

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EXPANDED SHARIA: RESISTANCE, VIOLENCE, AND RECONCILIATION

The early years of the Nigerian Fourth Republic were marked by systemic conflict between the twelve Northern sharia states and Christian groups, primarily from Southern and Middle Belt states. The conflicts were episodic and unprecedented in the extents of bloodletting, even by Nigeria's tragic standards of religious violence. The crisis did encourage some introspection on the part of senior federal government officials, religious leaders, and political elites from all regions of the country. But on the whole, collective efforts at reconciliation were less than far-reaching; peace initiatives were severely compromised by distrust among contending ethno-religious blocs in the country.

#### The Case against Sharia: Christian and Nationalist Critiques

Anthony Olubunmi Okogie, the Catholic archbishop and national president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), was at the forefront of national debates against the imposition of expanded sharia in the Northern states.<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Okogie and many Christian leaders argued essentially that the Northern states' sharia policies were serious threats to the rights of Christian

minorities in Northern Muslim states and that sharia would destroy Nigeria's fragile democratic transition, undermine its precarious federal structure, reify ethno-religious identities, and derail the country's developmental agenda. Archbishop Okogie was particularly concerned about the danger of a Muslim versus non-Muslim binary in Northern states, as he expressed it: "Any such law [sharia] will stand as a parallel law to the Constitution and therefore, is unacceptable. If Christians and other religions practiced in the country decide to have their own judicial systems, how many systems of laws will be in this one country?"<sup>2</sup> Okogie's views were further elaborated in a five-part newspaper series on sharia's implications by his successor as CAN president, Dr. Sunday Mbang, primate of the Methodist Church of Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> Mbang, Okogie, and many Christian leaders embarked on a national campaign to neutralize what they considered a dangerous political development.

Southern intellectuals also wrote extensively to register their fears about sharia. In fiery newspaper editorials, pamphlets, and conference papers, their viewpoints underlined that pro-sharia initiatives threaten the Constitution.<sup>4</sup> For example, Rotimi Williams, a legal luminary and Yoruba Christian who had chaired the 1979 Constitution Drafting Committee, argued that a "radical sharia movement" would impose an unbridgeable constitutional fault line between the Northern states and other states in the country, as well as between common law and sharia. He endorsed the thinking among human rights groups that the imposition of expanded sharia will fundamentally alter the prevailing concept of civil rights and civil liberties in Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Olu Onagoruwa, a Yoruba Christian who was once Nigeria's federal minister of justice and attorney general, argued that the Nigerian Constitution trumps any other legal code.<sup>6</sup> Particularly problematic for Christian-educated elites was the idea of equality between common law and sharia as competing legal systems. As an editorial in the Lagos-based national newspaper the *Weekend Concord* put it: "Nigerian common law was created by Christians and was also imposed upon the Muslim community. But there is a difference: common law can change and adapt to the needs of the time. Sharia does not change since it is believed to be the word of Allah."<sup>7</sup> The irony was not lost on many other Christian critics of expanded sharia that the constitutional provisions that granted the Northern Muslim states the right to legislate on matters of jurisprudence was derived from common law that now would be prohibited under expanded sharia.<sup>8</sup>

Unique among Nigerian states, indirect rule in Kaduna State had subjugated non-Hausa-Fulani indigenes (mostly Christians by the late colonial period) to the control of emirate rulers. If not de jure, aspects of this colonial imposition had continued de facto during the postcolonial period as Nigeria

went through various political transformations. For Christians in Kaduna State, expanded sharia meant a forced return to an oppressive legal system still fresh in the memories of local elders.<sup>9</sup> Following the colonial imposition of earlier decades, the lines of citizenship were being redrawn; “by defining political self-determination in religious terms and excluding others from central aspects of public legislation, Muslims redefine the *demos* that it is entitled to rule,” to the exclusion of Christians in Kaduna State.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, such rigid legal interpretation precluded any compromise. Christians who were obviously concerned about the implications of expanded sharia argued that the modern process of Islamization that the Hausa-Fulani political class was determined to impose must be stopped at all cost. Claims like these had been commonplace in Nigeria’s political discourse. We will recall that during the OIC crisis in the 1980s, Christian theologians and Southern commentators argued that Nigeria’s membership in the OIC during the Babangida regime was an attempt by Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers to dominate the country.<sup>11</sup> Anti-sharia analyst Moni Odo Ngban pointed out that the push for expanded sharia by emirate rulers was the final confirmation of a trend that went back to the NPC’s northernization and Islamization policies of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, since each Northern state implemented sharia differently, critics argued, the principle of Islamic unity was compromised, with serious legal and political implications for state affairs throughout the country.<sup>13</sup>

