

A DISCORDANT NOTE: SECULAR, MODERNIST, MARXIST MUSLIMS

The overwhelming majority of Muslims reject secularism. However, there have been some notable exceptions. This chapter talks about Muslims who accept secularism and how mainstream Muslims react to them. An anonymous author in *Nasiba* is horrified at the very possibility that some Muslims advocate secularism. Writing about “the lie of the separation of religion and politics,” he expresses his consternation that some Muslims can think in those terms at all. “What kind of nonsense would turn a Muslim into a secularist or have a Muslim support the secular policy for the country?”¹ Talking about those who “turn their countries into this very evil direction of secularism,” he calls out a strong curse on them.²

Ibraheem Sulaiman is equally upset with them. In his 1983 article in *Radiance*, he expressed high praise for the positive traditional role of the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria. However, he bemoaned the new kind of secular leaders that were coming out of Sokoto during the civilian regime of President Shehu Shagari. It had produced a president who stood for “secularism and American democracy.” This development was no accident, for it coincided

with the moral deterioration of a once proud centre of Muslim morality and splendour. “At present [Sokoto] is a filthy and repulsive city,” Sulaiman complained. It was “morally offensive, dead and dark as far as knowledge and moral inspiration are concerned,” and thoroughly secularised. All the western vices of gambling, drinking and prostitution reigned supreme. Sokoto represented a “history of the movement of a people from active creators of history to its passive victims; from a vigorous and intellectual life to a sordid moral and mental confusion. From caliphate to secularism.” If Sokoto were to regain its former status, it would have to quit “trying to reconcile a colonial [i.e., secular] legacy with its Islamic heritage,” for they cannot be combined.

And then there was that other alleged secular Muslim leader from Kano: the late Aminu Kano, a famous national politician. On the one hand, the man was a firm Muslim, constantly drawing inspiration from Islam and quoting Dan Fodio, the great 19th-century reformer of Sokoto. So the people saw him as a Muslim revolutionary. On the other hand, this “Islamic Aminu is at the same time the Secular Aminu, who, in an attempt to win the confidence of those who have already chosen their own idols, compromises those principles of Islam he always evokes, and to subscribe fully, when expedient, to secular politics or bring about a secular regime.” Aminu’s achievements were meager, merely “the installation of two governors,” namely Kaduna’s Balarabe Musa and Kano’s Abubakar Rimi. Musa, according to Sulaiman, waged a false struggle, pretending to be fighting for Islam but with secular weapons and goals. He pretended to love the people while running a government of “capitalist exploitation.” No wonder that he was removed from office. Rimi similarly ran his government on secular principles that were alien to his people.

So Sulaiman asks Aminu, “How come that ten million Muslims of Kano have at their head a governor who is a direct contradiction to Islamic humility, soberness, moral rectitude and profound spiri-

tual commitments?" Again, "If the object is to remain committed to colonial principles and to establish secular and immoral regimes, why invoke the Qur'an, why draw from Islamic sources, why refer to the Shehu?" Aminu's "failure," during the secular federal regime of Shagari with these two secular governors in his party under him, "indicates that any attempt to bring about a secular political and social transformation in a Muslim society is bound to fail. Islam alone is the source of such a transformation."³ With reference to "secular" Turkey, Ado-Kurawa similarly asserts, "Secularism cannot succeed in any Muslim society without the use of force."⁴

The political party of Aminu and his governors also included the historian Yusufu Bala Usman and author-politician Lawan Danbazau. In line with Aminu's position, though Muslims, they adhered to a Marxist perspective, somewhat parallel to Latin America's Christian liberation theologians. They emphasized how religion in Nigeria was used as a tool of manipulation.⁵ The secular state was necessary to resist this manipulation urge. When I attended a lecture Usman delivered at a conference at ABU, I was not sure whether I was listening to a Muslim or to a Marxist.

The hostility among Fundamentalists is so strong against secular Muslims that they will curse them publicly by name. Ahmad Joda was an elected Muslim member of a constitutional assembly. He advocated that the government should withdraw from all involvement in Islam, including the big ones of pilgrimage and education. The editor of *Alkalami* was so angry that he wrote an editorial entitled "*Allah Wadan Naka Ya Lalace*," which in English would sound like "Cursed are you; you are finished!" Elsewhere in the text, he referred to Joda as "this cursed Muslim." He declared, "It is incumbent on every Muslim to curse Ahmad Joda." He suspected that Jews and Christians might be behind this development. "This deed of his made him lose all his prestige among the people."⁶

