

The Interplay of Power and Religion in Nigeria from Colonization to Democratization

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Abstract: Nigeria is one of the most populous Muslim countries of the world where religion has been a major factor in politics. Specifically, Islam has played and continued to play notable role in politics in the country whose constitution and rule of law are of secular orientation. Yet, there has not been a systematic study devoted to the political activities or participation of Muslim organizations in governance in the country. This article investigates the interplay of power and religion in Nigeria during her colonial period and the first 40 years of her political independence namely, as well as the role of Muslim organizations in electoral processes and democratization in the country during that period. Questions addressed are as follows: What was the nature of religious identities in Nigeria during this period? How did religious identities of the citizens impact on politics in the country during the period? What roles did Nigerian Muslim organizations play in politics during the period and to what extent were they reckoned with as a force for democratization in the political process. The study is historical and also critical and analytical in method. It has the potential to provide the country a clear direction on the ideal role of religious bodies in a political process in view of the nature of the relationship between state and civil society of which religious organizations are a part. Such a contribution is capable of shaping, influencing or curbing the growing and excessively militant dimension of political Islam in the country.

Key words:Power and Religion • Political Islam • Political Activities of Muslim Organizations • State and Civil Society • Colonial Nigeria • Pre-1999 Independent Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The subject of the present study is located within the broad scholarship of political Islam. According to Esposito, "Political Islam is rooted in a contemporary religious resurgence in private and public life' which is traceable to the fact that 'many Muslims have become more observant with regard to the practice of their faith (prayer, fasting, dress and family and Islam has reemerged as an alternative to the perceived failure of secular ideologies, such as nationalism, capitalism and socialism' which has invariably paved way for the emergence of Islamic rhetoric, actors and organizations as sources of legitimacy and mobilization, informing political and social activism" [1]. In view of the centrality of the place of Nigeria to the Muslim World where it is the largest Muslim majority country in Africa, there is a need to provide a Nigerian perspective of the academic discourse on political Islam. Such a contribution will probably be a most useful addition to the available body of scholarship

on global perspectives on religion and politics. This article seeks to articulate how the political structure of Nigeria favoured or impeded the attainment of the goals and aspirations of various Muslim organizations, as well as what such organizations, too, contributed, in turn, to the political process in the country. The article restricts itself to the period from colonization to the return of the country to full democracy. The article seeks to assess critically such contributions as made by the Muslim organizations during this period with a view to determining their relevance and viability to the political process of their time, as members of the civil society. The ultimate question in this regard is: Which influenced which? Islam or the government?

Nigeria, a Muslim majority country provides a rich material for the subject of this article. It offers an analysis of the religious identities of Nigerians and how such identities have translated into the emergence of religious bodies, especially of Islamic orientation. The interplay of Islam and politics is addressed under two sub-headings,

namely the colonial era which covers the period from 1903 to 1960, the post-independence era which covers the period from 1960 to 1999. The paper does not concern itself with the democratic era which covers the period from the country's full return to democracy to the time of this research. That period will have to be the subject of another paper. Such a classification or periodization is intended to facilitate a meaningful analysis with a view to doing justice to the subject of the present article.

Religious Identities of Nigerians: Identity has been defined as any group attribute that provides recognition or definition, reference, affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group, acting individually or collectively. Osaghae and Suberu [2] have identified two approaches that could be employed in characterizing the nature of Nigeria's identity diversity. One of the two approaches concerns the classification of identities on the basis of "... distinction between primordial ties which are basically inscriptive and based on the "givens" of life (tribe, kinship and ethnicity among others and civil ties, which hinge on industrial society type aggregations like class, political party affiliation, interest group membership and so on" [2]. The other approach is of conflict-based orientation where "identities that form the basis of political demand, mobilization and action, or so-called politicized identities, may be regarded as salient and relevant" [2]. A critical look at this characterization of the concept of identity reveals that the nature of Nigeria's identity diversity embraces all identities such as region, religion, ethnicity, class, gender and other forms of social differentiation.

In the Nigeria context, religious identity ranks, second, by following ethnicity in order of importance. Yet Osaghae and Suberu insist that "in parts of the North commonly referred to as the 'core' or Hausa-Fulani Nigeria" which is roughly contaminated with those states that adopted Shariah law in the Fourth Republic... religious identity is more critical than ethnic identity and in fact serves to activate ethnicity" [2]. Relying on Lewis and Bratton (2000), Osaghae and Suberu maintain that of the "two largest ethnic groupings, the (southern) Yoruba were considerably more prone to define themselves ethnically... than were the (northern) Hausa-Fulani, who rather opted for a religious (Muslim) identity" [2]. This explains why the North/South dichotomy in Nigeria is not only a product of ethnic groupings, but also of religious identities.

