

CHRISTIAN MUSLIM RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN POLITICS

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Politics is a key arena in which interreligious dynamics and forces are often at play. It has long been recognized that religious identities shape the attitudes, sensibilities, and approaches of different agents – both individual and group – toward politics at national, regional and international levels. But this takes on an even more crucial texture in pluralistic societies where the coming together of agents with different religious orientations can be tricky, potentially difficult and sometimes result in socio-politically undesirable ends; as the case of Nigeria, a historically multi-cultural and religiously pluralistic country is illustrative. This study highlights two key issues in Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary Nigerian politics. It begins, however, with an overview of the terms ‘religion’, ‘politics’ and the nature of the relationship with special reference to Christianity and Islam. It argues that Christian-Muslim relations in the country has often played out in the struggles for power between both religions and in the politics of suspicion.

1.0. The Relationship Between Religion and Politics with Particular Reference to Christianity and Islam.

Growing scholarly attention has been focused on the relationship between religion and politics, both at a global level and also in the context of particular national locales. In a sense, this is not surprising because as George Moyser notes, writing in the context of political science in the early 1990s, ‘There are in, in any given period, areas of the subject that receive a lot of attention, and those which attract less. The study of religion and politics, in these terms, has moved rapidly in these years from one of neglect to one of intense scrutiny’.¹ The nature of the topic means that much of the research in the area tends to be interdisciplinary and methodologies employed depend, in large part, on the particular interest and focus of the researcher(s).² Although it is difficult to be exhaustive, in this

¹ George Moyser, ed. *Politics and Religion in the Modern World*. London: Routledge, 1991, ix.

² At the risk of overgeneralizing, we may say that Political science tends to focus on issues, among others, bordering on the impact of religious identity on nation-state politics and how religions inform, shape and alter the dynamics of transnational, international and global relations. Sociological treatments, although wide-ranging,

chapter, we begin first by attending to definitional issues: what is meant by the terms 'religion' and 'politics'? This is important in so far as a variety of understanding of these terms exist and there are serious contentions about what they mean; how they should be defined and what socio-cultural phenomena are captured by them. After this, we survey some discussions on the relationship between both phenomena and end the chapter by paying particular attention to Christianity and Islam's relationship to politics.

1.1. Defining terms: 'Religion' and 'Politics'

A particularly difficult aspect of exploring the relationship between religion and politics lies in how to define both terms. This is because definitions provided are often contentious and sometimes betray the ideological orientation of the individual or group advancing the definition. Edward B Taylor's influential notion of religion being 'the belief in Spiritual Beings'³ is one amongst many others. John Bowker surveys some of these in his entry on 'Religion' in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Some of the definitions he notes include Karl Marx's 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opiate of the people'; Emile Durkheim's 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them'; Peter Berger's 'Religion is the human attitude towards a sacred order that includes within it all being—human or otherwise—i.e., belief in a cosmos, the meaning of which both includes and transcends man'.⁴

often pay attention to issues of how states attempt to regulate religions and how religions (both at an institutional macro level and in individual or small group micro level) respond to these attempts as well as how globalization informs these; issues of secularization – how it is happening or failing to happen; and how socio-political conditions inform particular religious responses and vice-versa. In theology, the field of Political Theology is devoted to exploring how religions define themselves in relation to the political in the light of their theological traditions.

³ Edward B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, first published in 1871. It is often said that a key weakness of this definition is that not all religions have a belief in 'Spiritual Beings'. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, London: Pearson, 1989, 3, cites Theravada Buddhism as an example of a non-theistic religion.

⁴ "Religion" in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Online version, by John Bowker, Oxford University Press, 2003

The difficulty with these definitions, it is noted, is that, as J. H. Leuba is credited with having demonstrated, they merely tell us *about* religions – what religions *do* – rather than what religion *is*. Bowker goes on to note that these definitions also reveal something of the focus bias of those who define them. While some focus on the doctrinal dimension of religions others focus on their social dimensions and yet others on their public aspects while some other definitions draw attention to the private dimension of religions. For Hick, the various definitions of religion fail largely because they are ‘stipulative’. They assume in advance what religion must be and define it accordingly.⁵ Use the "Insert Citation" button to add citations to this document.

Even Bowker’s own definition of religions as ‘organized systems which hold people together’ is not itself without problems. For one thing, it can be criticized for being too broad as to include even ‘secular’ ideologies which may not identify themselves as religions.⁶

These difficulties notwithstanding, and especially in view of our concern with religion’s relationship with politics, we may agree with W. E. Paden’s notion of religion as ‘a system of language and practice that organizes the world in terms of what is sacred’.⁷ Religion, in this later conceptualization, has a certain logic of conceiving of the world as being ordered rather than merely ‘just there’; having a *telos*, and seeks to shape the lives of its adherents in a way that brings them into proper alignment with this conceived order. Further, following Simeon Ilesanmi *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*,⁸ our approach in this study employs the term religion ‘referentially’ – focusing on how persons who self-identify as

⁵ John Hick, *ibid*, 3.

⁶ Definitional issues are one thing. More recent critiques have focused on the very idea of ‘religion’ as being an ‘invention’ of the Western academy to make sense of social realities in non-Western contexts in a way that preserves the illusion of other societies being mirror images of the West (Europe in particular). Critiques along these lines include Jonathan Z Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 and Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁷ W. E. Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, 10. Quoted in Moyser, *ibid*, 9.

⁸ Simeon Ilesanmi, *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997, 5.

religious or are so regarded and institutions which inform and define these identities engage with the political. More concretely, we pay attention to two 'Abrahamic' religions – Islam and Christianity – and note how their various beliefs, theologies and practices shape and are in turn shaped by politics.

'Politics' is the other key term in our study. As with 'religion', it is also not clear how best to articulate what is meant by the term. Lincoln Allison brief entry on the term in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (3rd edition) draws attention to some of these difficulties. While for some, politics is to be restricted to governments and states and how they come about and what they do, others would favour a broader definition which conceives of 'the personal' as always being political. The idea in the latter being that all interpersonal relations are by their very nature political. Moyser quotes D. Miller's definition of the term which sees politics as 'a process whereby a group of people, whose opinions or interests are initially divergent, reach collective decisions which are generally regarded as binding on the group and enforced as common policy'.⁹ While helpful, this definition does not tell us much about how those 'collective decisions' are reached and how their legitimacy is negotiated. Moreover, it may appear to have a liberal democratic bias in that it already presupposes notions of deliberation and consensus: Western liberal democratic values which are by no means universal.

Whatever definition preferred, however, it is generally agreed that 'politics' goes beyond state politics as we can legitimately speak of church politics, family politics and university politics. The focus of our study, however, means we shall be biased toward state politics. State politics would cover those processes and institutions which not only bring about but help ensure the continuity of the state. We may think of the 'state' here as, 'a geographically delimited segment of human society united by common obedience to a single sovereign'.¹⁰ political parties, civil society, and pressure groups are often singled out as examples of political institutions while such processes as elections, protests, propaganda

⁹ Moyser, *ibid*, 3.

