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# Muslims and Christians in Nigeria: Attitudes towards the United States from a Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> Perspective

## IRIT BACK

One can argue that there is no clear-cut dichotomy on religious lines in Nigerian attitudes toward the United States, that is, Christians are not all pro-American and Muslims are not all anti-American. On one hand, since Nigeria's independence in 1960, cooperative economic relations and amicable diplomatic relations have existed between the Muslim leadership in Nigeria and the United States. On the other hand, there are expressions of anti-American attitudes among Christians, especially in the 1990s. Yet the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> discourse in Nigeria, a country roughly divided between a Muslim north and a Christian south, reveals the centrality of religious affiliation in shaping attitudes toward the United States.

The aim of this article is to explore the various dimensions of post-September 11<sup>th</sup> discourse from a historical perspective. During the 1990s, two main developments were central in shaping the attitudes of Nigerian society toward the United States. First, processes of intensification of religious identity and the politicization of religion strengthened during this decade.<sup>1</sup> They escalated between 1999 and 2001, during the implementation of the *Shari'a* system of law in northern Nigeria, and peaked after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Second, the exposure of deep cleavages in Nigerian society, including geo-religious ones, was one of the effects of the abolition of successive military regimes and the restoration of democracy to Nigeria at the end of the 1990s. These cleavages were especially evident in the rivalry between the two main candidates in the recent elections: Olusegun Obasanjo, the southern Christian candidate of the People's Democratic Party, and Muhammadu Buhari, the northern Muslim candidate of the All Nigerians People's Party.<sup>2</sup> Obasanjo's electoral victory in April 2003 will probably sharpen the religious features in the debate surrounding the attitudes of the Nigerian people toward the United States, mainly because of the fears of the Muslims in the north from change in the political status-quo.

In analyzing the question of Nigerian attitudes toward the United States, one needs to make a distinction not only along religious lines, but also along sociological lines, especially between the elites and the masses. The attitudes of the elites, especially the political and economic elites, toward the United States, can be described as consistently pro-American; the religious component is generally insignificant in their attitudes. Their outlook will be elaborated in first part of this article. The second part will deal with the attitudes of the masses toward the United States. This is a more complex issue because their attitudes were shaped by various processes of social change such as immigration, urbanization, and the spread of means of communication and the media. An examination of these processes of social change emphasizing the voices of the masses, both Muslim and Christian, facilitates a review of the development of their attitudes toward the United States. Finally, an analysis of the riots in the city of Jos in September 2001, their historical roots and their consequences, will serve as a basis for the claim that Nigerian attitudes toward the United States became more differentiated along religious lines after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

### Uneasy Friendship? Attitudes of Muslim Nigerian Elites toward the United States

The factor of uneasiness, attributed to Nigerian-U. S. relations by George Obiozor, was a consequence of two major events: the *coup d'état* of 1966 and the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.<sup>3</sup> These events exposed the fact that optimistic American views of the strength of Nigerian democracy and unity were premature. Yet, as this section will claim, during the various phases of the shaping of U. S.-Nigerian relations, the factor of uneasiness can mainly be ascribed to the attitudes of the United States toward Nigeria. Nigerian leaders, on their part, tended to maintain consistently pro-American attitudes, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

While there is no evidence that religious affiliation

played any role in shaping relations between the United States and Nigeria after its independence, there is evidence that they were strongly influenced by the British colonial legacy of prioritizing the Muslim north. The influence of British colonialism on the creation of geo-religious identities is beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient to mention that different types of administration and the scope of social change led to different levels of politicization between the north and the south. On one hand, the considerable exposure of the predominantly Christian south to processes of social change and Western influences led to high rates of politicization and to the dominant role played by southern Christians in creating and leading the Nigerian national movement. Muslims in the north, in the other hand, were exposed to reduced levels of both social change and political participation, which were led mainly by Muslim leaders. The tradition of collaboration between these elites and the British authorities, shaped during the colonial era, strengthened as independence approached. The southern element in Nigerian nationalism was perceived as subversive, and the British preferred to strengthen the dominance of the North.<sup>4</sup>

Although in the early years of Nigerian independence, U. S. policy toward Nigeria was limited mainly to the economic sphere,<sup>5</sup> there was much evidence of a mutual attraction between the two nations. Shared factors, such as a common colonial master, the size of the countries and their ethnic and religious heterogeneity, sustained this attraction. Thus, the first Nigerian Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966), a northern Muslim, said, "We admire the American way of life, and we respect the people of the United States for their love of freedom."<sup>6</sup> Similar declarations were repeated on various occasions, such as Balewa's official visits to the United States, and were accompanied by comparable proclamations from the American side.<sup>7</sup> Yet, while this spirit of admiration and a desire for strong cooperation continued to shape Nigerian attitudes toward the United States, the same did not hold true for American attitudes toward Nigeria, especially after 1970.

