
THE INDIGENE-SHIP QUESTION AND ITS IMPLICATION ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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***Abstract.** The Nigeria constitution makes provision for her citizens to live and secure means of livelihood, own property and enjoy other opportunities without discrimination in any part of the country. However, it appears the desire to eliminate others from certain privileges within a given geographical area under the auspices of 'non-indigene-ship' raises its ugly head, this is made manifest in the recognition of non-indigenes at various levels; states, local governments, districts, clans, and sometimes even kinship groups. This leads to discrimination in different aspects ranging from job opportunities, admission opportunities, access to arable land and other economic opportunities. Using a library research approach and critical observation the paper applies the critical theory of race and racism to clarify the concepts of indigene, settler, and national development. It examines the socio-economic implication of indigene/settler relationship on the development of Nigeria and concludes that, national development will be better achieved with practical unity and co-operation. Suggestion are made among others that, all policies leading to discrimination against Nigerian citizens be abandoned to make room for full utilization of human and natural resources to ensure development.*

Keywords: Indigene, Settler, National Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Indigeneity is a very serious issue affecting development in Nigeria. The way and manner in which the Nigerian nation came into being has encouraged and promoted indigeneity and the problem of indigene/settler relationship in the country. Omotoso (2010:146-150) has observed that, indigeneity and the problem of Citizenship in Nigeria has a long history. The people who inhabited the different geographical areas now constituting Nigeria show themselves differently and were independent of one another. The various nationalities has existed as autonomous socio-cultural political and economic units until the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate by Lord Lugard, which brought these nations together as one. Despite several years of togetherness, constant interaction, economic and social benefits enjoyed through this union, people within these distinct components still relates as strangers one to another.

It is sad to note that, after several years of residing within the same geographical area, under the same constitution and leadership (1914 to 2013), Nigerians still find it difficult to accept the reality of being one as a country. As observed by Hagher (2002:52-62), Nigerians are attached to their tribal nationalities to the detriment of the Nation State. Nigerians define themselves first as part of their ethnic group before being Nigerians; our tribal identities seem to be our indigenous identity. While we can be called citizens as set out in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, we are more comfortable being members of our tribes. To these effect public resources like jobs, contracts, admission and other privileges are denied Nigerians who are guaranteed fundamental rights to enjoy such things, on the basis of indigene-ship. With the spate of ethnic hostilities based on indigenous hosts and settlers communities, it seems that citizenship rights ends, where indigene-ship rights begin. However it does not go free from consequences ranging from individual to societal underdevelopment (Open Society Initiative for West Africa, 2012).

Nigerian citizens are facing undue deprivations within their country contrary to section 42(2) of the 1999 constitution which says "No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by the reason of the circumstances of his birth"? However, three fundamental terms are introduced by the constitution without very clear definition of their meaning or their relationship with each other; these terms include citizenship, residency and indigene. How does these concepts relate to each other? Should residence and indigene-ship limit citizenship rights or should they actually enlarge it? Has the introduction of indigene-ship as a constitutional concept achieved the purpose of equal representation of every group in government or has it alienated a section of the population who are caught up in the segregation brought by the legal indigene-ship principle? In view of this, the paper deems it fit to examine some basic questions like who is an indigene, who is a settler? What is the nature of relationship between the two? To what extent has this differentiation affected the development of the country?

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

This write up is anchored on the critical theory of race and racism championed by Du Bois. The theory came about as a result of the growing realization that the civil rights movement of the 1960's had lost its momentum and there was need for a revived social activism and for new theorizing about race. The ideas associated with critical race theory developed from a wide range of sources, and some of them are quite familiar to social theorists. The theory was developed in America to explain the nature of relationship that existed between the white and the black.

The theory is based on some basic tenets as follows: Race is not a fixed reality but a social construct meant for the convenience of its perpetrators. Minority groups have no one single identity that describes them; it may be colour, religion, class or geographical location. Minorities and elites whites view racism with a different perspective. Great importance is attached to place of origin and colour. The critical race theory is oriented to

the elimination of racial oppression (Ritzer, 2008:640-642). According to this theory race is a social construct that changes over time, and it goes with prejudice and discrimination. Such social constructions are created and manipulated to deny certain individuals the privilege to enjoy certain benefits in the society.

