INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC THOUGHTS, 3, 79-96, 2014

ISSN 2306 -7012

Religion and Politics: The Debate with reference to Nigeria

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Abstract: Scholars have for long been interested in the relationship between religion and politics and consequently a plethora of research has been produced by scholars of religious studies and social sciences. Literature produced in the late twentieth century did acknowledge the role of religion in the politics of the country. They disagreed on whether religion to be kept aloof from politics which means secularism or to let religion play a major role which is what Islam stands for. Unfortunately, despite the ubiquity of religion in the politics of Nigeria, Islam has been marginalized by early scholars.

Keywords: Religion, Islam, Secularism, State, Politics.

Relationship between religion and politics has for long been a subject of deliberation and research among scholars of religious studies and Social Sciences. Some scholars believe in the separation of religion from politics while others stress the unity of religion and politics. Despite the differences, most of these scholars agree that religion does have an impact, positive or negative, on the political process of many countries. Hence, some scholars believe that religion, especially Islam, is being manipulated by state leaders and elites to serve their own ends. There are those who believe that religion is a unifying force. This study focuses on the literature produced on identities, religion and politics generally and the impact of modernization on religion before moving onto the country studies in general and then Nigeria in particular. The study zeroes in on the literature produced in the middle and late twentieth century.

State, religion and politics

Interest can be described as those kinds of goals for which most people are willing to make ultimate sacrifices. Webster's dictionary defines interests as "a feeling that accompanies or causes special attention to an object or class of objects. It also means to induce or persuade to participate or engage". Thus, it is this feeling that instigate people to act, in other words, it leads to the formation of identities. Mu'azzam and Ibrahim define an 'identity' as:

> involving the location of oneself, giving meaning to the self on the political map both as an individual and as part of a collective. It is a system of social relations which cannot be maintained in isolation and can be used to mobilize man as man and as part of a general within a system of diverse identities (1997: 1).

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Brenner (1993), on the other hand, believes that religious identities are formulated by using and redefining various components that may be religiously valid, but at the same time, they are motivated by social, political and economic issues. Brenner argues that:

> as complex clusters of attributes, they are subject to continuous reordering by self and others depending on perceived aims, needs and constraints; they reflect political conflict and are representations of alleged social realities rather than essences in themselves (1993: 74).

Brenner further shows that economic and political interests lead to the formation of various religious identities motivated by socio-economic tendencies aimed at representing and providing for the people (e.g. educational and medical services) as against the exploitative political systems. As a result, "these institutions enjoy a popular legitimacy based on local volunteerism which is patently opposed to the intrusive and exploitative reputation of many state institutions" (1993: 74).

Constantine (1993) focused on how leadership and Muslim identities affect politics. He believes that the importance and significance of religion in politics can be identified when dealing with identity problems. In the first place, religion is still a very powerful mode of mobilizing people, even though they also become entangled in secular conflicts. Secondly, religious identity is only one form of social identity. Third, religiously-oriented interest groups participate in politics in two ways: either to promote collective religious values or to defend the secular interests of some of their members. Thus, Constantine believes that religious identity gets mixed up with other forms of identity, which makes it to lose some of its religious claims, especially if it is working within the political system.

Hervieu-leger (1985) argues against the belief of Emile Durkheim as contained in his "Social Division of Labor" that with the evolution and development of the society on the basis of science and empiricism, religion and God lost their significance for the human beings. Hervieu-leger asserts that:

> There is a paradox of modernity in which the secularization of society proceeds at the same time with the creation of utopian space-time; a situation which re-imposes the religious problematic as long as society remains incapable of resolving human needs (cited in Ibrahim, 1989: 19).

In the case of Nigeria, Mu'azzam and Ibrahim (1997: 20) argue that the hardships of the Structural Adjustment Programme period have made many people to turn to religious organizations and religion itself as an "alternative mode of economic survival and political expression of opposition and protest". Jega (1997) likewise asserts that the politics of identities in post-colonial Nigeria has been shaped by socio-economic factors coupled with authoritarian military rule. As a result, ethnic, religious, regional, communal and other identities have come to colour the political process in Nigeria, especially with the introduction and implementation of SAP. He argues further:

> The process of state decomposition, combined with the devastating impact of SAP on the livelihood of Nigerians can be said to have actually transformed the Nigerian people's multiple identities and narrowed them to a single focus, resulting into "deeper and more rigid social divisions", gravitating around the politics of identity. Thus, although at anytime individuals may simultaneously share multiple identities, they tend to use one, or at most few of these as platforms of political organization and action. This has become increasingly so in the Nigerian context (1997: 13).

