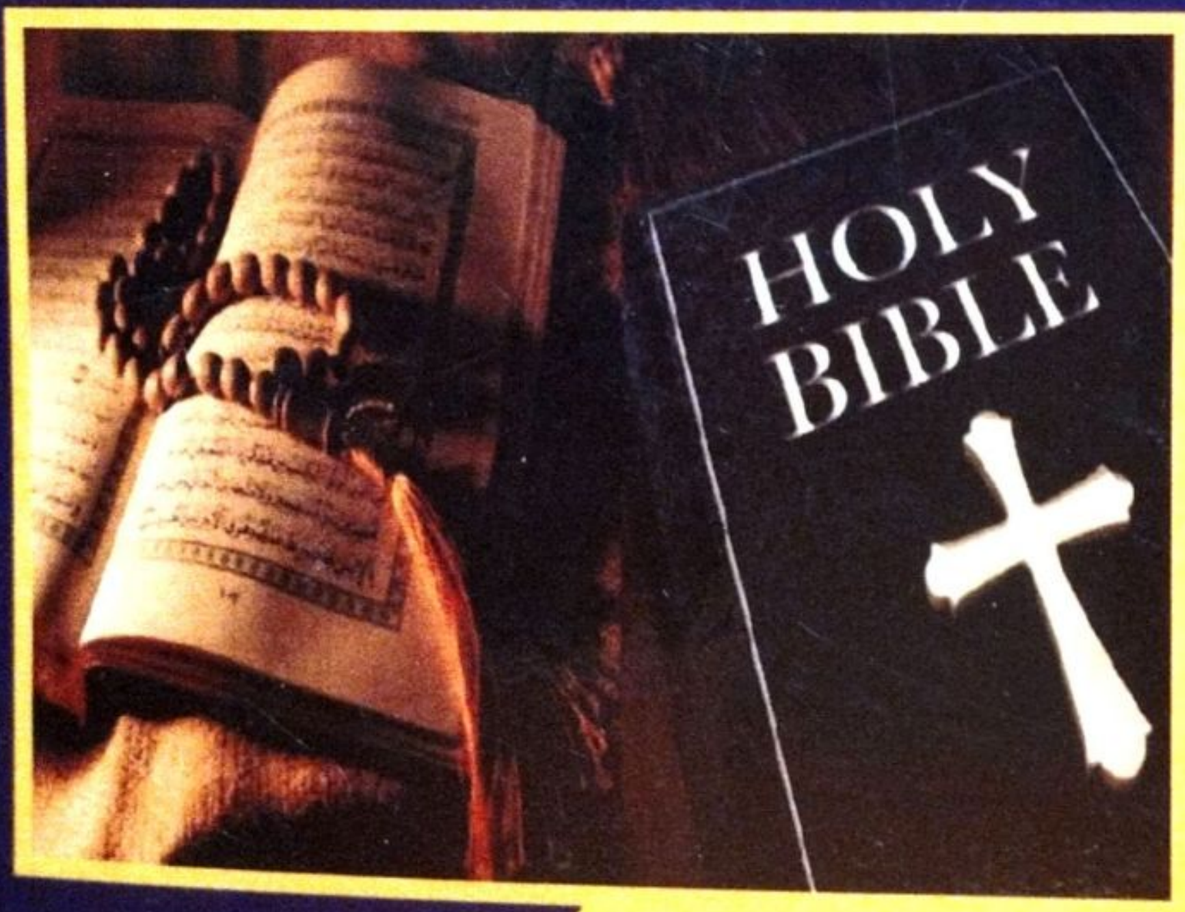
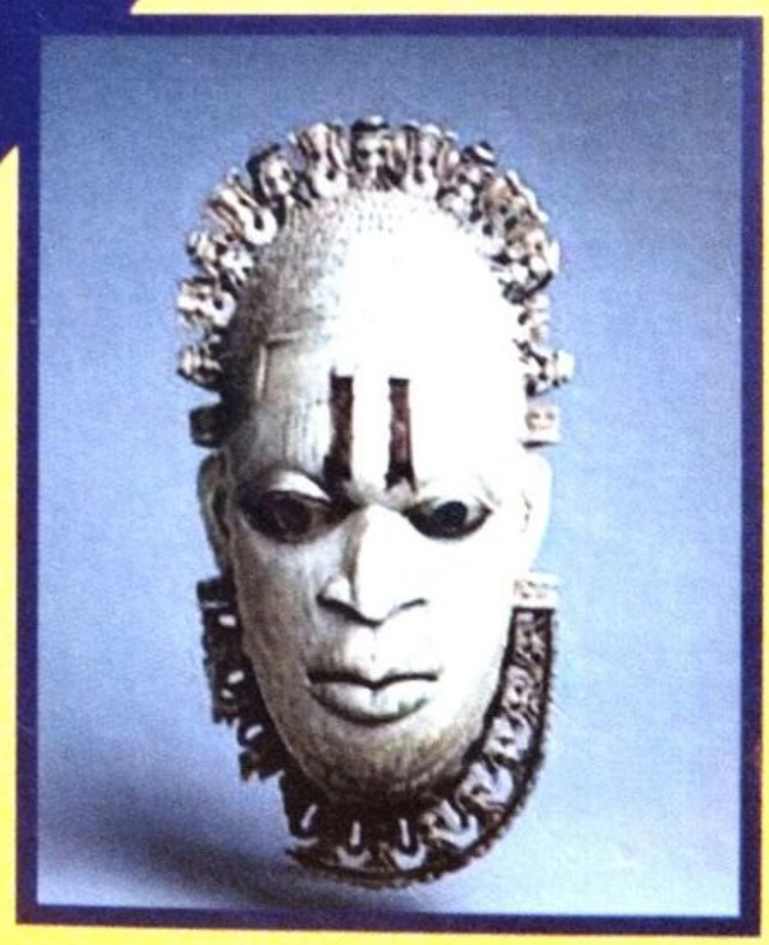
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Religious Violence in Nigeria: A Study of Boko Haram Insurgence

