

# **TOLERATION, EXTREMISM AND HATE IN NIGERIA: THE EXPEDIENCY OF ANOTHER SOCIAL AGREEMENT**

IkeChukwu K. Onah\*

## **Abstract**

It is continuously becoming difficult for ethnic groups in Nigeria to live in peace and harmony. The constant killing and hate prevalent in Nigeria which is already becoming a recurring decimal has made life short and brutish. This tension is orchestrated by religious intolerance which gave birth to ethnic distrust and hate. The tension generated by the latter calls for a rethink and renegotiation of the social agreement that brought the various ethnic groups in Nigeria together and reevaluation of the principles of humanism imbedded in various religious doctrines. It is ironic that what individuals evaded in State of nature has become the lacuna to attaining happiness in political society. It is also ironic that the doctrines of these religious groups provide fertile ground for executing horrific acts. Evaluating the concept of religious toleration and social contract, this paper tried to understand if these ideals can still instill peace and harmony in current volatile Nigerian polity.

**Keywords:** Toleration, Extremism and Peace, Hate and social pact

## **Introduction**

Skirmishes and strains between the two dominant faiths in Nigeria namely Christianity and Islam have been common place though chiefly in northern Nigeria. However, “a new wave of Ethno-religious related violence in the form of terrorism has been initiated by Boko Haram in Nigeria in an exponential magnitude that can be described as unprecedented.”<sup>1</sup> The patterns of violent attacks by some persons that claim Islamist terrorists groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria indicates the existence of established contacts between this terrorist group and other terrorist groups such as ISIS. The resolve to unleash mayhem with sophistication indicates that these terrorist groups have related mission. But amazingly, the Boko Haram terrorist group’s target has no boundary. They unleash their terror on both Christians and non-Christians though from profound evidence as to be evidenced in the course of this paper, their activities are mostly aimed at Christians. Hence, it is not complicated tagging their menace religious extremism. But “of greater concern in Nigeria is the fact that these activities aimed at Christians are well orchestrated and enjoy the support of Muslim politicians, businessmen/women, security officers, global terror groups and some Islamic countries.”<sup>2</sup>

For the sake of clarity, in this paper we define religious tolerance as implying “a willingness to ‘put up with’ the religious beliefs and cultures of other persons that share the same socio-political context with us even when our religious opinions and dogmas vary.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand religious extremism or intolerance is the

willingness of religious persons who subscribe to certain religious systems and doctrines believed to be sanctioned by their creator to murder or cause harm to other persons who subscribe to other religious systems and beliefs with the understanding that such acts of violence are in the service of God. Religious extremism is synonymous to religious terrorism. Thus, “Extremists or terrorists have no sympathy for their victims, because they view those victims as enemies of God and they readily sacrifice their own lives because they expect huge and immediate afterlife rewards in return for martyrdom”<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile generally, toleration means non-interference with beliefs, actions or practices that one considers to be wrong but causes no harm to life, right or property. We shall in the course of this paper explore if and how if there is need for another social agreement commonly known as social contract as espoused by Social contract theorist like John Locke and the application of his concept of toleration in taming the surge of religious related havoc and bloodbath in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

Similar to Augustine, Thomas Aquinas developed a number of reasons for limited and conditional toleration, drawing especially strong limits against tolerating any form of heresy. The question of peaceful coexistence of different faith was much discussed in the Middle Ages, especially in the 12th century. Abelard and Raimundus Lullus wrote inter-religious dialogues searching for ways of defending the truth of Christian faith while also seeing some truth—religious or at least ethical—in other religions. In Judaism and Islam, this was mirrored by writers such as Maimonides or Ibn Rushd (Averroes), whose defense of philosophical truth-searching against religious dogma is arguably the most innovative of the period marks an important step towards a more comprehensive, Christian-humanist conception of toleration, though in the conversations among representatives of different faiths his core idea of “one religion in various rites” remains a Catholic one

Jean Bodin’s work is important for the further development of modern ideas of toleration in two ways. In his *Six Books of a Commonweal* (1576), he develops a purely political justification of toleration, following the thought of the so-called *Politiques*, whose main concern was the stability of the state. For them, the preservation of political sovereignty took primacy over the preservation of religious unity, and toleration was recommended as a superior policy in a situation of religious plurality and strife. Marked by bitter religious conflicts, the 17th century brought forth a number of toleration theories, among them three paradigmatic classics: Baruch de Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*.

