

**ISLAM AND RELIGIOUS SWITCHING: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
FACTORS OF RELIGIOUS MOBILITY IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

One phenomenon of post-modernity is the mobility of adherents of religions from one religion to another; and this seldom attracts the interest of scholars to do scholarly investigation on the phenomenon towards ascertaining its effect on societal harmony and development or otherwise. This paper explores the phenomenon of switching religion with a major focus on the movement into and out of Islam in Edo State; a religiously plural society. The paper adopts the rational choice theory, coupled with the social inertia and strains theory of religious switching. It found out that besides the theological reasons of religious mobility, socialization, geographical mobility, exogamy and socioeconomic problems line up among the factors that orchestrate switching. The research further established that in a plural society like Edo State, it serves some benefits in terms of marital engagement and harmonious religious interactions. The paper recommends effective policy measures on the part of the Government that will address the socioeconomic problem of poverty which is the bedrock pushing individuals to switch for religious succor. Also, it calls for policy measures that would stem the media publicity of religious possibilities of unverified miracles. The paper posits in submission that religion, in spite of the postulation of scholars that it will dwindle with the development of science and technology, still flourishes and serves useful benefits for societal growth and development when explored and managed properly through the understanding of its dynamics as a force of societal cohesion.

Key words: Islam, Switching and Religion

Introduction

Human beings stand out as the central focus of all humanitarian studies. The understanding of man as he lives in his ecological boundaries serves useful benefits in the

construction of a better society for continuous progress, growth and development for the wellbeing of man in his earthly living. The *homoreligious* defines man as a religious being for his capability of self transcendence, a feature exclusively attributed to man among the class of mammals (Livingstone, 2005:3; Wotogbe-Weneka, 2001: VIII). Man, therefore, is but a mystery unto himself as he is always confronted by fundamental questions of existence and life experiences which solutions and answers he is ever in search of. Such questions include, but are not limited to:

What is the purpose of life? Why am I living? Why am I in this situation? Why is this and that happening to me? Why me?

All these perplexing questions that man raises only find expression in religion which provides explanations that assure man that his life has meaning or purpose. Religion, thus, is an important institution in the lives of human beings. It enlivens life with the meaning it gives to man as he sojourns on earth. Finding the meaning of this basic concept called religion has amounted to endless debates among scholars and philosophers of religion. However, we align with Jemiriye (2002:150) who approached the concept from a tripartite dimension represented by alphabet A, B and C, wherein A relates to C through B. A represents a person (human being), B stands as a form of relation such as belief, conduct, faith, rituals and trust, while C is a Super Being - God or gods. The illustration represents the relationship that exists between man and a Super-Sensible Being which man expresses in his belief and worship system.

This expression of belief and worship manifests in a host of different religious traditions including Islam. The existence of these numerous religious traditions and given the endless quest of man in search for answers to the perplexing questions of existence and issues of life brought about the phenomenon of religious switching in which man now becomes a religious mobile, moving in and out from one religious tradition to another. This phenomenon of religious switching has characterized contemporary human religiosity especially among the adherents of prophetic and universal religions. The phenomenon now forms a contemporary theme but with minimal scholarly attention. It refers to the mobility or movement of people within a religious belief and movement of people in and out of a religion. It is a process in which adherents of a religious tradition tend to shift their religious obligations and observances or loyalty to another religion in one circumstance or another. The scenario results in shift of religious rituals and dogmas, while the belief in God or the Ultimate Reality inherent in the religion is retained. The phenomenon is most visible in Christianity which has numerous denominations in which adherents switch from one denomination to another while retaining the singular belief in the triune God. Islamic religious tradition is often not visible with such feature owing to the centrality and unification of its religious rituals through mosque settings. However, Islam has witnessed the mobility of its adherents in and out of the religion and the scenario

characterizes the religious landscape of Edo State. Thus, this paper explores the factors that orchestrate the switching of religion by religious adherents and the effects such phenomenon has on Islam as one of the major religions of the people.

