3 April 2015

Beyond Secularism: Sectarian Conflict and the Resilience Challenge for the African State

Abdelwahab El-Affendi[1]

Africa is currently at a pivotal turning point, following two decades of dramatic progress in economic development, political stability, improved governance and inspired regional cooperation. A number of emerging security crises, in particular the recent upsurge of violent conflict, together with its 'religious' justification, rogue character and cross-border spill-overs, is threatening stability and economic well-being in many countries. The threat is compounded by its impacting a number of the pivotal states on the Continent, including Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and Libya, thus threatening to turn some of the major pillars of continental stability architecture into liabilities. It is imperative that the nature of the threat be accurately diagnosed in a timely manner, and dealt with in a measured way without a counterproductive overreaction.

The spread of violence reflects multiple failures in African state and society, including failure of the state in securing the loyalty of all its citizens, compounded (and often caused) by the failure of political and intellectual elites to provide inclusive political and moral leadership. No less important is the failure of religious leaders, institutions and movements to provide credible spiritual and moral leadership that could channel religious commitment into constructive channels. The sectarian diversion of religious sentiment into violence or the search for short term gains for partisan actors is, fundamentally, a crisis of religion and religious leadership.

The fragmentation of the actors and the predominantly 'privatized' character of the violence partly reflected the relative lack of external state support. (It is no coincidence that the disintegration of

---

[1] *Dr Abdelwahab El-Affendi is a political Scientist, student of Islamic Thought. He has written extensively on Islam and Modernity, Islam and Politics, Islam and Democracy, Multiculturalism, Islam in the West, Muslim Intellectuals and Sudanese and Middle Eastern Politics. He is currently the Coordinator, Democracy and Islam Programme, University of Westminster, UK.*

Somalia followed the agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia during the first IGADD summit in 1986 to stop supporting rebels in both countries.) This made it imperative on rebels to seek local sources of finance and fall back on narrow ethnic mobilisation. It also limited the restraining influence of external sponsors, which partly explains the excessive brutality, as well as the recent

salience of religious mobilisation. The violence also involved mainly the marginalised extreme, with no credible intellectual leadership or coherent political project, except for pure rage.

Ethnic mobilisation has been, and still remains, the primary driver of conflict in Africa. However, rebel groups found religion to be a vital resource, even better than 'blood diamonds' for resource-starved rebellions (or beleaguered regimes). However, both ethnicity and religion have a tendency to veer out of control once mobilised in conflict, as Somalia, Sierra Leone or the LRA, graphically illustrate.

The modern African state has failed to contain these trends because it remains neither genuinely national nor credibly secular. Regimes which engaged in coercive secularisation (as in Somalia, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, etc.) ended up taking control of religious institutions and becoming deeply involved in dictating to people what to believe. The backlash is responsible for most of the current violence. Regimes which suppressed pluralism to avoid ethnic and religious strife usually ended up secretly –or not so secretly- feeding strife through blatantly partisan policies (or by just forcing the disenfranchised to fall back of primary solidarities). Democratisation (or the collapse of despotic regimes) had often been blamed for the upsurge in violence, or the disintegration of states and political communities. However, the real causes have to be looked for in the repressive policies which kept resentments and tensions pent up in a pressure cooker scenario that was bound to blow up.

Religion, Conflict and the African State

Religion figures prominently in the narratives framing the more destructive conflicts currently plaguing the continent, in particular in Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Sudan. However, many analysts have argued that the underlying failure is the state's lack of inclusiveness and its failure to fulfil its basic functions of providing a decent life for its citizens. The salience and politicisation of religious identity was seen by some as an outcome of the 'failure of modernity', which resulted in uprooting large groups without delivering any compensating benefits (Ellingsen, 2005: 307). Conflicts that look like 'religious' rebellions against the domineering 'secular' state, or reactions against the imposition of religious hegemony, are in fact linked to the failure of the state to address concerns regarding inequality and lack of fair representation of disadvantaged groups in national institutions (Haynes, 2007: 308-9). This diagnosis finds support in related observations that the current waves of violence in many African states had been preceded by a pervasive 'exiting from the state', which took many forms: mass resort to the black

market, migration, the formation of self-support kin/locality groups and networks, or adherence to maverick religious groups, etc. (Osaghae, 1999).

Similarly the weak-state syndrome (weak capacity, weak legitimacy, defective governance, lack of cohesive national identities, and external and internal vulnerability), has been blamed for disruptive violence. The syndrome produces its own 'political logic, where 'internal conflicts are the deliberate creation and maintenance of 'war economies''. Elites in such states adopt various strategies (including exclusivist politics, patrimonialism, ethnic mobilisation, corruption, etc.) to navigate the treacherous waters of state fragility. These strategies frequently –and predictably- generate conflict (Jackson, 2002: 35-44). Patrimonialism, or the tendency to use the state as a private resource by ruling elites, and using these resources to secure support among privileged constituencies, was also seen as an explanatory variable to explain the weakness of the African state and the rogue nature of recent wars that reflect this feature (Kawabata, 2006; Reno, 2011).

According to these analyses, the secular-religious divide is not the core factor in ongoing conflicts, but the incapacity of the state to fulfil its core functions effectively. Religious conflicts have been rare in Africa, at least until recently, as many studies have indicated. Often apparent religious conflicts could be symptoms and consequences of 'struggle among competing sects of elites for political power and ethnic favouritism' (Bamidele, 2014: 39). Even where studies appeared to pinpoint religious factors in conflict, this is linked to a 'politicisation of religion', rather to religion as such (Basedau *et. al.*, 2011: 752-54; Bamidele, 2014: 39). The difficulty of decoupling ethnic and religious identities (not to mention class identities) in the fault-lines dividing the belligerents is also reiterated by many (Haynes, 2007).

In this context, the exhaustive study by Basedau and his colleagues (2011), covering all major conflicts in Africa between 1990 and 2008, sheds important light on the contexts in which religion plays a role in conflicts. Noting that the empirical findings on religion as a mobilization resource in conflict found 'little support for the claim that a higher politicization of religion automatically increases the (internal) conflict risk' (Basedau *et. al.*, 2011: 755), the researchers attempted to empirically test hypotheses about links between religious mobilisation and political violence. They concluded that: 'Religious and ethnic identity overlaps are the most significant and strongest predictors for both armed and religious armed conflict'. Polarization across religious lines is significant only in cases of religious tension or feelings of religious discrimination and tension (Basedau *et. al.*, 2011: 767).

This finding is supported by the observed fact that in instances of presumed religious conflict in Africa (e.g. Sudan, Somalia or Nigeria), ethnicity was the basic marker of the dividing lines, and religion was introduced later to buttress ethnic claims. I have explored in depth elsewhere the complex interplay between ethnicity, religion and political entrepreneurship in Sudan, amassing

sufficient evidence to show that mutual insecurity among polarised religio-ethnic groups is what drives the conflict. Religion was used as a weapon in inter-elite conflict in the North, which in turn antagonised the non-Muslim South and worsened the conflict there. This in turn increased the insecurity of the hegemonic riverain elite, leading to more use of religious mobilisation, generating more conflict and disintegration in a deadly 'spiral of insecurity' (El-Affendi, 1990; 1991; 2011; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c).

