RELIGIOUS MULTICULTURALISM: A CHALLENGE ON WEST AFRICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

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Abstract: The development of human resource potential which requires a maximum set of supporters. Not only the economic and political stability but also support social elements. The continent of Africa in particular West African region is an area that is composed of different cultures or different religions. Not only Christian and muslim relations but today is precisely coupled with strife Wahhabism that trigger strife with sunni and Shia and more. The challenges faced by tribes or Nations in the West African countries is also related to diversity. This paper will discuss the African community in developing their potential for the sake of development of the country. The method used is a research library with chaos theory as a framework for analysis. The results showed that West African countries with a high potential of resources but have a tenuous bond between culture and tribal practices are high it is difficult to develop existing resources to the maximum.

Keyword: west africa, multiculturalism, human resources development, religious affairs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism means different things to different people. For some it is directly linked to the politics of recognition and of difference (Taylor). In this regard, it concerns an appreciation of the necessity to deal with diversity in ways that affirm the value of different cultures and to respect the various claims made by minority groups. For others, multiculturalism concerns an explicit policy of protecting particularistic local cultures in the face of hegemonic and global cultures (both Australia and Canada have such self-conscious policies) or it can refer to a loose form of cultural pluralism (Kuper). Since multiculturalism is not a homogeneous concept or practice, it is important to differentiate between multiculturalism as a practical response to diversity and as an aspect of social philosophy advocating particular values with respect to cultural differences. There is no unifying theory of multiculturalism, and its respect for difference finds expression in a variety of political, social, and cultural approaches to problems of diversity.

The concept of multiculturalism does not enjoy widespread currency in African social thought. It is certainly not a topic of debate in early-twenty-first-century intellectual discourse on the continent. There are many reasons for this neglect, but it is undoubtedly connected to the fact that African societies are intrinsically multiethnic and multicultural. Diversity is not a new thing in Africa. Multiculturalism is premised on challenges to hegemonic cultures occasioned by the large-scale migrations of people who may experience alienation, marginalization, and exclusion in the host country. Sweden, for example, was remarkably homogeneous in a cultural sense prior to the influx of migrant laborers in the 1960s. African countries, in contrast, have entirely different histories. By and large, African states were formed by colonialism, usually to serve the interests of the colonists and, therefore, with little attention paid to the precolonial ethnic allegiances and other forms of belonging. These different histories play a critical role in the extent to which the concept of multiculturalism may be relevant in the African context.

II. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

After years of neglect, the theme of employment has returned to the forefront of the international development agenda, following on the heels of the global financial crisis and its aftermath. Prominent examples include recent reports by UNCTAD, UNRISD, the World Bank, in addition to the extensive work by the International Labour Organization. The social value of employment has been recognised within this revived attention, bringing the theme close to the heart of the human development approach. However, there is a danger of reducing the ‘social’ into a utilitarian framework.
For instance, the 2013 World Development Report treats the ‘social value’ of jobs as the individual value of a job (presumably the wage) plus its various spillover effects, which can be negative, such as environmental costs, or positive, such as social identity, sense of fairness, or gender equality. This idea of spillovers comes from modern welfare economics—an influence that leading thinkers of the human development approach have tried to critique and overcome since the origins of the approach.

Instead, the idea of ‘social value’ arguably needs to be anchored in a more nuanced sociological understanding, such as the social nature of basic needs. Like happiness, but unlike objective human development metrics, social values are inherently relative and subjective, such as the sense of security and dignity that people derive from work. These perceptions can adapt over time and to changing contexts. The perception of certain types of work as enhancing dignity in a rural agrarian context, for instance, might not persist through the course of urbanization. Structural and institutional transformations associated with development add even further complexities, particularly in a globalised setting where perceptions are conditioned by factors that extend far beyond the local.

Unemployment is a good example of these complexities. There is a consensus that unemployment must be generally avoided not only because it is detrimental to incomes and demand, but also to dignity and social cohesion. However, many policies that address unemployment have been controversial because, for example, they can often result in detrimental effects on peoples’ dignity or social status by forcing them to accept substandard employment mismatched with their skill sets, or else by being used to discipline welfare recipients. On the other hand, sufficient social security can allow the unemployed to avoid situations where they are forced to accept any work at any wage. If affordable and accessible schooling options are also available for mature students, spells of unemployment might encourage reskilling and result in increased social mobility, esteem and income. Under such circumstances, the ability to be unemployed could become a source of dignity and advantage. In most developing countries that lack generalized social security, unemployment is generally a status that only relatively well-off people can afford.

The relationships between social and economic values are hugely debated on empirical, theoretical, ideological and even epistemological grounds. The utilitarian argument that the social value of employment is more or less imputed by its monetary market value is particularly problematic in a world in which people are compelled to work and are not necessarily free to withdraw from a hypothesized labour market bargain, whether their compulsion is driven by absolute poverty or else by more nuanced social needs. The lack of freedom to be excluded in this sense can lead to exploitation.