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Abstract

One of the problems ravaging the developmental spheres in Nigeria today is the issue of violence which has erupted in forms of ethno-religious and political mayhems. Presently, the North-Eastern part of the country is battling with tremble created by notorious Boko Haram insurgents. Alarmingly, the group attributes itself to Islam and some people may think the claim of Boko Haram is correct. This research was however carried out to investigate the religious violence in Nigeria with emphasis on Boko Haram insurgents. Analytical method was employed for the research. Also, the study relied on the information gathered through print and electronic media. The study tried to make juxtaposition between Islamic tenets and Boko Haram dispositions. It was however revealed that the claims and terror activities of Boko Haram insurgents are not congruent with the principles and teachings of Islam. Necessary recommendations were made in accordance with the findings of the study.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with a dense population of people with divergent culture, religion and tradition. Historically, the ancestral religion of the people is African Traditional Religion (ATR). But with infiltrations of Arab and Western cultures, new religions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism and so on emerged. This made Nigerians to become adherents of various religions with some people retaining and maintaining the traditional African religion. Thus, religion is a set of beliefs which is supposed to be personal affairs and even serves as a means of enhancing individuals' morality standards and subsequently encourage his communal participation and societal development. By this, religion should play a pertinent role in achieving national goals. This claim could be understood when critically going through the tenets of each of the worldly religions. Unfortunately, today, the prime role of religion has been upturned by some religious adherents and religion is being projected as a means to achieve personal objectives. Religion is being used to achieve economic advantages, political gains and some have hidden

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under the pretext of religion to perpetuate evils.Presently, Nigeria is battling with various problems. Among which are the havocs caused by Boko Haram insurgents. Getting close to a decade now, BokoHaram has being wreaking havoc on developmental spheres in Nigeria. The shocking point about the menace of Boko Haram insurgents is that the group claims to be an Islamic sect whose prime aim is to Islamize every citizen and get rid of western culture in the country in general and in their territory in particular(Adebayo).It is on this background that an attempt is made to critically study the activities of Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria vis-à-vis pristine Islamic principles with the aim of unraveling whether Boko Haram insurgence is religious or political.