Ado-Kurawa is anything but impressed with Muslim secularists. They are those "who accept the Western Christian notion of

separating the spiritual from the mundane and subordinate divine laws to man-made laws.” They really should not even be considered Muslims, since they reject “part of the message of Islam.” He asks, “Can one be a Muslim and a secularist at the same time?” Quoting 2:85 of the Qur’an, his answer is basically negative. It is only charity that makes him concede that “it is safer to refer to them as Muslims.”⁷ Alhassan Ibrahim, a political science student at ABU, during the Muslim Maulud celebration in Kaduna, commented on “stooges of the Western world, wearing the garb of Muslims.”⁸

It is claimed that Muslims who imbibe secularism, Az-Zubair’s “clones,” often either trivialize religion to a mere spiritual and personal dimension or, worse, scorn religion altogether as hopelessly outmoded and as a barrier to modernization. They “cause much confusion in our midst.” Many of these are found among the educated leaders who are “overawed” by Western science, while they lack “true understanding and full grasp” of Islam—as well as of Western culture. But he does not see any need for Nigerians to adopt secularism. They have no valid reason for removing “all semblance of spirituality from their social and political life, and suffer the same fate as their western brethren.”

Mustapha describes the world view of such Muslims as “disfigured and secularised to the extent that they see nothing scholarly or deserving of intellectual attention in their own history, culture and religion. They regard their own intellectual tradition and scientific achievements mere accidents, primitive and lacking the capacity and potential to meet the challenges of the twentieth century.”⁹

Ibrahim Umar finds that Muslims with Western education “flout and scorn the laws of God in preference to secularism.” Over half a decade later, he reserves more harsh words for those he considers secular Muslims, referring to them several times as “secular fanatics,” one of whom is Governor Makarfi of Kaduna State. He has earned that epithet because he allegedly “arrogantly” declared the sharia as established in Zamfara State “unconstitutional.”

Following El-Miskin, Umar declares that “the greatest enemy the Muslim community has today is not the Christian, the Jew or the Pagan, but the secular fanatics who profess to be Muslims.” “These secular zealots are the real hypocrites who have been brainwashed and rendered renegades by Western education and propaganda such that, when sharia is mentioned, their hearts are filled with disgust, contempt and horror.” “Sincere Muslims should not allow themselves to be intimidated and cowed by this bunch of diehard renegades.” Makarfi and his ilk are warned “of God’s ultimatum” that, according to the Qur’an, the full burden of eternal punishments awaits them.¹⁰

A contemporary Muslim writer of a totally different stripe is considered by some a secular modernist. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi is accused of all the evils associated with modernist Islam, including capitalism, by one Danladi A. Mohammed, a sharia advocate. Sanusi is regarded as an “arrogant modernist” who counts Marxists among his “colleagues,” though he is at the opposite end of the spectrum, working as he does for a capitalist bank. Along with the Marxist Muslims, Sanusi rejects sharia governors “as manipulators of religion.” He has deliberately condemned some Muslims as Fundamentalists for the very purpose of bringing “the attention of the anti-Islamic forces against his Muslim brothers, so that they could be targets of persecution as is the case in most Muslim countries and Sanusi knows this very well.” Nothing good can be expected from Sanusi, for, being a banker, he “is deeply immersed in usury, approving and monitoring usurious credit to breweries, casinos and brothels.” He is closely associated with “usury, the foundation of Western economic domination of Muslims.” He also “eulogizes [the] Western lifestyle, which depends on the exploitation of others.” In his writings, he depends on “*kafir* philosophers” and “secularists,” thus drawing his inspiration from “Western intellectual tradition and not from the Islamic tradition.” If Sanusi has his way, developments “will lead to the secularist disaster which has

befallen the Muslim societies that implemented modernist projects which is nothing but humiliation and cultural neurosis.” “Islam will be eliminated gradually from the lives of the Muslims.” And all that about a Sanusi with a degree in sharia studies from Sudan!

It seems to be a matter of “tit for tat.” Sanusi returns the “compliments.” He is said to despise Fundamentalists as ignorant and illiterate and has described them as hiding “internal injustices, inequities, corruption and despotism by portraying themselves as the sole and undisputed interpreters of the Divine Law and defenders of Islam’s pristine purity.” He also accuses Nigerian Islam of being “strikingly similar to the petro-Islamism in operation in corrupt and conservative Arab states.”

Such disagreements among Muslims are not the point of this book. I bring up these examples for two reasons: First, to indicate that the major opinions discussed in this volume do not go unchallenged within Islam; secondly, to indicate the strong mutual rejection of each other. It reminds me of the mutual intolerance within the Christendom of a couple of centuries ago. No love lost between Islamists and modernist brethren; only contempt and condemnation to the point of denying the other the status of Muslim.¹¹ However, there are pro-sharia folk like Abdullahi Bello, who actually admire Sanusi and often agree with him,¹² though not on this score.

