

**SHARI'A LAW AND RESISTANCE BY THE CHRISTIAN
ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA, ZURU BRANCH, KEBBI
STATE, NIGERIA¹**

* * *

Nathaniel D. Danjibo, PhD

Senior Lecturer

Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies

University of Ibadan, Ibadan

ABSTRACT

Sharia has been a controversial and contentious issue in the political development of the Nigerian state. Much as most Muslims in Nigeria wanted the Islamic jurisprudence to be constitutionally institutionalized, non-Muslims are opposed to the clamour for the entrenchment of sharia law in Nigeria. The adoption and implementation of Sharia by 12 states in northern Nigeria between 1999 and 2000 generated serious tension and conflict between protagonists and those who sought to resist Islamic law in northern Nigeria. Using In-depth interviews and state gazette policies, this study examined the tension that greeted the adoption and implementation of the Shari'a law in Kebbi State and the attendant resistance to the law by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Zuru Branch in Zuruland.

¹ This is an updated excerpt from my Ph.D thesis submitted to the department of political science, university of Ibadan in 2005.

Introduction

...opponents of the sharia are too willing to accept...every criticism of the discourse as 'progressives' or 'liberals' or 'reformists' without subjecting the arguments to rigorous intellectual scrutiny. Defenders hold firmly equally dogmatic ideological positions to which they ascribe dubious labels of authenticity and tradition and insist on the authority of sources (Sanusi Lamido Sanusi)².

Sharia law controversy was one major issue that greeted Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999. Barely five months after the country transited from military to civilian rule on 29 May 1999 Governor Sani Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State, in what came to be known as Gusau Declaration, officially declared on 27 October 1999 that his state would be governed by sharia, the law of God. Addressing a large gathering of people, Governor Yerima stated:

Sharia is the Islamic Law as ordained by Allah in the Qur'an and as practised through the Hadith and *Sunna* of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and the works of the Prophet's companions and other renowned Islamic scholars. It covers the whole life of a Muslim from the spiritual to the intellectual, political, social and economic spheres. It preaches peace, justice, fairness and equality. It is the only legal system that cannot be amended to suit particular circumstances or times because it is a divine command....The Government of Zamfara State therefore must govern Muslims in the state according to the provisions of sharia³.

² Cited in Jan H. Boer, *Muslims: Why Muslim Sharia Law: Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*. Belleville, Ontario, Canada: Essence Publishing, 2008, p. 24.

³ Governor Sani Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State while addressing a large crowd on 9 November 1999 in Gusau the capital of the state during the inaugural speech that culminated in the adoption and implementation of sharia law in the state.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

This declaration attracted mixed reactions from all parts of Nigeria. Most Muslims, including those in the southern⁴ part of the country, applauded the declaration as most Christians condemned it. The contention between Muslims and Christians is based on two-dimensional positions. First, whereas the Muslims see the introduction of sharia law as fulfilling Allah's injunction, the Christians saw it as a deliberate plan to Islamize Nigeria. Second, Sharia law also re-evoked the whole question of whether Nigeria is a secular state or not. For the Muslims, Nigeria cannot be defined as a secular state while the Christians have interpreted the non-adoption of any religion as a state religion by the Constitution of the country to mean that Nigeria was a secular state. The resistance to Sharia law by the Christian Association of Nigeria was tantamount to resisting the Islamization of the Nigerian state. Since the core of northern Nigeria is inhabited by mostly Muslims, there was pressure on the part of other state governments to emulate Zamfara State. Therefore, eleven other states- Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kwara, Niger and Yobe States also adopted sharia.

The Sharia debacle in Nigeria attracted global attention to the extent that a scholar on jihad wrote that "Several northern Nigerian states have rather haphazardly adopted some elements of sharia, the classical Islamic law that is typically the first plank of the Islamist electoral platform. The motivation was democratic in the sense that Muslim politicians proposed the adoption of sharia to consolidate popular support."⁵ The sharia controversy later sparked of violent crisis between Christians and Muslims in Kaduna State in April 2000 leading to the death of more than 2000 persons. The Kaduna

⁴ Some Muslims in Oyo and Osun States also joined in the clamour for the adoption and implementation of sharia in their respective states.

⁵ Noah Feldman, *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003, p. 49.

violence attracted reprisal attacks in eastern Nigeria in places like Onitsha, Aba and Owerri as the conflict took an ethnoreligious/regional dimension. Once again, Nigeria was plunged into waves of religious crisis at the turn of a new democratic era as a result of the controversy over sharia.⁶

Kebbi State was among the states that adopted Sharia law in Northern Nigeria in early 2000, a few months after Zamfara State did. Kebbi State has a complex ethnocultural and religious composition. Colonial Native administration delineated the state into four Emirates which are Argungu, Gwandu, Yauri and Zuru. These Emirates were four of the five Emirates that constituted the then Sokoto State Emirate Council before Kebbi State was created in 1991 by General Ibrahim Babangida's military regime. It should be noted that whereas Argungu and Gwandu Emirates in the north of the state are inhabited mostly by the Muslim *Kabawa* and *Arawa* and several other minority identities that have, through the jihad conquest of the early 19th century been assimilated into the dominant Hausa-Fulani religious/cultural identity, the two Emirates in the south-Yauri and Zuru- are inhabited mostly by Christians and adherents of traditional belief systems belonging to different ethno cultural identities such as the Lelna (Dakarkari), the Kamberi, the Dukkawa, the Gungawa, the Achifawa, the Fakkawa, the Bangawa and Katsinawan Laka, Gwanfawa, Gelawa, Kelawa, and several numerous sub-identities.⁷

⁶ Rotimi Suberu, Religion and Institutions: Federalism and the Management of Conflict over Sharia in Nigeria. *Journal of International Development*, 2009, pp. 547-560.

⁷ See, P. G. Harris, "Notes on the Dakarkari of Sokoto Province, Northern Nigeria", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Volume LXVIII, January-June, 1938, pp. 113-152; Ceslaus Prazan, *The Dukkawa of Northwest Nigeria*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1977; A. R. Augi and S. U. Lawal, eds. *Studies in the History of the People of Zuru Emirate*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1990; Mahdi Adamu; "A Hausa Government in Decline" Yauri in the 19th Century", M. A. Thesis,

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

Zuru Emirate is very unique for the reason that in fact, it does not qualify to be an emirate in the strict sense of the word. This is because the emirate system of administration presupposes the fact that such a community is strictly Muslim with an *Amir* (Emir) as head, representing the Caliph or Sultan of Sokoto and in turn, the prophet of Islam. However, the contrary is the case in Zuru, where most of the groups have different identities separate from Hausa/Fulani and are mostly traditionalists and Christians as earlier mentioned. Zuru resisted Islam since the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodiyo and even resisted the colonial imposition of the emirate system between 1903 and 1913 by force of arms. The colony remained a Paramount Chiefdom until 1979 when the elite conspired to apply to become an emirate.⁸ This is unlike Argungu and Gwandu Emirates which were established by the jihad conquest of Usman Danfodiyo, while Yauri Emirate willingly submitted itself as a tributary state to the Jihadists. The major focus of this study, therefore, is to discuss the role the Christian Association of Nigeria, Zuru branch played in resisting and rejecting sharia law in Kebbi State.

