

Who Rules Papa's Land? C. Wright Mills and the Nigerian Power Elite

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Benjamin Aigbe Okonofua¹

Abstract

In his immensely provocative work *The Power Elite*, Mills argued that the United States of America is controlled and manipulated by elite that constituted the leadership of three major institutions: business, government, and the military. These institutions and their leaders, over the years, have consolidated their hold on power while evading public opprobrium and chasm. Although Mills and those who support his thesis have been successful at applying the “power elite” model to the United States and, perhaps, developed countries in the Western hemisphere, it is debatable that his rigid classifications and their underlying assumptions apply to other countries, particularly in Africa with different socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical milieu. This article offers an opportunity to apply the “power elite” model to a non-Western, underdeveloped modern nation-state: Nigeria. Nigeria, the most populous Black nation on earth, is clearly under the control of a “power elite.” The question is which elite? Within relatively brief compass, I attempt to identify the Nigerian power elite as a way to validate or reject the “power elite” model of C. Wright Mills.

Keywords

political science, social sciences, ethnicity and politics, intersectional politics, government and representation, legal studies, political behavior, political institutions, political economy, political sociology

Introduction

In *The Power Elite*, Mills (1956) analyzes America's power structure specifically to demonstrate that the democratic doctrine of the separation and balance of power is an ideal with no specific counterpart in reality. He argued that America is controlled by power elite that commands the resources of the most powerful bureaucratic organizations, and thus, dominate the American society and its populations. Over time, these bureaucracies have enlarged and become centralized, and the circles of those who control them have narrowed considerably. Mills (1956, p. 9) argues that the powers of these “higher circles” have increased considerably and the consequences of their decisions have become enormous.

Mills argues that the power of the higher cycles of corporate chief executives, the political directorate, and soldier statesmen derives from authority, which is a specific expression of what Max Weber calls “bureaucracy” or “rationality.” Bureaucracy has not only enlarged the decision-making process, it has also centralized it, placing in the hands of a few men with very similar backgrounds and interests, power over the entire society. The similar circumstances of the “higher cycles” as well as the functional interdependence and growing integration of the dominant institutions guarantees the unity and exclusivity of the “top social stratum.” The unity or inclusiveness of the higher cycles or top social stratum of power can be juxtaposed to the exclusiveness or “otherness”

of the other institutions whose influence diminishes with the increasing centralization and integration of the dominant institutions. These “other” institutions and the vast majority of the population are ultimately subordinated to the power elite and come to depend on the power elite for the key decisions that govern their existence. Of the three domains of institutional power, Mills saw the corporate elite as the most powerful.

The idea of the superiority of the economic class throws into sharp relief Marx's concept of class especially the idea of the “ruling class.” For Marx, the ruling class refers to an autonomous social formation of wealthy families who not only control society's wealth but also make its key decisions. Mills' elite model differs slightly from this conception of the ruling class. For example, Mills (1956) described the economic power elite as “the managerial reorganization of the propertied classes into the more or less unified stratum of the corporate rich” (p. 59). Rather than an amorphous collection of wealthy families, in which legal claims to an income from property were the defining characteristic, the ruling class

¹University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Corresponding Author:

Benjamin Aigbe Okonofua, University of Benin, Main Gate, Ugbowo Lagos Road, Benin City, 052, Nigeria.
Email: benjaminokonofua@hotmail.com

came to be defined by the organizational structure through which it gained ascendancy. It is because of this new importance of the institutional forms of power that he preferred the term *power elite* to *ruling class*. For Mills, while the Marxian conception of “class” is decidedly economic, the concept of “rule” is political. The idea of a “ruling class” therefore connotes “the theory that an economic class rules politically” (Mills, 1956, p. 60). Mills replaced the traditional idea of a ruling class with that of the transcendent power elite. Yet, the idea that the economic power elite dominates does not suggest (as does Marx) a conceptualization of the power elite as merely constitutive of economic power; rather, it evokes the complex interaction of the three dominant institutions and the consequences of their power for the rest of society. Their unique positions within an expanding capitalist system enable them transcend the levels of ordinary men and opens up vistas of power that makes their actions and inaction consequential for the entire society.

This conception of the power elite finds support from Marxist scholars like Martin Sklar (1988) who argues that America’s ruling class has been reconstructed by corporations. This complete makeover has injected senior corporate executives into the power mainstream, although as junior partners. These executives constitute the “neo-power elite” and are themselves subject to the control (through informal social ties and corporate socialization processes) to the de facto owners of the corporations. More importantly, the corporate reconstruction and reorganization of the economy has facilitated a more or less permanent organizational link between large corporations, government institutions, and the military industrial complex. This has produced a tripartite reconfiguration and domestication of power within government, business, and the military. For example, parallel to the increasing importance of state power is an entire complex of change within its inner structures that ensures that the state becomes more than ever before an “executive committee of the ruling classes” (Marx & Engels, 1888/1967). The state apparatus comes to embody not only the interest of the ruling classes in general but also their collectively expressed will. In place of the previously atomized members of the ruling class, the state must now respond to their organizations. The government, therefore, is merely a select “committee” that represents the interests of big business. In the course of its routine business of governance, this committee acts as guarantor and protector of the corporate interest in the same way that corporations serve as the spirit of government. In this sense, the state and corporations co-articulate each other.

