

Politics of Religiousity and the Challenge of Political Development in South–Western Nigeria: Interrogating Issues in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

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Abstract

The Nigerian state is composed of various ethnicities. One of the major ethnic groups is Yoruba in the South-western Nigeria. Therefore, the study seeks to unveil Islam and politics in South-western Nigeria since the enthronement of democracy in 1999. The study argues that religious politicization has been detrimental to the unity of the region. Islam was wrongly believed to have no role to play in the society hence the Muslims are marginalized and are not relevant in the political space in Nigeria. The study observes that political apathy on the part of Muslims paved way for Afenifere, a socio-political organization who often pursued a Yoruba agenda but never considered the interests of Muslims as equally important. It is in view of this that the study concludes that, politics and religious consciousness have been exemplary in the political development in the South West since the beginning of the present democratic dispensation. On a final note, the study recommends that Muslims need to get involved and showcase their competence in governance instead of agitation for persistent relevance.

Keywords

Islam, Nigeria, politics, Southwest, marginalization

Introduction

Nigeria as a country is a conglomeration or an aggregation of several nationalities which makes the country a pluralist and multi-faceted society. The diversity of language, customs and traditions gives the country a rich cultural diversity. Nigeria is a British creation by uniting the various nationalities into a single country today known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This is the amalgamation of 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard. The amalgamation brought together the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, the colony of Lagos and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria into one country. This was done to serve the interest of Britain without the consent of the various ethnic nationalities. This act marked the beginning of various ethnic groups struggle for power in

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Nigeria. Though, the politics was characterized by ethno-religious based politics, religious sentiments was not so pronounced.

Apparently, the Eastonia conception of politics as authorities allocation of value or “who gets what, when and how” (Easton, 1965) is most pertinent in South-West Nigeria. Through party, decolonization in the 1950’s and governance in the First Republic (1960–1966), the religious factor has become one of the various variables in the struggle for political power in Nigeria. This Machiavellian principle of politics meant that for the politicians to survive, all means must be explored to attain the end. The people became cannon fodder in this power game where the different interests of the citizens make them ready pawns. The Muslim – Christian divide created in the South – West during the colonial era made the political terrain doubly volatile; first, in the play out of the politicians’ power game and; second, in the inter play of the Muslim – Christian struggle for attention and privileges. It has been a Darwinian; a case of the survival of the fittest (Oluwatoki, 2018, pp. 409).

In 1978, when the ban on political associations was lifted, it was the Yoruba, led by the late Obafemi Awolowo who first announced the creation of a political party, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The UPN was formed from another Yoruba socio-cultural group called Afenifere. In 1998, another political party predominantly made up of the Yoruba political elite was again founded from Afenifere. These political parties did not win enough political seats outside the Yoruba political space which suggests that they mainly relied on local support (Harneit –Sievers, 2006). Strikingly, a critical review of political events prior to independence and even after independence has not indicated any significant role played by Muslims or Muslim groups in the political arena of the South-West Nigeria. Of course, there could be many factors responsible for this. The British colonialists claimed to run Nigeria on the imperative of secularity in a multi-religious society, available evidence suggests that the colonial administration consciously employed religion as an instrument of pacification (Opoola, 2011, pp. 231).

Retrospectively, Christian missionaries by their activities sowed the seeds of discord between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, more so in the South – West. The Christianized and westernized post-colonial state called Nigeria continues to rouse Muslim indignation at the blatant disregard of their rights and the level of injustice they often suffer in a society they call their own (Oluwatoki, 2018, pp. 407). Prior to independence, the educated Christians were recognized and the affairs of the country was later handed over to them. This afforded them the opportunity to dominate and dictate the pace of political development in Nigeria. Meanwhile, while the political permutation was going on, the few privilege Muslims got a wrong definition and interpretation of Islam. It was wrongly believed that politics is not for Muslims but for non-Muslims; and involvement in it will ultimately lead to hell-fire! This is the beginning of problem(s) that the Muslims often encounter in determining their relevance in the political space in Nigeria. Over the years, the question of

Muslim being involved in politics has always been an issue of paramount importance to the Muslim *Ummah* (community).

