

## RELIGIOUS MILITANCY AND SELF-ASSERTION IN NIGERIA: A PHENOMENAL ANALYSIS.

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### **Abstract**

*This paper recognizes that the religious landscape in Nigeria is characterized by competition for dominance and self-assertion by contending religious groups. Though, there are various identifiable religious groups, it is important to observe that three leading religious groups are easily distinguishable. They include African Indigenous Religion (AIR), Christianity and Islam. Therefore, this paper investigates and appraises how these religious groups have used militancy, whether inter or intra, in their quest to gain supremacy and other socio-political gains. This paper differs from the typical narrative of questioning militancy only in the context of Christianity and Islam; thereby making it look as if they are the only ones in contention. In order to show its novelty, the paper includes AIR in the discourse. In order to situate the ideological and theological justification for the use of militancy, the paper analyzes the hierarchy of relationships and taxonomy in the geo-religious space. To ensure that the paper achieves the objectives it has set for itself, it uses the qualitative aspect of the approach includes high level interviews and focus group discussions.*

**Keywords:** militancy, religious identity, completion, violence.

### **Introduction**

There is agreement in literature that all religions have both violent and peaceful tendencies (Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Chapman, 2007; Fox, 1999). It is against this background that Sampson (2012) observes that religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilisations. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for

violence, hence its indication in some literature as a 'double-edged sword' (Maregere [2011](#), Obasi [2009](#)).

From time immemorial, religious bigots have attempted to legitimise violence, in the name of God. Contemporary acts of extreme violence such as terrorist attacks are often justified as 'holy warfare'. In the past two decades, religion has been at the centre of the most violent conflicts around the world, thereby gaining notoriety as one of the prime security challenges confronting the world in the wake of the Cold War (Juergensmeyer [2000](#), Abu-Nimer [2000](#)). A study conducted in Spain has found that societies that are divided along religious lines are more prone to intense and prolonged conflict than those divided by political, territorial and ethnic differences (Reynal-Querol [2002](#)). Perhaps this reality explains the prime position that religious violence occupies on Nigeria's security pyramid. As we shall see in this article, religiously motivated violence has plagued the country more than any other security challenge.

Kpughe (2017) argues that global religions such as Christianity and Islam, have ideologies and doctrines that are so diverse and complex that justification for both violence and peace can be found within their traditions. As such, virtually all religions have at different times and places been associated either with conflict or peace. In this work, the concern is the link between religion and violence. This view is predicated on what Juergensmeyer (2003) says. According to him, all global religions have a violent perspective.

From the foregoing, it is understandable why religious identity has been a keg of gun-powder that has umpteenth times exploded in the proverbial gun of violence in Nigeria. Worried by this, Agbiboa (2012) avers that since Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999, religious identity politics and attendant violence have assumed historically unprecedented proportions. Providing an existential meaning of the religious landscape of Nigeria, Ake (1992) says that religion in Nigeria is politicised, politics is religionised and religious groups tend toward becoming political formations whose struggles with each other and competing interests may be more conflictual due to the exclusivity of religious group membership.

Intriguingly, Ehusani (2004) captures the interplay between religion and politics and draws a useful difference between the politics of religion and the actual practice of religion in Nigeria. In congruence with Ehusani, Appleby (2000) observes that it is the politics of religion that has brought upon us so much trouble. But why does religion seem to need violence to the extent of having militants; and why will militants use religion to rationalize or justify their havoc?

Meanwhile, it is important to mention that two out of the three dominant religions are foreign and have different entry dates into the two major regions of Nigeria: North and south. Only AIR is autochthonous. While the presence of Christianity predates Islam in southern Nigeria, reverse is the case in the north. Islam had its presence in Kanem Borno and Sokoto axis before the arrival of Christianity. Commenting on Islam in Kanem Borno, Falola (1998) reveals that the introduction of Islam to Northern Nigeria beginning in the eleventh century AD at Kanem-Borno was largely through the peaceful activities of Islamic traders, scholars, and clerics from North Africa. However, the cherished legacy of peace was lost through the activities of overzealous missionaries who embarked on forcibly proselytization, often using the instrumentality of militancy.

