

Belonging&Non Belonging:A Discuss on the Indigene/Settler Issue in Jos,Nigeria

Kemi Emina(Ph.D)

Dept of Rel std&Philosophy Delta state University Abraka.Delta State

Abstract

The JOS crisis has clearly brought to the fore the indigene /Settler issue and the multiple negatives encountered in a plural society like Nigeria. While noting the implosions that exist in such plural societies like Nigeria, recourse is made to John Rawls idea of justice. Succinctly leaning on his idea of overlapping consensus and idea of citizenship, this paper adopts an elastic definition of citizenship and indigeneship. It posited that any Nigerian citizen who has lived in any part of the country for a reasonable length of time and if he so chooses ought to be regarded as an indigene of such a place and as such ought not to be discriminated against. The paper while urging for a religious balanced society in the impossibility of a religious blind society, noted that discrimination is bad since humanity is one.

Introduction

For some time now, there has been crisis in Jos, leading to massive loss of lives. The Jos crisis has painted a picture of anomie leading many to argue that the crises if not well handled might lead to cacophony of events that might begin the redefinition of Nigeria.

Nigeria as a plural society has tendency for such intermittent implosions and if ways are not fashioned to handle such, the aftermath might live a sour taste in the mouth.

This is especially so, bearing in mind that a study carried out in the United States of America in 2005 had warned that religious and ethnic strife in Nigeria could lead to a military takeover or that Nigeria could become a failed State.

However, it is important to state that this prediction was not the first of its kind. Karl Meir in 2000 apparently alluding to Chinua Achebe's sad commentary on Nigeria as a country that has fallen down said "This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis" Karl Meir's position is suggestive of a country in immense crisis that really might find it difficult coming out of it.

In the same vein, the then renowned jurist and the architect of Abuja as Federal Capital, Late Justice Akinola Aguda in October 2000 noted:*Nigeria as we know it today has come nearly to the end of its life... The cracks on its wall are too great for the edifice to continue to stand. (See Gambo 2010:12).*

This position of Aguda seems to buttress the arguments by those who do not believe in the conglomerate called Nigeria. They have argued that Nigeria is not yet a nation but an amalgam of different ethnic groups loosely held together. But if the alarm raised by Aguda still makes meaning 12 years after, then it is indicative that the centrifugal forces pulling her are determined to bring her to extinction. Apparently in a hurry to fulfill these predictions, Jos the Plateau state capital has since become a theatre of the absurd. Kenny Adamson a cartoonist captured it thus "Our State of nation is our national attempt at self-immolation".

A Brief History of Jos

For the purpose of this discourse, a brief historical background of Jos is undertaken.

Jos is situated in the "**Middle Belt**" region of Nigeria. It has a temperate climate which makes it one of the coldest cities in Nigeria and owing to its plateau; it has a scenic beauty and a major tourist destination. Due to the apparently beautiful weather, Jos in the early 1950s was peopled by strangers with the Igbos of eastern Nigeria accounting for about 50% of the stranger population in the city. Hence, Jos was then called the city of strangers. Its beautiful scenery made Platnicov (1967:33) describe Jos as the healthiest place in West Africa.

Jos was believed to have been founded in the 20th century (about 1902) as a tin mining city and due to the commercial presence of tin in Jos, Nigeria was the 6th largest world producer of tin, then a major revenue earner. This also, apparently attracted strangers' into the community.

One of the ever recurring issues is who owns Jos? This has been one of the major causes of the conflagration in the city. This apparent innocuous question has set ethnic groups against one another. Specifically, the Berom, Anaguta and Afizere and the Hausa/Fulani, lying claim of pre-eminence over one another. The contention lies with who is an "indigene" or "Settler" in Jos. Danfulani and Fwatshak captured it thus:

Today, however, the ownership of Jos town is hotly contested among the three main indigenous ethnic groups (the Berom, Naraguta and Afizere) whose traditional land meets on an unmarked borderline in Jos town, on the other hand, and the descendants of Hausa/Fulani settlers who initially settled

in Jos as traders and Tin miners, today known as the Jasawa (a Hausanised term for Jos), on the other hand. (2002:245)

The Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere who claim joint ownership of Jos claim that the name “Jos” is a derivative from Berom word “Gwash” or ‘Jot’ meaning a Water Spring. Their position is hinged on the “Gazette of Northern Province of Nigeria as compiled by British Colonial masters between 1920 and 1932, which they claimed had no mention of Hausa/Fulanis as the indigenous people of Plateau province. They further claimed that records show how Hausa/Fulani jihadists who attempted invading their land in 1873 were defeated by them. (Nkanga:2011:1).

