

Religious Movements and Lethal Violence in Nigeria: Patterns and Evolution

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Abstract

This article argues that lethal violence by religious practices and allegiances are more common in northern Nigeria more than in southern Nigeria, that the deadly attacks in the South are reprisal to the killing of Christians in the North, which polarises the society. Hence, a way of eradicating this violence is by initiating strategies to sanction adherents that incite religious violence, and therefore, it is suggested leaders should consider promoting inter-religious marriages, seminars, peace education, and religious tolerance, coupled with state sanctions for those who obstruct the peace.

Keywords: Christians, Lethal violence, Muslims, Northern Nigeria, Religious groups.

Introduction

Violence has unfortunately become synonymous with the Nigerian state. Although intergroup violence predates Nigeria's independence, since independence in 1960, the Nigerian state has been in the throes of lethal violence occasioned by the intolerance between religious groups whose adherents are emotionally attached to their faith. The divergence of religious groups in the country has also worsened the negative peace that characterises inter-religious relations. What has been the case in Nigeria is contrary to the recent statement by President Pranab Mukherjee of India who avers that "religion cannot be made a cause of conflict," especially due to intolerance among religious adherents. To a great extent, religion has been made a perennial source of lethal violence. Hotspots of religious violence include Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, among other states in the North.

Oshodi (2011) also is of the opinion that the historical trajectory of the Nigerian state has been punctuated by a number of actions, inactions and contradictions which have continued to resonate with contemporary realities and challenges associated with political and socio-economic implications. According to Albert (1991, 19), “ethno-religious crises are part of the urban problem in Nigeria.” Such crises had been in existence in most parts of northern Nigeria. Since the Maitastine violence and the Zagon Kataf Conflict, which culminated in the setting up of a judicial commission of inquiry on the 10th of February, 1992, as well as the Danish cartoon conflict in Northern Nigeria, religious violence has become an aspect of intergroup relations. A new dimension is now the Boko Haram insurgent violence. Almost all the religions in Nigeria have high regard for human co-existence and thus discourage violent actions against neighbours. Regrettably, people responsible for the fatalities are not atheists as most of the perpetrators have a particular religious group they identify with. In fact, the fierce contest and conflict has mostly been between Muslims and Christians.

It has been noted by scholars that religion is a central part of human existence (Giddens, 1993, cited in Oraegbunam 2011, 186). And this fact has not adequately been given consideration by adherents of religious groups, hence the resurgence of violence and failure to accommodate. The centrality of this phenomenon explains why Nigeria is a heterogeneous and secular society with various religious groups such as Christianity, Islam, and ATR. Secularism in this context refers to non-adoption of any particular religion as state religion, and this means that citizens are not accommodated on the basis of their religion. By implication, individuals are seen as citizens and not regarded as members of a particular religious group, as contained in chapter one and article 10 of the 1999 constitution which states that the Government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion (Ogoloma 2012, 65). The Constitution shows that citizenship is above religious affiliation and this gives every member of the state a sense of belonging.

In the pre-colonial era, Africans had different traditional belief systems, which offered them the opportunity to worship their various indigenous gods based on their traditions of origin. But everything changed with the advent of the foreign religions of Christianity and Islam. Ibenwa (2014, 6) asserts that “Christianity and Islam in Africa marked the beginning of religious pluralism on the continent, thus putting to an end the monolatric religious system that operated in the traditional African societies.” Although some scholars argue that ATR is intrinsically pluralistic, it is not as pluralistic like the foreign religions. Secularism is a derivative of existential philosophy. Events in Nigeria since independence have shown that both Christians and Muslims act fundamentally as if the religions originated from the country rather than from an alien land (Danjibo 2012, 236). Such fundamentalism has evolved and aggravated what this article refers to as hostility perception in intergroup relations fuelled by excessive pride in religious groups with debilitating implications for peaceful co-existence.

Religion is a source of profound comfort and good in the world (Laderman 2015). Given that religion is an important driving force among humans (Firth 1952, cited in Agunwa 2014, 91), it is still realistic, despite religious violence, to take advantage of religion as a channel of enhancing intergroup relations.

