

Islam and Democratic Federalism in Nigeria

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The Nigerian return to democratic federalism in 1999, after 15 years of centralized military rule, has raised questions about how to decentralize without provoking sentiments for partition. In addition, the 1999 presidential election witnessed a voluntary “power shift” from the northern region to the southwest, and in both major parties—the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Alliance for Democracy/All Peoples Party (AD/APP)—the presidential candidates were from the “Christian” southwest and the vice presidential candidates from the “Muslim” north. This paper examines how regional and ethno-religious factors have emerged since the transition to civilian rule in 1999. The most obvious issues are the revival of Shari’a law in the criminal domain in the far northern states, the subsequent patterns of ethno-religious conflict (especially in the large northern urban centers), the impact of the events of September 11 on elite and grassroots populations, and the challenge of insulating democratic processes from religious polarization.

The global context too has changed. In October 2001 at the Muslim foreign ministers meeting in Qatar, the 56 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) agreed to condemn terrorism and ignore the Taliban’s call for jihad against Christians and Jews. Yet, OIC national leaders also must deal with public opinion in their own countries, and the question of external influences is never far from the surface. As a large and complex “religiously mixed” country in the midst of a political transition, Nigeria is a special challenge.¹

1. See, “Rising Muslim Power in Africa Causes Unrest in Nigeria and Elsewhere,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2001, sec. A, p. 12.

The most recent census in Nigeria (1991) did not ask religious identities. The common wisdom—based on previous census data—is that the population of about 120 million is approximately 50 percent Muslim, 40 percent Christian, and 10 percent explicitly “traditional,” making Nigeria one of the larger Muslim population states in the world. Whether the next census, scheduled for 2002, in preparation for the 2003 elections, will ask religious identity is not clear. However, there is a fairly even balance across Nigeria’s 36 states: 13 are predominantly Muslim (especially in the north); 13 are predominantly Christian (especially in the middle belt and southeast); and 10 are mixed (in the middle belt and southwest).² A more political way of characterizing patterns of Muslim demographics is to recognize that the 19 northern states are predominantly Muslim and the 17 southern states are predominantly Christian. The emergence of six geocultural zones as a means of political clustering emerged in the 1990s, as the number of states increased to 30 in 1991 and then to 36 in 1996.³ The new capital at Abuja is meant to be a crossroads of such cultural, religious, and demographic patterns, as well as a true “Federal Capital Ter-

2. The 36 states, with estimated religious identity patterns, are as follows: 1) predominantly Christian: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Ondo, Rivers; 2) predominantly Muslim: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebi, Nasarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara; 3) mixed: Benue, Kaduna, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Plateau, Taraba.

3. The six zones include: 1) northwest (Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Zamfara); 2) northeast (Bauchi, Borno, Adamawa, Taraba, Yobe, Gombe); 3) Middle Belt (lower north): (Plateau, Benue, Niger, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa and FCT); 4) southwest (Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti); 5) southeast (Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi); and 6) south-south (Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Cross River, Bayelsa).

ritory,” in terms of equal political access, intentionally situated in the middle of the country.

Since January 2000, the 12 far northern states have introduced Shari’a law.⁴ Clashes in Kaduna state between Muslims and Christians in February 2000 resulted in about 2,000 dead. This was followed by backlash violence in the far north (e.g., Sokoto) against southern Christians and backlash violence in the southeast (e.g., Aba) and southwest (e.g., Lagos and Ibadan), followed by about 2,000 more deaths in Kaduna in May. In late 2001, ethno-religious riots emerged in Jos and Kano, with hundreds killed. Official commissions of inquiry reports will be forthcoming, but an obvious preliminary question is whether such violence is ethnic, ethno-religious, more explicitly “religious,” political, or some other pattern based on socioeconomic status and competition. An overarching question is whether such violence and tension may destabilize Nigeria as a whole, as it prepares for local, state, and national elections in 2003.