For, Islam with its revolutionary message attaches great importance to politics. The Muslims are entrusted with the noble position of God's vicegerents on earth. They are regarded as the leader of all creatures as attested in the verse of the Qur'an: "*Ye are the best of people, evolved for mankind, enjoying what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God*" (Qur'an, 3, pp. 110). A deeper reflection, understanding and appreciation of this declaration clearly suggest that Muslims should be in a position to initiate, direct and control events in the society. The easiest way to demonstrate this is to control political power, and this cannot be possible except through active participation in politics. However, the Muslims were made to believe that politics in form of a democratic system of government is a dirty profession abhorred by God and as such should not be mixed with religion. This orientation began at a time when religious leaders were getting interested in politics as a result of its sensitivity. The Muslim preachers said that politics is for the rascals, thugs and those who were exposed to Western education only. Quite disturbingly, this and other reasons accounted for the apathy of Muslims towards active participation in politics.

Interestingly enough, since 1999 which marked the beginning of the present democratic administration, Muslims have been so much conscious to be part of the political reconfiguration in the South-west. Religion and politics have become so complex and unique to the extent that they are shaping the nature and dynamics of events in the South-Western Nigeria. The historical consciousness of the Muslims and their perception of marginalization by the Obasanjo-led government in 1999 created an uproar by the Muslim elites. Perhaps, this singular action motivated quite a number of Muslims to be keenly interested in politics. Notwithstanding, the presence of Muslim elites in politics in the South-West has not radically change the fortune of the Muslim *Ummah* (i.e. community). This is because the few interested Muslims who joined politics were not driven by an ideological orientation or mission. Rather, they were in politics for their personal inordinate desire and inelastic ambition.

Islam and Political History in South West Nigeria

Historically, Islam had been firmly established as a way of life of a large portion of Yoruba and before the penetration or incursion of colonialism. In fact, it is an unarguable fact that the British colonialists met Islam on the ground when they penetrated Southwest Nigeria, not only as a religion but rather as a culture, civilization, ideology and a complete way of life. It was the fear of this that threaten them to perceive Islam as an obstacle to the establishment of their hegemony. Consequently, the colonialists did everything humanly possible to erase the traces of indelible marks of Islam from the

region. This, perhaps sometimes make it difficult to have accurate and authentic history of the emergence of Islam in Southwest. The conspiracy of the Europeans colonialists with the Orientalists narrow down the wonderful contributions of Islam to the development of the Southwest. It has been wrongly established that, Islam was spread with force of Qur'an on the left hand and the sword on the right hand. This is not only a fallacy but fundamental distortion of historical facts.

From the authoritative sources, Islam as a religion is a peaceful religion and was spread majorly by the merchant traders. As argued by Akinjogbin (1971), Islam had come to the ancient Yoruba kingdom of Oyo by the 14th century through Trans-saharan trade. This made it possible for the first mosque to be built in Oyo-ile in 1550. Precisely, Islam was established in Iwo in 1655, spread to Iseyin in 1760, Saki in 1790, Osogbo in 1889, while Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu-ode, Ikirun and Ede knew about Islam before the Fulani Jihad of 1804 (Gbadamosi, 1978, pp. 4). Also, Islam came to Lagos in the 18th Century while the first mosque was built in 1774. In spite of this, with the high rate of propaganda, the Christians are able to establish themselves firmly in the Southwest with political involvement and economic prosperity. Undeniably, the Muslim *Ummah* in the Southwest is backward in terms of economy, education, leadership e.t.c.

