

Understanding the Twists and Turns of Terrorism among Muslims in the Nigerian Experience: An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The history of humanity is replete with different acts of terrorism across ages and civilizations which takes different forms but fundamentally, they reflect man's inhumanity to man. Basically, different ideologies form the basis for such heinous acts. Nigeria, being a pluralistic society that is predominantly Muslims and Christians, has been faced with different forms of religious fundamentalism, extremism and terrorist attacks in the past four decades especially arising from some sects under the guise of promoting Islamic ideology for the establishment of 'Islamic State' across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Engaging this issue through the historical, phenomenological and sociological research approaches, it was discovered that most of these acts of religious radicalism, extremism and terrorism are often hinged on religious and ideological manipulation, ignorance, poverty, absence of functional structure that promotes the operation of rule of law, thus increasing the frequency of violence and its effects. The work therefore recommended among other things the de-emphasizing of religious exclusivism, deconstruction of the age-long theologies of absolute truth claim, e.t.c. The conclusion of the work is that, dignity of humanity must take precedence over every religious contravening ideology that often leads to brutality and dehumanization of fellow human beings.

Keywords: *Terrorism, Muslims, Radicalism, Development, De-radicalization, Ideologies*

INTRODUCTION

Humanity from the cradle has been faced with different realities of life. Most times, these realities have formed and shapened to a large extent man's actions, belief systems and also his interaction with the society at large. As generally believed, man is a religious animal. This position is predicated upon the fact that, there is no any society that exists, be it primitive or civilized without one form of religion or the other. This religious inclination of man has to a large extent explains his life in totality. Man's existence as well has been faced with some nagging experiences which are both natural and human-made.

In the contemporary society, one of the major threats to the human existence is the problem of terrorism, especially when this is done under the influence of religious radicalism. As a matter of fact, the modern form of terrorism has debased the essence of humanity, thus turning the world at large into a theatre of war and brutality. Fundamentally, the Nigerian experience of this phenomenon is such that has assumed different dimensions and being propelled by different factors. For instance, there have been series of

agitations, aspirations and even groups that have taken and still taking the form of terrorism and this can be categorized under different factors as we shall see later in this work.

The Nigerian experience on what can be seen as terrorism in the name of 'religion' is now becoming quite alarming because of the nefarious acts of Boko Haram (an acclaimed Islamic sect). This therefore makes the Nigerian nation to be more troubled than any other countries in the recent years within the Sub-Saharan African region under the stronghold of terrorist attacks. Perhaps, one of the reasons for this position in a way could be hinged on the fact that Nigeria's largest proportion of her population is predominantly Muslims and Christians. And in most cases, there exists mutual suspicion and mistrust among members of these two major faiths in Nigeria. But one major question in the mind of concerned people is why is Nigeria bedevilled with these constant religious confrontations in this side of the clime and especially in its northern part that is predominantly dominated by Muslims?

In the past four decades in the Nigerian experience, one can count more than twenty

major religious-related crises that have rocked the nation. This can be seen from the skirmishes of Maitatsine sect which began in the late 1970's in Maiduguri and spread to other parts of the region; and other religious crises including some indigenous religious unrests like the case of Ombatse group in Nasarawa State and other inter-tribal wars or violence perpetrated under the influence of 'indigenous spirituality' which have left trails of tears and agony on the minds of many, and the present Boko Haram insurgency that is rocking the nation. These crises often begin as social, ethnic or political misunderstandings and soon assume a religious dimension especially when not properly managed.

Some have severally argued it that most of these conflicts originate from tussles over control of land, claims to settlers or political issues. Of course, poverty, unemployment, and insensitivity on the part of government that often leads to massive corruption and social injustice play very significant factors. Unfortunately, these tensions are often baptized as conflicts between the adherents of different religious faiths, especially between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. "It is somewhat trite, but nevertheless sadly true, to say that more wars have been waged, more people killed and these days, more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in history".¹ There are many narratives suggesting the facts that Islam does not support violence. For instance, Umar in his words maintains that;

There is no religion I know of in this world that advocates violence. On the contrary, all religions advocate peace, harmony, tolerance, patience, understanding and good neighbourliness. In fact, Koran (sic) categorically states that even if unbelievers living amongst you who wish to live in peace, you should by all means live in peace with them... And in effect, Islam teaches us that there is no compulsion in religion... The Bible propagates the same phenomena of peace ... All these are clear indication of the fact that both Islam and Christianity and indeed other religions have as integral part of their fundamental objectives such virtues as peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and respect.²

¹ C. Kimball, *When Religion becomes Evil*. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002), p.1

² "Governor Umar's Address to the Public, March 7, 1987", in *New Nigerian*, 11 March, 1987, p.3

A proper reflection on the position of Umar suggests the sincere stand of what religion stands for or what it should represent in the human society. However, if one will further juxtapose such position with that of al-Zakzaky, a renowned Islamic cleric, one would wonder what if truly Umar is correct. According him, he uncontrollably posits that:

Does the Nigerian constitution recognize the law of Allah? Does it recognise the Quran as the supreme law? A section of this constitution you are referring to says that its laws are supreme, whatever law that is not consistent with its provisions, are null and void. Now we know for sure that the laws of that constitution run contrary to the provisions of the Quran. So, according to Nigeria's constitution, the Quran is null and void. And it will be a contradiction, for anybody who accepts the law of the Quran accepts Allah too, at the same time, accept the constitution of Nigeria ... We want Islam and no power on earth can stop it.³

Given the above contradictions and what can be termed as a gross affront against the constituted authority especially in a religiously pluralistic society like Nigeria, this work therefore is set to interrogate the place of religious radicalism, manipulation, extremism and bigotry which form the basis for the present acts of terrorism being witness in Nigeria. And since this has been the re-occurring decimal in the northern region, a deliberate attempt shall be employed in focusing on the northern part of Nigeria.

