The virtual collapse of public educational system in Nigeria, especially in the Northern states, is now widely recognized, but the transformation of the Islamic educational system that has resulted partly in response to that collapse has not been sufficiently understood. The main goal of this essay is to demonstrate that a notable aspect of the current transformation of Islamic education is the proliferation of new Islamic schools that are significantly different from the old Islamic schools, and to show that the new Islamic schools have emerged in response to both domestic and international forces for change.

Specifically, the essay argues that following huge educational expansion in the 1970s, Nigeria’s public educational system deteriorated steadily during the 1980s-1990s. These decades also witnessed the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (WB/IMF) actively promoting privatization and deregulation under the structural adjustment program (SAP). Responding to deterioration of the public educational system in the new policy environment of privatization and deregulation, private initiatives established new Islamic schools in Nigeria that reflect a global trend of transformation of Islamic education. Indeed, expansion of private initiatives in the educational arena is equally observable in many countries influenced by structural adjustment programs. As the global movement toward expansion, privatization, and deregulation of the educational sector gathered momentum in the 1990s, education became the “last frontier for profit,” whose expenditure, estimated at two trillion dollars, presents irresistible opportunities for private investors and entrepreneurs. According to one estimate, “by the end of the 1990s, world governments had sold
more than $1 trillion in assets to private investors. And a growing number of state and local
governments had turned to private operators to run prisons, parking lots, ambulance services, public
schools and social-services operations.” By profiling a small sample of new Islamic schools in
Nigeria listed in appendix I (Sample of New Islamic Schools), this essay hopes to contribute to our
understanding of both the for-profit and non-profit private actors that are changing education
globally. The essay also hopes to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of educational
dualism in Muslim countries.

**Background Context**

New Islamic schools emerged in Northern Nigeria in the context of the long evolution of
Nigeria’s new national policy on education, itself a part of larger transformation of Nigerian state,
economy, and society following the devastating civil war of 1967-1970, and the subsequent
emergence of the developmental state in Nigeria. It is, therefore, imperative to outline the basic
characteristics of Nigeria’s developmental state and its evolution within the last three decades. But
first, I must emphasize that it is no my goal to engage the larger debate on the failure of African
countries to have “hard states” capable of promoting sustained development in the sense of rapid
industrialization, steady economic growth and enhanced living standards. I only want to
demonstrate that the specific trajectories of development policies and programs adopted by
successive regimes in Nigeria during 1970s-1990s are the necessary background for the emergence
of the new Islamic schools that I want to analyze here. Therefore, I am expediently using the term
“developmental state” in the sense defined by Leftwich:

“those states whose internal politics and external relations have served to concentrate
sufficient power, authority, autonomy, competence, and capacity at the center to shape,
pursue and encourage the achievement of explicit developmental objectives, whether by establishing and promoting the conditions of economic growth, or by organizing it directly, or a varying combination of both.”

The widespread view in the relevant literature is that Nigeria’s developmental state has been a disastrous failure. It can hardly be disputed, however, that it did exhibit the defining features that Leftwich highlights in the above quotation, particularly in the immediate period after the civil war. Furthermore, Leftwich emphasizes six salient characteristics of the developmental state, namely: 1) developmental elites who are “highly nationalistic,” “relatively uncorrupt,” very capable and determined to articulate and enforce sound policies and programs for rapid industrialization and steady economic growth; 2) relative autonomy that frees the state “from the demanding clamor of special interests (whether class, regional, or sectoral …) that it can and does override these interests in the putative pursuit of national interest;” 3) bureaucratic power in the form of “very powerful, highly competent and insulated bureaucracies with authority to direct and manage the broad shape of economic and social development;” 4) weak civil society that lacks the capacity to challenge or disrupt the priorities already set-up by the powerful state bureaucracies under tight control of developmental elites; 5) subordinating private capital both domestic and foreign to the articulated agenda of the developmental elites; and 6) authoritarian tendency is an undesirable but inevitable outcome of these five characteristics of the successful developmental state, forcing it to rely on the tangible results of positive economic performance for its credibility and legitimacy. The following paragraphs will sketch how Nigeria’s developmental state acquires (and loses) some elements of each of these six characteristics, but certainly not to the degree necessary for the successful Asian models in South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, or even in Botswana, the only successful developmental state in Africa. Of course, the rise and decline of Nigeria’s developmental state is precisely the relevant point that helps to explain the transformation of Islamic schools.
To begin with, Letwich emphasizes that the developmental elites become “highly nationalistic” often in response to “internal or regional security threats and thus underlining and extending Tilly’s thesis (for Europe) about the importance of war-making in state formation.”¹¹ The Nigerian civil war represents the birth pangs of the developmental state as the imperatives of war dictated the need for centralized planning that drew together the top ranks of the civil service and the military. In the aftermath of the war, the civil-military coalition congealed into Nigeria’s veritable developmental elites, who launched ambitious development plans that clearly reflected not only highly nationalistic goals, but also the intent to transform Nigeria into “a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, and a land of bright and full opportunity for all citizens.” These have been the objectives of Nigeria’s national development plans that became a sort of mantra ritually recited by the developmental elites on all available occasions of state ceremonies. The only feature conspicuously missing among Nigeria’s developmental elites was, unfortunately, the decisive one of incorruptibility. The legendary corruption of Nigeria’s developmental elites has earned the country unenviable position among the most corrupt countries in Transparency International corruption index.¹²

The relative autonomy of Nigerian state from the clamor of special interests is stronger than commonly acknowledged by scholars and Nigerians alike. The recent waves of communal and religious violent conflicts point to the resurgence of powerful communal, religious, and regional special interests that had earlier led to the Nigerian civil war. By once again gravely threatening the continuing existence of the country, these special interests underscore the severe weakness of the Nigerian state. But the important point to note is that the victorious emergence of the federal government from the civil war meant not only the defeat of regionalist secession, but also the opportunity to consolidate the relative autonomy of the state. Huge increases in petroleum prices in
the 1970s yielded surplus revenue that enabled the federal government to embark on massive public projects through five-year development plans. Beginning with reconstruction projects after the Nigerian civil war, estimated at over £300 million, the federal military government financed large projects that steadily widened and strengthened its hold on the national economy.