The first complication in the relations between the two countries occurred during the successful *coup d'état* of 1966, which marked the end of an era of multi-party democracy in Nigeria. Still, the actual watershed in U. S.-Nigerian relations, especially from a religious point of view, was the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70) and its aftermath. The reasons underlying the American decision to adhere to an unofficial policy of neutrality are widely covered in the relevant literature.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to mention the clearly religious dimension of the war. Public opinion, worldwide and in America, viewed the war as a symbolic confrontation between David -- the Christian people of Biafra, and Goliath --

Nigeria itself, which was perceived to be predominantly Muslim. This contributed another layer to the ambivalence of United States policy, torn between its commitment to the integrity of the Nigerian nation on one hand, and its disgust with the Nigerian government's policy of starving the Biafran people, claimed by them to be a legitimate weapon of war, on the other. The religious affinity between the American and the Biafran people indirectly contributed to the American government's decision to provide humanitarian aid to Biafra.

One of the causes of the Civil War was the discovery of oil in eastern Nigeria. The oil discovery led to a separatism claim from the eastern people, especially the Ibo, who claimed the independence of Biafra from Nigeria in May 1967.<sup>9</sup> After the defeat of Biafra in 1970, Nigeria has become one of the most important exporters of oil to United States. This fact seems to be a key component in shaping the relations between the two nations, relations which have had their ups and downs in the decades since 1970. They were influenced by various factors, such as the Cold War and its aftermath, the Arab world's oil export policy, and the attitudes of the various American administrations toward Africa in general and toward Nigeria in particular, among other factors. But a major factor in shaping these relations was the changing nature of the Nigerian regime since the end of the Civil War.

Periods of democratization in Nigeria were marked by *entente cordiale*. The democratically-elected President of the Second Republic, Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), expressed the admiration of the Nigerian people for the American political system and noted the influence of the American constitution on shaping the constitution of the second Republic.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, periods of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships were characterized by estrangement, especially on the part of the United States. This was the case, for example, with the dictatorial regime of Sani Abacha (1993-1998). It can be claimed that the limited sanctions led by the United States against Abacha's regime hastened its collapse.<sup>11</sup> However, the dominance of economic interests in shaping relations between the two countries in many instances obscured other dimensions, such as that of human rights.

These priorities were a major factor in shaping anti-American feelings among various social classes in Nigeria, especially those who were brutally excluded from the oil revenues. Who were these groups and what was the religious character of their opposition? Since the decolonization period in the 1950s, processes of politicization of the masses were much more noticeable in the south than in the north. Christian graduates of the mission institutions in the south and of educational institutions abroad, such as Nmandi Azikwe, were the ideological *avant-garde* of the anti-colonial movement.<sup>12</sup> In

the first decades after independence, the tradition of anti-establishment (and thus anti-U. S.) criticism seems to have been a salient feature of the Christian elites – both political and intellectual. During the 1980s and the 1990s, as result of the implications of oil production in areas that were inhabited mostly by Christian populations, this criticism grew noticeably. One outstanding example is Wole Soyinka, Nigerian Noble prizewinner for literature. Soyinka, a Yoruba Christian, was a fierce critic of both the American way of life<sup>13</sup> and of U. S. policy toward Nigeria. One example of his criticism of American policy concerned the claims of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). This movement protested, through strikes and publications, crimes carried out by both the Nigerian government and the international oil companies against the Ogoni people (mainly Christians) who inhabited the oil-rich Ogoniland in southeastern Nigeria. In 1995, nine key activists, including Ogoni leader Ken Saro-Wiwa, were sentenced to death and later executed. Soyinka himself was one of the main spokesmen on behalf of the activists, and on many occasions condemned American hypocrisy in its policy toward Nigeria.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the central role played by Christian intellectuals and activists in shaping anti-American attitudes, especially during the 1990s, it cannot be claimed that religious background determined these attitudes. Most critics of the U. S. were individuals provoked by economic, political, and environmental motives, not religious ones. In contrast, Nigerian Muslim attitudes toward the United States were clearly motivated by processes of politicization of religion whose effects were manifested mainly amongst the masses.

