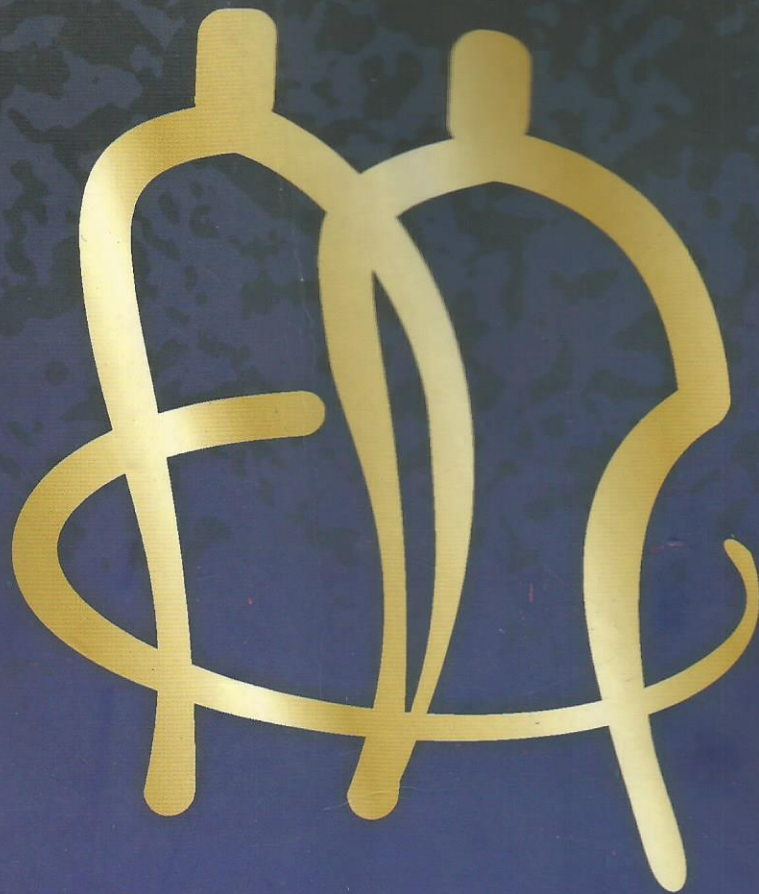


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Contextualizing Islamic Radicalism and Religious Violence in Nigeria: The Understated Role of Religious Conviction

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'A man who is convinced of the truth of his religion is indeed never tolerant. At the least, he is to feel pity for the adherent of another religion but usually it does not stop there...'

— Albert Einstein (Cline)

INTRODUCTION

Nigerians pride themselves in being one of the most religious people in the world. With a population of about 150 million, Nigerians are almost evenly divided between Christianity and Islam, reflecting ethnic and regional distinctions with the northerners being predominantly Muslims and the southerners Christians. 50.4 percent of this population are said to be Muslims, 48.2 percent Christians, and 1.4 percent are either practitioners of other religions or are unattached (National Population Commission and ORC Macro). Regrettably, this strong dose of religiosity has panned out to be more of a curse than blessing as it has served as a veritable source of sectarian violence and conflicts, which have resulted in casualties and damage to properties, thus hindering Nigeria's growth and development¹. Indeed religiously motivated violence has plagued the country more than any other security issue since inception (Sampson 104). This tendency has made Nigeria record more religious conflicts than the rest of Africa put together (Alao 4).

While there are no precise records on the exact number of these religious conflicts in the country, tellingly, an overwhelming majority of them (95 percent) have occurred in the Muslim-dominated northern region of Nigeria (Sampson 106). It would be an oversimplification, however, to heap the blame on Muslims or Islam for this. After all, religious radicalism is not exclusive to Islam: the three major religions in the country have all undergone some form of radicalism, albeit on differing scales. Some scholars have argued, for example, that radical

Christianity has a longer antecedent for such, dating back to the 1930s when the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) antagonized orthodox churches for their practice of syncretism (Alao 30). More recently, in 1987, a Christian preacher allegedly sparked off violence in Kaduna State when he launched a verbal diatribe on the Holy Quran in an attempt to discredit Islam and promote his religion (Gofwen 101).