¹⁰ Frederick M. Walkins, "The Concept of State" in *The International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, cited in Simeon Ilesanmi, *ibid*, 6.

highlight some aspects of the political process in the context of government state politics.

1.2. Religion and Politics

Much contemporary discourse (especially in the West) around the relationship between religion and politics seem inevitably to have an undertone of the contested issue of 'separation of church and state'. Sometimes encoded in the idea of 'separation of church and state' is the normative belief that the 'proper' relationship between religion and politics ought to be one of separation. Although it is outside the scope of our study to map out a comprehensive historiography of this idea of church-state separation, it is at least helpful to note that the classic reference of this idea is often traced to Thomas Jefferson's *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (1786). James Lankford and Russell Moore's recent article in *Time* observe that although the notion of separation of church and state is often taken to mean that religion should not feature in public life (or more specifically, American politics in this instance), the original idea in Jefferson's thought was not the exclusion of religious belief from politics but an insistence on a religious pluralism where neither religion nor non-religion is privileged by the state.¹¹ The difficulty of maintaining state neutrality with regards to religion and the contested nature of the relationship between religion and state since the adoption of the *First Amendment* (1789) has been subject to much discussion.¹² Despite the contentions that have accompanied the notion especially in the legal sphere, Derek H. Lewis notes that a key logic behind its adoption in the United States was the attempt at both safeguarding the plurality of religious orientations as well as ensuring that political institutions serve common interests rather than narrow particularistic preferences.¹³

¹¹ James Lankford and Russell Moore, *The Real Meaning of the Separation of Church and State*, *Time*, January 16, 2018.

¹² Derek H Davis, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Church and State in the United States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, provides a good overview of historical, political, legal and sociological aspects of the issues.

¹³ Derek H. Davis, "Religious Pluralism as the Essential Foundation of America's Quest for Unity and Order", in *The Oxford Handbook of Church and State in the United States*, Edited by Derek H Davis, 10, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010

Europe just as the United States has also sought to safeguard the religious neutrality of the State. Although the relationship of religion to politics and the impact of politics on religion must eventually be understood on a case by case basis in different Nation-States, John Madeley reminds us of the 1648 'Westphalian Settlement' which besides helping to end the bitter Thirty Years War also signaled a recognition that 'it was for the political authorities to decide which religion should be established in a particular territory'.¹⁴ The Settlement granted sovereigns power to decide the right afforded the different religions (in this case, the particular stream or denomination of Christianity). While the settlement was radical already, Madeley further notes how the French revolution of 1789 sought to further 'de-Christianize' France. Although this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, the struggles against the Roman Catholic clerical order during the revolution would establish a pattern of an uneasy relationship between religion and politics in France and other predominantly Catholic Western European countries.¹⁵ The nature of Europe's relationship with religion, informed largely by wider aspects of this historical background, has proved influential in a theoretical discussion on the relationship between religion and politics in the global world.

In certain anthropological and social scientific studies, distinctions are often made between 'modern' societies and 'traditional' societies. Although it is beyond the scope of our study to review the extensive literature on both concepts, we may note that modern societies are often said to be characterised, in Weberian terms, by 'rational-bureaucratic' forms of political legitimation and they differ from 'traditional societies' which tend to be organized around Charismatic or traditional legitimation of political authority. The German sociologists Ferdinand Tönnies is often credited with the classic distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.¹⁶ Traditional societies are marked by *Gemeinschaft*. This German term which is often translated as 'community' denotes, as Tönnies employs the term, a form of social ordering in which interpersonal interests are emphasized over personal interest and such societies would tend to be communal with

¹⁴ John Madeley, "Politics and Religion in Western Europe" in *Politics and Religion in the Modern World*, edited by George Moyser, 32, London: Routledge, 1991.

¹⁵ Madeley, *ibid*, 36.

¹⁶ Which he introduces in his classic "Community and Society", first published in 1887.

‘simple face-to-face’ relations that are often sentimental rather than ‘rational’. *Gesellschaft* on the other hand ‘is typified by modern, cosmopolitan societies with their government bureaucracies and large industrial organizations. In the *Gesellschaft*, rational self-interest and calculating conduct act to weaken the traditional bonds of family, kinship, and religion that permeate the *Gemeinschaft*’s structure.’¹⁷

Although intended as “Ideal types” rather than actual types, the distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies have served as a convenient heuristic for understanding actual societies.¹⁸ With regards to the discourse on the relationship between religion and politics, it is often noted that while in many Western societies (which are characterised as modern and secular) the role of religion in public life is not pronounced; this is not the case with non-Western societies (‘traditional’) where, it is said, such bifurcation of both aspects of societies are non-existent. John Esposito notes, for instance, that in many of the Arab nations, shaped in a thoroughgoing fashion by Islam, ‘the question is not whether religion should inform life but when and how’.¹⁹ This differs, he notes, from the ‘modern Western secular tendency to separate religion and politics or to presume that secularization is the only modern option possible’.²⁰

Drawing upon David Easton’s systems approach, George Moyser helps us focus on three aspects of the political system which are affected or potentially affected by religion. These are ‘political parties, pressure groups, and the mass of citizens itself’.²¹ Parties may define themselves as being the political arm of particular religions (or denominations) or be informed by particular religious beliefs and doctrines. Conversely, political parties may be outrightly anti-religious. Parties may also forge alliances with religious groups and vice-versa. In certain instances, even while the party may be officially religiously neutral, they may

¹⁷ “Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft” in Encyclopædia Britannica

¹⁸ Although not our immediate concern, it is important to note that post-colonial social science tends to be critical of the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ as they are felt to perpetuate notions of Western hierarchical supremacy over non-Western societies. Claude Ake, *Social Science as Imperialism*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1979 is an example of one such work in this critical tradition.

¹⁹ John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, Revised 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 159.