Means (1965) is of the opinion that religion, especially Islam has always been manipulated by leaders "for communal and cultural identity in order to achieve a workable formula for political stability" (1965); even though whenever they do so in creating an Islamic state, they inevitably jeopardized the foundation of that society, i.e. the Shari'ah.

Although, Paden's (1973) analysis is concerned more with the indirect effect or power of religious "personnel" on political values and forms of organization, he believes that religion affects politics in a different number of ways depending on the level of differentiation in the society. He claims that:

> in a highly differentiated society, religious actors may or may not participate in the political sector. In a pre-differentiated society, the political actors and the religious actors may be one and the same (1973: 10)

Paden also shows that in an indirect way, religion is being used and/or manipulated to control people due to the relationship of religion to components of political culture, i.e. authority and community. He further asserts that there is a "symbiotic" relationship between bureaucratic authority and the main religious components in the society. Thus, he cites Weber who argued that even though bureaucratic classes reject irrational religion, he stresses "their recognition of the usefulness of this type of religion as a device for controlling people" (Paden, 1973: 11). Hence, Paden argued that integration between the masses and the ruling elite is achieved through the manipulation of common religious symbols.

Modernization, religion and politics

Modernization is the movement or the change from the old to the new. Mumtaz Ali cites Lerner when he defined it:

> as a process of change in the social structure and social system through an increased knowledge in science and technology; as a movement of transition from traditional society of religion, magic and superstition to a modern and postmodern society that is free from religious matrix and traditional norms; as a process for change in the set of relationships between the individual and the society; as a process of mobilization, differentiation, industrialization and

> secularization; as a process towards high economic growth; stable democracy, and a capitalist economy; as a process to overcome nature and become independent of its control; as a movement toward the construction of healthy, peaceful, content, and prosperous society; and as Europeanization, Americanization, and Westernization (Ali, 1997: 14).

Apter (1967), Huntington (1968, 1973), Hoogvelt (1978, 1987), and others agree with Lerner and believe that political modernization denotes the release of the political system from religious and traditional values. Apter (1967) argues that religious values and tradition hinder innovation and the transition from the traditional to the modern.

Hoogvelt (1978) believes that the manipulation of religion for power and authority is not a new phenomenon, it rather existed even within the primitive and archaic societies, whereby societal identity is used by the controllers of the political sphere as the basis for legitimacy. She further argues:

> In other words, at this stage of social evolution, the most probable occurrence is for those who monopolize political responsibilities and superiority to claim religious responsibilities and superiority as well (1978: 29).

Thus, for Hoogvelt if religion and its impact on the society had not been relegated to the private sphere, such positive characteristics of modernization like industrialization, profit-maximization, increase in the standard of living of the people, etc. could not have been given the chance to determine the behavior of humans. She believes that: "With Christianity and especially with the Protestant Reformation, the wider cultural value system in Europe had become geared to rational action in the world" (1982: 115). Weber asserts that this "involves the explicit definition of goals and the highly precise calculation of the most effective means to achieve them, in contrast to action arising from habit or from traditionalism as principle" (Hoogvelt, 1982: 115).

Huntington (1968) affirming the negative relationship between religion and modernization argues that: "Modernization is associated with a marked re-distribution of power within the political system, the breakdown of local, religious, ethnic, and other power centers and the centralization of power in the national political institutions" (1968: 142). On the possible future scenarios of the relationship among the world major religio-cultural groupings, Huntington predicted "Clash of Civilizations," saying:

> civilization is the highest cultural group of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by the common objective elements such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions and by the subjective self-identification of people. People have levels of identity… people can and do re-define their identities, and as a result, the composition and boundaries of civilization change (1997: 69).

In other words, national boundaries no more serve as the foundation for identity and commitment, nor does it act as a unifying force for civilizations. Religion which was supposed to be weakened by modernization, has now taken center stage. Thus, according to Huntington, it will be one of the "cultural fault lines" that will separate different civilization and be one of the sources of the most important conflict in future.

Similar to Huntington, Gellner (1994) considers religion particularly Islam, as a rival to civil society and modernization. He argues that for civil society to prosper, there is the need for the privatization of religious belief, while Islam considers religious belief as public and, therefore, has a love–hate relationship with modernization, and its features can not accommodate this need. This is because Islam accommodates industrialization, some aspects of science and liberty, but not secularization, thus, not total liberty. Moyser (1991) also believes that the difference between religion and politics is visible mainly in modernized societies, as a result of secularization.

