AND CARNAGE IN THE NAME OF GOD

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA / ABIODUN ALAO

RAGE AND

CARNAGE *in* THE

NAME OF GOD

BUY

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RAGE AND CARNAGE *in* THE NAME OF GOD

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Abiodun Alao

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Another one to the memories of
Nathaniel Ojo and Abigail Mojoyinola

The wonderful people who gave me life
Gbogbo ibikíbi tí ẹ bá wà, ilẹ̀ ire o
(May whichever grounds on which you are resting be blessed)

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Contents

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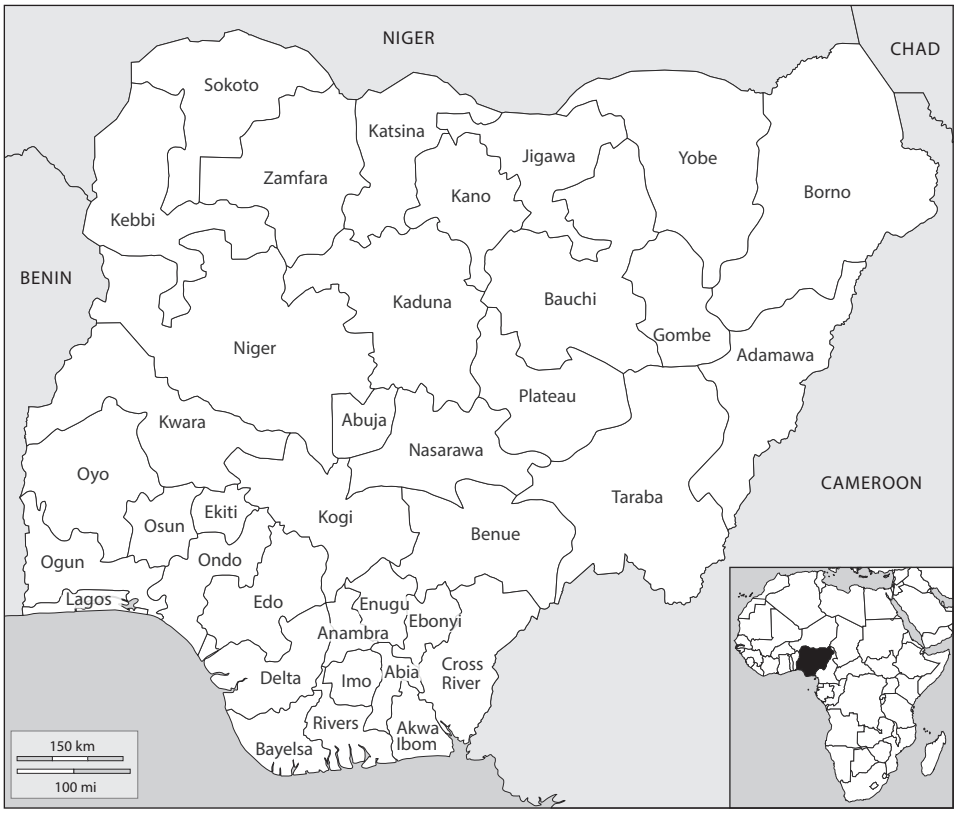

Map of Nigeria's states.

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Introduction. OF NIGERIA, RELIGION, AND VIOLENCE

There are certain important points to note on . . . Nigeria's evolution. First, the entities that today constitute the Nigerian state were brought together by force of arms. . . . [Second,] several of these conquests and mergers of territories were not executed by the British government but by a profit-making enterprise, the Royal Niger Company. Finally, the use of the term "amalgamation" . . . underscores the fact that the integration of the peoples and cultures within the merged territories was not the overriding objective of the colonialists. —TUNDE BAKARE, "Negotiating the New Nigeria"

Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by a difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated. —GEORGE WASHINGTON, letter to Edward Newenham, October 20, 1792

When Nigerians interpret events in their country, especially the ones connected to religion, the nation's history is a central part of their reflections. They ask themselves and each other what should have happened in the past, and what could have been different. The process that led to the creation of Nigeria began in 1900, when Britain withdrew the charter of the Royal Niger Company and the area that later became Nigeria came under the direct supervision of the Colonial Office in London. Up to this time, three separate entities existed: the colony of Lagos, the Southern Protectorate, and the Northern Protectorate. In 1906,

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the colony of Lagos merged with the Southern Protectorate and in 1914, the Northern and Southern Protectorates amalgamated to form the new entity called Nigeria. Those who ponder the *ifs* of history wonder how things would have turned out if the amalgamation had not taken place and both entities had subsequently won independence as separate countries. Indeed, the country owes most of its paradoxical characteristics to the circumstances of its composition.

Although battered and bruised, postindependence Nigeria remains upright and unbeaten. With a population of about 200 million people, it is the world's seventh most populous country and the nation with the largest population of Black people; it is the twelfth largest producer of oil and one of the largest producers of natural gas; it has one of the world's largest columbite reserves and the second largest bitumen deposits; it also has one of the world's largest deposits of iron; two of the world's major rivers pass through its territory; it has a broad array of vegetation that can be cultivated into agricultural products for domestic use and exports; it has some of the earliest known evidence of human existence, dating back to 9000 BC; its population includes some of the world's most energetic youths. Given all of this abundance, there are expectations that Nigeria should surpass countries that have basic human and natural endowments. Indeed, the country faces such expectations from three sources: from its huge citizenry, most of whom believe that their country has everything that it takes to give them a better quality of life; from other Africans, who think that Nigeria's population and endowment should translate into continental leadership; and from Black people all over the world who want to see Nigeria as a Black nation rise to global prominence. The country has, however, not met any of these expectations, due in part to the acrimony that has characterized relations between its component units.