### **The Politicization of Religion – The Evolution of Muslim Attitudes toward the United States**

In analyzing the relationship between the United States and Nigeria since 1960, Levi Nwachuku predicted that “As Nigeria enters the last decade of the twentieth century, its relations with the United States will be shaped by three factors, namely America’s attitude toward political and economic development in Africa, the debt crisis, and the direction of race relations in the United States.”<sup>15</sup> Like many observers in the period before September 11<sup>th</sup>, Nwachuku failed to discern the importance of the religious component in the complex and multifaceted relations between the two countries. Yet, the impact of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> in a country that is divided between Christians and Muslims, especially on their attitudes toward the United States, reveals the centrality of religious affiliation in shaping these attitudes.

An understanding of the roots of the emerging tensions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria calls

for a brief survey of the geo-religious history of its north. Islam arrived in the area around the eleventh century. After the fourteenth century it became the social and political base of the Hausa kingdom – states such as Borno, Kano, Zaria, Sokoto, and Katsina. Muslim identity with the north was further established in the beginning of the nineteenth century as a result of the *Jihad* movement of Utman dan-Fodio, which enlarged its boundaries to those of the Sokoto Caliphate.<sup>16</sup> British colonial rule contributed another level to the establishment of Muslim identity in the north, both through its separate administration and by instituting indirect rule there.<sup>17</sup> Yet, although the north was predominantly Muslim, it was clearly not homogenous. Social changes in the north and the south created the phenomenon of mass migration to cities in the north of southern people, mainly graduates of the mission institutes, who were not able to find jobs fitting their skills in the south.<sup>18</sup> This large-scale migration was among the main causes of the intensification of religious identities and the politicization of religion after the 1950s.

As independence approached, tensions between the north and the south became clearly recognizable. During this phase, the consolidation of feelings of territorial unity was evident in the separate areas, but did not serve as a link between them, and led to the intensification and politicization of religious identities. This was evident, for instance, in the growing xenophobia toward southerners in the north, based on the threat the northerners felt that southerners represented in the vocational and economic spheres. This xenophobia was inflamed and became more politicized during the 1950s, as independence approached, by the Northern People’s Congress, the major political party in the north. This process continued after Nigerian independence in the beginning of the 1960s, and reached its apex with the discovery of oil in the middle of that decade.

Nigeria’s abrupt entrance into a macro-capitalistic economy as the result of the oil discovery led to a process of widening the socio-economic gaps in the Nigerian society and the exclusion of a wide stratum of it from oil revenues.<sup>19</sup> Legacies of inadequate governing were evident in successive military and civilian regimes, which perpetuated a mentality of intolerance, violence, and violation of human rights. Nigerian researcher Charmaine Pereira claimed that:

Competition among rival male elites and their ethno-regional constituencies in the postcolonial era has given rise to the opportunistic mobilization of ethnic and religious identities in the effort to retain state power, with serious consequences for governance and public management. This has had implications for Nigeria’s level of social development, which is much worse than that of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in Asia and central and South Amer-

