

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RELIGION AND THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE

The challenges posed by ethno-religious identities to Nigeria's emergent post-colonial state was immediately evident after the 1959 federal election that ushered in independence in October 1960. After the elections, officials of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)<sup>1</sup>—the party that represented Middle Belt ethno-religious interests in the elections—alleged that the dominant Hausa-Fulani Muslim party, the NPC (Northern Peoples Congress), used state power to sanction and intimidate their supporters throughout the region. In Tiv communities, a UMBC stronghold in the Middle Belt, UMBC officials claimed that NPC-controlled native authorities used repressive measures to oppress their supporters. In Laffia, another UMBC stronghold in the region, UMBC officials claimed that NPC-controlled native authorities levied punitive taxes on their supporters, imprisoned them illegally, and deprived them access to employment.<sup>2</sup>

These well-founded charges of fragrant abuse of power<sup>3</sup> reflect tensions between Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and increasingly assertive ethno-religious minority groups in the Middle Belt since the onset of decolonization in the

early 1950s. These recurring conflicts, in part, can be traced to the rapid conversion of so-called tribal pagans in the Northern Nigerian Protectorate to Christianity and the waves of migration of Southern Christians to the region during the colonial period. As Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers reasserted control over these communities through the NPC-controlled regional government during decolonization, these ethno-religious groups formed new political organizations to assert their autonomy by the early 1950s. As the tensions between Hausa-Fulani Muslims and non-Muslim minorities intensified in the years immediately after independence, NPC leaders further utilized state patronage to coopt some opposition leaders, and deployed repressive measures to intimidate those they considered recalcitrant.<sup>4</sup> Thus, during Nigeria's first democratic government from 1960 to 1966 (the First Republic) intersecting religious, ethnic, and regional identities intensified to spark communal conflicts in Middle Belt communities.

In other parts of the country, ethno-regional and communal power brokers mobilized collective political action by speaking to narrow sectarian aspirations. Adele Afigbo argues that the prevailing ethno-regional and communal tensions during decolonization—especially ethnic, religious, regional, and subethnic—degenerated into major political confrontations during the First Republic.<sup>5</sup> As competition for state patronage and power dominated political alliances among the dominant regional-based parties, overlapping and intersecting divisions shifted back and forth between entrenched regional and local fault lines, complicating religious, ethnic, and subethnic tensions everywhere. In the Northern Region, these conflicts were not limited to ethno-religious rivalries between Hausa-Fulani Muslims and Christian minorities; they also reflected prevailing intrareligious competition among Sufi orders immediately after independence.

As with earlier intra-Muslim conflicts in the 1950s, the schism grew in the context of the exponential growth of the reformed tijaniyya order in many Northern Muslim communities (see chapter 4). In reaction to the growing influence of Ibrahim Niass's reformed tijaniyya, the sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello (the premier of the Northern Region), founded the Usmaniyya movement (named in honor of his great-great-grandfather, Usman dan Fodio) in 1963 to check the erosion to his leadership in the Sokoto Caliphate. To reassert the authority of the caliphate among Hausa-Fulani Muslims at a time when the masu sarauta's legitimacy was questioned by tijaniyya leaders, Bello linked the NPC's mission to the political-religious project of his forebears in Hausa states in the nineteenth century. Abdulkader Tayob notes:

Bello had tried to unite the Muslim of Nigeria under a sufi order, called Uthmaniyyah [Usmaniyya], to recall the jihadist leader of the nineteenth century. This particular order would unite Muslims in a nation-state under the symbol of a historical figure associated with the area. The particular construction of a national Sufi order would be reminiscent of constructing a nation in historical and symbolic terms. At the same time, Uthmaniyyah aimed to diminish the political and social roles of the older Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah orders.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, to consolidate his control over Northern Muslims, Bello flew Usman dan Fodio's war banner at rallies, made frequent visits to the Shehu's tomb and presented himself as the extension of Usman dan Fodio, Abdulahi, his brother, and Muhammad Bello, his son in the Hausa-Fulani Muslim hierarchy. By the early 1960s, posters of Bello were even showing a direct link to the Prophet Muhammad, through his connection to Usman dan Fodio.<sup>7</sup> Starting in 1963, Bello and his supporters embarked on "conversion campaigns" to Islam that was characterized as modern-day extensions of the Sokoto Jihad into the Middle Belt and non-Muslim areas of emirate society.<sup>8</sup> Illustrating the wider geopolitical implications of the sardauna's conversion campaigns, Iheanyi Enwerem observes:

Bello's specific target for the final unification of the North was to convert the "pagan" enclaves in the region to Islam. He was determined to sway them away from the Christian missionaries. This move was understandable, principally because the enclaves were not only the major sources of Christian growth in the North, but could also become the seedbed of a political threat to Islamic interest in the region if the trend were allowed to continue. Besides, Christian missionaries had erroneously resigned themselves to the belief that these "pagan" enclaves were the reserved domain for their missionary enterprise.<sup>9</sup>

In response, UMBC leaders mounted stiff resistance to the sardauna's Islamization policy, considered an assault on Middle Belt communities.<sup>10</sup>

The sardauna also convened the Council of Mallams, an advisory group of senior Muslim clerics appointed by and accountable to him as regional premier. When Niass, the tijaniyya leader, refused to curtail his "confrontational" teachings, the council instigated a theological debate on whether a contentious reformed tijaniyya practice that entailed the crossing of arms (*kablu*)—as opposed to the "arms at ease" (*sadlu*)—practice was an acceptable (*sunna*) method of prayer.<sup>11</sup> Although the council endorsed Niass's teaching as sunna, a gesture

of goodwill to encourage Niass to concede ground to the sardauna, Niass's followers still questioned Bello's authority. As relations between tijaniyya adherents and NPC supporters deteriorated, riots, erroneously believed to be the handiwork of Niass's followers, broke out in Argungu in Sokoto Province. Ultimately, in 1965, the Council of Mallams decided to ban imams from leading prayers with arms crossed. As kablu was a reformed tijani practice, the sudden change of course was a deliberate plan to delegitimize Niass among the masses of Northern Muslims, attempting to cut off his challenge to the NPC and its masu sarauta base. Furthermore, as Niass forged an alliance with the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the emirate's main opposition to the NPC, Niass's tijaniyya challenge to the masu sarauta took on a more decidedly political dimension.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the sardauna reworked *ijma* "to characterize not the agreement of the ulama on a particular legal matter, but rather to symbolize the consensus of the Islamic polity and its legitimated leadership."<sup>13</sup> As the putative modern-day embodiment of the Sokoto Jihad, the sardauna and NPC loyalists dismissed their major opponent in emirate society, NEPU, as *kafir* (infidel) despite the strong Islamic traditions of NEPU leader Aminu Kano.<sup>14</sup> NEPU countered that the NPC had betrayed the vision of Usman dan Fodio by collaborating with corrupt British rulers. With regard to Islamic legitimacy, Abubakar Gumi, the dynamic Muslim cleric, provided a theological reply to NPC opponents. After meeting the sardauna during the 1955 hajj, Gumi became his adviser on Islamic affairs, and was appointed deputy grand qadi, and later grand qadi of the Northern Region. With Gumi's help, the sardauna founded the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (Society for the Victory of Islam, or JNI) in 1964 to promote unity among Northern Nigerian Muslims. Following the JNI's inaugural meeting—chaired by the waziri, Junaidu of Sokoto, and attended by the sultan of Sokoto and representatives from each province of the Northern Region—the organization built its headquarters and Islamiyya school in Kaduna, the regional capital.<sup>15</sup>

Following the assassination of the sardauna in 1966 in a failed military coup, and the dissolution of the Northern Region in 1967, the JNI was coopted by other prominent emirate rulers. After the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War (1967–1970), the organization came under the influence of Ibrahim Dasuki, a powerful Sokoto potentate who became the sultan of Sokoto in 1988.<sup>16</sup> To expand its base, the JNI called for Muslim unity throughout Nigeria and formed alliances with international Muslim groups, especially those related to education and development. For instance, with the help of the Kuwaiti Sabbah family, the JNI established the first Muslim post-secondary school in Northern Nigeria, Sheikh Sabbah College in Kaduna.<sup>17</sup> As Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers strengthened the

connection between Muslim piety and Northern identity, the *masu sarauta* further projected Northern Muslim power into Nigeria's contentious national politics.

