

Essays

Religion and the Future of Nigeria: Lessons from the Yorùbá Case¹

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Editors' Note

Professor John Peel, 1941 to 2015, died on November 3, 2015. He was appointed to the Editorial Board of this journal.

Ará ìgbàun dà oò?
Ará ìgbàun dà?
Ìbá ẹ̀ pé à ìí kú ní o,
Ará ìgbàun dà?

Where are those who lived before us?
Where are those who lived before us?
If people do not die,
Where are those who lived before us

Sleep well, great mind.

Abstract

This paper presents an illuminating analysis of the place of religion in Yorùbá social and political life, and why the Yorùbá experience represents a great example to the rest of Nigeria, particularly the religiously-volatile north of the country. Combining multiple approaches from historical sociology, the sociology of religion, political history and the public lives of critical political and religious agents over a period of about a century of Yorùbá history, the article explains why the Yorùbá case is an exemplar in religious harmony. He argues

1. This paper was first given as a lecture as part of the 90th birthday celebrations of Sir Olániwún Àjàyí KJW, given at the Muson Centre, Onikàn, Lagos, on 10th April 2015. The lecture took place in the middle of the 2015 national elections, and I thought it appropriate to keep the temporally specific tone of the lecture.

that the Yorùbá are constantly pressed towards *òlájú* (modernity/development/progress) which makes cross-cutting communal belonging more salient, thus ensuring that the Yorùbá constantly mobilize both religious and secular institutions and processes in the all-embracing project of *òlájú*.

When I was first approached informally about giving this lecture, my initial sense of pleasure at the honour of being so invited was quickly followed by a certain anxiety about the responsibility I was taking on. In my time I've given countless lectures to academic audiences of various kinds, but this one must surely contain many people much more familiar with Sir Oláníwún Àjàyí's achievements than I am. Yet it befits the occasion that my topic should be germane to his many-faceted career and the wide range of his interests, particularly in the three broad areas of law, religion and politics.

On the subject of law, I am frankly unqualified to speak. But religion, particularly Yorùbá religion in all its forms, has been my main research interest, ever since I first came to Nigeria over 50 years ago to study the Aládurà movement.² And politics is a subject that concerns everyone, as well as one that in Nigeria intersects with religion in complex ways, sometimes overt and sometimes under the surface of things. So it seemed to me that it would a fitting subject for a day devoted to Sir Oláníwún's life and achievements, if I spoke about some connections between religion and politics. I didn't anticipate that I would be doing so in the middle of elections which may well have momentous consequences for the country's future. They seem to have got off to a good start. What seems to me especially important about them for the long-term is the proof that Nigeria can peacefully change an elected regime, as much as for their specific outcome. I am sure I will speak for everyone present in expressing my hope and prayer that Almighty God will continue to see Nigeria safely through this testing time and guide her elected leaders along the ways of peace and prosperity for all her people.

In the last few years, I have turned more to the subject of Yorùbá Islam — an important but sadly neglected field within Yorùbá studies — as well as the relations between Christianity and Islam.³ Over the same period the endemic religious violence over much of northern Nigeria has risen to a shocking level with the activities of Boko Haram. By contrast, the Yorùbá religious situation seems almost miraculous. Here the two rival faiths, though they have many highly committed members and compete with one another strenuously, have

2. J. D. Y Peel, *Aládurà: A Religious Movement among the Yorùbá* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

3. See Peel, *Christianity, Islam and Òrìṣà-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), from which the central sections of this paper are drawn.

yet managed to co-exist peaceably and often amicably. There have been tensions and conflicts from time to time, but (to the best of my knowledge) no one has ever been killed for their faith in Yorùbáland. There are surely lessons here, not just for northern Nigeria, but for other places in the world torn by religious conflict.

Clearly, I don't have definite solutions: they can only be worked out on the terrain of real-life practice by Nigerians familiar with the local situation. But the Yorùbá case can suggest conditions that might be positive or negative for achieving religious amity in Nigeria more widely. So in this lecture I will mainly talk about how the Yorùbá have managed to achieve this happy state of affairs (with a few bumps along the way), and hope that in the ensuing discussion you will draw out some of its wider implications. But to frame my discussion, and so that you know where my argument is going, I will briefly state up-front what seem to me to be the two most general conditions which make the Yorùbá situation different from most of northern Nigeria:

1. The first condition is sociological. In Yorùbáland, at all levels, from extended families through the town or *ilú* up to Yorùbáland as a whole, religion and community cross-cut. This means that religious conflict is restrained by the fact that, if it were to occur, it would tear communities apart; and so community norms work to prevent it. This contrasts with situations where the differences don't cross-cut, but stack up on one another, as where a Muslim/Christian difference coincides with differences between natives/strangers, farmers/ herdsman, or ethnic differences between (say) Berom/Fulani in Plateau or Hausa/Kataf in Kaduna State. Here religious and community differences reinforce one another, so that violence is not restrained but likely to be accentuated.

