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The Jos Crisis and Narratives of Autochthony and Land

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Abstract

Despite the continued presence of the military in Jos, north-central Nigeria for the maintenance of public order, it is apparent that this has only deterred conflicting parties from initiating large scale attacks. However, while the presence of the military prevents open violent exchanges, it has not stopped isolated killings which this article posits is principally sustained by constructed narratives of enemy images. This article identifies the use of rhetorical narratives on autochthony and ownership of land and the abuse of supposedly civic platforms for acts that are inimical to civic tolerance and civility have become non-lethal weapons of war. In other words, these platforms play instigative roles instead of reconciliatory roles that are normatively expected of civic organisations. While this article is not passing a judgment on the ownership of Jos, it posits that exploring areas of cooperation based on cross-cuttingness by the two main parties through the civic platforms can go a long way in creating a non-militaristic superstructure for peace in the community.

Introduction

Pursuing sustainable postconflict peace as part of the processes of conflict management and peacebuilding require a comprehensive understanding of the issues in conflict, the actors and their interests including both obvious and hidden variables sustaining such conflicts. However, a precise identification of these variables poses a serious challenge to peace scholars and practitioners for reasons such as the mutation of conflicts, hidden conflict entrepreneurs, and unstated demands by parties in conflict amongst others. These factors can

be grouped into structural and human factors. While policy and actions of government can decidedly respond to structural factors sustaining conflicts, handling the human variables require more. This is because structural actions do not easily address the processes, beliefs and actions that stand between attributes of the conflict environment and conflict behaviour of the parties in conflict.¹ This is particularly so in conflicts that are rooted and fuelled by collective memories of groups involved in conflicts. In such conflict contexts, narratives constitute

non-militaristic but combusive agents on such conflicts by reiterating enemy images and sustaining ancient hatreds which underpin most identity-based conflicts.

Embedded enemy images, collective beliefs and collective memories constitute serious impediments to the management, routinisation, reduction and resolution of identity conflicts. This is because these enemy images become deeply rooted and defiant to change once formed. I posit in this article that enemy images are not natural but socially constructed during the course of inter-group relations, interactions and competitions. In responding to conflicts, it is pertinent for scholars, practitioners and policy makers to pay more attention to the positive and negative use of narratives by parties in conflict. This is because they are used to (re)construct images, identities and memories. Conflicts rooted in collective memories and the construction of enemy images have wrought horrendous destructions on the continent of Africa leaving in its trail sorrows, tears and blood from Cote d'Ivoire to Rwanda to Somalia as telling examples. In these instances, neighbours suddenly became each other's preys and predators. In the process, lives and properties even those symbolising shared identity and patrimony are destroyed. This article opines that the negative use of narratives is the fuel that makes conflicts between erstwhile brothers and neighbours combusive, deep-rooted and intractable.

Since about four decades ago when narratives became veritable tools of presenting realities of groups' suffering through storytelling in order to evoke and provoke actions from places outside the locale of these conflicts,² they have played dual roles as

groups instrumentalise them to (re)claim, (re)construct, (re)design, (re)script and (re)frame real and conjured experiences. This has been the case in most conflicts that are rooted in ancient memories intertwined with issues of autochthony, land and belonging in African conflict theaters including Nigeria. One of such conflicts is the *host-settler* contestation between the Hausa-Fulani referred to as migrants by those who claim to be the indigenous groups of Jos. In the protracted Jos crises, the use of narratives has appeared as one of the instruments of conflict.

Since the time when the first explosion of violence between the *hosts* and *settlers* the federal and state governments have responded sometimes expressing diametrically contrasting views and approaches to the resolution of the conflict. However, one common approach usually used is the setting up of panels and commissions of inquiry with specific objectives. This road was taken in 2001 when the Justice Niki Tobi Judicial Commission of Inquiry was set up. During its sittings, there was an avalanche of conflicting claims on *autochtonie* and ownership of land through the use of storytelling which this article describes as narratives by the two contending groups. Since then, these diametrical positions have been hardened by the *hosts* and *settlers* through the use of narratives ostensibly aimed at (de) (re)constructing of memories, provoking and evoking support for each side from within and outside the locale of conflict. Drawing on the main narratives rendered at the Justice Niki Tobi Commission and the ones available in other secondary sources; this article identifies the contest for the ownership of Jos and its land as the highest denominator in the conflict.