Despite the popularity of the Millsonian power elite theory, we can be circumspect about the existence of a reconfigured tripartite elite structure in contemporary United States that replaces Marx’s ruling class. Also, it is not certain that the evidence used to substantiate the existence of this “power elite” is not circumstantial. More importantly, we do not know if the model applies to nations outside the Western hemisphere, particularly in Africa. Since Mills argues that

the power elite are activated by the American social structure, it stands to reason that his model may not apply to non-Western societies with different historical and cultural milieus. While the United States of America is the acclaimed leader of the “free” world, the nations of Africa are essentially underdeveloped and in many ways economically, politically, and culturally dependent on the West. With few exceptions, many African nation-states are attached to the apron strings of Europe and the United States as a result of which they are in advanced stages of economic and political stagnation and cultural retrogression (Ake, 1991; Osaghae, 1998; Rodney, 1972). For this reason, it will be apropos to see whether the same set of elites or their variants are active in African power equations. This article, therefore, will analyze Nigeria’s power structure both as a way to determine whether Nigeria is subject to the same power constellations C. Wright Mills identified in the U.S., and to see whether his power elite theory has empirical and theoretical depth and longevity.

The Nigerian Power Elite

With a population of 152,217,341 (Nigerian National Population Commission, 2007), Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country and the eighth most populous nation in the world. It consists of over 250 ethno-linguistic groups speaking more than 400 languages (Igbinovia, Okonofua, Omoyibo, & Osunde, 2004; Onwubiko, 1972; Sagay, 2008). Politically, Nigeria is organized under a federal structure, consisting of a central government, 36 federating states (including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja), and 774 local government areas loosely organized under six regions: north east, north west, north central, south east, south west, and south south. This geospatial structural formation is important to an analysis of the Nigerian power structure as will become clear from the discussion of the various domains of power in Nigeria. Following Mills (1956), I examine the bureaucracies of politics, military, and business and the key individuals who run these bureaucracies. This will permit a validation, rejection, or modification of his power elite theory as well as provide a more nuanced appreciation of the environment of power in Nigeria.

The Hausa-Fulani Aristocratic Elite

Although Nigeria is typically broken down into six regions, it is more useful to think about Nigeria in terms of a north versus south division. The dominant ethno-linguistic group in the north is the Hausa-Fulani in the north east and north west surrounded by smaller ethno-linguistic groups like the Kanuris, Tivs, Igalas, Junkuns, Nupes, Zango-Katafs, and Biroms in the north central. The Yoruba in the south west, the Igbo in the south East, and the Ijaw in the south south are the dominant ethno-linguistic groups in the south (Crowder, 1978; Onwubiko, 1972; Sagay, 2008). This north/south

division also has religious implications especially since Nigeria's religious population is split between Islam (50%), Christianity (40%), and indigenous beliefs (10%). Islam is dominant in the north while Christianity is dominant in the south (CIA World Factbook, 2010). This ethno-religious configuration, as I shall demonstrate, is crucial to any analysis of the structure of power in Nigeria.

The seeds of the present day Hausa-Fulani political hegemony were sown by the Fulani Islamic jihad that began in the Central Sudan in the 19th century (Onwubiko, 1972). The Fulani are a nomadic, cattle-herding people who due to their nomadic nature were the first among the Hausa states to come into contact with Islam. Led by Uthman Dan Fodio, the Fulani sought to Islamize the region through Jihad (holy war). The main political consequence of this Jihad was the Fulani conquest of most of what later became northern Nigeria. The Fulani conquest of Hausa land started with Uthman's victory over the army of Mohammed Yunfa, King of Gobir, in 1804. Consequently, independent Hausa states such as Kebbi, Zaria, Katsina, Gobir, and Kano were conquered between 1805 and 1809. By 1809, the conquest of the entire Hausa land was almost complete. Following the success of the Fulani Jihadist in Hausa land, the Jihad was extended to non-Muslim areas outside Hausa land that had considerable concentrations of Fulanis. Thus, Adamawa (1806), Nupe (1810), Ilorin (1835), all fell to the Fulani Jihadists (Onwubiko, 1972, 1982). After their victory, the Fulani established theocratic control over the entire northern region under the leadership of the Sultan of Sokoto who came to wield theocratic authority through a close-knit ethno-religious class, the Sokoto Caliphate. The Caliphate established emirates in all northern cities and imposed strict Islamic legal codes that demanded the complete acquiescence of the citizenry.

Following the 1914 amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria, the British systematically began to centralize control under the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy. The centralized administrative structure of the north encouraged the British to establish the system of indirect rule wherein the Sultan was made subservient to British authority (Apter, 1999), but continued to exercise ethno-religious control over northern populations. Moreover, the British were extremely resentful of the leadership of southern Nigeria because the British considered them to be very belligerent and aggressive in their clamor for independence. Sir James Robertson (the last colonial Governor-General of Nigeria) justified the British preference for northern leaders by referring to "differences in ordinary custom and behavior between the dignified, polite and rather aloof northerner and the uninhibited, vociferous southerner who noisily showed his disagreement in council and parliament without good manner and restraint" (see Deng, 1996, p. 62).

The centralized theocratic authority of the Sultan and the Caliphate made British imperial administration in the north cheap and less problematic (Crowder, 1978; Okonofua,

2011; Onwubiko, 1972). If that same rulership could be foisted on the rest of Nigeria, the British task of exploiting Nigeria's natural resources would be less arduous. Thus, under the guise of systematizing administrative control, the British Balkanized southern Nigeria by creating two regions (eastern and western regions) out of the existing southern protectorate but left the northern protectorate intact (Crowder, 1978; Omoruyi, 1999; Sagay, 2008). This redistricting eviscerated the bonds of unity that had existed between nationalities in the south and created a forced sense of ethnic rivalry between the east and west. It also set the stage for the eventual Hausa-Fulani ethno-political hegemony. To make matters worse, the British created contiguous zones within the east and west to accommodate a vast body of small ethnic nationalities such as the Ijaw, Urhobo, Efik, Edo, Esan, Itsekiri, Ibibio, Afemai, and so on, which were stripped of their ties to the east and west. These nationalities were maintained by the British in a manner geared specifically toward upsetting the politics of the south and providing southern allies for the north in the event of political stalemate (Kennedy, 2007; Okonofua, 2011). It is for this reason that Ijomah (1988, p. 56) argues that the British forged together "inconsistent cognitive elements without creating clear behavioral assertions" that would have created lasting bonds of unity among the collaborating units.

