"Sharia or Death": The Mass Mediated Hegemonic Rhetoric of Theocratic Populism in Nigeria's Muslim North

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Abstract

This paper explores the genealogy and contours of theocratic populism in Nigeria's Muslim North from 1999 to 2007. It examines the mass-mediated rhetorical articulations of Islamic theocratic populist politics in the region while laying bare its motivations in a religiously plural polity such as Nigeria. It argues that the introduction of Sharia laws in Nigeria's Muslim-majority northern states was a populist response by a traumatized hegemonic power bloc in Nigerian politics — which had hitherto taken for granted its right to dominate the social and political space —to regain its political and discursive high ground against an emergent, competing power bloc. Through an exploration of archival materials, the paper unpacks the rhetoric of the narratives between an entrenched but traumatized Muslim northern Nigerian hegemonic bloc, which had lost political power, and an embryonic yet ascendant hegemonic power bloc from the Christian south. It also showed that although advocacy for Sharia evaporated after the northern Muslim elite regained its lost political power in 2007, it inspired the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group that has murdered tens of thousands of people in Nigeria.

★ Keywords: theocratic populism; Nigeria; Islam; sharia laws; ideology.

Introduction

The restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria in May 1999 after prolonged periods of repressive military totalitarianism provided a vent for the eruption of theocratic populist politics—a sort of populism of the right[1] — in Nigeria's Muslim north. The coterminousness of the restitution of constitutional democracy and the rise of theocratic populism is at once a testament to the vitality of democracy and a symptom of its "pathology."[2] Although it was the advent of democracy that legitimized calls for the codification of Sharia laws in Northern Nigeria's predominantly Muslim states, the adoption of Sharia in some Nigerian states imperiled not only Nigeria's democracy but also the country's very legitimacy to exist as a diverse, multi-cultural entity. This contradiction was stirred up by the fact that Nigeria's 1999 constitution simultaneously guarantees freedom of religion and forbids the adoption of any religion as a state religion.[3]

Although, traditionally, it was legitimacy-challenged totalitarian regimes that championed the strict enforcement of Sharia laws in Muslim-majority countries, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, advocacy for Sharia, or Islamic law, has lately been animated by competitive multiparty democracy.[4] Nevertheless, in a multi-religious society with a labyrinthine network of conflictual relationships such as Nigeria, advocacy for and adoption of Sharia even in Muslim-majority parts of the country were bound to impose strains on national cohesion. Thus, the implementation of Sharia precipitated bloody communal convulsions[5] and eventually inspired the birth of Boko Haram. In this paper I examine the genealogy and contours of radical Muslim populism in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007. I also explain the mass-mediated rhetorical articulations of Islamic theocratic populist politics while laying bare its motivations in a religiously plural polity such as Nigeria.

I argue that the introduction of Sharia law in Nigeria's Muslim-majority northern states was a populist response by a traumatized hegemonic bloc in Nigerian politics—which had hitherto taken for granted its right to dominate the social and political space—to regain its political and discursive high ground against an emergent, competing power bloc. Through an exploration of archival materials, I unpack the rhetoric of the narratives between an entrenched but traumatized Muslim northern Nigerian hegemonic bloc, which had lost political power, and an embryonic yet ascendant hegemonic power bloc from the Christian south. I also explore the political and social consequences of this conflict on the social basis of the state's legitimacy, and how this fact impacts on the composition, decomposition, and recomposition of popular identities in Nigeria.[6]

Through this paper, then, I illuminate how theocratic populist politics informed the rhetoric of hegemonic contestation between two regional blocs in a multi-ethnic, postcolonial federation and the consequences this has had and continues to have for identity formation

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1   Jamie Matthews, "Populism, Inequality and Representation: Negotiating 'the 99%' with Occupy London," *The Sociological Review* 67 no. 5 (2019): 1018–1033.

2   See Tjitske Akkerman, "Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology," *Acta Politica* 38 (2003): 147–159. Also see Cas Mudde, "The Problem with Populism," *Guardian*, February 17, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe.

3   Osita Nnamani Ogbu, "Is Nigeria a Secular State? Law, Human Rights and Religion in Context," *The Transnational Human Rights Review* 1 (2014): 135-178, https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/thr/vol1/iss1/4

4   Robert Hefner, ed., *Shari'a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

5   See Farooq A. Kperogi, "Clash of Newspaper Ideologies? An Analysis of the Ideological Split in British Newspaper Commentaries on the 2012 Miss World Riots in Nigeria," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 23 no. 1 (2013): 121-143). Also see Henrik Angerbrandt, "Political Decentralisation and Conflict: The Sharia Crisis in Kaduna, Nigeria," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29 no. 1 (2011): 15-31.

6   In the past, scholars have investigated how economic policies such as IMF/World Bank-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs composed, decomposed and recomposed popular identities. See Attahiru Jega (ed.) *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute, 2000).

and re-formation in Nigeria. Through this analysis, a better understanding is developed of ways in which political power is configured and contested in the context of the shift in the balance of hegemonic forces in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007. By drawing from the academic literature on populism, hegemony, identity construction, Islam, and rhetoric, as well as such popular sources as Nigerian and foreign newspaper accounts of the political struggles in Nigeria, I show that the introduction of Sharia law in northern Nigeria—and the civil and communal upheavals it has precipitated— is not evidence of incipient "Islamic terrorism" in Africa but the theocratic populist hegemonic discursive strategy of an elite group. It is hoped that this case study will deepen and broaden our understanding of the multifarious guises and manifestations of populism, especially in transitional, multi-religious, and fragile polities. In the next section of this paper, I explicate the concept of populism and show how it manifested in Nigeria's Muslim North.

