

## **An Examination of Effects of Proliferation of Islamic Organization in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Formation of organizations and Islamic organizations for that matter is a natural phenomenon encouraged by Almighty Allah and practiced by Prophet Muhammad right from the inception of his prophetic mission. This was inherited by the subsequent generations of Muslim down to our time. However, unlike in those days, today, this practice has become pandemic that both the eligible and non-eligible Muslims now form Islamic organizations. This has great effect on the purpose for which it was initiated. This paper is therefore, designed to examine the effect of proliferation of Islamic organizations in Nigeria. In doing so, the tentacle of the paper is expanded to cover evolution of Islamic organization in Nigeria, aims and objectives of the organizations, achievements of the organizations, factors responsible for proliferation of Islamic organization in Nigeria as well as merit and demerit of proliferation of Islamic organizations in Nigeria. Conclusively, challenges militating against the activities of the organizations were identified and some way out were as well offered.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The formation of Muslim groups, unions and organizations to work for the preservation and defence of Islam is not an innovation in the history and philosophy of Islam. It is justified in the numerous commands of the Qur'an and Sunnah for Muslims to collectively enjoin good and forbid evil and assist one another in instilling virtues. The Qur'an says:

*Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity. Be not like those who are divided among themselves and fall into disputation after receiving clear signs: for them is a dreadful penalty. (Q3:104)*

The founding of Muslim organization was a response to the convergence of several forces on Islam and the Muslims in Nigeria. Formation of Muslim organizations started as far back as eighteenth century. Necessity, they say is the Mother of all inventions. Islam was introduced to Nigeria for the first time around 1068 A.D. when the Umayyad Muslim descendants fled south to escape persecution at the hands of the Abbasid caliphs when they came to power in 750 A.H. Thus the indigenous people of Kanem as well as Borno mixed with the Umayyad Arab Muslims who came and lived with them, and through marriage became one. Islam became firmly established in Borno through Muhammad Ibn Mani during the reign of Umme Jilmi who ruled between 1085-1097 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

It is an undisputable fact that Islam preceded Christianity in Nigeria. History reveals that Arabic language was the first official and administrative language in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> By the late thirteenth century Islam was firmly rooted and Islamic Principles were taught in different places. Alli quoted by Raji writes on the bright position of Arabic and Islamic education in Nigeria before the advent of the Christian mission thus:

The introduction of Islam to Borno (Northern Nigeria) in the 11<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of Islamic education and establishment of Islamiyyah Schools, first, in Northern part of the country and later in the Southern areas. Record indicated that in 1914, there were as many as 24,757 Islamiyyah Schools in Nigeria enrolling 238,615 pupils under the supervision of 15,000 *Muallims or Mallams*

The modern or western oriented education first came to Nigeria through the Christian missionaries and the British rules. These Christian missionaries were until recently responsible for the running of the great majority of the schools in Nigeria. This activity began in 1842 and reached its zenith around 1925.<sup>5</sup>

These missionaries without exception used their schools as a means of conversion and each found that children were more valuable for this purpose than adults, though adults were not ignored in their evangelical programme. So, the instruction of western education meant a change of name, religion, way of life and feeling of inferiority complex for the Muslim youths. Those who were not ready to change to Christianity would otherwise lose their jobs or be deprived of getting education and were regarded as social outcast.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the *Ullamah* (learned Muslims) were not considered useful to the new administration. These and many other series of attempts, both overtly and covertly, were made by the colonial masters, their disciples and agents to downgrade, disgrace, and if possible wipe out Islam completely because it was perceived as a serious threat to the crusade activities launched by the Colonialist under the canopy of Christian missions.

