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Two concepts of community in the Niger Delta: social sense of communality, and a geographical sense of place. Are they compatible?

Abstract: Purpose

This paper aims to understand what two apparently contrasting concepts of communality and place attachment say about the quality of community life in the Niger Delta.

Design/methodology/approach

The research for this paper relied on extensive qualitative and quantitative data: qualitative data were collected from five oil-rich and three oil-poor communities across Ogoniland, while quantitative data were collected from four of these communities. Thematic content analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data, while the quantitative data were analysed for descriptive statistics through Excel.

Findings

Most participants from both oil-rich and oil poor communities strongly reject a social sense of communality and strongly endorse a geographical sense of place

Practical implications

The wider implication of this finding is that proponents of community development (CD) have a choice between either the cynical option of noting that Ogoni's strong sense of place will make them tolerate limited CD, or the noble option of noting that Ogoni's strong sense of place is a solid foundation on which to build sustainable CD by empowering citizens to create their own future.

Originality

The originality of this study is twofold: First, it shows the complexity of people's sense of community, encompassing widely different and possibly contradictory elements. Second, it reveals the strength and persistence of people's attachment to place, despite its physical disfigurement.

Keywords: social sense of communality, geographical sense of place, adaptive preferences, community development

1. Introduction

Attempts to conceptualise the meaning of 'community' have not led to a generally accepted definition (Fitzsimmon and Lavey, 1977, Smith, 2001). Community is often interpreted simply as a group of people within a locality (Stancey, 1969), but this definition is inadequate because it embraces every type of group (places of work, church, neighbourhood, school, etc.) as community, without any substantive understanding of the nature of the relationships that exist between the group members (Bhattacharyya, 2004). Two distinct attempts to understand these relationships focus on (i) a social sense of communality; and (ii) a geographical sense of place. In terms of (i), a social sense of communality, Tonnies makes a

distinction between ‘relational’ and ‘associational’ communities (Wagner, 2005). Relational communities are described by Tonnies as a form of *gemeinschaft*, because they are characterized by close, face-face relationships between their members; traditional norms are the basis of social control and regulation; and there is a strong sense of communality among members who are loyal to their community as they possess ‘natural will’ which informs their subconscious mind to voluntarily serve the group interest (Loomis, 2002). Sandstedt and Westin (2015, p 136), note that Tonnies’ idea of natural will is ‘inborn and inherited’. By contrast, associational communities are characterised by Tonnies typically in cosmopolitan settings with bureaucracies and industries, guided and managed by individual choice and neo-liberal economic policies (Loomis, 2002). Here, community members do not possess ‘natural will’, but ‘rational will’, and their subconscious minds are mostly tuned to work towards their own self-interest and not the communal interest. As a result, communal bonds are weakened, and there is little sense of communality. Tonnies argues that relational communities develop into associational communities. However, although many writers respect Tonnies’ analysis of community, critics say his two concepts are too extreme and do not fully capture the complexity of today’s communities (Sandstedt and Westin, 2015; Loomis, 2002).

In terms of (ii), a geographical sense of place, writers who enunciate this concept of community emphasise not the social relationships between people in the community, but the natural relationships between the people and their physical environment (Anton and Lawrence, 2014; Ashild, 2007). The term ‘genius loci’ is sometimes used to signify geographical sense of place, which covers physical features and people’s experiences of, and consequently their belief in, the area (Graham, Mason and Newman, 2009). For Niger Deltans, ‘land defines who you are... when a baby is born, the placenta is buried. In this sacred soil a tree is planted which belongs to the newborn baby, representing its connection to the land’ (Zandvliet and Pedro, 2002, p. 24). This sort of personal connection anchors the person to the ‘place’ and attaches sublime or spiritual value to it (Tuan, 1977), indicating there is something profound about human relationships to place, lying deep in people’s emotions (Hernandez, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace and Hess, 2007). It describes ‘how people feel about particular places, perceive them and attach meanings to them, the understanding of which is vital in assessing the level and tendency of public attachment to particular places’ (Hashemnezhad, Yazdanfar, Heidari and Behdadfari, 2013, p.96; see also Talo, Mannarini and Rochira, 2014; Ardoin, 2006).. Relph (add ref) points out that place attachments may be positive or negative: for example insideness especially existential insideness, denotes the strongest level of place attachment because it is an “unself-conscious immersion in place”, whereas the opposite (existential outsideness), is a place experience that leaves residents with a sense of alienation. Some writers have suggested that this geographical sense of place may widen to embrace elements of the social world inhabiting the place, including social community, psychological well-being, cultural symbols, and political and economic systems (Ardoin, 2006; Graham *et al*, 2009), thereby bridging the gap between the sense of place and the sense of communality.