### **Statement of the problem**

The battle for supremacy and domination among religions in Nigeria is a common place phenomenon. This is particularly common with Islam, Christianity and African Indigenous Religion (AIR). Nigeria's socio-economic landscape has remained the battle ground for this cantankerous struggle for supremacy and control. In order to gain and consolidate control over others, religions in Nigeria have often than not, resorted to the use of militancy. It goes without much scratching of imagination that there is an established correlation between militancy and violence.

This is because militants, as the name implies, are individuals who are combat ready. Thus, they are often tools for unleashing violence and mayhem. Unfortunately, religious militancy comes from religions that preach peace. The contradiction of preaching peace on one hand and raising an army of militants on the other hand by religions, is outstandingly curious; leaving many questions that are begging for answers. For instance, does religious militancy still portray regions as harbingers of peace? What is the sociological impact of religious militancy? In what ways has religious militancy promote or hindered peaceful co-existence? These questions are not only problematic but important in the interrogation of the role of religious militancy in the quest for self assertion.

### **Methodology**

This paper adopts the simple methodology of qualitative approach of research. Thus, it makes use of secondary sources such as books and other printed materials (online and offline). These materials are used to provide contextual analysis of the issues discussed in this paper. Furthermore, high level interviews and focus group discussions are held in order to validate or invalidate the views canvassed by online

and offline materials. These interviews constitute the primary sources used for the study.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The term Religion: Religion is exceedingly contested term in scholarship. Thus, there are varying definitions of religion. Some of these definitions resemble, while others are completely in disagreement with one another. This suggests that the concept of religion cannot be boxed in a single definition. Consequently, divergent conceptualization of the term proliferates. In order to establish how complex, it is to define religion, I will recourse to Martineau, cited by Alston (1976).

According to him, “religion is the belief in an ever-living God” (p.143). While definitions of this type highlight something important about religions – the undeniable fact that propositional beliefs typically play a significant role within them – nevertheless, they take no account of other, equally prominent, features of religion. They fail to recognize, for example, the centrality of “religious” emotions like piety, the importance of faith, and the key role of traditional practices. Yet each would seem to constitute typical features of many religions. A further problem is that defining religion in terms of belief that has a particular kind of object, such as God, entails that certain belief systems which are routinely regarded as religions – Theravada, Buddhism, for example – would have to be classed as non-religious; an entailment which strikes many as counter-intuitive (Harrison, 2006).

Nevertheless, in this work, the author aligns himself with the two definitions of religion offered by Bangura (1994) that captures both the material and the spiritual perspectives of the term. According to him, “in a material sense religion refers to religious establishments (i.e. institutions and officials) as well as to social groups and movements whose *raison d’être* are to be found within religious concerns. In the spiritual sense, religion pertains to models of social and individual behaviour that help believers to organize their everyday lives. In this sense, religion has to do with the idea of transcendence, i.e. supernatural realities; with sacredness, i.e. language and practice that organize the world in terms of what is deemed holy; and with ultimacy, i.e. the ultimate conditions of existence” (p.26).

The definition by Bangura is adopted because it covers the parameters of dominant religious bodies in Nigeria, namely African Indigenous Religion (AIR), Christianity and Islam. The three religions have in common both the material and the spiritual perspectives that Bangura’s definition acknowledges. For instance, on the material plane, AIR, Christianity and Islam have Shrines, Churches and Mosques (in that order) that are often attacked by religious militants during

violent conflicts. On the religious dimension, the three religions concede to supernatural realities (in their varying names) for that matter.

**Militancy:** According to Fearon and Laitin (2003) militancy is a low-level military conflict characterised by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from a rural base. For Essoh (2018) a group becomes militant when it engages in the use of force or strong pressure to achieve social or political change. Militancy also refers to the behaviour or attitudes of people who are active in trying to bring about political change, often in ways that some people find unacceptable. Therefore, militants see violence as a sacramental act or divine duty to be executed in direct response to some theological demand (Hoffman 2006), as opposed to a tactical means to a political end.

From the foregoing, I will liken religious militants to an armed group that is engaged in combat or fighting or that resorts to violence to attain certain objectives. This, according to Ikelegbe and Okumu (2010) presupposes first that it is a civil force or a privately organised group of armed persons and second that it is largely an informally organised force whose structures, hierarchies, commands, procedures and processes are usually not fixed and rigid. Third, it is generally mobilised voluntarily on the basis of some common identity challenges or general concerns and threats.