The Gap in the Literature

There are several works written on sharia as a divine law which derived its source from the Koran, meant to guide every Muslim in his or her relationship first with Allah (God) and humanity. For Muslims, Sharia law is the all and all guiding principle which should govern the behaviour of every Muslim from birth to death and it

Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, 1968; Frank Salamone, *Goods and Goods in Africa*:

⁸ Nathaniel Dominic Kyale Danjibo, "Minorities in the throes of Domination Politics: A Case Study of the Zuru in Northwestern Nigeria" PhD Thesis in the Department of Political Science, 2005.

cannot be separated from the laws of the state.⁹ This position only presents sharia as a divine law which cannot be contested by Humans but must be accepted hook, line and sinker. Other empirical works on Sharia in Nigeria have only presented the discourse at the national level in terms of the friction it generates between Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁰ These works have only concentrated their efforts on discoursing the politics and politicization of religion in Nigeria, with less attention paid to the relationship between Christians and Muslims at the sub-national level. This study, therefore, x-rayed the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Zuruland of Kebbi State as a result of the adoption and implementation of Sharia in the state.

Geography and Brief History of Zuruland

Zuru Emirate is located in the southeast of Kebbi State. The Emirate shares a boundary with Zamfara State to the northeast, Sokoto State to the north and Niger State to the south. The Emirate is composed of several ethnic groups, dominant among which are the Lelna

⁹ See, Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Shari'ah: The Islamic Law*. Zaria: Centre of Islamic Studies, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, 1404 A.H.; Sayyed Mohammad Hosayn Tabataba'i, *Islamic Teaching: An Overview*, Translated by R. Campbell. Iran: Imam Hussain Foundation, 1989; A. Rahman I. Doi, *The Cardinal Principles of Islam*. Lagos: Islamic Publication Bureau, 1972/1981; Mohammad Higab, *Islam is the All Divine Message in One, Volume 1*. Lagos: Islamic Publication Bureau, 1983; Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, Eds. *The Hidden Origin of slam: New Research into its Early History*. New York: Prometheus Books: 2010.

¹⁰ P.P. Ekeh and E.E. Osaghae, Eds. *Federalism and Federal Character in Nigeria*: Ibadan: Heinemann Books, 1989; M.H. Kukah, *Religion Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993; Iheanyi. Enwerem, O.P. *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA, 1995; Jan H. Boer, *Muslims: Why Muslim Sharia Law*, Vol. 6. Bukuru, Jos: African Christian Textbooks; Jan H. Boer, *Christians: Why We Rejected Muslim Laws*, Vol. 7. Bukuru, Jos: African Christian Textbooks; Johannes Harnischfeger, *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2008.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

(Dakarkari), the Fakkawa, the Bangawa, the Achifawa, the Dukkawa and the Katsinawan Laka.¹¹ Other minority ethnic identities that inhabit Zuruland are the Gelawa, Kelawa, Hausa, Fulani, Kir, Kamberi, and the Zir. There are also some migrant/settler ethnic identities from southern Nigeria such as the Igbo, the Urhobo, Isoko, and the Yoruba. People in Zuruland practice three dominant religions, Christianity, Islam and the Traditional Religion (TR). Historically, the people of Zuruland resisted and in fact, defeated the Hausa/Fulani jihadists in 1898 in the battle of *Penin Amana*.¹² Furthermore, Zuruland was also the first in that part of northwestern Nigeria to accept Christianity, which made it the only Christian colony proximate to Sokoto Caliphate.

Pre-colonial Zuruland consisted of different independent ethnic and sub-ethnic nationalities. However, when British colonialism came to Zuruland in 1903, it tried to bring these independent groups under one emirate system patterned alongside the already existing ones without consideration for prior socio-political/administrative arrangements, cultures, beliefs and historical relationship with the Hausa/Fulani. This attempted imposition resulted in a war of resistance from 1903 - 1908, between the people of Zuruland and the colonial army detachment.¹³ Not being able to administer the place and collect taxes successfully, British colonial administration evolved a system of the chiefdom, separate from the Hausa/Fulani emirate system and lured the different ethnic groups into accepting a

¹¹ Augi, A. R. and S. U. Lawal, eds. *Studies in the History of the People of Zuru Emirate*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1990.

¹² C. E. Boyd, in *Anthropological Notes in the Gazetteers of Northern Nigeria, Volume III, The Central Kingdoms*, London: Frank Cass, 1972.

¹³ See, Samuel Peter Umaru, "Incorporation and Resistance: A Study of the Relationship between Alela and Sokoto Caliphate to the British Occupation C. 1804-1910, M. A. Dissertation, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, 1992.

con-federal system of administration, with power rotating amongst the five major traditional chiefs of Udaba (Dabai), Upaku (Fakai), Donko (Danko), Uhyegu (Wasagu) and Dere (Diri or Sakaba) every year. These five chiefs represented the five dominant ethnic groups in the federation. The federation came to a halt in 1963 when Usman Danga, the chief of Dabai was installed as the permanent Paramount Ruler of the Zuru Federation, despite protests by the four other chiefs¹⁴ who felt that the Chief of the Dakarkari (Lelna) represented by the Chief of Dabai (Udaba) was imposed on them and their people.

With the creation of states in 1967 by General Yakubu Gowon, Zuruland was placed under the then Northwestern State and when the Northwestern State was split into two –Sokoto and Niger States in 1975, the people of Zuruland had a choice to be part of either of the states. The elite in Zuruland decided that Zuruland should be part of Sokoto State because they did not want to compete with the Nupe people who were also educated. Choosing to be part of Sokoto State was thought to be an advantage because the people of Zuruland were the most educated in that part of the country, having been exposed to early enlistment into the colonial army in the early 19th Century¹⁵.

¹⁴ Danjibo, N. D. “Minorities in the Throes of Domination Politics: A Case Study of the Zuru in Northwestern Nigeria”, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, 2005.

