UNVEILING THE ROOTS OF ENDURING COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: INDIGENE-SETTLER RIVALRY AND THE PATH FORWARD

MICHEAL GODWIN OKOLIKO
KADUNA STATE UNIVERSITY, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
godwin.michealokoliko@gmail.com

KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

The enduring conflict between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria has escalated over time, resulting in persistent and often violent communal disputes. These conflicts have inflicted significant harm, including widespread community devastation, loss of life, displacement of millions, and severe human rights violations, particularly impacting vulnerable populations like women and children. Despite governmental efforts to mitigate these conflicts, the fundamental issues remain largely unaddressed, with governance structures often struggling to manage the crises effectively and provide lasting solutions. This article examines the underlying factors contributing to intra/inter-communal conflicts arising from indigene and settler rivalries in Nigeria, utilizing the lens of elite theory. By comprehensively analyzing these factors, a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics at play is gained, allowing for the identification of potential avenues for meaningful intervention. This study adopts qualitative research design to arrive at its conclusion, finding and recommendation. It is imperative to recognize that these conflicts are deeply entrenched in historical, social, economic, and political factors that have shaped Nigeria's societal landscape.

Introduction

One major factor contributing to the widespread disputes between ethnic groups in Nigeria is the ongoing competition between natives and settlers in different regions of the country (Higazi, 2018). According to Mang and Ehrhardt (2018), if this phenomenon is allowed to continue uncontrolled, it might have disastrous effects similar to a malignant illness within any country's political system. Unchecked disputes between indigenous peoples and settlers can pose a serious threat to national integration and nation-building, just like cancer can spread and cause havoc across the entire body. Community disputes and interethnic crises have been prevalent themes throughout history, spanning from pre-colonial times to the colonial era. Internal conflicts between various ethnic groups were common in many ancient African kingdoms (Mang & Ehrhardt, 2018).

According to Krause (2017), the idea, definition, and perception of what it means to be an indigene and what it means to be a settler—which establishes the rights that indigenes have over non-indigenes—are the root causes of the unresolvable conflicts that

have arisen from the story of the indigene/settler in different parts of Nigeria in contemporary society. In the harsh fight for limited resources to satisfy the competing needs of human connections in a defined society, unhealthy ethnic-based varied goals, ambitions, and aspirations gave rise to the value of "indigene status" (Nwagwu, 2016; Che, 2016; Ehrhardt, 2017). The unyielding trend has resulted in the destruction of several towns, the documented loss of enormous numbers of lives and property, and the vulnerability of millions of displaced people to abuse (e.g. rape, hunger, infections, epidemics) and other related consequences (Oyediran, 2018). The majority of victims and casualties of the lawlessness are women and children. Nigeria has a wealth of experience with intracommunal strife, inter-indigene feuds, and ethno-religious crises that often touch on settler and indigenous disputes. For example, it was stated that Fulani invaders mercilessly murdered Gyang Dantong, a senator representing the Plateau North Senatorial District, and Gyang Filani, a member of the Plateau State House of Assembly from the BarikinLadi seat, in cold blood.

When the Fulani herdsmen assaulted Gabriel Suswan's convoy in 2014 while he was on an inspection visit of the crisis region in Benue State, the governor of that state barely avoided death. Other examples are the Tiv-JukunWukari war in Taraba State (1999-2001); the Aguleri crisis in Kaduna State (1992-2001) between the Atyaps (natives) and Hausa/Fulani tribes; and the Zangon-Kataf crisis in Kaduna State (1992-2001). Women and children make up the bulk of the lawlessness' victims and casualties. Nigeria has extensive history with conflicts involving settler and indigenous people, such as intracommunal fighting, inter-indigenous feuds, and ethno-religious crises. For instance, it was claimed that Gyang Dantong, a senator from the Plateau North Senatorial District, and Gyang Filani, a member of the Plateau State House of Assembly representing the BarikinLadi seat, were ruthlessly and cold-bloodedly killed by Fulani invaders. The governor of Benue State almost escaped death in 2014 when Fulani herdsmen attacked Gabriel Suswan's convoy on an inspection tour of the crisis area in that state.

