

The Dynamics of Citizenship, Indigeneship and Settlership in Nigeria*

Rita Okpeahior and Nally Nwadei

Abstract

Like in many societies the world over, the indigenes-settlers' syndrome in Nigeria is an age long problem. The distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes even in ancient societies and primordial communities attest to this assertion. However, in the distant past, hybrids emerged from the blending of both factions, but this is no longer the case in contemporary times. This work examines the ideals of citizenship, indigeneship and settlership in Nigeria and goes further to analyse the implications of each status. The question of indigeneship has been a recurring decimal in our national struggle for original nationality in Nigeria. It has been said to be the albatross of national cohesiveness, the bane of unity and the cause of chaos, conflicts and seeming anarchy in our society. This work provides an insight into the dynamics and (perceived) honorary advantages that an indigene has over a non-indigene in a location. This work will provide knowledge of the practices of indigene – non-indigene segregation, offering instances of clear mistreatment of Nigerian citizens simply on the grounds of non-indigeneship.

Introduction

An indigene of a particular place is a person who can trace his or her lineage back to a community of individuals who were among the original inhabitants of that location. In practice, however, this

definition can be tough to apply and is most often only used as a way to express tribal and ethnic differences. In some cases, officials are required to break the population down into categories determined by poorly-documented historical patterns of migration that might date back a century or more (Bach, Diamond, Bierstecker, Kirk-Greene and Oyediran, 1997). Furthermore, it is the person who was born in a particular place which defines an indigenous person. There is no precise definition of "indigenization" even though a broad range of policies at every level of government make use of the concept. The Nigerian Constitution makes use of the term and even requires that the President's cabinet includes at least one indigene of each of the country's 36 states. The government, however, does not explicitly define the word. But, the federal civil service takes great care to allocate positions more or less equitably among indigenes of each Nigerian state while it leaves to the states the option of who their indigenes are. State governments pass that discretion further on down the line, leaving local officials with unfettered discretion to determine who the indigenes of their community are. Local officials' power to grant or deny indigene status to their residents, in turn, gives them a *de facto* veto power over any individual's attempt at attaining federal government employment. To some extent, this lack of clarity mitigates the word "indigene," which has a meaning widely understood at all levels of Nigerian society.

In spite of or perhaps because of the complexity of the issue, state governments fail to articulate any actual sets of criteria that should be used by local officials in determining whether a person is an indigene of their community.

The indigenes of a place are those who can trace their ethnic and ancestral roots back to the community of the people who initially settled there. Every other person no matter how long they or their families have lived in the place they call home is and will always be a non-indigene. Who then is an indigene of a state? The constitution of Nigeria has no definition for the term indigene; it only refers to it passively. Section 25(1)(a) of the constitution mentioned above provides; "every person whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria." To correctly understand this provision, resort will be made to the

interpretation section of the constitution which defines “belong to” where it is used with reference to a person in a state to refer to “a person either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents was a member of a community indigenous to that state.”

The Concept of Indigenization

The population of every state and local government in Nigeria is divided into two groups of citizens: indigenes and non-indigenes. The indigenes of a place are those who can trace their ethnic and family roots back to the community of people who initially settled there. Everyone else, no matter how long they or their families have lived in the place they call home, is and always will be a non-indigene. The concept of “indigenization”—the idea that there is a meaningful distinction to be made between “host” and “settler” communities—is not entirely a false concept. Nigeria is a nation of more than 160 million people, but many Nigerians belong to ethnic communities so small that they dread being absorbed into the larger populations around them and losing control of their individuality as a community. The distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes may help to assure Nigeria’s more than 250 ethnic groups the power to preserve their distinctive identities – their culture, traditions and traditional institutions of governance – by maintaining some cultural distance between themselves and other Nigerians. This rationale, however, has been twisted beyond recognition by state and local policies, often unsupported by any law or another form of legal justification, that marginalize and exclude non-indigenes in ways that have nothing to do with the preservation of cultural identity and autonomy. As a matter of government policy, many states refuse to employ non-indigenes in their state civil services, and most if not all of Nigeria’s thirty-six states deny them the right to compete for academic scholarships. State universities discriminate against non-indigenes in their admissions policies and charge higher fees to non-indigene students who do manage to secure admission. Non-indigenes must also contend with a range of less formal discriminatory practices, such as barriers to political participation and discrimination in the provision of essential services and infrastructure to their communities that government does nothing to stop or even

discourage. All of these practices have been made more harmful—and become more controversial—by increasing levels of chronic poverty throughout Nigeria. But many Nigerians have no real ties to the regions they are said to originate from, and feel that they should have some way of becoming full citizens of the places they call home. Worse still, Nigeria is home to communities of people who are discriminated against as non-indigenes even though their families have occupied their land for a century or more and no longer have any idea from where their ancestors migrated.

