

he received news that his sister had been kidnapped and a N500 million ransom was being demanded. This had nothing to do with MEND and was negotiated – as virtually all of these cases are – in a strange netherworld between the public and secret worlds of politics and crime in the ‘post-insurgency’ phase of the Niger Delta amnesty (signed in 2009). This case is not in any sense a representative example of kidnapping in the Niger delta but it suggests that Oriola’s important book is simply a start.

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**Sharia or Shura: Contenting Approaches to Muslim Politics in Nigeria and Senegal** by SAKAH SAIDU MAHMUD

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Despite a spate of recent work reviving the tradition of comparative political science research on Francophone West Africa (Villalon 2010; Bleck & Van de Walle 2011), efforts to bridge the conceptual and experiential gaps between these nations and their Anglophone neighbours remain sadly few and far between (with one exception being William F.S. Miles’s excellent 2007 edited volume on Political Islam in West Africa). In this light, Sakah Saidu Mahmud’s *Sharia or Shura* is an inspiring effort to buck current academic trends by offering an apt, if not entirely successful comparative study of two of the region’s Muslim-majority heavyweights. The book itself is structured around an intriguing puzzle: Given their shared heritage of 18th/19th century jihadist revival and active Sufism, why have Senegalese and Nigerian Islam taken such different political forms? Or, as Mahmud himself frames it, why have Muslim politics in Senegal remained ‘peaceful’ while in Nigeria they have yielded a successful popular movement to implement sharia, contributed to rising sectarian violence, and ultimately birthed the radical Boko Haram movement currently terrorising much of north-eastern Nigeria?

To this question, Mahmud applies a wide range of evidence, focusing particularly on differences in British and French colonial responses to organised Sufi Islam, the importance of a politicised ‘Islamic’ identity in building successful political coalitions in northern Nigeria, and economic and social ideologies of Senegalese brotherhoods – all well-trodden academic territory. His primary thesis, however (developed most clearly in Chapters 5 and 6), centres on a comparative analysis of ‘weak stateness’ (drawing, most notably, on the work of Joel Migdal) that draws a sharp institutional distinction between the Nigerian and Senegalese experiences. As he argues, the rise of politically influential Islamist movements in northern Nigeria resulted from the historical weakness of the Nigerian state, first in terms of its regionalist system inherited from colonial rule, and subsequently in terms of its fragmented military-federal system. Senegal, on the other hand, which benefited from the strong but tolerant leadership of Leopold Senghor, French *laïcité*, and a much greater capacity for channelling religious activism into state-approved channels, was able to stem the tide of more radical, potentially violent Islamism.

But while the outline of this argument drives at some useful distinctions between the two nations' experiences, it is not entirely successful. For one, the book lacks a coherent, consistently applied theoretical lens, with the result being that the empirical case study chapters often meander in the absence of a framework for organising the broader comparison. For example, he introduces the 'Muslim politics' approach pioneered by Eickelman and Piscatori at several points in the text, but otherwise fails to follow up or structure the analysis around its insights. Also odd is Mahmud's invocation of the term *shura* (consultation) in the book's title as a term somehow representative of Senegalese Islam, particularly when it appears nowhere in his empirical analysis. For another, the text relies heavily on secondary news sources (particularly BBC.com web reports), even when local reports (particularly from the robust Nigerian press) are readily available. Even if, as Mahmud argues, the book's goal is not to present 'fresh evidence' but rather fresh analysis, this is inexcusable. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Mahmud's effort to heighten the contrast between the Senegalese and northern Nigerian religious experiences by focusing on the organisation of religious movements themselves means that he devotes very little consideration to the most obvious and striking point of difference between the two nations—Nigeria's ~85 million Christians, and their significant impact on the calculations and incentives of Muslim political and religious activists. Any account of Nigeria's sharia implementation process that fails to address how the country's long history of religious power-sharing and the rapid expansion of Christian evangelical movements since the 1970s both contributed to sharia's rise is fundamentally incomplete, even if (as Mahmud does) it also discusses the broader problem of religious violence.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Mahmud's book offers a useful addition to the scant body of recent academic work offering a comparative, regionally driven perspective on Muslim politics in West Africa. Experts on either case will find little here that is new, but the synthesis provides a possible jumping-off point for further work in the field.

## REFERENCES

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**Sierra Leone: A Political History** by DAVID HARRIS

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This book supplements rather than surpasses earlier literature on its topic because it focuses on state rather than society in Sierra Leone, and thus