Of all the issues that have been at the center of controversy in Nigeria, religion is one of the most prominent. A British Broadcasting Corporation survey carried out in January 2004 depicted the country as the world's "most religious nation," with over 90 percent of those sampled saying that they "believed in God," "prayed regularly," and were ready to "die for their religious belief."[1] Religion seems to be particularly contentious in Nigeria. For example, the number of Nigerian citizens who have died as a result of religious violence in the last four decades is higher than that of all other African countries combined. The country's religious challenges have brought it to global attention, as when the militant group Jamā 'at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da'wa wa-l-Jihād (widely known as Boko Haram) kidnapped the so-called Chibok girls in April 2014. Furthermore, Nigerian citizens abroad have been involved in religious radicalization, as in

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the cases of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who attempted to bomb an American airline in December 2009, and of Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale in the London murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in May 2013. Indeed, by 2018, Nigeria was the third worst-hit country on the Global Terrorism Index—after Iraq and Afghanistan.[2] By the end of 2020, the situation had become even more worrisome, with religious violence becoming connected to other ethnopolitical violence of such anarchic proportions that many were concerned about the continued existence of the Nigerian state itself.

Globally, one of the most disturbing features of the last decade is the extent to which religious violence created security challenges that stunted development, destroyed advances in the international search for good governance, and threatened harmonious relations within and among states. In the course of the past decade, virtually all the continents of the world recorded cases of extreme violence motivated by the expression of religious beliefs. Several distinctive features make this category of violence particularly worrisome: the borderless aspects of its theaters, the facelessness of many of its actors, the indiscriminate range of its victims, its spectacular and devastating methods, and the relative inability of most affected countries to cope with its aftermath and consequences. As is discussed later in this chapter, most of this violence is linked to radicalization, a term whose vast literature has often confused and complicated its meaning.

Although recent religious violence has been inextricably interconnected, with radical international religious organizations having sympathizers across the world, there are still geographical specificities to its causes and manifestations. In Africa, these manifestations frequently bring together variables that may, on the surface, appear unconnected. Indeed, issues such as ethnicity, political governance, developments in other nations, and socioeconomic factors have complicated the relation between religion and violence.

But before going into detailed discussions on religion and violence in Nigeria, there is the need for some background discussion, including working definitions of both religion and violence and how the linkage between the two currently manifests. There is also the need to identify and discuss the origin and meaning of key issues that have been at the center of global controversies over religion and violence. These are particularly important because of the ways such issues pervade discussions throughout this book.

Very few subjects are as difficult to define as religion, and as Milton Yinger has noted, every definition is satisfactory only to its author.[3] At the same time, religion remains one of the most important and most controversial identity issues in the world, a major factor that affects relationships and interpretations

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of actions and/or inactions. While this introductory chapter does not explore the many aspects of religion or go into profound epistemological questions, it does identify some key aspects germane to this book.[4] Religion can be defined most simply as a position rooted in personal conviction. Yinger notes, "Where one finds awareness of and interest in the continuing, recurrent, permanent problems of human existence—the human condition itself, as contrasted with specific problems; where one finds rites and shared beliefs relevant to that awareness, which define the strategy of an ultimate victory; and where one has groups organized to heighten that awareness and to teach and maintain those rites and beliefs—there one has religion."[5] Huntington also defined it in a shorter way as "the central force that motivates and mobilizes people."[6] Also, Pargament defines it as "a process, the search for significance in ways related to the sacred."[7]

Broadly, religion has core aspects, and scholars like Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn have identified three of these: (1) a social construction, "created by the people and as part of a culture"; (2) an "integrated set of ideas by which a group attempts to explain the meaning of life and death"; and (3) a "normative system defining immorality and sin as well as morality and righteousness."[8]

Central to most religions are three things: ritual, prayer, and orthodoxy. While ritual and prayer are largely geared toward the ultimate beneficiary of the adulation, orthodoxy shapes the attitudes and behaviors of those practicing a religion. What also seems characteristic of religion is the idea of benefits from sacrifices that people make in the pursuit of the religion. Most people who take part in religion have the expectation of reward for their belief, either in life or after. Among others, merely looking forward to the meeting of their earthly needs in an afterlife has made many people hold onto their religious faith, but it also, quite ironically, has made them vulnerable to manipulation and amenable to violence.

The question of violence has also attracted its own body of scholars.[9] Studies here fall into four categories: its causes and effects; its targets (e.g., women, children, ethnic group, etc.); broader thematic lenses, like society, politics, and religion; and type (whether physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, or cultural). Again, avoiding profound philosophical postulations, this book focuses on violence as a behavior, usually unlawful, in which a person uses physical force to hurt, damage, intimidate, or kill.

