

RELIGION: A CLOG IN THE WHEEL OF NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE

Yemisi Olawale* and Abbah Umaru**

Abstract

One of the major factors that have continued to raise questions about Nigeria's democratic experience is religion. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, religion is often viewed as having a negative influence on Nigeria democracy. Succinctly put, religion has manifested as a source of conflict rather than a resource for peace and development in Nigeria. In spite of the formal separation between the fields of religion and politics, religion has continued to influence Nigeria politics and often times perceived as the bane of democratic progress. Drawing from Yusuf Bala's Religion Manipulation thesis, it becomes clear that ever since the emergence of Nigeria Fourth Republic; religion has become a tool of manipulation in the political space. For instance, it has served in the process of political mobilisation, voting pattern and behaviour, policy formulation, political appointment and protraction in religious strife and conflicts. This study, which relies on secondary data reveals that religion has assumed a defining role in Nigeria's democratic process by becoming a social and political force of importance and most importantly a pushback for any meaningful progress of the country.

*Yemisi Olawale

University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria; yemisiwaleisaac@gmail.com

**Abbah Umaru

Niger State College of Education,
Minna; Abbahumaru2011@gmail.com

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Introduction

The religious and political landscapes of states in the world have reflected inherent diverse tendencies and identities. Nevertheless, heterogeneous identities have been one of the characteristic of every human settlement and existence. Religion in both global private and public spheres has become highly contested and subjected to various interpretations. Elandi and Adel (1994) observed that the rise of religious fundamentalism or nationalism undermines legitimacy, democracy and good governance. In other words, religion today is assuming a defining role in public life across the globe and within local communities. This, in fact, is evident in Nigeria democratic experience since the emergence of Fourth Republic in 1999. The (ab)use of religion in political affairs has degenerated into national questions: debate over secularism of the state, introduction and constitutional jurisdiction of Sharia courts, Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), religion and election, religious holiday and grant for pilgrimage, among several other questions attest to the ascendancy of religion in the political affairs of Nigeria since independence.

Religion has influenced Nigeria post-colonial democratic experience; this is due to dysfunctional mobilisation of religious differences for ethnic, political and socio-economic gains. Since the 1980s, which marked a watershed in inter-religious relations, Nigeria has witnessed religious conflicts mostly between Christian and Muslim aficionados. However, since 1999, religion has become a political tool employed in the struggle for ascendancy and hegemonic control of various government spheres. Dogara (2013: 14) notes that political competition between Christians and Muslims is without doubt a significant

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political issue in Nigeria. Several scholars have researched into the nexus between politics and religion in Nigeria. Haar (2005: 303-326) surmises that religion and politics constitute an alternative source of power – namely spiritual and material spheres. Haar further notes that religion has become a deadly weapon in the politics of developing countries. Leo Igwe explains the consequence of mixing state affairs and religion in what he identified as trouble and confusion, anarchy, riots, destruction and bloodshed in the country” (in Bujra, 2006:742). Falola (2009) believes that the ascendancy of religion as a powerful political tool in Nigeria can be traced to four factors: ‘the failure of democratic and military political leadership to initiate significant transformational policies, which gave rise to alternative leaders and leadership models through religion and religious organisations’; ‘the failure of institutions and structures of governance have been interpreted as the failure of the state itself’; the implication of the Structural Adjustment Programme, which contributed to the pre-eminence of religious conflicts through the 1980s and 1990s and religion proved more effective as an instrument of political mobilisation. Usman (2009) corroborated Falola’s submission when he argued that ‘events since 1999, particularly the rise of political Islam in the North and Christian/Pentecostal revivalism, have had a profound impact on the country’s fledgling democracy and claims to secularism”. Kukah (1999; 2003) shows the nature of religion, politics and power in northern Nigeria using his personal and direct experiences to offer a paradigm on how religion guides social and political change in Nigeria. Falola (1998) using approaches and paradigms drawn from history, sociology, religious studies, and political science, provides a comprehensive analysis of the subtle manipulation of religion, in Nigeria since the 1970s. Similarly, Akwara et al (2013) studies on religion, politics and democracy identified how religion and politics inhibit the growth of democracy in Nigeria. Akwara et al (2013) opines that democracy is associated with secularism rather than affiliation with any religious faith which can ultimately jeopardise the

legitimacy of the state. Babatola (2015) examines the role of political leaders in the manipulation of religion for political affairs. He contends that Nigeria political leaders who are either Christians or Muslims in the country have clandestinely promoted their religious belief to the highest level of the country's governance. Wakili (2009) also claims that religion has heightened the tempo of politics in Nigeria history through the formation of political parties and voting behaviour.

