

Muslims in the city of Calabar: spatial segregation and the ghetto

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Abstract

The major characteristic of Nigerian society is its pluralism. With the change in the patterns of economic development, the diversity of Nigerian culture is gaining complexity. While maintaining the ideas of secularism and limiting caste politics, society is moving towards polarisation and fragmentation. Moreover, the issue of social exclusion has taken over the recent discourse from central policy-making to political debates and academic discourse, first in Western Europe and later in other parts of the world. Within these challenges, the role of public policy multiplies. As a manifestation of power, the public policy aims at the general concern of its citizens through policy alternatives. While the issue of minority rights has become an important topic, there can be numerous reasons quoted and unquoted for the existing discrimination among Muslims. The exclusion of Muslims as a minority in the Christian-dominated city of Calabar, located in Cross River State, Nigeria, is a living reality. The increasing interplay of religion with education and the under-representation of Calabar City Muslims in the ghettos motivated this research. This work aims to highlight the lack of experience regarding education and the patterns of segregation of Muslims in the city. The mainstream neglects and the everyday struggles of Muslims in maintaining their lives in the ghettos, where the people in the area are languishing and going through cycles of impoverishment in the larger context of urbanisation and globalisation. Also, as settlements influence the making of identity, the choice of educational institutions and socio-economic positionality affect the overall engagement of Muslims in the mainstream.

Keywords: Nigeria, Calabar, ghetto, Muslims, urban space.

1. Introduction

The interest in patterns of representation and inclusion has widened in Nigeria and across the world. In the past few years, the demand for policies of inclusion has considerably increased. Further, the need for public interest and equal rights has

increased the urgency to act. The propagation of democracy has led to a consensus that, in a democratic system, any single group should not have a monopoly on governance. This has led to a greater awareness of the importance of developing policies that address marginalised groups' aspirations to build equity and stability within the political system.

Under-representation of minorities has been discussed in political debates. L. Wirth (1941) describes under-represented minority group as one of individuals who, due to their physical or cultural traits, are picked out for unequal treatment within the society in which they reside and become targets of collective discrimination. From the arithmetical perspective, the term *minority* refers to a group less numerous than others in a society. From the arithmetical perspective, Muslims are a religious minority of less than 5% in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, Nigeria (John, Ekeke, 2017). However, the Nigerian constitution has anticipated the right to freedom of religion, the conservation of every cultural group's language, and the management of educational institutions. These exclusive rights have offered the minority groups an alternative identity along with the public policies that apply to all.

When groups are restricted from accessing government facilities, it is the constitutional duty of the state to intervene. A. Béteille (2008) and P. Velaskar (1990) point out that inequality in access to education leads to further disparities that create backwardness for the individual, who cannot access other facilities. At the time of schooling, the children's self-image is formed. Students have reported being targeted and questioned about their religious beliefs. Thus, the interaction of a child in school with classmates, teachers and parents aids in the development of self-image. The present research identifies underlying theories of social exclusion concerning the Muslim community in the city of Calabar. This work aims to address the schooling experiences of children living in ghettos and how ghettoisation further perpetuates inequalities within the educational system.

2. Spatial structure and the segregation

Over the past decades, segregation has been widely discussed by social scientists, urban geographers, and planners and most of the literature sees segregation as

a case of spatial injustice. *Segregation* is a term that comes from the Latin *segregare*, which means “to separate an animal from the herd” (Rosiek, Kinslow, 2015: 85). Transposed into an urban context, it referred to an intentional act and was used in works relating to Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe or South African apartheid to convey the idea of discrimination (Frisch 2011). Spatial structure and segregation demonstrate the geographical polarisation of social groups as well as their social distancing from other groups. It leads to the combination of geographical and social spaces where social groups are identified with an area and are defined by certain groups of people. It thus initiates *spatial consciousness* or the conscious selection of space.

However, urban sociologists have for long advocated that the heterogeneity in cities breaks down rigid social structures and produces increased mobility, instability and insecurity through the affiliation of individuals with a variety of intersecting and tangential social groups with a high rate of membership turnover (Wirth 1938). Social stratification through caste, class, race and ethnicity matters in Nigeria, whereas spatial settlement seems to be an inevitable accompaniment of urban life, and the spatial processes have resulted in many forms of settlements (ghettos, gated communities, ethnic enclaves, religious communities, developments for the elderly etc.) – (Marcuse 2005). This leads to segregation that is, besides, involuntary and less voluntary. The three main processes of segregation are (Schelling 1980): the first, which results from intentional acts of discrimination; the second, which emanates from structural economic forces; and the third, which is the consequence of individual decisions.