For example, Nigeria’s first national development plan for 1962-1970 period provided for a capital expenditure of ₦2.2 billion, while the second plan for 1970-1975 budgeted ₦3 billion in capital expenditure. In contrast, the third national development plan during the oil boom years of 1975-1980 provided for an initial capital expenditure of ₦30 billion, which was revised upward to ₦43.3 billion, while the fourth plan covering 1981-1985 provided for a capital expenditure of ₦82 billion. Increased petroleum revenues enabled Nigeria’s developmental elites to consolidate their grip on state power, and by expanding their control over the economic, political, and social arenas, they enhancing their relative autonomy from special interests. But regrettably, rampant corruption among Nigeria’s developmental elites meant that at best no more than a quarter of these huge revenues could be accounted for; the rest disappeared into private fortunes. And herein originates one principal reason for the present weakness of the Nigerian state making it seemingly unable to assert its autonomy against rising tide of violent communalism. Corruption robbed Nigeria’s developmental elites of credibility, thereby assuring failure, for as Huff and Dewit demonstrate, without building reputation and credibility, a developmental state is doomed.

In the 1970s, series of political reforms neutralized communal and regional special interests and also weakened civil society while at the same time enhancing the autonomy and authoritarianism of Nigerian developmental state. Decentralizing the regional centers of power, most notably through changing Nigeria’s federal structure from three regions at independence in 1960 to twelve states in 1967, nineteen states in 1976, thirty states in 1991, and thirty-six states in 1996, effectively removed
the political platform for communal regionalism. In 1976, a nationally uniform political and administrative system of local government areas (LGA) replaced provinces and districts that used to provide municipal and rural local administration.\textsuperscript{16} Between 1976 and 1979, a Constitutional Drafting Committee produced a blueprint for a new constitution that was debated in the Constituent Assembly. The new constitution adopted American presidential system in place of the British parliamentary system inherited from the colonial era. These political reforms strengthen the relative autonomy of the Nigeria’s developmental elites by expanding territorial and sectoral jurisdiction of state power—in addition to its dominant role in the economy. Furthermore, legal reforms implemented in the 1970s eliminated regional differences in judicial administration and the court-system inherited from colonial era by creating a nationally unified legal system and judicial structure. But more relevant to the main argument of this essay is of course the educational reform (discussed in more detail below) that also radically altered the inherited colonial educational system, and in turn provided the blueprint for new Islamic schools. Collectively, these reforms point to Nigeria replacing the regionalism that nearly caused the country’s disintegration in the 1960s with the relative autonomy of holders of state power, a salient attribute of the developmental state.\textsuperscript{17}

The military regimes that formulated and implemented all these reforms did not allow for Nigeria’s weak civil society to develop any significant political capacity. Apart from the complete absence of political parties—except for the brief interregnums of the Second Republic (1979-1983) and the still-born Third Republic (1986-1992)—professional associations, media outlets, students and labor movements were all governed by military decrees that made them heavily dependent on the government. More importantly, the military regimes of General Yakubu Gowon (1967-1975) and Murtala Mohammed/ Olusegun Obasanjo (1975-1979) emasculated foreign private capital through series of economic indigenization decrees.\textsuperscript{18} Ostensibly promulgated to increase local private capital
participation in ownership and management of key economic sectors, the indigenization succeeded more in increasing the dominance of the developmental state over Nigeria’s economy, and in the process fostered the prebendalism and neopatrimonialism that scholars hold accountable for badly stunting the development of private capital in Nigeria through rampant corruption.\textsuperscript{19}

The reforms that unfolded in the 1970s played a crucial role in initially bolstering the legitimacy of Nigeria’s military regimes. The seemingly endless flow of revenue from petroleum export promised continuing provision of social services that gave popular legitimacy to the military regimes. This is consistent with Leftwich’s observation that successful developmental states maintain a “strange mixture of repression and legitimacy” that explains their ability “to distribute the benefits of rapid growth, at least in terms of schools, roads, health care, public housing and other facilities to an expanding circle of people.”\textsuperscript{20} The accomplishments of Nigeria’s developmental state in this regard are, however, often eclipsed by monumental corruption. In particular, over-centralized control of resources reinforced by the authoritarianism of military rule and the patrimonialism and prebendalism of civilian rule, gravely undermined Nigeria’s giant development projects.\textsuperscript{21} In 1982, Nigeria was forced to adopt austerity measures under an economic stabilization program that, however, failed to halt the slide of economy.\textsuperscript{22} As the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) began to articulate structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, the end of Nigeria’s developmental state became only a matter of time. Beginning in 1986, erratic but continuous implementation of structural adjustment programs by the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha steadily forced the Nigerian state to retreat from provision and financing of social services, including education, thereby paving the way for private initiatives in educational sector.\textsuperscript{23} The rise and decline of the Nigeria’s developmental state is consistent with the global trend that Mark Berger has convincingly documented.\textsuperscript{24}
Rise and decline of the developmental state in Nigeria’s educational arena

The specific trajectories of transformation of the developmental state in Nigeria’s educational arena originated from a national curriculum conference held in 1969 and a sequel seminar attended by educational experts in 1973. Following a series of discussions, workshops, and conferences, the federal government of Nigeria accepted recommendations in a document titled *The New National Policy on Education* that was first published in 1977, and revised in 1981. This document envisaged a complete restructuring of Nigeria’s public education system that was further spelt out in the detailed blueprint prepared by the Implementation Committee for the National Policy on Education, a pointer to the prominent role of Nigeria’s developmental elites in policy formulation and implementation. Significantly, the new educational policy adopted “national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the Second National Development Plan, and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education,” thus clearly linking the new educational policy to the expansion of the developmental state in Nigeria. Writing from the insider’s perspective of a career educational administrator who actively participated in formulating and implementing the policy, Aiyepeku hints at the high nationalism of Nigeria’s developmental elites by emphasizing proudly that the new educational policy gave “Independent Nigeria … an indigenous national policy” that helps to sever colonial ties to Britain. The intricate details of how the new educational policy evolved are beyond the scope of this essay, but three notable aspects are relevant for understanding the emergence of new Islamic schools.