The fact that Islamic radicalism is overwhelmingly predominant in northern Nigeria still raises concerns. In the remainder of the essay I attempt to show that this trend is both historically and socially contingent, rather than being influenced by socio-economic factors. I begin with a debate on the role of religion in religiously motivated violence; I go on to demonstrate, by placing Islam in Nigeria in historical context, that the role religious conviction plays in the dynamics is historically contingent. The third section discusses how the interpretation of one's religion can decide actions in religiously motivated conflicts.

Islamic Radicalism, Fundamentalism and Religious Violence in Nigeria

Since the creation of the Nigerian state there have been a number of religiously motivated conflicts/violence in which Islamic radicalism has taken a centre stage courtesy of fundamentalist ideas. It is imperative to make a few conceptual clarifications at this juncture. Radicalization, in the context used in this essay, refers to the process of strict adherence to a belief-system that involves the use of non-conventional means to aspire and effect change along the lines of what is considered an ideal past or an envisioned future in the society (Alao 13). Fundamentalism on the other hand, in its most general sense, has to do with the literal interpretation of holy texts, which—in the case of some versions of religious traditions—translates to a desire to replace secular ideas with religious ones.

Islamic radicalism has its earliest roots in Nigeria in the first decade of the twentieth century when Caliph Attahiru I led the Burmi insurgency against the British colonialist and secularists in 1903 (Adeleye 302-8). The form of Islamic radicalism that took place in the immediate pre-independence and post-independence era came in the form of 'Islamic socialism' which was made manifest through the formation of political parties like the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Northern People's Congress (NPC). It is distinguished from the earlier form of radicalism in that it eschewed the use of arms. There was a brief hiatus between 1966 and 1980 when the country was under military rule. This break was interrupted by the activities of the Maitatsine

group in the 1980s, with uprisings starting from Kano (in 1980), spreading to Kaduna (1982), Yola (1984) and Bauchi (1985); they sought to replace the secular polity with political Islam through ferocious arm confrontations. The group's activities were both interspersed and immediately followed by other forms of violent conflicts motivated by religion, like the Kano metropolitan riot of 1982, the nationwide crisis over Nigeria's membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference in early 1986, the Kafanchan religious riots of 1987, and the nationwide debate on the implementation of Sharia in 1988, among many others (see Adesoji *The Boko Haram Uprising* 97). However, the Boko Haram—a sect that attained its militant status in 2004 and is still very much operational till date—is by far the most volatile Islamic radical group the country has ever witnessed. It bears semblance with the Maitatsine in aims and objectives but their use of bombs and suicide bombings make them even more dangerous. A collage of these religious crises has, between 1980 and 2008 alone, caused over 50,000 casualties (Alao 35).

With such resounding implications, there has been a proliferation of a number of scholarly literatures that account for these religious crises. An overwhelming majority, however, place emphasis on socio-political and economic factors as the underlining causes. Kwaja (107-8) for example, placing particular emphasis on religious crisis since 1999, heaps the bulk of the blame on the fragility of state's institutions, especially as regards their ineptitude in coping with diversity, stemming corruption and eradicating poverty. He concludes that these deficiencies create fertile grounds for actors to 'manipulate' the poor into killing in the name of God. Salawu holds a similar stance; he adds that government neglect, oppression, victimization and marginalization of a segment of the Nigerian society, particularly among the poor youths, is a catalyst for the escalation of these religious conflicts (Salawu 348). Falola adopts a broader approach in accounting for religious conflicts; rejecting a mono-causal explanation, he attributes these crises to political instability, diversity, poverty, modernization, colonialism, Nigeria's external relationship, and successive corrupt and irresponsive military regimes (Falola 12-14).