²⁰ Esposito, *ibid*, 159

²¹ Moyser, *ibid*, 6.

draw their membership or appeal more to persons of particular religious affiliation and orientation. Pressure groups are also another avenue for religions to influence the polity. Pressure groups may, as with political parties, be explicitly organized along religious identity lines. They may also choose to mobilize specifically for religious ends or protest when they perceive their interest to be under threat. The last aspect of the political system which can be religiously charged is the mass of the citizens. The population distribution of religious affiliation may affect the polity in a marked way. Issues of religious minority-majority negotiation would depend on that distribution, for instance.²² Studies have also focused on how voting patterns can be significantly affected by religious identities and orientations of the mass of the citizens in the State.²³

1.3. Christian and Muslim Approaches to Politics

It is quite difficult to speak of 'a' Christian or Muslim approach to politics. The difficulty stems largely from the fact that both religions have varied manifestations which all display diverse attitudes and relations to politics. This is beside the equally important fact that geographical context heavily informs the approaches adopted and the nature of the relationship to that particular political context. With regards to Christianity, for instance, it is now common to find scholars speak of 'Christianities'. The plural form is intended to draw attention to the intense diversity within the Christian tradition. With regards to Islam, Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori exemplify a tendency in contemporary academic discourse to highlight 'Muslim' rather than 'Islamic' approaches to politics. By focusing on Muslim politics, Eickelman and Piscatori wish to emphasise the variegated nature of Islamic approaches to politics; Muslim engagement with politics, they note, 'is influenced by a number of factors, which while including scripturally defined precepts, also include national identities, economic circumstances, and social status'.²⁴ This is important to bear in mind because any assertion about either religion's approach to politics may not be generalizable as

²² Moyser, *ibid*, 6-8.

²³ R. Rose and D. Urwin, "Social Cohesion, Political Parties and Strains in Regimes", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol 2 (1), 1969, 7-67 and K. Janda, "Region and Religion as factors underlying support for national political parties", 14th World Congress of International Political Science, Washington DC. Cited in Moyser, *ibid*, 25-26.

²⁴ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, xvii.

they may be invalidated depending on sub-tradition or context. This accounts no doubt for the tendency in both the social sciences and in the theology literature to situate discussions within a particular context.

This caveat notwithstanding, because much has been written which focuses on how both religions relate with the political in the context of the State, we shall now briefly note certain key points relevant to our purpose. Islam, perhaps more than Christianity, has received a disproportionate amount of attention in the literature. In a sense, this is entirely understandable as the rise of what has been termed 'political Islam' has had more by way of global impact than any Christian counterpart in the contemporary era. We begin then with Islam. Peter Mandaville's 'Islam and Politics' which attempts a survey of Muslim politics in various nation-state and global contexts, begins nonetheless with a discussion of the historical aspects of Islam's relation to politics. Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), in Islamic belief, is regarded as the Messenger of Allah and the last of God's prophets. What is of relevance to our study is to note that although Muhammad is seen as the last of God's prophets, after his flight (*Hijra*) in 622 to Medina and particularly after the final conquest of Mecca in 630, Muhammad, in the Islamic historical tradition, did manage to achieve the hitherto impossible feat of uniting the Arab world of the time under an Islamic rule, becoming, as it were, the first Caliph.²⁵ The history of the ensuing conflicts over the legitimate successor to Muhammad after his death is well known, but for our purpose we may note that the caliphates of the 'four rightly guided' Caliphs (*Rashidun*), Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali whose reigns spanned from 632 to 661, is often looked back upon in certain Muslim imaginaries as the golden age of Islam. The years after these saw challenges and splits within Islam which would have continued ramifications even to the present but in spite of this, the expansion of Islam continued through much of the Middle Ages until the end of the Abbasid dynasty in 1258.²⁶ It is not relevant to our purpose to rehash the history as there are many superb works which attend to this,²⁷ It will suffice to mention that the history reveals a pattern

²⁵ John Esposito, *ibid*, 10

²⁶ Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 2014., 33-39.

²⁷ John Esposito, ed. *The Oxford History of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, is but one amongst many other excellent resources on the growth of Islam.

of close affinity between religion and political legitimation. The Islamic concept of God's oneness (*Tawhid*) has often been drawn upon to theologically justify this affinity.

Constantine's edict of Milan in 313 which changed the status of Christianity from being *religio illicita* to becoming the legitimate religion of the Roman Empire is significant for certain parallels it has to the Islamic caliphate system. Although, the key difference might be that while in Islam, its state-political dimension accompanied it from its very beginning, it was not until after over two centuries of the Christian movement that its state-political dimension would emerge. This fact does not undermine the fact, however, that as John D Gruchy notes, the teachings of the Christian Scripture, just as the Islamic Sacred scripture (*Quran*) and Traditions (*Hadiths*) has often provided resources for articulating a 'Christian' vision of society.²⁸

Discussions of 'Islam and Politics' often attend to the contested issue of the *Sharia* and especially its compatibility or otherwise with the modern secular constitutional framework. Mandaville defines the *Sharia* as 'the moral and ethical system of the Islamic religion'.²⁹ This, he admits, is in the broad sense of the word. The more specific understanding of *Sharia* tends to refer to the moral codes and systems of legal retribution and enforcement which are employed in a number of Muslim majority countries as the primary legal system. The *Sharia*, Mandaville notes, derives not only from the sacred Islamic texts but also from precedent.³⁰ While one cannot generalize, it is difficult to find a Christian counterpart to the *Sharia* in the contemporary period. This is not to say that Christian scriptures have not functioned or continue to function politically or informed many so-called 'secular' legal systems but merely to note that in the contemporary period, an instance of a nation-State whose legal codes are mainly derived from the Christian Scripture and the Christian tradition (loosely speaking) does not exist. This difference, as would become obvious later in our study, has implications

²⁸ John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Chapter 2 in particular, "The Prophetic Vision", 40-53.

²⁹ Mandaville, *ibid*, 41.

³⁰ Mandaville, *ibid*, 41.

especially as it touches on certain issues in Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria.

2.0. Key and Emerging Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Nigerian Politics

An impressive number of studies have devoted attention to exploring various aspects of the political dimensions of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.³¹ More recent scholarship has tried to update aspects of the topic to account for key developments that have emerged since the start of Nigeria's Fourth Republic.³² In this chapter, we identify and attempt to explicate on two key and emerging and closely interrelated issues – Christian-Muslim struggles for state power and the politics of suspicion – which, we shall argue, accompany Interreligious relations between the two dominant religions in the political sphere of Nigeria. It would be helpful for better situating of the issues to begin first with providing an overview of aspects of Nigeria's demography and history that touch on the issue of Christian-Muslim relations and to this, we now turn.

2.1. Historical Background and Demographics of Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria

Religion has played a key role in the formation of contemporary Nigeria. In his recent study of the subject, Olufemi Vaughan attempts to show how the religious factor has been critical to the formation of the Nigerian *polis* and this crucial role, Vaughan contends, extends back to the pre-colonial period.³³ Although at present, the Nigerian public sphere is dominated by Christian-Muslim voices, it is important to remember that a variety of indigenous religious traditions continue to have adherents in the country. Indeed, a number of studies

³¹ Such as Simeon Ilesanmi, *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997); Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Iheanyi M. Ewerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Institut Francais de Recherche en Afrique, 1995; Matthew H. Kukah, *Religion, Power and Politics in Northern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993)

³² Nigeria's 'Fourth Republic' refers to the democratic dispensation that came into effect in 1999 with the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo. The three previous democratic 'republics' have been that of 1963-1967 with Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as Prime minister; 1979-1983 with Alhaji Shehu Shagari as president and the botched republic of 1992-1993 in which the election of Chief MKO Abiola was annulled by the then military government of General Ibrahim Babangida.