Nonetheless, that is not to say that the entire country or the North is united along the line of Islamic identity or that the south or southwest is united on the basis of ethnicity. Among the Nigerian Muslims, there is a dichotomy between the Northern Muslims and the Southern Muslims. And among the Muslims in the North or the South, there again is a dichotomy between the Tariqah or Sufi Muslims and the Izala or Sunni Muslims. However, this religious segregation is not peculiar to Muslims in the country as their Christian counterparts, too, have several sub-cleavages that are of political importance. These include the Protestants (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Lutheran), the Catholics, the Evangelical Church of West Africa, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of indigenous churches. Notwithstanding, these several denominations, churches and Christian organizations have, through umbrella bodies like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and the Catholic Bishop Conference, played significant roles as an integral part of civil society in anti-military struggles and democratization [2]. In a similar token, Muslim identities have been of importance in the political process in the country. Through their umbrella body namely the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic affairs (NSCIA) Muslims, too, as individuals and as groups have contributed in no small measure to political activities in the country.

However, the politicization of Muslim identities in Nigeria has been connected with such factors as state policies which Christians allege are favourable to Muslims. Instances of such policies include state sponsorship of pilgrimage to Mecca and membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) as well as the clamour for the introduction of Sharia law at federal level, sequel to its adoption as the basic law by a number of states [3]. There is little evidence of participation in the democratization process by the African Traditional Religion which is regarded as the least politically active of the trio of itself, Islam and Christianity. Accordingly, Muslim and Christian identities have been the focus of any discourse on religious differentiation and conflict in Nigeria. Yet Muslims, according to Lewis and Bratton, are the most active of the three groups with regards to contribution to the political process as they are "much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians" [4]. Yet it should be pointed out that there is a wide gulf between articulation of a religious identity and effective participation in the political process or

democratization, as the latter is what matters most, with regards to the present discourse. This article hopes to critically assess the performance of Muslim organizations in this regard, in the following section.

The Interplay of Islam and Politics in Nigeria: The subject of this section is, as noted earlier, addressed under two subheadings namely the colonial era (1903-1960) and the pre-democratization post-independence era (1960-1999).

The Colonial Era (1903-1960): The nature of the interaction of Islam with politics in Nigeria during the colonial era was characterized by disparities between the Northern experience and the Southern condition. In the North, for instance, the British had realized, after the declaration of the Northern Protectorate in 1903, that they were short of hands and may therefore not be able to colonize the area effectively. Consequently, they employed the indirect rule system by retaining the various emirates under the Sokoto Caliphate which was also empowered to cover and control other areas of the Northern Protectorate that were hitherto independent thereof and operated an entirely different political structure [5]. Accordingly, the Sokoto Caliphate and the various emirates under it, including Borno, lost their potency to fulfill their traditional role of promoting Islam and enforcing the Shariah and therefore became “transformed into mere but effective agents of the British” [5]. Sani Umar graphically captures this development where he writes:

The political head of the Sokoto Caliphate was stripped of his Islamic credentials: he was no longer the Caliph but a Sultan. And for the Sultan as well as the emirs to occupy office they had to swear by the Almighty Allah to loyally serve the Christian Monarch of Britain... Thus what was supposed to be Islamic political institutions had been virtually transformed to agencies through which colonial violence was remorselessly visited on Muslim masses [5].

The above quotation provides a clear picture of the interplay of Islam and politics in Northern Nigeria during the period under discussion. It is worthy of note that the same setting witnessed the imposition of Islamic political systems as represented by the emirates, over various non-Muslim communities under the Northern Provinces. This way, the British compelled the Sultans and the emirs who were custodians of the Islamic law in their domains, to jettison the Islamic law and enforce the colonial law and order, whereas Islamic political institutions were

extended to Muslim domains, without the necessary Islamic legal ingredients that could facilitate their meaningful application.