Nigerian politics similarly illustrates the complex interplay and mutually reinforcing politicisation of ethnic, religious and regional identities. Religion has always been a subtext in the ethno-regional rivalry that erupted in the 1966 coups and subsequent violence. However, the religious factor became more explicit with the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in 1976 (a year which witnessed the replacement of a Christian president by a Muslim pro-democracy general, who was promptly assassinated). A number of overtly religious incidents began to erupt from the 1980s, where conflicts or political mobilisation occurred across religious lines. However, apart from some specific incidents (the intra-Yoruba split in 1988 over whether a Muslim or Christian Yoruba candidate should be elected as a deputy speaker, or the Sharia movement from 1999), the ethnic-regional identity appears to be the central focus of mobilisation. Even the Sharia issue could fit the pattern, since it coincided with the election of a 'Christian' president, and petered out in coincidence with the election of a 'Muslim' president in 2007. It is also to be noted that southern Muslims were neither part of the Sharia campaign, nor were they involved in the recent violence. It is also clear that when polarisation occurs around the 'religious' identity of that president or official, the reference is usually to nominal affiliation, regardless of religious observance or even the programme of the individual. This was most graphically illustrated by the 2001 riots in Jos over the appointment of a 'Muslim' to head the poverty alleviation programme in one part of the city (Onapajo, 2012; Ibrahim, 1991; Tsaaior, 2015; El-Affendi and Gumel, forthcoming).

We shall return to this key issue, but it is equally important to note also the way religion played, or sought to play, in some rare but significant occasions, a crucial role in blunting or overriding ethnic cleavages. The best illustration is the Muslim community in Rwanda, where the consensus is that, unlike main Christian churches, 'the vast majority of the Muslim community did not participate in the genocide, but rather acted positively, with many Hutu Muslims protecting Tutsi Muslims and non-Muslims' (Doughty and Ntambara, 2003: 7). Similarly, in its early stages the so-called 'Islamic Courts' movement in Somalia has worked to bring peace to parts of the country and transcend tribal divides, even if some of its methods were brutal and somewhat archaic. Key figures in that movement, as is well known, later played a crucial role in laying the ground for the current (shaky) democratic transition in Somalia. A lot of the 'Islamist' violence in Somalia was also a direct consequence of intervention by rival states in the region, as is well known. Moderate Islamic movements have also largely played a constructive role, as we can see with mainstream

movements in most North African and West African countries, in particular Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, Algeria, Mauritania, etc.

At a more fundamental level, the advent of modern statehood to Africa was not only a colonial import, but it has also come to the continent with its own religious adjunct, western Christianity (in contrast to 'eastern' Christianity, which pre-existed colonialism in Egypt and Ethiopia), at a time when the question of secular supremacy has already been resolved in Europe. So the Christian 'package' has arrived complete with the secularist ideology and related ideas (including democracy), even though the colonial authorities were not too keen on equally advancing those components of the package. Not to mention the way Christianity was used in some areas (as in South Africa or Algeria) to support apartheid and other colonial outrages. The colonial order also marginalised Muslims and indigenous believers, creating imbalances that would later generate conflict. In addition, Christianity also came in many sectarian forms, and has later become implicated into Africa's complex web of ethnic cleavages. More recently, evangelical Christianity of the 'consumerist' American variety has become Africa's newest import.

Of central significance to our current debate is the traumatic way in which the whole package of the colonial experience intruded upon the African way of life, a factor so eloquently and insightfully depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). This in turn impinges on the protracted and still ongoing debate about what 'African-ness' consists in. This debate, which engaged intellectual African giants, such as the late Ali Mazrui, Wole Soyinka K A Appirah, among others, centres on how to relate Africa to, and/or extricate it from, the colonial experience (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014).

In this regard, there is an interesting parallel between current Islamic revivalist movements and the protracted search for African 'authenticity'. Both are attempts to reconstruct an 'authentic' cultural identity that has been presumably disturbed by colonialism. However, the colonial experience has in fact become –paradoxically- constitutive of this elusive 'authenticity'. It is almost impossible to extricate either 'Islam' or 'African-ness' from the constitutive colonial experience which moulded both the perception of African-ness and modern Islamic sensibilities. It is no coincidence that the two major modern Islamist movements (the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Indo-Pakistani Jamaat Islami) have both emerged within the sphere of British colonialism. The quest for authenticity, both African and Islamic, is also framed by the integration of the state into the current (decisively secular) global order. No less remarkable is the durability of the much maligned 'colonial' borders and the 'national' identities associated with them, not because of the efforts of African leaders and institutions, but in spite of them. This has been demonstrated in the fact that all the three states which broke away (Somaliland, Eritrea and South Sudan) had intense cultural and historical connections with the 'mother country', but a distinct and separate colonial experience: a clear indication that the 'colonial' identity trumps all others.

To sum up, the 'religious' dimension of the 'rogue' violence which plagued some African countries in recent years needs to be seen in the wider context. A combination of ethnic polarisation and state weakness or collapse gives potency to divisive religious mobilisation that feeds conflict. While the religious factor is salient in many cases, and cannot be simply discounted or explained away, closer attention needs to be paid to who is using religion and in what context. In Nigeria, southern Muslims or the urbanised elite in the North (in sum, the majority of Muslims) were not part of the conflict. In Somalia, where the unit of politics is the clan and not the individual, the current mobilisation cannot be understood independently from clan (and nationalist) politics, especially given the role of Somalia's two neighbours and traditional rivals. In Sudan, it is the militarised state which controls and uses religion to shore up its authority against the rebellious periphery and rival traditional elite. In Mali, a combination of ethnic mobilisation and foreign resources tipped the balance. In all these cases, the failure of the state to champion national cohesiveness was a major contributor to the crisis.

More important, what unites the groups involved in this 'rogue' violence (LRA, Boko Haram, Seleka, Kamajor, *janjweed*, etc.) is rather their 'outsider' status, based on the preponderance of marginalised constituencies with tenuous links to the broader community (compounded by their cross-border mobility). These groups harbour deep resentment against the urban elite, and lack a coherent language to articulate whatever grievances they may have. They proved vulnerable to manipulation by ambitious rogue leaders who compounded their isolation by atrocity-centered initiation tactics, and by ample recruitment of child soldiers. No less significant is the intense involvement (in particular in the wars in Darfur, Chad, Mali and CAR) of new trans-national 'nomadic' contingents, with no previous political engagement and no fixed allegiance to one country. In short, the preponderance of actors who are complete outsiders to the political community. The language they use, religious or secular, is mainly internally directed to promote in-group solidarity, and is not a political language of grievance and specific demands. Their emergence is the function of total or partial disintegration of the political community.

Secular Remedies?

