

Radical Islamism and the Issue of African Nation Building: A Reading of Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday* (2015)

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Abstract: Nation building in Africa is a central issue in the process of African self-determination. This paper interrogates the representation and the critique of radical Islamism as a religious identity to set up an African nation. The investigation based on social identity theory, shows that Islamic fanaticism, in Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*, objectifies the individuals by holding them in a logic of political, economic and religious predation. It is therefore argued that the Nigerian author defends an ideology of consensus that promotes religious diversity in the project of nation building.

Keywords: Africa, Nation Building, Identity, Islam, Radicalism

Résumé : La construction de la nation est une question centrale dans le processus de l'auto-détermination de l'Afrique. Cet article interroge la représentation, et la critique de l'islamisme radical en tant qu'identité religieuse pour bâtir une nation africaine. L'étude qui s'appuie sur la théorie de l'identité sociale, révèle que le fanatisme islamique dans *Born on a Tuesday* d'Elnathan John, réifie les individus en les enfermant dans une logique de prédation politique, économique et religieuse. L'on soutient donc que l'auteur nigérian défend une idéologie de consensus qui fait la promotion de la diversité religieuse dans le projet de construction d'une nation.

Mots-Clés : Afrique, construction d'une nation, Identité, Islam, Radicalisme

Introduction

The representation of Islam in African creative and imaginative writing has oscillated between approval and repudiation. Asfar (142) notes that the progressive evolution of Islam in West Africa has accommodated with African traditional beliefs and practices. Instead of a clash, there has been a fusion between African indigenous religions and Islam as a foreign one. Emad Mirmotahari (2011) goes further to insist on the role of Islam

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in the construction of individual and collective identity. He mentions some East African writers like Abdulrazak Gurnah, Nuruddin Farah and Moyez G. Vassanji, (though tagged Canadian citizen) who, in their work, portray East African societies that have harmoniously integrated Islam despite pending difficulties that are inherent to any religion.

Yet, other literary writings are critical and even opposed to the advent and the spread of Islam on the African continent. The tendency and the emphasis of their argumentation are grounded in history molded by ideology. In their view, Islam and also Christianity represent not only, a dreadful weapon for economic and political domination but also, a blur that contribute to Africans' mental enslavement. For Achebe (1953), Armah (1973), Ngugi (1965), those foreign religions undermine the assertion of Africans' genuine identity and prevent them from achieving cultural, economic and political self-determination. In the perspective of African renaissance, both Christianity and Islam are depicted as alienating and misleading in their narrative fictions.

Today, the two foreign religions have nonetheless developed into many smaller groups in Africa. Part of the trend in Islam is Islamic extremism. It has even gained momentum in recent decades. Radical Muslims have promoted a univocal African society that would be ruled by the laws of sharia, (the law the God). Boko haram insurgency in Nigeria, is a tangible illustration. This article, debates therefore the issue of religion, precisely Islam, in its radical dimension, in the process of the construction of an African nation. It surveys the representation and the critique of Islamic fundamentalism in Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. Indeed, the Nigerian writer's debut novel depicts through the lens of Dantala, an insightful picture of radical Islamism in Northern Nigeria. The ideology and the violence of religious extremism, rather nurtured by poverty and ignorance, than genuine faith, give rise to a chaotic Northern Nigerian society.

This paper probes into that precarious Islamic posture and actions as depicted in Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. It poses the problematic of religion in connection to societal integration and harmony. It is argued that Islamic religious extremism paves the way to societal chaos and that religious diversity, however, fosters the building of a nation.

The novel is, indeed, a realistic discourse on that poignant plague that affects the Nigerian society, and by extension the African continent.

The depiction of that societal antagonism due to religion and political conflicts, is decrypted through Henri Tajfel and John Turner's social identity theory. It is a theory that "deals with intergroup relations, that is, how people come to see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group), and the consequences of this categorization." (Eyeruroma and Allison 210). Some related concepts like Identity formation, social categorization, depersonalization, and social comparison are used to describe the conditions that make social identity of a group like the Mujahideen, more important than a person's identity as an individual.

