

SETTLERS AND INDIGENES PHENOMENON IN NIGERIAN FEDERALISM:

AN ASSESSMENT OF JOS, PLATEAU STATE.

BY

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ABSTRACT

The issue of settlers and indigenes has been recurring severally in Nigeria. It is posing a lot of danger to corporate existence of the Nigerian state. Several communities that were hitherto lived peacefully suddenly took arms against one another as a result of claim of ownership of the land and by implication the community. The study therefore examines the importance of land ownership in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria and the importance attached to the indigeneity status of citizens. In Nigeria, the emphasis is on 'town of origin' and 'state of origin'. Such details are required on official documents. As a result of this, Nigerians are guarding their individual 'town of origin' and 'state of origin' jealously. The nature of Nigeria federalism promotes this and by implication induces conflicts across the country. In Nigeria, federal character and quota system principles are enshrined in the constitution. What this suggests is that both political and administrative positions are allocated on the basis of state of origin. The study adopts historical descriptive analysis to elicit information on the issue. It observes that the settlers and indigenes phenomenon is a major issue capable of threatening and even destroying the unity of the country. So many crises in the country that had shaken the nation to its foundation could be traced to such phenomenon. Examples of the crises include Jos crisis, Amuleri- Aguleri crisis, Ife- Modakeke crisis etc. The emphasis in the study will be on Jos crisis. The study concludes that for Nigeria to make progress and to be a developed nation, it must find a way of tackling the problems associated with settlers and indigenes.

Keywords: Nigeria Federalism, Settler, Indigene, Federal Character, Multi-ethnic Society, Nigerian Constitution.

Introduction

Federal states all over the world vary in many ways, such as; in the nature, character and significance of the underlying political, economic, cultural and social diversities. Consequently, the Nigerian federalism like those of other developing countries are confronted with a lot of complex challenges which on many occasions have shook the Nigerian state to its foundation. One of such challenges is the settler/ indigene phenomenon. This problem more than any other one has posed a lot of difficulty to the Nigerian state. Governments at all levels seem to be helpless and hopeless in the resolution of the crises and conflicts arising from it. Most Nigerians who had lived peacefully together for years will suddenly take arms against themselves on issues bothering on indigene or non indigene status of those concerned.

Land, political and economic interests of the elite are at the heart of this problem. In Africa, land is seen as a major inheritance, as such, Africans do not joke with it. Therefore, anything that threatens their accessibility to land is seriously viewed. In addition to this is the economic interest of the elite. Due to their desire for political power and governmental patronage elite will always instigate the masses to stave off those they perceive to constitute an obstacle to this desire. In otherwords, the crises and conflicts associated with indigenes and non indigene in Nigerian federalism are encouraged by the elite. Since independence till date, conflicts between “indigenes” of particular localities and “settlers” have intermittently occurred with records of varying degree of casualties. A number of such crises manifested in areas like Ife/ Modakeke, Amuleri/ Aguleri, Zango/ Kataf, Urhobo,/ Itsekiri, Junkun/ Tiv, Kuteb etc Junkun- Chamba, Sabongari/ Kano etc.

The latest of such crises is in Jos. The paper therefore delves more on this crisis for a better understanding of the issue. Therefore, this work studies the indigene-settler tensions in Plateau State as well as how the nation's constitution that permitted federalism has been manipulated by actors in the state. The Nigerian constitution is contradictory particularly as relates to citizenship and indigeneity. For example, it makes provision for federal character principle - a system which seeks to balance the appointment of political positions, jobs and other government benefits evenly among the Nigerian citizenry. This is in conflict with another principle – indigeneity. The principle underlying the right to such benefits is dependent upon where an individual's parents and grandparents were born. The result therefore is widespread discrimination against "settlers" which have at various times resulted into clashes where thousands of lives have been lost and hundreds of thousands displaced. Also, it is important to note that the state is the major focus of competition among all groups because it plays the central role in making decisions about the distribution of political spoils as well as deployment and allocation of scarce economic resources among others.