The promotion of secularism as a doctrine does not therefore offer a direct answer to this problem. In fact, the aggressive and doctrinaire imposition of militant 'secularism' in countries like Somalia has been largely responsible for the disintegration of that country by weakening the role of religious solidarity and promoting divisive solidarities. However, the rebuilding of cohesive political communities, a sin qua non for the viability of modern states, requires the avoidance of divisive agendas. The neutrality of the state between religious communities, otherwise known as secularism, remains the default strategy for achieving this. But its success depends on a multitude of factors.

Like democracy, secularism recommends itself by claiming to offer something for everyone: freedom *for* religion and freedom *from* religion. As a doctrine advocating the 'containment' of religion outside the realm of public policy, it seeks to protect religion from coercive state interference, while preventing the state from enforcing a divisive religious view. The doctrine comes in many varieties, as will see, but it has been linked to conflict, and often generated some in its own right. French and Russian revolutionaries and those who followed in their footsteps, as well as Kemalists in Turkey and many Arab revolutionaries and despots, have violently repressed religious freedom in the name of secularism. By contrast, secularism has evolved largely peacefully and by consensus in the United States and in many European countries. Often this also followed a series of violent conflicts in which the state secured a monopoly of religious authority by suppressing or annexing independent religious institutions (as in England).

Equally interesting has been the initiation of 'religious' leaders (with 'sectarian' motives) of the early campaigns to disentangle religious and worldly authority. In Christianity, sectarian disputes within the Church prompted St. Ambrose (340-397) and Pope Gelasius I (d. 496) to defy imperial authority's favouring of dissident sects (Rendell, 1978: 118-19, Mastnak, 1996: 7-9). The problem recurred again in the 'Investiture Controversy', pitting Emperor Henry IV (1056–1106) against Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), as a revived papacy reclaimed the exclusive right to appoint and consecrate bishops and abbots. The conflict was only resolved in the Concordat of Worms (1122), in which church authorities regained the right to designate clerics, but permitted monarchs some limited share in appointment and ceremonial investiture (Rendell, 1978: 135-37, Mastnak, 1996: 16-19).

In Islam, the decisive confrontation took place during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'moun (813-833) who wanted to impose a controversial doctrine about the nature of the Quran favoured by his adopted rationalist sect of the Mutazilites. His bid failed completely, in spite of ardent attempts by him and his immediate successor to impose the doctrine systematically and violently. Similar attempts by the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) to enforce Shiite doctrine in North Africa failed even more spectacularly.

Needless to say, the 'religious' actors (for the political actors were no less religious) in those early conflicts, while seeking freedom from dictates of the ruler of the day, did not accept that rulers should be exempt from religious discipline (Henry IV had to walk barefoot over the Alps in the middle of winter and wait for three days outside the Pope's residence to get his excommunication lifted). However, things had shifted radically since then, and the argument today is that secular power occupies centre-stage. The very fact that we are having this conversation is proof enough that we live in 'secular age', as Charles Taylor (2007) puts it, or in a 'disenchanted world', to use

Max Weber's term. Spiritual or religious arguments are no longer admissible in public debates like this one.

Secularism and Secularisation

Secularism is the attitude which welcomes this situation and seeks to defend and fortify it where it is threatened, deepen and entrench it where it has become a reality, and extend it where it is weak or non-existent. Ardent secularists like Richard Rorty see nothing wrong with the 'Jeffersonian compromise' that made it 'bad taste to bring religion into discussion of public policy'. For them, protests against this systematic exclusion of religion from the public sphere have no justification. Reticence about one's religious beliefs in public is a small price to pay for religious liberty. Is it not enough that atheists cannot run for public office in America 'without being disingenuous about our disbelief in God'? (Rorty, 1994: 169, 171).

The claim that this process is irreversible is central to the 'secularisation thesis', which links modernity to a sustained decline in the social significance and popularity of religion, coupled with a loss of social influence by religious institutions and leaders (Bruce, 1996: 26). The thesis, .which has come under attack from the 1980s, notes also the acquiescence of religious leadership in this drift, distancing itself from traditional doctrines and beliefs and reinterpreting many others. This trend appears to be universal enough, at least in industrialised societies, to warrant an additional conviction that common causes must be responsible for it (Bruce, 1996: 37). As a result, religion became just one sphere among the many differentiated fields of social action, losing its erstwhile dominant and overarching position in the emergent pluralistic 'market-type' social configuration (Berger, 1967: 107, 136-9; Bruce, 1996: 39-43).

To account for evidence of a religious resurgence in recent years, the thesis was more modestly reformulated recently by one author into three separate components:
   1) differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms,
   2) decline of religious beliefs and practices
   3) marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere

Only the first proposition represents the defensible 'core component of the theory'. Societal modernization is thus 'a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the modern state, the capitalist market economy, and modern science—from the religious sphere, and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere.' The two other related theses are only derivative consequences of this general process, and they 'are not defensible as general propositions either empirically or normatively' (Casanova, 2006: 12-13).

In depicting the de-privatisation of religion as peripheral to modernity, the new formulation accepts the public resurgence as compatible with the secularisation thesis, and thus avoids the main pitfall of habitual attempts to save the thesis by 'making it normative' (describing the religious revival as a 'revolt against modernity'). However, critics argue is impossible for thesis (1) to hold if the other two fall by the side. If religion fails to decline or ceases to be private, other spheres cannot remain isolated. The new version also neglects the crucial point that religion and the secular constantly interpenetrate, and it is usually secular power which determines 'the legitimate space for religion', drawing the constantly shifting boundaries between the two (Asad, 2006: 209). In this regard, the public sphere cannot be a 'neutral' arena for 'rational' discourse, but 'a space *necessarily* (and not just contingently) articulated by power'. Casanova reproduces these power configurations in attempting to designate which types of religious discourse are to be publicly admissible (Asad, 1993: 181-2).

The Power of the Secular

If the state, in defining the parameters of legitimacy in the public sphere, admits only religions that conform to certain liberal sensibilities (in a stringently delimited role) as legitimate participants in public debate, it is bound to come into conflict with religious people (Asad, 1993: 199-200). In this important insight, secularism is not merely an absence of religion, but a positive presence, a political act of exclusion (Calhoun, 2010). It denotes a relation of tension and interpenetration, in which total exclusion is impossible (Stavrakakis, 2002: 20-21).

However, the rise of the modern state and its claims of exclusive legitimacy, prompted criticisms of the 'Machiavellian genealogy' of this self-aggrandising Leviathan, which has emerged in Africa and the Muslim world as an entity 'riddled with fundamental contradictions' (Sanneh, 1991:207). By absolutising itself and posing as a society's ultimate value-centre, the modern secular state was not 'merely content to restrain and arbitrate, but also to prescribe faith of a moral kind and conformity of an absolute nature'. As the state claims an 'unlimited and illimitable' sovereignty, it poses a direct challenge to the religious conscience, and substitutes for the 'religious dangers' it sought to combat 'far worse hazards' (Sanneh, 1991: 204-206). The current religious ferment in the Third World must then be understood as a reaction against this deification of the state and a rebellion against its absolutist claims (Sanneh, 1991: 204, 206-7, 215-6).