### Military Rule, Religion, and National Politics

However, the main threat to the NPC's Hausa-Fulani Muslim hegemony emerged after the January 1966 assassination of the sardauna—and Prime Minister Balewa—in a failed coup carried out by predominantly junior Igbo (Christian) officers from the Southeast. Following the crisis that engulfed Nigeria after the coup, the succeeding regime of Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi (an Igbo Christian) relied on traditional rulers, especially Northern emirs on whom the impact of the coup was most devastating, to help restore stability. During Ironsi's short tenure as head of the national government (January 16, 1966–July 19, 1966), prominent traditional rulers, especially Northern emirs, were called upon to bridge the gulf between competing regional interests and the new military regime. Having dismissed regional politicians, Ironsi embraced the emirs as the embodiment of Northern interests.<sup>18</sup> The failure of his policy reveals the limit of the military regime's neotraditional strategy as a viable response to Nigeria's political crisis—as British administrators had learned several decades previously.

After assuming control of the federal government, Ironsi appointed military governors in the three regions, along with a fourth region, the Mid-West Region, which had been carved out of the Western Region during the AG crisis from 1962 to 1966:<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, son of a prominent Igbo businessman, to the Eastern Region; Major Hassan Katsina, son of the emir of Katsina, to the Northern Region; Lieutenant Colonel F. Adekunle Fajuyi to the Western Region; and Major David Ejor to the Mid-Western Region. Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, the highest-ranking Yoruba army officer, became chief of staff of Supreme Headquarters; and a thirty-three-year-old Christian, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, an Angas, from the Middle Belt was appointed chief of army staff.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, the new regime enjoyed the goodwill of most Nigerians. Even Hausa-Fulani Muslim elites, who had lost their two foremost leaders in the January coup, the sardauna and Prime Minister Balewa, cooperated with the regime despite the seemingly sectarian nature of the coup. This endorsement was short-lived, however, as Ironsi failed to assuage Northern Muslim anxiety. As far as Hausa-Fulani Muslim leaders were concerned, Ironsi's first transgression was his failure to bring the leaders of the coup to justice, despite the decision of

the Supreme Military Council to proceed with their trial in May 1966. When May rolled around, Ironsi postponed the trial indefinitely. To Hausa-Fulani Muslim elites, this confirmed their suspicion that the January coup was a sectarian Igbo (Southern Christian) conspiracy to dominate the Muslim North. In addition, critics claimed that Ironsi surrounded himself with a clique of Igbo advisers, contending that the Federal Military Government (FMG) was dominated by Igbo allies of the military ruler.

It was Decree No. 34 that proved to be Ironsi's fatal miscalculation.<sup>21</sup> The decree dissolved Nigeria's federal structure and established a unitary system of government. Dissolution of the structure that was established during the constitutional conferences of decolonization forced Northern emirs, as new regional intermediaries, onto the center stage of national politics. This was the first and only time since its inception that Nigeria was governed as a unitary state, and the first time the *masu sarauta* had no formal political structure to articulate its agenda. In addition, two decades of hard-fought battles to win regional autonomy, which had been the legacy of the beloved and martyred *sardauna*, was wiped off the map with a stroke of the pen. More immediately, the Hausa-Fulani Muslim political class feared that the abolition of Nigeria's federal structure would expose their region to takeover by the more educationally advanced Southern Region. In a matter of days, the decree sparked waves of violence in several Northern cities.<sup>22</sup> As riots intensified, mutinous Muslim mobs turned their rage against vulnerable Southern Christian settlers, especially Igbos, in the Northern Provinces.<sup>23</sup> Afraid for their lives, many Southern Christian settlers—including many Igbo Christians—fled the North for the Eastern, Western, and Mid-Western Provinces.

Federal military authorities responded to the violence against Igbo settlers by seeking help from Northern emirs. Having denounced regional politicians, Ironsi embraced Hausa-Fulani emirs as communicators of his policies to emirate society. He instructed the four military governors to discuss important state policies with traditional rulers in their respective provinces. The most critical of these dialogues were those held between the military governor of the Northern Provinces, Major Katsina, and Northern emirs.<sup>24</sup> The emirs, in turn, discharged their role as intermediaries with great confidence. For example, in June, after many private deliberations with Katsina, the sultan of Sokoto, Sir Abubakar III, submitted a bold memorandum to Ironsi, demanding the repeal of Decree 34.<sup>25</sup>

With growing Northern discontent, Ironsi convened a national conference of traditional rulers in Ibadan on July 28–29, 1966, to find solutions to the country's political crisis. Twenty-four prominent traditional rulers represented the provinces at the meeting, and were charged with finding viable solutions to

Nigeria's crisis. As fate would have it, Ironsi could only attend the first day of the conference; after a state dinner in his honor, Ironsi and his host, Governor Fajuyi (the Western Region's military governor) were assassinated—just two months after issuing Decree 34. The bloody counter coup, led by Northern officers, also claimed the lives of many other Igbo officers.

The counter coup catapulted Chief of Army Staff Gowon to power, and moved the country in yet another direction. As the national crisis deepened, Gowon abandoned Ironsi's strategy of working through emirs and traditional rulers. More importantly, Gowon, a Middle Belt Christian with strong cultural connection to the Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite emerged as a bridge to Middle Belt minorities who were influential in the Nigerian officer corp.<sup>26</sup> For Gowon, the looming crisis required a more comprehensive approach, integrating the efforts of a broad-based coalition of regional power brokers. The affairs of state now revolved around alliances among military administrators loyal to Gowon, senior federal civil servants, and prominent regional politicians—now recognized as essential spokesmen of major ethno-regional groups. Gowon appointed prominent politicians from the failed First Republic as commissioners in his Federal Executive Council and as heads of federal statutory corporations. He encouraged their participation as regional “leaders of thought” in various federal peace initiatives.<sup>27</sup> Recognizing the central place of regionalism in the crisis, Gowon released Awolowo, the preeminent Yoruba political leader, from Calabar Prison in August 1966. In 1963, Awolowo had been convicted of treasonable felony against the federal government during the AG crisis of the preceding democratic era.<sup>28</sup> After his release from prison, Awolowo was chosen by Yoruba obas and elders to lead the Yoruba regional delegation to the critical “leaders of thought” conferences, created by the FMG to recommend solutions to the crisis that ultimately led to the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War. For strategic reasons, Gowon also appointed Awolowo as federal commissioner for finance and vice chairman of the Federal Executive Council in 1967.

Significantly, Gowon reinstated the preexisting federal structure and divided the Northern, Eastern, Western, and Mid-Western Regions into twelve states. This military decision led to the creation of new states, including some that reflected the long-term agitations of ethnic minorities for autonomy in the Eastern and Northern Regions. From the Eastern Region, where the Igbo people were the dominant ethnic group, the FMG carved out three states: East Central, South Eastern, and Rivers. The Northern Region was divided into North Central, North Eastern, North Western, Kano, Benue-Plateau, and Kwara States. Significantly, the last two of these gave—for the first time since colonial rule—ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle Belt and northern

Yoruba areas their own states.<sup>29</sup> This decision prompted emirate elites to re-evaluate their perceived eroding power and unite around a strategy that would establish a new partnership with the political class of these new states. At least from a formal-legal perspective, the dream of Islamization, Northernization, and “Hausanization” suffered serious reversal after the creation of the states.

