ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to carry out a critical analysis of the religious dimension of political decisions and policies in the Babangida era. Nigerians are yet to recover from the pains and agony of Babangida regime. The negative impact of that regime was the manipulation of religion for political purposes. Religion was not only secularized, but was reasonably politicized. Babangida used religion to obtain legitimacy and consolidate his grip on political power.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Islam, politics, Nigeria, Babangida.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is an indispensable factor in nation building. Historically, Christianity and Islam have contributed immensely to the socio-political development of Nigeria. Both religions, at one time and another have acted as harbingers of civilization and "the fountain of morality in our social evolution (Ogbu Kalu 317, 318). Though exotic, from the point of view of origin, Islam and Christianity have so permeated the Nigerian culture and society, that they have unconsciously assumed the status of an indigenous faith in some communities. That is true of Islam in northern Nigeria and Christianity in the south. Majority of Nigerian people see themselves either as Christians or Muslims. An insignificant proportion identifies themselves as votaries of traditional religions. Religion occupies a very prominent position in contemporary Nigeria. Organizations such as Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Christian Association of Nigeria and Christian Council of Nigeria are more political than religious in goals, outlook and national influence.

It is on this vantage position that religion has arrogated to itself the enviable status of a king-maker. All power seekers—military or civilian—pay homage to religious leaders, either to obtain spiritual blessings or to gain support of their followers. Religion has therefore become a constituency with clerics as leaders. Some social
thinkers have advocated for the separation of religion from politics. John Onaiyekan has rightly disagreed with such advocacy:

In most human history, politics and religion have gone hand in hand. In great ancient civilizations of the world, kingship and priesthood were very closely related. At times, it was not too clear whether we were dealing with a king with sacred powers, or a priest with political authority. The priest-king was common phenomenon. Examples cut across all continents: the Egyptians in Africa, the Assyrians in the Middle East; the Greeks and Roman empires in Europe, and the Inkas in the Americas... Similarly, in our African traditional societies, political life was shot through and through by religion. The rulers were agents of the gods of the land and custodians of the wishes of the ancestors. The people, on their part, accepted the political arrangements governing their lives as religious obligations (qtd. in Kukah vii).

The great, and immortal Indian nationalist, Mohandas Karamohand Gandhi, known in India as Mahatma "Great soul" once posited that it is a clear case of ignorance for any nation, or people to attempt to separate religion from politics.

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life... those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means (qtd. in Abdullahi et al 121 ).

Onaiyekan has also argued that it is socially impracticable to separate religion from politics and that such agitation is not borne by history:

The question of the relationship of religion and politics is therefore an inevitable and important one. The strident call for a separation of politics from religion often becomes a slogan used according to the convenience of the moment. The reality is that both are tied together, by the very nature of things and this for at least two reasons: First, there is something inherently sacred about political power. History has shown that it can only be properly exercised when handled with sacred attention. In religious jargon, we say, "all powers belong to God." Secondly, it is the same concrete human person who assumes both political and religious identity, and one necessarily affects the other. No wonder, even nations which make much of separation of religion and politics find many ways in practice to act against this principle (qtd. in Kukah vii).

The manipulation of religion as a platform for acquisition and consolidation of political power in Nigeria has not only boomeranged, but has adversely constituted a
socio-spiritual menace both to the religious community and the larger society. Independent Nigeria is bedeviled by fundamental problems that bother on religious fanaticism, ethnicity and socio-political instability, which militate against national cohesion and progress (Usman 22, 23).

**NIGERIA: GEO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS**

The historian, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene in an article entitled "Who coined the name Nigeria?" asserted that Flora Shaw, who later became Lady Lugard, first suggested in an article published in Times magazine that the several British protectorates in the Niger be known collectively as Nigeria (Niger - area). Nigeria has a land area of about 924,000 square kilometers, which is approximately four times the size of United Kingdom. The largest distance from east to west is more than 1,120 kilometers, while from the north to the south, it stretches to 1,040 kilometers. The 1953 census put the population of Nigeria at 31,168,000. The 1963 census put the figure at 55,620,268 showing a twenty million Increase over the 1953 figure. The result of the last census put the population of Nigeria at 140 million. Apart from being the most populous country in the commonwealth, being surpassed only by India and Pakistan, Nigeria is the most populous country in all black Africa.

Geographically, Nigeria is located in the Guinea Coast of West Africa, between latitude 4° and 14° north and longitude 3° and 14° east. The Republic of Cameroon bound Nigeria to the east, the Atlantic Coast to the south, Benin Republic to the west and the Republics of Niger and Chad to the north. Historically, Nigeria assumed its present political status in 1914 when Sir Frederick Lugard amalgamated the two British protectorates of northern and southern Nigeria for administrative convenience. The question that is begging for answer is: Is Nigeria a nation? Lanyi and McWilliams have defined a nation as: “… a common culture, common symbols, a particular view of the world which is distinct from other world-views. What makes a nation different from other cultural groups, however, is that one of the symbols associated with its values and attitude is a particular piece of territory” (40).

A nation is a form of human group with a distinctive blend of habits, customs, manners, literature, art, religion and language. Citizens of any nation must recognize some closeness and affinity, which will engender cooperation with each other and the willingness to be united into one government. Nations of the world are unique with different elements of nationhood. While some nations are united on the basis of a common ethnic descent, others like the Swiss nation cannot achieve nationhood on the basis of a common origin because of linguistic diversity. Some people prefer dual nationhood. Scots for instance see themselves as both Scottish and British, just like many American Jews. While we admit that nationhood can be defined both in cultural and territorial terms, the ambiguity and lack of uniformity has to be recognized. In Britain, religion is not a priority as an element of nationhood, while in Poland religion is fundamental to nationhood. A strong element of nationhood among the Dutch nation has been a long tradition of unity against external threats. Richard Muir posits thus:

While most nations can claim a range of shared objective characteristics, for a nation to exist most of its members must share a sense of belonging and display a measure of nationalism. Members of a nation will reveal a degree of common purpose
over a range of issues and a period of time and they are conscious of themselves as forming a particular political community (85).

The most vital question that we should consider is the historical antecedent on the evolution of nation-states. How do nations come to exist? Definitely, nations may come into existence through an overbearing military power, which forcefully unite all the ethnic groups into one nation. Majority of African nations including Nigeria are products of colonial amalgamation done in the interest of the colonial masters. What is the fate of a nation that comes into existence through the barrel of the gun and manipulations of imperialists? Such a nation will be deficit in national solidarity, character and patriotism. Nigeria is a typical example of such a nation. As a country without nationalists and patriots, Nigeria does not seem to belong to anybody.

Nigerian leaders defend and fight for personal and sectional interest. One of the most outstanding problems that have crippled our rise to nationhood is ethnicity. Nigeria is a merger of many heterogeneous nation states. With no less than 250 ethnic groups, there is a prevailing notion of ethnic exclusiveness and incompatibility, which has been the bane of national integration. Okon Edet Uya has rightly described Nigeria as "an ethnic mosaic" (15). Some of the major ethnic groups include the Hausa - Fulani to the north, the Yoruba and Edo groups to the west; and the Igbo and Ibibio groups to the south east. The minorities include the Kanuri of present - day Borno State, the Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw of the Niger Delta; the Oron, Efik, Annang and Eko groups of the lower and upper Cross River basin; the Igala, Tiv, Iomba, Jukun and Nupe of the Middle Belt region, and so on.

In the entire history of Nigeria, from independence in 1960, the country has not produced any president or head of state that can be recognized as a national hero. Nigerians are in agreement that first Republic politicians like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa et al were all tribal and local heroes. The spirit of patriotism and national consciousness is low in Nigeria. Nigerians pay primary loyalty to their villages, clans, local governments and states of origin than to their country. Nigerians have never seen themselves as one nation with a common destiny. Chief Obafemi Awolowo who worked so hard to improve the condition of Yoruba people through the provision of free education, free medical services and related advantages of a welfare State, knew the geopolitics better than any other person when he said that:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English" or "Welsh" or "French". The word "Nigeria" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (47, 48).

He was completely correct. Nigeria till date is not a nation, because those who should work hard to make Nigeria a nation have abandoned Nigeria. As far back as 1947, Tafawa Balewa had said:

Since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Province in 1914, Nigeria had existed as one country only on paper. It is still
far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country (qtd. in Oluyede 24).

