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ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: REFLECTIONS ON THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCE

Abstract

The paper examines the nature, operations and driving force behind the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. It argues that while portending Islamic fundamentalist credentials, Boko Haram is also representative of the socio-economic aspirations of most ordinary citizens in the Northeast of Nigeria who are excluded from the socio-economic spheres in modern Nigeria. Boko Haram posits both the irrelevance and decadence of the state and the need for its violent overthrow and establishment of pure Islamic society. It argues that even though Boko Haram cannot be fully explained by socio-economic factors, extant structural and socio-economic conditions in the Northeast produce many frustrated and deprived young people who feed into the fundamentalist aspirations of Boko Haram. Thus, the coincidence between socio-economic conditions in the Northeast which compares unfavorably with other zones in Nigeria; the structural deficiencies of the state and a long history of Islamic fundamentalism creates the conducive atmosphere for violent extremism represented by Boko Haram.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Nigeria, Islam, Terrorism, Insurgence, Islamic fundamentalism

Introduction

The paper is a critical examination of the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria especially from the perception of the group as representing an embodiment of both the frustration of ordinary citizens in the Northeast with their socio-economic situations and more crucially as the imagination of a desirable socio-political order in the larger Nigerian society. It also argues that the unquestioned categorization of the Boko Haram as a terrorist group and dependence on responses so dictated may only address the immediate manifestations of the group but create a socio-political lacuna that may regenerate other groups of its ilk in the future. Despite the above, we see Boko Haram as an Islamic fundamentalist group with

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a popular base anchored on its socio-political aspirations towards a better life for ordinary citizens. Therefore, as a home-grown Islamic fundamentalist organization, the Boko Haram is not only a quasi-religious movement but a radical socio-political organization which seeks to supplant the modern state in Nigeria.

Islamic fundamentalism apart from its impact on the socio-political system has had a deleterious impact on the Nigerian society. The impact ranges from spreading a pervasive feeling of insecurity to loss of human lives because of violent activities. Boko Haram has reportedly killed an estimated 10,000 people since it began its spate of bombings and attacks on military formations, churches, and relaxation centers in 2009.² The Global Terrorism Index 2015 has it that Boko Haram has become the second most deadly terrorist group after the ISIL and that it was responsible for over 6,644 deaths in Nigeria in 2014 alone.³ Most recently, Reuters reported that the sect has killed over 20,000 people and driven out over 2 million people from their homes.⁴ Probably the largest number of attacks and casualties has been in places of worship in the northern parts of the country including the national capital, Abuja. However, nothing has more clearly demonstrated the odious motives of the Boko Haram that led to its re-categorization as a terrorist group than the dare-devil abduction of over 200 teenage female students in Chibok in Borno state, North-east Nigeria in April 2014.⁵

The nature of the abduction and the videos showing these students as new converts to Islam⁶ have further drawn condemnation of the group and the ire of the international community. In reaction to growing violence of the group and the massive insecurity in the Northeastern part of the country, the Nigerian government has declared an all-out war on the group. This onslaught by government forces has received logistic and intelligence support from a couple of countries including the U.S, U.K, Australia, France etc. that have shown concern with coming to grips with the Boko Haram and its reign of terror in Nigeria.

Religious uprising like the 'Boko Haram' is seen as the reflection of a Nigerian state overwhelmed by the challenges of nationhood and where the acute scarcity confronting citizens make them easy preys in the hands of religious zealots

2 Edlyne Anugwom, "Mediatizing Islamic Fundamentalism: Insights from the Boko Haram Insurgence in Nigeria", in: *New Media and the Mediatization of Religion: An African Perspective*, Gabriel Faimau and William Lesitaokana (eds), Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 157-169.

3 Edward Delman, The World's Deadliest Terrorist Organization, it's not ISIS, The Atlantic, 2015, November 18. <https://www.theatlantic.com>, accessed

4 The Two Way NPR, 110 Girls Missing in Latest Suspected Boko Haram Attack, says Nigerian Government, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/twotwo-way/2018/02/25/588867121/110-girls-missing-in-latest-suspected-boko-haram-attack-says-nigerian-government>, accessed

5 CNN Library, Boko Haram Fast Facts, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/09/world/boko-haram-fast-facts/index.html>, accessed ; Edlyne Anugwom, "Mediatizing Islamic Fundamentalism: Insights from the Boko Haram Insurgence in Nigeria" . . . pp. 157-169; Andrew Walker, *Eat the Heart of the Infidel: The harrowing of Nigeria and the rise of the Boko Haram*, London, Hurst and Co. Pub, 2016.

6 BBC News-YouTube, <https://m.youtube.com/watch>, accessed

touting one belief or another.⁷ In other words, religious uprising often embodies the frustration of citizens about the political process in the state and more especially the inability of the state to respond to the existential needs of citizens. In this situation, citizens become easy prey to any associational movement to address perceived injustice, even when such movement is in the guise of religion.