In this situation, land and autochthony jointly emerge as a patrimony being contested for by the feuding parties through the use of narratives.

Presenting the functional use of narratives by the two parties in the conflict as revealing of the extent of bifurcation and mutual suspicion between these two neighbouring ethnic nationalities; the article argues that this constitutes an intangible but lethal threat to peaceful co-existence in Jos cognizant of the enemy-images already created by the use of these narratives in the dialectical struggle for the appropriation of autochthony and ownership of land by the *hosts* and *settlers*. This article presents the instrumentalisation of rhetorical narratives in an indigene-settler conflict for mobilisation, construction of group memories and the appropriation of land as a patrimony through the abuse of civic platforms which resonates the views of Peter Ekeh on the limitations of many civic platforms for pursuing civic goals such as peaceful co-existence because of their glued attachment to primordial interests.

Central to many post-Cold War conflicts in Africa are the issues of autochthony, land and belonging. Cognizant of the limitations of the ethno-political generalisation of post-Cold War conflicts in Africa,³ the conflation of these three as causes of violent conflicts has made democratisation, state security and inter-group relations precarious. This has informed recent conclusions that democracy or democratisation does not necessarily promote peace⁴ and the compelling need for the political leadership to build the nation before building the state.⁵

Although, national stability and peaceful co-existence are more sustainable with strong

institutions rather than strong men, the pervasiveness of identity conflicts since the end of the Cold War in Africa, has also reintroduced the tempting discussion on whether ethnically plural African states need strong men or strong institutions to maintain peaceful relations.⁶ While evidences of the limitations and implications of relying on strong men for maintaining stability and order in ethnically plural countries abound; Cote d'Ivoire after Houphet Boigny, Yugoslavia after Marshal Tito and Iraq after Saddam Hussein, there are scanty evidences of places in Africa where functional strong institutions exist for constructively managing dialectical ethnic relations. This poses a serious challenge to the demoralisation process in many fledgling democracies in the continent. This is because elections provide a regular avenue for the expressions of the extent of these enemy images by competing ethnic nationalities and politicians in these countries. As observed: "playing on ethnic fears and hatreds is truly the politics of the gutter: unfortunately it works"⁷ and this informs why politicians usually rely on it for winning votes. Therefore, instead of democratisation to promote stronger inter-ethnic cooperation, the negative use of narratives for selfish and narrow political objectives further splits the people apart. These narratives are expressed through various media such as articulated language, including written and oral, pictures, both still and moving, gestures.⁸ Narratives are also present in: "myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama (suspense drama), comedy, pantomime paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio)."⁹ Narratives come in during identity conflicts especially the protracted and deep-rooted ones

that are characterised by collective memories, enemy images and intense struggle for ownership of the state and its resources such as land.

In such circumstances, ethnic activists, political and conflict entrepreneurs exploit polarisation and ethnic tensions for political gains. They deliberately (re)interpret histories and traditions to deepen ethnic differentiation, heighten grievances and increase tensions between ethnic nationalities in dispute.¹⁰ For example, Milosevic presented himself as both ethnic conflict and political entrepreneur by deliberately mismanaging the differences between the Croats and Serbs after the state structure became weakened following Tito's death.¹¹ Similarly, in Rwanda, Sudan and Somalia on the continent of Africa, narratives have served as causes of conflicts that have had destructive effects on inter-ethnic and inter-group relations. Characteristically, states in this situation are countries that are experiencing state formation processes, socio-cultural pluralities with host-settler dichotomies and located in the Bottom Billion of Paul Collier's¹² categorisation where many African countries are located.

