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RELIGION, ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN NIGERIA BEFORE 1960

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country and policies and public opinion are sometimes influenced by this reality. This detail is further accentuated by the fact that the northern part of the country and the southern regions appear to favour different religions and—by extension—worldview, therefore, sometimes conflict on national issues. While these conflicts have been extensively captured by a plethora of literature, the foundational cause have not received sufficient attention in terms of how the mix of foreign religions and ethnicities—reinforced by colonial politics—influenced identity construction, which in turn determined views on politics. It is against this background that this paper investigates the extent to which the introduction of Christianity and Islam shaped ethnic identities in Nigeria to the extent of influencing the peoples' worldviews. It is argued, therefore, that the relationship between religion, ethnicity, identity and colonial policies set the background for Nigeria's external politics in post-colonial Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria sits on a geographical area of 923,768 km^2 and is home to more than 350 ethnic groups. These groups existed long before the coming of the Europeans and had their distinct identities. Of these ethnicities, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba are the most prominent. This prominence owes much to the numerical advantage of these groups as well as their geographical location, both of which were leveraged upon by the British to elevate these ethnicities above all others during the colonial era. That is to say, people north of the Niger/Benue Rivers became broadly seen as Hausas; those to the west as Yorubas; and those to the east as Igbos. While it is true that there are other ethnic groups in each of these regions, it is safe to suggest that, broadly speaking, those others, while maintaining their distinct identities, have a lot in common with the dominant ethnic group in their region. For example, while the Ibibio are culturally different to Igbos, they are far more similar to them than they are to the Yoruba in the West. The same could be said in relation to the Jukun and the Hausa. This explains why political analysis in Nigeria is usually geared towards this categorization.

Be that as it may, long before the introduction of Islam or Christianity, people of all these ethnic groups were very religious. They practiced African Traditional Religion. In fact, as Kalu puts it, 'Religion dominates the roots of the culture areas of Nigeria... Thus, all activities and instruments of governance

and survival were clothed in religious ritual, language, and symbolism.'[1] Kato goes on to add that 'religion is the single most important factor of traditional African life.'[2] It is, therefore, not a surprise that when foreign religions were introduced to Nigerians they generally thrived. More than that, as we will find out, these new religions were potent enough to shape the people's identities. And these shaped identities, influenced by colonial policies, set the background for Nigeria's domestic and external politics in post-independence Nigeria.

Arrival of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria

The arrival of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria is already well documented and need no elaborate discussion here. However, a brief recount is central to our study. Islam originated in Arabia through the preachings of Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. In the same century, it was spread to North Africa during the caliphate of Umar b. al-Khattab. Since there were close relations between North Africa and West Africa, as a result of the trans-Saharan trade that existed from the 8th century, the practice of Islam in North Africa was bound to rub off on West Africa. There were several caravan routes that connected North Africa with West Africa, prominent among them were the West and East routes. Kanem-Borno was an area that benefitted from Islam's presence through the Eastern trade route.[3] As a consequence Kanem-Borno was, as early as the 7th century, the first area in Nigeria to have had contact with Islam.[4] Hausaland was the next to come in contact with Islam. The introduction of the religion there owes much to the coming of the Wangarawa (a group of Mande Dyula Muslim merchants and clerics from Mali), who came first to Kano for trade in the 14th century. However, a protracted struggle between the adherents of Hausa traditional religion, on one hand, and the converts of Islam on the other, which prevented the prevalence of Islam there. The same was true of other Hausa states like Katsina, Gobir and Zazzau. It is important to mention, however, that while Islam was growing somewhat steadily in Hausaland its political influence varied according to the degree of commitment to it by the rulers and their differing circumstances.

From the north Islam started spreading south and the next notable area to come in contact with Islam was the area inhabited by the Nupe, which was just south of Hausaland and north of Yorubaland. It is important to mention that the trans-Saharan trade route that connected North Africa to Kanem-Bornu and the Hausa states also extended to Nupeland. This warranted early Islamic influence in Nupeland by the mid 17th century.[5] The same Nupeland was instrumental in transmitting Islam to Yorubaland. For example, Samuel Johnson mentions the presence of a Nupe Muslim emissary, Baba Yigi, who was sent to Oyo sometime in the 17th century by another Muslim cleric, Baba Kewu, to admonish Alaafin Ajiboyede because of his highhandedness.[6] In fact, Gbadamosi has explained that before the end of the 18th century Yorubas were not just receivers of the Islamic faith but propagators of the faith to neighboring

domains like the Dahomey.[7] It is worth stating, however, that despite the inroads of Islam in Yorubaland, they remained only a minority at this point.