The first part of this paper deals with the roots and apparent grounds that cause Islamic radicalism. The second part, explains the dangers of Islamic extremism in the construction of the Nigerian nation in the context of religious diversity.

1. Islam and societal chaos

1.1 Money, Politics and Islam: the search for power position

Elnathan John's narrative sheds light on an inaccessible world. The reader discovers, through the sight of the protagonist, Dantala, the close and strong link money, politics and Islam. Cuadra (2016) asserts that "Elnathan John undertook extensive research on the development of political Islam in Nigeria, in order to include all its elements in the book". That triptych will lead Northern Nigerians to a battle ground among adepts of the same religion. In spite of their leadership positions, Imams prove unreliable in the long walk to order and peace owing to the part they play in business and politics. The novel shows that they are the root cause of the fierce religious and political unrest

Alhaji Usman is a businessman. He possesses companies, lands, and plantations. He is portrayed as a rich man who gives out alms at mosques to the unprivileged. Sheikh Jamal, Dantala's mentor, is an imam. He is the vice-chairman of the mosque which is headed by Alhaji Usman. Both Sheikh Jamal and Alhaji Usman represent the elite in a Northern Nigeria ravaged by extreme poverty. In the perspective of the social identity theory they represent a category of people, (in the context of the narrative), with almost the same living standard and sharing the same religious vision and ambitions.

Religion in such a context is implicitly used by that elite to seek political position in view of controlling the system. Islam becomes a

pretext to manipulate the mass of people who basically seek nothing but a path to worship their maker. Alhaji Usman uses his money to build many mosques in order to have all the attendees' votes in his favor during political elections. As to Sheikh Jamal, he is a preacher and a teacher of Islam with a solid educational background. He knows that controlling the political system (of Nigeria), throughout the education system, is a guarantee to achieve total political control of the country. On an occasion, as he was discussing with Malam Abdul-Nur, who was his former assistant but now a Mujahideen, Sheikh Jamal submitted him the following thought:

Which is more injurious to Muslims, refusing to join the government and refusing to go to school and being sidelined by the government or going to school, pushing for separate classrooms for boys and girls, pushing for girls to wear hijabs to school, joining government and the police and the army and eventually becoming strong enough to control the government? (John 135)

The imam Sheikh Jamal, teaches and preaches for faith. But he also spreads the ideology of Islam to conquer the machinery of the State (of Nigeria). Throughout the narrative, there is an insidious search for control to avoid political, economic and social marginalization of the Muslims. Sheikh Jamal is depicted as a moderate imam who accepts religious diversity. Nevertheless, his actions, thoughts and discourses implicitly show the manipulation of Islam in order to achieve business and political goals.

Countries like England, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia appear in the narrative as partners that provide funding to religious factions. Reference to those countries means that there is an international power relationship. The reader discovers that Imams receive money from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran to wage war against other religious groups in Northern Nigeria. That money injects dynamism and zeal into religious movements. Malam Abdul-Nur, after returning from Saudi Arabia, turned more radical. Dantala expresses his concern about Malam Abdul-Nur's fanaticism in his diary because it was potentially source of tear and conflict within the North Nigerian Muslim communities. The imam spreads his extremist views in mosques almost freely even though he was warned by Sheikh Jamal. One can read in Dantala's journal the following: "How easy it is for Malam Abdul-Nur to say the word kill especially when he is talking about the Shia people (...) But I do not agree with the way Malam Abdul-

Nur is talking about them like he will kill all of them if he catch them.” (John 101)

Two categories of imams emerge: the moderates and the fanatics. This is according to the social identity theory, the social categorization. Imams categorize themselves and others in differentiated groups. The moderates and the fanatics are antagonist social categories. Whatever the side, the search for power position is permanent. They are opposed by religious ideology, politics and business ethics. Each side seeks for hegemony over the other. The reader is, indeed, introduced to a viciously organized network of money laundering, corruption on purpose of political agenda.

