DIAGNOSING THE INTERPLAY OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, ELITE HYPOCRISY AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ASCENDANCY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

It is a truism that Nigeria is one of the most religious countries in the world. Religion is often employed among politicians, policy makers and religious leaders, as a determining factor in who occupies public offices and a major influence on policy direction of government. The intrigue and nuances that usually go into this process, more often than not, lead to a compromise of public interests by the religious stakeholders and political gladiators, especially after elections. Guided by social identity theory, this essay examines how religious identity of the citizens/aspirants and patronage by the political elite shape voters' behaviour on the one hand; and the nature and dynamics of leadership ascendancy on the other hand.

Introduction

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with an estimated 160 million people, and among its most diverse, with more than 250 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups. Islam and Christianity are nearly equally represented, while African traditional religions are also prevalent (Lewis, 2011:2). In much of the news and discourse on Nigeria, the country is represented in sharp divisions between a 'largely Muslim north' and a 'predominantly Christian south'. This narrative, while a convenient short-hand, ignores the brimming diversity in both halves of Nigeria and glosses over the intricate ethnic, religious and social ties that have been responsible for holding the country together through many episodes of turbulence. In today's Nigeria the north and the south are home to an ethnically and religiously mixed population. Across the country Muslims and Christians have co-existed peacefully for decades, and they inter-marry in the southwest where

identity is mainly shaped by regional culture and values (Hoffmann, 2014:5). However, weak institutions and mobilization of identity groups are often exploited by Nigeria's ruling class for their own selfish benefit. Religion has increasingly become more divisive in Nigeria and has exacerbated tension along fault lines. While it is generally believed that ethnic identification is presumed to be the most salient and consistent source of social identity in Nigeria (Lewis, 2007 cited in Okpanachi, 2010:7), this common assumption is challenged by a research by the Pew Religious Forum which revealed that religion, rather than ethnicity is the most salient identity in the country. Political activists exploit the religious factor, knowing that religious factor is the deepest and strongest rallying point. It has strong images or symbols, values and commitments; it evokes strong emotions (Agu, 2010:10). This essay is divided into six sections. Section one sets the background to the study while section two is the theoretical explanation of the key concepts. Section three discusses the interplay of religion, society and politics within a broad context and section four analyses how religious identity shapes political leadership ascendancy in Nigeria. The impact of this phenomenon on governance and the Nigerian state is brought to the fore in section five while section six concludes the study with some suggestions.

Conceptualising Religious Identity and Elite Hypocrisy

The use of the term 'religious identity' to refer to the identification of an individual with a religious tradition was first introduced by Hans Mol (1976, 1979) and later expounded by Seul (1999). These scholars argue that because religions rest on metaphysical and ethical beliefs drawn from a shared religious tradition, they form a key influence on an individual's perspectives of themselves and the world. Seul argues that religion provides the strongest kind of identity for individuals and groups. Religious norms and values are communicated through texts and practices and because of their appeal to the transcendent they have a greater influence on people than other kinds of influences.

Religious Identity is a specific type of identity formation. Particularly, it is the sense of group membership to a religion and the importance of this group membership as it pertains to one's self-concept. Religious identity is not necessarily the same as religiousness or religiosity. Although these three terms share a commonality, religiousness and religiosity refer to both the

value of religious group membership as well as participation in religious events (e.g. going to church). Religious identity, on the other hand, refers specifically to religious group membership regardless of religious activity or participation (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_identity).

In Nigeria, religious identities are usually classified into three – Christian, Muslim and Traditional. Of the three, traditional religions is the least politically active; numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses. However, in parts of the Kogi, Kwara, and Nassarawa states, masquerade activities associated with traditional religion have been a major source of conflicts. In effect, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict, with Nigerian Muslims much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 5 cited in Osaghae and Suberu, 2005:11).

For some, elites are the decision-makers of the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society. For others, elites are the sole source of values in the society or constitute the integrating force in the community without which it may fall part. Elites have been regarded as the Chief threat to the survival of democracy. Their existence has been taken to be the very denial of democracy. Elites which have exceptional access to key positions in the society or which appear to wield control over critical and crucial policies disproportionate to their numbers can understandably seem to be living contradictions of the notion of government by the people. Despite this, other writers have seen elite as the bulwarks of democracy, protecting it from the dangers of totalitarianism (Duru, 2012).

