

Boko Haram Fundamentalism: A Critical Metamorphosis

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Abstract: In this article I argue that the Boko Haram Islamic fundamentalist sect in Nigeria started as an intellectual group with the aim of equipping youth with a formidable knowledge of the Qu'ran, in order to live a meaningful life. Boko Haram did not have recourse to violence at that time. Over time, the sect became a completely fundamentalist group utilising two methods: intellectual refutation of western scientific episteme, and a militant outfit to enforce its teaching. However, since the demise of its leader Mohammed Yusuf, the sect has not been able to present a coherent ideological front. Rather, it has continued to deploy violence of a terrible magnitude. Its violent attacks have become a subject of political disagreement between the ruling party and the opposition party. It is therefore suggested that deliberate, disciplined efforts should be put in place to curb the menace of the sect that is ravaging the country.

Keywords: Boko Haram, fundamentalist, politics, sect, Muslim, Christian.

I. Introduction

Since the 1980s, Nigeria has been faced with religious crises. This is so because of the convoluted pluralism that defines the diversity of the country. In many instances, it is difficult to distinguish religious conflicts from ethnic or political ones. In fact, many have suggested that religion is just a smokescreen for other forms of crises that have taken place in Nigeria. But it is also very crucial to come to terms with the reality that the struggle for political independence from Britain was basically anchored on ethnic and religious affinities. For example, in 1954 when the southern part of Nigeria moved a motion for independence, the northern part

defiantly objected to it. Nigeria eventually declared political independence on October 1, 1960.

Nigeria's history of struggle against colonial rule clearly shows that political parties were formed on ethnic and religious platforms. For instance, the Northern People's Congress was formed by Muslims whose ideology reflected feudalism and Islamic conservatism, and was based strongly in the northern part of Nigeria where Islam is strong with Fulani-Hausa values.¹ The Action Group formed in the southwestern part of Nigeria reflected a Christian progressive front with substantial input from Yoruba traditional values.² The National Council of Nigeria Citizens formed in the southeast was Christian-minded and radically imbibed the values of the Igbo.³ Even though this configuration did not lead to religious crisis, it was an impetus to what was to take place later. There is, therefore, an urgent need to determine what kind of crisis the nation is dealing with at this particular point in time in order to manage the crisis.

It has been observed that ethnic conflicts can be exacerbated by religion. J. Milburn Thompson argues, "religion is one of the features that can distinguish one ethnic group from another. Since religion pertains to core values, it can inflate the intensity and intractability of ethnic conflict. Religious beliefs can even be used to

¹ The Fulani-Hausa group is a problematic ethnic definition because in reality they are a separate, disparate people. The Fulani migrated into the northern frontiers and settled among the Hausa, who are the aborigines. The Fulani are a small but politically powerful group whose strength is derived mainly from the population of the Hausa.

² Action Group was a political party founded by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the South-West Nigeria during the colonial period.

³ James S. Coleman, *Nigeria Background to Nationalism* (Benin City: Broburg and Wistron, 1986).

legitimize intolerance toward another ethnic group.”⁴ While this may be correct, it does not seem to capture all ethno-religious conflicts, particularly the trend that has characterized the Boko Haram Islamic fundamentalist sect currently ravaging the north-eastern part of Nigeria. This is so because it is difficult to ascertain whether Boko Haram is fighting an ethnic, religious or political war. While Boko Haram has been classified as a terrorist insurgency, the prime focus of this paper is to critically analyze its metamorphosis. Boko Haram began as a strictly religious fundamentalist group totally opposed to the teachings of some Islamic clerics, but as time went on, and in response to political exigencies, it abandoned its pristine objective of puritanism in favour of political liberation. The sect has since, without a clearly defined reason, turned to the destruction of property and lives in the north-eastern axis of Nigeria. Its modus operandi thus far has shown that Christians and Muslims, Hausa-Fulani and other ethnic groups are victims, though some argue that Christians have been targeted more than Muslims.

