The Public Space in Nigeria: Politics of Power, Gender and Exclusion

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Abstract

The public space often conveys a notion of *res publica,* owned by all members of the public, with equal access and participation. In reality, however, there are several publics, as indeed spaces at the local, state, national and international levels. Irrespective of levels, the public space is where decisions binding on all are taken, executed and evaluated. It is an arena where the various publics struggle to have control over and participate in. Access to and participation in the public space in Nigeria is frequently conceived as part of the *national question* and speak to the nature of integration in one country where all constituent units have a sense of belonging. It is here argued that Nigeria's public space is a contested terrain, access to which reflects all the known divides in society: gender, class, religion and ethnicity. These divides become the important determinants of access as well as the nature and quality of participation. Some of these contestations have led to explosions of violence, pitting indigenes against settlers, one ethnic group against the other(s), as well as Christians against Muslims. These experiences, including those of women's participation in the political process and struggles for a common citizenship in one Nigeria, are used as illustrations of the contest over public space. It is concluded that participation in and control of the public space must be recognized as part of the broader issues of citizenship rights and gender equality in society.

The Nigerian experience has important lessons for the rest of the African continent which is stuck in several conflicts, most of them over access and control of national-territorial public space.

Résumé

L'espace public véhicule souvent une notion de *res publica,* appartenant à tous les membres du public avec un accès et une participation sur un pied d'égalité. En réalité, cependant, il existe

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plusieurs publics, ainsi que plusieurs espaces, aux niveaux local, étatique, national et international. Indépendamment des niveaux, l'espace public est le lieu où sont prises, exécutées et évaluées des décisions ayant force obligatoire pour tous. C'est une arène dans laquelle les divers publics luttent pour le contrôle et la participation. L'accès et la participation à l'espace public au Nigeria sont fréquemment conçus comme faisant partie de la *question nationale* et soutiennent la nature de l'intégration dans un pays où toutes les unités constituantes ont un sentiment d'appartenance. Il est ici soutenu que l'espace public nigérian est un terrain contesté dont l'accès reflète toutes les divisions connues de la société : le genre, la classe, la religion et l'ethnicité. Ces divisions deviennent les déterminants importants de l'accès, ainsi que de la nature et la qualité de la participation. Certaines de ces contestations se sont soldées par des explosions de violence, dressant les indigènes contre les colons, un groupe ethnique contre l'autre ou les autres, ainsi que les chrétiens contre les musulmans. Ces expériences, y compris celles de la participation des femmes au processus politique et aux luttes pour une citoyenneté commune au Nigeria, servent d'illustration à la contestation autour de l'espace public. En conclusion, nous disons que la participation à l'espace public et son contrôle doivent être reconnus comme faisant partie des questions plus larges de droits liés à la citoyenneté et d'égalité des sexes dans la société.

L'expérience du Nigeria comporte des enseignements importants pour le reste du continent africain qui s'enlise dans plusieurs conflits, dont la plupart portent sur l'accès et le contrôle de l'espace public national/territorial.

Introduction

The public space, and related synonyms such as public sphere, public domain, is a seductive area, attracting wide scholarship and debates (Habermas 1991; Egwu 2008; Rinaldo 2008; Ferenades 1997; Banerjee 2001). Authors of the growing bibliography on the subject have, predictably addressed different aspects. To some, the public space holds out the potential of bringing about change in hitherto more restricted societies. Rinaldo, for example, has focused on how new forms of Islam are opening up the Indonesian space in general terms, and to feminisation in particular. As part of this feminisation process, issues of gender equality and the more strict Islamic doctrine which hitherto justified the subordinate status of women, are being debated and challenged. Through workshops and other public space engagements, women are now exposed to alternative interpretations of Islam. Concerns about the public space also include changing ideology (the previous contest between communism and capitalism has all but disappeared); or rather the dominance

of the market ideology and its twin processes of rolling back the state and the rise of private sector and programmes of privatisation and public-private partnerships. According to Banerjee (2001), older forms of public space are disappearing and in their place are emerging private-public spaces such as the malls, galleria and shopping arcades. These new forms of public space reflect and are informed by the changing ideology – the dominance of the market or capitalism.