After reconstructing the geopolitical map of Nigeria, the British proceeded to conduct a series of censuses, which were deliberately rigged in favor of the north (Omoruyi, 1999; Sagay, 2008). For example, the first ever National census, which was conducted in 1931, was rigged to give the north numerical advantage over the south. Out of a population of 19,930,000, the north was awarded 11,434,000, the west 3,855,000, and the east 4,641,000, with a plurality of 2,938,000 people in favor of the north (Sagay, 2008). Thus, from the very beginning, a permanent majority in population, which was intended to translate into a permanent majority in the future federal legislature and consequently a permanent control of power, was programmed for the Hausa-Fulani political elite. On the basis of this figure, the north during the 1950 National Conference demanded for at least half the seats in the central legislature as a condition for remaining a part of Nigeria. Consequently, according to Sagay (2008), in 1951 the colonial officials distributed seats in the central legislature thus: north, 68 seats; west, 34 seats; and east, 34 seats.

In the 1952 census, the scenario of the 1931 census was repeated. This time, the increase in population in the 21 years between 1931 and 1952 was so carefully and masterfully doctored, that the birth and death rates in the three regions were virtually the same, and the difference in population between north and south remained very identical to the 1931 figure. Thus, out of total population of 31,540,000, the north had 16,540,000, the west 6,369,000, and the east 7,971,000. Again, the north had an advantage of 2,500,000 people (Sagay, 2008). With these results, seats were distributed that

made it possible for the north to gain political control. Even if the west and east (collectively known as the south) had pooled resources together to challenge the north, they would have failed. For example, according to Sagay (2008), in the last nation-wide elections before independence, Sir James Robertson, the Governor-General, recognizing the strategy they had so carefully worked out, invited Sir Tafawa Balewa of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) to form the new government even though the counting of votes had only just begun. When the final results were announced, the NPC did not have a simple majority in the House of Representatives. It was clear from the results that the Nnamdi Azikiwe led National Council of Nigerian Citizens (From the east) with 89 seats could have successfully formed a coalition government with the Obafemi Awolowo led Action Group (from the west) with 73 seats and put the NPC with (134 seats) in the opposition. Omoruyi (1999) explains the preemptive action of Sir James Robertson, thus:

Sir James Robertson was a shrewd implementer of the northern rule earlier fashioned by Lords Harcourt and Lugard. Sir James was especially recruited by the British government in 1955 because of his experience in Sudan with an identical situation to Nigeria's. He is on record as confessing that he did not handle this phase to the satisfaction of Dr Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo. Sir James confessed that he invited Balewa to form the government in 1959 by persuading some of the southern members to support him and after Sir Abubakar had assured him that he will get a southern group to work with him. Sir James did this before the results were announced. He confessed that he did this to appease the Sardauna of Sokoto, the leader of the NPC, to stop him from taking the north out of Nigeria. (p. 25)

The story of the 1963 census (the first after independence) was not different. The north, imitating their British allies, expertly doctored the figures to achieve pre-determined results (Forsyth, 1992; Obi, 2010; Omoruyi, 1999; Sagay, 2008). The eastern region particularly challenged the result with such vehemence that the country dangled dangerously on the precipice of anarchy. The unjust manipulation of the census to facilitate permanent northern political control was part of the grievances of the east in their ill-fated attempt to pull out of Nigeria through the creation of the Republic of Biafra. As a result of their declaration (of cessation), a bloody civil war was fought from 1967 to 1970, which resulted in the death of over 1 million easterners and the total destruction of all infrastructures in eastern Nigeria. At the end of the war in 1970, the east was brought back under direct political control and supervision of the north, and permanently shut out of the Nigerian presidency (see Elaigwu, 2009; Forsyth, 1992; Gray & Stolper, 2003).

The 1991 provisional census was also condensed to maintain the carefully designed colonial program. Out of a total estimated population of 88,504,477, the north was awarded 47,261,962 and the south 41,242,512 thereby maintaining the colonial margin. According to Sagay (2008), the most

absurd aspect of the announced figures was the attempt to equate Kano State (the most populous state in the north) with Lagos State (the most populous state in the south). While Lagos was awarded a figure of 5,655,751, Kano, in order to match that, was awarded a figure of 5,632,040. Sagay (2008, p. 368) argued that "any honest observer knows that the population of Lagos cannot be less than 15 million." Yet, based on the 1991 census results, Lagos was allocated only 20 local government councils while Kano and Jigawa states (Jigawa was carved out of Kano in 1991 and prior to the 1991 census the expanded Kano state had a much smaller population than Lagos) were allocated 71 local government councils. Again, while Lagos State has only 24 members in the Federal House of Representatives, Kano and Jigawa (with a smaller combined population), have a total of 35 seats. What this means, according to Sagay (2008, p. 368) is that "no bill can pass through the house without the concurrence of the northern states" thus guaranteeing "permanent power installed by a combination of the colonial master, the Arewa political oligarchy and the northern military organization".

