Introduction

One of the outcomes of the security challenge imposed by the Boko Haram insurgency on Nigerian society has been the emergent preponderance of theories that attempt to explain the motive of the Islamic group. Unlike the Niger Delta militancy which preceded it, and which predicated its desire for a separate state from Nigeria on decades of conspiratorial neglect by the Nigerian state and multinational oil prospecting companies in the Niger Delta region, Boko Haram has refrained from articulating and formally presenting its grievances, apart from its declared desire for the strict interpretation of Islamic Law in Nigeria. The confusion also grows out of the changing dynamics in the operations of the sect. For instance, its terrorist campaign, which initially targeted security formations and personnel, has expanded to include civilians and non-government targets, and the Nigerian public generally.

The theories are divided into two broad spectrums. One views the problem essentially as internal. The other blames external forces. The former looks at socio-economic factors, as well as deep-seated political, religious differences in the Nigerian society. It also includes vengeance over the death of the sect’s leader, Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. The external forces argument has two planks: one characterizes the problem as part of global Islamic jihad and focuses on the sect’s links with international terror groups such as al Qaeda or its affiliates as al-Shabaab or the al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, (AQIM); the other views it as conspiratorial – a grand strategy to achieve the predicted disintegration of Nigeria by 2015, (See “Africa in 2020 Panel” Report). Within the conspiratorial thesis is the sub-theme that Nigeria is being targeted by envious and troubled neighbours. This aspect also links it to the now ‘unemployed’ war-hardened returnees from the Libyan crisis and their ascendant arms stream from that tumult.

How relevant these theories are to the explanation of the current crisis is the question to which this paper addresses itself. Is Nigeria merely convulsing from her many internal contradictions that successive leadership has been unable to manage or resolve, or are external forces actually at work to undermine Nigeria; if so, how and for what purpose? While each of the competing perspectives indeed may offer some valid approximation of the real cause(s) of Nigeria’s security challenge, the multiplicity has tended to frustrate a clear understanding of the problem and articulation of appropriate response to it. This paper set out to examine the entire gamut of the theories with a view to clearing, rather than adding to the confusion. But we can expect that, as the Boko Haram challenge persists, more theories will continue to evolve.

An Explanatory Note on the Origin and Activities of Boko Haram

The apparent confusion generated by the plethora of theories attempting to explain the Boko Haram challenge also characterizes the origin of the sect. The confusion not only reflects in the narratives about the exact date, and who the actual founder was, but also to the true source of these expositions. For instance, Adibe (2012), has observed that while the popular belief is that it was founded, sometime between 2001 or 2002, Madikie notes that the date is as far back as 1995, and argued that, one Lawan Abubakar, who later left for further studies at the University of Medina, Saudi Arabia, actually founded the Boko Haram sect. Under Abubakar, the sect was known as Sahaba, (Adibe 2012 cited in Adibe, 2012: 50). Elsewhere, these expositions are credited to Shettu Sanai, a civil right activist in northern Nigeria, who helped broker the first peace deal with the sect, which failed Businessday online, February 1, 2012). While Uzodike and Maigawara on the other hand acknowledge the Lawan Abubakar angle, they attribute their source to Ujah et al. (see Uzodike and Maigawara, 2012: 100). They also acknowledge the 1995 version which traced the origin to an evangelical group formed by Muslim students at the University of Maiduguri, Borno state, who reportedly felt dissatisfied with Western education (Uzodike and Maigawara, 2012: 100).

Muhammad Yusuf, to whom the formation is now generally ascribed, according to the competing narratives only assumed leadership after Abubakar’s departure and “indocentered the sect with his own teachings, which he claimed were based on purity” (Adibe, 2012: 50). Yusuf’s notion of “purity” and teachings were inspired by the works of Ibn Taymiyya, a fourteenth century legal scholar who preached Islamic fundamentalism and is considered a “major theorist” for radical groups in the Middle East (Johnson, 2011), after whom Yusuf named his mosque in Maiduguri (The Nation, May 23, 2012). But just as the sect itself may be less concerned about whom to credit for its formation than waging its war against the Nigerian state, the state too may be less concerned with the origin than it is with the threat that the group now poses to society.

The obscurity surrounding its true origin perhaps informs why initially, the sect “had no specific name as its members attracted several descriptions where they operated based on the perception of the local population” (Okeke, 201: 450). Such names include Talibain and the Yussufiyah. The sect soon began formally identified as Ahlusanna wa jama’ah al Hijra – ‘Congregation of Followers of the Prophet Involved in the Call to Islam and Religious Struggle.’ The name Boko Haram, to which it is now commonly referred derives from the sect’s anti-Western posturing, literally meaning ‘Western education (book): civilization is sin.’

