

Religious Bias and Governance in Nigeria: A Flash Back

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Abstract

Governance refers to the ability to organize a particular society in an orderly manner so as to maintain peace, progress, and development. It is mainly associated with ensuring the welfare of the citizenry in an atmosphere of democracy. Thus, when one talks about governance, it is usually associated with law and order. The degree of the success achieved in maintaining law and order in a particular society brings out the vivid distinction between 'good' and 'bad' governance. Thus, religious or cultural bias can make a whole lot of difference between good and bad governance. This paper concentrates on the influence of religious bias on the political arena of Nigeria – on its ability to govern itself. A brief survey of some of the incidents involving religion and politics from 1979 till date would clearly show that Nigeria is still very far from declaring herself a country free from various kinds of militating obstacles against good governance - the Sharia and currently the menace of Boko Haram, which has registered Nigeria in the notorious book of global terrorism.

1. The Problem of the Sharia in the Second Republic

Islamic law had always been in existence in Nigeria, even during the colonial period when the name Nigeria had not been clearly given to the amalgamated nationalities within it. At this time, Sharia was practised alongside with the system of British indirect rule through emirs and chiefs, whereby the British instituted regional and provincial governments parallel and superior to that of the native authority. With independence, the programme of the Islamisation of Nigeria was vigorously pursued by some muslim conservatives. The Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI) and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, for instance, constituted essential vehicles for the realisation of this project. Ahmadu Bello - Premier of Northern Nigeria, was in the forefront for the implementation of the Islamisation of Nigeria, especially through the instrumentality of the Sufi brotherhoods, the reformists and state Islam. It cannot be completely ruled out from the crisis and eventual civil war that rocked the very unity of Nigeria (1966- 1970).

According to Mazrui (1986:15-16), for instance, in the Second Republic (1979-1983), the National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N) or the Political Party in power under President Shehu Shagari used the tools of political expediency to foster the Sharia agenda. The President established a Presidential Advisory Board on Islamic Affairs. Open appeals were made to Muslims in such places as Sokoto, Oyo, and Kaduna etc to vote for the N.P.N. The government spent flagrantly on Islamic pilgrimages to Mecca. It was at the time of Alhaji Shehu Shagari that the popular Austerity Measures were first introduced to Nigeria, while at the same time giving out millions of Tax-payers' money for the sponsorship of Islamic programmes, like the Hajj operation. In 1981 alone, about 100,000 pilgrims were sponsored by the state to travel to Mecca. Note that the period between 1979 and 1983 was memorable in different ways. For instance, the two tendencies of privatisation and militarisation appeared to be prominent. Under civilian rule from 1979 privatisation gathered momentum. The resources of the nation were, to all intents and purposes, deemed to be private hunting ground for those in power and of their supporters. Lucrative contracts for trade or construction were handed out on the basis of personal considerations. Foreign exchange was privately allocated and arbitrarily distributed. Millions of dollars and naira disappeared into the private accounts of key figures abroad. Moreover, the rampant unofficial and unlegislated privatisation of the state's resources seemed to have set the stage for the state's militarisation. Nigeria's armed forces – restive for a variety of reasons- found additional grounds for impatience with the civilian politicians. In the end, it was the putsch of 31 December 1983, and the push towards militarisation, which triumphed over the pull towards privatisation of the Nigerian state.

2. Ethnicity and Corruption in the Second Republic

In the 1979 elections for the Second Republic, the notion of ethnic bases was used to refer to the states whose original ethnic states corresponded to those of the Presidential candidates. For example, Igbo (Anambra, Imo) for Nnamdi Azikiwe who was the Presidential candidate of the NPP; Kanuri (Borno) for the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) Presidential candidate, Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim; Hausa (People's Redemption Party, PRP) with Aminu Kano as Presidential candidate; Yoruba (Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo) for Obafemi Awolowo who was the Presidential candidate of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN); and Hausa-Fulani (Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto) for Alhaji Shehu Shagari (Fulani) whose party was the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). Rivers state, with a large Igbo population, was counted as part of the NPP base; Kwara, with a large Yoruba population, was seen as

part of the UPN stronghold; and Niger, with its historical close links and ties to the Fulani Empire in the North, was presumed to be part of the NPN base. But the results of the elections showed a different orientation. For instance, the UPN and the NPP seats won in Kwara and in Rivers respectively, were mainly in the Yoruba and Igbo constituencies.