Despite governments better coordinated and largely effective military offensive since 2015, the group still possesses the capacity to inflict mayhem. Even more telling is the fact that the main leader of the group, Shekau has eluded both death and capture by Nigeria's military.⁸ The challenge in 'caging the sect' has been compounded with the split in the group since 2016.⁹ In this case, while Shekau remains the main factional leader, another formidable faction is led by Abu-Musab al-Barnawi and controls the areas in and around Lake Chad and Niger including Yobe state in the Northeast. The al-Barnawi faction known as Wilayat in West Africa (*Wilayat al Sudan al-Gharbi*) has the backing of the ISIS and is even touted as ISIS in West Africa. This was the group suspected of abducting over 110 schoolgirls from Dapchi in Yobe state in February 2018. However, unlike the earlier Chibok abduction, almost all the girls were returned within a month of the abduction.¹⁰ In spite of the denial from the government sources, there are speculations that the release was made possible by the payment of ransom by the government.

Though the Boko Haram has so far manifested its activities in other countries close to Nigeria like Cameroon, Niger and Chad, the concern has gone beyond the West African region into relatively distant Southern Africa. Apart from the pledge of former South Africa's President Jacob Zuma to help Nigeria with the Boko Haram insurgency during a state visit in March 2015 (which was actually the position of mainstream Nigeria media just before Zuma's visit to Nigeria in early March¹¹); a reputable South African outfit, Specialized Task Training Equipment and Protection (STTEP) has been contracted by Nigeria since late 2014 to provide specialized military assistance towards routing the Boko Haram.¹²

7 Nathaniel Danjibo, Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The "Maitatsine" and "Boko Haram" Crises in Northern Nigeria. <http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/N-D-DANJIBO-islamic-fundamentalism-and-sectarian-violence.pdf>, accessed; Roman Loimeier, Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 47, No. 2-3, 2012, pp. 137-155; Abimbola Adesoji, The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2010, pp. 95-108; Igbo Aghedo, Old wine in a new wine Bottle: Ideological and Operational Linkages between Maitatsine and Boko Haram Revolts in Nigeria, *African Security*, Vol. 7, 2014, pp. 229-250; David Ojochenemi, Lucky Asuelime and Hakeem Onapajo, *Boko Haram: the socio-economic drivers*, New York, Springer, 2015.

8 Even though Boko Haram is seen as splintered now, the Shekau led sect remains the most visible and prominent.

9 This should be considered the first major split since the emergence of the Ansaru earlier on was the first split in the organization though the Ansaru was short-lived.

10 It is suspected that the government of Nigeria was made to pay millions of Euro as ransom for the girls and there was even prisoner swap involved also in the deal.

11 Simon Allison, Nigeria: Is South Africa really joining the Fight against Boko Haram? *Daily Maverick*, 2016, 8 March, www.daily-maverick.co.za/article/2016-03-08-nigeria-is-south-africa-really-joining-the-fight-against-boko-haram/, accessed

12 Andrew Walker, *Eat the Heart of the Infidel: The harrowing of Nigeria and the rise of the Boko Haram*, London, Hurst and Co. Pub, 2016; Mike Smith, *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War*, London and New York, I.B Tauris, 2016.

By current estimates, the Boko Haram has been pursued out of most towns and communities in the Northeast but still maintain presence in their Sambisa forest hideout and the areas around the Lake Chad Basin. Also, some of the abducted Chibok girls remain either unaccounted for. There is also the regular detonation of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) by members of the group even in the towns they no longer maintain any presence. The most recent being the bomb attack on people returning from Eid al-Fitr ceremonies in Maiduguri in June 2018.¹³ Therefore, while there is no doubt that the Nigerian government through the military has made serious inroads into destabilizing the group, the recurrent detonation of IEDs, rampant abduction of women and girls and wanton destruction of village settlements in the Northeast by the group calls attention to the need for continuous interrogation of the Boko Haram not only from a scholarly perspective but also from the need to generate knowledge upon which policies and interventions could be anchored.

Therefore, this paper is a further reflection on the Boko Haram as an embodiment of both religious sectarianism and socio-political vehicle for negotiating aspirations in the larger Nigerian society, especially by those who are marginal to the socio-economic processes of the society. Apart from a critical re-interrogation of the Boko Haram episode, the paper suggests new approaches to handling and pre-empting such conflicts which remain recurrent challenges to development and nation building in Nigeria. It relies mainly on extant literature and documentary data on the Boko Haram in Nigeria in addressing the concerns raised. The rest of the paper is structured into the following sections: a brief overview of the origin and growth of the Boko Haram; the nexus between the Boko Haram and other Islamic fundamentalist groups in Nigeria; the structural and socio-economic impetus behind the Boko Haram; the goals or motives of the group; and the conclusion which examines the current responses to the Boko Haram by the government and attempts to proffer new strategies for tackling the Boko Haram and similar groups in Nigeria.