II. Conceptualization of Boko Haram

Boko Haram is a combination of Hausa and Arabic words. *Boko* is an Hausa word which, when literally translated, means “book.” But with the introduction of Western education to Nigeria by Christian missionaries and British colonialists, the meaning of boko expanded to include education as a whole. “Book” in this sense symbolizes education, particularly Western education, since the Hausa or Muslims are not averse to “book” in its literal sense. Etymologically, boko is derived from

⁴ J. Milburn Thompson, *Justice and Peace: A Christian Primer* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 116.

boka, meaning “sorcerer.” Boka is traditionally associated with evil or witchcraft—something fearsome, undesirable and to be done away with. In its traditional social meaning among the Hausa, boko also means a fake or false bride. It is a common marriage ceremonial practice for the family of the bride to first present a lady (usually not the actual bride) fully dressed to the family of the groom. After paying some amount of money to be shared joyously by the bride’s family and friends who participate in the ceremony, the real bride is ultimately led out to the cheering of the crowd, marking the climax of the ceremonies. The first bride, regarded as false, is usually rejected while the groom’s family waits in anticipation for their bride. This act of rejection is what is symbolized in the rejection of Western education. The first bride is viewed as a corruption of the real bride; therefore, the former has to be rejected. In the same vein, since Western education is believed to be a corruption of the Islamic education and values, the former stands rejected. The successor to Mohammed Yusuf, the pioneer leader of Boko Haram, suggests that boko represents Western education, civilization or culture, since culture is a broader term than education and encapsulates the values that are taught in the West. From this perspective, boko means “falsity, fakeness, sham, counterfeiting, deceit, make-belief.”⁵

⁵ For details see, Eskor Toyo, “Boko Haram and Western Education: A comment” *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development*, 11/4 (December, 2011): 56; Matthew Kukah, “Boko Haram: Some reflections on causes and effects” in *Boko Haram: Religious Conflicts and Dialogue Initiatives in Nigeria*, Vol. 1, eds. Simon O. Anyanwu, and Isidore Nwanaju, Owerri: Edu-Edy, 2010, 4-7 and Shehu Sani, “Boko Haram: History, Ideas and Revolt” *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development*, 11/4 (December, 2011): 17-26.

Haram, on the other hand, is an Arabic word which simply means “forbidden, a taboo, prohibited, rejected or unacceptable.” *Halal*, which is the opposite of haram, means “permissible, acceptable or approved.” It is in this sense that Boko Haram connotes a rejection of Western education or civilization as forbidden, or as a normative evaluation, as bad, evil and sinful. In the Hausa context, it means masquerading is prohibited. This understanding is invoked by the belief that Western education has tumbled and deviated from its civilizing promises, engendering a degenerate society where evil thrives unchallenged. Thus, the sect felt the need to return to the pure state of Islam, as pioneered by the Prophet of Islam and diligently prosecuted by Usman dan Fodio in northern Nigeria in the 19th century. While Usman dan Fodio is widely remembered as a jihadist and a reformer of Islam, many scholars and practitioners of Islam overlook his avid interest in education, not only for men but more particularly for women. Fodio’s intellectual stimulation is evident in his daughter’s valuable contributions to the education of women in Islam as well as their place in nation building. Nana Asma’u bint Shehu Usman dan Fodio’s educational legacies speak eloquently to the importance of, and connection between, the practice of true religion (Islam in this case) and the nurturing of inter-personal relationships, both of which are necessary for social integration and nation building in today’s Nigeria. Dan Fodio taught that those who confined women to familial duties alone are doing a great disservice to God and humanity as well as religion. As a result, he called on Muslim women to disregard the call of those who plan to deceive them by turning them to baby-producing machines. In fact, any leader who shuns learning, as Dan Fodio argued, will lead his

or her subjects astray. The famous universities of Timbuktu and Birni Gazargamo, both products of this stream of Islamic intellectualism, do not teach courses in Islamic religion alone. Globally, the contributions of Muslims to medicine and other fields cannot be underestimated.⁶

The foregoing analysis raises some critical questions about the philosophical basis for Boko Haram as a concept or an ideology. In other words, if it is true, and indeed it is, that the Muslim religion is not averse to education of any type, whether Western or Islamic, it stands to reason that Boko Haram may be misconceived or may misrepresent Islam itself. In fact, it is argued by many Muslim scholars that even the Prophet of Islam taught Muslims to seek knowledge to as far as China, since China was at that time thought to be the farthest distance that could be covered. This implies that knowledge or education for the Muslim is not optional but compulsory. It was in response to this that Muslims devoted their energy and resources to education. As Caner and Caner explicitly demonstrate, the golden age of Islam was not when it engaged in wars, but rather during devotion to the growth of its intellectualism. They further argue that the history of Islam shows that as intellectualism was declining, violence and terrorism began to grow, which is