¹⁵ Having discovered Zuruland to be the land of warriors, especially the Dakarkari who resisted the Jihadists, Colonial administration established the first military recruitment camp in the area in early 1900s. A lot of men from Zuruland fought in the colonial army in both the First and Second World Wars. This expedition has helped to expose the people to Western education and Christianity.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

The elite believed that the educational advantage and exposure to the military the people of Zuru had would give them the opportunity to be treated as equals in Sokoto State.¹⁶

Unfortunately for the people of Zuruland, they became an obvious minority that suffered relative deprivation under Sokoto State. For example, even though the people of Zuruland were the most exposed to Western education in the state, no person from Zuruland ever rose to become a commissioner in Sokoto State. In terms of infrastructural development like roads and electricity, Zuruland was least developed compared with the other three Muslim-dominated emirates. All efforts for the language and culture of the people to be recognised were rejected in favour of Hausa and Arabic. Furthermore, in 1980, the Sokoto State government came up with a policy that forbade the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge in all schools from primary to tertiary levels in a bid to halt the spread of the Christian religion.¹⁷

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Zuru Branch

Although there seems not to be any consensus among scholars as to the exact time or period when the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was established, however, Iheanyi Enwerem's book gave an insight into the evolution of CAN. To resist the planned Islamization of the North by the Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello, with the tactical formation of the *Ja'ama tul Nasir Islam*¹⁸ in 1963,

¹⁶ Interview with retired Major-General Sani Sami, the current Emir of Zuru. In 1975, he was among the elite that decided Zuruland should be part of Sokoto and not Niger State.

¹⁷ See, Danjibo, N. D. "Democracy and the Paradox of Domination Politics" in Emmanuel Ojo ed. *The Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: John Archers, 2006.

¹⁸ *Ja'ama tul Nasir Islam* is an Arabic phrase which means people committed to the victory of Islam

the Christians in the North came together to form the Christian Association of the North (CAN) in 1965.¹⁹ The name was later changed to the Christian Association of Nigeria during a joint meeting of Christians from both the north and the south in 1976, during the General Olusegun Obasanjo regime. The CAN became formidable in 1978 during the Constituent Assembly when the issue of Sharia law became contentious between Christians and Muslims.²⁰ The CAN further became reinvigorated in 1986 after General Ibrahim Babangida's regime tried to smuggle Nigeria into the membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).²¹ From that moment, Christians in Nigeria were united for a common cause against threats of domination and perceived planned Islamisation of the Nigerian state. The Association became a formidable vocal body in defence of the rights of Christians in Nigeria.²²

Since when it was established in the 1980s, the Zuru branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria was not an active organization. One of the major factors that affected the association was denominational rivalry mostly between Catholics and members of the United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA), the first two churches established in Zuruland. While the UMCA was established in 1925 by two American missionaries, the Catholic Church was established in 1931 by Irish missionary priests. Other orthodox churches are the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) and the Baptist Church. Presently, there are numerous Pentecostal churches scattered all over Zuruland.

¹⁹ Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA, 1995, Cf. Chapter Three; Niels Kastfelt, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria: A Study in Middle Belt Christianity*. London and New York: British Academy Press, 1994.

²⁰ P.P. Ekeh and E.E. Osaghae, op. cit.

²¹ Kenny, Joseph "Shari'a and Christianity in Nigeria: Islam and a Secular State". *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 26, Fasc. 4, November, 1996.

²² Joseph Kenny, Ibid.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

Before the adoption and implementation of Sharia law in Kebbi State, the relationship between the Catholics and especially members of the UMCA in Zuruland can be likened to the one between the Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland save that it did not take a violent dimension. Members of both the Catholic and UMCA churches had for a long time lived in mutual distrust along doctrinal and social lines. For instance, before the adoption of Sharia law by the state, there had not been any form of ecumenism involving the two churches for over six decades until Sharia concerns brought them together. Furthermore, the mutual animosity that existed between the two churches manifested in negative social relations to the extent that inter-denominational marriages were discouraged among members of the two denominations. It was, in fact, easier for female members of the two churches to get married to Muslim men than foster inter-denominational marriages between or among members of these two churches. However, this problem began to wane as soon as the Kebbi State Government adopted Sharia law in 2000. As the saying goes 'those who share an experience share an identity'. In other words, the positive outcome of Sharia law was the unity it helped to foster among Christians in Zuruland.

Sharia and the Muslim Community

Islam believes that Allah is the lawgiver and any law that does not emanate from Allah is antithetical to both the physical and spiritual development of any society. Allah's laws are pure, clear, divine and unquestionable and therefore transcendental over all human laws put together. This is why Abdur Rahaman Doi in his description of Sharia stated:

Shari'ah is an Arabic word meaning the Path to be followed. It means 'the way to a watering place.' It is

the Path not only leading to Allah, the Highest but the path believed by all Muslims to be the path shown by Allah, the Creator Himself through His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad himself (P.B.U.H.). In Islam, Allah alone is the sovereign and it is He who has the right to ordain a path for the guidance of mankind. Thus, it is only Shari'ah that liberates man from servitude to other than Allah. This is the only reason why Muslims are obliged to strive for the implementation of that path, and that of no other path.²³

In the Hausa language, the word sharia means judgment, but in Islam, the word has a wider conceptual understanding. In a wider context, Sharia connotes Islamic jurisprudence, which accepts the totality of the infusion of theology and politics. Victor Low observed that in Islam, religion “is inseparably interfused with most public, economic and cultural affairs”.²⁴ Islamic theology upholds that life and society are indivisible. Therefore, life in society must be guided by religious all-embracing law (sharia), which is a matter of necessity and not interest.²⁵ As Kumo observed, in Islam, “...the state is subordinate to sharia and it is sharia which lays down the general norms and functions of the state and all the public institutions of the state”.²⁶ The emphasis on Islamic religion as public policy gave rise to two related doctrines: (1) the supremacy of sharia as Islamic jurisprudence and; (2) the sovereignty and purity of the Islamic community (*Umma Muhammadiya*). This is where Islam derives its philosophy as the only recognized religion.²⁷ The

²³ Abdur Rahaman I. Doi, *Shari'ah: The Islamic Law*. ABU Zaria: Centre of Islamic Legal Studies, 2001.

²⁴ Low, Victor N. *Three Nigerian Emirates: A Study in Oral History*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

²⁵ Rosenthal, Erwin I. J. *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1962.

²⁶ Kumo

²⁷ Fuad I. Khuri, *Imams and Emirs: State, Religion and Sect in Islam*. London: Saqi Books, 1990; William F. S. Miles ed. *Political Islam in West*

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

supremacy of Sharia can also manifest in two ways; the first is the priority given to jurisprudence, and the second is the dogmatic insistence on the comprehensiveness of religion. In this case, Islamic jurisprudence is derived from three sources - dogma, custom and history. Dogma connotes the unchallenging message of the Koran as directly given to the prophet of Islam; history is the recounting or documentation of the daily experience of the Islamic community beginning from the narratives of the different prophets way to the Hadith of the prophet of Islam while the custom represented by Arabic traditions.

Every community is regarded as the *alumna* (community of brethren), which believes in the fusion of state and religion. The central element or objective of the Umma was to unite all Muslims under the doctrine of one God (Allah) and Muhammad as the prophet.²⁸ Because of the belief in the supremacy of Islam, only Muslims must continue to rule or take leadership positions. Leadership must not be bequeathed to non-Muslims extremely referred to as the *kafir* (infidels). Thus, according to Rosenthal, Islam must draw a borderline between the servants of God and the prophet of Islam (Umma Muhammadiya) on the one hand and the *alkali*.²⁹ Islam holds that the task of the state must be backed by a moral foundation. Therefore, Islamic society must acknowledge and accept sharia as the canon law, qualifying and conferring executive and judicial powers in the society.