It was to become obvious that the results of the presidential elections in 1979 did not satisfy the various presidential candidates, especially the Yoruba-based UPN of Obafemi Awolowo. He undertook a series of legal battles to ensure that he prevented Alhaji Shehu Shagari (NPN) from being sworn-in as President of the Second Republic, because according to him, he did not win the necessary 2/3 majority in all the states to become the President of Nigeria. The fierce post-election legal battles certainly re-enacted the situation in the First Republic of Nigeria. The only difference was that the political set-up in the Second Republic was more trans-ethnic than in the former. The effort to overcome complete regionalism and ethnicism was manifested in the political alliances between the nine U.P.N., G.N.P.P., and P.R.P. Governors who explained their collaborations as being rooted in their common social and political orientations. The NPN, on the other hand, struggled to stand up to oppositions through the establishment of Presidential liaison offices in all the 19 states – an action interpreted by the allied Governors as a breach of the policy to enhance cordial and effective cooperation between the Federal Government and the State Governments, irrespective of the party in control. The same sort of problem was witnessed in the conflict over Revenue Allocation whereby the NPN-controlled Federal Government used the excessive Revenue Allocation power accorded the Presidency to humiliate most differing state Governments on party basis.

A substantial allocation of revenue was also made at this time for the promotion of Islam, especially in the North. A clear indication is shown in the unbridled spending of Ministers, political officials, and party financiers. No wonder, Nigeria relapsed economically in the Second Republic and declared Austerity Measures in 1981, two years after the inauguration of the Second Republic. It was the era of the Petro-Naira and fragrant expenses. The *Petro-Naira* was an expression used to describe the era of the oil boom in Nigeria when there was a lot of money accruing from the sale of crude oil in the international market. It was also associated with the reckless spending habit of Nigerian politicians during the same point in history. The following analysis from Tribune Newspaper speaks for itself: 13 members of the NPN donated a total of 5 million Naira to party political funds in a one-hour ceremony. A Nigerian citizen left 500,000 pounds in a London Taxi, while another gave 3 million to an English woman. Dr. Olusola Saraki (NPN) donated a total of 695,000 Naira to various charitable institutions in his constituency, Ilorin, having accepted 50,000 Naira bribe from Leyland Motors. Richard Akinjide (NPN), Attorney General, Minister of Justice, took a 120,000 Naira bribe from Jamal Engineering Company under the First Republic, and stayed 18 months in Ikoyi Hotel at the expense of the Government, running up a bill of 113,234 Naira, even though he was also provided with official quarters (*West Africa*, July 6, 1981, pp.1518-1525; *New Nigerian* (Kaduna), July 8, 1981; *New Nigerian*, July 5, 1981; *Daily Sketch* (Ibadan), June 28, 1981; *Daily Sketch*, July 8; 1981). Two Senators awarded a contract for a new aircraft to a British firm and asked that the Nigerian Governments' bill should include an additional 9 million Naira to be split between the senators and the middlemen who arranged the deal. Governor Ibrahim of Niger State was found to be carrying 3 million Naira on him when he visited London (Barber, and Karim, 1982, pp.437-438). There could have been some exaggerations in the reports of Money politics in the second Republic, but the reality remains that a lot of religious politics and ethnic rivalries were enhanced by the reckless flow of the Naira. It is pertinent to know that at the time of these incidents of political plundering of the national economy, 5 Million Naira was equivalent to \$8 Million. Today, the reverse is hundred-fold the case: \$1 Million = circa 135 Million Naira. The Second Republic directed by the Northern-Muslim dominated NPN also witnessed the mysterious disappearance of 2.8 Billion Naira from the Nigerian Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Till date, the incident has not been explained. In May 1981, about thirteen NPN stalwarts raised a whopping sum of 5 Million Naira at the dedication of a new NPN National Secretariat.

