

**IDENTITY ISSUES, AFRICAN STATEHOOD AND
SECURITY IMPLICATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF
NIGERIA, 1960-2000**

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges of identity crises in Africa and its attendant implications on Africa's security that have also impeded economic growth and development, using Nigeria as a case study. This has become necessary as a result of the desire to find out the most appropriate solutions to it once and for all as it is being used by the incumbency in leadership against its political opponents. The study adopts a qualitative method of analysis, using mainly secondary data sources. The study finds that issues pertaining leadership and identity-crisis has become a source of serious concern in Nigeria and Africa respectively, because it causes unnecessary bloodshed, destruction, derailment and resource wastage. This has become a recurrent unresolved issue in Nigeria due squarely to leadership failure on the part of the Nigerian leaders, with its attendant security implications. The paper argues that for durable and sustainable peace to reign in the whole of Nigeria, there is the need for inclusive political participation by all members of the Nigerian state in their place of residents. The paper concludes that Nigeria's quest to become true leader of the African continent will only manifest when genuine respect is given to the ethnic groups, irrespective of the boundary-identity imposed by the British colonists.

Key words: Identity, African States, leadership and Statehood, Security Implications, Development.



Introduction

Africa since the period of gaining independence from European imperialists have been inundated with identity issues taking major share of these challenges. Colonial rule forcefully merged people of disparate ethnic origins and identities into one state to enable the seamless exploitation of resources without recourse to their politics or history. After colonial rule ended in the 1960s, these people started competing for control of state's resources using every medium. One of the mediums employed to outflank competing ethnic groups is the use of identity as a means to secure political power.

The identity issue in Africa has become a tool in the hands of elites to outsmart each other in power struggle, with the sole objective of excluding their political opponents. This gives credence to the issue of land ownership which is supposed to be premised on historical, linguistic, cultural and psychological considerations objectively. Africans' failure or inability to analyse and value their historical backgrounds objectively, especially as it relates to their identity is one of the main reasons for crisis in the continent. Interpretation of identity using all sorts of sentiments to achieve selfish objectives has become the order of the day. This is especially true when it comes to possessing strategic resources; all manners of tactics spelling grave consequences for the continent are employed.

In Nigeria, the individual's or group's desire to exclude very popular rivals in order to maintain political, economic, and social relevance in their communities and in order to make such opponents irrelevant also in their societies or communities. This often leads to crisis. The most unfortunate aspect of it is that most claims and counter claims in order to exclude each other have no objective base or bases.

In what follows, this paper examines Nigeria's cases of identity, accusations and counter- accusations leading to series of



conflicts witnessed in the nation, the role of the media in the crisis, and the efforts of the government in addressing this issue.

Cases of Identity Crisis in Nigeria

On January 24, 1980, Alhaji Abdurrahman Shugaba Darman, the majority leader of old Borno state House of Assembly in Nigeria was arrested and deported to a village in the republic of Chad by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His deportation was on the basis that his father was a Chadian. One of the reasons for his troubles was his charismatic nature which attracted large crowds at political rallies, due to his speech in which he criticized the then ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) government of inefficiency. He belonged to the then Great Nigeria Peoples' Party (GNPP) of late Ibrahim Waziri. He however took his case to court and won against the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the basis of lack of merit.

The ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) took this unholy political measure just to intimidate Shugaba Darma in order to frustrate and reduce his popularity in Borno state and in Nigeria. How could it have happened that he rose to such position without the Borno people knowing his background? This kind of thing can probably only happen in Africa and not anywhere in the world where politicians weaponise identity as a tool to decimate their opponents or to situate narratives in a way that would launch them to power.