A panoramic view of colonial Nigerian politics reveals how the Yoruba elite made their entry into Nigeria's national politics, and the consequences. When Chief Obafemi Awolowo created the Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1945, the transmutation of this cultural group into the Nigerian political scene in 1947, and its transition into a political party – the Action Group (AG) – in 1951, was done within a context of an already existing ethnic rivalry leading to the independence of Nigeria. But the political brilliance of Awolowo lay not just in his mobilization of ethnic energies around the concept of the Yoruba, but, the alignment of ethnicity with federalism as the panacea for Nigeria's political development. Federalism thus became Awolowo's, and the Yoruba's political ideology for rethinking and restructuring the Nigerian state. Awolowo's brilliant infrastructural transformation of the Western region along the line of his modernization blueprint constitutes a stark proof of his political conviction that regionalism is a desirable pivot in a truly federal Nigeria. However, Awolowo's failure to become the Nigerian head of state tells a different story which points at the seeming imperviousness of the Nigerian state to ideological politicking.

In "Yoruba Factor in Nigeria Politics", Professor Julius Adekunle (2006) outlines what he called "the contributions of Yoruba people to the growth of Nigerian politics from the colonial period to the present." The June 12 political debacle around M.K.O. Abiola significantly reinforced the Yoruba agenda of political autonomy and regionalism. Since independence, the Yoruba political desire has been tied around either producing a Yoruba president (which Awolowo and Abiola failed to achieve) or the achievement of a fully

autonomous region along the old western regional framework. Both of these aspirations have become the juncture of extreme frustration with the lackluster real-politik of the Nigerian state. Yet, Adekunle (2006, pp. 273, 291) concludes that: "Today, the Yoruba remain in the Vanguard of Nigerian politics".

The Yoruba identity and the working of its nationalism, the Yoruba political elites developed the sense of nationalism from their precolonial assumption of group identity and cultural projects in the 1900s to a radicalised political project starting in the 1940s. The earlier spirit of nationalism focused on re-branding the Yoruba ideational culture (language and philosophy) and aesthetic values. In contrast the laternationalism, linked with Chief Obafemi Awolowo's political project, assumed that Yoruba as a nation should occupy a central position within the independent Nigerian political space. In the process of pursuing this latter idea of political nationalism, the Yoruba re-created the spirit of oneness. There were a multiplicity of factors that contributed to this re-creation and success of nationalist politics. They included the role of Western education, the nature of Nigerian colonial politics between 1914 and 1959, the structure of the Nigerian post-colonial military regimes and the emergence and increasing number of Yoruba political elites.

The elements that helped to create a sense of belonging among the Yoruba and influenced the Yoruba's project to gain political control in the Nigerian federation as elucidated by Ajala (2009, pp. 12-13) include the following:

1. The creation of socio-cultural associations linked with the Yoruba mythological ancestry. Examples are Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà founded in London in 1947 and launched in Nigeria in 1949, Afenifere in 1966 and O'odua Peoples' Congress in 1995. All of these groups pursued a Yoruba social, cultural and political agenda.
2. The foundation of Yoruba dominated and controlled political parties, such as the Action Group, founded in 1951, the Unity Party of Nigeria, founded in 1978, and the Alliance for Democracy, created in 1999. All these political parties advanced the cause of Yoruba locally-conceived nationalism and politics, and acted as organs of grassroots nationalist and political mobilisation.
3. The use of local genres of musical and drama presentations in grassroots mobilisation, through the media, in support of nationalism. Examples of the music and drama genres included Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba must think), a genre of Yoruba cinema produced by Hubert Ogunde in 1957 and Ka'sora (We should be careful) – another Yoruba musical genre produced by I.K Dairo in 1960 (Nolte, 2009). There were also many other Yoruba artistes who produced home videos and recorded songs between 1993 and 2003 expressing Yoruba concerns in Nigeria. Many other Yoruba-based media outlets expressing Yoruba causes in Nigeria were founded especially following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 general elections in Nigeria.

All these forms of local genres created a broader awareness of the Yoruba people in support of nationalism and local politics.

Awolowo's project of re-inventing the Yoruba as a nation seemed to be a success. To negotiate Yoruba inclusion in Nigerian political power structures was a political project that is still in progress, supported by the Yoruba political elite, which is mostly in the progressive political camp. However, Awolowo's repeated failure to become the Nigerian president, having contested three times (1959, 1979 and 1983) and his eventual death in 1987, contributed to the decline of Yoruba nationalism – until 1993, when another eminent Yoruba man, Moshood Abiola, contested and allegedly won the federal elections for presidency. That the elections were annulled sparked off a re-emergence of active Yoruba nationalism, which became more inclusive.

