

Being and Nothingness of COVID-19 in Nigeria: A Case of Excessive Propaganda and Misplaced Political Economy

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Abstract

The ontological character of COVID-19 as a pandemic in Nigeria is bizarre and interesting when viewed from the Nigerian perspective. The being of COVID-19 as a disease cannot be contested, and its claimed magnitude cannot be determined or ascertained in Nigeria. The claimed rise, prevention and control in Nigeria as propagated on our media can be viewed with mixed feelings. It is a fact from all scientific investigation and research that there exists a pandemic of this nature worldwide, but when we analyze the political economy of COVID-19 in Nigeria, we may begin to wonder the distinction between Being and nothingness of the disease in Nigeria. We may be forced to begin to wonder the role of propaganda in this “pandemic” Our approach shall be descriptive and analytic. The questions that may be asked are, what actually is the pandemic? Is it the phobia or the disease itself? This is critical when analyzed from those who had practical experiences of the disease and survived or their loved ones survived or died in it. In addition are those who have neither of the above but died from the vicious propaganda and side effect of it. The objective of this paper emphatically posits that the being of COVID-19 in Nigeria when compared to other diseases is nothing but excessive propaganda motivated by misplaced political economy.

Keywords: COVID-19, Exploitation, Malaria, Pandemic and Vaccines.

Introduction

The word “COVID-19” in Nigeria and other parts of the world echoes in the minds of men with shivers. We may speak as observers who neither us nor our loved ones Home and Abroad died or got infected with the disease. Those who may have been directly infected or affected may reflect on the title “Being and nothingness of covid-19” and might wonder why it appears we have trivialized the “dreaded” disease with Philosophical expression as above. Whatever expression, understanding and experience we have relating to COVID-19 in Nigeria, one thing that stands out is that there are complications in the issues relating to the being of the disease in Nigeria. Further analysis on this issue of COVID-19 shows that the uproar concerning COVID-19 in Nigeria amount to nothingness.

The Being of COVID-19 in Nigeria

The question here is, is the existence of COVID-19 a fact in Nigeria? To the common man in the streets of Nigeria that hasn’t any direct experience of the disease nor had his neighbor died of COVID-19, its existence is a farce. To the wealthy that can travel

comfortably outside the country and have seen and experienced the disease, asking this question amounts to being irrational taking cognizance of the global outcry. Why is this so? The reason is that the common Nigerian who accepts that the disease exist believes that it is a disease for the rich and privileged people in the society. It is conjectured that the disease is for the punishment of the wicked rich people, especially the bad politicians. So far records have shown that those mostly infected are the wealthy and the celebrities. It began with one of the highest political figures in Nigeria, the late chief of staff to the President Abba Kyari who died of COVID-19 in April 2020. "The deceased had tested positive to the ravaging COVID-19, and had been receiving treatment. But he died on Friday, April 17 2020..." (Aghaeze .S. 2020) Definitely he was not the first but as a public figure his death by the disease was a public issue. The contention of the being or non-being of the disease is an epistemological issue despite scientific evidence based on results of what we have been told.

The proposition of the common man in the streets of Nigeria is based on the mystical perception that there is a karmic Law which the sickness COVID-19 is instituting. Unfortunately, the high and mighty in the society have died. On the 25th of June 2020, the former governor of Oyo State, Senator Abiola Ajimobi died of complications from covid-19. Wahab Adegberno died on 2nd July 2020, he was the commissioner for Health in Ondo State. Buruji Kashamu died on the 8th of August 2020, Adebayo Osinowo died on 15th of June 2020, etc. A wide range of public officials have tested positive but were fortunate to recover, they range from the Governor of Abia State Okezie Ikepeazu, Governor of Bauchi State Bola Mohamed and host of others (Ayeni .T. 2020) We may have heard of all these elites and others dead or infected in one way or the other because they are public figures, however, if the common man on the streets dies of COVID-19, we may not know, neither will it generate public attention. Thus, the being of COVID-19 is a fact, but its spread and infection is relative to individuals, people, races and climate. Why is this so? We can say it is so as a result of the nature of the disease. The nature of the disease is such that the 'Nigeria factor' renders it less potent. The way it affects and kills people especially in the western world and other areas like China, Brazil and South Africa is not the same in Nigeria. The Nigeria factor that is responsible for this low infection is not a totally different climate and environment, not very wonderful preventive measure but inherent immunity as a result of frequent treatment of malaria disease.