Ake (1996: 31) gives a clear distinction between the ruling class and the government. He avers that both are related but also distinct in a very concrete way. The ruling class is in power while the government is only in office. The government is the small group in charge of the major institutions of the state, particularly the legislative and administrative machinery. The ruling class is all the power centres- political, cultural, religious, and economic- that constitute the existing political domination. For instance, in the case of Nigeria, the ruling class includes all the powerful traditional leaders, the major religious leaders, the higher ranks of the coercive institutions such as the military, the police and the judiciary, international capital and the wealthy

Nigerians who command the economy. Unfortunately the increasing misery and alienation arising from their corrupt and incompetent rule is threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria rather than promising their revolutionary liquidation.

A focus on political elites is a focus on the primacy of political interests. As both Mosca and Pareto underscore in their works, members of the elite act in order to preserve their position within their societies. Specifically, political elites' action is aimed at the preservation of their political power. As Thomas Schwartz argues, members of the political elite are 'ambitious people seeking office for individual recognition, career advancement, and the power to affect societies' (Schwartz 2009, cited in Tardelli, 2013:88-89). As political power is always contested, the minimal objective driving political elites is to stay in power. Driven by the need to secure coercive tools and maintain their authority, elites are interested in controlling state institutions for two reasons. First, institutions provide elites with state power hence the ability to mobilise material resources and coercive tools to control and shape both their own societies and the international arena in which they operate. Second, institutions stabilize a political elite's rule by legitimising and extending the political elite's formula to an entire community, thus making elites' rule more acceptable to non-elite groups (Tardelli, 2013:97).

In Nigeria, many political elites, past and present, have accumulated personal fortunes through resilient, deeply rooted systems of political patronage that are wired into the booming oil industry in the south. Today, Nigeria is contending not simply with a growing gap between its northern and southern halves but also with the polarization between Nigeria's diverse population and an affluent minority that is seen – regardless of its ethnic or religious background – as becoming out of touch, self-serving and corrupt once launched into the wealth and comfort of the federal capital city of Abuja (Hoffmann, 2014:7).

Religion, Society and Politics in Nigeria: The Overlapping Lines

Religion generally supports social norms, reassuring the people that their ways are right and their cause is just; for religion has become part and parcel of society and has been reported to be the focal point of cultures. In the Nigeria context, for instance, one cannot doubt the seriousness of the faith and the commitment of most Nigerians in their religious beliefs. One cannot equally

doubt the richness, of the cultural heritage which Nigerians find in religion and in its significant role in their historical experience. More importantly, one cannot doubt that Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion contain fundamental moral principles on which aspects of our society and culture are built (Adamolekun, 2012:143). Nigeria is among the most, if not the most, religious country in the world. According to the Pew Research Center, Nigeria is at the top of the charts in terms of intense religiosity. Both Christianity and Islam have experienced very dramatic growth over the last 50 years. They have not just experienced quantitative growth, but they have experienced very important qualitative changes – changes in denominational affiliation, changes in theology, changes in attitudes towards one another (Kukah, 2007).

Religion and politics have to do with two spheres of activities in the life of the same persons. Citizens who belong to religious groups are also members of the secular society, and this dual association gets complicated. Religious beliefs have moral and social implications, and it is appropriate for people of faith to express these through their activities as citizens in the political order. The fact that ethical convictions are rooted in religious faith does not disqualify them from the political realm. However, they do not have secular validity merely because they are thought by their exponents to be religiously authorized. They must be argued for in appropriate social and political terms in harmony with national values (Cauthen, 1997). The complex interaction between religion and politics is most visible in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria where everyone in the country openly and fervently identifies with either Christianity or Islam. Today, Nigeria's population is divided nearly equally between Christians and Muslims. The import of this has been established by Ruby and Shah (2007).

> The importance of that divide is well illustrated by the fact that religion- not nationality - is the way in which most Nigerians choose to identify themselves. In a May-June 2006 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 76% of Christians say that religion is more important to them than their identity as Africans, Nigerians or members of an ethnic group. Among Muslims, the number naming religion as the most important factor is even higher (91%).

