

Anglo-French rapprochement and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria in the 1950s

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Abstract: The dawn of the 1950s in Nigeria witnessed an increase in the rise of Islamic religious fundamentalism, especially in the Northern parts of the country. This paper explores the different dimensions to the problem of Islamic religious fundamentalism in Nigeria in the 1950s, including an attempt by Britain to involve the French government in the search for solutions to the problem. The paper argues that the problem of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria in the 1950s revolved around the doctrinal schism between the two foremost *Sufi* brotherhoods (the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah) in West Africa. The fact that the problem arose at a time when Britain was preparing Nigeria for independence merely increased attention to the problem. The paper suggests that even though Britain and France had similar religious experiences in their colonies, the approaches made to solve the problems arising from the issues were similar in content though different in implementation. The paper concludes that although Britain accepted in principle to adopt the French approach, the eventual solution to the problem of religious fundamentalism was arrived at through a combination of local (home-grown) approaches, as well as the domestication of the French ideas.

Keywords: Religious fundamentalism, rapprochement, French and British colonial policy, northern Nigeria and transfer of power.

Abstrak: Awal tahun 1950an, Nigeria menyaksikan pertumbuhan kebangkitan fundamentalisme Islam, terutamanya di utara negara tersebut. Kertas kerja ini mengkaji dimensi yang berbeza terhadap permasalahan fundamentalisme Islam di Nigeria dalam tahun 1950an, termasuk percubaan Britain untuk melibatkan kerajaan Perancis bagi mencari penyelesaian terhadap permasalahan tersebut. Kertas kerja ini membincangkan bahawa permasalahan fundamentalisme Islam

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di Nigeria dalam tahun 1950an berkisar tentang doktorin perpecahan antara dua puak utama komuniti Sufi (Qādiriyyah dan Tijāniyyah) di Afrika Barat. Bahawasanya permasalahan itu timbul ketika Britain sedang mempersiapkan Nigeria untuk kemerdekaan sedikit sebanyak meningkatkan perhatian terhadap masalah tersebut. Walaupun Britain dan Perancis mempunyai pengalaman agama yang serupa dalam tanah jajahan mereka, namun kertas kerja ini mencadangkan bahawa pendekatan yang diambil untuk menyelesaikan permasalahan-permasalahan yang timbul daripada isu-isu tersebut adalah serupa dalam kandungannya tetapi berbeza daripada segi perlaksanaannya. Kertas kerja ini menyimpulkan bahawa walaupun secara prinsipnya Britain menerima pendekatan yang digunakan Perancis, namun penyelesaian akhir kepada permasalahan fundamentalisme agama dapat dicapai melalui campuran pendekatan tempatan (di negeri sendiri), selain daripada idea-idea dalaman Perancis.

Kata kunci: Fundamentalisme agama, penyesuaian, polisi penjajahan Perancis dan Britain, Nigeria utara dan pengalihan kuasa

At the dawn of the colonization of Africa by European powers in the 19th century, the relationship between France and Britain was characterized by diplomatic rivalry. In West Africa, the *Say-Baruwa Line*, which determined the northern borders of modern Nigeria, engendered the race to Fashoda (Anene, 1970), a small village in Southern Sudan. In fact, the British and the French engaged in serious diplomatic rivalry in the hey days of the colonial acquisition over this village. Elsewhere in Africa, the French and the British struggled against each other for the possession of different parts of the continent. Yet, at the twilight of colonialism in Africa, the two colonial powers cooperated with each other. The rapprochement came about as a result of the following factors: (a) the rise in Islamic fundamentalism in the 1950s; (b) the rise of the popularity of the Tijāniyyah among the people of northern Nigeria owing to the activities of Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé of Kaolack, a Senegalese Islamic leader; (c) the rise of and potential threat of Nasserism; (d) the tendency and actual possibility of Muslims in northern Nigeria turning towards the Middle East and Pakistan for cultural contact; and, above all, (e) the period was that of decolonization in Nigeria when the territories had to be sanitized of all vestiges of radicalism or whatever might truncate a peaceful transfer of power. Based on the declassified records of the British Colonial Office, this study analyses the nature and scope of the diplomatic co-operation between Britain and France, resulting from

increasing activities of Islamic revivalism in northern Nigeria in the 1950s. Unlike existing studies (Kane, 1994), the conclusions arrived at in this study are based on the records from the declassified files of the British government.

Islam in northern Nigeria before the 1950s

Considering the modest beginnings of Islam in northern Nigeria and the apogee which it reached in the Middle Ages, the history of Islam in the region had, until the last decade of the 18th century, been a mixed one. However, towards the end of the 18th century, religion seemed to have lost most of its original fervour. In fact, by the end of the 18th century, most of Hausaland had reverted to syncretism and it seems that few people practiced pure Islam. It was at this juncture that Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio led a *jihād* which was as much a revolt against the existing socio-political system in Hausaland as it was a religious war to purify Islam. By 1804, Usman Dan Fodio had succeeded in overthrowing the Habe rulers, replacing them with his own Fulani kinsmen (Adeleye, 1971; Last, 1967). The socio-political system which Dan Fodio introduced in most areas of northern Nigeria lasted until the British took control of Nigeria in the early part of the 20th century (Ikime, 1980; Mohammed, 1983).