### **Formation of Muslim Organizations in Nigeria**

The feeling of being inferior, uncivilized and the humiliating treatment meted to the Muslims worried the minds of the elites. In an attempt to save Islam and the Muslims from this embarrassing situation, the versatile and ever virile youths in Lagos who have attained higher level of western education brought themselves together and formed progressive societies that will further strengthen and promote Islamic virtues and ideals. Prominent among these organizations were the Muslim Literary Society and Juvenile Muslim Society.<sup>7</sup> Sometime in 1916, one Dr. Oguntola Sapara a medical doctor of great repute who was a lecturer at the School of Pharmacy in Lagos returned from England on holidays, brought back a copy of the *Islamic Review* which he gave to his friend, Mr. L.B. Augusto who in turn circulated the few copies among the members of the Muslim Literary Society and Juvenile Muslim Society.<sup>8</sup> Through the reading of this journal they (Members of Muslim Literary Society and Juvenile Muslim Society) became aware of the existence of another journal 'The Review of Religion.' Copies were ordered for and through which they became aware of existence of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in Islam in India. In the same year (1916), Mr. L.B. Augusto wrote to the Ahmadiyyah Movement, telling them of the difficulties facing the Muslims in Nigeria arising from having no Schools to attend other than the Christian Missionary Schools. In response to the letter, a condition that if only he (Mr. Augusto) and his other young Muslim friends could be members of the Ahmadiyyah Movement, Schools would be established for them. So, in September 1916, the members of the two Muslim societies (Muslim Literary Society and Juvenile Muslim Society) welcomed the proposal and readily became members and the Ahmadiyyah Movement was introduced into Nigeria with late chief Imam L.B. Augusto as its first president.

Furthermore, Mr. L.B. Augusto while in London met members of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in their Southfields headquarters and discovered to his surprise the strange belief which every member of the movement was expected

to hold faithfully. He rejected the preaching of the Qadian Ahmadis in its entirety when he discovered that Qadian had unnecessarily introduced Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet after the last prophet who was Prophet Muhammad (SAW). On his return to Nigeria in 1924, he tried to persuade the members of the Ahmadiyyah Movement to renounce Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet but when he could not, he succeeded with his supporters and founded the Islamic Society of Nigeria in March 1924 which was subsequently renamed Jama-atul Islamiyyah of Nigeria as a permanent platform for projecting Islam in the right light.<sup>9</sup> The foregoing analysis marks the beginning of formation of the first generation of Muslim organizations. Apart from the ones mentioned above some other early Muslim Organizations in Nigeria include: Ansaru-deen Society of Nigeria founded in 1923, Zumratul Islamiyyah Society of Nigeria founded in 1927, Nawair-deen Society of Nigeria founded in December, 1939, Ansarul Islam Society of Nigeria founded in 1943, Nurudeen Society of Nigeria founded on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1953, in Zaria, Muhyideen Society of Nigeria founded in 1960, in Ilorin, Shamsudeen society of Nigeria founded in 1960, in Ilorin, Jamaat Nasirul Islam founded on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1961, Ahbabud-deen Islamiyyah Society of Nigeria founded in 1975, the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) established in October, 1985. The above mentioned organization and many others are the early and first generation of Muslim Organizations that strived assiduously for the unity of the Muslims and progress of Islam in Nigeria. It is as well interesting to know that in 1973 the Muslim communities and Islamic Organizations in Nigeria constituted a central body known and called 'The Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs'.

### **Aims and Objectives of these Organization**

Majority of these Organizations have some aims and objectives in common due to the circumstances that led to their establishment while some other aims and objectives are peculiar to each organization. Their common aims and objectives is our concern here and they are as follow

1. The spread of Islam to areas it had not hitherto reached.
2. Founding, building and maintenance of educational institutions where Muslim Children could receive both Islamic and secular type of education without fear of conversion to Christianity.
3. Promote, foster, encourage and sustain the religion of Islam.
4. To encourage Muslim Parents to send their children to school for secular education beyond the primary school level and up to secondary school

level. Majority of the Muslim parents could afford the expenses of giving their children secular education, but their fear, which was justified in many instances at the time, was the conversion of those children to Christianity.

5. To make the Muslims take their proper place in the society when they were then regarded as second class citizens because of their deficiency in secular education in spite of their being in the majority.
6. To fully explain the religion to all and sundry.
7. Reformation of Muslims by making them realize that Islam is not just a creed to be followed but a life to be lived, that it is not the belief alone that matters but the practice of the teachings of the Qur'an.

### **Achievement of the Organizations**

For an organization to prove its worth and be respected, it has to perform certain activities according to its aims and objectives. The realisation of its goals through the activities of the members will determine the degree of its achievements. Obviously, the effort of the Muslim organizations in transforming the society to the better cannot be ignored. These organizations have made their marks through their activities. Though their efforts to reach their target are made difficult by a number of militating factors against the attainment of their goals. Yet they continued to wax stronger in their efforts to achieve the stated aims and objectives. The Muslim organizations in Nigeria can be felt in educational and social-religious aspect of the Muslims in their areas.

