**THE SIERRA LEONE PROBLEM**

The Sierra Leone problem as I see it, is not just about Land Tenure. It is way deeper than that. Until we are willing to deal with all the aspects of the problem, and truly work towards a united Sierra Leone,- combining Freetown with the Provinces in order to make a United country, we will never solve it. The mere fact that we are still referring to provincials and Krios, and this paper differentiates them, indicates a problem which needs to change. I must say though that Freetown has undergone a fundamental change as more people from the provinces now live there.

Some of the issues as I see it are:

**Long standing superior attitude of Krios toward the provincials**. Not so long ago, when a Krio asked me (I am of mixed culture,) “wetin mek you choose you daddy ing culture, you nor choose you mammy yone? *(why did you choose you father’s culture (provincial) instead of your mother’s (Freetown)*, then went on to announce that I must have an agenda, raise a red flag. It indicated to me that there was a major problem. On the other hand, a cousin from the provinnses may say “ah nor wan de wit you Krio paddy dem” *(I do not want to be around your Krio friends)* There are many similar anecdotes which can be told especially by some of us who are of mixed culture.

There was a time when if a Krio girl had a boyfriend with a last name like Koroma or Bangura or such, the family was up in arms, and tried to break up that relationship. In my opinion, many Krios feel superior to those from up country, because they are better educated, they are Christian and are more likely to live like the westerners. I have known some Mixed culture folks who prefer not to reveal their provincial ties and would deny that they speak their tribal language. Some would not be caught dead in African attire.

**The attitudes of the Missionaries (the whites) and some of the newcomers.** Many missionaries saw the provincials as heathens, and treated them as second class citizens. I once heard a Krio man mutter as he was running from a tribal ceremony in Freetown, “den heathen ya” *These heathens!!*

**The differences in ideology** – What is the African way of thinking and what is the Western way?. I believe there is a difference, both have their merits, and one is not better than the other.

**The way each group does things**. What are the differences in rules and regulations?. What are the differences in thinking about land ownership between the Provinces and Freetown?.

It is my understanding that, like many natives in the world, (Polynesian Natives, Native Americans etc.),in the provinces, the chiefs were the stewards of the land they were on. They were the Landlords. but it was not theirs to sell. They gave land when it was needed, in return for “Cola”. They could lease the land but not sell it. If the Lessor died without any descendants, the land reverted back to the Lesee or chief. Of course, as in every situation, there are those in leadership positions, even today, who believe they own everything they supposed to take care of, instead of thinking of themselves as just stewards. Today’s leaders are often reluctant to give up their positions especially if they are making a lot of money, but. not everyone is crooked. Today, given our Western ideology and dependence on money for all things in our lives, it is expected that land in the provinces should be sold just the way it is in Freetown and non one wants to think about an alternative which just might work. Why can’t it be leased in respect of the beliefs of the provincials? One fear, (*and it is a fear of the unknown!*) I have heard against leasing, is that when one leases, the chief has the power to change his/her mind at any time, and abruptly end the lease Today, in Freetown, there many pieces of property owned by families who were either given by the ancestors, or bought their property. The problem, they are either all dead, or are overseas, and have not been home in years. These properties simply lie fallow, and eventually rot. Probably, if they had been leased they could have been in use today, having reverted back to the government.

**Differences in the Educational Standards in Freetown vs. Provinces**. How many good schools are in the provinces? Yes there are a few that can be named, e.g. Bo School, Harford School, and a few others, but they are precious few, compared to Freetown. When a school was opened in Freetown for Provincial students, e.g. the Albert Academy, there was resentment on the part of the Krios, and the school quickly dubbed ‘Mende man college’. Can you imagine the feelings of resentment the students must have had as they tried to get an education in that atmosphere? I have learned over the years that grudges run deep and can last for centuries, and can move from one generation to another. I believe that there are some deep seated grudges which need to be corrected. We must begin to talk with each other and begin this dialogue. Ignoring it would be like American say that now they have a black president, the racial issues are over. But they are not resolved!!! Racism is rearing its ugly head during this election cycle, in a very ugly way!!!

Indeed, we need to go back to the beginning and really take a look at what things were like then, then ask the questions, what changed when the Freed Slaves and Re-captives arrived? How did their form of government differ from what already existed? What efforts were made to integrate the newcomers with those who were already there? Very few krios, except those who went to trade or to work, have gone to the provinces to see what it is like or to lease land.

Then came the rebel war, when many provincial s fled to Freetown for safety. (There was a time when Freetown was called Sierra Leone by the provincials. To them it was a different country similar to Temne Country, Mende Country and so on. The refugees abandoned the villages (which had no resources, conducive to survival. Many had no water, definitely no lights, limited schools or teachers, no sources of employment, youth programs etc.) Life in Freetown was better than what they left behind.

To me, the solution is very simple and just might work.

1. The administrative government can be moved to the middle of the country, somewhere above BO, where it straddles the North and South (the Temne and Mende countries), whilethe Financial government remains in Freetown. This move will bring with it, Electricity, Good roads, potable water, (if nothing else, to make the ministers comfortable). There would be, educational institutions, better quality of teachers, employment, better health resources, agriculture and easier transportation - a good railway service. People would be willing to return home. Fresh produce (which is currently wasting up country), can be brought to market in Freetown. The country would begin to knit together and become united. It is a big sacrifice which we have to make for us to move forward. As long as we remain where we are – doing ‘bandaid solutions and actually wasting a lot of money with our piece meal projects, we are marching in place.
2. Intermarriage will solve the superiority question, as well as the tribalism problem. People will be able to, get to know and understand each other. This process has already started.
3. Taking a look at our own land tenure system, discuss with the chiefs and create a system which suits Sierra Leone and not the West. Who says their way is always the best anyway?? We definitely need to have more pride in our country and our abilities.
4. Establish an easy way for those in the Diaspora to come home, even if for short periods of time, to help to develop a new and united Sierra Leone. The brains are out of the country, yet we complain about those who by Grace, are trying to hold the country together.

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