All established techniques for resolving conflicts appear to have failed to address these enduring issues of intercommunal and ethnoreligious rivalry (Akinyosoye, 2019). According to Oladipo (2020), the upsurge appears to have progressively overtaken the government's repressive apparatuses, resulting in the crises being handled instead of resolved. This research aims to explore the underlying causes of intra- and inter-communal conflicts centered on rivalry between indigenous people and settlers, as well as the implications and significance for national integration and nation-building. The essay also looked at the reasons why all levels of government have been unable to provide long-term answers to this terrible problem that is destroying communities.

Concept of Indigenous Peoples

The term "indigenous peoples" is used to describe a wide range of people according to different historical, legal, and cultural circumstances. The original or native occupants of colonized territories, especially in areas conquered by Europeans like Africa, Asia, America, and Australasia, are referred to as indigenous peoples, according to Ikpeze (2020). With the International Labour Organization's 1957 approval of ILO Convention No. 107, which addressed the integration and protection of indigenous and tribal groups in sovereign nations, this phrase became widely recognized (Okaneme, 2018).

"Indigenous" refers to someone who was born or raised within a certain area that is claimed as traditional tribal land. The phrase originates from the Ancient Greek terms "indo" and "genous," which mean "inside/within" and "birth/born," respectively (Kyernum, and Agba, 2022). Because of their historical connections and cultural differences from other people, indigenous inhabitants are also known as aboriginal, native, original, or hereditary owners (Merriam-Webster).

Indigenous peoples are defined by international and state law as persons who have unique rights because of their cultural or historical distinctiveness and historical links to a particular place (Harris, 2021). The susceptibility of indigenous peoples to exploitation, marginalization, and oppression by dominant political or ethnic groups has been addressed by these legal categories as they have developed throughout time. For instance, indigenous Australians in Australia have experienced dispossession, marginalization, and abuse, as evidenced by policies such as the "Stolen Generations" (Anderson, 2020).

Indigenous peoples face a number of difficulties, such as discrimination, poverty, environmental degradation, political autonomy, land rights, and the preservation of their culture and languages (Wilson, 2015). Throughout history, there have been a variety of intricate interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, from domination and violence to mutual gain and cultural exchange (Garcia, 2021).

Incidence of Indigene and Settlers Conflicts in Nigeria

Mang and Ehrhardt (2018) noted that the fact that natives and settlers are the same people who equally claim Nigerian citizenship and have been involved in political, religious, cultural, and economic interactions for more than a century is one of the state's enduring contradictions. The so-called settlers pay taxes, worship, socialize, trade, and marry so-called indigenes (Ojo, 2017). However, when it comes to sharing resources, including land ownership, indigene/settler sentiments are whipped up, and the so-called settlers frequently face egregious injustices such as discrimination and persecution (Akinyosoye, 2019). The following discusses two instances of confrontations between native people and newcomers:

Zangon-Kataf Crisis

Conflicts have existed in the Zangon-Kataf crises from 1992 and have lasted until 2010 (Egwu, Salihu, & Kure, 2017). The southern Kaduna State region is mostly home to Christians, with a small minority of Hausa/Fulani Muslims (Adetula & Dung, 2019). Ethnic chauvinism, perceived socio-political marginalization, lack of access to basic economic resources, unequal opportunities, unresolved fear of dominance, and unhealthy religious and cultural rivalries among communities are the main causes of ethno-religious conflicts (Akpuru-Aja, 2017). While the Hausa/Fulani assert ancient Zaria Emirate sovereignty over Zangon-Kataf, resulting in governmental dominance over the indigenous people, the Atyaps claim possession of Zangon-Kataf since the 1850s (Adetula & Dung, 2019).

In Christian and Muslim communities, poverty, culture, and religion all play a big role in triggering violent disputes. The 1992 Zangon-Kataf riots resulted from Muslims' simple fear that the local government chairman, a Christian, intended to move the city's main market (Egwu et al., 2020). The decision was misinterpreted as an attempt to move the major market from the crowded urban center to a neutral location inside the local government buildings, depriving Hausa/Fulani indigenous people of their political influence in the area.