Conceptual Clarification

Islam

Islam stands in a long line of semitic and prophetic religious traditions that share an uncompromising monotheism and belief in God's revelation, his prophets, ethical responsibility and accountability, and the day of judgment (Esposito, 2005:1). The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root "*SILM*" which means: peace, purity, submission and obedience (Abdulati, 1997:20). In religious context the word Islam means submission to the will of Allah and obedience to His law. In Kilani (2008:18), Islam is a noun formed from the infinitive of a verb *asalama* meaning "to accept", "to submit", "to commit oneself;" which invariably means to submit or surrender to Allah. Qur'an (3:85) says, "if anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)". This by implication means that only through submission to the will of Allah and by obedience to His law can one achieve true peace and enjoy lasting purity. A Muslim, in this regard, is one who submits to the will of Allah.

Besides peace and submission to Allah's will, Islam is also a belief system with universal rules and principles which are succinctly stated in Qur'an 34:28. The verse states that: "We have not sent thee but as a universal (messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not". In a similar vein, Islam is regarded as the primordial religion of man, the *Din al-Fitrah*. This is captured in Qur'an 30:30 which states: "so set your face steadily and truly to the faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not".

Thus, Islam is a way of life which applies to all aspects of human existence and performance. In contradistinction to the common view of outsiders, Muslims do not look upon Islam as a religion founded by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) but by Allah Himself. Islam is not named after Prophet Muhammad (SAW) because he was called a Muslim himself according to in Qur'an (6:163). The verse states that: "No partner hath He: this am I commanded and I am the first of those who bow to His will". The Qur'an also speaks of the earlier prophets as being Muslims. Qur'an (2:136) states: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them. And we bow to Allah (in Islam)".

Concept of Religious Conversion

The word “conversion” etymologically comes from the Latin word *conversio* which means to turn, to return and to turn again (Richardson, 1999:1051). The word is used in English language to refer to a change from one state or form to another. Relating to religion, it denotes change in the religious life and behavior of people. It involves a positive interior change in one’s religious conviction, morality and spirituality from a state of unbelief, weak or lukewarm faith, to a holy and ardent religious life (Ejizu, 2012:3). This understanding brings to the fore that religious conversion does not only refer to moving from one religion to another but also refers to increasing the appreciation of and adherence to religious affiliation. This implies that conversion does occur within the same religion as well as across religions and from a religion to none. This prompts the classification of the components of religious conversion. First are the “converts”: people that were brought up outside organized religion, that is, the Indigenous Religion. Organized religions are the prophetic religions such as Islam and Christianity.

Second are the “apostates”. These are people who had embraced the organized religions but later ceased to identify with those religious traditions while the third category are the “switchers” which are those that were raised in the organized religions but have currently moved from one of the organized religions in which they were raised to another. This latter category of religious conversion which indicates the occurrence of movement from one organized religion to another, most especially the movement in and out of Islamic Religion in Edo State forms the concern of our enquiry in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories that analyze the phenomenon of religious switching were adopted in this paper. The first is the rational choice theory which is an economic approach to human behavior that defines the process of determining what options are available and then choosing the most preferred one according to some consistent criterion. The two primary concepts of this theory are the maximizing assumption and the stable preference assumption. Development in sociological study of religion has produced a new pattern through the adoption of this theory in explaining institutional and individual religious behavior. American sociologists (Finke and Stark 1998; Stark and McCann 1993; Warner 1993) theorized that modern religion in free societies can be compared to a marketplace, where individuals make religious choices over which denomination they prefer to identify with. The more pluralism and freedom of religion people experience in society, the more likely are they to view religious affiliation as a choice.