Therefore, to effectively and critically analyse this problem, the paper is arranged into seven different sections starting with the introduction, the political economy of the Nigerian federalism, concept of citizenship in Nigerian federalism, indigene-settler crises in Nigeria with special reference to Jos, towards harmonious relationship in Nigerian federal system and conclusion.

The Political Economy Approach- A Theoretical Analysis of Nigerian Federalism

It is appropriate at this juncture to give some theoretical underpinning of the issue. Therefore, political economy approach is used in analysing the problem of settler/ indigene

in Nigerian federalism. Richard Harris (1975), Hamza Alavi (1978), Eme Ekewkwe (1985), Bade Onimade (1988) and Julius Ihonvbere (1989) have noted that political economy approach would provide a thorough understanding of national issues particularly in Africa since the approach will always situate such issues within a conceptually global perspective. Gilpin, 2004 as Cited in Mimiko, 2010: 17 lend credence to this, according to him;

...the relationship between economics and politics at least in the modern world is a reciprocal one. On one hand, politics largely determines the framework of economic activities and channels it in direction intended to serve the interest of the dominant groups. On the other hand, the economic process itself tends to redistribute power and wealth. In the same vein, it transforms the power relationships among groups.

Political economy approach scientifically studies the society in its totality and takes into consideration the interconnection of social relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the substructure (economy) and the super structure (policy) and thus, political economy helps in understanding societies in its entirety. The theory is relevant here when discussing the rivalry and conflicts between groups particularly as regarding land, history relating to it and other development challenges cum setbacks that have subsequently followed (Asobie, 1990: 1). According to Julius Ihonvbere (2000: 73) it is essential and necessary to understand the dynamics of Nigeria's distinctive political economy and social balances as well as the lasting impact of the social formations historical experiences. No doubt it will further give better understanding of the crisis of politics and power that has clearly manifested in the perennial conflicts between the Plateau state indigenous groups and the Hausa-Fulani settlers. Moreover, the struggle for participation in government and political patronage saw the Hausa-Fulani Muslims settlers against the indigenous tribes of Anaguta, Afizere and Berom who are mainly Christians. At the centre of the crisis in Plateau state is the hot contestation over economic and political spoils, which

has resulted into groups ganging up against one another with the instrumentalisation of indigene/settler phenomenon/syndrome as a veritable defence mechanism. The work therefore explores the interconnection between issues of political patronage/administration, resource allocation and class accumulation.

The nature of Nigerian state and the character of its federal system are dependent principally on two major elements of the country's political economy, i.e, ethnic pluralism and economic statism (Diamond 1988: 33-92). The two more than any other are influencing and affecting the conduct of the nation's affairs. Nigeria is an underdeveloped economy as such; the state is largely dominating the economy, seeing to the use of resources and equally dispensing patronage. This has necessitated the keen competition for state offices and resources. Otwin Marenin eloquently put this in perspective. According to him:

Nigerian society is characterised by an overpowering statism which inextricably intertwines political and economic power. The line demarcating politics and economics has been erased as the state power equals wealth and wealth is the pathway to power (Marenin; 1988: 21).

The nature and character of the Nigerian state as highlighted above elevate "distributive considerations rather than ideological or programmatic contestation into the primary impulse for political competition" (Suberu, 1998: 277). For Crawford Young, there is a tendency in Nigeria for individuals to seek support from their...kinfolk in the pursuit of the most basic of economic and political goods (Young, 1982: 92). The general belief in the country is that the state has strategic offices and positions which can be occupied or captured through competitive process. Therefore, ethnicity in Nigerian federalism remains a vital social force. What is more, competition for positions, appointments, advancement and

the control of the governmental apparatus of the Nigerian state influence and accelerate the ethicising of the country and by implication settlers/ indigenes crisis all over the country.