Others have raised concerns about peaceful cohabitation in a multi-ethnic environment, especially in the era of neo-liberal economic policies, and the fierce contest it has unleashed among these varied nationalities (Egwu 2008). There is also the entire question of gender inequality and how initial gains made by women in attaining some prominence in the public space in South Africa appear to be receding (Albertyn 2003). Catherine Albertyn has argued that more gender equality is necessary for fostering more women's participation in general and to address the gender dimension of HIV and AIDS in particular. In addition, there are concerns about more global public spaces, such as the internet and cyber space in general and the attendant powerlessness of local populations over global corporate interests generally, but especially, cultural homogenisation and the attendant toll on local cultures (Banerjee 2001). The cyberspace also empowers by creating the space for people who may not have access to mainstream media to make their voices heard through blogging. There are other concerns about the use of the web for advertisement, pornography and junk mail, popularly known as *spam*. In some countries, the web also provides a forum for fraudsters to engage in advance-fee fraud. In Nigeria, the act is popularly called 419, a reference to the section of the penal code and perpetrators are suggestively called 'Yahoo boys'. There are thus varied concerns about the use(s) of as well as the nature of public space. These concerns include ownership of what is notionally 'public' and the nature of participation among various members of the public, more appropriately various publics.

While the debates about public space rage, there appears to be little unanimity about what constitutes the public space. The term is sometimes used as a synonym for geo-territorial space occupied by a country or its political divisions into provinces, regions or states. The public space is also used to refer to physical places such as parks, gardens and shopping malls which are open to the public. It also includes work-related spaces such as factory sites and bureaucracies. The term is used here to refer to all of these notions.

Irrespective of typology, the public spaces have some common denominator in the sense of a shared space with some general public, and

have some rules and regulations governing activities and participation, as well as impacting on the lived world of the general public. There are also some moral codes which are or seek to be binding on all publics. Two levels of publics may be deciphered as the general public who are human beings *qua* human beings as well as more restrictive members into which the general public are divided as ethnic, religious, class and gender publics. As we return below, public spaces are in fact open to many publics, often with each contesting the rules and moral codes in operation as well as more meaningful participation. These contestations can become harbingers for changes as well as conflict. It is in this sense that we contest that the public space is not just a *res publica* of an undistinguished public; rather it is a terrain contested by many publics.

In this essay, we contend that access to the public space(s) in Nigeria is frequently contested between various publics among which are ethnic groups, religious groups, classes and gender categories. It is often conceived as part of what Nigerians commonly refer to as the *national question* or issues of common citizenship and sense of belonging among all constituent groups (Elaigwu 2005; Akinyemi 2005). Contests over the public space pit various groups against each other and have led to explosions of violence. The contestations between indigenes and settlers and subsequent explosions of violence are used as illustrations about the nature of participation between various publics. The nature of women's participation in the political process also provides further illustration of inclusion and exclusion in the public space and how struggles for participation are effectively part of the broader issues of citizenship and gender equality.

We first briefly dilate on the concept of public space and why it is important. The subsequent section discusses the struggles for participation and control of the public space by various publics. It is stated in the conclusion that Nigeria's public space provides a window on the nature of debates and the issues which portend to build peace or foment trouble. There are important implications for the rest of the African continent which often experience armed conflicts, most of which originate from contestations over public space(s).

Theorising Nigeria's Public Space

The public space in Nigeria takes many forms including geo-political space of the state, religious and secular spaces; as well as work-related spaces. These spaces are in addition to more global and international spaces such as cyber space and international community fora such as the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and United Nations Organisation and its agencies.

Nigeria's state and the government are reckoned as occupying some geo-political space which is internationally recognised by other countries and the international community. This space of almost one million square kilometres has three tiers of government. First, there is a federal government which oversees all of the vast territory and has exclusive rights over a variety of issues. The second tier is the state, 36 in all plus the Federal Capital Territory, and all of which have designated geo-political spaces within the bigger Nigerian geo-territorial space. The Local Council areas are the third tier of government and are located within the states as well as the Federal Capital Territory. These state-territorial spaces are clearly demarcated and recognised both by those within and outside each tier of government. But as illustrated in the next section, the issue is not the spaces *per se* but access to resources and participation in decision-making. There are, therefore, questions about whose public space(s); who controls the space(s) and what is the nature of participation of the various publics?

Religion is an important social institution in Nigeria and part of this importance is the spaces religious organisations occupy. In addition to the more traditional places of worship such as churches and mosques (traditional religion or animism is mostly in the background), there are now huge open air spaces where the faithful assemble for special festivities and prayers. Such open spaces are mostly located along highways and when the faithful (some- times in the hundreds of thousands) gather, vehicular traffic flow is disrupted. Whether in the more traditional enclosures or in open spaces, religious spaces are regulated by moral codes, including, depending on type of religion and/or the denominations, dress codes. As detailed below, there are several attempts to expand religious spaces to cover entire states such as the imposition of *shari'a* or Islamic law (Ostien et al.; Kuna 2005; Egwu 2008; Gofwen 2003) and moral codes (such as the prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol) binding on believers and non-believers.

There are also secular spaces such as public parks, amusement parks and gardens. Many of these parks and gardens are owned by city councils, local councils and state governments. However, while 'owned' by the public, there are also enormous private interests. In and around Abuja, for example, some of the parks are maintained by private construction companies supposedly as part of corporate responsibility. There are other private sector interests in the use of these spaces for sale and consumption of alcohol, fish and chicken kebabs. In effect, these spaces have been transformed into private-cum-public fora for commercial activities rather than the more sedate spaces they were originally conceived to be.

