When Religion Becomes Evil: The Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

By

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Abstract

The intractability of the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram in the northern Nigeria has been a major source of concern to the polity. Whereas religion is arguably the most pervasive force one can ever imagine in human society, especially in her ideas and commitment to a better human society on one hand, it has also been linked to the worse examples of human alienation, sufferings and death associated with religious exclusivism. All established religions, especially the major ones have been victims at one time or the other of their own truth claims based on selective readings and narrow interpretations of the sacred texts, which in turn fans the embers of fundamentalism with the expected consequences. This study therefore is intended to provide the suitable explanations vis-à-vis the impetus that gave rise to the insurgency. The evidence assessed and presented in this paper indicates that the insurgency is religiously motivated for the sole purpose of Islamization and hegemonic control of the polity. The study adopted Huntington's 'Clash of Civilization' and Festinger's 'Cognitive dissonance' theories which identified cultural identity and values as inalienable, and without which could be a recipe for conflict to explain the Boko Haram phenomenon. The findings further reveal that the nature of politics in Nigeria has in no small way accounted for the menace. Finally, the central message of Islam which is peace is yet to be effectively communicated to the votaries by the clerics.

Key words: Religion, evil, Boko Haram, insurgency, exclusivism

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is a plural society, slit between the two major established religions; Christianity and Islam with others following indigenous sects. The indigenous religion which is the oldest is informed by the cosmologies and lived experience of the people. The other religions, Christianity and Islam are not native to the people but the consequence of the European conquest and the Arab jihad respectively. While Christianity has most of its adherence in the southern part of the country, Islam holds sway in the north (Ikenwa, 2019). Today, however, these two foreign religions

appear to have dominated the public sphere, even though the indigenous religion have remained pervasive in the everyday life of the people.

The nation has long grappled with how to govern a diverse nation in which the intractable struggle between Christians and Muslims over dominance and political power in the public space remains a significant factor in the recurring religious violent conflicts. Whereas religion is arguably the most pervasive force one can ever imagine, especially in her ideas and commitment to a better human society on one hand, it has also been linked to the worse examples of human alienation, sufferings and death associated with religious exclusivism (Kimbel, 2002).

Nigeria is apparently home to numerous challenges which are a complex of political instability and ethno-religious violence, economic dysfunction and corruption, insurgency and constitutional problems that has bedeviled the polity in proportions never known before in the turbulent and checkered history of the country. The North which is the locale of this study has witnessed a long history of bloody communal, ethno-religious violent conflicts since the return of the democratic dispensation in 1999. Prior to this period, there were notable bloody riots. One precedent for Boko Haram was the 1979 revolt led by Sheikh Muhammad Marwa whose activities was widely recognized as dangerous to the peace and stability of the nation formed an Islamic extremist sect, Yan Tatsine (followers of Maitatsine) that rejected all secular authorities except and Islamic regime ruled by strict adherence to the sharia. The sect instigated violence in Kano, the largest city in the north which resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. The death of Muhammed Marwa following a military crackdown fueled a backlash of increased violence that spread across other northern states over the next twenty years (Ewi M, 2013).

Maitatsine crisis are not direct precursors to Boko Haram, but they do reveal a history of violent rebellion in Northern Nigeria. Boko Haram back-story also taps into an older historical tradition of resistance to colonial-controlled Sokoto elite led by Muhammad Al-Kanemi. Beside the historical legacy, the rise of Boko Haram has been fueled by decline in the economy. Lake Chad has shrunk by 90% in the past forty years, drastically affecting fishing livelihoods and irrigation farming for a surrounding population of 30 million, with desertification claiming more than 770 square miles of cropland every year. Boko Haram has emerged in the poorest region of Nigeria, where 71.5% of the population lives in absolute poverty and more than half malnourished (Jeremy, W. 2014). It has become a major threat and a destabilizing factor across Sub-Saharan Africa and has become a major focus of global policymaking with insurgency related in Nigeria between 2003-2014 having exceeded those in Iraq and Afghanistan (Omeni, 2021). To say the least, the ongoing

campaign of terror by Boko Haram which is our subject matter has become a major international security concern.

