From Multiculturalism to Humanistic Secularism: Harnessing Nigeria's Cultural Diversity

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Abstract

The Nigerian state is deeply polarised along ethnic and religious contours, with a widening gulf between the poor masses and the rich few, which reflects the culpability of the ruling elite. However, the actual character of the class struggle is often blurred by the politicization of ethno-cultural and religious differences in a manner that undermines political order and national unity. Ethnicity and religion are thus usedby the political class to manipulate the citizens' consciousness of their ethno-cultural and religious identities to serve the masked parochial class interests. This has made the political arena very volatile and conflict-laden. Stemming the tide of this incessant clash of values and violent ethno-religious conflicts requires a creative adaptation of multiculturalism and secularism. This paper defended a sophisticated understanding of state in the globalization era, which includes citizens' appreciation of their cultural differences, mediated by consciousness of their shared humanity and a strong commitment to the ideals of a civilized community. It argued for a genuinely humanistic secularization of state affairs, harnessing of the country's diverse cultural heritage, and promotion of religious accommodation rather than cultural assimilation and the interference of religion in state affairs, or vice versa.

Key Words: multiculturalism, humanistic secularism, cultural diversity, cultural integration, national unity

The Background

Nigeria's population as at 2015 was estimated to be 182.2 million. Although there have been controversies over the accuracy of this figure, with virtually every group claiming to be undercounted and others inflated, the exact population cannot bet much less or higher than that. Ethnographic studies reveal that the country has no fewer than 250 ethnic and linguistic groups. J. S. Colemanidentified 248 language groups, and a more recent study by Barbour

revealed 395 distinct language groups (Coleman 1986, p.15; Barbour cited in Amucheazi 1980, p.48). Other studies delineated some 250 to 300 ethnic groups (Mbeki-Ekanem 2010, p.xxiii; Amucheazi 1980, p.17). These people practise different religions, the major ones being Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Islam is dominant in the northern part of the country, Christianity in the southern part, and both are expanding rapidly in terms of membership at the expense of ATR.

The rapid expansion of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria accentuates the aggressive rivalry between the two religions and the cultures they embody, namely Western and Muslim civilizations respectively. This expansionist tendency is reinforced by cross-currents of entrenched religious tenets and cultural sentiments that often ignite violent conflicts with ethnic and religious undertones. That partly explains the superlative incidence of such conflicts in communities, states and regions of the country where there is a significantly high population of adherents of both religions, for example Jos and southern Kaduna in northern Nigeria, and between the northern and the southern regions of the country. Lately, it has also manifested in the form of attack on farmers mostly in Christian dominated regions by Fulani herdsmen.

The state has taken some strategic, cultural, and constitutionalmeasuresto stem the tide of these conflicts either directly or indirectly. The measures include: setting up of panels of inquiry to investigate the causes of specific conflicts;adoption of a more aggressive policing;introduction of citizenship education at primary and secondary school levels and the mandatory teaching of Nigerian cultures in tertiary institutions in the country; and prohibition of state religion, which is an expression of *secularism*as a political doctrine. In some cases where the actors in the crises have acquired sufficient might to undermine state power, the state has had to negotiate with those actors or the larger group which they purport to fight for, especially if their actions have a significant toll on the state's economic resources, political stability, and foreign image. For example, the Federal Government of Nigeria has at various times tried to negotiate with the Niger Delta insurgents, Niger Delta leaders, and the Boko Haram militia in north-eastern Nigeria. It is important to note that these conflicts are not all of the same nature and their main causes are thus not exactly the same. However, they are all relevant in providing the analytical ingredients for evaluating the state's approaches to their resolution.

Policing and conflict resolution are, no doubt, conventional measures for promoting security and peaceful coexistence in societies. The inclusion of certain compulsory courses inschool curricula at various levels is also a needful measure to reduce friction and enhance intergroup cohesion. They are dimensions of the multicultural approach to public policies in culturally and religiously diverse societies. Nevertheless, multiculturalism may lead to moral relativism, anomie and other unintended consequences if it is not anchored on an integrative social theoryor doctrine that canregulate public conduct across cultural and religiousboundaries, and unite the people as members of a political community. That theory is what I have called *humanistic secularism*.

Judging by the provisions of Section 10 of the Nigerian constitution, which states that "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as a State religion" [Federal Republic of Nigeria, *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria(As Ammended)*], Nigeria is in principle a secular state. Ironically, there are state chapels and mosques, and religious creeds are normally declared at official gatherings in public institutions and state events, often times to the exclusion of one religion or the other; states sponsor pilgrimages. All thesenegate the ideals of secularism. In this paper, I have articulated

the idea of humanising secularism and showed the need for thatin culturally and religiously diverse states with particular reference to Nigeria.This is in furtherance of an important task of philosophers in our age, as urged by George Francis McLean, "to look with new insight into their lived cultural heritages for resources with which to humanize modern ... social progress, and to enable these to promote rather than supplant the riches of their cultural identities and traditions" (cited in McLean *et al*. eds. 2008, p. vii).