At a national convention to find solutions to Nigeria’s political crisis shortly after Gowon’s ascent to power, Hausa-Fulani Muslim leaders initially pushed for secession before switching course and advocating a strong central government with new states, Benue-Plateau (Middle Belt region) and Kwara (northern fringe of the Yoruba region). Mobilizing the support of the Council of Mallams and the JNI, the Northern Muslim elite closed ranks, asserting their position as the defenders of Islam and Northern interests.<sup>30</sup> By the time of the outbreak of the civil war in early 1967, old NPC stalwarts had established a good working relationship with leaders of the National Christian Association (NCA) in the Middle Belt and Northern minority communities. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite’s rapprochement with Middle Belt Christians initially worked because of Gowon’s strategy<sup>31</sup> of building a united front against the Biafra (predominantly Igbo) secessionist agenda and sustaining the federation with the support of the political classes of the core Northern emirate, Middle Belt, Yoruba region, and ethnic minorities in the defunct Eastern Region. However, once the NCA was drawn into the Northern alliance, ethnic fissures soon emerged among these Christian minority groups, effectively undermining a unified Christian coalition. Indeed, Hausa-Fulani Muslim power brokers were able to fend off simultaneous challenges from Southerners and Northern Christians at once, meanwhile quashing internal dissent and unifying their base.<sup>32</sup>

As former colonial governor, Macpherson later would recall during the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War, this united front from Northern Muslim rulers in the midst of the Biafran secession also contributed to the regionalization and militarization of Nigeria. Recounting his “friends” killed during the Nigerian crisis in the 1960s, Macpherson agreed with the sentiment of Igbo leaders that Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Biafra leader and former military governor of the Eastern Provinces, embodied the apprehension of core Igbo constituency immediately after the countercoup against the Ironsi regime. Drawing on his correspondence with Igbo leaders during the crisis, Macpherson observed during the civil war that Igbos could only participate in a federation that would ensure their protection, especially after the systematic mob attacks on Igbo settlers in Northern communities.<sup>33</sup>

In the long term, the absence of vibrant Igbo settlers in Northern cities would have important implications for religion and society in Northern states



for many years to come. With the departure of Igbo settlers, mainline missions, especially Catholic churches, redoubled their missionary work among indigenous non-Muslim communities in Northern and Middle Belt states. In the case of the Catholic Church, the missions embraced a strategy to “northernize” church doctrines, tailored missionary work to the unique demographic conditions of the region, and more effectively engage the social conditions of non-Muslims in Middle Belt and Northern states.<sup>34</sup> Enwerem notes the new trajectory in Catholic missionary work in Northern states immediately after the civil war:

The Catholic Church in Northern Nigeria announced its growth, so to speak, in 1970 with the ordination of ten priests. Many more soon followed, to the extent that by 1979 the region could boast of about eighty-six indigenous priests, within Tivland alone, the historic center for anti-Muslim resistance in the North, leading with forty priests. Women were not found wanting in responding to the call to a religious vocation. In view of this, it became necessary to found the indigenous religious communities of nuns, like the Congregation of Our Lady of Fatima in Jos, the Sisters of the Nativity in Makurdi, and the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena in Sokoto. With the exception of Maiduguri and Yola, all the ten Dioceses in the former North are headed by indigenous bishops. In 1991, Kano became a mini-diocese—a step towards becoming a diocese.<sup>35</sup>

Conversely, the consequences of the civil war encouraged another moment of Hausa-Fulani Muslim ascendancy. The devastating consequences of the war and the consolidation of military rule centered on a Hausa-speaking officer corps would help cement the political influence of the *masu sarauta* in the 1970s and 1980s. This resurgence of Northern Muslim elite in national politics generated strong, but divided opposition from the Southern states, the Middle Belt, and Northern minority Christians, with serious implications for sharia as the country embarked on constitutional reforms for a democratic government in the 1970s.

Concomitantly, Northern Muslim assertiveness encouraged Southern and Middle Belt Christians to forge alliances across denominational, ethnic, and regional lines. Indeed, Gowon’s postwar policy of reconstruction encouraged mainline Catholic and Protestant denominations to coordinate their response to the devastation in Eastern states. For example, the Christian Council of Nigeria—a group of Protestant churches—collaborated with Catholic churches to establish the first national ecumenical project in 1971. This led to the establishment of two important initiatives: the National Institute of Moral

and Religious Education and the Christian Health Association of Nigeria; the latter organization coordinated the distribution of international medical relief to war-torn southeastern communities immediately after the war.<sup>36</sup>

This new ecumenicalism notwithstanding, mainline Christian denominations remained cautious in their newfound relations until the formation of Nigeria's preeminent national Christian organization, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), in 1976. While many factors encouraged its formation, most analysts agree that the consolidation of Northern Muslim interest was the catalyst for its establishment.<sup>37</sup> With a strong focus on the Northern Muslim power structure, the political theater for CAN's activities was in the non-Muslim areas in the old Northern Region, where the Sokoto Caliphate had consolidated its power base under the indirect rule system, and Christian missions had made significant inroads since the colonial period.

### Sharia Debate and Transition to Democracy

The years immediately after the civil war were expected to be a time of national reconstruction and reconciliation, but wound up being a period when contending political and religious groups reasserted themselves within the framework of Nigeria's prevailing ethno-regional structure. As the Gowon regime embarked on post-civil war reconstruction, Muslim activists, through various national Muslim organizations, especially the recently formed Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), reasserted Muslim interest in national affairs.<sup>38</sup> These agitations opened up a space for discussions on sharia in the Nigerian legal system. With the overthrow of the Gowon administration in 1975, religion gained greater influence in national politics. Gowon's successor, General Murtala Mohammed, a devout Muslim from Kano, openly embraced a public role for Islam in state affairs during his short period as head of state (July 30, 1975–February 13, 1976). Following Southern Christians' outcry against Mohammed's attempt to establish a federal Sharia Court of Appeal, the FMG backtracked to create a unified Customary Court of Appeal in 1975.<sup>39</sup>

It was in the wider context of agitation for post-civil war political and legal reforms that the FMG in 1975 created a committee to draft a constitution that would herald Nigeria's transition to democracy. This deliberation led to the 1979 Nigerian Constitution, and encouraged an animated debate on the role of sharia in Nigerian political and legal affairs.<sup>40</sup> This debate, which brought Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite into direct conflict with the political class of other regions of the country, once again exposed Nigeria's deep religious and regional fault lines. Consequently, sharia emerged as a critical medium for the articulation

of Hausa-Fulani Muslim interests during the transition to a democratic government in the mid-1970s.