ica.<sup>20</sup>

Feelings of alienation and deprivation amongst the Nigerian masses were translated into a call for religious innovation, feelings which were not exclusive to either religion. Muslims and Christians alike were exposed to intensified socio-economic inequality and to an increased level of government corruption. Both blamed the active part played by the West, primarily the United States, for this development. Yet, in the context of their attitudes toward the United States, two significant points should be mentioned. First, processes of rapid social change were widening both socio-economic and socio-religious inequality. Second, while in their discourse Nigerian Christians continued to refer mainly to the West, Nigerian Muslims were beginning to refer to the wider world of Islam. This change occurred gradually after the mid-1970s, with the rapprochement between Nigeria and the Arab world, especially Saudi Arabia, and the effects of the Iranian Revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Although cordial relations had existed between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia since independence, the rapprochement between them became more evident after October 1973 with the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Israel and Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> On the political-diplomatic level, Nigerian hesitation regarding its association with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) ended in 1985, with the decision of President Ibrahim Babaginda (1985-1993) to make Nigeria a member of the association. This move caused a fierce debate in Nigeria, and was opposed mainly by Christians who perceived it as a threat to the religious status-quo in the country.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the more important influences of this rapprochement were evident on the grass-roots level in many dimensions. Saudi Arabian investments, both private and official, were reflected in the spread of mosques. Until 1970, for instance, there was only one major mosque in the city of Kano. By the end of the 1970s, mosques flourished throughout the city, many of them financed by Saudi Arabia. The educational institutions connected to these mosques, such as libraries and *Qur'an* schools, spread the message of Islam amongst the masses.<sup>24</sup> Another important factor in the politicization of Islam was Nigerian students who studied in institutes of higher education in the Arab world. The most salient group was composed of students who studied at the Islamic University of Madina (Saudi Arabia), named *Yan Madina*. With their return to Nigeria, they had considerable influence on the Northern Nigerian society, both on the academic level, where they served as teachers in the Universities and in the Arabic Schools, and on the religious level, where they served as *Imams*. On the socio-political level their influence was considerable through direct political nominations and in their leaderships of mass movements such as *Yan Izala* and student associations.<sup>25</sup>

The influence of the Iranian revolution was less evident on the surface, due to its *Shiite* orientation. Nevertheless, the essence of its revolutionary messages, especially the anti-Western and anti-American ones, penetrated into different strata of Muslim Nigerian society. Moreover, as a counter to Saudi influence in Nigeria, the Iranians spread their views about Islamic revivalism through various media, such as the Hausa newspaper *Sakon Islam*.

One of the main consequences of the spread of Saudi and Iranian influence was the establishment of Islamic mass movements. Hundreds of Muslim associations and societies (*jam'as*) cropped up and the number of their followers and supporters has grown consistently since the 1980s.<sup>26</sup> One representative example is the *Jam'at izalat al-bid'a wa-iqamat al-sunna* movement (known simply as *yan izala*), established in 1978 in the city of Jos. Its patron was Abubakar Gumi, once the Grand *Qadi* of northern Nigeria. Many of the organization's activists were graduates of Arabic schools,<sup>27</sup> and their elaborated *Wahabi* perceptions about the ideal form of the Islamic society were clearly influenced by Saudi doctrines about Islam. The movement's messages were spread through the various media – newspapers, radio programs, brochures, and audiocassettes. The mobilization of hundreds of thousands of followers and supporters in less than a decade was proof of the effectiveness of the message and of its efficient distribution.<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to claim Muslim exclusivity about processes of intensification of religious identity and politicization of religion. The discovery of oil, as described above, had major implications for Nigerian society as a whole. Feelings of alienation and despair toward the malfunctioning of the Nigerian state, violations of human rights, and increasing poverty were among the causes for the search for refuge in religion, which was common to Muslims, Christians, and others. As was the case with Islam, the power of Christianity, both numerically and ideologically, grew steadily during this period. Similar to Islam, the increase in the power of Christianity was influenced by the world of Christianity. Evangelical groups in the United States and Europe supported the activities of Christian groups in Nigeria and molded their religious orientation. American television programs such as the "700 Club" attracted the attention of millions of Nigerian Christians.<sup>29</sup> As part of a worldwide phenomenon, Pentecostal churches were spread all over Nigeria, attracting millions of followers. While this phenomenon spread nationwide, it had particular relevance in the north. There, the Christian revival was perceived as part of a larger Euro-American conspiracy against Islam, and Christians in the north were considered "agents of Western cultural imperialism."<sup>30</sup>



It is difficult to claim that these processes were reflected in Christian and Muslim attitudes toward the United States during the 1980s and even most of the 1990s. Instead, it can be claimed that these attitudes were gradually assimilated until they manifestly appeared as part of the debate over *Shari'a* implementation. The visible starting point of the debate over *Shari'a* implementation was the declaration by the State of Zamfara of its intention to adopt the *Shari'a* as its legal system in September 1999, a move that was adopted by other states in Northern Nigeria in the next two years. Although it can be claimed that these declarations were an internal affair of the Northern Nigeria states, their timing was not coincidental; it coincided with processes on the global and local levels and came as a reaction to them.

