

Appendix 21:

The Islamic Movement: Revisiting the Issue

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Sunusi Lamido Sunusi is a man that I have come to respect because of the depth of his knowledge and his dialectic approach (to borrow his words) to issues. I have been following his contributions from “Afenifere: Syllabus of Error” to “From Philosophical Rationalism to Monistic Theosophy: Observation on Banu Az-Zubair’s Comment” and I always marvel at his grasp of knowledge of contemporary issues. However, while I agree with most of the conclusions in his discourses, I cannot seem to agree with his thesis as contained in his article “The Islamic Movement: Real Issues, A Response to Yola.” (I hope I am not dragging the debate backward.)

He said: “My thesis, on the other hand, was and remains that Islam requires Muslims to join hands with other Nigerians in the struggle to create a better, more religious and humane, more liberal, honest and fair political environment in which all Nigerians can improve their lives – economically, culturally, intellectually, spiritually and morally. The struggle is for me, a revolution against our collective-oppressors rather than a crusade against our fellow-oppressed. This thesis was not addressed.” I believe that there are internal contradictions in his thesis that need to be resolved. For how can we build a more religious society when we have many religions that are sometimes diametrically opposed to each other? How can we have a fair political environment where the idea of a political environment differs between individuals and groups in the country and how can we improve our lives economically, culturally, spiritually and morally where the concept of some is completely different to that of others? Some would argue that in this situation, compromise would have to be made and each one should follow his own religion and culture so that we can coexist peacefully, but at what expense are we going to do that?

Let us look at the present economic system for example; in the Islamic economic system, charging of interest on loans is categorically forbidden. God said, “Those who appropriate interest are like men possessed of the devil” (2:275), so if we want to “join hands with other Nigerians,” then we have to, among other things, “appropriate interest.” We have to accept that the present economic, social and political system in Nigeria, because of its multi-cultural and multi-religious nature, is to a very large extent incompatible with our values. Moreover, since Islam is a complete way of life, which encompasses all actions, whether social, political, economic or religious, we cannot live in such a society, “without losing sight of the great Islamic values which our decadent political system requires.”

¹A. U. Bello, Gamji, 30 Aug/2003. Appendix 22.

For how can we be comfortable with a system that places people, not God, as sovereign powers to decide for themselves what we believe has already been decided by God? Is it not pathetic to accept the present unjust economic system in the name of one Nigeria when there is an alternative economic system that is just? How can we reconcile our belief in the divine law with belief in the supremacy of the constitution? On the other hand, is the present political system the ideal we are looking for, where quantity, not quality, is the determinant of gaining political power? What of our system of education, our culture and ethical values? Are we going to compromise our noble ways because we want to flow with the tide?

We have to address these painful questions now or we have to accept the consequences later (in the hereafter). Granted that there exists a law of necessity, but for how long are we to hide under this law? At least, if we try and fail, God is a witness to our actions, but it is not an excuse to accept the present imperfections and do nothing to change the situation.

We cannot afford, especially now, to compromise our identity and accept the present arrangement which has its roots in imperialism just because as he reasoned “that there can be no programme for change, for transformation of the life of the Muslim *Ummah* unless it is an integral part of a general programme of national transformation which recognizes that the Muslims are a sub-set of the Nigerian Political Economy.”

Especially now, because fortunately the “objective reality” in Nigeria today as appropriately captured in Dr. Tilde’s article “Buy the Bridge a Single-Bed” is that “Whatever is their disagreement, Nigerians must accept that the argument of restructuring is very strong and convincing. From the sad events of January 15, to the Civil War, to the Orkar coup, to June 12 and its aftermath, and finally to the present tenure of Obasanjo and its 419 origin, the country’s political history is often punctuated with crises arising from mutual distrust. Besides, the periphery has grown too large for the corrupt and inefficient centre to keep intact without deterioration setting in. The Yoruba for example are over twenty-five million. That is a big nation. What sense does it make to deny such a people autonomy of their choice? Why should anyone today in Sokoto, Maiduguri or Makurdi raise a finger against a new Biafra? What moral imperative or interest would compel the North to ‘save’ the oil rich Niger delta if its people now strongly feel that they will be better off with an autonomy that gives them exclusive control over their oil resources?”

If we look at some countries of the world, we will see that they have a smaller population than Nigeria; look at Malaysia, Australia and South Africa for example. Their population is approximately 22, 19 and 43 million respectively. In term of development these countries are ahead in almost all indices: literacy rate per capita, life expectancy and urbanization. To the argument that the world is moving towards consolidation and synergy is feeble, because the movement is between independent countries having separate identity but consolidating for a common good, like the E.U. and the African Union. They are not consolidating to diffuse their identity, but to strengthen it; not to compromise on their values but to uphold it; and like the late Ahmadu Bello would say

“not to forget their differences but to understand it in order to forge an alliance for mutual benefit.”