Apart from trade, the 1804 Usman dan Fodio Jihad was another factor responsible for the spread of Islam in Nigeria and its attendant political significance, particularly across Hausaland. Usman dan Fodio, the leader of the Jihad, had been the most important Fulani cleric in Gobir, the northernmost and most militant of the Hausa kingdoms. The kings of Gobir, like other Hausa monarchs, were at least nominally Muslims, and for a time Usman dan Fodio had been employed at their court. He then used the influence he had gained to develop a Muslim community of his own, some miles away from the capital, governed according to the strict principles of law preached by the Qādiriyyah religious order. The kings of Gobir gradually came to the conclusion that they could not afford to tolerate this independent jurisdiction within their unsettled kingdom and began to take steps against the Muslim community. By 1804 the situation became such that Usman felt he had no alternative but to declare a jihad and to adopt the role of an independent Muslim ruler. Discontented Fulani and oppressed Hausa peasantry throughout Hausaland welcomed the opportunity to rid themselves of oppressive rulers and arbitrary taxation. Within three years almost all the Hausa kings had been replaced by Fulani emirs who acknowledged the supreme authority of Usman dan Fodio.[8] Sokoto and Gwandu emerged as the twin capitals of a new Fulani empire (or Caliphate). As a consequence Fulani aristocracy had taken over the Hausa system of government and had brought it into line with the principles of Islam as stated by Usman dan Fodio. The movement was taken further south. For example, Fulani and Hausa clerics intervened in a succession dispute in the old kingdom of Nupe and by 1856 had converted it into a new emirate ruled from Bida.[9] There had also been considerable Fulani and Muslim penetration into northern Yorubaland, and, in about 1817, the ruler of Ilorin, Afonja, rashly invoked Fulani and Hausa aid in his rebellion against the king of Oyo. His new allies, therefore, took over and the new emirate of Ilorin was created, and the disintegration of the Oyo Empire was accelerated.

In the end, the only serious check to Fulani conquest in northern Nigeria was in Borno whose Leader El-Kanemi, who insisted that the Fulani clerics did not have a unique right to interpret Muslim law for his people. That the jihad was unsuccessful in Borno did not mean, however, that the kingdom was less Islamic than the Hausa states since Islam was already a state religion there. Also, the jihad could not spread southwards beyond Ilorin and northern Yorubaland partly because of the terrain, which militated against the use of pack animals (the means of transportation of the jihadists) and the Yoruba army repelling the Fulanis in the battle of Osogbo in 1850. Colonial incursion in Nigeria starting from the mid 19th century put a paid to any future jihad in Yorubaland. The jihad also had no impact on the Igbos in the southeast. While there is no evidence of the presence of Muslims in Igboland before the 19th

century, official records actually attribute the advent of Islam in the southeast to the arrival of Hausa and Nupe hunters as well as through the Adamawa slave merchants who came to the East for slaves and ivory around the 1870s.[10] There was, however, no form of Jihadist territorial conquest. Crucially, however, Usman dan Fodio, and more especially his children, firmly imposed on the conquered territories an Islamic theocratic state and the application of the Shari'a law in all its ramifications. This only happened in the north, and this meant that the northern part of present day Nigeria in which the jihad had thrived now had a different Islamic orientation and culture compared to other parts of the country where Islam was practiced.

Unlike Islam, Christianity, a monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, had its introduction in Nigeria through two different epochs. The earliest contact with Christianity could be traced to the Portuguese Catholics in the 15th and 16th centuries. This was when the kingdoms of Benin and Warri, in southern Nigeria, had early contacts with Christian Europe. The introduction of this foreign religion was initially greeted with enthusiasm from the native rulers, but such excitement was to quickly wane in a matter of decades to the extent that the Portuguese attempt to establish Christianity in this region ended in a miserable failure. Reasons for such failure ranged from the association of these early missionaries with slave trade to the paucity of missionaries in that region.[11] It was not until the mid 19th century that the introduction of Christianity had a strong footing in the country. This second wave of missionary enterprise owed much to the activities of both the Protestant missions and the Catholic missions.