The more symbolic spaces are also recognised in Nigeria. There was, for instance, a long-drawn struggle during the long years of military rule for the opening up and the enthroning of democratic space. Along the same line, there was some clamour in the first years of the 1999 return to civil rule for more opening of the democratic space to permit the registration of more political parties (Egwu 2005). There are also the less visible cyberspace and international fora, all of which constitute the spectrum of public spaces in Nigeria.

Irrespective of types, public spaces in Nigeria are a contested terrain in which many publics meet, interact and engage in various forms of contestations. These publics who are defined by various membership criteria such as ethnicity, religion, class and gender try to build solidarity for purposes of greater access, control and participation. It is here argued that public spaces are not really public in the sense of common property over which members of the public have equal access and participation. To the contrary, public spaces are veritable battle grounds where various publics, based on equally diverse interests, engage in countervailing struggles. Public spaces are fora where citizens encounter each other, negotiate control and sometimes engage in violent struggles. These struggles are essentially over ownership and access, control, and participation. It is important to examine these issues in some detail.

Ownership and Access to Public Spaces

The ownership of many public spaces seems obvious. There are religiously-owned spaces and publicly-owned spaces. Ownership of other spaces (such as cyberspace and international organizations) are less obvious, if also seemingly collective. These last groups of spaces are often not as contentious as the more public and state geo-political spaces. States and local councils, as indeed the Federal Government, are part of the common weal and notionally collectively owned by all members of the public. This sense, however, is deceptive as there are spirited attempts by some publics at each stage to take possession of and push the common state spaces in particular directions. In Nigeria's history, such struggles include the forcible overthrow of civil government (which governed by the constitution) by the military which ruled by decree; and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes and neo-liberal polices (Federal Government of Nigeria 1986; Egwu 1998) which ended the era of state-provided welfare (Erinosho 2008; Egwu 1998). Other issues include attempts to enforce religious codes such as the current (2008) debate about dress code; the attempts by the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory in the second quarter of 2008 to prohibit of the sale and consumption of alcohol in Abuja public gardens and parks; and much earlier the 1986 surreptitious registration of Nigeria as a member of Organisation of Islamic

Countries, OIC. Aside from these general concerns, struggles for the control of state spaces are fierce because these are the spaces where citizenship rights, entitlements and opportunities are contested, won in various degrees or lost.

Simultaneous with the struggle for ownership is the struggle for access to public spaces. Those who attempt to claim ownership also try to define criteria for participation and spell out who is included or excluded. This issue of inclusion and exclusion is a recurring decimal and regularly expressed in popular parlance as *the national question* and sense of belonging. There are always members of the Nigerian public who decry marginalisation and exclusion; they regularly compare themselves with people they regard as better placed. The regular staple is the absence of federal presence by which is meant little or no institutions and very few people represented in the central government. Increasingly, such allegations are made on behalf of particular geo-political spaces. There are regular clamours about neglect of particular geo-political zone(s) – there are six of these – and prescriptions of what steps are necessary to remedy the situation. It is in this sense that we agree with Rinaldo that the public spaces are 'arenas of negotiation among a variety of publics' (Rinaldo 2008:1782).

In Nigeria, these publics include ethnic and religious groups and more recently geo-regional groupings. This is illustrated by the armed struggles in the oil producing Niger Delta region which has brought the various ethnic groups in the region under one umbrella of oil and control of its process (Ibeanu 2003). Control of state public spaces are also important because Nigeria's federation remains over-centralised especially in the management of revenues which go first to a joint federation account and are later distributed to the states. The formula for such revenue-sharing has remained an issue with different regions (spaces) agitating for larger shares. Furthermore, there are also contests over priorities and what share of funds should go to what development priorities.

Control of Public Spaces

The issues about public spaces in Nigeria go beyond claims to ownership to the question of control and who is 'in charge'. In state spaces such as the three tiers of government, the constitution might spell out who is in charge of structures. But beyond the constitution, there are regular contests about who is really in charge; implied here is the fact that there might be surrogates in some positions. There are further questions about who is qualified to get to positions. The issue here is not about constitutional and other rights, more central is the practice which, in spite of the constitution and other laws, gives some members of the public access to, and disenfranchises others from, opportunities to control public spaces. Typical here are the regular

contentions between indigenes and settlers, where the former are determined to prevent the latter from positions of the control over the public space.

