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# **ISLAMIC ACTORS AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

**Policy Paper N°1**

**March 2013**

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Based at the University of Oxford and the development Research and Project Centre in Kano, the **Nigeria Research Network (NRN)** connects European, American, and Nigerian academics and practitioners who have extensive experience with empirical and development-oriented research in northern Nigeria. (<http://www.geh.ox.ac.uk/nrn>)

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## Executive Summary

This policy paper synthesises research findings from the first phase of the IRP-Abuja research project and suggests avenues for policy intervention based on these findings. The first phase research consists mainly of three ‘mapping’ papers of Islam in northern Nigeria and one literature review on interfaith relations in the region. Seven main themes were derived from these papers: demography, diversity, politics, education, women, conflict, and conflict resolution. On the basis of the research findings, policy interventions were suggested in four key areas: (a) philosophy of intervention; (b) education; (c) peace building; and (d) intellectual exchanges.

Although Nigerian population censuses have been notoriously unreliable, all existing data indicates that the northern part of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim. There are significant variations between the northern States, however, as the states in the North West zone have the highest percentage of Muslims in their total population, followed by the North East and the North Central States in that order. Data is even more contested when it comes to Christian-Muslim percentages in the population, but most surveys indicate that the Christians command a minority in most states in the North West and North East; only in some North Central states do Christians constitute a majority of the population. Religion is highly significant for the self-identification of most Nigerians and both the Christian and Muslim communities are highly internally diverse. Within Nigerian Islam, the main groupings are the Sufi brotherhoods, anti-Sufi reformists, the ‘neutral’ Sunni, other Sunni minorities, the non-Sunni ‘Shia’, Ahmadiyya, and the Quraniyyun. In the past, there were also millenarian sects like the *maitatsine*. Recently, the region has witnessed the rise of violent Islamist group, Boko Haram.

The Nigerian state is largely ‘secular’, but in practice religion and politics are tightly interwoven. In the Nigerian context, secularism is often seen as striking an equal distance between Islam and Christianity, and the avoidance of bias in favour of one or the other. Within this perspective of religious equi-distance, the followers of traditional African religions are often erased from official view, even when they are a significant, but dwindling, proportion of the population. This brief describes how all northern Nigerian States are host to significant Islamic (and Christian) institutions, including customary *sharia* courts, Islamic traditional authorities or Emirs, Pilgrim Welfare Boards, and Islamic Religious Preaching Boards. The twelve States that introduced *sharia* criminal law after 1999, moreover, have constructed a great variety of additional Islamic institutions within their State and local governments, including *Sharia* Commissions, Hisbah Boards, and *Zakat* and *Hubusi* Commissions. The efficacy of *sharia* implementation is widely criticised. At the same time,

however, *sharia* is also arguably the most divisive issue in the political relations between Christians and Muslims in the north. No other single issue brings so clearly to the fore the mutual fear of religious persecution and political domination, central to all interfaith (and interethnic) relations in Nigeria.

Most of the time, everyday relations between Christians and Muslims are peaceful and cooperative. However, interfaith relations have also repeatedly been tainted by competition and collective violence. There is a huge, and growing, body of literature that analyses these cases of conflict and violence, summarised in the literature review produced by this project. It is important that every instance of violent conflict be analysed as a temporal process, contingent upon its own particular context. At the same time, the literature review also highlighted factors that are significant in several different cases of collective violence, across the northern region. Most importantly, such factors include socio-economic inequalities between ethnic and religious groups, or 'horizontal' inequalities, overlapping identities, 'indigeneity', the politicisation of religion and ethnicity, state failures and economic crisis, youth unemployment, and resource competition.

Irrespective of their religious differences, however, most Muslims (and Christians, in fact) agree on the importance of education for their children and respective communities. For most Muslims, education primarily involves Quranic education, either through 'traditional' Quranic schools or *Islamiyya* education. Increasingly, however, Muslim parents are beginning to demand good-quality 'modern' education in subjects such as mathematics, science, and English. Unfortunately, the supply of both private and public education is completely unable to meet these growing demands, especially as girls and women are also increasingly expected to attend school. Perhaps partly as a consequence, the position of Muslim women in northern Nigeria remains constrained; even as reformist Islamic movements (e.g. *Izala*) and women's NGOs like the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) strive for their emancipation.

## I. Key Findings: Islam and interfaith relations in northern Nigeria

This brief synthesises the findings of the first phase of research conducted by the IRP-Abuja team. More specifically, it presents policy-relevant aspects of the mapping reports of Islam in Nigeria's three northern geo-political zones and the literature review on interfaith relations. As such, this paper quotes and summarises the three zonal mapping studies, presented by Phil Ostien (2012a, 2012b), Muhammad Nur Alkali *et al* (2012), and Mukhtar Bunza and Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2012). It also incorporates the literature review on interfaith relations in northern Nigeria by Mustapha, Diprose and Ehrhardt (2012). For more detailed information on any of the issues discussed in this brief, the full papers and a film on *almajirai* are (or will shortly be) available at [www.geh.ox.ac.uk/nrn](http://www.geh.ox.ac.uk/nrn). The brief focuses on seven main issues, namely those of demography, diversity, politics, education, gender, conflict, and conflict resolution.

### 1. Religious Demographics

The religious demography of the country is a hotly contested issue. The federal government has had to respond to this situation by removing questions on religion from the census. Nigeria's three northern geo-political zones comprise the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja and 19 states, namely, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau (North Central); Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe (North East); and Kano, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Jigawa, Katsina, and Zamfara (North West). These territories range in population from almost 10 million people in Kano down to about 1.5 million for the FCT. In ethnic and religious terms this is a very heterogeneous part of Nigeria, but the precise ethnic and religious

**Table 1: % of Muslims by State, per the 1963 census and the % of Muslim senior executive officials in 2011**

Present State	1963	2011
	% Muslim	% of Senior Executive Office Holders who are Muslim
<b>NORTH CENTRAL ZONE</b>		
Kwara	76	78
Niger	62	91
Kogi	38	48
Nasarawa	30	65
Plateau	26	16
Benue	3	0
<b>NORTH EAST ZONE</b>		
Yobe	95	100
Borno	88	97
Bauchi	83	97
Gombe	75	73
Adamawa	35	65
Taraba	26	59
<b>NORTH WEST ZONE</b>		
Sokoto	99	100
Zamfara	99	100
Jigawa	98	100
Kano	97	100
Katsina	95	100
Kebbi	86	100
Kaduna	56	75



demographics remain a highly contested subject. Although it is clear that, in religious terms, Islam and Christianity are dominant, no Nigerian census since 1963 has gathered data on religious affiliation. The 1973 and 1991 census results were discredited. Only in 2006 was the population census again conducted, but no questions were asked on ethnic or religious identity given the experience of the politicisation and rejection of preceding census results (Suberu 2001, 157; Slocum-Bradley 2008, 50). Aggregation of the 1963 provinces for which census data was gathered, into the current states of the northern geo-political zones, yields the following results on religious affiliation by current state in 1963.

