Islamism Vs Secularism: A Religious- Political Struggle in Modern Nigeria

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This paper is a historically based approach to the topic of contemporary political and religious status of Nigeria. Recently, the secular administration by Islamists has generated violence between Muslims and Christians. The latter view Islamism as a gradual Islamisation of the country. Modern Islamists plead for a re-introduction of shari'a and OIC membership. They reject the secular status of Nigeria, the Islamic banking and educational system, etc.
The meaning and purpose of these are not different from hijrah, and mahdism of early 20th century. The issue is about restoring the ousted Caliphal system, and about rejecting the Western system and secularism, which were introduced by imperialists. The spirit of Islamism is increasing, especially among the grass-roots, elite, and politicians. In these circumstances, the phenomenon has to be assessed in an interdisciplinary way.

I. Introduction

Islamism is an idea for restoring the political side of Islam in modern times. This movement has been identified as a new phenomenon emerging among Muslim societies as a result of the political and cultural domination of the West through colonization. Westerlund suggests that the idea of Islamism basically developed in the 1970's. It is a kind of reformist and puritanical movement, similar to previous ones, which have been occurred in earlier centuries, as a reaction to the process of avoiding the Qur'an and sunnah, which form the basis of the shari'a'.[1]

An alternative sense of Islamism is used in this paper, meaning Muslim individual and/or organizational efforts which have as their goal the establishment of Islamic law as background for a Muslim governmental system and to plead for the re-emergence of Ummah.

On the other hand, secularism means a movement in society directed from other-worldliness to life on Earth. Secularism started as a reaction to the attitude of religion of despising human acts (in pre-Renaissance Europe). Secularism expressed itself in the development of humanism, wherein human being began to show more interest in human cultural achievements and limit the excesses of religion in public life.

The idea of secularism was introduced into the Muslim world by European colonialists. The concept was perceived by Islamists, as Hoebink demonstrates, as one of the imperialists' shrewdest devices to perpetuate Western dominance of Muslims and to cause them to deviate from their own religion, thus relentlessly contesting and challenging its basis and purport.[2] In this context, the term secularism refers to the system of separation between politics and religion, restricting religion only to private acts. Meanwhile, secularist refers to a person, group, or state that encourages the idea of secularism.

It is absolutely unavoidable to consider the two sides of the premise, particularly in countries with a deep history of political Islam and colonial domination. Nigeria is one such country. It is one of the African states which experienced the Islamic Jihad that configured a Caliphate (founded by Usmanu Danfodiyo in the 19th century). It has a long history of mahdism against the colonial conquest of the Caliphate. After independence the struggle continued as a de-colonization process. It was pursued by Islamists who had both Islamic and Western education.

The debate continued to manifest itself in different ways, such as the idea of making shari'a, a federal Court, which would necessarily include criminal jurisdiction. Shari'a need not be limited to civil cases only . Other topics of the debate are: Nigeria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and the status of the country as 'secular' or 'non-secular'. In the later, these discourses ended up in violence and carnage, which affected thousands of lives and properties. The persistence of this problem threatens the corporate existence of the Nigerian state and requires a serious assessment from different perspectives, in order to understand the phenomenon and to proffer possible solutions.

This paper approaches the following issues: the genesis of the Islamists' challenge to secularism, the nature of their demands and the ways in which the 'secular' Nigeria and secularist individuals respond to those demands, the political and religious implications of these conflicts on the Nigerian State, and how the relative peace has affected coexistence in this multi-religious nation. In addition, it discusses the possible solutions of these problems.

II. Historical Background

It is interesting to notice that both Islamists and secularists in Nigeria found their arguments in the historical experience of the country. The Islamists' point has always been the Caliphal legacy of the Islamic system, in which daily life developed according to the precepts of the Qur'an and the sunnah of the prophet, before the British imperial occupation. The history of the Caliphate and its administration remain as an inspiring source for Islamists and their demands. One of the well known voices of Islamism in Nigeria, Malam Ibarhim Sulaiman, consistently assesses that, 'the Muslims in Nigeria want to create an Islamic state, similar to the one that was founded by Usmanu Danfodiyo'.[3]

Usmanu Danfodiyo's jihad started in 1804. An Islamic state was founded in 1809, with Sokoto as its center. The Caliphate incorporated almost all the northern parts of the country, which constitute more than a half of the vast areas of contemporary Nigeria. Its influence also extended to some areas in Niger republic, Chad, Cameroon, and other areas in the West African region. In theory and practice, the Caliphate ruled for a century, utilizing the tenets of Islam.

Later, as a result of European imperialist expansion, the Caliphate came into contact with European powers such as Germany, France, and most significantly, Great Britian. However, as a result of the treaties signed with different Emirs and Sultans of the area, the British crown claimed the right to occupy the region. Thus in 1900 Lord Frederick Luggard declaired the Caliphate a protectorate of the British crown. The declaration was subsequently followed by pacification and annexation of southern emirates as Ilorin, Bida, Kontagora, Bauchi, Gombe from 1901 to 1902. The trade center of the Caliphate (Kano) and the capitol (Sokoto) were subjugated by British forces in February and March of 1903[4].