There are also issues of hours of operation of various spaces indicating when the facilities open and close. In some instances, there are age restrictions to access. In the more recent times, public spaces in Nigeria are beginning to enforce dress codes. In many universities, women are prohibited from wearing body hugs and other attires which reveal curves. Attempts to control the public space have been extended to satellite television in general and live telecasts, some of which are considered so indecent as to spread corrupting influence. Big Brother Africa, a reality television show, has been particularly singled out for criticism; and subscribers to cable networks are now compelled to indicate if they want the channel. The Nigerian Senate held a hearing on the matter in the second quarter of 2008 but has not made any definite pronouncement (Obi 2008).

Participation and Exclusion in Public Spaces

Another dimension of Nigeria's public space(s) is the nature of participation. In most of these spaces, criteria for participation are clearly spelt out and generally non-contentious. There is some unanimity about what roles Christians and Muslims play in their places of worship and what roles non-members of the denominations have with regard to the two regions. The same is true about public parks and gardens which are regulated by local councils and, in the case of tourist parks, the state Tourism Board. This is not the case in state spaces in which the three tiers of government exist. Perennially, there are countervailing struggles for more access to and better participation in the state spaces. Often, some publics, such as religious or ethnic groups perceive themselves as marginalized, largely excluded and play only second fiddle. Research on citizenship and participation in governance has shown that allegations about marginalisation are pervasive just as are allegations about government's bias (Abah and Okwori 2002). It was even alleged that governments, at all three tiers has ethnic groups – usually the ethnic groups of the core people – in leadership. Religious affiliation is also read into the quality of participation in government. Correctly perceived or otherwise, there are allegations of favouritism towards Christians or Muslims. Gender is also an important criterion for participation and exclusion. As discussed below, the number of women in and the nature of their participation is different from men's.

Questions of ownership, control and participation in public spaces continue to be burning issues in Nigeria's public space(s). These issues lead to determined struggles by the various publics and have in many cases led to violence.

The Struggles among Various Publics for Public Spaces

Issues about the national question or struggles for control, ownership and participation, especially in state public places, have remained central to Nigeria's post-colonial experiences. As Tyoden and others (2001), and Toure, Abah and Okwori (2002) have shown, these issues divide Nigerians into various publics: ethnic and further division into ethnic majority and minorities; indigenes and settlers; religious groups as well as class and gender categories. Each of these publics have different interests which then form the agenda for mobilisation and struggles.

In their violent forms, the struggles for the control of particular spaces involve the following:

- the definition of some Nigerians as *persona non grata* and subsequent expulsion from particular spaces/locations;
- massive mobilisation of religion and ethnicity to define the enemy and engage in violent acts against them;
- physical elimination of such Nigerians;
- burning and looting of their poverty;
- mass exodus of the assailed to safety, mostly to military and police installations or regions and spaces where they have large numbers – usually the ethnic homelands.

In the various explosions of violence, the assailed are told to 'go home' as indication that they no longer belong in some particular geo-political space. As discussed in detail below, this is a signal that they must relocate to spaces of their ethnic 'homeland'.

Religious Identity and the Public Space in Nigeria

We should state at the outset that religion and ethnicity in Nigeria are in several respects fused. The torch-bearers of the two dominant religions, Islam and Christianity, came to the country from particular directions which have largely influenced the number of followers. There are predominantly more Muslims in the North from where the bearers of Islam came to Nigeria, just as there are more Christians in the Southern half from where Christian missionaries entered Nigeria. In addition, the majority of the Hausa-Fulani are Muslims, just as the majority in the South-South, South-East and most of the North-Central regions are Christians. The South-Western region seems equally divided.

Beyond issues of life in the hereafter which both religions teach, religion has also been politicised through the use of state power to propagate religious agenda such as funding of Islamic schools by state government; the

appointments into key positions or the evaluation and whether these conform with religious equity; and the use of religious affiliation in political campaigns (Usman 1987; Toure 1999, 2003; Kuka 1993). More than other issues, religion has become the underbelly of Nigeria's national unity and major criterion for evaluation of what is right or proper in the public space. It is a continuing debate among supporters on both sides.

Nigeria was surreptitiously enrolled in the Organisation of Islam Countries in 1991. This act, was observed by Ewerem (1995) as a 'dangerous awakening' of religious sentiments. Since then, the seemingly cordial relationship between the two religions became characterised by mutual suspicion and acrimony, especially in Kaduna state. The grievances of the Christians include the takeover of their schools by the state, marginalisation, especially in the civil service, and subsuming of the entire Christian – and animist – southern half of the state under the Emir of Zaria (Mustapha 2000). These historical factors lie at the heart of the identity politics and persistent conflicts of the Southern Kaduna peoples (Atyap, Bajju, Jabba and others) and the Hausa-Fulani in the locality. Questions of ownership, control and participation in the public sphere in this Southern half of the state are contested between the two groups, the Hausa-Fulani and the others (Mustapha 2000; Egwu 1998, 2003, 2008). In the recent past, several incidents of violent explosion in the contest over spaces have been recorded, particularly in Kaduna State.

