WHAT IT MEANS TO BE MUSLIM

Hearing the name “Mukhtar” what comes to mind? I am sure most people have never heard the name before. It is an Arabic name, and it is who I am because I am a Muslim. “Are you a Muslim because you were born a Muslim, or because you want to be a Muslim?” I was asked this question multiple times when I was younger, and I never answered. The obvious answer is that I am a Muslim because I was born a Muslim and my parents are Muslims. Yes, it’s partly true but I never wanted to say that. It made me feel like I did not know what it truly meant to be a Muslim.

There are several stereotypes that people have about Muslims. Most people believe Islam is a very violent religion because of the several cruel attacks carried out by different terrorist groups. From the 9/11 bombing by al-Qaeda to the kidnapping of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram, a famous terrorist group in West Africa. These two terrorist groups claim that they are fighting for Islam and claim to be serious Muslims. However, there is nowhere in the Holy Quran that states that we should kill in order to pass across Almighty Allah’s message. According to the scripture, members of terrorist groups are not considered Muslims because of their unholy acts. The fact that you are born a Muslim, or you call yourself a Muslim does not make you one. There is a lot more to the religion. You should be able to practice the five pillars of Islam which are prayer, profession of faith, fasting, alms and pilgrimage. These men do not even carry out their five daily prayers. In Nigeria, a member of the Boko Haram terrorist group was caught and was made to read the Holy Quran. He was unable to read it, and this proved that they are not truly Muslims, they only claim to be.

This stereotype has affected my personal life in different ways. When I was younger, I used to go to the playground after school and come back home very dirty. I would have sand all over my body and look like I had just left a construction site. My white socks were as dark as charcoal, and my shirt looked like it had been dipped in a bucket of water. My parents hated the fact that I used to go there and always looked for a reason to ground me. One day after school, I did my normal routine and rushed to the playground with so much excitement. Getting to the playground I saw my other friends playing hopscotch and I was eager to join. When I asked if I could join them, they all looked at me with a weird face and said no. I asked, “why?” and they replied, “Because you are part of Boko haram!”. Little and ignorant me just shrugged it off and did not care. By the time I got home and told my parents about my experience at the park, they scolded me and explained why people would say such a thing. After they explained, I began to think a lot and became extremely insecure about my religion. I did not want people to think I was a terrorist because I am Muslim. As I continued to grow and gain more exposure; I read a lot and talked to different scholars. I learnt what it is to be a Muslim and that the title “Muslim” doesn’t necessarily make you one. You have to practice the religion properly to be considered one.