A number of scholars have discussed the role of religion as being central to the causes of these radical actions, not in the context of its hermeneutic nature, but in relation to interactions between the different existing religious traditions in the country. For example, Omotosho attributes the causes of religious conflicts to provocative utterances, disparaging publications and 'competing atmosphere' between Christians and Muslims in the country (Omotosho 15-31). Achunike shares a similar position; he argues that the ignorance of religious devotees of

their holy text, and that of other religious traditions, are the primary reasons for religious violence in Nigeria. He contends that this phenomenon is further fuelled by the avariciousness of religious actors, poverty, and irresponsible government (Achunike 287). Sampson tries to identify 'immediate and visible drivers' that trigger religious conflicts and concludes that these include obstructive and disruptive modes of worship, disparaging proselytizing, government patronage and religious preferentialism (Sampson 103-134).

From the understanding of the existing literature there is a gap in the role religious conviction, based on hermeneutic traditions, plays in the dynamics of religious violence and Islamic radicalism in Nigeria. The cluster of scholars that hold the view that institutional decay and socio-economic factors are largely responsible for this occurrence, fail to account for the reason why religion is always very attractive as a mobilizing force in these sectarian conflicts, and why actors find the arguments of the so-called 'manipulators' very compelling. On the other hand, accounts that focus on the role of religion in these crises, solely through the lens of existing interactions between religious traditions, oversimplify the issues, neglecting the inherent differences in hermeneutics that necessarily conflict with those of other religious traditions. The remainder of the essay presents a framework which advances the position that hermeneutic traditions in every religion are historically shaped and socially influenced—and that these best explain the Islamic radicalism witnessed in modern Nigeria, especially in the northern region.

Islam in Nigeria: a Historical Background (with emphasis on the pre-colonial era)

Of the two dominant religions in Nigeria, Christianity being the other, Islam was the first to gain entry. Islam arrived Nigeria in two phases. The first of these phases came between the 8th and 11th century, when through the activities of trade merchants and missionaries from North Africa, people of latter-day northern Nigeria were converted. Early successes of conversion were first recorded in the ancient Kanem-Borno Kingdom in the northeast around the orbit of the Lake Chad, from where the religion spread to the Hausa and the Kanuri people in the other parts of the northern region around the 13th and 14th centuries. From the 12th century onwards Islam gained such a footing in Kanem-Borno to the extent that their charismatic ruler, Dunama Dibbalemi (1221-1259), built a hostel in Cairo for Borno students and pilgrims, having led series of conversion campaigns (jihad) in the region (Falola 25). Idris Alooma

(1570-1602) consolidated on these efforts of 'Islamization' in the latter part of the 16th century.

While it remained largely a religion of the elite, especially among traditional rulers and trade merchants, by the 17th century, Islam had become rooted in most northern Nigerian cities and capitals, including the Hausa states. Rulers even enhanced their political strength by waging successful jihads, establishing Quranic schools, building mosques, and admitting Islamic scholars into their courts. A combination of these factors bred stronger affinity and relationship between these cities and the Islamic world in the Middle East, as well as aided literacy in Arabic among the indigenes (Falola 25). In the Hausa states, however, indigenous religious practices were still very prevalent. This was particularly the case because the Hausa rulers avoided offending the powerful cult priests and, therefore, had to continue the practice of traditional rites, which were pagan in nature. The pervasiveness of this trend ensured that Muslim converts tolerated traditional religious practices and sometimes conflated traditional rites with Islam (syncretism). At this time, therefore, these states were neither theocratic nor was full scale Sharia implemented therein, except in Kanem-Borno where the rulers still displayed a staunch commitment to undiluted Islam.