In the Southern protectorate however, the interaction of Islam with politics took a different dimension. Rufai has graphically captured the essence of the politico-religious climate of this part of the country with regards to the linkage between religion and power or, better, Islam and politics, when he writes:

...During the independence struggle of the late 1940s, the Western Nigerian Muslims seriously felt the need for a united front or better still, a common forum for interaction. The vigorous pursuit of the fulfillment of this great need culminated in an all-Yoruba Muslim conference called in 1948 by late Alhaji Muhammad Ameen Ikudaisi of Ijebu-Ode under the chairmanship of the Late Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lawal Adeyemi II. The conference led to the formation of the Muslim Congress of Nigeria of which the Late Alaafin of Oyo was made patron and Alhaji Muhammad Lawal of Lagos, the president. After the formation of the Congress, Muslims in that part of the country were surprised to note that no Muslim won a public office despite the fact that most of the electorates (in the early 1950s elections) were Muslims. Aggrieved by this unbearable experience, the Muslims resolved to transform the Muslim Congress of Nigeria and some other Muslim organizations into a Muslim party named National Muslim League (NML.). Quite conscious of the possible injurious effect of this development on his political life, the then Premier of the Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, expressed his displeasure with the idea of forming a political party on the basis of religion. This however prompted the Muslim Party which had already won a number of seats in the local government elections to change its name to National Emancipation Party (NEP) almost immediately [6].

An experience similar to that which is described above was recorded with regards to the interaction of Islam with politics in Northern Nigeria on the eve of the country's independence. This concerns the aspect of the independence political process which involved the implementation of a political system based on the Westminster model. The model required a more active political participation of Northern Nigerian Muslims, in the rest of the country and of the Southern Nigerian Muslims, in the Northern part. In order to win “a majority of seats in the First Federal Parliament, the predominantly Muslim Northern People's Congress party (NPC) had to

campaign vigorously in the less Islamized and non-Islamized areas of Nigeria such as the Middle Belt” [6]. Such consideration was grounded in the fact that the Muslims in this region accounted for 21 percent of its entire population in 1959 and was therefore of great importance to the NPC’s political fate or electoral success in 1959. Consequently, “in addition to winning other seats, the NPC won five entirely non-Muslim constituencies, supporting in these and in other instances non-Muslim associations and standing non-Muslim candidates [6].

Kuka and Falola write of the fact that the Muslims decisively formed a protest political party in Lagos in 1953 [7]. Named the Untied Muslim Party (UMP), the party used Islam as its platform and symbol and adopted the motto, “All Muslim are one.” Consequently, the party contested elections in 1954, 1956 and 1959 but lost owing probably to the fact that there were Muslims in other parties, too, which were not perceived as anti-Islam. In other words, the Muslim votes were fragmented into various parties. Yet the party continued steadily in the pursuit of its goal of uniting all Muslims into a single political party, even after its electoral failure. In 1955-56, it represented the interest of the Muslims by speaking for them through its criticism of the membership of the delegation to the London Constitutional Conference owing to the fact that the number of Muslims was not sufficient to represent the interest of the religion” [7]. In a similar token, the party aligned with the NCNC in supporting “the cause of Alaafin (Monarch) Adeniran Adeyemi of Oyo, who was deposed and exiled by the Action Group Government in 1954. The UMP succeeded in reading religious implications into the purely political crisis of the Alaafin as it argued that “Muslims were being robbed of progress and one of its leaders was being punished for promoting Islam.” The Muslim Party further argued that the Monarch was only being persecuted for wearing a turban or the Meccan Pilgrim Head-dress and for his aversion to practice pagan superstitious rites [7].

Sequel to several protests by Muslims against their perceived oppression and suppression, another Muslim political party emerged in 1957 through the merger of various Muslim cultural and political groups and was named *Egbe Musulumi Parapo* (the National Muslim League, NML). At the inaugural meeting of the NML, its President-General Alhaji A. R. A. Smith, did not equivocate in criticizing the Action Group government for “its poor financial allocation to Muslims, exclusion of the teaching of Arabic language in schools and the Christian domination of the Western House of Chiefs and the Western Region Executive Council” [7]. Right from the

early days of its formation, the relationship between the NML and the ruling party, AG, was one of hostility. The NML alleged that the AG used party thugs to harass its members during its meetings and the AG, too, claimed that the ultimate goal of the NML was to “destroy its chances in the General Elections of 1959 and to discredit its achievements in the West” [7]. Consequently the leader of the AG and Premier of the Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, “appealed to all Nigerians to destroy the NML for several reasons; it introduced religious intolerance and fanaticism and it was creating a situation that could lead to a religious war and the disintegration of the corporate body of religion itself.” According to Kuka and Falola, the Premier claimed that it was untrue that Muslims were in the majority in the West thereby dismissing the NML as an evil organization that would be seriously dealt with by the AG, which shall “leave no stone unturned to combat what is really a diabolical threat to the peace and tranquility of this country and a calculated assault on the freedom of religion” [6].

