

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**

**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

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**OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION**

# **Religious Tensions in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Militant Group**

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master Degree**

**Submitted by: Ziane Fouzia  
Lamri Toufik**

**Supervised by: Dr. Baghdadi Assia**

**Academic Year: 2016/2017**

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## **Abstract.**

Religion is said to be a key component in bringing social stability and rest to building a nation. However, in a multi religious, multi ethnic, multi linguistic, and multi cultural country like Nigeria, religion tends to be a source to fuel instability and disharmony. The emergence of armed groups like Boko Haram has plagued a nation and a country already overwhelmed by a Muslim-Christian polarization knitted with a political intrigue. This research casts light on the period following the return to Democratic rule adopted in 1999; and aims at digging the reality behind Nigeria's continuous political and social struggle as the country struggles to survive. To achieve this, the research politically analyzes some key events, mainly caused by the Boko Haram sectarian group, which poisoned the coexistence of the adherents of the two Abrahamic religions. Despite the government's declaration of the group's defeat in 2015, a deep look into Nigeria's core demonstrates that the ideology is still alive and is deeply rooted in society to the extent that the movement has soon reemerged and continued mildewing the country and the nation as well.

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*General  
Introduction*

## General Introduction

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The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Anchor Books edition, New York, 1994. Chapter 20 pp.123.

In many parts of the world, religion could serve as an instrument of social harmony. Paradoxically, however, it has also proved to be a motive for violence (Sampson 2012). Many religious extremists create and engage in conflicts justifying their acts as “holy warfare” done in the name of God. Abu Nimer et al. (685) emphasize that issues related to religion have taken broader significance since the Cold War and the events of September 11. In a study conducted in Barcelona; Spain, Reynal - Querol (465-483) found out that societies which are divided along religious lines are more prone to intense and prolonged conflict than those divided by political, geographical, and ethnic differences. This fact, perhaps, explains the prime position that religious violence occupies in Nigeria’s political equation.

With an estimated population of 186 million, Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country that is about half Muslim and half Christian (CIA 2016). The Islam-Christianity dichotomy in the country provides a good example for evaluating the relations between the two Abrahamic religions. Nigeria has proven to be receptive towards Islam and Christianity. Such a fertile milieu has provided the soil for both

## General Introduction

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religions to flourish. The Cross and the Crescent thus have found a hospitable place within Nigeria's political arena. Despite the amicability that has long existed between the two faith communities, Muslims and Christians have been viewed as the major antagonists with a long record of bloody encounters involving many conflicts; Akinade stressed it in a lecture he delivered in 2002.

For years, this religious polarization plagued the country (Oluwaseun 2015, Ibenwa 2014, Nwaomah 2011, and many others) leading Nigeria to become a "country in chaos". Social and political instability, heavy toll in loss of human life, political and social disintegration, economic decay, to name a few, seem to be endemic in Nigeria. Considerable research has been done regarding the causes of violent religious conflicts in Nigeria. The recurring sectarian violence can be related to many factors. According to Danjibo (3), the failure of governance is responsible for the eruption and spread of violence. Salawu (345-353) believes that government neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry are some of the predisposing factors. In his political treatise, kwaja (105-115) identifies fragility of the government in terms of their capacity to manage rising inequality, corruption, gross violation of human rights, contestations over land as the underlying causes of violent conflicts in Nigeria.

In the light of globalisation and under the new political order that resulted during and after the Cold war, the third world war allies of the west have been considered as the worst victims of the new social regime (Okechukwu 80-97). This "new order" tends to "create conflicts within states rather than between states" (Evans,

## General Introduction

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1994; Van de Goor et al. 1996 qtd in *ibid*). Nigeria, as one victim, seems to be greatly affected by this “new regime”.

In the case of Nigeria, conflicts are most of the time linked, in a way or another, to religion. The fundamental issue about religion, however, is that it lies at the heart of politics in Nigeria. Ibenwa, in this respect, argues that there has always been a strong divide between a predominantly Muslim north and a south which has been primarily Christian (3-8). Hence, to open up the question of the relationship of religion to conflict is to open up some of the most difficult and controversial issues which are deeply rooted in, and fundamentally cancelled by, contemporary understandings of tolerance and tension in Nigeria.

Such a tense milieu, where religion is being politicized, created a climate favourable for many violent sectarian groups to emerge. Armed groups such as Boko Haram, Walker argued, have emerged with the motive to put an end to a corrupt government (2). The group has violently launched, since its foundation, a series of violent attacks on political, military and religious leaders as well as on civilian innocent people leading to a massive destruction of human life and properties (*ibid*); and drove peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims to be an outreaching state to be attained.

This study is conducted to investigate the “special” relationship existing between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria and its impact on the country and the people as well. Thus the following research questions guide the improvement in this study in achieving its purpose:

## General Introduction

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- How do the two religions co-exist?
- What factors led to the existing conflicts between the two?
- In what ways do religious conflicts affect the country?
- Are there any measures taken by the government to contain them?

The politicization of religion has inspired the writing of this research paper which is aimed at exploring the relationship between the two; how they both relate to power; and the problems that have arisen there from. In doing so, the study follows a historical approach whereby data are collected and treated analytically.

In trying to answer the fore mentioned questions, this research is divided into three main chapters. The paper, in the first chapter, starts with a glance at the host country, Nigeria; its geographical position, historical background, and the economic arena. The paper, then, within the second chapter, continues its journey to introduce the two religions, Islam and Christianity. It focuses on the history of the arrival of each faith on the Nigerian ground and how both shape the country's identity and fuel the conflicts plaguing it. The paper's final destination is in the third chapter containing a political analysis of the factors which agitate those conflicts and their emerging effects as well.

*Chapter One:*

*In The  
Hospitality of  
Nigeria*

Nigeria is an African country which enjoys a geographical, economical and historical richness.

### 1. The Geographical Arena

With an estimated population of more than 186 million people, Nigeria emerges as Africa’s most populous country (CIA 2016 sec. Geography). Nigeria covers an area of 923,768 sq km (BBC 2017). Nigeria is located on the Gulf of Guinea on Africa’s western coast, and is surrounded by the Republic of [Benin](#) in the west, [Chad](#) and [Cameroon](#) in the east, and [Niger](#) in the north (ibid). The Federal Republic of Nigeria comprises [36 states](#) and the [Federal Capital Territory](#), where the [capital, Abuja](#) is located (BBC 2017). The 36 states are listed with their date of statehood (Nairaland Forum Home Page):

State	Date of Statehood	State	Date of Statehood
Abia	27 August 1991	Kano	27 May 1967
Adamawa	27 August 1991	Katsina	23 September 1987
Akwa Ibom	23 September 1987	Kebbi	27 August 1991
Anambra	27 August 1991	Kogi	27 August 1991
Bauchi	3 February 1976	Kwara	27 May 1967
Bayelsa	1 October 1996	Lagos	27 May 1967
Benue	3 February 1976	Nasarawa	1 October 1996
Borno	3 February 1976	Niger	3 February 1976
Cross River	27 May 1967	Ogun	3 February 1976
Delta	27 August 1991	Ondo	3 February 1976
Ebonyi	1 October 1996	Osun	27 August 1991