Madu (2003, 46) believes that religion involves man's recognition of the existence of powers beyond himself, which created the universe and sustains, preserves and provides for this universe, thereby making it possible for a society to comprehend the relationship between God and man. It refers to a spiritual and social phenomenon which consists of sovereign power, with a spiritual component consisting of non-physical, immaterial, incorporeal, intangible or invisible entities such as God, Satan, angels, demons, heaven and hell (Dzurgba 2008, 10), as well as believers, salvation, sinners, infidels, born again and deliverance, among others. As a social institution, religion is described as a dependent and independent variable which usually affects the societal structure to the extent that social units also influence religion (Oraegbunam 2011, 187). From the foregoing, it is evident that the belief in a supernatural being (the existence of God) is responsible for the conviction that faith is crucial and demonstrates the actions of people who follow the tenets of the religion that offers assurance of salvation. In this regard, the supernatural being is usually seen as the giver of knowledge, wealth and power.

History has it that religion creates a platform for extremists and other adherents to justify their actions, particularly violent behaviour and bloodshed against fellow humans in the name of God (Nwankwo 2015). In the Gambia for example, literature shows that extended families of Muslims, Christians, and practitioners of the traditional Awasena (“religion of pouring”) had contributed to the conflicts that manifested along religious lines as a result of resistance to conversion to Islam through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s (Thomson 2012). According to Laderman (2015), religion has become one of the most powerful social-cultural forces in history, having the capacity to cause conflict. The havoc it has wrecked in Nigeria’s scenario is the series of fatalities involving the protagonists whose relentless acts of inciting religious cleavages have heightened tensions in most parts of the country.

Issues surrounding religion are just one of the many sources of violence in Nigeria, namely crime, land issue, cattle grazing, oil production and distribution, car accidents, football clubs’ disputes, political crisis, natural disaster, market issues, witchcraft and sorcery among others (Adams 2014; Abu-Nimer 2000; Afeno 2014; Alqali 2015; Alegbeleye 2014; Akpomera 2015; Akinpelu 2015; Animasawun and Aremu 2015; Okolie-Osemene 2015a; Animasawun 2013; Agbigboa 2013; Bello 2015; Bonkat 2014; Chukwu 2014; Jimoh 2015; Makai 2015; Munir and Olojo 2015; Nwankwo 2015; Uwa 2015; Egharevba and Iruonagbe 2015; Onuoha 2012; Onwuegbuchulam, Whetho and Mtshali 2014; Onah 2014; Nwanya 2014; Ukoji 2014; Okolie-Osemene and Okoh 2014; Titus 2015; Sampson 2012; Wariboko 2015).

Religious violence has created many clichés in the country, namely religious militancy, extremism, fundamentalism, religious terrorism, religious bigotry, religious pluralism, religious prejudice, The Muslim north, The Muslim community, The Christian community, The Christian south, radical Islamist (jihadi-Salafism), conflict sensitivity, religious antagonism, religious incitement, religious rights, freedom of worship, religious zealots, clash of theologies, Islamophobia, and religious discord among others. Unfortunately, most of the aforementioned clichés hamper inter-religious dialogue.

However, given that conflict is an inevitable part of human existence (Albert, 2001; Okolie-Osemene 2015b), the problem remains that such issues escalate to violent attacks by parties that eventually amount to fatalities. In Kano for example, why is it that both Christians and Muslims have become the merchants of violence? It is worrisome that every little misunderstanding between the Muslim community and their Christian counterparts is greeted by invasive attacks by one side while the other prepares for a violent defensive response. This has manifested itself for years in Sabon Gari area of Kano state so much so that some southerners who have lived there for more than three decades refused to relocate down south despite requests by their parents and siblings to leave the north due to religious disturbances. There are several Christian minorities from the north including those from Kano State residing in Sabon Gari.

Methodology

The article makes use of primary and secondary sources relevant to the study including Nigeria Watch database which maps the trends of violent deaths, media reports, available literature, statements of religious leaders aimed at abating religious violence and key informant interviews. It also adopts qualitative analysis to discuss ways in which religious confrontations have contributed to lethal violence and actions of religious groups.

