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Secularization and Religious Identity in Nigeria's Religioscape

Abstract: In this article, I argue that secularization is not a universal concept; it is a Western one whose social and existential context provided the basis for its theorizing. I contend that colonialism and missionary religions brought their kind of secular thought to Africa as African countries were under colonial rule when the debate was rife in the West. Showing this through interdisciplinary methods, the article further contends that the notion of resurgence of religion resonating after the Cold War and particularly 9/11, which is saturating Western debate, cannot also be universal, as secularization did not take place in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Using the Nigerian example, it will be shown that religion has continued to play a pivotal role in identity politics since the colonial era, and there are obviously no signs of abatement. This has however skewed identity, with its resultant effects on national unity and development. The complication of the Nigerian constitution on the secular status of the country has further provided impetus to the already volatile polity. If a reasonable national identity can be established, the present constitution should be unraveled in a manner that makes room for ambiguous secular status.

Keywords: Nigeria, secularisation, religious identity, Africa

Abstrakt: W niniejszym artykule dowodzę, że sekularyzacja nie jest pojęciem uniwersalnym; jest to pojęcie zachodnie, którego podstawę do rozważań teoretycznych stanowi jego kontekst społeczny i egzystencjalny. Twierdzę też, że kolonializm i religie misyjne wniosły do Afryki własny rodzaj myśli sekularyzacyjnej, bowiem gdy na Zachodzie toczyła się na ten temat debata, kraje afrykańskie znajdowały się pod rządami kolonialnymi. Posługując się metodami interdyscyplinarnymi, pokazuję, że pojęcie odrodzenia religii po zimnej wojnie, a zwłaszcza po wydarzeniach z 11 września, którym przeniknięta jest zachodnia debata, również nie może mieć charakteru uniwersalnego, ponieważ w Afryce, a w szczególności Nigerii, sekularyzacja w ogóle nie miała miejsca. Na przykładzie

Nigerii pokazuję, że od czasów kolonialnych religia nadal odgrywa kluczową rolę w polityce tożsamości i nie widać żadnych oznak osłabienia takiego stanu rzeczy. Spowodowało to jednak pewne zniekształcenie jej tożsamości, co miało wpływ na jedność i rozwój narodu. Skomplikowane zapisy nigeryjskiej konstytucji na temat świeckiego statusu państwa dodatkowo zwiększają niestabilność tamtejszej polityki. Aby odpowiednio wytyczyć określić tożsamość narodową, należałoby zacząć od analizy obecnej konstytucji wraz z jej niejednoznacznością w kwestii świeckości państwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Nigeria, Sekularyzacja, tożsamość religijna, Afryka

Introduction

One general mistake many Western scholars make is generalization and universalization of their ideas and assume that such ideas are not only indisputable, but also empirically valid outside of the West. A second mistake could be deliberately ignoring other areas of the world and worldviews as if they are inconsequential in the overall determination and exercise of their ideas. Such skewed positions have undermined the presence and reality of those areas of the world and their worldviews, which, in the course of time, in brutal rebellion, invalidate many of their so called finely constructed ideas. That kind of politics of thought is expected and describes the relations that exist between the global north and south as apodictically demonstrated in the scramble for Africa in the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, colonialism, neocolonialism, globalization and their attendant modernizing impetuses and effects. Therefore, when secularization is discussed from a Western perspective, it usually assumes a theological toga: as it is in the West so it is everywhere!

The meaning of secularization has been mostly gleaned from interdisciplinary perspectives, which will be utilized in this article. From political, sociological, theological lenses, secularization is understood as the privatization of religion, decline of personal religiosity, function of rationalization, differentiation of secular spheres, and so forth. In discussing the secularization of Africa, sometimes, these various categories are not neatly separated.

Recently, Barber [2012a] predicted that there would be a demographic twist that would make the non-believer population greater than the believers in religion by just 2038 globally in the similitude of the social prophets of the 1960s, who also 'prophesied' the decline and demise of religion globally as a result of increasing

secularization. Barber [2012b] anchored his prediction on the existential and hedonistic lifestyle and pleasurable abundant affluence observed in much of the West. While the claims of the secularist theorists are being unbundled in their very presence, Barber, following suit, shows how the universalization of ideas or even feelings about something should be cautiously exercised and predicted. Abbink [2014: 94] nicely makes this caution more pungent when he argues that "the modernization and rationalization of life do *not* universally make religion irrelevant – there is no inevitable process of peoples/societies losing or neglecting religious faith under these conditions."

By any standards, religion has not declined, and is not showing signs of decline in Africa unlike in the West. One reason is that the population of Africa is growing almost geometrically in comparison to the West, where it is is almost static. In 2018, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that for the first time in history, people above 65 years are more than those under five, with Europe having highest number of people over 60, which makes the population as aged. The report predicts that by 2100, there could be just one birth for every octogenarian [Lorenz 2022: 1]. However, the 20 youngest populations are found in sub-Saharan Africa, and, by middle of the century, Africa would likely house one billion young people. Whereas in Europe and Asia, the population of young people would likely shrink by 21 per cent and "almost a third" respectively [Lorenz 2022: 1]. The demographic implication on religion is that Africa is most likely to be continuously more 'religious' than the West in the future. Thus, to use the West's religious demography as a benchmark for global prediction on religious demography would be a wrong premise. This is not to suggest that all Africans are, and will be, religious. Gez, Beider and Dickow [2022] have noted the rising number of 'nones', even though Africa still appears to be the least secular.

As Abbink [2014] argues on the basis of Pew Surveys, religion and its influences are not declining in Africa, and have not shown the possibility of a decline in the near future. Jenkins [2016] also recognizes quite lucidly that the religious overflow in Africa will spill over to the rest of the world as the continent at present is resident to more Muslims and Christians than anywhere else. But the contentious issue is how has this overflow of religion impacted on identity in a democratizing Africa, given as Abbink [2014: 87] notes, that "religion has even become the primary identity for most Africans, perhaps above national identity"?

This question is germane because, as in the West, religion in Africa has not relocated to the private square as Western secularization theory seems to maintain; if anything, religion in Africa is actively present in both private and public space, and oftentimes authorizing morality and influencing politics. This posture of religion is indisputably problematic, because it has increasingly caused skirmishes with preventable casualties.