2. The second condition is cultural. Yorùbá Islam lacks a tradition of Jihad, that is where an extreme sense of religious difference is felt to justify violence against religious others. Since this is a negative condition, it implies that we look at how Christianity and Islam in their Yorùbá forms, despite their rivalry and differences, have actually influenced one another so as to reduce those differences, and even to produce a sense of being engaged in a common spiritual quest. The tree which has yielded the poisonous fruit that we see in Boko Haram could never grow in Yorùbá soil!

This paper will have three main sections. I will first examine each of the two areas that I have just outlined, and then I will turn to consider their joint relevance to the situation of Nigeria as a whole.

I

The Yorùbá greatly pride themselves on their religious toleration, and it is an outlook that has roots in their traditional religion, with its many different *òrìṣà* cults which individuals could move between. The earliest expression of this outlook that I know of is a song which the people of the Rémọ town of Ìpẹ̀ru sang to an Christian evangelist who alarmed them with his fierce preaching about hellfire in 1878: "Let the Ifá man worship his Ifá, let the *òrìṣà* man worship his *òrìṣà*, and let the slave follow his Şàngó priestcraft for his food".⁴ This tolerant spirit was supported by a pragmatic and provisional attitude towards religious allegiance. Religions were expected to provide this — worldly benefits, to the community as well as to the individual; and whereas one might change one's religion, one's membership of one's town was fixed. A Sango-worshipper might become a Muslim, or a Methodist join the CAC, but a son of Ìsarà could not become an Ìbàdàn man!⁵

The world-religions could not override this givenness of community: rather they had to show they could contribute to its wellbeing and prosperity. The supreme symbol of community was and is the *ọba*, who had to patronize all its recognized faiths, because his highest duty was to ensure its wellbeing which depended on them. Under colonial conditions it was becoming ever clearer that the great key to the progress of both individuals and communities was modern education, and here Christianity had a great advantage. When I did a social survey in Ilesha in 1974, and asked people about this, they used a series of terms which seemed to blend into one another: *atúnliúṣe*, *lọstwájú*, *itẹ̀stwájú*, *idagbàsókè* and above all *ọlájú* — with its image of empowerment through opening the eyes to the wider world, and moving from darkness into light.⁶ When I read Sir Ọláníwún's autobiography,⁷ it struck me how much his whole career has been inspired by this ideal. By the late 1930s, Yorùbá towns were coming to feel that their progress depended on having an educated *ọba*. Here, Ìsarà was one of the first, with the election of S.A. Akínsànyà as its Ọdẹmọ in 1942. And it is significant that many mainly Muslim towns were happy to choose Christians as their *ọbas* — like Adénlé as Àtáọja of Ọşogbo

4. Thus the Apèná of the Ọsùgbó society in Ìpẹ̀ru, as quoted by the Revd. James Johnson to CMS Secretary, 21 June 1978, CMS Papers (University of Birmingham), CA2/O56.

5. Sir Ọláníwún Àjàyí was born in Ìsarà, in Ìjẹ̀bú-Rémọ, in 1925.

6. For a review of Yorùbá concepts of development, see Peel, "Ọlájú: A Yorùbá concept of development", *Journal of Development Studies*, 14 (1978), 135–65.

7. Ọláníwún Àjàyí, *Lest We Forget* (Ìbàdàn: Bookcraft, 2011). See too his attractive account of his public life in Ìsarà, *Ìsarà Afótámọdi: My Jerusalem* (Ìbàdàn: Bookcraft, 2011). An interesting contrast with the quasi-fictional account of Ìsarà, where Wọlé Şóyínká's father came from, in Şóyínká's *Ìsarà: A Voyage Round Essay* (London: Methuen, 1989)!

or Láoyè as Tìmì of Èdè — because their education enabled them to represent their community more effectively.

This outlook continued into the era of party politics which opened up in the 1950s. Both the two main parties which fought for Yorùbá support, NCNC and AG, were led and dominated by Christians, but the AG most fully embodied the Christian-linked ideal of *òlájú*, which underlay its flagship policy, the introduction of universal primary education. Some Yorùbá Muslims became worried at what they saw as the Christian affinities of the AG, and in 1957 launched an overtly sectarian party, the National Muslim League. But this was effectively stamped on as religiously divisive by the AG leadership, and steps were taken to gain Muslim favour, such as the setting-up of a Pilgrims' Welfare Board and better provision for Islamic instruction in schools.⁸

Religion was not wholly kept out of Yorùbá politics; but where it did appear, it was usually an accidental by-product of particular local circumstances. Here there is an illuminating contrast to be made between Ìbàdàn and Lagos, both towns whose indigenes are mainly Muslim. In both cases this arose because the wider commitments of the party — whether AG or NCNC — did not allow it to represent the perceived interest of the local indigenes. At Ìbàdàn, the Yorùbá-wide commitments of the AG meant that it had to support the demand of the so-called “native strangers” — i.e. Yorùbá from other towns who had come to settle in Ìbàdàn — for land-rights in the town. Local popular opposition was articulated by the charismatic Muslim politician, Adégòkè Adélabú, whose Mábòlájé Grand Alliance naturally affiliated itself to the NCNC at the Regional level.⁹