First, the previous school system (modeled on the British public school system introduced during the colonial era) did not operate uniformly in all parts of Nigeria. Different regions used to provide eight, seven, or six years of primary education, five to seven years of secondary education, and three
to five years for higher education.\textsuperscript{30} The new educational policy replaced these variations with a uniform 6-3-3-4 school system that provided six years of schooling at primary level, three years at junior secondary level, three years at senior secondary level, and four years at university level. The new unified educational system reflects the centralizing tendencies of Nigeria’s developmental state that were also evident in political, economic and legal reforms discussed earlier. In addition, the 6-3-3-4 system implemented many other important innovations: new curriculum, new certification upon graduation, new types of examination and assessment of learning outcomes, new areas of learning concentration, and new educational goals and objectives that were all geared toward realizing the main objectives of Nigeria’s development plan.\textsuperscript{31} Poor funding, mismanagement, erratic policy and programmatic alterations due to changes of political regimes, have continuously plagued implementation of the new educational policy over the last two decades.\textsuperscript{32} Still, the public educational system currently operating in Nigeria is markedly different from the old system. But not all the changes have been for the better. The dismal decline of educational standards associated with poor implementation of the 6-3-3-4 school system became a very important factor for parents who choose to send their children to the new Islamic schools for quality education.

There are even more linkages between the new national educational system and the emergence of new Islamic schools. It is not coincidental that all the twenty-one schools discussed in this essay emerged during the period of implementing the new educational policy that began in 1976 with the introduction of compulsory and free universal primary education (UPE). The UPE attracted several millions of students to public schools, leading to a corresponding increase in demand for resources.\textsuperscript{33} The first set of students to enroll in the UPE was estimated at 2.297 million, but the actual enrollment was 2.992 million. Thereafter, enrollment continued to rise steadily: in 1975/76 academic year, a total of 21,223 primary schools had 177,221 teachers for 6.1 million pupils, and in
1980/81, the number of primary schools had reached 36,524 with 376,681 teachers for 13.76 million pupils. By 1988, the total number of primary schools declined to 33,796, enrolling 12.69 million pupils, and 308,178 teachers. A similar pattern of rise and decline is also discernible at secondary and higher education levels.

Initially, huge revenues from the sudden rise of petroleum prices in 1973 provided enough funding for massive educational expansion, but in the 1980s, funding declined sharply. For example, expenditure allocated to education during the second national development plan (1970-1974) amounted to over N282 million, with the federal government spending more on universities while state governments “centered on the expansion of facilities at the primary and secondary schools level.” In the third development plan of 1975-1980, the amount rose to over N3.1 billion. Even so, the federal government felt confident enough to take over private schools to meet the continuing rise in school enrollment that mirrored the expansion of the developmental state in the educational arena. Thus not surprisingly, the declining fortunes of the developmental state during the fourth development plan for 1981-1985 appeared also in the allocation for education that fell to only N7.7 million. Even these figures do not adequately capture the full extent of the decline of resources available to the educational sector. The devaluation of Nigeria’s currency began in 1984 when the exchange rate fell from one U.S. dollar to less than one naira—N0.70—and continued declining to about N100 to $1 by the end of the 1990s. This massive devaluation means that fewer resources were actually available for education.

Additionally, mismanagement and corruption meant that only a small fraction of budgeted funds was actually spent on educational projects. The decline of petroleum revenues in the late 1970s was further aggravated by widespread financial irresponsibility that characterized the civilian administration of the Shagari Regime between 1979 and 1983. Rather than fulfilling their promises
to improve education, politicians diverted funds to their pet political projects. Consequently, school buildings deteriorated without repairs, supplies of educational materials dried up, and teachers’ salaries were not paid for months. Successive military regimes continued to neglect education, leading eventually to the virtual collapse of the public educational system. Sofolahan makes the point nicely when he remarks that “the national policy was conceived in times of oil-boom, born in times of oil-glut, and nurtured in times of economic depression.” The best way to decode this cryptic remark is to recall that in 1976, the federal government introduced free universal primary education, and in 1985 it withdrew completely from funding primary education as structural adjustment program began the compression of the developmental state. In 1996, the federal government had to concede that: “given the dramatic rise in the demand for educational services in the face of growing population and dwindling resources available to the government for maintaining an efficient educational system, the involvement of the private sector, communities and non-governmental organizations would be inevitable, once again, in order to move education forward so as to meet the challenges of the 21st century.” The rise and decline of the developmental state in Nigeria’s educational arena between 1976 and 1996 paved the way for emergence of private schools, including the new Islamic schools.

While the new national policy on education was unfolding, it initially helped to change Muslims’ longstanding negative attitude toward western education. The tremendous economic expansion during the petroleum boom of 1970s created employment opportunities that the available manpower could not fully utilize. Tangible material rewards of acquiring western education not only in the form of regular employment, but also in access to patrimonial control of state economic enterprises of the developmental state, were strong enough to neutralize Muslims’ negative attitude. Moreover, the new educational policy provided free education first at primary level and later at all levels, including
scholarships at Nigerian and foreign universities. But just as bright economic opportunities, free education, and generous scholarships raised Muslims’ acceptance of modern western education, public financing of education began to decline precipitously. Now, Muslims must finance their own education, a realization reinforced by the ideology of deregulation and privatization of state enterprises. Some of the new Islamic schools were established by private entrepreneurs responding to Nigerians’ excess demand for education beyond what the state could provide.

