

Religious Polemics and the Participation of Yorùbá Muslims in Nigeria's Democratic Dispensation: An Overview of Al-Asrau's Perspective

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Abstract

Politics is a set of happenings that are linked with the governance of the people. The year 1999 marked a watershed in the political history of Nigeria with the transition from military to civilian rule and since then, the country's political arena has become vibrant with several significant political issues. Islam, according to the Muslims, is a system that pervades every human sector including politics. Democracy being a Western system has constituted bone of contention among Muslims across the globe, including Yorubaland of Nigeria. It is within that context that a renowned Muslim jurist in the region, Dr. Sirajudeen bin Bilal al-Asrau wrote his seminal work. The present attempt aims to highlight Al-Asrau's submission to the political cum religious polemics among contemporary Muslims in Yorubaland. The study adopts an analytical method of research. Some of the findings of the study include the majority of Muslim jurists across the globe have validated the participation of Muslims in the democratic processes, based on either the ground of necessity or a firm belief that democracy is not totally alien to Islam. This is also the position promoted by al-Asrau in his work. The study recommends more political awareness for the Muslims in Yorubaland as a major means to actualize right to religious freedom and prevent religious harassment and persecution.

Keywords: Politics, election, Nigeria, Participation, Yorubaland

Introduction

Islam as a complete code of life, declares leadership as a trust (*Amānah*) and gives a detailed description of it. According to the Islamic view, leadership is a sacred position that can solve the problems of humanity and guide to the betterment of here and hereafter (Umar, 2009, p.46). The position of leadership is so important in Islam that Prophet Muhammad was reported to have advised that at least, where Muslims are up to three in number, they should appoint a leader for themselves. He was himself divinely endowed with leadership qualities. Meanwhile, the socio-economic and political growth and development of any nation depends largely on the quality of its leadership as well as its ability to entrench, sustain and facilitate good governance. To build a strong, efficient, viable, ideal and egalitarian nation, the leadership must imbibe and display an extraordinary spirit of commitment, dedication, patriotism and discipline.

Geographically, Yorubaland occupies land which lies on the South-Western part of Nigeria between the third and the sixth degrees of North latitude. It is bounded on the North, and on the East, roughly by the River Niger, on the South, by the Bight of Benin, and on the West, by Dahomey (now the Benin Republic) and Togo. The Yoruba constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria and they effectively occupy the

whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, and the Lagos States and a substantial part of Kwara and Kogi States. A considerable number of Yoruba people also inhabit the South-Eastern part of the Republic of Benin (former Dahomey). All these areas formed what was known as the Yoruba country before the European partition of Africa (Arikewuyo, 2022, p.2).

The Nigerian nation which has existed for over 64 years as an independent entity from the British colonial masters, and which prides itself as the "giant of Africa" is yet to achieve any meaningful, viable and sustainable socio-political development, due to bad and inept leadership over the years.

Nigeria is a multi-religious nation with Christians and Muslims living together as citizens, though Islam predated Christianity in Nigeria. In the South-Western part of the country which is otherwise known as the Yorùbáland, Islam was said to have been introduced into the region from the Empire of Mali during the reign of Mansa Kankan Musa (Opeloye, 2003, p.12). This explains why Islam was referred to as "*Imale*" and the adherents were described as "*Onimale*". The boom in trade and commerce in the empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was instrumental to the spread of Islam in Yorùbáland. By the seventh century, early Muslims were made up of migrants, itinerant merchants and scholars. Major towns in Yorùbáland came in contact with Islam. Namely: Iwo, Iseyin, Lagos, Abeokuta, Saki, and Ilaro, at different times with Mosques springing up accordingly. (Gbadamosi, 2018, pp.2-7)