Opponents of sharia were also concerned that the reforms would undermine Nigeria’s nascent democratic transition.<sup>14</sup> Although expanding Islamic law appeared to have popular appeal among Northern Muslims voters, opponents of sharia claimed that it would undermine Nigeria’s democratic principles because sharia, by its very nature, stifles civil liberties and liberal values.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, some commentators suggested that the sharia movement was purposefully erected to subvert the shift in presidential power to a Southern Christian, the Egba-Yoruba Olusegun Obasanjo.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Southern, Middle Belt and Northern minority Christians cloaked themselves as defenders of the Nigerian democratic republic, keeping faith with the country’s nationalist and republican traditions, going back to the colonial period.<sup>17</sup> Expanded sharia, they asserted, would set a dangerous precedent, indicating that majoritarian rule allowed state governments to enact nefarious Islamic laws that would trample on the constitutional rights of Christian minorities.<sup>18</sup> In a cacophony of opposition to the Northern states’ sharia policies, prominent Nigerians from various walks of life, most of them Christians, and even some “progressive” Muslims registered strong objection to what they considered an assault on the Nigerian Constitution and the country’s vaunted “federal character.” One

influential Pentecostal leader, Archbishop Abraham Oyeniran of the United Global Church Association of Nigeria, opined: “There is no doubt that some people are bent on seeing an end to this democracy.”<sup>19</sup> Aishat Ismail, Nigeria’s minister for women’s affairs and a Muslim women’s rights activist, stated that the Northern states’ sharia policies were a distraction from national development and democratic consolidation.<sup>20</sup>

Prominent journalists including Tope Adebayo and Fred Egbe<sup>21</sup> wrote essays that reproduced Southern anxieties, contending that expanded sharia policies would deepen sectarianism and ethno-religious violence<sup>22</sup> and accelerate Nigeria’s disintegration along ethno-religious lines.<sup>23</sup> Southern-based Christian newsletters were strident in their criticism, depicting the Zamfara State sharia initiative as a “Legislative Monster.”<sup>24</sup> Unsubstantiated reports had it that the Northern Muslim states of Nigeria had mobilized funds to promote sharia in Southern states with substantial Muslim populations and thereby expand the political trouble.<sup>25</sup> Many sharia foes were united in their concern that sharia would further reify ethno-religious identities and carve permanent fault lines in Nigeria’s fragile federal state. They feared that, just as colonial authorities had reinforced Northern Muslim rule, expanded sharia would permanently define rigid communal divisions along Christian-Muslim lines, dangerously undercutting the dynamic process of social interaction that was beginning to emerge in the postcolonial era.<sup>26</sup> In addition, mixed parentage, and the presence of other religions (particularly indigenous religious traditions and religious syncretism) scuttled any attempt to divide Nigerians into neat Christian and Muslim enclaves. Overlapping identities muddied the water, particularly in the case of Middle Belt and Hausa Christians.<sup>27</sup>

Religious riots have been particularly severe since the 1980s in Kaduna State, where the population historically has been evenly divided between Muslim and Christian indigenes; and the state’s Christian-Muslim divide is further complicated by the large proportion of Christian Southerners. The trend of religious conflict reemerged when the Kaduna State House of Assembly passed legislation to implement expanded Islamic law and thousands of Christians registered their opposition by flooding the government’s exploratory committee with petitions.<sup>28</sup> This was followed by violent riots between Muslim and Christians.<sup>29</sup> Igbo Christian traders in urban areas have always been vulnerable targets in Northern sectarian attacks.<sup>30</sup> More than four hundred people were killed and property worth billions of naira destroyed following waves of attacks and counterattacks in the state.<sup>31</sup> Even the proposal by the Kaduna State government to create a new local government administration for Kataf communities (that is, non-Hausa-Fulani Christian indigenes) was stiffly resisted by

Hausa-Fulani communities, who argued that such a move would encroach on their land; indeed, it ignited fresh communal violence<sup>32</sup> in which more than three hundred people were killed and more than one thousand buildings were destroyed.<sup>33</sup> The Kaduna sharia riots exposed preexisting tensions, despite the state's seeming cosmopolitan outlook.

Yoruba Christian analyst Ben Oguntuase's account of the Kaduna riots captures the suffering of thousands of Nigerians caught in the sharia crossfire in Kaduna State. What began as a drive for Islamic law led to open communal violence and consequently a national debate on public safety and the constitutional rights of Nigerian citizens. Revealing the extent of the crisis, Oguntuase recounts:

A soldier drove in a Mercedes Benz car into the station narrating how he was forced to seek refuge. Other vehicles started arriving with shattered windows. Then a man was brought in with a machete cut on his head. Two armed policemen escorted the victim to a hospital. It will be a miracle if the man survived. The cut was deep and part of his brain was already gushing out. . . . Four officers agreed to escort us, all . . . armed. We formed a 10-vehicle convoy. A young police officer in mufti [Northern civilian clothes] volunteered to lead the convoy on a motorcycle. We headed for the Nigerian Defense Academy. All the way, we were meeting resistance. The policemen fired sporadically into the air to clear the way. Red-hot roadblocks mounted by the rioters were all along the route. As we approached a crowd, the policemen would fire into the air, the crowd would disappear. As soon as the last vehicle passed, they would start hauling stones at the convoy. Along the way we saw at least five roasted bodies.<sup>34</sup>