Table 1 presents the percentages of Muslims of the population of all northern Nigerian States as per the 1963 survey. It also presents the percentages of senior executive office holders who are Muslims, as an indication of the political importance of Muslims in the States in 2011. This is obviously a problematic indicator, likely to overstate the majority religion (be it Islam or Christianity) due to the political exclusion of minorities (e.g. through indigeneship) and the first-past-the-post electoral system. Moreover, the figures in table 1 may not only overstate the majority religion, but also ignore affiliation to ‘traditional’ religions. While it is likely that this group has dwindled since the last survey in 1963, some people in northern Nigerian still combine some aspects of their African traditional beliefs with their Christianity or Islam. As such, African traditional religions still play some role in northern Nigerian society.

While we can be fairly certain that Muslims are a majority in most northern states, the proportion of Muslims and Christians in the national population has been a sour point in interfaith relations as each faith seeks to wear the toga of the majority. The politics of national religious demographics is a sensitive and polarizing issue that has affected even the Muslim majority states of the north. In the politicized climate of claims and counter-claims, it has often been difficult to sift the truth from the half-truths. Such has been the level of tension that after 1963, religious affiliation (along with ethnicity), has been removed from the census. We are therefore left without

any firm evidential basis to address the issues thrown up by religious demographics. Though the available fragmentary evidence give us some idea about current trends, they are far from conclusive and they should properly be understood as educated speculations. Starting from more

<b>Table 2: % in national population in two censuses</b>		
	<b>1953</b>	<b>1963</b>
<b>Muslims</b>	45.3	47.5
<b>Christians</b>	21.4	34.5
<b>African Traditional Religions</b>	33.3	18.3

*Source:* <http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Global-Christianity-Nigeria.aspx>

reliable evidence, Table 2 summarises the religious demographic data from the 1953 and 1963 censuses.

This census trend suggests that between 1953 and 1963, many more followers of African traditional religions converted to Christianity, compared to those who converted to Islam. With no credible census data after 1963, and the final removal of questions on religious affiliation, we have very little evidence to go on. Instead, what we have are very contradictory assertions. For example, the CIA's *World Factbook* asserts that Muslims are 50% of the population, Christians, 40%, and indigenous beliefs 10%, the US State Department claims that 'there is no agreement on the number of total Christians or Muslims in Nigeria.'<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, we are left with informed speculations based on surveys conducted originally for other purposes. But recent surveys also find varied – and even contradictory - results on the share of each religion within the population. The most sophisticated survey is the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), given the rigorous sampling method used, and the large sample size of all the surveys. Yet, while estimates from the 2003 NDHS put the Muslim population at 50.4%, similar estimates from the 2008 NDHS put the Muslim population at 45%! It is not possible for both figures to be correct as the percentage of Muslims did not drop so drastically over that five-year period. Still within the realms of informed speculation, the Pew Foundation has suggested that Muslims will constitute 51.5% of the population by 2030. This is based on evidence which suggests that Muslim women have a higher fertility rate than their non-Muslim sisters; an average of six to seven children, compared to an average of five. The higher fertility rate is based on the fact that Muslim women tend to have lower levels of education, lower birth control use, and tend to marry earlier (15.9 years), compared to non-Muslim women (19.5 years)

Based on the available evidence, therefore, it is difficult to point the pendulum in one direction or the other. In the charged atmosphere of conflict over religious demographics, it is just as well that that item is left off the national census. Until such a time that the topic becomes less emotive or greater certainty and confidence can be introduced into the census process, our suggestion is that the current status-quo of omitting questions on religion should be maintained. The conflict over religious demographics is also closely tied to the other key issues in interfaith relations covered in this brief.

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<sup>1</sup> Laolu Akande, 'U.S. heightens debate on Nigeria's Christians, Muslims population', <http://www.nairaland.com/346015/u.s-heightens-debate-nigerias-christians>

Irrespective of the contestation around religious group size in Nigeria, many sources note the deep religiosity of Nigerians of all denominations (e.g. Falola 1998; Ibrahim and Mu'azzam 2000; Last 2007, 2008; Ehrhardt 2007, 2011). Both for Islam and Christianity, Ibrahim (1991) and Ibrahim and Mu'azzam (2000) have noted an increase of fundamentalist beliefs over the past three decades. Islamic reformist movements with fundamentalist beliefs have been analysed by Clarke and Linden (1984) and Kane (2003), who have explained them in reference to the generational resistance against *Sufi* dominance; the way in which Islamic fundamentalism presents an ideology of social change and public morality; and the impact of external influences. This fundamentalism has not only led to a "veritable 'explosion' in the number and activities of clergy" (Ibrahim 1991: 121). There is also increased competition amongst the clergy for influence and relevance, and increasing commercialization of the spiritual and ritual realm, leading to a political economy of religious practice which some have termed the 'prayer economy'. Furthermore, there is also the hardening opposition between Christians and Muslims and, partly as a consequence, the increasing importance of the 'umbrella organisations' such as the *Jama'atul Nasril Islam* (JNI) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

## **2. Diversity in Nigerian Islam**

Despite widespread public perception, the Muslim population of northern Nigeria is far from being a single monolithic unit. They are divided into several distinct groups, movements, or sects, who are also divided within themselves. Currently, however, many northern Muslims agree that Islam has one set of roots – even if its branches may show considerable differences. Most of the Muslims in the region can be classified as Sunni Muslims of the Maliki school of law; there are, however, also non-Sunnis, including (quasi) Shia, Ahmadiyya, Qur'aniyyun, and other smaller sects. Moreover, the Sunnis are divided amongst themselves, into Sufis, anti-Sufis, independents (or 'neutral Sunnis'), and several other, smaller groups. It is virtually impossible to estimate the relative sizes of any of these groups, due to a lack of reliable data.

### **2.1 Sufism**

Sufi groups have two key characteristics: their mysticism and their veneration of saints. Sufis are defined as:

Muslims who take seriously God's call to perceive his presence both in the world and in the self ... [and] stress inwardness over outwardness, contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social interaction (J. Esposito, cited in J. Hill, 2010, 16-7).

The Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya brotherhoods are the two main Sufi organisations in northern Nigeria. Our mapping exercises suggest that the majority of Muslims in northern Nigeria affiliate to either of these two religious Orders. Both have a long history in the region with the Qadiriyya being strong in the Sokoto Jihad movement and preceding the Tijaniyya which gained a toehold from around 1820. Both Orders exist in all northern States; currently, the mapping papers suggest that the Tijaniyya are more numerous than the Qadiriyya. Both groups are differentiated by their idiosyncratic prayer rituals; there are also some theological differences between them. Some of these are discussed in some detail in Bunza and Mustapha (2012). Following Ostien (2012b: 12), the two Orders:

are not formal constructs in any legal sense, but loose networks of networks, whose nodes are leaders claiming spiritual power and religious authority from their own spiritual forebears with whom they are linked by *silsilas*, chains of authority. Around each leader followers gather; the more followers [and networks] a leader acquires, the more powerful he becomes. [...] The rules for followers are not onerous at the lower levels of involvement and people in all walks of life can join or associate with the brotherhoods and pursue the sort of religious life they offer at the level that suits them. Many then find further outlets for their religious energies as informed by their *tariqa*, by forming other organisations dedicated to pious works which they themselves support and manage.

Until the 1970s and the rise of anti-sufi Muslim groups, much of the internal politics of the Muslim communities of northern Nigeria was shaped by the competition for followership and influence between the different networks that constituted the many branches of Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya (see Paden, 1973). Today, however, the dominance of the Sufi orders has dwindled due to the rise of competing groups, pushing them to work more together rather than in competition with each other.

## **2.1 Anti-Sufism**

The Sufi Orders were the dominant Islamic groups in pre-colonial and colonial northern Nigeria. They represented the embedding and domestication of Islam within African conditions. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, a new generation of Muslims began to organise themselves in opposition to these groups. The reformist anti-sufi groups challenged the two key principles of the Sufi Orders: their mysticism and their veneration of saints. The most important organisational expression of this opposition was *Izala*, or in full *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'a Wa'ikamatis Sunnah* (Society for the Eradication of Innovation and the Re-establishment of the Sunna), abbreviated as JIBWIS. Much has been written on the *Izala* and the mapping reports discuss the organisation and its theological beliefs in much detail,

including the history of its split into *Izala A* and *B* (and re-unification in December 2011), as well as the (violent) confrontations between the Sufis and the anti-Sufis. As Ostien (2012b: 18) explains:

*Izala* was formally founded in 1978 in Jos [...] and explicitly defined itself as anti-Sufi: that was what the “eradicating innovation” part of its name meant: identifying, preaching against, winning people away from, and hoping to suppress the alleged deviations and superstitions and magical practices of the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, all said to be *bid’a*: the wrong kind of innovations, amounting to heresy or even apostasy. What *Izala* proposed to put in place of all the Sufi complications was a more austere and originalist and allegedly more Godly form of Islam, mildly Wahabi, which was also modernist: an up-to-date Muslim Protestantism if you like, adapting a purified Islam to modern conditions.

The *Izala* has been more anti-Tijaniyya than they have been anti-Qadiriyya. This might be for two reasons: the Tijaniyya are the dominant demographic force within northern Nigerian Islam; and the Qadiriyya are associated with the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio - a person whom it would be impolitic to openly attack.

### **2.3 ‘Neutral’ Sunni**

The independent, or ‘neutral’, Sunni Muslims are “neither a corporation nor even a network of networks: it is defined only by exclusion, by the non-participation of its members in any *tariqa* or in *Izala*. [...] This leaves open a wide field of opinion, ranging from people from Muslim backgrounds, “cultural Muslims”, who have more or less given up religion altogether as many in the west have done, to pious Sunnis, as learned and austere in their practice as *Izala* might wish, who do not believe in picking fights” (Ostien 2012b: 21). According to Alkali *et al* (2012), the activities of ‘neutral’ Muslims “are centred around certain *ulama* who command tremendous respect from the [entire Muslim] public but have no relationships with any of the sects or the rulers”. Their numbers in the North Central were guessed to lie between 5% and 20% of the different States; in the North East, their presence was ‘guesstimated’ at between 2% and 8%. The authors of the mapping reports thus estimate the proportion of ‘neutral’ Muslims to be a small minority of Muslims in the North Central and North East zones; other data, however, suggests that this group may be larger in some parts of the north (Ehrhardt 2011).

### **2.4 Other Sunni Groups**

In addition to the three main categories of Sunni Muslims in northern Nigeria, the mapping reports also described several smaller groups that are generally considered part of the larger Sunni community. Some of these Sunni groups are differentiated from the main Sunni bloc

along ethnic or theological grounds. For example, the ethnic Yoruba Muslims can be found in some ethnically-specific Islamic groups. Bunza and Mustapha (2012) highlight the importance of *Nasrul-Lahi Fatih Society of Nigeria (NASFAT)*, described by Soares (2009, 190) as ‘a Yoruba Muslim organization, arguably even a form of Yoruba Muslim cultural nationalism.’ The organization is found ‘anywhere where there are large concentrations of Yoruba in Nigeria’. Ostien (2012b) also describes the Ahmadiyya and Nuruddeen society in the North Central zone, both of which are Yoruba-dominated, while Alkali *et al* (2012) note the existence of the Ahmadiyya, Ansarudeen, and Nawairudeen groups within the North East zone. Darul Islam is an Islamic group that lived near Mokwa, in Niger State, before it was forcibly disbanded by the Niger State government in 2009 after the Boko Haram clash with security forces in Maiduguri. Its leaders were repatriated to other States, including Kano. The movement is described in detail by Ostien (2012b: 24-5).

The Mahdiyya is another marginal Muslim sect, based largely in Kano. As Bunza and Mustapha (2012) point out, these are followers of Muhammed Ahmad b. Sayyid of Sudan, who proclaimed himself as the long-expected Mahdi, the God-guided One of Islam, sent as the Saviour of Muslims as the end of time approached. Though Sayyid died in 1885, his followership in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria remained a thorn in the flesh of the British colonial administration. A tiny remnant of the movement remains active in Kano today. The final example of a Sunni group in the north is Boko Haram, or *Jama’atu Ahlul Sunna li Da’awati wal Jihad* as those who identify with this movement prefer to call it. Given its violent attacks throughout northern Nigeria over the past few years, there has been considerable academic and policy interest in this group. Our mapping reports show, however, that in its current incarnation, *Boko Haram* is very much an extremist and marginal movement in the wider spectrum of Islam in the region. The organisation has strong regional roots, with its main base of support in the far northeast of the country, but its influence has spread to parts of the North West and North Central. Reports in the press suggest that a faction or factions of the group might have established close links with militant Islamist groups in Mauritania, Mali and Somalia.

## **2.5 Non-Sunni Groups**

Having outlined the main groups that constitute Sunni Islam in northern Nigeria, this brief has covered the vast majority of Muslims who live in the region. However, the mapping reports also described a few groups who fall outside the mainstream category of Sunni, which will be discussed here. As Ostien (2012b) notes, there are probably very few orthodox Shia Muslims in Nigeria, even though many Sunni Muslims will suggest the opposite. There is, however, a group of Muslims who do not identify as Sunni and who are often classified by others as Nigerian Shia: Sheikh Ibrahim el Zakzaky’s Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN).

