

**IN NIGERIA**

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS EFFECT OF THE BOKO HARAM MOVEMENT

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Abstract

There were several attempt to develop programs of reforming the practice of Islam in Nigeria. While some of the campaigns guarantees easy admission to paradise with strange ideologies, others engaged in the use of superstitious activities to attract followers. More others are forcing people to accept their ideologies, without recourse to its legality and number of casualties. For instance, the activities of Boko Haram have attracted condemnation to Islam and the Muslims. The paper attempt to assess the effect the movement on the socio-religious life of people. To achieve these, historical and theoretical

analysis is employed. The work reveal that violent activities of the Boko-Haram are nothing but a rebirth of the Khawarij ideologies, which does not in any way represent

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the pristine teachings of Islam, and the understanding of the early Muslim scholars. It concludes that extreme activities of the movement have done more harm than good to Islam and the Muslims. It further recommends the need to regulate and monitor religious activities for peace and harmonious coexistence the country.

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous and one of the rich and multi-religious countries in Africa (Kwanashi,10). It came into existence as a result of the amalgamation of southern protectorate that is dominated by Christian majority due to the early Christian missionary activities in the area, and the

Northern Protectorate that is dominated by Muslim majority due to the early activities of Muslim scholars and traders from north Africa in the region (Ishiaku,25). These developments paved the way for Islam and Christianity to be the most popular religions in the country.

Unfortunately, some religious leaders manipulate even the Nigerian constitution to favor their religion against other religions in the country. For instance, some Christians perceive the efforts of some Muslims to extend the application of Islamic laws to cover criminal cases, as a subtle attempt to Islamize ‘secular Nigeria’ (Dlakwa,13). *Some non-Muslim minorities in the northern part of the country, see it as a deliberate move to annihilate them. Many Muslims interpret this reaction as a deliberate move to deny them the freedom to practice their religion, a political strategy to modify the image of the country from multi religious to secular society, and an intellectual move to replace the deeply rooted Islamic culture with western culture in the region (Ioimeir,139).*

These claims and counter claim resulted to the frequent upheavals between followers of the two major religions, sects and denominations, which continue to tamper with the peace, unity and tolerance among Nigerians. Most recent is the emergence of Boko-Haram, a religious movement claiming of striving against anti-Islamic practices in the country (Yusuf, 8). While the Government perceives them as religious extremists, majority of the Muslims consider them as adherents of deviated sect.

Unfortunately, some non-Muslims believe that Islam is a violent religion that preaches enmity against them. They also believe that, Boko-Haram is a planned movement to annihilate them (Bello,3). This paper assesses the socio-religious effect of the Boko-Haram activities. It reveals that the violent activities of Boko-Haram are the results of deviant understanding of Islam, and with greater consequences on Muslim communities in the country.

This paper has adopted a historical and theoretical method of data collection. All information here are based on the available data on the existing literature.

Emergence of Boko-Haram in Nigeria

There are different accounts on the roots of Boko-Haram in Nigeria. Some are of the belief that the movement was a reinvention of the 19th century confrontation between the then Sokoto Caliphate leadership and the Colonialists that forced themselves into the Sultanate. Others traced the root of the movement from adherents of *Shi’ism* in Nigeria. More others traced the origin of the movement

from a *Sahabah Group* led by Mallam Abubakar Lawan, who was succeeded by his disciple, Muhammad Yusuf (Alkali,3).

Following a doctrinal disagreement with his former teacher Shaikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam, Muhammad Yusuf went ahead to transform the movement to religious militants with radical and confrontational attitude. They changed the name of the movement from *Yusufiyyah* to *Jama'atu Ahlus Sunnah Lid-Da'awati Wal Jihad* (movement for adherence to Sunnah through religious preaching and strive(Dlakwa,7). For wider comprehension, the media houses call them *Boko-Haram* -meaning-western education is forbidden, is evil, is a crime, is misdeed, or a prohibition that is rebellious to Islamic education(Loimeir,3).

When the group started to openly propagate their ideologies in 2002, people saw them as mere fundamentalists' sect, until when they started to gather strength and followers in 2009, it then became too late for the government to curtail their activities (Alkali,73).