The calculated use of violence in the name of religion is not a new phenomenon; its roots go deep in history.[10] The Sicarii, a group of militant Jewish zealots, waged terrorism against the Roman occupation between 66 and 70 AD.[11] This group operated in broad daylight and targeted Roman priests.[12] They also

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frequently went to public places with hidden daggers to strike down persons considered friendly to Rome. Like modern-day radical groups, they sometimes released their captives after the payment of ransom. Suicide activities were also part of the group's strategies. Indeed, it is believed that many of its members preferred to commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be captured by the Romans. Another early violent religious group was the Assassin sect, a radical Shi'ite Ismaili group during the eleventh century. (We get the modern English word *assassin* from them.) The group directed their activities against Sunni rule, and their practice, too, was to commit murder in public places as a way of intimidating the population. Sometimes they only threatened enemies into submission.[13] Further historical evidence of violence in the name of religion is the wars between Christian Crusaders and Muslims that occurred between 1095 and 1281, and the Spanish Inquisition of the fifteenth century, countering apostasy, witchcraft, heresy, and other practices considered crimes against the Catholic Church.[14] Sanctioned by the Pope at the behest of the Spanish monarchy, the Inquisition burned thousands at the stake and expelled Jews and Muslims who refused to be baptized from Spain.

In its current form, the roots of recent violence in the name of religion can be traced to the end of World War I, when the Western colonial powers agreed to establish several new states and to redefine the borders of old ones, without taking into consideration the ethnoracial, religious, and geopolitical realities of the respective regions. While this balkanization did not immediately result in extreme political behaviors, it laid seeds that would germinate in Central Europe and the Middle East. The relative peace continued until World War II, after which several other groups emerged across the world to challenge these new boundaries. Religion thus became intermingled with politics and nationalist sentiments. These groups soon found political means ineffective and turned to militancy.

But while all the major religions have been associated with one form of debate or another, the Islamic religion has been the one most associated with recent controversies in global politics. This is because, according to Simon Mayall, Islam is much more than a religion but also a complete sociopolitical system, leading to the concept of "Political Islam," which in this context is broadly defined as the intermix of Islamic religion with the process of political governance.[15] The exact origin of the idea of political Islam in sub-Saharan Africa is somewhat difficult to ascertain. Some consider the first case to be the 1804 jihad of Usman dan Fodio.[16] But a variant of political Islam began to appear in most of the former colonial territories not long after independence. Indeed, by the late 1960s, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea had recorded traces of

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Islamic revivalist movements.[17] It was, however, not until the late 1980s, when the National Islamic Front successfully engineered a military takeover of power in Sudan, that a new dawn began in political Islamism. The takeover coincided with an Islamic revival in western regions of Ethiopia, and more importantly the emergence of Islamic jihad groups in Eritrea. At this point, Somali Islamic fundamentalist movements were in their infancy, but they blossomed in subsequent years.[18] Islamic radicalization in sub-Saharan Africa was a product of increasing interconnectivity among radical groups in the region and between the groups and wider global networks, and it also catalyzed further networks.

To understand the phenomenon of political Islam, there are a few important things to note because of the ways it has become connected to violence. The first of these is how Islam sees the state.[19] Although it needs to be acknowledged that there are debates across many varieties of Islam, Islam's orthodox understanding of the state is profoundly different from the Westphalian principle of state sovereignty, in that the Islamic idea puts the whole concept of sovereignty within Allah—the Supreme Being—at whose pleasure all human beings exist and in whose name governance should be undertaken. Consequently, Islam sees an elected or appointed leader as God's representative.[20] The main duty of government is to enable individual Muslims to lead a good life that glorifies the name of Allah, and this can only come through their strict adherence to the Qur'an and its stipulated law, the Sharia. This law is believed to be divinely established and consequently not subject to change or human interpretations, unlike secular laws.[21] The Qur'an 3:103 enjoins unity among Muslims. While Islamic religion recognizes *ikhtilāf*, which denotes dissension of views, it preaches that this should be done without violence.

A central and contested concept in political Islam is *jihad*, a term with a variety of different interpretations, and one that evokes strong reactions.[22] In its origin, the term has its roots in the word *jhd*, which in Arabic means "to strive" or "exert oneself"—in short, to struggle. There is a recent tendency to interpret *jihad* dramatically, in a strict radical "dualism, as the permanent Manichean struggle between the forces of good who seek to restore a true moral order for the salvation of mankind (often assumed to be the jihadists) and the camp of the cosmic foes who are determined to impose a secular governance in the world based on western norms and values, as opposed to the desired Pan-Islamic caliphate advocated by the jihadists."[23] In his book *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Mark Juergensmeyer describes how al-Qaeda and its affiliates frame their violent struggle against perceived Western imperialism as a "transcendental or sacramental act with the imprimatur of

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the divine or with a moral, sacred and religiously-sanctioned validation—in short, as cosmic war."[24]

In fact, the word *jihad* has four connotations in Islam. The first is the jihad of the heart. This struggle is with the self, an interior effort aimed primarily at self-purification. The objective here is to live according to the Sharia, to strive to do what is right and to reform individual bad habits. In short, Muslims must personally strive for interior perfection. The second is the jihad of the tongue, or preaching, which is understood as a gesture of peace to the unbeliever by inviting him or her to join the faith. The third is the jihad of the hand, otherwise interpreted as charity.[25] It is only if these first three have been found ineffectual in changing the world that the *ummah,* which refers to the community of believers, can resort to the use of the fourth—the jihad of the sword. Even so, the permissible mode is defensive (*jihad al-dafa'a*): jihad is the external defense of Islam from non-Muslim aggression.[26] It is not an offensive exercise.