In Lagos too one might have expected the NCNC to become the political voice of the Muslim indigenes, since it had grown out of Herbert Macaulay's earlier NNDP which had had the closest links with the majority *Jama'at* party at the central mosque through the “Ilu Committee”.¹⁰ But after 1945 Lagos experienced such rapid population growth, including many Igbo from the East, that by 1950 Christians had come to outnumber Muslims and the Lagos indigenes started to feel marginalized in their own town. But because the NCNC could not disown its wider ethno-regional commitments, it lost the confidence of the Lagos indigenes — who turned instead to the AG as their champion. The AG made the most of its chances by creating a strong

8. For details, see Richard L. Sklar's classic work, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), Chapter 6.

9. See Sklar, Chapter 7, and Adégòkè Adélabú, *Africa in Ebullition* (Ibadan: Board Publications 2008; originally 1952).

10. On Lagos politics, Pauline H. Baker, *Urbanization and Political Change: The Politics of Lagos 1917–1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), and Láí Olúrodé, *The Life and Times of LKJ* (Lagos: Rebonik Publications, 2005)

network of support among the market women, led by the piously Muslim Madam Àbíbatù Mógàjí. The consequences have proved long-lasting: there emerged a lineage of progressive Muslim politicians — L.K. Jákàndè, Bólá Tinúbu, Rájí Fáshólá — belonging to the AG and its successor parties, who have controlled Lagos State down to the present. I shall return to the consequences of this shortly.

But in the 1980s the conventional wisdom that the Christian/Muslim divide did not give rise to political conflict among the Yorùbá came under serious pressure. A lot had happened in the meantime: a long period of military rule, the Civil War, the transformation of Nigeria's political economy by oil, the creation of a new constitution prior to a return to civilian rule in 1979. Somehow linked to these, but not in an obvious or direct way, was the emergence of new movements of spiritual renewal in both world religions. In Islam, the main one was Izala, based in the North and linked to Salafí or Wahhabi currents in the Middle East, which made bitter attacks on the Sufi brotherhoods. On the other side, emerging rather later, there was the rise of neo-Pentecostalism, popularly known as Charismatic or Born-Again Christianity. Together they raised the level of individual religious commitment, gave religion a higher profile generally in public life and sharpened the competitive atmosphere between them.

In Yorùbáland the 1979 election led to a paradoxical double effect.¹¹ On the one hand, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), led by Chief Awólówò, won a much greater share of the Yorùbá vote than its predecessor the AG had done, though it was defeated at federal level by the Northern-led NPN. Yet at the same time, Muslims became a more distinct and assertive force than they had been before. There were several reasons for this. The Islamic consciousness of many younger, more educated Muslims had been raised by the Sharia debate of 1978–79; the long dominance of Nigeria's government by Northern Muslims offered a political resource to be exploited; and with the steady increase in Yorùbá Muslims' level of education, they were less inclined to look to Christians to provide political leadership than before. Particularly in Oyo State, the NPN picked up on the old anti-AG tradition now with a more strongly Muslim flavour. Its UPN governor, Chief Bola Ige, was the target of criticism from radical members of the Muslim Students Society for what they saw as pro-Christian bias in some of his policies. A new role was played by a group of wealthy Muslims, notably M.K.O. Abíólá, who was given the title *Bàbá Àdíníni* ["Father of Religion"]. In the 1970s he had been famously satirized for his business practices in a well-known song by Fẹlá Kúti and was well

11. On the 1979 election, Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

known for his flamboyant life-style, but he now became more serious about doing things for the Muslim community and exploited his business links with the Northern power-elite to good advantage. He used his *National Concord* newspaper to campaign for Sharia.

In 1985 Abíólá provoked the highest-profile public confrontation between Muslims and Christians which the Yorùbá had ever known, through a reckless speech at the opening of the new mosque on the UI campus, in which he demanded the demolition of a monumental cross that had then stood for over 30 years, a few hundred yards from the mosque. The dispute ran on for many months, but was eventually resolved through a compromise — and I think with a great sense of relief of having pulled back from the brink of something nasty and essentially un-Yorùbá. The most apt comment I heard on it came from a young journalist in Kaduna in 2008, after he'd taken me on a tour of the city to show me some of the devastating effects of the riots there in 2000 and 2002. He asked me about the Ìbádàn cross dispute, and was impressed by how it was finally resolved without violence: "the Yorùbá love themselves, they set religion aside. They bear more affinity to themselves than to religion".¹² Allowing for the awkward way he put it, he was praising the Yorùbá for prioritizing fellowship within the framework of a community over any kind of faith-based antagonism (and implicitly, wishing it was more like that in Northern Nigeria).

A few years later, Babangida began what would prove to be the empty charade of a return to civilian rule, setting up two parties with carefully vetted candidates. It is not surprising that M.K. Abíólá was chosen as one of them, for (in the light of his recent record) he must have seemed a safe choice. But as the campaign got under way, some unexpected things started to show. Because his opponent in the presidential race was a Northerner, Abíólá became the candidate of the South and particularly the vessel of Christians' hopes to see the overthrow of the Northern/Muslim/military complex that had been in power so long. If ever a politician was defined by the hopes vested in him, rather than by the force of his own convictions, it was surely Abíólá. So the military took fright and annulled the elections. After an interim period, Abacha seized power and Abíólá was imprisoned.