This leads us to note that the two concepts of community – communality and place – are not necessarily in conflict. It is possible for members of a community to profess both a strong

sense of communality and a strong sense of place. In such circumstances, there may be a 'virtuous circle', in which each reinforces the other (Graham *et al*, 2009, p.5). However, there does seem to be something paradoxical about communities in which members hold a negative perception of communality, yet a positive perception of place, since we would expect a negative view of communality to lead to a negative view of the place in which that negative view of communality is experienced. But this is precisely what we have found in Ogoni communities - a strongly negative view of communality yet a strongly positive view of place. The following questions arise: How can we explain and resolve this apparent paradox? What does it tell us about the nature of these communities? What are its implications for the quality of community life and development in Ogoniland? Does it imply that community-driven development should be replaced by place-driven development?

The current study seeks to answer these questions by investigating the perceptions held by Ogonis in Nigeria's Niger Delta on the nature of their communities. Section 2 describes the condition of Ogoniland and the Ogonis. Section 3 explains the methods of data collection, analysis and their limitations. Section 4 presents the results of the study. Section 5 discusses the paradoxical nature of those results. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. The Ogonis of the Niger Delta

Ogoniland is in Rivers state, one of the nine Niger Delta states in Nigeria. It became famous because crude oil was discovered in commercial quantities during the 1950s in some of its communities, and its extraction caused vast environmental devastation which precipitated many struggles against the Nigerian government and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), struggles which led in 1990 to the creation of the 'Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People' (MOSOP) (Boele, Fabig and Wheelers, 2001). MOSOP presented to the Nigerian government an Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) which outlined the demands of the Ogonis not only in relation to the environmental damage done to their lands and waters, but also to the economic, social and political marginalization that they are forced to endure (Boele et al, 2001). The bill described Ogoniland as a virtual colony of the Nigerian state. In 1993, 300,000 Ogonis demonstrated their deep desire for redress of the perceived wrongs against them by a historic solidarity march against the Nigerian government and Shell (Agbonifo and Aghedo, 2015). Institutions created by the Nigerian government and Shell to ameliorate the sufferings of the Niger Deltans had failed (Oladele and Austen, 2015; Ering, 2013). For example, according to many critics, the 'Hydrocarbon Pollution Restoration Projects (HYPREP) created to coordinate the sustainable restoration of Ogoniland, was mired in corruption from its inception (Mmom and Igbuku, 2015; UNPO, 2013). Thisday newspaper of Saturday 9th August (2014, p.3), reported that a senior government official (Mr Danladi Kifasi) described HYPREP as a: 'mistake' because Ogonis had no input in its creation; a corrupt coordinator was picked to manage it; and it served merely as a smokescreen by the Nigerian government and Shell (see also Okeke-Ogbuafor, Gray and Stead, 2016a; Amnesty International, 2014).

Despite the praise of community-driven development as a bottom up solution for CD (Opare, 2007; Kelsall, 2011; Dinbaba, 2014), critics have traced another source of Ogoni problems to

within their own communities in the shape of their traditional chiefs/elites who have been accused of authoritarianism, cronyism, and corruption (Mohammed, 2013; Okeke-Ogbuafor et al 2016a; Asuni, 2009; Babalola, 2014; Arisuokwu and Nnaomah, 2012; Nweke, 2012; Zandvliet and Pedro, 2002). This is ‘multiple jeopardy’ for the Ogonis, says Mohammed (2013, p.1), because the sources of their frustration, i.e. the corrupt milking of community funds for what is perceived to be fraudulent community development (CD), comes from both the top and bottom. A recent evaluation of the contributions made by Ogoni community-based organizations (CBOs) to CD by Okeke-Ogbuafor, Gray and Stead (2016b) claimed that these organizations could be further sources of misery (see also Dawari and Shola (2010).