Thus, through the politics of population, the Hausa-Fulani political elite have had an effective hold of political power in Nigeria. Their dominance ensures that the bulk of the nation's resources go into providing infrastructure in the north even though the north contributes least to the nation's resource wealth and revenue. For example, out of 774 local councils, the north has 418 and the south 356. These numbers are important because each local government council irrespective of its revenue and expenditure (and resource profile) gets exactly the same amount from the federation account. The federal revenue derives 85% from the sale of crude oil, which is obtained 100% from southern Nigeria (Okonofua, 2011; Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Sagay, 2008; Ukeje, Odebiyi, Sesay, & Aina, 2009). Thus, the bulk of the 20% of the federation account reserved for local governments end up in the north. Similarly, out of 336 seats in the Federal House of Representatives, the north is allocated 182 seats and the south 154 seats, thereby re-enforcing the British colonial legacy of centralizing control under the leadership of the caliphate. Moreover, northern cities like Abuja were built exclusively from oil wealth. In comparison to oil powerhouse states like Bayelsa, Abuja boasts some of the most sophisticated infrastructure in Africa whereas cities like Yenagoa lack basic amenities like roads, pipe borne water, electricity, and hospitals.

C. Wright Mills (1956) in analyzing the political elite observed that their power derived from their occupation of command positions within government bureaucracy. These positions are constitutional. It is the authority domiciled in the office of the president, for example, that gives the American presidency its power. In the Nigerian case, the power of the Hausa-Fulani elite does not obtain from the constitution or for that matter from the authority encapsulated in executive positions of government. The power of these elite derives chiefly from their possession of religious

and cultural capital. Through the spiritual headship of the Sultan, the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy is able to exercise near absolute control over northern populations and this control extends into the military, the top echelon of which is made up principally of Muslim officers from the north. The religious authority and power of the Sultan and members of the Sokoto Caliphate can be juxtaposed to the powerlessness of the northern mass. The fact that politics in Nigeria is not functionally differentiated from the sociocultural considerations that govern everyday life enables the Hausa-Fulani elite to systematically manipulate the Muslim Ummah through a generalized system of patrimonialism (Chabal & Daloz, 1999) transmitted in different ways but especially through a pedantic form of Islamic education that teaches quiescence and servitude. In this way, the spiritual authority of the Sultan and the Caliphate is maintained. Historically, the Sultanate has instrumentalized its immense cultural capital through the Hausa-Fulani political elite, whose political dominance has been legitimated over the years (even in periods of military rule) by its hegemonic (which includes its born-to-rule mentality) control of the apparatus of state and by its rigid control of the politics of population.

Control of northern populations gives the Sultanate tremendous political capital. If the multiethnic Nigerian population could be conceptualized simply as a northern and southern division, with the north dominant by reason of numerical majority, then, whoever controls the north virtually controls the south and by extension the Nigerian federation. And when we juxtapose the monolithic theocratic control wielded by the Sultanate in the north against the multiplicity of Christian and traditional religious forms and ethnic formations competing for influence in the south (Onwubiko, 1972, 1982), it stands to reason that the north (harmonized under Islam) will dominate the south (composed primarily of autonomous communities and egalitarian structures). I suggest, therefore, that the Hausa-Fulani political elite through the symbolism of the Sultan and the Sokoto Caliphate wield political power in Nigeria. While it is the Sultan and his council that pulls the puppet strings, it is the individuals who occupy key executive offices that are the puppets on strings. Although the suggestion that the Hausa-Fulani elite symbolized by the Sultanate is the dominant political force in Nigeria may appear counterintuitive, the annulment of the presidential election of June 12, 1993, presumably won by Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba, supports this thesis. This event, discussed in the section on military elite, demonstrates the power of the Sultanate especially its ability to compel a military despot to cancel an election that had already been conducted and for which billions of Naira had been expended.

Also, the recent extremist violence in northern Nigeria by Boko Haram is partly an attempt to reverse the north's loss of political power in 1999 and the series of minor social and political revolutions that have taken place since then, which

threatens the political and cultural hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani elite. Specifically, the death of President Yar'Adua (a Hausa-Fulani) in office on 6 May 2010, was a "game change" as it enabled his vice-president from the south to assume the presidency and to extend southern rule until 2015. The mobilization of the north through Sharia or what Mazrui (2001) calls "Shariacracy" beginning in 1999 and subsequently the Boko Haram insurgency that has challenged the legitimacy of the Goodluck Jonathan administration, which it calls "infidel," are specific strategies the Hausa-Fulani elite have adopted to deal with their loss of power and possibly to regain power. The loss of political power in 2010 created two general conditions in northern Nigeria. The first is what Tilly (1977) calls a *revolutionary situation*, which allowed marginal groups like Boko Haram and their political sponsors to believe that conflict with the state is necessary and feasible and the second is *dual sovereignty*. A condition of dual sovereignty according to Tilly (2010) is symbolized by (a) the appearance of contenders or coalitions of contenders advancing exclusive alternative claims to the control over the government, (b) commitment to those claims by a significant segment of the subject population, (c) the incapacity or unwillingness of the government or its agents to suppress the challenger coalition. To Boko Haram and its leaders, Nigeria's political structure must be transformed in ways that eliminates the potential for political upset such as witnessed in the 2011 presidential elections where President Jonathan, leveraging the power of incumbency (which in Nigeria usually means electoral fraud), crushed his Hausa-Fulani opposition. In order to avoid this situation and to guarantee the political and cultural dominance of the Hausa-Fulani elite, Nigeria must become a theocratic state under the control of the Sultan who will wield political and cultural (religious) authority.