The Boko Haram: overview of origin and growth

The group popularly known as the *Boko Haram* is *Jama'a Ahl al-sunnah li-da'wa wa al-Jihad*.¹⁴ It first emerged around 2002 as a self-styled group calling itself the 'Yusuffiyya' in apparent reference to its youthful leader Mohammed Yusuf and was based in the railway quarters in Maiduguri in Borno state which subsequently became its operational headquarters. At early stages especially before 2009 few people paid attention to this group, but by 2009 the group had attracted a good number of followers and sympathizers from all levels of the Borno

13 News 24, *Nigeria Eid Suicide Attack Death Toll Rises*, 2018. <https://m.news24.com>. News UN, *UN Chief Condemns Suspected Boko Haram Attacks targeting Eid al-Fitr Celebrations in Nigeria*, 2018 <https://new.un.org>, all accessed

14 Literally, Congress or Group of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad.

state society, including security operatives, politicians,¹⁵ and even scholars. Thus, the group attracted ideological sympathizers and made in-roads into the national and state political hierarchies. The Boko Haram came to national prominence after a massive clash with security agencies in 2009 in Maiduguri during which their first leader, Mohammed Yusuf lost his life (though he was reportedly killed in police custody).¹⁶

Boko Haram as a name is a popular alias for the movement and largely indicative of the belief or ideology of the movement. In fact, the name was made popular by journalists and public analysts in Nigeria who saw it as an apt description in view of the beliefs and philosophy of the group. Thus, *Boko Haram* is simply a combination of the Hausa words, “Boko” which literally translates into “Western or foreign”¹⁷ and “Haram” which is an Arabic derivative for “forbidden”. Generally, the Boko Haram conceives the secular state as representing an idol. Thus, even Muslims who subscribe to the dictates of the state are idol worshippers who deserve to die under the Sharia code. The group equally interprets attendance at secular schools, participation in government activities and keeping the laws of the state as idolatry. In fact, the kidnapping of the Chibok girls was motivated by the above doctrine which saw the children as infidels and idol worshippers for attending such a secular school.

The initial agenda of the group was to replace the Western-style state and its values with Islamic structure and values. As a popular news magazine reported in 2009:

The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where ‘orthodox Islam’ is practiced. Orthodox Islam according to him (Muhammed Yusuf, leader of the sect) frowns at western education and working in the civil service because it is sinful.¹⁸

But the extent to which this orientation is explicitly the goal of the elites of the group and its political supporters in high places remains questionable. With the increasing attention it drew from the security agencies since 2009, the group has also changed its *modus operandi*. The group’s operational area has moved beyond Maiduguri, the Borno state capital to other areas of the North includ-

15 It is claimed that one Alhaji Buji Foyi, a former state commissioner in Borno State was one of the initial funders of the Boko Haram. Incidentally Foyi was also killed following his arrest in the 2009 face-off with the police. However, Sani (2011) reports that sponsors of the group include prominent Northern religious leaders and politicians. In fact, the support received by the group in the North in their clamour for amnesty, between 2013 and 2014, makes this speculation believable.

16 Prior to the clash that led to the death of the first leader of the Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, the group had had run-ins with the police and the local authorities though these were seen largely as insignificant.

17 In other contexts, ‘Boko’ can mean fake or deceitful. In other words, it is always negative. In the Boko Haram case it entails what is western; foreign; strange; fake with reference to education and western civilization or vestiges thereof

18 *Tell Magazine*, August 10, 2009. p. 34. At first Muhammed Yusuf localized his ideology and launched vitriolic attacks on other notable Islamic scholars in the North and against established political and state institutions which he saw akin to the Maitatsine creed as the root of the rot engulfing Islam in Nigeria.

ing Nigeria's Federal Capital city of Abuja. It has also changed from the guerilla tactics it first employed in invading communities, use of explosives and engagement of the Joint Task Force (JTF)¹⁹ in gun duels. Apparently, after the death of its first leader, the group shifted from its initial fight against the injustice of the Western-style government against Muslims to engagement in vendetta against politicians, government officials, clerics and houses of worship.²⁰ As Galadima²¹ posits, having transformed from a seeming ideological sect into a group of murderers and political gangsters, only a few people still seem to regard Boko Haram as victims of an oppressive government but rather as dissidents.²² It is now largely classified as a global terrorist organization and may not only be a religiously or ideologically driven group anymore.

Relating the Boko Haram to similar Islamic fundamentalist groups before it

To fully appreciate the nature of Boko Haram and its modus operandi, it would be instructive to briefly examine the relationship between it and similar Islamic fundamentalist groups before it in Nigeria. While it is not the first incidence of Islamic religious uprising in Northern Nigeria, the Boko Haram is a new addition to the long history of Islamic fundamentalist conflicts. Perhaps, it was the recognition of this fact that led Aghedo to view Boko Haram as 'old wine in a new wine bottle'.²³ However, beyond the above indication of historical linkage, Boko Haram is an uncanny regeneration of two past Islamic fundamentalist episodes in the history of Nigeria. These episodes include the pioneering Islamic move-

19 The Joint Task Force (JTF) first emerged in the late 1990s as a special joint operation of the armed forces and police to deal with armed youth militancy in the oil producing Niger delta region of Nigeria. Since then it has been found useful in curbing all forms of insurgency and armed threats to security within the domestic borders of Nigeria.