The Nigerian-state is apparently at a dreadful precipice. The intractable state of insecurity engendered by Boko Haram insurgence is quite disheartening and alarming. The losses attributed to the insurgency thus far are by no means slight transcending human casualties and increasingly manifesting in micro and macroeconomic terms (Nicklas and Mandel 2014; Eme, 2012:23; James, 2013:2). Soysa (2001) in his postulations on conflict avers that creed related conflict as in this instance of Boko Haram is prevalent in highly homogeneous religious settings like in the Northern Nigeria. He then concluded that, if there is a clash of civilizations, it is much likely that it is political rather than civilizational. Even though it could be said that the driver of Boko Haram insurgency and other violent conflict in the North may seem to have religious undertone, there internal inducers have been aptly linked to the failure of leadership in the lack of political will to articulate and foster policies that will engender national cohesion and development nay peaceful coexistence (Davis,2007; Salkida, 2012).

Conceptual Clarification Religion

The word religion means different thing to different scholars, and so it evokes different images, ideas, practices, beliefs, and experiences. It is a complex component of human existence. The definitions giving to religion are in most cases narrow that it excludes many belief systems which are sometimes taken as religion. To this end, the best way to explain or define religion is to resort to identifying the characteristics that are common to religions which include, belief in the supernatural beings, myth, separation of the sacred and the profane, ritual worship, moral system of social relationships, religious feelings. The first concept of religion is sacred, which is the idea that religion binds individuals and communities together. Myth is not the conventional definition we think of rather a much deeper concept. Myth ties and binds humans into a powerful story about their destiny and origins.

Scholars of religion like Imo (1986) do not agree on a single definition of the word 'religion' because religion is a combination of two things: the profane and the supernatural. Therefore, a good definition must bring the two aspects into focus. Such definition for him must feature specificity and inclusiveness. He advances that religion is the varied, symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to that, which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted value for them. McGee (1986) posits that the religious communities of human beings are often distinguished by reference to their central object of worship. Around this sacred object, person or concept, belief patterns, ritual practices, ethical

system, and social organization take form. He went further to defines religion as "a set of activities organized around the sacred- that nonempirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe''. Whereas these definitions may not have included all the elements, but it reveals, however, that religions comprise of sacred, supernatural, and institutional elements. Thus, religion can be viewed as the system of culturally patterned faith based on the existence of god or gods (sacred or supernatural). Religion therefore provides more general guidelines for action in the form of beliefs, values, and system of meaning which is necessary for value consensus, social order, and collective conscience.

Insurgency

Insurgency refers to a violent move by a person or group of persons to resist or oppose the enforcement of law or running of government or revolt against constituted authority of the state or of taking part in insurrection. Insurgency as defined above becomes violation of the constitution's criminal law and the international treaty obligations of a nation in the following circumstance: When it constitutes an attack on defenseless citizens and their properties resulting into injuries, loss of lives and properties as well as forced or massive internal displacement of people out of their habitual places of residence. When it drives business/investors away from an insecure area and when it constitutes domestic and international crimes punishable by law such as treasonable felony, terrorism, murder, crimes against humanity and genocide (Powell and Abraham, 2006; Abolurin, 2011).

Traditionally however, insurgencies seek to overthrow an existing order with one that is commensurate with their political, economic, ideological, or religious goals (Gompert and Gordon, 2008). According to Kilcullen, "Insurgency is a struggle to control a contested political space, between a state (or a group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers". He further draws a line between classical and contemporary insurgencies indicating that the later seek to replace the existing order, while the former sometimes strive for the expulsion of foreign invaders from their territory or seek to fill an existing power vacuum (Kilcullen, 2006).