For Fukuyama, though religion poses itself as a challenge to modern liberalism, it is: "the weakness of the religious based societies which fairly agree on the nature of good life could not provide even the minimal preconditions of peace and stability which led to modern liberalism" (quoted in Ajami et al, 1997: 19). Apter also believes that religions, values and traditions hinder innovation, and the transition from the traditional to the modern.

Despite polity secularization, being one of the characteristics of political modernization as propounded by Smith (1974), it is evident as argued by Fred R. Vonder Mehden (1974), that religious resurgence exists side-by-side with the governments' attempts at secularization. According to Smith, "the political process becomes not more secular, but more traditional-religious as lay and clerical politicians discover in religious symbols a powerful instrument for mass mobilization" (1974: 9). For Smith, these traditional-religious groups contribute to political modernization as they involve the masses in the political process. However, Smith wrongly believes that in the end, there will be no need for the traditional-religious card, as with the attainment of a certain level of political consciousness, the political process will be able to take care of itself, and, thus, the prevalence of the political process – secularization which denotes the formal separation of religion and polity and the refusal of the state to have any religious identity. Nonetheless, Smith also believes that religion can be a positive supporter to modernization, change and political development only if it is re-interpreted and reformulated, of course, not taking into consideration the practical feasibility of doing such. He further argues that:

> Within both reformulated Islam and Catholicism, there has been a repudiation of medieval timelessness and a rediscovery of the dynamics of the historical process through which divine purpose works itself out (1974: 24).

Religion and politics in general

According to Rourke (1991), religion has been and still is a very significant force in influencing world events, from the participation of the Roman Catholic Church in anti-

nuclear movements to the clashes between the equally 'expansionist' Islamic and Christian world, the Reformation, World Wars I and II, down to the imperial era where the missionaries were used to pave the way for colonizers to control and subjugate socially, economically and politically the colonized. Thus, Rourke maintains that religious conflicts are not just something that took place in the past, it still exists. In other words, there is a relationship between religion and politics which is multi-dimensional. Rourke further states that religion, particularly Islam, is being used by its adherents to rid themselves of neo-colonialist indirect domination by outsiders and return to a society ruled by Shari'ah. However, he erroneously predicts that the unity of the Ummah may not be possible through Islamic religion due to certain factors like ethnic differences, nationalism and sectarianism. This is because a large number of Muslims are not Arabs and Arabic is not their language. For example, Iranians, Pakistanis, Afghans and so on. Also, newly independent countries are not ready to surrender their freedom and sovereignty. There is also the Shi'ite-Sunni differences. He, however, stated that "These religious and secular rights, however, tend to be subordinated to Islamic unity when there is a threat to an Islamic State from non-Muslims" (1991: 172), as seen by the support given to Saddam Hussein of Iraq by Muslim countries like Iran (its former enemy) when attacked by the Allies. Arjomand claims that religion can be used for the politicization of the people, citing examples of:

> The consciousness of religious factors and the prominence of the men of religion in the elected assemblies in Iran and Turkey before the autocratic centralization of the mid-1920s, the consistently high percentage of the vote received by the Islamic parties in Indonesia in general election since 1955…, etc. (1986: 87).

However, Arjomand (1986: 107) does not believe that religion is used to politicize the masses, rather, they join Islamic political parties and groups because it is only through Islam that they can find their identities coupled with the failures of the varieties of panaceas in the Muslim world like parliamentary, democracy, nationalism, Arabization, socialism, communism, etc. According to him:

> The general presumption of their failure leaves the arena of mass politics to the Islamic ideology as the uncontested panacea which further more can claim "authenticity" in contrast to the 'imported' ideologies of the preceding decades (1986: 107).

Ahmed (1988) and Mardin (1983) have also discussed the relationship between religion and politics showing how they were affected by each other in Turkey. Mardin believes that despite the impact of Islam in the policies of the various governments since the Tanzimat, and the impact of social, political, and economic factors in shaping religion, it is actually the concept of social justice which is more powerful and appealing to the people. He argues further:

> Nevertheless, in the last decades, the Turkish Republic has been able to establish institutional channels for the expression of political preferences and social ideals which take the pressure in this matter away from religion (1983: 157).

Ahmed, on the other hand, disagrees and believes that Islam has been used as a political weapon by different parties to woo the voters. Due to the influence and impact of Islam on the Turks, even the Nationalist Action Party (NAP) which was neo-fascist in character, "who had dismissed Islam as Arab and, therefore, alien to the Turkish genius, found it expedient to integrate it into their ideology… by talking about a Turkish-Islamic synthesis" (Third World Quarterly, 1988: 760). Ahmed, therefore, argues that Islam is reasserting itself in Turkey so much, so that even the Kemalists are sitting up to notice it.