The task urged by McLean is a perennial one, because every age presents an array of social and culturalchallenges that cannot be adequately addressed by the philosophies of the preceding age. Thus, there is a need in the present age for the articulation and adaptation of what Edmund Husserl called*Weltanschauung philosophy*, which is "the expression of the wisdom, value, world-view, life-experience, etc., of a culture at a given epoch... [the aim of which is] to provide theoretical answers to the problems of life in a given age (Omoregbe1991, p. 34). Perhaps the most dominant feature and challenge of the postmodernist era is the tension between the homogenising effects of globalism and the pluralising tendencies of multiculturalism. We have been caught up in the web of Huntington's prediction of the clash of civilisations and the philosophers are challenged to think out of the box.

The Clash of Civilizations and the Appeal of Multiculturalism

Civilization is here understood as an embodiment of society, its culture, and the dominant spirit that inspires a people. As elucidated by Samuel P. Huntington (1993),

> A civilization is a cultural entity. Villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity. The culture of a village in southern Italy may be different from that of a village in northern Italy, but both will share in a common Italian culture that distinguishes them from German villages. European communities, in turn, will share cultural features that distinguish them from Arab or Chinese communities. Arabs, Chinese and Westerners, however, are not part of any broader cultural entity. They constitute civilizations. A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people (p. 22).

A civilization may consist of subcultures and can accommodate multiple religions, but that is only in so far as the religions agree with the fundamental values that define that civilization.

The earliest use of the phrase "clash of civilizations" may be traced to a book by Basil Mathews entitled *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations*, published in 1926. It derives from "clash of cultures," which was already in use during the colonial period and the *Belle Époque* (a period in European history beginning from the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 to the outbreak of World War I circa 1914). Albert Camus used it in 1946 and Bernard Lewis in 1990 in an article entitled "The Root of Muslim Rage." Samuel P. Huntington proposed the term in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, developed it as a hypothesis in a 1993 article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" and formulated the thesis more elaborately in his book published in 1996 with the title *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Huntington's hypothesis was a response to a 1992 article by his former student Francis Fukuyama, who argued in his book, *The End of*

History and the Last Man, that the advent of Western liberal democracy may signal not just the end of the Cold War,but the end of history as such and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.On the contrary, Huntington's hypothesis is that a new post-Cold War political order was emerging in the post-Cold War era and that the fundamental source of conflicts in this era will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. Rather, "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (p. 22). He further stated that:

> Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (Huntington 1993, p. 22).

Huntington identified ten "major" world civilizations, namely: (i) Western (ii) Orthodox (iii) Islamic (iv) Islamic/Hindu (v) Hindu (vi) African (vii) Latin American (viii) Sinic (ix) Buddhist, and (x) Japanese.

Here, we are examining Western versus Muslim civilizations. In this context, Islamic civilization is not the same as Islam as a religion, although they are intricately related and the former may be regarded as more or less a cultural adaptation of the latter. Religion is understood here as "man's response to his awareness of the existence of a Supreme Being who is his creator and how this response affects his relationship with other creatures" (Udoidem 1997, p. 153).

Postcolonial Nigeria has witnessed countless ethnic and religious conflicts of varying scales. However, apart from the Civil War of 1967-1970 which was clearly a secessionist struggle by the people of eastern Nigeria, other major conflicts prior to the beginning of the 21st century had been triggered by factors bordering on religion, ethnicity, contest over land and territorial rights, and struggle for minority rights.

The occurrence of violent religious conflicts in Nigeria has been mostly between Christians and Moslems in the northern states, especially in Local Government Areas and communities where the Christian population is large enough to make them assert their presence and their religious freedom. In many cases, however, the conflicts start as disputes between two small neighbouring local communities or ethnic groups over territorial rights, but usually escalate to spread to other groups, sometimes assuming the character of a religious war. This is largely true of the areas where religious and ethnic boundaries tend to coincide, as it is in the 'middle belt' and the southern fringe of the former Northern Region of Nigeria notoriously exemplified by ZangonKataf and the adjoining communities in Southern Kaduna.