TERROISM: AN OVERVIEW

Terrorism in the human society is as old as man himself. The history of humanity is replete with different acts of terrorism across ages and civilizations. Most of these acts of terrorism take different forms but, essentially speaking, they all reflect man's inhumanity to man. In most cases, different ideologies form the basis for such dastard acts in the human society. Some are said to have been predicated upon religious, political, social or economical struggles.

The question of defining what terrorism means in most times is rooted in ambiguity due to its nature. The difficulty in defining it is in agreement with the basis for determining when the use of violence (directed at whom, by whom, for what ends) is legitimate; therefore,

³ El-Zakzaky, "I Do Not Respect the Constitution", in *Weekend Concord*, 20 April, 1991.

the modern definition of terrorism is inherently controversial. The use of violence for the achievement of political, economic, religious or social ends is common to both state and non-state groups. This is because, political violence, including terrorism, has systematic origins that can be ameliorated. Social and economic pressures, frustrated political aspirations, and in a more proximate sense, the personal experiences of terrorists and their relations, all contribute to the terrorist reservoir.⁴ This position is in tandem with what Whittaker believes to be part of the rationale behind terrorism tendencies. According to him, he maintains that, the reasons include the following: Logical choice and political strategy, Collective rationality, Lack of opportunity for political participation; and Disaffection within an elite.⁵

From available records, the majority of definitions in use has been written by agencies that are directly associated with government, and they are systematically biased to exclude governments from the definition. Different scholars from different fields of endeavour such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, religion, philosophy, e.t.c. have carried out different research on the nature, rationale and effects of terrorism in the human society. Despite all these efforts in understanding and containing it, the phenomenon remains unabated in the human society. And importantly, there seems to be different dimensions to its spread in the modern society with devastating effects on humanity.

According to a study by Jeffrey Record of US army in 2003, “A 1988 study counted 109 definitions of terrorism that covered a total of 22 different definitional elements”.⁶ Terrorism became a controversial term because of the mixed interests of different nations, countries and even groups or individuals. This controversy heated up especially after the 9/11 attacks. United Nation has also mentioned the same problem. According to The United Nations, the International Rule of Law and Terrorism; “The United Nations Organization

⁴ I.O. Lesser, “Countering the New Terrorism: Implications for Strategy”, in I.O. Lesser, et.al. (eds.) *Countering the New Terrorism*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), p.127

⁵ D.J. Whittaker, ed. *The Terrorism Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2001), p.14

⁶ J. Record, *Bounding the Global war on Terrorism*. December, 2003, p.10

has been unable to reach a decision on the definition of terrorism exactly because of the conflicting interests of sovereign states that determine in each and every instance how a particular armed movement (i.e. a non-state actor) is labelled in regard to the terrorist-freedom fighter dichotomy”.⁷

This term, “Terrorism” comes from the French word *Terrorisme*, and originally referred specifically to state terrorism as was practiced by the French Government during the reign of terror. The French word *terrorisme* is derived from a Latin verb *Terreo* meaning *Ifrighten*.⁸ The modern development of terrorism began during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror (1793 - 1794). During this period the term terrorism was first coined.⁹ There is no single definition of the term terrorism. The concept is from the word *terror* which is construed to mean great fear, something which makes one to be afraid. Consequently, the lack of a unified definition has left scholars, text researchers, theologians and security experts, among others helpless. The very diversity of views reflects the enormous variety of efforts to understand and agree on a definite conceptual framework for understanding terrorists and their methodology.

Terrorism cannot just be defined as that which is limited to violence and threat of violence. This criterion alone does not produce any useful definition since it includes many acts not usually considered as terrorism, for example; war, riot, organized crime and simple assault. Walter Laqueur sees terrorism as “the use or the threat of the use of violence, a method of combat, or a strategy to achieve certain targets... (It) aims to induce a state of fear in the victim, that is ruthless and does not conform with humanitarian rules... [P]ublicity is an essential factor in the terrorist strategy.”¹⁰ On the part of Bruce

⁷ H. Koechler, “The United Nations, the International Rule of Law and Terrorism”, Fourteenth Centennial Lecture at the Supreme Court of the Philippines and Philippine Judicial Academy, 2002

⁸ KimCampbell, <http://www.etymonline.com/index/terrorism>

⁹ J.B.Okwii, “Terrorism in Nigeria :The Church’s Response”, being a Paper Delivered at the 55th Commencement Exercise of the UMCA College, Ilorin, 21 September, 2013, assessed on 15 August 2015.

¹⁰ W. Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (2nd ed.). (Boston: Little & Brown, 1987), p.143.

Hoffman, "Terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent—or, equally important, threatens violence, designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target, conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia), and perpetrated by a sub-national group or non-state entity."¹¹ Reiterating on the unchanging nature of the phenomenon, Stephen Sloan posits that the definition of terrorism has evolved over time, but its political, religious, and ideological goals have practically never changed.¹²

The UN General Assembly Resolution 49/60, titled "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism," contains a provision describing terrorism as: "Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them".¹³

Fundamentally, one must bear in mind that there are problems about attaining an all-inclusive definition. As Yasser Arafat, late Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), notably said in a 1974 speech before the United Nations, "[O]ne man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." This statement exemplifies the ease with which politicians' biases can influence their definitions of terrorism. In line with these contentions, a public opinion poll was conducted in Palestine on December 21, 2001. The poll found that 98.1% of the Palestinians surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that "the killing of 29 Palestinians in Hebron by Baruch Goldstein at al Ibrahimi mosque in 1994" should be called terrorism, whereas 82.3% of the same respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that "the killing of 21 Israeli youths by a Palestinian who exploded himself at the Tel Aviv

Dolphinarium" should be called terrorism.¹⁴ Trying to define terrorism is like being in an Alice-in-Wonderland universe; it is a concept that no one can clearly define and even involves actors that no one can specifically identify. While some definitions are precise, others lack important aspects of terrorism (e.g., global connections, ideological roots, etc.).¹⁵