As the conflict between pro-sharia (largely Northern Muslims) and anti-sharia (Southern, Middle Belt, and Northern-minority Christians) factions intensified during the constitutional debates, a powerful national Muslim coalition emerged to petition for a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal (FSCA) that would have jurisdiction over both civil and criminal cases. Pro-FSCA Constituent Assembly members insisted that since religious injunctions requires that the conduct of Muslims must be regulated by Islamic law, the new Nigerian constitution must grant sharia courts authority to adjudicate on all legal matters that affect Nigerian Muslims.<sup>41</sup> But when it became apparent that pro-sharia delegates would not achieve their objective in the Constituent Assembly, they elected to boycott assembly deliberations. Eventually, a compromise by the Constitution Drafting Committee's judiciary subcommittee established Sharia and Customary Courts of Appeal in Northern states, with limited authority in civil and criminal cases.<sup>42</sup> Ardent anti-sharia activists contended that the subcommittee's compromise would infringe on the constitutional rights of religious minorities in Northern states and would undermine the secularity of the Nigerian nation-state. Despite this limited constitutional victory by Hausa-Fulani Muslim elites, the Northern pro-sharia alliance was largely a marriage of convenience, bringing together emirate elites of different ideological persuasions and political interests. For example, Islamic reformist clerics, notably Abubakar Gumi, were by the mid-1970s challenging the masu sarauta's legitimacy, claiming that the Hausa-Fulani Muslim aristocracy was a component of a corrupt Nigerian oligarchy.<sup>43</sup>

### State Crisis and Religious Violence

Political parties in Nigeria's second democratic government, the Second Republic (1979–1983), had their roots in the political alignments formed during decolonization. Aware of the deep divisions among the major regions, and hoping to undermine alternative centers of power, the Ironsi, Gowon, and Mohammed/Obasanjo<sup>44</sup> military regimes had all curtailed partisan political activities during the period of military rule, from 1966 to 1979. In the Northern states, preexisting political associations provided an organizational node for the construction of parties in 1978, when the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime lifted the ban on party politics. Most prominent of these was the National Movement, precursor to the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which later won the presidential elections of 1979 and 1983. Although the NPN later embraced

a diverse coalition of junior partners, notably Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo politicians, as well as ethnic minorities from the Niger Delta and Cross River areas,<sup>45</sup> the party had its foundation in the Northern Peoples Congress—the former Hausa-Fulani party of the preceding civilian government under the leadership of the late sardauna of Sokoto.<sup>46</sup>

Despite this national alliance, the NPN was firmly anchored to the masu sarauta. Significantly, the party was formed when emirs and other Northern Muslim dignitaries assembled in Sokoto, the headquarters of the caliphate, to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Sir Abubakar III as the sultan of Sokoto and Sarkin Musulmi (leader of Northern Nigerian Muslim).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, prominent caliphate titleholders, such as Ibrahim Dasuki, Baraden (later sultan) of Sokoto, and Shehu Malami, Sarkin Sudan of Wurno (a major titleholder in the Sokoto Caliphate) played important roles in the critical months before the 1979 elections. The Makaman Bida, one of the caliphate's most influential traditional chiefs and trusted adviser of the late sardauna served as the grand patron of the party in its formative years.<sup>48</sup> Once in control of state affairs, NPN governors and officials emphasized the emirs' role in the preservation of political stability and the maintenance of law and order.<sup>49</sup>

Similar to the initial era of democratic governance when a progressive populist party, Northern Elements Peoples Union (NEPU), opposed the NPC, the party of the masu sarauta, the People's Redemption Party (PRP) emerged to draw its legitimacy from NEPU's progressive traditions; the PRP campaigned against the entrenched power base of the masu sarauta, now articulated under the political machine of the emergent NPN. Although the PRP was the brainchild of political newcomers, notably Abubakar Rimi, Balarabe Musa, and Bala Usman, former NEPU leader Aminu Kano later was elected party leader.

From the Yoruba states of Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, and Ondo, as well as Kwara State and Bendel State (essentially the old Mid-Western State),<sup>50</sup> prominent Yoruba politicians and obas (traditional monarch of Yoruba city-states) rallied the support of the defunct Action Group (AG) loyalists under the leadership of Awolowo, now elevated to the distinguished title of the Asiwaju of Yorubaland (leader of the Yoruba people) by leading obas. This group became known as the Committee of Friends. This committee led to the formation of a Yoruba-centered party in 1979—in collaboration with old Edo, Itsekiri, Ishan, and other Mid-West allies—the Unity Party of Nigeria.

In the Southwest and Southeast, respectively, the “Progressives” of Lagos and the old Eastern Region formed an alliance that drew its support from the proscribed NCNC coalition of the old Eastern, Western, and Mid-Western Regions. The Lagos and Eastern Progressives merged in May 1978 to form the

Committee for National Unity and Progress. This coalition later became the Southern wing of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP).<sup>51</sup> Like the National Movement and the Committee of Friends, these organizations combined the experience of an older generation of party leaders with the aspirations of a new cohort of influential power brokers. Despite the objection of a formidable Northern ally, Kanuri political stalwart Waziri Ibrahim, Nnamdi Azikiwe, the former NCNC leader and renowned nationalist, later became the NPP leader and its presidential candidate in 1979.<sup>52</sup> Ibrahim went on to form a breakaway party, the Great Nigerian Peoples Party, which dominated electoral politics in his Bornu stronghold. Consequently, prevailing ethno-regional (and in the case of the Northern states, ethno-religious) alliances provided the framework on which these major political parties were subsequently based during Nigeria's second democratic government.

Given this context, the election that followed the new constitution saw voting primarily along ethno-regional lines. Dominated by the Northern states, the NPN succeeded in attracting a winning coalition through the support of junior allies in the South, especially in the East, Rivers, and Cross Rivers States. Shehu Shagari, the Turaki of Sokoto, a prominent Hausa-Fulani Muslim titleholder, was elected president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In addition, the NPN succeeded in securing control over the federal legislature.

With the ascendancy of the NPN in national and regional politics, Hausa-Fulani Muslim power was anchored to the sardauna's northernization and Islamization vision of the previous democratic era. This incited strong resistance from Christian activists, especially in Southern and Middle Belt states, as well as among Christian minorities in Northern states. As Christians accused the NPN of advancing Northern Muslim interests, ethno-religious and regional divisions grew wider.<sup>53</sup> And as Southern, Middle Belt, and Northern Christians trumpeted their opposition against what many considered the monopoly of state power by a Northern Muslim oligarchy,<sup>54</sup> NPN emirate political elites pushed back, insisting on establishing a Sharia Court of Appeal that would have full legal authority in civil and criminal cases in Northern Muslim society, further amplifying Christian anxiety.

The growing ethno-religious and regional tensions brought violence.<sup>55</sup> Starting in 1980, a wave of religious violence by fringe Islamic movements ravaged several Northern communities. Although the origins of these violent conflicts are not always easy to discern, this enduring religious violence tended to reflect several important factors. First, it reflected the deepening religious and ethnic divisions in Northern and Middle Belt states; second, it showed the growing

alienation of the masses of Northern Muslims with the neopatrimonialism of the custodians of the Nigerian state; and finally, it revealed the widening gulf among factions of Hausa-Fulani groups over claims of leadership of Northern Muslims. These factors exacerbated prevailing fissures between Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and Northern Christian “indigenes”; Hausa-Fulani Muslim indigenes, and Southern Christian “settlers”; Hausa-Fulani elite and Southern Christian intelligentsia; and Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite and Northern Muslim radical groups.<sup>56</sup> With all of these religious crises going on, the moral authority of the holders of state power was seriously compromised, severely undermining Nigeria’s fragile democratic process.<sup>57</sup> Compounded by deepening economic crisis from statism and the declining price of petroleum, the Shagari administration’s growing neopatrimonialism exacerbated ethno-regional and ethno-religious tension among Nigeria’s diverse groups.<sup>58</sup> In addition, these religious conflicts reflect deeper structural crisis endemic to the Nigerian state and society. The tenuousness of Shagari’s NPN government was revealed when a military coup brought the Second Republic to an end on New Year’s Eve of 1983.