Spatial structures reinforce and influence the evolution of social structures, where residential segregation results in circumscribing contacts. The neighbourhood is the most important source of socialisation after the home. The areas of residence are one of the large sets of correlated parameters influencing employment status and educational attainment. The social and economic conditions in ghettos and some ethnic enclaves are partly influential in maintaining the self-perpetuating cycle of poverty in which many racial minorities find themselves, while residential propinquity forms the basis of communities that may eventually explode in the search for social and economic justice (Morgan 1984). Ghettos generate negative intra-ethnic externali-

ties. Growing up in a purely ethnic environment may slow down assimilation, putting the residents at a disadvantage and can have adverse economic effects, e.g. difficulty in acquiring jobs and ethnic organised crime networks may flourish in large ghettos (Anas 2004).

The *ghetto* is an area of spatial concentration used by forces within the dominant society to separate and to limit a particular population group, defined as racial, ethnic or foreign, and held to be, and treated as, inferior by the dominant society (Morgan 1984). Ghettos further lead to a cycle of marginalisation where the individual is cut off from the development and policy of the state due to the discriminatory process. A. Anas (2004) argues that exclusion is an institutionalised policy that prevents minorities from locating in specific places; as the economy of the ghetto becomes isolated, unemployment, poverty, crime and social problems increase, while political power and public expenditures decline. The best form of intermixing of identities and people is through social interaction. Social interaction is the means by which communication, content and information are exchanged between individuals and groups. The classical theories of *structural functionalism* and *social Darwinism* develop the idea that society is thought to be a system of interconnected parts. The social interaction links interconnect these essential parts, which form the whole framework and maintain it at the same time.

Across the globe, the 1970s saw urbanisation formed by corporate capital under the liberal policies of the state. The areas of residence are treated as consumer products, with a huge investment in infrastructure to promote corporate urban development. The residential areas are divided into a variety of patterns, reflecting social divisions based on class, income, nationality, religion, wealth, occupation, race, colour, ethnicity, language, age, household, cultural preference or lifestyle. For purposes of policy-relevant analysis, the important lines of division are understandable based on three distinguishable groups as ideal types: culture, functional economic role and position in the hierarchy of power (Marcuse 2005).

3. Lines of social division in Nigeria

3.1. Cultural divisions

Nigeria is a federation, in which the states are organised along linguistic lines. Linguistic differences are mainly cultural differences defined in the event of migration. Though the Nigerian Constitution guarantees freedom of movement and freedom to settle within Nigeria as a fundamental right, migrants face several barriers in their ability to access civic amenities, housing and employment (Babalola 2020). The differences in culture can be easily evident in terms of language, attire or architectural style, which may result in divisions on the basis of ethnicity, tribe, religion or belief and lifestyle.

3.2. Divisions based on functional economic roles

Economic status proves a complicating factor when it comes to determining who is eligible for what. Policymakers and disadvantaged groups are grappling with difficult questions about how and when to consider class when identifying legitimate roles. A. Thorat (2010) associates economic disparities across social groups with unequal and discriminatory access to skills and education, as well as restricted occupational mobility. Further, he points out that poverty is more likely to be a visible symptom of the invisible infliction of social division, exclusion and discrimination by social identity, caste, religion, ethnicity, region and gender. Similarly, a finding suggests that job applicants with a Dalit or Muslim name were considerably less likely to have a positive outcome than an equally qualified person coming from a higher caste name, suggesting stereotypes about certain out-groups as unsuitable for employment. F. Kain (1968) explains that ghetto residents are far from where the urban jobs are located, and the main economic advantage of living in a city is the opportunities an urban area creates for trade and exchange, which are thus beyond the reach of ghetto residents.

3.3. Differences in hierarchical status

The globalisation process deepens the existing inequality structures while forming new inequalities on multiple levels. In fact, globalisation is seen as relations

of power. Class is a widely relevant line of differentiation where income is a good substitute for status and the occupation known as socio-economic status (SES). It is an indicator of an underlying relationship and not a description of the relationship itself.

4. Geographies of discrimination

The Chicago school of sociology, also known as the ecological school of urban sociology, initiated studies on segregation in the 1920s by emphasising the unequal group distribution of households and human behaviour in the urban environment (Wong, Reibel, 2007). The four major frameworks to explain the emergence of segregation have been identified by A. Chung and Y. Brown: assimilation, stratification (by the discriminatory processes), resurgent ethnicity due to group preferences and pluralism (ibidem). L. Wirth (1928: 15) focussed that “the localised aspect of urban communities causes the segmentation of urban life, both because the individual has no conception of the overall scheme of urban life and because urban life tends to be extremely segmented, due to the formation of spatially segregated areas which are likely to be sorted according to colour, ethnic heritage, economic and social status, tastes and preferences”. While the Chicago school, with its urban ecological view, looks at the technological advancements of the city, it overlooked the inequality study.