The foundations of Protestant missionary activities in Nigeria were laid in the Niger expedition of 1841. Delegates were commissioned by the British Crown to negotiate with important local chiefs treaties for the abolition of slave trade and to replace such trade with a friendly commercial relationship between the British and the natives of Africa. Trade was not the only item the British Government was interested in the instructions given to the leaders of the expedition, the government enjoined them to tell the native rulers 'that the Queen and the people of England profess the Christian religion and that by this religion they are commanded to assist in promoting goodwill, peace. And brotherly love, among all nations and men; and that in endeavoring to commence further intercourse with the African nations, Her Majesty's Government is actuated and guided by these (Christian) principles.'[12] This was particularly the reason why the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) of the Anglican Church was very involved in the expedition. Accompanying the troop was a certain Bishop Ajayi Crowther, who was an ex-slave boy of Yoruba parentage that had been based in Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, between 1793 and 1842, about 500 freed-slaves in Sierra-Leone had returned to Badagry and other parts of Yoruba land. The immigrants at Badagry had sent urgent messages and earnest entreaties to the missionaries in Sierra Leone to send Christian teachers.

The response to this appeal was the birth of missionary activity in Yoruba land. That same month Reverend Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary society arrived in Badagry and worshipped with Reverend Birch Freeman.

On 29 December1842, Townsend left Badagry for Egbaland. He was received by Oba Sodeke of Abeokuta. By this time Townsend had formed a partnership with Samuel Ajayi Crowther who was instrumental in communicating with the natives in Yoruba language. The Missionaries established Mission Station in Abeokuta on 27 July, 1846. Abeokuta also served as a home for those freed slaves that settled there. While in Abeokuta, they practiced Christianity. They also preached the religion to others who were not Christians. Abeokuta was made the Headquarters of the other Mission Stations for Yorubaland. The CMS also opened missions in other prominent Yoruba kingdoms like Ibadan (1852), Oyo (1857) and Ife (1858). By 1857 Bishop Crowther had effectively become the head of the Niger Mission. The mission covered all the peoples of the Niger River from its delta northwards up to and including the northern states of present-day Nigeria (But excluded missions in Lagos and other Yoruba towns). In 1857, accompanied by twenty-six clergymen who had returned from Sierra Leone, including Ibo-speaking James Taylor, Ajayi Crowther embarked on a journey which led to the creation of a mission in Onitsha and another at Igbebe at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers, opposite Lokoja.[13] He also succeeded in establishing a flourishing mission at Bonny in 1865, another at Brass in 1868 as well as the Kalabari mission in 1874.[14]

Crowther and his followers also attempted spreading Christianity into the Islamic north. There they attempted to convert Muslim rulers such as Masabu of Bida, and also tried to obtain permission to open mission stations in these Muslim dominated areas.[15] They also lured these Muslim rulers with financial benefits from Britain if they agreed to promote the existence of these Christian missions in their domain.[16] Both Masabu and his successor, Umar, were opened-minded and interested, and therefore agreed to continue to protect the Christian mission in Bida. A similar strategy was adopted further north, but with less success. In the end, though a Christian presence was established north of the Niger River there were few converts in contrast to the situation further south. Clarke records that by the mid 1880s there less than 4000 Christians in the region.

Though the CMS was the most successful of the Protestant Christian missions in spreading Christianity in Nigeria, there were others that tried to achieve the same feat. For example, the main mission Church in Calabar during the 19th century was the Presbyterian Church, which was introduced to Calabar by the Jamaican-based Irish missionary, Hope Waddel in 1846. The Presbyterians spread out from Calabar to Creek Town, Duke Town and Old Town among other places. It was not until 1853, however, that their first convert was baptized. They also had very little success converting the local rulers. Similarly,

the Southern American Baptist mission, which arrived in southwestern Nigeria in 1850, did relatively little to encourage the growth of a self-governing Church in the region. In fact, controversy and dissension within the Church over questions of the training of clergy and racial discrimination led to secession from the mission Church and the establishment of the Native Baptist Church in the late 1880s.[17] Just as missionary activities had not been limited to the CMS, so also was missionary work in Nigeria not limited to the Protestants, but included the Catholic Church.