This characterisation of modern state and society is rejected by theorists who argue that secular society embodies 'a plurality of systems of ultimate significance', where authority is fragmented, and the individual gives partial allegiance to multiple centres at multiple levels. Differentiation, rather than conformity to a given normative order, is the character of modern secular society (Fenn, 1970: 118). The 'secular' modern is also partly the outcome of an internal 'secularisation' of religion, as displayed in the radical shift within the Catholic Church. The latter has, since the 1960s, overturned its bitter hostility to 'human rights' and went on to espouse the rights regime

with evangelical fervour. So much so that 'One could almost say that the pope is becoming the high priest of a new global civil religion of humanity' (Casanova, 2006: 17, 26)

However, even when religions engaged in 'internal' reforms to fit the secular mould and gain acceptance within 'modernity', power, even coercion and excessive violence, were not absent from this process. This refers to Talal Asad's above cited trenchant critique of this 'make-believe' self-narrative of secularism, which camouflages its character as 'a new set of practices producing a new political subject'. It thus fails to sufficiently highlight the power dimension of secularization as

> a coercive process in which the legal powers of the state, the disciplinary powers of family and school, and the persuasive powers of government and media have been used to produce the secular citizen who agrees to keep religion in the private domain (Chatterjee, 2006: 60).

Contextual Secularism

In an attempt to salvage a more inclusive formula and versions of secularism, Rajeev Bhargava advocates what he calls 'contextual secularism', in contrast to absolutist versions of the 'hyper-substantive' or 'ultra-procedural' types. 'Hyper-substantive' secularists would insist on excluding religion from all arenas of public life out of principled hostility to religion, while 'ultra-procedural' secularists adopt a policy of exclusion and non-interference based on equal distance from all religions. By contrast, contextual secularism is prepared to tolerate some inter-mixing of religion and politics where it does not threaten the structure of ordinary but dignified life of all, or even when it is just unavoidable. Here, the state is not required to practice total exclusion of religion, but to keep a 'principled distance' from it. This is different from mere equidistance from all religion: the state can intervene in religious affairs or refrain from doing so (but strictly in a non-sectarian way) to promote religious liberty and equality of citizenship (Bhargava, 1998: 486-542).

Charles Taylor voices, from a different perspective, similar objections to the procedural obsession with institutional separation. He urges instead the prioritisation of substantive values, mainly liberty, equality and fraternity over formal proceduralism. The state must be neutral and equidistant from all religious beliefs and non-religious positions. All, including religious groups, must have a right to participate in public debates on equal footing. Secularism thus needs to be redefined more inclusively to make it more accommodating of a wider range of views and cultures (Taylor, 2011).

Positions such as those of Taylor and Bhargava faced theoretical and normative challenges. Authors like Akeel Bilgrami (2014: 25-48) argued that secularism properly defined is not merely about being equidistant from all religions, but involves giving priority to non-religious political

ideals, such as freedom of thought and expression, fundamental human rights, and guarantees religious freedoms (except when they clash with these ideals). Thus secularism does not necessarily have to be liberal, and could impose it by force. In an earlier version of his paper, Bilgrami (2011: 31-32) agrees with Taylor that secularism should ideally not be imposed. Religious opponents should rather be engaged in a 'fraternal' dialogue to help them accept its benefits from their own point of view, in line with John Rawls's idea of 'overlapping consensus' (meaning agreement on shared institutions without the parties subscribing to each other's overall worldview). However, he affirms at the same time that secularism as a political doctrine is not a good in itself, and is not suitable for all contexts. It is justified when competing religious views clash and destabilise the state, but will not be necessary if such situations did not obtain (Bilgrami, 2014: 47).

Ethics, Power, State

Yet implicit in all this discussion is the conceptualisation of a power configuration which posits a one-way relation between the secular state and its religious challengers, where secular demands (for example, free speech and gender equality) would be non-negotiable. The possibility of non-secular views changing is the only avenue contemplated, but not the other way round. For some, this reflects the Machiavellian-Hobbesian idea of the absolute autonomy and supremacy of the state, seen by some as the defining moment of modern political thought, as well as marking the genesis of the modern secular state (Sanneh, 1991). However, Sartori assails this 'pure politics' interpretation of Machiavelli, which sees power as not subject to any ethical constraints. What Machiavelli (rightly) affirmed, Sartori argues, was that politics was not ethics. He also said that politics was morally impure, which is also correct, since 'pure politics' does not exist anymore than purely idealistic politics. A more useful distinction would be between war-like politics, where 'might makes right', and the use of force is paramount, and peace-oriented politics where conflict resolution is sought by means of covenants and 'rightful' procedures (Sartori, 1987: 39-44).

If we accept this view, then the history of the evolution of modern democratic theory and practice could be seen as an odyssey to establish peace-like politics. This struggle recognises the role of the state as the rightful claimant to the monopoly of legitimate violence on a given territory, but seeks to 'civilise' and circumscribe this violence and limit its abuse. This indicates a necessary but problematic relation between violence and legitimacy. The states needs to build consensus to establish its legitimacy and be able to deploy violence. But often violence itself is the bedrock of this legitimacy. Not every disagreement can be settled through argument, and there comes a point where the argument to stop (as in the court system).

But if the state arrogates to itself the right to draw the 'ultimate line' of the permissible, it also creates a recipe for conflict with rebels of all sorts, including 'conscientious objectors'. And as we know, religion is mainspring of conscientious objections par excellence. When the state says this is

a line you cannot cross and God draws another, there are likely to be many St. Ambroses and Luthers who would obstinately proclaim: 'Here I stand. I can do no other.' The state's ability to maintain its 'sovereignty' is thus contingent on the acquiescence or elimination of independent religious authorities.

Thus 'it is not religious zealots alone who contribute to fundamentalism and fanaticism… but also secularists who deny the very legitimacy of religion in human life and society and provoke a reaction' (Madan, 1987: 757). In some contexts, secularism may present itself as an alien cultural transplant, and the 'limitations of secular humanism (so-called)', are not fully recognised. This in turn highlights the need for 'a post-secularist compromise' that should 'seek new ways of maximizing the freedom of non-believers *and* believers alike' (Keane, 1998; Keane, 1997).

Both religion and the state have been described in terms of 'alienation.' Social activity involves the 'objectivation' of the human self, the participation by the individual in the creation of a social reality that appears to him as independent of his actions. The adherence to a particular religious doctrine, like the joining of a political community, entails a degree of *conscious* alienation, in the sense of making a contract or a covenant that would commit the individual to powers outside himself. Such covenants, freely subscribed to, do not contradict the agent's freedom or autonomy, on the contrary, they are seen as of its essence. The demand for political or religious freedoms are precisely demands for the right to make such covenants and commitments.