Deductively, one can identify the essential characteristics of religious militants as irregular forces (outside regular military forces), informal (not usually formal state militaries or paramilitaries), private forces (paying allegiance to a particular religious identity), illegal (not sanctioned by law), and clandestine (support, funding, arms and management are often secret and outside the public view). The purpose or goals of religious militants usually relate to projecting or protecting, and fighting for and defending certain religious or related interests that may concern power and resource struggles, security and safety.

### **Militancy in AIR: Fanning the Burning flames of violence**

No religious group in Nigeria is insulated from violence either as perpetrator or victim. Buttressing this view, Sampson (2012, p. 9) says that “although often marginalised, traditional religion ... is not by any means insulated from religious violence”. In their explanation of the violence between adherents of AIR and other religious groups in Nigeria, Osaghae and Suberu (2005, p. 11) reveal that “masquerade activities associated with traditional religion have been a major source of conflicts”.

Contextualizing this existential phenomenon, Oyegbade (2021, p. 28) reports that “a leader of Qamarudeen Society of Nigeria in Osun state, Alhaji Moshood Salawudeen was killed and 14 others were seriously injured when some traditionalists attacked Muslims in Osogbo”. According to him, traditionalists during their *Egungun* (masquerade) festival were drinking and dancing in front of a Mosque at Oluode Aranyin area of Osogbo and Muslims at the mosque attacked them. The traditionalists immediately mobilized “and later came back with guns and cutlasses and attacked the Muslims, injuring many among which were women and children” (Oyegbade, 2021, p. 28).

In a related development, Olatunji (2021) reports that *Oro* (masquerade) festival became bloody. He explains that “violence broke out when the traditionalists, who had imposed a curfew because of their *oro* festival clashed with the Muslim faithful, who were observing their evening prayer” (p.9). Sampson (2012) also accounts that on 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1999, there was a violent clash between Yoruba traditional worshippers and Hausa groups in Sagamu. The crisis originated from the killing of a Hausa woman by the *Oro* Masqueraders for violating traditional rites.

It needs to be pointed out that all the foreign religions had cause for violent conflict with members of AIR. For instance, early missionaries of Islam too had attacked votaries of AIR. Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio and his allies considered rulers of Hausa states as votaries of AIR or at best, persons who were syncretic than Islamic. Thus, Bar (2019) observes that Othman and his group were becoming increasingly exasperated by the surrounding African traditional way of life. Therefore, they accused the rulers of Hausa land of heathen practices. According to him “life within the Hausa kingdom generally continued to be in contrast with Islamic ideal” (p.83). These were the turn of events that gave rise to the movement of Islamic reformists, championed by Shehu ‘Uthman dan Fodio of the Muslim jihad of 1804-1808, sometimes referred to as the Fulani or Sokoto Jihad in literature.

This notwithstanding, historians defer on their interpretation of the final events leading to the declaration of the jihad by ‘Uthman dan Fodio. Hiskett (1962) suggests that Uthman and his companions, together with their students had thought they could reform Islam in Hausaland through religious discourse or arguments. However, they later realized that this approach of dialogue (intellectual religious argument) alone was not yielding the desired outcome for Islam. They then resorted to the use of force, which in the end gave them control of most of Hausaland.

Murray (1967) believes, however, that 'Uthman dan Fodio and his followers only resorted to jihad as a last option in view of the aggressive treatment they received from the Hausa kings. But for the Waldman (1965), Othman and his followers sought to destroy (what they considered) pagan and syncretic practices, which Hiskett (1962) argues were in reality, to Hausa people, associated with their indigenous religion. Thus, it is obvious that the jihad cannot be disassociated from *Tajdid* (religious renewal) as ideological motivation. Re-Islamisation agenda was a motivating factor in activities that confronted the pre-jihad Hausa states that were seen as 'half Islamic states' that comprised of people who were Muslim but the state was half Islamic, at best. Hence the need to make it *kasamusulmi* (abode of Muslims), using every means, including militancy.

In order to perfect their militant quest, the Jihadists created *ribāt*, where soldiers were kept. Zehnle (2020) explains that originally, *ribāt* designated the gathering of horses for war among pre-Islamic Arabic clans. The concept was borrowed by the Jihadists and with *ribāt*, militants were camped and trained in the art of warfare. Again, due to dearth of documentation during this era, it is near impossible to have the exact statistics of those who were killed, property destroyed and how many persons were tortured and imprisoned during the period of the Jihad.

