

Questioning Indigeneity: A Perspective in the History of Minna Town 1910-1976

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Abstract: A major challenge in our society is the issue of indigeneity. It has affected to a reasonable level in many instances peace and tranquility of the society as indigenes and migrant settlers conflict over who actually is land lord and who is the settler. This is a problem to the development of our societies as under such climate, tension revolves around the peoples. Similar situation have degenerated to violent crisis in many towns in Nigeria over the years as noted in Jos, Kaduna and other towns in Nigeria. In the case of Minna, recent developments in its history show the struggle to claim ownership/indigeneity between the Native Gbagyi and the other languages such as the Hausa and Nupe. This study adopts conceptual method to articulate and analyze the historical origin of Minna, discuss its transformation from a hill top settlement to being a state capital. The study saw it necessary to explain the dynamics that have led to the nature of relationship which produced the current development in the history of Minna town.

Key words: Questioning, indigeneity, settlers, historical, development, Minna town

INTRODUCTION

Indigeneity is a major question that always lingers in most towns and settlements across the world most especially, Africa and it is a historical phenomena (Joshua, 2003). The question of who is or who not an indigene has not only affected peaceful coexistence but also it has created syndromes like; Marginalization and other forms of social divide (Waldron, 2003). In many parts of the world the question of who is an indigene continued to generate debate for instance such issue in Malaysia it has been whether Malay be privileged over other groups on the grounds of indigeneity the aborigines inclusive preoccupied discussions (Nah, 2006). In Nigeria the question has led to serious crisis as in Jos (2011-2014), Zangon-Kataf (February 1992, Lagos (Hausa/Yoruba), Tsaragi (Nupe/Yoruba 2002), Ife/Modakeke (1997) and Kano (Hausa/Tbo) the result of which was lost of thousands of lives and destruction of properties. Elsewhere in Enugu indigeneity question has rather not created any rouse among the people (Odoemene). Similarly the situation in Minna has not recorded any violence but it has generated tension and mutual distrust between the Gwari who are native in the area and other tribes in particular Hausa and Nupe. This is because the Gwari see these two tribes as non indigenes in Minna town. Indigeneity is thus consciousness of being native to a particular place based on historical time of arrival (Waldron, 2003). People tend to claim indigeneship of a place because their ancestors had arrived much

earlier on the given settlement and hence, the monopoly of land, natural resources and even political authority.

Minna lies at latitude 9.37°N and longitude 6.33°E on a geological base of undifferentiated basement complex of mainly gneiss. It is located in the central Nigeria area very close to the new federal capital city of Abuja. The land is fertile coupled with abundant rainfall which enables the cultivation of a variety of crops. The town covers an area of 2.274 km². It has a mean annual rainfall of 1333 mm (52 inches). The rainy season starts in April and ends in October. The mean monthly temperature is highest in March at 38.5°C and lowest in August at 25.1°C. Two major streams dissect the town, each beginning from paida hill at different points but conjoin somewhere at Keteren Gwari where it moved to be joined by another tributary (Tunga stream) at Kpakungu. Minna has savanna vegetation that makes it conducive for easy human habitation a characteristic of Nigeria's middle belt region. It is generally a grassland characterized by Shea butter and other related trees.

Minna is the capital of Niger State. It is a popular railway town through which the Kano to Lagos line passes. There is also the Baro rail terminus which extended some 176 km Southeast from Minna to Baro (NGS Minna Archives, APN 328). The town is severally connected to different directions of the state and the country by series of road network.

The major inhabitants of Minna are the Gwari, Nupe, Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Igala, Tiv, Idoma, Benin;

Others are Barebari and nationals of the West African countries of Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The Gwari population stood at 5%, Nupe 17.7%, Hausa-Fulani 31.1% Yoruba 11.9%, others 24.1% (The people are traditionally known as Gwari but in recent times they preferred being called Gbagyi). By these figures it is indicative that the settlers seem to be more populous in the town with the Hausa being the largest. This is so because the Gwari who are indigenous in the area to a very large extent prefer where land is widely available for engaging in farming activities. Most of the settlers in Minna have been attracted to the town by economic factors like the railway work, mining, handicraft, trade and employment in the colonial administrative services. The coming of the railway was largely responsible for the movement and settlement of a number of groups in Minna town. For instance groups like the Hausa are attracted to the area by agricultural products such as yam and grain cultivation. Yoruba and Ibo were attracted by gold and petty trade as well as white collar jobs. Similarly, the Ijesha a sub group of the Yoruba are noted for the introduction and sale of textile materials, mostly on credit basis (Ibrahim, 2011).