The second theory is the Strain Theory which holds that in any society, there are dominant set of values and goals along with acceptable means of achieving them which everyone is not capable of achieving at the same time. Since everyone is not always able to achieve these goals to the fullest at a given point in time, there is a gap in the achievement of these

goals and the means by which people have to achieve these goals created what Merton tagged “social strain”. Merton’s instance with American society is dramatic. According to him, in American society, the dominant values and goals are often seen through successes in individual achievement measured in terms of material acquisition, social status and personal recognition, among others. The acceptable means of attaining these goals in American society are individualistic through hard-work, self-control, persistence and education which the society’s work ethic emphasizes, and failure is in the same way personal. Thus, Merton contends that since people do not enjoy success in the same way in spite of the work ethic, they are strained as a result of the inequalities of the society’s values and goals. Their inability to achieve these values and goals through conventional means, according to him, made them respond to it through crime that manifest itself in different guise. However, not all individuals that lack legitimate opportunities resort to crime. People sometimes look beyond the ordinary to attract opportunities for the achievement of values and goals of earthly living.

It is, perhaps, based on this understanding that Iheanacho and Ughaerumba (2013:193) argue that people often turn to religion in order to satisfy conventional desires as a result of strain experienced through unusual personal or collective deprivation. In the same vein, unusual personal deprivation or strain experienced in one’s religious affiliation may lead to switching of one’s religious affiliation.

The third theory is the Social Inertia Theory which is an adaptation from Newton’s motion theory. It states that a body continues in its uniform state of rest unless a force acts on it. The theory states that people maintain the associations and identifications they are socialized into unless one’s life is significantly disrupted in general or the specific association/identification is directly challenged. Among the proponents of this theory are Laserwitz, (1995); Lawton and Bures, (2001); Loveland, (2003); Sherkat, (2004); Smith and Sikkink, (2003). Religion is one means of identity/identification in the human society (Iheanacho and Ughaerumba, 2013:189). The phenomenon represents not only an important tie between the individual and the larger social group, both as a basis of association and as an expression of shared meanings. It also provides the platform with which people view their worlds.

Modernity in the society has created the atmosphere of religious pluralism in which individuals in the society now share affiliations. The inertia theory thus holds that people will continue to maintain their religious identification unless they encounter a significant challenge or disruption. Religious identification in this context refers to the religion or affiliation into which one is born and grows up. As such, when one’s religious affiliation becomes incapable of managing one’s challenges and anxieties, religious mobility/switching becomes inevitable as the individual will have no choice but to look

for an alternative. It is in the light of the above theories that this paper examines religious switching as it affects Islam in Edo State.

Phenomenon of Religious Switching in Edo State

The examination of the religious landscape of Edo people shows a remarkable degree of the phenomenon of religious switching among religious adherents in the state. Basically, there are three major religious traditions: Islam, Christianity and the Indigenous Traditional Religion in the state. Islam and Christianity are considered as the two organized religions. While Islam has no denomination, all the varieties and denominations of Christianity are treated together under the Christian Religion. As earlier indicated in the previous section of this work, converts are those who moved from the Indigenous Religion to either Islam or Christianity, representing the two major organized religions in the state. These organized religions are foreign religions which, from inception and growth, converted majority of the people into their folds, most especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Imokhai 1982, Isichei 1995, Ilega and Onu 2008, and Kilani 2008). The period actually witnessed massive religious change through conversion. However, a remarkable degree of post modern religious phenomenon became widespread in the late 20th and early 21st centuries through switching of religions. This concept indicates religious mobility; that is, the movement between the organized religions whereby people who were born and brought up in the organized religions began to shift from one religion to another in search of acceptable religious identity. The phenomenon of one religion losing and gaining members, thus, emerged in the religious landscape of Edo State.

Lack of statistical record of data of the population of religious adherents as it pertains to the two organized religions in the state and unavailability of previous scholarly work on the issue left the researcher to resort to looking at the presence of Mosques and Churches in the sample communities within the area of the study. The presence of Churches invariably outnumbered that of the Mosques and the population of worshippers varies respectively. From the investigation of sample households visited, it shows that up to 90 per cent of the modern people in Edo State were raised in either of the two organized religions (Islam and Christianity).

