The current challenge posed by the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria is not only about the viciousness of its terror campaigns, nor the sect’s avowed mission to impose Islamic law on the country, it is also about confusion regarding the exact cause(s) of the violence. Several theories have emerged to explain the problem, broadly revolving around socio-economic, political, and religious themes, all of which are treated in detail in this study. This paper argues that while none of the perspectives may exclusively explain the problem, analyses that consider the political context deserve particular attention, especially in relation to President Jonathan’s contestation of the 2011 presidential election and the coming election in 2015.

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 precipitated 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 terror 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 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 the assorted 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 such 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 Exploratory 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, Madike, he notes, traces the date back as far back as 1995, and argued that, one Lawan Abubakar, who later left for further studies at the University of Maiduna, Saudi Arabia, actually formed the Boko Haram sect. Under Abubakar, the sect was known as Saha, (Madike 2011 cited in Adibe, 2012: 50). Elsewhere, these expositions are credited to Shehu Sani, a civil right activist in northern Nigeria, who helped broker the first peace deal with the sect in 2007, which failed Businessday, online, February 1, 2012). While Uzodike and Maiangwa on the other hand acknowledge the Lawan Abubakar angle, they attribute their source to Ujah et al. (see Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012: 100). They also acknowledge the version which traced the Boko Haram sect its anti-Western posturing, literally meaning “Western education (book) civilization is sin.”

In the early stages, the Boko Haram sect was widely known to have mobilized its membership from women and children, school drop-outs and unemployed university and polytechnic graduates, most of who tore 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 Maiangwa, 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 Yusufi while in police custody, as well as his father-in-law and sect financier, Ustaz Bui Foi, and the incarceration of members by state authorities.

Although Yusufi allegedly drew inspiration from radical Islamist, Ibn Taymiyya, he reportedly resisted some of followers relentless advocate that “an Islamic state was realizable through preaching and mobilization of the people to reject secularism, by way of taking up arms and fighting to conquer the unbelievers”; “Yusuf was said to be against any form of violence, saying it was against the teaching of Islam” (Suleiman cited in Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012: 101). It is, therefore, yet uncertain whether the sect’s current level of radicalization is a function of the deaths of its initial leadership and subsequent clampdown by the State or the accession to its leadership of the taciturn psychopath, Abubakar Shekau, a Kanuri native, who boasts that “I enjoy killing anyone that God commands me to kill – the way I enjoy killing chickens and rams,” (BBBC, online, June 22, 2012). Along with two other top leadership, Abubakar Adam Kambar and Khalid al-Barnawi, Shekau in June 2012 recently made the United States’ list of international terrorists.

Until the June 16, 2011, bombing of the Nigeria 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, Hafizi Ringim returned from a duty tour of Maiduguri where the sect had just carried out some terror campaign and stated he would soon catch 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 a “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 multiethnic 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 subject societies, the “acceptance” of the colonial order was largely a matter of calculation, often in ignorance, of indigenous institutions. Guenther Roth (1968) sees the divided plural society as an impediment to the realization of modern, rational-legal institutions (cited in Jackson and Rosberg, 1998:36). 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 Maiangwa, 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
clients in the *cursus honorum* that is the race for preferment – "the image of personal rule” (see Jackson and Rosberg, 1998:17).

The inherent complexities in the states forced by European imperialism made less feasible the prospects of the new states modelled after the Western types (Roth, cited in Jackson and Rosberg, p. 36). Although the African states have come a long way down the road of nation-building process, with many heterogeneous or multinational states having to resort to varying ways of resolving their inter-group relations (Elagwu, 1997:58), many of the states still struggle from one shock after another resulting from those sociological and political divergences; so much so also because "the African state is hardly ever coexistent with a common society” (Ekech, 1989:5) and "the society in which it [the African state] exist is typically segmented into small rival political communities, often with strong localized identities, competing to capture and exploit state power or at least prevent it from oppressing them” (Ake, 1999:42). According to Professor Peter Ekeh, “The political history of Africa has become a tale of drift and instability. … Standing above, and set aside and apart from society, the African state has turned out to be arbitrary, because it operates outside societal rules” (Ekech, 1989:5). The arbitrariness of the African state has conferred on African political culture, attributes of negativity, so that “African political culture has become characterized by a vast array of negative elements such as corruption, violence and mistrust” (ibid).