On the whole, the political economy of Nigerian federalism is not merely focusing on the distribution of power and wealth in the country but equally examining the origins and morality of this distribution as well as the means to change it. The political economy approach adopted in the study equally looks at the consequences of settler/ indigene crisis on the Nigerian state.

Concept of Citizenship in Nigerian Federalism

The 1999 Nigerian constitution Section 25, 26 and 27 make provisions for all categories of citizenship in the country i.e by birth, registration and naturalisation (FRN, 1999). This simply means that Nigerians regardless of where he lives is a citizen of the country as long as the parents or grandparents are Nigerians. Apart from this, as a citizen of the country, such individual is free to live and work anywhere in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. But despite this, the concept of citizenship in Nigerian federalism is problematic simply because of increasing growth of primordial ties, ethnic or tribal sentiments. Ojukwu and Onifade (2010; 175) reinforce this. According to them:

Citizenship is an important notion because it defines the constitutive elements of the democratic state and elaborates the relationship between state power and individuals. It spells out procedure and sets of practices defining the relationship between the nation-state and its individual members... Unequal class or status relations are derived and a structure and ideology of common objectives are superimposed. Citizenship in Nigeria infers an equality (of rights) bestowed on all who are Nigerian citizens backed up by adequate constitutional provision in order to ensure that this is so... in principle, all Nigerian citizens are equal no matter the circumstances of their birth and whether or not they reside in their places of origin. But in

practice, one is a Nigerian citizen only in his state of origin. Outside one's state of origin, he is not a citizen (ibid)

Nigerian citizens are facing undue deprivation within the country particularly in an area which is not his/ her indigenous place. This is contrary to Section 42 (2) of the 1999 constitution that says no citizen of the country shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstances of his birth. (FRN 1999). The non indigenes in any part of the country are subjected to undue frustration, oppression, marginalisation etc. the interesting thing about this is that, it is not limited to a particular area. For example, those that are currently undergoing this experience will do worse to other non- indigenes in their own area if they have the opportunity. Non -indigenes are discriminated against in Nigeria federal state. This is the root of the crisis associated with indigene- settler in the country. As a result of the crisis generated by the indigene- settler issue in the country, the concept of the Nigerian state does not really hold any appeal to average Nigerian. Nigerian people are more loyal and believe more in their various ethnic or indigenous groups. As a result, they hold more allegiance to these ethnic groups. This perhaps account for the dimension ethnic crisis is assuming in the country. The pluralistic nature of the Nigerian state and coupled with the colonial origin of the country affects the perception of the people about the country. Nigerians at various levels particularly the elites always use ethnicity or indigeneity as a tool to gain more favour, lucrative contracts, choice governmental positions and political patronage among others.

Ordinarily, average Nigerians of any ethnic group always see themselves as one and have no reason to doubt themselves, due to this and naturally, they will avoid fighting themselves. But the poor average Nigerians are gullible and easily manipulatable. The elite in their characteristic manner manipulates the poor and instigate them to cause crisis just for

the benefit of the elite and their family members. Most of the ethnic crises in the country or indigene- settler crisis are precipitated by the elite using the masses.

Indigene- Settler Crises in Nigeria: The Jos Plateau Example

Indigene-settler problem has been a recurring issue in Nigeria threatening the peace and tranquillity of the country. Plateau State is currently the main site of ethno-religious crisis in the country as a result of settler- indigene phenomenon. Plateau State is one of the thirty- six states in the Nigerian federation. Just as the Nigerian state itself, Plateau State is a multi-ethnic state. It is made up of several ethnic groups such as the Geomai, Tai, Berom, Ngas, Afizere, Anaguta. The state has more than thirty (30) ethno-linguistic groups.

