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RESEARCH NOTES: Islam, Christianity and Power Struggle in Northern Nigeria[1]

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Abstract: These research notes describe the tortuous struggle for political power in Northern Nigeria, where religion plays such a prominent role. The paper traces the histories of Christianity and Islam in the North, their effects on the region's politics and economy, and the role of religion vis-à-vis the current national crisis.

This paper offers a brief overview of the interplay of religion and politics in the making of the Nigeria state. It focuses especially on Northern Nigeria, where religion is prominently and relentlessly employed to establish cultural identity and political control over the region and Nigeria as a whole. The ideological invasions of religion and secularism in Northern Nigeria represent pivotal moments in this struggle for political control of the country. Other recent events, such as the ethnic violence reported widely in the news, are rooted in this ongoing struggle for political dominance. This paper highlights the perspective of Christians in the north, whose experiences and views rarely find expression. Only then can a complete picture of Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria emerge.

Northern Nigeria did not exist as a political entity until its annex by the British in 1900. Previously, this vast region (formerly called Sudan by the Arabs, or Western Sudan to distinguish it from Anglo-Egyptian Sudan) stretched from the Sahel in the north to the southern tropical rain forest. It was inhabited by various independent ethnic groups living side by side in clearly distinguished ancestral farmlands. These included the Hausas,[2] Jukuns, Tivs, Jaba, Angas, Berom, Tarok, Irigwe, Kagoro, Bajju, and others. Mostly, these tribes lived in harmony, though inter-tribal wars were not uncommon (usually fought to acquire slaves, either for domestic use or export, or to extend the realm of a kingdom).

These tribes boasted carefully-transmitted and strictly adhered-to cultural and religious traditions which formed the basis of their identity as a people, Vestiges of these religious traditions continued in spite of the arrival of Islam and Christianity, both of which were accommodated by the traditional religions. The arrivals of these religions are so emphasised it has created the impression, for example, that the Hausas (Habe) never had any religious tradition prior to the introduction of Islam. Yet the persistence of religious traditions amongst the Maguzawas and other *non*-Hausa tribes, especially during the missionary era,

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[1] This paper has been edited and abridged with the author's permission.

[2] For more on the origins of Hausa see H.A.S. Johnston, *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto* (London: OUP 1967), and A.H.M. Kirk-Green, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of their Historical Traditions* (London: OUP, 1966).

demonstrates their resilience and perceived social value. It is important, then, to remember that religion and politics in contemporary Northern Nigeria is not a phenomenon limited to the post-independence era, but rather has roots reaching far into the pre-Islamic and pre-Christian eras which offer some insight into the interplay of religion and politics in today's Nigeria.

Jihadist Roots of Religious Politics in Northern Nigeria

The prominent position enjoyed by the seven Hausa states in Northern Nigeria was chiefly due not to their numerical strength or social organisation but their contact with the Arab world. The Hausas traded with the likes of Egypt, Mali, Libya, and Morocco, making the Sahara an important commercial trade route. Consequently, the Hausas became known across the Arab and wider world. Through this contact with Arab Muslims, especially the Wangara Muslims from Mali, the Hausa eventually embraced Islam around the 15th century. They built mosques, and the wealthy went on pilgrimage to Mecca. Some trained to become Muslim teachers and clerics. Thus, before the advent of Christianity in Northern Nigeria, Islam was the established religion throughout Hausaland. The Koran became the basis for regulating life and practice among the Hausa communities, and places such as Timbuktu, Kano and Katsina became places of learning.

In 1754-1817 a jihad, or holy war[3], was unleashed on the whole of the then Sudan, so changing the region's socio-political landscape that its impact is still felt today.[4] Louis Brenner states, "The success of this movement ramified throughout much of West Africa in subsequent decades, inspiring several other important jihads and attempts to establish Muslim states."[5] It was led by the Fulani scholar Uthman dan Fodio, whose ancestors had settled in Hausaland in the 15th century. The movement sought to stamp out any possible resurgence of animism, as well as establish an Islamic theocracy (dar al Islam) in the region.

Some of dan Fodio's justification for jihad centred upon the maltreatment of the poor, the uncovering of the heads of free women, legal injustices, and how Hausa kings or amirs led grand lifestyles, taking bribes and failing to practice Islamic law. Dan Fodio's jihad sought vigorously to eliminate from Hausaland

[3] For the Fulani jihadists, jihad is a means of overcoming the evil in oneself, but also a means to spread the faith. For further discussion see David Emmanuel Singh, 'Meaning of Holy War, Jihad in Islam', *Religion and Society* 48 no.1 (March 2003), 46-66.