Locke in his radical theory distinguishes between state and church in an early liberal perspective of natural individual rights. While it is the duty of the state to secure the “civil interests” of its citizens, the “care of the soul” cannot be its

business, this being a matter between the individual and God to whom alone one is responsible in this regard. Hence there is a God-given, inalienable right to the free exercise of religion. Churches are no more than voluntary associations without any right to use force within a legitimate political order based on the consent of the governed. Montesquieu argues for the toleration of different religions for the purpose of preserving political unity and peace, yet he warns that there is a limit to the acceptance of new religions or changes to the dominant one, given the connection between a constitution and the morality and habits of a people. In his *Persian Letters*, however, he had developed a more comprehensive theory of religious pluralism. The difference between the two perspectives—political and inter-religious—is even more notable in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writings. In his *Social Contract*, he tries to overcome religious strife and intolerance by institutionalizing a “civic religion” that must be shared by all. Lockean justification argues that respect is owed to individuals as personally and ethically autonomous beings with the capacity to choose, possibly revise and realize an individual conception of the good. This capacity is to be respected and furthered because it is seen as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for attaining the good life.

Contemporary argument has engrossed more on questions of respecting particular religious practices and beliefs. It is obvious that toleration is a political ideal imposed by natural reason that requires people to put up with a certain amount of wrong beliefs though not all wrong beliefs are tolerated. Though in centuries before now, religion is seen as the arch cause of extremism but in its basic origin, religion is rarely the root cause its often used as a tool by terrorist groups in recruiting. Thus Kressel argues that:

All of the major creeds possess the potential to impede social, psychological, political, and intellectual development. And the seeds of such pathological religion lie sprinkled dangerously throughout the very sacred texts that believers often regard as error-free. [...] When religion leads to evil, it makes little sense to say that the believer has misconstrued the truth of the whole enterprise. The enterprise itself is a mixed bag.<sup>5</sup>

### **Findings and Discussion**

Studies have found that many people join a religion not because they agree with its theological arguments, but because religion endows "people with an enhanced sense of solidarity to advance collective, often political intentions the overbearing consequence of the latter has divided Nigeria along ethno-religious lines and unleashed carnage and misery in Nigeria Society. Faith related conflicts in Nigeria “dates back to 1953, and in the case of the town of Tafawa Balewa, to 1948”<sup>6</sup>. In 1980s a lot of religious conflicts in northern Nigeria left several people dead and myriads of properties destroyed. As regards this mayhem Ibrahim writes that “serious outbreaks between Christians and Muslims occurred in Kafanchan in southern Kaduna State in a border area between the two religions, propagated by

extreme leaders who were able to polarize their followers through speeches and public demonstrations”<sup>7</sup>.

In Kano, the clashes by the two dominant religions in northern Nigeria in Postcolonial period are pointers to intolerant society. Hence, “there were clashes in October 1982 when Muslim zealots in Kano were able to enforce their power in order to keep the Anglican House Church from expanding its size and power base. They saw it as a threat to the nearby Mosque, even though the Anglican House Church had been there forty years prior to the building of the Mosque”<sup>8</sup>. The most controversial extremist in the 1980’s in northern Nigeria Mohammed Marwa, commonly known as Maitatsine, was a controversial preacher in Nigeria. “Maitatsine is a Hausa word meaning ‘the one who damns’ and refers to his curse-laden public speeches against the Nigerian state. According Olawale, “in the early 1980s, there was a major Islamic uprising led by Maitatsine and his followers, Yan Tatsine that led to several thousand deaths. After Maitatsine’s death in 1980, the movement continued some five years more. The Kano 1980 riot was a riot in Kano, Nigeria led by Maitatsine and his followers and the first major religious conflict in postcolonial Kano.”<sup>9</sup>