Their conception and practice of Islam are diametrically opposed as for managing the society. Malam Abdul-Nur, Sheikh Jamal’s former assistant, longs for a Nigeria that is converted to the Islamic Law, commonly known as Sharia. Sheikh Jamal would rather have a democratic Nigerian society in which everyone could live and practice his or her religion freely. Hassouna (280) remarks that “for Abdul-Nur, the real aim is not religious one, but he seeks power, money, leadership and dominance”.

Islam as a religion is about worship and spiritual growth. As such, it should contribute to the societal cohesion. Yet, Islam as represented in the narrative, no longer serves cultural or ideological goals for togetherness but it is used for political and economic ambitions. The amalgamation of money, politics and religion gives rise to a society with all sorts of dichotomies. Conflicts between rich and poor and more significantly, clashes between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims”. The opposed Islamic views and practices derive from a mental conditioning that contributes to the identity formation of each category of people. The moderates and the fanatics view and judge one another through stereotypes and prejudices. It then gives way to the “in-group and out-group opposition”. The population in such a context is led and manipulated regardless of their real needs for survival.

As one can read in *Born on a Tuesday*, people immersed themselves in Islamic culture in such a way that Islam determines the political, social, and economic organization of people and their leaders in Northern Nigeria. Islam has become the benchmark that defines their identity. Besides, most of the people experience extreme poverty. They have a

transcendentalist conception of life which pushes them to think that any occurrence is Allah's plan. The narrator, would repeat "Allah knows best" whenever he is confronted to critical situation. No need to look for any rational grounds to the confusing situation. The sense of initiative and even actions take the form of a conformism according to one's interpretation of Islamic rules. Elnathan John depicts the general population as dispossessing self-determination, as they act as automated people in the hands of imams. The battle for power position has become blatant. There is an abuse of Islamic authority. Money is used by Imams to blur and corrupt. Adepts are insidiously used as pawns in the game. So, the opposition between imams, in such a fertile environment, is a real ground for a societal deterioration.

1.2. Islam within bigotry and chaos

Social identity theory lays the emphasis on the individual identity formation in the context of the group. People develop a clear and specific view of themselves and of their identity. It is a mental process that is perceptible in the diachrony of the narrative in the novel under study. Elnathan John's novel subtly, draws a picture of that identity formation that leads to societal decadence through the life of his protagonist, Dantala. The Nigerian writer criticizes the shortcomings of a society torn between religion, poverty and ignorance. The critical mind of the individual is misted up with passionate religious conviction and outrageous poverty. Most of the people are illiterate and have developed a fatalist worldview that made them easy prey for Islamic fanaticism.

The defective education system proves to be an important factor in the bewilderment of the society the novelist refers to. Kids are taught in Quran-based schools (Almajiri system) by teachers called Malams. The narrative reveals that their education is mediocre; and they finally earn their living as errand-boys. Some of them have to fend for themselves in the streets by joining the street boys. Owing to their low intellectual development, the Kuka tree boys (gang of thugs), in Bayan Layi is a typical example of the failure of that education system. Dantala and his street mates, Banda, Gobedanisa...are easily manipulated by politicians. "The Kuka tree boys" are used by politicians to perpetrate criminal mischief by looting politicians' headquarters and even kill other political opponents. The ineffective education gives no perspective of professional integration. It rather generates drug addicted thugs, robbers and murderers. Kids

identify themselves fatalistically as marginalized groups used as political adjuvants to commit crimes and troubles.