In any discussion of politics, religion, or violence in Nigeria, distinguishing those patterns that are predominantly “elite” and those that are “grassroots” is important. At the elite level there has been a long pattern of Muslim-Christian interfaith cooperation (during both civilian and military periods), while at the grassroots level, there have been sporadic instances of both intrafaith and interfaith conflict. Especially in the Muslim states there have been significant confrontations between antiestablishment groups and northern Muslim elites, which in turn, are causing these elites to reconsider how to strengthen their own politico-religious credentials. Significantly, with the return to civilian rule in 1999, the impetus for the establishment of Shari’a law has emerged largely from grassroots pressures rather than from the elites. To understand these patterns more fully, this essay will look at 1) trend lines of Muslim religious and ethno-religious identities; 2) Muslim leadership and ecumenical movements; 3) the interplay of religion and politics in Nigeria; and 4) the extent of external influences and links.

4. The 12 states with Shari’a law, as of December 2001, are: Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Niger, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, and Borno.

Trend Lines of Muslim Identities

The three predominantly Muslim areas of Nigeria are the nineteenth century Sokoto caliphal “emirate states” in the northwest, the historic Borno state in the northeast, and certain parts of Yorubaland in the southwest. At present, at least seven cross-cutting tendencies within the Muslim community are identifiable: 1) emirate authorities and traditional nonsectarian mainstream Muslim groups; 2) sufi brotherhoods, especially the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya; 3) anti-innovation legalists, especially the Izala; 4) intellectual reformers; 5) anti-establishment syncretists, especially remnants of the Maitatsine movement; 6) antiestablishment “Muslim Brothers” (Ikhwan), sometimes labeled as “Shi’ites;” and 7) unemployed urban youth and Qur’anic student movements, formed around local schools and teachers.

Traditional Ethno-religious Affiliation

The emirate states share the legacy of having been part of the Sokoto caliphal experience in the nineteenth century. Within the “northern region” of the twentieth century, they stretch from Sokoto in the west to Adamawa in the east and to Ilorin and Niger in the south. By definition they are predominantly Muslim in their traditional political structure. In the twentieth century they have evolved into distinctive “emirates” (i.e., with an emir, or equivalent, as symbolic head of the unit). Although Hausa tends to predominate as the lingua franca, the emirate states are a multilingual cluster, including Fulfulde, Yoruba, Nupe, and several minority languages. Often there are traditional rivalries among these states (e.g., Kano and Sokoto split into civil war in the 1890s), and this cluster has not always acted as a unified block. Yet, within this zone, the Sultan of Sokoto has special salience in spiritual matters, and the Emir of Kano has a special place because of the socioeconomic importance of Kano emirate.

Borno (and environs) in the northeastern corner of Nigeria is the oldest continuous Islamic community in sub-Saharan Africa, dating from the eleventh century, and is similar in structure to the emirate states, but with a “Shehu” as chief religious-political leader. In the nineteenth century, when Sokoto tried to conquer Borno, there was a standoff, and “resistance to Sokoto” became part of Borno’s historical legacy. The outgroup identity designation for people from Borno is “Beri-

beri.” The dominant language group in Borno is Kanuri, although, like Sokoto, Borno is a multilingual cluster (increasingly with Hausa as a lingua franca).

There has been an indigenous pattern of Islamic culture in Yorubaland throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in the areas that became Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos states. Major urban bases for Yoruba Muslim populations include Lagos and Ibadan. In addition, Ilorin city (and emirate) in Kwara state is a historic component of the Sokoto caliph system. Ilorin, as a Yoruba society, but with predominant patterns of Yoruba and Hausa bilingualism and with mixed Yoruba/Fulani/Hausa leadership patterns, is a potential bridge (or flash point) between emirate and Yoruba culture zones.

Sufi Brotherhoods

The Sufi brotherhoods evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, Qadiriyya brotherhood affiliation became part of the identity of the Sokoto Caliph leadership, because of the association with the caliph founder, Usman dan Fodio, who died in 1817. In the 1830s and after, Umar Futi and his followers spread the Tijaniyya brotherhood in northern Nigeria. Thus, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya became the two major Sufi brotherhoods in what came to be northern Nigeria, especially within the caliph areas. By contrast, the leaders and scholars of Borno have not been affiliated with Sufi brotherhoods.

