HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 5. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

The Metamorphosis of Boko Haram: Lessons of Societal Negligence and Religious Manipulation, 2009-2021

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Abstract

Radicalisation and extremism festered in north east Nigeria for a considerable period of time until it exploded into violent conflict and eventual into an insurgency. How a seemingly imperceptible group of fanatics grew into a regional menace as well as the role of societal complicity has attracted scholarly attention. The study adopts the historical descriptive method and better explained with the Social Identity Theory (SIT). The study employs both primary and secondary sources of data. Findings reveal the complicated role of Islam, acute poverty, feelings of exclusion, manipulation of susceptible youths and weaponisation of religion. The conflict is almost becoming irretractable, partly because of society's tacit acceptance of the exclusive interpretation and understanding of Islam that opposed all other value systems, including rival interpretations of Islam. The implicit encouragement (sometimes unintentional) by prominent Islamic clerics of extremist dogma further exacerbated issues. The study concluded that in order to successfully contain religious extremism, the society must be intentional about it. Religious leaders must purposefully use Islamic doctrines to tackle the message of hate and change the impression of a cosmic conflict of good against evil with a recourse to total war without limits been espoused by Islamic extremist in north east Nigeria. Successfully deployed strategic communication could also assist in exposing the Boko Haram extremist ideology as misguided doctrine, free the mind of some of its misled members and help prevent further societal radicalization a reoccurrence of violent extremism. Importantly the political will by all to act right is crucial.

Keywords: extremism, insurgency, radicalisation, terrorism, violence.
Wordcount.

Introduction

Nigeria is a very large, multi-religious, and culturally diverse country. The possibility of socio-cultural and religious harmony and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria is often truncated by a number of man-made reasons. The lack of development (human and economic) as well as the prevalence of acute poverty prompted by years of misrule has led to public mistrust of authorities and a crisis of legitimacy. This persistent misrule has led to a loss of faith in the Nigerian state, its institutions, and agents, thus the withdrawal of some disenchanted citizens into

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primordial identities. Withdrawal into these primordial identities and enclaves has further strengthened radicalisation and extremism of different kinds (political, ethnic, and religious). Radicalisation and extremism, in turn, have subsequently increased sectarian violence.

In the last two decades, Sub-Saharan Africa has been under siege from a multiplicity of violent extremists and terrorist groups.[1]One of such groups is *Jama'tul Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*(JAS) better known as Boko Haram. Boko Haram instituted a reign of terror that exploded into a full scale insurgency.[2] Between 2009 and 2021, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) identified 4,440 incidents in which 40,621 people were killed, 16,327 of whom were civilians.[3] The United Nations' Refugee Agency estimates that the conflict has displaced 2.4 million people and put more than seven million at risk of starvation.[4] An estimated two (2) million internally displaced Nigerians and another four hundred thousand (400,000) externally displaced Nigerians have sought refuge in Lake Chad Basin neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Republic.[5]

The birth, rise, transformation and consequences of the actions of Boko Haram Sect will be explored in this paper. This paper is divided into six sections. The first section uses the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to examine the role of identity in the rise and metamorphosis of BH. The second section explores the origin of the Boko Haram sect and its journey towards jihad and insurgency. The third section discusses the adaptive and transformative voyage of BH,while the fourth analyses Boko Haram's ideology of exclusivity and its claims of victimhood and penchant for vengeance. The fifth section examines the complicated role of religious leaders in the growth of Boko Haram, and subtle nurture of extremism in the society. In the sixth section, approaches to countering and changing the violent extremist narrative is offered as the paper concludes.

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[1]AuduBulamaBukarti "Violent Extremism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons From the Rise of Boko Haram"; *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 23rd July 2021.
[2]John Campbell, The Council on Foreign Relation's Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), December 2018.http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483
British Broadcasting Corporation-BBC, "Nigeria's Boko Haram attacks in numbers - as lethal as ever, 2017. "https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42735414
[3]Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project -ACLED "Boko Haram Crisis",8th November 2021.
https://acleddata.com/crisis-profile/boko-haram-crisis/
[4]United Nations Development Programme - "Strategy on protection, return and recovery for the North-East Nigeria Promoting integrated development and humanitarian solutions in principled manner", *UNDP Report* February 2017.
[5] United Nations High Commission on Refugees-UNHCR, Nigerian refugees in Chad, Cameroon and Niger, 30 Jun 2021.
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/nigeriasituation#_ga=2.155809531.1973709748.1571844796-1590759838.1571844796

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

The Social Identity theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner explains the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination.[6] They argue that membership of social groups forms an essential aspect of a person's identity, indeed, people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organisational membership, religious affiliations, gender, and age cohort.[7]SIT in summary states that social identification is a perception of oneness with a group of persons; social identification involving the forming of in-groups and out-groups; and social identification which leads to activities that are consistent with the identity, support for institutions that embody the identity and stereotypical perceptions of self and others.[8]This definition of the SIT quite captures the Boko Haram Islamist movement which prides itself in its group identity that includes shared experiences, attitudes, beliefs and interests of in-group members. Moreover, their identity and sense of cohesion is further enhanced by their aversion to the secular democratic constitution of the Nigerian state which in their view has allowed corruption and abusive of power, thus the need for religious purity as a panacea to societal ills.[9] According to SIT, the self-identification of BH insurgents as members of a much larger community will help them to fulfil their avowed goals, strength to them lies in their collective identification.