In moments of national crisis, Nigeria does not always have people who can display positive patriotic feelings. In Nigeria, dedication and love to one's religion supercedes national allegiance. M. S. M. Kiwanuka once said: "... that many of the new nations of Africa are artificial creations of the colonial regimes and apart from a common territory, they generally had nothing, common to them" (qtd. in Agim 2). The observation that Nigeria is an artificial creation of imperial Britain gives the erroneous impression that there are some nations, which are perfectly homogenous. Most nations of the world emerged as an amalgamation of multiplicity of ethnic, religious and class interests which have learnt over a period of time to accommodate each other.

A nation, according to Karl Deutsche is the result, or product of transformation of several ethnic elements into an integral homogenous unit through the process of social mobilization (44). During the wake of the annulment of the June 12 election, and the attendant resurgence of Igbo and Yoruba nationalism, many Nigerians advocated for the re-negotiation of the terms of our union. Notable in this advocacy was the political scientist Dokun Jagun who posited:

There must be a national plebiscite arranged on the basis of each community, which entered into treaties with the British prior to 1914. In other words, the sovereignty of each must now be recognized. Each community must decide whether or not it wants to continue in this union and on what terms (37).

Politically, the centrifugal forces of disunity have overwhelmed the centripetal forces. From the secession of Biafra to the declaration of the Ogoni Bill of rights and the suppressed Ogoni kingdom, Nigeria has been a nation that is pivoted on the fulcrum of force. Nigeria indeed is not only a loose and disunited political entity, but "an atomistic society perpetually at war with itself" (Emmanuel Ayandele). The military had capitalized on this loosed socio-political structure to impose a succession of irresponsible and visionless regimes on the people of Nigeria. Since the military have no other means of achieving social cohesion apart from the gun, they identified religion as a viable instrument of legitimation and we call this "the manipulation of religion".

IBRAHIM BABANGIDA: THE MAN

Born in August 17, 1941, to Malam Mohammed Babangida and Aishatu in Minna, Niger State, young Ibrahim became an orphan at the age of 14. He was only 12 years in 1953, and in primary four, when the mother died. Ibrahim was however lucky because he had three benevolent uncles Aliyu, Alhassan and Mohammed who were willing to help and train him. His only sister, Hanatu was several years younger.
After elementary education, Ibrahim was admitted into Government College, Bida in 1957, there he met good friends like late Mamman Vasta, Sani Sami, Mohammed Magoro, Abdulsalam Abubakar, Gado Nasko, Garba Duba and others who also like him later rose to become generals in the Nigerian army. Babangida's courage, foresight, creativity and spirit of adventure were first noticed in school days. For that, he was appointed a school prefect. His first impression of power was developed during that period. He played football for the school and also excelled in mathematics and physics.

**Career in the Army**

In his last year at school, the late Tanko Galadima, then honourable minister for army matters visited the school and persuaded the graduating students of 1962 to enroll in the Nigerian army. Babangida accepted the offer, and was among the eleven who were recruited and admitted into the Nigerian Military Training College, Kaduna for training as officer cadets. Other schools attended include Indian Military Academy, Royal Armoured Center, United Kingdom and the Army Armoured School, United State (Ekpu, Up from the Grass 12-17)

By January 15, 1966, when Nzeogwu staged "Operation Damisa", Babangida was only a lieutenant serving under the command of Major Hassan Usman Katsina (as he then was). During the civil war, Babangida fought in the 31 Battalion under the command of Major Wushishi (as he then was).

I joined the war just a month after it started. We started from Nsukka front... after the capture of Enugu, I became the battalion commander, I think about 1968, and had my own Command, the 44 Battalion... I got hit in a place called Uzuakoli about 1969 (Ekpu, Up from the Grass 19).

From 1967 to 1970, Babangida held various posts as troop leader, battalion commander and later, brigade major. From 1973 to 1975, he was commander of 4 RECCCE and commander armoured corps. Although Babangida specialized in armoured warfare, his political ambition led him into coup plotting:

I think I will admit for the first time that I've been involved, except the January 1966, but from then on in all the coups d'etat somehow I've been involved in 1975, we were the prime movers of the coup here in Lagos (Ekpu, Up from the Grass 20).

In July 1975, as a lieutenant-colonel, Babangida was appointed a member of the Supreme Military Council, under General Murtala Muhammad administration. The greatest event in the history of Nigeria that catapulted Babangida into limelight was the Dimka coup of February 13, 1976. On that fateful day, Lt. Col Bukar Sukar Dimka, murdered the then Head of State, General Murtala Muhammed and announced the forceful overthrow of the Federal Government of Nigeria. As the nation waited in fear and bewilderment, Lt. General T. Y. Danjuma, then chief of army staff detailed Babangida to go with a battalion and "flush out" Dimka and his group from the radio station. Babangida complied immediately, and after a prolonged shoot out, Dimka and his men were routed. Dimka who absconded, was eventually arrested, court-marshaled, and executed. Babangida's courage in foiling
Dimka's coup accorded him a reputation as a soldier's soldier. In 1981, the Shehu Shagari regime, suspicious of Babangida's aura and unpredictable courage and popularity removed him from the sensitive armoured corps to become director of army staff duties and planning. Babangida was directly involved in the 1983 coup that toppled the government of Shehu Shagari. When Muhammadu Buhari became Head of State, Babangida was named chief of army staff.

Military Presidency

It was through that exalted and prestigious office that Babangida won many soldiers to himself and in August 27, 1985, toppled the Buhari / Idiagbon government and proclaimed himself the first military president of Nigeria. To achieve stability and public acceptance, Babangida retained all the service chiefs and named 28-member Armed Forces Ruling Council, with Ebitu Ukiwe as the chief of general staff. There is no doubt that Babangida was a powerful president. Until December 1991, when civilian governors were elected in preparation for diarchy Babangida appointed about 90 military men as governors within seven years. He appointed four naval chiefs, three air force chiefs and three Inspector-generals of police within the same period. Military postings were irregular; instability was used as an instrument of State policy to consolidate his power, influence and ambition. Several times, Babangida dissolved and reconstituted the Armed Forces Ruling Council. He had no difficulty sacking the chief of general staff, Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe.

Babangida foiled two-coup attempts, one in March 1986, which led to the execution of his schoolmate and childhood friend Mamman Vasta and eight others. The other was April 22, 1990, which led to the execution of Major Gideon Orkar and 68 others. In both cases, Babangida who came to power through coup rejected all appeal to commute the death penalty into life imprisonment and insisted that in the military, the penalty for treason is death.

BABANGIDAISM

But what is in a name? For over eight years, Nigerians were still in the dark as to the true personality and mission of General Ibrahim Babangida. The mystery was not in the ordinary meaning of his name, but the philosophical, mystical and metaphysical representations of a man who changes more than a chameleon. Ibrahim is the Arabic equivalent of "Abraham" which means "father of the house". But these particular meaning is too cheap, and weak to capture and accommodate Babangida's legendary mission and impact on contemporary Nigeria. For General Joseph Momoh, the former Sierra-Leone President who was Babangida's friend and classmate at the then Kaduna Military Training College, Babangida is:

A very shrewd man he is not the sort of person that could be easily understood... he is got a very placid face and always wears a smile. And there is the tendency for you to feel he is a soft ball but definitely the man is as hard as nails (Aginam 33).

Babangida who came to power as a military dictator transformed himself to a skillful politician, very good in diplomacy and cunning. Babangida's political wizardry and hermaphroditical domination of the Nigerian society for over eight years compelled Nigerians to do thorough research on the man's nature and personality.
There is a Greek myth Khimaira (meaning she-goat), which conveys a literary picture of a fire-breathing monster with the head of lion, body of a goat, and a tail of a serpent, indeed a fabulous beast made up of parts taken from various animals. Khimaira (she goat), and Khimaros (he goat) are the root words of English word "chimera". Nigerians did not fold their hands over Babangida's chimerical portrait. There was a lot of ratiocination on this complex, complicated and intriguing personality. Since Nigerians are good at abstract thinking, it did not take them long to unravel their greatest mystery.

The first reasonable and commendable effort in the nation's quest for a suitable paradigm for Babangida came from Ekundayo Wright, a former editor of the Sunday Punch. Wright blazed the trail with an article titled "Babangida is a Snake". The article, which was published in Sunday Punch of 1st September, 1985, came five days after Babangida ascendancy to power. Wright argued that, "If the Chinese horoscope is anything to go by, then our new President, General Babangida is a snake" (5). Although the popular notion of the snake is something dangerous, crafty, artful, playfully mischievous, insidious and roguish, Wright argued that those born under the snake sign of the Chinese horoscope were "very wise, intelligent and deep thinkers" (5).