The field of segregation studies has advocated different themes and measures of segregation. There is there no such agreement on which measure is best to use S. Massey and A. Denton (1988) conceived of residential segregation as a multidimensional phenomenon varying across five distinct areas of measurement, i.e. evenness, exposure, concentration, centralisation and areas. Evenness is related to the differential distribution of two social groups in a city. It is not measured in any absolute sense but is scaled relative to some other group. Exposure is the degree of potential contact between minority and majority group members in the areas of a city. Concentration is the physical space occupied by a minority group in proportion to their population. Groups that dwell in a small area are said to be residentially concentrated. Centralisation refers to the degree to which a group is spatially located near the

centre of an urban area. The concept *clustering* is the extent to which the space inhabited by minority members is connected to one another, or within a space (Denton 1988). The debates on segregation in the early 2000s turned towards black self-segregation.

5. Social identity and change in the spatial structure

Social identity is an analysis or an image that an individual has of themselves; its self-awareness. This suggests that to form a personal idea, the individual must be conscious of *others* who are different from him/her. These distinct differences form its identity. The social identity theory proposed by H. Tajfel (1985) identifies three cognitive processes relevant to a person's being part of an in-group (us) and an out-group (them), i.e. social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. Social categorisation is the process through which the identification of groups is done as to which group an individual belongs. These social categories include religion, caste, as well as social and economic status. A person can belong to more than one group. Social identification is the identity of a group, people have categorised themselves into. If people have categorised themselves as students, they adopt the identity of a student and make compatibility with that. There will be an emotional significance to the identification with a group. Social comparison is the categorisation and identification of a group that leads to a comparison with other groups. The similarities between groups are emotionally laden, leading to in-group as entailing a "competition for positive identity". Outgroup categorisations are strategically framed to maximise self-evaluations (Islam 2014).

Social identity is thus a differentiating mechanism by which individuals establish their own identity based on the perception of *self* and *others*, and it delineates the two. Social identity is thus surrounded by the dualistic construction of *self* and *others*, as well as *us* and *them*. Through this identity, individuals bond together, giving rise to a collective community with similar faith, living style and a common worldview, which provides them with a refuge. Within these communities, inclusionary and exclusionary processes create strong ties and networks of social interaction. Social interaction further articulates the myths and realities of the historical past

and shares a sense of reality and worldview that connects individuals into a totality. The environment generates the process of forming a ghetto, slum, enclave or citadel according to an individual's needs and reality. In short, if an ethnic group is divided into neighbourhoods, it is a *ghetto*; if poor people are living together, it is a *slum*; if an ethnic group voluntarily chooses to reside, it is an *enclave*; and if the rich separate themselves, it forms a *citadel*. While the ghetto is linked with segregation through force, the enclave is segregation through choice.

Social accessibility has been less taken care of, only economic exclusion and inclusion have been considered. Social exclusion and inclusion play an important role in the residential areas of different social groups. Social exclusion highlights the inaccessibility of a buyer, due to their social identity. For example, a Hindu may not like to sell or let his house to a Muslim and vice-versa. Both groups may preferentially treat another member of the same religion by lowering the rent or value of the house or land or giving him/her certain privileges, e.g. allowing him/her to buy the plot in instalments. The information about the sale or rent of a house loses the buyer due to his social identity. Thus, even if the interested buyers can afford to buy a certain space at a particular location, they cannot do so because of the limitations. This shows that residents do not have access to the places they want and irrespected of how much money they have. Instead, the places they have are highly preferred and organised, which leads to a lot of spatial polarisation.

In Nigeria, identity is not solely ascriptive. Technically, there is no end to dissimilarities or differences between individuals and social groups. This suggests that multiple criteria exist on which differences can be based, giving rise to various sources of identities that individuals derive from their sense of self or differences that differentiate one's identity from others. The nature of social identity is *situationally fluid* as described in the social identity theory, meaning that it is subject to modifications and tends to fluctuate. Social identity alters its course according to need. Individuals need to be protected in a cocoon where they can hide and feel safe, because the unfamiliar environment makes them afraid and insecure.

6. Calabar and its Muslims

Nigeria is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country, with over 350 ethnic groups and even more languages spoken within its territory (Ogunmodimu 2015). According to the most recent census, conducted in 2006, the population of Nigeria stood at 140 mln people, making Nigeria the most populated African country. The three largest ethnic groups in the country are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Other large ethnic groups include the Ekoi, Edo, Fulani, Ibibio, Idoma, Igala, Ijaw/Izon, Itsekiri, Gwari, Jukun, Kanuri/Beriberi, Nupe, Urhobo and Tiv (ibidem). Muslims constitute about 51% of the overall population, and Christians comprise approximately 47% while almost 1% of the people professes traditional religions (Ogunmodimu 2015). There is no official data on the religious and ethnic composition of the population, but most Muslims constitute a majority in the northern states, while Christians are predominant in the southern states, where the city of Calabar is based.