General Motives of Boko-Haram Movement in Nigeria

The Boko-Haramists observed that Northern Nigeria in particular, which was once a Muslim community observing the rules of Sharia, has been hampered by deviations from the core teachings of Islam, largely due to imposition of western cultures and un-Islamic values that produced many corrupt government officials and security agents known with the attitudes of oppression, bribery and corruption, looting of public funds, and insensitivity to the needs of poor Nigerians (Yusuf,52). They believe these are the main causes of the extreme poverty that hinders the progress of the Country. As such, the first step to correct these decadence is the application of Sharia laws in the country. The movement which attract followers, mostly unemployed youth. Their target is to overthrow Nigerian government toward establishing an Islamic state, which would cleanse the region from moral decadence to the light of Islam (Yusuf, 67). Majority of the Muslims are not happy with the radical confrontation exhibited by the Boko-Haram movement. They see them as deviant Muslims, whose activities attracts condemnation to Islam and the Muslims. Their *modus operandi* have been typical of a terrorist organization characterized by radical confrontations that spread violence, and indiscriminate use of explosive devices (IEDs) that destroys innocent souls and properties (Dlakwa, 15). Until recently, a faction of the group in the name of *Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a*, or *Ansaru*, emerged

to rebel against the continues bombings and killing of innocent citizens by the larger group (Alkali,71).

The government of Nigeria and international community see them as a threat to Nigeria and global peace that should be crushed to maintain the unity and existence of the country. The non-Muslims support this on the belief that the movement emerged with a plan to get rid of them by means of massive killing, forceful conversion and expulsion from northern Nigeria.

Ideologies of the Boko-Haram

In an attempt to achieve their motives, the Boko-Haramists embark on preaching campaign for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate based on the Sharia (Dlakwa,13). They developed their ideologies based on personal interpretation, without recourse to the interpretation of classical Ulama. They preach that;

1. The noble Qur'an stated that the application of any law other than the Sharia is clear unbelief (Q5:44-36). As such, it is a duty on the group to replace it with the sharia, even if it warrants the use of armed conflict (Yusuf,54).
2. Committing capital sin is an act of infidelity, even if the perpetrator performs *Salat*, fasting, Hajj and gives out Zakat (Yusuf, 60).
3. All the executive, legislative and judicial functions that were derived from the secular constitution constitute act of *Taghut*. Any Muslim who subjects himself into such institutions has become a polytheist. As such, the Nigerian law enforcement agents and civil servants are nothing but a living corpses (Yusuf,64).
4. The legislators that formulate laws, have made themselves partners to Allah (SWT) the law giver, whether they mean it or not. Such is an elevation of human ideas and sovereignty, over the laws and sovereignty of Allah the Creator (Yusuf 73-78). In other words, it is an act of infidelity to formulate laws at the expense of the Sharia.
5. The knowledge and rules of *Qawa'id al-Fiqhiyyah* and *Maqasid al-Shariah* were formulated to divert Muslims from the true teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Hence, they partake in *Al-Hukum Bi-Lawaazim*-Judging people based on indirect and even insignificant circumstantial evidence(Ishaku,3).
6. Contrary to the path of Muslim majority that accepts rules of necessity (*Addarurah*) according to its weight. The Boko Haram consider such rules as deviation (Ishaku, 7).

7. Western democracy is nothing but a means of deification and disbelief. Its principles totally conflict with Islam because, it paves way for the emergence of unqualified, unfaithful and corrupt rulers (Yusuf, 88).
8. Imitation of western cultures and civilization that has to do with bowing to the mace in the legislative houses and replacing weekend days from Fridays and Saturdays to Saturdays and Sundays are forms of idol worship and polytheism (Yusuf, 94)
9. The Boko-Haramists claim that they are the saved sect (*Firqat Naajiyyah*), and it is a religious duty on them to strive in correcting the belief, ideologies and dealings of other Muslims (Ishaku,4).
10. The evils plans injected in the curriculum produced by the western world, are greater than its usefulness on Muslims. Many ideas and theories in the western education curriculum contradicts the Sharia, which also converts people to idol worship. Instances of such contradictions include the Darwinian theory of evolution which contradicts Q4:140, the claim that the Sun does not move but revolves at one place contradicts the Qur'an (Yusuf, 88-94), the scientific belief that *Nudfah* has life which is contrary to the process of creation explained in the Qur'an and Hadith (Ishaku,4), the scientific theory of energy contravene the Qur'an (Ali,9), the scientific theories of photosynthesis and rainfall through evaporation contravenes Q:16:17 among others (Ali,9).
11. They preach the need to establish policies that will limit the interaction of Muslims with the western world. To them, such will prevent Muslims from adopting secular ideas and the evil practices of innovation, superstition and paganism stated in Q6:2, and Q30:20.
12. The citation and belief in the National pledge and National Anthem are confessions of disbelief in Allah the Creator and Disposer. For instance, the phrase '*to serve Nigeria with all my strength*' means to worship Nigeria with all my strength, which contravenes the rules of *Tawhid* stated in Q36:38.
13. It is a religious obligation to rebel against unjust rulers. In other words, whoever refuses the justification to answer the call for '*military Jihad*' against unjust rulers is an unbeliever (Yusuf, 43).