Two stages in which switching of religions usually occur were identified. The first is during the coming of age of young cohorts and, secondly, during adolescent age where young adolescents begin to transit to the next life cycle stage. Thus, out of every ten (10) religious adherents, three (3) will have switched their religious affiliations. Thus, of the 90 per cent of adherents of organized religions, less than four (4) percent have switched from Christianity to Islam and up to six (6) percent have switched from Islam to Christianity. Then, about 80 per cent retain their religious identity in the organized religion in which they were raised. This could be represented in figure 1 below.

Reasons/factors influencing this switching phenomenon were examined based on the items from the questionnaire developed by the researcher.

Religion	Stayers	Moving out	Entering
Christianity	90 of 100	4 of 10	6 of 10
Islam	60 of 100	6 of 10	3 of 10

Figure 1, representing an approximate switching relationship between Christianity and Islam.

Factors influencing religious switching

(Weak) Childhood Religious Socialization

According to Sherkat and Wilson (1995), early childhood socialization influences individuals in the preference they make later on in life. Religion is one of the first agents of socialization in the society. Socialization through childhood religious practices, thus, produces preference on which later religious choices depend. Strong and solid childhood religious socialization to a greater extent leads to religious preference sustenance in an individual's religious life. That is, an individual who received a strong religious background from his/her parents is likely to maintain and remain in that religious tradition in his or her old age without moving out of the tradition. In the same vein, weak childhood religious socialization affects religious stability of an individual in adulthood. This factor receives support in our investigation of the phenomenon of religious switching in Edo State. Some of the young adults who switched out of Islam were found to be those whose childhood religious socializations were weak. Islam has a defined early childhood religious practice that enables a child to be fully groomed in Islamic religious knowledge and practices. Quran (2:233) places the responsibility of child upbringing on both parents. However, the mother owns the first responsibility of child upbringing by suckling and weaning the child.

In the process of carrying out these responsibilities, the mother's religious piety also rubs off on the child. Thereafter, child should be enrolled in *Madrassa* Arabic School for Arabic/ Quranic learning and recitation. This should be followed with modern Islamic nursery/primary school for the moral and educational development of the child. A child who socializes with the above defined Islamic mode of religious socialization is unlikely to turn away from it at adulthood. On the other hand, impious mothers/parents hardly see to the solid religious socialization of their children and this affects their maintenance and retention of their religious affiliation at adulthood in the face of competing forces of religious change.

Lapsing in Religious Practices

This is another factor orchestrating religious switching. This happens when an individual begins to lapse in keeping his/her usual religious practices. It is usually expressed in avoiding essential voluntary and obligatory worship services. Loveland (2003) described this act as opposition to religious institutions which give room for the development of preference that stands at odd with the institution. What this entails is that lapsing religious practice through avoidance of worship sessions creates a vacuum which may generate preference that conflict with the religious services provided by that religion. When such happens, the individual develops new religious preferences which may lead him/her to switching.

Following the theoretical framework, we adopted in this study, the lapse may be as a result of certain strains the individual experiences, by which he looks elsewhere for alternatives within the emerged preference suitable to his yearnings. Our investigation found “lapsing” as a factor in switching out of Islam. This was common among the weak Muslims who found Islamic mode of worship stressful in keeping to the prescribed daily obligatory ritual prayers of Islam. Our investigation reveals that some Muslims especially youths, who switched out of Islam find the ritual prayer burdensome to complete daily. We found this particularly at Irrua, a town in Edo Central Region of the State, which was hitherto a Muslim dominated area. According to these persons who left Islam, Christianity offered a flexible mode of worship which is less conservative compared to Islam and it confers a high socializing influence on members in the society. In spite of these persons position, we still found in our further investigation a lady who was raised in Christianity but moved to Islam in appreciation of the coherent nature of Islamic mode of worship. According to her, she joined Islam for the sole reason of the way the Muslims worship, especially with the ritual prayer which made her fulfill her sense of obligation to her Creator by worship.

