Review of *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*

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Book review of *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*

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Both Islam and Christianity have had significant impacts on the making of African societies, from the time of Africa’s first encounters with these two religions. Even more significant is the role these religions have played in a multi-religious environment such as Nigeria. Given that both religions have played a vital role in the shaping of society, politics, and ethnic identity in Nigeria, Olufemi Vaughan's analysis is a welcome addition to Nigerian Studies. Drawing from an array of disciplines, Vaughan presents a complex scholarship that examines the intersection of history, religion, politics, ethnic struggles, and nation building, contributing to a growing body of literature and discourse on the role of religion in all of these diverse fields of study.

The book is divided into two sections and nine chapters. The main premise of the work is that religion (focusing on Islam and Christianity) lies at the root of modern Nigeria. Beginning with an analysis of the impact of Islam and Christianity on the three major regions of Nigeria, it outlines how these interactions have shaped Nigeria. The second section deals with the crisis that has emerged with the imposition of Sharia law in post-colonial Nigeria and how it has complicated issues of nationhood and contestations for power in various parts of the country.
The author begins by recounting the significance of Islamic jihad from the Sokoto Caliphate and Christianity from the Yoruba country in Southwestern Nigeria in the nineteenth century, both of which provided the impetus for major transformations in Nigeria. These processes were in place even before the imposition of colonial rule. He extends his analysis with a critical examination of the politico-social structure in Moslem northern Nigeria and its intersection with the British indirect rule system. While the pacification of Northern Nigeria curtailed the power of the old aristocracy, Britain did not attempt to dismantle the Islamic structures and social institutions of the Caliphate. Thus, indirect rule in the north was a negotiated encounter, in which the old and new powers collaborated to control the local population, preserve Islam, and extend political hegemony over the rest of the region.

While Christianity did not play as overtly a political role as Islam in the making of colonial societies in Nigeria, still it acted as a collaborative hegemony, challenging the Hausa-Fulani influence in the non-Muslim sections of the Middle Belt and providing opportunity for non-Muslim elements in the north to acquire a new religion and ideology which sought to limit the influence and power of Hausa-Fulani rule. Meanwhile in the southwest, Christianity re-ordered Yoruba socio-political systems, creating a syncretic worldview drawing from Yoruba traditions.

The Moslem-Fulani structures were incorporated into the political power systems that emerged during decolonization. The long-term consequence of the challenge that came from the South and Middle Belt was an exacerbation of the intolerance between the Moslem north and the rest of Nigeria. Of even greater significance was the role of Yoruba Christian identity in the transformation of the Yoruba ethno-national consciousness towards the end of the colonial period. Indeed, religion was infused into political struggles at both the regional and national levels, becoming even more pronounced on the eve of independence. Thus, "ethno-regional and communal power brokers mobilized collective political action by speaking to narrow aspirations" (113).

The convergence of Pentecostalism and mass conversion, along with social, political, and economic conditions in modern Nigeria is explored within the context of an expanded implementation of Islamic law (Sharia) in some northern Nigerian states--generating new discourses around religion and identity. The persistent attempt by Hausa-Fulani elements to extend Sharia law in twelve predominantly Muslim states in northern Nigeria, despite democratic opposition to this attempt, has raised the level of political discourse and pitted constitutional advocates of the circularity of the Nigerian state against those who advance the right of states with predominantly Muslim populations to impose their own religious identity.

In last two chapters, the author extends the argument surrounding Sharia law and the stiff opposition that has come from the south, Middle Belt, and northern minority Christians. The politics of Sharia has further complicated the political structure and trajectory of political alignments in Nigeria, exacerbating the divisions between the Muslim north and the Nigerian Christian population. The debate at the government and non-governmental levels over expanded Sharia reveals the deep divide in the country and the way in which ethnic ideology has shaped the discourse and perspectives about belongingness/non-belongingness and the outsider/insider perspective.

Although weighted heavily toward the religious struggles in the North and the Middle Belt and the influence of religion in the southwest, Vaughan's work draws upon a deeper analysis and framework
that situate the influence of religion in Nigeria within the nineteenth-century Islamic movement and the emergence of Christianity in the latter part of the century, examining how these processes have shaped regional and nation politics in Nigeria. Scholars will appreciate the excellent and critical analysis presented in this book.