In the early stages, the Boko Haram sect was widely acknowledged to have mobilized its membership from women and children, school drop-outs and unemployed university and polytechnic graduates, most of whom toere up their certificates; student members withdrew from school. Okeke posits that “these recruits were indoctrinated by Yusuf to believe that their state of hopelessness was caused by government which imposed Western education on them and failed to manage the resources of the country to their benefits” (ibid). Although from the outset, the sect’s teaching was peaceful, but not without attracting attention among other Islamic preachers who saw the preaching and interpretation of the Quran as a recipe for violence and an affront to constituted authority (ibid:457). Although incidents of violence have earlier been recorded against the sect, (Uzodike and Maigawara, 2012: 102), serious concerns over its violent tendencies grew only after the open confrontation between the sect and the government in July 2009 following the death of Yusuf while in police custody, as well as his father in-law and sect financier, Ustaz Baji Foi, and the incarceration of members by state authorities.

Until the June 16, 2011, bombing of the Nigerian Police Headquarters in Abuja, the sect had restricted its terror campaign mostly to the North East part of Nigeria. Remarkably, the attack on the Police Headquarters came barely after then Inspector-General of Police, IGP, Hafiz Ringim returned from a duty tour of Maiduguri where the sect had just carried out some terror campaign and stated he would soon smoke them out. The sect followed up that attack with the bombing on August 26 of the United Nations House, also in Abuja, a place Shekau described as “forum of all the global evil,” (Thisday, September 19, 2011). Since then, Boko Haram has either claimed responsibility for or has been credited with most terror activities in the north of the country. Its operations have also grown in scale and sophistication.

Theoretical Considerations: Deeply Divided Society, State Failure and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

Sociologically, most African countries are multicivilizational societies with populations that are sharply divided along racial, cultural, linguistic, religious, and similar cleavages. Most are composed of several and some, of many different traditional societies, each with distinctive institutions to which members of other traditional societies are not only detached but also disinclined, if not actually opposed (Jackson and Rosberg, 1998:36). Politically, from the perspective of the European colonial powers, a colony was not arbitrary. But from the perspective of those Powers, the divided plural society as an impediment to the realization of modern, rational-legal institutions (cited in Guenther Roth, 1968). Theoretical Considerations: Deeply Divided Society, State Failure and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria. The African state rather than being a public force tends to be privatized, that is, appropriated to the service of private interests by the dominant class. Guenther Roth (1968) sees the divided plural society as an impediment to the realization of modern, rational-legal institutions (cited in Guenther Roth, 1968:36). Therefore, the African state rather than being a public force tends to be privatized, that is, appropriated to the service of private interests by the dominant faction of the elite (Ake, 1996: 42). Thus according to Chabal and Daloz (1999), “its formal (rational-legal) structure ill-manages to conceal the patrimonial and particularistic nature of power” (cited in Uzodike and Maigawara, 2012:96).

In the words of former Senegalese leader, Leopold Sedar Senghor, politics no longer is “a question of the art of governing the state for the public welfare in the general framework of laws and regulations. It is a question of politician politics – not even ideological tendencies – to place oneself, one’s relatives, and one’s
The cogency of the relational/vengeance perspective is such that for a long time, it remained the plausible explanation for the terror campaign by Boko Haram as the death of Yussuf in the population are allegedly unhappy with the compromise of state-level shari'a coexisting side by side with a secular federal system (Lengmang, 2011:101). 17, 2012, also highlights the vengeance thrust of the “We” and “Others” psychology. In this instance, the avengers, presumably Christians now constituted the “We”, while Muslims became the “Others”. In the context of the Boko Haram campaign, the state’s capacity to secure itself or to perform in an expected manner has been eroded. As the state is perceived to have become an enemy, and the state itself to be in disarray, Boko Haram attacked it. The state, through the eyes of its enemies, has already failed. The state’s legitimacy is in question. As the state becomes prone to economic dislocation and political instability – all which are indices of state failure (Rotberg 2002: 86 cited in Uzodike and Maingwa), it has met the necessary requirement of a weak state. Indeed if Karl Maier’s political biography of Nigeria, This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis (2004), is dismissed as the cynicism of a foreign, Nigerian novelist, China Achebe, apart from decrying the leadership ineptitude of the Nigerian state some decades back notes that “Nigeria is an example of a country that has fallen; it has collapsed” (Achebe, 1983:1 in Uzodike and Maingwa, 2012:97). The Boko Haram challenge in the final analysis is to reflect the deep ensuing Niger Delta crisis, the state which the various perspectives, to which we shall presently focus on attempt to explain. Adibe (2012) captures the depth of the challenge when he argues that:  

[...] The Nigerian state, contrary to the media hype, is regarded as the enemy, not just by Boko Haram, but by several Nigerians and groups, each attacking it with as much ferocity as Boko Haram’s bombs, using whatever means they have at their disposal: politicians entrusted to protect our common patrimony steal the country blind, law enforcement officers see or hear no evil at a slight inducement, government workers drag their feet and refuse to give their best while reveling in moonlighting, organized labour, inducing university lecturers in public institutions go on indefinite strikes on a whim while journalists accept ‘brown envelops’ to turn truth on its head or become uncritical champions of a selected anti-Nigerian state identity. What all these groups have in common with Boko Haram is that they believe that the premise on which they act is justifiable and that the Nigerian state is unfair to them, if not an outright enemy (cited in Uzodike and Maingwa, op.cit. p. 98).