Functional Perspectives of Narratives: Poetic, Dialectical and Rhetorical

As a tool of creating (imagined) realities, narratives have become functional in conflict situations and contexts. This has been sustained by the conviction that it provides a universal medium of human consciousness which enables the transcultural transmission of messages about a shared reality.¹³ There have emerged three main functions of narratives and these are: poetic, dialectical and rhetorical functions. The

poetic function is used to express beauty which could pass for romantic function. The primary goal of the *dialectical* function is the discovery of revelation and presentation of a truth with the intention of separating facts from fiction. In this context, fictions are symbolic constructs with no actual or verifiable relationship to the objectionable world of humans.¹⁴ On the other hand, facts are symbols that represent empirically verifiable phenomena. The *dialectical* function of narratives aims to attain the status and role of facts. In this bid, its content becomes its main feature and this is also constrained by the criteria of accuracy and external validity.¹⁵ The main objective of the *rhetorical* function of narratives is persuasion. In achieving this, there must internal and external consistency. Internally, a *rhetorical* narrative must be consistent with itself as well as with the larger discourse of which it is only a part. Any form of internal contradiction whether within the framework of the narrative or between the narrative and the proof, is almost certain to undermine the probability and force of the argument. Externally, a *rhetorical* narrative must be consistent with the audience's general outlook on the world with both its logical and sociological explanations.¹⁶ In order to achieve this, rhetorical narratives have two distinguishing features unlike the other two types of narratives. These are unity of direction and unity of purpose.

In its unity of direction, the adversarial content requires that advocates take opposing sides in a dispute. The reason and evidences offered by each side is aimed at proving a single interpretation chained to facts, value and policy.¹⁷ This is because the *rhetorical* narrative functions in general to compel the

audience to believe a particular understanding of the issue based on particular point of view, therefore, it must project a voice that underscores the unity of direction. For its unity of purpose, it is act-centred.¹⁸ As already explained that the main objective of rhetorical narratives is to subtly wield power by persuading the audience to hold and stick to a particular interpretation of events and issues, *rhetorical* narratives relay events surrounding a conflict in a way that involves the audience. In order to wield power and enact interests, rhetorical narratives usually display brevity, avoid contractions, demonstrate unities of purpose and directions and integrate the credibility of narrators, authors and speakers.¹⁹

Indigenes-Settlers Context of Post Cold War African Conflicts: The Nigerian Experience

In explaining conflicts in post Cold War Africa, one is persuaded to identify continuities and change in different contexts. While the change has been in the use of more lethal weapons and increased frequency of intra-state conflicts; the continuities have been in the objectives of these conflicts that have always been value and resource-driven. Three hypotheses have been popularised in the literature towards explaining African conflicts.²⁰ These are: the poverty-conflict nexus, rent seeking for natural resources or warlordsism, and ethnically polarised weak institutions. The violent conflicts that broke out after the end of the Cold War in Africa were mainly host-settler contestations which regards one group as immigrants while the others are referred to as the autochthonous groups leading to a *we-them* or citizenship crisis. In many places, this

represents an historical continuity of adversarial relations cognizant of the combined effects of migration and conquests which made inferior citizens or subjects out of the conquered people.²¹ Underlying such conflicts in most cases is the bitter struggle for domination of space and control of resources in the midst of scarcity. Central to the making of *hosts* and *settlers* are issues such as migration, inherited colonial borders and dislocation and dispossession occasioned by development. These issues have conflated to make identity and citizenship crises intractable and deep-rooted in many African countries.

The crisis in Cote d'Ivoire illustrates one of such. As part of a well-intended plan to build the economy through a 1950s French model, premised on strong state institutions supporting private sector growth, there was a lavish reception accorded immigrants to come cultivate cocoa on unused land.²² This led to a tidal wave of influx from bordering countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. By the 1980s a significant percentage of the labour force (40%) was made up of immigrants. This worked well until the 1980s when the price of cocoa and coffee crashed and the price of imported oil increased which led the country to go borrowing. By 1993, the country has accumulated a debt of \$15 billion.²³ In contrast to the preceding years of prosperity and comfort that obtained till the 1980s, three in four people were scratching for jobs by the early 1990s.²⁴ With the disappearance of jobs, young men were forced to search for jobs on farm lands. But the best of the lands had been occupied by immigrants.²⁵