Identity according to David Buckingham is fundamentally paradoxical right from its Latin origin *idem*, meaning "the same", the term nevertheless implies both similarity and difference.[10] While identity is something we uniquely possess, it is also simultaneously distinguishes a group from another, as it implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. In this paper, identity is about identification with others who share similarities in significant ways or are perceived the same. Identity thus has three simultaneous meanings, as (i) an agency, (ii) a consequence, and (iii) a representation.[11]

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[6]H. TajfelAnd J. C. Turner, The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour,cited in S. Worchel and W. G. Austin(Ed) *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1985.

[7]Tajfel&Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour" 1985

[8] B. E. Ashforth and B. E. Mael, Social Identity Theory and the Organisation", Academy of Management
Review, 14 (1) 1989

[9] Daniel E. Agbiboa. "Peace at Dagger's Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria",
Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 37 2013

[10] David Buckingham,. "Introducing Identity" Youth, Identity, and Digital Media. David Buckingham. (Ed); The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008

[11]Buckingham,. "Introducing Identity" 2008

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Samuel Huntington similarly argues that people and groups use politics and religion not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity, and in the process of this identity search and re-creation, constructing enemies becomes essential.[12] Identity has increasingly been perceived in absolutist and confrontational terms, with BH believing their own identity only becomes truly valid by the invalidation of alternative or competing identities. A quote from Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of World Order" best captures this scenario:

> There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering after a century and more of sentimental can't. Those who deny them deny their family, theirheritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves! They will not be lightly forgiven.[13]

Boko Haram – The Origin

Abdul Raufu Mustapha attempts an empirically based multidimensional approach in analyzing the origins and rise of Boko Haram, which highlights five factors: religious doctrines, poverty and inequality, post-1999 politics, youth agency, and geography.[14] The return to civil rule in Nigeria in the year 1999 after almost three decades of brutal military dictatorship unleased a fury of seismic forces that shook the country to its very foundations. Ethnic, political, cultural and religious groups competed in a no-holds barred contest for the determination of the faith and fate of the Nigerian state. While the political and ethnic agitations seem subdued after a while, the religious agitations in the North increased significantly culminating in the adoption of Sharia Law by 12 Northern States in year 2000.[15] Some Scholars argue that the adoption Sharia law appeared to be an effort to pacify conservative Muslims who had consistently agitated against the secular nature of the country and who perhaps were seen either as a threat to the tenure of the political office-holders or as a support base that could not be neglected on the basis of political calculation[16] However, the call for Sharia law soon became an elite-serving "political Shariah" which stopped any real reform.[17] This consequently resulted in the northern political establishment been perceived as enemies by some religious radicals.

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[12] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations And the remaking of World Order*, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996
[13]Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations And the remaking of World Order*, 1996
[14]Mustapha Abdul Raufu, "Understanding Boko Haram, in Sects and Social Disorder: Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria" in *Boko Haram The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, NJ Princeton University Press, 2017
[15]AbimbolaAdesoji, *TheBoko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria*, Africa Spectrum Publishers, 2010
[16]Adesoji, *TheBoko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria*, 2010
[17]Obi Anyadike, "Road to Redemption? Unmaking Nigeria's Boko Haram", *IRIN*, 2015

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Moreover, the northern of Nigeria particularly from the 1970s witnessed increasing schism between the Muslim establishment comprising of hereditary Muslim Rulers (such as the Sultan of Sokoto and Northern Emirs) and the Sufi spiritual teachers. These includes the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya Orders and the the Salafi movement founded by Sheik Abubakar Gumi,an anti-Sufi polemicist in 1978. The group officially known as *Jama'atIzalatal-Bid'awa-Iqamatal-Sunna* (the Society for the Removal of Heretical Innovation and the Establishment of the Prophet's Model).[18] The fragmentation of previously sacred spiritual authority in Northern Nigeria with the declining popular legitimacy of hereditary Muslim rulers created a measure of disillusionment at the grassroots. Also thefurther deterioration of the networks of surveillance and influence of these hereditary rulers created authority vacuums which were later exploited by extremists.