In this paper, the rise and decline of Western secular theory, and how the resurgence of religion has challenged the theory, will be briefly explicated. It will be argued that when debate on secularization was rife in the West, most African countries were under colonial authorities. The implication of this is that secularization theory, as understood in the West, in its hard form was brought into Africa, but has not been deeply engrafted. We zero in on Nigeria's history with a religious tweak and thereafter show the problematic nature of secularism in the country, and how this has continued to affect identity and human relations and politics. Our argument is grounded on the premise that uncompromising or hard secularization, as in the West, has not taken place in Africa just as obsessive religiosity being practiced in Africa has also not helped the continent to develop. A balance between them is required for a holistic development of the continent.

Secularization in Western Thought

In the West, the relationship between religion and state has been a contentious one. Particularly from the era of the European Enlightenment, the status of theology as the queen of science did not only wane, but also seemed to have gradually been lost as rationalism gained currency. The propagation and promotion of "the God of the gaps" steadily continued to exclude religion from the public sphere or public consciousness, as more and more people thought that religion should be done away with or at least, privatized. The decline of traditional or organized religion aptly explained the thrust of secularization.

Secularization itself has not been free from religion, because its pristine and accretive meaning has always related to and resonated with religion. For instance, it derives from the Latin *saecularis*, which is the adjective of *saeculum*, connoting a long period of time, but which quickly assumed a Christian meaning of worldly in relation to sinfulness and denunciation of God, to the handing over of the Church's property to the world; a deep sense of religion characterizes the meaning of secularization. To press this home, monastic priests were differentiated from

their parish counterparts as a demonstration of the separation theory underlying secularization [Knippenberg 2015].

The admission and acceptance of secularization as a term in social science in the 1960s amplified its influence in contemporary society. The birth of secularization as a theory that insisted that religion is 'poisonous' to the public sphere strongly and adversely affected the relevance of religion. To be sure, secularization theory, if it now qualifies to be regarded as a theory, because, according to Onishi [2018], it is not more than a "doctrine", is the belief, and in fact, the prophecy that religion would not only wilt, but also subsequently die out of human society. According to Onishi [2018: 171], "the doctrine of secularism relies upon a mythological vision of the human as an autonomous rational ego that has the ability to master itself and the world through calculative thinking." Onishi's argument views secularization as an unbalanced ego that seems not to have roundly defined the modern humanity in concrete terms.

The apparent triumph of secularization theory, it was thought, would mean that science would solely explain the origins of humanity, and thus put paid to superstitions and dogmas propagated by religion; in fact, its currency in scholarship and praxis affected how individuals and nations identify themselves [Abraham 2015]. With democracy and its concomitant liberalism and freedom, secularization thesis held that individuals could challenge the authorities of the myths and doctrines which religion had canvassed for several centuries. With industrialization, economic growth and advancement in technology, an ataraxic future was believed to be in store for humanity because, as the secularists thought, hunger, disease, poverty and so forth which were the cannon fodder for the thriving of religion would completely be eliminated from human society. This disenchanted view of life promised a different world-based heaven. Once this paradisaic cocoon was realized for humanity, religion would naturally be eased out of the space [Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011]. But the two World Wars practically affected this rational projection for humanity because, rather than secure humanity, the recourse to rationalism and science resulted in horrific human carnage, whose effects have not fully been erased from history and global consciousness.

Bruce [2009] notes that since the middle of the nineteenth century, religion had evidently declined in the West; its colonizing ethos and influence in politics had also waned in national politics. Progressively, Western liberal democracies divorced themselves from religion, and tilted aggressively toward secularism. Even

though secularization was initially intended to remove the vestiges of religion from the public sphere and replace them with secular principles, as more apodictically demonstrated in Francophone social science, secularization, as it turns out "owes more to the unintended consequences of diffuse social changes than to the deliberate actions of people promoting a secularist agenda" [Bruce 2009: 145].

Shortall [2021: 3] brings home these unintended consequences of secularization when she argues, in the case of Catholicism in France, for instance, that "what is striking about Catholic political thought is the extent to which it defied the logic of secular political taxonomies." In keeping with the Catholic thought and identity, Shortall [2021: 3] argues that the church "sought to articulate a religiously grounded alternative to both capitalism and communism, both liberalism and totalitarianism" that were the aftermath of the Second World War. The Church, she maintains, was not swallowed up by secularism; rather secularism became the premise for the birth of *nouvelle theologie* – new theology – which, in the course of time, helped in articulating a virile vision for public engagement within a secular space. Shortall [2021: 2-3] elucidates further:

The separation of Church and state did not bring an end to the public role of the Catholic church in France. Though it marked the end of one kind of Catholic politics, it also marked the beginning of another…. But in fact, the events of 1905 forced theologians to reimagine the nature of the Church and its relationship to the political order, as they grappled with the key quandary with the Catholic Church in the twentieth century: how to maintain a public role for itself once the institutions of public life had been secularized…. The separation of Church and state had a productive rather than a destructive effect on … theology, inspiring new approaches to the problem of political theology and opening up new avenues for Catholic engagement in public life. The results were transformative not just for the Church, but also for European politics more broadly, as theologians weighed in on debates over fascism and communism, democracy and human rights, colonialism and nuclear war.

The predictions and hopes of a truly secularized world, as global events have now shown, were not realized [Lewison 2011; Igboin 2021a]. If anything, secularization was pursued as an exclusive or particularistic belief that was guarded to eliminate religion, as though religion was its only enemy. But in essence, however, secularization could not meet the yearning in the deepest recesses of the human soul, a depth which is the domain of religion. Human spiritual void and the need to

make sense of their lives can only be realized by religion rather than secularization. Before the acknowledgement of the limits of secularization or the process of de-secularization, the issue of identity seemed to have been settled in favor of secularization, at least, in the public sphere. In other words, if religion was separated from the state, public identity was carved based on secularization.

Identity has to be publicly expressed in order to ensure inner satisfaction for any person and group. Any identity that cannot be confidently expressed in public will result in emotional tension between oneself and others who may, by their agency, prevent such public expression. As experience has shown in contemporary world, individuals and groups have persistently agitated and struggled toward acceptance of their peculiar identity wherein they find fulfilment. Therefore, if secularization defined the public sphere, it evidently gave the best of identity; the suppressed religious identity must then find a way to resonate. Hence, the civilizational clash, in this context, of secular and religious identity, which has hardly been acknowledged.

The subverted religious identity, we contend, is essentially what is now widely referred to as resurgence of religious identity. The religious imagination that was prematurely buried in the shallow sand of secularism has launched itself into public consciousness with a thunderbolt.