The Niger Delta is located in the southern part of Nigeria, comprising an area of 70,000 km² that encompasses nine states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers (Watts 2004). The Niger Delta is crossed by the Niger River, on land covered with swamps, rainforests and woodlands. It is a region extremely rich in natural resources, particularly oil, which was discovered in the 1950s (ibidem). The city of Calabar has been selected as the area of the study. The location has been taken up because the city has been significant in Nigeria for its historical, religious and touristic importance. Calabar city is a major centre of tourism in Nigeria. Also, the city of Calabar is considered the first capital of Nigeria because it served as the first capital of the Southern Protectorate, the Oil River Protectorate, and the Niger Coast Protectorate. Calabar Port on the Atlantic Ocean forms one of the best natural harbours on the West African coast. Therefore it became one of the earliest trading stations for European merchants, who used it to supply their ships with slaves and food items for the American market (Akpanika 2020). Way back in the 15th century, Portuguese sailors had already visited there, as they sailed the West African coast in their quest to find a sea passage to India. Yet it took until 1846 before Scottish Presbyterians founded the first mission station in Calabar. In the following decades, Christianity grew in influence, and this is where the first hospital and the

first post office in the country were opened (ibidem). Today, Calabar is a flourishing trading centre and an administrative hub.

As one of the major urban centres in Nigeria, Calabar has become a place where migrants seeking adventure and livelihood converge, thereby increasing the population of the area. As the population increases, the need to grow the economy and create jobs for the growing residents increases. Hence, the need to develop appropriate and sustainable public policy is also important. As of 2021, Calabar is the 26th largest city in Nigeria in terms of population, sized ca 605,000 inhabitants (Akanika 2020). Calabar has a sizable Muslim population (12.6%), mainly immigrants. While Christianity predominates in Calabar now, the indigenous African religions prevailed before 1846.

The average literacy rate of Calabar City was 69.3% in 2020, compared to 64.7% in 2001 (Isah, Iliyas, 2020). The current scenario of the city of Calabar offers limited opportunities for the disadvantaged sections. Multiculturalism and social mobility have been overlooked, and the Nigerian cities' residential spaces showcase the social and economic realities. Inequality and exclusion are deeply embedded within these structures. Due to the weak structures, the basic governance system is missing, and differences are produced, contested and reproduced.

An increasing trend in identity politics singles out the marginalised sections that seem to be *outsiders* or migrants. There is a widespread movement of identity-based issues where individuals are identified with their caste or religious identities first, which stays with them during migration from rural to urban-based areas. There need to be ways through which urban areas can become more inclusive and liveable. It can happen in two ways. First, addressing "informality" and "right to the city" concerns must be integral parts of urban planning and governance processes that structurally address the issues of exclusion and inequality in India's growing urban spaces. Second, insulating urban governance issues from both the entrenched nexus of real estate barons-politicians-bureaucratic elites as well as the losers from the previous decade of communal and vote bank politics can serve to slow or even reverse the current trend of urban spaces becoming more exclusionary, unaccountable, and unwelcome places for the poorest and most disadvantaged.

In spite of the constitutional recognition of urban governance in the Regional Planning Decree of 1992, the points of urban setting remain unsolved in Nigeria as cities lack the devolving powers of funds, functions and functionaries. There is a need for consciously supported urban inclusive policies that cater to the demands of the disadvantaged sections of society when their identity-based exclusion is neglected and policy responses are processed for them. The debate on the pattern of Muslim housing and the question of self-segregation has become a dominant discourse determining Muslim social space, which can be termed spatial and cultural self-segregation. The issue of spatial segregation revolves around some of the associated issues, which are more inclined towards ethnic residential areaing and “Muslim no-go areas”. It is based on the idea that many Muslims choose to live in separate neighbourhoods and deliberately exclude themselves from society.

J. Eade (2011: 92) highlights that “religious identities are intimately bound up with the process of migration, cultural diversity, and the relationship between geopolitical events at the global and local levels”. Spatial segregation and residential settlement have been into the discourse and are being studied with patterns of racial-ethnic segregation as a group’s spatial position in society is connected to their socio-economic well-being. Resources and opportunities are unevenly distributed in some neighbourhoods with safer streets, high property values, services, effective schools and a more supportive environment than others. As people improve their socio-economic capacity, they gain benefits. By doing so, they transform their socio-economic achievements into better residential areas.