It is important to note that Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio was an adherent of the Qādiriyyah order of Islam, and this became the official religious inclination of his successors (Last, 1967). Thus, at the beginning of the 1900s, Islam in northern Nigeria was essentially practised along the lines of the Qādiriyyah doctrine. For the British, the dawn of colonial rule in northern Nigeria meant that the cultivation of the Muslim establishment of the post-*jihād* period would serve a dual purpose. In the first place, the collaboration which developed between the British and the Sokoto Caliphate was meant to counter the activities of the Mahdists, (Adeleye, 1972; Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1990) who had organized revolts against both the British and the Caliphate. The British were, therefore, good “helpers” and protectors for the Caliphate against the Mahdists. This was particularly true as the possibility of a Mahdist uprising was a visible and potent threat to both the established Caliphate and the establishment of British rule, especially in the whole of Western Sudan. Also, the British saw the friendship with the established Sokoto Caliphate as a chance to edge out the French and the Germans in the acquisition of territories in that part of Africa.

It was in this socio-cultural setting, established by the Qādiriyyah, that the Tijāniyyah movement was introduced towards the end of the 19th century. This was to prepare the ground for the imminent clash of the adherents of these two movements of Islam in the 20th century (Tahir, 1978). This clash, together with its potential for the breakdown of law and order, as well as its tendency to generate violence at every opportune moment, triggered the Anglo-French rapprochement.

The French and British attitude towards Islam in West Africa before 1950

The attitude of the French government towards Islam in the first half of the 20th century was a reflection of the fact that there was a history of uprising and resistance against French rule in the Senegambia region, led by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the leader of the Mouride sect. Therefore, the establishment of the Moslem Affairs Office as a component unit within the Ministry of Overseas France was certainly an indication of the importance which the French colonial government attached to Islamic issues in West Africa, which was inhabited predominantly by Muslims. Yet, a consideration of the French attitude towards the rise of Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism in Nigeria, which had French territories as its neighbours, is necessary in order to understand the position which its bureaucrats took on the issue.

As far as the French were concerned, the British did not seem to understand that Islam must be accommodated and integrated in West Africa in order to tap the advantages which such an “understanding attitude” would bring in. Indeed, the French had evolved a policy of integrating the leading practitioners of Islam into local colonial administration. Since Muslims were the majority across West Africa, Islamic Sheikhs and Marabouts played prominent roles in local administration (CO554/1317). Thus, between 1854 and 1914, the goal of French policy was quite clear:

Our Islamic policy shall aim at preserving friendly but watchful relations with traditional Islam in view of the imminent dangers to the French cause arising from the spread in West and Central Africa of Islamic forms which are inspired by political programmes and anti-French ideas rather than by mystical ideas and confessional disciplines (CO554/1317).

In 1952, M. Louis Mangin, Head of the Moslem Affairs Office in French West Africa, visited the Gold Coast and northern Nigeria ostensibly to study “the Moslem Problems in the territories.” Apparently reacting to what he perceived as indifference on their part, M. Louis Mangin, advocated to the British not to stay neutral in religious matters in Nigeria (CO554/1317). To Louis Mangin, sufficient attention needed to be paid to the various Islamic organizations because they were “primarily directed from Egypt, Sudan and Pakistan and they possessed the ability to influence the dominating forces in these areas which are naturally inclined to work with them” (CO554/1317). Mangin was worried that France and Britain’s ability to deal with these threatening tendencies of the Islamic movements was diminishing, especially as they were in the throes of handing over power to their territories. After outlining a number of possible options for dealing with the problem, Louis Mangin held the opinion that both the French and the British authorities should take steps to counter the Middle Eastern influence in the area (CO554/1317).

Louis Mangin cautioned about the seeming lack of Britain’s interest about the potential threat Islam was posing to Western interests in the 1950s. In fact, it was a political problem which he believed was bound to increase:

On the French side there is now general agreement on this, but the same cannot be said on the British side, where the generally received opinion, as much in the Colonial Service and the Foreign Office, is that Islam should be regarded solely as a religious phenomenon – a matter affecting individuals in which it would be imprudent to meddle – and that the spread of Arab culture should only have the effect of consolidating this religion and that it should consequently contribute indirectly towards establishing a bulwark against communist materialism (CO554/1317).

On their part, the British did not, at the beginning of colonialism, understand the main driving force behind the mass-mobilization capacity of Islam. This was especially true for Sufism, which was perceived by the British as an evidence of fundamentalism. However, the real reason peasants gathered around a religious personality was for religious and spiritual elevation. It was a strategy to cope with the vagaries and challenges of everyday life. In a way, the realities of colonial rule

as exemplified by taxation and forced labour in public works, where peasants were transported from rural areas to urban centres to work, also acted as an impetus for the masses of the people to look for a way out of their seeming hopelessness (Lubeck, 1987).