⁶ Toyo, 57; Muhammad S. Abubakar, "Islam and Peace-building in West Africa" lecture delivered at The Samuel L. and Elizabeth Jodidi Annual Lecture at Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, USA, 9th October, 2011, p. 7; Benson O. Igboin "Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Towards a Re-awakening of the Prophetic Voice" *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae: Journal of the Church History Society of Southern Africa*, XXXIII, Supplement, 2012: 223-241 and Jacob Olupona, "Bonds, Boundaries, and Bondage of Faith: Religion in Private and Public Spheres in Nigeria." Lecture delivered at the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award, 1st January, 2013.

defining or portraying Islam in a bad light. Consequently, *boko haram*, that is, “western education is sinful,” is antithetical to the Islamic philosophy of education.

However, there is a specific sense in which Boko Haram conceives of education to be evil. In this case, it is not the enlightenment occasioned by education that is being referred to or rejected, but the corruptible values that such forms of education introduce to society, particularly Islamic society.⁷ As a result, Boko Haram believes Western education introduces rugged individualism and materialism that undermine Islamic values of moderation in life. While this argument is weak because it does not take into account totalitarian Islamic societies that avidly amass wealth to the detriment of the larger part of the society, it is nevertheless true that Western values, not necessarily Western education, have continued to encourage individualism against communality.

The most critical objection to Western values relates to democracy and its institutions and instruments: democracy as a form of government and its institutions such as the constitution, police, military and judiciary is believed to have been fashioned after Western ideology and is rejected because it is contrary to an Islamic form of government. But the question is what form of government does Islam approve? This question is crucial because many Islamic scholars have argued that there is simply no form of government that the Qu’ran stipulates. Muslims have continued to live under different forms of government. In Nigeria, they have

⁷Benson O. Igboin, “Karl Marx on Religion: The Perspective of Boko Haram in Nigeria,” *Journal of Religious Culture*, 183 (2014): 1-17.

experienced military and democratic regimes headed by both Muslims and Christians. We can also draw examples from outside Nigeria to make the same point that there is no one form of government stipulated in Islam. For instance, even though Arab nations are headed by Muslims, the recent Arab Spring which has resulted in the transition to democracy, particularly in Egypt, shows that Muslims are not averse to democracy. Observers are also of the view that even though these Arab countries are led by ardent Muslims, corruption, human rights violations and underdevelopment—which are ascribed to Western education, values and forms of government—are also prevalent in Islamic countries. The difference is how these socio-political evils are handled by the different belief systems and institutions.

In any case, Boko Haram seems to suggest that the pure state of Islamic government that Nigeria should adopt has to do with the unitary system of government. In this system, as practiced in the pristine Islamic period when the Prophet of Islam and the four orthodox caliphs were the religious cum spiritual, political, judicial and economic leaders in turn, all those outside the realm of Islam but within its territories were made to pay taxes. Boko Haram thinks this is the quintessential form of government for pluralist Nigeria. It argues that Christians are infidels and therefore not spiritually fit to lead or head a Muslim nation-state. Thus, since the present political system affords people other than Muslims the opportunity to head the country, such a political arrangement is *haram*—forbidden.

III. Boko Haram as a Fundamentalist Sect

There are two different accounts of the origin of Boko Haram. While some argue that it started in 1995 under the aegis of Sahaba group, others posit that it actually started in the 1960s during the Nigeria Civil War. Available sources and information have discounted the latter claim for lack of evidence. Sani holds the former view that in 1995, Abubakar Lawan introduced the Sahaba group, which was primarily saddled with the responsibility of teaching Muslim youth the tenets of Islam. When Lawan left for the University of Medina for further studies, he handed over the leadership of the group to Mallam Mohammed Yusuf. It was Mohammed Yusuf who radicalized the group and termed it *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*, which means "Association of Sunnis for the Propagation of Islam and for Holy War" or "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad." It is instructive to add here that Boko Haram was initially a nonviolent sect, which engaged in intellectual response to society's ills.⁸

Yusuf's radicalization of the group with a new philosophical focus on jihad—not necessarily of the mind, but of the sword—culminated in the setting up of an Islamic government headed by him. His government, which the security agencies ignored initially as inconsequential, spread across Nigeria, Chad and Niger. But the most important point here is that Yusuf momentarily succeeded in establishing an "Islamic" form of government based on shariah, which he believed was the foretaste of what was going to happen throughout the country.⁹ Kuna provided an ideological

⁸Sani, 19. Recently, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who has been reported to have had secret discussion with representatives of Boko Haram, claims that he found out that the sect actually predated his presidency between 1999 and 2007. This gives credence to the position that Boko Haram must have begun in 1995. This interview was aired on Channels Television on May 29, 2014, under the caption "state of the nation."