Terrorism in the name of faith has become the predominant model for political violence in the modern world. This does not mean to suggest that it is the only model because nationalism and ideology remain as potent catalysts for extremist behaviour. However, religious extremism has become a central issue for the global community. In the modern era, religious terrorism has increased in its frequency, scale of violence, and global reach. At the same time, a relative decline has occurred in secular terrorism. The old ideologies of class conflict, anti-colonial liberation, and secular nationalism have been challenged by a new and vigorous infusion of sectarian ideologies. Grass root extremist support for religious violence has been most widespread among populations living in repressive societies that do not permit demands for reform or other expressions of dissent.¹⁶

However, in this work, it must be mentioned that while we engage ourselves in trying to interrogate and understand the dicey nature of terrorism in the human society, we must bear in mind here that the overview idea of the phenomenon is hinged on the fact that, "it is the premeditated use or threat to use illegal force and violence either by state or non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation of people".¹⁷ Terrorism can be classified into different headings or categories on the basis of ideological underpinnings and operations. These include but not limited to international, religious, political, pathological, issue-based, state, bio, cyber and domestic terrorism.¹⁸ In

¹¹ B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (2nd ed.). (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.43

¹² S. Sloan, *Terrorism: The Present Threat in Context*. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), p.20

¹³ "Religious Terrorism" www.sagepub.com/sites/.../33557_6.pdf, p.2, Accessed on 12/05/2015

¹⁴ Khalil Shikaki, (2001, December 21). Palestinian Survey Research, <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2001/p3a.html>.

¹⁵ "Terrorism and Communication", www.sagepub.com/.../51172_ch_1. Accessed on 19/06/2015, p.6

¹⁶ "Religious Terrorism" www.sagepub.com/sites/.../33557_6.pdf accessed on 12/05/2015

¹⁷ Definition of Terrorism, from Sage Publication

¹⁸ An excerpt from my ongoing PhD Thesis titled "A Comparative Study of Terrorism in Indigenous Religion, Islam and Christianity in Nigeria", 2017, Chapter 2, pp.10-18

view of the above, it is pertinent to maintain that certain factors also have been adduced to as being responsible for terrorists' actions in most cases. Some of these factors have been theorized and they include but not limited to; deeply divided society, state failure and violent conflicts in Nigeria, the rational/vengeance theory, the human needs/socio-economic theory¹⁹, political factor/theory²⁰, Islamic Theocratic theory²¹ which explains the ultimate need for the establishment of Islamic State under the operation of Shari'a law, and as well, the Conspiracy theory²² which is also central in the understanding of the prevalence of terrorism in the human society.

TERRORISM: THE TWIST AND THE TURNS IN THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Terrorism, violent confrontations, extremism and conflicts have been part of the Nigerian society for the past four decades, both from the military dispensation down to the civilian government. Different irredentist groups have constituted great disturbances in one way or the other to the nation while some are still like a torn in the flesh of the nation today. Some of these groups include Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The present and most deadly one among them now is the Boko Haram sect which started its major terrorist attacks in 2009 in Nigeria. Most of these groups employed terror tactics in pressing home their agitations, and

¹⁹ E.J. Dougherty, and L.R. Pfaltzgrate, Jr, *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, Second Edition. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990)

²⁰ H.M. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, Reprint Edition. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, Limited, 1993), p.x

²¹ J. Lengmang, "The Upsurge of Religious Fundamentalism: A Critical Reflection in the Light of the 'Boko Haram' Phenomenon in Northern Nigeria," in S.G. Best, (ed.) *Religion and Post-Conflict PeaceBuilding in Northern Nigeria*. (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd., 2011), p.101

²² S. Joshua, and F. Chidozie, "Terrorism in Nigeria", in R. Ajayi, and J.O. Fashagba, (eds.) *Understanding Government and Politics in Nigeria*. (Omu-Aran: Department of Political Science and International Relations, Landmark University, 2014), pp.352-355

that have resulted in wanton destruction of lives and property in most cases.

According to Okwii, Nigerians are traumatized by violent crimes and the manifestations of terrorism daily. The threats have compelled government, individuals and private companies to invest heavily on security. High profile assassinations, bombing, sabotage and kidnappings are threats that are causing widespread inconvenience and apprehension. Armed robbery has compelled inter-state luxury buses to carry armed police escorts. The threat of hijacking has led to time consuming security checks at airports. Similarly, sabotage and kidnapping of foreign oil workers have forced oil companies to employ armed guards. The state of insecurity is disincentive to foreign investments.²³ These manifestations of terrorist acts in the Nigerian society appear not to be predominantly peculiar to a particular religion among the three major religions which are African Religion, Islam and Christianity. However, it must be noted that, from the Nigerian history, there has been considerably higher cases of fundamentalist movements in Islam in Nigeria than what is obtainable in the remaining two religions given the rise in sectarian movements with different ideologies and their effects on the society at large.

The contemporary Nigerian society is engulfed with varying heinous acts of terrorism with effects that are beyond what one can pretend about. These acts of terrorism, be it the Maitatsine sect uprising, religious cruelty by extremists or suicide bombing and wanton destruction of lives and property by members of Ombatse group, and that of the Boko Haram sect, adherents of Oro worship among others have seriously caused untold hardship to the Nigerian populace. The resultant effect therefore is that, everyone is being affected (either directly or indirectly) by it.