Religious violence was so severe that critics of the state government's sharia policy called for the creation of separate neighborhoods based on fixed religious affiliations. But CAN condemned the idea as outrageous. Tony Uda, the organization's state chairperson, dismissed the proposal: "All those involved in such movements are promoting the disintegration of the nation."<sup>35</sup>

Overall, the riots did more than destroy lives and property; they deepened communal suspicion in the state and etched intolerance into national consciousness.<sup>36</sup> Economically, opponents of expanded Islamic law argued that the campaign for sharia was a costly program that diverted resources from pressing national priorities in economic development. Anti-sharia commentator Moni Odo Ngban said that sharia would further harm Northern Nigeria's already fragile economy, as new regulations on the region's weak industrial sector would put many out of work.<sup>37</sup> Bee Debki, another anti-sharia analyst, argued

that the sharia program was a “political gimmick” with which the masses of the Northern Muslim poor were given the false hope of economic redistribution through the implementation of new sharia policies.<sup>38</sup>

Interparty dialogue may have produced positive outcomes on the sharia question. In Zamfara State, for example, the state’s opposition party (the PDP) called on the ruling party (the APP) to drop its sharia program and face the challenge of community development.<sup>39</sup> General Zamani Lekwot, a Christian Kataf stalwart and previous military governor of Rivers State, lamented the north-south development gap and held that it was the government’s responsibility to invest in education reform instead of sharia. Condemnation of the Zamfara State government reached greater heights in the Yoruba states. The Lagos-based *National Concord* mocked Governor Sani: “What has happened to all the lofty election campaign promises made to the Zamfara electorate about better health care, improved infrastructure, good potable water supply, qualitative education, and enhanced farming subventions? These pragmatic programmes are now thrown into the dustbin in the mad chase for a religious El-Dorado [*sic*].”<sup>40</sup>

Christian leaders were particularly concerned about the implications of sharia for the rights of Christian minorities in Northern states.<sup>41</sup> In the highly contentious case of Niger State, with its substantial Christian population, the Right Rev. Jonah G. Kolo, Anglican bishop of Bida in the state capital and the state CAN chairman, urged national Christian leaders to protect Niger State’s Christian minorities against the state government’s expanded sharia policy.<sup>42</sup> Representing Christians, CAN also opposed the Kano State government’s sharia policy, arguing that the state’s implementation of sharia policy would undermine the rights of non-Muslims.<sup>43</sup> A national Christian organization called the Eclectic Movement of Nigeria denounced the sharia-inspired attacks on Christians in Northern states.<sup>44</sup> And Archbishop Peter Akinola, primate of the Nigerian Anglican Church, called for the withdrawal of state funding to religious groups.<sup>45</sup>

As would be expected, Nigeria’s vibrant Pentecostal movement posed the most vociferous Christian opposition to expanded sharia. Many Pentecostal leaders were strongly against applying sharia to criminal law because of its impact on their church members in Northern states. Nigeria’s Pentecostal church movement reflected the shifting political, social, and economic realities that went hand in hand with moving from military rule to democracy. Drawing on new national and transnational networks, in which evangelical churches positioned themselves to engage in pressing national debates (see chapter 6), prominent Pentecostal leaders argued that expanded sharia was a cynical

attempt to recover the North's loss of presidential power following the demise of General Abacha's regime.<sup>46</sup> As they had done to confront the Abacha threat, Pentecostal leaders mobilized their members to confront a new menace of Zamfara sharia with the spiritual force of prayer. They presented Zamfara Governor Sani as spearheading the evil mission to undermine Nigeria's destiny as a prosperous democratic republic.<sup>47</sup> The general superintendent of the Gospel Light Redemption Church, the Rev. Isaac Orihaki, attacked the federal legislature for not protecting Christian minorities against the sharia policies of the Northern states.<sup>48</sup>

The challenge from the Pentecostal movement was most severe in the Middle Belt states and among Northern Christian minorities. In the case of the Middle Belt, Lubeck's apt summary of how religious identity has shaped political conflicts since the nineteenth century is worth quoting at length:

From the 1980s until today [2011], the borderline regions with their mix of Christians and Muslims have been the site of bloody inter-communal violence. Ironically paralleling the Islamization process, the process of Christianization has served to unify smaller ethnic groups in this region and facilitated the formation of the common Christian identity in opposition to a long-dominant Muslim rule. Christian memories of exploitation by Muslim slave raiders in the precolonial era and discrimination since independence stoke grievances that found an effective voice in militant Pentecostal Christianity. Historically, communal violence was based upon ethno-national (e.g. tribal) identities, but as religious identities became increasingly politicized and nurtured by militant global networks, religion gradually displaced ethnicity as an identity marker. . . . The specific disputes provoking these violent conflicts arose from many issues: conversion, land rights, migrant rights, political reputation, control over schools, accusation of blasphemy, political patronage, Nigerian membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference, state subsidies for the hajj and, of course, the place of sharia in the 1987/1988 constitution. In a classic example of mirror image victimization, each side accused the other of seeking to dominate, marginalize, and convert its opponents.<sup>49</sup>

The archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, visited Zamfara State, now widely recognized as the spiritual headquarters of Northern Nigeria's sharia movement. During his visit, Williams expressed misgivings about harsh sharia punishments. Governor Sani defended his state policy, insisting that Zamfara's expanded sharia policy enjoyed the support of the masses of local Muslims.<sup>50</sup> In addition to Christian leaders, many prominent political leaders

from Southern states actively opposed the Northern states' expanded sharia policies because they infringed on the constitutional rights of non-Muslim minorities in Northern states.<sup>51</sup> Vice President Atiku Abubakar, a Northern Muslim from Adamawa (one of the two predominantly Muslim Northern states that did not impose expanded sharia), would drop the political bomb on the sharia matter when he said that the sharia riots were the upshot of political agendas: specifically, that Northern Muslim stalwarts were determined to frustrate the presidency of Obasanjo, a Southern Christian, and cast doubt on the legitimacy of his PDP federal government.<sup>52</sup>

Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka was critical of the Northern states' sharia policies and rendered scholarly views that reaffirmed the popular Christian arguments on the preeminence of national state secularity and citizenship. Soyinka told the nation that expanded sharia ipso facto nullifies Nigeria's existing Penal Code and that it effectively threatened to destroy the legal essence of the Nigerian federal republic. More pointedly, Soyinka wanted President Obasanjo to take legal action against the twelve Northern states on grounds of criminal negligence; he said the governors were neglecting their official responsibility to protect Christian minorities, "indigenes," and Southern Christian immigrants caught in a vast network of religious irrationality.<sup>53</sup> When the bloody Kaduna State riots erupted, state PDP leaders condemned APP politicians for instigating the sharia movement for political gains. Since sharia prohibits interest rates, the new laws were also opposed by commercial banks. When those banks threatened to pull their services from Northern states following the promulgation of expanded sharia, the Zamfara State government announced that the state was on the verge of securing external assistance from Arab states to establish Islamic banks and that Saudi Arabia and Libya were potential business partners.<sup>54</sup>

Some interesting subdebates did occur among Christian groups and within Muslim leaderships. A minority of Christian leaders argued that religious institutions—including sharia courts—have important roles to play in stemming Nigeria's rapidly slipping morality. For example, Olubi Docasta of Zaria's Celestial Church of Christ argued that sharia could remedy the erosion of moral values and serve as an antidote for societal decay. Likewise, Frieder Ludwig points out that some Christian leaders contend expanded sharia is principally against "social vices" such as alcohol and gambling.<sup>55</sup> He writes:

Conservative Nigerian Muslims and conservative Nigerian Christians often agree in the demand to ban "social vices," and in their list of such vices both sides tend to include the consumption of alcohol, gambling, and homosexuality—all issues which are tolerated within the Western

legal systems. In addition, since Christians also witnessed the collapse of law and order in Nigeria and often have personal experiences of crime and corruption, many of them favor severe punishments for criminals and advocate the death penalty and other harsh punishments.<sup>56</sup>

Other Christian critics thought that pro-sharia supporters were self-righteous<sup>57</sup> and that enforcement of new sharia laws would put undue pressure on Nigeria's already weak criminal justice system. Surprisingly, support for moderation in the pursuit of sharia came from an unlikely source in Sokoto State: the grand qadi, who saw that sharia-derived alcohol regulations were not enforceable,<sup>58</sup> in part because alcohol vendors in several Northern states had devised creative ways of packaging and selling alcoholic beverages.<sup>59</sup> Performance evaluations of post-sharia policies showed that "social vices" targeted for elimination did not disappear automatically; expanded sharia did not seriously undermine prostitution, gambling, and alcohol distribution in Northern states, particularly in areas frequented by members of the armed forces.<sup>60</sup> An article in the influential Britain-based periodical *Africa Confidential* indicated that there was a rise in crime but no visible reduction in poverty.<sup>61</sup> Harnischfeger summed up these apparent policy shortcomings of expanded Islamic law many years after sharia's imposition:

Divine justice has not materialized, so the masses of the faithful feel betrayed. Most of them had greeted the proclamation of Sharia with enthusiasm; today they defy many of its laws. The official gender separation is ignored in most places, alcoholic drinks are readily available, and the usual vices are back, though relegated to some hidden corners. . . . Sharia has created legal insecurity; its criminal laws, dress codes and dietary taboos cover a wide area of social activities, but they are enforced only sporadically and arbitrarily.<sup>62</sup>

Some critics went further, not only divorcing sharia from the prevention of crime but also linking it to endemic corruption and political vice by embedding it in the legacy of military rule.<sup>63</sup> Nigerian Christian church leaders condemned sharia as not only violating the religious rights of Christians, but also leaving "unpunished the failings of the powerful and wealthy."<sup>64</sup> Harnischfeger contends that sharia allows for systematic corruption under the guise of centralized zakat (alms) collection.<sup>65</sup> The Southern Nigerian commentator Tee Mac sarcastically queried:

How is it that an unknown cattle thief loses one arm for being caught and tried under sharia, yet Mariam Abacha [former military ruler Sani

Abacha's widow] lives comfortably in her huge mansion? And everybody knows that she is one of the main actors in a multi-million dollar stealing scam or looting of our treasury. Shouldn't all those around her who helped to defraud Nigeria of billions of dollars be tried in sharia courts in their respective states?<sup>66</sup>

For some observers, when the Southern-dominated National Human Rights Commission gave support to expanded sharia with the provision that it would be enforced "on Muslims only," the announcement struck a dismissive tone, something like "Let them do what they want with their people."<sup>67</sup> This attitude of disengaging from Northern Muslims is widely held by the Southern Christian intelligentsia, which argues Northern Islamic culture is antithetical to Southern Nigeria's modernist traditions.<sup>68</sup>

Anti-sharia critics noted many other areas of discrimination against Christians in emirate society.<sup>69</sup> Ludwig cites how Christian hospitals and schools had been converted to Islamic institutions since the 1980s. He also describes a history of violence against Northern Christians and their exclusion from state office.<sup>70</sup> When Niger State, with its significant Christian minority population, expanded sharia, Reverend Kolo, CAN's state chair, stated that "Christians have been witnessing systematic marginalization . . . from senior state appointment."<sup>71</sup> One prominent Christian critic catalogued Zamfara State's discriminatory measures:

no Christian held a position of authority in [Zamfara]. Even the Religious Affairs Ministry set up to look into relevant areas of the two religions had no Christian member/representative, yet there are more than 77 qualified professionals who are indigenes and of the Christian faith. . . . The radio station in the State has closed its doors to Christians. Commercials and paid adverts containing Christian literature are not aired. . . . There is no Christian pilgrims' welfare board. Other restrictions include churches not being allowed to be built on any land sold to them, and Christians being evicted from rented apartments and in some cases not getting houses to rent.<sup>72</sup>

Conversely, Sani maintained that sharia would not have an adverse effect on non-Muslims because he had established a good rapport with Christians, established a Christian Complaints Commission, supported Christian pilgrims, admitted Christian students to the state's university, supported Christian education, and encouraged dialogue between Christians and Muslims.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, however, Zamfara State paid the salaries of imams and funded the

building and maintenance of mosques, while many Christians were forced to relocate outside the state, especially those who ran nonsanctioned businesses.<sup>74</sup> In other Northern states, Christian critics insisted that non-Muslims were subjected to justice under sharia.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the resources of Northern state governments were used to promote various Muslim activities at the expense of Christian groups. As Ludwig writes:

Katsina CAN leaders pointed out that the admission of Christians to public secondary schools in the state is very difficult if not impossible. Thus, Christians have to send their children to other states to get post-primary education. Moreover, Christians cannot enroll in the army and head major establishments or institutions. When the time comes for them to occupy higher positions, Muslim juniors are imposed on them or they are transferred to other places to occupy subordinate positions. There is no provision for Christian programs on the state radio and television stations. The ban on public preaching seems to apply only to Christians. Most importantly, application for building plots for Churches are seldom approved and Christians are often denied burial grounds.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to the task of dealing with cases of discrimination, most Christians found it difficult to tolerate the moral implications of what they considered a medieval penal code that was undermining the progress of their country. While Northern Muslims asserted sharia's humanity, Christians claimed that its draconian rules, outlined in the Penal Code, proved Islamic law promoted cruel and inhumane punishment.<sup>77</sup> This sentiment permeated the Southern Christian print media. For example, the Lagos-based *National Concord* editorialized: "The proclamation of sharia and the series of reports about public flogging of adults, the Governor's threat to expel the local military formation in the state and the specter of beheadings, amputations, honor killings and stoning to death which form part of Islamic *Hudud* gave a picture of Iran rather than a state in the Federal Republic of Nigeria."<sup>78</sup> Yoruba Christian commentator Fred Agbaje, in reference to Zamfara, drew on the Western concept of natural law to condemn the reforms.<sup>79</sup> Elsewhere, Southern Christian commentator Festus Obin thundered: "In this twenty-first century when every country on planet earth is working hard to be technologically recognized, it would be shameful for any geographical enclave or living space to contemplate the introduction of sharia, a fourteenth century code of conduct."<sup>80</sup>