Islamic organizations place premium on education in view of its importance and value to the society as it nurtures a good man out of human being and as powerful weapon to effectively bring out a better change in a given society.

Majority of the organizations have achieved a lot in promoting the educational standard of the Muslim children both in Western and Islamic education. They considered it a weapon by which Islam can be developed and protected from the enemies of Islam, who are striving day and night to whittle it down. Hence the Islamic organizations made it their responsibility to give sound education to their children in both ways without their faith being affected. Examples of one or two organization is bound here. Ansarud-deen Society of Nigeria founded its primary school in Alakoro, Lagos in 1932 and by 1960, the society had built over 200 primary schools, 18 secondary modern schools, 3 secondary grammer schools including one for girls and teacher training colleges

and by 1971, its post primary institutions numbered 14 all scattered over the federation<sup>10</sup>. Another Organization with similar track record is Ansarul Islam society of Nigeria. Adekilekun records that ‘as of February, 1983 the society has 126 primary schools, 86 Islamiyyah Schools, 45 Arabic and Islamic Centres, five Ma’ahads in Ilorin, Kwara state and Owo, Ondo state of Nigeria and 118 women study groups’<sup>11</sup>. Some other Organizations with such track record include Anwarul-Islam Society of Nigeria, Nawairud-deen Society of Nigeria, Jama’at nasril Islam to mention but a few.

The systemic approach of the organizations towards the propagation of Islam through their various activities created brotherhood and unity of purpose among Muslim youths. The impact of their educational activities on the people of their areas are too numerous to mention. The Islamic organizations fought for the practice of Islam in their respective Schools to see that Islamic studies is entrenched in the school curricula and the practice of Islam was allowed without any molestation. They also financed and sponsored some educational programmes which had great impact on the Muslim youths such as Qur’anic recitation competition, Islamic quiz and so on. The awareness of the Muslims is greatly enhanced through: lectures, quiz competitions, symposia, workshops which are normally organised by these organizations in furtherance of their aims and objectives. The impact of workshops and Islamic vacation courses organised by Nacomyo for the youth organizations served as an avenue for socialisation and promotion of Islamic brotherhood and cooperation among members of various organizations strengthen their knowledge of Islam.

Since education is the most important part of aims and objectives of these organization, it did not come as a surprise that much more efforts are put into this aspect. The organizations embarked on the training of Islamic teachers for the formal schools<sup>12</sup>. This is done so as to give Muslim students the opportunity to be taught by Muslim teachers and by doing so the fear of conversion would be allayed. They also took up sponsorship of some Muslims to higher institutions. This is because there are some indigent students who could not further their education to higher level for lack of fund. Many Muslims benefitted from this sponsorship programme. Some Muslims were even sent to Cairo to study and these Muslim came home with their degrees and they now hold important posts in different parts of the country.

For decades back, a very large section of the Muslim communities held the erroneous belief that there should be only one Jumaat Mosque in a township

and that the *khutbah* could only be said in Arabic Language. This couple with other factors debarred the rich individuals interest in building mosques and thus availability of very scanty number of mosques. But the need was later felt by these organizations for having their own mosques having been aware of the fallacies attached to it. This was not devoid of opposition from some quarters but ultimately the truth prevailed. This is a glaring achievement as mosques of those organizations now scattered around in the Muslim Communities today and *khutbah* is delivered in the languages of their communications in their various Mosques.

In the area of social engagement, these organizations perform common functions. The organizations had inculcated social ethics into the day-to-day happenings of the people to certain extent. This could be seen in the manner they carry out social functions such as marriage, naming ceremony, house warming, Hijrah ceremony and so on. The impact of these organisations has considerably affected the way of life of the people of their areas. They are now Islamically conscious of their social engagement which normally reflected the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. The system of conducting marriage ceremony in the past has been corrupted with various bad cultures. The organizations played a major role in reorganising the system, at present they conduct most of the Islamic marriage ceremony according to the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet (SAW).