20 Prominent Boko Haram attacks include: the June 16, 2011 attack on the Nigerian police headquarters ostensibly targeting the Inspector General of Police which was executed through vehicle-borne IED. Although the attack did not get the police chief, it killed two innocent by-standers and damaged several vehicles in the Police headquarters. The attack on the UN Building in Abuja in a suicide mission that took the lives of 25 people, injured over 80 and wrecked the impressive building. Also, on January 20, 2012 the group used two IED vehicles in another suicide attack in Kano that left almost two hundred people dead. There was also the Easter day attack in 2012 in Kaduna in which bombs killed over forty people. The April 19, 2013 fracas between Boko Haram and the JTF in Baga Borno state in which over 180 people were killed, and 2000 homes burnt is another vivid example. There have also been scores of IED attacks on churches and places of Christian worship all over the North and Abuja. These attacks generally show both an increasing sophistication of modus operandi and the deepening frustration of the group that have enlarged the scope of its perceived enemies. It also more crucially underlines the irrationality of the group like most Islamic fundamentalists.

21 Dan Galadima, *The Metamorphosis of Boko Haram*, 2011, www.leadership.ng/nga/columns/2571/2011/07/24/metamorphosis-boko-haram.html, accessed

22 Though Boko Haram is translated simply as "western education is forbidden," the group sees itself as "people committed to the removal of innovation and jihad". Innovation in this case means essentially western education and western political structures seen as alien and inconsistent with the larger goals of Islam. Also, the group sees itself as dedicated to the execution of jihad mainly in the sense of the enthronement of an Islamic state and the sharia law all over Nigeria. Perhaps, this last goal firmly ties in the group with other similar movements before it in Nigeria.

23 Igho Aghedo, *Old wine in a new wine Bottle: Ideological and Operational Linkages between Maitatsine and Boko Haram Revolts in Nigeria*, *African Security*, Vol. 7, 2014, p. 229.

ment led by the highly venerated Usman dan Fodio which carried out the highly successful and expansive Jihad in Northern Nigeria in the 19th century and the relatively later Maitatsine uprising led by the maverick self-proclaimed prophet Alhaji Maitatsine in the 1980s.²⁴

Usman dan Fodio, the venerated progenitor of modern Islam in Nigeria, was not the one who introduced the faith into the country. By the 19th century, Islam was already well-established in most major centers of Hausa states, including Borno in the north east, dominated by the Kanuri ethnic group. Dan Fodio, whose origin is traced to Gobir, one of the original seven city states of Hausa land, was led into action by the observed docility and lukewarm religiosity of the Islamic communities in the North. Dan Fodio was of the Fula ethnic group, latter migrants into the Hausa hinterlands of Gobir.²⁵ He was dissatisfied with the practice of Islam in these areas which he saw as adulterated with aspects of traditional Hausa religion and where the Islamic code of conduct or Sharia was not fully practiced.

Shehu Usman dan Fodio (born Usuman bii Fuduye), also referred to as Shaikh Usman Ibn Fodio and Shehu Uthman dan Fuduye (1754 – 1817), was both the leader of the Jihad or Islamic revolution in Northern Nigeria in the early 19th century, and the founder of the historic Sokoto Caliphate which is still the spiritual headquarters of Islam in Nigeria.²⁶ His descendants as Sultans of Sokoto have ruled the Nigerian Muslim community since the 19th century. Dan Fodio was a teacher of Islamic law and lived in the city of Gobir till 1802 when he led his followers into exile because of incompatibility between his radical reformist ideas and the desires of the local authorities in Gobir. The exile provided dan Fodio with the opportunity for long-desired political and social revolution which covered not only Nigeria but also parts of modern Cameroon.

Dan Fodio's jihad against Gobir was launched in 1804 with the support of his Fula ethnic group (also known as the Fulani or Fulbe²⁷) and Hausa peasants. The Hausa peasants joined the jihad because they were dissatisfied with their rulers who they perceived as oppressive. The Fulani also easily followed Dan Fodio since they were also not satisfied with the corruption of Islam with traditional practices in these Hausa communities. Dan Fodio relying on his considerable ora-

24 Edlyne Anugwom and Paulinus Oji, "Ethnic and Religious Crisis in Nigeria: a Review of Past and Present Dimensions", in: *Religion and Societal Development*, M. Okwueze (ed.), Lagos, Merit International Pub, 2004, pp. 143-168.

25 Still a town in the present Northern Nigeria.

26 British Encyclopaedia Online, Usman dan Fodio, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/620352/Usman-dan-Fodio.html>, accessed ; Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman dan Fodio*. London, Oxford, 1973; Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, London, Longmans, 1967; Muhammad Bello and E.J Arnett, *The Rise of Sokoto Fulani*. Kano: Kano Emirate Printing, 1922.

27 Fula/Fulani, an ethnic group spread over many countries in West Africa and beyond (Sudan, Central Africa, Egypt) who usually in spite of being found in so many countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Chad, Togo (actually all areas with cattle herding cultures or the presence of itinerant cattle herders) are minorities apart from the case of Guinea where they constitute 40% of the population and Nigeria where years of intermarriage and close bonding with the indigenous Hausa group have enabled them to metamorphose into an ethnic majority known as Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria.

tory skills and intellect rallied these disgruntled Hausa peasants and disenchant-ed Fulani Muslims to establish a huge army at his command and thus launched his extensive jihad.²⁸