The history of Catholic missions in Nigeria is not as eventful and elaborate as that of the protestant churches. However, they also were actively involved in the land. The Catholics arrived a little later than the protestant missionaries and owed their spread and successes to a certain Father Borghero, who had initially thrived in spreading the Catholic mission in states like Sierra Leone and Dahomey. Between 1860 and 1862, the Italian Roman Catholic Father, Borghero who was stationed at Whydah in Dahomey paid a visit to Abeokuta and Lagos. And on reaching there, he met some Nigerian Catholics who were freed slaves from Brazil and had settled there. In addition to this, Father Borghero was also surprised at meeting some Brazilians who had been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, but, were living in Lagos. He was therefore encouraged when he saw some of his natives and Nigerians who were adherents of the Roman Catholic faith in Lagos. He consequently established a mission station at Lagos. But, it had no permanent Priest. He made Lagos one of the out-stations of Ouidah in Dahomey. By 1862, Father Borghero sent a Catechist named Padre Antonio who was a freed slave from Sao Tome Island to the Lagos Mission.[18] There was also the growth and expansion of the Roman Catholic faith towards the Niger Delta area, Igboland and Yoruba states.

In the end, as a result of both the Protestant and Catholic missions Christianity had by the end of the nineteenth century been firmly rooted in Nigeria, particularly in the southern part of the country. In Yorubaland, Protestant Christianity had thrived, but there was also a Catholic presence there. Here, adherents had to commingle with the already existing Muslims there. In Igboland the Catholic Christianity had thrived the most even though there was the presence of Protestant Christians as well. The fact that Islam had recorded little success here meant that the region was mainly inhabited by Christians. In the North where Islam had been a state religion Christian missionaries had very limited success in penetrating the area. Even so, there were minority Christians in non-Hausa Fulani areas the region; there were more of them in the part that today constitute the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Religion and Political Identity in Pre-Colonial Nigeria

The arrival of Islam and Christianity in today's Nigeria had a profound influence on the political identity of the people. This is particularly the case with the Hausa-Fulani in the North and the Yoruba in the Southwest. An

examination of the evolution of these two diverse groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides an illustration of two diverse ways in which the relationship between ethnic and religious identities can evolve into a political identity. The evolution of these identities underscores the relationship between power and group identity. This was to have profound consequences on their interpretation of national events even till date.

The Hausa-Fulani Identity

The fact that the Fulani jihadists of the early nineteenth century largely created a monolithic theocratic state among the Hausas states in the north has already been established in this chapter. It becomes apposite to mention here that the Toronkawa, the 'Fulani' clan to which Usman dan Fodio belonged, did not consider itself to be Fulani until after the start of the jihad.[19] Indeed, the Toronkawa distinguished themselves from the Fulani although they did acknowledge a relationship with them. In fact, they claimed to be part Fulani and part Arab.[20] The Fodio family also did not only claim descent from Prophet Mohammad's family, but also rights of first settlement in the Gobir area. In other words, they saw themselves as part of the political community of Gobir as well as members of an international community of Islamic scholars.

The Toronkawa inter-married with members of other scholars, including Kanuri and Haabe, as did Dan Fodio himself. They were well-integrated into the entire northern Nigerian scene, serving as highly respected advisors to the Emir of Gobir and as excellent Islamic clerics. The Toronkawa indeed also had an understanding of the political and religious reality of the period. Their international ties were extensive and events in other parts of Africa did not go unnoticed, including the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, which was to a large extent, a reaction to the pressures of European imperialism.[21] It was this spirit of fundamentalism that precipitated their early nineteenth century jihads in Hausaland. Prior to these jihads, Islam had only existed in the Hausa states only as one religion in a religiously heterogeneous area, and the Hausa rulers were tolerant of this casual and flexible approach to religion in their domain insofar as it did not threaten their authority.[22] Such a laid-back approach to religion, however, infuriates fundamentalists of any persuasion; and the Toronkawa clerics were no different. Indeed, there were legitimate claims of abuses that justified the jihad against the Hausa rulers, but these abuses may have existed before without being checked. It was in fact the spirit of the age, aided by a number of historical forces that focused Toronkawa attention on these abuses and provided them with the excuse needed to justify their revolution (jihad).

