

**„EAT THE HEART OF THE INFIDEL': THE HARROWING OF NIGERIA
AND THE RISE OF BOKO HARAM“**

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Andrew Walker's exceptional interest in Nigerian historiography as a backdrop to the eventual rise of Boko Haram, an terrorist Islamic sect that believes that Western civilization is forbidden, ravaging the north eastern part of Nigeria is instructive. From the simple story of Dorogu who was taken away as a slave in 1849 from the north eastern Nigeria to date (2016 AD), twists in politics, religion and culture have continued to undergird individual and corporate interaction. The conversion of Dorogu from Islam to Christianity and his wife remaining a Muslim till date illustrates that religion is not a matter of compulsion, theoretically. But the weave of Western education with Christianity at the earliest time added to the tension that was to brew especially during the colonial period in Nigeria generally and northern Nigeria particularly. Another underlying historical point the book made is the influence of Islam in the northern Nigeria. Although Walker narrated how Uthman dan Fodio led an army that took over the Hausaland which already had some form of Islamic culture, he did not press the analysis deep enough to demonstrate the fact that the Hausa had very thriving political and religious culture prior to the invading Fulani. The thrust here is that though it is now generally accepted that Islamic culture is associated with the north, the fact remains that there was autochthonous culture that the Hausa had developed and lived in before their conquest. Although the new Islamic reformers condemned the indigenous religious practices as idolatrous, there are ample evidences to show that recourse to such practices as wearing of charms were assimilated by the Fulani invaders. The ideals of the reformation had significantly weaned within the Fulani hegemony as political intrigues were the order of the day long before the colonial incursion.

Just as the conquering Fulani had both political and spiritual objectives but seemed to be more committed to the former, so were the colonialists who posed as Christians but were more interested in political and economic exploitation of the country. "They were Christians, in part motivated by a political question that would go hand in hand with the expansion of trade" (p. 27). The British invasion led to a higher organogram or hierarchy, namely, the Hausa were at the rug of the ladder, the Fulani and then the British as superior. This structure was subtly

inherent in religious interaction such that the indigenous religious traditions and practices were viewed as polytheistic and barbaric, Islam was regarded as politically convenient for the political interest of Britain insofar as Indirect Rule was profitable to her interest, while Christianity and Western education remained central to the heart of the British colonialists because they would need semi-skilled manpower to run the colonial administration. The emirs resisted Western education because they believed it had a dose of Christianity, and British, for their selfish interest agreed to halt the spread of Christianity in the north, but the implications of this are an albatross on the country today where the rich in the north stop at nothing to give their children the best education available anywhere in the world.

Walker moved further to show that despite the public profession of Islam in the north, the truth is that lies, intrigues, deception and thuggery characterized political engagements. These practices are in contradiction to true Islam: "All politicians lie" (p.91). One clear example is the sharia issue that is a complete political deception. Despite the public support for the full implementation of sharia, the truth is that high profile politicians in the north never live by the sharia law they so enthusiastically campaigned for; even Sani Yerima who started it would not retribute what he corruptly acquired as demonstration of repentance and commitment to the sharia law. This state of affairs between politics and religion was a fertile ground for the emergence of Boko Haram that believes that there was a deception by the proponents of sharia. "The advancement of sharia in this new democratic period was also used by politicians as a tool to project themselves in a competitive political atmosphere" so as to "access power, define public morality and shape the course of sharia implementation" (p.129).

Boko Haram, though has different narratives of origin, believes that the fraud associated with the implementation of sharia in 2000 needed to be corrected. The pre-colonial, Uthman dan Fodio model of Islamization of territories and frontiers became the guiding principle for Boko Haram. Dan Fodio eliminated indigenous religious practitioners and Muslims who were viewed as compromisers with traditions. For dan Fodio, no preaching was good enough for compromisers; they had to be killed. For the sect, not only do Christians represent Western education or civilization, but also Muslims who do not believe in its cause are not fit to live hence the killing of Muslims as well. With this divine assignment called jihad, Boko Haram continues its stride to establish an Islamic state where full sharia would be implemented. Accordingly, the question of the secularity of Nigeria is brought to the front burner. How best would secularity be negotiated in a country that has a long history of inter-religious and intra-religious violence? Walker apparently noticed that such a question as this would be answered depending on the religious affiliation of a person, political interest or ethnic affinity and of course the context in which the question is asked. To leave it at that suggests that the country is weak, unable to deal decisively with the Boko Haram

sect at both political and religious fronts.

Walker ends the book on a pessimistic note, particularly as it relates to the handling of Boko Haram and the political economy reasons widely adduced to have ignited it; he may not have deliberately lost sight of the deep religious indoctrination that Quranic education only has achieved, and the otherization of Christians and traditionalists in a supposed secular entity reminiscent of the Uthman dan Fodio model. While the military engagement with Boko Haram is spontaneous, it is without doubt imperative for sociological undertaking to unearth the Madhist philosophical underpinning that usually smokescreens political ideology anything that it has sprouted. As it were, it raises more fundamental questions than answers to the complex and intriguing relationships amongst Nigerians: “I feel Nigeria would be recognisable to a boy, brutally whipped from his home, a victim of slavery, transformed by Victorian manners who maintained a mystery deep within him. Dorogu would have readily understood Nigeria’s present inner torment” (p.219). Perhaps, the slave trade, Fulani-Islamism and colonialism shouldn’t have taken place in the first instance! Perhaps Lord Lugard would have allowed Western education as he did in the south. Just perhaps!

Although dotted with topographical errors, the book is written in simple, understandable language that appeals to the intellect and emotion, the political and the religious, national and international audiences. Its sociological grounding adds taste to its historical and contemporary contents. It is recommended to all who have interest in the relationship between religion and politics, and how history of this relationship has continued to be repeated.

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