Many infected Nigerians that survived it attested to the fact that they were treated with malaria drugs. One can therefore attest that Nigerians are to some extent have immunity to the disease and that accounts for it not being devastating in Nigeria as in other climate.

The Paradox of Covid-19 and the Political Economy of the Disease

In delving into the paradox of COVID-19, we should ask ourselves this question. What makes a particular disease a pandemic? A disease is a Pandemic when its outbreak spreads across countries or continents and takes more lives. COVID-19 has been categorized as pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) because of its ravaging destruction of lives in the western part of the world and China. It was published that Africans will die in Millions with COVID-19 infections (Okereke .C, Kelsey .N. 2020) Melinda Gates

expressed this belief and stated she “foresees bodies lying around in the streets of African Countries”. It was reported that a day later after her comment, it was announced that the United States, where Gates is from, had surpassed Italy in number of deaths from COVID-19. We see the statement by Melinda as propaganda to frighten Africans in preparation for the vaccine being initiated to have easy access into Africa.

The prediction of Bill and Melinda Gates and the claim by the WHO (www.voanews.com) n.d did not work as expected because the rate at which the disease ravaged the west far exceeded their imagination. Surprisingly, Africans especially Nigeria did not really experience death as predicted but the Phobia. It is true that we lost prominent people in our society due to COVID-19, but its ravaging effect as propagated is a misnomer.

The issue of the pandemic nature of covid-19 is relative when juxtaposed with the rate of infection in the west and China. This proposition is on the grounds that there are more deadly diseases in Africa and Nigeria in particular that claims more lives than COVID-19 yearly, yet has not been taken seriously because the western pharmaceutical companies are making huge profits from it. No Company or Organization has volunteered to sponsor or develop a vaccine for them. Developing a workable and successful vaccine means losing business in Africa.

Malaria and typhoid have been ravaging Africa and Nigeria in particular, HIV-AIDS has been with the world for years and ravaging and claiming many lives in Eastern Africa including Nigeria. Hepatitis B and C has been there taking its victims. In all these, vaccine have not been developed since the last Fifty years because it is peculiar to Africa and Nigeria. The western pharmaceutical companies must have a market for their drugs. One wonders how a vaccine could be developed within a year for COVID-19. Firstly, we may postulate that it is because it involves the infection of western people and secondly, they are looking for a worldwide market for their vaccine. The irony of it all is that for the first time in the history of medical practice in this contemporary period, there has been open criticism of the COVID-19 vaccine. (Verman .C. 2021) The Tanzania’s president was criticized for dismissing COVID-19 vaccine. (Kombe .C. 2021) On various social media medical, medical experts who criticized the vaccine were censured, yet the Nigerian Government has been romancing on the possibility of enacting a law to enforce the vaccines on the citizens. As at July 2021 more than a year since the announcement of COVID-19, death rate in Nigeria as at 14 July 2021 stood at 2125 (Worldometers 2021) this figure shows that COVID-19 kills 5.6 persons a day in Nigeria which is nothing when compared to the daily deaths from non-pandemic diseases like malaria, typhoid, cancer, and hepatitis B and C.

Yearly death rate from malaria is over 300,000 with one million cases of infected persons. No vaccine has been developed because they felt it was not necessary. 11% of maternal mortality is as a result of Malaria, yet it’s not labeled pandemic. Over 215,000 deaths occur in Nigeria from HIV/AIDS infection, yet no vaccines have been developed. An estimated number of 19 million Nigerians (Hepatitis Foundation 2020) are living with Hepatitis B and C and 884,000 die each year, yet it did not attract the development of vaccine. The reason for this is not far-fetched, pharmaceutical companies benefits from drugs sold in the treatment of these diseases. Why is covid-19 vaccine an issue in Nigeria

compared to the above diseases? Why should Nigeria romance with the nothingness of COVID-19 when juxtaposed with malaria and typhoid? One major reason is profit from agents and big pharmaceutical organization seeking to rule the world through the vaccine.

The Irony of Covid-19 as a Source of Exploitation in Nigeria.