However, the British developed a strong relationship with the Fulani aristocracy, who were both the political and spiritual heads of the communities created after the 1804 *jihād*, led by the Qādiriyyah leader, Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio. As a result of their policy of indirect rule, the British had a patronizing attitude towards Islam as a religion in northern Nigeria. Indeed, the new political order which came into being after the success of the Fulani *jihād* made sure that the Emir (the traditional ruler) was also the religious head of the emirate. Thus, in a situation where the ruler guaranteed a ready acquiescence to Britain's rule, the British were obliged to guarantee his reign. Apart from this patronizing attitude of the British to the politics of the northern region of Nigeria, there was also the very supportive role of fostering and encouraging Islamic and Arabic studies as a deliberate policy of educational and social development in the northern Nigeria.

Unlike the French, the British believed that the centripetal force of Islam, as it appeared to have existed in French West Africa, was not apparent in northern Nigeria. To Britain, Islam was of the utmost importance, and this appeared to have led the British officials to evolve and pursue a policy of "determined non-interference" in matters of religion. The British, unlike the French, did not consider integrating Islam into local administration because the Native Authority system already had the Muslim Emirs as the locus of administration. However, by the mid-1950s, a number of developments forced the British to reconsider this policy. In 1947, the British announced a policy of colonial reforms which, in the 1950s, was transformed into a policy of devolution of power to the forces of Nigerian nationalism (Cell, 1980; Lawal, 2000). The adoption of this policy was to prepare Nigeria for eventual self government. However, the British officials in northern Nigeria were seriously concerned about the consistent threat and actual violent confrontations between the two major Islamic movements which dominated the religious terrain of northern Nigeria – the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqahs*.

Sufi *ṭarīqahs* in northern Nigerian

Ṭarīqah, essentially, refers to a path through which a Sufi Sheikh (or religiously pious person) leads his followers. The two leading *ṭarīqahs* in northern Nigeria, as in the whole of West Africa, were the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah brotherhoods. They are essentially Sufi and both, in their orthodox forms, are tolerant *ṭarīqahs*. Up till the end of the Second World War, the two *ṭarīqahs* had maintained a relationship of mutual respect. However, the visit of Sheikh Sidi (Cede) ben Omar Tijānī (descendant of the founder of the Tijāniyyah movement) to northern Nigeria in 1949, as well as the rise of Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé of Kaolack as an important religious personality and force in West Africa in the 1950s, seemed to have changed this peaceful relations. Although the two phenomena did not, on their own, raise the spectre of fundamentalism, the activities of some of their followers did. Indeed, there was initial co-operation between the two *ṭarīqahs*, as underlined by the coalition of the successors of Al-Haj Umar of Futi and the army of Sultan Attahiru of Sokoto against the British at the second battle of Burmi in 1903, in which the British triumphed (Adeleye, 1971). It should be noted that the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* in Nigeria probably originated from the visit of Al-Haj Umar of Futi who had earlier visited Ain Mahdi (about 200 miles south of Algiers), the hometown of the founder of the Tijāniyyah movement. Al-Haj Umar, while returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, had stopped by in Sokoto where he married a daughter of the Sultan, an event that seems to have given him a foothold in the largely Qādiriyyah terrain. Al-Haj Umar's successor, Sheikh Bashir, was one of the supporters of Sultan Attahiru against the British in 1903. Another descendant of Al-Haj Umar of Futi was Alfa Hashim, who was also recognized as the leader of Nigerian Tijānīs by the British until his death in the 1930s.

Thus, it can be seen that throughout the 1930s, the Qādiriyyah and Tijāniyyah relationship was essentially that of peaceful co-existence. It was through the influence of these descendants of Umar of Futi in northern Nigeria that the Tijāniyyah movement grew. For instance, Mallam Madami, the son of Sheikh Bashiru who was exiled to Lokoja in the early part of the 20th century and who settled in the Dakayawa area of the Hadejia Emirate. In addition, the activities of itinerant Sheikhs, who visited the north-west littoral of Africa for proselytization, seem to have influenced the growth of the Tijāniyyah movement in the northern

part of Nigeria. It is also important to note that early in its history, the stable of the Tijāniyyah had been suspected of subversion through its adherents' familiarity with the Mahdists. However, this was quietly nipped in the bud. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the Tijāniyyah movement continued to grow, claiming many of the most influential people in the north. While in 1950, Sheikh Sidi ben Omar Tijānī visited Nigeria and had assumed the leadership of the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* by then. This Sheikh Sidi ben Omar's visit elicited scenes of excitement just as the visit of Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse of Kaolack to the Emir of Kano in 1952 witnessed a scene of wild enthusiasm. After this, the membership of the *ṭarīqah* grew dramatically, accounting for the greatest number of Muslims over most of the northern region of Nigeria.