During the twentieth century, the Tijaniyya spread extensively in Kano, which was the commercial and industrial capital of the north. Because of the social networks that extended out of Kano through the long distance “Hausa trader” system, the Tijaniyya spread throughout Nigeria (including Ibadan) and throughout West Africa. A “reformed” version of Tijaniyya was developed, which accommodated many of the modernization developments of the post–World War II era. This reformation was associated with the leadership of Ibrahim Niass, a Wolof speaking shaykh from Kaolack, Senegal, but had its Nigerian base in Kano, under the leadership of Tijjani Usman, and the late emir of Kano, Muhammad Sanusi. In the mid-1990s, leadership focused on a wealthy Hausa businessman, Shaykh Abdulrazaq, who maintains a lavish mosque/school.

In turn, the Qadiriyya also experienced a “reformed” development, associated with Shaykh Nasiru Kabara of Kano. Students from throughout Nigeria would come to Kano to study in his schools and libraries. With the death of Nasiru Kabara in the fall of 1996, the mantle of leadership fell to his son, who maintains the mosque/school across from the emir’s palace in the center of the old city.

Anti-Innovation Legalists

The anti-innovation legalists are associated with the leadership of Shaykh Abubakar Gumi, an outstanding Arabist and legal scholar from Gumi village in Sokoto. Gumi studied in Khartoum and was a key liaison with Saudi authorities. Shortly after independence in 1960, Gumi was appointed Grand Kadi in northern Nigeria and hence was responsible for the regional Shari’a legal system. Gumi became the teacher of many younger university-educated elements, and many of the civil servants and professionals in northern Nigeria. His influence was extensive in the modern sector. Among the urban youth of the new towns in the north, especially cities such as Jos and Kaduna without a brotherhood tradition, social organizations and teaching networks developed under the umbrella name of *Izala*, taken from the Hausa version of Usman dan Fodio’s book, *In Favor of Sunna and against Innovation*. Although Gumi directly influenced some of the *Izala* groups, others set off in their own directions. This led to some confrontations between the *Izala* and the youth wings of the reformed brotherhoods, especially in Kano, because the *Izala* condemned the brotherhoods as “innovations,” (i.e., developments after the time of the Qur’an and the Sunna). Gumi became influential through his translation of the Holy Qur’an into the Hausa language. His translation was widely distributed throughout northern Nigeria and was the basis of a fundamental reassessment or “reformation” within the Muslim community, which thereby had direct access to holy writ in a vernacular language. Gumi died in September 1992, and whatever cohesion the *Izala* movement may have had began to splinter into a variety of localized agendas.⁵

5. See Sheik Abubakar Gumi, *Where I Stand* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1992).

Intellectual Reformers

The intellectual reformers are most noticeable within the northern universities system, especially Usman dan Fodio University in Sokoto, Bayero University in Kano, and Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. There is a fine line between Nigerian Muslims who would like to apply Islamic principles to contemporary Nigerian political life, and those who try to identify what an “ideal” Islamic political system would look like. Clearer is the gap between those who reflect on the ideal nature of neoclassical Islamic systems in the contemporary world, and those who feel that they should impose such systems on themselves and others. The intellectual reformers, often members of departments of Islamic, Arabic, or legal studies, represent two tendencies with regard to an ideal model: those who refer back to the Sokoto reformation period as a source of ideas and values, and those who prefer to downplay the Sokoto experience and refer directly to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, looking to the Madina model as the standard by which an ideal system should be judged. Many scholars involved with the study of the history of the Sokoto caliphate are also concerned with the contemporary relevance of such history. There have been many efforts to reprint the writings of the Sokoto reformist leaders in Arabic, Hausa, and English. For the most part, such intellectuals debate the interpretation of Qur’anic and caliphal principles within an academic setting, but their influence in the media and in political life is considerable.⁶

Antiestablishment Syncretists

The antiestablishment syncretists emerged in the late 1970s when the oil boom in Nigeria made rapid change, urbanization, and modernization a powerful force. Their “syncretism” was a blend of traditional Hausa folk beliefs, and highly selective bits and pieces of the Qur’an. They tended to represent the “dispossessed” newcomers in the urban centers, who saw the Muslim establishment getting richer and more westernized to the detriment of poor and non-Western segments of society.

6. For example, see Mahmud Tukur, *Leadership and Governance in Nigeria: The Relevance of Values* (Zaria: Hudahuda Press, 1999).