Overview of Religious violence in Nigeria

Religious violence could be viewed as crisis or conflict that used to erupt among the adherents of various religions living in a given society. It could be inter-religious violence when the feud is between a religion and the other one. Sometimes, there is to be intra-religious conflict when violence erupts among the people of the same faith. There are other conflicts that are more of political or tribal in nature than religious even though some people may see them as religious simply because each group involved come from a different religion(Omotosho).Be it as it may, conflict is unavoidable in human society. Conflict erupts anywhere two or more people converge or live. Since no two humans are the same, no matter how careful they are, their individual differences would play out at a particular time. This differences lead to changes in individual dispositions in the society, and once this happens, the society itself falls in. By gradual process, the changes can lead to tension and its attendant conflict(Abdur-Rafiu).

The historical records showed that religious conflict in Nigeria goes as far back as 1948. It has been on record that conflicts have occurred in TafawaBalewa town in 1948, Igbo Massacre in the north in 1966 and Christian-Muslim conflicts in Kafachan Kaduna state in 1980s. In 1980s there was an upsurge in the rise of religious violences. Some of the factors that have caused the violence included the Maitatsine factor, enrolment of Nigeria in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference by the erstwhile military ruler of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida which Christian community considered unfair and the institution of shariah in 9 Muslim-majority and in some parts of 3 Muslim-plurality states also gave rise to religious crisis in the new dispensation(wikipedia).

Another point that has fuel the ember of religious crisis in Nigeria is the fact that leaders were able to polarize their followers through speeches and public demonstrations. In addition, exploitation of the media used to propagate the ideas of the conflict, thereby radicalising each force even more. Media was biased on each side so while places like the Federal Radio Corporation discussed the idea of defending Islam during this brief moment of terror, it did not report the deaths and

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damage caused by Muslims, galvanising the Muslim population. Similarly, the Christian papers did not report the damage and deaths caused by Christians but rather focused on the Islamic terror. Other individuals leading these religious movements use the media to spread messages which gradually became more intolerant of other religions(wikipedia).

In the recent times, there were attacks in Zaria between the Shiites Islamic sect and the Nigerian military force. The incidents have led to the loss of hundreds of lives, property and the arrest of the Shiite leader. Since 2009, the Islamist movement Boko Haram has fought an armed rebellion against the Nigerian military, sacking villages and towns and taking thousands of lives in battles and massacres against Christians, students and others deemed enemies ofIslam (wikipedia).

In addition, lack of recognition of one another, campaign of hatred and blackmail, lack of clear understanding of beliefs and culture of people of other faiths and extremism as a result of poor knowledge of the teachings of religion being defended are all contributing factors to eruption of religious violence in Nigeria(Omotosho).

Boko Haram at a Glance

Boko Haram is a name or slogan given to a movement that emerged in the Eastern part of Northern Nigeria. The group named themselves *Jamā'atAhl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wahwa'l-Jihād* (Group of the people of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad). They hold the belief that corruptions emerged in the area because of the people's adoption of Western styles of Education and life. They therefore advocate that Western Education is an aberration which must be discarded. Perchance, the idea has made them to be referred to by people as BokoHarram (Azeez).

Akanji submitted that studies have shown that the group clandestinely developed over a period of time under different names such as *Ahlulsunnawal'jama'ahhijra*, Nigerian Taliban, and the *Yusu□iyyah*. This, the writer stressed, is making it difficult for the government to effectively track it existence and mission. However, Adebisi, Oyedeji and Azeez noted that the true Historic root of Boko Haram group could be traced to 1995 when AbubakarLawan established the *Ahlus- SunnahWalJama'ahHijrah*or *Shabbab*group (Muslim Youth organisation) in Maiduguri, Borno State. Then the group was non-violent movement until the demise of AbubakarLawan. Then Muhammad Yusuf assumed the leadership. Under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf, the group preferred to be addressed as *Jamā'atAhl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wahwa'l-Jihād*(Group of the people of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad). Immideately after the death of AbubakarLawan (the initial founder), the group changed from being non-violent to become violent and constitute terror to the community. Muhammad Yusuf established a religious complex and school that attracted poor Muslim families from across Nigeria and neighboring countries(Adebisi). By denouncing the police and state corruption,

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Yusuf attracted followers from unemployed youths (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram). Muhammad Yusuf was successful in radicalizing the group. He won the respect of some clerics and youths in Northern Nigeria who become his followers; while the bulk of his followers however come from the *Almajiri*(Akinbi).