The rules guiding the orthodox Tijāniyyah were such that they represented a sound moral code while its members were expected to pay respect to temporal authority. As has been noted above, both the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqahs* were essentially tolerant in their orthodox pristine forms. The major open conflict came about after World War II and the rise of Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse of Kaolack. Even then, the conflicts were initially limited to the Sokoto province and the adjoining parts of Katsina and Kano. However, Sheikh Sidi ben Omar's 1949 visit led to the popularity of Yan Wasifa, an extremist sub-group within the Tijāniyyah movement, responsible, for the outbreak of violence in different parts of the region. This enthusiasm for the Yan Wasifa led to the first major attempt in building separate Friday (*Jum'ah*) mosques in several towns in north-east Sokoto. Also, it manifested itself in open baiting of the Qādiriyyah. This visit also brought into existence a number of scurrilous songs against the Sultan from among the followers of the Tijāniyyah. It was the persuasion of the Sultan that led to a temporary halt in the tension-soaked relationship between the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah movements. Many of the Tijāniyyah-built Friday mosques were pulled down, while the visits of Sheikh Ibrahim of Kaolack to Kano in 1952, though given a tumultuous welcome, did little to provoke antagonism.

The Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* advocated that, in addition to pagan accretions, other unnecessary and harmful rites should be discarded. It called for a return to the true path of salvation. There had been many revivals in the history of Islam. Over the years, however, each new revivalist *ṭarīqah* had become more conservative and less exciting, and

appeared to wait for the arrival of its successor. This explains how the Tijāniyyah defeated the Qādiriyyah in northern Nigeria. As far as religion was concerned, the movement would appear to have incorporated two elements that were important to an African worldview. These were the ready availability of a brave and saintly personality who was perceived as being loved by God and the mysteries surrounding its initiation. Both factors were present in the growth of the Tijāniyyah in northern Nigeria in the 1950s.

In a situation such as in northern Nigeria, which was characterized by the existence of an army of unemployed youths and inter-ethnic wars, the existence of the Yan Wasifa offered the opportunity to utilize boundless energy for religious exhibitionism and exclusiveness. The older Muslim generation, on the other hand, was faced with the prospect of being left behind in the grand scheme of things. Joining the Tijāniyyah movement was thus, a means of self-reassertion. Among the factors that tended to attract Muslims to the Tijāniyyah in northern Nigeria was the fact that it offered an opportunity to make money. Its initial itinerant preachers were also, invariably, wealthy merchants who did not fail to mix business with religion.

By the mid-1950s, the supporters of the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* formed a considerable majority amongst the Muslims of northern Nigeria. Also, most of the Emirs and the Courtiers had become either Tijāniyyah or, simply viewed it favourably. The Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* was much respected in Bauchi, Jos and Katagum, ostensibly because its local leader had converted the Emir of Katagum to the *ṭarīqah*. In Bida and Kontagora, the existence of the Tijāniyyah was of long standing and a note in a Native Authority file in 1926 indicated that “there were very few Qādiriyyah left” (cited in CO554/1992). The same view can also be expressed for the Muri Division, where a report states that “whereas a few years ago the Muslims were Qādiriyyah almost to a man, now, as a result of energetic missionary activity, the Tijānis are much more in number”, while the southern Adamawa region witnessed vigorous Tijāniyyah missionary activity leading to a considerable conversion of many Fulani of the area (CO554/1992).

Noticeable changes in the conduct of the Tijāniyyah began sometimes in mid-1954. It was in this year that the matter reached a head when the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* began to be more assertive in its proclamations across the northern region of Nigeria. Although operating under the

generic name of the Tijāniyyah, it was the militant and “extreme” wing, the Yan Wasifa, that was the source of apprehensions on the part of the British colonial administration in Nigeria. As would be seen in the sequel, across the region, the Yan Wasifa constituted a formal threat to the peace of the entire northern part of Nigeria. These threats were in the nature of religious exhibitionism, exemplified by public chanting and parades, the tendency to reject the existing religious order by openly contesting the leadership of the different towns, as well as by their decision to construct their own Friday mosques in an effort to create exclusive Tijāniyyah communities in the area. Peasants and ignorant youths made up the majority of Yan Wasifa.

Across the whole of northern Nigeria, the Yan Wasifa were a veritable source of instability and destabilization. For instance, around the north-east district of Sokoto, the Yan Wasifa caused riots, and even prevented the Qādiriyyah from holding and leading the ‘Īd al-Fiṭr prayers that mark the end of fasting. The Native Authority had to step in and temporarily ban public chanting and, in one instance, had to intervene in an Imamate crisis relating to whether a village Liman should be Qādiriyyah or Tijāniyyah. In the Shellen area of Adamawa, the Yan Wasifa “alarmed” the local population by their exhibitionism during the 1955 *Sallah* celebrations. At Idah, the Igala capital which had a largely mixed population of Muslims, Christians and traditional worshippers, a unique situation occurred, where the Qādiriyyah refused to allow the local Tijāniyyah community to join them for the traditional *Sallah* prayer, thereby leading to some skirmishes which were quickly brought to an end.