³³ Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

make clear that African Traditional Religions (ATR), as these indigenous religions are referred to in the literature, continue to exert, in spite of the decline in the number of their adherents, covert influences on the religious practices of both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.³⁴ Besides their role in informing aspects of Nigerian Christian and Muslim lived theologies and their dynamic interrelation with these religious traditions, the indigenous religious traditions continue to provide legitimation for traditional power structures in many parts of the country.³⁵ Although the dialectics of the relationship between these traditional forms of power and the 'secular' modern Nigerian government are no doubt less than straightforward, it suffices to note that they continue to be important even in the contemporary Nigerian political context.

The dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria require some appreciation of the demographic distribution of the millions of adherents of both religions in the country. Although the exact statistic for 2019 is not available, recent estimates put the population of the country at 200 Million.³⁶ It is difficult to know for certain the number of those, in this number, who are Christian and Muslim. Due largely to the politicised nature of the issue, recent censuses have deliberately omitted the question of religious affiliation.³⁷ It is generally agreed, however, that both religions share an almost equal number of adherents. A 2011 *Pew Research Centre* study put the number of Christians in the country at 80 Million and the number of Muslims at 76 Million.³⁸ Admittedly, the validity of this statistic may not be accepted by all but its value to this study lies in its evidencing the fact that a majority-minority pattern in relation to both religions does not

³⁴ See for instance, Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; JDY Peel, *Christianity, Islam and Orisa Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015); Deji Ayegboyin '...but deliver us from Evil': The Riposte of the MFM and its implications for the Reverse in Mission'. *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*. Vol. xxxvii, June & Dec. 2005, p. 33-64.

³⁵ Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s–1990s*. Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000)

³⁶ "Nigeria's Population now 198 Million – NPC", *Premium Times*, April 12, 2018. The last nation-wide census conducted in 2006 had put the country's population at 140 million. Cf. "Report of Nigeria's National Population Commission on the 2006 Census", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 33(1), 2007, p. 206-210

³⁷ Pew Research Centre, "Regional Distribution of Christians", December 19, 2011. Accessed online: <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-regions/>

³⁸ Pew Research Centre, *ibid*.

exist in Nigeria (although such patterns do exist in particular regions of the country).

Broadly speaking, Nigeria may heuristically be divided into three main regions – North, South and East.³⁹ In terms of the demographic distribution of religious adherents, there is a Muslim majority in the Northern part of the country even though there exists a significant Christian minority in this Northern region as well. The Southern part of the country is made up of almost an equal number of Christians and Muslims while the Eastern region consists mostly of Christians. Talk of ‘regions’ as we have just used it, however, is not very precise and it is more appropriate, for analytical purposes, to speak of ‘states’ and ‘geopolitical’ zones (which are the terms employed in contemporary Nigerian constitutional discourse). In these latter terms, Nigeria is made up of 36 states and these states are categorized into six geopolitical zones.⁴⁰ The North-East, North-Central and North-West geopolitical zones which together comprise 19 states make up what is generally referred to as the Northern part of the country (or simply ‘the North’) and it is in this region of the country that a disproportionate majority of the country’s Muslim population reside. The demographic distribution of Christians and Muslims in the six South-western States are almost even. The 11 states that together make up the South-east and South-south are made up mostly of Christians.⁴¹ This demographic distribution accounts for the common references in both popular and academic discourses to the ‘Christian South’ and the ‘Muslim North’.

³⁹ Nigeria used to be politically administered on regional basis. The regions (Northern, Western, Mid-Western and Eastern) were, however, broken down to 12 states in 1967.

⁴⁰ “South-east -5 states = (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo)

South-south -6 states = (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Rivers)

South-west – 6 states = (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo)

North-east – 6 states = (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe)

North-west- 7 states = (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara);

North- central-6 states= (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Plateau)”

Accessed online: Chizoba M, “Six Geo-political Zones in Nigeria”

https://www.academia.edu/14476835/THE_SIX_POLITICAL_ZONES_IN_NIGERIA

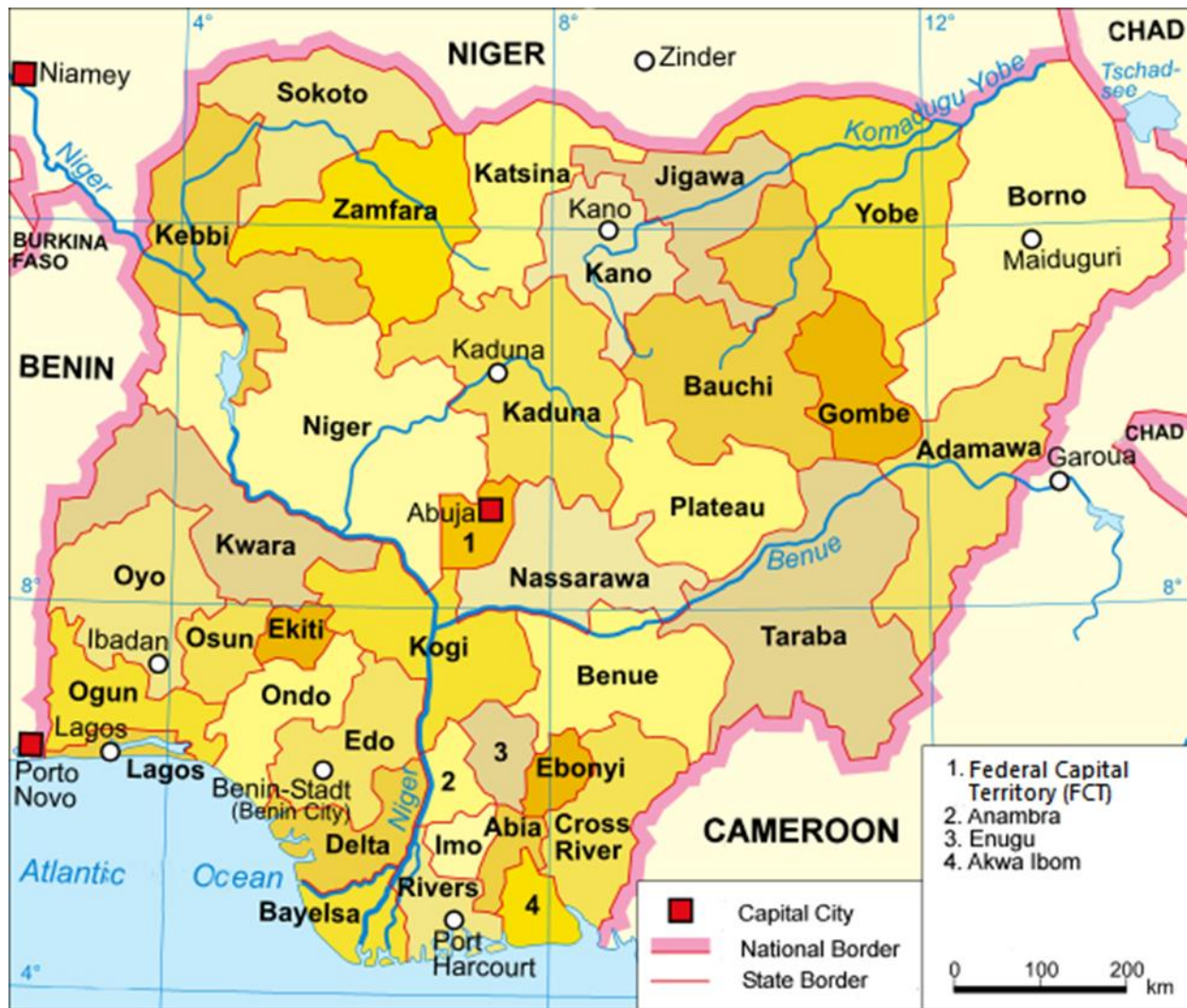
⁴¹ cf. John H. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008), pp. 7-10.