With the tendency to blame every of the continent’s woes on the incidence of colonialism, it remains debatable, however, whether it was the nature of the state inherited at the end of formal colonialism or the neo-patrimonial and particularistic orientation of the competing power elites who inherited the post-colonial state that is the problem. Whichever, the African state remains characterized by its discontinuity with the society.

Those negative elements identified by Ekeh, and much more, have all combined to make the African state irrelevant to the citizenry, thus eroding its legitimacy. Additionally, 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). Here, Rotberg’s articulation of the characteristics of a failed state in economic and political terms is illuminating. According to him, the economic sphere is characterized by deteriorated standards of living, a lack of public goods and services, the flourishing of corruption and rent-seeking, and a pervasive economic stagnation (ibid. p.96). In the political sphere, some leaders and their allies readily work to subvert political norms by corrupting the electoral process, stifling the emergence of civil society or space, and abusing security and defence forces for parochial ends. Moreover, the political sphere is dotted with ethnic discrimination and resultant discord. Governments that once operated to benefit the whole of all the nation’s citizens are perceived to have become partisan. Corruption fulfilling elite invest their ill-gotten gains overseas, building lavish residences and palaces with state funds (ibid. pp.96 – 97).

Rotberg further argues that in the late phase of failure, the state’s legitimacy will collapse:

Once the state’s capacity to secure itself or to perform in an expected manner recedes, there is every reason to expect disloyalty to the state on the part of the disenchanted and aggrieved citizens. Logically, many transfer their allegiances to their clan and group leaders, some of whom gravitate towards terrorism as they strive to secure communal mandate. Mobilizing support from both external and local supporters, the terrorists seek out havens in the more remote and marginalized corners of failed states where they blend in, more comfortably in the prevailing chaos associated with state failure (ibid).

The various theoretical constructs that attempt to mirror the Nigerian state point to a deep gulf between state and society or in Ekech’s (op.cit) term “the difficult relations between state and society” – from Wale Olatun’s “Hanging State’, Hamza Alavi’s “Over-developed State”, to Teresa Turner’s “Entrepot State”, Gunnar Myrdal’s “Soft State” and Claude Ake’s “Irrelevant State”. In the realm of theory, such disconnect is not only capable of eroding legitimacy but also inducing state failure and the subsequent repercussions that emanate from it such as violent conflicts or terrorism as Rotberg’s postulate suggests. Empirically, Uzodike and Maingwa have articulated the various conditions and features of a failed state as pertaining to Nigeria, ranging from the Failed States index in which the country ranked 14 in 2011, Terrorism and Political Mapping (2010-2011), which ranked her fifth and the Human Development Index Trend Report, which emerged 156 out of 187 countries. On these factors they aver that the chaotic and anarchic situation in the Nigeria of 2012 exemplifies the characteristics of a failing or weak state that is degenerating into full failure (Uzodike and Maingwa, op.cit. p. 97).

The Boko Haram challenge in the final analysis seeks to reflect the deep crisis bedevilling the Nigerian state, the various theories, 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 envelopes’ to turn their head on its head or become uncritical of the selected anti-Nigerian state agents. 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 this, we avoided the danger of combining the voices of disparate social groups 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 accommodated 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/vengence 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 all 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, (Paley, 2006:54-55). The differences in value invidious such as the “We” and “Others” dictionary: “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 the savagery of the “Others”, the Boko Haram members. On the other hand, the latter group bond either by the common purpose of fighting the “anti-societies” 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 threat of the “We” and “Others” psychology. In this instance, the averagers, presumably Christians now constituted the “We”, while Muslims became the “Others”. This was in view of the complexity of the Nigerian society, the tenuous relationship of its disparate social groups 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 accommodated 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 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 perspective which blames social conditions for the violence is anchored on the human needs theory of social conflicts. Its central thesis is that all humans have basic needs which they seek to fulfill and failure caused by other individuals or groups to meet these needs could lead to conflict (Rosati et al, 1990 cited in Faleto, p. 51). The theory is similar to the frustration-aggression theory of violence, which posits that aggression is always a consequence of frustration (Dougherty and Pfaltzgrae, Jr, 1990: 266). According to the theory, relative deprivation and disparity between individual's expectation and value capabilities and that the lack of a need satisfaction – defined as a gap between aspirations and achievement generally – relies on the psychological state of frustration and aggressive attitudes emanating from it (Midlarsky, 1975:29).