It is against this backdrop that *Jama'tulAhlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad* (JAS) otherwise known as Boko Haram emerged in the 1990s and got transformed in the 2000s. According to Prof. Ibrahim Umara, the Boko Haram movement is alleged to have started in 1995 as a Muslim Youth organisation at Ndimi Mosque under the leadership of one MallamLawal, while Mallam Usman Serigen was his deputy [19]Mallam Lawal went for further Islamic studies at the University of Medina in 1999.[20]However, a vacuum was created by his absence, and a young and charismatic *Ustaz*(Islamic teacher/ leader) by the name Muhammad Yusuf rose through the ranks to the position of leadership by the early 2000s. Originally known as Modu Jon and a member of the Shia movement in Borno State, Muhammad Yusuf later denounced the Shia denomination and joined the *Izala* movement.[21] He was mentored by prominent Salafist scholars like Ustaz Haba Haji and Mallam Jafar and quickly developed a following.[22]

Around this time also, a young medical student from the University of Maiduguri, Muhammad Ali, alongside other members of his *Islamic Dawah* group, were propagating Islam across the northern parts of Nigeria.[23] It was a global group made up of mostly Palestinians, Afghans, and Bangladeshis who were committed to the

[18]Alex Thurston, "The Disease is Unbelief: Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview", *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis* Paper No. 22, 2016
[19]Interview sessionwith Prof Ibrahim Umara of the Department of Political Science, University of Maiduguri on the 2nd of September 2021
Interview session with DSS personnel (Counter-Insurgency Unit) at the DSS Office, Abuja on the 20th of August 2021
[20]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021
[21]Interview session with Mallam Abdul Rasheed, the Curator, National Museum Maiduguri on the 1st of September 2021
[22] Interview session DSS Personnel, 20thAugust 2021
Interview sessionMallam Rasheed, 1st September 2021
[23]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

propagation of Islam and the enthronement of Sharia Law.[24] Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Yusuf met and developed a working arrangement.

Accused of teaching strange Islamic doctrines, Muhammad Yusuf in 2002 established his own mosque called *Markaz* after being previously expelled from two different mosques for propagating radical views. Muhammed Ali's fledging religious group soon suffered a setback as their teacher and guide, Abu al-Bara al-Daurawi (from Daura in Katsina State), fearing arrest by Nigerian security agents, fled to Saudi Arabia with the organisation's funds.[25]

Following this setback, Ali declared the city and the Islamic establishment to be intolerably corrupt and irredeemable. Muhammad Ali and his followers thus journeyed to Zaji-Biriri in the Tarmuwa Local Government Area and later to Kanamma in the Yunusari Local Government Area of Yobe State near the Nigerien border.[26] Once in Kanamma, the movement adopted the name "the Nigerian *Taliban*" and prepared for Jihad against the Nigerian state.[27] The Nigerian Taliban argued along Salafist lines of literal Quranic interpretation and religious knowledge exclusivity. In particular, the adoption and replacement of Sharia (God's law) with secular law (the laws of man) was considered a major act of unbelief deserving of the deceleration of*takfir* (excommunication from Islam).

However, an ideological schism soon broke out between Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Yusuf.[28] They differed on two main positions. Muhammad Ali argued that it was not mandatory to first establish Islamic evidence before declaring *Jihad* on political rulers who utilised secular laws in place of Sharia law.[29]Moreover, Ali and Yusuf differed on the right timing for the declaration of Jihad, while Ali argued that the time was right, Yusuf believed the Nigerian Taliban movement was not yet ready, and neither were the people in Northern Nigeria."[30] Muhammad Yusuf's insistence on his ideological position eventually led to the Nigerian Taliban declaring *takfir*(excommunication from Islam) on him and his supporters.[31]

As the Taliban commune at Kanama began to expand, the commune was accused of land encroachment by its neighbours.[32] The conflict turned very violent. Between

[24]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021
[25]AbdulbasitKassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfirand Jihad as Recipes for Schism", in Jacob Zenn (Ed), *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point May, 2018
[26]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War", 2018
[27]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War", 2018
[28]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War", 2018
[29]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War", 2018
[30]Interview session with Prof BanisaheedAbdulrahman Ahmed,Centre For Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maidugurion the 2nd of September 2021
[31]Interview session with Prof Ahmed, 2nd September 2021
[32]Interview session with Prof Ahmed, 2ndSeptember 2021

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December 2003 and September 2004, the Nigerian *Taliban* launched a jihad in which police stations and government buildings were attacked and burnt at Kanamma, Babbangida town, Damaturu, Gwoza, and Bama all in North east Nigeria.[33] The Nigerian security agencies responded, killed many members of the group and arrested many more, while others escaped into exile. Muhammad Ali died in the uprising, and Muhammad Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia.[34]

On his return from Saudi Arabia in December 2004, Muhammad Yusuf called for an end to all infighting within the Nigerian Taliban while encouraging all previously dispersed members and those in hiding to come out and plead allegiance to the new leadership. A new mosque, called *Ibn Taimiyyah (Taimiah) Masjid*, was built in the north central part of Maiduguri metropolis on a piece of land donated by Yusuf's father-in-law, Baba Fugu Mohammed.[35] Yusuf and his group built an enclave in the city with its own governance structure. It soon became a source of attraction for many displaced and hungry people through its welfare packages of handouts, food, shelter, and cheap marriages. A sizable number of refugees escaping famine and conflict in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, along with an increasingly large pool of jobless Nigerian youths, significantly swelled the ranks of the group. It was suspected that the group was funded through donations by *salafist* contacts in Saudi Arabia as well as wealthy northern Nigerians.[36]The group, while experiencing relative peace, expanded into other states, including Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, Adamawa and Niger states.