Reckless spending, money laundry, and inter-party conflicts were not the only signs of derailment from the ideals set up by the political parties of the Second Republic. Intra-party squabbles and legal battles also constituted a spanner in the wheel of progress of the nation. The PRP split in the national executive and administration did not only diminish its ideals but also led to its final decay and demise. To worsen matters for the Party, there was the long misunderstanding in the Kaduna executive and legislature, which eventually led to the impeachment of the Governor, Alhaji Balarabe Musa on June 22, 1981. In Kano, the radical Governor, Abubakar Rimi, quarrelled intensely with the traditional and religious ruler/Emir of Kano. When the former threatened punitive measures against the Emir of Kano for alleged acts of disrespect to the PRP state Government, the Kano branch of NPN incited the people to protect the dignity of the office of the Emir (*New Nigerian*, July 10, 1981). The consequences of the mass reaction against the threat of the state government led to a wanton destruction of lives and property worth over 100 Million Naira. It was in the wake of the random or organised vandalism as Abubakar Rimi was in Maiduguri for a meeting of the nine Progressive Governors that his chief political adviser, Dr. Bala Mohammed was killed (Rufai Ibrahim, 1981, pp.73-74). Other things destroyed in the July 10, 1981 inferno in Kano included the State Government Secretariat which housed five strategic Ministries, including Finance, the Radio House Kano, the State house of Assembly, the headquarters of the pro-Imoudu PRP (After the split in the PRP, Chief Michael Imoudu became the national chairman of his own faction of the PRP with Governor Abubakar Rimi of Kano State as secretary, while the original PRP retained Alhaji Aminu Kano and S.G. Ikoku as national President and National Secretary, respectively), the site of the State's new publishing company, and the residential places of the Kano state officials (*New Nigerian*, July 11, 1981; *West Africa*, July 20, 1981, p.1635).

3. General Ibrahim Babangida and the Organisation of Islamic Conference

The dissatisfaction with Shagari and his administration led to a military coup on 31 December 1983. The two following military rulers, Muhammadu Buhari (1 January 1984- 27 August 1985) and Ibrahim Babangida (27 August 1985- 27 August 1993), both northerners and Muslims, did not succeed in changing this situation in spite of their vigorous efforts to bend towards Muslim interests. Babangida's administration was characterised by a political transitional programme, which opened up religious issues of serious concern. It was strictly speaking in the spirit of the Islamic *tajdid* or reformation, which started after the independence of Nigeria in 1960. The thirst to keep religion and politics in the same bandwagon increased everyday in the Islamic circle. Although the constitution defined that "the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion", there was every indication that the Muslim section of the polity was not yet satisfied with the level of Islamic involvement in the life of the generality of the people.

But General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) initiated the most remarkable strain in the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the post-independent era, with the secret inclusion of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (O.I.C.). The chaos inflicted on the Nation as a result of this action cannot be underestimated. A lot of religious riots were witnessed, especially in the North between Christians and Muslims. At no time did one observe Christians reacting as vehemently as during this time. Lectures, Seminars, and even books were written to call the government to order. Although the membership was reduced to an observer-status, the majority of the Christian population did not believe the honesty of the military dictatorship of Babangida. Another programme that proved the determination to impose the Sharia on the polity was the Decree, No. 26 by the Babangida Administration on 25 November 1986, under the platform of Constitutional Amendments (*Federal Republic of Nigeria: Official Gazette*, November, 1986, vol. 73, no.59, p.311). The word "personal" (that is, limiting the application of the Sharia to the sphere of family law and practice) was deleted wherever it occurred after the word "Islamic" (which extended the scope of the application of the Sharia with its concomitant consequences) in the Constitution, especially in sections 217, 223(1), 226 (a), 241(3) and 242, which were meant to give the Sharia a very wide range of civil application, creating the avenue for its possible 'universalisation' (that is, the possible prosecution of non-Muslims according to Islamic law) in the context of the Nigeria legal code.

