts. It is not enough to focus on

improving the lives of people today; development must also preserve the environment and its resources for future generations. Sustainable development challenges nations to move away from economic systems based purely on extraction and consumption of natural resources, toward models that balance economic growth with social and environmental well-being. In Nigeria, for example, the focus on extracting oil has often come at the cost of environmental degradation and social inequality, with devastating consequences for local communities.

The structural transformation of society is another important aspect of development. It refers to the transition from a primary-resource-based economy to a diversified economy that fosters industrial growth, technological innovation, and the development of sectors like manufacturing, services, and agriculture. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, the colonial legacy of an extractive economy centered around the export of raw materials like oil has hindered the diversification necessary for sustainable long-term growth.

Further, political development is an essential element of national development. Political stability, the rule of law, and the capacity for democratic governance are all integral to development outcomes. In many African countries, including Nigeria, weak political institutions and corruption have hindered development. Political elites often undermine the development process for personal or group gains, diverting resources away from public goods like education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Another critical aspect is inclusive development. This focuses on ensuring that all segments of society, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and rural populations, are included in the development process. Inequality is one of the major obstacles to development in many postcolonial societies, and without addressing the structural inequalities that persist in Nigerian society; whether ethnic, gender, or regional, development remains incomplete. It is essential for a development framework to prioritize social justice and ensure that the benefits of development are broadly shared.

In Nigeria, development challenges are directly linked to the persistence of inequality created by colonialism and reinforced by indigenous colonialism. The country's oil wealth, for instance, has been a source of great revenue but has not translated into widespread economic prosperity for its citizens. Instead, it has been concentrated in the hands of a small elite, while the majority of the population lives in poverty. This oil curse is a classic example of how resource wealth in developing countries can be a barrier to development when managed poorly or exploited by powerful elites.[12] Without addressing the root causes of this inequality, many of which stem from colonial structures and their post-independence perpetuation by local elites, Nigeria will struggle to achieve sustainable development.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

3.1.1. Post-Colonial Theory

Post-colonial theory provides a critical framework for understanding the enduring impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized societies. It examines how the cultural, political, economic, and psychological structures established during colonial rule persist long after the colonizers have departed, often shaping the internal dynamics of post-independence nations. As a theoretical lens, post-colonialism critiques the ways in which power, identity, and social relations are influenced by the colonial experience, and it seeks to unveil the subtle and overt ways in which colonial domination continues to operate in independent nations.

At its core, post-colonial theory addresses the legacy of colonialism, focusing on the systematic inequalities and power structures left behind. Scholars such as Said),[13] Bhabha,[14] and Spivak[15] have been instrumental in shaping the field. Their works emphasize that colonialism was not merely a political or economic phenomenon but a profound cultural and psychological event that reordered the world's understanding of identity, power, and knowledge. One of the central concepts in post-colonial theory is "othering", articulated most famously by

[12] R.M. Auty, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource Curse Thesis*, Routledge, 1993.
[13] E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, 1978.
[14] H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 1994.
[15] G.C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.

Edward Said in his foundational text *Orientalism*. Said demonstrated how colonial powers constructed the "Orient" as an exotic, backward, and inferior counterpart to the "civilized" West.[16] This act of "othering" justified colonial domination by portraying colonized peoples as needing Western guidance and control. In the Nigerian context, British colonial narratives depicted African societies as primitive and incapable of self-rule, thereby legitimizing their political and economic domination. These narratives did not disappear after independence; instead, they were internalized by the indigenous elite and continue to influence societal structures and perceptions.

Another critical idea is hybridity, introduced by Homi Bhabha. Hybridity describes the creation of new, mixed cultural forms resulting from the interaction between colonizer and colonized. While hybridity can be a space of resistance and creativity, it can also be a space of confusion and conflict, where indigenous identities are fractured and reconstituted through colonial experiences. Nigeria's post-independence political institutions, for instance, reflect a hybridization of traditional governance structures and British parliamentary systems, often resulting in tension and dysfunction.

Post-colonial theory is critical for understanding the phenomenon of indigenous colonialism, as it explains how the structures of domination are internalized and perpetuated by local elites. Fanon's work, especially *The Wretched of the Earth*, is particularly relevant here. Fanon described how the national bourgeoisie in post-independence African countries quickly assumed the role of the former colonizers, exploiting the masses for their personal gain.[17] Rather than dismantling the colonial economic and social structures, the indigenous elite maintained them, securing their own wealth and power at the expense of the general populace.