It is, however, important to state, at this juncture, that worship is an integral part of a religious system. It is the very essential feature that makes a religion a living religion. The beliefs in any religious system could only be evident and demonstrated through the act of worship. At the very heart of worship is the ritual prayer through which reverence to the Supersensible Reality in religion is demonstrated.

In Islam, worship is referred to as *Ibadah*, a concept which connotes Lordship and servanthood form of relationship. Ritual prayer (*Salat*) is an essential component of Islamic worship wherein an attitude of humble service of the servant before his or her Lord is expressed. Islam prescribes five daily obligatory prayers to be performed at certain prescribed times for every Muslim, including non-obligatory prayers of various forms at individual or private level (Quran 20:130). The early morning prayer (*Fajr* or *Subh*) begins the day for every Muslim followed by early noon prayer (*Zuhr*), which is immediately followed by *Asr*, the late afternoon prayer. At sunset, *Maghrib* is observed

while *Isha*, the early night prayer completes the daily devotion of every Muslim to God. There are stated *raka'ah*; a word which literally means an act of bowing down before God which technically means *one complete act of devotion in prayer (salat)*, involving standing, bowing down, prostrating and sitting down (Abdul, 1980:46), in each of the five-time obligatory daily prayers.

Geographic Mobility

Living together as a family within a given geographical location in most cases facilitates and strengthens ties of socioreligious bond on the people concerned. There are times when the needed growth and development of members mandate them to move apart in search of education or employment for better living conditions. In this circumstance, family members begin to separate to start a new living in another location. The new environment might pose an influence that may affect the religious practices of the person which could lead to switching of religion.

In Edo State, like in every other part of the country, educational pursuit always makes the young adolescent to break ties with parents and family. This factor supports our investigation of the switching phenomenon in which people switch out of Islam in school especially at the university level because their religious ties to parents and/or guardians have been weakened by the mobility factor. Our survey of the major institutions of higher learning in the state: University of Benin, Ugbowo; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; and Auchi Polytechnics, Auchi, located in the three senatorial districts of the state reveals the prevalence of religious switching among students.

Awareness of Some Religious Possibilities

It has been established by scholars that existential questions and life-threatening experiences could only be sought in religion (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2005; Iheanacho and Ughaerumba, 2013; Omoregbe, 1993; etc.). Religion offers templates of meaning system of addressing issues and exigent situations that characterize human life. When individuals experience such situations, they try to search for solution from the meaning system their religion offers. There are some events and experiences that do not find express interpretation within the purview of the individual's existing meaning system. Experiences such as loss of loved ones, painful illness or economic depression experienced by an individual sometimes indicate failure of existing personal meaning system. As such, when an individual sees his/her religious belief system not able to sustain him or her in such moment of crisis, or that his religious meaning system is weak or incapable of managing such a meaning-threatening moments, confusion and frustration begin to set in.

When an individual sees the possibility of remedying the situation in other meaning system or religious tradition or belief system, preference for that system begins to develop and that leads to switching of one's religion.

Development in information dissemination in modern times, through the media and personal/group social interaction, has helped in awareness creation about events and occurrences that would have hitherto be obscure or restricted. The use of modern facilities of information propagation to publicize and advertize miracles of healing and relief from other life-threatening situations create a consciousness in the minds of those in such situation the possibility of gaining respite when they turn or subscribe to that belief or affiliation. Some Muslim switchers encountered in the course of this study claimed this as the reason behind their switching to Christianity. An example is a Muslim woman whose daughter was healed along with a Christian girl of lassa fever at Irrua Teaching Hospital when they were prayed for by Christian brethren. The Muslim woman said she switched to Christianity with her family members except her husband after that incident.