As Minna becomes cosmopolitan, one common feature of its population is the adaptation of the Hausa language as lingual Franca, despite the fact that it is a Gwari town. Even the indigenous people (Gwari) prefer to speak Hausa in preference to their own language. Most of the ethnic groups residing in the town occupy specific quarters, for instance, Kwangila and Keteren Gwari are largely inhabited by the Nupe and Yoruba, Limawa and Nassarawa by the Hausa, Sabon gari by the Igbo while Paida housed the Gwari and the Tiv.

Conceptual clarification: This research rest on the concept of indigene/settler dichotomy as it is a major current in the history and socio-economic and political life of our societies. Major concepts employed for this research therefore are:

Questioning: It is common for people to ask “From where” questions regarding the origin and how particular persons have arrived where they found themselves. Such question we conceive as interrogating the roots of our history.

Indiginity: The issue of who is an indigene and who is a stranger/settler is not only a regular question but it is one which constantly sought to place people within their historical reality. Most often strangers who find life better in the new location tend to settle down over time that may be as a result of factors like inter-marriage, economic prosperity and political power and they claim indiginity.

Settler: The settler is one who has moved into another place to abode and have established socially, economically and politically. In most cases, such person becomes integrated into the host community.

Historical: Record of man’s activity overtime and given environment. History is so kind as it keeps record of man’s actions and brings it up when the need arise. It is in the process of such invitation of history to serve as the witness that the earlier settlers (natives) tell the story of the arrival of the stranger (settlers) and until such historical question is properly answered sometimes peace and harmony is truncated.

Development: This implies growth and expansion in the society usually as a result of improvement in condition of living.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is based on the use of available literature on the history of Minna and other related works on the subject matter to buttress argument. The study utilized archival records, state documents, academic journals, thesis and relevant textbooks. It is therefore, a documentary research analyzed on the basis of literature and personal observation. Some of the works on Minna depict its history as that in which the development of the town was encapsulated in ethnic crisis during the period of our study and that such contradiction continued to exist to present time (Bawa, 2015). Similarly other such works on the history of especially, colonial build towns like Jos and Kaduna paint the picture the manner that it was the colonial history of the towns that has led to the crisis which later bedeviled them (Egwu, 2004). We observed that in many settlements in Nigeria; Enugu, Lagos, Makurdi and Minna, much as the question of indiginity exist it has never led to violent crisis nor affected development (Gatawa, 2013). It has been argued that in Lagos, Hausa and Nupe have not only lived for very long period they have also inter-married with the Yoruba hence Lagos, Markurdi Jos and Minna have become cities of mixed ethnic Indiginity. Thus as someone born and bred in Minna, over the past five decades the observed opinion is that the question of Indiginity is secondary in the historical development of towns because it is the efforts of both indigenes and settlers that result in the monumental growth of settlements.

The traditions of origin of Minna town: The word Minna derives from Gbagyi language which connotes different meanings according to the traditions of origin of the town.

One of such is that given the location of the settlement on the hill top from where invaders (slave raiders) can easily be seen the people usually roll heavy rocks on the coming attackers in addition to poisonous arrows. Thus, it was very difficult to invade the hilly settlement, hence, the name Minna meaning "They can't conquer" as invaders usually retreat.

A second version of the tradition has it that in the formative years of the settlement people of Minna and their cousins in neighboring settlements have the traditions of marking a new year by quenching all fire in every house hold. The king makers will then bring fire from the village of Bwogi (from where they are said to have dispersed) to other principalities. Prayers and celebration for good harvest year and a prospective new year are usually undertaken. To that effect Minna got its name which comes from Gbagyi words; MYI meaning distribute or spread and NNA implies fire. Thus put together we have Myinna meaning the distributors of fire or spreading of fire (Godwin, 1997).