To sum up the argument so far, transformation of public schools under 6-3-3-4 system, massive educational expansion, failures in implementing new national policy on education, and changes in Muslims’ attitude toward modern western education are internal forces for change. They are externally reinforced by the global triumph of neoliberal ideology of privatization and deregulation as implemented in structural adjustment programs. Occurring within the last three decades, these developments collectively demonstrate that the rise and decline of the developmental state in Nigeria’s educational sector set the background context for emergence of new Islamic schools.

**Islamic Schools: The Old vs. The New**

The sample of the new Islamic schools in Appendix I shows that only one school was established in 1976, but as the background factors discussed above unfolded during the 1980s, eleven more schools were established, and additional nine schools emerged in the 1990s. Clearly, the already identified changes within the broader educational arena between 1970s and 1990s are relevant for understanding the proliferation of new Islamic schools within the same period. Before examining more connections between changes in the broader public educational system and new Islamic schools, let us briefly outline the contrasts between the old and the new Islamic schools.
The Old Islamic Schools

The old institutions of Islamic learning in Nigeria comprise two tracks. First, Qur’anic schools provide the starting point by teaching Arabic literacy and recitation of the Qur’an to pupils from early childhood to adolescence. Second, *ilm* schools provide the second track for specialized training in diverse fields of Islamic learning. Unlike modern formal schools, both Qur’anic and *ilm* schools operate with an open-ended structure that allows each student to pursue an individual course of study. Abdurrahman and Canham observe that the structure and purpose of traditional Islamic education differ radically from those of Nigerian national educational system. In traditional Islamic education, “there is no clear-cut division into primary, secondary and tertiary levels. There is no progression from one class to another and from one level to another, with examination barriers erected along the way. There are no classes, there are no age-limits, and there is no rigid timetable with neatly timed periods for subjects.” In addition to giving basic skills of reading, writing, and calculating, Qur’anic schools also expose pupils to “the life-giving words of the Qur’an, without which the child would have no hope of happiness in this world or of salvation in the next.” On the other hand, *ilm* schools increase “students’ understanding of the divine purpose as revealed for all time by the Prophet.” Furthermore, whereas Qur’anic schools emphasize “rote learning” of memorizing the Qur’an, *ilm* schools teach through a pedagogy of close reading of a text, along with extended commentary on its various meanings and implications.

Typically, the teacher will be seated on mat surrounded by his disciples, who will take turn to read from their individual Arabic texts while the teacher gives interpretation and commentary in Hausa or Fulfulde. The core subjects in the curriculum of *ilm* schools comprise Qur’an exegesis (*tafsir*), Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (*hadith* and *sira*), Principles and Rules of Islamic
Jurisprudence (*fiqh* and *usul al-fiq*), Theology (*Ilm al-tawhid*), Mysticism (*tasawwuf*), Arabic Language and Literature (*al-luggha* and *al-adab*), Mathematics (*al-hisab*), Medicine (*tibb*), and History (*tarikh*). The favorite textbooks are selected from ancient writings of classical Muslim authors, although novices also utilize abridged versions or versification of the classics by local authors. The traditions of Islamic learning in both Qur’anic and *ilm* schools emphasize the supremacy of spiritual and moral values over bookish learning, application of knowledge to guide the conduct of everyday life, and intellectual quest as lifelong endeavor. Also central to traditions of Islamic learning is a master-disciple relationship characterized by deference to the master, and sustained through face-to-face oral instruction that transmits not only learning but also spiritual guidance, moral authority, piety and blessing. These traditions of Islamic learning have produced outstanding Islamic scholars, including a number of prolific authors. Although still very much alive, the ancient traditions of Islamic learning, particularly the Qur’anic schools, are facing serious crises of relevance in contemporary Nigeria.

As Okoye and Yau have documented, Qur’anic schools have increasingly failed to fulfill their traditional educational mission. Instead of educating their pupils and giving them skills and knowledge necessary for functioning effectively in society as they used to, Qur’anic schools have deteriorated to the extent that many people regard them as no more than a breeding ground for street-beggars. In the 1950s-1960s, early attempts to reform Qur’anic schools gave birth to Islamiyya schools “originally established by private initiative to meet the growing demand for improved standards in the [Qur’anic] schools.” To meet that goal, they adopted all the features of a formal school system that were absent in Qur’anic and *ilm* schools. Islamiyya schools remained, however, very negligible in Northern Nigeria. The new Islamic schools under examination differ in many
respects from Qur’anic, *ilm and Islamiyya schools; they are also different from the *Ilmiyya/Adabiyya* Islamic schools established in the western region of Nigeria during the early colonial period.\textsuperscript{55}

*The New Islamic Schools*

The new Islamic schools adopt the organizational format of Nigeria’s modern public school system, but differ in their fundamental institutional orientation toward promoting a broad Islamic cultural orientation. The school environment is saturated with Islamic images (murals, maps of the Islamic world, posters, Arabic calligraphy, and mosques). School administrators actively foster Islamic identity and awareness among students and teachers not only in classrooms but also in all school activities. Islamic congregational prayers are regularly observed in school mosques. Islamic dress, particularly for female students, is another visually powerful way of fostering Islamic identity and awareness in these schools. While these features collectively create a distinctly Islamic atmosphere around the new schools, it is the curricular emphases on Arabic and Islamic Studies that really shape their Islamic character and orientation, and differentiate them from both the old Islamic educational institutions and Nigeria’s public schools. Variation in curricular emphases on Arabic and Islamic Studies calls for classifying the new Islamic schools into two types: schools operating *madrasa* curriculum, and schools operating modified national curriculum of public schools.