The Board and Management of Punch Group of Newspaper immediately suspended Wright. Nigerians were not frightened by the fate of Wright, rather a floodgate was opened for deeper and down-to-earth analysis of an enigmatic military politician who told the nation in July, 1992, during the maiden Nigerian Media Merit Award that as a military officer, he was trained to dominate his environment. And he actually dominated Nigeria for over eight years.

But the most symbolic nickname for IBB was to come from Chinweizu in his Vanguard column of July 6, 1986, when he called Babangida the Maradona of Nigeria. Soccer fans, know of Diego Maradona, fleet-footed dribbler from Argentina. Dare Babarinsa of Tell magazine has argued that the Maradona paradigm originated from late Olabisi Onabanjo, former governor of Ogun State and not Chinweizu. Babarinsa commented further on the meaning of Maradona:

Like the famed footballer, Babangida does not mind scoring with "the hand of God" ... Maradona means a politician of unscrupulous banality and who is ready to trade anything for the satisfaction of power... who is capable of anything and whose stock-in-trade is surprises (He came, He saw and... 14).

For the Lagos Lawyer, chief Gani Fawehinmi, Babangida's real name, is Machiavelli, the Florentine politician whose doctrine was the "end justifies the means" (qtd. in Iloegbunam 27).

As the answer was not forthcoming from the various conjectures of journalists, lawyers and close friends of IBB, distinguished academicians of honour and global reputation joined their compatriots in a search for appropriate empirical categorization of Nigeria's greatest problem. An internationally acclaimed professor of economic, Ojetunji Aboyade (now deceased), who was very close to Babangida as chairman of Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC), described Babangida as a leader whose:
First instincts are those of an officer. To me one of his best attributes is that he is a good listener. He can sit down for hours listening to a variety of things. And when he says "yes" to you, don't take it as 'yes'... I would hope that biographers, historians, psychologists would study this man in depth because he intrigues me (Aginam 32).

Noble laureate- Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka, is of the view that all the nicknames so far given to Babangida were inappropriate. For him Babangida is a "Chess player"

I think he is a good chess player, it is convenient for us to call him a dribbler, but I think the way he moves the pieces on the Nigerian chess board is more akin to a sense of chess board than to football. And that is what makes him what you call an enigma and what makes him very dangerous foe because you never know what he is planning. I too, I am intrigued by him... He is a man capable of great compassion and at the same time he can be ruthless (Aginam 32).

From every indication, Babangida was a phenomenon. Whether Nigerians call him snake, or Maradona, is not a new development in Africa, the land of dictators. African leaders love names and titles. The then president of Zaire, Joseph Mobutu had in a messianic frame of mind, changed his name to Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Mgbedu Wasa Banga which was the epitome for his doctrine of authenticity. Kamuzu Banda former president of Malawi, had insisted that he be addressed as: His Excellency, President-for-life Ngwazi, Doctor Hastings Kamuzu Banda, The Guide. Marcias Francisco Nguema, the executed tyrant of Equatorial Guinea had called himself "The unique miracle". With little or no education he conferred upon himself the curious title of Grand Master of Science, Education and Culture. At post independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah was Osagyefo - Saviour. At Tanzania, Julius Nyerere was Mwalimu (teacher). At Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta was known as Mzee (the great old man) (Iloegbunam 27). Without any university education Idi Amin of Uganda addressed himself as field marshal, doctor, professor et cetera. In Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello was known as "Gamji" (a strong tree).

It must be emphasized that in Africa, except in the rare case of Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kaunda, and Mandela, these nicknames do not always depict higher patriotic services, but in most cases, it serves as symbols of intimidation, marginalization and collective outcry against negative domination, exploitation and injustice. Where it was self conferred, it was only meant to mystify a despot and venerate a wicked ruler from the status of a human oppressor to a divine vice-gerent, whose actions must be accepted, as the perfect will of God for the people. So was Babangida and the people of Nigeria.

Since important facts about the Babangida years are still concealed by State Security Services, a comprehensive judgment of this epoch may be pre-mature. "Babangidaism" promises to be a vast and variegated intellectual enterprise. Whatever is the ultimate research finding, will serve only as history. History is only a post-mortem report, it cannot resurrect the dead and cannot compensate the injured, or vanquished contender.
The most painful and unpardonable dictatorial act of Babangida was the unilateral and arbitrary annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election that was considered the freest and fairest election in Nigerian political history. For the first time, Nigerians voted for a candidate of their choice without any regard, or consideration to religion and ethnicity. The victory of Moshood Abiola and his presidency would have catapulted Nigeria into a great nation. In annulling June 12, 1993 election, Babangida reversed providence and took Nigeria a century backward. The crises that followed this unpatriotic act led to a state of anarchy in Nigeria. The Nigerian Army and Police Force killed many Nigerians. Abiola and the wife, Kudirat died, and the nation actually died with them. Nigerians have rejected any apology from Babangida. Majorities have insisted that he should be tried in the court for unpatriotism.

THE MANIPULATION OF RELIGION IN NIGERIA

It was the famous Russian statesman and first premier of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, also known as Lenin who said: “We shall find the most fertile field for infiltration of Marxism within the field of religion, because religious people are the most gullible and will accept almost anything if it is couched in religious terminology” (qtd. in Wells 118). Gullibility is a condition of "social unconsciousness" in which one is easily taken in, or tricked. Throughout history, the wise dominate the fools; the strong rules the week and the rich dictate for the poor. Therefore, he who pays the piper dictates the tune. One of the simplest, cheapest and most successful channels for such manipulation had been religion. The reasons according to Ray Ekpu: “... is that religion is founded on faith and on faith only. It is, unlike science, a matter of the heart, not of the head... religion admits little, if any, of the spirit of inquiry or of empirical or ocular proof, it becomes an intoxicant, just like alcohol, it urges the heart to rule the head” (10).

Of all the institutions in the society, religion is the most pervasive, dynamic and people oriented with the largest followership and loyalty. Aristotle has said that politics is the queen of sciences, and that man is a political animal. Suffice to say that man is more, and primarily a religious animal. The tenets of all religions include peace, urbanity, patriotism, man-to-manness and social righteousness. Rebellion, confrontation and antagonism is not part of religion. V. O. Adefarasin writes:

Every religion that is worth the name prohibits killing, lying and other social vices. It is such a striking and interesting phenomenon in human life that it cannot be ignored even by skeptics, agnostics or atheists. There is no other phenomenon which moulds and controls human life as much as religion does. Human beings have given up not only their possessions, but even their lives for their religious beliefs. Those born into wealth and destined to inherit wealth have renounced wealth and turned themselves into beggars for their religious beliefs. Francis of Assisi did precisely that in the West, while Gautama Siddhartha Buddha did same in India. Human beings have given themselves up to be slaughtered, to be eaten by lions, to be thrown into fire and be burnt alive, rather than renounce their religious beliefs. Thus, religion has such a powerful grip on human beings such
that it cannot be ignored in human society. Religion that is meant
to be the platform for peace, stability, progress, development and
unity has apparently been used by many to disrupt the well being
of person and society (293).

As social cement, religion preaches the virtues of neighborliness and self-abnegation.
Religion consoles the poor and the exploited class, with a promise of transcendental
bliss and eternal prosperity in the heavenly places. That was the reason why Karl
Marx described religion not only as an inverted consciousness, but a major obstacle
against socio-economic and political revolution.

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a
heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is
the opium of the people. To abolish religion as the illusory
happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness... The
criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale
of tears the halo of which is religion (38, 39).

Admittedly, Marx had been quoted out of context by some of the critics of religion. A
good perusal of the primary source "Marx and Engels on Religion" reveals that Karl
Marx, though an avowed atheist, never at any time, under-estimated the dominant
position of religion in all human societies. Marx criticism of religion was to cause man
to "think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has
come to reason..." (39). Religion, must no longer play the role of an opiate, a
vampire and social anesthesia in contemporary Nigeria.