The first major religious conflict with national implications started in the early 1980s with a radical Muslim sect known as ‘Yan tatsine (Hausa for, roughly, “those who damn”). ‘Yan tatsine (Maitasine) deployed Islamic doctrine and Hausa traditions of protest to gain popular support among marginalized Hausa talakawa in Northern cities. While many analysts emphasized the fanaticism of ‘Yan tatsine, Paul Lubeck perceptively traces the *gardawa*—the Qur’anic students who were foot soldiers of the sect—back to the era of the Sokoto Caliphate in the 1800s. As Nigerian society experienced rapid social transformation, Lubeck contends, “semi-industrial capitalism” further undermined the *gardawa* in major Hausa urban areas such as Kano, especially in the dry season. Before the petroleum boom of the 1970s, the *gardawa* had been steadily integrated into the labor market in Northern cities. Huge growth in oil wealth (from \$1 billion in 1970 to almost \$23 billion in 1980) intensified social inequality among an emergent commercial-bureaucratic class and the masses of Hausa talakawa, as semi-industrial production stagnated. With this economic transformation, the “laboring poor” was effectively marginalized from the mainstream economy, especially in Northern Nigeria’s principal city, Kano.<sup>59</sup>

It was in the context of these tensions in 1980, that ‘Yan tatsine’s opposition to state authorities exploded into twelve days of violent riots in Kano City that had national reverberations.<sup>60</sup> With inadequate response from state authorities, the riot claimed many lives and destroyed property worth millions of naira. In 1981, another religious protest initiated by ‘Yan tatsine discontent in Kano

ended in a major confrontation between two Muslim sects that reportedly resulted in the death of several thousands. In Maiduguri in Bornu State, 400 people were killed in 1982. Two years later, in Jimeta in Yola State, 763 people were killed. And in Gombe State, more than 100 people were killed in 1985.<sup>61</sup> When Pope John Paul II visited Nigeria in 1982, growing tensions between Christians and Muslims rose to a boiling point, leading to widespread unrest, including the burning of eight churches in Kano by mobs of Muslim youth.<sup>62</sup>

With Muslim and Christian identities further shaping boundaries of political mobilization by the late 1980s and 1990s, religious conflicts became outright confrontations, complicated by a mix of political, social, and demographic conditions, especially in an environment where the legitimacy of the holders of state power was very much in doubt. The trigger for these violent confrontations tended to be in the perceived encroachment of a religious minority—“non-indigenes”—on the “ancestral” space of a dominant ethno-religious group. In this context, Christianity and Islam had emerged as an important framework for the articulation of local interests connected to the distributive resources of the state. This trend intensified the wave of religious conflicts in the emirate states and the predominantly Christian Middle Belt states.<sup>63</sup> Significantly, this trend has effectively posed a serious threat to peaceful coexistence among Christians and Muslims in Northern and Middle Belt states, especially since the 1980s.<sup>64</sup>

In other Northern cities, religious riots were triggered by several unfortunate incidents in the 1980s and the 1990s, notably, a case of an alleged inflammatory speech by a Christian preacher who had recently converted from Islam in Kaduna State; a Muslim protest in Kano in 1982 over the construction of a church near a mosque, which reportedly led to the death of forty-four Christians; and a visit by German evangelist Richard Bonnke in 1991, dubbed a “crusade,” which resulted in two days of mayhem that led to the death of more than two hundred people, most of them Christians. In addition, there were reports of a meeting at the Central Mosque of the Ahmadu Bello University campus that called for the “destruction of Christianity in Zaria” and led to riots in the university that spilled into local communities, resulting in the destruction of churches, mosques, and the homes of many Christians; and in Kano City, in May 1995, a confrontation between two alleged Hausa thieves and Igbo shop owners led to religious attacks by irate Muslim youths in the Sabon Gari (settler) quarters, resulting in the death of many Christians.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, these waves of religious crisis were widespread during the military regimes of three Hausa-speaking Muslims after the demise of Nigeria’s Second Republic, namely the military administrations of Generals Buhari, Babangida, and Abacha.

## Muslim-Christian Relations: Conflict and Compromise under Military Rule

The brief military regime of Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (January 1984 to August 1985) further firmed up the power base of the Northern Muslim political class. Following the massive corruption of the ousted civil-democratic government, Buhari's regime projected stern and dictatorial policies that restricted civil liberties and confronted many professional and civic organizations (including the Nigerian Bar Association, Nigerian Medical Association, Nigerian Labor Congress, and Nigerian University Students Union). However, the regime embraced Hausa-Fulani emirs to harness local support in Northern states. A Hausa-Fulani "Brahmin" from Katsina, Buhari regularly consulted the sultan of Sokoto, Sir Abubakar III, on critical state affairs. Buhari also instructed his state military governors, especially those in charge of Northern states, to embrace emirs as an "informal second tier of authority."<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, Buhari's brief rule witnessed prompt military response to sporadic religious violence by Muslim militants in Northern states. For example, the Buhari regime moved against religious riots carried out by 'Yan tatsine militants, allegedly with support from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon nationals in Kano in 1984—and intermittent riots in Yola from 1984 to 1985, killing more than one thousand people. State authorities blamed this wave of religious disturbances on demographic pressure from illegal immigrants. As Nigeria's economic crisis deepened and with growing discontent over the restriction of civil liberties, another Hausa-speaking Muslim general, Ibrahim Babangida, ousted Buhari in a palace coup in August 1985.

Under Babangida's regime, Nigeria's Christian-Muslim conflicts took center stage over the country's controversial membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC, later Organization of Islamic Cooperation) in 1986.<sup>67</sup> Christian leaders claimed that the regime made the decision to join the OIC without consulting the Nigerian public. Nigeria's powerful Catholic bishops, expressing concern over the nation's unity and the rights of Christian minorities in predominantly Northern Muslim states, noted that the OIC charter undermined the essential tenet of Nigeria's plural and secular state.<sup>68</sup> Earlier in the year, at a national conference on Babangida's OIC policy, a prominent Catholic leader, Monsignor Hypolite Adigwe, had argued in a well-circulated conference paper that Babangida's policy would embolden the Northern pro-sharia movement.<sup>69</sup> As the OIC controversy expanded, Adigwe's paper was published as a pamphlet titled *Nigeria Joins the Organization of Islamic Conference, O.I.C.: The Implications for Nigeria*.<sup>70</sup> Adigwe notes:



The ratification of our membership of the OIC amounts to amending our constitution automatically. It is at variance with Section 10 of our Constitution which declares Nigeria a secular state. Both are mutually exclusive. The OIC is there to foster Islamic religion in all its dimensions—economic, political, cultural, scientific, etc. and every activity has to be in accordance with Islamic law. Our money will therefore be used in spreading Islam, building Islamic schools, universities, and mosques, and maybe fighting a jihad.<sup>71</sup>

Responding to the strong opposition of Christians throughout the country, General Babangida convened a Consultative Committee of leading Christian and Muslim leaders, including Archbishop A. O. Okogie, Catholic archbishop of Nigeria; Bishop J. A. Adetiloye, Anglican bishop of Nigeria; and Ibrahim Dasuki, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs—to explore how Nigeria’s national interest might “be affected by the recent change from observer status to full membership within the OIC.”<sup>72</sup> Significantly, under the chairmanship of a Northern Christian military officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Shagaya (a regime loyalist), the committee was noticeably different in its makeup from the delegation of Northern Muslim notables that had formally presented Nigeria’s application for OIC membership at the organization’s annual meeting in Fez, Morocco, earlier in 1986.<sup>73</sup> Not surprisingly, the report of the Consultative Committee was vague and perfunctory:

We note that the assurance given by the Federal Military Government that our full membership of the OIC does not in any way imply Nigeria has become or will become an Islamic state has addressed the undoubted reservations expressed by sections of the country. We also note that these reservations can only be cleared with time and after further consultation. Furthermore, we agree that the peace and stability of our multi-religious nation and the secular character of Nigeria must be preserved.<sup>74</sup>

The following year, when Muslim mobs attacked churches in several Northern cities, Catholic bishops called on federal and state authorities to carry out a thorough investigation to bring those responsible to justice. At the annual Catholic Bishops’ conference in Awka in 1987, the bishops again queried Nigeria’s OIC membership.