This theory to a great extent explains the indigene/settler relationship because just like the nature of prejudice and racial discrimination suffered by the blacks from the whites in America, settlers in Nigeria are made to suffer denial of job opportunities, positions of authority, etc. In the same way, race is said to be a social construct, indigene-ship is also a social construct hence it varies from one geographical area to another. The theory also shows how great importance is attached to one's place of origin hence it becomes the basis for accessing life opportunities. According to this theory, racism is not beneficial; it leads to discrimination, prejudice and inequality in the society. The theory then advocates for social justice to put to an end the practice of racism. This explains the indigene/settler relationship in Nigeria where settlers are looked down upon, called all sorts of names and denied privileges and full utilization of their talents and skills. This does not lead to productivity, it rather hinders development. As the theory advocate for social justice it is an indication that there is need to change the nature of the indigene/settler relationship.

CONCEPTS CLARIFICATION

Some basic concepts needs to be clarified as used in this work in order to make the write up easily appreciated. Such includes: indigene-ship, settlers, and national development.

Indigene-ship

The term indigene is usually used to show the level of acceptability of an individual in a certain geographical area above others on the basis of the fact that he or she owns such a place as an inheritance from the fore-fathers, and can trace his or her ancestral background from the said place. Considering this issue Omotoso (2010) viewed indigene-ship as a discriminatory concept employed in the Nigerian state to distinguish between the natives of a particular locality and those who are thought of as not belonging to such places. The explanation of this concept usually becomes difficult any time attempt is being made to single out non-indigenes of a particular place. For example an individual who heir from a particular state but has been carried away by the great grand-parents to a new destination for over a century is in most cases still asked to go locate his or herself in a place of birth where the individual happens to know nothing, all in the name of authenticating one's indigene-ship . In some cases there is always no trace of such persons identity in the place claimed to be the place of origin.

Indigene-ship is different from citizenship in the since that, every Nigerian is a citizen but Nigerian citizens are never accepted as indigenes of all parts of Nigeria, this makes the definition of an indigene very difficult in the Nigerian context. Indigen-ship is

sometimes viewed as a biological term used to describe people of homogeneous background who are regarded as same biologically even when they are not socially connected. Indigene-ship is also looked upon as a weapon commonly employed by various groups to exclude other Nigerians from certain privileges due to scarcity of resources in the society. For this reason any indigeneity claim by any community is not just a claim for territorial control *per se*. Almost invariably, it is an issue of political economy – i.e. it is usually inspired and fired by a natural struggle for access to, or control over, economic activities or means of survival in a given locality. (Oladele, 2007)

Citing Nwosu, Omotoso (2010) looked at indigene-ship as a cake sharing syndrome and the distributive pressure associated with Nigerian federalism. To him therefore indigene-ship is a weapon used by the elites to exclude others from, and gain access to the resources of the state. Indigene-ship has become a powerful political tool in the struggle for state power and resources. Lemchi & Nwaoha, (2013: 1-20) lament the situation in Nigeria in which each group identify its own members against the rest as outsiders who ought not to enjoy certain rights and privileges.

Indigenes are essentially a group of people which has common identity a common descent or lineage, and cultural affinity. However the word indigene has multiple meanings especially in the Nigerian set up such that, it has become a nominal concept used for convenience in relation to the circumstances surrounding the birth of an individual. This is because somebody who is described as an indigene in a particular state can at the same time be discriminated against from a cultural group within the same state on the basis of the fact that he or she is not an indigene of that culture. To this extent, an indigene can be better described as one accepted by majority of people in a particular geographical area as being so culturally and biologically.

The Concept of Settler

The term settler is used in many cases to connote individuals who reside in a particular place not recognised as their original place of birth. In some instances it describe any one born outside the native home of the ethnic group. This is a derogatory term used to describe individuals who are considered to have resided outside a place of their ancestral background. With this in mind Neighbours are usually pitted against each other and the assailed expelled from particular geo-physical space and told to go “home” such individuals are frequently referred to as “settlers” and labelled as foreigners, visitors, colonizers, by other groups who claim to be “indigenes” of particular geo-political spaces. (Odufowokan, 2012)

Defining who a settler is in the Nigerian society is a difficult task because anybody can be an indigene as well as settler. To this effect a citizen of Nigeria who heirs from Nasarawa state is considered a settler in Benue State, within the same Benue State, an indigene of Benue state who heirs from Makurdi local government is seen as a settler in Gboko local government. At the same time an indigene of Gboko Local Government from one clan

or district is a settler in another. Even within the same kinship group other members are discriminated against in view of the nature of their birth. In Tiv society for instance, one is not considered an indigene of a place simply on the basis of the fact that his or her mother is an indigene of such a place hence people who are residence in their mother's communities are always reminded of the fact that they are visitors and have no right to share in the privileges that are accrued to sons of the soil in such places. In practice therefore all Nigerian are indigenes and settlers at the same time depending on time and place.