The Muslim population in the 18th century in Yorùbáland and the religion did not make a meaningful impact on the political scene. Due to the activities of the itinerant Islāmic scholars from North Africa and the modest effect of some Hausa slaves, Islām enjoyed a peaceful and gradual spread (Gbadamosi, 2018, pp.2-7). During the pre-colonial period, some parts of the Yorùbáland applied *Shari'ah* in their dispensation of justice. In Ede, Oba Habibu Lagunju applied *Shari'ah* fully in his domain during the second half of the 19th century. The colonial masters were said to have established a court in the town in 1913 whose judge Alufa Sindiku wrote the proceedings in Arabic. Iwo, Oba Muhammadu Lamuye appointed a qadi in his court to adjudge the *Shari'ah* provision in cases involving his subjects who were predominantly Muslims. In Ikirun, Oba Aliyu Oyewole the 7th Akinrun appointed a qadi in 1910 who dispensed justice according to the *Shari'ah*. (Gbadamosi, 2018, p.5)

Over time, democracy has become overwhelmingly adopted as the preferred system of governance by most countries of the world today, including Nigeria. While the system has worked relatively well in the developed world, the opposite is often the case in the developing world, particularly Nigeria. Some hard-line conservative "*Ulama*" in different parts of the Muslim world, including Nigeria, have advanced the view that democratic governance is not Islamic and thus Muslims must not participate in it. This has left Islam and Muslims on the periphery of governance in different countries.

In Yorùbáland, there are divergent opinions on the issue abound in the Muslim world mainly because it is not an issue that has been explicitly addressed in the primary sources of the *Shari'ah*, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah. (Gbadamosi, 2018, p.6). Otherwise, there would not be a ground for divergence of opinions. So, the issue is a subject of *Ijtihad*, a juridical process which is the task of well-rounded scholars.

The scholar's opinions in Yorùbáland can be conveniently classified into two distinct groups. The first group of scholars considers Muslim participation in elections as a prohibited act (*haram*). Holding this position are the two prominent scholars, Dr. Sahraf Gbadebo and Muhammad Ali Jabata. As fondly called, Jabata, however, is notoriously renowned for his extreme literal understanding and rigid application of Islam in Ilorin particular and Yorubaland in general. The second group of scholars have an opinion that is different from the first group mentioned above. Two prominent scholars from Ilorin can be noted in this regard. They are Prof. Abdul Razzaq Abdul-Majeed Alaro and Shaykh AbdulWahab Ajia. They adamantly assert that Islam advocates for active engagement in democracy to uphold and propagate the genuine essence of Islamic values worldwide (Yusuf, 2022, p.9). If the Muslims should fold their hands and do nothing thereby giving a free rein to the others to display their licentiousness or debauchery, evil will be the order of the day and the whole society will be engulfed by its consequences.

In contrast, Dr. Asra' unequivocally presents his stance in his book *Mushārahātu'l Muslim Filintikhābāt ma' ghayri'l Muslimīn* (the participation of Muslims in elections in non-Islamic nations) using Qur'anic verses and Hadith to validate his position in favour of Muslim participation in elections (Al-Asra', 2014, p.2). Hence, this study attempts to review his position.

Democratic Dispensation in Nigeria: A Conceptual Analysis

The term democracy, like most concepts in social sciences, lacks a precise single definition. Rather, it is generally a matter of intellectual supposition. The scope of its definitions has seen a continuous expansion in contemporary discussions. There are meanings, opinions, perceptions and definitions of the term by different scholars and philosophers like Rousseau, Locke, Jefferson, Lincoln and Mills (Lawal, 2012, p.185).

The word democracy is used to refer to political situations or phenomena with features of equality and freedom featuring traditional terms such as democratic society, democratic political process, democratic style of governance, democratic sessions, administration and monitoring, democratic consultation and democratic rights. It has also been applied to realms beyond political science, creating such hybrid concepts as economic democracy, social democracy, art democracy and academic democracy. Given that the notion of "people being masters of their affairs" has taken root as the essence of the democratic political process, as a universal value of human societies and as a fundamental principle of modern civilized nations, the statement "democracy is a good thing" seems to have a self-evident truth or common sense (Lawal, 2012, p.185).

Supposedly, democracy is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as: "the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves. In other words, the Merriam-webster dictionary has defined democracy as "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections"s.