In a similar perspective, Francis Fukuyama classified Christianity as " the most
important slave ideology... that leads most directly to the realization of societies
based on liberty and equality here on earth" (196). Fukuyama condemned the
eschatological dimension of Christian theology, Christianity posits the realization of
human freedom not here on earth but only in the kingdom of heaven" (197).
Fukuyama then concluded that the failure Christianity to impose freedom in a
pragmatic sense, project Christianity as a form of alienation, weak faith, false
consciousness and a pillar of social estrangement.

It was that same mental frame that led George Hegel to assert with sympathy
that the "completion of the historical process required only a secularization of
Christianity, that is a translation of the Christian idea of freedom into here and now"
(qtd. in Fukuyama 197). It was the considered opinion of both Hegel and Fukuyama
that the pragmatic ideal of Christianity can be utilized as a weapon to eradicate
oppression and all forms of social evils. For Marx" the task of history... is to establish
the truth of this world", and the immediate tasks of philosophy... is to unmask self-
estrangement in its unholy form" (39).

The late Nigerian social critic and university don, Bala Usman and his
ideologue friends across the nation have been waging intellectual battle against the
manipulation of religion by various secular interest groups in the Nigerian society.
Usman defined manipulation as a process of...

Essentially controlling the action of a person or group without
that person or group knowing the goals, purpose and method of
that control and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised upon them at all (96).

On the motive of Nigerian elite class in manipulating religion, Usman wrote:

This campaign of systematic manipulation of religious sentiments is being conducted for the sinister and reactionary purpose of diverting attention... they wear a cloak of religion in order to confuse and divert the attention of our people from their harsh conditions of exercise (97).

When Lenin spoke of religious people as being gullible, he meant to say that religious people are neither objective, nor rational. Religious people are therefore vulnerable to deceptive manipulation. Manipulation of religion therefore means that certain interest group in the society can use religion consciously for the furtherance of irreligious goals and ambition.

For over eight years, Ibrahim Babangida who ruled Nigeria as a conquered territory with excessive veto and discretionary military powers manipulated religion as a pawn for negative domination of the society. He successfully manipulated both Islam and Christianity and threw civil society into blood bath and pogrom. The religious wars, which characterized the Babangida years, had nothing to do with religion. Another don and social critic, Adebayo Williams has said:

Even the OIC fiasco which many may mistake as an indication of Babangida's religious leaning was nothing but a desperate political concession to a faction of the Nigerian ruling class... At least it takes us, despite the unending manipulations of the religious and tribal bigots among us, out of the primitive woods of ethnic and religious chauvinism into the open arena of class conflicts (40).

The manipulation was comprehensive. There was a decline in the spiritual and socio-religious development of the country. Both Islam and Christianity recorded quantifiable loses because of persistent destruction of human and material resources.

THE STATUS OF RELIGION IN THE NIGERIAN CONSTITUTIONS

The status of religion in the Nigerian constitutions has been a problematic issue. It is indeed a subject of urgent national importance. Between the amalgamation of 1914, and independence in 1960, Nigeria passed through five major constitutional changes (1922, 1946, 1951, 1952 and 1960). There was also a republican constitution in 1963, then the 1979 Federal Constitution. The 1989 Constitution was not implemented because of the desire of the military to perpetuate itself in power. Presently, the country is operating under the 1999 Constitution. Until 1979, religion was not a major factor in Nigerian politics. Section 10 of the 1979 Federal Constitution prohibited the adoption of a State religion. It should be noted that section 10 of the 1979 Federal Constitution was re-enacted in section 11 of the 1989. A similar provision has found its way into the 1999 Constitution. What then is
the status of religion in the Nigerian Constitutions? Is it correct to describe a multi-religious society like Nigeria as a secular State? What is the meaning of secularism?

Etymologically, our English word "secular" has both a Latin and French roots. The two Latin derivatives are "secularist", meaning "temporal", and saeculum meaning "this present age". The French word "secular" have similar connotation. It was used of the duration of one human generation or longevity. It also connotes the spirit of the age, or an epoch in history. The word "secular", therefore came in later centuries to refer to the affairs of everyday life, in contradistinction to the prime concern of religion with the first cause and eschatological consequence of human existence. In the medieval period, the word "secular" was interpreted to mean the opposite of religion. The erroneous impression was created that religion has done little or nothing for the intellectual and scientific upliftment of humanity. It was contented that religion was a major obstacle to progress and creativity. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, "secularists" were understood to be advocates of scientism. Brian Hill posits thus:

... people who wished to withdraw all human activities from the province of religion and base them on logic and scientific method. The legal system would no longer appeal to divine law but to social-contract. Social services like hospitals were no longer to be charities motivated by religious compassion but utilities logically demanded by the just State. Secularism made man the measure of all things, and trusted that freedom and autonomy would automatically bring out the best in him (61).

A clear distinction must be made between the secular nature of the State and political secularism. N. S. S. Iwe writes:

Political secularism is atheistic in its genesis, inspiration and aspiration and socially and politically seeks to divorce the State from God and legitimate interest of religion. It falsely assumes and presumes that religious and spiritual interests are of no consequence in the temporal order. .. Secularism advocates absolute separation of religion and politics. Here is a political extremism and a false interpretation of the secular nature of the State (2).

The sociologists of religion, Larry Shiner has interpreted the concept of secularization as a comprehensive acceptance of change and conformity with "this (world", here Shiner is talking about a situation where "The religious group or the 'religiously informed society turns its attention from the supernatural and become more and more interested in "this world" (462). This according to Shiner involves a disengagement of society from religion, transposition of religious beliefs and institutions, desacralization of the world and a movement from a "sacred" to a "secular" society:
The world is gradually deprived of its sacral character as man and nature becomes the object of rational-causal explanation and manipulation. The culmination of secularization would be a completely' rational' world society in which the phenomenon of the supernatural or even of 'mystery' would play no part (462).

If political secularism is interpreted to mean atheism, or anti-religion, then the drafters of the 1979, 1989 and 1999 constitutions never intended such a thing for Nigeria. As a multi-religious state, secularism only connotes neutrality of the State in matters of religion. To interpret secularism in a humanistic outlook tantamount to hostility to all religions, Iwe writes:

In the fourth Line of the preamble to the 1979 constitution of Nigeria, the whole nation, through its legitimate constitutional fathers affirmed that Nigeria is sovereign nation under God. Hence Nigeria as a nation and a polity cannot be divorced from God and the legitimate interests of religion (3).

Justice Niki Tobi of the Supreme Court of Nigeria corroborated Iwe's position when the latter gave his interpretation of section 11 of 1989 Federal Constitution. There is that general notion that section 11 makes Nigeria a secular nation. That is not correct... secularism, the noun variant of the adjective secular, means the belief that the State, morals, education et cetera, should be independent of religion. What section 11 is out to achieve is that Nigeria cannot for example, adopt either Christianity or Islam as a State religion. But that is quite different from secularism (28).

Another prominent voice in this debate was Murtala Aminu, a legal practitioner. Like Tobi, Aminu is of the opinion that Nigeria is not, and cannot be a secular State in the sense of excluding God from the socio-political system. Nigeria is a multi-religious society and the idea of the supernatural is prevalent in Nigerian culture and social life. Aminu expounded on the legal implications of the Preamble to the 1979 and 1989 constitutions:

If by virtue of the provisions of our constitution, our nation is under God -the Transcendent Controller of human destiny and religion generally is a vehicle by which one can meaningfully be under and therefore obedient and subservient to God, how can the State fail to be concerned or be related to religion? (373).

Aminu proceeded further to interpret section 14(2) (b) and section 15(2) (b) of the 1989 Federal Constitution, which provide inter alia that"... the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government." Aminu contented:

... in considering the people's welfare as enjoined by the constitution it is impossible to separate the people from their religions. Thus all organs of government, authorities and persons... are constitutionally duty bound to provide for the welfare of the people, which must of inescapable necessity
include the welfare of that which is of overwhelming importance to the people - their religion (374).

The proposition of Tobi is equally relevant when he said:

God is the creator of the world. God is our creator. The preamble clearly recognizes the importance of God in a united and harmonious sovereign nation. It is clear from the preamble that the Constitution has no place for atheism or those who do not believe in the existence of God (28).

Religion has a role to play in nation building. No matter the pretension of humanists, the world is yet to discover a commensurate secular alternative to religion. Humanism itself is a hoax. All known civilizations in human history utilized religion as a pivot of morality and cultural reinvigoration. It is a risk for man to disregard the cosmic sovereignty of God. S. N. Ezeanya has said:

Man learns from religion that he has specific obligations to himself, to his fellow human beings and to the society to which he belongs and above all, to his maker. Religion... tends to unite individuals, communities, and nations under the divine umbrella of one and the same heavenly father, God. Remove this religious inclination from man, blot out of his mind the belief in his maker who rewards the good and punishes the wicked... what we have left is an animal (323).