They are ambiguous about their stance on the main tenets of Shia doctrine, but at the same time express a clear affinity to Iran and Iranian Muslims. Though they have been known to boast that they can organize processions with as many as 500,000 people (Hill, 2010, 24), they only constitute a small minority of Muslims, and mostly located in the cities.

According to Alkali *et al* (2012: 16), *Ahmadiyya* are a controversial Muslim group in the northeast: many Muslims do not even consider them to be Muslims, because the group's founder is alleged to have declared himself a prophet. According to Clarke and Linden (1983, 49), the:

Movement was founded by Ghulam Ahmed in northern India in the late nineteenth century. His claims were to be the Mahdi, the promised Messiah, and to be an avatar of the Hindu God, Krishna, as well as being a re-appearance of the Prophet Muhammad.

Ostien (2012b: 12) describes that the group has been in Nigeria since the 1920s, but that "there are few of them in the North Central zone. [...] The western part of Kogi State, inhabited by peoples closely related to the Yoruba (Okun) seems to have the greatest concentration of Ahmadis anywhere in this zone". Overall, however, Ahmadiyya constitutes only a tiny minority of the overall Muslim population of northern Nigeria, and most of them are probably of Yoruba ethnicity. The Ahmadiyya are particularly noted for their missionary zeal in spreading access to western education and health services.

In general, the *Quraniyyun* are those Muslims who reject the significance of the teachings of the Prophet (the Hadith) and accept only the Quran as the word of Allah. There appears to be two main examples of this doctrine: the 'Nigerian Submitters' and the *Kala Kato*, the latter meaning 'A mere man (i.e. Muhammad) said it'. The followers of *Kala Kato* are largely characterised by the exclusive reliance on traditional, Quranic education, to the exclusion of all other forms of schooling and knowledge. They are a small minority of Muslims in northern Nigeria and are largely young and poor, living peacefully in the margins of society. *Kala Kato* and *Darul Islam* are often difficult to differentiate from each other. By contrast the Nigerian Submitters are a very different social group, comprising largely "well-educated academics and business people well acquainted with the internet" (Ostien 2012b: 14). In the North East, they were reported only in Borno State; in the North Central States, there was only one mention of them in Nasarawa State. Because of its connections to the US-based Egyptian Rashid Khalifa, Alkali *et al* (2012: 16) notes that "most Muslims allege that it is America's attempt to destroy Islam by distorting the content of the Quran". Little has been heard of the group in Borno since the death of Justice Isa Othman in 2009.

At the more heretical end of the spectrum lies the *Maitatsine* sect, whose members are not visible these days, though a few of them must still be lurking around. The sect caused a tremendously violent conflict in Kano leading to the death of over 4000 people in December 1980 (Clarke & Linden, 1983, 119) and the leader's death led to posthumous violence in Borno and Adamawa States. The sect was allegedly noted for many heretical views, including the suggestion that Muslims could pray facing any direction, and the view that any Muslim who wore a watch or a button was a *kaffir*. Both the pacifist *kala kato* and the violent *Maitatsine* call to mind an earlier sect called the *bani Israela*, a:

‘socially highly conservative, almost contemplative’ group that had ‘moved out of the Muslim community into idiosyncratic interpretations of the Qur’an which led them to read Christian scriptures with great interest as the “prophecy of the prophet Isa”’ (Clarke & Linden, 1983, 116).

This sect was still around in the early 1980s, though no traces of it were found during the mapping exercises; but its non-visibility does not mean that remnants of it do not continue to exist.

The multiplicity of Islamic groups and orientations is often lost in the blunt ‘we-they’ politics of religious polarization in contemporary Nigeria. Nigerian Muslims do not share a common attitude towards peaceful co-existence with other faiths. Similarly, the Catholic Church and the Africanist Churches like the *Aladura* seem more favourably disposed to cooperative interfaith relations with Muslims than, say, the Pentecostal churches. We suggest therefore that wherever possible, public policy should recognize the multiplicity of Muslim – and Christian – views as a way of limiting the tendency towards the wholesale and artificial polarization of the faiths.

### **3. Islam, Politics, and the Nigerian State**

Even though the Nigerian constitution provides for a considerable measure of ‘secularism’, it is difficult to understand Nigerian politics and the state without reference to religion. In most of the northern States, the religion with most political ties is Islam, save for those States where Muslims do not constitute a substantial majority (i.e. Plateau, Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Taraba, and Adamawa). In all States but Benue, however, Muslims occupy elected political offices. Besides such elected political offices, the ties between Islam and politics show great variation between the States. The mapping reports provide many examples of this diversity, so suffice it here to outline the main features of ‘official Islam’ in the north. In this regard, it is useful to distinguish between those features that characterise all northern States, and those



that are present only in the 12 States that, after 2000, have re-introduced the *sharia* criminal code.

### **3.1 Islamic Institutions I: All (or Most) Northern States**

Due to the long historical presence of Islamic communities in most of the northern States, Islam has many institutional expressions that predate the recent, and controversial, re-introduction of the *sharia* criminal code. As illustrations, the mapping reports have provided examples of the following four Islamic institutions.

- Customary courts that apply Islamic civil law to local Muslims, as well as *Sharia* Courts of Appeal where appeals are heard in cases where Islamic civil law has been applied. Ostien (2012b: 32) describes these courts thus: “ ‘Area Courts’ [...] are the successors, since 1967/68, of the northern Native Courts of colonial days. All parts of the zone also have High Courts and Magistrate’s Courts. In all these courts litigants in civil cases have choice-of-law options, and one body of law they can choose (or that the court can choose for them) is Islamic law. [A]ll the northern states [...] now have their own *Sharia* Courts of Appeal, inherited from the Northern Region under the virtually identical statute”. This includes all northern States except Benue which shares a Court of Appeal with Plateau State.
- In northern Nigeria, ‘traditional’ authorities continue to be a factor of importance – even if their former political power has been seriously diluted after independence. Often, the Emir is considered the symbolic head of the Islamic community in his Emirate. It is therefore significant to note that all northern States, bar Benue and Kogi in the North Central zone, have traditional rulers who derive their position partly from their Islamic credentials. In most States these traditional rulers are Emirs, but Ostien (2012b) notes other examples of Muslim traditional leaders in Kogi and Plateau States. As Blench (2006) and Ehrhardt (2007) have argued, the main function of traditional rulers is conflict mediation. In this role, it is a considerable risk for traditional rulers to become involved in politics, because of the increasingly precarious basis of their legitimacy and authority.
- Ostien (2012b: 35) notes that “all states of the North Central Zone have statutory Muslim Pilgrim Welfare Boards, whose job, in conjunction with national authorities, is to manage the *hajj* (pilgrimage) every year, for pilgrims coming from that state. There are parallel ... Christian Pilgrim Welfare Boards managing the annual pilgrimages of Christians to the Holy Land”. Although North East and North West mapping reports do not comment on these Boards specifically, similar organisations exist in all northern States. They are organised under the federal umbrella of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria; most also have Christian equivalents, in order to balance the distribution of state funding for religious purposes.