This position however seems at variance with the position of the Hausa/Fulani oligarchy. It is their contention that Jos was their pro duct having nurtured it into a modern city without any help from any of the indigenous ethnic groups in Jos (Best: 2007:24).

The Hausa-Fulani (also referred to as Jasawa) argued that during the colonial era, specifically between 1902 and 1947, they were appointed rulers of Jos with the title “Sarki Jos” as evidence. They further stated that before Nigeria’s independence in 1960, they represented Jos politically in the Northern Regional Assembly and in the pre-independence conference of Nigeria.

While this position may be true, given the towering presence of the then Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of Northern Region ,Sir Ahmadu Bello, who held the whole of the North including Jos firmly together.

Does this representation confer ownership on them? It is arguably and justifiable so too, that being of the Hausa/Fulani stock, the influence of the Sardauna must have being brought to bear on the aborigines of Jos. But that, many say does not signify ownership.

The Issues in the Jos Crisis

So far in our discourse, we have noted that part of the issues that has exacerbated the conflict in Jos centers on ownership of land. Succinctly put, it hovers over indigeneship and settlersip.

The Websters Universal Dictionary/Thesaurus defines an indigene simply as “Native” while the Human Rights Watch (HRW) Report defines an indigene as somebody “who can trace their ethnic and genealogical roots back to the community of people who originally settled there”. If this definition is accepted, can all Nigerians be indigenes. Do all Nigerian derive their citizenship through ethnic and genealogical roots? (see Obomanu, The Guardian March 21, 2010).

In the case of the Jos crisis, the Hausa/Fulani who must have lived there in the past 300 years are perceived as settlers or strangers. If one who has lived in an area for so long is not regarded as an indigene. Who then is an indigene? It seems that indigene as understood by us will mean the same as belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group. So going by this narrow understanding, an Igbo man who though born and breed in the North is still perceived as a stranger simply because he was not biologically fathered by a member of the ethnic group. Invariably, he might suffer discrimination in all facets of life.

The Nigerian (1999) constitution has not helped matters. It seems to have a narrow definition of citizenship or indigeneship when it specifies three ways of obtaining Nigerian citizenship by birth, registration and naturalization. While the birth option derives from genealogy, registration and naturalization, citizenships are obtained through marriage and domiciliation (but in this case for foreign nationals.)How does one become an indigene?

Again, the 1999 constitution posits that for appointment to the office of Minister, it specifies in section 147(3) that “The President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State.” And it does this without defining who an indigene of a state is or how a Nigerian becomes one. But again, it is practiced “when a person must prove beyond reasonable doubt that he or she is an indigene of a place by, for instance, get a letter of identification from the traditional ruler or councilor before a local government council or state could issue a certificate of indigene ship not citizenship”(Obomanu,The Guardian March, 21, 2010).

It therefore follows that since indigeneship is only obtained through genealogy, how will a naturalized citizen or a settler become a minister?Obomanu again posits:

Are we to have citizens who cannot be Ministers, people who are foreigners in their country? I think not... I think there is an implicit assumption that every Nigerian citizen must be an indigene of a Nigerian State else the constitution will be basically denying some citizens the right of being a Minister (The Guardian ,March 21, 2010)

Going by this analysis, it is evident that there is a yawning gab in our constitution in its failure to clearly define who an indigene is. Though the 1999 constitution posits that if one has domiciled in an area over a given number of years, he/she can vote or be voted for. While this is so stated, its operation has been worrisome.

However, this seeming bifurcation is a creation of the elites who do this for economic or political advantage. It is a known fact that the so called settlers in any given community were allowed to participate in

the traditional activities of the people and were never discriminated upon. The off springs from such “strangers” usually got ingrained in the ways of the host community and over time were treated as members of the community.

We have earlier alluded to the negative role of the elites who exploit any given situation to maximize advantages.

