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## **Review of Islamic Modernity in Nigeria**

**By**

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Review of Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria : A Survey of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition  
By Ousmane Kane

This book published by the famous publishers Brill of Netherlands in the 2003 is the English version of the author's PhD thesis submitted to the Université de Paris in 1993. It is a well-written book and a testimony of the erudite scholarship of the author and the opportunity he had in interacting with many scholars of Islam from various parts of the world as indicated in the acknowledgments. The 288+xvii pages book is made up of an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion, a very rich bibliography, appendices and an index. It is a very valuable addition to the collection of similar books on Islam in Nigeria .

The introduction is on the normative versus alternative modernity. Where the author made several relevant definitions and argued that the Islamic movements of reform in West Africa attempted to promote modernity because they mediated social change (page 2). The aims of the book to contribute to debate on the formation of modernity in Muslim world were also stated (pages 7-13). There is a brief review of some books on Islam in Nigeria in the section on Islam and social change in Nigeria . A significant observation is that the use of the terms "Hausa-Fulani hegemony" and "Northern hegemony" by Reverend Father Kukah in "his book are misleading". Because among other reasons not only the minorities opposed the "hegemony" but also people who are Muslim Hausas and Fulanis and that many northerners have business interests and connections with entrepreneurs in the South. Kukah's simplification down plays the issue of economic class in the relationships. This might not be unconnected with his ethnic background of being a Christian minority "from southern Zaria (Kachia local government) who resented the perceived Islamic domination of Northern Nigeria ". Kukah confirmed the perpetuation of this resentment in a narrative he gave elsewhere<sup>1</sup>[1]. The suspected biases of Reverend Kukah and another Christian writer Dr. Jibrin Ibrahim were also noted elsewhere in the book (page 190). The theoretical framework of the book is discussed (pages 20 to 23) so also the sources and methods (pages 23 to 25). The book focused its attention "to the modus operandi of the Yan Izala at the microlevel in Kano " (p. 20).

Chapter one of the book titled 'Agents of Social Change in Twentieth Century Nigeria' is a review of the political history of Nigeria . The author discussed some of the agents of this social change such as "the abolition of slavery, the growth of the two main world religions, Islam and Christianity, the construction of Nigerian postcolonial State, and the oil boom and the neglect of the rural areas". He argued, that: "they are part of the process of the formation of modernity in Nigeria ". Chapter two is titled: ' Kano in the Nigerian Context' though brief, it is rich in references thus demonstrating the extent of the library research of the author. The author is correct

in his analyses of the role of the mass media and the effect of the wealth of the "nouveaux riches" on patterns of social relations. Most of the current sponsors of the Saudi version of Islam in Kano are "nouveaux riches" some of whom made their money through their close connection with previous military dictators of Nigeria . There is an interesting parallel during the early colonial rule the British opposed the Tijjaniyya whom they considered "bad Muslims" because it was more radical and they attempted to promote Qadiriyya whom they considered "good Muslims"<sup>1</sup>[2]. At that time a younger generation of Ulama and the "nouveaux riches" of that time became affiliated to the Tijjaniyya of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass.