What followed after Yusuf's return from exile was not a drastic ideological detour from the past, but rather an incremental process of Jihadi preparation in which the ultimate aim was not overtly concealed. Yusuf continued his debates with the *Salafi* clerics, and wrote the first and second editions of a book expounding the creed of his group and establishing the Islamic evidence for ruling by God's laws for the apostate" political rulers. These writings formed the basis of the training of his followers in spirituality, preparation for *jihad*, and the virtues of martyrdom. Muhammad Yusuf routinely eulogised and celebrated Osama Bin Laden and the Muslims imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Abu Ghraib, Iraq as heroes of Islam worthy of emulation.[37]

By the end of 2008, Yusuf and his closest followers were convinced that Nigerian political rulers could no longer pretend to be ignorant of *tafsil*(detailed explanation about Islam especially what it accepts and abhors) and the impending *takfir*

[33]Andrea Brigaglia, *The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram,* Parlemo: Diritto&QuestioniPubbliche 15, 2015.
[34]Brigaglia, *The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology,* 2015
[35]Andrew Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" Special Report *United States Institute Of Peace* Special Report 308, 2012.
[36]Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" , 2012
[37]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War", 2018

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(excommunication from Islam). [38] This increasing realisation alarmed some *salafi* clerics who then tried valiantly, albeit unsuccessfully, to stem the tide and prevent the oncoming doom. Particular attention was focused on the youths by these *Salafist* clerics, who were considered most susceptible to Muhammad Yusuf's increasingly popular message. The 2007 assassination of Sheikh Ja'afar in Kano, Muhammad Yusuf's former mentor, who had become a constant critic is believed to have been ordered by Yusuf or members of his group.[39]

Muhammad Yusuf and Boko Haram, as part of their welfare and public endearment schemes, launched the "own-a-motorcycle programme".[40] If payment was prompt and up to date, they got to keep the motor cycle after a six-month probation period.[41] Moreover, groundnut, millet, and sorghum mills were set up by BH to empower more unemployed people, with many women especially benefiting from these grain milling schemes.[42] Membership of the *Taimiah Masjid* Sect swelled as vagrants came from all across the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) Area to benefit from the BH welfare programme.

Furthermore, the government of Governor Ali Modu Sherrif, as part of its urban renewal programme, decided to demolish illegal structures in and around the Post Office area in Maiduguri.[43] Many of the youth displaced by this demolition, where accommodated at the *Taimiah* Mosque complex.[44] BH also claimed they were determined to restore the lost glory of Islamic scholars by organising Quranic recitation sessions, particularly among youths, where rewards included free meals and cash gifts between 500 and 1000 Naira.[45]

As membership increased steadily and the *Taimiah* Mosque complex began to expand, Muhammad Yusuf set in place rules and regulations and soon created a state within a state. The compound, apart from having its own workers, also established its own government, institutions, and enforcement agents.[46] Officials were distinguished by the colour of their turbans: the police wore maroon turbans, prison warders wore green turbans, and the para-military wore red turbans.[47] Paramilitary exercises were conducted daily from the railway terminus area all the

[38]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War", 2018
[39]Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" , 2012
[40]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021
[41]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021
[42]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021
[43]Interview session with Prof Ahmed, 2ndSeptember 2021
[44]Interview session with Prof Ahmed, 2ndSeptember 2021
[45]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021
Interview session with Prof Ahmed, 2ndSeptember 2021
[46]Interview sessionMallam Rasheed, 1st September 2021
[47]Interview session Prof. Umara, 2nd September 2021

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way to the airport road, which coincidentally housed the Nigerian Police and DSS offices.[48]

On the 11th of June 2009. Boko Haram members traveling en masse to the burial of another member at Gwange cemetery in Maiduguri had an altercation with policemen attached to the crime fighting unit "Operation Flush".[49] Operation Flush operatives fatally shot 13 Boko Haram members and injured others.[50]In response to this altercation, the sect mobilised its members.

The level of response and preparedness within the group seemed satisfactory to its leadership. In his last official lecture before the July 2009 uprising, titled "Open Letter to the Nigerian Government," Yusuf denounced the Nigerian government for the wicked and indiscriminate killings and arrests of BH members across some northern cities, particularly Maiduguri, Argungu, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Bauchi.[51]Thereafter, BH was banned from preaching in almost all northern cities. Yusuf then released several video sermons in which he openly threatened the secular state and its institutions and agents with brutal violence, thus setting the stage for the next step of the Jihad.[52] The Boko Haram abode at the *Taimiah* Mosque complex in Maiduguri was the epicenter of the short-lived uprising which commenced on the 26th of July and lasted until July 30th, 2009 across four Northern states, Bauchi, Kano, Yobe, and Borno. This uprising left an estimated 1,000 people mostly BH members, dead, including the captured Muhammad Yusuf, who was killed under controversial circumstances.[53]