In addition to the poor education system, ignorance, and worse, the lack of critical mind, are other factors that pave the way to that societal chaos. Muslims as represented in the narrative are not educated enough to question the rightfulness of an imam's actions and decisions. The imam's words stand as the principles that guide them. Fanatic religious leaders, like Malam Abdul-Nur will use the people's naive devotion to Allah to shepherd his followers. He has an ambition: to see the whole Nigeria under the rule of the Sharia, the Islamic law. As he defends: "Sharia, I will use Sharia! The laws of Allah are self-sufficient" (John 168)

The poor education system and the rampant ignorance among the population are two important factors of the identity formation. There is logically a claim for Islamic radicalism. It is viewed by their followers as legitimate and applicable to anyone. Malam Abdul-Nur gives no opportunity to contest his views and decisions. To him, everyone should fall in a bigotry for Allah. That is, to be obstinately devoted to Allah. Only Sharia should direct thoughts and actions, regardless of how many people really know it. Therefore, his worldview is based on a radical binary opposition. He (Malam Abdul-Nur) and his followers represent good and those who do not share the same view represent evil. To them, they act to satisfy what God expects from a "genuine Muslim". They have to either turn "bad Muslims" and non-Muslims into "good Muslims", or to eradicate them in the name of Allah. They spread and impose a univocal and uncontested opinion on the Qu'ran.

To enact their policy of bigotry, extremists reify their followers. Masquerade, trickery, lies, and luring are some of the first strategies used to conquer members. Malam Abdul-Nur offered a new phone and a radio set to Dantala in order to have the young man's sympathy. In his attempt to convince Dantala, he asked him strategically: "Are you ready to do what Allah wants when He wants it, without asking why?". (Jhone 73) There is a subtle tactic of brainwashing that Malam Abdul-Nur and his fanatic followers use to lure new adepts and extend their numbers. When manipulation fails, they use violence. Threats and, terrors and public slaughters become the ultimate means to impose their vision and dominate. Malam Abdul-Nur's movement is identified as *the Mujahideen*, that is the guerilla fighters who impose Islam to non-Muslims.

The reign of the “Mujahideen” is the manifestation of a latent tension between Muslims namely the Shiite and the Sunna. Dantala’s twin brothers, Hassan and Hussien, are viewed as different and even lost and dangerous Muslims. They are Shiites, that is, for them, Muslims with contradictory and strange behavior. They are said to have been brainwashed to join a Shiite movement in Tashar Kanuri. Dantala expresses his mother’s fear about his twin brothers:

Khadija is afraid for my brothers. She says they joined a Shiite group in Tashar Kanuri and came back acting strange. She is sure they were brainwashed to follow the group, because our father was not Shiite. (...) She cries when she says my brothers have left the path of wisdom and of Islam (Jhon 47)

The narrator’s example of family dislocation can be extended to the whole Northern Nigeria where societal deterioration has worsened due to the spread of Islamic fanaticism and endemic poverty.

Both ideology and politics of radical Islamism imposed on ignorant and dogmatized people tear Northern Nigerian Muslim community into opposed clans. The narrative refers to the war between Shiite and Sunna in Northern Nigeria. The author has successfully made it clear that it is a war of the Islamic elite who manipulate the masses into bigoted congregations ready to fight each other. The end of the story shows a society fallen into anomy. There is a chaos due to that religious rivalries. The population undergoes conflict between Muslim clans, conflict between Police and the population. Sheikh Jamal, the moderate has his throat cut by the Mujahideen.

Dantala’s quest for knowledge to maintain his stability in that universe of religious zeal and conflicts, has turned into bewilderment and wandering. Symbolically, it illustrates a society with no vision, no objective due to Islamic radicalism. Therefore, one wonders the sense and the validity of religious extremism in the perspective of the construction of a nation.

2. Radical Islamism: an Obstacle to Nation Building

2.1. The Mujahideen and the Logic of Predation

In *Born on a Tuesday*, the character Malam Abdul-Nur and his Mujahideen movement, struggle for the hegemony of an alienation based on Islam. The philosophy and the practice of such an Islam necessarily

has generated and maintained Northern Nigeria under the yoke of a religious adversity. The Mujahideen sustain a radical societal stance of antagonism that entertains tensions and conflicts. They believe in religious purity and claim the duty either to spread or to impose their views of man linked to God and his laws. The predatory logic that sustains their position represents the catalyst for social tensions and permanent conflict.