However, the agent may come to regard this situation as oppressive if the state becomes too despotic, or when the religious authorities no longer conform to shared ideals, or when the religious doctrine itself becomes unconvincing. This is when revolutions, reformations or conversions occur, in order to recapture the balance between the inner and external imperatives, to overcome 'alienation' in the negative sense. In other situations, covenants still regarded as legitimate may conflict: the religious or moral commitments can no longer be squared with civil and political obligations, for example. If the person or group in question regards both commitments as legitimate, then the result is usually tragedy, as in Thomas More's defiance of Henry VIII's authority and his martyrdom, or Martin Luther King's campaign of civil disobedience. But more often than not, the two imperatives are not equally recognised as legitimate, which generates reformations or revolutions.

The monopoly of a superior capacity for violent deterrence thus hinges crucially on an acceptance of the legitimacy of the state. A significant deficit in legitimacy could undermine the state's monopoly of violence as dissent increases. At a certain level, a revolution may ensue, as a signal that the state has lost all legitimacy. 'Righteous force' would then be deployed on the other side.

The 'democratic solution' has sought to restore a balance by making the state's legitimacy and right to monopolise violence subject to strict limitations on state power. Constitutionalism, democracy, and secularism combine to limit state power. Democracy ensures that the state is subject to the will of majority; constitutionalism and the rule of law limit the state's capacity to infringe on rights and freedom, even if the majority wanted to; secularism ensures that the state cannot infringe on religious freedoms. Constitutional democracy thus reproduces the promise of secularism: freedom *for* the state to use violence when necessary to safeguard freedoms, and freedom *from* arbitrary state intervention for citizens going about their lawful business.

To sum up, secularisation is a fundamental feature of modernity, representing a major shift of power from the traditional exponents of religious norms and morality in favour of new 'specialists' in worldly affairs. The first area to rebel against church authority was the economy, where the church's age-old ban on usury was defied. The alliance of monarchs with the new rising class of financiers and merchants enabled political power to safeguard its autonomy against the church in the new emerging nation-states. The logic of capitalism, which still governs our world, forced states to accept the autonomy of the economic sphere, if only through a 'Darwinist' survival of the fittest: states which deferred to the logic of the market were able to build viable economies which enabled them to wage wars more effectively and subdue rivals. Educational institutions and scientific inquiry soon wrested its autonomy from church authorities, while the new secular media usurped the role of the pulpit as leader of public opinion and forger of (national) identities. In the 'secular age' we live in, the Pope consults his doctor when sick, and only prays to the Virgin Mary later. He also consults his banker about his financial affairs, and his political and media advisors when crises erupt.

While critiques of the secularisation thesis need to be taken into account, this fundamental shift of power towards secular experts and dominant centres of power, such as financial markets in metropolitan centres, and political centres in control of massive resources, is undeniable. This shift of power is experienced in many region as oppressive and alienating. When replicated in local forms in African states, and compounded by dual alienation from global and local centres of power, it could prove explosive. However, mere rage against this hegemony, whether expressed in religious or other discourses, is insufficient and could make matters worse, unless guided by enlightened strategies about restoring some balance.

The Politicisation of Faith as Sectarianism

The 'secular' status quo is facing multiple challenges, ranging from various forms of single-issue activism (on abortion or HIV/Aids, for example), to intervention of church leaders on political issues, politicians professing attachment to religious causes (with varying degrees of sincerity), to the emergence of broad based social and political movements espousing 'religious' causes, or mobilising political support on the basis of religious identities.

Such movements are not essentially politically disruptive, and it is important to distinguish the various levels and modes of resistance to secularisation. The first model is conservatism, which is an old form of resistance to modernisation and secularisation, manifesting itself in radical forms in the enclaves of the Amish and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in the United States. Conservative or traditionalist tendencies (including conservative Sufi and Salafi groups) in Africa and elsewhere, also fit this pattern. These constituencies are interested in preserving their way of life in a narrowly defined realm of belief and personal behavious, and are not highly politicised. Related to this are moderately politicised conservative constituencies, which campaign on a single issue platform or a broad range of issues. Since such groups campaign largely within democracies or existing regimes, either in civil society or in the wider political space, they pose no serious challenge to the prevalent secular order. In fact, this has proved to be one of the mechanisms of integrating groups into that order, as the trend has been the evolution of 'conservative' groups in the direction of progressive acceptance of more and more liberal positions. The exception is some fringe groups within the animal rights or anti-abortion civil activism, which had tended towards extremism and even violence.

At another level we find organised religious activist groups, as social or political movements. One can include here evangelical or conservative groups and churches, which proliferated in Africa recently. A recent study estimates adherents of Pentecostal churches in Africa at 12% of the entire population of Africa, and members of charismatic churches to reach up to 5% (a combined total of nearly 150m). These churches count among their adherents celebrities and heads of state, and have increased their influence in countries like Zambia, Uganda and Nigeria. In some instances, the politicisation became so intense it split Christian churches, as happened when the Catholic Church in Nigeria pulled out of CAN in 2012, accusing its Pentecostal leaders of being too close to the government. However, politicisation is not restricted to evangelists. The Coptic Church in Egypt has witnessed progressive radicalisation, leading to open clashes with the state in the late 1970s. In 2013, the Church openly backed the protests against President Morsi and supported the military coup against him.

The politicisation of Islam and the preponderance of anti-secular tendencies has been more salient, however. In the African context, Muslim self-reassertion is combination of multiple overlapping movements. These incorporate regional movements of marginalised areas, usually the northern, less fertile and relatively impoverished regions. Related to this are demographic and/or empowerment shifts, since most Muslim African communities have 'self-marginalised' by boycotting colonial educational and state institutions. Finally, there is the impact of the broader 'Islamic revival' movements, which sought to reassert religious identity and reclaim a public role for religion.

It is to be noted that these movements, while appearing to be global, have invariably evolved locally, usually out of student groups or local religious scholars. I have recently read the memoirs of a prominent Moroccan Islamist (an associate of the current Moroccan Prime Minister), who recounted how a number of fragmented religious study and prayer groups began to emerge in high schools in the early 1970s. Members were typically young men from rural areas who felt disoriented by their novel city experience, and found companionship and security in these groups. They often experimented with joining several emerging groups, which were also groping around for direction, before settling with one. These movements often faced instant (and unintended) politicisation, as they clashed with established secular (usually left-wing) student groups over such issues as establishing prayer rooms or the consumption of alcohol on campus. What struck me was the uncanny parallel between this experience and the stories I have heard over the years from the founders of similar groups in Northern Nigeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Malaysia, etc.

In all these contexts, we witnessed a number of parallel developments: fragmentations of the movements in each country along moderate, conservative and radical lines, and convergence of these trends transnationally. The moderate trends have tended to cooperate and consult a shared body of literature, while both the conservative and radical groups have, until recently, remained parochial and country-focused. The insurgencies in Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s had only national agendas in spite of their pan-Islamist rhetoric. They claim to oppose the corruption of the entrenched elite and the despotic pro-Western regimes, and there is often a class/regional aspect to the identity of insurgents. In many instances, as in Somalia or Eritrea, ethnic/secular insurgencies shifted towards religious rhetoric, in line with what happened elsewhere (Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, The Philippines, etc.). The rise of trans-national groups like Al Qaeda as a 'franchise' that could provide funds and training has influenced this shift, but it was not the only factor. Let us also not forget the contribution of the former Libyan regime, which used to provide funding and training for a wide range of insurgents, including those in Chad, Sudan, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, etc. The discrediting of secular nationalist ideologies, and the rising influence of conservative Gulf countries following the oil boom, also helped these broader trends.