An itinerant preacher, Muhammad Marwa, also known as Maitatsine, led the most significant of such fringe cults to emerge, in Kano in the late 1970s. A violent confrontation between the “Yan Tatsine” and the authorities in Kano City occurred in December 1980, with thousands of resulting deaths. Even with the death of Maitatsine in these Kano riots, his followers violently challenged authorities in Gombe, Borno, and elsewhere in the north throughout the 1980s and even in Lagos in the 1990s. In general, mainstream Muslims do not regard this movement as “Muslim,” but as a cult outside the bounds of orthodoxy.

Antiestablishment “Muslim Brothers”

The antiestablishment “Muslim Brothers” (*Ikhwan* or ‘*yan brotha*) emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a younger generation of semi-educated and even better educated youth found that they had no employment prospects in the economic austerity of the time and began to challenge the corruption and wealth of the Muslim establishment on Islamic grounds. The leader of the group in Zaria was Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky, who had graduated in economics from Ahmadu Bello University. Because he then had received training in Iran and Iranian funding appeared to be involved, his movement was termed “Shi’ite” by the larger Nigerian community, which was also an attempt to marginalize his influence because Nigerian Muslims are Sunni rather than Shi’ite by tradition. Throughout the 1990s the Ikhwan and the authorities clashed, culminating in the arrest of Ibrahim on September 13, 1996, in Zaria and his jailing in Port Harcourt. Subsequently, his followers protested in Zaria and Kaduna and about 40 were killed in direct clashes with the police. In February 1997, at the end of the month of Ramadan, several of the followers tried to take over the central mosque in Kano and were killed in the resultant clash with police. The exact nature of this “Shi’ite” movement remains obscure, but the antiestablishment challenge is clear. Zaky, released after the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, continues to be a vocal critic of the Muslim establishment, and, more recently, of Shari’a criminal law in some northern states.⁷

Unemployed Youth and

7. For a journalistic account of this movement, see Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria*, chapter 6; “The Faithful,” *Public Affairs*, 2000.

Qur'anic School Movements

Large metropolises with high immigration rates have hundreds of local Qur'anic schools that may form around a local teacher (*mallam*). In the north, such schools often form just outside the "traditional" walled cities (or in the newer wards), because the traditional ward structures in the "old cities" are usually well integrated into local politics. In places like Fagge in Kano, which attract immigrant students from throughout the north and from surrounding countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, students are poor (*talibai*), rootless, and perhaps easily swayed by itinerant Muslim preachers. These students come from rural Sunni families, and often make their living by begging or working as day labor. The key to understanding this phenomenon is to recognize that there is no stable leadership structure in place and often no respect for more established forms of religious authority.⁸

Muslim Leadership and Ecumenical Movements

The early Muslim ecumenical movement of the 1960s in Nigeria, especially the *Jamatul Nasril Islam*, broadened into the national arena, mainly through the vehicle of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), established in 1974. The head of the Supreme Council was the Sultan of Sokoto, the vice president was the Shehu of Borno, and the secretary general was a leading Yoruba Muslim lawyer, Abdulateef Adegbite. The vice presidents are drawn from the 36 states of the federation and include distinguished emirs and other Muslim notables (including the late Alhaji Chief Moshood Abiola, Baba Adini of Yorubaland in Ogun State, and Alhaji Abdul Azeez Arisekola Alao, the Aare Musulumi of Yorubaland, Oyo State). The NSCIA has regular meetings that bring Muslim leaders from all states of the federation to deliberate on matters of common interest. At the international level, the council maintains close links with counterparts in other countries and cosponsors the Islamic Council in London. The NSCIA cosponsored the

Islam in Africa Conference in 1989, which resolved to establish the Islam in Africa Organizations network with headquarters in Abuja, the federal capital. The council handled the construction of the Abuja National Mosque and maintains the Abuja National Mosque Management Board.

In 1987, in the aftermath of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) controversy in Nigeria over whether to be a member of the OIC, the federal government established the National Council for Religious Affairs (NCRA). In modified form, this council ultimately came to have 12 Christian and 12 Muslims leaders who were intended to discuss matters of mutual concern and report directly to the Ministry of Interior. In practice the NSCIA represented the Muslims, and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) represented the Christians. After a period of deadlock in the council, the Christian leaders stopped attending, and the NCRA became moribund.