The state was created in 1976 from the former Benue- Plateau state, and was reduced in size in 1991 with the creation of Nassarawa State. (Blench and Dendo; 2003). It is distinctive for its high level of ethno-linguistic diversity, and it is populated by a great variety of small groups living in hamlets. The state attracted pastoralists in the nineteenth century when its human population was relatively sparse and the discovery of tin and the subsequent growth of Jos inevitably brought a major expansion of the (farming) population (ibid). The crisis in the state is traceable to ethnic difference pitting Hausa 'settlers' with the Plateau indigenes. The indigenes feel the state belongs to them and therefore have the right to control it but the Hausa settlers are equally laying claim to certain part of the state. This has resulted into indigene versus settler battles in some parts of the state. The indigenes are resisting the Hausa settlers in politics and administration of the area.

Therefore, ethnicity is seen as an important political identity and the ideology of indigeneity is a potent tool of ethnic politics in the state. It is necessary to look at various issues that led to the crisis. These include the following:

a) Land Issue

In Nigeria, indigeneity is associated with land ownership. This is not only limited to Nigeria, land ownership is an issue all over Africa. As such, anything that affects the land affects the people and must be resisted by all means. Eme Awa supports this view when he asserted that indigeneity is strong in Nigeria because people are seeing the land as a primary form of property in the traditional society and its source as a form of wealth (Awa, 1985). This account for the deep- rooted animosity between the indigenes (land owners) and the settlers in Plateau State. The desire of the settlers to have access to the land at the expense of the indigenes is the major problem in the state. The crises in Plateau are first and foremost a struggle over land as majority of Plateau state indigenes are Christians who are tied to the land as peasant farmers or workers in the civil service while the settlers, mainly Muslim minorities are Hausa dry-season farmers and cattle rearers; while the Igbo, Urhobo and Yoruba, are dominating the business life of the state (Danfulani: 2005:3). The crisis remains intractable and the dominant Christian (indigene) population in Plateau state is insisting that until the problem is given a constitutional solution, the hospitality of the people of the state should not be abused by settlers particularly the Hausas who make outrageous and bogus claims for rights and privileges which does not exist anywhere else in the federation (Danfulani 2006, cited in Ostien, 2009:7).

b) Political Patronage/ Competition

One of the major factors that triggered the indigene/ settler crisis in Plateau State is political exclusion. The return to civil rule in 1999 saw the indigenous people using their population to advantage by voting massively for Plateau Indigenes while settlers are finding it very difficult to occupy position of authority as a result of their minority status. This is contrary to what obtained under military rule. During this period, the Hausa/ Fulani dominated the strategic positions in various military governments and they always use this to advantage in putting Hausa settlers in Plateau State into positions against the wish of the indigenous people.

Therefore the opening up of political space under civilian rule has been accompanied by intense ethnic competition at all levels in the state. The indigenous elite have consolidated their power and control of the state, excluding the settlers particularly on the basis of religion and ethnicity (Higizi; 2011: 16).

The creation of Jos North Local Government in 1991 by Babangida administration was the major issue that sown the seed of discord between the indigenous people and Hausa/ Fulani settlers. The new local government was created to cover the area inhabited by the Hausa – Fulani settlers. It can be said that it was created solely for the Hausa- Fulani settlers. The indigenous population saw this as an affront and a deliberate plot by Northern-Muslim dominated military regime to legitimize and legalize the indigenous status of the Hausa – Fulani settlers. In the real sense of it, it seems, this was what was in the mind of the military top brass since such thing was not replicated in other areas. For example, in Kano

state, there is an area known as Sabongari solely inhabited by the settlers' – such as Yorubas, Igbo etc but instead of creating a separate local government, since they have more than required number of people to make up a local government, the military government divided the area into different local governments. In such local governments, the settlers are in minorities and cannot be seeking to occupy any major political position. If the creation of separate local government for the settlers in Plateau State is good why has it not been replicated in other states particularly the Northern- Muslim states like Kano?