Nigeria's federal government has done nothing to control this state and local discrimination against non-indigenes, even though it makes a ridicule of the Nigerian Constitution's guarantee of freedom from discrimination. While high-ranking federal officials including even President Olusegun Obasanjo have publicly condemned the growing negative impact of Nigeria's indigene/settler divide, federal government policies have served to strengthen and legitimize its consequences.

Also, to their direct human influence on the lives of non-indigenes, these discriminatory policies have helped to worsen inter-communal tensions that are dangerously volatile in and of them. After more than four decades of terribly corrupt and unaccountable governance, the benefits that are meant to go with Nigerian citizenship are in desperately short supply. As poverty and unemployment have both become more widespread and more severe in Nigeria, competition for rare opportunities to secure government jobs, higher education and political patronage has deepened dramatically. Many Nigerians believe that this desperate competition between citizens for some basic level of economic security lies near the heart of most of the country's inter-communal conflicts.

Against this background of scarcity and competition, disagreements over who are and are not entitled to call themselves indigenes have been made more intense and ultimately more violent by the increasingly difficult economic consequences of losing the debate. Perhaps just as important, government policies that enhance the importance of indigenization have heightened inter-communal divisions because they have served to erode the very meaning and

significance of national citizenship, subordinating it in many respects to Nigerians' ethnicity and ancestry.

Proof of Indigeneship

Local governments in Nigeria issue "certificates of indigenization" to people who are indigenes of their jurisdictions. These certificates serve as documentary proof that the bearer is an indigene of the area of the local government that issues them. Possession of such a certificate is, in fact, the only way for a Nigerian to prove that he or she is an indigene of his or her community, and a Nigerian who does not have an indigenisation certificate will be treated as a non-indigene in his or her regular interactions with all levels of government. Also, a Nigerian who does not have a certificate of indigenization from a local government somewhere in Nigeria is effectively an indigene of nowhere. An increasing number of Nigerians find themselves trapped in this category of stateless non-indigenes. In somecases, this is because their families have been living on the land they now occupy for generations and no longer remember precisely from where their ancestors migrated.

In other cases, non-indigenes may know where their families originated but cannot persuade local officials there that they are bona fide indigenes. Because the federal government distributes many employment and educational opportunities among the indigenes of various states, a Nigerian must be able to indicate which part of the country he or she is an indigene of before he or she can apply for job placement. Along with these national handicaps are similar policies put in place by their state and local governments that discriminate against non-indigenes.

In spite of the importance of these documentations of indigenization, local administrations do not adopt formal procedures or guidelines for deciding those who merit the certificates Rather, individualssubmit a simple application form to obtain suchdocument. It is then the duty of local government officials to determine whether each applicant is anindigene, theoretically by investigating their claims of historical connection to the locality. In practice, however, local government officials have unfettered discretion to exercise their authority the way they consider fit. In

many cases, their informal, ad hoc approach yields results that broadly appear legitimate by a given LGA's constituents. In other cases, local governments exercise their discretion in an opaque or even an arbitrary manner easily influenced by personal relationships, prejudice, and corruption. Of additional concern is that the process is not open to any realistic way of appeal. Some local governments delegate the primary authority to evaluate applications for indigene certificates to the district heads within each local government area.

Nigeria's 774 local government administrations, thus, present the image of the most corrupt, arbitrary and incompetent tier of government. This broader problem is the absence of a unified structure for such issuances. Also, many local government officials routinely extort bribes for such applications unless massive bribes from all applicants. The practice reflects a deeper culture of corruption that makes the certification process subject to manipulation and undermines its validity. The above approach makes it easy for non-indigenes to obtain such certificates. In most of Nigeria, this practice is widely believed to be common, with the result that other officials are often inclined to second-guess the validity of indigene certificates presented by people applying to them for jobs or scholarships or higher education. The manner these officials purport to "evaluate" the legitimacy of indigene certificates can also be arbitrary and discriminatory. The flip side to this problem is that in some cases local officials improperly deny indigene certificates to people with legitimate claims to indigene status because of their ethnicity or religion.