Built into these condemnations was a streak of paternalism, often associated with the Western-oriented Southern Christian elite, especially from

public intellectuals, who predominated in Nigeria's influential Lagos-Ibadan news corridor. The most scathing condescension by Southern Christians was reserved for one of emirate society's most dominant social institutions, the *almajiri* system of Qu'ranic education. They denounced this age-old system as a reflection of the decay of emirate urban life. To these detractors, *almajiri* retarded the development of Northern states, especially at a time when modern education was essential for the modernization of Nigerian society.<sup>81</sup> However, the *almajiri* system has a long history in Northern Nigeria, dating back decades before the Sokoto Jihad, and is integral to the contemporary Qu'ranic educational system, in which Muslim teachers (*mallams*) retain control over their student wards.<sup>82</sup> Many scholars have implicated the *almajiri* system in the wave of religious riots in Northern states from the 1980s onward, especially the 'Yan tatsine riots of the 1980s, the ethno-religious riots in Zangon-Kataf in the early 1990s, the sporadic religious riots in the 1990s, the sharia riots of 2000–2002,<sup>83</sup> and Boko Haram attacks since 2008. Indeed, allegations of the *almajiri* harassing female students at Kaduna Polytechnic in July 2000 appeared to confirm some of these critics' contentions.<sup>84</sup> Thus, many Southern, Middle Belt and Northern Christians viewed Northern Muslim commoners as being in need of liberation from their scheming rulers, who imposed a backward legal system to advance narrow political agendas.<sup>85</sup> One anti-sharia editorial in the Lagos-based *National Concord* notes: "The *almajiris*, urchins, the poor and the oppressed should now be rescued before it is too late."<sup>86</sup> However, this condescension from Southern Christian commentators is ironic, too: they are arguing that the Northern Muslim poor must be "saved" from the system enacted by the very political leaders they elected.

Substantial opposition also was mounted against expanded sharia through established national public agencies. A notable illustration of this was carried out through the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), the mandatory national integration and development service program established by the Gowon regime in 1973. The NYSC promoted national integration by dispatching its new recruits to communities far removed from their birthplace. However, following Zamfara's sharia declaration, some Southern government officials expressed a lack of confidence in the Northern states' ability to ensure the constitutional rights of non-Muslims and discouraged NYSC recruits from their states from taking up their postings in Northern states.<sup>87</sup> Since this program had become critical to the provision of essential services to most states, Sani intervened, promising Zamfara's NYSC members permanent appointment in the state civil service.<sup>88</sup>

## Expanded Sharia: National and Global Connections

In their analyses of Nigeria's post-1999 sharia movement, Paul Lubeck, Ronnie Lipshutz, and Erik Weeks argued that economic globalization and "global Islam" are "mutually constitutive forces." As globalization disrupts the relations between state and society, they contend, nation-states with strong ethno-religious groups and weak state system such as Nigeria, experience uncertainty that can encourage the resurgence of Islamist movements. In Northern Nigeria, this process had, in fact, started with the reformism of Izala in the 1980s, especially among younger, upwardly mobile Muslims. Consequently, Lubeck, Lipshutz, and Weeks contend that reformist Islamic movements like Izala provided the impetus for Nigeria's sharia movement in the formative years of the Fourth Republic.<sup>89</sup>

With these national and global connections, the sharia crisis thus complicated the old ethno-regional and ethno-religious alliances that have sustained power configurations from decolonization in the 1950s to the period of military rule in the 1990s. Indeed, during the previous military regime, fringe militant Southern political movements had gained prominence as important ethno-regional movements opposing the perceived Hausa-Fulani Muslim domination of national politics. One such group was the Yoruba militia movement, the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC). Formed in 1993 after General Babangida annulled Abiola's election as president, OPC embarked on a militant agitation program for "Yoruba freedom" that reached its peak in the late 1990s.<sup>90</sup> In response to such intense identity politics, several Niger Delta militia groups, especially Ijaw, also solidified their power during military rule in the 1990s on the injustice over the exploitation of oil from the Niger Delta region.<sup>91</sup> Following the trend set by these groups, many Christian organizations took on more decided opposition as the sharia crisis intensified in the Northern states. With the apparent weakness of Nigerian state authorities, Southern, Middle Belt and Northern Christian organizations forged global alliances to confront the Northern states' expanded sharia policies.

However, with the exception of Pentecostal churches, Nigerian Christian denominations seemed to gain little from their global connections. Thus, the Vatican worked for peace, but had little influence on the country's diverse Christian communities. Even worse, doctrinal differences drove a wedge between Nigerian and Western Protestant clergy, leaving the latter ineffective during the sharia crisis. For example, Nigeria's chief Anglican, Archbishop Akinola, was joined by his charismatic Ugandan colleague, Bishop Orombi, to lead a global opposition of conservatives in the Anglican Communion (mostly from the Global South) against the liberal theological doctrines of Western Anglican

churches.<sup>92</sup> While denouncing the liberalism of Western Anglican and Episcopalian churches, the outspoken Akinola also led a strong opposition against expanded sharia in Nigeria's Northern states.<sup>93</sup> The effect of these divergent ideological perspectives had been to separate Nigerian mainline churches from their potential allies in the West, crippling the latter's ability to have an important influence on Nigeria's sharia crisis. When the archbishop of Canterbury visited Zamfara State in his capacity as titular head of the global Anglican Church in February 2001, the impact of his lobbying for Christian rights was minimal.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, Nigerian opponents of sharia drew a contrast between Islamic and international law, particularly the global treaties and human rights agreements to which Nigeria is a signatory,<sup>95</sup> including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Agitation by activists following the first court-ordered amputation in Zamfara State led the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights to petition the state government.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, detractors of sharia challenged the claims of sharia advocates that expanded sharia had been effective in other countries.<sup>97</sup> For example, in an editorial in the Lagos-based weekly magazine *Tempo*, an analyst argued that many countries that experienced Islamist revolutions in recent decades were now retreating from it.<sup>98</sup>