Cataloguing some of the nagging experiences with respect to terrorism in Nigeria, Frank Oshanugor, a Crime Reporter with the Post Express Newspaper, in his book "Terrorism:

²³ J.B. Okwii, "Terrorism in Nigeria: The Church's Response", being a Paper Delivered at the 55th Commencement Exercise of the UMCA College, Ilorin, 21 September, 2013, accessed on 15 August 2015, pp.2-33

The Nigerian Experience, (1995 – 1998)”²⁴ listed some acts of terrorism which can be referred to as ‘State Terrorism’. This is because, they were heinous acts perpetrated by the State through its apparatuses in order to cow anyone that attempt to stand their ways. His discussion was solely centred on the administration of the then military Head of State, Gen. Sanni Abacha. In the work, the brutality that attended Abacha’s regime and some of the sporadic and endless bombings, unexplained deaths and disappearances among others were gross act of terrorism against the masses. He argued that all of these were orchestrated and perpetrated by the State apparatuses which are against the constitutional role of every government – the protection of lives and property. The focus of his work was on a particular regime without creating any link to religious influence or factor in such experience. His work as well did not put into consideration some acts of terrorism which the nation had earlier experienced even before his period of consideration (1995 - 1998) which could be seen as influenced by religious manipulation. Also, the recent experiences in the Nigerian society were not covered. These and many more have made it quite expedient for this work to succinctly examine the vacuum and provide further information on the issue of terrorism under religious experience and practice.

The Nigerian experience on the issue of religion and terrorism is that, either overtly or covertly, since the contact between the two major world religions – Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, there have been constant religious confrontations. Tragically, the practice of religion in Nigeria today has become so volatile and combustible that innocent people are slaughtered, bombed and maimed²⁵ on the ground of any slightest provocation. This in most cases has been attributed to the manipulation of religion. The experiences in Nigeria since the late 1970s’ religious confrontations which were ushered in by the uncontrolled brutality and skirmishes that

²⁴ F.S. Oshanugor, *Terrorism: The Nigerian Experience, (1995 – 1998)*. (Nigeria: Advent Communications Ltd., 2004).

²⁵ E.M. Ehioghae, “Religion and Violence in Contemporary Nigerian Society: A Proposal for Peaceful Co-Existence”, in R.A. Akanmidu, (ed.) *Thoughts in the Humanities*. (Keffi: Department of Religious Studies, Nasarawa State University, 2011), p.350

greeted the nation through the Maitatsine sect, championed by Bawa Marwa, can be said to have been responsible for the flood gate of bloodsheds in the nation under the guise of religion. Past administrations (both military and civilian) appeared not to have taken the issue of security of lives and property as serious as it should, thus, being unable to contain and nip such act of brutality in the bud at its inception before it snowballed into uncontrollable situation. Unfortunately, the religious faithfuls who are taken in by their devious machinations saw themselves as people fighting a ‘just cause’ in the name of God. This can be seen in the light of the unnecessary brutality and wanton destruction of lives and property which in turn create mutual mistrust, distrust and suspicion. Most times, these religious adherents were brained washed, convinced or made to believe through their religious texts on the rationale behind such act of fighting and engaging in other acts of brutality “all in the name of God”.

To understand this furthermore, it is of importance to place on record the confession of a onetime bigot who saw nothing bad in violence since it is erroneously believed to be another means of attain some forms of spiritual virtues. Mohammed Abdul-Azeez, who was once a member of the Maitatsine sect, confessed that; “I was a bigot, a fanatic and an ignoramus of man fighting tirelessly, maiming and actually sending the innocent to the great beyond prematurely, all in the name of religion.”²⁶ The irony of the matter is that, many who belong to this category, basking in the euphoria of religious extremism in the name of religion are scattered all over the nation with little or no hope of unlearning their wrong mentality and religious indoctrination. This happened at the Foursquare Church in Yaba, Lagos, after he had renounced his membership of the Islamic sect that first caused mayhem in Kano in December 1980. Abdul-Azeez’s repentance came nine years after the incident in October 1989. Even at that time, the ravages of the Maitatsine riots in Kano, which later spread to Yola, Maiduguri, Bauchi and Gombe in that order, was still fresh in the minds of Nigerians with many who are yet to recover from the emotional and psychological trauma it caused them. The riots

²⁶ A. Akazeze, “From Maitatsine to Boko Haram”, in *Newswatch*. Wednesday, 28 October 2009. www.newswatchngr.com Accessed 10/08/2014

caused huge losses, both in human and material terms. No less than six thousand lives were lost during the mayhem.

The very first violence in Kano shocked many Nigerians to their marrow. In that crisis alone, 4,177 lives were gruesomely murdered. The Kano incident stands out for being the first religious crisis that took a huge toll on human lives and property. Although there had been series of religious tensions and skirmishes across the country, one of which was the crises witnessed in May 1980 in Zaria during which property belonging to mainly Christians were destroyed by some Muslims, few people could have imagined that differences in religion could lead to such wanton destruction of lives and property as witnessed in December 1980.²⁷ But that was the scenario.

Taking a stock of some of these heinous acts which most of them were perpetrated unchallenged under the guise of religion, Jan Boer in his book series on *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relation*, Vol. 1-3, raised many issues. Fundamentally, in the Volume One of the series titled, 'Nigeria's Decades of Blood'²⁸, he painstakingly chronicled some of the religious attacks in Nigeria and he covered two decades of such experience (1980 - 2002). What became his major focus was the question of why would religion becomes a weapon of mass destruction of such a great magnitude instead of a unifying force? His work focuses only on the Christian-Muslim relations while leaving behind the Indigenous religion and how they could also be influenced to and thereby become tools for terrorism tendency in the society.

In the volume two and three of the same series, Jan Boer titled the works, "Muslims: Why the Violence?"²⁹ and "Christian: Why this Muslim Violence?"³⁰ respectively. Certain issues were

as well raised in the works. As a matter of fact, many questions were raised which include; why do Nigerian Christians and Muslims riot, kill and destroy? Why should religion bring Nigeria constantly to the brink? Who is to blame for all this terror, the Christians, Muslims, both, or neither? What are the causes for all these violence? Are they actually religious, political or combination of many factors? These and many more were issues raised in the two volumes. However, we must also note that the works only cover certain periods which does not extend to the contemporary realities in the Nigerian experience. Nevertheless, this work shall painstakingly look into the present experience in the Nigerian society along side with the global reality of modern terrorism as it can be linked with that of the Nigerian society. Terrorism in the name of religion will therefore be focused upon in this study.