7. The segregation of Muslims in Calabar

One of the most dominant instruments of alienating Muslims from mainstream society is by constructing their identity as “the other”. Muslims are finding new places in exploitation as a result of capitalist accumulation. The question of “good Muslim – bad Muslim” (Mamdani 2005) dual identity, taken from the United States, has been modified for Nigerian conditions. The stereotyping of the two is such that good Muslims are taken as affluent and influential, whereas bad Muslims lack these qualities. It is important to note that some elite Muslims also brought this dis-

course and mentioned that, due to a lack of education, health facilities and education, Muslims are prone to succumbing to violence (Ushe 2012). Thus, the good Muslims thought to distance themselves from the bad Muslims. In reality, everyone aims to be like the Muslims, who are less excluded and get the best of life. Through structural adjustment, the Muslims who are better in terms of monetary gains and educational advancement have distanced themselves from the unorganised masses. Earlier, those differences were not found along the lines of class and identity.

Furthermore, due to the fear of violence, Muslims are concentrated in the ghettos because it gives them the freedom they want to pursue. Ghettos have been maintained due to fear, and a large section of the Muslim population has been living in fear of security. Given the fear of frequent riots, discrimination in housing policies and economic instability, Muslims tend to remain on the periphery in the olden parts of the city, which are developed by lack of development and entrenchment of fear. The civic neglect of the state, discriminatory treatment by its agencies and insecurity among Nigerian Muslims have long been offered as an apparent reason for their marginalisation (Bako, Syed, 2018). Due to the deprivation of resources or lack of access to resources, the Muslim community in Calabar has been facing backwardness, marginalisation, discrimination and violence. The community has been subjected to spatial discrimination, i.e. they are forced to live in ghettos, either for security reasons or due to denial of houses in mixed localities, creating further grounds of inequality. Muslims are fleeing into ghettos due to a sense of security. The areas of Bokobiri and Sabogari in Calabar city are living examples of this, where the areas are reaching the saturation point due to lack of space.

P. Oroz (2005) highlights some factors that have contributed to the spatial segregation: income inequality, low levels of macroeconomic growth, the existence of a small construction industry, a lack of diversity in financial services and poorly functioning public services. Due to a lack of such services, there are problems in buying and renting property for Muslims. G. Jamil (2014) highlights that the identity issue in housing and segregation does not simply stop at the point of intolerance and prejudice but has a material consequence as the owners of the property want their investments to multiply and would resist anything devaluing their investment. They

believe that the Muslim presence in a locality “pollutes” the neighbourhood and brings down prices. This is the reason why Muslims cannot buy a property in certain neighbourhoods that would like to maintain Christian exclusivity in the area where they settle down and are shunned and segregated (ibidem). Scrutinising the issue of representation is very important and it changes the way people think about their identities and how they think about space.

The stereotyping of Muslims remains an essential element in the stigmatisation of Muslims. As E. Goffman (1963; 85) explains, it “seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human. He bears a stigma but does not seem to be impressed or repentant about doing so”. The discriminated image comes from the stigma attached to these groups and their deprived identity. E. Edem et al. (2012) explain that the general thesis of Muslim deprivation in Nigeria rests on two counts: (1) on the community’s material dispossession and power deficit, and (2) on the de-recognition of what are held to be constitutive elements of “Muslim culture”.

The concept of a “voluntary ghetto” by L. Wirth (1938) marked the beginning of a long process of isolation. The air of the ghetto was stagnant with ignorance, religious bigotry and fanaticism, which fed on the exclusion from the world outside and the violent persecution. Spatial polarisation has further deepened the differences and has led to the closure of communication channels between people outside the ghetto-forming spaces of relegation. The major points of these spaces of relegation are: (1) an element of social/political constraint over the residential option; (2) class and caste diversity, regrouping individuals according to ethnic and religious identity; (3) the neglect of the state authority in infrastructure and education, the estrangement of the residents from the rest of the areas due to lack of transportation and job opportunities; and (4) the sense of closure among the residents (Wacquant 2007).

As R. Robinson (2005) points out, urban facilities have not found their way into Muslim areas. There are no parks, no widened roads, no recreational facilities, and no modern educational facilities. These are implicitly denied to Muslims because

they are located elsewhere, though on the face of it, they are created for everyone. The making of such places leads to a long-lasting effect, as E. Glaeser (1997) highlights that ghettos create artificial barriers that impede critical opportunities for trade and the exchange of ideas, and this deprives residents. Segregation results in two effects: firstly, it reflects the desire to share a common place with people of the same community for common cultural practices. Grouping and re-grouping have been in practice to protect the religious culture. Secondly, the desire to regroup has become a problem in areas where Muslims are in the minority, and it has become difficult for them to buy property. Furthermore, the feeling of insecurity has risen due to a lack of safety measures as witnessed in the city. Thus, self-segregation leads to unequal access and discrimination, creating a *ghetto effect* (Das 1990).