When Ibrahim Babangida assumed office, his emphasis on the secular nature of the constitution and its application seemed to allay the fears of Islamic imposition on the other members of the society (*New Nigerian*, Kaduna, 6 October 1989). But it was not to last for a long time. A series of examples could contradict Babangida's reiteration of secularity in 1989 and what his government did from 1985 when he took office. They include: his political appointments, Nigeria's membership in the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the 1987 Kafanchan crisis, and the attempted coup of Gideon Orkah on 22 April 1990. Summarising the Islamisation strategies of his administration, J. Kenny states "Ibrahim Babangida brought more strain by secretly carrying the nation into the OIC. There were several serious religious riots in the North between 1987 and 1992. Babangida's cancellation of the June 12, 1993 presidential election might have plunged the country into a bitter religious war, but for the fact that the elected candidate was a Muslim. There was much northern Muslim complaining of marginalisation when Obasanjo came in 1999" (Kenny, 2000, p. 112).

When Babangida took over power from Buhari, Christians thought that the man (Buhari) who had an avowed intention to institute Islam in Nigeria had gone (*Newswatch*, Lagos, 24 February, 1986.). The composition of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) under Muhammadu Buhari might have informed this fear. Under him, there were 10 Muslims out of 19 members in the SMC. 9 members were Christians. In the council of Ministers with 21 members, eleven were Muslims while 10 were Christians. In the National Council of States, comprising the 19 military governors of the nineteen states, there were seven Muslims and twelve Christians. But it was clear that more important decisions were taken in the first and second councils because of their federal nature. The first two years of Babangida's regime tilted towards a greater Christian representation in the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). But it was not to last for a long time. There were 14 Muslims and 14 Christians in the AFRC. In the national council of ministers, 13 members were Christians while 9 members were Muslims. Out of the 19 military governors in the national Council of States, 14 were Christians while 5 were Muslims. With 204 Christian members in the three arms of government and only 138 Muslims between 1985 and 1989 in the three arms of government, the impression was created that Christians were the favoured ones (*The Democrat*, Kaduna, 28 May 1990.).

The secret admission of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in January 1986 was the first shock received from the Babangida regime, although he had more Christians than Muslims in the three arms of government. It was a French news service based in Lagos, which announced that Nigeria had been formally admitted into the Organisation of Islamic Conference. When the news was eventually confirmed, Nigerians became aware of the OIC for the first time, as well as of the aims of it. Set up by Muslim countries for the progress of Islam, "it claimed to offer assistance to member countries" (Makozi, 1996, p.58), although "it was clear that in the end, the organisation was nothing other than a Trojan horse for Islamic evangelism" (Makozi, *op.cit.*, p.58.). It is an event that remains active in the minds of all Nigerian Christians. The removal of Ebitu Ukiwe (a Christian and his second in command) because he told the Press that the issue was neither discussed in the AFRC nor in the Council of Ministers was not a happy event for the majority of Christians and Nigerians alike (*Guardian*, Lagos, 24 January, 1986). The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) reacted strongly against the removal, accusing the government of a plan to islamise the country through the entrance into the OIC, although to no effect (*Newswatch*, Lagos, 24 February 1986; Anthony Okogie, in *Independent*, Sunday 26 May, 1991, p.1). CAN condemned the entrance of Nigeria into the OIC as clandestine and demanded a total and unconditional withdrawal. In defence of Islam, the Muslims "argued that this was a mere concession to Muslims and that since Nigeria had already established diplomatic relations with the Vatican, there was really no contradiction in Nigeria's membership of the organisation. The government finally claimed to have resolved the matter by setting up an amorphous group which it called the Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA)" (Makozi, *op.cit.*, p.59). The task of the group was not to be easy. Thus, although the group was made up of an equal number of Christians and Muslims, there was a clear sign of distrust among the members who finally