[4] However, despite its impact the war did not affect the entire region. Apart from the Southern part of Nigeria and areas of the Middle Belt which escaped the jihadist onslaught, the other area of the Sudan resisting the jihadists was the Kanem Bornu Empire, which itself embraced Islam nearly seven centuries earlier than the Hausas. The ruler of Kanem Bornu, Muhammad al-Kanem, even debated with the jihadists on the use of the sword for religious ends. It appears he suspected the Jihad was a means for achieving the Fulani expansionist agenda. Al-Kanem argued that the use of religion is very destructive, and advised for tolerance especially in relations to Kanem-Bornu. See The AL-Kanemi-Bello Correspondence, 'The Case against the Jihad' in Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigeria Perspectives: An historical anthology* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), 261.

[5] L Brenner, 'Histories of Religion in Africa', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30 (2000), 145.

anything pagan or un-Islamic, and in doing so established a strong system of administration based on Sharia law.[6] Part of Dan Fodio's manifesto reads:

> *That to make war upon the heathen king who does not say "There is no God but Allah' on account of the custom of his town, and who makes no profession of Islam, is obligatory by assent… to take the government from him is obligatory by assent. And that to make war upon the king who is an apostate, and who has abandoned the religion of Islam for the religion of heathendom is obligatory by assent…to make war against the king…who mingles the observances of Islam with the observances of heathendom, like the kings of Hausaland for the most part-is also obligatory by assent, and that to take the government from him is obligatory by assent.*[7]

He believed the implementation of Sharia must be placed in the hands of an Islamic scholar who would govern strictly but humanely over a caliphate, a federation of many emirates supported by a simple, non-exploitative bureaucracy. This re-structuring of Hausa states by Fulani elites along Islamic lines soon raised suspicions that the jihad was not simply about spreading Islam, but also the Fulani conquest of Hausaland. (The abandonment of Sharia following the death of dan Fodio is often cited in support of this view.) Fulani political acumen and organisational skill was amply demonstrated in its ability to replace Hausa *sarakunas* (kings) with Fulani amirs. Kukah and Falola note that in its final form, the Fulani Caliphate was nothing like the jihadists had anticipated as rivalry, slave raiding, and judicial corruption were commonplace.[8]

What quickly emerged and became institutionalised was a Hausa/Fulani hegemony spread across Hausaland and into so-called pagan territories. Now, the Hausas were culturally distinct from the nomadic Fulani people. The jihad, however, forced a cultural symbiosis, creating what is now commonly referred to as the Hausa/Fulani group. This group emerged as the dominant ruling class in the region, notorious for using religion (Islam) as a political tool to exercise control. Its seizure of power was aided by conflicts within the pagan tribes. For example, in the northern part of Yoruba country the chiefs were often jealous of each other, permitting the jihadists to exploit inter-tribal rivalries. Thus, the ruling Hausa/Fulani enjoyed unprecedented privilege and power prior to the arrival of the British, while Islam was the underlying force that legitimised their rule.

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[6] The word Sharia is derived from the Arabic word *shara'a*, which simply means the path Allah ordained for all true followers both in terms of worship and duties of life. Sharia covers areas such as belief, morality, transactions, and punishments for any violation of the law, including lashes, amputation of hands, or stoning to death. The main source of Sharia is the Koran and the sunna of the Prophet. Arguably, Sharia encourages peaceful co-existence with non-Muslims but the application of such laws depends on the interpreter.

[7] See Hodgkin (op. cit.), 247-8.

[8] Matthew Kuka and Toyin Falola, *Religious Militancy and Self-Assertion* (Brookfield: Avebrury, 1996), 2.

Several pagan tribes were forcefully converted to Islam and brought under the Hausa/Fulani hegemony. The other territories, mainly pagan enclaves, were constantly fighting the well-armed jihadists seeking to expand Hausa/Fulani hegemony, as well as control the slave supply required by the ruling class for agricultural labour. (Surplus slaves were sold to the Arabs and Turks across the Sahara.) Even in the wake of the missionary movement in the 20th century the jihadists were still pushing the Fulani-Islam frontier further south. Their political and economic interests sometimes led them to forge alliances with pagan tribes in order to fight another tribe, but the relationship would quickly be terminated once the goal had been achieved. (Consider, for example, the Hausa/Fulani alliance with the non-Muslim tribe of Jukun to fight the Tivs in the Middle Belt area).