The result of these pressures on their homes or places of residence is that most Ogonis, whose population was put at about 832,000 in 2006 (UNEP, 2011) live in a state of poverty - obtaining less than \$1 per day (Ikejiaku, 2009, p.15; Ekpenyong et al 2010; Okeke-Ogbuafor et al, 2016b). As a result, youth unemployment is high (Babalola, 2014), “health facilities are almost non-existent, school buildings are collapsing with classrooms and laboratories empty” (Maduagwu 2012, p.5). Moreover, Shell’s drilling activities have destroyed Ogoni’s once fertile soils and viable rivers, so they can neither farm nor fish in the way they did before oil was discovered (Boele et al, 2001; Ebegbulem et al, 2013).

However, by contrast to the dire condition of the majority of the population, their leaders are generally well off. Pyagbara (2007, p.10) traced this privileged status of the elite to the strong bonds between Ogoni leaders and Shell which treats:

their community people as subjects and them as big men because of the largesse and special treatment that are given to them [individuals rather than the communities] by the oil companies thus alienating them from the people. The result is that in times of distress or oil pollution like oil spills and fire conflagrations, most of these elders think of themselves first and collect monies and others from the oil companies or they will form companies in order to front them for contracts to do the “clean up exercises” which are actually euphemisms for cover ups.

Unsurprisingly, such a situation of economic inequality between the mass and the elite has bred disillusion in the minds of most Ogonis, expressed in perceptions of a negative sense of communality. Surprisingly, however, the same Ogonis expressed positive perceptions of their sense of place, despite the despoilment of their natural surroundings. It is this apparent paradox that the current study has discovered, by investigating the perceptions of Ogonis about the nature of their communities, using the McMillan and Chavis (1986) questionnaire on a sense of community (SoC). The SoC questionnaire measured (1) membership: the perception of shared boundaries, history, symbols, sense of emotional safety and individual investment in community; (2) influence: the individual’s perception of the interaction between the community and herself; (3) fulfilment of needs: perception of the benefits members derive from their community; and (4) emotion: perception of shared emotional connections.

3. Methods of data collection and analysis

The first phase of data collection was conducted between February and May 2014 in Ebubu, K-Dere, Ogali, Korokoro, Nonwa, Sii, Lewe and Kanni-Babbe communities. These communities cut across the four local government areas that make up Ogoniland. During this phase, 67 key informant interviews (KIs) and three focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out, and 200 open-ended survey questionnaires (SQAs) which focused on the nature of community were administered (with 189 returns). The second phase of fieldwork was carried out between March and April 2015 after the analysis of the first data sets (KIs, FGDs, and SQAs). In this phase, 200 closed survey questionnaires (SQBs), were administered in four (Lewe, Kaani-babbe, Ebubu and Korokoro) of the eight communities from where the first set of data were collected. There was a 100% return of these SQB questionnaires. Data collected through semi-structured interviews showed that about 60% of KIs can be described as poor and vulnerable community members. The remaining 40% cover Shell officials, community chiefs/elites, community religious leaders and non-Ogoni indigenes resident in Ogoniland. Participants in the three FGDs represented members of their community's indigenous community-based organizations (CBOs), because each session had an octogenarian, a youth, women and men, representing, respectively, their community's council of chief and elders group, youth, women and men organizations. KIs like FGD participants, were recruited from Ogoni CBOs on the basis of their knowledge of their community through snowball sampling. Even though Ogoni CBOs comprise many different social networks, they are representative of community residents (see Okeke-Ogbuafor et al, 2016b, Magadla 2008 and Green, 2010). Without an up-to-date sampling frame for probability sampling, recruiting participants from these CBOs reduces biases associated with snow ball sampling. SQAs targeted community elites (present and past community leaders), also recruiting them from CBOs through snowball sampling, based on their first-hand knowledge of their communities. KIs provided mostly the 'common persons' perceptions; FGDs provided both elitist and ordinary persons' perceptions about the nature of their communities; SQAs provided 'elitist' perceptions of the nature of their communities; and SQBs were follow-ups of SQAs, KIs and FGDs