Also, in 1991, the German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke attempted a crusade in Kano but some Islamic adherents saw it as nonconformity with their faith hence the Islamic group unleashed terror on Christians in Kano causing a religious riot leading to the deaths of about hundreds of Christians. In Kaduna State of Nigeria about “two thousand persons lost their lives precisely between 21<sup>st</sup> February-23<sup>rd</sup> May during Religious riots between Christians and Muslims over the introduction of sharia law in Kaduna State. This was said to be “the start of the religious riots phase of the Sharia conflict in Nigeria”<sup>10</sup> Also in Jos between 7–17<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 “religious riots broke out between Christians and Muslims that claimed hundreds of people dead.”<sup>11</sup> Exactly in November 22, 2002 in Kaduna State of Nigeria, “Inter-religious riots started in Kaduna, which resulted in many houses of worship being burned by religious zealots. It was verified that an article in *This Day* about the 2002 Miss World beauty contest (to be held in Abuja), in which Muslims took offence caused the mayhem.”<sup>12</sup> What is commonly referred to as “Yelwa massacre occurred between February and May 2004 in Yelwa.”<sup>13</sup> The tragedy resulted in many deaths. As regards Muhammad cartoons crisis “the international crisis reached the Nigerian city of Maiduguri on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2006, in which over 50 people were killed and many buildings destroyed or damaged by rioting Muslims, outraged because of cartoons about Muhammad in the Danish newspaper”. More so, another riot in Jos occurred between “28–29<sup>th</sup> November 2008 was between Christians and Muslims over the result of a local election”<sup>14</sup>.

In 2009 Boko Haram enveloped some parts of northern Nigeria. In July 2009, precisely in “Maiduguri, Bauchi, Potiskum, Wudil the Islamic militants killed over a thousand people between 26 and 29<sup>th</sup> July; during the violence, Christians were killed for refusing to convert to Islam.”<sup>15</sup> In 2010 Jos town in Nigeria witnessed another massacre. As stated, the “victims were mostly Christians killed by Muslims.”<sup>16</sup> Damaturu witnessed severe attacks on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The

dreaded “Islamic militants associated with Boko Haram attacked police stations, churches, and banks” The mayhem got to a crescendo with the bombings on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2011 in Madalla were “Muslim militants bombed a Catholic church during Christmas mass.”<sup>18</sup> The attacks continued with in January 2012 when in “Mubi, Yola, Gombi, and Maidugur Islamic terrorists attacked churches and Christian businesses; Boko Haram claimed responsibility”<sup>19</sup>. Also in January 20, 2012, in Kano “Islamic terrorists attacked churches and Christian businesses; Boko Haram claimed responsibility”<sup>20</sup>. Precisely in April 8, 2012 Kaduna witnessed another massacre when “Islamic terrorists bombed a church on Easter Sunday.”<sup>21</sup> Also in June 17, 2012 in Kaduna State of Nigeria specifically “in Wusasa, and Sabon Gari, Islamic terrorists bombed three churches.”<sup>22</sup> The mayhem made a thrust southward precisely in Kogi State Nigeria were Islamic militants opened fire at worshippers in a Deeper Life Church shooting in which many people lost their lives on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2012 at Okene. According to BBC report on the Okene havoc, “Islamic militants attacked a church; the pastor was among the dead.”<sup>23</sup> In a similar sphere in December 25, 2012, “Islamic militants in Nigeria attacked a church on Christmas Day; afterwards the church was set on fire.”<sup>24</sup>