The Position of the 1999 Constitution on the Indigene/ Settler Dichotomy

Arguably, the satisfactory resolution of issues of citizenship could have gone a long way to address and resolve more concretely the indigene-settler problem, but this has not been the case. Interestingly, successive Nigerian Constitutions since political independence had emphasized the issues of citizenship and fundamental human rights. Chapter III of the Constitution primarily identifies who a citizen is and how one can become a citizen. Specifically, sections 25 to 27

determine how citizenship can be attained in Nigerian. These are by birth, registration and naturalization. In the same vein, Chapter IV of the Constitution dwells extensively on the Fundamental Rights of Nigerians irrespective of their ethnicity, location or place of birth. Obviously, these provisions were meant to act as a safeguard against or to provide redress for violations of one's citizenship rights. It would seem however that these provisions did not envisage or perhaps display a total ignorance of situations whereby the rights of citizenship will be handicapped or prevented by extraneous considerations such as indigenization or ethnicity. Even where there are explicit provisions on the fundamental rights that Nigerians can enjoy, the situation is not in any way different. For instance, Section 42 of Chapter IV of the Constitution provides for the right to freedom from discriminations. Specifically it states that, "a citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not (a) be subjected to disabilities or restriction to which citizen of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions, political opinions are not made subject or (b) be accorded any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizen of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religious or political opinions." Lofty as these provisions are, the reality is far from the ideal. Hence, the contention of Oyeweso (2012) is that the Constitutional provisions are negated by political consideration in which case there is a focus on what he refers to as indigeneshiprights, which are either ethnic or sub-ethnic groups' right. This argument has exposed the federal system to some degree of divided or dual citizenship between group and individual rights.

The 1979 Constitution from which the 1999 Constitution was modified has been seen as laying the basis or foundation for the indigeneship problems. This is because it expressly provides that to enjoy access to positions and opportunities on the basis of "federal character" one needs to be an "indigene" of the state or local government concerned. Being an indigene involves showing evidence of belonging, through one's parents or grandparents to a community indigenous to a State or Local Government, which in effect suggests the membership of a local ethnic and linguistic

community. Thus, the inability to prove such evidence will result in being defined as a “stranger” who cannot enjoy all the rights and privileges of indigenes and natives (Akin, 2009). And similarly, section 147 of the 1999 Constitution states that the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each state, who shall be an indigene of such state. Therefore, it should be quickly pointed that the motive behind the incorporation of these provisions into the Constitution ostensibly is to strengthen the Federal Character principle.

In other words, the Federal Character principle was meant to promote unity in diversity while encouraging accommodation at the federal level particularly regarding appointments. Without holding a brief for the framer of the Constitution, therefore, it could be said that the principle was not meant to achieve anything sinister or divisive. The context above is rife when it is considered that the Federal Character principle and its ancillaries such as the quota system as well as zoning among others have promoted mediocrity at the expense of merit. Mainly, with the abuse that characterized the application in civil service appointments, promotion, admission into schools and so on, then it could be seen as a solution that has become problematic. More importantly, the exclusion of Nigerians by ethnicity or sub-ethnicity and the consequent denial of access to land, education, employment and even political offices could not have been envisaged or perhaps deliberately ignored/glossed over by the framer of the Constitution. Remarkably, one major thesis running through the preceding discussion is that the Constitutional provisions on citizenship and fundamental human rights should have provided the needed antidote to the indigene-settler dichotomy, but they did not. Primarily, because some of the provisions were problematic and even contradictory in some cases wherein citizenship versus Federal Character, and more importantly in the promotion of group rights over individual rights through a political concept like indigenization. The second is that the provisions did not envisage or contemplate some problematic situations. And in essence, citizenship had not, and might not be able to resolve the indigene-settler problem particularly in its present form.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, section 25(1)(a) defined citizenship in Nigeria. Considering the need to allay

the fears exhibited by minority ethnic groups on the eve of independence, it is clear that the constitution retained both the concept of indigeneship and Federal Character to protect minority rights. It aims at redistributing opportunities and limiting the tendency and temptation of mega ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (the so-called WAZOBIA parlance) to dominate and monopolize public benefits that some of them have come to regard as a matter of right. Many governments consider the Federation as the exclusive balance of interests of these three major ethnic groups. However, the imperative of achieving national unity, social equity and restitution demand that all the constituents of the federation be involved in the affairs of the nation, especially the sharing of power. Especially so when the ethnic minorities on a scale far outweigh the majority groups in the total population.