Populist Democracy in Theocratic Garbs

Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens theorize populism as "a strategy of political mobilization using a typical style of political rhetoric," which consists in "appeal to the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment."[7] Populism depends for its mobilizational effectiveness on the magnetic charm of a charismatic leader who embodies "the will of the common people and who is able to speak on their behalf."[8] An abiding feature of populists is their capacity to construct binary oppositions between the "people" and the "elite" and to offer simple-minded but relatable answers to life's complicated existential torments with the aid of demotic linguistic registers. As Margaret Canovan points out, populism is an "appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of society."[9] It is, according to Paul Taggart, "of the people but not of the system."[10]

In other words, populism and democracy share a tenuous ideational kindship in that they both derive the ideological and cultural basis of their legitimacy from appeals to "the people." It is precisely because of this fact that scholars such as Torbjörn Tännsjö insist that populism is the most genuine manifestation of the ideals of democracy.[11] Several scholars have, however, posited that populism represents a perversion of constitutional democracy.[12] Nadia Urbinati, for instance, argues that

> "The ideology of populism displaces equality for unity and thus opposes social and political pluralism. Its extreme consequence, as the experience of fascism testifies, is to transform a political community into a corporate household-like entity, where class and ideological differences are denied and mastered in the attempt to fulfill the myth of a comprehensive totality of state and society".[13]

In other words, because it often seeks to totalize its vision of the world and to obliterate the individuality of people in a democracy, populism subverts the core ideals of liberal democracy. From the foregoing, it is obvious that populism is a complex concept about which there is

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7 Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens, "Populism Versus Democracy," *Political Studies* 55 (2007), 407.
8 Ibid.
9 Margaret Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," *Political Studies* 47 no. 1 (1999), 3.
10 Paul Taggart, *The New Populism and the New Politics: New Protest Parties in Sweden in a Comparative Perspective* (London, Macmillan, 1996), 32.
11 Torbjörn Tännsjö, *Populist Democracy: A Defence* (London: Routledge, 1992.)
12 See, for instance, Nadia Urbinati, "Democracy and Populism," *Constellations*, 5 no.1 (1998): 110–24 and Pierre-André Taguieff, "Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem," *Telos*, 103 (1995): 9–43.
13 Urbinati, "Democracy and Populism," 110.

no definitional unanimity among scholars because it has different strands, manifestations, and iterations in different countries and contexts. In Nigeria, for instance, the first populist movement to emerge in the country's Muslim North in the 1950s was fundamentally a populism of the left against a repressive feudal system.[14] Nonetheless, the recrudescence of populism in the same Muslim North between 1999 and 2007 took on a right-wing, theocratic form.

I conceptualize theocratic populism as a manipulative political movement that is nourished by and draws social and cultural legitimacy from appeals to a religious ideology that excites the passions of a majority of the population of a society.[15] In northern Nigeria, that religion is Islam. It is the faith to which most of the population subscribes. The rampant corruption of the political elite, the economic disaffiliation of vast sections of the society, and the failures of liberal democracy to live up to its promises all conspire to create fertile grounds for the germination and maturation of theocratic populism.[16] This is, of course, by no means unique to Muslim northern Nigeria. Scholars have identified cultural and institutional factors that stymy democracy in Muslim-majority countries. Ellen Lust, for instance, points to the "preconditions of democracy" whose absence in Muslim-majority countries renders democracy there vulnerable.[17] The preconditions are economic prosperity, presence of a healthy civil society, deliberative culture, institutional arrangements that sustain incumbent power wielders, and strategic concerns.[18] Nevertheless, like most populist movements, the invocation of "the people" is usually no more than a stratagem for hegemonic political battles of temporarily traumatized segments of the political elite, as I show in subsequent sections of this paper. As Paulina Ochoa Espejo argues,

> *"Populism is an ideology of collective identity, one that seeks to build political hegemonies by exclusion. What makes a politician populist is neither her appeal to the common people, nor her opposition to the establishment: that is just democratic politics. What defines populism is the idea that the society's establishment—the elites of the society—and the professional politicians who are their agents can be eschewed because none of them is genuinely part of "The People.""* [19]

The desire to build "political hegemonies by exclusion" was the overriding motive force behind the politics of strategic populist religious exclusion by Northern Nigeria's political elite. Declaration of Sharia in Muslim-majority states in a religiously plural country like Nigeria was the most effective way to achieve hegemony by exclusion. In order to understand how the theocratic populism of Northern Nigeria's political elites was little more than a hegemonic rhetorical strategy to wrest back power from its southern counterpart, it is appropriate to move now to my conceptions of hegemony.

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14   See Adagbo Onoja, Cosmas Attayi-Elaigu, and Yunusa Zakari Ya'u, *The Populist Factor in Nigerian Politics: Truncation or Transformation of NEPU/PRP Radicalism?* (Zaria, Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1995).

15   For a study of theocratic populism in a Muslim polity, see Kambiz Afrachteh, "The Predominance and Dilemmas of Theocratic Populism in Contemporary Iran," *Iranian Studies* 14 no. 3/4 (1981): 189-213.

16   The failure of liberal democracy to conform to the cultures of developing countries and deliver on good governance has been captured robustly in the literature. See, for instance, Robert Pinkney, *Democracy in the Third World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); Adrian Leftwich, "Governance, Democracy and Development in the Third World," *Third World Quarterly* 4 no. 3 (1993): 605-624; Bhikhu Parekh, "The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy," *Political Studies* 40 no. 1 (1992):160-175. In fact, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel argue that it is economic development that births democracy, not the other way round (see Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, "How Development Leads to Democracy: What We Know About Modernization," *Foreign Affairs* 88 no. 2 (March/April 2009): 33-48.

17   Ellen Lust, "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46 (2011), 166.

18   Ibid.

19   Paulina Ochoa Espejo, "Populism and The People," *Theory & Event* 20 no. 1 (2017), 94.

"Sharia or Death"

The Discourse of Hegemony

Celeste Condit pointed out, in 1994, that although hegemony is a valuable conceptual apparatus in multiple disciplines to unpack social phenomena, it had attracted only "sporadic development in communication studies."[20] This has changed dramatically over the years. Communication scholars now increasingly deploy the concept to theorize inequalities, to illuminate the politics of subalternity, and to explain quotidian, imperceptible but nonetheless consequential forms of domination and exclusion.[21]

The concept of hegemony was birthed by attempts to reconcile or explain away the apparent disjunction between classical Marxian teleology and the reality of ideological reproduction, negotiation, and legitimation in capitalist society. Friedrich Engels is the first to give expression to the notion of hegemony in his oft-cited "Letter to Mehring" (1893) in which he said, among other things, that: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker. Consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces."[22]