However, as Christian-Muslim tensions intensified, some Catholic leaders also encouraged peaceful dialogue with their Muslim counterparts, drawing on doctrines from the Second Vatican under Pope Paul IV from 1962 to 1965. Significantly, in a high-profile meeting later in 1987, Catholic bishops, in collabo-

ration with the Association of Episcopal Churches, in a communiqué titled “Christianity and Islam in Dialogue,” identified common grounds between the two world religions; they called on Muslim leaders to reject discriminatory practices against Christians, including classifying non-Muslims as infidels and imposing heavy penalties on Christian converts from Islam, and on Muslim women who marry Christians.

No Christian leader exemplified this spirit of peaceful dialogue with Nigeria’s Muslim leadership during this period more than Cardinal Francis Arinze, a former archbishop of Onitsha and president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. He later became a prominent cardinal bishop in the Vatican. As one of Africa’s foremost Catholic priests, Cardinal Arinze, an ethnic Igbo, had gained fame for his humanitarian work in the defunct Republic of Biafra during the civil war. Having arrived at the Vatican only a year before the OIC crisis, Cardinal Arinze had acquired extensive experience with Christian-Muslim conflicts in Nigeria. As Nigeria’s religious crisis intensified in the 1980s, Cardinal Arinze called for reconciliation and understanding between Christians and Muslims. For example, in a notable keynote address in 1988, he provided important historical and global contexts to Nigeria’s enduring Christian-Muslim conflict. Cardinal Arinze contended that while Christianity has existed for twenty centuries and Islam for fourteen, their relations had been characterized by tension and conflict. However, since the Second Vatican, important theological steps had been taken to establish an environment of reconciliation between Catholics and Muslims. Calling for constructive dialogue, Cardinal Arinze argued that religious conflicts are often related to political and economic factors, compounded by historical memories of wars and violence. Drawing on the Second Vatican’s call for peaceful coexistence,<sup>75</sup> he pleaded the imperative of accommodation and reconciliation among Nigerian Christians and Muslims.

Cardinal Arinze was, however, realistic about the limitations of interreligious dialogue in Nigeria’s deeply divided society. He felt that Nigerian Catholic leaders should nevertheless find inspiration from the doctrine espoused in Vatican II and the works of Pope Paul IV—and subsequently Pope John Paul II. In the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, Cardinal Arinze notes that Vatican II speaks of the right of every human being to follow his or her conscience in religious matters. It sought to underscore shared beliefs among various religions and the need for understanding and collaboration. Cardinal Arinze noted that Pope Paul received the ulema of Saudi Arabia in 1974. For his part, Pope John Paul II engaged people of various religions, especially Muslims, receiving Muslim representatives and giving addresses on interreligious dialogue around the

world. Cardinal Arinze called on Nigeria's Catholic leaders to draw on the inspirational leadership of Paul IV and John Paul II.<sup>76</sup>

In keeping with Cardinal Arinze's passionate call for interreligious dialogue, some Nigerian Catholic priests encouraged constructive dialogue between Catholics and Muslims. In this regard, the work of a renowned Igbo Catholic theologian, the Rev. Dr. Stan Anih, is worthy of note. In his popular pamphlet *The Cathedral and the Mosque Can Co-exist in Nigeria*, Reverend Anih contends: "We believe that by a healthy dialogue between Christians and Moslems a new religious sensitivity, called ecumenism . . . can give Nigeria peace and unity because dialogue is an eternal action."<sup>77</sup> Reflecting on the fallout of Nigeria's religious crisis in the 1980s, Anih called on people of all faiths, especially Christians, to "listen" and "dialogue" carefully and work with Muslims to achieve a common good. He insisted that this new ecumenism must lie in reconciliation, the acceptance of pluralism, and "bracketing" all destructive aspects of culture to achieve unity in diversity. After all, "the basic doctrine of all theologies is the sameness of divinity in all men [and women]."<sup>78</sup>

Some mainstream Muslim organizations attempted to encourage constructive dialogue between Muslim and Christian groups. For example, the Council of Ulama tried to corral diverse Islamic interests into a peace movement, but its ties to the "radical" Muslim Student Society hindered the organization's claims as a reliable broker of peaceful dialogue with Christian groups.<sup>79</sup> Other peace efforts initiated by federal and state authorities took the form of seminars, workshops, and conferences to foster religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims.<sup>80</sup> In 1987, the Babangida administration convened the National Council for Religious Affairs (NCRA) as a statutory body to promote peaceful coexistence. This body, however, enjoyed little success. In practice, the committee consisted of leaders of the NSCIA and CAN. When the latter alleged bias from federal authorities toward Northern Muslims and stopped participating in the body's deliberations, the committee became obsolescent.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the peace initiatives, the divide between Christian and Muslim groups grew wider as the OIC controversy raged on with great intensity. Muslim leaders, most of them from emirate society, defended Babangida's decision to join the OIC, arguing that Nigeria is a majority Muslim country and thus should deepen its relationship with Muslim countries.<sup>82</sup> Muslim rebuttals to OIC critics further contended that the organization merely sought parity with Christian organizations; for example, Muslim activists argued that belonging to the OIC was no different from having diplomatic relations with the Vatican, as many countries did, including Nigeria.<sup>83</sup> However, the OIC's stated objectives revealed a major contradiction for a country with Nigeria's religious history: as

noted by a former OIC secretary-general, the organization's main objectives are "to propagate Islam and acquaint the rest of the world with Islam, its issues and aspirations . . . [and affirm that] Islam is the only path which can lead [Muslims] to strength, dignity, prosperity, and a better future. It is the pledge and guarantee of the authenticity of the *Ummah*, safeguarding it from the tyrannical onrush of materialism."<sup>84</sup>

Christian leaders, for their part, argued that since OIC membership held the force of international treaty, Nigeria, like other OIC members, now would be duty-bound to provide financial resources to defend Islamic holy places, support Palestinian liberation movements, and promote global Islamic solidarity. In the end, the OIC affair and resultant controversy only hardened religious identities, especially as they reflected entrenched Hausa-Fulani Muslim power structures, Northern Christian minority resistance, and Southern Christian intelligentsia insistence on Nigerian state secularity.<sup>85</sup>

Embedded in the OIC conflict and contemporaneous national debate were the questions of how and by whom "Islam" and "secularity" were defined in a country where the vestiges of Western governance were steeped in Christian influences. The saga thus exposed a fundamental contradiction in the discourse of the Nigerian state and society over the meaning of religion in Nigeria's purported secular state. In his keynote address at the annual conference of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions in 1991, the eloquent Yoruba secretary-general of the NSCIA, Lateef Adegbite, argued that Nigerian Muslims who confront this contradiction fall into the following stark categories:

state supremacists (who seek to place the state above all other social institutions including Islam); atheists and secularists (who claim that Nigeria is a secular state, which Muslims argue against because Islam forbids denying the presence of God); modernists (who undermine religion and [would like] to do away with it); rival religious groups (who feel threatened by Islam and want to harass Muslim leadership and drown Islamic voices); spoilers within (a house divided within itself, giving Islam a bad image); and media misrepresentation (local and international media aimed at distorting [the image of] Islam).<sup>86</sup>

While such specific religious dictates reflect strong conviction, they reify major ethno-religious fault lines in Nigeria's contentious politics.