Methodology

In examining the various perspectives that have attempted to capture the causes of the Boko Haram insurgency since the outset of the problem, we looked at general theoretical frameworks that have been employed universally to explain similar crisis. In this regard, we made reference to foreign and local (Nigerian) sources. At the same time, we paid critical attention to the diverse views provided by the broad spectrum of the Nigerian society. In doing so, adequate consideration was given to all the shades of opinions representative of the various divides of the Nigerian society. This was in view of the complexity of the Nigerian society, the tenacious relationship its disparate groupings and the implication of the Boko Haram insurgency on the continuing existence of Nigeria as a single corporate entity. The idea is that resolving the Boko Haram challenge and forestalling a resurgence of the sort in the future may to a large extent depend on a national consensus on what the problem really is and how it will be tackled as was the challenge posed by the Niger Delta militancy. Apart from the dangers it constitutes to Nigeria’s immediate neighbours, Nigeria’s position as a strategic country in global consideration also warrants that even non-Nigerians share concerns over what may have gone wrong. The paper approached such views. We also considered perspectives provided by persons with security backgrounds. Indeed the contemporariness of the problem is such that as the violence escalates and the State intensifies efforts towards finding solution, fresh perspectives emerge, and the media relay these developments. Reliance on these media sources is a function of this contemporariness. Generally, the historical-descriptive method of inquiry was adopted in the study.

The Relational/Vengeance Theory

Relational theory attempts to provide explanation for violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic, (religious) and historical relationships between such groups. The belief is that cultural and value differences as well as group interests influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways. Thus, a number of conflicts grow out of a past history of conflict between groups that has led to the development of negative stereotypes, racial intolerance and discrimination, (Faleti, 2006:54-55). The differences in values involved are described by the “We” and “Others” dichotomy: “The fact that ‘others’ are perceived as different makes us feel they are entitled to less or are inferior by reason of […] values. This disrupts the flow of communication between us and them and to that extent, twists perceptions that we have about each other” (ibid.p.55). Okereke notes that sect members “attracted several descriptions where they operated based on the perceptions of the local population […] In some communities, where it existed, the sect and its members were described as terrorists and persons with psychiatric challenges” (ibid.p.450).

The state and other members of Nigerian society who are targets of Boko Haram’s violence may indeed find it difficult to understand the sect’s penchant for blood-letting. On the one hand, the former group becomes in this context the “We” and all efforts are being to secure it from savagery of the “Others”, the Boko Haram members. On the other hand, the latter group either by the conscious or unconscious purpose of fighting the “unbelievers” for Allah, or feeling of deprivation or both sees the remaining members of the Nigerian society as the “Others”. In the circumstance mutual antagonism exists and can be violently expressed. On the part of Boko Haram, killing of members by government security forces - the “Others” attracts reprisals from it, the “We”. The retaliatory attacks against Muslims in the Gomina Gora area of Kaduna state by an irate mob following the multiple suicide attacks on churches in the state on Sunday June 17, 2012, also highlights the vengeance thrust of the “We” and “Others” psychology. In this instance, the avengers, presumably Christians now constituted the “We”, while Muslims became the “Others”. In the words of Alliuran Islamic School (AIS) in Jalingo, capital of Taraba North East, “We are against the activities of Fulani people and others and we wish to see them in our state” (AIS, CACRT, Journal, 2(1), December 2011), exemplifies an effort to institutionalise the “We” and “Others” dichotomy. In parts of the North, some segments of the northern Muslim population are allegedly unhappy with the state’s reliance on state-level sharia’s coexisting side by side with a secular federal system (Lengmang, 2011:101). The cogency of the relational/vengeance perspective is such that for a long time, it remained the plausible explanation for the terror campaign by Boko Haram as the death of Yussuf in the police custody, and the hunting and incarceration of the members and the “Others” security forces were seen to have fired the “We” and “Others” psychology, and have been a major factor in the sect’s resolve to avenge their members through the terror campaigns (Daily Sun, online, January 23, 2012). Jail-break operations to rescue incarcerated members and marrying of dead
members’ widows by living members, all sustain the status. Thus the reported killing of members who declared suicide missions on the orders of Shekau, the killing in September 2011 of Babakura Fugu, an in-law to Yusuf, for allegedly accepting blood money from the government (Thisday, September 19, 2011) which signifies existence of faction within the group, all widen the sect’s targets, blur the line between the “We” and “Others”, and so challenge this perspective.

Similarly, to the “Others,” the sect’s identity is purely political. Hence, “boko Haram” is a misnomer, as the term is used for political ends and not for religious purposes. This is especially true in the north, where the state has been a tool of political manipulation and division. However, in the south, the term has been used more liberally, as it reflects the reality of the situation.