Theoretical Discourse

Explaining the intergroup relations between Christians and Muslims in the context of violent conflicts requires a theoretical discourse which is anchored on the hostility perception theory characterised by mutual suspicion and competition to evangelise and win more souls. Indeed, inter-religious relations in Nigeria have not only become synonymous with hostility perception but have also assumed debilitating proportions at the detriment of national integration. For instance, Catildi (2011, 29) argues that hostility perception, which is negative perception of the other, manifests when groups are hostile toward a particular group or one's own group, identity, or culture to the extent that such perception tends to exacerbate conflict and conflict behaviour. In other words, hostility perception theory is closely linked with the realistic group theory formulated by Muzafer Sherif (1996), and Sherif (1998) which contends that hostility between two groups results from real or perceived conflicting goals, which generates intergroup competition. When groups are engaged in reciprocally competitive and frustrating activities of a zero-sum nature, each group will develop negative stereotypes about, and enmity towards the other group (the out-group) (cited in Onu 2002, 363). The foregoing made Owolabi (2003, 8) to posit that "the problem of the 'other' is simply the problem of how to manage individual or social relations, which is also a form of power relations leading to anxiety on domination and being dominated syndrome." Of course, the fear of domination by one religious group or another has contributed in no small way to the incidents of lethal violence between Christians and Muslims in most parts of Nigeria.

Hostility perception has created what Akamadu (2014) describes as the scars of our history as a nation since 1914. The state of the nation in which there is every day intergroup violence is occasioned by intolerance and tension between conflicting religion, economic and socio-political praxis and ideas (Adetolu 2013; Okolie-Osemene 2017). For instance, in 1991 in the United States, which has a (contentious) Protestant Christian majority, the Persian Gulf War was greeted by an arson attack on the Islamic Centre's mosque in Quincy, Massachusetts; residents of Milton teamed up to purchase a landed property that the Muslim community was planning to buy in 1992. Meanwhile in Yuba City, California, another uncompleted mosque was burned down on September 1, 1994 as a result of alleged involvement with the Muslims who had committed violent acts, including bombings against Christian areas (Adesina 2002, 67). In Kano State, religious cleavages have characterised the relationship between Christian Igbo migrants and the Muslim Kanawa (indigenes of Kano) with attendant intergroup conflicts that date back to pre-independence Nigeria (Albert 1991, 6). All these portray hostility perception which has characterised the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. No wonder why Danjibo (2012, 235) avers that "religion inevitably contributes to conflict in the society."

In their study on intergroup relations in Nigeria, Ogbogbo *et al* (2012, 1-3) assert that "since independence, intergroup relations (characterised by social consciousness, indifference towards others, protection of socio-cultural values in a competitive society etc) have remained within the matrix of suspicions and hostility." Yake (2015, 192) raises a fundamental question, that: "since both Islam and Christianity preach peace and have peace as one fundamental attribute, why then do we have so much chaos in northern Nigeria; why does it seem an almost impossible situation to resolve." The answer is not farfetched as the relations between both religions are enmeshed in hostility perception with violent actions. In addition, hostility manifests itself in various areas across the country, such as religious fighting, struggle for power, land grabbing disputes, communal clashes, and natural resource conflicts among others. Tensions from the foregoing are often heightened because, as noted by Williams (1994), the stakes are collective goods, such as categorical claims to prestige and political authority. Most religious health and political issues have become the bane of religious cohesion in the country. Stonawski *et al* (2016, p.8) assert that "fertility ideals have shifted towards smaller families among Christians and to a lesser extent also among Muslims in non-Sharia states." The menace of hostility perception (especially in the context of religion) which has scathed intergroup relations is one of the most malignant attributes of intergroup relations in the country. Hostility perception of the other is indeed a major driver of violent conflicts aimed at inflicting pain on others. Violent extremism can also be responsible for the inability of some sects to identify with others that do not share their religious views.

Religious Related Violence in the Polity: Involvement of Christians and Muslims

The fact that religious allegiance and practices contribute to the contextualisation and escalation of intergroup conflicts in Nigeria, they cannot be underplayed, especially a situation where religious issues become public concern. It is therefore not disputable that Christians and Muslims contribute to peace and conflict. The positive part of their contributions is the advocacy and peace-making steps to discourage violence, even though some of the members in both groups have contributed to the perpetration and escalation of lethal violence.