It was on record that the former governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff had been alleged of giving supports to Boko Haram but no longer needed them after the 2007 elections and stopped funding them but they were then out of control. Later on the government waded into the issue and joint military task force operation was launched for intervention. Subsequently, Yusuf was arrested, and was kdied in custody "while trying to escape".(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram).

Thereafter, AbubakarShekau took over the leadership of the sect. Under Shekau's leadership, the group continuously improved its operational capabilities. Since 2009 up to date, Boko Haram has launched military operations presumably in an attempt to create Islamic state. The activities of Boko Haram include bombing, hijackings, kidnappings, outright shooting, abduction and other destructive acts of antagonism perpetuated with the aim of intimidating people and government into changing their policies (Adebayo 2012; Adebisi, Oyodeji & Azeez).

Azeez and Salako revealed some serious instances of Boko Haram activities. These include, killing of Imam Ja'far Mahmud Adam and some worshippers in a mosque in Kano in 2007; bombing of military tent in Bulumkutu in Borno state; invasion of a mosque in Shaka, Kano in 2012; killing of 20 secondary school students and a teacher in Potiskum, Yobe state in July, 2013 and setting fire on a police station in KarimuLamido, Taraba state. The above writers however noted that the instances above are just very few examples of notorious activities of Boko Haram.Another instance is the abduction of over 200 secondary school girls from Chibok(Ikezue). On the other hand, Adebayo found that Boko Haram has created widespread insecurity across northern Nigeria, increased tensions between various ethnic communities, interrupted development activities, frightened off investors, and generated concerns among Nigeria's northern neighbours. Boko Haram terrorists have been responsible for near daily attacks in most places in the North Eastern part of the country. They were behind the attack in Kano that killed nearly 200 people and three major attacks in Abuja, including the bombing of the UN headquarters in August 2012.

The activities of Boko Haram group have caused a lot of setbacks to peaceful co-existence among the people in Nigeria as a whole and in the areas captured by the insurgents in particular. Thousands of people have lost their lives, many have been displaced from their homes and abodes, many properties had been destroyed, school girls were abducted, numerous mosques and Churches have been bombed with many people killed and the group was designated as a terrorist group by US in 2013 2013(bbc.com/news/world-africa).

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Azeez and Salako lamented thus:
These notorious activities have caused a lot of embarrassments to the generality of Nigerian Muslims. Different kinds of insults have been passed on to innocent, gentle and God fearing Muslims. Several bad names have been given to Muslims such as terrorist, al-Qaedah etc..... Implication of all these cannot be over emphasized. Those that have been nursing grudge against Islamand Muslims have their way. Nominal Muslims with shaking faith would have been surely disturbed. Many non-Muslims see the crises as religious and that Muslims hate them and are ready to fight them through Boko Haramgroup. Some even wrongly opine that the concept of jihad in Islam is to kill non-Muslims.

Looking critically into the above submission of Azeez and Salako would make one to think of a dare need of embarking on studies that would clarify what Islam stands for and what Boko proclaims.

The Position of Islam on Religious Violence

Islam in its conceptual connotation implies peace. It is a religion of peace that enjoins its adherents (Muslim) to uphold and maintain peace with his Creator (Allah), himself and his fellow mankind. Islam means peace, purity, submission and obedience. In the religious sense, the word Islam means submission to the Will of God and obedience to His law ('AbdaAl'Ati, Islam in Focus). Preaching peace, making peace, keeping peace and maintaining peace and order are integral parts of Islamic principles. In Islamic sense, submission to the Will of God, together with obedience to His beneficial law, is the best safeguard of peace and harmony. It enables man to make peace between himself and his fellow men on the one hand, and between the community and God on the other. It creates harmony among elements of nature (9). Islam educates mankind and trains him/her in hope and patience, in truthfulness and honesty, in love for the right and good, in courage and endurance. Islam provides man with peace and security and makes his life meaningful (31).

