



## John N. Paden

*Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World,*

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The book under review examines John Paden's incisive analysis of how the Nigerian state has been able to manage ethnic/religious diversity in the midst of violent confrontations across ethno-religious and regional fault-lines on one hand, and its relations with the U.S as a pivotal state in the Muslim world within the framework of the United States Institute of Peace's Muslim World Initiative and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. The author locates the nexus between faith and politics in Nigeria historically and demographically, as well as demonstrates a profound awareness of the convergence of interests between U.S and Nigeria, which has security, religious, political and economic undercurrents.

In chapter one, the author gives an overview of Nigeria in global perspective, in terms of its demographic importance, with a population of over 140 million people, its being the most populous country in Africa, the fourth largest member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), has the six largest number of Muslims in the world, it is the only country with an approximate balance between its Muslim and Christian population. Above all, its ethno-linguistic and religious diversity makes it one of the most complex countries in the world. All of these constitute the driving force in the quest for nation building and stability since independence in 1960 (p1), which also explains the link between Nigeria and the global economy. The author is categorical about intensity of religious identity in Nigeria, which accounts for one of the highest in the world. This religious identity grew during the military era (1984-1999) and was very pronounced and dominant during the Fourth Republic. He argues superficially that Nigeria is probably the least well known of the Muslim world's pivotal states. Its role as the dominant African state, its extraordinary influence in West Africa, its significance as a major world oil producer, and its experience with democratic rule since 1999 makes it a critical country, especially in its relations with the United States (p.3-4).

Chapter two looks at the geo-strategic significance of Nigeria in term so of the sources of its influence within a sub-regional, regional and global realm. The author argues forcefully that Nigeria is not a Muslim state in Africa, but a multi-religious country that operates under a secular constitution that serves as a bridge between Muslims and Christians in Africa within the framework of the Federal Character Model and the 'People of the Book Model', as political solution, which is premised on the assumption that Muslims and Christians felt they had more in common than they had with indigenous, animist (or polytheist) communities (p.21-23). This assumption has been contested on the grounds that the use of derogatory words such as 'arna' or 'kafiri' (pagan) by the Muslims to describe their Christian counterparts contradicts this claim, which has been a major source of violent confrontation in Jos, Plateau State. This was one of the burning issues at the Plateau Peace Conference, after a state of emergency was declared on Plateau state by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Plateau



State Government, 2004:46). The introduction of Shari'a law in some northern states of Nigeria as well as the delicate relationship between the Muslims and Christians are major threats to the '*People of the Book Model*' as a framework for building inter-faith harmony in Nigeria.

Largely due to oil wealth and demographic resources, Nigeria's influence in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union (AU), its status in the OIC, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, Nigeria would continue to play a pivotal role globally. The author also highlights the growing influence of an avalanche of Muslim identities and organisations such as the Sufi Brotherhood and the Izala, students and youth organizations, women's organizations, national umbrella organizations and antiestablishment networks, which include the so called Shiites and Taliban organizations respectively (p.27). All these identities and organisations would remain relevant as far as politics and society are concerned.

In chapter three the author analyses the challenges to nation building in Nigeria, and provides a great deal of insight into the challenges the Nigerian state is confronted with, within its quest for national stability and development. This include; establishing a workable political system that is impervious to manipulation, consolidating the rule of law as the cornerstone of social justice, developing capacity for conflict resolution as one of the pillars for peace, security, stability and economic development, stemming corruption at all levels of government through effective leadership and civic culture respectively (p.51-74). While Paden's proposal provides a window of optimism for Nigeria in its effort at nation building, politics in Nigeria since has been seen as a matter of 'do or die' by the political class, to the extent that the electoral process has remained flawed as a result of cases of electoral fraud, corruption, the monetization of politics as well as the god-father phenomenon (Ibrahim, 2007:12; Gambo, 2006:89). This has dented Nigeria's image as a dominant African state, and has made her influence in the West African sub-region shrink. It is evident from Nigeria's inability to come to terms with these challenges that the conduct of elections, and the workings of government makes national reconciliation a daunting task, and the quest for democratic consolidation remain fragile.

Conditioned by the foregoing, in chapter four the author discusses the pathways to change, in the face of the challenge of national building staring Nigeria in the face in terms of what the future holds for the stability of the country? Paden seeks to reflect on some of the scenarios that have been painted based on the 1996 Shell Oil Vision 2010 Scenarios for Nigeria, the 2005 U.S National Intelligence Council Report, which considered a worst case scenario for Nigeria. In fact, the quest by former President Olusegun Obasanjo and some of the State governors to change the constitution so as to allow them have a third term would have plunged Nigeria into the worst-case scenario, which would have unleashed major ethno-religious violence in the polity, disrupted oil supply, heightened secessionist moves by regional governments, major refugee flows as well as instability in other parts of the West African sub-region (p.75-81). The series of protests by Nigerians both at home and in Diaspora, forced the Senate to reject the third term option, which put to an abrupt end the third term option. Notwithstanding these developments, the Federal Government decided to



frustrate the political ambition of some politicians such as the former Vice President Atiku Abubakar through the anti-corruption agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which came up with an advisory list of politicians that should not be allowed to contest for the 2007 general elections. This approach placed the Peoples Democratic Party's Presidential candidate Umaru Yar'adua at a vantage position over majority of the presidential aspirants. Amidst all these, the three major political parties; the Action Congree (AC), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) considered ethno-religious power sharing a very sensitive issue that could mar or make their mandates if not handled effectively. Thus, they all allowed power to shift from a Southern Christian to a Northern Muslim candidate, since the Southern Christians had being in the presidency for eight years (p.82).