In Nigeria, this theoretical perspective helps explain why political leaders often act in ways that do not advance national development. They inherit a colonial state system designed for resource extraction and control, and instead of transforming it into a vehicle for popular empowerment and equitable development, they use it to

[16] Said, *Orientalism*, 1978.
[17] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961.

entrench their dominance. Indigenous colonialism, therefore, is a continuation of colonial rule, merely with indigenous faces a reality that post-colonial theory helps to expose and critique. Moreover, post-colonial theory highlights the psychological colonization that persists in post-independence societies. Many Nigerian leaders and citizens continue to valorize Western models of governance, education, and culture while neglecting indigenous knowledge systems and local developmental models. This epistemic dependency undermines efforts to forge autonomous development pathways suited to Nigeria's unique historical, cultural, and socio-economic realities.

Applying post-colonial theory to the issue of development reveals the deep structural barriers that impede genuine progress in postcolonial societies like Nigeria. Development policies and strategies often mimic Western models without adapting them to local contexts, resulting in initiatives that fail to address the needs of the broader population. Moreover, the persistent inequalities, ethnic divisions, and political instabilities that plague Nigeria today can be traced back to colonial-era strategies of "divide and rule", which post-colonial theorists argue were deliberately designed to fragment societies and inhibit collective action against colonial power.

The uneven development of regions within Nigeria the North-South divide, the marginalization of minority groups in the Niger Delta despite their contribution to the national economy through oil production can be understood as legacies of both colonialism and indigenous colonialism. Post-colonial theory thus insists that development must be decolonized; it must be grounded in local realities, respect indigenous knowledge systems, and aim to dismantle the structures of inequality and domination inherited from the colonial era.

3.1.2. Internal Colonialism Theory

The theory of internal colonialism was first articulated in the 1960s and 1970s by scholars such as Blauner in the context of racial and ethnic relations in the United States. Blauner argued that African Americans and other minorities in the U.S. were

subjected to a form of "colonial" domination within the nation itself, with their economic, political, and social life shaped by systemic exclusion and exploitation.[18]

Later, theorists expanded this concept to postcolonial states. In the African context, internal colonialism describes how dominant groups (whether ethnic, regional, or class-based) exploit marginalized groups within the same nation-state. Rather than dismantling the exploitative structures established by colonialism, the new ruling elites maintain and benefit from them. Hechter's work *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* applied the concept to Britain but provided a theoretical model adaptable to understanding postcolonial realities globally, including Africa.[19]

Nigeria presents a quintessential case of internal colonialism. After independence from Britain in 1960, the structures of exploitation and domination created under colonial rule were not dismantled. Instead, they were taken over by indigenous elites who continued to govern in ways that privileged certain regions, ethnic groups, and classes over others.

The most glaring example is the relationship between the oil-rich Niger Delta and the Nigerian federal government. Despite being the primary source of the country's wealth through petroleum exports, the Niger Delta has remained one of the most impoverished and environmentally degraded regions in Nigeria. Successive Nigerian governments, dominated by political elites from other parts of the country, have extracted resources from the Niger Delta while neglecting its development needs. This mirrors the classical colonial relationship between metropole and colony: the periphery (Niger Delta) is plundered for the benefit of the center (federal elites and dominant regions).

Internal colonialism is also evident in ethnic politics. The British colonial strategy of "divide and rule" institutionalized ethnic divisions that persisted after

[18] R. Blauner, 'Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt', *Social Problems*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1969, pp. 393–408.
[19] M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, University of California Press, 1975

independence.[20] The Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East became the dominant political blocs. Smaller ethnic groups often found themselves politically marginalized and economically disadvantaged, reinforcing internal colonial hierarchies. Moreover, political patronage and clientelism reinforce these internal colonial structures. Access to state resources and political appointments is often determined by ethnic affiliation and loyalty to dominant groups rather than merit or equity. This fuels regional grievances and exacerbates feelings of alienation among marginalized groups.

Understanding internal colonialism is crucial for diagnosing the roots of Nigeria's persistent underdevelopment and political instability. It highlights that national independence alone does not guarantee liberation from colonial structures of domination. Without conscious efforts to dismantle these internal hierarchies, newly independent states risk replicating colonial patterns under indigenous rule. In Nigeria, the consequences of internal colonialism are visible in separatist movements, such as the resurgence of Biafra agitations, and in chronic underdevelopment and insecurity in marginalized regions. Development efforts that fail to address these internal inequalities are likely to be superficial and unsustainable.