- Many States in northern Nigeria have Islamic Religious Preaching Boards, or equivalent organisations, including Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, and Zamfara. Ostien (2012b) describes the functions and mandate of the Niger Islamic Religious Preaching Board in some detail, as a representative case study for the institution throughout the region. In brief, its function is to regulate Islamic preachers and organisations, in order to counter such destructive movements as *Maitatsine* in Kano in the 1980s and *Boko Haram* in the contemporary era. While the administrative motivation behind these institutions is clear, there is also an obvious tension between them and the freedom of religion enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. Perhaps partly as a result of this tension, Ostien (2012b: 34) observes that the Preaching Boards have not been very effective lately.

### **3.2 Islamic Institutions II: 12 ‘Sharia’ States**

As noted before, the programme of *sharia* re-implementation since 1999-2000 in twelve of northern Nigeria’s States<sup>2</sup> has been most extensively detailed by Ostien (2007). The central legal element of all twelve *sharia* programmes was to re-introduce the Islamic criminal code into the States’ judicial systems; previous versions of *sharia* covered only civil matters. However, one of the most important conclusions from Ostien’s work and from the mapping reports conducted as part of the IRP-Abuja is that there are many significant differences in the actual design of *sharia* between the States. Ostien’s (2007) table on *Ulama* institutions in Vol. VI of his series lists all *sharia* institutions present in all the twelve States<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, even if the institutional designs show similarities, there are great differences in the efficacy with which the institutions have been created and implemented.

Because of this diversity in design and implementation, it is difficult to draw general conclusions about the state of *sharia* law in the ‘*sharia*’ States. Two such conclusions do present themselves, however. First, both Ostien (2012b) and Alkali *et al* (2012) argue that in terms of the actual implementation of *sharia* law in their societies, none of the States have been very effective. Public support for *sharia* was high, at least among Muslims, because people believed that its implementation would bring morality and social justice back into

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<sup>2</sup> The twelve *sharia* States, which have all more or less intensified their efforts to implement *sharia* law after 1999-2000, include Zamfara, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Bauchi, Borno, Yobe, Kebbi, Jigawa, Gombe, Niger and, to a lesser extent, Kaduna.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.sharia-in-africa.net/media/publications/sharia-implementation-in-northern-nigeria-volume-six/Table%20of%20Ulama%20Institutions\\_final.pdf](http://www.sharia-in-africa.net/media/publications/sharia-implementation-in-northern-nigeria-volume-six/Table%20of%20Ulama%20Institutions_final.pdf)

Nigerian politics. But as Alkali *et al* (2012: 26) argue: “there appears to be a large gap between public expectations of *sharia* and what is offered as *sharia* by the States practising the legal code in north-eastern Nigeria. [...] Hence *sharia* implementation in Borno, Bauchi, and Yobe was increasingly regarded as a mockery with the usage of terms like ‘political *sharia*’.”

Second, it is clear that where the *sharia* code has been implemented, there is a considerable and as yet unresolved tension between the Islamic laws and the ‘secular’ laws that exist in parallel. In theory, the State *sharia* laws should, ultimately, be subordinate to the constitution and the federal laws designed and derived therefrom. Moreover, *sharia* laws should only apply to Muslim Nigerians, and to those non-Muslims who choose to be adjudicated under its mandate. However, in practice the relationship between *sharia* and federal law differs from State to State and depends on the choices of individual legal practitioners involved. One of the consequences of this legal uncertainty is that, in some circumstances, *sharia* laws may be used for discriminatory purposes, for example in localities where both Muslims and non-Muslims reside (which, in effect, is true for most cities in northern Nigeria). Worth mentioning is the acute tension between Christian beer-sellers (often of Igbo ethnicity) and the *Hisbah* in cities like Kano.

### **3.3 Politics and Interfaith Relations**

Most of the time, Nigerian Christians and Muslims live together harmoniously. However, it is also undeniably true that Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria have increasingly been tainted by competition and conflict. Two forms of religious contention have received the most analytical attention in the interfaith literature: political competition and violent conflict. This section zooms in on the relationship between religion, political competition, and the state, while the subsequent section focuses on violent conflict. Three concepts have dominated both the political and academic debates on this relationship: domination and competition, secularism, and *sharia*.

Domination or the fear thereof, as Ludwig (2008) argues, is at the heart of the national political struggle between Nigerian Christians and Muslims<sup>4</sup>. Christians fear the historical legacy of northern, Muslim political dominance in the Nigerian federation, while Muslims fear the socio-economic dominance of Nigeria’s southern regions as well as the global

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<sup>4</sup> This fear of domination also shapes relationships between different Christian groups and between Muslim groups. However, their competition often plays out at lower societal levels than the federation, such as in State or Local Government politics.

dominance of 'the West' and its secular or, more polemically, anti-religious values and political institutions. Due to the strength of the Nigerian state and its pivotal role in distributing the oil resources, these mutual fears of religious dominance have not only led to "a battle for the control of 'theological space'" (Ibrahim 1991: 125), but also to political competition – what Ibrahim (1989) referred to as the politicisation of religion (see also Enwerem 1995). After the Biafran war, constitutional reform severed some of the direct links between political parties and religious affiliations at the national level, for example by prohibiting political parties from adopting a party religion. There is therefore no particular religious colouration for most Nigerian political parties at the national level. At the local level, however, the population of the state is often sufficiently homogeneous to allow, and even motivate, political parties to use religion as a campaigning tool.

Due to the mutual fear of religious domination, manipulation of religion for political motives therefore continues to be an integral part of Nigerian politics. Secularism and *sharia* have become the two central points of contention in the religious/political competition, questioning and contesting the very core of the Nigerian state. Judging by the sheer volume of writing on *sharia* in Nigeria, its continuous salience in the country's public debates, and the entrenched intensity of the positioning in these debates, it may be argued that *sharia* is the most salient aspect of the politicised relation between Nigeria's different religious communities. And as may be expected from such a salient and controversial political issue, opinions and interpretations of *sharia* have only become more divergent. In academic terms, the following clusters of analysis may be discerned.