⁹ Ibid.

template for the understanding of Boko Haram as a fundamentalist sect. According to Kuna, though Yusuf had Western education, he refuted certain scientific postulations that he believed were contrary to the Qu'ran.¹⁰ For instance, Yusuf held that the world is flat and that evolution is false. Yusuf taught his followers that if the world was spherical as Western science holds, it would mean that the Qu'ran was fallible and erroneous. The same argument goes for the theory of evolution which clearly posits that God is nonexistent. In other words, if evolution was true, creationism, which the Qu'ran teaches, would be false. Since the Qu'ran cannot be false, evolution must be rejected altogether. He also taught his followers that there are aspects of biology that contravene the teaching of the Qu'ran. Yusuf thought all forms of knowledge that contradict the Qu'ran must be rejected as false as they represent Western ideology purposely created to promote extreme secularism—that is, total rejection of God! Murtada buttresses this point as follows:

Some of them have beliefs such as that the rain is withheld in the sky during summer and then during spring it falls. Muhammad Yusuf stated: 'We as Muslims believe that rain is from (sic) Allah and has nothing to do with the sun.' For they regard the scientific explanation of the process of rainfall as opposing where Allah says: 'And we have sent down rain from the sky in a measured amount and settled it in the earth. And indeed, We are able to take it away' And where Allah says: 'Do you not see that Allah drives clouds?' Then He brings them together, then He makes them into a mass, and you see the rain emerge from within it. And He sends down from the sky mountains [of clouds] within which is hail, and He strikes with it whom He wills and averts it from whom He wills. The flash of its enlightening [*sic*] almost takes away the eyesight.¹¹

¹⁰ Mohammed Kuna, "Revivalist Movements, Toleration, and Conflict in Nigeria: Preliminary Notes on the Boko Haram," a paper delivered at the ISA/RC22 mid-term International Conference on the theme: "Religion, Conflict, Violence and Tolerance in Global Perspectives," January 27-30, 2012 in Abuja, Nigeria.

¹¹ Ahmad Murtada, *Boko Haram in Nigeria: Its Beginnings, Principles and Activities in Nigeria*, trans. AbdulHaq al-Ashanti, (Kano: SalafiManhaj, 2013), 18.

Consequently, Yusuf insisted on the literal interpretation and application of the Qu'ran, which led to the formation and institution of a shariah form of government. It is this radical form of revivalist preaching that first transmogrified the Sahaba group into a fundamentalist sect. Yusuf continued to attack all forms of secular ideologies thought to be contrary to Islam. As he gained a large following among the masses who willingly submitted to his radical teaching, Yusuf proceeded to launch consistent attacks against Islamic clerics whom he believed to be sympathetic to Western values, which he associated with corruption, the bane of Nigeria's development. According to him, secular ideology would water down the teaching of Islam. For Yusuf, the West represents secularism and is spreading it to the domain of Islam around the world, including Nigeria. To Yusuf, it was rather unfortunate that Muslims who were supposed to guard against such "destructive" infiltration were now embracing it in the name of democracy or education. He therefore saw it as incumbent on him and his followers to correct such teachings and return Muslims to the true, pure religion they were abandoning. The vehemence and intransigence that characterized the way he preached against Western values was the basis upon which the people in Maiduguri, Borno State in Northeast Nigeria where the sect was based, nicknamed it Boko Haram.¹²

However, in 2002 the sect was said to have helped the governor of the state win election after entering a pact according to which the latter would implement full shariah. The argument was that though the state had passed a law to implement shariah, its implementation was not far-reaching enough. The overarching pressure

¹²Sani, 22.

on the governor to declare total shariah led to serious friction between Yusuf and the governor. Understandably, for Yusuf a pact entered into must be honored. But for the governor, if such a pact ever existed, its implementation would be subject to the political exigencies that define the state and its instruments. Since the complexities involved in governance were not favorable for implementing full shariah, he felt it was safer and better to implement limited shariah as other northern states had done. But for whatever reasons, Yusuf was not inclined to accept limited shariah. For him, if the governor were a Muslim, he would be brave enough to do the will of God, i.e., implement full shariah.