All the founding fathers of the Nigerian nation had strong religious affinity. Atheism is foreign to our culture. It is unreasonable to declare a country with many religions a secular State. Nigeria is not and cannot be a secular State. Nigeria is a multi-religious State.

**NIGERIA’S FULL MEMBERSHIP IN THE ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE (OIC)**

On 21st August 1969, Heads of State and Governments of some Islamic countries gathered in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, for preliminary discussions that will lead to the formation of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Majority of delegates came from oil-rich Arab countries. According to the then Secretary-General of the Organization Hamidal-Gabid, OIC was established to check and confront “criminal arson perpetrated by Zionist elements on the Al-Agsa (Jerusalem) Mosque in 1969 (305). The prime objective of OIC was therefore to safeguard the holy places and support the struggle of the people of Palestine. As at 1992, 46 countries spread over Asia, the Middle East and Africa had joined the organization, with Africa leading with twenty-three countries.

At the formative stage in 1969, the then Sultan of Sokoto and supreme head of Nigerian Ummah, Alhaji Abubakar Siddiq III gave his moral and spiritual support to the founding fathers of OIC. The late Abubakar Gumi led the Nigerian Muslim delegation. As the delegation left Nigeria, the then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon in a phone call, informed King Hassan of Morocco that the team was not an
official delegation of the Nigerian Government. As a result, the delegation was not accredited. When the OIC was formally inaugurated, less than two years later, Nigerian Government showed no intention joining the organization. For a period of seventeen years, Nigerian Muslims maintained an observer status (Adigwe 1, 2).

In January 1986, the Babangida administration without any national consultation decided to take Nigeria into OIC as a full member. A high-powered Federal delegation led by the then minister of Petroleum Resources presented Nigeria's application to the conference-in-session. Other members of the delegation included, Abdulkadir Ahmed, then, Governor of Central Bank, Ibrahim Dasuki, then, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Abubakar Gumi. The Moroccan Government granted the Nigerian delegation a free transport to ease logistic problems. Although the organization charter stipulates that all application for membership are to be cleared after one year probationary period, Nigeria was granted automatic and instant membership. The conference chairman, Abdulatif Filali who was also the foreign minister of Morocco accorded the Nigerian delegation a rousing reception saying"... your seat has been reserved and we hope you will apply your consistent dynamism to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the OIC (qtd. in Tella and Abbas 15).

The first Nigerian newspaper to report Nigeria's full membership in the OIC was Guardian. Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe, who was the chief of general staff and second in command in the political hierarchy, denied the story saying that the Armed Forces Ruling Council never discussed such. Subsequently both the minister's of information, Anthony Ukpo, and external affairs, Bolaji Akinyemi, unequivocally dissociated themselves from the story, each claiming that no decision to that effect was taken at the seat of government. It did not take long, Ukiwe was sacked without any cogent reason. Akinyemi was dropped in a cabinet reshuffle, while Ukpo was redeployed. Commenting on Akinyemi's removal, Soji Akinrinade and others said:

Akinyemi was opposed to a change of Nigeria's observers status for full membership and wrote several memoranda to the president on the issue... the memoranda were based on "solid and credible reasoning about the need for Nigeria to be preserved as a secular State as well as to avoid the examples of Lebanon and Northern Ireland (20, 21).

The Guardian newspaper in an editorial opinion stated that Nigeria's full membership with the OIC has threatened national unity:

Beyond fidelity to religion, and beyond economic well-being... Our fundamental commitment and the Federal Government's is to the unity and integrity of Nigeria. We are satisfied that our membership of the OIC constitutes a threat to our unity. We believe that the government should review its position and withdraw (5).

As the nation was thrown into yet another unnecessary tension, and political convulsion which was characteristic of the Babangida era, many people asked, is it defensible for a multi-religious State like Nigeria to join a religious organization like
The Christian Association of Nigeria called for unconditional withdrawal of Nigeria from the OIC. The Catholic archbishop of Lagos, Rev. Olubunmi Okogie said: "If it were a section of the Islamic community that joined, there is no problem, but for Nigeria as a country, we hold the president responsible for this. The president alone does not make Nigeria" (qtd. in Olojede et al 14). In a swift reaction to pacify aggrieved citizens and clarify government intention General Ibrahim Babangida said:

"... We joined the organization in exactly the same way as we joined the United Nations. The Commonwealth, the OPEC, the Organization of African Unity, the World Olympic Committee... We did not decide to regularize our membership of OIC as a result of pressure from any quarters, neither is it an attempt to assert the supremacy of one religion over any other (qtd. in Adigwe 22 - 26)."

Babangida's statement was not only preposterous but extravagant. None of the organizations he mentioned, that is, UN, OAU, OPEC, Commonwealth and World Olympic Committee have religious foundation and functions. Although some Christian denominations in Nigeria may be affiliated to the World Council of Churches, All Africa Conference of Churches, World Pentecostal Fellowship, the Vatican et cetera, Nigeria as a geo-political, sovereign nation does not hold membership status in these religious organizations. If only, we can give up prejudice and vested interest, then it is possible to know the difference between OIC and OAU, OPEC, UN et cetera. Categorically, OIC is an Islamic forum dominated by oil-rich Arab nations with a zealous mission: "To strengthen the struggle of all Muslim people with a view to safeguard their dignity, independence and national rights" (Olojede et al 16). On conditions of membership, the OIC charter, article VIII states: "Every Muslim State is eligible to join the Islamic Conference on submitting an application expressing its desire and preparedness to adopt this charter" (qtd in Olojede et al 16).

If membership is open to every Muslim State, Nigeria is not a Muslim State and cannot join OIC. Section 10 of the 1979 Federal Constitution states: "The government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State religion (14)." Section 35 of the 1989 Federal Constitution provides for right freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It is therefore prima facie, that government decision to upgrade Nigeria's observer status in OIC without National consultation was unconstitutional, null and void and of no effect. Ali Mazrui in a deliberate move to defend his religion (Islam), had said that government failure to obtain national consensus on the matter was only "a matter of style".

Why was the application not publicly debated in advance as was the issue of whether to accept the loan from the International Monetary Fund in 1985? Why was there confusion among government spokesmen about Nigeria's membership of OIC? Why was there secrecy until a French News Agency disclosed Nigeria's entry into the Islamic Conference? I regard all these questions as secondary-concerned mainly with style (257).
It is pertinent to remind Mazrui that such a major foreign policy decision cannot be taken and implemented without the approval of the AFRC and without the collective consent of Nigerians. It is even problematic that the decision was taken without the knowledge of the ministers of external affairs, internal affairs, information and without formal discussion at the Federal Executive Council and the Council of States. Such "reckless style" had led Sudan, Ireland, Greece, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, Ethiopia and other nations into endless bloodbath. Four years after the OIC debate, Godfrey Uzoigwe commented with intellectual curiosity and bewilderment thus:

A neutral observer, for example, would be puzzled to know: how a secular State managed to smuggle itself into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC): Why it is involved in the annual pilgrimages to Mecca and Rome: and why the constituent Assemblies of 1978 and 1989 respectively almost broke up over the Sharia affair... (19).

The OIC controversy was not between Christians and Muslims, but it was the Federal Government versus the people of Nigeria. It was therefore very surprising that fundamentalists of both religions capitalized on that argument to boost their political image. Babangida's decision to take Nigeria into the OIC was a fundamental confusion and error that has impeded national understanding, integration and religious tolerance. Whatever reason was given to justify that decision is untenable and inadequate. We cannot under-estimate the relevance and advantage of peaceful co-existence; economic gains are secondary to social and political stability.

**ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

As a strategy to resolve the OIC stalemate, government inaugurated a Committee to advise it on how to handle the impasse on 3rd February 1986. The then minister of internal affairs, Col. John Shagaya, chaired the Committee. The 25-man Committee was made up of government officials and religious leaders. The Committee was to determine how Nigeria's full membership with the OIC would affect national interest and peaceful co-existence. The Committee that met in Abuja from 3rd to 5th February 1986 adjourned to reconvene in Lagos on Tuesday 25th February 1986 to adopt their final recommendation for submission to government. The final report was submitted on 21\textsuperscript{st} March 1986. Unfortunately, till date, the nation is still awaiting government white paper on the Committee's recommendation.