It is instructive to note that the fight against Boko Haram gained no traction until the President sacked his experienced National Security Adviser (NSA), General Owoeye Azazi (from the south), and appointed a less experienced retired army colonel and scion of the Sultanate, Colonel Sambo Dasuki, in his place (Obia, 2012). The former NSA reached the conclusion that Boko Haram is beholden to the Hausa-Fulani political elite, which the president lacked the courage or will to fight. In fact, an increasingly exasperated President Jonathan suggested that Boko Haram (meaning the Hausa-Fulani political elite) had taken over his government (Adetayo, 2012). However, through Dasuki's appointment, the president was able to rally the Sultanate through the adoption of a "peace offensive" that alienated the Kanuri leadership of Boko Haram from the Hausa-Fulani elite leading to its internal fracture. Today, Boko Haram comprises several factions including *Jama'atu Ansarul Musilimina Fi Biladis Sudan* (Vanguards for the protection of Muslims in Black Africa) or *Ansaru*, which has vowed to help reclaim the lost glory of the Sokoto Caliphate through violence.

The Military Elite

The Hausa-Fulani aristocracy has also sought to perpetuate its hegemony through control of the military. The Nigerian military unlike the American military is a very partisan force. Partisanship here suggests the tendency to subvert laid-down rules and ethics for the professional conduct of the military, which at all times must be subjected to civilian control. Through the subversion of these rules (including the constitution), the military itself comes to play a direct role in the political administration of Nigeria. While Mills discussed the military elite in terms of the ability of individual officers (or retired officers) to negotiate entry into politics (through elections) supported by the financial muscle of the economic elite, the Nigerian military elite are themselves a fourth political estate constrained not by the Nigerian constitution but by the limits imposed by the Sultanate. Power is appropriated forcefully through coup d'états, which is a profound subversion of the Nigerian constitution. It is not coincidental, therefore, that since independence in 1960, there have been seven successful military coups and the military have ruled Nigeria for 38 of its 52 years.

Coups and counter coups (apart from the politics of population) have been a primary means by which the northern aristocracy has maintained their hold on power. Each military coup typically begins with the suspension of the Nigerian constitution and its replacement with military decrees and edicts (Okonofua, 2011). Even in instances of civilian rule, the latent but potent threat of military intervention has been a control tool in the hands of the Hausa-Fulani elite. This is not surprising, considering that the aristocracy has no faith in the democratic system of elections. Having manipulated census figures to give the facade of northern population superiority, the aristocracy could not assure itself of popular rule through the ballot. In the one instance in which they put their presumed population advantage to the test (the June 12, 1993, presidential elections), they failed woefully. Thus, with the exception of the 1965 unsuccessful military coup, every successful military porch has been carried out by young Muslim officers from the north with the direct backing of the Sultanate. It is also instructive that with the exception of the bloody coup that toppled General Aguiyi-Ironsi in 1966, every military coup in Nigeria has been a palace coup, in which case, bloodless (Okonofua, 2011). This signals a type of power-sharing arrangement where the Hausa-Fulani elite determines regime change (outside of elections) to ensure the continuous circulation of power among its military elite while ensuring some level of geographic spread of power among northern territories.

Nigerian military, throughout history, has been influenced by three key variables: the colonial roots of the military (which has had tremendous impact on the way the military perceived, or used to perceive, its role, the structuring of defense policy and its strategic and tactical doctrines); the requirement of law enforcement and territorial defense; and

their attachment to the Sokoto Caliphate. These three variables imply that the Nigerian military is militaristic in orientation and design and is a willing instrument of coercion and control for the Hausa-Fulani political elite. The June 12, 1993, presidential election fiasco testifies to the alliance between the military and the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy. The election was between the Social Democratic Party's Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim from South West Nigeria, and the National Republican Convention's Bashir Othman Tofa, a Hausa-Fulani Muslim from North West Nigeria. The election shaped up to be a contestation between the north and the south, and in the calculation of the caliphate, Alhaji Tofa would win handily on the strength of the northern population advantage. Moreover, the Sultanate also expected that minority southern nationalities that were historically coerced to voting with the north would deliver for the north in case there was a deadlock. As a result, the Sultanate actively supported the option A4 open ballot electoral system in which voters queue up behind preferred candidates. This transparent system would not only ensure that the elections were free and fair, it would also legitimate the political hegemony of the aristocracy. This plan boomeranged. Because of Abiola's personality (and religious affiliation) and the quality of campaign he ran, he won all of the states in the south as well as minority nationalities in the north central region. When it became clear that if the results of the election were announced power would shift to the south, the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy through Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki urged General Babangida to cancel the election. Again, when it became obvious that Bashorun Abiola had won, the Sultan again brought pressure to bear on General Babangida to annul the election (Sagay, 2008).

Little wonder, then, that of the nine military men that have ruled Nigeria, seven were of northern extraction. The exception, Generals Aguiyi Ironsi (in 1966) and Olusegun Obasanjo (in 1976) became heads by default, being beneficiaries of circumstances they did not author. General Aguiyi-Ironsi (from the east) became "Head of State" because he was the most senior officer in the army following the failed 1965 coup attempt by young eastern officers led by Major Kaduna Nzeogu that killed Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern Region, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, the Premier of the Western Region, and Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, the federal finance minister. A reprisal coup was staged in 1966 by young northern officers led by Colonel Yakubu Gowon to avenge the killing of the Sultan and to return power to the north, which resulted in the killing of General Aguiyi-Ironsi and several southern politicians (Azikiwe, 2001; Achebe 2012). Also, General Olusegun Obasanjo became "Head of State" in 1976 after his boss General Murtala Mohammed was killed in a failed coup attempt by young Christian officers from the north central region led by Colonel Buka Suka Dimka. Obasanjo, mindful of the fate that befell General Aguiyi-Ironsi and scared of the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy that

controlled the military, accepted to lead only after strong assurances from the north and his would-be second-in-command General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (Obasanjo, 1990; Omoigui, 2007). Obasanjo hastily conducted a sham election in 1978, which returned power to the north even though Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a Hausa-Fulani, did not get the required votes.