However, a focal group discussion in Zaria with octogenarians gives an idea of the fearsome havoc that the Jihad wrecked in northern Nigeria and beyond. One of the participants said his grandfather told him that the encounter of the Jihadists in Gobir with the locals left vultures eating corpses in the field for days. This reveals that sizeable number of people were killed and unlike the normal culture of burying the dead, this was not done. Probably the battle was too fierce to allow for this.

The focal group discussion in Tsafe town of Tsafe Local Government Area of Zamfara state with 5 Islamic clerics further reveals that grain barns were burnt; women and children were molested and forcible marriage became a common place experience. By way of deduction, gender-based violence was prevalent as the militants fighting the Jihad saw themselves at a point as outlaws. This gave birth to power tussle among the rank and file of the fighting force. The militants were no longer abiding by Islamic tenets of prosecuting a war. The culminating effects is that the unruly conduct left a damaging reputation of some of the key actors.

The followers of AIR have continued to be at the receiving end of the socio-political contest in Nigeria. They are hardly respected as they are being brandished as *Kafir*

(infidel) by the Muslims and pagan by Christians. Thus, they have often played the victimhood card in the civic and political space. It is important to also mention that votaries of the AIR too have perpetrated violence. A case in view is the *ombatse* group that wreaked havoc on unsuspecting citizens in Nasarawa state.

Chukwuma and Clement (2014, p. 13) says “Ombatse is a native trado-spiritual organization for the Eggon people of Nasarawa state, Nigeria”. While Chukwuma and Clement (2014) view Ombatse as a trado-spiritual organization, Vaaseh (2014) disputes and argues that the group is an ethnic militia with a militant agenda. According to him, “Ombatse militia is one of the militia groups that has stagnated the pursuit of good governance germane for Nigeria’s democratic consolidation” (p. 2). On his part, Olayoku (2017) describes Ombatse as a vigilante group whose mission is to enforce spiritual and ethical standards.

He explains further that “the peculiarity of the Ombatse group’s emergence is in its intervention to provide spiritual and ethical security as contained in the code of conduct of its members. For instance, members are not expected to participate in any of the ills that the group abhors, which include witchcraft, wizardry, murder, theft, rumour-mongering, secret society, adultery, blood rituals and theft. Participation in any of these destroys the potency of the *Ozho*, and makes members vulnerable to attacks” (p.9).

Irrespective of its anatomy, the worrisome characteristic of Ombatse is its penchant for violence. This is because between 2012 and 2014, the militant group had killed more than 100 people in its conflicts with different groups in the state. In single violent encounter between the group and security operatives on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Alako village that defined its killing spree, Jamestone Foundation (2013) reports that Ombatse members claimed a total of 95 policemen and state security agents were killed, while police have admitted to 30, with seven still missing. Most media reports suggested a figure in the range of 55 to 65 dead, but a nurse reported a local hospital had received 90 corpses and was awaiting the arrival of another 17.

Police later revealed that four policemen were still being held hostage by the Ombatse ((Daily Trust, 2013). With this dexterity in killing of security operatives among others, it is obvious that Ombatse as form of AIR has destroyed its proverbial shrine of peace and regrettably sharpened its breadknife of violence. From the foregoing, it is obvious that AIR is a victim as well as perpetrator of violence using the instrumentality of militants.

**Militancy in Christianity: From the temple of peace to the ashes of devastation**



The early encounter of Christianity and AIR was characterized by violence. The Christian Missionaries had course to resort to violence, using military wing of the colonialists, while votaries of AIR used their community level armies to counter Christian missionaries and their colonial collaborators. This is probably why citing Ayandele, Babalola (1988) avers that Christianity seemed a much greater disturber of the African society and by implication AIR.

In a focal group discussion with 4 Christian octogenarians and 2 votaries of AIR in Akwanga town of Akwanga Local Government, participants revealed that Christian missionaries who came to Endehuhill, which is now in Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, had brutal encounter with adherents of AIR that resulted in the death of many, including Delta British Force, which the colonialists drafted as militants of the missionaries.