The Hausa/Fulani's superiority over other indigenous people in the social, political, and economic spheres is further exacerbated by the differences between Muslims and Christians (Adetula & Dung, 2019). Socio-religious divisions were caused by the colonial authority's establishment of Native Authority Schools for Muslims and Mission Schools for Christians (Egwu et al., 2020). Feeling oppressed by Hausa/Fulani hegemony, the Atyaps turned to Christianity as a way out of their situation, which resulted in the establishment of two competing legal systems and disparate educational programs in the area. Deepening ethno-religious divides, this increased Atyaps' social and political consciousness (Akpuru-Aja, 2017). There have been allegations of government collusion in their ineffective intervention attempts, resulting in a large loss of life and property as a consequence of the war.

Hausa/Fulani and Berom/Anaguta/Afizere Crisis in Jos

The Berom people are the indigenous ethnic group of Jos, Plateau State in Nigeria. Within the State, they concentrated mostly in the local government areas of Jos South, Jos North, Barkin Ladi (Gwol), and Riyom. Berom has a population of 1,083,000 out of which 96% are Christians, according to 2006 census. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berom_people). Ironically, the Jos crisis is multicultural, multifarious, and multilateral in nature and scope. It has many ethnic group contenders for Indigeneship of the land “Jos”, particularly the Jos North Local Government Area. Berom tribe is one of the contenders, who claims that Jos is their ancestral inheritance. They claim that Berom settled and secured Jos along with Anaguta people prior to the adventure of the colonialists who made Jos the administrative centre of their government by conquest. According to them, Hausa/Fulani people were brought into Jos by British colonial masters as cheap labour in the Tin mining activities, which was the main commercial activity in the area then. (Sampson, n.d).

The native ethnic group of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, is known as the Berom people. They were predominantly found in the local government districts of Barkin Ladi (Gwol), Jos South, Jos North, and Riyom within the State. Based on the 2006 census, Berom has 1,083,000 residents, of whom 96% identify as Christians. (http://Berom_people.wikipedia.org).
Paradoxically, the Jos problem has a multinational, multicultural, and diverse reach. There are several ethnic groups vying to be considered indigenous to the "Jos" territory, especially in the Jos North Local Government Area. Among the candidates is the Berom tribe, which asserts that Jos is their original homeland.

Another ethnic group in Jos, the Afizere, supported Berom's assertion that the Hausa/Fulani people living there are foreign immigrants who do not value or return the kindness extended to them by their host communities. The Hausa/Fulani are viewed by the Afizere as a group that lacks the power to assert its customary territory and authority in Jos. They refuted assertions that ethnic groups from the Anaguta and Berom tribes owned Jos. Afizere asserts that Jos is their property, and they have a lot of data to support this claim. The Bukuru Low Cost Bridge was supposed to mark the border between Afizere and Berom, but colonial officials combined Afizere's holdings with Bauchi Province, and Berom easily took over the majority of Jos (http://www.nairaland.com/998903/perspectives-causes-conflictsjos).

The Hausa/Fulani communities assert that they founded Jos from scratch and brought it to its current state of development without the assistance of the purported indigenous ethnic groups. The main point of contention in their argument is that Jos was founded in the 1800s on uninhabited ground, and no indigenous tribes were present in the area they currently claim as their own. The most important Hausa/Fulani leader in Jos, Turakin Jos, Alhaji Inuwa Ali, reiterated in 2002 that Jos is a Hausa settlement and that Mr. Ames, a colonial administrator, had confirmed this. He made this statement during a speech he gave at the Presidential Retreat on Peace and Conflict Resolution at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Jos, 23–26 January.

Causes of Indigene and Settlers Conflicts

Many complicated and multidimensional factors, including as historical grievances and current socio-political dynamics, are the primary causes of confrontations between indigenous people and settlers. Conflicts in Zango/Kataf stem from Muslims from the Zaria Emirate imposing aristocratic authority on the indigenous Atyaps, which led to political and socioeconomic dominance and the enforcement of Sharia law against non-Muslims (Kpuru-Aja, 2017). Conflicts over land usage also result from the displacement of the community market and the violent intrusion of Fulani herders into farming regions (Kpuru-Aja, 2017). Tensions already present in Jos, Plateau State, are exacerbated by rival claims of indigeneity between the Hausa/Fulani and the Berom/Anaguta/Afizere. Distress and discord are caused by the federal government's nepotistic appointments that benefit the Hausa/Fulani settlers at the expense of other marginalized ethnic groups (Oke, 2016). prejudice based on religion and culture.