On the global level, it was influenced by the parallel yet contradictory processes of African marginalization, including Nigeria, in the international arena, and Nigerian centrality in the African arena. On one hand, Africa as a whole had suffered from a process of marginalization in the international arena in the post-Cold War period, as evidenced by events in Rwanda, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of the United States, Nigeria's role during the 1990s became more central in two main aspects. First, during this decade American interest in West African oil steadily increased. In this context, as the fifth largest exporter of crude oil to the United States, Nigeria became progressively more important.<sup>31</sup> Second, after the relative success of military intervention in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Nigeria came to be perceived as a major power in West Africa and was expected to take a larger role in keeping the regional order. In this context, maintaining internal order and stability in Nigeria became extremely important, especially in the American view.<sup>32</sup>

However, the Nigerian internal arena was far from stable. The debate over the implementation of the *Shari'a* began after the successive dictatorships of Ibrahim Babginda and Sani Abacha and the opening of the political space to a gradual return of democracy to Nigeria. As mentioned above, the democratization process brought old splits and tensions to the surface, including in the religious sphere. In this regard, the religious debate about legal identity has special importance, as Simeon Ilesanmi put it:

In these debates, each religion is ascribed its own particular concept of 'good' politics, together with the right to seek the recognition and institutionalization of its symbols in the country's polity. It could, in fact, be argued that the present debates are of scholarly interest not primarily because they revolve around the possible coalescence of religion and politics, for this is nothing new in human history nor it is

unique to Nigeria. The debates are significant because of the *new vocabularies being used* [my italics], which, depending on perspectives, could either help launch Nigeria in a new cultural and moral direction, or precipitate its political fragmentation.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, using "new vocabularies" was especially important in the case of Muslim vs. Christian's attitudes toward the United States. It was important because it symbolized the development of a new discourse, one which was much more radical and characterized by religious affiliation. The outbreak of a protracted wave of violence between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria was evidence of the intensification of religious identities there. Yet, in the context of religiously-aligned attitudes toward the United States, it was only after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> that the correlation between these attitudes and the politicization of religion became evident, as seen in the case of the events in Jos.

### Events in Jos from a Post-September 11th Perspective

Since 1999 there have been many incidents of violence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, taking an estimated toll of about 10,000 deaths.<sup>34</sup> The events in the city of Jos were not exceptional in their circumstances or scope, yet their timing has particular relevance to the theme of this article. The riots broke out on 7 September and continued until 12 September 2001. If we relate to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> within this period, the riots provide an unusual perspective on the shaping of attitudes toward the United States along religious lines in Nigerian society.

Relevant to the Jos events are the location of the city and its recent history. Jos is the capital city of the Plateau State. Located in the Middle belt region, it is almost at the geographical centre of Nigeria and thus not considered part of the traditional arena of religious conflicts, Northern Nigeria. Moreover, it was considered a symbol of coexistence between its Christian majority and Muslim minority.<sup>35</sup> Until 1999, the city showed positive urban growth rates. The implementation of the *Shari'a* in the northern states had indirect effect on Jos, as large numbers of migrants, mostly Christians who opposed *Shari'a* rule, arrived in Jos. Two researchers from the University of Jos, Danfulani and Fwatshak, claim that this wave of migration upset the delicate ethno-religious equilibrium. They show that the reasons for the outbreak of the clashes were more related to the ethnic character of the population than to its religious character, in spite of what was described in the media as preliminarily religious riots.<sup>36</sup> Yet, after September 11<sup>th</sup> the course of the events clearly changed, as Danfulani and Fwatshak show:

Wednesday 12 September witnessed a re-enactment of the previous dark days of unrest, but on an even

greater scale, as the fragile peace that had been brokered gave way to total anarchy and chaos. Writing under the caption, 'The disruption of Jos peace,' the *Northern Star* of 19 September 2001 stated that casualty figures were highest on this day because 'This second round of riot in Jos city was triggered by the jubilation of certain people within the metropolis over the recent American tragedy'... This, of course, is a reference to the terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, which for some miscreants signaled the triumph of Islam over the West, for them synonymous with Christianity.<sup>37</sup>