Another oral tradition regarding the name Minna is that which connect the settlement to a spiritual serpent that is said to live in a cave on the hilltop ancient settlement. The serpent was called Mi-na coined from Mi-ona (literally meaning the serpent that swallows goat). This tradition is not accepted by most indigenes of the area, although, it is generally believed that such a spirit lives in the caves of the hills.

The indigenous dwellers of the hilltop settlement called Minna are the Gbagyi but corruptly pronounced as Gbari by their neighbours the Nupe and Gwari by the Hausa. The Gbagyi as they preferred to be called like most African tribes believed they migrated to their present home from some place in the North. One tradition has it that they came from Borno in the North-East of present-day Nigeria while another holds that they migrated from Zaria to Abuja from where they dispersed (Bawa and Bahago, 2003). These are hermitic hypothesis as studies have shown that languages such as Gbagyi, Kadara, koro are indigenous to their present areas of abode (Ikime, 1977). However, the inhabitants of old Minna (hilltop) claim they came from Borno area in the mid 18th century first they settled at Bwogi, near Lafiyagi from where they moved to the hilltop later called Minna for the purpose of defense which is a common characteristic of most of the stateless societies in that region.

The Minna Gwari has before the advent of colonial rule in the area evolved kingship known as Otsu (Bawa, 2015). He was appointed by a council of elders who are the king makers that were seven in number as follows: Madaki Yinkagbin, Galadiman Paida, Galadiman Taayi,

Galadiman Pmassi (Shakwata) Shaaba Dogan Birgi Wambai Dayin and Damidami Fadayin. The Otsu was surrounded by men that today form the various District head(s) of: Yinkangbin, Shango, Taayi, Shakwatu (Pmassi), Birgi, Danyin and Fadayin. Although, the king did not have established Paraphernalia of kingship such as royal bodyguard and standing army but trumpets were said to be used for him (Bawa, 2015). The first in the list of kings crowned on the hilltop was Otsu Sagbakun c-1750 followed by Otsu Dubadna, Shegbe, Yakwonko, Tuku, Baba, Diko 1, Shango, Diko11, Bwaba, Shegbe 11, Musa Kwatu Bwaba and Gwadeze.

The people were predominantly farmers, who farmed crops such as yam, Sorghum, Maize and Millet, etc. They also practiced animal husbandry, raising animals like goat, sheep and cattle. A particular breed of cow common among the people is the Kpayi nanko (a species of West African Dwarf) usually short, fat and produces a lot of milk. The people interact with their immediate neighbors in the form of inter-marriage and other forms of socio-economic intercourse but the better part of their contact with larger societies like the Nupe and Hausa was that of raids and wars. Minna like other Gbagyi settlements became major area for slave raiding by these emirates, especially, Kontagora. Hence, mention must be made that before the advent of colonial rule there was no any other tribe that coexisted on the hilltop with the people. It was the colonial administration and more seriously its railway transportation system that enhanced the massive influx of people into such colonial settlements like Minna, Kaduna, Makurdi, Enugu, Jos and Kafanchan (Usman, 2005).

Minna is located within the geo-political area of Sokoto Caliphate which came to form part of Northern Nigeria. In the 19th century, the Fulani who through the Jihad seized political power in the region established government on hitherto non Fulani emirates that was in existence (The states and kingdom that were in existence are not Fulani by tribe they are Daura, Zazzau, Gobir, Kano, Kastina, Nupe, Ilorin, Kebbi, etc. and became emirates following the establishment of Fulani rule. Slave trade constitute an integral part of the economy of the 19th century Fulani Empire (caliphate) and even the whole of West Africa: Ogunremi and Faluyi (1996) (eds) Economic History West Africa, since, 1750; London, (1996) Rex Charles, P.5. I Akinjogbin and S.O Osoba, Topics on Nigerian Economic and Social History: Ile Ife, Ife Press, 1980, P. 98.). Societies outside the caliphate especially, those that have not evolved centralized authority became prey for slave raids which constituted an integral part of the caliphate's economy.