Moreover, internal colonialism theory challenges the myth of national unity often propagated by postcolonial states. It forces a recognition that "nationhood" can mask deep internal divisions and exploitative relationships that must be addressed for genuine, equitable development to occur.

4.1. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is most appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena such as indigenous colonialism and its impact on Nigeria's development. A qualitative approach allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of how historical, cultural, political, and economic factors interweave to produce patterns of internal domination and underdevelopment. As noted by Creswell, qualitative methods are particularly suited to studies that seek to explore meanings, experiences, and processes rather than simply measuring

[20] W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972.

variables.[21] This research is exploratory and descriptive in nature, aiming not to test hypotheses but to develop a rich, theoretically informed analysis of indigenous colonialism within Nigeria. Given the socio-historical nature of the topic, an interpretivist paradigm underpins the research, emphasizing the importance of context, subjective experiences, and multiple realities.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, data was collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and depth. The primary methods of data collection included Secondary sources such as academic books, journal articles, policy documents, government reports, historical records, and credible news archives were systematically reviewed. Special attention was given to works by prominent post-colonial and internal colonialism theorists, as well as studies specifically addressing Nigeria's post-independence development challenges.

5.1. Overview of Colonialism in Nigeria

Similar to most African countries, Nigeria fell under effective colonial rule during the 19th century. Following years of extensive trading activities and the spread of Christianity around the River Niger, the British succeeded in securing a firm hold over the region. They proceeded to establish formal colonial structures, introducing government institutions and other political frameworks, beginning with the annexation of Lagos in 1861. By 1914, a systematic process of consolidation had taken place, uniting the Colony of Lagos with the Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria into a single geopolitical entity, officially named Nigeria. To govern Nigeria, the British colonial authorities implemented the policy of indirect rule, a system that had been previously tested and found effective in the Northern Protectorate. Indirect rule entailed governing through prominent and influential members of local communities, who were appointed as Warrant Chiefs and native Political Agents. These individuals were issued mandates or warrants authorizing them to mobilize the cooperation of the indigenous populations to advance colonial interests. The primary aims of British colonialism were to open up the region to British commercial activities, using diplomacy when possible and resorting to military action when necessary to enforce the abolition of the slave trade, and to

[21] J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd edn., SAGE Publications, 2013.

uphold law and order within society. At that time, the principal centres of colonial administration were Lagos city for the Lagos Colony, Calabar city for the Southern Protectorate, and Kano city for the Northern Protectorate.

Upon unification of the Southern Protectorate with Lagos Colony into the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and its subsequent amalgamation with the Northern Nigeria Protectorate in 1914, Lord Lugard was appointed the first Governor of the unified Nigerian entity.[22] Lord Lugard built a system which blended the British-style machinery of government with a grassroots administrative instrument in the form of a hybrid strategy that combined British officials at the top of the executive, legislative and judiciary wings of government on the one hand and the native chiefs and prominent members of the local society at the lower rung of the ladder on the other hand.

At this point, the administrative style of the British was gradually being insinuated into the governance of the Nigerian state, and it became the main influence on the local way of organising things, politically, socially and economically. It is in this way that political domination of the society, through colonization, permeated government, trade, religion and the social life of the peoples of Nigeria, with structural and attitudinal implications for the existing public and private organizations. The stiff conditions of colonialism also had implications for the application, cultivation and development of contemporary management practices, as the existing institutions, particularly those owned by the state, had to operate within the ambits of the rigid style preferred by the British colonialists. Colonialism essentially became the tool that was deployed in relegating and decimating the local institutions and management practices while these were supplanted with western-style administrative structures that were invariably regarded as superior to the indigenous ones.[23]

[22] U. Mohammed, 'International political economy of Nigerian amalgamation since 1914', *European Scientific Journal*, vol. 9, no. 29, 2013.
[23] M.N. Kiggundu, 'The challenge of management development in sub-saharan Africa', *Journal of Management Development*, vol. 10, no. 6, 1991, pp. 32-47.