The weird politics that emerge as a result of COVID-19 in Nigeria is bizarre. Nigerian citizens have been on constant bombardment by terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Bandits and killer Herdsmen. Many communities have been ravaged with many brutally killed. In all these, perpetrators most times were not arrested. Kidnaped people are most times released through government negotiations with the terrorist and paying of ransom to them thereby empowering them financially. On this ground, the government in many occasions has been classified as insensitive to the cries of the people. However, with the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic in China, Europe and America, the average citizens in Nigeria appeared shocked at the government's attitude to it. The federal government took it as a matter of urgency to act like Florence's Nightingale but with the spirit of Judas Iscariot. The question now arose, when did the federal government become so humane to wish to save lives of Nigerians on a disease that doesn't have destructive capability like Malaria, Typhoid and HIV-AIDS? No politician wants to take treatment in any of our hospitals because they are substandard, our military can't withstand most insurgents because of substandard weapons, but the government donated billions on a disease that cannot be equated with the mortality rate of malaria, typhoid, AIDS or Hepatitis. The reason for all this might be predicated on expected foreign donations and dependency on the west. The government through its weapon of propaganda about the high fatality rate of the disease created unwarranted fear among Nigerians and its lock down policy led to so many hardships including starvation, avoidable deaths as a result of lack of access to health facilities, ugly sharp practices, primitive and unorthodox preventive and curative measures, domestic violence and law enforcement agencies brutalities on innocent and defenseless citizens etc.

The competitive Scramble for a vaccine that has been subject of controversy is an indication that the political economy of COVID-19 is that of extraction and exploitation in Nigeria. A major issue is relying on analysis of data on trends of COVID-19 infections from the world Health Organization and dependent on African center for disease control and prevention. This reliance amounts to unreflective dependency on perceived western supremacy in medical practice. In Nigeria the desire for profit from foreign donors motivated the consideration for welfare package for the people. The intent is not really for the people but for the enrichment of some selfish political leaders.

The federal government of Nigeria announced the provision of palliative for the lockdown experienced between March 2020 and July 2020. Billions of naira was released from public and private donations to be given as cash and food to the citizens. The monies did not circulate as was announced and food and beverages meant for the citizens were stored in warehouses all over the country by some political leaders without distribution. The intention for not distributing them maybe to sell them privately. There are video evidences on social media showing warehouses where undistributed food items were looted by the masses nationwide. (Channels TV. 2020) By this, we can conjecture that the

uproar about COVID-19 in Nigeria and claimed or perceived government assistance was not for altruistic reason or the benevolence of those in power, but was due to selfishness and personal aggrandizement.

It is strange and suspicious to hear that the Nigerian government released the sum of 10 billion naira for local vaccine production. (Onyedika-Ugoeze .N. 2021) We feel that this is misplaced priority because COVID-19 is nothing compared to malaria and typhoid, HIV-AIDS and Hepatitis that claims hundreds of thousands of lives in Nigeria as against the propaganda of COVID-19. Since the release of that sum of money, there has been no comment on the research or possible local vaccine production. The propaganda concerning COVID-19 has created a phobia that makes Nigeria trivialized more deadly diseases in favor of it. For fear of being infected by the controversial COVID-19 vaccine, the governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello categorically stated that he will not take the vaccine and doesn't need it because he is healthy. (BBC Pidgin. 2020) Even the efficacy of the vaccines is now a subject of controversy as some people vaccinated still die of the disease. Just recently the manufacturers of the vaccine are all requesting for a third 'jab' as the vaccines are proving less potent for the disease. This indicates that the vaccine is a kind of coax.

Recommendation and Conclusion

This paper does not negate the being or existence of COVID-19 as a disease. It however, postulates that the propaganda of the diseases has created a phobia among Nigerians such that they feel it is deadlier than diseases that have been killing hundreds of thousands of Nigerians yearly. The position is that the diseases can be treated locally just as our alternative medical practitioners have been treating symptoms and diseases of related dimension.

This paper also posits that COVID-19 is nothing compared to the destructive capabilities of malaria etc. The propaganda regarding the disease is misplaced and based on extortion and exploitation, both by the Nigerian leaders and foreign pharmaceutical companies with the interest of conquering the world market for their vaccine programme.

The only solution is to look inwards and develop indigenous approach to the treatment of the disease. Both the orthodox medical practitioners and the alternative medical practitioners should be encouraged to produce medication on this. The aggressive frightful propaganda on COVID-19 should be redirected towards healthy living to avoid deadlier diseases like malaria, hepatitis and HIV-Aids whose mortality rate yearly revolves over half a million deaths in Nigeria. Nigeria should be cautious in accepting the controversial vaccines from other countries of the world. In reality, the beingness of COVID-19 in Nigeria is nothing compared to hundreds of thousands of deaths yearly from almost neglected diseases peculiar to Africans.

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