

Boko Haram in Context: An Attempt to Solve the Current Campaign of Violence in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Since 2009, there has been violent uprising of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Consequent upon this unfortunate development, therefore, different attempts have been made by scholars to situate boko haram conflict within the broader field of political violence, terrorism and other related theories of conflict. However, different accounts exist within literature on how to identify the cause and motivation of the group's choice of violent strategy. These accounts which are built on narratives and theories are centred on; socio-economic and political explanations, religious explanation, grievance from the extra-judicial killing of Boko Haram leader, the polarised nature of the Nigerian state and, as well as the influence of international Jihadist movement. However, some of these accounts appear to be insufficient in explaining the phenomenon while others are faulty in terms of the ontology and methodology used in analysing the phenomenon. Poor socio-economic and political situations can be source of peaceful cooperation and not all individuals tend to be violent in the face of deprivations. Before the killing of its leader, Boko Haram under different names was already radicalised. While religion as described by Juergensmeyer (2000) as both vehicle for peace and violence, it will be inappropriate to downplay the role of radical religious ideology due to the; name, mission and similar attributes of Boko Haram with International Jihadist movement. Similar to Wiktorowicz (2006), this paper seeks to argue on Boko Haram within the radical Salafist ideology, thereby situating it within the context of Political Islam. Political Islam is a term which is anchored on belief that the socio-economic and political lives of Muslims should be determined by Islam, it is a fussy term, particularly as it seeks to answer whether it is a "revolution, radicalism or reform". Consequently, this paper recommends on how both the efforts of moderate and non-violent Muslims and the government can be synchronized towards bringing a sustainable solution to ending the Boko Haram campaign of violence.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Salafism, Political Islam, Radicalism, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The group *Jama'atul Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'wati wal-jihad* (Association for propagating the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), popularly called Boko Haram (BH) (Western education is forbidden), is a fundamentalist Islamist movement that has the aim of overthrowing the Nigerian government and to create an Islamic state. This quest is anchored on the destruction of anything perceived Western or secular (Maianguwa et al, 2012; Agbibo 2013; Loimeier 2012).

Majority of scholars believe BH emerged in 2002 (Maianguwa et al. 2012, Adesoji 2010). Nonetheless, it became prominent in 2009 given the violent uprising resulting to the killing of its leader Sheik Mohammed Yusuf by the Nigerian security agents (Adesoji, 2010). Consequently, BH escalated with government establishments, religious centres, schools, public centres as well as security and media outlets (Maianguwa et al, 2012) as its main targets of attack. Moreover, these attacks occur mostly in Northern Nigeria and predominantly in the Northeast. The groups' targets are regardless of religion (Amnesty International 2015) and political affiliation.

The extant studies on BH majorly overlaps within socio-economic (poverty), political and religious background of Nigeria, as well as the global derive for Jihad. Agbibo (Agbibo 2013) argues that BH is caused and motivated by history of militant Islam and relative deprivation and as well as the killing of Yusuf. More so, Maianguwa et al, (2012) argue that the relative poverty, feeling of marginalisation and, the use of religious politics in northern Nigeria triggered and escalated the group's campaign of terror.

Other, accounts (Adesoji, 2010, 2011) sees the emergence and the motivation of BH as a radical Islamic evangelism and revivalism. They anchor their arguments on the, Usman Danfodio Jihad, history of religious crisis in Nigeria, Maitasine uprising, Iranian Revolution of 1979 and, the various religious crisis.

The arguments within the literature may be important in explaining the ongoing terror of BH but what is still puzzling is that in spite of the socio-economic, political and religious factors not all individuals chose violence as a strategy of expressing grievances. Hence, it is pertinent to ask whether Boko Haram emanates from the justification of an

individual sojourn on earth, the framing of poor socio-economic and political situations from a religious worldview or the combination of both? This question requires more empirical studies by researchers.

While it will be improper to exclude the role of religion Juergensmeyer (2000) aptly construes religion as a double edge sword having the potentialities for both violence and peace. Therefore, this study attempts to put BH within the context that vividly describes the radical ideology of BH. Notably, the nomenclature and mission of BH already signposts the need to situate the violent group within the context of radical Political Islam.

METHODS

This study paper secondary method of data collection. These include articles from the extant literature on Boko Haram and other related news from reliable online media which lay credence on the narrative of Islamism and as well as the contextual understanding on BH. The ontology or framework the study adopts is anchored on political Islam and Salafism.

BOKO HARAM IN CONTEXT

Loimeier (2012), Oyeniyi (2014), and Azumah (2014) attempt to explain the rise of BH using the history of Salafist movement, they separately give account of how the internal disputes within the Yan Izala (members of Izala; *Jama'at Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna*, Society of Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunna) Salafist movement led to the emergence of BH. Oyeniyi (2014) asserts that BH is a local movement which radicalised due to international influence. The Salafist doctrine has been a source of acrimonious debate within and without Islam.