Africa: State-Society Relations Transformed. Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, Colorado, 2007.

²⁸ Noah Feldman, *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy.* New York: Farra, Straus and Giroux.

²⁹ Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962.

Sharia in Islam holds that Muslims are equal before the law and Allah, and the significant correlate is that people who refuse to accept Islam as the only 'true' religion cannot be accorded full citizenship in the Islamic state. In the Islamic society governed by Sharia, therefore, Christians and non-Muslims are regarded and treated as second-class citizens.³⁰ According to Khuri (1990: 34), "Formal Islam does not conceive of Muslims occupying a minority status even if non-Muslims were to constitute the majority of the population". This position was also reinforced by Andrew Barnes.³¹ The dogmatic 'supremacy' of Islam was the reason behind the declaration of Sharia by some states in northern Nigeria at the advent of civil rule headed by a Christian in 1999. The Islamic State must protect the Muslim faithful against the non-Muslims, and this obligation has been constructed in terms of jihad (holy war), which has two warrants:

- (a) The propagation of faith by force when every other means fails;
- (b) The assurance that only the servants of Allah (Muslims) are entitled to the highest political reward (Low 1972: 27).³²

By obliging Muslim rulers to defend the faith and the interest of the faithful against the infidels, Sharia has effectively segregated the society into two- *Dar-al-Islam* (the community of believers) and *Dar-al- harb* (the community of unbelievers). In a plural society, therefore, the main task of Islam is to transform the *Dar al-Harb* (unbelievers) into *Dar al-Islam* (believers) even by force of arms. In the history of political religion in Nigeria, this was what informed the 1804 Jihad expedition of Usman Danfodiyo to forcefully capture

³⁰ Simeon Ilesanmi, "Constitutional Treatment of Religion and the Politics of Human Rights in Nigeria", *African Affairs*, 100, pp. 55-72.

³¹ Khuri, Op. Cit., p. 34; Andrew E. Barnes, *Making Headway: The Introduction of Western Civilization in Colonial Northern Nigeria*. Rochester, New York: The University of Rochester Press, 2009, pp. 65-67.

³² Victor N. Low, *Three Nigerian Emirates: A Study in Oral History*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

and convert non-Muslim territories to Islam.³³ With this injunction, Islam, backed by sharia, has provided the opportunity for its adherents to take total control of politics, administration and economy to the exclusion of other groups in the society. This is what forms the basis for the discrimination of non-Muslim groups in any society governed by Sharia.³⁴ But what exactly does Sharia mean?

According to the Zamfara State edict that justified the adoption and implementation of Sharia:

Sharia is the Islamic law as ordained by Allah in the Qur'an and as practised through the Hadith and Sunna of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and the works of the Prophet's companions and other renowned Islamic scholars. It covers the whole life of a Muslim from the spiritual to the intellectual, political, social and economic spheres.³⁵

For Muslims, Sharia defines and guides everything from the personal to the community, the nation and the state. Muslims have the right to be governed by Sharia, but we have to take into account the fact that this is only possible in only sole Muslim societies. The contestation is reinforced in mixed or plural societies where groups other than Muslims also have the right not to be governed by Sharia law. As Johannes Harnischfeger noted:

When Muslims in Northern Nigeria decided to shape their penal code by their religious tradition, they excluded non-Muslims from an important aspect of public legislation. As the introduction of Sharia demonstrates, the transition to democracy is not a protection against religious conflicts; it only strengthens the politics of exclusion. The right to self-

³³ Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman Dan Fodio*, New York, 1973.

³⁴ Danjibo, Op. cit. Chp. 5.

³⁵ Zamfara State Government, 9 November 1999.

determination appeals to people who are united by common values and traditions....³⁶

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Zuru Branch and the Struggle against Sharia Law

The Sharia controversy is not a new issue in the political development of Nigeria. It is important to note that Sharia had guided the administration of the Hausa/Fulani emirates long before the advent of colonialism in northern Nigeria. The Fulani emirs had appointed Khadis (judges) to administer their court system and deliver judgment according to strict Islamic laws.³⁷ Most Muslim scholars and jurists in northern Nigeria would continue to blame colonialism for the erosion of Sharia law and this is because they believe that British colonial administrators deliberately caused the death of Sharia by imposing and supplanting Sharia with British laws. Jan Boer captured the frustration of an anonymous Muslim who wrote (in Hausa): “They (the British) came among the Muslims; they treated them harshly and with contempt. They did away with the Muslim Sharia.”³⁸

The Northern Regional government in Nigeria adopted the Penal Code as its form of jurisprudence. There is no doubt that the Penal Code derived its philosophy of jurisprudence from Sharia. That was why the Northern Regional Government under Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Sokoto, appointed Grand Khadis who functioned as Supreme judges. On the part of minority groups in northern Nigeria, sharia was one of the major reasons cited by minority groups for the creation of the Middle Belt from the Northern Regional government

³⁶ Johannes Harnischfeger, *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2008, p. 22.

³⁷ Andrew E. Barnes. *Making Headway: The Introduction of Western Civilization in Colonial Northern Nigeria*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009.

³⁸ Jan H. Boer, *Muslims: Why Muslim Sharia Law*. Belleville, Ontario Canada: Essence Publishing, 2008, p. 63.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

in 1958.³⁹ During the Second Republic, precisely at the Constituent Assembly debates of 1978, the Sharia issue again divided the members against each other on religious lines. It became a contentious issue between Muslims and Christians.⁴⁰ While the Muslims were insisting on having a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal entrenched in the 1979 Constitution, the Christians resisted such a move to the extent that the Muslim delegates led by Alhaji Shehu Aliyu Shagari protested and staged a walkout. Alhaji Shehu Shagari later became the first elected President of Nigeria on October 1, 1979.

From 1978, the sharia issue did not surface again in Nigeria until November 1999 when Ahmed Yerima, the Governor of Zamfara State declared that his state would be governed by the Islamic legal system. After Zamfara State adopted sharia law, the Zuru branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), envisioned there could be a spread to other parts of Northern Nigeria, especially the fact that Kebbi State shared proximity with Zamfara State. The Christian organization became actively nationalistic in the face of this dilemma. Concerning an open letter written by Governor Sani Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on why sharia law was implemented in his state,⁴¹¹ the Zuru branch of CAN issued a rejoinder to the Governor's letter. Governor Sani Ahmed Yerima claimed he had the mandate of the entire people of Zamfara State to discharge his duty by adopting and declaring Sharia law in his state. Yerima insisted he was merely

³⁹Patrick C. A. Daudu "The Management of Ethnic Conflict in Northern States of Nigeria, Ph.D. Thesis, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, 1974.

⁴⁰Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion Power and Politics in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1994.