To be sure, implementation of full shariah would mean that Borno State would secede from Nigeria. This is the case because if the governor swore an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of Nigeria when he was inaugurated—a constitution that does not allow for a state religion—the reasonable consequence would be that the governor would become a caliph over a caliphate. The idea of a caliphate is that the caliph is the supreme leader who exercises spiritual, political, judicial and economic powers over a territory governed entirely by shariah. For Islam, there is not separation between state and religion. In fact, the state is subsumed under religion since it is the latter that provides guidelines for the administration of the former. However, the governor's inability to do Yusuf's bidding expanded the scope of infidelity to include those nominal Muslims who would not sacrifice for the cause of Islam. Again, Murtada provides insights into Yusuf's position against democratic government:

The movement rejects employment under the current democratic Nigerian government, whether as a member of the police, military,

security services or any other government position. They regard this as total obedience to a disbelieving system while Allah says: 'And do not incline towards those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire, and you would not have other than Allah any protectors; then you would not be helped'... Yusuf mentioned in one lecture: 'All of these ahadeeth provide a decisive indication that employment under the government which does not rule by the Book and Sunnah is impermissible. These governments rule solely by satanic man-made law, and thus the impermissibility of working in the police or army is even more so.'¹³

IV. Beyond Mohammed Yusuf: Further Metamorphoses

In July 2009, there were a series of fatal clashes between the already radicalized Boko Haram sect and the Nigerian Police. Those clashes led to scores of death. It was during one of the clashes that Yusuf was arrested and was alleged to have been killed extra-judicially. The vengeful resurgence of the sect against the police and the military thereafter has nothing essentially or substantially to do with religion. It is a purely political war aimed at destroying every vestige of Western ideology and value or practice. After the 2011 general elections were won by Goodluck Jonathan, the sect could not hide its political agenda for the nation. According to this agenda, the President was an infidel, and could only be recognized if he converted to Islam. At another time, it demanded the resignation of the President. The political implication of calling for the President's resignation is very simple to discern. If he did, the Vice-President, who is a Muslim, would become president and call for full Islamization of the country, thus fulfilling Boko Haram's political aim.

¹³ Murtada, 18.

Another strong resentment was based on the fact that President Jonathan is from a minority; therefore, in political calculation, he ought not win the election. The recourse to ethnic sentiment clearly meant that the Boko Haram sect was instigating a civil war, not only on the basis of religion, but also ethnicity. The fear was that this could lead to the disintegration of the country. Masipula Sithole explains the implications of the rise of a minority group to positions of authority, which clearly describes Nigeria's situation after the 2011 election:

The salience of ethnicity will increase as individuals of lowly ranked ethnic groups attempt to rise to positions hitherto the monopoly of those higher in the ethnic social structure. As the former make a claim to power, status, and prestige, the latter close ranks to defend the same. The ensuing conflict takes on an ethnic flavor because the lines of battle are structured along ethnic lines.¹⁴

The ethnic argument involved an advocacy for comparative treatment of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), which had wreaked havoc on Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. Former President Umaru Yar 'Adua had granted MEND and others amnesty and also put in place a policy to develop their region. Consequently, the northern leaders argued that Boko Haram should also be granted amnesty.

Several critical questions relating to security and politics were raised by this request, particularly around the issue of amnesty. Can amnesty, a purely political pardon granted to a group of political offenders within a political system, adequately address a religiously induced insurgency based on religious fundamentalist principles? Does political pardon fit into the Islamic jihadist concept,

¹⁴Masipula Sithole, "The Salience of Ethnicity in African Politics: The Case of Zimbabwe," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 20 (1985): 187.

according to which the granter of the so-called amnesty is considered an infidel and expected to either repent and accept Islam or be prepared to pay the supreme price for opting to remain an infidel? If the members of Boko Haram accepted amnesty, was the government prepared and ready to face other insurgent groups that would demand or expect amnesty in the future? If Boko Haram refused the offer of amnesty, what would the government do? Interestingly, the sect rejected the offer of amnesty. Instead, it argued that it was the federal government that actually needed amnesty from Boko Haram because the former was an infidel. In fact, unlike MEND, Boko Haram has not come up with any organized leadership with whom political leaders can negotiate or present a charter of negotiation. As President Jonathan remarked, it was difficult to grant amnesty to “ghosts” or faceless groups.¹⁵ Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos buttresses this point when he states that the sect is “considered a political uprising, a religious organization, a social movement, or a purely criminal affair.”¹⁶