- First, descriptive analyses of *sharia* law as a legal and juridical system (e.g. Ostien 2007; Paden 2005). These interpretations largely circumvent *sharia* as a political issue and consider it on the basis of its substantive characteristics as a system of law, jurisprudence, legal process, and, to a lesser extent, governance (Ostien 2006).
- Second, historical interpretations of *sharia* as a near-continuous feature of Nigeria's northern region. As such, the recent re-introduction of the 'full' *sharia* may be interpreted as a way, for Nigerian Muslims in the north, to reclaim their historical political traditions that were subordinated under colonial and post-colonial 'secular' rule (e.g. Last 2008). Using the results of the Afrobarometer surveys, Kirwin (2009) suggests that this support has only increased since 2001, especially – but not exclusively! – in the states that implemented the *sharia* penal code. Interestingly, he finds that even among Christians, about one in every four Christians now support *sharia* as a legal code.
- Third, starting from this public support for *sharia*, Suberu (2009a; for his more general analyses of Nigerian federalism: 2001, 2008, 2009b) examines the institutional context of

its current implementation and evaluates the Islamic legal code as largely benign. In Suberu's analysis, the state-level implementation of *sharia* law is a successful tool to manage religious (political) conflict and to "cauterise national disintegration". Because if Nigerian Muslims would not be allowed to implement their religious laws at the State and Local Government level, they would attempt to do so at the level of the federation, thus raising the stakes of the struggle that their claim would spawn.

- Fourth, however, this positive evaluation of *sharia* is challenged by scholars, political, and religious leaders alike, who consider its implementation as an ill-concealed attempt to Islamise Nigeria (e.g. Boer 2008). Their central concern is that while Muslim leaders claim that *sharia* only applies to those who identify with Islam, this theoretical distinction is all but meaningless in everyday reality (Ludwig 2008). The most often quoted indications of *sharia*'s impact on non-Muslims are: the discrimination against women, for example through the diminished weight of their legal testimony or the restrictions on their modes of public transport; the criminalisation of conversion (i.e. 'apostasy'); the imposition of Islamic values, most notably on dress codes in the school systems of some in the north, even including Christian missionary schools, and in matters concerning alcohol; and the dominance of Islamic voices and interests in the public sphere, for example in public news media and in the regulations regarding the building of non-Muslim places of worship (HRW 2004; Ludwig 2008; Marshall 2002). Urban planning laws are said to be used in a discriminatory way to prevent Christians from building churches in some cities. Moreover, several *sharia* states have incorporated certain 'vigilante groups' as an informal state police force, as for example the *Hisbah* in Kano already mentioned above (e.g. Last 2008).

As this overview has shown, the connections between religion and politics in Nigeria are very complicated. Some institutional and legal aspects of Islam are integral to the very constitution of the state. This notwithstanding, we support the effort by the federal government to maintain equi-distance between the two major faiths. We recommend that state governments should learn some lessons from this approach. We also endorse suggestions that the state should withdraw from activities concerning pilgrimage, except for the standard travelling privileges extended to all Nigerians travelling outside the country. Finally, we note the feeble voices of followers of African traditional religions crying out for recognition. Creating public and policy spaces for practitioners of these religions like Professor Wande Abimbola and Professor Wole Soyinka might have the salutary effect of diluting the 'we-they' binary confrontation between Muslims and Christians. When both Muslims and Christians learn to tolerate the so-called 'heathens' as fellow human-beings, both may be on the way to learning tolerance towards each other.

#### **4. Islam and Education in Northern Nigeria**

All three mapping reports note the crucial nature of education to Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria. Ideas about what constitutes good education differ, however; between Christians and Muslims, but also between different Muslim communities and families. For most Muslims, a child's education means first and foremost learning about the Quran. This entails learning to recite the Arabic text, without necessarily understanding its meaning. Such Quranic education is provided through 'traditional' Quranic schools and Islamiyya schools, both of which will be discussed in more detail below. Increasingly, however, Muslim families are acknowledging the usefulness of 'modern' or 'Western' education, comprising subjects such as biology, physics, mathematics, and English. This form of education remains contested because of its perceived 'Western' and even 'Christian' roots, as *Boko Haram* make abundantly clear, but parents are increasingly aware of the necessity for their children to acquire 'modern' skills besides Quranic knowledge.

Although the provision of good education is poor in most States in northern Nigeria, schools are organised and funded in a variety of ways. Ostien (2012b: 25-31), Hoechner (2012), and Bunza and Mustapha (2012) provide a useful introduction to the various forms of education, differentiating traditional Quranic schools, Islamiyya schools, and public (government-run) schools. Traditional Quranic schools exist throughout northern Nigeria and offer the most accessible form of education for Muslim families. Increasingly, however, Muslims are realising the importance of combining Quranic education with 'modern' schooling. Such a combination is provided by both Islamiyya and public schools, although the former often put more emphasis on Islamic education than the latter. Increasingly, however, the distinctions between public and Islamiyya schools are fading, because governments are beginning to set up public Islamiyya schools.

We believe that education, both religious and secular, remains one of the principal avenues through which good interfaith relations can be nurtured. Much attention needs to be paid to both the content and the quality of the education available to most young people within Muslim and Christian communities across northern Nigeria.

#### **5. Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria**

The position of Muslim women in northern Nigeria has long been a subject of academic attention (Hill, 1969; Barkow 1972; Callaway 1984; Callaway 1987; Robson 2000; Robson 2006; Werthmann 1997; Werthmann 2002). Perhaps most analytical attention and debate has focused on the subordination of Muslim women, as illustrated by the practice of 'seclusion' (*kulle* in Hausa). Although many Muslim women around the world wear a veil and practice some form of seclusion in their homes, neither of these two practices have an

unequivocal scriptural basis in Islam. Historically, northern Nigerian Muslim communities (especially the Hausa and Fulani) have a tradition of female seclusion, which in many families continues to this day. As Mustapha, Diprose and Ehrhardt (2012) note, colonial occupation at the turn of the twentieth century led to increasing rates of seclusion and its extension into more rural communities. Specific practices of seclusion differ considerably, of course, between different communities and families; virtually all, however, entail substantial mental and physical constraints on the social lives of Muslim women. However, as Polly Hill (1969) notes, seclusion has not prevented Muslim women from engaging in substantial economic activities, 'hidden' from the public gaze. Chumley (1997, 3) further notes that within the cultural milieu, such economic 'activity paradoxically both affirms and challenges the patriarchal hegemony that enables their seclusion'.

As a consequence of these constraints, Alkali *et al* (2012) argue that "women's overt involvement in Islamic matters was for a long time criticised by the *ulama* in the region". At the same time, the three mapping exercise, Alkali *et al* (2012), Ostien (2012b), and Bunza and Mustapha (2012), emphasise that the engagement of women in Islamic matters in northern Nigeria has increased over the past few decades. This emancipation is partly due to the rise of reformist Islamic movements, such as *Izala*, which emphasise the importance of, for example, women's education; it is also partly due to the rise of Islamic women's organisations. The most important organisations in this regard were highlighted to be the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN, present in all northern States), the *Badrudin Islam Asalatu* Circle (Ilorin/Ibadan), the *Egbe Obirin Alasalatu* (Women's Prayer Group) (Kogi State), Women Initiative for Sustainable Community Development (WISCOD), and WRAPA. The three reports also introduce several female Muslim activists from their respective zones.