According to Falola and Heaton (2018), the atrocities carried out by violent extremists belonging to both Christian and Muslim sides fuel the deepening of hostilities and result in a furious competition for political control, resource distribution, and citizenship status. In Nigerian politics, ethnic patronage is still a significant factor, with people using their ethnicity to get support and expand their power (Falola & Heaton, 2018).

Ethnic and religious tensions compound historical injustices, socioeconomic disparities, and political grievances to give birth to wars. In order to establish long-lasting peace and harmony in Nigeria, addressing these fundamental problems calls for comprehensive solutions that support inclusion, equitable resource allocation, and intergroup communication.

The Dynamics of Indigene and Settlers Conflicts in Nigeria

Government reactions are one of the major elements influencing the dynamics of disputes between indigenous peoples and settlers in Nigeria. As stated in the constitution, Akpuru-Aja (2017) asserts that the government's main duty is to protect the safety and well-being of the populace. Tensions can turn into major

crises when the government is unable to appropriately handle conflict signals. On the other hand, prompt and unbiased reactions can aid in preventing disputes from getting worseThis is consistent with the results of Albert (2021), who pointed out that rather than being caused by underlying problems in the communities themselves, the continuation of conflicts like the Ife-Modakeke crises is frequently the result of ineffective government interventions. Furthermore, Osaghae and Suberu's (2019) study highlights the crucial role that the state plays in preserving peace and security, noting that the state's inability to carry out this duty can escalate conflicts and create crises of legitimacy.

The partisanship of consecutive administrations and their handling of sensitive issues exacerbate ethnic strife. Akpuru-Aja (2017) points out that the government's seeming support of Hausa/Fulani assertions of superiority and authority exacerbates ethnoreligious conflicts.

This is seen by the way that state administrations' attempts to resolve disputes locally are undermined when appointments and interventions by the government favor Hausa/Fulani interests. As noted by Akpuru-Aja (2017), the Chief Justice of Nigeria's reluctance to swear in a judge due to ethnic reasons is an example of how government acts sustain feuds between indigenous people and settlers. Furthermore, Ibrahim's study from 2022 highlights how conflicts are made worse when one group dominates political positions at the federal government level since nominations to the federal government frequently give priority to the interests of particular ethnic groups.

Moreover, the government's credibility and power are weakened by its inability to defend civilians against violence and bring criminal charges against those who do it. Ibrahim (2022) contends that the state loses credibility and legitimacy when it is thought to be biased in favor of one group over another. Partisan management of ethnoreligious disputes has detrimental effects on national security and development, which adds to Nigeria's current security issues. This is consistent with the conclusions of Akpuru-Aja (2017), who highlights the need for responsive institutions, unbiased governance, and coordinated efforts to foster peace and unity among various ethnic groups in order to address these disputes.

Way Forward on Settlers/Indigenes Issues in Nigerian Federalism

In the framework of Nigerian federalism, resolving the complicated issues pertaining to settlers and indigenous peoples calls for a multipronged strategy that places a premium on inclusion, equity, and the rule of law. Adopting laws and procedures that support inclusivity and true federal character in governance and decision-making processes is one possible path ahead. As required by the constitution, this entails making sure that appointees to important positions at the federal and state levels appropriately represent the variety of Nigeria's ethnic and religious landscape (Otite, 2017). Governments may promote a sense of unity and belonging among diverse ethnic groups by upholding the federal character principles, which help to lessen sentiments of marginalization and exclusion (Anyanwu &Erero, 2022).

Furthermore, safeguarding the basic liberties and rights of every person, irrespective of ancestry or religion, should be the top priority in any endeavor to resolve concerns pertaining to settlers and indigenous people. This entails defending the freedoms of movement, property ownership, and equitable access to opportunities in the fields of work, healthcare, and education. The government must make sure that laws and regulations are applied impartially, openly, and without bias or prejudice against any one group (Anyanwu &Erero, 2022).

Fostering interethnic communication, understanding, and reconciliation is essential for establishing trust and advancing social cohesion in addition to legislative and policy changes. productive talks and productive interactions between settlers and indigenous people can be facilitated by initiatives like interfaith dialogues, cultural exchange programs, and indigenous forums. The promotion of tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence may be greatly aided by the involvement of civil society actors, grassroots groups, and religious leaders (Adesina & Mordi, 2016).