What followed was a punitive exercise by security forces against suspected Boko Haram members and their supporters, benefactors, and sympathizers. The Boko Haram movement went underground only to resurface over a year later under the leadership of Khalid Al-Barnawi and AdamaKambar, who were soon arrested by the Nigerian authorities.[54] In the leadership void created, Abubakr Shekau took over and instituted a regime of bloodletting.[55] A resurgent Boko Haram on December 7, 2010, freed over 700 inmates, including over 100 sect members, from a prison in Bauchi.[56] Four people, including a soldier, one policeman, and two residents, were

[48]Interview session with Prof Ahmed, 2nd September 2021
[49]Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" , 2012
[50] Freedom C. Onuoha, "A Danger not to Nigeria Alone- Boko Haram's Transnational Reach and Regional Responses',*Freidrich-Ebert Stiftung,* 2014
[51]AbdulbasitKassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018
[52]Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?" , 2012
[53]Kassim, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War",2018.
[54]Interview session with Personnel of the Defence Intelligence Agency –DIA (Counter-Insurgency Section) Maiduguri on the 1st of September 2021
[55]Interview session with Personnel of the Defence Intelligence 1st September 2021
[56]Agbiboa, "Peace at Daggers Drawn?", 2019

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

killed in the raid.[57] This marked the beginning of an orgy of violence that has not abated for almost two decades.

Transformation of Boko Haram

Over time, Boko Haram has preserved core elements of its message. But Boko Haram has also periodically shifted its strategies, tactics, and self-preservation:

- open preaching and attack on some government institutions 2001-2004;
- launch of the failed revolt 2004-2009;
- the transformation into a terrorist group 2010-2013;
- the transformation into an army of occupation 2013-2015; and
- the loss of territory, external affiliation, internal schism and increased attacks of soft targets (mainly non-military).

BH has equally undergone considerable name change and internal schism. Parts of the movement have been labeled "Yusufiyya," after its founder.[58]The "Nigerian *Taliban*" label stuck for a time after the 2003–4 uprising.[59] The phrase "Boko Haram" is itself a nickname given by outsiders. From 2010 it was officially referred to by its leaders as *Jama'tul Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*(JAS). With its affiliation to the Islamic State in 2015, Boko Haram's official name became *Wilayat GharbIfriqiya,* or "Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)."[60] This name positioned Boko Haram as an administrative unit within the Islamic State's "Caliphate."

In 2012, a splinter group announced its formation, calling itself *Jama'atAnsar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan* - The Society of the Defenders of Muslims in the Lands of the Blacks, i.e. in Sahelian Africa.[61] Moreover, following the lead of Mamman Nur and Abu Musab al-Barnawi, a son of Mohammed Yusuf, a number of senior leaders split off from Shekau's forces, and retained the name ISWAP, and gained recognition from ISIS.[62]

Boko Haram's Doctrine of Exclusivity and Penchant for Vengeance

Boko Haram(BH) was and remains reactive and adaptive in many ways, it initially sought to co-opt mainstream religious rhetoric and then reacted violently when mainstream voices denounced it. Boko Haram's ideology is centered on two main

[57]Agbiboa, "Peace at Daggers Drawn?", 2019
[58] Alex Thurston, "The disease is unbelief": Boko Haram's religious and political worldview; The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper | No. 22, (January 2016)
[59]Thurston, "The disease is unbelief", January 2016
[60]Thurston, "The disease is unbelief", January 2016
[61]International Crisis Group (ICG), Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province Africa Report No 273 (16 May 2019)
[62]ICG, Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province 16 May 2019

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positions, the first, is religious exclusivism that opposes all other value systems, including rival interpretations of Islam and. Secondly, the politics of victimhood and penchant for vengeance.

Boko Haram's ideology is that of Salafist jihadism. Muhammad Yusuf in his 2009 publication "*Hadhihi 'Aqidatunawa-ManhajuDa'watina"* - This Is Our Creed and the Method of Our Preaching, laid particular emphasis on three key themes: the unacceptability of secular education; unacceptability of democracy and its accessories; and the total rejection of the authority of the secular state and its agencies and agents.[63]The deployment of violence is considered by BH a sacramental act and divine duty executed in accordance to their faith, as such it is unconstrained in the use of deadly force.