The negotiation of the dialectics of orchestration of dominant ideology enunciated in this passage, and later elaborated by Lenin, clearly provided the epistemological template for Gramsci's theoretical interventions.[23] The Gramscian notion of hegemony is an intervention into Marxian epistemological dilemma in light of the perpetually variable character of capitalism (with which Marxian theorization is almost exclusively obsessed), especially what has now been fashionably dubbed "late capitalism"—an evolutionary stage of capitalism that defies vulgar Marxian teleology. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe grapple with Marxism's mutually contradictory notions of (1.) the historical inevitability of the dissolution of the capitalist social formation as enunciated in the concept of historical materialism, (2.) the necessity of purposive intervention in the liquidation of capitalism in the form of worker-led revolutions, and (3.) the base-superstructure dialectic that posits that the form and content of a socio-economic formation determines, even predetermines, its political processes, dominant ideological consciousness, and so on. They attribute the popularizations of these contradictory notions in Marxist discourse to Leninism's "appalling impoverishment of the field of Marxian diversity."[24]

Gramsci transcended classical Marxist theory by not only fleshing out the skeletal treatment of the dynamics of cultural mediation in classical Marxist texts but by replacing reductionist class analysis with a theory of cultural hegemony that is unmediated by the essentialism of vulgar and reductionist Marxian dialectics. As Laclau and Mouffe point out, Gramsci's whole project was to fill what they termed the "double void"[25] that emerged in Marxism in light of the shifting character of late capitalism.

Gramsci explained away the inability of socialism to replace capitalism by the early twentieth century by suggesting that capitalism entrenched its dominance not by means of political and economic coercion through violence or conspiratorial manipulation of

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20   Celeste M. Condit, "Hegemony in a Mass-Mediated Society: Concordance about Reproductive Technologies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 11 no. 3 (1994), 205.
21   For instance, I used the concept to explain how media hegemons like CNN use to coopt potentially oppositional citizen journalism. See Farooq A. Kperogi, "Cooperation with the Corporation? CNN and the Hegemonic Cooptation of Citizen Journalism through Ireport.com," *New Media & Society* 13 no. 2 (2011) 314–329.
22   Cited in Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 89.
23   Jorge A. González credits V.I. Lenin with being the first Marxist to use the concept of hegemony to explain away the apparent contradictions of Marxism before Antonio Gramsci. See Jorge A. González, "Cultural Fronts: Towards a Dialogic Understanding of Contemporary Cultures," in *Culture in the Communication Age*, ed. J. Lull (London: Routledge, 2000), 107.
24   See the "Preface" to Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* 2nd edition (New York, NY: Verso, 2001), viii.
25   Ibid, 13.

the working-class but through a culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became naturalized as the "common sense" values of all. These values are subtly orchestrated in the everyday consciousness of subordinate groups through the push and pull of the ideas of both the dominant group and the subordinate groups, but the push and pull only dramatizes the marginality of the subordinate groups. Manuel Alvarado and Oliver Boyd-Barrett quote Geoffrey Nowell-Smith as suggesting that common sense is "the way a subordinate class lives its subordination."[26]

However, unlike classical Marxists, Gramsci emphasizes that domination is never total and irreversible; it is always liable to be contested. He noted that "common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself."[27] According to John Fiske, "the consent of the subordinate groups must be constantly won and re-won, for people's material social experiences constantly remind them of the disadvantages of subordination and thus poses a threat to the dominant class."[28] Thus, a consensus culture develops in which the subaltern classes identify their own good with the good of the ruling elites, and this incentivizes them to nurture and protect, rather than extirpate, the *status quo*.

Hegemony can also be used to explain everyday phenomena like discursive domination, elite dominance in politics, and even the rhetorical articulations of populist politicians. This is consistent with Jorge Gonzalez's admonition that "we need a less confining understanding of hegemony to serve us well."[29] His idea of a conception of hegemony that has utility for the practical, everyday world is one "where hegemony is considered not as a direct stimulation of thought or action but a framing of competing definitions of reality to fit within the dominant class's range."[30]

This concern has been addressed by Jacob Torfing in his *New Theories of Discourse*. His illumination of the manifested presence of hegemonic discourse provides the point of departure for this paper. He points out, for instance, that "the political as well as moral-intellectual leadership of a hegemonic force (state, class, movement, other) hinges on the construction of a discursive formation that provides a surface of inscription for a wide range of demands, views and attitudes."[31] This view expands the terrain within which the concept of hegemony can be applied. Hegemony can be exercised not just by the ruling classes in capitalist society to naturalize their dominance and orchestrate their value systems, but also by political elites in inter- and intra-group power fights within nations.

This paper thus engages with the discursive resistance of the northern Nigerian Muslim power bloc using the instrumentality of Islamic fundamentalism as a discursive formation in a multi-religious federation. As Torping points out, "the articulation of discursive elements into contingent moments within a hegemonic discourse takes place in a conflictual terrain of power and resistance."[32] As I show in this paper, the introduction of Sharia in northern Nigeria was the consequence of the attempt by a hitherto secure and self-assured power bloc to wrest back the political power it had conceded in a moment of contingency to a weaker, less politically sophisticated regional power bloc. After only a few years of being outside the orbit of power, the northern Nigerian Muslim ruling class soon discovered its virtual dislocation from the power configuration in the country and felt discomfited about it. Dislocation, Torping

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26   Manuel Alvarado and Oliver Boyd-Barrett (eds.), *Media Education: An Introduction* (London: BFI/Open University, 1992), 51.
27   As cited in Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture Society and the Media*, eds. M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran, & J. Woollacott (London: Methuen, 1982), 73.
28   John Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television," in *Channel of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. R.C. Allen (London: Routledge, 1992), 291.
29   Jorge A. González, "Cultural Fronts," 107.
30   Ibid.
31   Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 101.
32   Ibid

reminds us, is the necessary precondition for hegemonic articulation. "Without dislocation," he says, "the social totality would be fully sutured and objectivized, and there would thus be no room for hegemonic articulation."[33]

According to Gramsci, hegemonic articulation usually takes one of two operational modalities: transformism or expansive hegemony. Transformism is an incorporatist strategy that seeks to dilute opposition and conflict within the polity through the cooptation of marginal groups within a discursive formation. Expansive hegemony, on the other hand, is an offensive strategy of a traumatized hegemonic bloc, which exploits the consensus in the polity to mobilize popular sentiments against a competing power bloc.[34] In the case of northern Nigeria, the ruling class deployed an expansive hegemonic strategy through the declaration of Sharia laws. Islam is the most potent consensual instrument that rouses the masses of northern Nigerians to act in a common way. This attitude has basis in the social history of northern Nigeria and the pattern and content of identity construction in that part of the country, as I show in the next section.