Sometimes now, there had been the problem of conversion to Christianity through marriages. This is a situation whereby a Muslim female contrary to the injunction of Islam<sup>13</sup> married non-Muslims. This situation gave Muslim parents and Muslim brothers great concern. It was through interaction of Muslim brothers and sisters in their Islamic organizations that such obnoxious practice was checked and minimized to a great extent. Henceforth, Muslim brothers and sisters among the students contract marriage to the happiness of Muslim parents. Furthermore, they organize social gathering for Hijrah celebration annually to mark the commencement of the Muslim new year calendar. They celebrate Maolud Nabiy, 'birth day of the Holy Prophet' annually. They also have their respective anniversary week where socio-religious activities are line-up. By this, many people know the importance and beauty of Islam and they no longer feel ashamed to be Muslims.

### **Proliferation of the Muslim Organizations**

Many factors combined together could be responsible for proliferation of Muslim Organizations in Nigeria. Among the factors to be considered are as follows. Political factor takes a great deal in this respect. Politics and Islam are two inseparable entities. Islam stipulates that no society should exist without leaders to direct the affairs of such society. The claim to headship or leadership by some individuals has brought about secession of some others who are disenchanted with the leadership style of their associations and thus proceeded to form their own new organizations. This was said to be partial cause of formation of QAREEB Society of Nigeria as its founders were formally members of NASFAT. Love of women is another factor considered responsible for proliferation of Muslim Organizations. A critical study of the first generation of Muslim Organizations reveals that those Organizations were usually segmented to two or three wings namely; fathers wing, youth wing and women wing and each wing having its own Organization separate from others, but unfortunately the new generation organizations have muddle things together, young men and ladies now mingle and operate freely together. This has thereby giving devil free hand to operate and resultant effect in most cases is dissolution of the organization or secession and formation of another Organizations by the aggrieved members.

Economic reason is another factor to be considered. Some people have found in religion a gold mine. These people have turned religion into an article of merchandise. Like their Christian counterparts who have made fortunes in the name of religion through proliferation of churches, some Muslims with the same motives have taken clue from those Christians, they claim to be men of God, formed different Organizations in order to converge people particularly women around them, brainwash them, exploit them and get their desire satisfied.

Ideological difference also plays a great role in aiding proliferation of Islamic organisation in Nigeria. Difference in ideology has been in existence in Islam for long, thus we have Ahlu-sunnah, Shiite, Mutazilite and so on. This has come down through the ages to the current age. Thus people of common ideologies and interest who like to be identified have come together for identification under different names as organizations such as association of Tijaniyyah sufi order, association of Qadiriyyah sufi order, the Jama'atu izalatil bid'ah wa iqamatis Sunnah, Jama'at tabligu da'awah, Ahlus Sunnah wal jama'ah e.t.c likewise people who like to be identified with the root of their



educational prosperity and achievement have also come together to form different organizations named after their origin such as al-Adabiyat al Kamaliyyah Association of Nigeria, Zumuratul Muminina Society, Nikobatul Marcasiyyin and so on.

### **Merits of Proliferation of Muslim Organizations**

The phenomenon of the formation of various Muslim organization to serve complementary role is no doubt a healthy development and manifestation of Islamic resurgence in the twentieth century c.e. This serves as an indication that Muslims have regained their ground and identity, that they have overcome the oppression and feeling of inferiority complex inflicted upon them by the Christian missionary colonialists. Coming together of young Muslim ladies and men, their interactions under these Organizations have to a reasonable length curb the conversion of young Muslim ladies and men into Christianity, through the enticing strategic programmes put in place by the Christian bodies and Churches. It as well signifies that Islam is growing and progressing in the country. It could be seen that Muslim professionals are also coming together as bodies and establishing their enterprises base on Islamic norms and values. Flying the flag of Islam, and propagating the religion within their capacity as bodies. Example of such Organisations include Muslim Medical Doctors Association, Association of Muslim Engineers, Muslim Accountant Association of Nigeria and so on. With this development, one hopes that a vision and a mission of re-orientation, revitalization and reinstatement of Islamic values and cultures in the minds and attitudes of Muslims and societies is realizable.