Interethnic and interreligious hostilities and conflicts between different groups in Nigeria date way back to the colonial period, and intensified during the First Republic and afterwards. OkwudibaNnoli observed with respect to the character of the political class during the colonial period that they only paid lip service to the desirability of national unity and their political actions belied their hypocritical "condemnation of ethnic particularism," as they institutionalised ethnicity and ethnic identity "by making them a basis for economic participation within the regional enclaves and, to a lesser extent, for political participation at both the regional and national levels" (Nnoli 1978, p. 154).In a similar vein, "by 1953, the major political parties in the country, the NCNC, AG, and NPC had become associated with the three major ethnic groups, Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, and the three major regions, East, West, and North respectively" (Nnoli 1978, p. 158).

One glaring instance of interethnic feud during the colonial period was the hostility of the NPC-NCNC coalition to the opposition AG and the political intrigues that led to the creation of the Mid-West State in 1963 out of the minority area of the Western Region, which some observers perceived as transcendingnormal partisan politics and verging on the threshold of ethnicity. The first population census in independent Nigeria, which was held in May 1962, was also widely alleged to have been manipulated by the northerners and, expectedly, that sparked off hostilities between them and the southerners. Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwaubani*l* (2005) observed and noted that:

> The census was of crucial importance since the allocation of seats in the Federal House of Representatives was based on population. In other words, its results would determine who or what part of the country would dominate the country's politics. Rumours indicated that the census results that were not yet published gave the North a larger population than the two southern regions combined. The AG and NCNC which feared that the North would, as a result of the census, continue to dominate the country bitterly attacked the census results (p. 257).

Ethnic prejudices and rivalry also contributed largely to the July 1966 counter-coup in Nigeria. RaphUwechue (1969) has noted that even though "the intentions of the young men of the *January Coup* were most probably national" (p. 58), "In many non-Ibo hearts, the one-sided pattern of killing (in the first military coup in January 1966) aroused suspicion that perhaps the coup was an attempt by Ibos to seize power in the country" (p. 60).

It is probably true as Uwechue opined that the intentions of the *January Coup* plotters were national, but misunderstood by the non-Ibos. But, although there is some shred of evidence to suggest that the motives of the plotters were indeed national, there werealready deep-rooted pre-existing ethnic prejudices and resentments which were further festered bythe "one-sided pattern of the killing" in the coup. The aftermath of that was:

> ...the Northern revenge—or rather, "over-revenge"—as witnessed by the May Riots, the July Counter-coup and the massacres of the September-October 1966. A similar misunderstanding of the intentions of the Federal Government after these massacres led many Easterners, especially Ibos to believe that what had happened was a planned attempt to exterminate them (Uwechue1969 p. 63).

As stated above, there has been a long history of mutual interethnic suspicion, resentment and rivalry in Nigeria, which culminated in the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War as a direct result of a "Declaration of Independence" from Nigeria by the Ibos ('Biafra') on 30 May 1967 and the determination of Nigeria to clampdown on the secession. This view is also expressed by a former Head of State and former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo, who stated in his memoirs on the Nigerian Civil War that "The war itself was the culmination of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued Nigeria from independence. That uneasy peace and stability had their genesis in the geography, history and demography of Nigeria" (1980, p. ix).

The Arab Spring that began in 2010 also seems to have had, and continues to have, a disturbingly decisive contagion effect on thealready repulsive state-group as well as intra- and inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria. At present, several years after Nigeria's independence and the civil war, interethnic and interreligious hostilities remain the major obstacles to political stability and social order in Nigeria. Devotees of Islam, especially the fundamentalists, tend to suppress other faiths and even consider violence against nonconformists as a holy mission.

Another worrisome dimension of the clash in recent times is the unprecedentedly high incidence of violent clashes between "Fulani" herdsmen and local "indigenous" farmers in various parts of Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it would be mistaken to see the Boko Haram fighters in northern Nigeria as a merelocal terrorist or militia group. I propose, instead, that "Boko Haramism" be analysed within the broader context of the clash of civilizations which, in fact, is poignantly conveyed in the meaning of the group's name. The name Boko Haram is a conjugation of a Hausa word "**Boko**" (meaning "fake," which refers to secular Western education) and an Arabic word حَرَام (transliterated as "**haram**" meaning "forbidden"). Thus, the name is translated as "Western Education is a sin" or "Western influence is a sin." Similarly, the insurgency in the Niger Delta is, in some sense, a misguided and inappropriate expression of a deep sense of injustice against the region. That partly explains why there is a considerably higher level of toleration of corruption, marginalisationand various other forms of social injustice at the intra-ethnic level than when the same "evils" are perpetrated, or perceived to be so perpetrated, by other "outsiders."