The first major explosion of religious violence in Kaduna State was in the College of Education, Kafachan in 1987. Here, the annual week of the Fellowship of Christian Students' activities included an open-air crusade. During the crusade, a Muslim female alerted other Muslims that the preacher was denigrating Prophet Mohammed and Islam. The Muslim students quickly assembled, began to assault Christians and broke up the convention. The crisis quickly spread outside the campus where Christians and Muslim began to kill one another and burn houses. Consequently:

> …In Kaduna, the state capital, a team of Moslem Youths came out all over the major streets. Initially, they attacked homes and shops of Kaje people [also called Bajju, this is one of the main ethnic groups in Southern Kaduna, where Kafanchan is located]. But within a short while, it denigrated to an outright attack on Christians, their property and churches. This pattern of attack spread to the major cities of Zaria, Katsina, Funtua and Kankia (Gofwen 2004:91-92).

What began on the campus of a college in a rural location engulfed the entire state. Here, the violence was between Christians and Muslims, but had ethnic dimensions, pitting the Hausa and the Bajju (Kaje).

The second explosion related to the introduction of *shari'ah* or Islamic rule in 2000. *Shari'ah* itself must be understood as part of attempts to impose a

religious moral code on an entire state territorial space. Soon after the return of civil rule in 1999, the Governor of the Northwestern State of Zamfara introduced *shari'ah* (Mair 2000; Sha 2005). This action seemed to have challenged other northern governors, including Kaduna's, to do the same. Consequently, by 2004, all but five – which are in the predominantly Christian central region – of the nineteen Northern states had introduced *shari'ah* (Sha 2005:195).

The introduction of *shari'ah* in Kaduna was facilitated through a committee of the state House of Assembly and of the Executive. The Christians in the state complained that in both, the cards were stacked in favour of the pro-*shari'ah* lobby. In addition to having the majority in both committees, groups of Muslims demonstrated daily in favour of *shari'ah* throughout the committee sitting to hear cases for and against. Organised as the Christian Association of Nigeria, Christians staged a peaceful protest around the town and to the Government House to voice displeasure over the composition of the committees and *shari'ah* law. On the return trip, they were attacked and some people were killed. This marked the commencement of the *shari'ah* crises, which later engulfed the entire state.

Beside the Muslims and Christians, the Hausa-Fulani and the Bajju (Kaje) singled each other out again for attack (Gofwen 2004). The official sources indicate 609 deaths, 746 vehicles burnt, 123 churches and 55 mosques burnt (Gofwen 2004:119). The military was deployed to bring the situation under control. The 2000 *shari'ah* killings led to reprisal attacks against Muslims and people of Hausa-Fulani and 'northern' origins in the predominantly Christian South-East zone (read space). The message here seemed to go beyond revenge; it included asserting claims over a space the assailed Christians could call their own.

In 2002, Nigeria hosted the Miss World Beauty pageant. The show was, however, opposed by some Muslims who saw it as defiling the public space with overexposed bodies. When protests and lobbies to have it cancelled failed, the Muslims engaged in acts of violence in which non-Muslims were the primary targets. Also singled out were drinking joints and churches, all of which defined 'us' and 'them'. This violence too evoked retaliatory attacks in the South-East geo-political space which the majority Igbos – and Christians – could claim as their own. The assailed were told to 'go home'.

Ethnicity and the Struggles for Public Space in Plateau

Ethnicity is prominent among the factors driving identity politics and the politics for the control and participation in public space. The saliency of ethnicity is brought home by recent experiences in central Nigeria, especially in Plateau and Nasarawa states (Alubo 2006). This section sketches these experiences in the states of Plateau and Nasarawa. These two have experienced more outbreaks in the struggle for domination, control and participation in the public space.

Perhaps because of its semi-temperate weather and picturesque rock formations, Plateau State is fondly called the 'home of peace and tourism'. This nickname, which is displayed on license plates, has been challenged by recent experiences between the various ethnic and religious groups. Plateau has 52 ethnic groups, a number exceeded only by Adamawa with a count of 80 (Alubo 2006). Most of the ethnic groups in the state claim to be *indigenes* and exist side by side with *settlers*. As used in Plateau and the rest of Nigeria, an *indigene* is someone whose genealogy can be traced to particular geo-ethnic space within a local council or state in which s/he is resident. People whose roots are elsewhere, i.e, are indigenes of other states, are regarded and called setters. This configuration enables groups to assert claims to ownership of land in particular space(s), and frequently the power to dictate and control the running of political affairs. However, in the construction of indigene/settler identities, the terrain expands or narrows, depending on the stakes (Alubo 2006). Thus, some of those who may be regarded as settlers in a contest between local councils in a state may unite as indigenes of the state against contestants from other states.