The conquest was immediately followed by political and religious structural changes of the area. Basically, the shari'a was restricted to civil matters only. Criminal cases were the High Commissioner's, the Resident's, or their representative's jurisdiction. In the ceremony which marked the beginning of British rule in the Islamic state of Sokoto, Luggard made the following assertion to the Muslim leaders, the ulama, and the crowds,

"The old treaties are dead: you have killed them. Now these are the words which I , the High Commissioner, have to say for the future. The Fulani in old times under Danfodiyo conquered this country. They took the right to rule over it , to levy taxes, to depose kings and to create kings. They in turn have by defeat lost their rule which has now come into the hands of the British…All men are free to worship God as they please. Mosques and prayer places will be treated with respect by us… You need not have fear regarding British rule, it is our wish to learn your customs and fashion, just as you must learn ours"…[5]

As a result of the fact that people in the Caliphate continued to show their discontentment with the new

administration and policies, which were generally considered as alien and Christian, the pledge of 'non-interference with the religion of Islam' was announced by the government. That was decided in order to avoid religious unrest of the masses, which the British were neither ready nor able to contain. The opposition to the British, however, continued in different ways. Part of people chose to leave the country, viewing it as having been invaded by the Nasara-Christians. This included the sultan Attahiru I and other prominent scholars of the Caliphate opinion (such as Alqadi Abdullah). Another part decided to stay, either to continue the fight (the Satiru and Hadejiya revolts, in 1904 and 1906, have to be mentioned in this respect) or in order to continue the fight intellectually (the party of Waziri Bukhari is to be mentioned in this context). The revolts failed, due to their weak military support and outdated weapons in comparison to the British. The Sultan Attahiru I refused to cooperate with the new government. He had fled the country, choosing hijrah- (migration), following the prophet's way from Mecca to Medina. The Sultan was chased and killed by British forces after four months of fight, on his way to the Holy Land (in July 1903).

However, the intellectual opposition continued in the colonial period. Yadudu and Doi[6] argued that although the colonial government succeeded in paralyzing the shari'a and the entire Islamic system except for the parts of it which favored the colonial administration, the agitation for the previous system could not be displaced. As Alqadi Abdullah mentioned, the reason for the consistent opposition to the system introduced by the Europeans was that ,

…"(it) creates a good opportunity for Christians to interfere in the Muslim world and to gradually pollute Muslim values and ethics. It (meaning the British rule) would be the cause of bad habits such of those who do not believe. Meanwhile, the weak-hearted have got used to their shameful traditions and cultures and the children have grown up under the influence of their religion. Eventually, Islam would be degraded."[7]

It could be clearly stated that the Muslims' contempt for the European way of life and moral standards served as the main argument of their opposition to Europeans

The Islamists' fight in modern times originated in the opposition that started with the British imperial occupation of the Islamic Caliphate of Sokoto. Jonathan Reynolds asserts that its legacy and spirit refused to give up with the conquest of the Caliphate in early 20th century . He stressed that "it could be doubtful that the debate over the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate was a way in which the northern region's inhabitants (Muslims) could seek a meaningful political system rooted in history and modern times"[8] .

Williams asserts the same. According to her, "the message of Danfodiyo, the founder of the Caliphate, is as relevant to contemporary Nigeria as it was to the 19th century society,"[9], due to the way in which the contemporary Islamists' movements refer to it.

Thus, the new independent government of Muslims, dominating the northern region, had to face both the demands and aspirations of its citizens, after the colonialists were gone. Rev. Matthew Kukah noticed that Sardaunana Sir Ahmad Bello, the Premier of the northern region, was trying win the trust of his people. He had to promise to perpetuate the Caliphal system, as follows:

"…the restoration of the pre 1900 era , modernized, polished, democratized, refined, but not out of recognition, reconstructed, but still within the same framework and on the same foundation…the school, the college, the fertilizer, the hypodermic syringe, have transformed Usmanu Danfodiyo's world, but the basis is still the same."[10]

This certainly demonstrates the attachment of people to the former system and it actually proves that the dead Islamic state of Nigeria (the Sokoto Caliphate) continued to be present in the political life of Muslims. Therefore, it was quite normal that, when Zamfara's state governor re-introduced shari'a, after the democratic election of 1999, people saw him as the reviver of Danfodiyo's legacy. Thereafter he was given the title of a mujaddid- reformer.[11]

Thus, the fight between Islamists and secularists has its basis in what Muslims consider as their cherished Caliphal system (which they uphold as needing to be revived). Opposed to this is the idea of perpetuating the colonial legacy of separating religion from politics, which was introduced after the colonial occupation.