In March 1996, the Sultan of Sokoto, Ibrahim Dasuki, was deposed and jailed by Head of State General Abacha. Dasuki was replaced as Sultan by Muhammad Maccido, but because Dasuki had been a prime mover behind the NSCIA the future of this organization remains unclear, especially because Maccido is seen more as a local leader. The release of Dasuki after the death of Abacha did not result in a challenge to Sultan Maccido, and Dasuki now lives quietly in Kaduna.

A second Muslim umbrella organization, which is similar to NSCIA, is the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN). In the mid-1980s, the impact of the spread of education began to be felt more clearly among Muslim women. Part of the response to such education was to become even more Western, and some Muslim women participated in organizations like Women in Nigeria. Others began to reclaim their own sense of Muslim identity. The Muslim Sisters Organization was established in Kano, and later FOMWAN was established to give coherence to Muslim women's organizations throughout Nigeria and focused on the need to counteract the role of "custom" in Nigeria Muslim societies. By the early 1990s, FOMWAN had about 400 member organizations throughout Nigeria, with a majority of member associations in the Yoruba-speaking areas. Each state selects representatives to a national committee, which

⁸ See, for example, the work of Paul Lubeck, *Islam and Urban Labor in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

publishes a magazine (*The Muslim Woman*) and holds annual conferences on a topic of special concern to Muslim women. The main language of communication is English, and the FOMWAN acts as a liaison with other national and international Muslim women's organizations. Today, FOMWAN remains the major pan-Nigerian association for Muslim women, even though a wide variety of nongovernmental organizations focus on particular issue areas.

Religion and Politics

This section will touch on four aspects of religion and politics in Nigeria, because the perception of a level political playing field and ethno-regional balance are seen to be the keys to ethno-religious harmony and political stability: (1) religion and constitutional law; (2) religion and electoral politics; (3) religion and military politics; and (4) the Shari'a law issue and ethno-religious violence since the establishment of Shari'a law in many far northern states.

Constitutional Law

The constitution announced by the military government in May 1999, which set up the Fourth Republic, was similar to that of 1979, which set up the Second Republic. The 1999 constitution states that the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion. The sections on "fundamental rights" refer to "freedom on thought, conscience, and religion." With regard to the judiciary, the Shari'a Courts of Appeal of a state are established to deal with personal law, where all parties are Muslim.

With this mixed constitutional mandate—for the Nigerian state not to adopt any religion, but to allow for Muslim civil law within the legal system—the "fundamental right" of every Nigerian to freedom of religion is even more salient. The "Freedom of Religion" clause is articulated as follows. (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. (2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or

observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian. (3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination. (4) Nothing in this section shall entitle any persons to form, take part in the activity of, or be a member of, a secret society.

Because of Nigeria's long history of colonial and military rule, the role of the judiciary in the interpretation of fundamental rights has been uncertain at best. Many of the issues of conflicts of rights or limits of rights have been determined by edict or decree. The limits of unorthodox opinion, especially in religious matters, are a delicate but essential judgment made by political and religious leaders, but also by constitutional lawyers. A number of legal issues remain to be addressed through case law: the tax status of religious organizations, the right to public broadcast time, the right to be represented on national advisory boards, the basic right to preach, the right to have time off to worship (e.g., for Friday prayer or holidays), the right of religious leaders to protection from defamation, the right to be included in a nonpreferentialist model of government, the right to religious education, the protection from having to change religious affiliation in order to acquire education, the right to change religious affiliation, and, of course, the issue of Shari'a law in the criminal domain.

The general practice in Nigeria is not to utilize legal services in pursuit of fundamental or religious rights. Rather, grievances are addressed through the political process, even when that process is military rather than civilian. The lack of federal case law is partly the result of the fragility of constitutional order and the high stakes placed on political solutions.

Electoral Politics

The federal elections of 1959, 1964, 1979, and 1983 were remarkably consistent in the alliance patterns between geocultural/religious zones. The election of June 1993, which was annulled, was an exception. The 1999 election echoed some of the earlier patterns: five of the six zones supported the winner, and the southwest zone supported the loser.