We might also question whether the processes that drive modern economic growth reinforce the social values of employment. The classical Marxist answer is that capitalist processes are fundamentally alienating for labour; the class conflict that follows is what makes capitalism so dynamic, rather than a harmony between social and economic values. As pointed out by Giovanni Arrighi, even Adam Smith viewed the division of labour within production units and the specialization of work into monotonous and uniform tasks as harmful to the moral and intellectual qualities of the labour force. This tension between productivity and social value can be observed today within increasingly complex and atomized factory systems of production and distribution, such as in the ‘Walmartization’ of retail stores across the globe.

Bearing these complexities in mind, it is nonetheless useful to focus on the conditions that might allow for sufficient and sustained social values of employment within development. Redistribution is a hugely important condition given its role in socializing the wealth produced by increasing productivity in order to support forms of employment that would be deemed socially valuable and that would reinforce other human development gains, such as in education. In the absence of such socialisation, the
perpetual quest for increasing worker productivity might well exacerbate certain structural aspects of vulnerability, thereby undermining the social valuation of objective (or absolute) gains made in human and economic development.

Warning radicalism

Islam is the predominant religion of the West African interior and the far west coast of the continent (70% of West Africans); and was introduced to the region by traders in the 9th century. Islam is the religion of the region's biggest ethnic groups by population. Islamic rules on livelihood, values, dress and practices had a profound effect on the populations and cultures in their predominant areas, so much so that the concept of tribalism is less observed by Islamized groups like the Mande, Wolof, Hausa, Fula and Songhai, than they are by non-Islamized groups. Ethnic intermarriage and shared cultural icons are established through a superseded commonality of belief or community, known as ummah. Traditional Muslim areas include Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Guinea, Niger; the upper coast and inland two-thirds of Sierra Leone and inland Liberia; the western, northern and far-eastern regions of Burkina Faso; and the northern halves of the coastal nations of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana and ivory coast.

In view of recent terror attacks in West Africa, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso have raised fears of growing radicalization of youth in the region. Al Qaeda has claimed responsibility for attacks on a hotel in Burkina Faso’s capital in January and an attack on a popular beach resort in Ivory Coast. More than 65 people died in the attacks, many of them foreigners. Experts say radical versions of Islam have been gaining ground in parts of the region like Mali and Niger and gradually spreading to other parts of the region. Analysts and security experts say the financial and doctrinal penetration of Salafism, the fundamental school of thought, advocating for a return to the original ways of Islam in the region and slippery propaganda from militant groups is making recruitment easier.

In Senegal’s poor southern region of Casamance, Boucar Gassama, a retired civil servant is still shocked that his 25-year-old medical student son in Dakar abandoned his studies to join the Islamic State. “He’s a humanist. During his fourth year at university, he was part of a group that cared for the sick and their peers. For the last two years, he had been doing consultations at the mosque. With this behaviour, he is acting alone. I never thought he would do this,” He said he has since lost contact with his son after an argument over his decision to depart. ISIS propaganda and security sources confirm fighters from countries including Chad, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria are already in Libya, where the group is consolidating its presence.

However, they represent the minority of between 3,000-6,000 ISIS fighters, with the lion share coming from North Africa and the Middle East. Some religious scholars say more needs to be done to guide students’ readings of the Koran which they often rote-learn at religious schools.

“These are not people who grew up with Islam, with an Islamic education. Education is a process. You and I are muslims, and it’s not like we just converted. We received a certain type of education, we were taught about love, peace, tolerance, affection, and being open. Where we come from, we were taught that everyone is the same, no matter what their ethnic background or race is,” said Imam Cisse Djiguiba.

With growing concern in the region about recruitment into ISIS and other militant groups, countries like Mauritania have closed several Koranic schools since January for security reasons. In Mali, where an Islamist insurgency is intensifying, some are calling for audits of mosques and NGOs.

The region is being torn by several conflicts with armed groups fighting to control vast territories for trafficking of all kinds; jihadists are still present in Mali’s northern regions; terrorist groups close to Al Qaida threaten to kidnap people; and the sect of Boko Haram terrorises vast stretches of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroun.
Security forces, including the police, are therefore a key target group for the protection of rights in West Africa. Also, in a region with the lowest human development index and the highest illiteracy rates in the world human rights documentation and knowledge is crucial.

A. PEOPLE OF WEST AFRICA

Culturally, the people of the region belong for the most part to one of three major language families. In the northern and least-populous Saharan regions, Arabs and Imazighen (Berbers; singular Amazigh) of the Afro-Asiatic language family predominate. South of a line connecting the course of the Senegal River, the Niger River, and the southern two-thirds of Nigeria, Niger-Congo languages are spoken. Along the middle course of the Niger River and around Lake Chad, Nilo-Saharan languages related to those of peoples farther east predominate. These peoples are divided into a very complex ethnic mosaic but may often be conveniently classified by their individual languages.

