



Post covid-19 examination of socio-ethnic concerns in South-west, Nigeria

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Abstract

It is no longer a hearsay that Nigeria is going through multidimensional challenges threatening the peace of the nation. Nigeria has been enmeshed in all kinds of crises fueled by ethnic and religious bigotries. The Post COVID-19 assessment of the socio-ethnic concerns of this study revolves around some of the sociologically and ethnic challenges that the South-western States of Nigeria have got to deal with in the new normal. In the past, the diversity of ethnicity used to be a major source of strength and national identity but now becoming the source of many evils. The reasons are not far-fetched simply because it has been badly influenced, leading to intolerance and anomie. Even though efforts have been made to proffer solutions through various dialogues and state interventions; the impact of such measures has yielded little or no result even after the COVID-19 pandemic when the nation should be focusing on economic resuscitation, the issue of insecurity and ethnic conflicts are still part of the current challenges that Nigeria is facing. Hence, the need to examine the socio-ethnic concerns vis-à-vis the reasons they are still sources of worry in the post-COVID-19 period. This paper adopts historical and sociological approaches to achieve its objective. Findings show that the effect of the 1914 amalgamation, bad leadership, ethnic superiority, and biased legislation among others are the major factors responsible for these socio-ethnic concerns; particularly in the South-Western part of Nigeria. The study concludes that the





practice of true federalism; and respect for the rights and cultures of other ethnic groups represented in the south western part of Nigeria would help in achieving the long-desired peaceful coexistence that will usher in national unity, peace, and development.

Keywords: COVID-19, Ethnicity, Religion, Socio-ethnic Concern, and the Nigerian Society.

Introduction

Generally speaking, Nigeria is said to be a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation because of its diversity in ethnicity and religious status. There are over three hundred (300) ethnic groups belonging to various religious affiliations in Nigeria. This diversity has given Nigeria the advantage of a rich cultural heritage and social identity among nations of the world. However, yesterday's strength is fast becoming today's woe as this diversity has not been effectively managed to foster social cohesion and integration resulting in brutal violence in various parts of the nation. Apparently, the experience of social disorder, social disintegration, and the tendency of a failed State are some of the naked pieces of evidence with which the current state of Nigeria can be evaluated.

The thrust of this paper is to have a Post COVID-19 assessment of some socio-ethnic concerns in the southwestern part of Nigeria known predominantly as the community of the Yoruba people but accommodates people from other backgrounds in the spirit of one Nigeria. The paper adopts historical and sociological approaches to investigate the surrounding factors responsible for the socio-ethnic crisis, politics and the quest for national identity at a time Nigeria needs to concentrate more on resuscitating the economy made worst by the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Idea of Socio-Ethnicity in Southwest, Nigeria

Society is made up of people who form an integral part of nationhood; hence, the definition of sociology is the development of the structure and functioning of human society. This gives credence to the social engagement of people in line with their interpersonal and/or intercultural relationships. Ethnicity is a sense of collective belonging that ties together ethnic groups based on a common language, history, culture, race, norms, values, traditions, religion, nationality, and ancestral descent. Therefore, an ethnic group is a group of people that have the same culture, race, language, or dialect which differentiates them from others. Ethnicity is a complicated concept to explain due to its nature of ambiguous features. Hassan (2008), explains that "ethnicity relates to a people



whose unity rests on race, language, religion and cultural ties or bonds. Enloe (1973) equally observes that, of all the groups that man attaches himself to, ethnic groups seem the most encompassing and enduring. It can be a building block, but also a potential stumbling block on the road to modernity and no ethnic group remains isolated as it shapes an individual's perception with a sense of belongingness. In the Southwestern part of Nigeria, there has been a similitude of peaceful co-existence among various ethnic groups as well as among religious sects for decades until recent years when a growing concern is raised about ethnic cum religious crisis within the southwestern states. The continual problem of socio-ethnicity in Nigeria; especially in the South-West can be attributed to the incompatible structure and malfunctioning of Nigerian federalism. Elaigwu (2005) validates that, the recent inter-ethnic/religious conflicts in various states across the country are all part of the bubbles of the Nigerian federation. They are based on the historical structures of mutual fears and suspicions among Nigerian groups in a competitive process that reveals their dissatisfaction with the state of the federation.

Adebayo (2010) asserts that attempts to check the defect in the system of federalism brought about the emergence of many other principles, like the "quota system" and the Federal Character principle of the 1979 Constitution. Several steps have also been taken to promote unity among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Such steps include the establishment of federal institutions in some states of the federation, the promotion of national sporting activities, and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme; to mention a few. All of which the South-West has benefited from but for the current trends of socio-ethnic concerns which pose threats to good governance and nationhood in Nigeria.

Factors Responsible for Socio-Ethnic Concerns

This aspect of the study highlights some of the factors that are responsible for the socio-ethnic concerns in the South-West as advanced above.