Given the persistence and influence of religion in the lives of citizens, many proponents of secularization had to renounce their earlier position and admit the presence of religion in human society in the West. In Harvey Cox [1995] and Peter Berger [1999: 2-3], among other known voices in the propagation of secularization theory, literally decamped, and asserted that the world, as Berger now views it, is "as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" and added that "the relation between religion and modernity is rather complicated." Berger then warned that "those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril" [Herrington, McKay and Haynes 2015:6]. Cox [1995] recognizes the fall of Pentecostal fire from above as indicating and instantiating power in the public sphere; a semiosis that resonates well with historical significance for global Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism is today one of the fastest growing strands of Christianity [Asamoah-Gyadu 2021b, Igboin, 2022], which Lewison [2011: 31] succinctly describes thus: "Its powerful and flamboyant presence in the public sphere, built

on its evangelical charge, makes it a religion that takes up space – religion that is very much 'in' and 'of' the world." Wariboko [2020] adds that Pentecostalism is not an entirely a private religious sensibility, as its actions critically impact the public sphere, and generate public responses.

Since after the Cold War and particularly the aftermath of 9/11, 'resurgence of religion' has become a buzzword that is shaping religious conversation and relations in the West. In their seminal work, *Nations Under God*, Herrington, McKay and Haynes [2015: 2] note with concern that the religious resurgence in the West is not "hollow claims." Accordingly, "the evidence suggests that while it is true that general religious ceremonial attendance and the authority of religious figures have declined in most developed countries, developing countries show significant levels of religious commitment and they possess a continually rising portion of the world's population" [Herrington, McKay and Haynes 2015: 2].

They further argue that for the events of 9/11, many scholars in the West had neglected the role of religion not only in international relations, but also in conflict. Resurgence of religion is broadly associated with the rise of religious politics that finds expression in violent sectarianism as well as particularistic religious identity that pits one religious group against another as well as against the secular system. Religious revivalism and exclusivism and their concomitant violence in the era of resurgence of religion mean that there was a decline in the public presence of religion [Hibbard 2015a].

The philosophical underpinning and political grounding of resurgence of religion is manifest in what Petito [2015: 64] refers to as "a militant and violent-prone form of politics, almost as a God-sent plague of punishment on the earth." Whatever resurgence of religion means to the West, it is obvious that there are: [1] a return to an abandoned or subverted concept of identity, eclipsed by secularization, which has found its way back into the public sphere with revenge; [2] a stronger basis for the expansion of the meaning of religion, a term, which for a long time, has been understood almost exclusively in reference to Christianity. In referring to resurgence of religion, therefore, religions other than Christianity are now added in the cluster, whereas Christianity was the main religion against which secularization theory was built.

It is in this sense that Scott Hibbard [2015a: 104] argues for the relevance of religion in modern societies precisely because "it continues to define collective – and

particularly national – identities, and second, because religion is uniquely able to provide a moral framework for political action." In other words, "Religion provides a normative language for political action, informs nationalist mythologies, and helps to define collective identities" [Hibbard 2015b: 100]. Hibbard [2015b: 103] further elaborates that "Religion also remains central to the construction of identity, and particularly collective identities. Hence, even if there is a formal separation of church and state—that is, a separation of religious authority from political authority—religious ideas and beliefs continue to provide a basis for social cohesion and a language for contemporary politics."

What does the above portend for Nigeria or Africa as a whole, since secularization theory was premised on the Western social sphere and context, and given that African countries were under colonial rule when the debates were rife in the West? How might secularization affect identity in Nigeria? Before I respond to these questions, it is pertinent to give a short historical background of Nigeria with a religious tweak.

A Brief History of Nigeria

Nigeria, in the West African region, is indisputably the largest Black country of the world with over 350 ethnic nationalities brought together by the British authorities that colonized the country. One out of five of the sub-Saharan population is a Nigerian. Nigeria's ever controversial population has been estimated to be over 200 million people and projected to be 440 million in the middle of the century, which would make it third largest country in the world behind China and India, beating the US [Campbell and Page 2018: 5]. Nigeria's population is controversial because all the censuses conducted since colonial period were 'rigged' in favor of the north and subjected to litigation; the same trend that often affects the country's elections. The claim of northern part being more populated has been subjected to critical inquiry, but the political utility of the claim has continued to enjoy undue influence on the political trajectories of the country [Igboin 2021b]. Adogame [2010] observes that the country's censuses have been subjected to manipulation because of their political, economic and most especially, religious advantages. The politicization of Nigeria's censuses has resulted in the country's unreliable demographic data, which leaves researchers to make conjectures. In addition, because of the politicization of census, since 1963, when the country conducted its first post-independence census, religious affiliation has always been omitted from the questionnaire [McKinnon 2021].

Gez, Beider and Dickow [2022: 54-55] point out that "Muslim leaders threatened to boycott the 2006 national census should the government keep 'religion' on the identity list, apparently out of concern that the census would identify theirs to be a minority religion…. Religious statistics are used to advance political arguments, to perpetuate certain religio-political hegemonies, and to affirm discriminative practices."

The claim of the north being more populated has also resonated in religious demography, and scholars are often careful in declaring a particular region as overwhelmingly more religiously populated than the other.[1] Thus, the north is projected as predominantly Muslim and the South as Christian. This projection seats uncomfortably on the religious politics that was played by the colonial authorities.

This politicization should be understood in light of the common overlap between political and religious clientelism, with ethnicity often straddling both domains.

[1] Before the amalgamation in 1914, there were six attempts to conduct census around the Lagos Colony starting from 1866, 1871, 1881 and 1891, 1901 and 1911. The 1911 was crisply described as "very defective" and "the British administrators in charge admitted that the census figures were only preliminary and little value for comparative purposes." The 1921 census "yielded inaccurate data owing to the difficulties arising from the hearty dislike which many tribes feel towards enumeration, and to the shortage of European staff due to World War 1." For detailed analysis of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial census conducted in Nigeria and how they have been manipulated, see Chidi Odinkalu [2022]. According to Odinlaku, any enduring democracy must take three things in consideration: census, regular elections and public accountability. These are intricately interwoven, and when the first is rigged, mythologized or absent, it has rippling effects on the second and third and the whole country. McKinnon's [2021] analysis tilts toward Christian population growth slowing down because adherents of traditional religion have largely been converted and reproduction is higher in the northern part of Nigeria. Igboin's [2012b] analysis shows that the war and activities of Boko Haram and banditry, and most importantly, high mortality rates, poverty and life expectancy in the north have significantly affected the demography of the region. The most crucial challenge is the blatant refusal to record birth and death and use of modern census technology that would have ameliorated the distrust that has thus engulfed all the census exercises thus far. The Nigeria National Conference of 2014 observed these problems of inaccurate and politicized census "with past figures inflated for the purposes of increased revenue allocation and other advantages from the government at the center" [The National Conference 2014]. It therefore recommended that there should be a national database and linkage of all databases operated by commissions and institutions in order to sync them and avoid fraud and criminalization of inflation and distortion of enumeration and census figures. Unfortunately, up until today, no attempt has been made to even debate the document let alone implement it. The government is however proposing to conduct a national census in March 2023 just after the 2023 general elections, which analysts have largely criticise as ill-timed and interpreted as influenced by political motives. The last national census was conducted in 2006 with controversial results that resulted in litigation as expected.

