

Terrorism and the State of the Nigerian Nation: A Case Study of Boko Haram

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Abstract: *The Boko Haram sect is the latest of the Islamic Religious set that emerged and unleashed serious violence in the northern part of Nigeria. More than three hundred people were said to have been killed in Bauchi and Borno States within a week during the crisis in August, 2009. The sect got its name, Boko Haram, from its belief and philosophy of western civilisation. The name literally means "Education is prohibited or bad". In other words, education is considered to be Haram. This sect rejected western education simply because of the failure of the Nigerian Leaders who are exposed to western education, to improve their living conditions. This is why, during the uprising, government structure, like police posts and government properties became object of attacks. The paper concludes that the Boko Haram uprising is a case of using religion to challenge government and its policies. Furthermore, that religion will continue to be a weapon of protest or resistance to all unpopular government policies.*

Keywords: *Terrorism, State, Nigeria, Nation, Boko Haram.*

I. Introduction

Religion, a fundamental social phenomenon has been a victim of many abuses and misuse. Some individuals have used it as a source of power and suppression, while others have either used it as an effective instrument for exploitation and cheating or as a means of persecution and killing of members outside their religious fold. In Nigeria, we are very much acquainted with religious intolerance, fanaticism and mayhem. Since the 1980, after the bloody Maitatsine riot which claimed a toll of lives and properties, religious riots have become a frequent occurrence in Nigeria. Not quite five years after the Maitatsine riot which was purely religious, another uprising enveloped the ancient city of Kano, in 1985. This time, it was the Gideon Akaluka riot. Akaluka who hailed from the eastern part of the country was accused of mutilating with the Holy Qur'an, either in his business place or residence (Umar, 2009). The Muslims around him felt slighted and demanded for his death. The suspect was then arrested and thrown straight into prison to allow nerves to cool down. While in custody, Muslims fanatics broke into the prison, overpowered the guard and Akaluka was gruesomely murdered. His head was paraded along the street of Kano. Umar further observed that his friend Tunde Amoa of the defunct Daily Times Newspaper was shot in the chest with poisonous arrow of the Maitatsine group while trying to capture the latest of the uprising.

The Boko Haram sect is the latest of the Islamic religious sect that emerged and unleashed serious violence in the northern part of Nigeria. More than three hundred people were said to have been killed in Bauchi and Borno within a week during the crisis in August, 2009. The sect got its name, "Boko Haram", from its belief of western civilisation. The objective of this study is to show how religion can be used as a channel for the expression of discontent with the state. The paper is structured into five, that is, the introduction, definition of concept, historical background of religious crisis in Nigeria, the emergence and activities of Boko Haram and the Nigerian State and finally the conclusion.

II. Definition Of Concept

The word "Boko Haram" is a combination of Hausa and Arabic words, which connote "western education" and something that is forbidden. A Farah in the Dictionary Arabic-English defines "Haram" as that which is forbidden as opposed to that which is "Halal" or lawful". "Boko Haram" therefore means "Western Education is a sin".

According to (Ishaku, 2009) Taliban and Boko Haram are one and the same; they are identified by their fundamentalist beliefs and mode of dress. They believe that Western Education is Haram (taboo), that reading any book apart from the Koran is a sin. Like the Maitatsine, they also believe that using modern technology makes one a Kafri (unbeliever).

III. Historical Background Of Religious Crisis In Nigeria

Nigeria, the “Lion” of Africa”, is not only Africa’s most populous nation but also the world’s largest mixed Muslim/Christian society, with roughly eighty-five million Christians and the same number of Muslims. Imam SaniIsah of the WaffRoad Mosque in Kaduna, the Capital of the Muslim-dominated northin Nigeria, says that his country is “Saudi”Arabia and the Vatican rolled into one”, (Allen, 2013).While there are many impressive examples of Muslim/Christian harmony, there are also multiple front in the global war on Christians, that’s especially the case in northern states, which are majority-Muslim and where beginning in 1999 efforts to impose Islamic Shariah Law led to periodic outbreaks of violence that left thousands dead, (Allen, 2013). Nigeria is a deeply, divided state which comprises about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Three of these groups are: Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba classified as major ethnic groups while the remaining groups are classified as minority groups. The country is also divided along religious lines. The North is predominantly a Muslim region while the South is predominantly a Christian Zone. By 1960, Nigeria became a politically independent nation with these contradictions intact.