Effective conflict resolution procedures are also required in order to quickly and impartially resolve complaints and disagreements between settlers and native people. This might entail creating committees for conflict resolution

based on indigenous knowledge, bolstering established legal institutions, and granting access to other dispute settlement procedures. In order to enable local leaders and institutions to settle disputes amicably and advance social justice, the government should also fund capacity-building programs (Ofoeze& Ezeani, 2017).In the end, it will take a coordinated effort from all parties involved—the government, civic society, religious authorities, traditional leaders, and indigenous people—to achieve long-lasting peace and harmony between settlers and indigenous people. Nigeria can get past its settler/indigenes difficulties and move toward a more prosperous and inclusive future for all of its residents by embracing diversity, enforcing the rule of law, encouraging discourse, and investing in conflict resolution systems.

Theoretical Framework

The elite theory, which was developed in the early 20th century by sociologists Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels, serves as the theoretical foundation for this research. According to Gauba (2003), Mosca, in his work "The Ruling Class" (1896), viewed society as separated into two groups: the governed (masses) and the rulers (elite). Pareto introduced the term "elite" to refer to a group of persons displaying remarkable talent in various professions. According to traditional elitists, society is necessarily dominated by elites, with power resting in the hands of a small minority, making democracy and socialism unachievable (Lopez, 2013). This idea is captured in Mosca's concept of the political class and Pareto's rule of elite circulation, which hold that elites take power by peaceful or violent means, leaving the majority always under the control of a minority (Lopez, 2013). According to elite theory, a minority that includes the economic elite and policy-planning networks holds the majority of power outside of democratic political procedures (Sambo, 1999). In order to preserve their supremacy, the elite employ manipulative strategies including persuasion and oratory, which results in the concentration of power among a small number of people (Gauba, 2003).

The Nigerian settlers-indigene dichotomy is seen through the prism of elite manipulation, which takes advantage of ethnic feelings to uphold their authority and keep the public divided (Azeez and Ibukunoluwa, 2015). Nigerian federalism is in danger because self-serving political elites use this contradiction to maintain their political relevance and expand their authority (Lopez, 2013). The elite thesis thus highlights the role of political elites in maintaining social divisions for their own profit and sheds light on the dynamics of settler-indigene conflicts in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a literature review as the primary data collection method. The review focuses on articles published between 2021 and 2024, delving into community and settlers' conflict in Nigeria. The chosen timeframe ensures the inclusion of recent perspectives and developments, providing a current and relevant understanding of the community and settlers conflict in Nigeria. This methodology aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse surrounding the rivalry between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria

Conclusion

Nigeria's settler-indigenous conflict problem is a complicated, long-standing problem with major ramifications for the growth and cohesion of the country. These long-lasting disputes, which have their roots in historical, social, and political factors, have heightened tensions between different ethnic groups and impeded the pursuit of peace and development. The theoretical framework of elite theory clarifies how political elites exacerbate public differences and thwart attempts at integration and reconciliation by sustaining and profiting from these conflicts. Resolving historical injustices, advancing inclusive government, and encouraging communication and understanding amongst many ethnic groups are all necessary components of a multidimensional strategy to address the underlying causes of settler-indigenous conflicts. Moreover, coordinated efforts are required to strengthen social cohesiveness, empower vulnerable populations, and create a society that is more inclusive and equitable. Nigeria may advance toward a more secure and prosperous future, based on the values of justice, equality, and togetherness, by resolving the underlying grievances and injustices that drive settler-indigenous conflicts.

Recommendations

1. The government should acknowledge historical injustices and implement policies to address grievances, promoting reconciliation and integration.

2. Political leaders should prioritize diversity and inclusion in policymaking and decision-making processes, appointing representatives from diverse backgrounds to key positions.

3. Civil society organizations, religious leaders, and community elders should take the lead in organizing peacebuilding forums and mediation sessions to promote dialogue and conflict resolution.

4. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies should collaborate with local communities to design and implement empowerment initiatives tailored to their specific needs.

5. Educational institutions, cultural organizations, and media outlets should play a role in promoting intercultural understanding and celebrating Nigeria's diverse heritage through collaborative projects and campaigns.

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