Although the riots in Jos diminished after that day, mainly because of the harsh intervention of security forces, riots broke out in other places. On 13 October, riots were reported in Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria. The riots began when several hundred demonstrators gathered to protest the American action in Afghanistan, and evolved into rioting in the streets, where more than one hundred people, mostly Christians, were killed by Muslim rioters. During the riots, U. S. flags were burned as well as an effigy of George W. Bush, and the demonstrators carried placards with messages such as: "May god destroy America" and "we answer your call Osama."<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, it seems that as a consequence of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the clear-cut religious dichotomy in Nigerian society's attitudes toward United States policies rose to the surface. These attitudes were manifested both at the mass level, such as in riots and demonstrations, as noted above, and by the declarations of Muslim leaders in Northern Nigeria. It is important to note, however, that these attitudes were not homogenous, and appeared mainly along ideological lines. Anti-American policy sentiments were particularly evident among the leaders and supporters of radical Islamic movements, persons who had no official roles in Nigeria's government. One clear example is the *Ikhwan* (the Muslim Brotherhood), a movement that was established during the 1980s by *Sheikh* Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, who was arrested during the regime of Sani Abacha. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, Zakzaky denounced the attacks themselves, but claimed that the American reaction in Afghanistan could be considered a war on Islam, not on terrorism: "For the time being, the United States had the sympathy of Muslim people in the area, but if the world's richest country decided to attack the poorest nation on earth, it would be another story."<sup>39</sup> An even more radical example is that of Abubakar Mujahid, who was el-Zakzaky's student. As leader of the newly-established *Ja'amutu Ta jidmul Islami* [the Movement for Islamic Revival], he did not hesitate to attack the United States itself for her part in the September 11<sup>th</sup> events: "Before we condemn this attack on America we have to see who carried it out, and then see their reasons. If you put a person in a corner,

then like a snake he may feel he has to strike back."<sup>40</sup>

More moderate views toward the United States were expressed by Muslims holding official positions in Nigeria, such as the Emir of northern Nigeria. The Emir stated that *Jihad* had to follow strict rules, and that these rules had not been observed in the terror attacks on the United States.<sup>41</sup> This view is important not merely because it expresses an official Nigerian stand, but also because of the Emir's powerful influence upon many traditionalist Muslims in Nigeria.

In contrast to the relative diversity in the Muslim reaction, the attitudes of Christians toward the United States after September 11<sup>th</sup> were more homogenous. These attitudes are evident, for instance, in the reactions of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), considered the parent of the Christian organizations in Nigeria, to the events. Generally speaking, after the implementation of the *Shari'a* in the northern states, CAN often appealed to the international community, including the U. S. government and Christian and human rights organizations there, calling for support for the Christian stand against the implementation of the *Shari'a* system of law. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, solidarity with the United States seemed to reach its peak. The acceleration of Christian-Muslim conflicts as a result of these events, as described above, was perceived by some Christian leaders as part of a universal call for *Jihad*, and thus strengthened their proclaimed pro-American stand.

## Conclusions

The events surrounding the Miss World contest in November 2002 were the continuation of the violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians in post-September 11<sup>th</sup> Nigeria. A comment by a reporter for the popular newspaper *This Day* suggesting that the Prophet Mohammad "would probably have chosen a wife" from among the contestants ignited a new wave of violence between Christians and Muslims in the city of Kaduna, where the contest was supposed to take place, with the loss of more than 200 lives. These events were followed by the declaration of the Anglican Bishop of the city of Jos that, "The Muslims are winning - they have won. Islam is growing fast. For many Muslims, it makes more sense to reject America's and Europe's secular values, a culture of selfishness and half-naked women, by embracing Islam."<sup>42</sup>

Can it be argued that since September 2001 there is evidence of a clear-cut dichotomy of attitudes on religious lines: pro-American policy Christian vs. anti-American policy Muslim? In the period immediately after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, even if the reactions of Muslims toward the United States were not homogenous, as shown earlier, the anti-American policy voice of the more radical groups was louder than the more mod-

erate voice. Almost three years later, where do these voices stand? George W. Bush's visit to Nigeria in April 2003 does not provide an unequivocal answer to this question.<sup>43</sup> The visit itself did not raise fierce Muslim opposition in Nigeria. This fact, combined with the general relaxation in violent Christian-Muslim clashes, reflects the return of a relative religious status-quo to Nigeria. The current attitudes of Muslims in Northern Nigeria toward the United States are more diversified than those expressed in the pre-September 11<sup>th</sup> period, both along ideological lines and across socio-economic groups. The question as to which of these groups and lines will prevail, if any, remains open for further investigation.