The rise of *Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad* commonly known as Boko Haram can be seen in the milieu of Islamic group that advocates unconventional beliefs and anarchical practices. These are actions that are often linked to ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria, “Boko Haram became a household word in Nigeria in 2009, the origin can be traced to 1995.”<sup>25</sup> Its initial emergence was as “a Muslim youth organisation called Shabaab, under the leadership of Lawan Abubakar and later Mohammed Yusuf, with its headquarters in Maiduguri, in north-eastern Nigeria. Meanwhile, “until the death of Yusuf in 2009, Ibrahim Shekai, the present leader of Boko Haram was the deputy leader of the group.”<sup>26</sup> The name *Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad*, means “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad in Arabic education.”<sup>27</sup> What it simply means is “Western education is sinful”. Currently in Nigeria, Boko Haram is not alone in this business of destruction of life and property but with another killer squad from the Islamic sect commonly known as Fulani Herdsmen. Many have argued that the rise of extremist group in Northern Nigeria by mainly Moslem youths is as a result of poverty. But it could also be argued that poverty is not affecting only the Muslim youths of Northern Nigeria. Christian youths from Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria experience similar trials. Their inhuman activities have resulted in killings of Christians, and destruction of properties. Boko Haram and other Islamic fundamentalist groups are employing all of their resources derived from within and outside of Nigeria to achieve their jihadist mission.

### **Toleration in Intolerant Society**

Lockean notion of toleration is good example of a moralizing attitude of the political and intellectual elite towards the masses. Toleration is regarded as one chief virtue of morally enlightened people who are capable to regard wrong beliefs

as conditionally acceptable. Most liberal theories that promote toleration follow this path of imposition of reason from an ideal moral viewpoint. It is definitely easier to justify the problem of religious extremism, a lot easier to do that, than it is to propose what should be done to promote Toleration. Toleration is the acceptance of an action, object, or person which one dislikes or disagrees with, where one is in a position to disallow it but chooses not to. It has also been defined as "to bear or endure" or "to nourish, sustain or preserve" or as "a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry" too. Toleration may signify "no more than forbearance and the permission given It is perhaps unfortunately not difficult to specify the negative—and that is an understatement—aspects of religious extremism. Obviously, violent extremists, who commit terrorist acts within the context of their interpretation of Islam, first of all, and under their own banners of Islam, however wrong they may be, are killing and wounding human beings, and destroying living essentials. They impede positive development; they are oppressive; they threaten further chaos and destruction. Not only has this been the case in the Middle East in the recent time period, and the not so recent past; it is the case today, from Yemen to Algeria, in Iraq, Libya, and other places, and both the numbers of these extreme militants, and their actions, are increasing. Currently in Nigeria, we see more violent actions, terrorism, more killing, more wounding, more destruction, certainly impeding any positive advancements, really any planning, of economic development. Actually, extremism means, literally: driving (something) to the limit, to the extreme or the quality or state of being extreme, advocacy of extreme measures or views. Nowadays, the term is mostly used in a political or religious sense, for an ideology that is considered (by the speaker or by some implied shared social consensus) to be far outside the (acceptable) mainstream attitudes of society.

According to Kressel:

Extremist are much more likely to come from times and places where events are unpredictable, unstable, confusing, and potentially dangerous. Modernization and globalization have unleashed destabilizing forces in many parts of the world, and the consequences have been most intense for latecomers to modernity. Failed societies are most at risk, where political and social systems deny basic gratifications to large segments of the population. [...] The lack of protective constitutional provisions like freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and a strong independent judiciary all increase the potential for religious extremism.<sup>28</sup>

It is historically evident that the genesis of religious intolerance and extremism has its root from the doctrines of the two dominant religions in Nigeria. The God of the Abrahamic religions, so far as it is concerned in The Bible, The Koran, and in history, hates opposing Gods. The Israelites are described as being commanded by God, time and time again, to wage war against and kill pagans because they dare to worship icons, fake gods, and any number of unapproved things. Worshipping

wrongly is prohibited in the traditional Ten Commandments, and is consistently one of the most punished crimes in the holy texts of Jews, Christians and Muslims. There seem to be great peace in regions that supports religious pluralism than people with monotheist faith. Islamic terrorism is a constant threat to world's peace. Their fundamentalist posture has resulted in uncountable deaths, mostly of innocent victims. This brutish adherence stems from Muslim teachings. Teachings in the Koran offer strong rationalization for extremism. Thus, this verse compliments the latter "Let those fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fighteth in the way of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward."<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the cause of this research, we identified the following as the causes of extremism and hate in Nigerian society:

1. Indisposition to finding the middle ground with those who disagree
2. Devaluation of happenings in the present and concentrated focus on life after death
3. Assumption of the role of God's Military defender
4. Unimaginable Reverence of some religious leaders
5. Absence of concern for physical evidence, except the one approved by the religious doctrines
6. Misinterpretation of doctrines by politicians in religious garb
7. Lack of quality education
8. Annihilation of rights
9. And use of religion for political supremacy.
10. Ethnic superiority complex

Having identified aforementioned causes, this paper suggest that the case of Nigeria society has gone beyond mere re-orientation or the usual rhetoric by leaders that we have no other country but Nigeria hence we must remain as one indissoluble entity. The Nigerian situation which has been worsened by frequent maiming and destruction of life and property by militants known as Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen have taken our society back to the state of nature where life is 'short, nasty and brutish'. Nigeria is a heterogeneous society pulled together by colonial masters to become one country. Aside being a multi ethnic conglomeration, Nigeria is a multi-religious society. But amidst pluralistic religious

environment, Christianity and Islam are dominant. It is observed in Nigeria that plethora of violence attached to religion in Nigeria stems from the Northern part of Nigeria which are predominately Moslems. Rising from Nigerian independence, violence associated with religion and ethnicism had always emanated from the Northern part of Nigeria and often orchestrated by Islamic adherents. The situation is alarming because Nigeria is now divided along religious line though hitherto separated by ethnicism. The intolerable Islamic adherents do not want the existence of non-Muslims especially in their midst. The nature of the killings and debasement of humanity by the terror laden fundamentalist in northern Nigeria in the past years and flagrant support of such carnage by their political masters calls for separation of the country along religious lines. The latter is obvious when government that is saddled with the protection of life and security have failed to preserve life which is the cardinal notion of going into social contract.

The case of Nigeria calls for new social agreement. It calls for assembly of the various constituents of the country through their representatives where they will decide to renew their social agreement of coexistence or dismemberment according to their choice of association. A society where life is not sacrosanct cannot be said to be that society that stemmed from social contract. The situation in Nigeria is a pointer that the initial amalgamation was a forceful fusion of opposites meant for sole convenience of the initiators. Toleration is workable when the extremist is able to respect others individual rights that does not harm another. When people have no right to live because they make a choice that causes any harm to another then there is urgent need for a new social pact. Toleration does not imply that a particular belief is right while the other is wrong. The natural law ascribes the right to live to every individual but when the ones that are tolerating are exterminated, there is urgent call for new social agreement in Nigeria.

**\*IkeChukwu K. Onah**

Department of Philosophy

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Email: kingsley.onah@unn.edu.ng