Religious identities in Nigeria are closely linked with ethnic identities. There are over 250 ethnic groups in the country.⁴² Each of these ethnic groups has distinct languages although some similarities exist amongst some of the languages. The three major ethnolinguistic people groups in the country are the Yoruba, the Igbos and the Hausa-Fulani. These three groups together make up almost 70 percent of the country's population.⁴³ The Hausa-Fulani are the majority in the 'Muslim North'; the Yoruba are the majority in the 'Christian-Muslim' South-west while the Igbos are the majority ethnic group in the 'Christian-South'.

⁴² Cf. "CIFORB Country Profile – Nigeria"

Accessed online: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/ptr/ciforb/resources/Nigeria.pdf>

⁴³ John N. Paden, *ibid*, p. 7



Map of Nigeria showing the country's current 36 states.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Nigeria_states_map

Aspects of the country's religious history are reflected in this demographic distribution of religious adherents in the country. Although the date of Islam's first encounter with what is now Nigeria⁴⁴ is not known with certainty, the records make at least clear that Islam predated Christianity in the country by at least seven centuries. L. Hickin asserts, in corroboration of this point, that Islam has

⁴⁴ 'Nigeria' came about officially in 1914 with the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Nigerian Protectorates. Cf. Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 45. Because of this, to speak of 'Nigeria' before 1914 is somewhat anachronistic.

had a ‘steady infiltration’ into the Northern part of the country since the 12th century C.E.⁴⁵ In contrast, it was only in the 19th century that, after an earlier ‘failed’ missionary enterprise had made forays into the country in the 15th century,⁴⁶ that Christianity, through the efforts of a variety of Western Mission churches and organisations like the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Baptists (of the American Southern Baptist Convention), the Methodists, Presbyterians, the Sudan Interior Mission, amongst others, emerged as a significant religious presence in the country.⁴⁷ Mission Christianity of both the protestant and Roman Catholic streams were, in the main, quite successful in the Southern parts of the country but a variety of factors including, not limited to but particularly due to, colonial administrative hesitancy about fears of not disrupting the established socio-cultural and traditional political structures of the Islamic Emirate system which was in place in the Muslim North, made it quite difficult for Christian Missions to make as much headway in the North as they did in the South.⁴⁸ The different religious orientations in both parts of the country would go on to exert significant impacts on the socio-economic development⁴⁹ of both regions; the dynamic of their relationship during the decolonisation years but especially after

⁴⁵ L. Hickin, “The Advance of Islam in Nigeria”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 26 (4), 1936, p. 400-403

⁴⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1983), pp. 35-52.

⁴⁷ There are several studies which provide more details of the historical development of Missionary Christianity in Nigeria. Two important works on the topic are E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. (London: Longmans, 1966); J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite*. (London: Longmans, 1965).

⁴⁸ A discussion of the phases and nature of Christian Missionary activities in Northern Nigeria prior to the Amalgamation in 1914 are discussed in E. A. Ayandele, “The Missionary Factor in Northern Nigeria, 1870-1918”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* Vol. 3, No. 3 (December 1966), pp. 503-522; Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 82-88 provides, amongst other points, an interesting case study of the challenges the ‘Catholic brothers’, a Roman Catholic mission organisation, faces in her attempts at propagating Christianity in Northern Nigeria. Several studies exist which address in fuller details various aspects of the (pre-colonial) Sokoto Caliphate. These include, Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, London: Longman, 1967; Ibraheem Sulaiman, *The Islamic State and the Challenge of History: Ideals, Policies and Operation of the Sokoto Caliphate*. (East-West University Islamic Studies. New York: Mansell, 1987) and R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906*, (London: Longman, 1971).

⁴⁹ There exists significant divergence in socio-economic development between the Southern and Northern regions of the country. In terms of such development indicators as quality of education and health care, the South generally performs better than the North. Some have noted the fact that the Christian-majority South had a head-start in Western Education over the Muslim-majority North as a being contributorily factor. For more on the economic disparities in the regions, see: UNDP “National Human Development Report 2018: Achieving Human Development in North East Nigeria”, (Garki, Abuja: UNDP, 2018)

accessed online: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2018_nigeria_finalfinalx3.pdf

Independence.⁵⁰ It is by no means an exaggeration to say that much contemporary Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria's political arena are informed by the early histories and concomitant trajectories of Christianity and Islam in the country.

2.2. Christian-Muslim Struggles for Power in Contemporary Nigeria

In the contemporary political context, a key area in which Christian-Muslim relations has had momentous import is in what Ebenezer Obadare terms the 'struggle for state power' between both religions.⁵¹ Perhaps nowhere else illustrates this dynamic more than the various presidential elections which have taken place in the country during the country's Fourth Republic. We shall presently delimit our discussion to presidential elections in so far as, to a large extent, what happens at the presidential level helps to illustrate broader tendencies which also play out at the various state and regional political levels.

Nigeria has witnessed six elections since the beginning of the Fourth Republic.⁵² Obadare marshals several evidences to show that religious identities (especially, in Obadare's study, Christian religious identity) have played a chief role in these elections and in the politics of the Fourth Republic in general. Obadare argues, for instance, that the chief appeal of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo⁵³ who emerged as the winner of the 1999 elections (competing under the aegis of the People's Democratic Party, PDP) was the perception amongst many Christians (especially in the Southern Part of Nigeria) who viewed his religious identity as a Christian as something of a guarantee that their interests would be represented or at least protected.⁵⁴ Even though Obasanjo's rival at the polls in 1999 had

⁵⁰ See Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, pp. 1-111, for more discussion on the dynamics of Christianity and Islam during the years of decolonization (c. 1940s-1960).