III. The content

The main issues of political and religious debate in contemporary Nigeria are the 'secular status' of the country, the topic of the implementation of shari'a, government involvement in the religious sphere (as the administration of Hajj), membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), etc. These issues are the trigger of the current conflict in the Federation, as a result of the increasing waves of Islamism in the country. We will to briefly analyze the above mentioned issues.

a) Status of Nigerian State

Beginning with the British occupation of the Sokoto Caliphate, the separation between the state and religion was institutionalized. The Islamists refused to accept the term 'secular' to describe the status of their country, since they consider it to be a denial of religion by the state. The secularists view 'secular status' as a possible way of protecting themselves from Islamic dominance within a Nigeria's multi-religious society. The Christians are also afraid that this could be detrimental to their religion, while some Muslim secularists consider the increasing Islamists' demands as a way of achieving political goals which are not necessary for the progress of Islam.

In a recent research article published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electorate Assistance (IIDEA) in Nigeria, one could notice that:

"Islamic and Christian actors have turned the concept of secularism into a major political stake, which is assumed to favor Christianity and to be against the interest of Muslims"[12]

This perception may have been configured as a result of different meanings and ways of using the term in modern politics. Quoting Kambasaya, Williams states that: "secularity … while being described as a belief in secularism, can more appropriately be seen as a state of being neutral in religious affairs, neither opposing, nor promoting religion … as such it respects the belief while, at the same time, keeps an eye on religion, so that it does not overstep its boundaries to infringe in matters of public interest, thereby jeopardizing public peace."[13]

It seems to be obvious, from the above quote, what the Islamists oppose. They believe that, instead of jeopardizing public peace, religion is a source of peace, without which society will continue to deepen in moral crisis, in spite of scientific and technological progress. In Ilesanmi's opinion, "the term secular can not mean religious neutrality, from a historical point of view (as Peter Berger argued); there is an inherent connection between Christianity and the features of modern Western world, so that the modern world could be viewed as a high fulfillment of the Christian spirit."[14]

According to P.B. Clarke, this debate on the term 'secularism' has been a controversy for a century in Nigeria. The debates concerning the future of postcolonial constitutional aspects[15] are continuing debates from the colonial period (especially discussions from the 1940's and 1950's). However, the debate has been strongly manifested during the sessions of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, focusing on the transition to civil rule (which took place from 1975 to 1978). The constitution of Nigeria specifies that the status of the country is:

"Indivisible Sovereign Republic, Secular, Democratic and Social."

Later the term 'secular' was avoided, as a result of Muslim opposition, and the term multi religious was adopted. As Clarke stressed, these debates may have had political dimensions, but they were also about religious faith and practice and the whole question of ensuring that Nigeria had a fitting and workable constitution. These debates were also extended to include law and order in general, and issues such as cultural identity, imperialism, the colonial legacy, mental and legal de-colonization.[16] Thus, the "fight" has been on the issue of either maintaining the legacy of the British conquerors with the separation of religion from the state, or reviving the Caliphal system, in which religion and state can not be divided. However, the historical background has been considered by both Islamists and secularists in contemporary Nigeria.

Mushirul Haq pointed out in his study of Islam in Secular India that Muslims can tolerate a secular state

if it provides religious freedom (freedom of worship) to every citizen. They hesitate to accept secularism as a way of life, if it involves any restrictions of religious matters. This is not the way of life proper to the Muslims as "what follows" (the after life) is their goal.[17] However, in the Nigerian case, even if the term "secular "has been abandoned, the status of the country remains a secular one. Nevertheless, freedom of religion was clearly stated in the constitution of the federation. However, section 10 of the constitution prohibits from consideration any religion as a state religion.[18]

There is another debate that has to be mentioned and considered. It concerns the issues of joining the OIC and of applying shari'a as the legal code of Muslims.

b) Nigeria's membership in the O.I.C.

Another conflict episode between Islamists and secularists was the controversy on Nigeria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference. Most of the Muslims viewed the membership as a fulfillment of their right to be represented in an international forum that takes into account issues regarding their religion and other economic and political problems. On the other hand, the Christians consider that the 'secular status' of the country would be violated as if organization is affiliated to a certain religion. Furthermore, the membership was viewed as a step to a gradual Islamization of the country which they could notice.

It has to be noted that Nigeria had held the status of observer in the organization since 1969, which was reiterated in 1971. This status was maintained till 1986, when it applied for a full membership. The Political Bureau decided the political future of Nigeria at that time.

As it was a sensitive issue. The Constitutional Review Committee and the Constituent Assembly deliberated it, in their 1987/88 and 1988/89 proceedings. It is also important to observe that the issue of OIC membership, decided the Christians for the first time in rejecting Babangida's 'secular' government (which was against Islamists). The Christians argued that the political implications of the membership were that the presidency of the country and the ministry of foreign affairs, as institutions, would permanently belong to the Muslims.