The Mujahideen group adopt and develop beliefs and behavior that make them singular. This is the social identification process, that is members of the group would behave in the way that they believe members of the group should behave. They build their identity according to the values of their group that make them different from the rest of the community. They would have people recognize them throughout their symbols. Reference to such symbols is made evident when Dantala, the narrator describes their intrusion into their environment: “All we know is suddenly there are black-and- white banners, flags, and stickers everywhere that read either “Mujahideen” or Sunna Sak” (John 158)

In the social identification process, the individual appropriates his /her in-group values and attitudes. In *Born on a Tuesday*, religious fanaticism triggers in-group members to commit reprehensible acts like slaughtering. They write that: “The central cognitive process in social identity theory is depersonalization, or seeing the self as an embodiment of the in-group prototype rather than as a unique individual” (Burke and Stets 231).

The in-group member acts not for individual purpose but to satisfy the expectations of the group. The Mujahideen’s vision is biased by prejudice and stereotypes about the out-group members. There is a devotion to position his in-group as exclusive.

The out-groups, the moderate Muslims and non-Muslims, represent for the Mujahideen a target to assimilate or to eradicate. It is a mandatory integration that is incompatible with a peaceful societal construction. That self-obsession for their religious sectarianism biases the project of the construction of an African nation. In the narrative, Malam Abdul-Nur, is head-on in his predatory project to have the whole Nigeria subdued to Sharia. There is a rigid obsession for dominance and homogeneity.

In their logic, there is no gender equity. Malam Abdul-Nur’s wife is victim of domestic ill-treatment. The leader of the Mujahideen is

misogynous. The conversation between Dantala and his friend Jibril reveals the cruelty of Malam Abdul-Nur toward his wife:

‘He treats her like a donkey.’

‘What?’ I pretend not to have heard him.

‘Like a donkey. He treats her like an animal that he despises. Some days he locks her in her room without any food because his food is cold or there is too much salt or not enough salt. He beats her with a tyre whip. He forces things into . . .

He stops. Tears start to flow and then he starts sobbing.

‘He forces things into her . . . into her . . . anus! Candles. Bottles. He

flogs her with the tyre whip when they are doing it. Some days she faints’. (Jhon 127, 28)

In Mujahideen’s worldview, women have no say and must be reduced to their natural roles of child bearers and traditional roles of housekeeper. The objectification of women by radical Islamists undermines the construction of a free and progressive society. Women are enslaved, and therefore they cannot contribute to the evolution of a mixt social life. Denying women’s freedom is excluding them from their socio-economic and political decisions. That patriarchal abuse, deprives women from any initiative of empowerment.

The Mujahideen leave no room for individual freedom and creativity neither in the public nor in the private sphere. They lord it over every single aspect of people’s lives. Jibril, in the narrative portrays his own brother, Malam Abdul Nur as despot that compels everyone to subordination and humiliation. There is a permanent psychological torture that destabilizes Jibril and Malam Abdul Nur’s wife to the extent that their home becomes a place of trauma. The adultery between Jibril and his brother’s wife can be interpreted as a search for psychological comfort and freedom.

Politically, they radically reject democracy and consider it as a Western instrument of domination marked by sin. The last resort is violence to impose an Islamic State. The narrator reports Malam Abdul-Nur’s words as follows:

the basis of the Nigerian government is kufr because democracy is ‘a disgusting, anti-Islamic, Western invention which seeks to introduce liberal ideas and kill Islamic values.’ He adds that working for the cause of kufr makes

a person a kafir. He emphasises the word 'kafir' and says that it is the obligation of every able Muslim to forcefully challenge and remove ungodly, infidel rulers. Not through elections, because elections themselves are part of a system of kufr, but by force, because Muslims are bound by submission to the will of Allah. (John 67)

The political ideology of the Mujahideen is an autocratic one said to be Quran based. That power is concentrated in the hand of Malam Abdul-Nur. There is no means to restrain or to regulate the Mujahideen's domination. They expect a complete and servile obedience of the population. There is a denial of the other as a different person capable of enriching the society. Through the different forms of abuse they impose on people they have promoted religious extremism and therefore, created an obstacle to the construction of a free and self-determined nation.