Elsewhere, the growth of the Tijāniyyah *ṭarīqah* continued with ever-increasing speed and accompanied by frictions with other *ṭarīqahs* caused by the Yan Wasifa. It was largely a growth from the top downwards with friction occurring mainly in those areas where they had begun with the peasantry or small traders, and where the rulers were strict Qādiriyyah. Thus, the Yan Wasifa appeared to be conscious of the prevailing socio-economic circumstances of the society. They tried to align themselves with the rising Talakawa (peasants) as well as the Hausa merchants of such centres of trade as Gusau, Chafe and Kaura Namoda. Events in Gwandu, southern Katsina, Adamawa and riverine Ilorin were similar to one another as the Yan Wasifa enthusiasts drew to themselves, local “subversive” elements in an effort to provoke the

authority and thereby discredit it. In some other areas, such as in Funtua and southern Katsina, the Yan Wasifa tended to become identified with Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), a local radical political opposition group. In some other areas such as Lafiagi and Shonga, they were identified with the largely southern region dominated by Action Group Party (AGP) (CO554/1992). This formed the political dimension to the activities of the Yan Wasifa group. In some cases, minor disputes between social and economic factions were used as a pretext to start trouble by the religious groups. For instance, in 1953, an affray in Besse District of Gwandu between local farmers and the Hamalliya men over damage done to farms by the latter's cattle was immediately stopped as soon as the leader of the Hamalliya group, one Garba Modibbo heard of it.

The Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah had been engaged in some doctrinal rivalry which dated back to the time of the Kano civil wars of 1894 (Paden, 1973). During this civil war, the Sultan, who was the head of the Qādiriyyah and also the political head of the Sultanate of which Kano was only an emirate, had tried unsuccessfully to impose his own nominee as the Emir of Kano. This created some jealousy and resentment towards the Sultanate as many of the Emirs in northern Nigeria adopted Tijāniyyah as an outward visible sign of independence from the Qādiriyyah-dominated ruling house in Sokoto. This adoption of Tijāniyyahism was also in part an expression of the smouldering resentment of a section of the indigenous inhabitants against the Fulani conquerors who formed the ruling families in the Emirates of the Northern region.

Of relevance in this regard is the career of Mallam Aminu Kano, who was not only an adherent of Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé of Kaolack, the leader of the Tijāniyyah in the whole of West Africa, but who also visited Kaolack frequently. Aminu Kano was a Tijānī who espoused a socialist idea of equality and championed the cause of the vast majority of the peasants, mostly Yan Wasifa, of northern Nigeria. This soon brought Aminu Kano into open conflict with the political establishment in northern Nigeria. The Aminu Kano phenomenon, as far as the Yan Wasifa problem was concerned, created a contradiction. The Yan Wasifa were in the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) which Aminu Kano led. The spearhead of the Tijāniyyah movement in Kano was the Emir Sanusi who belonged to the conservative, aristocratic Northern

Peoples' Congress (NPC). Thus, a schism was created between the radical Aminu Kano and the Emir of Kano, a conservative politician. This schism led to a situation where the local political leaders in northern Nigeria perceived the Tijāniyyah as a potent threat to the political establishment in the region. Thus, at the height of the 1950s, there was a convergence of interests between the British colonial administration and the emergent political leadership of northern Nigeria. This was especially true as the transfer of power was progressing to suppress the NEPU which had become a rallying point for the peasants. This came as a result of the perception that its leader, Mallam Aminu Kano, was brazenly anti-establishment.

The Emir of Kano was the most important and influential of the Emirs who had embraced Tijāniyyahism. However, in the mid-1950s, the Yan Wasifa assumed a dangerous posture. In essence, the group was considered a serious threat to the peace of the region as it attempted to seize principal mosques in a number of towns and villages, and threatened violence as a means of converting people. The threat which the Yan Wasifa group constituted was illustrated in a memo written by the Colonial Office to the Foreign Office in 1956 (CO554/1317). According to the British, one major reason that led to the evolution and growth of the Anglo-French rapprochement was the perception that the Tijāniyyah group was capable of fomenting a region-wide problem for the local Qādiriyyah leadership in particular, and for the British generally.

The rapprochement and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism

Considering the rather mutually exclusive policies pursued by the French and British before the 1950s, the details of Anglo-French co-operation on Islam at that time are sketchy. However, there are snippets of what might be considered aspects of mutual assistance, even if these were not codified in any manner. For instance, in a 1950 report on Islam in the French Cameroons, Gouverneur Beyrides says that Al-Haj Umar of Futi's influence in Zinder and Goure is considerable, indicating that the exchange of intelligence between the French and the British had been long standing (CO554/1992). At the same time, there are records of intelligence sharing on the activities of Ali Gati, who led his followers from the French colony in the desert to cause mayhem in the Argungu area of the Sokoto province. He was to be imprisoned later in 1949 when

he returned to the French territory (CO554/1992, p. 16). The net seems to have been cast further afield as evidence shows that during the First World War, efforts were made by a German named Rudolph Prietze, who changed his name to Abdul Malik Pasha to further the German cause by provoking a Mahdist upheaval in Nigeria (CO554/1992). The initial British support for the Sokoto Caliphate against both the Mahdist tendency as well as against the Germans seemed to have been resuscitated.