<b>Edo</b>	27 August 1991	Oyo	3 February 1976
<b>Ekiti</b>	1 October 1996	Plateau	3 February 1976
<b>Enugu</b>	27 August 1991	Rivers	27 May 1967
<b>Gombe</b>	1 October 1996	Sokoto	3 February 1976
<b>Imo</b>	3 February 1976	Taraba	27 August 1991
<b>Jigawa</b>	27 August 1991	Yobe	27 August 1991
<b>Kaduna</b>	27 May 1967	Zamfara	1 October 1996

### Nigeria's 36 states (Nairaland Forum)

The following two maps illustrate the location of Nigeria in Africa and the distribution of states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

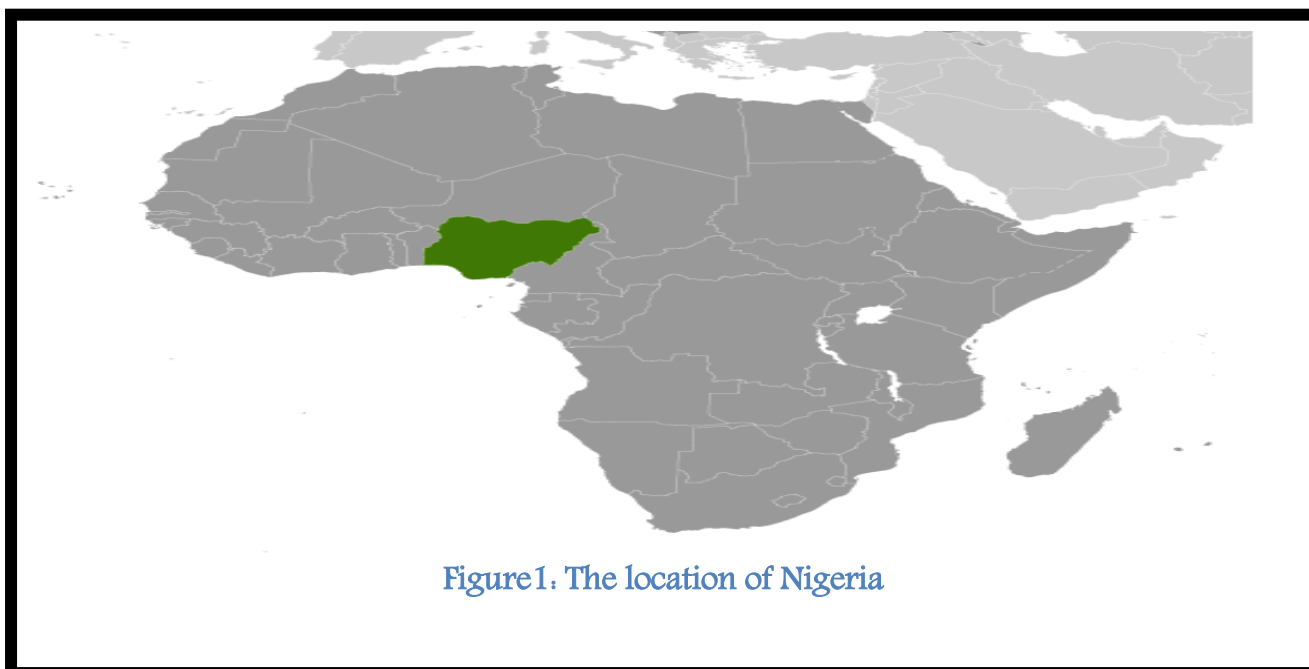


Figure 1. The location of Nigeria

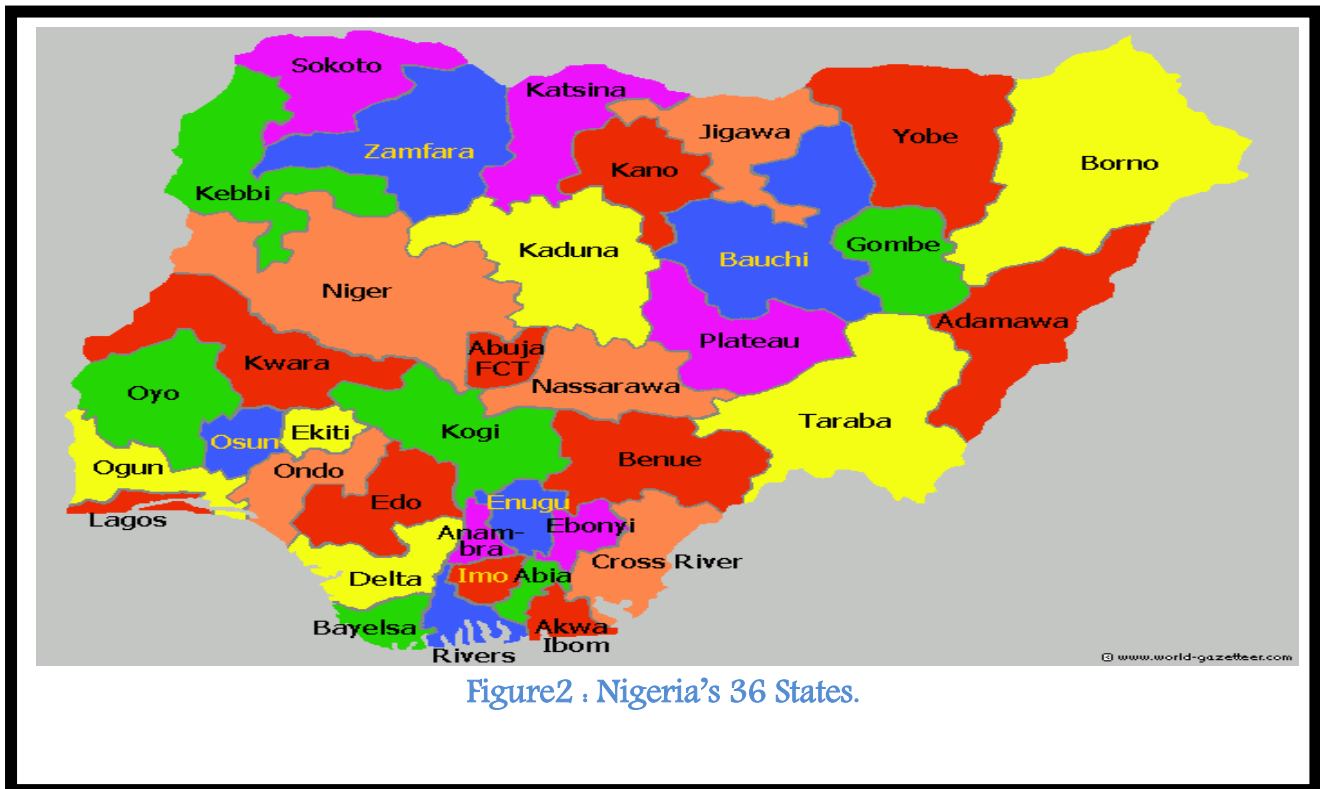


Figure2 : Nigeria's 36 States.