The next eventful step of the Babangida's regime was to upgrade the panel to a permanent body with the name "Advisory Council on Religious Affairs" (ACRA). Members of OIC Committee dominated the membership of ACRA. It will be recalled, that members of the OIC Committee in a statement after a consultative session at Abuja on Wednesday, 5th February, 1986, had endorsed:

...the suggestion of the president that a permanent consultative forum be established to advise Government on major religious issues of common concern to all faiths... The useful exchange of views we have had encourages us to urge that such a consultative forum be established soon on a permanent basis (qtd. in Adigwe 28).
Speaking during the formal opening of ACRA on 29th June, 1987, the then chief of general staff, Rear Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, called on members to "assist the government and the people of this country by stressing and accentuating the positive role that religion can play in national development" (qtd in Kukah 234). The body was composed of twenty-four religious leaders, twelve each from Islam and Christianity. As an experiment in our social evolution, ACRA was designed for failure. From the very beginning some Nigerians saw the Committee as a subtle move by government to manipulate religion and that the Committee may be upgraded to the status of a federal ministry of religion in the nearest future. Another serious flaw was the composition of ACRA, which gave the false impression that there are only two religions in Nigeria.

Another cause of pessimism was that since OIC Committee was incapable of producing a unanimous report, some people doubted if the same people would ever arrive at a consensus. The most consistent opposition against ACRA, came from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Christians expressed grave reservation and skepticism over ACRA and gave the government conditions on which the Church in Nigeria will participate in ACRA. The first condition was that no government official must join the Council as a member; ACRA must be autonomous; there must be joint chairmanship, with each chairman presiding over meetings rotationally. The government accepted all these.

As ACRA settled for business, it was unanimously agreed that there would be two chairmen, each from Christianity and Islam. The council also agreed to have two secretaries, while the chairmen would preside over meetings in turns, the secretaries will work co-operatively. It was also agreed that government must show the draft of ACRA Decree to members before it was made public. Government accepted the resolutions of the Council, but went ahead to promulgate and publish the decree without consulting with the Council.

The Decree which was titled, "The Advisory Council on Religious Affairs Decree 1987", was promulgated in Lagos on November 16, 1987, contrary to agreement, the Decree provided for a chairman and deputy to be elected from within the Council, while the secretary will be appointed by the government. Christian leaders sent an urgent memo to the Federal Government calling for the amendment of the Decree to reflect the decisions of the Council and the agreement reached between Christian leaders and government. Christians boycotted the next ACRA meeting. ACRA Decree was later amended to accommodate the appeal of Nigerian Christians.

The greatest shock that finally destabilized ACRA was the resignation of Ambassador Jolly Tanko Yusuf from the Council. In a letter to the president, Yusuf contended that it was a matter of honour for him to withdraw because of the presence and utterances of Abubakar Gumi. Gumi had told a Nigerian magazine that Muslims in his lifetime will never accept a Christian leadership in Nigeria and that if Christians will not accept Muslims, as their leaders, the country should split into two. In an interview with Today's Challenge. Yusuf said:

"that this man came out openly like this in a country like Nigeria and the government has said nothing, and no Muslim opposed him. . . . I thought the job of the government is to call everybody
to order, even if it involved punishing somebody trying to cause trouble. In fact, in other countries it would have been regarded as treason. But nothing happened! So I have a feeling that this is part of a plan (9).

ACRA did not achieve any aim. Public funds were wasted in conducting consultative meetings. From every indication, government did not have good intentions. There must have been secret plans to manipulate the two most powerful religions as a political strategy. The German sociologist, Max Weber once said: "in a secular world, the only place for religion is in the area of interpersonal rather than public relations" (qtd. in Adigwe 25). From OIC to ACRA, the Federal Government wasted much time and resources on religious debate, while the economy was still in a bad shape. The attention and preoccupation of government was diverted from major areas of concern to trivialities.

POLITICS OF MOSQUE AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

In 1947, Margery Perham, a British colonialist, had speculated, "independent Nigeria would be fraught with strife because of the many religions" (qtd. in Awofeso 19). The problem with Nigeria today is not that of multiplicity of religions, but the manipulation of two religions, Islam and Christianity by the ruling class. Many Nigerians are neither Christians nor Muslims. What impression, and future, do such people have when public funds that should have been used to provide social amenities and public utility services is diverted to religious patronage. When the Shehu Shagari administration donated Ten million naira to the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs for the building of a national Mosque at Abuja, the national executive committee of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), unequivocally condemned government action in funding religion. As a face saving device, government stated that CAN will be given Ten million naira for the building of a national cathedral at Abuja (Kukah 162, 163).

In 1983, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria sent a memo to the president, discouraging government funding of religions:

We appreciate and commend the Federal Government’s concern for, and interest in, an effective religious presence in our new capital. It underscores the laudable policy and determination of the present administration to restore religion to its rightful place in our national and public life... As a matter of principle, we believe that the erection of places of worship (Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or any other religious profession) is the competence of that religious body itself (qtd. in Kukah 162, 163).

When Shehu Shagari was asked in 1983, if erection of mosques with public funds did not portray discrimination against other religions, he confidently said:

It is only fitting that I, as the president of this country have a place of worship that befits my status. My vice president as you know is a Christian. If he also wishes to have a befitting place of worship, that is up to him (qtd. in Kukah 163).
Shagari's argument was illogical. Religion has nothing to do with the office of a president. There is no constitutional provision that "a befitting place of worship" should be erected in the State House for the president. If all Nigerian president's are allowed to carry their religion officially to State House, then when votaries of African Traditional Religions become president, various shrines will be erected as "befitting places of worship". This is clearly nonsensical. It must be emphasized here, that the argument was not between Islam and Christianity as erroneously assumed in some quarters, but between the Federal Government and other religions who were marginalized. For it is my considered opinion that government has done serious injustice to other religions by funding construction of mosques at government quarters. In 1987, Ray Ekpu had said:

The various Nigerian governments have, over the years, been laying the mines for the religious explosion... places of worship are built at public airports and in government quarters with public funds contributed by citizens of various religious persuasions.. Instead of leaving the various religious communities to fend for themselves and to build their mosques and churches if they want, the Federal Government donated tons of money to the Moslems and later to the Christians to build their places of worship in the new capital (who stole the pipe? 4).

The most serious confrontation between Christians and government over construction of mosques at State House occurred in 1988, when the then Gongola State Government under the governorship of Group Captain Isa Mohammed, awarded a contract to one Alhaji Suleiman Ahmadu Lawai, to construct a Mosque at the State House, at the cost of Seventy-Five Thousand, Eighty naira, sixty kobo (N75,080.60). Government action was challenged by Rev. Wilson Sabiya, then, Gongola State chairman of CAN. Sabiya declared government action as a discriminatory policy against Christians. Mohammed then ordered the arrest and detention of Sabiya on the 19th February, 1989. Sabiya was later released after two days of unlawful detention.

In August 22, 1989, CAN filed a case at the Federal High Court, Kano against the State Government to enforce the fundamental rights of Christians in Gongola State. The case which was later transferred to Yola High Court, came up for hearing on October 19, 1992. CAN's counsel, Barrister L. D. Nzadon, submitted that "the application is hinged on paragraph (a) and (b) of section 39(1) of the 1979 constitution". CAN in pursuance to order 2, Rule (1) of the fundamental Rights (Enforcement procedure) Rules 1979, prayed the Court, among other requests for:

An order compelling the respondents to either pull down (demolish) the mosque the Gongola State Government (has) constructed at Government House/Military Governor's office, now Deputy Governor's office, Yola between 14th December, 1988 and June 1989, or construct a church (Chapel) at the Government House/ military Government office now Deputy Government office now of the same size and quality as the Mosque (qtd. in Today's Challenge 16).
After several adjournments, legal debates and cross-examinations, the learned trial judge, B. S. Bansi delivered the judgment on 3rd September, 1993 with the following declaration:

The act of constructing a mosque at the Government House out of the public funds of Gongola State without the corresponding construction of the church for the applicant and those he represented who are equally citizens of Nigeria! Gongola State and the co-owners of the said public funds is in my judgment a flagrant violation of their rights under section 39 (1) (a) (b) of the 1979 constitution (qtd. in Today's Challenge 10).