To the British, the need for a more forward-looking policy regarding the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria had become necessary by the mid-1950s. Such a policy had to be woven around a rapprochement with the French, whose colonies bordered Nigeria. This policy would appear to have been quickened by the disturbing reports in early 1956 that Garba Modibbo, the leader of the Hamalliya sect, was involved in arms trafficking. Indeed, as far back as 1951, it was rumoured that Modibbo was importing and storing arms from French Africa. By 1956, reports suggested that he was buying arms in the Western Provinces and exporting them to French Africa (CO554/1992). The French, mindful of the civil war in Algeria, then kept a watchful eye from over the border, obviously in an attempt to find out whether there was any substance to these rumours. Thus, a convergence of interests had made an Anglo-French rapprochement imperative in the circumstances. Therefore, the need for British co-operation with the French had heightened by the mid-1950s. Simply, this is due to the fact that its officials had noted that British interest in Islamic affairs had fluctuated throughout the years and had, by then, reached a very low level. "Developments in 1956, however, had shown how much has been going on about which we know next to nothing" (CO554/1992). In all, the behaviour of the Yan Wasifa group was such that it gave the impression that British rule, and by implication that of the French, would soon break down and that the Yan Wasifa would take over. In mid-1954, rumours were rife that the Yan Wasifa had been heard to say that the power of the French and British authorities were on the wane and that their turn was coming.

Why did the British seek co-operation with the French on Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria in the 1950s? The answer to this question appears to be mainly because Islam was more prevalent in French West Africa than in the British areas of West Africa. The fact

that Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse of Kaolack (Hutson, 1999; Nyang, 1984; Seeseman and Soares, 2009), alleged to be the mastermind behind the renewed Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria, was a Senegalese (which made him a French national) could also be responsible for Britain's reaching out to the French for some assistance. Of course, the French had already developed a *modus operandi* for dealing successfully with, and accommodating the forces of the Islamic religion in their territories. They had done this before the British and, as such, the British believed that there might be one or two things to be learnt from the French. But why did the British embrace rapprochement at this time? It was largely because of decolonization and the transfer of power then taking place in Nigeria. Also, the reality of the cold war situation made such a rapprochement reasonable, especially in view of the then-recent Suez crisis. The basis of British anxiety was that with the growth of President Gamal Abdul-Nasser's influence in the Arab world and the tendency of the average northern Nigerian Muslim to look towards North Africa, there was the possibility that Nasserism may be lurking in the corner.

Also, in the 1950s, it became a policy of the Northern regional government of the late Sir Ahmadu Bello to send Muslim scholars to institutions in the Maghreb, Egypt as well as Saudi Arabia, to study the basics and the niceties of Islamic law and jurisprudence. These scholars were later to become prominent judges. Some of these scholars such as the late Sheikh Abubakar Gumi became the Grand Kadi; his deputy, Mallam Haliru Binji, and Abdul-Kadiri Orire, among others, were to become the pioneers of modern *sharī'ah* in northern Nigeria. Thus, with this type of principled stand of the Northern Regional government about the training of these Muslim scholars in Egypt and other places in North Africa, the fear became real for the outgoing British administration that Nasserism, which had by then become a new "threat", was attracting the interest of the nascent Northern political power base.

Above all, Britain feared that as the transfer of power was proceeding in Nigeria, as was the case also in other British territories in West Africa, enough safeguards had to be put in place to prevent any upheaval which could threaten the entire "devolution of power" programme. To them, the potential danger from the "presence of an exclusive band of men, filled with religious fervour, members of a brotherhood with a history of intolerance and massacre, whose devotion to their leader can only be

compared to that of S.S. storm troopers to their Führer” (CO554/1992) was the most disturbing of the Islamic religious development in northern Nigeria.

The British had other serious concerns. Across the Northern region of Nigeria, there were incidences of religious intolerance which threatened the peace. For instance, there was the increasing spread of militant Tijāniyyahism in general and the “privately sponsored and even more inflammable variants of this [*tarīqah*]” which were causing increasing concern to the British authorities (CO554/1321). In the same way, there were reports of many other Islamic movements that were different from the Qādiriyyah, involved in acts considered to be detrimental to the security of the region. With such threats, it was not surprising that the British and the French decided to unfold this rapprochement in order to watch Islamic fundamentalism in the northern parts of West Africa very closely, and then attempt to curb their growth.

The focus of this Anglo-French co-operation was on holding periodic inter-ministerial meetings on the subject of Islamic religion in their territories, as well as sharing intelligence information on the general trend of Islamic activities in the northern region of Nigeria. Considering their integrative approach towards Islam and its leaders in the Francophone areas of West Africa, especially in Senegal, the French considered the seeming aloofness or “non-interventionist” attitude of the British to be grossly inadequate and dangerous. The French administrators, under the influence of Professor Montague and his colleagues at the School of Higher Moslem Studies in Paris, would seem to have believed that the British West African governments were not sufficiently alert to the challenges of Muslim political and religious movements (CO554/1317).

Much as circumstances forced the British to reconsider their attitude towards Islam in northern Nigeria, the British still believed that the French were overbearing in their relationship and policy towards Islam. In a brief presented to the inter-ministerial meeting between British and French authorities in 1956, the position of the British officials in Nigeria was that their hitherto policy of “determined non-intervention in Islamic religious matters has, generally speaking, proved to be a strong stabilizing factor” (CO554/1317). The situation in the second half of the 1950s seemed to have influenced the British against the continuation of

this “nonchalant” attitude towards Islamic affairs in northern Nigeria. A consideration of some of the issues of Islamic nature that came up during this period would further buttress this position.