⁴¹ See, *The Monitor*, Friday December 3, 1999.

fulfilling God's injunction and the desire of the people.⁴² The Zuru branch of the Christian association reacted to Governor Yerima's claim, thus:

⁴² The Zamfara Sharia Declaration, 27 October, 1999.

We dispute the claim you made that you are discharging your legitimate responsibility by introducing Sharia law in Zamfara State; we are hundred per cent sure that you did not include Shari'a law in your campaign manifesto let alone make (sic) mention of it to the electorate during your campaign visits, otherwise, y, you wouldn't have used the harlots, *yan Ganga/chacha* (drummers and gamblers).... It is heartbreaking to note that an elected Governor like you is identifying himself with one particular religion instead of being liberal in outlook (sic). We think that religion is a private affair between the faithful of one's (sic) religion and his God, but now you have proved that it is the contrary⁴³.

The Christian organization also challenged the claim by Governor Yerima that all the people in Zamfara State were Muslims. The organization referred to a considerable number of the *Maguzawa*⁴⁴. Moreover, the governor's assertion was make-believe in the sense that there are large numbers of Nigerians from different ethnocultural/religious backgrounds who live in Zamfara State. The concerns raised by the Zuru branch of CAN had no effect in halting the implementation of Shari'a in Zamfara.

⁴³ A Rejoinder to the open letter written by His Excellency, the Governor of Zamfara State, Alhaji Ahmed Sani (Yeriman Bakura), to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), on "the issue of implementing sharia law in Zamfara State", CAN, Zuru Emirate, n. d. pp. 1&2.

⁴⁴ The *Maguzawa* are traditional Hausa people mostly found in Zamfara, Katsina and parts of Kano States; they have resisted conversion into Islam since the jihad era of Shehu Usman Danfodiyo, which earned them the name *Bamaguje* (singular) and *Maguzawa* (plural), meaning 'those on the run'. Presently, pockets of them are Christian and Muslim converts. See, Johannes Harnischfeger, *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2008, p. 97.

The decision by the Kebbi State government to adopt and implement Sharia law a few weeks after Zamfara did was met with vehement reactions, especially by the Christians Association of Nigeria, Zuru branch. According to the Christian organization “Sharia is unconstitutional. It is nothing short of declaring an Islamic state.”⁴⁵ The fear expressed by the Christians was based on the fact that if Sharia law was implemented in Kebbi State, it would pave the way for greater marginalization, discrimination and suppression of the religious and cultural values of non-Muslims. As the Christian body stated,

It is only Islamic culture that will be pursued and encouraged. All other cultural values will be compelled to fail. For example, there will be no traditional or cultural activities. If Christians were equally illiterate and ignorant, their festivals will equally fade.⁴⁶

Here, the Zuru branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria became a vanguard for both Christianity and the African Traditional Religion (ATR) in Zuruland. This is because a large number of those who practice the traditional belief system were not exposed to Western education and so were not in tune with the challenges of modernity and the post-colonial Nigerian state. The Christian organization further stated thus:

The ultimate objective of sharia is total Islamization of the North or at least establishing the stronghold (sic) of Islam, which ultimately will lead to the establishment of an Islamic culture and economy, that is, an Islamic state. With immediate effect, power and authority in its entire ramification will be confined to only Muslims at the expense of the Christians and traditional believers, irrespective of their merit.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The Christian Association of Nigeria, Zuru Emirate, “A Release on the occasion of a peaceful rally held to protest against the implementation of Shari’a Law in Kebbi State”, on 25 November, 1999.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, P. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p.3.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

This reinforces Khuri's earlier assertion that Muslims do not accept the superiority of non-Muslims in a mixed society and this is because Islam does not accept the superiority of those outside of the *Umma Muhammadiya* (community of believers), considered to be *kafir* (infidels). Ibrahim Sulaiman even presents the fiat in a more militant way when he posited that "Islam is an unconquerable force which, despite all opposition, subversion and attacks from its enemies everywhere, must express its domineering will and assert its authority over all other systems."⁴⁸

The protest against the planned adoption of the *Shari'a* law by the Zuru branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria culminated in a series of rallies staged by the Christians in November/December 1999 with placards and slogans such as "it is easier to adopt *Shari'a* in Onitsha than in Zuruland"⁴⁹. As a result of this protest rally, the Kebbi State Government inaugurated a committee to look into the possibility of implementing the *Shari'a* law in the state. The committee was mandated to go around the state and consult with the people on whether or not the *Shari'a* law should be adopted and implemented. This was to give the impression that the government of Kebbi State respected public opinion on the issue and that whatever the outcome could be said to be the wish of the majority.

The first problem that greeted the inauguration of the committee was the fact that all members of the committee were Muslims even though there were a sizeable number of non-Muslims in the state

⁴⁸ Cf. Seyd Khalid Rashid, ed. *Islamic Law in Nigeria: Application and Teaching*. Lagos: Islamic Publication Bureau, 1986, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Onitsha is a commercial centre of the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria that is predominantly Christian. The message was clear. If it was not possible to implement sharia among the Igbo people, it was also not possible to implement it in Zuru considered to be the centre of Christianity in northwestern Nigeria.

who in fact, were protesting against Sharia. The Christians, therefore, predicted that the outcome of the committee's recommendation would favour the adoption and implementation of Sharia law in the state. While in Zuru for 'consultation', the committee only met with the Emir of Zuru and not the people. The Emir, who did not want a fallout with the government, told the committee that he and 'his people' were in support of sharia. This made the Christian organization issue a memorandum expressing its concern against the membership of the committee, its terms of reference and the outcome of its recommendation. Six key observations were raised by the Christian body:⁵⁰

- There was neither Christian nor a representative of the traditional religion on the committee;
- Section 279 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria only allowed for a Sharia Court of Appeal at the state level, which should take care of Muslims;
- If Christians and traditionalists made up 40% of Kebbi State we wondered why Islam should be adopted and imposed as a state religion;
- Shari'a could not exclusively apply to Muslims in the state;
- Shari'a was a legal system, which encapsulated the socio-economic and political affairs of an Islamic society;
- Shari'a was bound to create a lot of problems in the daily affairs of the people, especially non-Muslims.

For this reason, the constitutional provision which only allowed for the establishment of a Sharia Court of Appeal at the state level⁵¹

⁵⁰ A white paper issued by the Zuru branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria rejecting the composition of the sharia implementation Committee of Kebbi State.

⁵¹ CAN, Zuru Emirate, Memorandum on the implementation of Shari'a law in Kebbi state", Addressed to the Chairman of the Committee on the implementation of Shari'a Law, 16th November 1999, pp. 2-7.

should be strictly adhered to, because establishing an Islamic Penal Code parallel to the constitution of the land would only help to bring about chaos in the polity.⁵² The non-representation of the non-Muslims in the committee was considered to be a deliberate ploy by the government of Kebbi State in order not to encounter any opposition to the anticipated recommendations.