National Development

National development is a process through which a nation fully utilises her human and material resources for the welfare of her citizens, it also has to do with a condition in which the citizens of a nation acquire national consciousness to a point of viewing themselves as one, pursuing the same goal and working towards the welfare of all members of the nation. When there is an improvement in the total life of a nation, this can be described as development. This also has to do with the total improvement in the socio-economic, political and material wellbeing of the entire members of a society.

In the Nigerian perspective, Awosu (1998) defined national development as a process through which the Nigerian people become self-reliant and confident, and can constantly generate and mobilize energy which is capable of running independent and democratic government and of inducing a productive and distributive economy which is both self-generating and self-perpetuating. As echoed by Todaro and Smith (2011:15), this type of development entails the elimination of poverty, inequality, and unemployment within the context of a growing economy. Economic development has also been typically seen in terms of the planned alteration of the structure of production and employment such that agriculture's share declines and that of manufacturing and service industries increased.

With respect to this write-up therefore, the socio economic development of a nation is however, not dependent only on the amount of resources available in a society but on how accessible the resources are to the general masses and the mode of distribution of such resources that ensure its utilization by the greater number of the citizens. It also has to do with the level at which the rights and privileges of citizens are guaranteed and how the citizens are aware of and enjoy such privileges and rights.

INDIGENE VERSES SETTLER RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA

All over Nigeria the crises between 'Indigenes'/'settlers' exist as a context for identity, access to and control over resources and positions which are further complicated by the practice of discrimination against Nigerians who are tagged 'settlers' distinct from the principle of citizenship in Nigeria. Citizenship is all-embracing irrespective of tribe, religion and sex as expressed in section two of the 1999 constitution actually receives short shrift for other primordial considerations such as indigene.

There are no elaborate processes to ensure that inclusive citizenship is discounted for the narrower concept of indigeneity. In most states in Nigeria, certificate of indigene are issued to give indigenes of such states privileges and opportunities such as scholarship, employment etc. which are denied others. In addition, the federal government uses indigeneity as the basis for determining federal character, a policy, which among others, provides that employment and other opportunities should reflect the diverse origins and, in practice, give opportunities to people who may have lower qualifications but are from educationally disadvantaged states. This in as much as is meant to carry all Nigerians along, has become a means of segregating Nigerian citizens. With this, it is possible for a non-Nigerian seeking for citizenship to be indigenised in a certain community within Nigeria but it is almost impossible for a Nigerian of one community to become part of another community (Kuna in Alubo, 2011).

This practice is central to many of the civil disturbances in Nigeria. A document of ethnic violence was quoted by Alubo (2011:44) to have highlighted the settler/ indigene relationship as distinct as he said:

“In terms of access to resources and opportunities in day today life, the distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes is critical. In practice the two groups effectively have different rights resulting in discrimination and inequality of access in many fundamental areas of life and human wellbeing. The impact remains particularly in the area of access to arable land, education, and job opportunities where an informal two tier system operates. For example non-indigenes have to pay higher fees to enter good public schools, while paying the same taxes as indigene, non-indigenes complain of discrimination and harassment in their search for employment especially in the civil service where many senior positions are seen as effectively reserved for indigenes.”

This distinction between indigenes and settlers is central to the recent challenges to national integration and contestation for citizenship right. This is because, to be born and have entire working life in a state other than that to which one traces ancestry, does not qualify one as an indigene of that state. The practice of indigeneity is based on lineage making it impossible for settlers to realise full and inclusive citizenship. In this sense, integration is problematic because settlers cannot become indigenes irrespective of one's duration of residence, contribution to the well fair of the community and good conduct. Part of the problem is the use of the particularistic criteria for natives as bases for citizenship. To bear the identity of a native has its role in creating solidarity among people in the same category.

Many locations in Nigeria have cultural festivals which are used to build solidarity across tribes and tongues. The problem however arises when such identities are employed to determine entitlement to rights. This is precisely how balkanisation into ethnic groups has become a source of divisions rather than symbols of unity in diversity.