By 1956, the British seemed to have been convinced that more forward-looking and more determined interests ought to be shown in Islamic affairs in northern Nigeria, as the French had done. One need not seek very far to find the reasons for this apparent determination to change their policy. British official records began to reveal a conscious determination to confront the problems posed by the rise in Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, this was represented by the activities of the militant wing of the Tijāniyyah, the Yan Wasifa group. The governor of the northern region now “[took] a serious view of the matter and sees in the movement a threat to the stability of the whole Region” (CO554/1317). Also, the British became more aware of the Egyptian government’s efforts “in the last few years to attract students to Muslim universities in Egypt” (CO554/1317). Thus, the federal and regional governments began to take steps to discourage Nigerians from going to Egypt (CO554/1317; Lawal, 2000, pp. 103-112). The anxiety expressed over the contacts of Nigerian Muslims with Egypt should be understood within the context of an emerging fear of “Pan-Arabism” as exhibited by President Gamel Abdel Nasser. He had taken over the government of Egypt and changed the name of the country to the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1952. Since that time, the Egyptian government had increased its interest in Nigeria and had, in fact, increased the number of scholarships offered to Nigerians (CO554/1317).

The internationalization of the problem of the Tijāniyyah-Wasifa group in northern Nigeria was captured in a secret savinggram written by the governor of the northern region to the Governor-General of Nigeria in June 1956. While acknowledging the danger posed by the Tijāniyyah group to the existing socio-political and religious set-up in northern Nigeria, Sir Bryan Sharwood-Smith (the governor of northern Nigeria) warned that the incidents went further than opposition to the Qādiriyyah, and amounted to a direct challenge to the Native Authority system. He concluded:

At present, the indications are of a secret organisation based in Kano and working through medium towards a temporal power. Perhaps assisted by inspiration from Senegal,

Morocco and beyond and with possible link with Pan Arabism (CO554/1321).

The involvement of Sheikh Ibrahim Niase, a “pious religious leader” from Senegal which had been a foremost French territory since the 1850s, was one major factor that further engendered Anglo-French rapprochement of the 1950s. Also, the need to approach the French for some form of co-operation was underlined by the conclusion of British officials that the Tijāniyyah movement “seem[ed] to have derived its inspiration from Senegal, Morocco (two French territories) and may have links with Pan-Arabism.” The rapprochement seemed to have been engendered, particularly “by the points about Sheikh Ibrahim Koulakh which should be of some interest to the French!” (CO554/1321). To the British, the personality of Sheikh Ibrahim Niase of Kaolack was something that was worthy of close monitoring. This was because, even though the French looked upon him “as of little importance, by 1949 he appeared to have established himself as the undisputed leader of the Tijānī *ṭarīqah* in Nigeria” (CO554/1992).

Anglo-French rivalry and the rapprochement

In spite of the general acknowledgement on the part of the two colonial powers of the danger which the rise of the militant sect of the Tijāniyyah movement posed to the socio-political arrangement of northern Nigeria in the 1950s, little or nothing came out of their rapprochement. A major factor that appeared to have slowed down the extent of co-operation between France and Britain was the fact that they had different perceptions of the problem from the onset. Also, there existed between the French and the British a subtle diplomatic rivalry, which seemed to have bred suspicion in the development of this rapprochement. It was as if the rivalry that characterized the relationship between them at the beginning of colonization was still present. The British neither trusted nor were they ready to entrust their “secrets” to the French during this period, as records of the British government in the 1950s talk of French “metropolitan security being not wholly water-tight” (CO554/1421).

Nevertheless, the British still wanted to co-operate with the French as much as they could, although a number of reports which they provided to the French were doctored “for security reasons” (CO554/1421). In fact, an official wrote, “I have suggested a few passages whose references might offend the French and which could easily be doctored and

other passages which do show, fairly clearly, the extent of the security network in parts of northern Nigeria” (CO554/1421). Apart from the apparent security considerations already pointed out, a salient reason for this mistrust between the two co-operating governments seems to be, as one official put it, that the British were “inclined to think that the Report had better not be passed to the French whose security is rather rudimentary and whose ideas on Islam in Africa seem to be so far from ours” (CO554/1421).

This mistrust and the difference of perception concerning the problems of Islamic fundamentalism both vitiated the extent to which the Anglo-French rapprochement could have achieved. In the end, nothing concrete was achieved, apart from sharing intelligence information and holding periodic inter-ministerial meetings. As the two governments never arrived at a common view, even on the actual existence of an issue, their discussion of the problem remained “fruitless and [was not] possible to bring about, despite the obvious goodwill on both sides, even the smallest amount of collaboration, either in respect of the exchange of information or in respect of consideration of the common action which could be undertaken” (CO554/1317).