5.2. Indigenous colonialism as a major impediment to Nigeria's development

Indigenous diplomacy in Nigeria characterized by political bargaining, ethno-regional alliances, patron-client relationships, and informal negotiations outside formal institutional structures has profoundly hindered the nation's development trajectory. Unlike traditional diplomacy aimed at advancing collective national interests through strategic engagement, indigenous diplomacy in Nigeria has often revolved around protecting sectional, ethnic, or elite privileges. In the post-independence period, politics became a game of access and distribution of state resources among competing elites, rather than a platform for sustainable nation-building. Regional leaders deploy diplomatic strategies such as power-sharing bargains, zoning arrangements, and rotational leadership deals to safeguard their group's interests. These practices, while temporarily stabilizing political tensions, have fundamentally eroded meritocracy, institutional credibility, and long-term policy consistency, thereby entrenching mediocrity and undermining development initiatives.

Furthermore, indigenous diplomacy has facilitated the commodification of political office, where positions of leadership are treated as rewards for regional loyalty rather than as avenues for public service and transformation. Leaders ascend to power not primarily based on competence or vision but through the successful negotiation of elite pacts, ethnic endorsements, and informal agreements that prioritize patronage over governance. This has generated a pervasive culture of prebendalism, where officeholders perceive public positions as sources of personal wealth to be distributed among loyalists and kin. Consequently, critical sectors such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and industrial development suffer chronic underinvestment and policy neglect.

Moreover, the diplomatic emphasis on maintaining ethno-regional equilibrium has produced a rigid, uncompetitive political culture that stifles innovation and discourages critical reforms. Critical policy decisions, such as the adoption of fiscal federalism, electoral reform, or restructuring of governance architecture, are often subordinated to elite consensus-building efforts aimed at preserving the status quo. Such diplomacy prioritizes political survival and elite accommodation over the difficult but necessary structural transformations required for national

development. For instance, while several national conferences and constitutional review exercises have been held ostensibly to advance democratic governance and development, their outcomes have largely been diluted by behind-the-scenes diplomatic bargaining among elites unwilling to cede entrenched privileges. In this sense, indigenous diplomacy serves as a mechanism for conserving power relations rather than challenging or transforming them for developmental purposes.

Additionally, indigenous diplomacy's reliance on informality and personalization of political processes undermines the predictability, transparency, and accountability necessary for sustainable development. Formal institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and public service are often bypassed or weakened as real decision-making takes place in informal spaces dominated by ethnic champions, political godfathers, and oligarchic networks. The reliance on unwritten agreements and opaque power-sharing deals generates instability, as dissatisfied groups often resort to violence, secessionist agitation, or judicial contestations when they perceive themselves as excluded from the spoils system. This undermines political stability, discourages investment, and perpetuates a cycle of developmental stagnation. As Bayart argues in *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, African states, including Nigeria, have often become arenas where personal networks and informal power practices hollow out the formal structures of governance, impeding genuine state-led development.[24]

Indigenous diplomacy fosters short-termism in governance. Because political survival depends heavily on maintaining fragile elite pacts, leaders are incentivized to pursue immediate, politically expedient projects that reward loyal constituencies rather than implement long-term development plans that might outlive their tenure or threaten the delicate balance of power. Major national plans such as Vision 2010, Vision 2020, and the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) have largely failed to achieve their objectives, partly because successive governments abandon or distort them to satisfy the imperatives of indigenous diplomatic settlements. In such a context, national development becomes episodic, inconsistent, and vulnerable to the changing dynamics of elite negotiation rather than being anchored in a coherent, sustained vision of progress.

[24] J.F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: the politics of the belly*, 2nd edn., Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009.

In essence, while indigenous diplomacy was perhaps a pragmatic tool for negotiating Nigeria's complex diversity during the early post-independence years, it has metastasized into a significant obstacle to national development. By entrenching mediocrity, institutional decay, ethnic chauvinism, and short-termism, indigenous diplomacy has diverted Nigeria's political energy away from transformative development towards perpetual elite bargaining and resource sharing. Without a deliberate shift toward a political culture that privileges merit, national interest, and institutional integrity over sectional bargaining, Nigeria's development aspirations will continue to be undermined by the very indigenous diplomatic practices that were once seen as necessary for managing its pluralism.

Indigenous colonialism functioned as a major impediment to Nigeria's development by perpetuating systems of oppression, exploitation, and marginalization within the country. This phenomenon has its roots in the historical legacy of external colonialism, which imposed foreign structures, systems, and values on Nigerian societies. Over time, these external influences were internalized and reproduced by local elites, leading to the emergence of indigenous colonialism. The impact of indigenous colonialism on Nigeria's development has been multifaceted. Economically, it has led to the exploitation of natural resources, with benefits accruing to a small elite while the majority of the population remains impoverished. This has resulted in stunted economic growth, perpetuated poverty, and widened income inequality. Furthermore, indigenous colonialism has undermined the development of strong, effective institutions, leading to poor governance, corruption, and instability.