While in the past two decades, the region of West Africa has experienced various armed conflicts, a new security threat that has emerged is the growing threat of violence by radical Islamist groups. This phenomenon has assumed prominence in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States of America. Against the background of a politically unstable region, impoverished by poverty, disease, conflicts, and a high rate of illiteracy, a foothold by radical Islamist groups could destabilize the whole region. The recent escalation of violence perpetrated by radical Islamists in the northern parts of Nigeria and other countries poses a grave threat to the region as Nigeria is home to approximately half the population of the region. Some measures that governments, in concert with other stakeholders, can take include poverty alleviation measures, economic development t of deprived areas, socio-political reforms, inter-faith dialogue and consultations, prevent institutionalization of Sharia law, promotion of good governance and inter-governmental cooperation. The region of West Africa is bound by the Atlantic Ocean in the west and south, by the Sahara desert in the north, and in the east, by an imaginary line approximately along the present eastern boundary of Nigeria. It is difficult to define the northern and eastern limits of West Africa in geographical terms because of the non-existence of natural geographical barriers marking off this part of Africa from the rest of the continent. Two major movements influenced the West Africa region in pre-colonial era: the dispersion of the Bantu people, which led to the development of many kingdoms and empires, and the expansion and consolidation of Islam. Between the 11th and 15th century, West Africa was a major trading region, exporting goods to Europe, India, Malinke Sundiata to become renowned throughout the Arab world for its wealth and learning. The Mali Empire rose out of the regions’ feuding kingdoms. At its heights, the empire of Mali composed of most of modern Mali, Senegal, and parts of Mauritania and Guinea (BBC Religious Compilation on Africa n.d.). The Mali Empire was a multi-ethnic state with various religious and cultural groups. Muslims played a prominent role in the courts as counselors and advisors. While the empire’s founder, Sundiata Keita, was not himself a Muslim, many Malian kings became Muslims. The most famous of them was Mansa Musa. He made Islam the state religion and in 1324 went on pilgrimage from Mali to Mecca (Hill 2009). A hundred years later, the kingdom fell into decline and became the target of Tuareg raids. By the 18th century, the northern part of West Africa was a patchwork of city-states and kingdoms and further south, the Ashanti kingdom (in modern Ghana) rose to prominence. Other prominent kingdoms were the kingdoms of Dahomey, Songhai, and Tekur. During this period, traditional religion played an important role in the lives of the people of West Africa. Although there were differ
ent varieties of traditional religious practices, almost all these religions had common characteristics; a belief in the existence of one God above a host of other lesser gods, a belief in ancestral spirits, the idea of sacrifice to induce divine protection and the need to undergo the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood (BBC Religious Compilation on Africa,).

B. RELIGIONS IN WEST AFRICA

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attack, there appears to be a rise in religious conflicts in parts of West Africa, most notably in Nigeria. This conflict appears to revolve around the perceived rise of radical Islam that was born out of the globalization of Al Qaida. Whether or not Islam, and more specifically radical Islam, is becoming more prevalent in the region is the main focus of this research. Islam is difficult to define or generalize. In one sense, it denotes a religion, a system of beliefs and worship, and in other, the civilization that grew up and flourished under the aegis of that religion. Islam therefore denotes more than fourteen centuries of history, a billion and a third people, a religion and a cultural tradition of enormous diversity (Lewis 2003). Islam is a monothestic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Holy Prophet of Allah (Oxford Dictionary Eleventh Edition). The Holy Prophet Muhammad, who was born in Mecca in about 570AD, is credited with the origin of Islam. The Arabic word “Islam” is derived from the Arabic word “Al Salaam” which means peace. The root word of Islam is “alsilm” which means “submission” or “surrender.” It is understood to mean “submission to Allah” (Orlich n.d.). There are different sects and grouping of Islam such as the Wahhabism, Sufism, and Salafism. Wahhabism is a conservative Sunni Islamic sect based on the teachings of Muhammad ibn 18th century scholar from what is today known as Saudi Arabia, who advocated for the Islamic world through the funding of mosques, schools and other means from Persian Gulf oil wealth. The primary doctrine of Wahhabism is Tawhid, or the uniqueness and unity of God (Glasse 2001). The principal tenet of Salafism is that Islam was perfect and complete during the days of Muhammad and his Sahaba (prominent companions of Muhammad), but that undesirable innovations have been added over the later centuries due to materialist and cultural influences. Salafism seeks to revive a practice of Islam that more closely resembles the religion during the time of Muhammad (Hoebink 2007). Sufism is a mystic d version of Islam. Sufism is a science whose object is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God (Zarruq 2008). Several Sufi sects, such as the Mourides and Tijani in Senegal, follow the tenets of Islam as interpreted by those sects’ founding prophets. Arab traders, and the Berbers of North Africa, brought Islam to West Africa through the northern part of Africa. The Berbers converted to Islam as far back as the 7th century and through their commercial transactions and influence on northerners, were able to spread Islam quickly among inhabitants of the region. In West Africa, large cities like Timbuktu, Goa and Djenne, had large Berber and Arab populations and with them came Islam from the Middle East. On the east coast of Africa, a new culture came about from the mixture of Arab traders and Africans living together. City States like Zanzibar and Kilwa were a testament of the greatness of the two cultures building together and sharing knowledge. There is evidence that many rulers converted to Islam not because they wanted to be Muslims but rather for economic and political reasons. Islam continued to spread with its trade links to the Arab world, converting many West Africans who saw Islam to be lucrative because of its economic prospects (Kalagenesis 2009). In West Africa, great kings like Mansa Musa of the Mali Empire, who made the Hajj to Mecca, on his return from the trip, brought many famous Islamic scholars from Cairo to build new schools and mosques in Timbuktu. These Islamic scholars later began to demand strict interpretation of Islamic law as the Muslim population grew larger. Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage projected the Mali Empire’s enormous wealth and potential, which further attracted many Muslim traders and scholars. Local leaders took keen interest in the Islamic legal system and Islamic theology. Timbuk
tu became a center of Islamic learning and civilization and established Sankore University, the first Muslim University in West Africa (Doi 2006). Many major towns became the principal focus of Islam and relations were established with the Arab world in the Middle East. The various trade routes between West Africa and the North made places like Gao, Timbuktu, Sijilmasa, Taghaza, Borneo in northern Nigeria and Hausa land very important (Hill 2009).