Between 2011 and 2014, not much, if anything, was heard about Islamic teaching from the sect. All its efforts have been geared towards terroristic attacks on the country. Even after the declaration of the state of emergency in May 2013, Abubakar Shekau, the present leader of Boko Haram and successor of Yusuf, still believes that the formation of an Islamic state in Nigeria is a possibility. According to

¹⁵ See George Agba, “Jonathan Grants Amnesty to Boko Haram Sect” *Leadership*, April 3, 2013, and George Agba, “Boko Haram: Onaiyekan Backs Sultan Over Amnesty for Sect” *Leadership*, April 2, 2013.

¹⁶ Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism” in *Boko Haram, Islamism, Politics, Security and the State of Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014), 136.

him, the sect can achieve its goal if like-minded foreign Islamists from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq join them in the jihad “to create an Islamic state in Nigeria.”

Although Pérouse de Montclos argues that “Boko Haram is basically an indigenous uprising with a religious ideology, a political meaning, and some social support locally, unlike transnational professional terrorist groups that can strike anywhere in the world,”¹⁷ Shekau, after the death of Yusuf, announced to the world that Boko Haram had joined al-Qaida.¹⁸ Pérouse de Montclos maintains that there is no visible, concrete support to label “the whole movement as a foreign terrorist organisation, precisely because of its grassroots and its genesis.”¹⁹ Rudolph Atallah, former Africa Counterterrorism Director for the U.S. Department of Defense, says that “Boko Haram’s ideology is deep-rooted in AQ (Al Qaeda) ideology. Their core values are in line with Ibn Taymiyyah, a 14th century Islamic scholar. They want a region that is purely Islamic, they want an Ummah (Islamic nation) under the banner of the House of Islam.”²⁰ Murtada argues that while it is true that the adoption of suicide bombing, which Boko Haram resorted to after the death of Yusuf, is a reflection of al-Qaida’s strategy, such announcement or declaration is more propaganda than real. He further notes that there are claims that Boko Haram has links with the Algerian Salafi-Jihadi organization, which is open to security interrogation. In any case, Murtada concludes that even though these claims may

¹⁷ Pérouse de Montclos, 136.

¹⁸ Murtada, 22.

¹⁹ Pérouse de Montclos, 137.

²⁰ See Breitbart News’ interview with Lt Col. Rudolph Atallah on Boko Haram and Islamist movements in Africa, available at usaafricadialogue@googlegroups.com. Accessed June 4, 2014.

not be true altogether, there is the irreducible belief that Boko Haram has some ideological affiliation with them.²¹

After the demise of Yusuf, strong socio-political reasons were adduced to have been responsible for the rise of the sect, contrary to what its history has revealed. According to the incumbent governor of Adamawa State, Murtala Nyako, the region started experiencing growing signs of deterioration in the 1990s, as shown in the social and economic life of the people. In reference to Boko Haram, he asserts:

The initial assumption was that Boko Haram was religiously motivated. Nobody now associates the group with any religion; their targets have largely been within Muslim communities. What, therefore, are the motivating factors of the so-called Boko Haram? We must answer this question correctly to enable us determine what type of war we are fighting. The Boko Haram itself has not helped matters since it has never come out by its actions to define what type of war it is fighting...We now notice a new trend; the random destruction of life and property in the style of Boko Haram in the North-East and the illegal carting away of herdsmen's cattle now take place in all the States of Northern Nigeria and is being adjudged by the public as deliberately aimed at bringing conflict amongst the ethnic groups and between Muslims and Christians of the region.²²

These revelations are instructive to the understanding of the metamorphoses of the Boko Haram sect. Nyako argues that the sect has abandoned its 'traditional' philosophy, which was puritan in nature. A critical point, however, as pointed out by Nyako above, is that Boko Haram is yet to state any clearly defined aim or grievance for its continuous terroristic attacks on the country. This ideological lacuna opened

²¹ Ibid, 23.