Islam is, however, as much at war with itself as it is against other religions or ideologies. There are, indeed, present-day Muslims who use jihad as a justification both for attacking the West and for attacking Muslim governments and other members of the Islamic faith. The roots of this phenomenon go back to the historical foundations of Islam, even if the revival is modern and the resonance decidedly contemporary.

Radical Islamic groups have shifted from defensive to offensive strategies: "transitional jihadi groups have elevated offensive military campaign[s] to impose radical Islam on everyone as the sixth pillar of Islam." Their objective is to propagate violent war against two categories of people: the infidel and the heretic. The origin of this was the Prophet Muhammad's Medina period (AD 622–32). The definition of what constitutes an infidel or heretic is problematic. Under the broadest definition, both concepts include anyone who acts against the Sharia. Moreover, these jihadi groups have interpreted jihad as *fard ayn* (individual obligation), rather than *fard kifaya* (collective duty).[27]

The concept of jihad seemed to enter a new phase during the 1980s and 1990s, when it was mixed with nationalist and separatist sentiments, as it manifested in countries like Bosnia and Chechnya. The jihadi-Salafist radical philosophy saw governance according to anything other than God's laws as a violation of God's absolute sovereignty. This phase brought the Islamic religion to global attention, and from the mid-1990s Osama bin Laden extended his brand of jihadism to the United States and the West. In Nigeria, Boko Haram took this position.

A phenomenon that has also attracted considerable attention in all discussions about radicalization is suicide operation. As noted earlier, this practice

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is not new, as it dates to the period of the Assassins that operated between 1090 and 1275. Indeed, the Islamic religion has a special celebration for individuals who die in the process of protecting the *ummah*.[28] In the Islamic religion, suicide missions can be acts of martyrdom. However, Brahimi has noted that there is still a distinction between suicide and martyrdom. Quoting the Egyptian Islamic scholar Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi, Olomojobi points out the distinction: "Suicide is an act or instance of killing oneself intentionally out of despair and finding no outlet except putting an end to one's life. On the other hand, martyrdom is a heroic act of choosing to suffer death in the cause of Allah, and that is why it is considered by most Muslim scholars as one of the greatest forms of Jihad."[29] Some radicals have quoted the Qur'an to justify suicide operations. For example, Qur'an 2:216 notes, "Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth and ye know not." But many Muslims also argue that only a complete misrepresentation of this injunction will interpret it to mean the adoption of violence and that the supreme injunction of peaceful coexistence is at the center of the Islamic religion.[30]

Islam's position on the just war theory (*jus ad bellum*) is distinctive: it justifies and even requires followers to prosecute some wars to preserve the Islamic faith (Qur'an 8:60, 73). Those who lose their lives in such a process are guaranteed a blissful life in eternity. Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad admonished Muslims not to think of those who have died while killing in God's way as dead. Rather, they are alive with God, well provided for, happy with what God has given them of his favor; rejoicing that for those they have left behind who have yet to join them, there is no fear, nor will they grieve; rejoicing in God's blessing and favor, and that God will not let the reward of the believers be lost. The Qur'an also encourages those who are reluctant to fight for the Lord to join in. From this, it can be concluded that the Qur'an ordains just war for legitimate purposes.

An aspect of physical violence in Islam that has attracted considerable controversy is the one that stipulates stoning to death (*rajm*) as the punishment for adultery (*zinā*). Even some Muslims have argued that it runs contrary to the provision in the Qur'an 24:2–3 that stipulates flogging one hundred times (*jald*) for the same offense. A scholar of Islamic religion, Yasir Quadri, has tried to clarify the contradiction here when he notes that "stoning to death is not contained in the Qur'an; it is however contained in hadith which reported that the Prophet of Islam applied it."[31] According to Quadri, "the first culprits who were sentenced to death by stoning by the Prophet were not Muslims but a Jew and

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a Jewess. He applied a Jewish law to the Jews (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22). He also applied the same law to two Muslims (Mā'iz ibn Malik al-Aslamī and a Ghamidiyyah woman), apparently before the revelation of Qur'an 24:2–3, which appears to have been revealed to abrogate the punishment of adulterous Muslims by *Rajm*."[32]