Although the cries for reforms during the jihad were at first couched in the universalistic language of Islam, the movement relied on members of diverse ethnic and class groups. So did the 'counter-revolutionary' forces that supported Gobir. Even members of Dan Fodio's family, including two brothers, fought on the emir of Gobir's side against their brother.[23] It follows, therefore, that the

jihad was not solely an ethnic or religious confrontation. It is true that ethnicity and religion were part of the important factors, but both were related to the question of power. Hendrixson captures it succinctly when she notes that, 'if before the jihad the Toronkawa practiced the craft of religion, after it they practiced the craft of politics.'[24] It was also as a consequence that they could now be called 'Fulani' as readily as Toronkawa.[25]

It was in a bid to consolidate their power after the success of the jihad that the Toronkawa increasingly came to rely on their Fulani allies. A lot of Toronkawa leaders had lost their lives in the 'holy war' to allow for pure Toronkawa leadership of the newly established Sokoto Caliphate. The Fulani also needed to be rewarded for serving as allies in the jihad. Consequently, the Toronkawa began to define religious and political affairs increasingly in ethnic terms in the new Islamic state. With time, many of the Fulani leaders began to abandon not only Fulfulde, but many Fulani cultural characteristics. Instead, they adopted the Hausa language and many of its cultural elements. In the process a new Fulani identity emerged: one that had components from the original Fulani identity, the Toronkawa and the Hausa identity, all cemented by the 'pure' practice of Islam as defined by the ruling elite. It was this emergent identity that came to be known during the colonial era as 'Hausa-Fulani'. As we will find out, building on the political-religious-ethnic situation already present in northern Nigeria was part of the British political genius.

Yoruba Identity

The Yoruba are highly urbanized people. This in turn makes them very flexible. Thus, for the Yoruba, it is not necessary to have one religion or one set of lineage rules governing them. Most Yoruba rulers were divine kings reputed to be descendants of Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba race. His home, Ile Ife has a ritual significance for all Yoruba. This ritual significance of Yoruba divine kings remained important even when Islam became prominent in Yorubaland and prominent kings practiced Islam. For example, a nineteenth century king of Oyo, Atiba, may have acted like a Muslim in Ilorin, but after his coronation, he reinstated the annual cycle of ancient rites and also built temples for the gods (*orisa*).[26] In the same vein, Atiba also restored the ancient cult of the ancestral kings in Oyo.[27] In fact, the Alafin's position as the head of all cults gave him a powerful bargaining position in the political life of Oyo. Religion, therefore, like the strength of one's lineage, was one of many elements that could lead to political power. Consequently, it was not unusual to find Yoruba families composed of people of not only different Muslim brotherhoods, but also various Christian denominations with, perhaps, some adherents of traditional religion found in the mix.

Put differently, while lineage was still an important aspect of Yoruba political system, a man's skill in playing by the different rules, and circumventing them if necessary, ultimately determined his rise to power. It is, therefore, safe to

generalize that principles of ascription and achievements were found in the Yoruba political system.[28] The system, thus, rewarded those who were able to manipulate its various strands. Consequently, the successful leader was marked by flexibility and the ability to juggle various interests while forming alliances among competing factions. It follows, therefore, that Yoruba political leaders have tended to treat Islam and Christianity as dispensable political symbols. Neither of these two foreign religions seemed integral to Yoruba self-ascription nor to the ascription by others of what it means to a Yoruba. In other words, both Islam and Christianity offered options to a people long familiar with the value of flexibility in political life. The two religions, at least at first, proved open to syncretism and spread through Yoruba agents; and their compatibility with the strong traditional base of Yoruba religion aided their acceptance. Thus, it was possible to be a Yoruba and a Christian or a Yoruba and a Muslim. To put it succinctly, Yoruba identity never rested on being either Christian or Muslim; a member of either religion had valid claims to the identity.

The manner in which the two religions arrived Yorubaland, coupled with the political and economic environment of the time, also helped shape this Yoruba identity vis-à-vis religion. From the south there was the pressure and attraction of European imperialism, which was symbolized by Christianity. Thus, Yoruba Christians used the religion as a means to secure entrepreneurial opportunities for themselves.[29] From the north, the Yoruba people were faced with the military imperialism of the Fulani. While maintaining their moderate older tradition of Islam that had existed before the coming of the Fulani, the jihad also influenced the conversion of a number of indigenous people. Also, following the Yoruba civil wars, displaced people were attracted to the dignity and spiritual powers of the Fulani mallams, and by the business opportunities associated with Muslim traders. Consequently, having been situated between Christian Europeans and Muslim Fulani groups, it was necessary for the Yoruba in the nineteenth century to be both Muslim and Christian; that is, to have alliances with both groups and their various denominations. Also, habitually, these alliances crisscrossed families, ensuring safety in case of changes in political power.[30]

Igbo Identity

The Igbo identity, particularly in terms of religion, cannot be discussed in the same breath with the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba. This is mainly because of two reasons: firstly, Igboland was largely an acephalous society, where 'identities' and political cooperation was basically restricted to the clan or village level. Secondly, unlike the Yoruba the region was not exposed to any major Fulani jihadist incursion, which would have gone a long way in shaping or establishing a *religio-political* identity. While Christianity thrived there it was never at any point seen as a state religion; rather, it was relegated to the private domain. However, it is worth mentioning that this Christian faith did shape the people's worldview, howbeit at an individual level and not as a

collective. Christianity was therefore not integral to the self-ascription of the Igbo.