The first major religious crisis in the country was the Maitatsinecrisis which took place in Kano in the early 1980. The crisis was masterminded by Late MuhammedMarwa, which claimed the lives of thousands of Nigerians both Christians and Muslims from different parts of the country, (Umar, 2009). The challenge posed by the religious sect led the government to claim that it was externally motivated. In March 1986, barely a year after the last Maitatsine riot was recorded, Christians and Muslims engaged each other in a superiority fight, in what was said to be sparked by a mere Easter procession in Ilorin, (Akaeze, 2009). Subsequent religion squabbles were recorded in the early 1990s. Beginning with the March 1987, confrontation in Kafanchan between Muslims and Christians led to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Christians and the native Kajes were accused of destroying mosques in the Southern Kaduna Town of Kafanchan. On the same day, in Gusau, Kaduna, Zaria, Katsina and Funtua, the nation witnessed what might be seen as a reprisal attack when someMuslim took to the streets chanting war songs and setting churches and properties belonging to Christians on fire, (Akaeze, 2009). The disturbance also led to the loss of lives and destruction of properties.

Another issue that brought Nigeria close to the brink of disaster was the O.I.C. issue. Most Nigerians had never heard of the organisation and the news that Nigeria had joined an Islamic Organisation known as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) nearly went unnoticed except for the doggedness of both Cardinal AnthonyOkogie of Lagos and News Media, (Kukah, 2003). The Guardian (a national daily) had apparently picked the news up through agency reports. From there on, there were frantic moves to confirm from the government what the real story was, but for some weeks there was only confusion. If the organisation was an Islamic one, then this was playing into the hands of the Christians who have held all along that “There was a secret plan for the Islamization of Nigeria, (Kukah, 2003)”.Christians’ uncertainty deteriorated to consternation as all the key members of the government who were Christians claimed to be ignorant of such a major foreign policy and economic event. Nigerian Christians became very restive and anxious about the details. Amidst all the confusion, the National Concord Newspaper, owned by Chief M.K.O. Abiola (late), a Muslim with business connections in the Arab world, announced that two of its journalists had actually attended the meeting that sawNigeria’s admission into the organisation, (Kukah, 2003). The arrogant posture adopted by the paper showed the desire by those wishing to maximize the advantages of being close to the government to enhance their business connection under the cover of their religious faith. The newspaper confirmed that a delegation led by AlhajiRilwanuLukman (late), the then Minister for Petroleum, had gone to Fez, Morocco, to announce to journalist that“we are here for a mission”. In his address, the Chairman of the conference welcomed Nigeria as a full member, saying “Your seat has been reserved and we hope you will apply your consistent dynamism to the achievement of the aims and objectives of the OIC” (Kukah, 2003). The questions then were; where did the idea about consultation of Nigerians go to? Whom did the President discuss the matter with, and how were delegates picked? What did he seek to achieve? Why had major foreign policy guidelines been shelved aside?

Christian Association of Nigeria’s (CAN) position was however straight forward, it insisted for the unconditional withdrawal of Nigeria from the organisation. Its position was summed up by the views of CardinalOkogie who argued that, “If it were a section of the Islamic community that joined, there is no problem, but for Nigeria as a country we hold the President responsible for this”, (Kukah, 2003). The President alone does not make Nigeria. The JamatuNasir Islam (JMI) argued that the call for the withdrawal was part of the insensitivity of Christians towards matters that concern Muslims.....if Nigeria withdraws from the OIC it will have to withdraw diplomatic relations with the Vatican. In another editorial, the Guardian Newspaperstated that;national unity was threatened and called on the government to think again because, beyond fidelity to religion, and beyond economic well-being, our fundamental commitment and the Federal Government is to the unity and integrity of Nigeria. Some saw the religious implications beyond the country. Professor O. Aluko argued that “the true aim of the OIC is to secure a broad Anti-Israel solidarity front; the second aim is cultural imperialism. We must be left alone to chart our course”.