Generally, the association between violence and religion has brought a number of political issues to the forefront. Issues like election and harmonious intergroup relations are factors in religion across the world. The practice of elections, central to political governance, appears in the central writings of Christianity and Islam. Christianity recognizes the practice; for example, in the book of Deuteronomy, 1:9–17, the people of Israel were instructed to choose among themselves those who would rule over them. Apart from this, the Bible also recorded several instances of the freedom of choice—the essence of an election—being given to the people of Israel. Election continues as a Christian practice today. Catholic bishops elect the pope, the head of the Catholic Church, and Anglican Church bishops also elect their head, the archbishop. In the Christian view, generally, taking part in a secular election is a civic duty, a demonstration of good citizenship, and emphasized by their religion. Similarly, while Islamic scholars posit that neither the Qur'an nor Hadith makes a categorical statement concerning elections (and neither uses the word), some argue that Islam has room for the related idea of representation. For example, H. A. AbdulSalam points out that the political system in Islam operates in three dimensions: *tawhid* (belief in God), *risalah* (messengership), and *khilafar* (vice regency).[33] According to him, *khilafar* also means representation, and anyone who occupies this position is expected to represent and lead according to the word of God.[34] The Qur'an also encourages mutual consultations in political matters and governance through *shura*, which means consultation, and the Hadith notes that leadership is to be chosen by consensus after due cognizance has been taken of the leadership and spiritual capabilities of all the people. The Hadith dictates that the best among the people in terms of knowledge and fear of God are selected as the leaders. The Prophet, however, further instructed that anyone who puts himself or herself forward for leadership should not be appointed. Further evidence that elections are not un-Islamic can be seen in the regular elections in predominantly Muslim states, including Egypt, Iran, and Pakistan.

Similarly, both the Bible and the Qur'an encourage the crucial practice of harmonious intergroup relations, focusing on reconciliation after a conflict. In the Bible's 2 Corinthians 5:18–19, it is written, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that

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is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." Also, Romans 5:10 reads, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." Finally, Matthew 18:15 notes, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." The Qur'an also underlines the importance of reconciliation. In Ash-Shura 42:40, it notes, "The Recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof; but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is with Allah." Also, in Al-Hujuraat 49:9, it states, "And if two parties or groups among the believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them both. But if one of them outrages against the other, then fight you (all) against the one which outrages till it complies with the Command of Allah. Then if it complies, make reconciliation between them justly, and be equitable. Verily! Allah loves those who are equitable." Finally, Al-Hujuraat 49:10 declares, "The believers are nothing else than brothers [in Islamic religion]. So, make reconciliation between your brothers, and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy." Thus, both the Bible and the Qur'an teach reconciliation after a disagreement.

In the last decade, however, violence connected to religion has heightened, and this has been linked to radicalization, or the adoption of radical views by various religious groups across the world. Radicalization has become a trendy term and, like most words that have fallen into that category, it has become vulnerable to distortion. Its interchangeability, rightly or wrongly, with other terms like extremism, fundamentalism, and terrorism has added further layers of controversy and confusion to its conceptualization. Radicalization, in all its ramifications, has been studied rigorously by scholars, such that any detailed discussion in this chapter will not serve any additional purpose.[35]

In the context of this book, a radical group is one that professes a belief system that rejects the status quo and actively aspires to an idealized past or envisioned future, embedded in the paradox of past as future and change as a return to the past. Such a group calls for its adherents to use violent and unconventional means to realize that change. Its nostalgic view of aspects of the past and expectant view of the future signal a group's rejection of the present. Radicalization, then, is the process of transforming the mental and emotional motivations of a person or group to shift from peaceful to violent behavior.

Broken down further, six aspects of this definition are particularly important. First, radicalization is a process (with identifiable phases) and not an event, its dynamics formed by the complex interaction of multiple events, actors, relationships, beliefs, and institutions. Second, it emphasizes and aims

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for profound change: the transformation of socioeconomic situations, cultural and political values, institutional practices, and belief systems—whether of an individual, a group, or a society. Third, its unconventional means include behaviors, attitudes, values, and moral standards that are not only alternatives to the status quo but are often opposed to it. Fourth, it operates at multiple levels—individual, group, and societal—and the distinctions between them often blur. Fifth, it spans different spheres of life, including the religious, political, social, economic, and cultural. Finally, it is underlined by fundamental principles, worldviews, and understandings about human and societal existence. But what the discussion above on religion and violence has implied is that the manifestation of both depends on the society where they occur.

Following these background considerations on religion and violence, the discussion can now go back to Nigeria. In this country, religion has become interwoven with the politics of the nation's ethnopolitical divide and its fluid socioeconomic structure; indeed, religion underpins Nigerian politics, governance, and intergroup relations. The global and the local intersect in the politics of religious violence. The complexity of the country's history, across its sixty years of existence, makes it profoundly difficult to understand: it has had fifteen different leaders; five military coups (each of which resulted in a change of government) and an unknown number of unsuccessful, suspected, and alleged coups; a bitter civil war; an annulled election; an interim administration; a brutal dictatorship; and several cases of violent ethnonationalist agitation. Efforts to describe Nigeria in all its variety frequently result in paradox, with one historian even pointing out that anyone who claims to understand the country is "either deluded or is a liar."[36] In short, the country exhibits major contradictions between what is expected and what has so far been achieved.

Three issues have influenced the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria: ethnicity, politics, and economics. Although the connections of each of these with religion are shown in subsequent chapters of this book, their distinct characteristics as features of the Nigerian state should be briefly noted here.

Matters of ethnicity in Nigeria have centered largely on access to power and state resources and on how different groups interpret actions or inactions in the country's zero-sum politics. The root of ethnic disputes in postindependence Nigeria, as in most other African countries, is colonialism, which forced disparate ethnic groups together into nation-states.