Also, it is for this reason that the writers of the 1979 Constitution entrenched the concept of Federal Character in the 1979 Constitution, repeated in the 1999 Constitution. This idea was borrowed from the American Constitution evidently couched on the principle of Affirmative Action, meant to deliberately provide opportunities to disadvantaged groups and act as an instrument of engineering social equity. The Federal Character of Nigeria refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation. Governments may and can even be required to take affirmative action (sometimes known as "positive discrimination") on behalf of certain segments of the population to correct conditions that have prevented or impaired their enjoyment of human rights. This would include preferences for government jobs and university admissions. Such policies must be based on "reasonable and objective criteria." And the preferential treatment must be directed to diminish or end discrimination against the group and only for so long as is needed.

The Constitution in Section 14(4) lays down similar conditions for the states and the LGs, recognizing the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Nigeria, enjoining decision makers to "recognize the diversity of the people within its area of authority" to ensure proportionate equitable representation of all individuals in

government. At the Federal level, therefore, factors to be considered are usually a person's state of origin, ethnic group and religious affiliation. At the LG level, factors include political constituency, ethnicity and religion. The term "indigéne" entered the Constitution in respect of the appointment of Ministers as reflected above. It is in pursuance of these objectives that Decree 34 of 1999 put a Federal Character Commission in place; and, further elaborated on the scope of the Federal Character principle, expanding beyond what it meant under the 1979 constitution. Section 4(1) (a) empowers the Federal Character Commission:

To work out an equitable formula...for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the civil and the public service of the Federation and of the states, armed forces, the Nigeria Police and other security agencies, bodies of corporate owned by the Federal or State Government and Extra Ministerial Department and Parastatals of the Federation and States.

The principle of representation extends to bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government and the private sector. The decree also includes the distribution of socio-economic services, amenities and infrastructural facilities. Section 4(1) (d)¹⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ provides that the Commission is to work out modalities and schemes for "Redressing balances and reducing the fear of relative deprivation and marginalization in the Nigerian system of Federalism as it obtains in the public and private sector." On account of the importance of the significance of the mandate of the Federal Character Commission, Schedule 3, Part 1, Paragraph C of the 1999 Constitution reproduces these provisions. The Hausa-Fulani, who were left far behind in the area of acquiring Western education, have benefited immensely from this national policy.

The best document on this problematic issue so far was the paper given by President Olusegun Obasanjo himself as founder/president of the Africa Leadership Forum (ALF) located on his Ota-Sango farm. In a seminar, which the ALF's Conflict Prevention and Management Centre held in Jos from 15 to 17 December, 1993, on

the theme “The Settler Question in Nigeria: The Case of Jos Plateau” General Obasanjo noted in his opening speech:

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

Historical Evolution of the Concept of Indigeneship in Nigeria

In Nigeria, and as exemplified by the findings of Ellsworth, ethnic, religious and regional identities appear to be the dominant basis for framing political identity, and therefore in determining right bearers(Ellsworth, 1999).²

Crucial to the concept of citizenship is the notion of reciprocity of rights, obligations between state and citizens, and some degree of participation membership of a political community. All this makes citizenship the mother of all political rights and a domain of all contestations. In much of Africa, as a result of the history of state formation, the question of group identity and rights have come to be prized above individual rights in the construction of citizenship rights. Thus ethnic, sub-ethnic, religious, communal and regional, forms of identity appear to be dominant in framing discourse of citizenship rights, as has been the case in Nigeria. Ethnicity and related cleavages justify the exclusive basis for the construction of political identity and citizenship. Attachment to one's community, and, through it, to the soil of the ancestors or the homeland is a fundamental dimension of citizenship. In analyzing the pathologies of citizenship in Nigeria, Momoh opines that “to be accepted as an indigene one is expected to be a native; and to be accepted as a citizen, one is supposed to be an indigene.” This system of citizenship has been legitimized in the successive constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, from the 1979 constitution, which was the first attempt to codify this public law. Three issues make ethnicity problematic in relation to discourse on identity and citizenship: Firstly, ethnicity is not a fixed form of identity, but it is subject to

various reconstruction and redefinition. Boundary breaking and redevelopment are enduring qualities of ethnic identity. The problem is that ethnic identity is quite recent phenomena in Nigeria and therefore, is in constant need of redefinition (Egwu, 2017). Much of pre-colonial Africa was characterized by the flexibility of identities and the construction of public realm under guarded by moral ethnicity (Momoh, 2001).