The incidents of religious lethal violence are conspicuous in Nigeria. Nigeria Watch database describes it as “religious fighting” which is one of the sources of violent deaths, apart from prevalent accidents, crime, economic issues, and political clashes. From early 1980s to 2000s over 48 cases of religious fighting were recorded in the country (Mgbachu and Onwuliri 2014, 105). It was also reported that between 1980 and 2004, 104 out of 178 reported clashes that occurred in Northern part of the country were related to religious violence (Nigeria Watch 2011, 21; Sani 2007, 292). Reports on religious violence arguably do not rely on any scientific database and cannot be cross-checked (Nigeria Watch 2011, 21). This is due to conflicting reports on deaths by government officials, the police, the media/journalists and worse still, the social media, which mostly dishes out live and sometimes unverified reports.

Notwithstanding, Nigeria Watch (2011, 21) posits that conflicts are described as religious when some of the protagonists are religious organisations, such as churches or mosques, as well as when stakeholders advocate a religious agenda. And this is apt considering the fact that most religious conflicts are generated and escalated by members of the groups, who are determined to protect their interests no matter how selfish and detrimental it may be to human security, public peace and stability. No wonder why Munir and Olojo (2015, 29) revealed that there were eight violent incidents of religious crisis – the Yan Shi’a and the Sufi brotherhood known as the Tijaniyya in some parts of Sokoto and Kebbi States including Gwadabawa, Gudu, Sakaba and Illela Local Government Areas – between 2006 and 2014.

The mutual suspicion and negative peace that greeted the division of Nigeria along three ethnic based regions – Hausa-Fulani (North), Yoruba (Western region) and Igbo (Eastern region) - as aggravated by the decision of the Action Group members to conduct a political campaign in support of Nigeria’s independence, proposed for in 1956 in Kano (North), which eventually made the Muslim Kanawa – the Kano indigenes of mainly Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality – to riot for four days in an Igbo dominated Sabon Gari, which climaxed in the death of 36 people and 241 wounded (Albert 1993, 13). From all indications, the Muslim youths have a proclivity for marching towards the residents and business anytime they are aggrieved over religious issues in which they perceive any wrongdoing by Christians.

It is noteworthy that when General Aguiyi Ironsi introduced the unification decree in 1966, there were mass protests on March 29 in Kano, in which over 200 Igbos were murdered by the rioters at Sabon Gari (Albert 1991, 15). It should be noted that the majority of the Igbos are Christians, adherents of Protestant and Orthodox churches. Obi (1991, 54) has argued that “the massacres which occurred in Kano, as had occurred in a dozen or so cities in the northern parts of Nigeria will continue until Nigeria defines itself.” This is because most times the security forces are caught unaware and hardly forestall the total breakdown of law and order until people are killed in such lethal violence.

The 1982 Muslim Students Society protested the Muslim-Christian conflict in October, 1982 over the location of an Anglican Church in Kano and led to the death of 44 people, while hundreds were killed in an evangelist, conversion-related conflict caused by Christian and Muslim students of the College of Education in Kafachan, Kaduna State in March 1987 and later (Mgbachu and Onwuliri 2014, 104; Isichei 1987). The fact that the Muslim students acted to stop a conversion process shows that they have the audacity to always confront their Christian counterparts first and mobilise Muslims in all states as far as protecting the Qur'an is concerned. Given that it is a sacred/holy book, they are ready to protect it at all cost.

In Christianity, the task of evangelism is highly critical and is one of the drivers of religious violence in Northern Nigeria. Most Pentecostal Churches are determined to evangelise in order to win more souls in the kingdom, yet they do not mind the dangers of ministering to extremist who may respond aggressively. This is probably due to the inability of some Christians to confirm the faith of the people they wish to “share the word” with. Of course most Muslims are now aware that this evangelism is responsible for church growth and successes recorded by many churches in the North since 1990. Such evangelism with the aim of Christianisation is usually carried out one on one and also society-wide.