SPACE FOR TABLE 1

While the first set of data was collected from eight oil-rich and oil-poor communities, SQBs were administered in four (2 oil-rich and 2 oil-poor) communities (see Table 1). The choice of four communities was to ascertain whether results would show any significant difference in perceptions between members of oil-rich and oil-poor communities. SQBs were given the McMillan and Chavis (1986) questionnaire for measuring their sense of community (SoC), and the questionnaires were completed by both elite and vulnerable members of the communities. The SQB respondents were selected through convenience sampling for two reasons: first, CBO leaders could not provide a complete list of their members to allow for

probability sampling; and second, the SQBs were administered during the 2015 presidential and governorship electioneering period in Nigeria, when community members avoided gathering for meetings, and were always in a hurry to leave meeting venues, because the political situation in Rivers state during the 2015 elections was one of insecurity (Joab-Peterside, nd). In all, fifty SQB questionnaires were administered by the researcher and an assistant in each of the four communities on scheduled days at various CBO meeting venues and sometimes at the homes of CBO members. Like FGDs and KIs, SQBs were targeted mostly through their community CBOs. However, as with most survey sampling techniques, this survey was not free of sampling errors. For instance, the researcher is unsure about the exact membership strength of the six types of CBOs sampled in each of the four communities.

With regard to data analysis, the qualitative data generated in this study were analysed through ‘thematic content analyses’. Transcribed KIs and FGDs were sorted thematically and in consideration of the context in which they were used, and identified themes were threaded together. Comments in SQAs were copied into two lists; list one was according to themes; and list two was based on the context in which these themes were used. SQB questionnaires were analysed quantitatively through Excel to determine the value accorded to the various components of the sense of community (such as reinforcement of needs, membership, influence, and shared emotional connection) by research participants.

4. Results

4.1 Negative sense of communality

As in the literature, all the FGD participants and also the 258 interview and questionnaire respondents (KIs and SQAs), affirmed that most Ogonis are poor and live without basic facilities. K-10 said “*we are very poor here..., no roads, no hospitals, no tap water, no good school, we live in leaking houses*”. KI-11 claimed “*we lack everything*”. The few primary and secondary schools “*that we have are not enough to take our people*” (KI-18). Opinions differed, however, when questions about the nature of their communities were asked. Twenty one SQAs and 15 KIs, most of whom were community chiefs and elites, described their communities as communal and equal. For example KI-5, a community youth leader, said “*we are equal because even members that do not contribute financially for lack of money still participate actively*” during community meetings/gatherings. In support of this claim, SQA-62 traced the abundance of what he called “*community cooperative spirit*” in his community to its egalitarian structure where “*there is no difference between the rich poor...since the poor can also decide how community money is spent, whether they contribute their money or not*” (KI-20). KI-7, a community chief, described his community as safe, ideal, organized and complete because:

“the youth council of this community is to guide the community so that no outsider can come into the community to terrorize us, the women organization bring up women

to understand their husbands and to behave as mothers. Our culture is good and we maintain it...it has helped us to keep this community together in unity”.

Similarly, SQA-30 described his community as communal and peaceful because “*tradition demands we cooperate*”.

However, such positive comments about communities were mainly expressed by community leaders and elites, who disproportionately benefitted from them. By contrast, the majority of respondents held very negative views about the structure of their communities. Forty one KIs, three FGDs and 60 SQAs thought their communities were deeply unequal. These participants argued that respondents who described their communities as ‘equal’, oversimplified the nature of their communities in three major ways. First, they overlooked the deep gulf between community elites and ordinary members. Second, they ignored the impact of external actors on the structure of their communities. Many respondents blamed Shell for undermining the sense of communality by divide-and-rule tactics which fomented divisions. For example, KI-20 claimed that “*they [Shell] have this policy which does not magnate with community policy [communality] in the sense that they cheat and tell lies they are not transparent. When they come to the communities they remove the home fronts and when they want to deal with us they contact each of our organizations differently and try to manipulate and put divisions between us, they play a lot of politics*”. Similarly KI-2, a member of the elite, held that Shell sowed seeds of discord in his community:

‘they [Shell] takes delight in divide game, if they want to do road in this community, they will first come in and pick a rascal. A boy that will disobey the chiefs and elders, a boy that can cause confusion, they [Shell] will empower him and then introduce him to government security. After that the boy recruits his own boys that will work with him and then they will begin to cause confusion in the community and then Shell will declare that they cannot work in the community because it is not peaceful’

Third, they did not take into account the viciousness created as a result of certain traditional practices. For instance, 39 KIs condemned the Ogoni culture of inherited leadership for being undemocratic. Okeke-Ogbuafor, Gray and Stead (2016a, p. 59) reported that Ogonis traced most of their problems to this culture which allows inherited chiefs to manage their communities, since they lacked leadership qualities and training: “they just got up and ascended their thrones because their fathers were chiefs”. And despite their poor quality, as tradition demands, these leaders are not readily replaced (Platteau and Abraham, 2002; Chigudu, 2015 and Okeke-Ogbuafor et al, 2016). As a result, this culture (inherited leadership) is marked by mismanagement and lack of accountability (Donovan, nd and Chigudu, 2015). Seventeen KIs and 32 SQAs confirmed that the corrupt acts of community chiefs/elites are not queried. Chigudu (2015) described this culture as a caste system; 12 KIs reported that this caste system cannot be easily broken even though it restricts their social mobility because, as Platteau and Abraham (2002) note, it is seen as sacred and having divine approval. Community chiefs surround themselves with handpicked assistants who do not query their ‘masters’ because “they are the same people that these chiefs use” for their own

interests (Okeke-Ogbuafor et al, 2016, p.58). **Based on these perceptions**, respondents (KIs, SQAs and FGDs) divided the social structure of their communities into seven groups (see Table 2), which possessed very different levels of participation in community affairs. **For respondents these distinct levels and their characteristics shows the inequitable nature of their communities.**

SPACE FOR TABLE 2

Moreover, KIs-8, 22, 25 and SQAs- 30, 46, 65 and 189 argued that the lack of cultural unifying symbols have left their communities diluted of solidarity. For SQA-97, *“our cultural life is dying”*, because Ogoni communities are expanding (KI-3). According to KI-1, this is because their communities are *“beginning to wear the status of a big city”*. Even though SQBs said they are able to recognise most members of their community (3.84, 3.80, 3.6, and 3.0), their communities lacked communal symbols that unite them (1.55, 1.06, 1.38, and 1.88 (see Figure 3). KI-3 claimed that Ogonis lack a common unifying symbol because *“the influx of strangers into Eleme is affecting our own way of life, our culture and tradition. It has gotten to the extent that if care is not taken, our local dialect can go extinct”*. KI-16 said that *“we do not work as a group in my community, everybody concentrates on their immediate family...I only travel home to see my cousins, my mum, they are my direct relatives”*. Likewise, KI-48 said *“am not concerned about anybody but my wife and kids, am also less concerned about the community”*. KI-55 declared that *“I mind my business”*, while KI-53 said *“my life centres around my farm and my house... I stay back in my house”*. Most SQBs respondents claim that they do not invest time and effort in being part of their community (1.06, 1.08, 1.27 and 2.38): they do not have much in common with each other, and therefore do not feel the need to live communally (Pyagbara, 2007).

4.2 Positive sense of place

By contrast to the largely negative perception of respondents (SQAs, KIs and FGDs) about the extent of communality in their communities, SQB respondents hold a very strong sense of place in their communities. Using the McMillan and Chavis (1986) questionnaire, we found that in both the oil-rich communities of Korokoro and Ebubu and the oil-poor communities of Lewe and Kanni-Babbe, members feel a sense of warmth about the place of their communities, because these places are ‘mostly’ important to them (ratings of 3.90; 3.98; 3.98; and 3.62, respectively); a source of identity (3.94; 3.84; 3.81; and 3.08, respectively); and a home (3.82; 3.62; 3.80; and 3.48, respectively) into which they must fit (3.47; 3.3; 3.23; and 2.67, respectively).