This view was, however, rejected by Muslims, who argued that other countries with non-Muslim presidents and ministers were members of the organization and the secular status of their countries was not violated, nor were their religious beliefs affected. Countries such as Chad, Cameroon, Uganda, Guinea, Burkina Faso, etc., were already members of the organization. The Islamists lamented[20] that Christians in Nigeria were more intolerant that Christians from other countries.

The Archbishop of Kaduna (which is one of the areas of religious crisis of Nigeria) stated in an interview, "my assessment of the implication of this admission into the OIC is that it can trigger off a big

misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims."[21] The issue was discussed in the framework of a meeting of Catholic Bishops of Nigeria. Their conclusion was, "Now that the fact is clear after mature deliberations and having listened to various presentations from Christians and some Muslims, we do not, and shall not, agree to Nigeria's membership in the OIC."[22] In this context, the Christians proved that they did not approve of the government's decision to join the organization.

In order to clear up its position regarding such a decision, the government of Nigeria tried to demonstrate that the decision was based solely on legal international relations. Meanwhile, it tried to keep good diplomatic relations with other third world countries that constituted the majority of the organization. The government's response was that:

"…we shall not neglect any opportunity to serve our national interest in any reasonable international forum. The same policy of propagating our national interest has been pursued by many nations inside and outside of the African continent with very positive results for their national well-being and international standing. To this end, the Nigerian flag will be raised in every international forum which we have sufficient reason to belong to or to attend. Our attitude to the world must not be one of fear, but one of a spirit of engagement, discovery and co-operation".[23]

The Nigerian government could hardly be free of economic interests. It was interested in obtaining free loans and financial aid from the Islamic Development Bank and other Muslim countries of the Middle East. It was a time of economic recession, but Nigerians asked the government not to take IMF/World Bank loans.

Even though the government tried to win trust concerning the membership of OIC, the Christians refused to accept the situation and intensified their opposition to membership. Ultimately, membership was not accepted. The Islamists viewed this fact as a victory for the Christians and therefore they continued to plead for and to try to force membership.

Hunwick noticed that the Christians are "nervously following the matter and the actions of Muslim organizations for any hint, real or imagined, that Nigeria may be moving towards an Islamic state."[24] This is, therefore, one of the unresolved tensions in the political and religious situation in Nigeria.

c) The Shari'a issue

The shari'a controversy has been the cause of bloodshed and loss of lives in Nigeria. This issue has been a persistent one in the 20th century: from the final conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903 to the declaration of full fledged shari'a by the Zamfara state government in 2000. Shari'a, as a way of life and a Muslim legal system, "is primarily based on the Koran and Hadith in its composition and application. Its use is all-inclusive. The shari'a legal system had been applied, in most of the northern states, long before the advent of the British."[25]

Due to the Muslims' abhorrence to other legal systems, the problem of shari'a was one of the formost problems that the colonial administration had to face. Even some of Qadis, who accepted employment in the service of the colonial government, preferred dual judgments for the cases/situations they had to judge: one according to the demands and restrictions of the new system, and another according to the shari'a (usually accepted when out of office).

As shari'a had been seriously entrenched in the northern parts of Nigeria, to eliminate it proved to be difficult. It is only the part that concerns the criminals' cases that had to be judged by courts. In order to get rid of the tension which the issue of shari'a had created, Luggard, the British High Commissioner of northern Nigeria, said the following to the Emirs:

"you Emirs can go administering justice (shari'a) as before, but without any suspicion and corruption. I also add that you should stop cutting hands of thieves, you must leave everyone with his feet and hands…" [26]

In order to achieve this goal, the government reformed the court hierarchy, they introduced the repugnancy test, and they allowed European law graduates to screen all court proceedings and judge without referring reverse to the Qadis or Emirs.[27] Even in these circumstances the emirs and Ulama continued to insist for a full implementation of shari'a.

As a colonial officer, Joseph Schacht visited northern Nigeria in 1930. Afterwards, he reported on the status of Islam through several centuries. What he found fascinating was how the issue of shari'a was vigorously followed by the Muslims. He stated :

"The next ambition of the Muslim ruling class in northern Nigeria is to continue in the same direction and to seek the removal of the few restrictions which the British administration had to impose on the full application of Islamic law. Their immediate objective is either to be left free to apply the Maliki law of homicide to the letter, or to be relieved altogether of this matter, in which there is an obvious conflict of Islamic and British ideas of justice. Their motive" (for the agitation, he further emphasized) "in this is, beyond doubt, a sincerely religious one, it is a question of conscience for them …The debates of the house of chiefs and the House of Assembly show how jealously the members of these bodies watch over the shari'a, and how apt they are to oppose even the most innocent administrative measures on the grounds that they interfere with pure Islamic law."[28]

This Muslim belief in shari'a, as a divine rule that comes from Allah, in its supremacy over any other laws that human beings impose, and in its capacity to solve their problems of society, is a strong factor that compels them to continue to insist on its implementation. Murray Last observed that, "The shari'a issue as Allah's blueprint for ensuring order and justice: to reinstate the shari'a, people say, will enable Nigerian Muslim society realistically to escape from the morass of corruption and misgovernment, from the break down of justice, from the immoralities of conspicuous wealth, drunkenness, whoring, epidemics of both

petty burglary and vicious armed robbery, from the desperate joblessness of the urban young."[29]