Europeans arrival in the region in 19th century and later the consolidation of series of plans, treaties and

maneuvers between various European trading groups, explorers, missionaries and the natives paved way for the subsequent conquest and imposition of colonial rule on Minna. The most dominant European nation in the Nigeria area was Britain which finally conquered and colonized it.

On the 1st January 1900, a British imperial officer, Captain Fredrick Lugard at Lokoja hosted the Union Jack that marked the beginning of British administration in Northern Nigeria (Ikime, 1977). The new colonial authority immediately wrote to the Caliph of Sokoto that the British government of her majesty has taken charge of his country (Adeleye, 1971). However, Nupe and Kontagora were serious threats to Lugard's ambition and the new administration as such there was the need to deal with them quickly (Crowther, 1980; Ikime, 1977).

In 1901 Lugard launched an offensive on Bida and Kontagora both of which were defeated. By piecemeal approach British forces was able to defeat the whole caliphate by 1903 with the fall of Kano and Sokoto (Ikime, 1977). Lugard accused the emirates of slave raiding on smaller ethnic groups, especially, the non Muslim such as the Gwari. Thus, he stated that:

The history of slavery in all countries show that the system cannot be maintained without a constant recruitment of slaves acquired under all the horrors of slave raids such as were annually undertaken in the dry season in the North or by kidnapping and purchase which caused the free tribes to live in continuous fear and interfered with their agriculture and progress. The number killed or left to starve in these raids, resulted in the large depopulated areas which are still to be seen in the Northern provinces, especially in the province of Kontagora and Kabba (Bawa and Bahago, 2003)

It must be mentioned that Nagwamatse of Kontagora in particular raided most part of Gwari land (Minna inclusive) until the British conquest and subsequent liberation of the people (Crowther, 1980). Hitherto the Gwari of Minna and surrounding localities were under the subjected authorities of the Fulani rulers of Kontagora. The above statements illustrate why Lugard accused rulers of Northern Nigeria especially the Caliph and his Co-Fulani rulers as being corrupt and wicked. He wrote to London on 15th January 1903 in an effort to justify his attack on Kano and Sokoto that:

Those in London who did not support war in Northern Nigeria were ignorant of the true situation. They did not know how corrupt the Foreign Fulani rulers were they bought and sold their own citizens, they took bribes, they oppressed their people and they mutilated their citizens for minor crimes. In Bida and Kontagora and other places where the British had used their military might to seize power, these evils had already been stopped. Similarly they would be stopped in Kano and Sokoto once these places were occupied by the British (Bawa, 2015)

The conquest of Sokoto marked the annexation of the whole of the area within its geo-political jurisdiction including the pagan settlements such as those of the Gwari, Kamuku, Kadara and Koro (Ibrahim, 2011). Therefore, the conquests of Sokoto caliphate which include the initial defeat of Kontagora transferred allegiance of authority to the British from all the localities and principalities that were formerly under Kontagora (Crowther, 1980). Thus, it must be noted that the British did not fight Minna rather its overlord, Kontagora whose defeat marked the liberation of Minna Gwari which paved way for the establishment of colonial rule in Minna as was done in other places.

Following the conquest of Kontagora the colonial administration began to embark on the reorganization of political entities of which in 1905, Bosso Minna, Pytha, Shatta, Maikunkele, Gurusu and Paiko were merged together by the British under Minna division. This incidentally coincided with the construction of Minna Kano and Baro lines. Subsequently, Minna later gained the status of district headquarter, provincial headquarter and territorial headquarter of the railway cooperation which played a vital role in elevating the status of the town. It has greatly enhanced the development of Minna town as it attracted larger population to it for various socio economic and political reasons.

Minna indeed is one of such towns whose development is attributed to its being a Colonial Provincial headquarters, native authority headquarters and at the same time territorial office of the railway cooperation (Ibrahim, 2011; Francis, 1993). Before the end of the first decade of the 20th century, Minna already housed people from various parts of West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular (Mohammed, 2016). Most of these people were attracted by the political and economic potentialities of the area. It is evidently clear

that the town has long been a place where people come to buy food items from different parts of the country (Ibrahim, 2011).