The Human Needs/Socio-Economic Perspective

The socio-economic perspective of the Boko Haram challenge in Nigeria, essentially attempts to de-emphasise the interpretation of this being a particularly Muslim or northern crisis (Kukah, 2012). The socio-economic perspective of the Boko Haram challenge in Nigeria attempts to de-emphasise the interpretation of this being a particularly Muslim or northern crisis (Kukah, 2012). The Boko Haram phenomenon is perhaps more interesting because of the specific historical context in which it is occurring. First, while other Muslims may want to dissociate themselves from its activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north. It also agrees with the submission that competition for scarce resources may be of greater importance in explaining political violence in the developing regions (Oberschall 1969; Nelson 1969). Chairman of Northern Governors’ Forum, (NGF) Aliyu Babangida has also decried an “unfavourable federation allocation structure in which the Northern states are at great disadvantage amidst rising illiteracy, poverty, ignorance and general backwardness in the region,” (Daily trust, online, February 24, 2012).

This perspective has encountered severe criticisms recently, even from the north. Senate President David Mark argues that poverty and unemployment no longer offer a cogent explanation for the insurgency as these adverse socio-economic conditions are not exclusive to the north, (Peoples Daily, online, June 26, 2012). While socio-economic deprivation could be most severe in the north, the north-east where it originated, no such violent group as Boko Haram is known to have sprung up in states in the north-west and north-central. Hordes of beggars who line Katsina streets reflect the poverty in that north-western state, yet it has neither bred nor harboured such a violent group. Evidence pertaining to Latin American and Sub-Saharan African urban settings similarly challenge the relevance of the theory of the “revolution of rising expectation” (Midlarsky 1975: 30).

The Political Feud Perspective

The crux of the problem is the overpoliticisation of social life. […] We are intoxicated with politics: the premium on political power is so high that we are prone to take the most extreme measures to win and to maintain political power. – Claude Ake

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symbol of northern solidarity. Known as the Leaders of Thought, the group comprised of [sic] Alhaji Aliyu Makaman Bida (leader of the defunct NPC), Alhaji Aminu Kano (NEPU) and Mr. Joseph Tarka (UMIC) (pp.39-40).

Gowan’s nine years in power (1966-1975) remains the longest any one ruler has occupied Nigeria’s presidency. Again, although General Ibrahim Babangida, a Gwari who ruled Nigeria from 1985 to 1993, hails from the Minority Middle-Belt as Gowon, his eight-year rule was marked by robust obsequious to the Sokoto Sultanate which symbolizes (Muslim) spiritual and (northern) political authority. Babangida’s choice of Sambo Dasuki, (Nigeria’s new NSA as haidee de camp after his a successful coup against General Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani, could be seen not only in the light of forestalling a backlash from the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy, which installed the latter to power (Ohokisi, 1993) but also as an appeasement gesture towards it.

Beneath the façade of northern hegemony, however, the resentment against Hausa-Fulani hegemony over the rest of the north among other northern political blocs persists. Perhaps the boldest expression of this resentment was the expulsion of the five northerners and predominantly Hausa-Fulani Nigerian states from Nigeria by army major Gideon Orkar in the coup against General Aminu Kano in 1993. Major Orkar named some of those states as the Borno, Taraba, Gombe, Adamawa and Bauchi states. Notably, the orkar minority group in the north had accused the Hausa-Fulani of seeking to perpetuate their rule at the expense of the predominantly Christian peoples of Nigeria’s Middle-Belt. The age-old resentment of the old Kanem-Borno Empire towards the over-arching influence of the Sokoto Caliphate in the north also remains. When the late General Sani Abacha, a Kanuri, assumed the leadership of Nigeria in 1993, he retired several top military officers, many of whom were regarded as ‘IBB Boys’ and were mainly Hausa-Fulani. Abacha’s later deposition of the Salute of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, and concomitant prominence accorded the Shehu of Borno by his regime, was perhaps the climax of a revived age-old rivalry between old Kanem-Borno and Sokoto Caliphate. That interlude, however, did not redeem the peripheralism of the Kanem-Borno axis in the northern domination of Nigeria’s political power trajectory.

It is against this backdrop that the political feud theory has generated more interest than any of the perspectives that attempt to explain the Boko Haram phenomenon as it also further exposes the deep division among Nigeria’s disparate social groups. Professor Wole Soyinka view on the problem perhaps captures this scenario most succinctly:

Much play is given, and rightly so, to economic factors – unemployment, misgovernment, wasted resources, social marginalization, massive corruption – in the nurturing of the current Boko Haram phenomenon. However, one of the most potent factors has been what I will call ‘the ethnic militia phenomenon’. This phenomenon has become the vice-president. By those choices, Jonathan was able to assuage to some extent the north-west and Hausa-Fulani over the loss of Yar’Adua.

There remains a need, however, to examine the Boko Haram crisis in terms of its implications for the 2015 presidential election in specific historical and contemporary context, given the current season of violent discontent in Nigeria. To limit oneself to these factors alone, is an evasion, intellectual and moral cowardice, and a fear of offending the ruthless strains, even if illegally (Joseph, 1991; Sklar, 1998). Very significant in the campaign of violence by the Boko Haram is the corresponding intensity which marked the post-2011 election Nigeria. From apart from Jonathan for violating his party’s power transition, while international observers viewed the April 2011 general polls in which Jonathan emerged victorious as credible, “many Nigerians, especially in the north, did not” (Herskovits, 2012).