In Yadudu's perspective, this thought of the Nigerian Muslims, reinforced by their historical antecedents, is the reason for their demand for the reintroduction of shari'a, a system they had strongly believed in. It was functional for centuries, before being eroded by the English Common law. He further observed that, "in the democratized Nigeria, where Nigerians are asserting group or ethnic rights, the grassroots and elite of the Muslim areas are fervently active in restoring the shari'a system.[30] They tried to shatter the legality of the imposed English laws, as the laws were based on foreign principles, being enforced by military British forces. Obviously, these laws were not popular among these people, mostly because they had a Christian origin.

Dr. Kumo, one of the Muslims' leaders trained in the Western legal system, asked the insightful question "why the transplanted English law, which was imposed in the country by the colonial regime, should be allowed to remain the common law of Nigeria." At least from the nationalist point of view, the independent Nigeria needs to evolve its own legal system, to make distinguish it from the system of the colonial period

Professor Yadudu asserted that "if shari'a could not be accepted on the fact of its religious background, the English laws also should suffer the same fate." The English law is basically Christian. He makes his point, quoting Lord Sumner, "Ours is and has always been a Christian State. The English family is built on Christian ideas and if the national religion is not Christian, there is none. English law may well be called a Christian law."[31]

The statement was reaffirmed recently, in 1986. Yadudu was reacting to those who accepted the English law in Nigeria's constitution and were against mentioning shari'a in the constitution. A member of the CDC lamented in 1978 (during the proceedings): "I, as Muslim, will not feel that I am completely practicing my religion, without accepting shari'a… if we accepted the freedom of religion, there is no need to narrow my freedom."[32] This will make religious freedom meaningful and fair, among Nigerians of different religious backgrounds.

On the other hand, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), warned that a religious conflict willstart if shari'a is accepted. In an open letter addressed to the president during the constitutional drafting meeting, they mentioned that "Sudanese experience was enough for Nigeria to profit from and eschew anything which has to do with the shari'a in our constitution. If not, the consequences will be too grave and obvious."[33] Indeed, the Christians of Nigeria demonstrated their stiffest opposition when they provoked Muslims to a violent encounter, in the Kaduna and Bauchi states especially. It was spread to other cities in Nigeria and it damaged lives and properties.

It could also be argued that apart from religious reasons, there are also some other possible aspects

that could motivate the Muslims' plea for the Islamic system, despite all the difficulties Christians and even some Muslim secularists generated. It is a known fact that after independence, the desires (needs) of Nigerian people for their very own system increased. Muslim actors stated that the failure of the system was not only caused by operators, but by structures that the state was built up on. They think that the only solution is Islam. In his article "Politics : Islamic approach", Falaki assesses the situation thus:

"Muslims are beginning to appreciate that the civilization they have been copying and cherishing does not possess the good qualities needed for human organization. What the West has so far offered to Muslims is nothing more than continuous decline and moral degeneration resulting in frustrations as well as loss of purpose and direction."[34]

Another Muslim activist went further in blaming the secular administration for the social, political and economic crisis that saddled the Nigerian state. In his opinion, "all the crises facing the Nigerian state are the result of the secular system, which demoralized people and accustomed them with materialism." The spread of crimes such as armed robbery, the absence of law and order, fraud, and corruption are the results of secularism. He concluded that "the only system that takes us to the way of sanity is Islam" (by applying shari'a).[35]

The current economic and political problems in Nigeria are multi-dimensional, being the results of many elements. Such a statement has become typical for an Islamic slogan. It involves the idea of a necessary reassuming of the Islamic values and of a necessary abandonment of Western, European systems and policies.

For example, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria made the same statement, as follows:

"When the governments that have ruled Algeria have demonstrated their inability to cope with the multidimensional crisis that is shaking the country to its very depths, the Algerian people have initiated a process of resurgence which is moving them in direction of a democratic and pluralist polity anchored in an authentic Islamic societal foundation. The failure of different ideologies, Western and Eastern, have compelled us to turn to our religion in order to safeguard and protect our history and civilization and our human and natural recourses."[36]

Thus, Nadvi argued that "the frustration and utter skepticism of the Muslims with the Western models accelerated the speed of revivalism. The Muslim nation states, divided into capitalist and communist systems, failed to attain any progress. They followed the Western culture in its entirety at the cost of Islamic values, but in vain."[37] Therefore the eagerness to return to Islam became obvious. What is very interesting in the Nigerian context, is the way in which the Islamic actors try to achieve their goals. They do not want to demolish, but to modify the democratic system, in order to make it functional.