Another perturbing manifestation of interethnic disaffection and hostility in Nigeria is the recent threat by the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) to boycott gubernatorial election in Anambra in November 2017 and general (national and state) elections in the entire south-eastern states in 2019 if the Federal Government of Nigeria fails to conduct a referendum on the exit Biafra from Nigeria. In reaction to the Ibo agitation for secession, a coalition of northern youth groups issued a notice to the Ibo in all northern states to vacate the region within three months, after which they would be forcibly evicted and all their landed property in the region confiscated. The eviction notice was supported by the Northern Elders Forum, whose spokesman, Professor Ango Abdullahi, declared that the notice by the northern youths was an expression of the north's "anger and frustration over the irresponsible behaviour of Igbo (Ibo) youths and elders ... (and that) ... We all know how the first coup was hatched against the north. We know who masterminded that political coup and the aftermath" (NaijaNews.com).

Some members of the political class exploit and even exacerbate the existing ethnic and religious cleavages in order to woo voters from various divides of the electorate where they can be favoured by strategic whipping of ethnic and religious sentiments. This further intensifies and increases conflict along ethnic and religious contours.

Given Nigeria's geography, history and demography, a multicultural approach is, no doubt, an appropriate social policy model forharnessing its cultural diversities and for diluting the forces that trigger clashes between different ethnic groups. Yet, I consider it appropriate at this point to highlight some attendant fundamental challenges and unintended consequences of multiculturalism, one of which is that it almost inevitably tends to lead to cultural relativism and, in turn, moral relativism.

Multiculturalism, Cultural Relativism, and Moral Relativism: The Nexus and Issues

The term multiculturalism has both its broad and narrow conceptualizations and has been used to mean different things in different countries and contexts (Scanlon Foundation). Amy Gutmann (1998) defined the term somewhat broadly as "the state of a society or the world containing many cultures that interact in some significant way with each other" (p. 171). Culture is used here to mean "a human community larger than a few families that is associated with ongoing ways of seeing, doing, and thinking about things" (Gutmann 1998, p. 171). In this sense, multiculturalism simply denotes a social phenomenon or ethnographic

feature, which may not necessarily influence public affairs and state policies. In other words, a state, country, or society can be regarded as multicultural irrespective of whether public policies and intergroup relations are conducted on the basis of the existing diversity of cultures.

In the narrower sense, the term refers toa social policy framework that grants equal status or recognition to multiple cultural traditions to coexist within a country as a way of dealing with cultural diversity, especially in nation-states. Australia, Canada, and the United States are classic examples of multicultural states; however, the meaning of the term 'multicultural' differs significantly across these climes.Australian policy of multiculturalism can be traced back to the 1970s during which the Whitlam government adopted both the Canadian name and policy of catering to a multilingual population (Jupp, cited in Scanlon Foundation Multiculturalism Discussion Paper 2018). Yet, asJupp noted, the Canadian meaning of multiculturalism is not exactly the same as the Australian. Rather,

> ... being a bi-cultural and bi-lingual nation, Canada had a sound basis for adopting an approach that recognised the continuation of cultural inheritance. However, in Australia, ethnic minorities were not based on long-resident settlement groups – instead, they comprised newly arrived immigrants. As such, in Australia, less emphasis was placed on cultural maintenance (Jupp, cited in Scanlon Foundation Multiculturalism Discussion Paper 2018).

The Australian concept of multiculturalism also differs from the way it is conceptualised in the United States, where the policy was largely borne out of civil rights and constitutional protections. In the United States, multiculturalism included ethnic quotas in public appointments and adjustment of electoral constituencies in accordance withthe ethnic distribution of the population.

In this paper, I shall adopt an adaptation of the Australian concept of multiculturalism, according to which migrants have constitutionally guaranteed rights to belong to Australia while also keeping their respective birth country's customs and traditions. In this sense, multiculturalism is culturally integrative rather than assimilative. Rupert Murdoch, an Australian-born American media mogul, is quoted to have observed that Australiais "a great model for the world – a prosperous, multicultural society of people living together in peace and freedom" (Soutphommasane).

Like Canada, Australia and the United States, the Nigerian constitution provides for a federal system of government, which is unarguably more suitable for multicultural societies than any other structural arrangement. However, Nigeria differs from these countries in some important ways that are antithetical to multiculturalism, one of which is the anomaly in its present model of federalism and the structure and character of the federation itself.Both the 1960 Independence Constitution and the 1963 Republican Constitution were federal in character and established three (and from 1963 four) semi-autonomous federating regions, each of which had its constitution and governmental institutions (Osieke, www.thomasfleiner.ch/.../Nigeria3.pdf). The regions enjoyed substantial latitudes of autonomy in sync with the legalistic cum institutional requirements of a federal system, but the involvement of the military in politics led to a highly centralised or unitary governmental structure which is inappropriate for a multicultural state because it has a tendency to foster the dominance of one group or some groups over others (Nbete2006, p.106).