Poor Leadership

Leadership is very key to the national or regional security of any nation. The definition of any leader is seen in the result that plays out from the amount and kind of influence it has on its people. While good leadership has a positive influence on the people for national integration; bad leadership has a negative influence on the people for national disintegration. Dawood (2015) argued that incompetent leadership is the problem of Nigeria's diversity which manifests very often in ethno-religious crises, ethnicity among others. Since 1960 when



the country attained independence, the ethnoreligious crises have left the country comatose. This means that under bad leadership people are dissatisfied and are disconnected from their leaders and themselves. Where leaders are nepotistic, biased, and discriminatory; the people, the followers, or members of the society will react to find expression for their dissatisfaction, using hatred, hate speeches, riots, and so forth.

Bias Legislation and Ethnic/Religious Superiority (Arrogant ideology):

Beginning with Ife-Modakeke communal clashes in 2000 (1849-2000), historians believe that the major causes of their conflict (were land ownership, payment of land rent (Isakole), the establishment of local government, and the placement of its headquarters, all of which are reflected in cultural identity, economics, and politics. Poor intervention from the government (both federal and state) of the day escalated the crisis. The sociological effects were far more reaching. There was a complete social disorder and breakdown of social control within the areas covered.

The arrogant ideology of an ethnic group more often than not creates some sort of oppression. Where one ethnic group feels more important, better, useful, and entitled than others often leads to social anomie. For instance, the Kwara state government compelled all schools including Christian-based schools to allow female Muslim students to wear Hijab within the schools' premises and during active hours. While the Muslims in the state were happy, the Christians were not comfortable. Recently, the supreme court ruled that female Muslims can wear their hijab in public places, institutions, and so forth. This judgment was termed corrupt, as it prioritized the Islamic dictates over other religions in a secular state. Imam Abdul-azeez Onike representing NASFAT, commented that "Hijab: Supreme Court's ruling strengthens our belief in the judiciary"

The reactions from non-Islamic adherents are not funny at all: A lawyer expressing the implication of this biased ruling dressed to a court hall in a native doctor's attire as a traditionalist. On another occasion, a Christian lawyer dressed like a catholic priest, wearing religious regalia. It was told that the judge could not continue the proceeding as a result. No religion should be placed above others.

Some Post-COVID-19 Socio-Ethnic Concerns in South-West, Nigeria

The Post COVID-19 era is also referred to as the new normal. A period following the global upsurge of the Corona Virus Disease pandemic that reordered usual practices and halted global activities. It challenged the social, educational, political, psychological,

physiological, emotional, spiritual, and economic well-being of the World. Surprisingly, the first confirmed case of this pandemic in Nigeria was tracked in February 2020 in Lagos, the commercial hub of the South-West.

It baffles to note that, at a time when the government of Nigeria should focus on the aftermath of the pandemic and the reality of the new normal which has grossly affected virtually every facet of the life of the citizens; the disheartening issues of insecurity, kidnapping, ethnic crisis, political and religious bigotries, industrial strikes, unemployment and so forth, are the order of the day; and they are like adding salt to injury. Some of these challenges are captured in this study as socio-ethnic concerns, especially the ones peculiar to the South-West.

The Igangan Community Onslaught

Nnoli, (1995:4) explains that "ethnic conflict emanates as a result of common group awareness to live or urge to achieve some objectives that are seen to be of great value and which are perceived as being stopped."The multi-ethnic society promotes segregation, discrimination, and polarization of the society characterized by "We", "us" or "Them." According to Usman (1987:2) cited by Usman and Garba (2019); "The emerging ethnic crisis has its origin from the past due to mistrust, suspicion, selfishness, poverty, envy, ignorance and unemployment between or among ethnic groups, in Nigeria".

One of the Socio-ethnic concerns of the post-COVID-19 is the ethnic clash between the Fulani extraction and Yorubas living in Igangan, Ibarapa Community in Oyo State. It is a social concern as it threatens the peaceful coexistence of the Nigerian community. The careful evaluation given in a report by the Editor of National Daily (2021), revealed that the unrest was a result of some Fulani herders encroachment into the farmlands of Yorubas within the same community. It was gathered by an eye witness, the secretary of the Farmers Union for the past two decades who claimed to have documented the activities of the Fulani herders for such a long time. Further investigation by Olaniyi and Oyewale (2021) showed that there have been kidnappings of members of the community which are predominantly Yorubas. 50 million naira ransom was reported to have been paid by the members of the community to the Fulani herders at the time of these happenings.

The Social concern has been the insecurity growing in the community and environs which has led to the loss of lives and properties while the battle to cope with the pandemic was still on. Apparently, indelible damage has been made in the mind of the host members of the



community; state delegation notwithstanding made effort to mediate between the two ethnic groups living in the same community to restore social order and peaceful coexistence. However, the clash has awoken a Yoruba secessionist named Sunday Adeyemo (popularly known as Sunday Igboho) and his supporters who started a movement that has become a threat to national unity in the bid to have a Yoruba Nation and have the Fulanis ejected from Yoruba community.