Most of the conflicts ignited by ethnicity in postindependence Nigeria can be brought under three headings: the rivalry between the three dominant ethnic groups in the country; the agitations and complaints of the numerous minority groups directed against these dominant groups; and the controversies

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and competitions among the various minority populations. The perception of Nigerian political elites of the role of ethnicity in politics and intergroup relations is another issue, with long-term implications for the country. Since independence, many political leaders have had a very narrow understanding of national unity. For example, in a 1952 speech at the Northern House of Assembly, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who eight years later was to become the country's first prime minister, noted that "the Southern people who are swarming into this region daily in large numbers are really intruders. We don't want them, and they are not welcome. . . . The fact that we are all Africans might have misguided the British government. We here in the North, take it that 'Nigerian Unity' is not for us."[37] Although statements like this by regional leaders across the ethnic spectrum are divisive, it seems likely that their positions were colored by other factors beyond raw ethnic differences. Economic fears, political anxieties, and inadequate empirical information about each other could be argued to have been the primary factors responsible, rather than a deeply held hatred.

Nigeria's complex politics has many dimensions, one of these being military involvement in politics and its consequences. The military intervened in politics in 1966 and ruled the country for two periods, for an initial thirteen years (until 1979) and later for another fifteen years (from 1984 to 1999). Many analysts have concluded that these military interventions inhibited the nation's development. They further stunted Nigeria's political evolution, already imperfect, militarized its society, and distorted its social fabric. But what seems to have had the most significant consequence was the country's brutal civil war between 1967 and 1970. While forms of acrimony had characterized ethnic relations since the struggle for independence, they were fairly well managed until the military's assassination of political leaders during its first coup in January 1966 started the process that led to the civil war.[38] The war ended in 1970, but has remained a major reference point in public discourse and a force shaping the affairs of the country.[39]

The question of political leadership is also critical to religion. In the zero-sum relationships among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, which group will produce the leader is often a contentious issue. Ethnic groups have argued that leadership of the country has been dominated by another ethnic group. To ensure broad acceptability and representation, political parties have taken ethnic configurations into account when selecting leaders and election candidates. Concepts such as zoning have become part of Nigeria's political vocabulary.[40] Another factor that is important in the leadership controversy has to do with the caliber of leaders that have ruled Nigeria. This has many

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ramifications, and many Nigerians believe that most of the leaders saddled with running the country found themselves in charge contrary to their own desires or leadership ability.

The role of economics in understanding controversies in Nigeria is also complex. Most Nigerians think that the country's economy has been badly managed, given the frequent allegations of corruption leveled against those who have held political office. Much of the population also believes that those who have held economic management positions have been either incompetent, dishonest, or both. Thus, when governments call on the populace to accept belt-tightening economic measures, the general response has been that citizens are being made to pay the price of the leadership deficits of their ruling elites. The issue of corruption is, however, the most profound. While corruption in Nigeria has many facets, its manifestation in public office holders has attracted the most interest.[41] Indeed, of the thirty-six governors who assumed office after the 1999 election, fifteen were facing corruption charges in various courts by the first quarter of 2020, while two were serving jail terms for corruption.[42] What most people find curious about corruption in Nigeria is the huge dichotomy between official denunciations of the act and the absence of official identification and punishment of perpetrators. Governments, both civilian and military, have come to power with promises to stop corruption, with some even creating special institutions for that purpose, but they have rarely followed through on their pledges.

The controversies surrounding economics in Nigeria are also connected to the politics of managing its natural resource endowments. While all of Nigeria's natural resources have been at the center of long-standing debates in the country, oil has been one of the most contentious. The high profits to be made from it, the environmental consequences of exploring for it, the international scope of its distribution and politics, and its role in Nigeria's ethnopolitical and socioeconomic affairs have made the resource particularly contentious. A central point of dispute is who should control the country's oil: the communities who bear the environmental consequences of its extraction, or the central government, which has the constitutional power to distribute natural resources throughout the nation. The question of who defines national interest itself has been extremely controversial. People from oil-producing communities sometimes complain that what is advertised as being in the national interest is nothing more than the selfish desire of an ethnic oligarchy. The country's ethnic configuration, which defines the ethnic group in possession of the oil as a minority, has further complicated the link between ethnicity, resource control, and politics. The other national resource in contention is land, which has

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not only economic but spiritual, political, and social importance, because it is valued as the place of birth; the burial place of the ancestors that the Creator has designated should be passed down to successive generations; and the final resting place for every child born on its surface. The government has always tried to ensure its control of land; the 1978 Land Use Act entrusts all land in the country to the state governor. To summarize, there are multiple layers of inherent lack of trust between the nation's various components, and virtually every segment of society is engaged in a complex web of zero-sum relationships and competition with at least one other segment: there is conflict between the majority groups and the minorities; youths and adults; politicians and the citizenry; military and civilians; elites and masses; employers and employees; and so on. While it may be argued that all of these conflicts are also present in other countries, the ramifications are especially complex in Nigeria because of its weak political systems and structures, which are unable to withstand multiple contradictions, and its enormous population. All these issues have affected the politics of the country's religious outlook.