Inadvertently, an administrative system that encouraged immigration bred horizontal

inequalities, that is, inequalities among groups with shared cultural identities²⁶ that adversely affected the indigenous population during economic crises was exploited by politicians for votes by playing up the *indigene-settler* divide pitching the migrant populations of over 4 million people and a quarter of the country's populations drawn from Burkina Faso (57.5%), Mali (20.4%) and Guinea (2.4%) half of whom were born in Cote d'Ivoire²⁷ against the indigenous populations. Based on the fact that most of these immigrants belonged to the Northern Mande and Voltaic ethnic nationalities located mainly in the northern part of the country and were mainly coffee and cocoa farmers, it was easy to give the conflict a North-South colouration. Two strongly discordant views have been dominant in explaining the rationale behind the conflict. One argues that: "much of the rhetoric of division and ethno-nationalistic hatred on both sides of the conflict is highly theatrical and a cover up for illicit economic gain".²⁸ On the other hand, it has been described as a "war of modernity"²⁹ targeted at answering questions on citizenship and nationality embedded in a conflict over political, economic, educational, cultural and land rights³⁰ or a war of identification carrying within it seeds of exclusion.³¹ In the Ivorian crises, different types of narratives were used to (de)(re)construct autochthony, land, images and collective memory and identity.

Inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria at the vertical and horizontal levels have been characterised mainly by dialectical struggle for dominance and control of state resources by the disparate ethnic nationalities that make up the country. This bitter struggle constitutes one of the actualities militating against Nigeria's

potentialities of being at the vortex of African super power in a competitive global arena for continental revival and racial renewal.³² However, events in most of post-colonial and post Cold War Africa reflect a disturbing fulfillment of the prediction of the American *Time* Magazine of December 5, 1960 on page 20 that: "In the long run, the most important and enduring face of Africa might well prove to be that presented by Nigeria".³³ This is illustrated by the spate of intra-state value and resource-based crises that continuously threaten the state and nation building processes across the continent. Since the end of the Cold War, litanies of negatives have plagued Nigeria and the continent. These plagues include:

Civil wars, armed conflicts, different forms of social violence, sub-human poverty, famine, the ravages of diseases including AIDS-HIV, cholera, malaria-fever, polio, etc. economic crises and collapse, political crises including the uses of democratic means for autocratic ends, travesties of all sorts in the name of elections, the crisis of citizenship and indiginity, inter-faith and inter-ethnic and inter-racial violence, lack of access to basic modern amenities by the largest proportion of populations within the different national boundaries and many more. These ills continue to constitute the African post-colony as a source of terror, astonishment and hilarity at once.³⁴

Violent communal conflicts since the inception of the fourth republic have claimed thousands of lives and led to the destruction of properties of inestimable worth thereby constituting a serious terror to peace, national and human security, nation and state building, democratisation and inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria. In terms of cost, the Jos crisis has

claimed thousands of lives as reported by the International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (ISCLRL) and the Human Rights Watch. The (ISCLRL) reported that 13,500 lives had been lost to ethno-religious crisis as at 2010 while the Human Rights Watch documented 11,000 as the estimated number of lives lost in major violent confrontations between the indigenes and the settlers on 7 September, 2001; 12 September, 2001; 1 January, 2002; 12 February, 2002; 2 May, 2002; 1 July, 2002; 12 February, 2004; 2 May, 2004; 28 November, 2008; 17 January, 2010³⁵ and 7 March, 2010.³⁶ The conflict has resulted in sustained and isolated instances of raids and violent confrontations in both urban and rural parts of the entire Plateau State. Also, the old mining sites for which the State was reputed for have not been spared in the orgy of violent clashes. As at 2011, over 1664 non-indigenes comprising Nigerians from South-East, South-West and South-South have been killed in the perennial conflicts since 1994 besides suffering material losses of over N970 billion.³⁷ The conflict became so horrendous in 2006 that it led to the declaration of a State of Emergency in the state.