presented a report, which showed that no side had made any concessions. The aftermath of the growing tension and distrust was given expression in the series of violent clashes between Christians and Muslims in 1987, as seen in the Kafanchan crisis of 5-12 March 1987 in which a lot of lives and property were lost in a religious imbroglio between Christians and Muslims (Communiqué of the Council of 'Ulama' on the Occasion of the Kafanchan Riots in March 1987). Another factor of the OIC crisis in Nigeria is important to note. To counteract the Christian opposition to the OIC, the Muslim Council of Nigeria issued a statement that tended towards a tough pursuit of Muslim rights and privileges in Nigeria (*Afkar Inquiry*, May 1986). I will devote more detailed explanation of the Kafanchan crisis in the next Chapter as an obstacle to dialogue as well as mutual co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. It is true that some African countries with large Christian population (Uganda, Sierra Leone, Benin republic, Gabon, etc) are in the OIC, yet the situation in Nigeria must be considered on its own merit. But a word to the Muslim description of the Justice Karibi Whyte (a Christian) Tribunal authorised to investigate the bloody clash and apportion appropriate blame showed the extent of the distrust that had developed between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. The Islamic Welfare Foundation in Lagos characterised Karibi Whyte's judgement as a 'kangaroo justice' because of undue long years of prison sentence given to Muslim culprits (*Islamic Welfare Foundation*, Lagos, 1989; *Council of Ulama Press Conference*, Kano, 31 May 1990).

In the characteristic uncertainty of Ibrahim Babangida's tenure, he also removed Lt. General Domkat Bali (a Christian, defense minister, member of the AFRC and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) in December 1989. Although he assumed the post of defence minister himself after the removal of Bali, he gave it up after a short time. He also reduced the membership of the Council of Ministers to 19, with 10 Muslims and 9 Christians (*New Nigerian*, Kaduna, 3 January, 1990). The other two arms of government were also affected in favour of Muslims. It became clear in which direction Babangida was heading. There was an immediate response from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which saw in the reshuffles a movement towards a fulfilment of some Islamic demands. A letter followed demonstrations in the north to General Ibrahim Babangida, which made it clear to him that his actions were geared towards the Islamisation of Nigeria (Protest Letter to General Ibrahim Babangida, 1989. The Letter was also widely circulated among Christians). To allay fears of maltreatment under his administration, Babangida replied at the occasion of the swearing-in of a new internal minister in 1989 that the entity called Nigeria does not admit of the alleged North-South or Christian-Muslim dichotomy as alleged by CAN. The unfolding events of his administration would prove his statement right or wrong.

If the regime of Sani Abacha (the successor of Babangida) was known for direct and ruthless brutality, that of Babangida could be described as one that incited a lot of manipulative religious politics and disharmony. Infact, it could be said that it was Babangida's regime that started an elaborate process of the disorganisation of harmonious living in Nigeria after the Second Republic. Many historians describe the coup organised by Major Gideon Orkah (Benue State) on 22 April 1990 as an articulation of the sentiments of Christians in the unruly governance of Ibrahim Babangida. It was described as a re-enactment of the dissatisfaction of the Middle belt Christians with the Northern hegemony during and after the colonial rule. The post-coup announcement (Post-coup broadcast of Major Gideon Orkar, April 22, 1990; *Newswatch*, 7 May 1990) whereby Muslim states of Sokoto, Katsina, Borno, Kano, and Bauchi were cut off from the Federation of Nigeria cannot be explained without some reference to religious sentiments and affiliations. Who knows what could have happened if the Orkah coup of 1990 had succeeded, in what the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) described as a "coup against the Muslim-dominated north" by the Christian Middle Belt (*BBC news bulletin*, 22 April 1990)? To add credence to the BBC report, the coordinator of the Northern Zone of CAN, Jolly Tanko Yusuf was arrested and held in connection with the foiled coup. The secretary of the northern branch of CAN was also arrested, questioned, and detained. CAN made her protests against the arrests and detention of her executive members, and pressed on the government to withdraw from the OIC. Moreover, they demanded the immediate dismissal of two controversial Muslim ministers – Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman, in-charge of external affairs, and Professor Jibril Aminu, holding the portfolio of Petroleum Resources – since they represented an overt fulfilment of the conditions of the membership of any country in the OIC (Archbishop Okogie, Statement by CAN President in *Democrat*, Kaduna, 28 May 1990). The Council of Ulama answered to the protest of CAN, thus: "We wish to state categorically that the assumption by CAN that the present government is an Islamic one is untrue. Strictly speaking, the government has more to do with Christianity than Islam since secularism as practised by the government is an extension of the Church concept of government. In Islam, politics and religion are inseparable. For a government to be Islamic, Allah has to be the legislator through the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet" (Press conference by Council of Ulama, Kano, 31 May 1990; see also Press Conference by The National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO), Lagos, June 1990). The coup was muted to have been sponsored by a wealthy young Christian businessman from the South. The 36 year-old Great Ogboru was described as a 'born-again' Christian of the Pentecostal Household of God Fellowship Church, Ikeja, and Lagos. His whereabouts have been unknown since the foiled coup.