In 1999, following the death of General Sani Abacha in office, General Obasanjo (retired) who had been imprisoned by General Abacha for his role in a phantom coup plot was released from prison and made president. Obasanjo remained in the saddle for 8 years and is referenced as evidence that power had devolved from the Hausa-Fulani political elite. Yet, Obasanjo, a Yoruba, was the preferred candidate of the Hausa-Fulani political elite in association with the military top brass. His People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost at every level (ward, local council, state and federal congresses, and governorships) in his home (south west) region to the Alliance for Democracy (AD) but won overwhelmingly in the north. Interestingly, there were only two presidential candidates and both were from the South West. The South West was rewarded with the presidency to pacify international petrol-capital, which had threatened severe sanction following the June 12 fiasco (Sagay, 2008; Omoruyi, 1999). Thus, to maintain the tripartite power configuration, the Hausa-Fulani political elite grudgingly agreed to zone the presidency to the south but deftly reserved the right to pick the candidate most agreeable to it. It is not coincidental that they picked a former soldier with strong ties to the north.

The implication of this is that the Nigerian military is a powerful institution that historically has been influential in the political development of Nigeria. Apart from direct involvement in politics through the violent usurpation of power, it has also continued to play influential roles in post military transitions through the manipulation of the electoral process. Today, some of the most influential politicians are former military top brass including David Mark, the present President of the Nigerian Senate. Through their alliance with the Hausa-Fulani political elite and the salient threat to usurp political power forcefully, the military has become a political institution in the mold of a political party, able and willing to control electoral events and to occupy seats in government that unlocks legitimate and illegitimate economic opportunities. However, as past events have shown, the influence of the Nigerian military is subject to the more powerful influence of the Sokoto Caliphate that it continues to look up to for religious and political signification.

The Economic Elite

The Nigerian economy is oil dominated and oil accounts disproportionately for the nation's domestic and foreign revenue (Okonofua, 2011; Watts, 2009; Watts, Okonta, & Kemedi, 2004). Oil exportation is the latest in a long line of raw material production for exportation that has pauperized

local populations and enriched international business conglomerates and foreign states and nationals. For example, it has been suggested that the basis of the British colonization project was economic (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Okonofua, 2011; Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Sagay, 2008). The British economic policy had three main motions: to expand commerce through the exportation of raw materials (cash crops and mineral resources) and the importation of finished goods, to integrate Nigeria into the global cash economy based on the U.K. currency, and to force Nigerians to work for that currency (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The British economic policy also required that Nigeria be self-supporting (Sagay, 2008), which suggests that Britain had no desire to invest in the economic development of Nigeria. To ensure that its interest would remain protected after independence, the British designed a political system that put the north firmly in control of southern resource wealth. According to Lord Harcourt, the British Colonial Secretary at the time,

We have released northern Nigeria from the leading strings of the treasury. The promising and well-conducted youth of the north is now on an allowance on its own and is about to effect an alliance with a southern Lady of means. I have issued the special license and Lord Lugard will perform the ceremony. May the union be fruitful and the couple constant. (see Sagay, 2008, p. 365)

From the onset of this union, the north was to be the dominant, controlling partner and groom, and the south, bride. The plan of colonial Britain was to retain economic control through local northern surrogates who would protect British interests even after political independence. This British colonial economic legacy is expressed today through multinational oil companies that completely dominate the oil production enterprise. Even where the government has attempted to liberalize the industry by injecting local entrepreneurs into the lucrative oil trade, these local businesses have either acted as fronts for the multinationals or sold their oil licenses and oil blocs to multinationals. For example, General Theophilus Danjuma sold 45 percent of his stake in Akpo oil and gas field or oil bloc OML 130 to China's largest offshore oil producer CNOOC for \$1.75 billion (Forbes, 2012). Moreover, the majority of these indigenous companies are owned by influential members of the Hausa-Fulani elite and retired soldiers in trust for or in alliance with foreign economic interests. According to Senator Ita Inyang, "eighty-three percent of all present oil blocs are held by northerners" (Josiah, 2013), which reinforces the age-long alliance between the colonialists and their Hausa-Fulani surrogates. Eteng (1996, p. 21) describes this relationship as modern day "internal colonialism," which along with other mediating factors, has produced the near endless schisms that describe the failing nature of the Nigerian federation and according to Watts et al. (2004) "strike to the very heart of Nigeria's political future." In essence, "many of the post-independence socio-political and economic formations are a direct consequence of

the state-building and economic integration process begun under colonial rule” (Osaghae, 1998, p. 1).

All of these mean that Nigeria’s petroleum economy is controlled by global corporate bureaucracies in alliance with the Hausa-Fulani political elite and the military. These bureaucracies are run by an elite crop of technocratic managers subject to global finance power houses such as the IMF and the World Bank and multinational businesses such as Shell and Chevron. For example, since 1999, past and present administrations have appointed technocrats including serving officials of the World Bank such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and many others who routinely consult for global finance and oil conglomerates as high-powered government officials. These officials continue to function as appendages of these international businesses, often to the detriment of Nigeria. Thus, as Saro-Wiwa (1992) has argued, there is a “slick alliance” between international petrol-capital and the Nigerian state, an alliance that Watts (2002) argues has produced an oil-state enclave economy that shuts out local populations. Petrol-capitalism is a specific form of global capitalism that is anchored on oil profits. While it yields billions of dollars in profits yearly, its residue is a devastated ecology and unremitting misery for millions of local people many of whom have been forced out of their ancestral lands by the exigencies of oil production.