The new Islamic schools operating *madrasa* curriculum provide six years of training in classical Arabic and Islamic education. *The Northern Provinces Law School* was the first *madrasa* in Northern Nigeria. British colonial authorities established the school in 1934 to train Muslim judges for the colonial administration of Islamic law. In 1947, the school was reorganized and renamed *School for Arabic Studies* (SAS) to provide five-year training leading to *Grade II Teacher Certificate* upon satisfactory performance in a written examination in English, Arithmetic, and
Teaching Methods, moderated and conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). Apart from these standard courses offered in all teacher-training schools, SAS requires additional training in Arabic and Islamic Studies that qualifies its graduates to teach the same subjects in primary schools. In 1954, SAS began to offer an expanded madrasa curriculum that provided four years of training in classical Arabic and Islamic Studies, leading to a Higher Islamic Studies Certificate upon successful performance in a written examination in Arabic Language and Literature and Islamic Studies moderated and conducted by the Board of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Unlike the Grade II teacher-training curriculum that uses English as the language of instruction, the madrasa curriculum uses Arabic to train ulama to serve as Muslim judges, as well as teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The Sokoto Arabic Teachers’ College, established in 1963, followed the SAS model, and by 1979, similar Arabic Colleges had also been established in Gombe, Maiduguri, Hadejia, Katsina, as well as two additional ones in Kano, one of which was exclusively for women. Thus there were no more than ten SAS-type colleges teaching madrasa curriculum in the 1970s when Nigeria’s new national educational policy began to be implemented, but they steadily grew during 1980s-1990s. For example, in 1994, forty-five schools were officially affiliated with the National Board of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS)—the new name for the reorganized agency that oversees madrasa curriculum and co-ordinates its certification examination.

A major transformation of madrasa curriculum came in 1989. After three years of negotiations, NBAIS persuaded Federal Government officials to grant official recognition to a modified madrasa curriculum to be taught on the 6-3-3-4 school system. NBAIS had already redrawn the old madrasa syllabus from a four-year course of study to a six-year one, divided into three-year Junior Islamic Studies (JIS) and three-year Senior Islamic Studies (SIS). Other changes added courses on
Arabic Literature by Nigerian Authors, Social Studies/General Knowledge, Teaching Methods, Hausa/Yoruba, and Home Economics for female students. Significantly, English and Mathematics used to be optional subjects in the old four-year madrasa curriculum, and taught at primary school level. Under the new six-year curriculum, both English and Mathematics were raised to compulsory subjects and to the same level as in the public secondary schools. Junior Islamic Studies schools are also required to offer courses on Physical Education and Integrated Science, while Senior Islamic Studies are required to offer one science subject (Physics, Chemistry, or Biology) and Agricultural Science or a Vocational Subject. Arabic is still the language of instruction for Arabic Language and Literature and Islamic Studies, while English is the language of instruction in secular subjects. Thus whereas the old madrasa curriculum provided classical Arabic and Islamic education, with only marginal proficiency in English, the new madrasa curriculum aims to provide proficiency in English, and also broad competence in western secular education while still offering classical Arabic/Islamic education. Appendix II (Educational Tracks and Levels) shows that 7 out of 21 schools teach both JIS and SIS curricula, one school offers only JIS, and two schools offer only SIS.

A point worth emphasizing is that all the new Islamic schools are experiencing several problems implementing the new madrasa curriculum. Shortage of teachers for western secular subjects, teaching materials, laboratories and textbooks are the more common problems that prevent most schools from offering science subjects. Consequently, most students graduate without gaining the expected competency in western secular education. Another problem is that some teachers, parents and students regard secular subjects as a nuisance; a small number parents protest against introduction of western secular subjects. But both sets of complainants comprise a very small number of those who still prefer pure Islamic education, and do not affect significantly the general impetus for combining both Islamic and western education. A more common complaint is that solid
classical Arabic/Islamic education had been diluted, leading to lower standards. Despite these problems, thousands have been graduated under the new madrasa curriculum; many have completed university education and are pursuing careers in modern professions.

I have elsewhere documented the emerging career patterns among the new cadre of ulama trained in both Islamic and western education under the new madrasa curriculum. I have also shown that long-term sociological consequences can be observed in the correlation between various Islamic trends and different educational backgrounds. Specifically, I found that Islamic traditionalism is more common among those educated in traditional Islamic education of Quranic and ilm schools, Islamic modernism is more prevalent among those with modern Islamic education of the madrasa, and Islamic fundamentalism is more common among those trained in the secular education of public schools.\textsuperscript{61} Another important consequence of the transformation of Islamic education is the increased access of more Muslim females to advanced training in classical Arabic/Islamic education. In contrast to the very few exceptional women who used to receive Islamic education, the new Islamic schools have produced thousands of Muslim women with high level of Arabic and Islamic learning. The majority of these women take teaching careers in public schools while some teach at colleges and universities, and a few of them follow the traditional ulama career of writing, preaching, counseling, and officiating in ceremonies and ritual services. Predictably, some female Islamic scholars favor modernist views while some adopt more traditional views particularly on gender issues such as family planning, women’s participation in public life, etc. It seems very likely that career Muslim women with advanced Arabic/Islamic learning will change traditional gender roles and expectations, but the exact trajectories remained to be seen.

Before turning to examining the new Islamic schools operating the 6-3-3-4 curriculum of public schools, I will call attention to one other important outcome of the transformation of Islamic
education. The Senior Islamic Studies Certificate has now replaced the old Higher Islamic Studies Certificate based on the four-year madrasa curriculum. The old certificate was not officially recognized by the Federal Government, and even in the Northern states it was given only limited official recognition for careers in teaching and administration of Islamic law. Its holders could only study Arabic/Islamic Studies or Islamic Law (Shari’a) at federal universities in Zaria, Kano, Sokoto, and Maiduguri, and even then only after completing a three year course of study, thus doubling the period of their university education into six years instead of the regular three years. These restrictions are no longer applicable to holders of the Senior Islamic Studies Certificate that is now recognized nationally as equivalent to the Senior Secondary School Certificate awarded by public schools. The two certificates are recognized as equal levels of educational attainment for employment and admission to universities, thus qualifying holders of the Senior Islamic Studies Certificates for various professional courses at universities and specialized academies for police, immigration, customs, state security service and military training. As the formation of a new Muslim elite unfolds, it remains to be seen how much of their Islamic education will influence their future professional lives, and how their public influence may intersect with that of graduates of the new Islamic schools that operate the national curriculum of public schools.