Moreover, Boko Haram actions from 2009 seem to have been determined by vengeance against enemies real and perceived. Boko Haram initially directed their frustration at educated urban dwellers, seen as corrupt and accused of being bad Muslims.[64]In response to alleged brutality by Christian security agents as well as Christian collaboration to undermine their activities, Boko Haram killed Christians and sought to enflame Muslim-Christian tensions. Between 2011 and 2012, Boko Haram repeatedly claimed responsibility for bombings of churches, including spots of recurring Muslim-Christian skirmishes such as Kaduna and Plateau States in North Central Nigeria.[65]

In addition, Boko Haram's desire for vengeance shaped its behavior during the 2011 election campaign. The sect settled local scores, assassinating Borno politicians close to outgoing Governor Ali Modu Sheriff (including the governor's preferred successor as well as his younger brother). Post 2013 establishment of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) elicited indiscriminate violence from BH as civilians were made to collectively pay for CJTF assistance to the security agencies.[66]

Furthermore, the choice by young boys to stay in school rather than jointhe ranks of BH led to a number of brutal attacks exemplified by the BuniYadi school attack of February 2014 in which of fifty-nine (59) young male students were slaughtered.[67]

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[63]ICG, Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province 16 May 2019
[64]ICG, Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province 16 May 2019
[65] Omar Mahmoud, "Local, Global, or in Between?" Boko Haram's Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks in Jacob Zenn (Ed), Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency; Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (May 2018)
[66]Idayat Hassan and Zacharias Pieri, The Rise and Risks of Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force: Implications for Post-Conflict Recovery in Northeastern Nigeria in Jacob Zenn (Ed), Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency; Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (May 2018)
[67] Omar Mahmoud, "Local, Global, or in Between?" Boko Haram's Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks in Jacob Zenn (Ed), Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency; Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (May 2018)

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This was followed by the April 2014 kidnapping of two hundred and seventy six (276) schoolgirls in Chibok in retaliation for the alleged detention of female BH members.[68]Also the traditional institutions were not spared. According to the Shehu of Borno Alhaji Abubakar El-Kanemi, 13 traditional rulers and district heads had been killed by Boko Haram.[69]Moreover, Islamic clerics and religious establishments became assassination and bombing targets, including Liman Bana, Ibrahim Birkuti, and Sheikh Ali Jana'a, who were fierce critics of BH or were known to provide information to security forces with respect to BH.[70]

In response to the 2009 Hoko Haram violence, the Nigerian authorities deployed the police and the armed forces of the Joint Task Force (JTF) initially to urban centresin Borno to quell the violence. However, with its ignorance of urban guerilla warfare and seeming inability to contain Boko Haram violence, the government was compelled to change tact and expand security operations. Inadequate coordination between security forces resulted in delayed and heavy-handed responses to local security threats.[71] The insurgency dramatically exacerbated earlier socio-security challenges. The military's inability to protect civilians in the early years of the conflict generated widespread resentment.

However, sustained military offensives decimated insurgent ranks.[72] The previously impregnable insurgent enclave of Alagarno Forest-Timbuktu Triangle (comprising Buk, Talala, Gorgi in Sambisa forest) was finally breached by MNJTF forces in January 2021.[73]This achieved the twin benefit of freedom for those trapped in Boko Haram controlled areas as well as helping to facilitate the delivery of much needed humanitarian assistance.[74]

Schism within the Ranks of the Boko Haram Movement

For a while, tension existed among the different BH factions of JAS, Anasru and ISWAP. however it eventually exploded into violence. After years of conflict, accusations and counter accusations, Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) fighters finally invaded Sambisa forest, the home of Abubakr Shekau, neutralising

[68]Elizabeth Pearson, WilayatShahidat: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber in Jacob Zenn (Ed), Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency; Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (May 2018)
[69]Abdul Seye, "Boko Haram: Insurgents killing traditional rulers, 13 District Heads gone-Shehu of Borno", *Daily Post Newspaper*, 1st September 2020.
[70]Seye, "Boko Haram: Insurgents killing traditional rulers, September 2020.
[71]NSRP, "Impact Report: Output 1—Security and Governance," *Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme*, 2017.
[72] NSRP," *Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme*, 2017.
[73]MuritalaAbdullahi, "Troops Advance Into Boko Haram Enclaves in Sambisa Forest", *HumAngle*, January 28, 2021.
[74]Abdullahi, "Troops Advance Into Boko Haram Enclaves in Sambisa Forest", January 28, 2021

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JAS defences. It was claimed that Shekau was offered a chance to join Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) but refused and instead chose to blow himself up.[75]

Not long after, Musab Al Barnawi and his successor, Ibn Bako, were killed in Nigerian military airstrikes.[76]A new leader was appointed by the ISAWP hierarchy from Baga, Kukawa, Borno State, named Sanni Shuwaram.[77] The *Jama'tul Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad* (JAS) hierarchy appointed Mallam Bakura, also from Baga, Kukawa, Borno State, to succeed Abubakr Shekau.[78] This episode marked the end of one era in the history of Boko Haram/JAS/Ansaru/ ISWAP, and the beginning of another, with the death of their former leaders and the decimation of their ranks.

Leadership Hypocrisy and Subtle Support forRadicalisation

Throughout history, Borno has been regarded as a home and major centre of Islamic influence in Central and Southern Sudan. The reigns of the Seifawa and El-Kanemi dynasties entwined Kanuri and Islamic identities, which were established on Quranic values and Islamic jurisprudence.[79] This identity entanglement is so profound that being a Kanuri has become synonymous with being a Muslim.[80] To defend Islam, therefore, is to defend the cultural heritage of the Kanuri. This historical sentiment was exploited by Boko Haram, who presented Islam as a Kanuri property and heritage that must be defended from Western contamination.[81] In this way, language, religion, and region became Boko Haram's channels of communication, infiltration, indoctrination, and operations.