The original federating regions were later split into component states that have replaced the regions and, thus, seem to constitute the federating unitsexisting vis-à-vis the local

governments. But the constitution provides for three tiers of government—central (federal), state, and local—with a fiscal arrangement that is anything but a true fiscal federalism. Too much power is concentrated in the centre and the relationship of the federal government to the states and the local government is unclear. Federal representation is on the basis of federal constituencies and senatorial districts comprising varying numbers of local government areas with different cultures lumped together. This has led to unequal and uneven representation at the centre, which has hugely undermined interethnic relations in Nigeria.This also goes on at the state and even local levels. Given the correlation between political and economic power, the pervasive desire for the latter increases both intergroup and interclass competition for access to, and control of, political power at different levels.

Cut-throat competition for state resources is further exacerbated by the institutionalisation ofunjust resource allocation regimes, which intensify intergroup hostility and other centrifugal social forces. To be sure, systemic injustice along ethnic boundaries and intergroup rivalry and hostility foster intra-group solidarity, undermine national unity and reinforce ethnic politics. As I have noted elsewhere, although ethnic consciousness is a primordial property of intercultural relations, "it is usually reinforced by specific historical forces usually of a political, ideological, social and economic nature" (Nbete2006, p. 79). In an atmosphere of intergroup rivalry and hostility, ethnic consciousness takes the form of ethnocentrism and the culture of the dominant group tends to assimilate or eclipse others. If, on the contrary, the state and its institutions uphold the people's cultural rights, then that may promote either cultural relativism, which also has its own challenges, or an uneasy tolerance which also tends to trigger the development of social fractures in society.

Simply put, cultural relativism is "the idea that conceptions of right and wrong differ from culture to culture" (Rachels 1999, p. 21). In other words, it holds that different cultures have different moral codes. William Graham Summer notes the point in cultural relativism thus:

> The "right" way is the way which the ancestors used and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. It is not heldsubject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways. It is not outside of them, of independent origin, and brought to test them. In the folkways, whatever is, is right. This is because they are individual, and therefore contain in themselves the authority of the ancestral ghosts (Summer, cited by Rachels 1999).

As stated in the above passage by Summer, cultural relativism rejects claim to the objectivity and universality of moral truthsand regards moral prescriptions as more less cultural codes. Thus, it urges, we should not (or ought not to) use one culture as a standard for evaluating another. Rachels distinguishes the following six claims made by cultural relativism:

1. Different societies have different moral codes.

2. There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another.

3. The moral code of our society has no special status; it is merely one among many.

4. There is no "universal truth" in ethics; that is, there are no moral truths that hold for all peoples at all times.

5. The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.

6. It is a mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures.

Rachels points out that each of the six propositions above is independent of the other, and that some of them are not correct. It is also to be noted that some of the propositions are statements of fact without any prescriptive tenor. Yet, the appeal of cultural relativism hinges on what has been called the cultural difference argument, which involves a leap from a factual proposition as premise to a conclusion about the status of morality. That is, from the premise that "Different cultures have different moral codes," it proceeds to conclude that "Therefore, there is no objective 'truth' in morality."

Cultural relativism has at least three serious consequences on social progress and our moral architecture. First, as noted by Rachels (1999), taking cultural relativism to its logical conclusion would lead at best to a "sophisticated, enlightened attitude" (p. 25) and at worst to *moral relativism*, which could engender moral apathy and the triumph of evil. Moral relativism in a general sense is the view that "moral claims are true only relative to some standard or framework" (Neil Levy 2002, p. 19). Levy distinguishes three basic kinds of moral relativism, namelydescriptive relativism, moral-requirement relativism, and meta-ethical relativism. By descriptive relativism, "we simply mean that, as a matter of fact, different cultures or (rational) individuals hold different fundamental moral principles, which sometimes conflict" (Levy 2002, p. 20). Moral-requirement relativism is "the view that what is morally required of individuals varies from group to group, culture to culture, and so forth" (Levy 2002, p. 20). What this simply means is that an individual'smoral conscience is (or ought to be) shaped by the standard of morality held by the individual's group, culture, experiences, etc., and that standard alone determines what is morally required of the individual, which may be at variance with what is morally required of another individual from a differentgroup, cultural background, etc.Meta-ethical relativism is the view that moral judgements are neither absolutely true nor false. Consider a culture (call it culture X) in which women who give birth to multiple babies, such as twins or tripletsare banished and the babies killed, and another (call it culture Y) which considers such an act as barbaric and morally reprehensible. The logic of cultural relativism allows a member of culture Y to judge only the acts of the members of his own culture and prohibits him from condemning a member of culture X based on the moral codes of culture Y. To evaluate the moral status of the actions of members of another culture, one needs, as Summer urges, to refer to their folkways. Levy (2002) has noted that "These three kinds of moral relativism are importantly related to each other. In fact, each of them builds upon the preceding one"(p. 21).