The *Maitatsine* uprisings started in Kano in the early 1980s and spread to other neighbouring states in the North. These uprisings remain perhaps the longest and most widespread Islamic fundamentalist strife in the history of modern Nigeria. Mohammed “Maitatsine” Marwa was the leader of the *Maitatsine* movement which unleashed terror throughout the North of Nigeria in a series of uprisings known as the *Maitatsine* uprisings. *Maitatsine*, which Marwa adopted as a nickname, means “the one who damns” in the Hausa language; a clear reference to his public speeches which were composed of curses and incendiary outbursts against the Nigerian state and non-Muslims. Reportedly, he came from Marwa, a town in north eastern Nigeria (purportedly part of Cameroon before Nigeria’s independence).²⁹ Marwa claimed to be a prophet and Mujaddid in the mold of Usman dan Fodio whom he saw as his model³⁰. He clashed with the colonial administration before independence and was exiled from Nigeria but returned after Nigeria’s independence.³¹ In spite of arrest by the Nigerian authorities in 1975 for slander and public abuse of political authorities, his preaching began to attract the sympathy of other notable religious leaders in Kano and beyond; a development often ascribed to his successful pilgrimage to Mecca.

Given his customary ranting and disdain for constituted authority and public institutions, he quickly attracted a large following among the youth, unemployed urban dwellers, the poor and others marginal to the socio-economic spheres of the society. These followers³² soon began acting out their frustrations and the teachings of Marwa by involving themselves in altercations and clashes with the police and even with other religious figures seen as opposed to the ideas of the movement. Maitatsine, in the bid to emulate dan Fodio took part in the violent activities of this group and eventually lost his life in one of such clashes with the security forces in 1980. However, his death only served to spread the influence of the organization, deepen its animosity towards government and other citizens, and more crucially transformed Marwa into a revered martyr.³³ The group

28 The Fulani groups that joined the dan Fodio jihad were not simply motivated by religious zeal to establish pure Islam, some of them joined out of a spirit of ethnic solidarity since dan Fodio was seen as a kinsman who offered the possibility of enthroning the supremacy of the largely migrant Fulani group in the region. Also interesting is that dan Fodio most probably provided an opportunity for some adventurers to join-up and promote a socio-political system favorable to their quest for both power and economic space.

29 Another account has it that Muhammed Marwa was an Islamic scholar who migrated to Kano, Nigeria from the town of Marwa in Northern Cameroon in 1945 (see, Danjibo, nd).

30 Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: the crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*, New York, University of Rochester, 1998.

31 In Danjibo’s (nd) account he was expelled from Kano by the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Sanusi Lamido for his abusive and provocative ranting against the emirate institution and the political class in the city. Whatever the case, Marwa reappeared in the mid-sixties after Nigeria’s independence and carried on with his habitual tirade against both religious and political authorities.

32 Known also as *Yan Tatsine* or followers of Maitatsine and because of their militaristic and confrontational posture.

33 Marwa was succeeded by his trusted disciple and confidant, Musa Makaniki who later fled to Cameroon after wreaking enormous

engaged in terror and religious killings between 1980 and 1992 in the northern states of Kano, Borno, Kaduna, Adamawa, Katsina, Gombe and Bauchi and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost before the uprisings ended in 1992.³⁴

Aghedo³⁵ traces in broad details the relationship between Boko Haram and the Maitatsine uprising. Despite the insights in the paper he focused mainly on similarities between the two groups in terms of the rejection of secularism, ostentatious lifestyle, rejection of western democracy and education. But while the two movements or groups share the above traits, they can be fairly generalized for all Islamic fundamentalist groups worldwide. Therefore, we see the relationship between Boko Haram, the Dan Fodio Jihad and Maitatsine as more fundamentally embedded in the personal idiosyncrasies, charisma and the prophetic and revolutionary zeal of the leaders. In this sense, these groups have been led by men who had personally envisioned a larger than life role for themselves; who see themselves as the embodiment of the essence and ultra-piety of Islam and as those brought into the world to radically transform it on the basis of what they all portrayed as unadulterated and pure Islam anchored on strict interpretation and enforcement of Sharia law in all spheres of the society. The sentiments of these leaders bear testimony to the above personality traits and vision of Islam. For instance, dan Fodio showed an unhidden preference for the Sharia and discontentment with the practice of Islam without Sharia.

The evidence of this belief is best captured in his book, *Tanbih al-ikhwan 'ala ahwal al-Sudan* ("Concerning the Government of our Country and Neighbouring Countries in Sudan") in which he wrote:

The government of a country is the government of its king without question. If the king is Muslim, his land is Muslim; if he is an unbeliever, his land is a land of unbelievers. In these circumstances it is obligatory for anyone to leave it for another country.³⁶

Secondly, as shown in his establishment of the formidable Sokoto Caliphate which grew rapidly to envelop all the other pre-existing Hausa states, dan Fodio, probably, out of his frustration with the local authorities in Gobir, saw the dominance of Islam as largely untenable without a good hold on the political structure of the society i.e. Islam as a political tool and emblematic of the political desires and aspirations of adherents.³⁷

Maitatsine equally propagated a largely Shi'a ideology. He believed in the

havoc in Nigeria. He was reportedly arrested by Nigerian security sometime in 2004.

34 Sylvanus Udoidem, "Religion in the Political Life in Nigeria: A Survey of Religion-Related Crises since Independence", in: *New Strategies for curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, Okafor F.U (ed.), Enugu, Fourth Dimension, 1997.