Nonetheless, Southwest Muslim *Ummah* (*community*) has not succeeded in making itself politically relevant. This challenge remains daunting, particularly in the face of attempts being made by Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-cultural group, to arrogate to itself all the rights and influence in the region. Afenifere dominated the political arena in Yoruba land and appeared to have succeeded in keeping Muslims at bay until recently when the Oyo State Muslim Community under the leadership of Alhaji Ishaq Kunle Sanni called its bluff (<http://www.nairaland.com>). Before this happened, Afenifere had constituted itself into a self-appointed spokesperson of the entire Yoruba people. The only strange thing was that; the organization did not reckon at all with Muslims in the religion. It always left out Muslim leaders from its meetings and deliberations even though, it would still calm to speak on behalf of all Yoruba people.

Islam and Politics: Understanding the Nexus

In Islam, politics is not forbidden. The *Shari'ah* covers politics and treats political duties and rights as religious obligations. This explains why right from the advent of Islam, the *Shari'ah* (law) and *Siyasah* (politics) have been intimately related. The *Shari'ah* provides the framework within which politics can be conceived and activated. It provides clear guidance and objective criteria for political life. Politics, on the hand, promotes and sustains the *Shari'ah* since the implementation and maintenance of *Shari'ah* is the *raison detre* of political power (Muhammad, 2003, pp. 3). Islam does not accept the dichotomy between religion and politics. Thus, it is a wrong belief that Muslims are prohibited from involving in politics, organizing a political party, or bringing about social change in the name of Islam. Fundamentally, politics is part and parcel of Islam. To Muslims, there is no politics without Islam and there is no Islam without politics. Though, politics in Islam is not a “dirty game”, or “a game of chance”, or “a license for the exploitation and embezzlement of public funds, nor is it a ticket or an instrument for oppression and political vandalism.

Indeed, politics is a very critical issue in Islam. It is an integral part of Islam, and does not preach the superficial division of life into religious and worldly realms. Rather, it underlines the fact that separating the Mosque from the state, and politics from religion, are against Islam's unified concept of life. In this sense, it is a fact that cannot be disputed that, Western definition, is inapplicable in an Islamic discourse. They are laden with the Western notions of power, for "all politics is about power". But that kind of "power" has no place in Islam. However, even in the strict, popular sense of governmental processes and making of public policy, it shapes life decisively. Therefore, to separate religion from politics is to deprive Divine Law of its most important sphere of jurisdiction. It is no wonder that the colonial and neo-colonial powers and their agents tried to separate religion from politics, because they know that the only power that can fight their encroachments is the spiritual zeal of the oppressed peoples when it manifests itself as a political force demanding justice, freedom, independence and equality.

Also, to "de-religionize politics means to "de-legalize", "de-moralize" and to "de-spiritualize" the political behavior of big powers, for they do not want to be encumbered by any kind of considerations, legal or moral. All that matters to them is power, wealth and domination. Although, they respect international laws and agreements when it suits their interests. It is the law of jungle that they ultimately consider supreme. Thus, by separating religion from politics, the imperialists and their agents kill two birds with a stone. Invariably, they succeeded in putting a stop to the spiritual zeal of the masses who were basically religious, throughout the Muslim world- from political expression and participation in politics and, by depoliticizing them, from taking their destiny into their own hands.

Accordingly, in Islam, religion does not need to be politicized: politics is already part and parcel of its eternal teaching, and it will remain so despite the efforts of imperialist stooges to depoliticize Islam and Muslims. The purpose of Islam and the mission of Prophet Muhammad was to create a divine culture aimed to achieve the best possible conditions for the spiritual and material development of the individual and society. This culture was based on a monotheism which was not merely theological and metaphysical but also has equally important social, political, legal, ethical, and economic dimensions. Its aim is to create a world society based on a socio-political system in which ultimate sovereignty belongs to God, the Creator and the Law Giver, and where all human beings are equal and brethren. Notwithstanding, politics is also central to Islam if it is defined in its narrow sense to mean the art of governance. The Qur'anic exhortations of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil" and "of upholding justice and other Divine values and criteria", require the participation of all members of the society in the affairs of government by strict adherence to the Shari'ah as laid down by God.