Islam, like other religions before it, sees religion as an ideal way of life that has to be shared with others by way of propagation and preaching rather than forcing it on others (Omotosho). Qur'an says: "Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching: and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best who have strayed from His path and who receive guidance." (Quran 16:125). Another verse reads "And dispute you not with the people of the Book (Jews and Christians) except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); But say: 'we believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam). (Quran 29:46)

It is pertinent to note that among the fundamental principles of Islam is that

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faith is based on strong conviction and freedom of choice. It cannot be forced upon anybody because Islam forbids compulsion in religion. Qur'an says "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error; whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things." (Quran 2:256). In Islam, the earth on which humans live is a trust entrusted to mankinds by Allah and it has been naturally purified by Him, as such, the trust must be safeguarded and taken care of. No mischief should be perpetuated. Disrupting societal peace is mischievous and any act of mischief perpetuated is like polluting the natural purity of the earth and severe torment awaits those who make mischief on earth. Qur'an says "

Muslims are enjoined to be peaceful and must not disrupt the societal peace. The issue of violence or insurgence is never part and parcel of Islam. Islam takes cognizance of the fact that, in human society, heterogeneity of tradition, culture and religion is inevitable and as such a Muslim must bear it in mind that his religious responsibilities must not hamper his social responsibilities as he would be accountable in the sight of Allah for both.

A critical glance at the structure of social life prescribed by Islam for a Muslim would reveal that it is based upon the highest principles that targeted towards securing happiness with prosperity for the individual as well as for the society. The role of the individual is complementary to that of society. Between the two there is social solidarity and mutual responsibility. The individual is responsibility for the common welfare and prosperity of one's society. This responsibility is not only to the society but also to God. In this way the individual works with a sound social-mindedness and a genuine feeling of inescapable responsibility. It is one's role to do the utmost for one's society and contribute to the common good. On the other hand, the society is also responsible to God for the welfare of the individual. When the individual is able he/she is the contributor and society is the beneficiary. In return the individual is entitled to security and care, should he/she become disabled. In this case the individual is the beneficiary and society is the contributor. So duties and rights correspond harmoniously.

In an Islamic society the individual cannot be indifferent. He/she is enjoined to play an active part in the establishment of sound social moral by way of inviting to the good and combating the evil in any form with all lawful means at his/her disposal. In so doing, not only does one shun evil and do good but also helps others to do the same. The individual who feels indifferent to society is a selfish sinner; his/her morals are in trouble, his/her conscience is in disorder, and his/her faith is undernourished.

In addition the substantial elements of social life in Islam include; sincere love for one's fellow human beings, mercy for the young, respect for elders, comfort and consolation for the distressed, visiting the sick, relieving the grieved, genuine

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feelings of brotherhood and social solidarity; respect for the rights of other people to life, property, and honor; mutual responsibility between the individual and society (Hammudah). Quran says: Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and giving to kith and kin, and He forbids all indecent deeds, and evil rebellion: He instruct you, that ye may receive admonition" (Qur'an 16:90).

"O you who believe! Fulfill all obligations ..... and help one another in righteousness and piety, but help not one another in sin and rancor. Mind God; for God is strict in punishment". (Qur'an, 5: 1 – 3)

Some of the Prophetic traditions on the importance of peace keeping in the society include:

"Whoever relieves a human being from a grief of this, God will relieve him from a grief on the Day of Judgment".

"Anyone who has no mercy on the juniors and on respect for the seniors is not one of us Muslims".

"None of you is a true believer in Islam until and unless he loves for his fellow man what he loves for his own self".

"Whoever invites others to good id like the doer of good and will be rewarded accordingly, and whoever instigates evil is like the doer of evil and will be punished accordingly".