Colonial Legacy and Its Implications for Religious Politics

The nearly 400-year Hausa/Fulani drive for political dominance over the vast Sudan region was brought to a halt with the arrival of the British, who captured the whole region and declared it a British territory. The southern kingdoms succumbed to the British in 1906, who amalgamated the two protectorates in 1914 with Sir Frederick Lugard as the first Governor-General. Nigeria, then, was a British imperial creation, put together from an amalgam of autonomous emirates, kingdoms, and chiefdoms of disparate ethnic and linguistic groups. The British took direct control of the region not for slave-trade, which had been outlawed in 1807, but to obtain raw materials for the industrialised Empire. The British also hoped direct rule would introduce the Sudanic states to a legitimate form of business and usher in European civilisation.

Northern Nigeria had a well-established Islamic system of centralised administration and highly developed taxation throughout Hausaland and the conquered pagan territory.[9] Impressed with such organisation, the British resolved not to disrupt this system but rather exploit it to achieve their own regional interest. Undoubtedly this, together with the Colonialists' policy of indirect rule (direct rule by indirect means), positioned the Hausa/Fulani ruling class favourably in a new Northern Nigerian political landscape. In contrast, the interests of the pagan tribes were downplayed in the new imperial reality.

The pagan states believed the British would end the social injustices and economic exploitation caused by the Hausa/Fulani rulers, but this as not so. Rather, the British preferred a modified emirate system of administration, extending it even over non-Muslim groups. The Emirs were confirmed in their local authority as agents of the British. Meanwhile, groups outside the social structure of the emirate were constituted into artificial emirates and their rulers styled as emirs. Where no centralised authority existed, the Colonialists provided a native authority under local chiefs or influential men. This policy of placing non-Muslims chiefs under the rule of Muslim emirs led some to embrace Islam to

[9] Yusuf Turaki, *The British Colonial Legacy In Northern Nigeria* (Jos: Challenge, 1993).

achieve social mobility. For the Muslims, it meant the search for a new Islamic identity, perhaps through their transnational character.[10]

Formal missionary activity accompanied by evangelism and social work did not appear until the 20th century. For example, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) opened its first mission in 1902, and in 1904 the first Sudan United Mission (SUM) missionary arrived. The objective of these Protestant missionaries was to reach the peoples of the Sudan before Islam did.[11] But fears of a Muslim uprising, which might endanger the British presence, led the Colonial administration to restrict Christian proselytization activity from all Muslim areas. This restriction on evangelistic activity provoked some reactions.[12] Consequently Protestant Mission groups were forced to turn attention to the *sabon–gari* (new towns designed by C.L. Temple) or non-Muslim tribes. In these areas, the missionaries achieved remarkable success. Churches were planted, Christian communities established, and social services such as hospitals, dispensaries, and Christian schools were opened among the non-Muslim groups of Northern Nigeria. Although Muslim enclaves also benefited from these social services (for example sons of the ruling class received an education), for the most part they remained suspicious of the missionaries, who they believed were collaborating with the Colonialist to impose Christianity and western civilization upon them.

The Winding Down of Empire

Anglo-Hausa/Fulani relations during the Colonial period were marked by suspicion and tension. Any rebellion by a Hausa/Fulani ruler was quickly dealt with. However the protection the Caliphates enjoyed during the Colonial administration afforded the Sultan and the Emirs the opportunity to consolidate their position as sovereigns over Northern Nigeria, and to strengthen Islam against the influence of Western civilisation and Christianity. Conversely, the pagan tribes were almost un-critical and un-suspicious of the activities of the Colonialists and the missionaries, who they regarded as liberators against the oppressive regime of the Hausa/Fulani in Northern Nigeria. (In fact, the Colonialists did very little to liberate them). This helps explain why the British encountered little opposition among the pagan tribes. Unwittingly, this attitude

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[10] Some scholars provide excellent documentation of this experience, for example Lissi Rasmussen, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa: The Cases of Northern Nigeria and Tanzania Compared* (London: British Academic Press, 1993).

[11] See for example E.A.Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966).