For instance, the crusade by the Christian Association of Nigeria and the German-based Reinhard Bonnke Ministry aimed at “evangelising for church growth” with a theme tagged “Kano for Jesus,” which was perceived as provocative aggression by the Muslim Kanawa and culminated in a Muslim – Christian riot on the 14 of October, 1991 with the loss of hundreds of lives (Albert 1991, 17; Obi, 1991). Such fatalities showed the atmosphere of negative peace which made most Christians in the area to close off their community in order to protect themselves. This ugly trend of sudden riots in the North made most Southern Christians avoid having too many property in case of violence that may occasion the need to relocate.

Indeed, Northern Nigeria has also been a victim of misinterpretation by Nigerians and outsiders. The “misrepresentation of the region by many (both within and outside the country) calling the north, the Hausa-Fulani north or the categorization of all northerners as Hausas/Muslims has brought a lot of problems to the region” (Yake 2015, 193). It is noteworthy that even the local and foreign media have rather aggravated this complexity with little regard towards conflict-sensitive journalism, as they usually refer to the divide as the Muslim north and the animist Christian south.

This apparent misrepresentation of northern Nigeria as a monolithic Muslim enclave has also contributed to the resurgence of violent conflicts involving Christians and Muslims in all parts of Nigeria – what this article refers to as nationwide violence targeted at adherents. This misconception is responsible for intra-market conflicts and associated arson in some states where traders assume that everyone from the north is either Hausa/Fulani and/or Muslim. It is a major source of reprisal attacks in most states in the Southeast geopolitical zone, especially in Abia, Anambra and Imo State where most Igbo indigenes that are predominantly Christians carried out reprisal attack on Muslim communities in the states (generally called Ama Huasa ie Hausa Quarters). In Aba (Abia State) and Onitsha (Anambra State), each time there is religious crisis in the north, most Muslims and even non-Muslim Northerners immediately leave the towns in droves without any delay to avoid being massacred. The non-Muslim Northerners that do not wish to migrate to the north are forced to remain indoors and avoid public spaces to escape the wrath of aggrieved Igbo youths whose relatives may have fallen victim of religious violence in the north. The militia-like response to such scenarios by youths in the Southeast is like what Albert (1993, 17) described in the case of North, that “the Igbo and Yoruba formed militia groups and hit-squads around the outer ring of the Sabon Gari settlement to defend it against the Hausa-Fulani attackers.”

It is only when security forces especially soldiers are deployed by the authorities that such situations can be put under control, with the atmosphere of negative peace manifesting for some weeks and sometimes months. For instance, between 1999 and 2002, some towns in the Southeast experienced reprisal attacks after the killing of some Igbos (Christians) in the North, and in the process many Muslims in Aba were dragged out and killed in a protest-like atmosphere which was later controlled by security operatives. All locations, markets, shops, offices, houses, buildings, streets and public spaces occupied by northerners or Muslims were rounded and invaded by protesting Aba youth, who killed any suspected or identified Muslim in the process. In the National Institute for Nigerian Languages Aba, it took the intervention of the senior staff and the security men on duty to make distress calls to the police, who arrived at the premises of the institution. The police successfully drove all Muslims/northerners who were members of academic staff to Umuahia, the state capital where they stayed in police safety until all were taken to their homes in the north.¹ Before then, the principal officers of the Institute played a remarkable human rights protection role by evacuating the Muslims (Northerners from Adamawa, Bauchi among others) from one corner of the compound to another in search of a safer area, as the aggrieved were already at the gate, in order to move them closer to the transport unit where a vehicle was already waiting before the arrival of police officers. At that time, most residents were already pointing accusing fingers at some of the principal officers for hiding Muslims whose co-adherents attacked Southerners. Some youths had attempted scaling through the fence to gain access into the Institute, while the Northerners were seriously apprehensive of the imminent danger ahead.² Unfortunately, only one staff returned to Aba, while others remained in their home states where they decided to settle permanently in order to avoid recurrence of the ugly and seemingly inhuman experience. All these scenarios were driven by hostility perception. A Ghanaian shoemaker at Umuokahia Village in Aba called Mohamed who was generally seen as a Muslim, had to repeatedly inform people especially his customers that he was not an Hausa man from northern Nigeria to avoid the consequences of such misconception.