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[75]Premium Times "Boko Haram leader, Shekau, dead as ISWAP fighters capture Sambisa forest", *Premium Times Report,* May 20, 2021.
https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/462774-boko-haram-leader-shekau-dead-as-iswap-fighters-capture-sambisa-forest-report.html
British Broadcasting Corporation-BBC, "AbubakrShekau Nigeria's Boko Haram leader is dead", 7th June 2021.
https://www.bbc.com/ninews/world-africa-57378493
Interview session with some surrendered Boko Haram insurgents (Awam-commoners/non-combatants) at Hajj camp, Airport Road, Maiduguri 3rd of September 2021
Interview session with some surrendered Boko Haram insurgents (Rijal-foot soldiers) at Borno State Holding Facility, Customs Area, Maiduguri on the 31st August, 2021
[76]Premium Times, "ISWAP: NSA confirms killing of Al Barnawi's successor, MallamBako", October 22, 2021.
https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/491057-iswap-nsa-confirms-killing-of-al-barnawis-successor-malam-bako.html
[77]Interview session DIA Personnel, 1st September 2021
[78]Interview session DIA Personnel, 1st September 2021
[79]Richard Olaniyan, (ed), *Nigerian History and Culture*, London: Longman Group Limited,1985.
[80]Interview session with Mallam Abdul Rasheed, the Curator, National Museum Maiduguri on the 1st of September 2021
[81]Interview session with Mallam Rasheed, 1st of September 2021

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While some *Salafist* clerics opposed and openly preached against Muhammad Yusuf and his radical views of Islam, other *Salafist* clerics in northern Nigeria, either consciously or unconsciously, through their preaching and glorification of Jihad and martyrdom, prepared a fertile ground for the rise and growth of Muhammad Yusuf's more extreme ideology. The duplicitous position of these clerics was exposed by Muhammad Yusuf, especially that of Jafar Adam, who supported al-Qaida's global jihad against distant foes but was calling for restraint in the declaration of jihad against the foe that was close by (i.e., the Nigerian state).[82] In fact, in an old lecture, Jafar Adam was quoted as saying that "the jihad in Nigeria is coming; either they, the infidels, chase us out of Nigeria or we chase them out."[83] Moreover, the Kano-based *salafi* cleric and former Commander General of Kano's Hisbah board (state religious control board) Aminu Daurawa, as early as 2001, not only fervently preached in support of suicide bombing as a martyrdom which Muslims should aspire to, but ultimately described God as a suicide bomber.[84] This ambivalent outlook from top religious clerics further encouraged Muhammad Yusuf and his top disciples.

As time went by Boko Haram naturally progressed in their violent quest for the creation of their ideal society, as such martyrdom and violence were activated. Contrary to some opinions that believe BH violence was only a direct response to government high-handedness and excesses of security agents, BH was always going to use violent means to achieve its aims. The movement was only bidding its time and waiting for the moment to commence the violent phase of its *Jihad*. Their initial weakness was what kept them relatively peaceful, especially after the unsuccessful 2003/2004 Nigerian Taliban revolt. At one point, BH was proclaiming *taqiyya* (concealment).[85] The concept of *taqiyya* means that until Jihadists are well prepared and powerful enough to effect the change they desire, they, in the interim, possess the right to publicly proclaim precisely the opposite of what they hold in secret.[86] This *taqiyya*(concealment) manifested in the immediate post-exile (2004 Saudi Arabia) period of Muhammad Yusuf, and he got bolder in his public messages as his group got better prepared and all pretenses were set aside from the beginning of the year 2009, when all seemed set for the violent stage of the *Jihad* later in the year.

Countering and Changing Violent Extremist Narrative

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[82]Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018

[83]AbdulbasitKassim, Translation of "Audio Lecture on the Book of Monotheism by AbubakrShekau," cited in AbdulbasitKassim, Boko Haram's Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfirand Jihad as Recipes for Schism, in JacobZenn (Ed), *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018.

[84]Abdulbasit Kassim, "ShaykhAminuDaurawa, Boko Haram and the Theological Discourse on Suicide Bombing," available at *Medium*, 2017.

[85]Tariq Amin-Khan, Analyzing Political Islam A Critique of Traditional Historical Materialist Analytic,*Independent Socialist Magazine,*2009.https://monthlyreview.org/commentary/analyzing-political-islam/

[86] Amin-Khan, "Analyzing Political Islam", 2009

The societal problems of radicalization, religious extremism and zealotry as well as obstinate intolerance are real and cannot be denied much longer. Contempt towards others considered different has been allowed to fester for too long and in some instances, it seems to have been deliberately cultivated and nurtured. Radicalization and extremism in Nigeria's north east took a while before metamorphosing into violent conflict and eventually into a full-scale insurgency. Society is guilty of willful negligence, self-denial of associated problems as well as weaponization of religion and poverty. Without a change in attitude and reorientation of religious faithful the problems of extremism and violence will persist. Even if the BH insurgency is brought to an end, without countering the pervasive extremist narrative and culture, it's only a matter of time before the next outbreak of faith-inspired violent conflict will occur. Society's tolerance of extremist ideology continues to give religious zealotry the much needed energy to thrive.