Scholars and theorists have given different definitions of insurgency. While some of these definitions are closely related, others are not so related though contain common elements and this still makes the subject technically difficult. Perhaps insurgency is best understood by first considering what it is not. Insurgency is not terrorism or conventional war for example, though it shares with them some similarities such as the use of force or guerrilla tactics to achieve an end which is often political. Basically, the difference between insurgency and terrorism lies in the scope and magnitude of violence. While for instance, terrorism rarely brings about political change on its own, insurgency attempts to bring

about change through force of arms. Similarly, terrorists often apply a wide range of damages when compared to insurgents. On the other hand, while conventional war involves adversaries symmetric in equipment or training, insurgency involves adversaries that are asymmetric, weak, and almost always a sub-state group.

Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary defines insurgency as "an armed rebellion against a constituted authority (for example, an authority recognized as such by the United Nations) when those taking part in the rebellion are not recognized as belligerents."

The British Army counter-insurgency manual, Army Field Manual (AFM) defined insurgency as:

> *"The actions of a minority group within a state, who are intent on forcing political change by a means of a mixture of subversion, propaganda and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate the broad mass of the people to accept such a change. It is an organized, armed political struggle, the goals of which might be diverse."*

This definition also conforms with the US Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24) which defined insurgency as "an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control" (Petraeus & Amos, 2006). Apart from the definition by Kilcullen and to an extent that of Oxford dictionary, in what seems to be a replacement of the 2006 FM 3-24 definition of insurgency, the 2009 Joint Publication 324 Counterinsurgency operations, defined insurgency as "the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow, or force change of a governing authority."

While this thesis agrees more with this definition by the Joint Publication, it wishes to stress that such definition excludes any insurgency that does not seek to overthrow or change the governing authority. A good example would be separatist insurgencies which aim for secession from within a state or reformist insurgencies which seek to influence government policies by forceful means. In all, insurgencies connote an internal uprising often outside the confines of state's laws and it is often characterized by social-economic and political goals as well as military or guerrilla tactics. Put differently, it is a protracted struggle carefully and methodically carried out to achieve certain goals with an eventual aim of replacing the existing power structure. To launch their anger on the state, insurgents

often target civilians and infrastructures. However, other than the violence of insurgency is its political and social-economic dimension, where often lies its causes and effects.

Theoretical Framework

There are no specific theories that could explain the reasons behind Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, however for the purpose of this study Clash of Civilization and Cognitive Dissonance theories would be used in explaining reasons behind the insurgency.

The Clash of Civilization and Cognitive Dissonance theories

This study adopts the Greed and Grievance approach initiated by conflict theorist to explain the causative factors to routine violence, insurgence, and civil war. The Clash of Civilization and Cognitive Dissonance are concepts that seem fundamental to almost every conflict.

Samuel Phillips Huntington was born in New York in 1927and a Political Scientist. His seminal work was *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* which he published in 1998. The content of which predicted inter-cultural clashes. Prior to the end of the Cold War, societies were divided on ideological lines between the capitalist west led by the United States of America and the communist Soviet Union led by Russia. Huntington thesis therefore hypothesized a new world order that will not be known on ideological, political, or economic but cultural. In this sense, the new pattern of conflict will be driven based on patterns of cultural cohesions irrespective of national boundaries (Huntington, 1996).

Huntington criticized the existing paradigms by affirming the priority of culture over interest and power as the core of international politics, and by arguing that, in the new era, states were losing their centrality in favor of alliances and organizations based on shared civilizational values. He identified the eight major civilizations: the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu. Islamic, Orthodox. Western, Latin America, and Africa amongst others on which the worlds civilizations has been built over the centuries while refuting the idea and possibility of a mono-cultural civilization predicated on the West.