It was under these circumstances that the second phase of Islam's spread in Nigeria began in the 19th century. Between 1804 and 1808, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, a Fulani Islamic preacher, led a series of jihads which were aimed at purifying Islamic practices in the Hausa states and ultimately installing a new righteous leadership. His effort was a huge success as the fourteen Hausa states of the time were successfully overrun and replaced with Fulani rulers (Emirs). The jihad triggered the establishment of Nigeria's first caliphate. The caliphate was divided into emirates, which were all overseen by a single Sultan who had his seat of administration in Sokoto. The caliphate, which covered all of latter-day Nigeria, derived cohesion from Islam as the Sultan not only served as an administrative ruler but also the spiritual father. The Fulani Emirs also ingrained Islamic values and practices across the regions (Crisis Group African Report N 168). By the second decade of the 19th century, while Fulani rule was sometimes greeted with tacit resistance from segments of the northern population, Islam had become widely accepted by the people and entrenched in the administrative system so much so that Sharia, which was the only recognized legal system in the land, was applied more widely and more rigidly than anywhere else outside Saudi Arabia (Ostien and Fwatshak 3).

The Fulani's did not restrict their jihad to the northern part of latter-day Nigeria; they made inroads into the southwest where they were able to create a

southern caliphate with its capital at Ilorin. From Ilorin, the Fulani's penetrated and conquered Oyo in 1830, and a good number of the Yorubas were converted to Islam. By the mid-nineteenth century, while Muslims still represented a vocal minority in the southwest, their number grew consistently courtesy of the allure of Islamic education, increasing number of northern missionaries and the receptive nature of the Yoruba traditional elites to the religion as a whole (Falola 26). Significantly, however, unlike in the north where dan Fodio and his associates had emphasized the practice of unadulterated Islam, Islam in the southwest accommodated unorthodox beliefs which have till this day given Yoruba Islam a different orientation. Again, unlike in the north, Islam in Yorubaland did not nurse any theocratic agenda: the local rulers who were not adherents of Islam were not supplanted and replaced by hardcore Muslims, neither were the Yoruba towns administered on the principles of Islam, nor laws based on Sharia.

It becomes apposite to make mention of the Muslim brotherhood in Islam that were grounded in the northern region, which partly explains the intra-religious conflicts in the north. The two dominant brotherhoods in the region are Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, popularly known in the local Hausa language as *Sadulu* and *Kabulu* respectively. Having been founded by Abd al Qadir (1077-1166 AD) in Baghdad, the Qadiriyya arrived northern Nigeria in the 15th century. On the other hand, Ahmad al-Tijani (1737-1215), an Algerian cleric, formed the Tijaniyya sect in Fez, Morocco and its influence arrived Nigeria in the 1820s, through the ancient city of Kano. Both the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya belong to the Sufi branch of Islam; they are mystics who also believe in the coming of a Mahdi that will reform the world (Falola 228). While there are commonalities between these brotherhoods there are also fundamental differences in doctrines², which pitted them as rivals in pre-colonial northern Nigeria³. Intra-religious rivalry among Nigerian Muslims could also be understood in the context of the presence of Islamic sects that oppose Sufism in its entirety. In pre-colonial Nigeria, however, the spread of Islam was largely patterned along the Qadiriyya doctrine, as it was the brotherhood Usman dan Fodio belonged.

Colonialism and After: the Intrusion of Secularism

By the time the British colonialists arrived northern Nigeria in the first decade of the 20th century Islamic characteristics had become a permanent feature of the region. In January 1900 the northern part of Nigeria became a British protectorate, but the effective conquest of the Sokoto caliphate lingered on for at least three more years. To be sure, Frederick Lugard who led the conquest was

aware that the strongest opposition he would encounter in the region would come from Islamic radicals. His fears were made manifest in the 1903 Burmi insurrection, led by Caliph Attahiru I, where the British launched an assault on the Islamic radicals who opposed them. There was a recurrence of such Mahdist movement in February 1906 when a brutal radical insurrection cost lives and properties in Satiru. While such aggressions continued intermittently until the 1920s, they were eventually suppressed by the superior fire power of the British. Despite their conquest, the colonialist had the understanding that a compromise with the traditional administrators of the region, rather than a combative measure, was necessary (Adeleye 302). The incumbent emirs were therefore given the promise of non-interference with their religion (including the practice of Sharia) and the retention of their thrones, provided they remained cooperative and loyal to the British colonial administrators.