The Jos crisis in Plateau state which centred on the identity issue and ownership of Jos is a pointer to this. The central issue in the Jos conflict is “who owns Jos” as an entity? Was it founded by the Berom, the Anaguta, the Afizere or the Jasawa (Hausa – Fulani)? To answer this question demands that one has to be very objective and honest in historical analysis of issues and events surrounding the founding of the settlement called Jos. The Berom, the Anaguta and indeed the Afizere claimed that the city of Jos was founded on the land that belonged to them as the native people of Plateau state. The Hausa (Jasawa) claimed that



the settlement called Jos was founded by them on the “virgin land” that belonged to nobody.¹

The Berom, the Anaguta and the Afizere claimed that Jos was founded on the land that belonged to the native of Plateau. Accepted, but who founded the settlement of Jos? Was it founded by the Berom, the Anaguta or the Afizere or by them both? And was it really possible for the three ethnic groups at that remote past to team up and found a settlement accepted by them all? What is the template for now on which every ethnic group in the dispute would work together?

In the same vein, other very important questions raised were: (a) how were the Hausa – Fulani able to produce twelve or thirteen Sarkin Jos in succession? (b) how did come about that almost all streets and places in Jos today are bearing Hausa names such as Anguwan Rogo, Gangere, Anguwan Rukuba, Ali Kazaure street etc? (c) How did it come about that Hausa – Fulani dominant the most dominate ethnic group today in the heartbeat of Jos?² (d) How come a government publication titled. “This is Jos” referring to Jos as “Hausa settlement of Jos?”³

The Colonial world was a dual world. Just like what transpired in the infamous apartheid regime in South Africa, British rule over the area that became known as Jos had similar policy. It must be noted that under the British rule, the city of Jos was divided into the government reserved Areas for Europeans and other Foreigners, the township for educated southern Nigerian clerks and other Europeans, and the native town mainly for Hausa migrant workers.⁴ Thus, over the years, ten different Sarkin Jos came to manage the everyday affairs of the town called Jos.⁵

The appointment of Berom in 1947 to the Gbong Gwom led to tensions with the Anaguta and Afizere, so also with the Hausa over the position of the Sarkin Jos.⁶ Why of tensions with the Anaguta and the Afizere over Jos since they claimed it belonged to them all? Many analysts of Jos and Plateau state crisis believe that were it not for the Hausa as the common enemy, the Berom,



the Anaguta and the Afizere would be fighting seriously among themselves over the ownership of Jos and its privileges now.

The Hausa leaders argue that there was no Jos when they first arrived on the Plateau. They said they founded Jos and nurtured it into a modern city. They said parts of what is Plateau state today was under the Bauchi Emirate.⁷ And that the Jasawa elite held political offices under the British and under the former military administrations.⁸ All these are to buttress their ownership of Jos.

Causes (factors) Responsible for Jos Crisis

As if these claims and counter claims by the claimants of the ownership of Jos were not enough came the creation of the Jos North Local Government Area from Jos Local Government in 1991, meant to enhance rural development. This creation was not taken kindly and in good faith by the Berom, the Anaguta and the Afizere, on the ground that it was meant to please the Hausa,⁹ because of their dominance in Jos.

Closely related to this, was the appointment of Alhaji Aminu Mato, a Hausa man as the chairman, caretaker management Committee of Jos North Local Government Area Council. To this development, the Berom, the Anaguta and the Afizere protested against the appointment.¹⁰ In the same vein was the appointment of Alhaji Muktar Usman Mohammed by president Olusegun Obasanjo on June 20, 2004 to the office of National poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) as Coordinator and as Chairman of the Local Government Monitoring Committee (LGMC) for the Jos North LGA council.

The creation of two federal constituencies in Jos was also interpreted as being in favour of the Hausa community in Jos. This too was vehemently resisted by the Berom, the Anaguta and the Afizere as usual, but to no avail or of no effect. The Hausa's resistance to their exclusion from Jos and Plateau state affairs



soured relations between the inhabitants of Jos and Plateau state people.