In this wise, Huntington advanced in his 'clash of civilizations' which became the most striking features of post-cold war debate the arguments against other paradigms interpreting the postCold War world. The article was first published in the influential periodical *Foreign Affairs* in1993, and later as a book. According to Huntington, every civilization sees itself as the center of the world and writes its history as the central drama

of human history. It is not surprising then that the west equates civilization with westernization due mainly to their dominance in the post-Cold War order in the international arena for which they are always suspects by the non-westerners (Crockatt, 2007). To drive this argument, Huntington, disputed the postulations of his former student, Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History,* published in 1992 among others. Fukuyama who was greatly inspired by the Hegelian philosophy and Kojeve's notion of 'universal homogeneous state' imagined a world without conflict at the demise of the cold war era except for ideological or spiritual reasons. In this view, the world would have been united under one sole way of life and system of values inspired by liberal democracy and Western ideas. And so given the failure of all systems of ideas alternative to liberalism, he concluded that history had reached its end (Fukuyama 2006). Huntington's paradigm is at variant with the hypothesis on the optimist vision of the new world order where conflict will be completely overcome due to the existence of a universal homogeneity. The very idea of a world in which there is a plurality of civilizations is opposed to the notion that there is one and only one human civilization. He argues that there are some: 'certain basic values' and 'institutions' that are common to all cultures and civilizations (Huntington, 2002, 6). Hence, he concluded that, history can rather be explained in the light of the divisions among humanity, such as 'tribes, nations, and broader cultural entities normally called civilizations' (Huntington 2002, 56). Not only is a universal civilization based on Western values impossible, but the instauration of a global democracy is also doomed to failure (Huntington 2002).

On the other hand, the Cognitive Dissonance is a theory in social psychology proposed by Leon Festinger (1957). Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental conflict that occurs when a person's behaviors and beliefs do not align, thereby causing some uneasiness and tension. These victims often tend to relieve the tension in different ways which basically includes rejecting new information that conflicts with their hitherto beliefs (Jayne, 2019). In any case, human beings strive for internal psychological consistency to function mentally in the real world, hence a person who experiences internal inconsistency tends to become psychologically uncomfortable and is motivated to reduce the cognitive dissonance. In central thesis is that when two beliefs are inconsistent, the individuals experience negatively arousing cognitive conflict called dissonance. Because the dissonance is aversive, the individuals try to reduce it by changing one or the beliefs. Cognitive dissonance is experienced wherever there is discrepancy between preferred value and actual value states. This situation which could be religious, political, economic, socio-cultural, and so on may be a trigger for anger, hatred, violent conflict with the sole desire to eliminate source of dissonance (Alao, 2015). The causative factors that could have predisposed the Boko Haram insurgency is largely one of identity and in the real or

perceived discrepancy between the preferred way of life (their notion of orthodox Islam) and the actual state of existence (Westernization).

Both theories on clash of civilization and cognitive dissonance are connected as conflict theories since it underscores the fact that a people's real identity and culture is a means of selfidentification, that gives a sense of belonging in a group or sub-group, based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion that re-affirms itself in the understanding of a plural world. It is their contention that to do otherwise is create opportunity for conflict.

And so, when deprivation sets in, the consequence is the crisis of identity-based conflict as a collective for identity turns deprivation into discrimination. In addition to this, fear of security sets in and eventually breeds grievance groups. As grievances escalate and leads to opposition against state policies from political protest to civil violence, routine conflict, insurgency, and even civil war, it becomes a function of the actions and reactions of the sect and the state. The response from the state is to limit the perceived threat by a counter force (Bayan, 2002; Regan and Henderson, 2002).

The Islamic extremist sect, Boko Haram rather than being driven by the desire for primitive accumulation, wealth predation has been a source of financing their struggle (insurgency) against the state and its institutions. The grievances are rooted in the level of corrupting influence of the western civilization and education, official corruption of political elites, manifesting in the mindless primitive looting of the state treasury and assets by the 'infidels', the extrajudicial killing of their erstwhile leader Yusuf and the need for revenge. There is no gain saying that financial combatant is crucial to the success of any rebellion, hence the need to resort to extortion and donations from within and the diasporas.