In studying the effect of religion on the politics of Burma and Thailand, Von der Mehden (1974) argues that religion influenced the politics of Burma due to the refusal of the colonial government to recognize and encourage the traditional "Sangha Hierarchy". In other words, their qualification of religious knowledge, which used to open up channels of employment, was not considered by Christian-British government, in fact, those that participated in the government were non-Buddhist. This instigated the monks to participate fully and encourage the masses to participate in politics via the nationalist movements. Von der Mehden argues that:

> While the political and social structure and official ideology was in the process of being secularized through colonial administration and western influences, this very secularization under nominal Christian leadership led to the installation of religion into the political process through the nationalist movements… (Smith, 1974: 54).

Examining the relationship between religion and politics in the Caribbean, Hurbon (1986) asserts that majority of the independence campaigns in "Black Africa" started as "politico-religious" movements having Millenarian or Messianic leanings. He further argues that due to the depression and the oppressive atmosphere of apartheid, other political oriented movements and channels of expression were not able to emerge. Rastafarianism, which is a movement for the "redemption of worlds black population" supporting Emperor Haille Selassie and declaring him the Black Saviour by redefining the Bible, sought to build an identity for the Caribbean Islands by being a religio-political movement. Hence:

> It concentrated its electoral campaign among the young unemployed urban youth who were at a loose end, had no future and were moreover, despised by the ruling class. The movement snatched them up at the opportune moment, speaking to them in their own language and talking of the restoration of their dignity (1986: 196).

Moore believes that despite the separation of religion and politics in the American and Canadian societies, people still rely more on religious values and symbols. Rhetorics used

in public discourse has created and reflected popular approval. Moore states that religion is used in North-America as a channel of negotiating one's position in the society and securing identity.

Achile Mbembe studying Christianity and the State claims that it is not really the politicians manipulating religion, but rather the masses using religion. In his words: "the current explosion of religious revivalism in Africa is another ruse by the common men to create a counter ideology and alternative political space in response to totalitarian ambitions of African dictators" (quoted in Ibrahim, 1989: 9).

Ajami (1983) argues that in Egypt, it is not so much religion that influences the political process, but authority. The authority can either use religion to maintain and consolidate its power by either making it to dance to state policies and rules or by showing the negative aspects of religion to the people if some of them decide to revolt on the basis of religion. In other words, religion is manipulated to serve state interests through the use of "prominent authorities", men of religion and those in politics who had "reached the summits of power and for whom the men of religion have a great deal of respect" (Piscatory, 1983: 15), who make religious statements and Fatwas in favour of the state and those holding the reigns of power. Ajami cites an example with the Fatwas and support by Al-Azhar (the so-called voice of Islam) which he considers as the religious mouth-piece of the state and which sanctions the deeds of the politicians or rulers, good or bad. For instance, when President Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem in 1977 to sign the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, Al-Azhar believed it was within the boundaries of Shari'ah and even went to the extent of equating the treaty with the treaty of Hudaybiyya to gain support for Sadat and his government. Ajami further asserts that the Ulamas of Al-Azhar, using religion make people to be passive and not rebel or act against the reigning political power. This is because the Ulama are at the same time protecting their own economic interests, since if they do not tow the states line, they become unemployed, dismissed from Al-Azhar, their salaries stopped, etc. Thus, Ajami argues that in Egypt "religion is to retain an honoured position in the society, but it is to be shackled and quarantined, paid homage to, but kept on the margins of power" (Ibid: 19).

Similar to Paden, (1973), Cudsi and Karar find that religion (Islam) does not have a direct impact on the political process. Cudsi believes that the Sufi are not interested in participating in temporal and mundane activities which will distract their attention from their path of holiness, thus, they "contented themselves with offering or withdrawing their religious sanction for existing political regimes" (Ibid: 37). Cudsi states that even President Ja'afar Numeyri who has been known and confirmed that he has used and manipulated religion to serve his purposes of consolidating his position and power accused the Sufi (sects) of manipulating religion to serve their own private interests. Karar argues that although leaders of the Tariqa (sects) in Sudan possess considerable might due to their religious position as heads of Tariqas they do not directly participate in

politics, but rather mediate between their followers and politicians in political disputes in their societies.

Similarly, O'Brien (1986) believes that the leaders of the Sufi orders Qadriyya, Tijjaniyya and Mouride use their saintly influence to participate in government indirectly. In other words, Marabouts (living saints) are used to appeal to the people to tow the government line. According to O'Brien:

> Sufi orders, now as in colonial times thrive by acting as intermediaries between the government themselves. Although, the saints have popular support, they lack the training, as well as any powerful inclination to take over the often unpopular tasks of government. This preference for power without responsibility has been evident since colonial times (1986: 129).