The non-interference was not, and could not, have been absolute. After the defeat of the Sokoto caliphate, for instance, the region's capital was moved to Kaduna, a change which diminished the authority and influence of the sultan of Sokoto. While the sultan retained the spiritual leadership of all the Muslims, his political clout progressively waned during the colonial years to the extent that in the immediate prelude to Nigeria's independence, in 1959, the British governor announced that the sultan and the emirs would thenceforth be subject to ministerial decrees. As a result, they were dispossessed of the power to appoint and discipline judges (Crisis Group African Report N 168 4). Even so, in the heyday of the colonial administration the system of the emirates that was created by dan Fodio was maintained and was only slightly modified to suit colonial administration. The administrative powers of the emirs largely stayed the same, although they remained subordinate to British officials.

While the colonialist also attempted preserving the Islamic cultural values of the north by discouraging western education and innovations, there were still a number of alterations that have created lasting impressions. The British allowed Christian missionaries and their schools in the non-Muslim fringes of the northern region and also tried to discourage Muslim and non-Muslim interactions so as to avoid tainting the Islamic culture. However, some of their policies brought a major change in their educational pattern. The first evidence of this was the introduction of Roman scripts to replace the *ajami* for writing the Hausa language. Also, although the British did not establish as many schools in the north as they did in the rest of latter-day Nigeria, a European-style education system corrupted the Islamic system of schooling. For example some scholars have mentioned that there have been two phases of Islamic education in Nigeria,

and that one phase transited to the other as a result of colonialism (Adeniyi cited in Alao 9). The first phase entailed the traditional Quranic schools that existed in the pre-colonial northern region, where the Mullahs (Mallams in Hausa) were the teachers, and classes were conducted twice a day in informal settings such as Mosques, under trees, a Mallam's sitting room or even their verandas. The pupils that attended these schools are known in Hausa as *Almajiri* (*Almajirai* in plural).

With the advent of colonialism came a cultural shock in Arabic scholarship. Contrary to the western educational system, that sets aside Saturdays and Sundays as school-free days, the Quranic school week runs from Saturday to Wednesday and having Thursdays and Fridays as free days. These schools also did not operate on any elaborate curriculum, but relied exclusively on the Quran as syllabus. Holidays were also fixed along Islamic lunar months and religious festivals. For instance, the annual vacation is fixed to align with the Ramadan period, while a shorter break was given around the time of the *'id-T' kabir* festival (Alao 9). After the British had established their suzerainty over the region the Quranic schools remained largely neglected by colonial policies. However, the colonial influence still peculated. For example, the introduction of western-styled education and making it a prerequisite for gaining entry into privileged positions, undermined the significance and monopoly of the Quranic schools and the *Ulama* (Islamic scholars). Additionally, the British established Islmiyya schools, which were based on a conflation of traditional Islamic curriculum and Western inspired educational models. Examples of such schools were Shahuci Judicial School (founded 1928) and the School for Arabic Studies (1934), both located in Kano.

This development overwhelmed the traditional Quranic schools, but did not obliterate them. They continued as parallels to the growing western dominance in the region. Their existence persists till date and their traditions, structures, and functions are collectively known in the north as the *Almajiri* heritage. Acting as parallels to western-styled educational system and resisting its incorporation into the traditional Islamic schools, the Mallam's—whose influences had waned with these developments—began an ultraconservative Islamic education, which pitted western civilization and its adherents as enemies of not just the heritage, but Islam as a whole (Awofeso, Ritchie and Degeling 316). This scenario partly explains the *Almajirai's* primary involvement in religious crises and their commitment to Islamic extremist groups like the Maitatsine in the 1980s and, more recently, Boko Haram (see Gofwen; Onuoha; and Awofeso, et al.). It is instructive to note that Quranic schools in Yorubaland—the other region in

Nigeria where Islam has had a strong footing—were better able to accommodate western influences firstly because, as earlier explained, they had a different Islamic orientation that was more relaxed about fundamentals; and secondly, because the Ahmadiyya Islamic sect had a strong influence in the region and were themselves very receptive to Western civilization (Alao 8).