The attitudes of Muslims in Nigeria toward United States policies are connected to the current events in Nigeria itself. The ability of the Obasanjo's regime to shape more democracy and pluralism will need to be matched on the ground, especially its ability to shape "a case for dialogue" and to cope with the enormous splits and conflicts in Nigerian society, including in the religious sphere.<sup>44</sup> The attitudes of members of Nigerian society toward the U. S. reveal that these attitudes are no longer determined only by the interests of the ruling elites, but must take into consideration the interests and needs of the masses, both Muslim and Christian.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: IFAN, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>"Nigeria: The Generals' Elections," *New African* (March 2003): 16-19.

<sup>3</sup>George Obiozor, *Uneasy Friendship: Nigeria/US Relations* (Enugu, Nigeria: Forth Dimension Publishing Co., 1992).

<sup>4</sup>James S. Colman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 332-352, 353-368.

<sup>5</sup>Levi A. Nwachuku, "The United States and Nigeria - 1960 to 1987: Anatomy of pragmatic Relationship," *Journal of Black Studies* 28:5 (May, 1998): 578.

<sup>6</sup>Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Nigeria Speaks* (Lagos: Longmans, 1964), 104.

<sup>7</sup>Obiozor, *Uneasy Friendship*, 22-62.

<sup>8</sup>See George Obiozor, *The United States and the Nigerian Civil War: An American Dilemma in Africa, 1966-1970* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of Foreign Affairs, 1993); Obiozor, *Uneasy Friendship*, 87-143; Nwachuku, 578-581.

<sup>9</sup>For a background to the war see: Keith Susan M. ed., *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria* (London: F. Cass, 1978).

<sup>10</sup>Nwachuku, "The United States and Nigeria," 583.

<sup>11</sup>The main sanctions were the classification of Nigeria by the United States as a leading global drug trafficker, ending direct air links with Lagos, ceasing assistance from the Export-Import Bank, and compelling a veto from U. S. representatives at the multilateral institutions. See Peter M. Lewis, "Nigeria: Domestic Crisis Challenges International Influences," *SAIS Review* 15:2 (Summer/Fall 1995): 17-38; Gilbert

M. Khadiagala, "The United States and Africa: Beyond Clinton Administration," *SAIS Review* 21:1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 259-273.

<sup>12</sup>See Ehiedu E. G. Iweriebor, *Radical Nationalism in Nigeria: the Zikist Movement and the Struggle for Liberation, 1945-1950* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>Olusegun Adekoya, "A Picture of the Big Apple," *Research in African Literature* 34:2 (Summer 2003): 183-191.

<sup>14</sup>Aaron Sachs, "Dying for Oil: The Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa," *World Watch* 9 (May/June 1996): 10-21.

<sup>15</sup>Levi A. Nwachuku, "The United States and Nigeria - 1960 to 1987: Anatomy of a Pragmatic Relationship," *Journal of Black Studies*, 28:5 (May, 1998): 585.

<sup>16</sup>See Marvyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup>In southern Nigeria, on the other hand, the British established a direct system of rule. In effect, until the merger of 1914, these units were administrated separately.

<sup>18</sup>In addition, there are considerable minorities of Christians in the northwest, as well as communities of believers in traditional African religions.

<sup>19</sup>On the implications of the oil discovery on the Nigerian society see: Augustine A. Ikein, *The Impact of Oil on a Developing Country: The Case of Nigeria* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

<sup>20</sup>Charmaine Percira, "Configuring 'Global,' 'National,' and 'Local' in Governance Agendas and Women's Struggles in Nigeria," *Social Research* 69:3 (Fall, 2002): 782.

<sup>21</sup>John Hunwick, "Sub-Saharan Africa and the Wider World of Islam," in Eva E. Rosander and David Westerlund, eds., *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (London: Hurst, 1997), 37-38.