Chapter three titled: The Fragmentation of Sacred Authority is very interesting. The chapter discusses the emergence of the Muslim Students Society (MSS), the rise of the Da'wa Group of Shaykh Aminudeen, the prominent role of Shaykh Abubakar Gumi and the rise of the Izala movement and its implantation in Kano . It also discusses the moderate and radical advocates of an Islamic state in Nigeria as well as the Maitatsine movement that ravaged Kano . Like other chapters it is rich in references but the discussion on the MSS is very brief the author could have discussed how the Izala tried to hijack the organization that has struggled to remain neutral in the struggles between the Sufi and anti-Sufi groups. The section on Shaykh Aminudeen Abubakar is also very interesting because it documented the various stages of his metamorphosis. The author's analyses are easily verifiable since the Shaykh is still alive any observer could visit his center in Kano . One may even be tempted to say it is indeed 'history in the making' if there is anything like that. It is also a lesson for the many new religious entrepreneurs of similar persuasion. It would be interesting to know the reaction of Shaykh Aminudeen to the analysis. A more informative section is on Shaykh Abubakar Gumi and the rise of Izala. It also chronicles his metamorphosis from his close connection with the Premier of Northern Region Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto ("who did not know Arabic" (page 83) even though he was very committed to Islam) to his position as a leading anti-Sufi figure in Nigeria . During the period of the Premier, Shaykh Abubakar Gumi was not anti-Sufi and he even composed a *wird* (litany) similar to Sufi litanies. The author suggested that he used the opportunity and connections in Kaduna to spread anti-Sufi ideas after the death of the Premier. During the crisis of the late sixties he attempted to reconcile with Sufi leaders "in order to build a broader base for his participation in Nigerian politics" the Kano "*ulama* suspected ulterior motives and following due deliberations, they rejected his offer for reconciliation". The author noted that it was against the background of the attempt by radical Sufi sympathizers to physically exterminate Shaykh Gumi that the Izala movement was formed (page 85). This is a significant observation considering the apparent reversal of roles because of the intolerant nature of the factions of the Izala and the neo-Izala groups in Kano . The section on 'the laborious process of implantation of Izala in Kano ' demonstrates the commitment of the members of the group to their objectives.

Chapter Four titled 'The Social Base of the Yan Izala' opened with the argument that they are products of "the modern world—urban-based with modern education". The author categorized the movement into leadership (made up of preachers who are learned and patrons who provide material assistance) and sympathizers who are actors "persuaded by the interpretation of Islam that the Yan Izala movement advocates". The author used selected biographies to analyze the social backgrounds of the membership of the movement. One might not agree with his interpretations but the chapter is very informative and offers some suggestions on why the religious entrepreneurs of the movement behaved in the manner they did based on their backgrounds. It should also be viewed against the backdrop of this statement by

Shaykh Abubakar Gumi when they were discussing the emergence of Izala at a meeting of Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI) made up mostly of Emirs: "it is a struggle by the bottom against the top. The young men and women of Izala now understand their religion better, and their ultimate challenge is against you at the top. I fear that one day they may take away the ground from your feet, and you will fall away"<sup>1</sup>[3].

Chapter Five titled 'The Worldview and Recruitment Patterns of the Yan Izala' analyzes the process of selection of source materials from Islamic literature that they use in their preaching and writings and also the modes of recruitment and maintenance of allegiance. The sources were broadly categorized into external and local. The main external source is *Kitab al-Tawhid* of Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab the reformer who originated from Najd whose teachings became the cornerstone of Saudi Arabian Islam. His followers are known as Wahhabis but against their wish. They preferred to be called *ahl-Sunnah* or *Salafi* to the exclusion of others who do not share their anti-Sufi tendencies. The other book is the collection of hadiths by Imam Nawawi titled *Riyad al-Salihin* it is noteworthy that the author of the book is also claimed by Sufis and Asha'aris (another group considered not *ahl-Sunnah* by those in Saudi Arabia and their followers in Nigeria who appropriated this name for themselves only). The author explained that the Izala movement adopted this book partly because it is not widely used in the traditional Islamic schools of Northern Nigeria. The main local source for the movement is undoubtedly Shaykh Abubakar Gumi. This included his teachings made available by the radio as well as those recorded in audiocassettes. His books include a *tafsir* (exegesis of the Qur'an) titled *Radd al-adhan ila ma'ani al-quran* as well as his translation of Qur'an to Hausa language that contained polemical comments. But the most outstanding polemicist of the movement was Tahir Maigari who wrote two biographies against the leaders of the Tijjaniya. One of which made a copious quotation of a leading Arab Christian scholar, Jamil Abun Nasr's book with the invocation of the latter's scholarship as an authority to strengthen his claim (page 129). It should be noted that there is generally less body of literature by anti-Sufi groups compared to the Sufi groups partly because of the newness of the former in Nigeria <sup>1</sup>[4]. Chapter Six titled: 'Counter-Reform Movements' as the name implies is a reaction to the previous chapter but as a scholarly work it documented the Sufi/Sufi opposition before the arrival of the anti-Sufis. It also documented the hostile reaction against the rise of the Izala by the Jundullahi Movement a militant pro-Sufi group. This may be interesting considering the new patterns of confrontations between the Sufi groups and neo-Izala groups in Kano. There is also the intellectual reaction especially by the leading Sufi figure Shaykh Sharif Ibrahim Salih who has over ninety published works to his credit.