The colonial experience did not only affect the Islamic learning culture in the north, it also had a direct imprint on the legal and administrative system. When in January 1914 the Northern and Southern Protectorate together with the Lagos colony were amalgamated, with the entire Nigeria being administered from Lagos, the region which had been administered within the framework of Sharia had to contend with colonial/secular laws. Although the sultans and emirs retained some of their previous functions, the new colonial state was seen as losing its theocratic essence. Worse still, colonial laws and administration were conceived as a direct attack on Islam because secularism was perceived to align with Christianity while running parallel to Islam. Such a view is held in the light of the fact that much of the Nigerian legal system is derived from England, which proclaims herself a Christian state. The same is the case with the use of the Gregorian calendar which is inspired by the Christian religion. This is not to mention the observance of Saturdays and Sundays as work-free days in honour of the Christian and Jewish religion (Falola 90).

On the attainment of independence in 1960, colonial laws and administrative system remained the ground framework under which the independence constitution and the post-independence political system were shaped. The implication was that the northern region had been forced to be part of a system they found completely alien. In response, Muslims from the north attempted a repudiation of colonial values by advancing what was known as 'Islamic Socialism'. This subtle form of radicalism began in the decade preceding independence and was spearheaded by the likes of Mallam Aminu Kano who founded the political party, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU). The party did not intend to completely alter the laid down political system but reform it along Islamic doctrines and, more importantly, to fashion a pan-Islamic north. NEPU, however, lost grounds in both the 1959 parliamentary elections and popularity in the northern region to the Northern People's Congress (NPC), headed by the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The NPC were more receptive to colonial ideas than NEPU and did little to impose Islam on the new polity. This is not to say that the NPC did not also nurse the agenda of a pan-Islamic north. It is salient to note, however, that both the likes of Aminu Kano and Ahmadu Bello had benefitted from Western education. Despite being the

grandson of Dan Fodio, Ahmadu Bello had attended western elementary school as well as a Katsina teacher training college; while Aminu Kano also attended Katsina College and the University of London. The implication was that their views on 'anti-westernization' were necessarily more relaxed than, for instance, the average Mallam and Almajiri. For example, while serving as Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello attempted to modernize Islamic schools in the north by promising state funds to local schools that were willing to incorporate western values (Khalid 19).

The influence of Islamic socialism severely waned after the collapse of the first republic in 1966, in a coup which ultimately cost Ahmadu Bello his life. In the immediate aftermath, the history of Nigeria became dominated by successive and prolonged military rule, during which, radical Islamic movements that challenged the polity were non-existent with the understandable apprehension of being violently repressed. There was a brief hiatus in Nigeria's military dominance between 1979 and 1983, when Nigeria operated a civilian rule. During this period there was another upsurge in Islamic radicalism. Perhaps the most vocal of these radicals at the time was the former Grand Qadi of Northern Nigeria, Sheik Abubakar Gumi, who was instrumental to the formation of *Jamaatu Izalat al Bid'ah wa Iqamat al - Sunah* (Group for the Eradication of Innovation and Establishment of Tradition). Though Gumi's group was not directly linked to any form of violence or attempt to topple the government, the former Grand Qadi always advocated for an Islamic state and lamented the exclusion of northern pre-colonial administrative and religious cultures from the post-colonial polity. For example, on advocating for the strict practice of Sharia, he condemned an attempt to reform Western laws to accommodate Sharia, claiming that it was not only impossible but insulting to Islam (Falola 126). Just as the likes of Ahmadu Bello and Aminu Kano, Gumi favoured a pan-Islamic north, he is credited for claiming that the north is bounded by Islam and was for this reason being victimized by the non-Muslim south (Onapajo 46). Perhaps more tellingly, Gumi had also incitingly stated that Muslims must not accept non-Muslims as their president (Awofeso, Ritchie and Degeling 323). Gumi's sentiments coupled with global events, take for instance the 1979 Iranian Revolution, bred more religious radicals during this period, some of whom espoused their intentions through violence. Examples were Ibrahim El Zakzaky's Muslim Brotherhood and the extremely volatile Mohammed Marwa led Maitatsine sect, which were very active in the early 1980s. There was another prolonged military interregnum between 1984 and 1999, which curbed Islamic radicalism; but a return to civilian rule and the emergence of global jihad ensured a resurgence of Islamic

radicalism with the most volatile being the Boko Haram, a sect that has claimed responsibility for the death of thousands through suicide bombings.