Multiculturalism entails moral-requirement relativism, neither of which canonly succeed in promoting mutual *tolerance* and reducing conflicts among people of diverse cultures in the short term, but fails to foster genuine mutual tolerance and*respect* for each other's culture. Tolerance is more or less a containment of resentment, whereas recognition is an affirmation that a person or group is worthy of respect. And, according to Charles Taylor,

> our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if people or society around them mirror back a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (cited in Levy 2002, p. 63).

A people whose culture is merely tolerated and not respected would feel bad and suffer psychological as well as psychic distortions. At the same time, resentment builds up among those who are either compelled by state policies and regulations or manage on their own to endure or tolerate the cultures of others. Ironically, we cannot respect if we do not judge, and if we are to judge we must be able to condemn; but both cultural relativism and moral relativism forbid us from making judgments about the moral status of any culture from the standpoint of another.

If we cannot (or ought not to) judge certain elements of one culture as condemnable or, at least, inferior to the other, then there will be no moral order and social life will be in a topsy-turvy state. Without any established standard of morality, there will be no justification for the role of foreign intervention missions by countries and international bodies, such as the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, among others. Yet, as we are aware, without such interventions injustice and immorality would have surpassed its current scale in the world today. After all, as Edmund Burke rightly opines, evil triumphs if good men do nothing. That is not to suggest, however, that these interventions are never in breach of some justifiable and widely held moral principles. Nay, sometimes they amount to flagrant abuse of power and wanton interference.

Another logical implication of cultural relativism is that the rightness or wrongness of an action will be determined by simply and merely considering the conformity or nonconformity of the action with the standards of our society. According to this test, in determining what is right and what is wrong, all one need do is to ask whether the action is in accordance with the code of the moral agent's society. As Rachels (1999) rightly noted,

> This implication of Cultural Relativism is disturbing because few of us think that our society's code is perfect; we can think of ways it might be improved. Yet, Cultural Relativism would not only forbid us from criticising the codes of other societies; it would stop us from criticising our own. After all, if right and wrong are relative to culture, this must be true of our own culture just as much for other cultures (p. 26).

Since, according to Cultural Relativism, the morality of a person's actions derives from the moral codes of that person's society and not those of any other, it follows that one cannot look elsewhere for the standards by which the actions can be evaluated.

Furthermore, cultural relativism calls the idea of moral progress into doubt. In practice, we observe that culture is dynamic and, in most cases, social reformation is considered to be an expression of moral progress and cultural advancement. After all, "Progress means replacing a way of doing things with a better way" (Rachels 1999, p. 26). Although some social changes are for the worse, some are for the better and change is a *conditiosine qua non* for growth and development. One change that has been widely welcomed in virtually all parts of the globe is the widening scope of women's role in society. But, if cultural relativism is correct, this change and, indeed, any change at all, will be adjudged as condemnable since they negate the extant moral codes of society.

Moral progress consists in advancing towards the ideals of the society. But if the moral status of actions ought only to be evaluated by cross-checking the actions with the primordial moral architecture of society, then there will be little or no room for social reforms. Social reformers such as Socrates, Isaac Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwahave sought to change their societies for the better by canvassing for some change in the status quo towards a better way of doing things and sometimes for the redefining of its ideals. But if cultural relativism is correct, then the

'reformer' is forbidden fromproposing any alternatives to the society's ideals since those ideals are by definition correct.

The Concept and Essence of Humanistic Secularism

My main task here is tripartite—to indicate as clearly as possible what is meant by the coinage humanistic secularism, to highlight its essential ingredients, and to show that it would enrich multiculturalism and rescue it from its shortcomings. But the two words from which it is coined, namely *Humanism* and *secularism*, both have deep historical roots and variants, and their meanings have been largely distorted.Thus, although I will not engage in an etymological analysis of these concepts,I think it would be helpful to indicate the sense in which they are understood here.

First, what is Humanism or Secular Humanism as it is sometimes called? The American history Professor Edward P. Cheyney noted that Humanism has meant many things:

> It may be the reasonable balance of life that the early Humanists discovered in the Greeks; it may be merely the study of the humanities or polite letters; it may be the freedom from religiosity and the vivid interests in all sides of life of a Queen Elizabeth or a Benjamin Franklin; it may be the responsiveness to all human passions of a Shakespeare or a Goethe; or it may be a philosophy of which man is the center and sanction. It is in the last sense, elusive as it is, that Humanism has had perhaps its greatest significance since the sixteenth century" (*Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*p. 541).