Religious Exogamy

Exogamy is described as the act of getting married to someone outside one's clan, tribe or social group. The word originates from two combined Greek words, *exo* and *gamos*, which literally means "outside marriage" (New World Encyclopedia in www.newworldencyclopedia.org retrieved 21/02/2018). The opposite of exogamy is endogamy, meaning marriage within the same group. Over the years, scholars have attempted to unravel the possible origin of exogamy. For example, Emily Durkheim, in his *Totem and Taboo*, argued that the taboo against incest was the defining reason behind the promulgation of exogamy. He put it that people of the same totem in the primal societies were regarded as clans with blood relation, and sexual relation or marriage within such clans was prohibited and considered as incest. Thus, exogamy was a guide against incest which is a taboo (Evans-pritchard, 2004:53-59). As religion is a group phenomenon (Johnstone, 2011:40), religious exogamy represents marriage outside one's religious group or affiliation. Marriage is an important institution in human life. It is defined as a socially approved mating relationship that is expected to be stable and enduring. Also, it solidifies relationships that enrich communities and nations by bringing forth new lives, new hopes as well as diffuse ethnic barriers that tend to prevent unity (Kilani, 2016:3). The importance of marriage in African societies is underscored by the fact that it is a mandatory venture for every adult male and female, and as such an unmarried adult is regarded inferior in the eyes of African societies (Mbiti, 1969:106). This value attached to marriage in the society makes the search for marital partners unlimited or unrestricted to culture, ethnic or religious boundaries. Herein lies a core determinant of religious switching in Edo State.

Switching religion for marital reasons in contemporary time depends on the propensity of the religious groups to retain existing members and to attract new members. The religion in which a person is raised represents an “origin” while the religion to which a person switches represents the “destination”. Origin and destination religious affiliation are two variables that determine the effect of switching on a religion. Our investigation of exogamous factor of religious switching reveals that most Muslim switchers are women whose marriage partners turn out to be non-Muslims, mostly Christians. Although, Islam grants freedom of marital engagement to Muslim men with non-Muslims women it prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men (Quran 5:5).

Thus, the mature Muslim lady’s inability to contract marriage within Islam, coupled with the status role marriage confers on members of society, make them switch their religion. If the prospective suitor is a Christian, they abandon Islam for Christianity. In the same way, our investigation equally found out some Christians both male and female who switched to Islam by reason of marriage. However, the propensity of retaining the switcher by the new affiliation depends on the commitment of the person and the attractiveness of the religion to the person in question.

Socio-economic problems

According to Isiramen (2010:311), socio-economic and political problems in Nigeria have pushed many Nigerians into psychological and physical trauma which is almost transforming into neurosis. The rate at which the poverty level keeps escalating as a result of unemployment and underemployment is alarming. The initial 15 per cent poverty level in Nigeria at her independence has risen astronomically to 65.6 per cent in 1996 (Isiramen, 2010:311). This has made many Nigerians to be socially disadvantaged and deprived of basic necessities or good living conditions. The harsh conditions have provided a fertile ground for new Pentecostal Christian Movements to thrive as their teachings and preaching emphasize therapeutic competence in delivering people from the manifold “demons” they claimed were responsible for the socioeconomic disadvantaged position of the people. As a succor and spiritual means of liberation from the shackle of poverty and deprivation, many embrace the new Pentecostal Movements with the philosophy of self-help and belief in future hope (Isiramen, 2010:313). Some Muslims equally switched their religious affiliation to this new teaching in Christianity with the hope of getting liberation from the shackle of poverty.

Family attitude towards switchers

A general experience of the switchers both Muslims and Christians reveals an attitude of alienation and emotional discontent. Alienation is an attitude of making one feel like a stranger where one would have been a member and actively participating in the life and activities of the group or family one belongs. Alienation is according to Iroegbu (2004:68) the greatest ontological evil that can happen to a being in its essence, existence and

expression. It means the conscious attitude or act of indifference towards a fellow being. The etymological meaning of the word will help us grasp the severity of the evil involved in the act. Alienation is from the composite French verbs “*alien-er*” and “*lien*”. *Aliener* means out of, from or outside of, while *lien* stands for link, nexus, bond, hook or line. *Aliener*, thus, means to break, untie the hook and destroy the line. Therefore, to alienate means to sever or break the relationship or link that exists between two persons or group, or between a person and a group (Iroegbu, 2004:69).