Whereas madrasa curriculum provides classical Arabic/Islamic education, the national curriculum taught in public schools provides modern western education. The two curricula also differ in their aims and objectives. Among other goals, madrasa curriculum aims to foster Islamic identity and consciousness with competencies in Arabic and Islamic Studies to “equip students to orient their lives in accordance with Shari’a.” In contrast, the national curriculum aims at “self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political,
scientific and technological progress." It is of course true that madrasa curriculum does not neglect secular educational objectives such as citizenship and national unity, while the national public curriculum also seeks to foster “moral and spiritual values … [and] shared responsibility for the common good of society.” Still, observable differences in institutional orientation and “silent curricula” of the new Islamic schools and the public schools combined to make a clear difference in the schooling impact on students attending the two types of schools. Given curricular differences in both contents and objectives, the new Islamic schools had to change aspects of the national curriculum to conform to their Islamic identity and goals.

Apart from the general Islamic orientation of the school environment, the second set of new Islamic schools teaches a modified version of the national curriculum of public schools. First, Arabic and Islamic Studies are compulsory in all the new Islamic schools instead of their optional/elective status in national public curriculum. Most of this set of new Islamic schools include Qur’an memorization and use Arabic as the language of instruction for Arabic/Islamic Studies. Additional encouragement for students to focus more on Arabic, Islamic Studies, Qur’an memorization come in the forms of special prizes for accomplishments in the three subjects, school sponsorship of major Islamic festivals, and promoting students’ clubs and organizations. Appendix II (Educational Tracks and Levels) shows that nine out of twenty-one schools teach the modified version of the national public curriculum at junior secondary school level (JS), twelve schools teach it at senior secondary school level (SS), and nine schools teach it at both JS and SS levels.

This modified curriculum provides students with modern western education and an intermediate level of Arabic/Islamic education. In this regard, the new national curriculum as modified and operated in the new Islamic schools differs from the new madrasa curriculum and the old national curriculum. The new madrasa curriculum aims to train ulama that are also knowledgeable in modern
secular subjects, while the modified national curriculum aims to produce modern/western educated Muslims who are also knowledgeable in Arabic/Islamic Studies. The two curricula proceed from opposite directions: new madrasa curriculum is roughly divided into 70% Arabic/Islamic education and 30% modern western education, while the modified national curriculum is roughly divided into 70% modern western education and 30% Arabic/Islamic education. In contrast, the old national curriculum offered Islamic Studies only in English, and at a considerably lower level, while the old four-year madrasa curriculum gave solid training in classical Arabic/Islamic studies with only a trifling exposure to elementary English and Arithmetic. Clearly, the new Islamic schools offer wider and more intensive training in Arabic and Islamic studies as well as modern subjects.

Again, the long-term consequences are not yet fully clear. One observable outcome is that the new Islamic schools that teach the modified new national curriculum are also encountering implementation problems similar to the ones facing the schools operating on the new madrasa curriculum, particularly shortage of qualified teachers and textbooks. But addition of Arabic and Islamic Studies into the new national curriculum is more popular with both parents and students than addition of secular subjects in the new madrasa curriculum. This popularity enables the new Islamic schools to draw more and more students away from traditional Qur’anic schools that are losing their functional relevance in relation to the contemporary economic, social, political, cultural and intellectual realities of Nigeria. In contrast, the new Islamic schools train students for university education and careers in modern professions, while still providing Arabic/Islamic education that qualify students to win prestigious prizes in international competition for Qur’an recitation.

Certainly, graduates of the new Islamic schools are likely to play important social and political roles, but the exact trajectories of those roles are not yet clear. In a sense, the establishment of so many new Islamic schools in Northern Nigeria is indicative of a broader societal shift toward
the global trend of Islamic resurgence. It is the same broad shift that is also manifested in the widespread enthusiasm for the ongoing implementation of the “Full Shari’a” in Muslim majority states of Northern Nigeria. As new Muslim elites, graduates of the new Islamic schools will continue to reinforce the broad societal shift toward a more prominent role for Islam in public life, especially if these Islamic schools develop into self-perpetuating educational institutions.

**Institutional Characteristics**

All the new Islamic schools adopt the institutional format of modern school systems. It is not, however, certain that they will all develop into enduring institutions principally because they have not fully embraced the key modern traits of efficiency, innovation, record keeping, financial accountability and bureaucratic management. It is encouraging to note that some of these schools have already developed beyond the second decade since their establishment. Still, their institutional continuity will depend on the extent to which key modern traits prevail over inevitable interference of traditional attitudes and expectations.

**Organizational Innovation**

Their modern organizational format allows the new Islamic schools to combine both Arabic/Islamic education and modern western education. The general tendency is for one school to provide multiple tracks at various educational levels. There are three tracks: Arabic/Islamic Studies, Qur’an memorization, and modern western education. And there are six educational levels: nursery (N) pre-primary (PP), primary (P), junior secondary (JS) and junior Arabic/Islamic Studies (JIS), senior secondary (SS) and senior Arabic/Islamic Studies (SIS), and national certificate of education
Appendix II (Educational Tracks and Levels) shows that only four out of twenty-one schools provide a single educational tract or level: AIM provides only Junior Arabic Islamic Studies (JIS), BIS provides only Senior Islamic Studies (SIS), GDQ provides only Qur’an memorization, and NCI provides only Senior Secondary Certificate (SS). The remaining seventeen schools provide at least two tracks at multiple levels. MCE has the largest number of four levels (PP, P, JS/JIS, and SS/SIS) and the two tracks of madrasa and modern western education, followed by ATC with the same two tracks and three levels (PP, JS/JIS, and SS/SIS). CIS is the only school offering the higher level NCE in addition to two levels (JS, SS/SIS). Combining the two tracks of madrasa and modern western education at multiple educational levels allows schools to take advantage of economies of scale, but also requires considerable organizational skills that are not evenly available in all schools. In particular, record-keeping, which is necessary for institutional continuity and planning for growth, is quite poor. Similarly, only very few of these schools maintain standard accounting of their finances. Without regular and meticulous record-keeping and financial accounting, no school can aspire to a bright future of institutional development.