What happened then was an even more extraordinary reversal. This most un-Awólówò-like of politicians — a man who had never been personally close to Awólówò or at all sympathetic to his policies — found the mantle of Awólówò placed around his shoulders. I happened to visit Nigeria for three months research in 1994 and it felt like stepping back 30 years in time: once again the most prominent Yorùbá leader had been imprisoned, a victim

12. Thus Mr Samuel Aruwan of Kaduna, 19 March 2008.

of Northern oppression. As with Awólówò, his reputation was enhanced by his being seen in terms of a Christ-like paradigm of collective redemption through one man's vicarious suffering. In some quarters Abíólá, the professed supporter of Sharia, was even seen as a kind of honorary Christian. Or this is what some people wanted to believe: I remember seeing a headline in the *Daily Times*, which read "MKO Born Again?"! No good evidence that this was true; but the wish was father to the thought. It struck me at the time that the Born-Again rhetoric of breaking with the past and receiving fresh empowerment through the spirit fitted well the yearning of Yorùbá of both faiths for a new political dispensation.

This was not an easy time for Yorùbá Muslims, either. In 1995 the *Àrẹ̀ Musùlùmi*, Alhaji Arísekólá Àlàó, was nearly lynched by students on an ill-advised visit to the University of Ìbádàn campus, because of his friendship with Abacha. Yet in general, Yorùbá Muslims were as opposed to the Abacha regime as Christians were. The issue of Abíólá's imprisonment put a very severe strain on relations between Yorùbá and Northern members of the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs. To the Yorùbá clerics' request for support from their Northern colleagues to secure the release of Abíólá — so I have been told by Dr K. K. Ọ́lọ̀şò, a member of the Yorùbá delegation — the Northerners replied that they could do nothing because it was a "political" not a "religious" matter; but one has to ask, since when did the Sultan and emirs draw such a fine distinction between religion and politics?¹³ So Abíólá's career ended on a paradoxical note. He failed in what he aimed to do — become President of Nigeria — but succeeded in what he did not consciously set out to do, to repair the damage done in the 1980s by serving as a bridge to bring Muslims and Christians together *as Yorùbá*. He died as more a *Başòrun* as a *Bàbá Àdinni*.¹⁴

It is perhaps too early to comment on the interplay of religion and politics since Obasanjo's election as President in 1999, but I shall tentatively suggest how some recent developments seem to fit in into the long-term pattern that I have been trying to discern. One thing that Obasanjo had in common with Abíólá, was that he did not stand at all close to the Yorùbá political mainstream whose cardinal figure was Chief Awólówò; and this presumably was what initially recommended him to the founding elders of the PDP. But if they were hoping that Ọ́básanjó would deliver the Yorùbá vote for them, they were disappointed: in 1999, the Yorùbá again showed their loyalty to

13. Dr K. K. Ọ́lọ̀şò, interview, 9 May 2009.

14. *Başòrun*, as a senior Ọ́yọ̀ title conferred on him by the *Aláàfin*, implies recognition as a leader of all Yorùbá, of whatever faith, whereas *Bàbá Àdinni* relates exclusively to Muslims.

the Awoist tradition by voting AD, though this support was later eroded in some states by the PDP's exercise of power. But this did not last: in 2011, the pendulum had swung back the other way. Throughout all this there was the bastion of Lagos, which has enjoyed the fairest elections and the best government of any Yorùbá state, and remained solid for the successor parties to the AG. The ironical outcome here was that a political tradition which at its outset in the 1950s had been so largely dominated by Christians now had as its principal standard-bearers the progressive Muslim politicians who have for decades controlled Lagos.

Am I right to think that this means that Muslims, who once tended to feel marginalized, are now fully integrated into the political mainstream, so that the Muslim/Christian divide is neutralized as a factor in Yorùbá politics? It would be rash to predict that this must always be so. In any case, religious amity, even in Yorùbáland where it has deep cultural roots, should never be taken for granted; it has to be seen as an accomplishment, something that has to be worked at.

II

So I now turn to what has been going on within the two religions themselves over the past century. Here a good place to start is with some remarks by Edward Blyden, Caribbean-born pioneer of African nationalism and in the 1890s the director of Muslim education in Lagos (though himself a Christian). In his classic book *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, Blyden compared Christianity unfavourably with Islam as regards its adaptation to local conditions. In Islam, he argued "the Arabic superstructure has been superimposed on a permanent indigenous substructure, so that what really took place, when the Arab met the Negro in his own home, was a healthy amalgamation, and not an absorption or undue repression..."¹⁵ Islam had thus become a truly African religion whereas the Christians were still religious outsiders; and this was because they were mere imitators, completely in thrall to their European mentors. This contrast serves to pinpoint the very different agendas pursued by the two faiths in the years to come.