Nigeria's 36 states ([http:// Nigeria's States](http://Nigeria's States))

The geographical position of Nigeria, just north the equator, seems to shape her tropical climate. The hot and wet tropical climate in Nigeria is the result of the interaction of two air masses, the moist Tropical maritime coming from the Atlantic Ocean and the drier Tropical continental coming from north-east winds (USA TODAY par. 1; and Online Nigeria pars. 2 and3). In view of this; Nigeria is divided into two climatic parts, north and south (Online Nigeria par. 5). While the southern part encompasses four seasons, the northern part enjoys only two seasons (Come to Nigeria sec. 1 and 2).

## 2. The Economic Rostrum.

Being the largest oil producer, Nigeria emerges as Africa's biggest economy (CIA 2016 sec. Economy). In the same respect; the OPEC, in its *Annual Statistical Bulletin*

for 2016, acknowledges that Nigeria is the world's 7<sup>th</sup> Crude Oil producer. With \$41,818 million in 2015 (ibid), "Oil [in Nigeria] has been a dominant source of income and government revenues since the 1970s" (CIA 2016 sec. Economy). The oil production area concentrates round the Niger-Delta Region, in the Southern part of Nigeria, which comprises the following nine southern states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers (Oviasuyi and Uwadiae 110). Oil discovery in Nigeria dates back to 1956 by the Royal Dutch Shell oil company (The Guardian, Oil in Nigeria) in Bayelsa state (BBC NEWS 2009 Home Page). However, this wealth from oil exportation revenues was nothing but a "curse" for the country and the people are plagued by "massive poverty" (Oviasuyi and Uwadiae 115-119).



- Oil struck in June 1956
- Government has made \$1.6trillion since discovery
- Most Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day

### **Figure3: BBC NEWS: Nigeria's Oil**

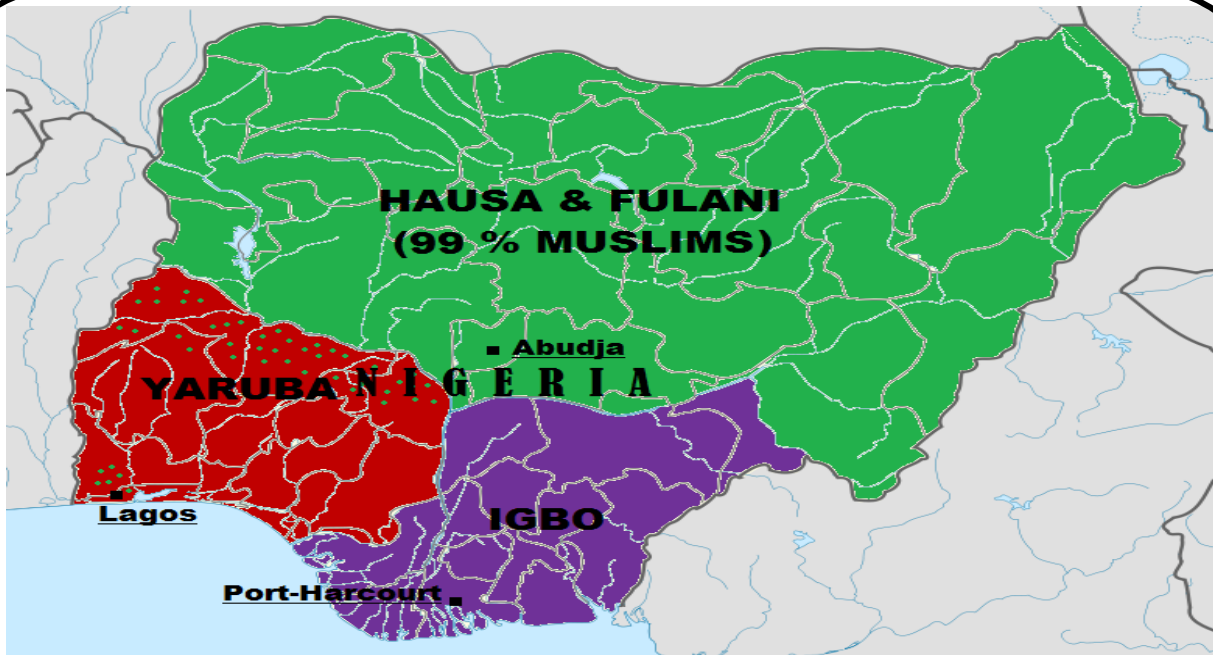
In spite of the heavy oil industry that Nigeria relies on for sustaining economy, agriculture accounts for 41% of the Gross Domestic Product (FAO 2010 sec. Our partners: Nigeria). Nigeria's wide variety of crops seems to be influenced by the

country's geographical position and ecological variation. The major agricultural products encompass maize, yam, palm oil, cocoa, rice, peanuts and millets (ibid).

Nigeria's agricultural sector has long served the country's economy and employed two-thirds of the entire labor force (FAO 2017, Nigeria at a glance). However, the sector faces serious problems which curb its developments. "Since the eighties", poor funding, frequent changes in government policies, , limited adoption of research findings and technologies, high cost of farm inputs, inefficient managements of resources, inadequate storage facilities and poor access to markets all contribute to the withdrawal of agricultural productivity in Nigeria (FAO 2010 sec. Our partners: Nigeria; and FAO in Nigeria 2017 sec. Nigeria at a glance).

### **3. The Historical Ground.**

"Named after the River Niger" (Ayua and Dakas 1), Africa's most populous country is formed of more than 250 ethnic groups the most influential of which are Hausa and the Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo (CIA 2016 sec. people and society). Additionally, and according to the *Central Intelligence Agency*, more than 500 languages are spoken in Nigeria with English, a colonial legacy (Ayua and Dakas 1), being the official language (sec. People and Society). From a religious point of view, Nigeria is a land of spiritual opportunities with Islam forming the majority 50%, Christianity forms 40% of the population and indigenous beliefs forming only 10% (ibid). While Muslims predominate the Northern part of Nigeria (Iruonagbe 152) in the Hausa and Fulani area, Christians are concentrated in the Southeast in what is called the Igbo land (Ayua and Dakas 1). However, the "religiously mixed group", Yoruba, occupy the Southwest (ibid). The following chart illustrates the distribution of the three major ethnic groups together with their corresponding religions.