The emergence of the Boko Haram sect in 2002 and its public appearance in 2009 has really terrified the nation Nigeria to her knees. Virtually every week, there is always series of attacks which ranges from bombing, maiming, kidnapping, and even to attacks on security operatives especially in the North-Eastern part of the nation. Though the literal meaning of the name Boko Haram means "Western education is evil", or Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), but the perspective or ideology behind their incessant attacks seems unknown owing to their recent modus operandis. There are different arguments as to what the purpose of the group is all about. Some see them as religious group, while others see them as being politically or socially inclined. In another quarter, this group is seen as a combination of different motivations.

Nevertheless, it is important to say that, since the first recorded act of violence committed by the so-called 'Taliban' in November 2003, Boko Haram has actually struck against political targets, police stations which were sometimes the only effective presence of the state in remote villages; prisons were attacked to release militants; schools that symbolised Western education and the colonisation of the mind; mosques and Muslim scholars who contested the moral authority of the deviant sect; politicians and

²⁷ A. Akaeze, "From *Maitatsine* to Boko Haram", in *NewsWatch*. Wednesday, 28 October 2009. www.newswatchngr.com Accessed 10/08/2014

²⁸ J.H. Boer, *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relation: Nigeria's Decades of Blood. Vol.1.* (Jos: Honey City Press, 2003).

²⁹ J.H. Boer, *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations – Vol.2, Nigeria's Decades of Blood, 1980-2002, Muslims: Why the Violence?* (Canada: Essence Publishing, 2004).

³⁰ J.H. Boer, *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations – Vol.3, Christian: Why this Muslim Violence?* (Canada: Essence Publishing, 2004).

godfathers who were fraudulently elected and who were accused of failing to implement properly Islamic Law, e.t.c.³¹

Meanwhile, the extension of the targets of Boko Haram to Christian communities has testified to the radicalisation and professionalization of the sect. Indeed, this shift makes more sense for a terrorist group which seeks an international audience. In the Western media, first, it pays more to attack Christians rather than Muslims – hence a better chance to publicise the local struggle of an Islamist sect. Moreover, Boko Haram can now claim to be part of a global holy war when it pretends to defend Muslims against Christian aggressors in Kaduna or Plateau States – and hence the possibility of external support from organisations based in Arab countries. Also, it is sometimes suggested that attacking Christians is a way to force Nigerian Muslims to take sides.³² But, away from their attacks on Christian communities is their recent indiscriminate attacks on people with no consideration for religious affiliation, gender, political association and worldview, ethnic colouration or educational attainment. This calls for further interrogation which will be considered in the subsequent chapters of this work.

A proper look at the position of Stephen Prothero in his popular work “God is not One”³³, one will gain an insight into the reason behind some of the so-called religious fundamentalism and terrorism tendency all in the name of God. His argument is predicated upon the fact that, there are diverse religious claims and the absolute truth claim is domicile in most of the world major religions. Thus, given rise to conflicting truth claim among the varying communities of faith. According to his position, the Age of Enlightenment in the Eighteenth Century popularized the ideal of religious tolerance, and we are doubtless better for it. His position is that, why do we need to pretend that the world’s religious traditions are different paths to the same God? To him, we

blur the sharp distinctions between religions at our own peril, and that it is time to replace naive hopes of inter-religious unity with deeper knowledge of religious differences.³⁴ Gaining the understanding of his position will go a long way in helping us to gain better understanding on what informs the action of some religious fundamentalists and their claims. This work is not in any way trying to maintain that there exist different Gods for different religions, but, to make use of the differences that exist among the three religions under study and to explore how they have been manipulated over the years majorly for selfish interests, thereby creating societal unrests which include acts of religious terrorism in the society.

The Nigerian situation today in relations to different acts of terrorism clearly paints the gory picture of insecurity in the highest level which the security operatives at times appeared to be unsecured, talk less of securing others. But, there are cases of recorded successes on the part of the Nigerian security operatives which are being celebrated by many today. One might ask this question, ‘to what extent will the government be able to maintain such progress?’ With religion, having being grossly manipulated in the Nigerian experience especially in the past four decades, it has cast its overwhelming shadow on politics, education and other spheres of the society; leaving behind its trail with much untold hardship and agony in the society. This could also raise another worry on the nagging question of to what extent are the complications and the reign of terror being experienced presently, and the unpredictability of the future be an outright deviation from the normative reality of religion in the human society? Issues of this nature will continue to resonate through constant engagements and interrogations among many stakeholders with the bid to finding a lasting solution to the problem of religious extremism, radicalism and terrorism in the human society. The table below shows some cases of religious violence in the Nigerian history. However, the information contained here is not in any way a complete data but is a pointer to the fact that indeed the issue of religious extremism in Nigeria is a reality that is biting hard on the nation.

³¹ P. Montclos, “Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism” in M. Pérouse de Montclos, (ed.) *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*. (Ibadan: African Studies Centre, 2014), p.138

³² S. Prothero, *God is not One*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

³³ S. Prothero, *God is not One*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