In worsening inter-ethnic relations and conflicts as it has been in Jos North local government area of Plateau, this article locates the use of narratives on land, autochthony, belonging, and the (de) (re)construction of collective memories and identities in the context of the macro-micro dilemma causative theory of conflict.³⁸ This position is hinged on the view that the narrative paradigm helps in explaining what is intended whenever something is said or written.³⁹ This is not far from the view that perspective on narratives

that recognises the *rational* and *narrational* as the two paradigms of human communication.⁴⁰ While the *rational* holds in technical fields, the *narrational* often holds in politics and during conflicts because actors rehearse a constructed and reasoned argument which makes narratives functional.⁴¹ This behaviour is usually found in macro-micro contexts of conflicts. The macro-micro causation explanation of conflicts is a situation in which for example, the strained relationships between large ethnic nationalities like the Yoruba Igbo or Hausa are replayed at the micro level oftentimes without verifiable reference to conflict at the macro level. However, the motivation for such conflicts is rooted in the strained macro-ethnic relationship between the two major ethnic nationalities. In most indigene-settler crises and clashes in Nigeria, feuds over seemingly negligible issues such as where to excrete often snowball into horrendous conflagration between two major ethnic groups.

In such situations, feuding parties instrumentalise narratives to mobilise for support along religious and ethnic lines which underscore the fragility of peace amongst ethnic nationalities in the country. The fragile peaceful relations amongst the ethnic nationalities have created ethnic insecurity akin to the security dilemma of the Realist political theory. Ethnic security dilemma posits that ethnic groups will perceive an increasing threat from other ethnic nationalities as they gain control over the reins of state power.⁴² In this context, power includes not only control of state machineries but also sources of wealth and affluence especially land. This trend has depicted and defined violent conflicts especially host-settler type in Nigeria

since 1999 as one with irreconcilable differences and struggles between individuals and groups over access to power and the opportunities and privileges that accompany it.⁴³ The designation of one group as settlers and the other as indigenes flows from problematic and clashing notions of citizenship held along geo-political and ethnic lines.⁴⁴ This brings to the fore the distinction between the first and second orders of citizenship. While the first-order level of citizenship relies on the legal and constitutional basis of citizenship, the second-order level of citizenship focuses on the social conditions in which citizenship can be exercised.⁴⁵

The second-order level of citizenship particularly makes host-settler conflicts horrendous and intractable because of the use of narratives to (de) (re)construct accounts of autochthony, land and patrimony as it has been in Jos. This is because citizenship becomes the bases for socio-political and economic ascendancy instead of responsibilities and duties. The Jos crises is metaphorical of the post Cold War experience of many African countries because of the salience of issues of autochthony, land and belonging hinged on narratives.

Despite its protraction and plethora of views on its causes⁴⁶ and attempts at conceptualising the conflict,⁴⁷ the indigene-settler conflict in Jos cannot be over-conceptualised. This is because conceptualisation provides a scholarly tracking of the conflict as it mutates. Also, conceptualisation helps in contextually defining ideas or notions with contestable meanings. In the context of this article, conceptualisation of the indigene-settler crisis in Jos is premised on the use of narratives;

cognizant of the explanation that humans have a natural tendency to think in narratives.⁴⁸ This is derived from the scholarship perspective and logic that have found narratives to be important in shaping and expressing political identity, perspectives and ideology⁴⁹ as the case has been in Jos between the indigenes and settlers. Cognizant of the fact that one's view(s) of conflict determine(s) the values given it as a value-laden concept⁵⁰ and in this respect, one may choose to treat conflict as a pathological state and search for its causes and treatment or just focus on the behavioural aspect of the concept. This article takes the second option by focusing on the use of narratives as conflict behavior and conceptualises it as a deep-rooted societal conflict. This is because it is characterised by deep feelings, values and needs that cannot be met by an order from external or local authority, be it court, arbitrator, or a powerful nation.⁵¹ Such conflicts seem endless, erupting into irrational emotional displays and episodic violence as the Jos crisis has been.

The Study Area

Plateau state derived his name from the high plateau that dominates its topography. Although, counted as one of the nineteen northern states where the *lingua franca* is Hausa amidst a largely Muslim population, Plateau state is geo-politically located in the north-central or middle-belt zone of Nigeria that houses national minorities who are largely Christians.⁵² The animosity that characterises inter-group relations is pronounced in social attitudes, politics and patterns of life all of which have made mobilisation for conflict along ethno-religious lines attractive. Plateau