Unlike the relational/vengeance theory, the perspective goes beyond the trigger to focus on the underlying factor(s) that could have bred such groups. It has its largest proponents from the intelligensia, and is particularly viewed by some foreign governments such as those of the United States and Britain as explanations for the problem. Nigeria’s socio-economic indexes seem to validate the assumption of human needs theory. The Human Development Index Trend, for instance, ranked Nigeria 156 out of 186 in 2011. The socio-economic factors being aduced as the root causes of violence in Nigeria include unemployment, especially among the youth, poverty and a deteriorating standard of living, especially in the north. But perhaps its relevance in the context of the Boko Haram problem is in its role in the perpetuation of poverty and hopelessness that which has been a feature of the northern region. Hence for Professor Jean Herskovits of the State University of Nigeria to whom “it was clear in 2009 when the insurgency began that the root cause of violence and anger in the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness,” the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

The Political Feud Perspective

The crux of the problem is the over politicisation 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

In political terms, 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 disempower the government, and the dysfunctional state system that places distribution above production (Aregbesola, 2012). The governor of the south-western state of Ogun, Rauf Aregbesola, a Muslim, who is credited with years of government during which the unemployment rate is not less than 10% of the south-eastern states. In the empowerment context, it is natural for all Areas to maintain their territories, which is a critical variable in conveying a sense of fair play or otherwise to the losing side. Importantly, Jonathan’s electoral victory came barely three years after power returned to the north, from an eight-year sojourn in the south, where the north grudgingly ceded it to 1999 following the turn-around from the annullled 1999 presidential election, which Mohammed Abiola, a southerner was acclaimed to have won. Through ingenious political engineering by the Nigerian power elite, a power-sharing arrangement was devised which rotates central power between the north and south. After years in the south under Olusegun Obasanjo’s presidency (1999-2007), power had returned to the north in May 2007 via the Umaru Musa Yar’Adua’s presidency and was supposed to remain there for another eight years. Despite the constitutional provision that guarantees his succession by his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, the northerner was sour for having ‘lost’ power again to the south by virtue of Yar’Adua’s death in May 2010 barely three years into office. The sense of loss, which ensued from Yar’Adua’s death manifested in the tension in which Nigeria was soaked in the pre-2011 general elections period. Attention needs to be paid, however, to the general misconceptions about the north as a monolithic political entity. Apart from the Hausa language as a lingua franca in the north, the Hausa-Fulani who constitute the region’s dominant population are predominantly Muslims and as Uche (1989:8) has rightly noted, “the Moslem religion united the vast areas of the North with political and economic elites whose mismanagement of the country’s resources engenders the unemployment, poverty and deprivation that breed frustration and foster violence. As Dougherty and Pfaltzgrae Jr. have rightly noted, hostilities in such instances, are directed “toward someone or something not responsible for the original frustration” (ibid). A more profound explanation of the north’s socio-economic crisis lies in a perspective that sees a nexus between its depleting patrimonial economic system, which dis-empowers the northerners, and the dysfunctional state system that places distribution above production (Aregbesola, 2012). The governor of the south-western state of Ogun, Rauf Aregbesola, a Muslim, who is credited with years of government during which the unemployment rate is not less than 10% of the south-eastern states. In the empowerment context, it is natural for all Areas to maintain their territories, which is a critical variable in conveying a sense of fair play or otherwise to the losing side. Importantly, Jonathan’s electoral victory came barely three years after power returned to the north, from an eight-year sojourn in the south, where the north grudgingly ceded it to 1999 following the turn-around from the annullled 1999 presidential election, which Mohammed Abiola, a southerner was acclaimed to have won. 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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).