As Muslims are often found in the older and inner parts of cities where they usually have long histories of residence, the response of the state and the judiciary will be important in such matters. There are ways in which the state could promote pluralistic living. The attempt is not possible without a guarantee of security for those residing in ethnically and culturally varied areas. It is much easier for people to live with individuals of their kind. The real estate markets have expanded their role in exploiting ghettoisation. The latest addition has been the highlighting of the projects on caste/community lines and in places where one can live without the presence of the "other", which may be another religion or another economic divide. Segregation now has legal backing. The local Muslims feel that their religion, culture, language, institutions, etc. are in danger, and they do not have a "public space" and that whatever public space that exists is monopolised by the religious institutions (Rathore 2012). Thus, cities like Jaipur, which were less affected by communal violence in comparison to Ahmedabad, the fleeing of Muslims to the Muslim dominated areas revealed another ghetto in the process (Glaeser 1997).

R. Gupta (2015) states that the neglect of sectarian relations and its salience in everyday life due to the attention paid to the study of communal relations and critical events marked by violence reinforces the ghetto effect by homogenising Muslims into a singular, undifferentiated category. Thus, to summarise, ghettos are formed in four ways: firstly, when the minorities and people of the ethnic groups voluntarily

choose to live with people of the same kind; secondly, when the majority can afford better living in a more settled area; thirdly, when the majority uses force, as in cases of violence, legal issues and resentment, the minority confides in these areas; and fourthly, poverty may create ghettos where people cannot afford to live anywhere else.

8. Education among Muslims in Calabar: accessibility, affordability and quality

Education enhances the capabilities of an individual. It is a mechanism for enabling active citizenship; thus, those who are denied the right to education face the possibility of having limited chances in the future. M. Zembylas and A. Keet (2019), for instance, argue that meaningful education as a right is key to advancing social justice, as people who are marginalised in education face the prospect of bleak future chances, which truncates their participation in social processes affecting them. On that note, successive governments in Nigeria have at various times, introduced inclusive policies aimed at providing education as a fundamental right of every child. Since the operation of the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, it has recorded visible levels of enrolment. In 2010, the country recorded an 83.3% gross enrolment rate at the primary school level, with male enrolment hitting 87.1% and female 79.3% (Ushe 2012). Despite these figures, a large section of school-aged children in Nigeria are not captured in these numbers as statistics show that over 9 mln *Almajiri* students are presently outside the mainstream school system (Fahm et al., 2021). The *Almajiri* educational system is a religious institution system which encourages parents to leave parental responsibilities of wards to an Islamic school.

After independence, the Nigerian state in the early 1970s took over private and religious schools (both Christian and Muslim) from individuals and communities, as education was regarded as a government venture and not a private enterprise (Ushe 2012). The state, through its policy, emphasised equality of access for all citizens at all levels. However, despite these takeovers and efforts towards inclusion, some Quranic schools, e.g. the *Almajiri* system in Nigeria, have continued to thrive outside the purview of the state by enrolling more pupils of primary school age than

western-styled schools (Kainuwa et al., 2018). A national level strategy by the state in 1999 re-introduced a free and compulsory western-styled education programme for primary and junior secondary school-aged children. The main aims of the programme are to ensure a smooth transition from primary school to junior secondary school and for learners to remain in school long enough to acquire basic life skills. Since the programme was put in place, enrolment rates have gone up, but these figures do not include the Almajiri boys who are not getting enough help from this policy.

The Almajiri schools evolved as an institution highly revered and noted for moral and spiritual education. These schools enjoyed support in pre-colonial times as valued institutions for religious socialisation and social reproduction (Bello et al., 2013). At that time, host communities readily gave alms and accommodation wherever the Mallams (the school owners) and their pupils settled as a form of religious obligation to these bearers of religious knowledge. These schools' owners (Mallams) do not charge fees for their services, and there are no grading systems in place (Awaru et al., 2021). The alleged linkage between *Almajiri* and terrorism has obscured *Almajiri's* long history and its differences. *Almajiri* provides Islamic knowledge in mosques, which provides elementary knowledge to the Muslim children in the Muslim-dominated neighbourhood. An important feature of this system of education is that it is restricted to boys between the ages of four and twelve years. Girls attending these schools are not considered as *Almajiris* and they only attend those Quranic schools near their homes and for shorter periods of time (Osumah 2013). The curriculum of these schools consists of teaching and learning the 60 chapters of the Quran. This curriculum is delivered in the original word and language of God, with an emphasis on the religious duties of Islamic life.