Suffice it to say, the Qur'an expressly condemns anarchy and disorder, and the Prophet of Islam stressed the need for organization and authority in society. Within this context, Umar, the second Caliph, considered an organized society impossible without an *Imam* (the leader) and added that there could be no *Imam* without Obedience (Enayat, 1982). Even, the *Khulafau-al-Rasidun* and those who succeeded them recognized that the divinely mandated vocation to realize the will of God in history was communal as well as individual. They held an organic and holistic approach to life in which religion was intimately intertwined with politics, law and society. This is well expressed by Ka'b as quoted by Ibn Qutaybal (Quoted by Lewis, 1976, pp. 184) saying:

Islam, the government and the people are like the tent,
the pole, the ropes and the pegs. The tent is Islam, the
pole is the government, the ropes and pegs are the
people. None will do without the others.

Clearly, politics is even more central to Islam when it is defined in the realist perspective as a struggle for power. To profess faith in Allah and to proclaim tawheed is to call unequivocally for the repudiation of taghut i.e. those who claim absolute right and power which is due only to God and therefore, to banish *Zulm* (i.e. oppression and injustice) from the face of the earth. The *tawhidi* society Islam desires can brook neither a rival nor a compromise. The Qur'an enjoins the believers to shatter the absolutism of demi-gods and false deities: to divest them of any leadership roles; to wrest power for the righteous; and to reinstate good in place of evil. It was on the urging of the Qur'an that the Prophet Muhammad came out of his seclusion and fought all those who rebelled against the Prophetic guidance. One of the major objectives of his hijrah (migration to Madinah) was to establish political authority in accordance with the Divine will (Moten, 1996, pp. 20).

The fusion of religion and politics, therefore, is the dictate of Islam and cannot be disregarded. The choice between the Creator and Caesar simply does not arise: In Islam, there is no Caesar, there is only God and His Messenger. The Shari'ah incorporates the temporal with the spiritual within this context, ethics sets the tone for politics and the rules of political behavior are derived from the ethical norms of Islam. Thus, the major concerns of politics, that is, striving to control the state structure, to wrest power for the righteous, to root out evil and bring about the good life are all relevant to and encouraged by Islam. In other words, politics in Islam is a continuing effort to increase the power of Islam and to keep in check or reduce the power of *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance). By virtue of this fact, politics becomes what is known in the Qur'anic terminology as *amal al-Salih*, meaning, good deed.

Islam and Politics in South West Nigeria

In Nigeria, especially, religion plays very vital and influential role in the society that has manifested itself as a potent force in the political development of the Nigerian state from pre independence to post-independence (Danjibo, 2011, pp. 3). The character of Nigerian state as the center of activity, power and authority in a multi – religious society such as Nigeria makes it attractive and a point of contest for various groups seeking to dominate and influence the other. This coupled with the fact that, religion is one of the diversities highly susceptible to manipulation by politicians places Muslims and Christians on their toes at moments of political appointments and contests. What logically derives in this context is that the amount of public space enjoyed by a particular religious group will be largely determined by who controls political power (Muhammad, 2006, pp. 298). A recurrent issue in the political discourse in Nigeria is the secular character of the Nigerian state. Religious pluralism makes adoption of state religion fraught with danger. So the prohibition of a state religion by Section 10 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) still remains. It is interesting to note that this Section ten does not declare Nigeria a secular state, it only states that the government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion. This seems to reflect an appreciation of the fact that religion is too vital in the life of Nigerian citizens for the state not to be involved. And the much talked about secular character of the Nigerian state is not the clear-cut case of separation between church and state, religion and politics. There cannot be an issue too sacred for the state to touch if fundamental interests are involved.