Honourable Justice Bansi, then went ahead and granted prayer No.2:

The Gongola State Government is hereby ordered to construct at the premises of the military Governor's office Yola a church for the use of the Military Governor's office Yola of the same size and quality as the mosque constructed by the Government... The church shall be completed within 8 weeks from the time the contract is executed as it was done for the mosque. Be it so (qtd. in Today's Challenge 22,23).

As court orders were normally flouted by military authorities, it is not known, if this court order was ever implemented. Godfrey Uzoigwe had observed that:

From the irritated pronouncement of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), inspite of consistent and clear government statements that Nigeria is a secular State, the Christians believe that Muslims are clearly favoured in independent Nigeria (19).

SUCCESSION DISPUTE IN THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE

Northern Nigeria before, and after the advent of Islam had been a feudal society. Feudalism, which evolved in Western Europe in the 8th and 19th centuries, is a legal and social system in which vassals were protected and sustained by their lords. Another name for feudalism is vassalage. A feudal society is a stratified one. The gap between the lords (the rich) and their servants (the poor-class) is wide above imagination. The legitimacy of feudalism is derived from the force of tradition and economic power. Tradition represents conservatism and respect for historical antecedent. Society must be guided by the past.

The King in the words of K.A. Busia "sits upon the stool of the ancestors" (15), Political legitimacy in Africa is derived from cosmological belief. The society is composed of an ongoing community of the "dead", the living, and those yet unborn. As Irving Markovitz observed:

The "dead", though unseen, nevertheless influenced the course of the living: They could cause crops to fail and prevent women from conceiving. They could be offended and therefore had to be 'reached'. The chief, as successor of the royal ancestors, acted as a bridge for the tribe between the living and the dead (104).

Writing in the same vein, Fortes and Evans Pritchards have this to say:
An African ruler is not to his people merely a person who can enforce his will on them. He is the axis of their political relations, the symbol of their unity and exclusiveness and the embodiment of their essential values. He is more than a secular ruler... His credentials are mystical and derive from antiquity... the political structure are vouched for by tradition and myth and their interrelationships are guided by values expressed in mystical symbols (M. Fortes and Evans Evans Pritchards 6).

Powerful Kings all over the world, will happily accept King James I (1603-1625) of England as their progenitor. It was this monarch who elevated the theory of kingship to a divine pedestal. James I postulated that:

The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth, for Kings are not only God's lieutenants upon the earth and sit upon God's throne, but even by God Himself, they are called gods (qtd. in Ekpu, A Harmless Anachronism 13).

In modern Africa, external change agents have challenged the privileged status of traditional rulers, Western education posing the greatest threat. Political authority now resides either with the parliament, or, on the whims or caprices of a dictator. Traditional rulership is now viewed to be anachronistic, hence incompatible with civilization. David Kimble has rightly observed that:

Educated Africans... found it increasingly difficult to fit into the traditional order, where religious and secular authority rested with the chief, where the social hierarchy ascended and descended in the clearly defined stages, and where status depended on birth and lineage rather than individual qualifications or achievements. Thus there emerged a growing cleavage between the chiefs and the educated community (62). 

The traditional institution has come under serious pressure in Africa, in recent times. Historically, external political authority, except in the case of conquered territories, did not appoint African kings. Appointment and demotion of kings was always undertaken by a special group of investiture officials, that is council of elders. The kingmakers in Yoruba traditional society were called "The Oyo Mesi", in Benin; the kingmakers were called "The Uzama". In Hausa land, there was no uniform system of government. With the Fulani infiltration and conquest of Hausa states beginning from 1804, Islamic system of government and jurisprudence was imposed throughout Hausa land. Political and religious authority was vested on Amir al-Muminim (the leader of the faithful).

From Mohammed Bello to Alhaji Abubakar Siddiq the caliphate (later changed to sultanate) had been revered and glorified. No historian in the past could have believed that the stool of Usman Dan Fodio could degenerate into a pawn for military opportunism. As the peace loving, Abubakar Siddiq finished fifty years of peaceful reign and finally parted to his ancestors, powerful, influential, wealthy and well-connected contestants emerged. The contenders to the throne included Ibrahim
Dasuki, Shehu Malami, Abubakar Alhaji and Mohammed Maccido, sultan's eldest son. The office of the sultan, in importance and prestige is next to the presidency. The late Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, once said, if he were asked to choose between being the president of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto, he would have preferred the later.

On November 1, 1988, the 17th, sultan of Sokoto, Abubakar Siddiq III died. Before his demise, the late sultan had told some members of the Sokoto Council of king makers, headed by the Waziri that he would prefer that his first son, Mohammed Maccido, succeed him. The suggestion, which was accepted by the Imams, was later made public and Maccido became the heir-apparent to the throne. It was based on this arrangement that the council of kingmakers announced the appointment of Mohammed Maccido as the 18th Sultan of Sokoto over Rima Radio, on 4th November 1988.

As thousands of supporters sang and danced in honour of the new Amir Al-Muminim and Sarkin Musulumi (Commander of the faithful), another announcement came on Rima Radio. It was the voice of Aliyu Gumbi, the Magajin Gari of Sokoto and member, Sokoto State council of king makers. Gumbi told the State that no new sultan had been appointed and that people should go about their normal business, while awaiting further instruction from the appropriate authorities. On November 6, 1988, at about 2 p.m., Rima Radio relayed a special announcement from the State Government:

The military governor of Sokoto State, Colonel Ahmad Muhammadu Daku, in accordance with the provisions of the chiefs (appointment and deposition) law of Sokoto State of Nigeria, Chapter 20, and after due consultations with the state council of chiefs has approved the appointment of Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, Baraden Sokoto, as the new sultan of Sokoto (qtd. in Abu et al 11).

This announcement was an invitation to chaos and social disorder. A three-word Hausa phrase Ba mu so (we don't want) expressed the bitterness and resentment of the people over Dasuki's appointment. Sokoto was inflamed as the talakawas (commoners), almajiri (Quranic pupils), went out with offensive weapons to avenge "injustice" done on Mohammed Maccido. Houses, business premises and government offices were burnt to ashes. At the Sokoto prison, the protesters freed five hundred prisoners. As at November 6, 1988, 13 human beings were confirmed dead, and admitted into the Sokoto General Hospital mortuary. More than one hundred fierce-looking, battle-ready, anti-riot mobile policemen heavily guarded Dasuki's house.

Ibrahim Dasuki, an Oxford-educated, multi-millionaire businessman and politician had been secretary-general of Jama'atu Nasril Islam for seventeen years, and was also secretary-general of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs for fourteen years. From 1966, when Ahmadu Bello was assassinated, Dasuki had shown serious interest for the throne. But many things stood against this ambition. In 1985, Shehu Malami, a leading contender for the sultanate, in a public lecture, challenged Dasuki's right to the throne. Basing his argument on history, Malami declared:
One of the children (of Usman-Dan Fodio) is Muhammadu Buhari, whose mother was Aishatu Gabdo. Muhammadu Buhari's descendants are based in Tambuwal, Sifawa and Dogon Daji, where they are the district heads. Although they also originated from Usman Dan Fodio, they have never, throughout the history of the caliphate, produced a single sultan (qtd. in Babarinsa 10).

Apart from the fact that none of the descendants of Muhammadu Buhari had ever ascended the sultanate, it was also argued that Dasuki's name was not included in the list of nominees that were recommended to the state government. There was a strong and believable rumor that Dasuki's chances were enhanced by his intimate relationship with the military dictator-General Ibrahim Babangida. At that time, Sambo, Dasuki's son, was Babangida's aide de camp. Yakubu Mohammed of Newswatch wrote:

There is no doubt about Dasuki's qualification for the job. He worked tirelessly to further the cause of Islam even if his opponents think he is a hawk and a quiet jihadist. He commands a lot of respect and his influence goes beyond Nigeria's border. Which makes it more tragic that his choice should be greeted with such intense acrimony. It is neither in his interest nor in the nation's interest that his ascendancy to the exalted throne of sultan should be accompanied by bloodbath (6).