The Marxist group in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria referred to it as “A campaign of the manipulation of religious sentiments”. In a statement which they released as a group, they marshaled their patriotic credentials restating their determination to defend the country, by arguing that “we have no houses, no bank account, no assets, connections or patrons and protectors anywhere in the world. Nigeria is the only place on God’s earth that we belong to. We shall therefore do anything to promote and defend its unity and interests”, (Kukah, 2003).

As it was later to be seen, Nigerians were only now making up to Banbangida’s new style and tactics of administration. Once again, Nigerians faced the consequences of the irresponsibility of politicians playing political games with issues as dear to many Nigerians as religion. Nigeria once again came so close to the brink of disaster.

The Jos crisis, the first of which was in September, 2001, was said to have been sparked off by political difference between the mainly Christians natives and the settler community made up of the Hausa/Fulani., (Demola A and Sam. A, 2009). By the time the dust raised by the squabble had settled, hundreds of people had lost their lives while properties and businesses that took pains and years to acquire went up in ruins. In what could pass as a postscript on the Jos crisis, a disappointed Nigerian had noted that “The fact that the crisis happened at all in Jos, of all places shows that anything is possible in Nigeria”, (Ademola A and Sam A, 2009). His statement was a reminder on how Nigerians viewed Jos. Long considered as Nigerian’s idyllic city, due partly to its natural beauty and temperate climate, Jos was also a cosmopolitan town and meltingpot of various ethnic groups of people who had lived in peace for many decades. But since September, 2001, that peace of the state was shattered, Jos had literary known no peace.

After the Jos 2008 disturbances, Human Right Watch carried out an investigation and it came out charging the police of extra judicial killings, (Sunday, 2009). In responding to the inter-communal violence, the Nigerian police and military were implicated in more than 130 arbitrary killings mostly of young men from the mainly Christian natives and the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. Human Rights Watch documented 133 of these killings but believes that the actual number of arbitrary killings by security forces may be substantially higher than these figures.

While most of the inter-communal violence took place on November 28, 2008, the vast majority of the killings by the police and military came on November 29, the same day that Plateau State Governor, Jonah Jang issued a shoot on sight order to security forces. Human Rights watch researchers documented 15 separate incidents of arbitrary killings by the police during which at least 74 men and boys, all but two of them Muslims, were killed. (Umar, 2009).

The vast majority of police killings were perpetrated by the anti-riot police mobile force, commonly referred to as MOPOL. Human Rights Watch also documented eight incidents involving the arbitrary killing of 59 men by the military. According to witnesses, all of these victims were Muslim men, mostly were young, men and nearly all were unarmed at the time they were killed. (Umar, 2009). Sometime in November 2000, Kaduna was back in the news. The row this time had to do with a story in “Newspaper” concerning the impending Miss World Pageant billed to hold in Nigeria. Isioma Daniel, a reporter, wrote an article which Muslims considered disparaging to their faith. They soon went on rampage, causing blood to flow. The riots later spread to Abuja where the Miss World Beauty Pageant was scheduled to hold, forcing the organizer to cancel the event and name London as replacement. (Akaeze, 2009).

In February 2006, a group of Muslim converged in Ramat Area of Maiduguri Town to protest the drawing in a Danish Newspaper of Prophet Muhammed. The police reportedly fired teargas to disperse the crowd only for them to go on a rampage. They destroyed properties belonging to non-Muslims and attacked and killed Christians including Michael Gajere, who was identified as the Catholic Priest in charge of St. Rita’s Catholic Church, Maiduguri (Akaeze, 2009). In that crisis, more than 50 Christians reportedly lost their lives, with some 200 shops, 50 houses and 100 vehicles either burnt or vandalized.