In other words, they wanted the best of both worlds. Although, some of these orders later on started becoming more politically oriented as a result of the Khumayni revolution and the bid by the government to reduce their power through the Salafs, however, inter-brotherhood rivalry and the strength of the Sufi orders did not allow for such.

Kane shares similar views with these scholars about the indirectness of the political participation of the Turuq in politics, but he differs in some respect in that he gave them more weight than the others had done. Kane believes that the existence of these networks of Turuq in West Africa led by Marabouts contributed to the spread of Islam and the guaranteeing of security in the society. He continued to assert a majority of those Marabouts who lead the most important religious communities intervened in political life by instructing their clientele to vote for the party in power. These instructions influenced hundreds of thousands of votes at election time.

Kane, therefore, believes that the Turuq are a very important force in Senegal, since without their backing no candidate can be elected. Moreover, because of the importance of the Turuq in West Africa, Kane believes that some Arab countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Morocco, Algeria have manipulated them (Turuqs) to achieve their political ends, even though manipulating them may not be easy and their power may not be absolute. As a result of the system of 'exchange of services' if the Marabouts become too assertive and attempt to influence political policies the government deals with them by putting them against rival sufis and they have to forego their privileges as shown by Loimeier(1996). Having seen what the scholars have to say of the relationship between religion and politics generally, in what follows we focus on our area of study, Nigeria.

Religion, politics and secularism in Nigeria

Even in pre – colonial Nigeria, religion and the state have had a close working relationship, where religion permeates the daily business of politics and economy. However the colonial government valued the extent of the relationships from region to

region and even within a region on how the relationship would affect them. This is the basis for Federalism in Nigeria as the diverse nature of the country was taken into consideration. According to Dan Mole:

> the colonial state recognized the importance of cultural diversity which is largely a factor in any Federal system. Religion is noted in culture, therefore religious diversity was adequately provided for in the independence Constitution and in official documents. Provisions were made for the establishment of the Shari'ah court of Appeal and a court of Resolution in the Northern Region" (1996: 224).

One could see that the Shari'ah law was not imposed on the non – Muslims even that time, as the court Resolution existed only in the Northern Region to cater for the non-Muslims.

Elaigwu, J. I. (1993) studied the relationship between religion and politics within the context of Federalism. For him the federal system of government that was supposed to manage all differences is itself subjected to serious strains from the unending religious conflicts. The multicultural nature of Nigerian state led to the adoption of the Federal system of government, whereby the various sectors of the state sent their grievances to the Willinks Commission on Minorities. Some of these grievances include the domination of government by a regional ethnic majority; eradication of the minorities culture and language; religious tolerance; discrimination in economic spheres; recruitment in public offices; changes in the legal systems in the region and the maintenance of public order and individual freedom (1993: 3). Thus the religious conflicts that have been cropping up have political basis which goes back in time .However, Elaigwu erroneously believes that the conflicts are more serious and enduring in places "where there is a convenient matrimony between religion and politics, where religion legitimizes politics and vice-versa" (1993: 6). This is because he mentioned that the British adopted the indirect rule because of the institutions they found in the North which were operating successfully and these institutions were based on such a matrimony. Unlike many scholars (Gilliland etc) that alleged that the Sardauna of Sokoto politicized religion, Elaigwu (year?) argues that religious bigotry is one of the lowest in the sins of the first Republic, the entrance of religious intolerance into the political areas of the country began with the Shariah Debate at the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Despite his obvious subjectivity, Udoidem agrees that the separation of religion from politics is in his words "pragmatically problematic," especially in a pluralistic state having different political and religious outlooks. This problem and difference in perception by the two major religions Islam and Christianity leads to political and religious conflicts, which are interlaced (1996: 154).

His understanding of the doctrinal foundations of religious conflicts as well as his linkage of some crises to Islam is however misinformed .For instance the Civil war is

linked to the demand and quest of the Muslim's for an Islamic state. He probably has such a perspective because "the Biafran warlords, in their bid to gain international support (at least from the Christian world), canvassed that the war was between the Muslim North and the Christian East" (ibid: 159).

For Williams, (1996), the Nigerian state creates and fuels religious conflicts by not practically adopting the Constitutional clause which makes "Nigeria a secular state legally". This is because in a religiously plural state where different prominent religions exist, there tends to be instability, chaos and conflict due to lack of firm practice of secularity as exemplified by such states like Ireland, Lebanon, Sudan, Pakistan and Punjab in India (1996: 188). Williams strongly calls for secularism in multi religious states for "This would stem feelings of uncertainty, frustration (sic) and hatred, which were advertently or inadvertently generated through careless and unfeeling attitudes of some statesmen" (ibid).