Islam and the Construction of Identity in Northern Nigeria

Northern Nigeria has had contact with the Arab and Muslim world since the ninth century.[35] By the fifteenth century, Islam became a state religion in much of what is today northern Nigeria.[36] Over the years, Islam—and religion in general—has emerged as a central building block in the construction of identities, including ethnic identities, in northern Nigeria. The Hausas, one of northern Nigeria's more than 200 ethnic groups, are predominantly Muslim and enjoy numerical dominion over other ethnic groups in Nigeria. From the 1800s to now, they have intermarried with the Fulanis, the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, and it is now usual to talk of the "Hausa-Fulani" people. An Islamic reformation in the eighteenth century led by a Fulani cleric called Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio entrenched Islam even more among the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria such that Islam has become an inextricable element of Hausa-Fulani identity.[37]

However, northern Nigeria is an agglomeration of a multiplicity of ethnic and religious identities of which the Hausa-Fulani are only the dominant group. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim power structure in the region has historically pursued a transformist hegemonic agenda by encouraging the notion of a "One North, One people, One Destiny" identity through the tokenistic cooptation of aggrieved Christian ethnic minorities since non-Hausa Muslim ethnic minorities are almost always culturally indistinguishable from, or are easily assimilated into, the dominant Hausa-Fulani majority. The relationship between northern Nigerian Christian minorities and the Hausa-Fulani Muslim majority has always been a delicate and testy one. At the dawn independence in 1956, northern Nigerian Christian minorities, for instance, feared that the dominant Hausa-Fulani Muslim majority would impose Islamic laws on the region

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33   Ibid: 109.
34   Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
35   For an overview of the history of Islam among the Hausa of northern Nigeria, see Joseph Schacht, "Islam in Northern Nigeria," *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957):123-146. Also see John Hunwick's "Sub-Saharan Africa and the Wider World of Islam: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26 no. 3 (1996): 230-257.
36   Jibrin Ibrahim, "Religion and Political Turbulence in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 29 no. 1 (1999): 115-136.
37   More than ninety percent of people who self-identify as "Hausa-Fulani" are Muslims. The Hausa-Fulani identity is the most fluid and flexible in Nigeria. People from other ethnic identities who convert to Islam, speak the Hausa language with native proficiency, and dress like the Hausas can often lay claim to a Hausa-Fulani identity. However, indigenous "Hausa" people who have refused to embrace Islam—and they are a tiny minority—are not called "Hausa" by the dominant power structure. They are called by the derogatory term "*Maguzawa*." For an overview of the construction of Hausa identity, see Frank A. Salamone, "Becoming Hausa: Ethnic Change and its Implications for the Study of Ethnic Pluralism and Stratification," *Africa: Journal of International African Institute* 45 no. 4 (1975): 410-424.

and obliterate their identities. These fears led the colonial administration to set up what was called the Sir Henry Willinks Commission.[38]

In response to the anxieties of Christian minorities in the region, at independence, the emergent Hausa-Fulani Muslim ruling class devised an incorporatist hegemonic strategy by putting in place a concessionary legal system, called the Penal Code, which helped allay the fears of non-Muslim minorities in the region while satisfying the desire by Muslims to live by the civil aspects of Sharia law. The Penal Code is a mishmash of neo-Islamic laws, British common law, and the native customs of northern Nigerian ethnic minorities.[39] But the mutual distrust between northern Nigeria's Muslim majority and Christian ethnic minorities in the region lingers, nonetheless. So it is an enduring fact of the sociology of Nigeria that the most dominant contradiction in the northern region is religion, while the dominant contradiction in the south is ethnicity. Northerners, more than southerners, define their identity in religious terms.[40] Northern hegemons have always exploited this fact to maximum advantage in their moments of political trauma. Northern masses are more easily roused to popular action when the appeal is to religion than when it is to ethnicity since, in any case, the Hausa-Fulani identity is, in reality, the alchemy of diverse ethnicities through the instrumentality of Islam. This fact also forces northern Nigerian non-Hausa, non-Muslim minorities to organize and mobilize on the basis of their common Christian—or at least non-Muslim—identity. This background contextualizes the controversy over the declaration of Sharia laws by the northern Nigerian political class.

Background to the Trauma of a Hegemonic Bloc

Constitutional rule was restored in Nigeria in May 1999, after fifteen continuous years of military dictatorship headed by Muslim northerners. The 1999 election was the result of the consensus of the northern ruling class to voluntarily yield to persistent demands for a "power shift" to the South in light of the domination of the power structure by the northern Muslim ruling class for all but three years of Nigeria's existence as an independent nation.[41]

In late 1999, only a few months after Olusegun Obasanjo, a southern, self-professed born-again Christian, was elected president for the first time in Nigeria's history, northern elites began complaining about being pushed to the margins by a man they literally installed as president. Obasanjo was imposed on the nation by the Northern political class in the belief that he had the capacity to simultaneously satisfy southern agitation for a "power shift" (as the southern Nigerian media christened it) and preserve northern hegemony. The basis for this optimism derived from the fact that when he was military head of state from February 1976 to September 1979 consequent upon the assassination of a radical northern Muslim military head of state to whom he was deputy, he quickly organized elections and handed over power to a civilian of northern Nigerian origin. Since then, he had been seen as a "friend of the North," but pooh-poohed as a "quisling" by his southwestern kinsmen.

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38   See Osita Agbu, "Re-Inventing Federalism in Post-Transition Nigeria: Problems and Prospects," *Africa Development* XXIX no. 2 (2004): 26-52.
39   For a popular account of the history and evolution of the Penal Code and how it differs from the Sharia law, see Farooq A. Kperogi, "The Shariah and the Penal Code: What's New?" *Weekly Trust*, November 5-11, 1999: 10.
40   See Richard L. Skylar, "Contradictions in the Nigerian Political System," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3 no. 2 (1965): 201-13. For a Nigerian perspective, see Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1978).
41   For an excellent summary of the politics of power rotation between northern Nigeria's power bloc and its southern counterparts, see John Paden, "Islam and Democratic Federalism in Nigeria," *Africa Notes* 8 (March, 2002), available at https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/anotes_0203.pdf ; accessed October 20, 2019. Note that a Christian ethnic minority from the south by the name of Goodluck Jonathan became president after President Umaru Musa Yar'adua, who was a northern Muslim, died on May 5, 2010 after only three years in office. He ruled from May 2010 to May 2015. That means, as of 2019, southerners have ruled for only 16 years out of Nigeria's 59 years as an independent country.