Hussaini Abdu has an interesting angle on the Marxist-modernist concept of oppression. He is not so convinced that Muslims understand Western secularism properly. “This perception has an element of truth,” he admits, but “it does not necessarily depict the general nature of Western secularism.” His explanation for this opinion is couched in the rather unclear, pompous style popularly called “*dogon Turanci*” in Nigeria. He goes on to deliver what will probably be regarded a harsh insult to Islam, especially by Fundamentalists.

Reacting to secular dogmatism, populist [read: Fundamentalist] Islamic groups have advanced a conception

*of the state that is quite similar in purpose and form to the very secular state they oppose. Like Muslim secularists, Islamic populists see the state as an instrument in the hands of ruling powers for imposing a particular conception of the world and specific values on the rest of society. They insist, therefore, that the Islamic state should be charged with the duty of imposing Islamic law on the larger society. It is, however, observed that the position of contemporary populist movements stands in direct contradiction not only to Islamic values and beliefs, but also contrary to political practices developed in historical Muslim societies.*¹³

Ouch! Now fundamentalism and main stream Nigerian Islam are put in the same boat with their two arch-enemies and even *declared* to be the same! That can hardly be accepted with grace!

The purpose of this chapter is to indicate that Nigerian Islam is not one solid block without any significant discordant note. Not all Muslims despise secularism, though by far most do. You may remember from Monograph Two that an anonymous writer alleged a surprising alliance of ABU-based Muslim Marxists with the Jos-based missionary community.¹⁴ It seemed an unlikely association and, in fact, is. I well remember the time that I, a representative of the latter, stepped into the office of a representative of the “ABU Marxists” at a time they were the sworn enemies of capitalist-Christian apartheid. Though mine was intended to be a friendly get-acquainted visit, my surprised host squirmed uncomfortably in his seat and did not know how to react to this sudden intrusion of this missionary Boer. Of all names! Surely this intruder had to be an agent of the worst of vermin. The man’s problem was that I also introduced myself as a family friend of his in-laws, whom he would probably classify as corrupt Christian elite. How could he kick me out? Well, that gentleman saw me, a representative of the Jos missionaries, in a secular alliance *against* Marxists. Hardly an ally!

To all other Muslims, all non-Muslim faiths and systems—Christianity, Marxism, capitalism, even if adherents profess Islam—spell secularism and secularism, chaos.

▲ NOTES

¹ *Nasiha*, p. 35. Original Hausa: “*To kuma ina karyar a raba addini da siyasa?*” “*Wane karambani zai kai Musulmi ya zama dan sekkula? Ko kuma ma har su Musulmi su maida kasarsu mai bin tafarkin sekkulanci?*”

² *Nasiha*, p. 34. Original Hausa: “*Wasu suka mai da kasashensu a kan wannan mummunan tafarki—sekkulanci. Allah wadai!*”

³ I. Sulaiman, 1983, pp. 19-22. Of course, the Malam, as he was fondly called, could not have reached his political height without people voting for his party. The two papers, *The Pen* and *Alkalami*, based on Mallam’s turf, were at one with him in calling for radical change among the emirs and for denouncing oppression. On the sixth anniversary of his death, *The Pen* featured an editorial in which he was highly honoured and praised (21 Apr/89, p. 3).

⁴ Ado-Kurawa, *Shari’ah in Nigeria*, p. 14.

⁵ See Monograph Two and M. Kukah, 1993, p. 229.

⁶ “*Ra’ayin Alkalami*,” 15 Jul/88. “*Wannan lalataccen musulmi.*” “*Ya zama tilas akan kowane musulmi ya la’anci kuma ya yi Allah wadai da Ahmad Joda.*” “*Wadannan kalamai sun sa girman Ahmad Joda ya zube warwas a idon jama’a.*”

⁷ Ado-Kurawa, *Shari’a in Nigeria*, p. 13.

⁸ N. Dambatta, 8 May/2004.

⁹ A. Mustapha, “Introduction,” p. ix.

¹⁰ I. Umar, 8 Oct/93; 19 Dec/99.

¹¹ D. A. Mohammed, “Muslim Intellectuals,” pp. 2, 18; “A Response to an Intellectual Challenge.” For Sanusi’s own statement, see Sanusi, “The Politicisation.” For details about manipulation of religion, please refer to Monograph 2, pp. 108-119. These forceful exchanges may be partially attributed to the Nigerian tendency to express disagreements in the strongest of emotional tones.

¹² A. Bello, “The Islamic Movement,” p. 1.

¹³ H. Abdu, *The Triumph*, 7 Mar/2003. Appendix 23 on *Companion CD*. See D. Pipes, Dec/95 for a similar opinion.

¹⁴ *Radiance*, p. 38. J. Boer, Vol. 2, pp. 136-137.