As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country, Nigeria's broad religious geography reflects the historical exposure of its northern communities to Islam through the trans-Saharan trade and the success of Christian missionary enterprise in many of its southern parts (Nolte, Danjibo and Oladeji, 2014:10). Northern Nigeria's early interaction with Islam created the predominance of

Islam in pre-colonial Hausa-Fulani cities. Since ethnicity in northern Nigeria is not entirely homogenous, other ethnic groups, particularly in the River Niger and River Benue, were not predominantly Muslim. A 19th century jihad under Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) revived Islam and integrated a large part of northern Nigeria under a new caliphate. Islam also spread to the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria through voluntary conversions and links to Malian trading communities (Nolte, Danjibo and Olajedi, 2009 cited in Emelonye, 2011:21). For Christianity, its history in Nigeria can be traced to the abolition of the trans- Atlantic slave trade in the early 19th century. The activities of European Christian missionaries and liberated and returned slaves were more concentrated and intensified in coastal cities such as Lagos and southeastern Nigerian ethnic communities. Thus, Christianity became the dominant religion in southeastern Nigeria as Christian evangelism and education spread (Emelonye, 2011:21). Apart from Christianity and Islam, Nigerians also belong to a range of other religious groups. The largest of these is comprised of followers of traditional religious practice.

The cynical manipulation of religion by the Nigerian state has led to a combative dimension in Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria. Complicating matters, ambitious individuals have also acted as demagogues as they exploited deep-seated prejudices for personal benefit. Thus, Christians and Muslims have become embroiled in an acerbic struggle for ascendancy over the Nigerian body politic. A great many different kinds of religio-political conspiracies have engulfed Nigeria since the 1980s, and these have ultimately destabilized civil society in many parts of the country (Falola, 1998 cited in Akinade, 2002). In fact, as noted by Familusi (2010:159) it will amount to an error of contradiction to claim that secularity in Nigeria is absolute and the legal provision notwithstanding. Without mincing words, religion has been a potent factor in Nigerian politics since independence, thereby threatening her secularity. The fact that no religion is recognized as a state religion does not suggest that religion is not an issue of concern to successive administrations in Nigeria. In fact, it has been a matter of inevitability. For instance, the annual state sponsorship of pilgrimage has become a tool for political patronage, as state governors and federal politicians use the opportunity to reward party men and women in the hope of solidifying their political bases.

Religious organizations have never pretended not to be interested in the affairs of the country as they are, in many ways, involved. One of such ways is prayers that are offered for leaders and

the country as an entity. These prayers are both solicited and unsolicited (Familusi, 2010:159). It is observable that the electoral process in Nigeria has also attracted faith-based organizations since the emergence of democratic government in 1999. The four consecutive elections conducted so far, that is, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 were monitored by some religious bodies like the Justice, Development and Peace Commission, (JDPC), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC) among others. This may not be unconnected with the objective of injecting some level of credibility into the electoral process as they usually partner with other civil society organizations. More often, their reports generate interests among scholars and politicians alike just as the latter partly depend on these reports for election litigation (Omilusi, 2014).

The Nigerian politicians have always appealed to the people's sentiments to pursue their hidden agenda. In their newly found campaign strategy, they have just realized that a Muslim-Muslim ticket or Christian-Christian ticket will spell doom for the country! And some questions readily come to mind: What has religion got to do with competence and vision required of a good leader? What has being a Muslim Governor or Christian President got to do with the country's educational system, road network, economy, electricity, poverty reduction, wealth creation and employment generation? In fact, who among the political gladiators is a real Christian or good Muslim- by sanctimoniously pontificating on the voters' choice of candidate and the religion he/she professes! And if they are, why have they not translated their religious teachings into good governance for the benefit of all? Their understanding of governance can be viewed from the narrow prism of ethno-religious sentiments-just to attain or retain power. Yet, in any of their political permutations, they care less about fraudster-fraudster ticket, looter-looter ticket or murderer-murderer ticket! In fact, Heads of State who professed either of these religions are culpable for the underdevelopment, pervasive corruption and criminality that characterize the Nigerian state.

 Religious Identity and Political Leadership Ascendancy

Religious issues are often closely linked with power politics. Various actors use religion to enhance their own political power. In the 1980s in Latin America, the Catholic Church played a

key role in transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracy. The Church initially supported the National Reorganisation Process in Argentina (1976- 1983). It kept its distance from Pinochet's rule in Chile, but stayed closer to popular movements for change in El Salvador. National churches even mediated between conflict actors in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala. In Turkey, the ascendency of the Gülen movement, an influential Sufi Islamic brotherhood, shows religion as a powerful prop for the political ambitions of theologians. The degree of religiosity of a society will influence the role religion plays in a transition. But a strong role for religion does not necessarily impede the consolidation of a democratic order. Authoritarian regimes abolished ideological trends informed religion, but a healthy democracy allows for a wide range of views (Mikaïl, 2012).

Elites in Nigeria garner their legitimacy from a variety of occupational and identity-based affiliations. In the public sector, there are military, political (both traditional and western), and bureaucratic elites whose positions of authority provide access to government resources. These elites distribute state resources both legally and illegally, often developing patron-client relations based on ethnic, religious, or regional commonalities. In the private sector, traders and owners of businesses across the country are also elites, using their wealth to influence public policy in many of the same ways as the west. Political leaders cannot rule the country without building coalitions with elites representing a myriad of interests, since the political system in and of itself is not imbued with sufficient legitimacy from which to govern (Kaiser, 2005:27-28).

Ideally, religion should not be a matter of any importance in politics and distribution of power in a modern state, more so in a multicultural one. If religion were left at the level of spiritual interaction between individuals and whatever represents God for them, it should not matter to voters and candidates who are interested in solving social and mundane problems facing citizens. In particular, citizens in a mono-religious space would have no reason to think in terms of religion when choosing a candidate or when a candidate that subscribes to the territory's only or dominant religion canvasses for votes (Sekoni, 2014). But the elite have always used religion as a tool of exploitation to achieve selfish socio-economic ends, while politically deploying religious fanaticism and favouritism to polarize the people and sustain unhealthy tension in the country. To date, public officials use public funds as a tool for political patronage, thereby

generating resentment and outrage from rival religious groups (Sampson, 2014:336).

With the emergence of democratic rule in 1999, there was an unwritten political contract between Nigeria's political elites – that the presidency would alternate between a Muslim and a Christian every two terms – which broke down in 2010 when then-vice president Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian former governor of oil-rich Bayelsa state, took over from Muslim president Umaru Yar'Adua who was dying barely three years into his first term. In the 2011 election, Goodluck Jonathan won a full presidential term for himself (Linden, 2014). It has become a recurring phenomenon for political elites to attribute their ambition to divine calling with a view to getting the support of the electorate.

In the 1999 elections, Pentecostals supported Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party. For many Protestant leaders, he symbolized the restoration of Christian control over government. In 1995, while in prison, Obasanjo claimed that he was "born again." Once elected, Obasanjo called for national prayer and fasting to assure a successful transition (Freston 2001: 188-89; Ojo 2004: 2, 9). In 2002, with presidential elections approaching, Obasanjo claimed a divine mandate to win a second term. One of his opponents, Chris Okotie of the Justice Party, also claimed a divine mandate to lead Nigeria. Okotie first entered the national limelight in the 1980s as a pop star but later became a pentecostal preacher. He sought the nomination of the National Democratic Party but lost, then switched to the Justice Party, which nominated him (Ojo 2004: 2; IRINnews.org 2003). Okotie again contested the 2007 presidential election under the banner of the newly registered Fresh Democratic Party, which he chaired.

The religious identity component of the country's divisions is also today becoming no less strong than the ethnic. They are in fact often overlapping; political candidates usurp both these identity markers. Tensions have been building since the last election cycle in 2011, which sparked the highest levels of election violence since the return to civilian rule in 1999. According to Hoffmann (2014:4), Jonathan's appeal to the north's Christian voters ahead of the 2011 election, which was powerfully represented by a photo of him kneeling before a popular Pentecostal Christian preacher, served to alienate him from many sections of the northern Muslim

community. He however, notes that since the last election, the northern anger continues to simmer but remains unresolved and deeply misunderstood:

> Too often, it is misrepresented in the Nigerian and international media as simply a demand for a northern (specifically Muslim) president. However, the widespread discontent among ordinary northerners with President Jonathan and the northern political elite has more to do with a long-held sense of political and economic marginalization than a desire to see a northerner assume the presidency again.

In his analysis, Fawole (2014) affirms that deliberate manipulation of religious, ethnic and other primordial identity symbols to gain political advantage over opponents has been a recurring phenomenon of Nigerian politics at least since independence. Generally, members of the Nigeria political class routinely employ these symbols as weapons in their hegemonic contests, and by far the most guilty in this identity manipulation are the educated elites among them. For them, all is fair in love and war, and no weapon is too crude to be employed in the contests to gain and or retain political power. For Obianyo (2010:144), one of the intriguing aspects of Nigerian politics is the ease with which the political class capitalises on any form of identity to capture state power or public office. At one time ethnicity is used; and where the ethnicity is not catching on, religious sentiments are employed. Ethnicity in this sense also includes other forms of local identities that have come to be known in Nigeria as the indigene factor. In other words, the history of Nigerian politics is one in which one form of identity or the other has always played a role.

The infiltration of religion into the electoral process is consummated with thanksgiving by politicians in Churches and Mosques to acknowledge God's sovereignty and faithfulness; and for granting them victory no matter how fraudulent the election might be. It has not been recorded, in recent time that such people were prevented, by religious leaders, who ideally should not be part of any fraud (Familusi, 2008). Today, Nigeria is more polarised along sectional and religious lines than at any time in its history. We are seeing a government and ruling party that has shown every readiness to use religion to divide the country in order to rule over it. Tragically, the diabolical efforts of the ruling party's hacks have produced a situation where many voters have already made their decision on who they would vote for simply on account of

his religious identification (Eriye, 2014). Given the current political debate in the country, this trend may continue as opined by Akinlotan (2014):

> Under Dr Jonathan, the politicisation of religion is unlikely to abate, and his aides and campaign directors and sympathetic clerics will mine it copiously, as they are already doing with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). It is not surprising that religious leaders like Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor have thrown in their lot with Dr Jonathan. To him and others like him, it is a natural and effortless process, a subliminally divine and even messianic struggle to win and hold down Aso Villa for God.

The nation's landscape has continued to be marked by institutional dysfunction and infrastructural dilapidation despite the religious affiliations of its leaders at all levels of governance. According to the former governor of Ekiti state, Kayode Fayemi (See *Premium Times*, 2014), "churches are proliferating in the midst of social and moral squalor. Nigerian Christians live in a bipolar reality. The same can be said of Islam and its phenomenal growth in the country over the years. As Nigerians, we share in a common social experience marked by decadence, while we also function as people of faith in the controlled environments provided in our churches". Dr. Fayemi accused President Jonathan of stage-managing visits to influential religious leaders to exploit their popularity for his political gain:

> It is becoming increasingly clear that one of the do-or-die strategies of the ruling party to retain power in 2015 is to compensate for poor performance in office by stoking ethno-religious sentiments and pushing the country to the brink of crisis. This can be deciphered from the ethnic jingoists who brazenly threaten fire and brimstone if President Jonathan is not returned in 2015, as well as the predilection of our president to stage-manage visits to influential spiritual leaders and exploit their goodwill to masquerade as the anointed candidate of people of a particular faith (ibid).

The paradigm that has emerged from our implicit national consensus has shelved aside every conceivable internationally codified parameter to evaluate quality and performance. We had done all these on the altar of temporary conveniences to promote our irrational partisanships and or crude personal interests. The great cause for concern is that, in the midst of all this cancerous comprehensive dilapidation of our country, intellectuals with hitherto proven sterling pedigree descend into the gutter of truly nonsensical advocacy of unreason and illogic. This would be a national embarrassment in any other clime. The phenomenon of the intellectual as a blind griot, a prodded but independent hireling, has returned to our shores (Alalade, 2014).

Impact of Religious Politics on Governance and the Nigerian State

In a country that is already fragile and constantly teetering on the verge of dissolution, religious crisis presents a considerable challenge. The intense politicization of religion in contemporary Nigeria has continued to aggravate the deepening antagonism between Christians and Muslims all over the country. Currently, Nigerians are passionately questioning whether their country should remain united as one entity. Some argue that they should seek a federal solution to Nigeria's problems based on several autonomous regions while others wish to jettison the colonial borders altogether and create new states. Incendiary strife between Christians and Muslims has added more weight and credence to the secessionist agenda (Akinade, 2002). Citing different instances in history where religious bigotry has ruined countries with its attendant implications, Adinuba (2014) expresses worry about the Nigerian polity:

> Every Nigerian must be worried by the current mindless promotion of religious bigotry. Faith is founded on the most powerful sentiments in human beings, and not reason or rationality. Divisive politics based on religion has proved to be most destructive in human history. Religious politics manipulation by the late Jafar el Nimiery from 1973 destroyed the Sudan, eventually leading to its breakup in 2011. Religious politics was responsible for the Balkan War which broke up Yugoslavia in the 1990s into three different countries. Religious politics led to the carving out of East Timor from Indonesia in 2002. Religious politics held Northern Ireland down for decades until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 promoted by United States President Bill Clinton led to the enthronement of reason. Religious politics between Christians and Muslims is responsible for the ongoing carnage in the Central African Republic.

During President Obasanjo's rule, Christian-Muslim tensions deepened. Shortly after Obasanjo took office in 1999, states in the country's northern half began to apply Sharia to criminal cases, provoking considerable insecurity and hostility on the part of Christians. Twelve states in the predominately Muslim north established some form of Sharia. At the same time, many Christian churches, including independent evangelical and Pentecostal churches as well as mainline denominations such as the Catholic and Anglican churches, stepped up evangelistic and missionary efforts in Nigeria's middle and northern states, further increasing tensions. Since 2001, incidents of Christian-Muslim violence have become both more frequent and bloodier (Ruby and Shah, 2007). The religious bigotry and intrigues that characterise Nigerian politics have been, in the few years, manifesting themselves during elections as covertly manipulated by the political elites.

The alienation of the citizenry and their resort to self help under the canopy of different ethno-religious cum sectarian persuasions has a colonial origin, but has heightened with the onset of "democratic" rule in the country. This is not surprising given the predilection of the Nigerian elite in the face of poverty of ideas, to manipulate ethnic and religious identities, to feather their nests and gain unmerited advantage in the elite scramble for the national cake (Nnonyelu, 2013:100). Every Nigerian, according to David-West (2014), agrees that the greatest impediment to our quest for robust national growth and development (economic or political) as well as needed progress is bad leadership. The main existential ingredients of which are: Corruption, lack of integrity, lack of principle, indiscipline, unreliability, lack of vision and power intoxication. All these undesirables are even compounded with arrogance of power manifest in reckless and careless impunity in exercising power, with the power elite or leadership being deluded into baselessly believing in its invincibility.

The non-separation of religion and state is the main factor why there are no correlative or preventive laws to ensure general accountability of public offices. Rather, it ensures the provision of dubious manipulations that are dependent on the religious affiliation of the incumbent democratic president, governors or other government officials. For example, so many parastatals are set up by the federal government but their functions overlap and are duplicated with each other. Patronage, clientelism or favouritism does overlook the genuine qualification and expertise required for good productivity (Agu, 2010:14).

The political elites' hypocrisy manifests in their continued sanctimonious postures and postulations as they, at every given opportunity, arrogates their hold on to power to the wish of God even as the country sinks deeper in the undesirables mentioned by David-West. The implication is that the Nigerian people continually groan under a political leadership that romances religion but is allergic to transparency and accountability. Consequently, as Nigerians are "hemmed in by poverty, unemployment, disease and threatened daily with sudden death, it is not surprising to see them besiege foreign missions looking for travel visas to escape from the country at the slightest opportunity. This is not to disregard the proliferation of several religious groupings whose fortunes have blossomed under the extant socio-economic environment" (Nnonyelu, 2013:101). This has also been reinforced by Eriye (2014):

> Voters must ask themselves if they are going to elect a president based on his piety or their performance. We are suffocated with religiousity and church/mosque-going at election time. Once the elections are won and lost, these supposedly pious politicians return to business as usual. How is it that with all our holy and prayerful politicians, Nigeria is so messed up? We remember religion when it helps us carve up the nation's wealth. Our faith takes a back seat as we despoil the land and desecrate the offices that God in his mercies has allowed us to occupy; we abuse the powers we should hold in trust for the people.