**Figure 4: Ethnic and Religious Groups in Nigeria**

<http://> Ethnic and Religious Groups in Nigeria

Modern-day Nigeria is, according to the *Nigerian Federal Research Division*, the product of many factors chiefly the spread of Islam to the region, the slave trade, and colonialism (1). These are said to bring many changes to the Nigerian society.

The introduction of Islam to Nigeria was via peaceful interactions among traders and scholars (Akinade 121). Trade with North Africa helped Islam to find its way to Nigeria in the eighth century (Oloyede 3). However, by the end of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries Islam was widely spread in the region through scholars; and many Islamic mosques and schools were established (Oloyede 4 and Yeld 113). Since then, Islam has played a crucial role in the political and social lives of Nigerians (Wakili 3). For the *Nigerian Federal Research Division*, Islam made it possible for the Northern part to unite under one “Islamic government” (1).

The late fourteenth century was nothing but a beginning of a dramatic change for Nigerians. The transatlantic slave trade, that started with the Portuguese in 1471 and then moved to the British during the eighteenth century, forced more than 4 million people to migrate (Nigerian Federal Research Division 1-2). This process deeply affected the country and the people as well, and its impact is “still evident” (ibid 2). Forced migration through slave trade continued to exist in Nigeria till the early nineteenth century with the coming of Christian missionaries who put an end to slavery (Danjibo and Oladeji 10).

Alongside with the introduction of Islam and the process of slave trade, colonialism seems to have a huge impact on the country and the nation as a whole. Nigeria, by 1900, became under political control of Britain (The Commonwealth sec. colonial period). In fact, the British settlement in Africa’s populous country dates back to the eighteenth century when the British replaced the Portuguese to emerge as the dominant power of slave trade (ibid). However, by the nineteenth century, slavery was abolished by Christian missionaries who came to the region (Danjibo and Oladeji 10) and led the British Government to ban slavery (The Commonwealth sec. colonial period). In spite of the abolishment of slavery, other interests such as palm oil (Nigerian Federal Research Division 3) enhanced Britain’s interest in making Nigeria her protectorate (Ayua and Dakas 2). These commercial benefits rapidly transformed into political interests during the “scramble” where European powers competed to gain as many spheres of influence as they could (Nigerian Federal Research Division 3). Competition over territories, hence, led Britain to shift towards political control over Nigeria in 1900 (ibid). Though it lasted only six decades, the colonial period brought a deep and drastic change (Nigerian Federal Research

Division 2). Nigeria got its independence on October 1, 1960 but is still suffering from the new order colonialism left behind (ibid 1-2).

Africa's biggest economy and its most populous country is linguistically, religiously, ethnically, and culturally diverse. This diversity made of it a fertile soil for Nigeria to become what it is now.

*Chapter Two:*

*Two Gods, One  
Land*

Nigeria seems to be a land of religious opportunities. It encompasses three major religions with Islam being the most popular covering 50% of the population, Christianity with 40%, and indigenous beliefs with only 10% (CIA 2016). Religion, for Nigerians, is life and life is religion (Mbiti 233). For this, the two Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Islam, found Nigeria a fertile land to spread their beliefs. Geoffrey Parrinder (68) states that, "Two great missionary religions, Christianity and Islam, have made powerful inroads into [Nigerian] life in this century" (qtd in A. Strinckland 4).

Though different; Christianity and Islam are, to some extent, alike. Both religions originated from the Middle East. Their guiding principles are based on divine revelation and they have prophets as mediums who receive and articulate God's words. According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, adherents of the two religions "believe in one God, in heaven and hell, (...) and in the literal truth of their scriptures; (...) attend worship services; [and both] give religious alms" (3).

However, the two religions came to Nigeria at different time periods and locations. This chapter discusses the introduction of the Cross and Crescent to the country.

### **01. Islamizing Nigeria**

The spread of Islam in Nigeria dates back to the eleventh century when it first appeared in Borno in the northeast of the country. Later Islam emerged in Hausaland in the northwest and its influence was evident in Kano and Katsina. Islam was for quite some time the religion of the court and commerce, and was spread peacefully by

Muslim clerics and traders. Increasingly, trans-Saharan trade came to be conducted by Muslims. In the second half of the eighteenth century a Muslim revival took place in western Africa, in which Fulani cattle-driving people, who had settled and adopted Islam, played a central role (Agunbiade Nurudeen. P01). In northern Nigeria, the Fulani scholar Uthman dan Fodio launched a jihad in 1804 that lasted for six years, aiming to revive and purify Islam, to eliminate syncretistic beliefs and rituals, to remove all innovations contrary to the Koran and Sharia, and to encourage less devout Muslims to return to orthodox and pure Islam. However, this religious revolution also had a political element concerning state formation and state conflict. It united the Hausa states under sharia law. In 1812 the Hausa dynasties became part of the Islamic State or Caliphate of Sokoto. The Sokoto Caliphate ended with partition in 1903 when the British incorporated it into the colony of Nigeria and the Sultan's power was transferred to the High Commissioner. However, many aspects of the caliphate structure, including the Islamic legal system, were retained and brought forward into the colonial period (The History of the Continent).

A new impetus to the spread of Islam was provided by Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern Region after Nigerian independence in 1960, with his Islamization programme that led to the conversion of over 100,000 people in the provinces of Zaria and Niger. The military coup in 1966, which claimed the lives of many politicians including Ahmadu Bello, brought his Islamization programme to an abrupt end but the 1970s saw continued government policy favouring the dominance of Islam. History has shown that Islamization was easier under military dictatorship and Islam spread quickly under Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) (The History of Nigeria).

## 02. Christianizing Nigeria

Christianity first came to Nigeria through a group of Portuguese missionaries in the fifteenth century (Ibenwa 3, and Moller 25). These missionaries came through the southern coastal areas (Nwaomah 96). It was not until the eighteenth century that Christianity started to propagate by those freed slaves who had been converted to Christianity and began to return to Nigeria (Ibenwa 3). However, the “real breakthrough for Christianity” was successfully accomplished with the “Scramble for Africa” in the late nineteenth century\* (Moller 26). Nigeria was to be a “sphere of influence” belonging to Britain. Once British settlers arrived to Nigeria in 1841 (Ibenwa 3), they started building churches in an attempt “to win the hearts and minds of the people (...)” (Moller 26) and thus, making control over the land an easier process.

Missionaries found it difficult to convince the people to convert to Christianity because of two main reasons. The first was that Nigerians were very attached to their already established traditional beliefs (A. Stickland 4), the fact that made it a hard task for evangelists to make people turn into Christianity. The second was that Nigerians always related Christianity to colonialism (Okon 199). Roodney contends that “missionaries were agents of colonialism” and that, together with imperial authorities, they came to subjugate and exploit [Nigeria] (qtd in Okon 199).