The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 strengthened the rise of anti-British and anti-Western sentiments, particularly among Islamic scholars, which gave rise to PanIslamism. Over the years, this British occupation led to the formation of various militant Islamists groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which sought against British colonial rule. These groups soon spread throughout Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and North Africa (Servold n.d.). Throughout the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century, Sufis stood at the forefront of the Jihad against Europeans in all parts of Africa. The Libyan, Omar al-Mukhtar, led the struggle against the Italian occupation; the Somalis, Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah Hassan led the struggle against the British, Italians and Ethiopians; and other less known Islamic Sufi scholars, such as those who took part in the Maji Maji rebellion against the Germans in Tanzania (Terdman 2007). Gradually, this militant form of Islam penetrated both inland and southward through the activism of major charismatic figures that inspired intense resistance against European domination. These activities sowed the seeds of resistance against the colonial powers and local leaders that supported them. This process of Islamization in Africa did not cease after the colonial period and continues even today with the result that some African Muslims now carry on a tradition that has a long history in certain areas of Sub-Saharan Africa. Christianity finally came to West Africa with the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch in the 15th century. Although there were previous attempts to introduce the religion, these attempts did not yield any positive results. The indigenous people, however, continued to indulge in their own traditional religious practices until the 19th century when Christian missions to Africa increased because of antislavery crusades and the interest of Europeans in colonizing Africa. In areas where people had already converted to Islam, however, Christianity had little success (BBC Religious Compilation on Africa n.d.). Christianity came as an agent of change to West Africa in that it brought new opportunities to some and destabilized the power base of others. In the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, Christianity culminated in a series of battles and wars between the Ashanti kingdom and the colonialists. These Christian missions brought education, literacy and slave trade to the shores of West Africa. Although the practice of slavery had occurred all over the world for many years, this was the first time that so many people from one continent had been transported to another against their will. Spread of the Christian religion, at this point, was minimal and limited to the coastal regions (BBC Religious Compilation on Africa n.d.).

Radical Islam may be described as a group of Muslims with extremist views who want to bring about fundamental change. It has normally been associated with the Middle East, South East Asia and parts of North Africa. Radical Islam has been associated with Islam largely because of various interpretations of the Qur’an by many people to achieve groups or individual objectives. Radical Islam is commonly promoted through extreme acts of violence and terror such as that promoted by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaida. Islamic fundamentalism is a conservative religious movement that seeks a return to Islamic values and Islamic law (Shar’ia) in the face of Western modernism, which it sees as corrupt and atheistic (Britannica Concise Dictionary). Radical Islam is therefore different from Islamic fundamentalism in the sense that while radical Islam seeks to bring about change in a radical way, Islamic fundamentalists aim to return to the fundamentalism of Islam in the face of what they perceive as corrupt and atheistic tendencies of Western culture.

It is pertinent to note, however, that both radical Islamists and Islamic fundamentalists seek to bring about change. The former seeks radical changes usually b
violent means and the latter by a return to the fundamentals of Islam. Many people have associated radical Islamists with fundamentalism perhaps because of the difficulty indiffereniating one from another. Fundamentalists seeking change or a return to the fundamentals of Islam may not necessarily be associated with violence. It is fair to state, however, that fundamentalisit with extremist Islamic views who seek to bring about radical changes through violence can be referred to as radical Islamists.

Radical Islam can be traced as far back as the 13th Century when the armies of Islam waged war, destroyed and completely conquered Persia, which at that time had been exhausted by many previous wars. The defeat of Islam and the advent of the Industrial Revolution turned Europe and Western economies into developed nations (Deman 2006, 26, 39) Over time, as some analysts have argued, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War resulted in the gradual rise of radical Islam. During this period, radical Islam metamorphosed into a complex ideology manifesting itself in various forms such as kidnapping and terrorist attacks. Islam, which started in the early days of Muhammad, has often been turned into a radical ideology by some and has been used several times by various Muslim sects to propagate their own group interests (Pipes 2000). While many followers of the religion would regard radical Islam as a religion, others may want to visualize it as an ideology, just like fascism, communism and Marxism.