Conversely, the NML seemed unperturbed by the threats of the AG. leadership as the Muslim party recorded a great achievement in 1958 when “it appeared before the Minorities Commission as the representative of religious minorities that suffered persecution and required constitutional safeguards for protection” [7]. The contribution of the NML in protecting the interest of the Muslims in this regard was publicized and the Muslims were pleased and self-comforted. However, the NML was later widely criticized for “using religion for selfish considerations” [7]. The aftermath of this was the party’s decision to change its name to the National Emancipation League (*Egbe S’eru D’Omo*), without necessarily compromising its commitment to the cause of the Muslims. Consequently, the Muslim Party entered into an alliance with the NPC. This development gave the ruling AG. a tough time moreso that it was already facing a stiff opposition from the NCNC. “Although the NEL performed badly in the 1958 elections, polling less than one percent of the total votes in the local government elections and failing to win a seat in the Federal Elections of 1959, it succeeded in building a measure of Muslim opposition to the ruling AG’ which reacted by forming ‘a rival Muslim organization, the United Muslim Council’ [7] with a view to fighting the political threat constituted by the Muslim Party.

It is obvious from the foregoing that Islam was a force to reckon with in the politics of the pre-independence Nigeria. It should be pointed out however that while the political participation of Muslims in the North during this period was characterized by

compromise and negotiation of Islamic principles in the face of political power that of their Southern counterparts was characterized by agitation for active involvement in governance. This shows that the relationship between Islam and Politics in colonial Nigeria was far from being passive as each of them had a great influence on the other, albeit to varied degrees in the two British protectorates. Was the interplay of the two of the same nature in the independent Nigeria? This question is addressed in the following section of the article.

The Pre-independence/post-independence Era (1960-1999): The influence of politics on the activities of the Muslims in Nigeria had been noticeable since the eve of the country's independence from its colonial masters. However, it almost became a major determinant of the Muslims' direction in their religious practices in the aftermath of independence. As the North/South dichotomy became entrenched in the psyche of the Nigerians, the Muslims of each of the two regions realized the relevance of the religious factor to their political well-being. Accordingly, religion was instrumentalized in the pursuit of political interest. One is even surprised to notice that the religious factor was even involved in the articulation of political identities among people of the same region as seen in the case of Northern Muslims where the rivalry between the Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah Muslim brotherhoods was heavily politicized immediately after independence.

Being a leader of the Qadiriyyah Brotherhood in the country, the Premier of the Northern Region and Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello was able to prompt the Sokoto Native Authority, through the Sultan, to enforce certain regulations which led to the imprisonment of the adherents of the rival Tijaniyyah brotherhood. Consequently, the religious issue became politically complicated as the NPC of which the Premier was a leader and which, of course, was the ruling party in the North, employed its political power in persecuting the Tijaniyyah who were predominantly members of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) of which Alhaji Aminu Kano was leader and which was a formidable opposition party in the North. According to Balogun, "members of the Tijaniyyah were forbidden to raise their voices while observing their *wazifah* and *dhikr* prayers on Fridays in any mosque..., a number of them who were arrested for breaking this law in Gusau were given jail sentences ranging from two to three months ... and at another point some Tijaniyyah members who built their

own mosque in Gusau and Kaura Namoda were accused of engaging in 'Bidiya' (bid'-heresy) and they were compelled by the Sultan of Sokoto to demolish the mosque" [3].

It is obvious from the foregoing that politics was given a religious coloring with a view to persecuting political opponents in Post-Independence Northern Nigeria under the Premiership of Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. This invariably affected the image of a "untied North" that was being orchestrated by the Premier himself. This way, the opposition political organization, NEPU, felt fulfilled as it had purposely provoked the ruling party to act or react violently to its political rivals in the Sokoto province with a view to embarrassing the Premier and Sardauna of Sokoto who was a leader of the Qadiriyyah as well as the Sultan of Sokoto who himself was the traditional head of the Qadiriyyah who had, for some time, been using the concept of a "United Front" in his political campaigns and emphasizing the need for religious tolerance. The implication of this is that the NEPU, too, employed the religious factor in taking on the ruling party which was banking on its political power. Consequently, the ruling party, on account of this and the need to address a number of Islamic issues, was constrained to draw a line of demarcation between its politics and Islamic activities that culminated in the formation in 1962 of the *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI) as an umbrella body for Northern Muslims and a demonstration of a United North [6].