Notably, the misrepresentation was responsible for the 2011 post-presidential election violence in which hundreds of Nigerians were killed, especially suspected southerners. It is on record that April 17 and 19 of 2011, hundreds of lives were lost due to the political victory of a Christian, which was unwelcomed by youths in the North. For the records, Muslim youths reacted violently because of the fact that people were allowed to rig elections for Goodluck Jonathan without encumbrances yet corps members mostly from the south who were ad-hoc staff of INEC were trying to insist on the rules in the north. This according to Nigeria Watch (2011, 19) “had more to do with the frustration of the Muslim North against the Christian South after the election of a president hailing from the Niger Delta.” Although some northerners, especially those in the then ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party, were also victims of the incident, the majority of those affected were southerners, mainly Christians, including women and children. While some were raped in the process, others were killed. Unfortunately, some of the people serving the country in the National Youth Service were also raped.³ Many journalists had to scamper for safety by travelling down to the south or staying in military barracks in order to avoid being attacked by the irate protesters. The Red Cross in Nigeria reported that more than 40, 000 people were displaced in the North. Fearing reprisal attacks as usual, Muslims in Christian areas of southern Nigeria, especially the Southeast, had to seek refuge in military barracks because the majority of their relatives had died in the north. The violence that greeted the elections can best be described as the politics of religion rather than the separation of religion from the electoral process. According to Awowole-Browne (2011, 6-7), 520 people were killed, 165 churches burnt, 53 mosques burnt, and 1,442 houses destroyed. The fact is that whenever there is religious violence, the figures are often underreported for reasons of peace journalism and to prevent reprisals, meaning that only the affected families and communities can give the actual number of their relatives that died.

Commenting on the incident through a nationwide broadcast, former President Goodluck Jonathan stated: “the acts of mayhem are sad reminders of the events which plunged our country into 30 months of an unfortunate civil war, enough is enough...the protesters are ‘misguided elements’ who do not share in the spirit of our democratic achievement.” Also, then-Archbishop Mathew Manoso of the Kaduna Catholic Archdiocese described the society as militarized mainly due to the fact that the military is politicized along ethnic and religious lines. The military also sent soldiers to quell riots, who took their pound of flesh relying on ethnic and religious sentiments (JDPC, 2011). Such actions showed unprofessionalism among the security forces and are not done in the spirit of nation building.

Nigeria’s most dreaded sect – Boko Haram⁴ - is also one of the most feared terrorist groups in Africa. This group has consistently capitalised on religious issues to inflict sorrow on families and institutions across the country. At the height of their attacks, no week passed without reports of casualties affecting both the rich and poor, including Muslims and Christians, thereby raising questions of the consistency of their ideology and moral standing as a religious group. The group’s *modus operandi* have been characterised by attacks of security checkpoints, attacks on churches and mosques, market bombings, attacks on schools,⁵ and tertiary institutions⁶, motor parks, plazas, highways, camouflage and even the use of female suicide bombers, which is a recent strategy.

Media houses have also recorded casualties, losing structures and personnel, as well as the United Nations Office in Abuja. Sports centres and other recreational places have not been forgotten by the group, which wields weapons that are sometimes more sophisticated than those of the security forces.⁷ According to Nwogu (2012, 45) the use of a Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) was operated by a suicide bomber at the Headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force in 2011; a similar attack on the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja the same year further showed the group's sophistication in attacking international and domestic security targets. There was hardly any attack that the group did not claim responsibility through their leader's media message, although their command structure has seemed unclear several times, after the alleged death of their leader, Abubakar Shekau. Such attacks reflect what Sampson Isaac describes as "extreme violence that is often justified as 'holy warfare' (2012, 104). It exemplifies what Wikström and Treiber (2009, 78) posit – that when acts of violence are perpetrated, the main intention is not to physically harm the targets, but to serve as moral actions guided by rules about what it is right or wrong to do in a particular circumstance.