However, shortly after his election, perhaps in a bid to dispel the notion that he was a mere pawn of the Northern ruling class, he announced in a country-wide broadcast that people who supported his election as an "investment" should consider their investment lost. Since it was the northern Nigerian elite consensus—instigated by past presidents and military heads of state, emirs, businesspeople, retired military generals, and so on— that "invested" in the election of Obasanjo as president against the wishes of the region he is native to, the broadcast was interpreted as a treacherous affront. Perhaps, the inspiration behind Obasanjo's betrayal of the northern ruling elites that installed him into power was his desire to retaliate for his imprisonment by a military regime headed by a brutal northern Muslim general by the name of Sani Abacha who attracted international attention and reprobation for his human rights violations, including the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a minority rights activist in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Obasanjo was imprisoned on trumped-up charges of planning the violent overthrow of the reigning military regime in 1995 because of his trenchant criticism of the crass human rights abuses of the government. He had hoped that his "northern friends" would come to his aid, but they did not. He was billed to be executed when the head of state suddenly died of a heart disease. A month after his death, a popular southern Nigerian politician from Obasanjo's home state whose electoral victory was invalidated by a past northern-led military regime also died in prison. He had been imprisoned for declaring himself president after his electoral victory was voided for no apparent reason. The late politician, known as Chief MKO Abiola, was a Muslim from the south. His religious identity made him acceptable to northern Muslims while his ethnic identity invited sympathy for him in the south.[42] Added to that, he was enormously wealthy and well connected to the northern ruling class and to international finance capital. He ran for president against a little-known northern Muslim politician and won, but the northern-led military regime nullified his victory before it was officially announced. The annulment of his impending electoral victory and his subsequent imprisonment heightened ethnic and religious tensions and deepened the primordial fault lines in the country.[43] When General Sani Abacha died, there were expectations that the transitional military government headed by another northerner would liberate MKO Abiola from prison and install him as president. But after the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Africa visited him in prison, he suddenly fell ill and died.[44]

The death precipitated violent riots in the southwest and intensified the stridency of southern demands for a restructuring or dismemberment of the country. The northern political class was thrown into a dilemma. They could hold on to power only at the risk of supervising the disintegration of the country. It was this background that necessitated the decision to support the election of Obasanjo as president. He had the distinction of not only being from the same state as the late politician but of being a "friend of the north." The campaign slogan northern politicians used when they were selling his candidature was: "a man we can trust." He was released from prison and granted pardon. Rules were tweaked to bestow preferential treatment on him. There was a consensus among northern politicians that the field of contest should be restricted to southern politicians alone. The north used its numerical strength and power of incumbency to ensure Obasanjo's electoral victory. But shortly after winning elections, he defied all predictions. Instead of being the friend the north could trust, he became the symbol for the sprouting of a southern elite power bloc and the source of trauma for the northern power structure.

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42   See Jibrin Ibrahim, "Political Transition, Ethnoregionalism, and the 'Power Shift' Debate in Nigeria," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 27 no.1 (1999), 12-16.
43   See Ebenezer Obadare, "In Search of a Public Sphere: The Fundamentalist Challenge to Civil Society in Nigeria," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38 no. 2 (2004): 177.
44   Ibid.

In time, the Northern political class, otherwise known for its tactful reticence, began to complain of "marginalization." Senior northern military officers in their hundreds were either retired from service or redeployed from strategic posts by Obasanjo. Oil contracts by northern businessmen were revoked, and the northern political elites were literally pushed to the margins of governance. This represented the first time in the history of Nigeria that the hegemonic northern Muslim power structure had been kept outside the orbit of power. Obasanjo deliberately set out to inaugurate his own expansive hegemonic agenda by subverting the transformist hegemonic agenda of the northern ruling class. For instance, when cries of "northern marginalization" greeted all his appointments, he decided to appoint northern Christian minorities in positions of authority, positions they had never occupied during the period of northern political ascendancy. This exploded the fragile unity of the north. The northern political class changed the tune of their complaints. It was no longer that the "north" was marginalized in appointments and access to power; it changed to northern Muslims (sometimes called the "core north," which invariably implied that there was a peripheral, inconsequential north) were kept out of governance. Northern Christians were outraged. The time-honored north-south divide, around which agitation for power in Nigeria had been organized, collapsed. The schism between northern Muslims and northern Christian minorities widened and deepened.

When the southern power bloc was kept out of governance in the past, it used its newspapers and non-governmental organizations as sites of contestation. The phrases "northern caliphate," "feudal northern oligarchy," and "Kaduna Mafia" became powerful catch phrases in the mobilization of popular, usually ethnic-based, sentiments against the northern Muslim ruling class. (Kaduna, the political capital of the former Northern Region before Nigeria devolved from a regional structure to a state structure in 1967, is home to many prominent northern politicians.) The northern power bloc had no such elaborate institutional props to support it. And so, when they dislodged themselves from power through their own temporary, strategic, if contingent, miscalculation, the only option left for them was to invoke Islamic theocratic populism in the service of their expansive hegemonic agenda, which I discuss in the section that follows.

The Declaration of Sharia in Northern Nigeria

On October 27, 1999, the governor of the northern state of Zamfara, Ahmed Sani Yerima, declared Sharia as the official law of the state, saying, "Without sharia, [the] Islamic faith is valueless."[45] He insisted that he was merely "reintroducing" what the north had been robbed of since "Christians from Britain" came to colonize Nigeria. The governor was appealing to the sense of cultural pride of Muslim northerners who boast centuries of Arabic literacy and scholarship before colonialism but who have now been subsumed within a Western "infidel" educational system that is skewed in their disfavor.[46] He became an instant celebrity among a broad spectrum of northern Nigerian masses who were disillusioned with what some scholars have called "the criminalization of the African state."[47] The federal government

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45   Mohammed Rufai, "Sharia Law Declared in Muslim Nigerian State," *Independent*, October 28, 1999, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/sharia-law-declared-in-muslim-nigerian-state-739026.html. Implementation of the law formally started on January 27, 2000.