For many decades, the strategy in the North African countries, where Islamic movements had strong presence, has been to outlaw and combat the moderate groups and co-opt the conservative ones. This was partly responsible for the rise of more extremist and violent groups. More recently, and partly due to the impact of the Arab Spring, more inclusive policies have imposed themselves, with moderate Islamists leading the government in Morocco and taking part in coalitions in Tunisia and Libya. Algeria has also incorporated Islamist parties in the system, even though it still bans the most popular one. Egypt has reverted to the old strategy of co-opting the conservatives and is engaging in a violent and dangerous crackdown on mainstream Islamists. The policy of inclusiveness had been adopted over the long term in Malaysia, Kuwait and Jordan, where it has proved very successful.

In this regard, it is important not to think of moderate and violent 'Islamist' groups as part of a continuum, since these are radically different creatures. Some in Nigeria have also taken to seeing a continuum between groups like Boko Haram and the secular northern elites, which is in itself an instance of destructive 'narratives of insecurity', of which more later. Rather, we should see Boko Haram and Al-Shabab in one category with the LRA and similar rogue actors whose emergence is a symptom of extreme marginalisation and disconnect ('exiting' of state and society).

The Lord Resistance Army (LRA) from Northern Uganda was an early template for such groups, which were in turn assimilated to what some described as the 'new wars' in Africa and elsewhere. According to this thesis, the new conflicts which unfolded in Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC or Darfur do not fit the bill of conventional wars. Here states are not the main actors, while the belligerents do not seem to have clear political objectives. They also show minimal respect for agreed norms of conducting wars (Johannessen, 2011). Rather, we have here extremely fragmented warring groups, mostly from the marginalised rural poor, with diffuse leadership and no clearly defined ideology. These new wars display observable patterns that include the regionalisation of violence (with conflicts spreading across borders, its privatisation (with both rebels and counter-insurgency forces engaged in it for private gain) and unrestrained brutality (Ben Arrous and Feldman, 2014). For William Reno (2011), these new 'warlord' or 'parochial wars lack a coherent ideology, and are a direct consequence of the decay of patrimonial regimes and the fragmentation of its extractive apparatus.

We will return to this issue, but suffice here to emphasise the qualitative difference from the mainstream Islamist groups have problems in that, like their Christian counterparts, have only a narrow agenda focused around social issues. That is why, when they assumed power, as happened in Egypt, they had to engage into feverish improvisation, before converging towards common sense and consensual politics, as happened earlier in Tunisia, Turkey and Morocco, where Islamists continue to play constructive roles. The same happened in Sudan, where earlier radical rhetoric has been abandoned in favour of closer alignment with neighbours, regional consensus, international norms and regionally-brokered peace deals.

Regardless of the disagreement about the trajectory and import of these conflicts, it is clear that they are more the outcome of a socio-political trend (the weakness and disintegration of states and societies), rather than a product of a new intellectual trend, religious or otherwise. In fact, these new insurgencies are characterised by a marked absence of intellectuals or educated individuals at the helm. While they have certainly started with some basic narrative for the purpose of mobilisation, that narrative tended to become less and less coherent and more irrelevant for the bulk of child soldiers and uneducated (and unwilling) recruits. There is not much intellectual conversation going on within these groups, and often not much conversation at all, due to the

relative isolation of small bands of groups of child soldiers who often had to fend for themselves in inhospitable terrain (Cf. Reno, 2011, chaps 5 and 6).

The movements were also characterised by an apparent disconnect from the home communities, which become the first victims of this devastation. Boko Haram, for example, has not only devastated economic, social and educational life in its wake, but religious life as well. Many Muslims in the areas affected in northern Nigeria now dread going to mosques, especially at night, for fear being attacked by the group (El-Affendi and Gumel, forthcoming). This disconnect is also partially due to the cross-border nature of many of the war in West Africa and East-Central Africa, where rebel groups moved from one country to another. But one needs to qualify Reno's argument here about the absence of accomplished intellectuals and theorists of revolution in the 'warlord' and 'parochial' rebellions, and the role of corrupt state elites in the latter (Reno, 2011: 5-15). Reno appears to take at face value the claims of 'reformist' rebels like Museveni, even when he admits the blurring of lines between his categories. 'Reformist rebellions' had also to rely on child soldiers, ethnic mobilisation and banditry due to the pressures of war. In a sense, the more chaotic rebellions were an indirect outcome of that ethnic mobilisation and use of child soldiers by 'reformist' rebellions. Religious mobilisation, as we have seen, is part of this process.

A lot has been written and said about Al Qaeda and 'Islamic terrorism' since 9/11. The group's core leadership is composed of an alliance between those who adhere to strict Salafi creed and the more eclectic jihadists from Egypt and other Arab countries. What unites them is a narrative condemning Arab regimes as apostate and subservient to the West, and a conviction that these regimes could only be toppled if Western support for them was made costly by direct attacks on Western interests. Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the group has attracted new allies from Central and East Asia to North Africa, functioning like a 'franchise'. One of its offshoots, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has declared its independence and since then announced its own 'state' and 'caliphate' in Iraq.

All this makes it difficult to pinpoint the motives and defining doctrine of this conglomerate. It is difficult to fathom why groups like Al-Shabab in Somalia, or ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, should declare allegiance to the group when the cost of doing so appears to outweigh any perceived benefits.

Boko Haram has now followed that pattern and affiliated itself to IS, a move whose objectives remain unclear and its benefits less so. Both Al-Shabab and Boko Haram have emerged in a wider context of conflict, grievance and polarisation. It is this context and its dynamics which had to be examined, since it is what generates and sustains these movements. For example, the total membership of Al-Shabab in 2005 was 33 (thirty three) individuals (Hansen, 2012), while police in Nigeria managed to arrest all but seven of the estimated 60 members of Boko Haram in a clash that occurred in 2003 (Maiangwa et al. 2012: 46). The 2009 confrontation, provoked by the shooting of unarmed group members by the police, resulted in the virtual wiping out of the group, as

hundreds were killed, including the movement's leader Mohammed Yusuf. The fact that these movements rise again like a phoenix points to enabling structural factors that continue to generate them (El-Affendi and Gumel).

So how can this phenomenal growth from nothing or a tiny kernel be achieved in such record time? A field study conducted last year by USIP in Northern Nigeria listed as explanatory reasons for the attraction of Boko Haram among disaffected youth: limited religious knowledge, illiteracy, poverty, marginalisation and alienation, and police and army brutality (Onuoha, 2014). In the case of Al-Shabab, local and nationalist factors were cited, including the Ethiopian intervention of 2006, which provoked deeply held Somali antipathy. Also some alliances with disaffected clans and similar deals (Agbiboa, 2014). However, none of these explanations is fully satisfactory, since although most of these points are valid as contributory factors, one needs to see the bigger picture, including links with the wider 'religious' constituency.