Omotosho asserted that despite the fact that Islam had to engage in several self-defence wars at its advent, it believes in peace and peaceful co-existence. Perhaps the best way to note Islam's attitude towards peace and peaceful co-existence is the way it dealt with unbeilivers in the Makkan period and also with people of the book later in the Madinah period there was no any time anybody could be harassed or molested simply because he or she was not a Muslim or if they refused to become Muslim. Instead, Islam made it clear to the Makkan pagans that if they refused to change over from their idol worshipping, they were entitled to continue with their religion: Say: "ye that reject faith, I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which you worship. Nor will yea worship that which I worship. Nor worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine"

Juxtaposition of Islamic ethical teachings and Boko Haram activities

So far we have highlighted the activities of Boko Haram group in Nigeria and the Islamic position about violence and insurgence in the society. Boko Haram is always described in the media as an Islamic sect, but is it really Islamic in its belief, practices and activities? To provide answer to this question, the following points could adjudge the fact:

I. For any group or an individual to claim that his word, life, or behaviour is taken from a certain religion, that word, life or behaviour must tally with the pristine ideology, philosophy and principle of that religion.

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ii. At the inception, Boko Haram group focused on opposing Western education. Whereas, in Islam, the injunction to seek for knowledge of whatever form is sacrosanct. There are series of excerpts and quotations from Quran and Hadith on the importance of knowledge and going out in quest of education. For example: the prophet was reported as having said: Go out in search of knowledge even it would be in China. If the propagator of Islam who is an Arab, born and brought up in Arabia, and launched his religious preaching in Arabia could mention that his disciples could travel as far as to China in search of knowledge where it is clear that the form of education to receive there would be quite different from what he teaches, then why should somebody today calls for condemnation of any form of education other than Islamic education. The campaign for condemnation of Western education is never Islamic and must not be condoned by a true Muslim except a mediocre or hypocrite.

iii. Book Haram sees its members as the only true Muslims and considers others as infidels and their land must be rid of infidels. As such, they launched military operations in attempt to create Islamic state. This is purely anti-Islamic ideology for the following points:

a. In Islam, it is wrong for anybody to declare himself more superior (either in piety or devotion) to other. The judgment belongs to Allah. Quran says: …So ascribe not purity to yourselves. He knows best who fears Allah and keeps his duty to Him. (Quran 53: 32).

b. In Islam, it is established that no man must be compelled to embrace Islam as guidance belongs solely to Allah. Quran says: And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed, all of them together. So, will you (O Muhammad SallaAllahuAlayhiwasallam) then compel mankind, until they become believers. (Quran 10:99) So remind them (O Muhammad SallaAllahuAlayhiwasallam) you are only one who reminds. You are not a dictator over them (Quran 89: 21-22).

c. Nigeria is already a state and freedom of religion is copiously enshrined in the constitution. In fact, Muslims have been coexisting peacefully with non-Muslims as long as the history of the existence of the country and attempts from detractors to infringe upon rights of others are always been addressed by the Government. What is then the reason for clamouring for an Islamic state in a multi-religious society? This is an act of aggression and transgression and Islam never tolerates aggression from its own side or from any other side, nor does it entertain aggressive wars or the initiation of aggressive wars. Muslims are commanded by God not to begin hostilities, or initiate any act of aggression, or violate any right of others (Hammudah;140). Quran says: Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, and do not

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transgress limits (do not initiate hostility). For God loves not transgressors. (Quran 2: 190). Do not make mischief on earth after it has been put in order. (Quran).

iv. Book Haram is designated a terrorist group by US in 2013. Since Boko Haram has being confirmed a terrorist group would make it easy for us to say that the group is not a religious group. Islam, which the insurgents ascribe themselves to, has no speck of terrorism in its pillars, principles, philosophy, ideologies and practices. The Noble prophet Muhammad SallaAllahuAlayhiwasallam was reported as having said: Surely, religion is very simple; and nobody would attempt to cause hardship in religion without (the hardship) consume him.