Though the widespread emphasis on the fear of God by some Nigerians clearly comments on the prevailing political culture throughout Nigeria, where those in power often commit crimes with impunity, this has not stopped the corrupt political leaders' sinister religious patronage and "victory" at every election period. Interestingly, in many developing countries, like Nigeria, where the party system is not well developed nor the citizens politically mature, voters tend to be presented choices of personalities rather than distinct political platforms. Political parties and/or candidates for public offices may not have a coherent policy and program platform but rather a hodge-podge of campaign promises on which elected candidates could easily renege. Meanwhile, voters do not usually feel empowered to demand accountability from elected public officials. In a worst case scenario, the elected officials use the power of their position in public office to serve personal, family, party and patrons' interests above those of a wider constituency or the general public while the voters feel powerless in changing this situation and resigned to waiting out the completion of the officials' terms of office (Miranda, 2005:6). Nigerians are accustomed to incidents of impunity among the ruling class, which is blatant indulgence in political, social or economic wrong-doing or crime with freedom or immunity from being punished by the law. Suffice it to say that what the country needs now is a better system of governance. Probity and accountability must become the norm, and the government must tackle social issues of education, health, employment and housing among other national challenges.

Concluding Remarks

It is posited by Sekoni (2014) that the country needs a constitution that is unequivocal about secularity of the state as a means of welding together a country of multiple religions. Without a constitution that has adequate provisions to remove fear of domination of one religious group by another, or of one ethnic or linguistic group by another, asking citizens to discountenance the

politics of identity and reflection of plurality (in terms of religion, ethnicity, or language) may be nothing more than wishful thinking. He submits further:

> After almost half a century of lack of direction, it is conceivable that most voters would want a presidential ticket that is committed and capable of providing regular electricity, an enabling environment for the growth of sustainable refineries to reduce the cost of energy for citizens and governments; creating jobs for young Nigerians and empowering our women; providing an educational culture that can compete in the modern world; etc. But it is also imaginable that there are many Nigerians who would want a guarantee of inclusivity, reflection of all forms of plurality (call it federal character) in the room in which the national cake of job and other opportunities is shared. Such guarantee can come more assuredly from a secular constitution and modern religion-neutral institutions, than from good-hearted leaders who can proclaim that they are tolerant Christians, Muslims, or Animists (ibid).

As the 2015 elections draw nearer, politicking is focused on personal and patronage rivalries with little or no attention to the country's challenges and no accountability to the Nigerian people. No new generation of political leader has emerged to change the dynamics. The 2011 pattern of appeals to ethnic and religious identities is about to be repeated with the potential resumption of the killings that followed those elections (Campbell and Harwood, 2013). Nigerian politicians, Fawole (2014) asserts, need to beware how they play politics and what stratagems they employ and manipulate in their hegemonic contests. Playing the religious joker at a time the whole of Northern, Western and Eastern sub-regions of Africa are experiencing a dangerous upsurge in religious militancy, insurgency and terrorism is without doubt a morally repugnant way to play politics. What this multi-ethnic and multi-religious country needs at this time are leaders who preach and encourage peaceful and harmonious co-existence, not hate and division.

It is expected that political leaders should endeavour to provide selfless service which is based on public interest. This can be achieved if the leaders show honesty in dispensing public duties and declaring any personal interests that may conflict with public duties. The leader must be disciplined and committed to serving the people. What Nigerians deserve, therefore, is transformational leadership- in the real sense of the word. It is an involved, complex process, yet an important one that binds leaders and followers together in the changing of the people and the nation at large. The followers have deep respect for such leaders and generally have a high level of trust in them. Transformational leaders have the ability to inspire their followers and have a strong commitment to serve the people. They guide people from darkness to light. Leaders who

fit into this category celebrate the success that they and the followers have been able to achieve because they were all committed to the dream. Playing the religious joker or mere advertisement of religiousity will not achieve this!

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