

Religious Factor in Nigeria External Relations

O.O.E. BALOGUN

Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State.

Abstract. Religion builds human belief system. It is a weapon that shapes one's attitude, norms, culture and deed in life. When religion is taken to a large extent it makes its followers so submissive that scarcely can they do anything in their life times without using it lay sown principles as guide. Nigeria is a notable country in the western part of African continent which practices three dominant religions. However the imbibed/accultured religion (Christianity in the South and Islam in the North), have over powered the cultural ones (traditional religion). Religion can also be seen as an act of God fearing and of a monastic order and that belief in the existence of a supernatural ruling power the creator and controller of the universe, who has given to man a spiritual nature which continues to exist after one's death. These religious groups play several roles in tilting the policies of Nigeria internal and external dealings as a Muslim leader prefers to work with Muslim administrators while those of Christians have faith in co-Christians irrespective of the competency and experiences of governance of the sect members. This also affects the external relationships these leaders propose or entered into while they are in power.

Keywords: Religion, human; attitudinal weapon; submissive followers; Christianity, Islam and Buddahism, monastic order; Traditional

1. Introduction

Religion has come to play more prominent factors in Nigeria external relation starting from the first Republic in Nigeria (1960-1966) the issues raised by the involvement of the Northern Peoples' Congress in Arabia world by the Action Group which was then southern dominant part was the factor that while there are Muslims in both Northern and Southern Nigeria, It is possible to talk of a Muslim North and

a Christian South, in the sense that the way of life and the pattern of thought of the dominant political elite in the North are influenced by Islam, while the society and political ideas in the South are more secular (Brith (2010), Olajuwon (2014).

Brith submits that this was to say that the Northern people's Congress was an Islamic party, but if one tried to separate the ideas of the party which were due to its traditional and conservative nature from those that were due to Islam, one would find that there is a considerable overlap. For instance the refusal of the Northern Peoples' Congress government of Northern Nigeria to disenfranchise Northern women: Compactable with Northern women being kept in Purdah an Islamic tradition, although thus decision could be traced to the conservation of the party. However, the most important fact is that the Northern leaders; believed that their political ideas were sanctioned by Islam, and this belief was shared by the vast majority of Northern society as posited by Emil and Jude (2011).

The consequence of the role of Islam in Northern Nigeria was the creation of a society that was sensitive to political and social development in the Arab world. For example, the suppression of the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt by Nazzar was actively discussed among the Mallams in Northern Nigeria and probably among the Emirs and other leaders of the Northern people's congress; it was this awareness of and interest in the events happening in the Arab world that demonstrates the faith factor in the influences of Islam (Lead (20069), Abraham (2009) and Jude (2011).

The second factor was the conscious decision made by the Sarduanan, the leaders of the Northern people Congress then, to transfer a situation of sensitivity to development in the Arab World to active

involvement in the developments in the Islamic World, Olajuwon (2011) submits that during the colonial period, British authorities were aware that the nature of Northern society was one of potential development in the politics of the Arab world; hence the fear of the British authorities about the possible spread of Mahidism from the Sudan to Nigeria and the influences' of Nazzar on Northern Nigeria. After independence, the Sardauna began such a policy of involvement. In June 1961, he went on a tour of the Muslim State in the Middle East and Asia. In Pakistan he announced that he had convinced Ayub Khan as to the need for a summit conference of all Muslim State and that he would canvas Iran, Lebanon, United Arab Republic, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The Daily times strongly criticized the Sardauna as posted by Eli (2007) and Caston (2010).

It pointed out that because of Nigeria internal politics, a confederation of Muslim state was unacceptable to Nigeria's African policy and that there was need to establish time relationship with "Yellow black Africans" and then to stretch pan Africanism to those heads that are geographically in Africa but whose hearts are not in the continent. The Daily times was asserting that the North African Arab Commitment to pan. "Africanism was less than" it should be, and hence the Sardauna should exert himself to get a serious commitment to African from the Arab instead of essaying to push Nigeria into an Islamic politics confederation.

The Northern regional government issued a clarification saying that what Sir Ahmadu meant was that he was seeking "a Unity of mind on cultural and spiritual matters and not planning for a political confederation of Muslim State". But rather than accepting this face-saving explanation by his government, the Sardauna repeated his call for an Islamic summit and a resurgence of Islamic nationalism. In Iran he announced that he had discussed diplomatic, economic and cultural agreement between Nigeria and Iran, and in Saudi Arabia he announced that he had invited the king of Saudi Arabia to visit Northern Nigeria as retreated by Ebimene (2014).

The Southern press was incensed by those pronouncements of the Sardauna and called on the Prime Minister Alhaji Tafawa Balewa to repudiate the views of the Sardauna. The Prime Minister tries to walk the tight-rope, while accepting the Sardauna's proposal for Muslim Summit, he rejected the ideas of a confederation because of the geographical dispersion of the state involved. He affirmed the right of any region to invite a foreign

Head of State as long as the request have the approval of the Federal Government. (Constitutionally, Balewa was wrong in this matter). Moreso the Prime Minister attacked the Nigeria press for inaccuracy and mischief-making. In reply, the Daily service quoted extracts from the Sunday Statesman to disprove the charge that the Nigerian Press had misquoted the Sardauna. Actually, the daily service missed the point. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa knew that those reports were accurate since they were quoted from the root source but he insisted that the Sardauna did not say those things; because he had no right to say them. In other words, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was telling Nigerian press, "I don't believe you; he could not have said those things" (Ajadi and Brill (2000).

The National Convention of Nigeria Citizens also supported Alhaji Tafawa Balewa's submission in playing the message of the Sardauna down. It dissociated itself from all criticism of the Sardauna's statement, including that of its National Convention of Nigeria Citizens said that if the Muslims' Body advocacy was non-political, like the World Council of Churches, it welcomed it. However, if it was meant to be a political body the National Convention of Nigeria Citizens would look into the whole affairs from a well-meaning and bordered perspective while considering its full implication; having due regards to the multi-religions nature of our society and make their own sober views Known" as reported by Abdullahi and Rasaan (1999).

None of those controversies deterred Sir Ahmadu bello, who later became Vice President of the World Islamic league. The league is a non-political organization and its pronouncements on "Zionist aggression" are to be regarded as routine and National but of non-political significance. However, the Sardauna continued to mix his involvement with the league to foreign affairs. In 1964, he announced that he had settled differences between Saudi Arabia and United Arab Republic by appealing to their common interests in Muslim brotherhood. In 1965, he appealed to Ethiopia and Somalia to settle their differences in accordance with the principles of the world Islamic League, ignoring the fact that Ethiopia is not a Muslim State. Apart from the accusation that Sir Ahmadu's activities were a violation of the constitution, there were accusation that his activities had resulted in Egyptian involvement in the Nigerian political conflict as recorded by Osho (2008), Allan (2008) and Hybrid (2000).

The pattern of politics conflict in Nigeria had been on a North/South basis. It was to maximize this conflict

that a southern party, National Convention of Nigeria Citizens founded a coalition with the Northern people congress in 1960. This strategy worked for three years during which both parties succeeded in destroying the Action Group. After 1963, however, the National Convention of Nigeria Citizens became the Chief Political Opponent of the northern peoples' Congress. It was during this time that National Convention of Nigeria Citizens alleged that Egypt had given half a million pounds to the Northern people's Congress. More ominous was the allegation that an Egyptian plane loaded with arms (or UTE Northern government, unloaded its cargo in Kano in 1965") while these allegations were denied by the Northern people's Congress, the Northern government and the Egyptian Embassy in Lagos, they were believed by the Southern Nigerian as truth (Alabi, 1996 and Eyo, 1997).

The third factor which influences relations between Nigeria and Arab world was low to adopt attitudes on the Arab/Israel conflict which would be conceivable with the joint membership of Nigeria and the States of Arab-Africa in the organization of African unity. Before independence, there were already economic ties between the government of western and Eastern Nigerian and Israel. The Northern people's Congress called on the federal government to end all negotiation with Israel for financial assistance and to withdraw recognition from the state of Israel. "When the Federal Government ignored this call the Northern government dissociated itself from the loan agreement from a tiny country subsidized by "the voluntary contributions from the American Jews. The immediate reaction came from NEPU another Northern party, in a warning to the Northern people's congress not to introduce religion into the politics of Nigeria (Brill, 2000 & Rasaq, 1999).

These sentiments were echoed by the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens and the Southern press. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa rebuked the Northern Regional Government. He said that Nigeria and Israel were friendly and would co-operate for their mutual development. Secondly, he said Nigeria would not become entangled in any quarrel between the Jews and the Arabs. Thirdly, he said, Nigeria would receive genuine assistance from any country except South Africa. He ended by issuing a warning to his party "It will be the end of happiness in this country when religion is brought into politics" (Gomwalk, 1976 & Ebram, 1995).

In January 1962, the Nigerian Contingent to the Common Wealth Education Conference held in India

stopped in Cairo to change planes. 'the Egyptian government invited both the Federal and Northern Ministers of Education to stay in Cairo as guests of the government, but ignored the Western and Eastern ministers. The regional governments became partisan and irresponsible in the Arab/Israel conflict. On a visit to Israel, Chief Akintola, Premier of the then western region assured them of their loyalty, he was quoted to say, "You can be assured of our friendship and support at any place, and he promised never to withdraw this". In the same vein, M. I. Okpara reader of the National convention of Nigerian Citizens premier of the East said "I myself from almost an Israelite". I love and admire Israel. For my part I shall always go to Israel and any aid offered to us would be accepted." Sir Ahamadu of course, offered his support to the Arabs: Jordan is my second home. To my mind, it is Israel that does not exist. And if it will exist, I don't know what it is" (Allan, 2008). Esho (2008) and Caston (2010).

However, the regional governments had no power to commit Nigeria to either side in the Federal Government, which they have powered on and taking ideas/decision and almost succeed in resisting pressures on Nigerian to do so. However, by stopping short of opening an Embassy in Thi-Aviv, although the Israel government had an Embassy in Lagos, the Nigerian government was bowing to pressure from the North which would have seen hostile to such a move. Nigeria attitudes to North Africa were determined by the complexities present in its internal system. "The North had both cultural and religious affinity with Arab North Africa and it was only natural that the Northern would seek to and their isolation from the world by responding and strengthening these contacts with South Africa. "However, the Sardauna's emphasis is on religion rather than trade, and his allowing the religion's affinity with North Africans' to dictate his stand on the Arab/Israel and were taken as unfortunate" (Emil and Jude (2011), Load (2008), Olajuwon (2011). It is not possible to equate the implications of the Sardauna's attitudes toward North Africa with those of the political leaders toward Israel. Firstly, both the stem and Eastern regions sought ties with Israel for such needed technical assistance and although empathic religiously to Israel. Sir, Ahmadu Bellow wanted the federal Government to join the Arab and anti-Israel policy in, the Middle East.

The national Convention of Nigerian Citizen, while favouring a pro-Israel policy or words, the North had pro-Arab sympathies, while the South had pro-Israel sympathies. To preserve the unity of the country, government politics had to be middle of east.

However, there are still some, unanswered questions. How did Alhaji Tafawa Balewa managed to defy Sir Ahmadu Bello on this issues? Could Sir Ahmadu not have say on the Northern people's Congress members to oppose Alhaji Tafawa Balewa's opinion? Or it could be that Sardauna had behind his mind Koranic sympathy for balewa in which he did not want the Christian counterparts to say he was confronting his Muslim member (Balewa) (Rasaq (1999), Hybid (2000), Jacob and Irish (1999).

2. Organization of Islamic Conference and Nigeria: The Case of Religious Factor in Nigeria's External Relations

Quite unknown to many, Nigeria has been a part of the Organization of Islamic Conference from its inception, Sir Ahamdu Bellow, the late Sardauna of Sokoto, representing Nigeria was one of the founding father in the Sardauna body of the organization which then comprised an alliance of Muslim States of Algebria, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Libra, Syria, and Northern Nigeria (Balogun (1998), Eli (2007) and Irish (1999).

The league was formed primarily to fight "Zionism" as represented by Israel, complain and where feasible, eclipse Christianity, using in these Modern days of organization., economic aids is bait and effective weapon instead of sword and arrow. By this time the organization was expanded and formally established in May 1971, Nigeria was only be given an observer status because Nigerian's permanent representative the one body of the organization of Islamic conference, Sir Ahmadu Bello was already and had to be substituted by groups of people with Islamic affinity, and partly because of the fact of the three regions North, West, East, it was only in the Northern part that Islam could be said to be mostly pervading (Olajuwon (2014), Ajadi (2010) and Ojo (1997).

At the world of Islam festival that was held in London summer 1977. The following nations were tabled and adopted: that Muslim Organization should set up a centre in respective areas to resist Christian Missionary activities. That Islamic Radio and television be established "That all Christians activities, no matter what be the expression be stopped," "that Muslim Organization should set up internet centres, Christians activities". "That all Christians' literature be banned in Muslim countries, the economic strength of the Muslim would be utilized so that no financial support is to any country where Missionary activities are carried on against Islam.

From this premise, the debate started in Nigeria again, as a result of news carried down open by a foreign medium (Agence France Press) A.F.P after the 46th Membership on 18th January, 1986 which followed Federal Military governments planning silence over the matter was frightening until Babangida confirmed the mission issued on February 3rd, 1986.

Since then, different schools, of thought have emerged over the issue, firstly a class taught was championed by Dr. Lavi Ogunbarabi, senior Research fellow at the Nigeria Institute for International Affairs, Lagos and the Executive secretary of the Nigeria, Arab Association gave a sample of ten countries belonging to the organization, of Islamic conference which are constitutionally secular states with some of them having, dominant Christians population, Benin, Cameroon, Comoro, Island, Gambia, Garbon, Sierra-Leone, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Uganda and Upper Votal. It is true that these countries are members but they were not told whether they are admitted into the organization secretly or openly and for what reason.