⁵¹ Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria*, London: Zed Books, 2018.

⁵² Nigeria's 1999 constitution states that the 'President shall vacate his office at the expiration of a period of four years commencing from the date' and that he/she will not be qualified for election if 'he has been elected to such office at any two previous elections'. Hence elections have been held every four years in Nigeria beginning with the first presidential elections of the Fourth Republic which took place in 1999.

⁵³ Obasanjo had previously served as military head of state in the country between 1976-1979 before enabling the transition to the Second Republic.

⁵⁴ Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic*, 51

been another Christian, Chief Samuel Oluyemisi Falae⁵⁵, Obasanjo's public image as a 'born-again' Christian who had experienced something of a dramatic conversion while serving time in prison⁵⁶ bolstered, on Obadare's analysis, the confidence, amongst Christians, that he was something close to being 'a second Messiah'.⁵⁷ Whether or not Obadare's analysis of the religious significance which Christians are said to have perceived in the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo is entirely correct, we can take from his later discussion of the close relationship which what he terms the 'theocratic class'⁵⁸ had with the president⁵⁹ the fact that Christians (or at least some prominent Christian leaders) saw in Obasanjo's presidency an answer to their prayer for a Christian presence in the highest seat of power of the country.⁶⁰

The 1999 presidential election was the first election to take place in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and in many quarters, it was a watershed moment not least because it represented something of quite remarkable progress for the country in view of her hitherto chequered history of military rule. Olusegun Obasanjo served two terms in office (1999-2003; 2003-2007). His predecessor, who resumed office on May 29, 2007, was a Muslim from the Northern part of the country (Musa Yar'Adua) who had previously served as a state governor before his becoming president.⁶¹ The choice of a Muslim Northerner by the party of the incumbent (i.e. the PDP) was in keeping with the People's Democratic Party's constitutional clause of ensuring 'fair' distribution of representation amongst the different ethnoreligious identities.⁶² While understandably a pragmatic move, it bears highlighting that the fact that such a clause exists in the

⁵⁵ being the candidate representing a coalition of two parties: The Alliance of Democracy, AD and the All People's Party

⁵⁶ He had been tried and found guilty (under questionable grounds) of planning a coup against the infamous military head of state General Sani Abacha (who was Nigeria's military head of state between November 17, 1993 to June 8, 1998)

⁵⁷ Obadare, *ibid*, 51; 55-64

⁵⁸ In Obadare's usage, the 'theocratic class' is comprised of the prominent Christian leaders in Nigeria.

⁵⁹ Obadare, *ibid*, 64-67

⁶⁰ Obadare, *ibid*, 51

⁶¹ He had served as governor of Katsina state (one of the 19 Northern states of Nigeria) before his being 'handpicked' by the outgoing president to succeed him. Obadare, *ibid*, 73-97 provides more detail on this 'Muslim Interlude'

⁶² Obadare, *ibid*, 177

first place is itself an acknowledgement of the power that ethnoreligious identities hold in the country. This validates Moyser's point (which we reviewed the previous chapter) about how political parties may be impacted by 'issues of religious minority-majority negotiation'.⁶³

Yar'Adua's untimely death on the 5th of May 2010 (while still in office) meant that he was not able to complete his four-year term as president. As Nigeria's constitution provided, the vice-president, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who was both a Christian and a Southerner (from Bayelsa state), was sworn in as president to complete the term. Goodluck would go on to stand for president in the next presidential elections in 2011 (still under the aegis of the PDP). His identity as both a Southerner and a Christian on the one hand, and also the fact that amongst some Muslim Northern elites, the feeling existed that the original mandate of Yar'Adua was understood, as in Obasanjo's tenure, to last for two terms, made a bit problematic his decision to run as president in 2011.⁶⁴ In spite of these, however, and after apparently reaching a concession with key members of this Northern Muslim elites to run only for one term,⁶⁵ Goodluck would eventually emerge as the winner of the 2011 Nigeria presidential election, continuing as president until 2015.

The 2015 polls saw General Muhammad Buhari, a Muslim Northerner, emerge as president.⁶⁶ In certain Christian circles (especially in the Christian Association of Nigeria⁶⁷) there were propaganda campaigns against the candidacy of Muhammad Buhari mainly on grounds of his religious identity as a Northern Muslim and concerns about an incipient agenda by the Muslim North to Islamize

⁶³ George Moyser, *Politics and Religion in the Modern World*, 6-8

⁶⁴ Obadare, *ibid*, 103

⁶⁵ Ismail Omipidan and Jibril Musa, "2015: Why I backed out on one term agreement –Jonathan", *The Sun*, 29th April 2017. Accessed online: <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/2015-why-i-backed-out-on-one-term-agreement-jonathan/>

⁶⁶ The 2015 elections, like many general elections in Nigeria was rife with instances of electoral violence and various forms of malpractices but it was particularly significant for being the first time the country had witnessed an incumbent president dislodged. Cf. "Nigeria's election: Hail to democracy" *The Economist*, Apr 4th, 2015. Accessed online: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2015/04/04/hail-to-democracy>

⁶⁷ Founded in 1976, the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, is the foremost ecumenical Christian organisation in Nigeria and its membership is drawn from almost all the Christian churches in the country.

the country.⁶⁸ Although some Christian groups like the *Northern Christian Leaders' Eagle-Eyes Forum* endorsed Muhammad Buhari in the 2015 elections⁶⁹ and the fact that his running mate Prof. Yemi Osibanjo was a Christian (and also pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God) reduced the force of the propaganda that he was an Islamist of some sort, the 2015 presidential election underscores the salience of religious identities in informing voter decisions in the Nigerian context but more than that, how religious groups often attempt to extend their influence beyond their traditional borders.

2.3. The politics of suspicion

In a somewhat similar vein to Fabian Jankovic we employ the term 'the politics of suspicion'⁷⁰ in this chapter to connote the sense of distrust of the 'religious other' in Nigeria's politics; a tendency to suspect the motivations, decisions, and policies of those in positions of power or who hold strategic political decisions largely because of their religious identity and what this identity is believed to portend. The term is inspired by Paul Ricœur's notion of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in his *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). It is our contention that a predominant feature of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria is suspicion and this distrust of the religious other, we shall presently indicate, cannot be divorced from the nation's religious history.