Religious controversies in Nigeria have prompted some brilliant studies, and in the last decade or so this body of scholarship has increased astronomically because of the activities of the radical group Boko Haram. Many of the recent books on religious violence in Nigeria have focused on this group, making a significant contribution to the literature on national and global radicalization. But this book is not, primarily, about Boko Haram, even though it does discuss the subject substantially. I have decided to avoid concentrating on a phenomenon-specific subject or quasi-ethnographic cases, and instead look at broader themes: how religion has been associated with violence in postindependence Nigeria and how this has affected the nation's socioeconomic and ethnopolitical relations. It starts with a handful of basic questions: Is religion's susceptibility to violence in Nigeria internal to (each) religion or due to external forces—or both? Are its social and ethnopolitical relations conditioned by religion or vice versa? If religion conditions political relations, does that mean that the violence of Nigerian religion is permanent? Some of these questions are discussed in the chapters ahead as they relate to Nigeria.

I advance five main arguments in this book. First is that religious violence in postindependence Nigeria has arisen largely because of the numerous contradictions—social, economic, and historical—that underscored the establishment of the Nigerian state. Second, contrary to what is often assumed, no religion in Nigeria has a monopoly on violence, and all three main sectors in the country—Islam, Christianity, and traditional religions—have engaged in violence and threatened to use it, although the scale of their actions has been

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different. Third, various elites have exploited the unrest in order to further advance their self-interest. Fourth, the causes of religious violence in Nigeria are largely internal, and even when external factors account for violence, local issues often affect how it plays out. Fifth, and last, is that recent cases of religious violence in Nigeria have benefited from some of the consequences of globalization.

Anyone writing a book on religion and violence in Nigeria should confess some diffidence, given the many challenges of the task. No single book on the subject could ever capture all the ramifications of the phenomenon, and this book does not make such a claim. Despite all of my efforts to prevent oversights, some things will almost certainly have escaped my attention. In addition, writing on the topic is fraught with many difficulties, especially because one can always find reasons to include or exclude any occurrence from the broad discussion—including possibly key issues of natural resource management, chieftaincy matters, ethnicity, elections, and even commercial relations—depending on time, place, and circumstance. Similar occurrences in different social and political contexts could be categorized as religious violence (or not). Thus, deciding what to include (or not), and finding explanations for these distinctions, has been one of the profound challenges I faced as I wrote this book. Indeed, these issues are often interwoven in ways that make delineations almost impossible. Also, the boundaries between and among religions in Nigeria are extremely fluid and blurred across time and practices, to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to compartmentalize each religion in Nigeria. Finally, events in Nigeria, especially along the lines of religion and violence, change rapidly, and sometimes quite profoundly, thereby making the work of researchers trying to catch up with developments intensely difficult. Any book on religion and violence in Nigeria is thus always a work in progress.

A brief note on the methodology that I adopted seems appropriate in this introduction. The book is based on the library-historical method, long-term observation as a student of Nigerian politics and society, and interviews with some actors around the country. I consulted libraries across Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. All interviews complied with the research ethics standards of King's College London.

I need to include a major disclaimer at the outset of this book: none of Nigeria's three main religious divisions—Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions—is inherently violent or violence prone, and this book does not presuppose that. Rather, all religions, like identities, are subject to intense instrumentalization (and manipulation) in the pursuit of particular interests by individuals and groups. The way actors instrumentalize religions is one of the themes that thread through this book.

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The book has eight substantive chapters. The first discusses Nigeria's key religions and the historical politics of their emergence and development, laying out the sociopolitical and historical background of the roles that religion and religious violence have played. It addresses the defining features of Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions, and tracks how they arrived in the territory that later became Nigeria. It also looks at the effects of colonization, ending with independence and how it affected the role of religion in the affairs of the new country.

Chapter 2 discusses the political violence of Islamic radicalization in Nigeria, tracing its history, phases, contexts, manifestations, and socioeconomic and security ramifications, and investigates the efficacy of mechanisms aimed at addressing it. It explores the Maitatsine riots and the activities of other violent groups. Finally, it discusses patterns and methods of recruitment, the membership makeup of radical groups, and their reactions to the activities of other religions. It also looks at intra-Islamic religious differences, radicalization in tertiary institutions, and the role of the media.

Chapter 3 examines Christianity's association with violence in Nigeria, seeking to document all the known cases when Christians used violence, and the cause of each instance, asking to what extent they were reactions to Islamic radicalization. It discusses a radical Christian group that was formed specifically to challenge Boko Haram militarily and compares the position of this group with those groups of mainstream Christians who did not turn to violence. The chapter also explores some isolated cases of violence carried out in the name of Christianity against hapless segments of the population, especially children. This chapter also discusses radical Christian clergy who openly called for their congregants to violently defend the Christian faith against attacks from other religions.

The objective of chapter 4 is to complete the circle by discussing the link between Nigeria's traditional religions and violence. Among other topics, the chapter looks at the underlying motivations of worshippers of traditional religions when they engage in violence. It also looks at links between the worship practices of traditional religions and violence among their practitioners and with adherents of other faiths. There is also a discussion of some of the violent clashes that have involved traditional religions, especially their patterns of manifestation and the processes of resolution.

Chapter 5 describes the new radicalization and political violence in Nigeria. It looks specifically at the activities of Boko Haram. The chapter first considers the origin of the group and how it transmuted into a major national threat. It also considers the doctrinal issues surrounding the group's formation, its connection with national politics, and the activities that have brought it global

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attention. In addition, the chapter discusses bickering within the organization and how this has affected members' attitude toward violence. Boko Haram's sources of funding, its recruitment strategy, and its targets are highlighted, as is the Nigerian state's attitude about the group's insurgency activities. Finally, the chapter looks at the broader cross-national activities of the group, especially incursions into neighboring states and the counterreactions this has attracted from those states.