Key informants in Ughelli, Delta state reveal that the adversarial disposition of Christian missionaries towards AIR was what gave birth to the violence between them and members of AIR. In some parts of Nigeria, traditional rulers resolved not to allow Christian missionaries into their communities. For instance, Anyandele (1966) says that King Jaja of Opobo was one of those powerful rulers who forbade missionaries from entering his kingdom in order not to distort his culture. He described the advent of the missionaries as British factor for cultural, political, religious and economic imperialism. Determined on preserving indigenous religion and institutions at all costs, even when it began to show that he was resisting the irresistible, he spared no effort to oppose the Christianization of the Niger Delta.

Another contentious issue of violent conflict was total regard and disdain for the culture and tradition of the Africans. Providing contextual analysis of the situation, Clinton (20119) says that in Anambra state (one of the major Igbo states in Nigeria), *eke* (the royal python) is regarded as a totem and nobody can deliberately kill it without incurring the ostracism of the people. If an *eke* killer is not killed by the mob, he definitely faces social ostracism, and when he eventually dies, he will not be given an honorable burial under traditional religion.

What most early Christians in Anambra area did was to kill the *eke Idemili* (the sacred python belonging to Idemili deity) deliberately and use them as food. Not only that, they killed and ate this totem animal, they put its head inside match boxes which when picked up and opened by the traditional religionists, they had to offer special sacrifices to cleanse themselves from the abomination because they had seen the head of *eke* (Royal python). This brought the first physical conflict

between the traditional religionists and the Christians in that part of Igbo nation. (Clinton, 2019). Unfortunately, there is no statistical data of how many persons died in such circumstances.

Furthermore, massive destruction/demolition of shrines and sacred groves was another conflict area. Perhaps, this explains why Wotogbe-Weneka (2013) opines, “the huge resource that would otherwise be generated through tourism industry which is encouraged by government nowadays is lost through reckless destruction of sacred groves” (p. 10). Most of these groves house costly masks that were traded by barter for a piece of singlet, sugar, or mirror to the missionaries, which today are displayed for tourist attraction in many European museums. Christianity believes that God is worshipped in the church not in groves, and as such, wasting the groves.

### **Taxonomy of Islamic Space: Situating Perceptions and Reactions of Islamic Militants**

There are different categories of persons that make up the socio-political and religious space in Islam. Normally, the Muslim *umma* are duty bound to preserve peace, welfare and wellbeing among themselves, first and foremost. However, depending on one’s space and relationship on the hierarchy of Islamic religious space, violence against a person may be permitted, allowed or disallowed. If permitted or allowed, then militants can be used.

Rahim *et al* (2015) say that the Islamic Sharia has divided the political world into two main blocks: *Darul-Islam* and *Darul-Harb*. The former concept of *Darul-Islam* means the home of Islam; Islamic state. The latter *Darul-Harb* is the home of War; the non-Muslim state in war with Muslims. Ahmed, (2008) is of the view that there are two religious scholastic groups on the definition of *Darul-Islam*. According to him, the first cluster of scholars, mostly Hanafites, believe in the Territorial Principle of Islam that says that every Muslim state has its own respective limited jurisdictional territory and that one Muslim state must not have any jurisdictional interference in another Muslim state’s affairs for whatsoever reason.

The second group of scholars believes in the Passive Nationality Principle (PNP). Those that are proponents of this school of thought include: The Shafite, Hanbalite, Malikite and many other schools of thought. According to this view there is no territorial concept in Islam. In their opinion, all the Muslims are one nation. Therefore, there should be one caliph over them and the entire world. Akehurst (1998) observes that there are a lot of complexities in both the ideologies but each one provides appropriate arguments in the support of their respective views.

Another intriguing group mentioned in Islamic religious landscape is what is referred to as *Darul-Kufr*: Meaning the home of Atheism. Some scholars such as Rahim *et al* (2015) argue that all the non-Muslim states are included in this cluster. Accordingly, this cluster is further divided into two subgroups i.e. the non-Muslim states in war with Muslims and the non-combating non-Muslim states.

According to Islamic Sharia the citizens of *Darul-Harb* are the perfect enemies of Islam and during a militant encounter they should be killed when and wherever they are found and this is the very real interpretation of the Quranic verse in which the Almighty Allah has commanded the Muslims to fight and kill the atheists when and wherever they are found but the militant religious clerics generalize the verse and apply it on all non-Muslims (Rahim *et al*, 2015).