As the above passage suggests, the meaning of the term is largely determined by the context in which it is used. Our focus here is on the philosophy of Humanism, aptly defined by T. Z. Lavine (1984) as "A cultural and intellectual viewpoint which affirms the dignity and worth of human beings, in respect of the power of human reason to know the truths of nature and the capacity of the human spirit to determine, express, and achieve what is good for human beings" (p. 81). Corliss Lamont (1949), an American socialist philosopher and 'spokesman' of Humanism defined it briefly as "a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy" (p. 13). One of its hallmarks is modesty, and "it does not try to appeal to intellectuals by laying claim to great originality, or to the multitude by promising the easy fulfilment of human desires either upon this earth or in some supernatural dream world" (Lamont 1949, p. 13). Instead, it accommodates the various aspects of human nature and seeks to set free the emotions from cramping and irrational restrictions. Despite its celebration of reason as "the final arbiter of what is true and good and beautiful, it insists that reason should fully recognize the emotional side of human beings.

Humanism is a many-faceted philosophy, whichcaptures the temporal dimensions of human consciousnessby utilising the lessons of history and the richness of the philosophic tradition in addressing the challenges of the present. It seeks to "organize into a consistent and intelligible whole the chief elements of philosophic truth and to make that synthesis a powerful force and reality in the minds and actions of living persons" (Lamont 1949, p. 13).Lamont spelt out ten features which he considers to be the central postulates of Humanism. They are as follows:

i.   The belief in a naturalistic metaphysics or attitude toward the universe that considers all forms of the supernatural as myth; and that regards Nature as the totality of being.

ii.   The belief that we human beings are an evolutionary product of the Nature of which we are a part.

iii. The reposing of ultimate faith in humankind, premised on the belief that human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems, through proper application of reason and scientific method.

iv. Opposition to all theories of universal determinism, fatalism, or predestination, and the belief that human beings, while conditioned by the past, possess genuine freedom of creative choice and action, and are, within certain objective limits, the shapers of their own destiny.

v. The rejection of a transcendental foundation of morality and belief in an ethics or morality that grounds all human values in this-earthly experiences and relationships and that holds as its highest goal the this-worldly happiness, freedom, and progress—economic, cultural, and ethical—of all humankind, irrespective of nation, race, or religion.

vi. The belief that the individual attains the good life by harmoniously combining personal satisfactions and continuous self-development with significant work and other activities that contribute to the welfare of the community.

vii. The belief in the widest possible development of art and the awareness of beauty, including the appreciation of Nature's loveliness and splendour, so that the aesthetic experience may become a pervasive reality in the lives of all people.

viii. The belief in a broad social programme that stands for the establishment throughout the world of democracy, peace, and a high standard of living on the foundations of a flourishing economic order, both national and international.

ix. The belief in the complete social implementation of reason and scientific method, which entails full freedom of expression and civil liberties in all areas of economic, political, and cultural life.

x. Opposition to dogmatism and, thus, belief in the unending questioning of basic assumptions and convictions, including its own.

To be sure, a few of the above postulates of modern and contemporary Humanism do not square with the classical Greek andRenaissance Humanism which, I propose, should be blended with some new elements to yield what Udo Etuk calls the New Humanism. Such adaptation is in line with the logic of Humanism. As a self-critical philosophy, Humanism is creatively dynamic. I shall take up the task of articulating the mode of that adaptation shortly.

Let is now look at secularism. This term, too, is not limpid and has different forms. It is sometimes confused with Humanism because of their semantic affinity. Barry A. Kosmin draws a distinction between *secularity* and *secularism*, stating that the former refers to individuals and their social and psychological characteristics, whereas the latter relates to the realm of social institutions (1). In this paper, the term secularism is understood in the sense used by Kosmin, that is, as a political doctrine; but we shall use secularity to refer totheconcomitant feature of secularism as a doctrine. To give a simple definition of secularism, it is a political doctrine that stresses the separation of the state from religion and the influence of any religious group. The forms of secularism "vary with the religious configuration in which they develop" (Kosmin 1).

Secularism may be classified as "strong" or "soft" based on "attitudes towards modes of separation of the secular from the religious and the resulting relationship between them" (Kosmin 2). All forms of secularism entail the process of *secularization*, described by Max

Weber as the "disenchantment of the world"—a characterization of the process of rationalization he adopted from the poet Friedrich Schiller (Kosmin 4). Harvey Cox describes secularization as the "deliverance of man 'first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reasons and his language,'… the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols" (Cox, cited by Kosmin 4).