Gowon’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 haisde of 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 (Okohski, 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 hassle (IBB) in 1990. The two northern minority group of the Nigerian military, had accused the Hausa-Fulanis 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 Sulanate 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 events. By those choices, Jonathan was able to assuage to some extent the north-west and Hausa-Fulani over the loss of Yar’Adua. 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 Kanuri sense of marginalization, an emergent militia for that ethnic group.

disappeared, in the general context of Northern angst over the loss of central power, 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.

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 the general context of the theory of northern loss of power, for the Nigerian political system, notorious for its prebendalist 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).

Very significant in the campaign of violence by the Boko Haram is the corresponding intensity which marked the post-2011 election Nigeria. Apart from anger against Jonathan for violating his party’s power rotation theory, while northern 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 terrorist 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” (Mallursky, 1975). With the ultimate budged by the Boko Haram sect in early January 2012 to southern Nigerians residing in the north to return to their region, the contention that “Boko Haram [s] out to end 1914 amalgamation,” (Saturday Sun, online, January 21, 2012) of the northern and southern protectors, which formally created the political entity known as Nigeria, applies Soyinka’s thesis that the perpetrators are indeed anarchists who, having lost power, are bent on dismembering Nigeria.

The political feud perspective has acquired more dimensions as it also reveals emergent dynamics in Nigeria’s power relations. Jonathan’s Igbo 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 terrorist 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 Nigeria’s 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 annulment. Thus his suggestion to his ethnic Igbo youth to mobilize its own militia, Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, to “devise a means of constructive engagement with the south” (Vanguard, online, 29 September 2011) towards 2015. Chukwumerije’s call for the mobilization of the Igbo militia should be seen within of context of the mobilization 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. For instance, it assumes that the military is a family of officers, irrespective of their ethnicity, with a common loyalty to the Nigerian state, and that military authority is vested in the head of state.

Instead, while 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 to advance and protect (Akinyemi, 2002:21). Since 1999, certain fundamental changes have, in place in the command structure of the Nigerian military-security institutions to the extent that certain offices, hitherto the exclusive preserve of the north or the Hausa-Fulani, are now occupied by personnel outside of these areas. For example, for the first time in post-civil war Nigeria, an Igbo became the chief of army staff in the person of Lt. General Azubuike Ihejirika. Similarly, a southerner became the national security adviser (NSA) in the person of General Andy Ongwa. The attainment of the Nigerian military as an ethnic militia by the north and/or Hausa-Fulani. Significantly, in 1999, retired army captain and former military intelligence

Below 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 Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani, in 1990. The two northern minority group of the Nigerian military, had accused the Hausa-Fulanis 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 Sulanate 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:
context, a statement by Ishiahi Mohammed Bawathe 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 Jamatu Ansarul Muslimin 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 for General Arazzi, 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 telephone contact for possible dialogue (Xinhua online, July 10, 2012), does not project a disposition to Bankole’s (Akinbode 1993:10) 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:xxi) 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 in the form of the Prophet Muhammad, towards the 21st century, the claims of the old North-South divide is traversed by a new one – ‘hate for the Yoruba’.”

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 allegiance 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, although this segment may arguably be small, “they are increasingly becoming radicalized and more willing to periodically express themselves through violence (ibid).

Boko Haram attributes resentment to the shari’a coexistence with secular federal system to the view by 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 tangential its link with al Qaeda or its affiliates, the Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria holds the vision of global political Islam, which is the overthrow of the current world 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 be held responsible to the people (People’s Daily, online, January 27, 2012), or the militancy of its leader, the late Abubakar Shekau, who declared that “true believers must die in battle or beheaded” (Akinbode, 1993:10) points to the Boko Haram’s disregard for the social strata and the importance of the rioting for the war on terror itself. The sect’s rebuttal of Dasuki’s claims to have secured its telephone contact for possible dialogue (Xinhua online, July 10, 2012), does not project a disposition to Bankole’s gestures.

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 Mujahideen 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 (Mozayyan, 2009:242) 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.”