To interpret the terror attacks as orchestrated attempts to undermine Jonathan thus qualifies them as political violence intended for the “transformations either within structures of political authority or within economic and/or social system” (Mullarsky, 1975). With the ultimate aim of the Boko Haram to instill in the wake Babangida’s choice of Sambo Dasuki, (Nigeria’s new NSA as haidee de camp after his a successful coup against General Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani, could be seen not only in the light of forestalling a backlash from the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy, which installed the latter to power (Ohokisi, 1993) but also as an appeasement gesture towards it.

The political feud perspective is premised primarily on the argument that while the extra-judicial killing of the leadership of the Boko Haram in 2009 had caused a violent confrontation with the state, the severity that the violence has now assumed is the fallout of a fierce political battle in 2011, which we have already referred to. The outcry at that time resounded around forcing Jonathan to give up his 2011 presidential ambition to allow for a return of power to the north and pitted some formidable political forces in the north against similar forces in the most of the south – especially from Jonathan’s minority ethnic Ijaw nationality of the south-south of Nigeria who saw in Jonathan’s ambition an opportunity to placate the restive region over perceived decades of economic and political marginalization in the Nigerian Union. The post-2011 election violence in parts of the north, therefore, did not only symbolize a rejection of the polls result and/or Goodluck Jonathan’s Christian southerner’s presidency, but was also a precursor to the current mayhem[1].

Midlarsky (1975: 28) defines an act of political violence “as an attempted or actual injury (ordinarily not sanctioned by law or custom) perpetrated on persons or property with the actual or intended effect of effecting transform...” (1993: 22) has argued: “Unlike the other ethnic groups in the Nigerian military, the Hausa-Fulani military representatives who have a sense of collective interests towards it.

In the general context of the theory of northern loss of power, for the Nigerian political system, notorious for its prebendalism, patronage system, and cronism, the stakes for the control of political power can be quite high, and loss of central power could prompt a “highly placed, highly disgruntled, and thus highly motivated individuals” or group towards bringing the country “under a specific kind of fundamentalist strain,” even if illegally (Joseph, 1991; Sklar, 1998).

The political feud perspective has acquired more dimensions as it also reveals emergent dynamics in Nigeria’s power relations. Jonathan’s Ijaw ethnic group claims Boko Haram is a northern attempt to undermine the president’s power. At the same time, there is an emergent school of thought that the specific focus of the terror campaign is the 2015 presidential election, an attempt to ensure that power returns to the north by 2015, especially amidst speculations that Jonathan may yet contest the presidency at that time. Senator Uche Chukwumerije, who has canvassed this view, links Jonathan’s accession to power from the vice-president in 2007 to the elected president in 2011, to the Niger Delta militancy spear-headed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND from the late 1990s. Obasanjo’s emergence as president in 1999 to him also owed to the militancy by the Yoruba ethnic militia, the Oodua People’s Congress, OPC as an aftermath of the 1993 presidential election postponement. Thus his suggestion to his ethnic Igboland ethnicity to mobilize its own militia, Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, to “devise a means of constructive engagement with the youth” (Vanguard, online, 29 September 2011) towards 2015. Chukwumerije’s call for the mobilization of the Igbo militia should be seen within the context of ethnic militia for political ascendency in Nigeria, which forms the central thesis of our essay in a forthcoming volume[2].

Professor Bolaji Akinyemi’s conceptualization of the Nigerian military from July 1966 to 1999 as an ethnic militia is quite functional in understanding our argument in the essay under reference. In doing so, he has argued that referring to the Nigerian army as an an-classical and unusual case of ethnic militia does not mean that it was made up of only one nationality. Instead, it is composed of representatives of many of the nationalities of Nigeria, it is only the northern Hausa-Fulani military representatives who have a sense of collective interests towards it. For example, for the first time in post-civil war Nigeria, an Igbo became the chief of army staff in the person of Li General Azubuike Ihejirika. Similarly, a southerner became the national security adviser (NSA) in the person of General Andrew Arazzi. The appropriation of the Nigerian military as northern and/or Hausa-Fulani militia was perpetuated by that monopolization. Thus, the loss of such monopoly has obviously removed the appropriation of the Nigerian army as the ethnic militia by the north and/or Hausa-Fulani. Significantly, in 1999, retired army captain and former military intelligence operative, Sagir Mohammed, formed a northern militia, the Arewa People’s Congress, (APC) “to protect and safeguard the interest of the North wherever it is” (Obasi, 2002:43). Outside of the north, the APC is perceived by some as “the maintenance of [northern] hegemonic control in national politics” (ibid). As Akinyemi (2003: 22) has argued: “Unlike the other ethnic militias who seek change, the Arewa People’s Congress seeks the maintenance of the status quo, irrespective of its crises of marginalization”. Although the APC appears to have now disappeared as one of the Northern regional political parties, Boko Haram may be conceived of as a resurgent Northern ethnic militia or in the specific context of the Kanuri sense of marginalization, an emergent militia for that ethnic group.