³⁴ S. Prothero, *God is not One...*

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Date	Location	Principal Actors and Effects
May 1980	Zaria (Kaduna State)	Disturbances in Zaria during which property belonging to mainly Christians were destroyed
December 18-29, 1980	Yan-Awaki Ward in Kano (Kano State)	Riots by Maitatsine sect, 4,177 people died, extensive destruction of property
October 29-30, 1982	Bullumkutu, Maiduguri (Borno State)	Kala-Kato and Maitatsine sects and 118 people died, extensive damage to property
February 27-March 5, 1984	Dobeli Ward, Jumeta – Yola (Gongola State)	Maitatsine sect, 586 died, wanton destruction of property
April 26-28, 1985	Pantami Ward, Gombe, (Bauchi State)	Maitatsine sect, 105 people died, extensive destruction of property.
March 1986	Ilorin (Kwara State)	Muslims and Christians clashed during a Christian procession at Easter
May 1986	Ibadan, University of Ibadan, (Oyo State)	Demonstrations by Muslims in which they burnt the figure of the Risen Christ in the Chapel of Resurrection, University of Ibadan
March 1987	a. Kafancha (Kaduna State)	Clashes between Muslims and Christians at the College of Education, Kafancha and lose some lives and the burning of some mosques by Christians and native Kajes
	b. Katsina, Funtua, Zaria, Gusau and Kaduna (Kaduna State)	Wave of religious riots in which Muslims burnt down numerous church buildings, and damaged property belonging to Christians. Many lives were lost.
February 1988	Kaduna, Kaduna Polytechnic (Kaduna State)	Religious riots, ostensibly among students, destroyed the foundation walls of the Christian Chapel
April 1991	a.) Katsina (Katsina State)	Religious violence spearheaded by Mallam Yahaya Yakubu, leader of the fundamentalist Shite sect in Katsina. It was a protest over a blasphemous publication in fun-times. Several lives were lost and property destroyed.
	b.) Tafawa Balewa (Bauchi State)	Started as a quarrel between a Fulani man and a Sayawa meat seller in Tafawa Balewa. Escalated into a full blown violence and later took the colouring of religious war in Bauchi. Several lives were lost and properties valued over hundreds of millions of Naira were destroyed.
October 1991	Kano (Kano State)	A peaceful procession by the Izala sect to halt Rev. Reinhard Bonnke from having a crusade in Kano. Later degenerated into very bloody religious violence. Thousands of lives were lost and property valued at millions of Naira was destroyed.
May 1992	Zango-Kataf, Zaria, Kaduna, Ikara. (Kaduna State)	A communal feud between the Katafs and the Hausas later took the dimension of inter-religious war between Muslims and Christians in other major cities of Kaduna State. Several lives and property were destroyed.
January 1993	Funtua (Katsina State)	The Kalakato religious sect assaulted the Village Head and burnt down a Police vehicle. Lives and property were also lost.
February 28, 2000	Kaduna (Kaduna State)	Kaduna city exploded in violence as Muslim and Christian extremists and other hoodlums clashed over the proposal to introduce Shari'a
February 29, 2000	Aba (Abia State)	The riot which began in Aba as a reprisal to that of Kaduna, which later spread to other Eastern states.
September 8, 2000	Kaltungo (Gombe State)	A religious violence that was sparked off by the presence of the state Shari'a implementation committee.
December 2, 2000	Hadejia (Jigawa State)	A sectarian disturbance that was caused by a debate between Muslims and Christians. There was wanton destruction of worship places.
September 12, 2001	Onitsha (Anambra State)	A reprisal killing of Northerners in Onitsha following the Jos crisis in which several Igbos were killed.
October 12, 2001	Kano (Kano State)	A peaceful anti-American protest over the bombing of Afghanistan turned violent, taking ethnic and religious tone. It degenerated into uncontrollable violence which claimed lives and damaged properties and places of worship

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June 2002	Yelwa Shendam Mayhem (Plateau State)	An ethno-religious fracas between the native people (predominantly Christians) and Hausa settlers (predominantly Muslims).
November 21, 2002	Kaduna (Kaduna State)	A violent protest in Kaduna following a Newspaper editorial on hosting of beauty pageant in Nigeria.
January 2004	Yobe State	Militant Islamic group operating under the name of Muhajirun launched a Taliban-like attack on police. Men of the Nigerian Army killed five and arrested several others.
April 3, 2004	Makarfi (Kaduna State)	Religious protest in Makarfi town over alleged desecration of the Qur'an by a Christian teenager.
May 1, 2004	Yelwa Shendam (Plateau State)	An ethno-religious mayhem that claimed over 500 lives and many women and children were abducted by suspected Taroh militia. This was a revenge killing.
September 27, 2004	Limankara, (Borno State)	A self-styled Taliban group hiding on the Goza hills and Mandara mountains on the north-eastern boarder with Cameroon raided Police Stations killing Officers and stealing ammunition.
January 16, 2005	Ipakodo (Lagos State)	A religious mayhem between OPC and Muslims over the erection of Ogun Shrine in a Muslim praying ground. Over 50 lives were feared lost.
August 20, 2005	Isale-Eko area of Lagos Island LGA, Lagos State	No fewer than 30 Muslims youths feared dead when cultists and members of the out-lawed Odua People's Congress (OPC) attacked Muslims.
26 – 30 Jul., 2009	Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Yobe	Religious violence unleashed by the radical <i>Boko Haram</i> sect on Christians. Over 700 persons killed, 3 500 persons internally displaced, 1264 children orphaned, over 392 women widowed, and several properties destroyed.
29 Dec., 2009	Bauchi	Religious violence unleashed by the <i>Kala-Kato</i> sect on Christians. Over 38 persons killed; about 20 suspected members of the sect arrested; and over 1000 people internally displaced.
11 Apr. 2010	Plateau	Attack on a Christian village of Berom stock, some 30 kilometres south of Jos, by suspected Fulani herdsmen The attackers targeted the homes of some officials in Kura Jenta, in reprisal to the killing of about 150 Fulani Muslims, who were allegedly killed and dumped in wells on 19 January 2010. No life was lost but 3 houses and 6 vehicles were torched. This violence was ethno-religious.
16 Jun., 2011	Police Headquarters, Abuja	Authorities said 6 persons were killed and 73 vehicles destroyed. Suicide bomb attack at the Police Headquarters, Abuja by suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamists whose ideology is framed around religion (<i>Wahabism</i>)
26 Aug., 2011	UN House, Abuja	Suicide bombing at the UN House, Abuja by suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamists. 23 persons (11 UN personnel and 12 non-UN personnel) were killed.
25 Dec., 2011	Mandala, Niger State, near the FCT	The bombs were alleged to have been planted at the Church's parking lot. At the last count, 45 persons were killed. Some died instantly, others from injuries sustained from the explosion. Over 80 others were receiving treatment for various degrees of injuries.
5-6 Jan., 2012	Gombe, Gombe State	Gunmen stormed a Deeper Life Church in Gombe, shooting indiscriminately at worshippers. The <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamist sect claimed responsibility for the shooting. 6 persons were reportedly killed while many others were injured.
5-6 Jan., 2012	Mubi, Adamawa State	Suspected <i>Boko Haram</i> militants stormed a gathering of Igbo Christians and shot sporadically, killing over a dozen and injuring others in apparent execution of an ultimatum given by the <i>Boko Haram</i> Islamist sect to Southern Christians living in the North to leave. 22 persons were reportedly killed; a dozen others were injured.