Chapter 6 discusses religion, religious violence, national politics, and the intricacies of intergroup relations. The chapter analyzes how successive administrations have addressed the key religious controversies they confronted, and how the religious predilections of individual political leaders have been reflected (or are believed to have manifested) in their management of state affairs. Also discussed is how religious violence is connected to agropastoralist issues in some parts of the country. The chapter also touches on controversies around the alleged attempt to Islamicize Nigeria.

The seventh chapter discusses the economic ramifications of religious violence in Nigeria. In counting the economic costs, the chapter assesses various ways that the national economy has been affected by insurgencies, including the consequences of violence for farming, trading, and commercial activities. The chapter also looks at the economic consequences of the government's fight against religious violence, especially the allegations and denials of graft by top military officers when they procured arms to fight insurgent groups. There is also a consideration of how economic disempowerment has fueled religious violence, ensuring a cyclical relationship between these realities.

Chapter 8 goes global, looking at how Nigeria's religious violence links to international radicalization. The chapter first explores global involvement in Nigeria's religious controversies immediately after independence. It then discusses how external forces—in particular, events in the Middle East, including the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran—have been affected by religious politics and religious conflict in Nigeria. More profoundly, the chapter investigates the various links between Boko Haram and global Islamic radicalization and the nature and extent of the support the movement is receiving from this source.

The book's conclusion asks why religion remains one of the most contentious identity issues in Nigeria and how its link with ethnopolitical violence has helped define intergroup relations in the country. It also discusses how religion and violence play into the equation of the #EndSARS protests that pervaded the country between October and November 2020.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. "Nigeria Leads in Religious Belief," BBC News, February 26, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/wtwtgod/3490490.stm.
2. Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland, 2018, 8.
3. Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis, *Religion and the Individual*.
4. McGuire, *Religion*; Seul, "'Ours Is the Way of God.'"
5. Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*, 33.
6. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order*, 27.
7. Pargament, *Psychology of Religion and Coping*, 2.
8. Eitzen and Zinn, "Religion."
9. Recent books on violence include Alvares and Bachman, *Violence*; Larkin, *When Violence Is the Answer*.
10. David Rapoport has done a study interrogating how three main religions have been associated with violence; see Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling."
11. Abd Aziz, "Terror in the Name of God," 61.
12. Horsley, "The Sicarii."
13. For more on the Assassins, see Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins.*
14. Abd Aziz, "Terror in the Name of God."
15. Mayall, "Jihad and the Clash within Civilization," 27–40.
16. This jihad occurred in most parts of present-day northern Nigeria, discussed extensively in chapter 1.
17. For more on revivalist Islam in North Africa, see El-Khawas, "Revolutionary Islam in North Africa."
18. Adam, "Islam and Politics in Somalia."
19. See Hallaq, *The Impossible State*; Sabet, *Islam and the Political*.
20. Davidson, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 39.
21. Salvatore, *The Sociology of Islam.*

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22. A'la Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*.
23. I owe this point to Abdulbassit Kassim, who is quoted here. Personal communication, June 15, 2019.
24. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 11.
25. I thank Professor Simeon Ilesanmi for drawing my attention to this.
26. Esposito, *Unholy War.*
27. Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, 143.
28. This can be seen, for example, in the celebration of Husain, the third Shi'ite imam, who died while rebelling against Yazid, who practiced an adulterated version of Islam. See Olomojobi, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 94.
29. Olomojobi, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 95.
30. Interview with Alhaji Sule Baba Ali, November 2007.
31. Quadri, "All in the Name of God."
32. Quadri, "All in the Name of God."
33. AbdulSalam, "Islam and Public Life," 261.
34. AbdulSalam, "Islam and Public Life."
35. See, for example, Ranstorp, *Understanding Violent Radicalisation*; Peter Neumann, "Introduction," in Neumann, *Perspectives on Radicalization and Political Violence.*
36. Bourne, *Nigeria*, ix.
37. Adisa Adeleye, "Amalgamation of 1914: Was It a Mistake?" *Vanguard*, May 18, 2012.
38. Most of the officers who staged the coup were Christian Ibos, and those assassinated were Hausa and Yoruba, including two of the highest-ranking Hausa army officers, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Northern Region Premier Ahmadu Bello, and the Western Premier Ladoke Akintola.
39. For more on the civil war, see Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*. Nigerians who participated in the war have now contributed to the literature, including Obasanjo, *My Command*; Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy of Victory*.
40. This is the process whereby offices were allocated to ensure some form of ethnic and religious balance.
41. See Ali, *Anatomy of Corruption in Nigeria.*
42. See Owele, "Class of 1999 Governors," 33.

CHAPTER ONE: RELIGION AND NIGERIAN SOCIETY

1. See Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*; Awolalu, *West African Traditional Religion*; Olupona, *African Spirituality*; among others.
2. For example, human sacrifice was known to be practiced among the Gauls in Europe.
3. Mbiti, *African Religions, and Philosophy.*
4. Olupona, "15 Facts of African Religions."
5. Olupona, *African Religions*.
6. Olupona, *African Religions.*
7. Olupona, *African Religions.*
8. Olupona, *African Religions.*
9. Olupona, *African Religions.*

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