Secondly, there is the state of unequal ethnic relations defined regarding access to the national power and resources. This is to be understood as the consequences of not merely ethnic plurality, but tentatively put, the state of ethnic relations characterized by intense unequal competition for resources of the state, the most sought after being the appropriation of state power, particularly, its coercive and resource allocating elements (Ifidon, 1996).

With regards to power relations and control, of course, the mega ethnic groups—Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo are highly advantaged and privileged. Third, there is the impact of prolonged military (mis)rule and the accompanying over centralization of power and resources, devoid of any democratic framework of negotiation, compromise and accommodation.

Non-indigeneship in the Electoral System

Citizenship in Nigeria is conceptual rather than practical. It equates more with being a foreigner in one's land. In Nigeria, whether you were born in a state or had lived and worked there all your life, if it is not the state of origin of your progenitors, you are a stranger, a non-indigene who is not entitled to the status and benefits enjoyed by those whose ancestors have been native to the state and, therefore, are "bona fide" possessors of the state. The above conception of indigeneity denies an outsider a pensionable appointment for a job on a contract basis except such appointment is a Federal one. Non-indigenes can vote in the communities they live in, but often face formidable obstacles including outright intimidation should they seek to participate more directly in local politics. Political exclusion of non-indigenes operates in a way that leads indigenes to adopt protectionist and defensive behavior.

Public sector employment

The public sector is one of Nigeria's largest sources of employment opportunity (Dabalan and Oni, 2000). In an economy suffering from high levels of unemployment and chronic poverty, recruitment into the civil service or some other government institution is the only realistic hope many Nigerians have of socio-economic advancement. Stable employment is also one of the few tangible benefits ordinary Nigerians can expect to receive from a government that has largely failed to provide for the needs of its citizens.

Increasingly, however, non-indigenes find themselves denied the right even to compete for government jobs and are unable to obtain equal terms of service with indigenes when they do manage to obtain public sector employment. Many Nigerian state governments have implemented policies that deny non-indigenes the right to compete for most civil service positions, while also eliminating non-indigenes' right to retirement pensions and the right to contest seemingly unfair layoffs if they are hired. This discrimination is also reflected in state policies that prevent non-indigenes from competing for some positions at the federal level as well. In Kaduna, Kano and Plateau States, government policy is not to hire non-indigenes into the state civil service unless there are no qualified indigene applicants for a position. Even then, non-indigenes are employed on a "contract" rather than a "permanent and pensionable" basis. Contract employees are ineligible for government pensions and can be fired at will should the civil service decide to replace them with indigene job seekers.

High-ranking officials in some states have been known to state quite candidly that the policy of their administrations was not to hire non-indigenes into the state public service unless there were no indigenes qualified to fill certain positions. However, in all these states discriminatory hiring policies are not mandated by state law or even by the hiring guidelines published by the states' civil service commissions. Nonetheless, such discrimination has become an accepted norm perpetuated by local, state and to a lesser extent federal government.

Non-indigenes also find themselves barred from some jobs in the federal civil service. As a matter of federal government policy,

low-level positions in federal agencies or institutions are reserved for indigenes of the state that hosts the agency. While higher-level positions in these institutions are not technically subject to the same restriction, the federal government often defers to local demands that such positions also go to indigenes of the host state. Until several years ago, for example, Kano and Plateau States both employed large numbers of non-indigenes in their respective state civil services, many of whom were members of Kano's large Igbo and Yoruba populations. But both states suddenly and arbitrarily purged almost all their non-indigene employees: Plateau in 2000 and Kano in 2002. The Kano State purge in particular left hundreds of longtime government employees, including many teachers in the public-school system, jobless and adrift. Because the overwhelming majority were "contract" employees, they had no legal right to challenge their termination—which is precisely why they were not offered permanent and pensionable employment in the first place.