<sup>22</sup>See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "The OAU and Afro-Arab Cooperation" in Yassin el-Hyouti, ed., *The Organization of African Unity after Thirty Years* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 147-168.

<sup>23</sup>Olusola Akrinrinade and Ojo, M. A. "Religion and Politics in Contemporary Nigeria: A Study of the 1986 OIC Study," *Journal of Asian and African Affairs* 4:1 (1992): 44-59.

<sup>24</sup>Bawuro M. Barkindo, "Growing Islamism in Kano City since 1970: Causes, Forms and Implications" in Louis Brenner, ed., *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 1993), 91-105.

<sup>25</sup>Muhammad S. Umar, "Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria, 1970s-1990s," *Africa Today* 48:2 (Summer 2001): 127-150.

<sup>26</sup>Muhammad S. Umar, "Changing Islamic Identities in Nigeria from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Sufism to Anti-Sufism," in Brenner, *Muslim Identity and Social Change*, 154-178.

<sup>27</sup>These schools were aimed to spread the knowledge of Islam, in its *Wababi* form, amongst the masses. See Stephan Riechmuth, "Islamic Learning and its Interaction with 'Western' Education in Ilorin, Nigeria," in Louis Brenner, *Muslim Identity and Social Change*, 179-199.

<sup>28</sup>Roman Loimier, "Islamic Reform and Political Change: The Example of Abubakar Gumi and the Yan Izala Movement in Northern Nigeria," in Eva E. Rosander and David Westerlund, eds., *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (London: Hurst, 1997), 286-307.

<sup>29</sup>Don Ohadike, "Muslim-Christian Conflict and Political



Instability in Nigeria," in *Religion and National Integration in Africa: Islam, Christianity and Politics in the Sudan and Nigeria*, ed. John O. Hunwick (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 101-123.

<sup>30</sup>Ohadike, "Muslim-Christian Conflict," 110.

<sup>31</sup>Nevertheless, it is important to mention that other West African exporters, such as Angola and Chad have also become increasingly important recently. See Stephen Allis, "Briefing: West Africa and its Oil," *African Affairs* 102 (2003): 135-138.

<sup>32</sup>Herbert Howe, "Lessons of Liberia: ECOMOG and Regional Peacekeeping in Coping with Collapse in Africa," *International Security* 21:3 (Winter 1996-70): 145-176.

<sup>33</sup>Simeon O. Ilesanmi, "Constitutional Treatment of Religion and the Politics of Human Rights in Nigeria," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 531.

<sup>34</sup>Peter M. Lewis, "Islam, Protest and Conflict in Nigeria," *Africa Notes* 10 (2002): 1-10.

<sup>35</sup>According to the 1952 census, the Christians represented 84.5 per cent of the population and Muslims 12 per cent. See Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani and Sati U. Fwatshak, "Briefing: The September 2001 Events in Jos, Nigeria," *African Affairs* 101 (2002): 243.

<sup>36</sup>Danfulani and Fwatshak, "Briefing: The September 2001 Events in Jos, Nigeria," 244-247.

<sup>37</sup>Danfulani and Fwatshak, "Briefing: The September 2001 Events in Jos, Nigeria," 251.

<sup>38</sup>"At Least Eight Die in Anti-U.S. Riots in Nigerian City," IslamOnline, <<http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2001-10/14/article8.shtml>>, (13 October 2001).

<sup>39</sup>Dan Isaacs, "Nigeria's Firebrand Muslim Leaders," BBC Africa, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1573491.stm>>, (1 October 2001).

<sup>40</sup>Isaacs, BBC Africa.

<sup>41</sup>Mark Doyle, "Nigeria's Emir Opposes Bin Laden," BBC Africa, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1573491.stm>>, (23 November 2001).

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Kareem M. Kamel, "Beyond Miss World: Muslim Protest in Nigeria", IslamOnline, <<http://www.islamonline.net/ENGLISH/Views/2003/02/article04.shtml>>, (6 February 2003).

<sup>43</sup>"Bush trip evokes mixed response" CNN Africa, <<http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/07/07/bush.visit/>>, (8 July 2003).

<sup>44</sup>Pini Jason, "The Case for Dialogue," *New African* 402 (December 2001): 26-27.