Plateau state is located in the middle belt region of the country and according to (NOA: 2003) it is one of the least developed regions, thus, the confrontation over the meagre/ little resources accrued or found in the area is not unexpected. While the indigenes seek exclusive control of existing social and political rights at the expense of the settlers the latter seeks to resist their perceived unjust deprivation, exclusion and humiliation and when such are restricted, it leads to wanton destruction of lives and property. It is obvious that citizenship as a concept has been manipulatively adopted by actors in the state as an available and readymade tool to skew and play out others in order to permanently exclude them in the scheme of events on the basis of certain construction of political identities and “indigenes” clearly resist the “settlers” and the latter too resist their exclusion on grounds mostly on long residency and their membership of citizenship of the Nigerian state.

c) The Nature and Character of Nigerian State.

To situate the phenomenon properly, it is necessary to point out that the current central paradigm of Nigerian politics allows the state to have dominating and unchallenged sole distributive clearing power for economic and political spoils and as such, Mohammed, (2005:2) avers that the enormous resources at the disposal of the state accruing from the

sale of petroleum resources has led to the intense competition for power leading to the widespread use of money and armed thugs. The state as the avenue for the control of decision making apparatus of political spoils and economic patronage raise the competition to the level of vicious struggle (ibid). In the same development, it is necessary to appreciate the ferment in the central states in Nigeria comprising of Plateau, Taraba, Nassarawa, Kaduna, Benue, Bauchi states. According to a special report by the National Orientation Agency, (NOA: 2002) some of the socio-economic characteristics of the zone which when manipulated negatively prepare the ground for the conflicts and results into the situation at hand presently in the zone are: These include but not necessary limited to the following:

- 1. Over 50% of the ethnic groups in Nigeria are found in the zone.*
- 2. Apart from rich mineral resources, the zone is endowed with massive land and grazing activities (this explains the massive influx of people from other areas particularly cattle rearing Fulanis from the North to this zone.)*
- 3. In terms of development, the zone is one of the least developed in spite of the location of the federal capital (close) to it.*
- 4. The zone has a very large pool of ex-servicemen and it is important to note that majority of these ex-servicemen were disengaged from service at very young ages and have not really been gainfully employed since their retirement (NOA: 2002: 2-3).*

It is therefore worrisome that despite the fact that the people of this zone are known to be hospitable, accommodating and peaceful, how come they suddenly changed and began to engage in frequent violent vicious clashes?

d) The Problem of Nigerian Constitution

No doubt, the crisis in Plateau state has opened a renewed debate on the use of the terms “settler” and “indigene”. In the nation’s 1979 constitution, the phrase belongs or belonged to a community indigenous of Nigeria was used in the definition of citizenship Section 23, Sub section (1) (a)] while the phrase “federal character” also entered Nigeria

constitution in 1979 to denote a principle of minority group inclusion in federal government and its affairs (Ostien 2009:4). Section 147 (3ii) of the 1999 constitution also states that “...the President shall appoint at least one minister from each state, who shall be an indigene of such a state” (FRN 1999). Thus the 1999 constitution recognizes that there are indigenes/settlers in Nigeria. Ordinarily, one would have thought the crisis on the notion of citizenship would have been put to rest by the constitutional provision of Section 25 (1a) that defined citizenship in Nigeria as;

every person born in Nigeria on or before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to community indigenous to Nigeria

The seeming retention of both the concepts of indigeneship and federal character to protect minority interests but their fears remains unabated. Danfulani (2003:7) opined that the federal character in Nigeria refers to distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging in the nation irrespective of where they find themselves. Section 14 (4) states similar condition for the states and the local governments, it recognizes the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Nigeria as well as other social diversities and enjoined decision makers to recognize the diversity of the people within its area of authority to ensure proportionate and equitable representation of all persons in government. Of note, it is for reasons such as to ensuring and engineering social equity as well as to deliberately provide opportunities to disadvantaged group (minority) in order to give them the needed sense of belonging wherever they find themselves and this principle of representation is expected to extend to bureaucratic, economic, political posts at all levels of government.