4. Babangida's Transition to Civil Rule Agenda and Religious Politics

Few months after the military coup of Ibrahim Babangida and his assumption of power, he set up a Transition to Civil Rule Committee in 1986. The Federal Military Government charged the Committee with the task of collating information about the kind of political future that would suit Nigerians. To facilitate the political process, the Government confirmed its acceptance of the recommendation of the Panel for the adoption of a two party political system. But the step was soon to be exposed to suspicion. This is because "the narrowing down of political choice to two parties in an environment already poisoned by so much religious suspicion only paved the way for the emergence of religion as a basis for political competition" (Makozi, *op.cit.*, p.60). There was no other cogent reason for this kind of argument considering the annulment of twenty associations vying for recognition as political parties by a government that claimed to be open to return to civil rule. The two parties formed by the government were called the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Both represented the traditional inclination to the right and to the left respectively. There was nothing democratic or civil in the mode of their establishment. This is because the government "drew up Manifestoes for both

parties and built political party structures for them in all the State and Local Government Headquarters of the States. Nigerians were then ordered to join the parties which Jack had built” (Makozi, *op.cit.*, p.61). Nothing was really defined in Babangida’s political agenda for Nigeria, such that by 1991 election dates and programmes had been twisted several times. In what seemed a glimpse of hope for the already embattled populace, elections into the State and National Assemblies, as well as Gubernatorial elections were held. In the final leg of the elections, Alhaji Tofa (NRC) and Chief M.K.O. Abiola (SDP) were allowed to contest on the Presidential platform for their different parties. Both were Muslims – from the core North and the South respectively. Although the electorate knew their connections with the military and open support for the Islamisation programme in Nigeria, the latter preferred them to the everlasting manipulations of Ibrahim Babangida. Perhaps the annulment of the 12 June, 1993 elections of which Abiola was emerging, as winner was an indication that the Northern Oligarchy was not completely assured of the success of the Islamisation programme under Abiola. But this annulment was to open the Pandora box of other hidden agendas in Nigeria. It is important to note that the NRC had a larger followership in the Muslim North than in the Christian South, and vice versa.