[12] Andrew E. Barnes cites the controversial pamphlets of Ethel Miller published by SIM-Niger Press in his article, 'Religious Insults: Christian critiques of Islam and the government in colonial northern Nigeria', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34.1-2 (2004), 62-81. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) also produced documentation of the discrimination by Western governments against Christian missions in Muslim contexts. According to some accounts Lugard was *not* against mission work; if anything he saw mission societies as facilitators of British intention in Northern Nigeria. See Captain C. W. J. Orr, *The Making of Northern Nigeria* (London: Darf Publishers, 1987), 256-274.

towards the British eventually helped pave the way for the Muslim Hausa/Fulani to succeed the Colonialists upon their departure. Colonial hierarchical structure (underpinned by racial theory) placed the British above the Hausa/Fulani, who in turn were placed above the pagan tribes (who the British believed were some way from acquiring the sophistication of the Hausa/Fulani). This view underpinned the Colonial system of administration and became the irrevocable basis for social relations and political activity in Colonial and post-Colonial Northern Nigeria.

As the wind of political change began to sweep violently across post-War Africa, it became obvious that the Colonialists must leave. But the question was how they would be replaced by indigenous Africans. Northern Nigeria especially witnessed increasing political tension. The strong Northern People's Congress (NPC), a political party formed in 1951, was composed mainly of the Hausa/Fulani ruling class and underpinned by Islam. The NPC was led by Ahmadu Bello, an admirer of Uthman dan Fodio. In reaction, rival parties such as the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Non-Muslim League (NML) were also formed, which were seen by the Hausa/Fulani ruling class as a threat to their chance of succeeding the Colonial administration. Meanwhile, there was also the threat of the Southern Christian majority.[13] Thus, the NPC was repackaged and presented as the only party able to represent the interest of all Northern people, both Muslim and Christian. This ploy succeeded in luring unsuspecting non-Muslim politicians, especially the elite Christians, to join the NPC, despite the fact that those joining from non-Muslim backgrounds rarely rose to positions of prominence. Even those converting to Islam were still not given equal prominence among the ruling elite. On the whole, Christian communities were less aware of the political intrigues of the day.

However, there *were* several attempts to unite the Christians in the North to counter the threat posed by the NPC. For example, the Northern Christian Association (NCA) was formed in 1964 as a political forum to represent the interest of Northern Christians. But as Kukah notes, the lack of any central political, social, economic or cultural base, together with doctrinal differences, made it extremely difficult to forge a common identity and political power to negotiate with or challenge the Hausa/Fulani ruling class (who, with British support, looked down upon them as an inferior class).[14] Meanwhile, the Dandogo motion in the Northern Regional House of Assembly blamed the missionaries for politicising Christians and sought their expulsion from the whole of the North.[15]

Therefore greater impetus for change had to come from the Christian-educated nationalists of the south. The Rahol Kannang Meeting, with the moral

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[13] For some documentation on these events see for example Tekena N.Tamuno, 'The Independence movement' in Richard Olaniyan ed. *Nigerian History and Culture* (London: Longman, 1985), 176-188.
[14] Matthew Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Lagos: Spectrum, 1993), 48.
[15] Ibid., 49.

support of the missionaries[16] (SIM and SUM), represented another attempt by Christians to discuss the future of Christianity in the North against the threat of Islam, as well as their own political future, but once again, ethnic and denominational disunity was detrimental to the success of the organisation. And unlike the financial support enjoyed by Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI), a quasi-political association from the Arab world, the Christian group was hindered because of a shortage of finances. It soon yielded to manipulation by the NPC, which, threatened by the Christian group, acted quickly to form an alliance with it by preaching religious tolerance. The South could not be permitted to exploit religious difference in the North.

The fears and grievances of the Northern minority groups, as expressed to the British inquiry commission in 1958, was evidence that NPC would form the next government (not in the best interests of the minority groups, most of them, of course, Christian). The commission acknowledged the grievances in their documented report[17], but decided these could only be dealt with in a united Northern Nigeria. Perhaps the British were confident the Nigerian people could deal with their own problems. Or perhaps they were unwilling to delay Nigerian independence. In any case it proved a grievous mistake because forty years after independence the minority question still haunts Nigeria, as seen in the relentless use of religion to reinforce the ethnic and socio-economic and political divisions.

The Struggle for Power During the Military and Civilian Eras

Many Africans believed Nigerian independence would mark a new lease of life for oppressed non-Muslims in Northern Nigeria. Yet the journey towards genuine liberty for all in the north remains distant. The first attempt at self-governance, under the leadership of Tafawa Balewa, ended after only six years with a military coup on 15 January 1966. One reason cited for the military intervention, led by army officers mainly from the Christian East, was to rebalance a political landscape skewed in favour of the Muslim Hausa/Fulani ruling class. Although the coup was not interpreted in explicitly religious terms, it was clearly so, given the prominent role of religion in the northern politics.