Such attacks have created fear in public spaces like parks, markets, and stadiums, so much so that people are afraid of becoming the next victims each time they find themselves in high vulnerable points, especially in North-central and North-eastern states. Attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram did not spare any sector, class or religion, as there is hardly any group among the three main religions that has not been under the bout of the group's insurgence violence. So far, the group has been able to combine insurgent tactics and terrorism, with civilians and security forces recording more casualties.

Table 1: The Classification of Religious Lethal Violence

S/No	Geopolitical zone where recurrent	Religious issue	Pattern of escalation	Protagonists and nature of intervention
1	North and South	The politics of religion in the country	Protests with chants	Almajiri, Muslim youths including the Muslim Kanawa
2	North	In connection with the abuse of deity	Media war and protests	Youth leaders, Clerics
3	South and sometimes North	Reprisal attacks	When reports of attack are received, Muslims or Christians are alerted on the need to relocate	Igbo Youths, Northern indigenes (Hausa-Fulani), Southerners (Yoruba/Igbo), Muslim leaders, Security forces,
4	North in response to any religious matter	Global perspective of religious issue	Mass protests with chants and roadblocks, attack on strangers (Southerners)	Youths, Entire Muslim community, Southerners
5	Mainly in the North	Religious symbols and manhandling of the sacred book	Request for unreserved apology from the accused	Muslim Clerics, Youth leaders, entire Muslim community, non-Muslims

Source: Compiled by the authors from observation and media reports

As table 1 demonstrates, there is hardly any religious issue that does not involve many protagonists, leaving the government as a shadow party, because most government officials are either Christians or Muslims. Most of these violent incidents are usually greeted by internal displacement, destruction and abandonment of property for some years. Notably, religious groups are involved in lethal violence in three ways: (a) directly as perpetrators (b) as protagonists or shadow parties, which can involve information dissemination about religious issues without conflict sensitivity in that regard (c) as targets or victims.

Religious Violence and Human Rights Violation

In terms of human rights implications of violence, some scholars have noted that religious groups in Nigeria have been involved in clashes and skirmishes either as an aggressor or in defense (Wariboko 2015; Cilliers 2015; Ilo 2014). This has rather created a precarious situation where religious groups struggle to protect the rights of their adherents in the country. Religion inspires an upsurge of violence mainly because the adherents are disposed to acts of violence.

The religious violence has devalued human life and subjects it to wastage. Notably, Albert (1993, 19) has cautioned that “concrete solutions must be found for ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, otherwise urban dwellers, whether indigenous or strangers will learn to take the law into their hands.” It is obvious that a society that allows citizens to take laws into their hands under the guise of religious interests cannot escape the consequences of religious lethal violence that has the capacity to plunge the state into socio-political instability. Such lawlessness can start motivating arms to be proliferated in the name of self-defense to fend threats from “hostile neighbours”. If all adherents of religious groups comprehend the following statement by Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa’ ad Abubakar, human rights abuses by religious groups would be abated: “there is no conflict between Christians and Muslims, between Islam and Christianity” (*Vanguard*, 27 December 2011).

It is evident that the human rights implications of violence between different faith adherents cannot be underplayed. The inability to muster up courage to tolerate people outside one’s religion during conflicts rather compounds the possibility of preventing the abuse of such rights like the right to life, freedom of movement, freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom from physical violence, and the right to access education and desired food, among others. The foregoing manifests itself most times during religious violent conflicts, which usually escalate to the extent that both Christians and Muslims have mapped out areas - volatile areas, isolated places, and no-go areas – in the form of hotspots of the violence. These hotspots may simultaneously be safe for one particular group and high risk for another. This is the case in some parts of the Plateau and Kaduna States, where ethnic conflicts turn into religious violence that divide the residents with attendant negative peace.

Similarly, the upsurge of violence affects the freedom of movement and access to foodstuffs, even when needed due to states of emergency; the use of violent weapons to attack innocent people leave women and children more vulnerable to attendant internal displacements. This ugly trend has created fear among Christians living in the midst of Muslims, and Muslims residing in Christian-dominated places because most times, before security operatives intervene, some would have already been killed. This is one of the reasons why some southerners are sceptical about their relatives residing in or picking up appointments in states that are commonly regarded as the “far” North. This apprehension is also a concern to northerners who have relations residing in the south.