The Maiduguri incident led to reprisal attacks in Onitsha by some Igbo. Incensed by the sight of their Kith and Kin who were brought home for burial, some Igbo went in search of some Muslims in the Commercial Town and ended up killing more than 30 of them. Three years later, Maiduguri’s reputation as a hotbed of ethno religious crisis again came to the fore, and in a fashion that reminded many of the Maitatsine riot. Religious zealots who tagged themselves “Boko Haram” orchestrated an orgy of violence in four Northern States including Borno, the Capital of Maiduguri. The others were Bauchi, Kano and Yobe State. More than One Thousand innocent Nigerians lost their lives in just four days.

IV. Book Haram: Origin And Activities

In July 2009, a group of religious zealots who tagged themselves Boko Haram launched attacks on police and government structure in a bid to advance their claim that modern western culture is “Haram” and that their followers should rely entirely on Islam. The Boko Haram movement emerged as a consequence of the corruption and deprivation suffered by a majority of unemployed youths in some northern parts of Nigeria.

What has western education done for them lately? A decade of supposed democracy has only yielded mounting poverty and deprivation of every kind to the vast majority of the people but has relegated them to the background. It is against this background that Boko Haram can be understood.

According to (Olayinka, 2009), Boko Haram was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri, the Capital of Borno State by self-proclaimed religious teacher Muhammed Yusuf. Members of the sect included Former Top Government Functionaries in Borno State, Former University Lecturers, dropped out students, illiterates and jobless youths. The group reportedly includes members from neighboring Chad and Niger Republic. Its members pray in separate mosques and do not mix freely with local people. They wear long beards and red or black head covers. In 2004, the group moved to Kanamma in Yobe State, close to border with Niger, where it set up a base from which it attacked nearby police outposts. The group has stronghold in four states in Nigeria, Yobe, Kano, Bauchi and Borno, (Ayuba, 2009).

The group has its core base in Maiduguri, which has a concentration of traditional Quranic Schools. However, there is no link between the Quranic Schools and Boko Haram. Some members of this group have been educated in secular schools and Universities in Nigeria. Allegedly, the group members burned their desires in the conviction that true salvation is to be found in Islamic learning. The members of Boko Haram sees all the corruption that takes place in the society as the deliberate manipulation of the rule inspired by book, which Nigerian government symbolizes. They are unhappy that, they are no job for them while they see politicians brandishing millions of naira, (Ayuba, 2009). The emergence of Boko Haram clearly shows that the administrators of Nigeria have over time, seriously alienated the majority of the local people from their share of the riches of the country. This group is a product of the poverty and unemployment caused by corruption. Boko Haram opposed a system they felt seriously alienated them from their religious believes. They also drew attention to be insensitivity of the political class to the plight of the people. Their leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was able to convince the poor and hopeless youths that they were products of long years of neglect by the ruling elites. This became easy for him to indoctrinate them.

One major atrocity carried out by Boko Haram was a coordinated series of assaults on Christmas Day 2011, which left at least fifty people dead and hundreds injured, (Allen, 2013). Most of the carnage came in Madalla, a satellite town on the outskirts of the National Capital, Abuja, where a bomb went off outside St. Theresa's Catholic Church and left an additional eighty people injured, including both Muslim bystanders and Catholics exiting the Christmas Mass, which had just ended when the blast occurred.

(Allen, 2013), further observed that the vast majority of the dead of St. Theresa's Catholic Church were very young. They included four-year-old Emmanuel Dilke, who was killed alongside his Father, his Brother, and his Sister. Also left dead was Chiemerie Nwachukwu, an eight month old baby killed alongside his Mother. Their Bishop, Martin Igwe Ugoukwu of Minna diocese, later side, "our people have suffered so much, but our response should not be one of anger. It should be one seeking peace and justice", (Allen, 2013), both the body count and the symbolism of striking on Christmas day galvanized attention around the world to the threat posed by Boko Haram, including specific menace to Christians.