During this period, another major bout of religious violence exploded on the national scene in Kafanchan, in Kaduna State, in March 1987, later spinning off to other parts of the state and several Northern communities. This wave of Christian-Muslim confrontations would mark the peak of the religious violence

in Northern and Middle Belt states in the turbulent 1980s. Kafanchan, headquarters of the Jema local government, is located about three hundred kilometers south of the city of Kaduna. With a population of about eighty thousand, Kafanchan consists largely of Christian indigenous ethnic groups—the Jaba, Kagoma, Ninzom, Ayyu, Gwantu, Numana, and Godo-godo—as well as Hausa-Fulani Muslim “settlers.” In this specific case, underlying Christian-Muslim tension turned into open attacks on churches when a recent Christian convert from Islam, Abubakar Bako, allegedly blasphemed against Islam at a Christian students’ organization meeting at the city’s College of Education.<sup>87</sup>

After a week of destruction, the Kaduna State military government convened a panel chaired by State Commissioner for Justice Hansen Donli to investigate the riots and to make recommendations to the state authorities. The Donli Panel noted: “From many submissions made, it was quite obvious that certain highly placed individuals and organizations, had in the past been in the habit of either making unguarded utterances or publishing provocative and sensitive materials in the media, capable of causing tension in the country.”<sup>88</sup> However, the panel failed to secure the confidence of both Christian and Muslim groups. CAN claimed that the panel did little to address the plight of aggrieved Christians and kowtowed to powerful Muslim interests.<sup>89</sup> Representing Muslims’ interests, the Council of Ulama called for Islamic solidarity, argued that the state governor should have done more to protect Muslims, and requested the release of Muslims detained in police custody. A Committee of Concerned Citizens claimed that the economic and social deprivation of the masses of Hausa-Fulani Muslims was the root cause of the violence, but Christian groups, the Kaduna State government, and the federal government dismissed the committee’s claims. Eventually, the FMG (Federal Military Government) convened a judicial tribunal chaired by Justice Karibi-Whyte to try all those detained in the religious riots. In the end, little was done to provide either justice or reconciliation. Reflecting on these tragic riots many years later, the Rev. Dr. Matthew Hassan Kukah—a renowned Catholic theologian and later Catholic bishop of Sokoto—concluded that the crisis further consolidated the power base of the Northern Muslim elite.<sup>90</sup>

Sporadic religious violence continued in some Northern communities in the late 1980s as the Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite asserted its power base during the Babangida regime’s transition to democratic government. Toward this end, Hausa-Fulani elites created the Northern Elders’ Committee, consisting of emirs, politicians, businessmen, and senior administrators, to exert influence over the FMG. In the context of these efforts, internecine battles continued between Muslims and Christians, especially in Kaduna State, with its large

indigenous Christian population. More widespread communal conflicts were reported during the 1987 local government elections. Christian leaders in Kaduna State and other Northern states with substantial Christian populations alleged that Muslims retained a stranglehold on state affairs, as exemplified by the OIC crisis, Nigeria's involvement in the Islamic Development Bank, and the unrelenting push for expanded sharia in Northern states.<sup>91</sup> Northern Christian leaders called for comprehensive reforms to ensure secularity and national unity, and for a prohibition against Nigerian membership in international religious organizations.<sup>92</sup>

During this period of intense religious conflict, intra-Muslim relations in the Northern states also suffered as reformists, particularly Abubakar Gumi (see chapter 4), rose to prominence. Gumi had been educated in elite Islamic schools; he came to know Hausa-Fulani Muslim notables such as Tafawa Balewa, Aminu Kano, Ibrahim Dasuki, and Shehu Shagari in his youth.<sup>93</sup> After attending Kano Law School, he briefly worked with the sardauna and as a scribe for the chief alkali, thereafter taking up a teaching position at his old school in the early 1950s. In 1955, Gumi was made imam of the sardauna's hajj group, and later, in 1957, he oversaw the pilgrimage of Nigerians to the hajj. As discussed earlier, these notable accomplishments won him the appointment as deputy grand qadi of the Northern Region just before independence, and in 1962 he was promoted to grand qadi. Gumi and the sardauna collaborated to found the JNI (Jama'atu Nasril Islam) and established many Islamic schools in the Northern Region. After the sardauna's assassination, however, Gumi embraced a new Islamic reformism and questioned the authority of the masu sarauta. In the early 1970s, he criticized Gowon's military regime; this move won him support from populist elements in emirate states. In 1975 General Murtala Mohammed appointed Gumi grand mufti. Three years later, Gumi gave his blessing to a new movement, Jama'at Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna, or Izala. Seeking to both revive and reform Nigerian Islam, Izala leaders preached a return to orthodoxy and decried Sufi thought as deviating from holy texts. He reserved the strongest criticism for the tijaniyya because of the association of the qadiriyya with Sokoto jihadists, whom he revered. Despite Sufism's long history—arising from twelfth- and thirteenth-century mysticism, with qadiriyya coming first and the tijaniyya arriving during the eighteenth century—Gumi claimed that such Sufi orders “are inconsistent with true Islam.”<sup>94</sup> According to him, Sufis teach withdrawal from this world, practice mystical rites, canonize certain rulers, recognize saints, and organize the ummah into hierarchical, competing structures, all of which are unauthorized innovations to the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, Izala gained prominence among relatively well-educated professionals in the public and private sectors, especially in the cosmopolitan cities of Kaduna and Jos. With a focus on religious orthodoxy, Izala emphasized strict interpretations of religious texts, especially the Qur'an and hadith, along with the widespread availability of classical texts in Hausa language.<sup>96</sup> Reflecting in his autobiography on the establishment of Izala, Gumi frames the organization as a regrettable necessity, given the corruption of some emirs who had broken from Sokoto's piety: "They had brought back to life all the corrupt practices against which Sheikh dan Fodio went to war with the former Hausa rulers. They had become kings with big palaces full of servants and courtiers, and required other people to bow down before them. They kept concubines and did not really fear God's anger."<sup>97</sup> Later, Gumi defends his Izala movement on grounds similar to those propagated by Usman dan Fodio and his followers during the Sokoto Jihad: "Certainly, one could draw a lot of parallels between the rise of some contemporary mass elements, like the Izala Movement, and the forces that overthrew the Hausa kings during the Jihad in 1804."<sup>98</sup> Indeed, it was from the tradition of the Sokoto Jihad that Izala established its moral authority to inscribe sharia into the Nigerian politico-religious project.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, Izala institutionalized criticism of Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers and lambasted preachers who claimed to have direct connection to the Prophet. Within months, such activity had sparked a full-fledged crisis among Northern Muslims; attempts at reconciliation failed in 1979 and again in 1983, the second time despite President Shagari's personal intervention. Hausa-Fulani Muslim youths flocked to its teachings despite the emirate establishments' ambivalence toward the movement. Tensions, already fraught, were heightened when Saudi Arabia gave the prestigious King Faisal Award to Gumi in 1987 for his service to Islam. Nigerian Christians were against the award because it underscored the influence of Saudi Arabia in Nigerian politics; in addition, some emirs frowned at it because it elevated Gumi's brand of Islamic orthodoxy among Nigerian Muslims. Nevertheless, "intra-Sufi and Sufi-*Yan Izala* differences mounted" by the late 1980s,<sup>100</sup> resulting in the formation of Jundullahi (Soldiers of God) and the Fityan al-Islam (Muslim Youth or Heroes/Youth of Islam) by qadiriyya and tijaniyya, respectively. Despite these counters, members of Izala were widely seen as forward-thinking Muslims because they advocated female education and denounced entrenched traditional practices considered un-Islamic, such as customary bride prices. Despite Gumi's death in 1992, and eroding Izala membership, the movement remains influential among Northern Muslims.<sup>101</sup>

## A Long Transition to Democracy

At the height of such political uncertainty in 1985 Babangida announced his transition program to a constitutional democratic government. Although the program was later subverted by Babangida himself,<sup>102</sup> the issues that dominated the discussion from military rule to a democratic government nevertheless provides a good illustration of Nigerian public discourse for almost four decades. The regime's contentious politics of democratic transition exposed the growing politicization of the Nigerian military by the late 1980s, revealing a clique of senior military officers' domination of the extractive agencies of the state.