Elements of Deviation from the intent of Islamic Texts.

Islam is a civilization that is prone to dialogue rather than violence and confrontation (Q49:13). While some of its laws are relevant to all time and

changing society, others may be flexible depending on the condition, situation and circumstances. That was why the Prophet (SAW) was reported to have observed prayers and *Tawaf* at the *Ka'abah*, at a time when it was full of idols in the early period. His main concern was to orient people's thought against polytheism and institute monotheism. If these are achieved, the unbelievers will either destroy the idols themselves or, may not raise objection at a time of destruction when Idols have no relevance as object of worship. He also provided the Madinan constitution to guide both Muslims and non-Muslims to live in peace and harmony with one another, and without compulsion and imposition. In addition, none of the prominent *Tafsir* scholars interpreted ambiguous verses with the most literal meanings and rigidity as that of the *Khawarij* and *Boko-Haram*. In fact, it was the application of the most literal meaning of the Qur'an that made the *Khawarij* to declare Ali bn Abi-Talib out of Islam on grounds that he accepted ruling other than that of Allah the Most High (Gidado,34). They did not comprehend the fact that the verse does not prevent people from making rulings on matters relating to certain issues, so long as it is done within the dictates of Islam. In other words, there is room for human judgment on certain issues that may require investigation and application of circumstances and rules of common good.

For instance, due to necessity, Umar ibn Al-Khattab suspended the application of the punishment of stealing (Q24:2) at the time of famine during his Caliphate. Does that mean his action amount to infidelity? Also, the claim that no matter the necessity, ruling by other than the Sharia is an act of profanity, polytheism and major unbelief reveal a deviation to an extreme theological dimension. Classical *Tafsir* scholars have been citing the view of Abdullah ibn Abbas that, application of manmade laws on necessity devoid of any affirmation that it is superior or equal with the Sharia is never act of disbelief (At-tabari,256). In fact, even the application of manmade laws in circumstances where the preventive barriers ceased to exist can only be classified as minor disbelief within the boundary of Islam (Ibn-Kathir,97). It is outright major disbelief, where a Muslim makes it permissible without necessity (Al-Razi, 543). More so, it is unlawful to make *Takfir* of any Muslim on account of major sins, provided he believe and observes the obligatory ritual of Islam. All that is required of a Muslim is to engage in the system with clean intention to Islamize the anomalies with the weapons of knowledge, not with guns, bombings and the spread of violence that neither benefit Islam, nor qualify the suicide bomber a martyr.

Socio-Religious Effect of the Boko-Haram Movement in Nigeria

As the activities of the group widened, the insurgency once made the country ungovernable. They destabilized the country towards disintegration in line with religious affiliation. While majority of the Muslims and sincere non-Muslims condemned the activities of Boko-Haram, many of them suspect hidden motives or conspiracy in their acclaimed activities. Facts continue to reveal that apart from the Boko-Haramists, many elements such as bandits, politicians, and even foreigners, hide under the cover of the group to carry out all sorts of atrocities. Such people were severally caught participating in the killing and bombing government officials and buildings, including sporadic shooting at places of worship in disguise, looting at banks in the name of Boko-Haram, spying, supplying and arming the group with sophisticated weapons, and providing them with training and intelligence information.

These are why many Nigerians believe that the activities of Boko-Haram are planned strategy that has to do with international politics to destroy Nigeria. That may be the reason why the government is yet to trace the source of funding and training of the Boko-Haramists. As a result, the insurgency survived for many years destroying innocent lives, properties and religious tolerance in Nigeria to the extent that; no matter the competency and integrity of a candidate, religion became a determining factor of elections. In other words, the activities of the group have created a dangerous enmity between some Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Followers of the two religions are losing confidence on the leadership style of each other.