35 Igho Aghedo, Old wine in a new wine Bottle: Ideological and Operational Linkages between Maitatsine and Boko Haram Revolts in Nigeria, *African Security*, Vol. 7, 2014, pp. 229-250.

36 British Encyclopaedia Online, Usman dan Fodio, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/620352/Usman-dan-Fodio.html>, accessed

37 Matthew Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan, Spectrum, 1993.

need for the establishment of unadulterated worship of God and contended that Islam has been corrupted by Western values and lifestyles as well as the modern state which he saw as the epitome of the desecration of Islam as a pure religion. Marwa was not just an Islamic extremist, but a charismatic and emotive speaker who could easily sway crowds of believers.³⁸ Boko Haram embodies all the above traits both in its beliefs (ideology) and the vision and drive of its leadership from Yusuf Mohammed to Abubakar Shekau.

The structural and socio-economic impetus behind the Boko Haram

Probably a single thread connecting most recent narratives of the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria is the fact that socio-economic privations expressed in such things as poverty, unemployment, low literacy rates etc. and mis-governance especially in terms of massive corruption have privileged both the growth and even attraction of the group amongst the ordinary people in the Northeast.³⁹ In other words, the quick spread and seeming popularity of such a violent movement as the Boko Haram may be largely explained within the ambit of the socio-economic processes of the Nigerian state. In fact, the rejection of democracy as a way of governance would seem logical against the realization that years of democracy in Nigeria have neither ameliorated nor tackled the socio-economic challenges of ordinary citizens sufficiently. Thus, Boko Haram emerged not only as a subterfuge to the Nigerian state but may equally be embodying some form of socio-economic Eldorado for the ordinary citizens of the Northeast.

Nigeria suffers perhaps from three critical divides which also feed into the emergence of violent and extremist groups like Boko Haram. These divides which are in the form of North-South; Muslim-Christian; and the rich-poor are also the driving forces and lines of alignment in social conflicts in the country. Therefore, these divides are to an extent equally at the heart of the socio-economic forces behind Boko Haram. In other words, Boko Haram has not been comfortable tackling 'infidel' Christians only like other Islamic religious uprising before it but has also tried to establish itself as the vanguard of a revolutionary emancipation of the less privileged.

Smith succinctly captured the suffocating socio-economic situation in the Northeast thus:

As Nigeria's oil economy led to the neglect of other industries and corruption flourished, the North-east struggled. The region, for so long a crossroads of ideas and trade in the scrubby savannah near Lake Chad and the Sahara Desert,

38 Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: the crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*, New York, University of Rochester, 1998.

39 Roman Loimeier, Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 47, No. 2-3, 2012, pp. 137-155; Abimbola Adesoji, The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2010, pp. 95-108; Igbo Aghedo, Old wine in a new wine Bottle: Ideological and Operational Linkages between Maitatsine and Boko Haram Revolts in Nigeria, *African Security*, Vol. 7, 2014, pp. 229-250; Alex Perry, *The Hunt for Boko Haram: Investigating the Terror tearing Nigeria Apart*, London, Newsweek Insights, 2014.

trailed much of the rest of the country in education and wealth by the time Yusuf began building his movement.⁴⁰

The general socio-economic outlook for the youth in Nigeria in the last decade in general has been aptly described:

It's been years and years of neglect now. The gaps have got larger. You see the number of children coming out of school and you have to be scared. Where are the jobs? Where is the future? They grow up begging on the street. They have been so deprived that they do not know respect. They do not have values. They do not care for human life. They do not care about anything. It makes it easy to brainwash them.⁴¹

The above perception is evidently more intense and pronounced in North-eastern Nigeria than in the other zones of the country. In fact, a comparison of the Northeast zone (even Borno state which is the epicenter of Boko Haram activities) with the other geo-political zones in the country or the comparison of Borno state with other states outside the Northeast geopolitical zone would reveal that both the zone and state are at the bottom of the ladder according to most major social indicators.

For instance, in the 2010 poverty measurements among the six geo-political zones, except for its neighboring Northwest, the Northeast zone comes last in the four critical indicators of poverty viz. food poverty, relative poverty, absolute poverty and dollar per day poverty.⁴² In a related score, the rate of youth drop out from school in Borno state is twice that of smaller states like Niger and Ekiti and one of the worst in the whole nation.⁴³ This situation is further worsened by the revelation that Borno state also comes out almost the worst in comparison with other states in terms of level of education attained by youth. In fact, it recorded a worrisome 41.1% of youth who had below primary level education; 8.1 with primary education; 41% with secondary education and a paltry 9.4% of youth with post-secondary school educational qualifications. The dire conditions get even worse with reference to type of education acquired by youth (where only 34.4% of Borno youth attend formal education institutions); youth literacy level and unemployment in the general population.⁴⁴

Therefore, the major problem in the Northeast is that it harbors many unemployed and perhaps unemployable youth who are both restless and frustrated. The Northeast presents the curious mixture of massive youth unemployment,

40 Mike Smith, *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War*, London and New York, I.B Tauris, 2016, p. 59.

41 Popular Nigerian musician, Femi Kuti quoted in Alex Perry, *The Hunt for Boko Haram: Investigating the Terror tearing Nigeria Apart*, London, Newsweek Insights, 2014, p. 31.