 The ethnic configuration in Plateau is such that most of the groups are in particular local council spaces, with only a few (such as the Berom, the Taroch, Ngas and Goemai) in two or more contiguous local council spaces. The Hausa-Fulani are found in virtually all the local councils, with heavier concentrations in Jos North, Wase and Shendam. Most of the other ethnic groups are predominantly Christians or animists, while the majority of the Hausa- Fulani are Muslims. In this sense, Plateau State is another illustration of the close relationship between religion and ethnicity in Nigeria (Alubo 2004; Enwerem 1995) such that 'conflicts that are essentially ethnic in nature, also have religious colouration' (Sha 2005:196).

From the very beginning, there was peaceful coexistence between the Hausa-Fulani and the other ethnic groups, as symbolised by inter-ethnic marriages, invitations to each other's cultural festivals and close associational life. In spite of general peaceful coexistence, there was simmering discontent as indigenes accused the Hausa-Fulani of dominating the polity and of exhibiting religious arrogance by calling others *Kafrai, arna* or infidels (Mustapha 2000:101). These labels become the veritable passes for control and participation in the public spaces. However, while these strains seem well contained, they could have stoked the fire of the violent explosion in the 2001/2004 period.

The simmering discontent led to two major blowouts in 2001 and 2002. Jos, the capital city of Plateau State, experienced massive explosions of

violence from 7 September 2001. Various accounts (Danfulani and Fwashak 2002; Human Rights Watch 2001) have some agreement that:

(i) During the *Jumat* prayer the only thoroughfare around a Mosque in Kongo/Russia – a sprawling squatter camp – had been customarily blocked. A motorist, Rhoda Nyam allegedly insisted on passing through, and the ensuing altercation assumed a citywide violence, pitting Christians against Muslims.

(ii) Alhaji Muktar Mohammed was appointed as the coordinator of the Federal Government Poverty Alleviation Programme. There was some uproar about why such an important appointment should have gone to a 'settler' rather than an 'indigene'.

In effect, there is agreement that the triggers relate to control over public space as well as participation. These triggers were in addition to longstanding political issues in the relationship between indigenes and settlers. During the regime of General Babanigda, for example, additional local councils, including Jos North, were created. One Alhaji Aminu Mato, a Hausa Muslim, and therefore a 'settler', was appointed from Abuja as the caretaker Chairman. His appointment was stoutly opposed by the indigenes who felt it should have come to them. The real issue was about control of this local council space and who should or should not exercise such control.

As the 2001 violence unfolded, the targets were stretched from indigene/settler to religion: Christianity and Islam. Violence was particularly ferocious in areas of large Christian or Muslim concentrations. In either area, virtually all persons of a different religious affiliation were forced to flee or were killed (Danfulani and Fwatshak 2002; Human Rights Watch 2001). The contest over spaces was forcefully brought home as the objective was to compel people to relocate one from spaces perceived as not belonging to them. The orgy of blood-letting continued to spread as both sides attempted to avenge the deaths of their number and loss of property.

After the 2001 explosion, there was also an outcry among the Muslims over the relocation of a polling station from Angwan Rogo, a predominantly Muslim slum, to Eto Baba, where Christians predominate. For the Muslims, the relocation was part of the calculated attempt to frustrate the quality of their participation. When the electorate assembled for voter registration in the new Polling Station in May 2002, pandemonium broke out; the orgy of violence had commenced again. There were killings by both sides and the burning of property. As in 2001, identity politics was broadened from ethnic affiliations to religion. Gangs of youths took over the streets and intercepted

passers-by. Through the administration of simple religious tests (Christians asked about the Trinity; Muslims asked about *Shahada*), people received free passage or instant death. A curfew was later imposed, and the deployed security forces rapidly brought the situation under control.

The contestations have taken other non-violent forms. Around Jos Muslims who lived in predominantly Christian neighbourhoods have moved out. Christians too who lived in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods have also moved to other spaces (Best 2007). In effect, the contest over spaces has led to various Christian and Muslim enclaves in the Plateau State capital, thereby reinforcing claims of who owns which spaces.

Indigenes/Settlers and Contestation for the State Public Space in Nasarawa

In Nasarawa state, there were similar contestations for control and partici-pation in the public space. As in Plateau, there was a similar explosion of violence in the Southern Senatorial District in Nasarawa, a state south of Plateau. The major ethnic groups in the space are Kwalla, Alago, Migili, Koro, Eggon, Tiv and Jukun (Nasarawa State Judicial Commission of In-quiry 2002:11). This district is inhabited by both agriculturalists and pastoralists, with the former in the majority. Relationships between the two groups are characterised by intermittent conflicts occasioned mostly by the straying of cattle (Nigerian cattle rearers are nomadic) into farms. Except for these sporadic incidents, relationships between the various ethnic groups were generally cordial.