This association can often be dated back to colonial times, when colonial powers and religious groups carved out their areas of operation and continued after independence as groups fought for state power and access to resources [Gez, Beider and Dickow 2022: 54].

While the Muslim north still believes that it was the colonial authorities that halted the Islamization of the whole south, the Christian south argues that it was the same colonial authorities that prevented the full evangelization of the north. The conquest of the north by the British is touted as the wedge against Islam down south, and the colonial pact with the north to protect the region from Christian influence also explains the limitation of Christianity up north [Vaughan 2016]. Like the midfield of a football pitch, the Middle Belt both separates and joins south and north and represents a religious mix, both practically and demographically.

Nigeria is a religiously 'devout' country; it is also a place that is endowed with natural, human, and cultural resources. The business of religion is the second most thriving business, apart from the oil industries. There is hardly any corner of the country where temples, churches, mosques, shrines of different shapes and sides cannot be found. They are not just petty places of worship; there are mega-mosques, mega-churches, mega-shrines, and mega-temples that congregate thousands of worshipers at a time [Igboin 2021a].

Nigeria is not only religiously pluralistic; it is also religiously diverse. More complex than the plurality of religions is its religious diversity. Following Beckfordian thesis, religious diversity implies: i] diversity of religious organizations, ii] diversity among individual adherents who belong to them iii] diversity of faith traditions iv] diversity as regards those who combine different religious identities, and v] intra-diversity within a religious tradition [Beckford 2014]. Diverse religious subgroups and denominations complicate identity construction, but also function to maintain some form of sanity and tension. This depicts the ambivalent nature of religion.

Nigeria is not an organic nation but a "manufactured state", whose survival as one country since independence in 1960 has been described as a miracle [Bourne 2015: ix. See also Meir 2000]. This immediately suggests that without the British, there would not have been what is now referred to as 'one Nigeria.' The creation or rather the invention of Nigeria as a country is usually traced to the amalgamation of 1914, when Lord Frederick Lugard, the then colonial Governor General, fused

the Northern and Southern Protectorates together for easy administration of the British colonial government.

But the actual idea for the 'carving and gluing' together of the disparate peoples who lived independently in their nations could be traced to the Berlin-Congo Conference of 1884-85 when Europe scrambled for Africa [Adogame, Gerloff and Hock 2008]. This date is critical to our context because, as Akinwunmi [2008] argues, the Berlin Conference has both spiritual and political implications on Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular. The Berlin Conference did not only succeed in partitioning Africa in accordance with political interests, but also created spiritual and ecclesiastical cartographies that aligned with the dominant Christian affiliations of the European nations [Akinwunmi 2008 and Bonk 2008]. As will be discussed later, multiple Christian identities that resulted from the scramble added to the already saturated indigenous religious identity as well as Muslim identity. But the tension between Christian and Muslim identities has been more acerbic and difficult to manage. As Campbell and Page [2018: 5] observe, "Nigeria is at the junction between Christianity and Islam, and more broadly, where the modern and the traditional overlap." This partly explicates the nature of religious plurality and identity politics that constantly reverberates in Nigeria's politics.

Prior to the advent of colonialism, there were many well developed empires and kingdoms. In the south, the Benin Kingdom had flourished until the nineteenth century, when it was defeated by the British. The Oyo Empire, the Ife Kingdom, as well as those of the Igbo, were firmly established and organized. In the north, the Sokoto caliphate, Hausa dynasties and the Kanem-Bornu Empire represented sophisticated administratively and judicially developed civilizations, overthrown by the British and all amalgamated into one country.

Most contemporary historians have been very unfair to the religious history and sensibility of these disparate civilizations. While it is easy for them to simply narrate that the north had an Islamic caliphate, they forget that there were deep traditional religious priest-kings that were sometimes conquered, whose voices are still being drowned in the matrix of overarching Muslim population.[2]

[2] The National Conference [2014] observed that there are minorities across the country that have been strangulated by the dominant ethnic groups. According to it, "It must be noted that minority/dominant ethnic group consciousness and agitations are also exhibited at the sub-national levels. In all, the ethnic minority and the National Question are, the products of the balkanization of nationalities resulting in their spread across states." It recommended constitutional provisions to ensure the rights of minority peoples in the country.

These minority populations in the north – non-Muslim and non-Christian but traditional believers – have continued to suffer the loss of identity while faintly resisting the imposed one. The case of the south appears to be a lot more different because traditional religious believers can publicly self-identify and practice their faith [Janson 2021]. In essence, Nigeria's pre-missionary and precolonial histories should be studied from their indigenous religious outlook; this is important because even today, that religious psychology and sensibility still resonate in identity construction and existential bonding in a pluralist Nigeria.

It is instructive to argue that the British did not (primarily) come to civilize Nigeria, as has been widely assumed by many Europeans and Eurocentric scholars; perhaps British kind of civilization can be said to be an unintended consequence. But more importantly, civilization has to be defined in context, because many of the empires had been developed more than most of Europe in the Middle Ages. However, the psychology and application of Charles Darwin's evolution – social Darwinism – partly pushed the rival European powers to gratify their insatiate territorial and commercial expansionism. For the British and their counterparts in other African countries, the understanding and application of natural selection presumably put them at a more superior pedestal against the Africans [Campbell and Page 2018].

The racist relationship between the colonizers and the colonized caused tension that resulted in violence on many occasions. Of course, colonialism is itself a violent invasion of Africa's space and civilization; colonialism was sustained and maintained by constant violence against and violation of Africans. The politics of evil was well entrenched in colonial Africa in that the colonizers justified the beauty of violence against the colonized but condemned violence against the colonizer [Crais 2002; Fanon 2004 and Falola 2009].