IV. The Muslim Activists and Secular Democracy

One of the Nigerian Islamists' interesting feature is their relationship to 'modernity'. Issues such as western education, participation in governments and administrations of non-Islamic regimes, democratic elections, women's rights, and participation with non-Muslims are issues to be debated for " ulama". A general feature of Nigerian Islamists is that they combine both Western and Islamic education . They work as administrators, academics, politicians, and sometimes they are involved even in the army and other paramilitary activities. In his study, Jibrin Ibrahim pointed out this development. He noticed that:

"…the new Muslim activists have acquired both western and Islamic education and speak Arabic as well as French and/or English and local languages. As Islam is very plural, these intellectuals have become the vectors of this plurality. Some of them, for example, operate in the brotherhoods, while others oppose the brotherhoods. Their point is that of a return to the source, the Qur'an, the development of the Ummah - the Islamic community - and the struggle against western ideology and hegemony."[38]

However, the main problems of the activists in modern times are not Western education or the political system, but the way in which these are implemented.

Other topics were more debated, with a view toward motivating people to live according to Islamic values: the proper way for female students to dress, the problem of making school schedules (exam timetables, especially), not to contradict the religious calendar, and adjusting school calendars.

The Muslim activists view the political involvement, the elections and democratic processes as ways of protecting Islam from the domination of non-Muslims in multi religious Nigeria This is a legacy that Shaykh Abubakar Gumi introduced and suggested to other activists. It is a known fact that Gumi challenged his traditional ulama's counterparts, who criticized his political position, especially by organizing a fatawa (legal opinion) to demonstrate that politics was more important than prayer.

In his study on 'Islamic Reform and Political Change' in Nigeria, Roman Loimeier detailed and analyzed this aspect. It is enough to present Gumi's view on participation of both men and women in the voting system in this context. According to him :

"It is said that if the Muslims rest, the unbelievers will make war on them. So it is a duty for men and women to take up arms…Well (by this analogy), it is (a duty) to cast a vote. Now since this will be beneficial to oneself and moreover beneficial to the Muslim community, it is Satan who prevents them (women) from going out… As long as a man's wife covers her body properly, there is no problem. If you hear somebody say that this is a gathering of men and women, we don't want it, this is Satan who urges the unbeliev-

ers, men and women to oppress the Muslims. I personally will go out with my wives, with our children following. If this is not done, even to the point of letting unbelievers predominate, then what is our position? …This religion, if you do not protect it, it will not protect you. This is what makes me say that politics is more important than prayer… With politics one stands and worships together, where as prayer is only part of this … It is a necessity that every man takes his women and children above the age of eighteen to register so that we can predominate over the non-Muslims.[39]

This demonstrates how the Nigerian Muslim reformers consider that modern politics could cope with religious practices. Gumi's opinion has remained a main reference in the contemporary democratic processes. Abubakar Gumi's followers reiterated his words, especially for his opponents. The democratic period in Nigeria turns out to be the best time to fully implement shari'a. Such an issue could not have been debated this way during the colonial occupation of Sokoto Caliphate.

Currently, there are twelve states in the Muslim areas whose official legal system is the shari'a.[40] It is interesting to note that the various House Assemblies in the shari'a states follow the conventional ways of deciding the law, debating and voting the bill and sending it to the executive to be accepted.

There is no Islamic party formed in Nigeria; which is not the case of other Muslim nations (Pakistan or Sudan). This fact also proves how secular democracy is being appropriated by the Islamists. According to Murray Last, "Madeleine Albright, when recently visiting Kano (one of the states that have shari'a), was taken aback when thanked (albeit ironically) for introducing shari'a: "but it was due to democracy," she was told.[41]

The new class of Islamists now living in Nigeria uses democracy to achieve its goals instead of violence. Esposito eloquently explained this fact:

"The participation of Islamic organizations in electoral politics, using ballots not bullet, has ironically made them an even more formidable threat to regimes in the Muslim world and some in the West. The justification for the condemnation and suppression of Islamic movements was that they were violent extremists, small non-representative groups on the margins of society, who refused to work within the system, and as such were threat to society and regional stability. Those who once dismissed their claims as unrepresentative and who denounced their radicalism as a threat to the system now accuse them of an attempt to 'hijack democracy'.[42]

This approach to politics and democracy has tremendously changed the way that the secular administrations deal with the Islamists in Nigeria. In the recent shari'a crisis, even the president could not reject the adoption of the legal system, since he did not want to loose part of his electorate .

Another topic to be debated in Nigeria is that of electing non-Muslims by Muslims. The large majority of Muslims elected President Obasanjo (a Christian) in

the last election, even if Abubakar Gumi asserted that Muslims should never elect a non- Muslim.