From the foregoing, it suffices to say that there exists a connection between clash of civilization and cognitive dissonance as drivers of the Boko Haram insurgence. To sustain the fight against the corrupting influence of western civilization vis-à-vis the Islamic tenets and principles, the sect became dependent on prediction for their survival thereby transforming into violent rebellion.

Evolution of Boko Haram

Boko Haram is an ideology and a group waging a complex insurgency predominantly in northern Nigeria. The name 'boko' is translated to mean western-style education/civilization that equips you for modern corrupt socio-political and economic life in Nigeria is un-Islamic and should be forbidden, and 'Haram' meaning 'forbidden, sinful,

sacrilegious' (Obinna, 2011, Sani, 2011; Efehi R, 2014; Murray L, 2008). 'Boko' in its colloquial Hausa usage means 'book', and when in roman script is iconic of western education believed to be garbed in Christian ideology which was to be avoided so as not to trap the vulnerable and unsuspecting Muslim youths towards the religion of the overlords. So, the two words are applied in the context of Islamic religion and its propagation. This being the case, it suffices to say that the ideology 'Boko Haram' has a distant origin than it is being portrayed by many scholars. It must be said ab initio, that different Islamic extremist sects had emerged at different epoch in Nigeria's Northern region with the same ideological drive and goal. The most recent Islamic extremist set that emerged in the North-East, the 'Jama'atu Ahli isSunna Lid-Da'awati wal—Jihad' translated as 'People Committed to the Teachings for Propagation and Jihad' (Alao, D and Atere C, 2014) is only one among others. The sect got the name 'Boko Haram' from the street as nick name, but it is officially identified by the former. According to Walker (2012:7), '…the name was really a succinct critique and implied rejection of Yusuf teachings…rather than a distillation of the group's core beliefs, was a name given to the group by dismissive neighbors who had not joined the sect and had no time for it'. However, it must be noted the sect rejects being identified by the name 'Boko Haram'. It rather prefers its official name as referred above (Sani 2011; Osumah 2013).

Prior to the colonization and the later annexation into the British Empire in 1900 as a colony, the Bornu Empire ruled the locale which has become Boko Haram's enclave at present. As at then, this territory, a sovereign sultanate was under Sheik Uthman Dan Fodio in the early 19th century following a successful jihad fought against what was perceived as the hopelessly corrupt and apostate Hausa ruling elite (Hickey, 1984). The sultanate was administered in line with the principles of the constitution of Medina which was largely made up of Kanuri Muslims. It must be noted therefore, the jihad which started for the purpose of maintaining the purity of Islam soon became synonymous with a search for political empire (Crowther 1978; Crisis Group 2010), an ideology that succinctly became the drive and campaign strategy for future jihadist/politician (Udoidem, 1978). As a matter of fact, since 1903 when the Sokoto caliphate which ruled parts of what is now northern Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon, fell under the British rule, there has been resistance among Muslims to Western civilization (Metz, H.1991; Farouk, C 2012; Marcel 2012; Da'wah coordinated council of Nigeria,2009). To this end, the northern Muslim elites made a pact with the British colonialists that they would rule indirectly in exchange for Western Education not being imposed on the protectorate (Dearn, 2011 cited in Abimbola and Adesote 2012), to lose the purity of Islam to the influence of western civilization.