Another issue that had set the place ablaze is religion. Much as the elites try to down the play the religious factor in the whole saga, religion remains a sore point, such that the law enforcement officers who were promptly drafted to quell the conflagration were alleged to have taken sides depending on what faith they professed. The major mobilization cry in many parts of the country had been religion, and so religion as a weapon of destabilization is very handy in Jos. Momoh(2010) captured it thus:

- The so called settlers are muslims and the so-called natives are Christians. So when one group is organized by the cults that manipulate emotions of human beings for their personal greed, they bounce on one another; and these managers of chaos tell the world that the people are fighting because of their religious difference.(Sunday Vanguard March 14)

The truth is, religion being an emotive thing, the people are easily manipulated into fighting all in the name of God.

The crisis also has a tinge of politics to it. Nkanga argued that the fragile peace that hitherto existed between the Beroms and the Hausa/Fulani snapped following:

The creation of the Jos North and Jos South Local Government areas by the Military ruler Ibrahim Babangida in 1991, aggravated the ill feeling amongst the different communities. While majority of Beroms, Anaguta and Afizere found themselves in Jos South, the Hausa/Fulani community had numerical advantage in Jos North, where Jos metropolis is located. This further heightened tension as the recognized paramount ruler in Jos, the Bong Gwom, was isolated in the midst of Hausa-Fulani (2011:1).

Jos North, where Jos metropolis is located. This further heightened tension as the recognized paramount ruler in Jos,the Bong Gwom,was isolated in the midst of Hausa-Fulani(2o11:1)

This already built animosity between the Hausa/Fulani and the natives later resorted to open confrontation why? Nkanga posits:

This was due to the Hausa/Fulani protesting the Plateau State Military Government reversal of the appointment of a Hausa/Fulani as the care taker committee chairman of the Jos North Local Government, following the Berom, Anaguta and Afizere rejection of his appointment (Next 2, 2011).

It is important to stress that there is also economic dimension to the crisis. Needless to say, a people who suffer economic deprivation are always ready tool in the hands of mischief makers. That unfortunately is the situation in Jos and its environs.

The question that looms large is what then is the effect of the crisis on the people? Can development, progress be achieved in a state of anomie? This is equivocally absurd as the telling effects are obvious among the populace. Since the crisis, the hitherto tourist centre has witnessed mass exodus of people, and people of other ethnic groupings have fled the city to take refuge in their enclaves. And sadly so, for when there is such exodus of people fleeing for safety, then the fragile unity of the country is threatened.

This is worrisome, knowing that since its inception especially with the discovery of tin in commercial quantity and the creation of Benue Plateau State with Jos as its headquarters, since then, Jos has contended with the heterogeneous population due to its strategic location. (Gwamma & Amango: 2010).

This position is further buttressed by Platincov (1967:44) who said “the problems of administering a heterogeneous community were recognized as early as 1962” stating further that “the extreme heterogeneity of Jos reflects the variety of peoples of Nigeria of whom almost all are represented”.

However, the story appears different today for the crisis in the country shows that Nigerians do not yet think as Nigerians but owe allegiance to their primordial enclave, and so whenever the centre fails, they resort to their primordial enclaves to whom they owe much solidarity. In such a siege atmosphere the unity of the nation is threatened.

Jos Crisis and John Rawls Principles of Justice

Nigeria is a plural society and as expected in all plural societies in the world, there is tendency for conflicts. Plural society for the purpose of this discourse is a society composed of more than one member of ethnic groups, religion and language. And what today is being witnessed in Jos is usually expected of plural societies. What is

different however is that we have not planned on how people in plural societies can live together with very minimal friction. Hence the resort to the principles of Justice as captured by John Rawls.

In his idea of justice, John Rawls an American philosopher argued that people in plural societies are bound to experience the problem of justice and stability which are the features of such societies.

Emina (2010:297) argued that there might be this uncanny feeling to dismiss John Rawls idea of justice as being solely relevant to developed societies, as it presupposes a society which is atomized and individualistic, a people conscious of their separateness and their particular interests and anxious to realize them. Indeed there might be an erroneous assumption that Rawls notion of Justice is boundary defined. But on the contrary, Rawls position on Justice finds meaning in plural society like Nigeria and the visible instability that goes with such society, ever conscious of her ethnic differences and the inherent dislocating tendencies that is always brought to the fore in who gets what and how much.

Rawls was driven by the desire to ensure that justice was done hence he opined “that in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled, the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interest”.