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 readily expendable, especially if it hindered the advancement of Islamic agendas. Islam thus became a means and an end for the frustrated masses, giving rise to leaders of Islamic communities who were anxious to push the need to restore Islam to its former position of power by removing the corrupting Western influences and replacing them with their own. These leaders were in turn driven by a desire to gain power to enhance the representation of their community at the highest levels of government. The replacement for General Azazi, Nigeria’s first ever non-Muslim non-northern 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 telephone contact for possible dialogue (Xinhua online, July 10, 2012), does not project a disposition to Bankole’s gestures.

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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 being born in the north? If so, they too are as much northerners as we are southernners because they too are basically northerners as we are basically southerners.

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 eternal joyous existence in the world beyond (Moazayan, 2009:241), however, the average Nigerian Muslim political elite is most likely interested in Boko Haram’s version of Islam. He may, in the words of Moazayan, be more interested in a “future that guarantees independent thought, social liberty, modernity and economic renewal in this world” (ibid. p. 243) – progressive Islam. Nigeria’s oil wealth (upon which the Nigerian elites rely for primitive accumulation) is a major disincentive to the evolution of a national 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 talks about the north being capable of surviving without southern oil, efforts to find oil in the north 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 northern political leaders in the Boko Haram activities have been rife (Daily Sun, January 23, 2012), but governors of the North’s 19 states, out of which only four are Christians, denied the charge off any collusion with the sect or any plots to disintegrate Nigeria. Babangida words perhaps, sum up what could pass for the feelings of the Northern Muslim political elite’s threats to Nigeria’s corporate existance:

You see in this country we fought the war for almost three years for the benefit of living together. I have a bullet in my body, so nobody will talk to me about secession or breaking away. If you go to any church I would always say yes, get my tailor to take my measurement, get on my khaki and I go back to fight a war to keep this country together (Daily Trust, January 27, 2012).

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 itself, which may be sponsoring the crisis in order to rally southern support behind his administration, and therefore, to wrest control of the political administration. If this is so, the theory is that these elements are being propped up by other international actors, most likely the US, to instigate the violence. If this is the case, then the violence may be seen as a predetermined outcome of the desperation of power elites who have lost power and are looking to regain it.

For the first hypothesis regarding internal actors, which we have treated in great detail under the political feud theory, our position is that its merit probably lies in the profound feeling of marginalization emanating from the north-east, either in terms of perceived denial of socio-economic infrastructure and the Kanuri sense of marginalization from central power. The second hypothesis suggests that the Boko Haram threat may be seen in two ways. First, the hypothesis perhaps draws from instances where attempts or actual attacks on Southern and Christian targets both in the north and south, which were blamed on Boko Haram, but were traced to Christian southerners (Blueprint, Tuesday January 31, 2012). Similarly, in November 2011, the State Security Services (SSS), also paraded a syndicate that circulated terrorist messages, which prompted some foreign diplomatic missions to issue warnings that emptied Abuja’s high-brow hotels. The group was comprised southern Christians and not Muslims nor northerners. From a northern perspective, these cases “suggest that Boko Haram is now the new weapon used by various interest groups to cause violence, mislead and confuse Nigerians in order to achieve their selfish agenda” (ibid). It is difficult to comprehend how Christians who continue to fall victims of attacks on their places of worship and Southerners who are being asked to flee to part of the country from where most have spent the greatest parts of their lives and built multi-million naira businesses, and who have asked Jonathan to quit if he cannot lead (Leadership online, May 1, 2012) will rally behind a government which has proved incapable of protecting them.