The process of the appropriation of local lands and as a consequence, their economic subsistence, has been well documented. First, these lands are seized by the Nigerian state (politically controlled by the Hausa-Fulani political elite and their allies in the army) through a land use decree that ignores local histories, traditions, and culture (Saro-Wiwa, 1992). Next, for ease of administration and appropriation, these lands are converted into “oil blocs,” which are advertised for public bidding in vain attempt to create legitimacy and transparency in the oil license allocation process (Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Watts, 2009). These blocks are then negotiated with specific political and military leaders that enter bids as fronts for expatriates and global finance power houses. Finally, oil production licenses (and blocs) are issued to these political and military leaders in trust for the global finance houses and oil conglomerates. The political and military leaders by themselves or through appointed technocrats administer these oil estates for their principals in Europe, America, and lately Asia (Shell/Chevron/ExxonMobile/CNOOC, etc.) in exchange for financial compensation, which runs into billions of dollars annually (see Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Saro-Wiwa, 1992; Ukeje et al., 2009; Watts, 2009).

In essence, petrol-capitalism in alliance with the military and Hausa-Fulani aristocracy effectively controls economic power in Nigeria and their power is exercised by the tiny minority that runs these bureaucracies. Eteng (1996) argues this point well when he observes that

This fact is well known and highly acknowledged by the appropriating Nigerian state in power, the expropriating

multinational oil companies and the expropriated oil bearing communities . . . The privileged groups who directly benefit from the wealth include: the multinational oil companies, Nigerian managers of state power, and members of the country’s ruling class for the majority ethnic groups and their cohorts from various social classes and communal groups. (p. 113)

As Bourdieu, Wacquant, and Farage (1994) would argue, the Nigerian economic elite (who in this case are global finance and oil power houses represented at the local level by Nigerian technocrats) stands in a relation of “circular causality” with the Hausa-Fulani and military elite. Together, they expropriate power from the masses which they abrogate to themselves. Their interests become the interest of the entire society and the state, which increasingly resembles a fictive body and an instrument for propagating, satisfying, and reproducing these interests.

Control of Nigeria by the Power Elite

Mills characterized the political elite based on the individuals responsible for making the key executive decisions of the state (i.e., the president and his key advisers, officers and ranking members of the U.S. congress, members of the Supreme Court, etc.). In the Nigerian context, the political elite are embedded within the dominant Hausa-Fulani aristocratic class. It is this aristocracy that determines who would occupy command positions within the political bureaucracy, as well as the duration and extent of their powers. In other words, the Hausa-Fulani political elite effectively wield “de facto” national political power in Nigeria.

Mills discussed the military elite in the context of their affinity with the corporate and political elite. Thus, not only is the American military an “industrial complex,” it is also a political rolling mill of sorts, which is intricately linked to the political agenda of the state. Thus, in the Millsonian Power elite theory, the power of the American military is immanent in the constitution, which subjects the military to civilian control. This relationship allows for intense interaction between the political and military institutions and the key individuals who command these institutions. In the Nigerian context, the power of the military elite derives from their complete lack of respect for the Nigerian constitution (or their unprofessionalism) and their loyalty and subservience to the religious authority of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Whereas Mills discussed the corporate elite in terms of the wealth they possess and their ability to manipulate consumers, which facilitates their integration into the political, I discuss the Nigerian corporate elite in terms of international petrol-capital. Since the Nigerian economy is oil dependent and the businesses involved in oil exploitation in Nigeria are foreign, the Nigerian corporate elite is no other than global capitalism and the individuals in America (Chevron, ExxonMobil), France (Agip), and Netherlands (Royal Dutch Shell) who constitute the majority shareholding class in these

companies. As Water Rodney (1972) argues, any analysis of economic power in Africa will reveal the “gentleman who dances in Abidjan, Accra, and Kinshasa when music is played in Paris, London, and New York” (p. 36). This should not come as a surprise given the economic impulses of the British colonial system. In relinquishing political control to northern surrogates, it aligned these to a global capitalist network dominated by the IMF/World bank and multinational oil conglomerates. As long as the northern political machine in association with the military protects these institutions and their interests, the north would continue to enjoy political power.

A good (but tragic) example of the close interaction of the directorates of military, politics, and business in Nigeria is the 1995 judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the famed Ogoni playwright and environmental rights activist. Saro-Wiwa carried out a massive campaign of resistance against the Dutch oil giant Shell, which won concession from the Nigerian state to mine oil in Ogoni land. While Shell and its Nigerian political backers were posting fantastic profits, the entire Ogoni ecology was under relentless attack from oil spills and effluent deliberately discharged into the environment. According to Saro-Wiwa (1992), oil production in Ogoni land had become

An ecological war in which no blood is (apparently) spilled, no bones are broken, no one is (assumedly) maimed, so few are alarmed but men, women and children die, flora, fauna and fish perish, air, soil and water are poisoned; and finally, the land and its inhabitants die. (p. 182)

To prevent the continued devastation of Ogoni people and environment, Saro-Wiwa organized the peasants into a resistant movement under the auspices of the “Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People” (MOSOP). They picketed Shell’s corporate offices and disrupted oil production, which resulted in the shutting off of more than 400,000 barrels of oil per day and billions of dollars in oil profits/revenue for the state/MNC alliance. To break the resistance, the government at the prompting of Shell sent in the military to quell the revolt. Hundreds of Ogoni men and women were killed and many more arrested and detained without trial. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists were arrested and tried in a kangaroo military court on trumped up charges. They were found guilty and executed despite global outcry against the judgment (Etine, 2009; Pilkington, 2009). Through the execution of the “Ogoni nine” as they came to be known, we see how the interests of the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy, military statesmen, and international business coincide and how the power that they wield has immense consequences for the people at the lower rungs of the power ladder.