Nigeria gained independence from Britain on 1st October 1960. Like any other British colony, the country was compelled by Britain to adopt democracy as its system of governance in Nigeria and most African countries. Thus, instead of democracy resulting in the development of Nigeria, it has been weaponized for the ethnic division that repudiates the structural and institutional development of the country. After 64 years of independence, the practice of democracy in Nigeria has offered little benefit to the population. While democracy manifests a quality standard of living, economic prosperity and a secured future in Western countries, it produces the opposite in Nigeria. The practice of democracy in Nigeria is associated with huge costs, yet there is a glaring manifestation of underdevelopment in the country. This is evident in high levels of illiteracy, poverty and insecurity. The benefits of democracy to the Nigerian populace are at odds with the realities in Western countries, where the system was adopted from. Accordingly, Nigeria's democracy needs to be modified and adapted to suit the needs and capacity of the country in terms of running costs and dividends offered to the population (Akindele, 1987, p.3).

In a nutshell, the relationship between Islam and democracy in the contemporary world is quite complex. This is because the Muslim world is by no means ideologically a monolith. Various Islamic adherents and groups exhibit varied attitudes to popular and modern notions of democracy and its tenets. The Nigerian situation seems to paint a much more complex scenario. Not less than four outlooks can be identified. Firstly, at one end are mainly non-Muslims who believe that the application of Islamic laws beyond the provisions of the constitution would collide headlong with modern democratic principles and the multi-religious nature of Nigeria (Oraegbunam, 2011, p.1).

Secondly, the other rung of the ladder is occupied by mainly pious Muslims, for whom the idea of democracy is purely of Western, foreign and secular origin, and has nothing to do with Islamic practice. Some of these Islamists are of the view that democracy is a practice that is imposed by Westernizers and secular reformers upon Muslim societies. They often argue that the concept of popular sovereignty on which much of an entire edifice of democracy is built denies the fundamental Islamic affirmation of the sovereignty of Allah, and is, therefore a form of idolatry. For this school of thought, the injunctions of Shariah and the provisions of the constitution or any other law are quite parallel, and in the event of any conflict, the former would prevail (Oraegbunam, 2011, p.2).

Thus, socio-economic and political inequality is a prominent and permanent feature of democracy particularly in Nigeria where democracy has widened the gap between those who have access to power and public funds and those who do not. Since democracy is said to be government of the people by the people and for the people, it is therefore generally assumed that democracy is the most suitable form of government at least as far as the delivery of Ronald's 'political goods' is concerned. It is therefore generally taken for granted that the pursuit of the welfare of the generality of the people is the epicentre of democracy wherever it is practised (Herskovits, 1979/1980).

Ironically, in Nigeria today, individuals struggle heart and might to provide for themselves those basic social amenities the state should normally provide. Those Nigerians who have the means generate their power, make personal security

arrangements, patronise privately owned schools and hospitals, etc. On the other hand, the less privileged rural dwellers who are in a clear majority, live in palpable darkness, drink all sorts of contaminated water and contact with all kinds of water-borne diseases there and are regularly harassed, wounded or killed by armed bandits and by the well vased Muslim participation in politics as well being utilise Islam law all these could be ended (Adeyinka, 2014, p.111).

Biography of Dr. Sirajudeen Al-Asra'

He is Sirajudeen bn Bilal bn Nafi'i. He was given the Appellation of Al-Asra' by Sheikh Abdul Baqi Oluko-Agba due to his quick assimilation of movement and his dedication to quick memorization. However, he was born into the family of Bilal bn Nafi' Magaji Oba (which is composed of princes who are entitled to kingship) in Iwo. Both the parents of Dr. Sirajudeen were of Yorùbá origin.

His grandfather Nafi' was a prince while his grandmother Hawau was also a princess of Tadese, This implies that, from both parents' sides they are prince and princess. However, The name "Magaji" implies the leader of a prince. When you pronounce "Magaji," it means the leader of a particular subject. His father Bilal was into Cocoa and Ekuro businesses. Later, he proceeded to a similar business sawmill (An Oral Interview Conducted with Dr. Sirajudeen Bn Bilal (Al-Asrau), on 27/2/2024).