The abovementioned submissions have acknowledged the role of religion in the formation of political parties, influence of religion on election, political mobilisation and ethnic relations in Nigeria. This article seeks to contribute to the literature by providing an analysis of the nexus of religion and politics in Nigeria's fourth democratic experience. The objective is to push further a thread of discussion on the issue of religion and politics, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge. The study relies on the content analysis of secondary data, sourced from extant literatures. There are three sections in the article, apart from the introduction and conclusion, interspersed therein is a background of religious belief in Nigeria. The next segment examines Yusuf Bala's religion manipulation thesis and religion's role in pre-1999 governance experiences. The last segment examines use and abuse of religion since 1999.

Religion in Nigeria: A background

Nigeria is a multi-religious country with three major religions. These include African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. African traditional religion has a longer history with different ethnic groups in Nigeria. According to Onyeidu (2001), ATR is indigenous and had existed in pre-colonial society before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. Aderibigbe (2015) state that a unique characteristic of the religion is its embellishment in the heritage of the African people. He further notes that ATR designates the traditional worldview of Africans, manifesting both the philosophical and practical experiences developed, sustained, and passed on from one generation to the next.

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Islam has a longer history than Christianity in Nigeria. Islam penetrated into Nigeria in the 11th century through Kanem-Borno before spreading to other Hausa states. Falola (1998: 24) states that the expansion of Islam into Nigeria came through the activities of merchants and missionaries. The deepening of Islam in northern Nigeria can also be attributed to successful campaigns of Usman Dan Fodio Jihad in 1804, which triggered the establishment of Caliphate in Nigeria (Falola 1988: 24). The penetration of Islam in the western part can be attributed to the commercial relations with the northern merchant and clerics. The Jihad also facilitated the spread of Islam across the region and into the heartland of some western Nigerian societies such as Ilorin (Kukah & Falola, 1996). The spread of Islam in Yorubaland is also attributed to the religion accommodation of some traditional practices such as polygamy. Through such, it gained significant acceptance by influential rulers and chiefs in this region

The history of Christianity can be traced to the larger history of European incursion into Nigeria in the 15th century. The initial spread of Christianity was limited as a result of limited missionary personnel, fund, among others. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a boost because of its role in the abolition of the slave trade and promotion of western education. Among the thriving mission enterprise of this period was Church Missionary Society (CMS), Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMS) with significant influence in Badagry and Abeokuta of the Yoruba speaking region. The case of Christianity in northern Nigeria was difficult. However, by 1910, the CMS Missions had made influence in Zaria and Bida while the Sudan Interior Mission at Patigi was active among the immigrant communities in the Sabon Gari.

Religion Manipulation Thesis and Nigeria Democratic Experience Prior 1999

Usman et al. (2010) defines religion as any belief system in which adherents submit themselves to a particular supreme being – supernatural, material or cosmic – as a sacred independent entity with invincible capacity to supply a range of mundane and after-life satisfactions in return for unconditional obedience, devotion and loyalty. Politics is defined ‘as the process of making and executing governmental decisions or policies (Lasswell 1995: 1-5), the authoritative allocation of values (Easton 1957: 383-400); or who get what, when and how (Lasswell 1930); the quest for power, order and justice the art of influencing, manipulating and controlling others (Quincy 1955: 130); the process of resolution of conflict in society (Ranney 1957: 35-38) and a struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desire on public issues’ (Dyke 1990: 134). Yusuf (1987) provides an antithetical relationship between religion and politics in what he presented as a manipulation thesis. Yusuf presented the thesis at a public lecture presented at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1987. In his understanding of religion manipulation, he states thus:

The real basis of the manipulation of religion in Nigeria today is the need to obscure from the people of Nigeria a fundamental aspect of our reality. That is the domination of our political economy by a class of intermediaries who are being increasingly exposed. And this is to enable this class to cover themselves with religious and ethnic disguise in order to further entrench division among our people, slow down their awakening at any cost; even unity of our country for which so much has been sacrificed (Usman 1987: 23).