The aftermath of the Jos crisis (conflicts) was the massive killing of the Berom, the Anaguta, the Afizere, the Hausa and indeed innocent individuals and destruction of property and goods worth billions of naira. This indeed, created serious state of insecurity in not only Jos but in the whole of Plateau state for no justifiable reasons, but for baseless tribal reasons. This was because the central characters in this ownership of Jos crisis have allowed their emotions to becloud their sense of reasoning negatively.

They ought to realise that Jos city has become a home to both of them. None has the power to deny the other the right to stay in Jos because the Nigerian constitution has allowed everybody to stay in any part of the country unmolested. This is because the government acknowledged the fact that its citizens across the country are products of both internal and external migrations right into the remote past that might not be easily traced.

In the light of this fact, the claimants of the ownership of Jos need to understand their each other's peculiarities (differences) with the sole objectives of using such for their peaceful and useful coexistence for the good of all. This has become very imperative because there is nothing on this earth that will forcefully separate them as evidenced in their being together despite chain of killings and destruction of each other's properties worth billions of naira.

Thus, they need to avoid calling each other with derogatory names such as the so called the native, the non – native, host community, foreigners, settlers, “squatters,” the “migrants,” the “non–indigenes”, the “stranger elements”¹¹ among others which can only worsen situation negatively and deepen tension.

The Contributions of the Media to Identity Crisis

According to Maxwell McCombs, The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key



public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance they should attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news.

Unfortunately, the mass media (press) has contributed negatively in worsening the crisis as each took side instead of exhibiting professionalism in order to enhance peaceful and useful human relations among the warring parties. Thus, they peddled series of rumours most of which were unfounded to suit those who originated them for their selfish designs. These rumours gave rise to death tolls due to chains of road blocks and violence within the city and on the major roads across Plateau state.

Government's Attempt at Finding Solution

The Commissions of Inquiry

Many commissions of inquiry¹² were setup by both the Federal and Plateau state governments in order to help in finding sustainable solutions to the Jos and Plateau conflicts. But unfortunately, reverse was the case as members of such commissions were themselves not committed or have took sides. Thus, the findings and recommendations were not made public, as the Plateau state government said publishing reports of such commissions was going to endanger the fragile peace of the state. However, the Ajibola Commission Report recommended promotion of political inclusion and participation of all Plateau people.¹³

All these showed that the Plateau state government had no political will to resolve the crisis which was the main reason why all peace building efforts failed. The government refused to realise that a compromise between the warring parties to stop the conflict was inevitable, because it took side with one side; thereby



making it very difficult to proffer solutions to the crisis (conflict) in Jos in particular and Plateau in general.

As if all these crises have not taught Nigerians any useful lessons, the identity crisis¹⁴ have almost engulfed the whole of Nigeria and have indeed become very problematic in almost all countries of Africa. It has become a deliberate measure used by the incumbent and their sycophants to gain advantage of excluding those they perceive as their opponents in their immediate society. This has in most cases given birth to very negative consequences as evidenced in unnecessary bloodshed, destruction, derailment, and resource wastage across the country.

In Nigeria, these are some of such crises of identity with their negative consequences across the country: in Delta state, there is the issue of Itsekiri vs Urhobo and the Ijaw; in Osun state Ife – Modakeke, Ogoni vs Andoni in Rivers, Umuleri vs Aguleri conflict in Anambra state,¹⁵ Tiv vs Jukun in Taraba state, Inyimapu vs Agbaja clashes in Ebonyi state, just to mention a few out of many of such instances. These are reflections of the happenings in this regard across Africa with their attendant negative implications on the continent's peace and security.