Influence of the founder(s)

Out of twenty-one schools under examination, state and local governments established three only. Appendix III (Founders of New Islamic Schools) reveals that organizations established nine schools, individuals established seven, and community and group of individuals established one school each. This prevalence of private initiative in establishing these schools reflects the impact of the neo-liberal ideology of deregulation and privatization; it also lends credence to the increasing
optimism that civil society and non-governmental organizations will revitalize societies devastated by authoritarian regimes. But to what extent will these schools survive their founders?

Ordinarily, one expects that schools established by organizations will have a greater chance of developing as an enduring institution since their future does not depend on the continuing goodwill of the founding patron. But Appendix III reveals that of the seven schools established by individuals, one was established in 1980, one in 1985, one in 1986, and four in the 1990s. Clearly, schools established by individuals have endured as much as those established by organizations.

A point worth emphasizing here is that two schools (BIS and IIS) were established by organizations with international affiliations, and it is not a coincidence that the two are among the best managed schools. In fact, IIS is by far the best in terms of organization and academic programs; its students have won first or second prizes in national and international competitions, including Qur’an recitation international competition. The parent association of IIS is Nur al-Islam, which is funded and run by a Syrian engineering firm, Shinco Nigeria Limited. Almuntada al-Islami, the London-based parent organization of BIS, sponsors staff members to attend international seminars taught by experts on modern management techniques. The positive impact is unmistakable in the very efficient management of the school, leading to the steady rising of its high reputation as a center of excellence.65 It is also relevant to note that BIS attracts foreign students from neighboring countries. The involvement of international Islamic organizations, however, should not be overemphasized, since it can only be detected in two out of twenty-one cases.

The other organizations are primarily local, though not lacking some international connections. This is especially true of Izala, which is the parent organization of two schools (AMC and AGC) and the inspiration for many others. Izala’s Wahhabi reformism makes it possible to attract support from Saudi Arabia, particularly in the form of scholarships for graduates of Izala schools to attend Saudi
Islamic universities. The Nuruddeen Society, which has a longer history of establishing schools in Yorubaland, is the parent organization for one school in the list under current examination (NCI). Jama’atu Nasril Islam runs three schools (AIM, ATC, JGC), and the Moslem Women Association of Plateau State is the founder of TPS. These organizations are working hard to keep their schools functioning as effectively as they can: some of the schools and their students have won prizes in various local and national academic competitions, and all could easily boast of their former students who have successfully graduated from institutions of higher learning, including premier Nigerian universities. Still, their schools do not impress a visitor that they are as well managed as the two schools affiliated with international Islamic organizations. The difference is partly attributable to poor record-keeping, financial accountability, and management, and partly to the fact that the two internationally affiliated schools enjoy greater access to more resources.

The individuals who established seven out of the twenty-one schools fall into four categories. First, a wealthy patron provides resources including land, buildings, and equipments needed to start the school, and often remains the major source of funds for expansion and capital projects. Such wealthy patrons may exert strong influence on the orientation of the school. AMC, BMM, and HSS were established by individual wealthy patrons; and AIM was also initially established by a wealthy patron, who later handed-over the school to Jama’atu Nasril Islam organization. Second, an individual Islamic activist who was able to mobilize resources from the local community, including volunteer teachers, established CIS. His indefatigable activism has kept the school growing despite numerous challenges, notably inadequate resources and lack of professional management. Third, reputable Islamic scholars are the individuals who established GDQ and KRS by transforming their traditional Qur’anic schools into the modern institutional format and then attracting community and governmental support to keep the school going. Finally, an individual entrepreneur established JNI
to take advantage of market opportunities in Islamic education arena that have been greatly enhanced by the prevailing deregulation and privatization. Similarly, the group of individuals who established GMP comprises entrepreneurs responding to market opportunities (excess demands, and willingness of parents to pay for their children’s education). This diversity of founders produces different impact on the institutional functioning and continuing development of the new Islamic schools.

**Conclusion**

Three important aspects of the new Islamic schools of Northern Nigeria reflect key features of the current transformation of Islamic education in Muslim countries, and changes in the broader global educational arena. First, neoliberal reform measures of privatization and deregulation have forced the state to retreat from provision of social services, including education. These policies appeared credible in light of the mismanagement, corruption, and inefficiencies associated with the failures of the developmental state, for which Nigeria stands as the paradigmatic example. Private initiatives have emerged to meet excess demands for education. Shobhana Sosale observes that private financing and provision for education have historically been prevalent, but “during the course of the 20th century, however, the role of the state (public sector) assumed predominance for purposes of nation-building and instilling national identity.”

State predominance in education has created “numerous constraints,” including inefficiencies, misallocation of resources, and financially unsustainable educational expansion. Pressures for increased private initiatives in the educational arena comes from both the supply side (declining state provision and increased private provision), and from the demand-side (parental choices for quality, cost and value, and cultural and religious preferences). These observations are clearly reflected in the changes in Nigeria’s educational system.
For example, the rise and decline of the developmental state in Nigeria’s educational arena and serious decline of educational standards resulting from the corrupt management and erratic implementation of the 6-3-3-4 school system created the supply-side factors (i.e. shortage of providers of quality education) that contributed to the emergence of the new Islamic schools of Northern Nigeria. Muslims’ preference for combining both Islamic and western types of education constitutes the strongest demand-side factor for the continuing growth of the new Islamic schools. The participation of state governments, local and international Islamic organizations, wealthy patrons, and individual entrepreneurs all reflect how supply/demand and public/private factors combined to create different models of private initiatives in the educational arena. This development shows that educational privatization and deregulation occur in several forms: 1) the auctioning of public educational assets to private entrepreneurs, 2) various models of provision, financing, and management of education, and 3) opening different levels of primary, secondary and higher education for private participation. While conforming to the global trend of educational privatization, the new Islamic schools profiled in this essay illustrate the specifically Islamic features that are also observable in the educational transformation of many Muslim countries.