46   Until 1906 when the British conquered the Muslim caliphate in northern Nigeria, the region had been ruled by sharia law. In its place, the British imposed their legal codes and inaugurated what they called the "repugnancy test" system, which permitted the conquered people to punish civil law violations only as long as the punishment did not conflict with British notions of civility. This move was a vital step in consolidating imperial authority. See Ogechi E. Anyanwu, "Crime and Justice in Postcolonial Nigeria: The Justification and Challenges of Islamic Law on Shari'ah," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12 no. 2 (2006): 315-347.

47   See Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford and Bloomington: James Currey and Indiana University Press, 1999).

initially ignored this provocation for two reasons. First, religion is such an emotive and divisive issue in the country, and in the north especially, that an impolitic statement from a president who never failed to display his born-again Christianity in public could spark off deadly riots that could endanger the lives of Christians in the north. Second, the government thought it would be a transitory theocratic thrill that would wither away with time.

However, in less than a year, the Sharia train moved to all the predominantly Muslim states in the far north. The state legislatures in all the states amended their laws to expand the application of Sharia laws to include criminal matters.[48] It was now clear to the president that he was the target of these Sharia proclamations.[49] He was still nevertheless careful in his utterances. On some occasions, to the frustration and outrage of Nigerian Christians—and obviously in a forlorn attempt to appease northern Muslims— he defended the rights of the states to be governed by their religious laws.[50] He was quoted on many occasions to have said "political Sharia" would soon "fizzle out."[51] It did not.

It got violent when, in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna, which has an almost equal number of Muslims and Christians, the state legislature began considering amending its laws to implement Sharia in the state. The Christians in the state, who are politically weak but numerically significant, resisted this move. While they were demonstrating against the planned introduction of Sharia, Muslim youths attacked them, and this precipitated a bitter and bloody internecine fighting that left thousands of people dead. Christians in the south responded by also attacking and killing northerners that lived there. Unfortunately, in the retaliatory attacks, northern Nigerian Christians resident in the south were mistaken for Muslims and attacked.[52] The crises that this introduction of Sharia engendered invested on the northern ruling class a huge bargaining chip. The federal government could no longer dismiss them.

But the northern Muslim ruling elites' winning of rhetorical leverage against the federal government created an unanticipated backlash and rolled back their erstwhile modest gains in their transformist hegemonic power game. Because the Sharia controversy pitted Christians against Muslims in several deadly clashes, the hegemonic discourse of a monolithic northern identity (which had always papered over the angst of marginalized Christian minorities in the north) was exploded. It gave rise to a more assertive northern Christian voice and radicalized southern Nigerian Christianity in unexampled ways. But this resurgent northern Christian identity is complicated by the fact that northern Christians were also murdered in the south in retaliation for the killing of southerners in the north. The northern elite class took advantage of this again to rally the people of the region around the time-honored slogan of "one north, one people, one destiny"—a slogan popularized by the immediate post-independence northern regional leaders. An umbrella association of northerners called the Arewa[53] Consultative Forum was formed and, for the first time in the history of the North, a Christian ethnic minority by the name of Sunday Awoniyi was elected to head it to heal the wounds of the north. Although this organization did not douse the mutual suspicion and distrust between Muslims and Christians in the north, it significantly undercut the southern Nigerian elite power calculations. The southern elites had hoped that the religion-inspired internal dissension in

48   Hitherto, Muslim laws were only applicable to such civil matters as marriage, inheritance and communal dispute resolution.

49   See *Economist*, "The Attractions of Sharia," 364 /8289 (July 9, 2002), 44-44, 2/3p, 1c.

50   His comments frustrated many people, including people in the West. Paul Marshall, for instance, noted that "Obasanjo has many virtues, but candor about the effects of sharia in his country is not one of them." (See Paul Marshall, "No Fizzle: Sharia Thrives (and Preys) in Nigeria," *National Review Online*, February 3, 2004, https://www.hudson.org/research/4688-no-fizzle-sharia-thrives-and-preys-in-nigeria.

51   See Ike Oguine, "Nigeria's Sharia Furore," *New Internationalist* April 2003, 355, p5, 1p.

52   See The New Humanitarian, "Nigeria: Focus on Tension Between Communities in Kaduna State," IRIN News Report. https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-focus-tension-between-communities-kaduna-state; accessed October 12, 2019.

53   "Arewa" is the Hausa word for north.

the north would cause northern Christian ethnic minorities to align with them politically to isolate and neutralize the northern Muslim power elite.

Conversely, some southwestern Muslims, inspired by the "success" of their counterparts in the North, also became emboldened to demand that they be governed by Sharia laws. This has precipitated an intriguing conflation and dispersal of ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria and the precipitation of crises that threatened the very basis of the legitimacy of the state. The next section unveils how this played out.

Clash of Hegemonic Narratives

The first coordinated responses of the federal government to the Sharia controversy in the aftermath of the outbreak of violence in Kaduna on February 21, 2000 was to declare the Sharia laws unconstitutional. And soon contestations and disputations over the constitutionality of the introduction of Islamic laws in Nigeria's mainly Muslim northern states became the main form of the hegemonic contest. While the federal government invoked the constitutional provision that forbids the declaration of a state religion in any part of the country as a basis to declare Sharia laws illegal, northern politicians justified their declaration of Islamic laws by quoting a provision of the constitution that grants all citizens the right to freedom of religion and conscience.[54]

Speaking at a Harvard University forum in 2000, President Obasanjo said, "We have a constitution in Nigeria and the constitution is against any state religion. To that extent, no part of Nigeria can formulate or go for anything that is a state religion--it is unconstitutional."[55] The president was referring to section 34 (1) of the Nigerian constitution, which forbids the declaration of state religion in any part of the country.[56] On March 18, 2002, the Attorney-General of Nigeria sent a memorandum to the twelve Sharia states, drawing their attention to the constitutional provision that guarantees equality before the law and pointing out that the oft-repeated pronouncements of "Sharia governors" that the law would apply only to Muslims still failed to satisfy the constitutional requirement that no citizen of Nigeria should be subjected to punishments more severe than would be imposed on other Nigerians for the same offense. The presidential committee set up in 2000 to review the 1999 constitution also declared that the adoption of Sharia in some states would lead to the emergence of a parallel criminal justice system and precipitate a constitutional crisis.[57]