Vox Populi. Vox Dei. "the voice of the people is the voice of God". Unfortunately, despite the massive violent protest, Dasuki finally consolidated himself on the throne. He was the sultan of Babangida era. As soon as Babangida "stepped aside" from power, the foundation of Dasuki's sultanate began to crumble. Dasuki's enemies renewed the struggle against his appointment, worst still, as Dare Babarinsa of Tell Magazine observed:

Dasuki made himself vulnerable, when, after gaining the throne he failed to understand the full import of a successful prince. His subjects expected him to stand for justice and religious piety. Instead of finding his own roots among the common people of Sokoto, he was still involved in high stake political horse-trading, always ready to subvert justice and due process when it suited him. His principle was expediency and his religion, power (11).

It will be recalled that when the dictator, General Ibrahim Babangida annulled June 12 presidential elections, which Moshood Abiola, then deputy president, Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs won, Dasuki told the world that the annulment was the "will of God". As no man is immune to the verdict of history, Ibrahim Dasuki, the 18th sultan of Sokoto was dethroned on April 20, 1996 by the Sanni Abacha's regime. This was not unexpected, as Lt. Col. Sambo Dasuki was declared wanted by the Federal Government on allegation of involvement in the "coup plot" of 1995. Some of the reasons given for the removal of Dasuki according to Akinkuotu et al includes:
Unbecoming conduct, poor leadership, unauthorized journeys, alleged misuse of funds, causing disaffection among Muslims, demeaning the exalted throne through failed banks' trials, decline of Islamic religion under him and inviting foreign diplomats without government's knowledge (14).

Dasuki was suddenly arraigned before failed banks tribunal over an alleged debt of N775m, owed Alpha Merchant Bank and Republic Bank by Afro Continental Nigeria Limited and Nigercafe Foods.

The rise and fall of Dasuki, was the peak of the manipulation of all institutions of society by the military. Since military governments are illegitimate and also wanting in credibility, appointments into key positions are not by merit. The implication is that there is bound to occur, enthronement of mediocrity and the dethronement of excellence. A society, or government that have no regard for merit is doomed and that is the plight of Nigeria under the gun. Through the influence of Lt. Col. Sambo Dasuki and the vested interest of General Babangida, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki was installed by force as a new sultan against the popular wishes of the Sokoto kingmakers who had earlier announced the appointment of Mohammed Maccido as a successor to the father's throne.

Several organs of society in Sokoto, and indeed the Islamic world were either forced to accept Dasuki, or assuaged with political appointments, money and related favor. When Dasuki ascended the throne, Sanni Abacha was the chief of army staff. It was under his command that tanks and armored vehicles were rolled out to keep peace and put the opposition under forceful control. But things have changed suddenly. Babangida is no more in power and Sambo is exiled and Dasuki has fallen out with Abacha, and he is no more the sultan.

While it may be too early to comment on the impact of Dasuki's dethronement on Nigerian Islam, one views with sympathy the humiliation which a dethroned sultan had to receive from those who initially installed him as a puppet sultan. Writing on the topic "The Man Who Lost an Empire" Dare Babarinsa of Tell magazine said this of Dasuki:

He was the Amir Al Muminim and Sarki Musulumi-commander of the faithfuls. His forefathers' words sent armies into battles and deprived kings of their crowns but he was the head of empire that has lost its army. Now he is lost. He is now a prisoner whose future is cloudy and uncertain (10).

Another question that calls to mind is what is the future of the traditional institution in Nigeria? If it is very easy to appoint and dethrone a natural ruler, what will happen to traditional society if a sacred stool is over-politicized.

Between 1953 and 1965, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who was premier of northern Nigeria deposed eleven emirs. The most outstanding was the ignominious deposition of Mohammadu Sanusi as Emir of Kano in 1963. Other emirs who were either deposed or forcefully "retired" were the emirs of Argungu, Bauchi, Biu and Adamawa. A similar precedent occurred in the west when Chief Obafemi Awolowo deposed the Alafin of Oyo, Oba Adeyemi II. Ladoke
Akintola, who succeeded Awolowo as premier had the courage to reduce the annual emolument of Samuel Akinsanya, the Odemo of Ishara to one kobo.

The first deposition of a natural ruler by a military ruler was in the western region of Nigeria when Adeyinka Adebayo deposed Olateru Olagbegi, the Olowo of Owo, who after twenty-five years regained his exalted throne. It is part of our history that in 1986, the then military governor of Gongola State, Yohanna Madaki (a Colonel) ordered the deposition of Umaru ‘Abba Tukur as the Emir of Muri, following allegations of corruption against him. It is also on record that a military governor once detained the Attah of Igala, Aliyu Obaje in Makurdi.

In August 1984, the Buhari/Idiagbon administration suspended the Emir of Kano, Ado Bayero and Ooni of Ife, Okunade Sijuade, and further confined them to their domain for six months, for traveling to Israel without clearance from the Federal Military Government. But what future holds for traditional rulers. Bala Takaya, a political scientist and director, Center for Development Studies, University of Jos commented:

It is anachronistic to talk about traditional rulers in modern democratic Nigeria. I suppose this category of rulers should simply be called community leaders rather than traditional rulers...It might be necessary to create other community leaders to be more functional, more relevant in modern Nigeria such that you don't have to select them by how blue their blood is or how long is the line of royal relationship or lineage (qtd. in Babarinsa Masters of the Game (19).

The deposition of Dasuki is even more complicated because he was not only a traditional ruler, but also the head of the Muslim community in Nigeria. Ishaq Lakin Akintola, the then Director of the Muslim Rights Concern, had described the dethronement of Dasuki as a dangerous end for Islamdom and suggested that an urgent national congress of all Muslims organizations be convene to discuss the inherent dangers in tying the Nigerian Muslim leadership to a traditional stool. Akintola's proposed congress was also to review the modalities for choosing the leadership of Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. It was speculated that the Yoruba's might advocate for the sultanate to be rotated between north and south. Even though there is no separation of religion and politics in Islamic world-view, the entire episode was shameful for Islam. The overt humiliation of Dasuki by the Abacha regime was a pathetic sight. It was not only Dasuki that was disgrace but the entire Ummah in Nigeria. It is even pathetic to report that Dasuki's successor Mohammed Maccido painfully died in a plain crash while returning from Abuja. Maccido's death was heartbreaking even to the Christian community. It is doubtful, if Islam in Nigeria has recovered fully from the manipulation of the Babangida's era.

**CONCLUSION**

The military that were recruited, trained and commissioned to defend the constitution, peace, stability and territorial integrity of Nigeria, suddenly changed their role from defense to that of pseudo-custodian of good governance and democratic traditions. The outcome of their new decision and role was the manipulation of sensitive social institutions, such as religion, to stamp their legitimacy and authority on civil society. Almost all categories of power-seekers use
religion as a pivot to reach the masses and achieve their goals. Religion, therefore, is a pawn in the hands of adventurers. As primus-inter pares, among all contending social forces, all facets of human ambition find realistic expression and fulfillment under the canopy of religion, therefore, the politicians, business barons, the military, the academic, technocrat et cetera, employ religion to achieve 'social goals and personal ambition.

The decision of the military government then to upgrade Nigeria's membership status in the OIC without national consensus was a clear evidence of manipulation of religion for political ends. The diversion of public funds for the construction of mosques was covertly meant to portray Islam as a State religion. The failure of the military government to stop the Late Abubakar Gumi from making treasonable utterances was ominous conspiracy against national peace and stability. Government inability to stop perennial religious riots in Northern Nigeria, at a time when the Nigerian Police was rated one of the best in the world, was interpreted as complicity on the part of government.

The Federal Government should abandon all proposals for the realization of a fully secular society in Nigeria. Like the Indian constitutional model, secularism should imply government neutrality towards religion. Since Nigeria is multi-religious, the government should at least be fair to all religions. Religious leaders should desist from negative and narrow indoctrination of their followers. Politicians should stop using religion as a vehicle for social dominance. One of the greatest achievements in the history of religion is the spirit of dialogue and ecumenism, which today, with a phenomenal progress, is becoming a global experience. Ecumenism should be nurtured to greater height to agree with the theological and historical pursuit of religion-world peace. Surely, we have a choice to make. Either we embrace dialogue, tolerance and good conscience, or we mortgage our children's future to religious war that cannot be resolved. Let me conclude this paper with the first and the last stanzas of our old national anthem in the hope that God will help Nigeria:

Nigeria, we hail thee
our own dear native land,
though tribe and tongue may differ,
in brotherhood we stand.
Nigerian all and proud to serve
our sovereign motherland.

0 God of all creation
Grant this our one request,
Help us to build a nation
where no man is oppressed
and so with peace and plenty,
Nigeria may be blessed (1).

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