SPACE FOR FIGURE 1

5. Discussion

In this section, we discuss four possible explanations for the apparent paradox between a negative sense of communality and a positive sense of place in Ogoni communities. Two explanations are methodological and two are substantive. The first methodological explanation is that the apparent paradox may be due to the different methods of obtaining data: the questions put to KIs, FGDs and SQAs were semi-structured, and greater time was allocated to allow for follow-up questions, whereas the survey questions to SQBs were structured, and allowed no time for follow-up questions. But why should KIs, FGDs and SQAs be more critical of their community than SQBs simply because they had more time to answer follow-up questions? The second methodological explanation for the difference between the findings of the two data sets is that there may be differences in the respective communities canvassed. The KI, SQA, and FGD respondents were drawn from eight communities - Korokoro, Ebubu, Nonwa Ogali, Kaani-Babe, Sii 2, Lewe and K-Dere - whereas the SQB respondents were drawn from only four of those eight communities - Korokoro, Ebubu, Kanni- Babbe, and Lewe. In fact, however, there is no evidence to show that there was any significant difference between the two sets of communities to make one set on average more positive than the other set in their perceptions of communality.

The first substantive explanation suggests that oil makes the difference: i.e. that respondents in oil-rich communities are more negative about their place of residence than are respondents in oil-poor communities, because the degradation of their physical environment is much worse. However, the respondents did not confirm this hypothesis. For example, SQBs in the oil-rich communities of Korokoro and Ebubu were just as committed to the sense of place as were SQBs in the oil-poor communities of Lewe and Kani-Babbe.

The second substantive explanation is more convincing. These perceptions may not be in conflict at all, because it is perfectly possible for people in a community to value highly their place of residence yet be very critical of the social life and organisation that exists in that place. SQBs felt a strong attachment to their place of residence because it was their ancestral home. They were spiritually rooted to the spot, and even if they left the village, they would always regard it as their source of identity, their existential source of belonging. And the strength of this umbilical cord was undiminished by either the physical degradation of the community's hinterland, or the gross deficiencies of the community's social system. On the contrary, the depth of their attachment to the place enabled them to cope with these physical and social shortcomings in their communities. They were fortified by an inner bond to withstand the deprivations of unemployment, poverty, illness and exclusion, and their response to these deprivations was resignation and fatalism rather than anger and hatred. This is an adaptive strategy

Frediani *et al* (2014, p. 6) cited Sen who provides a psychological explanation for such adaptation, suggesting that SQB respondents have adjusted to the adverse conditions of their

communities because “deprived groups may be habituated to inequality, may be unaware of possibilities of social change, may be hopeless about upliftment of objective circumstances of misery, may be resigned to fate, and may be willing to accept the legitimacy of the established order”. In other words, even though SQBs are disillusioned by the lack of communality in their communities, their positive sense of place as their source of identity and home enables them to carry on. The acceptance of community imperfections by SQBs reflects “coping and survival strategies”, a phrase used by Alexander and Klein (2009, p. 47) to describe the so-called ‘Stockholm syndrome’ explaining how hostages deal with life-threatening conditions. Dunning (2015) explained that people are most likely to embrace such coping strategies, first, if they completely depend on their captives for survival, and, second, to reduce stress. It could be argued that Ogonis are completely dependent for their survival on their sense of place, and that this reduces their stress levels sufficiently to enable them to cope.

There may also be an element of cognitive dissonance in these perceptions. Drawing on Festinger and Carlsmith’s experiment about ‘forced compliance behaviour’ of cognitive dissonance as explained in Mcleod (2008), it is possible that SQBs (and some other respondents) subconsciously downplayed the negative impacts of their communities on them as part of their coping and survival strategies. For one thing, SQBs seemed hopeful that things might get better for them in their communities (3.55, 3.69, 4 and 4 respectively), hence they accepted current community imperfections as a temporary condition which may yet improve. For another thing, SQBs do not feel it is worth investing their time and effort in their imperfect communities (1.06, 1.08, 1.27 and 2.06, respectively). This coping and survival strategy resembles the fable of the ‘fox and the grapes’ as explained by Barnes (2009), which graphically describes how preferences can easily be transformed and how non-preferences become adaptive preferences. According to Barnes (2009), the hungry fox transformed its preferences by rationalising, even when it was dying of hunger, that the grapes were sour, not because it knew they were sour but because it could not reach the grapes on the high vine of the tree. The question arises whether respondents transformed their conscious preference for an equal community to an adaptive preference for their unequal communities, because they served as their home and source of identity. Adaptive preferences could explain why SQBs from the four communities rationalised that their communities are healthy and impact positively on their wellbeing because they have good leaders (2.73, 2.67, 2.67, and 3.55) hence their needs are met (2.38, 2.92, 2.92 and 3.18). These SQBs have adapted their preferences to suit their disadvantaged situations.