Wiktorowicz (2006) avers that there are three strands of ideologists within the Salafist movement; the Purists, Politicos and, Jihadist. The Purists through non-violence strives for the “propagation, purification, and education”. While they view politics as distraction from Salafism, the Politicos seeks to bring the Salafist ideology into politics because they see it as an instrument for social Justice and a vehicle to establish God’s laws. The Jihadist ideology is antithetical to the other two because it is a militant approach which seeks for radical revolution (ibid).

These strands of the Salafist movement can be described within the ambit of Political Islam, as a concept which implies that all facets of human existence, “values and governance” should be determined by Islam (Khan 2014). In line with Wiktorowicz (2006) I argue that the interpretation of the Salafist doctrine is contextual, hence whether Political Islam is a revolution, radicalism, or reform, it is contextual. In this regard it will be proper to look at BH as a radical form of Political Islam.

ISLAMISM AND NIGERIA: UNDERSTANDING THE BH IDEOLOGY

THE DIVISION WITHIN

The growth and spread of radical Islamist ideology continues to be an increasing phenomenon across the sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade with the emergence of groups such as Alshabab, Boko Haram, Ansar dine. This trend is connected by the linkage of these violent groups to international Jihadist movement in the Middle-East. Prior to the emergence of Boko Haram, Islam in Nigeria witnessed inherent theological disputes such as the Izala and Sufi tensions and, the Shiite debate (Azumah, 2015). Some of these argumentations gradually culminate into radical groups such as Maitatsine and Boko Haram. These theological disputes are centred on; Tawheed (monotheism) Da'awah (evangelism), Dawlah (state) and Din (religion), Jihad (strive in the name of Allah), kafir (infidel) and, Boko (Western education) within the Nigerian secular society. These kind of disputes also mirrors Hirschkind's (1997) explanation of political Islam where he distinguished radical Islamism from non-radical Islamic evangelization.

Hence it can be argued that the individual interpretation of these concepts gradually breeds radicalism and it is noteworthy to locate these concepts within the name and actions of BH. Other moderate Muslims believe that only one God (Allah) deserves their worship (Tawheed), BH in contrast believes that every other people regardless of religion must submit to Allah.

While other Muslims such as the JNi (Jama'atu Nasril Islam, an umbrella group for other Muslim communities in Nigeria) defines Da'awah as the peacefully spreading and strengthening of the Muslim faith within the existing democratic structures, BH believe that Da'awah (being the fourth word in its name) is achieved by force. Jihad (last word in BH name) is divided into two according to Bhutto (2008). The first is the lesser Jihad which entails to fight aggressors in self-defence of religion while the greater Jihad suggests fighting oneself to piety, (spirituality). Thus, it could be argued that BH claims to be fighting infidels and, may conceive the killing of Yusuf and the counter-terrorism strategy of the FGN (Federal Government of Nigeria) as an attack on the Muslim faith.

The Jihadist Salafist adherents as opined by Wiktorowicz (2006) mirrors BH interpretation of Kafir. Also BH sees itself as a Takfiri (another Muslim who accuses other Muslims of apostasy) movement (Azumah, 2015) that is why if you do not believe in their ideology, regardless of your religion you are an infidel and to them infidels deserve death. Moreover, that may explain why Muslims are also victims of the ongoing terror.

In the course of reconciling Islam with the Nigerian secular state, moderate Muslims have always strived to project their identity and coexist with other religions in Nigeria. That explains the reason why the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and JNI recognise the Nigerian state and, peacefully coordinates Islamic Da'awah. In another dimension BH does not believe in this type of reconciliation, it is against secularity. To buttress this assertion, several Islamic scholars such as Sheiks Jafar (Azumah 2015) and Albani (Aljazeera, 2014) (who even lost their lives) criticize BH for its ideology and encourage Muslim youth on peaceful Da'awah.

Apart from the BH's differing ideology from other Islamic groups, there are some arguments or division within Nigerian Muslims that do not culminate into violent movement. While some of these divisions are due to leadership disputes within sect such as Yan Izala arguments others are based on the acceptance of some doctrinal interpretations such as Hadith (Loimier 2012, Azumah 2015).

UNITY WITHIN

In spite of this divisions and the increasing number of the sects in Nigeria, majority of Muslims are bonded by the Sharia legal system recognised by the Nigerian Constitution. The call for Sharia criminal law (popularly called political Sharia) in Nigeria by the year 2000 appears to unite the Muslims to some extent. Over the years NSCIA and JNI have succeeded in coordinating the Muslim ummah (faithful) through spirituality such as the sighting of moon during Ramadan fasting and, negotiation with Government in promoting the interests of Muslims. More so, the Izala factions of Jos and Kaduna are now united. In addition, the pains and damages emanating from BH reign of terror have to some extent united the Nigerian Muslim groups against radicalism and as well as the rejection of the tagging of Muslims as terrorists.

