

**Thesis Title:** Rethinking Discourses on African Identity in the Light of Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This research is a critique of the discourses on African Identity in the light of the religious fundamentalism in Nigeria. It has been developed by using the valuable insights of such writers as Blyden, Cesaire, Senghor, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Nwoko, Onyeocha, and Oyebola. Recognizing the weakness of their analysis as their emphasis on the need to return to some pre-colonial, communal African *Weltanschauung*, this research acknowledges the importance of the theme of cultural synthesis which cuts across their theories. Articulating different views of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria, it also contrasted the social milieu within which the discourses on African identity arose with that accompanying the emergence of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria. Whereas the former was set on the colonial and post-colonial era, the latter also began before the colonial era, but later solidified in the mid 1970s when as Falola and Kukka noted that a paradigm identity shift occurred among Nigerians. Nigerians began to see themselves as Muslims and Christians, and no longer in their ethnic or tribal identity (Kirk, 1998). Such a paradigm shift implies religious Ethnonationalism, as argued in this research, led to religious intolerance and bigotry in the Nigerian context. It is based on this that the researcher calls for a rethink of the theme of cultural

synthesis in order to delineate the communal *Weltanschauung* of Nigerians, and of an acknowledgment of the instrumental role played by religion as a platform for acquiring ideologies which influence identity, prevalent in the thoughts of Edward Blyden, Senghor, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Nwoko, Onyeocha, and Oyebola on African identity. This research extols intellectual revolution aimed at deconstructing and contextualizing theological thought to promote the African communal *Weltanschauung*. It also argues that providing greater chances of political participation and protection of the rights of Nigerian citizens irrespective of their religious denominations, and forums to effectively engage the Nigerian civil society in debates and campaigns on the sanctity of human lives, would help avert the manipulation of their religious sensibilities and identities, and possible imposition of new identities on them.

Lastly, this research also supports the need for Nigerians to rethink the meaning of their national identity as Nigerian citizens in relation to the faith communities they belong to, as the twin concepts of identity and community become broadened and challenged by the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism- borrowing Bauman's terminology, the "liquid modernity" of post modernism wherein the used-to-be-stable norms and routines that keep communities together now seem unstable and conflicting. This is important because now many cultural conflicts and extremism are orchestrated by both inside and outside structures, and the philosophical question remains how can Nigerians resist the imposition of new identities and blend the seemingly conflicting values existing in their socio-political and religious spheres of their civil society. That is what this research wishes to demonstrate.