Like it was anticipatory, only two decades after Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was the Maitatsine revote of the 1980s in Kano led by the conservative preacher of the of the Cameroon decent Muhammed Marwa. Like his mentor, Uthman Danfodio, the zealot thought that Islam had come under the corrupting influence of western civilization and so the need for a jihad to effect purification (Agbiboa 2013) taking undue advantage of the prevailing socio-economic inequality and instigated riots that accounted for the death of over four thousand people (Ewi, M. 2013).Again, consequent upon the constitutional reforms in 1977 which nearly polarized the Nigerian state because of the Islamic extremist agitations against the secular structure of the polity in favor of a state religion (Islam). The imbroglio became a springboard for the emergence of two other extremist groups, the 'Jama'atu Sunna' otherwise known as Izala localized in Jos, Plateau State. The other is the Shiite Movement led by Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzarky, a movement that still threatens the peace and security of the Kaduna State and the entire region. In the light of these assertions, one can only deduce that, Boko Haram ideology is not a new entrant into the Nigeria's socio-political space. The origin of Boko Haram as 'People Committed to the Prophets Teachings for the propagation and jihad' is also marred with controversy as there are contending paradigms. However, most scholars agree on the parallel, if not direct connection in terms of the individuals involved while some researchers are of the view that the 'Jama'atu ahlis Sunna Lidah' emerged in the year 2001, (Campel and Bunche 2014; Olawoselu and Onuselogu 2014; Liolio,2013). Others like Nnabuisi,2012; Chukwuemeka, 2013; Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2014) traced its origin to 2012. For Mmadike (2011), Boko emerged in 1995 of the Sahaba and which was virtually led by Lawan Abubarkar who later left for university of Medina. The set was later said to be radicalized by Muhammed Yusuf who studied under the popular Nigerian Islamic scholar, Sheikh Jafar Mahmud Adam (Abimbola, 2012). Yusuf successfully exposed the sect to political influence and foreign collaboration, especially with the Al-Queeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM) and Taliban (Crisis Group, 2014). Having regrouped in 2010 under the new Commander-in-Chief (Amir ul-Aman), Imam Abu Muhammed Abubabar also known as Shakau, following the death of Yusuf, the sect improved greatly in its operational capabilities (Ibrahim, M. 2011; Campbell, 2012; Waldek and Jayasekara 2013; Zenn, 2012). AQIM provided the training for the combat and the use of improved explosives devices (IEDs) which greatly enhanced the performance and show of dexterity and sophistication in asymmetric warfare (Danjibo cited in Ambimbola, 2012). In all, while the period between 2002 and 2004 appears to be recurring dates for the origin of the sect, this research considers it most appropriate to adopt 1995 when it emerged under the leader, Lawan Abubarkar. In addition to the ambiguity surrounding Boko Haram's date of origin, its identity is also obscure. The sect is believed to have flourished under various names such as: Ahlul Sunna wal'Jama'ahhijra, the Nigerian or Yobe Talibans, Yusufiyyah, Boko Haram (Adibe, 2012; Danjibo, 2012) and

then most recently, Wilayat Gharb Afriqiya, to designate it as a branch of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) following Shakau's pledge of allegiance to the self-declared Caliph abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Institute for the Study of War, May 2015). The seeming ambiguity stems from the fact that these various groups all seem to promote the same ideology as that of Boko Haram. Meanwhile, certain difference can be identified among some of these groups. For instance, while it has been identified that Boko Haram originally emerged in 1995, the Yobe Talibans, who were neither infiltrate from the widely known Taliban of Afghanistan, only emerged in 2002 (Sani, 2011). They consisted essentially of Nigerian university graduates, ex-military personnel and professionals, and were "easily identified by their Spartan dress code and long beard, reminiscent of Osama bin Laden". They call themselves Al Sunna Wal Jamma, (followers of Prophet Mohammed's Teaching). Nonetheless, like the Boko Haram, they envisaged replacing "the corrupt democratic administration with a holier government founded purely on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith" (Sani, 2011). Boko Haram, therefore, is merely a representation of the hard-liner old habits of Danfodism, a retrograde belief system and criminal enterprise that taps into the older prejudices towards western civilization. In all, the most identifiable differences from their forebears (pre-colonial and colonial sects) are that it is based in cities not in camps dipped in the countryside, and dispersed within cities; using assassination, guns, explosive devices (IED) not bow and arrows, phones, motorcycles, cars instead of horses and camels, kidnapping and suicide attacks patterns that dates back some 200 years. So, the difference lies in their dexterity, sophistication, and strategies in asymmetric warfare, hitherto unknown, which has made a mockery of Nigeria's security architecture.