The 1966 coup was coldly welcomed in the North and a few months later aborted. General Aquiyi Ironsi, from the East, was appointed Military head of state. The Northern ruling class soon became suspicious of Ironsi's reform agenda and sought reassurance that this was not the "Ibonization"[18] of Nigeria. Ironsi's government was ousted after six months by a Muslim-led coup, resulting in Ironsi's death and the mass killing of Ibo indigenes living in the north. Even though the Ibos were predominantly Christians, the northern Muslims maintained

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[16] See Ayandele (op. cit.), 176.

[17] Report of the commission appointed to enquire into the fears of minorities and the means of allaying them, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of state for the colonies by command of Her Majesty.

[18] The Ibo are the second majority ethnic group in Nigeria after the Hausa.

that the civil war was ethnic, rather than religious. Clearly, the long battle for the soul of Northern Nigeria and the country as a whole is essentially a religious one.

The marginalised Christian minority tribes were somewhat naïve of the role religion played in the politics of the 1960s. But the opportunity for the minority tribes to acquire political significance came at the beginning of the civil war when Yakubu Gowon, a young army officer from the Christian minority, was appointed Military head of state. As Kukah rightly observed, this shift was a major departure from the perceived norms of power in the region.[19] As the rift between the North and East threatened the fragile unity of the young independent nation of Nigeria, Gowon was saddled with the enormous task of averting the obvious disintegration of the country. The history of this war is well documented.[20]

The northern ruling class felt somewhat confident in Gowon's ability to govern the federation, especially given his family and military pedigree. Gowon understood his mandate in strictly military terms, refusing to use his position to address the political and social injustices endured by Christians in Northern Nigeria. Few scholars discuss how Gowon's indifferent attitude to politics might have been a reflection of the popular Christian belief in the separation of Church and State. However, from the perspective of many Ibos, Gowon's attitude made him susceptible to the political manipulations of the northern ruling class who supported his appointment in the first instance. Yet this was only with a view to gaining political control at some stage once more.[21] Perhaps in addition to the social harmony that characterised Gowon's regime, non-Muslims gained some political freedom from the Hausa/Fulani hegemony through the creation of more states in 1967 and 1975, and here we must acknowledge the individual effort of Joseph Gowalk, governor of the new Benue-Plateau state, to free the non-Muslims from the stranglehold of Hausa/Fulani hegemony. This development became the basis for a new social order, posing a threat to Northern elites who thought that their political survival henceforth depended on presiding over the newly constituted central government.

The place of religion in Nigerian political culture came to a head again during the 1977/78 Constitutional Assembly, in the wake of the return to civilian rule. This time the challenge was to employ constitutional means to address issues and problems that threatened the corporate existence of the nation and to chart a political agenda for the future. The Constitutional Assembly was inaugurated during the Murtala/Obasanjo's Military administration, which in 1975 overthrew the Gowon-led government in a bloodless coup, resolving to return sovereignty to the people of Nigeria. One thorny issue that divided the assembly along religious lines was the debate on Sharia and its role in society. Christian members of the Assembly generally supported a secular Nigeria state, which to Sharia proponents amounted to nothing more than an atheist nation.

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[19] Kukah (op. cit.), 39.

[20] See for example John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).

[21] Kukah (op. cit.), 39.

After much heated debate, it was agreed the word "secular" should be dropped from the constitution. To pacify the northern Muslims, who wanted their lives regulated by the Koran, Sharia courts were established in many parts of the Northern Nigeria, with little thought given to what the consequences of this action might mean for Christians living in Muslim territories.[22]

Given this entrenchment of religious sentiment in the national psyche and the potential danger it represented, subsequent military governments appeared to distance themselves from religious politics. For example, General (President) Babangida first became popular because of the ethical revolution programme launched during his eight-year dictatorship. Ironically, Babangida blamed instability in Nigeria on corruption and poor management of the country's resources, especially during the Shagari era (NPN). But by the time Babangida left office in 1988 Nigeria had declined economically, socially and politically. It was also during his tenure that Nigeria became a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). This unilateral decision to smuggle Nigeria into the OIC, coupled with the unresolved issue of Sharia, led to a failed coup on 22/23 April 1990, peaceful protests by politically-sensitised Christians in the North, and the disproportionate retaliation from extreme Muslim fundamentalists.[23] The colossal loss suffered by Christians in Northern Nigeria remains a major physical and emotional scar Christians carry as a mark of discipleship.