Yusuf (1987) also stresses that religious manipulation for political gains in Nigeria was not due to the instigation of foreign powers or the attempt by Nigerian stooges to please them; it usually arose, because of the desire of the political elite to exploit

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religion as a tool in satisfying their socio-economic aggrandisement. Yusuf also argues that “the campaign of systematic manipulation of religious sentiment is being conducted for the sinister and reactionary purpose of diverting attention...they wear a cloak of religion in other to confuse and divert attention of our people from their harsh conditions of existence”. Yusuf (1987) further stresses that manipulation essentially means controlling the action of a person or a group without the person or group knowing the goals, purpose and methods of that control and without being aware that a form of control is being exercised on the all. Yusuf’s argument is not primordial; it still occupies an important discussion in the politics of Nigeria. Scholars have considered the manipulative use and abuse of religion in Nigeria. For instance, Edlyne et al, (2004: 20) describes the use and abuse of religion in Nigeria thus:

Religion is a means to perpetuate violence, fuelling of ethnic consciousness and solidarity, acquisition of political power and socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction and vandalization of property of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religions. As a means of commandeering political legitimacy in Nigeria, it has dictated the pace of the political democratization process which hitherto nurtured ethnic consciousness in the country

Agi (1987: 92) also states that, “what seems most evident is that the Nigeria political elite and their counterpart in the churches and mosques are manipulating religion and religious sentiments or their own personal and not communal ends”. The outcome of religious manipulation is predetermined and beneficial to the architects of such plan. Kukah (1999: 25) submission provides an explanation to the aforementioned. He contends that “those who engage in this manipulation do so to cover up their lack of political base. They neither love their religion nor the people who they arm to defend these religions. In

the end, it is their personal and class interest that they seek to defend'. Since the emergence of Nigeria Fourth Republic, political manipulation and mobilisation through the use of religion has been evident in Nigeria politics. This is probably the most frequent ways in which religion is used or misused in. The manipulation thesis revealed that the progress of Nigeria has been marred largely by individual and interest groups who have taken recourse in the systematic deployment of religious sentiment by which groups antagonism along religious lines are played out (Kukah 1999: 25).

Nigeria gained her formal independence on October 1, 1960. As a pluralistic state, religion has played significant role in the nation's politics prior to 1999. As a result of the prominence of religion, successive civilian and military government had involved themselves in religious debates and controversies. Religious debates were active in Nigeria First Republic (1960-1966). Asaju (1990: 181) noted that "by the time Nigeria got her independence, it had become clear that the erstwhile northern and southern British protectorates were of varying religious persuasions such as would play a determinant factor in the destiny of the nation". The role of religion in Nigeria politics is not only limited to democratic regime. Religion also gained prominence as a political instrument under the military regime. Olushola (2003) argued that conflictual nature of Christian-Muslim relation began with the military incursion into politics on January 15, 1966. The Murtala-Obasanjo military administration (1976-1979) witnessed religious debate over the establishment of a Federal Sharia Court recommended by the 1976 Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC). The debate over the establishment reflected individual stakeholders' religion affinities, the secularity of the state and religious freedom. The 1976 CDC brought forth the issue of Sharia into national question. The Second Republic under Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), religion and sectarian agitations began to play out in many ways. The administration witnessed the 1980 Maitatsine Crisis under Muhammadu Marwa. The manipulation of religion in election

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was also evident in 1983 general election. Shagari exploited religious affiliations when he urged the Muslim in northern Nigeria not to vote for 'infidels'. As noted by Olushola (2003), Shagari Administration entrenched religion in Nigeria political space by portraying it as a potent instrument for mass-mobilisation.

Religion also manifested in Nigeria politics during the Buhari/ Idiagbon administration between 1983 and 1985. Issues over religious holidays grant and in-kind palliatives such as ram provision became sources of controversies. The administration also faced challenges emanating from sectarian strife such as violent demonstrations by Muslim fanatics in Jimeta in Gongola State on February 27, 1984, 1985, the Maitatsine crisis, among others. The Babangida administration regime heightened religious divides with the January 1986 Nigeria membership approval of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) held in the Moroccan city of Fez as the 46th member. At the same period, Nigeria also subscribed to the membership of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) with shareholding status. The issue of Nigeria membership of the OIC created perhaps, the unhealthiest religious tension as non-Muslims and Christians protested on grounds that Nigeria was a secular society — a position strengthened by the provisions enshrined in the country's constitution. There was too, the Christians-Muslim student strife at the University of Ibadan in May 1986 (Ibadan Cross Crisis), March 1988 at the Kaduna Polytechnic, and the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria on June 12, 1988 (Falola 1998: 207-219). Religious identity also manifested itself under General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). The administration witnessed Shittes/ El Zazaky religious protest and religious tension over Nigeria foreign policy relation during this period. Nigeria entered into a multilateral relationship with Islamic countries known as D-8, comprising Turkey, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran and Egypt.