For Christianity, Africanization had to be high on the agenda. Blyden's severe indictment was shared by some in the missions, notably the Rev. James Johnson, the zealous pastor of Breadfruit church, who urged his parishioners to wear African dress, and insisted on giving Yorùbá names in baptism.¹⁶ Yet

15. E. W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967, originally 1887).

16. See E. A. Àyándélé, *Holy Johnson: Pioneer of African Nationalism, 1836-1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1970).

the basis of Africanization had already been laid through the pioneering work of Bishop Crowther in creating a standard form of the Yorùbá language and translating the Bible into it.¹⁷ Other important work intended to reconcile Christianity with Yorùbá culture took place in the fields of history and religion. Greatest of all was the Rev. Samuel Johnson's magnificent *History of the Yorùbás*, which argued that Christianity was providential for the Yorùbá.¹⁸ The task with traditional religion was more complicated, for while much of it had to be condemned as idolatry, some could be understood in a new way, as culture. Thus Ifa was reconfigured as "African philosophy" or a cultural archive of ancient Yorùbá wisdom. Some bold pastors went much further, notably the Rev. E.M Lijádù, who actually took instruction from a *babaláwo* and saw Ọ̀rúnmilà as a deity of salvation who pointed the way to, and was actually fulfilled in, Jesus Christ.¹⁹ This was Africanization at an intellectual level, achieved mainly by clergy of the mainline missions. But if Christianity was going to supplant the *òrìṣà* cults, it needed to provide a practical alternative to them. Eventually it was the Aládurà churches which developed spiritual means — *àdúrà* instead of *ẹ̀bọ* — to address the perennial demand for healing, well-being, protection from enemies and so forth. This was the deepest level of Africanization.

Now with Islam, there was never any sense that it needed to Africanize itself — rather the opposite, for in the eyes of a growing number of more self-conscious Muslims, the trouble with Yorùbá Islam was that it was all *too* "African". The main impulse here was therefore what is usually termed "Reformism", that is the project to purge Islam of all adulteration with elements adopted from local paganism. Such movements have occurred throughout West African history over several centuries, sometimes peaceable and sometimes violent, of which latter the Jihad of Usman dan Fodio 200 years ago is the best example.²⁰ Yorùbá Islam was barely touched by such concerns before the C.20, but then Reformist ideas started to gain ground. An early showing appeared in a controversy that had raged among the *ulama*, or Islamic

17. The classic study remains J.F.A. Ajàyí, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965).

18. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás* (Lagos: CMS Bookshop, 1921).

19. J. D. Y. Peel, "Between Crowther and Ajàyí: the Religious origins of the Nigerian Intelligentsia", in Toyin Falola (ed.), *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Adé Ajàyí* (Harlow UK: Longman, 1993). See also E.A.A. Adégbolá, "Ifá and Christianity among the Yorùbá: A Study in Symbiosis and the Development of Yorùbá Christology, 1890-1940" (PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1976).

20. The classic study, of course, is Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longman, 1967).

scholars, of Ìbàdàn since the 1930s.²¹ Was it acceptable for the chief imam and senior *alfa* to make a formal visit to the Olúbàdàn at the Iléyá festival and use the Koran to divine for the forthcoming year, after which they would make prayers to avert any evil that might befall the town? It was an Islamized version of a ritual that had formerly been performed by *babaláwo*. The issue which exercised the *ulama* was whether this was an idolatrous abuse of a sacred text, or a justified way of replacing paganism with something more Islamic. The ritual was finally abolished in 1955, ironically by the first Christian *Olubadan*, I.B. Akínyèlé, who was the head of the CAC and himself took a very severe view of idolatry in all its forms; and it was never reinstated.

But it was not really till the 1970s that Reformist pressures — which were largely pressures to conform to the normative patterns of Sunni Islam as found in the Middle East — really made themselves felt. It is a sad irony that one of the first targets was Ahmadiyya, which had been the first serious modernising force in Yorùbá Islam, pioneering Western-style education for Muslims and standing resolutely for a non-jihadist Islam.²² But in 1970 the World Muslim League declared Ahmadiyya to be a non-Muslim sect, and the Saudi government announced it would no longer grant visas to Ahmadis wanting to do the *hajj*. The Sultan of Sokoto was quick to give further support to the ban — no cost to him, since the Ahmadis were almost exclusively Yorùbá — and it had a devastating effect on them. The virtual collapse of Ahmadiyya meant that a more radical and militant leadership came to the fore in the Muslim Students Society. Wahhabi ideas were spread by graduates of Saudi universities, and related anti-Sufi and pro-Sharia messages came from Izala in the North. Then there is the conservative Tablighi Jama'at from Pakistan, which in recent years has gained many followers. So certainly it is the case that a growing number of Yorùbá Muslims are now drawn to more radical forms of Reformism, calling themselves Ahl us-Sunna, or the people of the way of the Prophet. The most decisive sign of the advance of their ideas would be if there was a general desire for the adoption of Sharia law. This has been supported (at least in theory) by many recognized Yorùbá Muslim leaders — whether Muslim chiefs like Abíólá or Arişekólá, or by Arabic scholars

21. For a detailed account see I. A. Jimoh, "Arguments and Counter-arguments in Selected Works in Arabic by Nigerian Authors" (PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, 2005).