Ideology, Philosophy and Symbol

Boko Haram is an indigenous group which only turned itself into a Salafist Jihadist group in 2009.The movement is diffuse, and fighters associated with it do not necessarily follow Salafi doctrine (Blanchard, 2014). Boko Haram's principal goal references the groups millenarian position that pre-westernized and strict Muslim society was more puritanical than the present secular nature of governance and indeed society (Omeni, 2021). It seeks therefore, to establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria that it believes would address the ills of society, including corruption and bad governance which it believes is the outcome of westernization. Put succinctly, the basic ideological underpinnings of Boko Haram basic is the belief that any system that is man-made is forbidden for any Muslim to work under such system and to work under such system is disbelief and to even belief such system is disbelief (Abdulrahaman cited in OludeleAjiboye, 2019). The understanding behind the ideology of Salafi organizations is strict adherence to Islamic teaching, what it means to be a good Muslim as defined by the prescriptions of the faith, notably a categorical distinction between what is licit *(Halal*) and what is forbidden, *(Haram*). To sanitize this, they initially

fought for the establishment of a Shari'a government in Borno State under the then Governor Ali Modu Sheriff, but after 2009, their aim was directed to the Islamization of the entire Nigeria. Boko Haram school of thought considers anything western as completely not Islamic, and as such the basis for religious weakness. According to AbdulMumuni Ibrahim Muhammad, a leader of a group of 33 members Boko Haram faction, "we are fighting westernization to protect adulteration of Islam." (Vanguardngr, 2011). For this reason, Boko Haram thus adopted a 'non-western' lifestyle by wearing non-western clothes, eating basic foods, and worshiping in their own mosque in Maiduguri, all of which also separate them from other Muslims in the North. In fact, its members do not interact with the local Muslim population and have even carried out assassinations in the past on anyone who criticizes it, including Muslim clerics (BBCnews, 2013). Boko Harams' symbols share some similarities with other international Islamic organizations. It uses the same Black Standard flag as ISIL as one of its symbols. It is also known to use other visual symbols that are regularly released to the public. There are three elements that often appear as its symbol:

1. Two crossed Kalashnikov AK-47 automatic rifles (This symbolizes armed struggle and the willingness to use violence)
1. An open Quran, the holy book of Islam (This symbolizes Islamic proselytizing)
2. The Islamic declaration of faith, the shahada. The declaration is written in Arabic. It reads (There is no God but Allah and Muhmmad is the messenger of Allah).
3. Black Standard variant flag (this symbolizes their proclamation of support for Syria/Iraq based group and the levanter (Farouk, 2012).

The group publicly extols its ideology even though its founder and former leader Muhammad Yusuf was himself a highly educated man who lived a lavish life and drove a Mercedes Benz (BBC News, 2009).

During a 2009 interview conducted by BBC, the late Muhammad Yusuf rejected scientific explanation for natural phenomena, such as the sun evaporating water being the cause of rain, Darwinian evolution, and the Earth being a sphere "if it runs contrary to the teachings of Allah." Before his death, Yusuf also reiterated the group's objective of changing the current education system and rejecting democracy.

Locating the evil in Religious Exclusivism

Religion is a complex component of human existence. When rightly used, it inspires individual and community of faith to transcend narrow self-interest in pursuit of higher values and truth, which ultimately promotes the common good of all. On the other hand,

the world has also witnessed evil unleashed on humanity due to deeply held exclusivist religious beliefs. It is no gain saying that religious exclusivism is a contradiction in terms. It is prevalent in most established religious groups and manifests in certain interpretations of concepts from the scriptures. Every religion that elevates her teachings and belief to the level of absolute truth claims, had already open a door to the possibility of corruption, intolerance, hate and violence. According to Kimball (2002:39) whatever people may think and say about their religion and love of God, there are basic indicators to justify their authentic truth claims or otherwise, 'if their behavior toward others is violent and destructive, when it causes suffering among their neighbours, you can be sure the religion has been corrupted and reform desperately needed. When religion becomes evil, the corruptions are always present'. The concern of this paper, however, is on the Islamic extremist groups and their attitude towards other religions. For the extremists, their religion is the only way to God. While every religion has its truth claim as an essential ingredient in building an inclusive faith, it is nonetheless the points at which divergent interpretations are given.