Equally, while expanded sharia seemed to have popular appeal in Northern Muslim states, many emirate leaders were ambivalent about the new policies because of their potential to destabilize the country. Indeed, misgivings for expanded sharia sometimes came from unexpected sources. For example, Ibrahim Zakzaky, the popular reformist Muslim cleric who led a militant opposition against the emirate establishment during the Abacha regime, claimed that strong Christian resistance meant that Nigeria was not ready for this type of reform; Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, an influential emirate potentate and Muslim scholar who was installed as emir of Kano in 2014, argued that sharia must stick to its primary thrust of social justice, which the current codifications had not done.<sup>99</sup> These discordant voices provide a glimpse into some Northern Muslim ambivalence over expanded sharia.

### Religious Reconciliation and Coexistence

Despite the clarity of the battle lines between pro-sharia and anti-sharia advocates, especially in Kaduna State, a quiet transition took place in many of the twelve Northern states between October 1999, when Governor Sani first introduced expanded sharia, and late March 2000, when many on both sides

of the conflict began to moderate their strong positions. This trend toward reconciliation after the devastation in Kaduna State was apparent when several Northern Muslim states decided to moderate some of sharia's harshest provisions and some Christian leaders grudgingly accepted that Islamic law reflected aspects of Northern Muslim identity.

With the devastating consequences of the religious rift, many antagonists and protagonists in the confrontation were compelled to moderate their position on Islamic law. Many Northern Muslim leaders were more ambivalent because of the cost of expanded sharia to national unity.<sup>100</sup> For example, following the announcement of Sokoto State's expanded sharia policy, the state government convened a committee of Muslim clerics led by the grand qadi to investigate its implementation. This committee recommended that state authorities postpone the implementation of sharia so that the government could educate local people about the new laws.<sup>101</sup> Although this plea went unheeded, state authorities took on a moderate position, especially with regard to implementing the policy for Christian minorities. Also, because of the political crisis, many Southern Christian elites were willing to concede if the official interpretation of sharia was more "progressive."<sup>102</sup> Thus, the fallout from the sharia riots, especially in Kaduna State, forced Christian leaders to embrace the idea of a more moderate sharia policy that would respect the rights of Christian minorities in Northern states. Consequently, the backlash from the sharia conflict temporarily encouraged some Christian leaders to embrace a more centrist position as the sharia crisis intensified.<sup>103</sup> Progressive Northern theologian Dr. Matthew Hassan Kukah of the Catholic Secretariat seemed to have accepted the idea of a partial expansion of sharia at a Jama'atu Nasril (JNI) seminar in February 2000. Even the relatively shrill Eclectic Movement released a ten-point statement that only denounced the violence of sharia riots, while acknowledging the precedent for Islamic law in the Nigerian judicial system.<sup>104</sup>

With the transfer of presidential power to Obasanjo, a Yoruba Christian, Southern Christians, especially Obasanjo's Yoruba coethnics, soon felt it beneficial to tone down their strong opposition to expanded sharia. Indeed, the unique Yoruba experience with Christianity and Islam was called upon in this regard.<sup>105</sup> With the tragic religious riots in the Northern and Middle Belt states, the remarks of a political scientist at Sokoto's Usman dan Fodio University effectively captured this softening conciliatory trend: "For the Hausa, Islam is a total way of living. For the Yoruba, it's not a total way of living. The cultural aspects of the Yoruba are stronger than religion, whether it's Christianity or Islam."<sup>106</sup> A *New York Times* journalist quoting him may have exaggerated the affinity between Yoruba Christians and Muslims: "Indeed, Yoruba Christians

and Muslims marry each other without a second thought. It is not unusual for Yoruba to have members of both faiths in their families; some even practice both religions. But among Northerners, being a Christian Hausa is considered a contradiction in terms.<sup>107</sup> This relative balance between the world of Yoruba traditions and Islam is evident in the writings of prominent Yoruba Muslim intellectuals such as Lateef Adegbite, the Yoruba secretary-general of Nigeria's leading Islamic organization, Jamat-Ul-Islamiyya; and Tajudeen Gbadamosi, a renowned scholar of Islam at the University of Lagos.<sup>108</sup> Finally, the biggest catalyst to general moderation was one that moved all actors alike: after more than a decade of recurring conflict, the impasse created by the sharia crisis encouraged a rapprochement among various religious and political groups.