In West Africa, characteristics of radical Islam can be traced to around the 18th century, when Uthman Dan Fodio, a Fulani scholar, led a major jihad 1802. With the help of a large Fulani cavalry and Hausa peasants, Fodio overthrew the region’s Hausa rulers and replaced them with Fulani emirs. The movement led to centralization of power in the Muslim community, education reforms, and transformations of law. Uthman Dan Fodio also sparked a literary revival with a production of religious work that included Arabic texts and vernacular written in Arabic script. His heirs continued the legacy of literary production and education reform (Hill 2009). During that period of British colonial rule, the Muslim north perceived itself as separate from the Christian and animist south. The British modified indigenous practices necessary to assure the continuation of colonial rule, but they did not fundamentally disturb Islamic practices in the north. They permitted the application of Sharia in some aspects of criminal law and removed some of Sharia’s more stringent penalties such as stoning, amputation, and death (Falola 1999).

In northern Nigeria, the most conflict-ridden cities in included Kano and Kaduna, where there were substantial Christian communities. In addition to Sunni activism for Sharia, violence-prone Shia sects also emerged. These sects have been involved in clashes in Kano, Kaduna, and Zaria, where they were most prominent and referred to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as their source of inspiration for revolutionary leadership (Falola 1999). Many believed that this attempt to impose Islam in all spheres of life against African traditional religion marked the beginning of radical Islam in the region. In recent times, the idea of rejecting modernity in favor of a return to the past has given rise to a number of movements. This is important as these movements have undoubtedly been that known, after its founder, as Wahhabism (Lewis 2004). Additionally, the phenomenon of radical Islam, which calls on Muslims to use violence, has become a common feature in some West African countries.

The 11 September 2001 attacks awoke the world to a sophisticated form of Islamic terror whose network was worldwide with far reaching consequences. The attacks also ushered in an era of a new wave of violent attacks by radical Islamist groups. Recent efforts by Al Qaeda leadership to extend its bases into Africa and events in recent past in some countries, especially Nigeria, suggest a growing trend of radical extremist activities in West Africa. In the most recent violence in 2010, a group calling itself the Boko Haram unleashed mayhem on the population in some northern states of Nigeria resulting in the deaths of about 700 people (Bauchi 2009). Other radical groups have alleged, among other issues, that Christians have encroached on their farms and grazing lands driving t
heir communities into economic deprivation and poverty. This brings to fore the settlers and indigenes problem, which alludes to the role of economic resource misallocation as a potential source of religious conflict (Paden 2010).

A range of socioeconomic and psychological factors have been associated with those who have chosen to radicalize to include the bored and frustrated, unsuccessful college students, the unemployed, the second and third generation, new immigrants, pettycriminals, and prison parolees. Invariably, these individuals seek other like-minded individuals and often form a loose knit group, cluster, or network. Commonalities among these individuals’ age, residence, schools, interests, personality, and ethnicity are critical in determining who becomes a member of a particular group or cluster (Sageman 2004).

Islam represents about 50 percent of the population in the West Africa region against approximately 40 percent for Christians. Social changes in West Africa have given rise not only to a complexity of religious expressions but also diversity and divergence of theological expression. There are fundamentally different views of Islam within the religion. There is the Ahmadiyya, which has a theology quite different from the patterns of worship in orthodox Islam. There are various groupings referred to as Sufi sects, such as the Tijaniyya, Qadriyya, and the Badirriya (Assimeng 2010). While these various movements have differences, which sometimes resulted in conflicts in the region, they have generally co-existed in relative peace. The process of radicalization, often described by many authors, seeks to attribute certain factors to the cause of radical Islam. These factors include large Muslim populations, poverty and unemployment, illiteracy and marginalization among others. Aclose look at the region however indicates other underlying factors. For instance, Gambia and Guinea, with significant numbers of Muslims and deplorable poverty levels, have not recorded significant activities of radical Islamists. Senegal, a country with about 95 percent Muslims has also not experienced violent activities of radical Islam. Nigeria on the other hand, with about 60 percent population of Muslims, has been ravaged by violence by radical Islamist groups. There are indications therefore that other factors peculiar to the region may be responsible for the radicalization of the Islam. Arab Berbers introduced Islam in West Africa from North Africa through trading. Islam coexisted with West African traditional religion until the era of colonial rule when radical Islamist groups began resistance against what they perceived to be oppression and an affront to Islam.

In the post-independence era, when militant Islamic struggles continued in other parts of the world, West Africa remained relatively peaceful and devoid of any serious religious conflict until the latter parts of the 20th century. The 11 September 2001 attack on the United States ushered in an era of increased violence by Muslim radicals in certain countries in the region, especially in Nigeria. The interest and presence of radical groups in Africa assumes an alarming dimension in the wake of political violence in Nigeria and reflects West Africa as a viable region for the growth of radical Islam. This has manifested itself through self-radicalized sympathizers of global Jihad, which follows the strategy and doctrines of Al-Qaeda and its supportive clerics and scholars. In the recent past, the world has witnessed a growing presence of newly formed radical jihadi groups in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa using violent conflicts to radicalize African Islamic elements, recruiting and bringing the African arena under the Jihadi “global umbrella” (Tezman 2007).

Although many studies have pointed to certain underlying factors, which facilitate the process of radicalization of Islam, West Africa does not fully lend itself to such interpretations, prompting an analysis of other factors. This thesis was developed with astuds of the phenomenon of radical Islam, using Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire as casestudies.