2.2. The Advocacy for an Islam of Unity in Diversity

Some contemporary Africans believe that they need to be authentic by getting rid of foreign religions (Christianity and Islam). Writers such as Nioussere Kalala Omoutunde, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Ayi Kwei Armah have shown interest in the need to restore African spiritual identity in order to reconcile with their genuine identity. To them, foreign religions undermine the struggle of Africans to re-appropriate their self-determination, that is, the freedom to decide for their future. Foreign religions are viewed as disguised instruments of economic exploitation, political subjugation and cultural disorientation and alienation of Africans. Through his writing Ayi Kwei Armah has rejected and critiqued the manipulation strategies behind those foreign religions. As one can read in his novel, *Two Thousand Seasons*:

We are not stunted in spirit, we are not Europeans, we are not Christians that we would invent fables a child would laugh at and harden our eyes to preach them daylight and deep night as truth. We are not warped in soul, we are not Arabs. We are not Muslim to fabricate a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness, and call our creature creator. That is not our way. (A.K.Armah 4)

Armah promotes an African identity based on historical consciousness that neither Islam nor Christianity are African religions. Those foreign religions generate identity paradigms that are source of

permanent division among Africans. Therefore, to construct a strong African continent, Armah advocates the reconstruction of a genuine African identity based on values and norms of the origins, Kemet, The Ancient Egypt. It is an authentic African historic and cultural legacy that can unite all Africans instead of dividing them as one can read in *Born on a Tuesday*.

As for Elnathan John in *Born on a Tuesday*, religions can rather be integrated in the construction project of a free African society. The writer has an ethical purpose that consists in making religious diversity an advantage for cohesion and progress. His novel denounces dysfunctions in the state apparatus, families' discord, the failure of the Islamic School model failure, religious and police violence, etc. Though it focuses on radical Islamic violence, the novel is a pledge for a societal cohesion despite religious diversity. Therefore, he includes characters, scenes, statements, in his narrative strategy to show that the improvement of human condition represents the core of his artistry. The excerpt below is taken from an interview and it underlines that commitment:

Isidore Diala: Is the purgation of the protagonist Dantala at the close of the novel a peculiarly Islamic experience?

Elnathan John: I will say it is peculiarly human and that was what I sought to do: to sort of move it away from being firmly domiciled in Islam to it being domiciled in humanity in general. (Okeawolam Diala, Online)

The Nigerian novelist knows that: "Religion can be integrative or and as well disintegrative, it stabilizes and at the same time destabilizes, rouses hatred and strife in the society". (Eyeruroma and Allison 197) The narrative mainly highlights the division between Islamic sects while the division between Muslims and Christians is implicit. According to social identity theory, the social comparison, occurs when each group, in a situation of rivalry, struggles to maintain their self-esteem. The competition becomes fiercer as moderate Muslim like Sheikh Jamal, and fanatic ones like Malam Abdul-Nur fight for political and economic power position but also crueler for identity (religious values and norms).

In the light of this, it is worth to infer that the Nigerian society, depicted by Elnathan John, is in the long run, likely to totally collapse. Issues of political leadership, social relations, economic development, cultural enhancement are distorted in a context of religious rivalries. Political objectivity, for example, is biased as religion operates in the

narrative as atavistic to define their prime identity. Adepts of Radical Islamism construct a cleaving identity paradigm. The supporters of that religious radicalism identify themselves not first and only as Africans or Nigerians, but as Mujahideen and nothing else. That identity formation jeopardizes any attempt at integration and harmony. Therefore, people privilege their differences rather than their similarities. In the narrative, the Shiite are viewed by the Sunna as strange and foolish. Christians are viewed by extremist Muslims as 'kafr', ungodly, infidel that every Muslim has to remove from office. In-groups and out-groups are suspicious towards one another.