## **6. Violent Conflict and Interfaith Relations**

There has been a tremendous amount of academic and policy attention on the subject of conflict in Nigeria. This is partly due to the repeated instances of collective violence: while analysts differ in their assessment, most agree that the early 1980s and the transition to democracy in 1999 both witnessed an upsurge in communal violence in Nigeria. For example, in mapping violence across Nigeria, Elaigwu (2005) estimates that between 1980 and 2005 there were at least 140 violent inter-group conflicts in Nigeria, resulting in the loss of lives and property. Alubo (2006) states that over 80 major eruptions of violence took place between May 1999 and December 2003 in Nigeria, which, he notes, was three-fold the number that occurred during the eight year rule of General Babangida regime between 1985 and 1993. Alubo (*ibid.*, 4) also states that 300,000 deaths during the period would not be an

over estimate. Meanwhile, Scacco (2007 cf. HRW 2006) states there were nearly 500 episodes of violence between May 1999 and December 2005.

Many of these disturbances had ethnic as well as religious connotations; moreover, they have occurred within as well as between Muslim and Christian communities. In general terms, Last (2007) argues that ethnicity's significance as a marker of difference – and an identifier for potential targets of violence – slowly gave way to the salience of religion. As a consequence, religion is often quoted as one of the factors influencing processes of violent escalation; at the same time, collective violence is hardly ever exclusively, or even predominantly, 'religious' in nature. 'Christian' and 'Muslim' conflicting actors are often also divided along ethnic, regional, or party-political lines, which blurs the defining role of religion in these situations. Moreover, even when 'Christians' fight 'Muslims', it does not follow that religion, or religious difference, is the (sole) cause of the violence. Therefore, this paper argues strongly for a contextualised and multi-layered explanation of violent conflict, of which many good examples are given in the existing academic literature.

If we look more closely at the religious actors involved in violent conflict, it should be noted that *inter*-religious conflict between Christians and Muslims is now more prevalent than *intra*-Islamic conflict between different groups, especially from the middle of the 1970s – with the obvious exception, of course, of the struggles around Boko Haram. The intra-Muslim dimensions of violence are often ignored because of the more sensation Muslim-Christian violence. More recently, in Bukuru in Plateau State, and in Gonin-Gora on the outskirts of Kaduna, allegations of Christian violence targeting unsuspecting Muslims has been raised. Several cases stand out as 'key instances' of collective violence. Prime examples are perhaps the *Maitatsine* riots in Kano, Maiduguri and other parts of the north in the 1980s, and the violence in Kafanchan in 1987; the latter marked the starting of the shift from ethnic or intra-Muslim conflicts that were predominant from the 1950s until the 1980s, to Christian-Muslim confrontations that have been dominant since the late 1980s. Other prominent 'key instances' of violent conflict include the Christian-Muslim violence in Zangon Kataf LGA in Kaduna State in 1992; the 1999/2000 Kaduna violence following the re-introduction of *sharia*; the 2004 violence in Plateau and Kano States; and several other cases in Plateau State, highlighted in the literature review (Mustapha, Diprose and Ehrhardt, 2012).

Every instance of collective violence clearly differs with respect to the particular set of factors that help to explain its occurrence. Moreover, every situation of collective violence is a temporal and dynamic process, in which structural factors interact with the agency of authoritative actors and organisations to ensure the mobilisation of those who act violently. The literature review, in recognition of these principles, provides many examples of such



local and process-oriented analyses of specific conflict situations. There are, however, factors that recur in the analyses of different case studies of violent conflict. In this regard, the following factors are arguably most often quoted:

- horizontal (intergroup) economic, political, and cultural inequalities;
- the salience, overlaps, and intersections between ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries;
- the negative effects of the political institutions of 'indigeneity';
- the historical legacy of indirect rule;
- the politicisation of religious and ethnic identities and the resulting political competition, especially in situations of political change (e.g. redrawing political boundaries) and instability;
- the inability of the state to stem the negative effects of protracted economic crisis, to ensure public order, and to implement post-conflict peace building measures;
- the 'youth bulge', combined with exploding youth unemployment rates and the corresponding 'availability' of some young men to engage in illicit behaviour, including political violence; this is particularly significant when politicians hire these youths to cause havoc, a practice that many consider common occurrence;
- the heavy-handedness of Nigeria's security forces in resolving situations of violent escalation, or even their active involvement in aggravating such tense situations; and
- other, more generic factors, such as group size and resource competition (e.g. over oil revenues and land).

## **7. Conflict Resolution, Peace Building, and Interfaith Relations**

In view of the recurrent nature of collective violence in Nigeria, conflict resolution and peace building are important themes in the country's interfaith relations. Albert (1999a) differentiates interventions to resolve, manage, or transform conflicts by the types of people involved in problem-solving processes and argues that it is essential to use the middle range approach, through three different mechanisms: conflict management training, problem-solving workshops, and the establishment of peace commissions or committees. Albert (ibid.) positively evaluates these initiatives through briefly examining the Academics Associates Peace Works (AAPW) activities in the Jukun-Tiv conflicts in Wukari, in the Fulani-Sayawa conflicts in Tafawa Balewa, and in the Igbo-Ora interventions in Oyo state, and also drawing evidence from a Nigeria-wide external evaluation of conflict resolution efforts conducted by the British High Commission, one of the funders of AAPW.

Focusing more on interfaith dialogue, Ojo and Folanrami (2010) describe the most important 'professional' interfaith bridge-building organisations in Nigeria at present. They note the still-

born Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA) and its more effective successor the Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC). In addition to these national bodies, the authors also describe several more local conflict resolution institutions, such as the Centre for Interfaith Relations and Cross Cultural Outreach (Ogbomosho), the Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Movement (Jos), the Bridge Builders (Kaduna), and the Interfaith Mediation Centre and Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum (Kaduna). They highlight the latter two initiatives, by Rev. Wuye and Imam Ashafa, as one of the more significant examples because it reoriented militant youths, facilitated peace agreements, and opened channels for interfaith dialogue.

While Ojo and Folanrami (2010) acknowledge the positive intentions and efforts of all these organisations, they also note the limited reach of most NGOs, the disconnect between NIREC and the grassroots, and the absence of traditional African religions from these fora as limits on their efficacy. Moreover, professional conflict resolution organisations (often NGOs) run the risk of 'reifying' the social processes of conflict and violence and thus isolating them from their wider context and structural causes. To some extent, this is also true for some of the traditional, community, and religious leaders. They have little impact on the structural factors contributing to violent conflict. However, these authorities have an extensive base of legitimacy and authority within their respective communities and can, as such, influence processes of collective framing and mobilisation. They may therefore have as much impact on the processes of conflict as those with influence over the structural drivers of the violence.