Essentially the railway factor is significant in the development of Minna town. Transportation system of this kind is harbinger of increase population and economic expansion. This is because it provides a meeting point where people from different walks of life meet for various motives most of which are of economic importance. The railway which came to Minna in 1905 attracted workers, traders and adventurers most of who settled in the town.

An important element that is of tremendous economic significance is the discovery of gold in Minna. As early as 1908 gold mines had began to attract people to Minna from different parts of the country. This highly valued metal brought in gold diggers, usurps, buyers and these consequently enhanced the consolidation of the town as these various people settled down.

Colonial economic policies on especially, cash crop production and other related commodities also played significant role in attracting people to Minna. Being the District and Provincial headquarters, it remained the centre where these products are received by the middlemen and their European partners for easy transportation by railway to the sea (Minna is closely located to Baro an inland port from where goods were transported in and out of the Northern part of Nigeria). Some of the popular items collected included groundnuts, cotton, Shea-nut and hides. There was also the Minna pig farm which was one large industry that produced huge quantity of poke meat for Lagos market. The industry employed labour and also generated economic activities thus; it attracted population into the town.

The presence of these various economic facilities and opportunities enhanced the growth of the town. Similarly, the provision of administrative machineries such as police, prison services, courts and infrastructures like healthcare centers, schools, portable water and electricity further accelerated its development. At the attainment of independence in 1960, the town remained headquarter of Niger Province and Gwari native authority. It was until the 1976 state creation and local government reform which changed its status to headquarter of the new Chanchaga local government area and the Capital of the new Niger State (Zoaka and Dauda, 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The question of indigeneity: The 1976 creation of Niger state with Minna as capital had similar effect with the

advent of railway in the area, hence, the two developments was responsible for the increase influx of people into the town. The various political organizations and reorganizations, since, the advent of colonial administration to post colonial era brought about the increase in the peopling of the town which consequently led to the intensification of indigeneity issue in the history of the town.

Starting with the establishment of colonial presence in the area, the railway which began in 1905 brought in people into the area. These include colonial administrative staff, technicians and other service providers. Most of these people came early during the establishment of British rule in the area making the town become heterogeneous in its composition. Consequently, Hausa language which is more widely spoken in the Northern Nigeria became widespread in the settlement. However, it was the appointment of one Mallam Muazu Sokoto by the colonial apparati and the subsequent appointment of Ibrahim Dangaladiman Wushishi (Bawa, 2015) that laid the strength of the Hausa in Minna. Muazu Sokoto was a Hausa man said to have come from Sokoto area via Paiko, Bosso then to Minna and for his knowledge of Quran made to serve as intermediary between the colonial government and the increasing number of laborers (Nigerians) in the area. Together with the colonial authorities the town of new Minna was established in 1910 and he became the Judge (Alkali) and at the same time the Imam and President of the town council (Ibrahim, 2011). His position rooted the Hausa factor considerably in the history and politics of Minna town to date hence the family is not only recognized but still retain the title Sarkin Hausawa. The implication is that it provided the Hausa people more opportunities in the colonial and post colonial administration of Minna town more, so, it encouraged more Hausa people to settle in the town as he and his family successors became the host of Hausa in Minna town (The family has over the years being the major host of Hausa migrants to Minna. Most Hausa people at arrival to the town first find refuge in Gidan Sarkin Hausawa before settling or finding personal a more permanent abode).

The appointment of Ibrahim Dangaladima a Hausa man from Wushishi equally increased the position of the Hausa people in the political and socio-economic history of Minna town. This was because the Hausa people not only very enterprising but equally pervasive as they are more willing to settle anywhere that is economically and politically viable.

In 1950, the colonial authority instituted the position of Emir of Minna with Ahmadu Bahago a Gbagyi from Kuta as the first. Bahago's, appointment though criticized

by Lawu and a few others, marked the beginning of the unification of Gbagyi people who were previously independent of each other. However, it was the policies of the Emir that intensified the Hausanization of Minna. This is because he introduced most of the traditions and offices in Hausa political setting into the area as well as Islamic culture and propagation of the religion (Bawa, 2015).