Socially and culturally, indigenous colonialism has contributed to the marginalization and exclusion of minority groups, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The suppression of indigenous cultures and languages has also led to the erosion of Nigeria's rich cultural diversity. Additionally, the power dynamics inherent in indigenous colonialism have fueled conflicts and tensions between different groups, further hindering national development.

In the political sphere, indigenous colonialism has weakened the Nigerian state, making it difficult to build a cohesive national identity and develop effective governance structures. The legacy of colonialism has also contributed to ongoing power struggles, with various groups vying for control over resources and power. This has resulted in a lack of stability and security, which are essential for development. Overall, indigenous colonialism has been a major impediment to Nigeria's development, perpetuating economic underdevelopment, social and cultural marginalization, and political instability. To overcome these challenges, Nigeria needs to address the root causes of indigenous colonialism and work towards building a more inclusive, equitable, and just society. This will require a nuanced understanding of the complex historical and contemporary factors at play, as well as a commitment to dismantling the systems and structures that perpetuate indigenous colonialism. By doing so, Nigeria can unlock its full potential and achieve sustainable development.

Against the foregoing background of colonial policies and their implications for some of the important aspects of life, it can be argued that the smooth and orderly development of Nigeria suffered serious impediments during this period. Conflicts generated by the strictures of colonialism may have deterred the smooth development and articulation of modern Nigerian theory of management which could be applied across organizations. However, the fact of the cultural, racial and religious diversity of the peoples of Nigeria may have complicated the situation. This diversity made it difficult to describe common or unified local philosophies that could cut across the various ethnic peoples of nation, and which may be applied broadly in modern Nigerian organizations. As Uwah observed, the absence of such indigenous philosophies poses a real challenge to the development of management solutions or theory that best fits the Nigerian system. [25]

The direct result of a lack of home-grown management theory has been the wholesale importation of theories cultivated and developed in the western world, under foreign environmental circumstances. The colonial administration-

[25] E.D. Uwah, 'Development of management theory in Nigeria: challenges and prospects. Seminar paper presented at History of Management Thought', MSS 6424, University of Calabar, Nigeria. 30th June, 2004.

sponsored/supported organizations had practised (and, their survivors continue to practice) management policies and strategies based on theories perfected in their home or headquarters' countries. These business organizations are essentially still tied to the 'apron-strings' of their parent companies, and as such, management policies as practiced therein are predictably based on foreign theories. Although Nigerians now form the bulk of the top-management personnel in such establishments, they are often required to strictly observe or abide by the processes prescribed by their overseas parent company. The key findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical frameworks of Post-Colonialism and Internal Colonialism include;

Persistence of Colonial Structures

One of the most significant findings of this study is that the institutional and administrative structures established during British colonialism were largely maintained after independence in 1960. Instead of initiating a radical restructuring to serve indigenous aspirations and development needs, Nigerian political elites retained centralized bureaucracies, extractive economic systems, and divisive administrative units. As Rodney aptly noted, colonial infrastructures were designed to facilitate resource extraction and social control rather than inclusive development a structure that Nigeria's indigenous rulers chose to preserve.[26] Post-independence governments across successive republics continued to operate within a framework that prioritized state power consolidation over participatory governance or equitable resource distribution. This finding resonates with Fanon's (1961) assertion that national bourgeoisies in post-colonial states often become "intermediaries" who replace the colonizer without changing the structures of oppression.[27]

Elite Capture and Resource Appropriation

The study also finds that indigenous colonialism is characterized by elite capture of political and economic resources. Political offices have been used as instruments of wealth accumulation rather than public service. Access to state resources became tied to ethnic affiliation, clientelist networks, and regional dominance rather than

[26] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 1972.
[27] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961.

merit or need. This perpetuated uneven development across Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups.

For example, despite the centrality of the Niger Delta to Nigeria's oil economy, the region remains impoverished and environmentally degraded. Indigenous rulers from other regions have continued the colonial tradition of exploiting peripheral regions for the benefit of the center, mirroring classic internal colonialism dynamics described by Hechter.[28] This pattern of elite exploitation reinforces Watts' concept of "petro-violence", where oil wealth, instead of fostering national prosperity, fuels corruption, underdevelopment, and political instability.[29]

Ethnic Domination and Political Exclusion

Another finding is the deep entrenchment of ethnic domination, which reflects internal colonial structures. Post-independence Nigeria institutionalized ethnic politics, leading to political exclusion, marginalization, and disillusionment among minority groups. Despite the rhetoric of national unity, governance structures have often served the interests of dominant ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo), sidelining smaller ethnic nationalities.