became highly cosmopolitan as a result of migration from across Nigeria during the early colonial period sequel to the industrial scale tin and columbite mining.⁵³ Comparably, this increased the number of Christians in Plateau because of the influx of many Igbo and Yoruba migrants.⁵⁴ This culminated in the establishment of Jos and other mining settlements by the European patrons of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) between 1902 and 1913 while it became a township in 1915.⁵⁵ The indigenous people are the Berom, Angas, Geomai, Afizere and Rukuba.⁵⁶ At the inception of the burgeoning industry, mining and colonialism led to the dispossession of the Berom and Anaguta of their valuable farmlands.⁵⁷ One of the consequences of the rapid social and economic transformation of Jos was the marginalisation and dislocation of its initial inhabitants in the colonial economy and social order.⁵⁸ Therefore, with development came the (in)advertent sowing of the seeds of future conflict which underscore the role of migration in the crises that makes it comparable to Cote d'Ivoire. According to the national census of 2006, Plateau state has a population of 3.1 million people.⁵⁹

Since independence, there have been six occasions of the creation of states (1963, 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991 and 1996). The trajectory of contemporary Plateau state could be traced to 1967 as part of the termination of Nigeria's regional system. Also, in 1976, there was further alteration of the polity with the creation of Benue state while the present is what remains after creation of Nassarawa state in 1996. At this juncture, it is important to separate the *narrational* rhetoric from *rational* rhetoric of what should inform the creation of states based

on realities in Nigeria. The *narrational rhetorics* that have accompanied the creation of states or federating units in Nigeria are to: minimise conflicts; promote unity; bring government nearer to the people; the preservation of cultural peculiarities and economic development.⁶⁰ A critical examination of the many of the states created since 1963 would fall flat in the face of *rational* and informed explanations which should be based on: land size; economic viability; population size and quality of life.⁶¹ This must be premised on one of the laws of federal stability espoused by J.S. Mill which posits that for a federation to be stable, the federating units should be fairly equal in size.⁶²

In the case of Nigeria, most of the states created were done for reasons other than those ones presented above. In 1963, the primary intent for creation of state was laced with acrimony and fierce party rivalry.⁶³ In 1967, the states were created in order to prevent the secession attempts by Ojukwu-led Biafrans although it created a federal structure that enhanced the protection of the minority rights.⁶⁴ However, the preeminence of the majority groups was restored through the 19-state structure. The 1987 and 1991 creation of states complicated the problem of geo-political balancing with the control of the majority reaffirmed.⁶⁵ States in Nigeria became 36 on the occasion of the country's thirty-sixth independence anniversary. One of the implications of the creation of more states has been the creation of new sets of *hosts* and *settlers* in these newly created political entities.

Although, while the Cold War lasted, Nigeria did not experience any prolonged internal crises apart from the civil war, there

have been many dysfunctional and destructive conflicts that do not serve any immediate purpose for state or nation-making plaguing Nigeria since 1999 when the extant democratic dispensation started. Most of these conflicts fall into two categories. The first category comprises resource-based conflicts; such as the prolonged one between the federal government and militants from the oil-producing Niger-Delta region. The second category is value-based conflicts over clashing values and ideologies intertwined with issues of identity (ethnicity and religion). These value-based conflicts occur at the vertical and horizontal levels because it brings the Nigerian state in conflict with sections of the country while it also manifests in violent clashes between Nigerians along ethnic and religious lines. An example of this is the raging conflict between the Nigerian state and *Jamaatu Ahlil Sunna Lidawati wal Jihad*, otherwise known as Boko Haram which can be situated in two broad contexts. It can be located as a feature of the state-making process which speaks to the national question and the place of religion in a supposedly secular state or a fulfillment of Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations.

At the ethnic level, there continues to be intra and inter-ethnic conflicts in the context of host-settler which rely heavily on the use of narratives. Therefore, much as one may classify the crises in Jos into the context of host-settler crisis, its protracted and intractable nature has produced its own narratives as constructed by the parties involved. Apart from Jos, there have been other destructive conflicts in the context of host-settler contests that have constituted prolonged crises across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria. They include the

Bassa-Egbura conflict in Nassarawa State,⁶⁶ the Hausa-Fulani Sawaya crises in Bauchi State,⁶⁷ Ife-Modakeke crises in Osun State,⁶⁸ Aguleri-Umuleri clashes in Anambra State,⁶⁹ and Urhobo-Itsekiri conflict in Delta State.⁷⁰