There remains a need, however, to examine the Boko Haram crisis in terms of its implications for the 2015 presidential election in specific historical and contemporary context, given the changing dynamics in northern politics. Beginning with the north-west and north-east blocks, after becoming president on May 5, 2010, following Ya’Adua’s death, Jonathan had chosen Namadi Sambo as his deputy, a Muslim and then governor of north-west Kaduna state. In the 2011 presidential poll, Jonathan also nominated Sambo as his running-mate, who went on to become the vice-president. By those choices, Jonathan was able to assuage to some extent the north-west and Hausa-Fulani over the loss of Ya’Adua[2].

We have earlier mentioned the Kanuri resentment of the Hausa-Fulani hegemony. That resentment grew from the historical rivalry between the North-West and the Fulani and the old Borno Empire. That rivalry is a fact that the Boko Haram leadership notes that the areas covering the old Borno Empire “do not only take pride in this but also the fact that they contacted Islam much earlier than what is today’s North-West geo-political region on Nigeria” (Tribune, online, June 27, 2012). These areas are largely made up of Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria and the parts of Niger, Cameroon and Chad Republics. Interestingly, nationals of those neighbouring countries account for foreigner elements among the Boko Haram operatives. We did also state that for the General Abacha period 1993-1998, the Kanuri ethnicity had maintained, a marginal quotient in the Northern domination of central power in Nigeria.

While Southerners, therefore, may erroneously refer to all northerners as Hausas and Fulanis (Uche, 1989:9), to the Kanuri, both Atiku who contested against Jonathan in the January 2011 PDP presidential primary and General Muhammadu Buhari who contested against him in the subsequent presidential election under the Congress for Progressive Change, (CPC) are Fulanis. Their electoral victory would invariably perpetuate the Fulani hegemony. A closer examination of the Boko Haram terror movement thus reveals it clearly as a Kanuri revolt – it is “dominated by Kanuri boys, despite the recruitment of volunteers from areas outside Borno and Yobe States” (Tribune, online, June 27, 2012). Outside of its core Borno versus Fulani
context, a statement by Ishiaki Mohammed Bawahie Chief Whip of the House of Representatives of the Nigerian National Assembly and leader of the north-east caucus in the House, further underscores a general north-east angst. According to him, “We felt that over the years, the North-Eastern region has been marginalized in all aspects of life in this country, and marginalization is responsible for insecurity in North-East” (Sunday Trust, online, February 12, 2012).

In the context of the age-long rivalry between the Caliphate and old Borno Empire, a group has emerged, which is believed to be the Caliphate response to Boko Haram. Known as the Jama’ata Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladin Sudan meaning the ‘group that dedicates itself to helping Muslims in Africa,’ and led by someone who goes by the pseudonym Abu Usamah Ansar, it states its mission as “to correct the concept, meaning and purpose of Jihad in Islam.” The group claims it will neither attack innocent persons, including security personnel nor non-Muslims because “Islam forbids killing of innocent people including non Muslims” (Desert Herald, online, June 2, 2012). The replacement of General Azari, Nigeria’s first ever non-national security adviser, with Col. Sambo Dasuki, a scion of the Caliphate, whatever purpose it supposes to serve, raises the question of the likelihood of the appointment worsening the old animosities between the Sokoto Caliphate and old Borno Empire, which may affect the war on terror itself. The sect’s rebuttal of Dasuki’s claims to have secured its telephonic line (Sunday Trust, online, July 10, 2012), does not project a disposition to Banksi’s gestures.

In the north-central, or Middle-Belt area generally, two developments have combined to change whatever cohesion which existed in the northern region. One, although religious extremism in Nigeria has been a northern phenomenon, re-occurring ethno-religious conflicts in Jos, Plateau state which has pitted Hausa-Fulani Muslims particularly against the predominantly Christian indigenous population has helped to bolster common consciousness among the minority Christian ethnic groups in the region. This common consciousness is defined by shared Hausa-Fulani hegemonic burden, and re-enforces the resentment towards that hegemony. Two, Kukah (1993:xiii) has noted that “the Middle Belt, with its clusters of Christians and traditional religious worshipers, remain central to the geopolitical-political calculation of both the ruling class in the North, and those of the South, with each laying claims on a different basis. While the Muslims in the North lay claim to religious superiority, the Christians lay claim to the area’s cultural identity.”

Towards the 2011 presidential elections, the Boko Haram sect has hardly masked its intention to bring down the Nigerian government, the Kufur system, and ultimately Islamize Nigeria. Lengmang (2011: 101) notes the allegation that some segments of the northern Muslim population may be unhappy with the compromise of state-level shari’a coexisting side by side with a secular federal system. Hence, while this segment may arguably be small, “they are increasingly becoming radicalized and more willing to periodically express themselves through violence (ibid). Lengmang attributes resentment to the shari’a coexistence with secular federal system by the view to many a northerner that western education is incapable of stimulating meaningful development and prosperity in the region, and so shares the fallacy of western education being incompatible with Islam (ibid: 99).