However, the emergence of the JNI did not bring to an end the politicization of Islam as the Islamic setting remained a platform for the articulation of political differences between the ruling NPC and the opposition NEPU. According to Sani Umar "throughout the politics of the First Republic, there was a conscious attempt on the part of the politicians to manipulate the sectarian and other religious differences" [3]. This may be illustrated with the fact that in 1964, the "Sardauna of Sokoto (and Premier of the North) had his descent traced to Prophet Mohammed as elections were approaching and that way, the Sardana forced the political opposition to resort to religious forums to carry out their own political activities" [3]. There, of course, is no gainsaying the fact that Islamic forums are the appropriate places for the opposition to deflate or counter this political strategy of the ruling party for there, at least, must be a comment or reaction to that on the part of NEPU. Unsatisfied by the inability of the opposition to effectively tackle the ruling party along the line of investing religious sentiments in political campaigns especially during the

1964 electioneering, the opposition leader, Alhaji Aminu Kano was said to have telephoned the Premier directly concerning the need for him to draw a bold line of demarcation between religion and politics. As the ruling party proved adamant and unrepentant, NEPU, too, was constrained to employ a religious strategy of similar nature within Kano city by displaying in its principal campaign posters photographs of the opposition leader, Aminu Kano, being blessed by Shaykh Ibrahim Niass of Kaolack in Senegal who was the leader of the Tijaniyyah Order. Consequently, both the ruling party and the opposition in Northern Nigeria found themselves employing Islamic ideals, symbols and sentiments in their pursuit of their political agenda and in support of their positions [3].

It is noteworthy that the NEPU constituted to the ruling NPC an opposition so formidable that the ruling party became politically uncomfortable especially with regards to the further politicization of the sectarian crisis between the Tijaniyyah and the Qadiriyyah. This development stimulated in the leadership of the ruling party the wander- lust for “a Trans- brotherhood religious community which would complement the political scheme of a United Northern Region with common cultural heritage, loyalty and identity” [3]. This need as felt by the ruling party confirmed the concern of the leadership of the Action Group (AG) in Pre-Independence Nigeria which, as noted earlier, feared that the growing political consciousness of the Southern Nigerian Muslims may culminate in a political cooperation or alliance with the NPC. Consequently, the trans-brotherhood religious community, whose underpinnings were essentially political, “emerged during the period 1960-66 and unofficially came to be known as Usmaniyyah (named after the leader of the Sokoto Jihad of 1804)” [3]. The Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello, personally “led the movement until his death in 1966, at which time the momentum slowed down to a point where the movement is not recognized today” [5].

The manifestation of the interplay of religion and politics in Nigeria is not peculiar to the Muslims as there had been several instances of this among the Nigerian Christians, too. For instance, the importance of the religious factor to politics played out in the 1961 elections where denominational affiliation was a major determinant of the results. For example, in the Awka/Onitsha area, twelve Catholics won while the Protestants won four seats. Consequently, “in promotions and appointments, the dominance of the Catholics in leading the Public Service Commission of the Region also determined the dominance of Catholics in the immediate aftermath of independence” [3].

The interaction of Islam with politics in Northern Nigeria became more active with the relationship of the Premier with the ruling family in Saudi Arabia. The relationship, which is traceable to the eve of Independence, was strengthened after the independence and culminated in the intensification of the involvement of the Federal Government of Nigeria in Hajj operations. It also made the Premier of the North more acquainted with the rest of the Muslim world and “more involved in the politics of international Muslims Organization which was why he was suspected of planning to “set an Islamic theocracy in Northern Nigeria. [8]. The outcome of the Premier’s active involvement in Islamic activities at the International level was his election in 1964 as the Vice President of the World Muslim League (Congress) which is based in Saudi Arabia.

In the Southern part of the country, however, the internal crisis that greeted the operations of the Action Group in the years immediately after independence, exacerbated the disunity among the Muslims. The crisis had divided the political party into two opposing groups under its two rival leaders, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola. Consequently, the United Muslim Council (UMC) which, as noted earlier, was the party’s instrument for attracting votes from Muslim electorate during the colonial era, decided to go with one of the two factional leaders of the party, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Sensing some danger in the Muslim support to his rival through the UMC, Akintola quickly formed the Muslim Progressive Council (MPC) under the chairmanship of Chief Adedeji Iba, who was then the Mogaji Basorun of Ibadan, with a view to dividing the political support of the Muslims between himself and Awolowo.