But why resort to violence? The malleable role of hermeneutics

I have hitherto explained how colonial (secular) ideas completely altered the religious orientation and culture of the northerners and how this has built tensions in the post-colonial era. This, however, does not necessarily explain why these tensions/grievances translate into the use of violence as a means of expression. After all, Abubakar Gumi, a staunch critic of Western intrusion in the Islamic heritage of northern Nigeria, was most vocal in denouncing the Maitatsine sect and their violent methods. He described the leader, Marwa, as 'Satan and a single-minded person who could recite the Quran without comprehending it' (Falola 156). The same sentiments were expressed on the Boko Haram: in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Christmas bombings that claimed the lives of over 40 people, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, the acclaimed leader of Nigerian Muslims, responded by claiming that 'Violence is not part of the tenets of Islam and would never be allowed to tarnish the image of the religion' (Faseke). Such reactions are understandable in the light of the fear that their religion is being hijacked by outsiders to espouse selfish desires. This section of the essay contends that this position is an oversimplification which neglects the role of hermeneutics.

Apart from mainstream adherents trying to safeguard Islam, it is popularly believed among neutrals that these Islamists are irrational in their actions (see Sampson 115) and are therefore likely using the religion as a smokescreen to achieve other motives. This position is problematic on two counts: firstly, religion does not operate on logical premises to non-adherents and cannot be placed in the garb of reasonability or irrationality. Secondly, among every religious tradition are sub-traditions, which in principle means that, that one sub-tradition condemns the other does not make the condemned any less a member of the broader religious tradition. Put differently, there are many Islams with their different dogmas, and no strand can proclaim absolute truth over one or disclaim the other. This position stems from the fact that the Quran, like any other religious text, is malleable. Silberman, et al. (761-784) explain how religion could be used to facilitate either peaceful activism or violence, opining that religious texts could be similar in structure and function but there could be different interpretation as to what is unique and what is perceived as sacred. This does not only explain why some Islamic radicals espouse their agenda through violence, but explains the multi divisions within Islamic traditions and

the existence of different sects and sub-traditions within Islam in general and Nigerian Islam in particular. For example Marwa's Maitatsine were anti-Sufis who opposed the dominant Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya brotherhoods; there was also the El Zakzaky's Muslim Brotherhood whose members were Shiites, and a couple of others.

Scholars who condemn the violent methods of radicals and claim such ways have no place in the Quran only draw on the peaceful values like the respect for the sanctity of life and extolment of selflessness. Omotosho (25), for instance, argues that the reason for religious violence in Nigeria is because of the lack of knowledge of the 'true religion.' He based his stance on portions of the Quran like *"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"* (Qur'an 16: 125). Conservative Muslims (or radicals) have also used the same Quran (especially the verses 5:47-48 and 5:50) to argue that Allah would not condone a political system or set of laws apart from Sharia, and that those rulers who have made Muslims submit to secular laws would answer to God (Falola 80). In 1980, the Egyptian writer, Abd al-Salam Faraj, published a compelling pamphlet, translated, *'The Neglected Duty'*, where he justified violent Muslim acts. He argued that the Quran and the Hadith were meant to be taken literally and not allegorically, and that the 'duty' that has been neglected is that of *'jihad'*, calling for physical confrontation with anyone who departs from the moral and social requirements of Islamic law to be the targets for such. Faraj, claiming to have drawn his inspiration from the Quran, went on to conclude that the true 'soldier of Islam' is allowed to use virtually any means available in achieving a just goal, including violence (Juergensmeyer 81).