**References**

- <sup>1</sup> Hassan Mwakimako, "Christian–Muslim Relations in Kenya: A Catalogue of Events and Meanings," *Islam and Christian– Muslim Relations*, vol. 18, no. 2, April 2007, p. 287
- <sup>2</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Leadership analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* vol. 7, no. 2, 2014, p. 23
- <sup>3</sup> Sara B. Hobolt, et al. « Religious intolerance and Euroscepticism" *European Union Politics*, vol. 0, no.0, 2014, pp 3-4 DOI: 10.1177/1465116511404620. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1465116511404620>
- <sup>4</sup> Laurence. R. Iannaccone and E. Berman, "Religious extremism, the good, the bad, and the deadly," *Public Choice*, 2006, 128:109-129, DOI: 10.1007/s11127-006-9047-7 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11127-006-9047-7>
- <sup>5</sup> Neil J. Kressel, *The Danger of Religious Extremism*" (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) p.11
- <sup>6</sup> Augustine Adah (2013-07-23). "Will relocation of Tafawa Balewa LG headquarters guarantee peace?" *Hallmark*. Archived from the original on 2014-06-21 Retrieved 2014-06-21
- <sup>7</sup> Jibrin Ibrahim, "Politics of religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State', *Review of African Political Economy*, 45 (1989), 65-82. pp. 65–68, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4006011>, accessed on 01/11/2011
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 65-66
- <sup>9</sup> Isaac Olawale Albert, G. N. Uzoigwe (1999). *Inter-ethnic and Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria*, Lexington Books, p. 29. Retrieved June 19, 2015.
- <sup>10</sup> Johannes Harnischfeger, *Democratization and Islamic Law: The Sharia Conflict in Nigeria* (Frankfurt am Main 2008) p.16. Campus Verlag
- <sup>11</sup> Obed Minchakpu (1 October 2001). "Religious Riots in Nigeria Leave Hundreds Dead". *Christianity Today*. Retrieved 30 November 2008
- <sup>12</sup> The "Miss World Riots": Continued Impunity for Killings in Kaduna". *Human Rights Watch*. July 2003. Retrieved 3 April 2014.

- <sup>13</sup> Religiously motivated killings between Christians and Muslims. "Revenge in the Name of Religion", Human Rights Watch, 26 May 2005
- <sup>14</sup> "Nigeria: Jos Riots – Death Toll Hits 400y: witnesses". AFP. 29 November 2008. Archived from the original on 3 December 2008. Retrieved 30 November 2008.
- <sup>15</sup> "Nigeria accused of ignoring sect warnings before wave of killings". London: The Guardian. 2009-08-02. Retrieved 2013-05-30.
- <sup>16</sup> Nossiter, Adam (8 March 2010). "Toll From Religious and Ethnic Violence in Nigeria Rises to 500". The New York Times. Retrieved May 30, 2013.
- <sup>17</sup> "Nigeria group threatens more deadly attacks". Al Jazeera. 6 November 2011. Retrieved May 30, 2013.
- <sup>18</sup> "Nigeria church bomb death toll rises to 37, wounded 57". Reuters. 30 December 2011. Archived from the original on 13 January 2013. Retrieved May 30, 2013.
- <sup>19</sup> "Christians flee attacks in northeast Nigeria". Reuters. 7 January 2012. Archived from the original on 13 January 2012. Retrieved May 30, 2013
- <sup>20</sup> Sky News, ed. (23 January 2012). "Nigeria: More Bombs Found As Death Toll Rises". Sky News: Archived from the original on 26 January 2012. Retrieved May 30, 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> "Suicide car bombing kills 38 in Nigeria on Easter Sunday". Associated Press. 9 April 2012. Retrieved May 30, 2013.
- <sup>22</sup> Reuters-UK: "Nigerian Christian worship subdued by church bombs", by Augustine Madu and Joe Brock (24 June 2012) - (Retrieved : May 30, 2013)
- <sup>23</sup> "Nigeria church attack in Kogi state 'kills 19'". BBC News. 7 August 2012. Retrieved May 30, 2013.
- <sup>24</sup> CNN Staff (25 December 2012). "12 killed in attacks on two churches in Nigeria - CNN.com". CNN. Retrieved 15 February 2015.
- <sup>25</sup> K. Mohammed, "The Message and methods of Boko Haram" in Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria, M. de Montclos, Ed. Leiden: African Studies centre, 2014, p. 9
- <sup>26</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Leadership analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria," p,23
- <sup>27</sup> A. Olojo, "Nigeria's troubled North: Interrogating the drivers of public support for Boko Haram," viewed 5 December 2018, Available: <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Olojo-Nigerias-Troubled-North-October-2013>, p. 11
- <sup>28</sup> Neil. Kressel "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism" (2007) p. 28

<sup>29</sup> Quran (4:74) 10<http://166.62.117.116/quran/noble/sura4.html#74>, Retrieved: 27.05.2019, 15.53