Subsequently, conflicts persist in Plateau State and Chief Obasanjo Olusegun in a seminar which the African Leadership Forum (ALF) organized on Conflict Prevention and Management in 1993 opines in his opening speech that:

the concept of settler or non-native syndrome has of recent hardened into a theory of ethnic exclusiveness and molded and propagated to foist a pejorative meaning to advance economic and political control among competing elite groups for interests during democratic regimes.

In Plateau state, among the key flash points (area) where the indigene/settler confrontation have raised and are raising dusts intermittently are in Jos are between the indigenous Afizere, Anaguta and Berom against the settler Hausa-Fulani, while it is the indigenous Wase against the settler Taroh and Jukun Hausa-Fulani, also the Yelwa indigenous tribe are fighting the Goemai and Jarawa (Hausa-Fulani settlers). While Shendam, Bakin Gyawa, Kadarko, Saya areas are also witnessing armed rivalry between the indigenous and settler tribes. Invariably, laying the case for full citizenship as permitted in the constitution; citizenship refers to rights ascribable and attributable to the individuals as a member of a political community. Accordingly, it applies to and endows a person with full political and civil rights within the context of the modern state. In the history of political community, the question concerning who are settlers and who are indigenes exhibits the fact that the whole argument is within a realm of citizenship. Thus, it remains a fertile ground for exclusion and permanent contestation (op.cit; 2007; 35). The most significant cause of communal violence in Nigeria is the entrenched divisions throughout the country between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as mere settlers. Even though settlers may have lived in an area for hundreds of years as well as contributed to economic and social spheres of the community, they are consistently reminded of their status and technically discriminated against in terms of land ownership, total control of

commerce and education among others. Notably, it is upon the struggle to have a fair share that most of the conflicts/ struggles emanates. As it has been emphasized in this study, the Plateau state crisis remains a prime example of conflict marking the indigene versus settler syndrome exacerbated and manipulated by political factors and central to the crisis is the struggle over access to land and whatever the historical or constitutional claims and justifications are the conflicts are always and everywhere about access to scarce resources. In like manners, (BBC, 5 May, 2004 cited in IDN; 2005) reported that many observers in Nigeria believe that the roots of the violence across the country are not religions or cultural. They say that conflicts are created and stoked by politicians both at a local, state and national levels all that seek to gain advantage from established social divisions and once triggered, the violence naturally generate its own momentum.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the issue of indigene- settler and the problem associated with it in Nigerian federalism. It is observed that contrary to constitutional provisions that all citizens are equal regardless of colour, ethnic origin, sex, religion etc but in practice, the equality of Nigerians is not real. The contradictions in the nation's constitution led to this.

As a pluralistic society, the framers of the constitution came up with some principles such as federal character and quota system. These principles are to ensure effective representation of all segments in the country in decision making process. However, only the indigenes of an area can benefit from what has been zoned to the place. In otherwords, individual Nigerians can only benefit from their states of origin. Therefore, regardless of number of years one has lived in area once he/ she is not an indigene of the area, it will be quite impossible for the person to benefit from the state. The attempt by settlers

particularly the Hausa- Fulani in Plateau state to secure some benefits which constitutionally reserved for the indigenes of the state is the cause of the crisis.

Indigene- settler crisis is aggravated by so many factors such as land issue, political patronage/ competition, constitutional problems among others. It appears the governments at various levels lack the required political will to once and for all tackle the problem. Many panels and commissions were set up to unearth the causes of the crisis. Despite the thorough jobs done by these bodies, governments lack the courage to implement the recommendations.

It is important for government to be decisive, bold and courageous in solving the crisis considering the numbers of lives wasted and property destroyed. The inability of government to muster enough courage to deal with those fuelling the crisis will spell doom for the country. Both the people and the government must work towards ensuring peace and stability in the area. It is important to note that without peace, there will be no progress and development.

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