Sirajudeenbn Bilal Al-Asrau was born later in 1960 in Iwo, a town very close to Osogbo, the capital city of Osun State. His father, Bilal was a native of Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria, a great businessman, a religious leader of the Islāmic faith and an itinerant scholar. Who travelled through most of Yorùbá towns and villages preaching the religion of Islām and its faith like any other scholar of that period. Al-Asra' grew up in Iwo town under the tutelage of his parents given a very sound Islāmic education. He lived in a well-civilized and cultured environment a place full of numerous scholars in all ramifications of the Islamic sciences. The boyhood of Al-Asra' was observed to have been associated with miraculous and legendary.

In 1982 Dr. Sirajudeen married AlhajaKudirahBintu Abdul-Baqi. However, in 2003 he also married AlhajaAminahBintuIshaq and in 2013 he married Alhaja Maryam Bintu Muhammad by the grace of God each of these wives was blessed with children however the first wife had the following: Dr Rasheed Olayinka 2- DrAbdulAzeez 3-Abdulrahman 4-Abdul Raheem 5- AbdulBaqi 6-Abdul Lateef. While the following children were from the Second wife: 1- Fatimah 2- Abdullahi 3-Haseenah 4- Afirah 5-Hafsah and the from the third wife came the following: 1- Abiraru 2- Muhammad 3- AbdulHamid 4- AbdulRauf 5- Bilal.

Sirajudeenbn Bilal Al-Asra' descended from ancestors who were people of knowledge, eternal wisdom and noble character. Being the son of an Islāmic Scholar, he received his early elementary Qur'anic education at an Islāmic school called MadrasatOpa Baba which was founded by one of the followers (*Jama'*) of Sheikh AbdulBaqi Muhammad and therein he was able to learn rudimentary knowledge of the Qur'an and some chapter from the Jurisprudence and Poetic books and he graduated from this school in the year

1971/1972. (An Oral Interview Conducted with Dr. Sirajudeen Bn Bilal (Al-Asrau), on 27/2/2024)

Scholastic Arguments on the Participation of Muslims in Democracy in Yorùbáland

Evidently, the democratic system in Nigeria has not yet materialised into a system of good governance as one would envisage. Rather the system is ridden with corruption and bad governance at different levels, sadly with Muslim politicians soiled in it despite the Islamic injunction that governance is a trust and that political leaders must be accountable not only to God but also to the populace they govern. Over the last decade, a standard format has emerged in the argumentation about “Islam and democracy.” In this format, some scholars argue that Muslims should not participate in democratic dispensation such as Dr. Sharaf Gbadebo and Muhammad Ali Jabata whose opinion was against Muslim participation in the democratic dispensation (Yusuf, 2022, p.9).

Jabata who thought that *bid'ah* is indivisible and every act of *bid'ah* makes the doer a *Kafir* (infidel) and ultimately leads him to hell fire rejects the opposing opinion, which is upheld by most scholars, to the effect that not every act of *bid'ah* necessarily makes the doer a *Kafir*. Thus, his approach to *Da'wah* activities is extremely marked by rigidity. This is vividly reflected in his opinion on Muslim participation in the elections. He considered it a prohibited act outright. The basis for his position is the mere fact that election is a process which is undertaken within the framework of democracy which he considers un-Islamic. By partaking in the electoral process, he believes that a Muslim is therefore promoting an un-Islamic system which is a sinful act.

He contended that a Muslim that participates in the election has disbelieved in the teaching of the Qur'an and his abode is hellfire except if such a Muslim repents before death relying on Q4:74. More so, Jabata held that no reason can necessitate the participation of Muslims in the election. He revealed that Prophet Muhammad was raised to condemn democracy and participation in elections because of the elements of *kufir* embedded in it. He claimed that there is unanimity among Muslim scholars on the excommunication of the participator in either democracy or election. He held that Shaykh Yahya Al-Hajuri and many others consider it a major polytheism because it contradicts Q12:40, Q18:26, Q42:21, and many others. He also opined that Muslims are not allowed to imitate non-Muslims and that democracy is a system introduced by them. Jabata submitted that democracy promotes enmity, hatred, nepotism, cheating, hate speech, extravagant spending during campaigns, self, imposition by candidates vying for elective positions, and injustice. In his view, Muslims cannot partake in it because they are expected to live above the board (Yusuf, 2022, p.9).