42 National Bureau of Statistics, *Nigeria poverty profile*, Abuja, NBS, 2012a.

43 National Bureau of Statistics, *National baseline youth survey*, Abuja, NBS, 2012b.

44 National Bureau of Statistics, *National baseline youth survey*, Abuja, NBS, 2012b; National Bureau of Statistics, *General household survey report (2007-2011)*, Abuja, NBS, 2012c; National Bureau of Statistics, *National literacy survey*, Abuja, NBS, 2010.

political corruption and pervasive poverty which are conducive to civil violence and the repudiation of state structured order and value systems. Thus, the North-east represents, "a place where restless, unemployed youth, corrupt politics and unforgiving poverty had helped induce a violent uprising by a seemingly bizarre religious sect".⁴⁵

There is no gainsaying in the fact that "despite Nigeria's oil wealth, poverty has been getting worse over the past decade in the Muslim north while parts of the south are booming. The northern textile industry has collapsed, cross-border trade has declined, desertification is displacing cattle herders, and agriculture cannot support the huge increase in population. The social statistics in the north are significantly worse than in the south. One example: female literacy in any language in the north is about 20 percent; in the south it is in the high 80s".⁴⁶ While acceding to the poverty thesis in the Northeast as the cause of the Boko Haram insurgency, Simons⁴⁷ argues that this pronounced poverty is a product of the irresponsibility of Northern political elites who have been in control of power at the centre in Nigeria for far more years than those from the South of the country, as well as the inability of these leaders to invest in both formal education and entrepreneurship unlike the situation in the South. The 2010 National Education Data Survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics shows that while primary school attendance for the whole country was between 35% and 80%; the rates for the Northeast and Northwest were between 43% and 47% and 35% and 38% respectively representing the lowest rates in the country.⁴⁸

It would perhaps be tenuous to establish a relationship between worsening socio-economic conditions and violent extremism of the Boko Haram. Undoubtedly, the high levels of youth unemployment; low literacy and general lack of access to formal education produce a critical mass of young people, who out of frustration and lack of belief in a better future can be easily swayed and brainwashed by Islamic clerics and preachers. It is somewhat easier to turn the anger of these young people against the modern state and its agents in a situation where the modern state, as Boko Haram contends is the source of all social woes in the society. In fact, both Yusuf Mohammed and his successor Shekau are known for blaming modernity, western education for general socio-economic deprivation in Nigeria. As Alex Perry reports,

Why bother with Western style education, Yusuf would ask in his sermons, when there are no jobs even for graduates? Hadn't money and oil given them a government that stole from its people? Hadn't Western influence given them Ali

45 Mike Smith, *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War*, London and New York, I.B Tauris, 2016, p. 57.

46 John Campbell, Nigeria and the Horror of Boko Haram. Lecture presented at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 2015, p. 3, <http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/2015/50303>, accessed

47 R Simons, *Boko Haram and the Agenda of a Failed Nigeria State*, Publisher unknown, 2015.

48 National Bureau of Statistics, *National literacy survey*, Abuja, NBS, 2010.

Modu Sharif, a state governor who built himself a palace of marble pillars and golden gates in the centre of Maiduguri?⁴⁹

In the above case, modern education is portrayed as serving no useful purpose but produces leaders like the governor in question who are corrupt and therefore insensitive to the socio-economic conditions of the people.

Be that as it may, one other critical explanation of the Boko Haram is linked to the society's belief system especially about education. The Boko Haram teachings profit largely from the hegemonic nature of the Northern society and its perception of the type of education desirable. Boko Haram condemns western education but actively promotes Islamic education and Arabic language as vehicles toward the proper acquisition of Islamic knowledge. Before the 2009 encounter with the police and the subsequent proscription of the group, it had provided Islamic education to children from poor backgrounds from Borno state and elsewhere from its compound in Maiduguri. An unsubstantiated account has it that the founder and first leader of the group, Yusuf Mohammed, even received a grant from Saudi Arabia for the school within the group's compound in Maiduguri.

The structure of Northern Nigeria society was perhaps instrumental in both the success of Maitatsine and Yusuf in garnering followers. One core attribute of this society was the popularity of a state-sponsored Islamic education which generated an *Almajeri* institution that made young people itinerant and homeless students of the Koran and Arabic in the North and created a mass of eager youths who could be easily swayed and manipulated to do the bidding of perceived religious scholars and authorities.⁵⁰ Also, Islamic fundamentalists took advantage of the existing historical disdain of the Northern society for western education. In the Northern states of Nigeria, from the inception of colonial rule, there has been a marked distinction between schools or institutions providing western education (*makarantan boko*) on one hand, and the Koranic schools (*makarantan allo*) and those providing purely religious instruction (*makarantan addini*) on the other hand. Generally, those in the latter schools were perceived to be wiser and truer to Islam.⁵¹

This orientation, although in consonance with Islam, was unwittingly reinforced by the colonial administration which saw the shielding of the North from western education as imperative to ensure pliable and compliant non-radical subjects. In fact, Lord Lugard, the first colonial governor of Nigeria, is credited

49 Alex Perry, *The Hunt for Boko Haram: Investigating the Terror tearing Nigeria Apart*, London, Newsweek Insights, 2014, pp. 51-52.