As a metaphor of post-Cold War African conflicts, the influx of non-natives to Jos can be likened to the migration of Africans from Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea into Cote d'Ivoire and which later became the basis of a destructive conflict in that brought to the fore the host-settler dichotomy in the country. Also, the Liberian crises had its own dimension of host-settler divergence which drew a line between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous Liberians as so-called. Just as migration to the mining sites played a facilitative role in the making of Jos, internal displacement induced by ethno-religious violence around Jos especially in places like Bauchi, Kaduna and Kano which had Christians as targets cannot be divorced from the resentment between the Christians and Muslims in Jos which is a factor in the unmaking of Jos which started in 2001. Equally, there has been an unprecedented rate of out-migration of Fulani Muslims from Jos to neighbouring communities in Bauchi state.⁷¹ State responses to these conflicts have come in forms of military deployment, provision of humanitarian assistance and setting up of commissions of inquiry whose recommendations hardly see the light of the day. All of these have been applied with no sustainable effect on the crises. In particular, these commissions offer platforms for the feuding communities to stake claims which congeal rather than liquefy negative perceptions held of each other by the parties. One of these commissions set up in respect of

the Jos crises was the Niki-Tobi Commission of Inquiry which the two main parties in the conflict used to express their intent to make claims and counter-claims instead of peace through the use of narratives.

The Niki-Tobi Judicial Commission of Inquiry

The Justice Niki Tobi-chaired judicial commission of inquiry⁷² was set up sequel to a violent conflict that occurred on the September 7, 2001 which threatened the peace and security of Jos metropolis and its environs. The specific responsibilities of the committee which was inaugurated on 18 October, 2001 by the governor of the Plateau state were to; investigate the immediate and remote causes of the crisis, identify persons or groups of people responsible for crisis, establish the extent of damage to properties and loss of lives, to obtain any other relevant information or facts and to suggest ways to forestall future re-occurrence. The committee adopted a combination of methods of methodology that included placements of advertisements in both electronic and print media calling for memoranda from the general public and authors of memoranda were to present them in person, get cross-examined and re-examined by counsels generally. Members of the press were also permitted to record the proceedings. In order to have a first-hand feel of the crises, the committee visited most of the places affected by the crises and saw places where whole villages and communities were sacked. However, sequel to the eruption of violence in Vom, Turu and Vwang districts of Jos South local government on December 30 and 31 while the committee was still sitting, the government

had to expand the mandate of the committee to include the areas affected by the conflict. This also warranted the extension of the time given to the commission.

Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Autochthony and Land on the Stage of Inquiry

As a form of theatrical performance, the Justice Niki-Tobi Commission provided the stage for the performance of rehearsed and unrehearsed narratives and counter-narratives on the ownership of the Jos crises by the contending parties in the conflict. While the *indigenes* presented their narratives under the auspices of the Jos Divisional and Cultural Organisation Solidarity Front (JODICO), the *settlers* (Hausa-Fulani) used the Jasawa Development Association (JDA). One of the issues that generated clashing narratives was the name of Jos. According to the report of the Niki Tobi Panel, the JAD claimed that the name Jos was from the Hausa word *Guash* which was mispronounced as Jos. On the other hand, the Beroms claimed to have named the place *Jot* after a spring water which the Europeans pronounced as Jos. Another narrative has it that the Beroms called *Jot-Shill* named after a spring located at the back of the Jos main market which many believe could cure any ailment.

As parties in conflict, the two instrumentalised the *rhetorical* use of narratives because of its functionality. In buttressing its claim of ownership, the JDA refers to the preponderance of Hausa language in names of important titles and streets of Jos such as Sarki, Galadima, Balarabe, Turaki, Sheu, Ali Kazaure and Dan Kaffalla. Also, the JDA gave a narrative on

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the history of rulers of Jos.⁷³ The Concerned Muslim Youths a mainly Hausa-Fulani peopled group gave their own narrative of the ownership of Jos by ascribing the socio-economic and political development of Jos and most of the villages in the mining areas in the division and referring to the fact that these areas still bear the names of their founders such as Barkin Ladi, Rafin Bala, Gindin Akwati etc. according to a prominent witness on the side of the JDA, the Hausa-Fulani came to Jos long before the Biroms and that Jos was established long before the arrival of the colonial masters who arrived in 1900.⁷⁴