Although the United States continues to predict Nigeria’s disintegration by 2015 – pointing out that a private agency, not the US government carried out the survey upon which the report is predicated – those who emphasize this aspect of the external conspiracy theory point to a 2008 war game conducted by the US army which was designed to test its response ability to probable state failure in Nigeria in relation to US energy needs. The oil-rich Middle East has historically been unstable, and resurgent Islam has complicated the problem. Nigeria’s far north is contiguous to the troubled Sahel and Maghreb regions, which also are contiguous to the some Middle East states in the grip of Islamism. The US interest in Nigeria’s oil does not predispose it to be comfortable with such proximity to this potentially Islamist enclave. At a one-day symposium on ‘international conspiracy: towards Nigeria’s disintegration,’ in Kaduna, North-West Nigeria, the Association of Muslim Brotherhood of Nigeria (AMBON) noted that “there were reasons to believe that the peace and security of Nigeria were being threatened by the western world powers for their economic gains; that the western world threatens the peace of the country in order to protect their economic interest in Nigeria’s oil region” (Daily Trust, February 3, 2012). In the opinion of one member of Nigeria’s National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the US might be aiming to severe the oil-rich Niger Delta or the south from the far north in order to insulate the former from the emerging Islamic activism in the north with the ultimate goal of securing the vital oil resources in the south (private discussion with source, January 4, 2012). It would be preposterous to assume, however, that the United States could guarantee America’s energy interest in Nigeria within the context of a failed Nigeria balkanized into several fiefdoms.

Sentiments such as these have led to reservations over state efforts to collaborate with foreign powers to combat the Boko Haram. According to Professor Tam David West, Nigeria’s former minister of petroleum, “When they come ostensibly for security, they have their own agenda to penetrate our system and subjugate the sovereignty of the country; not only that, they become a powerful force within the country to dictate the political direction” (The Nation, online, January 29, 2012). A member of Nigeria’s security forces, Uche Nwogu, shares this concern. Without naming any particular country, she notes that “by the time these people come in the name of helping us fight Boko Haram, they would have understood their modus operandi and would themselves start bombimg us while we assume it is still Boko Haram” (Discussion with source on the subject, Monday January 30, 2012). The scenario in the Arab states tends to validate these musings. According to Professor Mishousudovski et al., in the Global Research Online Interactive Reader Series (GRIS), Western powers used “Political Islam” – including the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda-affiliated groups – to pursue their hegemonic objectives. Covert operations, they note, were launched to weaken the secular state, foment sectarian violence, and create social divisions throughout the Arab World. In Libya, they contend, “the ‘pro-democracy’ rebels were led by Al Qaeda affiliated paramilitary brigades under the supervision of NATO Special Forces. 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 Book no.1, online, November 2011).

The 2005 report was followed by a February 2011 version prepared by US military experts which stated as follows:

Although inherited and chosen layers of identity will be as “authentic” as conventional categories of citizenship and nationality, one category possibly will continue to stand out in the near future – that is, a category which may come to be defined more as a result of tension or worse. The challenge of Islamic activism could produce a much more intense backlash of Christian activism. Nigeria, Ethiopia, and other places in Africa will remain battlegrounds in this struggle. However, 2025, ‘masses of multinational integration and the value of “diversity” could face a combination of challenges from nationalists [and] religious zealots.

A pattern in Boko Haram’s insurgency – targeting religious and ethnic fault-lines – appears designed to enact the 2025 scenario described above. Hundreds of deaths of members of the Igbo ethnic group. “When they come ostensibly for security, they have their own agenda to penetrate our system and subjugate the sovereignty of the country; not only that, they become a powerful force within the country to dictate the political direction” (The Nation, online, January 29, 2012). A member of Nigeria’s security forces, Uche Nwogu, shares this concern. Without naming any particular country, she notes that “by the time these people come in the name of helping us fight Boko Haram, they would have understood their modus operandi and would themselves start bombimg us while we assume it is still Boko Haram” (Discussion with source on the subject, Monday January 30, 2012). The scenario in the Arab states tends to validate these musings. According to Professor Mishousudovski et al., in the Global Research Online Interactive Reader Series (GRIS), Western powers used “Political Islam” – including the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda-affiliated groups – to pursue their hegemonic objectives. Covert operations, they note, were launched to weaken the secular state, foment sectarian violence, and create social divisions throughout the Arab World. In Libya, they contend, “the ‘pro-democracy’ rebels were led by Al Qaeda affiliated paramilitary brigades under the supervision of NATO Special Forces. 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 Book no.1, online, November 2011).

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Conclusion: Any Hope for Optimism?
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 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 Aziza 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 as 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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A Publication of: