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## The religious economy of political liberation in Nigeria: An elite theory analysis and a prognosis

**Remi Chukwudi Okeke**

Department of Public Administration and Local Government  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

E-mail address: [remiokeke@gmail.com](mailto:remiokeke@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This study is an interdisciplinary examination of the relationship between religion and political liberation in an elite-arrested nation-state. The study is situated within the empirical context of the Nigerian socio-political system. The case-study state is accordingly, representative of others, currently under what the work denotes as domestic elite hegemony, which necessitates political liberation. Invariably, the study entails an elite theory analysis of the linkages between the research variables. Hence, a prognosis is occasioned by the analysis. The study finally found the possibility of a fusion of the two major religious persuasions in the country, in attempting to counterbalance the enduring and debilitating elite dominion of the Nigerian nation-state. The study is highly significant in its interdisciplinary methodology. Hence, it has succeeded in touching upon the subject areas of religion, sociology, political science and public administration. Consequently, the study possesses immense theoretical and empirical relevance.

**Keywords:** Religious Economy; Political Liberation; Nigerian Elite; Elite Theory

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Political science had long considered religion increasingly irrelevant in social life [1]. This was despite the progressively self-evident occurrences in the reverse regard. Nevertheless, religion is a critical construct for understanding contemporary social life [2]. It

accordingly illuminates the everyday experiences and practices of many individuals; is a significant component of diverse institutional processes, including politics...and plays a vital role in public culture and social change [2]. Consequently, the role of religion in society has recently been the subject of renewed empirical and experimental interest [3].

The subsisting 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Section, 10) and indeed all the previous Nigerian Constitutions have specifically provided that, the Government of the Federation of Nigeria or of a State (in the federation) shall not adopt any religion as state religion. Hence, the generally held notion of secularity of the Nigerian state essentially derives from this constitutional provision. It is noted in any case, that the secularization worldview is not a Nigerian peculiarity. But central to the concerns of this study is the linkages between the secularism of the state in Nigeria and the seeming insularity of the citizens to political visibility, on the grounds of their ostensible religiosities and the attendant (constitutional) secular requirements.

Indeed, the relationship between religion and politics will continue to elicit research attention. Although scholars tend to downplay the role of religion in political life, the truth is that the vast majority of people in the world profess a strong allegiance to some spiritual faith [1]. This study is therefore, purposively focused on the adherents of the two major religions in the Nigerian nation (Christianity and Islam) and their actions and/or inactions, in the areas of contradicting domestic elite hegemony and engendering political liberation in the country. The study is immensely significant because, it brings what Gill [1] calls microlevel analysis (focusing on specific historical questions) into the study of religion and politics, as different from the earlier trends of dealing solely with broad global phenomena and only engaging in metaphysical theorization.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

According to Nwokeoma [4], the government in Nigeria has failed in her constitutional responsibilities (to provide for her citizens). [Nwokeoma's reference is actually to successive governments in the country]. Then how did the citizens react? Ademola-Olateju [5] responds:

We became pew-hugging, minaret-clinging religionists, who stand for nothing, except invoking God at intervals, to project unavailable righteousness. Our country's political discourse rests on the pedestal of misgovernance, without commensurate and sufficient appreciation from materially inebriated, docile and apathetic citizenry.

Nwokeoma [4] further opines that the citizens who consequently embraced religion were also disappointed due to the lack of social support systems within these religious groups. They therefore rebel against the State and religion, and resort to criminal and antisocial behaviour, like widespread armed robbery, bank robberies, kidnapping, rape, vandalization of government property, terrorist activities, like the heinous Boko Haram terrorism in the country and creation of clandestine groups in most parts of the nation [4]. The foregoing positions of Nwokeoma [4] and Ademola-Olateju [5] are also denotable as political failures in the case-study country. It is equally characterizable as a challenge to the religious economy of the generic national system in Nigeria. In any case, Nwokeoma continues:

Religion, which ordinarily is the service and worship of God or the supernatural, is a very important and fundamental institution of society. Correspondingly, individuals fulfill their religious obligations by identifying and adhering to one religious group or the other, some individuals personally choose the religious groups to belong, while majority are members of a particular group because, they were socialized by the family to identify with the group. However, because of the inherent elixir of life, inequality and difficulties in society, some members of these religious groups are wealthy, while some are poor [4].

Hence, without necessarily setting out to do so, what Nwokeoma has painted in the preceding (indented) paragraph of the study, is a picture of the religious economy, with its inherent supply and demand sides, and its obviously integral imperfections. Thus, if government has failed in her constitutional responsibilities to provide for her citizens, there is a problem. Furthermore, when the citizens were to seek solace in religion (the pew-hugging, minaret-clinging religionists) and the religious economy is marked (marred) by inequality and sundry difficulties, there is also a massive challenge. The problem of this study is further depicted in the following contention:

The situation is so bad that a great (big) chunk of the country is tuned out, zonked out or ensconced in Churches and Mosques, urging God to take up human duties. Our abandonment of rational thought and right reason has generated a uniquely Nigerian religious “Wisdom of Crowds”. We are a crowd, bumbling in concert, hoping to land on the island of tranquility, designed, worked out and delivered from heaven, without human sweat [5].

Will political liberation solve this problem? What matrix of the religious economy and political liberation may solve the problem? These are the central research questions that encode the problem of the study. As contemplated by Ademola-Olateju [5], how may the profusion of faith by Christians and Muslims in the Nigerian state, translate into political engagement? In other words, and in the proper context of the current study, how may the religious economy in the case-study nation-state, lead to political liberation in the country?

### **3. ON THE MEANING OF RELIGION**

Defining religion has been described as a slippery enterprise [1]. In the same dimension, Loy [6] posits that religion is notoriously difficult to define. It is therefore, held in this study that religion is indeed, one of the most hazardous issues to conceptualize for scholarly intervention. This is because; the scholar’s soul is also involved in the battle of content-validity. However, according to Gill [1], the most commonly assumed definition of religion is summarized by Smith [7] as follows: religion is a system of beliefs and practices oriented toward the sacred or supernatural, through which the life experiences of groups of people are given meaning and direction. Furthermore, religion is not simply an objective descriptor of certain kinds of practices that show up in every time and place. It is a term that constructs and is constructed by different kinds of political configurations [8]. Furthermore, it has to be noted that it is usually important to distinguish between spirituality and religion. Thus, citing the following sources [9, 10, and 11], Gates & Steane [12], highlight as follows:

First, man, who exercises control and designates god a minor place in its every-day activities, established religion as an institution but spirituality extends to all facets of a person's life. Hence, while spirituality is chosen, religion can be forced. Second, religion can be defined as a human phenomenon: a manifestation of the flesh, but spirituality is more transcendent as a manifestation of the Transcendent. Third, spirituality is more a perspective that influences behaviour as a way of loving or accepting or relating to the world, which is less deterministic than behaviour expected through religious practices. Although these distinctions may seem academic, they signify the divergence of views over attempts to see spirituality and religion as synonymous. In general, therefore, religious practice can be associated with authority, orthodoxy and self-justification, whereas spirituality can be associated with more individual and civil mystical experiences [12].

In Finke [13], religion is defined as a system of beliefs, symbols and practices concerned about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning. Fink further argues that whereas some define religion, based on the functions it performs for individuals or for society at large, his definition confines religion to beliefs and practices that are based on supernatural assumptions. This, he further holds, helps to distinguish religion from secular ideologies, science and other forms of culture that may serve many of the same functions of belonging and belief that religion performs. By extension, Fink [13] defines religious groups as collectives that promote religious beliefs, symbols and practices.

In addition, from the sociological viewpoint, Nwokeoma [4], citing Schaefer [14], highlights that the foremost sociologist that recognized the critical importance of religion in human society was Emile Durkheim (contradictorily an atheist – Durkheim was an atheist), who defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices, relative to sacred things [4, 15]. Durkheim, early reached the view that apart from a deep sense of the sacred—which was for him, the vital substance of all religion—there could be no durable form of society. The sacred and the social were for Durkheim, two sides of the same coin, and the distinction between the sacred and the profane is, Durkheim tells us, the profoundest distinction ever reached by the human mind [16]. Consequently, in the schema of the sacred, human life and its spiritual trajectories must rank truly highly. Religion is therefore a reverence of the sacred, for man's temporal benefits and his ultimate spiritual survival.

#### **4. A CONCEPTUAL ELUCIDATION ON RELIGIOUS ECONOMY**

The factor of composite temporal and spiritual benefits, invariably leads us to an economic theory of religion. Thus, according to Iannaccone [17], at the heart of any economic theory of religion is the notion of religion as a commodity, an object of choice . . . Consumers choose what religion (if any) they will accept and how extensively they will participate in it. These choices (or refusal to choose) are also not immutable – people can and often do change religions or levels of participation over time [17, 18]. Furthermore in these contexts, Dillon [19] argues that religion continues to be of a significant dimension, intertwining individual lives, collective identities, institutional practices, and public culture, and, although in some

circumstances, it has a negative impact (e.g., violence), in other situations, it holds an emancipatory charge. Beyer [20] further posits:

One of the more notable features of contemporary global society is the proliferation of organizations in virtually every sphere of social life. Although these are certainly not evenly distributed in this society, any more than is wealth or power, they affect social life in all parts of the world. The most powerful of these are economic and political organizations. Yet, both at the national and the international level, an ever-increasing number of nonbusiness and nonstate organizations make their presence felt in our daily lives. Among these is a complex array of religious organizations of greatly varying power, size, internal structure, and degree of stability.

Thus, in their complexity of arrays, the religious organizations present immense options, akin to market (economic) options. Furthermore, citing Stark [21], Finke & Stark [22] declare:

Within all social systems, there is a relatively distinct subsystem encompassing religious activity. We identify this subsystem as a religious economy and define the religious economy as consisting of all the religious activities going on in any society, including a “market” of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s). Just as a commercial economy can be distinguished into elements of supply and demand, so, too, can a religious economy.

Hence, the most significant feature of a religious economy is the degree to which it is deregulated and therefore market-driven, as opposed to being regulated by the state in favor of monopoly. The most immediate impact of regulation is on the supply of religions available to people, and the peoples’ freedom to choose any of the available religions [22].

The religious economy framework is therefore, a rational choice approach to religion. It treats religious environments as economies, in which religions and religious groups are firms competing for customers, who make rational choices among available products [23]. The religious economy analytical paradigm indeed, offers a useful corrective to an "oversocialized" model of human religious behavior [23,24]. Hence, social action, in the market perspective, is not simply a consequence of influences on groups and individuals but a result of the decisions made by groups and individuals, in order to achieve goals [23]. Thus, seeing religions as competing firms can help us to understand why religion continues to survive and even flourish in contemporary pluralistic societies [23].

Nevertheless, it has not been all eulogies for religious economy and its rational choice tentacles. Bankston III [23] posits that some questions about it remain. One of these questions, which he examined in his study is, how religious beliefs, statements about the supernatural, which are taken as true, can be considered as economic products (items of consumption) that are ordinarily purchased because they fulfill desires. Bruce [25] in Bankston III [23] had equally argued that religious beliefs are matters of deep commitment to putative cosmological realities, not articles selected from a shelf of competing goods. Bankston III [23] therefore decided to look at the difficulties that the religious economy-rational choice tendencies have posed, by actually considering beliefs as economic goods. He

found that these difficulties do not mean that we should necessarily reject the religious economy / rational choice perspective.

Bankston consequently suggested that religious faith should be seen as a social good, produced and maintained by interactions among those who are both its producers and consumers. In this regard, while one does not choose to believe directly and on the basis of desire alone, in the way that one might choose a particular brand of deodorant, socially embedded demands for beliefs, can lead individuals to take part in the interactive production of belief [23]. It is strongly believed in this study that the religious economy analytical model is imbued with immense plausibilities.

## **5. THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF ELITE THEORY**

This study is essentially framed on the analytical template of the elite theory (not rational choice theory). An élite is a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that controls a large amount of power [26]. According to Henry [27], in Okeke [28], the classic expression of elite theory can be found in C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* [29]. However, Higley [30] has also given an impressive account of the origins of the elite theory, as cited below:

Elite theory's origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca [31], Vilfredo Pareto [32], and Robert Michels [33]. Mosca emphasized the ways in which tiny minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities, adding that "political classes" – Mosca's term for political elites – usually have "a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority" over those they govern. Pareto postulated that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals; but in actual societies, elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections. Pareto sketched alternating types of governing elites, which he likened, following Machiavelli, to lions and foxes [28].

Michels, continues Higley [30], rooted elites ("oligarchies") in the need of large organizations for leaders and experts in order to operate efficiently. As these individuals gain control of funds, information-flows, promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning, power becomes concentrated in their hands. Emphasizing the inescapability and the relative autonomy of elites, all three men (Mosca, Pareto and Michels), Higley concludes, characterized aspirations to fully democratic and egalitarian societies as futile.

In the specific case of the Nigerian elite, Ibietan & Ajayi [34] have characterized them as predatory and exploitative. Thus, elites are the societal agents (albeit in the negative regard, and in cases such as in the Nigerian state), through which broader forces such as ethnicity, class and religion are filtered to the ordinary people [35]. Graf [36] in Ebohon and Obakhedo [37] further vividly characterizes the Nigerian elite as follows:

- They necessarily cohere around the state apparatus to appropriate it for personal benefits, both civilians and military.

- They are essentially non-productive, and thus in a large measure, they relate to the state in parasitical mode of relationship.
- They are fragmented, fractionalized, factionalized and segmented along ethnic, regional and religious cleavages as situations and circumstances demand.

Truly, the foregoing portrayals of the Nigerian elite are in tandem with the suppositions of the character of the country's elite that informed the conduct of this study. Therefore, the application of the elite theory in the study is along the lines of how this class of apparently privileged minority of Nigerian citizens (the elite) has, despite the religious economy tendencies of the Nigerian state or consequent upon such inclinations, continued to bind around the state structures, to seize them (the state structures) for personal benefits. And the larger society on the other hand, remains generically unproductive.

Hence, Ogbunwezeh [38] in Ebohon and Obakhedo [37] declares that actually, the Nigerian political elites have been united in the philosophy of plundering the nation for personal enrichment, through access to state power. Every government that comes seems to be fighting for the maintenance of the status quo ante, and continuous enjoyment through unearned privileges [37].

## **6. THE NIGERIAN STATE: A CONCISE HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNT**

The Nigerian state obtained political independence from Great Britain in October 1960. However, by January 1966, the ruling (civilian) government was brutally ousted by the nation's Military. Central to the arguments of the soldiers, for toppling the government in power (with violence) was the question of corruption, in which the adherents of each of the two major religious persuasions in the country were self-evident participants. In addition to leadership sleaze, there was inter-tribal hatred in the national polity.

Hence, the first military coup d'état of January 1966 in the country and the counter coup in July of the same year, featured on massive scales, alleged and proven cases of tribally-induced murder of the nation's leaders. (Nobody among the fallen leaders was actually killed on the grounds of his religion).

Profoundly found in the country at this time were deep-seated ethnic antagonisms, not religious bigotry. A civil war ensued (the Nigeria-Biafra war) fought between July 1967 and January 1970. At the end of the warfare, the Military remained in power, with intermittent pretences of handing over the affairs of the state to civilians, whom they would subsequently bring down.

Ebohon and Obakhedo [37] argue that despite the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state and its concomitant defects, the nation at independence, was seen as a beacon of hope to many other nation-states in the continent. That is to say that no matter the circumstances, Nigeria held the prospects of a strong developmental state that would be a rallying point to other states. The *raison d'être* for this huge confidence was that Nigeria was perceived as a regional economic hub and political force and an African regional super-power [37]. The military mishap in the politics of the country however unfortunately accelerated the pace of bringing the emergent state to its developmental nadir. The Military in the country continued to stage counter coups against subsisting military governments in the Nigerian state. Hence,

leadership instability (as driven by the soldiers) remained a permanent feature of governance in Nigeria, from October 1960 to May 1999, when the men of the Armed Forces seemed to have finally surrendered power to civilian politicians.

However, in all of the foregoing, another enduring feature of national affairs in the country is what seems to border on elite determination to guarantee that the Nigerian nation fails to survive as a nationally prosperous entity, for the good of all her citizens. Consequently, either in military fatigues or civilian garbs, the power elite in Nigeria possesses a seemingly irrepressible tendency to gravitate towards the thieving of national resources. Citing Ihonvbere [39], Ojukwu & Shopeju [35] contend that the country's picture and identity is that replete with confused, factionalized and extremely corrupt elites, with a limited sense of nation. These elites they (Ojukwu & Shopeju) argue, lacking strong and viable base in production, turns the state as its primary instrument of primitive accumulation and in the end, the state is mangled and rendered impotent, in the quest for nationhood, growth and development, much less democracy.

Hence, according to Soniyi [40], it was estimated (as at 2012) that \$400 billion of Nigeria's oil revenue had been stolen or misspent since the country's independence in 1960. The estimation was attributed to a Nigerian-born former World Bank Vice-President for Africa, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili. In that same year (2012), almost 100 million Nigerians were living on less than \$1 (£0.63) a day [41].

World Population Review [42], highlights that Nigeria's current population is in the region of 194.0 million people [out of which almost 100 million were living on less than \$1 (£0.63) a day]. Furthermore, according to Nwabughioqu [43], Nigeria's Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, had disclosed that about 110 million Nigerians were still living below poverty line in the country, despite the policies of past governments to improve their welfare. It is however held in this study that elite grandstanding had fully tainted such policies of government, thereby making them largely ineffectual, (as such policies were not truly designed with the needy citizens in mind).

In the face of these apparent distresses, Ademola-Olateju [5] then ponders: Why are Nigerians content at setting new unbecoming standards every day? Bad roads? Take it to The Lord in prayer! Comatose Healthcare System? Bad diseases will not be our portion in Jesus name! Collapsed Educational System? What will be will be, our children are overcomers! Epileptic Power Supply? May the good Lord bind all the principalities, demonic spirits and the powers of darkness preventing Nigeria from enjoying stable electricity supply! In consequence, Nigerians sit on their hands, praying for celestial edicts to be beamed down to them from God's majestic throne [5]. It then begins to appear as if the citizens have reconceptualized the constitutional notion of secularism in the country to cover a dichotomous interpretation of the relationship between religion and politics (political engagement) by the people of our case-study country.

Nigeria's contemporary narrative therefore borders on hopes betrayed (by the elite) and new expectations solely hoisted on the benefaction of the Almighty (by the citizenry). It is also a history of evident elite-arrest of a national system - what Ebohon & Obakhedo [37] have similarly depicted as elite constructivism. In addition, embodied in these configurations, is a critical case of apparent acquiescence to such state capture, by the subaltern class of the Nigerian polity.

## **7. CONTEXTUALIZING POLITICAL LIBERATION**

Political liberation therefore presupposes the condition of political bondage. And so, to effectively conceptualize political bondage, we must touch upon the meaning of politics. Consequently, Asobie [44] argues:

Politics is primarily and ultimately about human welfare. It is about the improvement of the material conditions of life; it is also about the maintenance of the psychological and emotional stability of man ; and about his spiritual growth as well...So politics shapes all, structures all, develops and under-develops all other aspects of national life. It even contours the basic framework for the realization of human destiny [44].

Hence, political bondage would lead to retrogression in human welfare. In an environment of political bondage, the material conditions of life will remain in decline, citizens' psychological and emotional stability will remain largely questionable, spiritual growth might be nonexistent, at best, dubious. Being therefore that politics shapes all, structures all, develops and under-develops all other aspects of national life, political bondage would lead to national atrophy. Indeed, what has led to national political bondage in the Nigerian state is that politics merely became a matter of amassing power for the sharing of or dubious allocation of natural resources and their proceeds. Politics in the country, has consequently not been about production and the methodologies of increasing national productivity and invariably raising the standards of human and social welfare. Asobie further remonstrates:

Politics is not just about sharing or allocation; it is in fact, much more importantly about creating a general environment that is conducive for organizing production, increasing productivity, thereby maximizing human or social welfare through an enhancement of the quantum of the social product. Politics is fundamentally about material and human development; and development begins with production, and not with distribution or sharing.

In further conceptualization of politics in this paper, we bring in two of its most popular descriptions, as authoritative allocation of values for a society [45] and the question of who gets what, when and how [46]. And truly interweaved into the concept of authoritative allocation, are the combined notions of fairness and firmness. Consequently, when the variable of fairness is deleted from the considerations, the result of subject allocation is either brutal, exploitative or both exploitative and brutal. We thus begin to approach a scenario that requires political liberation. Relatedly, the question of who gets what, when and how, demands the highest degree of fairness, on the opposite side of which is authoritative exploitation, demanding political liberation.

Asobie thus decries what he views as the preoccupation with state monopoly, of the use of force, with power as the means and end of politics, and the conceptualization of politics as essentially struggle for power [44]. Therefore, when politics is so conceptualized, essentially as the struggle for power, the need for political liberation arises.

It is highlighted at this point that Africa's most outstanding novelist was a Nigerian, the late Professor Chinua Achebe (author of the classic, *Things Fall Apart*). In his most portentous Nigerian-specific narrative (an amazingly slim masterpiece), he simply and squarely, seminally identified the trouble with Nigeria, as a failure of leadership [47]. He blamed the generic Nigerian elite for the national failures in the country but also suggested that the character of the overall national leader (the President or Head of State and Government) could produce the desirable positive changes in a polity. Three decades after his (Achebe's) seminal articulation, the trouble with the Nigerian state has remained undiminished. The central issues are still primarily political.

They have to do with political leadership and its failures. And in these debilitating political tendencies, the most fundamental issue is elite subterfuge. Therefore, political liberation in the Nigerian context entails the freeing of the nation-state from these incapacitating elite stratagems.

## **8. THE WEAPON OF RELIGION AS POLITICAL ALBATROSS IN NIGERIA**

The supreme task of the political authority is to create and sustain a legal environment characterized by liberty, tolerance, mutual respect by citizens or group of citizens for one another, and general acceptance of the 'bindingness' of contractual obligations [44]. Then what is the supreme import of religion? It is precisely to create and sustain the spiritual environment for the engendering of these same variables.

According to Ellis & Ter Haar [48], religion and politics have been linked throughout African history. Hence, in all known pre-colonial African political systems and states, public religious performance played an important role. In pristine Nigerian societies therefore, politics and religion were not essentially bifurcated.

There might have been functional specializations and structural specificities, but the political leader and the religious leader eventually synchronized into the same essence. And at the center of this quintessence, is the wellbeing of the human person, in spiritual and temporal formations. Then when we were deemed to be making progress in matters of spirituality and temporality, our lives became completely cleft into dual definitions, with a section of them controlled in the name of the Father, by money-minded religious leaders and the second part dominated by some self-centered political elite

And indeed, the Nigerian political elite would do anything to prevent the latent religious tolerance in the country from becoming feasible. This researcher was an employee of a Muslim-dominated organization in Nigeria, for over fifteen years and not once in these lengthy number of years was he or any other non-Muslim colleague (to his knowledge) discriminated against on the grounds of religion.

In fact, in all the Nigerian cities and the countryside, the subaltern members of the two dominant faiths, ordinarily cohabit peacefully. The elite of all descriptions, irrespective of religious affiliations, also work together in looting the public treasury. It is only when a disagreement arises with regards to the sharing formula of their politico-economic booties, that the ostensible religious crises are witnessed in the country.

The elite at this time deploys religion as weapon to settle scores with their political adversaries.

Thus, in deploying the weapon of religion to settle political scores, the Nigerian elite horrendously undercuts the religious economy template in the country and above all heightens the political bondage of the citizenry.

Furthermore, each of the two major religious groups in the Nigerian state possesses a nationally known tendency to let their group activities overflow to the country's highways and get the roads completely blocked. The elite and the hoi polloi usually come together to engage in such worship sessions. And indeed, there are very strong tendencies in the same country to think that these gatherings, particularly in the Christian regard are mainly designed for money-making. But the Muslim version is not also insulated from apparently irreligious trajectories. In fact, the Islamic version frequently leads to cataclysms and mayhem, occasioning loss of property and loss of lives [49]. Hence, while a brand of Christendom in the country propagates the theology of money as core religion, a certain branch of Islam in the same nation, disseminates the doctrine of hate, obstruction or destruction, as its own corporate philosophy. And the socio-political challenges of the state remain gargantuan and remote from core religious considerations.

Besides, beginning from Nigeria's independence (in 1960) until the current democratic era in the country, all cadres of public officers in this state, take the conventional oath of office, placing their hands on the "weapon" of Bible or Koran - the universally known Holy Books of the two dominant religious denominations in the country - Christianity and Islam, respectively. From independence to the current period also, Nigeria's generic elite have maintained the Nigerian state as a play field of socio-political and economic perfidies, despite their Bible or Koran oath taking. The political elite in particular have been damagingly remarkable in ceaselessly indulging in a mindless thieving of the country's national resources. Corruption therefore remains a critical character of governance in the Nigerian nation and the secularity of the state, which has also metamorphosed into citizens' insularity to political visibility, becomes another political albatross. Religion accordingly remains an instrument of domestic elite hegemony in the country.

## **9. THE POLITICS-RELIGION NEXUS: SOME COMPARATIVE AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND THE CONTINUING ELITE TRAJECTORIES**

Citing Glenn [50], Demerath III [51] posits that the Catholic Church had been instrumental in unseating both Brazil's military regime and Poland's Communist state. Demerath III [51] further asserts that very different Muslim movements have opposed and toppled entrenched governments in Indonesia, and that religion has both opposed and been opposed by the state in Iran. Buddhist organizations also have been a thorn in the side of political elites in both China and Thailand, and Hindus were demanding changes in the world's largest democracy, India [51]. Thus, religion can engender political liberation. Huber [52] has however argued that if religious participation is widespread (as obtainable in the Nigerian case), religious participants are more or less a cross-section of society, and thus cannot really act like a special interest group. The implication of this scenario is that such cross-sections of society (with widespread religious tentacles) may never be sensitive to political liberation issues. The truth although is that, in the most extreme condition of politically-induced deprivations, the widespread religious participants, in their cross-section formations would easily act like a generically affected group.

In Western Europe, the politics and religion nexus may also occasion an Islamic migrant and Christian indigenous conundrum [53]. The Nigerian case is however different. There may be peripheral cases of migrants and aborigines altercations, leading to frequent violence, whose roots are however, largely traceable to relative deprivation. But the valid national position is that the Nigerian Christians and Muslims were co-foundation stakeholders of the Nigerian colonially-contrived federation. The elite do not dispute this reality of equal co-foundation stakes. Therefore, the religious economy in Nigeria can easily dovetail into political amity. And truly, there are very few notable atheists in the Nigerian system. The most notable of such confirmed unbelievers is the Literature Nobel laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka. Every other Nigerian elite has been either a well-known Christian or a fervent Muslim. Yet all types of political and economic leadership experiments have been undertaken in the country, to engender socio-political and economic development, with immensely contentious outcomes. Thus, the faith that these elite profess (in their Christian and Islamic tendencies) have not had positive linkages with the nationally desired destination of development in the country.

In the Nigerian state therefore, there is what is describable as elite collective identity in the negative regard, and incidentally, numerous cases of ‘charismatic’ authority, as only embedded in dubious individuals. Hence, there is apparently in the totality of the Nigerian scenario, something akin to a weakened capacity of the nation-state to generate collective identity and a collective version of ‘charismatic’ authority [54] desirable for nationally definable progress. The political elite have curiously ensured, through the incidence of kleptocracy, that this positive outlook remains a national mirage. The same elite also manipulate the religious economy to suit their political and egotistical purposes. Furthermore, the religious elite even remain willing to mingle with the professional politicians and are ever needy of the political elite’s reciprocity of their doubtful spiritual offers, in the form of prayers for divine protection of the politicians. Hence, religious organizations, even in their widest institutional configurations do not maintain their own armies or police force. (It is arguable that they require such security apparatuses). But the nouveau riche religious leaders in Nigeria, have incorporated into their long motorcades, complements of the military and the police force, for protection against their seen and unseen challengers. Incidentally, it is the corrupt political elite, which make their accesses to the military and para-military cover possible, through the religious leaders’ temporal linkages with the political elite.

## **10. RELIGION AND POLITICAL LIBERATION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD AND THE FUSION OF VARIABLES**

Historically and globally, the power to mobilize of the established religions has been humongous. In the Nigerian setting however, the spiritual or socio-political purposes of religious mobilization is not self-evident. Hence, the way forward entails the emergence of Nigeria’s brand of what Keddie [55], denoted as new religious politics, and aimed at political liberation in the country. It is not an issue of Christian fanaticism or Islamic fundamentalism. It is more of a matter of an inevitable fusion of ideologies. Indeed, a seamless fusion of religion and politics is possible anywhere. Religion and politics are both systems of ordering the power inherent in human society and as such, religion and politics are closely related [48].

Then Demerath III [51] remonstrates:

In a world teeming with violence, oppression, and depravity, it is little wonder that religion should be seen as a solution. Whether as prayer, theology, or saintly inspiration, religion has been both a first and last hope in confronting social ills. But religion is also involved in more secular responses. As a major contributor to what has been termed “civil society,” it can make a social and political difference in two respects. First, at the macro level, religion’s various organizations and institutions can play a direct role in the public arena by challenging governmental shortcomings and depredations. Second, at the micro level, religion can foster a sense of “social capital” by giving its lay participants practice in, and encouragement for, participating in wider social and political circles, whether as mere voters or intense activists.

Curiously, in Nigeria, where in the normal course activities, the ordinary citizens and the elite freely worship their God (for Christians) and Allah (for Muslims), during elections, votes are canvassed for, on the grounds of religion. In other words, the Christians are required to vote for God, while the Muslims are expected to vote for Allah, in an ostensibly deregulated religious economy. The elite (the political elite) are instrumental to these needless manipulations because, when they (the power elite) subsequently become participants in the same government, they do not traditionally loot the public treasury, based on religious divides. Irrespective of their different faiths, they grossly and ceaselessly plunder the state’s resources together.

And so, for the 2015 general elections in the country, Reverend Father Ejikeme Mbaka of the Adoration Ministries Enugu, Nigeria (AMEN), in an unprecedented action, deviated from the national convention of watching helplessly, as the elite engages in their normal religio-political manipulations. Fr Mbaka runs a Ministry in which on yearly basis, nearly a million Nigerians gather in his detached grounds at Enugu, Southeast, Nigeria, on December 31, to offer prayers of thanksgiving to the Almighty God. He uses such occasions to make spiritual and temporal pronouncements on the state of affairs in Nigeria. (The Nigerian convention is for Christian clerics to make such pronouncements in favour of Christians and for their Muslim counterparts to prognosticate in favour of their Islamic followers).

Precedent to the 2015 elections however, on new year's eve of 2014, Reverend Father Mbaka, urged Nigerians at the annual religious gathering, to vote the (Christian) President Goodluck Jonathan out of office. He cited the fact that President Jonathan had failed to address spiritedly the issues of insecurity and corruption in the country. Father Mbaka encouraged his followers to vote for Muhammadu Buhari, even though he was a leading Nigerian Muslim, saying (Fr Mbaka saying) that regardless of religion, candidate Buhari was the right person to lead Nigeria [56].

Most Nigerian Christians were outraged and the hierarchy of Christendom in the country was discomfited. Nevertheless, Fr Mbaka’s followers (across the country) must do the bidding of their leader. The Muslims in Nigeria were both dumbfounded and impressed. Mbaka’s pronouncement thus changed for all time, the religio-political shape of politics in the Nigerian state. There were unarguably, multiplier effects of this particular pronouncement, which boosted the (Muslim candidate) Buhari’s campaigns. Subsequently, for the first time in Nigerian history, a sitting President of Nigeria (in the person of Goodluck Jonathan) lost an election.