The feeling amongst many Christian leaders for Christian representation at the highest level of government underscores the role religious (and ethnic)

⁶⁸ Kazeem Ugbodaga, "Bakare Blasts CAN, PFN For Endorsing Jonathan", *PM News* (Lagos), 2 February 2015. Accessed online: <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2015/02/02/bakare-blasts-can-pfn-for-endorsing-jonathan/> Cf. Ebenezer Obadare, Electoral Theologies: Pentecostal Pastors and the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria, LSE Blog, December 16th, 2015. Accessed online: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2015/12/16/electoral-theologies-pentecostal-pastors-and-the-2015-presidential-election-in-nigeria/>

⁶⁹ Sylvester Ugwuanyi, March 28: Over 500 Northern pastors endorse Buhari, *Daily Post*, February 13, 2015. Accessed online: <https://dailypost.ng/2015/02/13/march-28-500-northern-pastors-endorse-buhari/>; Dare Lawal, "Northern Christian leaders endorse Buhari; present Bible gift to him" *The Scoop*, February 12, 2015. Accessed online: <https://thescoopng.com/2015/02/12/northern-christian-leaders-endorse-buhari-present-bible-gift-photos/>

⁷⁰ "On the Politics of Suspicion: American responses to the Pentagon Papers and revelations of government deception during the Vietnam War" (accessed online at <http://winstonchurchillbc.org/media/2013/09/2013-Essay-Fabian-Jankovic-First-Prize.pdf>)

identities play in the Nigerian context. Although some scholars like Ebenezer Obadare seem, on the whole, critical of the close relationship between the Church (the 'Pentecostals' more specifically in Obadare's study) and the state⁷¹, it is not difficult to understand why Christians (or at least some of them⁷²) have sought to be more assertive of their presence in Nigeria's politics.⁷³ This is made clear when one considers the concerns which the non-Muslim minority have often raised against the Muslim elite in the North. In his fine socio-historical study of elite power politics in Northern Nigeria, Matthew Hassan Kukah⁷⁴ has attempted to highlight patterns of hegemony wielded against the non-Muslim Christian minority in the North. These hegemonic tendencies date back to the *Jihads* of Uthman Dan Fodio (1804-1808), who most decisively established Islam as the dominant religion in the North.⁷⁵ The impact of this *jihād* on the later Muslim-Christian relations on the one hand and Northern Muslims relation to state power continue to be felt even to the present. The contemporary Boko Haram⁷⁶ Jihadist group has often looked back to this *Jihad* of Uthman dan Fodio and the Islamic Emirate which he consolidated as something of an ideal.⁷⁷ It is beyond the scope of our study to go into extensive details about the *Jihad* of Uthman dan Fodio⁷⁸ but it suffices to note that the *jihād* has had the impact of giving Islam the status of legitimacy in the North which has not similarly been enjoyed by non-Muslim religions in this region.

⁷¹ Ebenezer Obadare, *ibid*, 5, 162, 165.

⁷² There are diverse Christian denominations in the country and even though, since the establishment of the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN in 1976, they have formed an ecumenical front, there still exists significant differences between them especially with regards to their modes of engaging with the political. For a helpful taxonomy of Christian Churches in the country, see Deji Ayegboyin and Asonzeh Ukah, 'Taxonomy of Churches in Africa: The Case of Nigeria'. *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*. Vol. XIII (1) 2008, 1-21; and for a study of some Christian churches (in this case the Pentecostal churches) and the diverse forms in which they engage the political, see Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

⁷³ Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

⁷⁴ Matthew H Kukah, *Religion, Power and Politics in Northern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993)

⁷⁵ Vaughan, *ibid*, 16-24.

⁷⁶ Although popularly known as 'Boko-Haram', the sect officially goes by the name: 'Jamā'atu Ahli is-Sunnah lid-Da'wati wal-Jihād'

⁷⁷ Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, London: C. Hurst and Company, 2018, 88

⁷⁸ For more details on the jihad and especially its religious significance, see: Ibrahim Sulaiman, *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman dan Fodio*, (London: Mansel, 1986).

Given that the *jihad* of Uthman dan Fodio was ostensibly carried out in order to purify Islam of a variety of ‘corruptions’ to which it had become soiled in,⁷⁹ Nigerian Christians’ suspicion of Islam and Northern Muslims in particular, has often been framed in the rhetoric of fears about a continued *Islamization* of the country. These concerns may sometimes have been exaggerated but it cannot be denied that several incidents in the country’s post-Independence history have sometimes lent a semblance of credence to these fears. When in the 1960s, for instance, the then Premier of Northern Nigeria and also the *Sardauna* of Sokoto, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello embarked, on a series of ‘conversion’ campaigns to win more converts from the non-Muslim minority (especially those in the Middle Belt⁸⁰)⁸¹ and when in the Constitution Drafting Committees of the 1979 and 1989 Nigerian constitutions, a push for an expanded Sharia was made by a consortium of Northern Muslims, Christian suspicion of an imminent plan to Islamise the country were given an added edge.⁸² The unpopular decision in 1986 by the then military head of state, General Ibrahim Babaginda, to enlist Nigeria as a full-fledged member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference⁸³, OIC,⁸⁴ was also an occasion for suspicion by many Christians and it was perceived by many as another Northern Muslim ploy to leverage state resources for the furtherance of Islam.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ While the religious motive may have been crucial, other factors bordering on economy and politics also played key roles in influencing its trajectory. Cf. Femi Ajayi, *The Effect of Religion on the Political Process*, New York: iUniverse, 2009, 36.

⁸⁰ The states referred to as Middle belt in Nigeria are Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, Adamawa, Plateau and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

⁸¹ For a discussion which puts the Sardauna’s apparent privileging of Islam within a larger context of patterns of marginalisation of non-Muslims in the North, see: Johannes Harnischfeger, “Islamisation and Ethnic Conversion in Nigeria”, *Anthropos*, Bd. 101, H. 1. (2006), 37-53. cf. Olufemi Vaughan, *ibid*, 114.

⁸² For more discussion of how the issue of *sharia* affected the dynamic of the constitution drafting process of the 1979 and 1989 constitutions, see Femi Ajayi, *The Effect of Religion on the Political Process*, New York: iUniverse, 2009. For a focus on the ensuing patterns of rhetorical suspicion which the sharia debate caused in both Christian and Muslim quarters see: Joseph Kenny, “Sharia and Christianity in Nigeria: Islam and a Secular State”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 4 (1996): 338-64. doi:10.2307/1581837.

⁸³ Now, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

⁸⁴ The OIC identifies itself as ‘a collective voice of the Muslim World’ which ‘endeavours to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world’. https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en. It is made up of 53 Muslim-majority nation states.

⁸⁵ Part of the problem in Nigeria joining the OIC was also the ‘secretive’ circumstances under which this took place. Cf. Simeon Ilesanmi, *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, Ohio, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997, 176.