Conclusion

This article examined the nature of religious groups’ involvement in fatalities usually occasioned by religious conflicts between adherents of the groups. Observations show that Northern part of Nigeria and the South-eastern region have always been the flashpoints of religious violence, even before the advent of the Boko Haram sect. However, the Northern part of the country remains the hotbed of violence while the Southeast only records such incidents in the form of reprisal.

The main observation in this regard is that Christians and Muslims have recorded more fatalities than different traditional religious groups within the African Traditional Religion (ATR), which does not even confront others directly. Although most people practicing ATR wage spiritual warfare in the form of juju, the reason why ATR is not associated with much violence is because it is not competing with other religions. Unfortunately, the scale of violence contradicts the principles of these religions, which uphold universal rights in their sacred books; these principles especially uphold peaceful co-existence and value for human life, as God remains the sole giver of life that must not be taken away by man. Religious violence has hampered the religions' role in galvanising resources for nation building in the country.

The available options for the eradication of religious lethal violence are conspicuous. Given that all the groups have spiritual leaders, it is suggested that they embark on a reorientation to enable their members to comprehend the necessity of peaceful co-existence between all the regions as well as the significance of religious tolerance with the aim of curbing related incitements that climax in lethal violence.

In essence, while inter-religious tolerance is encouraged in the country, Nigeria's Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and their Islamic counterparts, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) and the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) – the umbrella bodies of Islamic groups in the country – should begin to initiate strategies to sanction their adherents who incite religious violence through partnership with law enforcement agencies; this is because anarchy is inevitable where the actions of men are not regulated, including religious and domestic settings.

Given that the role of religious leaders is sacrosanct in guiding their adherents and encouraging an appreciation of other religious groups, as well as the truism that the spiritual controls the physical, leaders should consider promoting, as this article suggests, inter-religious marriages, conduct seminars, peace education and respect for the religion of the other, coupled with state sanctions for those who obstruct the peace, to prevent religious violence.

Endnotes

1. During this period, the authors were informed about the incident by residents around the National Institute for Nigerian Languages where the police carried all northerners away to Umuahia.
2. Key Informant Interview with a Participant observer during the incident.

3. A female youth corps member who was in Maiduguri during this period said that she was raped by ten teenagers who were younger than she. Her parents, she confessed, had objected to her going for the programme in the North. They had planned to influence the posting to the southern part of the country. She rejected this, which made them not to want to associate with her. She said after giving her life to Christ, she was managing to put those things behind her and was helped by her pastors through psychological healing.

4. Obviously, since 2009, Boko Haram has killed more than any known militant group in the country. This is apt when compared to all the Niger Delta militant groups which have not shifted their targets from oil companies. Boko Haram uses bombs to attack civilians but MEND and others have not left the creeks to attacks churches, markets, schools, among others, which made Boko Haram to have cause for more lethal incidents.

5. The 2014 attack on a secondary school in Chibok, Borno states led to the formation of the Bring Back Our Girls movement. The group is notorious for abducting young females who are forced into marriage with the insurgents. Some are sometimes raped or killed according to media reports.

6. The bombing of ABU, Zaria in Kaduna state, specifically in a church during service will ever remain evergreen in the minds of the survivors and families of victims. It is remarkable that some lecturers were also killed in the attack. Also, in 2017, some lecturers died after multiple suicide bombings in University of Maiduguri.

7. There have been reports on the issue of weaponry and how Soldiers complained about inadequate and substandard weapons as some of the factors responsible for their inability to defeat Boko Haram, Shekau's Boys. This was also confirmed to the authors by an Immigration Officer actively involved in the counter-insurgency as he rated motivation very low and discouraging. He stated that even villagers mocked at them for putting on what they saw as fake or substandard bullet proof vests. The successful attack on some soldiers in ambush and direct confrontation reaffirms the above claims. For instance, a Major the authors met in 2012 during SPSP conference on Managing Security in a globalised world at the NAPC, Jaji was reportedly killed inside his APC in Northeast when Boko Haram bombed the APC. Some of these may have contributed to the mutiny incident in Maiduguri over the death of soldiers and series of ambushes against them.

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