The prison scene and the wandering of Dantala at the end of the narrative are a representation of a completely bewildered nation. Citizens are put in jail and tortured. There is no Muslim no Christian, no religious extremists. The characters we discover at the end of the story, are brought down to their essential features. They are nothing else but human beings that are victims of religious blindness and cupidity. Dantala wanders about like a lost soul in the street after his imprisonment. His enthusiastic quest for knowledge, loyalty, and reconciliation has given way to uncertainty. The fatherly figure that he found in Sheikh Jamal turned into a catastrophe after the slaughter of the latter. He appears as a disenchanted character that would rather be called "Black spirt" than by his true name, Dantala which means born on a Tuesday.

Elnathan John, however, perceives the possibility of a reconciled nation in that nightmarish context. Sheikh Jamal, the mentor of Dantala, is a moderate Muslim leader. He has promoted an Islam that is compatible with the ethno-religious diversity of the Nigerian society. Though slaughtered by the Mujahideen, his vision and practice of Islam lead to nationhood. The posture of that character shows that for a nation to develop, religious differences should be integrated in the process of nation building. Religious difference should not be exploited at worse but for good sake through the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of others irrespective of how they disagree with you. Sheikh Jamal shows that Islam is indeed compatible with the idea and reality of tolerance among differing religions. His open-mindedness fits with a principle of the Qu'ran. This is the illustration through the position of Abur Hamdi Usman about the issue of tolerance in Islam:

The Quran seeks to establish peace between various religious communities and acknowledges differences of belief and cultures. It places great emphasis in maintaining good relations between adherents of various religions [1, 2] because according to the Quran, religious freedom is an important basis for sustainable peace. The Quran calls all believers to ‘enter into complete peace and follow not the footsteps of devil’ (al-Baqarah verse 208). This aspect is highlighted in the Quranic discourse on tolerance. (Usman, Online)

Referring to that important principle of tolerance, one could argue that Muslims can freely live in a country with non-Muslims. People should rather build their identity not on religious peculiarity, but on their citizenship. Nigerian citizenship should operate as the social identity that could trigger step by step a unified African continent.

Born on a Tuesday, explores chaos as the ultimate outcome of Islamic extremism. In that way, the novel falls in the category of critiques of religious extremism. As a rule, religion provides strong linkage between in-group members. Only interpretation and practice are detrimental to the societal development. Dantala’s, quest for knowledge, to find a better balance between religious rivalries, is without doubt, the model of Nigerian citizen that the author intends to promote. The ambition of the author is to see the whole Nigerian society united and focused on a common goal of development. The well-being of individuals, families and even the whole national community can be achieved provided people shift from religious identity paradigm to national identity one.

Conclusion

Elnathan John’s narrative depicts a Northern Nigerian society racked with the strains of radical Islam. The underlying reasons are illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. The novel poses a societal problematic such as the construction of an African nation in a context of religious fanaticism. Indeed, religious identity as we have tried to show, contributes in jeopardizing the socio-political stability, a major condition to build a nation.

This paper has been able to show that neither the ideology nor the practice of radical Islam can operate as a catalyst for the building of a nation. Indeed, radical Islamism promotes an autotelic societal governance in which individual and collective freedom are totally denied. However,

for a religion to be an opportunity for the construction of a nation, one should put aside his/her religious ego and privilege the national membership.

This can be achieved through the quest of knowledge and kinship as symbolized by the main character, Dantala. But also through the open mindedness of the moderate Imam Sheikh Jamal. There is therefore an advocacy to redefine the idea and the reality of identity based on citizenship in the process of the nation building.

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