Second school of thought believed that organization of Islamic conference is not a religious organization. Alhaji Yusuf Maitama Sule, Nigeria's former permanent representative at the United Nations is among those advancing this idea. According to him, Nigeria's joining of the Organization of Islam conference is not religious body but a financial first aid groupj" (Gomwalk (1970), Esho (2008), Alabi (1996) and Abraham (2009).

Some other proponents of Nigeria's Membership of the Organization of Islam conference even say that the organization is like the organization of African unity, E.E.C, COMECON, UNO and ECOWAS. But one can easily pick out the organization because the name of the organization of Islam conference which is "Organization of Islamic Conference" clearly identifies it as the religious organization. Alos, most of the specialized committees or commission of the organization of Islamic conferences bear the "Islam" which in their titles for example the Islamic commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs', Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development; Islamic Civil aviation Council.

The first and the second school conflict with Dr. Ogunbambi's expression that the Organization of Islamic Conference viable soft loan entails "borrowing by Islamic rules, with little or no interest, and payment spread over a long period of time with little or no interest. (see African Guardian, Abdullahi

(1998), Brill (2000), Lead (2008), Deion (2000) and Jacob (1999).

3. Economic Consequences Postulated Under O.I.C

Nigeria's membership of Organization of Islamic Conference holds in the economic gains that Nigeria can get from the organization that idea has been deliberately wayed up while suppressing the religious nature of the organization of Islamic conference by many people. Some idealists have capitalized on the present economic hardship in the country and the need to revive Nigeria's economy. The soft organizational loans which bear little or no interest, and with a long term spread payment periods is an a "Financial first aid group"

One could say that there is nothing wrong in Nigerian suggesting economic and from anywhere to revive Nigeria's economy. What one may quarrel with, is the situation where such Nigerians fail to analyse, and understand the present day politics of international aid (Even food has become a weapon of international politics), and the likely adverse socio-political effects such foreign aid will have in the domestic front. Nigerians rejected the International Monetary fund loan and opted for itself reliance because it was clear fact that a borrower is a slave to the lender.

There is political, "diction that states "he who pays the piper dictate the tune". The foreign policies of nations are not based on charitable intents and no foreign aid goes completely without conditionality's (Courtesy of International Monetary Fund). If not why must one think of joining the Organization of Islamic conference to get aid when not all of Nigerians are Muslim: protagonists of Organization of Islamic conference asserted that Nigerians need Islamic conference loans. Antagonists explained that organization of Islamic conference then should be regarded as Arab imperialist and who is even sure that the body is not central by these.

Professor G. O. Nwanko (former Executive Director of the Central Bank of Nigeria) according to Vanguard (October 28, 1985, Page 16 said that "Shagari's administration capitalizing on religious sentiments and connections, and approached Saudi Arabia in 1982 for some loan. Saudi Arabia had the good intention to give Nigeria's N1.0million interest free loan but this blocked by western imperialists").

4. Conclusion

It is true therefore that by forcing the decision makers, this approach also helps to determine both the internal as well as the external sources of specific

policies. For advance internally made policies may be influenced by domestic politics or public opinion or by the decision maker's social, ethnic, or religious background; while normally, the policies may be influenced by the forces to which the decision-maker would be exposed beyond the boundaries of his own generated areas by either internal or external factors.

Lastly, at the seminar jointly organized by the Ministry for special Duties (Federal in the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the following solutions were adopted: President Ibrahim Babangida said that major controversies, between Muslims and Christians in the country were potentially dangerous to the nation's interest. This message was delivered on his behalf by Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe (the then chief of General Staff, at the opening of a National seminar on "The question in Nigeria) often assumed regional over-tones". The President said although the two religious promote ideological and Cultural unity amongst ethnic groups and nationalities, they tend to intensify contra-diction at the higher level. The president said that it was regrettable that politicians, top government functionaries and business men had exploited Nigeria's ethnics, religious and linguistic differences to their advantage. He told participants at the ethnic group held office that their lot could be improved, irrespective of the personal qualities of the individual. President Babangida added that individuals in government have acted and exercised power in a manner to lend credence this belief.

The former Minister for Special duties, Air vice Marshall Ishaya Shekari who was the Chairman of the Seminar, said that Nigeria was presently standing on the hold of foregoing its national identity". He stated that after 25years of independence, there was need to have another local look at the divisive factor of our past to chart a new Historical Society of Nigeria, Professor Obaro Ikime, suggested that promulgation of "Act of Union" in the country, adding that it was imperative to have such an act in the presence of a proper chatter of rights. The act, he said should spell out what it means to be Nigeria and what the people could expect from the state in return for their loyalty and suffices".

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