In the city of Calabar, there are currently about five major mosques known to its inhabitants, and this is relatively low compared to the number of Muslims living in the city. It is also estimated that more than half of this population are either children or young adults between the ages of 13 and 21 years. This is because Calabar is predominantly Christian, and a large percentage of Muslims living in the city are either immigrants from core Muslim states in the North or some of the mixed religious

states in the West who came to Calabar for economic reasons. They could also be children of the immigrants. Another reason for the low patronage of students in the *Almajiri* system could be attributed to the systemic stereotype that sees the group as a recruitment ground for violent groups and extremists. This view is largely held by Christians and followers of other religions.

In relation to education, the non-participation of school-aged children in the mainstream education systems by the *Almajiri* faithful in the city of Calabar has some implications. S. Klasen (2001) sees social exclusion in education as when the process of education fails to promote access and equal participation. Though not explicitly defined in Nigeria's 2004 Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) policy, the term *special groups* is used to define the *Almajiris* and other seemingly disadvantaged groups. This therefore connotes the possibility of being outside the mainstream school system and the state's efforts at inclusion through universal policies. The claim that children are excluded from education by the continuous massive violation of education as a right is seen in the exclusion of children who lack access to their rights within and through education. There are many signs and symptoms of a complex web of education-related factors that play a role in how people become excluded on both an individual and societal level. These include not enrolling, being passive, not going to class, repeating, and dropping out.

The above is evident in the low number of Muslims in Western-styled schools in Calabar City. The western-styled school system is presently structured on a 9-3-4 system where the first six years are spent in primary school, the first three years in junior secondary school, and the last three in tertiary institutions. The basic school system, inclusive of early childhood, is offered through private day-care. The first nine years of the basic school system are based on a policy of free and compulsory education for every school-aged child. J. Farrell (2007: 155) sees "schooling (western-styled) as a long-term process in which children may be sorted at many different points and in several different ways, [operating] as a selective social screening mechanism". J. Farrell (2007), through his model of educational inequality, examines schooling and education on the basis of equality. The equality of access (the odds that children of different social groupings will get into the school system), equality of

survival (the chances of children of various social groupings staying and completing a cycle of study), equality of output and outcome (the chances of children of the same social groupings learning the same thing at the same level at a defined point and the possibilities of living relatively similar lives subsequent to schooling). Undocumented reports gotten from the Cross River State Education Board state that there are less than 9% of Muslim students in primary, secondary and tertiary education within the schools in Calabar. This means that young Muslims in the city of Calabar are either part of the *Almajiri* system or do not go to school at all.

9. Why are Muslims losing ground? The focus of the hour

The fallout of Muslims in different spheres has led to a debate on whether Muslims should even exist. From the media framing their identity to mob lynchings, anti-nationalist profiling and scrutiny of their identity, the image of Muslims has been questioned time and again. The recognition of the basic right to housing with regard to quality of life needs to be provided in Muslim-dominated areas. The relationship between Muslims and the Calabar City media has always been complex. Muslims and Islam suffering from a biased press are known to be widely accepted facts. While the media discerns sensitive issues, Muslims are severely affected by the manipulation of images in the media. The reasons are varied. For many, Islam and its adherents are fundamentally opposed to the values they hold dear. On the other hand, many Muslims believe that the non-Muslim media is encouraged by what they believe to be a “conspiracy” against Muslims.

From human rights violations through communal riots to the growing intolerance of sedition charges, Muslims have been at the forefront. The media pick up Muslim men and women randomly and ask their reaction to issues of Islamic rules and happenings about which they have scanty knowledge, and the given answer becomes the new media catch. Fundamentalist, extremist, backward, anti-national and Islamist prefixes have joined the perception of Muslims, forming a hollow politics of divide. The largest minority group in the city of Calabar has been exposed to the nuances of exclusion, inequality and social deprivation, where the stereotyping and negative identity formation have resulted in the denial of resources, stimulating the

“us-versus-them” debate that is already dangerously encompassing in the current environment.

The Muslim communities are in a state of intense political transformation where their national identity is being deconstructed, their factional and ideological lines are getting aggravated, and extremism, radicalism and oppression are widening. In this myriad of identities, one finds Muslims in the city of Calabar nowhere practically but in a state of every affair theoretically. They are harassed, violence and anti-national comments are common, and enforcement of the majority laws on the nation’s new fashion. Muslims who choose to wear their national identity loudly are accepted in the political system as “much accepted” and it is the only identity allowed for them. Paradoxically, by proclaiming and expressing their indifference and raising their voices, Muslims are never heard. The extent of disenfranchisement and harassment is causing an irreparable loss to their already submissive identity. The government’s right attitude toward delivering on the made promises of inclusive governance can rightly ensure that it will never reach the tipping point.