Similarly, there can be no issue too secular in Nigeria for religious men not to be involved if vital interests are at stake. Nigerian states had all along been involved in religious matters and will continue to be, as indicated by the establishment of National Council of Religious Affairs (Umar, 1989, pp. 93). Hence, there is no doubting the fact that, Christianity and Islam are quintessential factors in national politics, whether overtly or covertly. In fact, that Nigeria is a secular state is not a reality because state machineries have been used and public funds have been expended in promoting Godly affairs. Some of the issues that border on state legitimization of religion in Nigerian politics expounded by Davies (1995, pp. 85) include government involvement in holy pilgrimage, oath taking, religious public holidays, religious ceremonies with official backing and teaching of religious studies in public schools. However, in the scheme of political relevance in the political space in the Southwest, the Muslims seem to have occupied no strategic position and neither are they politically relevant. This is as a result of political apathy on the part of Muslims.

Put differently, the political participation of Muslims are not feasible to have command any sense of respect. The political participation are those

voluntary activities such as holding public and party office being a candidate for office, attending elections campaigns, voting and exposing oneself to political stimuli (Anifowose, 2011, pp. 205-206); seeking information, discussion and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially, communicated with elected representatives, formal enrolment in a party, canvassing for votes, speech writings and speech making, working in campaigns and competing for public and party offices (Bello-Imam, 1987, pp. 235).

Notably, prior to independence, those who were actively involved in the agitations of independence were Christian elites. As such, those who were in-charge or at the helm of affairs shortly after independence were the Christian elites. Of course, this is because Western education which was introduced by Britain came *pari/passu* with Christianity. As it was a deliberate attempt, it was the Christians who benefited a lot from the scheming. Hence, since independence, this has been given the Christians an edge over the Muslims in the region. Systematically, the Christians organized, populated and paraded themselves as the mouthpiece of the region through the formation of Afenifere. Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-political group has taken this advantage to dominate the political affairs in the region. It constituted itself into an official spokes group of the entire Southwest region. It is quite undemocratic to observe that the organization has not reckon at all with Muslims in the region. The Muslims leaders, scholars and the elites has never played a prominent role(s) in any of their organized meetings, discussions and deliberations on the interests of the region, yet it often claims to speak on behalf of all, an irony!

However, shortly after inauguration of the Fourth Republic, the Nigerian democracy began to witness the increasing influence of religion in politics and politicisation of religion due to the resolve of some Northern state governors to adopt the Islamic legal code – *Shari'ah* – as the penal and criminal code in their states. With Zamfara state blazing the trail, eleven other northern states followed suit. The pro-*Shari'ah* argument is that, for many years, Muslims have witnessed the humiliation of their faith being relegated to the background in public matters, whereas antagonists view the *Shari'ah* issue as a grand design to undermine the national government and cause confusion. The series of violent confrontations being witnessed at present is a demonstration of the fundamental problem of religion that has created acute insecurity in the land (Opoola, 2011, pp. 231), particularly in the South-Western Nigeria. The Christian Association of Nigeria vehemently opposed it and violently rejected it.

Consequently, this resulted into some dramatic conflicts in the Southwest. The battle was vigorously fought through the media propaganda and the governors in the Southwest immediately dissociated themselves from the agitation of implementation of *Shari'ah* law. In an uncontroversial analysis, there has been deliberate manipulation of religious and other primordial identity symbols by the Christians to gain political advantage over the

Muslims. Since the present democratic dispensation, marginalization of Muslim in the political appointment has been recurring decimal in the political affairs of the Southwest. Despite the fact that, the Muslims are, unarguably the majority in some states; the state governors have always given more appointments to Christians than Muslims. It is worrisome in a State like Ekiti, one of the most serious impacts of this political disadvantage is the marginalization of Muslims in political appointment. In spite of the majority status of Muslims in the region, state governors have always given more appointments to Christians than Muslim. *Sahara Reporters*, Nigeria's leading Online Newspaper, published a press statement by Muslims Rights Commission (MURIC) on 10th September, 2015:

MURIC lambasted Fayose for the nepotism in his cabinet noting that all the key appointments in the Ekiti State government were made up of Christians, which included his Deputy Governor and speaker of the State House of Assembly. "With a Christian Deputy Governor, a Christian Speaker, a Christian Deputy Speaker, and a Christian Chief of Staff, Fayose's hypocrisy becomes crystal clear". The statement continued saying, "All the judges in the state are Christians. All the fourteen (14) commissioners in the state are Christian. All the Special Advisers except one are Christians. All the twenty-six (26) Permanent Secretaries are Christians". According to the statement, "Fayose's state's 5-member board are all Christians including Ekiti State University (EKSU) except one, which has a Muslim member. The 7 – member board of Colleges of Education, and that of Health Technology are all Christians. All the sixteen (16) education secretaries are Christians while all the sixteen (16) local government caretaker Chairman, except one are Christians", it said.

This is a very bad signal for an emerging democracy in Nigeria. Particularly, it in view of this, with other ugly developments that prompted Noibi (2015) the Executive Secretary of Muslim in Southwest Nigeria to have lamented that:

.....Muslims in the region, have for a long time been short-changed in many ways. Despite our large proportion in the population, we are marginalized by successive governments both in educational and in socio-political matters. The ethnic based organizations

that emerged in the region have purportedly spoken for the entire region without consultations whatsoever with Muslims. On many occasions, the stance of these organizations on issues at hand were detrimental to the image and welfare of Muslims.

The Southwest as it is today, with the seven Yoruba states of Osun, Ondo, Lagos, Ogun, Kwara, Oyo and Ekiti has two Muslim governors (Mr. Isiaka Oyetola of Osun State and Abdul Rahman Abdur'Rasaq of Kwara State) and five Christian governors (Barr. Rotimi Akeredolu (SAN) of Ondo state, Mr. Dapo Abiodun of Ogun state, Mr. John Fayemi of Ekiti state, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos state and Mr. Seyi Makinde of Oyo state). The basic issue is that their philosophy of governance is the same. No, single consideration for the interest of Islam in the real sense of administrative and governance of their respective state. Of course, they often embark on cosmetic programmes to identify with the Muslims. The manifestation of acrobatic religiosity of Christians in Yorubaland is not limited to workplaces. It extends to educational institutions. Students identified as Muslims, particularly female Muslim students who uses *hijab*, are the most vulnerable in this regard. The current happening in Ilorin, Kwara state is a clear and perfect testimony to this disturbing fact!

Particularly, an objective analysis of Oyo state in the southwest witnessed the venom of jaundiced religious inclination in making electoral choices in the 2019 general election. Christian community were of the view that the gentlemen agreement amongst the elites was breached in the state. The then incumbent governor being a Muslim for eight years was mentioning and sponsoring another Muslim to take over from him. As if to add salt to an injury, the three senatorial candidates in the state happened to be Muslims! This became a campaign issue which was used to swing votes against All Progressive Congress (APC). The Christians were far from being comfortable with the sense of alienation they had before the elections in terms of choice of candidates which was tilted in favour of Islam (Ojo, 2019, pp. 20). Eventually, at the end of the keenly contested election, the Christian candidate Mr. Seyi Makinde under the platform of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), won the election.

Be that as it may, the fundamental problem of Muslims in the Southwest politics is the problem of leadership. At the political formation, no ideological Muslim elite could be identified as the brain behind the political engineering of any party. Even, within the established political parties, no Muslim is known as the mouth piece of any political parties. In fact, from the MKO Abiola's June 12 saga through the Abacha dictatorship, no authoritative voice of condemnation from any Muslim leader or formidable Muslim organizations, and the established NADECO and Afenifere that championed and spearheaded the struggle were unfortunately not representing the interest of Islam. In the

absence of a formidable hoary leader(s), there emerged the politically conscious Muslim individuals who are keenly interested in getting involved to mark their presence but no solid political party to experiment their relevance. Yet, the Muslim elites or the community are still quite skeptical on the what should form the basis of their support for few Muslims that are interested in politics.