Religion and Nigeria Democratic Experience since 1999: Use and Abuse

Nigeria witnessed a democratic transition from the military administration of General Abdulsalami, which promptly launched an Eleven-month transition programme that culminated in the swearing in of a democratically elected president on May 29, 1999. However, since the emergence of the nascent democracy, discussions have been concerned with how democratic transition will be consolidated. By consolidation, we mean a democracy that is characterised by political stability, national integration, good governance and sustainable development.

As noted elsewhere in the study, the ‘debate over the religious status of the Nigeria state remains one of the most passionate and acrimonious, often beclouded by bellicosity, zealotry, arrogance and prejudice’ Kukah (1999:102). Nigeria pretends to be a secular state. Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution states that the government of the federation shall not adopt any religion as state religion (Federal Republic Constitution, 1999). In spite of the constitutional provision, Muslims and Christians compete for space, converts and political domination (Falola 2009). Omoregbe (2003) have also identified three ways in which religion has influence politics, namely, by the direct involvement of religious men in politics, by fusing the two (religion and politics) as one and by subjecting politics or government to the doctrine or laws of religion, thereby carrying out politics or governance along the line of religious doctrine, ideals or laws (Omoregbe, 2003). All the aforementioned indices of Omoregbe are obvious in Nigeria Fourth Republic politics. One major implication of religion for democratic development can be measured in the area of election. Ojukwu et al. (2019) contends that Nigeria struggles for sustainable democracy, good governance, and development have been so daunting that all previous attempts at democratic transition have been futile. The challenges emanating pre and post-election process are clear indices of challenges faced at democratisation. Elections in Nigeria, despite the understanding that only credible election can

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consolidate and sustain the country's nascent democracy have been marred by extraordinary acts of rigging, thuggery, "do or die" affair, ballot snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulations of voters' list, brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Omotola, 2010; Bekoe, 2011).

The influence of religion in Nigeria has become evident in the nation's voting and political mobilisation process. Nigeria voting pattern since 1999 has often reflected religious percentages, and largely guided by religious affinities. Kukah, (1993:228) posits that "no one can aspire to, or hold political office in Nigeria without pretending to be religious". Asaju (1990) also states 'that aspiring political leaders lay more emphasis on psychological exploitation of people's religious affiliation rather than the logicity and practicality of manifestoes based on individual credibility and merit'. Similarly Olushola (2003: 65) observed that 'religion, as volatile as it is, remains a veritable instrument for political manipulation in Nigeria. Without doubt, politicians across the ethnic divides found religion more useful in mobilising support for their candidacies or parties than ethnicity'. Familusi (2012: 26-27) argued that religion often determines the choice of a flag bearer/running mate for the posts of the president and governor in states that have a large representation of Christians and Muslims.

In the 2003 electoral campaigns in Anambra State, the Catholic priests openly enjoined church members to vote for the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) candidate, Peter Obi. Obianyo (2012: 15-16) contends that the Catholic Church endorsement of Peter Obi was based on his strong Catholic background and affiliation with a brother as a Reverend father in the Catholic Church. In 2007 Sokoto State election, Shi'ism was one of the political weapons used in the campaign rallies by the People's Democratic Party supporters against the DPP-Democratic People's Party gubernatorial candidates (Ibrahim & Tukur 2013: 415). Also, Ojo (2004) states that the 1999

elections, witnessed Pentecostal Christians support for Obasanjo's candidature, viewing him as a symbol of the restoration of Christian control and ending of Muslim political dominance in Nigeria.