These two politically motivated Muslim organizations waxed stronger and stronger as they created a ripe political atmosphere among Southern Muslims during the volatile Nigerian political experience of the 1960s. Consequently, their activity was supplanted by passivity with the emergence in 1972 of the Western State Joint Muslim Organization (WESJOMO) which, though not a politically motivated Muslim organization, was brought about through the instrumentality of the political power of a Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and later Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice, Dr. Lateef Adegbile, “who comfortably combined public office with da’wah work during his days in government (1971-1975)” [6]. He had initiated the idea of an umbrella body for Nigerian Muslims during his meeting with the Sultan of Sokoto when he went up North in 1971 to attend a conference of the Commissioners of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs. The Sultan told him

that there already was an umbrella body for Northern Muslims, known as *Jamat Nasril-Islam* (JNI) which would be willing to cooperate with an umbrella body of Southern Muslims. On his return to the South, the Commissioner founded WESJOMO which later cooperated with the JNI and the Lagos-based Muslim Council in forming the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). With the split of the Western State into Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States by the Murtala Mohammed Military Administration, the leadership of WESJOMO thought it wise to adopt a new name that could describe its areas of coverage and therefore adopted National Joint Muslim Organization (NAJOMO) which now comprises the Muslim communities of Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States. Both Osun and Ekiti states were included after their creation in 1991 and 1996 respectively [8].

However, the active involvement of a public office holder at the highest level of governance in the old Western State, Dr. Lateef Adegbite in promoting the idea that culminated in the founding of the organization, perhaps portrayed the Muslim body as politically motivated in the estimation of some notable Nigerians. For instance, al-Iluriyy [9] sees the Muslim body as a product of the disunity occasioned by political parties among the Muslims of Southwestern Nigeria. Accordingly, he describes the body as a remnant of the UMC and MPC. However, the fact that the founder of the body is neither a politician nor has he ever been associated with any political group strips such a view or perception of creditability.

Yet there is a dimension of the interplay of politics and religion in the relationship of this body with the government. For instance, the body played a significant role in the “campaigns for the establishment of Sharia courts in those Southern states with significant Muslim population” Specifically, the body submitted a strong memorandum to the Constitution Drafting Committee in 1977 which initiated steps leading to the adoption of a provision in the 1979 Constitution, since reinforced by the 1989 Constitution, empowering any state that desires the application of Shariah to the Muslims in its areas of jurisdiction to do so by a resolution passed to the effect by the State House of Assembly and assented to by the Governor of that state” [3]. Closely related to this was the intervention of the Muslim body in the decision of the Ondo State Government to demolish the Akure Central Mosque. The body capitalized on the relationship of its founder with the political authorities in Nigeria who

contacted the then Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua who in turn intervened and stopped the decision of the State Government. Today, the mosque remains where it is as a result of the intervention of the Muslim body.

There also was a manifestation of the interplay of Islam and politics in Nigeria during the Constituent Assembly in 1978 when the Shariah question generated a heated debate. Through the platform of the NSCIA, the Muslims made their position known. Consequently, the resistance of the moves to introduce the Shariah Court of Appeal into the Federal Constitution led to a walk-out by eighty –eight Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari who later became Nigeria’s first Executive President in 1979. The then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo who later became a Civilian President in Nigeria, intervened to appeal to the members to let wise counsel prevail and not to allow “personal feelings and sectional interest to override the need to fashion a new constitution that will be flexible and workable as well as guarantee the existence of our great nation” [3]. The speech made by the Head of State in that regard pricked the conscience of the members of the Assembly and navigated a good way for the provisions under the 1979 Constitution making the establishment of Shariah Court of Appeal by the States voluntary.

The Second Republic witnessed a new dimension in the interplay of religion and power in Nigeria as political activities were given religious colouring. This development culminated in the classification of political parties along religious lines. Oloyede gives a clear picture of this where he writes that:

...the opinion gained ground... that the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was likely to have pro-Islamic leanings while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the National Peoples’ Party (NPP) would be pro-Christian. As time passed, most Muslims in Oyo State leaned toward the UPN. Thus while the Yoruba natives of Ogbomosho, despite the preponderance of Christians in the town, were mostly committed to the NPN., the Muslim-dominated city of Iwo was made up of a large number of avowed UPN loyalists. The local leaders of the NPN in Oyo State were mostly Christian (some originally Muslims who had converted to Christianity) but the campaign songs and party slogans of NPN reflected a clear Islamic bias. An example was such local Yoruba songs as *Apoti anabi ni e so si, beri ti Janama ema ya sibe, Apoti Anabi ni e so si*

(cast your vote into the box of the Prophet (Muhammad)–Shun hell-fire, drop your vote into the ballot box of the Prophet (Muhammad)... However, the UPN won decisively and this brought about an intense phase of internal restrictions and wrangling within Muslim circles, to the point that some congregations (mosques) were torn apart on political grounds [11].