Tony Blair and allied neo-conservatives continue to argue that the radical violent 'Islamist' groups represent 'part of a spectrum' of which 'moderate' Islamism is an integral part, and that needed to be confronted as a whole (Blair, 2014). There is a sense in which this is a tautology, as all 'extremist' movements are on a spectrum extending from the moderate end to the radical extreme. Blair's own Labour party is part of a spectrum that extends to the far left and radical communism. In fact there are reports that Britain's own intelligence services had been spying on the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson in the 1960s for suspicion of alleged Communist sympathies. However, it is now widely accepted that, far from being the 'thin wedge of Communism', the moderate left has played a decisive role in defeating the far left in Europe.

The same is true of 'Islamism'. It is not the success of moderate Islamism which paved the way for terror groups, but the failure of mainstream Islamism to attract the youth around a worthwhile project. Islamism was a rebellion against the perceived rigidity of traditional religious authorities and their inability to evolve an Islamic language that could survive modernity. Radical groups were in turn a rebellion against the perceived failure of the modernising project of traditional Islamism. Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood have been accused of conceding too much to the corrupt establishment, while failing to bring about meaningful political change. It is remarkable that Al-Shabab appeared to emerge out of the attempt to dislodge the relatively 'moderate' Islamic Courts Union movement, which had earlier 'exerted a level of moderating influence' on the more radical youth (Agbiboa, 2014: 28). There is evidence that Boko Haram owes a lot to a double revolt against both traditional religious authorities and moderate Islamism. Following the failure of the 'Muslim' candidate in the April 2011 presidential elections, rioting angry youth in in a number of key northern states torched buildings associated with the Emirs and Sultans, who 'hitherto enjoyed absolute loyalty from the people' (Onapajo, 2012: 59). It is this kind of anger against all

forms of authority which feeds into movements like Boko Haram which promise 'direct action' and instant results.

Religious movements, whether Muslim or Christian, voice critiques against corruption, despotism and mal-governance in general. They also reject some liberal inclinations and norms, in particular relating to sexual mores. Some even reiterate radical critiques of the hegemonic imbalances of the international order and the unfairness of the world capitalist system. However, while radical violent groups make use of such rhetoric, and add narratives about injustices and atrocities ascribed to their national or international opponents, such rhetoric is not what distinguishes and animates these movements, especially since these ideas are shared by many democratic forces and peaceful Islamic groups. What distinguishes the radical violent groups is the espousal of a rhetoric of extreme isolation from the rest of the world, a sense of deep grievance against everybody and a conviction of the futility of dialogue and peaceful approaches to change. They inhabit a narratively constructed world of extreme isolation, where everyone else is corrupt and evil, and a threat that needs to be dealt with.

They are not alone in this, unfortunately. An examination of posts on the social media and discussion websites touching on political issues in the affected area can yield some interesting – and terrifying- insights. A cursory glance at the comments on an article or a post touching on Boko Haram or Al-Shabab would reveal dangerous polarisation and mind-boggling partisan claims that should give any responsible leader many sleepless nights. We can experience the horror of our societies disintegrating morally and intellectually before our very eyes, in real time. Given the prevalent narratives, resort to violence from those who believe them should come as no surprise. Again the problem is not misguided leadership, but the apparent complete lack of it, especially from the intellectuals, that poses the most serious threat.

The Nigerian case in particular, embodies the main features of the problem. We observe deep fault-lines of polarisation among elites along regional-ethnic lines, and deep mistrust due to irrational power struggles. However, the marginalised and disenfranchised youth see collusion among the elites and condemn all sides as partners in corruption, as the events of 2011 indicate clearly. As is the case in many other African countries (Sudan, Ivory Coast, CAR, South Sudan, etc.) elites irresponsibility peddle narratives of mutual demonization to mobilise ethnic/religious support for their bids for power, or even a minor share in it. But they do not see the consequences of such manufactured polarisation.

To sum up, therefore, the politicisation of religion and its use to justify violence appears to be a dysfunctional response within dysfunctional systems. This phenomenon can be more accurately described as sectarianism to account for the multiple layers of intersecting and mutually

reinforcing elements of identity in these conflicts. Sectarianism is a limited and limiting view of self and the world, where the group lives in a world of its own, separate from others.

> It is this all-encompassing worldview that Tony Becher points to when he describes sectarianism: '[The sectarian spirit] combines a narrowness of outlook with a breadth of application. It is a matter of seeing the world which one inhabits only from one particular angle: but it is the whole of that world, and not simply a limited part of it which falls within the scope of the sect's defining dogma' (Sullivan, 1999: 152).

The sectarian spirit is often combined with a narrative of intense insecurity that portrays the group as endangered and threatened. These narratives of insecurity are present in all episodes of mass atrocities, including terrorism and genocide, where desperate acts of violence are justified in terms of desperate situations. As we have found out in a recent study (which incorporates the examination of drivers of mass conflict in 9 case studies, including 3 African countries –Nigeria, Kenya and Sudan-) narratives of insecurity play a decisive role in provoking mass violence and enlisting 'ordinary' people in genocidal enterprises (El-Affendi, 2015). This can happen even in uniquely homogenous countries, like Somalia. People just 'invent' lines of polarisation when it suits them. A certain constituency is mobilised and informed that the 'other' side is hatching dark plots to exterminate them. So they better take 'pre-emptive action'.

It may be apt to describe these strategies as fanatical', although on closer examination, 'fanaticism could be synonymous with opportunism' (Hughes and Johnson, 2004: 4-5). It is true that 'fanatics' (if we overlook the bias inherent in the use of the term) tended to show 'an extraordinary dedication to their cause and a willingness to endure immense suffering'. However, it is also clear that 'many manifestations of fanaticism in the modern period have been part of a rational decision-making process', and 'limited rational ends often belie the fanatical means employed' (Hughes and Johnson, 2004: 4-5). However, if we accept Clausewitz's argument about the inherent tendency of war towards extremes, then the epithet 'fanaticism' becomes redundant. We do not need to stipulate fanaticism ('dangerous extremism') in order to account for the fact that in war, belligerents do their worst to inflict maximum damage on the other side, since the party which holds back will most likely lose. If wars do not go to the ultimate goal of extermination or utter subjugation, it is due to 'friction' (logistical difficulties) and political limitations (fear of political consequences, such as antagonising third parties, etc.). The extremism displayed by belligerents is thus 'not fanaticism but the logic of war' (Paskins, 2004: 8-10).

This brings us back to our earlier point of the imperative of transforming the war-like politics of the Hobbesian state into peaceful inclusive politics. Sectarianism as destructive political polarisation across religious, ethnic or tribalistic lines, is premised on narrative of insecurity and mutual mobilisation promoted either by intellectuals or political entrepreneurs. The context is usually a state which has failed to provide security and inclusive citizenship for all. When

mobilising along religious fault lines, sectarianism does not adhere to the religious imperative of serving God, but rather thinks it can put God in the service of its divisive political agenda.