Religion influence voting patterns as well. In the 2011 presidential election featuring sixty-three political parties had the then incumbent president - Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari as the major contenders. The 2011 general election also possess evidence of religious voting. Voting figures revealed that Goodluck Jonathan had a landslide victory in the Christian dominated areas of the South and also the Christian areas of the North otherwise known as the Middle-Belt region. This guaranteed him a landslide victory after winning 23 states in the country and polling 22, 495, 187 votes. He was rejected outrightly in the Muslim 'Core North' where Muhammadu Buhari swept all the votes in its 12 states including Sokoto, Zamfara, Niger, Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Bauchi, Kaduna, Jigawa, Borno, Gombe and Yobe (*The News*, May 2 2011). The implications of religious colouration of electoral process, no doubt, hampers the growth of democracy in Nigeria. This position is succinctly put by Haar (2003: 318):

Religion is an often powerful instrument in the hand of those who use it, these are not necessarily always believers alone, they may also include other, such as politicians, who manipulate religion effectively. It is worth noting that many politicians in the world and in those parts of the world where people are overwhelmingly religious (in case of Nigeria) (in the defined sense of the word), have already discovered this potential and used it for their own, often factional purposes, in ways that prevent the establishment of peace. They are acutely aware that both the realm of political and the realm of religion are connected with power whether religiously defined (in terms of spiritual power, located in the transcendental

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sphere) or in secular terms (located in the material sphere)... Politicians therefore find it important to try and extend their influence and control into the religious realm.

Religion could also be used either to canvass support for candidates or dissuade the electorate from voting/supporting a particular government (Familusi 2012). The institution of Sharia revealed how religion has become a potent factor in Nigeria democratic space and political process. Diara (2012), noted that the adoption of Sharia as a state law in Northern Nigeria began in Zamfara State on October 27, 1999, introduced by the then Governor Ahmed Sani Yerima. This action later spread to all the core northern states like, Kaduna, Sokoto, Niger, Yobe, Borno, Katsina, Bauchi, Kano, Jigawa and Gombe. Onapajo (2012) notes Yerima earned widespread support and acceptance from the people of Zamfara for his governorship ambition owing to his campaign promise of implementing *Sharia* as a major strategy to address widespread societal decadence among them. The aftermath of Sharia introduction was characterised by killings, blood-letting, destruction of properties and widespread violence. For instance, between February-May 2000 over 1,000 people died in rioting over the introduction of Sharia in Kaduna State alone (Omotosho 2014:133). In another perspective, Olushola (2003) has also argued that the introduction of Sharia was a clear response by the northern (Muslim) oligarchy use of religion to mobilise opposition in the North against the Obasanjo Administration over religious federal character principle. Usman et al. (2009) also pointed out that religion has also been used by the political governing class to cover up problems arising from its failure to deliver.

In addition, conflict often exacerbate when religion become a tool in the hands of politicians or political interest groups, which is used to create, maintain or strengthen factional position. For example, the introduction of Sharia led to several schisms between the Christian and the Muslims. The adherent of both religions interpreted the constitution to suit their aim and

protect their freedom of religion. For the Muslims, Sharia is a Muslims holy law and therefore a fundamental religious right of the Muslim. In other words, Sharia is subsumed in the totality of Muslims everyday life and that Islam is not only a religion but a complete way of life that articulate private, public, political, social and societal lifestyle. It is the conviction of some Muslims belief that a denial of Sharia is an infringement of their fundamental human right and the distortion and violation of Islam.

The Christian perspective of Sharia is at variance with Muslims position. For the Christians, they see Sharia as a political Islam. Onaiyekan (2001) sees the implementation of Sharia as a matter of great controversy mainly because of the political dimension. The Sharia is perceived as the agenda of the northern political class to use religious doctrine to serve political and selfish interest goals. In any perspective religious debates over Sharia are made, it has been employed as a political tool. However, the aftermath has revealed cases of religious based argument. For instance, Christian and Islamic adherents questions the secular ideology of the state arguing that the root cause of Nigeria challenges is her failure to take their religious values into account. Also, the Sharia case has demonstrated cases of religious intolerance and epoch of intractable inter-religious violence in Nigeria which is detrimental to the survival of a transitional democracy. The potency of religion in politics has also fostered religious conflicts and fundamentalism which hitherto are harmful to a transitional democracy. Christian and Islamic fundamentalist emerged as a response to politics and violence. For instance, fundamentalism, militancy and religious preaching have contributed to violence, conflict and religion manipulation. Since 1999, Nigeria has witnessed a lot of radicalisation, manipulation and politicisation of religion thereby endangering the Nigeria state. The mmanipulations and politicisation of religious conflicts, have led to the death of tens of thousands and destruction of properties worth billions. In these situations, democracy becomes fragile. Without doubt, Islamic

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and Christian fundamentalists have increased and complicate the position of religion and Nigeria as a secular state. Yusuf (1987) states thus:

A series of violent demonstrations riots and civil uprising in this country in the last two years, have forcefully made Nigerians come face to face with the reality that religion is been systematically manipulated by some forces, for specific purpose which are clearly opposed to the unity of this country (Usman 1987: 71).