C. SUSCEPTIBILITY OF AFRICAN MUSLIM S TOWARDS RADICAL ISLAM

Charlotte and Frederick Quinn, in their book, *Pride, Faith, and Fear: Islam in SubSaharan Africa*, says Islam in West Africa is referred to as local Islam where there are no institutions of higher Islamic learning, ordained clergy or international bodies to regulate doc
trine. Without any specific educational or doctrinal standards beyond adherence to the five basic tenets of Islam, there is considerable variety among the practices of individual mosques. Islam overlaid with traditional local belief systems usually has provided its own explanation about life and death and how to deal with reverses and good fortunes. Elements of folk belief, rituals and music were retained and given an Islamic overlay. Thus, the blending of Islamic with pre-Islamic cultures was a distinction of Islam in West Africa to which the prayers of Sufi mystics and the language of the Quran was added.

They observed that despite the leaderless nature of Islam in the region, Sufism and several brotherhoods have expanded throughout the region beyond national borders. For instance, Senegal’s Tijaniyya has a large following in northern Nigeria and the Mouridina clerics follow peripatetic Wolof traders throughout West Africa, Europe, and North Africa.

According to Hussein D. Hassan, in a Congressional Research Service Paper, Islam in Africa, African Muslims, like other Muslims in Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere, seem to be locked into an intense struggle regarding the future direction of Islam. At the core of the struggle are questions about the way in which Muslims should practice their faith. This scholar asserts that the majority seems to prefer to remain in the moderate, tolerant course that Islam has historically followed. However, a relatively small, but growing group would like to establish a stricter form of the religion, one that informs and controls all aspects of society. He noted that although the majority of Muslims in Africa are Sunni, the complexity of Islam in Africa is revealed in the various schools of thought, traditions, and voices that constantly contend for dominance in many African countries. African Islam is not static and is constantly being reshaped by prevalent social, economic, and political conditions. Hassan states that African Islam has both local and global dimensions. On the local level, experts assert that African Muslims operate with considerable autonomy and do not have an international organization that regulates their religious practices. This fact accounts for the differences and varieties in Islamic practices throughout the African continent. On the global level, however, African Muslims belong to the Umma, the worldwide Islamic community, and follow global issues and current events that affect the Muslim world with keen interest. With globalization and new initiatives in information technology, African Muslims have developed and maintained close connections with the wider Muslim world.

Lamin O. Sanneh in his book, The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and the West African Pluralism, reveals that when Islam first appeared in West Africa, people were intrigued, curious, puzzled perhaps bewildered but seldom hostile. The warm reception received by Muslims enabled them to flourish and the indigenous people found their usefulness as important traders and Arab importers of a written language. In time, Muslim commercial enclaves grew in size and influence, attracting converts from the local population. As time elapsed, converts practiced the old African traditional beliefs and at the same time drawing on their new found faith, which became inconsistent with earlier custom and usage. As knowledge increased, the practice of Islam became lax. The book reveals that persistent visits to West Africa by prominent Islamic scholars raised the general standard of observance by bequeathing requisite symbols of Islam, like the Qur’an, a legal document, a turban, prayer rug, or prayer beads, a silk gown and other items. It further notes that Muslims took a favorable view of Africa’s religious openness, found affinity in certain practices and exploited gaps in local techniques and resources and asserted the primacy of Muslim scripture, law and practice. This dynamic historical theme of affinity and challenge, accommodation and primacy helped establish Islam in West Africa.

Not everyone, however, alludes to the growing influence of radical Islam in the subregion. In his book, The Dark Sahara, Jeremy Keenan, is of the opinion that citing the need to combat the growth of Al Qaida in Africa is a deception by the U.S. to establish bases in the region and pursue its multiple imperial objectives in the name of security.

John Paden, in an article, “Is Nigeria a Hotbed of Islamic Extremism,” disagrees with the assertion that ra
dical Islam is on the rise in Nigeria. He notes that religious violence in Nigeria must be understood as part of a complicated political context in a country striving to maintain national unity amongst an ethnically diverse population split evenly between Christians and Muslims. Paden states that Nigeria is not a hotbed of Islamic extremism but one of Islamic moderation. He observes that while much of West Africa’s Islam is influenced by Sufism, the Sokoto Caliphate has maintained a decisively West African version of Islam, less dependent on external Arab influences.

D. WHAT MAKES RADICAL ISLAM APPEALING TO WEST AFRICA MUSLIMS

The question of why extremist groups continue to be able to attract followers perpetually seems irrational especially in the face of social stigmatization, emotional separation from one’s family, professional risks, and police harassment. Yet recruiting efforts never heeded continue to draw members into the fold. David McCormack, in his Occasional Paper Series titled, The African Vortex: Islamism in Sub-Saharan Africa, notes that while the historical complexities that allowed the penetration of radical Islam are many, greatest consideration is generally given to two potential sources. First is the mixture of dire political, social, and economic conditions that arose from the inability of African states to forge representative governments and strong economies following the collapse of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s. He observes that while Africa has taken desirable steps in recent years away from its economic and political backwardness, these have not been enough to discourage its large Muslim populations from the Islamist lure, as Africa continues to be plagued by unaccountable and corrupt governments and underdeveloped economies. Ironically, he notes that, where democratic transformation is taking place, Islamists have been afforded greater freedom to implement their program, while sometimes painful but important economic reforms have created dislocation used as ammunition by Islamists.