It is important to note that the Fulani herders' community also has been coexisting with the Yorubas for many years without any major clash. Who could be wrong? One may ask. Have the Yorubas attempted to break the peaceful coexistence of many years? Interactions with some of the members of this community revealed that while the Yorubas are suspicious of the Fulanis based on recent killings in other parts of Nigeria, the Fulanis feel empowered by the current federal authorities who are dominated by their kinsmen.

Agitation for Yoruba Nation

Although this has been before COVID-19, it became more pronounced Post-COVID-19 due to the alleged ethnic bias on the part of the Nigerian government which is characterised by nepotism and marginalisation in the distribution of state power and resources. The implication is a major social uproar in every part of the nation especially among the marginalised ethnic group – predominantly, the southern region of the country. In the South West, Sunday Igboho; and in the South East, Nnamdi Kanu as secessionists with growing followers agitating for divorce from what many sometimes referred to as a marriage of inconvenience by Lord Frederick Lugard in 1914. The national unity was threatened until the secessionists were captured by the power that be. However, as long as the injustice, marginalisation, nepotism, and so forth, persist, the nation is said to be postponing the evil days.

Irrecoverable Ruins of Modakeke-Ife Inter-Religious Clashes

Ife-Modakeke, is situated in Osun State in the South-West Zone of Nigeria. Historical accounts have it that Ifes and Modakekes are sons and daughters of the same parents. As Yorubas, their ancestry is traced to Oduduwa the progenitor of Yoruba race. Ife-Modakeke ethnic riot was a major ethnic crisis in the Southwestern part of Nigeria that resulted in the loss of many lives and properties. Historians believe that the major causes of their conflict were: land ownership, payment of land rent (Isakole), the establishment of local government, and the placement of its headquarters, all of which are reflected in cultural identity, economics, and politics. Poor intervention from the

government (both federal and state) of the day escalated the crisis. The sociological effects were far more reaching. There was a complete social disorder and breakdown of social control within the areas covered.

The socioeconomic impact of the crisis on the two communities is more or less irrecoverable as many parts of the two communities are still battling rebuilding infrastructures lost to the clashes. The emergence of COVID-19 has even made the socioeconomic recovery of the communities even more difficult.

Emilokan Political Campaign

As the 2023 general election unfolds events, presidential candidates emerge from various political parties' primaries laid with ethnic bias. The Slogan "Emilokan" has unofficially been captured in the Nigerian political lexicon as a turn-by-turn. Sources show that the slogan is birthed out of a political frustration of a popular political figure; about the lack of support for his bid to secure the party's presidential nomination. It was at this time that the phrase "Emi Lokan" began to circulate the country. The slogan is alleged to have under-toned with ethnic bigotry. This is a social concern as election into the highest public office should be based on merit and not 'emilokan' (turn-by-turn) basis.

The highest office of the nation, the presidency should not be assumed based on entitlement but on national inclusiveness, justice, equity, and fairness. Issue-based campaigns should be done within a specific ideological framework. The concept of 'emilokan' seems to be tending towards ethnic division which may go a long way resulting in voting apartheid. The religious coloration of the Muslim-Muslim ticket to the presidency has also generated uproars among the Christians - even among non-Christians which may also determine the side the voting pendulum will swing.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is still very real and its impacts are still very much felt in all facets of the nation, particularly in the South-Western region. Therefore the government should ensure that measures are enforced to coordinate the current concerns such that they do not escalate beyond what its capacity can manage. The government should continue to provide welfare and related support to cushion the adverse effect the current concerns have on the nations, particularly in the South West.



Nigeria as a nation is achievable with the right leadership having a political will to drive desired unity without which national cohesion and unity will remain a mirage. Particularly in the south/western part of Nigeria where there is a movement to completely disintegrate from Nigeria.

Recommendation

The paper, therefore, recommends that the states within the region (South-West) should intensify border fortification through empowered state or community policing efforts to ensure that the core responsibility of the government of protecting lives and properties within their region is not left unattended. The security of south western Nigeria should be taken paramount by the state governments to defend their borders against banditry, kidnappings, and other related insecurity issues.

The study also recommends that governments should focus on ensuring equity, justice, and fairness are transparently administered as this will douse the agitation from the region of the country; this way, the goal of national unity and social order would be achieved. This study, therefore, recommends that true federalism be practised and that provisions be made succinctly clear in the constitution on how power should be rotated to allow for inclusiveness in the state administration of power and resources. The researcher, therefore, recommends national dialogue that is born out of the genuine concern and desired change. A national conference where the outcome shall be implemented and not be swept under the carpet.

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