There are some other classifications of non-Muslim states. These include individuals or states who are in contract or any type of agreement with an individual Muslim or Muslim state. According to Rahim *et al* (2015) such status of states or individuals are placed in the category of *Darul-Muwadi,ah* or *Darul-Mu,ahidah* (the home of agreement; with whom an individual Muslim or a state has a treaty of peace). The other category is that of the *Amaan* (the non-Muslim individual who formally has been in agreement with a Muslim state for entering and living in peace within an Islamic state) and the individual who seeks *Amaan* is called a *Musta, amin*.

The third category in this respect is that of *Ahl-e-Zimmah*. Azad (1971) reveals that they are the non-Muslim people who are the permanent citizens of a Muslim state. They will have to pay the *Jizya* (a tax which is received from these people for exempting them from military services). The present-day scholars lift the burden of *Jizya* from them because they present their military services and state loyalty to the state's military.

In the religious space of *Darul-Islam*, killing is permitted basically in the context of *Takfir*. According to Fishman and Moghadom (2010, 13) *Takfir* is "the process by which radical Islamic groups excommunicate other Muslims, thereby rendering them subject of attack". *Takfir* is the process of declaring an individual, group or a government as apostate. By this, it provides the religious justification to attack such persons or institutions. The earliest noticeable case of *Takfir* was the Othman Dan Fodio jihad. Beyond the religious puritanism that the movement claimed was also the burning desire to achieve political goal as events eventually showed.

Another classic case of Islamic religious militancy is *Maitatsine*. The term, *Maitatsine* is used in referring to the Cameroonian immigrant, Mohhamed Marwa

and the militant movement that ultimately became the signature of his radical ideology. The *Matatsine* movement was deeply rooted in *mujaddid*, which is a popular Muslim tradition. It refers to a person who appears at the turn of every century of the Islamic calendar to revive Islam, remove from it any extraneous elements and restore it to its pristine purity. A *mujaddid* might be a caliph, a saint (*wali*), a prominent teacher, a scholar or some other kind of influential person.

Agbiboa (2014) says that *Maitatsine* attracted the urban poor, rejecting Muslims who had, in their eyes, gone astray, lived in secluded areas to avoid mixing with mainstream Muslims, and rejected material wealth on the grounds that it was associated with Western values. The *Maitatsine* uprising led to eleven days of violent clashes with state security forces in Kano in December 1980. As the violence abated, a tribunal of inquiry set up by the federal government in 1981 found that 4,177 people were killed in the violence, excluding members of the police force who lost their lives (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Although the Nigerian military crushed the uprisings and killed its leader, over the next five years, hundreds of people were killed in reprisal attacks between remnants of *Maitatsine* in the north and government security forces.

Another Islamic Militant group that has proved uncommon dexterity is Boko Haram. According to Percouse de Montclos (2014), like many Salafi organizations, Boko Haram believes that the full implementation of Sharia requires a change of political regime because a democratic and secular constitution contravenes and is an affront to the law of God. The real name of the militant group is the 'Sunni Community for the propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad' (*Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*). The group was founded around 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, a radical preacher based in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state.

Its original source of inspiration came from the Movement for the Eradication of Heresies and the Implementation of Sunnah, known as the Izala ('Eradication'), a Nigerian Wahhabi Salafi organization created under the aegis of Sheikh Mahmud Abubakar Gumi in 1978. The difference, however, is that the Izala reject armed struggle. While they have security personnel, the *yanagaji* ('those who help'), to police their religious meetings they favour negotiation over confrontation with the state.

According to Percouse de Montclos (2014), for Mohammed Yusuf, the model of revolution was the jihad of Usman dan Fodio and the Sokoto caliphate established in 1804. The main difference from other radical Islamist movements in Nigeria is

that Boko Haram publicly confronted the state; an approach established by Mohammed Yusuf. Unlike the Izala in Jos, Kaduna or Kano, Mohammed Yusuf prohibited his followers from working in the civil service and did not advocate voting in elections. For him, voting legitimizes secular democracy, thus he regarded participation in elections as heresy.