In an interview for Quality News Magazine in 1987, Gumi emphasized: "the two party system of government will not be South against the North, but Islam against Christianity. Once you are a Muslim, you cannot accept the choice of a non-Muslim to be your leader." The response of the President of CAN, Archbishop Okogie, was that "The country will be reduced to ashes if a non-Christian president is elected."[43] This also proves the importance of elections for various religious groups in Nigeria. They want their interests to be protected by the center. Concerning the issue of education Gumi's position was very positive. He said in an interview:

"Nigerian society is like any other society, if you educate them it becomes good, if you don't educate them, it becomes like any bad society. Between mankind and beast, the difference is education. When you educate them you elevate them."

The model of shari'a state in Nigeria proves the success of the Islamists.

The debate on the possibility of appointing non-Muslims and women to high offices has been positively managed. In Zamfara there are about three women who work as permanent secretaries in the state cabinet, for instance. In Sokoto state the Permanent Secretary for the Agency for Rural Development is a Christian, and a woman is the commissioner in the cabinet. Similarly, two other, very important offices of the state are managed by women. The first one is Shaykh Gumi's daughter.[44] In the state of Niger, a shari'a state, there is a Christian deputy as governor. Similar situations could be found in almost all the Muslim states of Nigeria. Indeed, the Islamists' appropriation of secular party policy and democracy to entrench the Islamic system has marked a turning point in the history of Islamic revivalism in contemporary Nigeria.

V. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to view the rising of Islamism in modern Nigeria as a challenge to secularism. It has demonstrated that most of the new Muslim activists in Nigeria are the product of Western education and civilization. These vanguards of Islamism are either trained in the universities of Nigeria and the Middle East, or in European and American universities.

The main source of conflict between the secularists and Muslim revivalists must be identified in the historical experience of the country: the emergence of an Islamic state, the Sokoto caliphate, with shari'a as the official system of the state, and the idea of separation between state and religion, which was a result of colonialism. These issues are reference points for the contemporary debates.

Moreover, the economic, social, and political crisis of the 1980's and 1990's has contributed, to a certain extent, to an alternative political system, in which Is-

lamic values have been seen as a solution for the failed Western political models of democracy and military. It has been argued that the Islamic system is an antidote for the sicknesses that has saddled the country's progress and the welfare of its citizens, in spite of the fact that the country is endowed with huge natural and human resources.

Instead of violence, Nigeria's Islamists have adopted political, peaceful modalities to achieve their aims (although shi'ah groups of El-zakzaky's leadership are still partaking in the political activities of Nigeria, which is not ideal for Muslims, it is said). This can be viewed in their participation in democracy, elections, and in the administration of the 'secular' state. They have not formed Islamic political parties, in order to participate at elections and other political processes (which is different from other Muslim countries). This fact has made them a voice in the democratic era, due to their electoral power; they are perceived more as allies than as a threat to the administration.

This paper suggests that a system of federalism has to be institutionalized, in order to avoid conflicts and violence, which are sometimes the result of rivalries between the Islamists and secularists. The federal government is able to maintain neutrality regarding religious matters, creating a climate of understanding and peaceful co-existence of all religions.

The states that chose shari'a system or any other system of law which the people voted for should be constitutionally allowed to implement their choice. This is due to a heterogeneous culture, religion, and tradition in Nigeria. In this way the tensions and violence in religious and political matters will be reduced.

Notes

1. Westerlund, D. (1997) "Reaction and Action: Accounting for the Rise of Islamism" Rosander, E.E. and Westerlund, D. (eds) African Islam and Islam in Africa : Encounter between Sufis and Islamists. *Hust &Company, London, P.308.*

[2] *See* Encyclopedia Britannica Micropaedia Ready Reference, *1989,Vol.10, Chicago, P.594. See also ,There are interesting articles of Dr. Aliyu Tilde and Dr. Jibrin Ibrahim for and against the use of secular laws in Nigeria,:'God save us from religious laws' and " God save us from secular laws", 'Nigeria, secularism and shari'a', 'Islam and secularism'. 'Islam and secularisation". These thesis and counter thesis on the issue of secularism in contemporary Nigeria, show the nature of intellectual battle between the proponents of Islamism and secularism.*

[3] Sulaiman, I. (1986) "Conflict of Values in Nigeria: Background to the Encounter between Islam and Western civilization ". Paper presented at the national seminar on National issue in Nigeria, Abuja, p.4.

[4] *See for details Last, M. (1967)* The Sokoto Caliphate, *Longmans, Muffet, D.J.M.,(1964)* Concerning the Brave Captains: Being a History of the British Occupation of Kano and Sokoto and of the Last Stand of the Fulani Forces, *Andre Dentsh, London.*

[5] *See Lady Luggard, (1968)* A Tropical Dependency, *Frank cass, P.450-51*

[6] *Yadudu, A. H.(2002) "Shari'a Implementation in a Democratic Nigeria: Between Deference to Popular and Libertarian Challenge",3rd Annual Conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, Sheraton Crystal City, Arlington, U.S.A., and see for details , Mahmoud, B.A., (1988)* The History of Shari'a in the Defunct

Northern Nigeria, *Jos University Press. The book is relevant for this discussion.*