This exclusion has manifested in various forms:

i. Electoral violence and rigging that disproportionately affects minority regions.
ii. Inequitable federal resource allocation favoring the dominant groups.
iii. Manipulation of census figures and political boundaries to maintain dominance.

As a result, calls for restructuring, self-determination movements, and ethno-regional militancy have persisted, highlighting the failure to build an inclusive postcolonial state.

[28] Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, 1975.
[29] M. Watts, *Resource curse? Governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria*. Geopolitics, vol. 9, no. 1, 2004, pp. 50–80.

Cultural Suppression and Epistemic Violence

The study reveals that indigenous colonialism extends beyond political economy into the realm of culture and identity. Postcolonial Nigeria has perpetuated the colonial denigration of indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and governance models. Western paradigms continue to dominate education, law, and governance, leading to a form of epistemic violence — the systematic marginalization of indigenous ways of knowing and being.

For instance, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that were effective at the community level have been eroded by imported judicial systems that are often inaccessible and alien to local populations. This has not only alienated citizens from the state but also undermined social cohesion.

Regional Underdevelopment and Environmental Injustice

Regional underdevelopment, especially in areas rich in natural resources like the Niger Delta, further demonstrates the internal colonial dynamics. Despite being the economic engine of the nation through its oil resources, the Niger Delta has suffered environmental degradation, poverty, and infrastructural neglect.

The environmental injustice inflicted upon the Niger Delta mirrors the exploitative economic practices of colonial enterprises. Multinational oil companies, in collusion with local elites, have continued extractive activities without adequate environmental protection, compensations, or sustainable development initiatives. This reinforces the argument that the metropole-periphery relationship has been internalized within Nigeria.

Impediments to National Integration and Sustainable Development

Finally, the study finds that indigenous colonialism has been a significant impediment to national integration and sustainable development. By entrenching inequality, exclusion, and regional resentment, indigenous colonialism undermines efforts at building a cohesive nation-state. Instead of fostering a shared national identity, the Nigerian state remains fragile, characterized by deep divisions and recurrent crises.

As long as internal colonial structures persist, true democratic consolidation, equitable development, and national reconciliation will remain elusive.

Conclusion

This study set out to critically interrogate the phenomenon of indigenous colonialism and its role as a significant impediment to Nigeria's development. Through rigorous conceptual clarifications, theoretical explorations grounded in Post-Colonial Theory and Internal Colonialism Theory, and analysis of historical and contemporary realities, it has been established that indigenous colonialism is neither a peripheral issue nor a historical relic. Rather, it constitutes a central and continuing structural challenge to Nigeria's aspirations for political stability, economic growth, national integration, and social justice.

The findings unequivocally demonstrate that indigenous elites, through mechanisms of ethnicized diplomacy, political clientelism, resource capture, and cultural alienation, have internalized and perpetuated colonial logics of domination, exploitation, and exclusion. Instead of dismantling the oppressive systems inherited from British colonialism, Nigeria's indigenous rulers have often reinforced these systems to serve narrow parochial interests. This failure to undergo true decolonization at the institutional, political, economic, and epistemic levels has left Nigeria trapped in cycles of underdevelopment, political instability, and regional inequalities.

Indigenous diplomacy, instead of fostering inclusive negotiation and national solidarity, has often become a vehicle for deepening ethnic rivalries, weakening democratic institutions, and diverting developmental resources into elite patrimonial networks. Ethnic politics, shaped by internal diplomatic arrangements, has prioritized power-sharing over meritocracy, thereby undermining leadership effectiveness and governance credibility. Consequently, rather than catalyzing a renaissance of indigenous innovation, participatory democracy, and socio-economic advancement, post-independence Nigeria has struggled under the weight of a fragmented polity and a compromised state apparatus.

Ultimately, the study concludes that Nigeria's major development failures are not merely the residual effects of external colonialism, but are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of indigenous colonialism, a self-imposed internalization of colonial structures and mentalities by local elites. Without a deliberate and radical process of internal decolonization, targeting not only political and economic structures but also the socio-cultural and psychological foundations of governance, sustainable development in Nigeria will remain elusive.

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