Within the Islamic tradition, there are long held theologically exclusivist views about other *religions*. One such belief is that salvation is only available through Islam. So, to gain or lose salvation is dependent on whether a person responded appropriately to Islamic belief and tenets (Qur'an 2:82, 3:133, 5:119, 2:24, 4:55-56). A further reading of the Qur'an (3:85) would state expressly, 'And whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter, he shall be one of the losers' (3:85). However, the Qur'an does also contain verses that tends to exclude people of the religion of the 'book' like Judaism and Christianity as invalid or among the losers (Qur'an 2:62; 5:69; 5:72-73). A selective reading and literal interpretation of the Qur'an or any sacred text could have grave implications. For instance, the teachings of the *hadith* are unequivocal and unambiguous against any form of suicide. It also prohibits the killing of women, children, and non-combatants, not even in war.

There are some inclusivist Islamic scholars differ significantly from the hard-liner extremist's narrow interpretations of sacred book. In their views of (Ismail, 1998; Fazlur 1988; Madjid 2005; Asgar 2013 as cited in Saeed, 2020), Ismail noted that God is the source of all revelations and there can be no contradiction between His commands in the Qur'ān and those in older scriptures of other religions; the Torah and the Gospel. Also, Fazlur argues that the Qur'ān confirms religious inclusivism and the salvation of other religious communities. According to Madjid, the salvation of others is rooted in the Qur'ān, since many verses, such as Qur'an 5:48, accept religious diversity and consider it God's plan for humanity.[10] Religions of all prophets for Madjid, is considered a 'universal way' or path to

God.[1] Asghar Ali (2013) went further to admit that whereas "the sharia, the law, and the way of life of different religions may be different, but the essence of all religions – *din* – is the same." Muslims are expected to believe in all prophets and all scriptures, and all prophets taught the same essential message or followed the same way (*dīn*) (Qur'an 42:13). The Qur'an while acknowledging the true essence of humans in their inalienable rights to freewill further admonishes that, even if most people do not follow God's path, they cannot be forced to believe in God or His way because there should be no coercion in matters related to faith (Qur'an 2:256).

In all, it is not uncommon for most established religions among others to lay claim to divine revelation of their scriptures. The authenticity or the veracity to such claims is not within the scope of this present study, however, it suffices to say that the idea of inerrancy of the sacred books should be understood within their proper contexts. Being that while the sacred books are 'inspired', it is nonetheless written through humans who are not without their limitations. So, it is important to understand the background, the contexts, intended audience and purpose, and how it applies to people of different cultures and civilizations.

Conclusion

The intractability of Boko Haram insurgency is hinged on the fundamental issues of group identity and power relations. Whereas such elements as mutual suspicions, state fragility, misgovernance and external interventions are obvious, the religious element cannot be overemphasized. The emergence of Boko Haram for all intent and purpose signifies the maturation of long festering extremist impulses and ideology that run deep in the social calculation of the Islamic Northern Nigeria. The phenomenon should be seen as an effect and not a cause which is symptomatic of decades of mis-governance and elite delinquency made manifest in social chaos.

Moreover, politicians in there to obtain power often appeal to religious sentiments, by so doing inflame conflicts by aligning themselves with groups that represents their religious beliefs, hence the difficulty in finding a lasting solution to the conflict. The study recommends meaningful collaboration with the international community in addressing the menace of Boko Haram. Nigeria needs to consider this when articulating her foreign policy objectives. Regional cooperation amongst African neighbors should also be strengthened.

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