5. The Fatwa Commission of 1990

The Sharia is, therefore, considered in some quarters as an effort that has degenerated into an outright use of violence and fundamentalist manoeuvres, often in conflict with the modern and contemporary principles of democracy, freedom of worship and mutual co-existence. The historical background is clear. Although the western systems conferred political prominence on the likes of the Sardauna of Sokoto, they created the added problem of spiritual legitimacy. He must have to combine both effectively in order to prove his credibility to other Muslims since the indubitable expectation of every Muslim is to have the Sharia take precedence “over all other legal systems in Nigeria as the law that governs the majority of her people” (Suleiman, *Political Bureau*, Lagos, 1986; *New Nigerian*, Kaduna, September 1986; *National Concord*, Lagos, 6 April 1988). It is this tradition that the Northern hegemony has tried to uphold irrespective of the side effects to the democratic process in Nigeria. The final process of the implementation of the Sharia, especially in the North could be traced to the Fatwa (authoritative ruling and problem-solving) Commission established in May 1990 by the Centre for Islamic Legal studies at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The scope of the commission’s work was not only religious, but also political and economical. The enforcement of the Sharia in Zamfara by the governor points to a fulfilment or realisation of that dream. For instance, laws prohibiting prostitution, alcohol, and gambling, which are regarded as Christian and secular are put in place. They are also seen as economically Islamic and puritanistic. The *Zakat* (poor tax), which is central in Islam as way of redistributing wealth between the rich and the poor, are enforced. Land reforms, which involve giving the majority of the land to peasants, are also expected to be put in place. Whether the Muslims will be able to take over land already acquired by the Multinational companies – sometimes regarded as Christian and from Europe and America – is not yet clear. Based on the *riba* or collection of interest, the Muslims are discouraging loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

6. The era of Muhammadu Sani Abacha and General Abdulkarim Abubakar (1993-1999)

With the annulment of the democratic elections on 23 June 1993 in which Alhaji Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba from the South, won, another trend of religious antagonism blew open. It is not surprising that such a situation would arise after the suspicions surrounding the 1990 Christian-led *coup d’état*. The transition to civil rule scheduled for 1992 with two political parties aimed at de-emphasising regional politics was further postponed. Most scholars claim that Abiola, whose prospects of winning the election under the auspices of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) against the favourite of the incumbent, Ibrahim Babangida, was seen in the North as an unconvincing Muslim who could not carry out the programme of Islamising Nigeria. Owing to the uncertainty of his possible allegiance to the true spirit of the Muslim Northern Oligarchy in the promotion of Islam, he was imprisoned until he died in 1998 under inexplicable circumstances. The rage of the Yorubas due to the denial of a political mandate they considered theirs at that time was sharper than expected. To avert anarchy, Ibrahim Babangida installed an Interim National Government (ING), which was headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan – a Yoruba multi-national and business tycoon – from the same constituency as Chief M.K.O Abiola himself. The interim President who managed the country only a few months until General Sani Abacha – the most senior military officer in Babangida’s era - took over in November 1993, was a Christian. Sani Abacha’s five years of dictatorship (1993-1998) did not help issues as well. In fact, he is described as the worst military dictator Nigeria ever had. He did not only pursue the cause of Islamisation of Nigeria, he emptied the foreign reserves of the country. He is accused of siphoning more than \$5 billion into different foreign accounts. Until today, only about \$708 million have been recovered Swiss banks. His death in 1998, which was greeted by street parties and jubilations, saw to the ascendancy of General Abdusalami Abubakar – also a Muslim - who after one year handed power over to a democratically elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo. Six months after his assumption of office, most Northern states began to adopt the Sharia as State law. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news of Thursday, 5 July 2001, paints the picture thus: “after lurching from one Military Coup to another, Nigeria now has an elected leadership. But it faces the growing challenge of preventing Africa’s most populous country from breaking apart along ethnic and religious lines. Political liberalisation ushered in by the return to civilian rule in 1999 has allowed militants from religious and ethnic groups to express their frustrations more freely, and with increasing violence... The imposition of Islamic law in several states has embedded divisions and caused thousands of Christians to flee”.

If General Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd) (1998-1999) had continued a long time in office, he could have without doubt continued the programme of the Sharia without fears or favours. This could be attested to, by the radical change he effected in the 1999 Constitution, which gave the Sharia the new impetus it is enjoying presently in the Constitution of Nigeria. According to David Iheanacho, "Nigeria was better of a secular state of the 1979 Constitution than a multi-religious state of 1999 Constitution. Granted that the word "secular" sounds jeering and too foreign and perhaps too American for the religiously and culturally sensitive Nigerians, it gave the Nigerian state the necessary freedom and independence to deal with religious issues in a hands-off manner" (Iheanacho, and David, in <http://nigeriaworld.com>, Saturday, 23 February 2002, p.7).

7. Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2003) and the resurgence of the Sharia

Having gone the lane of historical development among the military juntas and few democratic experiments in Nigeria since independence, it is clear that 'The Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission' (HRVIC) set up by Olusegun Obasanjo immediately after the institution of the third republic on 29 May 1999 cannot but be lauded as a noble step in the right direction of national reconciliation and possible reparation of individual and communal wrongs against one another since 1960. Making the findings of the commission public, the chairman of the commission, Justice Chukwudifu Oputa (retired justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria) said: "We wounded one another in communal clashes and religious riots. We are all therefore equally guilty. While the powers-that-be have to apologise to Nigerians, we the citizenry have also to apologise to one another. This will be the first step in the right healing process of reconciliation" (*Daily Champion*, Lagos, May 30, 2002). The wisdom underlying this judgement was also based on the fact that the Commission found that "from its inquiries, (it) discovered that during the period under review (15 January 1966 to 28 May 1999), the greatest offenders and gross violators of human rights of fellow Nigerians were the military dictatorships and their overzealous security outfits" (*Daily champion*, Lagos, May 30, 2002). Although the indictment of the military was coated in philosophical terms, the historical development of the military and politics in Nigeria, especially in relation to the manipulation of religion, shows that the present strain in the relation between Muslims and Christians constitutes one of the injuries suffered by the polity. A clear sign of the Muslim determination to impose Islam on the Nigeria polity is remarkable with the imposition of the Sharia in most of the Northern States of the Federation in opposition to the election of a Christian President -Olusegun Obasanjo - for Nigeria. One cannot immediately say with certainty to what extent the Sharia would succeed in disintegrating or uniting Nigeria. One fact is clear: either Muslims accept the civil structure of Nigeria and live at peace with the others or they continue to inflict untold inquietude on the generality of the populace until a complete rupture occurs in what is today called Nigeria.

8. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and the Boko Haram

It was assumed towards the end of Obasanjo's regime (1999-2007) that Nigeria would breed a little and fresh air of relief from different kinds of agitations and religious cum ethnic manipulations. Thus, the election of Alhaji Musa Yar'dua after Obasanjo was heralded with joy. He was considered a moderate who could effect measures that would appease the Niger Delta Militants who were fighting for equity in the distribution of the Oil proceeds from their region. But little did anyone know that his death would re-ignite more complicated agitations from Northern Nigeria propagated under the umbrella of some religious radicals called Boko Haram. Since July 2009, Boko Haram has been the scourge that has eaten deep into the unity of Nigeria as a nation. Boko Haram started the onslaught as a religious crusader-group for the purification of the Nigerian system. But with time, it manifested itself as a marauding religious group, killing and aiming people; stealing and robbing banks to finance their nefarious activities; burning houses and public institutions; sending people into exile and cutting telecommunication networks to prevent the military from reaching their hideout.

The general elections of 2015 have been distorted through the activities of Boko Haram. It is postulated that more half a million people have been displaced all over Nigeria.

9. Summary and Conclusion

Before the official departure of the colonial administration in 1960, there was a lot of advancement brought through education, science and technology. But there was also a huge arrears of problems left on the people's shoulders. The most significant of them was the religious intrigue and conflict between Muslims and Christians. It was an ugly situation that was transferred into the political arena. Thus, after the political independence of Nigeria in 1960, Muslim and Christian leaders sought to project their various beliefs through various means. Perhaps, the urge to re-assert the *Status quo ante* by Muslims in the governance of the country was most pronounced than ever. From their reduced status of indirect leadership during colonialism, they wanted a central position of governance. But it was bound to create problems, which before long degenerated into a civil war from 1967 to 1970. The prize was enormous for the nascent democracy in Nigeria. Since the end of that war, Nigeria has experienced an intensified war of religious antagonism and misunderstanding. Today, Boko Haram has taken the centre-stage. The North wants the political power badly in order to continue their over-lordship of the other parts of Nigeria. However, the development in the country shows that the country would be better governed if mutual understanding, justice, tolerance, fair-play, and patriotism should be given a pride of place.

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