Afterward, in July 2015, the victorious Muhammad Buhari (now President) declared that history would favor Fr Mbaka for courageously speaking truth to power, at great risks to his life [56]. Additionally, in December of the same year, President Buhari (a Nigerian Muslim) declared that one of the best exhortations to the nation he has heard from the pulpit, was the one made early in the year by Father Ejike Mbaka ( a Nigerian Catholic Priest) of the Adoration Ministries, Enugu [57]. Fr Mbaka was on a visit to the Nigerian President at Aso Rock Villa, the seat of Nigerian government, when the President (a Muslim) made this declaration.

It is emphasized further in this study that because religion has long been viewed as a pillar of the status quo [1], even in Nigeria, Rev. Fr Mbaka's overt support for Candidate Buhari (a leading Nigerian Muslim) was historically unparalleled. It also needs to be fully highlighted that the Catholic Priest's Ministry at Enugu, Nigeria, is predominated by the Nigerian underclass: the beggarly, the sickly (who lack the finances for medical care in the country), the hungry (who have nobody to feed them) and indeed, the terribly disadvantaged citizens of the Nigerian state. The pitiable conditions of these victims of relative deprivation are largely attributable to the gratuitous pillaging by the country's elite of the humongous natural resources, with which Providence (in inscrutable benevolence) has blessed the Nigerian nation. Thus, the influential Catholic cleric has flown a kite for the course of the religious economy and political liberation in Nigeria. Will his Islamic counterparts reciprocate this gesture?

There are undoubtedly among the Muslim Imams in Nigeria, unconventional but nationalist religious leaders, whose weltanschauung is in harmony with the religious tendencies of Fr Ejikeme Mbaka. Is the Nigerian system capable of coming up with an alliance of these two radically beneficial, religious inclinations? This study prognosticates in the regard that there is such a possibility. We profoundly hinge our projection on the grounds that with God, nothing is impossible. Consequently, the issue of religion being the precipitate phenomenon of political liberation in Nigeria is not after all a preposterous prognosis.

It may be true as asserted by Demerath III [51] that religion, narrowly construed, has a narrowing prospect of making a difference in the world of secular affairs. However, it is similarly, most assuredly not true, (as admitted by Demerath) that religion has become a mere cipher. Hence, when its structural and cultural potential are combined, it can still be very powerful indeed [51]. It also remains the truth that religion has played catalytically beneficial roles in the political struggles of some other countries [1, 51]. It is therefore prognosticated further, in this study, that this catalytic role is also a possibility in the Nigerian state. However, for this to happen, the religious economy must be divested of its elitist domination – the structural and cultural potentials of religion must be recognized in such an environment. The religious economy therefore, is fundamentally, not profitably isolatable from politics. Furthermore, the brand of politics that isolates religion, methodologically leads to domestic elite hegemony. It then begins to seem as if the essence of religion is to make things better. And once you talk about making things better, you are talking about politics [58].

Political liberation in this study therefore, invariably implies freedom from domestic elite hegemony – a hostage condition imposed by a nation's cold-hearted political elite. The truly devious matter about this political class in the Nigerian state is that the members have continued to succeed in stage-managing the religious economy of the country to their sneaky group advantage. In this regard, a religious economy that is promoted to be highly deregulated is in essence, immensely regimented.

Hence, the differences between the worldviews of the Nigerian religious and political elites are usually surrounded by gargantuan obscurities. Thus, the demand side of the religious economy in Nigeria remains a function of the shenanigans and perfidious performances of the political elite.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

The secularization thesis had made political scientists to see religion as a peripheral subject matter [1]. The occasioning compartmentalization and bifurcations seem more profound in public administration. Currently however, there is an overwhelming evidence to dispute these tendencies. Hence, religion is a constructed category, not a neutral descriptor of a reality that is simply out there in the world [8]. The relationship between religion and political liberation is accordingly also constructible. World events make it increasingly clear that religion is, and will continue to be, a major player in politics [1]. This also has to be applicable to the local affairs of the Nigerian state and indeed, in domestic politics everywhere.

Politics as a category of human endeavor, independent of religion, is equally seen as a distinctly modern concept [8]. And in the Nigerian case, this distinct modernity has invariably led to an unbecoming destination, a scenario that is no longer tenable. It has specifically led in Nigeria to a brand of modernity that is also muddled up with elite subterfuges. The recommended alternative is modernity that derives from the old ways of religio-political fusion. Consequently, the template of religious economy in the country would lead to the political liberation of generic Nigerian masses, from the iron grips of their elite intimidators. Finally, this study is highly significant in its interdisciplinary methodology. Hence, it has succeeded in touching upon the subject areas of religion, sociology, political science and public administration. In this regard, the study possesses immense theoretical and empirical relevance.

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