Despite all the difficulties confronted by the missionaries, Christianity became rooted in most of Southern Nigeria by the beginning of the twentieth century (Gray 59). What then shaped the abrupt change in peoples’ attitudes towards conversion to Christianity?

Colonialism, Gray (60) emphasizes, played a crucial role in introducing Christianity to Nigeria. The political and social anarchy resulting from the British military occupation of Nigeria translated into horror and insecurity among the people (Ekechi 104 – 105). However, this was not the case for Christianized Nigerians. “These”, Ekechi insisted, “were treated with some measure of respect by British officials . . . and received preferential treatment.” (105). Christianity, thus, became an access towards security and stability. But beyond that, “Christianity was”, was according to Ekechi’s words, “a badge of honor”. Hence, to escape persecution and benefit from the rewards given by the church, people rushed to convert to Christianity (Ekechi 105). In an attempt to attract more and more people to accept Evangelism, Christian missionaries introduced humanitarian activities and services. Indeed, as Galadima and Turaki argued claimed, “They fought against illiteracy and ignorance through educational programs and institutions; fought against . . . diseases and epidemics through medical work; and developed their religious and spiritual morals through the plantation of mission stations and churches” (96). “These”, continued the two authors, “were not ends in themselves but rather a means to the gospel” (100).

However, the mission of the missionaries did not stop at developing social and religious services but evangelists intervened in governmental issues. During the British settlement, the colonial administration imposed forced labor on Nigerians to build government institutions and make roads; the fact that enraged the people (Ekechi 105). Ekechi emphasized the idea that in order to escape such an exploitative form of work, many people sought refuge in churches (106). By intervening

forcefully, the missionary saved the Christians from the risks of the forced labor (ibid). This fact again led to a mass conversion to Christianity.

Christianity, as Gray (60) puts it, would not have made its rapid advances in Nigeria without the help of Black initiatives. "Freed slaves", he adds, "Who as teachers and traders were the pioneer evangelists in Southern Nigeria" (ibid). They played a crucial role in attracting people to turn to Christianity (Galadima and Turaki 86).

### **03.A Symposium on Religious Existence of Christianity and Islam.**

The journey of both religions, Islam and Christianity has gone through different stations. They experienced moments of agreement and peaceful coexistence, and they did experience periods of discord and conflicts.

#### **3.1. Religious Coexistence: Different but Amicable**

Since their introduction to Nigeria, Christianity and Islam have long coexisted together under peaceful conditions (Ushe 120). The relation between the two religions has portrayed a clear picture of prolific encounters. Akinade, in a lecture he delivered in 2002, stressed that the fact that both religions share commonalities paved the way for religious dialogue and understanding to take place. This, as it seemed, encouraged the two communities to live side by side in concord and consort. Their relations have been characterized by commercial cooperation, political stability, shared social experiences, and common cultural heritage. Akinade, in this respect, explicates the relations between Christians and Muslims that dominated the Nigerian pre-colonial period.

"In many parts of Nigeria, there is a form of dialogue of life that operates on practical and day to day terms. Christians and Muslims live next to each other; mingle freely in all aspects of human

endeavor, meeting in the market place and on the streets, in schools and other institutions. Both Christians and Muslims are awakened every morning by the strident voice of the muezzin from the minaret of the mosque, urging faithful believers that “it is better to pray than to sleep.” Christians receive Christmas and Easter greeting cards from their Muslim friends, neighbors, and relatives. Muslims are present in churches for the baptism, wedding, or burial of relatives and friends. In this dialogue of life, Christians and Muslims are enriched by each other’s experience and spirituality, and strengthened by certain features of the faith of the other”.

The beautiful religious image that both sects drew was desecrated by colonialism. Ushe agrees that the harmonious relationship and the mutual respect and understanding disappeared in Nigeria due to the new order the colonizer left behind (120). Hence, conflicts found a fertile land to spring and augment.

### **3.2. Religious Tensions: Beginning of Bloodshed**

Ushe argues that the relations between Christians and Muslims started to become tense since independence, in 1960, the fact that led conflicts to emerge and dominate the Nigerian piazza. The harmony that long existed at a Muslim-Christian theatre faded by the desire for power and domination. Nigeria, since then, has become, as Kura described it, “a theatre of war characterized by an increasing number of religious crises” (par. 6). The struggle over power and domination shortly led to a bloody conflict, the Biafra Civil War from 1967 and 1970, in which more than one million died (Jacob 42). The recurring religious conflicts in Nigeria were doing nothing but enlarging the gap between Christians and Muslims and those days of peace and rest seem not to come back. The violent conflicts have plagued Nigeria as a country newly getting out of decades of struggle for independence.

The Nigerian religious sphere has proved to be receptive towards Islam and Christianity. Both found welcoming hands to accept them. Though they came at different periods of time, both religions affected greatly their adherents. Their peaceful coexistence did not last long, the situation turned to bloody tense conflicts in which the biggest loser is the Nigerian.

# *Chapter Three:*

## *Nigeria's Religious Tensions; The Endless Chase*

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The end of the Cold War marked the emergence of a new political scenario, the politicization of religion (Abu Nimar 685 – 686). In fact, the collapse of Socialist ideology, gave the opportunity for liberal capitalism to dominate the world. This new political order made the third world allies of the west the worst culprits (Ebeanu 84). What characterized this period was that religion played a key role in manipulating politics. The intervention of religion in political matters and vice versa is said to lead, most of the time, to conflicts. Research asserts that societies that are divided along religious lines are more vulnerable to intense and prolonged conflict than those divided by political, territorial and ethnic differences. Hence, in a secular country like Nigeria, violent conflicts seem to make it incarnate the term “Vampire State” as suggested by George Ayittey in his work with the telling title “Africa in chaos”.

In a country that is half Muslim and half Christian (CIA 2016), religion in Nigeria is being a source of social unrest and disharmony. In fact, there is a consensus that such a Muslim-Christian “dichotomy exists and is so deep that it threatens the existence of the nation” (Ebeanu 3). This religious polarization plagued the country and led to devastating conflicts most of which occurred since the return to democratic rule in 1999. Since then, religion, in a way or another, has been used as a divisive power to destabilize the country.

Recurring sectarian violence in Nigeria is multi dimensional in terms of causes and in terms of effects. In effect, while a great deal of these causes conflate, much emphasis is on the social, economic, ethno-religious and governance factors. In the case of Nigeria, these factors, most of the time, end up with violent acts that take a

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religious matrix. That is, a problem may start as social or economic but finish as a religious one. To understand the way these factors operate, this paper casts light on one group that emerged as a result of the interplay of the forth mentioned factors, the Boko Haram movement.

## **1. Boko Haram. Carrying the Brunt of Struggle**

Conflicts on religious grounds have been fueled mainly by the violent armed group Boko Haram. The group's operations are driven by various factors and in return they do have destructive effects on various sectors.