The reality now is that some states in the North that have predominant Muslim population can unite and form a complete Islamic state under a restructured Nigeria. Needless to say, a model Islamic state is built upon a spiritual base in which the citizens are first called upon to recognize the existence of God the Almighty, to worship Him and obey His commandments. By obeying God, they will discipline themselves, cleanse their soul, and nourish their heart as well as their mind with the sublime principles of magnanimity, contentment, brotherhood, love, charity, and piety. Such progression is the foundation of Islam, in it the spiritual order constitute the groundwork of the system of education, of personal and social morality. This reality has fortunately, I hope, lay to rest some aspects of the debates on Islamic Movement, since “non Muslim in contemporary Islamic State” is no more a fundamental issue, neither is the assertion that there are tens of millions of non-Muslims and that we have cultural, religious and economic diversity.

The debate now should be centered on developing an Islamic Political Economy that is based on a different epistemological premise from the capitalist and socialist thought; such political economy should have the force of reason that would enable it to permeate the world, thereby making it universally acceptable. It is now left for our scholars, and this is a challenge to Sunusi and co. to develop this model, define its precincts, experiment with it in a smaller context (like in the northern states mentioned above) and perfect it and finally export it. This I believe is what we should be concerned with for now, not to assume that the Islamic system is archaic, impracticable and unfeasible in the present situation. Let us not forget that unlike Mecca when the prophet (S.A.W.) started his mission, Nigeria at least had a large percentage of its citizens being Muslims. However, with the help of the Almighty God, the force of reason, moral uprightness, leading by example, the prophet (S.A.W.) was able to spread Islam, which conquered the whole of Arabia and beyond. Let it not be mistaken that I want to compare the prophet with any one of us; what I am only saying is that we can use his methods to achieve what we want to achieve.

In developing an Islamic Political Economy, we would have to look at the socio-economic principles of Islam. In the social sphere, the underlining principles are that since human beings are dependent on each other they should care for others and that there should be consultation among themselves in all matters of common concern. This principle of consultation will ensure that allocation of offices and dispensation of justice is done in a manner that would be beneficial to the whole society. It will also ensure that people are engaged in socially obligatory duties, which should be complemented by the state to ensure that bridges between self-interest and public interest, that are so vital for peace and prosperity in human society, are built.

Islamic worldview as relates to Islamic economic system rest entirely upon genuine fraternity deriving from unswerving *Iman* in God. This is a conviction, which makes the recognition of God tantamount to giving to the poor and the deprived that which they need by way of nourishment, clothing, shelter, medicine, education and upbringing,

without even making them feel that they have been the objects of charity. It follows from what has been said above that Islam has conditioned Muslims to live a life of fraternity in the spiritual, moral, and economic spheres of life. It teaches that a person's *Iman* is not regarded as complete until that person has wished for his fellow that which he wished for himself.

We also need to be concerned with our own peculiar situation; the internal anomalies existing in our society, problems identified by Sunusi as regards our elite, *Ulamas* and even the masses. It is not enough to criticize nor is it enough for the proponents of the system to discuss the issues at seminars and on the pages of newspapers. It is only by identifying those Islamic principles, defining methodologies and making a conscious effort to realize objectives and setting benchmarks to measure success that we would be able to make progress. Sunusi's criticism and suggestions would be more useful if it is directed to correct the imperfection within the system we are proposing. At least people would identify and reason with him, since we all share the same religion and have common values.

I will conclude with the thought of Dr. Masudul Alam Choudhury as depicted in his paper, "What is Islamic Political Economy"? He said: "The polity of the Islamic socio-economic system is called *Shura*. The *Shura* is constituted of decision-makers who are learned persons in the tenets of Shari'ah on specific political, socio-economic and scientific issues. These fields, when viewed in the light of the broadest application of Shari'ah, become of the nature of *Deen* (divine code of life). The decision-makers in such *Shuras* come from very decentralized areas of life with participatory democratic privileges to form collective decisions. Such decisions are collectively formed through voting (complete or partial social consensus) in the *Shura*. The *Shura* formulates market friendly, socially friendly policies for morally ethicizing such systems. Such on-going interactions generate polity-market interrelationships, with the market system responding to the policy regimes instituted by the *Shura* on the basis of knowledge of Shari'ah on specific issues (formation of *Ahkam*, or rules from fundamentals, *Usul*). The power structure of polity-market interactions of an ethico-economic type thus explained by the Islamic concept of political economy, is aimed at developing integration through interactions between the *Shura* and the market system in accordance with the precept of the Quran and *Sunnah*."