The actors in the best position to alter some of the structural conditions of conflict are those who are part of the state, all the way from the top of the federal government to the chairman of the local government. As Suberu (2001) and Suberu and Diamond (2000) argue, one way in which these actors have attempted to reduce the risk of conflict is through the design of Nigeria's federal political institutions. In terms of maintaining the integrity of the Nigerian state, these efforts have largely been successful at the national level; at the local level, however, Nigerian politics is as much a cause of conflict as its potential solution. Yet certain efforts to prevent or resolve conflicts are also taken at the local level, for example through early-warning 'security committees' involving state officials, security services, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and other organisations and authoritative individuals. Sani (2007) also argues that governors have been deeply involved in attempts at conflict resolution through instituting administrative and judicial inquiries into the remote and immediate causes of conflict from the colonial era to date. But he adds that there is little empirical data to assess whether such judicial inquiries have been successful.

## II. Avenues for Policy Intervention

Based on the analysis in the mapping reports and the literature review, this section sets out four key areas for consideration in policy intervention: philosophy of intervention, education, peace building, and intellectual exchanges.

### 1. Philosophy of Intervention

Considering the charged national context deriving from religious and regional controversies about the recent activities of Boko Haram (Mustapha, 2012), and the equally charged international context of the post-9/11 2001 'war on terror', it is important that any intervention is clearly thought through to avoid sending the wrong message.

In the domestic context:

- Any intervention must not be seen as 'favouring' or negatively 'targeting' any religious community. Though the project is on the Islamic communities of the north, genuine interfaith efforts must involve members of the Christian communities. Any intervention must be seen as fair, balanced, but honest for it to be effective in the long run.
- Secondly, though intervention will focus on religious actors in conflict prone situations, efforts should also be made to contact non-religious actors, especially women and the youth, to avoid a situation where the religious dimension of conflict becomes reified and religious actors given a virtual veto power over interfaith relations.

In the international context, there are two contrasting philosophies of intervention:

- The study of religious violence in Islamic northern Nigeria by the Strategic Studies Institute of the United States Army (Hill, 2010) represents one pole. The key orientation in this study is the exploitation of the divisions within the various Muslim sects, especially the division between the 'traditional' Sufi Orders and the 'fundamentalist' reformist anti-Sufi groups that are defined as the 'problem'. However, as Soares (2005, 7-8) argues, this bifurcated view of Islam can be misleading; besides, the *intra*-Muslim conflict that could result from such a policy perspective can be as damaging as the current *inter*-religious conflict. Such an approach might serve American geo-strategic concerns, but bring little peace to northern Nigeria. Though Hill (2010) is ostensibly just an academic study and not explicitly official government policy, some of its recommendations, such as the opening of an American Consulate in Kano, are already under consideration.
- The second philosophy of intervention can be gleaned from the attitude of the Catholic Church to the Islamic faith. After centuries of bitter animosity, the Second Vatican Council (1962-66) declared that 'the God of Islam is the one, living and true, merciful and

almighty God...’ (Clarke and Linden, 1983, 129), thus opening up the possibility of interfaith recognition and dialogue between the two faiths.

- It is the moral and humanistic force behind the Papal position that is sorely needed in northern Nigeria today, not the politics driven by the geostrategic interests of western states. In practical terms, this means support for such bodies as the Christian-Muslim International Task Force which recently came to Nigeria on a fact-finding mission. The 12-member joint delegation was led by World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Olav Fyske Tveit of Norway and Jordanian Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, chairman of the board of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

## **2. Education**

As noted above, the demand for good Quranic and ‘modern’ education in northern Nigeria is high, but it remains in short supply. Yet education is one of the major keys to peaceful co-existence. The following three areas require particular attention:

The quality and quantity of primary, secondary, and vocational education. Although Nigeria formally operates under the Universal Basic Education policy, in practice basic skills education has deteriorated rapidly over the past decades. Therefore, investments should be made in these three levels of schooling, both through the state and non-state organisations involved in providing these forms of education. In this regard, Islamiyya schools provide some of the most promising examples of schools that can provide good quality Quranic and ‘modern’ education.

Finally, particular attention should be given to the education of Muslim women. Not only are women still more likely than men to ‘drop out’ before having completed secondary or even primary school, they are also the surest way to improve the educational performance of their children. Many Nigerian Muslims believe that Islam allows for, and even promotes, the education of women; material circumstances, however, often constrain the realisation of this ideal.

There are many Islamic organizations interested in educational provision. Some form of collaboration with them would facilitate wider dialogue while addressing the critical needs of marginalized Muslim youth.

## **3. Peace building**

- There is a window of opportunity to engage in and stimulate peace building and interfaith cooperation at the communal level. It is important, in this respect, that external support should be targeted at strengthening existing efforts and structures within local communities and not the creation of ‘floating’ new organizations that soon collapse after

donor grants are spent. The recent Kano Covenant, where the Kano branch of CAN cooperated with the Islamic Concerned Citizens of Kano to promote interfaith peace, provides a good example of such existing efforts that should be supported. Other examples are the Interfaith Mediation Centre and Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum in Kaduna, and various women's groups across the three zones a good example of which is the interfaith women's group that demonstrated for peace in Maiduguri. Even diplomatic solidarity visits which signal the recognition of such local efforts can be very important to their morale.

- Non-Nigeria organisations could work with the federal Nigerian research institutions (e.g. the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, the National Defence College, and the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies) to strengthen their research, early-warning, and advocacy capabilities. Currently, these institutions are important channels for the domestication of international norms in peacekeeping, peace building, and human rights; there is therefore room for dialogue with them on these issues.
- There are shining examples of peace building and inter communal bridge-building in places like Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, and South Africa. Nigerian interfaith NGOs and Universities researchers should be encouraged to get to know and network with such positive examples. There is also a Pan-African peace-building NGO based in Nairobi, which tries to share good practices across the continent.
- Strengthening existing efforts made by the diplomatic community at interacting with senior members of Nigeria's faith groups. Special attention should be paid to Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC), because its national reach and high-level political support render it, potentially, an influential actor to improve interfaith relations.

#### **4. Intellectual Exchanges**

The diplomatic community in Nigeria, in cooperation with other non-Nigerian organisations, could contribute to the welfare of Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria by investing in the following forms of intellectual exchange:

- Supporting exchanges between northern Nigerian academia and Western universities.
- Islamic feminists have learnt to read, interpret, and cite the Quran in defence of their position against the pervading patriarchy. These efforts need to be supported.
- Those Islamic *ulama* and scholars interested in interfaith relations and other social issues such as the reproductive rights of Muslim women and the corrosive consequences of the pandemic of divorce in Muslim societies can equally be encouraged and supported to interact with international actors, and to promote their own messages within Nigeria.