In January 2012, at an evangelical Church in Gombe, a city in the North Eastern Nigeria, Nine people died and nineteen more were injured in a shootout by gunmen Pastor Johnson Jauro told reporters that gunmen burst into his church, killing people including his wife, (Allen, 2013). "The attackers he said started shooting sporadically they shot through the window of the church many members who attended the church service were also injured".

Also on the 17th July, 2015 Boko Haram kills thirteen people at the Eid el-fitr praying ground at Damaturu, Yobe State. "Thirteen people were killed in the suicide blasts", said by the police commissioner Markus Danladi, (Duku, 2015). The attacks were carried out by three underage girls, fifteen other people were also injured in the attacks at Layin Gwange and at phase I, about two kilometres from the Central Mosque where Governor Ibrahim Geidan of Yobe State, the Chief of Army Staff, Major General Tukur Buratai and other dignitaries observed the Eid payers, (Duku, 2015). The explosions sent people scampering to safety while many others choose to stay indoors.

Boko Haram had global networks, such as with the Chadian rebels, Mauritania, Al-guedain Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanese. They are trained in guerilla style of military tactics and their attacks are compared to suicide bombers in the Middle East. (Olayinka, 2009).

V. Boko Haram And The Nigeria State

The Boko Haram uprising was unlike the other religious upheavals that the country and northern Nigeria have experienced in the past, was very swift and destructive. Between the period of four days, it recorded scores of death which amounted to over one thousand people and lost properties worth millions of naira, (Demola and Sam, 2009). The Boko Haram phenomena were a great challenge to the activities of government not only in northern Nigeria, but the nation as a whole. Nigerian leaders do not implement policies that will better the lives of its citizenry, but rather implement policies that are geared toward enriching

themselves and that of their immediate families, while the greater percentage of the people are unemployed or under-employed. This situation does not mean inability but refusal of the government to provide job opportunities for its teaming graduates. Thus since most members of the Boko Haram uprising are discriminated graduates who are down cast and dissatisfied with their economic situation despite possessing western initiated and implemented and the youths involved in the general scheme of things, that unemployed youth at any point and part of the country could form protest groups and challenge the status quo. (Demola and Sam, 2009).

The northern part of Nigeria which is the home of the Boko Haram uprising has been known for its backwardness both educationally and in terms of infrastructural development. Shamsudeen blamed the problem on lack of commitment and efforts on the part of the northern leaders and thus cautioned them to be responsible, (Ayuba, 2009). The northern political leaders are more concerned with keeping local people in perpetual servitude as evidence in the fact that children of the rich already have jobs waiting for them even before graduating from school. The Boko Haram uprising is a challenge not only to the northern leadership but to the nation at large. The elites cannot eat their cake and have it.

Another challenge of the Boko Haram crisis on the Nigerian Nation is that it disrupted economic activities by scaring away foreign and domestic investors from the region. The fact that within twenty four hours, the uprising escalated to neighboring states such as Bauchi and Gombe is indicative of how widely spread the uprising was, (Umar, 2009). The far reaching effect of this was that it sent off foreign investors from the country. The Boko Haram uprising exposed the failure of the Nigeria State in promoting and sustaining the standard of living of its citizenry.

VI. Conclusion

Boko Haram is not only a Northern Nigeria phenomenon, but points to Nigerian's national question and the government's insincerity and failure since the inception of democracy in Nigeria. The problem and the challenges which the uprising throws have remained unresolved. The fact that it has been quelled down and the problems not solved is an indication that it could re-occur because the factors responsible for the crisis are yet to be addressed. This thesis concludes that Boko Haram uprising is not only religious in nature, but has socio-political undertones. It shows the importance of religion as channel to protest or reflect disaffection with the activities of government, especially those charged with the administration. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that given the extensive spread and network of the Boko Haram, the nation will witness more disturbances from this group in future if they escape the security beam one more.

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