During the First Republic (1960–1966) the dominant northern party (Northern Peoples' Congress) made every effort to find allies among the Christian middle-belt factions, and ended up with a coalition that included northern Muslims and middle-belt and eastern Christians. This coalition faced a Muslim/Christian Yoruba alliance. During the Second Republic (1979–1983), the same alliance pattern prevailed.

During the election in 1993, which was intended to be a transition to a Third Republic, the dominant alliance was Yoruba-based and excluded many of the emirate states and the Christian east. Ironically, the apparent winners in the June 1993 election were a Yoruba Muslim (Moshood Abiola) for president and a Borno Muslim (Babagana Kingibe) for vice president, who appeared to defeat a Muslim from Kano and a Christian from the east.

During the election of 1999, as mentioned earlier, both presidential candidates were Yoruba/Christian, and both vice presidential candidates were northern Hausa/Muslim. Hence, there were no overt ethno-religious overtones to the election, which was won by Olusegun Obasanjo (Yoruba/Christian, from Abeokuta) and Atiku Abubakar (Hausa-Fulani/Muslim, from Yola).

The clear pattern is that electoral politics do not divide along Christian/Muslim lines in Nigeria. To the contrary, every effort has been made, through different combinations of elements, to link coalitions that include both Christians and Muslims. The stated intent of the 1995 constitution (unpromulgated) was to create a rotational system for the highest federal offices, so that no one zone or region may predominate and making cross-zonal/cross-religious coalitions mandatory. This idea was scrapped in 1998–1999 as too cumbersome, but the idea of “federal character” (or ethno-religious balance) was preserved in other ways.

Religious and ethnic political parties have been banned in Nigeria since the First Republic. The idea of “federal character,” which has been implemented since the civil war (1967–1970), has meant that each of the states—and hence religious segments—must be represented at the federal executive level. The fact that the critical swing area—the Yorubaland southwest—is almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims while

politics tend to revolve around city-state loyalties, has lessened the tendency to politicize religion. Yet, whenever a political “crisis” occurs—including a military coup—the question of religious balance is a matter of immediate calculation.

Military Politics

On July 29, 1975, General Murtala Ramat Muhammad, a Hausa-Fulani from Kano, emerged as the first Muslim military head of state in Nigeria. He had replaced General Yakubu Gowon, an Angas Christian from the middle belt, who in turn had replaced Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo Christian in July 1996. On February 13, 1976, Murtala Muhammad was assassinated in a failed coup attempt apparently led by Christian middle-belt officers. Murtala Muhammad was replaced by his next in command, General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Yoruba from Ogun, who, for the next three and a half years—prior to the return to civilian rule in 1979—continued the policies of his predecessor, including the creation of a new federal capital at Abuja. The next-in-command and close confidant to Obasanjo was Shehu Musa Yar ‘Adua, a dynamic Muslim personality from Katsina emirate, who later died in prison under mysterious circumstances during the Abacha military regime.

The general pattern of top military leadership has usually been a Muslim-Christian or a Christian-Muslim team. The exception was the military regime of Muhammad Buhari (a Fulani-Hausa Muslim from Daura emirate) and Tunde Idiagbon (a Yoruba Muslim from Ilorin) during 1984–1985. The subsequent regime of Ibrahim Babangida (a Gwari Muslim from the middle belt) was religiously balanced (1985–1993), as was the successor regime of Sani Abacha (a Muslim who grew up in Kano but was originally from Borno) and his next in command General Oladipo Diya (a Yoruba Christian). Muhammad Buhari (Fulani-Hausa/Muslim) and Ernest Shonekan (Yoruba/Christian) were two top civilian members of the Abacha regime. The successor regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (Muslim, from Niger state), which handed over to the civilian regime on May 29, 1999, was also ethnically and religiously balanced.

In short, despite some of the prevailing perceptions that Hausa Muslims have dominated the top military lead-

ership, military politics is not much different from electoral politics on the matter of religious balance. The annulment of the June 1993 election was clearly not the result of religious factors, because both Abiola and his opponent, Bashir Tofa, were Muslims.