22. There is so far no adequate study of the recent history of Ahmadiyya. For an earlier period see Humphrey J. Fisher, *Ahmadiyya: a Study of Contemporary Islam on the West African Coast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). For the later period see A. R. I. Doi, "Islam in Nigeria: Changes since Independence", in E. Fáshólé-Luke, A. Hastings and G. Tasie (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 350–53; and as a telling account by a prominent ex-Ahmadi (and a distinguished scholar of Nigerian Islam), I.A.B. Balógun, *Islam vs. Ahmadiyya in Nigeria* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1977).

like Professor Noibi or lay intellectuals like the late Dr Lateef Adégbité — but the mass of ordinary Muslims (including those who are *obas* or politicians) have little enthusiasm for it.²³ The reason is pretty obvious: if adopted it would drive a wedge through communities and families which are religiously mixed. And the Yorùbá give top priority to religious amity in their communities.

Now one might suppose that since the two movements I have been discussing — Radical Reformism for Islam and Africanization for Christianity — go in opposite directions, some sort of gulf would open up between the two faiths, with negative implications for Yorùbá cultural unity. But this is checked by another remarkable feature of the relations between the two faiths: that their very rivalry leads them to copy one another. This is because the two faiths in Yorùbáland have to compete in a kind of market-place, where potential converts are like customers. This gives religions a powerful incentive to copy from one another whatever aspects of their “product” seem to enhance their appeal to the religious public.²⁴

In fact a readiness to borrow from the other goes back to the very early days of Christianity, when Bishop Crowther showed he was happy to use terms of Arabic origin already current among Muslims to translate Christian concepts — important concepts too, like *àdúrà* for prayer, *àlùfáà* for priest or pastor, *iwàásù* for sermon, *wólìlì* for prophet. By the early C.20, the borrowing went both ways, though Christians and Muslims borrowed different things from one another. Muslims started to copy some more external aspects of Christianity, like its Western-style education and superior organization: here the Ahmadiyya Mission led the way and other bodies like the Ansar-ud-Deen society followed. They were also impressed by church buildings, which they began to copy with modifications, so there came into existence a uniquely Yorùbá style of mosque architecture, which lasted up to the 1980s, when a more international Islamic style took over. You can see examples of both styles in Nnamdi Azikiwe Street in downtown Lagos, when you compare the vast new Central Mosque with its four lofty minarets (which would not look out of place in Kuwait or Kuala Lumpur) and the little Alli Qlòkò mosque, built in 1931, which could only be Yorùbá.

At the same time Christians were concerned at the growth of Islam among the masses in Lagos, and thought they could learn from them, especially in making prayer effective for people’s daily needs. So what we find around 1910 is the appearance of little prayer booklets for private use which adapt the Muslim idea of the “99 Beautiful Names of God” to enhance the power of prayer

23. For a fuller account, see Peel, *Christianity, Islam and Òrìṣà-Religion*, Chapter 8.

24. This argument is set out at greater length in Peel, *Christianity, Islam and Òrìṣà-Religion*, Chapter 9.

and also recommend saying set prayers several times a day. A key figure here was the Rev. T.A.J. Ògúnbiyì who learned Arabic and gained great prestige for being the first Christian to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1912.²⁵ He wrote several pamphlets in Yorùbá, one called *Àdùrà Tètédámilòhùn* [Prayers for Quick Answers] which includes prayers for different needs. Sometimes an Arabic epithet, like *al-Aziz*, would be rendered directly into Yorùbá, as *Ọba Alágbára*. Sometimes he uses Hebrew invocations of God instead of Arabic ones, such as one to Jah-Amad or *Olúwa t'ó wà láéláé* [Eternal Lord] against having *àbíkú* or — one to interest the lawyers in the audience! — to Jah-Shafat or *Olúwa Onídájó "fún wàhàlà ẹjọ"* [Lord of Judgment, "against legal trouble"]. I even think it very likely that the practice of having watch-night services, which started with the Cherubim and Seraphim in Lagos around 1925, may owe something to the Islamic practice of *tahajjud*, a kind of nocturnal prayer which is felt to be very powerful.

But fast forward eighty years, and the influence is running the other way, as is clear from a banner I saw in 2002, advertising a meeting at the UI mosque: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful", it read, "Caring and Sharing Sufi Centre (Inc.) Nigeria Presents Ramadan Celebrations (30 Days of Spiritual Renewal and Manifestation of Miracles). Theme: Open the Floodgates of Prosperity".²⁶ The Born-Again idiom of this is unmistakable. Holy Ghost Night as held by the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which emerged in the 1990s as the clear market-leader,²⁷ has proved so popular that NASFAT has opened its own prayer camp on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway where it holds a weekly Tahajjud service of like kind, as well as developing a similar range of social and welfare activities for their members. In fact there is a wide variety of Muslim groups which emulate Christian models, some more Aládurà and some more Born-Again in their style, and some led by women, like Alhaja Mujidat Adéoyè's Fadilullah Muslim Mission at Òşogbo, with its Aládurà-style *afàdùràjagun* or "prayer warriors".²⁸ And as Professor

25. It is a great pity there is, as far as I am aware, no biography or autobiography of T. A. J. Ògúnbiyì, who is chiefly known for founding the Reformed Ògbóni Fraternity in 1912. He later became Archdeacon of Lagos, a post from which he was removed (I think in the 1940s) for the practice of praying at his father's grave.