State government officials vigorously defended their discriminatory hiring policies as a necessary response to rising levels of unemployment and the debilitating effects of Nigeria's long history of economic decline in general. Implicit in their explanations was the notion that state governments are only responsible for the well-being of indigenes and owe little to non-indigene residents of the state.

The then governor of Abia State, Theodore Orji, approved the disengagement of all non-indigenes of Abia State from the state's civil service due to his opinion that the non-indigenes were the cause of the state's inability to pay the 18,000 naira minimum wage fought for by Labour Unions and implemented by the Federal Government. Professor Itse Sagay, a constitutional lawyer and a Senior Advocate of Nigeria held that the decision to sack non-indigenes of Abia state "is primitive, stone aged, very backward and against labour and human rights laws," adding that it is also contrary to the Nigerian constitution. Prof. Sagay referred to Section 42(1)(a) of the Nigeria constitution³ that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of ethnic grouping and state of origin. He said that Nigerians in any part of Nigeria had the right to association and can live and work in any

part of Nigeria. He called on the federal authorities to stop the dismissal of Abia non-indigenes.

Also, for some state government officials, even employment in private sector establishments situated in their states should be for indigenes only. They promote and where possible, thrust this policy on these establishments. There is no better evidence of this official policy than in the welcome speech of Governor Peter Odili of Rivers State to the Managing Director of Lufthansa while paying him a courtesy visit on 17 April 2005 in his office after Lufthansa's plans to operate direct flights from Port Harcourt to Germany. He wished that out of every ten Nigerian employees Lufthansa was to recruit, eight should be 'true sons and daughters' of Rivers State. The mainly Rivers State audience expectedly cheered hectically. In the implementation of jobs in the state for indigenes of the state policy, there have been occasions where Rivers State indigenes who are not qualified for certain jobs in the private sector presented themselves for employment, only to sell their offers at the point of appointment.

Conclusion

The fact that discriminatory practices which violate the fundamental rights of millions of Nigerians might be politically popular in some quarters in no way justifies state governments' willingness to perpetuate them. The reality, however, is that state governments are unlikely to act unless they are legally compelled to do so, and in any case the problem is a nationwide phenomenon that cannot realistically be combated one state at a time. For these reasons, and because of its implications for the basic rights of all Nigerians, the indigenization issue is a problem that requires federal government leadership. Until now, however, such leadership has been entirely lacking.

Also, not only has the federal government failed to exercise leadership in ending discrimination against non-indigenes, but some federal policies serve to legitimize and entrench that discrimination. Federal universities and other institutions, for example, make use of the concept of indigenization in implementing admissions or hiring quotas. This adds to the material disadvantage suffered by

Nigerians who cannot obtain a certificate of indigenization, and reinforces the notion that a person cannot become a full citizen of a place of which he or she is not an indigene.

Our citizenship rights- the factors that bind us together as members of one nation bound in freedom, peace, unity and common destiny- have taken series of crippling hits since independence. From a country where Nigerians and Africans once lived without let or hindrance in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s when we collectively struggled for independence from European colonial powers, we have sunk to an entity where Nigerians are being deported from their places of residence to their supposed places of origin, or being prepared for registration in a manner suggestive of sectional, ethnic or religious profiling.

To solve this problem, we must first examine critically, the socio-cultural, geopolitical, economic, political and other factors that fuel the divisions or dichotomies between Nigerians of a locality and other Nigerians who have come to live among them. Even if you abolish the indigene prison, it will not amount to removing the difference between the hosts/settlers in any given community.

It shows that the problems confronting our citizenship rights are too deeply rooted for mere legislative fiats alone. The indigenes-settler's problem in Nigeria has become protracted due to certain factors. In the age of global citizenship, becoming a citizen in Nigeria both in words and in deed should not be circumvented either by constitutional provisions which are meant to guarantee them in the first instance or by political considerations through which some elite might want to feather their nest. Rather, citizenship should be strengthened beginning with constitutional provisions, which should not only be enforced by the government but also by the people. Their differences as well as diversity of their interest, background and goals notwithstanding, the people's beliefs that these differences cannot be put aside should be revisited. New ideas and orientation should be put in the heads of indigenes to see Nigeria as one instead of as a pod with separate factions.

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