RECOMMENDATION: ADDRESSING THE VIOLENCE AND IDEOLOGY

Ensuring a sustainable solution to the current reign of terror requires a multi-dimensional strategy which is anchored on both violent and non-violent approaches. These approaches should particularly be a joint effort from the Government and International community, and Nigerian Muslims. The ongoing war against the terrorists by the AU backed multi-regional forces has drastically reduced the level of violence within Nigeria and the spill over to the Neighbouring; Chad, Niger and, Cameroun (Aljazeera, 2015). Curbing radical Islamist within the Sub-Saharan region and as well as securing Nigeria's porous borders will help reduce the influx of radical ideology from the Middle-East where radical Islamist groups are dominant.

Brigadier-General Gumi, son of Sheik Abubakar Gumi, one of the great proponents of the Izala movement (Leadership 2015) aptly asserts that apart from the active and expected role of Government in resolving the BH violence the North and Muslims have the moral duty to work in unity towards the de-radicalisation of BH members. More so, he recommends that apart from the use of force, there is a need for counter-narrative on the BH violent ideology. Furthermore, that this counter-narrative should include stakeholders such as the "Bar, Bench, university academia, traditional institutions, Sharia jurists, Muslim and Christian clergy and the victims".

If Government at federal and state levels can sponsor all religious faithful for pilgrimage, fund Sharia and Customary courts, and also conduct mass marriage for the ummahs such as Kano Zawarawa (widows) marriage (Yusof and Mashi 2015) regardless of Nigeria as a Secular state, then it should be able to censor preaching. Moreover, the type of terrorism Nigeria witnesses is a group level terrorism not a lone-wolf terrorism. Thus this suggests that individual clerics are central to the mobilization of people towards violence.

Given the level of unity within Nigerian Muslims and the huge legitimacy enjoyed by NSCIA and JNI, the government should empower these institutions to licence Islamic preachers, the NSCIA, JNI and the Sharia Court of Appeal can set a framework in this respect. In the past Islamic sects only licence clerics if they are of good integrity, knowledge and, sound mind. However, there are few states presently such as Niger and, Sokoto that are able to licence its preachers (Punch 2014, Thisday 2013). Moreover, the Sultan of Sokoto being the master of the Islamic faithful (Amīr al-Mu'minīn) advocates for the licencing of preachers (Vanguard 2013, Thisday 2013)

More proactive actions are needed from the Da'wah Coordination Council of Nigeria (DCCN). The DCCN is an association of forty-one (41) Islamic organisations borne out of professions and associations committed to evangelism particularly through humanitarian services. It is necessary therefore that the DCCN engage in mass awareness and value orientation of young and radical Muslims since it represents the interests of Muslims in important human endeavours.

CONCLUSION

So far, the paper through the ideology of the jihadist Salafist attempts to explain BH as radical Political Islam whose emergence has much to do with the theological disputes within Islam in Nigeria. Islamism in Nigeria and the BH phenomenon, to a reasonable extent suggests that Political Islam is contextual depending on individual interpretation whether violent or non-violent.

Military approach will only suspend BH for a while in as much as there is no unity on the side of Nigerian Muslims to counter extremism through a well-planned continuous process that involve Islamic; Jurisprudence (Fiqh), independent interpretation (Ijtihad), and implementation (Fatawa). The present structure of the Islamic evangelism provides a fertile ground for such implementation. This plan should be supported by the DCCN in terms of complementing the effort of governments at all levels in uplifting the socio-economic and political conditions of its people. The Nigerian state needs to take a preventative measure as it degrades and destroys BH. Anjide (2015) suggest that "whether its [BH] ideology or perception of Nigeria is rational or not, without de-radicalizing Boko Haram, Nigeria should expect a resurgence of the group in the future whether using the same or a different name. At a point in time the US thought it had finished with the Taliban in Afghanistan, but the Taliban fled and resurfaced in Pakistan and allegedly infiltrated the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)." Therefore, since the Boko Haram predominated area are border towns, there is possibility for them to have safe havens in other countries.

In conclusion, this paper seeks to impact on policy making, Islamism, and the search for a sustainable solution to the BH violence. It further strive to contribute to the broader field of terrorism on the cause of group- religious terrorism. Thus, whether Socio-economic and political factors are involved or not, what is of paramount importance is understanding the worldview of BH. This is because the violent campaign is unfolding on the platform of religion. Hence, it is necessary that further empirical research is done to give a broader explanation on the choice and increase in the levels of violence of BH.

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