However tantilizing its link with al Qaeda or its affiliates, the Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria holds the vision of the general political Islam, which is the overthrow of the current government (Kufur system) and the enthronement of an Islamic theocratic state. Perhaps its reported rejection of President Jonathan’s invitation for dialogue and demand that he converts to Islam or he be branded a heretic is a clear demonstration of its Islamic belief (People’s Daily, online, January 27, 2012). Mehdad Minimis this tended the rise of the radical Islam to three variables. One is the 1979 Iran Revolution that ushered a widespread rejectionist philosophy, changing the Muslims’ view of themselves and their position in the world, as well as their approaches to daily life and politics. The second is the anti-western feelings in the Middle East traceable to the effect of European colonialism. The third and most recent is the American presence in the Middle East with claims that it brought a corrupting influence (Mozyayyan, 2009: 241). In a related way, corrupt and ineffective political leadership espousing Western ideologies and failing to bring about the necessary change to underline its justifiable claims to political Islam. Eventually, the Islamists’ gaining and holding power in Iran produced the wake-up call throughout the Muslim world and led to widespread Islamic resurgence. Thus,

New standards were now set and a new discourse gained currency that targeted the “enemies of Islam” through revolutionary, militant, and martyred-oriented strategies. Life became radically expendable, especially if it hindered the advancement of Islamic agendas. Islamic life thus became a means and an end for the frustrated masses, giving rise to leaps of Islamic communities’ nerve. As the number of Islamic communities increased, many of them formed into ‘brotherhoods’ (Western Civilization is sin) that hinder the promotion of their own millenarian beliefs (Mozyayyan, 2009: 242).

Despite its debt to the Islamist regime in Iran for the Islamic awakening, the current radical or jihadist Islamic movement, was founded by the late Osama bin Laden and has its origin in the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan. There, the “links among individual and different national groups were forged” (Crenshaw, 2009:403). It is most unlikely that any of the Boko Haram’s operatives in Nigeria ever fought in Afghanistan. But the triumph of the jihadists in Afghanistan has had a bolstering universal effect on jihadists across the globe, so that as Crenshaw rightly observes, “other men [and women] who were too young to have fought in Afghanistan […] emulated what they saw as the jihadist model,” (ibid: 404). Lengmang reports further that as a way of identifying with the Taliban, during one of its violent attacks on a police station in Kanamma, Yobe State, members of Boko Haram briefly flew the black Taliban flag, a gesture as a way of identifying with the Taliban, during one of its violent attacks on a police station in Kanamma, Yobe State, members of Boko Haram briefly flew the black Taliban flag, a gesture symbolizing commonality of cause (Lengmang, 2011: 98).

Professor Fernando Reinares has also argued that political influences such as events in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Middle East generally, Chechnya, Bosnia, etc. could motivate the jihadists (BBC, online, April 29, 2006). For the Boko Haram sect, the inspiration derived from Afghanistan, for instance, may not be limited only to the victory of the Mujahdeen over the Soviet, but rather symbolizes the triumph of Islam over secularity. It derives essentially from the fact that the victory was scored with the primitive and improvised arms (Mozyayyan, 2009: 242) as befitted the Islamic war of liberation. This is most unlikely that any of the Boko Haram’s operative in Nigeria ever fought in Afghanistan. But the triumph of the jihadists in Afghanistan has had a bolstering universal effect on jihadists across the globe, so that as Crenshaw rightly observes, “other men [and women] who were too young to have fought in Afghanistan […] emulated what they saw as the jihadist model,” (ibid: 404). Lengmang reports further that as a way of identifying with the Taliban, during one of its violent attacks on a police station in Kanamma, Yobe State, members of Boko Haram briefly flew the black taliban flag, a gesture symbolizing commonality of cause (Lengmang, 2011: 98).

While the war is cast in religious terms, where the likes of David and Goliath are evoked, and true believers are directed into action by being reminded of the unexpected outcome of that lopsided confrontation. David had contributed his faith, devotion, courage and selflessness, just as Muslims are called to do. God did, and will do the rest. In such instances, it is critical that God be seen “as a personal participant in the fighting process.” It is God that grants victory so that “truth” may “nullify falsehood.” Similarly, when Muslims won […] it was not you who slew them, but Allah (Mozyayyan, 2009:244).

Boko Haram has invoked the name of Allah severally to explain why it carried out its terror campaigns to media sources. The sect’s operatives undoubtedly are imbued with the mind-set as a way of identifying with the Taliban, during one of its violent attacks on a police station in Kanamma, Yobe State, members of Boko Haram briefly flew the black taliban flag, a gesture symbolizing commonality of cause (Lengmang, 2011: 98).