It is an attitude of declaring: *no more relationship*. It is *having nothing to do with someone again*. For me (us) you are dead, non-existent, the oblivion of being, no belongingness, you do not belong here anymore. These are common expressions that describe the act. This is the evil involved in alienation. And it kills the spirit of the alienated and reduces him or her to a lesser cadre of being with a sense of worthlessness. Alienation is the kind of reaction that befalls religious switchers in the state. It is mostly experienced by those that switched to Islam from Christianity according to our investigation. One of the ladies interviewed specifically stated that her family members regarded her as a lost person when she joined Islam and, till the moment, she is still seen as such but she was not deterred by that attitude toward her because of the joy and beauty she found in Islam. The peace and beauty her spirit enjoys in Islam, to her, surpasses the alienated attitude towards her from her family members.

In a similar way, the Muslim switchers also experience the attitude of alienation from their parents and family members but in a lesser degree as our investigation discovered. Some of those that joined Christianity from Islam said their family reacted emotionally with discontent in their resolve to switch to Christianity but after a while they consolidated and continued the normal family relationship. However, in as much as there is the general attitude of alienation and emotional discontent, there were some switchers that neither experience alienation nor emotional ostracism. These were those that occupied leadership position or were the eldest in the families whose parents have died. Some of them encountered said that no one could question their resolution because of their position in the family and they did not compel others to follow them as they believed religion is a matter of the heart. Anywhere the heart and mind lead someone in matters of religion, that is where the person ought to be. It is interesting to note that this is the position of most respondents to the question of reaction from family members towards switching of religion in the state. In all, on the average, the religious landscape of Edo State shows a common understanding of the concept of freedom of religion and this, perhaps, significantly stands as the basis of the attitude of religious tolerance in the state.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The principle of choice of religion as provided in the Quran and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) play out in the religious landscape of Edo State

without hesitation or restriction. Quran 2:256 states that “there shall be no compulsion in religion...” and section 28 subsection (1) of CFRN states that “every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change one’s religion or belief...” The promulgation of this principle of freedom of choice of religion invariably implies that the society is pluralistic and lacking one established way of spirituality and performance of religious obligations. This justifies our first theoretical frame, the rational choice in which the proponent theorized that modern religion in free societies can be compared to a marketplace, where individuals make religious choices over which denomination or religious groups they prefer to identify with.

Our second framework, the Strain’s Theory lays credence to the socioeconomic debacle in which people often turn to religion in order to satisfy conventional desires as a result of strain experienced through unusual personal or collective deprivation. While the third framework we adopted, the Social Inertia Theory, justifies the mobility of people from one religion to another in search for succor which other religions seem to be providing through the expression of its possibility in the new religion.

However, it is important to note that the modern and postmodern religious phenomenon of switching religion serves some benefits in the religious practices and observances in Edo religious landscape. It has created an avenue for marital relationship as many of the religious switchers, our findings revealed, did so for marital reasons, and this has led to harmonious religious interaction of both Muslims and Christians in the state. This attests to the reasons why Edo State has no record of religious uprising or violence. That notwithstanding, it is the recommendation of this paper that Government should put in place effective policy measures to address the rate of unemployment by providing jobs and infrastructural framework for private individuals to establish themselves in order to curtail the high rate of poverty and to stem the tide of media publicity of religious possibilities of unverified miracles. It is our submission that religion, in spite of the postulation of scholars that it will dwindle with the development of science and technology, still flourishes and serves useful benefits for societal growth and development when explored and managed properly through the understanding of its dynamics as a force of societal cohesion.

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