This happened to be the general characteristics of the whole of Africa. One of such cases that readily come to mind is that of indigene-ship and citizenship in Cote d'Ivoire whereby a onetime prime minister of the country was later denied of being a bona fide son of the country. This was meant to exclude others from belonging to the system because of their popularity.¹⁶

In the run up to elections which were fixed for 1995, new electoral law demanded that to qualify to stand for presidential election in Cote d'Ivoire a presidential candidate must be an Ivoirian born to parents who must be Ivoirians themselves. People knew this law was enacted to deny Alassane Dramane Quattara from contesting for presidency as his popularity knew no bound in Cote d'Ivoire. This popularity of his was seriously feared by those



in power in Cote d'Ivoire, hence, they were bent on stopping him from contesting using all the means necessary at their disposal. His mother was from Burkina Faso.¹⁷ This type of law can probably only happen in Africa and not any part of the world, meant to exclude one's opponents from belonging to using his privileged position in government which is always temporary.

The aftermath of this was catastrophic as it ignited the embers of ethnicity in the political landscape of Cote d'Ivoire. Thus, the awareness of ethnic differences in Cote d'Ivoire was seriously mobilised into full blown ethnicity by all sides as a weapon in the struggle for political power in a nation which once prided itself as a land of common destiny. On this note, one must show proof of relationship to the land in order to be a citizen. That one must point to his village to show that he is Ivoirien. Thus, not being an Ivoirite became the justification for the disqualification of Alassane Quattara from the Ivoirite presidency.¹⁸

The question now is: which criteria were eventually used for the position of the prime minister of the country that made him qualified? As a result of this ugly development, Cote d'Ivoire found itself in flames, as this concept of Ivoirite became a national ideology, which was pursued with increasing xenophobic zeal in order to suppress the perceived political opponents. Military officers believed to be pro – Quattara were demoted and host of others dastardly acts of hatred.¹⁹ Quattara however later became president of Cote d'Ivoire 2010.

Effects of Happenings in Cote d'Ivoire on Africa

The citizenship or indigene-ship crisis in Cote d'Ivoire sent bad signal to other African countries whose leaders wanted to copy same despite its adverse effects witnessed in Cote d'Ivoire. They were bent on emulating and practising it for their selfish end. This became possible because of both internal and external migrations with their roots in the remote past. Below are roll calls of such cases in Africa.



In East Africa the Asian community that has been there for years are victims of cases of identity. Their citizenship rights have problem of acceptability by those who preferred indigene-ship as against citizenship. They are found in Uganda, Kenya and other countries in the region are regarded as residents and indigenes.²⁰ They have been there time immemorial in the very remote past that can hardly be traced; who have been part of development agenda of the region. In 1970s, General Idi Amin Dada of Uganda dealt with them mercilessly on the account of doubtful origin by expelling most of them, though some returned later after his over throw.²¹

West and Central Africa also had such cases as regards the Lebanese and other Asians whose indigene-ship have matter of controversy especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone and many other nations that used citizenship as a major weapon to frustrate them, especially during election periods. One hears of all these types of things in Africa.

In Zambia, president Kenneth Kaunda the past independence president of the country and who ruled for twenty – seven (27) years, was banned in 1996 from contesting for presidency as he was now found to be a foreigner in Zambia, as his parents were migrants from Malawi who settled in the then Northern Rhodesia, where he (Kenneth) was born on April 28, 1924. They forgot his role in their struggle for independence which made him a pioneer president of the country. If not Africa, where can this happen, where one's contribution is easily forgotten?

In a similar vein, President Joseph Kabila of Democratic Republic of Congo was accused of being a foreigner in the run up to 2006 election by the opposition. That he was a foreigner because he grew up in Tanzania and could not speak lingala which is commonly spoken in Kinshasha.²² This is typical of African madness in an attempt to frustrate his perceived opponents. It is indeed an elite problem in Africa in order to outdo their rivals politically.



In the same vein, in the run – up to the first multi – party elections in Kenya, Kenneth Matiba, one of the leading opposition figures, warned that Asians must not be allowed to acquire citizenship status, because by his political calculation, Asian support was with the government of the day. These are very few instances of elite burden in Africa which have contributed in no small measure in the under development of Africa as a whole. Such development is the reflection of the failure of African elites to utilize the power that had been at their disposal for long to harness the resources of their countries for the benefit of their people. They have been in power for long but their incompetence and corruption made it impossible for them to develop the continent.