Interestingly, we can see that this adaptive coping strategy is also manifest in responses from KIs, SQAs and FGDs. For example, 17 KIs, 43 SQAs and 2-FGDs were resigned to live with poor community leadership. KI-28, from Ebubu community reported that he is from a very poor home and so cannot revolt against the leadership of his community “*my father was a nobody...they [community leadership], will just come in the night and kill me*”. FGD-1, confirmed that vulnerable community members “*do not confront authority*”. Instead, for survival they maintain their contact with community meetings: “*people treat us [poor] anyhow...in our community meetings they do not consider us. If you remove your name from*

the meeting, our people will say that you are not part of the community” (KI-54). KI-2, a community leader, emphasised the need for community members to constantly attach themselves to their communities *“as a community member, you must, I use the word, you ‘must’ identify with the community... it is our culture”*, despite the fact that *“they do not have any voice in the community”* (KI-65). Thirty one KIs, especially members of the vulnerable group, confirmed that they are second class citizens in their communities, yet as KI-39 observed, although *“they don’t involve me in anything because am an unimportant person...I have accepted my position [2nd class] in this community”*. KI-60 intoned that *“we are all hopeless, we don’t look forward to any good thing”*.

Respondents like KI-27 suggested that most Ogonis have adapted to the vicious nature of their communities, because poverty and hopelessness have impacted on their sense of judgement: *“the poor do not always have the capacity to react...poverty has affected the reasoning of our people, they are easily manipulated”*. KI-23, a social performance officer with Shell Nigeria, who has worked with the Ogonis for over a decade confirmed that vulnerable groups suffer from *“blind loyalty”* to their leaders. KI-29 reported that vulnerable community members *“are easily deceived by these leaders, they are easily wooed, they are easily influenced”* with food. This explains why most vulnerable community members who have been systematically disadvantaged in their communities do not revolt against those communities, but instead cling to them. This is a characteristic response of Africans because: *“the community is very important, it is a form of identity and for this reason everybody tries to belong”* (KI-27). KI-25, a member of the community elite, said that obedience to and loyalty for the community are imperative since *“the community owns all of us because we were born into it and it existed before us and even after our exit, the community will still stand and no matter whom you are, you can never be bigger than the community”*. This is a case of community members being “self-submerged” in a collective sense of identity (Kochalumchualti 2010, p.1).

6. Conclusion

This study has focused on the contrast between Ogoni communities’ negative sense of communality and positive sense of place. It reveals that even in the condition of extreme adversity that negatively affects the well-being of community members, many Ogonis still expressed a strong sense of belonging to their places of residence. Most poor respondents who hold their communities in high regard do so because of their attachment to place of origin, rather than their estimation of the quality of communality in that place. The wider implication of this finding relates to strategies of community development (CD) in Ogoniland. CD strategists have a choice between (1) the cynical option that Ogonis’ strong sense of place will keep them quiescent and compliant in the face of continuing hardship, and so little needs to be done to alleviate that hardship; and (2) the nobler option that Ogoni’s strong sense of place is an invaluable foundation on which to build vibrant communities by empowering residents to take forward their own priorities for community development. It may be that investment in Ogoni’s strong sense of place could resolve the inherent problems of inequities and unfairness in human communality and associated relationships. With equity

and fairness, development could stay, and trust and interpersonal bonds could grow and deepen¹. In other words, the Ogoni's sense of place could generate a sense of communality.

Because this is the first study that compares Ogonis' sense of communality and place, this paper recommends more extensive research into Ogoni's sense of communality and place. Part of such research could involve measuring the sense of communality along socioeconomic lines, and the sense of place along psychological lines, to see whether there is common ground between them. There is also need for research into the perceptions of Ogoni residents about how to invest in the sense of communality and the sense of place to promote CD.

Notes

¹ We are indebted to Prof Dominic Medway of JPMD for this point.

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Appendix

SPACE FOR TABLE