In the 1990s religious and ethnic violence had become increasingly frequent, forcing a re-arrangement of community settlements along religio-ethnic lines. The spate of violence and social disruption continued with hardly any respite during the start of a new democracy in 1999. The view that Muslims in Nigeria were bent on `islamising' the country was held by the majority of Christians living in the north and south, stirring them to challenge this agenda. Thus, today Christians are increasingly discarding the mentality of an oppressed and helpless minority and instead becoming more politically assertive and active. However, a dark day for Christians was when President Obasanjo, a professed Baptist, openly supported the re-introduction of the controversial Sharia law in areas where there is majority demand for it. Again, the protests that followed claimed many innocent lives and properties, with Christian communities bearing the heaviest casualties. As far as the Christian communities were concerned, the battle was for the defence of their constitutional right to live and practice their religion anywhere in the country without being harassed or persecuted by Muslims in the name of God. This need to defend religious liberty has given rise to a new political consciousness and activism among Christians never before seen, with fresh political impetus coming mainly from ordinary Christian young people concerned about their future and prepared to act.

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[22] For more documentation on the Sharia debate see, for example, Kukah and Falola, 117-139.

[23] See a personal account by Bee Debki, *The Tragedy of Sharia, Cry and the Voice of Masses: Kaduna Crisis from an eye witness*, 2000.

The Current Climate and Road to Peace in Northern Nigeria

Despite the nascent democracy in place at this time, the rift between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria (which some argue is a major theatre of Christian-Muslim engagement)[24] will continue unless something is done to harmonise social relations. One wonders why democratic values and principles are failing to address the issue of religion. Clearly, the Nigerian democratic system needs to be re-evaluated and remodelled in order to serve the interests of *all* the people. Genuine religious dialogue would also help strengthen Muslim-Christian relations in Northern Nigeria. Where possible, such dialogue, currently confined to academic circles, should be widened to include ordinary people.

However, the strain in relations is now being fuelled by events emanating from outside Nigeria. For example, several churches and lives were destroyed in the once serene city of Maiduguri as a consequence of the recent Danish cartoon protests. The perpetrators, most of whom would likely not be able to locate Denmark on the map (let alone describe the contents of the cartoons), see such actions as an opportunity to show solidarity and stand up for the interests of Muslims everywhere, even at the expense of national loyalty. It is an indication of the growing global dimension of the current conflict in Northern Nigeria, and suggests that current local efforts for peace should be broadened to include international communities.

The continued religious crisis fuelled from within and without has deepened suspicion and lack of trust between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria to such an extent that religion has been rigorously repositioned as a tool for political mobilisation in the new democratic process. Current politicians are experts in using it to canvass support and keep themselves in office, even when they are known to be corrupt public officials. One would wish that in a highly religious country like Nigeria, politicians would make themselves accessible and accountable to their electorate. Unfortunately many Nigerian politicians use the veneer of religion to win elections and make a living. This appeal to religion tends to obscure other issues, such as food, health, water, housing, education, and security. While not ignoring religious matters, scholars and religious leaders in Northern Nigeria should follow in the Platonic tradition of enlightening the public on the responsibilities and virtues of those called to govern.

Heightened political consciousness and participation is generally perceived as an important development among Christians in Northern Nigeria, especially when one recalls how missionaries were extremely discreet when it came to political activities. (Kukah is right that Christian communities have paid little attention to religion and political formation in Northern Nigeria. Rather concentration has been on the pioneering works of the missionaries and results of such activities.[25]) Although being a somewhat new political culture, the Nigerian Christian political movement, if properly nurtured and sustained, has the potential

[24] Andrew F. Walls, 'Africa as the Theatre of Christian Engagement with Islam in the nineteenth century', *Journal of Religion in Africa* .29 (1999), 155.
[25] Kukah (op. cit.), 9

to correct power imbalance in the political landscape in Northern Nigeria. Unlike the long political legacy of the Hausa/Fulani, which passed on from one generation to another, the current crop of Christian politicians has virtually no political legacy, except perhaps the long and difficult history of subjugation and exploitation which could be used to inspire current politicians. In this connection it is important to document the struggles of the minority groups in Northern Nigeria so that the stories can be properly told and lessons learned that would strengthen Muslim-Christian relations and build a better society in Northern Nigeria. In this regard theological institutions and the emerging Christian universities should give pride of place to local history and its impact on Muslim-Christian relations in the democratic state of Nigeria.

For further reading on the issues raised in this historical survey of the politicisation of Nigeria's Christians, please consider the following sources:

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