Dr. Sharaf Gbadebo shares the same idea with the latter. He opined that election is a process that promotes a democratic system of government whereby man-made law is applied against the divine law, namely *Shari'ah*. To the extent of its contradiction with Islamic principles, Muslims are not allowed to participate in the democratic system of government. He argued further that Muslims cannot make any significant contribution to improve the system and held that none of the Muslims who occupied lofty positions in the system has succeeded in affecting the system with Islamic principles of governance. Justifying his belief on the prohibition of participating in democracy and election,

Gbadebo quoted a legal maxim that says: الغاية لا تبرر الوسيلة “The goal cannot justify the means”.

In other words, a steadfast Muslim should not vie for an elective position under a democratic system because the system is man-made. Condemning the participation in the election, Gbadebo opined that the fact that democrats believe in the superiority of the constitution made under the system is sufficient for Muslims to be wary of it. He therefore concluded that democracy is built on falsehood and whatever is founded on mendacity will only result in vain. (ما بني على باطل فهو باطل)

Another group of scholars have an opinion that is different from the first group mentioned above. Two prominent scholars from Ilorin can be noted in this regard. They are Prof. Abdul Razzaq Abdul Majeed Alaro and Shaykh AbdulWahab Ajia. Prof. Alaro acknowledged the fact that the issue belongs to the realm of *Ijtihad* where scholars are allowed to have independent opinions. He subscribed to the view that allows Muslims to participate in elections (Yusuf, 2022, p.9). He supported his position by invoking the principle of necessity (*Darurah*) which confers a temporary legality on what is otherwise illegal. Since this principle must be resorted to given an impending harm and a desired partaking in the election, non-Muslims would seize the opportunity to dominate and rule over Muslims. In this regard, non-Muslims would be justified and Muslims would be disadvantaged because, in the democratic system, the rule is for the majority. Ultimately, the interest (*Maslaha*) of Muslims becomes compromised. So, to forestall this impending harm (*Mafsadah*), and invoke the principle of necessity (*Darurah*), Muslims are thus allowed to participate in the general elections by casting their votes and even by contesting for available elective posts. He corroborated his position with the submission of the prominent scholars at the Islamic *Fiqh* Academy in Makkah and the Islamic *Fiqh* Academy under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Corporation who had studied the issue painstakingly. Their verdict was that it is permissible for Muslims to participate in the elections in consideration of the public interest of the Muslim community (Muslimvoice.com.ng/2022).

Shaykh Ajia also issued a *fatwa* in support of the permissibility of Muslim participation in the elections. And stated his stand that either election or voting the Islamic method of appointing leaders is through the constituted authority that appoints the best person to be leadership position. This is also achieved through mutual consultation. But the reality is now different from what was experienced by the past scholars. Now, the mode of appointment into leadership positions has drastically changed. Given this, voting is among the issues that can be studied by weighing between benefits (*Masalih*) and harms (*Mafasid*). If we should say that it is not permissible for Muslims to participate in deciding who the leader in their country becomes, this would amount to a monopoly by non-Muslims (Mohammad, 2022, p.26).

As such, non-Muslims shall gain an absolute control over Muslims. No doubt, there are great harms in this which only Allah can quantify. In order to avoid this, Muslims are thus permitted to partake in the elections to vote for the position of authority as the best candidate among Muslims. So our affairs can be trusted unto a Muslim leader. But this is not without clarification. A Muslim candidate who deserves to be voted in by Muslims

must meet some conditions that will qualify him for the sensitive position of leadership. These include his commitment to the religion and Prophetic tradition, his sense of justice, his capacity and trustworthiness among other qualities which must be processed by the leader. But in the absence of a Muslim candidate with the above qualities, any Muslim candidate with most or some of those qualities may be voted for. However, if all Muslim candidates are lacking in those qualities, the one with lesser evil shall be voted for. This is because a choice should be made among the morally bankrupt Muslims if there is no morally upright person. It is a consensus of scholars that a morally corrupt Muslim should be preferred to a non-Muslim. Therefore, voting for a non-Muslim is of greater harm than voting for a morally bankrupt Muslim. Hence, the latter is a lesser evil in comparison with the former (Yusuf, 2022, p.10).