26. This was Shaykh Rasheed Akinbilè, who founded an Islamic Brotherhood of Sufism in the 1990s, which he later changed to an International Brotherhood of Sufism, when he felt it extended beyond Islam. Several pages are devoted to Akinbilè in J.S. Adékòyà, "The Role of Music in promoting Islam" (PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, 2005)

27. On which see in particular Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2008).

28. D. O. Ògúngbilé, "Religious experience and women's leadership in Yorùbá Islam", *Gender and Behaviour* 2 (2004), 117–39.

Amídù Sání has noted,²⁹ many Yorùbá people of either religion are prepared to accept that spiritual power and effective prayer may come through practitioners of the other religion. What all these cross-influences have produced is a distinctively Yorùbá style of religion, embracing both Christianity and Islam, which serves to underpin the sense of community that binds the Yorùbá together.

III

I now come to the last section of my essay which is to do with what all this means for the larger Nigerian situation. Central to what I have been saying is how important, indeed crucial, a condition it is for Yorùbá harmony, that religious differences are contained within a strong sense of overall shared community. The original template for that community was the traditional town, but over the last century that has been extended upwards to embrace the Yorùbá as a whole. Has Nigeria developed the features of a community? Nations have been called “imagined communities”, so this is tantamount to raising the key question: how far is Nigeria really a single nation?

To find an answer, we need to go back to the entity brought into existence by the British back in 1914, and to track, in a very schematic way, how it has since developed. The essential contradiction in what the British did was that they simultaneously brought North and South together and kept them apart; and that flaw has replicated itself under changing forms ever since. That, I would say, is perhaps *the* — or at least *a* — fundamental key to understanding the history of Nigeria. The British were not concerned to lay the foundations of a nation, but to make a colony governable and profitable. The wealthier South was to finance the administration of a poorer North, but Northern ruling institutions — the emirate system above all — to which the British were attached for reasons sentimental and ideological as well as practical, were to be protected and favoured. I won't go into the details of this, save to say that whereas a large measure of economic integration of North and South came about (through transport links, internal trade, labour migration, even settlement), cultural and political convergence were actively discouraged.

During decolonization the British strove to ensure that the structure they had created remained in place, notably by discountenancing any moves to reduce the power of the North by creating a Middle Belt Region. It is therefore an irony that the Sardauna of Sokoto, a prime beneficiary of British policy, should (with true aristocratic candour) have referred in 1956 to “the mistake

29. A. O. Sání, “Conversion and reversion in the power accession narratives of Muslim prayer groups in Nigeria”, *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 21 (2012).

of 1914". It wasn't just that the Sardauna really disliked like the ethos of the South, but that he and the Southern leaders, especially Awólówọ̀, talked past one another when it came to conceiving of the nation. Awólówọ̀' s was a European-style nationalism, in which ethno-linguistic entities are the natural political units; and this is why he had argued so cogently in his *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (1947), that Nigeria, because of its cultural and linguistic diversity, needed to be a "federal union". But the Sardauna drew his political conceptions from classical Islam and the example of the Sokoto Caliphate, so that it wasn't the Hausa-Fulani as an ethno-linguistic entity that mattered to him, but the religious community or *umma*. In this respect the British seriously failed to understand what the core region of the North, for which they had such a regard, was really about. Showing their ethno-racial prejudices, they mostly called it the "Fulani Empire" whereas we call it — more appropriately — the "Sokoto Caliphate".³⁰

After independence, the Sardauna soon showed his hand. In the 1950s his slogan had been "One North, One People", implying that all its indigenes, whatever their religion, would be equally at home there. But later the emphasis shifted to a conception of the North as a kind of successor state to the Caliphate — hence the Islamization campaigns that he began around 1962, as well as such other measures as reprinting the works of his ancestor Usman dan Fodio. The late Yusuf Bala Usman, a fine historian, wrote a little book arguing that the political manipulation of religion in Nigeria began under Gowon.³¹ I think he was wrong: it began with the Sardauna, and yet it wasn't quite manipulation since the Sardauna genuinely believed that only Islam could provide the moral basis for the political community of the North as he conceived it.