It is obvious from Oloyede's words as quoted above that Muslims had become divided along political lines. This development made them operate in disarray and unable to speak in one indivisible voice. This became an experience of great concern to some Muslim elders. The growing concern among them had coincided with an unsuccessful attempt by a Muslim parliamentarian to make the State Government see some sense in designing and executing "a crash programme for the training of Islamic Religious knowledge teachers," owing to the fact that there was no sufficient number of such teachers in the State's post-primary institutions whereas there was no dearth of teachers for Bible Knowledge.

There was a clear manifestation of the internal division among the Muslims in the state when A.R.A. Shittu, a former president of the M. S. S., University of Ife branch, who was elected to the Oyo State House of Assembly in 1979, raised the motion but was unfortunately opposed by majority of the legislators some of whom were 'liberal' Muslims who decisively frustrated the motion and tagged him a religious fanatic [11].

This development propelled the Muslim Elders and notable Muslim youths in the state to converge immediately for the purpose of solidarising with the Muslim parliamentarian over the lost motion. In their comments and observations on the unfavourable political situation where they had found themselves, some of them emphasized the need for "a consultative body representing all Muslim organizations that would present a united front against any government decision that was considered unfair to Islam" [11]. This idea it was that culminated in the decision on the 30th of March, 1980 of the Council of Muslim Youth Organisations in Oyo State, with the following objectives:

- Presenting a United Muslim voice, particularly of its youth, to the government as and when necessary
- Resisting, in collaboration with the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSS), any religious oppression in the educational institutions of the State.
- Enlightening Muslim elders in particular and Muslims in general about the modern strategies of the anti-Islamic forces in the states, particularly those entrenched in governmental positions.

- Launching a campaign to encourage Muslims to participate in party politics, to become involved in the activities of a party which had majority support in their respective areas.

Oloyede has articulated how in September 1980, this Muslim body resolved to expose the numerous acts of religious intolerance which were being committed against Muslims by the State Government. Such acts, according to him, included the refusal of the government to make provision for the teaching of IRS in schools; changing of names of some Muslim schools to Community schools as was the case with Muslim Grammar Schools, Ilero which was changed by the State Ministry of Education to Ilero Community Grammar School and Muslim Grammar School, Igbeti which was forcibly changed to Marble Grammar School, Igbeti as well as conversion of Mosques to other utilities as was the case with Ire Baptist Grammar School mosque which was turned into a Cultural Centre and Ibadan Grammar School mosque which was meant to become a classroom with effect from 3rd October, 1980 [11]. In presenting their grievances, the Muslim youths collaborated with their elders and stated all the grievances in a letter presented to the State Governor by their delegation. Rather than address the grievances the Governor Chief Bola Ige, claimed that the Muslim complaints were being masterminded by the opposition party, NPN, which was envious of the political achievements of his ruling party, UPN in the State. Yet the Muslim organization was not perturbed by the political interpretation given of the matter by the State Governor. The Muslim youths thereafter "took advantage of every Muslim socio-religious gathering to inform the public of the anti-Muslim activities of the government" and even made the monthly meetings of their Council... a politico-religious forum whereby the use of political power to oppress the Muslims was constantly mentioned and analyzed." They also went as far as composing "melodious Islamic songs in Yoruba language to remind Muslims of official oppression, one of such songs being the following:

Muslim ni gomina teko, o si je ki Kristiani se esin; Musulumi ni gomina Kwara o si je ki Kristiani se isin. Bola Ige de Oyo tan Esu gba ijoba (The Governors of Lagos and Kwara States are Muslim but they allow Christians to worship; Bola Ige, won in Oyo State and the devil reigns) [11].

It is not out of place to state that the story of the interaction between Islam and politics in Southwestern Nigeria during the Second Republic is the story of the Council of Muslim Organizations which strove fearlessly and relentlessly in protecting the interests of the Muslims.

Ten years after the political engagement with the Shari'ah question, the issue arose again at the 1989 Constituent Assembly as the non-Muslims were committed to "wiping out the gain the Muslims made in the 1970 constitution" [3]. Yet Nigerian Muslims rose to this challenge and defended their legal systems through their representation in the Constituent Assembly.