The 1976 state creation brought about development in all ramifications as it brought into the town large number of civil servants from the defunct Sokoto State. The Nupe in particular constituted about 40% of the civil service, hence, their dominance of the system and significance in the historical dynamics of Minna town. Of considerable number were other Nigerian tribes such as the Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv and Edo. The Gbagyi was small in number making it easy to be dominated by the larger groups particularly Hausa and Nupe. These larger groups come to wield enormous economic and political influence in the town most especially as they integrate more with the locals through inter-marriage and other social aspects of life. Over time the settlers, especially, their offspring claim indigeneship of Minna, hence they were born and breed in the town over years.

Indigeneity becomes a question, since, the formative years of the town starting with the tensed relationship between Abubakar Zarumai Lawu from Bosso and Mallam Muazu Sokoto. The former challenged the imposition of a non-indigene in the administration of the emerging town (Bawa, 2015). In the light of this native/settler dichotomy Lawu in 1927 organised his Gbagyi kinsmen not to bring to the market food items for few days a situation that made the colonial authority to summon Lawu for interrogation (Bawa, 2015). Situations of these nature is not uncommon in Nigeria in Makurdi Akpen submitted that the processes which brought about integration began before the advent of colonial rule and that the establishment of a labour camp in Makurdi in 1912 by the colonial authorities attracted population which came to be swelled by the 1924 arrival of railway transport system in the area. He noted that the first king of Makurdi Audu Dan Afoda was a Hausa man not Tiv and that led to the awakening of the indigenes to struggle for the institutionalization of the office of Tor Tiv. Similarly in Jos a colonial developed town based on Tin mining animosity among the natives and settlers especially Hausa/Fulani rooted in issues surrounding resource allocation and control, political dominance, land ownership have combined into explosive dimension leading to the killing of more than 13, 500, since, the return to democratic dispensation in 1999 (Krause, 2011). Equally the case of Ife and Modakeke which have lasted, since, 1835-2000 was

basically caused by indigene/stranger difference and it dragged for so many years claiming lives as the conflict ensued (Oluwaseun and Olasunmbo, 2014). The Ife see Oyo people who out of the threat of Fulani invasion moved into their place as strangers and that despite every means for peace remained the basis of conflict.

However, though migration engenders conflict but alone it cannot be a sufficient reason or explanation for conflict generation. Nnoli subsumed that it is not the contact between groups that in itself breeds inter-group conflict but rather, the degree of competing claims among groups. The degree of competing claims can be in the area of agricultural farmland, political power distribution, economic resources, social amenities and the preservation of primordial ties.

The worries for this study is that in view of the fact that events in history have causal relationship and given occurrences in places like Jos, Tsaragi/Share, Ife/Modakeke, Zangon Kataf and other crisis that had bedeviled the country based on similar historical antecedents, the Gbagyi of Minna have not only lost control of their land but also lack the political dominance to govern the town. All the aforementioned cases were caused by the simple historical fact that a certain period in their history waves of settler moved into the places and over time gained economic and political power beyond the control of the natives. The development of any settlement is actually never a monopoly of the indigenes but a combined effort of immigrants and the availability of natural resources. However where indigenes marginalized in their own land tension and possible violence becomes inevitable.

CONCLUSION

This study tries to examine the historical origin of Minna town it shows that the Gbagyi who are native to the area migrated into place from probably Borno in the Northeastern Nigeria area. The area became prey for the Fulani slave raiders during the caliphate era and caused the movement of communities to seek refuge on the hilltop until the coming of colonial rule in the 19th when they were liberated.

The advent of colonial administration and infrastructural development such as railway transport system, employment opportunity and other economic activities enhanced the influx of people into the area most of whom settled down in the town leading to its development.

The appointment of non indigenes into position of authority by the colonial authority laid the foundation of ethnicity in the town. Both Mallam Muazu Sokoto and

Dangaladima Wushishi were Hausamen brought in to exercise political control on a settlement that is non Hausa. The situation not only denies the Gbagyi their natural political authority on their land but also, led to the proliferation of Hausa culture in the town.

On whole, it can be safely said that the economic and political dominance of Minna by non Gbagyi, especially, the Hausa was a colonial creation and that as observed in other Nigerian town care must be taken as the town get more Hausanized.

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