Consequently, many national and regional organizations intervened to find solutions to the conflict. For example, a coalition of civil society organizations joined forces with traditional rulers and religious groups to press for a comprehensive peace arrangement. Five Northern states simultaneously agreed to suspend their plans to implement their sharia projects in order to mitigate additional episodes of bloody religious clashes.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, interfaith efforts expanded considerably. In a public show of solidarity, Muslim groups invited Christians on pilgrimages to Mecca. CAN and JNI publicized a joint peace agreement that underscored the common brotherhood between Christians and Muslims, though it also condemned the political manipulations undergirding the sharia crisis.<sup>110</sup> National seminars and conferences were organized by various civic and religious organizations to chart pathways to reconciliation.<sup>111</sup> Several Pentecostal churches urged peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims.<sup>112</sup> The federal government established the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council, and Yusuf Ameh Obaje was appointed as national coordinator.<sup>113</sup> Several prominent intellectuals proposed an Academy of Peace to design a moral code for religious reconciliation between Nigerian Christians and Muslims.<sup>114</sup> One such regional dialogue included a Catholic priest, a Pentecostal theologian, and a Muslim cleric.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, Christians and Muslims throughout Nigeria joined in a cross-country initiative for peace; prominent Igbo Christians such as B. O. Nwabueze embarked on personal missions to engage Muslim organizations in dialogue;<sup>116</sup> and among leading Yoruba Muslims, Lateef Adegbite devoted extensive time to calls for peace and reconciliation.<sup>117</sup>

Catholic and Protestant bishops called on church leaders to teach reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims.<sup>118</sup> Pastor Adeboye, the influential leader of the powerful Pentecostal church the Redeemed Christian Church of God, counseled Christians against carrying out reprisals on mosques and Muslim institutions.<sup>119</sup> The celebrated human rights lawyer

Gani Fawehinmi, a Yoruba Muslim, sued for peace and advised the government to investigate the religious riots.<sup>120</sup> In a burst of uncharacteristic self-awareness, public figures on both sides of the sharia divide said they wanted an end to media sensationalism that exacerbated religious divisions in Northern states.<sup>121</sup>

One of the most dramatic consequences of the sharia imposition was the flight of local capital from Northern states. Zamfara State saw a massive exodus of Igbo traders. As a result also, local banks saw savings evaporate, numerous businesses vanish, and markets shrink.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, when sharia came into force, financial services were no longer able to charge or bear interest, which further displaced banks and other financial institutions from Northern states and brought to a halt businesses that depended on credit and loans. Additionally, everyday economic transactions were seriously impeded by sharia's strict requirement to separate local communities on the bases of gender; women of all faiths attempting to take *okada* (the motorcycle public transportation) were harassed by vigilante sharia enforcers, effectively barring half of the population from the only affordable means of transportation in Northern communities.<sup>123</sup> In Kaduna State, as a result of the riots, over forty thousand Southerners fled, including numerous students, leaving the state's universities empty, and skyrocketing gas prices prompted bus drivers to charge exorbitant prices for transit, adding to the general economic chaos.<sup>124</sup> State government losses were compounded when churches affected by the violence sued for damages, after state authorities promised to reimburse 20 percent of the reconstruction costs of destroyed places of worship.<sup>125</sup>

Nigeria's international image was of course compromised by the recurrent violence. Conscious of the harm to foreign investment, the federal government hired international public relations firms to reassure Western partners that Nigeria was still safe for business. Professor Tam David-West, a former petroleum minister from the Niger Delta region, captured the sentiments of most observers on the economic implications of the sharia crisis:

The collective madness and sadism displayed on the screens of global television cannot be inviting signals for foreign investments in our limping economy. Only a compound fool or a mad entrepreneur will invest in a country with doubtful sociopolitical stability; a country so primitive in the manifestation of its hate. And no amount of foreign globe-trotting or sweet sermons and beautiful assurances for investment in our economy can impress any serious prospective businessman. It's as simple as that. Is this the Nigeria that anyone should be proud of? Is this the Nigeria whose "positive" image (laundered, obviously) we want to sell to

the outside world, inviting them with open arms, to bask in the sunshine of a said fledgling democracy? We should all hide our heads in shame.<sup>126</sup>

Much of the debate that ensued following the imposition of sharia in the Northern states effectively tilted national attention toward the parlous state of political instability and massive economic disruption in pro-sharia states. Many analysts also said that sharia was a grossly misplaced priority given the severe underdevelopment of Northern states. In responding to criticisms,<sup>127</sup> Zamfara Governor Sani unveiled an ambitious state development policy. Many of the sharia states followed the Zamfara example, publicizing various social welfare programs. In fact, the Bauchi government suspended the implementation of its sharia policy because it diverted resources away from essential social services.<sup>128</sup> These policy pronouncements may have been motivated by political expediency rather than a genuine commitment to development, but at least the sharia conflict provoked a new discourse on governance in some Northern states.<sup>129</sup>