In contrast to the narratives of the JDA, the JODICO also made of narratives to establish their right of ownership of Jos. Referring to a Gazetteer of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, Volume IV chapter V, Jos Division was described as: . . . formed by the Birom, Ganawuri, Irigwe, Jerawa, Rukuba, Pakaran and Anaguta tribes who live in the northern and central parts of the Plateau and on some of the broken ground to the north and north-west of it, and all of whom share a common Native Authority at Jos.⁷⁵ Amongst these tribes, the Birom tribe had the largest population of some 44000 spread across eight districts and half of the Ganawuri. The JODOCO also tendered a confidential letter from the Resident of the Provincial Office to the Secretary of the Jos Northern Province which states that: "As the Birom authorities develop and are able to effectively look after the immigrant settlements and mining camps in their areas the District Officer's authority would be taken away".⁷⁶ Contents of another letter tendered by the JODOCO reveals the views of the British on Jos thus in two paragraphs and the opinion

expressed by Sir Ahmadu Bello in his book titled *My Life*:

In the pre-British times, Jos did not exist except as a small Birom village. The discovery of tin in the area brought to Jos a large stranger settlement predominantly Hausa including Ibo and Yoruba and other tribes which settled round the terminus of the railway.⁷⁷

The special position of Jos as a stranger settlement of Hausas in the middle of a Birom area has been recognised by the Native Authority by the establishment of Jos Native Town as a subordinate Native Authority with an elected Town Council. This Town Council presided over by the Chief of Jos with an elected Vice-President. The situation is similar to Sabon Gari Kano, where the Waje Council is presided over by the Wakilin Waje, a Native Authority appointment with an elected Vice-President.⁷⁸

The countries that did not come under Fulani rule were the areas known as the Borno Province, the Plateau Province (less Wase), the Jukun, the Tivs and Idoma peoples of South of the Benue and small parts of Kabba and Ilorin Provinces.⁷⁹

From the narratives given by the two sides, it becomes evident that civic associations occupy a strategic role in identity conflicts especially indigene-settler conflicts because they serve as platforms for expressing and advancing claims and counter claims of groups embroiled in contestations. The use of narratives by the two groups speaks to the *rational* and *narrational* use of narratives on one hand and the rhetorical functionality of narratives. As paradigms of human communication, the *rational* paradigm is used

mainly in technical fields while the *narrational* is used in politics and during conflicts because actors render a rehearsed and constructively reasoned argument which makes narratives functional as a tool of appropriation.⁸⁰ While the JODOCO relied on facts from documents as a form of *rational* narratives, the JDA relied more on *narrational* narratives most of which were tendered and not beyond doubt. Also, they both opted for the rhetorical function of narrative because of their adversarial relationship.

Equally worthy of engagement at this juncture is the role of supposedly civic associations like the JDA and JODOCO for advancing primordial interests. Their activities bring back the argument of Peter Ekeh⁸¹ of the two publics and that a lot of the so called civic associations actually belong to and pursue primordial interests which make him to conclude that instead of adding to the civic public, they subtract from it. Cross-cuttingness⁸² or areas of cooperation between these associations which could be explored for peaceful co-existence between the two communities have not been explored by these supposedly civic platforms based on the diametrically opposing narratives presented by the two. The narratives presented by the two provides and insight into the likelihood of them serving as patrons for violent groups who want to unleash violence in continuation of the contest for the ownership of the community. As David Laitin⁸³ observed, once young men unemployed and with no hope of social mobility get a signal that they can riot without fear of punishment, they become more pliable.

Conclusion

Narratives function as a means of organising and passing knowledge across generations in communities going by the contrasting narratives presented by the JODOCO and JDA on autochthony and ownership of land in Jos. This has led to negative typification⁸⁴ and enmification⁸⁵, a process of creating negative values and depictions of the opponent arising from internalised narratives handed down from generation to generation which now constitutes the respective group memories that sustain enemy images fuelling the conflict.

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