### **1.1. Societal ills as a fuel to violent conflicts**

It is of common sense that the standards and morals of a society determine the way its members act. However; if these values are corrupt, social evils erupt. Social ills, if one is permitted to call them as such, are endemic in the Nigerian society. Nigeria as reported by Sklar and Whitaker in their "*Rivers of Oil, Trails of Blood*" is rich but the people are poor (6). The current situation of the country makes it clear for an observer that issues such as poverty, insufficient food, illiteracy, inadequate shelter, disease, unemployment, exploitation and insecurity of food and life take a high status among a large proportion of Nigerians. Additionally when social problems are coupled with social injustice and bad governance, the scene is set for violent activities. Analysts, such as Odumosu (72), view that "In Nigeria, there is a tendency to exalt the rich without bothering about the source of wealth". Such kind of discrimination, it is agreed, drives members who feel the burden of both economic and social discrimination towards acting violently. Mohammad Yusuf, "a school

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drop-out," and the founder of the Boko Haram movement is a good example to explicate this idea. Psychoanalysts, such as Salaam, believe that Yusuf developed some psychological deficiencies such as ideological intolerance and vengeance as a result of social deprivation (par. 4). This kind of deficiencies, generally lead people and in this case it did, lead Yusuf to develop a sense of discontent over society in general and people who hold a contrary ideology in particular. In order to compensate for his need, Yusuf sought shelter in religion but followed an extremist view. He, as a result of his followership to Islamist (but not Islamic) ideology, founded an Islamic group in 2002 which he named "Boko Haram" (BBC 2016).

In order to understand the way this group acts, it is of high importance to explicate the term "Boko Haram". In Hausa language, the word "Boko" means "Western/foreign" whereas the word "Haram" is derived from Arabic and means "forbidden" (Danjibo 7). "Piecing the two words together," Danjibo explains, "means to forbid everything Western" (7). Yusuf's intent behind founding such a group was to substitute "modern state formation with the traditional Islamic state" (ibid). In fact, since its creation, Boko Haram has been considered as a threat to the nation because of the violent attacks and the rising conflicts it provokes. Reports on the events agree that since the killing of Yusuf, the founder and leader of the group, during the riots of 2009; the group has engaged in more frequent and destructive violent operations. Media-documented statistics estimate that the death toll from 2009 to April 2017 is estimated to be more than 52 929 people. During the riots of 2009 alone, "over 1000 lost their lives including Yusuf", 3 500 persons internally displaced, 1 264 children orphaned, over 392 women widowed, and several properties destroyed (Lacey 17).

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Following the killing of their leader, Boko Haram members started a series of destructive attacks the most influential of which was the Abuja attacks on the UN's main office in 2011. "This is not an attack on Nigeria," Nigeria's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Viola Onwuliri told the BBC, "but an attack on the global community, an attack on the world." Condemning this terrible act, the UN chief, Ban Ki-moon, together with the most senior American general working on Africa, Gen Carter Ham, said many sources indicated ties between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, which operates in North Africa. Repeated heavy attacks by the members of the Boko Haram members led the U.S Department of State to allocate Boko Haram a terrorist organization in 2013. This, however, did not stop the group from continuing carrying their violent operations. The group launched attacks that killed hundreds of students, burned many villages, and kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in April 2014. The abducted schoolgirls, according to a local human rights group, have been sold into forced marriage to their Boko Haram kidnappers for \$12 some of whom have been taken to the neighboring Chad and Cameroon. Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau acknowledged that the group had taken the girls and said they would be sold. "I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market, by Allah," Shekau said, according to Agence France-Presse. Three weeks after the abduction and following the failure of Jonathan Goodluck's government to find the abducted girls, growing protests sprung up around the country. The humanitarian calamity also gained support from international activists who put pressure on the government to bring back the girls. The situation became a global rallying cry and anger bulged against a state that was running up to February's elections. Halite Aliyu, of the

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Borno-Yobe People's Forum, told the Associated Press on Wednesday "We are living in a state of anarchy" where capturing women and then selling them off can be considered nothing but a medieval kind of slavery. On account to the government's inability to rescue the kidnapped girls, the United States sent a team of experts to Nigeria to help finding them. While only 50 girls only could reportedly escape, unfortunately and regrettably too, about 220 still remain at the hands of the Boko Haram members till today. Because the violent acts have always been driven by the group's intention to establish an Islamic state, the abduction of the girls seemed to be considered as a slap on the face of the Nigerian government under a Christian leader, especially because the elections were soon coming in February 2015.

## **1.2. Religious extremism, a proper ground for violence**

One of the clearest aspects of religion is its ability to bring social harmony and peaceful coexistence within societies. Regrettably this is not the role religion has taken in a sectarian polarized country like Nigeria. It is not religion, however, that fuels violence, it is the misunderstanding of the doctrine as well as the extremist ideals held by adherents which embrace violence. Motivated by the intention of establishing an Islamic state but confronted by harsh government treatment, the Boko Haram sect radicalized. The group calls itself *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*, or "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad". Boko Haram, as mentioned earlier in this paper, colloquially stands for "Western education is sin". In this essence, the group violently rejects western concepts and fights the government's adoption of western modernizing values.

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Following this dogma, the group harshly targeted schools and universities destructing hundreds of educational buildings and killing thousands of innocent people. Fear and horror urged parents to withdraw their children from institutions and forced schools to shut down. This, by no means, worsened the situation of spreading ignorance and illiteracy among children in the Nigerian society.

Carrying Jihad in the Name of God as a justification for their violent acts, Boko Haram members imposed intimidation and brutality amongst Christians and Muslims as well. The purging of what the group called “bad Muslims” and the prey of Christians set a favorable atmosphere for tensions to continue and get worse. The mass murders, suicide bombings, mass abductions, and the assassination of political and religious leaders make violence a chronic curse in the equation of the social stability in Nigeria. The 2002 religious crisis which gulped Kaduna was, *The Telegraph* reported, generated by Muslims’ desire to preserve religious purity in a multi-religious milieu. The insurgency occurred when the country was preparing for the Miss World contest. Muslims contended that the scenery of girls manifesting themselves in semi-nude clothes and prancing to an ogling public violated the tenets of Islam. In fact, nudity is despised by moderate Muslims and Christians who prefer to condemn it in their mosques and churches. However, the riots of Miss World resulted from Islamic extremism that led to violent attacks on Christians. Adam Muhammad Ajiri, professor of Islamic studies at the University of Maiduguri, in an interview with Aljazeera addressed Boko Haram members saying, "What is happening is not a jihad, it's genocide. What are your objectives? What do you want to achieve?... It's a faithless Muslim organization engaged in carnage. And then

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unfortunately the media and the people took it as Islam, but there's no Islam there". This shows the prevalent ignorance among some Muslims who associate Christianity with impiety the fact that leads to intolerance which in turn erupts into violent tensions carried in the name of God.