Based on the above, Shaykh Ajia stands on the point that, it is permissible for Muslims to vote for whoever he deems fit and capable to lead the country (Gbadamosi, 1908, p.222). The bottom line of the foregoing is that Muslims should define their participation in politics which is to ensure the commandment of what is good and prohibit evil. This is more so because if the righteous ones fold their arms and do not participate in politics, the evil ones will have a field day thereby making rules and policies by which the country, including the Muslims, is governed. This will lead to enacting devilish laws such as gay and lesbianism. Thus, the evil of abstaining is obviously more than participating.

Al-Asrau's Perspective

It should be noted that the permission for Muslims to participate in elections is also the position of the prominent Muslim scholars in Nigeria who were aware of the multi-religious status of Nigeria. In this regard, *Al-Asra* considers it worthy the establishment of participation in politics as a doctrinal as well as a practical necessity. He arrived at this by his feeling that the Prophet (S.A.W) had not come only to preach and give a few rules of conduct. Rather, he came to create a social order based on certain divinely inspired, permanent and universal principles. These principles are enshrined in the book of Allah. *Al-Asra* concludes this stand in his book thus:

أن تكون ثمة مشاركة فعلاً لا قولاً ولا مجرد دعوى، فلا يكون المشارك مجرد آلة في يد غيره، يُنفذ به الحاكم الفعلي ما يريد هو، وليس لديه صلاحيات أو اختصاصات معقولة ولو بصورة جزئية، وإلا لم يكن لمشاركته معني ولا أثر.

The participation should be practical and not theoretical, it should neither be a mere identification nor should the Muslim participants be an ordinary tool in the hands of somebody else being used for the implementation of that person's personal wishes and agenda. He should be someone who is interested in participating in order to actualize a reasonable agenda, at least in a partial form. Otherwise, the participation

of such a person is meaningless. (Al-Asra', 2014, p.4)

Based on this impression, it could be established that the responsibility of the Muslim in his society is to ensure that *Shari'ah* reigns supreme in the society in which he resides and to strive for its continuation, as much as possible. He should also guard the implementation of the *Shari'ah* jealousy. Otherwise, he should at least make an effort towards its provision and realization.

However, every Muslim must strive hard to reform his corrupt society, and this reformation can only be realized by establishing an Islamic form of governance. Since the Islamic government cannot, however, be established except by participation in the existing structure, then it follows that a Muslim has to actively participate in the electoral process which is a key aspect of democracy because whatever can render an obligation incomplete is itself an obligation.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that there is a need to participate in every action that leads to the establishment of good governance so that the instrumentality of governance will be by the will of Allah; and all forms of satanic antecedents in government will be extinguished from existence. *Al-Asar'* said:

إتاحة الدولة فرصة مشاركة المسلمين مع غيرهم لهذا
الحق الانتخابي. وأن يكونوا قد بقوا محترمين وممكنين
لا يتعرض لهم ولا لدينهم في شيء، بل لهم عزتهم
وكرمهم

Meaning:

The government of the so-called democratic countries should give Muslims the opportunity to participate with non-Muslims in a peaceful and conducive environment in such a way that their dignity will be protected and their religion's identity will not be tampered with, but rather maintained. (Al-Asra', 2014, p.5)

For the sake of *Maslaha* (public interest) the Muslim community must work to safeguard itself from harm and to secure its interests, known as *Maslaha* (public interest), which dates back to the Maliki School, later developed by Imam Al-Shafi'i. The *Masalah* further into the doctrine of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of the *Shari'ah*) which the *'ulama* turn to when dealing with the extendibility of Islamic Law to changing circumstances. It provides a general framework for Muslims, to tackle their respective problems in changing conditions, which conforms with the Qur'an i.e. Allah does not wish hardship on His servants (Qur'an 2:173; 21:107; 5:6; 2:179 & 2:233). *Al-Qardawi* reiterates that all that is in the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet is, perused, by human interest, at large. Shaykh Nizam Ya'qubi states:

“In the matter of elections and voting we must look at what is in the best interest of the whole community (*Maslaha*) and what is lesser of the two evils”.