Nevertheless, a solution to radicalization and extremism must come from within rather than from without. The religious component of the BH insurgency must be adequately addressed. While religious beliefs alone aren't sufficient enough to cause radicalization or lead to extremist violence, it has often been used to justify extremist actions. As empirical example has been proved in the BH insurgency, the average BH insurgent is hardly learned in the religious faith he/she is supposedly fighting for.[878889] Religion could help provide a solution through strategic communication as a counter-terrorist /insurgency tactic. Through strategic communication the ideological foundation of the Boko Haram doctrine of exclusivity of truth and propaganda of hate can be assailed and exposed for the misguided ruse that it is. Islamic Clerics and other respected members of the Muslim Ummah must adopt, embrace, preach and propagate Islamic teachings that accept and respect humanity, racial and religious harmony, peace and love. Muslim clerics who speak nicely to all in public in gatherings, then go to their mosques and promote violence must be condemned in totality. There is the need to help create an environment whereby open minded Muslim leaders who speak out against fundamentalist violence are given a wide forum and protection from the violent extremists.

Muslims must to learn to live in peace with others and not wage war against fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike who have all chosen to live in peace.[90]Jihadists must also be reminded that compliance with laws of war that minimizes damage and destruction is key to Islam. Any deviation from these Islamic tenets governing war, strips the conflict of any religious camouflage and reduces it to mindless and needless violence.[91] Furthermore, any attempts at re-establishing the Islamic

[87]Obi Anyadike, "Road to Redemption?" 2015
[88] Interview Session with Mr. Musa Chanttu Director Behavioural Modification at the National Orientation Agency (NOA) Abuja on the 16th of August 2018
[89] Interview Session Via Telephone with General Emmanuel Aladeniyiof Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Abuja on the 21st August 2019
[90] M-Sani Umar, Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria; Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD – Abuja) 2016
[91] Umar, "Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria", 2016

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

caliphate in Nigeria will only bring catastrophic consequences on Muslims and Non-Muslims alike, because no group can re-establish the Islamic Caliphate that God Himself allowed to get destroyed.[92]

In addition Dr Ibrahim Jalo another prominent Nigerian Salafist scholar offers an epistemological Salafist counter narrative to the issue of "*taghut*" which is central to BH religious belief and ideology. Mohammed Yusuf preached to his followers that working for a non-Islamic government is prohibited by Islam as contained in Quran 2: 257 which forbid serving or following *taghut*.[93] Yusuf says obeying non-Islamic political authority is synonymous with worship and should be avoided at all cost. Dr Jalo however, offers counter arguments using Quranic verses and "*Al Salafal Salih*" (interpretations by righteous ancestors) in explaining *taghut* as the physical and human manifestation of Satan commanding allegiance of ignorant people.[94] As such *taghut* cannot and must not be equated or represented with the state, just as serving the state must not be considered an act invalidating Islamic faith.[95]

Moreover, DrJalo quoting several fatwas issued by the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research, Knowledge and Fatwa in Saudi Arabia contends that Muslims are permitted and even encouraged to acquire modern secular education as well as mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.[96] The need for mass popularization of counter radical narratives cannot be over emphasized.

Conclusion

Radicalisation and violent extremism in north east Nigeria as epitomised by the Boko Haram insurgency highlights the role of society in molding and shaping religious identities and outlook. Societal complicity played a significant role in Boko Haram's metamorphosis and the attendant massive humanitarian catastrophe in the Lake Chad Basin Area (LCB). As such community based societal response is crucial in countering the violent extremist ideology which drives the insurgency. The use of Salafism Islamic doctrine which BH purportedly originated from as counter narrative is most fitting. This predominately community-based could help stem the tide of new radicalization, assist in the process of mass disengagement of existing terrorists/insurgent cells, and ultimately the establishment of lasting peace. Various instruments such as ideological doctrines of counter-fatwas from well-known imams and muftis, emphasis on family and peers both as a support group and as a group towards which the repentant has responsibility, could help create the conditions conducive for collective and mass disengagement and end to conflict and prevent a reoccurrence. This manipulation of highly susceptible youths as well as the deployment of Islam as a weapon by Boko Haram highlights the duality of

[92] Umar, "Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria", 2016
[93] Umar, "Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria", 2016
[94] Umar, "Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria", 2016
[95] Umar, "Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria", 2016
[96] Umar, "Salafi Narratives against Violent Extremism in Nigeria", 2016

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religion as a double edged sword that could cut both ways, as such messages from Islamic clerics must be precise and, ambiguity must be avoided.

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