The most remarkable interaction between Islam and politics in Nigeria was recorded when the result of the 1993 Presidential Elections was annulled. The elections were widely believed to be hitherto the freest and fairest and overwhelmingly won by the then Baba adinni of Yorubaland, Alhaji Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola who incidentally was a Vice President of Nigeria's apex Islamic body. In the morning of June 23, 1993, the cancellation was officially announced of the elections which had been held since the 12th of June, 1993. The Nigerian people had expected the Nigerian Muslims to condemn the unjust and unwarranted cancellation of the elections. Rather, the body was silent on the matter for so long. Thereafter, a statement was credited to its President General (who was also the Sultan of Sokoto), Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki enjoining the undeclared winner of the June 12 elections to accept the annulment as "an act of God." The TELL Magazine was later to publish how the June 12, 1993 elections divided Nigerian Muslims and affected the inter-personal relationship of the two leaders of the apex body namely the President-General and the Secretary-General [12]. After five years of continued incarceration, the detained Vice President of the NSCIA died in prison without achieving his goal of steering the ship of Nigeria. His death marked a great loss to the Nigerian Muslims and the entire country.

While Nigerian Muslims were counting their political losses, their Christian counterparts were consolidating themselves in the political arena. Their political consolidation manifested in a number of ways. One of such way was the emergence in 1992 of the Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), for the Ten Northern States, S. L. Slifu, a retired teacher, as a presidential candidate [5]. He desired to capitalize on the sentiments within this Association, CAN, "for a Christian president as a means of redeeming their battered image and restoring their confidence." This notable Christian leader was later joined in the presidential race by another Christian, Professor Jerry Gana. Although neither of them could really go far in the pursuit of his political ambition, the heart of the matter is that this period of practical deprivation of the Muslim witnessed the progress of the Christians on the political scene. Falola and Kuka illustrate this when they write that:

...the gubernatorial elections had thrown up some exciting results for Christians at the local levels. Voters at the local levels would seem to have swallowed the tablet of religious politics and the virus of religious politics had spread all over the nation. In Imo state, one Rev. Hyde Onuaguluchi, a wealthy but controversial church leader (accused of burning the cross before a television audience), joined the race for the presidency, although he... fell by the way side a catholic priest and a protestant pastor were elected as governors of the neighbouring states of Benue and Taraba, while a self confessed "Born Again" Christian, Bamidele Olumilua, became governor of Ondo State. In Edo and Osun States, a Reverend, Deacon and a Prophet were elected the deputy Governors. Even in Kaduna State, a Catholic rose to the position of Deputy Governor in many local council elections, Reverends, Elders, Deacons and Apostles won seats as Chairmen or Councillors [5].

Challenged by the unfavorable political setting in the country, the Nigerian Muslims began to feel the need for a platform to relaunch themselves into the political scene. Consequently, Muslim organizations started awareness creation in a vigorous and aggressive manner. The purpose of their efforts in this regard was to stimulate more participation of Muslims in the political process. Notable among such Muslim bodies as championing the political cause of the Muslims was the *Da'wah* Academy in Lagos which was committed to enlightening and organizing Muslims for such participation during the electioneering for Nigeria's return to full democracy in 1999. However, the death of the founder and coordinator of the Academy, Shaykh Abdul Hakeem Abayomi, in the early 2000s punctuated the activities of the body and eventually made it moribund in its politics-related effort, thereby causing the Nigerian Muslim individuals and organizations to operate in disarray with regards to democratization or the political process in the country.

CONCLUSION

This paper has made a historical analysis of the interplay of Islam and politics in Nigeria. It traced the genesis of the interaction between religion and power in the country to the colonial era. It also gave specific details of the linkages between religion and politics during the volatile political atmosphere of this period. The paper also enumerated the notable political events of the period from the country's independence to its return to full democracy. The paper articulated the implication of such events to the Muslims as well as their responses or

reactions to them. In this connection, the paper analyzed the roles of Muslim organizations in the political process or democratization. In specific terms, the paper discussed the emergence or operation of Muslim organizations along the political lines. It also discussed the political roles of notable Islamic bodies which featured prominently in the linkages between religion and power, during the period under study. Ultimately, the paper articulated how the attention of the world shifted to the growing discourse on Islam and politics and how Nigeria came into the focus through some of the notable terrorism related issues involving some Nigerians in recent times. The analysis in the paper found that religion has always been a major factor in the political process in Nigeria and illustrated this with the interplay of Christianity and Islam on the political scene in the country.

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