Another example is the precariousness of power under President Goodluck Jonathan. Since his election, President Jonathan has faced brutal attacks from the core of the northern political elite, which are believed to be behind the Boko

Haram insurgency that has almost crippled economic and social life in north-east and north-west Nigeria. In a rare moment of candor, the president observed that Boko Haram had infiltrated his government. According to him,

Some of them are in the executive arm of government, some of them are in the parliamentary/legislative arm of government while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the armed forces, the police and other security agencies. (Adetayo, 2012)

The implication of this is that the president is made to feel the raw power of the Hausa-Fulani political elite who smarting from their loss of political power following the death (in office) of President Umaru Yar’Adua in May 2010. For example, the president was forced to cancel the yearly ceremonial cutting of the Nigerian anniversary cake at Eagle Square, Abuja, in 2011 and 2012 following threats by Boko Haram insurgents to disrupt the event. At the 2010 event, two car bombs exploded outside the venue of the event killing 8 people and wounding many others. While the Niger Delta insurgent group MEND claimed responsibility for the attack for which Henry Okah (a factional MEND leader) was convicted in a South African court, the Nigerian President, hours after the attacks, absolved MEND of culpability implying that the attacks were carried out by elements from the north (see Ohuegbe, Otuchikere, & Isaac, 2010). Northern angst against President Jonathan appears to be more about the manner of his election, which many consider an ego-bruising defeat for the Hausa-Fulani political elite, than for his performance in government, which many southerners grudgingly call abysmal. Many influential members of the Hausa-Fulani elite have vowed to make the country ungovernable until the presidency returns to the north and groups such as Boko Haram and Ansaru (see Anya 2012; Aziken 2013) are believed to be working this project with uncanny precision and untoward outcomes.

Conclusion

The overarching objective of this article has been to analyze Nigeria’s power structure based on the categories identified by C. Wright Mills (1956). Mills argued that in modern America, power is concentrated in the tiny elite that constitute the leadership of three institutions: business, government, and the military. Thus, my goal was to apply his model to Nigeria as a way to validate or repudiate his thesis. It is my conclusion that the power elite theory, while not standing on all fours, applies to Nigeria and is therefore valid. First, as Mills suggested, the political directorate, the military top brass, and corporations co-articulate each other and their interests coincide at several junctions: through Islam, which gives the Sultanate immense politico-religious influence over petrol-capital/state enclave economies; by greed wherein they plunder the nation’s oil assets without the

responsibility of accountability; by the similarity of their social circumstances wherein their kids attend the same ivy league schools in Britain and the United States of America and inter-marry, own choice properties in Nigeria and abroad, have access to high-quality medical facilities abroad, and keep their stolen wealth in the same international financial institutions in Europe and the United States.

Second, while the theory correctly identifies the key institutions as the bureaucracies of politics, business, and military, the specific configurations of power are different in very important respects. In terms of political power, Nigeria deviates from Mills structure to the extent that power organizes around the religious fiefdom of the Hausa-Fulani political elite. Thus, political power does not proceed finitely from government executives; instead, it flows in reverse from the religious and cultural leadership of the Sultanate. In terms of military power, the Nigerian military elite approximate power through the usurpation of the executive functions of the state. This goes against the grain of Millsonian thinking where the military is intricately linked to the political establishment such that a revolving door opens from military bases into the hollowed chambers of congress, for example. In terms of corporate power, Mills focused on corporations within the United States and their close affinity to the political and military establishments. Through profit, they wield immense power, that enables them negotiate entry into politics or to decide who occupies political positions. In the Nigerian context, the corporate power block is foreign, but operates within the state through pseudo-capitalists who are the political managers of the state or their technocratic surrogates.

The above suggests that the bureaucracies of politics, business, and the military are closely intertwined. Their power is guaranteed by what Durkheim (1893/1984) calls “social similitude” and Bourdieu (1990) calls “habitus.” Their influence is maintained not only by their functional interdependence and integration, but also by what Bourdieu (1999) calls “Doxa,” which is the point of view of those who dominate by constituting and dominating the state. All of these suggest that as the power and importance of the “big three” increases, the importance of other bureaucracies diminishes. Worst still, the masses or “publics” become increasingly weakened, atomized, and alienated. The evisceration and emasculation of the mass corresponds to the weakening of the middle level of power represented in Nigeria by high-ranking civil servants, university professors, traditional rulers and chiefs, the clergy, and corporate executives. These other levels come to bear the brunt of the powerful decisions of the higher circles against whom there has been little opposition, at least until recently.

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Author Biography

Benjamin Aigbe Okonofua has a PhD in sociology from Georgia State University. He teaches sociology at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Benin. He is also a CGI HTS consultant to the U.S. Army Africa and has enduring research interest in race/ethnic conflict, resource conflict, terrorism/counter terrorism, irregular warfare, DDR/SSR, peace building, and social movements. He is the executive director of the African Center for Conflict Transformation.