Despite her assertion that the term secular does not appear in the Constitution of the Federal Republic, Williams still went ahead to discuss and imply that Nigeria is a secular state which is involving itself in too many matters that are religious not sufficiently involving itself in religious matters, as far as the religious section is concerned. The examples cited are Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C.), Pilgrims Welfare Board, building of places of work ship (sic worship), the teaching of religion in school, health education, the legal year ceremonies etc. Despite the formal secular characteristic of the Nigerian State, the nature of its evolution demands a certain level of involvement in matters that are religious to a certain extent such that its secularity is not affected. Hence, Williams like Yinger believes that there should not be, nor is it possible to have a complete separation between religion and state. She therefore argues that the Constitutional clauses are not enough in entrenching the secularity of the state; the leaders and the citizens need to change their attitudes going by the multitude advantages of a secular state.

In his book *The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria,* Usman (1987: 9) asserts that the use of religion in political campaigns cannot be isolated and studied separately, but within the larger context of the Nigerian economy and as a continuation of a political pattern which can be clearly traced back to the last years of the Gowon regime. Usman believes that religion is being manipulated in political campaigns and state affairs so as to hinder any chance of unity among the Nigerian populace and to serve certain vested interests of the manipulators. This manipulation is done by creating illogical fears and insecurity among both Muslims and non-Muslims. According to Usman:

> This blind fear of the unknown … only loosens the fibers of the threads which are forging the unity of the people of this country. It also undermines popular participation in democratic activity across the various nationalities of the country, which alone can bring the common people to realize their common

> interests over and above any geographical, ethnic, religious or cultural differences (1987: 82)

This, he believes, has significant political consequences in the sense that it could lead to violent conflicts on the basis of religion, ethnicity, tribalism, etc which are divisive in nature and will, therefore, affect the unity of the people and ultimately, the democratization process in the country.

Ibrahim (1989) also argues that religion, being a powerful social mobilization weapon, plays a very significant role in the division of the "national cake" in Nigeria. Ibrahim states that politicians use religion to satisfy their own vested interests by magnifying religious identities and differences to canvass for votes and support. For instance, the issue of Shari'ah Debate in 1977 and 1987-88 during which the various factions of the two religions stopped fighting themselves and united to fight the common opponent either Christian or Muslim was amplified by the "political entrepreneurs who hope to gain dividends from religiously consolidated constituencies (1989: 24). Ibrahim further explains how religion is used by the two main religions of Nigeria (Islam and Christianity) to create political unity in place of "theological unity" by forming associations to serve as political platforms. For example, the Muslims formed the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) in 1962, while the Christians formed the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in 1976. For Ibrahim, factionalism and fundamentalism prevented these religions from uniting themselves, thus, they sought policies to achieve this unity. Moreover, he suggests that the increasing production of the clergy and the consequent rivalry and competition leading to factionalism is nothing, but the result of the economic situation in the continent. "The religious sphere is turning into a significant arena of capital accumulation. Money is the root of many of the 'evils' confronting religious movements" (Ibid: 17).

Also arguing in the same way, Kane (1994) believes that in Nigeria, especially Northern Nigeria, religion being a powerful instrument of mobilization, aspiring politicians and state functionaries supported the creation of the Izala movement in anticipation of manipulating it to gain political rewards: "This is all the more so because religious leaders mediate between politicians and civil society" (Marty & Appleby, 1994: 498).

Sawande (1988) in the Punch, states that religion in general is being manipulated by adherents as opposed to B.J. Takaya who believes that it is the Islamic religion that is being manipulated by "faceless political groups". According to Sawande:

> All religions reek with the blood of human carnage, not because God is blood-thirsty, but because in the primordial irony, man created a god limited by man's own weaknesses; lust for a political power base, economic dominance… it is no wonder that by way of generalization the "God of the Christian" or the "Allah

> of the Muslims" in Nigeria who now seek for political constituencies are God or Allah, they created for themselves (1989: 21).

Although there are conflictual relations between the minorities and the dominant majority, especially in the North and the Middle-belt, which led to the formation of the Northern Nigerian non-Muslim league, in the Middle-belt, Mensah believes that it was not really religious, but political, since "religion was secondary and mainly instrumental in the disruptive and non-integrative conflict" (n. d.: 22). However, Mensah contradicted himself by citing Gilliland (1971) who narrated the experiences of some village heads (one Muslim and the other adhering to his traditional religion), and how they relate with their District Head who was also Muslim. The non-Muslim Village Head was victimized as he was not granted anything he petitioned for, while the Muslim village head was given whatever he requested for, gifts and even an additional title. Thus, Gilliland concluded that:

> the extent to which traditional village heads became Muslims during the period of the Sardauna's prominence would be difficult to establish. But conversions to Islam were many, where it was politically advantageous to do so (quoted in Mensah, n.d.: 23).