### **1.3. Poor and corrupt politics as a good fond for bloodshed**

In addition to the injustice that is deep-rooted in the Nigerian society, and religious extremism and intolerance; Boko Haram came into existence as a result of poor governance. The government's inability to provide welfare for its citizens has created a vicious cycle of corruption and poverty at all levels leading to violent acts. The Christian federal governance through unjust distribution of national wealth in the country created a North-South dichotomy. In his political treatise, Uthman Dan Fodio, a political analyst in African affairs wrote, "while Nigeria scores very poorly on every index of human development, Northern Nigeria sinks below the abysmal national average to the extent that a child born in the northwest or in the northeast is likely to have a lower quality of life than a compatriot born in the southwest or southeast". According to the National Bureau of Statistics, In the North, 72 percent of people live in poverty, compared to 27 percent in the South. This inequality in distributing the government's wealth is multi-dimensional to the extent that led to the creation of a huge gap between the state and the citizens. The spread of illiteracy, diseases, unemployment, delinquency, and low quality of services is incarnate in the Northern part of the country. The huge disparity between regions in favoring the Christian South over the Muslim North raised dissatisfaction among Muslims in

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Northern states. Favoring one section over another automatically leads to neglecting the excluded one. The policy of exclusion may be considered as the policy of marginalization. Feeling marginalized makes people drive towards a party that contains them, supports them, and most of the time recruits them. The destination is very often to Boko Haram whose rise can be seen as a result to the failed government not a cause to it. The group's operations, as an opposition to marginalization and neglect, have been clearly carried against the state and have been violent in tone.

## **2. Nigeria's Consequences of Religious Struggle, No End in Sight**

The costs of conflicts are horrendous, and in many cases conflicts seemed to have wiped out the accomplishments of decades of development. The violence resulting from the terrorist operations of the group that calls itself Boko Haram made Nigeria endure deep-rooted illnesses that are threatening the existence of the nation.

### **2.1. Social Anarchy and Instability**

In a chaotic country like Nigeria, society is united by nothing but pain and grief. The attacks held by the Boko Haram movement caused a total social instability and a complete anarchy among the people. The destruction of houses and livelihoods with the burning of farms and whole villages impose on people to join camps where basic supplies are scarce. Aljazeera in 2016 reported that the UN estimated 4.5 million people living in camps are in need of food. Because of the lack of food aid, thousands of people are starving to death. The Doctors Without Borders team reported to Al

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Arabiya English that 75.000 children died of hunger while other 400.000 are at risk of famine and malnutrition. It is agreed that malnutrition is a welcoming ground for many diseases; hence, children living in badly equipped refugee camps are vulnerable to killer epidemics such as sepsis, malaria and diarrhea. Malaria, according to World Health Organization, is the direct cause for 40% of infant deaths in Nigeria with other 7.6 million children under threat. In such conditions, characterized by certainly infectious water and poor hygiene with poor sanitary services, refugee camps become a seeding mold for even more threatening infectious diseases like cholera, hepatitis E, and Ebola. According to Doctors Without Borders team, 25 pregnant women died from Hepatitis E in Diffa camp and 135 were newly identified in April 2017.

Accepting to live in such bad conditions was the only choice for Nigerians to flee Boko Haram violent operations. However, escaping to join the camps did not prevent them from terror but it did worsen the situation. The displaced people became easy targets for the attacks made again by Boko Haram members the fact that made the aghast people live in constant fear and unrest. The group has launched a series of suicide and bomb attacks on camps where displaced people sought refuge. As reported by Aljazeera in January 2015, more than 86 people were killed in an attack on a camp in Maiduguri. The scene was similarly repeated a year later when the group used girls to bombard a camp in Borno. The New York Times reported on February 10, 2016 that two young girls blasted themselves with bombs. In the double suicide attack, as reported by Aljazeera, 70 people have been killed. The camp was

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home to those displaced people who were forced from home by the armed group, Boko Haram.

Camps not only are home to epidemics and sustainable fear and attacks but also a favorable ground for abuse and rape. Because camps lack many basic services such as potable water, food, clothing and other basic elements, people take advantage of the situation to abuse women and girls. Women in such situations hold the double burden, the trauma of the conflict escorted by the fear of being kidnapped or raped. The violation of human rights in camps for displaced people fleeing from Boko Haram is very heavy. Human Rights Watch published a report in October 2016 in which it recorded that, in July alone, 43 women and girls had been sexually abused by camp leaders, policemen and soldiers. Escaping the attacks of Boko Haram is not the key for a restful life; instead, it is the beginning of a terrifying curse for women. Things go from bad to worse. People like policemen and camps' leaders are supposed to provide security for the displaced women but in a chaotic corrupt country like Nigeria, these "supposed" security providers become, themselves, abusers. The 43 women reported were sexually exploited by officials. Their need for food and basic life elements fueled their acceptance for sexual abuse and exploitation. This fact demonstrates the extent to which Nigerians live in a country wounded by corrupt morals.

## **2.2. An Identity Crisis**

Another dimension in the Nigerian religious equation is the deep-seated divisions Boko Haram assaults create among Nigerians. In fact, the cost is very high. The violence coming from this group translates into a division of the Nigerian society

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under the “we” versus the “them”, or in other words, the “Muslim” versus the “Christian” cliché. This is said to open the door for mutual religious misunderstanding and intolerance among the members of the two religions. The atrocities caused by the Islamist group are bringing nothing but enlarging the gap and deepening the wound already existing between Muslims and Christians. Motivated by its desire to establish an Islamic State but faced by the coming of a Christian, Jonathan Goodluck, to Presidency in 2011 explain the outburst of the series of violent attacks which were focused on, though not directed only to, targeting Christians and churches. Boko Haram has become a real menace for the Christian population. In a frank statement, by Musab al Barnawi, the leader of the group declared in August 2016 that his sect has entered a new era in which the fight, this time, is against the “Christianization of Society”. “We want,” he threatened, “to alert Nigerians and the world that the Islamisation plot has been proven by the Boko Haram new leader Abu Musab al Barnawi that their new mission is to kill all Christians and burn down all churches”, the *World* reported. More than 13.000 Christian have been victims of the burning of churches and the slaughtering of villages, the *International Business Times* added. Some of the victims are priests and religious leaders. Outraged and overwhelmed by the recurring onslaughts on religious people and religious institutions, sometimes even, at religious ceremonies like Christmas days, Christian Nigerians returned to violence as a means to revenge. Many cases were reported where Christians tortured, burned, massacred, and murdered several Muslims. They also targeted mosques and whole villages. The situation has become worse when Christians founded armed groups such as Niger

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Delta Revolutionary Crusaders to thwart Boko Haram violent attacks on Christians. The Christian group took an oath of revenge attacks on Muslims and mosques. "But, we want to warn them (Boko Haram members) that we," the Christian armed group vowed, "will not accept killing of innocent Christians or burning of churches. That if they try it in the north or any part of Nigeria, we will not see any Muslim or mosque in the Niger Delta", reported the *Vanguard*. This can be considered as a terrible headache for the Buhari's administration which stands unable to bring unity in diversity. The result is the incessant pervasive recurring conflicts which seem to bring Nigeria to its knees.