The African Union has, since the launch of the CSSDA initiative in 1990, made important progress towards promoting democracy, human security and social and political inclusiveness. The Arab-African Spring (for it has started in Africa) has initially given a decisive push to this process, not only by tackling the most troubling regimes in a miraculous way, but also contributing to a radical shift in the Continent's image. Together with the equally miraculous transformation in South Africa, it has made Africa a source of inspiration for the whole world, instead of the object of pity. However, as we know, most of those gains are now under threat, and many African trouble spots remain or crop up. Insecure regimes find the fomentation of sectarianism and hate rhetoric a short-cut to face political challenges. The AU capacity for advancing inclusive politics and proactively staving off or tackling major crises should enhanced and creatively upgraded.

A central objective should be to shore up the resilience of the state. Politically this requires the strengthening of state institutions and enhancing their legitimacy through consensual democratisation, transparency and the rule of law. Formal democracy is not sufficient where deep divisions exist in society, and such divisions must be healed through constructive dialogue and allayment of fear. Otherwise, democracies could become a short cut to civil wars as happened in Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya and Egypt. The African Union must play a proactive role in this regard through early warning and pre-emptive action.

Economically, the model of the developmental state, which prioritises development and is able to implement effective strategies to achieve it, must be promoted and established (Ayee, 2013). However, this effort must heed UNECA's call for such states to be 'inclusive and operate through a democratic governance framework' (Shaw, 2012: 840). For it is the uneven development and the systematic marginalisation of large sections of the population in many countries which led to the current crises. It must also conform to the principles of human development, which insists that freedom and the systematic development of human capabilities are integral to genuine developments.

There is also a crucial role for civil society activism and for intellectual and political leaders to promote the values conducive to the creation of robust and resilient states and good governance. Africa has provided inspiring models of visionary non-sectarian leadership, and awe-inspiring initiatives of peaceful transitions against all odds. What needs to be done to emulate and generalise these models, together with the hard-won insights about democratic multicultural existence elsewhere, to overcome the rise in sectarian conflict that is threatening the very existence of many African states to-day.

There is also need to mobilise African intellectuals to provide moral and intellectual leadership to counter the destructive sectarian narratives and divisive approaches to nationhood. They should strive to provide narratives of hopes and solidarity for the alienated and marginalised youth, and role models for the young everywhere.

Conclusion: Secularism Comprehended

We have referred above to some of the challenges posed to secularism's central claims to even-handedness between people of different faiths and none, chief among which is the argument that secularism harbours its own 'religious' biases, and exercises concealed power. Secularism could be reconciled with democracy only under a minimalist state that limits its interference in the affairs of society. But secular democracy requires some level of indifference to religious cleavages and some level of security for all groups. As Haynes (2007: 316) notes, a major cause for conflict is the fear of insecure ethno-religious groups of domination of the state by hostile rivals. For this reason, the perceived unlikelihood of re-establishing a religious monopoly as a direct consequence of a competitive system (Berger, 1967: 143) is not just a feature of the secular order; it is the very condition of the viability of the secular compromise. When there is credible likelihood of religious and political freedoms leading to the re-establishment of religious monopoly, then neither secularism nor democracy could obtain.

In particular in the North African context, the sudden resurgence of Islamist movements has stirred deep feelings on insecurity among the entrenched elite, leading to the violent reaction we have witnessed in Algeria and other countries of the region in from the early 1990s, and is tragically being replicated in Egypt today. A solution needs to be found which accommodates the insecurities of the secular elite, while recognising the motives for the mass revolt against the exclusionary and oppressive practices of the elites and their corruption. We have to deal with a dual problem here: the elite has lost legitimacy because of their corruption and intellectual and moral bankruptcy. But they insist on holding to power by resort to the same bankrupt practices which precipitated the current crisis in the first place. The result would be to bring the state to the verge of collapse, and replicating the chaos and disintegration which is the focus of our current concerns. However, the Islamist-led revolt against the entrenched secular order has been unable to develop an alternative and fairer vision, or even to comprehend the complex nature of the globally dominant secular order. They unusually voice moral condemnation of the dysfunctional order, and reproduce some of the leftist critiques of the international system, but without the theoretical depth or the coherent proposal of viable alternative. The inevitable failure of their endeavours provokes the insecurity and predictable overreaction of the entrenched elite, and the frustration and rage of the marginalised who then launch into blind violence.

The compromises on which the modern secular democratic state is based may thus need to be revised to take into account this possibility (neglected by secularisation and modernisation

theories) of credible challenges to secularism. The first premise of the new compromise is the need to accommodate the irreducible pluralism of modern societies. This in turn necessitates agreement on universally acceptable principles for co-existence, which nevertheless must not be hostile to any particular culture or religion. International law and the covenants on human rights are important, if imperfect, attempts to move in this direction. This could also be accomplished through minimalist frameworks of co-existence, whether within states or on the international arena. Already some major progress has been made in developing multiculturalist frameworks in a number of advanced democracies to provide recognition for minority rights. Multiculturalism is currently suffering a backlash in Europe, but we need not go into this here.

In Africa, more need to be done to evolve accommodation frameworks guarantee freedom of religious expression and association. The 'religious-neutral' (to avoid using the term secular) compromise which is essential for assuring peaceful co-existence in pluralistic societies, needs to evolve to accommodate situations where religion is not on the decline. This may necessitate the application of novel and imaginative formulas for co-existence within states, with the possible replication of the autonomous but interdependent entities which currently exist only on the international level. It may go as far as permitting 'enclaves' where religious communities hostile to major elements of the overall compromise may nevertheless be able to practice freely without having to subscribe to the overall philosophical framework of co-existence, as long as they respect its terms. Such compromises would necessitate some legitimation from within the relevant religious tradition, in both moral and theological terms (along the lines adopted by the Amish community or Orthodox Jews in the United States).

In the end, the crucial development underpinning the modern pluralistic secular order, which is also becoming a feature of our global environment, has not, as appears to be the general belief, been some mysterious social developments that made religion and morality irrelevant overnight. Rather, the more important factor had been a transformation in the way both religion and politics had come to be conceived, by *religious* leaders and believers, as well as by politically active individuals and groups. In the West, a significant majority of religious people have come see the new developments as more true to the spirit of religion than the previous church-dominated order. The transformation in the religious outlook was helped by political and social developments that made tolerance of individual freedoms both prudent and ethical.

Central to all this is the resilience of the state, not only in terms of the robustness of its security apparatus, but also in its inclusiveness and capacity to respond to popular demands, provide reassurance and move fast to contain problematic situations. Civil society also needs to be dynamic and proactive, and play its role. Hitherto, one of the major deficits in Africa has been in competent, visionary and non-sectarian leadership, even though Africa has also provided the most shining examples in this regard. The other deficit is also in inspired and inspiring intellectuals,

who could counter the sectarian and divisive narratives of the warlords and opportunist politicians, and provide moral and intellectual leadership that would promote unity.