[7] *Alqadi Abd Allah,* Ulama' and Colonialism in Nigeria*:* Risalah Ila 'lmuasirin *,Omar Bello(trans), (nd), p. 5*

[8] *Reynolds, J.T. (1997) "The Politics of History: The Legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria",* Journal of African and Asian Studies*, Vol. xxii, P.51*

[9] *See Williams, P.T. (1997), "New Measures to Ensure Effective Separation of State and Religion in Nigeria", Okafor, F.U. (ed)* New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, Enugu, Forth Dimension, P.186.*

[10] *See Kukah (1997), M. H.,* Religion and Politics of Justice in Nigeria*, Ibadan, P.50*

[11] Last, M. (2001) "Notes on the Implementation of Shari'a in Nigeria," West Africa Seminar Series, Department of Anthropology, University College London, P.2

[12] *IIDEA(2000),* Democracy in Nigeria: Continuing Dialogue*, Stockhom, P.77-78*

[13] Williams, P.T.,P. 186

[14] *Ilesanmi, S.O. (1997),* Religious Pluralism and the Nigerian State*, Ohio University Center for International Studies, P.182*

[15] *Clarke, P.B.,(1982)* West Africa and Islam: A Study of Religious Developments from 18th to the 20th Century, *Edward Arnold, P.249*

[16] Ibid, P.252

[17] *Mushirul Haq,(1982) 'Islam in Secular India', Donohue, J.J.& Esposito, J.L.(eds),* Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, P.177*

[18] Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,(1999), section 10

[20] *Adigwe, H.A.,(1986),* Nigeria Joins the Organization of Islamic Conference, OIC: The Implication for Nigeria, *Onitsha, P.10*

[21]Ibid, P.4

[22]Ibid.

[23] Just News Magazine,*July1998, Tom, H.M., "O.I.C. Pros and Cons",P.9. See Williams , P.T. & Falola, T.,(1995)* Religious Impact on the Nation State: The Nigerian Predicament*, Avebury, P.313*

[24] *Hunwick, J.O.,(1992) "An African Case Study of Political Islam: Nigeria"* The Annals of American Academy, *AAPPSS,524, November, P.150*

[25] *Okafor,G.M.(1992),* Development of Christianity and Islam in Modern Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal of Religious Forces of Christianity and Islam in Modern Nigeria*, Germany Alternberger, P.158*

[26] *Lord Luggard speech translated from Hausa into English, see Doi, A.I.,(1992),* Islam in a Multi-religious Society: Nigeria as Case Study, *Malaysia, P.214*

[27] See Mahmoud, A. B. (1988)

[28] *Schacht, J.,(1957), "Islam in Northern Nigeria",* Studia Islamica, *Vol.8, PP.138-139*

[29] Last, M.(2001),P.1

[30]Yadudu, A.H.,(2002), P.1

[31] *Yadudu, A.H.,(1993), "The Prospect of Shari'a in Nigeria", Alkali, N. et.al, (eds),* Islam in Africa: A Proceeding of the Islam in Africa Conference, *Ibadan, Spectrum , P.53*

[32]*Ofanagoro, W. (1977),* The Great Debate*, Triumph Publishers, Kano, Nigeria, Cited in Kukah, M.H. (1993),p.120*

[33]Cited in Yadudu,(1993),P.53 CAN, Leadership in Nigeria, to date, (n.d.),p.4

[34] *Falaki, A.M.,(1988), " Politics :the Islamic Approach", Sulaiman, I. & Abdulkarim, S. (eds),*On the Political Future of Nigeria, *Zaria, P.20*

[35] Sulaiman, M." Implication of Secular Education", Ibid,P.84

[36] *Sayyed, K.B.,(1995),* Western Dominance and Political Islam: Challenge and Response*, State University of New York Press, P.9*

[37] *Nadvi, H.S. (1995),* Islamic Fundamentalism: A Theology of Liberation and Renaissance, *Durban, P.47, see also Watt, M.,(1983) "Islam and the West", Mac Eoin & Albhali, A.,(eds)* Islam in the Modern World, *St. Martins Press, p.5*

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[39] *Cited in Lomeier, R.(1997),'Islamic Reforms and Political Change: The Example of Abubakar Gumi and 'Yan Izala Movement in Northern Nigeria", Rosander, E.E. &Westerlund, D. (eds),* African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters Between Sufis and Islamists*, Hurst& Company, London, P.293*

[40] *Esposito, J. L., (1993/4)" The Threat of Islam: Myth or Reality?, Hans K. & Jurrgen, M. (eds),* Islam a Challenge for Christianity, *Concilium, SCM Press ,London,P.41*

[41] Last, M.(2001),PP.6-7

[42] Esposito, (1993/4),P.43

[43] Quality News Magazine, Nigeria, October,1987,Vol.1 no.5, p.35

[44] *This system reminds Alturabi's idea of women participation in administration of Islamic State. See his book* Women in Islam and Islamic Society*, Nigeria,1993.*