The 2001 crisis related to fears of domination over this geo-political space by the Tiv, whose large numbers could sway electoral results. It was alleged that, due to 'the desire [of the "indigenes"] to suppress Tiv votes, the local tribes in Nasarawa were incited to terrorise and drive the Tiv away from the State' (Hagher 2002:207). More fundamentally, it was a problem of a sense of belonging, and how ethnic identity determined participation in local affairs and the quality of citizenship in general. Central to the crisis was the question of access to opportunities, political appointments and how these issues are determined by ethnic identity – essentially, who is an indigene or a settler. Fear of domination of the less populous ethnic groups, who consider themselves indigenes, is translated into denial of inclusive citizenship and opportunities such as others enjoy for the Tiv, a largely recent immigrant group regarded by the former as settlers (Tiv memo 2002:6).

The lingering issues received impetus from the return of democracy and party politics in 1999. Politics and elections thrive on the garnering of votes, a factor that the new civilian administration in the state seemed to recognise. Accordingly, as a reward for block votes, more Tiv people than hitherto were appointed to key positions in government. As elsewhere in Nigeria,

appointments are made on the basis of geo-political representation such that all local councils, and in some cases districts, within the councils, are primary considerations. The other ethnic groups in the senatorial district took umbrage and claimed that positions meant for the various local government council areas/spaces in the senatorial zone had gone to settlers rather than the indigenes (Nasarawa State Judicial Commission of Inquiry 2002).

In addition to representation, there were the issues of creation of chiefdoms and districts – essentially more spaces for the exercise of political power. The new civilian administration created, among others, the Azara Chiefdom, which itself brought forth new districts and villages, requiring the 'selection of new district and village heads' (Governor Adamu 2002:4). As part of the process, the district headship of Kurume became a major tussle between the Tiv and the Kwalla ethnic groups. The appointment went to a member of the Kwalla ethnic group, most of whom live in the neighbouring Plateau State. The Tiv considered the appointment a slight and argued that as the ethnic group with a higher population in the district, the appointment should have gone to them. They demanded a reversal, failing which they declined responsibility for any outcome. The new village head was soon beheaded in a nighttime invasion of his residence.

This incident became a watershed in the relationships between the Tiv and other ethnic groups, and secret killings of Tiv commenced around February 2001. In terms of the targets, 'other ethnic groups were severally and collectively pitched against the Tiv' (Federal Government of Nigeria 2003:137). The targets were thus fellow minorities, who previously had been in solidarity for collective emancipation of the North-Central region (space) from the majority Hausa-Fulani. It seemed that this wider struggle was placed in abeyance for the more immediate control and participation of the local space.

One of the immediate triggers was the murder of the Chief of Azara, who was also the Special Adviser to the State Governor. In reaction, mass killing of the Tiv commenced, forcing them to seek refuge among their ethnic kin in Benue State. Roadblocks were mounted and Tiv travellers were pulled from passing vehicles and executed (Tiv memo 2002:21). Other sources indicate that the Tiv did the same from the Benue end (Alli and Egwu 2003). There were therefore losses on both sides, with the Tiv bearing more of the brunt.

We conclude this discussion on indigenes and settlers by noting that the restrictions on participation have been formalised by the same state machinery which should ordinarily ensure equality. In virtually all of Nigeria, certificates of state and local council indigene are issued. These certificates give opportunities for employment, scholarship grants and other benefits to

indigenes to the exclusion of settlers (Alubo 2004). In addition, where non-indigenes are offered employment at all, they are placed on contract, a form which allows for periodic renewals and which does not carry retirement benefits (Egwu 2008). The situation creates the reality where some Nigerians are citizens in some spaces but not in others (Abah and Okwori 2005).

Gender and the Struggles for Public Space

The politics of access to and control of the public space also relates to women. The contestations here include all spaces such as community, local council, state and the federal level. Research (Ibrahim and Salihu 2004; Ogbuagu 2002; Simbine 2002) has shown that irrespective of military or civilian regime, the number of women in government are few and far between. In almost 32 years of military rule, there was [no] female Governor nor any in the highest policy making body, the Armed Forces Ruling Council. The dawn of democracy did not significantly change the situation; women voted, stood for elections but hardly won. Thus:

> During the last (1999) general elections, women constituted about 27 million out of the 47 million eligible registered voters but only 1.6% of them won elections. Women membership of political parties ... in 1999 was 5%, female party executives were 7% and women who qualifies as delegates stood at 8%...... Out of the 49 Ministers and Presidential Advisers… only 6 were women; only 4 of 52 ambassadors were women (Agina-Ude 2003:3).