The instability of the three- (later four-) regional system led to its replacement in 1967 by twelve States. Thereby began a long process by which the power of the Federal centre grew at the expense of its sub-units. This was enormously boosted by the collapse of agricultural revenues, which had been largely retained at Regional level, and their replacement by oil revenues, which flowed directly into the Federal coffers. Politics became more top-downwards, as the sub-units competed with one another for better access to the resources which flowed down from the Federal centre. Creating new States was popular with local ethnic interest groups as it increased their direct access to resources distributed by the centre and at times it was a useful strategy of divide-and-rule for the controlling power of the centre. The number of states has tripled

30. The term "Sokoto Caliphate" only came into general currency as a result of Professor Murray Last's book of that title, published in 1967.

31. Y. B. Usman, *The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria* (Vanguard Press, 1987).

to 36, and one wonders whether it can go much further, granted that some are no bigger than an administrative Division of colonial times. Behind State creation lay the shadowy presence of the old North/South divide, since the Federal government adopted the practice, when it created new States, of creating equal numbers from North and South. Yet otherwise that old distinction seems less and less relevant to realities on the ground.

Meanwhile, in contrast to these manipulations at the upper political level, social movements with the power to re-shape Nigeria have been emerging under the politicians' feet. And this brings me back to religion, particularly to the movements of renewal within the respective world faiths which became manifest in the 1970s: Radical Reformism or Salafism in Islam, and Charismatic or neo-Pentecostal Christianity. There has been quite a lot of argument among academics about how far these movements resemble one another. Some see them both through the lens of "fundamentalism", emphasizing their wish to go back to the religious basics and to break from the recent past, their common appeal to educated urban youth or the sense they each have of belonging to a global movement. For myself, I'm more inclined to underscore the differences, both in terms of where they have come from and where they would take Nigeria.³² Both have criticisms to make of the Nigerian state; and though there is quite a measure of overlap between them, there is an overall difference of emphasis. Now African states and governments, to be legitimate in the eyes of their people, must meet two general criteria: they must be seen as bringing development and they must be seen as being just. The Nigerian state is open to criticism on both scores.

Pentecostalism places its emphasis the state's failure to bring development. In his detailed study of RCCG, Dr Asonzeh Ukah describes its Redemption City as "an alternative society, properly equipped with all the necessary instruments of a functioning secular state".³³ It is at once a small-scale model of what Nigerians would like their country to be, and a reproach at the state's failure to achieve it. The Salafists, by contrast, emphasize the state's failure to deliver justice, a critique which picks up on Usman dan Fodio's attack on the old Hausa kings against whom he launched his Jihad. The codification of Islamic ideas of justice is, of course, Sharia law.

The adoption of Sharia as public law by Zamfara and eleven other Northern States in 1999–2001 was in good part a response to popular demand, fuelled by the desire of the Muslim masses to hold their elites ethically accountable in terms of their shared religious values: it was a powerful expression of a sense

32. These Issues are further discussed in Peel, *Christianity, Islam and Òrìṣà-Religion*, Chapter 10.

33. See his *New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 103.

of Islamic community. But the implications of its adoption were far-reaching in ways not immediately apparent. In effect it moved the boundary between South and North northwards: the old North had been coextensive with the former Northern Region, but the new North comprises only the twelve Sharia States. Nigeria was thus reshaped to comprise two geo-religious spheres with different cultural foundations: the Southern two-thirds of the country being a religiously plural society within a secular or religiously-neutral framework and the Northern one-third an Islamic society within which it is hard for non-Muslims to feel entirely at home. Despite the continuities of sentiment with the old North of 50 years ago, no one from the new North, I think, is going to be echoing the Sardauna's ominous remark about "the mistake of 1914". Oil revenues, as long as they last, will be a cement to bind the North to the South; but what will happen afterwards, if there is no development of moral and cultural bonds? Surely there must be more to Nigeria than another enactment of the Lugardian formula of simultaneously bringing North and South together and holding them apart?

As I wrote this essay, I came to think of the options facing Nigeria in terms of its three major cities: Abuja, Kano and Lagos. Abuja embodies a dream of Nigerian unity but to me it feels artificial, with shallow roots, a city of politicians whose principal business is to divide up the "national cake" (and also to make sure they get a generous slice of it for themselves). Kano is the beating heart of the North, a city of great antiquity and complexity, the nodal point of the entire Savannah region, and now striving to make itself as Sharia-compliant as it can. I will be very interested to see what impact its new emir, a man of great sophistication and integrity, and someone who straddles the worlds of Islamic scholarship and international finance as hardly anyone else could, will have on it. Then there is Lagos, the powerhouse of Nigerian development and fast becoming one of the world's mega-cities, a city open to all comers and unafraid of diversity. Living in London as I do, I think of Lagos as the London of West Africa — and London as the Lagos of Europe for that matter (and not just because I seem to hear Yorùbá spoken there almost every day of the week). In recent months we have been hearing some good news about Nigeria: its economy outstripping South Africa's and now its smooth transfer of government through elections. But the single thing which has impressed me the most was the way Nigeria handled the Ebola outbreak in 2014, through the effectiveness of the Lagos State government, the competence of the Nigerian medical profession, and the heroic self-sacrifice of one woman, Dr Stella Adadevoh, a great-great-great-granddaughter of Bishop Crowther. To me, that above all showed the potential of Nigeria.