One of the commendable activities of most of these new generation Muslim Organizations is introduction of Assalatu and prayer session. A day, usually Sunday of each week is set aside for this activity, some Organization have designated venue or ground for this purpose while some adopted rotational system within the members. This has in no small measure assisted in turning away gazes of fickle minded Muslim Sisters and Brothers from the traps of the Christian evangelists in looking or sourcing for solutions to their various problems. More so, some of this Organizations such as NASFAT, QAREEB and the likes also imbibe the idea of inviting Scholars to deliver lectures on vital issues affecting the lives of Muslim Men and Women. It is discovered that, it is through the activities of these Organizations that some young Muslim Brothers and Sisters gained access to such programmes and opportunity to listen to exhortations and have idea of what Islam is all about.

Furthermore, these Organisations have created avenues through which the less privilege Muslims are able to interact with the influential Muslim individuals and through which some benefits were been exchanged.

### **Demerits**

To start with, one of the adverse effect of proliferation of Muslim organizations in Nigeria is the fact that it resulted to unhealthy rivalries among these organizations. The fact is that every organization requires patronage of individuals in the society to flourish. As a result of this, in order to get the needed patronage, founders of each Organization claim superiority of their Organization over others, the result of which is usually condemnation of one another, leading to enmity and violent reactions from members and admirers of these Organizations toward one another. This fact is attested to by Bidmos when he writes ‘...even if there is only one religion in the whole world, man with his intellect will still generate controversies within the same unified faith as the difference between sunni and shi’ah. In Nigeria, a manifestation of intra-Religious rivalry plays out in the establishment of several Organizations that claim the same staus.’<sup>14</sup>

To further corroborate this fact Aliyu states thus:

*The contradictions and conflicts between the Islamic Organizations in Nigeria especially in the 80s became markedly evident. The conflict of the sufi group or brotherhoods (namely Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah) and the Jama’atu izalati did’ah wa iqamatis Sunnah (JIBWIS) as shortly (called izalah) is seen by some critic to have accounted for over seventy percent of the disunity among Nigeria Muslim’. Others declared it that ‘led by the izalah and IMN (Islamic Movement in Nigeria; the representative Organization of the shiites), between the groups, but increasingly between them and Christian Movements.’<sup>15</sup>*

Furthermore, some of these Organisations, as said earlier, in order to secure peoples patronage and retain the existing members have resulted to all sorts of enticement and by doing so introduced series of innovative practices into their religious activities. For instance, NASFAT and others introduced congregational *salat tahajjud*. In this practice married men and women, young ladies inclusive would leave their various houses for the designated centres where the prayer would be observed. The whole night would be spent there. This is an imitation of Christian idea of night vigil. This practice is completely

contrary to the practice and instructions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as far as *salattahajjud* is concern, and it is totally condemnable.

The most pathetic adverse effect of proliferation of Muslim Organization in Nigeria is the fact that some people are using it as a means of exploitation. It is unfortunate to note that more than seventy percent of the new generation Organizations belong to this group. Taking clue from their Christian counterparts, some Muslims discovered gold mine in religion and using all sort of powers and influence at their disposal ventured into establishing organizations in the name of religion with the aim of exploiting their members, patrons and admirers. Such people will never manifest any visionary agenda for establishing their organizations. They are fond of all programmes and activities that afford them the opportunity to extort money from people. Most of their activities revolve round ceremonies such as elaborate all year round maolud nabi, Hijrah celebration, laylatul Qadri celebration, launching of almanac, conferment of awards and all sort of programmes that have no bearing on the lives of individuals and the societies.

## **Conclusions**

No doubt, Muslim Organisations sprang when Nigeria Muslims really needed such formidable units to preserve and transmit Islamic virtues. In spite of the enormous problems faced by this Organizations, it is commendable that most of them (first generation) have recorded reasonable achievement in their socio-Religious efforts. These Organizations face numerous common and peculiar challenges which they must address to continue to register successes in their activities. These challenges relate to the spheres of religion, education, method of Da'awah, economy and the society.

Religious tolerance, cooperation, unity, healthy dialogue, planning, deep training of the preachers and leaders, economic independence, proper appreciation of time and space for activities, collaboration with one another on regular bases are some suggested remedies and meaningful weapons to addressing the challenges ahead of these Organizations. Islamic Organisations will continue to proliferate in Nigeria but would only achieve their aims and objectives when the challenges stated above are carefully considered and concerted efforts are put in place to address them.

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