The introduction of Sharia in northern Nigeria was accompanied by series of violent demonstrations and riots. A report by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) captured the aftermath of Sharia introduction thus:

The scale of massacres and destruction was very high and thousands of people were reported to have been slaughtered like rams. People were said to have organised the killing of their neighbours simply because they belonged to a different religious order. This phenomenon led to a major restructuring of the town [Kaduna] with people congregating in areas where their religious faith had a majority of inhabitants. (International IDEA, 2000:75)

In addition, the violent activities of religious interest groups that claimed to be inspired by a particular religious' ideology such as Boko Haram has tempted many individuals to see the increasing relationship between religion, politics and violence as harmful. The propensity and proliferation of religious violence has led many to questions if religion itself is a source of conflict or resource for peace (Garrie 2005: 303). For instance, the Islamic concept of jihad, have been carried over on to the material plane under a particular conditions notably for the purpose of self-defence, has proven helpful in justifying and rationalising the use of violence in modern times. The Boko Haram insurgency facing the Nigeria state is a very vivid

example of politicisation and religious manipulation for interest groups.

The implication of religious manipulation for development is another area of concern for any transitional democracy. Kukah (1994: 445) asks: can Nigeria continue to waste its resources rebuilding structures destroyed by the perpetrators of these inhuman acts at the expense of other areas? The very sensitivity of development for democracy is very crucial. In a bid for the perpetrators to instil fear and actualise their goals, religious violence is accompanied with destruction of individual, corporate and governmental structures. Religion prevents political stability needed to drive sustainable development. Oluwaseun (2015) notes that the influence of religion is not only limited to politics but its power influences virtually all other facets of life. Political power affects economic prosperity, social relation, educational advancement, and the psyche of the society. Without doubt, sustainable development is a necessary antidote for a transitional democracy. Religious activities such as riots have deterred the spate of political development in Nigeria.

Religion and appointment of public officials has also generated heated debates. Emphasis has been laid on religious character of governmental appointment. Asaju (1990) notes that government appointments to public position in Nigeria have become issues of public comment because of their religious implications. Religious stakeholders often protest political appointment especially when one religion believers are perceived to be overrepresented. The 1999 federal constitution explicitly provides for a Federal Character Commission that put issues such as religion, ethnicity and minority in compliance with this delicate balancing act in employment at all levels of government (Usman et al 2009). This was the case in 2003 when the ministerial and public service appointment was reshuffled to reflect the federal character of Nigeria under President Olusegun Obasanjo administration. Olusola (2003) discuss the reform thus:

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The implication of these reforms is that the federal civil service, particularly its leadership, now reflects a federal character, and is more balanced in terms of the ratio of Christians to Muslims than it was before the emergence of the Obasanjo Administration. These reforms were not limited to the civil service alone. Even the military service, the Foreign Service, the boards of parastatals, the police service, etc. have all witnessed some fundamental reforms.

Kukah (1994: 454) contends that religion has been drawn into government appointments by making sure that equal number of Muslims and equal Christians are represented in government positions. Usman et al. (2009) argued similarly that public policies have to be religiously justified and key appointments to the armed forces, police, judiciary and various political offices have to be balanced in terms of ethnic, regional and religious composition.

Conclusion

In the chequered history of Nigeria multi-religious identity, religion has assumed a dominant position in the political and democratic governance. However, since the emergence of Nigeria fourth republic, the use and abuse of religion has been a clog in the wheel of Nigeria democracy. The republic is experiencing space of religious ideologies manifesting itself in different sphere of politics and governance. Of utmost importance is Yusuf Bala's religion manipulation thesis whose relevance cannot be ignored when the use and abuse of religion is considered in Nigeria. Religion has been used and abused as a tool of political mobilisation, influence voting behaviour, appointment at the federal, state and local government levels, used and abused as an instrument of conflict between Christians and Muslims population. In the final analysis, it must be point out that religion has contributed to the challenges of national unity and integration in Nigeria.

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