It is clear from Mensah's example and Gillilands conclusions that village heads and political leaders used religion to further their own political interests, while the masses used religion (Islam) to serve their own economic interests, since they convert to Islam "on the basis of whatever gains they felt would accrue to them in taking that step" (Ibid). Mensah believes that this interplay between religion and politics in the south is chiefly restricted to "inter-denominational" conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, especially in the East as opposed to the North, and to a limited extent between Muslims and Christians. However, Mensah believes that in the South, especially the Yoruba area, ethnicity rather than religion serves as an important tool of political mobilization as opposed to the North where religion is given such significance. The modern Muslim political elite used the principles of inseparability of religion and politics to manipulate religion to serve their political interests and gain power. This is because if they are political leaders, then they are "defenders of the faith" also and, thus, putting their Christian contenders at a disadvantage since they cannot use religion due to secularism to mobilize political support. (But this assertion has been disproved and contested by Ibrahim and Sawande as we have seen). Mensah, thus, concludes that:

> Islamic rather than Christian sectarian activity tends to provoke violence and as such constitutes a threat to national integration. Islamic sectarian conflicts are more likely to have disruptive effects on the nation than inter-denominational conflicts among Christians in Nigeria (Ibid.: 34).

Similarly, O'Connel (1989: 200), just like Kukah (1993) is of the belief that religion is not so much a "serious factor in Nigerian politics as loyalty to local communities or

ethnic groups". He believes that the dominant Northern coalition imposed by the Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani which is simultaneously the ruling group also uses the link between religion and politics to achieve unity, while their Southern counterparts regard them not as political opponents, but as Muslims. Thus, both religions try to make their adherents to defend it against the other. According to O'Connel:

> This religious cleavage and confrontation which mimics and envenoms the old North-South division could in the longer run prove more serious than confrontation between straight forward ethnic alliances, since this religious conflict could enter into and threaten new and cherished modernizing social identities as well as forming part of embittering and widening ethnic cleavages (1989: 200).

Hence, both sections of the country camouflage ethnic needs and interests by couching it in a religious garb so as to succeed and this serve the needs of the ethnic groups. O'Connel is then saying that religion is being used to serve ethnic purposes.

Kalu (1989), Nabofa (1989), and Kukah (1989, 1993), in contrast to Mensah have shown that despite the Christian maxim "Unto Caesar what is Caesar's and Unto God what is God's", Christians have also used and manipulated religion to serve their own interest. However, Nabofa and Kukah insist that Northern Christians use the religious card in politics because they wanted to free themselves from the Northern Islamic oligarchy. Thus, Nabofa believes that politics in the North became religious politics as both Muslim and Christian leadership use their religious identification to get leadership positions.

Kalu argues that religion has been manipulated in Nigeria since before independence, when the Europeans tried to support their denominations and make sure that their doctrines and ideologies were maintained. Kalu explains how secondary schools were built by these Missionaries/Europeans with the help of the communities which regard these schools as some measure of development. He, therefore, states that:

> Roman Catholics and Protestants urged their members to vote for their members into the new legislatures. Religion became a crucial aspect of politics in this early trial of a new administrative structure. By the outbreak of the civil war, denominational rivalry had spilled from the Church building, schools, hospitals into political arena (quoted in Atanda et al, 1989: 14).

Kukah (1989) has shown in his studies how religion was given a role to play in the campaign for political offices during the 1979-83 elections. People were warned not to join this or that party as it will not augur well for their religion. According to Kukah "Like anything which politics conferred a Midas touch on, religion soon found itself in the cesspool of politics as Church, pulpits, clergymen began to sink deep into the political turmoil" (Ibid.: 157). Therefore, politicians started patronizing Churches, religious

causes, etc. so as to be considered a religiously worthy candidate and, thus, be vouched for by the leaders of that religion, which in turn will lead to more votes.

Mbon (1986), like Umar (1989), has studied the relationship between religion and politics by looking at the religious movements and how they affect the political, social, and economic sectors of Nigeria. Mbon studied the Aladura and the Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star, both of whom following the main theological teaching of older Churches still believe in the maxim "Unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and Unto God what is God's" and, therefore, do not participate in politics. Despite the above, individual members have participated fully in politics though with no significant effect on the political arena in the country. Also, individual members and small groups have voiced their opinions on various social and political matters like corruption, the 1966 coup de etat, the civil war and publication on general and existing political, social and economic issues. Mbon concludes that:

> One thing seems certain, however, if these apparently lonely voices keep speaking up, their words are likely to have some measure of observable impact not only on the membership of the new religious movements, but also on the general political arena of the country. And if that happens, then the official policy in these movements of non-involvement in political affairs may have to be reviewed in the not too distant a future (1986: 183).