²² See Murtala Nyako's averments at the three-day symposium on current economic, social and security challenges facing northern Nigeria in Washington, D.C., organized by the US Institute of Peace, March 17-19, 2014, available at <http://groups.google.com/group/USAAfricaDialogue>. Accessed April 7, 2014.

the floodgates for criminal activities manifest in the stealing of cattle across the northern axis of the country. More critical is what Nyako calls a twist in understanding the sect. He argues that the common knowledge the public has held is that Boko Haram is fighting against the government of Nigeria. But the trend that is current is that the reverse is true. In other words, Boko Haram is now a tool of the federal government to fight against the people of northern Nigeria. In unambiguous terms, Nyako further states:

The security situation we are therefore facing in Northern Nigeria today could be sponsored, financed, and supported by evil minded and over-ambitious leaders of Government and the society for political gains.... It is now clear to all and sundry that there is an unhindered coordination between the activities of Boko Haram cells and some strategic commanders sitting in high offices in our national Defence system. Boko Haram is therefore being viewed as a tool by some evil-minded conspirators to kill key traditional and political leaders of Northern Nigeria and cause the disintegration of Nigeria.²³

Put simply, Nyako is accusing the Nigerian President of sponsoring the activities of the Boko Haram sect in order to cause mayhem that would preclude the affected states from participating in the 2015 elections.

Nyako's accusations remain as yet unverified because, as some have argued, he is merely playing to the gallery, having recently decamped from the president's party to the opposition party. The argument is that Nyako's accusations or observations about Boko Haram's operations would have been taken more seriously if he had made them public when he was still in the same party with the president. It is for this reason that some have discarded his accusations as flippant, "most

²³ Ibid.

unconscionable and condemnable.”²⁴ Kalangolo Punani Gbasa also argues in the same vein. According to him, Nyako and other northern governors clearly displayed much ignorance and naivety about the Boko Haram situation. He defends the president against the allegations that he was conspiring with the Islamic sect. Rather, Gbasa argues that the president can only act within the limits of constitutional empowerment when addressing the terrorist activities of the sect. He also accuses the northern governors of failing to curb the security situation that the sect poses to their respective states. In his own words:

Northern governors are chief security officers in their states yet [they] failed to address the security issues. It’s obvious they have failed as governors.... The president can only work within the confines of the law as provided in the constitution. ... The same governors opposed state of emergency in the North. Probably, by implication, it is safe to say Northern governors created the monster called Boko Haram but did not expect it to go out of hand.²⁵

Finally, Gbasa suggests that the president should declare a full state of emergency, which means the governors would leave office for six months, and military administrators would take charge. By this he says, “They’ll all wake up and B’Haram will be laid to rest.”²⁶ But we cannot lose sight of the fact that some senior military officers are being tried for their alleged role in aiding and abetting the sect by selling arms and ammunition, providing logistics and leaking security

²⁴ See “Editorial: Jonathan & the 12 Northern Governors”

<http://huhuonline.com/index.php/opinions/3474-editorial-jonathan-the-12-northern-governors>
accessed 7th April, 2014.

²⁵ Kalangolo P. Gbasa, “Right of Reply: Jonathan & the 12 Northern Governors,” available at <http://huhuonline.com/index.php/letters/3484-right-of-reply-jonathan-the-12-northern-governors>. Accessed April 7, 2014.

²⁶ Ibid.

information.²⁷ But Nyako's position may be difficult to scale because of the sect's continuous terrorist attacks on the nation. The abduction of Chibok secondary school girls in Maiduguri in April 2014 clearly shows that Nyako's argument does not hold water.

Obviously, the above trend of accusations and counter-accusations has completely left out the Boko Haram Islamic fundamentalist sect. In other words, rather than focus on the sect, the various levels of government and political leadership are now accusing one another of conspiracy. Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), further confirms this. According to him:

The fourth dimension of Nigeria's crises... is the poor leader and governance usually associated with their management. Many of those charged with authority in the states where these conflicts occur are also parties to the crisis. They make feeble efforts to control the violence and do so when much of the damage has been done. They show little interest in initiating any genuine and meaningful process of dialogue and reconciliation. Much worse, they show no concern for the welfare and wellbeing of those individuals outside their immediate ethnic group.²⁸

Abubakar adds that there is a radical transformation from religious fundamentalism to political fundamentalism. The latter has become more popularly acceptable not because it is necessarily the truth, but much more because the socio-political disabilities and inequalities in the country have fostered it.²⁹ Insofar as government is alienated from the people it ought to serve, there are bound to be vitriolic reactions. With the high rate of unemployed youth eager to get jobs from

²⁷ Breitbart News' interview with Lt Col. Rudolph Atallah on Boko Haram and Islamist movements in Africa, available at usaafri dialog ue@googlegroups.com. Accessed 4th June, 2014.