There are […] no such phrases like Muslim North and Christian South. Wherever you go in this country, you will find out that there are Muslims and Christians living peacefully together. You will find out there are Christians in the North and it is the same in the South (Daily Trust, online, January 27, 2012).
The idea is also bewildering to Christians in the north. For instance, Bolarinwa Yusuff, a Christian from Kogi, a state in the north central wonders where the Boko Haram sect wants him to go. He stressed that he had been born a northerner, like his forefathers, and has no apologies to any one for being a Christian (interview, January 24, 2012). The sect’s position, therefore, raises the following questions: are the south-west Nigerian Muslims no longer part of the global Islamic family? are the northern Nigerian Christians no longer northerners simply for professing different faiths? However other than the fact that they too are human beings as far as God is concerned, they are also the children of the same tribal and ethnic groups.

The Boko Haram sect remains a fringe group and antagonizes mainstream northern Nigerian Muslims. It must, therefore, evolve in its campaign, a broad coalition that will accommodate not only a large chunk of those mainstream northern Muslims but also its elite corps. Whereas the Mujahedeen are focused on Islam’s days of glory or great piety, which to them assure the true believer of spiritual salvation and an eternally joyful existence in the world beyond (Moazamy, 2009:241), however, the average Nigerian Muslim political elite is most likely uninterested in Boko Haram’s version of Islam. He may, in the words of Moazamy, be more interested in a “futile that guarantees independent thought, social liberty, modernity and economic renunciation in this world” (ibid. p. 243) – progressive Islam. Nigeria’s oil wealth (upon which the Nigerian elites rely for strategic accumulation) is a major disincentive to the evolution of any broad coalition that will involve mainstream northern Muslims. For instance, an Estimated seventy-five per cent of oil reserves in former Sudan went to the South after July 2011 (cited in Haile, 2012). All of Nigeria’s oil reserves are located in the south. Despite talk about the north being capable of surviving without southern oil, efforts to find oil in the northern have intensified over the years. The point here is that, while the Boko Haram Mujahedeen may not care about the earthly economy, the northern political elites do. Allegations of complicity by the Boko Haram sect in the terror attacks in the north, for instance, have precipitated a ‘return home’ by the easterners and a warning that no ethnic group in Nigeria has monopoly of terrorism.

In the same report, Babangida named what he called the ‘Doctrine of Nigeria’s Settled Issues,’ which according to him cannot be compromised. They include, the country’s unity, her republican constitution, the states as federalizing units and the capitalist orientation of the economy. Babangida was a veteran of the Nigerian civil war fought to keep Nigeria as one Order (Turner, 1980: 74).

Conspiracy Theories

The conspiracy theories attempting to explain the Boko Haram crisis can be marked into two broad categories: one focusing on machinations of internal actors, the other on external actors. Internal actors may include the disgruntled northern power elite who, having lost power, are bent on bringing down Nigeria under a southern leadership, as well as the Jonathan administration who are of the opinion that the Boko Haram crisis is being used to hasten the erosion of political control by the Jonathan administration, and therefore, the Boko Haram crisis is an opportunity to realize their selfish agenda. The much-vaunted “Liberation” of Tripoli was carried out by former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). “Destabilization of sovereign states,” the authors contend, “is closely coordinated with military planning” (GRIS

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Peace and Conflict Review · Volume 7 Issue 1 · Year 2012 · Page 6
This study has examined various theories attempting to explain the driving forces behind the Boko Haram phenomenon. Our position is that each of the perspectives offers some degree of insight into the problem, as well as the general patterns of political tension and social violence in Nigeria, which Boko Haram merely epitomizes.

In any case, it is clear that Boko Haram has metamorphosed from a strictly religious movement to one espousing a political agenda. While acknowledging the difficulties in getting to the root cause of the problem, the government must at least address the issues related to Jonathan’s decision to contest the 2011 presidential elections against the power rotation principle designed by his political party, the PDP, and his speculated 2015 presidential ambition. Irrespective of the constitutional provisions on individual political rights and aspirations, solemn attention needs to be paid to professor Ekeh’s postulate that, “The historical condition in which the Nigerian state emerged has precluded its integration into a composite society” (1989:8).

Any efforts at effecting enduring stability in Nigeria, therefore, must recognize her complex plurality, respect the sensitivity of the component parts, and refrain from acts of political impunity.

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Footnotes

[1] At a public function shortly before he was removed as National Security Adviser, General Andrew Azizi in reference to the acrimony over Jonathan’s decision to go against his party’s zoning policy that could have prevented him from contesting the 2011 presidential election, referred to Boko Haram was a creation of some disgruntled members of the President Jonathan ruling party, who angered by his emergence, appropriated the group to destabilize his government. Many believe Azizi owed his sack to that statement.


[3] The voting pattern in the 2011 presidential primary of the ruling PDP made certain significant statements: whereas the Hausa-Fulani appeared to have been appeased by choice of Sambo as Jonathan’s running mate, referred to Boko Haram was a creation of some disgruntled members of the President Jonathan ruling party, who angered by his emergence, appropriated the group to destabilize his government. Many believe Azizi owed his sack to that statement.

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