

„BOKO HARAM: ISLAMISM, POLITICS, SECURITY AND THE STATE IN NIGERIA“

African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2014, pp. IX + 275, ISBN: 978-90-5448-135-5

The Islamic sect, popularly referred to as Boko Haram, an Hausa-Arabic neology, meaning western education is forbidden or fake, is used to designate the sect which calls itself in Arabic: *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* meaning "Association of Sunnis for the Propagation of Islam and for Holy War" or "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad." Boko Haram, a fundamentalist, insurgent-terrorist outfit, operating mainly in the north-east of Nigeria, is like a flame of fire that is covered with a multi-coloured nylon. While it radiates an array of multiple views in an attempt to understand it, it also melts those views as it has continued to metamorphose from a simple to a complex organisation, and an amoebic charter of engagement, with almost the same hysteric, reactionary responses, called counter-insurgency strategy, which controversially smears the military and other members of the Joint Task Force, charged with the responsibility of quelling the violent carnage of the sect. This fact, or lack of it, has contributed immensely to the various, sometimes unverified and irreconcilable emergent perspectives that have been garnered, not only in the tabloid but also in intelligence and academic repertoire. That is why any scholarly enterprise to dissect Boko Haram phenomenon in a monolithic way is bound to fail woefully. This conscious hindsight, resonate in the eclectic methodological approach adopted by the different contributors to this volume, well laid out the periscope for interrogating, understanding and engaging with the religio-political plenum and nuances of the sect and the state of Nigeria, which is the core of this book. Although an empirical or on the spot research is understandably difficult for now due to the unpredictable spiral of violence being perpetrated and perpetuated by the sect, the contributors have largely, almost dispassionately analysed data and issues multifariously.

While the political economy factors adduced to explain the rise of Boko Haram sect is legitimate, a more nuanced and integrated perspectives that emplace other critical factors such as historical, anthropological, sociological, philosophical, which engagingly point towards politicology, that is, a science (and political philosophy) which espouses the intricate relationship between religion and politics. In particular, the thrust of this book is Islam, which is not only a religion but

more crucially a way of life of the Muslim and her relationship with politics, society and the state. The inseparability of politics and Islam on the one hand, and the wringed relationship between it and the plural or secular state of Nigeria, are clearly depicted with interpretive expertise, practically and tangibly exercised, with a largely clear roadmap for policy formation or a marshal plan.

Implicated in the discourses is the idea of a 'political shariah,' which has continued to challenge the secularity of the Nigerian nation. The reason behind this is not far-fetched. According to some of the contributors, shariah is a challenge to democracy because in theocracy, its implementation is almost not a problem. This is even more correct as the sect believes that the introduction of sharia in 1999 by the northern state governments was not well managed. Consequently, shariah failed to unite the Muslims. This has inevitably provided ambivalence for Boko Haram: a struggle, so to say, for the re-enactment of pure Islam, where shariah will be the Grundnorm while not attempting any partisan political programmes to change the democratic status quo. The different inchoate voices among Muslims and the schisms that have taken place within Boko Haram sect are glare expressions of this position. It is for this reason that the analysis becomes pungent namely that the greatest challenge posed by Boko Haram is its inability to articulate its charter of demands, which now leaves open the possibility of conjectures. That Boko Haram members kill both Christians and Muslims and bomb churches and mosques deliberately eloquently states the ambience that defines its nature and operations. Again, the hatred for western education and deployment of the products of that education also well describe the ambivalence of the sect.

The question of western education, Islam (seen from the point of view of Boko Haram) and politics as they relate to almajirai who are generally believed to be the recruitment pool for Boko Haram is intricately handled. Against this popular perception is the forceful argument that though the colonial government failed to provide education, the state and federal governments of post-independent Nigeria have not fared much better. Unlike the southern part of Nigeria, the north is backward in education: the almajiri system of education thus leaves the children to the caprices of want and neglect. Despite this deplorable situation, there are no clear empirical evidences to link the almajirai with Boko Haram. This result suggests that western education is urgently needed to complement the strictly Quranic education that does not go beyond recitation of the Quran.

This above aspect of the arguments readily lends credit to the meta-conflict theory that Boko Haram exudes. Portia Roelofs quotes Horowitz as saying "there is the conflict itself, and there is the meta-conflict – the conflict over the nature of the conflict. Neither is coterminous with the other; neither can be reduced to the other" (112). In the midst of this is the instructive demand for the Nigerian state to protect her secularity. The serious challenge to the Nigerian state now, particularly with regard to Boko Haram, which all the contributors did not talk about,

though really still speculative as such, is the roles of Peoples Democratic Party and All Progressive Congress, as ceaselessly demonstrated in their attacks and counter-attacks, which add a no mean dimension to the complexity of the Boko Haram activities. This meta-conflict spectrum requires a deft scholarly investigation as it will possibly add to the understanding of the sect.

Finally, is the Nigerian state too weak to combat Boko Haram? An affirmative response is not apparently submitted, but implied. The reactionary strategy of the military, as suggested, must necessarily be changed for a proactive and even-handed strategy. In other words, a guided securitisation politics must be adopted to bring the sect to its knees. That apart, “political legitimacy, good governance, support for moderate Islam” (158) and engaging in deliberate counter-ideological campaign are the sine qua non for the possible arrest of Boko Haram. The book, *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria* presents a divaricate compendium of the blend of religion, fundamentalism, insurgency, terrorism, state and its responses and counter-responses, politics and Nigerian colonial historiography; all forms the complexities that define the nature and character of Boko Haram. But thinking Boko Haram as in the sect’s ‘philosophy’ is one thing; acting political and religious *boko haram* in response is another. What is most urgent and pungent is: thinking and waging peace through the synergy of politics and religion to rescue Nigeria’s secularity.

Igboin Benson Ohihon¹

Примљен:12.3.2014.

Прихваћен: 5.7.2014.

¹ Department of Religion and African Culture, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.
E-Mail: ohisuccess@yahoo.com