Undoubtedly, poverty, disenfranchisement and general societal disorder play a role in making African Muslims susceptible to Islamist influences. In his book, The Crisis of Islam, Holy War and Unholy Terror, Bernard Lewis states that almost the entire Muslim world is affected by poverty and tyranny. Both of these problems are attributed to American economic dominance and exploitation, thinly disguised as globalization. He notes that the increasingly wretched economic situation in most of the Muslim world and sub-Saharan Africa, compared not only with the West but also with the rapidly rising economies of East Asia, fuels these frustrations. To buttress the point further, he observed that the World Bank reported that in the 1990s, the combined gross national products of Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, three of Israel’s neighbors, were considerably smaller than that of Israel alone. He also cited World Bank reports in 2000, which stated that the average annual income in the Muslim countries from Morocco to Bangladesh was only half of the world average. He concludes that these problems, coupled with the combination of low productivity and high birth rate results in a growing population of unemployed, uneducated and frustrated young men.

E. SOCIO-POLITICAL IMBALANCE

Sociopolitical imbalance and its associated problems of poverty and deprivation remain a significant part of the north. Many people feel discriminated against on account of their ethnicity, religion, and region. In the northwest of Nigeria, only 25 percent of pregnant women use clinics compared to 85 percent in the southeast and maternal mortality rates in the northeast are 939 percent higher than in the southeast. Additionally, core poverty in the northeast is twice as high in the north west of the country than in the southeast. There is also discriminatory allocation of government projects and grants and differential access to key sectors of the economy, such as oil and gas and telecommunications (Langer, Mustapha, and Stewart 2007, 9).

Despite the large number of Ibos in Lagos and Kano, Hausas in Shagamu and Yorubas in Funtua, their absence from modern governance structures in their respective areas of abode is a testimony of the extent of their marginalization. In many parts of the country, such as Plateau, Nassarawa, and Taraba states, some Nigerians are labeled indigenes and others, settlers.
The former claim to be the natives and owners of the land while all others are regarded as tenants. In daily existence, the indigenes contend that all opportunities must go to them to the exclusion of the settlers. These exclusionary politics sow the seeds of violence. Muslims, who are marginalized even for reasons as simple as religion, become peeved and seek to do same in areas perceived to be dominated by (Langer, Mustapha, and Stewart 2007).

The state of Sokoto, for instance, is relatively peaceful as compared to other states. There is however, the existence of inequality between indigenes and settlers with discriminatory practices based on religion and ethnic divides. There is evidence of discriminatory practices in terms of job opportunities, conditions of work, educational opportunities, and basic amenities are not equality distributed. Settler communities lack access to roads and good schools. The nonindigenes of Sokoto are only allowed to vote, but not to be voted for. Except for token appointments, political appointments are reserved for the sons of the soil. The nonindigenes are employed on contract and pay higher school fees than the indigenes (Langer, Mustapha, and Stewart 2007). A region with a high fertility rate coupled with lack of employment opportunities invariably would result in a large number of disgruntled unemployed youth who then become disillusioned with life. If a group is excluded from political power and marginalized economically, group consciousness arises and disparate subgroups will be brought together under a common identity to create a more effective resistance (Steward 2009). These groups of people are the willing tools of any radical Islamic group or leader who seeks to recruit them. Religious leaders, Muslims and Christian, did not distance themselves from the rhetoric of the politicians. The politicization of the religious sphere and injection of political rhetoric with faith was one of the underlying factors of the crisis. For instance, as their followers were subject to police pestering and brutality, Muslim leaders did not hesitate to make pronouncements against this state of affairs. Their political militancy and partisanship came to the surface when Imam Boubabar Fofana, the spokesperson of the Superior Council of Imams of Côte d’Ivoire, stated that Muslims have no qualms giving their support to Alassane Ouattara, if the community deems him the best candidate. He said Muslims should not be blamed for their support for Ouattara, because it is as legitimate as the support the Baule people give to Bedie, and the support that the Bete people give to Gbagbo as well. The repression that the Muslims underwent during the elections and Gbagbo’s utterances forced the Supreme Leader of the Muslims to state that the regime of the current President was built by the blood of the martyrs of Islam (Konate 2004).

Just like the Muslim congregations, the Christian church was steeped in the political strife, with church leaders choosing sides openly. Archbishop Bernard Agre of the St. Paul Cathedral of the Plateau, Abidjan, was cited for being instrumental in the rejection of the candidacy of Mr. Ouattara. The bishops of Côte d’Ivoire, during a conference convened in September 2000, in Yamoussoukro, a few days before the presidential elections of October 2000, released a common statement where they publicly opposed Ouattara’s candidacy. They argued that in the opinion of the people of Côte d’Ivoire, some candidates raise more problems than they solve. For the sake of the country, therefore, which is dear to all Ivorian, be it an aturalized or native, they ask these leaders to be brave and wise enough to reconsider their stand and pull out of the political arena (Konate 2004).