In Nigeria, the British colonial authorities adopted Indirect Rule, which should be more appropriately referred to as 'divide and rule', because the British successfully set one ethnic group against another in order to exploit all of them. The ethnic cleavages that the British created in Nigeria have not been whittled down since independence. If anything, they have been the fault lines for national disunity, agitation for separate nationality and so forth. Campbell and Page [2018: 8] poignantly capture this when they ask: "What (not who) is a Nigerian?" According to them, this question is responded to in multilayered manner:

First, they would identify themselves with a particular family, either nuclear or extended. Next, they would volunteer religion…. Then they would note their ethnic group. They might tell you of what State they were 'indigenes' – that is, where their families came from, not necessarily where they lived. And only then would Nigerians conclude that they were also Nigerians [Campbell and Page 2018: 8].

Campbell and Page [2018] note that this ingrained colonial ethnic disjunction and solidarity – a nice paradox – have not helped to stimulate a pan-Nigerian spirit among the citizens. In other words, Nigerians see themselves as people of their pre-colonial disparate nationalities. Elsewhere, "Rwandans placed religion second after nationality … Chadians placed it third after nationality and ethnicity … and South Africans placed it even lower" [Gez, Beider and Dickow 2022: 56]. The British had completely disregarded their precolonial identities and forged one that is difficult to glue on them. Pieri [2019: 23] indisputably captures this situation thus: "The formal British takeover of these territories had a transformative effect on the governance and administration of the region. Most notable was the complete disregard for ethnic, religious, and cultural divides that existed in the country and the imposition of a single (and artificial) Nigerian identity on all."

If the British had been careful to recognize the diversities of the peoples and acted differently, the present socio-religious turmoil might have been avoided. Although some scholars like Ellis [2016] would want us to exonerate the British from the fate that Nigeria suffers today, it is practically impossible to defend and maintain the act of the amalgamation as a fatal mistake given the present Nigerian situation.

The low level of national patriotism can be traced to the ethnic cleavages, which are eclipsed momentarily when a section of the ethnic nationality assumes the leadership of the country. Igboin [2017] unravels this trajectory in Nigeria. According to him, the major nationalists that fought for the country's independence never seemed to believe in the unity and oneness of the country until they, by some stroke of political calculations, found themselves at the helm of affairs of the country. It is only then that they demonstrated patriotism and pan-Nigerian affinity. This trend has continued in postcolonial politics; ethnic nationality has been a critical political negotiating instrument to ascend to political offices in the country.

Moreover, Nigerian Christians and Muslims have, by some spiritual reckoning, traced their genealogy to Abraham/Ibrahim, and their promised lands located in Israel and Mecca rather than Nigeria, their natural provenance. The

externalization and internationalization of patriotism is often well demonstrated when Nigerian Muslims and Christians show concerned solidarity to people and events in Israel and the Arab world respectively [Igboin 2015]. For instance, when President Donald Trump relocated the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Nigerian Christians were agog. This political act was interpreted in Christian eschatological mode, and Trump was declared a defender of the Christian faith. Trump would be rewarded with many favorable prophecies and vigils for his lost reelection bid. When the US army killed some Iranian top military brass in 2020, Nigerian Muslims took to the streets to avenge their 'brothers' death on other Nigerians. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often domesticated in Nigeria; and sometimes, the casualties at home compete with those in the war theater.

Post-independence Nigeria has been bedeviled with crises of inveterate corruption, ethnic chauvinism, political upheaval, religious recrudescence and so forth. Religious politics has skewed and blurred national unity. In the northern part of the country, agitation for the introduction of shariah law into the Nigerian constitution has changed the vista of religious relations among adherents of other religions. In the 1970s, shariah law found its way into the constitution, and its application in real life situation has been a matter of hot debate. In 1986, General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military dictator, enlisted the country into the Organization of Islamic Conference [OIC], an act that heightened the debate on the secularity of the country. At the return to civil rule in 1999, the religious politics would be made worse in early 2000 when 12 northern states adopted the implementation of the shariah law, a decision that led to serious crisis and loss of lives and property [Igboin 2014a; 2014b; 2014c and 2021c].

The rise of Boko Haram, a terrorist-insurgent Islamic group fighting for total declaration and implementation of shariah law across the country, has further exacerbated Nigeria's religious history and relations. Boko Haram, which literally means Western education is a sin, argues that shariah law gives a comprehensive constitution on how Nigerian society should be organized and governed rather than how Muslims should be guided. The implication of this is that a modern democratic structure, which arguably aligns with Western liberal ideologies, should be destroyed in favor of Arabo-Islamic ideology, particularly the Medinan Order, where Prophet Muhammad was both a religious and political leader. Thus, Boko Haram felt that the shariah law, promulgated by the democratic government, cannot be deep enough to satisfy the yearning for authentic Muslim identity, because the democratic government itself is a function of a non-Islamic civilization

Consequently, for over a decade now [2009-to date], the Boko Haram group has been fighting to establish an *ummah* – Islamic community – where the shariah law would be used to govern. The group has continued to experiment a shariah-styled government in swathes of land it has captured [Igboin 2014b; 2021c]. The main argument of Boko Haram has been that Western education, secularism, civilization, democracy and its structures are evil. Boko Haram conceives secularism as absolute rejection of God or his non-existence. It argues that Nigeria cannot be a godless country, and because of its secularity, the country was open to Western influences that have negatively impacted on Muslims. Since the Western educational system is an agent of Western civilization in the country, Boko Haram started preaching against it and eventually started attacking schools and killings Christians believed to be agents of Western education and corruption.

However, the question of identity has been a contentious one because many scholars, such as Onuoha [2014], have argued that the Salafist teachings and methods of Boko Haram are antithetical to the tenets of Islam as a peaceful religion, while the latter believes that such Muslims who do not align with its cause are infidels that must be killed alongside other non-Muslims. However, Boko Haram has largely succeeded in manipulating Islamic theology to organize, radicalize, legitimate, indoctrinate and operationalize its thoughts and goal [Kassim and Nwankpa 2018; MacEachern 2018; Ekhomu 2020; Subrahmanian, Pulice, Brown, Bonen-Clark 2021]. Although there is a widespread disenchantment with Boko Haram's ideology and insurgency by the masses, it has succeeded in one critical way: "the reassertion of Islam as a primary identity" [Pieri 2019: 7].