Chapter Seven, deals with 'The Politics of Muslim-Christian Confrontation in Northern Nigeria'. The author lucidly analyzed the causes of this confrontation especially within the processes of contestations for political power and economic resources. He also noted with evidences the biasness of the commentators from both sides this is worthwhile because the Christian commentators have been promoted internationally as social scientists instead of members of a religious group that "brooks neither opposition nor constructive criticism"<sup>1</sup>[5]. The author analyzed the various religious riots from 1982-1992. He used some factors to explain the struggle for political power based on religion rather than ethnicity. The first factor he explained was the assertion of identity by Christian minorities and how they questioned "the pre-existing social and political order, which they believed favored northern Muslims" (page 204). Some of these minorities benefited from this struggle. One of such

groups was the "Langtang Mafia" from Langtang village in minority Plateau State, was "believed to be self-perpetuating, as evidenced by the high number of Langtang indigenes" in Babangida`s government. The influential Langtang indigenes in that government were:

General Domkat Bali (who retained his position of Minister of Defense and joint Chief of Staff under Buhari until he was retired in 1989), General Joshua Dogon Yaro (who announced the coup overthrowing Buhari and was general officer commanding the second division of the army), Colonel John Shagaya (formerly Internal Affairs Minister), General J. T. Useni (former governor, transport minister and now Quarter-Master General of the army), and retired General J. N. Garba (permanent representative at the United Nations), to mention only a few<sup>1[6]</sup>.

There was hardly any local government that had such an influence in any previous administration in Nigeria`s history.

Chapter eight is titled 'The Domestication of Izala'. This chapter documents how the state restricted Izala under President Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Head of State General Muhammadu Buhari who belonged to the traditional establishment because of their ancestry. The restrictions were relaxed during General Ibrahim Babangida`s regime. It is noteworthy that: "Even Shaykh Gumi`s position as part of the National Party of Nigeria did not relieve restrictions on some Izala preaching groups by political authorities in this period" (page 210). This chapter documented the process and events leading to the break up of the organization notably "the drive by the federal military government to infiltrate the society as part of its more global strategy to control all religious movements" (page 226). It seems that the Izala group like most religious organizations so much trusted state agents. The book is very revealing on how one of the scholars received financial support from a military ruler (page 206).

The conclusion is also well written and informative. The thesis of the book based on the field theory was justified and the author showed how capital was accumulated and converted by those in the field. The section on comparative implications is also very interesting especially the discussion on Islamic movements and the sociology of religion. There is no doubt some members of the Izala movement and its off-shots or neo-Izala groups may not agree with the analyses of the author nevertheless it is a challenge for them to offer their perspectives, which will educate us more. It is note worthy that the author acknowledged the piety of the followers of the Izala movement "who defended the Society remained loyal to the organization and made use of their resources and influence to protect members when they were persecuted" (page 251). The book should have included more information on the Shari`ah debate in Nigeria . Since it was published in 2003 when most of the northern states had implemented reforms of the legal system by incorporating aspects of Islamic Criminal Law as interpreted by the Maliki School of Islamic Law. This is very important because the Shari`ah issue became a rallying point and source of unity for Muslims of both the Sufi and anti Sufi persuasion.

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1[1] Maier 2000: 209

1[2] For more information see Reynolds 2001

1[3] Gumi with Tsigu 1992: 161

1[4] For more information on the Arabic literary works of northern Nigeria see Hunwick 1995 where there are chapters on Tijjaniyya and Qadiriyya writers of Kano and a chapter on the polemical literature for and against Sufism.

1[5] Ohadike 1992: 101

1[6] Osaghae 1991: 256