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- J.I. Elaigwu, *The Shadow of Religion on Nigerian Federalism: 1960-93*. (NCIR) Monograph Series No.2, 1993;
- J.I. Elaigwu, *The Politics of Federalism in Nigeria*. Jos: Aha Publishing House Ltd, 2005, pp. 213-217.
- Adapted from Onuoha, 2010 with additions and modifications by I.T. Sampson, "Religious Violence in Nigeria: Causal Diagnoses and Strategic Recommendations to the State and Religious Communities"

Note: The above information/data does not include the full information on the dastard acts of the dreaded Boko Haram sect which has been known globally since 2009 till date. It must however be noted that the sect has caused great damage to the Nigerian nation at large in which over 20,000 people have been gruesomely murdered by the sect, hundreds of people kidnapped (including the over 200 Chibok girls that were captured since 14th April, 2014), unquantifiable property destroyed and over 2 million people displaced and now living in different Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps across the country.

ADDRESSING THE MENACE OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

In finding a meaningful solution to the problem of religious terrorism or extremism in the Nigerian society, certain issues need further or proper interrogation. This, of course, requires a sincere approach in addressing the age-long bigotry and unrests that adherents of both Christianity and Islam have assumed in the human society as a request of its quest for expansion.

To start with, there are some basic Qur'anic positions (e.g. Qur'an 2:208; 2:205; 2:256; 28:56; 60:8; and 5:48 among others that promote peaceful co-existence, love and tolerance) that are central in this light which could serve as veritable means of addressing the menace of religious terrorism in the society. These positions in a way are in tandem with the Constitutional provision of the Federal Republic of Nigeria where in Section 38 (1-3) it states thus:

- Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
- No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or religion not approved by his parent or guardian.
- No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or

denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.³⁵

A proper interpretation of the above constitutional provision suggests clearly that, in a multi-faith society like Nigeria, the practice of religion or religious affiliation should be taken to mean a personal conviction without any coercion, intimidation or embattlement on anyone. In relation to this is the Qur'anic injunctions which can also be leveraged upon as means to promote religious freedom, thus, de-radicalizing religious bigotry and chauvinism. Qur'an reads that: "... To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation..." - (Qur'an 5:48). Also, "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the path has become distinct from the wrong path".

One would be correct to maintain that, going by the Qur'anic verses quoted above; religious terrorists who often lay claim on religious texts are not making sense of their claims and cannot be said to be faithful Muslims. Prophet Muhammad himself once maintained called for respect for people of other faiths, especially the Jews and Christians. In the charter he (Muhammad) granted to the monks of the monastery of St. Catherine, near Mount Sinai, it was stated that:

He (Muhammad) enjoined on his followers, to protect the Christians, to defend their Churches, the residences of their priests, and to guard them from all injuries. No Christian was to be forced to reject his religion; no monk was to be expelled from his monastery. Nor were the

³⁵ Section 38 (1-3), The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended in 2011.

Christian churches pulled down for the sake of building mosques or houses for the Muslims.³⁶

It therefore becomes imperative to further maintain that, as part of the way out of the menace of religious terrorism, there is the urgent need for proper interpretation of religious texts especially by religious leaders so as to avoid breeding of radicals in the name of pursuing any “divine cause”. Religious leaders must first be properly raised in the genuine understanding of religious dogmas and basic teachings that engender human cohesion and development. For instance, the commonly misconstrued verse of the Qur’an is Qur’an 2:190-191 which reads thus:

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah does not love transgressors. And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter.

Hinging on these verses alone through ignorance of its real contextual interpretation, many lives have been wantonly destroyed, and the nation has lost great fortune with respect to the destruction of lives and property. What many misguided Muslims believe with respect to the above verse is the “permission to kill at will for the cause of Allah”. Many religious leaders have as well explored the ignorance of many religious followers for their selfish advantage. While in some quarters, many unscrupulous politicians have as well whipped up religious sentiment knowing fully well that such has been a veritable tool for mobilizing supports for selfish interest since religion by nature, is volatile.

As part of its suggestions is the proper re-interpretation of the sanctity of life from the Islamic point of view. This suggests that, if the existence of humanity is the outcome of the Almighty God (Allah), then, man’s life should be seen as sacred and must be treated so; more so that, it is believed that no one has the power to take another person’s life.

Also, the proper orientation and re-orientation of religious adherents on the place of freedom of

³⁶ Ali, 1967, as quoted by Y.A. Quadri, “All in the Name of Allah”, being the 133rd Inaugural Lecture Series, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, on Thursday, 23rd May, 2013, p.37

religion both from the constitutional and religious points of view must be engaged adequately. Since there is no compulsion in religion, then, people of differing religious beliefs must be respected and value judgement should be avoided. In line with this, certain religious positions contained in many of the exalted religious texts which have become the centre of gravity for many religious extremists for the perpetration of their dastard acts must be re-interpreted in line with the contemporary realities and experiences for a better human society and the betterment of humanity. Though, in most cases, religious texts are presupposes to be infallible and not subjected to further interrogation. But, if sincerely done in the spirit of humanity and human development, such will help in placing humanity at an advantageous position of peaceful co-existence. This therefore by extension suggests the important role of proper education (both secular and religious) in curbing the menace.