It has been argued that while these religious markers are present, poverty and infrastructural decadence in Nigeria are the main factors making radicals gravitate towards the use of violence. For example, Adesoji, Onuoha and Pham all argue that the poverty in the country coupled with the unhealthy political rivalry, make politicians lure radicals for financial rewards. This position is not unfounded as the regions where volatile religious conflicts are most prominent are among the poorest in the whole country, and the militants are usually the unemployed almajirai who are particularly poor. This does not, however, tell the whole story as it is religion that explains the agenda and the tenacity of operation, even to the point of suicide as is the case with the Boko Haram in recent times. For example, political and economic factors do not explain such actions as the resignation of top ranking government officials and academics to join Islamic radical sects; neither do the tearing of degree certificates by

graduates or students dropping out of universities and polytechnics to join such radical movements (Faseke 50).

Scholars who defend the instrumentalist stance that religion is a smokescreen evoked upon by politicians who exploit the poor, make reference to the timing of these intense radicalization (early 1980s and 2000s), pointing to the fact that these were the rare occasions Nigeria was under civilian rule and that the political climate exacerbated these radical tendencies (Adesoji Maitatsine and Boko Haram 101-104). While this position also has some credence, I have earlier highlighted that radical tendencies were suppressed under military rule for fear of brutal repression. It is also important to add that the early 1980s, inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini's Iranian revolution, marked a period where there was intense proliferation of literature that advocated Islamic radicalism and violent 'jihadism'. The Egyptian Abd al-Salam Faraj's, pamphlet, translated, *The Neglected Duty*, was one that was widely distributed; so also was the work of his mentor, Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Ma'alim fi'l-Tariq* (English translation: Milestones). These works were not only circulated in the country but made for compulsory reading for members of radical Muslims and thus enhanced their conviction (Alao 18). Such convictions partly explain the high rate of radicalism during this period.

Conclusion

The essay has attempted to demonstrate that Islamic radicalism and religious violence in Nigeria have longer antecedents and deeper complexities than often conceived. Nigeria is indeed a country that is plagued by social injustices, poverty and unemployment; these incontrovertibly provide fertile breeding grounds for radical militant groups, but these conditions are not in themselves the prime cause for conflicts motivated by religion. Faith is rarely the sole cause of these crises but it is central to far too many conflicts to be dismissed as an epiphenomenon in the analysis and search for a durable solution. Religious leaders and activists are indeed capable of being opportunists and using the political ambience in the country to gain advantage and privileges for their particular beliefs and traditions, but they only act on the religious beliefs of these militants, and this is cannot be regarded as a 'brainwash' but religious conviction. As I have argued, religion, of any tradition, does not usually make sense to non-adherents as it does not operate on logical premises. These militant do not believe they are killing people but eradicating evil; and act as they do because they believe that they can influence historical events (McTernan 38).

With the role of conviction in religious conflicts in view, it becomes

necessary for policy makers and stakeholders to change their approach from quelling these crises with brute force to winning the 'hearts and minds' of these militant radicals. To underestimate the role of religious conviction in their strategy of resolution is to underestimate the destructive potential that lies in texts and traditions susceptible to contradictory interpretations. Moreover, as far as religious conflicts are concerned, tackling them with force—as the case study of the Maitatsine and the Boko Haram show—are usually counterproductive as they even generate more radicals who are sympathetic to the cause of their co-ideologues. Therefore, policy makers need to do more in enhancing inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue which would attempt to carve a hermeneutic culture which eschews violence of any form. Religious leaders also need to be more proactive in addressing the sources of the violence that emanate from within their own religious communities.

Notes

1. Between 1980 and 2008 alone, over 50, 000 deaths have been associated with religiously motivated crises (Alao 35).
2. The Qadiriyya, for example, are said to be generally more conservative especially as regards gender and economic issues (see Falola 230)
3. They are more united these days because of the need for solidarity against the emergent militant sects of Islam

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