Colonialism, Religion and the Construction of Power

It is common knowledge that there is a strong dose of racism attached to the European conquest of Africa. The British colonialists in Nigeria were no different; they shared in the beliefs of the Darwinian World. The colonial officers were imbued with the evolutionary anthropology of their day. This evolutionary anthropology posited people at various stages of development. As a consequence, 'Hamitic' peoples, presumably, were further advanced than various 'Negroid' peoples. For this reason, Lord Lugard, the foremost British colonialist of his time, perceived Northern Nigeria, in contrast to Southern Nigeria, as the location of the finer races, from which the lighter-skinned Fulani race was specifically chosen as not only superior to other ethnic groups, but also as having the right of leadership in Nigeria.[31] In fact, 'British colonial policy was maintained on the assumption that a conjectured light-skinned race, who unfortunately got themselves mixed up by marriage with the darker races, were the country's natural rulers.'[32] Accordingly, the colonial task was, on the one hand, to enhance the natural right of leadership of these higher races, and through them, on the other hand, to move Nigeria into the highest level of civilization.

In addition, Islam, the religion of the so-called finer race (the Hausa-Fulani), was considered by the British colonialist a better form of paganism than the fetishism of the primitive South.[33] The preference of Islam to Christianity by Lugard and his colleagues, however, hinged more on their perception of the colonial mandate than on their religious persuasion. Indeed, at the time of colonial rule, Islam was an aristocratic religion in the north. It had not yet seeped down to the common man. In fact, the rapid spread of Islam in the Hausa-Fulani region from about 5 percent of the population in 1900 to about 80 percent after independence, is as a result of deliberate British colonial policy.[34] Fredrick Lugard, despite representing what he called 'the most Christian nation' of his age was not a Christian. He did not find it difficult, therefore, to encourage the spread of Islam and to rule through Muslim rulers through the policy of 'Indirect Rule'. This was so because they did not have the resources, financial or human, to rule the vast area of Northern Nigeria directly. As a consequence, the Fulani identity was strengthened and their definition of the North as Islamic accepted by the British colonialists.

While the British favoured the north as an Islamic entity, the colonial state was neither in favour of Muslim or Christian education that was not geared towards the realization of their agenda in Nigeria. Hence, they neither destroyed nor developed the Islamic education system, though they appropriated the cultural and socio-political ethos of the Islamic faith it met in northern Nigeria to serve its interests. Similarly, the colonial state neither destroyed the Christian

missions in southern Nigeria nor spared them from restrictions even though the State, to sustain itself, relied heavily on the services of the products of Christian education system.[35] In place of both the Islamic and the Christian education systems, the colonial state instead initiated a secularized system of education. It was secularized mainly because religion was made an appendage — something merely recognized 'somewhat tardily' — rather than the hub of the colonial state's education policy.[36]

After Lugard left Nigeria in 1918, the secularized educational policy of the colonial state and its antecedents, the Indirect Rule Policy and the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria, were already well rooted in the country. So also was the administrative division of the country into three unequal groups of provinces. Such partitioning was to the advantage of the favoured Islamic North in comparison with its Western and Eastern counterparts in the Christian South.[37] By the mid-1930s and the 1940s after the colonial system had been firmly consolidated, given the barest minimum of contact between the different parts of the country, especially between the North and the South, the colonial system fostered religious and socio-political animosity, suspicion, and all sorts of divisive practices between the North and the South.[38] For instance, while the Islamic North perceived the Christian South as 'invaders' and inferiors and labeled them with derogatory terms such as *'nyamiri'*, the Christian South generally looked down on the average Northerner as unintelligent, conservative, a puppet in the hands of British colonialists, and, therefore, a clog in Nigeria's progress.[39] For example, Non-Muslims, especially those from the South, were conditioned to live in the segregated areas (the Sabon Gari quarters) of the northern cities. Also, the northern indigenous Christians were perceived as traitors to the Northern system; especially their religious affinity with the Christian south which was perceived as posing a political threat to the Fulani-Islamic hegemony.[40]