Because secularism and the process of secularisation developed differently in the different countries (America, Europe, and Asia) where they exist in well-established forms, there is also a difference in how the terms are interpreted in the different contexts. Nigerian model of secularism seems to be based on the American interpretation of the term as "opposition to an established religion and religious hegemony in the political or public arena" (Kosmin 11). In practice, however, the reverse is the case. There is need, therefore, to rearticulate the doctrine and anchor it on the right philosophy in line with its principles. Despite the varied forms of secularism, it has the same broad set of objectives as expressed by John Rawls. As Charles Taylor rightly remarked,

> The late-Rawlsian formulation for a secular state cleaves very strongly to certain political principles: **human rights**, **equality**, the **rule of law**, **democracy**. These are the very basis of the state, which must support them. But this political ethic can be and is shared by people of very different basic outlooks (what Rawls calls "comprehensive views of the good") (25, emphasis mine).

The goal of promoting human rights, equality, the rule of law and democracy pervades all secular states. Yet, conceptions of equality and the foundation and moral content of state laws in many secular states negate the goal of the doctrine.

Humanistic secularism differs from secular humanism. To draw this distinction, it is important to stress that secularism is a political doctrine which seeks to produce a certain political culture; whereas humanism is a viewpoint aimed at cultivating a certain attitude to life. Secularism devoid of humanistic content is a negation of the human spirit. The humanization of secularism, which yields what I have called *humanistic secularism*, will foster consciousness of human dignity and liberate the human spirit. It upholds the defence of human rights and equality, constitutionalism and democracy. As apolitical doctrine, humanistic secularism will promote cultural integration, peaceful ethnic coexistence and national unity.

Now, since the New Humanism, which is endorsed in this paper, does not accommodate some of the features of modern and contemporary Humanism, it is necessary to indicate the essential features of the New Humanism that are required to enrich secularism. One is concern with the humankind. According to Etuk (1999), "To some extent, it might be correct to say that all of Humanism can be summed up as one big concern with man" (p. 159). It seeks to promote the happiness and wellbeing of humankind.

Secondly, unlike the Old Humanism which constitutes itself into a religion and reserves no room for the supernatural, the New Humanism accommodates God and the realm of religion. But humanistic secularism, while recognizing the centrality of religion in human affairs, urges us to separate the realm of religion from the state. The state should protect the religious rights of individuals in the state.

Another relevant canon of Humanism is the theme of fraternity among humankind. The moral order must be based on values that promote the dignity of all humankind, irrespective of creed, culture and race. Secularism without humanism woulderode the moral foundations of the state and thus strip citizens of their happiness and human dignity. Humanism stresses the point that

"Our common humanity transcends any artificial grouping we may make, no matter how deeply these groupings are rooted in history and tradition" (Fagothey1976, p. 387)

Humanism in all its forms also recognizes the reality of the external world, which it regards as the domain of science. Our physical environment is an integral part of the external world, and our humanity places on us a moral responsibility to refrain from reckless exploitation of the environment. Fagothey defended this humanistic view thus:

> If Justice requires a fair distribution of nature's goods among people now living and love for one's fellowman requires a concern for his welfare, there is no reason that this justice and love should include all those living in various parts of space but exclude those living at different ages of time (p. 385).

The application of humanistic principles and values in the exploitation of the environment and distribution of the products of such exploitation will also reduce conflicts and thus promote unity.

Conclusion

As our study has shown that multiculturalism is a suitable social policy framework in multi-ethnic and religiously polarised states. Secularism is also an appropriate political doctrine. However, Nigeria and some so-called secular states tend to practise religious pluralism in the name of secularism by giving, or claiming to give, equal state recognition to different religions. More often than not, minority religions are neglected. Even members of those that are recognised tend to jockey for access to, and control of, state power as well as to impose their moral codes on the state or regions of the state where they constitute a majority.

Multiculturalism, as we have seen, could also lead to some unintended consequences if it is not regulated by a political culture that promotes social justice, human dignity and the fraternity of humankind. Multiculturalism mayhinder the emergence of a national culture as the melting pot of the diverse ethnic groups in a state. It also tends to engender moral relativism and an erosion of essential human values, which sometimes leads to anomie. It promotes tolerance and not true respect among people of diverse cultures. But national unity and the unity of humankind entail our ability to judge and condemn values. The humanisation of secularismin a multicultural milieu will provide a solid philosophical foundation for politics and governance in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious statesuch as Nigeria.

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