With the return to civilian politics in May 1999, every effort has been made to “reprofessionalize” the military, that is, remove them from politics. In the process, however, the perception has been widespread in the north that a disproportionate number of northern/Muslim officers have been pressured into retirement, or marginalized in other ways. Two former military heads of state from the north—Buhari and Babangida—remain key political figures in the Nigerian Fourth Republic, although there is still tension between them from the 1985 coup.

Shari’a Law

With the inception of democratic federalism under the Fourth Republic, the newly elected governor of Zamfara state announced that Shari’a law (including criminal law), an issue on which he had campaigned in fall 1998, would be introduced, to be applied to Muslims only.⁹ Other states from the far north began to follow this approach. In the turmoil that followed (even the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido, became a target when he tried to mediate) there was clearly both mass and elite support among northern Muslims.

Subsequently, various human rights groups have started to challenge the issue of Shari’a law in Zamfara through the state court system, with the expectation that eventually it will go to the Supreme Court. At the same time, various respected leaders on all sides were

9. For details on the Zamfara endeavor, see Zamfara State of Nigeria, *Shari’ah Penal Code Law*, January 2000, which in 55 pages, defines terms, criminal responsibility, punishments and compensation, joint acts, abetment, attempts to commit offences, criminal conspiracy, *hudud* and *hudud* related offences, *qiyas* and *qiyas* related offences, and criminal intimidation (including offenses by or relating to public servants, offenses related to religion, and offenses relating to ordeal, witchcraft, and juju). The author is grateful to Governor Ahmad Sani for extensive personal discussions of these issues in May 2000, during the governor’s visit to Washington, D.C.

convened to try to prevent further violence. As of 2001, 9 of the 17 Supreme Court justices were Muslim, and it was hoped that the issue could be settled politically while running its course through the courts.¹⁰

The issue of Shari’a law is of concern both within Nigeria¹¹, and externally. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has a section in its 2001 report that focuses on Shari’a developments, and has expressed a concern about extra-judicial enforcement of Shari’a laws.¹² Recent conflicts are also being evaluated through the analytical perspectives of “federalism theory,” which balance powers at the state level, and raise the issue of the responsibilities and structure of the Nigerian police in state and local matters.¹³

External Influences and Links

Even prior to the globalization of communications and transportation of the 1990s, each of the tendencies mentioned above within the Nigerian Muslim community had some pattern of external influence or linkage within the broader Muslim community (*ummah*). Yet, with the emergence of a Nigerian oil economy in the 1970s, the most noticeable external linkage pattern was the sharp increase in numbers of annual Nigerian pilgrims to Mecca, and the increased ties to Saudi Arabia (plus, of course, the extensive links and settlements in Britain). The oil economy has also allowed for extensive Nigerian investments in road and air links with neighboring countries and international locations. Needless to add, the national borders—drawn by colonial powers and basically artificial—are porous, be-

10. A more detailed discussion is available in John Paden, *Islam and Constitutionalism in Nigeria*, forthcoming.

11. As of November 22, 2001, one Web site (<http://www.gamji.com/NEWS113.htm>) that carries Nigerian English-language newspaper articles, listed 441 recent articles dealing with “Shari’a in Nigeria.” Needless to add, Hausa-language newspapers are also focusing on this issue.

12. Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, May 1, 2001. The chapter on Nigeria appears on pages 91–100. (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402-0001, ISBN 0-16-050796-0.)

13. See Rotiomu Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

cause they cut all major ethnic groups (Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Kanuri, and Igbo). Finally, the problems of immigration and customs inefficiency and corruption at many ports of entry also reinforce the permeability of boundaries.