Despite the advantage the Hausa-Fulani Islamic leadership had in the colonial state, they did not use their position to oppose the secularized education advanced by the colonial state, neither did they make enough effort to modernize or even improve its koranic schools.[41] Moreover, the standard of Christian civilization, particularly in the South, became a threat to the ruling Northern elite. Enwerem has identified three main factors that brought the threat of Christianity nearer home to the Islamic ruling class. First, there was the emergence of a class of educated Northerners, products of the earliest successful Christian missionary efforts, like Dr. R.A.B Dikko.[42] The second development was the emergence, in the 1940s, of opposition politics in the North, led by those who had passed through the colonial education system and were in touch with the radical politics in the South, like Aminu Kano's Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). The third and final development, happening at about the same time as the members of NEPU were denouncing the ruling class,

was Dr. R.A.B. Dikko, a Fulani Christian, founding a political organization, Jamiyar Mutanen Arewa (Association of Northern People, JMA).[43]

The combination of these events led to an instant reaction from the Islamic ruling class in the North. First, the ruling class had to project a credible image of itself to the people. To do so, the blame for the backwardness of the North was shifted from the British to the Christian Southerners, especially those domiciled in the North.[44] The second strategy was to displace the NEPU politicians as well as stifle whatever political ambition the Christians might have. This strategy was carried out on two levels — religious and political. The religious level involved a depiction of the NEPU politicians as hypocritical Muslims in so far as they associate with unbelievers and sought worldly benefits from them.[45] The political level involved a portrayal of the Christians as unbelievers who were 'southerners' at heart but dressed in northern 'sheep's clothing.'[46] In this connection, the Islamic ruling class, aided by the British colonial officers, took over Dikko's political organization and transformed it into a political party, the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC).[47]

The transformation of the JMA into NPC was necessary to prevent Dikko, being a Christian, from translating his political ambition into something un-Islamic, or against the Hausa-Fulani hegemony.[48] Under the full control of the Islamic ruling class, the NPC was tacitly transformed into a religious party. The Sultan of Sokoto, the grand patron and religious leader of Nigerian Muslims, also became the patron of the NPC. Ahmadu Bello, a product of the colonial state's school system and a descendant of Uthman dan Fodio, the leader of the Islamic jihad of 1804, became the party leader. Having consolidated the party for national politics in the 1950s, the NPC had to tone down their political rhetoric and incorporate representatives of various ethnic groups in the North who were ready to work under the Islamic character and leadership of the party. Thus, Northern Christians like George Ohikere, Michael Audu Baba, Jolly T. Yusuf, Rev. David Lot, among others, became a part of the party. In view of this background, it was not surprising that the NPC was able to assume leadership of the country's first post-colonial government.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that the pattern with which Islam and Christianity arrived Nigeria and the geographical space they found prevalence was hugely significant in terms of identity construction and politics. Islam arrived mainly from the north through trade with the Arabs, and its presence was further consolidated by the Fulani jihadists who turned the northern Hausa states into a theocracy. The spread of the religion southwards was not as successful with the exception of some Yoruba towns. The exact opposite can be said about Christianity, which was introduced mainly by the Christian missionaries through the coastal areas. While the religion had a strong presence in the south, its successes in the north were limited. This scenario went on to shape ethnic

identities, particularly that of the Hausa-Fulani, who defined themselves as Muslims. The Yoruba tradition of religious tolerance, coupled with the strategic advantage of having links with both Islam and Christianity in the nineteenth century, allowed for the thriving presence of both religions. But this did not necessarily mean that the Yoruba defined their identity in terms of any of these religions. Since Islam had very limited successes in Igboland—and also because this was an acephalous society— religion had very little to do with their identity construction as well.

The British colonialists found the status quo very compelling and compatible with their ambitions and, therefore, maintained the structure. They were particularly impressed with the Fulani elite rule in the north and the loyalty they commanded through their Islamic culture. Inevitably, the 'Niger area' was divided into the Northern and Southern protectorate with both having several differences. This division bred animosity between the largely Muslim north and the Christian south. The British also appeared to have a preference for the northern Hausa-Fulani, who through their party, the NPC, gained political leadership of the whole country in post-independence Nigeria. This set the tone for the politics and external relations that was to follow in the ensuing decades.

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