As militant Muslim groups flourished in the north from the 1980s to 1990s, mainline Christians, most vociferously Catholics and Anglicans, stood staunchly against the persistent erosion of Christian voice and values. They were at the forefront of the fight against extended military regimes and political violence that characterized the era. Although they fought against the military, they barely pushed for political or elective positions to consolidate their agitation and offer a pragmatic alternative in governance.

To date, while other mainline churches seem to have been less active in national politics, Catholicism has maintained a consistent posture in speaking truth to power. But the rise of the Nigerian Pentecostalism, with some political and prophetic fury, equals the domination of the political space by Muslims for sometime now. Nigerian Pentecostal Christianity and its political participation have begun to

challenge the existing political order, intruding, as some have argued, into the murky waters of politics. Obadare [2018] has extensively chronicled the rise to political prominence of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria. This brand of embodied or enchanted faith and praxis, he argues, can best be described politically as a Pentecostal republic. As Marshall [2009], Afolayan, Yacob-Haliso and Falola [2018], Adelakun [2022] among others have suggested, Pentecostals do not only assume a new and different ontological being when they claim to be born again, but they also indeed believe that being dominant in their present political space is part of their Christian heritage.

According to Adelakun, for example, performing power does not only relate to spiritual empowerment with the declarative command over demons and other spiritual forces believed to militate against an individual's progress, but also intentional involvement and intervention in political power in order to decree and determine how the social realm of the society operates. The political space is not neatly separated from the spiritual one; if anything, the latter determines and controls the former. This theological (re)imagination and (re)interpretation of politics and spiritualizing politics [Kalu 2008], initially thought to be a form of political naivety and then overlooked, has begun to yield political dividends as the current Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, is a pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the biggest Pentecostal church in Africa, having its presence in 196 countries of the world. For the Nigerian Pentecostal, "Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics" [cited in Wydra 2015: 1].

Furthermore, Nigerian indigenous religion still plays significant spiritual and existential roles, even though most Nigerians will not want to identify with it publicly. The traditional political structure that subsists in Nigeria, apart from the caliphate and emirate in the north, is constituted in the religious belief of the people. Contrary to widespread notion that the religion is artefact, Aderibigbe and Falola [2022] argue that the indigenous religion permeates the whole of African life, both public and private. According to them, indigenous religion has continued to shape people's lives and everyday reality, culturally, politically and economically. Adogame [2022b] argues that the fluidity and dynamism of African indigenous religion has helped to maintain and sustain individual and societal values in the face of threatening global forces. He further maintains that the religion, being a lived one, also shapes the religious and spiritual imaginations

of African religioscape.[3] Of course, it provides the cosmologies for the thriving of missionary religions, which helps it to contest, mediate or negotiate identity in Africa's religious marketplace.

In issues of social justice, a sizeable number of Nigerians resort to traditional means to resolve disputes or seek justice. Ellis [2016] also attests to the social and 'judicial' influence that traditional religious institutions play in Nigeria's body polity, in a country where the formal courts delay or find it difficult to administer justice. There is a religious and demographic blurring that makes defining indigenous religion difficult: many people who publicly and officially subscribe to either Christianity or Islam have continued to patronize the religious resources of the indigenous religion. In addition, religious intersectionality and religious syncretism have revived and transformed indigenous religion, apart from its attempts at organizing and formalizing itself [Laguda 2015; Janson 2021].

Secularization and Identity in Nigeria

As we pointed out earlier, when the debate on secularization was rife in the West, African countries were under colonialism. Of course, the secularization thesis could not have been the priority of the Africans at that time, given the violent nature of colonialism and Apartheid in South Africa. It might be argued that Western secularization could also be a form of violent incursion into the African worldview. The debate about secularization *in* and *of* Africa is an on-going one. According to Igboin [2018], it is more correct to argue for secularization of Africa than secularization in Africa. His argument is based on the reasoning that the incursion of the missionary religions – Christianity and Islam – and colonialism with their concept of individualism, which contradicts the African communality, sowed the seed of secularization in Africa. These foreign forces secularized Africa in the negative sense in which secularism is generally viewed in Africa. Seed [2015: 78-79] argues in this regard also when he observed that in Africa, prior to missionary and colonial advent, "existence (was) viewed in terms of an integrated and indivisible whole. All human beings and nature are animated by a basic 'vital force.' Human beings and nature are bound together in a symbiotic relationship. This relationship extends to the spiritual world" and does not draw a line between "the sacred and the secular."

[3] This is used to indicate the presence of multiple religions in Africa with the main ones being African Indigenous Religion, Christianity and Islam. It also refers to these religions' trajectories and the competitiveness that defines their interactions.

The blurring of the line between the sacred and mundane in traditional Africa did not allow for secularism, because the religious and political system, in their composite state, did not anticipate the strict Western conception of binary separation. It needs to be unraveled whether, before the advent of colonialism and missionary religions, there was no pluralism, a type that one can call intra-religious pluralism. Of course, there were various religious organizations and veneration of different divinities in African communities. Communality played pivotal role in identity construction more than religion. However, missionary and colonial redrawing and re-worlding of the African space has changed much of Africa's epistemology and theology of communality. With globalization, African culture and identity and their expression in relation with themselves and others, have raised critical concern [Igboin 2021d; Graneß, Etieyibo and Gmaier-Pranzl 2022].

As recently as 2015, Engelke [2015] would still repeat the long-abandoned sentiments of arm-chair anthropologists, who described Africa as a dark continent. Engelke conceives of secularism "as an achievement of civilization" which makes sense in "a certain kind of society – those with 'world religions,' not just witch-doctors or spirit mediums" [Engelke 2015:5]. He adds that "there is no 'proper' religion—where it's just 'African tradition'—there is nothing 'secular' to be constituted" [Engelke 2015:5]. For Engelke, Africa had no idea of religion until it had encounter with Europe. He claims that African traditions, properly conceptualized, cannot be qualified to be regarded as religion, because religion as a term is strictly constructed and understood in relation to Christianity. In fact, for him, the Europeans found no known tradition until they were able "to recognize 'tradition' as having 'religious aspects'" [Engelke, 2015:5]. The absence of a world religion in Africa means that secularism could not be contemplated; its absence connotes, produces and reinforces "Africa's ostensible darkness" [Engelke, 2015:6].