The distinction between indigenes and settlers is in effect a two tier structure of citizenship rights and opportunities. It is also a denial of inclusive citizenship rights and hence the reality that as one moves out of his or her local government of origin where he or she can lay claim to and authenticate his or her indigeneity of a state, the quality of citizenship diminishes. This practice is patently discriminatory, as the former justice minister Kanu Agabi is quoted by Alubo (2011) to have said:

“Non-Nigerians are not subjected to the kind of discrimination that (settler) Nigerians are subjected, Whereas a Japanese or Korean may readily find employment in some states, the same opportunity or privilege will often be denied a Nigerian with identical qualification who is coming from a different state within Nigeria. Against this background, a non-African who has the merits enabling him/her to qualify for citizenship need not apply for citizenship as he already enjoys rights and privileges which are denied Nigerians.”

Lamenting over the nature of segregation settlers experience in Nigeria, Odufowokan (2012), recounted how on Monday, 5 November, 2012, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Maryam Aloma Mukhtar refused to administer the oath of office on Justice Jombo-Ofo as a Judge of the Court of Appeal because of a petition alleging she was not from Abia State. This is in spite of the fact that a few years after marriage, she transferred her service to Abia State where she had served for 14 years. But now she's being denied a benefit due Abia because she is not an indigene of the state – irrespective of her rights by marriage as provided by the Nigerian constitution.

With this it has become clear that the indigene-ship question is difficult to address in the Nigerian Country hence what holds in the practical sense is different from what is obtainable in the provision of the Nigerian constitution. Alubo quoted the former president Obasanjo's speech at a 2002 retreat to have said:

“Many citizens are threatened and denied their God given and constitutionally guaranteed right to live and earn a living anywhere in our nation by such monstrosities as non-indigene, stranger, native or settler, constructions which create huge barriers between our people. Very often, the irony is lost to our people that every Nigerian is both an indigene and a settler and we pay a huge price when we ignore this fact... it exposes all of us and all our primordial loyalties to the evils which it generates... it

militates against the imperative of the integration of our national economy which demands that men and capital must be allowed to move freely and grow wherever they choose.”

Most of the civil disturbances in the country come as a result of the question of who is an indigene. What are his or her rights and entitlements? Does this vary from one location in the country to another? In view of this a particular group of individuals are persecuted from one location on the basis of the fact that such groups does not belong to a particular space. This situation affects the nature of participation and sense of belonging.

The Tiv /Jukun crisis of 1992, 1998 and 2001- 2002 which claimed several lives, displaced millions and destroyed property worth millions of naira came about as a result indigene/settler squabbles. Hausa settlers in Oro Sagamu Lagos State clashed with their host 17th July 1999 living about 100 people dead. In 2002 Hausa Fulani attacked the indigenes of Maza community in Plateau State where 5 people were killed. (Alubo 2011) several of such cases exist in Nigeria even in 2013 as the Tiv people within Nassarawa state clashed with other ethnic groups leading to the loss of many lives destruction of many villages and property.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF INDIGENE/SETTLER RELATIONSHIP ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

A lot of human and material resources in Nigeria have been wasted through the problem of indigene verses settler relationship. Due to this relationship, Nigerians are denied access to public service and opportunities to economic activities on the basis of their ethnic extraction simply because they live in a part of the country where they are looked upon as visitors. By this human and material resources are underutilized. (Open Society Initiative for West Africa, 2012).

Longkat (2005) observed how the people of Nigeria do see other Nigerians as non-indigenes from a particular state or local government area. The government has also covertly or overtly encouraged this phenomenon to the extent that when a student is filling any scholarship forms or admission forms there are always columns where such a student will have to necessarily indicate his ethnic nationality and or local government or state of origin. Access to employment opportunities is then based on indigene-ship instead of qualification, skills and performance thereby, underutilizing the human resources of the country and then hindering the economic development of the nation.

By this, some brilliant students are in most cases left out of admission and government sponsorship using indigene-ship criteria. This can go a long way to discourage hard work among the youths who may become frustrated leading to drop out and then backwardness on the part of the nation. Commenting about this, Odufowokan (2012) pointed out that “any indigeneity claim by any community is not just a claim for territorial control per se. Almost invariably, it is an issue of political economy – i.e. it is usually

inspired and fired by a natural struggle for access to, or control over, economic activities or means of survival in a given locality”.