However, Auwalu Yadudu, a well-regarded Harvard-educated professor of law whom the southern Nigerian media liked to call one of the leading lights of the intellectual wing of the northern powerhouse, contested this. He wrote that the broad freedom that the constitution guarantees all citizens to profess any faith of their choice provided a safeguard for the legality of the Sharia laws since non-Muslims living in the "Sharia states" (as they were often labeled by the Nigerian news media) were exempt from it. He also argued that the constitution empowers state legislatures to make or amend laws to suit their cultural singularities. However, the federal government pointed to the fact that the constitution stipulates that such laws cannot be in conflict with the spirit and letter of the federal constitution.[58] When it was obvious that northern Nigerian Muslims were losing the constitutional argument for Islamic laws in their states, particularly because many Sharia court verdicts were overturned by the

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54   For an overview of the constitutional debates over Sharia, see Andrew Ubaka Iwobi, "Tiptoeing through a Constitutional Minefield: The Great Sharia Controversy in Nigeria," *Journal of African Law* 48 (2004): 111-164.
55   David P. Johnson, "Islamic Law May Spread in Nigeria," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 19 no. 3 (April 2000), 53.
56   See *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, ch. IV 4, § 34(1) (1999).
57   Anyawu, "Crime and Justice in Postcolonial Nigeria:"
58   Iwobi "Tiptoeing through a Constitutional Minefield:"

Federal Appeal courts, the debate shifted to the desire by northerners to reclaim their lost heritage.[59] This appeal to a lost heritage resonated with the masses in the Muslim north.

When opposition from the federal government and Christians intensified, the largely mass-mediated rhetorical battle shifted to the exploitation of symbolisms. The Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria, for instance, revived an old debate about questions of symbolic parity between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.[60] Northern Nigerian Muslims insisted they would halt the re-introduction of Sharia laws only if some conditions were met: (1) the Gregorian calendar, which is Christian, is withdrawn for forty years while the Muslim calendar alone is used. Thereafter, both would co-exist. (2) Saturday and Sunday should be replaced with Thursday and Friday as work-free days for forty years after which Sunday and Friday would be simultaneously adopted as work-free days. (3) The red cross (construed by many Nigerian Muslims as a Christian symbol) in Nigerian hospitals and clinics should be replaced with the crescent for forty years after which both symbols would be used side by side. (4) The Muslim New Year should replace the current Christian New Year for forty years after which both will be observed as holidays. Other demands included changing academic gowns from the form of "Christian choirs," and changing the robes of judges and lawyers, which Nigerian Muslims said originated from "monks and Christian choirs."[61] This catalogue of demands, if met, would, of course, subvert the entire cultural edifice and symbolic representations of the country. But it would seem that the demands were only intended to dramatize the concessions that northern Nigerian Muslims had given their Christian compatriots over the years in spite of being at the helm of affairs for years. The conditions were not met.

Then threats of violence followed. The President of the Supreme Council of Sharia, Dr. Datti Ahmed, speaking for a vast swathe of northern elites, threatened that Muslims were ready to go to war if they were prevented from living according to the dictates of their religion's divine laws.[62] In time, the grass roots amplified the threats of violence set off by some Muslim political elites. The slogan "*sharia ko mutuwa!*" (Hausa for "sharia or death") became the battle cry for sharia advocates. It was inscribed on walls, building, bridges, and uttered during demonstrations in Muslim-majority northern Nigerian towns and cities. Other maximalist slogans were "*sharia dole ne!*" [Hausa for "Sharia is mandatory"] and "sharia or bloodshed."[63] And many politically inspired violent uprisings ensued after these threats. As Brandon Kendhammer points out, "rallies for and against sharia in divided communities precipitated communal riots" in many parts of Muslim-majority northern Nigeria.[64] Between 2000 and 2007, several religious riots erupted between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria—and retaliatory attacks particularly in the southeast— leading to thousands of deaths on both sides.

The federal government's desire to contain these violent eruptions forced it to give many concessions to the dominant faction of the northern Muslim ruling elites. By 2007 when Obasanjo's second term in office ended and when his bid to unconstitutionally extend his term in office was thwarted, he supported the emergence of a Muslim northerner by the

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59   See Auwalu Yadudu, "Benefits of Sharia and Challenges of Reclaiming a Heritage," Paper Delivered at the Nigerian Muslim Forum, Commonwealth Conference Center, London, April 2001. All the state governors indicatively called their declaration of Sharia laws as merely a "re-introduction" or restoration.

60   In the late 1970s when Obasanjo was military head of state, the Sharia debate also erupted. The northern political class at that time was not sure if power would be handed back to them and used Sharia as a bargaining chip, as they did from 2000 to 2007 when they were out of political power. For an overview on this, see Joseph Kenny, "Sharia and Christianity in Nigeria: Islam and 'Secular State," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26 no. 4 (1996): 338-364.

61   See *New Nigerian*, 17 March 2001.

62   Anyawu, "Crime and Justice in Postcolonial Nigeria:"

63   Author saw the slogans written as graffiti on walls and yelled during demonstrations in the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna between 2000 and 2002 where he was a reporter and news editor for the *Weekly Trust*, northern Nigeria's preeminent newspaper, and in other northern Muslim cities where he reported on the crisis precipitated by Sharia.

64   Brandon Kendhammer, "The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria and the Politics of Islamic Law in New and Uncertain Democracies," *Comparative Politics* 45 no. 3 (2013), 294.

name of Umaru Musa Yar'adua as president.[65] Thereafter, sharia laws in Northern Nigeria practically fizzled out.

Thus, northern politicians exploited common communal memory, religious symbolism, promise of better living conditions for the masses, and threats of violence to galvanize mass support among the northern grass roots and force concessions from a competing power bloc from the south. As Muhammad Umar instructively notes, "By embracing Islamic fundamentalism, western-educated Muslims equip themselves with the necessary Islamic capital to compete culturally, socially, politically, and economically" against not just Muslim elites trained in modern and traditional Islamic schools but also to gain concessions from their southern Christian counterparts in moments of political trauma.[66]

The greatest appeal of Sharia was that it encapsulated a potent persuasive source of unity for the northern Nigerian Muslim community otherwise divided along sundry primordial cleavages. And it seemed to have worked for the northern ruling class in wresting back power from the south. The northern ruling bloc's deployment of situational Islamic populism paid off. It regained its hegemonic discursive high ground and the flame of Sharia died.