These developments condoned the stratification of the citizens of the country by referring to them as Ivorians by origin and Ivorians by adoption, which was the rhetoric of the politicians. Under normal circumstances, wisdom and religious values, virtues of peace and tolerance, respect of the other, the condemnation of injustice in whatever form it presents itself, and the separation of religion from the State as enshrined by the Constitution of Côte d’Ivoire would have restrained religious leaders from assuming acenral role in the political arena (Konate 2004). From their pronouncements, leaders of these two religious institutions were polarized along political lines, and religious factors became a determinant factor in the political conflict also led to emergence of militant pro-government youth organizations, the Young Patriots.
While the Young Patriots initially were able to mobilize a wide crosssection of the population in Abidjan, they soon developed intourban militia forces under the control of the government, consisting exclusively of people from the southwestern part of the country, the home region of President Laurent Gbagbo (Stewart 2009, 23). The Young Patriots were used sever al times to conduct violentdemonstrations against other ethnic groups. The writer witnessed several instances where the government propagated demonstrations by the Young Patriots even against the United Nations forces.

F. PROMOTION OF INTER-FaITH DIALOGUE

Religion and ethnicity are part of the political processes in most West African countries. Both Nigerians and Ivorians are split along ethnic and religious lines. The government of Nigeria should organize regular interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims to promote peaceful coexistence of both religions in the society. The Nigerian government should intensify its use of the Christian Association of Nigerian Catholics dialogue with credible Muslim organizations to sensitize their members to refrain from voicing violence and resort to peaceful means of resolving differences. The government should transform the National InterReligious Council (NIREC) to a more communitytrenched institution with active branches in all the states and support judicial conflictmediation. The government of Cote d’Ivoire should foster interfaith dialogue by regular meetings of the Supreme Council of Muslims and the Conference of Archbishops. At the local levels, local leaders, senators, and mayors should be empowered to involve local Christian and Muslim leaders in peace building efforts. Additionally, local politicians and nongovernmental organizations should be encouraged by the Ivorian government to sponsor and organize regular dialogue between representatives of all the major ethnic groups. This should not take place after violence has broken out but must be a regulafeature of the local government authorities.

G. RESOLVE SETTLERS AND INGENES DISTINCTION

The settler and indigenes distinction in northern Nigeria is manifested in Coted’Ivoire by the concept of Ivoirité. With a quarter of the population affected by the concept in Cote d’Ivoire, it is almost certain that civil strife will resurge if the issue of Ivoirité is not properly addressed. The government of Nigeria should initiate a national process aimed at addressing the settler and indigene problem. This should bring together key leaders from all the settler and indigenecommunities to find anamicable settlement to the problem. The government should aim at a new land reform policy for the affected areas.

The government of Cote d’Ivoire should institute constitutional reforms aimed at addressing the problem at the national level. This could be preceded by a national referendum to ascertain the level of support beforehand taking the issue to the legislature. The international community represented by the United Nations, United States, African Union, ECOWAS and other stakeholders like France and Burkina Faso should support the government in establishing a new sociopolitical climate based on equality, tolerance and mutual respect for all parties in the Ivoirian conflict. Cote d’Ivoire should embrace a concept of universal citizenship rights for all the citizenry.

H. CURTAIL EXTERNAL ISLAMIC INFLUENCE

The government should curtail external Islamic influences from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran. This can be achieved through the monitoring of states’ interaction with other nations by the federal government. The federal government should also explore diplomatic avenues to reduce interaction between such countries and individual states. The West Africa subregion in recent times has witnessed a number of radical Islamists activities, raising security concerns for a region already saddled by poverty, disease and conflicts. Some, like Keenan, see the increased awareness of radical activities in West Africa as a ploy by the U.S. and western allies to propagate its imperial motives.

Keenan’s views, for instance is contrary to those who believe that the activities of radical Islamists groups have been prominent.
CONCLUSION

The government of Nigeria should set conditions for economic development of poor communities especially those in the northern parts of the countries. There should be reinvestment in infrastructure to improve social services, provision and access to basic amenities to all people irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. Governors should encourage trading between the northern states and other neighboring countries to increase trade and expand markets across the northern half of the country. In this regard, the governments should invest in the construction of rail and road networks linking the northern and neighboring countries to facilitate economic development. The government of Côte d’Ivoire should develop the northern parts of the country by building and extending water and electricity facilities. It should also provide tax relief to companies directly involved in economic development in the northern parts of the country. Islam over the years has coexisted with traditional religion for a long time. The decline of Islamic influence, blamed on the West, gave rise to the birth of an ideology called Islamism. This ideology has been generally characterized by violence, perpetuated by government officials. The governments of Nigeria should improve local governance structures in the northern parts of the country. The federal government should be transparent especially during local and national elections. Government officials should be held accountable to the people through upholding the tenets of justice and equality, freedom, probity, and accountability. This would ensure the reduction in the levels of corruption by government and public officials and thereby boost confidence in the population in the government’s ability to administer its affairs. From the above analysis, socio-political imbalance influences the ability of individuals and groups to resort to violence especially when they group under the banner of religion.

REFERENCE LIST