50 Patricia Williams, "New measures to ensure an effective separation of state and religion in Nigeria", in: *New Strategies for curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria*, Okafor F.U (ed.). Enugu, Fourth Dimension, 1997; Matthew Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan, Spectrum, 1993.

51 Nathaniel Danjibo, Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The "Maitatsine" and "Boko Haram" Crises in Northern Nigeria, <http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/N-D-DANJIBO-islamic-fundamentalism-and-sectarian-violence.pdf>, accessed

with stating that Western education was curtailed in the North to prevent the utter disrespect for the British that was beginning to emerge among colonial subjects in the South of Nigeria.⁵² In the absence of western education, parochial education which encourages intolerance of westernization proliferated in the North. As a result, while the Christian missionaries were establishing institutions offering Western education in the South, the North was being inundated with Koranic schools. In such a situation, the postulation that Western education and modernization are evil and anti-Islam remain largely consistent with historical tradition in the North.

Conclusion

From the foregoing I see Boko Haram as representing much more than a run of the mill terrorist organization. There is the need to look beyond the convenience of defining the Boko Haram as simply a terrorist organization which generates orthodox responses and reactions from the state and its agencies. Boko Haram, given its undoubted appeal to the commoners especially the young people in the Northeast of Nigeria (the population from which the bulk of Boko Haram fighters are derived) and the fine logic it weaves on the unquestionable widespread vertical inequality in the Nigerian society and unaccountability of the modern state raises salient questions about the nature of the modern state in Nigeria, its democracy and governance. Current efforts at curbing the group by brutal force may only produce short-term peace in the region. Therefore, the dependence on state-driven responses, dictated by the perception of Boko Haram as solely a terrorist organization, may only address the immediate manifestations of the group but create a socio-political lacuna that may regenerate other groups of its ilk in the future in Nigeria.

One way of curtailing activities of militant groups like Boko Haram is by sponsoring counter-narratives that tackle and repudiate their ideological positions. This is one method which is not being used either effectively or widely, in the case of Nigeria, but which may be very helpful since it takes these narratives to the local mosques and grassroots. This will prove effective especially when respected clerics offer positions and precepts from Islam that undermine and contradict the ideological foundations of radical groups.

Thus far, the military approach to the problem of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria has been faulty. The high-handedness of the JTF and even the JTF – ORO (Operation Restore Order), has been part of the problem. Hence, there is need for the military option to be nuanced and anchored on valid intelligence to ensure that excessive force is not used and, more critically, that innocent citizens are not treated as Islamic fundamentalists. It would also be necessary for all stakeholders

52 Sanusi L. Sanusi, "Politics and Sharia in Northern Nigeria", in: *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, Soares B and R Otayek (eds), New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

to begin to articulate a continent-wide response to increasing terrorist threats globally. For instance, Boko Haram while now largely a Nigerian phenomenon has shown the capacity to go beyond Nigeria, as evidenced by recent incursions into Cameroon, Niger and Chad and an emerging relationship with both the AIQM and the ISIS.⁵³ In this sense, it should be considered a threat beyond West Africa in the long run. With the increasing speculation of the connection of Boko Haram to such global terrorist groups as the ISIS, al-Qaeda and the al-Shabaab in Somalia there is no telling how far the reach of the group may be in Africa in the future. In fact, while al – Shabaab is a noted threat in East Africa,⁵⁴ there is no telling what permutations of alliance between it and other groups would herald for Africa.

53 Virginia Comolli, *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist insurgency*, London, Hurst and Co, 2015.

54 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), *Al-Shabab is a Threat to East Africa Region*, 2016 IGAD Report, Africa News, 16 August 2016.

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ИСЛАМСКИ ФУНДАМЕНТАЛИЗАМ И ВЕРСКИ КОНФЛИКТ У НИГЕРИЈИ: РЕФЛЕКЦИЈЕ НА ПОБУНУ БОКО ХАРАМА

Сажетак

Овај чланак испитује природу, операције и покретачку снагу побуне Боко Харам. Аргумент чланка се своди на то да Боко Харам, док представља основе исламског фундаментализма, у исто време представља и друштвено-економске аспирације већине становништва на североистоку Нигерије који су искључени из ове сфере живота модерне Нигерије. Боко Харам говори о ирелевантности и декаденцији државе и истиче потребу за насилним превратом који би довео до успостављања чисто исламског друштва. Иако се у чланку наводи да се Боко Харам не може у потпуности објаснити друштвено-економским факторима, специфични структурални и друштвено-економски услови живота на североистоку Нигерије производе много фрустрација код омладине која се налази утеху у фундаменталистичким аспирацијама Боко Харам. Стога, друштвено-економски услови на североистоку који су много лошији од осталих зона Нигерије, заједно са структуралним недостацима државе и дугом историјом исламског фундаментализма стварају погодну атмосферу за насилни екстремизам Боко Харам.

Кључне речи: Боко Харам, Нигерија, ислам, тероризам, побуна, исламски фундаментализам

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