In the late 1950s, the threat of actual breakdown of law and order was most prevalent in northern Nigeria to the extent that the British, apparently after the failure of a rapprochement with the French on Islamic affairs, had to devise another means of curbing the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. This was because the devolution of power was climaxing at this period. The tensions and actual intermittent conflicts between the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah brotherhoods, which had triggered Anglo-French co-operation in the first place, was to give way to an Islamic Advisory Council created by the government of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna who was the Premier of the northern region in the 1950s. The Islamic Advisory Council was created mainly to lessen the tension between the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah in northern Nigeria. This Council was to become insignificant in the aftermath of the first military coup d'état in January, 1966.

However, the attitude of the British Government towards Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria did not end with the failure of their rapprochement with the French. Rather, significant lessons seemed to have been learnt from the French attitude and approach towards Islam

in French West Africa. This is because it became obvious to the British officials that Islam and the forces of its propagation were capable of undermining the peace and stability of not only the northern region, but indeed, the entire country. Thus, the style of the French in integrating Islam and its leaders into local colonial administration was adopted by the British with some modifications. For instance, the British supported the creation of the Islamic Advisory Council under the government of Sir Ahmadu Bello. In fact, this council was the forerunner of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, which was to become a pseudo-official organ of the Nigerian government on Islamic affairs. The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) was to be under the leadership of the Sultan of Sokoto, the head of the Qādiriyyah brotherhood which had been collaborating with the British since 1907 (Best, 1999).

The attitude of the British government in the late 1950s appears to have been determined by the belief that some of the leading Islamic leaders and Mallams (of the Qādiriyyah movement) who were ignored by the Western world and its appurtenances of colonial rule had found in the Tijāniyyah movement a way to power and importance. Thus, it became important for the British to find a way to canalize their desire for power and recognition by bringing them “into the framework of local government.” However, before that, the outlook of these Islamic leaders must be widened (CO554/1992). Thus, at the twilight of their rule in Nigeria, the British introduced the idea of improvement of the Muslim leaders’ outlook through the encouragement of wider international travels. They also devised some courses for Islamic leaders under the auspices of the School of Arabic Studies, where some influential Islamic Leaders were invited to give lectures and talks along the lines of “moderate Islam” (CO554/1992).

At the end of the day, the rapprochement as conceived by the British and the French did not yield any obvious results. Yet, it would be erroneous to conclude that there was nothing concrete that resulted from the discussions between the French and the British over Islamic revivalism in the 1950s. The reality of an age-old diplomatic rivalry between them clearly vitiated any long-term co-operation that could have achieved more. However, going by the strategies adopted by the British in handling Islamic revivalism in the late 1950s, it could be seen that most of the ideas and tactics which the French adopted in their colonies were indirectly used by the British in handling Islamic

revivalism. However, it should be noted that the British refused to accept the French ideas wholeheartedly.

Conclusion

The two rival colonial powers began to co-operate when it dawned on them that there had arisen in the West African sub-region, a new wave of Islamic consciousness which bordered on extremism or fundamentalism. Thus, they pooled their efforts at coordinating intelligence information and sharing advice, as far as the issue of Islamic fundamentalism was concerned in West Africa in general and in the northern region of Nigeria in particular. However, the efforts which were made by leading officials on both sides were vitiated by, among other things, the differences in their perception of and attitude towards the issue, as well as by the seeming rivalry between France and Britain. It can be concluded that this rivalry conditioned the extent to which the intelligence shared between these two countries was freely given.

At the end of the day, nothing concrete was achieved by the rapprochement which suffered from lack of trust among the co-operating parties. Britain had to revert back to its home-grown solutions which, from all material facts available, could be considered as doing what the French had done with much success and which she had advocated from the onset, when the problem of Islamic revivalism was first noticed on a significant scale in northern Nigeria in the early 1950s. The period of the 1950s was significant for the British because it was the decade of decolonization and the transfer of power from the British officials to Nigerian nationalist politicians. Although available evidence tends to show that Britain did much to protect the northern region from the influence of the Western-oriented politicians from the southern parts of the country (Lawal, 2000, Chapters 5 and 6), the threat which the growth of a radical genus of Islam in the predominantly Muslim North posed was such that the British and northern politicians had to work together to minimize the danger of Islamic fundamentalism in the region and by extension, the whole of Nigeria.

By the late 1950s, the British seemed to have concluded that the French policy of integrating Islam with the local colonial administration through initiating co-operation with pliable Islamic leaders was the magic wand which held the promise of minimizing the danger which a

policy of indifference or antagonism to Islam could have engendered. As the British were concluding the decolonization exercise in Nigeria, efficient policy safeguards were being implanted to ensure that decisions about Islam were coordinated by a body which had at its head those Islamic and political leaders who had a vested interest in cooperating with the existing colonial structure, and whose interest in continuing the colonial nexus was assured (Lawal, 2000, Chapter7). This was why the attitude of the British colonial administration seemed to have reached the same terminus with that of the local political leadership under the conservative Northern Peoples' Congress led by the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji (Sir) Ahmadu Bello. It was also why radical Muslim leaders who were members of the Tijāniyyah movement were not tolerated in the business of the transfer of power. Above all, it was one of the reasons why the British had to resort to the French prescription, even though this had to be done through a circuitous route.

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