The 1999 Constitution is silent on the religious status of the Nigerian state. Whereas the Christians interpret it to mean Nigeria is a secular state, the Muslims insist that the constitution has not spelt clearly that Nigeria is a secular state. This controversy was much represented in the work of John Ayoade.⁵³ Moreover, democracy would have given an advantage to northern states that have the preponderance of Muslims the opportunity to practice Sharia law⁵⁴. Again, by democracy as a liberal ideology, Muslims have the right to be governed by Sharia. However, the problem is that of practising Sharia in a mixed and plural society without infringing on the rights of non-Muslims. In Zamfara and Kano States, for example, non-Muslims became the victims of the application of sharia law where their hotels and beer joints were destroyed; where state policy which forbade the carrying of women on motorbikes has also affected non-Muslim women; where women were forced to occupy back seats of

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ John A. A. Ayoade, "The Sacred in the Service of the Secular: The Nigerian Case", in John A.A. Ayoade, Adeoye A. Akinsanya and Olatunji J.B. Ojo, eds. *Nigeria: Descent into Anarchy and Collapse*. Ibadan: John Archers, 2014.

⁵⁴ Nathaniel D. Danjibo (2012), "The Impact Of Sharia On Intergroup Relations in Post-Colonial Nigeria", in C.B.N. Ogbogbo, R.O. Olaniyi And O.G. Muojama, Eds. *The Dynamics of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria since 1960: Essays in Honour of Obaro Ikime @ 70*. Ibadan: Department Of History, University Of Ibadan.

buses and cars so as not to mingle with men irrespective of whether they are Muslims or not; where Muslim landlords ejected Christian tenants at will; and where non-Muslims were dragged to sharia courts.⁵⁵

The Gradual Implementation of Sharia Law in Kebbi State

Despite the anti-sharia law protests embarked upon by the Christians and non-Christians in Kebbi State, the state government subtly and tactically systematically introduced the law by sponsoring a bill to the State House of Assembly, which successfully passed the bill into law. The bill was easy to pass because all the members of the House of Assembly (the legislative arm of the state) were Sharia. After the Sharia law bill was passed, the state government also issued other legislative bills concerning the daily affairs of the people based on Sharia principles. For example, the bill to regulate the manufacturing, sale and consumption of liquor was sponsored by Governor Adamu Aliero on the 12th of October 1999.⁵⁶ Even though the bill was eventually passed into law eight months after it was sponsored,⁵⁷ the Christians and traditionalists rejected it entirely, considering it as infringing on the fundamental human, cultural and traditional rights of the non-Muslim people of the state such as the Lelna (Dakarkari), Kamberi, Dukkawa, Gungawa and a host of others. This is because alcohol consumption is a common practice among the cultures of non-Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups. Traditional festivals, marriages, burial ceremonies, initiation rites and rituals, age-grade rituals, team farm work, and title taking, all require the brewing and consumption of liquor. Among *Lelna*, for instance, there is a celebration of wine feast known as '*Kyam Sodke*', which means '*Almighty Wine*'. This feast is celebrated annually, the biggest

⁵⁵ My personal interactions with some of the victims and the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Gusau, the capital city of Zamfara State in May 2020; Augustine Madu-West, "Kano: Muslim Landlord Shun Christian Tenants", DI, 14 July 2004.

⁵⁶ Kebbi State of Nigeria, Office of the Executive Governor, BK/S/10/VOL. VII, 12th October 1999.

⁵⁷ Cf. Kebbi State of Nigeria, Law No: 182000, May 15, 2000.

of which is celebrated after every seven years. It is during the annual feasts that adolescent male children are often initiated into the cult of men.⁵⁸ Therefore, prohibiting the brewing and consumption of liquor connoted an attempt by the government to send to extinction the cultural practices of the non-Muslims.

Since liquor has become part of the cultural life cycle of the non-Muslims, the people vehemently resisted any infringement in that regard. A few days after the bill that prohibited the sale and consumption of liquor was passed into law, some Christians and traditionalists besieged Zuru town *en-masse* with kegs and pots of locally brewed liquor wielding dangerous weapons, drinking and chanting war songs and spilling beer and hot drinks on the streets. Zuru town was thrown into confusion as tension mounted.⁵⁹ A few days after this demonstration, the Muslims, who are predominantly non-indigenes, staged a rally calling for a jihad in Zuruland. Their rally was dispersed by some groups of indigenous people who disrupted the rally by splashing hot *Burkutu*⁶⁰ on them. The situation became so tense that when the Muslims were calling for a jihad in Zuruland, indigenous people living in the diaspora who were mostly in the military sent spies to Zuru town to reconnoitre the situation. Information had it that Zuru people in the diaspora had concluded arrangements to come back to Zuruland to actively participate in the planned operations to forcefully eject the Muslim Hausa community out of Zuruland.⁶¹ The Emir, retired Major General Sani Sami, Sami Gomo II, got wind of the plan and called the leadership of the Hausa community and warned of the impending danger of calling for a jihad in Zuruland by people who are not indigenes. The Emir

⁵⁸ The brewing and consumption of local wine among the non-Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups in Zuruland does not discriminate against gender because both men and women are involved in the act.

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Umaru Tanko, Hussaini Kwali and Yaya Kwali, Zuru.

⁶⁰ A locally brewed wine made from guinea corn.

⁶¹ Interview with Bala Maitumbi, Zuru.

reminded the Hausa settlers that they must not take the liberal and accommodating spirit of the people of Zuruland for granted. The Emir's timely intervention helped to calm the tension which would have resulted in an unwarranted catastrophe.⁶² To this moment, Zuruland is perhaps the only Emirate where liquor is brewed, sold and consumed without any form of harassment by the state sharia police, the Hisbah.

As the tensile situation that greeted the bill concerning the brewing and consumption of liquor was calming down, another bill, which was for the "*Protection and preservation of donkeys in the State and other matters connected therewith*"⁶³ was passed and signed into law. The law deliberately targeted some parts of the state, especially parts of Zuruland and Yauri where donkeys serve as a source of protein. Generally the slogan "*Zuru domain name*"⁶⁴ is used by the Hausa to denote the people of Zuruland. Some ethnic categories in Zuruland eat donkey meat. However, because donkeys are domestic animals and are considered '*halaal*' in Islam, a law was enacted by the state government to 'preserve' them. Again, indigenous groups defied the law and went about their normal business.

During the wake of the Uhola⁶⁵ festival in December/January of 2000, different Lelna ethnic categories converged in front of the

⁶² My personal interaction with Major General Sani Sami, Sami Gomo II, the Emir of Zuru.

⁶³ Cf. Kebbi State of Nigeria, Law No: 152000, May 15, 2000.