Africa must learn from others

In the elite struggle for power, credence is always given to the need for definition of who deserves to enjoy what and who does not deserve to enjoy such in the country concerned; in the game of survival. Thus, others are declared non – citizens, on account that they belong to somewhere, and so are not entitled to the benefit of the state. In fact, this strand of indigene-ship or citizenship question in Africa has affected many countries negatively as such were causes of so many insurgencies witnessed today in the continent.

In diplomatic circles, nations are expected to learn from each other for their development. It seems African nations have not learnt anything from other nations of the world and are not even prepared to do so for their own good. Happenings in other nations are supposed to be eye openers to African nations and leaders, with particular reference to the happenings in the United States of America (USA). Africans are too pleased to cite example of a tradition in the west that suits their interests without ruminating on the conditions and realities that undergird such practices and to know if the prevailing conditions and the sentiments of their people towards implementing such policies.



At a time, the United States of America had George W. Bush as the 41st American president with two of his children governors in two of American states. All these were accepted in good faith by Americans. They did not see anything wrong with such emergence of the father and his two children ruling America at the same time. One of such children in less than ten years after his father's tenure became American president too. None protested against such because Americans believed they merited such. If it were in any of the African countries, only God knew what would have been the outcome. There would have protests accompanied by destruction of lives and properties worth billions of dollars, on whether America belongs to them alone.

Still in America, Barack Obama whose father was from Kenya, but went to the United States for studies, married a wife, a black American woman. The product of the marriage is Barack Obama who was born on August 4, 1961, who is today one of the American former presidents. The irony is that he (Barack) has never denied his link with Kenya. His Kenya family members are paying him visit in the United States of America and he too does same to them to maintain the relationship. If it were in any of the African countries including Kenya, his home country, it would have been tug of war when he declared his intention to contest for any position in America. He would have been asked whether he is an American or a Kenyan? And why is he claiming two nationalities, USA and Kenya? This is a case of advanced civilization which Africa needs to emulate for its own development and peaceful coexistence of its citizenry.

The root causes of African underdevelopment are these series of conflicts emanating from identity, indigene-ship, citizenship or ownership crisis in the whole of Africa. This is because they are always accompanied by killings and destruction of properties worth billions of money. In these, human resources that are meant to enhance labour are destroyed, all development achieved so far are destroyed, thereby taking us to square one in terms of development. And so long as these crises are not



stopped, Africa shall never develop as they are accompanied by chains of killings of human resources and destruction of properties.

Conclusion

Africans need to understand and appreciate each other better in order to collectively develop their continent. They must understand that crisis does no one any good but understanding and appreciation of each other's point of view helps a lot in human coexistence. The tendency to believe that external powers would solve problems affecting the continent is not only delusional but counterproductive. Thus, factors responsible for chains of migration across the continent must be understood, appreciated, and utilised for development of the continent. It is time African leaders begin to apply home-grown solutions to these problems and begin to honestly engage Africans in issues affecting the continent.

African leaders need to understand that issues pertaining to identity such as citizenship, indigene-ship and above all ownership of a place must be handled with sense of maturity in order to arrive at a workable solution devoid of bloodshed and destruction of each other's valuable assets. African relationship with the European states has necessitated that questions of identity and citizenship are carefully handled to prevent what happened in the Balkan region, where radical ethnic nationalism and its inevitable consequences led to the immediate cause of the First World War occurred.

African leaders must learn from other nations of the world especially from the United states of America that has Japanese Americans, African Americans, Indian Americans and a host of others living together relatively peaceful with each other. This indeed will help a lot in enhancing sustainable peace and development in the continent, and also reduce the perpetual intrusion of the western states into African affairs.



Endnotes

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