10. Policy implication and recommendations

The treatment of minorities in democracies, especially Nigeria, is by far better than the treatment of them in tyrannical states. However, democracies are formed by majority and state policies, which at times tend to diversify the views and adopt different approaches to deal with an issue, which at times proves incapable. It is not to say that the ideas of democracy and diversity are not important, but the system of elections and the existence of disparity without the ideas of social, economic and political justice make the system void for the minorities. Providing complete schooling in Muslim settlement areas can increase the chances of enrolment, but these policies should be on par with the social policies; otherwise, it can lead to further educational segregation and a difference in the quality of education they will receive.

The demand-driven approach to education needs robust policy design. D. Bolaji et al. (2015) highlight that most of the public policies in Nigeria are formulated with no policy designs. To help solve the problems associated with Muslim education in Calabar, a Ministry of Minority Affairs should be created by the state gov-

ernment to help solve the problems associated with minorities in Calabar City and Cross River State as a whole. Furthermore, the city's social policies can achieve their statutory goals only if they are listed out in the minds of the people. Muslims need to be ensured that they are an essential part of the city and schemes are being implemented exclusively for them. This will, in turn, reduce their thoughts of being separated and excluded. The proposed creation of the Ministry of Minority Affairs could come up with counselling sessions in schools to make them aware of the approaches and measures being followed for them.

To achieve the goals, policymakers must provide adequate resources and affordable access to facilities for Muslim children to attend school. S. Devarajan and R. Reinikka (2004: 122) highlight that "the goal of school autonomy and accountability is to create a system in which organisational providers have strong, sustained incentives to improve outputs". Where the practice of discrimination or bullying in the name of one's religion is being noted, authorities need to be sensitive towards this situation. Fostering diversity and exposure to all religions through interfaith interactions can address the queries of students. The schools in the city of Calabar may come up with a zero-tolerance policy towards any kind of malaise. Muslim research scholars and people who are in some position to create a difference in the lives of the community can also provide useful policy input and develop means to promote growth in the current status of Muslim faithful education. To encourage harmony within these spheres, school management committees may take necessary policy steps at the initial level itself.

Indeed, education can be a panache for development among Muslims in the city of Calabar. They experience a long-standing rift between conservative ideology, on the one hand, and liberal and leftist ideology, on the other. The government should look into the matter of exclusion among Muslims in all walks of life. It is high time Muslims needed to come out of their comfort zone, stop believing that they will be targeted, and proceed towards a more secular modern education. For this to happen, the government must open up spaces for children at least until the twelfth class, so that none of the children drop out of school on the pretext of going far away from their house. A strong rapport should be built based on a congenial environment

among students and teachers at school. Provision of skills-based work along with formal education and encouragement to participate in the system may be given to socially excluded children and religious minorities. It comes as a sense of urgency for the Muslim community to understand the power of education and work towards development rather than quibbling about beards, veils and infighting among sects.

11. Conclusion

This study sought to understand the dynamics and processes of exclusion, paying close attention to various indicators, e.g. geographies of discrimination, issues of access and the problem of segregation of Muslims in the city of Calabar. The location of a neighbourhood significantly determines the levels of access to services, the critical element in bridging the gaps in the strength of urban governance institutions. The trend of Nigeria's ongoing urbanisation offers little opportunity for the inclusion of its marginalised populations. Nigeria still has a long way to go before its cities become places where people can move up the social ladder.

Equal access to social rights can only be achieved if dealt with through inclusion in social, political, cultural and economic spheres. Social exclusion is a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created within the social environment. The issue of minoritarianism is fast becoming a means of exclusion and can only be overcome through the right kind of public policymaking for the excluded. A popular theme on the subject of public policy is *implementation*. When a policy is designed, it attempts to focus on its cycle, but it loses its focus on the central theme of implementation, which is the heart of the public policy process. The right public policy can further help in overcoming inequality.

Affirmative action has always been a controversial issue for Muslims. The term *affirmative action* refers to a policy aimed at increasing workplace or educational opportunities for underrepresented parts of society (Premdas 2016). Unless the city becomes more responsive towards the needs of minorities, the inclusionary measures will not be a success. S. Alam (2014) rightly points out that the issue of affirmative action for Muslims is complicated for two reasons: (1) the vast institutional deficit with regard to representation as well as the socio-economic backwardness of Muslims as

a whole, and (2) it shows that the community is differentiated and divided into sub-groups and caste groupings which have different capacities to access opportunities. Public policy needs to play an active role in promoting the rights of minorities. Further, affirmative action should not be taken up as a substitute for reservations. It is time to realise that different groups need to be dealt with differently regarding their marginalisation. Muslims need affirmative action to increase their representation and, furthermore, to remove their backwardness in the city.

12. References

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