NEW TRENDS IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: 
A PRELIMINARY ACCOUNT1

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Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Nigeria has experienced a remarkable proliferation of Islamic educational institutions. Unlike the development of Christian and Western Education and its impact on the Nigerian elite before and after independence,2 this increase in Islamic educational activities has until now received only little attention. During the colonial period, the traditional Islamic schools in the North (Quranic Schools and Ilm Schools, Hausa: makarantar allū and makarantar ilmī) continued to flourish. For a city like Kano it is said that there were far more pupils in Quranic Schools than in any previous period.3 In many towns and villages of the western and central parts of the country, Quranic Schools were established for the first time. The increased movements of Muslim traders, craftsmen, and workers, together with the rise of the Tiğāniyya and Qādiriyya Brotherhoods contributed

1 This paper arose from research in progress on Islamic education in Nigeria. Hence its selective and tentative character. Especially the public institutions of Arabic and Islamic Studies (Teachers Colleges, University Departments etc.) and their mediating role between the State and the local Muslim communities will be dealt with in a future publication.


to this expansion which was part of the general growth of Islam during the colonial period.\textsuperscript{4}

The challenge of Western Education with its obvious professional prospects led Muslim communities in Lagos and in the West of Nigeria to organize their own school societies. Inspired at first by the activities of the Ahmadiyya Movement, these societies established and ran Western Schools for Muslim children in order to counter the educational impact of the Christian missions and to "promote the religious, moral and social advancement of the Muslim community".\textsuperscript{5} Furthermore, privately run modernized Arabic and Islamic schools have appeared in the North and the West. Since the fifties schools of this type have been founded in many parts of the country.

After independence, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, sought as Premier of the Northern Region to make Islam the unifying force in the North. He tried to reorganize and reform all Muslim institutions and to bring them under the control of his government. In 1961 he founded the Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI), a semi-official organization whose aim was to promote Islamic educational work and to strengthen the position of Islam in the non-Muslim parts of the North.

The assassination of Ahmadu Bello in 1966 brought these activities almost to a standstill. After the Civil War and the transformation of the country into a Federation of smaller States, Islamic education became less and less a concern of the government. Even in the Northern States it was mainly left in private hands.

With the rapid growth of public educational institutions during the seventies and the subsequent crisis of the education system which still persists,\textsuperscript{6} the Muslims’ interest in Islamic education has