Indigenes are looked upon as the first to have settled permanently in a particular area and who are considered as traditional inhabitants of the area that is, people who inherited such areas from their ancestors for the reason of first settlement as opposed to their having bought the place of residence or being given such places free by earlier settlers. Indigenes are seen to be those who have exclusive claims to a place through historical and homogeneous culture without an alternative place to lay claim or practice such a culture. It is sad to note that there seem to be no restriction to the level of contribution ‘settlers’ offer in their places of residence in form of payment of taxes, rendering of services and so forth, it is only when such settlers are to enjoy some opportunities and privileges that segregation and discrimination sets in. Such individuals treated as settlers are psychologically upset; they do not feel belonging and are emotionally unsteady to render hearty services to the host community.

Arable land which would have been used for mass production of crops for the feeding of the teeming Nigerian population is left uncultivated simply because of discrimination against non-indigenes. To this end, people who could have used such lands for food production are always given tough conditions to fulfil before being allowed access to such lands, and when such conditions are not met, the land remains uncultivated. With this, crops production is hindered and limited thereby, affecting the level of growth of the national output and then development.

Investors from different parts of the country are sometimes afraid of establishing big time business in towns outside their ancestral places even when such opportunities are granted, with the fear of having to lose money and resources in times of disagreement, violence and displacement that comes with the indigene-ship question. Up till now there are some local governments in Benue State that deny sale of plots of land to certain tribes within Nigeria, this has gone a long way to discourage Nigerian citizens from settling in such places and then the structural and economic development of such places is also hampered.

Another irony is that some individuals who are denied certain privileges for being settlers are those who are born in such areas and sometimes do not have anything to do with their so called places of ancestral origin except the piece of land to be used as their grave during burial. But such places are also occupied by some people who originate from other places. It then makes no much meaning insisting that Nigerians must remain in their ancestral places of origin to be able to access the privileges and opportunities within the country.

In some cases high level of discrimination on the basis of settler/indigene relationship result into crises and violence that manifest in wanton destruction of lives and property worth millions of naira. This affects the development of the country in several ways. The

displacement of people result to untold hardship, lack of productivity and over stretching of the host communities which are to cater for the displaced citizens.

Educational programs are distorted due to crises caused by the unhealthy relationship between settlers and indigenes of certain areas within the country. In times of crises, Schools are usually closed down for safety; academic calendar distorted thereby delaying the academic progress of the Nigerian youths. It was in view of this that senator Abu Ibrahim sponsored a bill addressing the indigene/settler relationship which seeks for the rights that can be enforced by law to bring some stability into the polity of the country. The bill seeks to enact the right of Nigerians to settle anywhere in Nigeria and carry out their lawful activities for the nations socio-economic development without being stigmatised as non-indigene. It also seeks to enact the rights to formally regularise and recognise their status as indigenes of a particular locality after 20years of domicile. In essence, the bill seeks to enact the peaceful co-existence among the Nigerian communities, reduce unnecessary tension and insecurity generated by the issue of settler's indigenes, enhance the much desired unity of the nation, reduce the fear of forfeiture of properties among the indigenes in states of the federation and seek compensation for victims of indigene-ship violence, (Ishaka W., 2012). However, this problem still lingers with its consequences.

CONCLUSION

The issue of identity and placement of Nigerian citizens has ever being a matter in the Nigerian society right from the time of independence such that, Nigerians are made to see themselves as strangers within their country. It is very difficult for Nigerian citizens to feel secured in any part of the country apart from their ancestral place of residence. This situation is seen to have generated a lot of crises leading to lose of lives and property at different times affecting the level and nature of development of the nation. Something has to be done to ensure cooperation and unity among Nigerians to a point that Nigerians will be considered based on who there are and their contribution to the society so that, where one comes from rather than who he is will cease being a matter. When individuals are sure of being treated fairly in any part of the country nobody will think of value indiginety and they will be no room for discrimination.

SUGGESTIONS

Economic and social rights should be made accessible to every Nigerian irrespective of where they are from or reside, to ensure that the issue of indigene-ship loses its lustre through the enforcement of citizenship rights.

All tax payers in any state should be granted access to social and economic services and taxation should form the foundation of the relationship between the individual and the state, allowing for some level of impersonality which should ensure that Indigene-ship is not relevant in Nigeria.

Political, representation should be about numbers and should not relate to indigene-ship; once a candidate is capable of gaining supporters who could vote for him or her in a particular place that should suffice for the person's rights to be voted for in any part of the country.

Policies backing up discrimination against Nigerian Citizens in the name of indigene-ship should be abolished. With this done Nigerian citizens could operate freely and national consciousness achieved giving room for National development.

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