Despite the flaws and characterized the presidential elections, Paden is no doubt right on the fact that the election was significant in the sense that it sought to balance the interests and identity of the two major regions in terms of the Muslim dominated North and the Christian dominated South within the context of ethno-regional and religious identity (p.87). In fact, he attributes the ability of the Nigerian state to manage these ethno-religious diversities through several mechanisms that have been in put n place such as the notion of power sharing between the two religions, the implementation of the policy of North-South power sharing, the introduction of the Federal Character Commission, the location of the Federal Capital Territory close to the centre of the country with a national Mosque and a Christian Ecumenical Centre the establishment of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) so as to foster Inter-Faith dialogue and harmony respectively (p.89).

The protests and violence that characterized the November 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 Local Government elections in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, which led to the death of over six hundred people and the wanton destruction of lives and properties means that the Muslim-Christian identity politics can not be taken off the front burner was Paden wants us to believe in this book (p.93). Paden also raises a fundamental question about how the goals of national unity can be achieved. Thus, he identifies three approaches to national building; partition the country into component parts; the use of force or the threat of force to hold the country's unlikely components together; or devise mechanisms of democratic federalism suitable to the demographic and political realities at hand. As reported by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF):

Over the last year, Nigeria continued to experience incidents of violent communal conflict along religious and ethnic lines, which are often intertwined. The popular movement in 12 northern Nigerian states to expand the legal application of sharia to criminal matters continues to spark communal violence and is an ongoing source of volatility and tension between Muslims and Christians at both the national and local levels. Serious outbreaks of Muslim-Christian violence in the last few years threaten to divide further the populace along religious lines and to undermine the democratic transition and the foundations of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in Nigeria. Social, economic, and political conditions have not improved in the country, fostering a climate of even greater tension among ethnic and religious communities (USCIRF, 2008:241).



Events in the country has shown the option that the Nigerian state has chosen as reflected in the use of force to suppress militancy in the Niger Delta region as well as the massacre of some Islamist fundamentalists popularly known as 'Boko Haram', (which means western education is a forbidden), in some Northern states such as Borno, Yobe, Bauhi, Kano and Niger. In fact, contrary to perceptions that Sharia will fizzle out in Nigeria, the Boko Haram phenomenon shows that support for Sharia has not waned (Afrobarometer, 2009:10).

In chapter five the author does a critical review and assessment of the relations between the U.S and Nigeria from several perspectives; military and security, diplomatic and political, economic, business, educational, cultural, religious and non-governmental. Based on these, the interests of the U.S and that of Nigerian do converge in terms of the intensive search for evidence linking northern Nigerians with international Islamist terrorism, the need to institutionalize democracy in the Niger Delta region so as to eliminate militancy and the disruption of oil flows, local insurrection, criminal syndicate, kidnapping, environmental pollution, and oil piracy (Lubeck et.al, 2007:17-18). Paden provides insights into how the establishment of the American Command in Africa (AFRICOM) highlights the growing importance of U.S - Nigeria relations due to terrorism and oil (p.106).

How the Nigerian state consolidate its grip within the context of the these ethnic and religious diversities poses a grave challenge for the future of the state and its sovereignty in the future, in the light of the internal resistance to the secularity of the state as being challenged through the introduction of Shari'a law in some Northern States. In fact, the commonality shared between the U.S. and Nigeria in terms ethnic and religious diversity also reveals how religious and ethnic groups constitute the widest and deepest expression of popular politics (p.120). Though, while these diversities often result in violent confrontations in Nigeria, the reverse is the case in the U.S., whereby these diversities have been effectively managed.

While the strength of the book lies in Paden's analysis of how Nigeria has managed its ethnic and religious diversities and relations, he was not able to provide a model for Nigeria in terms of how the U.S. has been able to manage its diversities with no violence, in spite of the fact that the Muslim population in the U.S is not as significant as Nigeria. The fact remains that in the coming years, pervasive communal and sectarian violence, the agitation for the implementation of strict shari'a law, discrimination against religious minorities as well as the increased Islamic extremism will remain a dominant feature of politics. Thus, the Nigerian government should be proactive in taking the necessary steps to maintain religious freedom. In the final analysis, whether one disagrees with Paden is not the point, since the book opens up an important debate about the role of faith as a driving force in Nigerian politics and its relations with the international community. Thus contrary to the author's assumption that Nigeria could uniquely serve as both a model for inter-religious political accommodation, and as bridging actor in global politics between the West and the Muslim world, violent ethno-religious confrontations remains a major threat to political stability, which also poses grave danger for its image in the global economy.



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