The same poor representation of women applies to boards and parastatals, the crucial agencies for the implementation of government policies. In the 1999-2003:

> Of the 130 federal boards, only 7 are chaired by women, representing 5.6 per cent. If the 30 per cent earlier promised women [in ruling People's Democratic Party manifesto] were to be upheld, women would chair 39 of Boards out of the 130 so far announced…out of the 833 appointed members so far...women reprentIing10.3 per cent (Gimiya cited in Simbine 2002:150).

Two general elections have been held since 1999 but the gross under-representation of women persists. After the 2003 elections, the Senate with a membership of 109 had only three women while the 359-strong House of Representatives had only 12 women (Egwu 2005:25). By the 2007 elections the number of women in the House of Representatives increased to 30 and the number in the Senate increased to nine.

This situation is replicated at state and local council levels. In the 2003-2007 period, Benue state with four out of 26 legislators had the highest number of women in the country. By the 2007, this number had reduced to

two. However, there were gains as in others aspects. Benue now has the only female local council chair in the North-central zone.

Experiences in the States of Nasarawa and Southern Kaduna show that women aspiring to political office faced formidable challenges. First, if they were married to men outside their states of origin they confronted a double jeopardy as they were disowned by both states. In respect of her state of origin, she no longer belongs while the state where she is married treats her as 'outsider'. In this way, she is not perceived as belonging to any space. Second, women who run for politics are called unflattering names, and husbands come under intense pressure not to allow their wives run for elective office. Third, women are generally less knowledgeable about the political process and may not know what is involved. Finally, they receive less support both from the communities and parties supposedly because politics is outside their sphere of activities. This virtual exclusion is also rationalised by religion and culture (Alubo 2008).

Conclusion: Making Spaces more Public

The foregoing has illustrated that the public space is not just a place for the general public. As has been shown, members of the public are further divided into ethnic, religious and gender publics. Each public seems to have an agenda for exerting influence on the public space or resisting such influence. In the Nigerian experience, such countervailing struggles have resulted in explosions of violence especially between ethnic groups that are further divided into indigenes and settlers as well as into religious groups.

The contestations and resulting violence speak to the nature of citizenship and how politics of identity entitles or disenfranchises people. In the final analysis, at stake is the nature of national integration. In a situation where one's rights, entitlements and opportunities are circumscribed by identities and what spaces such identities are the basis of inclusion or exclusion in available opportunities, national integration is tenuous. Indeed, part of the survival strategy of those discriminated against in certain spaces (this is very common because of the limited number of locations where paid employment is more available), is to seek refuge in their ethnic or religious groups. As Abah and Okwori have argued, those left out in the cold but

> Severed from their relatives back home, discriminated against by host ethnic group who at every opportunity, draws attention to their status as foreigners trying to take the food away from the 'son of the soil', the migrants[settlers] have no option but to reach out to their kinship ties to dispel their insecurity (Abah and Okwori 2002:27)

Another strategy is to demand for new local councils or states which would provide new spaces for the fuller realisation of citizenship rights and entitlements (Alubo 2004).

In this way, the entire country is divided into various spaces controlled by different groups of indigenes or religious groups to the detriment of a clear sense of any overall Nigerian public space where members of the public as citizens can bring up and negotiate more general issues. What has become more common is the plethora of agitations by geo-ethnic and regional groups (Madunagu 2002) to create spaces for the exercise of more citizenship entitlements and self-determination. However, the aftermath of each state creation exercise does not really solve the problem; instead new minorities emerge and the former begin to demand more states and councils almost immediately (Toure 2003; Egwu 2008). The more states are created, the more Nigeria is effectively balkanised into ethnic and religious spaces.

Part of what stokes the fire and the contestations is the absence of much material benefit from this overall space or common Nigerian citizenship. The material benefits come from state and local councils which are the contested terrain between various groups and hence the inclusion and exclusion (Abah and Okwori 2002, 2005; Alubo 2008). At the moment, the contestations show that Nigeria is a country with many citizenships where some are citizens in some spaces but not in others. It is in this sense that citizenship in Nigeria has many geographies (Abah 2003).

While we have here focused on Nigeria, there are parallels for the rest of the African continent. Like Nigeria, there are contests between natives, indigenes and settlers in terms of entitlements and opportunities (Neocosmos 2007; Mamdani 2000). Where Nigerians demand new spaces by agitating for local councils and states, some ethnic and religious groups that feel marginalised in Africa demand secession; examples here include the Lord's Resistance Movement in Uganda; rebels and struggles for the control of mineral resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and, to some extent, the problem in Dafur, Sudan. Many of Africa's civil conflicts are about spaces; who belongs where; and the nature of participation. In an era of growing poverty and emiseration in the continent, ethno-religious conflicts over ownership of resource-endowed spaces have become frequent. The agenda must include moving from ethnic and religiously-controlled spaces to a more 'national' level which would provide a truer 'Public Space' for all members of the public.

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