### **2.3. A Forgotten Population**

The fierce fighting between Christians and Muslims on the one hand and the preoccupation of the government with conflicts resulting from armed groups on the other hand have led to the exclusion of key projects like education and employment to the margin. According to a report published by Aljazeera, 50 million youth are struggling with high unemployment. Rising unemployment among people in an instable country like Nigeria is a good reason for crime to spread. Consequently, they are more likely to be utilized as tools for violence rather than for prosperity by people who prioritize their own personal enrichment at the expense of national development. In fact the idle, because of the financial problems they face and the worthless social status they feel, become an easy prey for armed groups like Boko Haram to recruit them. In this respect, John Kerry, in a talk with the CNSNews, underlined the issue of unemployment as a recruitment tool for Boko Haram "where

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young people are grabbed at an early stage, proffered a little bit of money. Their minds are bended, and then the money doesn't matter anymore. They've got the minds, and they begin to direct them into these very extreme endeavors." Paying members with money and using them in operations make them feel their usefulness and worth. Such tactics attract people to join the group and engage in violent acts they might not will to do.

#### **2.4. An Infrastructural Overthrow**

The recurrent sectarian assaults on institutions and buildings, blast of cars and buses with the burning of, sometimes, whole villages are harshly destroying and negatively affecting the infrastructure of Nigeria, making the process of rebuilding the country a difficult task to maintain. Even if the State merges to restore itself, with the repeated violence occurring frequently, Nigeria finds itself entering a vicious cycle.

Since 2009, it is estimated that the loss in material sources is equal, according to Aljazeera Media Centre for Research, to \$9 milliard the fact that caused the government to witness a general infrastructure deficit. Chronic power shortages are worsening the suffering of a nation plagued by decades of governmental neglect and corruption. The continuous violence by a group that is against modernity and western ideals, the Boko Haram sect targets every sign of modern life. Power generators are not an exception, they are also being attacked. The average of electricity supply, for example, is less than three hours per day, and sometimes with no power for three to four days, said Adewale Pearce, an Anglo-Nigerian critic in The

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New York Times. Lack of potable water forces people to drink infectious water leading to the emergence of mortal diseases such as malaria, cholera, typhoid, to name a few. Hence, living under such conditions seems to make of life a nightmare for a nation dancing the macabre dance.

## **2.5. Rotten Political Issues**

The situation in Nigeria has shifted from complexity to complexity qua complexity. The effects that have generated from the religious conflicts mainly resulting from the sectarian group Boko Haram have made the world's political leaders to reconsider the situation in Nigeria. Knowing that Boko Haram is becoming a real threat to the country and to the region as a whole; and at the request of President Goodluck Jonathan, an international summit was organized in 2015 in Paris to discuss security in the region in. "Your struggle is also our struggle," said Hollande. "We will always stand ready not only to provide our political support but our help every time you need it, because the struggle against terrorism is also the struggle for democracy." Following the summit and as Boko Haram continued to advance, international military coalition between the United States, the United Kingdom, and France was formed to intervene in the region. The newly elected President Muhammadu Buhari gave the army a term until the end of 2015 to defeat the "terrorist group". With military help from neighboring Chad and Niger, and after several months of ferocious fighting, *France 24* reported that the coalition military army succeeded to drive Boko Haram from the cities it had already taken. In December 2015, President Buhari said, in interview with the BBC, "So I think technically we have won the war because people are going back into their

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neighborhoods. Boko Haram as an organized fighting force, I assure you, that we have dealt with them."

Although Boko Haram has suffered many military relapses in its fight against the international coalition, the group is still considered as a threat to isolated villages in the region, challenging the claim of victory by the Nigerian military. Sir Aprad, a political analyst in African affairs stated, "They may crush the movement, but they won't kill the ideology, which is based on the gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. The ideology it brought, that Yusuf started, can spread everywhere. Even if the movement has been crushed, maybe in two or three years time we will have to see what they do and where it will re-emerge".

Conflicts in the Nigerian religious equation; the factors differ but the result is one, a fall into the abyss. All factors lead to violence and all sectors are affected by it. What worsened the situation is the emergence of the militant group Boko Haram which added fuel to the fire and made it impossible for unity in diversity to become true.

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*General  
Conclusion*

The Nigerian society is manifested round religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and its biggest economy. However, the existence of two antagonist religions on the Nigerian ground has smudged the country and its nation. In fact since the return to Democratic rule in 1999, competition over power and domination has fueled the struggle between Christians and Muslims. In such a chaotic tense milieu, Poverty, unjust distribution of national wealth, unemployment, poor services, greed of political leaders, religious intolerance and extremism, among others, create a fertile soil for seeds of violence to grow. These have been manifested into feelings of rejection and intolerance towards the other group the fact that motivated the idea of forming militia by both religious sects. The emergence of militant groups like Boko Haram did nothing but worsened the situation. In fact, since its foundation, the group has engaged in and launched a series of bloody, destructive violent attacks. Motivated by the desire to establish an Islamist State, the group has claimed that its fight is against a corrupt, unjust government that contains a corrupt society. However, their attacks are not meant to address the government only but they target Christian civilians and corrupt Muslims as well. The group's incessant assaults have become a hobgoblin which has aggravated the deep-seated hostility between Christians and Muslims all round the country. The government and Christians from their part have carried reprisal attacks that have targeted the Islamist group and civilians too. Victims and oppressors in such a broiling religious atmosphere are hard to recognize, they seem to be everyone and no one on both tallies.

The attacks operated by the militant group left behind social, economic, political and religious landmarks that are still threatening the national security of Nigeria.

The conflicts on religious grounds have brought the Giant of Africa to its knees and turned it to a sleeping dwarf. The experiences of religious conflicts in the country have proved to promote instability and insecurity. Millions have lost their lives, hundreds of thousands of property have been burnt down or destroyed, millions have been displaced and have become exiles in their own home, other millions have become exposed to violence and crime, and memories of the catastrophic events are always remembered with bitterness. The dramas of the successive conflicts led the Administration under Muhamadu Buhari to call for an international military intervention to put an end to the rot suffocating Nigeria. After a fierce fighting of several months, the government leader declared the defeat of the threatening group. Though as an argument for a solution to a politically motivated religious conflict, Buhari's declaration remains unconvincing since the group has shortly reemerged and started a new wave of violence. The group's deep-rooted ideology explains the state's admirable failure to amputate its plague. However, one might consider that the absence of religious dialogue and mutual respect between Christianity and Islam occurring in a corrupt melting pot destroy bridges leading to social harmony and stability.

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