Engelke romanticizes colonialism and deliberately loses sight of the "long processes of delegitimization and demonization, led by agents of Christianity and Islam, many followers of traditional African religions have come to internalize their traditions as lesser religions or even as no religion at all" [Gez, Beider and Dickow 2022: 58]. Ndlovu-Gatsheni [2018; 2020], Mhango [2018], Davidson [1992], among others, have demonstrated the evils and violence that colonialism caused in Africa, and how it systematically eroded the progress and development of Africa. They also show how colonial interpretation of reality did not countenance African thought patterns. Neo-colonialism has wrongly continued

to define Africa in the image of Europe and projecting it as the central of gravity for global progress. These absolutized opinions have been used to gauge Africa [Lorenz 2022]. Gez, Beider and Dickow [2022: 56] observe that "These Western and European roots are too often overlooked, and the history of scholarship on religion is replete with false universalization based on Western conventions…. The use of standard [Western] articulations and categories risks playing down the uniqueness of religion in Africa."

So, the questions are: what is a world religion? What are the criteria to select a world religion? Who are those who fix the criteria? What is secularity, and what political or religious context should be appropriate for its conception?

The foregoing might seem to suggest that secularity was completely absent in Africa prior to its contact with the West, either in connection with colonialism or missions. However, Igwe [2017] argues that if secularity means political separation of religion and state, there are some examples to demonstrate the presence and practice of secularity in Africa before colonialism. Studying the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria and Dagomba of northern Ghana, Igwe argues that priests and monarchs had finely defined and separated roles and functions in the administration of the communities. In fact, they provided checks and balances in the exercise of their powers. While the priests took charge of rituals and other spiritual concerns of the communities, the monarchs were saddled with the day-to-day administration of the kingdom, and issues that required spiritual information or adjudication were promptly referred to the priests and vice versa. In the case of the Dagomba, the difference was so clear that the monarchs were called the owners of the land, while the priests were regarded as "owners of the gods" [Igwe 2017: 26].

Igwe [2017] calls attention to the colonial erosion of African indigenous political arrangements through forceful introduction of a Western type of government that was not neatly secular as the colonial authorities claimed. "It is important to note that despite the proclaimed secular nature of the colonial state, there was a mix between colonial politics and colonial religion… (such that) [Africans] did not know who came to missionize and who came to politicize" [Igwe 2017: 26].

This colonial mix affected much of the postcolonial constitutions in Africa where, in some instances there are secular principles which do not have practical correspondence in politics. "While most African countries have inherited, as a legacy of European colonialism, a degree of separation between religion and

state, authoritarian tendencies and the great power of religion in many post-independence African countries have often tested this principle" [Gez, Beider and Dickow 2022: 58].

The status of Nigeria has been highly contentious because the concept of secularism immediately invokes a sense of absolute godlessness. Sampson [2014] emphasizes the point that the British allowed northern Nigeria to be ruled by Penal Code, which has semblance of the shariah law; the southern part was governed by Criminal Code, styled along Western legal system. At Independence, the Western legal system was bequeathed to the entire country, which the north felt was tilted toward Christian canon law. The agitation for Islamic jurisprudence or shariah law since then became a matter of religious politics with dire consequences. While radical Muslims like the Izala and Boko Haram prefer to regard Nigeria as a multireligious (and preferably an Islamic) state because of their religious sensibility and radicalism, some who are moderate consider the country as a secular state with a difference. Most Christians do not seem to quarrel with the secularity of the country because they believe that with such status every religious tradition and citizen should be able to practice their faith without molestation. And government should also provide a level playing field for all religions to thrive without favoring one over the other. However, as Fox [2011] correctly observes, Nigeria's secular status is contentious because, whereas the constitution forbids the adoption of any religion as a state religion, twelve states in the north between 1999 and 2002 adopted sharia as the governing law.

Fox's reference to the Nigerian constitution is pertinent to understanding how secularity works in Nigeria. Although Fox is correct in asserting that there is a constitutional provision that forbids any state of the federation from adopting a particular religion, the same constitution provides for the establishment of a shariah court to an appellate level financed by public tax. This peculiar provision is what was exploited by the northern governors who politically adopted shariah law in 1999-2002. One of the most radical Islamic movements, *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI), for instance, argues that since the word 'God' appears in the constitution and the word 'secular' does not appear in it, it would be unreasonable to regard Nigeria as a secular state. Indeed, according to Igboin [2021a: 12] "sharia appears at least 76 times, kadi 50, Muslims 10, Islamic 26, *wakf* 2 times" whereas "Torah, canon or Christian does not appear at all" in the constitution. He adds that no Nigerian language appears in the constitution whereas Arabic words are therein as well as on the currency notes. Accordingly, Abulmumini Adebayo Oba

blatantly declares that: “Islamic law, having accepted the sovereignty of Allah and His laws, cannot accept the ‘supremacy’ of the Constitution and the sovereignty of the people” [cited in Vaughan 2016: 201].

Logically, Oba is arguing that the Nigerian constitution is inferior to the shariah law and since there cannot be two sovereignties in one country – Nigeria in this case – the Nigerian constitution must acquiesce and relinquish its supremacy to shariah law, while all the citizens irrespective of their religious belief accept the supremacy of Allah. This is the same ideology that underpins the Boko Haram movement, which contends that the democratic structure built on the constitution is un-Islamic. This extreme religious imagination and indoctrination was practically exhibited on 12 May 2022, when some Muslim students stoned Deborah Samuel, a Christian lady, to death and burnt her inside their college for allegedly blaspheming against the Prophet of Islam, without recourse to the courts for adjudication.[4]

The argument can further be made that the ‘God’ that appears in the constitution, even though it would have been preferred to be written in Arabic according to the Izala position, is indeed Allah. God in this sense is not neutral, syncretistic, pluralistic or secular. On the contrary, he must be considered and understood in a monolithic, particularistic, Islamic or theocratic radar. It also supports the contention that ‘God’ in Christianity and Islam is not the same, despite the comparative sentiments tangentially expressed, which, of course, are geared toward peaceful coexistence. This thus calls to question this position and claim of other religious traditions to the secularity of the country [Igboin 2021a]. Essentially, the position of the Izala and Boko Haram groups cannot be effectively sustained because not all Muslims accept their interpretations of the constitution and Islamic texts. As I have pointed out earlier, there are very many Muslims who do not identify with the Boko Haram’s teachings and activities and other groups like Izala.