Mbon seems to be suggesting that these New Religious Movements are contradicting themselves by claiming that they are officially apolitical, but at the same time involving themselves in politics. So which is it, do they have an observable impact on the socio-economic political scenes of the country or not?

According to Umar, there is manipulation of religion in Nigeria, especially in the North, and particularly during the First Republic. In that period, political parties and politicians escalated the differences, and violent clashes were instigated between the various sects, especially Tijjaniyya and Qadriyya, to carry their political activities. For instance, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, traced his decent to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), while Mallam Aminu Kano, not to be left behind in the manipulation drama, displayed posters showing Ibrahim Niass blessing him in Kaolack. Thus, in the words of Umar "throughout the politics of the First Republic, there was a conscious attempt on the part of the politicians to manipulate these sectarian and other religious differences" (1989: 78). Umar also cites the conversion campaigns of the Sardauna of Sokoto, s a case of manipulation of religion by politicians and masses whereby politicians, especially the Sardauna got converts to Islam and at the same time secured votes for NPC, while the converts converted for what they could gain in cash or kind from the government and the rich.

In their paper "Religion and Stability in Nigeria", Ekoko and Amadi (1989) are of the opinion that religion can be used to foster stability or instability depending on its

usage. They believe that in the various periods in Nigeria, from colonial times to the contemporary period, religion was used in politics, though the degree of usage varies. In the colonial era, members of the African Traditional Religion used religion to oppose colonialism. With the increase in the strength of both Christianity and Islam, politics in Nigeria started acquiring religious undertones. Therefore, like Mensah, Nabofah and Kukah, Ekoko and Amadi believe that the non-Muslims of the North were oppressed and were not given equal status in the socio-cultural and administrative framework of the North coupled with the fact that the NPC government was pro-Islamic and religiously intolerant, thereby making the Christians to resent and resist the government which in turn leads to instability. With the establishment of the 1977 Constituent Assembly, religious politics achieved a higher level in its threat to the stability of the country, with the Shari'ah debate. Muslims were demanding for Shari'ah courts all over the country and the Christians and other members refusing on the basis of the 'secular' character of Nigeria. Despite the efforts of the political parties, during the Second Republic, of sharing leading roles between members of the two religions, Ekoko and Amadi argued that:

> The Second Republic was characterized by intense religious tension accentuated by religious intolerance, politicization and manipulation of religious questions for party or personal political gains and above all by religious fanatism (1989: 35).

Hence, there was no more tolerance and accommodation. Religious intolerance reached its zenith with the Maitatsine riots and its serious consequences on the stability of the nation. Similarly, religion was exploited and manipulated during the 1983 general elections by all political parties except the Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP). Although the military take-over was not religiously oriented religious politics came to dominate the period of the regime, viz.: the Shari'ah Debate and the OIC issue. Ekoko and Amadi, therefore, concluded that religion does have an effect on the stability of Nigeria and from observed events Islam has affected and threatened Nigeria's stability more than Christianity.

Clarke (1988) on the other hand argues that in the Nigerian context, although political interests may have helped in the Shari'ah debate raised by the Muslims, it is not really the motivating factor. Since for the Muslims living mostly in the Northern Nigeria, "there is no dichotomy between religion and politics and that for Muslim politicians, Islam continues to provide one of the main languages of political discourse" (1988: 537).

Conclusion

The review conducted above shows divergences among scholars studying religion and politics. Some scholars believe that religion is exploited one way or the other by the politicians, rulers or state authority itself to cater for their interests; some scholars like Peter Clarke believe otherwise. Consequently, a lot of research has been conducted in this

area. Nevertheless, there is still a gap in the literature of this significant issue in the Muslim world in general and Nigreria in particular. Most of the literature reviewed show clearly that these are not based upon empirical data and these do not analyse the attitudes and opinions of the people of Nigeria. It is, therefore, essential that much more research be conducted to show the role of religion, Islam, in the politics of the countries with Muslim majorities like Nigeria. It cannot be denied that Islam plays a dominant role in the affairs of the state and Muslim public opinion supports the role of religion in the state. Yet, Islam has been marginalized perhaps due largely to the manipulation of actors external to countries in the Muslim world. This needs to be proven and well documented.

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