Combining Islamic learning and modern western education has remained a difficult issue in Muslim countries since the nineteenth-century. The new Islamic schools of Northern Nigeria exhibit some of the varieties of educational dualism that have been developed in Muslim countries, including Mali, Senegal, Sudan, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Incorporating Qur’anic education in the tahfiz track of the new Islamic schools has made it possible to memorize the Qur’an and acquire both Islamic learning and western education, thereby equipping graduates with the multiple sets of skills they need to function effectively in meeting contemporary challenges of modern society. This Northern Nigerian experiment provides a solution to the crisis of relevance confronting
the old Qur’anic schools more effectively than the UNESCO/UNICEF initiative of introducing vocational training into the old Qur’anic schools. Similarly, offering both Islamic and western types of education in the same school environment seems to be more realistic than the idealistic model of “Islamization of knowledge,” and cheaper than attending separate schools to acquire Islamic and western education. These Northern Nigerian experiments have not yet solved all the persistent problems of educational dualism in Muslim countries; they do, however, point to the possibilities of educating Muslims to live according to Islamic values and beliefs in the multi-cultural and increasingly inter-connected modern world.

The social and political consequences of the worldwide educational transformation in Islamic societies are manifesting themselves in contradictory trends. On the one hand, Dale Eickelman demonstrates the subtle ways in which mass education, mass communication, and neo-liberal policies of privatization and deregulation have opened up public spaces for debating the relevance of Islamic heritage in modern society. As a consequence of these developments, Eickelman contends that Islamic modernity is underway, leading to an understanding of Islam as civic dialog. On the other hand, Nasr calls attention to the active role of the state in the transformation of Islamic education in Pakistan. The Islamization policies of the military regime of Ziaul Haq have resulted not only in the expansion of madrasas and reform of their curricula, but also in the increased militancy of the teeming number of madrasa graduates. Doctrinal and regional differences characterizing the various madrasas translate into factions among the new cadre of Islamic elites seeking alternative employment outside the public sector that could not provide needed jobs to all of them. Escalation of sectarian violence is the outcome of the intense competition for limited employment opportunities as well as for dominance of the Islamist political constituencies in Pakistan. The Pakistani trend seems more prominent in Nigeria, where growing Islamic activitism
has steadily become more and more attractive in the face of continuing deterioration of the public sector under the predatory regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha. As I argued elsewhere, graduates of the new Islamic schools are at the forefront of the increasing demands for the full application of Islamic law that has become more irresistible since Nigeria’s return to civilian rule in 1999. The Islamist activism of graduates of new Islamic schools, not only in Nigeria and Pakistan, but in many Muslim countries as well, can be seen as the conservative wing of an emerging Islamic modernity. This observation corrects the over-emphasis on Islamic liberalism that features prominently in Eickelman’s insightful analysis of the social and political consequences resulting from transformation of Islamic education.
## Appendix I

*New Islamic Schools: Abbreviation, Name, and Date of Establishment*

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<th>Full Name</th>
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<th>Year</th>
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### Appendix II

**Educational Tracks and Levels**

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## Appendix III

Founders of New Islamic Schools

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<td>TPS</td>
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I collected the data for this essay in field research in Nigeria during July-December 1999 and May-August 2000 with funding from Faculty Grant of Arizona State University, which I hereby gratefully acknowledge. I presented an earlier version of the essay at the workshop on innovations and their contextualization in African Islamic societies at University of Bayreuth, Germany, 9-10 February 2001. I am grateful for the generous hospitality of the organizers of the workshop, Professors Roman Loimeier and Rudiger Seessmann, and critical comments and suggestions of the workshop participants.

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5 For example, see: “Investment Opportunities in Private Education in Developing Countries,” An International Conference Sponsored by the International Finance Corporation, Member of the World Bank Group, (Washington DC, June 2-3, 1999); and the cover story titled “Education: The last Frontier for Profit,” The UNESCO Courier (November, 2000): 16-37.


21 Peter Lewis, “From Prebendalism to Predation,” 79-103.


30 Aiyepeku, *6-3-3-4 System of Education in Nigeria*, p. 2.


36 Ibid., pp. 182-87.


41 Ibid., p. 34.
46 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
47 Ibid., p. 54.
48 Vivid description of traditional pedagogy of Qu’anic schools can be found in Danjuma A. Maiwada, “Curriculum Development in Koranic Education,” Kano Studies new series 2/2 (1981): 146-68.
53 Abdurrahman and Canham, Ink of the Scholar, p. 65.
54 For the origins and development of Islamic schools during the colonial period (1903-1960), see the colonial records preserved in Nigeria’s National Archives in Kaduna under the title “KADMINEDUC AS 2/8 Volumes 1 and 11: Islamic Schools in Northern Nigeria.” Also see: G. Tahir, “The Significance of Leadership Perceptions and Solutions to Issues and Problems of Western Education in Hausaland, 1940-1960s,” Kano Studies new series 2/3 (1982-1985): 163-78.
56 Colonial records relating to School for Arabic Studies are preserved in Nigeria’s National Archives, Kaduna, under file NO “KADMINEDUC AS 2/12.”
58 Sheikh Nurudddeen Hassan, Muhammad S. Abdullahi, and Alhaji Ben Yunusa, The History and Activities of the National Board of Arabic and Islamic Studies, (Zaria: Institute of Education Ahmadu Bello University, 1994), pp. 61-66.
59 Ibid, 43-56.
60 Nigerian National Council of Principal and Supervisors of Islamic and Arabic Secondary Schools, Manhaj al-Dirasat al-Islamiyya Li’l-Thanawiyaa, (Zaria: Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, n.d.).
62 Manhaj al-Dirasat al-Islamiyya Li’l-Thanawiyaa, p. 3.
Ibid.


Liu, 3.