⁶⁴ One of the characteristics of warrior groups is their love for meat. The Hausa used the phrase to describe the love for meat that the people of the have. It is actually a mild way of referring to them as cannibals. Furthermore, the Hausa only eat what is properly slaughtered with using the words *Bissimillahi* (in the name of Allah...). The traditional Zuru people eat both what is slaughtered and what is not slaughtered. In addition, Muslims classify all flesh into three- the flesh approved for eating, the flesh that is Haram (forbidden) and Halal (not forbidden). The

⁶⁵ An annual thanksgiving festival where young adult females dance the last dance before they are married off and where the young adult men dance goodbye to 'boyhood' preparatory to the seven year service that would

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

Emir's house chanting provocative songs such as “*Sami week neem Janka a c'telne*”⁶⁶ to express their disappointment with the Emir who was accused of betraying his people. This was because the Emir, Sani Sami, was perceived to have become a Muslim fanatic and a Sharia protagonist.⁶⁷

The reaction of the people against the Emir was because when Zamfara State adopted and implemented Shari'a law in November 1999, Sani Sami was the only Emir from both Sokoto and Kebbi that attended the inauguration without invitation, especially the fact that he was not Hausa-Fulani. Secondly, he was said to have given his tacit consent to the government of Kebbi State when contacted on whether sharia should be implemented in the state or not. During an audience with the Christians at the United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA), the Emir was publicly humiliated and insulted him while others threw pebbles at him, accusing him of complicity to sell his people into slavery. Thirdly, Sani Sami desecrated tradition by going to demolish *Kuri C'gomo*⁶⁸ in *Udaba*, his ancestral home to ‘Islamize’ the remains of his father who died as a traditionalist in 1945. In place of the sacred traditional hut, an epitaph was erected with an Arabic inscription. The traditional people of *Udaba* however, demolished the Arabic epitaph and re-erected the hut in its traditional fashion. The Council of traditional elders of the *Udaba* community

enable them fetch a wife. This category of young men and women are known as *Ya-Datono*.

⁶⁶ Translates as Sami (referring to the Emir's father) ate donkey meat and chewed the bones.

⁶⁷ Though the Emir is an indigene of Zuruland and coming from one of the revered traditional ruling houses of *Udaba* (*Dabai*), he was the one of the few Emirs who attended the inauguration of sharia in Zamfara. His traditional title is Sami Gomo II because his father who ruled in 1945 was Sami Gomo I.

⁶⁸ *Kuri C'gomo* is a sacred hut-sepulcher where successive chiefs are buried.

forced Sani Sami to appease the ancestors or risk being dealt with.⁶⁹ In the face of this betrayal, the Christians in Zuruland told the Emir categorically that if Sharia law was implemented in the Emirate, they would install a Christian chief to whom they would pay allegiance.⁷⁰

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) against Certain Sharia Policies

As part of implementing the Sharia legal system in Kebbi State, the Government issued some policies affecting post-primary schools in 2001, which elicited a reaction from the Christian Association of Nigeria, Zuru branch. One such policy was the separation of male and female students in mixed schools in line with Islamic culture which forbids the interaction of both sexes. While the policy demanded that the female students resumed classes at 7:30 am and close at 12:30 pm the male students resumed at 1 pm and closed by 6 pm. Reacting to such a policy, the Christian Association stated thus:

We wish to express our vehement displeasure and disenchantment with the recently introduced policy in some of our co-educational (sic) institutions. Under the arrangement, girls attend classes in the morning and boys in the afternoon. This policy is not only carrying the Sharia agenda, but it is also a retrogressive policy in the highest order (sic). This has added to the tension that hangs over the Emirate in the wake of the clamour for Sharia laws (sic) since last year (2000).⁷¹

The policy was said to derive from Islamic moral theology, which forbids contact between males and females to keep the society ‘pure’. This is a weak argument in the sense that the same male and female students live and interact in their respective communities

⁶⁹ Personal interaction with Baba Ali, Chief Security Officer, Federal Technical College Zuru, Zuru, September 7, 2004.

⁷⁰ Information derived in July 2020 from an anonymous but active participant at the meeting that held in UMCA.

⁷¹ The Christian Association of Nigeria, Zuru Zone, “A Submission against the Mode of Dressing and Shift System in Our Post-Primary Institutions.” A Communiqué Issued to the Executive Governor, Kebbi State, 29 August 2001.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

outside the school environment. As a result of the policy, the female students resumed classes by 7 am and closed by noon, while the male resumed at 1 pm and closed at 6 pm. One wondered what quality education could be given in 4 hours, especially since the same set of teachers was expected to teach both morning and evening, classes. This is the reason why the state is listed amongst the educationally disadvantaged states in Nigeria. We could best imagine the degree of retrogression in the standard of education in the state with such a policy in place.⁷²

Worried by the decreasing standard of education in Kebbi State, the Christians were unanimous in finding a solution to secure the future of their children. The Christian Association of Nigeria bought acres of land on which they proposed to build a school from nursery to secondary and a clinic. To this end, every Christian family in the entire Zuru Emirate was mandated to donate a bag of cement and 5 blocks of cement. The launching of the project took place on Sunday, 28 December 2008, under the chairmanship of retired General Ishaya Bamayi where large sums of money were realized, at least enough to start the project. The school had started with voluntary teachers and is depending on philanthropists to support them by providing furniture, books and stipends for the teachers.⁷³

⁷² Though Governor Aleiro canvassed that education has improved from 10% -48% in Kebbi since the inception of his government, our visit to both Government Technical College, Zuru and Government Science Secondary School, Zuru, which are counted among the best schools in Kebbi showed the contrary as there was massive failure in the Secondary School Certificate (SSCE) Examination. This was also the case with schools in Yauri Emirate. For a full detail of Governor Aleiro's claim see, New Nigeria, Monday, March 25, 2002, pp.1 and 2.

⁷³ Personal interview with Mr. Caleb Bakidi, the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Zuru branch, 27 December, 2021.

The second policy that CAN protest against was that of imposing a dress code for all female students in primary and secondary schools. The government of Kebbi State made it mandatory for female students to wear uniformed trousers and *kaftan* (long tops), typical of the way Muslim women dress in Pakistan. The Christian body referred to the Holy Bible to support the point that the Christian religion forbids such a policy when it stated:

We would like to re-state our disgusted feeling (sic) on the present uniform for our daughters in the post-primary institution; our living God did not permit it. It is strongly unbiblical. 'The Woman shall not wear that which pertain-eth unto man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment for all that doeth so are abominable unto the Lord thy God (Deuteronomy 25:5)(KJV).⁷⁴

The Christian body went further to reiterate its stand on a four-point submission:

1. As regards the separation of boys and girls in schools, reverting to the status quo is immanent;
2. That the separation of males and females in schools is artificial and non-permanent;
3. That our Christian daughters are forced to flout God's injunction by wearing 'men's' clothing;
4. That Christianity abhors women in men's dress and vice versa.⁷⁵

Objectively speaking, the Christians were only being fanatical about the dress code. As far as the mode of dressing in northern Nigeria is concerned, the Muslims are even more conservative about dress code than the Christians. The fact that most of the females in northern Nigeria who put on pairs of trousers and T-Shirt, even in Zuru town

⁷⁴ CAN, Zuru Zone, Communiqué to the Executive Governor, Kebbi State, Op. cit., pp. 2-3.