²⁸ Abubakar, 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

the government losing hope, Camara concluded that there would be a spiral of violence. He puts it thus:

The young no longer have the patience to wait for the privileged to discard their privileges. The young very often see governments too tied to privileged classes. The young are losing confidence in the churches [and other religious organizations], which affirm beautiful principles... but without ever deciding, at least so far, to translate them to real life. The young then are turning more and more to radical action and violence.³⁰

V. Concluding Remarks

From the disquisition so far, we have established how the Boko Haram fundamentalist Islamic sect in northern Nigeria started out as a puritan group whose ideological intent was to intellectually equip the youth with the knowledge of Islam so they could live a meaningful life. This humble, nonviolent beginning acknowledged the fact that the society was in dire need of change, but not through jihad. This period soon gave way to a radical, ideological pursuit of a pure Islam that called for the implementation of sharia throughout the country. t. Although Yusuf's government was not free from corruption, deprivation and human rights abuses, he had a large followership arising from his courageous denunciation of popular wealthy Islamic clerics he painted as beneficiaries of corrupt Western education or values, e.g., democracy.³¹ It was Yusuf's intellectual and militant engagement that popularized the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria and beyond.

After the death of Yusuf, no coherent Islamic "ideological" front was projected by the sect. It appeared to have completely drifted or metamorphosed into

³⁰Helder Camara, *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1971), 26.

³¹Sani, 23.

a political group with dire criminal propensities. It is also observed that much of what is heard about the group is inchoate arguments and counter-arguments adduced to it from “outsiders.” The term “outsider” is used here advisedly because of the conspiracy theories that have characterized the sect’s activities. From this, one can say that the religious objective was lost, or perhaps died with Yusuf.

Consequently, the focus now is on resolving the political twist that has engulfed the sect and its continuous attacks on the country. Since socio-politics is now crucial in this terrain, political justice is equally pertinent. This should be pursued by all the stakeholders in security matters in the country. A “commitment to justice, liberation, or the overthrow of oppression is not enough, for all too often the means used have brought in their wake new injustices and oppressions.”³² President Jonathan hinted at this when he argued that since education is one sure long-term solution to the continued religious crises in the northern part of Nigeria, the critical stakeholders must deliberately invest in education. In this regard, his government has ensured that all states of the federation have one federal university each by establishing 10 new universities within the last four years. Since it is the responsibility of the state governments to establish primary and secondary schools, it behooves the governments of the affected states to follow suit by complementing the 125 nomadic schools the federal government has established.³³

The critical point being made is that justice needs to be enshrined as mouthing platitudes will achieve nothing by way of the resolution of the Boko Haram terrorist activities. Real cases of injustice should be concretely addressed.

³² Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981), 59.

³³ “Editorial: Jonathan & the 12 Northern Governors.”

The only true answer to violence is to have the courage to face the injustice which constitutes violence.... The privileged and the authorities will come to understand that common sense obliges one to choose between bloody and armed violence, on the one hand, and on the other the violence of the peaceful: liberating more pressure.³⁴

This is the final point that all the stakeholders must embrace if the Boko Haram insurgency will be effectively addressed. It is a point that political leaders of different persuasions have not come to terms with because of their intransigent clinging to their primordial sentiments rather than working towards national unity. In fact, it is even now truer than when Chinua Achebe first argued in the 1970s that unless deliberate efforts are made by Nigerian political leaders to curtail injustice and indiscipline, ruthless revolution might occur that will slide the country into colossal ruin. I conclude with his words:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character...The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership...In the final analysis a leader's non-nonsense reputation might induce a favourable climate but in order to affect lasting change it must be followed up with a radical programme of social and economic re-organisation or at least a well-conceived and consistent agenda of reform which Nigeria stood, and still stands, in dire need of.³⁵

³⁴Camara, 55.

³⁵ Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa and the Trouble with Nigeria* (England: Penguin, 1983), 22-23.

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