Conclusions and Recommendation for Future Research

The introduction of Islamic laws in Nigeria's Muslim-majority states was disguised as a legitimate Muslim self-assertion in a social and cultural milieu that symbolically marginalized Muslims, but it was no more than a transformist hegemonic theocratic populist strategy to wrest back power from an exhibitionistic, self-described born-again southern Christian president.[67] Well-informed northern Nigerian Muslim scholars have admitted this. Sheikh Imam Nuruddeen Lemu, for instance, averred that "sometimes politicians use the word 'Sharia' when they know the majority are Muslims, that the majority of voters will support them and the local scholars will support them."[68] This affirms Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens' conceptualization of populism as "a strategy of political mobilization using a typical style of political rhetoric," which deploys "appeal to the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment."[69] The declaration of Sharia as the official law of Muslim-majority northern Nigerian states was an effective expansive hegemonic theocratic populist strategy.

However, unlike other forms of populism, the theocratic populism in northern Nigeria was not dependent on the charm and oratorical prowess of an inspirational figure, as was the case in the 1950s and early 1960s when Aminu Kano led a socialist populist movement against northern Nigeria's oppressive, parasitic, and profligate monarchies. Ahmed Sani Yerima who inaugurated the Sharia theocratic populism was no charismatic personality. In fact, he was a dour, uninspired, and uninspiring figure who was later charged with humongous corruption by the Nigerian government's anti-corruption agency.[70] The popularity and resonance of Sharia with the northern grass roots owed more to the genius of its framing than to the rhetorical

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65   Umaru Musa Yar'adua died in office on May 5, 2010.
66   Muhammad S. Umar, "Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970s–1990s," *Africa Today* 48 no. 2 (2001), 144.
67   Ebenezer Obadare, for instance, described Olusegun Obasanjo as "the first president in the country's history to 'Pentecostalise' power, drawing on Christian symbolism in his political performance and rhetoric, and appointing into key positions personalities who, while not necessarily handpicked for public office on account of their born-again credentials, nevertheless interpreted their official roles as key moments in their Pentecostal discipleship." See Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria* (London: Zed Books, 2018).
68   Katrin Gänsler, "Nigeria Looks Back on 20 Years of Sharia Law in the North," Deutsche Welle, October 27, 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/nigeria-looks-back-on-20-years-of-sharia-law-in-the-north/a-51010292
69   Abts and Rummens, "Populism Versus Democracy," 407.
70   See Sahara Reporters, "ICPC Arraigns Former 'Sharia Governor' Senator Ahmed Sani Yerima Over Corruption," Sahara Reporters, January 20, 2016, http://saharareporters.com/2016/01/20/icpc-arraigns-former-sharia-governor-senator-ahmed-sani-yerima-over-corruption.

ingenuity of any one figure. Brandon Kendhammer points out that the allure of Sharia for the northern Muslim hoi polloi was attributable to its framing around "key concepts" such as "rights," "social justice and economic development," and "holding elites accountable."[71]

Nevertheless, the decentered theocratic populism of northern Nigeria's Muslim elites, at some point, transmogrified into a Frankenstein monster that threatened to devour its creators. Although calls for Sharia were trigged by the elites, its spread in 12 of northern Nigeria's 19 states was powered by the passions of the masses. For instance, in Kano State, northern Nigeria's biggest state and commercial nerve center, the governor was reluctant to join the "Sharia train" because of the state's history of and proneness to religious violence, but was practically railroaded into codifying Sharia in the state's laws by the grass roots.[72] Unlike other Sharia states where governments assured the nation that non-Muslims would be exempt from Islamic laws, the Kano State government attempted to compensate for its initial disinclination to codify Sharia law in the state by declaring that even non-Muslims would be subject to the disciplinary consequences of Sharia because "the government of Kano State does not reserve any area where the commission of crime is allowed."[73]

What occurred in Muslim northern Nigerian between 2000 and 2007 was not a systematic, transaction-oriented theocratic populist movement. It was a contingent, ephemeral, opportunistic, power-grabbing theocratic populist stratagem to win back lost political power. Disparate resentments from northern Muslim elites who felt isolated from the compass of power quickly coalesced into a consensual outrage and inspired an unorganized, leaderless, theocratic populist movement, which quickly dissipated the moment power was regained. In the service of their goal to recapture political power, northern Muslim political elites deployed not just threats of violence and actual violence, but also cruel, selective capital punishments against poor northern Muslims[74] to instill fear and overawe their southern counterparts. In other words, northern Nigeria's theocratic populism used "the people" both to lend legitimacy to their politics and as expendable fodder in a self-interested hegemonic power game.

Although the fervor for Sharia evaporated after the northern Muslim elite regained lost political power, it inspired the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group that has murdered tens of thousands of people,[75] most of whom are Muslims, since 2009. Although the group operates outside the structures of the state—and is, in fact, opposed to the state, including most of the Muslim elites who started the Sharia movement—it used most of the rhetorical templates of northern Nigeria's theocratic populists to legitimize its ascendancy. A systematic scholarly exploration of the continuities and breaks between the Sharia wave of the early 2000s and the emergence of Boko Haram would be worthwhile for future research.

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71   Kendhammer, "The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria and the Politics of Islamic Law in New and Uncertain Democracies," 298.

72   See Farooq A. Kperogi and Aliyu M. Sulaiman, "Sharia: Triumph of Kano Masses," *Weekly Trust*, 3 no. 20, June 30–July 6, 2000, 7.

73   Ibid.

74   For instance, in March 2000, only three months after the formal implementation of Sharia in Zamfara, a man by the name of Buba Bello Jangebe had his right hand chopped off because he was found guilty of stealing a cow. (See BBC News, "Nigerian Sharia Court Orders Amputation," BBC, March 23, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/688639.stm. In 2001, a divorced woman known as Safiya Hussaini was sentenced to death by stoning by a Sharia court in Sokoto State for having a child outside wedlock. The sentence was vacated by an appeal court a year later. In January 2002, a man in Katsina State was hanged by the state government after admitting to murdering a woman and her children. Months later, in the same state, a single mother by the name of Amina Lawal was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery. The sentence was overturned two years later by an appeal court.

75   See John Campbell and Asch Harwood, "Boko Haram's Deadly Impact," Council on Foreign Relations, August 20, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/article/boko-harams-deadly-impact.

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