Summary and Conclusion

There is no denying the fact that the post – colonial Nigerian state has been a hot – bed of religious antagonism and acrimony between Islam and Christianity. Both have become competitors for public space. At one level, it is rivalry for a greater number of converts and at another level, it is competition for vantage positions in the power matrix. In spite of government’s endeavours to balance relations between the two. Mutual suspicion and antagonism has remained a common feature.

The study attempts to interrogate Islam and Politics in the Southwest Nigeria. It establishes that Religion has been an indispensable phenomenon in Nigeria. It has been and will continue to be an important factor in political discourse. The influence of religion is not only limited to politics but it influences virtually all other facets of life. Political power affects economic prosperity, social relation, educational advancement, and the psych of the society. Hence, it is well argued that, religious harmony has been exemplary in the history of Southwest polity. Notwithstanding, the teeming Muslim population in Yorubaland has been at the bottom of the pyramid of acute poverty, mainly because it has always been short – changed in the political scheme of things. It is therefore high time Muslims in the region actively engaged in politics.

Disputes and conflicts witnessed over the years have been more or less caused by fear of insecurity, poor education or lack of it among some group of people, who are mostly hoodwinked by unpatriotic persons seeking to advance their selfish-interest. These unpatriotic citizens are to be found mostly in the corridors of political power; they often exploit religion as a tool of manipulation. Democracy, being a system, which gives freedom to people more than any other system of government, is open to abuse by unpatriotic citizens for their own narrow interests. The integration of the region should be the utmost priority and the only thing that guarantees this is democracy and democratic governance. In other words, this is going to be the only antidote against lawlessness, corruption, impunity, visionlessness, religious bigotry, leadership deficits and political immaturity – a terrible combination that could easily spell the destabilization of the Southwestern region in Nigeria.

Living together is more than an acceptance of difference; it requires mutual trust; reliability and good faith in social interactions. Clarity is therefore

needed on what we can and may expect from others, and the certainty that broken trust will be addressed and restored. The law and justice will help in this respect, but living together requires more mutual trust than the law and justice can offer. These are only the tip of the iceberg. Our daily life is for the most part based on cooperation that is not dictated by law or contract, but based on custom, mutual trust and affection. Those habits and values will have to correspond to the principles of lawfully arranged trust. If this is not the case, then the government will not be able to function in the long run.

Recommendations

Beyond the question of marginalization lies the survival and development of the South-Western Nigeria. There is the need to fully understand the forces working to derail all efforts aimed at regional integration. It is the duty of politicians and leaders to establish standards of governance, by using different tactics or strategies, unity of purpose, patriotism and selflessness. In this regard, most crucial for building a dynamic democratic culture that will ensure the integration of all ethnic and religious groups on the basis of fairness and justice is essential. Thus, if Muslims prefer to live together in social units with a set of laid down rules and regulations made in the Nigerian constitution, which is binding on the Muslim community, they should not only be interested in politics but be partisanly involved in the running of the affairs of their land in so far as their actions do not contradict the basic and fundamental teachings of Islam. Islam does not go against Muslims being politicians after all, but, on the other hand, it encourages one to take up the challenges of working hard for the welfare of his people.

From the foregoing analysis, I consciously pointed that Islam and politics are inseparable. To this extent, it is unislamic for any Muslim to ignore politics under whatever pretext. For, it is only through politics that Muslims can aspire to control government and by extension protect their interests including the nascent *Shari'ah* ordained by God. Infact, the benefits derivable from participation in government by good and conscious Muslims cannot be enumerated while the harm the *Ummah*, may suffer by withdrawing from government can best be described as "*al – fitnah*" (i.e. humiliation) as worse than death

More importantly, in any society that Muslims find themselves, they are bound to ensure that they resist any ideology that is in conflict with the just ideology prescribed by God and co-operate with others in that society to evolve a system that would be humane and based on the fundamental principles of human liberty, equality and justice. This is more so when a Muslim realizes that God's injunction are not arbitrary, whimsical, despotic or impossible to act upon. Though, it should be well appreciated that, politics in Islam is not about looting the treasury, pride, boastful but of sincerity and fulfillment of duties. It is not who get what, when and how: it is not a game of chance or a dirty game: rather it is an act of *Ibadah* (worship).

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