Immediately after seizing power in 1985, Babangida appointed a Political Bureau to recommend a suitable democratic system for Nigeria. At its inauguration in January 1986, Babangida called on the panel to identify the problems that had led to previous failures of Nigerian civilian governments and to propose effective political response to sustain a democratic system in the long term.<sup>103</sup> Unlike the 1976 Constitution Drafting Committee, this was a fact-finding commission, responsible for appraising Nigeria's governance institutions and proposing viable solutions. Although many Nigerian civic groups were growing wary of military-sponsored transition programs, emirate elites actively participated in the Political Bureau discussions. Dominated by proscribed NPN party bosses from the Second Republic, Northern Muslim elite formed a political organization called the Committee of Elders to lobby the Political Bureau. The political class of Southern states (notably from the Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Ijaw, and Yoruba communities) also lobbied the bureau. In one landmark gathering in early 1987, an organization called the Eastern Solidarity Group, consisting of politicians and traditional rulers from the Eastern states of Anambra, Imo, Rivers, and Cross Rivers, resolved to "advance eastern interests."<sup>104</sup> In the West, Yoruba politicians and obas started an ethnic association called the Egbe Iloiwaju Yoruba (Yoruba Progressive Organization) to position the Yorubas for the next democratic government.<sup>105</sup>

The Babangida regime, in any case, rejected the Political Bureau's main recommendation: the establishment of a social democratic/socialist republic. This decision left the regime with no other option but to embrace the existing political arrangement. This further hardened Nigeria's neopatrimonial political structure, rationalized by dominant ethno-regional power relations. As the resultant crisis of political legitimacy intensified, the Nigerian political process was aggravated by a dramatic economic downturn brought on by falling oil prices, a staggering foreign debt burden, and shortages of foreign exchange.



This intensified existing disequilibria—between classes, between regions, and between community-based structures and the Nigerian state.<sup>106</sup>

Complicated by the economic crisis of the 1980s, religious identity in the Babangida years thus reflected intersections of ethnic, regional, and class interests. Babangida's initial policy of dialogue was steadily replaced by manipulative and repressive measures to ward off growing discontent.<sup>107</sup> This only alienated restless professional and civic organizations. As the regime restricted the political space and civil liberties of the urban citizenry, its policies were complicated by the failure of its economic liberalization program. It was clear by the late 1980s that it would be difficult to reconcile a structural adjustment program, imposed with the blessing of the International Monetary Fund, with the regime's faltering democratic transition program.<sup>108</sup>

Nonetheless, economic problems worsened, causing cutbacks in already dwindling social services, resulting in more unrest by early 1988. Small-scale, localized events, such as mobs of Muslim youths attacking churches, became frequent,<sup>109</sup> and religious intolerance continued into the early 1990s. The sultan of Sokoto, Sir Abubakar III, died in 1988, ending a fifty-year reign, and disputes over his succession caused riots that killed ten people before the appointment of Ibrahim Dasuki as sultan.

As the Babangida regime planned, the Constituent Assembly met in 1989 to review a new constitution. Christian activists argued that the legal system was now tilted toward advocates of expanded sharia in civil and criminal cases. Sharia advocates, on the other hand, were adamant that the opposite was the case and that Nigeria needed a federal sharia appeal court system, for which they had unsuccessfully fought in the previous decade. In language foreshadowing the sharia crisis that would overwhelm the country at the beginning of the twenty-first century, sharia advocates in the Constituent Assembly argued that in order to make justice equitable, Nigerian Muslims should have the constitutional right to be governed by sharia in civil and criminal cases. With the growing polarization between pro-sharia and anti-sharia factions, Babangida removed federal Islamic law from the Assembly's terms of reference.<sup>110</sup> Finally, while the Constituent Assembly increased the jurisdiction of sharia courts of appeal at the state level, it still limited these courts' powers to civil cases among Muslims. This constitution, which came to bear Babangida's name, was made into law but never enacted.<sup>111</sup>

Significantly, 1990 witnessed a failed coup by junior officers, mostly of Middle Belt and Northern Christian minority origin, that further deepened religious tensions, alongside the growing delegitimation of the Babangida regime. Sporadic religious riots in Bauchi continued from 1990 to 1991, reportedly

killing two hundred people, and similar outbreaks in Katsina took forty lives. In 1991, Islamists clashed with the military in several Northern communities, while anti-Christian riots occurred in Kano.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, the Federal Military Government conducted a census that led to allegations of widespread census inflations across the federation.<sup>113</sup> In early 1992, ethno-religious conflict broke out in Kaduna and Taraba States, the latter a Tiv-Jukun conflict that lasted through the following two years. Later in 1993, the Babangida regime's transition program finally brought about a presidential election. A Yoruba Muslim from Ogun State, Moshood Abiola, won the presidency on the Social Democratic Party ticket. It was declared the freest election in Nigerian history, yet Babangida annulled the result, a move widely attributed to the fact that it would have shifted regional control over federal government from the Hausa-Fulani Muslim North to the South. Strong opposition against the military regime forced Babangida to step down. After a brief interim civilian government led by Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba ally of Babangida, former Chief of Army Staff Sani Abacha staged a coup in November 1993, keeping power in the hands of Hausa-speaking Muslim officers.

The next five years were characterized by a level of state brutality unknown in postcolonial Nigerian history. Political dissidents and prodemocracy activists, including former military head of state Olusegun Obasanjo, were jailed on trumped-up charges of sedition for opposing the regime. And in 1995, Abacha executed Ogoni (Niger Delta Region) human rights activist Ken Saro Wiwa and his compatriots, amid global outrage.<sup>114</sup> In March 1996, Abacha took the unprecedented step of deposing Dasuki as sultan of Sokoto and replaced him with the more conservative Muhammadu Maccido, initially preferred by the Sokoto kingmakers.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, Abacha imprisoned the radical Muslim cleric Ibrahim Zakzaky in September 1996. Zakzaky's followers clashed with state security forces in Zaria in late 1996, and again in February 1997, when they tried to capture the Kano Central Mosque.<sup>116</sup> By this time, it was evident that the relationship between the Abacha regime and the Northern Muslim elite was significantly strained because the regime's excessive repression had shattered the equilibrium between the Northern Muslim political class and the political classes of other geopolitical zones in the country, effectively undermining the strategic political advantage of the emirate political class.

Abacha died suddenly in 1998, amid speculation of foul play, and the defense chief of staff, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, another Northern Muslim, became interim head of state. He immediately announced a transition to civilian rule. As prodemocracy activists insisted that the interim regime respect the outcome of the June 12, 1994, presidential election, President-elect Abiola

died suddenly only a month after Abacha, and the Abubakar administration introduced another transition to democratic government program. The interim government reinstated political freedoms, released political dissidents—including Obasanjo, Zakzaky, and Dasuki—from prison. Finally, a Constitutional Drafting Committee was instated.

This committee's final proposal for a new constitution was based on the 1995 Abacha draft constitution, which had curtailed sharia.<sup>117</sup> Unlike the 1979 Constitution, this draft constitution came from a peculiar environment. It was formulated during the period when emirate power was declining and the military's image was being shattered. Nonetheless, elections were held, and former military head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba Christian, was elected president on the ticket of the People's Democratic Party (PDP)—and Nigeria's Fourth Republic was born.<sup>118</sup>