In addition, the violent movement of the group targeting military formations, government institutions, and populated areas resulted to catastrophic loss of lives with massive displacement of people to the extent that; hardly could you trace the impact of intervention from humanitarian agencies, and non-governmental organizations. In other words, there is obvious mismatch between the basic needs of those people affected by the crisis and the humanitarian support and assistance from government and donor agencies. These caused enormous damage to the economy that paved ways for the widespread of extreme poverty, sexual abuses and several reports of vices and hostility that produced illegitimate children with the possibility of inheriting radical behaviors at IDP camps. Several victims of the Boko-Haram crisis were displaced with no security and means of livelihood, but with little or no hope for integration and resettlement.

Despite the fact that majority of the victims of the Boko-Haram movement are Muslims, some non-Muslims see the movement as terrorist teaching of Islam, physical manifestation of irrational violence, and a sign of religion that has no respect for human lives. They claim that the movement was created as a means of forceful inducement of Christians to the dictates of the Sharia, and to radically vacate the non-Muslims from northern Nigeria. More others see their activities as a symbol of rebellion and hostility against western culture, the idea which continue to portray image of backwardness on the Nigerian Muslims (Ishaku,4). They forget the fact that the movement has destroyed the integrity of most Muslim communities with extreme poverty, increase number of orphans and neglected children, and with greater loss of innocent lives.

Recommendations

Allah (SWT) called the Muslim communities the best because; they exhibit moderation between laxity and extremism in the matter of religion. This make Islam to be compatible with the reality of modern life. Many of the misunderstandings and distortions of religious knowledge among contemporary Muslims arise from inadequate knowledge of the sharia. As such, Nigerian government should establish a dialogue and supervisory committee of versatile and responsible Muslim scholars and Christian clerics at the national and state level. They should engage in preaching peace and to promote religious harmony between Muslims and Christians, and with a mandate to prevent radicalism, extremism and interfaith tension. This will pave way for the committee to repel any form of deviation from the pristine teachings of Islam and Christianity. No insurgency was completely subdued or eliminated by the use of force, especially against those who do not fear death and sought to die a martyrs. Other recommendations include;

1. Government should ensure the provision of sound economic policies and programs that will engage larger number of youths in the affairs of government. Otherwise, neglecting the youth means endangering the future.
2. Muslim intellectuals should be encouraged to continue with the existing intellectual project of Islamization of knowledge to produce school curricula to the standard of Islam.
3. Muslims should use their population power to elect pious, learned and competent leaders that will provide sound policies in line with the dictates

of Sharia. With proper application of Sharia, the Muslims doesn't need to pursue non-Muslims to recognize the beauty of the Sharia.

4. The *Jama'atu Nasrul Islam* (JNI) has a responsibility of regulating the activities of Muslim scholars toward ensuring proper interpretation of texts in their preaching sessions. Only the qualified scholars should be allowed to give verdict on religious matters. This will prevent the inculcation of delusionary claims, indoctrination of deviant ideologies, and hates speeches along sectarian beliefs. In other words, all preaching and sermons should be free from insinuation.
5. The non-Muslims should judge Islam based on its pristine teachings, not with the attitude of some deviant Muslims.
6. Nigerians should be made to understand that seeking foreign aid in line with religious affiliation to fight innocent Nigerians, is an act of injustice that amount to treason. Nigerian have the required machinery to resolve their grievances internally. They should not allow themselves to be used by foreigners to destroy Nigeria.

The implementation of the above recommendations will counter the spread of deviant ideologies because, only highly learned Muslim scholars with adequate insight into the aim of Islam should have the license to preach and give religious verdicts. This will end clinging to the literal meaning with no regard to situation in all circumstances.

Conclusion

The Boko-Haram ideologies are nothing but deviant ideologies, which have done worse than good to Islam and the Muslims. The movement reveal their inexperience, immaturity, and the misunderstanding of the objectives of Sharia. The most disturbing is the condemnation of any scholarly verdict that falls short of their view, which increased the volume of hatred and mistrust between them and the larger Muslims and non-Muslims. It also, paved way for the widespread of poverty, vices and backwardness in the affected Muslim communities to the extent that; the foreigners are using the opportunity to achieve their economic policies in the region. How could they attribute Islam to the prohibition of western education which has become a necessity if not compulsory to the contemporary Muslim world? Do they mean that they are more knowledgeable and more committed to Islam than those Muslim scholars that studied foreign

cultures and sciences that developed the *Ummah* to its pristine period? One cannot deny the fact that some foreign thoughts, scientific theories and civilizations need scrutiny to conform to the teachings of Islam. Many of them were found useful with the ideals of Islam. As such, the Boko haram Movement It is nothing but a re-invention of the *khawarij* ideologies that planted seeds of hatred among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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End Notes

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