⁷⁵ Ibid. pp.3-4.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

are Christians is enough reason to suggest that Christians are more liberal than Muslims with regards to general dressing codes. However, the basic underlying reason is that Christians in northern Nigeria are opposed to Muslim cultural imposition. Therefore, the opposition by Christians concerning the dress code for female students was more or less a resistant expression, which tends to reject whatever is perceived to be Muslim⁷⁶.

Christian Consultative Committee (CCC) and Sub-nationalism

The CCC was established in October of 2001 in response to Governor Adamu Aliero's claim that the representatives of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the State were non-indigenes, which meant that only a few indigenes were Christians in Kebbi State. The Governor's position was that the leaders of the Christian association could not be speaking or fighting the cause of the indigenes.⁷⁷ Among the founders of CCC were the late Philip Dabo, John Isah Yafi and Dominic Baba. The first impact of CCC was felt when Governor Aliero argued that Christian Religious Knowledge could not be taught in schools of the state because only about five per cent of the population of Kebbi State was Christian.⁷⁸ It would be recalled that when Kebbi State was still part of Sokoto State (1976-1991), the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge was forbidden and stopped in 1980 in line with the Sultanate policy to halt the spread of Christian religion in the caliphate. The policy was conceived to be a kind of modernized jihad against the *kafirs*

⁷⁶ Jan H. Boer, Christians: Why We Reject Muslim Law. Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations, Volume 7. Bukuru, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks

⁷⁷ Interview with Dominic Baba, Secretary, Christian Consultative Committee, Zuru.

⁷⁸ An interview granted to the Tempo News Magazine, Vol. 16, No. 05, February 15, 2001.

(infidels). The policy was also in line with the Islamic principles of the Sokoto caliphate, which must promote the teaching of no other religion(s) but Islam. During this time, all teachers of Christian Religious Knowledge in the state were retrenched without severance benefits. As far as the caliphate was concerned, it was carrying out God's injunction as revealed by the Koran which says "religion in the eyes of God is Islam".⁷⁹

To fault Governor Aliero's claim, CCC conducted surveyed pupils and students in schools within the Zuru metropolis. The research found that of the twelve secondary schools in Zuru Emirate alone, there were 4,757 Christian students, while 7,850 primary school pupils were Christians. In the Sakaba Local Government area there were 1,852 Christian pupils, in Danko/Wasagu Local Government area there were 5,480 Christian pupils, while in the Fakkai Local Government area there were 844 Christian pupils. In order words, according to the findings of CCC, a total number of about 21,783 students and pupils were Christians within Zuru Emirate alone, to say less in other parts of the state.⁸⁰ The association wrote to the Governor on their findings and insisted on having Christian Religious Knowledge taught in schools but to no avail.

Worthy of note is the fact that since Christian Religious Knowledge is a subject widely offered during the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO), the marginal number of those who offer it in any part of the country should not be the subject of denial. Instances abound where two or three students who register for any particular subject are allowed to sit for the examination, much less Christian students who are willing to offer Christian Religious Knowledge as a subject but are deliberately denied the opportunity. Moreover, such denial would make it impossible for Christian students who would like to read

⁷⁹ Koran, 2: 19.

⁸⁰ See, Report of the Committee on Education of the CCC, Zuru, n.d., p.2.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

Law at the university since Christian Religious Knowledge is a requirement.

The main ideology of the CCC hinged on the fact that nationalism must begin from within Zuruland itself. The CCC embarked on a vigorous public enlightenment, to educate the people of Zuru on the need for effective political participation. The reason, according to Dominic Baba, is that the Hausa people controlled the economy of Zuruland, they were also able to actively participate in politics since politics involves money. Whereas the indigenous people of Zuruland were only concerned about bravery and excellence. On why the indigenous people would not effectively participate in politics, Dominic Baba blamed it on colonialism and the Puritan attitude of early Christian missionaries towards politics. Missionary teachings discouraged early Christian converts from participating in politics.⁸¹ As a result, most Christians in Zuruland stayed away from politics leaving the 'devil's game' to mostly Hausa/Fulani and Muslim non-indigenes.⁸² Unfortunately, this attitude only helped to shut the Christians out of decision-making in the affairs of the state.

John Yafi Dabai, a staunch member of CCC was quite optimistic that if both the Christians and traditionalists would participate meaningfully in the politics of Zuruland, there would be a drastic change towards the control of local politics and economy.⁸³ To this effect, CCC embarked on the public enlightenment of the indigenes to sensitize both Christians and traditionalists on the need to actively

⁸¹ Personal interview with Dominic Baba, Secretary CCC, in Zuru.

⁸² It is interesting to note that the first Senator who represented Zuruland between 1979 and 1984 was a non-indigene by name Alhaji Tanko Tela. Alhaji Bala Na'Allah who also represented Zuru in the National Assembly first in the House of Representatives then later as a Senator since 2007 is also not an indigene but a Hausa settler.

⁸³ Personal interview with John Isah Yafi Dabai, member of CCC.

participate in local politics.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the less numerical strength of Christians is not likely to put them in a vantage position in state or local government politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sub-nationalism is usually an ongoing process and it may take time before the goals and objectives are realized. The activities of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Zuru branch, have, yielded some results to the extent that they have created some awareness of a renewed political consciousness in Zuruland. It has also fostered a harmonious relationship among Christians that were hitherto, divided along denominational lines. Furthermore, Zuruland has become the only Emirate where there is no functional Sharia court in the entire state. Muslims from the other Emirates who want to indulge in drinking liquor travel to Zuru town to escape harassment and molestation or even sharia court trials, because Zuru town is the only place where liquor is sold publicly without any harassment by the Hizbah.⁸⁵ These achievements, notwithstanding, the policy on education and dress code for females and the refusal to allow the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge in schools still apply to Christians in the state. Despite the adoption and implementation of sharia law by the Kebbi State Government, people in Zuruland have continued to practice the three religions-Traditional belief systems, Islam and Christianity.

Since religion is a very emotive value-based issue in the body politic of the Nigerian state, both Muslims and Christians must continue to embrace a dialogical approach in matters that are sensitive in order not to overheat the polity. Furthermore, there is the need for adherents of both religions to continually learn and be educated on the values and principles of either religion for better understanding

⁸⁴Personal interaction with Danbaba Na'Allah.

⁸⁵ Hizbah is a body of sharia law enforcement officers popularly referred to as the sharia police.

*Shari'a law and resistance by the Christian association of Nigeria,
Zuru Branch, Kebbi State, Nigeria*

and accommodation. This is even more necessary in Zuruland where every family consists of members who practice the three religions, indigenous traditional belief system, Christianity and Islam. Further still, Kebbi State Government must uphold the Constitution of Nigeria by guaranteeing the rights of citizens and not by seeking to promote the values of a particular religion over others.