The original smaller group, with its grassroots following, acted as a cohesive unit and retaliated to avenge killings of its members. For this reason and its rejection of Western education, Boko Haram is often compared to the *Maitatsine* movement of the 1970s and 1980s, also in northern Nigeria. But in his book Mohammed Yusuf does not absolutely denounce all modern things: Boko Haram makes use of Western technology, while *Maitatsine* was a luddite heterodox Islamist movement that spoke out against the use of radios, watches, bicycles and cars. Moreover, *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* is closer to the Salafi doctrine, a position that may partly explain its resilience and capacity to survive longer (Perouse de Montclos, 2014).

According to the Council on Foreign Relations (2016), by August 2015 more than 16,000 people had been killed and 2.5 million people displaced because of Boko Haram violence. For Akinloye (2018), the cumulative deaths in Nigeria was about 53, 595 from 2011 to 2018. This is an alarming statistic given the fact that Nigeria was not and is still not in a civil war situation. The Militant group has killed both Muslims and Christians. For Muslims, the ideological justification for killing them is accusation of apostasy, though such Muslims belong to *Darul-Islam*. Meanwhile, Shekau (2012) told Christians that "The religion of Christianity you are practicing is not a religion of God – it is paganism ... We are trying to coerce you to embrace Islam, because that is what God instructed us to do". The attacks on Christians and church property could be indicative that the country is on the brink of a religious war. But that is exactly the price to pay as members of *Darul Harb*.

Intra-violent conflicts are also recorded among the Shaiites and Sunni Islamic sects, especially in Sokoto, Kano, Zaria among others. Though the sects do not have a standing Militant wing, Focal Group Discussion in Sabon-Gari axis of Zaria town suggests the strong presence of amorphous militant youths among the two sects. Often times, these militant groups have clashed and wreaked havoc, thereby rendering the public space unsafe. For instance, there was a clash between the Shiite group and the Nigerian police in 2009 during the *Alquds* procession (IHRC report 2014), resulting in the death of four Shiites.

Furthermore, some Shiite members were attacked during their procession at the outskirts of Kano by Boko Haram in November 2015. A day after, El-zakzaky claimed it was not a Boko Haram orchestrated attack (Lere, 2015); thereby, creating an impression that there is a collaboration among the security agencies and other Sunni groups. On 12 December 2015, the Chief of Army Staff's (COAS) convoy clashed with the Shiite procession in Gyallesu area of Zaria. The clash erupted into violence, in the end the house of El-Zakzaky and Husainiyyah were invaded and destroyed. In addition, more than 300 people were reported dead including the wife of Zazzaky and top Shiite leaders including the leader of the Kano branch, Sheikh Mahmud Turi (Leadership 2015).

### **Findings**

- i. Religious militants are easy tools that religious bigots often used in causing violence in Nigeria.
- ii. Religious ideologues are emboldened by the army of militants that they keep. Thus, they make statements that undermine the authority of the Nigeria state without fear of any consequence as it has often than not happen.
- iii. Peace-building in a toxic environment that is saturated with intimidation and violence comes with a higher cost that ordinary. This is the burden that the nation is undergoing at the moment
- iv. Development and progress of the Nigerian state is compromised by the prevailing violence. An example in view is the disappearance of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs).
- v. More that inter-religious dialogue, Nigeria needs dialogue of life. A situation where votaries of different regions are intentionally brought to work together in order to diffuse suspicion.

### **Conclusion**

Religious militancy has continued to plague Nigeria so long due to the lopsided geo-politics and bad governance that has persisted. The reason is that such a situation often leaves in its wake narratives of victimhood. Field work in some parts of the north-central Nigeria shows that sentiments of victimhood in the Nigerian state are rife. It is against this background that the paper recommends that all relevant authorities (state and non-state actors) must avoid situations that

will create victimhood narratives. The danger of refusing this lies in the caution of Kundnani(2012).

According to him, “narratives have plots, within which events are given significance and explained in terms of particular causes. They also have protagonists who are given particular identities. Events and protagonists are relational, in that they only make sense in relation to other actual and potential protagonists and other actual and potential events. And narratives are necessarily selective, reflecting choices about what is relevant and irrelevant, and foregrounding particular events and protagonists as opposed to others. Usually, narrative plots involve their protagonists being confronted with a disturbance or conflict which needs to be resolved through some course of action” (p. 6). We must therefore not make religious militancy to be that course of action.

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