Religious leaders, traditional rulers and political leaders should also be properly engaged in the light of the truth and human dignity. They should allow the campaign against the manipulation of religion to begin with them since they command great followings. For instance, the Governor of Kano State in Nigeria, in his reaction to the problem of constant killing of Christians in his State under the guise of blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) publicly and angrily avers that; “I never had that Christians fight for Jesus Christ. I remain committed to end the massive illiterate of Muslims in Kano State. Qur’an is available for all Muslims to buy and read ... Islamiya and Qur’anic schools are available for all Muslims to educate themselves, not by ignorant killing in the name of Allah or Prophet Muhammad again in Kano State...”³⁷ This position, if sincerely embraced by all leaders across the country especially among the two major religious communities in Nigeria – Christianity and Islam, such will to a large extent help in addressing the problem of religious radicalism and bigotry.

³⁷ Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, “I will Kill All Muslims if you Kill Christians for Blasphemy to Prophet Mohammed” www.theechoesofhope.com/2016/09/04/gov-ganduje-i-will-kill-all-muslims-if-you-kill-christians-for-blasphemy-to-prophet-mohammed-saw-again/ Accessed on 15/02/2017

Many have on several occasions suggested mass youth empowerment³⁸ as one of the basic solutions to the problem of religious terrorism in Nigeria. Unemployed youths in Nigeria often times have become the breeding ground for extremists and bigots since they easily fall for manipulations and radicalization at any slightest possible means. The government of the nation should be committed to addressing some of the basic infrastructural challenges that often create discomfort and unease among her citizenry. In line with that, the law of the land in handling such issue should be reformed for effective implementation and security agencies should be properly equipped in line with the global standard so as to effectively and efficiently keep the nation safe from such disturbances and experience. As part of the suggestions in this work is the neutrality of government in matters of religion and politics. Since no religion in Nigeria is known or expected to assume the position of state religion, then, undue government patronage of religion must be curtailed as much as possible. A level playing ground must be pursued. As such,

For Muslims, it is about doing away with underlying absolutist attitudes. Unless these attitudes are replaced by a more pliable approach, no progress will be made. For Christians, it is about changing perspectives from secularism to wholism. Failure on the part of either will ensure that the interplay between religion and politics will continue to be “mis-sed” – misunderstood, mishandled and misguided. Christians and Muslims will not be able to engage in meaningful dialogue, let alone devise viable solutions.³⁹

In order that a society that will be terror-free and human dignity restored be achieved, core values of religion should be properly learned by both religious leaders and adherents. These values include but not limited to love, faithfulness, sincerity, respect, dignity of life/human person,

e.t.c. The place of family ideal in promoting an ideal society cannot be over-emphasized with respect to the problem of terrorism in the human society. Peaceful and well-coordinated family settings will help in building our society into a better place.

Also, there is a need for the re-interpretation and/or interrogation of scriptural passages that often times become the pivot upon which extremists’ ideological dispositions stand. This is because, most of the religious bigots, fundamentalists or fanatics often perpetrate their dastard acts with utmost joy and with high level of impunity given the fact that such act is a ‘service to a deity or God’ which is part of eternal reward in the hereafter for such ‘obedience to divine order’. It is however pertinent to engage in the deconstruction of such aged-long theologies of religious exclusivism, absolute truth claim, intolerance within which many religious fundamentalists have either ignorantly or deceptively found themselves, and greatly deluded with such an obnoxious perception.

CONCLUSION

This work has so far explored the issue of terrorism in Nigeria with special focus on its twists and turns. The emphasis was placed on the northern part of the country that is a Muslim dominated area which has in the past four decades of the Nigerian experience witnessed greater religious confrontations, and characterized by incessant killings, uprising of religious sects with conflicting religious ideologies, high rate of poverty level and considerable high level of illiteracy among other things. As argued in this work, to say the obvious, the high rate of poverty and unemployment among the people, and the worst case of illiteracy especially among the youths have become the basis for the thriving cases of the manipulation of religion in the region. This manipulation of religion has remained the breeding ground for religious radicalism, extremism, bigotry, fundamentalism, and fanaticism. Thus, leading to different twists and turns in the religious landscape in Nigeria.

It is therefore expedient at this juncture to posit that, given the global reality with respect to sectarian uprising, high rates of insurrections, insurgent groups, extremism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and the increase in religious unrest across the globe, necessary steps should be taken in order to nip in the bud the spread of religious extremism and ideological positions that are against human dignity and development

³⁸ S. Joshua, and F. Chidozie, “Terrorism in Nigeria”, R. Ajayi, and J.O. Fashagba, (eds.) *Understanding Government and Politics in Nigeria*, Omu-Aran: Department of Political Science and International Relations, Landmark University, 2014, p.360

³⁹ J.H. Boer, *Christian and Muslims: Parameters for Living Together, Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations – Vol.8-2*. Belleville ON, Canada: Essence Publishing, 2009, pp.123-124

in the society. Essentially, the need for proper re-orientation of politicians must be done in order to stem the tide of the 'politics of bitterness' or the 'do-or-die' political ideology which a larger percentage of them believe in. Government will also help in preventing the avoidable doom of the manipulation of religion when there is a deliberate step to reform the society, and put in place effective structures to address such the prevalence of state of anarchy and lawlessness in which anyone can whip up religious sentiment in order to achieve a personal and selfish interest. On the whole, for a peaceful society to be enjoyed in Nigeria; there is an urgent need for both de-radicalization and counter-radicalization programmes to be embarked upon by the government and other stakeholders like religious and traditional institutions so as to secure the future of the Nigerian nation. This is because, "the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain."

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