v. Boko Haram group have caused a lot of setbacks as thousands of people have lost their lives, many have been dislocated from their homes and abodes, many properties had been destroyed, school girls were abducted, numerous mosques and Churches have been bombed with many people killed. Our question here is that, can it be proved that Boko Haram carried out all the aforementioned terror activities in the name of Islam? Are the insurgences embarked upon in the name of Islam? The answer is outright No. The life, statements and actions of the Noble prophet Muhammad SallaAllahuAlayhiwasallam never portrayed terror act. The prophet and his companions did coexist peacefully with pagans in Makkah and with Jews and Christians in Madinah and the environs. A critical study of the life of the prophet and his companions would reveal that any terror activity perpetuated to disrupt the peace of the society is alien to Islam. No amount of excuse could adjudge for kidnapping, abducting or killing of people and destroying the properties in the name of Islam. Let us for instance, examine the excerpt of a pact entered for by prophet Muhammad SallaAllahuAlayhiwasallam with the people of Najran:

" For the people of Najran and their suburbs, they have entered into the pact with Allah and Muhammad, the prophet and messenger of Allah. That their, properties, lives, lands and roots (are safe and secured) for those that are present and absent (during the pact making) and those that are under their custody, be it minority or majority. No abbot must be compelled to denounce his monastery; no monk must be compelled to renounce (his faith); also, and no sorcerer must be prevented from his sorcery; no ransom must be paid; no revenge (on the blood shed) during *jahiliyyah*must be taken; neither must they (non-Muslims) be surcharged nor they be subjected to any hardship..." (BnKathir)

The above excerpt is one of the numerous examples of the peace making agreements contracted by the prophet of Islam Muhammad SallaAllahuAlayhiwasallam. It could be noted here that the prophet provided the

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conditions for peaceful coexistence among Muslims and non-Muslims. Nowhere in the Qur'an or in the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad can one find it where it mentioned that Muslims should not co-exist peacefully with others; or war must waged against no-Muslims. War is never an objective of Islam nor is it the normal behaviour of true Muslim.

Conclusion

In the course of examining the religious violence in Nigeria with special reference to Boko Haram insurgence, it has been established that the prime role of religion in transforming individual and the society has been abused. Religious violence is a recurrent issue in Nigeria. Mostly, the causes include the lack of recognition of one another; campaigns of hatred and blackmail; the lack of genuine desire to understand each other's belief and culture; and Extremism. The Boko Haram's insurgence might be as a result of the deliberate extremism which is politically motivated. Hammudah was of the view that religion has been abused and misunderstood. Some people have used as a means of exploitation and suppression, as pretext for prejudice and persecution. Some other people use it as a source of power and domination over elite and the masses alike. In the name of religion, unjustified wars have been launched, freedom of thought and conscience suppressed, science has been persecuted, the right of the individual to maturity has been denied, and man's dignity and honour have been flagrantly debased. In the name of religion, injustices have been inflicted upon humanity with the result that religion itself suffered many losses.

In conclusion, Boko Haram members may claim to be Muslims but their activities contradicts the pristine principles of Islam. Islam is the religion of peace: its meaning is peace; one of God's names is peace;the daily greetings of Muslims and angels are peace; paradise is the house of peace, the adjective 'Muslim' means peaceful. Peace is the nature, meaning, the emblem and objective of Islam. So, the war and peace disturbances that are perpetuated by Boko Haram are never religious but rather something else.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

I. the notion that Boko Haram insurgence is Islamic should be refuted. There is need for more thorough research on the hidden goals behind the insurgents' activities of Boko Haram.

ii. the Nigerian government, in addition to current security actions against the terror group, should sponsor researches and investigations (academic and operational) into the real force and brain behind the insurgences.

iii. Islamic scholars should intensify efforts in educating people, most especially the young ones that are been lured into insurgence in the name of Jihad. They should

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be made to understand that insurgence is never a form of Jihad, in addition, essence of life is to be preached to the young people and that committing suicide bombing would never earn someone Allah's favour but rather a means to incur Allah's wrath.

iv. Muslims should co-exist with others and always keep and maintain peace.

v. adherents of various religions should see one another as brothers and ensure peaceful co-existence among themselves for the development of the society

vi. Political leaders should have piety of God and desist from using religion to score political points or to cause chaos in the society.

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