The OIC issue continues to inform the perceptions of the Muslim ‘other’ by many Nigerian Christians in the political context. During the 2015 presidential election, for instance, a recurring trope in the Christian Association of Nigeria’s propaganda against the Muslim contender, Muhammad Buhari, was to recall how ‘during Babaginda’s regime, he [Buhari] sold Nigeria to the OIC in order to Islamise Nigeria with an agreement that OIC will be supporting Nigeria financially and materially to accomplish their mission’.⁸⁶ Christian suspicion of the incumbent Muslim president (Muhammad Buhari) continues to the present and is evident in CAN’s recent public denouncing of the president’s attendance of the 14th OIC conference which was held in Mecca, Saudi Arabia on the 31st of May, 2019.⁸⁷

We should quickly add in parenthesis that this suspicion is often complicated by the ethnic layering with which the religious identities of many Nigerians is embedded. Conflicts between farmers and herders⁸⁸ whose occurrence has been accentuated in recent years have equally fed feelings of suspicion. There continues to be agitations of felt underrepresentation by *particular* ethnic (and religious) groups in the context of official government appointments and contentions over alleged overrepresentation by other ethnic groups.⁸⁹ Each of these issues, no doubt, requires more detailed analysis than we can undertake here but our highlighting them is to make even more clear our

More discussion of the politics of suspicion which attended to the OIC event can be found in Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 1998, 93-102.

⁸⁶ Kazeem Ugboaga, “Bakare Blasts CAN, PFN For Endorsing Jonathan”, PM News (Lagos), 2 February 2015. Accessed online: <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2015/02/02/bakare-blasts-can-pfn-for-endorsing-jonathan/> Cited in Ebenezer Obadare, *ibid*, 134.

⁸⁷ Seun Opejobi, “Islamization agenda: CAN president attacks Buhari for attending Organisation of Islamic Cooperation meeting” PM News, June 1, 2019. Accessed online: <https://dailypost.ng/2019/06/01/islamization-agenda-can-president-attacks-buhari-attending-organisation-islamic-cooperation-meeting/>

⁸⁸ Ruth Maclean, A radical idea for an ancient African conflict: talking to the enemy, *The Guardian* (UK edition), 10 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/10/africa-nigeria-herders-farmers-; Eno Adeogun, Fulani herdsman more threatening to Nigerian Christians than Boko Haram, Premier, 19 December 2018, https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Fulani-herdsman-more-threatening-to-Nigerian-Christians-than-Boko-Haram>

⁸⁹ Halimah Yahaya, Again, CAN accuses Buhari of lopsided appointments, *Premium Times* (Abuja), 18 September 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/284189-again-can-accuses-buhari-of-lopsided-appointments.html>; Leke Baiyewu, Buhari’s alleged lopsided security appointments split southern, northern senators, *Punch* (Nigeria), 24 October 2018, <https://punchng.com/buharis-alleged-lopsided-security-appointments-split-southern-northern-senators/>

argument about the ubiquity of *suspicion* in contemporary Nigerian interreligious/ethnic politics.

2.4. Conclusion: What is the future of Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria's politics?

Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria's politics has been challenging; it often has been strained by struggles for power and mutual suspicion of the 'other'. While constraints of space have not allowed us to be detailed and more nuanced, we have tried to indicate how these challenges owe in significant parts to the history of the country and how the problems posed continue to be crucial even to the present time. We should add also that these challenges have very often gone beyond the discursive and have, not infrequently, resulted in overt and tragic conflicts.⁹⁰ While we briefly made mention of the Islamist sect, *Boko-Haram*, we have not been able to go into depth about the relation of their activities to politics.⁹¹ The sect and the aftermath of its heinous activities continues to pose immense socio-economic challenges to the Nigerian state (although it would seem its [*Boko-Haram*] heyday has past). But what needs emphasizing here is the explicitly political agenda which the sect has. Its rhetoric has often been framed in terms of antagonism against Western education⁹², criticisms of other non-Salafi-Jihadi Muslims, animosity toward Christians and, of import to our present study, opposition of *democracy*.⁹³

⁹⁰ From the 1980s onward, such issues as the place of *Sharia* in the constitution, the *Maitasine* uprising and other religiously informed hostilities have been constant features of Christian-Muslim relations especially in Northern Nigeria. For more on religious violence in Nigeria, see: Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998, and Israel Akanji, *Towards a theology of conflict transformation: a study of religious conflict in contemporary Nigerian society*, *Unpublished PhD Dissertation*, University of Edinburgh, 2011.

⁹¹ A helpful history and analysis of the sect is provided by Alex Thurston, *Boko-Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

⁹² 'Boko-Haram' in Hausa may be translated as 'Western education is forbidden'. cf. Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, London: C. Hurst and Company, 2018, 1.

⁹³ For a compilation and translation of an extensive range of Boko-Haram audio and video recordings and texts, see: Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, London: C. Hurst and Company, 2018.

The struggles for power by both Christians and Muslim seem to be indicative of an under-developed sense of nationhood amongst Nigerians;⁹⁴ a situation resulting in other identities like religion and ethnicity resonating more strongly with the citizenry than their *Nigerian* identity. It is not misguided to suggest that this apparent failure of nationhood is closely related to the failures of successive military and civilian governments to ensure equitable socio-economic opportunities for all Nigerians. Indeed, it may be that Nigeria's apparent crisis of development contributes in no small measure to the ascendancy of religious agents who, frustrated by the state's failure to deliver on vital public goods, seek to assert themselves more in the politics of the country. We can conjecture, if our reasoning is valid, that it would continue to be the case that, to the extent present socio-economic conditions persists, religious agents would continue to make their agitations (real and imagined) known and take measures (even if that means extending beyond their traditional borders) to shape the polity to favour their corporate interests. They would continue to actively seek to have their 'sons and daughters' represent these corporate interests; however parochial these interests may seem to the neutral observer.

Simeon Ilesanmi proposes what he terms 'dialogic politics' as a panacea to both the religiously informed struggles for power and what we have referred to as the politics of suspicion. Critical of both the pretensions inherent in a 'secularist' state and the inherent hegemonic tendencies of the 'confessional' (or theocratic) state, Ilesanmi, following the influential Catholic public theologian John Courtney Murray, imagines the possibility of 'congruence between religious visions of the good political life and the aspirations of secular persons'.⁹⁵ He is convinced that both Christians and Muslims must learn to go beyond their all too often narrow theological leanings and strive to seek and work toward the common good. Admittedly, as Ilesanmi recognises, a purely secular state may not be realistic in view of the salience of religion in Nigeria. But then, as the 1999 constitution makes explicit that the 'State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion',⁹⁶ it behoves the government, if peaceful interreligious relations would be realized, to

⁹⁴ Cf. Femi Ajayi, *The Effect of Religion on the Political Process*, New York: iUniverse, 2009, 5.

⁹⁵ Simeon Ilesanmi, *Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, Ohio, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997, 63.

⁹⁶ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. 2 (10)

ensure that this constitutional provision is not merely a formality. As Ilesanmi puts it 'no matter how genuine the intentions of people of various persuasions may be, without an appropriate political context (such as rigorous adherence to constitutional protection) that encourages intercommunal cooperation, such efforts will surely be impeded and frustrated'⁹⁷ We can only hope that the Nigerian government would provide such a context.

⁹⁷ Ilesanmi, *ibid*, 235.

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