From the above, it can be seen that the principle in *Shari'ah* known as, ‘Warding off the greater of two evils even if it involves performing the lesser evil (*Akhaf ad-Dararayn*)’ is an obvious and agreed upon tool to help Muslims live while being loyal to their tradition and heritage.³⁵ He initiated the writing of the book upon observing the lack of Muslim participation in elections and the discord among Muslim scholars in Yorùbáland.

Al-Asra' deemed it crucial to address this topic and enlighten Muslims about the Islamic rules governing participation in a democratic system. This book offers a comprehensive exploration of jurisprudence, delving into both Qur'anic and Sunnah perspectives on the subject. However, we are not diving into the polemics involved among the jurists to exert one another's position over the intricacies concerning Islamic political structures and the status of its theological legitimacy, rather suffice it to allude to their general perception of politics or political system vis-à-vis Islam as a religion (Al-Fanjari, 1973, p.213).

Conclusion

The democratic system which is based on election is fundamentally antithetical to the principles and teachings of Islam. However, the permission for Muslims to participate in such is justified by the necessity (*Darurah*) to ensure that the interest (*Maslaha*) of Muslims in Southern is protected. Instances in the past and in the present times have provided a convincing basis for Muslims not to shy away from partaking in the electoral process. Therefore, Muslims should participate in the election in Nigeria to advance the interest of Islam in the country. As such, the verdicts of Prof. Alaro, Shyakh Ajia as well as Dr. Al-Asra' through his book *Mushāarakatu'l Muslim Filintikhābāt ma' ghayri'lMuslimīn* (the participation of Muslims in elections in non-Islamic nations) on the issue of Muslim participation in elections are more in tune with the principles of Islam.

In a nutshell, Dr. Sirajudeen Al-Asra' and other scholars opined that Muslims should be allowed to participate in elections, however, They based their agreement on the fact that democracy is antithetical to Islamic ethos. But, they submitted that it is permissible for Muslims to participate in elections. They hinged their position on two major principles, namely the necessity (*Darurah*) and the public interest (*Maslahah*). These two principles are regulated by some conditions which determine their validity and legitimacy. For *Daruriah* to be applied, it must be established that failure to apply it would lead to the destruction of life or property. As for *Maslahah*, it must be established that it is outweighed by the opposite, namely *Mafasdah* (Harm).

Another group of scholars, namely: Dr. Gbadebo and Jabata opined that it is categorically impermissible for Muslims to participate in the election neither as contestants nor as voters. Their line of reasoning follows a rigid approach reminiscent of the classical *Zahiri* school of legal thought which is notorious for applying the letter of the law without considering its spirit or realities. No doubt, this group of scholars considered an Islamic

state as the ideal political platform wherein Muslims can operate, and not a system that is at variance with the principles of the divine law. Going by this verdict, they expect Muslims living in a secular state to distance themselves from the electoral process, not minding the possibility of allowing non-Muslim citizens to wield absolute authority and power.

Without mincing words, we Nigerians are in a nation of paradoxes where the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. The rich and the political elite have cornered virtually all the resources of the country and have, therefore, mercilessly leave the citizens to live in inhuman circumstances. Nevertheless, this paper staunchly supports the perspective that participation in democratic processes is a public interest and a necessity for the Muslim community as against those that oppose it.

Recommendation

This paper recommends that Muslims most especially southern should vehemently participate in the democratic dispensation and if they do not, non-Muslims shall gain an absolute control over Muslims. No doubt, there are great harms in this which only Allah can quantify. In order to avoid this, Muslims are thus permitted to partake in the elections to vote for the position of authority as the best candidate among Muslims. So their affairs can be trusted by a Muslim leader.

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