Historically, the following “international” patterns are also clear. 1) The traditional emirate authorities in the northern states derive from the jihad that established the Sokoto caliphate in the early nineteenth century, and clearly have ethnic—especially Fulani—and religious ties that link into the Sudanic belt in West Africa. Even prior to the establishment of Sokoto, trans-Saharan trade and Islamic culture flourished in the Hausa city-states, especially via the commercial capital of Kano. 2) The Sufi brotherhoods are all transnational, with the Tijaniyya linked closely with Morocco and Senegal, and the Qadiriyya with the Maghreb and Iraq.¹⁴ The Tijaniyya, being more associated with Hausa long distance traders, has extensive links throughout West Africa. There is hardly a market or commercial center in West Africa which does not have posters of Tijaniyya saints and leaders. 3) The anti-innovation legalists have close ties with Saudi Arabia, sometimes by way of Khartoum, and have been instrumental in linking northern Nigeria to the broader world of Sunni Islam, and in challenging the Sufi tradition.¹⁵ 4) The intellectual reformers clearly have scholarly ties throughout the Muslim and Western worlds. 5) The anti-establishment syncretists have ties with local groups in neighboring African countries, especially Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. 6) The so-called “Muslim Brothers,” surprisingly, have their ties with the Shi’a world, especially Iran (since 1979), rather than the Sunni world, and are often ready to challenge the various authorities within the Sunni world. 7) The urban youth and migrant students may be more insular in their experiences, but have access to radio and cassettes from a variety of external sources. 8) Finally, the elites of the ecumenical movements have extensive contacts worldwide.

14. See John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1973). For a map of international trade and religious routes, see p. 33.

15. See John Paden, *Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and Leadership in Nigeria* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986).

Conclusions

The fact that the Muslim elite establishments in the emirate states, Borno and Yorubaland, have normally felt comfortable working with mainstream Christian counterparts, should not obscure the fact that at the grassroots level since 1999, highly localized Muslim and Christian groups, often competing for land or jobs or educational opportunities, have found cause to challenge each other, as well as the establishment. The boom and bust cycles of an oil economy (e.g., in late 2001, oil revenues in Nigeria dropped by one-third) plus the often high expectations for change in the new civilian political arena—including a demand for “law and order” based on recognizable principles, rather than military decrees—have created a rich drama of ethno-religious expression based on the hopes and fears of ordinary Nigerians.

Within the emirate states, a cleavage has been forming between the Muslim establishment and Muslim grassroots elements. This has had spillover effects on Muslim-Christian relations, as the hard driving evangelism of some Christian groups, who have made it their mission to convert Muslims at the local level, created the potential for inter-faith confrontation in various socioeconomic domains. These conflicts are increasingly difficult for emirate and civilian gubernatorial authorities to contain or mediate, without asking the federal authorities to call in national police and military resources.

Into this mix, the revival of Shari’a law during 2000–2001, combined with the impact of contemporary globalization and communication trends—especially through the Saudi connection—created a volatile situation. Yet, a clear consequence of the Shari’a revival was partially to close the gap between Muslim elites and grassroots elements in the north, even though the interpretation of Shari’a law is left to councils of *ulema* within each of the far northern states, and hence does not have a standardized impact.

This Shari’a revival was further inflamed after September 11, in the fog of confusion as the “war on terrorism” took on global proportions, and the “Osama riots” unfolded in the Fagge area of Kano. Several weeks passed before traditional authorities, such as the

Emir of Kano, could be mobilized to condemn Osama bin Laden.¹⁶

A major key to stability in Nigeria is the continued pattern of religious balance and coalition building, both within the military and among the civilian political class. Nigeria remains a multi-religious—rather than a secular—society, and religious balance issues are at least as important as ethnic or state balances in the various “federal character” endeavors. The larger issues of democratic rule, federalism, human rights, rule of law (including Shari’a law), and equity of access to resources will have to take account of the fragile balance of geocultural and religious zones in Nigeria, and the need for conflict resolution efforts across such zones. At present, the weakest link seems to be the challenge of decentralizing power—including the police force—without “balkanizing” or partitioning the country, or creating a situation of such chaos that the military is tempted to intervene. One hopes that no side will use the Shari’a issue as an excuse to destabilize the entire country. The polarization of ethnic, religious, and regional clusters must be addressed politically, constitutionally, and economically if Nigeria is to meet the test of the three-tier federal elections coming up in 2003, and make a real transition to democratic federalism.

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¹⁶ BBC, “Nigeria’s Emir opposes bin Laden,” November 23, 2001. “One of Africa’s top Islamic leaders, the powerful emir of the northern Nigerian state of Kano has told the BBC he is opposed to Osama bin Laden’s version of jihad against the United States. The emir also said he was monitoring U.S. bombing of Afghanistan to ensure that it was aimed solely at what Washington called terrorism, and not Islam in general...”

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