Rawls used the hypothetical situation in the original position to address the issue of justice. In other words, Rawls central idea is that if people are ignorant of those things that prejudiced directly or indirectly in their favor, as the situation in the original position allows, then they would choose his two principles as found in the original position to regulate their society. The contractors are of equal partners in the arrangement; the issue now is whether people involved in the Jos crisis could have chosen to live in an atmosphere of anomie? That is doubtful.

One issue that comes to mind is the idea of citizenship and indigeneship. Going by Rawls conception of citizenship, there are no indigenes of Jos, Aba, Awka, Ilorin, Asaba, all are citizens of Nigeria. It therefore follows that by this universalized definition of citizenship, the idea of indigeneship/settler pales away. Therefore, it will be wrong to classify the issue as a Jos problem bearing in mind that citizens of a country are free to live and work in any part of the country they so choose. This is so because an ideal society fights to protect and fortify the basic rights and liberties of its citizens, this seems not the case in Nigeria.

Any society that cannot boast of this is not an ethically sound society and therefore not worthy of existence. Guaranteeing the equality of all ethnic groups is tantamount to guaranteeing the equality of individual citizens especially in Nigeria. If Nigeria were to be a homogenous society, there would be no need to talk about ethnic groups and community based equality. But since, ethnicity always confronts us; it means that there must be conscious effort using the equal liberty of all citizens to ensure peace.

Ozoeze 2005:44, aligns with this position “since Nigeria therefore is a plural society, it is important that the country strives to live up to the ideals of modern democratic society if all the ethnic groups are treated in equal basis in all respect.

To solve issues in such a plural society like Nigeria, Rawls enjoins us to adopt the idea of overlapping consensus. By overlapping consensus, Rawls means how supporters of different comprehensive doctrines can agree on a specific form of political organization. The doctrine can include religion, political ideology or morals.

However, Rawls is clear that such political agreement is narrow and focused on justice. This consensus is reached in part by avoiding the deepest arguments in religion and philosophy. It means therefore that one must down play the incidence of religion and ethnicity and make merit the standard but again this must not offend the equal liberty principle. Rawls hopes, that the religious, moral, and philosophical doctrines that citizens accept, will themselves offer toleration and accept the essentials of democratic regime. In the religious sphere, Rawls will advocate a reasonable pluralism which might contain a reasonable accommodation of people of all faith.

Being reasonable, none of these doctrines will advocate the use of coercive powers to impose conformity on none believers.

The Vatican council in support of liberal attitude to religions posits that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion in matters of religion to the extent that he might act contrary to his own belief whether privately or publicly.

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reasons itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a human right. (1965, art. 2)By this, going by the admonition of this council, effort must be made to down play the incidences of religion.

Therefore, if we cannot have a religious blind society, is it not possible to have a religious balanced society? For humanity is one.

Finally, taking the difference principle which Rawls posited as a consensus building formula, it would be seen that all the various ethnic groups in the country appreciates this principle as it guarantees the basic liberty within each group. The difference principle actively stipulates that “social and economic inequalities are to be

arranged so that they are to the greatest benefits of the least advantaged". It means that by the difference principle when translated into the national level and supported by every section will help assure that the basic liberties of citizens are upheld; as well as respected.

Conclusion

We have taken a voyage into a discourse on the Intractable Jos Crisis. We have also noted the idea of citizenship as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution and thinks that the definition of citizenship as it is in the constitution is not all embracing. The prevailing view of indigeneship as being the same as belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group regardless of whether or not you are born there does not do us any good. Hence the need for constitutional amendment. This amendment would expand the meaning of indigene to include people who are either born in a place or are resident in place for a reasonable number of years. Any legislation which will make a Nigerian, a Nigerian is desirable and if there is a bill that will define indigeneship and citizenship such that a Nigerian is not discriminated upon and allows for equality of citizenship as envisaged by Rawls then and only then can we begin to talk of oneness.

However, knowing Nigerians, it can be abused and this might mean Nigerians taking advantage of the bill to claim indigeneship in more economically viable states or even local governments. This can be resolved by ensuring that it becomes a criminal offence to have dual indigeneship.

This are troubled times for us, we must settle once and for all the problem of indigene/settler in a country where some states employ some Nigerian citizens on contract while many expel non indigenes from their employment. We have already a situation where non indigenes are made to pay more in terms of school fees in higher institution even when they study the same course. We must operate a constitution that will make a Nigerian proud to be a Nigerian, such that he is truly not discriminated.

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