[4] The religious politics of Deborah’s murder is that those arraigned in the court are being charged with “conspiracy and inciting public disturbance” rather than murder. Violent riots broke out subsequently in Sokoto by Muslims attacking Christians while demanding the unconditional release of the arrested suspects. While many Muslims condemned the extrajudicial killing of Deborah, prominent Muslims defended it as the right punishment for blasphemy. The political side of it is well demonstrated by Mr. Atiku Abubakar, a Muslim, former Vice President, and now the presidential aspirant for 2023 elections, who had to delete his tweet sympathizing with the family of Deborah because Muslims threatened not to vote for him. See Awosika [2022].

From this wieldy religious twist, how does Nigeria manage its identity? This critical question has been confronted, evaded, haphazardly answered or ignored. But it is a pertinent one that has continued to resonate in peaceful and violent ways. Nigeria has been described as "a nation held hostage to preventable events of tragic nature and at the front burner repeatedly are questions we have refused to face squarely: Who we are, where we belong, what we represent, what does Nigeria mean to us, do we want to remain one, and how? [Onwunyi and Ezeifegbu 2019: 9851].

Despite the national attitude to these repugnant questions, the country is aware of the consequences of ignoring them. Like Adogame [2022a: 11] strokes, these questions are not only existential but also spiritual, and they determine the health of individuals and the country. According to him, "Who I am, where I am coming, and who/what do I wish to become?" in a multireligious, secular and racial/ethnic encounters are questions that must be disburdened in order to be clear about oneself and others. Religious identity politics has continued to play a highly divisive role among Nigerians, and it seems unlikely that it will vanish overnight.

Francis Fukuyama talks about three categories of identities in our daily encounter with ourselves and others, namely: Thymos, Isothymia and Megalothymia. Thymos asks the question, who am I? Self or personal identity is not as simple as was assumed because individuals continue to understand themselves in accretive ways. Isothymia concerns the desire for recognition and conferred dignity we believe is our due, while megalothymia is the desire for others to recognize us as their superior. Managing the three types of identities is critical to how personal and group relations are formed and maintained on the one hand, and the level of private, group, ethnic, communal, religious or national peace and cohesion on the other [Kukah 2022]. In Nigeria, megalothymia type of identity has taken the pivotal stage of religious and ethnic encounters. The religious and ethnic superiority and arrogance that pervades the polity and the quest for its nationalization as a guiding ethos is a bane of national unity and social and ethnic cohesion. Both identity and religion are defined in exclusive terms rather than in mutually reinforcing manner.

The real-life situation in the country is that religious identity politics between Muslims and Christians has seriously affected the democratization process; for instance, competence and capability to steer the ship of governance are sacrificed at the altar of religious idiosyncrasies and ethnic considerations and affinities. Appointments are often made on the basis of religious affiliation rather than

competence and capacity to deliver on the job; this has constituted a barrier to democratic and national development. The introduction of the Federal Character, which makes representation mandatory for critical positions at the federal level, was meant to balance both religious and educational disequilibria between north and south, which unfortunately, as evidence has spawned, has been abrasively abused with impunity. The political understanding that Muslim and Christian be president and vice president and vice versa is also meant to balance the politics of religious identity and representation.

Religious identity chauvinism, exhibited by the dominant religious traditions, has resulted in the mobilization of the masses to action. The political elite have also stroked the ember of religious identity for their self-serving political interests, which exacerbate religious and political tension. What Kukah [1983] observed in the 1980s in this regard has not changed; if anything, it has become more pervasive. According to him, politicians and the elite have abandoned the most critical and ideological issues that the country needed to develop and devoted their energy toward religious mobilization for self-projection. His words are apposite to drive home his argument:

The ground was therefore well laid and rather than the politicians seeing themselves being divided only by the contending ideological presentations of their party manifestoes, a lot of useful energy was diverted to building religious lagers. Rather than mobilize Nigerians to their cause as politicians, the new political elite were busy mobilizing religious constituencies for a war against one another [Kukah 1983: 103].

More specifically, Olawale [2020: 10] observes, "politicians have adopted the introduction of Islam to create a direct identity to the political landscape of the country. They adopted *sharia* to emphasize the presence of Muslims in the national space. The influence of this religious code has led to deadly confrontations between Muslims and Christians over the years."

The emergence of Pentecostal identity and politics in national politics as a countering force is most likely to result in further complication of the already tense situation if great care is not taken to guide its application.

Despite taking an illiberal stance on national issues, there are some cases in which the adherents of major religions agree on moral issues. For instance, in spite of

Western pressure on the Jonathan presidency to halt the criminalization of same sex union in 2014, the religious leaders and political elite momentarily put their differences behind them and lobbied both publicly and privately for the Bill to criminalize the practice. The president received accolades for standing up against Western pressure and upholding the scriptural texts of the religions and moral standards of the land [Laguda 2021].

Conclusion

I have argued that secularization, as understood in the West, cannot be applied to Africa as a whole and Nigeria, in particular. This is because the notion of secularism, as denoting godlessness, and secularization, as meaning decline in religious belief and its influence in the public space, do not empirically and analytically resonate with the African religious politics. Despite the negative influences of spiritualizing or religionizing politics in Africa, secularization is yet to define personal and group identity. The argument of global resurgence of religion also cannot be sustained in the experience of Africa because secularization did not actually take place.

Although there could be a rise in global religious nationalism and violence as a result of international politics and competing ideologies, most especially in the West, the issue of religious violence has been a recurrent one in Nigeria, and not due specifically to religious resurgence in the aftermath of Cold War or 9/11. One reason for this is the politics of religious identity and its incidental benefits that accrue to those who have continuously stroked the ember of religious politics inherited from the British. Colonialism and missionary religions have been identified as being responsible for the politics and complications of religious identity in Nigeria. In addition, the plethora of nuances of secularization has complicated religious identity; this is because identity is constructed mainly on the premise of religious affiliation.

Religious obsession has not helped the country, and it shows no sign of decline. Therefore, it has become imperative for a more nuanced deconstruction of secularization in Nigeria through legal means to take place. The starting point is obviously the constitution that is ambiguous about the country's secularity, whose lacuna has been exploited to further demand and entrench dubious and controversial religious politics and identity.

In addition, it has become critical to understand that secularity does not connote godlessness: the existence of God and subscription to religious tradition should be

taken as the basis to deny freedom to those who hold opposing view or perpetrate intolerance, which has been the bane of religious coexistence in the country. It has been established that there was a practice of separation of religion and state in pre-colonial Africa, and each institution functioned as checks and balances. This practice, which is autochthonous to Africa, can still be resurrected because it upholds and balances African values, religious sensibilities and political administration. This decolonizing perspective of secularization needs more nuanced study and application.

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